

MANIFESTATIONS OF FLOW AND CREATIVITY IN ADHD PERSONS

by

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(Under the Direction of Bonnie Cramond)

ABSTRACT

ADHD is currently defined by psychiatry by its dysfunctional symptoms. As a result of this stigma, ADHD persons experience low self-esteem and prejudice from society, affecting their quality of life and potential to succeed. However, there is a contrasting positive view of ADHD as a healthy wiring of the brain different from the typical brain that inherently has its own benefits. A couple of these postulated benefits are increased flow states and creativity. These benefits are both supported and challenged by the research literature, which are reviewed here. I present a careful look into the research which shows a correlation between ADHD and inattention with particular kinds of creativity and points out issues with studies that challenge the ADHD-creativity connection. In my research study, ADHD persons are interviewed in order to evaluate whether there is a relationship between ADHD, flow states, and creativity. I also asked them how the stigma and misunderstandings of ADHD affected them in terms of self-appraisal and societal discrimination. I had found that ADHD does not seem to correspond with flow states, but nevertheless it is connected with a form of creativity called idea generation or elaboration, and that ADHD persons are indeed negatively affected by the prevailing academic view of creativity as merely dysfunctional.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

A symptom that Attention Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) persons experience is inattention, during which they tune out the external environment. I hypothesize this inattentive state they get into is often used for creative brainstorming and visualization, and that often the inattentive state constitutes what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls flow, a psychological state in which the individual is intensely involved in creative activity.

In this qualitative study, I interviewed four students in the New Jersey and New York City Area diagnosed with ADHD, ages 28-36, in order to investigate whether they experience their inattention as flow states in which they do creative brainstorming. I also explored the kind of negative thoughts and beliefs they have about their condition, how others discriminate against them, and finally, how the environment can be structured in a way that is conducive to the way they work.

Significance of the Study

Currently, ADHD is viewed as a dysfunctional condition. Children with ADHD are characterized as readily distractible, quickly shifting in activities, and failing to finish things (Lahey et al., 1988). None of these characterizations have positive connotations to them. This negative view is implied in the name of the condition itself—that it is a *disorder*.

Historically, the American Psychological Association changed definitions of various disorders overtime and the list of symptoms they constitute, often depending on societal power structures over time (Meents, 1989). I argue that the definition for ADHD can be changed not

only to better reflect the reality of the condition, but also to help persons with ADHD and their loved ones view the condition in a healthier light: that there may be a positive side to the condition as well.

What the medical diagnosis of ADHD defines as a problem of distraction in ADHD may actually be diverted attention (Rutter, 1989), in which ADHD persons focus their thoughts away from the environment but towards creative thoughts, perhaps immersing themselves in a state of psychological flow. Thus, such a state of distraction is not merely a negative manifestation of ADHD, but a positive one. This shift in view of ADHD may have important consequences for the self-esteem and self-concept of individuals who may view their condition as an “Other” devaluated by society, only possessing of negative traits and a negative condition.

If a connection between ADHD and creativity can be drawn, perhaps ADHD persons can see the benefit to the unique way their brains are wired. This shift in view may also influence the treatment of ADHD, since one of the primary goals of treatment is focused on eliminating distraction through psychoactive treatment. A healthier self-view and knowing how to create a constructive, non-discriminatory environment may be key to combat negativity against ADHD.

If it can be found that the ADHD brain is wired so that it is advantageous for creativity, this piece of knowledge will be a valuable piece of self-esteem for individuals with ADHD. It will be valuable because resources can then be geared towards setting ADHD children on a path in life that would capitalize on their strengths rather than one which is focused merely on attenuating their weaknesses. This study will help contribute to the theoretical formulation of ADHD, as mentioned earlier, as not simply a “disorder” but a condition that can be beneficial to the individual and society.

I believe that the study may be significant in addressing ADHD medication policy. Currently, parents have control of how much their children are medicated, and this may lead to inappropriate levels of medication for ADHD children. I do think there is sometimes a tendency for parents to over-medicate. Singh (2005) interviewed mothers and fathers. Their narrative seems to suggest that part of the reason they medicate their children is their fear that without treating their children, they would not meet society's expectations that they are "accomplished, independent, and self-reliant" from an early age. Clinicians tell parents to decide on a day-to-day basis when to medicate their children. This may even cause weekend dosing dilemmas; though the child is off from school, the parent may want to medicate the child on weekends. Parents can pressure their children to concentrate on "the seriousness of building a future rather than the frivolous pursuits of the afternoon" (Kindlon and Thompson 1999). Krautkramer (2005) states that these "frivolous pursuits" include creative activities such as make believe, over-active imagination, and play. It is possible that medication prevents creative individuals from letting their inborn self naturally unfold overtime, and that parents may limit their unconventional thoughts and behavior since they control when their children take their medication on a day-to-day basis.

Definition of Key Terms

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: a neurobiological disorder characterized by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), the official manual of the psychiatric community, as a dysfunctional condition with the negative symptoms inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsiveness. In contrast to this view, it can be argued that ADHD is a healthy deviation from the norm possessing of both beneficial and unbeneficial characteristics.

Flow: a psychological state of mind in which an individual becomes fully immersed in an activity with a single-minded, focused involvement and intrinsic motivation. This experience is accompanied by a feeling of joy in which one feels at one with an activity. Psychologists consider flow to be a healthy, positive experience that is beneficial to psychological well-being (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Hyper-focus: though ADHD individuals can be attention-shifting, inattentive, and distracted, they also display a paradoxical trait of intense mental focus on a narrow area of interest or activity.

Neurodiversity: a paradigm shift in the understanding of psychological disorders which views them not merely as negative conditions, but simultaneously as positive conditions with positive attributes and advantages the neurotypical brain does not possess (Baker, 2011).

Review of the Literature

General Conception of Study

According to psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1990), creative individuals often experience flow, the ability to hyper-focus on creative activity. There is little to no research on whether inattention in ADHD individuals constitutes as flow experiences. In fact, Csikszentmihalyi posited in his book, *Flow*, that inattention disorders do not bear a relationship to flow because flow experiences involve attention as a main attribute (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). However, as mentioned earlier, the seeming “inattention” of ADHD individuals might actually be diverted attention. The hyper-focus that ADHD individuals experience may be intensive attention to a specific area of interest, which sounds much like a flow state.

Csikszentmihalyi has noted that creative individuals are prone to flow experiences. I argue that a relationship does exist between creative and ADHD individuals. There is anecdotal

evidence that suggests creativity and ADHD may involve similar cognitive processes.

Daydreaming, which is a form of inattention, is often experienced in ADHD persons. Cramond (1994) cited Torrance as stating, “Robert Frost was dropped from school for what we call daydreaming; during some of his lapses from attention he was probably revolving a poem in his mind. Other eminent creative writers, scientists, and inventors have had similar experiences (Torrance, 1963, p 49).” She mentioned that Frank Lloyd Wright would be so caught up in his daydreaming that his uncle needed to shout at him in order to get his attention (Cramond, 1995). Cramond (1994, 1995) detailed the surprising number of trait similarities between creative and ADHD individuals. Both groups have diverted attention, which may be seen by others as merely inattention, where they tune out the external environment and may hyper-focus on internal thoughts and visualizations. Both seem to possess a broad range of interests, have difficulty organizing or keeping track of things, dislike rules and limits placed by others, have high energy and activity levels, are sensation-seeking, are prone to risk-taking and impulsivity, are lacking in social graces, have drastic mood swings, and seem to be driven by a self-propelled motor. Cramond found that 26% of a sample of highly creative adolescents self-reported clinically elevated ADHD symptoms (Cramond, 1994).

Shaw investigated neurological anomalies in ADHD individuals and discovered increased left laterality and mixed dominance in the brain, which resonates with the speculation that right hemisphere and mixed dominance play a role in creativity (Shaw & Brown, 1991, 1999). ADHD individuals are known to have deficits in self-regulation, such as difficulty delaying or inhibiting responses, as well as slow processing speed (Rucklidge & Tannock, 2002).

Do creative individuals possess similar cognitive deficits? If so, a correlation in deficits between creative and ADHD individuals provides plausible support for the relationship between

creativity and ADHD. Some studies find that creative individuals tend to have normal or even greater capacity than noncreative individuals to self-regulate and thus block out irrelevant interference (Stavridou & Furnham, 1996; Green & Williams, 1999; Gamber & Kellner, 1968; Golden, 1975). This seems to suggest that creativity is not related to distraction. However, the problem of these studies is that they did not control for intelligence.

Carson, Higgins, and Peterson (2003) investigated whether creativity is associated with poorer lateral inhibition, which is the inability to block out irrelevant interference, and whether lateral inhibition in tandem with high IQ predicts creative achievement. Participants took auditory discrimination tasks in which they put on earphones and had to identify a particular nonsense syllable among other nonsense syllables while being distracted by white noise. They also took the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking, an IQ test, and the Creative Achievement Questionnaire, which measured lifetime creative accomplishment. When IQ is taken into account, creative individuals turned out to have decreased lateral inhibition, thus more difficulty than noncreative individuals at blocking out interference. When high IQ is considered, low lateral inhibition scores predicted higher creative achievement.

In fact, a recent study (Zabelina, O’Leary, Pornpattananangkul, Nusslock, & Mark Beeman, 2015) examined the relationship between “leaky attention,” the tendency to spread attention over a wider range of stimuli, and creativity. They concluded that “leaky attention” allowed individuals to include and integrate stimuli from outside of their immediate attention in order to be more creative.

Healey and Rucklidge (2006) found that creative children with ADHD symptoms outperformed noncreative children with ADHD symptoms on processing speed, reaction time, and naming speed. However, creative children with ADHD showed poorer performance on

these tasks than children without ADHD symptoms. It is possible that difficulties in filtering out information cause creative individuals to not be dismissive of “irrelevant” information and be open to experiencing them. Slower speed of processing and reacting to stimuli may mean that creative individuals tend not to form or rely on consolidated, ready-made past associations in their mind when coming up with answers. Their need to seek out new associations leads them to have greater creativity but slower processing and reaction times.

Issues with Previous Research Designs

To date, the research on the relationship between ADHD and creativity has not shown a clear link, and in some cases ADHD was a detriment to creativity. However, I found that the problem with the research was that it tested ADHD research participants on entire, comprehensive creativity tests, but did not look at how they perform on individual subsections of the tests or on measures of real life creativity. I predicted that if one looked closely at particular subsections, ADHD people may perform better than normal on these smaller measures of creativity. The area which I believed they will do better at was in “elaboration,” i.e. coming up with many divergent ideas. I believe that they are worse when it came to implementing ideas and making them coherent, which makes sense given disorganization is a hallmark trait of ADHD. Zabelina et al, 2015 found that people with diffused attention reported greater real world creativity but did not get higher scores on the Abbreviated Torrance Tests for Adults (ATTA). They concluded that timed divergent thinking tests may require selective sensory processing although real world creative achievements are facilitated with leaky sensory gating.

