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Disability as a Cultural Problem

Abstract

This paper aims to reframe disability through John Dewey's transactional theory of culture to indicate how disability is not located in the biological organization of the individual nor in the organization of culture, but in the transactions between the two. This paper will apply Dewey's theory of culture to disability studies and philosophy of disability and then to ADHD to make clear the benefits of a transactional model of disability.

Keywords:

pragmatism, disability, culture, transaction, habit

This paper seeks to place disability in the context of John Dewey's transactional model of culture to better indicate the ways in which disability is not merely a biological difference or the result of social structures that disabled individuals but emerges in the transaction between the individual and culture itself. When Dewey's transactional model of culture is applied to disability and disability theory, disability can be understood as a unique way in which the human organism transacts with the environment through culture. Moreover, as a unique way of transacting with culture that emerges from the biological organization of disabled persons, Dewey's transactional model allows for an understanding of disability and ability as not opposite poles of a spectrum, but different ways of behaving and of experiencing as organized through transaction with culture.

This paper will therefore proceed through an articulation of Dewey's transactional model of culture to indicate the unique features of such a model, specifically with reference to the ways culture transforms the envi-

ronment and the human organisms within it, into persons and environments of meaning within which different ways of being persons emerge as unique combinations of habit. This transactional model of culture will then be developed in conversation with philosophy of disability to indicate some strengths of the transactional model of disability, specifically insofar as it destabilizes notions of ability and disability and reframes disability in the mode of how transactions with the environment are experienced differently by disabled persons. This paper will conclude with a brief application of this transactional model to ADHD, a disability which has received little attention in contemporary philosophical literature.

Prior to beginning, one thing should be made clear. Throughout this text I have attempted to use “disabled persons” rather than “persons with disabilities.” As will be indicated below, personhood is modified by disability and disability by personhood in a transactional relationship. Disability is not therefore something to be added to or removed from the ways in which disabled persons are in the world. To this end, it is not that “persons with disabilities” is a meaningless category, it is that the transactional experience of disability and personhood is better captured by the phrase “disabled persons” which avoids bifurcating the person from the ways in which disability structures their experience of the world.

Culture, for John Dewey, is the myriad ways in which human beings come together in mutual association.¹ As such, each culture has its own unique mode of organization that comes to structure the environment through which the human organism comes to be.² Here, we should be clear about what Dewey means by environment: “The words ‘environment,’ [and] ‘medium’ denote something more than surroundings which encompass an individual. They denote the specific continuity of the surroundings with his own active tendencies.”³ To this end, the environment exceeds the physical environment to include the social and cultural environment.⁴ On this view, not only is the physical environment necessary for the survival of the human organism, so too is the cultural environment. Put another way, it is through transaction with, and by means of, a cultural and physical environment that the human organism comes to be. Insofar as the physical and cultural environment limits the characteristics of the organism, the environment, in part, determines the direction of that organism’s growth.

Further, culture is that which organizes a physical environment to enable the growth of the human organisms within while simultaneously providing the means whereby the human organism is organized into a person. That is, culture is the primary influence upon the materials of human nature, the human organism, such that the result of the transaction between the human organism and its environment is recognized as a member of that society through their specific patterns of behavior. It is these patterns of behavior that ultimately enable the human organism, reorganized into a person, to be recognized as a member of a society. As these patterns of behavior are established not just in transaction with an environment, but by means of the environment, the development of persons as members of a culture is accomplished through culture as an environment.⁵ It is through the transformation of humans into members of a society through the organization of their impulses by cultural customs that culture is perpetuated and conserved.⁶ These ways of behaving, what will later be defined as habits, allows for the denotation of the activities of a social group and, insofar as those activi-

1) Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 67.

2) Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, 77.

3) Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 15.

4) Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 27.

5) Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, 75, 77.

6) *Ibid.*, 77.

ties are taken up by the individuals in transaction with the environment, the individual can be recognized as a member of the social group defined by those behaviors.⁷

It is for this reason that, for Dewey, different cultures and different individuals can be told apart. For Dewey, it is the different ways of behaving supplied by culture, when integrated together, which serve to give rise to the sense of anything “individual” in the personal sense.⁸ Accordingly, how these ways of behaving supplied by culture modify one another in their transaction with one another is what results in the attribution of culture as a personal property.⁹ Dewey offers the example of America to demonstrate this point. If, as Dewey suggests, American culture is largely oriented toward acquiring profit, it is not because human nature has an initially profit motivated orientation; it is due to the transaction of the human organism with the American cultural environment that serves to organize the elements of human nature, whatever they may be, into one that possesses an avaricious nature as a personal property. Thus, for Dewey, “the problem is to find out the way in which the elements of a culture interact with each other and the way in which the elements of human nature are caused to interact with one another under conditions set by their interaction with the existing environment,”¹⁰ to give rise to the specific kinds of persons within a given culture.

In the above, we should not understand culture, persons, and nature to be separate entities: they are, as stated previously, in transaction with one another such that each is changed in the act of transacting. This use of “transaction” to describe the relationship between the human and the environment, as opposed to “interaction,” is key to understanding Dewey’s broader theory of culture and the development of persons by means of a cultural environment. For Dewey, interaction takes the phenomena under investigation as an attribute of some static existence which underlies the phenomena itself. More specifically, “inter-action assumes the organism and its environmental objects to be present as substantially separate existences or forms of existence, prior to their entry into joint investigation,”¹¹ which is to say that the organism and the environment are ontologically separate forms, neither of which is interdependent upon the other. On this view, culture and the human organism are distinct manifestations of phenomena without admixture to be analyzed separately from one another.

Against this, Dewey uses transaction to indicate the interdependent nature of existences such that they are always engaged in a process of co-construction through their mutual engagement with one another. Dewey makes this clear in the context of the environment when he states, “the first great consideration is that life goes on in an environment; not merely in it but because of it, through interaction with it.”¹² Here, we should recall that transaction replaces interaction in Dewey’s through and, insofar as transaction involves the transformation of both organism and environment. As a result, we can understand Dewey to be stating that life goes on through transaction with the environment, by means of how the transaction between organism and environment entails mutual modification. That is, for Dewey, an organism survives by using its organs, and its embodiment, as the means of transaction with the environment such that it can satisfy its biological needs. This outreach to the environment in response to a need results in an expanded understanding of transaction which encompasses a back-and-forth movement between satisfaction, or stability, and precarity or lack.

7) Ibid., 75.

8) Dewey, *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*, 187.

9) Ibid., 187.

10) Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, 76.

11) Dewey, *Knowing and the Known*, 114.

12) Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 19.

Dewey's prototypical example is hunger.¹³ Hunger, on this view, is a lack that stimulates an organism to reach out to its environment for satisfaction. More than that, for Dewey, this lack represents a loss of equilibrium, or harmonious transaction with the environment, which results in the organism reaching out to the environment to restore the equilibrium between the organism and the environment. Thus, for Dewey, "life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it-either through effort or by some happy chance."¹⁴ To be clear, the foregoing is not to indicate that the process of transaction between organism and the environment is one of constant chaos and wild swings between equilibrium and disequilibrium; rather, it consummates in what Dewey refers to as a "stable, even though moving, equilibrium,"¹⁵ which itself is maintained through the integration of successive transactions. Consequently, from it emerges an active organization of harmonious transactions that "comes about not mechanically and inertly but out of, and because of, tension."¹⁶ In short, transaction results in organisms that are not static, self-contained ontological wholes. Instead, the organism is a dynamic manifold in constant adjustment with and through its environment. As a dynamic manifold, the organism is neither separate from nor totally identical with its environment. Instead, the organism and the environment constitute one another in an ongoing process of growth and development.

