

# ADDICTED TO GOOD GRADES

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## THE ADDERALL INDUSTRY: PROFIT VS. HEALTH

By Mary Rose McQueen

“A.D.D. for all. Adderall.” A catchy name for a catchy drug. Adderall; an amphetamine for those diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (A.D.H.D.) is prescribed to help those with this disorder better focus and behave in day-to-day situations. Among students, Adderall is considered an aid, or boost, to focusing and studying for those without A.D.H.D., making the smart even smarter. Adderall has quickly become the “study drug” of choice for both children and adult students. This alleged super drug is not only booming on the stock market but also on the black market. More than 10 million Americans are taking A.D.H.D. drugs.<sup>1</sup> There are many arguments from the industry and users about safety; however, there is no argument about the destructive potential of Adderall since it is classified by the government as a highly abusable substance.<sup>2</sup> Exactly what is causing this industry to skyrocket in sales? How desperate are we for straight A’s?

### MARKET BOOM

With 10 million users, A.D.H.D. has become a household term. Attention deficit disorders are now the second most diagnosed disease in children following asthma.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, the A.D.H.D. drug industry made over 13 billion dollars.<sup>4</sup> With

total spending on A.D.H.D. at roughly \$143 billion,<sup>5</sup> attention drugs are a very lucrative industry. The demand for Adderall has become so large that in 2012 the federal government had to combat shortages of the drug; the demand was larger than the quota the D.E.A. allowed that year. This quota is rising every year. Surprisingly, the steady pace of supply growth is not enough to satisfy our needs and prescriptions. Many criticisms have been made toward Shire, that manufactures Adderall, as well as Shire’s competitors and purveyors of generic substitutes. Experts complain that Shire is marketing in an aggressive manner that is leading to misdiagnosis and abuse and that the company cares more about profits than health. In 2014 Shire was fined \$56.5 million for claiming Adderall can “normalize” children who have A.D.H.D.<sup>6</sup> While raising some red flags, the penalty hardly dented this ever-growing industry’s rise in sales.

### THE STUDY DRUG

How is the runaway success of this industry possible, and are there truly that many children running around with A.D.H.D.? The answer to the latter is no. Though A.D.H.D. is usually diagnosed in younger children, a huge number of teen and adult

prescriptions for people who have been diagnosed with A.D.H.D. as children and adults.<sup>7</sup> A stop to the pharmacy is not the only place that adults and adolescents are going to get their Adderall, however. Adderall and its substitutes have become the “study drug” of choice; a recent study examining trends in the use of Adderall finds that it is mainly 18-to-25-year-olds who are abusing Adderall without a prescription. These teenagers and young adults are receiving their dosages of this drug illegally from family and friends, with only two-thirds receiving it from a prescription. Claiming it enhances academic performance, young people who would never consider abusing mainstream drugs are abusing Adderall.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, many high school and college students, have been offered this substance numerous times, it is not uncommon to take it without a prescription. This “harmless” study aid is not as harmless as we think, however. Adolescents and young adults incur serious side effects, side effects that adolescents and young adults trying to get ahead are ignorant of, or are happy, so far, to ignore.

## WHY THE PANIC?

Adderall is a D.E.A. Schedule II substance. This means that there is a huge potential for addiction and abuse. Adderall is known to lead to “severe psychological or physical dependence” and is considered “dangerous.”<sup>9</sup> Emergency room visits due to the abuse of the drug have noticeably risen.<sup>10</sup> With opioid addictions at epidemic levels, how are we allowing this industry to legally be making \$13 billion a year? In the book *ADHD Nation: Children, Doctors, Big*

*Pharma, and the Making of an American Epidemic*, Author Alan Schwarz investigates the evolution of A.D.H.D. and how the U.S. has created its own epidemic, diagnosing 11 percent of school-age children with this disease. Schwarz states, “Of course, there was no way to disentangle which children were actually impaired by severe hyperactivity and distractibility ... and which were either questionable diagnoses or, at the most cynical end of the spectrum, labeled merely for money or extra services.”<sup>11</sup> So back to the main question: profit or health?

## FREE PUBLICITY

Adderall is a buzz word and the industry knows it. The aggressive marketing has lessened; Adam Levine is no longer the Adderall cover boy like he was a few years ago (Figure 1).



Figure 1

Source: The Huffington Post

However, the demand for Adderall and the street buzz for the drug as a “study drug” is still as prevalent as ever. A study taken over a four-month period looking at drug-related tweets found “Adderall” to be by far the most frequently found drug-related keyword. (Figure 2) public health experts and policy analysts are concerned that the hype between teens and young adults of this drug will lead to even more misuse and addiction. The industry must be thrilled; it seems that Americans cannot get enough of this stimulant. We take it, we talk about it, and we share it with our friends.

## SUPER HUMAN ENDING

According to its enthusiasts, Adderall promises a super-human focus, mind, and appetite. If only Adderall did not have such severe health risks. Unfortunately, looking at current trends, there is no sign in sight of that the demand for Adderall will fall. The nation has proved is an eager market and Shire has focused in on taking every penny of it.

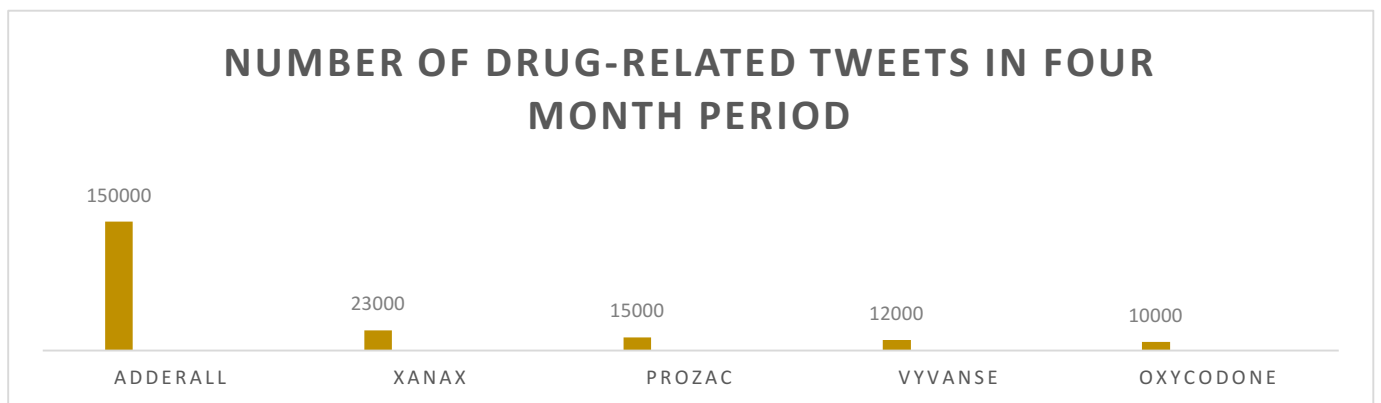


Figure 2

Source: Sarker, Abeed, and Graciela Gonzalez

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