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Experiences of Current or Former Homeschool Students Who Report ADHD Symptoms

Melissa Felkins
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Melissa Felkins

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Experiences of Current or Former Homeschool Students Who Report ADHD Symptoms

by

Melissa Felkins

MEd, Tarleton State University, 2010

BS, Tarleton State University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Psychology

Walden University

May 2018

Abstract

Homeschooling is currently the fastest-growing educational population in the United States with an estimated 2 million students. Because 11% of school children have been diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), there are likely to be many children with ADHD symptoms in the homeschooling population. The purpose of this study was to extend knowledge of the experiences of homeschooling in this population to assist students with ADHD as well as their parents and educators to make informed educational decisions. The multiple intelligences theory provided the theoretical framework for this phenomenological study. The key research question was focused on how current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms describe their experiences in a homeschool environment. Perceptions were collected from 12 participants ranging in age from 12 to 21 years of age who were recruited using criterion sampling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by phone or face-to-face. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' modification of van Kaam's structure. Through this process, the themes of individualization, self-concept, and experience of symptoms were identified. Specifically, the findings indicated that homeschooling children with ADHD symptoms is an individualized phenomenon and most students thrive in a structured yet flexible environment where tools and methods can be personalized. Participants developed individualized learning practices that would not be acceptable in a more traditional learning environment. This study contributes to the empirical literature promoting social change by providing foundational knowledge that can be built upon in future research to offer evidence-based information to this rapidly-growing population.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to homeschool students-past, present, and future-who struggle with ADHD symptoms. It is my hope that each of you are provided with the learning tools and environment in which you will reach your fullest potential. I encourage you to talk to your parents and any others who make educational decisions for you and let them know what you need to help you succeed. Each of you has a distinct way of learning and an opportunity to uniquely impact our world. I challenge you to make the most of your homeschooling years by taking ownership of your learning experience, which will help you to accomplish all of your goals in life.

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On a personal level, I would like to first give honor to my Heavenly Father, who has sustained me throughout this journey. Next, my loving and supportive husband, Henry, has always been my rock. He has shouldered more of the family responsibilities for several years, so I could reach this goal. I certainly could not have accomplished this without him. Although I have attempted to balance life as well as possible, my kids, Elijah, Isaac, and Symphony, have sacrificed time with their mom on many occasions while I was working on this project. I am thankful for our own homeschooling experience, which has ensured that I set aside quality time with them each day before turning my attention to my dissertation. I would also like to thank my parents for setting an example for me and my sister to always keep learning. Both of your daughters have now earned their doctoral degrees!

On a professional level, I would like to thank Dr. Susana Verdinelli, my dissertation chairperson. She has been such a dynamic source of wisdom and support throughout this process. I would also like to thank my other committee members who offered considerable constructive feedback along the way, Dr. Jimmy Middlebrook, Dr. Tracy Marsh, and Dr. Lisa Scharff. Finally, many thanks are in order for the participants who took the time to share their experiences with me to make this study possible and provide foundational knowledge of what it is like to be a homeschool student with ADHD symptoms.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background	2
Problem Statement	5
Purpose of the Study	5
Research Questions	6
Main Question.....	6
Subquestions	6
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Theoretical Foundation	6
Nature of the Study	7
Definitions.....	8
Assumptions.....	9
Scope and Delimitations	10
Limitations	10
Significance.....	11
Summary	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review	14
Introduction.....	14

Literature Search Strategy.....	15
Theoretical Framework: Multiple Intelligences.....	16
Homeschooling History and Demographics	18
Reasons for Homeschooling	20
Religion.....	21
Personal Freedoms and Ideology	22
School Environment.....	25
Quality of Traditional Education	27
Individualized/Alternative Learning Experiences	28
Special Educational Needs.....	29
Academic Experiences of Homeschooling	30
Academic Choices	31
Academic Performance	33
Psychological/Social Experiences of Homeschooling.....	36
SEN and Homeschooling.....	39
Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).....	43
ADHD and Academic Performance.....	47
ADHD and Homeschooling.....	49
Lack of Student Perspective.....	51
Conclusion	54
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	56
Introduction.....	56

Research Design and Rationale	56
Role of the Researcher	58
Methodology	59
Participant Selection Logic	59
Instrumentation	60
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection	61
Data Analysis Plan	62
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	63
Ethical Procedures	65
Treatment of Data	66
Summary	66
Introduction.....	68
Setting	69
Demographics	71
Data Collection	72
Data Analysis	72
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	80
Results.....	84
Textural and Structural Participant Descriptions	85
Composite Textural Description.....	129
Composite Structural Description.....	134
Summary	160

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	162
Introduction.....	162
Interpretation of the Findings.....	164
Theme 1: Individualization	166
Theme 2: Self-Concept	171
Theme 3: Experience of Symptoms	175
Limitations of the Study.....	179
Recommendations.....	182
Implications.....	183
Conclusion	185
References	187
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	202

List of Tables

Table 1. Demographics of Homeschool (HS) Participants	70
Table 2. Sample of Interview Excerpt Line-by-Line and Focused Coding	73
Table 3. Sample of Interview Excerpt Line-by-Line and Focused Coding for Negative Case Analysis.....	74
Table 4. Sample of Coding Book with Interview Excerpt.....	75
Table 5. Global Themes, Organizing Themes, and Basic Themes Derived from the Interviews.....	135

List of Figures

Figure 1. Thematic web of global theme 1: Individualization.....	76
Figure 2. Thematic web of global theme 2: Self-concept.....	78
Figure 3. Thematic web of global theme 3: Experience of symptoms	79

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

It is currently estimated that there are around 2 million students in the United States who are homeschooled. This is the most rapidly growing group in K-12 education (Institute of Education Sciences, 2014), increasing from 1.7% of the school-aged population in 1999 to 3.4% in 2012 (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016). Many parents choose to homeschool their children who have special educational needs (SEN), because they feel that the needs of those children are not being met in the conventional schools (Kendall & Taylor, 2014; Morton, 2010). There is a growing body of research conducted regarding students with SEN in homeschooling environments, but few studies have focused specifically on students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Duvall, Delguadri, & Ward, 2004), although it has been cited as a topic that needs more attention (Cook, Bennett, Lane, & Mataras, 2013; Kendall & Taylor, 2014; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Parsons & Lewis, 2010).

In this first chapter, the reader will learn about the background of the topic at hand. The problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, and nature of the study will also be delineated. Finally, important definitions will be stated, and assumptions, scope, limitations, and significance of the study will be discussed. This introduction will provide a solid foundation for the literature review and methodology description in the subsequent chapters.

Background

Students with ADHD are often academically unsuccessful in a traditional classroom (Birchwood & Daley, 2012). However, researchers have shown that they can be more successful in a structured, yet flexible homeschooling environment (Duvall et al., 2004). This is due to the increased time of academic engagement that comes from one-on-one or small group settings and the allowance for breaks and movement as needed. Over a period of five months, the homeschool participants in the Duvall et al. study made higher academic gains than the public-school participants in most standardized and rate-based test scores. However, these findings cannot be generalized to a larger population, because the small sample size only compared two public school and two homeschool participants. Several researchers have focused on homeschooling students with SEN, as a whole, and mentioned the need for future research on specific learning challenges. However, this study is the only one I have been able to locate that specifically targets the homeschooled population of children with ADHD. In the current study, I explored a slightly larger sample whereby expanding the literature and providing a foundation for increased research for this population.

Homeschool families who have children with SEN often make this educational choice because of many failed attempts at working with the traditional school system to meet the child's needs. Parents in these situations often view homeschooling as a last resort to help their child succeed (Morton, 2010). The parents in Morton's study, who removed their children from traditional schools as a last resort, considered the problem to be associated with the individual school and intended homeschooling to last only a

briefly until a new institution could be located. However, most of the families continued to homeschool, some after trying a brief unsuccessful return to traditional school, indicating that they were better able to meet their child's needs in a homeschool environment.

Nationally, in 2012, only 16% of parents who home educate cited a child's special needs as one reason for their choice (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016). However, in a study of students in Tennessee during the 2013-2014 school year, Morse (2014) found that 54% of the participating families ($n = 309$) indicated they were homeschooling a child with SEN. Of those families with a child with SEN, the highest number (22.6%) reported the specific SEN to be *Other Health Impaired* (which includes ADHD and other acute and chronic conditions). Additionally, of the families who reported previously sending their children to public or private school, 60.6% had children with SEN, as opposed to only 43.4% of families who had always homeschooled. The families who had previously sent their child to public or private school were significantly more likely than those who had always homeschooled to rate "the special needs of a child" as an important factor in choosing to homeschool (Morse, 2014, p. 90). Morse indicated that these data suggested a strong association between homeschooling growth and how public and private schools are addressing the needs of children with SEN.

Inquiry into the personal experiences and perspectives of students with ADHD symptoms who are homeschooled is lacking. However, Cook et al. (2013) recommended that more research is needed concerning both specific special needs categories and perspectives of students who are being homeschooled, as most studies have been

approached through parent interviews only. Loten (2011) had previously made some headway in this territory in a multiple case study through which the experiences of three homeschooled students with learning disabilities were explored. Loten gathered data through interviews with the students, parents, and other members of their academic experiences, along with observations and archival material. However, parents were still the biggest source of information in the study. Van Schalkwyk and Bouwer (2011) also interviewed both parents and children of four homeschooling families, but they encountered incongruence between the reports for some families and emphasized that it is “imperative to purposively heed the voice of the learner” (p. 188). The parent perception has been vital in guiding researchers to specific research needs as the phenomenon of homeschooling has grown. The logical next step is to learn about the experiences of the students from their own viewpoints, which brings depth to the existing knowledge (Cook et al., 2013). Specifically pertaining to current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms, learning about their thoughts and feelings regarding their academic experiences as homeschoolers informs other families who are considering homeschooling for their children with ADHD about whether this choice would be a good fit. The open-ended interview questions provided specific information about each participant’s personal experience, thereby revealing such information as ADHD type, academic history, personality traits, academic methods, and family dynamics. All play a vital role in an individual’s homeschooling experience and may provide a relatable connection for others with similar situations (Cook et al., 2013; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Rothermel, 2011).

Problem Statement

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) claimed that more than 11% of school children in the United States have been diagnosed with ADHD. With approximately 2 million K-12 homeschooling students in the United States (Institute of Education Sciences, 2014), it is likely that there are many students with ADHD who are currently being homeschooled. The lack of research pertaining to this population's experiences and needs is most likely due to the rapid growth it has experienced, but it is timely for the academic research community to address it (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Students, parents, and educators would benefit from learning about the experience of home education as a student with ADHD when choosing the best academic fit for their needs. This research has added to the foundational knowledge base and provided avenues of future research upon which to expand.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the personal experiences of current or former homeschool students, ages 12-21 years, who have been diagnosed with ADHD or have reported symptoms relating to attention, focus, and/or hyperactivity, which have negatively impacted learning, but have not been formally diagnosed. Participants were given the opportunity to discuss the academic approach that was incorporated into their homeschooling environment and describe their feelings regarding whether homeschooling was a good fit for their learning needs. Furthermore, inquiries were made into the participants' ideas regarding important factors that led to any academic achievements or challenges that prevented success, including significant components they

found to be beneficial or disadvantageous. The intended result was a complete depiction of each participant's perception of homeschooling as a student with ADHD symptoms.

Research Questions

Main Question

How do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms describe their individual experiences within a homeschool environment?

Subquestions

1. How do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive the individualized approach of homeschooling?
2. What are the factors of individualized education in a homeschool environment that current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms consider to be important?
3. What factors do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive as challenging within a homeschool environment?

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Foundation

The multiple intelligences (MI) theory, which asserts that there are several different ways of understanding (called *intelligences*) (Gardner, 2006), has been used extensively as a foundation for the promotion of individualized education and provided a lens through which this study was viewed (Adcock, 2014). Although there was not any attempt to connect the participants' experiences with Gardner's specific classifications of intelligence, as that would not address the research question at hand, these classifications

are key to the theory and portray the range of the individuality within the human learning experience. This theory aligns well with the individualized approach that homeschooling provides and offered a framework for the exploration of the experiences of homeschooled students with ADHD symptoms. The variance of homeschooling practices and the many philosophies that are employed, depending on a family's personal reasons for choosing to homeschool, were addressed in this study. This helped to explain how individualized education is an inherent element of homeschooling. The key construct of this study is individualized education, situated within the setting of the homeschooling environment, and focused upon the perceptions of current or former homeschool students who have ADHD symptoms. A more detailed explanation of the theoretical framework can be found in the next chapter.

Nature of the Study

I utilized a phenomenological design for this qualitative study, following the model of Moustakas (1994). This provided a structure that focused on the experiences of the participants, rather than the interpretations of the researcher. This idea is expanded through *epoche*, an exercise in which the researcher brackets herself or himself out of the study by fully explaining their own experiences in relation to the research topic (Creswell, 2013). Doing such allows the readers to come to their own conclusions about whether the researcher's background impacted the study in any significant way.

The current exploratory research project provided an in-depth understanding of the personal experiences of current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms by using interviews as data collection methods. The interviews allowed the

participants to reflect on their thoughts and feelings of homeschooling during K-12 years. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' modification of van Kaam's structure, which emphasizes horizontalization through significant statements (Moustakas, 1994). This process revealed themes, which were verified against each transcript. Individual textural and structural descriptions were prepared for each participant, and then a composite description of the essence of homeschooling with ADHD was presented.

Kunzman and Gaither (2013) asserted that, due to the lack of available or reliable data and the diversity of homeschooling methods, a qualitative approach is best suited for homeschooling research. Social constructivism was honored in that each participant was given the opportunity to construct their own reality pertaining to his or her individual experiences as a homeschooling student with ADHD symptoms (Patton, 2015). Through this process, the key concept of individualized education was expanded to include the perceptions of this understudied population.