While transaction is primarily intended to articulate Dewey's understanding of organism and environment co-creation, like the individuals that perpetuated culture, culture itself is engaged in ongoing transaction in and among the elements which comprise it as well as with the physical environment that it transforms through those transactions. That is, for Dewey, the answer to the question of how a culture comes to be is through transaction with a physical environment by its members such that the physical environment is transformed into an environment of meaning and consequences. Put another way, the physical environment is modified by individuals through their participation in the maintenance of a social environment with which the physical environment is continuous through its transactions.¹⁷ For Dewey, all action taken in a physical environment do so against the background of culture which then modifies the conditions that gave rise to the action itself.

An example may help clarify the above: a diamond, by itself, is a physical object. However, the value of a diamond emerges as a modification of the diamond's physical properties into meaningful properties that pre-empt some consequence or other. In the case of a diamond, it evidences monetary value or communicates something of the status of the owner. In the case of a diamond offered as part of a ring, the physical structure of the diamond conveys the meaning of the enduring love of the person offering the diamond. The diamond remains a physical object, but one that has acquired additional meaning through transaction with culture. The example of a diamond is pertinent to the modification of the environment by culture as "natural" diamonds possess a different meaning than "artificial" diamonds despite near identical physical properties. An artificial diamond, as a consequence of the histories of valuing diamonds as a cultural practice, has reshaped the meaning of both diamonds and cubic zirconia. As a result, cubic-zirconia and diamonds are not merely physical objects, they are cultural objects whose meaning grows through history as do the transactions of members of a culture with the physical object of the diamond through the systems of meaning supplied by a culture. Thus, for Dewey, a physical object "is perceived as part of the environing world, not in and by itself; it is rightly (validly) perceived

13) Ibid., 19.

14) Ibid.

15) Ibid., 20.

16) Ibid.

17) Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 27.

if and when it acts as clew and guide in use-enjoyment.”¹⁸ As such, the objects we encounter in the environment are not merely physical objects, but part of an enduring situation made meaningful by culture and as indications for how we should respond to a total environment.

To this end, insofar as culture transforms a physical environment, it also transforms the physical activities of the human organism in like fashion. Thus, for Dewey, “animal activities, such as eating and drinking, searching for food, copulation, and so forth, acquire new properties. Eating food becomes a group festival and celebration; procuring food, the art of agriculture and exchange; copulation passes into the institution of the family.”¹⁹ However, these transformations do not always result in the same kinds of properties as the meanings of the object vary due to the varieties of modes of transacting with the environment and the varieties of environments the human organism and the culture it is part of transacts with. To this end, different cuisines, religious celebrations, and familial structures all emerge from the transformation of the physical environment and the biological activities of the members of society.

Here, we return to a statement made earlier, that as individuals are told apart in their ways of behaving so too are cultures, though this is a much larger result of the transactional nature of the organisms that make up culture. This, too, explains Dewey’s statement in *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy* that the transformation of unique forms of behavior into personal properties of individuals occurs only under the influence of culture. More presently, it is under the pressure of socio-cultural influences that persons come to be understood as persons.²⁰ Here, Dewey uses the example of parenthood as the prototype for this transformation. While parenthood, in the biological sense of producing offspring, might be the consequences of reproduction, under the pressures of culture the provision of resources by men and the nurturing of children by women becomes a moral responsibility by virtue of the biological functions of the parents. Accordingly, the biological need for protection, nurturing, and support for growth necessary to ensure the survival of children becomes a right to such things under the pressures of culture.

Thus, for Dewey, the execution of the biological functions of reproduction, and the requirements of need satisfaction on behalf of the offspring into requirements possessing moral force is the result of the organization of biological impulses into an “office” through culture. For Dewey, the transformation of these biological functions into an “office” is to assign the responsibility for the discharge of the “duties” that accompany the transformation of the biological into the cultural in line with the expectations of the culture that has transformed these biological processes. Further, in transforming these biological processes into “offices,” the processes themselves acquire a moral quality such that individuals might be held accountable for the appropriate discharge of the responsibilities.²¹ To this end, “this change from the biological to the distinctively human and moral takes place not just under social conditions but because of influences, pressures, and commendations (approvals) occurring in group and communal life,”²² thereby inverting what Dewey understand the actual order should be. Instead of persons being assigned moral responsibility for specific functions transformed under culture, and thus having moral worth by virtue of how they fulfill these offices, persons should have moral worth for their intrinsic nature as persons.

To this end, how culture transforms the biological activities of the human organism into moral responsibilities is continuous with the ways that culture transforms a physical environment into an environment of

18) Ibid., 73.

19) Ibid., 62.

20) Dewey, *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*, 189–90.

21) Ibid., 190.

22) Ibid.

meaning and value. Like the transformation of physical objects into cultural objects of value, the transformation of a human into a person is accomplished by means of transaction with an environment that includes the cultural. More specifically, transforming human organisms into persons occurs within a social environment. On this view, “a person must be a human being, a man or woman, but must also possess additional capacities that exist (operate) only in a group in which there exist such relational functions as formulated liabilities, rights, duties, and immunities.”²³ This is to say that, for Dewey, personhood is not a fully defined property of individuals, but a potentiality, a capacity to be actualized through transactions with the cultural environment, and one which acquires specific meanings within that environment. Thus, for Dewey, “the recognition that all normal human beings are persons potentially is itself the product and mark of a great moral advance in the constitution of human society.”²⁴

It is in the above transformation of the biological to the personal and the “natural” to the cultural that we find the means of perpetuating culture. Indeed, as Dewey states: “culture as a complex body of customs tends to maintain itself. It can reproduce itself only through effecting certain differential changes in the original or native constitutions of its members.”²⁵ That is, to maintain itself, culture must effect the transformation of immature members of society through systematic methods, or education in germ. While it is not the purpose of this piece to describe in full Dewey’s theory of education, some elements of it have bearing on his understanding of culture. Specifically, education is a social affair. While formal education goes on in specifically designed environments, like schools and universities, the broad cultural environment into which an individual is born has an educative effect. To this end, for Dewey, it is the case that “the social environment exercises an educative or formative influence unconsciously and apart from any set purpose,”²⁶ which is to say that individuals learn to be persons and members of a society, and to transform the biological activities of the human organism into meaningful actions through transaction with a social environment which supplies the organization and direction of the biological impulses through habit or organized dispositions toward action.

While habits will be defined later in this text in greater detail, we may provisionally treat habits as organized dispositions toward action within a situation to secure a specific result. More specifically, where the perpetuation of culture is concerned, “any habit marks an inclination – an active preference and choice for the conditions involved in its exercise,”²⁷ and, as such, a habit will seek to organize the conditions favorable to its existence and it does so through understanding the raw materials to which the action of habit is applied. Habit, therefore, is a mode of knowing the world. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey provides the distinction between a child and an adult’s experience of the same object. For Dewey, it is not that the child lacks mind or intelligence to grasp the consequences of an object in experience; it is that the adult has formed habits of transacting with the world that allow them to understand the object in terms of its consequences for transaction. Similarly, skilled intellectuals “know” the world through the habits of thought cultivated by their professions, and not through mind or consciousness as conventionally understood.²⁸ In this way, habit is a mode of knowing and understanding the world through our dispositions toward action.

23) Ibid., 199.

24) Ibid.

25) Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, 76.

26) Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 20.

27) Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 53.

28) Ibid., 128.

