

This zine revolves around impulsivity, particularly applied to ADHD. I wanted to see what I would create by creating art on impulses I had over the course of a week. Each piece was created without any planning. My research focuses on where impulsivity actually comes from. Because ADHD is a mental disorder, people often forget that there are actual physical differences between the brain of someone with ADHD and someone without ADHD.

I wanted to use a zine to try and represent the condition for someone who doesn't have it. I wanted to try and mimic the overwhelmingness of ADHD with the collages. I've grown up with ADHD and it's something I will live with for the rest of my life. I know first hand the frustrations and difficulties that come along with it. While it can be managed, it's important that people understand that there are fundamental differences in the way an ADHD brain works.

ADHD is often overlooked and played down as it's not seen as something very serious by a lot of people. There are many people who don't believe it exists. I want the viewer to come away with at least a bit more insight into what it's really like to have the condition and how it works. ADHD can have a massive impact on a person's life, especially if undiagnosed. It's important that we don't undermine mental health issues. There is already a stigma in the United States against the discussion of mental health issues. Have you contributed to that stigma? What will you do to end the stigma?

Nick S.  
Sausalito, California

p | e a s e r e m a i n c a | m

Please Remain Calm

Your heart melts into my cup  
It tastes like warm honey

////////////////////  
~~you're not real in this dimension~~

I realized there was noone who could kiss away my shit

WHY DO I FEEL BORED

Today I ate a bowl of frozen strawberries and a handful of Fritos and later spent about 20 minutes sliding on the runner in my kitchen while watching That 70s Show on my phone. I had no particular reason to, they were just impulses. Just like how I just had the impulse to play my Lorde record. And did I do it? Yes,<sup>1</sup> because that's what this project is about, impulse. I'm going to be following what my impulses tell me to do.

I have ADHD, aka Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. It's a chronic condition that can affect one's ability to focus, mood stability, memory retention and recall, organization, etc. But one major symptom is impulsivity.<sup>2</sup> I've gotten a bit better at fighting some impulses over time. But some are still hard, like going on my phone instead of working, etc. But to hell with it, what happens if I let go and let my impulse guide me through creativity and my day?

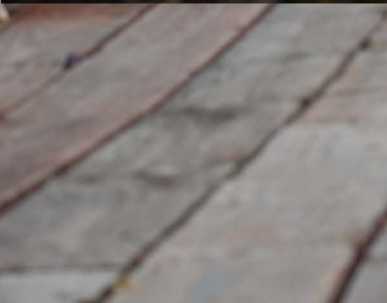
Impulsivity and ADHD come from physical differences in the brain. Studies have shown that people who are more impulsive have a thinner cortex on the areas of the brain responsible for decision making.<sup>3</sup> It's also been shown that people with ADHD have less blood flow to these areas, indicating a lesser function of these areas. And according to Very Well Mind, "the amygdala and hippocampus are smaller in the brains of people with ADHD. These areas are responsible for emotional processing and impulsivity".<sup>4</sup>

ADHD impulses can be hard to explain to other people. One analogy I saw likened it to being possessed by yourself. You want to do something productive but you end up doing something pointless for hours instead. All the while you're thinking about what you should be doing. It can feel nearly impossible to pull away from what's distracting you.

These smaller, distracting impulses have become even harder to control as technology has evolved to be addictive by design. Technology is being designed to be addictive and distracting for neurotypical people, so for people who have a predisposition to impulsivity, it's even harder to avoid.<sup>5</sup> Apps are designed to stimulate dopamine re-

lease with "rewards" such as likes and views. These boosts of dopamine are what subconsciously pulls you back to the app or website to get you to keep using the platform and generating ad revenue. Apps, social media platforms, in particular, are designed to have an endless stream of content to keep you engaged. This removes any natural stopping point where it would make sense to disengage.<sup>6</sup> The Ledger of Harms<sup>7</sup> cites the Journal of the Association for Consumer Research<sup>8</sup> when they say "The presence of a smartphone, even when off, can reduce cognitive capacity by taxing the attentional resources that reside at the core of both working memory capacity and fluid intelligence". In today's digital age, it's nearly impossible to not be with your phone at most times. According to a study done by Common Sense Media and Lake Research Project, "78% of teens check their devices at least hourly" and 69% of parents do the same.<sup>9</sup> This shows that the problem is rampant throughout society. And while these platforms addict neurotypical people, they're designed for them, so when someone neurodivergent is exposed to the tactics apps use, they're more likely to fall victim to them.

