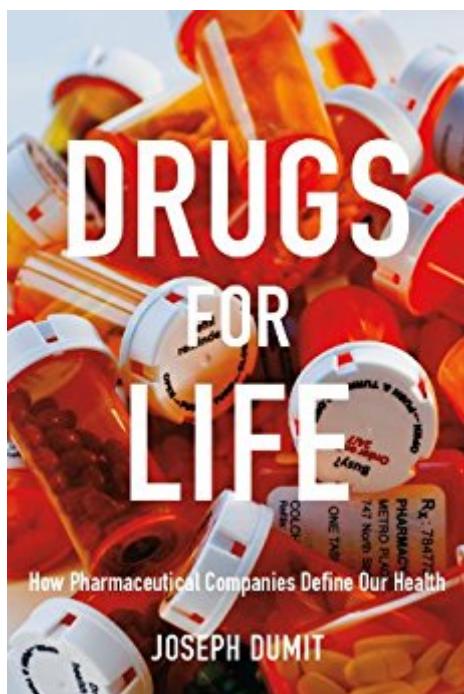


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# Drugs For Life: How Pharmaceutical Companies Define Our Health (Experimental Futures)



## **Synopsis**

Every year the average number of prescriptions purchased by Americans increases, as do healthcare expenditures, which are projected to reach one-fifth of the U.S. gross domestic product by 2020. In *Drugs for Life*, Joseph Dumit considers how our burgeoning consumption of medicine and cost of healthcare not only came to be, but also came to be taken for granted. For several years, Dumit attended pharmaceutical industry conferences; spoke with marketers, researchers, doctors, and patients; and surveyed the industry's literature regarding strategies to expand markets for prescription drugs. He concluded that underlying the continual growth in medications, disease categories, costs, and insecurity is a relatively new perception of ourselves as inherently ill and in need of chronic treatment. This perception is based on clinical trials that we have largely outsourced to pharmaceutical companies. Those companies in turn see clinical trials as investments and measure the value of those investments by the size of the market and profits that they will create. They only ask questions for which the answer is more medicine. *Drugs for Life* challenges our understanding of health, risks, facts, and clinical trials, the very concepts used by pharmaceutical companies to grow markets to the point where almost no one can imagine a life without prescription drugs.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Anthropologist Joe Dumit has written one of the most important and radical (going to the heart of things) books about health, marketing, medical research, and the pharmaceutical industry in recent decades. It needs to be on the shelf of every follower of Angell, Abramson, Avorn, Greene, Cassels, Welch, Hadler, Healy, Brody, Conrad, Goldacre and all the other doctors, journalists and social scientists broadcasting wake-up calls about how our current social perspective on health has been hijacked and turned on its head. Even better than many of the others, Dumit explains how it came about that we no longer think of health as freedom from treatment, but think of health as getting treatment for asymptomatic risks that are somehow endangering our future. This new paradigm of health - permanent risk and permanent treatment - is a catastrophe, because we are, always, perpetually, at risk of dying, and therefore if research (by the ever-growing pharmaceutical industry) is directed at uncovering risks, it will always succeed and there will be no future but more life-long pill regimens, more self-diagnoses, more screens, more tests, more side effects, more false results, more expense, and much much more worry. And for what - precious little gain in longevity, symptom-free days, or genuine understanding of our minds and bodies. Seeing the obvious is the first step towards resistance and change, but we are deep in the pocket and it will be a long road out. Make your book club read this book!

A well written book that is a scholarly work. That says volumes for me. The book describes the culture of creating an artificial consensus about the entire structure of medicine, based on what pharmaceutical companies want to sell. Most devastating line in the book was the author's report of a pharmaceutical marketing executive stating the goal is to have everyone on at least 5 drugs for their lifetime. Thus the title: "Drugs for Life". We are not imagining that there is increasing influence on medical practice from big pharma. It's a feature, not a bug in their plans.

Perfect

Informative, good read.

Although the book can sometimes feel a bit long and repetitive, the information it contains is an even-handed look at the reasons behind so many people in the West being put on preventive prescription medication. Since this is written by an Anthropologist, not a journalist or a doctor or pharmaceutical representative, it has neither an exposé feeling to it nor a particular slant.

