

BREAK

**RADICAL PSYCHIATRY
AND THE AMERICAN COUNTERCULTURE**

ON



LUCAS RICHERT

THROUGH

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The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

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This book was set in Stone Serif and Stone Sans by Jen Jackowitz. Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN: 978-0-262-04282-6

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Elizabeth and my wee ones, Oscar and Lucy

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1 Changing Minds

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon her heart?¹

—William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

“We need you more than ever,” Vice President Joe Biden told an appreciative crowd of nearly 15,000 mental health professionals at the American Psychiatric Association’s annual meeting in 2014. “And, quite frankly,” he continued, “we need more of you than exists today.”² Speaking in the Javits Convention Center in New York City, Biden highlighted a lack of Veterans Affairs and child psychiatrists as particularly acute problems in the twenty-first-century mental health marketplace. The rise of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and an uptick in mental illnesses, including depression, in younger age cohorts worried him. For Biden, American psychiatry stood as a model for the world, and more psychiatrists, as well as more mental health professionals, were desperately needed.

Biden was not alone in thinking about mental health in the United States. In recent years American mental health has seized the spotlight, for a number of reasons. Whether the issue under discussion concerns the mental health of active shooters or other kinds of assailants, the persistent rise in depression diagnoses, the relationship between marijuana use and psychosis, or the return of the use of psychedelic agents in psychiatric treatments, the public’s familiarity and fluency with mental health issues has

burgeoned. Recent TV series, such as *Maniac* and *Mindhunter*, and major motion pictures, including *Side Effects* and *Silver Linings Playbook*, have introduced stories about people struggling with mental health problems and with prescription drug use. An unexpected and controversial sensation in 2017 was *13 Reasons Why*, which focused on the assault, trauma, and suicide of a high school girl, bringing to viewers' attention the complex mental health issues that teens and young adults may face.

This book hopes to advance the discussion by placing the histories of American mental health, pharmaceutical use, and intoxicant use in dialogue with one another, all within the context of mainstream and fringe therapies. While definitions vary, *counterculture* in this book refers to theological, political, attitudinal, or material positions that departed from common and accepted societal standards. By tracing these histories, the book seeks to provide a more expansive outlook on and interpretation of mental health. My first book, *Conservatism, Consumer Choice, and the Food and Drug Administration during the Reagan Era: A Prescription for Scandal*, explored multiple aspects of pharmaceuticals in the United States from the 1970s to the 1990s. In it I maintained that consumer protections, product innovation, and freedom of choice in the American marketplace were challenged by competing ideologies and principles. My second book, *Strange Trips: Science, Culture, and the Regulation of Drugs*, moved beyond the pharmaceutical industry and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). I argued for a more robust understanding of the porous boundary between legal and recreational drug use and examined the back-and-forth struggles over the regulation of pharmaceuticals and recreational substances in scientific circles, with an eye on culture. This book reviews the ministrations provided to "diseased minds" during a countercultural climate in the 1960s–1970s, including "sweet oblivious antidotes,"³ in Shakespeare's words, and other sorts of therapies. It is still far from clear how best to "raze out the written troubles of the brain," a task Macbeth asked of his wife's physician. But a fuller understanding of the American mind and of mental health practices of the past, especially during an era that saw a major rewriting of treatment paradigms, should help place the U.S. vice president's comments in context. Perspectives from the past might also forestall reactions like Macbeth's to his wife's doctor. When the doctor seemed incapable of helping her mental trouble, Macbeth suggested that the practice of medicine was fit for the dogs.

Everyday people, just as much as government, medical authorities, and policymakers, must take into account commercial matters and cost-effective mental health strategies, and in this post-deinstitutionalization era, scholars have a unique opportunity to shape the contours of mental health policy.⁴ I hope that *Break On Through* plays a part in this discussion. Whether the topic is activism and radicalism, shifting diagnostic criteria, or lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) for the treatment of depression or end-of-life pain, there is always space for more information, including historical examinations. The major pendulum swings and struggles in modern mental medicine have often been described by the term “radical.” The introduction of Freud’s ideas into psychiatry, for instance, was viewed as a “radical act” and one that bestowed “radical gifts” on contemporary culture and social life.⁵ I believe it is important to unpack the idea of mental health radicalism in a comprehensive way.

