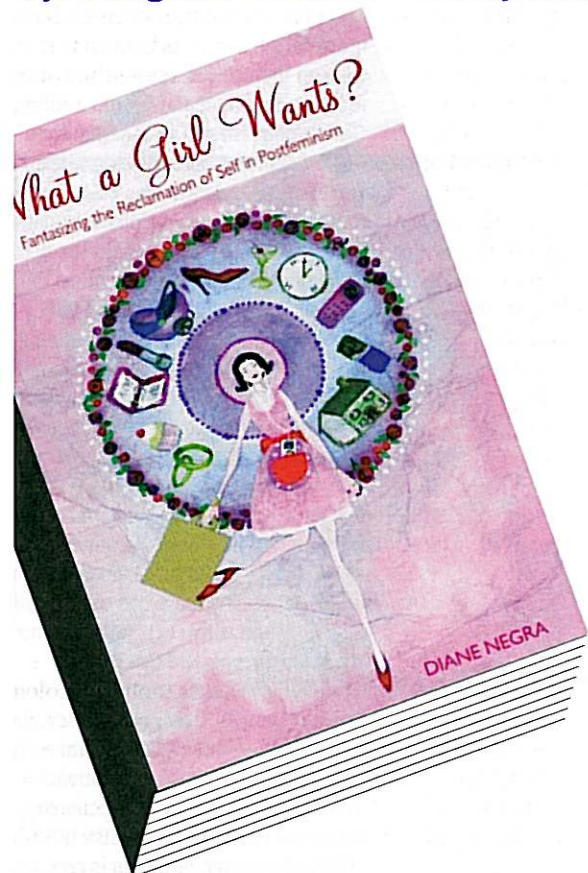


# ishing up domesticity

is reminded of the threat to diversity by resurgence of the commodity culture



Is? Fantasizing the self in Postfeminism

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cade of the 21st as seen the in of several state-ooks, some more 1 others. On the white men think tury rather more ay men or women. r's book is a valuable this literature, not 1 stating her case ined cultural of women she makes ctions between a anges, in cultural al life, and a talist social world aterial rewards of a ture. She analyses hat she sees as the

translation of the emancipations of feminism into what she describes as the "regularisation of luxury domesticity" and "expressive domesticity". Negra suggests that women are being persuaded to "return" to domesticity or to collude in the hyper-aestheticisation of everyday life through the elaborate domestic world.

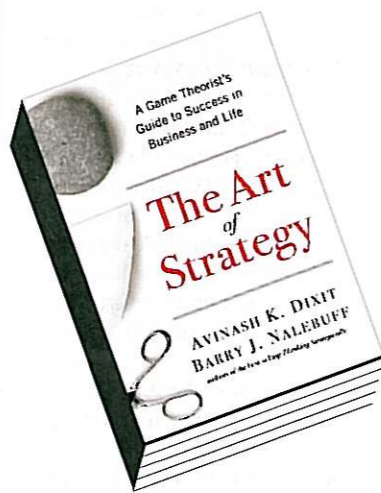
Negra's evidence comes largely from the United States, a country that has a passion for conventional domestic life unlike anything known in Europe. Negra's book was published before the emergence of Sarah Palin as the Republican candidate for the office of Vice-President of the United States. Yet Palin represents everything that Negra is describing: a woman (like Margaret Thatcher) who would not have achieved prominence without feminism and yet seems opposed to many of its political aims. (It is not comforting to read that the film *Miss Congeniality*, a

title Palin chose for a T-shirt, was followed by *Miss Congeniality 2: Armed and Fabulous*.)

"Fashion victim" is not part of the argument of Negra's book, although that explicit form of the self-conscious recognition of the possibilities of cultural resistance could constitute another pattern in popular culture. Thus, although the material that Negra offers is a convincing view of consumer culture, it is appropriate to suggest that that culture is more complex and, hopefully, less mindless. It is admittedly difficult, when faced with the popularity of certain films and television shows and certain political views of the world, not to agree that Richard Hoggart's "candy-floss world" has taken over the public space. But qualifications could be put, not least of which are the limited material means of many people. Palin and Thatcher might praise domesticity but most women have to work to support themselves and their families.

So however seductive domestic goddesses and stories of heterosexual bliss might be, we still return to their real impact. We now know the rather different stories behind the films of Doris Day and Rock Hudson, and the rediscovery of many people "hidden from history" has made us aware that dominant cultures are not the only cultures in any social space. Negra's book is a reminder of the horror of losing that diversity.

Mary Evans is visiting fellow, Gender Institute, London School of Economics.



**The Art of Strategy: A Game Theorist's Guide to Success in Business and Life**  
By Avinash K. Dixit and Barry J. Nalebuff  
W. W. Norton  
512pp, £16.99  
ISBN 9780393062434  
Published 1 October 2008

It is a while since I studied economics. It was during the 1980s, and game theory commanded a significant part of my syllabus. *The Art of Strategy* is evidence that it remains as vibrant today.

Game theory is a study of decision-making where players make rational, optimising choices that will also have an impact on fellow players' interests. Such situations continually (re)surface in life, some embroiled in conflict but others with co-operation.

The book's motive is to achieve better understanding of what the authors call – although I wouldn't – the "art" of strategic thinking. That is, being able to anticipate your opponents' next moves, assuming they will try to do the same to you.

This is an insightful read, and the authors are very passionate (and extremely knowledgeable) about their subject. Real-life illustrations of game-theory concepts and decision-making scenarios are plentiful as well as entertaining in their execution. I was happy, however, to be spared the over-complicated mathematics that I had expected.

