

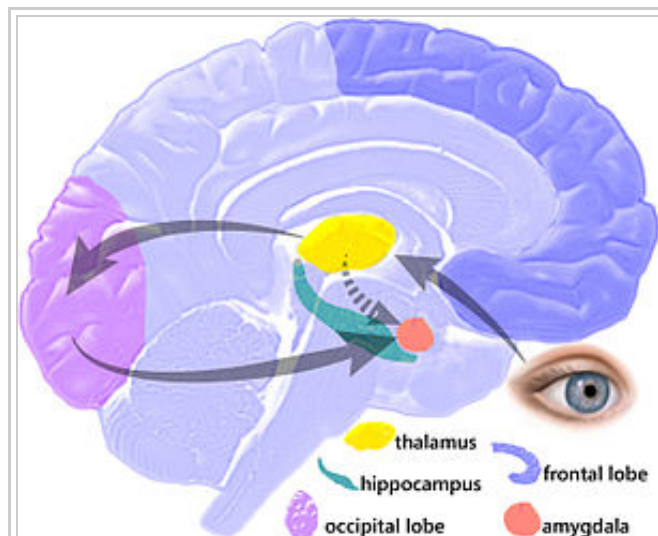
Amygdala hijack

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Amygdala hijack is a term coined by Daniel Goleman in his 1996 book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.^[1] Drawing on the work of Joseph E. LeDoux, Goleman uses the term to describe emotional responses from people which are immediate and overwhelming, and out of measure with the actual stimulus because it has triggered a much more significant emotional threat.^[2]

Contents

- 1 Definition
- 2 Positive hijacks
- 3 Emotional relearning
- 4 See also
- 5 References



Amygdala hijack - fear caused by optical stimulus

Definition

From the thalamus, a part of the stimulus goes directly to the amygdala while another part is sent to the neocortex or "thinking brain". If the amygdala perceives a match to the stimulus, i.e., if the record of experiences in the hippocampus tells the amygdala that it is a **fight, flight or freeze situation**, then the amygdala triggers the HPA (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal) axis and hijacks the rational brain. This emotional brain activity processes information milliseconds earlier than the rational brain, so in case of a match, the amygdala acts before any possible direction from the neocortex can be received. If, however, **the amygdala does not find any match to the stimulus received with its recorded threatening situations, then it acts according to the directions received from the neo-cortex. When the amygdala perceives a threat, it can lead that person to react irrationally and destructively.**^[3]

Goleman states that "[e]motions make us pay attention right now — this is urgent - and gives us an immediate action plan without having to think twice. The emotional component evolved very early: Do I eat it, or does it eat me?" The emotional response "can take over the rest of the brain in a millisecond if threatened."^{[4][5]} An amygdala hijack exhibits three signs: strong emotional reaction, sudden onset, and post-episode realization if the reaction was inappropriate.^[4]

Goleman later emphasised that "self-control is crucial ...when facing someone who is in the throes of an amygdala hijack"^[6] so as to avoid a complementary hijacking - whether in work situations, or in private life. Thus for example 'one key marital competence is for partners to learn to soothe their own distressed feelings...nothing gets resolved positively when husband or wife is in the midst of an emotional hijacking.'^[7] The danger is that "when our partner becomes, in effect, our enemy, we are in the grip of an

'amygdala hijack' in which our emotional memory, lodged in the limbic center of our brain, rules our reactions without the benefit of logic or reason...which causes our bodies to go into a 'fight or flight' response."^[8]

Positive hijacks

Goleman points out that "not all limbic hijackings are distressing. When a joke strikes someone as so uproarious that their laughter is almost explosive, that, too, is a limbic response. It is at work also in moments of intense joy."^[9]

He also cites the case of a man strolling by a canal when he saw a girl staring petrified at the water. "[B]efore he knew quite why, he had jumped into the water — in his coat and tie. Only once he was in the water did he realize that the girl was staring in shock at a toddler who had fallen in — whom he was able to rescue."^[10]

Emotional relearning

LeDoux was positive about the possibility of learning to control the amygdala's hair-trigger role in emotional outbursts. "Once your emotional system learns something, it seems you never let it go. What therapy does is teach you how to control it — it teaches your neocortex how to inhibit your amygdala. The propensity to act is suppressed, while your basic emotion about it remains in a subdued form."^[11]

See also

- Amygdala
- Emotional intelligence
- Stress (biology)

References

1. [^] Nadler, Relly. "What Was I Thinking? Handling the Hijack" (<http://www.busmanagement.com/article/What-Was-I-Thinking-Handling-the-Hijack/>). Retrieved 2010-04-06.
2. [^] "Conflict and Your Brain aka "The Amygdala Hijacking" " (http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:F0WT7mUV764J:www.sparc.org.nz/filedownload%3Fid%3Db07d08b0-77f9-4e92-9557-9120f8207146%26getfile%3Dtrue+amygdala+hijack&hl=en&gl=ph&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESg2_C1lBmeKk02ruG87VakbkuAcAcJRjZwMK_-ITyeM4QUdIQEJlfrHvKd8g1CmvB-0eGczvalOAIUGsBLa41hXJM76SIKv0VNIntlIILnVLW_-cM2IqEhWN6_5Qg-HNwlGqKZw&sig=AHIEtbStrKrp9qLIIOsQ9_kY4njiZg6vuA). Retrieved 2010-04-06.
3. [^] Freedman, Joshua. "Hijacking of the Amygdala" (<http://www.inspirations-unlimited.net/images/Hijack.pdf>). Retrieved 2010-04-06.
4. [^] *a b* Horowitz, Shell. "Emotional Intelligence - Stop Amygdala Hijackings" (http://www.umass.edu/fambiz/articles/values_culture/primal_leadership.html). Retrieved 2010-04-06.
5. [^] Hughes, Dennis. "Interview with Daniel Goleman" (<http://www.shareguide.com/Goleman.html>). Retrieved 2010-04-06.
6. [^] Daniel Goleman *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1999) n 87

6. Daniel Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998) p. 31
7. ^ Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* p. 144
8. ^ Rita DeMaria et al., *Building Intimate Relationships* (2003) p. 57
9. ^ Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* p. 14
10. ^ Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* p. 17
11. ^ Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* p. 213

Retrieved from "http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Amygdala_hijack&oldid=622245478"

Categories: [Emotional issues](#) | [Neuropsychology](#) | [Stress](#)

- This page was last modified on 21 August 2014 at 20:36.
- Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.