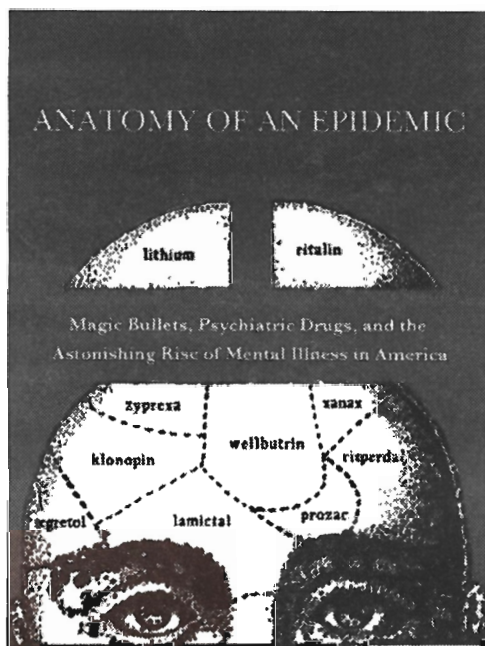


Robert Whitaker's "Anatomy Of an Epidemic-Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs And The Astonishing Rise Of Mental Illness In America"

Review by Sharon Goldberg



ROBERT WHITAKER
Author of *Mad in America*

I will begin my review of Robert Whitaker's new book "Anatomy of an Epidemic-Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness in America" by stating that the book is rather unsettling, especially for someone like myself who has taken Psychiatric Medication.

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Robert Whitaker is a journalist who has taken an interest in the rise of mental illness in the United States. He has looked into the effects of psychotropic medications and has found in all categories, whether anti-psychotics, anti-depressants, or anti-anxiety, that the medications are making mental illness more chronic. Whereas prior to the proliferation of psychiatric medication, people would have a bout with psychosis or depression, go into the hospital for six to twelve months, get better and resume their lives and livelihoods. Today people are getting sicker. They are taking medications, getting better quicker, but are not returning to the workforce. Instead, there are many more relapses and many more hospitalizations. People are getting on Disability and staying on Disability.

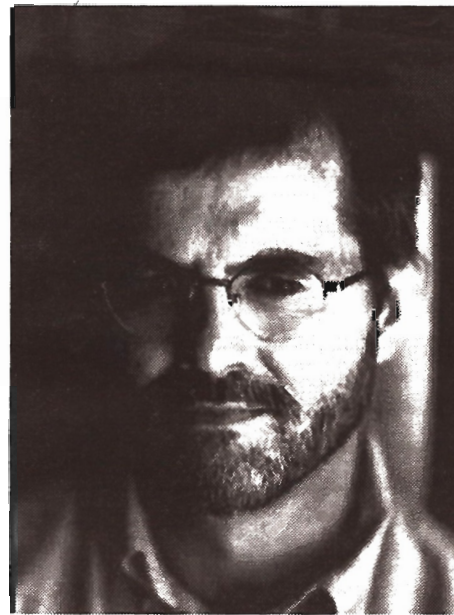
There are many devastating side effects. There is an increase in obesity and Diabetes among those taking psychotropic medications. There are also problems with high blood pressure, leading to Heart Disease and Stroke. The mentally ill are dying twenty-five years earlier than the general population.

On April 22, 2010, Marvin Spieler and I had the opportunity to interview Robert Whitaker and listen to him speak about his book. Community Access, an agency in the business of helping consumers obtain housing, obtain employment, and basically connect with those around them, invited Mr. Whitaker to speak.

I read "Anatomy of an Epidemic" prior to the interview and was dismayed at the way he seemed to be against psychiatric medication. I for one believe that anti-depressant medication has helped me be a productive member of society. I have a full time job and am not on disability. I believe my life would have taken a more unfortunate direction without medication. Marvin Spieler believes that his medication kept him out of the hospital for twenty-five years. He also believes that having SSI and SSDI benefits to fall back on is a good thing.

"What he is suggesting is that when someone who is eighteen or nineteen and has his or her first psychotic break, that the doctors don't put them on medications right away."

We stated our points of view to Mr. Whitaker. He explained that he was not against the use of medication or against SSI and SSDI. He was just looking at the statistics and they led to the conclusion that the medications were changing mental illnesses from episodic to chronic. He believes that as a society, we can do better. He hopes his book is a catalyst for change. He is not suggesting that we get rid of all our medications. What he is suggesting is that when someone who is eighteen or nineteen and has his or her first psychotic break,



Robert Whitaker, Author

that the doctors don't put them on medications right away. Perhaps they would speak with the patient; get to know what was happening with the patient prior to their break; treat the patient as a person. Maybe, given the opportunity, recovery could happen without a need for psychotropic medication. If not, there is a time to put a patient on medication. Exercise might be beneficial. A change in diet might help. Perhaps make the patient feel as if they are part of a community and offer support.

Would I recommend this book? It is hard to say. Much of the book was depressing. Some of it was very dry. There were many statistics. Also, Mr. Whitaker spends most of the book telling us what the medical establishment has offered us, medication, is bad for us. He interviews patients who have had negative experiences with medication. He does not interview patients who have had positive results.

The last chapter of the book offers us solutions to the drug-dominated mode of treatment in the United States. There are various studies featured. One describes exercise as a cure for depression. One describes a loving therapeutic community for emotionally disturbed children. A study done in Finland describes a unique way of treating those suffering with Schizophrenia in which patients were invited to participate in their own care. Doctors and family members gathered around the patient to actually listen to what the patient had to say. They were asked about their hallucinations and the voices they were hearing.

However, all these studies were done on a small scale. Do they offer solutions to the mental health crisis that Robert Whitaker alludes to in America? Somehow, I don't think so.

Book Reviews