Definitions

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): In addition to the official diagnosis of ADHD, as defined by the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), this study also included those who have presented with symptoms relating to attention, focus, and/or hyperactivity, but have not been formally diagnosed (Cook et al., 2013).

Homeschool: Education that takes place outside of a public, private, or charter school, and in which the parent is responsible for the schooling of the child (Johnson, 2013; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013).

Homeschool environment: The atmosphere and setting in which a homeschooling student completes academic work. This could vary according to the homeschooling method chosen by the parent/student, but generally refers to a less-structured atmosphere than can be found in traditional classrooms and more one-on-one time between the teacher and student (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013).

Individualized education: Learning environments and teaching methods that are tailored to the specific needs of a student (Adcock, 2014).

Special educational needs (SEN): Learning challenges that require special teaching/learning methods in order for the student to find academic success (Arora, 2006; Kendall & Taylor, 2014).

Traditional/conventional education: Education which occurs within a structured classroom environment where many students are taught by one teacher and expected to move forward at about the same pace (Anthony, 2015; Johnson, 2013).

Assumptions

The main assumption of this study was that the participants were truthful in their acknowledgment of having ADHD symptoms and being homeschooled. This is of great importance, as the entire research project was dependent upon the participants sharing their experiences of having been homeschoolers who have ADHD symptoms. It was assumed that the participants were willing to honestly and openly communicate their feelings regarding their own homeschooling experience. This was essential in establishing an accurate portrayal of the essence of the phenomenon.

Scope and Delimitations

Individual experiences of current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms was chosen as the focus of the research question. This focus was chosen to acquire knowledge of how students with ADHD symptoms who are homeschooled perceive this academic choice as a fit for their needs. Because neither educational nor psychological literature has addressed this specific and rapidly-growing population, a phenomenological approach provided the foundational knowledge that is necessary for future research to build upon.

Current or former homeschool students who have been diagnosed with ADHD, or report symptoms relating to attention, focus, and/or hyperactivity, but have not been formally diagnosed, were included in the study. Transferability is likely for readers who can identify with different participants whose homeschooling experiences appear to be much like their own.

Limitations

An important limitation to this study was the possibility that any young adult participants (ages 18-21 years) did not fully remember their experiences as homeschooling students with ADHD symptoms, because they may have graduated prior to the interviews. Some of their perspectives of how they felt and perceived homeschooling may have been interpreted through the lens of a young adult, rather than a child. Alternatively, they may have had an adequate memory of their late high school experiences but have been unable to fully share their experiences from earlier years of homeschooling. Including the perspective of current homeschool students, along with

former homeschool students, however, should have balanced this limitation and provided depth to the study. Another limitation involves the range of ADHD symptomatology that may have been experienced by different participants. Their symptoms could have ranged from mild to severe. Further, the type of ADHD symptoms the participants exhibit—hyperactive, inattentive, or combination—could have resulted in very different perceptions of their academic experiences.

Significance

Although there has been recent growth in the amount of literature available addressing SEN as related to homeschooling, an exhaustive literature review on home schooling and ADHD students revealed no studies that specifically target the experiences of students with ADHD through the perspective of homeschooled students. In this study, I explored the phenomenon of homeschooling with ADHD symptoms, as conveyed by the students themselves, rather than their parents (Cook et al., 2013; Parsons & Lewis, 2010). It also gave focus to the specific SEN of ADHD, which is underinvestigated in the homeschooling environment (Cook et al., 2013; Kendall & Taylor, 2014; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Parsons & Lewis, 2010).

Because the success of students with ADHD in a conventional classroom is limited (Birchwood & Daley, 2012), the results of this study will be useful to parents when considering the right academic environment for such students. With the homeschooling population growing so rapidly (Institute of Education Sciences, 2014) and more than 11% of school children in the United States having been diagnosed with ADHD (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015), it is likely that a number of

these students are currently being homeschooled or will be in the future. It is important to know how their individual needs are being met and whether they are finding success in this alternative learning environment. The findings of this study are valuable in helping families determine whether homeschooling can be considered as a viable educational option for students with ADHD, thus providing them with an alternative way to achieve their educational goals. Educators and school boards will be given insight as to whether it would be in some students' best interest to offer alternative means of learning, such as a hybrid home/school model. Any drawbacks or limitations that emerged could direct future research and educational planning for ADHD students, whether in a traditional or alternative learning environment, and allow home educators to address any deficiencies that could be modified to promote a higher opportunity for academic success. Finding that some students with ADHD symptoms can function more successfully in a homeschool environment, society at large might benefit as these students gain confidence in their learning capabilities and offer their unique way of thinking and accomplishing goals to the workforce in capacities for which they might not have otherwise felt qualified.

Summary

This chapter provided the background knowledge that is available regarding the population of current or former homeschool students with ADHD symptoms. It included the problem in terms of why it is important to explore their experiences, which was the purpose of the study. The research questions were presented, followed by an introduction to the MI theory and the phenomenological research design. Important terms were

defined, and assumptions, scope, and limitations were discussed. Finally, the significance of the study was expressed. In the next chapter, the relevant literature will be reviewed to provide a foundation for the current study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Homeschooling has been deemed as “the most robust form of educational reform in the United States today” (Murphy, 2014, p. 245). Existing research on the phenomenon, however, is deficient in generalization capacity due to a combination of factors, such as a lack of access to representative samples and the inability to control for certain demographic variables (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Despite these complications, researchers have continued to explore the various facets of the homeschooling population. In recent years, researchers have begun to move beyond the two most popular topics of previous decades—academic performance and socialization—and, instead, focus on specific demographic groups or particular teaching and learning methods (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). These types of studies have added both depth and breadth to the existing knowledge base. The current research project aimed to expand it to include a subgroup that had not yet been well studied.

Although there is a growing body of research drawing attention to the experience of homeschooling children with SEN (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013), there is a necessity for expanded research concerning specific learning needs within this environment (Cook et al., 2013). Students with ADHD symptoms who are homeschooled have received very little consideration among researchers, even though the population is likely growing at a rapid rate. As educational psychologists are in a unique position to understand both the academic and psychological needs of homeschooling children with ADHD, it is imperative that researchers in this field be actively engaged in conducting research of this

population (Jones, 2013). This will provide a knowledge base to aid families, schools, and governing agencies in decisions regarding academic choice. The purpose of the study was to explore the personal experiences of current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms.

This review of the literature provides a background of the practice and outcomes of homeschooling, as well as reasons for choosing to homeschool. SENs within the homeschooling environment are also addressed. The discussion then moves on to an overview of the specific SEN of ADHD and the associated academic challenges. Finally, the literature pertaining to homeschooling students with ADHD is examined. A research-based reason for approaching the subject through the student perspective is also provided, along with a discussion of the MI theory, which formed a theoretical framework for the study. Most of the literature discussed came from the United States and United Kingdom, as these are the two geographical locations that have provided the bulk of the homeschooling research to date.

Literature Search Strategy

The majority of the literature reviewed in this chapter was accessed over the course of my doctoral coursework, as I strived to identify areas in which current homeschooling research was lacking. Most articles were found through the databases Academic Search Complete, Thoreau, and PsycINFO. The terms *homeschool**, *“homeschool*”*, *“home educat*”*, *ADHD*, *attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder*, *home, unschool**, *SEN*, *“special educational needs”*, *“alternative educat*”*, and *“alternative learn*”* proved to be useful when combined in different groupings using the Boolean

search functions AND and OR. As is common in database queries, quotation marks were used to search for two or more specific words as one term, and the asterisk was used to indicate that any suffix of the given word would be acceptable.

Theoretical Framework: Multiple Intelligences

MI is a theory that was put forth by Howard Gardner in the 1980s, in which he changed the previously accepted definition of intelligence from one of how accurately a person can answer questions on an intelligence test to one of how much capacity a person has to process a certain kind of information (Gardner, 2006). He based this theory on biological factors that are unique to the human species and manifested in cultural experiences. Gardner's set of intelligences has expanded since MI was first introduced and now includes the following:

- Musical Intelligence
- Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence
- Logical-Mathematical Intelligence
- Linguistic Intelligence
- Spatial Intelligence
- Interpersonal Intelligence
- Intrapersonal Intelligence
- Naturalist Intelligence

Within MI theory, it is believed that people operate from a combination of intelligences but have a particular bent toward one or two that seem to be dominant. The idea of discovering and working within a child's strengths, rather than focusing on their

deficits, is inherent to MI theory. Those strengths can then be utilized to bridge the gap to areas of weakness in order to increase overall capabilities. Gardner believes that everyone possesses all eight intelligences, and some just need to be nurtured more than others (Koch, 2007).

The choice to use MI as a framework for this study flowed from the concept of individualized education. Homeschooling offers, arguably, one of the most individualized academic experiences available in modern education. This theory has also grounded many educational practices concerning students with SEN (Gardner, 2006), even in the public-school realm, where there is at least an attempt at individualizing the experience of students with SEN by incorporating individualized education plans (IEPs). Therefore, using it as a foundation for a study exploring the experiences of students with the specific SEN of ADHD within a homeschooling environment seemed like a natural and logical choice.

In one graduate course that taught educators how to integrate MI into their classroom assignments, only 1% of the teachers had consistently used MI in the past, although 88% of them had had previous training on the theory and felt it would be of great value to their students (Adcock, 2014). Adcock insisted that the theory has continued relevance and should continue to be reiterated in teacher training programs. In homeschooling circles, MI theory is not as well known by name, but there is much talk of learning styles and child-led learning, which in practice, plays to the natural strengths of a child. So, although home educators might not have heard the term *multiple intelligences*, it is likely that they are incorporating the ideas it represents into their students' learning

unknowingly. It was interesting to see the use of MI ideas revealed within the current exploration of students with ADHD who are homeschooled.

Homeschooling History and Demographics

Homeschooling is a practice that has been in existence for centuries. It was not until the late 1800s that schooling outside of the home became common. Even then, however, classroom learning often took a backseat to other priorities, such as the family farm or business. Compulsory education became the norm in the early 20th Century, and homeschooling was almost nonexistent for many decades (Cook et al., 2013). In the 1970s and 1980s, however, two different factions of people began to question the right of the government over that of parents to mandate educational practices and content. The liberals, led by John Holt, felt that the public school system was damaging to children and a more individualized, child-led learning experience, often known as *unschooling* would prove more beneficial (Mackey, Reese, & Mackey, 2011). On the opposite end of the spectrum, extreme Christian conservatives, led by Raymond Moore, opposed the secularism that they felt was being promoted in the public school system and viewed it as undermining the Christian values they were teaching in their homes. Both Holt and Moore promoted reform in the public school system, even as endorsers of homeschooling (Murphy, 2013). These two groups of people, who so often have had such opposing views, have used their agreement upon parental rights in education to form the backbone of the modern homeschooling movement (Kunzman, 2012).

By 1993, homeschooling was legal in all 50 states (Cook et al., 2013; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013) and has since become the fastest growing segment of K-12 education.

Although there were only 10,000 to 15,000 homeschooling students in the United States in the 1970s, current estimates are around 2 million, with most of that growth occurring since the turn of the century (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). In 1999, 1.7% of the K-12 population was homeschooled, but by 2013, that number had risen to 3.4%, representing a change from 850,000 students to 1,773,000 students (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016). It is important to note that these numbers are only estimates, as there is no way to accurately track the numbers of homeschoolers in the United States. Every state has different laws regarding homeschooling, with some having strict regulations and reporting procedures and others requiring no reporting at all (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Murphy, 2014). Another significant consideration to keep in mind is that schooling and education were defined as two different entities by the Supreme Court in the 1920s, giving states the opportunity to mandate that children be educated, without regulating parents' choice of the form of schooling (Kunzman, 2012). This has been a crucial factor in maintaining the rights of homeschooling families.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides the most reliable available estimates of homeschooling demographics through the National Household Education Survey (NHES), which is conducted every four years (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). According to the 2012 data, most homeschooling families are white, two-parent, nonpoor families with one income and three or more children, living in rural areas (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016). There are more middle and high school students being homeschooled than elementary school students, and most homeschooling parents have some form of postsecondary education, ranging from vocational school to graduate

degrees. The shift from telephone surveys in the previous data collection years (1999, 2003, and 2007) to mail surveys in 2012 resulted in the need for an adjusted estimate, because NCES believes that the change led to an undercount of the homeschooling population (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016). Consequently, there was no statistically significant change in homeschooling numbers between 2007 and 2013. Due to the standard and Type I errors, NCES cautioned readers against making causal inferences from the data included in the report (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016), although it remains to be the most accurate estimation available of the national homeschooling population.

Reasons for Homeschooling

A number of researchers have explored the motives parents have for choosing to homeschool their children. Although religion and opposition to the public school system, which formed the basis for the modern homeschooling movement, continue to be cited as reasons for many families, there has been an expansion to include more varied causation among those who choose to home educate. Morton (2010) described three categories of reasons for homeschooling as natural, social, and last resort choices, but acknowledged that these often overlap. Furthermore, most families tend to include several explanations that evolved over time when asked about their decision, rather than attributing it to a single static origin (Nelson, 2014). Rothermel (2011) described the categorization of families according to reasons for choosing to home-educate as follows:

Labels that create categories are useful for those with financial and controlling interests, such as local governments, whose education increases with pupil

numbers and who may therefore, develop initiatives to persuade certain ‘types’ of children into, or back into, school. As long as this approach continues, the needs of home educators and their children may never be met. (p. 53)

Religion

With the continued shift away from traditional Christian values as the societal norm (Boerl, 2014), this group continues to make up a large percentage of the homeschooling population. However, in terms of a motive for choosing to homeschool, the desire to provide religious instruction was only cited in the 2012 NCES survey as being the most important reason for homeschooling for 17% of homeschooling families. However, 64 percent of those surveyed marked this as being a factor that did hold some importance for them (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016). Ray (1997) contended that around 90% of homeschooling parents defined themselves as being Christian. Kunzman and Gaither (2013) and other authors dispute the accuracy of Ray’s data, however, because most of the participants for the early large-scale studies were recruited through the membership of a major homeschooling organization, the Homeschool Legal Defense Association, which is unapologetically Christian in its foundational beliefs. Ray tried to correct this limitation to some degree in the 2010 study by recruiting through four major and several minor testing agencies that provided standardized testing for homeschooling families, as well as triangulating with other data sources (Ray, 2010). Ray acknowledged that this limited the generalizability to homeschoolers who choose to participate in standardized testing, as this is not a requirement in all states. With the lack of reliable demographic data for the population, however, there is not a full-proof way to recruit

without the potential for some kind of bias. The best any researcher can do is to profess any limitations along with results. As for the Christian influence, a quick internet search for homeschooling curriculum or support groups will indicate the strong presence of Christian values that still dominate the homeschooling community.

