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Contents

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by Bob Geiger

[Slyly Stealing Sovereignty](#)

From The People

by Bruce Morris

[Harry Reid Lays Down The](#)[Law: No More War Without](#)[Congressional Approval](#)

by Brent Budowsky

[Impeachment is Off the](#)[Table?](#)

by John Loyd

[Bush-Speak--a much-](#)[abridged Dictionary](#)

by Vince Williams

[Osama Bin Laden Renamed](#)[Muqtada al-Sadr by America](#)

by Karen Fish

[A Frisson of Freedom](#)

by Iftekhar Sayeed

[BushCheney Inc.](#)

by Mark Petersen

[Bill O'Reilly = Super Genius](#)

by Mickey Z.

[Disappearance of Editor](#)[Creates Panic Among](#)[Peshawar Journalists](#)

by Muhammad Khurshid

[It means what it doesn't say](#)

by Ed Martin

[Bush Playing Politics With](#)[The Lives Of Our Soldiers In](#)[Iraq](#)

by Ron Fullwood

Subject(s): [Children](#), [Children Teens](#), [Drug Companies](#), [Marketing](#), [Education No Child...](#), [Family](#), [Health](#), [Health Psychiatry](#), [Health Psychology](#), [Lies DOE](#), [Marketing](#), [OpEdNews](#), [Teenscreen](#)Local Area(s): [California](#), [Canada](#), [Delaware](#), [Florida](#), [Iowa](#), [New York](#), [Ohio](#), [Oklahoma](#), [Pennsylvania](#), [Texas](#), [United States of America](#), [Wisconsin](#)

January 15, 2007 at 05:53:02

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## TeenScreen - The Last Straw

by [Doyle Mills](#)

The TeenScreen program is in big trouble.

TeenScreen is a highly controversial child suicide screening initiative with major ties to pharmaceutical companies. It is simply a marketing ploy to funnel massive numbers of our youth into the mental health system. An Internet search will pull up literally thousands of websites, articles and blogs critical of the program. Almost daily, newspapers publish articles and letters with the message that TeenScreen is a dangerous program, aimed at turning normal teenagers into new customers for the multi-billion dollar psycho-pharmaceutical industry. An on-line petition with 16,000+ signatures, <http://www.petitiononline.com/TScreen/petition.html>, calls on state and federal legislators to "Stop TeenScreen's Unscientific and Experimental 'Mental Health Screening' of American School Children".

With public opinion against it, TeenScreen is on the defense. They are attempting to promote carefully crafted messages - over and over again. These "talking points" are seen every time a TeenScreen staffer is interviewed, and repeated in letters from TeenScreen's director, Leslie McGuire and local TeenScreen worker bees. With Rabin Strategic Partners, a high-dollar New York PR firm, at their disposal, such a coordinated strategy is of course expected. Yet, these talking points do not actually answer the hard questions posed by the program's critics. Instead they utilize a simple technique known as the "straw man argument".

A straw man argument is a way of trying to win a debate while completely avoiding the actual subject at hand. It is done by taking a statement from one's opponent and altering it so that it becomes ridiculous and thus easy to defeat. This is commonplace in politics. A candidate says "We need to be careful with our spending" and the other side sets up a straw man argument by saying: "My opponent wants to cut benefits to people who really need it." It's a dishonest way of trying to win the battle for public opinion. It's a sign of desperation and an admission that one cannot confront the actual issues.

TeenScreen uses a handful of predictable statements to defend themselves. Unfortunately for TeenScreen, for Rabin, and for the pharmaceutical companies, these arguments are easily shot down by anyone who is willing to do a little research and who understands the straw man argument.

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### TeenScreen Straw Man Argument #1:

"We are not funded by drug companies!", a statement found in practically every TeenScreen press release. Since TeenScreen refuses to divulge its funding sources, it's impossible to know if this assertion is true. However, it is an example of the straw man argument. Nobody is claiming that TeenScreen is funded by drug companies. What is claimed, and can be verified, is that TeenScreen's advisory board is rife with major pharmaceutical company ties. Without belaboring the point, here is just a sampling:

- Robert Postlethwait, a TeenScreen advisory board member, spent 30 years at Eli Lilly until he retired in 1999. In 2004, according to a DarPharma Inc. press release, Postlethwait joined it's board of directors. DarPharma, Inc. is a company that develops "novel" psychotropic drugs.
- Catherine "Deeda" Blair, another TeenScreen advisory board member, has earned fees or stock from at least a half-dozen drug and biotech companies including Novartis, where she still consults, according a 2004 report by Fairchild Publications, Inc.
- In 2004 Michael Hogan, another TeenScreen advisory board member, won the Eli Lilly Lifetime Achievement Award.

