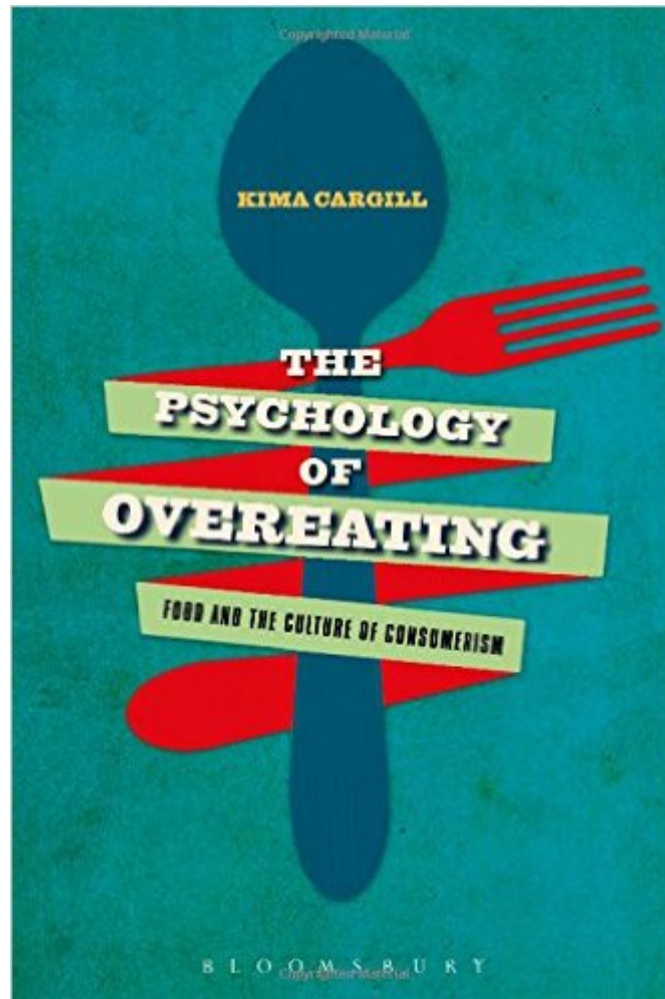


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The Psychology Of Overeating: Food And The Culture Of Consumerism



Synopsis

The Psychology of Overeating demonstrates that overeating must be understood as part of the wider cultural problem of consumption and materialism. Highlighting modern society's pathological need to consume, Kim Cargill explores how our limitless consumer culture offers an endless array of delicious food as well as easy money whilst obscuring the long-term effects of overconsumption. The book investigates how developments in food science, branding and marketing have transformed Western diets and how the food industry employs psychology to trick us into eating more and more - and why we let them. Drawing striking parallels between 'Big Food' and 'Big Pharma', Cargill shows how both industries use similar tactics to manufacture desire, resist regulation and convince us that the solution to overconsumption is further consumption. Clinical analyses illustrate how loneliness, depression and lack of purpose help to drive consumption, and how this is attributed to individual failure rather than wider culture. The first book to introduce a clinical and existential psychology perspective into the field of food studies, Cargill's interdisciplinary approach bridges the gulf between theory and practice. Key reading in food studies, psychology, health and nutrition.

Book Information

Paperback: 216 pages

Publisher: Bloomsbury Academic (October 22, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1472581075

ISBN-13: 978-1472581075

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 0.5 x 9.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (9 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #376,463 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #16 in [Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Movements > Existential](#) #20 in [Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Psychology & Counseling > Medicine & Psychology](#) #282 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Medicine](#)

Customer Reviews

I read this book because I saw that Marion Nestle reviewed it. It's a great book that looks at American consumerism, not just overeating, but overspending as well. It's very critical of the food industry and shows many of the ways they trick people into eating more. This is not a diet book

or a self-help book. It's a serious read, but well worth the effort. It actually helped me to understand why overeating is not really about willpower but about bigger social problems. The author makes it very relatable with interesting stories and examples.

In this book, clinical psychologist Kima Cargill argues that 'overeating is not strictly a problem of food or eating—it is a problem of consuming. The constant and exclusive focus by the mass media on food, weight, and dieting ignores the larger systematic problem of how the culture of consumerism traps people in poverty, debt, nutritional confusion, metabolic dysfunction, and limitless desire'. Throughout this intelligent, well-researched, and compassionate book Cargill looks at overeating through the lens of consumerism, and the result is an impassioned denunciation of the food industry and other forces of consumerism in the United States. Cargill argues that these forces are so powerful that it's just not enough to tell people to eat less and exercise more; we have to recognize the huge challenges that those who want to lose weight (or just eat more healthily) are up against: "Those saddled by consumer debt and excess weight have been blindsided by thousands of cultural messages they've received in their lifetime. Countering these forces is incredibly hard work requiring vigilance, reflection, and impulse control, as well as a high level of knowledge of nutrition and finance. I do not dismiss the personal responsibility in the equation, but it would be a mistake not to identify the systematic cultural and regulatory failures that lead people down the road to financial ruin." As such, this is not a conventional diet book—and is better for it. Instead it contextualizes individual struggles in a way that gives those individuals the tools and mindset to make better choices concerning how and what they consume. [I was given a free download of this book by the publishers for review.]

This is an excellent deep dive into the link between consumer culture and overeating. While it is a scholarly work, it is also extremely interesting and well-written. Dr. Cargill provides numerous anecdotes that make the subject come alive and the book very easy to read. Other reviewers are correct that this is not explicitly a diet or self-help book. However, for a motivated person who really wants to permanently change his/her eating habits (either to lose weight or simply to become more healthy), I am hard pressed to think of another book that offers a more compelling lesson. As the author writes, "At the individual level, treatment for overeating cannot simply be going on a diet or taking prescription medication, but must involve a rejection or rethinking of the food landscape and consumer culture." A big task? Absolutely. But for those of us who resent having our health negatively influenced by Big Food and Big Pharma, it is a battle worth embarking upon.

This is a landmark book with a multidisciplinary message. The central dilemma explored by Kim Cargill is the tension that exists between the individual as a consumer and the market as a provider, especially when market behavior is detrimental to the health and well being of the consumer. Throughout the book the consumer is represented by, Alison, who by rights should have everything under control • however almost the reverse is the case. An economist reading this book could ask is food a "Social Good" • and does food science and manufacturing consequently have a responsibility for the health of the consumer. A corporate accountant could reply that food is a commodity and the financial return to the corporation and shareholders is also a social good. The policy maker faced by the relative lack of power of the consumer faces a mammoth task to ensure that health outcomes are factored in to public policy. This author is extremely detail oriented and the book is well written and researched. Yes, she is frustrated by the limitations placed on her as a psychologist to assist her clients within a culture, of some may say deceit, to deliberately confuse the public as to the effect of what they are actually consuming. The magic of hyper palatable foods is, as she demonstrates akin to other forms of addiction and lead to neuro sensitivity and cravings which become embedded in the neural pathways of the addict, with disastrous health outcomes. Public health officials should read this book and be alarmed. That Kim Cargill has written this book as a balanced literary work attests to her professional approach to an emotive topic. I am encouraged by her forthright clarity and recommend this book.

While some of the ideas presented in the book may be worth considering, the moralistic, "holier-than-God" approach that the author takes was very off-putting, and undermines her credibility as a competent researcher. She rails against capitalism and western culture, but didn't show any educated understanding of economics or social systems that might provide realistic solutions to the criticisms she has of capitalism and western cultures.

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