

# Comorbidities in LD and AD/HD

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# Comorbidities and AD/HD

- 75% of AD/HD Adults Referred to Clinics have a Comorbidity

(Barkley, R.A. (1996). ADHD in Children Adolescents and Adults: Diagnosis, Treatment and Assessment. New England Educational Institute, Cape Cod Symposia (August), Pittsfield, MA.)

- 20% of AD/HD Adults have Two or More Comorbidities

(Hechtman, L. (2000). Subgroups of Adult Outcome of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. In T.E. Brown (Ed.), Attention-Deficit Disorders and Comorbidities in Children, Adolescents, and Adults. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press:.)



# Comorbidities (Continued)

Barkley wrote, “Up to 67% of ADHD children as adults are free of psychiatric diagnoses” (p. 207).

(Barkley, R.A. (1998). Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Second Edition. New York, NY: Guilford.)

Brown Estimated that 50% of AD/HD adult had Comorbidities.

(Brown, T.E. (1995). Differential Diagnosis of ADD Versus ADHD in Adults. In K. Nadeau (Ed.), A Comprehensive Guide to Attention Deficit Disorders in Adults. New York, NY: Bruner Mazel, pp. 93-108.)



# LD and Comorbidity



- The research into the comorbidities of LD and Dyslexia is not as extensive or thorough as it is with AD/HD for all age levels.
- Comorbidity has almost been an after thought in the LD literature.



# Comorbidity and Learning Disorders

- Most of the literature on LD and comorbidity is anecdotal and the definition of LD is not consistent.
- LD adults continue to have difficulty with their disabilities into adulthood. Social and emotional problems dominate their lives.

(Hooper, S.R., and Olley, J.G. (1996). Psychological Comorbidity in Adults with Learning Disabilities. In N. Gregg, C. Hoy, and A.F. Gay (Eds.), Adults With Learning Disabilities: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives. New York, NY: Guilford, pp. 162-183.)

(Hoy, C., and Manglitz, E. (1996). Social and Affective Adjustment of Adults with Learning Disabilities: A Lifespan Perspective. In N. Gregg, C. Hoy, and A.F. Gay (Eds.), Adults With Learning Disabilities: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives. New York, NY: Guilford, pp. 208-2312).



# Comorbidities and AD/HD

Pliszka indicated the following regarding Comorbidities of adults with AD/HD:

## ***Prevalence rates of adults with ADHD***

- Antisocial Personality Disorder 12% to 27%
- Alcohol and Drug Dependence 27% to 46%
- Major Depressive Disorders 17% to 31%
- Anxiety Disorders 32% to 50%

(Pliszka, S.R. (2000). Paying Attention to ADHD: Treatment Challenges with Comorbid Conditions. Philadelphia, PA: Medical Educational Systems.)



# Comorbidity and AD/HD

Weiss and Hechtman after a 15 year follow-up study came up with the following groups that AD/HD adult fall into:

1. 30 to 40% Fairly Normal Group
2. 40 to 50% significant Hyperactivity, and Social/Emotional/Interpersonal Problems
3. 10% Severely Antisocial and/or Mentally Disturbed

(Weiss, G., and Hechtman, L. (1993). Hyperactive Children Grown-Up (Second Edition). New York, NY: Guilford.)



# Comorbidity and Learning Disorders

- Research and observation of clinicians who work with LD adults tend to concur with the above.
- LD adults are more at risk for anxiety, depression, conduct problems and severe psychopathology than non-LD peers. The severity is more pronounced when they have comorbid AD/HD.

(Brier, N. (1993). LEAD 2000 Congress, Little Rock.AR.)

(Hooper, S.R., and Olley, J.G. (1996). Psychological Comorbidity in Adults with Learning Disabilities. In N. Gregg, C. Hoy, and A.F. Gay (Eds.), Adults With Learning Disabilities: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives. New York, NY: Guilford, pp. 162-183.)





# Comorbidity and Learning Disorders

- LD children with behavioral and emotional problems are more likely to have the same problems in adulthood.
- The more comorbidities a LD person has the more negative outcomes he/she will have.

(Goldstein, S. (1997). Managing Attention and Learning Disorders in Late Adolescence and Adulthood: A Guide for Practitioners. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.)