Issues

Present-day discussions surrounding mental health often center on the fifth edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Mental Diseases (DSM-5)*, released to much fanfare, as well as considerable criticism, in 2013. Arbitrating the line between illness and normality, the 947-page book governs many Americans’ mental health treatments, and critiques of DSM-5 often revolve around how it—and, by extension, the pharmaceutical industry—wield far too much influence. That too many psychiatrists are operating in the United States (contrary to Biden’s view) and too many prescriptions are being written is a hard-and-fast belief for many. In 2012 the APA’s annual meeting was held at the Philadelphia Convention Center, in the heart of the city. High-profile comments on the profession that year, coming from such insiders as Drs. Marcia Angell, Allen Frances, and Robert Whitaker, to name just three, galvanized conversations about the expanding influence of the pharmaceutical industry and the imminent release of DSM-5. Frances, for example, took the opportunity to praise DSM-III, first published in 1980, in a *New York Times* article. It had, he said, “stirred great professional and public excitement by providing specific criteria for each disorder.” That meant everyone was using the “same playbook,” which in turn “facilitated treatment planning and revolutionized research in psychiatry and neuroscience.” But in his

opinion, the APA had since overreached. The “times have changed, the role of psychiatric diagnosis has changed, and the association has changed.” The APA was no longer capable of being the sole professional arbiter of what constituted mental health.⁶

Another common refrain heard from opponents of the DSM and the mental health establishment is that Americans have experienced a revolution in psychopharmacology and witnessed tremendous advances in mental health care, yet the number of people plagued by chronic mental problems continues to grow. Depression, social anxiety disorders, and PTSD all appear to be on the rise. The economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton have advanced our understanding of “deaths of despair”—those due to alcohol, drugs, and suicide—as resulting from the merging of geographic and economic factors, with an increasing role for inequality. “Gilded” Zip Codes, for instance, are associated with a higher life expectancy, lower crime rates, and less morbidity. Long commutes to work, such as those faced by service workers who cannot afford to live in the locale of their employment, are associated with higher rates of obesity, stress, insomnia, loneliness, and divorce. These issues connecting economic status and the DSM diagnoses, which also played out in the pages of the *New York Times*, the *London Review of Books*, and the *New England Journal of Medicine*, were given greater force by the energy and fury of the Occupy protestors. A sociopolitical movement against social inequality and a deficit of “real democracy,” Occupy had as its primary goal advancing socioeconomic justice and new forms of democracy. The Great Recession of 2008–2009 crystallized inequalities in American society, and by 2011 Americans were holding demonstrations, flash mobs, and sit-ins to promote social justice. The movement spread beyond the borders of the United States, blossoming into a “global howl of protest,” as the *Guardian* put it.⁷ The convergence of socioeconomic, substance use, and mental health, as will become clear in the chapters of this book, has both parallels and roots in the 1970s.

Illicit drug use and the use of psychopharmacological agents are vital parts of the discussion. Prominent psychiatrists have begun suggesting that mental health specialties need reining in, what one critic has called “taming, pruning, reformulation, and redirection.”⁸ Often such assessments of mental medicine are mounted on opposition to “disease mongering, its overuse of polypharmacy,” and knee-jerk medicating for reasonably minor

difficulties in adults as well as children and adolescents.⁹ David Healy has labeled the overprescribing of drugs as *Pharmageddon*, a mental health apocalypse that manifested after World War II.¹⁰ In the immediate postwar years, the dominant notion that a biochemical imbalance could be the cause of mental illness led psychiatrists to turn to drugs like Miltown, Prozac, or Xanax for treatment.¹¹ A readiness to prescribe for any ill has recently been turned on its head as Americans have been afforded a sometimes frightening look at the role of the pharmaceutical industry in creating a sick society. They have received “the truth about the drug companies,” as the title of Marcia Angell’s book has it, and have become increasingly aware of the evolution in disease diagnoses and definitions in the United States since the 1950s.¹² Drug companies allied with physicians and used the political climate of the Cold War to influence public opinion, shape legislative reform and the regulatory architecture of the country, and ward off damning charges made by congressional investigations.¹³

