

THE BIG IDEAS

Bright Lines

That's where it's at.

The Susceptibility Quiz

Your score?

The Saboteur

Hi Resistance! Hi Part X!

Self-Perception Theory

Behavior --> Identity --> Feelings.

Bright Line Eating

The four bright lights.

Isn't That Extreme?

No. Accepting new normal is.



Bright Line Eating

The Science of Living Happy, Thin & Free

BY SUSAN PEIRCE THOMPSON · HAY HOUSE, INC. © 2017 · 320 PAGES

“I wrote this book because I want everyone to have that solution. The information contained in these pages is vital to changing our cultural understanding of what being overweight is—*not* a willpower deficit and *not* a moral shortcoming—rather, the by-product of a brain hijacked by modern food. And, more crucially, I want to show you what a solution that works actually looks like. It’s not about six small meals a day, free days, or even lots of exercise. I will teach you about Bright Lines, automaticity, and support. Bright Lines are clear, unambiguous boundaries that you just don’t cross, like a nonsmoker just doesn’t smoke. They work because they align with how the brain works. ...

You no longer have to feel lost in a flood of confusing and contradictory information on how to eat. Or languish on the couch, overeating late into the evening, knowing you’re choosing suicide on the installment plan. Or feel like your weight is holding you back from finally living your dreams and being the person you were meant to be.

Get ready to take back control of your brain and live your life as you never have before—*Happy, Thin, and Free.*”

~ Susan Peirce Thompson from *Bright Line Eating*

Susan Peirce Thompson is a Professor of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at the University of Rochester. She’s an expert in the psychology of eating and creator of Bright Line Eating Solutions, “a company dedicated to helping people achieve long-term, sustainable weight loss.”

Plus... She used to be obese and, as she says, addicted to *everything.* She integrates her background in neuroscience with her personal experience conquering her diet and other addiction issues in this super popular book. (Get a copy [here](#).)

I discovered the book via Alexandra (which is how I find a lot of great books :). She loved it. And, of course, I just LOVE “[Bright Lines](#)” and the science of [Willpower](#) so I was sold the moment I heard the title.

Susan shares some crazy stats: 2 BILLION people on the planet are overweight and 600 MILLION people are obese. The World Economic Forum estimates that over the next 20 years, we will spend \$47 TRILLION on “diseases caused by the global-industrial diet.”

That’s CRAZY.

Obviously, the approaches we’re using to address this epidemic aren’t working. She says it’s time for some Bright Lines. I agree.

If you’ve been struggling to Optimize your weight and you’re interested in an intense program to make it happen once and for all, I think you’ll dig the book and Susan’s approach.

I’m excited to share some of my favorite Ideas so let’s jump straight in.

“It’s been a wild ride, but at its core it’s pretty simple. The modern diet wires our brain to work against us, but we can rewire it to work for us. We are not weak. We are not stupid. We are simply trapped on a chemical hamster wheel and haven’t been given the tools to get off. Until now.”

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

BRIGHT LINES

"What you need is a plan that assumes you have no willpower at all—because at any given moment you may not—and works anyway. Bright Line Eating is designed to take the burden off willpower. No matter how much you know about nutrition, you'll never succeed if you're making food choices on the fly."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

"So. Bright Lines. Clear, simple, unambiguous boundaries that you just don't cross. We've arrived, finally, at the heart of the matter.

The most important contribution of the Bright Lines is that they bridge the Willpower Gap. Bright Lines give you clear rules for what you can—and can't—put in your mouth. And the result is that your eating choices become automatic. You don't have to think about them. There's no decision to make. It doesn't matter that it's 4 P.M. and that you have a tray of doughnuts in front of you. You will stand there knowing *exactly* what you are going to eat next, and those doughnuts won't be it. Bright Lines enable you to stop thinking about food, and to stop grappling with those 221 food-related choices a day we mentioned earlier. There is only one choice: respect the Bright Lines."

Bright Lines.

Science is unequivocal: That's where it's at.

What makes Susan's program so unique and so powerful (the results she sees with her community are astonishing) is the fact that it's the first and only approach of its kind—integrating the science of willpower with some foundational principles of nutrition.

In fact, the Bright Lines Eating approach is kinda like a mashup of the Ideas we talk about in [Habits 101](#) + [Willpower 101](#) + [Nutrition 101](#).

Recall that Habits 101 and Willpower 101 were all about the science of how to use our finite willpower wisely to install habits that run on autopilot.