However, as an artist, impulsivity isn't all negative. While I've always struggled to create realism in drawing and painting, my impulsivity helps me clear my mind and create abstract pieces purely on instinct. Photography gives me the ability to create on an impulse. I'm able to capture light to document the world around me through the lens. The process-based nature of developing photographic prints in the darkroom is calming. An ordered list of steps to follow in order to create a piece of art. The same process-based experience is what drew me to printmaking. Working through defined steps to create a piece. These process-based art techniques help me overcome impulse, they become meditative in a sense. I am able to fully absorb into the creation of the piece. The method of creation becomes part of the piece.



chaos  
thoughts collide  
crash and burn  
on an unregulated highway calmed by little  
endless traffic of information  
there are no lanes  
an unadulterated free-for-all  
so you take the first the exit you see  
marked by a small sign  
it leads you to a road  
a road that leads away from your destination  
the road is lined with entrance ramps  
but you stay on the road for hours  
and it's just you on the road  
you seemingly become physically attached to this road

as it drifts

further from the highway

further from your control  
the ramps start to fade away  
you barely notice them anymore  
and it's like they never existed  
and all is quiet

but you find yourself entering the highway in the same place you got off  
you gained nothing on the frontage road  
billboards encourage you towards the destination

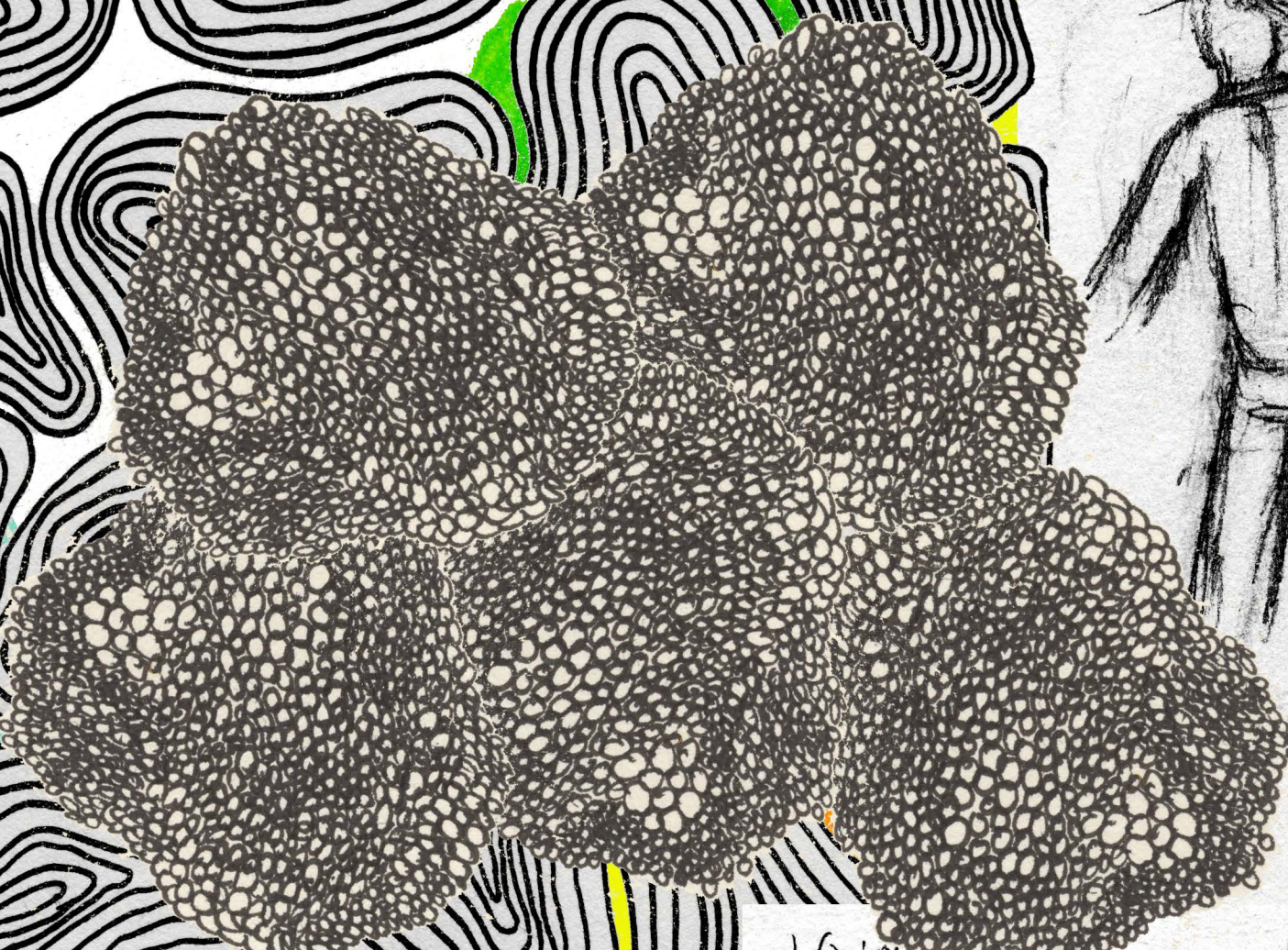
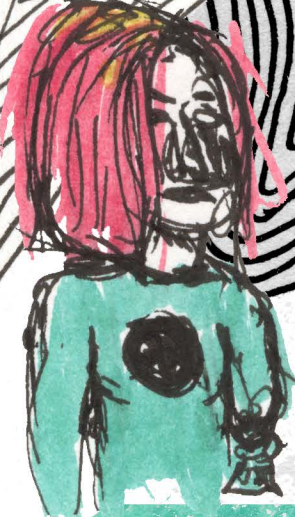
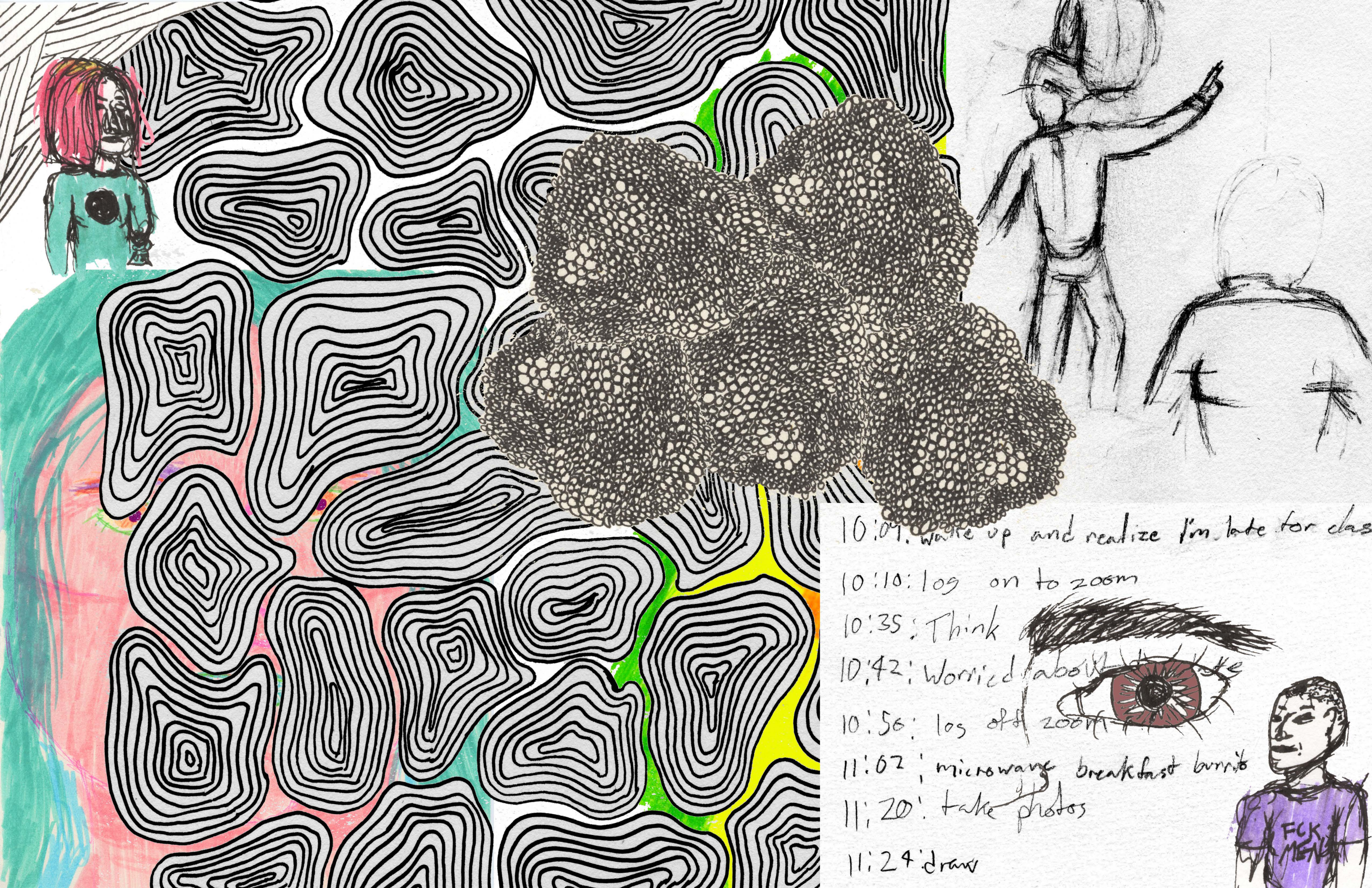
suddenly  
the highway lights up  
the noise of the traffic is overwhelming  
the ramps snap into view



