



Blaming the Brain: The Truth About Drugs and Mental Health

By Elliot Valenstein

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Blaming the Brain: The Truth About Drugs and Mental Health By Elliot Valenstein

Over the last thirty years, there has been a radical shift in thinking about the causes of mental illness. The psychiatric establishment and the health care industry have shifted 180 degrees from blaming mother to blaming the brain as the source of mental disorders. Whereas experience and environment were long viewed as the root causes of most emotional problems, now it is common to believe that mental disturbances -- from depression and anxiety to schizophrenia -- are determined by brain chemistry. And many people have come to accept the broader notion that their very personalities are determined by brain chemistry as well.

In his award-winning, meticulously researched, and elegantly written history of psychosurgery, "Great and Desperate Cures," Elliot Valenstein exposed the great injury to thousands of lives that resulted when the medical establishment embraced an unproven approach to mental illness. Now, in "Blaming the Brain" he exposes the many weaknesses inherent in the scientific arguments supporting the widely accepted theory that biochemical imbalances are the main cause of mental illness. Valenstein reveals how, beginning in the 1950s, the accidental discovery of a few mood-altering drugs stimulated an enormous interest in psychopharmacology, resulting in staggering growth and profits for the pharmaceutical industry. He lays bare the commercial motives of drug companies and their huge stake in expanding their markets. Prozac, Thorazine, and Zoloft are just a few of the psychoactive drugs that have dramatically changed practice in the mental health profession. Physicians today prescribe them in huge numbers even though, as several major studies reveal, their effectiveness and safety have been greatly exaggerated.

Part history, part science, part expose, and part solution, "Blaming the Brain" sounds a clarion call throughout our culture of quick-fix pharmacology and our increasing reliance on drugs as a cure-all for mental illness. This brilliant, provocative book will force patients, practitioners, and prescribers alike to rethink the causes of mental illness and the methods by which we treat it.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The odds are high that someone close to you has been told he or she has a "chemical imbalance" in the brain, but the odds are slim that the doctor who said it could point to any convincing evidence that it was true. The increasing awareness that most biological theories underlying diagnoses of depression, schizophrenia, and other mental problems are based very loosely on accidental drug discoveries and promoted heavily by pharmaceutical companies is the basis for neuroscientist Elliot S. Valenstein's book *Blaming the Brain*. Compelling reading for the age of Prozac, *Blaming the Brain* looks at the history of medical treatments for psychiatric disorders, and particularly the modern era of drug therapies, with the intent of uncovering whether science or rhetoric determines courses of treatment.

Claiming that there are no widely accepted theories of mental illness and that therapies are guided more by marketing than lab work hasn't won Valenstein many friends in psychiatry, but his scientific credibility is impeccable, and, better for the reader, his explanations of his doubts are clear and sensible. Whether discussing the "good old days" of insulin coma and electroshock therapies (after which drugs seemed a humane godsend) or the modern prospects of scientific research and medical clinics owned and directed by pharmaceutical companies, he maintains a calm, measured style that seeks to clothe the emperor, not replace him. *Blaming the Brain* is a powerful, thoroughly enjoyable book that will provoke much-needed thought and discussion on all sides of this important topic. --Rob Lightner

