

REVIEWS

**José Ramón Ubieto & Marino Pérez Álvarez.
Niñ@s hyper: Hyperactive, hypersexualized,
hyperconnected childhoods**

José Ramón Ubieto y Marino Pérez Álvarez. Niñ@s hiper: infancias hiperactivas, hipersexualizadas, hiperconectadas¹

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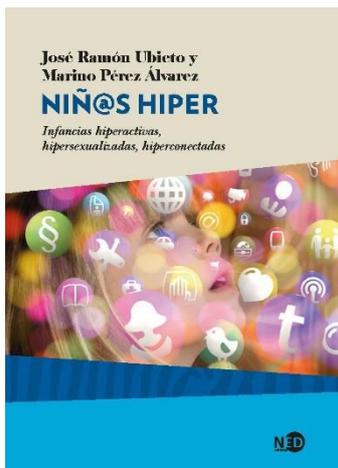
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The main argument of the book is that we are subjecting childhood to the Hyper pattern, which manifests itself in very high levels of activity, sexualization and excessive use of electronic devices. Exposure to unlimited stimuli and experiences has also become a common feature in today's childhood. Thus, children are forcibly labeled into diagnostic categories that can negatively affect their childhood life. This can lead to a pathologization of their experiences, which means that children are at risk of being unnecessarily diagnosed and medicated for difficulties and problems that are common during their development stage. Moreover, this occurs in an open and unfinished time in which they are still being developed and formed. The book examines a variety of disorders, including ADHD, conduct disorders, and

bipolar disorder. At the same time, the prolonged use of pharmacological treatments for these disorders, which ignore the normal reactions that children may have depending on their specific situation, is criticized. In response, the authors suggest that the priority is education, and propose changing educational strategies by implementing project-based work. This methodology allows students to move around a specific task. The authors also advise parents to encourage communication and play with their children again. In contrast to the autoerotic bonding that arises in digital interactions, where satisfaction is obtained through an individual, isolated connection to an object without mediation from another person, the authors argue that it is important to have face-to-face, real-time conversations, since this not only improves the relationship with others, but also the relationship with oneself. In short, the authors' intention is to defend the process of personal development of children without labeling as pathological those things that are common in everyday life, and to affirm that children have the right to take their time to grow up before becoming adults. The book is then approached from various sub-sections, which we will now formulate.

1. Strategies to support or assist parents in managing problems or conflicts with their children

The authors advocate a multimodal treatment that includes educational, family, psychological and pharmacological intervention. However, they consider that pharmacological treatment should not be maintained in the long term, but only for as long as necessary based on the progress obtained in the psychological therapy. Among the support strategies, they consider appropriate those focused on behavior modification and that provide psychoeducation and training to parents to effectively manage children's behavior, in order to reposition the problem as an aspect that can be addressed in the family and school context. Specifically, the authors indicate the need to use a contextual approach to situate the problem in the context in which it occurs and to implement, as a first line of action, educational strategies in the family and school environment, i.e., analyze the child's school and family context taking into account the existing conditions in order to detect what can be modified, both in the forms of education and in the interactions with the people involved in this context. In such interventions, it is emphasized that parents should play an active role. Another aspect they underline is the relevance of focusing on children's strengths in order to tailor, as professionals, interventions along this line.

It is important for parents to establish limits to their children's behavior; to develop an affective relationship where positive interaction predominates (especially the recognition and appreciation of their children's qualities); encourage dialogue and reasoning; communicate orders in a clear, effective and consistent manner; favor positive and adaptive interaction patterns over coercive and threatening patterns; learn to pay attention to their children; make effective and age-appropriate demands on their children in order to give them responsibility while having confidence in their ability; correct their children's misbehavior in a constructive manner; devote quality time to their children by encouraging cooperative play in order to release energy, follow rules, learn to wait, and develop social skills to interact with others. Likewise, on occasions, a space without activities (recreational, educational or extracurricular) should be made possible in order to recover the positive aspects of boredom, allowing the child to be alone with himself without the need for a distracting element, which would ultimately lead to greater self-knowledge and self-esteem.

