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# Youth Truth



Official 'Zine of Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions [www.asfar.org](http://www.asfar.org)

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## The Drugging of Children

Lisa Freeman

The subject of psychotropic medication prescriptions for preschool children has received its fair share of attention in the mass media since last month's publication of two simultaneous articles on the topic in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.<sup>1,2</sup> The news coverage has primarily focused on the prescription of methylphenidate (Ritalin) to treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children aged 2-4 years old, a prescribing practice which more than doubled in frequency from 1991-1995. But there are several aspects of the literature on this subject which have not been reported in news "sound bites", and which are worthy of mention.

**Psychotropic drugs other than psychostimulants (like Ritalin) are also being prescribed to large numbers of toddlers, often in combination with other drugs.** In a sample drawn from Michigan Medicaid data, out of 223 children aged three years old and younger who were diagnosed with ADHD, about 60% were given a prescription for psychotropic drugs, and nearly half of those were prescribed two or more drugs.<sup>3</sup>

Aside from Ritalin, one of the most frequently prescribed drugs appears to be clonidine, an anti-hypertension medication initially used on children to alleviate the insomnia or other sleep disturbances often caused by Ritalin and other ADHD medications. However, clonidine is now used by many doctors to treat sleep disturbances alone, or for aggressive or defiant behavior with or without accompanying ADHD (although its effectiveness for this use is unproven and seems to be in doubt).<sup>4</sup> The usage of clonidine by preschool children increased more than any other drug reported in Zito et al., despite the severe side effects that may occur even when used by adults. Allergic reactions, cardiac abnormalities or failure, drying of membranes (including eyes), nausea and loss of appetite are some of the side effects listed in the *Physicians' Desk Reference*<sup>5</sup> and reported in medical literature. Withdrawal symptoms can be extreme, and fatalities have been reported to have resulted from children missing a single dose.<sup>6</sup>

Another class of drugs frequently used to treat young children for ADHD, as well as other disorders, is the tricyclic antidepressant group (TCAs), which includes drugs such as Elavil. TCAs initially provided longer-acting agents for ADHD than Ritalin and reduced the need for repeated dosing (before the introduction of an "extended-release" form of Ritalin).<sup>7</sup> The tricyclic category of drugs is also associated with cardiac problems, as well as tinnitus, seizures, increased ocular pressure, vomiting, diarrhea, and anorexia. Particularly troubling with this class of drugs is the risk of tardive dyskinesia, a disabling, irreversible neuromuscular disorder which appears after years of drug treatment.<sup>8</sup> If these drugs begin to be administered at preschool ages and continue to be taken throughout the school years, the risk of tardive dyskinesia is greatly increased.

The use of TCAs on children has recently been decreasing, but another class of drugs appears to have filled the void: selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), the class of drugs including Prozac. While these drugs seem to be safer than TCAs, they can cause many of the same side effects, plus the added risk of sudden, severe allergic reactions.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, there is little evidence that this class of drugs is even effective in treating the problems for which they are prescribed.<sup>10</sup> Yet a review of information from the Intercontinental Medical Statistics Study revealed a *tenfold* increase in SSRI prescriptions to preschoolers in the United States between 1993 and 1997.<sup>11</sup>

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— **AROUND 3000 PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PROZAC WERE ISSUED IN 1994 FOR CHILDREN YOUNGER THAN ONE YEAR OLD** —

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## Buzz

### A Report from the Front

ASFAR's representative to the Minnesota committee determining the fate of the voting age bill deemed the presentation quite promising.

Miranda Dwyer, along with members of YouthSpeak and several high school and junior high students made a thought provoking presentation to the committee. Although issues were raised with the maturity and responsibility involved with lowering the voting age to 16, proponents of the bill countered that driving a car could kill you, voting could not. Presentations also included a video, and quote from the Constitution.

After the presentation, Dwyer was interviewed for the Pioneer Press and Minneapolis Daily.

ASFAR will keep you informed of the bill's progress, which now must be voted on by the committee.

- Submitted by Matthew Havens

## Letters

*Opinions expressed may not reflect the views of ASFAR.*

### And you thought we weren't paying attention....

(Editor's Note: The following was a letter from Melissa McGuire to the Minnesota committee considering the lowering the voting age)

Riding on the coattails of a dissatisfied generation X I too have felt the abandonment and unease of a generation left to fend for themselves, facing a bleak future of no peace, rainforests, or retirement. The day after my sixteenth birthday I started working. At the same time, I was taking a US History class in which I was informed for the first time that the social security I was paying would most likely not be there when I was old enough to collect it (which would be in my seventies anyway, I was also told).

