

We have all heard about how humans have developed over time to become progressively successful at remaining alive and reproducing. However, have you ever thought why our species is still surviving with a lot of dysfunctions that getting through a normal day can feel like a huge struggle?

If that is the case, then you're not alone. This is precisely the question that author Randolph M. Nesse wants to answer in *Good Reasons for Bad Feelings*. As it was explained by Nesse, there are a lot of good reasons for all the messy emotions we have, and the troubling dysfunctions we have around things such as food, sex as well as drugs. Hence, what may seem to be inconsistencies with the science of evolution are essential illustrations of both the internal systems we've developed over time and the manner in which these systems may be in conflict with modern life.

A few times our feelings may seem to hinder us living fruitful lives. However, as a matter of fact, there are good reasons for even the greatest unpleasant emotional responses. Understanding these reasons can enable us to feel better about ourselves.

Natural selection and our modern environments have brought us a lot of advantages and excessive weaknesses.

Through numerous generations, the process of natural selection has given us a series of advantages, like opposable thumbs and sensitive vocal cords. When combined with our evolved brains, these traits enable us to produce handcrafted wonders and to communicate our most profound thoughts.

However, regardless of the huge achievements of human evolution, we are yet to develop immunity to a lot of the physical and mental diseases that affect us. Although we have made specific illnesses less life-threatening than it used to be before; examples are infected wounds and polio, we still fall victim to other diseases like cancers and chronic depression.

This is as a result of our environment changes and consistently introduces new dangers such as processed foods filled with the dangerous quantity of sugar, salt, and saturated fats. Long-time

ago, these ingredients were uncommon. Therefore, our bodies had a healthy craving for them. However, as a result of their rapid abundance, our bodies are ill-equipped to deal with them. Therefore, we find ourselves experiencing high rates of obesity and heart disease, with eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia.

At any rate, there's little probability that natural selection will assist us in solving such problems because health and longevity are not what natural selection is focused on. Eventually, natural selection is about highlighting the traits that cause better chances of reproduction. If you've ever felt desperate to have sex with someone of the opposite gender, notwithstanding the problems this may cause, then you've probably experienced this process in action.

Also, natural selection has limits and trade-offs that virtually guarantee continued imperfections.

For instance, humans have a strong sense of sight, however, we definitely don't have the kind of telescopic vision that an eagle has. Hypothetically, we could grow new eyes that solve our imperfections; however, this would take thousands of generations, and the process would make our vision getting worse before it got better.

Any evolutionary development in the eyesight or the brainpower would come with a cost. If we were to gain more telescopic vision, this means that we'd lose the peripheral and color vision we enjoy presently. Also, if we were to grow bigger, more powerful brains, this would need larger heads, which would then increase the risk of death during childbirth.

There are certain traits that we'd like to lose like the feelings of stress and anxiety. However, this would also come with a price. As we'll see in the next chapter, these bad feelings enable us to sense danger and stay alive.

Emotions assist us in surviving and pass on our genes.

When we experience physical or emotional pain, we may visit the doctor to help relive these sensations or stop feeling them altogether. However, what if there are significant reasons for feeling these pains, or even jealousy?

Few individuals want to experience romantic jealousy, however, we can't deny that this is a powerful emotion. As a matter of fact, in the US between the years 1976 and 2005, 34% of female murder victims were murdered by a romantic partner.

However, even jealousy has a good intention behind it. Yet again, it boils down to reproduction and passing on our genes. For instance, let's say there are two heterosexual couples: in couple A, the man is very calm and he doesn't even object to his girlfriend having casual affairs, while in couple B the man is filled with jealous rage at even the slightest hint of infidelity.

The jealousy-free couple may have a happier relationship. However, there's also a higher probability that the woman in the relationship might become pregnant with another man's child. This shows that the calm man could possibly face nine months where he's unable to pass on his genes. Meanwhile, the jealous man in couple B may be intolerably possessive; however, his actions might increase the possibility that his genes get passed down.

Besides jealousy, there are other unwanted emotions that have less than obvious advantages, for example assisting us to avoid loss and possible dangers. In particular, anxiety is actually a warning sign that comes with perceived threats to our well-being, while sadness, on the other hand, is how our emotions allow us to know that loss should be avoided.