While the #1 thing we talked about in Nutrition 101 was eating more like we did pre-Industrial Revolution. The two big things we said needed to go in that class? Sugar and Flour. Those are the first two Bright Lines Susan tells us we need to follow. More on that in a moment.

For now, let's talk about Roy Baumeister, one of the authorities on [Willpower](#) who **literally** wrote the book on it. (Hah.)

He says: "He needs the help of 'bright lines,' a term [borrowed] from lawyers. These are clear, simple, unambiguous rules. You can't help but notice when you cross a bright line. If you promise yourself to drink or smoke 'moderately,' that's not a bright line. It's a fuzzy boundary with no obvious point at which you go from moderation to excess. Because the transition is so gradual and your mind is so adept at overlooking your own peccadilloes, you may fail to notice when you've gone too far. So you can't be sure you're always going to follow the rule to drink moderately. In contrast, zero tolerance is a bright line: total abstinence with no exceptions anytime."

So, again, BRIGHT LINES provide a **really** clear perspective on what is and what is not acceptable behavior.

Why are Bright Lines so powerful?

Because they completely REMOVE willpower from the equation.

We make the decision ONCE so we don't need to keep making it a THOUSAND times.

Chapter 1 is all about what Susan calls "The Willpower Gap." It's that Gap where we really *want* to do the right thing but our willpower is zapped, we've hit a point of what researchers call "decision fatigue" and we run out of juice to make good decisions.

THAT is when we want the bright lines so we don't even have to make a decision. The decision is already made. We just execute the plan. And, we execute the plan so consistently for so long that it just runs on autopilot after awhile. THAT's the power of Bright Lines.

*"Yup. When it comes to food,
these are the two culprits.
Sugar and flour.
In fact, I want you to
consider looking at sugar and
flour in an entirely new way.
People tend to think of sugar
and flour as foods.
I invite you to start looking
at them as drugs."*

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

THE SUSCEPTIBILITY QUIZ

"So I developed the Susceptibility Quiz, also known as the Food Freedom Quiz. It's only five questions, but they target exactly the dimensions that differentiate people for whom food is not an issue from people who battle its addictive pull. The quiz is framed to analyze your relationship with food during your *worst three months* of eating behaviors. Why? Because once you've engaged in behaviors like regular binge eating, those fiber tracts are laid in the brain. They might not be *active* anymore, but they never go away, so you'll always have to be more vigilant around food than someone who has never struggled that way."

That's from Chapter 4 in which we learn about how susceptible our brains are to food addictions. There's a simple online test you can take to discover your susceptibility score [here](#).

It's scaled from 1 to 10. 1 means you don't have any issues. 10 means you've got some monster issues. Well, technically, it means you're more susceptible but you get the idea.

Susan is a 10. (She jokingly says she's really a Spinal Tap 11.) Alexandra is a 9. I'm a 6.

(If there was a test for susceptibility on technology addiction, I'm sure I'd be a Spinal Tap 11. :)

I was a little surprised that I scored a 6 but, then again, I did used to love my McDonald's. And Taco Bell. And Burger King. And, now that I think about it, Doritos. And Cheetos. And Oreos. And... (Hah.)

The test measures your behaviors during your WORST three months. Why? Because, as Susan says, once you've engaged in those negative behaviors "*fiber tracts are laid in the brain. They might not be active anymore, but they never go away, so you'll always have to be more vigilant around food than someone who has never struggled that way.*"

We talked about this same Idea in [our Note](#) on *Irresistible* where we referred to it as pickling your cucumber brain.

Here's how Adam Alter put it: "*Cash invited me to participate in a group discussion with the centers' inpatients. As the session began, she repeated a mantra that I'd heard a couple of times already: 'Remember: once your cucumber brain has become pickled, it can never go back to being a cucumber.' The phrase was designed to discourage inpatients from doing what Vaisberg had done when he left the center: believing that they could play just one more game without their addictions returning. Cash was trying to explain that the inpatients' brains were forever pickled, in a sense, and that their addictions were always on the cusp of being rekindled. The mantra was a cute way of saying something very confronting: that it's impossible to ever completely escape the aftereffects of addiction.*"

Cucumber → Pickle.

Remember: Once our brain is pickled, it's pickled.

Moral of the story: Those of us who have pickled our brains in different domains of our lives—whether that's with food or smartphones or alcohol—need to be even more vigilant than those who have not.

We need to remember that even though those negative behaviors may not be ACTIVE at the moment, those neural tracts are grooved and ready to come back online which is why Adam Alter also said: "*... the most dangerous time for an addict is the first moment when things are going so well that you believe you've left the addiction behind forever.*"

We need Bright Lines for that part of our lives even more than others.

