



# Hyper: A Personal History of ADHD

*Timothy Denevi*

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## Hyper: A Personal History of ADHD Timothy Denevi

The first book of its kind, this compelling and moving memoir about what it's like to be a child with ADHD also explains the history of the diagnosis and how we have come to medicate more than four million children today.

Among the first generation of boys prescribed medication for hyperactivity in the 1980s, Timothy Denevi took Ritalin at the age of six, and during the first week, it triggered a psychotic reaction. Doctors recommended behavior therapy, then antidepressants. Nothing worked. As Timothy's parents and doctors sought to treat his behavior, he was subjected to a liquid diet, a sleep-deprived EEG, and bizarre behavioral assessments before finding help in therapy combined with medication. In *Hyper*, Timothy describes how he makes his way through school, knowing he is a problem for those who love him, longing to be able to be good and fit in, hanging out with boys who have similar symptoms but meet different ends, and finally realizing he has to come to grips with his disorder before his life spins out of control.

Skillfully and seamlessly using his own experience as a springboard, Denevi also reveals the origins of ADHD, from the late nineteenth century when hyperactivity was attributed to defective moral conscience, demons, or head trauma, through the twentieth century when food additives, bad parenting, and even government conspiracies were blamed, to the most recent genetic research. He traces drug treatment from Benzedrine in 1937 through the common usage of the stupifying chlorpromazine and brand new Ritalin in the 1950s to the use of antidepressants in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

Riveting, thought-provoking, and deeply intelligent, this is a remarkable book both for its sensitive portrait of a child's experience as well as for its ability to illuminate a remarkably complex and controversial mental condition. Rick Lavoie, author of *It's So Much Work to Be Your Friend*, says *Hyper* is "a significant and singular contribution to our field."

## Hyper: A Personal History of ADHD Details

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# From Reader Review **Hyper: A Personal History of ADHD** for online ebook

## **Mia says**

Denevi does a good job of interlacing the story of his own experiences as a kid diagnosed with ADHD and the history of ADHD diagnosis, theories of its etiology, and changes in its treatment. As a clinician working with children identified as having "severe emotional disabilities", 95% of my clients have an ADHD diagnosis and it was interesting to read his perspective of his behavior, both in childhood and as an adult.

As a clinician, I was surprised Denevi's behavior did not result in an ODD diagnosis as well as as ADHD. I was interested that he doesn't mention ODD-- although it is one of the diagnoses most highly correlated with ADHD-- in his brief discussion of comorbidity. Certainly I've seen plenty of kids arrive in my office with that diagnosis already in their records, for just the behaviors he describes for himself. Perhaps he was protected from an ODD diagnosis by social class privilege, or perhaps he avoids bringing ODD into the conversation because that would diffuse his acerbic (and valid) criticism of the ADHD industry as riddled with overdiagnosis and overtreatment.

I was happy to read that things improved for the author with age, and that he has crafted a life for himself that allows him to work around his remaining symptoms. This is what I talk to my clients and parents about all the time--middle school and high school are bizarre environments with multiple levels of traps baited for ADHD kids. College and adult life don't have to have the same traps, and the way you can know what kind of life to build for yourself is by getting a clear picture of what does and does not work for you--medicated and unmedicated alike.

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## **Carol says**

There is a stigma to ADHD, so I was surprised to find **HYPER, A Personal History of ADHD** by Timothy Denevi. It took courage to tackle the subject and determination to cover it in depth. When growing up, Timothy Denevi wanted to be a good boy, to fit in and not get into fights, and to not interrupt class. Just getting through preschool, kindergarten, elementary and secondary school was a major struggle for him. Outside of the classes, he was put on medicine which sometimes backfired on him. He was in counseling or therapy much of the time. He had to go through a sleep deprived EEG. I can feel for him as I had a 48 hour EEG once for different reasons and it was an experience that I never want to repeat.

