

Foreword

Until I reached my early 20s, I was happy to ignore the social realities of being a woman. As a child, I had an anxious temperament and I understood that a lot would be expected of me as an adult. It's no secret that the 21st-century woman is supposed to 'do it all'. On top of the career, relationships, babies and having the perfect body (cheers for that), women are also expected to be the caregivers, the domestic goddesses and the ones who remember everybody's birthdays. Never mind if you have the flu or your period is giving you grief, those plates mustn't stop spinning, and perish the thought that you drop one! I was intimidated, but thought if other women could do it without complaint, then surely I could too.

By the age of 24, that anxious 'temperament' of mine morphed into a full-blown anxiety disorder, eventually triggering a breakdown. I felt like a failure – everybody else seemed able to cope with life just fine, so what was wrong with me? I felt on edge constantly, tortured by panic attacks and bouts of insomnia. I was lost.

In my quest for knowledge about my condition, I devoured a great deal of reading material. Unfortunately, I only understood around 9% of what I read, and the dictionary became my best friend. The more I read, the more frustrated I became. It was all so complicated and scary. That's why I started my blog, *We're All Mad Here*, to write about mental health without the use of unexplained medical jargon.

In short, what I was looking for was this book.

I'll admit that when I was originally approached to write the forward I rolled my eyes. 'Here we go again,' I thought, 'another stuffy academic text book that only PhD students will understand.' However, within minutes of reading the

first chapter I knew I was mistaken. *The Female Mind: A User's Guide* is a hugely important publication. It reads like a friendly guided tour of a women's brain and covers a wide range of conditions. Basically, name it and it's there! There's even a fascinating chapter on the history of the female mind and gender inequalities. After reading Part I, I felt revolutionised. Is it any wonder that women are more likely to develop some mental illnesses? We deal with a lot of rubbish!

Furthermore, this book is easy to understand. Hurrah! I can't believe there's finally a mental health book for the general reader – one that's interesting as well as informative.

Whether you're dealing with mental illness yourself, or caring for someone else, this book is for you. Packed full of information, case studies and useful tips, it's a book you can dip in and out of, depending on your needs, or read in one go.

Hats off to the many authors, you're all fantastic and I wish *The Female Mind: A User's Guide* had been around 10 years ago.

Claire Eastham