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ADHD: Attention Deficit—HEY DEER!

When most people hear the word ADHD, most think of a little boy who has had too much sugar or someone with no discipline, refusing to do their work, with a made-up excuse to explain it. As is the case with most stereotypes, this ends up being hurtful and incorrect. Most people hear of my disorder and assume that I am simply hyperactive, lazy, a victim of something negative, or even worse, stupid. ADHD is complex and misunderstood; it is a disorder and an advantage in diverse ways. ADHD is far more complicated than many consider; hyperactivity is more nuanced than a sugar high, while it may look like laziness, it's different, it is not just a bad thing, and I am most definitely, not stupid. ADHD is something that can only be understood from the words of those with it, so people can understand.

Because of the stereotypes of ADHD, most assume I must be constantly trying to run around the room, or I don't have it. This is a misunderstanding based on the idea that hyperactivity is simply the inability to sit still when reality is more diverse. For the most part, my hyperactivity shows itself most when I am bored. Unlike the stereotypes, hyperactivity can be a racing mind. One time, during a particularly long drive north with my family, I got incredibly bored. I started to create a world in my head: stories, lore, cultural customs, and much more. While I was physically simply staring out of the car window, in my mind I was constructing an entire cosmos. I am not always so focused when this happens, though. Once while bored at the mall, I started to

bounce from topic to topic. My head was spinning with everything I was thinking about. In the span of five minutes, I had already examined the Crusades, a chess game I saw once, the current show I was watching, one man in a red jacket that passed by, and even some musings about Christian theology. Sometimes this is an interesting “Roomba of thought” (as I call it) and makes the boredom bearable, but other times my mind can be moving so fast and so far, that it is almost physically painful, and I begin to panic. While this is not true for everyone with ADHD, it is something that has been consistent my whole life. When I am quiet, my mind is the loudest thing in the room. What this means is that the stereotype of hyperactive ADHD, while still true in many ways, is not completely correct. In my experience, my mind is the most active. I may not run around and bounce off walls, but instead I dance with the strands of reality, I create and examine everything and anything, all in the confines of my mind.

Because of my ADHD, I often have trouble doing things on time. This could be as small as forgetting to brush my teeth or as big as leaving an important college application until the last minute. Most assume that this is because I lack discipline, and if I tried harder, then I wouldn’t have this problem. However, the truth is that I have no control over it. In my first semester of PSEO, I had an important test to study for, and it was incredibly important to me that I do well, and I was determined to do so. However, ADHD had other plans. What happened instead was that I sat at my desk the entire day with an unopened notebook, and a textbook collecting dust. From the outside, it seemed that I didn’t care enough and was being lazy. The truth is I wanted to study. I loved that class, and I desperately wanted to study for the test, but no amount of yelling at myself would make me do it. That day was spent feeling frustrated and stressed while I was powerless to fulfill my own goal. Almost everyone can force themselves to do things, but oftentimes I have a locked door in my mind that keeps me from doing this. I can push and pull,

but no matter what, the lock remains. On the outside, it may look like I wasted the day, but to me, I was waging a losing battle in my mind.

On the other side of things, I am often told that my ADHD is negative, and nothing good comes from it. To this, I respond with a simple story of passion and curiosity, a story that changed my life forever. When I was around thirteen, I was looking at pictures of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, a writing system I was curious about. What I found instead was a small group of strange, twisting pictures. These signs, I later found out, were ancient Maya hieroglyphics. A lot of people would simply investigate a little and move on, finding a new fact for conversation; but not me. I spent the next four years researching, drawing, and translating this mysterious and complicated hieroglyphic writing system. My ADHD gave me the gift of my life's obsession. It turned a brief occurrence on the internet into a passion that has stayed with me for years. ADHD gives me an intense and burning curiosity for the world and the things in it. Sometimes this is so important that it changes my life, and sometimes it is as simple as being entranced by a pigeon sitting on a bench.

Another common stereotype is that those with ADHD are too easily distracted and forgetful to be intelligent. This is quite simply wrong. My ADHD makes it so I think differently; it does not mean I'm not intelligent. One of my favorite hobbies is playing chess, and one game I was in a terrible position. My king was stuck in a corner, and my opponent was ruthlessly attacking me. I was desperately defending myself before my opponent made a move, and I saw something. I saw a pattern from a professional game I had seen months before. I saw my position and overlaid the professional game over it in my mind so I could find the winning sequence of moves. A lightbulb appeared in my brain, and I went ahead to use the pattern of information I learned months ago to win. I was able to memorize the position from a professional chess game and use

what I learned there to win in a different game. This is one of the hallmarks of intelligence, the ability to gain information and apply it. I was able to learn a chess principle and apply it months after I first saw it. While I admit, I often forget things, I will sometimes get distracted and either miss or ignore information I find boring; however, this is not the same as intelligence. Neither ADHD nor intelligence are that simple.

What is incredibly common with the idea of ADHD is that we are unable to focus. Most people think this because of the name, Attention DEFICIT Hyperactive Disorder, which is understandable. This is inaccurate in my experience; I don't have trouble with the ability to focus, but I have trouble regulating it. In many cases, yes, I do have a lot of trouble focusing for a long time, more specifically for things I don't enjoy. When doing math homework or something I don't enjoy, I often get distracted. While this seems to be consistent with the stereotype, there is a crucial aspect that shifts this assumption. If I am interested, I can go into a sort of "hyper-focus". Once, I was researching the ancient Maya and I spent almost an entire day in my room researching for fun with few breaks and minimal distractions. I can focus when I want to, or when I need to. If I have any outside pressure to complete a task, then I can focus on something even if I don't like it. One time, I was doing a group project that was due the next day. The pressure of the deadline and the pressure of other people counting on me combined to give me three hours of work completed in an hour and a half. I do not have a deficit of attention; I have trouble regulating it like most people.

My ADHD is complicated, my attention is not under my control, I am intelligent, there are good things about it, I do not lack discipline, and even though I'm not physically hyperactive doesn't mean I don't have ADHD. While there are many troubles that come with ADHD, there are good things as well. While writing this I have rediscovered the good things; I have become more

grateful for my ADHD that helps make me who I am. ADHD is more complex than simply too much energy or too little discipline. It is something that's beautiful yet difficult, a disorder and an advantage.