

Why We Should Stop Drugging Our Kids

Maybe it's time to stop drugging our children. A new [study](#) from the *Medical Journal of Australia* has found that the youngest kids in any given class are twice as likely to be receiving medication for behavioral disorders as the older kids in the class. And the proportion of boys receiving such medication was *three times* as high as it was for girls.

The Australian researchers looked at data for more than 300,000 students, of whom almost 6,000 received at least one government-subsidized ADHD prescription in 2013. (The actual rate of use might have been higher given that some people presumably bought the medication without government assistance). As the study found:

“The proportion of boys receiving medication (2.9%) was much higher than that of girls (0.8%). Among children aged 6–10 years, those born in June (the last month of the recommended school-year intake) were about twice as likely (boys 1.93 times, girls 2.11 times) to have received ADHD medication as those born in the first intake month (the previous July).”

This is not the first finding of its kind. According to a 2010 [article](#) in the *Journal of Health Economics*, “8.4 percent of children born in the month prior to their state's cutoff date for kindergarten eligibility—who typically become the youngest and most developmentally immature children within a grade—are diagnosed with ADHD, compared to 5.1 percent of children born in the month immediately afterward.”

What this means is that we are putting kids on drugs for behaving in age appropriate ways and in ways that are typical for their sex. Much has been written in recent years by folks like [Christina Hoff Sommers](#) about the ways that school has

become a welcoming place for girls but a hostile place for boys. From the books kids are assigned to read (never about war or violence) to the anti-bullying crusades (where even pretending that your fingers are a gun could get you expelled) to the emphasis on “grrrl power,” we seem to want boys to behave more like girls, or at least to sit still and keep quiet.

But the trend of favoring older kids in school has been going on for just as long and is also proving detrimental. Some parents blame this on the testing regimen that many schools have adopted. No Child Left Behind legislation is a common target for critics. The theory is that older kids will do better on standardized tests. But according to a 2000 [report](#) by the National Center for Education Statistics, “as many as 11% of boys were being held back in 1995,” which was six years before No Child Left Behind was signed into law.

Perhaps more than any other practice, holding boys back, or “redshirting,” as it’s also called, symbolizes our new attitude toward preschool and early elementary school. The reasons behind this new pressure for kids to succeed earlier have more to do with parents and the broader culture than they do with public policy (though the two are no doubt connected).

Middle and upper class parents are more and more worried about whether their kids are going to do well in school, whether they will get into the right college (or any college), whether they are going to have good jobs, etc. While research suggests that kids actually benefit socially and academically from recess and other periods of unstructured play, as well as being outside, parents are pressuring schools to spend less time on those activities and more time preparing kids for testing. As well, parents seem to be locked in a competition to see whose kid learned to read earliest or can do math problems on the iPad at the age of three. It’s hardly a surprise that many parents would turn to medication to ensure that their children, especially their sons, can keep up in

school.

Perhaps this is a natural inclination on the part of mothers and fathers, which modern concerns have made worse. But rather than suppressing our kids' natural behavior with powerful medications, maybe we need to learn to suppress our own.

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