

ADD Traits in Famous and Talented People ...a scrapbook

This article other than a few inserts of my own was compiled by T. Gallagher. I have not been able to contact or find her. Most of this was compiled in 1997. I happened to agree with what is written here and believe we are approaching this problem in the wrong way.

According to conventional wisdom, the traits of attention deficit disorder (ADD and ADHD) are an error of nature. But was Thomas Edison the world's most famous inventor in spite of his hyperactivity, inattention and impulsiveness or because of it? Why are ADHD traits so similar to traits shared by "highly creative individuals" as well as to the ENTP, or "Inventor," temperament?

This scrapbook contains clippings about famous, talented and highly creative people who have traits often used to describe ADD "explorers." This does not mean they have (or had) ADD. Many ADD traits are shared by the "gifted," (top 3%) who are about as boredom intolerant as ADDers. The purpose of this page is to destigmatize ADD traits, not to diagnose famous people. Just because a child daydreams or is disruptive in class, is impulsive, fidgety and can't seem "stay on task" does not mean they have a brain defect, although there are many physicians, teachers, and counselors who would say otherwise. They may be gifted or creative or just plain fidgety (and there's nothing wrong with that!)

- Daydreaming and Inattention -

"Highly Creative Individuals": Many have a reputation for daydreaming. (The Coincidence of ADHD and Creativity, Dr. Bonnie Cramond, 1995)

Robert Frost was dropped from school for daydreaming. He was probably composing poems during some of his daydreams. (The Coincidence of ADHD and Creativity, Dr. Bonnie Cramond, 1995)

Frank Lloyd Wright daydreamed so intensely that his uncle had to shout at him to get him back (Cramond).

Thomas Edison was said to be "addled" because of his excessive daydreaming in class.

Nikola Tesla "had such strong visualization abilities that he would imagine the workings of his inventions to great detail without putting anything on paper or conducting any experiments until all of the problems were worked out" ("Tesla: Man out of Time" by M. Cheney, 1981).

ADDers daydream frequently, leading to inattention in classrooms and other dull environments. Inattention is the most important diagnostic criteria for ADD. The conventional wisdom on ADD is that ADDers daydream because they can't pay attention, which isn't the whole truth. They can't pay attention to something which is boring. ADDers are extremely, even painfully, boredom intolerant. A daydream is more mentally stimulating, for example, than a grammar lesson, and ADDers require this mental stimulation more than others. Calvin's daydreams (from Calvin & Hobbes) are wildly imaginative adventures in outerspace. Calvin is a smart kid who needs excitement, and school doesn't cut it. ADDers may actually be paying very close attention, hyperfocusing even, to their daydream.

- Inability to Finish Projects (Inattention)-

"Highly Creative Individuals": Creative people have many interests and tend to play with ideas, sometimes losing interest in one to take up another. (The Coincidence of ADHD and Creativity, Dr.

Bonnie Cramond, 1995)

Leonardo da Vinci was famous for his paintings but only managed to compose 17 painting in 67 years, and some of those were never finished. Freud claimed that this was because Leonardo's father had abandoned him. Leonardo said his inability to finish projects was because his interests were "so many and so diverse." (The Coincidence of ADHD and Creativity, Dr. Bonnie Cramond, 1995)

John Grisham "I am prone to start projects that never quite get finished." (from the forward to A Time to Kill.)

Nikola Tesla "pursued so many ideas that he '...often did not follow-up on his intuitions, theories, and preliminary experiments to the point of verification.' This became a problem because others were then free to complete the invention and get credit for it as Tesla claimed Marconi did with the [radio]. Tesla was driven to action at one point when his bookkeeper reminded him that money was running out and his inventions were not being completed." (The Coincidence of ADHD and Creativity, Dr. Bonnie Cramond, 1995)

- Hyperactivity -

Highly Creativity Individuals: In a 1986 study, students who scored in the top third on a test of creativity were found to be significantly more hyperactive than those who scored in the bottom third on the creativity test. They were found to have a "surplus of energy," as expressed by rapid speech, restlessness, fast games and sports, marked enthusiasm, delinquent behavior, impulsive actions, and nervous habits" (The Coincidence of ADHD and Creativity, Dr. Bonnie Cramond, 1995).

Ernest Hemingway at age five: "Young Ernest burst in one day with the news that he had stopped a runaway horse single-handed.

His grandfather was much amused. 'Mark my words, Chumpy dear,' he told his granddaughter, 'this boy is going to be heard from some day. If he uses his imagination for good purposes, he'll be famous, but if he starts the wrong way, with all his energy, he'll end up in jail.'" ("Ernest Hemingway, A Life Story" by Carlos Baker, 1969).

Nikola Tesla "was almost drowned on numerous occasions, was nearly boiled alive in a vat of hot milk, just missed being cremated, and was once entombed (overnight in an old shrine). Hair raising flights from mad dogs, enraged flocks of crows, and sharp tusked hogs spiced this catalogue of near catastrophes." ("Tesla: Man out of time" by M. Cheney, 1981)

Thomas Edison ...

