

Using the Memory Hole to Create an ADHD Consensus

by [Peter Hitchens](#) (April 2019)



Village Boys, Lucian Freud, 1942

I sometimes tremble to recall the absurd feelings of total safety that sustained and informed me through my childhood. I trusted everyone. I never suspected any evil intent. I thought all authority was benign, all physicians competent. I even believed the commercials on the TV. Bad events were in far away places which would never reach me, and where I never need go. I lived, as it seemed, in a sunlit garden. Beyond the trees and the hedges which fringed it were other gardens much the same, well-tended and clean, stretching towards the peaceful horizon.

The 1960s taught me that cruel traps and feral beasts lay surprisingly close to my ordered life, that a single stupid action could whirl me into another, sinister landscape. I also learned that the wickedness and violence I thought were far away in jungles, on steppes or in ruined, despotic cities could find a way even into my quiet paradise. Worse, I discovered that I might, by a series of wholly unanticipated chances, find myself in those terrible places. Three nights before I stepped off the plane into what was left of the airport at Mogadishu, I would confidently have told you that nothing could ever have induced me to visit such a hell-hole. Yet there I was, shaking in my shoes, in the grip of ineluctable providence, or whatever it was. But, even so, I have still never completely cured myself of the suburban security and peace of mind that I learned in infancy.

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Here I am, after 40 years in newspapers and, like any ordinary fool, I still think, in a vague sort of way, that truth is not suppressed by power, that science, especially medical science, is basically benign, and that the strength of the free press can usually straighten out any problems of this sort.

So let me tell you, then, of the case of the words that disappeared, and the curious episode of the attempt to reach a medical consensus on ADD, the supposed 'Attention Deficit Disorder' also known as ADHD ('Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder').

This is, in my view, one of the great scandals of our age. We have turned away in horror from the chastisement of naughty children, to such an extent that in some European countries it is a crime to smack a child. Yet we drug children, often at very young ages and in increasing numbers, with amphetamines whose use is in general sternly banned by law. If smacking a defenceless child is wrong, then surely drugging a defenceless child is just as wrong. And yet conventional wisdom, which decides these things, regards the smack as an outrage, and the drug as normal and right. It is in these anomalies that we find out what is really wrong with our world.

And we drug them—mainly boys—for behaviour often far less troublesome than the things for which we used to smack them. Increasingly, we drug adults too, much as adults were given the fictional pleasure drug Soma in Huxley's *Brave New World*. Except that Soma is by definition harmless, and the drugs we give to real people may well not be. Amphetamines have a long and troubled record.

And nobody thinks this is odd, or questionable. Well, I say nobody, and it is not quite true. In fact, a small number of rather brave physicians and parents have put up a resistance to the enormous power of the ADHD lobby. But they are drowned out by the propaganda megaphones of the other side, who have of course recruited the drug takers and their parents to the cause. Object and you are sprayed with personal invective, as I have been so many times that I long ago developed a compete answer, which I first published in 2007 on the internet under the name of '[The ADHD Fantasy](#)'.

One of its key points is this—that there has never been any objective, falsifiable test for the supposed presence of ADHD in the human frame, that its diagnosis is wholly subjective and is in many cases a description of how the supposedly disordered person's parents or teachers may feel, rather than how the alleged patient feels.

For this statement I relied on pre-internet research, an account in book form ([The ADHD Fraud](#) by Fred Baughman) of a consensus conference at the National Institutes of Health in Maryland, at which this precise issue was raised. Dr Baughman's book is something of a samizdat document, and took some finding in the UK where I live, but I had also tracked him down to his home in San Diego, met him and decided that he was very much to be trusted. He is a veteran paediatric neurologist who knows his hard science and has much experience of genuinely sick children. Equally importantly, one of his own children was threatened with a 'diagnosis' of ADHD after a bad term at school. It was in the course of objecting to and resisting this conclusion that he became suspicious, and threw himself into a campaign against the drugging of what he regards as normal children. You do not need to agree with him or me to be dismayed by what I shall now relate.

In my article, 'The ADHD Fantasy', I [state](#) that 'I should here quote from the final statement of the panel, from the USA's National Institutes of Health Consensus Conference on 'ADHD', held on November 18th 1998.

'They concluded: 'We do not have an independent, valid test for ADHD, and there are no data to indicate that ADHD is due to a brain malfunction' (my emphasis).

My pro-ADHD attackers asserted that the words were made up, and that they do not form part of the statement as it is now displayed on the website of the NIH. Their second claim is, it turns out, absolutely true. You need to dive into the archive of the NIH to find it but the account of the statement there *does not contain these words*.

Yet Dr Baughman, who was at the conference, recorded them. They also appeared elsewhere in a number of independent places. One is an article on the conference published by the Gale Group, an educational publishing company. Its account dated 10th December 1998, less than a month after the conference closed on 16th November 1998, says:

'Diagnosis remains a major hurdle in terms of managing ADHD. The panel points out that the diagnosis itself is controversial and that "no independent, valid test" for ADHD exists. The panel also cites a lack of data tying the problem to a brain malfunction.'

This passage is clearly based on the version of the statement

that I have been relying on.

Next is a report from the Newark Star Ledger of 7th December 1998, probably obtained from a wire service report of the conference. It runs

'Confounding the diagnosis is the lack of a clear test or any proof that ADHD is indeed a product of a brain disorder.

That was the conclusion of a panel of pediatricians and child psychologists who last month listened to ADHD experts and then rendered their own recommendations. The National Institutes of Health runs consensus conferences as kind of a "science court" for various conditions, said Bill Hal, communications director for the NIH. *There is no current validated diagnostic test for the disorder, and no data to indicate ADHD is due to a brain malfunction* (my emphasis), Dr. David Kupfer, chairman of the panel and a professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh, said at a news conference.'

Once again, the same sentiment, missing from the archived version, appears quite clearly and unambiguously in a contemporaneous report. Then there is the 1999 first edition of a reputable academic journal, published by the established Springer Company of New York (not commercially connected with the German publisher of the same name) 'Ethical Human Sciences and Services'. This journal has since been renamed 'Ethical Human Psychology and Psychiatry' and is still going strong.

On page 10, it refers specifically to a 'consensus statement', and gives page numbers (notably page 2, cited in other independent versions of the statement) for its quotations. This must indicate that a printed version of the statement, with numbered pages, existed or exists somewhere.

It says 'The consensus statement pointed out "we do not have an independent, valid test for ADHD" (p2). In regard to a biological basis for the presumed disorder, the panel concluded that "there are no data to indicate that ADHD is due to a brain malfunction" (p2). This conclusion was drawn despite presentations by Swanson and others that claimed to show a biological basis".

Another reputable publication 'The Journal of Substance Use', (previously known as 'the Journal of Substance Misuse') originally published its account of the event in 2000, though it did not find its way online until 2009. It again quotes some of the missing words '. . . there are no data to indicate that ADHD is due to a brain malfunction . . . ' (NIH 1998). It gives this reference in a footnote: National Institutes of Health 1998 Diagnosis and treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: program and abstracts. NIH Consensus Development Conference, Rockville, MD'.

There is another important witness. Peter Breggin, a prominent critic of 'ADHD' was a listed speaker at the conference. He confirms