However, even though these feelings allow us to recognize and hopefully avoid harmful circumstances. Unfortunately, they don't give us a lot of solutions to what to do. For instance, if you were to sign a contract with an ethically dubious organization, anxiety may kick in, and however, it wouldn't necessarily assist you to find the best solution.

In contrast, positive feelings such as enthusiasm can help us recognize a good opportunity, and a feeling of joy can come with the type of accomplishments we should strive to keep making. However, while our feelings can encourage or discourage specific behaviors, very few circumstances are purely helpful or purely bad. Therefore, it's natural to live life with mixed emotions and feelings.

A doctor with an understanding of evolution will understand that a patient's negative emotions can be suitable for a situation, and not essentially something to avoid. Also, if someone is

experiencing an imbalance, the doctor will treat the cause of this imbalance instead of simply helping the patient to subdue these unwanted feelings.

By understanding the causes of anxiety and panic attacks, it can be beneficial in treating them.

Anxiety can come in different forms. It can sneak up on you during your morning commute as you think whether or not you closed the refrigerator door. Maybe you may experience panic attacks at random times during the day.

Nowadays, globally about 30% of people will experience some type of diagnosable anxiety. Hence, let's look at how anxiety can be helpful, despite being difficult to cope with.

Our feelings of anxiety have continued through generations of natural selection since they enable us to see and react to dangerous circumstances when they happen, and to avoid similar circumstances in the future. Meaning, anxiety assists us in surviving. Therefore, it is definitely a trait to hold on to.

What's less obvious is why we often feel anxious for no reason. Essentially, anxiety works like a fire alarm, warning us when the smoke begins to show in order for us to either put out the flames or escape before we're consumed by the danger.

Just like a fire alarm, occasionally anxiety happens when there isn't any danger. However, the occasional false alarm is a valuable price to pay for the benefit of having a warning system that might eventually save your life someday.

A random panic attack can basically be described as a troubling but important false alarm. You might be watching TV or reading a book, and the next minute your heart begins to race, your chest becomes tightens and you're overtaken by a desperate desire to run off.

As hard as these feelings might be difficult to cope with, they're however an essential part of our internal warning systems. Luckily, having an evolutionary understanding of anxiety can be beneficial in reducing the symptoms.

Just imagine losing track of time and having to walk home after sunset. Suddenly, you're overwhelmed with panic and the need to run home as fast as you can. If this was you during the days of hunters and gatherers, that panic attack may have saved you from being eaten up by a tiger. Was there really a tiger out there? You never can be too sure; however, the experience will remind you to get home before sunset.

This is where our anxiety can give us relief. Also, the advantage of medication can be understood from an evolutionary perspective. When medication enables you to live a life free of panic attacks for some time, your body and mind will begin to see your environment as being safe. Then, your outlook will regulate so that, even when you are not taking medication, your environment can continue to be seen as being safe.

Depression can occur from a dysfunction in the regulation of mood.

A lot of us are aware of the devastating effects of depression, either through the first-hand experience or through someone close to us. As a matter of fact, according to a study that was published in 2013 by the Lancet, depression accounted for more years lived with disability (YLDs) than any other disease.

However, in spite of familiarity, depression is notoriously very complex to diagnose. When does being in a bad mood lead to depression? And how long are we meant to grieve for after the loss of a loved one before it qualifies as clinical depression?

To explain questions like these, it enables us to understand the reason why we have different moods in the first place.

Currently, you may be experiencing one of the different types of moods. Perhaps, you're feeling discouraged or, maybe enthusiastic. One of the main causes of these different moods is that they provide us an advantage in finding out how much effort we should spend when we are experiencing favorable or unfavorable circumstances.

Let's say you're back during the days of hunters and gatherers, and you're about to begin picking berries. In doing this task, you'd have at least three questions to think about: How strong should my efforts be at picking the berries? When will I know it's time to go from one place to the other? And when will I know it's time to stop picking berries and move onto the other task?

