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## Magic and neuroscience united

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17TH, 2009 | BY: DANIEL FINKELSTEIN | SOURCE: THE TIMES ONLINE SHARE THIS:      

### Thoughts for the week: the magic of Paul Daniels

#### Am I dumb, or just a sucker for magic? Science has come up with an explanation

You're going to like this. Not a lot. But you'll like it. A couple of weeks or so back I went to see Paul Daniels play the Radlett Centre. There was a sort of Seaside Special first half with hoofing and songs from Joseph that I could have done without. But once Daniels came on, things changed for the better. Magic. I can't get enough of it.

It helps that I'm pretty gullible. I found it mildly irritating that Daniels's wife, Debbie McGee, kept wandering across the stage, acting dumb. It was only in the car on my way home that it dawned on me that her appearances were contrived as a distraction so that Daniels could do the sleight of hand or whatever. How stupid am I? Well, actually, I prefer to say that Daniels and McGee had found a way to exploit cognitive weaknesses that were a result of my neurological design. And a new Nature Reviews Neuroscience paper allows me to use the description without blushing. Much.

Two neurologists (Stephen Macknik and Susana Martinez-Conde, of the Barrows Neurological Institute) have collaborated on an academic paper with a group of magicians (Mac King, James Randi, Apollo Robbins, John Thompson and Teller, one half of Penn and Teller). In fact, the document they have produced is more like a manifesto.

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