This conclusion can be gleaned from looking at the effects of ADHD medication on performance on ADHD tests. It is possible to investigate the link between ADHD and creativity indirectly through observing the effects of ADHD medication on creativity. If ADHD

medication decreased creativity, a link between ADHD and creativity is bolstered. There are a handful of studies that tried to find the relationship between ADHD and creativity through controlled medical experiments. Funk et al. (1993) compared ADHD boys with non-ADHD boys on abbreviated versions of the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking—Figural. After administering different dosage ranges of the ADHD drug methylphenidate to research participants, they found no differences in creativity across these dosages. The dosage groups performed comparatively over time, thus suggesting no ADHD-creativity link.

Swartwood, Swartwood, and Farrell (2003) administered the ADHD drug methylphenidate to eight children with ADHD, testing each of them once on the drug and once off the drug while administering the Test of Divergent Thinking. They found no significant differences on the divergent thinking test subscales of Fluency, Flexibility, and Originality. Fluency is the ability to come up with coherent ideas, flexibility is the ability to switch from one unique idea to another, and originality is the ability to come up with novel ideas. These abilities are critical to creative thinking. Nevertheless, when the children were on methylphenidate, there was a significant drop in creativity on the Elaboration subscale, which is the ability to come up with as many ideas as possible.

Farah et al. (2009) administered Adderall to non-ADHD adults and assessed their creativity using creativity tests such as the Alternative Uses Task, a drawing task from the Abbreviated Torrance Test for Adults, Remote Associations Task, and Group Embedded Figures test. Adderall only affected performance on the latter two tasks, actually enhancing creative performance. However, these latter two tasks happen to be convergent tasks, meaning the drugs affect the ability to come up with the singular, most effective solution. Thus, this experiment

does not address how ADHD drugs may affect divergent creativity, in particular elaboration, the essence of divergence.

On the surface, these mixed results on ADHD medication do not bode well for the idea that there is a connection between ADHD and creativity. However, upon closer inspection, there seems to be certain conditions in which ADHD medication adversely affects creativity, thus showing there is an ADHD-creativity connection. In the Farah et al. study, there were differences between how cognitively higher-performing and cognitively lower-performing adults did on the ADHD drug Adderall. Adderall disproportionately enhanced performance for cognitively lower-performing participants on the Embedded Figures Task. Nevertheless, a fascinating finding in this study is that on the Remote Associates Test is that Adderall actually *impaired* the performance of cognitively higher-performing individuals. Adderall paradoxically enhances the creativity of the cognitively lower-performing but impairs the creativity of higher-performers.

What could this mean? One reason why ADHD medication may appear to enhance creativity is that the medication simply enhances the cognitive attention and organization skills needed to carry out a creative task, one aspect of the creative process. As a drawback, it seems to decrease another crucial aspect of the creative process: generating creative ideas. The adverse effects of ADHD medication on creativity are clearer among successful or higher-performing individuals with ADHD (that is, those with higher IQ, academic achievement, or are college-bound) because they were successful enough to organize their lives. Thus, for them, the medication decreased their creative abilities, because it hindered idea generation. Lower-performing individuals with ADHD, on the other hand, may benefit from medication because they have so many difficulties with organization. The negative decrease in idea-generation that

the medication may bring is offset by its capacity to enhance the ability to implement ideas. Higher-performing individuals with ADHD may have problems with organization, but they developed coping mechanisms to counteract the influence of these problems. They developed organizational abilities, or at least a useful semblance of such.

The adverse effects of ADHD medication on creativity may only be apparent on specific types of creativity tests. Indeed, perhaps ADHD is only related to particular kinds of creativity and not to others. The Funk et al. (1993) study on the effects of ADHD medication on creativity mentioned earlier only gave a general creativity test. It is possible no differences were found between the ADHD and non-ADHD group because they did not observe the individual subscales of the test, representing different components of the creative process. In the Swartwood, Swartwood, and Farrell (2003) study, medication did in fact decrease creativity on a specific subscale, which was the idea-generating subscale of Elaboration.

White and Shah administered the FourSight Thinking Profile, a test that determines the style of creativity one favors, to ADHD and non-ADHD individuals and found that there were differences in type of creativity these groups identified with. The ADHD group preferred the Ideator style (i.e. coming up with ideas) and the non-ADHD group preferred the Clarifier and Developer style (i.e. clarifying and developing ideas). They mentioned that the majority of studies that could not find a relationship between ADHD and creativity used nonverbal creative tests, which is just one subset of ability. In their own study they showed that ADHD individuals did better than non-ADHD individuals in originality on *verbal* measures of divergent creativity. This is consistent with the idea that poor lateral inhibition, which is the inability to filter extraneous stimuli, and difficulties with concentrations may lead to more randomness in thinking and greater consideration of irrelevant information, leading to a higher level of originality. With

this FourSight Thinking Profile in mind, we can see a pattern across studies: ADHD individuals seem to be good at coming up with ideas, but they are not good with organizing these ideas.

Theoretical Basis

This study is guided by the concept of neurodiversity. It argues that some of “disorders” listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders actually involve different but otherwise generally healthy brain structures that deviate from the norm, and that they may be perceived as dysfunctional because society, as it is structured, is created for neuro-typical people (Baker, 2011). Aside from a theoretical hypothesis, neurodiversity has to do with political and social rights. This is why I am investigating how social environments such as work and school discriminate against ADHD individuals, and how these environments can be healthier for them. The term “neurodiversity” came from sociologist Judy Singer, and its movement grew in large part due to online autistic groups (Singer 1999). However, this idea has spread to those with ADHD, bipolar disorder, Tourette’s Syndrome, and other disorders (Fenton & Krahn, 2007). Some autism advocates suggests that the term “person with autism” implies there is a normal person who is trapped with a disease. In their neurodiverse view, autism is an indelible make-up of that person, and thus he or she should be called an “autistic person” or an “autist” (“Aspies for Freedom,” 2014). Temple Grandin stated: “If I could snap my fingers and be nonautistic, I would not. Autism is part of what I am” (Grandin, 2006). Similarly, I hope ADHD persons can see themselves as “ADHDers” or “ADHD people,” not “people with ADHD.” Given the standpoint of neurodiversity, the DSM classification is inadequate because it is a medical model with the intention of fixing what it deems to be a deficit or problem, rather than a normal and healthy human variation, such as gender and sexual orientation.

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are the following:

1. Do ADHD persons exhibit characteristics of flow and creativity when they are in a state of distraction in and outside of school?
2. What indignities do ADHD persons perceive are keeping them from their potential?
3. How can the individual and environment change to be conducive and constructive to the wellbeing of ADHD persons?

Subjectivity Statement

I was diagnosed with ADHD, and thus this research had been driven in part due to my own experiences. I have recognized the connection between hyper-focus and flow in myself and also others with this condition. Part of my motivation for this project is to see whether others had the same experiences that I had, and this not only includes flow but also feelings of devaluation that come with teachers' and school's view of the symptoms of the condition and the way that ADHD had been framed in the psychological literature in negative terms. The struggle I had with focus and attention in school in my past may influence the interpretation of my own findings, but I feel at the same time I have real experience to guide my research.

I had gained a sense of self-confidence and self-knowledge from learning about neurodiversity, and it makes me feel that my condition is not simply a negative deviation from a norm. It is my hope that others can find meaning in neurodiversity as well, and I hope that this research can help guide others in their own personal understanding.

CHAPTER II: THE STUDY

Research Design

I originally intended for this project to be quantitative. I wanted to make a survey which asks ADHD individuals whether they experience flow in school. They would circle answers that indicated whether they had flow experiences or not. If enough participants met a certain pre-established criterion, then I could conclude that ADHD individuals experience flow.

After meeting and discussing this approach with others, I realized that this approach would not provide me with an adequate understanding of the relationship between ADHD, hyper-focus, creativity and flow. If I created a survey with all the possible answers provided it would not give me a rich description. Perhaps the answer lies outside of those survey questions. A research participant may check off an answer even though it does not really work for him or her because that is the best response that can be chosen. Perhaps the answer is more complex and elaborate. I can establish a deeper interrelationship between environments ADHD individuals experience and inattention, hyper-focus, and flow with a qualitative design. I can draw more information from detailed responses. Unlike a quantitative survey study, I can ask for clarification on the meaning of their responses.

This is a critical theorist interview study, with a method guided by symbolic interactionism and data interpretation done by thematic analysis. The study aligns with critical theory's purpose of emancipating individuals from the situations that oppress them (Bohman, 2012). I am interested in using critical theory to give ADHD individuals a way to view their

condition in a positive light. The way the American Psychological Association had defined ADHD does not offer such a positive view. Symbolic interactionism and data interpretation will be explained later in this paper.

Sample

There were 4 participants in the study. They were recruited via email and through convenience and snowball sampling (Patton 2002), in which I found participants through connections and by asking participants for referrals. The sample selection criteria in this study consisted of the following: (1) participants were at a minimum college-educated; (2) they had a diagnosis of ADHD as verified by medical records. I chose college-educated participants as a way to select for higher-functioning ADHD individuals. The reason for this was that there was some speculation that higher-functioning ADHD individuals had different outcomes from lower-functioning ones, notably the fact that higher-functioning individuals may exhibit creativity.

Table 1
Descriptions of Participants

Interviewee	Name	Age	Occupation	Interview Date
1	Romeo	29	Personal Trainer	5/7/2014
2	Winter	28	Economist	6/8/2014
3	Gus	34	Dentist	7/28/2014
4	Harvey	30	Occupational Therapist	8/25/2014

Methods

The methods were guided by symbolic interactionism, which states that we all live in a physical, social, and private reality (Charon, 2007). In this study's interviews, I mimicked Garfinkel's (1967) breaching experimental technique, in which I repeatedly asked my interviewees what they meant by what they were saying. This was to avoid making assumptions about what they might be saying, which were easy to make because my understandings were

guided by my own culture and personal history and theirs were guided by their own (Garfinkel 1967). I cannot have an objective view of their words. According to Deleuze (1988), we are all entangled with each other, and thus it is impossible to separate experimenter from experiment or to view the experiences of interviewees from a position “out of nowhere.” We are not self-contained human beings.

Data for this study were collected via individual interviews, which were recorded via a voice recorder. The interviews were semi-structured. (See Appendix A.) Questions were asked to determine whether participants experienced flow and creativity in relation to ADHD. There were also questions pertaining to the struggles that ADHD persons endure. The interviews were transcribed verbatim onto a Word Document after listening to the voice recorder replay. What was determined from this interview was whether creativity or flow was related to ADHD and how work or school settings were enabling or inhibiting of ADHD individuals.

I conducted the interviews in coffee-serving venues and parks in New Jersey and New York City. Coffee-serving venues and parks were relatively easy to locate for both researcher and participant and were relaxed and conversation-friendly environments for participants to express themselves and for me to understand what they are saying. Coffee-serving locations allowed me to buy coffee for the participant as a token of thanks.