and you swerve up into the fray

so you continue on the highway  
billboards encourage you towards the destination

when a small sign catches your eye  
"\_\_\_\_\_ this way", it reads  
and you drift towards  
you know the destination is more important than the calm road  
but control has been lifted out of your responsibility  
and so you speed off the highway  
to start the cycle anew





- 10:01: wake up and realize I'm late for class
- 10:10: log on to zoom
- 10:35: Think 
- 10:42: worried about  take
- 10:56: log off zoom
- 11:02: microwave breakfast burrito
- 11:20: take photos
- 11:24: draw



Impulsivity is not completely unmanageable. By examining how your impulsivity behaves, you are able to find your triggers and possibly eliminate them from your working environment.<sup>10</sup> Organize your workload and create an outline before starting. Time your work in intervals of 30 minutes of working and 10 minutes of writing. Lengthen the work time the longer you use this method to train your brain to stop distractions. It's also been recorded that diet can affect the severity of symptoms. Foods that contain omega-3 fatty acids as well as zinc, magnesium, and iron have been shown to improve symptoms. A regular eating and sleep schedule, as well as regular exercise, have also shown to be helpful.<sup>11</sup>

There are also some medical/therapeutic approaches that are available as treatment methods.<sup>12</sup> Behaviour Therapy (also known as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy or CBT) has shown to be effective to help patients create tactics to manage their symptoms and work productively in spite of them. There is a myriad of different medications available to treat ADHD. Most commonly prescribed are stimulants. These are either methylphenidate based or amphetamine-based. Both types of stimulants are available in immediate release, e.g. Ritalin (methylphenidate-based) or Adderall (amphetamine-based), as well as extended release, e.g. Concerta (methylphenidate-based) or Vyvanse (amphetamine-based). Both stimulant bases host a similar list of possible side effects, however, amphetamine-based medications have slightly more.<sup>13</sup> According to helpguide.org, "Stimulants are believed to work by increasing dopamine levels in the brain. ... For many people with ADHD, stimulant medications boost concentration and focus while reducing hyperactive and impulsive behaviors."<sup>14</sup> There are only 3 nonstimulant medications available for treating ADHD, an atomoxetine based norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor and two alpha agonists, the clonidine based Kapvay and the guanfacine based Intuniv. These medicines aren't as widely prescribed and have had less research done on them. However all three offer less side effects than stimulants as well as being an alternative for people who don't want a stimulant. Atomoxetine

works by blocking the norepinephrine (a chemical that increases alertness, focus, and memory retrieval) reuptake, causing more to be released and creating a concentration of norepinephrine in the brain.<sup>15</sup> Clonidine can help by lowering blood pressure and releasing norepinephrine to the prefrontal cortex. However, it is not as effective on its own as stimulants are and it doesn't work with all types of ADHD.<sup>16</sup> It's currently not fully understood how guanfacine works to help ADHD. WebMD states that "Guanfacine is thought to affect receptors in the parts of the brain that lead to strengthening working memory, reducing distraction, and improving attention and impulse control."<sup>17</sup> Like clonidine, guanfacine also relaxes blood vessels and lowers blood pressure.<sup>18</sup> These are all medications used to effectively treat impulsivity in ADHD in the US. They don't all work for everybody, so sometimes trial and error is necessary, but with so many options it should be possible to find a medication that can help.

Impulsivity is a complicated issue. It's a symptom of multiple conditions and disorders. It can be a burden to live and work with, but ultimately, I wouldn't be the same person without it. My impulsivity helps me in my art practice and helps me to explore and grow as a person. I will be living with it for the rest of my life, so it's better that I learn to manage and use it, rather than to let it gain control over me.



nic k