Some believe that children have a right to be exposed to beliefs other than those of their parents, so they will have the opportunity to make their own decisions about personal convictions. These people think it is the government's job to make sure this happens (Jennens, 2011). Kunzman (2012) asserted that advocates of autonomous thinking in children have presented no way to objectively measure when it has been achieved. The government cannot regulate that which it cannot measure. In the technological age in which we live, a family would have to be completely cut off from the modern world to not be exposed to the plethora of views that exist. Help from the government is not necessary for that kind of exposure. However, in every civilization since the beginning of time, parents have been passing their way of life on to their children. We teach what we know to be truth. It is a natural phenomenon that is seen even in animal behavior. As humans, it is normal that parents hope their children will internalize the values that they find important, but it is also normal that children make their own choices as they grow up, sometimes reflecting the parents' ideals and sometimes not. It is no different for the homeschooling family than for any other.

Personal Freedoms and Ideology

The conviction of personal responsibility for the education of their children is an ideology that runs deep in most homeschooling parents, regardless of culture,

background, or other demographic traits (Jackson & Allan, 2010; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). This is a sharp contrast to mainstream parents who feel that education should be left up to the professionals who have been trained in the field (Croft, 2013). Most home educators feel that they have a duty to direct the academic instruction of their children in order to ensure the highest possibility of success (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Morse, 2014). This does not mean, however, that these parents solely depend upon themselves to provide this opportunity to their children. They are, in many cases, simply the facilitators who seek out the necessary resources for the most desirable outcome.

Many homeschooling families use a variety of means to accomplish this task, including various forms of curriculum, internet resources, libraries, field trips, real life experiences, and homeschool support groups or learning cooperatives (co-ops) (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Such co-ops offer courses taught by either professionals or other parents who have specialized expertise in a certain field. Of particular importance to note is that it is not uncommon to find home educators who are former public school teachers (Croft, 2013). Furthermore, the percentage of parents who hold degrees, and even advanced degrees, is significantly higher for students who are home educated than for the general population of children ages 6-18 years: 44% and 36%, respectively, in 2012 (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016). The level of education of a homeschooling parent only has a moderate positive impact on the academic performance of homeschooling students (2.5% variance) (Murphy, 2014; Ray, 2013), but it is possible that the pooling of expertise from among the homeschooling community could have a positive impact on the performance of the group as a whole.

Limited government involvement in individual and family life is another theme that seems to be prevalent among homeschoolers (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). These families want to be able to decide for themselves what is best for their children without interference from politicians or government mandates (Jackson & Allan, 2010; Kunzman, 2012; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Although education may be the primary capacity in which this idea can be observed, there are other areas where this philosophy becomes apparent as well. For example, homeschoolers, as a group, tend to be more apt to oppose mandatory vaccinations than the general population (Cordner, 2012; Rothermel, 2011). On the flip side of this coin, some opponents of homeschooling believe that the government should be involved in order to ensure that children are being properly cared for, and homeschooling is not a smokescreen covering up abuse or neglect (Jennens, 2011). Proponents, however, feel that, because this has only been seen a handful of times, the majority of families who are providing a healthy environment for their children should not be punished for the actions of just a few (Arora, 2006). In fact, Williams (2017) found that homeschool students are 40% less likely to die from child abuse or neglect than the national average student. Ray (2016) found that homeschool students are much less likely to have been sexually abused than public or private Christian school students, but at about the same rate as private non-Christian school students. Removing personal freedoms is a slippery slope in the United States, which was formed upon such principles.

What it all really boils down to is the idea of preserving the freedom of parental rights. Of course, there may be extremists within the homeschooling community, as there

are in most every population, who think that their way should be everyone's way. Most homeschooling families, however, just want to protect their right to make the choices that they believe are in the best interest of their children (Kunzman, 2012). They want other parents to have that same freedom, even if they make different choices for their own children.

School Environment

In the 2012 NHES report, 91% of homeschooling parents listed concern with school environment as a reason for choosing to homeschool (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In fact, concern about school environment was chosen as the most important reason for choosing to homeschool by the highest percentage of families who took the survey (25%) (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016). Researchers have confirmed that school environment is a major motivation shared by many home educators across widely ranging demographic groups (Morton, 2010). Whether it be the previously mentioned lack of conservative values and morals, the prevalence of bullying and school violence, or a deficiency of cross-cultural teaching, homeschooling is utilized as an alternative to that which many homeschooling parents view as an environment of detriment to the well-being of their children (Morse, 2014; Morton, 2010).

Bullying has always been a concern in schools, and many homeschooling families whose children previously attended traditional schools have claimed that it played a role in their decision to homeschool (Morton, 2010; Nelson, 2014). Although *zero tolerance* rules have been put into student handbooks, they have been proven to largely be ineffective and often counterproductive (Englehart, 2014), sometimes leading to more

covert types of bullying, such as cyberbullying (Borgwald & Theixos, 2013). The media have brought attention to apparent suicides due to bullying in recent years, although mental health providers caution that underlying comorbid psychiatric disorders are more to blame than the bullying behavior itself (Dickerson Mayes et al., 2014).

Other forms of school violence have become rampant over the last several years as well. Between 2013 and 2015, there was an average of two school shootings per week on K-12 campuses in the United States (Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, 2017), and since the year 2000, there have been 615 school-associated violent deaths (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016). The local news has reported a recent surge in pedophilic behavior by teachers and coaches, primarily in middle and high school settings (Ratliff & Watson, 2014), and there are many cases of these abusers quietly resigning, rather than being fired or prosecuted, which has allowed for them to be hired at other schools (Geisel, Bon, & Buckman, 2015; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010). Homeschooling may be viewed by some as the only way to ensure that children are protected from the risk of physical and psychological harm that is increasingly inherent to the public school environment.

Homeschoolers who do not fit the traditional stereotype, such as those from nonwhite ethnic groups or non-Christian religions, may find fault with the traditional school environment when it comes to inclusion of their own cultural backgrounds. For example, several authors agreed that African American and Muslim families often choose to homeschool based on the stereotyping and oppression of their children or the lack of inclusion of their cultures in the curriculum in the public schools (English, 2016;

Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Mazama & Lundy, 2013, 2015; Ray, 2015; Saghir, 2011).

Ironically, African Americans who choose to home educate sometimes receive backlash from other African Americans, because it is viewed as being disrespectful to those who fought for equal access to education in years past (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). However, Mazama and Lundy claim that homeschooling is just the next step that African Americans are taking to equalize education in the face of continuing racism, as 24% of their participants cited racism as a motivation for choosing to homeschool.

Quality of Traditional Education

Among the top reasons parents give for choosing to homeschool is a discontentment with the quality of education in traditional schools (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). With the high-stakes focus that has been placed on standardized testing in public schools over the last couple of decades, due to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the atmosphere of the American classroom has morphed into a conduit of anxiety causing extreme stress for both teachers and students (Segool, Carlson, Goforth, von der Embse, & Barterian, 2013). These tests carry such a heavy weight, often with teachers' jobs and students' grade advancement tied directly to performance on a single assessment (von der Embse, Pendergast, Segool, Saeki, & Ryan, 2016). For many, instructional time is dedicated mainly to the material that will be presented on the standardized test and to teaching test-taking strategies that will hopefully produce positive results that will reflect well on the students, teachers, school administrators, and school districts (von der Embse et al., 2016; Tanner, 2013). Furthermore, educational policy makers often do not count teacher working conditions as

being relevant to student learning, and many credentialed teachers are leaving the profession due to dissatisfaction with those conditions (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011).

Individualized/Alternative Learning Experiences

Individuality in schools began to disappear when standardized test makers found it to be impossible to create tests that aligned with all of the different curriculum options chosen by different states and school districts, resulting in a shift to align the curriculum to the standardized test (Tanner, 2013). According to Tanner, “teaching-to-the test is now becoming an approved or ‘best’ pedagogical practice” (p. 5). Common Core, a set of standards that has been adopted by 42 states in the United States, has further limited personalized learning experiences and forced teachers to teach all students in a uniform manner, whether or not they believe it is in the best interest of their students (Burks et al., 2015).

For homeschoolers, on the other hand, individualized learning is inherent to the very nature of the learning environment. Most home educators are only teaching a handful of students, giving them ample one-on-one time with each (Duvall et al., 2004; Jackson & Allan, 2010). Even if they use outside resources, such as co-op classes that somewhat mimic a traditional classroom, those choices can be tailored to each students’ needs and interests, creating a much more personalized learning experience (Anthony, 2015). Jennens (2011) noted that there is a lack of research available concerning families who chose to homeschool for a time, but then returned their children to mainstream schools, possibly skewing the literature towards those who have found success with the homeschooling experience.

Special Educational Needs

Some parents choose homeschooling as a last resort when they feel the traditional school has failed to provide for the requirements of their children who have SEN (Arora, 2006; Parsons & Lewis, 2010). Often, these parents would have preferred to leave their child in a typical school setting, but they had not been able to find academic, and sometimes, social and/or emotional success, leaving parents with a feeling that they had no choice but to homeschool (Arora, 2006; Parsons & Lewis, 2010). The reason for the failure to thrive in conventional settings could be a result of a lack of training for teachers and teachers' assistants, at the fault of either the teacher training programs, the school systems, or the teachers themselves, in providing appropriate instruction and classroom management for these students (Kendall & Taylor, 2014). The mishandling of behaviors of students with SEN by teachers and school personnel often lead to both physical and emotional harm, and some parents have felt that homeschooling was their only option to ensure the safety and well-being of their children (Parsons & Lewis, 2010). Both Kendall and Taylor and Cook et al. (2013) also cited a lack of partnership between parents and educators as a reason for the breakdown of the educational experience. Although other studies have listed bullying of students with SEN as a factor in choosing to home educate, the participants of the Kendall and Taylor study did not concur. They did, however, list the treatment from educators as a factor.

Arora (2006) and Morse (2014) found that SEN was a significant factor in the decision to homeschool for parents who had a child with SEN, but not for those who did not have a child with SEN. It is also worthy to note that 60.6% of the families in one

study who had chosen traditional school prior to homeschooling had at least one child with SEN, as compared to only 43.4% of those families who had always homeschooled (Morse, 2014). According to the 2012 NCES survey, which has been cited in previous sections of this document, physical or mental health problems and other special needs were listed as important reasons for choosing to homeschool by 15% and 16% of the families, respectively (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016). So, although SEN may not be among the top reasons for choosing to homeschool, it is a significant factor for many families. Other parents, who may suspect their child has an SEN but are opposed to the idea of labeling that child with a learning disability, may choose to homeschool in order to provide the child with the personalized instruction that is necessary to help them succeed (Cook et al., 2013). In this way, the child can avoid the stress of testing for learning disabilities and the stigma that comes with the labels and subsequent social separation it often produces.

Academic Experiences of Homeschooling

It is difficult to explain the experience of homeschooling, because the practice varies tremendously from family to family and even from student to student within the same family. Depending upon the choices of each family, the academic experience might resemble a traditional school setting with a rigorous curriculum and teacher-led, textbook-based learning. On the other hand, it might not employ any curriculum at all and consist entirely of student-led learning and real-world experiences. The reality for most homeschooling families lies somewhere in between these two extremes (Rothermel, 2011). A common theme, however, is individualization of education (Morton, 2010).

Academic Choices

Families who choose to homeschool are bombarded with an overwhelming number of choices regarding teaching/learning methods and curriculum. Of the options listed for curriculum choice in the 2012 NCES survey by the Institute of Education Sciences (2016), “non-retail websites (77 percent); homeschooling catalogs, publishers, or individual specialists (77 percent); a public library (70 percent); retail bookstores or other stores (69 percent); and education publishers (53 percent)” (pg. 13) were all significant sources of curriculum for homeschooling families. There are so many options, and it takes time to navigate them and decide what will work for each family or student. Some subscribe to a particular educational philosophy, such as the Charlotte Mason method, classical learning, or unschooling. Others base their academics around a particular curriculum, such as Abeka or Bob Jones, that offers a complete program covering all academic subjects (Hanna, 2012; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Most, however, tend to evolve with experience and with the changing needs and ages of their children. An eclectic mix of curriculum choices and learning methods is commonly seen among homeschooling households, as is portrayed by the overlap in percentage of the whole in the survey mentioned earlier in this paragraph pertaining to multiple sources for obtaining curriculum (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016).

With the growing number of homeschooling families, support groups and learning co-ops are also becoming an important part of the academic experiences of many homeschooling families (Anthony, 2015). Often, these groups help to fulfill educational needs in areas where parents feel they need more support. Parents with different areas of

expertise can teach classes or the groups can hire professionals. The groups can also offer opportunities that would be more difficult to produce in the home setting, such as lab science courses, public speaking, and physical education classes. It is common for groups to meet once per week for class time and then complete the assignments during the week at home. Anthony discovered that parents are often willing to give up some of the freedom of homeschooling to a co-op in order to best meet the needs of their students when they know the group with which they are involved adheres to their shared educational goals or philosophies.

