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PERSPECTIVES

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Happiness in a Bottle

NO DOCTOR NEEDED,
JUST POP A PROZAC WHEN LIFE
GETS A LITTLE DULL.



Giovanni Salimena

Drug company's ad campaign nudges us ever closer toward becoming a Prozac nation

America, the land of the free and the home of the consumers. If you have a problem, we have a product that can fix it — or at least make you feel better for a little while. You don't feel manly enough? Buy a Ford. You don't feel sexy? Try this new shade of lipstick. Money, power, love and security can all be purchased with your Visa or Mastercard.

This consumerism has now moved into uncharted territory: mental health. Eli Lilly, a pharmaceutical company, has recently taken out two full-page ads in more than 20 national magazines to tout the virtues of Prozac. Who needs years of counseling when you can take a little pill that will do it all? After all, Prozac is just another product, right?

Wrong. Prozac is a psychoactive prescription drug that is used to treat mental illness.

Unfortunately, doctors can get Prozac for their patients without even consulting a psychiatrist. The symptoms of clinical depression, which is one of the most common uses for antidepressants, are vague and sometimes cannot be distinguished from the kind of depression everyone feels from time to time. This has led to an overprescribing of antidepressants. Twenty-eight million Americans were on antidepressants in 1996, although the American Psychiatric Association reports that at any point in time there are only 16 million adults who suffer from disorders that require antidepressants.

And Eli Lilly's ads for Prozac are only making the problem worse. Instead of targeting doctors in their ads, which is the practice of almost all prescription drug companies, Lilly entices consumers to do a self-diagnosis with the following line: Feeling depressed? If the answer is yes, then Lilly claims Prozac can help.

Lilly pharmaceutical company is trying to create a consumer market for its prescription product. And why not? Antidepressants are big business. According to a recent article in Insight on the News, consumers already spend approximately \$5.5 billion a year on antidepressants such as Prozac, Zoloft and Paxil. The problem with marketing antidepressants is that there is a fixed market: Those who have been diagnosed with depression. Therefore, when companies such as Lilly suggest to the general population that "Prozac can help," many consumers may end up trying to solve their problems with a pill.

In addition, Eli Lilly is securing a future generation of users for its product by targeting kids with a peppermint flavored Prozac. According to a recent article in U.S. News Online, 580,000 American kids as young as one are on antidepressants, even though the Food and Drug Administration is still in the process of evaluating the effects of antidepressants on children.

Opinion



Stephanie Knowlton

What would it be like to grow up on Prozac? Children would have no point of reference to understand what normal feels like and would learn nothing of coping skills. What would stop parents from seeking Prozac for their children as a means of making parenting more manageable or smoothing over some rough edges? After all, kids on Prozac could be a lot easier to deal with.

Maybe everyone would be easier to deal with on Prozac.

Depression is a real disorder that requires psychiatric attention and possibly medication. Eli Lilly's ads are simply trivializing mental illness to promote their product.

The message is simple: if you are unhappy with your looks, status, income or even your moods, we have the ultimate product. Try Prozac. It may not make you prettier, richer or more liked, but you will feel better anyway.

Stephanie Knowlton is a columnist for the Emerald. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.

