

Untangling the Mind: Why We Behave the Way We Do

David Theodore George

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Free yourself from emotional turmoil even when that turmoil is caused by others!

We have a much greater understanding of human behavior now than we did just a few decades ago. Yet even with this greater understanding of the human mind, why we do what we do can sometimes seem like a mystery. People are often left with unsettling questions about their own (or others') behavior.

We ask ourselves, Why did I make a spectacle of myself? Why am I so stressed? Why am I constantly so negative?

In his years as a clinician, Dr. Ted George has been struck by how much easier it is for people to say they have a physical illness than it is to admit they feel out of control with an emotion—be it anger, fear, or depression. With a physical issue, you have the source of the problem in concrete terms, such as in a lab report, but with an emotional issue, it can be much harder to define what's gone wrong. *Untangling the Mind* helps make sense of what's happening—and why. With knowledge of how the brain translates sensory signals into emotions, you will increase your understanding of your own—and others'—behaviors. As you learn about your psychological and neurological makeup, you will begin to see new possibilities for optimism, motivation, and well-being.

We *can* control our behavior and our feelings, no matter how much they may have ruled us in the past, and Dr. George helps us know how. Once you understand the deeply rooted instincts that activate your emotions, you can live more peacefully, behave in ways that are more in keeping with the person you'd like to be, and enjoy your life more fully. And you'll be better able to remain unaffected by the drama of other people's emotional storms.

Untangling the Mind: Why We Behave the Way We Do Details


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From Reader Review Untangling the Mind: Why We Behave the Way We Do for online ebook

Mike Bushman says

Unquestionably valuable reading for anyone trying to understand human behavior. Author does an excellent job of using examples from his practice to illuminate academically tested concepts, simplifying the complexities of the human mind in a way that helps readers identify practical steps to change to how we approach our own actions and the behaviors of others.

Cat Noe says

This individual seems to be obsessed with medication as a solution to all the mind's ills, to the point of completely ignoring the underlying problems or traumas which caused the amygdala to engage in the first place. Covering the problem with drugs doesn't eliminate the cause, and more often than not has side effects that at least rival the original condition.

While the light venture into neurology was interesting, leaning so heavily in P.A.G. inhibitors as the cause of neurological disturbances rather than a symptom completely destroyed the best of his credibility. This was basically a waste of time.

Joanne says

good insights into the way we behave.

Jennifer says

This was a great book. It was very informative and had some things I plan to use in the future.

Deb Lindfors says

Excellent book on the brain, if you have no knowledge on how the brain works this book explains it well.

Destiny Abrams says

Interesting ideas about how everything leads back to our response to survival. It brings up some interesting points but also may seem very repetitive if you understand that they are basically recalling the surrealistic response to stimuli as the main cause for all of the behaviors.

Connie D says

Fascinating research on brains and behavior, explaining how and why emotions (especially anger, depression/shutdown, fear, and non-emotion) can get out of control as well as some solutions. (It is a little repetitive at times, but that's understandable because some people probably only read the chapters of interest to them and would need that background information.)

Deb says

****Getting Emotionally Untangled****

Ever feel like your emotions are out of control?

Believe it or not, these emotional spinouts may have less to do with personality and individual experiences than they do with neurological functioning. *_Untangling The Mind_* presents a fascinating neurological model that explains how extreme emotions are actually cases of innate survival responses gone into overdrive. In the words of the author:

“This book looks at emotions and behaviors that are out of proportion to a situation. Emotions are not the same as behavior—they fuel it. By examining the relationship between tumultuous emotions and magnified responses, you get an idea of what sets them off, who’s most vulnerable, why they spin out of control, and what you can do to understand and contain them. My hope is to begin to untangle and answer the vexing questions about the **whys**, **whats**, and **hows** of emotions...My search has helped me construct a neurological model that ties together extreme emotions with behavior, pathways, and clinical characteristics. This explanation centers on the notion that everyone possess a neurological switch deep in the brain that can be flipped at the right time, and the wrong time. I hope to share with you my understanding and insight into how this switch works and what’s going on in people’s brains.” (p. 5)

Divided into three parts, the book first untangles the inner workings of the brain by showing how sensory signals are translated into emotions. Next, it uses personal stories to illustrate the neurological inner (mis)workings underlying specific emotional disorders, such as intermittent explosive disorder (extreme bouts of anger), panic disorder, depression, and psychopathy. The final part of the book uses the PAG* neurological model to offer an explanation for the emotional spinout and to effectively inform and guide treatments.

(*PAG is short for the periaqueductal gray, which is a brain structure central to simulating survival behaviors like defensive rage and escape.)

When the PAG is functioning correctly, it activates survival actions as needed, and appropriately harnesses anger/fear/depression/flat emotion to produce the corresponding behaviors of fight/flight/shutdown/predatory actions. However, in some people, the PAG chronically over-reacts, resulting in emotions and behaviors being in constant survival mode. (In brain-speak, this means that the thalamus continually detects stimuli as extreme threats and alerts the amygdala for a survival reaction instead of the cortex for thoughtful processing.) The PAG model shows the relationship between emotions, behaviors, and clinical pathology:

Emotion ---> Behavior ---> Extreme Behavior
Anger ---> Fight ---> Intermittent Explosive Disorder
Fear ---> Flight ---> Panic Attacks
Depression ---> Shutdown ---> Major depression
No Emotion ---> Predatory ---> Psychopathy

So, how do you override these extreme emotional reactions?