The preliminary description of habit is valuable for our further understanding of culture as, for Dewey:

To a considerable extent customs, or widespread uniformities of habit, exist because individuals face the same situation and react in like fashion. But to a larger extent customs persist because individuals form their personal habits under conditions set by prior customs. An individual usually acquires the morality as he inherits the speech of his social group.²⁹

Dewey further describes customs as a mode of interaction between persons that pre-exists the individual and serves to enable the transformation of organic behavior, what Dewey calls impulsions, into intelligent behavior that deploys the human organism in specified ways of acting. In light of the above, insofar as Dewey refers to speech as inherited, Dewey does not simply mean language. Rather, he intends communication in a broad sense. For Dewey, “‘culture’ and all that culture involves, as distinguished from ‘nature,’ is both a condition and a product of language.”³⁰ As a product of language, culture is that which enables the transmission of the collective body of habits that makes up customs and the institutions of culture. As a condition of language, culture enables the expression of the meanings of objects and events in their association with human aims and purposes. Language thus enables the formation of a community or society by means of enabling individuals to participate in the sharing of collective aims and aspirations, beliefs and a common understanding of the world through shared meaning. Further, “the communication which insures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions – like ways of responding to expectations and requirements,”³¹ and language is the means whereby individuals are habituated, and their dispositions shaped by culture. To this end, it behooves us to consider the breadth of what Dewey intends by language as it relates to culture.

For Dewey, “language in its widest sense – that is, including all means of communication such as, for example, monuments, rituals, and formalized arts – is the medium in which culture exists and through which it is transmitted.”³² Insofar as language also includes what Dewey refers to as the material aspects of culture³³ it includes the built environment as well as what Dewey calls “artifacts.” For Dewey, “artifacts include habitations, temples and their rituals, weapons, paraphernalia, tools, implements, means of transportation, roads, clothing, decorations and ornamentations, etc., etc. They, together with the technical processes involved in their use, constitute the ‘material aspect of culture’.”³⁴ Of note, Dewey also includes the ways that artifacts are used, and the habits that structure their use within the material aspect of culture which, as a mode of language, enables the transmission of culture. To be clear, how the artifact is used is also implied in Dewey’s inclusion of “temples and their rituals” in the material aspects of culture. Thus, we may also include the kinds of habits that are performed within habitations, the rituals, and habitual practices within schools, and so on. As with the transformation of the biological into the personal and the natural into the cultural, it is the transaction of the material with the non-material which enables culture to unite the totality of human experience into a unified form.

On this view, what has been referred to as the “non-material” elements of culture is best articulated by Dewey as the “ideal” elements of culture which encompass the moral, scientific, aesthetic, and political belief

29) Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 68.

30) Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 62.

31) Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 7.

32) Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 27.

33) Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 363.

34) Ibid.

structures which subsequently determine the use of the material elements of culture.³⁵ While Dewey is not explicit about this fact, the ideal elements of culture are also those that determine the appropriate use and organization of the materials of human nature such that the members of a culture can be identified as such. Beyond that, the ideal elements of culture are those elements of culture which assign the responsibility for the exercise of the duties toward their social and cultural group. Thus, how a person comes to be recognized as a person is more than a matter of being born into a culture, it is a matter of learning the cultural roles we can take through the ways that culture in its ideal form transacts with the materiality of the human organism and the ways that the resulting person further transacts with other individuals within the social environment.³⁶ Put another way, personhood is therefore a social achievement accomplished by means of a cultural environment.

To conclude this point, for Dewey, “that ‘culture’ includes the material and the ideal in their reciprocal interrelationships and (in marked contrast with the prevailing use of ‘experience’) ‘culture’ designates, also in their reciprocal interconnections, that immense diversity of human affairs,”³⁷ is to say that it is the ongoing transaction between the material and the ideal elements of culture that not only enables the intelligibility of the environment as meaningful, but the environment as experienced as such. On this view, it is the environment organized through these interrelations, these transactions, that serves to engage the human organism in transactions that “[form] the mental and emotional disposition of behavior in individuals by engaging them in activities that arouse and strengthen certain impulses, that have certain purposes and entail certain consequences,”³⁸ such that specific kinds of individuals are formed through transaction with the social environment thus established.

As an example, Dewey argues that a child whose family environment is comprised of musicians, whatever the child’s initial capacities, will have those capacities most related to music strengthened through the environment more so that other capacities they might possess by virtue of the nature of the environment and the persons within it.³⁹ This does not mean that the child will ultimately become a musician, rather; the aptitudes most closely related to music will be more thoroughly stimulated by such an environment and thus cultivate a mental and emotional disposition sensitive to the production, enjoyment, and appreciation of music. To this end, while these aptitudes are stimulated and cultivated in such an environment, it is the intelligent or creative deployment of these aptitudes that ultimately shapes the development of the individual in transaction with the cultural environment.

Further, it is not simply the case that an individual transacts with a single environment: for Dewey “a modern society is many societies more or less loosely connected. Each household with its immediate extension of friends makes a society; the village or street group of playmates is a community; each business group, each club, is another.”⁴⁰ Within a culture, individuals transact with multiple cultural and social spaces, each more or less tightly connected to one another. Each space contains within it its own specified modes of transaction, and its own customs which result in the transformation of the human organism in different ways through the back and forth movement between stability and precarity. Thus, for Dewey, the well-rounded individual is one who has developed the capacity to move flexibly between environments; conversely, the well-rounded society is one which provides multiple spaces to cultivate and develop the individual. This is, for Dewey, the democratic ideal as actualized in social life.

35) Ibid., 362.

36) Alexander, *The Horizons of Feeling*, 160.

37) Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 363.

38) Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 20.

39) Ibid.

40) Ibid., 25.

The above serves to push back against the mistaken impression of a single, undifferentiated cultural environment. As indicated above, for Dewey, there are multiple environments within the broad expanse of a given culture. As Dewey notes, there is a broad variety of economic, social, religious, and racial groups, each of which exercises an influence on the development of the organization of its members through the educative environment they establish.⁴¹ While a cursory gloss of this multiplicity might lead one to assume that such different environments lead to the formation of chaotic individuals, something Dewey notes by stating “as a person passes from one of the environments to another, he is subjected to antagonistic pulls, and is in danger of being split into a being having different standards of judgment and emotion for different occasions,”⁴² it is the office of cultural institutions, the school in specific, to coordinate the diverse dispositions, cultivated within the plurality of environments, by providing a broad environment organized around a common subject matter, a common aim which “accustoms all to a unity of outlook upon a broader horizon than is visible to the members of any group while it is isolated.”⁴³

What, then, does this transactional model of culture have to do with disability? The above provides the ground for considering disability as emerging through transaction with culture by means of biological differences. In keeping with the above, we can restate the problem of culture as trying to find out the ways that elements of a culture transact with one another and how the elements of human nature transact with one another under the conditions determined by the cultural environment. In the context of disability, the problem of disability is to determine how the elements of culture transact and how the elements of human nature transact under conditions set by the cultural environment to give rise to disability as a way of being in the world through culture. To be clear, this is not to ignore the biology of disability, as will be demonstrated in the section to follow, rather; it is to point to disability as emerging through the transactions between the body and the cultural environment. Put another way, the question of disability, like the question of culture, “is to be solved by reference to facts of action,”⁴⁴ that is, facts of transaction within a cultural environment, and the ways that environment enables or impedes action. More specifically, we must turn to the ways in which the categories of disability and ability emerge as ways of transacting through culture.

