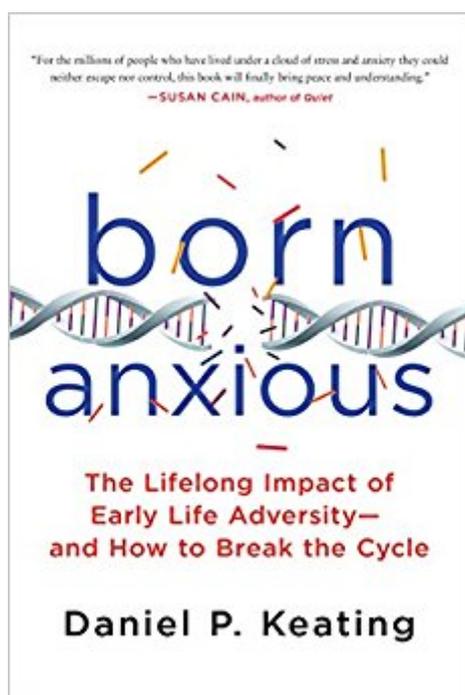


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# Born Anxious: The Lifelong Impact Of Early Life Adversity - And How To Break The Cycle



## Synopsis

Why are we the way we are? Why do some of us find it impossible to calm a quick temper or to shake anxiety? The debate has always been divided between nature and nurture, but as psychology professor Daniel P. Keating demonstrates in *Born Anxious*, new DNA science points to a third factor that allows us to inherit both the nature and the nurture of previous generations with significant consequences. *Born Anxious* introduces a new word into our lexicon: "methylated." It's short for "epigenetic methylation," and it offers insight into behaviors we have all observed but never understood: the boss who goes ballistic at the slightest error; the infant who can't be calmed; the husband who can't fall asleep at night. In each case, because of an exposure to environmental adversity in utero or during the first year of life, a key stress system has been welded into the "on" position by the methylation process, predisposing the child's body to excessive levels of the stress hormone cortisol. The effect: lifelong, unrelenting stress and its consequences from school failure to nerve-wracking relationships to early death. Early adversity happens in all levels of society but as income gaps widen, social inequality and fear of the future have become the new predators; in *Born Anxious*, Daniel P. Keating demonstrates how we can finally break the cycle.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Much more than just an overview of how new DNA research has enlightened our

understanding of anxiety, this is an empowering guide to combating the stress epidemic.

• Kirkus Reviews "Every once in a while a book comes along that draws us into the often obscure world of science, and takes us on a moving journey of understanding. Born Anxious is one of these special books, lucidly written and easy to grasp. On one level it's the biological story of the underpinnings of stress. But don't be fooled. This is a human story. For the millions of people who have lived under a cloud of stress and anxiety they could neither escape nor control, this book will finally bring peace and understanding. Everyone should read it."

• Susan Cain, author of Quiet "This book tells the story of the scientific work that will likely lead to a new understanding of why some of us feel as if our entire lives have been compromised by high levels of stress. But what makes it so important is that it also shows, indeed forcefully argues, that we do not need to be ruled by our biology. It won't be easy, but there are things that we as parents, as individuals, and as a society can do to take control of our psychological lives. This is an empowering book that anyone who has ever dealt with stress in themselves, their families, friends, even those they work with, should read and consider."

• Jeffrey M. Schwartz MD, Research Psychiatrist, UCLA, author of the bestselling books Brain Lock, The Mind and the Brain, and You Are Not Your Brain "In this period in human history when many are "stressed out", Keating tells a vitally important story of how inequality gets "under the skin" and affects physical and mental health over the life course, starting very early in life. And he provides very useful references to interventions for children, teens and adults."

• Bruce McEwen, PhD, Alfred E. Mirsky Professor of Neuroscience at Rockefeller University, and recipient of the Gold Medal Award from the Society for Biological Psychiatry. Author of The End of Stress As We Know It and The Hostage Brain

DANIEL P. KEATING is a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, and received his Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins. Keating has conducted research at leading North American universities; at Berlin's Max Planck Institute; and with the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, where he was a fellow for two decades and led the program in human development. He focuses on developmental differences: cognitive, social, emotional, and in physical and mental health. He resides in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Similar with other reviewers, I agree that this book touches on the epigenetic and social factors found to impact anxiety, and is more weighted toward policy. Although I lean into the camp that items related to policy are timely and crucial for reducing this societal burden. Anxiety plays a role in

all of our lives -- some more heavily than others. The changes discussed in this book may very well be crucial in mitigating the spiraling effect that anxiety plays in some peoples lives. Cognitive Neuroscience, epigenetics and behavioral science in this area is young, but it's growing very fast. As it does, we need to consider the implications and adjust policy accordingly. The only way to do this is to convey the importance to the public, as Dr. Daniel Keating has done in Born Anxious.

