



Blaming the Brain: The Truth About Drugs and Mental Health

Elliot Valenstein

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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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