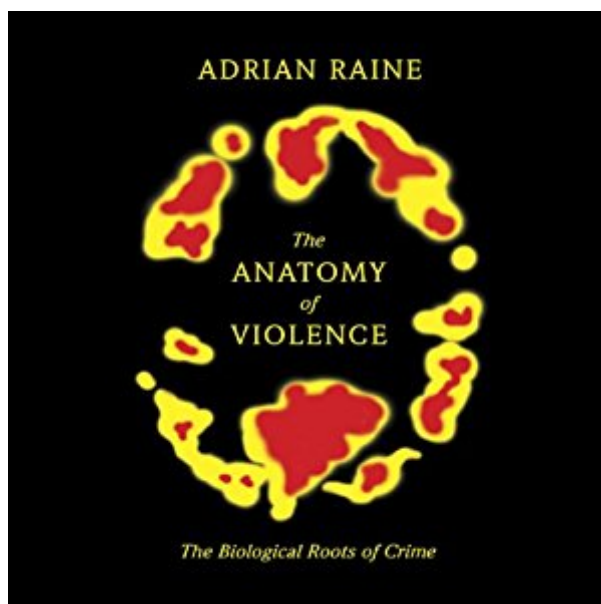


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The Anatomy Of Violence: The Biological Roots Of Crime



Synopsis

Provocative and timely: A pioneering neurocriminologist introduces the latest biological research into the causes of - and potential cures for - criminal behavior. A leading criminologist who specializes in the neuroscience behind criminal behavior, Adrian Raine introduces a wide range of new scientific research into the origins and nature of violence and criminal behavior. He explains how impairments to areas of the brain that control our ability to experience fear, make decisions, and feel empathy can make us more likely to engage in criminal behavior. He applies this new understanding of the criminal mind to some of the most well-known criminals in history. And he clearly delineates the pressing considerations this research demands: What are its implications for our criminal justice system? Should we condemn and punish individuals who have little no control over their behavior? Should we act preemptively with people who exhibit strong biological predispositions to becoming dangerous criminals? These are among the thorny issues we can no longer ignore as our understanding of criminal behavior grows.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was concerned when I picked this up that it would be just another apologetic about how criminals aren't really responsible for their own behavior, but it has turned out to be the best book I've read in ages! Raine is an adept writer, enthusiastic about his subject and impressively balanced in his approach. The book is exceptionally well organized with a logical, easy-to-read flow of ideas and concepts. The case studies are fascinating, and the scientific results rendered in way that both

maintains their intellectual integrity and makes them accessible to the lay reader. The author is upfront about the interconnected impacts of nature and nurture, clearly demonstrating what effects are strictly biological, which ones are socially driven, and how differing combinations of nature & nurture can produce radically different results. The section on the impacts on fetal/infant brain development reminded me of *The Crazy Makers: How the Food Industry Is Destroying Our Brains and Harming Our Children* in that it shows you the biological impacts of social choices, which was fascinating and extremely well done. I think this book should be required reading for parents, teachers, and the law enforcement/justice systems en masse - while Raine never claims to have all the answers, his insights are invaluable and will change the way you look at violence and crime. This was a pleasure to read, and I will look for more by this author in the future.

Most research into crime takes a sociological approach. Raine brings out the latest research into biological models and puts forward several controversial theories that put the biological (largely genetic based) models over the sociological models. He often reigns himself back in, mentioning that his models ARE theoretical, but his writing becomes evangelical on several occasions. Careful reading is necessary to pick these passages out and not get carried away in the author's enthusiasm. After 28 years working in law enforcement, I believe that Raine's work is groundbreaking and necessary, but over time - the reality of the models will edge back to the center - namely that nature and nurture both play a part in criminality. I believe this book would be good for folks in law enforcement, criminology, neuropsychology, and lay persons who want to be able to have a grasp on the current issues. After reading this book, I would recommend you visit 'The Science of Evil' by Simon Baron-Cohen for an alternate take on the issue. All the best, Jay

Adrian Raine's book, *THE ANATOMY OF VIOLENCE*, is a provocative and exhaustive treatise on the ways in which physiological phenomenon are currently thought to result in violent criminal behavior, and argues that these physiological factors are of primary importance in understanding criminal violence. I found the book intellectually unconvincing. Raine leaps quickly to questionable conclusions and presents things as facts that are dubious or have been completely discredited (some examples below). *THE ANATOMY OF VIOLENCE* is reminiscent to me of many treatises in soft fields such as social sciences or nutrition. The research described doesn't actually add up to a clear picture of anything; in fact, a sober analysis ought to lead one to question the validity of that research. Throughout the book, Raine describes many different physical factors, ranging from tiny differentials in the size of particular brain regions, to an excess of Manganese in the diet, and shows