# Depression and LD

## NORMAL FORMS OF DEPRESSION

1. “The Blues”- Less than two weeks of depressed mood associated with an environmental event.
  - \* Ratey and Johnson spoke of “Shadow Syndromes” which appear as, “...behavior that fits only part of a syndrome or disorder, but not all” (p. 13).

(Ratey, J.J., and Johnson, C. (1997). Shadow Syndromes. New York, NY: Pantheon.)



# Normal Depression and LD

2.. Bereavement – The normal grief reaction to a traumatic life event (i.e. death of a loved one, being diagnosed with a disorder, etc.).

- \* Symptoms: Loss of interest in things one typically finds pleasurable, depression, sluggishness, problems with sleep and/or appetite, guilt, suicidal thoughts.
- \* Complicated Bereavement- includes the above symptoms with a Major Depressive Episode.



# Grief and LD

Goldstein spoke of adults with LD and/or AD/HD who struggle with prolonged grief. “It has been suggested that adults with AD/HD and LD struggle with grief over their perceived incompetence and a lifetime difficulty with meeting everyday expectations” (p. 260).

(Goldstein, S. (1997). Managing Attention and Learning Disorders in Late Adolescence and Adulthood: A Guide for Practitioners. New your, NY: John Wiley and Sons.)



# Grief and AD/HD

Murphy and LeVert wrote of the stages of coping with being diagnosed AD/HD (seems to apply to LD also):

Stage 1- Relief and Optimism

Stage 2- Denial

Stage 3- Anger and Resentment

Stage 4- Grief

Stage 5- Mobilization

Stage 6- Accommodation

(Murphy, K.R., and LeVert, S. (1995). Out of the Fog. New York, NY: Hyperion.)



# LD Life Insight



“It is a common trait among the LD to know how to endure hardship and keep dark secrets” — Oliver Queen

(Kegan, R. (2001). Easing a World of Pain: Learning Disabilities and the Psychology of Self-Understanding. In P. Rodis, A. Garrod, and M.L. Boscardin (Eds.), Learning Disabilities & Life Stories. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, p. 194.)

# LD and Low Self-Esteem

- “Reasonably assume that most individuals with learning disabilities have had a more difficult course and are more likely to experience feelings of low self-esteem” (p. 24).
- “However, when the dyslexic succeeds, he is likely to attribute his success to luck. When one fails, he simply sees himself as stupid” (p. 9).

(Goldstein, S. (1998). Emotional Problems In Adults with Learning Disabilities.: An Often Unseen but Not Insignificant Problem. LDA Newsbriefs, 33 (4), p. 24.)

(Ryan, M. (1994). The Other Sixteen Hours: The Social and Emotional Problems of Dyslexia. Baltimore, MD: Orton Dyslexia Society.)



# LD and Dysthymic Disorder

- “For some adults with LD, a seeming inability to understand why life continues to be a struggle creates a tragic and self-perpetuating cycle of loneliness and Despair” (p. 72).
- “...the sheer day-to-day effort required of individuals with LD can be exhausting and dispiriting” (p. 48).

(Reiff, H.B., and Gerber, P.J. (1994). Social/Emotional and Daily Living Issues for Adults with Learning Disabilities. In P.J. Gerber and H.B. Reiff (Eds.), Learning Disabilities in Adulthood. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, pp. 72-81.)

(Roffman, A.L. (2000). Meeting the Challenge of Learning Disabilities in Adulthood. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.)





# LD and Dysthymic Disorder

- “Reasonably assume that most individuals with learning disabilities have had a more difficult life course emotionally and are more likely to experience feelings of low self-esteem” (p. 24).

(Goldstein, S. (1997). Managing Attention and Learning Disorders in Late Adolescence and Adulthood: A Guide for Practitioners. New your, NY: John Wiley and Sons.)



# Major Depressive Disorder and LD

- LD adults are more at risk for suicide.
- Many LD adults have had difficulties with depression.
- “Depression may also generate low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness as a result of negative feedback from others” (p. 49).

(Cordoni, B. (1987). Living With A Learning Disability. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.)

(Smith, S.L. (1991). Succeeding Against the Odds: Strategies and Insights From The Learning Disabled. Los Angeles, CA: Jeremy Tarcher.)

