

Is it doped or duped when it comes to antidepressants? The politics of the Seroxat controversy in Britain

Linsey McGoey

First-year MPhil/PhD student, BIOS Centre,
Sociology Department,
London School of Economics

L.J.McGoey@lse.ac.uk

Abstract:

Growing attention is being paid in Britain and the United States to the safety and efficacy of SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors), particularly to their use among children and adolescents (Whittington et al 2004; Amsted 2004). At the centre of debates over their safety is the case of Seroxat (marketed as Paxil in the United States), an SSRI made by GlaxoSmithKline. GSK has faced, and continues to face, a number of legal actions surrounding the testing, disclosure of clinical results and marketing of Seroxat (Pfeiffer 2004). I plan, focusing on Britain, to look at the politics of the controversy surrounding the regulation and use of Seroxat, investigating the perspectives of the varying parties involved: Glaxo, government regulators, psychopharmacologists and patient groups.

On the one hand, I plan to contextualize the current Seroxat controversy among earlier debates over the safety of psychopharmaceutical treatments, such as concerns surrounding the use of the benzodiazepine tranquilizers (Bury 1996; Healy 1997, 2002). On the other hand, I'll be looking at the distinguishing features of the Seroxat case, such as the more vociferous nature of the patient groups, composed of former users or the families of users who have died while on the drug, who are now launching legal and social campaigns against Glaxo. Lastly, the use and regulation of Seroxat will be considered in light of literature from the field of neuroethics which addresses some of the concerns raised by the use, regulation and potential of psychopharmaceuticals (Wolpe 2002).

References:

- Amsted, David. October 14, 2004. "Pop. Snort. Parachute" New York Magazine.
<http://newyorkmetro.com/nymetro/news/culture/features/9945/index4.html>
- Bury, M. 1996. "Caveat Venditor: Social Dimensions of a Medical Controversy." In Healy, D. and Doogan, D (eds) Psychotropic Drug Development: Social, Economic and Pharmacological Aspects. London: Chapman Hall.
- Healy, David. 1997. The Anti-Depressant Era. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Healy, David. 2002. The Creation of Psychopharmacology. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Pfeiffer, Syliva. October 3, 2004. "Who Failed the Seroxat Suicide Watch?" Daily Telegraph.
- Whittington, Craig et al. April 24, 2004. "Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors in childhood depression: systematic review of published versus unpublished data." Lancet 363. 1341- 1345.
- Wolpe, P. 2002. "Treatment, enhancement, and the ethics of neurotherapeutics." Brain and Cognition 50 (3). 387-395.