

neighbors

www.herald.com

SUNDAY, JULY 13, 2003

3 EAST

EAST

The Herald

SOAPBOX

Stimulants and society's ethical decay

In response to Mahvish Khan's article *Drugs used to enhance studying draw concern* [Metro Miami, July 6], I would like to comment on two issues: the prevalence of self-medication and the ethical quagmire it raises.

As Ariel Levy writes in a

recent article in *NEW YORK* magazine, "We have entered the golden age of self-medication."

Khan's article supports this observation by revealing the pharmaceutical high-life making its way onto college campuses. But this phenomenon is not just an adolescent dilemma.

Adults are also increasing their reliance on the medicinal crutch.

The stigma of "pill-popping" is eroding and a lackadaisical attitude to drug use in general is escalating.

For example, with a physician's stroke of a pen, a prescription can magically soothe away any crisis.

Hate to socialize? Take Paxil.

Can't deal with spouse wanting some "elbow room"?

Take Klonopin.

Romance trouble? Take Prozac.

Got to meet a deadline?

Take Ritalin.

Test tomorrow? Take Adderall.

The diagnosis? A pill for every ill.

For young adults, the abuse of prescription stimulants Ritalin and Adderall can become psychological cross-overs that may eventually lead to lifelong dependency and unresolved ethical issues.

If college students are "pill-popping" their way to better GPAs, what does this say about the strength of society's future moral fabric?

Classmates of students using Adderall and Ritalin as study tools consider this an unfair advantage akin to cheating their way through school.

According to Dr. Eric Heilgenstein, director of clinical psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin, "They [Adderall and Ritalin] can be viewed as brain steroids — the productivity levels are so much higher when comparing with students who do not use the medication."

The reality is that using these types of mood-altering drugs without a prescription is not only considered unethical behavior but a felony as well.

Thus evidence of such abuse can negatively affect future opportunities.

So, does self-medicating fuel moral decay? Or is it the other way around?

Has society's eroding moral values fueled the desire to self-medicate? Has relative moral-

ity run amok? The ends satisfying the means?

Consequently, research done by the nonprofit Center for Academic Integrity shows that 75 percent of all students admit to cheating on some level with the common reason being "other people get away with it, so why shouldn't I?"

Moreover, a growing gap exists between reality and perception. According to the 1998 Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth, a nationwide poll of more than 20,000 middle and high school students revealed a "disconnect" between what kids are doing (cheating) and what they think about themselves since 97 percent of the students believe it is important for them to be a "good person."

In fact, adolescents are known to eagerly rationalize their every whim if given the opportunity to do so.

Yes, misuse of prescription stimulants does pose deep concerns — not only as "gateway drugs for further substance abuse," but also as roadblocks to ethical maturity.

MARINO E. CARBONELL
LICENSED
PSYCHOTHERAPIST
CERTIFIED ADDICTION
SPECIALIST