And what of psychedelic medicine and its role in the mental health treatment armamentarium? LSD initially was the subject of basic scientific research for mental illness and addiction. For supporters, psychedelic psychiatry held tremendous therapeutic potential for individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia and alcoholism, yet the promise of this research was never realized because of its nationwide ban in 1968. In the 1980 publication *LSD: My Problem Child*, the Swiss biochemist Albert Hofmann reflected in an honest and incisive manner on the drug he had first synthesized in 1938.¹⁴ The book describes psychiatry’s combination of excitement and joy over the “powerful ‘new’ technology,” as the medicinal chemist David Nichols described it to Hofmann in 1993.¹⁵ LSD attracted researchers working in the fields of psychiatry, psychotherapy, and psychoanalysis, although its unconventional status meant it rapidly became both revered and reviled.¹⁶ By the early 1960s, more than a thousand scientific articles had appeared by investigators who had used LSD in a wide variety of settings and administered it using diverse methods and instruments. The conclusions they drew were equally diverse,¹⁷ but several promising applications emerged. Principal among these was the use of LSD for treating alcoholism; LSD was also tested in clinical settings as treatment for a range of issues, including homosexuality, depression, aggression, dysfunctional interpersonal relations, end-of-life pain, and in a model of psychosis.¹⁸ As

Hofmann noted, “LSD was discovered at a time when our society was not yet advanced enough to be able to integrate in a meaningful manner.”¹⁹ Carl Jung, by contrast, argued that it was “quite awful that the alienists” had discovered a new “poison to play with,” even though they weren’t entirely sure how to use it.²⁰

By 2013–2014, however, when the DSM was the subject of intense debate and Biden was reaching out to U.S. psychiatrists, the tide appeared to be turning. Articles began appearing in the popular press—the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic*, *Scientific American*, and other major periodicals—suggesting a return of LSD from the wilderness—indeed, a psychedelic rebirth or “renaissance.”²¹ An indication of the resurgence of interest in psychedelics within the scientific community was the 2013 Psychedelic Science conference, held in Oakland, California, under the aegis of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies. The conference brought together close to two thousand professionals, including psychiatrists, psychologists, anthropologists, and physicians, from around the world to discuss the medical use of psychedelic drugs. These issues were elucidated in *PBS NewsHour*’s January 2017 report on the renewed interest in research on psychedelic drugs. But participants did not want viewers to get the wrong idea. Dr. Stephen Ross of New York University’s School of Medicine asserted: “We’re following the data. We don’t think that this is going to cure anything or change the world. We are focused on helping sick people and just doing more science and following the data, seeing where it leads.” Dr. Michael Mithoefer was even more circumspect: “This seems to be a very powerful tool, but it is only a tool. . . . I think there is the danger of people thinking of it as a magic bullet.”²²

Design of the Book

This book explores the relationships among the American mind, Americans’ mental health, and psychiatry in the late 1960s and 1970s from a broader vantage point and an eye on countercultural trends. How was the American mind twisted and turned in the 1970s? What was the role of psychiatry and psychology? Who were the major actors shaping mainstream and alternative views of mental health therapy? How did intoxicants simplify or stymie therapies? Topics range from cults to cannabis, data-driven diagnoses, the DSM, and the importance of New Age therapies. The book

unpacks responses to and the regulation of American mental medicine in light of long-standing economic and political interests related to medical science. It tracks the discordant threads of the late 1960s and 1970s understanding of madness and mental medicine to help illuminate the present. In an overarching sense, the period of the 1970s was a shakeout moment in which radical ideas either matured, faded away, or became mainstream. If the period 1945–1970 could be described as “magic years,” as onetime APA president Daniel Blain wrote, the years following proved equally mysterious but far more fragmented.²³