Data interpretation for this study was informed by critical theory. Though I was interested in discovering “what is” (i.e. whether flow can be a symptomatic of ADHD inattention), I was particularly interested in how the experiences and perspectives of ADHD individuals were influenced by the value system society structured for them to live in. In a way, this study can be interpreted as a political act because it challenged and critiqued its reality-distorting value systems (Prasad, 2005). It was specifically interested in uncovering how deeply

the dominant view on ADHD has been perpetuated in the consciousness of those in work and school settings and in ADHD individuals themselves. It is important to investigate how groups become silenced as a result of the dominance of a particular view (Glesne, 2006). Though ADHD individuals are influenced by how society defines them, they may have their own personal views of their own condition, how they experience it, and how they get treated by power structures around them. They may even have mixed and ambiguous feelings, since they may assume that the power structures must be providing an “objective” view of their condition and that they must have the best intentions since they assume that power structures are meant to look out for them.

I also investigated how the medical definition of ADHD found in the DSM may influence ADHD individuals’ perception of self. Foucault proposed in *The History of Madness*, that the “mad” are deemed psychologically ill in part because society has difficulty finding productive use of them (Foucault, 2006). If you look in the DSM, ability to function and be productive to society determines what the “mental disorders” are.

I was interested in finding out whether ADHD persons may experience themselves as an “Other,” given the label of their condition as a “disorder” and the view that all symptoms of this disorder are problematic. To investigate whether all symptoms are necessarily problematic, I investigated whether hyper-focus and inattention can have the positive attribute of creativity or flow. There seems to be little in the literature that draws connection between flow and ADHD. Csikszentmihalyi, who proposed flow, believed that inattention disorders do not constitute flow states since flow requires attention (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). However, I think this is because he did not differentiate inattention from diverted attention. My approach is based on the theory of neurodiversity, a theory that holds that many disorders actually involve generally healthy brain

structures that deviate from the norm, and that they may be perceived as dysfunctional conditions because society as it is structured is created for neurotypical people (Baker, 2011).

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were coded and then the codes were combined into a few themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes that I came up with depended on how the interviews turned out (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003). The first step was to take the interviews and see whether experiences described could be viewed as creativity or flow. Next, informed by critical theory, I saw how positive and negative experiences may manifest in a work or educational environment. (See Appendix C.)

CHAPTER III: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I interviewed ADHD individuals to see if their diverted attention is used for creative thinking. In stark contrast to my hypothesis interviewees often said that ADHD was a hindrance to creativity, which was at first discouraging to me, but then when I prompted them to recount what they thought about during their “inattentive” states, they often cited creative ideas. The reason they thought ADHD was a hurdle for creativity was because it got in the way of organizing and implementing their ideas. It is only after recounting what they thought about while inattentive, would they say, “I guess what I just mentioned *is* creative thinking after all!” They were generally good at coming up with ideas during inattention, but their distractedness was a problem for organization and implementation of creativity. Their ADHD was helpful for half of the creative process, but not the other half.

In this analysis, I will address each of the themes in the order they appear in *Themes and Coding* (Appendix C). The interviews were transcribed, and each line of the interview was coded into preliminary themes. These themes were then combined together into broader themes. I picked out the themes that were significant, coherent, and meaningful, and these turned out to be “links between ADHD and creativity,” “uncertain link between ADHD and creativity,” “No link between ADHD and creativity,” “Negative feelings about ADHD,” “Unjust treatment,” and “Means of coping with ADHD.”

Main Question: Are ADHD and Creativity linked?

The first three of these themes address the main question of this paper, which is whether ADHD and creativity is linked. On the face of it, the first theme, “links between ADHD and

creativity” seems to stand in opposition to the third theme, “no link between ADHD and creativity.” However, all three themes express consistent patterns when one looks into the specifics and analyzes the data: (1) there does seem to be a connection between ADHD and creativity when it comes to inattention states. Inattention states seem to aide with the process of elaboration, or idea-generation. (2) There does not seem to be a connection between ADHD and creativity when it comes to being able to write down, organize, or implement the ideas that were thought of during inattention. In fact, ADHD got in a way of this part of the creative process, since a certain amount of focus is needed to do these tasks. (3) The final consistent pattern is quite important, since one of the central focuses of this paper is whether inattention states in ADHD constitute as flow states. All the interviewees did experience flow, but not at all when they are in their inattentive states. Therefore, the hypothesis of a flow-inattention connection is unsubstantiated.

Links between ADHD and Creativity

Evidence from the interviews supports a relationship between creativity and ADHD. The subthemes for this theme will be addressed in the following order: “ADHD leads to creative thinking,” “inattention and creative thinking,” “inattention and curiosity,” and “ADHD medication inhibits creativity.”

ADHD leads to creative thinking. Winter directly described how her condition helps her with creative thinking. The general idea that she got across was that ADHD helped her with creative thinking by allowing her to come up with divergent ideas. She stated, “ADHD helped me think of so many ideas that I would never think of (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 51).” Winter explained that ADHD caused her to think randomly and with great diversity, including wonderful connections that others would not think of (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 51). This

subtheme supports the notion that ADHD helps with the creative process when it comes with divergent thinking, i.e. coming up with many different ideas.

Inattention and creative thinking. Three of the interviewees directly and indirectly suggested that creative thinking occurred during inattentive states. Winter stated that creative ideas “spring off when I am daydreaming,” and daydreaming is an inattentive state. When directly prompted what she thought of when inattentive, unfocused, and not on task, she said that while teachers were explaining concepts, her mind would shoot off into different directions making connections with those concepts, which she said is like having her “own learning dialogue in her brain (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 47-48)” in which she “interconnected everything (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 47-48).” Winter thinks of these concepts in her own way and creates theories, which she stated her ADHD helped her with (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 47-48).

Romeo said during inattention, he would make associations during class, though his “notes are often unrelated, or you can see odd connections” (Interview, May 7, 2014, p.46). He said that “some of my best ideas are when I am zoned out. But I only write some of it down (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 44).” In other words, when he is distracted, that is when he had been at his most creative, but he had trouble implemented and organizing these thoughts, evidenced by the fact he did not write his ideas down.

Gus at first denied that he thought of creative ideas while inattentive, but when asked what he thought about when distracted, he included creative activities he brainstorms of doing, such as “pick up a paintbrush and start painting, or pick up an instrument and start playing (Interview, July 8, 2014, p. 52).” Gus later spontaneously corrected himself right after saying that, mentioned that when distracted he “would want to do creative stuff” (Interview, July 8,

2014, p. 52). When I followed up with the question of whether he had the urge to do creative things while distracted at school or work, he answered affirmatively (Interview, July 8, 2014, p. 52).

Three of the four interviewees stated that inattention was the key to divergent creative thinking and brainstorming. One mentioned that the hindrance of ADHD toward the creative process was in implementation and organizing (by writing the ideas down), rather than in divergent creativity.

Inattention and curiosity. Romeo said that when he was inattentive, he would wonder about things like if there was a hypothetical door knob, what it is made of (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 43). At first brush, this may not seem creative, but actually it is. Much of creative thinking has to do with problem formulation, which includes the capability to ask questions. Creativity is not just about answers, but it is just as much about being able to ask the right questions as well.

ADHD medication inhibits creativity. Another way to test whether ADHD is related to creativity is by seeing whether ADHD medication inhibits it. As mentioned in the introduction, there seems to be a relationship between ADHD medication and decrease in the part of the creative process called “elaboration” (i.e. coming up with as many ideas as possible). Winter corroborates this when she said that taking Adderall, even at a low dose, “[closed] my other tunnels of thoughts, I could not travel down those tunnels” (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 50). She again mentioned, “Medication does not make me want to go off on the thought-tangents at all” (Interview, June 8, 2014, p.50). Winter was the same interviewee who stated that ADHD helped her make original interconnections when she was distracted from class.

Uncertain Link between ADHD and Creativity

During the interviews, there were interviewee statements that neither strongly affirms nor negates the connection between ADHD and creativity. These come in the form of expressed uncertainty about the link, equivocal statements about the link, or only seeing minor connections between ADHD and creativity.

Expressed uncertainty if ADHD is behind creativity. Romeo mentioned that he can “take things out of context and create new contexts very rapidly,” but said he did “not know if that is related to ADD at all (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 47).” Harvey stated, when prompted with the question of whether he experienced creative thoughts during inattention, mentioned that since he was always inattentive, he did not know if his creativity correlated with it. He did say that he would come up with a plot for a story while doing schoolwork (Interview, August 25, 2014, p. 55-56). These statements do not negate the possibility that ADHD is related to creativity. Both participants happen to be quite creative, but they were not sure if it was due to inattention or not, being conservative in their answers. Certainly, Harvey’s penchant for coming up with a story plot while doing schoolwork is creativity occurring during an inattentive state, since the story plot did not have to do with the schoolwork he had to do, which is on occupational therapy. Therefore, though he did not explicitly know whether his inattention was related to creativity, it can be inferred that this is the case.

Equivocal statements. Romeo said that he does have creative thoughts while distracted from class. However, he explained that he thought that it was not the creative thoughts themselves that distracted him from class, but rather he was “already distracted” when he started to think of creative thoughts. Romeo stated, “It doesn’t distract me, it is part of the distraction, I guess (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 46).” Note here that he does not say that creativity is

unassociated with inattention; in fact he states that it is. What he said does not go against that idea that inattention is connected to creativity. Nevertheless, what he said was confusing since he thought that, though creative thoughts were not distracting him, they were part of the distraction. Perhaps one way to interpret what Romeo said is that the creative thoughts were not what initially distracted him, but they did help maintain his distraction. Therefore, this statement is neither a strong support nor refutation for the ADHD-creativity connection.

Sees only small connection between ADHD and creativity. Romeo stated that the creative state of flow did correspond with inattention, but just “a little bit.” Then he goes on to say that when in flow he is not inattentive (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 45). Romeo suggests there is only a weak link between ADHD and creativity in terms of flow states. This does not mean he thinks that ADHD and creativity are unrelated in other matters outside of flow.

No Link between ADHD and Creativity

The ways that interviewees seemed, *prima facie*, to weaken the hypothesis of a creativity-ADHD link is by suggesting that inattention was not conducive to creativity, and that flow was not related to inattention or distractedness. Upon closer inspection, their statements do not refute the connection between creativity and ADHD.

Inattention not conducive to creativity. Harvey mentioned that it was during the days he was highly inattentive he was “too distracted” to be creative, since he “would forget what [he] thought” (Interview, August 25, 2014, p. 56). This statement at first glance seems to go against the hypothesis of an inattention-creativity connection. However, Harvey actually did suggest that he thought of creative things while inattentive. The specific reason why inattention was not conducive to creativity was that he would not remember what he thought of. Therefore, he was not writing down his thoughts, thus losing a means to organize and implement his ideas.

