

How People CHANGE



**Relationships and Neuroplasticity
in Psychotherapy**

Edited by MARION SOLOMON and DANIEL J. SIEGEL

How People Change: Relationships and Neuroplasticity in Psychotherapy



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and Daniel J. Siegel

Reviewed by Nancy
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When I read the flier announcing another edition edited by Marion Solomon and Daniel J. Siegel I knew I needed to review it (hard not to give a nod to these two—they consistently offer quality material) but the list of contributors felt far too familiar— I’ve read many books and papers by many of the contributors, some I’ve even interviewed and written about for this magazine. One essay even acknowledged that a version of it was previously published in 2011.

Well, here’s to moving forward despite assumptions and preconceived notions and reading with receptivity and curiosity. Yes, I was pleasantly surprised by the newness of how established data was used to support creative and insightful ways to address change in psychotherapy.

How People Change offers 11 essays exploring growth and change, which are noted to be “at the heart of all successful psychotherapy”, and I will add at the heart of body psychotherapy and somatic psychology. The body and its place in our lives— our healing and overall health— is part of the process in many of these essays. A clear focus on mind-body dualism is supported as many of the authors write about the relationship between client and therapist and explore “the complexities of attachment, the brain, mind, and body as they aid change during psychotherapy.” Contributors include: Philip M. Bromberg, Louis Cozolino and Vanessa Davis, Margaret Wilkinson, Pat Ogden, Peter A. Levine, Russell Meares, Dan Hughes, Martha Stark, Stan Tatkin, Marion Solomon, and Daniel J. Siegel co-authoring with Bonnie Goldstein.

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Each essay presents the author's thoughts on how to induce, instigate, facilitate change in psychotherapy, how to be with the client in the change process, and what it means to be in relationship with a client's mind, brain, body, and soul. While there is not time nor need to detail each essay, I offer small glimpses of some of them.

Philip M. Bromberg: Psychotherapy as the Growth of Wholeness: The Negotiation of Individuality and Otherness

Bromberg begins with an interesting discussion of the two epigraphs he selected to begin his chapter:

"My one regret in life is that I am not someone else." (attributed to Woody Allen)

"We may still tremble, the fear of doing wretchedly may linger, but we grow. Flashes of inspiration come to guide the soul. In nature, there is no outside. When we are cast from a group or a condition we have still the companionship of all that is." (Theodore Dreiser)

In an engaging first-person voice that addresses the reader directly to intimately share an insider's perspective, Bromberg offers that his opening epigraphs not only guided the focus of his chapter but also demanded their own air time. He writes that while he normally picks one epigraph, two came to forefront, and while he usually selects them then forgets about them, while writing, these two kept coming to the page: "What I received was not a 'meaning' but a feeling of strangely pleasurable surrender to something new that was even more unbidden: The words of these two epigraphs, my reason for choosing them, kept changing experientially in unexpectedly personal ways while I was writing" (pg. 18).

His chapter continues to be a joyous read as he "introduces" us to how his mind works then begins what he calls the chapter proper. His work is strongly influenced by Allan Shore's contributions to psychotherapy and neuroscience (affect regulation, dysregulation) with emphasis on the phenomenon and concept of "state-sharing"—"the right brain to right brain communication process through which each person's states of mind are known to the other implicitly" (pg. 23).

"The interface between my own thinking and his (*Shore*), when linked to the centrality we each place of the mind-brain-body interface, provides the core context that I believe will allow psychoanalysis and psychotherapy to become most *genuinely* therapeutic" (pg. 23). His chapter thus focuses on how human relationships (specifically between therapist and client) enable the self to heal while simultaneously co-creating a dynamic link between healing and growth. While he dislikes the word change when applied to people, to address the theme of this book, he spends his time thinking about and thus writing about what makes psychotherapy *possible* (pg. 23). From his perspective, psychotherapy is a relational experience, shaped by two specific people. What makes it therapeutic is its uncertainty—what he calls safe surprises (pg. 23).

Later in this chapter, Bromberg underscores his "strong and lasting conviction that when *perception* organizes our way of relating, our patients are *therapeutically freed* (though not necessarily 'free') to actively 'do' unto us what we are 'doing' unto them" (pg. 33) to emphasize that "personal meaning is not birthed by the 'right words,' but by a two-way perceptual context that slowly includes the *cognitive* meaning provided by the personally negotiated affective physicality of its experiential meaning" (pg. 33). He then writes about the trauma of nonrecognition before sharing his case study involving those voices.