At the same time, Timothy Denevi traces the beginnings of the identifying ADHD in medical history and the strange ideas held back then and the evolution of different treatments. But the best part is still his expression of his own torturous experience of wanting to fit in when he was dealing with ADHD. When I read about what he went through at school, with his parents and teachers, I cannot help but think that a support group would have helped him not feel so alone with ADHD.

I highly recommend this book to parents and adults who have ADHD.

Even though I received this book as a win from FirstReads that in no way effected my thoughts or feelings in this review.

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### **Cathy says**

(pg.159) " ...Which is one of the problems with a medication meant to address that point where personality and biology meet: if the drug really does work, its benefit can feel unmerited; and if it fails, well, your fate is confirmed--there's something so deep and irreversible at the heart of you that even a pill can't reach it. Either way you're struggling to distinguish the things you can change from all those you can't."

(pg.169) Sometimes I like to think of ADHD - as a space that exists between desire and reality. This space is largest when you're younger and tends to diminish as the years pass. But does it close up entirely?

(pg.196).. "if ADHD doesn't determine you, it does tend to limit your second chances---a reality that, at the very least, places a premium on the moments in which you're conscious of deciding what happens next."

(pg.222)... "the biological approach of general medicine was broadly applied to the field of mental illness, a shift that has caused 'psychiatry to focus so exclusively on the brain as an organ that the experience of the patient as a person has receded below the horizon of our vision.' The results are what we're seeing now: misdiagnosis and over-diagnosis, and a reliance on drug therapy as the primary line of defense against disorders that, because of their nature, demand a multifaceted approach."

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### **Jose says**

Hyper is a good book I am not fan of the author now seeing that he wrote a book About Hunter S Thompson and his Fight against "Fascism" which I find absurd,nor the way the author twice in the book "In my Rush Limbaugh voice" or sounded Like Rush? or the way he seguesor transistions from his story back again.Despite this irksome details to me The book strikes a familiar chord and know from first-hand experience sadly. The author delves into the history of the diagnosis the people against it or for it,the Medicine involved and of course those who subscribe to Conspiracy theories regarding the APA and so-called Big Pharma being in it together .He provides alot of everything and not taking any sides so to speak,he himself continues to take meds which I believe depending on your doctor if you need to you should take under care.never self-medicate or mix with drinks as the author did in his teens nor ween yourself off. I believe the author was very responsible, I like his Catholic education background even if it's of the more soft and liberal jesuit kind. All in the book was wonderful and sad to read I recommend to it anyone.

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### **Mary says**

A history of ADHD combined with a personal narrative. While painful to read because of the way the author was misunderstood throughout his childhood, it was helpful as a parent to read his story.

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## **Dana friedman says**

This was eye opening in two ways-- I am living the life of Denevi's family with my third grader-- the various meds that work/don't work, behavioral charts, etc. the medical aspect was a huge cache of information all in one place that was interspersed so well with the narrative that I could imagine my third grader using some of the same words to describe things that are happening to him. I highly recommend this book for any parent who like me is raising a child with ADHD in today's environment and struggling with its management.

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## **Preston Francke says**

Tim is the author of this book and the person who this book is about. He has always had ADHD and this is the story of him living with it. In his early childhood Tim was diagnosed and prescribed Ritalin, which at the time was the most common treatment of his disorder. But after a terrible reaction with the rebound effect of it wearing off he, for many years avoided all forms of medication which could be used to treat the symptoms of ADHD. After he started school and it became apparent that they couldn't just do nothing his mother decided that it would be a good idea to have him start therapy with Dr. Laurie Hamilton. For many years his therapy sessions with her were his only treatment until she suggested that he start going to see her cousin Dr. Joe Epstein. He strongly recommend that they begin using medication alongside therapy and after a while his mother finally agreed with him. At the end of fifth grade he began taking nortriptyline. After this he was on a few other medications for nearly a decade until high school. At this point he went of to college just like anyone else and after he got married and had a son, and as his kid went into his first of kindergarten all Tim could think about is everything that could go wrong.