Flow not related to inattention/distraction. Interviewees did show that ADHD was not related to creativity, but only in the specific sense that it was not conducive to creative flow. When I asked questions about whether they had flow symptoms during inattention, there was either outright negation or expressed uncertainty about how these flow symptoms can possibly manifest during their inattention. When Romeo and Gus were asked whether flow was inhibitory during school or work, one stated “Oh, no. Usually the flow is related to what I should be doing” (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 45), and another answered, “Not so much” (Interview, July 8, 2014, p. 52). Harvey stated that he experienced flow “all the time” but he did not think they matched up with inattentive states, and he even stated, “If anything, it is the opposite,” that flow tended not to happen during inattention (Interview, August 25, 2014, p. 56).

The main reason seems to be that flow is about being focused on an *activity*. Usually, when people think of activities, they understand them as “doing tangible things,” rather than mere thinking. Thus, inattention is related to creative process of generating ideas in the head, but it is not involved with activity, i.e. carrying out those ideas into the tangible form of an activity. This is probably because this requires some organization and implementation skills, which inattentive states of ADHD persons actually tend to inhibit. Inattention is conducive to idea generation, but inhibitive of idea organization and implementation. Those with ADHD are good with one part of the creative process, but not the other.

Secondary Questions: What are the negative experiences of ADHD people? How can they cope with their condition? How can society support them better?

Now that we understand that there is a possible connection between ADHD and creativity, how can we make the lives of ADHD people better? In order to do so, we need to

understand negative feelings they have in regards to their condition, how they are unjustly treated by society, and what ways they can cope with ADHD. Then, we can build a society that can be supportive and nondiscriminatory towards them by advocating ADHD as a neurodiverse brain wiring with its own strengths, often in creativity, in order to stop society from viewing ADHD merely as the merely negative condition presented by the DSM and the media.

Negative Feelings about ADHD

ADHD individuals experience negative emotions in relation to their condition. It causes feelings of frustration, unhappiness, or anxiety, which can be alleviated if others were more understanding, helpful, and better educated about ADHD.

Feeling Frustrated. Romeo said that he would zone out during conversations with friends, but when he speaks, he would repeat what was already said, causing him to feel uncomfortable (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 45). Winter stated that she had difficulty remaining employed fulltime for she does not want to be “forced to think about something I don’t want to think about, especially if I am in an office environment (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 49).” Both expressed feelings of frustration, of not being able to engage in activities that others have little difficulty in engaging in. This will no doubt amount to work and school stress that others do not experience. If others are trained in the school and work environment how to respect their ADHD peers and be there for them even if they demonstrate problems, this problem may be reduced.

Feeling unhappy. Winter, the one who had difficulty maintaining fulltime employment, stated she felt “horrible” and “miserable” since she is “very unfocused” when she is made to think about things she does not want to think about (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 48-49). Thus, some sort of space to daydream should be given to ADHD individuals in school and work settings, especially since this would aide in creative idea generation.

Feeling Anxious. Gus reported anxiety in regards to not being able to filter out extraneous stimuli like music or people talking in the background while conversing with someone one-to-one (Interview, July 8, 2014, p. 51). Thus, society needs to provide quiet environments for ADHD individuals so background distractions are reduced. When ADHD people are at meetings where a lot of people are talking, others must consider that the ADHD person might say something out of turn or remain silent because he or she cannot make out what is being said. This leads to less demonization of the ADHD individual's mannerisms.

Unjust Treatment

The ADHD interviewees reported discrimination or fear of discrimination due to their condition. They may see others getting frustrated with them, prejudice in work and school, a need to conceal their condition to avoid discrimination, the ignorance of others of the condition's reality or nature, and others' misunderstandings about the condition.

Frustration of others. Romeo mentioned how employers and teachers would tell him that though they acknowledge he is smart, they also thought he was "dumb" (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 46). This is a blatant misunderstanding of ADHD.

Workplace/school discrimination. Winter mentioned about being fired from two of her office jobs. She mentioned that the condition was a stigma that she needed to hide from employers or else they would not hire her. Not being able to work in the average work environment made her feel "really depressed" (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 49).

Winter said that when she was in her master's program, teachers found out she had a "disorder" since she turned in a paper that stated she needs to take tests in a testing center. They would keep pressing her to disclose the disorder she has and would tell her they "think it is an excuse." They would even round her grade down since they felt she was given the supposedly

unfair advantage of extra time (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 48-49).

Gus went to graduate school in healthcare where they were more understanding of his condition, but he noted that “outside of healthcare, I see others have issues” in regards to accommodations (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 57).

There needs to be greater education about what ADHD is outside of healthcare as well as ethics about how to treat others with ADHD non-judgmentally to prevent ignorance. These discriminations at work and school seem to be quite prevalent and need to be addressed.

Need to Hide Condition. Winter, as mentioned earlier, said that ADHD was a “stigma,” and if employers know about it, this would factor into hiring decisions (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 49). Gus said he “would not want [ADHD] on my history and have it follow me” and that he “did not want that ADHD to follow me around, so I never jotted it down on any forms.” He then said he pretended to never have it (Interview, July 8, 2014, p. 54). The American Psychological Association must consider how the DSM is propagating the image of ADHD as a “stigma” given its one-sided negative description in the manual. A more balanced conceptualization of ADHD as a neurodiverse brain wiring with its own strengths and weaknesses should replace this one-sidedness. Imagine all the stress and suffering ADHD people experience for needing to hide who they are in order to find a job.

Disbelief of Others. Winter mentioned that people would not believe that she had ADHD, since they noticed that she got good grades. She would then have to reassure them that she is smart (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 50). This comes from a misinformed stereotype that ADHD people are failures who could not achieve in any way, given the belief that their condition is merely negative. ADHD people actually can be quite driven and can succeed, yet even acknowledgement of their success makes others incredulous since apparently they are not

supposed to succeed.

Misunderstandings. Winter, who is quite vocal about injustice, mentioned about how people have the negative connotation of ADHD as “little boys in the classroom...misbehaving, who eat Ritalin to calm down,” that the label is merely given to “kids that do not do well in school,” and that ADHD people are “not book-smart, their thought process is that they should be a mechanic or something else” (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 50). She added that she did not “want anyone having thoughts about [her] especially if [she doesn’t] know them or trust them before they get to know [her], especially the professional environment” (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 50). These are unfortunate and highly inaccurate stereotypes that are being propagated in the public that need to be addressed. These narrow and presumptuous ideas are something all groups that do not belong to the norm or dominant class, such as minorities, those with disabilities, the poor, and women, have to experience every single day, even though they are diverse people in their own right.

Means of Coping with ADHD

I was sure there were ways my interviewees dealt with their ADHD symptoms and how others can help or better understand them. Coping mechanisms should be documented, so that other ADHD people can consider using methods that others had developed.

Aside from all the negative that ADHD people encounter, there must be the positive as well, as some might have found certain school or work environments to be supportive of their condition. The goal would be to make all environments supportive of ADHD people.

Counting. Romeo mentioned how he would use his fingers to count in order to keep paying attention to something at work (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 43).

How other can help. Romeo said that in order to help others engage him in

conversation, they need to keep what they say short (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 43). Harvey said that when he spaces out when information is given to him, he would ask others for information he missed (Interview, August 25, 2014, p. 57). In order for others to be more receptive in helping ADHD people in these ways, they must be given a better education about the condition.

Communication. Romeo suggested openly communicating with everyone about his ADHD, being rather honest and direct about it (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 47). He said that he had become more expressive of his needs as he gotten older (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 44). This can be great advice, but keep in mind other interviewees mentioned how they had to hide their condition to avoid discrimination. If discrimination can be countered against, ADHD people can then become more open about their condition, and thus have their needs met so others can better relate to them.

Finding a niche. Winter talked about how she struggled to find a niche to work in due to her condition. She realized that “as long as I am on my feet or dealing with other people I’m okay...I may be spacier than an average person but I’m okay, but if I’m at a desk alone all day, not moving, it’s absolutely horrible and I really can’t do it (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 48-49).” ADHD people can learn how they can use their condition to their advantage, finding a place to work that is conducive to their hyperactive or inattentive nature. However, workplaces must be able to support this process in some way, rather than outright dismiss ADHD people.

Accepting organizations. Gus, the interviewee who worked in healthcare was the one who found himself in a supportive environment, because healthcare fields (at least those that relate to mental care) are knowledgeable about this condition. He said that since he is in occupational therapy, “people understand people have needs. So I sit in the back and pace the

room when I want to, make myself coffee, fidget toys. I am sensory seeking. Professors are really understanding...almost every occupational therapist is well-versed and understanding of people with attention problems (Interview, August 25, 2014, p. 57).”

The occupational therapy field should serve as an example, as a microcosm, for how the whole of society should treat those with ADHD. This field shows that it is possible that people can become understanding if they are well-versed in ADHD. Environments can allow those with attention problems the ability to be able to “pace the room” and “fidget toys” so they can deal with their restlessness, for example.

Future Directions

At the societal level, there should be an educational movement that first of all dispels the myths about ADHD, including the mainstream psychiatric belief that it is merely a disorder, so that these people can live a prejudice-free life as possible and be given the same work opportunities and freedom from the burden of misunderstanding that others enjoy. More research needs to be done about how to create environments that are supportive of ADHD people, and I think one way is by researching how the occupational therapy school and workplace environments handled this issue successfully. There should also be measures put in place to prevent school and workplace discrimination, as well as help ADHD people find a niche, a place in this world.

At the individual level, the goal should be to reacquaint creative ADHDers with their natures, but help give them a structure (with plentiful flexibility) that will allow them to implement their ideas. This is very different from a mere disorder-reduction approach upheld in the academic psychiatric mainstream. I think medication can be helpful (it can help give ADHD persons the focus they need to implement their ideas and also function at work and school), but it

should not be overused. There are parents who feel that such medication should be prescribed on weekends in order to make sure that their kids will become successful, productive members of society, though weekends can be better and more thoughtfully used for creative, imaginative, and spontaneous play and activities.

When it comes to research linking ADHD and creativity, it is important to control for intelligence—if you compare ADHD and normal people who are at least college-educated, it is possible that the ADHD people may turn out more creative than the normal people. This is because they have enough organization in their lives to get into college, and thus are generally better able to channel their creativity.

I hope in the future strategies can be developed to help ADHD individuals with their creativity. It is beneficial to let them realize that their disorder lends them one aspect of the creativity process, which is coming up with ideas, rather than the rather black-and-white assertion that their condition is merely detrimental to creativity. Of course, the creative process involves the ability to create fluent (that is, coherent) ideas and the ability to implement those ideas, which all may be a weaknesses of ADHD individuals. However, ADHD people will be more motivated to work on their weaknesses if they know that it will help with their natural strengths.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

For this project, I am conducting a research project examining the connection between ADHD, creativity, and flow states. As mentioned in the consent form, the information you share with me will remain confidential and your name will be replaced by a pseudonym. You can skip any questions you do not wish to answer and you may leave the interview at anytime. You are not obligated to participate. This interview will take about an hour. If you have any questions during the interview, please let me know. Do you have questions for me before we get started?

