

The Neurobiology of "We"

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You've no doubt heard of the mind-body connection. But Daniel J. Siegel suggests that there's another piece to the puzzle: the profound influence of those around us. On *The Neurobiology of "We"* the founder of the emerging field known as interpersonal neurobiology presents a new model of human potential that he calls the mindbody-relationship connection. Building on more than two decades of scientific research, Siegel offers listeners an in-depth exploration of this new map of human consciousness; insights into how interpersonal experiences shape the developing mind and foster emotional well-being; details on the untapped power this connection holds for individual and societal transformation; and more.

The Neurobiology of "We" Details

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Author : Daniel J. Siegel

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From Reader Review The Neurobiology of "We" for online ebook

Paul says

I can't believe this book was never released in print! It does such a good job covering attachment styles, trauma, neurobiology/neuroplasticity, and it makes a strong scientific case for living a more mindful/conscious/awakened life. Give it a listen!

Diane Moore says

Loved this audio program. Perhaps it was my prolonged listening that I seemed to lose the thread of the main points, but I enjoyed the personal stories mixed with the science.

Tom says

This is a super awesome audiobook. It makes sense to tell the story of how I got to reading this book, where I really came from, so that you might have some sense of whether or not the book would speak to you in a similar way it did to me, at the point you stand in your life today.

Daniel Siegel's work is almost easier to listen to than it is to read, in my very humble opinion, because his calming energy communicates the ideas that he's speaking in a more energetic sort of way.

The thing about Neurobiology of We, like Mindsight (which I also listened to but haven't read), is that there is quite a bit of detail. This isn't a complaint, it's just a fact that needs to be accepted if you feel the need to delve into this kind of work.

I listened to Mindsight earlier this year, by mistake. Looking at my audible.com history, I bought the book on March 10, 2012, thinking "Wow this sounds interesting." I was very into reading personal development books, but hadn't really hit a lot of the therapy type books. The book happened to be on some special for \$5 and I bought a bunch of books at the \$5 special. I started listening to it and...it made no sense. There was apparently no "unique selling point" to his story, it didn't catch my interest, I just remember lots of neuroscience mumbo jumbo, I had way too short of an attention span.

So I put it away for close to a year.

And a year later, I remember wanting to challenge myself. I remembered Mindsight being a challenging book. The year was 2013, and I was taking a short break from work, work and life in general had been stressing me out, so I quit my job, sold my stuff, and moved in with my parents for a short while, at the old age of 28 (that turned into about 6 months).

My goal for getting through the book was to actually UNDERSTAND the ideas the guy was talking about. This wasn't going to be a book I listened to while falling asleep. I set the timer to play 8 minutes at a time (cool feature on audible iPhone app I guess). At the end of every 8 minutes, I asked myself "what are 3 things I talked about?" If I couldn't answer, I'd give it another listen.

Ironically, I was *just* getting into being a chronic meditator in 2013. And the degree to which I can focus on someone else speaking is a skill that is similar to focusing on my breathe in meditation. Don't get distracted. Consciously direct your attention. And then ironically a big idea in this book was that mindfulness and meditation actually "repairs" parts of your brain.

And a lot of my brain had been...in a state of disrepair, stemming from my childhood. I'd never have thought.

So, Mindsight basically sold me on therapy, which I started in August 2013. Its been...great. Lots of challenges I've faced, internally so far this year.

Anyways, I went through Neurobiology of We more recently (finished just a few days ago on December 13th, 2013). This audiobook is really similar to Mindsight in concepts.

He speaks about a state called Integration, when different parts of your brain work together properly. A common example is that many people are unaware of their body. For example you might walk around being very tense, and not realize it. (Of course other people "see" this clearly in you, or more accurately "feel" it.)

You might have had some uncomfortable experiences growing up that led you to holding similar worldviews that are no longer useful as an adult.

This book is for...I would say, everyone. Well, at least everyone who is a human. Its a book about being more fully human.

His main area for beginning is that our experience consists of looking at our brain, our mind, and our relationships. Each of these 3 things affects each other. For example, what is a relationship, really? In your mind you have a concept of another person. You can change your brain in a relationship (which is what therapy is really all about, and as a "being an adult" person I can absolutely start to see that). This brain-mind-relationship idea is a big one for me.

Another one is "attachment styles." Youtube a video on "strange situation" to learn a bit about this experiment, and you will see that if you didn't grow up with a "secure attachment style" you can change this in therapy (with the "right" kind of therapist). If you don't have secure attachment, you'll walk through life with emotional problems of different types. Depression, anxiety, avoiding making decisions, avoiding certain social situations, etc. Some people like to say "Well I'm just nervous in so and so situations." That's fine. Does that mean you then AVOID the situations, or do you face them? That's a core idea to me, from the book.

