


ADHD and the Early Career Teaching Librarian An Autoethnography

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Article abstract

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ADHD and the Early Career Teaching Librarian: An Autoethnography

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ABSTRACT

What draws the ADHD brain to a job like librarianship? I was diagnosed with ADHD at the age of 42, five years into my career as a teaching librarian at a large public university. As I talked to colleagues and interacted with fellow librarians online, I noticed a trend of librarians being open and honest about their neurodivergence. As a result, this autoethnography explores my personal experience as a teaching librarian with ADHD. I will outline how ADHD affects my role in the following areas: being part of a team, leading a classroom, collaborating with faculty, and managing planning, grading, and communications. I explore these themes through six common ADHD traits: idealism, being an empath, rejection sensitivity dysphoria, being scatter brained, imposter syndrome, and hyperfocus. I will explore how these traits affect me daily, as well as how they have affected my career trajectory.

Keywords: *academic librarian · ADHD · librarian · neurodivergence · teaching*

RÉSUMÉ

Qu'est-ce qui attire le cerveau TDAH vers un métier comme celui de bibliothécaire ? On m'a diagnostiqué un TDAH à l'âge de 42 ans, cinq ans après le début de ma carrière de bibliothécaire enseignant dans une grande université publique. En discutant avec des collègues et en interagissant avec d'autres bibliothécaires en ligne, j'ai remarqué une ouverture et franchise grandissante chez les bibliothécaires au sujet de leur neurodivergence. Par conséquent, cette auto-ethnographie explore mon expérience personnelle en tant que bibliothécaire enseignant neurodivergent. Je décrirai comment le TDAH affecte mon rôle dans les domaines suivants : faire partie d'une équipe, diriger une classe, collaborer avec le corps enseignant et gérer la planification, la notation et les communications. J'explore ces thèmes à travers six traits communs au TDAH : l'idéalisme, l'empathie, la dysphorie de la sensibilité au rejet, l'éparpillement, le syndrome de l'imposteur et l'hyperfocalisation. J'examinerai comment ces traits de caractère m'affectent au quotidien et comment ils ont influé sur ma trajectoire professionnelle.

Mots-clés : *bibliothécaire · bibliothécaire universitaire · enseignement · neurodivergence · TDAH*

WHAT draws the ADHD brain to a profession like librarianship? While attending a seminar for parents of children on the autism spectrum, a local child psychologist shared a story about a student in his program whose mother decided that her child should be a librarian so that “he never has to talk to anyone.” My hand shot up. I could not let that go without comment. I had recently transitioned from a 13-year career in data management to working as an academic librarian. My job was to teach undergraduates how to do university-level research. “Never talking to anyone” was simply out of the question. While my own brand of neurodivergence also came with plenty of social anxiety, I was beginning to see how being in a position where I *had* to talk to people often worked to bring out the best in me. It turns out that talking with and teaching undergraduates was highly satisfying even though it drained me of most of my energy.

I was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) at the age of 42. My therapist had suggested it years prior, but I dismissed the idea. I have a master’s degree! I have a career! No way could I have ADHD, I reasoned. I was just not applying myself. I was *lazy*. I *knew* by looking at the state of my home that I must be lazy. I would often refer to myself as being *intellectually lazy* when I didn’t have the attention span to learn something that I needed to learn. On the other hand, when I wanted to learn something I had all the focus in the world (to the detriment of the things around me that also needed attention). I did not realize that these patterns were classic signs of ADHD (Littman 2020). I also did not realize that it is very common for these signs to be missed in women and girls, as we do not fit the common stereotype of little boys *bouncing off the walls* and disrupting their kindergarten classrooms (Holthe and Langvik 2017). The healthcare system is, unsurprisingly, more adept at identifying the externalized disruptive behaviours associated with ADHD (Young et al. 2020). Females are more likely to internalize their struggles, leading to diagnoses of anxiety and depression while missing their ADHD (Gershon and Gershon 2002).

