

Mind Wide Open: Your Brain and the Neuroscience of Everyday Life

By Steven Johnson

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In this nationally bestselling, compulsively readable account of what makes brain science a vital component of people's quest to know themselves, acclaimed science writer Steven Johnson subjects his own brain to a battery of tests to find out what's really going on inside. He asks:

- How do we "read" other people?
- What is the neurochemistry behind love and sex?
- What does it mean that the brain is teeming with powerful chemicals closely related to recreational drugs?
- Why does music move us to tears?
- Where do breakthrough ideas come from?

Johnson answers these and many more questions arising from the events of our everyday lives. You do not have to be a neuroscientist to wonder, for example, why do you smile? And why do you sometimes smile inappropriately, even if you don't want to? How do others read your inappropriate smile? How does such interplay occur neurochemically, and what, if anything, can you do about it? Fascinating and rewarding, *Mind Wide Open* speaks to brain buffs, self-obsessed neurotics, barstool psychologists, mystified parents, grumpy spouses, exasperated managers, and anyone who enjoys speculating and gossiping about the motivations and behaviors of other human beings. Steven Johnson shows us the transformative power of understanding brain science and offers new modes of introspection and tools for better parenting, better relationships, and better living.

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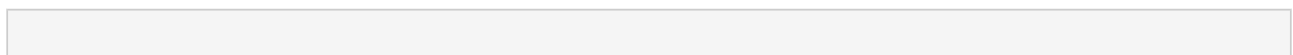
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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Given the opportunity to watch the inner workings of his own brain, Steven Johnson jumps at the chance. He reveals the results in *Mind Wide Open*, an engaging and personal account of his foray into edgy brain science. In the 21st century, Johnson observes, we have become used to ideas such as "adrenaline rushes" and "serotonin levels," without really recognizing that complex neurobiology has become a commonplace thing to talk about. He sees recent laboratory revelations about the brain as crucial for understanding ourselves and our psyches in new, post-Freudian ways. Readers shy about slapping electrodes on their own temples can get a vicarious scientific thrill as Johnson tries out empathy tests, neurofeedback, and fMRI scans. The results paint a distinct picture of the author, and uncover general brain secrets at the same time. Memory, fear, love, alertness--all the multitude of states housed in our brains are shown to be the results of chemical and electrical interactions constantly fed and changed by input from our senses. *Mind Wide Open* both satisfies curiosity and provokes more questions, leaving readers wondering about their own gray matter.

--Therese Littleton

From Publishers Weekly

It's the rare popular science book that not only gives the reader a gee-whiz glimpse at an emerging field, but also offers a guide for incorporating its new insights into one's own worldview. Johnson, the former editor of the Webzine Feed and author of the acclaimed *Emergence* (2001), does just that in his fascinating, engagingly written new survey. Applying what he calls "the 'long-decay' test" to gauge the information's enduring relevance, he chooses a handful of current neuroscience concepts with the potential to transform our thinking about emotions, memories and consciousness. In a charming device, the writer subjects himself to the latest in neurological testing techniques, from biofeedback to the latest forms of MRI, and shares the insight he gains into the moment-by-moment workings of his own brain, from the adrenaline spike he gets from making jokes to his intense focus when composing sentences. The structure is fluid almost to a fault, as Johnson illustrates, elaborates on and returns to his view of the brain as a modular, associative network, "more like an orchestra than a soloist." He introduces the amygdala, for example, as a small region in the brain implicated in our ongoing, nearly automatic interpretation of the emotional states of others (called "mind reading"), a function impaired in autistic individuals. But the amygdala, the brain's source of "gut feelings," returns in the following chapter as important in encoding fearful memories, a connection that helps explain why fearful or traumatic memories are so much more tenacious and detailed than emotionally neutral ones. Always considerate of his audience, Johnson weaves disparate strands of brain research and theory smoothly into the narrative (only a concluding section on Freud's modern legacy feels like a tangent), which leaves readers' minds more open than they were.

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From Scientific American

"Over the past three decades, science has given us extraordinary glimpses of the brain's inner geography.... We now have the technology in place to picture that inner landscape, in itself as it really is. These are tools, in other words, for exploring our individual minds, with all their quirkiness and inimitability." Johnson, who was co-founder and editor of the Internet science magazine Feed, tested several of the tools and reports on what they and various experiments can reveal about such mental activities as mind reading, the fear response, neurofeedback, the roots of laughter and how one gets flashes of insight. "Knowing something about the brain's mechanics--and particularly your brain's mechanics--widens your own self-awareness as powerfully as any therapy or meditation or drug."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Randy Johnson:

Do you one of people who can't read pleasant if the sentence chained from the straightway, hold on guys that aren't like that. This Mind Wide Open: Your Brain and the Neuroscience of Everyday Life book is readable simply by you who hate the straight word style. You will find the information here are arrange for enjoyable looking at experience without leaving even decrease the knowledge that want to provide to you. The writer regarding Mind Wide Open: Your Brain and the Neuroscience of Everyday Life content conveys the thought easily to understand by many people. The printed and e-book are not different in the content material but it just different available as it. So , do you continue to thinking Mind Wide Open: Your Brain and the Neuroscience of Everyday Life is not loveable to be your top listing reading book?

Clementine Frazier:

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