2. Practical application for the training of parents, teachers and clinicians

The book is mainly aimed at professionals, since it gives an overview of the current problems surrounding the ADHD disorder, related to the fact that we currently live in a society where productivity is rewarded and where the child is not given time to have moments of boredom and to be creative, in addition to excessively guiding the steps to be taken during childhood, without offering adequate learning and guidance when moving on to the next phase of adolescence, in some cases causing them to make the leap too soon. In addition, parents are very overwhelmed because they want to have the child's whole life under control and without problems, so when they break the norm, they immediately think that there may be a psychological problem and that the child may need medication (on this point, parents should be taught in consultation that suffering is part of life and that it is necessary to work on their resilience). Likewise, the book gives much importance to the "common sense" of parents, who should follow their instincts more and not be so afraid when deciding how to educate the child; therefore, it would be advisable to carry out exercises in consultation to increase their self-esteem and decision-making capacity.

There is also an important summary of the concept of ADHD itself and the current state of the debate between advocates and deniers, as well as the nuances within each of these two positions. In addition, it is emphasized that although there are currently no proven biological markers for ADHD, more and more attempts are made to explain this disorder from the paradigm of neuropsychology; however, the improvement found in neurofeedback studies is due to non-specific factors (e.g., the attention given to the child). Therefore, as professionals we must understand that it is not necessary to perform so many interventions with neurofeedback, but that listening and caring for the child in consultation is one of the main keys to his improvement: attention should be paid, above all, to some contextual variables that could be deconcentrating the child (e.g., bereavement, domestic violence, continued parental neglect, and family secrets). In addition, statistical data is provided that can help clinicians get an idea of how variable the data can be due to the limited consistency of the ADHD picture (depending on whether you use DSM-5 or ICD-10, you will encounter one diagnostic criteria or another). Another important point for professionals is the dangers of labeling, recommending clinicians to be cautious when giving a diagnosis, because although for some people receiving a category produces a sense of tranquility by calming their identity crisis and making them believe that they have "located" the problem

(and, in some cases, helping them to get benefits for mental illness), the negative side is that children adopt a "sick role", creating a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy where the child is told that he "cannot" do certain things because of his disease, making it difficult for him to get better; in addition, it is usually thought that the disorder is forever, i.e., chronic.

Naming is also one of the major forms of exclusion, creating a social stigma in children that can negatively influence their interaction with other people. In fact, sometimes there are clear signs of rejection of categorization and medication that lead to a boycott of treatment, lack of adherence to treatment or even direct violence towards the professional; all this happens because there are people who do not like to be reduced to a category, ignoring their uniqueness. In fact, when there is violence to the therapist, the person may not agree at all with the label that the professional has imposed on him or her. In these cases, resistance to treatment should not be approached as just another clinical category, but rather focus on this behavior and dialogue with the patient to understand his position, thus accompanying him or her during the process of improvement.