Hanna (2012), who conducted a rare longitudinal study of homeschooling families and their academic choices, found that over a ten-year period from 1998 to 2008, homeschooling families in Pennsylvania became much more reliant on internet sources and expanded their curricular selections in order to better meet the individual needs of each student. Carpenter and Gann (2016) found that homeschooling parents of high school students acted more as facilitators than teachers and provided their teens with an eclectic mix of pedagogical modalities, including online classes, private and group tutors, co-op classes, and self-study courses.

While describing a typical day of an unschooler, Pillalamarri (2015) suggested that curriculum is not just a textbook or worksheet, but instead, is a way in which a student interacts with their experiences and environment. This may or may not include elements that would be traditionally considered to be curriculum. Thomas and Pattison (2013) situated this type of learning within the sociocultural theory and postulated that learning would naturally occur without conscious awareness, such as when a newcomer

assimilates to their new environment or a young child develops language and social skills. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development for child-directed learning, then, would present as a choice of possibilities, rather than a scaffolded pathway towards a specific goal laid out by adults. English (2016) equated this type of child-led homeschooling to attachment parenting and claimed that it is often a natural extension of the practice.

Academic Performance

There are several studies that have presented data showing test scores of homeschooling students to be superior to those of public school students (Belfield, 2005; Ray, 1997, 2010, 2013; Rudner, 1999). The validity of some of these studies has been questioned due to the nature of the population samples that were used (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). As was mentioned earlier in the discussion of demographic limitations in the homeschooling research, much of the literature is based on samples taken from the membership of Christian homeschooling organizations of whom the majority are white, middle-class, two-parent families with one wage-earner (usually the father) and one stay-at-home parent (usually the mother) (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). The main problem this creates for the studies of academic performance is that, although the homeschooling students in these samples tend to perform better than the national average, they perform about the same as public school students whose families fit a similar profile. Therefore, it cannot be proven that the test performance is a result of homeschooling, and it might be more likely that it is result of demographics (Mackey et al., 2011).

Cogan (2010), on the other hand, explored the outcomes of homeschool graduates who went on to college and found that the students in his small-scale study had higher

college entrance exam scores, GPAs, and graduation rates than traditionally schooled students, even after controlling for demographic factors. Testing results have shown, however, that homeschooling students tend to score better on verbal portions of standardized tests than on math portions, which could be due to the emphasis that is placed on reading in most homeschools (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Martin-Chang, Gould, and Meuse (2011) claimed that homeschooled students who are taught in a structured format score better on standardized tests than those in mainstream schools, but those who are taught in an unstructured format score worse, although their limited sample size, 37 homeschool students matched with 37 public school students of similar age and geographic location, should be taken into consideration.

Green-Hennessy (2014) reported that homeschoolers are more often behind the expected grade level of their traditionally schooled, same-age peers, especially those with weaker religious affiliations. The lack of importance that homeschoolers often place on traditional grade level assignments, however, was not addressed. This points to a possible flaw in the homeschooling research—homeschooled children are measured against the standard of achievement that has been established for public school students, rather than the actual goals that define success for the individual student and family (Murphy, 2014).

Kunzman and Gaither (2013) asserted that homeschooling students whose parents have completed higher educational levels perform better academically. Hanna (2012) found that 60% of the homeschooling parents in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania increased their educational level over the course of ten years. It is unknown if this trend of continuing education for homeschooling parents is accurate in other regions of the

country, but such a phenomenon would presumably result in a better academic outcome for homeschooling students. In the most comprehensive study of homeschoolers that had been undertaken at the time, Ray (1997) found that, of the 5,402 homeschool students tested, those whose mothers did not earn a high school diploma scored 55 points higher on achievement tests than public school students whose mothers had not finished high school, based on data from the NCES for the same year. I was unable to locate any current data that compared academic achievement of homeschool students to public school students based on parental educational attainment, and Ray's study has been cited in several recent journal articles, indicating that there is no other study available regarding this particular facet of research (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Murphy, 2014).

Interestingly, on the topic of academic achievement of homeschooled students compared to public schooled students, the achievement gap that is often seen in public schools based on race, gender, and class, where male, nonwhite, and poor students generally perform worse on standardized measures, is largely non-existent within the homeschooling community (Murphy, 2014; Ray, 2010). In 1997, Ray found only minimal differences in math and reading scores between African American and white students in homeschools. In 2010, Ray confirmed a previous speculation that achievement based on gender is negated in homeschools. Murphy cautions, however, that the lack of scientific rigor within the existing homeschooling research, due to the difficulty in controlling for selection bias, as previously discussed, should be acknowledged when examining studies regarding academic outcomes of homeschool

students. Martin-Chang et al. (2011), who found that structured homeschoolers performed better on standardized tests than demographically paired traditionally schooled students in a controlled environment, but unstructured homeschoolers performed worse, have presented one of the most sound methodological studies to date on this subject (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Perhaps the best way to approach future research of academic achievement of homeschool students would be to focus on specific states that require reporting and testing of homeschool students. Although these results still would not be generalizable across every homeschooling demographic, they might go further in bringing reliable quantitative data to the research.

Psychological/Social Experiences of Homeschooling

Socialization has been a major concern for those who question the practice of homeschooling. The fear that adults who were homeschooled will not be prepared to interact properly in society has fueled the opposition for decades and is the subject of much of the homeschooling literature (Murphy, 2014). There may have been some credibility to this argument in the early days of the modern homeschooling movement, when those who chose the practice were few in number and labeled as weird for not following mainstream expectations for education (Murphy, 2013). There were few, if any, support groups or extracurricular opportunities for homeschooling students in the 1970s and 1980s, and many families may not have even known any others who had made the same educational choice for their children. Families chose to take advantage of real world interactions as social opportunities and found that involvement with people of many different ages in different settings was beneficial to learning social skills (Murphy,

2014). The parents preferred multigenerational connections to the same-age class groupings of traditional schooling, claiming a more well-rounded social outcome (Murphy, 2014).

Twenty-first century homeschooling still boasts of the advantages of socializing across generational boundaries and in real-world settings, but it has also remedied the lack of opportunity to mingle with other homeschoolers and participate in activities that are common in conventional schools (Anthony, 2015). In addition to support groups and learning co-ops, extracurricular activities abound for students who are educated at home. For example, in the Oklahoma City area, these students can participate in competitive sports, band and orchestra, choir, debate, robotics, dance, gymnastics, drama, 4-H clubs, National Honor Society, science fairs, and government youth leadership, just to name a few (Oklahoma Christian Home Educator's Consociation, 2016).

Current research indicates that homeschool students, in general, grow up to become productive and contributing members of society. Vaughn et al. (2015) found that drug and alcohol usage rates are much lower for this population than that of traditional students, although the reasons for this were only speculative. Thomson and Jang (2016) were able to pinpoint some explanations for the lower use as variables of social bonding, social learning, and religiosity. However, Green-Hennessy (2014) claimed that this only holds true for homeschooled youth who consider themselves to be strongly religious, although there were several limitations that should be taken in to consideration. They also tend to be more active in community service and even tend to vote more often than public school graduates. Murphy (2014) concluded that those who condemn homeschoolers for

not being concerned with the common good of society come up short, because these families actually have more civic involvement than most public school families.

In a small, qualitative research project, Hoelzle (2013) explored the transmission of values and beliefs from highly religious parents to their children by interviewing young adults who had spent the majority, if not all, of their K-12 years being homeschooled. He discovered that sometimes beliefs were transferred and sometimes they were not, but a strong parent-child bond existed in all cases, easing any bumpy transitions into adulthood. All participants believed that they were free to choose their own belief systems and did not feel that their parents were controlling or overbearing when it came to religion. Positive self-concept has also been found to be a benefit of homeschooling (Murphy, 2014).

Intrinsic motivation for learning may be higher in those who were homeschooled than those who were schooled traditionally. Riley (2015) found that students who were homeschooled scored higher on tests of autonomy and competence satisfaction, although they scored similarly to traditionally schooled students in the area of relatedness. These are the three factors that are necessary for intrinsic motivation. The reason for increased intrinsic motivation may be due to the student led, individualized learning that often takes place in homeschools, as opposed to the extrinsic behavior/reward system that is often used in conventional classrooms (Riley, 2015). Neuman and Guterman (2016) upheld that homeschooling parents perceive this idea of independence and autonomy within their children as a direct result of the lifestyle of homeschooling. This indicates a

social constructivist viewpoint in which these traits are formed through experiences and environment, not merely academic pursuits.

Rothermel (2012) cautioned that any tests of social or psychological well-being that were formulated with mainstream students in mind will not necessarily prove valid for homeschooled students. This author found major discrepancies between the results of two such tests when given to the same sample, indicating that the wording of the parent questionnaires could be biased toward the experiences of those in traditional academic settings. This is an important consideration for future researchers to keep in mind when studying the homeschool population.

SEN and Homeschooling

Removing children with SEN from conventional classrooms in exchange for a more personalized education at home has become a viable alternative when they have experienced academic or social failure to thrive. However, there has been much controversy over rights and responsibilities of both parents and local school districts in providing services to those students whose parents have chosen to home educate (Cook et al., 2013). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law that guarantees funding for special education services (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). IDEA does not address homeschooling, so states have the authority to decide whether homeschooled students with SEN have access to services based on whether they define homeschooling as a private school or a non-school (Cook et al., 2013). It has been argued that delays in learning might be noticed sooner by trained teachers than by homeschooling parents who are not as familiar with child development milestones,

especially if there are not other children in the home who are progressing at a more expected pace to whom the child with disabilities can be compared (Delaney, 2014). A lack of early identification could result in a lack of early intervention services that might benefit the child in terms of academic success.

Some parents are content in not receiving services, because they would rather the local, state, and federal government not have any control over the education of their children (Cook et al., 2013). Others, such as many of the parents in the Kendall and Taylor (2014) study, would prefer a mixed educational model in which they could work with the local school district to offer their child the best of both worlds, so to speak, utilizing needed services, such as speech or occupational therapy, while maintaining the safety and individualization of a home learning environment. Cook et al. contended that programs such as these would be beneficial in allowing special needs students to transition back into school, if necessary. Better partnerships between home and school might prevent the need for withdrawal in the first place (Arora, 2006; Parsons & Lewis, 2010). Local education authorities in the United Kingdom are required to ensure appropriate services are in place for homeschooling students with SEN, but the lack of reporting requirements of homeschooling families make it difficult to identify all of the students who might need such assistance (Arora, 2006).

Anthony (2015) purports that traditional schools could learn much from the homeschool co-op model used by many homeschooling families by creating a hybrid schooling model where parents and students are allowed much more input in educational choices than is customarily offered. The majority of Delaney's (2014) participants (four

out of five) indicated that they would consider allowing their child with SEN to return to public school if such a model was offered and the student wished to attend. Several states have incorporated programs that integrate homeschooled students into the public school system at varying levels, with Iowa, Minnesota, California, and Arizona being some of the trailblazers, and Kansas, North Dakota, Alaska, and Colorado following suit (Johnson, 2013). This benefits both parties in different ways. The public schools receive partial funding that they would otherwise miss out on, and the homeschooling students gain access to services, extracurricular activities, and interest-based coursework (Johnson, 2013). Sometimes, this partnership leads to the homeschooled students enrolling full-time in public school (Johnson, 2013). Many traditional homeschoolers look down on any involvement with public education, however, because they do not feel the government should have any connection with the education of their children. This is evidenced in the swift response by the homeschooling community in opposition of any legislation that is introduced that might afford more government oversight of homeschooling, such as the 2008 California court ruling that would have mandated homeschool teachers to be certified (Johnson, 2013). There is also an unyielding stance by many homeschooling organizations that online public school should not be considered to be homeschool (Home School Legal Defense Association, 2017; Oklahoma Christian Home Educator's Consociation, 2016).

Homeschooling children with SEN can sometimes present a high level of anxiety for parents who do not feel well supported either with outside services for their children's needs or moral support, and these exclusions may seem magnified with the severity of the

children's needs (Cook et al., 2013). It was interesting to note, however, that Morse (2014) claimed that parents who homeschool a child with SEN were less likely to be involved in a support group than those without a child with SEN. There is also sometimes an unsaid comparison game that takes place between homeschooling families, that can be exacerbated when a child's learning disabilities hold them back from performing at the level at which other homeschooling students seem to be performing (Loten, 2011). Conversely, the parents in Kendall and Taylor's (2014) study felt their lives were less stressful once they began homeschooling, because they were not having to deal with the issues that had caused so much tension when their children were enrolled in school. Students who were removed from traditional school settings as a result of their special needs not being met experienced a marked positive shift in their emotional, psychological, and sometimes even physical well-being once the stress of that environment was no longer present. However, they often required a period of time to *de-school* when first transitioning to a home learning environment (Kendall & Taylor, 2014). Delaney (2014) reported a higher level of overall satisfaction among parents of students with SEN who had chosen to homeschool than those who had chosen to place their children in public school.

Loten (2011) stressed the importance of individualized learning for students with SEN, noting that parents saw it as a critical component of their students' academic success. The one-on-one approach that is possible in homeschooling is ideal for students with SEN, and the ability of the parent-teacher to educate themselves on the student's particular learning needs results in targeted expertise in teaching and learning methods

(Loten, 2011). This author identified three components that were present in all three of her case studies and seemed to increase academic engaged time (AET), which is “a critical determiner of academic achievement in students with learning disabilities” (pg. 121). These components were intensive instruction, explicit instruction, and cognitive and emotional support, such as scaffolding and positive reinforcement. Bannier (2007) also supported the teaching methods of homeschooling teachers, stating that developmental educators in mainstream schools should take note of their practices, especially regarding complete mastery, appropriate pacing, retention, curriculum evaluation, and learning style accommodations.

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) defines ADHD as

...a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development, has symptoms presenting in two or more settings (e.g. at home, school, or work; with friends or relatives; in other activities), and negatively impacts directly on social, academic or occupational functioning. Several symptoms must have been present before age 12 years.

