

Ritalin, Prozac and kids, oh my!

Prescribing young children mood-altering drugs a dangerous, careless policy



HEATHER CORBELL

Two-year-olds are energetic. They also have very distinct moods. When given a toy, they are ecstatic and believe there is nothing better in the world than their new treasure. If the toy is taken away, they are crushed and often extremely angry. This is normal two-year-old behavior. In adults, such actions might be evidence of obsessive-compulsive disorders, hyperactivity or outright madness, but children can hardly be held accountable to adult standards. It follows, then, that children cannot be psychoanalyzed in the same way as adults. Unfortunately they are, and doctors are more likely than ever to place preschoolers on drugs such as Prozac and Ritalin. These drugs pose potential dangers to the health of small children, and they also make chemical dependents out of kids, doctors and parents.

Pills are becoming a temporary quick fix to serious problems.

Three weeks ago, the Journal of the American Medical Association reported that psychiatric drug prescriptions among preschoolers (children ages 2-4) increased by 50 percent from 1991 to 1995. In one study, this meant that 12 out of every 1,000 preschoolers surveyed were taking some kind of psychiatric medication.

These numbers worry doctors because the effect of drugs like Prozac and Ritalin on small children are still virtually unknown. A possibility exists that the drugs impede brain development. Further, in some cases where the sleeping pill Clonidine was prescribed to kids, they experienced fainting and slowed heartbeats. Dr. Joseph T. Coyle of Harvard Medical School adds that there is no evidence that psychiatric drug treatments even work on young children.

Pills are becoming a temporary quick fix to serious problems. Prozac, for example, is being prescribed more and more to people who struggle with short-term depression, rejection, self-esteem and grief. As long as the patient takes a pill, he or she is able to remain positive and functional. But, when the stupor wears off, problems remain. Pills only provide an illusion of normalcy and strength.

The same is true of the drugs prescribed to children. Ritalin has long been prescribed for hyperactivity. However, it is becoming a replacement for

discipline and self-control. Kids are subdued by Ritalin, instead of by a knowledge of how to behave appropriately. It is disturbing to think what these children will be like when they are finally taken off the drug. Because the chemical balance of their systems is so dependent on Ritalin, kids may become uncontrollable. Further, their bodies might shut down completely as they go through withdrawal.

Psychiatric drugs also serve as a crutch for parents who do not know how to deal with their highly active children. They may be unwilling to invest the time and patience that it takes to teach a child the right way to act, or worse, they may interpret the energy and curiosity of children as an illness. Too often, parents think that there is something wrong with a healthy, energetic child who runs through the house and colors on the walls. Their misconceptions are corroborated by doctors who prescribe stimulants to slow these

children down. In this way, parents, children and doctors are becoming chemically dependent. Kids count on drugs to calm them down, which enables them to completely side-step learning self-control. Parents get out of teaching discipline when they administer pills, and doctors make their jobs as easy as writing a prescription.

What is the effect on children when they start taking mood-altering drugs as early as two years old? They learn chemical dependence, but they also form a habit. If they are taught to pop pills daily in order to be the person society thinks they should be, what will prevent them from continuing the habit as they get older? Two-year-olds are learning the fast way to be fun, and a new generation of addicts is created by doctors and parents.

The dangers of drugging children are numerous. Parents risk stunting the development of their children and turning them into addicts. They also miss out on the joy and challenge of teaching kids how to be noble, functional people. It seems that doctors and parents are looking for the easy way out when it comes to behavioral problems. But the problems are just beginning. If the prescription trend increases, society could end up with a dysfunctional, chemically-dependent generation still living at home and popping pills in 20 years.

Heather Corbell is a junior English major.

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Declaration symbol of unity, not derision

The New Jersey state legislature recently discussed a bill that would require children in grades three through 12 to daily recite a section of the Declaration of Independence.



JILL RILEY

Students reciting "All men are created equal" would normally be considered a positive occurrence in a typical American school. Instead, the phrases from the Declaration have turned into "fightin' words."

