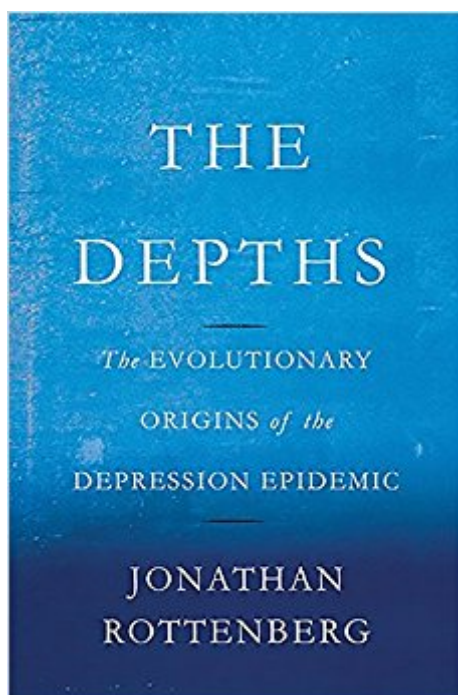


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The Depths: The Evolutionary Origins Of The Depression Epidemic



Synopsis

Nearly every depressed person is assured by doctors, well-meaning friends and family, the media, and ubiquitous advertisements that the underlying problem is a chemical imbalance. Such a simple defect should be fixable, yet despite all of the resources that have been devoted to finding a pharmacological solution, depression remains stubbornly widespread. Why are we losing this fight? In this humane and illuminating challenge to defect models of depression, psychologist Jonathan Rottenberg argues that depression is a particularly severe outgrowth of our natural capacity for emotion. In other words, it is a low mood gone haywire. Drawing on recent developments in the science of mood and his own harrowing depressive experience as a young adult, Rottenberg explains depression in evolutionary terms, showing how its dark pull arises from adaptations that evolved to help our ancestors ensure their survival. Moods, high and low, evolved to compel us to more efficiently pursue rewards. While this worked for our ancestors, our modern environment, in which daily survival is no longer a sole focus, makes it all too easy for low mood to slide into severe, long-lasting depression. Weaving together experimental and epidemiological research, clinical observations, and the voices of individuals who have struggled with depression, *The Depths* offers a bold new account of why depression endures and makes a strong case for de-stigmatizing this increasingly common condition. In so doing, Rottenberg offers hope in the form of his own and other patients' recovery, and points the way towards new paths for treatment.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Why is depression so prevalent and persistent? Why is the disorder so difficult to treat? Rottenberg, a professor of psychology who has suffered from depression, addresses those broad questions from a dual perspective as scientist and patient. Acknowledging that there is no single cause of the depression epidemic, he pushes for a new evolutionary model of mood and theorizes about the potential advantages of negative moods. For example, a low or sad mood might confer greater skepticism, deliberation, and caution in processing information. Mild depression could possibly function as an “emotional cocoon” that offers an opportunity for a time-out to ascertain what is going wrong. Rottenberg reminds readers that human beings “are not wired for bliss.” Evolution is fixated on survival and reproduction. Is it conceivable that mild forms of depression aid in achieving those evolutionary goals as crucially as happiness does? In this provocative presentation of the natural history and evolution of depression, the bottom line is, strangely, both deflating and hopeful: “Low mood is both inescapable and sometimes useful.” --Tony Miksanek

“The Depths: The Evolutionary Origins of the Depression Epidemic has the potential to revolutionize the way scientists study depression and therapists treat depression. It can provide hope for people with depression and understanding for their families.”; PsychologyToday.com; A stimulating book; Publishers Weekly; In this provocative presentation of the natural history and evolution of depression, the bottom line is, strangely, both deflating and hopeful: “Low mood is both inescapable and sometimes useful.”; Booklist; An important contribution to [Rottenberg’s] stated aim of promoting “an adult national conversation about depression.”; Kirkus Reviews; Almost a clarion call to open the discussion about depression, remove its social stigma and break with current scientific convention to help those suffering begin their recovery.”; The Economist; With tens of millions already on antidepressants, the expense will eventually force us to reevaluate our approach to care. The Depths is a first step.”; Philadelphia Inquirer; The personal experience of depression that Rottenberg details here lends authenticity to his mood science-focused consideration of both the origins of the depression epidemic and why it remains so tenacious and difficult to treat. As The Depths shows, our age requires innovative psychological approaches if we are to tackle the growing burden of depression and, further, to promote

well-being. — Times Higher Education; An ambitious, rigorously researched, and illuminating journey into the abyss of the soul and back out, emerging with insights both practical and conceptual, personal and universal, that shed light on one of the least understood, most pervasive, and most crippling pandemics humanity has ever grappled with. — Brain Pickings