(Shire, 2016, para. 2)

There are three types of ADHD: ADHD-inattentive type, ADHD-hyperactive/impulsive type, and ADHD-combined type. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2011) recommended that primary care physicians be responsible for most ADHD diagnoses and treatment plans, bringing in the help of subspecialists when the

diagnosis is not definite, due to the possibility of comorbid diagnoses or other concerns. Treatment plans consist of medication and behavioral therapy, with the focus shifting from an early emphasis on behavioral therapy during preschool years (4-5 years of age), to a combination of the two during elementary school years (6-11 years of age), and finally to predominantly medication during adolescence (12-18 years of age) (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2011). Of course, each treatment plan should be planned according to each child's individual needs, taking into account a number of supplemental factors. The main idea here is that treatment requirements change over the lifespan and should be reevaluated according to developmental needs (Young & Amarasinghe, 2010).

Colley (2010) also promoted treatment plans focusing on each child's specific needs, and further, asserted that ADHD is actually a bio-psycho-social disorder that requires the collaboration of medical, psychological, educational, and familial parties to provide optimal care. He also blamed a breakdown in communication between the scientific community and the general public for the skepticism that is often portrayed toward the diagnosis of ADHD as a biological condition, rather than a result of a flawed environment. It is essential to understand how the complex relationships between an individual and their environments simultaneously affect behavior and are created by behavior stemming from the biological origin of ADHD (Colley, 2010; Tarver, Daley, & Sayal, 2014). In other words, an escalating cycle is formed when a child with ADHD creates an unpleasant situation with their behavior, then reacts negatively to the way the environment responds to the situation. Paidipati and Deatrck (2015) agreed that "...family stress and strain, including adversity and dysfunction, may be a preexisting

state of the family or the result of managing childhood ADHD” (p. 9). Mulligan et al. (2013) differ in this opinion, stating that, “...it is considered unlikely that children influence the quality of the home environment” (p. 210). These authors found a 30% causation of hyperactivity/impulsivity in children with ADHD-combined type on environment and gender. Because a comparable relationship could not be established with the non-ADHD siblings of the participants, the authors concluded that the biological predisposition toward the symptoms of ADHD in those who were diagnosed must account for the difference. It should be noted, however, that fewer symptoms of both hyperactivity/impulsivity and opposition were documented in both the ADHD participants and their non-ADHD siblings when the home environment was considered to be supportive (Mulligan et al., 2013). Paidipati and Deatrck claimed that the effectiveness of ADHD treatment plans are positively or negatively affected by the quality of family relationships. Peer relationships follow a similar pattern. Children with ADHD are less likely to form and maintain friendships than typically developing children, putting them at risk of being victimized by peers (Redmond, 2011).

Ford-Jones (2015) cautioned against overdiagnosis of ADHD, citing a lack of attention given to relative maturity due to age when a diagnosis is being considered. Because educators initiate testing for over half of ADHD cases, it is important that they understand the difference in maturity level of students whose birthdays fall just before the grade level cut-off date and those whose birthdays fall just after. There could be almost a year’s difference in age between students in the same grade level (Ford-Jones, 2015). This creates an especially large maturity gap in the early grades. Inappropriate diagnoses

of ADHD result in unnecessary medication and a social stigma that could affect a child negatively in many aspects of life. Bussing and Mehta (2013) discussed how the negative effects of stigma can cause a damaging self-perception for children with ADHD.

Although arguably biased against the legitimacy of the ADHD diagnosis, Stoller (2014) contended that ADHD is actually a result of institutional conformity, rather than biological dysfunction. He refuted authors, such as van Ewijk, Heslenfeld, Zwiers, Buitelaar, and Oosterlaan (2012), who claimed biological cause for the diagnosis, citing fallacies such as presenting correlations as causations when none can be proven. Galves and Walker (2012) had previously made the same claim of correlation versus causation, adding that any biological dynamic is likely a result of neurological changes caused by an individual's experiences, giving credence to an environmental or psychological theory of causation. Tarver et al. (2014) concurred that environmental experience does, in fact, have an impact on brain development. However, they also acknowledged that ADHD is one of the most heritable psychiatric conditions, although no specific genetic risk factor has been identified. According to Stoller, ADHD is often named as a culprit for symptoms that likely have other underlying causes, because this diagnosis has become financially beneficial to educational, pharmaceutical, medical, and psychological systems. Many parents may not feel they are qualified to contest the opinions of the professionals in these industries, subjective as the diagnostic process for ADHD may be, so they accept the diagnosis without question (Stoller, 2014).

ADHD and Academic Performance

Students with ADHD have a historically more significant deficit in academic performance than their non-ADHD peers (Tarver et al., 2014). When evaluating the relationship between childhood ADHD diagnosis and high school academic outcome, Kent et al. (2011) found that this group:

1) received lower grades; 2) took fewer advanced level courses; 3) failed significantly more academic courses; 4) were rated by teachers as performing more poorly; 5) had poorer school attendance; and 6) were more likely to drop out before graduation. (p. 458)

Spiel, Evans, and Langberg (2014) asserted that, although it costs around \$5000 per year more to meet the needs of a child with ADHD than a non-ADHD student in a public school setting, many of the provided services are not effective, because they are not evidence-based.

Executive functions (EF), such as working memory, response inhibition, planning and organization, shifting, emotional control, initiation, self-monitoring, and sustained attention have been found to be highly correlated with academic achievement, but are often lacking in individuals with ADHD (Langberg, Dvorsky, & Evans, 2013; Mares, McLuckie, Schwartz, & Saini, 2007). Working memory, an EF that is particularly important to completing school assignments, is a pervasive deficit among those with ADHD, impacting visuospatial and verbal domains (Alloway, 2011). Langberg et al. explained how the ratings of EF change as children mature through the developmental stages and were able to specifically pinpoint planning and organizational skills, as well as

shifting from one task or environment to another, as essential for the academic success of middle school students. Daley and Birchwood (2010) suggested that EF deficits and inattentive symptoms, rather than hyperactivity/impulsivity, should be the focus of ADHD interventions, as those seem to be the culprits of academic dysfunction. Mares et al. found that teachers identified more EF deficits than parents and speculated the causes to be the teachers' experience in recognizing age-appropriate development and the increased structure of the school environment, as compared to the home environment.

Galves and Walker (2012) described the traditional classroom as a "...rigid, stultifying environment..." where "...curriculums are stuffed down the passively receptive throats of students through repetitive, boring worksheets; one-size-fits-all, standardized methodologies; and minimal or no opportunity for active learning" (p. 34). Nonconformity to such an environment is viewed as academic and social failure. Medication has been widely used in an attempt to improve academic performance and classroom behavior for students with ADHD, but this is a temporary solution with possible long-term risks that some parents are not willing to take (Tarver et al., 2014). Drastic measures, such as changing the academic environment, are becoming increasingly more common for parents whose children do not succeed in a traditional school setting and who may have ethical issues with modifying their children's behavior with medication. Narratives of students whose nonconformity to such an environment led to a referral from school personnel for diagnosis have shown how the desire for conformity within conventional school settings has resulted in detrimental life changes (Watson, 2011).

ADHD has shown to have an adverse affect on quality of life and self-concept, especially relating to school (Dolgun, Savaser, & Yazgan, 2014). Recent research has suggested that the academic shortcomings of students with ADHD linger into adolescence, debunking the previous idea that symptoms and associated problems at school taper off at puberty (Birchwood & Daley, 2012). Those who suffer from the stigma that comes with being seen as a poor student could be stifled from reaching their full potential, simply because their ADHD is not taken into consideration as a probable, or even possible cause, thus eliminating accomodations or treatment that could help them be more successful. Some researchers have recommended that a focus on homework organizational skills and classroom performance issues in the early years, which seem to be predictors of long-term deficiency, will better prepare these students for high school (Langberg et al., 2013). It would be interesting to discover whether this might be a phenomenon that is unique to students with ADHD who are traditionally schooled or if the findings would be similar for alternative learning environments, such as homeschooling.

ADHD and Homeschooling

ADHD was listed as one of the top diagnoses of children with SEN whose parents elected to home educate (Cook et al., 2013). Although the mainstream educational industry exhibits an air of superiority over parents regarding the capability of educating children, more and more parents are invalidating this idea by successfully educating their children at home (Stoller, 2014). As noted previously, Mares et al. (2007) indicated higher levels of EF impairment in students with ADHD reported by school teachers than

parents. One of their recommendations for treatment was to modify the school environment. Although homeschooling was not considered as an alternative environment, it does bring credence to the idea that students with ADHD might perform better in the more relaxed atmosphere of a homeschool setting.

As the only study in which the academic performance of students with ADHD in a homeschooling environment has been directly researched, it is important to include the results of Duvall et al. (2004) in this literature review. The limitations of this study should be noted, however, as there were only four participants (two homeschooled students compared with two public schooled students), and the article is quite dated at this point. Even so, the results indicated a slight advantage in the homeschool environments, based on academic gains of the students over a period of five months as revealed through standardized tests and rate-based measures. This advantage persisted, despite lack of training and lower educational levels of parents, and was thought to be a result of increased AET and one-on-one time with homeschool teachers (Duvall et al., 2004). Public school teachers had more training and education, but spent more time teaching to large groups and managing classroom behavior, both of which are necessary to the structure of traditional educational settings, but may not produce the greatest academic outcomes for students.

The flexibility in methods of teaching and learning in homeschooling environments allows parents to try unconventional practices, such as video game training, which is being studied extensively as a treatment for children with ADHD (Rivero, Nunez, Pires, & Bueno, 2015). It also provides the freedom to accommodate extended

sleep schedules. Most adolescents do not get enough sleep, but the problem is exacerbated in those with ADHD, as they have a difficult time going to sleep and staying asleep. Then, they compensate for fatigue with hyperarousal (Wiebe, Carrier, Frenette, & Gruber, 2013). This vicious cycle is detrimental to academic success. Many homeschooling parents choose a nontraditional schedule for their teens, allowing them to sleep longer in the mornings and complete school work in the afternoons when they are more alert.

The strengths-based perspective of neurodiversity, rather than the weakness-based perspective of intellectual/psychological/emotional/behavioral disability, which is found in most traditional schools, can provide students a more positive educational experience and lead to lifetime success (Armstrong, 2012). Creating such an environment is more easily accomplished in a homeschool than a conventional school. It would only take a commitment from the parents to do so, whereas the public school system would require an entire shift in educational practices from top to bottom. A strengths-based, talent-focused approach was found to be successful with twice exceptional-learners in a private school setting that was created explicitly for the purpose of testing this theory (Baum, Schader, & Hebert, 2014).

Lack of Student Perspective

Almost all of the homeschooling literature to date has been shared through the perspective of the parents, rather than the students themselves (Murphy, 2014). One exception to this was a thesis prepared by Nelson (2014), in which she interviewed both parents and students in the United Kingdom regarding their viewpoints of homeschooling

and discovered a generally positive attitude about the experience and outcomes. Parsons and Lewis (2010) reiterated the obligation that researchers have to explore the homeschooling experience from the student perspective, particularly when the students have SEN. However, gaining access to minors as research participants is a lengthy process, requiring extended IRB consultation for approval and procurement of parental consent and minor assent (Walden University, 2017). Participants with ADHD would also be considered to be a vulnerable population, requiring similar IRB consultations (Walden University, 2017). It is possible that this extended process of ethics approval may play a part in the lack of research conducted from the prospective of homeschool students with SEN. Much can be learned through the parents' perceptions; however, the whole picture cannot be painted without insight from the students who are being educated in this manner.

Van Schalkwyk and Bouwer (2011) conveyed the importance of understanding the homeschooling experience in light of the different microsystems that overlap in the homeschooling environment. Due to the personal identity of each homeschool, it is important to understand the unique facets that intertwine to make up each student's individual reality. For example, although it is common to assume that school and home would overlap for these students, knowing how the academics are structured would bring a better awareness of the experience. Furthermore, the inclusion of additional microsystems in the students' lives, such as homeschool co-ops, extracurricular activities, and jobs, provides a much more complete depiction of the essence of a homeschooler's life (van Schalkwyk & Bouwer, 2011).

Because small, qualitative studies are ideal for delving into the life experiences of any population, but especially one that has not been researched extensively, there are only a few examples available from which to draw information. In one such study, there seemed to be some contradiction between how the parents thought their child felt about homeschooling and how the child actually felt (van Schalkwyk & Boucher, 2011).

Whereas this may be concerning on the surface, it is important to recognize that, of the four homeschools participating in this study, the authors chose to focus on only one child in a family who had chosen a lifestyle of isolation. There was another family in this multiple case study in which the parent and child were both satisfied with their homeschooling experience, possibly because the parent took the child's opinions and ideas about his education into account (van Schalkwyk & Boucher, 2011). To truly begin to form an idea of what an average homeschooler's perception might be, many more students would have to be studied, while always keeping in mind the range of possibilities that exist in the way that a homeschooling environment is structured.

Jones (2013) conducted a more recent study in the United Kingdom using a technique called *photovoice*. The participants, nine homeschooled children between the ages of 7 and 14 years, used photographs, combined with verbal or written narratives, to represent their experiences. The themes that emerged from this exploration included (a) identity and development of self, (b) experiences and perceptions of learning, and (c) relationships with others. All of the participants' reports were positive, describing a good balance between parent-led and student-led learning, engagement in academic activity,

and familial support. Jones concluded that student choice, encouraged and supported by authority figures, promotes internalized motivation for learning.

Although most homeschooling parents report satisfaction with social opportunities for their students, there is a lack of research concerning how the students themselves feel about their social lives (Cook et al., 2013). Loten (2011) completed a small study with three participants who were homeschooling students with learning disabilities. Each had experienced frustrating social interactions but had found their own niche where friendships could blossom.