This is just one of the issues I realized I had no legal right to fight for – I could not vote. I was being taxed for an issue about which I was not allowed to decide the future. This taxation without representation is not only a violation of rights, it is a vile form of disrespect. The generation of my elders wonders why young people do not respect them and they wonder why the youth of today are more violent and restless than at any other time. It is not because we can't vote, it is because we are smart enough to know that we are being taken advantage of. We realize that you have no problem letting us take jobs, make money, help fuel the economy, while at the same time spouting a “children should be seen and not heard” philosophy. The denial of the right to vote is the effect, not the cause. Giving the vote to youth will give us the voice we need to shape and be an active part of our future.

Youth have realized that the world of peace and freedom we want cannot be attained by a generation that does not respect its future.

-Melissa McGuire

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# The President's Pen

ASFAR: Not Anti-Parent

*Eric Anderson*  
*President, ASFAR*  
<[andersep@slu.edu](mailto:andersep@slu.edu)>

One of the principal objections that I have heard from people for a long time about our organization is that it would undermine the power and authority of parents. In a way they are right--our aims would decrease the power of parents to some extent. However, our opponents are flawed in their assertion that this is a bad thing.

A very sensitive issue concerning parental power is that of corporal punishment. Experts on both sides have been debating the effectiveness of using corporal punishment on children for years. It is unfortunate that the debate is even necessary. If someone hits their spouse, they can go to jail, but if they hit their child, it is considered acceptable, at least to a certain point. In a society that is already very violent, one must question the wisdom of this. It is well known that young children learn by example, and if the example they see is corporal punishment, it is what they will learn. A judge has

even upheld the supposed right of a parent to beat his children weekly with a belt to "instill discipline". What about the rights of the child to be free from physical assault? Young people shouldn't be considered as property.

Another major point of debate on ASFAR's views is that we support eliminating legal distinctions between young people and adults. Will this undermine parental power? Not really, because economic power will still remain in the hands of parents. The purpose of ASFAR's stand is to support young people who have parents that neglect and abuse them, so that they will have legal recourse. And why shouldn't young people who start their own business with their own blood, sweat and tears be able to act on their own behalf for their own businesses?

Why shouldn't young people be able to control the money that they earn? I (and many other ASFAR members) certainly support good and empowered parenting, but it should be the right kind of empowerment. Parents need to spend more meaningful time with their children and less time on power trips. And government should not assist parents in their power trips by denying legal rights to young people, especially in cases where the parents are abusive.

ASFAR's approach is the one that would truly empower parents and children to work together towards improving the path of growing up by eliminating government interference in the process.

## News Link

### Washington State Bill Attacks Teenage Drivers

A bill currently under consideration in the Washington State Senate, SB 5449, would raise the age for obtaining a driver's license to 18 and revoke any license currently held by people under the age of 18.

The text of the bill can be viewed at <[http://www.leg.wa.gov/pub/billinfo/1999-00/senate/5425-5449/5449\\_sbr\\_03301999.txt](http://www.leg.wa.gov/pub/billinfo/1999-00/senate/5425-5449/5449_sbr_03301999.txt)>; for a commentary see <<http://www.americanpartisan.com/cols/malmsten/021100.htm>>.

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# Perspective

Justin Mallone

Vice-President, ASFAR

<editor@asfar.org>

A phenomenon I've always found fascinating regarding ASFAR is the incredible diversity of political and philosophical backgrounds it attracts. People from all political stripes, from liberal to conservative, from socialist to libertarian, join ASFAR for the common purpose of eliminating age-based laws they deem wrong. A question worth probing is: what is the reason behind this?

I would say it is because of ASFAR's straightforward position and singular focus. Unlike other civil liberties groups, which tackle a variety of issues in different areas, ASFAR focuses on the one area of eliminating age restrictions. Organizations which have a singular focus tend to draw from a broader spectrum of viewpoints than those organizations that cover more areas, because those with a singular focus have much less of a chance alienating potential members with their other viewpoints.