A Cultural Model of Disability

To say that disability and ability emerge through transaction with culture is to recognize how culture transforms the human organism into a disabled person through how the human organism and the environment are transformed through their transaction. Recall, for Dewey, that life goes on in and because of an environment, and more than that, through transaction with it. As such, the organism and the environment are co-constitutive through their myriad transactions with one another. On this view, disability is co-constituted through transaction with an environment that enables disability to emerge as a way of behaving, the meaning of an individual’s transactions with the environment. Again, this is not to ignore the biological as, for Dewey, the bodily organs are the means whereby any organism engages in transaction with the environment.⁴⁵ Bearing this in mind, differences in biological organization of the human organism will result in different transactions with the cultural environment, and different ways in which the human organism will be organized into a person. As will be

41) Ibid.

42) Ibid., 26.

43) Ibid.

44) Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 45.

45) Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 19.

demonstrated in the following, how the body transacts with the cultural environment serves to structure that which we call disability. It is here that we might begin with the following statement from Dewey:

For man is social in another sense than the bee and ant, since his activities are encompassed in an environment that is culturally transmitted, so that what man does and how he acts, is determined not by organic structure and physical heredity alone but by the influence of cultural heredity, embedded in traditions, institutions, customs and the purposes and beliefs they both carry and inspire. Even the neuro-muscular structures of individuals are modified through the influence of the cultural environment upon the activities performed... To speak, to read, to exercise any art, industrial, fine or political, are instances of modifications wrought within the biological organism by the cultural environment.⁴⁶

Here we might consider the ways that gold and diamonds were transformed in the previous section, or the ways that the human organism is transformed into a person, and as a person into a member of a society, through the ways in which they are shaped and organized by the customs of their culture. Put another way, custom makes use of the existing materiality of the body, as the “existing organs, impulses, instinctive tendencies, form the resources and the capital on which future development must build,”⁴⁷ including the development of the human organism into what we might consider an able-bodied person. To this end, a person is not so much originally suited to being a soldier, an athlete, a musician, or any other organization of the body as much as they become suited for such roles through the process of development through the environment. Thus, for Dewey, “the supposition that there is such a thing as a purely native original constitution of man which can be distinguished from everything acquired and learned cannot be justified by appeal to the facts. It is a view which holds good only when a static cross section is taken, when that is to say, growth is ignored.”⁴⁸

Here, then, is the value of Dewey and his transactional view of culture for disability: a transactional model rejects the assumption that there is a base or ground of human ability that can be appealed to as a means of marking disability as an abnormality. For Dewey, “the conception of a fixed and enumerable equipment of tendencies which constitutes human nature thus represents at the best but a convenient intellectual device, a bench mark useful for studying some particular period of development,”⁴⁹ which is to say that we may only appeal to normality, or a normal human, as a point of a phase of development and, even then, doing so holds the organism static in its development and ignores the ways in which the processes of transaction, of growth, is part of the “original equipment”⁵⁰ of humanity and is that which enables the human organism to be transformed through transaction with the cultural environment. Thus, because the human organism is always in a process of growth, pointing toward an ideal end of humanity is to proceed from a mistaken starting point. That is, the category of human is not fixed nor is it absolutely determined by its biological composition. Rather, it is an outcome of a process that develops differently depending on the cultural and social situation of the human organism. Further, one of the broad implications of this view is that the designation of the human is the designation of a range of ways of being human which may vary across time and transaction with different environments. To this end, there is no ideal human nature from which disabled persons are

46) Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, 49.

47) Dewey, “Human Nature,” 32.

48) *Ibid.*, 31.

49) *Ibid.*, 32.

50) *Ibid.*, 31.

a deviant, rather, disability is part of a range of human possibilities which emerge through transaction with a social environment.

Where disability is concerned, we may find additional support for the above thesis through Susan Wendell who argues that the question of normality itself needs to be understood with reference to the environment in which the individual is in transaction. That is, in a Deweyan sense, inquiry into the normal grows out of a background of culture and subsequently modifies the conditions under which inquiry into the normal is performed. Normality and abnormality, for Dewey, are the results of a process of inquiry that transforms the material of the human organism. They are, on this view, the results of the transaction between the human organism and the environment and do not pre-exist either. Rather, as stated by Wendell:

The distinction between the biological reality of a disability and the social construction of a disability cannot be made sharply, because the biological and the social are interactive in creating disability. They are interactive not only in that complex interactions of social factors and our bodies affect health and functioning, but also in that social arrangements can make a biological condition more or less relevant to almost any situation.⁵¹

Following Shannon Sullivan,⁵² I argue that what Wendell describes as interaction should be read as a mode of Deweyan transaction, specifically if we recall that for Dewey, interaction assumes a static relationship between object and treats the objects to be separate existences prior to the situation they are encountered in. An interactive view of disability would assume that there exists some definition of normal function apart from the context that supplies normality, thereby reifying abnormality or disability as an essential property of an organism and not something that emerges in transaction with an environment.

Still further, taking interaction at face value results in the assumption that a focus on one side or the other of the problem of disability would resolve the issue. This mistaken assumption would result in what Liz Jackson calls “the disability dongle,” or a “well intended elegant, yet useless solution to a problem we never knew we had.”⁵³ Put another way, disability dongles, like wheelchairs that walk up stairs, gloves that translate sign language, or any number of technological solutions to “problems” that disabled people did know they had, emerge from an interactionist perspective that does not take into account the actual ways in which disabled people transact with the environment. To this end, that disabled people did not know they had a problem to be solved is a result of the process of inquiry that consummates in the dongle assuming that the disabled person is prior to the environment, separate from the environment, rather than in transaction with the environment in the mode of mutual adaptation. The disability dongle therefore locates the source of the problem in the structure of the disabled person, a structure which includes their mobility aids, rather than in the transaction between the disabled person and the environments.

In keeping with the above, the interactionist view ultimately repositions the “normal person” as a static ideal that disabled people should attempt to approximate. In the example of the disability dongle, the walking wheelchair is an attempt to accommodate the disabled person to the environment in a one directional mode. It is the disabled person’s embodiment that must change to align with the environment, rather than a mutual adaptation of the environment and the disabled person. Wheelchairs must walk, sign language must speak, all in an effort to enable the disabled person to approximate the transactions of able bodied persons, rather than

51) Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, 35.

52) Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins*, 21.

53) Jackson, *A Community Response to a #Disability Dongle*, n.p.

enabling the transactions of disabled persons such that they and the environment grow through the transaction. In contrast, if we read Wendell's interaction as transaction, the cultural ground of disability becomes clear.

For Wendell, disability is "socially constructed," by which she intends "the interaction of the biological and the social to create (or prevent) disability."⁵⁴ If we read Wendell's "interaction" as Dewey's transaction, we can reunderstand the construction or deconstruction of disability as located within the transaction between the biological and the social such that disability is the transformation of the biological through the social, and the social is structured in transaction with the biological. Such a view therefore demands that we also recognize ability as a result of how the biological transacts with the social, or is provided with a structured organization through the interaction of the ideal and material aspects of culture. As an example, the ways in which scientific explanations for disability are appealed to as justification for the reorganization of the built environment and the practices ongoing within them is an example of how the scientific, as part of the ideal order of culture, transacts with the material aspect of culture in the form of the built environment. In their interaction, culture is modified through the transactions with the disabled person to give rise to environments that are "accessible" through their reorganization.

There is, however, another way in which we might read Wendell's transactional model of disability, and that is through Dewey's concept of "fitness"⁵⁵ as a reunderstanding of "ability." For Dewey, judging the "fitness" of the human organism purely with reference to the human organism's ability to survive in an environment absent cultural transformation is a mistake. It is not the case that those most able-bodied are those who are most fit to survive in an objective sense, specifically as the environments in which the human organism must survive have changed as a result of the development of culture. That is, for Dewey "the environment is now distinctly a social one, and the content of the term 'fit' has to be made with reference to social adaptation,"⁵⁶ which is to say that there can be no understanding of fitness or ability except with reference to how the individual transacts with a social environment. Fitness, like ability, is fitness within an environment which is adapted and adapts to the human organism and cannot be understood beyond it except insofar as the human organism can adapt to the new environment in which it is placed.

