

Transcript of “Quiet!!!: Supporting ADHD staff in Libraries”

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***Title Slide:***

**Amy Harris Houk (She/Her/Hers):** Hello! You are at “Quiet!!!: Supporting ADHD Staff in Libraries.”

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**AHH:** Today, we're gonna be talking about a few things. We're gonna do a quick introduction. We're gonna talk a little bit about ADHD in the workplace. We'll be talking about supporting employees and or colleagues with ADHD, and we're also gonna talk about self-advocacy.

Slides are available at [go.uncg.edu/quietncla](https://go.uncg.edu/quietncla).<sup>1</sup>

***Who Are We?:***

**AHH:** So, I'm Amy. I'm Amy Harris Houk. I work at UNCG. I'm the Assistant Dean for Teaching and Learning, and I was diagnosed with ADHD 2 years ago.

**Ian McLaughlin (He/They):** I'm Ian. I'm an MLIS student here at UNCG. I currently work as a Graduate Assistant at the Teaching Resources Center, and as an intern in the Research, Outreach, and Instruction Department at Jackson Library.

***Introduction:***

**IM:** So, in 2018 ADDitude magazine posted an article on their website that listed librarian as the fifth worst job for people with ADHD. We disagree. We think that this article was based off of stereotypes, such as the characters in the photos here. Which are Marian, the librarian from the Music Man, Mary from It's a Wonderful Life, specifically in the alternate universe of within the film. And then also Marienne, the librarian from You, a recent television show.

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<sup>1</sup> Go links are not always persistent. If this URL does not work, please go to [https://www.academia.edu/110899713/QUIET\\_Supporting\\_ADHD\\_Staff\\_in\\_Libraries](https://www.academia.edu/110899713/QUIET_Supporting_ADHD_Staff_in_Libraries)

### ***What is ADHD?:***

**IM:** Why are we talking about ADHD? Well, because we have it, and it needs to be discussed more particularly in a library setting. Mostly in a library we talk about patrons with disabilities, and we don't talk much about staff.

So, what is ADHD? It is considered a brain disorder associated with low levels of dopamine. There's 3 kinds. The impulsive or hyperactive, the inattentive, and then the combined, which is some balance between the 2.

### **Models of Mental Health and Disability**

**IM:** There are 3 real ways to think about mental health or disability. The first is the medical model which, in the case of ADHD, describes it as a persistent pattern of inattention and or hyperactivity and impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development.

The social model breaks away from that a little bit where they say that disability is something imposed on top of our impairments and disabled people are therefore an oppressed group within society.

Most recently, though, the neurodiversity model has been coming into the fore with where people are saying that people with learning differences are wired differently than their peers.

The main difference between these 3 is that the medical sees disorder, the social sees impairment as separate from the disability, and the neurodiversity sees differences rather than disorders or impairments.

### **Prevalence of ADHD Among Adults**

**IM:** And this is a chart off of the and NIH website showing the prevalence of ADHD among adults split up by gender, age, and ethnicity. As you can see, it's pretty even across ages in the middle, those middle 3 bars.

It is a little bit staggered towards men having it, and it's definitely something that more white people have been diagnosed with than people of color. Although these particular statistics rather should be taken with a grain of salt as we're going to talk a little bit about the male/female diagnosis gap, and then there are stigma and economic factors at play that could account for some of the ethnicity gap in ADHD.

### ***ADHD Diagnoses (or not):***

**IM:** So, ADHD diagnoses or not, there are definitely people out there living with ADHD that have not been diagnosed. One study in particular shows that there's a median time of 17 years between onset of set of symptoms and diagnosis. I fall personally well below that I was diagnosed as a child. I didn't have 17 years to have had symptoms before my diagnosis, but plenty of people are diagnosed well into their twenties or thirties.

**AHH:** Often, sometimes even their forties and I would like to say just very quickly that I more than a counteract your median time, because I think that I can point to starting to show symptoms at age 8 and the third grade and librarians are not great at math, so I'll say that I was diagnosed at 42. So that is a quite extensive gap between symptoms and diagnosis for me.

**IM:** Very good, alright and so then people with an inattentive type tend to have a longer time between onset and diagnosis, which could account for some of the difference between mine and Amy's experiences, because I've typically had hyperactive type. And, Amy, you've never told me for sure, but women tend to have inattentive type.