Another essential part of ASFAR's broad appeal is its lack of statements on economic issues. This, truly, is what I find to be the key to maintaining ASFAR's appeal across the spectrum. People may agree with you about the immorality of age restrictions, but start harping on what the proper economic system should be, and you've probably just alienated half your audience, at least. This doesn't mean that people check their economic principles at the

door when they join ASFAR. Quite the contrary. I myself have some very strong principles on the matter (incidentally, I support true laissez-faire capitalism, for those who care to know) but I recognize that ASFAR is not the place to attempt to advance them. There's a million and one other organizations I can join which are sympathetic to my viewpoint, but just as I wouldn't want a one-issue organization dedicated to, say, lowering taxes to suddenly adopt a youth rights position and thus undermine its support base and hurt its chances of lowering taxes, I would not want ASFAR to adopt a broad economic agenda which leans in *any* direction. It would hurt us tactically and also be contrary to the spirit of the organization as one that welcomes all people who seek to advance the rights of young people by abolishing age restrictions.

Certainly not least important is the chord ASFAR strikes with many people. Perhaps they see age-based restrictions as an abomination and monumental example of hypocrisy in a nation that professes that professes that its people are equal under the law. Perhaps they were advanced "for their age", and have experienced first-hand the injustice of judging people based on the particular series of numbers on their birth certificate. Whatever the particular reason, ASFAR **hits home** for many people, as can be seen by the occasionally fiery and impassioned debate that takes place on the ASFAR list. Many people, not knowing where else to voice their discontent, and

## The Really Big Tent

tired of being belittled and ridiculed for what they believe, express their frustration and exhaustion with the current state of youth rights on the discussion list. While we certainly welcome people sharing their stories, there are a variety of other ways through which people can channel their discontent.

### Fuel for the Fight

Often times, it seems that people let themselves get beaten down by the consensus as opposed to standing up for what they believe. When people say things like "You'll never be taken seriously!", "You're fighting the wrong fight!" and "Nobody will listen to you!", too often, it seems, the reaction on the part of the principled person is "Maybe they're right?" What one needs to do though, instead of giving up in despair and giving into the enemy, is to take that criticism and consider it a challenge. Learn to **feed** off it. When people say things in the vein of the negative comments mentioned above, one must not give in to doubt. One must take that criticism and say, "Oh yeah? I'll show them!" One must take the negativity of other people and turn it into something positive. Often, iron-clad principles and deeply-held convictions can seem like a heavy burden to carry, considering the criticism they provoke and the trouble they can cause. But one must realize that the feeling of being burdened is a self-imposed one. One can take the criticisms and turn them into a fuel which will power the engine of your conscious mind and carry you with incredible strength through the difficult battles that lie ahead.

— **ONE MUST TAKE THE  
NEGATIVITY OF OTHER PEOPLE  
AND TURN IT INTO SOMETHING POSITIVE** —

## End the Police School!

"TAKE OFF YOUR HAT!" a hall monitor built like a linebacker yells at a high school senior walking through the "commons" area towards the lunchroom.

"What?" the senior asks incredulously.

"DO YOU THINK I'M JOKING?"

A bit frightened by the threatening tone of the imposing hired mass, our senior complies and conforms.

After getting lunch and sitting on the "common" steps to eat, our senior puts his fleece golf hat back on. Near the end of lunch break, after peacefully eating his lunch, our senior is confronted once again: "Give me the hat; you'll get it back after school." Not trusting hall monitor's intentions, our senior takes the hat off and puts it away, standing there silently waiting to see what happens next. Taking out his pad of detention slips, hall monitor demands, "Give me your name." Not caring or having the time to stay after school and get punished for simply wearing a hat (he has laundry to do and a job to go to), our senior gives a false name and is done with it.

Is this story familiar to you? Do you have friends this has happened to? Do you think the power given to insensitive, disrespectful, wannabe cops has gone waaaaaaaaay overboard? Do you think the whole attitude of those in "authority" at your high school has changed in the last several years for the worse?

It was not always like this. You used to be free to wear a hat. You used to be free to go wherever you liked during an assembly. I hear that certain styles of pants are off-limits. I hear that students' collar lines can be no more than 1.5 inches lower than their necks. Are hall monitors going to start holding a ruler up to girls' chests to make sure they are within the limit? Where does it stop? What if tomorrow a rule is made that says everyone is required to wear underwear? Perhaps our hall monitors could stop everyone at the door and inspect you all. This may seem ridiculous, but if people who get their wages from our tax dollars are allowed to take away your personal property such as hats or other things, then it is a small step

to encroach further on your liberties. You used to be FREER than you are now in school! The Supreme Court of the United States ruled that students' rights DO NOT END AT THE SCHOOL DOOR! You are a free person! This is AMERICA! I listen to stories of how it is now and get a sick feeling in my stomach. I get Mad. This is not the way to treat people. You are a person and citizen of the United States. You are not to be yelled at or threatened, or have your civil rights violated in any other way. You mustn't stand for this.