You can answer all these three questions by paying attention to your mood. Changes in your mood will enable you to gather enough berries to satisfy your needs, while also letting you know when to stop before you end up with a heavy load. Meanwhile, a low mood may appear in order to let you know that you're experiencing an unachievable goal meaning it's time to stop wasting effort and move on to another thing.

In hunter-gatherer periods, our selections and choices were possible simpler than those we experience in today's complicated social world. Therefore, it can be confusing when your mood is affected by your profession or your relationships. So, should you quit your job every day when you are being faced with an unsatisfying grind? Should you pursue your dream of being an author even if the success is rare? Should you stay married even if you and your partner fight every day?

Sometimes our plans don't always end up as we had expected, and this can make us feel down. However, when we can't give up or change our plans, this is when a low mood can develop into clinical depression.

An evolutionary perspective can assist us in treating the actual roots of depression and not only the symptoms.

Unfortunately, there's no boundary to the number of ways our modern world can sink us into a depression state. It could be as a result of feeling helpless over a loved one who's really addicted to drugs, or to spending years working in a company that repeatedly passes you over for promotion.

Also, there are times when depression is caused by a malfunction in people's ability to control their moods.

People with dysthymia have a chronically low mood, and this can be difficult for them to achieve anything at all. However, people with hypomania which is the opposite disorder, experience a chronically elevated mood which can make them become workaholics and they usually don't know when to stop.

Living in one extreme or the other, and being unable to control your emotions, can lead to extreme disorders. Extreme and chronic low moods cause psychotic depression, which is usually accompanied by delusions and hallucinations. Meanwhile, extreme high moods can cause mania, which is also accompanied by psychotic experiences. What's even more disturbing is that all these symptoms of psychosis can appear and disappear for no apparent reason at all.

Since it's usually hard to find the causes of depression, psychiatrists sometimes now treat the different symptoms of depression as diseases themselves. The author names this questionable practice VSAD, which is the acronym for Viewing Symptoms As Diseases.

In the case of bipolar disorder, treating the symptoms is reasonable, since this disease is inherited and it can lead to a person switching between mania and depression. However, in most other cases, the basic problem is not inherited, and treating the symptoms won't solve the issue.

Unfortunately, many patients also use the VSAD method by blaming their depression on a chemical imbalance in the brain or some inherited family trait, instead of just getting into the messy business of accepting their personal problems.

However, when we consider the evolutionary purpose of our moods, we can put ourselves in a better place to really understand and treat depression.

Our mood regulation system has been an important part of the mental process for a long time. However, for it to function well and not get stuck in the extremes of depression or mania, we have to consider the three essential factors which are: our circumstances in life, how we relate

to these circumstances and how our brains are working. Also, cognitive therapy is very useful in treating mood disorders because it helps patients gain a new perspective on their lives.

We can improve psychiatry taking a more personal and individualized method.

We've made huge steps in understanding the world, all thanks to the scientific method, which thoroughly tests theory and ensure that it can be repeatable and predictable before making a law that can explain some natural phenomenon. However, what works in one field of science doesn't necessarily work in another field.

When psychologists try to seek a general rule for something; for instance why people are depressed, this is called a nomothetic approach. The experts consider large swaths of the population to find associations, like females are twice as likely as males to experience depression early in life.

However, this generalized method fails mostly to assist the individual, since everyone's story is different and understanding these differences is essential in understanding the reason for a person's depression. Unique and individualized causes for a patient's disorder are called idiographic explanations. However, even when we concentrate on these it can be hard to find the main reasons.

Let's look at two profiles of people with depression. Ms. X has a long history of depression in her family, and her husband has become very distant as he feels unable to assist his wife. Ms. Y has insomnia as a result of chronic pain and continuous anxiety. Her husband is regularly upset and accuses her of failing to do her part of the house chores.

Before you come up with your own conclusions, you should know that both Ms. X and Ms. Y are the same person. And the problem is, we have no way for knowing which idiographic explanation is the main reason for her depression.

However, that doesn't mean we can't find a way to know which factors in people's lives are causing the most adverse effects on their moods. After all, despite the fact that each individual's

conditions are different, it's widely accepted that everyone's emotional state is caused by the same factors.

These influential factors make up the acronym SOCIAL:

S which stands for Social Resources like friends and social influence.