### ***Women and ADHD and Librarianship:***

**IM:** All right. And as we spoke about very briefly just now. women in ADHD and librarianship. 82-ish percent of librarians are women. And they are less likely to be diagnosed with ADHD until adulthood because of how it tends to present in women. Women are not exclusively inattentive type. Though even combined, is more common for women than hyperactive type.

It's just that hyperactive type, and therefore more boys with ADHD tend to be more disruptive to classroom settings or households or public spaces, and so people tend to notice that more and push for diagnosis more.

**AHH:** I read an article this weekend, and of course I don't have it. But I did read an article that said that frequently girls at the elementary age, and even the ones with combined type are more likely, instead of being hyperactive or impulsive, are talkative. So, I would guess that many of my fellow women who have been diagnosed with ADHD probably had on their report cards say talks too much in class. But you know, again, that's a different sort of disruption than what is typically presented in the hyperactive or impulsive type.

### ***ADHD in the workplace:***

**AHH:** Alright, I'm going to take over now for just a moment, and we're going to talk about ADHD in the workplace because we have to use executive functioning everywhere we go, not just at home. So, there are a variety of reasons why folks with ADHD might not want to disclose and you might notice throughout this presentation that there are memes. While I was working on some of the slides for these pre this presentation, of course I went and found some memes because that was helping my productivity a lot. Also, I really like memes. If you know me, you know that about me.

So here is just kind of a collection of things that people with ADHD may hear again, not know, you know, but from people who don't necessarily know they're speaking to someone with ADHD so that could keep people from wanting to disclose.

### ***ADHD and Disclosure:***

**AHH:** So, you can see there's a link to a citation for a study here that talks about the fear of stigma. Stigma is real. There's definitely a stigma attached to ADHD, also, there's this Daley study is really interesting. I was fascinated about this. They studied same-sex siblings and found that the sibling with ADHD made less money than their sibling. And you know siblings are interesting because they're raised in the same sort of environment. So anyway, it's a very interesting study that followed siblings and their success in life.

Also, this survey of Americans in 2019 showed that 70% of Americans in the survey believe the ADHD is over diagnosed, and 46% of people believe that children grow out of ADHD. So, in an environment like that, it can be difficult for folks with ADHD to make the decision to disclose ADHD to their workplace.

### ***ADHD and the law:***

**AHH:** So, ADHD is covered by the Americans with Disability Act, which means that any workplace with more than 15 employees or any workplace that is affiliated with a State or local government agency, has to provide reasonable accommodations with ADHD, and you know, lots of other disabilities covered by the ADA. It has to be a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits more than one major life activity.

So, you, you know, people with ADHD can speak to their doctors. They may qualify for these reasonable accommodations under the ADA if they meet this particular threshold.

So, I know I hate it when people put long quotes on slides. But here we are. I just saw this quote, and I was like this just speaks so well, I think, to the experience of a lot of folks with ADHD. So, I'm just gonna read it again. My apologies. You can close your eyes if you want, and just let my words wash over you:

I once disclosed my ADHD to an employer at a previous job, and it was used against me at every turn. Every small mistake, every tardy arrival to work, every time I had to ask for something to be repeated, I was confronted with 'if you can't control your ADHD, it's going to affect your future with [company].'  
Occasionally, when I was working hard and really 'in the zone', my boss would make a comment like, 'looks like somebody doubled up on the Ritalin today!'  
My ADHD is unmedicated and untreated. It was mortifying, and absolutely affected the way I was viewed and treated by the organization. Since leaving that company I have never again disclosed my diagnosis of ADHD to any employer or co-worker.

So, I imagine that if you presented this quote to folks with ADHD, they would probably find something in here that they could relate to. So that's why it was important to include it in this slide show.

### ***ADHD from an Asset Perspective:***

**AHH:** Let's flip it around for a second. Let's talk about an asset perspective. We think of things like disabilities, and the Americans with Disabilities Act through a deficit perspective. But

there's actually some things that folks with ADHD can excel at. Creativity is one, and there are citations for all these. We didn't make them up. So, creativity. Obviously, we got things like divergent thinking, hyperfocus, which can be a good thing or a bad thing. If you're trying to get somebody's attention and they're hyperfocused, it's a bad thing. But if you want somebody who can single-mindedly focus on one task, then the ADHD person is, is your person nonconformist, adventurous, self-acceptance, and sublimation. I also really like this quote, I kind of want a banner, or something like a sash for a pageant that says, "queen of possibilities", because I feel like that's me. Maybe, I don't know. And then, excelling at intuitive decision making, I appreciate that. That's a really nice way of saying that we act without thinking sometimes, but intuitive decision making sounds a lot better, I think, than like reckless or whatever. I also really like these 2 memes, Black Girl, Lost Keys is fantastic. She's an excellent resource, and she really talks about how ADHD people can really shine in a crisis because we kind of have to. Well, from my perspective. In my opinion, I kind of have a series of personal crises that happen at all times, and so when there's a real crisis, I know how to handle it, because I've had plenty of practice in my life. So, I think it's, you know, it's important when thinking about having employees with ADHD in the workplace that they really can bring some positives.

