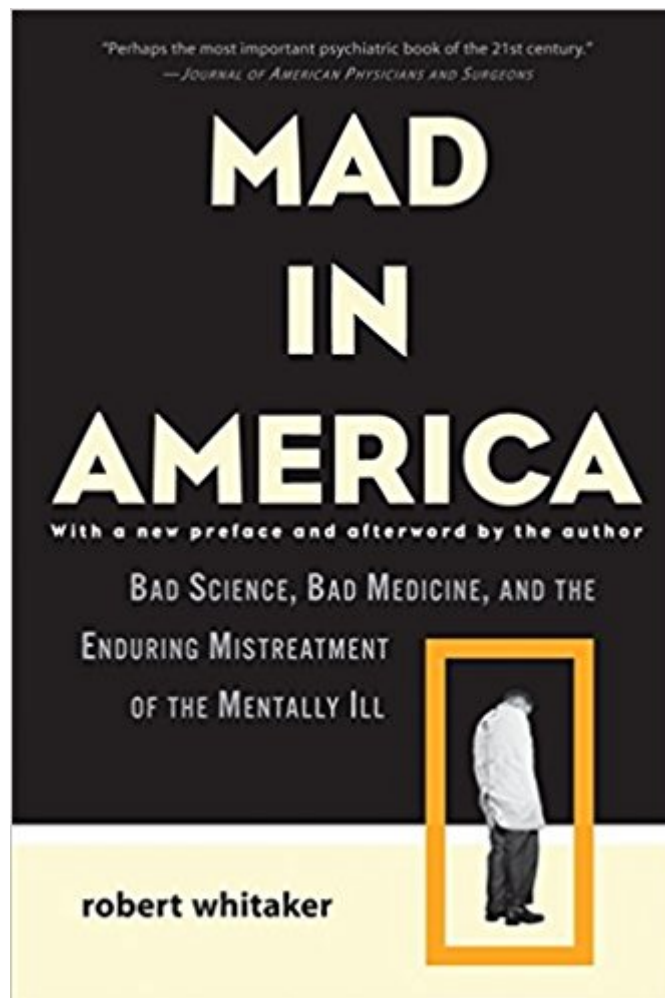




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# Mad In America: Bad Science, Bad Medicine, And The Enduring Mistreatment Of The Mentally Ill



## Synopsis

Schizophrenics in the United States currently fare worse than patients in the world's poorest countries. In *Mad in America*, medical journalist Robert Whitaker argues that modern treatments for the severely mentally ill are just old medicine in new bottles, and that we as a society are deeply deluded about their efficacy. The widespread use of lobotomies in the 1920s and 1930s gave way in the 1950s to electroshock and a wave of new drugs. In what is perhaps Whitaker's most damning revelation, *Mad in America* examines how drug companies in the 1980s and 1990s skewed their studies to prove that new antipsychotic drugs were more effective than the old, while keeping patients in the dark about dangerous side effects. A haunting, deeply compassionate book—now revised with a new introduction—*Mad in America* raises important questions about our obligations to the mad, the meaning of insanity, and what we value most about the human mind.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Hot on the heels of an optimistic film about Nobelist John Nash's schizophrenic journey comes medical journalist Robert Whitaker's disturbing exposé of the cruel and corrupt business of treating mental illness in America. *Mad in America* begins by surveying three centuries of mental health treatments to discover why positive outcomes for schizophrenics in the U.S. for the last 25 years have decreased--making them lower than those in developing countries. Whitaker asks, "Why should living in a country with such rich resources and advanced medical treatments for disorders of