"In our system, state-operated schools may not be enclaves of totalitarianism. School officials do not possess absolute authority over their students. Students in school as well as out of school are 'persons' under our Constitution." Justice Abe Fortas, *Tinker v. DesMoines* (1969).

Peace and Freedom,

Daniel McGuire



For the full cartoon and more on Proposition 21 see <<http://www.colorlines.com/waronyouth/>>

## News Link

### California Declares War on Youth

California's Proposition 21 was passed on March 7, 2000 by 62% of voters. The measure increases penalties for kids 14 or older for a wide range of offenses. Trial as an adult for 14-year-olds is now automatic for many crimes. For more information, see <<http://vote2000.ss.ca.gov/VoteGuide/Propositions/21analysis.htm>> and <<http://www.drcnet.org/wol/128.htm#editorial>>.

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# Sue's Review

Susan Wishnetsky  
Secretary, ASFAR

Arons, Stephen. *Short Route to Chaos: Conscience, Community, and the Re-Constitution of American Schooling*. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997.

Public schools have never been terribly successful at reflecting or accommodating diversity, whether religious, cultural, or individual. In its early years public education was expected not only to create a literate and educated population of voters and workers, but also to facilitate the assimilation of its diverse student body into a common American culture, uniting them in patriotism and appreciation of democracy, as well as a shared foundation of knowledge. Preserving or respecting the differences between students was not one of its goals. But in recent years, parents, religious leaders and special interest groups have engaged in increasingly hostile battles over the schools' perceived exclusion of or hostility toward their cultures, beliefs, or world views.

In *Short Route to Chaos*, author Stephen Arons joins these diverse groups in their appeal for greater flexibility, choice, and inclusion of community values in education, claiming that there is no "one best system" for educating children. "America's cultural diversity" he states "remains a significant source of its social and economic creativity and is essential to democratic discourse and sound political decision making." He blasts the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, the Bush/Clinton plan to standardize education on a national level, as a dangerous and tyrannical mandate of conformity, which he claims will "turn Americans against each other and ultimately transform potential unity into virtual repression".

Arons examination of the battles over education is fascinating and thoughtful, and his accounts of the various cases seem to be presented fairly and evenly, giving as much weight to secular concerns and liberal views as conservative views and religious beliefs. The information contained in his book is valuable and well-documented, and its organization is coherent, presenting the dilemma of educators trying to involve parents in their children's education and incorporate the subject matter and values demanded by their community into the curriculum, only to meet with bitter resistance and legal challenges from opposing factions, as good teachers become more and more subject to bureaucratic control, unable to use their skill and creativity to inspire students in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom.

Throughout the book, while focusing on the "needs of the students" as his primary concern, Arons continually identifies the students with their families and the communities to which they belong. In citing *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, in which an Amish family won exemption in 1972 from the state's compulsory education laws, Arons is sympathetic to the family's claim that exposure of their teenagers to the worldly ways of public school students was a

threat to their way of life. While Arons is eager to promote the freedom of communities to follow their beliefs, he forgets that the children of these communities are captives within them. He ignores the need of individuals to be exposed to alternatives to their community, and to be prepared to choose a different course, if they choose.

After quoting extensively from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Arons summarizes his position concerning families dealing with schools that are unresponsive to their needs: "Anybody who is forced to participate in a community — who does not have a reasonable way out — will find that private negotiating power is diminished, personal integrity is devalued, and individual conscience is trivialized. Like any monopoly, an involuntary school community can easily ignore the views or needs of dissenting individuals who either cannot realistically go elsewhere or who, if they do leave, cannot take with them the resources they need to participate in another community." But Arons fails to realize that this is precisely the position in which many children find themselves, not only with their school communities, but with their families and the communities to which their families belong.

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— ARONS  
JOINS THESE  
DIVERSE GROUPS  
IN THEIR APPEAL FOR  
GREATER FLEXIBILITY,  
CHOICE, AND INCLUSION OF  
COMMUNITY VALUES IN EDUCATION —

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Arons recommendation, sure to receive a great deal of support from many disillusioned and disheartened parents and politicians, is to remove all government control — federal, state, and local — from schools. Arons proposes a system of public funding for the education of every child, unaffected by the family's local tax base, to equalize the educational opportunities for all children. And with that grant of funding, each family with a child would have the right to choose the school that the child will attend, including home school. Except as justified by a compelling government interest, no regulation would be applied by any agency of government to any school, teacher, curriculum, instructional materials, or any other aspect of the content of schooling.