P.S. Chapter 1 was about The Willpower Gap. Chapter 2 was about "Insatiable Hunger" which results from our leptin acting funny. Chapter 3 is about "Overpowering Cravings" which results from our dopamine getting downregulated. [See the book](#) for more.

*"Here's the simple truth.
Plans based on moderation DO
NOT work for people who
are high on the Susceptibility
Scale."*

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

"Every cell in your taste buds dies and is replaced by a brand-new taste bud cell every two weeks, so as you detox, your taste buds will be going through their own evolution, and in very short order your food will taste AMAZING."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

THE SABOTEUR

"For four chapters, we've been talking about how eating the Standard American Diet can hijack and rewire your brain. But what does this sound like in your head as you're going around, living your life? Many of us who've tried to lose weight in the past can relate to feeling like we have two parts to our personalities, each with different agendas. There's the part that wants to get thin and stay that way and is bound and determined to manage our behavior to be successful this time . . . finally. Then there's another part that whispers in our heads, *It's just a little taste . . . you deserve to have some . . . it won't count . . . go ahead, no one's watching . . . you'll start again tomorrow.* In *Bright Line Eating*, we call that voice the Saboteur. It's the part of us that tries to derail our best plans and intentions."

The Saboteur.

We've met it in other contexts by different names.

Steven Pressfield calls it "Resistance" in his creative trilogy. While *The Tools* guys call it "Part X" in *Coming Alive*. I often call it that little whiney voice that's always convincing you that THIS time it's OK to not do whatever you know is the right thing to do.

Here's how Pressfield puts it in *Do the Work*: "*We're wrong to think we're the only ones struggling with Resistance. Everyone who has a body experiences Resistance. Henry Fonda was still throwing up before each stage performance, even when he was seventy-five. In other words, fear doesn't go away. The warrior and the artist live by the same code of necessity, which dictates that the battle must be fought anew every day.*" And: "*On the field of the Self stand a knight and a dragon. You are the knight. Resistance is the dragon.*"

Here's how Michels and Stutz put it in *Coming Alive*: "*The Life Force is the opposite of Part X. If X is the prophet of impossibility, the Life Force is the herald of limitless potential, creating the sense that everything can change right now, in the present. It knows, better than you do, what you're capable of—and it gives you the energy to become the highest version of yourself. I've never met anyone who couldn't benefit from more of it.*"

Pressfield tells us we need to *Turn Pro* and *Do the Work* to win *The War of Art*. Phil and Barry tell us we need to use Tools to win that battle with Part X. I say we need to live with areté moment to moment to moment.

Susan? She walks us through WHY and HOW that voice shows up in our consciousness and then tells us that we simply need BRIGHT LINES to tame the beast that is our Saboteur.

I like that. A lot.

(We're slowly getting to our specific Bright Lines. First, a little more psychology. :)

SELF-PERCEPTION THEORY

"Dr. Daryl Bem of Cornell University first posited self-perception theory in 1972. It was a radical theory at the time. It said that we come to know who we are by watching our own behavior. Previously, the scientific community thought that self-knowledge drove our behavior. Most people still assume that we know who we are inherently, and that we then pick behaviors in alignment with that sense of who we are—in alignment with our beliefs, values, attitudes, and political leanings.

Dr. Bem disagreed. His research showed that we form opinions about ourselves exactly as we form opinions about others—by judging our behaviors. No difference. If a friend is always late, you eventually decide they are not only an unpunctual person, but probably also a disrespectful one. You do the same to yourself."

"In many religions, such as Judaism and the Baha'i faith, the next day is thought to begin not at midnight, but at sunset."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

"On average, it took 66 days for the new behavior to become 95 percent automatic. ... However, that's just an average—the range is immense. On the low end, automaticity was achieved in as few as 18 days, and on the high end, 254 days."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

Self-Perception Theory.

This is a REALLY cool way to look at things.

Basic idea: When you see yourself doing something, you figure "That's like you."

That's a cool little twist on the whole Eric Greiten's-inspired Identity → Behavior → Feelings.

At this stage, we know that what we DO influences our feelings. But we don't even need to have the "Identity" firmly in place. We just need the Behaviors. Of course, having a sense of "Identity" is a useful way to drive those behaviors ("What would the super healthy version of me do right now?") but you know what's even more powerful to drive effective behaviors?

BRIGHT LINES.

I do X, Y, and Z.

No Identity required. No negotiation allowed. I simply do X, Y, and Z.

Result? According to self-perception theory, I SEE myself doing those things and my Identity is created. And that feels great.

