

ADHD and Creativity

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Have you ever noticed that the symptoms of ADHD and the characteristics typically associated with creativity are remarkably similar? Children with ADHD and creative children often exhibit signs of hyperactivity, difficulty concentrating and inattention, impulsivity and/or risk taking, and occasionally lack social skills and experience academic underachievement (Cramond, 1995). Upon first meeting a child who is hyperactive, impulsive, and easily distracted, would you immediately think, “Hmmm... I wonder if this child is highly creative?” Maybe. More likely, you might think, “I wonder if I should refer this child to be tested for ADHD.”

Portraits of eminently creative people often leave researchers wondering if these signs of creativity would have been diagnosed as ADHD in the present day. For example, Robert Frost is known to have spent so much time “daydreaming” in school that he was eventually kicked out, Leonardo da Vinci only completed a handful of projects in his career of more than 60 years, and Albert Einstein had both poor social skills and poor grades in math and science

In the same way, anecdotal experience usually allows for researchers and diagnosticians to illustrate the symptomatic similarities between ADHD and creativity. To date, very little, if any, empirical research has been conducted to justify any evidence of misdiagnosis. However, this is not to say that misdiagnosis does not occur. With the vague conceptual definitions of both ADHD and creativity, and the resemblance between the two, misdiagnosis is likely.

What does this mean for diagnosticians and the educators with whom they work? The misdiagnosis of children with ADHD and/or creative children has potentially harmful consequences, not the least of which includes medicating a child who does not need medication or failing to provide medication for a child who does need it. At this point, awareness of the overlap in symptomatology and the possibility of misdiagnosis is key. Hopefully future research will allow for more answers.

Cramond, B. (1995, March). *The coincidence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and creativity* (RBDM 9508). Storrs, CT: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.