

# The Talking Cure: The Science Behind Psychotherapy

By Susan C. Vaughan



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Dr. Vaughan interweaves stories from therapy sessions with cutting-edge research results. She shows how interpreting dreams, free-associating, and attention to childhood experiences have an impact on the structure of our brain. Anyone who, for one reason or another, questions the value of long-term drug therapy will welcome the alternative approach presented here.



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#### **Editorial Review**

#### Amazon.com Review

The fact that Woody Allen has spent a lifetime in psychotherapy has convinced many people who need help that talking it out with a therapist is pointless when drugs can do the same job, only quicker. But *The Talking Cure* makes a strong argument in favor of psychoanalytically based psychotherapy. Susan Vaughan, a veteran researcher, asserts that talking itself can change neural pathways in the brain (she says that instead of *Listening to Prozac* we should be *Talking to Neurons*), leading to permanent, positive change, sometimes in conjunction with drugs, sometimes without.

#### From **Booklist**

Psychoanalyst Vaughan believes patients should know how psychotherapy works. Her basic theme is that psychotherapy can change the connections of the brain's neurons. She says the story of each individual's life is unique and the way in which people tell their story is of vital importance to their understanding of self and to the treatment developed by the therapist. Caring and sensitive, Vaughan uses several case histories to demonstrate her methods, which include changing her thinking and approach as the patient's personality and relationships with self and others become more apparent through the telling of stories. Long-term therapy is especially valuable, she says, because it fosters self-analysis and because it gives a patient the time needed for practicing newly learned skills and enough opportunities to express strong emotions in safe surroundings. Vaughan's book is thought-provoking and informative, despite the meagerness of the scientific underpinnings implied by its subtitle. *William Beatty* 

#### From Kirkus Reviews

"I am a microsurgeon of the mind," announces the author, in this unusually engaging presentation of her theory about how psychotherapy alters the way the brain operates and thus how the mind works. Vaughan, a psychiatrist and NIMH research fellow at the New York State Psychiatric Institute, is a gifted explicator of scientific concepts. Here she draws on research in cognitive science, neurobiology, and developmental psychology to back up her theory about the effects of psychotherapy on the human brain. Vaughan proposes that a network of neurons in the cerebral cortex functions as a ``story synthesizer" that shapes our approach to relationships in daily life, and that the connections between these neurons are rewired through intensive, psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy. Well-crafted descriptions of sessions with patients in her private practice provide the framework within which she develops her theory and describes the research that she believes substantiates it. Data about the neural pathways of sea slugs, anxiety in monkeys, and the neurobiology of infants alternate with passages revealing her thoughts about and interactions with her patients. Clear and precise when it needs to be, Vaughan's writing is informal without being chatty. She has the knack of seeming to converse directly with the reader, and she can turn a memorable phrase: "For most people . . . medication changes how they feel, but psychotherapy is what changes what their lives are like." What she is doing here is fusing two positions in psychiatry--the biological approach, which explains mental disorders in terms of the brain and advocates medication to correct the disorder, and the psychological approach, which sees talk therapy as the answer. Whether her theory meets with the approval of her professional colleagues remains to be seen. Meanwhile, she has given the general reader a highly readable explanation of how one psychotherapist views her work. Especially interesting to those who have experienced psychotherapy or are considering it. -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

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