It's clear that the author originally was just looking at the culture surrounding healthcare, and the evidence led him down this path. Anyone who is familiar with Anthropology knows that Anthropologists are trained to attempt to avoid biases and just report what they see. Of course, everyone is human, and I definitely think that by the time Dumit finished his research he has formed an opinion that the reader can observe, however he does quite a good job of just presenting the facts. The book is divided into six chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion. The six chapters are: responding to facts, pharmaceutical witnessing and direct-to-consumer advertising, having to grow medicine, mass health: illness is a line you cross, moving the lines: deciding on thresholds, and knowing your numbers: pharmaceutical lifestyles. The book thus moves from the culture of facts and how we respond to them, to the business of pharmaceuticals, to how public health has impacted how we treat individual health, to how the individual health care consumer responds to the information they hear from all sides. Again, all of this is presented from an anthropological perspective. If a reader has not read an anthropology-research based book before, the way in which Dumit looks at the information may be a bit confusing or surprising at first, since it is more about culture, which may not be expected at first, given the title. However, the second chapter helps this perspective make sense, so even a reader new to this perspective will most likely be able to get into it. What Dumit's investigations revealed was a cultural shift from treating an illness after it negatively impacts a person's life to attempting to prevent illness. Whereas individual doctors may prefer prescribing lifestyle changes (work out more, eat differently, stress reduction), some doctors prefer being able to simply prescribe a drug and some groups of patients may prefer to keep their lifestyle and take a preventative drug. Similarly, the pharmaceutical industry sees preventative drugs that are taken by large groups of people with risk factors as a more monetarily sound investment than generating drugs for an illness that would be taken one-time or simply for the duration of the illness or just from the time of diagnosis to the end of the person's life. Preventative drugs are prescribed to people who have risk factors for developing an illness, and they then must be taken every day. At the same time as these situations have developed, public health, since the 1970s, has started looking at groups of people at risk for developing a disease that

would have a negative public health impact and advising that people with these risk factors be treated to prevent the disease from ever occurring. All of these factors have created the environment in which we now live in the United States where people who are not yet sick are still taking multiple prescription drugs to prevent their getting sick, often in spite of dealing with side effects. I think the book in general could be a bit better organized. My notes, although taken linearly, read as a bit disjointed, with some jumping around among different ideas. The overarching concepts are not laid out as clearly and succinctly in the book as they are in my review. Similarly, some concepts can be repeated a bit too often, leaving the reader feeling like they've read this before. Also, sometimes the book delves a bit too deeply into anthropological concepts and methods, given the fact that it is presented as a book for a layman. Finally, I feel the title of the book is a bit too click-baity. It reads as if it was written to sound much more controversial and attacking of the pharmaceutical industry than the book itself actually is. The title reads like the book will be a heavy-hitting exposé, when really it is an even-handed piece of anthropology work. Overall, this book will appeal to anyone interested in how the United States health care culture has evolved to the point it is currently at in regards to prescribing so many drugs. The reader does not have to be a scientist or involved in medicine to understand the book, although portions of it may feel a bit repetitive or overly technical at times. Although the book could be a bit better organized, overall it presents a clear look into the culture of drug prescription in the United States, and I recommend it to anyone interested in that topic. Note: I received a free copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

Wow was the book an eye opener. I always knew that pharmaceutical companies were for profit and have their own agendas but this book really shows how these companies are changing the way we look at health today. Dumit has really done his research in a wide variety of areas to give the reader an overall view of how pharmaceutical companies are working through marketing, clinical trials, and trying to get directly to patients to get people to take more pills. The part that bothered me the most was how Dumit shows that these companies seem to never consider what would be the best treatment but base every decision on how to get the most profit. It is a scary look at our healthcare system today and the constant push by these companies for more people to take more pills for as long as they can, even when there are side effects. I will say that I am not a science person so I found reading this book to be difficult at times. I struggled with some of the concepts Dumit talked about and found myself skimming through some parts. Dumit does make his points clear though about how there has been a shift in how we look at health during the last several years. I know that

the next time I go to see my doctor I am going to be discussing with her the things I learned in this book and I hope it will help me to make better decisions about my own health in the future. I highly recommend this book to everyone, it is really an important subject that effects everyone sooner or later.

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