If Arons believes that schools unfettered by government regulations will experience a flowering of free discourse and intellectual freedom among teachers and students, I think he is mistaken. Removing government from the picture places school administrators, catering to like-minded communities of parents, in charge of the indoctrination of students. In many cases, the restrictions on teachers and learners in these unregulated schools will be far more severe than those imposed by the government. Inequality of education, as measured by students' ability to formulate and achieve their own goals in life, will continue and perhaps even increase with such a system.

— DWYER  
BELIEVES THAT  
THE AUTHORITY TO  
MAKE DECISIONS FOR  
ONE'S CHILDREN SHOULD BE  
CONSIDERED A PARENTAL PRIVILEGE,  
RATHER THAN A SACROSANCT RIGHT —

Editor's note: Content of reviewed books is not necessarily the opinion of ASFAR.

## Two Books on Education

Dwyer, James G. *Religious Schools v. Children's Rights*.  
Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1998.

*Religious Schools v. Children's Rights* by James G. Dwyer provides a good response to Arons' book. Dwyer's book examines not only the practices and consequences of parochial education, but the general concept of parental rights over their children. Using extensive legal arguments, Dwyer shows that the total control granted to parents over every aspect of their children's lives is contrary to the spirit of the U.S. Constitution and case law precedents governing adults, even incompetent adults. While Dwyer accepts that most parents care for and should be permitted to raise their children unimpeded by government intervention, he believes that the authority to make decisions for one's children should be considered a parental privilege, rather than a sacrosanct right, and that the welfare of the child must be the primary concern, rather than the desires or beliefs of the parents.

Dwyer systematically examines the arguments that could be used to suggest that children born into certain communities constitute a special class of children, with different needs and deserving of different or special treatment. He concludes that the only characteristic they share is the beliefs of their parents, and argues that this feature is not sufficient to warrant unequal treatment or protection. Dwyer also discusses the case of *Wisconsin v. Yoder* and the argument that some minority com-

munities need special protection to ensure the very survival of their distinctive cultures. Dwyer agrees that minority groups like the Amish need protection from the intrusion of the modern world upon their way of life, but insists that such protection cannot go so far as to ensure that their culture will *never* "dwindle and come to an end" as a result of succeeding generations choosing to leave the community. The continued survival of a community beyond its current generation of members, Dwyer maintains, can not and should not be protected by law, for the right of its members to form and carry out informed decisions to remain with or leave the communities into which they were born is not outweighed by the desire of their elders to have them carry on their traditions.

Dwyer would like to see governmental regulations *expanded* to include private and parochial schools, particularly with regard to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits sex discrimination toward public school students. The practices of segregation by gender and denial of education to female students are especially common in parochial schools, and are no less damaging to their students than they would be to the rest of the student population.

While I don't believe that the recommendations in either book constitute a complete solution to the problem of providing a good education to all American students, I do recommend both books for their information and well-reasoned arguments. Both would be good additions to the bookshelves of any youth advocate.

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# Letters

*continued from page 2*

*Opinions expressed may not reflect the views of ASFAR.*

## Rethinking Education and Government

Today there is great concern about the quality of American education, and deservedly so. With crumbling infrastructures, overcrowded classrooms, mandated attendance, and an atmosphere often more akin to a prison than a place of learning, Americans have every right to be concerned about the current situation.

It's worth recalling that education is NOT the proper domain of the Federal Government. The Constitution grants no power to the Federal Government on the issue of education, yet the Government claims and exercises vast powers over the public education system, particularly through the Department of Education, and often doing so in the name of "better education for all American children". The truth, however, is that the Department of Education (created in the first place as a payoff to the National Education Association for its early endorsement of Jimmy Carter's presidential candidacy in 1976) is not only a waste of taxpayer money to the tune of as much as \$70 billion, but it also needs to be abolished if we truly want to uphold the principles of limited government enshrined in our Constitution.

This is not even as particularly radical or novel an idea as some may think. Abolishing the Department of Education was one of Ronald Reagan's campaign promises when he ran for President in 1980. Fulfilling that promise is long overdue, and the time to do it is now.

That's why I support the Separation of School and State <<http://www.sepschool.org>>. Government-run schooling has ruined the educational experience and crushed free-market alternatives through taxes for long enough! It's time to begin a serious national initiative to eliminate this monumental affront to the dignity and freedom of all Americans who have to endure the Government's twelve-year sentence.

