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A social life, good grades, and sleep; students can pick two. Or can they? There now exists a more appealing alternative: have all three. This may seem like an improvement, but it is only possible by unfairly using prescription drugs that make it possible to work tirelessly, efficiently and productively for hours on end. This hurts the values and integrity of our schools. It crosses ethical boundaries that form the foundation of our education. We are moving away from the days where self-discipline has led to success. Instead, study drugs have become the method of choice for many students to boost grades and test scores.

Drugs like Adderall, Concerta, Ritalin, and Vyvanse are giving students who are willing to risk the side effects an advantage over their peers. Originally prescribed to treat ADHD, these drugs are widely taken by many without the disorder. They contain chemicals that produce side effects like insomnia, irregular heartbeat, and paranoia. In addition, they are in the same class as Cocaine because of their highly addictive qualities.

The United States consumes about 85% of the world's methylphenidate, a chemical used in ADHD prescriptions. In 2000, the production of this chemical had multiplied 8 fold from the previous decade. It is no coincidence that study drugs have become a bigger and bigger problem with the rise of those diagnosed with ADHD. It is a relatively new disorder that made its appearance in the 20th century. Now, more than 8% of children have been diagnosed, and studies show that this number is continuing to rise.

Study drugs are being abused, and we know why.

In schools, the abuse of these drugs creates a rat race. Those who choose to stay “sober” are at a disadvantage. Recent reports of students snorting Adderall before their SAT highlights the edge these drugs give. The SAT remains an important factor in college admissions that have become more competitive than ever before. Students who use these drugs are cheating the system. Do we really want our top colleges and universities being overrun by these abusers? We are rewarding cheaters with acceptance into some of the best colleges and universities in the world.

The abuse of study drugs does not end in high school. The competitive advantage they give is also apparent in higher education. Full time college students are twice as likely to take Adderall than part time students or those who are not enrolled. In addition, there are countless students who have artificially improved, or maintained high GPAs after taking these drugs.

The use of these drugs is closely tied to schoolwork. This is where the real issue lies: the classroom. While our methods of treating ADHD are questionable, the larger problem lies in our system of education. The only way to eliminate these drugs completely is to stop prescribing them, and to do this we need to reform the way we educate.

In our current system of education, we reward those who are good at memorization, and we favor individual over group effort. We see this in things like the rise of standardized testing, and the importance of grading. We reward those who are good test takers, and who have the ability to flourish in the conventional classroom. We preach the idea that if one is successful in school, they will have a successful career. This

produces a system in which students are constantly competing with one another. We created a system that is tailored to a certain type of student.

This is why our system is flawed. To eliminate the use of these drugs, we need to eliminate the need to prescribe them at all. To do this, we must account for all the innovations in technology that are more common in our lives than ever before. Many students are having trouble concentrating, however it seems normal given the presence of all of this new media. Children are now learning and developing differently than they were several decades ago. With this in mind, there must exist a better way to teach that embraces these differences in learning, rather than prescribing pills that force students to conform to an outdated system. Self-discipline should not be prescribed in a pill, but rather a skill that is reinforced in the way we educate.

Education reform is therefore the only way to effectively lower the abuse of study drugs. People's minds are not the same, and we should create a system in which we account for those differences. We need to change it in a way that would eliminate the need to prescribe ADHD medication in the first place. This would halt the production of these medications that are molding the minds of our youth, and diminishing the integrity of our system.

Without education reform, we can only hope that the values of honesty and virtue will somehow prevail in our schools. Too many kids have already been pushed the brink, and have started to use prescription medication to stay competitive in the classroom.

I would know. I am writing this on Adderall right now.