



Inventing Ourselves: The Secret Life of the Teenage Brain

Sarah-Jayne Blakemore

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A tour through the groundbreaking science behind the enigmatic, but crucial, brain developments of adolescence and how those translate into teenage behavior

The brain creates every feeling, emotion, and desire we experience, and stores every one of our memories. And yet, until very recently, scientists believed our brains were fully developed from childhood on. Now, thanks to imaging technology that enables us to look inside the living human brain at all ages, we know that this isn't so. Professor Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, one of the world's leading researchers into adolescent neurology, explains precisely what is going on in the complex and fascinating brains of teenagers--namely that the brain goes on developing and changing right through adolescence--with profound implications for the adults these young people will become.

Drawing from cutting-edge research, including her own, Blakemore shows:

How an adolescent brain differs from those of children and adults

Why problem-free kids can turn into challenging teens

What drives the excessive risk-taking and all-consuming relationships common among teenagers

And why many mental illnesses--depression, addiction, schizophrenia--present during these formative years

Blakemore's discoveries have transformed our understanding of the teenage mind, with consequences for law, education policy and practice, and, most of all, parents.

Inventing Ourselves: The Secret Life of the Teenage Brain Details

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From Reader Review *Inventing Ourselves: The Secret Life of the Teenage Brain* for online ebook

Aimee says

Inventing Ourselves by Sarah-Jayne Blakemore is an excellent basic neuroscience primer for people with a little exposure to topic. On the surface it may seem a little daunting due to the amount of research that is cited for the lay person but Blakemore makes the information accessible to anyone that is interested in the subject by not over using neuroscience jargon and clearly defining all terms that are needed.

The book gives you a good overall view of the subject by devoting its first few chapters to providing a basic background on the psychosocial and developmental issues that adolescents face. The next few chapters detail some of the different structures in the brain, what those structures do, tools used to examine the living brain (MRI, fMRI, PET Scan), the differences between the brains of children, adolescents, and adults and the implications of those differences. The last chapters delve into more implications of the developing brain and rates of development, what can happen when things go wrong, research, and implications and possible interpretations of that research. A few of the topics I found most interesting :

- 1) How individuals vary on the rate at which different structures in the brain develop and what the implications those different rates may have not only on risk taking behavior of the individual but what that may mean for the individual when they are an adult. (prefrontal cortex rate of development compared to the rate of development of the amygdala and the nucleus accumbens)
- 2) The type of marketing and messages that teenagers are more likely to respond to based on the fact that they are less impacted by fear of adverse consequences than adults.
- 3) The research on how brains develop differently in people with different mental conditions like schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, etc.
- 4) The effects of sleep deprivation on teenager's brains.
- 5) Possible improvements that could be made to our educational system based on their specific developmental needs.

In short, this book is an excellent resource for parents frantically trying to understand their children, educators, other professions that deal with teenagers, or to those interested in neuroscience. The author is very knowledgeable and takes a compassionate view of people going through the formative period of life.

I received a DIGITAL Advance Reader Copy of this book from #NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Paul says

The very nerve centre of the human body is the brain. Its input is our senses, the memory helps us to learn from mistakes and controls the reactions that are needed. For hundreds of years, the brain has been a mystery to all that studied it, but only in the past few decades have we begun to scratch the surface of its capabilities. Even that is unravelling; those that thought as puberty begun, the human brain was developed have been proved wrong. The brain continues to change and adapt all through the teenage years and into adulthood.

In this excellent book on why the teenage brain is different, Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, professor in cognitive neuroscience at University College London takes us into the untidy spaces within their heads to share the latest details of what is going on. From her experiments that her team have in researching the brain we will

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Janet says

I received a DIGITAL Advance Reader Copy of this book from #NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. From the publisher

Award-winning neuroscientist Sarah-Jayne Blakemore explains the developmental journey our brains take during adolescence and how the experience of these years determines the adults we become.

Risk taking, intense relationships, going to bed and getting up late--what is going on in teenagers' brains?

Until very recently, we believed that the human brain stopped developing in childhood--that by the time you reached adolescence, your brain was fully developed. In *Inventing Ourselves*, award-winning neuroscientist Sarah-Jayne Blakemore reveals that this is simply not the case.

