



American Mania: When More is Not Enough

By Peter C. Whybrow MD

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A doctor's bold analysis of the cultural disease that afflicts us all.

Despite an astonishing appetite for life, more and more Americans are feeling overworked and dissatisfied. In the world's most affluent nation, epidemic rates of stress, anxiety, depression, obesity, and time urgency are now grudgingly accepted as part of everyday existence they signal the American Dream gone awry.

Peter C. Whybrow, director of the Neuropsychiatric Institute at UCLA, grounds the extraordinary achievements and excessive consumption of the American nation in an understanding of the biology of the brain's reward system offering for the first time a comprehensive and physical explanation for the addictive mania of consumerism.

American Mania presents a clear and novel vantage point from which to understand the most pressing social issues of our time, while offering an informed approach to refocusing our pursuit of happiness. Drawing upon rich scientific case studies and colorful portraits, "this fascinating and important book will change the way you think about American life" (Karen Olson, *Utne Reader*).

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The indictment of American society offered here—that America's supercharged free-market capitalism shackles us to a treadmill of overwork and overconsumption, frays family and community ties and leaves us anxious, alienated and overweight—is familiar. What's more idiosyncratic and compelling is the author's grounding his treatise in political economy (citing everyone from Adam Smith to Thorstein Veblen) as well as in neuropsychiatry, primatology and genetics. Psychiatrist Whybrow (*Mood Apart*) diagnoses a form of clinical mania in which "the dopamine reward systems of the brain are... hijacked" by pleasurable frenzies like the Internet bubble. Genes are to blame: programmed to crave material rewards on the austere savanna, they go bananas in an economy of superabundance. Americans are particularly susceptible because they are descended from immigrants with a higher frequency of the "exploratory and novelty-seeking D4-7 allele" in the dopamine receptor system, which predisposes them to impulsivity and addiction. The malady is "treatable," Whybrow asserts, not with Paxil but with a vaguely defined program of communitarianism and recovery therapeutics, exemplified by his friends Peanut, a farmer rooted in the land, and Tom, a formerly manic entrepreneur who has learned to live in the present moment. Whybrow's analysis of the contemporary rat race is acute, and by medicalizing the problem he locates it in behavior and genetics—away from the arena of conventional political and economic action where more systemic solutions might surface, but toward a place where individual responsibility can turn "self-interest into social fellowship."

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Review

Whybrow has seen the future. -- *New York Times*, Irene Lacher

About the Author

Peter C. Whybrow, MD, is director of the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at the University of California, Los Angeles. Born and educated in England, he is the author, among other books, of *A Mood Apart* and the award-winning *American Mania: When More Is Not Enough*.

Users Review

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Robert Doyle:

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