



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on August 5, 2022

Puberty at Liberty: Kids Maturing Earlier Than Ever; Doctors Befuddled

Years ago, when I worked with children, a parent told me that her daughter had just reached puberty.

The girl was seven.

Her brother was also “blossoming” — he was 10.

Far from being a family of outliers, these kids reflected a common phenomenon: Children today are entering puberty earlier than ever. Doctors aren’t sure why, either. (Yet I may have uncovered a major, though underappreciated, cause. I’ll get to that later.)



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It’s said that the average pubertal onset age for boys in 1900 was 16. This was portrayed in a way in the famed book *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in 1884: The protagonist, Huck, a boy of “thirteen or fourteen or along there,” had no trouble donning a dress and passing as a girl.

Today, however, puberty generally begins in white and Hispanic boys at age 10, and *nine* in black boys. The average age for girls is eight, [according](#) to Johns Hopkins, with onset at seven not unusual.

The implications for society are serious. Most obviously, this earlier sexual maturity isn’t accompanied by accelerated intellectual ([Piaget’s cognitive stages](#)) or moral ([Erikson’s psychosocial stages](#)) development. The result is that profoundly immature seven-year-olds may now have to contend not just with basic arithmetic and spelling, but also emerging sexual feelings.

Salon [published an article](#) on this topic recently that focused solely on earlier puberty in girls, no doubt because the site wanted to claim that the phenomenon — and preteens able to get pregnant as a result — was yet another reason to lament *Roe v. Wade’s* demise (which Salon implicitly did).

When the site finally concluded with that propaganda, it examined puberty’s increasing precociousness. The first factor it cited was the rising incidence of being overweight or obese. “In [one study](#) of nearly 1,200 girls in Louisiana published in 2003, researchers found a strong link between pre-menarcheal body mass index (BMI) and a higher likelihood of early menarche,” Salon related. “More recently, [researchers argued](#) earlier puberty is an effect of a higher BMI.”

Yet there’s no doubt more to it — such as, most likely, the chemicals in our environment. “Endocrine disruptors — like BPA and phthalates — could also play a role,” writes Salon. “These can be found in our food, water and many other household products, and are known for disrupting human hormones as they can bind to a receptor within a cell and then prevent the correct hormone from binding. One study found that exposure to endocrine disruptors even before birth could be linked to early puberty.”

Note here that BPA and some phthalates are [estrogenic compounds](#); meaning, they can perhaps mimic the effects of the female hormone estrogen in our bodies.



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Salon cited an expert who said that we probably would never be able to scientifically determine to what degree these endocrine disruptors influence puberty because, since they're *everywhere* in our environment, it's impossible to find an unaffected group to observe.

Salon also, however, mentioned a perhaps psychological factor. Before presenting this, though, a case for the rationality of such theories should be made.

Remember here that we have learned that environment can influence everything — even gene expression. In other words, a person may have a gene that correlates with a certain trait. Yet that gene may remain inactive, and hence the trait won't manifest itself, if the person is subject to certain psychological influences.

Now consider that, in 2010, “researchers at the University of California–Berkeley’s School of Public Health published a study that found that the absence of a biologically related father in the home predicted earlier” puberty in girls, Salon tells us. Of course, *one* study is just that. Yet it is interesting, and a theory comes to mind.

What if it's a survival adaptation? Could it be that, absent a father and the protection he would normally offer, a girl's sexual maturity will initiate sooner to increase the chances that she'll bond with another male, who could then provide (ideally) that protection? (It's just a thought.)

Yet there's another likely psychology-oriented factor. When pondering this issue years ago, a theory occurred to me that shortly thereafter was posited on TV by Dr. Drew Pinsky. His mentioning it raised my eyebrows a bit, since he'd hosted the rather decadent show *Loveline*. The theory is this:

What if today's early sexualization of children — via not just school sex education but, mainly, salacious entertainment — has a psychological effect of triggering earlier sexual maturity? Bearing in mind that, again, environment influences even gene expression, this is actually a very logical possibility.

But here's what makes it a probability. One way to perhaps test this theory, I thought today, would be to determine if sexually abused children (of whom, lamentably, there's an abundance), who also have obviously been sexualized, enter puberty earlier than do other kids. Yet a quick search engine investigation found that this research has *already been done*. The conclusion?

“Sex abuse triggers early puberty and its problems,” read a 2013 *Cornell Chronicle* [headline](#).

“Childhood sex abuse could accelerate puberty in girls, study finds,” [reported](#) CBS News in 2017.

Striking. And that our popular-culture/education sexualization of kids may (and I'm convinced does) have the same effect as sexual *abuse* should give us pause.

Also worth mentioning is that a 2020 [study](#) in the journal *Pediatrics* found that African girls entered puberty notably *later* than females in other parts of the world. Given that American blacks apparently enter puberty *earlier*, and that Africans should have at least a somewhat similar genetic profile, this is interesting. It could lend credence to all the theories mentioned above because Africans, being less prosperous yet more active and traditional, not only have a lower incidence of obesity but “may”

- have a lower concentration of endocrine disruptors in their environment;
- be more likely to have a father in the home; and
- be less likely to be exposed to decadent modern entertainment.

Of course, we'll hear that “more study is necessary,” and, of course, it is warranted. What we can know, and should, is that sexualizing children is ever and always wrong and destructive — and shouldn't be



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