Blakemore shows that there are fundamental differences between the adult and adolescent brain, and typical teenage behavior is caused by the transformations that take place during this formative period. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these physiological changes are most evident in the prefrontal cortex, the region responsible for decision-making, planning, inhibiting inappropriate behavior, evaluating risk, and understanding others. With implications for education, parenting, and treating mental health conditions, *Inventing Ourselves* will transform the way we think about adolescence and reveal that the changes we experience throughout our teenage years dictate the adults we become.

Oh, teenagers ... sigh. Blakemore deftly explains why it is such a minefield to be around when kids hit that age. Her tips and insights may be invaluable if you recognize any of the behaviours in this book, in your home and on the devices they are glued to!

Sherri says

This book provides a nice summary of research about what we know and don't know about the teenage brain. Blakemore, who is a professor of neuroscience herself, summarizes the research from the past 30-40 years and then describes her (and others') current research that shows how the adolescent brain continues to develop and change. She focuses mostly on executive functioning and the development "social self"

Although is is a bit dry, I found it fascinating. Blakemore's 2014 Ted Talk provides the basics:

https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_jayne...

Beth Chats Books says

This is a very informative non fiction novel on the adolescent brain. However it is academic in tone and it discusses and references an exhaustive list of clinical studies and trials which makes the reading experience a

trifle tedious. Listening to this on audiobook also was difficult as at points I got distracted and lost the thread. Overall an interesting book that is up to date on research and had some fascinating truths to express around adolescent and adult brains and brain development.

Alicia says

There was so much to enjoy in this book because it was easy to read and understand- it seems like Blakemore truly wants people to understand that adolescence is a unique time for brain functionality and development by giving examples that illustrate her point.

While plenty of the experiments were done by her and colleagues, she references plenty of others and shares that there is just so much more to learn and know. For the most part, they blend in well with her narrative and demonstrate her point without overwhelming readers and losing the overall message of patience and science in knowing teenagers. Yes she's English but references Western culture in general while taking into consideration culture and language from across the world.

I Post-ited quite a bit with tidbits of new knowledge but it also continues to remind me as a high school educator how we should teach and respond to teens during this developmental stage. And it threw me back plenty of times to think of my own teenaged self and that was welcomed.

Don says

IF you are planning on having children or already have them and they haven't progressed to adolescence (or even if they're in the throes of teenagedom) you need to read this book.

You need to realize that teenagers aren't behaving the way they are because they're mean - they're just insolent. So, why does my teenage sleep so much? - the author delves into the reasons and provides you with the answers (there are a few).

How can I get my teenager to adopt a more sensible view to life and avoid the pitfalls of various addictions?behaviors? The author provides h and hopefully some solid help.

Shelly says

Informative book! Neuroscientist Sarah-Jayne Blakemore delves into the physiological reasons for the common habits and risk-taking behaviors of our teenage children. Clearly, adolescents are in a transformative period. The brain of the adolescent is, in fact, not yet the same as the brain of an adult, which helps to explain some of their social behaviors and inability to properly evaluate risk and repercussions. This book offers an insightful view on how and why we can expect certain behaviors from middle-schoolers and high-schoolers. This is a great read for parents, teachers and those who work with children. I received an advanced reader copy provided to me by the publisher through NetGalley, which did not affect my rating. I have provided an unbiased and honest review.

Phil James says

This is a great book for anyone who works with teenagers. basically it looks at all the research about adolescent brain development and highlights the reality that the teenage brain is not fully developed yet and so it operates in a way that is different from an adult's. For this reason we need to accept that this places some limitations and difficulties on an adolescent which we probably need to take into consideration if we are to avoid getting really frustrated.
Well written and easy to follow.

Ben Field says

Interesting and informative, although does show how little we know. Highlights reasons as to why all science seems to change week to week, but the author give s a candid account, bit going too deep into the detail.

Not something I would read out of choice, just trying to push myself out of the box a little, so whilst it may not have been my cup of tea, I did find it informative. It was chosen based on a Radio 4 programme I listened to a few weeks ago, I also have a different book from the same programme, although that one will be more in my interest.