From Publishers Weekly

In the past 25 years, theories of mental illness have shifted from blaming mother to blaming the brain. While the prevailing view is that "mental illnesses are medical illnesses just like diabetes, high blood pressure or heart disease," and it's estimated that 30 million people worldwide have taken Prozac, the truth, argues Valenstein, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at the University of Michigan and the author of *Great and Desperate Cures*, is that we are only at the dawn of an understanding of mental illness. The studies he reviews indicate that a combination of medications and therapy offers the best chance of success at treating common disorders, although no one knows exactly why. Valenstein does a fine job of illuminating the various interests at work behind the ascendancy of purely biological hypotheses. They appeal to pharmaceutical companies, he suggests, for all the obvious reasons, and he details the impact that these companies have, at every level, on today's psychiatric landscape: from sponsoring research and colloquiums to lobbying government to marketing directly to both consumers and primary-care physicians?the largest prescribers of psychiatric drugs. The companies also, he reports, pressure editors of psychiatric journals, in which they also advertise, to downplay studies that cast doubt on the safety or usefulness of their drugs. Families and patients, meanwhile, embrace biological theories because they relieve them of the burden of blame, and physicians, he says, neglect their responsibility to report side effects to the FDA. This meticulously researched, evenhanded work deserves a large audience. Unfortunately, it's about as exciting to read as the fine print in your HMO contract; Valenstein, who comes out with both guns blazing, concentrates more on clearly digesting the data than on giving the story a human face.

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Review

David Healy, M.D., Ph.D. "Author of 'The Antidepressant Era'" Valenstein shows how the current theories of depression and schizophrenia arose, makes the case for them seem more persuasive than their original proponents did, but then in devastating fashion shows where their problems lie. More importantly, he goes

on to show why we continue to hold such beliefs that do no good for patients, that are no longer believed by neuroscientists and that hamper the development of more effective treatments...

Andrew Herxheimer "Emeritus Fellow, United Kingdom Cochrane Centre This book does something long overdue: It puts psychotropic drugs into historical and scientific perspective without being too technical. It should help prescribers and patients work together and use these drugs more carefully.

Joseph LeDoux, Ph.D. "Author of "The Emotional Brain" Valenstein swings a heavy bat at the conceptual basis of biological psychiatry. The book will surely shock psychiatric patients and will lead to soul searching amongst psychiatrists. Biological psychiatry will come out of the controversy that's sure to emerge either badly wounded or much stronger, but will never be the same.

Jerome Kagan, Ph.D. "Author of "Nature of the Child" and Professor of Psychology, Harvard University Once again, Elliot Valenstein challenges contemporary dogma -- this time by combining a lively, informative history of the growth of psychopharmacology with a critique of its deepest assumptions. The controversy this book will surely provoke reflects the significance of its arguments. Those who are friendly to or suspicious of the claim that all mental illness is primarily a biochemical disorder will profit from this bold, clearly written book.

Michael S. Gazziniga, Ph.D. "Director, Center for Cognitive Neuroscience, Dartmouth College Elliot Valenstein has provided us with a fast-moving and eye-opening account of why the brain story is but a part of the puzzle of mental illness. He has to be right.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carl Melton:

Book is written, printed, or created for everything. You can recognize everything you want by a publication. Book has a different type. To be sure that book is important point to bring us around the world. Next to that you can your reading ability was fluently. A book Blaming the Brain: The Truth About Drugs and Mental Health will make you to end up being smarter. You can feel a lot more confidence if you can know about almost everything. But some of you think that will open or reading the book make you bored. It is not make you fun. Why they may be thought like that? Have you searching for best book or appropriate book with you?

Larry Cain:

Information is provisions for anyone to get better life, information presently can get by anyone from everywhere. The information can be a know-how or any news even a huge concern. What people must be consider any time those information which is in the former life are challenging to be find than now is taking seriously which one is appropriate to believe or which one typically the resource are convinced. If you have the unstable resource then you have it as your main information there will be huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen inside you if you take Blaming the Brain: The Truth About Drugs and Mental Health as the daily resource information.

Penny Risley:

Your reading sixth sense will not betray a person, why because this Blaming the Brain: The Truth About Drugs and Mental Health book written by well-known writer who knows well how to make book that can be understand by anyone who have read the book. Written within good manner for you, still dripping wet every ideas and producing skill only for eliminate your own hunger then you still uncertainty Blaming the Brain: The Truth About Drugs and Mental Health as good book not just by the cover but also by the content. This is one guide that can break don't assess book by its handle, so do you still needing an additional sixth sense to pick this particular!? Oh come on your looking at sixth sense already said so why you have to listening to yet another sixth sense.

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