This book is amazing because, well, this one plus Mindsight, they changed my perspective quite a bit. As a software engineer learning about and spending time and energy on (1) business and customers and products and how to eventually start a business and (2) dating, women, and sex -- I learned that more core and fundamental was really understanding myself as a human and addressing my childhood wounds. (I wasn't beaten or raped or anything, and I always THOUGHT my childhood was "normal" which to me meant I was fine...and over the past few years I've realized WHOA I'm not crazy...they were! But then that made me "crazy" but repairably so...) I had thought the highest leverage area I could learn about was business (its still a high leverage thing I plan to pursue after I feel good about my emotional work with my therapist and all this reading and stuff.) And now, from Siegel's ideas, I realize that the biggest area for growth for me was this emotional work and understanding my brain. But not understanding it from like BOOK SMARTS, but more so from LIFE EXPERIENCE SMARTS, making sense of my experience of life.

Read this book. I imagine you, as a human being, will benefit greatly from it.

See, I personally used to be incapable of having connection with other human beings. Now I am starting to really be able to connect to others. (And I didn't even KNOW that I didn't connect to others!) Some days are great and some are totally a jumbly mess of uncomfortable emotions. And in some sense I didn't CHOOSE to come here, I was FORCED (through my period of "high stress" which wasn't really the stress's fault it was the fact that my brain and body and nervous system stopped being able to handle the "relatively normal level of stress" I was experiencing in life at the time). So I understand if you wouldn't go out of your way to read it but...if you are reading this review, then that means you're probably in the right spot to check it out.

David Mullens says

Great book on Interpersonal Neurobiology. Wish he would have went a little bit more in depth, but he did point to a couple of other books that sounds like they would fill in some gaps. A pretty heavy subject, but he makes the material pretty accessible.

Aimee says

audiobook. really interesting. going to do research on attachment theory as a result.

Nataly Cohen says

Love!

Kristina Handy says

Very interesting. Not exactly a self-help book. More like a "how your brain works" for non-neurobiologists.

Alyssa says

I was expecting something new from Siegel, but he really just explained already established concepts in psychobiology, neuroscience, psychiatry, and related fields. The science is all accurate, but this book connected ideas more than presented new information. I found it rather slow and repetitive, but I have studied these concepts before, so I suppose it could be helpful if you are new to the subject. He uses plenty of personal anecdotes--to the point where I thought he was going off on quite a tangent at times--but again, if you haven't studied this topic before, you may find it useful. This book is really for the layperson.

Siegel does do a pretty good job of explaining a concept in psychology known as attachment. He includes the historic research on attachment (Ainsworth and the like), the different types of attachment and how they manifest in childhood and in adulthood, and the impact that attachment has on development. In simpler

terms, he talks a lot about the relationship between parents (or other caregivers) and their children and how it affects the child throughout his or her life.

Overall, it provides a solid foundation of the science and psychology behind relationships, especially the parent/child relationship, but I would skip it if you've studied anything beyond Psychology 101 at the college level.

Lisa says

The science parts were quite interesting. The book starts with theories about post-traumatic stress and the use of narrative to synthesize past trauma. It's pretty strong here. The author, a psychologist, is commenting on the continuing value of talk therapy over the strong push toward increased medication. While the science continues to be interesting as the book progresses, it starts to become fuzzy over what is mainstream science, what needs more research, and what are purely Siegel's theories based on experience and anecdote, but not controlled research by him and others. The ending is the weakest part in that he doesn't really seem to tie a bow on the book. He doesn't offer concrete self improvement techniques or suggestions. He doesn't talk about clear directions for science. He goes off into mindfulness and fuzzy talk of his terms and theories. Don't get me wrong, I am convinced of the benefit of meditation and mindfulness, but he doesn't tie it all together with his initial discussions of narrative and neurology. Interesting, especially the science, but lacking in a clear message of either science or self-help, which falls apart at the end.

Anna says

Listening to this on CD. Wow. Figured out a few things about myself.

Carolyn says

Started to listen to the audio book version, but seemed to cover the same material as Siegel's Mindsight and also The Mindful Therapist.

