

Occupational Performance Needs and Strengths of Young Adults with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder

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Introduction

- Learning disabilities (LD) and attention deficit disorders (ADHD) are lifetime neurodevelopmental disorders that impact young adults in their everyday lives. They can occur together; 46% of youth with ADHD have an LD⁽⁵⁾.
- Within their daily lives these young adults struggle with keeping their lives organized, with study skills, have a negative perception of academic success, and higher dropout rates^(3;7). They also have higher stress levels, social skill deficits, and low self-esteem^(3;7;8).

Purpose

- Identify non-academic occupational performance needs and strengths of young adults with LD and ADHD to prepare an interview guide for subsequent use with college students.

Methods

Design: Cross-sectional qualitative

Data Collection:

- Two types: (1) textual data from public blogs, and (2) interviews from televised documentaries.
 - Internal Review Board approval sought; IRB exemption received. No consent was needed for collection of data taken from public domain media.
 - Hookway explains that, "Blogs are firmly located in the public domain"⁽⁴⁾. We did not need to retrieve informed consent from blog authors because their blogs exist in the public domain, making this research possible.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:

- Blogs are a recent phenomenon; therefore sought documentaries aired on network, cable, and public television within the last five years⁽⁴⁾
- Inclusion: (1) author/creator self-identifies as having LD and/or ADHD, (2) discusses struggles and/or strategies with LD and/or ADHD, (3) topics being discussed are pertinent to college, or young adults.
- Exclusion: (1) private posts, (2) poster/interviewee obviously not adult, (3) self-identifies as someone who is in high school.
- Blog posts were copied and pasted from the web browser to digital text documents.
- Televised interviews from documentaries were watched in full.

Data Analysis:

- Conceptual/Thematic description⁽⁶⁾; goal – elucidation of nuances & descriptions, interpretively integrate the data
- Analysis from digital text documents: Interview data, salient passages transcribed verbatim; Written blog data cut & pasted
 - Three researchers re-watched the televised interviews to identify salient passages
- Initial coding: 2 researchers independently identified salient quotes
- Salient quotes organized based on their similarities and differences, organization/conceptualization evolved as result of:
 - Repeated card sorting
 - Constant comparison of conceptualizations to data
 - Multiple discussions with other researchers
- Meanings were identified as subthemes then grouped as to overarching themes

Sample

- N = 13
- Males: n = 6 Females: n = 7
- Blogs: n = 9
- Televised interviews: n = 4

Search Terms

- Living with a learning disability
- Dyslexia blogs
- ADD young adults
- ADD blogs
- Dyscalculia blogs
- Learning disabilities college students
- Learning disabilities young adults

Results

Young adults with LD and ADHD live with a wide range of symptoms that affect their school, work, relationships, and self-conceptions. Participants from interviews and blogs shared stories depicting how their LD and ADHD symptoms affect them, their relationships, their daily lives, and their strengths. These tables and passages expound on their stories.

“The ability to see the entire picture and to step back from it and not just learn, I think in a dyslexic it teaches that in a sense”

“Hence me getting caught up on this blog . . . that is the gift of hyper focusing”

“I’ve absorbed vast amounts of knowledge, much more than my peers, and fueled an imaginative impulse that enriched my life to this day.”

“I was bound to hear: I’m sorry, but we can no longer have you as a board member. It’s just too much on you. Maybe you should leave the organizing for other people who are better able to do it.”

“I was never some hyper, out-of-control menace growing up! I never hit other kids or set fire to the school, or anything. How can I have ADD?”

“I decided to try it out (marijuana) . . . I could SIT DOWN and READ A BOOK without any movement!”

“How can I use something that I like to do to tackle something that is hard for me?”



Themes	Sub-themes
Personal Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of strengths is helpful Environmental stimulants make it difficult to attend Memory difficulties Time is a foreign concept Need sense of control: Worry about future Compensating for symptoms-> self medicating
Impact on Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of confidence Ashamed of LD/ADHD -> seems easier to keep LD/ADHD hidden Lack of awareness of social rules can lead to disruption of relationships Symptoms impact others via barriers of perpetual forgetfulness Can be hesitant to talk with college peers about LD/ADHD Society lacks common LD/ADHD knowledge

Discussion

- This sample’s young adults struggled with understanding and compensating for their symptoms within their everyday experiences outside of the classroom (social, home life, work, etc.). They shared experiences reflecting LD’s and ADHD’s widespread personal impact and impact on relationships within their everyday lives (social, home life, work, etc.).
- Much fewer passages regarding strengths.
- Findings begin to shed light on what young adults with LD and/or ADHD might need to successfully handle their symptoms within their everyday life.
- Study findings support similar to findings by Greydanus⁽²⁾. This study observed that symptoms of LD and ADHD persist in work and relationships.
- A few researchers have asked what the effects of LD and ADHD are outside of the classroom⁽¹⁾.
- Strengths and successful strategies identified may be informative to clinicians in assisting young adults with LD and or ADHD work toward more optimal occupational performance within their everyday life situation. Further research may help inform clinicians in their interventions and practices with this population.
- This study informed questions developed for an interview guide used in another study with college student with LD and ADHD. Questions developed included:
 - Others with an LD have said it is difficult to talk about it with peers and friends, do you relate to that?
 - Do you have LD symptoms outside of the classroom?
 - What strategies do you use to work with your symptoms?

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