(Roffman, A.L. (2000). Meeting the Challenge of Learning Disabilities in Adulthood. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.)



# LD and Anxiety

- LD college students have more problems with anxiety than do their non-disabled peers.
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder is frequently found in LD adults.
- Dyslexics tend to have significant problems with anxiety.

(Hoy, C. Gregg, N., et. al. (1997). Depression and Anxiety in Two Groups of Adults with Learning Disabilities. Learning Disability Quarterly, 20, pp. 280-291.)

(Hooper, S.R., and Olley, J.G. (1996). Psychological Comorbidity in Adults with Learning Disabilities. In N. Gregg, C. Hoy, and A.F. Gay (Eds.), Adults with Learning Disabilities: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives. New York, NY: Guilford, pp. 162-183.)

Ryan, M. (1994). The Other Sixteen Hours: The Social and Emotional Problems of Dyslexia. Baltimore, MD: Orton Dyslexia Society.)



# LD and Anxiety

Roffman wrote, “Adults with LD/ADHD often experience pressure as they work with their symptoms. Anxiety develops out of such day-to-day occurrences as the loss of yet another set of keys...” (p. 49).

(Roffman, A. (2000). Meeting the Challenge of Learning Disabilities in Adulthood.  
Baltimore, MD: Brookes.



# LD and Social Anxiety



“One final ongoing issue that is worthy of mention for many with LD/ADHD is the problem of fatigue. The extra effort to cope with the continued social and academic demands of schooling can be chronically exhausting” (p. 217).

(Roffman, A. (2000). Meeting the Challenge of Learning Disabilities in Adulthood.  
Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

# LD and Social Anxiety



Temple Grandin indicated that for those with autism spectrum disorders, social adaptation must occur at the conscious level. This could be said of those with LD and/or AD/HD.

(Grandin, T. (1995). Thinking in Pictures: and Other Reports From My Life With Autism.  
New York, NY: Vintage.

# LD and Borderline Personality Disorder

- Those with LD and/or AD/HD are more at risk for Borderline Personality Disorder.
- Some with Borderline Personality Disorder have EEGs that indicate abnormal temporal lobe activity.

(Kreisman, J.J., and Strauss, H. (1989). I hate you-Don't Leave Me: Understanding the Borderline Personality. New York, NY: Avon.)




# Psychotherapy and LD

## Why most LD adults seek therapy

- Stress and anxiety coping with life issues affected by the disability
- Low self-esteem
- Unresolved grief
- Sense of helplessness

(Barton, R.S., and Fuhrmann, B.S. (1994). Counseling and Psychotherapy for Adults with Learning Disabilities. In P.J. Gerber, and H.B. Reiff (Eds.), Learning Disabilities in Adulthood: Persisting Problems and Evolving Issues. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, pp. 82-96.)





# Psychotherapy and LD

- Those with learning disabilities may have more difficulty with everyday adult living than they did when they were in school.
- They may not be able to make a good living, have a social life, run a family, etc.

(Wren, C., and Einhorn, J. (2000). Hanging by a Twig: Understanding and Counseling Adults with Learning Disabilities and ADD. New York, NY: Norton.)



# Employment and Learning Disabilities



- “...social skills deficits can be the most debilitating part of the learning-disabled experience” (p. 201).
- “Failure at ‘office politics’ can lead to being fired. Many people with learning disabilities, at high or low levels, reach a plateau and are unable to advance for reasons of personal matching” (p. 201).
- Poor social skills are the reason for under-employment in many with LD.

(Brown, D.S, and Gerber, P.J. (1994). Employing People with Learning Disabilities. In P.J. Gerber and H. B. Reiff (Eds.), Learning Disabilities in Adulthood: Persisting Problems and Evolving Issues. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, pp. 194-203.)

(McLoughlin, D., Fitzgibbon, G., and Young, V. (1994). The Adult Dyslexic: Assessment Counseling and Training. San Diego, CA: Singular.)

# Major Depressive Disorder and Dyslexia

- Ryan wrote that dyslexics are at risk for depression. The following are characteristics of depressed dyslexics he discussed:
  - They tend to have a negative self-image.
  - They tend to view their world negatively.
  - They are hopeless about the future.