So how can this initiative be achieved? Well, separation is already happening de facto as students choose private- and home-schooling, as well as innovations such as co-op and on-line schooling. As millions more leave the "public" schools, we'll reach a point at which everyone will want out, and support for government schools will collapse. However, until that great day, it's up to those concerned about youth rights to fight against the Government's wasteful and destructive involvement in education, against mandatory uniforms and other such policies which further compound an immoral injustice with another immoral injustice, and against the compulsory schooling laws which force millions to endure the results of the Government's experimental meddling in education.

In summary, I'd say that given its track record, the best role for the Government in education is no role at all. It's time we liberated the minds and bodies of America's children from the choke chain of government control. And with technology, persistence, and truth on our side, we will succeed.

-Aaron Biterman

## News Link

### Israeli Court Says No to Spanking

The Israeli Supreme Court has ruled that corporal punishment by parents is "not effective from an educational point of view and causes serious harm to the child". The ruling effectively bans the practice of spanking. Israel joins nine other countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Austria, Cyprus, Croatia, Latvia, and Italy) which have banned corporal punishment.

For an article on the Israeli court's ruling see <<http://www.jpost.com/2000/01/26/News/News.1724.html>>.

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## Drugging of Children

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Many other psychotropics are prescribed for children, but the only other drugs that appear to be prescribed with frequency are the neuroleptics, the class of drugs including Haldol and Thorazine. These are generally prescribed for short-term relief of nausea, temporary control of behavior, or at very low doses to treat Tourette's Syndrome. Long-term use is commonly limited to autistic children who display uncontrollable self-destructive behaviour, although long-term use for general behavior control is often seen in institutional settings. Neuroleptic drugs *do* cause Parkinson-type motor disorders and tardive dyskinesia when taken for many years.<sup>12</sup>

Risks accompany the use of any medication, and physicians are generally trained to consider the "risk/benefit" ratio in each situation before prescribing or recommending a drug.<sup>13</sup> But when an underage patient is brought into the doctor's office by caretakers seeking treatment for the child's behavioral problems, one must ask, who stands to benefit from the treatment? For example, in the case of sleeping disorders, it may be the caretakers who are the sole beneficiaries of the treatment, which prevents child care responsibilities from interfering with their own schedules. A child may also benefit indirectly if caretakers are well-rested and free of resentments, but is drugging a child really the best way to accomplish this?

**Almost all psychotropic drug prescriptions for preschool children are "off-label", that is, prescribed for populations for which no standards of dosage have been established, or for conditions for which the product is not indicated and has not been tested.**<sup>14</sup> Ritalin, for example, is not approved by the FDA for use by children under age six. Elavil is "not recommended ... for patients under 12 years of age." And neither Prozac nor Clonidine are approved for pediatric use at all.<sup>15</sup> But doctors are not constrained by these FDA recommendations; in the case of children below the recommended minimum ages, they may extrapolate the dosage amounts based on adult dosage and the weight of their patient.<sup>16</sup>

Medications may also be prescribed for conditions not indicated for its usage. Prozac, for example, is only indicated for treatment of depression, bulimia and obsessive-compulsive disorder, and Elavil is only indicated for treating depression. In the most recent edition of the

*Physicians' Desk Reference*, clonidine is *only* listed as an anti-hypertension drug.<sup>17</sup> Yet doctors have experimented with these and many other medications — not in clinical trials, but on a patient-by-patient basis — to treat separation anxiety, crying, bedwetting, and sleep disorders that are commonly associated with preschool-age children.<sup>18</sup>

Some children's behavior that physicians attempt to modify with drug treatment are not even considered true disorders by the psychiatric community. For example, one study reported the treatment of 2-4 year olds with imipramine (a TCA indicated for depression) for their bedwetting problem,<sup>19</sup> but bedwetting is not even considered a disorder worthy of treatment when it occurs before the age of five.<sup>20</sup>

**Psychotropic drugs are being prescribed to children even younger than two years of age.** In the study of pharmacy records done by Zito et al., the researchers were unable to investigate the use of medications on children younger than two because years of birth in Medicaid records were recorded in two-digit fields, making it impossible to determine whether a patient was 1 or 100 years old.<sup>21</sup> However, according to FDA marketing data, around 3000 prescriptions for Prozac were issued for children *younger* than one year old.<sup>22</sup>