- Difficult Temperament and Deficient Social Skills -

"Highly Creative Individuals": "The stories of creative individuals with what are considered difficult temperaments are so abundant that the characteristic has become a stereotype" In one study, artists were found to be aloof and nonconforming to conventional standards of behavior, which was thought to be related to deficient social skills. (The Coincidence of ADHD and Creativity, Dr. Bonnie Cramond, 1995)

- Academic Underachievement -

Highly Creative Individuals: In a study of 300 eminent artists, individuals in the group were not typically considered to be good students in school (The Coincidence of ADHD and Creativity, Dr. Bonnie Cramond, 1995).

Thomas (Al) Edison's schoolmaster, "angered by the lad's inattentive 'dreamy,' distracted behavior, frustrated by his tendency to drift off during recitations, to draw and doodle in his notebook

instead of repeating rote lessons -- cuffed and ridiculed Al in front of his motley classmates. Teachers saddled with disaffected students like Edison were judged by how many pupils were promoted from one grade to the next, and they needed to rationalize the actions of children who were 'not apt.' Sure enough, 'One day,' Edison recalled with bitterness many years later, 'I heard the teacher tell the visiting school inspector that I was addled and it would not be worthwhile keeping me in school any longer. I was so hurt by this last straw that I burst out crying and went home and told my mother.' His indignant mother 'brought [him] back to the school and angrily told the teacher that he didn't know what he was talking about, that I had more brains than he himself.'" Mrs. Edison pulled Thomas out of school and began home-schooling, determined that "no formalism would cramp his style, no fetters hobble the free rein, the full sweep of his imagination." ("Edison - Inventing the Century" by Neil Baldwin, 1995).

- Different Learning Styles -

Thomas (Al) Edison: "The tales of Al's youthful curiosity consistently stress the consequences of his compulsion to discover phenomena or validate nascent theories through direct experience: investigating a bumblebees' nest in the corner of a pasture, he was attacked by an angry ram. Exploring new ways to shorten a skate strap, the tip of his middle finger was cut off by an errant axe. Deciding birds could fly because they ate worms, he mixed mashed worms with water and convinced a neighborhood girl to drink the concoction. She got sick, and he got 'switched.'" ("Edison - Inventing the Century" by Neil Baldwin, 1995).

- Sensation Seeking -

"Highly Creative Individuals" search for variety and intensity in life. This results in openness to experience, flexibility, high energy level, preference for complexity, playfulness, receptivity to new and

novel ideas and experiences (The Coincidence of ADHD and Creativity, Dr. Bonnie Cramond, 1995).

- Frequent Job Switching -

Thomas Edison started working for the railroad at age 13. During the next several years he was fired or quit numerous jobs in various fields. His first termination occurred when a chemistry experiment he was working on set fire to the train. His employer, a Scotsman, "burst in and summarily evicted the boy from the train a Smith's Creek station, hurling Al and his paraphernalia onto the platform - -'Off ye go, lock, stock, and ivry drap o' chiminals with ye. Ah must a' been daft when Ah let ye br'r'ring thim aboard!'" ("Edison - Inventing the Century" by Neil Baldwin, 1995).

- Sloppy Appearance -

Thomas Edison "did not go out of his way to tidy himself up for visitors. Most often you got the hayseed look." ("Edison - Inventing the Century" by Neil Baldwin, 1995).

- Other Interesting Tidbits -

Dr. Samuel Johnson: (Submitted by a reader) "Here's an excerpt from a witty and wonderful description of the great lexicographer Dr. Samuel Johnson, whose contribution to the intellectual progress of his time was so immense that the era is called 'The Age of Johnson.' Novelist Fanny Burney, upon meeting the great Dr. Johnson at the home of Sir Isaac Newton, wrote in her diary:

"His mouth is almost continually opening and shutting as if he was chewing. He has a strange method of frequently twirling his fingers, and twisting his hands. His body is in continual agitation, see-sawing up and down; his feet are never a moment quiet; and, in short, his whole person is in perpetual motion.

"His dress, too, considering the times, and that he had meant to put on his best becomes, being engaged to dine in a large company, was as much out of the common road as his figure; he had a large wig, snuff-colour coat, and gold buttons, but no ruffles to his shirt, doughty fists, and black worsted stockings."

"His attention was not to be diverted from the books, as we were in the library...having fixed upon one, he began, without further ceremony, to read to himself, all the time standing at a distance from the company. We were all very much provoked, as we perfectly languished to hear him talk; but it seems he is the most silent creature, when not particularly drawn out, in the world.... Dr. Johnson being taken from the books, entered freely and most cleverly into conversation; though it is remarkable he never speaks at all, but when spoken to; nor does he ever start, though he so admirably supports, any subject."