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“Pixies, monkeys and living in-the-moment”:

Toward a new conception of ADHD

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### **Declarations**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library\*\*, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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### **Acknowledgment of Authorship**

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has been done in collaboration with other researchers. I have included as part of the thesis a written statement, endorsed by my supervisor, clearly outlining the extent of collaboration, with whom and under what auspices.

I, Rosalind Redshaw, attest that I was responsible for the review of literature and writing of the manuscript contained within this thesis. I trained in IPA under my supervisor, I conducted the recruitment of participants, the semi-structured interviews and the transcribing of data. Associate Professor Lynne McCormack designed the study and independently analysed the data. In accordance with the protocols of IPA, both authors contributed to the interpretation and write-up of the data and implications of the findings. Drafts of the manuscript were forwarded to A/Professor Lynne McCormack for review, and amendments were made based on her feedback.

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### Abstract

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has been described as a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development. This qualitative study was interested in two questions: 1) What is it like to be ADHD in a neurotypical world, including potential advantages? and 2) Can participants' subjective interpretations of the way they operate in the world offer new insights into the mechanisms underlying ADHD? Five females and four males aged 29 to 54 years (mean age 39) participated in the study. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and was transcribed and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. One superordinate theme: *Unique ways of operating in ADHD*; overarched three subordinate themes: (i) *Otherness, medication and social expectations*; (ii) *Pixies, monkeys and living in the moment*; and (iii) *Blest not broken*. The themes highlight the personal, changing impact of ADHD across childhood and into adulthood, and specific characteristics and behaviours that participants attribute to an ADHD mental architecture. A unanimous tendency to live 'in-the-moment' was found across participants. The potential relationship between operating on a single-dimension timescale and classic symptoms of ADHD is discussed. Our findings offer a new perspective from which to understand both the difficulties and strengths of ADHD and have implications for quantitative research and theory-building related to the cross-temporal organisation of behaviour in individuals with ADHD. The benefits of developing a more balanced view of ADHD traits in terms of clinical practice is also discussed.

*Keywords: ADHD, qualitative study, living in-the-moment, advantages of ADHD, timing deficits*