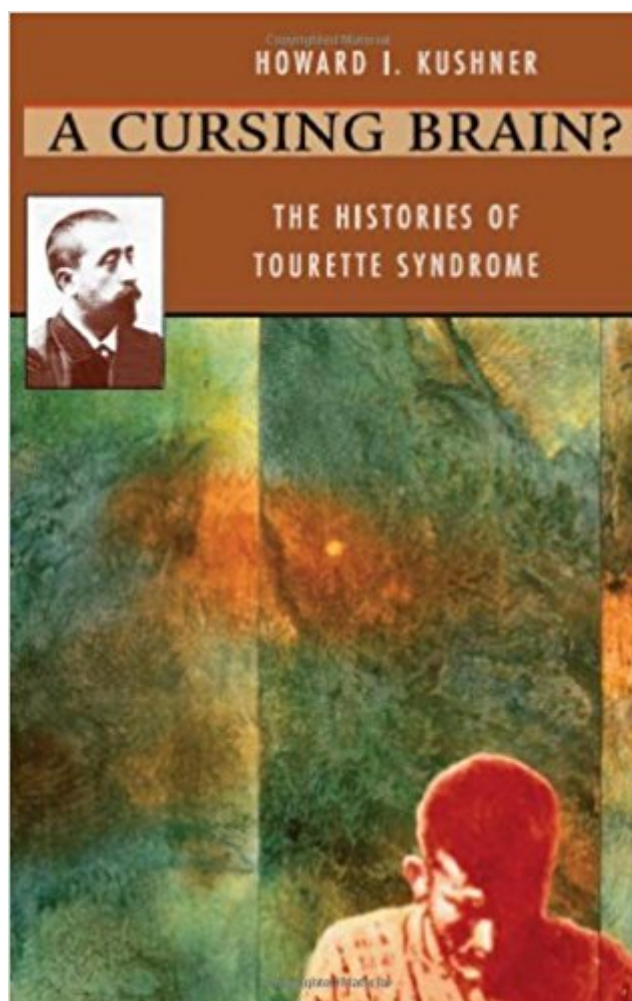


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A Cursing Brain? The Histories Of Tourette Syndrome



Synopsis

Over a century and a half ago, a French physician reported the bizarre behavior of a young aristocratic woman who would suddenly, without warning, erupt in a startling fit of obscene shouts and curses. The image of the afflicted Marquise de Dampierre echoes through the decades as the emblematic example of an illness that today represents one of the fastest-growing diagnoses in North America. Tourette syndrome is a set of behaviors, including recurrent ticcing and involuntary shouting (sometimes cursing) as well as obsessive-compulsive actions. The fascinating history of this syndrome reveals how cultural and medical assumptions have determined and radically altered its characterization and treatment from the early nineteenth century to the present. *A Cursing Brain?* traces the problematic classification of Tourette syndrome through three distinct but overlapping stories: that of the claims of medical knowledge, that of patients' experiences, and that of cultural expectations and assumptions. Earlier researchers asserted that the bizarre ticcing and impromptu vocalizations were psychological--resulting from sustained bad habits or lack of self-control. Today, patients exhibiting these behaviors are seen as suffering from a neurological disease and generally are treated with drug therapy. Although current clinical research indicates that Tourette's is an organic disorder, this pioneering history of the syndrome reminds us to be skeptical of medical orthodoxies so that we may stay open to fresh understandings and more effective interventions.

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Customer Reviews

Since the 1970s, the Tourette Syndrome Association has attempted to educate Americans to react compassionately to the startling involuntary gestures and vocalizations, sometimes shocking or obscene, of Tourettes patients. An increasingly common North American diagnosis, Tourette syndrome affects 2.9 to 5.2 per 100,000 Americans, most frequently male. Kushner (history of medicine, San Diego State Univ.) describes the shifting histories of this syndrome since it was first described by French neurologist Georges Gilles de la Tourette in 1885. Experts have variously attributed the Tourette complex of behaviors to moral defects, neurological damage, repressed sexual urges, and chemical imbalances. Such explanations, Kushner argues, conceal cultural assumptions that prevent physicians from fully hearing their patients stories and thus influence medical practice in damaging ways. Kushner cautions his readers that patients themselves, unconstrained by medical orthodoxy, have much to teach. A compassionate and absorbing work of medical history for academic and larger public libraries. Kathleen Arsenault, Univ. of South Florida at St. Petersburg Lib. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

One could doubtless read many books without coming on the phrase "ticcing coprolalics," but it is here, and it is serious business. It refers to the involuntary jerking movements (ticcing) and the untimely outbursts of cursing or foul language (coprolalia) emitted by people (mostly males) who suffer from Tourette syndrome. Kushner, a professor of the history of medicine at San Diego State University, reviews the history of efforts to understand and treat the affliction. Unfortunately, the cause is still unknown. Kushner believes the syndrome may be a reaction to a previous infection, but it has also been treated as a psychiatric problem. He expresses the hope that current research "will lead eventually to robust interventions aimed at the causes rather than the symptoms of these behaviors." --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is an excellent and comprehensive review of how Tourette Syndrome has been treated -- and mistreated -- through history. It reveals how much the viewpoint of the researcher (doctor, psychologist, etc.) determines the course of a study or how a patient is seen. Anyone interested specifically in TS will find it fascinating, but I think it is most relevant as a reminder that the scientist is a participant in a relationship with a patient. Medical students, medical researchers, physicians... should all read it.

It really is a HISTORY.

A comprehensive historical overview.

This is a fascinating and well-researched book, both in terms of TS itself and the history of medicine and psychology in Europe and the US. Some of the stories are just heart rending. The writing is sometimes a bit overly academic, however, and readers without graduate degrees or lots of other practice reading turgid prose may get a bit worn out while plowing through some of the paragraphs.

Very interesting and useful

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