

Beyond the Prison of Implicit Memory: The Mindful Path to Well-being

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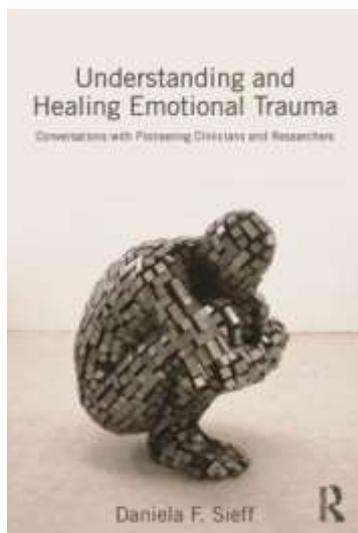
Chapter Summary

People who enjoy psychological well-being are typically emotionally secure, compassionate, open-minded and curious. Underlying these qualities is neurobiological integration. Growing up in an emotionally nurturing environment fosters the development of neural integration, whereas an emotionally inadequate environment stifles it.

Our early emotional environment also plays a vital role in creating the unconscious models that contribute to our 'attachment status.' If our caregivers are attentive, compassionate and loving, we become 'securely attached' and learn to experience ourselves as loveable, others as trustworthy and the world as safe. However, if our caregivers are neglectful, intrusive or abusive we develop 'insecure attachment', whereby we come to experience ourselves as unlovable, others as untrustworthy and the world as unsafe.

These unconscious models are encoded in 'implicit memory'. Rather than returning as a conscious memory of a past event, implicit memory returns as a way of seeing the world, a suite of emotions, and a set of behavioural reactions. Over time these ways of being become part of our character and we mistakenly believe this is who we are, rather than what we have learnt.

If our childhood emotional environment prevented us from developing emotional well-being, we can do so later in life. The human brain evolved to be shaped by interpersonal relationships, so working with an attuned and empathetic therapist can be powerfully reparative. Mindfulness practices can also make an important contribution. Not only do they foster neural integration and help us to become aware of our implicit memories, they also teach us to attune to ourselves with compassion and love, thereby enabling us to develop secure attachment through our relationship to ourselves.



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