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## Faster Pussycat: PW Talks with Bronwen Hruska

By Jordan Foster

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With her debut novel, [Accelerated](#), Soho Press publisher Bronwen Hruska dives into Manhattan's prep school quagmire.

**With younger and younger schoolchildren being prescribed drugs, this is a timely book. What was your catalyst to write it?**

When my son, Will, was in third grade, his school suggested we have him evaluated for ADHD because he was having trouble settling down in class. By shamelessly comparing Will to his friends, he struck me as having a normal level of energy for an eight-year-old boy. Still, the doctor diagnosed him with Inattentive-type ADHD and prescribed Ritalin. I'm a journalist by training, so I started researching and found some pretty staggering statistics. As of 2007, 9.5% of all children in the United States were diagnosed with ADHD. With numbers like that, I started to wonder if the problem was not that more

and more kids were unfocused, but that schools, parents, and a generally accelerated society, were expecting far too much from them.

**The world of your fictional Bradley School, like New York City's real private schools, is incredibly insular. How did you do your research?**

I grew up in Manhattan and went to Spence. My brothers went to Buckley. My kids go to private schools as do friends' kids. So it's a world I know intimately, for better or worse. I'd never try to write about something so specific that I didn't know inside and out. That said, my main character, Sean, is from Troy, N.Y., and to him, the world of Manhattan private schools is just plain weird. My hope is that Sean's outsider-ness, which helped me gain much-needed distance, will provide an easy way in for readers who have been spared the spectacle up close and personal.

**Was it difficult to inhabit the head of a male character and his young son?**

I've always thought of Sean as a parent first. That said, I obsessed over getting an honest handle on the male psyche. I'm not sure why I wrote the book from the male perspective, except that being a man pushed Sean even farther to the edge of the periphery of the private school mommy culture. I have two sons and the book sprang from my own frustrations with how boys are seen and treated in a school environment.

**How does the definition of "success" change if kids are being drugged in a constant race for perfection?**

Parents are feeling the pressure to help their kids not only succeed, but to keep up. With so many kids taking medication today to enhance their focus, what about those students who aren't taking prescription drugs? Aren't they at a disadvantage? High school and college kids have figured this out, and are using—and selling—their ADHD medication as study drugs where they used to grab a Giant Gulp of Pepsi. Instead of leveling the playing field for kids who really do have a deficit, ADHD medication seems to be setting the bar at a new high—and opening up millions of kids to the drugs' possible side effects. My (obviously rhetorical) question—and the frustration that made me sit down and write the book: is it all really worth it?