

# **NOT QUITE WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED**

**By Ava Bleiberg**

THREE WJ STUDENTS AGREED TO SPEAK INDIVIDUALLY UNDER THE PROTECTION OF ANONYMITY ABOUT THEIR PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE. PAIN KILLERS, ANTI-ANXIETY DRUGS, ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER (ADD) MEDICATION: THE LIST GREW PROGRESSIVELY LONGER AS EACH STUDENT TOLD HIS OR HER STORY.

**“I came to be in this alienated and dissociated state where I didn’t want to see anything, listen to anything or talk to anybody. I had insomnia because of it so I just stared at my floor, wishing I would disappear.”**

**“My heart beat got really fast and I started sweating and got really into my paper and freaked out.”**

**“I ended up going to school really really depressed, and I was pissed off at everybody, even my best friend. It wasn’t a good feeling and I felt kind of sick. I hadn’t eaten for a while and I wanted to eat, but it was hard to.”**

## **Students Are Popping Pills**

*“There was a lifetime supply right there in my house,” said senior Mark Rylan\*, an abuser of prescription pain medications.*

*“I looked around my house and I found a whole bottle of it,” said junior Jimmy Sonner\*, who regularly abuses ADD medications.*

*“They were prescribed to me, but it wasn’t really a necessary prescription,” said senior Derek Thomas\*, who has dappled in many different fields of prescription drugs, but mainly abuses anti-anxiety and ADD medications.*

*\*Name has been changed to protect identity*

“CURRENTLY AND IN THE PAST, I HAVE DONE WELLBUTRIN AND KLONOPIN, AS WELL AS ADDERALL, LITHIUM, XANAX, ZOLOFT, CONCERTA, RITALIN, VIVANCE, DEXTRIN, AMPHETAMINE SALTS AND WAY BACK IN THE DAY I USED TO ABUSE PAIN KILLERS,” SAID THOMAS. “THAT’S ALL I CAN REMEMBER OFF THE TOP OF MY HEAD, PRETTY MUCH THE MAJORITY OF ANTIDEPRESSANTS, ANTI-ANXIETY, AMPHETAMINE CLOUDS.”

THE DRUGS XANAX, KLONOPIN AND ZOLOFT ARE A FEW COMMONLY PRESCRIBED BENZODIAZEPINES OFTEN REFERRED TO AS BENZO’S, WHICH ARE USED TO REDUCE ANXIETY. THESE DRUGS ARE CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM DEPRESSANTS, AND WHEN ABUSED, INDUCE AN EXTREME RELAXATION AND PRODUCE AN EFFECT SIMILAR TO THAT OF ALCOHOL.

“I WAS ACTUALLY PRESCRIBED [ANTI-ANXIETY MEDICATION] FOR A WHILE,” SAID THOMAS. “THEN I WOULD JUST TAKE [THOSE PILLS] DAILY WITH THE XANAX AND KLONOPIN AND ALL. IT MAKES EVERYTHING SPACEY AND I COULDN’T TAKE ANYTHING SERIOUSLY, SO I’D USUALLY DO IT WHENEVER I WAS JUST GOING OUT TO SEE PEOPLE OR I FELT LIKE NOT REMEMBERING THE DAY.”

ALTHOUGH EACH DEPRESSANT WORKS DIFFERENTLY, THE PLEASANTLY DROWSY AND CALMING EFFECT IS WHAT ABUSERS NORMALLY SEEK TO ACHIEVE. AFTER CONTINUAL USE, TOLERANCE IS DEVELOPED AND GREATER AMOUNTS OF THE DRUG ARE NEEDED TO REACH THE INITIAL HIGH. THE CYCLE OF INCREASED TOLERANCE LEADING TO INCREASED ABUSE MAKES DEPRESSANTS A HIGHLY ADDICTIVE CATEGORY OF DRUGS.

DR. ANITA GADHIA-SMITH, A WASHINGTON-BASED PSYCHOTHERAPIST SPECIALIZING IN ADDICTION AND THERAPY, WAS ONCE HERSELF A DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSER. FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN REGAINING CONTROL AFTER HER BATTLE WITH DRUGS, SHE FINDS THE WIDE-SPREAD PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE AMONG TEENAGERS ALARMING.

“THEY’RE HIGHLY ADDICTIVE; THE USE OF ALL DRUGS AND ALCOHOL CAN ARREST AND IMPEDE EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AS WELL AS PHYSICAL HEALTH,” SAID GADHIA-SMITH.

SEEING AS THESE DRUGS CAN BE DANGEROUS TO DEVELOPMENT, THEY ARE CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES WHICH ARE MEANT TO BE OBTAINED THROUGH A PRESCRIPTION. ACCORDING TO THOMAS, THAT IS THE EASY PART.

“GETTING A PRESCRIPTION IS EASY,” SAID THOMAS. “YOUR GOLDEN TICKET IS GETTING REFERRED TO A PSYCHIATRIST, AND THEN FROM THERE YOU CAN PRETTY MUCH GET ANYTHING YOU WANT. FIRST YOU HAVE TO GO TO A PSYCHOLOGIST, AND THEN FEIGN THE GENERAL SYMPTOMS OF WHATEVER THE MEDICATION YOU WANT APPLIES TO. WHEN THEY REFER YOU TO A PSYCHIATRIST, YOU PULL THE SAME SHIT. THEN PSYCHIATRISTS ARE PRONE TO WRITING PRESCRIPTIONS BECAUSE IT’S ALL PART OF A NEVER ENDING CYCLE.”