Senthil Parthiban says

I am really impressed with the trinity model Siegel proposes. Relationships - the process by which we share our energy and information, Brain- The mechanism used to share energy and information, Mind- The regulatory control for Brain. Also Siegel provides valid argument for how early relationship between child and its parent or parents play a crucial role in the development psychology of the Child's brain and its future. An Excellent point is the case of an adult who had dissociative relationship during his childhood with his mother developed a brain, with its left hemisphere which is responsible for social skills and communication is not in sync with its right hemisphere which generates ideas from memories. Siegel also gives a brief but make sense explanation about neural circuitry for empathy based on mirror neurons and information flow and the nine fold path he provides for better integration of the mind's domains to create a better holistic we through our relationships is very sensible.

This book is an excellent work on how our relationships shape our mind and how empathy and compassion between us creates new neural pathways for integration in the brain to create a better sense of 'we'. In short a highly recommend read for any parent or couple and anyone how wants to build better social wellbeing.

Sean Lambert says

There is so much in this book about how we attach to others, why we feel about others the way we do, and really how we live and interact with those around us. This will definitely take multiple listenings to really get the ideas concrete in my mind. If you are interested in attachment theory or mindfulness practices, this book is going to spark a lot of great ideas as it shows how these ideas and practices connect with what "we" know about the physical processes that happen in our brain and nervous system. For people who don't just want to read self-help books, but also want to explore the scientific basis for why those books work (or don't), this would be an excellent place to start.

Kathleen says

I love everything by Daniel Siegel.

Kevin says

I enjoyed the ambiance of this audiobook. Siegel's pace was measured and calm, his tone disarmingly personal. It turns out that he literally founded the field of interpersonal neurobiology, which purports to synthesize vast swathes of scientific disciplines into a coherent whole. Large claims by an influential man.

The author was careful to precede his discussion by asserting that the mind and the brain are distinct, that he would like to move away from the aphorism that "the brain is the seat of the mind". Instead, Siegel advocates a philosophical stance of emergentism, that the brain-mind connection is causally bidirectional. In my view, this point was rather underdeveloped & the book as a whole does not hinge on the point.

One interesting chapter relates to attachment theory. Children-caregiver relationships tend to group into four distinctive categories. These can be divined from the Strange Situation test, which places the child in a foreign environment, and then removes the caregiver for a few minutes. Attachment style is linked to child response: secure-attachment children reach out to the parent, and then resume play; avoidant-attachment children ignore the parent; anxious-attachment cling to the parent and are slow to be comforted; disorganized-attachment exhibit confused, contradictory responses.

What Siegel demonstrates is how later in life, a particular interview called the Adult Attachment Interview can predict, with 85% accuracy, the attachment style learned by the adult, earlier in life. When asked to explore feelings about early childhood relationships: the secure adult will be able to fluently conjure feelings; the anxious adult will be derailed by more present anxieties ("just last week, my mom did something nice for my brother, but not for me"; the avoidant adult will not be able to fully access emotional data ("my mom was

organized, beautiful"); the disorganized adult will answer relatively normally until faced with questions of loss or abuse.

The demographic ratios between these styles in US society tends to be 55% secure, 20% anxious, 20% avoidant, 5% disorganized.

Another interesting point of the book relates to trauma, or PTSD. Siegel summarizes an impressive swath of research that suggests that PTSD is the result of memory-encoding inconsistency. Memory is not a monolithic system, but rather divides into myriad subsystems (ex: <http://www.pnas.org/content/93/24/134...>). Siegel argues that trauma occurs when the threatening event is encoded into implicit memory, but stress hormone prevents the hippocampus from encoding it into episodic memory. Without access to the conscious "metadata" for the event in episodic memory, flashbacks trigger confusion between the memory, and the event itself.

Finally, Siegel presented a way of thinking about the brain that I found more helpful than Latin names. If one curls up the thumb into the palm, and curls the fingers around the thumb, it is a half-decent model of the brain. The palm represents the brain stem, the wrist the spinal column, the thumb the limbic system, the fingers the cortex. Within the "fingers", the back section between second and third knuckles represent perceptual systems, the tips, the prefrontal cortex.

I'll now list two criticisms I have, one specific and one general. The first is a matter of definition; Siegel likes to define the mind as a "process that organizes energy and information flowing through the brain". This is largely fine, and reflects the consilience between thermodynamics and information theory. But, he tends to conflate the use of "energy" between thermodynamics and emotional/psychic energy, which is unfortunate. My second criticism is one that I have so far felt against the fields of positive psychology as a whole: I just didn't learn very much from this book. The brain sciences don't seem to be sophisticated enough yet to give Siegel the mileage he needs to establish his conclusions. With so little attention given to mechanism, books such as this one will always feel empirically inadequate.

That said, this book does represent a fairly compelling "beginner's guide" to interpersonal neurobiology, and I look forward to learning more (especially how interpersonal neurobiology relates to mindfulness meditation).
