

Parents being misguided about Attention Deficit Disorder

by Philip Ulanowsky

Teenagers with ADD, A Parents' Guide

by Chris A. Zeigler Dendy, MS
The Special Needs Collection, Woodbine House,
Bethesda, Md. 1995
370 pages, paperbound, \$16.95

The increasing dominance of the fields of psychology and psychiatry by the degraded view of man as nothing more than a talking beast, has led to a growing acceptance of the notion, that the human mind may be comprehended by its chemistry alone. So-called Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD, or ADHD, specifying hyperactivity as an included symptom) and its popular "treatment" with Ritalin (methylphenidate), typify the results of this dangerously unscientific logic. A critical look at *Teenagers with ADD* may give the reader an insight into the awful truth behind this, and similar frauds, once the veneer of scientific credibility is stripped away.

Like any number of other alleged disorders codified by the psychiatric profession in the recent decades (the number listed in the diagnosticians' reference manual has, reportedly, nearly tripled in the past 15 years, from just over a hundred to over 300, though homosexuality, for example, is no longer listed), the symptoms for ADD are sufficiently vague to allow very broad inclusion. *Teenagers with ADD* appears to have been written—or, better, constructed—to convince every possible parent, that his or her child probably has ADD, hyperactive or not. Whatever symptoms are claimed, the cause is alleged to be a chemical imbalance in the central nervous system. Some insist that the root is genetic. No proof of either claim exists.

The author is described in the book as a "mental health

consultant" with 24 years of experience, the mother of two teens with ADD, and co-founder of the local chapter of Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder (CHADD) in Gwinnett County, Georgia. CHADD, a national "parents' support" organization, actually functions as a support group for Ciba-Geigy, the manufacturer of Ritalin, from which it receives major funding.

The craft of manipulation

The book's appearance of solid grounding for its argument, results from employment of psychological smoke and mirrors throughout. The opening sentence of the first chapter, gives just a hint of what passes for science in the succeeding, several hundred pages:

"Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is a neurobiological disorder. That is, researchers believe that the symptoms of ADD are caused by chemicals in the brain that are not working properly."

Why does it not read, for example, "ADD is believed to be a neurobiological disorder," or, "Some/many researchers believe that . . ."? There is no basis for the first sentence as written; yet, the entire book rests on it.

Let's go a bit further in this "parents' guide."

"Although *all* children may be inattentive and impulsive at times, youngsters with ADD behave this way more frequently. In addition, their impulsivity and inattention are more likely to cause serious problems at home and school.

"Another hallmark of many teenagers with the disorder is underachievement in school. That is, these students don't perform as well academically as would be expected, given their level of intelligence. For some, but not all, hyperactivity during childhood is also a classic indicator. By adolescence, this hyperactivity has usually subsided, to be replaced by restlessness or sometimes rebelliousness. Seldom will two teen-

agers with ADD behave the same way.”

Thus, we have a neurobiological disorder (“researchers” believe), which causes inattention and impulsivity, which may or may not be symptomized by hyperactivity, poor academic achievement, and restlessness or rebelliousness in teen years, more often than “at times.” How many children have just been described?

Add to this the argument, that “uneven achievement”—doing poorly in one or more areas, while doing well in others—is another sign of this chemical imbalance, and you may see how this psychological quicksand works.

Not far into the book, this sort of loose talk is purportedly substantiated by a short, technical section on neurotransmitters, synapses, chemical imbalances, and so on. The key evidentiary study cited, is one conducted by Dr. Alan Zametkin of the National Institutes of Mental Health, which used a high-tech approach to detect higher brain glucose levels in adults with ADHD. This widely cited study was contradicted by another, similar study by the same fellow, on adolescent males, three years later, which showed no such evidence. However, the latter study is rarely, if ever, acknowledged, and certainly not in *Teenagers with ADD*.

‘Other factors’?

The Zametkin synopsis is then succeeded by the following, remarkable sentence: “Although current research supports the hypothesis that ADD has a genetic/biological basis, other factors may also influence the teenager’s behavior.” The role of parents, family life, and other circumstances of the child’s relationship to the world, are discussed at some length, but never is it suggested, of course, that the essential problem might be other than physical.

The highly manipulative construction of the book is pervasive. The main body of text repeats certain emotionally charged refrains, in order to convince the reader (i.e., parent) of the pertinence of a wide range of ADD “symptoms,” and the importance of accepting the disorder, making the child a “partner in treatment,” seeing drug treatment as a way of allowing the child to be himself/herself, and so on. Thus, over 200 pages in this oversized book, are devoted to counseling parents redundantly, on how to cope with the child, with themselves, with teachers, with other parents, and, of course, with all the psychological complications which may arise from the child’s problems, such as low self-esteem, depression, the parents’ own guilt, etc.

Complementing the main text, are photos of teenagers, some of which show them engaged in risky physical activities, such as daring skateboarding, and some of which do not. These are directly or implicitly captioned with quotes or text, which sometimes appear to have no connection whatsoever.

In addition, quotes are interspersed throughout the text, the implication being, that they “prove” what the text is saying. Again, some seem to match up, some not. Some, however, so obviously speak to completely opposite interpretations of why Johnny can’t concentrate, that their inclusion

can only be viewed as a way of making the reader doubt his basis for even *considering* that something other than ADD could be the cause of his child’s “problems.” Take, for instance, the following:

“ ‘Up until my ADD was diagnosed, I had never done well in school. During class I tended to be real tired and sleep a lot. I guess I thought I was lazy and stupid. Since I started taking Ritalin, I’m making mostly A’s and B’s.’—Shawn, 16”

A subsequent quote from Robert, age 18, is blunt:

“Academically, school wasn’t challenging. I didn’t get any gratification out of the academics. I always felt I could do the work. The work was always easy but I couldn’t concentrate. I’d get attention from [doing] academics but everyone got the same attention. But I could get limitless attention if I misbehaved. I always had good intentions. I always wanted attention but I hated bad attention. But it was the only attention I could get.”