I think that this book would be perfect for anyone looking for a easy and in depth story as a way to understand the perspective of someone with ADHD, or anyone with ADHD who would like to know more about their condition. I say this because the book has a mixture of completely factual sections and some personal stories from the author's life, these make it easy to follow and keeps the story going. This is nice in that in can make the complex history of ADHD something more easy to understand. Overall the story is well constructed and can keep any curious reader engaged.

I absolutely loved this book. I have no doubt that the reason for this is that there are striking similarities between my own ADHD story and the authors. I really found this story to be just the inspiration that I needed. Just with the parts of his child hood were I could really draw strong comparisons between myself and the authors story. I remember getting into the same sort of trouble as Tim like when he talks about his fights with other kids and not getting along with teachers. All I could think about was my 1st grade teacher and how I would never do my work. Or fighting with my mom and trying so hard to argue as to why she was being illogical. After all this I must give this book 5 out of 5 stars.

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## **Jessica says**

This is a really interesting account of what it feels like to live with ADHD. Timothy Denevi grew up in the 80's and was diagnosed with ADHD around the time he started school. When he was being tested to figure out if his issues were ADHD, he realized that something was "wrong" with him and never knew how to fix

it. What I found most interesting is that Timothy often realized immediately after doing something that it wasn't the right reaction or thing to do or say, but he couldn't un-do whatever he had just done. In school he learned that physically fighting kept most kids from picking on him because they were afraid of him. He goes through his whole school-age life - Kindergarten to graduating from high school and it was really interesting how some teachers were very understanding and accommodating and others were cruel and expected him to be like other "normal" kids. He also talks about how it felt to go on various medications for ADHD and how even now as an adult he struggles with "needing" medication to be "normal." My brother has ADHD and that was why I decided to read this book. This would be a great read for anyone with ADD/ADHD or anyone with a child/family member/loved one with ADD/ADHD to read to get an insider's perspective.

My only complaint about the book is that he intersperses his story with the history of ADHD and the treatment of childhood mental disorders/conditions - that's fine. But, I wish it had been a shorter chapter about his story and then a shorter chapter about the history of ADHD instead of a few long chapters with both. Sometimes it was hard to jump back and forth so much when you wanted to find out more of his story. But, maybe he did that on purpose to mimic the ADHD mind that tends to jump around and have a short attention span! Overall, I did like it and he does a good job telling his story and about the overall history and treatments for ADD/ADHD.

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### **Jonna Higgins-Freese says**

Overall, I was disappointed. Usually, what I find most useful about a book like this is the window it provides into what it's like to be another person. But somehow, I came away with no clear understanding of what it was like to grow up with ADHD, with no visceral understanding of it -- which is what I would expect from this type of memoir. Perhaps this is because I have a child with severe ADHD, so I kept looking for echoes of what I see in him in Denevi's narration, and not seeing it. Perhaps this is because Denevi's ADHD appears to be relatively mild compared to my experience of it (in my experience, when treatment for any disease is "optional" (i.e., the person can choose to take medicine/treatment or not and still function) that's "mild"). Or perhaps it's because I only see my son's experience through my own experience and was not able to gain sufficient empathy through Denevi's narration to come to any new understanding.

The most helpful aspect of the book was Denevi's summary of research on the history of diagnosis and treatment of ADHD, though again, this felt to me more muddled and less illuminating than many other such histories of various diseases/treatments I have read.

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### **Liz says**

Most of us can remember the exhilaration of being released onto the playground from a stuffy elementary school classroom, the awkwardness of a teenage movie theater make-out session, or the reckless thrill of getting tipsy before a high school dance. These are the transformative experiences and emotions that comprise Timothy Denevi's captivating nonfiction debut, *Hyper: A Personal History of ADHD*. But Denevi examines these scenes from his childhood through the lens of ADHD. How did it feel to be a six-year-old on Ritalin, or a teenager watching 2001: A Space Odyssey on Dexedrine? *Hyper* chronicles Denevi's journey from initial diagnosis through fifteen years of treatment, providing readers with a window into his unique view of the world with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

Supplementing these personal memories is the scientific history of ADHD as a condition. Since the late 19th century, physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, and others—from Sigmund Freud to Alfred Strauss to Michel Foucault to L. Ron Hubbard—have disagreed over the disorder’s causes and symptoms, and the most effective methods of treatment. Denevi weaves this research into his personal narrative to create a book that is not just funny and heartwrenching, but also informative and illuminating—a rare history of ADHD from a patient’s perspective.