**IM:** If I could jump in real quick coming at it from an asset perspective really kind of highlights the difference between the deficit models of the medical or the social and high as compared to the difference model of neurodivergence because in a deficit model there is no recognized asset. As soon as you recognize an asset it goes from a deficit to a difference. And so, I just wanted to loop that back real quick.

**AHH:** That is an excellent point. I'm glad that you said that.

So, to go back to ADDitude Magazine, which was the thing that sort of inspired this entire presentation. You know it said. Just loop back there real quick. "Librarians are masters of quiet, self-guided organization", and I know that everyone here is probably seen those listicles on a Buzzfeed, or wherever that says, you know, if you just want like a quiet, easy job, librarianship is for you. Well, y'all know as much as we do that many, many roles that librarians hold are not quiet or self-guided organization. Even so, I believe, in my opinion that some types of

librarianship may be ideal for folks with ADHD, because we function well when our days vary widely.

### ***Why (some types of) librarianship MAY be ideal for folks with ADHD:***

**AHH:** You know, as a supervisor, for me no 2 days are ever the same, and that is the sort of environment that I do best in. If my environment was the same from day to day to day to day, I would probably not be very good at my job. We are great at brainstorming. We're great at thinking outside the box. I think we're pretty good at group work, and you all know that librarianship involves a lot of group work. There are a lot of reasons that we are great at group work. We're really good, as the meme showed on the previous slide, I'm gonna go back really quickly here this one here on the bottom left. This is doing my own task helping others with task. Yes, I can do that. I can help somebody else with tasks. We also work best with accountability. So, if we're working on something in a group. I will personally do whatever I can to help out, because I don't want to let anybody else down. And when you're with a group, usually, there's very clear deadlines. Okay, by next Thursday we need this done. And you know, if with that amount of structure, I can, I can get a lot of stuff done.

We are also willing to try new things and take risks. So, I think that this, you know, could potentially lead to, you know, being very productive in certain types of librarianship like public service work. You know, being adult librarians, children's librarians, and reference librarians because of all of these different things that we get to do on a daily basis. So, to me, based on the asset perspective that we talked about in the previous slide, there's a lot of different kind of branches of librarianship where people with ADHD would be great. Alright.

### ***Supporting Colleagues and/or Employees with ADHD:***

**IM:** Alright! I'll pick back up here. So now that we've discussed what ADHD is and what it's like for people with ADHD in the workplace, what can people without ADHD do to support those who do have it. And what can people with ADHD do to support each other?

### ***Create an environment where neurodiverse people feel welcome:***

**IM:** The first thing is environment building. As librarians a lot of the time we are in a position of authority within our workplace. We have projects that we are heading, we have staff or

volunteers that are working on projects that we're just in charge of, and we may even be a director or a department head and so that puts us in positions to build environments. And that also includes building environments that are friendly to ADHD and other neurodiverse people. We need to watch out for microaggressions, both stemming from our own blind spots or for or coming from people that are working around or with us or what Amy was talking about earlier with disclosure and the story of the female middle manager. There were a lot of examples of microaggressions throughout that and so it would be a good idea, maybe to double back at some point and take a look at those again.

Providing flexibility is also huge. Universal Design for Learning does this really, really well. But, you know, the same way that using a sans serif font makes things easier for someone with dyslexia, creating a certain flow within the workplace, where it matters less how you do something and more of the outcome, can be really, really helpful for people with ADHD.

And then also just being the kind of boss or colleague that someone would feel comfortable disclosing to. This definitely includes not being an armchair shrink and you know, asking them, you know, like, "Hey, I've noticed this and this," like that's definitely more towards the microaggression side of things, and isn't as helpful as it may look from the outside. But at the same time, you know, if you're supportive when somebody else talks about another kind of situation that they're having, or other types of things that they might need to disclose at work, that can encourage people with ADHD to be able to come to you and just be like, Hey, you know, I've got this, and I'm struggling, or I've got this, and I could really use XYZ.

