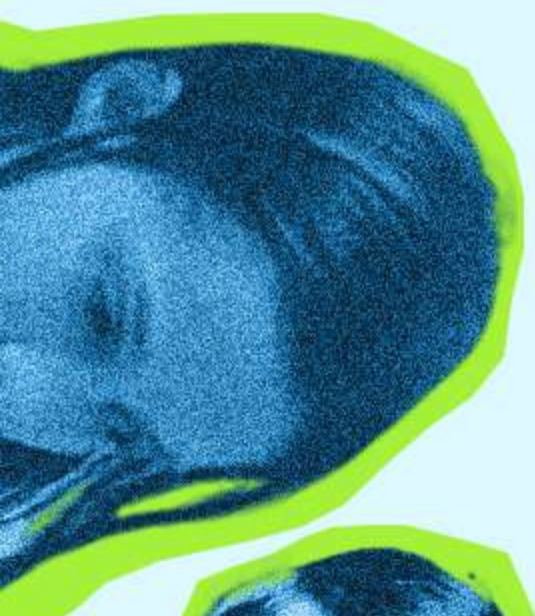
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7 Famous Cases That Changed Psychology







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CASE 01

1848 LOCALIZATION OF FUNCTION

Phineas Gage

(The man whose personality survived - barely)

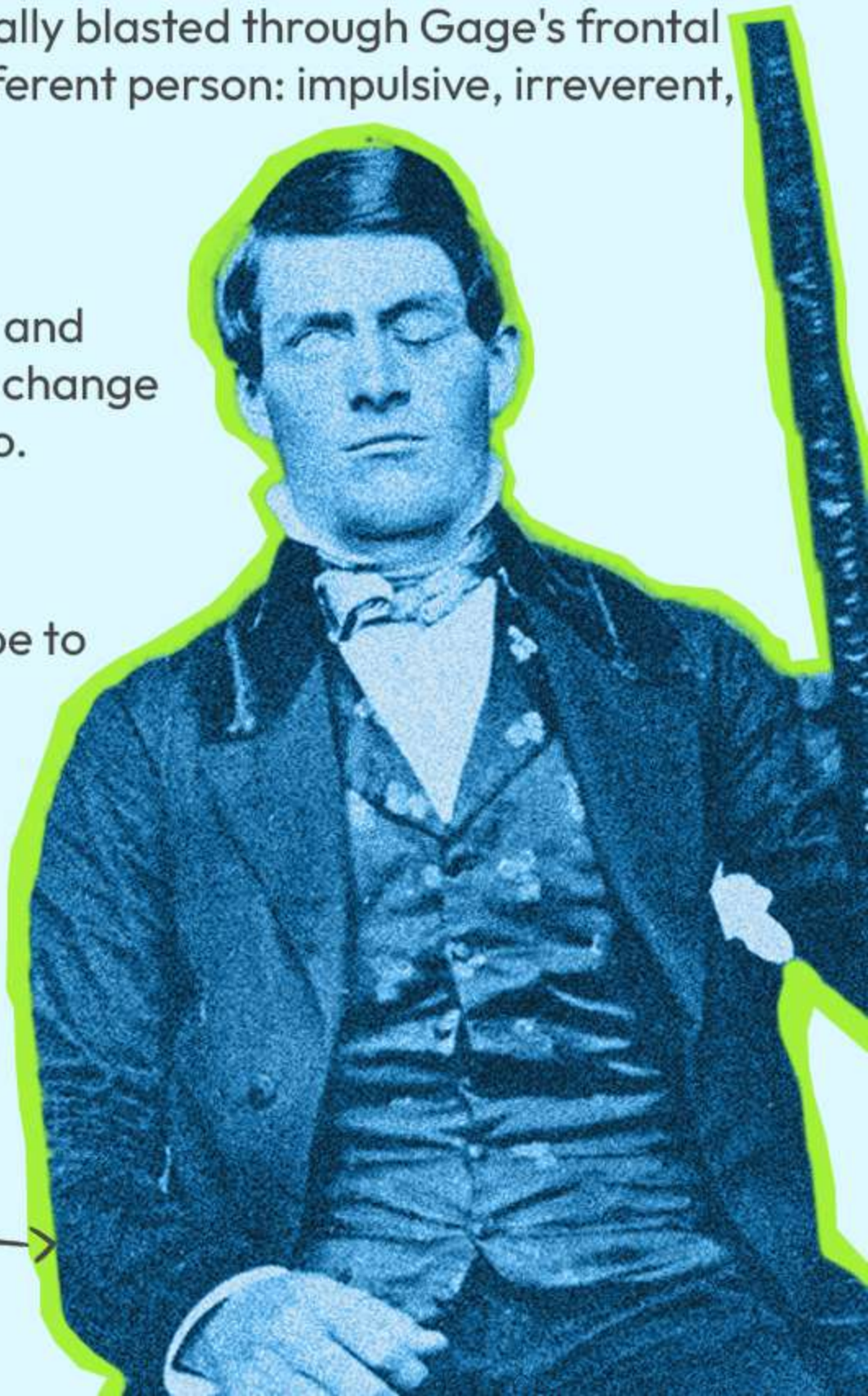
WHAT HAPPENED

A railway tamping iron was accidentally blasted through Gage's frontal lobe. He survived - but became a different person: impulsive, irreverent, unable to plan.

WHAT IT REVEALED

The frontal lobe governs personality and decision-making. Brain damage can change who you are, not just what you can do. Personality is biological.

- First evidence linking the frontal lobe to personality and social behaviour
- Challenged the idea that the mind is separate from the brain
- Still cited in every introductory neuroscience course



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CASE 02

1953 MEMORY & HIPPOCAMPUS

Patient H.M.

(The man who lived only in the present)

WHAT HAPPENED

Henry Molaison had both hippocampi removed to treat severe epilepsy. He woke up unable to form any new long-term memories- forever stuck in 1953.

WHAT IT REVEALED

The hippocampus is essential for converting short-term memories into long-term ones. Procedural and declarative memory are separate systems.



- Proved the hippocampus is central to memory consolidation
- Distinguished implicit from explicit memory a foundational distinction
- His real name wasn't revealed until after his death in 2008

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CASE 03

1920 CLASSICAL CONDITIONING ETHICS

Little Albert

(The experiment that should never have happened)



WHAT HAPPENED

Watson and Rayner conditioned a 9-month-old infant to fear a white rat by pairing it with a loud noise. The fear then generalized to other white, fluffy objects.