Little else is known about prescribing patterns of psychotropic drugs to infants in North America, because publications which record such patterns use age groupings, with ages 0-5 considered a single group. Some studies in Europe, however, have shown that starting even prolonged psychotropic drug use at age one or earlier is not unheard of.<sup>23</sup>

While warnings exist against the use of psychotropics by pregnant women to avoid exposing the unborn child to the chemicals, many of the same agents may be administered to an infant by doctors practically as soon as it leaves the womb. Aside from the possibility of occurrence of listed side-effects, giving powerful drugs to infants is especially worrisome in terms of their effects on the developing brain. While an infant's ability to metabolize drugs (thus avoiding poisoning and liver damage) is similar to that of adults, the brain's synaptic structure, on which these drugs work, does not achieve its maximum density until about the age of three.<sup>24</sup> Rodent studies of the effects of psychotropics given in this stage of development have indicated the possibility of permanent deficits in brain function,<sup>25</sup> but no comparable studies have been done on human subjects.

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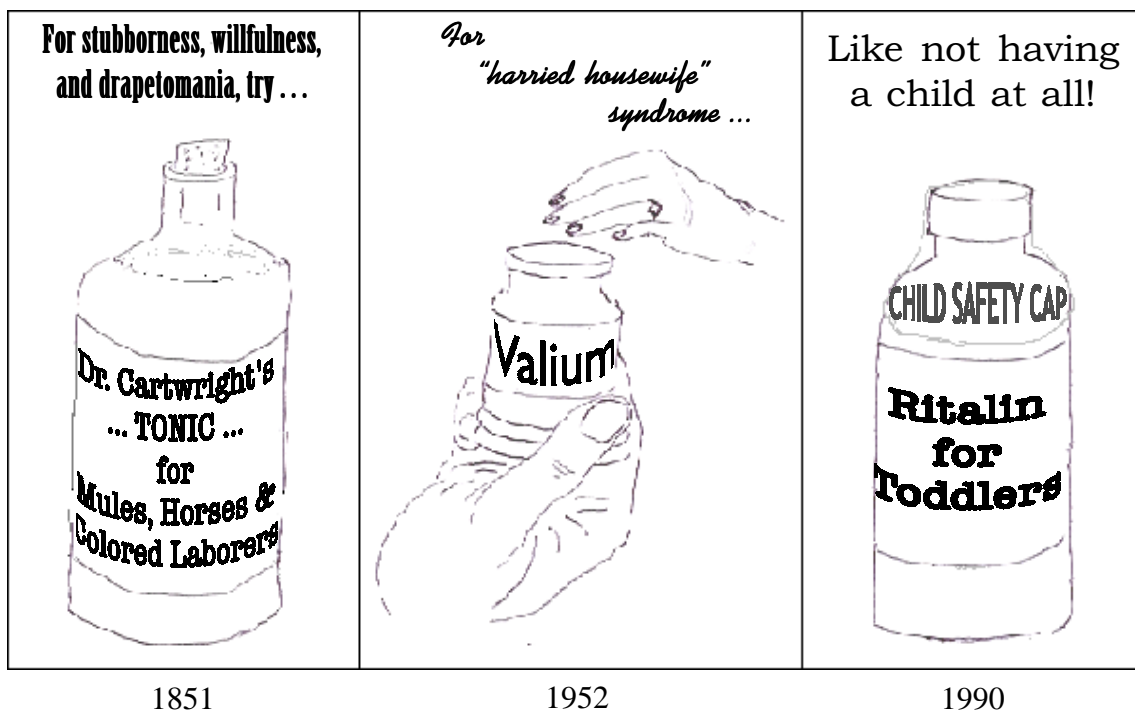
## Drugging of Children

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**Treatment of young children with psychotropic drugs is, more often than not, the only treatment provided.** Psychiatric guidelines make it clear that drug treatment does not *cure* psychological disorders or problems, but only helps to control symptoms,<sup>26</sup> and that psychosocial intervention and therapy are necessary to help patients understand and manage their own behaviors, thoughts and feelings. However, the evidence indicates that fewer than half of preschool children receiving drugs for ADHD, at least in Medicaid populations, were given psychotherapy as well.<sup>27</sup>

ily members, to be useful. They have no way of investigating the accuracy of the parents' perceptions, and must simply rely on the assumption that the parents are representing the best interest of the child.