The first five years of my library career were spent as a member of an education services team in the library system of a large public research university. It was a team of eight people and we were embedded in a first-year English writing and rhetoric course. The large amount of time we spent with our students was special and a true privilege, but our teaching schedules were overwhelming. In talking with my team and interacting with other librarians on social media, I noticed a trend of academic librarians identifying as *neurodivergent*. “The term neurodiversity is a broad term which refers to differences in individuals’ neurological functioning, and can be used as an umbrella term to describe variations such as ADHD, anxiety, depression, and autism spectrum disorder, among many others” (Anderson 2018, 2). Neurodiversity

highlights the idea that many brain conditions are not problems but rather a spectrum of differences in individual neurology (Hupfeld et al. 2022).

I knew that this work environment made my brain happy—exhausted, but content. This made me wonder if academic librarianship—especially with a large teaching component—was uniquely attractive to neurodivergent folks. While I could see where my ADHD gave me a special advantage in this role—there were also ways in which it was a detriment. Looking back, I often wonder if my ADHD has held me back in my library career.

Methodology

Autoethnography as a methodology allows the researcher to explore issues that may otherwise be invisible. ADHD in adult women is largely an invisible disability because women can mask the disorder and the perceived shortcomings can often be blamed on other things—personal failings, anxiety, the demands of raising children, and other societal expectations of working women (Harvey-Smith 2021). As described in the book *Autoethnography*, this method can serve to address the “crisis of representation” in research (Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis 2015, 11). This autoethnography aims to explore the effects of ADHD on a teaching librarian in an academic setting. As Reed-Danahay (2009) lays out in her article “Anthropologist, Education and Autoethnography,” this method provides an important avenue for examining the power dynamics working within academia. These dynamics can be seen as the undercurrent for many of the anxieties experienced by neurodivergent people working in academia.

While autoethnography can take many forms, I am writing this piece in the form of an evocative autoethnography with analysis mixed in. The analysis is based on grounded theory, breaking my experiences down into six concepts or themes based on the ADHD traits I have most related to, as well as the relevant contexts in my work experience (Pace 2012). I will explore how my own ADHD affects my role as a teaching librarian in the following contexts: being part of a team, leading a classroom, collaborating with faculty, and managing planning, grading, and communications. The ADHD traits I have identified are idealism, empathy, rejection sensitivity dysphoria, being *scattered brained*, and imposter syndrome. I have then related the relevant work contexts to the individual traits. These traits are not unique to ADHD, nor do they represent a comprehensive list of ADHD traits.

My focus is on a series of observations I had while working as an undergraduate instruction librarian and while also going through the process of being diagnosed with ADHD. I document the internal sense-making process that I went through

during this time period of about a year, starting in early 2021. One coping mechanism for my ADHD that I have used for years is to keep a file open on my computer to document random thoughts and ideas as they come to me—thus freeing up my brain to concentrate on the work at hand rather than the fleeting thoughts flying through it. That is how the data for this research was collected. As is typical for autoethnographers, my data is based on personal memory data and autobiographical information (Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez 2012). It also includes data from outside sources such as my family, colleagues, and students. My data consists of observations made about myself and my teaching collected in a OneNote notebook. Also saved in my OneNote notebook are many voice messages that I sent to myself—generally while driving. My thoughts can tend to be so transient that I've learned to document them as quickly as possible. After reading through these notes, I was able to code them according to the workplace contexts and ADHD traits described above. Some of this data will be reflexive and self-analytical—making connections between my own experiences and what is known about adult ADHD in women. My goal is to do a thematic analysis of my own narrative, described by Carolyn Ellis (2004) as “treating stories as data and using analysis to arrive at themes that illuminate the content and hold within or across stories” (196). I will explore how these traits affect me daily, as well as how they have affected my career trajectory.

The experiences described in this autoethnography are uniquely my own, but by exploring them I aim to draw attention to larger societal issues regarding the intersection of neurodiversity, women, and librarianship. While the literature largely describes ADHD as a *disability*, *mental disorder*, or *neurodevelopmental disorder*, I am choosing to call it a neurodivergence. Choosing this wording reflects my opinion that ADHD, autism, and other brain differences do not need to be seen as negative or something to be *cured*. Neurodivergence represents a type of diversity that deserves respect and accommodation.