A worthwhile and comfortably logical read. The author, a doctor specializing in and with first-hand experience with depression, convincingly uses facts and perspective to explain depression. I would recommend that the reader read the first and last chapters in that order before proceeding with the other chapters. The first chapter is powerful in placing weight on the issue and the author's suggested perspective while the last chapter, by way of discussing what is successful, makes a compelling case of what is missing in today's typical approach. 5 Stars for ease of explanation and compelling message.

A very new and interesting perspective on depression based on the author's two decades of research in the field. He makes a very persuasive case against the "chemical imbalance" explanation for depression -- and the accompanying view that depression can be categorized into discrete states, e.g. normal, moderately depressed, severely depressed -- and offers as an alternative the theory, backed by psychology experiments, that feeling "down" is a tool the brain uses for demotivation (when we're wasting energy pursuing an impossible goal). Depression, in this model, results from, among other things, continuing to pursue an unattainable goal, or at least continuing to work without signs of progress, because this prompts the mind to ramp up how "down" you feel. The harder you push, the harder it pushes back. If that sounds simplistic and like it misses a lot, that's because it's just one of many elements of depression Rottenberg touches on. I don't want to recap the whole book here; suffice to say that it's an illuminating read, particularly if you or someone you know has depression -- there are a lot of "oh, now it makes sense why [I/he/she] do/es that."

I had high hopes for this book, and it started out well. I wasn't familiar with the arguments that depression serves an evolutionary purpose and I found the animal evidence very convincing. However, I was hoping to learn about new breakthroughs in treatment. What struck me as odd was that the Minnesota Starvation Experiment was discussed, but the author didn't make the connection between malnutrition and depression outside of that study. Just because someone has

food available doesn't mean they are properly nourished. I can speak from my own experience with depression during much of my life that dissipated when I stopped eating wheat flour and sugar. I do agree with the author that we owe it to the younger generation to face this epidemic. However, I would start with the animal evidence and extrapolate to people. Perhaps we should look at our food supply and compare it to what our species evolved to eat before we became civilized. And look at our modern lifestyle in that light as well.. Maybe our bodies are sending us a message that we are doing something wrong but we look to pills and behavioral therapy instead of addressing the real problem.

This thoughtful, well-written book includes enough science to be credible and enough personal history to be compelling. We are all surrounded by people who are depressed, so it is useful and comforting to gain an understanding of depression from this book. Much as I would like to re-read this right away, it's more important to share my copy with family and friends. Congratulations and thanks to Dr. Rottenberg for this book.

Having endured a number of depressive episodes by my fifties, including the last which persisted for several years, I found Dr Rottenberg's insights spot on and encouraging, and a confirmation of those things I discovered to be most helpful on my own, through years of trial and error. Most significantly, once I began to "listen" to my depression and make changes in my life, I began to heal. I am experiencing now an existence better than ever, just as those shared in the book. Many thanks to Jonathan Rottenberg for his years of research and advocacy in this critical field and for this book which sheds new light on the darkest of subjects. I am sharing this book widely.

I have already recommended this book to a few people. I gave the copy I purchased to a dear friend that has been depressed for over a year! He smiled when I asked him yesterday if he had started reading it yet, and then told me in the same breath, I did not know that there were so many people going through the same thing as I am. I was beginning to think, there was nothing else I could do or say to help, prior to reading, "The Depths".

One of the best books I have read on depression since Andrew Solomon's "The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression." And that's saying A LOT. A refreshingly hopeful perspective is presented in Jonathan Rottenberg's words. Well-written, very readable, with points that are heavily backed by research (and are cited, references can be found in the Notes at the end of the book.)

J. Rottenberg expounds the unconscious mechanics of depression as an antiquated, overstimulated survival mechanism. Several myths and facts about modern depression are thoroughly examined. The major trends are exposed, providing a road map for recovery from the growing epidemic of depression in its most honest light.

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