(Ryan, M. (1994). The Other Sixteen Hours: The Social and Emotional Problems of Dyslexia. Baltimore, MD: Orton Dyslexia Society.)



# Comorbidity and AD/HD (Continued)

- Those with Combined Type AD/HD have more Externalizing Disorders
- Those with Inattentive AD/HD **MAY** have more Internalizing Disorders

(Milich, R., et. al. (2002) The Predominately Inattentive Subtype—Not a Subtype of AD/HD.  
ADHD Report, 10 (1), pp. 1-6.)



# Comorbidities (Continued)

Hynd stated 40% of those with Inattentive AD/HD will have an Internalizing Disorder.

(Hynd, G. (2002). ADHD and Its Association with Dyslexia: Diagnostic and Treatment Challenges. Paper presented at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual International Dyslexia Association Conference, Atlanta, GA, November 16.)



# Barkley said Affective Disorders are common in AD/HD Adults

- 30-35% Have Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- 25-35% Had Major Depressive Episode
- >50% Dysthymic Disorder

(Barkley, R.A. (1996). ADHD in Children, Adolescents, and Adults: Diagnosis, Assessment, and Treatment. New England Educational Institute, Cape Cod Symposia, August, Pittsfield, MA.)



# Comorbidities of Dyslexia

- AD/HD 40%
- Conduct Disorder 20%
- Depression 20%
- Generalized Anxiety 25%
- At Least One Comorbidity 60%

Willcutt, E.K. and Gaffney-Brown, R. (Summer, 2004). Etiology of Dyslexia, ADHD, and Related Difficulties: Using Genetic Methods to Understand Comorbidity. Perspectives, 30 (3), pp. 12-15.



# Dysthymia and AD/HD

- Wender, Reimherr and Wood indicated that almost 70% of AD/HD adults have Dysthymia.
- Murphy indicated about 35% of AD/HD adults meet criteria for Dysthymia of Major Depressive Disorder during their lifetimes.

(Wender, P.H., Reimherr, F.W., and Wood, D.R. (1985). A Controlled Study of Methylphenidate in the Treatment of Attention Deficit Disorder, Residual Type, In Adults. American Journal of Psychiatry, 141 , 547-552.)

(Murphy, K.R. (1978). Psychological Counseling of Adults with ADHD. In R.A. Barkley (Ed.), Attention Deficit Disorder, Second Edition. New York, NY: Guilford.)





# Dysthymia and AD/HD

Hynd indicated 17% of those with  
Inattentive AD/HD have Dysthymia.

(Hynd, G. (2002). ADHD and Its Association with Dyslexia: Diagnostic and Treatment Challenges. Paper presented at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual International Dyslexia Association Conference, Atlanta, GA, November 16.)



# Major Depressive Disorder and AD/HD

Spencer et. al. reported, “The rate of major depressive disorder among the adults with ADHD was similar to the rate in children...” (p. 97).

## **With Major Depressive Disorder**

- 1. Adult ADHD group 31%**
- 2. Child ADHD group 29%**
- 3. Adult Control group 5%**

(Spencer, T. , et. al. (2000). Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder With Mood Disorders. In T.E. Brown (Ed.), Attention –Deficit Disorders and Comorbidities in Children Adolescents and Adults. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, pp. 79-124.)



# Major Depression and AD/HD

Barkley reported 25% of those with AD/HD met criteria for Major Depression and most had a childhood history of Conduct Disorder. He speculated there may be a genetic link between AD/HD and major depression.

(Barkley, R.A. (1996). ADHD in Children , Adolescents, and Adults: Diagnosis, Assessment, and Treatment. New England Educational Institute, Cape Cod Symposia, August, Pittsfield, MA.)



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# Major Depression and AD/HD

Hynd indicated 4% of those with Inattentive AD/HD will meet criteria for Major Depression.

(Hynd, G. (2002). ADHD and Its Association with Dyslexia: Diagnostic and Treatment Challenges. Paper presented at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual International Dyslexia Association Conference, Atlanta, GA, November 16.)



# Major Depression and AD/HD

- Only the AD/HD children with Major Depression have problems with Low Self-Esteem
- Most AD/HD Children have inflated Self-Esteem.
- Adults with AD/HD may become demoralized.