WHAT IT REVEALED

Fear responses can be learned through classical conditioning. Emotional responses aren't innate they are shaped by experience and association.

- Demonstrated stimulus generalization, fear spreading to similar objects
- Would be completely impossible under today's ethical guidelines
- Sparked lasting debate about using children in psychological research

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CASE 04

1970 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION DEPRIVATION

Genie

(The wild child who rewrote language theory)



WHAT HAPPENED

Genie spent her first 13 years isolated and abused in near-total silence. When discovered, she had almost no language. Researchers raced to teach her.

WHAT IT REVEALED

There may be a critical period for language acquisition. Missing it leads to permanent deficits partial recovery is possible, full fluency is not.

- Provided real-world evidence for Lenneberg's critical period hypothesis
- Highlighted the tension between research and the welfare of the participant
- Her case remains one of the most ethically complex in psychology

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CASE 05

1990s AMYGDALA & FEAR

Patient S.M.

(The woman who couldn't feel fear)

WHAT HAPPENED

A rare condition called Urbach-Wiethe disease destroyed S.M's amygdalae bilaterally. She could not experience fear even in life-threatening situations.

WHAT IT REVEALED

The amygdala is the brain's fear-processing centre. Without it, humans lose the ability to recognize threats - but retain full social and emotional function otherwise.

- Confirmed the amygdala's specific role in fear detection and response
- Later research found she could feel fear via CO_2 inhalation - revealing a second fear pathway
- Showed that the amygdala processes external, not internal, threat signals