every kind, be so toxic to those who are severely mentally ill?" One of Whitaker's answers draws upon the historic and current assumptions of a physical cause for schizophrenia. This resulted in cruel and unusual physical treatments--from ice-water immersion and bloodletting to the more contemporary electroshock, lobotomy, and drug therapies with dangerous side effects. This physical cause model leads to Whitaker's more provocative explanation: that mental illness has become a profit center. He offers disturbing details about how good business for drug companies makes for bad medicine in treating schizophrenia. From drug companies skewing their studies and patient/subjects kept in the dark about experiments to the cozy relationship between the American Psychiatric Association and drug companies, Whitaker underlines the mistreatment of the mentally ill. This courageous and compelling book succeeds as both a history of our attitudes toward mental illness and a manifesto for changing them. --Barbara Mackoff --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Tooth removal. Bloodletting. Spinning. Ice-water baths. Electroshock therapy. These are only a few of the horrifying treatments for mental illness readers encounter in this accessible history of Western attitudes toward insanity. Whitaker, a medical writer and Pulitzer Prize finalist, argues that mental asylums in the U.S. have been run largely as "places of confinement facilities that served to segregate the misfits from society rather than as hospitals that provided medical care." His evidence is at times frightening, especially when he compares U.S. physicians' treatments of the mentally ill to medical experiments and sterilizations in Nazi Germany. Eugenicist attitudes, Whitaker argues, profoundly shaped American medicine in the first half of the 20th century, resulting in forced sterilization and other cruel treatments. Between 1907 and 1927, roughly 8,000 eugenic sterilizations were performed, while 10,000 mentally ill Americans were lobotomized in the years 1950 and 1951 alone. As late as 1933, there were no states in which insane people could legally get married. Though it covers some of the same territory as Sander Gilman's *Seeing the Insane* and Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady*, Whitaker's richer, more detailed book will appeal to those interested in medical history, as well as anyone fascinated by Western culture's obsessive need to define and subdue the mentally ill. Agent, Kevin Lang. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Very well written and informative book. Had to read it for neuroscience and it was a break from the regular material we dealt with (g-protein coupled receptor anyone?) Sometimes it was difficult to read, in an emotionally moving way. If you don't know anything about the history of mental illness in

America THIS is the book to read. Yes, it becomes a bit opinionated and antidrug industry, but if you don't come to that conclusion on your own then you're just a pharma shrill or a delusional psychiatrist.

I found some of the arguments in the book hard to believe. The closest I have come to mental illness was when my wife began to have some serious bouts with hallucinations and unreality. The cause of her difficulties were later diagnosed as Alzheimer's Disease. I never really bought into that diagnosis -- it seemed to me that there was dementia but not the classical kind of Alzheimer's as generally described in the literature. She was treated with psychotic medicines to slow down the disease. However after reading *Mas In America* I now believe that her medications may have accelerated her inevitable decline into dementia. As a retired researcher I can understand why there is a problem of experiment design. While I was in Graduate School my thesis advisor had me working on a project to prove one of his pet theories. After three years working with a Merchant Calculator to solve an eighth degree polynomial with fifty five terms, I found that the result was inconsistent with the initial hypotheses. Fortunately I still managed to get my Ph.D. after my advisor had come up with some explanation that I did not understand to explain why the outcome of my efforts did not obtain the hoped for events. In a reevaluation of my efforts some sixty years later, I concluded that the fault lay in the design of the experiment and that the model we chose was incorrect. For the first twenty years of my career, I worked as a researcher and frequently was exposed to results which did not support initial expectations. Thus I can appreciate some of the research into mental illness medications that did not have the desired results. However the life of the pharmaceutical industry depends on the "successful" development of new and powerful drugs to pay for the research effort. Failure is not an option. Unlike my research experience, lives were not at stake. However in the pharmaceutical industry, lives are at stake and ethical considerations are expected. In the firm where I was employed as a researcher, we had an "ethics" committee which evaluated our findings when lives were a factor in the studies. In one case my colleagues were studying the affects of "street pills" on human beings. Their subjects were local hippies who were more than anxious to take part in the study "because they got free pills in the name of science." In addition these pills were legal! Benjamin Disraeli is reported to have said: "There are three kinds of lies: Lies, damned lies and statistics." This truism is certainly applicable if one believes the premise in this book.

I am trying to understand why some people succeed or go much farther in life than others. I feel it has to do with how each individual's brain capabilities work and this book definitely puts that thought

into perspective.

A cautionary, compelling, frightening story of the mistreatment of the mentally ill by many of those entrusted with their care.

As a licensed mental health counselor I was aware of much of the history in psychotherapy. However, this book paints a simple light of what worked historically and what did not work. A great read.

A very well articulated history of psychiatry. Earned 5 stars because of the down to earth and optimistic epilogue, which gives aspiring mental health professionals hope for reaching the ideal standard of care: an emphasis on psychotherapy and social functioning while pursuant to a selective, case by case paradigm for prescription of psychotropics.

Wonderful and true book.

Needed it for a course. Was interesting.

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