



**The Diseasing of America’s Children, by John Rosemond and Bose Ravenel**  
reviewed by Charles Sigler, D.Phil.

If your child or the child of someone you know is said to have ADHD, ODD, or EOBD read this book. Rosemond and Ravenel persuasively argue that the “science” behind ADHD and other childhood behavioral disorders is not scientific: “Neither verifiable objective evidence nor replicable experimental results exist to support the claims of the ADHD Establishment.” (p. xi)

Their belief is that childhood behavior disorders such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and early onset bipolar disorder (EOBD) are actually manifestations of “dysfunctions of discipline and lifestyle that are endemic to today’s family culture.” (p. 189) They argue that behaviors that have been traditionally seen as typical of early childhood, matters of individual or gender difference, or the result of poor discipline are being redefined by the mental health establishment as “disorders.” Unruly, defiant children are ODD; “terrible” two-year-olds who are denied their self-centered demands and go ballistic have EOBD. Active, distractible boys and girls are labeled with ADHD. Shy, withdrawn children who avoid certain social situations are diagnosed with social anxiety disorder, Asperger’s syndrome or pervasive developmental disorder (PDD). Expensive medications of some sort are the usual solution for these so-called disorders. Money seems to be the driving force in the ADHD, childhood disorder marketplace.

In easy to understand language, Rosemond and Ravenel review the historical origins of childhood behavioral disorders and the implications such widespread diagnoses have for the future. They effectively challenge the wide-spread acceptance that such disorders are due to a biochemical imbalance or an inherited biological problem. In

doing so, they review the scientific literature for and against the biochemical imbalance hypothesis; demonstrating that the “science” behind ADHD and other childhood disorders is often based upon flimsy evidence and in some cases, “downright bad science.” If you want more than what they offer you here, there is a wealth of endnotes, with many online citations for further reading on your own.

They also look at the politics of diagnosis and pharmaceuticals. Appeals to professional consensus, that “there is great agreement” for the biochemical imbalance thesis, are treated by the ADHD Establishment as if consensus was irrefutable proof. Quoting from a speech given by Michael Crichton at the California Institute of Technology they note that: “Consensus is the business of politics. In science consensus is irrelevant.” Consensus is said to only be invoked when the science is not solid enough.<sup>1</sup>

The marketing of ADHD medications is said to be full of exaggerated claims and deceptive advertising: “Pharmaceutical companies have capitalized on the myths that permeate the subject of ADHD to manufacture and encourage even more myths about their products.” (p. 79) Not surprisingly, the pharmaceutical industry has one of the largest lobbies in Washington. Referencing a book by a former editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Marcia Angell, they cite how PhRMA, the industries trade association, spent more than \$450 million on lobbying from 1997 through 2002.<sup>2</sup>

The authors spend some time making an interesting point that baby boomers attending class in the 1950s or 1960s can recall *occasionally* that a child was disruptive; a far cry from the supposed one in six kids with near-constant discipline issues in today's classrooms. And the classrooms were much larger then than they are today. This sets up their later argument that the rise of the electronic media of “plug in drugs:” TV, video games and the like has been a major culprit in the ADHD epidemic. Oh, and they also cited supporting research. A 2004 study published in the journal *Pediatrics* found that for each hour of television watched on average per day between the ages of one

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<sup>1</sup> See the article “Crucial Issues in Biblical Counseling” on this website for a discussion of the different views of science.

<sup>2</sup> See the article “Big Pharma: The Truth About Drug Companies” on this website for an in-depth discussion of Marcia Angell’s book: *The Truth About Drug Companies*. Also try [opensecrets.org](http://opensecrets.org) for up-to-date information on the giving of top industries to Congress.

and four “increased by nearly 10 percent the risk of serious attention problems at age seven.” (p. 124)

Rosemond and Ravenel don’t just end with their critique of the problem, but present a “common sense” approach to address the ADHD/childhood behavior problem. “When children do things they shouldn’t, they don’t need a psychologist. They need discipline ... firm, calm, and loving discipline.” (p. 199). Common sense also says that assaulting the developing brain with electronic stimulation can compromise attention span and self-control, so limit or stop it entirely. Common sense suggests that diet can cause changes in mood, productivity energy and attention, so pay closer attention to a healthy diet for more functional behavior. They then gave several short case studies to illustrate how these recommendations can work.

The approach recommend by the authors teaches self-control to both the child and the parent. Again, the common sense of what they suggest is evident here: “What are ADHD, ODD, and EOBD if not failures of self-control? . . . Our approach makes unnecessary the ADHD Establishment’s expensive testing, long term (expensive) therapies, and potentially harmful (and expensive) medications.” (p. 211) It’s so simple, parents can teach one another, truly returning parenting and discipline to the nuclear family where it should be, biblically speaking: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)