

This is an old article of mine on a condition which causes nearly all the brain to go missing. It is an interesting way to look at how we function particular in regards to consciousness and how adaptive we can be as human beings. Here is the article, certainly worth thinking about I think.

We cannot imagine functioning without a brain.

While this may initially seem like an all-encompassing statement, I would dare say for the vast majority of people it would hold true as a belief. As a species we tend to put our physical brains at the top of the spectrum for a wide range of phenomena, e.g. intelligence, motivation, emotions, intuition to name but a few. A lot of research and consequently money is put into the study of the brain and its underlying mechanisms. Which is perfectly fine by the way and this in no way is an argument to discontinue those studies.

However, being in the position of knowing that our brains are not the end all and be all of human behaviour I often like to look at extreme outliers for contradictory points of view that I can point people to.

Recently while doing some research for a book I am working on, I stumbled across an anomaly in the medical literature that should at the very least give rise to a questioning of our normal view of the brain.

There is a medical condition known as hydrocephalus in which the cerebrospinal fluid, instead of circulating around the brain and entering the bloodstream, becomes dammed up inside. The condition is often referred to as water on the brain. There are variants of the medical condition but generally speaking in the most severe cases, the condition is fatal in the first months of childhood. Even where an individual survives he or she is usually seriously handicapped.

For reasons unknown sometimes a person manages to survive into adulthood and in some cases has led what appears to be a perfectly normal life. Initially this may not seem so remarkable, but consider the research by neurology professor Dr. John Lorber.

Lorber had an opportunity to examine a mathematics student who was academically bright and had a reported IQ of 126. When the student was examined by CAT-scan, however, Lorber discovered that he had virtually no brain at all.

To appreciate the extent of this phenomena view the picture below. You may note that the hemispheres are missing and where there would typically be brain mass there is only fluid.

In normal brains the cranial cavity is filled with two hemispheres approximately 4.5 centimetres deep. The student however had less than 1 millimetre of cerebral tissue covering the top of his spinal column.

In addition, Professor Lorber has identified several hundred people who have very small cerebral hemispheres but who appear to be normal intelligent individuals. Some of them he describes as having 'no detectable brain'. It is important to note that some of these people were married, were respected by the community, held down jobs and were responsible citizens. So much so that it would be nigh on impossible to distinguish them from people with normal brains.

We have to remember that this is an extremely rare condition and for the majority it does not apply; nonetheless it raises some interesting questions.

Here are a couple that springs immediately to mind:

Where is memory held if the normal areas associated with memory retention are not there?

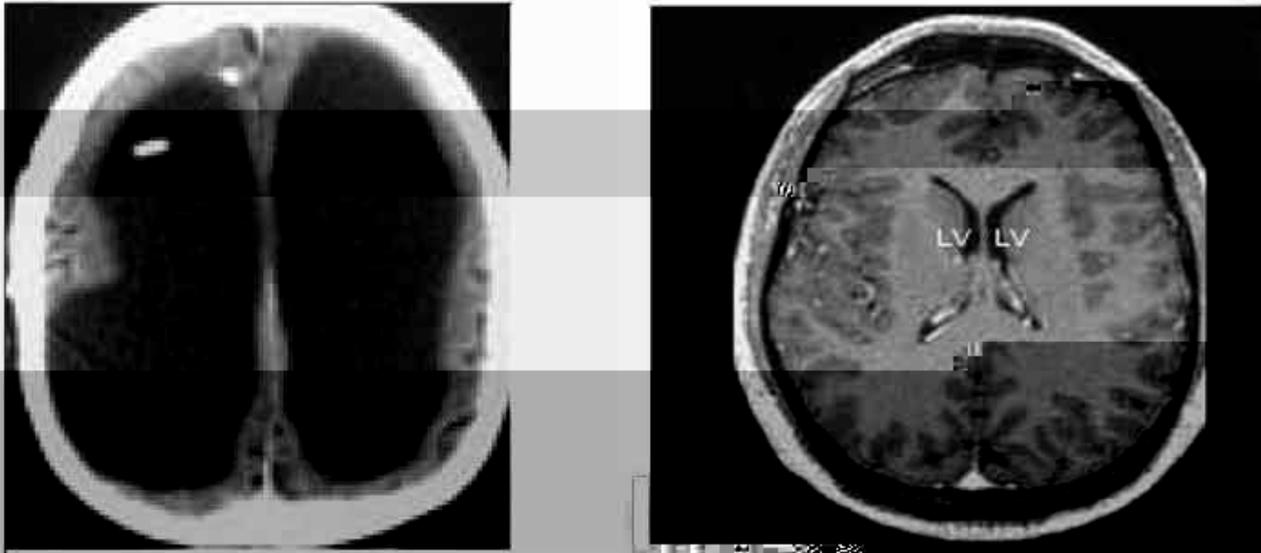
How were these people able to function at an emotional level?

Where is intelligence if the brain is effectively missing?

How are they able to process senses like vision, sound, taste etc.?

There are a myriad of questions that could be posed that defy our normal take on how we function in the world and that is why I like these cases of extreme outliers. They are useful in that they point to that there is something else going on that what do not as yet understand. They clash so heavily with convention that if one is wise enough it may accommodate a new line of questioning relating to how we function in the world.

Our assumption has nearly always been that brain equates to mind, but from this perspective this is not the case. Mind is not the same as brain and cases like these are at least cause enough to investigate whether this proposition is true or not.



The Missing Brain

From my perspective our brains are akin to receivers.