Louis Cozolino and Vanessa Davis: How People Change

These co-authors offer first a comparison between a rat and a human that involves tunnels and cheese. It seems that if a rat finds cheese at the end of a tunnel it will return to the same tunnel. But, if the cheese is no longer there, after a few disappointments, the rat will forage elsewhere. Meanwhile, a human will continue to haunt the same empty tunnel all the while believing that the cheese should be there. Their point is that the human brain is an organ of adaptation and survival. It is designed to do things as quickly, as efficiently as possible with the least amount of information (pg. 54). Our brain, they say, is inherently conservative—it wants to do

what's worked before. And it also a 'social organ' such that "its growth and organization is shaped and reshaped in the process of ongoing experience" (pg. 55). According to Cozolino and Davis, "The dynamic tension between habit and the need for adaptation lies at the heart of psychotherapy" (pg. 55).

There's an interesting discussion about dogma and unconscious egocentric biases (on the part of the therapist) that lead one to believe his/her way is the right way. And another fascinating conversation on reflexive social language (RSL) defined as "a stream of words that appear to exist to grease the social wheels" that consist of "verbal reflexes, clichés, and acceptable reactions in social situations that establish a web of pleasantries with those around us" (pg. 65) as compared to what they call our internal narrator, which verbalizes internal language that is far different than we share with other people. RSL connects us to others with a positive intent, while the narrator is a private language, a single inner voice that is primarily negative, and driven by self-doubt, anxiety, fear, and shame. It also serves to turn against others via critical and hostile thoughts. They end the essay with a case study.

Margaret Wilkinson: A Whole-Person Approach to Dynamic Psychotherapy

Wilkinson looks at how the client first came to be distressed enough to seek support and then how to bring about effective change so the client leaves with a "more robust sense of self and a confident approach to living" (pg. 73). She discusses attachment, affect regulation, meaning making, empathy, and neurological substrates of change.

Peter Levine: Emotion, the Body and Change

Dr. Levine looks at how the components and structure of emotions are rooted in both bodily processes and in our central nervous system function. He offers an interesting essay with historical perspectives leading to current day applications. He cites William James' conclusion that rather than running because we are afraid, we are afraid

because we are running (from a bear in this instance) and James' theory that bodily changes follow directly from the perception of the exciting fact (pg. 129). According to Levine, James' "counter intuitive view challenged the Cartesian/cognitive (top-down) paradigm where the conscious mind first recognizes the source of the threat, and then commands the body to respond . . . James' bottom-up paradigm that we feel fear because we are running away from the threat makes a crucial point of the illusory nature of emotional perception" (pg. 130).

Levine also looks at the tendency in psychology to view consciousness as either conscious or unconscious while he proposes that it occurs on a continuum, more like shades of consciousness (pg. 133). Looking at what is necessary to create change in our emotional responses, Levine spends quality time looking at the posture of experience (think Charlie Brown walking with his shoulders slumped, his head down perpetuating his down mood and Lucy telling him to walk with his head held high, to face and greet his world thus changing his internal feeling state). He then offers a lengthy discussion of Nina Bull's work before presenting his current case example.

Russell Mears: The Disintegrative Core of Relational Trauma and a Way Toward Unity

Mears discusses what he believes is the central pathological effect of relational trauma and how to overcome it. He notes that while "no accepted therapeutic approach exists", he proposes that "unity of mind is fostered by a specific kind of conversation between the patient and the therapist: a conversation that has the quality of analogical connectedness" (pg. 151). He writes about the importance of the therapeutic field, the concept of self and integration and conversation. He offers a language of connection that first couples with what is essential in the patient's expression—style, lexicon, syntax; however, the therapist's remarks are not an exact copy. It is secondly a language of connection that stems from a right hemisphere kind of style—defined by Vygotsky, as inner speech that refers to the life of the self, an inner world. A right hemisphere sort of speech involves

incomplete sentences, often missing a subject and at times even verbs are omitted (pg. 162). The overall sense is one of a good “fit”.

Dan Hughes: How Children Change within the Therapeutic Relationship

Hughes starts his essay by citing Cozolino: “Children need their parents’ curiosity about them as an avenue of self-discovery,” then adds that children in therapy need the same from their therapists. His chapter focuses on good conversations, relationships, and how curiosity and empathy facilitate the development of both between a child and therapist.

