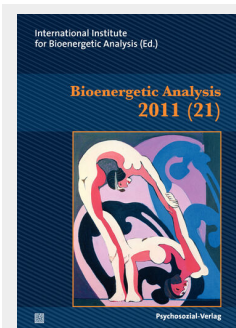


*Robert Hilton*

## Book Review of: Daniel Siegel: Mindsight



### **Bioenergetic Analysis**

11. Volume, No. 1, 2011, Page 133–137

Psychozoal-Verlag

DOI: [10.30820/0743-4804-2011-21-133](https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2011-21-133)



Bibliographic information of Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (The German Library)  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;  
detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

2011 Psychosozial-Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, Gießen, Germany  
[info@psychosozial-verlag.de](mailto:info@psychosozial-verlag.de)  
[www.psychosozial-verlag.de](http://www.psychosozial-verlag.de)



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). This license allows private use and unmodified distribution, but prohibits editing and commercial use (further information can be found at: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). The terms of the Creative Commons licence only apply to the original material. The reuse of material from other sources (marked with a reference) such as charts, illustrations, photos and text extracts may require further permission for use from the respective copyrights holder.

Cover image: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: *Pair of Acrobats*, Sculpture , 1932–33, Oil on canvas, 85,5 x 72 cm

Cover design & layout based on drafts by Hanspeter Ludwig, Wetzlar

<https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2011-21>

ISBN (PDF-E-Book) 978-3-8379-6889-7

ISBN (Print) 978-3-8379-2107-6

ISSN (Online) 2747-8882 · ISSN (Print) 0743-4804

---

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Angela Klopstech, PhD, Dipl.-Psych.,  
40–50 East Tenth Street, #1c  
New York, NY 10003  
212-260-3289  
klopkoltuv@aol.com

**DANIEL SIEGEL: MINDSIGHT***Robert Hilton*

When I first heard Daniel Siegel speak in 1999, I thought to myself, this man explains the neurological basis for the work we do as somatic therapists. My response was to his discussion of his first book, *The Developing Mind*. He has since written three other books: *The Mindful Brain*, *Mindsight* and *The Mindful Therapist*. This review is limited to *Mindsight*. You can go to Google on your computer and type in *Mindsight* and find many critical reviews of this book. I have chosen to write a review with my audience in mind. While giving you a taste of the overall message of the book I have deliberately focused on the parts that are particularly relevant to us as somatic psychotherapists.

Siegel defines *mindsight* as follows, “*Mindsight* is a process that enables us to modify the flow of energy and information within a Triangle of Well-Being. The *monitoring* aspect of *mindsight* involves sensing this flow within ourselves – perceiving it in our own nervous systems, which we are calling Brain – and within others through our Relationships, which involve the sharing of energy and information flow through various means of communication. We then can *modify* this flow through awareness and intention, fundamental aspects of our mind, directly shaping the paths that energy and information flow take in our lives.”

The illustration he likes to use in the book regarding *mindsight*, or the monitoring and modifying of the flow of energy, is that of a bicycle wheel where you have a hub in the center, a rim on the outside and spokes that go from the hub to the rim. The hub becomes the inner

place of the mind from which we become aware. The spokes represent how we direct our attention to a particular part of the rim. The hub can be seen as a visual metaphor for our prefrontal cortex. At any one time you may be able to direct your attention to various feelings and actions that are on the rim. As you do that you begin to realize that you are not defined by these experiences, that there is a you in the hub who can make decisions about where to focus your attention. Siegel says, “The hub of our mind is always available to us, right now. And it’s from this hub that we enter a compassionate state of connection to ourselves, and feel compassion for others.”

Anything that may come into our awareness may be one of the points on the rim. One sector on the rim is our inward sense of the body, the sensations in our limbs and our facial muscles, the feelings in the organs of our torso - our lungs, our heart, and our intestines. All of the body brings its wisdom up into our mind, and this bodily sense we can bring into our awareness. By doing a simple exercise of following our breath we are able to expand our awareness and thus our hub of awareness expands. Siegel in referring to a patient whom he had taught to follow his breath in this way says, “There is a place deep within us that is observant, objective, and open. This is the receptive hub of the mind, the tranquil depth of the mental sea.” He goes on to say that from this depth his patient, “could use the power of reflective awareness to alter the way his brain functioned and ultimately to change the structure of his brain.” In another place he states simply,

“One of the key practical lessons of modern neuroscience is that the power to direct our attention has within it the power to shape our brain’s firing patterns, as well as the power to shape the architecture”.

