

Are We Being Hypnotised?

INTRODUCTION

This session explores the relation between the objective and subjective worlds and helps students to reflect on the ways that people that can influence other's minds.

Explain to the students that the outside world, the environment, is what we call the *objective* world. It is the world we can examine with our senses, and with technological / scientific equipment. The inner world, our feelings, preferences and so on, is the other side of the coin. It is called the *subjective* world. Inside, in the subjective world, we are a seething mass of emotions, daydreams intentions and so on.

ACTIVITY

Since we all have to interact with the objective world, our subjective life is influenced by the objective world. Ask the students to say:

- *at what age they think human beings start to attempt to manipulate the subjective worlds of other people, and*
- *what strategies people adopt to resist being manipulated.*

Point out that there are various ways in which people try to control or manipulate the minds of others. We all do it to each other, especially with friends and family members. Can they think of examples? When they try to persuade others to their point of view, or to get what they way, what is their own dominant style? Ask them to imagine a line across the room: at one end is 'gentle persuasion' and at the other is 'violent coercion'. Encourage them to respond to such questions as:

- *Can you give examples of each extreme?*
- *What is 'emotional blackmail' and where would you put it on the scale?*
- *Where would you put 'hypnotism'?*
- *What about 'advertising'?*
- *What about 'teaching'?*
- *What about 'brainwashing'?*

ACTIVITY

Show students a range of current TV adverts, e.g, from: www.tellyads.com

Ask the students to identify, in each case:

- *Who they think the advertisers are trying to appeal to? How do they know?*
- *What specific things do advertisers do to appeal to their target group, e.g., humour, 'scientific' demonstrations, claimed 'facts', types of music and other attention-seeking sounds, online 'games' that feature products, sales and price reductions, life-style 'improvements, etc.*
- *Why does advertising appear to work?* [Point out that a 30 second ad on TV costs between £5,000 and £60,000 depending on the Channel and the popularity of the viewing time/programme.]
- *What's the difference between advertising and hypnotism?*

After some time exchanging views, get some feedback and then show a clip from one of Derren Brown's programmes, e.g:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=js_unuMakWc or
www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy75GtKsOAw.

Ask the students to say how they think Derren Brown works these 'hypnotic' tricks and to respond to other questions such as:

- *When do you think hypnosis as entertainment becomes dangerous?*
- *Do you think that people who've been 'hypnotised' can just snap out of it by themselves?*

CONCLUSION

Point out that various forms of political persuasion and 'charisma' have been used by individuals to get people to follow them, even to war. Do students know from History lessons, e.g., how figures like Hitler and Stalin got people on their side? Do they think that they could resist such social and psychological pressure themselves?