



How to unlock the potential of a beautiful mind and allow it to thrive as opposed to survive

ADHD - A new, philosophical understanding

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By Adam Bates

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Background

The formation of character takes shape in relation to the principles of pain and pleasure. For it is from birth that we begin to accumulate experiences and each of those experiences is to be stored not just with the sensory data, an image, smell or sound memory, but with the emotional tag which was experienced at the time. Thus, we know that as a baby, seeing mummy brings comfort and we relate the image of the mother appearing to such a feeling. That is to say, a baby waking in the middle of the night may experience temporary pain, they perceive that they are alone and that pain subsides and can soon be replaced by the pleasurable experience of comfort once the mother appears and takes the baby from its crib into her arms.

It follows that every experience creates a memory and link to an emotion by the nature of this principle, the first time we fall over we experience pain and thus, we desire to not fall over again. Yet, once we learn to walk and we see the joy and experience the comfort and praise of the mother or family around us that we learn attempting to do so, and succeeding, to walk is good. Learning to walk may also bring other pleasures too, the growing child becomes able to reach a toy that they may not have been able to access alone previously etc and so it follows that being able to walk is desirable and it can be a tool that brings more pleasurable experiences.

The first time we are outside and lose the mother in a shop will be registered as a highly painful experience, linking the losing of the mother with such an emotion and so the child knows that losing the mother is bad. The sudden flip from that traumatic feeling whilst the mother is lost though to that feeling experienced when finding her once more minutes later creates a pleasurable experience simply because of the change from that previously experienced painful state, to a state where that pain is completely eliminated. That moment of just being with the mother again, a normal experience in most circumstances, becomes highly pleasurable in this situation.

This therefore, is how habit forms and at the extreme end, addictions too. For we attempt to avoid those experiences that cause us the greatest pains and by nature we seek those which bring us the greatest pleasures. A first shot of heroin for example would be linked to such a pleasurable high that the brain registered that emotion with the experience of the drug, the

comedown that one may experience after, although in practice should simply be returning to that neutral state, is experienced as painful because of the emotional change and fall from that greater high that preceded it. This therefore, plays on the psychology in a way that makes a further hit highly desirable.

It is from the concepts of pain and pleasure that our character forms by means of that vast and ever growing, database of accumulated experiences and their emotional tags will shape all our future actions and decisions. Through the analysis of my own character and traits I had come to an understanding of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder being likely as the result of social and environmental actions as opposed to one that is more likely to be of a hereditary nature. I have though, in delving deeper into the research come to conclusions that it is likely a combination of the two albeit, as expected to myself and yet largely against much of the previous literature, influenced by the environment and the adaptations it causes to the brain to a far greater degree than hereditary elements.

Personal examples

I kept staring at the form, it began to blur in front of me, my head moving closer and then further away from the screen, a little focus, then more blur. I couldn't do it. When I had admitted as much to myself I walked down to the estate agent to ask them to complete it for me whilst in the office. This was November 2021 and yet on that very same day I had spent hours looking at research papers and had begun a write up on the, previously unknown, direct cause of the increase in cases of Poly Cystic Ovary Syndrome that had been witnessed particularly in the US and the UK over the previous 3 decades. I had already begun some philosophical thought and reading of the current research into ADHD and I had already related this to myself prior to this, quite literally, glaring example mentioned.

You see, attention deficit does not occur without a corresponding hyper focus (dis)order. That same child who may struggle to concentrate in class or on their homework suddenly has the ability to concentrate on their current favourite computer game for hours on end, mastering every level, every element and with each more challenging level their mind is focused solely on the task at hand, mastering their skills in a way that many others would never be able to do.

For me, first it was music and more particularly sound recording. I became obsessed and much to the disappointment of my mother, dropped all my A-levels having been a A* student in maths and sciences at school, in order to do a BTEC in popular music.

“I hope you do not wish to do music for a living Adam!” My piers would frequently say, I had only just started playing guitar a few years previously and was by nature extremely unmusical. But, I knew I had a skill when it came to writing and being creative where my mind desired to be so, I didn't want to do anything else for a living at that stage aside from something related to music. Fast forward 5 years and by the time I was completing my degree with a 1:1 grading in audio music technology, I would have the entire course of 50 plus students sat in science once one of my pieces had finished playing, before someone uttered the words - “How on earth did you do that with the equipment we have!”