Martha Stark: The Therapeutic Use of Optimal Stress

Stark looks at both change and resistance to change. She involves Freud’s concepts of “repetition, compulsion and adhesiveness of the id” before introducing her concept of ambivalent attachment and its role in dysfunctional defense and “the relentless pursuit of the unattainable as explanatory constructs for the almost universal resistance to change that therapists encounter with longstanding emotional injuries and scars” (pg. 186). She then turns to Chaos Theory to create understanding on a more fundamental level of both how people change and what must first be overcome if they are to change (pg. 186).

Stan Tatkin: How Couples Change: A Psychobiological Approach to Couples’ Therapy

According to Tatkin, couples therapy has a “long history of ineffectiveness because early approaches tried to retrofit cognitive, behavioral and psychoanalytic models to a dyadic system” (pg. 221). He recommends an integrated psychobiological approach that addresses the ‘system’ (meaning the couple) from a bottom-up, procedural memory perspective that combines three key domains: attachment theory, arousal and affect regulation, and developmental neuroscience (encompassing social-emotional deficits and issues of brain

integration along both the horizontal (right-left, left-right) and vertical (top-bottom, bottom-top) axes.

Marion Solomon: How Couple Therapy Can Affect Long Term Relationships and Change Each of the Partners

Solomon writes about the power of our brain not being the fact that we have billions of neurons but that we have all these connections between them that form and change our experiences (pg. 247). She looks at what made the primary love relationship become a danger zone versus a safe haven, such that each partner “calls on whatever protection they can against perceived emotional assaults by the other” (pg. 251). According to Solomon, most complaints couples have about the other stem from “reenactments of early disappointments in relationships that they had with their parents”. “People,” she writes, “resist letting go of their dysfunctional, self-protective defenses, despite the fact that their early, learned, traditional ways of being and doing have long outlived their usefulness” (pg. 253).

Bonnie Goldstein and Daniel J Siegel: Feeling Felt: Co-Creating an Emergent Experience of Connection, Safety and Awareness in Individual and Group Psychotherapy

Goldstein and Siegel explore “the nature of the human mind, the experience of consciousness, the impact of culture on mental health, how our social brains influence our connections with others and with ourselves and how we provide the kinds of experiences that promote well-being, cultivate resilience, and foster integrative neurological growth” (pg. 275).

In terms of awareness, they look at ways to cultivate conscious experiences to promote change that consider somatic correlations to awareness because we are raised in a disembodied world with the emphasis on ‘human doing’ versus ‘human being’ they write. Their integrative model of interpersonal neurobiology offers a “scientifically grounded approach that prioritizes the relationship between therapist and client and incorporates awareness of somatic (embodied), intuitive, and

emotional explorations of our stories” (pg. 285).

A Closing Quote

To offer a simple sense of closure, I offer a quote from Rick Hanson, PhD, author of *Buddha’s Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom* about *How People Change*: “This masterful collection of essays is rich with practical insights for psychotherapists, coaches, and really anyone who helps others change for the better. Far-reaching, lucid, full of heart, and highly recommended.”

About the Editors:

Marion Solomon, Ph.D., is a lecturer at the David Geffen School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry at UCLA, and Senior Extension faculty at the Department of Humanities, Sciences and Social Sciences at UCLA. She is also director of clinical training at the Lifespan Learning Institute and author of *Narcissism and Intimacy*, co-author of *Short Term Therapy For Long Term Change*, and co-editor of *Countertransference in Couples Therapy and Healing Trauma*.

Daniel J. Siegel, MD is a graduate of Harvard Medical School and completed his

postgraduate medical education at UCLA with training in pediatrics and child, adolescent, and adult psychiatry. He is currently a clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine, founding co-director of UCLA’s Mindful Awareness Research Center, founding co-investigator at the UCLA Center for Culture, Brain and Development, and executive director of the Mindsight Institute, an educational center devoted to promoting insight, compassion, and empathy in individuals, families, institutions, and communities. Dr. Siegel’s psychotherapy practice spans thirty years, and he has published extensively for the professional audience. He serves as the Founding Editor for the Norton Professional Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology which includes over three dozen textbooks. Dr. Siegel’s books include *Mindsight*, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*, *The Developing Mind*, Second Edition, *The Mindful Therapist*, *The Mindful Brain*, *Parenting from the Inside Out* (with Mary Hartzell, M.Ed.), and the three New York Times bestsellers: *Brainstorm*, *The Whole-Brain Child* (with Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D.), and his latest *No-Drama Discipline* (with Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D.). He has been invited to lecture for the King of Thailand, Pope John Paul II, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Google University, and TEDx. For more information about his educational programs and resources, please visit: www.DrDanSiegel.com.



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