These were explosive times. Psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud’s therapy to unlock the unconscious mind, was struggling against a “challenge to the couch,” a war fronted by proponents of biological psychiatry.²⁴ Social psychiatry and deinstitutionalization movements were reforming traditional mental health services as more and more patients emerged from asylums. Community mental health clinics popped up around the country, based on breakthroughs in psychopharmacological research and treatment. Powerful new antipsychotic drugs enabled a transformation in mental health service models. Entirely affirmative accounts of psychiatry and psychology began to give way to increasingly critical approaches. Many people felt that American psychiatry was at a confusing crossroad, and psychiatrists themselves became ever more “skeptical about the goals, methods, and achievements of their professions.”²⁵ It was “a time of rapid professional upheaval” and forces emanating from multiple directions “compromised the credibility of psychiatry.”²⁶ Headlines showed feminists pushing back against pharmacology and the U.S. Supreme Court turning against psychiatry.²⁷

This book tackles these ideas. It deals with radicalism in the profession, drugs, prescribed or used recreationally, and the American mind. According to historian Stephen Tuck, while it was perhaps once “tempting to dismiss” the era of the 1970s, it has recently “come into fashion as unexpectedly as a disco craze.”²⁸ Writers and historians no longer apologize for carefully scrutinizing the period.²⁹ Still, the view that the decade of the seventies was a unique period of sustained upheaval is flawed. Neither political nor economic nor cultural events transcended similarly critical (and interesting) moments in the 1950s, 1960s, or even the 1980s. The 1970s were special, to be sure. Yet the period manifested *both* continuity *and* “a crucial [time] of change and adjustment that has shaped the contours of U.S. history and global history.”³⁰

The decade began with several essential scientific breakthroughs and institutional changes that impacted mental health practice and perceptions. In 1970 Dr. Julius Axelrod, a researcher with the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his groundbreaking work on an enzyme that stops the action of the nerve transmitter noradrenaline in the brain. His work set the stage for breakthroughs in drug design for psychiatric disorders. That same year the FDA approved the use of lithium as a treatment for mania, based on NIMH research. A significant change for people with manic-depressive illness (bipolar disorder), the therapy led to abrupt drops in inpatient days and suicides among people with this serious mental illness. Economically, the therapy laid the foundation for immense reductions in the costs associated with bipolar disorder. A third important initiative in 1970 was passage of the Comprehensive Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation Act, which established the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism within the NIMH. Two years later, the National Institute on Drug Abuse within the NIMH was created following passage of the Drug Abuse Office and Treatment Act. Fourth, Kenneth Donaldson was released from Florida State Hospital in 1971. No longer deemed incompetent, he was awarded nearly \$48,500 in damages and wrote about his committal in a memoir. Several years later the U.S. Supreme Court, in a hotly anticipated decision based on Donaldson's case, declared unconstitutional the involuntary custodial confinement of admittedly nondangerous persons.³¹ The beginning of the decade, in short, heralded scientific promise and marked new legal and institutional approaches to mental health.

The mental health establishment also underwent both strong reconsideration and demonization, a trend that gained momentum throughout the late 1960s and 1970s. At different times, various commentators suggested that mental health professionals needed to modify service models. In 1961 the Harvard-trained psychiatrist Robert Coles, writing in the *Atlantic Monthly*, suggested that psychiatrists "try to hide behind our couches, hide ourselves from our patients," and prolong "the very isolation often responsible for our patients' troubles."³² According to Frank Riessman and S. M. Miller, writing in the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, psychiatrists shunned the possibility of "broad social change" and "passionate political involvement" for various reasons, including professional insulation, considerations of prestige, and infatuation with methods.³³ Bruno Bettelheim

characterized psychiatrists as “a rather conservative group” that, in his estimation, tended to avoid “radical analysis” of society’s problems, let alone entertain “radical solutions.”³⁴ “I think it is very true in psychiatry,” a London-based psychiatrist wrote in a letter to R. D. Laing, “more than in other branches of medicine that orthodoxies are inclined to be transmitted from generation to generation without criticism and . . . it is only by devastating attacks such as yours that knowledge can be gained.”³⁵ Others, such as President Richard Nixon, were even harsher, as he remarked: “You know, psychiatry is a God damned racket.”³⁶