You can find other TeenScreen advisory board members and their ties to pharmaceutical companies, courtesy of a website called TeenScreenTruth.com [http://www.teenscreentrueth.com/Teenscreen\\_Advisory\\_Board.htm](http://www.teenscreentrueth.com/Teenscreen_Advisory_Board.htm)

Local TeenScreen operations can accept funds from drug companies or other groups that stand to make a profit from children identified as "mentally ill" by the screening process. One TeenScreen site, in Tennessee, accepted money directly from Eli Lilly, a major manufacturer of psychiatric drugs. TeenScreen's defense is that they "strongly recommend" that local groups do not receive drug company funding, so as to avoid the "appearance of a possible inducement to recommend treatment". Note that they are concerned with the appearance of impropriety, not the truly dangerous situation of profit-oriented enterprises being given access to our young people.

Wherever TeenScreen pops up in various school districts, NAMI (the National Alliance on Mental Illness) can be found there pushing it. Invariably, NAMI helps spearhead the introduction of TeenScreen into schools. When local parents and civic groups speak out against the program, NAMI is TeenScreen's most vocal defender. NAMI published a guide for its members with TeenScreen's straw man "talking points" in an attempt to counteract opposition to TeenScreen. NAMI has received millions of dollars in pharmaceutical company funding. (Note: Although TeenScreen is very secretive and will not release the names of the schools they have infiltrated, many can be found here: <http://www.teenscreen-locations.com> thanks to the enterprising work of a few parents who are scouring the country hunting them down.)

### TeenScreen Straw Man Argument #2:

"We don't provide treatment!" It is true that TeenScreen is not directly in the treatment business. That fact is easily proven and that's why this straw man argument is used. What opponents actually say is that many of those students screened will be referred to psychiatric treatment (drugs). TeenScreen's own website makes it clear that treatment is integral to the screening process. The section entitled How to Start a Site includes this line: "Before you begin screening, a plan must be in place to manage the teens identified from the screening and ensure that they can access appropriate mental health services."

Laurie Flynn, the Executive Director of TeenScreen, makes this point very clearly in an article she wrote, "The long-term goal of TeenScreen is not just identification, but treatment for those in need. The TeenScreen program is a five-step process ... In the final step, a case manager meets with teens and

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makes referrals for further evaluation and treatment."

Treatment for those children identified by the TeenScreen program likely would include psychotropic drugging - which of course is a very profitable enterprise. Some of the drugs used to "treat" depression are known to cause suicidal ideation and induce violent behavior, and are required by the Food and Drug Administration to carry "black box" warnings stating this danger. TeenScreen itself admits that a percentage of the kids they screen and refer will wind up on drugs. Of course, they prefer to use the more benign-sounding term "medication". According to a study recently published in the Archives of General Psychiatry, kids who committed suicide were 15 times more likely to have been on antidepressants. This supposed suicide "prevention" program will likely increase teen suicides. Ironic indeed.

TeenScreen Straw Man Argument #3:

"We don't diagnose!" Certainly opponents of the program are not claiming that TeenScreen's 2-day-trained screeners diagnose anyone. That would be grounds for criminal action - practicing medicine without a license. Yet, the truth is that TeenScreen personnel are involved in the diagnosis. TeenScreen's "Screening Information Form" is filled out by screeners after the suicide survey is done on a child. The form contains check boxes for Social Phobia, Generalized Anxiety, Obsessive Compulsive, Depression and Panic Disorder. No, TeenScreen does not diagnose but they do set up the child for a diagnosis. As an analogy, they are not the bank robbers; they are the get away drivers - an accomplice to the diagnosis.

