Being and Doing:

Activating Neural Networks
Of Mindful Presence

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Topics

- Perspectives
- “Doing” and “being”
- Spacious awareness
Perspectives
Neuroplasticity is not breaking news. It’s been long presumed that mental activity changed neural structure: what else is learning?

The news is in how the mind changes the brain.

Most neuroplasticity is incremental, not dramatic.

Neuroplasticity is ethically neutral.

How to use it for good?
Grounding in the Brain - Benefits

- **Organizing** framework
  - Evolutionary neuropsychology
  - Common ground across theories and methods
- **Motivating** to clients, clinicians, policy-makers
  - Concrete, in the body, *physical*
  - Status of medicine, hard science
- **Highlighting** key principles and practices
  - Implicit memory
  - Nonverbal processes
- **Innovating** with truly new methods
  - Neurofeedback
  - Fear extinction
Grounding in the Brain - Pitfalls

- **Adding little new meaning**
  - Replacing psych terms with neuro (“amygdala made me do it”)

- **Over-simplifying**
  - Over-localizing function (e.g., empathy = mirror neurons)
  - Exaggerated terms (“God-gene,” “female brain”)
  - Materialistic reductionism, though brain and mind co-arise

- **Claiming authority**
  - Using neuro data to argue a political or cultural case
  - Using the secular religion of science to elevate status

- **Underestimating the mind**
  - Most big changes in psyche involve tiny changes in soma; mental plasticity holds more promise than neural plasticity.
  - Overlooking the insights and effectiveness of psychology
  - Ducking existential choices in values
“Doing” and “Being”
## Dual Modes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Doing”</th>
<th>“Being”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainly representational</td>
<td>Mainly sensory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much verbal activity</td>
<td>Little verbal activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future- or past-focused</td>
<td>Now-focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recursive contents of mind</td>
<td>Transient contents of mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal-directed</td>
<td>Nothing to do, nowhere to go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of craving</td>
<td>Sense of peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal, self-oriented perspective</td>
<td>Impersonal, 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; person perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm beliefs</td>
<td>Uncertainty, not-knowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td>Nonjudgmental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost in thought, mind wandering</td>
<td>Mindful presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tightly connected experiences</td>
<td>Loosely connected experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focal view</td>
<td>Panoramic view</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prominent self-as-object</td>
<td>Minimal or no self-as-object</td>
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Increased **Medial** PFC Activation
Related to Self-Referencing Thought

Self-Focused (blue) and Open Awareness (red) Conditions (in the novice, pre MT group)

Self-Focused (blue) and Open Awareness (red) Conditions (following 8 weeks of MT)

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Spacious Awareness
Ways to Activate “Being” Mode

- Relax
- Focus on bare sensations and perceptions
- Sense the body as a whole
- Take a panoramic, “bird’s-eye” view
- Engage “don’t-know mind”; release judgments
- Don’t try to connect mental contents together
- Let experience flow, staying here now
- Relax the sense of “I, me, and mine”
Whole Body Awareness

- Sense the breath in one area (e.g., chest, upper lip)
- Sense the breath as a whole: one gestalt, percept
- Sense the body as a whole, a whole body breathing
- Sense experience as a whole: sensations, sounds, thoughts . . . all arising together as one unified thing
- It’s natural for this sense of the whole to be present for a second or two, then crumble; just open up to it again and again.
Panoramic Awareness

- Recall a bird’s-eye view (e.g., mountain, airplane)
- Be aware of sounds coming and going in an open space of awareness, without any edges: boundless
- Open to other contents of mind, coming and going like clouds moving across the sky.
- Pleasant or unpleasant, no matter: just more clouds
- No cloud ever harms or taints the sky.

*Trust in awareness, in being awake,*
*rather than in transient and unstable conditions.*

Ajahn Sumedho
To study the Way is to study the self.

To study the self is to forget the self.

To forget the self is
To be enlightened by all things.

Dogen
Relaxing the Sense of Self

- Cautions: dissociative disorders, borderline PD

- Distinguish between the person (the body-mind as a whole) and the apparent self (the supposedly unified, stable, and independent owner of experiences and agent of actions).

- Notice that many activities need little if any sense of “I” (e.g., reaching for salt, cuddling).

- Notice how “I” changes; see how it grows in response to threats, opportunities, and contact with others; consider the apparent “I” as a process rather than as an entity: “selfing.”

- Focus on present moment experience itself, continually dropping any story of “I, me, and mine.”

- Enjoy the peace of less selfing.
Blissful is passionlessness in the world,  
The overcoming of sensual desires;  
But the abolition of the conceit I am --  
That is truly the supreme bliss.

The Buddha, Udāna 2.11
“Bahiya, you should train yourself thus.”

In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. To the heard, only the heard. To the sensed, only the sensed. To the cognized, only the cognized.

When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in the heard, only the sensed in the sensed, only the cognized in the cognized, then, Bahiya, there’s no you in that.

When there’s no you in that, there’s no you there. When there’s no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two.

This, just this, is the end of all suffering.

The Buddha
Penetrative insight

joined with calm abiding

utterly eradicates

afflicted states.

Shantideva
Great Books

See www.RickHanson.net for other great books.

Key Papers - 1

See www.RickHanson.net for other scientific papers.


Key Papers - 2


- Hanson, R. 2008. Seven facts about the brain that incline the mind to joy. In Measuring the immeasurable: The scientific case for spirituality. Sounds True.


Key Papers - 4


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