Further, fitness and ability are enabled by the cultural environment, the whole cultural environment. As Dewey states, fitness must be judged by the whole, and not simply with reference to a singular environmental condition. It is for this reason that part of fitness, for Dewey, consists in the flexibility of an organism to adapt to changing conditions. That is, fitness involves a dynamic relation to the environment such that the organism judged "fit" can quickly adapt to the environment. This is a point echoed by Rosemarie Garland-Thompson who articulates the opposite end of the spectrum, as the misfit. For Garland-Thompson, "the dynamism between body and world that produces fits or misfits comes at the spatial and temporal points of encounter between dynamic but relatively stable bodies and environments."⁵⁷ Put another way, "fit" and "misfit" are not essentially static properties of organisms, they emerge from the ways in which the organism transacts flexibly with its environment; in terms of disability, it is how one transacts with the cultural environment that enables or disables an individual.

In light of the above, both Wendell and Dewey, and Garland-Thompson to an extent, reject an appeal to a "normal" or "standard" organization of the body. Indeed, in "Individuality, Equality, and Superiority," Dewey

54) Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, 35.

55) Dewey, "Evolution and Ethics," 41.

56) *Ibid.*, 41.

57) Garland-Thompson, "The Story of My Work," n.p.

explicitly rejected an appeal to “uniformity and statistical averages,”⁵⁸ as well as “the habit of classification and quantitative comparisons”⁵⁹ as the grounds whereby equitable social organization can be achieved. Extended to the present context, Dewey, like Wendell, recognizes that any appeal to a normal or standard embodiment form which disability deviates and against which we can measure others is mistaken because it ignores the cultural organization of the biological, and the capacity for life to grow. Thus, Wendell states with regard to normality:

Appeal to what is biomedically typical of the human species would not seem to help settle the question, since people who are biomedically identical have different personal abilities, and people who have the same personal abilities are biomedically different. Eyeglasses, hearing aids, good prostheses, and other products of medical technology optimize the abilities of some people, while others, who have identical physical conditions but do not have access to the technology, lack the same abilities. People who use strong but completely effective corrective lenses may have the same personal ability to see as people with uncorrected good eyesight; do we want to call them or their seeing biomedically identical?⁶⁰

In the above, two things are clear: first, the modification of the human organism through transaction with culture in the mode of corrective lenses, prosthesis, hearing aids, and other artifacts of culture which enable transactions with the environment; or, more specifically, the ways that transactions with the environment are accomplished by means of the material aspect of culture. In keeping with a transactional approach, normal vision is not an innate quality of an individual, but an adaptation of the human organism through culture which organizes some modes of vision according to a set standard. Normal, here, is the organization of the biological through the ideal mode of culture which results in the generation of a standard for vision. However, this standard itself can be questioned through the very structures which enabled it.

For example, my corrective lenses give me better than normal vision through the modification of the raw materials of my biology. Through this modification, I am able to participate in a variety of other transactions such as driving a car, riding a motorcycle, or reading a book which would be rendered more difficult absent the ways that culture has intervened in my biology to enable the fitness of vision necessary to successfully accomplish these tasks. As a result, I possess an optimized personal ability to see that exceeds “perfect vision” but only by means of a cultural artifact which optimizes my vision for transaction within a cultural environment where a specific kind of visual acuity is necessary. Given the requirement of good or normal vision for my vocation as a philosopher, and good or normal vision for my leisure activities as a motorcyclist, good vision is a basic ability required of me in my profession and for my leisure activity as it would adversely affect my abilities within those specified contexts. In contrast, my visual acuity need not be augmented through my glasses for me to be competent in the martial arts as my vision is already optimal for that activity. To return to the point, insofar as my corrective lenses grant me the same personal ability of sight as someone with good uncorrected vision, my vision does not constitute a disability so long as I am in possession of my glasses in contexts where a specific mode of vision is necessary. That is, my vision becomes optimized through my transactions with the material aspects of culture such that I may participate in the ideal aspects of culture.

Implicit in the above is the requirement of good vision to navigate a cultural environment. Wendell points to this stating “how much ability is basic, like how much ability is normal, seems to depend on how much is neces-

58) Dewey, “Individuality, Equality, and Superiority,” 299.

59) *Ibid.*, 300.

60) Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, 16.

sary to perform the most common tasks of daily living in a particular physical and social environment.”⁶¹ This is the second point we should turn to, and one which can be illustrated by means of a personal example. My need for corrective lenses was discovered by my parents when I was unable to use a fork properly. While there were other signs of my poor vision, the one that indicated most clearly my need for glasses was when I was unable to successfully adopt the habits of good table manners, eating properly, because I could not see the fork. Further, when the fork was pointed out to me, and I was directed to use it, I often failed to grasp it. As a consequence, I developed the habit of using my hands to eat most of my meals, thereby disregarding the social norms of polite manners. However, my inability to use a fork was not due to a lack of personal ability, as I could grasp many other objects, but due to a biological difference, one which affected all other transactions with the world: I would hold books close to my nose, sit dangerously close to a television, and fail to grasp objects in front of me.

These transactions indicated an inability to “properly” transact with the world in ways appropriate to culture and further indicated the need to resolve how I transacted with the world through intervention into my biology. To be clear: given the kind of environment I was in transaction with, my vision was a basic ability necessary to enable me to be a full participant in my environment. Moreover, given the kind of environment I was in, specifically one where the social sanctions for the ways I adapted the environment to me and myself to the environment were costly, how I appropriated the customs of my culture served as the sign of a disability. Put another way, it is through transaction with culture, specifically my inability to take up the habits of polite table manners that required visual acuity, that my disability became apparent as a disability and one which would require specific cultural artifacts for resolution. Culture is, therefore, both the source of, and resolution to disability. Here, resolution is used not to imply that a disability can be resolved permanently, but to point to the ways that my vision indicated a lack which was resolved through reaching out to a cultural environment. To this end, the ways in which we understand “basic abilities” must be understood in terms of the consequences that differences from these “basic abilities” predict specific consequences for the individual in their transactions.

In line with the above, it is the case that disability, on Wendell’s transactional view, is not solely biological nor is it solely cultural. Instead, to take a Deweyan approach, disability emerges in transaction with and by means of an environment. Disability itself, and the ways in which disabled people are identified as such, is a social practice, one which is structured around power dynamics and inequalities in society.⁶² As a social practice, defining disability belongs to the order of ideal elements in culture that, in transaction with the material aspects of culture, result in Wendell’s cultural construction of disability. For Wendell, “the social response to and treatment of biological difference constructs disability from biological reality, determining both the nature and the severity of disability.”⁶³ Put another way, the social practice of defining disability emerges from the transactions between the material aspects of culture and the ideal aspects of culture, insofar as the interrelation between the two orders, operative in the medicalization of disability and the treatment of disability as something to be fixed as two examples, results in the organization of disabled persons from the raw materials of the biological reality of their bodies. To this end, it is not simply the case for either Dewey or Wendell that merely changing the organization of society would mitigate the ways in which individuals transact with the environment through their disabled bodies. Indeed, as Wendell notes, our very relationships with our bodies may not be dependent upon the organization of society and thus meliorated by reorganization of merely the material elements of culture: we must also attend to the ideal.

61) Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, 16.

62) Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, 23; see also Tremain, *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability*, for an excellent overview of disability and power.

63) Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, 23.

In this mode, we can turn to what Wendell terms the “pace” of society, or what Dewey would refer to as the moral responsibility for an individual to perform at a prescribed rate of speed, as resulting in an disabling conditions in a way similar to the material organization of culture. To this end, for Wendell:

When the pace of life in a society increases, there is a tendency for more people to become disabled, not only because of physically damaging consequences of efforts to go faster, but also because fewer people can meet expectations of ‘normal’ performance; the physical (and mental) limitations of those who cannot meet the new pace become conspicuous and disabling, even though the same limitations were inconspicuous and irrelevant to full participation in the slower-paced society.

This detour to discuss the pace of life is important not simply because the pace of life can be analogous to the dramatic or temporal structure of experience and therefore culture, but because this temporal structure is experienced differently through the different ways that disabled persons’ experiences are shaped by the cultural conditions under which their experiences are had. That is, for Dewey, insofar as culture points to processes and ways of experiencing as interconnected with what is experienced and the contexts under which experience is had, understanding disability requires us to understand the ways that disabled experience through culture unfolds temporally or, in Dewey’s terms, dramatically. To this end, as indicated by Dewey’s transactional thesis of culture, we may understand the “pace” of culture as the temporal dimension of the ordered relations of the environment as structured by culture.

This is the rhythm that Dewey refers to as the “material out of which (humans) form purposes.”⁶⁴ Moreover, how the human organism aligns with this rhythm structures the degree to which it can survive within a culture as “for only when an organism shares in the ordered relations of its environment does it secure the stability essential to living,”⁶⁵ which, in the context of Wendell’s thesis, results in the pace of society becoming disabling. Or, more concretely, disability emerges as the result of the ways disabled persons transact with the cultural environment such that the pace is experienced as impeding their capacity for transacting with the environment. However, understanding Wendell through Dewey in such a way would ignore the unique ways in which this temporal rhythm is experienced as what Alison Kafer refers to as “crip time”:

Crip time emerges here as a wry reference to the disability-related events that always seem to start late or to the disabled people who never seem to arrive anywhere on time. As one slang dictionary puts it, “crip time” means both “a flexible standard for punctuality” and “the extra time needed to arrive or accomplish something.” This need for “extra” time might result from a slower gait, a dependency on attendants (who might themselves be running late), malfunctioning equipment (from wheelchairs to hearing aids), a bus driver who refuses to stop for a disabled passenger, or an ableist encounter with a stranger that throws one off schedule.⁶⁶

Of import in the above is a reunderstanding of time as not simply clock time or how long an activity might take but as emerging from the ways that the disabled person is in transaction with the environment through the artifacts and ideals of a culture and not simply because of the biological organization of the disabled person. For example, crip time might be experienced because of a disabled person needing to find an accessible route to a given location and, upon arriving, discovering that the location itself cannot accommodate the disabled person, thereby extending the time needed for the gathering. Crip time might also result from the need for

64) Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 20.

65) *Ibid.*

66) Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip*, 26.

additional support from individuals within the environment, not simply in the mode of attendants as Kafer indicates, but also from the support extended from individuals with whom the disabled person is in intimate relationships with. That is, “recognition of a person’s disability by the people s/he is closest to is important not only for receiving their help and understanding when it is needed, but for receiving the acknowledgement and confirmation of her/his reality, so essential for keeping a person socially and psychologically anchored in a community.”⁶⁷ To this end, recognition of a person’s disability also includes recognition of the ways in which time is experienced through their disability, or the ways that the dramatic unfolding of experience is structured by disability, a point we shall address below.

Kafer qualifies the above definition of crip time through her reference to “queer time” which refers to the ways that time might be experienced as “queer” or out of line with straight time which implies a firm divide between past and present or the projection of a linear development to adulthood. Here, we might recall Dewey’s admonition against benchmarks and qualitative measures or the projection of defined ends which holds the individual static and ignores the reality of life as growth through transaction with the environment. In keeping with Kafer, we might point to the cultural organization of time as the means by which we understand the passage of time as structured by one mode of transacting with the environment. Thus, for Kafer “not only might they cause time to slow, or to be experienced in quick bursts, they can lead to feelings of asynchrony or temporal dissonance; depression and mania are often experienced through time shifts, and people with various impairments move or think at a slower (or faster) pace than culturally expected.”⁶⁸

Here, we might extend pace of thought as culturally expected in connection with Wendell’s understanding of the pace of society and Dewey’s dramatic or temporal structure of experience as embodied in culture. Put another way, the pace of a culture, through our transaction with it, serves to structure the pace of our thoughts such that how we think is as much a product of the modification of our biology by culture as it is part of our biology itself. Recall, for Dewey, culture is structured through customs, or what Dewey describes as “widespread uniformity of habit”⁶⁹ which are acquired through transaction with the cultural environment and consequently organize the ways the human organism responds to the environment. To this end, for Dewey, “thinking cannot itself escape the influence of habit, any more than anything else human. If it is not a part of ordinary habits, then it is a separate habit, habit alongside other habits, apart from them, as isolated and indurated as human structure permits.”⁷⁰ If we take Dewey at his word, the speed of thought, much less how thought occurs, is a consequence of the ways thinking is structured by culture through our transactions with it. Inasmuch as we come to understand a thought as rational or disordered or irrational, we do so against a cultural background that structures rational thought and enables such distinctions to be made.

To this end, it is through the modifications of the thinking organism, potential or actual, that we might discern their status as rational, irrational, or disordered. Specifically, it is through comparison with the widespread uninformative habits of thinking that we are able to judge the rationality of the thoughts of others. Or, in reference to mania, as Emily Martin points out, “just what people take manic behavior to be – whether it is rational, irrational, or somewhere in between – is not a given. It is a matter determined by people actively trying to place behavior, words, performance, and style in a field of meanings.”⁷¹ In line with Dewey, this is to say that how we determine the rationality or irrationality of behavior and the thoughts that accompany such

67) Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, 12.

68) Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 34.

69) Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 13.

70) *Ibid.*, 50.

71) Martin, *Bipolar Expeditions*, 10.

behavior, are a result of the ways that these behaviors are in transaction with a cultural environment that assigns specific meaning to the consequences of different transactions with the environment as they proceed from habits of thinking.

Turning back to Kafer, we can expand this understanding to deepen Kafer's notion of thinking faster or slower than the cultural norm through appeal to Dewey's concept of "dramatic rehearsal" as the means whereby we think through possibilities for action in our environments. To be clear, dramatic rehearsal is a part of taking action in an environment. As Alexander suggest in his example of communication, in order to throw a ball to someone, the person throwing needs to project the completion of the action in imagination to coordinate their action in the environment.⁷² They must, in a real sense, imagine how the other person will complete the action of catching the ball before the action of throwing the ball can be completed or taken. This provides us with a ground for dramatic rehearsal which Dewey defines as the ways that we "rehearse" the completion of possible courses of action in imagination before we commit to them.⁷³ Specifically, for Dewey, "we give way, in our mind, to some impulse; we try, in our mind, some plan. Following its career through various steps, we find ourselves in imagination in the presence of the consequences that would follow,"⁷⁴ and thus "thought runs ahead and foresees outcomes, and thereby avoids having to await the instruction of actual failure and disaster."⁷⁵

To be clear, this dramatic rehearsal is of actions within and by means of an environment. As culture supplied the background for our actions, and the environment in which the action takes place, as well as the customs of thinking that structure how and what we rehearse in imagination, it should not be surprising that the cultural organization of thought – the speed at which an individual dramatically rehearses actions – depends upon the ways in which they transact with the cultural environment. Put another way, the cultural environment serves to additionally structure how we think and the pace of thinking in transaction with the biological, a point which is especially true of disabilities that affect executive functioning, or the ability to plan. To this end, as Justin Bell notes,⁷⁶ it is not simply the case that disabled people think differently: it is how thinking as dramatic rehearsal accounts for the cognitive situation of the thinker and, as Kafer notes, the biophysical situation of the thinker in transaction with the environment that gives rise to disability as different ways of thinking and, as Wendell notes, ways of being in the world through transaction with culture.