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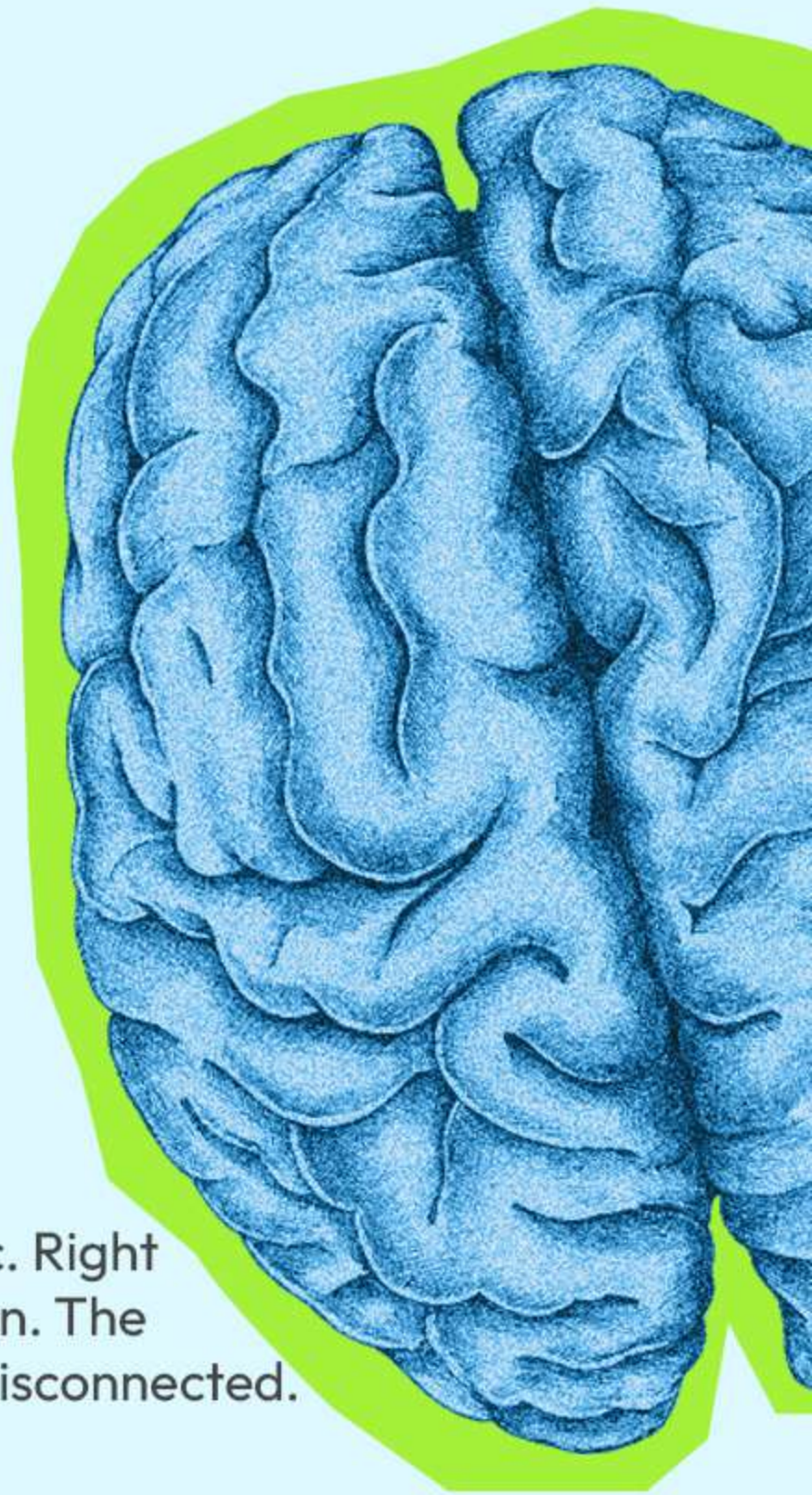
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CASE 06

1960s BRAIN LATERALIZATION

Split-Brain Patients

(Sperry & Gazzaniga's divided minds)



WHAT HAPPENED

To treat severe epilepsy, surgeons severed the corpus callosum the bridge between brain hemispheres. Patients appeared normal, but testing revealed two minds in one skull.

WHAT IT REVEALED

Left hemisphere handles language and logic. Right handles spatial tasks and pattern recognition. The hemispheres operate independently when disconnected.

- Gave Sperry the 1981 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine
- Established the foundation for understanding brain lateralization
- Spawned the (oversimplified) "left-brain/right-brain" personality myth

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CASE 07

1985 MEMORY SYSTEMS

Clive Wearing

(The musician with a 30-second memory)



WHAT HAPPENED

Herpes encephalitis destroyed Clive Wearing's hippo-campus and surrounding areas. He retained only about 7-30 seconds of memory - waking up fresh every moment, convinced he'd just regained consciousness.

WHAT IT REVEALED

Procedural memory (how to play piano) is stored separately from episodic memory. Emotion-based memory is also distinct - he still recognized his wife and felt love for her.

- Most severe documented case of anterograde and retrograde amnesia
- Proved procedural and emotional memory survive hippocampal damage
- His diary filled with repeated "I am now awake" entries is haunting and iconic

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