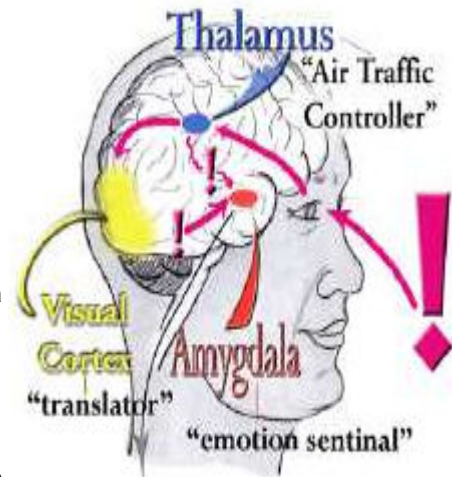


Keep your amygdala in check

How come we sometimes see 'out of character' behaviour and where does it come from? Those of you who know about the amygdala are probably smiling by now - those that don't are probably thinking I made this name up!

This is what happens in your brain when you get really mad - or really anything....

The diagram of the human brain on the right and subsequent description comes from <http://www.eqtoday.com> and depicts the routes from sensation to action. The journey begins with sensation, in this case vision, which is routed to the thalamus. The thalamus acts as 'air traffic controller' to keep the signals moving. In a typical situation, the thalamus directs the impulse to the, in this case the visual cortex, for processing. The cortex 'thinks' about the impulse and makes sense. "Aha," it says, "this is an exclamation mark! It means I should get excited." That signal is then sent to the amygdala where a flood of peptides and hormones are released to create emotion and action.



In what Dan Goleman labelled "The hijacking of the Amygdala," the thalamus has a different reaction. Like any skilled air traffic controller, the thalamus can quickly react to potential threat. In perceived emergencies the thalamus bypasses the cortex, the thinking brain, and the signal goes straight to the amygdala! In this case the amygdala can only react based on its limited number of stored patterns.

Sometimes this kind of reaction can save our lives. More frequently, in our day to day lives, it leads us to say something harmful, to escalate the situation, to act inappropriately or even to anger and violence.

To minimise the damage from hijacking, it is important to practice being aware of the emotional patterns which lead to a hijacking. We may be particularly vulnerable when we are involved in something we are highly motivated about, when we are tired, and/or under the influence of alcohol, and/or when we have a build up of stressors – the last straw.

I guess you can recall a recent episode in which you experienced an amygdala hijacking and one when you managed to avoid it?

What factors made you more vulnerable to hijacks?

What patterns of triggers or catalysts can you identify?

What fed it or kept it going?

What did you do to avoid it?

Maybe you remember one of the most famous amygdala hijacks when Kevin Keegan was interviewed live on TV after Alex Ferguson had wound him up. See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXpUdBIRZe8>

Food for thought?

For more hints and tips go to www.iridiumconsulting.co.uk/links.html