The existing literature about ADHD in librarianship is very limited. With this paper, I hope to open the conversation about this intersection and spark an interest in further research. I will draw on adjacent research looking at ADHD in academia, other forms of neurodivergence, women in academia, and ADHD in the workplace.

Idealism with an Eye Toward Social Justice

“Do I have to be ‘unbiased’ about social justice?”

ADHD is commonly associated with socially disruptive behaviour. People with ADHD may feel like outsiders, unable to understand the social norms being practiced around them (Schäfer and Kraneburg 2015). Maybe they cannot pinpoint why, but they

know they are different than their peers. At the same time, look up any social media account focused on ADHD or autism and you will see a theme: a social justice mindset (Caldwell 2022). If the stereotypical ADHD personality has anti-social tendencies, why it is also associated with the very pro-social perception of social justice? My own notes displayed this dichotomy. I observed anti-social behaviours such as interrupting, talking too loudly, or using profanity, while also being keenly sensitive to the struggles of those around me.

In today's world, teaching information literacy goes beyond the old idea of sending students to the library's databases and teaching them the CRAAP method. My teaching often focuses on the benefits and pitfalls of information found on the internet. When evaluating sources found online, I worry that I am unable to present them in an unbiased fashion. One theme I observed in my notes was being told by the people in my life that I have "very strong opinions." I would agree with that assessment, and I consider it to be an asset. Those strong opinions are often political in nature. I see injustices and inequity in the world, and it causes a very visceral reaction in me. While I do not believe that librarians need to remain neutral, I am constantly pushing myself to apply what I teach instead of having knee jerk reactions to sources I do not personally agree with.

How I handle this personal bias depends on the makeup of the class that I'm teaching. I have been lucky enough to have several sessions with most of my classes, and that gives me some time to get a read of the room. My first lesson is generally on topic development and brainstorming ideas. My goal is to teach my students how to make connections between ideas, back them up with evidence, and create a topic that is not only interesting for them but for their reader (i.e., their instructor). One approach I take is to be very up front about my own biases. On occasion I will get a student who wants to debate me on whatever topic we are discussing, and I welcome that, if it is done civilly. It provides a great opportunity for me to demonstrate *the scholarly conversation*. What I do have to keep in mind is that I cannot take it personally. This is where my ADHD can get me in trouble emotionally and I end up ruminating on what I think was a negative interaction or worrying that I have offended a student or instructor. I am anxious that I am not practicing what I preach, which is to be open to new ideas when you jump into a research project.

In their study of social justice mindsets in people with ADHD, Schäfer and Kraneburg (2015) concluded that high justice sensitivity is a coping strategy for people with ADHD to demonstrate that, although they may not understand social norms, they do in fact care deeply about avoiding social conflicts and denigration. Children and adolescents with ADHD have been shown to have a lower threshold for perceiving injustice denigration—both as victims and observers (Bondü and

Esser 2015). I believe my own ADHD lies behind my tendency towards brutal honesty in calling out inequities. On the other hand, I am very sensitive to criticism and therefore want to be as respectful of other peoples' feelings as possible. This does prove a fine line to walk.

In their article on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD or autism) in academic libraries, Giles-Smith and Popowich (2020) assert that inclusion of people with ASD is an essential part of the diversity and inclusion movement. Without inclusion of neurodivergent folks, you do not have a truly diverse workforce. Working for a large public university means that I encounter students from a wide range of backgrounds. I believe my ADHD allows me to be a more inclusive teacher and librarian. For instance, when I am teaching, I will often use a tool like Padlet. This allows students to share answers and ideas with me anonymously. I recognize that this allows students to join the conversation without needing to make themselves vulnerable.

Being an Empath

“Am I a sucker? Or am I sensitive and understanding?”

Closely related to the idea of justice sensitivity is that of being an empath—or being able to feel what others are feeling. Being an empath is related to the highly sensitive nature of someone with ADHD (Hallowell 2021). In learning about my own ADHD, this stood out as another theme. The feeling that I could *emotionally read a room*. I am someone who intently observes others and the subtle cues people give off about their internal emotional state.