Moreover, The strategies for help and support proposed in this book can be very useful, since in terms of interventions it is advocated that it is best not to follow a medication-only treatment or a multimodal treatment according to current recommendations (i.e., medication combined with behavior modification techniques), rather, it would be more convenient to provide the child with a series of aids or assistances according to his own problem and without the need for a diagnosis. Likewise, in the field of education, what is mentioned for teachers can be very useful: to innovate in the student's learning process by allowing them to carry out project-based work, that is to say, organized displacements around a task, thinking from a contextual and not a biomedical model. Information on bipolar disorder in childhood is provided so that professionals can take a critical position on the subject (questions are raised such as Are we not simply talking about typical mood fluctuations in children? or Is it not a consequence of the desire to stabilize mood through medication, because in our society there cannot be people who are in a state of euphoria and then need to rest?). In addition, the policy of psychoanalysis on the symptom is advocated, in which it is important to decipher the message in the form of the symptom in order to understand what is really happening to the patient, rather than focusing on the categories associated with the "behavioral tribe" (oppositional defiant disorder, antisocial disorder, etc.). Finally, it is advisable to recover traditional conversation and play with other children, encouraging spontaneous dialogue and face-to-face interaction, which have been lost due to the influence of social networks. Moreover, several authors consider this fact as one of the factors that cause there to be so many children with characteristics that lead them to be diagnosed with ADHD (Montoya-Rodríguez & Molina-Cobos, 2017), because in games some guidelines such as waiting, following rules and self-control are learned. Therefore, it is also applicable in the professional field, since within the intervention it would be necessary to create situations where the child can relate in person with others through fun and dynamic activities (e.g., promote a meeting of several children with ADHD a couple of times a week where they are invited, simply, to play tag or hopscotch).

3. Critical-constructive reflection on the work

In general, it is a book that invites us to reflect on how childhood, a period in which we should be responsible, is currently being pathologized, but in which we feel more comfortable being mere observers. Thus, we prefer to let children connect to the "digital other", instead of linking with them (Bozzola et al., 2022). We believe that the book has many strengths, as it makes us aware of aspects of childhood that we know are there, but that perhaps we have not stopped to think about, given the large amount of stimuli to which we are continually exposed and the frenetic pace of life we have (Warren & Aloia, 2019).

First, it is worth noting the issue of overdiagnosis of ADHD (Kazda et al., 2021), which stems from people's "social need" to label everything that happens to them. Perhaps this need comes from our poor ability to tolerate uncertainty and to know how to wait. The education system probably bears some responsibility for this, since from the time we are children, we learn that doing X (e.g., the exam) will be followed by a reward (i.e., the "passed").

In this regard, we already know that psychology is the most iatrogenic science (Schwarzlose, 2023). So, if we apply it to children, we find that the threshold of perception that something is "normal" (such a subjective concept) has dropped a lot in recent years. As a result, classic and common childhood behaviors have become problems that, in turn, lead to a series of disorders that only seem to be treated by medicine (Tkacz & Brady, 2021). Thus, now all children's behaviors and discomforts must have a name. For some parents this can be "reassuring", as it reduces the anxiety and anguish, they had when they did not know what to do with their child, who behaved differently from the rest, and not according to social norms (Serchuk et al., 2021). But it does not matter, now with the diagnosis, the child is the same as many others; this is what the authors of the book call McDonalization of childhood. Although it is not necessary to resort to childhood to explain this; we can also see it in psychological assessment (Jacinto et al., 2021): an individual who scores a 2 on a depression scale is exactly the same as another individual who scores the same, regardless of the context and learning history of both.

However, the clinical entity is not rejected, it is just that the approach could be different. Perhaps it could be refocused as a behavioral problem that can be solved through a multiple approach involving various actors, such as the family and the school (Dvorsky et al., 2021). After all, from own experience, it is not pleasant to sit in a chair during the whole class. The authors propose, for example, appealing to educational innovation strategies such as project-based work, which awakens children's curiosity and encourages them to be more self-learners.

As Tonucci (2015) said, "the most important learning in life is done by playing". And that is the real job of a child: to play. Therefore, this book is a call to our responsibility as co-creators of the process of social construction of children so that we make use of our most dynamic and participatory pedagogies in order to accompany them in this process; but without forgetting to set limits, teach to expect and follow rules, and educate in values. Thus, we must recuperate the excessive amount of time we have lost in front of a screen (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2020): conversation and play; talking and looking at each other's faces; and even the feeling of boredom, which fuels our creative side to invent things (e.g., a new game).

In short, we would recommend this book to all people, but especially to those parents who are currently in trouble, afraid of making mistakes, and who are desperately looking for guides and applications to know how to give answers and solutions to the daily concerns about the relationship with their children.

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