

Opinion

## **Azerrad: Behind the childhood bipolar boom**

**By Jacob Azerrad / Guest Columnist**

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### **Abusing kids by treating behavior like a disease**

“Spotlight,” nominated for six Academy Awards, tells the true story of the harrowing abuse of children by the Catholic Church. Another spotlight is long overdue, for once again, our most vulnerable, our children, are being abused. This time, the abuse is by the medical profession.

Today, children as young as 18 months of age are being given powerful untested antipsychotic drugs. The increase in the use of antipsychotics is directly tied to the rising incidence of one particular diagnosis, bipolar disorder. Experts estimate that the number of children being given this diagnosis is now more than one million and rising, making it more common than autism and diabetes combined.

In a 2008 article, “Are Our Leading Pediatricians Drug Industry Shills?”, pediatrician Dr. Lawrence Diller states “Most parents have never heard of him, but Joseph Biederman of Harvard may be the United States’ most influential doctor when it comes to determining whether their children are normal or mentally ill... Biederman and his team are more responsible than anyone for a child bipolar epidemic sweeping America (and no other country) that has 2-year-olds on three or four psychiatric drugs.

“The science of children’s psychiatric medications is so primitive and Biederman’s influence so great that when he merely mentions a drug during a presentation, tens of thousands of children within a year or two will end up taking that drug, or combination of drugs. This happens in the absence of a drug trial of any kind, instead, the decision is based upon word of mouth among the 7,000 child psychiatrists in America.”

Biederman is also well known as the subject of a three-year congressional investigation into his connection to payments from drug companies that make the drugs which are prescribed for his diagnosis. Drug companies have often backed researchers' works at universities, funding aspects of studies and papers that researchers direct or write. But in Biederman's case, the congressional inquiry claimed that starting in 2000, he took money from drug companies for seven years - violating requirements at his lead institutions Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School. He was sanctioned by both institutions.

Antipsychotic drugs were the nation's top class of drugs by revenue in 2009 at \$14.5 billion. We know that the number of American children and adolescents treated for bipolar disorder increased 40-fold from 1994 to 2003. We know that, according to the New York Times, between 1993 through part of 2008, 1,207 children who were given Risperdal, an anti-psychotic, suffered serious problems. And we know that, tragically, 31 of these children died. They shouldn't have.

In the seven-year period since 1994-1995, which coincides with the introduction of the diagnosis of childhood bipolar disorder, the number of ambulatory visits for children and adolescents with bipolar disorder went from 20,000 to 800,000, and most of them receive drugs.

Challenging childhood behaviors exhibited by young children have remained unchanged for generations. So, why are kids being diagnosed with controversial diagnoses and being prescribed powerful antipsychotic pills? Because over-medicating kids is a symptom of modern parenting. And modern parenting is being led down the road paved by a failed disease model of behavior, a desire for quick fixes, and willing accomplices in the pediatric profession. Parents are taught by the child rearing "experts" to reward bad behavior. That's nonsense. We start by "loving" our kids when they behave badly, and then we drug them by the millions into "good behavior".

What's wrong with the disease model of behavior is that it deals with learned responses as though they were diseases. And by prescribing strong medicines instead of teaching children new choices, it short-circuits the process by which they grow and learn. Worse, it lays the tracks for a lifetime habit of responding to challenge and disappointment with avoidance, denial, and chemical

dependency.

Countless parents, for decades, have simply wanted their children and family back. With continued failed and dangerous attempts at medical-based solutions, leading pediatricians have succeeded in preventing a return to behavior-based models. And the drugging and killing of our children goes on.

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