

Book Review of, “Adjust Your Brain”

A Gonul

Citation

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Abstract

Trying to solve the mystery of our brain and its diseases continues to be an interesting pursuit. Many researchers from different countries and laboratories work very hard to go one step further from what has been previously studied. Among this hard work, researchers sometimes forget to ask where we are at the understanding of the brain. At those times, we definitely need to unify the theories coming from different laboratories. Paul J. Fitzgerald tries to unify these theories coming from different researchers in his book, “Adjust Your Brain” (1) and proposes a model based on three major neurotransmitters in the brain; serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine. Paul Fitzgerald has a strong background in neuroscience, as a researcher and an expert on brain mapping. However, in his book you will not only find his expertise on neuroscience but also his personal story as a bipolar patient.

Previous books written by patients with mental illness provide the public with a wide insight about mental illness along with the associated disabilities of having mental illness. This book provides more than the author just offering insight to the readers about how mental diseases develop and how they can be treated in the context of neurotransmitters. While reading the book, I did not feel that the author wrote this specifically as a guide or a handbook for patients or their families. Many readers would definitely benefit from reading about this new concept on mental diseases. This new concept may help them to understand the brain better and which may lead to understanding and improvement for themselves and other people.

The author bases his theories on three neurotransmitters for explaining the etiology of a variety of mental diseases and personality trait/disorders. He proposes that mental disorders are due to an imbalance in neurotransmitter systems, especially the serotonergic, norepinephrinergic and dopaminergic systems. This kind of approach reminds me of Empedocles (490-430 BC) from the ancient Greeks who

proposed that diseases are due to an imbalance of body fluids. The author's approach may be viewed by some as an over simplification and underestimation of other theories related to mental disorders. However, it should not be forgotten that the most consistent research findings show that these neurotransmitter systems play important roles in mental functioning and its disease state.

In the last 10-15 years, neuroscience studies have become so complex that readers who are foreign to the field started to have problems following them. The author's clear language and simple examples help readers to better understand the brain. Furthermore, the book's approach guides readers in a very systematic way. First, there is a brief history of psychiatry and then the author's personal story. Then follows content on the “big three” (i.e., serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine) with their basic interaction among each other and other brain systems. Then, the author explains the pathophysiology of mental diseases and personality traits/disorders based on the “big three” in the rest of the book. Findings from new research as relevant to the suggested theory are included, along with pathophysiology explanations. The content on deep brain stimulation and genetics are excellent examples of this above approach.

In conclusion, the book “Adjust Your Brain” is for readers who want to learn more about mental diseases and personality disorders in the context of the neurotransmitter system. It is easy to read and to understand, and the reader would not need any other sources to understand the concepts in the book.

CORRESPONDENCE TO

Ali Saffet Gonul, MD e-mail: asgonul@hotmail.com Ege University School of Medicine Department of Psychiatry Izmir, Turkey & Mercer University School of Medicine Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Macon, GA, USA

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Author Information

Ali Saffet Gonul, MD