And then, also, considering psychological safety. We talk a lot about creating safe spaces for various different groups of people. The same goes for neurodiverse people. And there's a lot of resources out there that can help build those as well. So, what kinds of environments should we be trying to build for people with ADHD?

### ***(Many) People with ADHD Thrive in Environments with:***

**IM:** Opportunities for movement are huge for decades now, the majority of American workplaces have been cubicles and bullpens and offices, and that's a lot of sitting, and some people with ADHD can do that and get by with, you know, chewing on a pencil, tapping their



foot, chatting with the neighbor. But providing opportunities for movement can really really help.

So can regular and fairly immediate feedback. It is, of course, impractical to be able to give immediate feedback on everything to everybody, but having a schedule by which, you know, you know you check in once a week with everybody, or you know however, often works best within your workplace.

Deadlines with flexibility right like, it'd be nice to have it by the end of workday, Thursday. But lunch by Friday is the absolute limit. You know, give them that that space where they can say, oh, yeah, if I really want to do well at this, I can have it done by the end of the day, Thursday, but if something comes up, my anxiety doesn't have to like worry about that, because I still have 'til lunch on Friday.

Clear and regular communication. This is huge for people with ADHD. One thing that I just realized we might should have included, would have been something that they can refer back to. Written communication can be really, really helpful for people with ADHD. Whether that's, you know, just a little post it or, you know, saying like, "Hey, I'd like you to do XY and Z. I will send you an email with the details." And then also structure, but not too much structure, because while ADHD can be helped in a structured environment where there's fewer distractions, putting a lot of pressure on someone to remain within a structure can cause people with ADHD to reveal their rebellious streak, shall we say.

**AHH:** Yes, agreed. That made me laugh. So I had to unmute, to laugh aloud.

### ***Possible helpful accommodations:***

**IM:** Possible helpful accommodations. And again, these are *possible* they, ADHD is not a monolith. Not all of these will work for everybody and some things on this list. This list is not also not comprehensive but providing interruption-free work time giving people the chance to plug just uninterrupted work time into their workday calendar can be great, just having the opportunity to do that can be freeing, even if they don't take advantage.

Allowing work from home or a private office. This doesn't work for every job, but it also won't work for everybody with ADHD. So, you know, it's all about figuring out what works for everybody and what works for the position.

Noise cancelling headphones can be huge. It can also be a great way to like signal that you're not paying attention to the noise around you, or that someone isn't because if you got these big headphones on, all of a sudden, people know that that you're not going to hear them providing to do lists. This doubles back to referential communication.

Having a written to do list where somebody can be like, oh, shoot! What's that? Next thing I'm supposed to do I can't remember. Oh, right, I have this list. I don't have to remember the thing. Just have to remember that there is a list.

Prioritizing most important tasks, super easy to do on a to do list. There's lots of great apps if paper to do lists are not the way to go with that.

Another great way to do to do lists for ADHD people in a workplace is a like a task board. That's what my supervisor does at the Teaching Resources Center. And it's great because I can know who to go to real quick if I need something related to other tasks or for one of my own tasks.

Assistive technology like timers. Those are great and luckily; we have them right there in our phones. Amy and I currently have timers going to make sure we don't go over on this presentation.

Deadlines are great, you know. Just "If you could get this done?" Yeah, great. We'll get to it eventually, and, you know, you didn't tell me when. So, I'll get to it when I get to it. But if you give a deadline, then that creates, for many people with ADHD the right kind of structure where they can sit where it can help them prioritize.

Providing instructions in writing. I've already talked about that a little bit.

Sensory considerations. A lot of people with ADHD have comorbid sensory issues, whether that's high tone sensitivity like myself, or touch issues, or things like that. And so, keeping those sorts of things in mind.

Designing the physical environment of the workplace can also be helpful. I find task-based workstations to be really helpful. That would be where, instead of having my own desk, I might also have a desk. But you know you have, libraries are great about this, you have the reference desk where you do reference work. You have the circulation desk where you do circulation work. You have the book repair station where you do your book repair. Having task-based workstations like that can be super helpful because you move into an environment that is made for the one thing, and that will help you focus on the one thing.

And then meeting frequency, some people with ADHD thrive in a high meeting frequency situation, and some people with ADHD thrive in a low meeting frequency situation. And so again, it's all about talking with the people with ADHD that do disclose because you will have created a helpful environment for that and figuring out what they need and working with them to create the situation. That is best overall for everyone.

