



The Globalisation of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit

Bruce K. Alexander

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Addiction is increasing globally, and the conventional remedies don't work. Arguing that the cause of this failure to control addiction is that treatments have focused too single-mindedly on the afflicted individual addict, this book presents a radical rethink about the nature of addiction.

The Globalisation of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit Details

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Daniel says

A foundational text for scientific critical analysis of a topic primarily applied in political policy. Doing groundbreaking research into consequences of psychosocial deprivation, imposed by imperialism and free markets, neurologically and socially. Recommends countless other authors for further exploration of concepts. Solid starting point for discussing inherent biases in dominant intellectual culture. Will cite forever.

Bob says

This book is terrific & should be read in conjunction with “In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts” by Gabor Mate, MD. In “Globalization” Professor Alexander delivers a very convincing case that we are manufacturing addiction by the process of economic globalization & the social dislocation that inevitably goes with it.

Addiction is a coping mechanism for “dislocation,” which can arise from certain disastrous circumstances, such as the colonialist destruction of indigenous cultures, but is a fundamental element of free market economics even at the best of times. I don’t normally buy into these types of assessments but this makes a lot of sense. Although I do think that capitalism is the better way it has its problems, mostly stemming from the selfish greed of man.

He does show how global capitalism demolishes meaningful social relationships for which addictive tendencies provide an incredibly poor substitute. One of the main things he does is dismantles the myth of powerful, impossible to resist, habit-forming drugs, instead he explains that addiction; which more often than not entails no substance whatsoever but a variety of compulsive behaviors & fixations, including gambling, sex, romantic love, money, power, zealotry, video games, and starvation. This helps to explain a great deal of what is going on in our society. Think about that again; addiction is not something confined to chemicals but spans a whole range from sex, through gambling to the quest for material possessions.

This book makes a lot of sense, & is very thought provoking

Glenyss says

Highly academic with references up the yin yang, but I stuck with this book because I was intrigued by the author's theory that "dislocation" (loneliness, stress, isolation, lack of belonging) is at the root of addictions of all kinds.

Ashley says

This book in essence: as free markets have spread across the globe, social interactions are governed less by

stable communities and cultures and increasingly by impersonal transactions. As a result, governments and social institutions have prioritized wealth and efficient, unregulated markets instead of people. Because of this culture, people lose a sense of belonging, of community, of “psychosocial integration.” They become “dislocated.” People need to find a way to cope, so they turn to various forms of addiction (e.g. to drugs, to work, to gambling, to shopping, to money, to relationships.)

This is an insightful text that cites much work from other social science disciplines like anthropology, economics, history, and psychology.

Nzfiend says

Absolutely spot on. The first few passages had me concerned that Bruce is some sort of weird zealot.

He is not.

He is one of the only truly able people to bother putting thought into such a topic as addiction.

After finding and reading this in 2013 and showing it to a few professors and their ilk, I only wish that more universities, addiction centres and hospitals used it as RECOMMENDED COURSE MATERIAL.

Seriously, it would make a difference.

Sara says

Having just put this book down, I may seem a bit critical, but my thoughts immediately after reading are that this book tried to take on a lot. It addresses the notion of addiction in many forms and has some valuable insights that made me grateful I'd read the book-- but I felt I did have to read a lot to get to those nuggets. The author spends a great deal of time conceptualizing the flaws of free market politics. Eventually this connects to the notion of psychosocial displacement in a clear and compelling way... on the journey to this clear connection, though, the author seems to fall in and out of his element.

The book is formatted into fifteen chapters. I found that if a chapter seemed incomplete, what I wanted to read was usually in a later chapter, which was good enough, but I think some of the jumps in continuity could have been avoided. The organization of the book made me think that the author may have had some old grad papers lying around and thought they could be aptly included. I thoroughly enjoyed reading about, say, the author of Peter Pan and his connections to addiction, or Socrates' views on a psychosocially dislocated society, but I felt that content could have been better presented as a series of essays rather than as chapters or part of chapters in the book.

Lastly (and rather insignificantly), the author did not convince me of the validity of the term "spirit" in the title. I tried to think of what I might have used instead-- identity, personal history... ultimately, I think I may have scrapped it, because it just seems like a dangly bit that will get criticized and distract from the overall merit of the book.

The theory the author presents of psychosocial dislocation is thoroughly described and illustrated, and likely to resonate with the audience. It will be especially helpful to people within the broad reach of the public health field in dispelling false claims long made about addiction, examining addiction as a symptom, creating positive solutions regarding addictions and family members affected by addiction, and promoting critical

discussion about the potential impact of policy (not programs, but policy in every aspect) that could minimize the harms of addiction.

Kate says

Naomi Klein meets Rat Park.

Christy says

Another book that I did not have the luxury of reading back to back - essay material. The most informative chapter debunked the famous Skinner Box (rat becomes addicted to drugs available by dropper in cage) by creating a Rat Park. The rats in the latter do not succumb to addiction because the cage is large, has other rats and rat-friendly shrubbery and surroundings. Apparently rats are very social animals, so one rat in a cage throws off the experiment by making that one rat despondent. Thus vulnerable to addiction. I should really pick up this book again.

Lawrence Bish says

Perhaps the best research on addictions to date. Alexander's comprehensive approach to this blight on civilization provides plenty of evidence that the unintended consequences of globalized capitalism have created a world underclass.