**The use of psychotropic drugs on preschool (as well as school-age) children appears to be more prevalent among Medicaid populations – in which poor and non-white families, as well as children in foster care, are overrepresented – than among HMO groups.** Zito et al. also found a geographic difference between two Medicaid groups, which revealed significantly more dispensing of the most common psychotropics to preschoolers in the Midwest group than in the Mid-Atlantic group.<sup>28</sup>



The extent to which psychological disorders are caused by biological factors has long been debated, and remains unresolved. One can argue that rebellious, defiant, or aggressive behavior can be, in many cases, a healthy response to oppressive or provocative circumstances, and that it may be the environment, not the individual, that is in need of modification. Even psychiatric professionals who accept biological determinism as a valid behavioral model generally recognize the influence of a person's environment on their behavior, and realize that the individual patient may not be the only one in need of treatment. Family therapy is often recommended to help families find constructive ways to express their feelings and resolve their differences. But when children are too young to communicate their experiences, physicians probably do not generally view psychotherapy, for the patient or other fam-

Is there a substantial difference in the children in these three groups that warrants different levels of drug treatment? It's more likely that policy differences between the health care groups account for the difference in time and money invested in kids. Dispensing a drug to satisfy a parent or caretaker is a quick fix, which may be exactly what is desired by parents, physicians, and funding agencies which lack the resources to pursue more expensive therapeutic options.

**Virtually no controlled testing of psychotropic drugs has been carried out which can apply to preschool children.**<sup>29</sup> Although ethical issues of consent to receive a drug and potential harm which can be caused by untested agents has been a barrier to clinical trials involving children, these

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concerns have apparently not deterred physicians from prescribing “off-label” to individual pediatric patients. But the major source of reluctance to conduct clinical trials on children exhibiting symptoms of psychological disorders seems to be the necessity of a matched placebo group, consisting of children who will be, for the duration of the trial, *deprived* of medications which might have benefitted them.

With no clinical trials to determine the effectiveness of psychotropic drugs for young children, doctors rely on case reports in medical journals, as well as results reported by teachers and caretakers. While one may expect the effectiveness of a drug in modifying a “problem” behavior to be accurately reported, the total effect of a drug on a small child’s well being can only be guessed at. Even if the child is able to describe the effects or side-effects they experience, this report is likely to be conveyed to the doctor by a caretaker, who (intentionally or unintentionally) may minimize or exaggerate the effects of the drug.

**Psychotropic drug use on preschoolers is not confined to the United States.** Studies in Canada, England, France and Germany have also shown increases in this practice. One survey of school children in 609 primary schools around Strasbourg, France revealed that 12.1% of the children enrolled were receiving at least one psychotropic drug at the time of school entry, 36% of whom had started receiving the drugs at the age of one or younger.<sup>30</sup>

The use of medications to alter our thoughts, feelings and behaviors is controversial. Questions can be raised about whether personality differences among individuals, even when they may cause conflicts or interfere with an individual’s own goals and desires, might have advantages that are not immediately apparent. One can point to famous scientists, artists, musicians and writers who suffered from psychological disorders, and wonder whether they would have been as creative or brilliant had they been treated with modern medicines. On the other hand, there is no denying that many individuals have found psychotropic drug treatment to be enormously helpful in reducing their unwanted symptoms. The decision should be up to the individual patient.

In the case of pediatric medication, the choice is *not* made by the patient. The initial complaint to the doctor, the choice of the drug, and the assessment of its effectiveness are all made by people other than the patient. If a drug is being used on a child for lifesaving or critical health purposes, the decision is obvious. But when a mind-altering drug is given to children, without consent, in order to make them behave the way we would like, it deprives them of the only thing they can truly be said to own: themselves.

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# News Link

## Chicago Cannot Get Rid of Loitering Law

After Chicago's 1992 loitering ordinance (responsible for more than 42,000 arrests between 1992 and 1995) was found unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court on June 10, 1999, the City Council began crafting a new one to get around the Court's objections. The new bill, intended to target "narcotics-related" and "gang" loitering while leaving innocent young people alone, was approved on February 16, 2000; new legal challenges are anticipated.

Mayor Daley's press release praising the new law can be seen at <http://www.cityofchicago.org/Mayor/SpecialNotices/GangLoiteringOrdinance.2000.2.16.html>. A counterpoint is found at <http://www.bobbyrush.com/loiter.htm>.

## Utah Driving Restrictions Defeated

SB 93, a bill to prevent teens from driving unchaperoned with friends or dates, approved by the Utah Senate, was defeated by the Utah House of Representatives on February 9, 2000.

A report on this vote can be seen at <http://www.sltrib.com/2000/feb/02102000/legislat/24678.htm>.

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