Adam Mills says

Very interesting study of the development of the human brain specifically focusing on teenagers. The book is written by the Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience at University College London. The main argument of the book is that the brain is still developing through adolescence up to around 24 years of age and that this development accounts in part for some of the characteristics of teenage behaviour like excessive risk taking, exaggerated concern about peer group opinions etc. The writing is very attractive and the book is in no way a difficult or dry read. A large number of the explanations or descriptions of how the brain development may affect or cause certain types of teenage behaviour end inconclusively with a 'We don't know' type statement which highlights the fact that there is still a huge amount that is unknown about the way the brain functions and develops.

Andrea says

This was a highly readable book about the differences in the brains of adolescents vs children and adults. The brain goes through a lot of changes and that correlates with the changes in behavior and risk taking we often see in teenagers. The author encourages us to see adolescence as a unique time when the brain changes a lot and not think of it as a deficient time. Adolescents are not just “bad” adults. The chapters are short and full of research that is easy to understand. I really enjoyed this book.

Lora says

I got a bit bogged down in the names & abbreviations for the parts of the brain (as well as the details about

how each study was carried out), but there are some helpful bits for thinking about how to deal with adolescents more empathetically and why we should do so. That brain is still changing and growing! (Actually, it never totally stops growing! Cool.)

Gumble's Yard says

This award winning book is written by a Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience at the UCL who specialises in the developing brain of adolescence (defined as the period from the onset of puberty through to when an individual takes a stable, independent role in society).

She, along with other researchers, have taken advantage of the use of MRI scans to understand how the brain develops during adolescence (and how it is different to the child and adult brain) as well as looking at a number of small scale social study experiments (similar to those used in lots of Behavioural Economics studies) to identify different behaviours in adolescents in well understood tests and experiments (one example would be the delayed gratification Marshmallow test). Further in some cases these two ideas have been combined in functional MRI scans – looking at brain activity while completing tasks or experiments. In the book these studies are the tentative conclusions with them are discussed in extensive detail, alongside descriptions of the brain, its structure and what we understand of its functioning.

The fundamental finding of the studies is that, contrary to beliefs a number of years ago, crucial regions of the human brain continue to develop during adolescence, and in fact that this period is critical to the development of the functioning adult brain (something which is likely connected with most mental illnesses first developing at this stage – albeit the connections are not currently clear).

In particular the pre-frontal cortex (responsible for such areas as self-awareness, social interaction, suppression of inappropriate impulse and risk taking, ability to take into account other people's perspective) is developing significantly over this period – with significant levels of synaptic pruning. Another area that changed during this period is the limbic system – which controls emotion and reward processing, with teenagers particularly sensitive to the rewards of risk taking (at the same time that the pre-frontal cortex's ability to rationally suppress undue risk is still not fully developed, but the need for peer approval is at its strongest).

Risk taking is much more common for adolescents when with their peers due to this developmental mismatch between different areas of the brain. Interestingly for me the author points out that this is corroborated by motor insurance data when young drivers frequency of claims are higher when they have passengers in their cars (which as an aside, not pointed out by the author, also leads to a greater severity of claims due to third party bodily injury claims from passengers, as well as in catastrophic cases the potential for huge future care or loss of earnings claims). I have seen elsewhere that the author tentatively supports ideas to ban young drivers from carrying passengers of a similar age.

The book's strength is simultaneously its weakness.

Professor Blakemore resists strongly the temptation to draw overly certain conclusions and specifically in a penultimate chapter cautions against much of the popular science which likes to produce headline results around neuroscience and translate them into easy to apply ideas for education or brain training. She points out here, but also regularly in discussing the work of her own lab (and others with which she collaborates) the limitations of much of the current research: many results have not been independently replicated; the relatively recent innovation of MRI scanning means that there is an absence of longitudinal studies; the cost of MRI scans leads to issues of statistical validity - sample sizes are typically very small and there is very

limited opportunity to look for factor interactions; these issues plus ethical ones make randomized control trials (let alone blind or double-blind ones) difficult.

But of course the very scientific honest and transparency of these limitations, mean that Professor Blakemore does not supply a list of ready conclusions or recommendations for parents (or teachers) of adolescents. Her overwhelming conclusion here I believe is that adolescence is a vital part of brain development – and that most (if not all) of the behaviours we see (and often castigate) as typical teenage ones are crucial to this development and should be respected for what they are, while channeled as much as possible.

So overall an interesting book – albeit I think much of the sense of it could, for a lay reader, be gained by articles by the author or her excellent TED talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_jayne...