Bodily regulation, attuned communication, emotional balance, response flexibility, fear modulation, empathy, insight, moral awareness and intuition are a list of some of the elements of emotional well being and they all have a prefrontal function in the brain. Intuition, for example can be seen as how the middle prefrontal cortex gives us access to the wisdom of the body. This region receives information from throughout the interior of the body, including the viscera – such as our heart and intestines-and uses this input to give us a “heart sense” of what to do or a “gut feeling” about the right choice. Siegel states, “This integrative function illuminates

how reasoning, once thought to be a “purely logical” mode of thinking, is in fact dependent on the non-rational processing of our bodies. Such intuition helps us make wise decisions, not just logical ones.”

One chapter with particular relevance for us as somatic therapists is entitled, “Cut Off From The Neck Down: *Reconnecting the Mind and the Body*.” He describes a case with a patient. The patient as a result of childhood trauma had decided not to feel anything again. She demonstrated this comment by using her finger like a knife and cutting off her head. Yet she had heart palpitations and stated, “I guess there has to be something more to life than just this.” Siegel’s description of this patient sounds like a somatic therapist talking. He reports the following: “Halfway through Anne’s second visit, a quotation from James Joyce that I’d heard somewhere popped into my head: Mr. Duffy ‘lived at a little distance from his body.’ It was in the way she moved, the stiffness of her gait, the way she held her hands motionless in her lap. (Her throat cutting gesture stood out even more in retrospect.) It was also emerging from her account of a limited, rigid inner life lived only above the shoulders.”

He goes on to describe exactly what happens in our brain when we decide not to feel anything again. He also describes exercises that help in the recovery of the brain’s capacity to receive previously frightening information. The key, of course, to all of this is the empathic attunement of the therapist. He describes how in the beginning of the therapy with this patient he did a body scan. When she came to her chest where all the sadness had been hidden she began to hyperventilate and panic. He brought her back from the panic and suggested exercises she could do at home to help her. In a later session he returned to the body scan and this time when she contacted her chest she began to feel heaviness and tightness in her throat. Tears filled her eyes and she felt a profound sense of sadness. At first Siegel says her tears were slow, a few drops, then when she noticed them she wiped them away. Then he states, “As we stayed together with whatever she was feeling, she began to sob uncontrollably, her body bent over as she moaned in pain. I let her sense our connection with my own non-verbal signals - a sigh, a quiet “ummmm”, the rhythm of our breathing in synch. When she opened her eyes and we looked at each other, I noticed my own tears.”

In a session with Stuart, a different client, Siegel recalls reminding the

client of an event that he had told him about that happened in the client's childhood. The man was deeply moved and replied with tears, "I can't believe you remembered what I said months ago...I can't believe you really know me." Siegel writes, "I can't really put words to what happened, but – half a year into therapy – there now seemed to be a "we" in the room. If we had had brain monitors on hand, I think they would have picked up the resonance between us. Just as Stuart had been moved to tears at realizing that his mind was in mine, I felt deeply moved by feeling, for the first time, that mine was in his. There was a deep and open connection between us."

In summary, this book provides a clear description of the function of the mind and brain in psychotherapy and suggests ways that through mindfulness and attention we can actually change our brain's structure. Siegel believes that through this process we can become our own best friend and form a connection that is like that of a secure attachment. He also demonstrates the importance of the body and a deep empathic attunement in this process. It is quite heartening to read this coming from one of the leaders in the field of neurobiology and mindfulness meditation. I highly recommend this book to any therapist.

Daniel Siegel will be one of the guest speakers at our IIBA conference in October, 2011. After his presentation, Louise Frechette will offer a video presentation demonstrating her bioenergetic work with a client. Following the video presentation I will interview Siegel regarding his work and how it relates to what we do as somatic therapists. The following are some of the questions I will be discussing with him:

How do we integrate mindfulness meditation and the healthy function of the brain with the body and relationship?

Can a secure attachment be established in the brain through mindfulness meditation alone?

How important is the therapeutic relationship in securing or maintaining affect regulation in the client?

Can mindfulness exercises and/or the relationship with the therapist create a healthy brain state and thereby bypass the early traumas that are embedded in the body?

How differently do we work with clients who have very little or no access to a basic self or safe place for refuge?

(I would welcome any further questions you might have that I could present in the interview. You can reach me at rhilton@cox.net.)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Robert Hilton, PhD, has attained IIBA Emeritus Faculty status. An internationally celebrated trainer, he is the author of *Relational Somatic Psychotherapy*, which can be found at Bioenergetic Press.

His office address is:  
150 Paularino Avenue #185  
Costa Mesa, Ca. 92626