In addition to a lack of research from the perspective of homeschooling students, there is also a lack of research from the perspective of individuals with ADHD. Hareendran et al. (2015) took on the task of creating a self-report instrument that would aid researchers in obtaining data from adolescents with ADHD regarding their personal experiences. These authors felt that the increasing autonomy of adolescents and growing separation from their parents made it imperative to gather information about their experiences from the adolescents' own perceptions, as parents may know less about their day-to-day functioning than they would have when their children were younger.

Conclusion

This literature review has provided an overview of the current pertinent research available on the topics of homeschooling, ADHD, and the relationship of the two. The growing number of families choosing to educate at home requires researchers to dig deeper, beyond the common topics of academic achievement and social interaction, to grasp the experiences of the students themselves. This is especially important within

subgroups, such as the ADHD homeschooling population. The modern homeschooling movement has claimed its spot among viable educational choices, so it should be treated as such in future literature. The focus should no longer be whether or not it is a valid option. Instead, researchers should shift their attention to the actual process of educating children in this manner, including studies of all of the subgroups that are analyzed in traditional schooling. In the current study, I aimed to provide foundational knowledge of one of those groups that will, hopefully, act as a springboard for continued research of the understudied population of homeschooled students with ADHD. The next chapter will describe the methodology that was used to complete this qualitative phenomenological study. By digging deeper into the experiences of a few current and former homeschool students who have reported ADHD symptoms, I was able to explore themes that emerged, and thus provide a more thorough understanding of the perceptions of members of this significant subgroup of the homeschooling population.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the personal experiences of current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms. This chapter will explain the research methodology that was followed to answer the research questions. The first section will describe the qualitative research design of phenomenology and offer a rationale for that choice. Next, my role as the researcher will be discussed, including the important aspect of *epoche*, or bracketing myself out of the study. Details of the methodology, such as participant selection, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis, will then be outlined. Finally, issues of trustworthiness and ethics will be addressed.

Research Design and Rationale

The main research question that was asked for this study is this: How do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms describe their individual experiences within a homeschool environment? Subquestions include: (a) How do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive the individualized approach of homeschooling?; (b) What are the factors of individualized education in a homeschool environment that current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms consider to be important?; and (c) What factors do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive as challenging within a homeschool environment? The central phenomenon of the study was individualized education within a homeschooling environment for students with ADHD symptoms. For

the purposes of this study, individualized education was defined as learning environments and teaching methods that are tailored to the specific needs of a student. Homeschooling was defined as education that takes place outside of a public, private, or charter school, and in which the parent is responsible for the schooling of the child. In addition to the official diagnosis of ADHD, as defined by the DSM-5, I also included those who have reported symptoms relating to attention, focus, and/or hyperactivity, that have negatively impacted learning, but have not been formally diagnosed. The reasons for this will be explained in the section on participant selection logic.

Phenomenology was the qualitative research design that was chosen to explore the experiences of current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms. This method works well when very little is known about how a particular phenomenon is experienced, as is the case for this topic. Moustakas (1994) described a transcendental phenomenology, in which the focus is placed on the actual experiences of the participants through their own words, rather than the researcher's interpretations of the meaning of their words. Themes are derived from quotes and statements of the participants, and these themes provide both a textural and a structural description of the phenomenon. The textural description illustrates what was experienced, whereas the structural description depicts how it was experienced (Creswell, 2013). The portrayal of these two descriptions provided the essence of the phenomenon being studied.

I originally intended to use a multiple case study design for this research project, as the lack of reliable demographic information for this population might cause difficulty in sample selection. I was especially drawn to Yin's (2014) strategy, because it involves

real-world phenomena where context will most likely impact experiences of the cases. Context is extremely important when looking at the experience of homeschooling. There are so many different methods and practices utilized that finding two homeschoolers, even within the same family, who have identical experiences would be almost impossible. Therefore, finding out how and where learning took place for the participants would be essential in understanding their perception of the experience. However, because case studies are bound by time and place, and the participants of this study will most likely have experienced homeschooling at different times and in a variety of places, the case study approach did not seem to fit as well as phenomenology.

Role of the Researcher

In a transcendental phenomenological approach, it is important for researchers to bracket themselves out of the study by disclosing their own relationship with the topic at hand. Moustakas (1994) calls this *epoche*. This allows the reader to make an informed decision regarding whether bias inadvertently played any role in the process or presentation of results. In this case, bracketing is essential, due to the personal experience that I have as a homeschooling parent. I began homeschooling my three children in 2012 as a result of several factors. However, one of those reasons was that I had a child who was falling behind in a traditional classroom due to attentional issues. My child, although never formally diagnosed, shows classic behaviors of ADHD-inattentive type. Additional learning challenges, which are often comorbid with ADHD, have since been discovered. I have witnessed first-hand the experiences of my own child in both a public school and a homeschooling environment.

Although I do admit that I have a preference toward homeschooling for my own child with learning challenges, I do not believe that it is the best fit for every child or every family. I am a proponent of individualized education. I believe deeply that each child should be offered a learning environment that will give him or her the best opportunity for success. Therefore, I support freedom of choice in education. My hope is that my readers will find that my research presents a true reflection of my participants' experiences without any influence from my own. It is important to note, however, that my involvement in the homeschooling community is likely to be an asset in obtaining access to the population. The homeschooling community at large has a history of being wary of outsiders due to the negative perception that has often been presented by those who do not approve of the practice. As a homeschooling parent, there may be a level of comfort in participation, rather than the expected apprehension that usually exists when someone asks homeschoolers if they would like to participate in a research study.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The target population for this phenomenological study was current or former homeschool students who have been diagnosed with ADHD or report typical ADHD symptoms without a formal diagnosis. The reason for inclusion of those with symptoms, but no formal diagnosis, was that parents of homeschooling children often choose to forego the testing and diagnostic process if ADHD is suspected. There are several reasons for this, including the idea that needs can be met in a flexible homeschooling

environment, thereby eliminating the need for diagnosis, and the belief that attaching disability labels to children can be emotionally damaging.

The sampling frame was accessible individuals who met the criteria. Social media homeschool and ADHD groups were used to initiate recruitment, although snowball sampling was employed to recruit the required number of participants. Criterion-based case selection was used to make sure that participants were a fit for the study (Patton, 2015). As recommended to be appropriate for phenomenological studies by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), 12-15 participants who met the following requirements, based on self-report, were chosen:

1. Diagnosed with ADHD or presented with symptoms relating to attention, focus, and/or hyperactivity that adversely affected academic pursuits
2. Current or former homeschool student who is 12-21 years of age

Instrumentation

Face-to-face or phone interviews were used as the primary source of data. This data collection technique was appropriate to answer the research questions, providing information pertaining to the actual thoughts and feelings of the participants. Each participant was interviewed by the researcher on a single occasion following the interview protocol found in Appendix A. All questions were open-ended. The interview process provided ample documentation of the participants' perceptions of their own experiences. This formed the basis of phenomenon in their own words, without personal interpretation by the researcher, and effectively answered the research questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I initiated recruitment by posting advertisements on homeschooling and ADHD social media pages. This was the preferred method of recruitment, as it had the best potential of providing a wide range of participant experiences from different homeschooling approaches and demographic backgrounds. Recruitment through homeschooling co-ops or other organizations was not needed, as a sufficient number of participants were found through social media and related snowball sampling. Such recruitment was only to be used as a last resort in order to avoid compiling too homogenous a group. Selection criteria was established via self-report or parent-report. Adult participants or parents of minor participants were asked to sign an informed consent form that outlined their voluntary participation, confidentiality, data collection process, and right to decline to answer questions or withdraw participation at any time. Minor participants were asked to sign a child assent form that covered their rights and responsibilities and asked for their agreement to participate. Participants were compensated with a \$20 gift card for their time and were offered a summary of the results of the final project.

I interviewed each participant on one occasion via face-to-face or phone interviews. I contacted each participant via the contact information provided to me on the recruitment form. During that initial contact, either a phone call or email, I confirmed that potential participants met the inclusion criteria and emailed the appropriate consent forms. When consent was obtained, the interview was scheduled as either a face-to-face meeting or phone call. If the participant agreed to meet in person, I arranged for the

interview to take place at an agreed upon time in a quiet but public location, such as a study room at the public library. For minor participants, I went over the child assent form with them again before beginning the interview, answered any questions, and asked if they still wished to participate. Each interview was expected to last approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was recorded using two audio recording devices. Within two weeks of the interview, I provided the participants with a transcript that I prepared and requested that the participant read it to ensure their thoughts were accurately communicated. I offered to read the transcript to minor participants, if needed. Any changes needed to be submitted to me within one week of receiving the transcript. Once the participant was satisfied that their thoughts had been accurately communicated, I sent a note of thanks with an approximate project completion date.

Data Analysis Plan

Interviews were the primary data source, resulting in a large amount of data that required an in-depth process of coding (Patton, 2015). I manually coded the data. Following Moustakas' (1994) modification of van Kaam's structure, horizontalization was accomplished by highlighting all significant statements that were relevant to the experience. Next, the invariant constituents were established through a process of reduction and elimination. To accomplish this step, each of the significant statements were tested to determine whether; (a) "it contain(ed) a moment of the experience that (was) a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it", and; (b) it was "possible to abstract and label it" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). When only the invariant constituents remained, they were divided into clusters of meaning and given thematic

labels. These themes were then verified against the transcript of each participant's interview to ensure that they accurately reflected the true experiences that were portrayed. An individual textural (experiences of the participant) and structural (context of influence) description was prepared for each participant. Finally, the composite description was written to represent the essence of the phenomenon of being a homeschooling student with ADHD symptoms.

Data saturation was reached when no new data were being collected from which new themes could emerge. This is typically accomplished with about twelve participants in a study of this type (Guest et al., 2006), and proved to be true for my study as well. Although I did not continue to recruit more participants in order to purposefully seek out those who may have contrasting experiences from the majority, as is sometimes desirable in grounded theory research (Leitz & Zayas, 2010), negative case analyses did arise. Such deviations were acknowledged as an important aspect of the research, providing a more thorough description of the breadth of experiences that are possible within the phenomenon of homeschooling with ADHD symptoms (Preissle, 2008). I reported negative case analyses with a thorough textural and structural description of those participants' experiences and made mention in the composite description that an anomaly to the trend had occurred. This allows the reader to draw his or her own conclusions regarding meaning.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility is the qualitative equivalent to quantitative internal validity and shares the same level of importance to the study. The main source of credibility for this study

was member checks. Each participant was asked to read the transcript of his or her own interview and verify that accurate communication of personal thoughts and feelings regarding experiences as a homeschooling student with ADHD symptoms took place. Because the authentic portrayal of the participants' perceptions is the purpose of a phenomenological study, it was essential to preserve the participants' own viewpoints as I moved from gathering data to analyzing and reporting it. Proper inclusion of negative case analyses that occurred further adds to the credibility of the study (Preissle, 2008).

Transferability occurs when the readers of a report are able to determine whether the information provided would be applicable in their own situations. In a phenomenological study, one of the best ways to accomplish this is to provide a thick description of the phenomenon with details of setting and experiences (Creswell, 2013). For this study, it was important to describe the homeschooling approach used, number of years homeschooled, family demographics and relational aspects, as well as any other information that gave insight into the participants' perception of their experiences. Some basic demographic questions were asked in the informed consent form, and the participants were given the opportunity to further explain the answers at the beginning of the interview (Appendix A). Providing a sample of participants from varying backgrounds and homeschooling methods aided in extending transferability to a wider range of readers.

Dependability is the qualitative counterpart to quantitative reliability. In this study, it was accomplished by actual quotes from the transcripts being used heavily in both the textural and structural descriptions. This provided plausible congruence between

the data and the report. Dependability was further reinforced with the inclusion of negative case analyses, including quotes from participants whose experiences seemed to be quite different from the majority of the other participants. This full disclosure reinforced that the data are dependable and that I was dedicated to present the results without bias or exclusion.

Confirmability was established through reflexivity. I initially used *epoche* to bracket myself out of the study. After data were gathered and analyzed and the descriptions were written, I used reflexivity to relate my own experiences back to the problem statement in light of the experiences of the participants. Through this process, I examined whether my experiences had had any impact on the research process or my portrayal of the participants' experiences. I also evaluated whether the research process or participants' experiences had any impact on my own thoughts and feelings regarding homeschooling with ADHD symptoms.

Ethical Procedures

In order to uphold the utmost ethical procedures, Institutional Review Board (IRB) permissions and approvals for Walden University IRB approval #05-09-17-0359142 were strictly followed. Participant recruitment only began after IRB approval was in place. Informed consent was obtained from adult participants or parents of minor participants. Child assent was obtained from minor participants prior to data collection and explained the data collection process, including the participants' opportunity to review the interview transcripts and refuse participation. Because social media groups were the main avenue of recruitment, it could have proven difficult to maintain

confidentiality of potential participants during the recruitment process. People may have wanted to respond directly to the recruitment post, either for themselves, their children, or their friends. To negate this problem, comments were turned off on the recruitment post, and a link to a secure recruitment form was provided instead. During the interview process, participants were asked permission before recording devices were activated and reminded that they were free to decline answering any questions. The same interview protocol was used with all participants, but due to the exploratory nature of this phenomenological study, flexibility to allow the participants to add any information they deemed important was granted, within reasonable time constraints.

Treatment of Data

Electronic data were stored on both a password-protected file in my computer and a password-protected external drive. Hard copies of any information were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home, as were recording devices when not in use. Codes, rather than names, were used on all data, and pseudonyms were used when quotes were included in the report. Data were available to my dissertation committee upon request, but codes were used in that case as well. I kept a record of any participants who wanted a copy of the findings in a separate password-protected file from the data. Data will be destroyed after five years, as required by the university.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology that was used in this research study. Phenomenology was chosen as the best method, due to the fact that I was endeavoring to establish foundational knowledge of the experiences of current or former homeschool

students who report ADHD symptoms. I bracketed myself out of the study but used reflexivity at the end of the study to reestablish my position as a homeschooling parent and acknowledge any relationship between that role and my role as a researcher. Participant selection logic and instrumentation were discussed, as well as recruitment, participation, and data collection and analysis procedures. Finally, issues of trustworthiness, including ethical treatment of data and participants, were conferred. Results of the study will be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the personal experiences of current or former homeschool students who reported ADHD symptoms using the qualitative research method of phenomenology. The main research question was: How do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms describe their individual experiences within a homeschool environment? Subquestions included: (a) How do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive the individualized approach of homeschooling?; (b) What are the factors of individualized education in a homeschool environment that current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms consider to be important?; and (c) What factors do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive as challenging within a homeschool environment? The central phenomenon of the study was individualized education within a homeschooling environment for students with ADHD symptoms.

