

12-1-2016

Hit makers: why things become popular, Derek Thompson (book review)

Kathleen McCallister
William & Mary, krmccallister@wm.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/librariespubs>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McCallister, Kathleen, Hit makers: why things become popular, Derek Thompson (book review) (2016).
Library Journal, 141(20), 110-111.
<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/librariespubs/24>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the William & Mary Libraries at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in W&M Libraries Publications by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.

compulsive behavior.—Tina Chan, MIT Libs., Cambridge

Powers, Ron. *No One Cares About Crazy People: The Chaos and Heartbreak of Mental Health in America*. Hachette. Mar. 2017. 384p. notes. ISBN 9780316341172. \$28; ebk. ISBN 9780316341103. PSYCH

Educating general readers about mental illness and its troubled history in America, Pulitzer Prize winner Powers (*Mark Twain: A Life*) shares his searingly personal, heart-wrenching account of the schizophrenia that overtook his two talented, promising sons. In loving detail, Powers describes the joys and unfathomable challenges inherent in parenting two such blessed and simultaneously cursed young men. Most arresting is his narrative about his younger son, Kevin, a guitar prodigy. As a child, Kevin fell in love with playing the guitar and went on to dedicate his life to music. At the prestigious Berklee College of Music, he spiraled into inexplicable mental illness, and in the throes of depression, hanged himself in the basement one week before his 21st birthday. Older son Dean, a talented writer, also suffers from mental illness, but, with treatment, ultimately stabilizes. Powers alternates chapters between the history of his sons and the larger history of systemic mental health treatment failures in the United States. Ultimately, he sacrifices privacy, as he offers this book in powerful argument for necessary revised legislation. **VERDICT** For readers of Pete Earley's *Crazy*. [See Prepub Alert, 8/22/16.]—Lynne Maxwell, West Virginia Univ. Coll. of Law Lib., Morgantown

SOCIAL SCIENCE

Elkin, Lauren. *Flaneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, and London*. Farrar. Feb. 2017. 336p. illus. notes. bibliog. ISBN 9780374156046. \$26; ebk. ISBN 9780374715892. soc sci

This is a book about wandering women, the author included, who build relationships with their cities by walking through them. Anyone who has taken a stroll down a city street knows how visceral the experience can be (as long as you're paying attention), but this is uniquely true for women, who have never had the advantage of a covert relationship with their city sidewalks. Unlike men, women are singularly visible, whether they were breaking norms of yesterday by drifting without a chaperone, or are clipping around New York in modern-day heels. Women can and do make feminist statements simply by strolling through their stomping grounds; Elkin creates an interesting and inarguable case for this. She, too, is a wanderer and provides compelling anecdotes about her own journeys, inter-

persed with those of literary heavy-hitters George Sand, Jean Rhys, Virginia Woolf, and others. **VERDICT** At times the narrative feels dense and academic (with a hefty bibliography), but this is ultimately a celebration of women. You'll want to take a stroll by the end.—Erin Entrada Kelly, Philadelphia

Kitchener, Caroline. *Post Grad: Five Women and Their First Year out of the Ivy League*. Ecco: HarperCollins. Apr. 2017. 320p. ISBN 9780062429490. \$24.99; ebk. ISBN 9780062429537. soc

Recent college graduate Kitchener provides candid accounts of five women, including herself, as they navigate life after Princeton University. The author documents the trials and successes that this diverse group of individuals encounter during their first year away from the relative security and certainty of campus existence. Insights are provided on issues they face such as overcoming eating disorders, the implications of online hookups, and the pros and cons of pursuing graduate school. Particularly fascinating are the polyamorous relationships that are reported as commonplace among those interviewed. The author forthrightly details the ease with which couples welcome other sexual participants into their relationships. Also examined is the role of parents in each of these women's lives. Particularly, the grads struggle with how accepting continued family financial support affects their perceived growth and independence. Millennials are a hot topic, from HBO's *Girls* to works such as Alida Nugent's *Don't Worry, It Gets Worse*. **VERDICT** Kitchener's addition is an intelligent and thoughtful exploration of postcollege life that will strike a chord with young adults and those interested in future women of action. [See Prepub Alert, 10/31/16.]—Mary Jennings, Camano Island Lib., WA