To read more of my interview with Timothy Denevi, please visit the Tin House blog at this link:  
<http://www.tinhouse.com/blog/36689/do...>

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### **Lisa Moore says**

I applaud the author for sharing his story! I believe it will be helpful for families and educators to see ADHD from a child's perspective.

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### **Joshua says**

I enjoyed the interplay of personal history and social history. The ebb and flow was seamless. And as it moved along, I became more aware of the reality mostly hidden in memoirs or biographies—that we live in a world that is the result of others thoughts and behaviors. So, it was nice to see these two apparent histories side by side.

I am of the opinion that a book is to be measured by the intention and situation of the author. Thus, as he says himself, he wanted “to examine the mountain of material on ADHD from the point of view of a patient.” I can prefer all I want for him to write something more in line with *Humans of New York*. But that’s not what the author did. He wrote, as the subtitle states, a personal history of ADHD. And I judge the book on that merit and not my personal preference.

Also, that he is white, suburban, and from a family that sacrificed a lot to help him doesn’t take away from his struggle. His pains were real. We can all come up with examples of folks with worse circumstances or unique. I was a teacher at school like the author went to in high school—except was not religious. It was my job to help students with Dyslexia, Asperger’s, etc. Trust me, they suffered. Context is obviously different, but humans are humans everywhere. Pain is pain. To say otherwise borders on promoting white/class-based privilege.

You can create all the categories you want, but as the author seems to try to convey at the end, what we are left with is the individual. There are many ways of categorizing people’s advantages and disadvantages. At the end of the day we are left with the individual...the true minority. And so what that the book makes ADHD seem like a resource problem. Yes, I even had parents who acted like it was a resource problem at times. But so what, this is a personal history and all people seek resources to solve problems. I think it is important to step away from what this or that instance in the book may convey and hear the author's argument. His whole point was that we trouble ourselves with "reducing something exceedingly complex to a set of symptoms."

The only setback I have about the book has actually to do with the personal thrust of the book. It’s an



impression I had toward the end when the author's personal opinions about the matter of ADHD seem to take more of a visible nature. I got the thought that he is doing exactly the thing that he saw unfit in folks like Tredgold and Still and others. This is especially apparent when he says he is looking at all the evidence for ADHD from his own personal experience. And doing so because it's "been the exclusive province of the people prescribing, as opposed to receiving, treatment."

He shows us that Still and others barely have methodology to their research, that the thrust comes mostly from ideology. Yet, he seems to play this same game when he says what I just quoted. (Key word is "EXAMINE"). This is one opinion of one person's experience that has no empirical backing subject to statistical analysis. At all. When I read that, I couldn't help but think this as corollary to what many ideological arguments look like in social science investigation. Some don't adhere to proper methodology. They pen from their experience and how they think the world is and should be. Why? Because methodology comes from the oppressive white male European patriarchy. I could very easily put in the author's words "the exclusive province of the people prescribing, as opposed to receiving, treatment."

When he crosses from a memoir to examination, essentially putting his ideas up against psychologists and the like, then he's changed the basis upon which his book should be judged no matter the form it takes.

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## **Michelle says**

With the diagnosis of ADHD most commonly given to American youth/school children, (in higher numbers to boys) "hyper" a debut memoir authored by Timothy Denevi is a notable and important book, especially for parents and teachers. Denevi combines his personal story with fascinating data, studies/facts about ADHD by assorted specialists, doctors, psychiatrists beginning around the turn of the 20th century.

