

A Different Frequency

"I don't want other people to decide what I am. I want to decide that myself". Emma Watson

Having ADHD isn't difficult, but living in a world built for "normal" people is. Affecting around 1 in 25 people, it's not as uncommon as you think, but symptoms differ greatly from person to person. For me, it mostly affects my executive function and general behaviour patterns. Dopamine is a chemical in the brain that makes you "happy". It gives you an incentive to do things. People with ADHD absorb dopamine differently and don't get as much as "normal" people do, this results in hyperactivity and becoming easily distracted very often.

It can be paralyzing, hours may pass and I might either still be totally engrossed in whatever I'm doing, or else screaming at myself, to do whatever it is I've been asked. It's hard to do things that don't involve a dopamine reward, especially when so much feels like an effort. In fact, it's hard to make myself do anything at all, unless it's an urgent matter, which is why I get my best work done the night before it's due. In fact, I am writing this feature at 12.30 a.m. and have already asked for an extension to the deadline. Staying on task and the completion of tasks is extremely difficult for me. Procrastination is a major problem for people with ADHD. What might seem to you to be a simple chore, is for me an hour of mental gymnastics. I have to convince myself to get off the sofa and to stop being fixated on whatever it is I'm doing and then force myself to finally do that five-minute task.

ADHD, especially in teens, doesn't always present as a stereotypical "problem child". My behaviour, however has led to some strained relationships with adults who don't quite grasp the way I work. Although I don't blame them, having an adolescent neurodivergent, especially in the classroom, can't be easy. I never felt different to my peers until I started to understand what ADHD really was. I was diagnosed at the age of six, but ironically it was never something I paid much attention to. I enjoyed primary school, I had an outlet for excess energy with football and I flew through my work. The only things I struggled with were things I found boring and if I couldn't pay attention, it was impossible to manage.

I'm fortunate my mum noticed my symptoms early on and got me the support I needed. Although at times ADHD can be debilitating, it's manageable if you keep on top of it. A combination of medication and therapy can be really beneficial. I've tried four different types of medication; however, they didn't work for me, which left me disappointed that I'd never really be "normal", but I've since overcome that. As helpful as these supports are, they aren't perfect, there is a huge need for mental health workers and facilities in this country. It's not a condition that can be cured, learning to cope with the symptoms is about all you can do for it. That's not to say it has to limit what you can do with your life, Johnny Depp is a testament to this, despite being diagnosed with ADHD, he has become one of the most successful actors ever, so has Emma Watson, who was diagnosed with ADHD as a child. Both of these people have been extremely successful, and I'm sure they have had their own battles and struggles with their condition, because they probably had to work much harder than the average person to get there.

ADHD shouldn't be seen as a "worse brain", it's just a different brain. While we struggle with some things "normal" people wouldn't, we also have great strengths, like being able to devote hours to something we find interesting, and often thinking outside the box in general. The standard 40-hour, 9 to 5 working day isn't designed for people like me, it would be more efficient with some small changes to accommodate our needs and it would make every day so much more accessible to so many people. If I was able to fixate on, say, a work project, I could do what a neurotypical person could do in two days in just a couple of hours.

ADHD is not a superpower, by any means, but given the right conditions, it can greatly benefit certain things. The perception of a child with ADHD has to change from a “problem child” to the reality of someone whose brain just works differently than most. A child who is just as capable as others, even if they might have to do things in a different way. We’re just on a different frequency.

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