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Crazy Like Us: The Globalization Of The American Psyche



Synopsis

It is well known that American culture is a dominant force at home and abroad; our exportation of everything from movies to junk food is a well-documented phenomenon. But is it possible that America's most troubling impact on the globalizing world has yet to be accounted for? In *Crazy Like Us*, Ethan Watters reveals that the most devastating consequence of the spread of American culture has not been our golden arches or our bomb craters but our bulldozing of the human psyche itself: We are in the process of homogenizing the way the world goes mad. America has been the world leader in generating new mental health treatments and modern theories of the human psyche. We export our psychopharmaceuticals packaged with the certainty that our biomedical knowledge will relieve the suffering and stigma of mental illness. We categorize disorders, thereby defining mental illness and health, and then parade these seemingly scientific certainties in front of the world. The blowback from these efforts is just now coming to light: It turns out that we have not only been changing the way the world talks about and treats mental illness - we have been changing the mental illnesses themselves.

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Customer Reviews

Ethan Watters, an American journalist explores in his book *Crazy Like Us*, the globalization of American based mental illnesses such as anorexia, schizophrenia, PTSD, etc. In his book he explores four different types of illnesses and allows the reader to see just how much impact the American definitions and symptoms of these mental illnesses have had on other societies. He is able to keep his readers captivated by incorporating the stories of people who are inflicted with this

disorder. He also allows the reader to see how the disorder progressed from having a cultural specific identity to being manipulated into an entirely new being. One of his first examples is that of anorexia in China, at first the reason behind the disorder was completely different from our own, that was until it became exposed to the population. Which is where Watters introduces the concept of western technology and science. In his book he stakes the claim that because of the advanced science and technology possessed by the United States, leads to less economically stable countries to embrace ideas that are foreign to them without thinking how it will affect their cultural background. He proves this point several times in the book, whether it be the United States influencing the introduction of a mental illness to another country, or the use of data collected in the United States in order to push a new SSRI. Watters takes a topic that is what some would call near and dear to individuals of the United States, as mental illness is becoming a more prominent issues, and showing how it is negatively affecting societies that have not been introduced to these ideas. Meaning that no these societies quite possible did have these disorders in their society but before the globalization of their symptoms and definitions they had an entirely different meaning. They became something new instead of what they had always been. The reader sees then when reading chapter three of schizophrenics in Africa, the disorder was always there just never given a name or symptoms addressed to it. Instead it was just a burden to bare from God. Which is where the reader gets to see how the society accepts and treats the disorder. Watters book is very well constructed and easy to lose oneself in because of the stories he tells of others, and does not bog down the reading with countless studies done, or scholarly information that takes away from the meaning. If one is interested in anthropology, and medical studies this is definitely a book to read. It not only touches base with American culture, but several other cultures, and also gives the reader a taste of the medical aspects of the world. It also allows the reader to see a more in depth view of medical companies and how sometimes these companies are not out for the betterment of individuals; they are out for the betterment of their wallets. Watters took a unique topic and allowed the individuals stories speak for themselves on how globalization has left a devastating footprint on numerous societies; a footprint that some individuals may not be able to recover from.

I read this book for an Abnormal Psychology course. It's an ok read, and the language is clear and accessible, which helped me to read it quickly. The formatting is clear, and every chapter has an interesting story that doesn't lull you to sleep, unlike many other books which the professor required. However, Watters never comes out and states whether he feels that globalization is damaging or acceptable. The tone seemed very matter of fact and neutral most of the time, which helped the

bigots in my class express their problematic views freely with the book as backup. It would have been nice if the book had focused on more than a few select cases, e.g., in the PTSD chapter, instead of focusing just on Sri Lanka, it would have been very helpful and interesting if another case study had been used. The book itself is ok, although some of the material and the author's inability to take a stand was irksome.

Ethan Watters is a journalist who writes particularly about mental health. The premise of this book is that American understandings about the mind and the self, particularly ideas about mental illness and treatment, are being aggressively promoted and replacing traditional beliefs and practices in nonwestern societies. You might think this is a good thing, a sign of progress or modernization, if you believe Americans know more than the rest of the world about mental health. Watters clearly does not. He is of the opinion that psychiatry is culture-bound: that each society has developed its own idioms of distress and culturally meaningful forms of treatment, and Western psychiatry is rapidly destroying them. The American narrative of the moment is a particularly banal one that thoughts and feelings are just a batch of chemicals that psychiatrists can alter with drug therapy. Watters is well-read on the subject, and he has gone around the world to talk to researchers who are questioning the Western narrative. He has written an exceptionally clear, engaging, and persuasive book. As a psychological anthropologist trained in psychiatry, there is little here that I did not learn as a student thirty years ago, but this is the first book I would recommend to anyone who wants to explore the relationship between psychology and culture. It clearly challenges the prevailing premise of universalism, that the psychology and psychiatry of people everywhere is essentially the same and that culture is largely irrelevant.

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