

The Neurobiology of Connection and Affection

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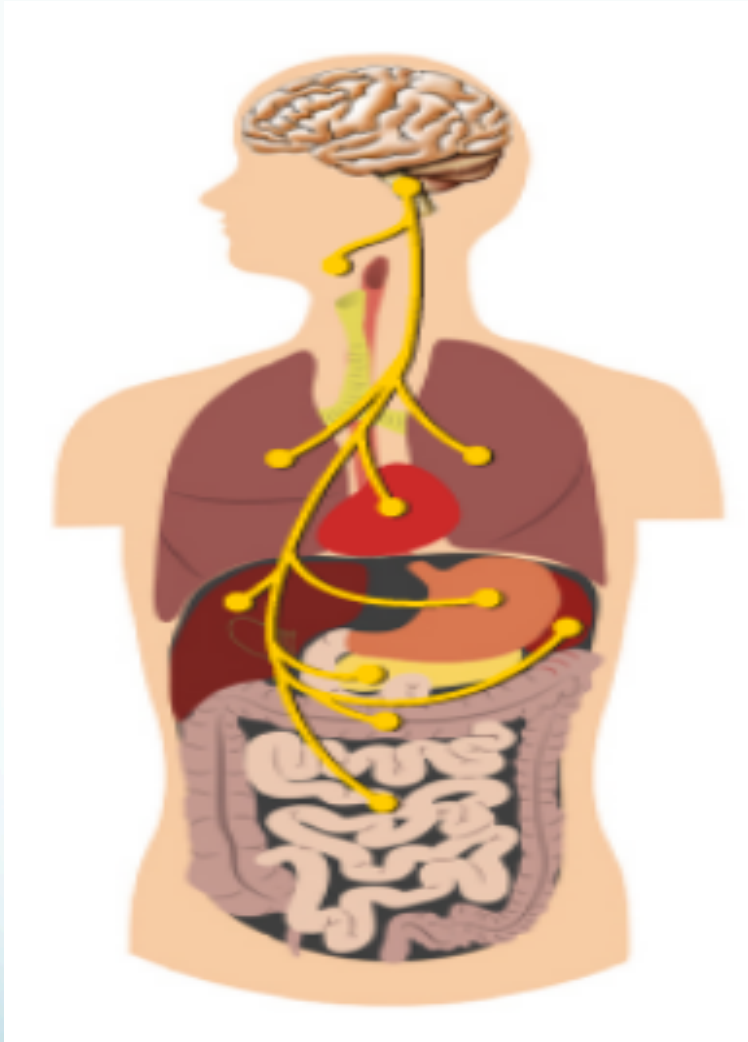
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Human Connection

