

David Dobbs on Critical Neuroscience

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By

The science journalist [David Dobbs](#) braved the cold and snow to visit us in Montreal last week — (well, he lives in Vermont, so perhaps the cold and snow wasn't such a big deal) — and he's written up his visit on his blog, Neuron Culture. Dobbs met with Suparna Choudhury—one of the founders of Neuroscience in Context and the [Critical Neuroscience](#) project—and his post is basically a discussion of what critical neuroscience is—or might be—from a science journalist's purview.

Dobbs raises the question of whether or not framing the project as “critical neuroscience” is likely to put off neuroscientists and make the likelihood of productive engagement less likely. However, he suggests that such a critical project is likely to gain more traction with neuroscience than it did with psychiatry for two reasons: 1) neuroscience is more open to ideas from the outside because it is at a relatively early stage as a separate discipline, it is still being defined and is full of people from other disciplines; and 2) “because in this open-source, open science, Everything 2.0 world, there's more general recognition that mixing disciplines produces richer work.” Let's hope he's right.

He also gives a nice plug for this site—along with [Neuroanthropology](#)—as a place to watch critical neuroscience unfold.

In any case, I think that many social scientists interested in the mind/brain sciences will be encouraged to learn about the degree to which a widely published science journalist like Dobbs is interested in their perspectives. This is extremely important, because I think that social scientists working on these issues sometimes take a rather cynical attitude toward science journalists (as though you could generalize so easily), assuming that there is little interest in anything but the perspectives of biomedical and biological scientists. In the same way that we (social scientists) too often fail to engage with the natural scientists or medical practitioners, we often fail to engage with genuinely open-minded and curious journalists or nonfiction writers — ultimately to the detriment of our own perspectives and arguments. I don't mean for this to sound like a blithe criticism; I understand the fear that journalists may take one's words out of context or oversimplify one's ideas, but I think that this only makes an effort at sustained engagement more important.

By the way, the [Critical Neuroscience workshop and conference](#), which were held about a month ago at UCLA, were extremely interesting — and I promise to write them up within the next couple of weeks.

AMA citation

. David Dobbs on Critical Neuroscience. *Somatosphere*. . Available at: . Accessed September 13, 2012.

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