Pomerantz, Shauna & Rebecca Raby. *Smart Girls: Success, School, and the Myth of Post-Feminism*. Univ. of California. Jan. 2017. 296p. notes. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780520284159. pap. \$24.95; ebk. ISBN 9780520959798. soc sci

Popular media narratives have created the perception that smart girls can easily achieve their goals and therefore have no need for feminism. However, Pomerantz and Raby (both, child & youth studies, Brock Univ.) have found that these narratives don't take into account the lived experience of said smart girls. To interrogate the stereotype, the authors interviewed 57 self-identified smart girls and 17 boys in southern Ontario and found that conforming to the stereotype has caused the

subjects stress, pressure to hide their intellect, and conflict in their social lives. Even though the girls tended to ascribe their success to a neoliberal framework of self-directed hard work, the authors' analysis discovered that the interviewees tended to belong to racial and economic classes that support their achievements. This examination also revealed that racism and sexism is still present in these individuals' daily lives. As the study took place in one town in Canada, it remains to be seen whether the findings can be applied to a broader, perhaps non-Western audience. **VERDICT** A compelling look into the complex topic of female academic success. Recommended for readers interested in education or gender studies.—Rebekah Kati, Durham, NC

Thompson, Nato. *Culture as Weapon: The Art of Influence in Everyday Life*. Melville House. Jan. 2017. 288p. ISBN 9781612195735. \$26.99; ebk. ISBN 9781612195742. soc sci

In a sprawling and ambitious exploration, curator and critic Thompson (*Seeing Power*) outlines the ways that culture has been used and abused by governments, politicians, and corporations to manipulate behavior, earn money, and influence the outcome of armed conflict. Thompson's politics and passion for social activism are never far from the surface. He attempts to draw together diverse threads such as Nazi propaganda, the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s, counterinsurgency doctrine in Iraq and Afghanistan, social justice initiatives in Philadelphia, the artwork of Andy Warhol, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and the social engineering of retail spaces in order to show how those in power seek to manipulate and modify the behavior of consumers to maximize both political and economic gain. Thompson's writing shines when discussing the arts and the "charity industrial complex"; his forays into military analysis are less successful. **VERDICT** This dense and wide-ranging read will appeal to those interested in critiques of capitalism and the philosophical questions raised by the corporate manipulation of culture.—Rebecca Brody, Westfield State Univ., MA

Thompson, Derek. *Hit Makers: Why Things Become Popular*. Harper. Feb. 2017. 352p. illus. notes. index. ISBN 9781101980323. \$28; ebk. ISBN 9781101980347. soc sci

It's a question to which we'd all like to know the answer: Why do some things become popular while others sink out of sight? This book by *Atlantic* editor Thomas might not give an easy answer, but it does offer a thoroughly entertaining look at the

Local Motion

Epic Bike Rides of the World: Explore the Planet's Most Thrilling Cycling Routes. Lonely Planet. Sept. 2016. 320p. photos. maps. index. ISBN 9781760340834. \$35. TRAV

This eye-catching and inspirational work provides ample encouragement to even the most novice cyclist to get out and experience a new biking adventure. Featuring contributions from 12 authors with varied cycling and travel writing experience, this book gives readers hundreds of ideas for rides covering approximately 30 countries (Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe, and Oceania); many of them “epic” or “bucket list” in nature. Arranged regionally, routes vary from hugely challenging (and quite dangerous) multiday rides to well-established big-city cruises taking a few hours. Basic information, called a “toolkit,” purports to enable better planning. However, the information provided is uneven and extremely brief, especially for the more exotic and remote routes around the world. Riders for these routes would have no real idea of what type of bike works best on the route, equipment needed, support, technical level, overall cost, language requirements, or simply whether or not a guide is recommended.



