The Quest for Mental Health

This is the story of one of the most far reaching human endeavors in modern history: the quest for mental well-being. From its origins in the eighteenth century to its wide scope in the early twenty-first, this search for emotional health and welfare has cost billions. In the name of mental health, millions around the world have been tranquilized, institutionalized, psychoanalyzed, sterilized, lobotomized, and even euthanized. Yet at the dawn of the new millennium, reported rates of depression and anxiety were unprecedentedly high. Drawing on years of field research, Ian Dowbiggin argues that if the quest for emotional well-being has reached a crisis point in the twenty-first century, it is because mass society is enveloped by cultures of therapism and consumerism, which increasingly advocate bureaucratic and managerial approaches to health and welfare. Over time, stakeholders such as governments, medicine, researchers, industry, schools, the media, the courts, families, and a public whose taste for treatment seems insatiable have transformed the campaign to achieve mental health into a movement that has come to mean all things to virtually all people. As Dowbiggin shows, if current trends continue, the quest for mental health is likely to make people more miserable before they become happier.

Ian Dowbiggin has taught history at the University of Rochester, the University of Dallas, the University of Toronto, and the University of Prince Edward Island. The author of six books on the history of medicine, he has also published in the American Historical Review, the Journal of Contemporary History, the Journal of Policy History, the Canadian Historical Review, the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, and the Bulletin of the History of Medicine. He is on the editorial board of the History of Psychiatry.
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The Quest for Mental Health

A Tale of Science, Medicine, Scandal, Sorrow, and Mass Society

IAN DOWBIGIN

The University of Prince Edward Island
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