



Capture: Unraveling the Mystery of Mental Suffering

By David A. Kessler M.D.

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Why do we think, feel, and act in ways we wished we did not? For decades, *New York Times* bestselling author Dr. David A Kessler has studied this question with regard to tobacco, food, and drugs. Over the course of these investigations, he identified one underlying mechanism common to a broad range of human suffering. This phenomenon—capture—is the process by which our attention is hijacked and our brains commandeered by forces outside our control.

In *Capture*, Dr. Kessler considers some of the most profound questions we face as human beings: What are the origins of mental afflictions, from everyday unhappiness to addiction and depression—and how are they connected? Where does healing and transcendence fit into this realm of emotional experience?

Analyzing an array of insights from psychology, medicine, neuroscience, literature, philosophy, and theology, Dr. Kessler deconstructs centuries of thinking, examining the central role of capture in mental illness and questioning traditional labels that have obscured our understanding of it. With a new basis for understanding the phenomenon of capture, he explores the concept through the emotionally resonant stories of both well-known and un-known people caught in its throes.

The closer we can come to fully comprehending the nature of capture, Dr. Kessler argues, the better the chance to alleviate its deleterious effects and successfully change our thoughts and behavior. Ultimately, *Capture* offers insight into how we form thoughts and emotions, manage trauma, and heal. For the first time, we can begin to understand the underpinnings of not only mental illness, but also our everyday worries and anxieties. *Capture* is an intimate and critical exploration of the most enduring human mystery of all: the mind.



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Editorial Review

Review

“In this richly documented, beautifully written, and original work, David Kessler has given us an idea that explains one of the most strange and most powerful processes in the human brain.” (E. O. Wilson, University Professor Emeritus, Harvard University)

“This book offers a bold, overarching explanation for many of the great problems of the mind, problems that are often merely named. Dr. Kessler writes persuasively and with unusual clarity. *Capture* is an engrossing book, impressive in its cultural as well as its scientific reach.” (Tracy Kidder, *New York Times* best-selling and Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Mountains Beyond Mountains* and *The Soul of a New Machine*)

“Kessler’s cogent argument is that a great deal of the apparently inexplicable behavior is the result of impulses, drives, and obsessions that may share fundamental neural and psychodynamic mechanisms. This carefully researched book is both startling and engaging, and written with brio.” (Andrew Solomon, National Book Award-winning author of *The Noonday Demon*)

“Capture is a breakthrough book. It takes a particular gift to cut across neuroscience, psychiatry, philosophy, and psychology and to ask the fundamental question: Why do we allow our best selves to torpedoed by thoughts and actions that sink us? His answer is profound, life-changing, and life-saving.” (Abraham Verghese, MD, author of *Cutting for Stone*)

“Capture defines a shape of human experience that seems to inform everything from the smallest action to the largest life aim, a unified-field theory of human activity that draws in how we form thoughts, manage trauma, and even try to reconcile will and cause.” (Chris Ware, author of *Building Stories*)

“Kessler writes about the concept of capture, or forces that strongly influence the mind, overriding reason and will. Invoking novelists, Freudian drives, and current neuroscience, Kessler explains how capture motivates, clarifies thoughts, and provides insight. A challenging and rewarding book for both scholars and lay readers.” (Library Journal)

“Kessler is an excellent storyteller, and *Capture* is bursting with human drama drawn from real lives rather than the bland, composite case studies that clinicians tend to favor.” (Washington Post)

“[A] Big Idea about how to conceptualize the mind and the brain... capture offers a new lens through which to understand human behavior.” (New York Times Book Review)

From the Back Cover

Why do we think, feel, and act in ways we wish we did not?

For decades, Dr. David A. Kessler has studied this question with regard to tobacco, food, and drugs. Over the course of these investigations, he identified one underlying mechanism common to a broad range of human suffering. This phenomenon—capture—is the process by which our attention is hijacked and our brains commandeered by forces outside our control.

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The closer we can come to fully comprehending the nature of capture, Dr. Kessler argues, the better equipped we are to eventually alleviate its deleterious effects and successfully change our thinking and behaviors. Ultimately, *Capture* offers insight into how we form thoughts and emotions, manage trauma, and heal. For the first time, we can begin to understand the underpinnings not only of mental illness but also of our everyday worries and anxieties. *Capture* is an intimate and critical exploration of the most enduring human mystery of all: the mind.

Advance Praise for *Capture*

“Kessler proposes an original theory of the mind. His cogent argument is that a great deal of the apparently inexplicable behavior of human beings is the result of impulses, drives, and obsessions that may share fundamental neural and psychodynamic mechanisms. This carefully researched book is both startling and engaging, and is written with brio.”—Andrew Solomon, National Book Award-winning author of *The Noonday Demon*

“In this richly documented, beautifully written, and original work, David Kessler has given us an idea that explains one of the most strange and most powerful processes in the human brain.”—E. O. Wilson, University Professor Emeritus, Harvard University

“*Capture* is a breakthrough book. In a world of increasingly specialized knowledge, it takes a particular gift and some stubbornness to cut across the fields of neuroscience, psychiatry, philosophy, and psychology, and to ask the fundamental question: Why is it that we allow our best selves to be captured and torpedoed by thoughts and actions that sink us? Kessler’s exploration of the question makes for a compelling read. His ultimate answer is profound and one that could be life changing and life saving. I know I will be handing this book out for just that reason.”—Abraham Verghese, MD, author of *Cutting for Stone*

“This book offers a bold, overarching explanation for many of the great problems of the mind, problems that are often merely named. Dr. Kessler writes persuasively and with unusual clarity. *Capture* is an engrossing book, impressive in its cultural as well as its scientific reach.”—Tracy Kidder, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Soul of a New Machine* and *Mountains Beyond Mountains*

“Capture defines a shape of human experience about which I’m pretty sure no one has ever written before, a shape that seems to inform everything from the smallest action to the largest life aim, a unified-field theory of human activity that draws in how we form thoughts, manage trauma, and even try to reconcile will and cause.”—Chris Ware, author of *Building Stories*

About the Author

David A. Kessler, MD served as commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration under presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. He is the author of *A Question of Intent* and *The End of Overeating*, a *New York Times* bestseller. He is a pediatrician and has been the dean of the medical schools at Yale and the University of California, San Francisco. Dr. Kessler is a graduate of Amherst College, the University of

Chicago Law School, and Harvard Medical School.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Paul Blum:

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have more or little spare time? Sure, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent their very own spare time to take a walk, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open or even read a book entitled Capture: Unraveling the Mystery of Mental Suffering? Maybe it is being best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time together with your favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with their opinion or you have various other opinion?

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Roberta Bourland:

The reason? Because this Capture: Unraveling the Mystery of Mental Suffering is an unordinary book that the inside of the e-book waiting for you to snap the idea but latter it will distress you with the secret this inside. Reading this book next to it was fantastic author who have write the book in such awesome way makes the content inside easier to understand, entertaining way but still convey the meaning thoroughly. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this anymore or you going to regret it. This unique book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book have got such as help improving your expertise and your critical thinking approach. So , still want to hold up having that book? If I have been you I will go to the reserve store hurriedly.

Mildred Hall:

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