Basically, riders are certainly inspired but left to do their own travel planning arrangements and in-depth research, which could be either beneficial or disastrous. **VERDICT** For libraries with large travel and recreational collections.—John N. Jax, Univ. of Wisconsin Lib., La Crosse

McCoy, Maureen. Wild Swimming in Ireland: Discover 50 Places To Swim in Rivers, Lakes & the Sea. Dufour. Dec. 2016. 176p. photos by Paul McCambridge. ISBN 9781848892804. pap. \$31. TRAV

Irish open-water swimmer McCoy and British photographer McCambridge present a collection of 50 swims along coastal waterways of Ireland, from Donabate, County Dublin, to Devenish Island, County Fermanagh. Descriptions

include directions for car and/or public transportation; important geographical information; grid reference numbers, which can be used with the Irish Grid Reference Finder; swimming skill required; facilities available; ease of access; safety tips for jumping and diving; tips on safe, winter, and night swimming; the front crawl and body surfing and bits of local history. The “At-a-Glance” sections mention the popularity of the site; whether or not it is family-friendly; its seclusion level; and nearby activities, including food and lodging. McCambridge’s photographs add a great deal to each site narrative. Filled with many Irish terms, this fine book is a delight to read, so long as you have a dictionary nearby to help with the charming phrases. **VERDICT** Perfect for armchair travelers, adventure swimmers, families, and for those who simply love or want to explore open-water swimming. Avid swimmers will clamor to get to Ireland posthaste.—Cheryl L. Branche, Brooklyn, NY

★Poggjoli, Kristine & Carolyn Eidson. **Walking San Francisco’s 49 Mile Scenic Drive: Explore the Famous Sites, Neighborhoods, and Vistas in 17 Enchanting Walks.** Quill Driver. Nov. 2016. 270p. illus. maps. index. ISBN 9781610352796. pap. \$16.95. TRAV

San Franciscans Poggjoli and Eidson have produced a detailed and entertaining guidebook for walking their city’s famed 49 Mile Scenic Drive. They have broken down the journey into two- to four-mile pedestrian segments. Maps, colorful photographs, number of steps, hill steepness ratings, and turn-by-turn instructions accompany every walk. Sights along the way are explained with blurbs of history and culture. Every chapter concludes with facts about parking nearby, mass transit access to the walk’s end points, and even public restrooms. Detours and alternate return routes offer more opportunities for exploration. Tips point out views, artwork, and sounds at various locations. Additional chapters provide information about walking, architecture, parking, and mass transit. Although the authors invite inhabitants to complete the route within a year, some walks identified as “must see” encourage visitors with limited time to enjoy the drive’s highlights. Interspersed among the walk descriptions, the *Daily CRAB* pages reveal historical photos and unusual anecdotes about the city’s past. **VERDICT** Anybody living near or traveling to San Francisco can utilize this handy and fascinating walking guide. If only every city had one as comprehensive as this.—Janet Clapp, N. Clarendon, VT

potential whys of the hits and misses of popular culture, using illustrative examples that range from vampire myths and impressionist art to *Star Wars* and Adele’s song “Hello.” Popularity, he finds, relies on a perfect cocktail that includes the right amounts of such things as exposure, familiarity and difference, timing, and the impossible-to-predict factors of luck and coincidence—and while Thomas keeps a light tone throughout, he doesn’t shy away from how the ingredients that make up cultural phenomena can lead to complacency in audiences and stagnation in

industries. **VERDICT** While this book’s mix of studied theory and anecdotal observation sometimes balances uneasily, it should provide some potential direction for those chasing that elusive next hit, as well as food for thought for anyone who has ever pondered the mystery of why we like what we like.—Kathleen McCallister, Tulane Univ., New Orleans

TRAVEL & GEOGRAPHY

Cotterell, Arthur. Bali: A Cultural History. Interlink. Nov. 2016. 256p. illus. by Ray Dunning. photos by Yong Yap. bibliog.

index. ISBN 9781566560818. pap. \$15. TRAV Prolific author Cotterell (*Ancient China; The Illustrated A–Z of Classic Mythology*) has lived and traveled widely in Asia. This book is part of a series that offers cultural and historical guides to the great cities of the world. These books are more than travel guides, giving readers a look at present-day identity and its links with the past. Divided into four parts: “Landscapes,” “An Historical Perspective,” “A Tour of the Island,” and “Balinese Culture,” the work also includes a much-needed glossary. “Further Reading”

Copyright of Library Journal is the property of Media Source, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.