The bill's goal is to saturate children's minds with democratic values, according to the Associated Press. The bill, sponsored by New Jersey Sen. Gerald Cardinale, R-Demarest, ran two votes short of passing the legislation in this most recent session. However, Cardinale said he will try it again — not surprising, considering the bill has been floating through New Jersey's legislature for 13 years.

"If the America we know is to continue in its mission, our children must have a clear grasp of this mission statement," Cardinale said.

Whether the Declaration truly includes all men constitutes the largest protest over the bill. When the document was written, the United States still accepted the practice of slavery. Therefore, opponents say, African-Americans were not included when the document states, "all men are created equal."

"I would never have my grandchildren stand in a class and repeat these words when at the time they were written they didn't include them," said Sen. William Bryant, D-Lawnside. "It is clear African-Americans were not included."

This racial argument should be considered invalid in the year 2000. Slavery has been abolished for more than a century, and

most Americans have come to the conclusion that all men, no matter their color, have the same unalienable rights and deserve to be treated with equal respect.

The Declaration does not make clear its application to women, either. However, the term "all men" should be considered to include all of humankind. Turning the meaningful philosophy of the Declaration into a bicker over two words is petty.

At the time the Declaration was written, political correctness had not been extensively outlined as it has in the present day. Writers of the

some feel it to be racially and sexually biased would be a mistake.

"These words belong to all of us and not some of us," said Sen. Norman Robertson, R-Clifton.

For the time being, independent schools in New Jersey have the power to decide whether to make the recitation a daily one.

The Golden Door Charter School in Jersey City, N.J., requires students to recite the sentences, but the students say "all people are created equal" instead of "all men."

"We need to get past [the race issue] and not neglect the importance of the ideas," said Golden Door principal Karen Jones.

Changing "men" to "people" would not be necessary if teachers took the time to sensitively explain the history of the document and why such ideals are so important.

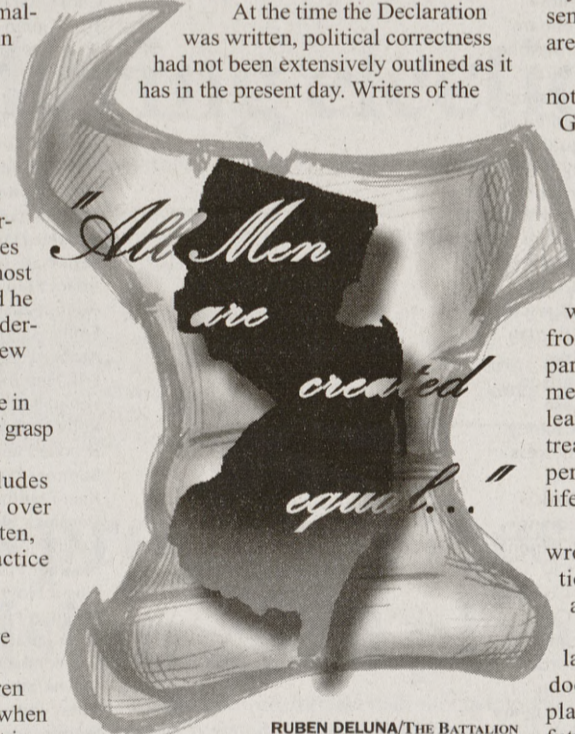
Children coming from homes where equality is not taught can learn from the Declaration. They will verbally participate in furthering the idea that all men are created equally. They will also learn that even though not all men are treated equally, they should be. That each person is born with unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Positive words such as these can do no wrong. The legislators in favor of recitation hope the bill will open eyes and aid acceptance.

Americans should not shun the Declaration of Independence. It is a historic document that still holds an important place in America's future — a promising future where one day, all men will be both created equal and treated equally.

Students in New Jersey should recite words reinforcing the basis of America — democracy. And the entire nation should join in.

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RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

Declaration did not have many sources telling them that using the word "men" to imply "humankind" might be offensive to some.