I had high hopes for this book, having studied the work on stress by Prof. Robert Sapolsky (I highly recommend his courses from The Great Courses; I'm not affiliated with Prof. Sapolsky or The Great Courses)but this book was mostly predictable advice, common sense, with only a few new ideas thrown in. Most interesting is the possibility that prenatal stress on the mother can impact the baby through life if it goes unrecognized and untreated. When the author turned to national and world population policy problems, I had a feeling of hopelessness. The human problems generally lose out to military, trade, corporate interests. I'd hoped for more concrete remedies than "supernurturing" fussy children or recommending that students who are involved in an extracurricular activity will make their school experience better. Most people already know this. Maybe with more research, a better book will follow.

The content does not live up to the title. Not an easy read if your not a psychiatrist, etc maybe a lecture on DVD would be easier to follow

This is an excellent book!

This book is one that explores the discussion of the roles of nature and nurture and our responses to early experiences, examining how these influence our path in life and future health issues. The author focuses on epigenetics and how stress responses can be turned on or off and even passed from one generation to the next. There is some technical science involved that is helpful to understand, while the book also examines sociological factors that could be addressed to break the stress cycle. Exercise, mindfulness, social connections, and other resources are suggested to help people overcome dysregulation of their stress response. This book summarizes a lot of previously published research and doesn't provide any especially novel treatments - it just does a solid job of explaining the science of how stress and our reaction to it influences our brain and body chemistry, and provides commonly used solutions for settling down the stress reaction.

In *Born Anxious*, author Daniel Keating makes a simple but intriguing assertion. After years of scientific research, he has come to the conclusion that if a person experiences serious enough early life adversity (in the womb or during the first year of life), then that person is at major risk for developing Stress Dysregulation (SDR), i.e., a genetic modification that prevents the body from shutting down the stress response. In other words, too much stress early in life will physically modify this specific "stress" gene so that it can't turn itself off. Keating says, "The decision by the epigenome to lock that stress gene is made in response to one question asked while a child is still in the womb or in the first year of life: what kind of world will this child be entering--one that is kind and supportive or one that is harsh and unforgiving?" If the body decides the child will be born or raised in a hostile environment, the end result is that she will have an almost constant oversupply of cortisol in the body, all in anticipation of life's "worst case scenarios." Pretty intense stuff, eek. So at what level of stress does the body permanently alter its ability to turn off that stress response? The short answer is, we don't know. Obviously children born into war zones or born to mothers who have experienced significant trauma during pregnancy are at risk. But (and this is where the book gets a little dicey, in my opinion...) what about in first-world countries, where we've seen a significant rise in stress dysregulation? Well, Keating claims that rising inequality is what is mostly to blame for our growing stress. And not just in people who are poor. He sees this as affecting everyone, regardless of class or income level. Poorer people may worry about simply getting by, but richer people worry about losing their status. This "constant underlying fear that things could go wrong pretty quickly" produces the same increased risk for stress dysregulation in pregnant women and young children across income levels. Truth be told, I'm not sure I'm 100% on board with Keating's assertion that inequality, both real and anticipated, is completely responsible for our rising stress levels and, specifically, SDR. However, his thoughts and observations about how stress impacts us as babies, children, teenagers, and adults (he has a chapter for each developmental stage) is fascinating. And I absolutely agree with his conclusion that we can combat our current stress epidemic by investing in human development: early education, public education, stress reduction training (especially for kids), universal healthcare, quality prenatal care, paid maternity leave, job security post-maternity leave, paid parental leave, and comprehensive sex education. As Keating has found in his research, "Countries that tell their citizens they will be taken care of when the chips are down have happier citizens." Ultimately, there is a lot to love in this book. I learned so much, not only about stress and how it so powerfully affects the body, but also about what we can do--what I can do--to help myself and others cope. I don't necessarily agree with all of Keating's arguments, but I still think this is a fascinating book and well worth the read.

I'm fascinated by mental health and various opinions about nature vs nurture. I enjoyed the insight into how childhood and very early life can impact how we respond to stress, even on a theoretical level. While this book does discuss and quote many scientific studies about those matters, it is poorly focused on the science and often gets into social politics.

That's also pretty interesting, and it does fit into the "lifelong impact of early life adversity", but only in the loosest sense. So just be aware that this is a book about advocating for progressive social justice, explaining anxiety through that lens, and offers no tangible assistance on how to improve one's self or your child's development. That's OK | there are a lot of self-help books out there and this one doesn't need to cover the same ground. Just understand what this is. I found the organization and writing in the book to be great, and the scope of what anxiety is to be pretty interesting. It's unusual for me to finish a book like this, but I had no trouble reading this over a week or so.

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