The ironic, double meaning of “attention deficit” is so clear, that it is hard to imagine the quote having been included for anything other than manipulative reasons. Yet, it strikes at the heart of the matter.

The real problem

There is a pervasive and growing problem in our society, with problems symptomized by attention “deficits” and a host of other abnormalities, just as there are pervasive and growing problems with drug abuse, violence, teen suicides, and on down the list. However, whether one takes the “liberal” view, that the problem is chemical or genetic, or the “conservative” view, that the problem lies in television or the public school system, or even the New Age view, that there is no problem, as long as everyone feels good about “processing” through it, the underlying reality will continue to grow worse.

As Lyndon LaRouche continues to emphasize, the pandemic of all these problems has resulted from the three generations (minimally) of social capitulation to fearful irrationality—from the suburb-bound generation of returning World War II veterans, to their Baby-Boomer children, and, in turn, to the “Generation X” children of the Baby-Boomers. Each succeeding generation has fled further from the reality defined by the challenges placed before it by world history, and has thus become more ignorant, more manipulable, and more pathological. The growing acceptance of the notion, that such new labels as Attention Deficit Disorder, Conduct Disorder, and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (not to mention such problems as depression) are genetic or chemical problems, demonstrates a clear case of Mass Superstitious Alchemic Disorder (MSAD).

As LaRouche has elaborated, the problem with psychology, and with the practice of psychiatry, even by insightful and compassionate individuals, has always been, that it has never defined psychological normalcy from any reasonable standpoint: It has never defined the human mind in terms of its essential (i.e., normal) creative nature, that extra-logical capacity of the individual human thought process, by which

mankind, through revolutionary discoveries in knowledge, realized through technological progress, has consciously advanced the relative potential population density of the entire species by orders of magnitude—something of which no other species is capable.

That uniquely human quality of mind, never enters the pages of *Teenagers with ADD*, of course; nor will one find it in the exhaustive literature churned out on the multitude of disorders and their pharmaceutical companions. One can rave that television producers subvert it, and scream that the schools don't teach it. It were better, however, to remember that we, as a society, have stopped living it, and to decide to do something about it.

Degrading the issues, destroying the mind

by Nancy Spannaus

Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy

by James Fallows

New York, Pantheon Books, 1996

296 pages, hardbound, \$23

When a journalist gets attacked in the *New York Times*, it's certainly intriguing. In the case of this book, it was the clue to the fact that journalist James Fallows, now Washington editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, had something trenchant and important to say.

Before *Breaking the News* had been out for two months, *New York Times* managing editor Howell Raines wrote a commentary attacking it. The gist of his attack was that Fallows was demanding that journalists act in the interest of informing the electorate on public policy issues, rather than covering all politics as a "horse race." Raines all but equates the responsible coverage of policy issues, as the equivalent of making "life easy for candidates and officeholders."

Even the *Times* doesn't mind Fallows's attacks on the media celebrities, of course. That they consider part of the genre of mindless, *ad hominem* attack journalism, which they love. They are determined, of course, as tools of the ruling establishment, to be the arbiters of political opinion and decisions, and to feed the cynicism of the population about the political process.

But Fallows has a more important message in this book, than exposing the conflicts of interest and astronomical sala-

ries of "stars" like ABC News's Ted Koppel and Cokie Roberts. He argues that the current mode of journalism is literally destroying the potential for a democratic political process in the United States, both by ignoring substantive policy issues, and by promoting a kind of political contest which is destructive of meaningful citizen participation.

When news became 'entertainment'

It's interesting to note some of the history of journalism's descent, to which Fallows refers. He reports that what are now the major news-entertainment features on TV, were once produced only to meet the rules of the Federal Communications Commission for providing some "public interest" programming. At that point the "talk" or news shows were not even expected to make money for the networks. But, beginning with "60 Minutes" in the early 1970s, Fallows says, that changed. News shows were now supposed to make money, and they gradually became more and more like entertainment, and did bring in mega-bucks.

But this is not merely true with the talking heads on TV. The orientation toward entertainment has also permeated the written press, to the point where it is often impossible to tell anything about a political campaign except "who hit whom?" Fallows puts it this way: "The effect is as flattening and mind-shrinking as if the discussion of every new advance in medicine boiled down to speculation about whether its creator would win the Nobel Prize that year. Regardless of the tone of coverage, medical research will still go on. But a relentless emphasis on the cynical game of politics threatens public life itself, by implying day after day that the political sphere is mainly an arena in which ambitious politicians struggle for dominance, rather than a structure in which citizens can deal with worrisome collective problems."

How opposite to the way in which journalism began in America! At that time, there were often "Gazettes," which concentrated on publishing commercial news, and on publishing government documents, for the perusal of the citizenry. But, nowadays, it is considered anathema for newspapers to publish long government documents, or policy papers by politicians. That's considered "partisan," whereas "real journalism" is located in the back and forth of charges and countercharges between one politician, or political party, and another.

Fallows locates this argument in the opposition of what is called "public journalism" to the standard fare of today. Taking on the institutionalized, and arrogant, dictum of the *New York Times*, he insists that journalism is not, and cannot be, objective and value-free. Journalists all have a point of view, because they have to choose from the massive array of "facts," what they are going to present. So, journalists should be honest and explicit about their point of departure, and deal with the issues they believe to be important in public life.

In the journalism world, apparently, what was called the public journalism movement took off in 1973. The examples which Fallows gives of this movement are not generally im-