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12 Things You Don't Know About Me and My ADHD

Adults with ADHD are masters of illusion. We'll convince you we've got everything under control when really we feel totally recklessly in shambles at all times. We act like grown-ups when we feel like 5-year-olds inside. Here are the truths about our ADHD that we'll never tell you.

by June Silny

My loved ones don't know me.

Beneath my bubbly, exuberant exterior I hide a lifetime of anxiety. Below my enthusiasm and passion lay fear and exhaustion. I've felt them for so long they almost feel a part of me, but no one sees that.

They see a neatly made bed, a promotion at work, dinner on the table, and children who make it to school (just barely) on time. They see a competent, highly functioning, superwoman with a smile on her face. But behind that smile, I'm holding my breath or gritting my teeth almost all of the time — sure that my house of cards will fall at any moment. Thanks in large part to my ADHD, every task takes longer, feels harder, and wears me down in a way I could never explain. It's lonely, perplexing, and exhausting hiding what's inside.

1. I am My Own Worst Enemy

I teeter daily between self-confidence and self-doubt; never sure which one will win. Some days, I jump into unknown situations with a confidence and clarity that shock even me. But inside a little voice is always telling me I'm just a child, an imposter of a grown-up. That negative self-talk can nag me for days, taunting me to push myself harder to prove myself. And I usually succeed. But, it's exhausting and painful to reclaim my confidence again after that monster called self-doubt jumps out from behind the walls of my head and begins shouting, "*Who do you think you are? You're getting in over your head. You can't do this. You're a phony. Stop pretending to be someone you're not.*"

2. I am Not Lazy

Mornings are beautiful, or so I hear. I sleepwalk right through them — awake and asleep at the same time. Sure, the cats are fed, the dog is walked, but please don't talk to me or ask me any questions. I cannot listen, answer or speak until my mental morning fog lifts around 10:30 a.m.

Research shows that 25 to 50 percent of people with ADHD have clinically reported sleep difficulties — falling asleep, waking up, or both. Something in our brain chemistry makes transitions to and from sleep rough and prolonged. For example, I know a neatly made bed makes me feel refreshed and clean; but after I wake up those crinkled covers look like 10-lb. weights. Fluffing and straightening sheets, pillows and covers is just way too much effort. Sometimes I make the bed at 4 p.m. I know this sounds lazy, but it's not. I'm an energetic person; it's just that my energy doesn't start flowing until my morning fog is washed away with a few cups of coffee.

3. Sometimes, Mental Roadblocks Control Me

Sometimes I want to cry. How is it possible that I am looking at my phone and can't find the app I used an hour earlier, and yesterday, and the day before? My phone is an extension of my hand, another limb. I see letters and words, but sometimes when I read the words they don't enter my mind. I read and re-read but the meaning doesn't penetrate. The more I stare, the less I see.

Sometimes I want to read so badly, but can't because my brain is not in the mood. As an adult, I have the logic and

ability to work around my good and bad concentration moments, but my heart breaks for the children who don't have the logic or freedom to balance those moments. My heart still breaks for the child I was that could have accomplished so much more had I known how to break through the roadblocks in my mind.

4. I Can't Hear You Sometimes

I am standing right in front of you. I watch your lips move. I hear your words. But my mind is elsewhere, focusing on something brighter, shinier, or louder. In a restaurant, I hear conversations on the other side of the room. The colors and patterns on everyone's clothes are impossible to ignore.

This doesn't mean I'm disinterested or rude. I'm not. And that's the hard part. I sometimes literally smack my cheek and say to myself, *Come back! Focus!* When I do, I am able to slide right back into the conversation as if I had been involved all along. I missed a few words but I fit the remaining words together like puzzle pieces and voila! The picture appears.