Barkley, R.A. (2002) Mental and Medical Outcomes of AD/HD. Pre-Conference Institute, # TPA1, Thursday October 17, 2002, 14<sup>th</sup> Annual CHADD International Conference, Miami Beach, FL.



# Suicide and AD/HD

10% will have attempted in the last 3 years

5% will die from attempts (Barkley, 1998)

There is even a higher rate with those with comorbid Antisocial Personality Disorder (Weiss and Hechtman, 1986).

(Barkley, R.A. (1998). Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Second Edition. New York, NY: Guilford.)

(Weiss, G., and Hechtman, L. (1986). Hyperactive Children Grown-Up. New York, NY: Guilford.)



# Bipolar Disorder and AD/HD

Wilens, Spencer and Prince stated 10% of AD/HD adults will have comorbid Bipolar Disorder.

(Wilens, et. al. (1997). Diagnosing ADD in Adults. Attention!, 3 (4), pp. 27-33.)





# Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Roffman wrote, “Adults with LD/ADHD often experience pressure as they work to cope with their symptoms. Anxiety develops out of such day-to-day occurrences as the loss of yet another set of keys...” (p. 49).

( Roffman, A.L. (2000). Meeting the Challenge of Learning Disabilities in Adulthood. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.)

Brown indicated anxiety is a common symptom experienced by adults with Inattentive AD/HD.

(Brown, T.E. (1996). Brown Attention-Deficit Disorder Scales. San Antonio, TX. The Psychological Corporation.)

# Generalized Anxiety Disorder and AD/HD

- Barkley reported 24% to 43% of AD/HD adults have “GAD”.
- Barkley reported 50% of AD/HD adults will have trouble with GAD in their lifetimes.

(Barkley, R.A. (1998). Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Second Edition. New York, NY: Guilford.)

(Barkley, R.A. (1996). ADHD in Children, Adolescents, and Adults: Diagnosis, Assessment, and Treatment. New England Educational Institute, Cape Cod Symposium, August, Pittsfield, MA.)



# Social Phobia and AD/HD

- Murphy stated AD/HD adults are at risk for Social Phobia.
- Tzelepis, Schubiner, and Warbasse reported 12% of AD/HD adults meet criteria for Social Phobia.

(Murphy, K.R., and LeVert, S. (1995). Out of the Fog: Treatment Options for Adult Attention Deficit Disorder. New York, NY: Hyperion.

(Tzelepis, A., Scherbiner, H., and Warbasse, L.H. (1995). Differential Diagnosis and Psychiatric Comorbidity Patterns In Adult Attention Deficit Disorder. In K. Nadeau (Ed.), A Comprehensive Guide to Attention Deficit Disorder in Adults: Research, Diagnosis and Treatment. New York, NY: Bruner Mazel, pp. 35-57.)



# Avoidant Disorder

Hynd indicated 4% of those with Inattentive AD/HD will meet criteria for Avoidant Disorder.

(Hynd, G. (2002). ADHD and Its Association with Dyslexia: Diagnostic and Treatment Challenges. Paper presented at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual International Dyslexia Association Conference, Atlanta, G, November 16.)



# Personality Disorders and AD/HD

- 11-22% of AD/HD have Antisocial Personality Disorder
- 11% Histrionic Personality Disorder
- 19% Passive Aggressive Personality Disorder
- 14% Borderline Personality Disorder

(Barkley, R.A. (2002). ADHD and Oppositional Defiant Children. Seminar presented by the Institute for Continuing Education, Fairhope, AL, in Phoenix, AZ, February 19-20, The Institute for Continuing Education, Fairhope, AL.)



# Reading Disorder-Dyslexia & Comorbidity

- AD/HD 35% (5%)
- Conduct Disorder 20% (2%)
- Depression 20% ((5)
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder 25% (10%)
- At Least One Comorbidity 60% (10%)

Willcutt, E.R., and Gaffney-Brown, R. (Summer, 2004). Etiology of Dyslexia, ADHD, and Related Difficulties: Using Genetic Methods to Understand Comorbidity. Perspectives, 30 (3). Pp. 12-15.