TeenScreen Straw Man Argument #4:

"We require written parental consent!" Bowing to public and media pressure, TeenScreen announced in August of 2006 that they would start requiring schools to obtain written parental consent before a child is screened which crippled the program's reach. TeenScreen's previous public stance was to allow a surreptitious scheme known as "passive consent". If the parent did not return a form specifically saying NO to screening - parental consent was assumed. In reality, many children were screened without their parents' consent or knowledge. Though clearly unethical and illegal per federal law, this method drastically increased the number of children who could be screened. Some schools, apparently unaware of the national controversy, still use TeenScreen's passive consent method.

The brouhaha about active and passive consent misses the point made by TeenScreen's opponents. In a letter to the editor published in The Fort Madison Daily Democrat, Jeannie Hetzer stated, "(the school) sends home a permission slip, but the permission slip gives the parent no idea of the content of the test or the repercussions." In her article entitled "What TeenScreen Doesn't Want You to Know about Parental Consent", educator Mary Collins stated, "There are federal and state laws requiring 'informed consent', meaning that before someone agrees to participate in any medical procedure or experiment, they must be informed of and must understand the medical facts and the risks involved...NO TeenScreen sites use full informed consent."

Certainly, TeenScreen DOES NOT provide full informed consent on what the ramifications of screening are and does not inform parents about the national controversy and the arguments against screening.

TeenScreen Straw Man Argument #5:

"It's the Scientologists who are against us!" Although Scientologists certainly should be flattered with that honorable distinction, many of the 700 plus doctors (to date) who have signed the "NO to TeenScreen petition" found here: <http://www.petitiononline.com/TScreen/petition.html> may disagree with that

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straw man argument. The creator of the petition, Teresa Rhoades is a Baptist according to the Daily Oklahoman. She is suing in federal court because her child was screened and diagnosed without parental consent. Rhoades says: "What does religion have to do with it?" Christians and homeschoolers have been some of the staunchest critics of psychiatric screening in schools. Many state directors of The Eagle Forum, a family rights group, have worked on legislation against mental screening in schools. Jews, Catholics, Christians and Hare Krishna's are working against mental screening of kids in schools. Many and various religious, scientific, education, medical, anti-government intrusion, media and other groups are rebelling against TeenScreen's goal to screen every child before they graduate from high school. Parents from all walks of life, whose children have been harmed by psychotropic drugs, might also wish to be included in the opposition. Michael Hogan, director of the Ohio Mental Health Department and TeenScreen proponent, referred to those opposed to mass child mental screening as the "Curious Coalition". Although TeenScreen proponents don't feel the need to announce their own religion when they are out campaigning to suicide screen, chances are they belong to the cult of biological psychiatry.

TeenScreen Straw Man Argument #6:

"Suicide is a leading cause of death in teens!" Opponents of TeenScreen don't argue that point. It can be verified by simply looking up the statistics on the internet. However, TeenScreen will not tell you the actual numbers for fear that no one will take them seriously. Suicide in young people is very, very rare. The word "suicide" tugs at the heart strings. Any suicide is certainly a tragedy and one suicide is one too many. TeenScreen's sales pitch on this point is effective in gaining sympathy from school administrators and parents who have not done their homework. If they elected to do their research on their own geographical area, they could find the low numbers from the Center for Disease Control website, which you can find here:

[http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate10\\_sy.html](http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate10_sy.html)

The solution, if there could possibly be one for the rare cases, would certainly not be to screen every child in a school, especially when many will wind up on the same drugs that carry FDA mandated Black Box warnings that these drugs carry a significant risk of serious or even life-threatening adverse effects such as suicidal ideation!

TeenScreen's claims that they are a "suicide risk screening program for youth" is a carefully worked out marketing scheme to gain support for their activity. The public at large cares about our next generation and would do anything to prevent suicide. What TeenScreen actually does is get more youth into the mental health system. They "partner" with local mental agencies and shrinks who become the recipients of the new customers and the profits. TeenScreen does not "partner" with non-psychiatric medical doctors to find a very possible physical source of a child's behavior, such as allergies, nutritional deficiencies, lack of exercise, toxicities and even side effects of psychiatric drugs!

TeenScreen is under attack, and rightly so. Our next generation is in danger and we cannot afford to let the future of this society be decided by straw man arguments. Demand that TeenScreen answer the tough questions and the real concerns. Then our lawmakers and school personnel can make the right decisions.

<http://www.teenscreentruth.com>

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