Our everyday lives are complex, a web of interrelated social and economic processes. Game theory is one particular heuristic that might assist us to grapple with cumulative life complexities. But it is one particular view of the world. It is not the only one, nor the best. Game theory has its limitations.

Neither is it a recipe for, nor a guarantee of, "success". Indeed, I am uncomfortable with the book's (at least implied) notion of "success".

On its cover, the book claims to offer "a guide to success in business and life", yet its preface claims that the book "is not an airport book" of success pointers.

I appreciate that there is probably some marketing rhetoric here, and I don't really have a problem with that – I suspect it's just part of the publishing *game*! The book represents a rich array of decision-making stories that might (or might not) assist people to cope with life's unfolding challenges.

But the book doesn't have solutions. "Solutions" are temporary at most; life's processes move on and new challenges will (re)emerge.

Game theory fails to endogenise sufficient attention to so many aspects of life that really matter, owing to its unfailing allegiance to formalism and technique over practical relevance. Decision-making is a mishmash of interwoven influences.

Its process of becoming is shaped by people's habits, routines, things we take for granted, gut feeling, trust (and distrust), tacit knowledge, history, cognition, power, addiction, fashion, emotion, morals, religion, values and considerably more. Game theory still affords too little attention to such stuff of life.

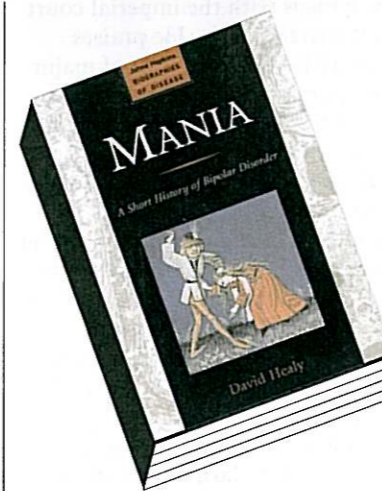
We should also not assume rationality in our (or others') decision-making. Nowadays, decision-making frequently occurs at lightning pace. "Strategic" thinking is significantly shorter than it used to be, and the same decision-maker will normally work on multiple strategies at the same time without optimal information or the brain capacity to use it.

Notwithstanding, game theory *is* useful for its theoretical purpose at hand, which, I think, is partly to augment decision-makers' armoury and acumen to the point where they might beneficially predict the outcome of their decisions (as long as they are also content with extreme simplifying assumptions concerning the decision context).

In conclusion, I would recommend that you read this book for what it is. And what it is, I believe, is a particular way of looking at decision-making situations backed by a rich collection of real-life illustrations.

It is an easy read and is written in a lively tone – which is not something I particularly recall from my lectures in the 1980s. Long live economics!

John Burns is professor of management and accountancy, University of Dundee. His research interests are management accounting, organisational change and institutional theory.



**Mania: A Short History of Bipolar Disorder**  
By David Healy  
Johns Hopkins University Press  
320pp, £16.50  
ISBN 9780801888229  
Published 18 July 2008

Healy is a controversial psychiatrist whose critics have been vociferous in denouncing his ideas and have even gone so far as to claim he has lost the plot. But his study of bipolar disorder has an important

if controversial message.

He argues that the pharmaceutical industry is "disease mongering" in order to sell treatments, that this is shaping scientific data and conceptions of mental disorders, and that there is no better example of drug companies' stranglehold on research and ultimately academic freedom than research into manic-depressive disorder. Healy discusses with complete clarity use of conveniently vague terms such as "mood stabilisers", which allow drug companies to sidestep clinical trials, and, more worryingly, to prescribe drugs for "mood disorders" to children aged as young as two.

Healy's arguments have strong currency when one considers that a large proportion of the authors published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* have received funding from drug companies, and this indeed may compromise the independence of research. Whether you heap approbation or venom on Healy, his message forces us to question diagnosis of and treatment for bipolar disorder. Science should be questioning, and by studying the

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history of mental disorder we see that culture and politics sometimes determine the data we accept and the data we reject. Historical analysis informs us of politically or scientifically inconvenient and long-forgotten observations, opening up the potential for new perspectives. It also shows us that disease-mongering and the use of the latest jargon in the interests of the academy have always been part of the scientific landscape. Healy reminds us that this is never ideal.

Despite the controversy that Healy's book will engender, it is informative, enjoyable and highly readable. Notwithstanding the controversial discussion around the impartiality of diagnosis and treatment, he provides a clear account of mania and bipolar disorder. He follows the concept of mania from ancient Greek and Roman civilisations through to the *DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition)* classification of bipolar disorder. Charting the changing definitions through the centuries, he shows how culture and society shape them. He demonstrates how links were established between brain function and mental illness and describes the emergence of psychopharmacology.

Healy's clinical experience and scholarship make the book a pleasure to read. The history he presents is punctuated with details that demonstrate his familiarity with the primary sources. The analysis of the rivalry between Jules Baillarger and Jean-Pierre Falret and between Emil Kraepelin and Carl Wernicke are informative and entertaining, and show how politics influences scientific findings.

We live in a time when definitions of the human condition and discussions of mental functioning are shaped by a language of political correctness. We perceive any deviation from a culturally determined norm as having scope for treatment and drug intervention to return the human experience to some pre-determined ideal state. Healy makes us aware that we are on a journey of discovery about the relationship between brain structure, neural function and human behaviour, and that our current understanding is shaped by the times in which we live.

Sue McHale is senior lecturer in psychology, Brain Behaviour and Cognition Group, Sheffield Hallam University.