O stands for Occupation and the work we can offer others.

C stands for Children and other family members.

I stands for Income and other sources of wealth.

A is for Abilities, health, and other personal resources.

L stands for Love and sexual intimacy within a meaningful relationship.

By assigning a score to each of these factors, we'd be applying both an idiographic and a scientific method to mood disorders. Therefore, by doing that, we'd be in a better position to understand the primary reasons for depression.

Our altruistic and selfless natures may be explained by kin selection and social selection.

Obviously, we all have the ability to experiencing pain and mental distress. However, despite all this, we also have an amazing ability to love and care for others. As a matter of fact, sometimes we can concentrate on assisting others even if it puts our own life at risk.

Unselfish behavior such as that can be seen as a type of altruism, and evolutionary scientists have asked how that possible self-destructive behavior has ended up being passed down.

One theory is called kin selection and it was proposed by British biologist William Hamilton in 1964, kin selection is involved with our DNA and identifying on a biological level that other humans share an important part of our genetic code.

Therefore, even if the trait of dividing your food with your cousins shows that you'll have lesser nutrients, such deed is reasonable since your cousins' share one-eighth of your genetic code with you. As long as this altruistic trait benefits more people than it hurts them, the trait will eventually end up being passed down among the general population. Also, this explains why drone bees have grown to die when they sting because this is eventually for the greater cause of protecting the whole hive.

Having this in mind; there is also another theory that explains not just the reason why altruism would get passed down, but also why you may pick just a single partner to commit to for the majority of your lifetime.

This theory is known as the social selection and it explains how we may desire partners who give us a higher likelihood of reproducing. Therefore, as theoretical biologist Mary Jane West-Eberhard describes, altruism, generosity, and loyalty would all be desirable traits that we might be attracted to in our partner.

Hence, over generations, this type of selection would lead to a population with a large number of unselfish people who like loyalty in their partners.

Our ability to love and care also comes with feelings of fear and grief.

Our capability to establish deep and caring relationships may look like a profound and beautiful thing, however, there's also a cost to pay for these emotional relations. Our ability to care for one another certainly means we also care deeply about what others think of us.

Nevertheless, we may want to appear as desirable sexual partners in order for our genes to live on even after we're dead. Therefore, we might end up doing anything possible so as to please other people. As a matter of fact, a good reason for the bad feeling of low self-esteem is that it makes us conscious of when we're not doing enough to please others.

However, as you are already aware pleasing people isn't usually easy. When you make a single person happy, you can concurrently make someone else think less of you, which can make you become uncertain among two individuals. Also, pleasing people is mostly a factor when making huge life decisions, like whether or not to get married, or the type of job to take. These are high-stakes selections that come with a plethora of chances to make some people happy while the other is left being disappointed. It's no surprise why social anxiety is very common.

Also, caring for others comes with the price of grieving, which is one of the most painful and devastating feelings you can ever experience. When grieving over the loss of a loved one, it can lead to years of you not functioning well as you once did.

Therefore, it's important to ask, what if we never had to grieve at all? Is there really a point for all this pain?

Again there's a good reason. It may be painful to even think about such a situation; however, imagine being on a boat and having your child fall overboard. Your fear of grieving such a loss would make you do everything and anything in your ability to save him.

However, if the worst happened and you experienced a loss, the grieving process would involve repeating the scenario over and over in your head, thinking about what you might have done differently to avoid the disaster. Therefore, if a similar condition were to occur again, you'd be more prepared to ensure that your other children remain safe. Also, those in your community will share in your grief and will make sure to take such similar precautions in the future.

Nowadays, we can see the silver lining of grief in advocacy groups such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving, which started as an approach of preventing further loss of loved ones to drunk driving.

Reproductive efficiency comes with the price of sexual satisfaction.

If anyone has ever told you they have a perfect sex life, they're probably in denial. Almost, everyone has issues associated with sex. Perhaps you've never been sexually attracted to your partner. Or perhaps you've never been able to experience an orgasm or feel like anybody will ever understand your sexual desires. Whatever the problem is, unsatisfying sex is very common, even if a lot of people choose not to talk about it.