In a portion of my teaching load, I was not just a visitor to the class. I was teaching one credit hour of a course, almost like a science lab, but for library research. In this capacity I was expected to grade and evaluate students. When I started in this position, I tried to emulate what my colleagues were doing, but I quickly realized that they all did it differently and I was going to have to choose my own path when it came to assessment of my students. How would I handle late assignments? Could I be tough when it came to grading?

Dr. Ned Hallowell is a psychiatrist and ADHD expert who shares information on various social media platforms. In a TikTok video about empathy he describes how people with ADHD are often able to read the feelings of other people before they have even expressed them (Hallowell 2020). I know that this sensitivity affected the way I assessed my students. I found it difficult to be hard and fast about the “rules” because I am also very sensitive to the pressure and struggle that comes along with that first year of college. I gave major leeway when it came to late assignments for two reasons: 1. I am rarely timely with grading assignments—how can I hold my students to a

deadline when I cannot stick to one myself? 2. I respect that the work I have assigned will not always be my students' first priority. In general, I was comfortable with this stance. Sometimes I would talk to my colleagues and hear how tough they were with their students. This triggered many notes to myself asking "am I a sucker?" Does my fear of disappointing people extend to my students, therefore letting them get away with more than they should? In the end I am simply more comfortable with leniency. At its core I believe that librarianship is a service role. I am there to support my students, not provide more stress in their lives. We did a standardized pre and post-test for our students, and the grades my students received were always consistent with what my colleagues' students received. I have no doubt that my students were obtaining the skills they needed, so if I can do that while also being a supportive and *easy* hour of their week, then why not?

Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD)

"Do they like me? And does it matter?"

When first joining the education services team I carefully observed the dynamics of the team. In that examination I needed to find where I fit into the dynamic. ADHD makes it hard to see ourselves as part of a group—it is even harder to break into an established group (Dodson 2023b). One of the newer ideas related to ADHD is that of Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria. Descriptions of this symptom by people on social media prompted me to re-think the possibility that I may have ADHD. RSD is an intense negative mood shift triggered by rejection (real or perceived), teasing, criticism, or negative self-talk (Dodson 2023b). RSD seemed to explain so many of my life experiences. This was a common theme in my notes, as well as my life in general. I always want to fit in while also seeing myself as a rebel, of sorts. I value being a change maker, while also struggling with the fear of being rejected for it. Of course, this specific sensitivity is also closely related to the justice sensitivity and empathy described in the previous two sections. In evaluating my notes it was difficult to tease some of these out, as my experiences with these symptoms tended to overlap. I observed a category of notes to myself where I specifically ask, "is my honesty disrespectful, and do I care?"

My ADHD sometimes makes me feel like Sophia Petrillo of *Golden Girls* fame—no filter, with a tendency to over share. After I do this, I then ruminate on the interaction and convince myself that I've annoyed everyone around me. Rumination is a common problem, particularly for women with ADHD (Holthe and Langvik 2017). Working as part of a team inherently requires a level of collegiality. In academia, this is also tied to the tenure process. The weight is huge for library teams to choose a colleague that you may potentially have *for life*. This is an academic tradition that may have an

especially negative impact for neurodivergent folks. These are people for whom the academic hiring process feels at best uncomfortable and at worst impossible. Jumping into the world of academia and the tenure process can be daunting for someone with ADHD or Autism since we can have difficulty with social cues (Canela et al. 2017). The power dynamic (dare I say, imbalance?) of this system is painfully obvious to me, making it feel all the more perilous. Someone on the autism spectrum may miss this dynamic altogether, therefore making it impossible to conform to the norms necessary to be accepted into the group.

In a qualitative study looking at ADHD work experiences it was observed that participants held a sense that they came off as lazy, ignorant, and incompetent—whether they were or not. They also described feeling as if they were “too much” or “too straightforward” for their colleagues (Oscarsson et al. 2022, 5). The characteristics of a person with ADHD (loud, disruptive, unable to concentrate on anything) can seemingly be in stark contrast to the librarian archetype. Personally, my ADHD makes it very difficult to read long portions of text (i.e., books). This, in and of itself, can make it hard to *fit in* in library culture. I generally have not read the books that my peers have read for leisure reading. In public librarianship knowledge of popular books can be essential. While it is not essential to the work of an academic librarian, in my experience it is often a key part of bonding with colleagues. No, I have not read *Lord of the Rings*, nor will I ever.