Characteristics of Inattention and the Flow State

1. When in the state of inattention, what do you think about? How would you characterize what you are thinking about?
2. When in such a state, how intensely do you experience your own internal thoughts? How does it feel like to be in such a state?
3. How would you describe such a state in terms of self-awareness, focus, personal reward you get from what you are thinking about, and sense of time?
4. How do you experience your external world in relation to this state of mind? How does it interact with you, if at all?
5. How do you feel when you are in a state of inattention?
6. Do teachers, family, or peers recognize any flow state characteristics you have while being inattentive? Flow is a psychological state of mind in which one is fully immersed, focused, and absorbed in an activity of interest

Educational/Work Setting

6. How does this state manifest in school/work relative to home? When do you find yourself in such a state in school/work?
7. How do teachers/employers respond to you whenever you are inattentive? How does other school staff respond to you? How do fellow students/employees respond to you?
8. How does the school/workplace address your ADHD?
9. How might ways the school/workplace is structured be conducive or not conducive to the way you behave?
10. How do you feel about your condition in regards to school/workplace?

Self-Perception

11. How do you feel about the diagnostic label of ADHD and how it is interpreted in the DSM (may read description in DSM if they are unfamiliar)?
12. What are some positive or negative attributes that you associate with ADHD?
13. How do you feel about your inattention and distraction?
14. How do teachers, parents, other adults view your ADHD diagnosis?
15. How do peers view your ADHD diagnosis? Does it influence how you interact with them?
16. Do teachers, family, peers have positive beliefs about your condition?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Interview 1

Name of Fieldnote File: ADHD Flow Interview #1

Pseudonym of Interviewee: Romeo

Name of Interviewer: Leon Tsao

Date of Interview: May 7, 2014

Place of Interview: Millburn Starbucks

Time Began Interview: 10:00am

Time Ended Interview: 10:30am

Name of Transcriber: Leon Tsao

Date of Transcription: May 10, 2014

Comments: It is difficult to hear the recorder because the Starbucks was loud and full of people. It required multiple hearings.

Transcript

R: When I'm experiencing flow. I'd disappear for hours--can't talk to me, it's amazing. I'm living in a constant stream of post-it notes.

I: So where do you go to work.

R: I'm a personal trainer. I am going to grad school starting September. I'm getting my doctorate in physical therapy.

I: So you experience inattention often?

R: I come up with compensatory mechanisms so the average person does not know or can't really tell, for the most part.

I: What would you do?

R: I don't know, let's say I'm at work, when I got to pay attention to something, I use my fingers to count, so when I lose focus, I can see my fingers and I have a subconscious sort of mechanism to keep counting. If something is important, you would need to direct my focus, you would need to keep it short. As I have gotten older, I gotten more expressive of my needs, and that has helped a lot. Because otherwise I would just sit there and stare at you, and have no idea what is happening anymore.

I: So what do you think about when you are in inattention?

R: Just random things. Whatever pops in my head. Let's say there is a door knob. Oh look, there is a door knob. That's cool. I wonder who made that door knob, or what it is made of.

I: Ok.

R: Just miscellaneous things.

I: How about creative ideas?

R: Uh, sometimes. But I never write them down, big mistake. Some of my best ideas are when I am zoned out. But I only write some of it down. When I am not distracted by other things, like when I am in the shower. I also find when I have a steady background, like when I am in the shower, running water as the constant background, or music, that helps.

I: Do you remember any ideas that you did come up with?

R: For example, program ideas for clients. I would be sitting around, my notepad on my phone full, and I am thinking, I wonder if they do this? I would write it down, and try it out.

I: So when you are in inattention how intensely do you experience your own thoughts?

R: Um, depending on the situation. It is also better when I am well rested. If I am tired, no.

I: When you are in inattention, do you feel self-aware at all?

R: Yeah, I know what is happening. Yeah, uh oh, I see I am losing focus. So that is why I can tell people. My fiance, for example, she would be talking and I would know I am staring at her and not remember anything that she said. I am very aware of when I am losing focus. For example, there is a lot of stimulation here, and so I am having a rough time, but I know how to work on it so I do the fingers trick. Compensatory mechanisms help me to stay focused.

I: Do you experience any personal award from when you are being inattentive, at all?

R: I don't know what you mean by personal reward.

I: I mean, if thinking about your own internal ideas gratify you.

R: Oh I see, yeah sometimes. I daydream my entire life all the time, I think is great. They are dreams that I can control, which is kind of cool. I was trying to learn how to lucid dream.

I: I was trying to do that too.

R: But whenever I start to lucid dream, I get excited, and then I wake up. There is a whole thread on Reddit, an entire sub-Reddit on it, I have read a third of it--it has not helped. I don't remember my dreams, so it does not matter.

I: When you are inattentive, how do you experience the external world?

R: I experience it the same way, but it depends on how unfocused I am, because some days I will be on others I will be off. On the off days, I will zone out, I would have no idea what is happening around me. I would completely just disappear. I would disappear into my own head.

Other times, I would know what is going on around me. I am still generally attentive, so if someone said something to me, it would snap me out of it, or they tap me, and I come back fast. Mostly short lapses.

I: Alright. When do you experience flow?

R: Flow? Majority of flow happens, let's say I am busy, and there is a 3 hour block in which I need to work, I would never experience flow. If I have a day off, if I started getting to the groove of things, I turn off my phone, I log off my Facebook, and all that other stuff, when I get into a flow, I can stick with that a while. The only other time I get flow, I think it is the level of stimulation and enjoyment.

I: Do you think flow corresponds with inattention at all?

R: A little bit. Flow is the only time I am not inattentive, that is when I am focused on a single task, I am on it, nothing else exists.

I: They say that people with ADHD hyper-focus?

R: That is exactly right. When I play games I am hyper-focused. Games that are competitive are also conducive to flow.

I: How does ADHD affect you at work and school?

R: Less so now than I used too. Before I knew I had it, I had a lot of trouble focusing. I'll have conversations with friends, and I will say something, and they'd be like, "We just talked about that." Damn it. It would happen all the time. As I learned more about it, it sort of gotten a lot better.

I: So did it affect you at school?

R: My junior year of college, I took one of my friend's Adderall. I was like, "Oh my god, what is this?" I could have whole conversations and think straight. So when I have big school days or a lot of homework, or I have clients, I take the Adderall. That has made a huge difference.

I: Does flow inhibit you at school or work?

R: Oh, no. Usually the flow is related to what I should be doing. I rarely get into flow for things I shouldn't be doing, for I know it will happen. As I learn more it affects me less, because I know what my limits are. So there is a lot of self-regulation.

I: So how do teachers and employers respond to you when you are inattentive?

R: Employers snap to get me back. Teachers the same. They are like, you are so smart yet so dumb. So frustrating. Why aren't you doing anything? I didn't know it back then. It drove a lot of people crazy. Also, on the flip side, it drove some of my friends crazy when I wouldn't pay

attention, and I would do better than them on exams. Which would be frustrating for them also. It is never from a lack of understanding, it is a lack of focus. Now I'm going to grad school, and I have full knowledge of my condition, so I'm curious as to how that's going to play out.

I: So what might ways the school or the workplace might be structured to address your inattention?

R: Lectures kill me. Worst thing, I would sit there and I will stare at them the rest of class. That is why I bring things to keep me entertained and play with them instead. I started bringing my laptop and I will watch Youtube videos, have my phone out and play games. Engaging discussions are much better for me. Also, use of more visual aides, I need to touch and see things. I am a visual-kinesthetic learner and also have bad focus, so the environment is completely not designed for me in any way, unfortunately.

I: Do you think about creative things doing lecture?

R: Sometimes I will make associations, sometimes if they are related to the class. My notes in the class are often unrelated, or you can see odd connections.

I: Does that distract you from class?

R: Uh, it happens when I am already distracted from class. It doesn't distract me, it is part of the distraction, I guess.

I: Ok. So how do you think ADHD is currently described as--ADHD individuals according to the DSM are described as inattentive, hyperactive, so it is a bunch of negative traits?

R: I would say, honestly, while it has given me a lot of negative things earlier in my life, it has given me benefit--I do not pay attention to things that don't matter. I don't worry about stuff I can't control, I'm really good at shutting off. The fact that I can sort of just switch. When I am in the flow, I am effective about whatever it is I am doing. So that has also been very beneficial. As long as I can manage the inattentiveness and learn how to compensate for it I find it to be very beneficial. I can't remember names, I am terrible at names. That's the only problem. I can only remember names when it is directly associated with something else I remember.

I: So do you have any hyperactive traits?

R: Yeah, I shake my leg a lot, constantly. I sit there with a hand on my leg and I'm like, "stop moving!"

I: So how do other people see your ADHD diagnosis?

R: Um, you mean the fact that I have it?

I: Yeah.

R: They are like, "that makes sense." So most people are not surprised. The occasional person would say "That does not exist!"

I: So do people have any positive thoughts about your condition?

R: Um, I'm not sure. Honestly, I do not know if I discussed it. My fiance has told me over the past couple years we have gotten much better at it, so I think its huge. The best way to deal with it is open communication with everyone about the condition. I'm also an incredibly honest person. Being direct to people actually helps. Everyone has an honest understanding of who you are, what you are doing. One of my greatest strengths is creative solutions to problems. So someone would have an issue, and I'll have a response. I can pull from past experiences very quickly, and combine different paths to create something new. For example, give me a paper clip, rubber band, and some glue, and I'll do something, I'll fix it. It's really strange. I can take things out of context and create new contexts very rapidly. I do not know if that is related to ADD at all, or if that's my brain, but I'm very good at that. Stupidly logical. When it comes to emotional intelligence, I'm not the best, but everything has a logical reason and progression. So I do not know if that is ADHD or that's just me. It is creativity and also technical ability, so give me an engineering type problem, I'll grab onto it and start putting things together. I'm a big tinkerer and do-it-yourself kind of guy.

Interview 2

Name of Fieldnote File: ADHD Flow Interview #2

Name of Interviewer: Leon Tsao

Date of Interview: June 8, 2014

Place of Interview: Bryant Park, NYC

Time Began Interview: 2:00 PM

Time Ended Interview: 3:00 PM

Name of Transcriber: Leon Tsao

Date of Transcription: June 9, 2014

Transcript

I: When you are in a state of inattention what do you think about?

R: Now everybody knows! I mean, what do you mean by state of inattention?

I: When you are unfocused, when you are not on task.