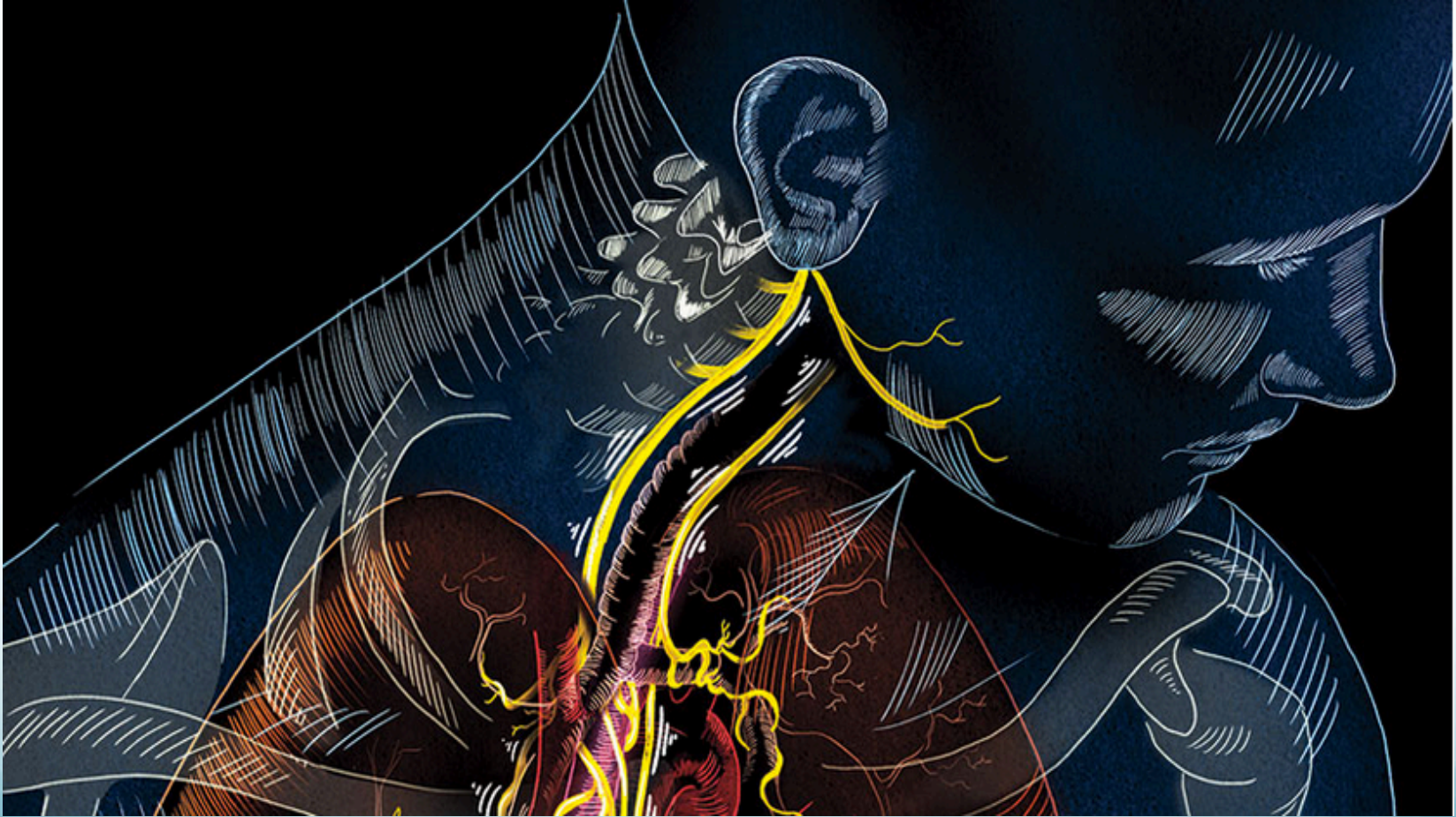


- Compassion requires turning off defenses
- How we feel determines whether we become friends, lovers or enemies because our neurophysiology colors our perception of the world.
- Empathy and love require specific conditions to emerge



- Our feelings are dependent on our physiological state (Autonomous Nervous System)
- Our cognition, feelings affect our physiology
- But also our sensations (gastric movements, heart beat) affect our cognition

80 % of the fibers of the vagus nerve
are sensorial



Polyvagal Theory

of Stephen Porges

- The Polyvagal theory explains the functional relevance of the mammalian modifications of the ANS and emphasizes the adaptive consequences of detecting risk (i.e. safety, danger or life threat)... on
- Physiological state
- Social behavior
- Psychological experience (including compassion)
- And health

How do we come closer?

- Compassion requires turning off biobehavioral defense systems in the “dyad” to enable both “the compassionate” individual and the other to feel safe to be proximal and to enable physical contact.



3 brain circuits

NEOCORTEX – cognitive functions,
language, analytical thinking

LYMBIC REGIONS – related to
emotions and memory

REPTILIAN BRAIN – related to
instinctual survival functions:
Fight, Flight and Freeze



Love is an emergent property of the Mammalian Autonomic Nervous System.



Bondings creates a sense of belonging and care



Physical closeness helps the Nervous System to self-regulate



How do we come interested in each other?

The delivery of attention in relationships requires the person to connect through eye contact, voice, gestures, body language, attuned attitude for the target person to become receptive of that kind of qualities.



Creating safety

- Dropping defense mechanisms
- Affectionate approaches require controlled containment and permission
- Protecting yourself is an act of self-esteem
- To be respectful and loving towards people, we need to be comfortable in front of them
- When our boundaries enables us to communicate our truth without pain, fear and anger the conditions for safety exists.

BONDING & SEPARATION

- DEPENDENT – Basic needs of connection, togetherness, closeness, spending time together to melt, feel protected, feel safe
- ANTI-DEPENDENT – Basic needs of autonomy, strong impulse for novelty, adventure, individuality, having its own space to know yourself

Why we cannot connect?

Due chronic stress & trauma

- It prevents us from having deep and sustained relationships
- Having a good relationship is such a tricky business (this business of sharing truth with one another, of talking and listening)
- A lack of containment is often at the center of troubled relationships.
- A lack of well defined and healthy boundaries

Do you want to know more?

- The Polyvagal Theory, (Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication and Self-Regulation)
by Stephen W. Porges.
- In an unspoken voice (De taal van je lichaam)
by Peter A. Levine

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