The United States has made a lot of changes during its existence, and dismissing the Declaration of Independence because

LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

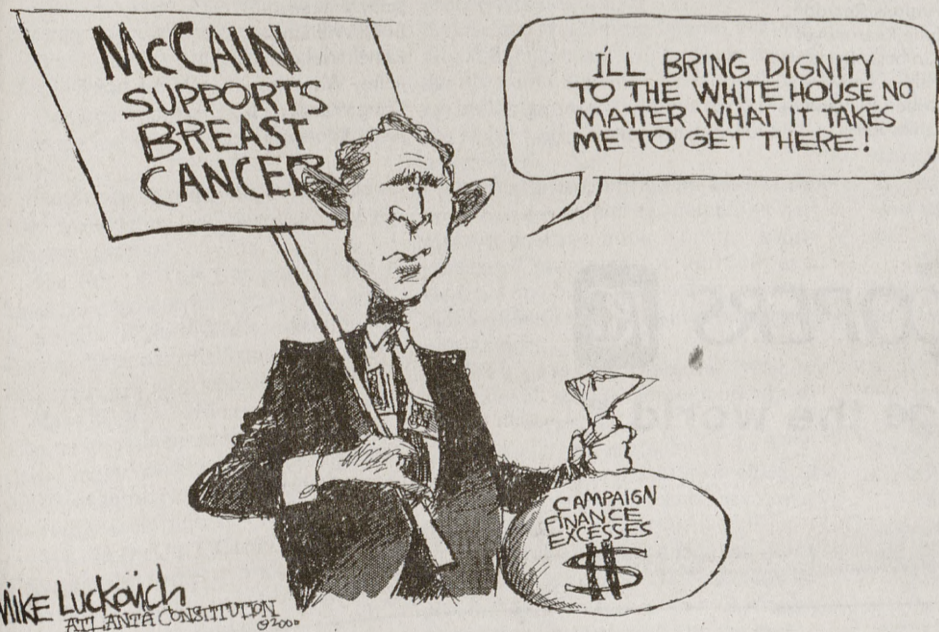
Bonfire firm's theory spawns more guesses

Last week, representatives from McKinsey & Co., a consulting firm overseeing the Bonfire Commission, announced to the eager ears of press and public that they found the cause of the collapse of the 1999 Aggie Bonfire. However, the firm said they wanted to further test their "answer" with outside engineers, and they would wait until May to make an official announcement explaining the collapse.

Not willing to wait until then, many anxious Aggies have begun guessing about what the conclusion might be. This past Sunday, the *Austin-American Statesman* listed a catalog of speculative reasons for bonfire's collapse.

While it is understandable, and even commendable, that McKinsey & Co. want more time to test their theory, by making a premature announcement and telling the press they found the cause of the collapse, the firm brought the issue into the spotlight once again and has given rise to more rumors and conjecture.

At a time when Aggies are looking for solid answers and certain facts about the fall of bonfire, McKinsey & Co. are leading the public to fruitless guess-work. The firm should, without question, continue to test their theory. However, they should keep further conclusions a private matter and avoid even more public speculation. In many Aggies' mind there is a question as to what caused the fall of bonfire. McKinsey & Co. should not tell the public they have the answer before they have finished testing their theory.



Harvard election scandal overrated

In response to Nicholas Roznovsky's Mar. 21 column.

A college student cuts some corners in his school election and Harvard becomes "just another cesspool of corrupt politics and moral depravity?"

Maybe the student wasn't as strictly disciplined as Roznovsky would have liked because it was such a trite issue. Last week my friend's bike was stolen, so does that make Texas A&M a "School of Corruption"?

In fact, A&M has had its share of issues that make Harvard's little scandal look petty. Rape charges in the Corps, hazing everywhere and drinking at the Bonfire site all out-shine a Harvard student going over budget during his campaign.

I definitely understand that Harvard made a mistake, but Roznovsky went overboard in his criticism. Calling Harvard's respectability a "myth" and claiming they attempted to mask

their scandals with "fancy Latin phrases" is so ridiculous that if any Harvard student gets his hands on the article, A&M would become a laughing stock in the Crimson.

Casey Friesenhahn
Class of '03

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