



Mapping the Mind

Rita Carter

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Today a brain scan reveals our thoughts, moods, and memories as clearly as an X-ray reveals our bones. We can actually observe a person's brain registering a joke or experiencing a painful memory. Drawing on the latest imaging technology and the expertise of distinguished scientists, Rita Carter explores the geography of the human brain. Her writing is clear, accessible, witty, and the book's 150 illustrations—most in color—present an illustrated guide to that wondrous, coconut-sized, wrinkled gray mass we carry inside our heads.

Mapping the Mind charts the way human behavior and culture have been molded by the landscape of the brain. Carter shows how our personalities reflect the biological mechanisms underlying thought and emotion and how behavioral eccentricities may be traced to abnormalities in an individual brain. Obsessions and compulsions seem to be caused by a stuck neural switch in a region that monitors the environment for danger. Addictions stem from dysfunction in the brain's reward system. Even the sense of religious experience has been linked to activity in a certain brain region. The differences between men and women's brains, the question of a "gay brain," and conditions such as dyslexia, autism, and mania are also explored.

Looking inside the brain, writes Carter, we see that actions follow from our perceptions, which are due to brain activity dictated by a neuronal structure formed from the interplay between our genes and the environment. Without sidestepping the question of free will, Carter suggests that future generations will use our increasing knowledge of the brain to "enhance those mental qualities that give sweetness and meaning to our lives, and to eradicate those that are destructive."

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