Denevi was a very young child when he received the diagnosis of ADHD. Dr. Smythe, was regarded as an expert at the time, though his methods were based on the outdated psychotherapy theories of Freud, (where children were often placed in custodial asylum care). Smythe's prescription of Ritalin was immediately deemed ineffective, and Denevi worked closely with Laurie, a young behavioral therapist at his school, who was working towards her PhD. Much of his therapy/treatment seemed hit and miss, his parents were very involved, advocating for him in an inflexible Catholic school, later he transferred to a public school. There were also several problems getting along with other boys, fighting, bullying etc. ADHD certainly put Denevi at a disadvantage, he was often stigmatized. The therapist he saw the longest, Dr. Epstein based out of a San Jose hospital ward, was his therapist for over 10 years, the anti-depressant he was prescribed for a number of years seemingly had minimal results. Bonding with his father over baseball, he coached his sons Little League teams occasionally. His mother had a large capacity to "disregard embarrassment".

Many of the first ADHD theories/studies originated with Freud, his daughter Anna Freud reasoned ADHD was the result of unconscious apprehension of children who failed to meet developmental stages, advocated "Play Therapy". In 1922 Alfred F. Tredgold advised of "germinal impairment" called for strict segregation and sterilization of mentally deficient children. In 1938 studies by Dr. Charles Bradley introduced the study of Benzedrine given to ADHD children, were calmed. Chlorpromazine (1950) was introduced and children were released from custodial asylum care, also with the introduction of Ritalin in 1955. The parent handbook "Baby and Childcare" (1947) by Dr. Benjamin Spock felt that healthy children were the result of conscientious parenting. Michael Foucault/Szasz published "The Madness of Civilization" (1961) casting suspicion of modern psychiatry, as agents of control, that marginalized creative open minded individuals. By the 1970's there were predominately Drug and/or Behavioral Therapy offered for ADHD. "The Feingold

Program for ADHD" (1976) eliminated many artificial additives/colorings from the diet, these principles are still in use. Dr. Peter Conrad influenced an entire generation of sociologists in the 1970's that resisted defining hyperactivity as deviant, authoring the book "Hyperkinesis".

Educational reform began in 1991, and many more students would qualify for special education services, ADHD diagnosed students under "health impaired". Denevi was able to reach a level of academic success, attending college, graduating with an MFA. He lives near Washington D.C. with his wife and family.

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## **Jen O'Brien says**

I received the book for free through Goodreads Giveaways.

I enjoyed the narrative flow of the novel. Tim Denevi has a masterful way of illustrating the autobiographical information with scientific research focused on both the historical and medical portions of ADHD. He explains through his own eyes what the world looks like to a person who doesn't have to deal with ADHD on a day to day basis.

As an individual with Asperger's I found a line near the end of the novel particularly poignant. Paraphrasing, he states that any time you explain that you have a medical issue it comes across as an excuse. I found this touching to me because it is a very real part of my day to day life. I deal with the fact that I am an aspie everyday, yet if I explain to people that something may be a part of my nature, it sounds very much like I am asking them to overlook my faults. Clearly this couldn't be further from the truth, I am asking for patience because somethings are harder for me to do than they might be for you. I felt Mr. Denevi's pain ever clearly.

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## **Rebecca says**

Very well done history of growing up with ADHD from a child's perspective. This book was hard for me to read at times as my family is in the midst of these struggles presently and I worry about my own child's perception of it all and what it is doing to his self-esteem. As a parent I want to seek the best help available, while trying to not to "label" him. How do you get help without labeling? How do you assure your child that he is normal and wonderful and smart and so talented, but then he has to go to special classes (behavior therapy) and take a pill each day, that his sibling doesn't have to do.

In the end I hope he knows and feels our continued love and unending support, and that he knows, as I think Timothy Deveni knows of his own parents, that we did our absolute best to help him be the best person he can be and we hope he is happy.

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