



The Antidepressant Era

David Healy

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When we stop at the pharmacy to pick up our Prozac, are we simply buying a drug? Or are we buying into a disease as well? The first complete account of the phenomenon of antidepressants, this authoritative, highly readable book relates how depression, a disease only recently deemed too rare to merit study, has become one of the most common disorders of our day--and a booming business to boot.

The Antidepressant Era chronicles the history of psychopharmacology from its inception with the discovery of chlorpromazine in 1951 to current battles over whether these powerful chemical compounds should replace psychotherapy. An expert in both the history and the science of neurochemistry and psychopharmacology, David Healy offers a close-up perspective on early research and clinical trials, the stumbling and successes that have made Prozac and Zoloft household names. The complex story he tells, against a backdrop of changing ideas about medicine, details the origins of the pharmaceutical industry, the pressures for regulation of drug companies, and the emergence of the idea of a depressive disease. This historical and neurochemical analysis leads to a clear look at what antidepressants reveal about both the workings of the brain and the sociology of drug marketing.

Most arresting is Healy's insight into the marketing of antidepressants and the medicalization of the neuroses. Demonstrating that pharmaceutical companies are as much in the business of selling psychiatric diagnoses as of selling psychotropic drugs, he raises disturbing questions about how much of medical science is governed by financial interest.

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