

Psychiatry's Cheerleaders and Killer Drugs

by Don Weitz

In a democratic system of thought control...[it is] necessary to take over the entire spectrum of opinion, the entire spectrum of discussion, so that nothing can be thinkable apart from the party line; not just that it be obeyed, but that you can't even think of anything else.

– Noam Chomsky, linguist and political activist

The myths and stereotypes surrounding “mental illness” and the “violent mental patient” are unfortunately alive and well. Medical reporters and columnists, editors and producers in the mainstream, corporate-controlled media in Canada and the United States constantly parrot psychiatry’s discredited medical model of “mental illness,” “mental health,” “safe and effective medication” and “lifesaving” electroshock as though they were proven scientific facts. I charge the corporate-controlled media with promoting fraud – presenting psychiatric opinion and “mental health” ideology as “medical science.” They air psychiatric propaganda – psychobabble – almost every day, repeating like a mantra that “schizophrenia” is a brain disease; that “bipolar mood disorder” is caused by a “chemical imbalance in the brain”; that “Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder” (ADHD) is a neurological disorder. In fact, ADHD is another psychiatric fraud; child psychiatrists are transforming normal children into psychiatric patients and drugging them with Ritalin and/or other addictive amphetamines – alarming facts documented by pediatric neurologist Fred Baughman, Jr. in his book *The ADHD Fraud*. According to other critics such as psychiatrists Thomas Szasz (*The Myth of Mental Illness*) and Peter Breggin (*Toxic Psychiatry*), as well as political science professors Herb Kutchins and Stuart Kirk (*Making Us Crazy*), virtually all psychiatric diagnoses, including hundreds listed in the current edition of psychiatry’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV), are false claims unsupported in the medical and scientific literature. So-called objective and balanced articles and TV specials on “mental illness” or “mental health” produced by the CBC and published in national newspapers never cite credible medical or scientific evidence to support such claims – because there is none. Nevertheless, we’re asked to believe this nonsense.

I also charge the corporate-controlled media with elitism. Personal statements, and in particular psychiatric survivors’ testimony, that criticize forced drugging and electroshock (ECT) and promote non-medical, survivor-run alternatives are routinely dismissed as “anecdotal” or not credible, or, even more commonly, edited out of major news stories on “depression,” “schizophrenia” and “mental illness.” Where are the balance, fairness and accuracy on which the media pride themselves?

When reporting on research findings that support psychiatry-and-Big Pharma claims of the alleged safety and effectiveness of psychiatric drugs, particularly the antidepressants and neuroleptics (“antipsychotics”), the media typically oversimplify them and overstate their scientific credibility, medical and social significance. Challenges to or criticisms of such claims are extremely rare. At the same time, scientific studies whose findings do challenge – or flatly contradict – the notion that these treatments work and are safe are

glossed over. And, although scientific studies conducted over the last ten years have proven conclusively that Prozac, Paxil and other SSRI antidepressants frequently trigger “suicidal ideation,” suicide attempts and mania in young people and others, the media did not even begin reporting on these alarming “side effects” until three or four years ago.

The “violent mental patient” stereotype/myth is currently propagated as fact in many media accounts and comments attempting to explain several mass killings in schools, colleges and universities in the United States. This ‘gun violence, particularly the horrific mass killing of 20 young children and 6 teachers at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newton, Connecticut, is assumed to be caused by a “deranged” or “mentally ill” Adam Lanza – without a shred of credible evidence such as a psychiatric history.

What’s also conspicuously missing in media accounts of the Newtown and other horrific tragedies - including the mass killings at Columbine, Aurora, and Virginia Tech - is the fact that SSRI-antidepressants and some neuroleptics are known to trigger this violence, including mania, suicide and/or homicide. In fact, the corporate media are irresponsibly silent on the close, scientifically-established relationship between powerful psychiatric drugs and violence, while it hypes the old and discredited “violent mental patient” myth. It is this stereotype/myth which is behind U.S. President Obama’s current call for national “background checks” of citizens applying to buy and register guns. At the same time, psychiatrists and other “mental health experts” – and, primarily, Big Pharma and its spin-doctors – market their hype of “safe and effective medication” to the media as scientific fact.

It has been thirty years since I began to criticize media depictions of “mental illness” and “mental health” issues as serious distortions, if not outright lies. It’s time to challenge the media’s pro-psychiatry spin on these and other “mental health” issues.

It’s time the media started telling the horrible truth about the disabling and deadly effects of psychiatric drugs, electroshock (ECT) and other allegedly “safe and effective” psychiatric treatments. Our health and lives are at stake.

Note: Don Weitz is a psychiatric survivor and antipsychiatry activist, co-editor of *Shrink Resistant: The Struggle Against Psychiatry in Canada*, and author of the e-book *Rise Up/Fight Back: Selected Writings of an Antipsychiatry Activist*.