This chapter will begin with a general description of the demographics of the participants, as a group. Data collection methods will then be explained. Next, the data analysis procedures will be outlined, and emergent themes will be discussed. Evidence of trustworthiness will then be presented. Finally, the results will be presented, discussing the themes in greater detail, including details of each participant's experiences through complete textural and structural descriptions. This will be followed by a similar description of the essence of the phenomenon of homeschooling with ADHD symptoms within a composite textural and structural description of the experience.

Setting

Participant recruitment was initiated through social media. Posts were made on homeschooling group pages, and a link was provided to my recruitment page. Potential participants or their parents clicked through to the web form where they provided contact information. I then contacted them via email and sent the appropriate consent forms. Once the consent forms were reviewed and participation was agreed upon, an interview time was set up. Nine interviews were conducted face-to-face in private rooms at the local public library. Three interviews were completed over the phone. Interviews took place over the course of four and a half months, with the first occurring on July 30, 2017 and the final taking place on December 12, 2017.

There were no known extenuating circumstances during any of the interviews that influenced the responses of the interviewees or the interpretation of the interviewer. Two parents of minor participants chose to stay in the room for the interviews, but this did not seem to affect the participants negatively. One parent spoke once during an interview because the participant could not remember how many years he had been homeschooled. The other parent did not speak during the interview. The possibility of parents of minor participants being present for the interviews was addressed in the methods chapter and was fully acceptable. The minor participants were given opportunity to choose not to complete the interview if they were not comfortable doing so with a parent present.

Table 1

Demographics of Homeschool (HS) Participants

Name	Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Grades HS	Current grade	Co-op?	HS format
Evalyn	White	F	17	K-Present	12	Yes-Preferred	Traditional/Co-op
Will	White	M	13	4-Present	9	Formerly-Not Preferred	Traditional
Morgan	White	F	14	K-Present	9	Formerly-Preferred	Online
Connor	White	M	12	2-Present	6	Yes-Preferred	Traditional/Co-op
Francesca	White/Hispanic	F	21	8-12	College	Formerly-Not Preferred	Traditional
Brian	White/Hispanic	M	14	1-Present	9	Formerly-Not Preferred	Traditional
Ivy	White	F	16	9-Present	11	No	Online
Ava	Black	F	12	2 nd ½ K-Present	7	Yes-Preferred	Traditional/Co-op/Online
Juliana	Native American	F	19	3-8; 10-12	College	Yes-Preferred	Traditional/Co-op
Michael	Native American	M	12	K-2; 4-Present	6	Yes-Preferred	Traditional/Co-op
Timothy	White/Hispanic	M	12	K-Present	6	Yes-Preferred	Traditional/Co-op
Ben	White	M	18	K-12	Internship	Yes-Preferred	Traditional/Co-op

Demographics

There were 12 participants in this study, ranging in age from 12-21 years of age. The demographic information can be found in Table 1. Seven were ages 12-14 years, and five were ages 16-21 years. Interestingly, half of the participants were male, and half were female. Of the older group (16-21 years), however, there was only one male participant, and of the younger group (12-14 years), there were only two female participants. Four participants were in middle school, five were in high school, and three were in college or doing internships. The ethnic diversity of the participants was exceptional, especially for such a small sample. Half of the sample identified as White, three identified as White/Hispanic, two identified as Native American, and one identified as Black.

Three participants were homeschool graduates, and the rest were current homeschool students. Four had always been homeschooled, but three more had spent only one year or less in a traditional school setting. Those remaining had been homeschooling for an average of 5.8 years. Two participants had gone to a private school after being homeschooled, but then returned to homeschooling after one to two years. Although a plethora of homeschooling styles was represented, and these labels do not tell the full story of any participant's experience, three were traditionally homeschooled, six combined traditional homeschooling with co-op participation, two exclusively attended an online school, and one employed a mixture of traditional homeschooling with co-op participation and an online school.

As was mentioned in previous chapters, participants may have been diagnosed with ADHD or reported symptoms without a diagnosis. Five had an ADHD diagnosis, and one was expecting a diagnosis soon from recent testing that had occurred. The other half reported symptoms but had not been formally diagnosed. Eight participants had never been medicated for their symptoms. One had taken medication for several years when she was younger but had not taken it in a few years. Three were currently taking medication for their symptoms.

Data Collection

Data collection took place over the course of 4.5 months. All data were collected through semistructured interviews using the interview protocol (Appendix A). Each participant was interviewed once. Nine interviews were done face-to-face, and three were completed over the phone. Each interview was recorded with two audio devices, and the recordings were used to create a transcript. I transcribed the interviews myself, as I felt that would help me to become more familiar with the data. The data collection process took place in the manner described in Chapter 3, with only one variation. The interviews lasted from 15 to 43 minutes, and not the 45 to 60 minutes that had been estimated, with an average time of 25 minutes. Some participants had much to share, but others were not as talkative.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were transcribed, I went through each one line-by-line to code the data according to the participants' own statements, taking care to ensure the

statements were taken in context to ensure validity. A sample of this line-by-line coding can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Sample of Interview Excerpt Line-by-Line and Focused Coding

Raw data	Line-by-line coding	Focused coding
Q. Tell me a little bit now about your difficulties with attention, focus, and/or hyperactivity.		
A. Well, when it comes to school, like, a lot of times, I have trouble just sitting there and, like, completely focusing on it. I'm definitely, like, up and down, kinda like scatter-brained all over the place, and sometimes it could take me a little while to actually sit down and get to work. I usually will have to take a break, like, in between each subject, or sometimes I can go like two subjects, but I always need that little break, or I can't focus.	Need to get up and move School takes longer Needs breaks	Hyperactivity Impact on learning Flexibility of schedule

This process followed Moustakas's (1994) modification of van Kaam's structure, achieving horizontalization by highlighting all significant statements that are relevant to the experience. The invariant constituents were then established through a process of reduction and elimination. Each of the significant statements was tested to determine whether; (a) "it contain(ed) a moment of the experience that (was) a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it", and; (b) it was "possible to abstract and label it" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The invariant constituents were then divided into clusters of meaning and given thematic labels. These themes were verified against the transcript of each participant's interview to ensure that they accurately reflected the true experiences that were portrayed. Later in this chapter, an individual textural (experiences of the participant) and structural (context of influence) description for each participant

will be presented, as well as the composite description written to represent the essence of the phenomenon of being a homeschool student with ADHD symptoms.

A number of codes were identified as the line-by-line coding was completed. Although there were certain codes that were applied to several different participants, there were also some that may have only been applied to one or two. I did not throw any code out, however, based on how many participants or statements to which it applied. I felt it was important to preserve the breadth of the experience and include any deviances from the norm, so as to present a true reflection of the experiences of all of my participants. This better allows for readers to understand the range of possibilities when homeschooling with ADHD symptoms and make the most informed decisions regarding whether it would be a good fit for their needs. A sample of coding for a negative case analysis can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Sample of Interview Excerpt Line-by-Line and Focused Coding for Negative Case Analysis

Raw data	Line-by-line coding	Focused coding
Q. Tell me how you would compare being homeschooled to going to regular classes.		
A. Um, for me, going to regular classes was better, because it was a schedule, and there were deadlines. Which with homeschooling, there's supposed to be deadlines, but it's your parent, so I had no motivation. So, I would stay in bed longer than I was supposed to, and like, I wouldn't do what I was supposed to do. I don't know. That's why it took me an extra year to graduate. I don't have self-discipline, and so the discipline in place at public schools is better for me.	Needs stricter deadlines Not motivated by parent School takes longer Lack of self-discipline	Others' Expectations Impact on learning Self-motivation

There were three global themes that emerged from the data: *individualization*, *self-concept*, and *experience of symptoms*. I utilized a web map to visualize the thematic networks of each theme, moving from basic themes into organizing themes, and finally, into global themes, as was suggested by Attride-Stirling (2001). I chose to use the Attride-Stirling terminology of global themes, organizing themes, and basic themes throughout the remainder of this report, as I feel it provides a good description of how the thematic structure emerged. A sample of the code book with interview excerpt can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4

Sample of Coding Book with Interview Excerpt

Code	Description	Example
Individualization (Theme 1)	Flexibility of school day	<p>“I would get up in the morning and kind of just relax a little bit. Our mornings were pretty lax. Eat breakfast, just kind of get things going. And then, I would primarily do all of my school work in, like, the late afternoon into the evening. I never really had, like, a set schedule. Like, I’m gonna do English at 2:00, or anything like that. It was kinda just, like, whatever I was in the mood to do. Or, like, just however much work I had to do. I would, like, start on that first, and do the easier stuff later. But, I would say each day as a little different. But for the most part, like, I kinda just picked out what I wanted to do. There wasn’t, like, a set schedule.” (Juliana)</p> <p>“Well, again, it’s with the flexible schedule thing, because my plan for the future, as of now, is to do something in musical theater, and I’m going to be taking a dance class. I don’t know exactly when the classes will be held, but I know that my mom and I will make time for them, and then I’ll do school work at another time. Like, if it’s in the daytime, I can do my work at night, so there’s always, it’s lots of flexible schedule.” (Evalyn)</p>

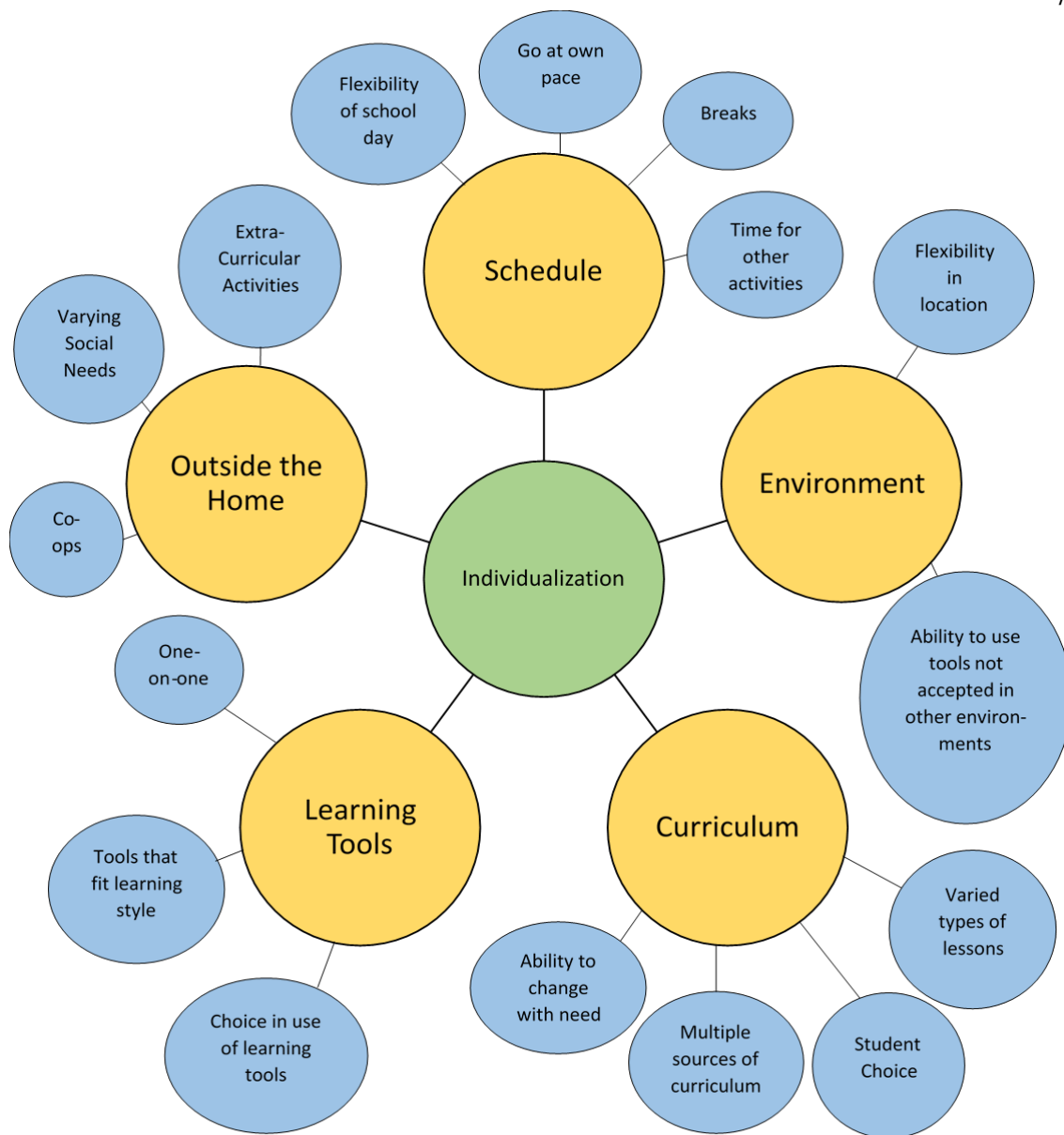


Figure 1. Thematic web of global theme 1: Individualization. Basic themes (blue) led to organizing themes (yellow). Organizing themes led to global theme (green).

Some of the most recurrent codes that were noted from multiple participants included flexibility (in schedule, environment, and learning methods), participation in learning co-ops, learning tools (one-on-one teaching, auditory/visual/hands-on learning), and focus tools (music, movement, comfort). These types of codes were organized into the categories of schedule, environment, curriculum, learning tools, and outside the home. The theme of individualization emerged from this family of codes (Figure 1).