The answer - obsession! For those years, from the moment I woke to the moment I went to sleep I would do nothing else, every single day without exception.

That obsessive mind is what led someone with what would be considered extremely poor genetics for building muscle, to the top in the fitness. Industry. I had to know everything, if there were anything that could improve my craft then I wanted to learn, from first thing in the morning until the last thing at night it was all I could think about - muscle and nutrition science. Often, I would wake in the night and not be able to get back to sleep until that thing on my mind had been answered by browsing articles or research papers. Of course, by this stage it had given me a wonderful career which only further allowed me to dedicate all of my thought and attention to it.

Then came philosophy and psychology and of life leading me to a path that beautifully linked those obsessions together; improving the lives through the knowledge of the mind and the body, that these elements work in a cohesive harmony together as can be understood by the example of the knowledge of the endocrine system intertwining with our emotional state. Yet, I had to get my PA or friends to fill out the forms, manage my diary and do the simple tasks that had not only been a challenge to me, but more importantly, an increasingly hard challenge as the years went by.

An increasingly hard challenge over time: is it therefore perhaps the case that ADHD is a trained and epigenetic disorder resulting from what we are subconsciously training our brain to do proficiently or not over time? I knew it was the case that with any addiction or habit, the more we indulge in the act, the stronger those neural pathways that we are laying down become. I also

learnt how science has recently shown that the physical structures of the brain do adapt to the activities we are frequently undertaking¹ and that a musician for example will see growth in particular areas of the brain as they continue to practice their craft over time.

What the current research shows us

There are three main facts that I then needed to consider when looking into the current research around ADHD and those are as follows:

1. Is most likely to occur in an older sibling when there are one or more children in the family²
2. Is most likely to occur to those who are youngest in their school year³
3. Is somewhat more likely to occur in children who were born prematurely or at least of a lower birthweight.⁴

I remember at some point in my teenage life my mother saying to me that I was a lovely child until my sister was born. Although perhaps said at a time where her emotional state would have influenced such a direct and harsh statement, it will have some contextual basis behind the thought. For when we consider that a sole child will be used to that constant attention from the mother in their early years and they are accumulating experiences that are always relating to the mother as positive, that the mother is always there with them and that the presence of the mother is always a good thing. When awake the child has the attention of the mother almost without exception, that child is the sole focus of the mother and therefore the Childs experiences accumulate where they are subconsciously seeing themselves as first at all times in the mothers world.

For myself, this would have been the case for the first 2 and a half years of my life prior to the birth of my sister and at which point the child suddenly experiences competition. For the child

¹ Nicole M. Hill & Walter Schneider - Brain Changes in the Development of Expertise: Neuroanatomical and Neurophysiological Evidence about Skill-Based Adaptations: <https://mrbartonmaths.com/resourcesnew/8.%20Research/Cognitive%20Psychology/Brain%20Changes%20in%20the%20Development.pdf>

² Reimelt, C., Wolff, N., Hölling, H., Mogwitz, S., Ehrlich, S., Martini, J., & Roessner, V. (2021). Siblings and Birth Order—Are They Important for the Occurrence of ADHD? *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 25(1), 81–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1087054718770020>

³ Thomas, Liji. 2019. *Youngest children in class at greatest risk of ADHD, depression*. News-Medical, viewed 09 December 2022, <https://www.news-medical.net/news/20190924/Youngest-children-in-class-at-greatest-risk-of-ADHD-depression.aspx>.

⁴ Song, I.G., Kim, HS., Cho, YM. *et al.* Association between birth weight and neurodevelopmental disorders assessed using the Korean National Health Insurance Service claims data. *Sci Rep* 12, 2080 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-06094-x>

at that age can not reason and they are certainly not at an age where they would rather spend their time away from the mother, this of course would be before they are leaving the house on their own and spending time in the company of friends etc without the mother being present. They bare witness to this rival for their attention and will accumulate new experiences, that love perceived in the expressions of the mother is now being show to something new, that same look that they had become accustomed to being only for them is now being displayed to another.

What can the child do to regain what is now perceived as a “lack”? They had become accustomed to living daily, every moment with the mothers focus and affection on them, now they have found that there are times where they feel they are “in the way”, are they still wanted? Does the mother still have that same love and thus desire to bring happiness and comfort to them too?