Conclusion: The Case of ADHD

While understudied in the field of philosophy, ADHD makes for an appropriate specific engagement through the transactional model articulated above due to the way in which its onset is often a result of changed cultural environments and changed transactions with the cultural environment. As indicated by Hallowell,⁷⁷ ADHD often goes undiscovered, or undiagnosed, due to the ways in which the organization of the cultural environment allow the individual to maintain transactions which are not characterized as ADHD. However, when the environment can no longer sustain their characteristic pattern of action, ADHD emerges as the way in which they are in the world:

72) Alexander, *The Horizons of Feeling*.

73) Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 132.

74) Dewey, *Ethics*, 275.

75) Dewey, *Middle Works*, 14, 133.

76) Bell, "Depression," 98.

77) Hallowell, *ADHD 2.0*, 81.

Another example is the change that comes from stepping onto the next rung of school – whether in grade school or college or graduate school. Take medical school, which we know all too well. Suddenly the student, who has done so well in school that he or she got into medical school in the first place, must cope with demands upon his or her brain like never before. The new pace of learning – like trying to sip water from a firehose, it’s often said – takes over everything, making it hard for the student to maintain his or her previously healthy and helpful practices, sleep, nutrition, and regular exercise among them.⁷⁸

In the above, it is not simply the change in environment that makes present ADHD through the individuals’ transactions, it is the change in pace. Where previously the environment sustained the equilibrium of the individual such that they could grow, the resulting change in pace caused the underlying biology, the raw materials of human nature, to be made manifest in the mode of ADHD. While the emergence of ADHD through transaction with the environment is valuable as a starting point, more valuable is the description of ADHD as a way of being in the world. As described by Melissa Orlov, “it is important to realize that ADHD is not always a ‘disorder,’ in spite of its name. It can be thought of as a collection of traits and tendencies that define a way of being in the world. It is only when the negative traits associated with ADHD become disabling that ADHD requires treatment,”⁷⁹ a position that Edward Hallowell echoes, “‘ADHD’ is a term that describes a way of being in the world. It is neither entirely a disorder nor entirely an asset. It is an array of traits specific to a unique kind of mind.”⁸⁰

Dewey argues that it is the interconnection of different ways of behaving that denote differences in individuals. For Dewey, while there may be generic ways of behaving among a class of entities, or even within a culture as supplied by custom, the ways that these generic ways of behaving are combined together through an organism’s transactions with the environment allow it to be denoted as unique in quality from its siblings. Here, too, we may take a similar approach: insofar as Dewey takes the “native equipment” of the human organism to be roughly equivalent to the biological equipment,⁸¹ what ADHD is, and how it is made manifest as a disability is the result of the ways the biological equipment of ADHD structured how individuals transact with the environment.

Briefly, “ADHD is a syndrome of impairment of executive functions: clusters of dynamic, interacting cognitive functions of the brain that are critical for most aspects of self-management.”⁸² While this impairment correlates with structural differences in the brain and differences in the production and uptake of neurotransmitters, specifically dopamine, ADHD is best understood as a manifold of impairments that are often interrelated but manifest differently in any given person.⁸³ Further, as indicated in the selection above, social pressures can intensify the symptoms of ADHD resulting in the manifestation of ADHD in an individual for whom there may not have been any reason to consider an ADHD diagnosis. Put another way, ADHD is a disability that, in many ways, is made present through transaction with the environment, particularly if there is a sudden shift or change in the environment such that the individual cannot re-establish their equilibrium.

Given the nature of ADHD, one way of understanding ADHD as structured through transactions between the individual and the environment is through Deweyan habit. Previously, culture was presented as

78) Ibid.

79) Orlov, *The ADHD on Marriage*, 36.

80) Hallowell, *ADHD 2.0*.

81) Dewey, “Human Nature,” 37.

82) Brown, *Outside the Box*, 13.

83) Ibid., 5.

composed of customs, or widespread uniformities of habits which organized the biological material of the human organism into a person. Further, thinking itself was described as a habit cultivated through transaction with a specific kind of environment. To this end, persons become recognizable as part of a specific culture through how the raw material of the human organism is structured through custom which give rise to the individual habits that denote persons specifically. Thus, by supplying the habits in the mode of custom, cultures supply the means whereby persons learn to be members of a culture. Because cultures determine the available habits, and individual habits are formed under the conditions set by these customs, culture is reproduced through the ways that individuals take up the customs in unique combinations that mark them as individual members of a society.

Beyond this, for Dewey, habits constitute the self.⁸⁴ In his discussion of bad habits, Dewey argues that a bad habit is a tendency to action that “overrides our formal resolutions, [and] our conscious decisions”⁸⁵ through the ways that habits demand particular modes of activity, of transacting with the environment. As such, for Dewey, habit is what enables the coordination of our biological structures with one another to accomplish an end. That is, for Dewey, the body becomes a means to accomplish an aim only when organized in conjunction with things aimed at accomplishing a result. Put another way, the body becomes a means when it is employed in some actual operation, and this operation is organized through the medium of habit as a disposition toward the world. Beyond this, for Dewey, the body is only potentially a means to an end until appropriated, taken up, and organized through habit.⁸⁶

Organization is key in the above but so is integration. For habit to be efficacious, habits must be integrated together such that each habit reinforces and sustains the other. And it is out of this reinforcement of habit that character emerges as the integration of habits into a unity recognizable as such. It is for this reason that Dewey states that our understanding of what is “individual” emerges from the combination of generic ways of behaving and cultural customs that enable the character as a quality of the ways of behaving to be made present as a property of persons. Thus, for Dewey, “a man may give himself away in a look or a gesture. Character can be read through the medium of individual acts,”⁸⁷ but only as these acts come together in an integration, a history of changes and adaptations to the environment by the organism by means of habit as disposition toward action. However, these dispositions are not culturally neutral, they bear the mark of their environments as “for every habit incorporates within itself some part of the objective environment,”⁸⁸ which is to say some part of the culture which supplied it.

This incorporation of the environment includes not just the material aspects of culture, but the ideal aspects of culture including those that organize our bodies in line with gendered and racialized expectations. On this point, Shannon Sullivan is informative:

The man who is revealed through his gestures, however, is not a genderless person, as the false neutrality of Dewey’s use of “man” suggests. As entailed by Dewey’s own position on the connection between cultural constructs and individual bodily habits, the existence of gender constructs means that the gendered bodily gestures and style of an inhabitant of a culture often mark him or her in very gender-particular ways. The man of whom Dewey speaks gives himself away as a man.

84) Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 20.

85) *Ibid.*

86) *Ibid.*, 21–22.

87) *Ibid.*, 30.

88) *Ibid.*, 38.

Likewise, my gestures and style are part of my fundamental bodily comportment, which means that they constitute, in large part, my existence as a woman.⁸⁹

Following Sullivan, if we are to understand ADHD as a way of being in the world, we might say that ADHD is disclosed through gestures and cultural habits. Or, more concretely, ADHD is disclosed through the ways that cultural custom is taken up differently through ADHD. One way of taking note of this is through the ADHD symptom of impulsivity.