“I learned a lot, but the teacher was a little cringe.”

This is a paraphrase from my notes of the only student evaluation that I ever read. RSD is not just a factor with my colleagues. This is also an issue when it comes to my students. The fear of rejection goes hand in hand with the sensitivity discussed in the previous section. People with ADHD have a reputation for being over-sharers and for being overly excited about subjects that they’re interested in (Steed 2022). When I read the above comment, I knew exactly who the student was (even though it was anonymous) and exactly what conversation they were referring to. As an instructor I am an open book. While they are young, my students are adults. Sharing personal interests is not the taboo thing that it might be with younger students.

However, oversharing can be a double-edged sword. I know from experience that sharing personal details about myself is an excellent way to break the ice and help my students relax and be open about their own ideas. At the same time, oversharing when interacting with someone can also make it seem like I am making everything about myself. This is difficult to navigate. Relating experiences back to our own experiences is a key way that people with ADHD relate to the world. It is not selfish, but rather a way for us to empathize with others. Relating others’ experiences to our

own is a coping mechanism that serves to help us empathize, and it also helps us cue our attention in to the other person. It's impulsiveness that then gets us in trouble, as it can be hard to hold back relating our experience to that person rather than keeping it to ourselves (Arabi 2022). Toeing this line of being open while not being cringeworthy has been a defining theme of my life but has taken on new meaning when it comes to interacting with students.

Scattered

“I want to do all the things. I cannot do all the things.”

One clear theme I gleaned from my notes was just how scattered my thoughts can be. This is not due to the actual text of the notes, but rather to their very random nature. I began this article with the question of what draws someone with ADHD to librarianship. I didn't know I had ADHD until recently—but that does not mean I was not aware of the ways in which my brain works differently than others before my diagnosis. Walking through the world always felt more difficult for me than it was for my peers. Still, the diagnosis was not easy to accept. Keeping notes on these thoughts helped me to see how my brain works in black and white, and many of my notes clearly highlight the coping mechanisms I have built into my life to deal with my ADHD—especially the tendency to be scattered and unorganized.

When I am teaching, I always work off of PowerPoint slides. I understand that pedagogically using these slides is not the ideal way of engaging with students; I also acknowledge the fact that I need them to keep myself on task and not forget important points. I make extensive use of lists and Post-it notes. ADHD brains are very “out of sight, out of mind,” so I literally have to have my tasks within sight (Dodson 2023a, par 23). Around the time of my observations I also invested in an Apple watch. The ability to speak to my wrist and have it tell me when to do things, and where to go, has been immeasurably helpful in dealing with time blindness. Check lists and electronic devices are common ADHD coping mechanisms, and they contribute to our ability to mask our ADHD (Canela et al. 2017).

A pediatrician shared that ADHD is poorly named, as it is not a deficit of attention; rather, it is a drive to pay attention to all of the things around us. This desire to pay attention to everything can lead to taking on too much. When we are doing too much, we are not doing anything well (Hallowell 2020). This quality, along with people pleasing and the nature of library work, can make it easy to take on too much and result in us often dropping the ball on important responsibilities. I thrived on the busy teaching load of my job, but I was also burnt out by that busyness. At the same time, I get bored and am unable to accomplish things when I am *not* busy

(Hoben and Hesson 2021). I have to be very careful not to say yes to everything that I find interesting.

It has been found that people with ADHD who have higher IQs are often able to compensate for their poor executive functioning and are therefore less likely to be diagnosed as children. They can mask their disorder (Miloni et al. 2017). I can now see how my intelligence likely helped me overcome my deficiencies. I have always been able to come up with creative coping mechanisms for my shortcomings. I was assigned to the library in my first year of college as a work-study student. Being a librarian had never crossed my mind before this time. In 1997 we did not have the extent of computer communications that we have now. However, working in the library I got to see behind the curtain to computer databases and what magic they bring. Fulfilling interlibrary loan requests gave me a skill set that most of my peers did not have—finding great information. I had access to the best computer technology academia had to offer at the time and took advantage of it to learn more about whatever fleeting topic I had running through my head. It was not just the access to information, though. It was also quiet and orderly. I live inside a noisy brain. The quiet and peace of the library was a calming sanctuary amidst the chaos of college life and dorm living. I am a chronically disorganized person and the library's strict organization rules were soothing.

