

AlbertMohler.com

Salvation in a Pill? Academic Doping and America's Parents

Tuesday, September 26, 2006



What if you could improve your child's academic performance with nothing more than a pill? That is no longer a hypothetical question.

Parents naturally want their children to excel. Some parents are taking that natural desire to new lengths — asking doctors to prescribe drugs like Ritalin and Adderall so their students — especially teenagers — will perform better on tests and assignments. The practice is spreading fast, and is now known as “academic doping.”

As [MSNBC](#) reports:

A 15-year-old girl and her parents recently came in for a chat with Dr. James Perrin, a Boston pediatrician, because they were concerned about the girl's grades. Previously an A student, she was slipping to B's, and the family was convinced attention deficit hyperactivity disorder was at fault — and that a prescription for Ritalin would boost her brainpower.

After examining the girl, Perrin determined she didn't have ADHD. The parents, who had come in demanding a prescription, left empty-handed.

Perrin, a professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics, and other physicians say this is an increasingly common scenario in doctors' offices around the country, though there are no hard statistics on it.

Parents want their kids to excel in school, and they've heard about the illegal use of stimulants such as Ritalin and Adderall for “academic doping.” Hoping to obtain the drugs legally, they pressure pediatricians for them. Some even request the drugs after openly admitting they don't believe their child has ADHD.

There appear to be several issues here. Some parents may want to blame a child's lack of academic performance on a medical condition. Others see the academic race for scholarships and college entry to be adequate reason to seek a chemical enhancement for their own kids. Parents of high achievers must wonder, “If he's doing this well without Ritalin, what could he do with it?” In any event, the promise takes the form of a pill.

As ethicist Ronald Cole-Turner argues, we are now “enhancement enthusiasts” — ready to try anything that promises enhanced human performance. But, at what cost? Where does this end?

More from [MSNBC](#):

Yet some parents will do whatever it takes to keep opportunities from slipping through a child's fingers — even outright lying to doctors to get the drugs, says Rater.

And some pill-eager parents aren't just seeking to level the playing field, they're trying to make their kids superstars, says Dr. Martin Stein, a professor of clinical pediatrics at University of California, San Diego.

“I see patients who come from privileged backgrounds and lower-level economic backgrounds and there's a

tremendous difference in parental expectations," Stein says.

Privileged kids tend to have parents who will push them to be the academic cream of the crop and when they aren't, they'll start looking for reasons why, he says. "I tell them that honor roll, a merit scholarship or acceptance in an Ivy League school is not the end point. That would be poor medicine."

For Christian parents, this controversy raises a host of questions. How do we define success and achievement? Just what are our expectations for our kids? Are we really ready to put them on powerful stimulants, just to raise their grades and test scores? What are we teaching our kids when we do this?

The "academic doping" problem emerged first at colleges and universities, where an underground market in Ritalin, Adderall, and other drugs is never far from sight. Students believe, rightly or wrongly, that the use of these drugs can help them cram for a test and score higher grades.

Now, the problem has reached high schools. How long before middle schoolers are trading pills before a math test?

The twentieth century taught many lessons, and one of the most perverse of these lessons is this: Salvation is found in a pill. Got an infection? Take an antibiotic. Can't sleep? Take a sedative. Can't breathe? Take an antihistamine. Can't cope? Take a psychotropic pill. Can't perform sexually? Take Viagra. Can't keep up with other athletes? Take a steroid. Can't remember which pill you are to take for which problem? Take a memory enhancer.

Want your kids to do better at school? Give them Ritalin and Adderall.

This is the perverse and pervasive logic of our day. But salvation is *not* found in a pill.

Content Copyright © 2002-2010, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