5. I Wish I Hadn't Said That

When my New York sense of humor partners with my ADHD, it's a terrible combination. I'm not always proud of my word choices and my dramatic flair. But when something feels real, I say it. Soon after, I usually regret it, but I never let on. I pretend I'm okay with whatever I just blurted out. But inside I'm crouching under the table, trying to hide. I want to quickly change the subject or run away from the conversation. Was I rambling? Did I offend someone? Why isn't anyone laughing?

6. I'm Too Compassionate

I care deeply about everything and everyone — from the skinny stray cats I feel compelled to feed to the homeless man sweating on the traffic island holding a cardboard sign. I take on everyone's emotions (including and especially animals) as if they were my own. If I seem detached, it's only because my mind is actively occupied with something or someone else.

I'm not a people-pleasing, co-dependent, enabler; I am a compassionate, loving person who retains each person's hurt, suffering, and sadness. I am an emotional sponge. And when I'm consumed by emotion, it's hard to speak. Please don't take it personally.

7. I Can't Let Things Go

Like referees reviewing a disputed play, I rewind and replay every aspect of my day. I return to every word I shouldn't have spoken, every phone call I didn't make, and every person I might have hurt. It's an invisible burden that brings no comfort; only regret. If I can resolve an outstanding problem, I do with an apology or a phone call. But some things are better left unsaid; so long as they don't turn into hidden resentments, which is another thing I worry about endlessly.

8. I Want It All — and I Want It Now

I'm a woman of excess. 100% of something is not enough. I always want more. When I eat, I eat too much. But that's OK because when I exercise, I exercise too much. I surround myself with too much of everything. There are too many books, too many purses, too much food, too many lipsticks, nail polishes, and shoes. But I love it all and use them all. I'm not hoarding; I prefer to call it warehousing. Storage makes me happy, even though it drives my loved ones crazy.

9. With Me, It's All or Nothing

Don't break my trance if I'm immersed in a project, a writing assignment, or cooking a meal. But when I am wrapped up in my moment, I am bound and totally absorbed in what I am doing. If I stop, I will lose my way, my momentum, and my speed. I like when I get carried away in hyperfocus. It actually feels good, though I know it's confusing and even maddening to loved ones who lose access to me for hours or days on end.

10. There's a Loud Child Inside Me

ADHD is my five-year-old self who never stopped saying, "I want what I want when I want it." I try to push her aside, but that little child is noisy and fierce. I'm not proud to admit it, but she is my driving force — and she can be quite motivating, or destructive. Everyone prefers doing what they love, but they understand that responsibilities and obligations require them to do things they don't love most of the time. Not me; my ADHD gets a chokehold on me and doesn't let me move forward. But when I get to do what I love, I can rule the world. Nothing can stop me.

11. I'm Exhausted By My ADHD

The ADHD mind works a triple shift. It never stops and it has no brakes. This makes me cranky sometimes. My emotions get out of whack, hard to control and intense. I exaggerate and exasperate, and then I realize how poorly I behaved. My thoughts stand like dominoes in formation, setting off a chain reaction, knocking over the next one, picking up speed, moving faster and faster. The movement only pauses while I sleep, if I can sleep with all those thoughts exploding in my head. My only relief comes from self-care. Quiet time is important. It's the only thing that gives my mind the space it needs to relax and recharge.

12. I Love My ADHD

Even though I have to deal with the rolling eyes of naysayers who think that I'm making up excuses, lies, and stories, I wouldn't change a thing in my brain. My ADHD allows me to love passionately, and to see color where others see black and white. I live outside the boxes and the lines. I fly without wings because amazing things do happen. Change doesn't scare me. It excites me. I embrace it. I see light in the darkness. I can stay up all night working on a project and deliver it the next morning with an Oscar-worthy performance. Some call it a burden, a disorder, or a deficit; I don't think so. To me it's a precious diamond that I need to guard closely and polish often — smoothing out the edges to discover new sparkling dimensions every day.

Give it up? No way! My ADHD is me. It's in my heart and my soul. I love it that way.