As a middle class, educated white woman, I have had the privilege of pursuing what I want professionally. Why is it that I chose librarianship? My scattered way of thinking is one of the reasons I love teaching and librarianship. I will generally have 20–25 students in front of me, each with a different background, major, and idea for what they want to research and write about. I want to hear all of their ideas and I want to make them as excited about research as I am. These are the interactions that feed my ADHD brain—connecting with students and learning more about them. It makes me vulnerable, as I am often sharing information about myself. However, I believe this is what gets my students to open up and share as well. I will brainstorm intentionally controversial ideas while making the classroom a safe place to discuss our differences. College is a place to question how you see the world—and who better to do that with than your librarian? The *randomness* of my brain gives me an advantage with this activity. One benefit of my ADHD brain is the ability to make connections between disparate ideas (ADDitude Editors 2022). Imagine the cork board with pictures connected by red string that is common in television crime procedurals—that is what it looks like within the ADHD brain.

Imposter Syndrome

“How does ADHD lead to taking temporary, hourly or low-salaried library positions?”

Hoben and Hesson observed in their own autoethnography of ADHD:

Despite our professional success, we had arrived in our current positions as mature students after having tried other careers. Our life histories, we realized, were characterized by periods of prolonged uncertainty punctuated by intervals of marked success. We also talked about feeling like impostors, a feeling that contributed to a sense of being disconnected, even when we were surrounded by colleagues and friends. Even when we were enjoying career success we often had a sinking feeling that it would all come crashing down, or that we would somehow jeopardize our newfound success. (2021, 42)

Looking back now, I recognize these periods of prolonged uncertainty punctuated by intervals of marked success. These are periods of what I have always called *breakdowns* that caused me to retreat from everything in my life and rebuild. The fact that I attended four different colleges before earning my bachelor's degree is evidence of this. After college I fell into a career as a clinical data manager. A few years into it I realized I was completely unfulfilled with my work. So, while not interested in finding new work, I knew I needed to be spinning multiple plates to keep my brain happy. This is how I ended up buying a house, getting married, finishing my master's degree, and having my first child within two years. Then, a full 13 years into my career, I realized I could no longer distract myself with more babies and degrees. I once again hit a wall and had a *breakdown*. I needed out but didn't know how to do it.

Having the privilege of my husband's salary to fall back on, I bounced around, accepting part-time library jobs just to get my foot in the door. I eventually took a part-time temporary position doing the work I had always imagined doing—teaching information literacy. However, it would be another two years before I would be doing that work full time. Anecdotally, I know that in my region it is common to have to piece together part-time jobs when starting as a librarian, and I wonder if I tolerated it longer than most due to a lack of confidence.

I am one of many librarians trying to move on from vocational awe—a concept introduced by librarian Fobazi Ettarh. Vocational awe is defined as “the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in notions that libraries as institutions are inherently good, sacred notions, and therefore beyond critique” (Ettarh 2018, par 3). Coming into the library profession I had the assumption that all librarians are brilliant and full of infinite wisdom. I also assumed that they are more experienced and talented than I am. They already have the job I wanted, so they must have all the skills I don't. The realization that many of them are just flying by the seat of their pants, just like I am, has been a welcome

comfort. Several of my notes were reminders to myself to look up the scholarly writing my colleagues had done, just so I could get a sense of that work and whether or not I could do the same. While I greatly admire the work of my colleagues, it has been a tough road for me to realize that I am capable of the same level of work that they are doing.