**AHH:** And I just want to point out this meme in particular, because at Jackson Library we have a great HVAC on all day long. That is just like it's just enough background noise for me to keep me productive. Every once in a while, the HVAC goes off and I feel like I'm gonna crawl out of my skin when it's too quiet. So, like this person ADHD feels and memes "brain background noise is infinitely more distracting than regular background noise". So, keep sensory things like that in mind.

### ***ADHD and Self-Advocacy:***

**AAH:** Alright. So now we're going to talk about my personal favorites. Self-advocacy: because haunted houses aren't scary enough. It's October. It's haunted house season. So just imagine a house where you go from room to room and make phone calls on your own behalf.

### ***Why is self-advocacy hard?***

**AHH:** So why is self-advocacy hard? I learned; well, I knew that this was true from my own experience. But I've learned through during this presentation that there's a 25% comorbidity

rate between ADHD and anxiety. It's actually the highest comorbidity rate between two mental health diagnoses which I found really interesting and also not at all surprising.

Also, I think maybe, maybe I don't want to speak, for of course I don't speak for all people with ADHD. I will speak for myself and say that you know again as a as a third grader staring out the window. I think that I sort of got used to being ignored and told that, you know, "If you just if you just try a little harder, you'll get it", or "Why don't you just pay attention?" You know, there's a lot of a lot of things that have been that are said to people with ADHD that really invalidate their experience. So, when they are, you know, formally diagnosed, and find themselves in a position where they need to seek accommodations or just help it's hard. It's hard to advocate for yourself, because see, you're used to people saying, "Oh, well, if you just tried a little bit harder, you'd be okay." So, it's very challenging and keep that in mind, you know, if you're not a person with ADHD, that it may be very difficult for a colleague or employee with ADHD to advocate for themselves because of the experience in their lives that have gotten them up to this point.

### ***Why/How we should do it anyway:***

**AAH:** We should do it anyway. So now I'm talking to my friends who have ADHD. We, you, should know what our rights are. You know, you should talk to your medical professionals about whether or not you qualify for accommodations under the ADA. But even if you don't, you can still ask for help from your workplace. You know, you can make a list of accommodations. You know, just think about things that you think would work. Practice with someone that you trust.

You know, maybe someone else with ADHD who you know, maybe, or someone who has experience asking for accommodations. You know, write yourself a script and practice it with another person.

One of my favorite thing ways to think about it is to pretend that you're advocating for someone else, like I will make a call and schedule a doctor's appointment for one of my children, but calling to schedule a doctor's appointment for myself is very difficult, so I will just try to convince myself that I'm actually trying to call for my child until it rings, and I have to give my own name and birthday.

Also, you know, if you're new to requesting accommodations, and you're not exactly sure what's gonna work? You can always offer a trial period. So hey, you know, Supervisor, can I try wearing noise canceling headphones when I'm not at the desk for 2 weeks, and we can see if it affects my productivity? See if it's distracting to other people, and then we can regroup. So, we should advocate for ourselves, even if it's difficult.

### ***TL;DL***

**AHH:** Too long; Didn't listen. If you're just joining us, or 30 min was too long for you to pay attention. It is entirely possible that someone you work with or someone who works for you has ADHD. They may or may not tell you. You may also work with people, especially women, who have not been diagnosed or were not diagnosed with the ADHD until they were adults, so they might be like me and be, you know, new, baby ADHD diagnosed people and just to do what you can in whatever your role is, whether you're a supervisor or not, to create an environment where neurodiverse people feel welcome. And if you have ADHD advocate for yourself, if you want to have a buddy, an ADHD buddy, you can reach out to me, and I'll be your ADHD buddy.

### ***Sources:***

**AHH:** We have a lot of sources. So again, our slides are available. Oh, here's some resources as well. CHADD, the Children and Adults with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder is a great organization. So is the Attention Deficit Disorder Association. The National Resource Center on ADHD is part of CHADD. There's also there's some great ADHD TikTokers out there, ADHD, Youtubers.

### ***Further Resources:***

**AHH:** There's some really good resources out there. This is one of those times with social media can be good. It can help you feel seen and supported, which is really nice.

### ***Thanks!***

**AHH:** So again, the slides are available at [go.uncg.edu/quietncla](http://go.uncg.edu/quietncla). Here's mine and Ian's contact information, and I guess that's it. Anything else to say, Ian?

**IM:** I think that covers it. All right. Thank you.