

Josh H.

Larkspur, California

ADHD

Acrylic, wood, audio

Behind every person is an ocean of thought. For people with ADHD, this swirling chaos moves non-stop. I like to describe the feeling of ADHD (*Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder*) as a TV and radio constantly playing and switching channels every so often. When I try and concentrate, my thoughts scream at me to look around and I have to constantly tune them out. That is the struggle to focus when you have ADHD.

ADHD makes it difficult to filter out irrelevant stimuli and control your thoughts. It converts any information that enters my brain into an attention-grabbing thought that I cannot control. This makes any slight noise or movement a distraction as I will instantly begin thinking about it and not focusing on the task at hand.

The purpose of this project is to give the viewer an immersive look into my mind and how I visualize ADHD. I made it intentionally chaotic to give the viewer a feeling of how difficult it is for someone with ADHD to focus on one thing for extended amounts of time. I have included six phrases and 27 images relating to my personal experiences with ADHD as well as shared experiences with others who have ADHD. The music playing is a collection of songs I have made or have a strong connection to.

The inability to control unwanted thoughts causes me to be constantly thinking about what others think of me and how I can change to be better accepted. As you walk through my installation, I challenge you to pick any spot on the walls, and see how long you can focus on it before your thoughts wander or something else catches your eye.

ADHD



Josh H.

The Oxbow School

OS46

Behind every person is an ocean of thought. For people with ADHD, this swirling chaos moves non-stop. I like to describe the feeling of ADHD as a TV and radio constantly playing and switching channels every so often. It feels like I have noise constantly swirling around in my head, pulling my focus and impacting my thought processes. Think of it like staring at a single gray dot in the middle of a moving sea of color. Your thoughts are screaming at you to look around, but you have to constantly tune them out and keep staring at that one point. That is how it feels to focus with ADHD. This paper explores my relationship with ADHD and how it has affected my identity.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects an individual's ability to sustain attention and has difficulty controlling hyperactivity and impulsive behavior. It can also negatively affect self-esteem, relationships, and grades in children. People with ADHD tend to have trouble staying focused on tasks, and will avoid or procrastinate on work that requires focus (Mayo Clinic).

ADHD was first mentioned in 1902 by British pediatrician Sir George Frederic who described it as "an abnormal defect of moral control in children." This definition would go through many changes until the American Psychological Association settled on Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. Nowadays, more and more children are diagnosed with ADHD usually during their elementary school years (Holland). According to a 2020 study, ADHD has a strong genetic link and children who have siblings or parents with the disorder are more likely to have it as well (Grimm et al.). In my case, my dad has been diagnosed with ADHD so it got passed down to me.

I was first diagnosed with ADHD in December of 2013 by Susan B. Schmidt, Ph.D. I was in 4th grade of elementary school and struggling to focus on lessons and topics I was

presented with. My teachers would report that they had to constantly remind me to stay on task or else I would get distracted and do something else. In my diagnosis, Schmidt reported how I had difficulty resisting visual distraction as well as trouble sustaining visual and auditory attention. However, she did report that I was able to pay attention when responding to them both at the same time. Schmidt wrote, “Josh's testing is suggestive of significant attention difficulties. Josh struggled on the Test of Everyday Attention. He struggled with both visual and auditory attention. Further, Josh described himself as struggling with inattention.”

I have always questioned what parts of myself were results of having ADHD. In 2013, an ADHD experiment entitled “*Do I need to become someone else? a qualitative exploratory study into the experiences and needs of adults with ADHD*” was conducted by the Athena Institute for Research on Communication and Innovation in Health and Life Sciences. The Athena Institute “addresses complex societal issues in a sustainable and equitable way, as our transdisciplinary approach includes the knowledge and expertise of a wide variety of factors and actors – both scientific as well as non-scientific – in research and innovation processes through studying and designing science-society interfaces” (Athena Institute). In this experiment, 52 adults with an ADHD or ADD diagnosis were gathered into eight different focus groups. Five of these groups were tasked with brainstorming topics and problems about ADHD, then discussing to expand on their brainstorming, and finally proposing solutions. The other three groups were tasked with reflecting on the findings of the five previous groups, then visualizing how they could achieve their desired situation, and finally finding real solutions to reach their goal. The results of this experiment will be discussed in comparison to my experience with ADHD.