Despite concrete evidence that I was qualified, I have still talked myself out of pursuing promotions repeatedly. I convinced myself that I could not handle a tenure-track position. The concentration needed to research and write was beyond my abilities. Also, the tendency to hyperfocus on topics I find interesting would be weighing on me all the time, taking time away from my family. I could see other librarians balancing these things, but I did not have faith that I could do the same. I live in fear of being *found out* as a fraud. ADHD can make you less likely to be considered for promotions and leadership positions (Roggli 2022). It was unlikely that a promotion would simply be offered to me; instead, I would have to actively pursue it. My lack of confidence was an obstacle to doing that.

“Individuals with ADHD experienced problems at work in particular in not meeting their own standards and perceived potential, yet this is less often accompanied by negative performance evaluations or losing their job” (Fuermaier et al., 2021, 1029). In other words, we are our toughest critics. According to Kiraz and Sertçelik (2021), negative childhood experiences and failures can lead someone with ADHD to self-doubt and make negative assumptions about new people and situations. A study found that people with ADHD often achieve lower levels of academic success, but even when they achieve the same level of academic success as their non-ADHD peers they often experience lower levels of employment and lower overall household incomes (Biederman and Faraone 2006). There are many reasons this could occur since ADHD can certainly cause problems with job performance. In my own case, I have rarely had trouble with job performance. It is the lack of confidence in myself to take on new job duties that has prevented me from seeking out higher paying jobs with more responsibilities. Holthe and Langvik (2017) interviewed women who were diagnosed with ADHD as adults and found that it can be a brutal blow to your self-esteem. It’s no surprise that this led me to an *I’ll take what I can get* attitude.

Special Interests and Hyper-Focus

“You’re so... extra” – comment from a student regarding my enthusiasm for library research.

We have all likely experienced the phenomenon of *going down a rabbit hole*. This is something that I experience often, and after learning about the idea of hyperfocus, I

now attribute this tendency to my ADHD. Librarianship may be especially suited to people who like to hyperfocus. Our jobs allow us to do intense deep dives on a wide array of subjects, all in the name of helping our patrons with their research. My scattered brain along with some hyperfocus makes for a great combination when consulting students on their research projects. I can go down the rabbit hole with them and make connections between ideas that they might not see. It also helps that some of my special interests are directly related to my practice of teaching information literacy. One of my favorite things to do is debunk misinformation found online. This love of fighting misinformation is also closely related to my passion for social justice and sensitivity to inequities.

Of course, hyperfocus is not always a positive experience. It can distract from pressing work issues. It can also lead to frustration and the feeling of *wasting time* when I have hyperfocused on a project that never comes to fruition. This is also a common occurrence for me. Once the intense interest in a topic wears off, it can be painfully difficult for my ADHD brain to re-visit and complete the project I was once so passionate about.

Hyperfocus is often called the *superpower* of neurodivergent folks. People with ADHD may have long stretches of being unproductive followed by short bursts of being super productive. Hyperfocus is a state that can be induced by intense interest in a subject or by the urgency of an impending deadline (Hupfeld et al. 2022). Although the science behind hyperfocus is not conclusive, it is commonly reported in popular and social media (Groen et al. 2020).

Conclusion

With time and education, I have come to believe that my ADHD is not a deficit, just a difference. This perspective has gone a long way in helping me be kinder and gentler on myself. That said, finding a profession that suits my unique neurological makeup has been essential in building my own self-confidence. It was not a direct path to this profession, but it was my own unique path to take. My own ADHD presents challenges to overcome, but I truly believe it makes me a better librarian.

Since beginning this project of exploring my own ADHD, I applied for and was hired as my university's first Data Services Librarian. Without this exploration, and the realizations that came along with it, I am not sure I would have even applied. This research has gone a long way in helping me to stop blaming myself for my perceived failures, and instead recognize that I have a unique approach that can offer value to my institution, my colleagues, and my students. Now being in a tenure-track position, I am confronting and pushing back against that imposter syndrome every day. The insight into how my own brain works has empowered me to take on that challenge.

Going forward, more research needs to be done within the library community to explore the prevalence of neurodivergence within the profession. Are neurodivergent folks drawn to the profession, and if they are, can they be comfortable sharing the challenges that their differences bring to their work? What accommodations can be made to facilitate the best work from our ADHD and ASD colleagues? The equity and inclusion movement must also grow to include neurodiversity.

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