“You need to know how to react when your survival systems sounds the alarm. Even more, you need to know how to modulate survival behavior...A lesson of the [PAG] model is that it is useful to consider whether the threat is truly a survival situation or a false alarm. Remind yourself that your neurological wiring can malfunction. Your brain can misread fear. The brain’s survival system can go haywire, sounding alarms when no threat is imminent...Acquiring insight into how your brain reacts to threats is a way of taking control. With this information, you are better able to grapple with changes for tomorrow. Instead of being bogged down in toxic emotions, you figure out how to override your brain’s imperfect wiring.” (pp. 242, 241)

Whether you want better control of your own emotions, or a better understanding of the out-of-control others around you, *_Untangling The Mind_* is well-worth tangling up with.

C says

Very helpful in its discussion of brain activity in connection with several problematic behaviors while providing suggestions to treat and/or improve those behaviors. Anyone can benefit from reading it. It's better to nip such things in the bud before they get to be diagnosable disorders. :)

Arnav says

Ever wondered why some people are more impulsive? why some people fear to do the some of the most common activities ? Well this is the book which would answer all such questions and also give you an insight as to why some people are emotionally driven to the extent that they harm people around them either physically or psychology ...

This book has a lot of Brain anatomy discussed but in the simplest of language. This Author has covered the entire plethora of emotionally driven behavior, be it the time when you shouted at your loved one for no specific reason or the time you saw a total stranger getting violent for no specific reason. The most common notion that people who are impulsive chose to do so and simply need an anger management course is not entirely true as explained with detailed example in this book.

A must read for those who have interest in Human Behavior and seek an answer as to why some people react differently to the same situations ...

Michael Stallard says

In "Untangling the Mind: Why We Behave the Way We Do," D. Theodore George, M.D., a psychiatrist and neuroscientist at the National Institutes of Health, describes a new model for understanding America's surge in emotional and behavioral disorders. Earlier this year, a report by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine of the National Academies found that comparing a peer group of 17 wealthy countries, Americans under 50 now have the lowest life expectancy and fall at the bottom (i.e. were the worst) of nearly every morbidity category from deaths by substance abuse, sexual-related diseases, infant mortality, violence and sedentary lifestyles that contribute to diabetes and cardiovascular problems. The report points out that in the years following World War II, America was near or at the top of the peer group. It rightly concludes that something clearly is wrong but, unfortunately, fails to provide a satisfactory explanation. The problem has become so acute that last week the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released figures that show suicide rates haven't sharply increased so that more Americans now die from suicide than from motor vehicle accidents.

Fortunately, Dr. George's book helps us understand what's going wrong. In his view, traumas experienced by 75 percent of the population result in faulty brain wiring that makes people vulnerable to the stressors, threats and fears we experience in modern life. The faulty wiring misinterprets threats and fears by blowing them way out of proportion. This results in emotional and behavioral disorders including anger that triggers the fight response, fear that triggers the flight response, depression that triggers shutdown and an absence of emotional anger that triggers predatory behavior. When people don't feel well emotionally - i.e. they are angry, anxious, withdrawn, depressed, etc. - they frequently cope in ways that result in addiction (e.g. substance abuse, promiscuity, porn addiction, eating disorders, cutting). Although these addictive behaviors provide temporary relief, they hijack the brain's reward system and eventually kick in the anti-reward system so that people need a fix of the coping behavior to feel better from the unpleasant sensations of withdrawal.

In the last part of the book, Dr. George describes how he helps his patients. He uses "talk therapy" to connect with them and teach them so they understand what's going wrong, he coaches them to help develop a plan that features neutral or healthy habits that replace unhealthy ones, and he encourages them to persevere until new healthy habits are formed. There are many useful parts of the book including Dr. George's model (focusing on the periaqueductal gray or "PAG" part of the brain), a list of threats and fears which trigger emotional and behavioral disorders, and descriptions of healthy behaviors that can be used to replace unhealthy ones.

My summary doesn't do the book justice so I highly recommend that anyone who is struggling with emotional or behavioral disorders, and for those who care about them, get this book and read it. "Untangling the Mind" is a valuable new resource that provides insight and practical advice to help the many Americans today who are struggling with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Note: In the spirit of full disclosure you should know that I write, speak and teach about reducing stress in the workplace so when I heard about this book I contacted the publisher, HarperOne, and requested, and was sent, a free review copy to consider writing about it.

Yaaresse says

DNF. At 23% mark, I find myself mostly bored. It's as if I've read all this before somewhere.

The author seems to be headed into waters of "we are only our biology and we can give you a pill to fix that" territory. If he is, I'd abandon the book when he got there anyway. I don't buy the "I can't help being a jackass; it's my biology" excuse anymore than I buy the "pop a pill to fix that" response. If he's *not* headed there, I'm still bored and 23% is more than enough chance to get to the point.

Marybet Hudson says

Dr. George really made a complicated subject accessible for the layperson. I enjoyed reading this and I learned a lot about emotional response. People are complicated, and other people's actions affect me, and my actions affect them -- though not always the way we think. Understanding my emotional responses is very helpful.

Devonne says

there is still lots of unknowns about the mind and why we do what we do.... Responsibility for actions is covered. I am still a student of examining motivation for our behaviors.