BRIGHT LINE EATING

"So, Bright Lines. Clear, simple, unambiguous boundaries that you just don't cross. We've arrived, finally, at the heart of the matter.

The most important contribution of the Bright Lines is that they bridge the Willpower Gap. Bright Lines give you clear rules for which you can—and can't—put in your mouth. And the result is that your eating choices become automatic. You don't have to think about them. There's no decision to make. It doesn't matter that it's 4 P.M. and that you have a tray of doughnuts in front of you. You will stand there knowing exactly what you are going to eat next, and those doughnuts won't be it. Bright Lines enable you to stop thinking about food, and to stop grappling with those 221 food-related choices a day we mentioned earlier. There is only one choice: respect the Bright Lines.

Bright Line Eating, as I've devised it, consists of four Bright Lines: Sugar, Flour, Meals, and Quantities."

Alas, we have arrived at the Bright Lines of Bright Line Eating.

There are four of them: Sugar + Flour + Meals + Quantities. Let's take a quick look at the first two. See the book for the last two.

First, sugar. It doesn't belong in our bodies. Period. As Susan says: it's *"the cardinal bright line. Without it, none of the others are effective, because you have to take sugar out of the equation to allow the brain—and therefore the body—to heal."*

Note: We're talking about ADDED sugar here. In all its forms and names (apparently there are over 60 names for it!): cane sugar, corn syrup, honey, agave, malted barley extract, etc. etc. etc. GONE!

Why? Well, many reasons but one of the big ones (especially for people struggling to lose weight) is the fact that sugar has been shown to light up the same brain area (the nucleus accumbens) that lights up for addictions to things like COCAINE. We need to ween ourselves off of it. ([See Notes](#) on David Ludwig's *Always Hungry?* and this +1: [Eating Sugar in an fMRI Machine.](#))

(Note: Artificial sweeteners are even worse than sugar in some ways. So... Susan says: Gone!)

Flour, Susan says, is a little wlier. But, it needs to go. Sorry. Hah. btw: Apparently, people say that pizza is the most addictive food on the planet. She says it's not the cheese (you ever see anyone running out to binge on cheese on broccoli?). It's the flour.

*"The point here is that once something becomes automatic, it frees up tremendous cognitive resources for other things. And you don't have to think about the behavior *at all* to get it done. The best part, in terms of staying true to your regimen, is that it will eventually become uncomfortable when you *don't* do it."*

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

"The reason we honor the Bright Lines and commit to living within them is because we find that consistency and structure make us Happy, Thin, and Free. More than that, they allow us to be the people that we strive to be and to do more of the things we want to do in life. Our focus moves beyond food; we become self-actualized and engaged with the world. That is what we all want our lives to be about."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

ISN'T THAT EXTREME?

"There's only one long-term, sustainable solution to this mess that I have ever seen work. It worked for me, and I have seen it work for thousands of others. Give up sugar and flour. Completely. Get them out of your system quickly and definitively.

It's possible you want to throw this book across the room. It's also possible you were given the book by someone who has lost and kept off a hundred pounds or more, so you're willing to keep an open mind. Either way, you're probably asking me right now, 'Isn't that *extreme*?'

To which I reply, 'I'll tell you what's extreme.' Each year in the United States alone, over 70,000 people have to get a limb amputated because of their Type 2 diabetes. *Seventy thousand people.* Their doctors have warned them it's coming, but it doesn't matter. They can't stop. They eat until they lose a limb. *That is extreme. That is how powerful addiction is.* Giving up processed drug-foods isn't extreme. What's extreme is the way our society eats—and the consequences we've decided we're willing to tolerate as a result.

And of course the answer is to quit. When someone is losing critical lung function because they smoke two packs of cigarettes a day, we don't tell them to moderate their smoking. We tell them to quit."

Is it extreme to cut out processed foods and the sugar and flour in them? Well... NO.

It's extreme that we're coming to accept our current behaviors and trends as a new normal. Reminds me of Krishnamurti's great line: "*It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society.*"

Whether you're looking to lose 100+ pounds or simply Optimize your weight or any other part of your life, let's be willing to be "extreme" and set up some solid Bright Lines to help the cause.

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

If you liked this Note,
you'll probably like...

[Willpower](#)

[The Marshmallow Test](#)

[The Willpower Instinct](#)

[Always Hungry?](#)

[Eat Fat, Get Thin](#)

[The Bulletproof Diet](#)

About the Author of "Bright Line Eating"

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives so they can actualize their potential as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + practical tools. Learn more and optimize your life at optimize.me.