



Flavor of the Month: Why Smart People Fall for Fads

Joel Best

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While fads such as hula hoops or streaking are usually dismissed as silly enthusiasms, trends in institutions such as education, business, medicine, science, and criminal justice are often taken seriously, even though their popularity and usefulness is sometimes short-lived. Institutional fads such as open classrooms, quality circles, and multiple personality disorder are constantly making the rounds, promising astonishing new developments—novel ways of teaching reading or arithmetic, better methods of managing businesses, or improved treatments for disease. Some of these trends prove to be lasting innovations, but others—after absorbing extraordinary amounts of time and money—are abandoned and forgotten, soon to be replaced by other new schemes. In this pithy, intriguing, and often humorous book, Joel Best—author of the acclaimed *Damned Lies and Statistics*—explores the range of institutional fads, analyzes the features of our culture that foster them, and identifies the major stages of the fad cycle—emerging, surging, and purging. Deconstructing the ways that this system plays into our notions of reinvention, progress, and perfectibility, *Flavors of the Month* examines the causes and consequences of fads and suggests ways of fad-proofing our institutions.

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