R: It really depends. I guess an example, I'm basically taking classes when I was, in example, economics class, or psychology class, whatever, um, I really love the classes. A lot of people thought economics was boring but the thing that made it interesting for me, I remember, when the teachers explain these concepts, I would just get it right away and I would think about whatever things in real life. I can't even think of some examples, growing up I always wondered about why are these dresses on sale, like these are regular price, like 100 bucks, who the hell is going to buy that one? I would always say like, why would stores do that, why would people buy from the full price, I always had these thoughts like that and economics always explained all

that for me, so when it was teachers explaining something like that in very generic simple terms and examples, my mind would instantly take that concept and connect to these past examples which I always wondered about in life. I would be like, oh that explains so much, this is why it happened, this is why, um, people are like this or this pricing thing is like this, I'll get all excited, and it will be like having my whole own learning dialogue in my brain, everyone in the class just like falling asleep and like and try to copy down notes or something, but because I understood it so easily, I just connected it with everything, like a whole bunch of real life examples, um, also what I do, I usually connect one idea to a concept to a whole bunch of things I observed in real life, interconnecting everything, I'm just interested in how everything in life and in society connect, and why things happen the way they do, and coming with my own theories, I mean I take everything with a grain of salt, not believing a 100% of things I learned in class, economics, whatever, I just take it and compare it to things I have noticed in real life and I can imagine happening, and kind of tweak it my own way, you know, this is just, really, like, happens is like this, and I deal with my own theories and ADD really helps me, actually.

I: Ok. When you are in such a state how intensely do you experience your own internal thoughts?

R: I mean, I don't know, is there a scale or something? I would say, pretty highly, I mean I am completely focused on it.

I: How in touch are you with the environment?

R: With the environment? Yikes. Um, I don't, I mean, the environment is really secondary. Like I'm really into my thoughts, and I don't, I guess I am not totally paying attention to what is happening around me. Yeah. Very little, like, yeah. Maybe I'll come back to some ideas, and it's like coming back up for another breath of air from being underwater and I'll be like, "What did she say now?" How can I relate that concept to some new ideas and situations?

I: How would do describe such a state in terms of your self-awareness?

R: What do you mean by self-aware? Like if I'm hungry. Like if I'm aware of the time?

I: Yes, like the time.

R: No, not the time at all.

I: Do you get personal rewards from your thinking.

R: Yeah, definitely.

I: So how does it manifest while you are at work?

R: Oh God! That's the thing, it is pretty horrible, actually, a lot of what I am doing, I haven't had a fulltime job in a year and a half now, yeah, I kind of just, in a way I don't really want one because I hate being forced to think about something I don't want to think about, especially if I

am in an office environment, I don't want to do that computer bullshit, I don't want to sit in front of a computer all day, I want to walk around, so the conclusion I come to is that as long as I am on my feet or dealing with other people I'm ok, like it actually is fine, and um, I may be a little bit spacier than an average person but I'm ok, but if I'm at a desk alone all day, not moving, its absolutely horrible and I really can't do it. I want to think about what I want to think about, not boring crap. So I'm very unfocused. I can't even do it, even it's easy, I don't even want to, its horrible, its miserable.

I: How do teachers and coworkers respond to your inattention?

R: Some employers have fired me. I've been fired from two of my office jobs, actually. It's for a lot of different reasons, actually, like jealous women or wives or something, with teachers they are mostly ok, even in the PhD program, as long as I made good grades, and it looks like I know what I was talking about, that's why I always pick things that were more interesting to me, because if I take boring classes I don't want to take, it's pretty horrible, like, I have a lot willpower so I can force myself to do work, so pretty much as long as I get good grades, it's pretty easy for me to understand new concepts, so, as long as I get good grades, the teachers are happy

I: Has the school or workplace addressed your ADHD?

R: Not really. I don't really tell people. Definitely not the workplace. Yeah, I mean, the workplace when they were getting rid of me, the boss said, I don't think you are really cut out for a desk job, go somewhere where you are out working with people, you are not meant for this. It made me really depressed at the time, I mean I don't really like this type of job, so now what? I felt pretty crappy but he's right. In school, I don't think people believe I have ADHD, because they'd be like you have good grades, you would fail your classes if you had ADD. Like, no, I'm actually smart, I wouldn't be, actually. I don't think they really believe it anyway, I usually don't tell them anyway. Hold on, what is the question again?

I: Um, how does the school or workplace address your ADHD?

R: I wanted to add something. As far as a thing like a stigma, the workplace would not put up with it, and they wouldn't even hire me or they'll fire me off the bat if they found out, that's why I don't tell them, but as far as school goes, I started my master's program, I had a paper I turned in saying she needs to take it at a testing center because she has ADHD, get 1 and half times the time, and some professors really did not like it, they think it is an excuse, it does not say what disorder you have or whatever, it just says the testing center you have to take it there, so they'll ask me a bunch of questions like why, what do you have? And I am like, "I'm not supposed to tell you." They just think it is a bunch of BS and they really didn't like it, and they would screw my grades down just a little bit. Instead of giving me the benefit of the doubt, they kind of rounded my grade down just a little bit. They are like, oh, she's getting extra time, so, you know, I'm going to compensate on my end by like rounding your grade down a little, she had more time to think about this. So yeah, I think it is a stigma for sure. None of them know it is none of your business.

I: So how do you think the school or workplace might be structured conducive to what you think?

R: I mean, I think discussion is, yeah, I think working alone could be hard like concentrating and stuff. If you're in class, unless you are doing a test, why waste time doing, it's been a while since I've been in school so I'm trying to think of what we did, I'll just focus on the good stuff they can do more of. I think they can have more in class discussions especially within groups, because it is like brainstorming, which is a huge strength of ADHD. And like sharing ideas in a group it helps you feel more confident, other people appreciate my ideas, you know, so you're able to put your ideas you branched off to good use, somebody will notice and appreciate it, you get to share. Yeah, that actually helped me a lot, confidence wise, my classmates, professors, they all appreciate it, especially in college, mostly.

I: You mentioned this, but how has medication affected your ADHD or creativity?

R: I cannot really take stimulants cause I am just very sensitive to stimulants, or any kind of medication or alcohol or anything, so I try Adderall, a low dose, it made my heart rate go up a lot, and I felt like, I don't think it's a full effect, because it was such a low dose, but it was making me a zombie, it was closing my other tunnels of thoughts, I could not travel down those tunnels, it was like composing off those, I had to focus, but it was no fun, I felt like the most boring person in the world, like I was going half-retarded, I was becoming really stupid, I did not like it at all, and then there are some, I may be willing to try Vivance or something, I heard some decent stuff about that, but I don't know, I don't like medication at all. Then there is the Strattera, which is black-labeled, or whatever, from the FDA, I think, that is the worse warning it can get before it is pulled from the market, it has killed people. I refuse to take that. It is ridiculous. I take natural supplements, which help somewhat. I am not saying it is perfect by any means, I take omega-3s twice a day, and I take multivitamin, it really helps. And its nature.

I: How does it help you?

R: It makes me feel more upbeat, I can focus better, I am energetic and at my best. Medication does not make me want to go off on the thought-tangents at all.

I: How do you feel about ADHD as a stigma?

R: It could be pretty bad, a lot of people have a lot of negative connotations towards it, really just inaccurate. They think of little boys in the classroom who are 5 or 6 misbehaving who eat Ritalin to calm down. I think that's a stereotype. Another stereotype: it is a learning disability, it is for kids that do not do well in school, an excuse like, I'm not stupid but I sucked at school. They are thinking of people who are not book-smart, their thought process is that they should be a mechanic or something else. I mean that could be one form of ADD, it is just there are so many, and many people get it so wrong. I don't want anyone having thoughts about me especially if I don't know them or trust them before they get to know me, especially the professional environment, so I'm not going to, it is none of their business, so I rather not tell them.

I: How do you think ADHD has helped your creativity?

R: ADHD helped me think of so many ideas that I would never think of, I mean in a way, it kind of wastes time, I am not as time-efficient as some people, in certain ways, like getting things done or being fast, all these people may not have all these thoughts to distract them, but I think it just comes with the territory. Do they go hand in hand with each other? You think of random, so many new good ideas, offbeat ideas, or jokes, ways of interpreting things that people just pass right by or don't even notice, you point it out and explain it to them, and they may get it or laugh, if it is funny or they will say, "Wow, how did you think of that?"

Interview 3

Name of Fieldnote File: ADHD Flow Interview #3

Pseudonym of Interviewee: Gus

Name of Interviewer: Leon Tsao

Date of Interview: July 8, 2014

Place of Interview: Interviewer's home

Time Began Interview: 12:00pm

Time Ended Interview: 1:00pm

Name of Transcriber: Leon Tsao

Date of Transcription: July 9, 2014

Transcript

I: What is your age?

R: 34.

I: And what is it that you do?

R: Dentist.

I: Cool. What got you into dentistry?

R: I was deciding to go to med school, dental school, or optometry, and those doing dentistry have a good family lifestyle, so I chose that. Others have pretty harsh schedules and not too much family time so I chose dentistry.

I: Seems like a good choice. So, my first question is, when you are in a state of inattention what do you think about?

R: Depends on the situation. If I am in a place where music playing, and people talking near me loudly, I cannot pay attention in a one-to-one conversation. I get anxious around those situations. I do a lot of daydreaming, forget about stuff I need to do.

I: What do you daydream about?

R: Mostly stuff I want to do instead, or stuff I should be doing, or other stuff. Hard to explain. Sometimes I think about someone else, in a middle of someone talking to me, so it's real hard.

I: Do you consider yourself creative?

R: I have been told I'm very creative, since I have tons of hobbies.

I: What kind of hobbies?

R: Music stuff, piano, drums, guitar, bass guitar, cello, violin, what else? Lots of musical instruments.

I: That is a lot.

R: I snowboard, I ski, I play golf, I backpack, tennis, cycling, running, swimming, everything. I can't sit still. It is a good and bad thing. Too many hobbies.

I: Do these hobbies or creative things you do distract you?

R: They actually keep me focused. When I do something I get focused. I do a lot of paintings that is what I do as part of creativity.

I: When you are at work or school, does your creativity distract you at all?

R: Uh, not so much.

I: Alright, so you don't think about your hobbies or anything?

R: Not really. When I am distracted it is mostly on things I need to do, or stuff I rather be doing, I always need to do something, like pick up a paintbrush and start painting, or pick up an instrument and start playing. I guess that would be a distraction in which I would want to do creative stuff.

I: So when you are at school or work you are distracted by the urge to do these things?

R: Yeah.

I: So when you were distracted, do you feel self-aware at all?

R: Uh, no, I don't really realize it until it happened and not during the distraction but after distraction I am totally not aware of what is happening. In a lecture I will go out for 20 minutes, and I totally missed everything.

I: When you are distracted, can it ever be personally rewarding?

R: Uh, not really, I kind of get angry with myself. As a kid, we teach each other to read to each

other, and then I will be asked “What did you just read?” I would not know I would zone out.

I: So, do you get personal reward from what you are thinking about? You might get personal reward, like you might think about painting something, you might think about how you might design your painting?

R: Yeah, I do. When I think of something, it is rewarding when I design something in my head, the outcome would be rewarding.

I: So, do you feel aware of your external world at all?

R: I am aware, but I am kind of...I am aware of getting distracted, I will continue to be distracted.