Psychology, whose history during this period was closely interwoven with that of psychiatry, was affected by the war in Vietnam and the heightened demand for treatment services. Psychology underwent its own transformation, shifting from its more academic and laboratory-based research traditions (psychometrics, personality testing) to clinical practice. And, like psychiatry, the discipline of psychology professionalized. It also received major investments in training and research opportunities, which rivaled those of its psychiatric sibling and led to competition between the two fields.³⁷ By 1968, Abraham Maslow was the world’s most famous psychologist, with tremendous crossover appeal. As the cofounder of humanistic psychology and coiner of the term “hierarchy of needs,” he ushered in biological essentialism, drawing linkages between healthy individuals and a healthy society. Even more important, his work challenged Freud and behaviorism. He remained highly influential throughout the 1970s.

The rest of this book investigates mental health practices, radicalism and intoxicants, and government policy and popular culture from different perspectives. Instead of focusing on a single substance or class of drugs, a single psychiatrist, a single program, or a single patient activist organization, the book explores intersecting histories. The mental health arena witnessed new entrants with the rise of patient groups, the availability of new therapies tailored to mass consumption, the acceptance of parapsychology as a legitimate field of study, and the renewal of psychedelic-based psychiatry. Options abounded. Patient consumers could dip their toes into New Age medicine, draw from the font of naturopathy and homeopathy, or explore Eastern-influenced medicine and teachings through venues such as the Esalen Institute in California. They might sample alternative mental health therapies, including primal scream therapy or transactional analysis, or find psychic comfort in participating in new religious movements.

The source materials used to construct this book include archives and government documents, medical journals, newspapers, histories of the field, and a select number of interviews. While the book is mostly a narrative work, Michel Foucault's formulation of power-knowledge (*le savoir-pouvoir*) underlies my treatment of medical practices, psychiatry, and culture. According to Foucault, humans are made "subjects" and "psychiatric identities" are created, and these identities then fluctuate over time, influenced by myriad factors.³⁸ The goal of the book is to offer a reinterpretation of medical and mental health knowledge in American society during the 1970s. *Break On Through*, however, is not a microhistory of an era, nor does it argue against the "fall" of psychoanalysis or in favor of biological psychiatry's heroic emergence. The book is not about federal mental health policy, and it does not prioritize ex-patient movements and antipsychiatry. Such narratives have been presented very well elsewhere.

At certain points, the book reaches further back in time than the 1970s. Though the book is not strictly a cultural history, it seemed worthwhile noting the movies and music of the period, along with other cultural forms of expression. To understand the American mind during the 1960s and 1970s and beyond, it is important to have at least some sense of the era's cultural and countercultural attributes. Cultural references thus cross historical documentation. Cultural influences on the development of the psychiatric profession are important as well (another example of the Foucauldian underpinnings of the book). Bodies of psychiatric knowledge should not be regarded as "universal, atemporal and objective."³⁹ Psychiatrists and their knowledge have not emerged from a "neutral space" beyond the history of a particular culture and society. Rather, the people who deploy psychiatric knowledge are products of, and thoroughly imbricated in, a social and cultural history.⁴⁰ American culture—its characteristics and knowledge, encompassing language, religion, social habits, and artistic expression—provided both the matrix in which psychiatry, its practitioners, and its clients grew up as well as a determinative influence on the further development of the field. As the sociologist Claude S. Fischer noted in 2010, "Understanding the cultural and psychological path Americans *have taken* not only satisfies our curiosity, it helps us think about the path Americans *should* take."⁴¹

The path *Break On Through* takes may not appear to the reader to be clear-cut. The book does not proceed chronologically or employ straightforward argumentation. Instead, the narrative is predicated on intersecting stories.

Chapter 2, "Disruption," presents a general overview of the decade of the seventies and seeks to describe a big picture of American society and mental health care. It concentrates on how the American mind was disrupted in the late 1960s and 1970s. What were the drivers of this disruption? How did science and technology influence working life? What role did responses to the Vietnam War play in altering the social paradigm? Adopting a broad perspective, this chapter explores how the American mind was reshaped by a topsy-turvy climate.

