

Supernormal: The Untold Story of Adversity and Resilience

by Meg Jay

Meg Jay, Ph.D. has written another important book to read, as she is a wonderful story teller. This book focuses on stories of her patients who have survived a multitude of past traumas including: sexual abuse, neglect, violence, and inadequate parenting.

The story however is not 'untold' and has been researched for years. The million dollar question is why does one person transcend after trauma while others do not? While teaching at a graduate school of social work for many years, I usually asked the students to include a focus on a strength/ resilience perspective, as people are strong and have the ability to overcome many things. The shortcoming of this book, as has been the case in others on this topic is that it tells the story but does not offer an exploration of the creative ways that people survive post trauma.

It is my professional experience that struggle is universal, and those with the most positive attitude fair best. It appears that attitude can really bend biology. I recommend this book as you will relate to one of the stories of resilience. - Dr. Michele Winchester-Vega, DSW, LCSW-R

Coming to a more full and clear understanding of one's personal strengths despite past traumas is a key component in therapy. Dr. Meg Jay leads her readers by example and compassion to recognize how each may have used their intuitive coping skills and determination to develop resiliency. Also, Dr. Jay normalizes the experience of any reader who lived through adversity through statistics and numerous stories.

As therapists, we offer and recommend groups to many because of the healing power of knowing about another person's success who had similar struggles. I encourage people to read this book in order to develop a better understanding of resiliency in general terms as well as within themselves. This book can empower you through validating the journey through the most common adversities faced during childhood. - Elena Morales, LMHC

Unfortunately childhood trauma is a part of many people's story. In *Supernormal*, Meg Jay explores the resilience of individuals who have experienced childhood adversity. Jay explores many forms of trauma through the anecdotal stories. This storytelling makes the book relatable and easily draws the reader in. Jay highlights the various forms of trauma that can occur and the impact that it may have on a child. These traumas include, but are not limited to, divorce, death, neglect, a sibling's illness, physical, and emotional abuse. Jay begins her book with her definition of "supernormal" and the neuroscience behind trauma. Perhaps most interesting is the explanation of how and why trauma impacts children differently than adults. Not only are the brains of children still developing, but they lack the experiences and cognitive structure to make sense of their trauma. In fact, Jay highlights that often times children do not have the actual vocabulary to even label their experiences as trauma. This can result in separating the memories and emotions tied to the trauma from experiences that can be labeled. Thus, creating an internal sense of secrecy surrounding the trauma that can devolve into shame. However, "supernormals" continue to fight the internal battle between good and bad to bounce back stronger and lead balanced and healthy lives. While the book is backed by thorough scientific research, her writing is easily readable and offers insight into how trauma is experienced and the way it can impact a life. Ultimately, the book provides a sense of hope that childhood adversity does not destine one to failure or repetition of the cycle. In fact, Jay stresses the protective power of love and kindness in shielding each other from the negative impact of adversity and the creation of supernormals. - Katie Helpley, LMFT

Throughout my time working in the field of social work, I have heard countless stories of clients experiencing adverse childhood experiences. I have always been in awe of those people trying to make sense of what happened for their resiliency, bravery, and courage. The stories told in Meg Jay's book Supernormal highlight the strength and fortitude of people who have weathered adversity, from childhood sexual abuse to divorce; parental incarceration to substance abuse in the home; domestic violence to neglect. Exposure to adversity during childhood is far more common than one might expect and this book normalizes these experiences for others who may have had similar life-shaping moments. It provides a breadth of research about resiliency and how people, the "everyday superheroes," cope with adversity. - Meghan McMahon - Vigeant, LMSW

"Supernormal: The Untold Story of Adversity and Resilience" is a great read that challenges the idea that those who have experienced childhood adversity or trauma are different and damaged, by defining them as "supernormal". Clinical psychologist and author Meg Jay, describes the supernormal as resilient individuals with above average outcomes after adversity, beating the expectations. She defines these children and adult's heroic, building courage and using strengths to rise above the circumstance and events experienced. The supernormal and the resilient, are those who resist being defined by their situation. In her book, Jay delves into the characteristics of the supernormal and resilient who have experienced adversity. The author uses stories of past clients and students, exploring the different approaches and coping skills that have made them the fighter's they are today. The author acknowledges the unique and courageous approaches of those impacted by childhood adversity and the power that one has, to gain control of their direction. I highly recommend this book as a resource for guidance and inspiration, as it explores the different realms of resilience and challenges one's humanistic strengths. - Julianne Scheck, LMSW

Supernormal by Meg Jay is one of the best books I have read in a long time! What a refreshing take on the topic of resilience. Immediately after reading this book, I gifted it to a number of people I felt could benefit from the message within. Dr. Meg Jay is a psychotherapist herself and goes through a number of stories from people she has worked with. She explores childhood traumas in different forms, including abuse from a parent, abuse by siblings, parent's substance abuse, divorce, as well as a few other types of childhood trauma. The stories can be heavy at times and may bring up feelings or memories for those readers who can relate. Be aware that if you venture into this book, it may be something you will want to process with a professional. I appreciated the fact that the stories varied and most anyone could related to at least one story if not parts of many of the stories. The book goes through how adverse experiences continue to affect us long after we have escaped the situation. It was refreshing to reflect on the many ways in which we as people turn horrific experiences into positive attributes as adults. I feel that this book offered a different perspective on trauma and supported the process of healing from within. - Mary LeRouge, LMSW

