

# Sweet swell of success brings yuppies stress

By Betty Cuniberti  
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — They are well-stocked with MBAs, VCRs and BMWs. But they feel SAD.

Many of the most successful Baby Boomers find their jobs long on salary but short on satisfaction, a situation some psychologists say can lead to serious emotional problems.

A highly educated, pampered group, their numbers are small but their impact is great, says Douglas LaBier, a Washington psychologist who has studied the problem of yuppie angst and written about it in *Modern Madness: The Emotional Fallout of Success* (Addison-Wesley, \$16.95.)

"They're extremely important in terms of the impact they have on the development of our society and our economy," he said. "They are shaping the direction our culture is taking, so it's a very serious situation."

TO RELIEVE the stress that has accompanied their success, the Boomers have embraced everything from aerobics to Zen. But many find they still have the feeling that something is missing. Could it be a beach house? A breast lift?

In many cases, professional success and the means to achieve it conflict with human values, he said. Based on his seven-year study of the problem, LaBier, a 42-year-old business and government consultant and faculty member at the Washington School of Psychiatry, has concluded that this unhappiness is "a very widespread situation" and a reaction to a corporate job structure that stifles creativity, individualism and idealism.

"I'D SAY the people who are normal but are suffering conflicts, what I call the working wounded, are well over 60 percent (of the total career force). The other people who are very sick but are adapted to their work — that's what I call surface sanity — are no more than 25 percent," LaBier said.

"There's a pervasive depression and sense of helplessness in the career culture, and it's not because people have messed up brain chemicals or miserable childhoods. There's something in our culture that generates depression as a byproduct."

Some mental health specialists agree there is a problem but question whether it's as serious

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and widespread as LaBier suggests.

Dr. Daniel X. Freedman, a University of California, Los Angeles, professor of psychiatry and editor of the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, said he would be "enormously skeptical" of the notion that 85 percent of the professional work force suffers serious emotional problems.

"SUCCESS ALWAYS brings with it the question, 'Is this really what you wanted?'" I don't find a disease which these people can claim exclusive ownership of," Freedman said.

Psychologist Mark L. Held of Englewood, Colo., treats many successful people in Denver's high-tech area and thinks the problem is as old as work itself.

"I see it as the nature of the human condition," Held said. "Mankind has struggled with this for a long time. Basically people are trying to balance satisfaction with success, and it's rare to find people who are successful and also very satisfied at the same time."

LaBier said one woman he counseled is a typical example. She is a 39-year-old lawyer "working enormously long hours on excruciatingly boring and meaningless activity, but earning a lot of money. She went to the guy above her," and complained, seeking more meaningful work.

LaBier continued, "He said 'You don't understand, do you? The very nature of our work that it's boring, it's meaningless, it has no social usefulness, and that we are handsomely rewarded.'

"NOW SHE'S in a great dea-panic," LaBier said. "She wants to work that has some meani-

If that were the only prob- she could quit practicing law work in a shelter for the hom- But the catch is: She still success — she just wants t- better about it.

The psychologists agree most people can help them by examining their value making changes that would them feel more fulfilled, cl- that may involve some sa- and risk.

Dear W.P.: A great many 11-year-olds do. Successfully handling a horse at any age depends on the horse, the youngster and the training. Another important factor to consider is conditions under which the horse would be ridden. (When all these factors are go, a horse "under the tree" is a big gift in more ways than one.)

• Dear Dr. Miller: We're considering buying a talking African gray parrot for several hundred dollars, which I understand is reasonable. I'd like to get it in hopes it would improve our home life, because my husband is a man of few words. Some days he gets by with two or three. Would the parrot be worth it do you think? — O.F.

Dear O.F.: African grays can be tops in talking birds. Still, counting on parrot palaver to turn your husband into a conversationalist could lead to frustration. Odds are it will take more than a bird brain, even a good one, to accomplish that.

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