I: In psychology, there is a concept called flow, like you would do something creative, and you get in the zone. For example, when someone plays basketball they might get in the zone they lose all sense of time and awareness. They are focused on what they are doing. Do you feel like you experience flow?

R: Yeah, totally, especially when I am working on a project. Then it would be in the morning, and I am like, I need to sleep.

I: Do you experience flow in a state of inattention?

R: Not really.

I: Some people with ADHD they say when they are inattentive, they are hyperfocusing on a creative idea they have.

R: Yeah.

I: So for you, you don't experience that.

R: I don't know, it's kind of weird. I do get good ideas, and I keep going on it, um, I think about it, but when I actually do it, that is when I get to that flow.

I: So how do teachers and employers respond to you when you are inattentive?

R: When someone notices? They don't really. I am kind of there, I pick on a little on the words, and I'll go back to get to the conversation. No one notices, because I will acknowledge it, but when they ask, I would not know.

I: How does your ADHD gives you difficulty at school and workplace if at all?

R: At school, I was in lecture, I would change position, jiggle my legs. I did not want to have meds, neither did my mom. I got straight A's, but in lecture, I would zone out, and that gave me

trouble. It can get pretty rough?

I: Do you feel like your medication affect your creativity in any way?

R: Yeah, I was told to take meds, and I had this SSRI which did not do a thing, it did not do anything for me. I moved to the next stuff, which is Adderall, and I said, nah, no thanks.

I: Ok. So does your school or workplace address your ADHD in any way?

R: No, I did not want to put it down on any type of form, I did not want any special treatment. It would ask do you have any disabilities that will impede you from learning something. I had these classmates who had meds who would have special treatment, and I thought it was not fair. I would not want it on my history and have it follow me, so I have a perfect bill of health, I take no medications, or drugs, I did not want that ADHD to follow me around, so I never jotted it down on any forms. I just pretend I never had it.

I: How might school or workplace can be structured that would be conducive to the way you behave? Or has it not been conducive?

R: I would not know how it would help. They would not be able change anything, but one-on-one, and hands-on which would be helpful. I am more of a hands-on person, like in physics, we can do exercises to watch and hold it, but as far as helping, I don't anything could be done. I don't know.

I: How has the school or workplace not been conducive?

R: I guess I don't really know.

I: Ok. What are some positive or negative attributes to ADHD?

R: Positive is that I am very active, and spontaneous. A lot of energy. I always want to do something, or pick up a hobby, which is expensive. That is the bad part of it, I kind of want to spend money on stupid stuff, and I find out I don't like it, and it would be such a waste.

I: And you said most cannot pick up on your ADHD?

R: I guess they kind of pick it up, small things like how I act, but it seems I am active and hyper.

I: What does your family think about it?

R: Actually, I was quiet and did not show it to my family. My family wasn't too involved. Growing up, I don't know.

I: What did you do in the military?

R: When I was in the military, I got bored, so I kept on picking up other job, I was in the military

police, a firefighter, I just pick up all these jobs on top of that, because I was bored.

Interview 4

Name of Fieldnote File: ADHD Flow Interview #4

Pseudonym of Interviewee: Harvey

Name of Interviewer: Leon Tsao

Date of Interview: August 25, 2014

Place of Interview: Parsipanny Starbucks

Time Began Interview: 5:15pm

Time Ended Interview: 5:45pm

Name of Transcriber: Leon Tsao

Date of Transcription: August 29, 2014

Transcript

I: So, when you are in a state of inattention what do you think about?

R: Inattention? Like when I am not focused? Well it can be anything, usually, like, financial things lately, schoolwork, a lot of different things. Sometimes I can space out and think of totally random things.

I: How about creative ideas?

R: Well, I think usually those come to me, a lot in the shower for sure, usually they do spring off when I am daydreaming.

I: What do you consider yourself creative in?

R: I guess maybe, I don't know. I don't think there is one specific—I am not an artist, but I love creative writing. I come up with plots, but I can't say they are real good, but they are usual.

I: What do you write about?

R: I don't write enough, not as much as I wish I could, like, just creatively, for myself, for fun. When I write essays, they are creative, at least to me they are not boring to read. Other people tell me what I write is creative, like professors.

I: When you are thinking about ideas for essays or creative writing, does it come in form of daydreams or not?

R: Yeah, sometimes when I look at dreams, I spring off of that.

I: Does it come when you are inattentive?

R: I don't know, I am always a little bit inattentive. It rarely would not come, when I am really concentrating, like doing taxes, I would not come up with a plot or something. Maybe randomly

does come when I am doing schoolwork.

I: When you are in such a state, how intensely do you experience your internal thoughts?

R: I don't know. They are not crazy, they are not overwhelming. I feel like I need to write it down right now, I need to open my phone, grab a pen or napkin, because at the moment I feel like it is the best thing in the world. It is not such a big deal later.

I: Does this relate to your inattentive traits?

R: I definitely have ADHD, but I guess I have inattentive days where I cannot follow conversations more than a few minutes. I don't know if I am the most creative, I am trying to think about it, no one has ever asked me this, I don't know. When I am inattentive, I am sort of inattentive. It could be different, not sure if they are related.

I: Do you get personally rewarded from your inattentiveness?

R: I like the question. Maybe a little bit. I never thought of that. I don't know. Sometimes, there are days when I notice strange things no one would notice, and usually some days, I call them my retarded days, you know, I never thought about it, now that you are asking, yeah, especially when I get too much or too little sleep, usually Sundays, the whole day is a daze and I am in a different mode, yeah, those are good days, I feel careless, when I drive, I will definitely miss the exits, those are the days I lose my wallet. When I was a kid, I learned to be careful with things, keys and wallets. It is kind of a mess in my head.

I: But it is not creative ideas?

R: I don't know. I wouldn't say I would do my best writing on the inattentive days, I will be too distracted, even if it interesting, I would forget what I thought. In the shower, definitely, I get good business ideas, things snap in place.

I: Have you experienced flow?

R: All the time.

I: Do they match up with inattentive states?

R: I don't think so. Flow would not be on my retarded days. I am writing a good essay, and I will forget time, I would not know how much time passes, so its my focus days. If anything, is the opposite.

I: Ok. So, when you have ADD, how was it like when you were in school?

R: It happens all the time, professors will be talking about two assignments, and I will be thinking about one. I go to a weekend program. People think "You seriously don't know there are two assignments?" Sorry, what was the question?

I: How does it manifest in school and work?

R: Everyone catches something and I won't. There are days when I am spacing out, but I can ask other people for information.

I: How do teachers and employers respond to your inattentiveness?

R: At school now I get extra time. The director of my program is a specialist in special services. It does not make a difference in how I feel in school.

I: How are ways that the school and workplace can be structured that is conducive or not conducive to your ADHD?

R: It is conducive. A weekend program is different; we are in class six days a month. It is great- it is an OT program, so people understand people have needs. So I sit in the back and pace the room when I want to, make myself coffee, fidget toys. I am sensory seeking. Professors are really understanding. In terms of work, in the future, in healthcare, in OT, this is what we do. Almost every OT is well-versed and understanding of people with attention problems.

I: How do you feel about being diagnosed with ADHD?

R: At first it was hard, with a diagnosis. Now it is so common now, it is like being diagnosed with the flu. I am in a field that is very accepting. I wish I had been diagnosed before, so in my first grad school, I would have accommodations. Outside of healthcare, I see others have issues.

I: Do you have positive thoughts about ADHD?

Good question. I don't know. If you find a link between creativity and ADHD that would be great. I do like being creative, I don't follow what I am supposed to do. It does not work well in school. Maybe the fact that your mind gets distracted it helps you think outside the box. I have a one-year old. I am afraid I might forget him in the car one day, or forget to pick him up at daycare.

APPENDIX C: THEMES AND CODING

Delineated below are the themes that I derived from the interviews, a definition of each theme, the characteristics and conditions under which I coded information under each theme, and excerpts from the interviews to illustrate each theme.

Theme: LINKS BETWEEN ADHD AND CREATIVITY

Definition: Those with ADHD show that creativity is related to their condition.

Characteristics: Claims that ADHD leads to creativity; inattention is associated with creativity or curiosity; ADHD medication inhibits creativity

Condition under which code operates: Those with ADHD identify how creativity is linked with their condition, inattention's role in creativity, and medication's inhibition of creativity.

Proposition: Those with ADHD show a connection between ADHD and creativity.

Illustration: Excerpts from interview that show this tendency.

Illustrative Excerpts:

ADHD Leads to Creativity Thinking

ADHD helped me think of so many ideas that I would never think of. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 51)

You think of random, so many new good ideas, offbeat ideas, or jokes, ways of interpreting things that people just pass right by or don't even notice, you point it out and explain it to them, and they may get it or laugh, if it is funny or they will say, "Wow, how did you think of that?" (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 51)

Inattention and Creative Thinking

Well, I think usually [creative ideas] come to me, a lot in the shower for sure, usually they do spring off when I am daydreaming. (Interview, July 8, 2014, p. 55)

Sometimes I will make associations, sometimes if they are related to the class. My notes in the class are often unrelated, or you can see odd connections. (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 46)

[In response to "When you are in a state of inattention what do you think about, when you are unfocused, when you are not on task?"]. When the teachers explain these concepts, I would just get it right away and I would think about whatever things in real life. I can't even think of some examples, growing up I always wondered about why are these dresses on sale, like these are

regular price, like 100 bucks, who the hell is going to buy that one? I would always say like, why would stores do that, why would people buy from the full price, I always had these thoughts like that and economics always explained all that for me, so when it was teachers explaining something like that in very generic simple terms and examples, my mind would instantly take that concept and connect to these past examples which I always wondered about in life. I would be like, oh that explains so much, this is why it happened, this is why, um, people are like this or this pricing thing is like this, I'll get all excited, and it will be like having my whole own learning dialogue in my brain, everyone in the class just like falling asleep and like and try to copy down notes or something, but because I understood it so easily, I just connected it with everything, like a whole bunch of real life examples, um, also what I do, I usually connect one idea to a concept to a whole bunch of things I observed in real life, interconnecting everything, I'm just interested in how everything in life and in society connect, and why things happen the way they do, and coming with my own theories, I mean I take everything with a grain of salt, not believing a 100% of things I learned in class, economics, whatever, I just take it and compare it to things I have noticed in real life and I can imagine happening, and kind of tweak it my own way, you know, this is just, really, like, happens is like this, and I deal with my own theories and ADD really helps me, actually. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 47-48)

[In response to: "Alright, so you don't think about your hobbies or anything?"] Not really. When I am distracted it is mostly on things I need to do, or stuff I rather be doing, I always need to do something, like pick up a paintbrush and start painting, or pick up an instrument and start playing. I guess that would be a distraction in which I would want to do creative stuff. [In response to: "So when you are at school or work you are distracted by the urge to do these things?"] Yeah. (Interview, July 8, 2014, p. 52)

Some of my best ideas are when I am zoned out. But I only write some of it down. (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 44)

Inattention and Curiosity

[In response to, "So what do you think about when you are in inattention?"] Just random things. Whatever pops in my head. Let's say there is a door knob. Oh look, there is a door knob. That's cool. I wonder who made that door knob, or what it is made of...Just miscellaneous things. (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 43-44)

ADHD Medication Inhibits Creativity

I cannot really take stimulants cause I am just very sensitive to stimulants, or any kind of medication or alcohol or anything, so I try Adderall, a low dose, it made my heart rate go up a lot, and I felt like, I don't think it's a full effect, because it was such a low dose, but it was making me a zombie, it was closing my other tunnels of thoughts, I could not travel down those tunnels, it was like composing off those, I had to focus, but it was no fun, I felt like the most boring person in the world, like I was going half-retarded. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 50)

Medication does not make me want to go off on the thought-tangents at all. ((Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 50)

Theme: UNCERTAIN LINK BETWEEN ADHD AND CREATIVITY

Definition: Those with ADHD make statements that neither strongly affirm nor negate the connection between inattention and creativity.