studies where researchers have found a large degree of correlation between these physical factors and criminal violence. Certain researchers have shown, for example, that the lead in gasoline, and the removal of lead from gasoline, describes nearly 100% of the rise and fall of crime in all societies for the past fifty years. Raine is modestly skeptical, at best, of any of the research that he cites (which amounts to thousands of studies -- the book, to its credit, is rigorous with citations). The net effect is an array of various smoking guns linking physical qualities to violent criminal behavior. But that itself presents a problem -- they can't all be smoking guns! A lot of the research has to be wrong in order for some of it to be right. Raine doesn't seem to be conscious of this problem. A skeptical read of this book will lead to an inevitable conclusion about the research that Raine describes: "a whole lot of confirmation bias goin' on!" In a classic example, Raine explains how one of his graduate students spent months re-analyzing the data from decades old research done by one of Raine's mentors. The mentor, the original scientist who produced the data, had concluded it did not show a statistically significant correlation between one physical factor and antisocial behavior. Raine's graduate student, after months of working at it, was eventually able to come up with a statistical treatment to prove that the data actually did show a statistically significant (in fact, very significant) correlation. Raine tells this story with pride in his graduate student's accomplishment and the way it reinforces his beliefs, but an outside observer like myself cannot help being reminded of the old adage from medical research that if you torture a set of data long enough with statistical analysis it will eventually tell you exactly what you want to hear. In another notable example of confirmation bias and credulity, Raine describes his groundbreaking research working with temp workers. He has made the truly incredible discovery that nearly 50% of temp workers in the United States are clinical grade psychopaths! Raine is amazed at all the horror stories of rapes and violence he and his research team are eventually able to wheedle out of these temp workers over a period of years. It doesn't occur to him that when you are paying people money to tell you what you want to hear.... they might actually tell you exactly what you want to hear! Those things are problematic, but some of the content of the book is simply factually incorrect. For example, Raine describes in lurid, almost gushing, detail the crimes and life stories of many serial killers, including Henry Lee Lucas and Gerald Stano. The life stories of these last two men feature prominently in Raine's discussion of nature versus nurture. Problem: both Henry Lee Lucas and Gerald Stano are famous for being "serial confessors" whose supposed crimes and endless "whopper" stories have been widely discredited and debunked. Raine, being widely recognized as one of the world's leading criminological experts, ought to know this, yet he presents their discredited stories as if they were established facts, and attempts to draw conclusions about crime

and human nature from them. In another example, Raine says that research on lying has shown that people are universally bad at telling when others are lying to them, and that trained law enforcement and security officers are, if anything, worse at identifying liars than the rest of us. The two or three studies that Raine cites in support of this are old and not particularly convincing in their methodology. In one, for example, people were asked to judge whether young children were lying when responding to a handful of yes or no questions (even the study participants told the researchers they thought it was stupid, because you can't judge much from a short video clip of a child saying "yes, yes, no."). Raine doesn't mention the fact, which he is hopefully aware of, that decades of other studies have found the opposite to be true: both that some people are unusually good at recognizing liars and that some trained law enforcement or security agencies are unusually good at it. This is one of the few examples in the book where I took the time to dig fairly deeply into the research being cited, so it is worrying to contemplate all the facts and evidence cited in the book which I did not have time to dig into. In another case, Raine trots out the old acorn that finger length ratios predict all manner of things about people, even though that idea has been pretty thoroughly discredited. In cases like this we are nearly stepping back into the middle ages. A great deal of the research that Raine has built his reputation as a scientist on is in the field of fMRI brain scanning, which skeptical psychologists and neuroscientists have famously debunked as "the new phrenology". Colorful fMRI scans showing the contrast between healthy brains and criminal brains are a major feature of this book. It is worth being aware that this area of research has been sharply criticized, and that the colorful scans created by researchers to gain grant money and to impress the public (and sell books!) are misleading. What a raw fMRI scan of the brain looks like is just a lot of noise everywhere, because the brain is active everywhere pretty much all the time. It is only through enormous amounts of statistical fiddling (read: confirmation bias ahead) that researchers boil scans of brains that are brightly lit all over, down into scans where only the desired areas of the brain are "activated". Then, at the very end, they color them up arbitrarily to make them look dramatic. This is why it takes months or years to analyze relatively small numbers of these types of scans, instead of minutes. Raine makes a pretense of defensiveness throughout the book, describing at length how scientists who favored a biological cause of criminality and violence have been marginalized in the recent past, but I think he protests too much. His book has been, as far as I can tell, universally lauded, and the idea that biology plays a large part in criminality is already widely embraced in the 21st Century. However, I wonder how many of the laudatory blurbs and reviews for this book are from readers who actually read it carefully and dug into it with a critical mind? I'm sympathetic to the idea that antisocial behavior, and psychopathy in particular, could be largely biological in origin, but

the science has to be good. Raine's book left me convinced that it is not. Maybe it will be some day in the future, but apparently not now.

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