Impulsive behavior means doing something without thinking. It manifests as blurting things out, spending too much, diving into projects, suddenly quitting jobs, starting relationships rapidly, and not being able to postpone self-gratification. This behavior has consequences for intimate relationships, at work with employers, as well as financially. Blurting things out creates conflict. Tact and diplomacy are usually not the strong points of the impulsive person.⁹⁰

Here, impulse control should be best understood as a habit developed through transaction with the environment. We are instructed on how to control our impulse from an early age through taking turns in games, raising our hands to speak, or even standing in line. We learn that it is more polite to wait to speak rather than speak over others, and to choose the appropriate time to make a comment, specifically a critical comment. All of these ways of transacting with the environment are encompassed under the broad understanding of manners as a kind of cultural custom, a set of habits used to navigate a cultural environment.

However, through ADHD, people are unable to adopt the habits associate with the above due to their unique biophysical organization. That is, as a symptom of ADHD, impulsiveness as manifested in an inability organize the body in line with the habits supplied by the customs of a culture becomes that sign of ADHD. Put another way, through the ways that ADHD structures the conditions under which people can exercise self-control, or the habits of self-control, people disclose themselves through their ADHD as it resists the organization of the body through habit as inculcated through the environment. The resistance then becomes an indication of difference in the ability to transact with the environment as a symptom of a disability through how it impedes successful transaction with the environment. Put simply, one of the ways that ADHD is disclosed through the inability to successfully incorporate habits of self-control, which then are made manifest as impulsivity through how this failure structures the meaning of an individual's transactions with the world through ADHD.

The above has a distinct correlate with the neuropsychology of ADHD, specifically recent understandings of ADHD as the impairment of executive functions. Executive functions are the cognitive capacities responsible for the recognition and prioritization of tasks, the motivation to carry a task to completion, the capacity to initiate tasks, and the capacity to plan and organize the means to accomplish a task.⁹¹ Where planning is concerned, ADHD impairs the ability to organize available courses of action into an actionable plan and, further, ADHD impairs the ability to anticipate the consequences of these plans of action.⁹² Consequently, ADHD often allows people to be effective "in the moment" but are unable to sustain long term planning activities. Moreover, this executive functioning disorder manifests as an inability to prioritize tasks in order of importance. Thus, ADHD causes struggles in determining which task to execute first, second or third as all tasks are presented with the

89) Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins*, 93.

90) Kooij, *Adult ADHD*, 25.

91) Brown, *Outside the Box*, 13.

92) Orlov, *The ADHD on Marriage* 45.

same level of priority in attention through ADHD. Melissa Orlov describes this as a general condition of the way the ADHD brain receives information:

The ADHD brain receives information quite differently. Instead of being hierarchical, I like to think of it as “flat.” Everything, important or not, initially receives about the same amount of attention. Noises, ideas, movements, even sometimes your own body parts, compete for attention at the same time in the ADHD brain. I have heard people with ADHD describe their brain as “noisy” (these are usually people who have tried medications and discovered that “noisy” is not the only way that brains can be).⁹³

In Deweyan terms, the way in which mind emerges through transactions with an environment as an attempt to reconstruct a precarious situation, or a situation in which the organism has lost equilibrium with the environment, is fundamentally different through ADHD. As all elements within a situation initially present with the same value in experience through ADHD, reconstructing the situation for potential action becomes difficult as ADHD prevents an individual from making a determination as to which element of the situation should be focal in the reconstruction of the situation. This, then, requires the individual to provide a total genealogy of the situation rather than directing their consciousness and attention to the focus in experience that would lead to its reconstruction and resolution which ultimately restores the equilibrium between individual and environment. As a consequence, ADHD causes an individual to focus on a small part of the situation, rather than recognize the situation in all of its interconnections.⁹⁴

To be clear, executive functions are one part of what Dewey calls the natural equipment which is organized into a human shape through transaction with culture. That is, executive functions are part of Dewey’s biological matrix of inquiry which, in transaction with the cultural matrix of inquiry, enables the human organism to navigate their environment. Moreover, in keeping with Dewey, this biological equipment is organized through transaction with a cultural environment: we learn how to prioritize the competing elements within a situation through the ways our cultural environment stimulates these capacities through supplying habits. Thus:

Throughout childhood, adults, older siblings, or other individuals provide considerable direct instruction in each instance to help the child successfully execute such task sequences. Initially, parents or other individuals facilitate this learning by doing the task for the child; they then progress to talking the child through the task, assisting as needed. Eventually, typically developing children gradually learn to do such tasks with a simple reminder to start the sequence. With similar parental guidance, most children gradually learn to interact appropriately with others, to safely cross a street, to ride a bike, and, eventually, to drive a motor vehicle.⁹⁵

To conclude, inasmuch as ADHD emerges as a clash between the individual and the attempt by culture to organize the individual, it is the organization of culture that can provide the resolution to the clash of ADHD with the organization of culture through adopting a new disposition toward action that draws upon the resources of the environment. For example:

93) Ibid., 48.

94) Brown, *Outside the Box*, 76.

95) Ibid., 13.

Some persons with ADHD eventually find ways to develop habits or routines that prevent their ADHD symptoms from disrupting their lives. Such compensatory strategies can be as simple as consistently placing one's keys in a particular place beside the door immediately on entering the house or utilizing reminders on one's cell phone for help in remembering to take pills on schedule each day.⁹⁶

Or, they may draw upon persons within the environment to better enable their transactions as in the following:

In some situations, it may be not a family member but a particular teacher, coach, neighbor, therapist, or perhaps even a peer who becomes a close friend, confidant, and advisor to help the growing person with ADHD feel recognized, appreciated, and encouraged to deal with frustrations, avoid potential trouble spots, and develop his or her personal strengths. It is difficult to overestimate the value and benefits that such a relationship can provide at critical points in the life and development of an individual with ADHD.⁹⁷

In the former, the material elements of culture are used to creatively transform the environment that the individual transacts with through ADHD. In this, new dispositions toward action are formed which appropriate and direct the natural equipment of ADHD such that it enters into continuity with the surroundings. This reorganization of the environment to enable continuity with the natural equipment of ADHD can extend to the social domain of culture wherein an individual finds a trade or area of study that enables an active continuity which extends the individual in the mode of growth. Here, Dewey's "fitness" comes to mind, however, what is necessary is not simply that such an environment exist, but that the person with ADHD be offered the chance to find such an environment.

As Wendell states, "disability is also socially constructed by the failure to give people the amount and kind of help they need to participate fully in all major aspects of life in the society, including making a significant contribution in the form of work."⁹⁸ This is to say that there is a need for a form of democratic education in the mode envisioned by Dewey. Specifically, for Dewey, one of the primary aims of education was not simply to prepare a student for a vocation, but, as stated previously, to inculcate flexible habits of transaction with the cultural environment. Beyond this, education also has the aim of discovering and enhancing the individual capacities of those it educated such that they could deploy them in the service of the growth and transformation of society. Thus, part of the responsibility of culture is to adapt to the varieties of natural equipment such that each can contribute in its particularity to the development of culture.⁹⁹ To this end, careful attention to how ADHD enables different transactions with the world, and how they do or do not succeed in reshaping the habits of culture to enable continuity with the environment established by culture is ultimately necessary if we wish to generate a more perfect union. As for Dewey, life is equivalent to growth, a Deweyan conception of the relationship between disability and culture involves attention to the ways disabled transaction with culture can point us to how we can make culture sustain the growth of all humans.

96) Ibid., 98.

97) Ibid., 96.

98) Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, 40.

99) Dewey, *Individuality, Equality, Superiority*, 295–97.

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