From an evolutionary perception, this may look unusual. Since sex is at the heart of making sure our genes are passed down, why isn't it usually satisfying for everyone? As bad as this may sound, natural selection has placed effective reproduction over sexual satisfaction.

The issue is a lot of us are attracted to young, attractive and healthy partners who will provide our offspring with the best possible genetic benefit for survival. Also, if your partner is kind, loyal and prosperous, it increases the probability that you'll have more children over time, and that these children will have the things they require to prosper and raise their own families. Meaning, we want it all.

With all these notions in our heads, deliberately or otherwise, it's very simple to see why we might become continuously unsatisfied. Also, the current bombardment of media, showing impossibly beautiful models and celebrities, doesn't benefit us at all.

As a matter of fact, the act of sex itself can be unsatisfying particularly for women. According to a survey that was conducted in 1999, 25% of American women said that they couldn't get to orgasm, compared to only 7% of American men.

This is certainly categorized as a bad feeling. However, as far as heterosexual couples are concerned there's a reason for this one as well, at least. In order for the best conditions for pregnancy to occur, the man's penis has to be in the right spot when ejaculation occurs and sex should stop immediately after ejaculation or else, the sperm may be forced away from the egg. This is the reason why men experience such extreme sensitivity after ejaculating which makes it almost impossible to further have sex.

Conversely, if women were to experience an orgasm that made them stop sex before their partner ejaculated, this reduces their chances of getting pregnant. Naturally, this trait wouldn't

be chosen, and this is one of the reasons why male and female sexual reactions differ. And while it may help the rates of pregnancy, it doesn't really do much for sexual satisfaction.

Our present access to food and drugs is at odds with how we advanced.

If you've ever attempted to exercise more, quit smoking or reduce your junk food, then you know how difficult it can be to do things that are undeniably beneficial for you. It is such a struggle for a lot of us to get fit that we use self-help products. Just in 2013 alone, the US market for weight-loss products was worth over \$60 billion.

The reason we have a problem losing unwanted weight and keeping them off is really straightforward: the device we developed for regulating body weight is ill-suited to the modern world.

This device goes back to when our hunter-gatherer ancestors had to endure whatever they could get. Now, we can take a walk to the supermarket aisles stocked with foods from across the world. To make matters worse, a lot of these foods have been prepared and packaged in a manner that they are so irresistible.

Unfortunately, the weight-regulation mechanism we've inherited is not capable to handle us having delicious food available all the time. Both the quantity of food we eat and the times we spend eating have gotten way out of control. In severe cases, a dysfunctional weight-regulation mechanism can lead to eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia.

Also, another problem is the ability to regulate the things we find pleasurable when it comes to drugs. However, the huge difference here is that we do not have an internal regulation mechanism for coping with drugs.

Pleasure in and of itself is usually not a problem, as a matter of fact; it enables us to learn and gain experience. In most cases, a pleasurable experience begins with a surge of dopamine, which serves as an incentive to repeat and gain from whatsoever action that is producing the pleasure. However, such experiences usually come with a feeling that tells us when to stop. For

example, if we eat a lot of candies, the pleasure becomes nausea. This is our internal regulation system working.

But, there is no such system for today's drugs, because they weren't used when our systems were developing. This gets to the actual danger of drugs: like other things they provide pleasure, but unlike other things, they form a limitless desire that can eventually lead to self-destruction.

Up till now, there's no cure for our troubled relationship with food and drugs. However, when we bring together the fields of psychiatry and evolutionary biology, we can start to see where the solution to these issues may reside.

Good Reasons for Bad Feelings: Insights from the Frontier of Evolutionary Psychiatry by Randolph M. Nesse Book Review

Evolutionary biology gives an irreplaceable perception of understanding our everyday emotions, behaviors and, disorders. By understanding how our internal systems were developed, we can understand issues such as mood and eating disorders. Also, we can see them as the malfunctioning of otherwise useful regulation mechanisms. Also, this method can assist us to find the actual cause for our dysfunctions, instead of finding alternative ways to treat individual symptoms or otherwise try to subdue our unwanted feelings. As evolutionary biology signifies, there is possibly a good reason for even the most unpleasant feelings.

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