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY PREVALENT AMONGST THE HIGH-SCHOOL AND COLLEGE POPULATION. NEARLY 30 PERCENT OF WJ STUDENTS CLAIMED THAT THEY HAVE TAKEN PRESCRIPTION DRUGS THAT HAD NOT BEEN PRESCRIBED TO THEM. DESPITE REALIZING THE HEALTH HAZARDS THAT MAY ACCOMPANY PRESCRIBED MEDICATION, SOME STUDENTS CONTINUE THEIR ABUSE.

“AFTER LEARNING ALL THE DANGERS, I WAS STILL FINE TAKING [OXYCOTIN PILLS] JUST BECAUSE I HAVE GENERAL CONTROL OVER MYSELF AND KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT I CAN AND CAN NOT DO,” SAID RYLAN.

TEENAGERS, ACCORDING TO GADHIA-SMITH, HAVE A SENSE OF INVINCIBILITY THAT HEIGHTENS THE CHANCE THAT THEY WILL STUNT THEIR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DEVELOPMENT DUE TO DRUG ABUSE.

“FOR A CERTAIN PERIOD OF TIME I THINK THAT WE ALL THINK WE ARE INVINCIBLE,” SAID RYLAN. “BUT IT PASSES.”

FOR RYLAN, THE MYTH OF INVINCIBILITY WAS VERIFIED AS FALSE WHILE HE WAS ABUSING OXYCOTIN.

“THE LAST TIME I SAW MY GRANDMOTHER, I WAS REALLY STRUNG OUT ON PAIN KILLERS,” SAID RYLAN. “I FOUND OUT A COUPLE MONTHS LATER THAT SHE DIED AND THAT HAD BEEN THE LAST TIME THAT I SAW HER. THE PICTURES WE TOOK OF ME AND HER, SHE LOOKED VERY HAPPY, BUT MY EYES WERE BASICALLY SHUT.”

PAIN KILLERS FALL INTO THE CATEGORY OF OPIATES. AMONG MANY NEGATIVE SIDE-EFFECTS, SUCH AS POSSIBLY FATAL GASTRONOMICAL REPERCUSSIONS, OPIATES INITIALLY STIMULATE A RUSH WHICH DESCENDS INTO A EUPHORIC, SEDATED STATE WHICH RYLAN DESCRIBED AS, “POT TIMES TWENTY.”

CONTRARY TO HIS VIEW OF OXYCOTIN, RYLAN HAS A SEVERE DISTASTE FOR ADD MEDICATION.

“APPARENTLY IT HELPS A LOT OF KIDS COME TO SCHOOL AND JUST TAKE A PILL AND THEN JUST DO REALLY WELL ON A TEST,” SAID RYLAN. “I THINK THAT PEOPLE ARE CHEATING THEMSELVES. I THINK THAT THEY WOULD DEVELOP BETTER HABITS IF THEY LEARNED TO TAKE A TEST THEMSELVES.”

NOT EVERYONE AGREES. A REPRESENTATIVE 10 PERCENT OF STUDENTS HAVE ABUSED MEDICATION TO COMPLETE HOMEWORK.

“BASICALLY ALL THE PRESSURE COMES FROM SCHOOL,” SAID SONNER. “IT’S MORE JUST TO ALWAYS GET WORK DONE, TO HAVE A STEADY RATE OF PROGRESS.”

ADD MEDICATION HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY EASIER TO OBTAIN AS PRESCRIPTIONS CIRCLE THE STUDENT BODY IN LARGER QUANTITIES.

“ADD IS SOMETIMES OVER-DIAGNOSED,” SAID GADHIA-SMITH. “I THINK THAT SOCIETY, IN GENERAL, IS LEADING TOWARDS THE QUICK-FIX MENTALITY TO TRY TO PUSH HARDER AND HARDER FOR MORE AND MORE AND MEDICATIONS ARE NOT ALWAYS THE RIGHT ANSWER.”

WHILE GADHIA-SMITH DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT LESS HOMEWORK WOULD DIRECTLY CORRELATE TO A DECREASE IN ADD PRESCRIPTION ABUSE, SHE STATES THAT IF MORE WORK WERE TO BE COMPLETED WITHIN SCHOOL, STUDENTS WOULD HAVE MORE TIME OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL FOR OTHER HEALTHY ACTIVITIES INSTEAD OF REACHING FOR DRUGS TO RELIEVE THEIR STRESS.

“I’M NOT SAYING ANYONE ENCOURAGES YOU TO HURT YOURSELF TO DO WELL IN SCHOOL,” SAID SONNER. “BUT IT’S ALWAYS AN ISSUE WITH KIDS, BECAUSE WE’RE NOT LIKE MACHINES, WE CAN’T DO EVERYTHING PERFECTLY, AND THAT’S OFTEN A PROBLEM. SO I GUESS HAVING THIS DRUG AROUND HELPS YOU A LOT BECAUSE IT MAKES YOU LIKE A MACHINE IN A SENSE.”