I've always had a hard time focusing on work; my brain just doesn't allow it. I constantly look for an outlet to distract myself from the uninteresting tasks in front of me. Even while writing this essay, I am constantly looking for some opening to take a break, get up, or do something else. In "*Do I need to become someone else?*", many participants reported having difficulty completing simple tasks, and had an easier time with more complex tasks. Similar to those in the experiment, I find myself favoring complex tasks over easy tasks. I will jump on any chance I get to challenge myself with a hands-on or difficult project because it will entertain and exercise my brain better than a simple one. These larger projects are able to sustain my attention and interest better. This has led to me creating many large, difficult projects as follow-up work to topics I learned. For example, I have made original music videos for assignments where other students decided to write a paper or give a presentation.

In "*Do I need to become someone else?*", the majority of participants felt like they were powerless to control their thoughts or emotions. Everyone felt like they were out of control, and could quickly change without any notice. I, too, sometimes struggle with this lack of mental control. I think of my thoughts like a radio and television both playing something different at the same time. Then without warning, the radio or television will switch and begin to play something else. I only recently realized that this was due to my ADHD, and that not everyone experiences it. It is odd that something I have lived with my entire life and grown used to, does not apply to everyone else. This constant thought in my head has contributed to a lot of overthinking and anxiety. Always thinking thoughts means that sometimes the television or radio will switch to a channel about people I know and I will begin to worry about what they are doing or what they think of me.

I have always struggled with my self-image and have to keep reminding myself that I do not have to change. Interestingly enough, most of the participants in “*Do I need to become someone else?*” reported the same thing. The experiment stated that, “Participants explained that they were convinced that something was wrong with them and that they were expected to act in a different way. In a sense, they felt they had to be someone else.” I am constantly second guessing my actions and wondering what people think of the way I behave. Uncontrollable intrusive thoughts question the way my arms are positioned and how they sway when I walk, how I look when I walk, how I look when I’m standing, what to do with my hands, am I doing too much with my hands?

Another contributing factor to the noise in my head is the inability to filter out irrelevant stimuli. In “*Do I need to become someone else,*” the majority of people found it difficult to filter out information that wasn’t important. Often I find myself getting caught up in topics that do not relate to my end goal. I will become sidetracked and just follow where my interest takes me. In Dr. Schmidt’s report, she stated that, “It was noted that Josh at times got himself distracted on tasks. He would stop his work mid-task and began asking this examiner non-related questions.” Bouncing a leg or fidgeting with something while seated and forced to pay attention is a common trait among people with ADHD. My brain’s constant search for entertainment leads it to bouncing my leg or fidgeting with my hands.

Similar to many of the participants of “*Do I need to become someone else?*”, I have struggled with controlling my behavior. The majority of people in the experiment expressed how they felt like they couldn’t behave in the way they wanted to. They understood how they wanted to act, but there was a gap between intention and performance. As a 4th grader with ADHD, I struggled with impulse control. My mom would constantly note how I was very

physical with my friends and how I struggled to respect personal boundaries. As I have grown and matured, impulse control has become easier to manage, but at younger ages, it impacted my ability to make friends and create relationships.

ADHD has always been a part of my everyday life, and dealing with the effects it has on me has been one of my greatest struggles. Staying focused is an everyday challenge I encounter and the feeling of not belonging plagues my social life. The constant ocean of thought leans me towards overthinking and anxiety and my need for challenging and problem-solving tasks leans me towards larger, project based work rather than essay writing. I would not be who I am today if it were not for ADHD, and I am not sure I would like who I am without it.

Works Cited

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