

**Observation Paper**

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SOWK 362

Professor Daniels

September 19, 2021

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This paper discusses the atypical and typical behavior of CP, a nine year old boy who is suspected of having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, also known as ADHD, and has recently had to deal with the divorce of his parents. In this paper, CP's unique characteristics are discussed along with observations on how the child socialized in this setting and his ability to communicate and difficulties discovered within his communication. The conclusion of this paper revolves around a reflection on my experience of this social interaction as I played the observer of this child.

This observation of CP took place on the evening of Friday, September 17th at Los Bandidos, a small Mexican restaurant beside Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia. The setting of this interaction was a small dinner with family and friends to end the week off and give CP and his mother, AP, a chance to get dinner with me, since it has been a while since I have had the chance to come home. Those involved in this social interaction were AP, also known as CP's mother, AC, who CP views as an older brother, and CS, who is one of AC's friends that CP quickly grew to love.

While much of my observation focused on finding CP's atypical behavior, I was able to notice some of his behaviors which were normal. When approached by the waitress towards the end of the observation, CP seemed to get somewhat shy when she handed him the check as a joke. Even though he did get shy, he did not ignore her as many younger children tend to do when feeling shy and he did not hide behind his mother or really turn to her for advice on what to do. He showed his maturity as a nine year old by grabbing the check, smiling, and laughing along with the waitress. He also showed typical age-functioning through his way of reacting to things that may not have gone his way. While he may have had a different idea in mind of what

he wanted to do, when told no or corrected, he didn't throw a temper tantrum. He may have gotten upset, but it was easy to tell that he could comprehend why he was told no and was able to listen to reasoning pretty well. CP showed much of his typical age-functioning and behaviors throughout my observation, such as comprehending reasoning well and using his manners with everyone there, including new people such as the waitress.

For a few months, we have all started to notice that CP displays some behaviors that have led us to suspect that he may have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD for short. With that being said, many of CP's characteristics that I found to be unique seem to correlate with common symptoms seen in children with ADHD. One issue which I found to be prominent throughout the recording was that CP really struggled at remembering the fact that he should ignore me and the camera throughout the recording. He also struggled with keeping his attention on one thing at a time, which is common for CP at home but is heightened when in crowded situations, such as restaurants. He was seen throughout the recording to bring his attention to multiple things in a short time span, as seen when he jumped from conversation, to lights, to dancing in his seat. He was also seen to squirm around a lot in his seat, even soon after being told to stop by his mother. Said, Huzair, Helal, and Mushtaq mentioned many symptoms in their article "Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in Children or Adolescents" that CP showed in his observation, such as struggling to sit still in his seat and fidgeting, having a trouble holding attention and struggling to follow instructions, and talking excessively (Helal et al., 2015).

CP was also seen to have some problematic behavior throughout the recording, as seen in his inability to listen or his attitude when he felt a negative emotion. When observing CP, I wondered if his behavioral issues may have become heightened from the divorce of his parents

about a year ago. According to the article “The Temporal Effects of Divorces and Separations on Children’s Academic Achievement and Problem Behavior” by Jeremy Arkes, “...in the 2 years after the disruption, children have significantly lower reading scores and worse behavioral problems,” (Arkes, 2015). Arkes also spoke on how most of the effects of separation or divorce were temporary, meaning that CP’s problematic behavior most likely will disappear over time. However, Arkes also mentions that things could worsen CP’s behavior, such as parental conflict, lack of parental contact, and the stress of marital transitions (Arkes, 2015). It is important to note that not only can the event of the separation affect children, but so can the two to four years before the separation actually takes place. Arkes speaks on this issue as well, stating that, “... there is evidence that children are already affected by the disruption process at least 2 to 4 years prior to the disruption,” (Arkes, 2015). With this in mind, not only is the event of the divorce possibly responsible for CP’s behavior, but so is the two to four year time span before the divorce happened.

I observed that CP seemed to relate to others very easily and found conversation with others easily, including when speaking to CS, someone he had never met before this moment. When it came to expressing feelings, CP was seen to get louder when excited or feeling a negative emotion, such as anger or feeling upset. He was able to make sense of the idea of sitting down for dinner with friends pretty easily, which is typical for his age. However, he did struggle with acting appropriately according to social expectations, which was seen in his loud mannerisms, his inability to sit still, and his random dance intervals during dinner. It seemed as though he had no idea about how he should behave and did not see his behavior as different from social expectations, which is abnormal for a nine year old.

When it came to CP's communication, it was easy to see where his strengths and his weaknesses were. He found it very easy to speak to others and join in on a conversation, but he often showed signs of ADHD when speaking with CS and AC that showed where his limitations in communication lay. He found it difficult to know when to speak, which often led to him interrupting either AC or CS to speak. He also struggled to keep his attention on the conversations he was in. I remember observing one conversation where he was being spoken to by AC, but he had started another one of his dancing intervals and had trouble focusing on what AC was saying. There was another time where he was in a conversation and quickly found his attention elsewhere. Instead of responding, he spoke on the lights behind his seat and seemed to tune out the conversations happening around him. According to the authors of "Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in Children and Adolescents", many of these issues that CP struggled with when it came to conversation are symptoms of ADHD. Such as struggling to hold his attention, often not listening when spoken to directly, talking excessively, and often interrupting others (Helal et al., 2015). If I was viewing a child younger than CP, I would not find many of these factors of his communication to be atypical. However, I do find it to be atypical for someone who is nine years old who has had the same symptoms of ADHD for more than six months. According to Helal et al., children must have six or more symptoms of both inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive for more than six months and those symptoms must not be caused by another mental health issue, be present before twelve years of age, be present in two or more settings, and interfere with school or social functioning (Helal et al., 2015).

As an observer, I found this to be a very interesting paper to write as it allowed me to view my brother in a social situation through a social worker's lens. It allowed me to do research on children's typical and atypical behavior and learn more about CP and why he behaves in the

way that he does. I learned a variety of new things when doing my research on this paper. I realized that much of CP's atypical behavior came from the possibility that he may have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. I also learned about the effects of divorce on children and how not only can the divorce affect CP's academic and behavioral problems, but so can the build up two to four years before the divorce. For months, I wondered what to do about CP's behavioral issues. I was happy to learn that this behavior will most likely disappear as he gets older. This study allowed me to learn a lot about CP and children's behavior in general, mainly focused around children of divorced parents and children with ADHD.

## References

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