Chapter 3, "From Prevention to Activism and Radicalization," examines the rise of radical psychiatry in the 1960s. Who were the radical psychotherapists? Where did they come from? What did they believe in? Self-described radicals were not always at the forefront of reformist agendas and were not the only health care providers to conceptualize American society as sick. Liberals, as opposed to "radicals," also contributed to restructuring mental health care services in the 1950s and 1960s. Even as the self-described radicals fought the system and "the man," they also fought each other. They argued that the field of psychiatry (and all other mental health professions) needed to modify training methods and service delivery models. Mental medicine had to throw off neutrality and embrace individual and collective sickness, which, the radicals contended, were natural by-products of militarism, alienation, and endemic racism.

Chapter 4, "Breakthrough of the Mind," examines new types of therapies deployed in the 1970s that straddled the line between science and religion. As psychoanalysis declined in popularity, substitutes emerged: the human potential movement, for example, furnished an outlet for Americans seeking therapeutic solace. New religions, such as Scientology, garnered greater attention. It soon became clear that, even as mental health practitioners, including the APA's Radical Caucus, interpreted, reformulated, and transmitted psychiatric, psychological, and antipsychiatric ideas, troubled Americans were certainly not lacking for therapeutic choice in the 1970s. In a laissez-faire therapeutic marketplace, much more was available than just the approaches proffered by the Esalen Institute and the Erhard Seminars Training, better known as EST.

Chapter 5, "Knowledge of the Mind," seeks to answer some important questions. What was the context in which the DSM-III was developed? How important was radicalism in the discussion of data? This chapter shows countercultural psychiatrists struggling for and against a more quantitative

approach to psychiatric diagnoses and the DSM-II. What does this suggest about pendulum swings in psychiatry during the 1970s? The return of the biomedical model in the mid-1960s was the result of several factors, though the issue was fundamentally about knowledge production in mental health at a unique moment in American history. This was vital, and social and political evaluations supplemented ongoing debates within the field about the validity of psychiatric diagnostics and struggles among psychodynamic and biological psychiatry. The chapter also takes up parapsychology. As many mental health professionals rebelled against the use of psychological adjustment or the weaponization of psychiatry in any form during the 1960s, how did others explore fringe claims about mental spoon bending or remote viewing?

Chapter 6, "Mental Health and Substances in the Seventies," examines the roles of LSD, cannabis, and 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA, ecstasy) in psychoanalysis. How did researchers explore the end-of-life use of LSD? To what extent should government limit and control access to a drug that might induce psychosis? These questions drove discussions about cannabis in the 1970s and stalled policy change; they are still with us today. Some mental health radicals argued in favor of closer engagement with prevailing issues of the day, saying it was time to get angry, to shout and press for action, while others examined anxieties around the process of dying. The discussion of MDMA, a main topic of this chapter, highlights that California in particular was a hotbed of health activism and medical entrepreneurship, a place where contested medicines collided with various economic and political ideologies.

Notes

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used psychiatry as a tool of repression. Right-wingers in the John Birch Society, for instance, had demonized the field of psychiatry throughout the 1950s and 1960s for just this reason. One often cited example was the case of Vladimir Bukovsky, who was forcibly hospitalized in Moscow for anti-Communist and anti-establishment activities. He became a poster child for Americans railing against psychiatric persecution and oppressive activities in society. For the American Association for the Abolition of Involuntary Mental Hospitalization's George Alexander, an attorney and spokesperson, there were thousands of Bukovskys in the United States. Donaldson's case in the Supreme Court was just one example of the changing legal landscape and shifting mental health climate in the 1970s. George J. Annis, "Medicolegal #11: The Non-Dangerous Mentally Ill Person's Right to be Free," *Orthopaedic Review* 4, no. 10 (October 1975): 59–60; Hudson, "The US Supreme Court Versus Psychiatry," 5; Sullivan, "Disgrace of the State Mental Hospitals," 5; Alan Meisel, "The Rights of the Mentally Ill under State Constitutions," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 45, no. 3 (1982): 7–40, 7–9.

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Chapter 3

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signaled a movement toward newer methods, including primal therapy or transactional analysis. It was also a declaration of support for Laing and Szasz. The fourth and final type of psychiatrist, a Delta, was radical in both politics and psychiatric practice.

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Chapter 5

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Chapter 6

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