What if they begin to cry? Crying has in the past meant the mother would come to them and one more give them that comfort. It works, the mother is suddenly showing concern for them once more, this behaviour will therefore be stored as an experience with that positive emotional outcome and may be repeated. But soon the mother learns this pattern is being repeated and too much so. Let's say that she is in the process of feeding the newcomer and thus can not suddenly switch that focus for the 5th time that day to the first child. What if the mother yells - “*just a minute!*” Or worse, “*shut up will you!*” Maybe the mother will resist but will display the look of stress herself and the first child may perceive this look alone as them causing the mother pain now. They used to bring nothing but pleasure to the mother and yet now they are causing the mother to feel distress just by their presence, in the eyes of the child that is.

Crying this time hasn't worked, what next? Throw their toy across the room perhaps?

The child then leaves the constant presence of the mother for the first time once they begin pre-school and then school. Here, there is one key and important fact to consider and that is that they child who is the youngest in their year will have been alive for 20-25% less time than the oldest child in that year. It is indeed true with myself that being born in August, I began school when I had only just turned 4 years old whilst the oldest in the class, born in September, would have turned 5 years old within the first few weeks of beginning school.

It follows therefore, that there is a substantial amount of difference in the cognitive development and life experience between those two extremes of the age of children in a particular class. That youngest child, perhaps having less prefrontal cortex development may well be less ready to thrive without the constant attention of the mother and thus would seek such comfort to

be provided to them from the teacher. It may then stand to reason that the child would seek such, in much the same way as the older sibling may in acting out in order to receive the attention from the teacher.

The responses of the teacher in such a situation may well be an important factor in the child's development, with the lack of understanding and expectation of that child to be able to focus on the class activity in the same way as the older children leading to that child continuing actions that are aimed at receiving what they would consider love and comfort, but in this case from the teacher. If the teacher is aware of such behaviour and the pivotal stage of the child's development they may be able to adapt their approach to suit and offer more praiseful encouragement and thus allowing the child to see rewards by way of praise and comfort for certain behaviours that would see them thrive more within the context of the classroom environment and the activities that are being undertaken. "I have seen you draw some things that are so beautiful, I was telling your mother about it the other day. I would love to see what you do manage to do with this one too." As opposed to "just get on with it, why can everyone else sit quietly and draw but you can't?"

The reduced birth weight would in all likelihood link with a reduced development of the pre-frontal cortex of the brain on birth and thus a greater degree of its development will be taking place within the environmental context provided by the mother as opposed to in utero.

Incidentally, I myself was not only the older of two siblings by two and a half years as mentioned, but was also the youngest in the class and had relatively low birth weight of 6lb and 6 ounces.

How to make those individuals thrive

In understanding the elements and examples mentioned I believe it would be possible in a hypothetical experiment to coerce a child into having the onset of ADHD symptoms and to also be able to reverse them by means of the actions of their mother and/or teacher. Therefore, more research to prove these concepts without doubt and then to create appropriate literature and source materials for both parents and teachers will be of enormous benefit to that child's development.

However, it is also an important point to not see ADHD as being a bad thing for a child or particularly for a young adult, for if they were given the right balance of encouragement, praise and also assistance where suitable they will thrive in their specific areas of interest and create some of the most incredible work in their field.

I had said for years prior to this understanding how I had always wanted my mother to turn around and say “you know what I am really proud of you and all you do for others.” Without that, it only made me more dedicated to my work and obsessed to become even better and better at what I do. Yet correspondingly, without that sign from the mother and instead having the focus on the negative traits of the individual can be detrimental at any age. That is, and I will use examples here to clarify such as - “if you are ill go to a doctor” as opposed to “see how you feel tomorrow and if you are no better call the doctor or let me know if you would like me to do it for you,” Or, when hearing of something the individual has achieved, not commenting on that achievement at all, ignoring it and responding with “I hope you have finished your admin too” will only lead to them desiring to go back to their obsession and to do more, whilst building a greater resentment to being able to do the admin or other mentioned activity. Whereas giving them that praise for what they have achieved and then reminding them that they now need to do the other task and offering to help or simply asking if they have help with it would encourage a very different response. Even on asking if they have someone to help without the offer of the help from the mother herself, shows that individual, that they do have that comfort and support that would otherwise be perceived as a lack.

It is by this means and of course I could and maybe one day will, elaborate with far more examples and greater detail, that the child and thus adult will be able to thrive in the field of which they dedicate their mind without suffering the negative aspects in a harmful manner to their wellbeing.