

The mind, the brain, the myth essay

[Life](#), [Relationships](#)



In "The Mind's Eye," Oliver Sacks opens up by asking three similar questions: "To what extent are we - our experiences, our reactions - shaped, predetermined, by our brains, and to what extent do we shape our own brains? Does the mind run the brain or the brain the mind - or, rather, to what extent does one run the other? To what extent are we the authors, the creators, of our own experiences?" (214) These three questions refer to the same question of the limit of control between the mind and brain. These questions begin to cast doubts on the belief of the brain being a "hard-wired" organ. They ensue an argument of self-finding; can our minds change the thought process of the brain? By answering the main question of which is in more control, many underlying questions can then be answered as well. Is the brain the center of control that constitutes every experience, or can the mind adjust this thought process to fit its demands; perhaps this is left in a paradox between the two where the control is only defined by one's self.

Oliver Sacks goes on to explain his view and give examples of people who he believes have had their mind make adjustments in their brain's "hard-wiring". In doing so, Sacks elaborates on the relationship between the mind and the brain, along with the self and experience. All four are connected and hold a readaptation is necessary in order to survive. The way the brain will adapt if it does so at all is up to one's self. Based on the way one separates and absorbs information, how they think can determine how their brain will adapt. Sack particularizes on the differences in adaptation in his stories, in one instance between two people both effected by blindness, John Hull and Zoltan Torey. Torey, unlike Hull, clearly played a very active role in building up his visual imagery, took control of it the moment the bandages were

taken off, and never apparently experienced, or allowed, the sort of involuntary imagery Hull describes. Perhaps this was because he was already very at home with visual imagery, and used to manipulating it in his own way.

“(518) Torey being an already very visual oriented person did not allow his blindness to affect his visual imagery unlike Hull, who lost concepts of imagery as if he was blind his whole life. Torey’s mind adjusted his brain’s thought process according to his earlier thought process. After one’s self decides how to adjust the thought process it is up to the mind to input this change in the brain. The brain, the mind, the self, and experience are all closely connected in how the brain perceives adaptation. In addition to the connection between the self, brain, mind, and experience, the self can be considered identical to the mind. One’s “ self” is simply the inner conscious thoughts of the mind. The mind is responsible for what one’s self does.

Sack’s essay explains this, “... he experienced a gradual attenuation of visual imagery and memory, and finally a virtual extinction of them ... By this, Hull meant not only the loss of visual images and memories but a loss of the very idea of seeing, so that concepts like “ here,” “ there,” and “ facing” seemed to lose meaning for him, and even the sense of objects having “ appearances,” visible characteristics, vanished. At this point, for example, he could no longer imagine how the numeral 3 looked, unless he traced it in the air with his hand. He could construct a “ motor” image of a 3, but not a visual one.

(507) It can be claimed that based on the way Hull thought “Hull’s self,” invoked his mind to change his brain accordingly. Hull had a slow deprivation of his sight through thirty years of life leaving his thought process less dependent on imagery. Based on Hull’s inner self using little visual imagery his mind was able to make decisions on how to change the brain’s thought process. Hull’s inner thoughts are his mind’s actions. However, in cases where the mind is able to shape the brain it is able to also have experiences and not be constituted by them. Such is the case for but not limited to people becoming blind later in life. Anyone’s mind can change the brain; it is just the switch that is needed to awaken the mind. The trauma of becoming blind can act as the switch blind people use to awaken their minds.

Oliver Sacks explains in his essay through various stories told by blind people of how acquiescence and joy. And such “deep” blindness he conceives as “an authentic and autonomous world, a place of its own Being a whole-body seer is to be in one of the concentrated human conditions.

Being a “whole-body seer,” for Hull, means shifting his attention, his center of gravity to the other senses, and he writes again and again of how these have assumed a new richness and power. ”(507 -508) As Hull’s mind shaped his brain into a new train of thought he became enlightened as he claims to be a “whole-body seer. ” Because of this Hull no longer needed visual experiences as a part of his thought process. His mind adapted to his blindness and broke free from being constituted by experiences and was

now able to create them. An example of this is found in Hull's new sensitivity to rain, "' Rain," he writes, " has a way of bringing out the contours of everything; it throws a coloured blanket over previously insteadily falling rain creates continuity of acoustic experience...presents the fullness of an entire situation at once...gives a sense of perspective and of actual relationships of one part of the world to another. '"(508) Hull's self found a new way to visualize, by using the sounds of rain. This gave Hull a new experience: not one taught to him, but one he created and had on his own.

His brain effectively became a tool to his mind. In Sacks essay, Hull describes himself as obtaining a great deal of control over his inner life and many other findings by Sack confirm this self perception as well, although in a general sense many people do not have a conscious control of their inner lives. The control for most people is left at a subconscious level; in some cases control is brought to a conscious level through the mind's ability to shape the brain; which is what is found to be true by the scientific findings in Sack's essay. Sack focuses on the adaptations in the brains of people who became blind later in life. It is found in these people that go through an adaptation in their thinking process that a new sense of control emerges. Sack explains such is the case for Torey, " Well aware that the imagination (or the brains), unrestrained by the usual perceptual input, may run away with itself in a wildly associative or self-serving way -as may happen in deliria, hallucinations, or dreams -Torey maintained a cautious and " scientific" attitude to his own visual imagery, taking pains to check the accuracy of his images by every means available.

I learned," he writes, "to hold the image in a tentative way, conferring credibility and status on it only when some information would tip the balance in its favor." (511) Torey is not like a regular person, his thought process adapted accordingly to his inner consciousness and made him much more aware of his inner self. He became very imagery oriented and was able to control and manipulate his inner thoughts. This new control emerged as a new thought process as Torey adapted to his blindness. Comparing this case which is similar to the other findings in Sacks essay to regular people you can see the amount of inner life control is drastically different. Ordinary people do not have the same capabilities as those mentioned in the essay. The scientific findings in Sacks essay counter the perceived thought that regular people perceive themselves as having a great degree of control over their inner lives; it is instead those gifted and able to awaken their minds that can truly have a great degree of control. Oliver Sacks essay "The Mind's Eye," ponders the question of the extent of power the brain and mind have on each other.

It provides proof that the mind can shape the brain, and control its adaptations. Forms of thought can be very complex and it is possible for the brain to have different thought processes based on how it is functioning. Sacks brings into light a complex and hidden connection between the brain, the mind, the self, and experiences. He also hints at a resemblance between one's self and the mind. And Sack proves that although in general people can be constituted by experiences, there are special cases where one has the ability to have experiences. Many people perceive themselves as having a great degree of control over their inner lives. Sacks scientific findings

dispute this claim and instead prove that only in special cases people can have a greater degree of self-control; cases where the mind is able to take control of the brain and one's inner self is able to become the author of its experiences.