Characteristics: Expressed uncertainty if ADHD is behind creativity; equivocal statements about the link between inattention and creativity; sees just a small connection between ADHD and creativity.

Condition under which code operates: Those with ADHD make statements of uncertainty, equivocalness, or minor support of the connection between ADHD and creativity.

Proposition: Those with ADHD show unsure connection between ADHD and creativity.

Illustration: Excerpts from interview that show this tendency.

Illustrative Excerpts:

Expressed Uncertainty if ADHD is behind Creativity

I can take things out of context and create new contexts very rapidly. I do not know if that is related to ADD at all, or if that's my brain, but I'm very good at that. (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 47)

[In Response To: Does [creative thought] come when you are inattentive?] I don't know, I am always a little bit inattentive. It rarely would not come, when I am really concentrating, like doing taxes, I would not come up with a plot or something. Maybe randomly does come when I am doing schoolwork. (Interview, August 25, 2014, p. 55-56)

Equivocal Statements

[In Response to: Does [creative thought] you from class?] Uh, it happens when I am already distracted from class. It doesn't distract me, it is part of the distraction, I guess. (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 46)

Sees Only Small Connection Between ADHD and Creativity

[In response to: Do you think flow corresponds with inattention at all?] A little bit. Flow is the only time I am not inattentive, that is when I am focused on a single task, I am on it, nothing else exists. (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 45)

Theme: NO LINK BETWEEN ADHD AND CREATIVITY

Definition: Those with ADHD make statements that show no link between ADHD and creativity.

Characteristics: Inattention not conducive to creativity; flow not related to inattention or distraction.

Condition under which code operates: Those with ADHD make statements that show inattention is not conducive to creativity; flow not related to inattention or distraction.

Proposition: Those with ADHD show no connection between ADHD and creativity.

Illustration: Excerpts from interview that show this tendency.

Illustrative Excerpts

Inattention Not Conducive to Creativity

I wouldn't say I would do my best writing on the inattentive days, I will be too distracted, even if it interesting, I would forget what I thought. (Interview, August 25, 2014, p. 56)

Flow Not Related To Inattention/Distracton

[In response to: "Does flow inhibit you at school or work?"] Oh, no. Usually the flow is related to what I should be doing. I rarely get into flow for things I shouldn't be doing, for I know it will happen. (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 45)

[In response to: "Do these hobbies or creative things you do distract you?"] They actually keep me focused. When I do something I get focused. I do a lot of paintings that is what I do as part of creativity. [In response to: "When you are at work or school, does your creativity distract you at all?"] Uh, not so much. (Interview, July 8, 2014, p. 52)

[In response to: "Have you experienced flow?"] All the time. [In Response to: "Do they match up with inattentive states?"] I don't think so. Flow would not be on my retarded days. I am writing a good essay, and I will forget time, I would not know how much time passes, so it's my focus days. If anything, is the opposite. (Interview, August 25, 2014, p. 56)

Theme: NEGATIVE FEELINGS ABOUT ADHD

Definition: ADHD individuals experience negative emotions in connection to their condition.

Characteristics: Feeling frustrated, unhappy, or anxious about the condition.

Condition under which code operates: Those with ADHD will feel frustrated, unhappy, or anxious about their own condition.

Proposition: ADHD individuals have negative feelings about their condition.

Illustration: Excerpts from interview that show this tendency.

Illustrative Excerpts:

Feeling Frustrated

I'll have conversations with friends, and I will say something, and they'd be like, "We just talked about that." Damn it. It would happen all the time. (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 45)

That's the thing, it is pretty horrible, actually, a lot of what I am doing, I haven't had a fulltime job in a year and a half now, yeah, I kind of just, in a way I don't really want one because I hate being forced to think about something I don't want to think about, especially if I am in an office environment. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 49)

Feeling Unhappy

I want to think about what I want to think about, not boring crap. So I'm very unfocused. I can't even do it, even it's easy, I don't even want to, it's horrible, it's miserable. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 49)

Feeling Anxious

If I am in a place where music playing, and people talking near me loudly, I cannot pay attention in a one-to-one conversation. I get anxious around those situations. (Interview, July 8, 2014, p. 51)

Theme: UNJUST TREATMENT

Definition: Those with ADHD are treated unfairly due to their condition.

Characteristics: Others' frustration with the condition; workplace and school discrimination; necessity to hide condition; disbelief in others that the condition exists; misunderstandings about their condition.

Condition under which code operates: Those with ADHD experience discrimination, misunderstandings, and the need to keep their condition private to avoid discrimination.

Proposition: Those with ADHD deal with different kinds of discrimination

Illustration: Excerpts from interview that show this tendency.

Illustrative Excerpts:

Frustration of Others

Employers snap to get me back. Teachers the same. They are like, you are so smart yet so dumb. So frustrating. Why aren't you doing anything? I didn't know it back then. It drove a lot

of people crazy. (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 45)

Workplace/School Discrimination

Some employers have fired me. I've been fired from two of my office jobs, actually. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 49)

As far as a thing like a stigma, the workplace would not put up with it, and they wouldn't even hire me or they'll fire me off the bat if they found out, that's why I don't tell them. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 49)

[In response to: "Has the school or workplace addressed your ADHD?"] Not really. I don't really tell people. Definitely not the workplace. Yeah, I mean, the workplace when they were getting rid of me, the boss said, I don't think you are really cut out for a desk job, go somewhere where you are out working with people, you are not meant for this. It made me really depressed at the time, I mean I don't really like this type of job, so now what? I felt pretty crappy but he's right. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 49)

As far as school goes, I started my master's program, I had a paper I turned in saying she needs to take it at a testing center because she has ADHD, get 1 and half times the time, and some professors really did not like it, they think it is an excuse, it does not say what disorder you have or whatever, it just says the testing center you have to take it there, so they'll ask me a bunch of questions like why, what do you have? And I am like, "I'm not supposed to tell you." They just think it is a bunch of BS and they really didn't like it, and they would screw my grades down just a little bit. Instead of giving me the benefit of the doubt, they kind of rounded my grade down just a little bit. They are like, oh, she's getting extra time, so, you know, I'm going to compensate on my end by like rounding your grade down a little, she had more time to think about this. So yeah, I think it is a stigma for sure. None of them know it is none of your business. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 49)

I wish I had been diagnosed before, so in my first grad school, I would have accommodations. Outside of healthcare, I see others have issues. (Interview, August 25, 2014, p. 57)

Need to Hide Condition

As far as a thing like a stigma, the workplace would not put up with it, and they wouldn't even hire me or they'll fire me off the bat if they found out, that's why I don't tell them. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 49)

I would not want it on my history and have it follow me, so I have a perfect bill of health, I take no medications, or drugs, I did not want that ADHD to follow me around, so I never jotted it down on any forms. I just pretend I never had it. (Interview, July 8, 2014, p. 54)

Disbelief of Others

In school, I don't think people believe I have ADHD, because they'd be like you have good

grades, you would fail your classes if you had ADD. Like, no, I'm actually smart, I wouldn't be, actually. I don't think they really believe it anyway, I usually don't tell them anyway. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 49)

Misunderstandings

It could be pretty bad, a lot of people have a lot of negative connotations towards it, really just inaccurate. They think of little boys in the classroom who are 5 or 6 misbehaving who eat Ritalin to calm down. I think that's a stereotype. Another stereotype: it is a learning disability, it is for kids that do not do well in school, an excuse like, I'm not stupid but I sucked at school. They are thinking of people who are not book-smart, their thought process is that they should be a mechanic or something else. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 50)

I don't want anyone having thoughts about me especially if I don't know them or trust them before they get to know me, especially the professional environment, so I'm not going to, it is none of their business, so I rather not tell them. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 50)

Theme: MEANS OF COPING WITH ADHD

Definition: Mechanisms are created to either deal with ADHD symptoms.

Characteristics: Finding ways to deal with inattentive or hyperactive symptoms; finding ways to have others help or understand; finding a niche in life that would be conducive to the symptoms; developing structures at work or school that would be conducive to ADHD individuals.

Condition under which code operates: Those with ADHD and around them find ways to work around its symptoms personally, with the help of others, through communication, through finding a niche, and finding places conducive to their symptoms.

Proposition: ADHD individuals and others exhibit ways to cope with its symptoms.

Illustration: Excerpts from interview that show this tendency.

Illustrative Excerpts:

Counting

I don't know, let's say I'm at work, when I got to pay attention to something, I use my fingers to count, so when I lose focus, I can see my fingers and I have a subconscious sort of mechanism to keep counting. (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 43)

How Others Can Help

If something is important, you would need to direct my focus, you would need to keep it short. (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 43)

Everyone catches something and I won't. There are days when I am spacing out, but I can ask other people for information. (Interview, August 25, 2014, p. 57)

Communication

The best way to deal with it is open communication with everyone about the condition. I'm also an incredibly honest person. Being direct to people actually helps. Everyone has an honest understanding of who you are, what you are doing. (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 47)

As I have gotten older, I gotten more expressive of my needs, and that has helped a lot. Because otherwise I would just sit there and stare at you, and have no idea what is happening anymore. (Interview, May 7, 2014, p. 43)

Finding a Niche

I don't want to sit in front of a computer all day, I want to walk around, so the conclusion I come to is that as long as I am on my feet or dealing with other people I'm ok, like it actually is fine, and um, I may be a little bit spacier than an average person but I'm ok, but if I'm at a desk alone all day, not moving, it's absolutely horrible and I really can't do it. (Interview, June 8, 2014, p. 49)

Accepting Organizations

It is great--it is an OT program, so people understand people have needs. So I sit in the back and pace the room when I want to, make myself coffee, fidget toys. I am sensory seeking. Professors are really understanding. In terms of work, in the future, in healthcare, in OT, this is what we do. Almost every OT is well-versed and understanding of people with attention problems. (Interview, August 25, 2014, p. 57)