Self-concept was the next theme that was identified. This emerged from the categories of codes that showed how the participants viewed themselves and their experiences in terms of ADHD symptoms, emotions, academics, internal talk, and external influences (Figure 2). The codes in this family included those that addressed the participants' perspectives regarding motivation and expectations (internal and external), academic challenges and successes, stress/anxiety, sense of belonging, and management of ADHD symptoms on an emotional and relational level.

The final major theme that came to light was the participants' individual experience of their ADHD symptoms (Figure 3). Each participant described their experiences with focus and hyperactivity and talked about how their learning was impacted. Many talked about how their experiences had changed over time, due to learning how to manage their symptoms or just by finding things that worked for them. I also included here behaviors that I noticed during the interviews that seemed to be related to their ADHD symptoms, such as real-time loss of focus and memory problems.

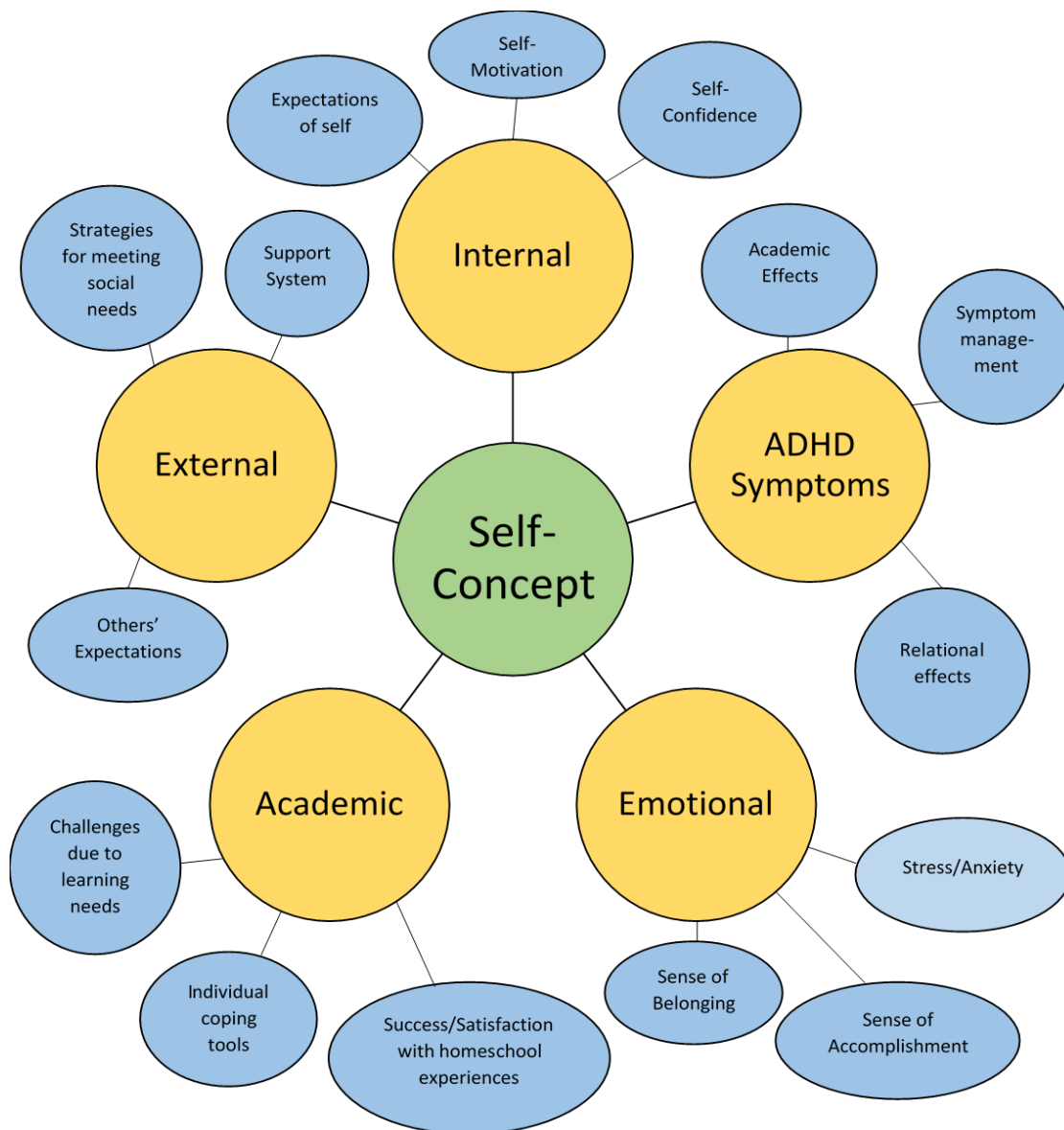


Figure 2. Thematic web of global theme 2: Self-concept. Basic themes (blue) led to organizing themes (yellow). Organizing themes led to global theme (green).



Figure 3. Thematic web of global theme 3: Experience of symptoms. Basic themes (blue) led to organizing themes (yellow). Organizing themes led to global theme (green).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The main source of credibility for this study was member checks. Each participant was asked to read the transcript of his or her own interview and verify that accurate communication of personal thoughts and feelings regarding experiences as a homeschooling student with ADHD symptoms took place. This was an essential step to provide an authentic portrayal of the participants' perceptions and preserve their own viewpoints throughout the process. Only two of the participants made changes to their transcripts, because they felt like their original words did not correctly or fully explain their thoughts. The rest were approved with no changes. There were a few instances of negative case analysis, in which a participant's experience seemed to veer from that of the majority. I made sure to include those instances in order to further add to the credibility of the study (Preissle, 2008). Morse (2014) states, "Comparison of the negative cases with the more commonly occurring cases will reveal important differences, and it is the developing understanding of these differences that is often critical to understanding the process as a whole" (p. 1215). I think it is important to note, however, that, even though there is some similarity between the experiences of some of my participants, the nature of homeschooling is very individualized. That individualization, combined with each participant's perception of their experiences, meant that there was a good level of variability among all participants, even among the two sets of siblings that I interviewed.

The main goal of a phenomenological study is to help readers understand the essence of an experience. Providing a thick description of the phenomenon helps to

establish transferability, so the readers of a report can determine whether the information provided would be applicable in their own situations. For this study, some basic demographic questions were asked on the informed consent, and the participants were given the opportunity to further explain the answers at the beginning of the interview (Appendix A). The participants in this study described their homeschooling experiences in much detail, providing information regarding the homeschooling approach used, number of years homeschooled, family demographics and relational aspects, environmental details, and their personal thoughts on the way in which their ADHD symptoms have impacted their life and learning.

Although I did not purposively recruit participants who would be representative of the widest range of possible backgrounds, it was fortunate that the small sample included four different ethnicities, an equal number of males and females, and the full range of possible ages that were eligible for the study. Within the group, there was also a wide range of ways in which homeschooling was executed, including traditional homeschooling, homeschool co-ops, online schools, and several combinations of these choices. Most participants came from two-parent families, but there was one who came from a single-parent family. The varying backgrounds and homeschooling methods represented allows for transferability to a wider range of readers.

Dependability was accomplished through the use of quotes from the transcripts, including textural and structural descriptions. In this way, congruence between the data and the report were maintained. I made sure to include quotes within the context the participant intended and incorporated quotes that represented negative case analyses. Full

disclosure was important in ensuring that the data are dependable and presented without bias or exclusion.

I initially used *epoche* to bracket myself out of the study, and now I will use reflexivity to establish confirmability and relate my own experiences back to the problem statement in light of the experiences of the participants. As I previously disclosed, I am a homeschool parent who has a child with ADHD symptoms. I believe that homeschooling has been the best academic fit for my child, but I support freedom of choice in education as each family strives to provide their children with the learning experience that meets their individual needs. It is now crucial for me to examine whether my experiences had any impact on the research process or my portrayal of the participants' experiences and evaluate whether the research process or participants' experiences have had any impact on my own thoughts and feelings regarding homeschooling with ADHD symptoms. As a human, it is expected that I will have my own opinions and ideas concerning just about everything. As a researcher, however, I strive to separate those opinions and ideas from my data so that I can provide an honest and unbiased report that truly reflects the experiences of my participants.

I did have to check myself a few times throughout this process to make sure that I kept my personal thoughts at an arm's length while diving deeply into subject matter for which I care a great deal. One of the most prominent feelings that I had to resist was the desire to act as a liaison between parents and children when children revealed to me that they felt their needs might be better met if certain changes were made in their homeschooling experience. Because I was not a counselor in this instance, I had to

separate myself from that role, but I secretly hoped that the parents would read the transcript and take their child's words to heart. It is my belief that homeschool parents who have not been trained in making modifications or accommodations for students with learning disabilities sometimes do not know how to or even that they can. I believe that a trap these and other homeschool parents often fall into is being a slave to the curriculum. They may feel like they have to stick with the curriculum they have, because they spent so much money on it, and that they have to do every single lesson and activity that is listed in the curriculum. In my opinion, this is not good practice with kids who do not have learning disabilities, much less those who do. Curriculum writers do not know students personally. They cannot possibly be the expert on every child. They provide a guide. It is the teacher's job to identify the needs of the student and plan lessons and activities accordingly. This is true (or at least should be, in my opinion) in every educational setting. So, this area proved to be a red flag for me due to my strong views. I did recognize it and made note of it so that I would be aware of how it might potentially affect my interpretation of the interviews.

I found myself empathizing with both the students and their parents, as I identified with both of their roles. It is probably easy sometimes for a kid with ADHD symptoms to get frustrated, not want to try (because it just takes so much energy to focus, and they often still struggle even when they are trying their hardest) and use their symptoms as an excuse to just say they cannot do it. It is tough for parents/teachers to know if they really cannot do something or if they just do not want to try, because it is so

hard for them. I have been there with my own kids, and it is difficult to know how much to push them without pushing too much and causing them to become overwhelmed.

I also found that I was personally affected in my thinking as a homeschool parent as I listened to these students describe their individual needs and struggles. Although I have always tried to listen to my children and work with them to create the best possible learning experience, I believe that I became more aware of certain areas that I have neglected and need to be more cognizant of in the future. I do not ever want to hinder my own child's learning because I am more concerned with what I think their learning experience should look like than what they are telling me it needs to be. Through this process, the need for training opportunities for parents of homeschool students with ADHD symptoms and other learning challenges was forefront in my mind as an area where I can possibly serve this community in the future.

Results

As was mentioned previously, the three global themes that emerged from the data were *individualism*, *self-concept*, and *experience of symptoms*. These themes can best be understood by first getting to know each of the participants through a textural and structural description of their individual experiences. Once the reader is familiar with each participant and their perception of their experiences, I will compile a composite description of the essence of homeschooling with ADHD symptoms, addressing the research question and subquestions, as well as the global themes.

Textural and Structural Participant Descriptions

As was previously stated, following Moustakas's (1994) modification of van Kaam's method, textural (experiences of the participant) and structural (context of influence) descriptions were needed for each participant. Those descriptions are provided in this section. Keep in mind that some participants were more forthcoming than others in their interviews, so some descriptions are more thorough than others.

Evalyn. Evalyn is a 17-year-old white female who is currently a senior in high school and has always been homeschooled. She was diagnosed with ADHD around age 8 or 9.

Textural description. Because of her mom's work as an evening nurse at the local hospital, Evalyn usually starts her school day around 11:00 a.m. and goes until around 5:00 p.m., which works well for her. "Since my mom has a later schedule, we tend to wake up later, unless we have a class that morning at a co-op or an extracurricular activity." Extracurricular activities and co-ops have been a positive part of Evalyn's homeschooling experience.

Although her family has a designated school room where she does a lot of her work, she admitted that she prefers to work at her desk in her room, where she can "get it all down and get focused." Most of Evalyn's work has been book-based, but she has used videos for math. She prefers books most of the time, because she can go back and look at the information again when she needs to.

"Ever since I was little, I've been very distracted easily," says Evalyn. "Whenever I got older, I got on some medication that helped me calm down and helped me be more

focused on my work, and it, like, did a 360 for me.” She stopped taking it when she was about 13 or 14. Although she still has symptoms, she feels like the medication helped her to train herself to stay much more focused. A couple of distractions she still struggles with are having her sisters around to make her laugh and seeing her bed when she works in her room. “And if I see my bed, I am tempted to just stop what I’m doing and just take a nap.”

If Evalyn did not have ADHD, she “wouldn’t need as much help trying to understand things, I’m fairly certain, because I could focus better on my activities, on my studies without my mind wandering every which direction.” As it is, her mind wonders a lot. This makes reading a challenge for her. Writing is also challenging, because she has a hard time “getting the right words to come out, because I have an idea there, but I’ll think of it, I’ll start to write it. I’ll get distracted. I’ll forget what I’m doing. I’ll forget what I’m writing.”

Music is a tool Evalyn uses to help her focus. “Most of the time I listen to gaming music, because they design gaming music to help you concentrate, you know? So, like, I guess that helps you think better.” She also finds it helpful to have a thesaurus or dictionary handy to look up words, so she does not waste time thinking about what a word means. She likes to doodle while she is listening, because it helps her focus. “Whenever I doodle, it sometimes helps me listen to the words better, because it gives me something to look at, something to focus on, but I can also focus on listening to what’s going on.”

She would suggest to other families to keep students busy with their hands, listen

to music, and make sure they get the one-on-one help they need. Homeschooling helps with the future by allowing Evalyn a flexible schedule to try more activities and develop her interests. She also values the time she has with her family. “It really allows you to be with your family more.”

Structural description.

Individualism. Flexibility is key to Evalyn’s individual experience. She needs to be able to go at her own pace, moving faster in subjects she excels in and moving slower at those that are more challenging. She even mentioned the importance of changing curriculum programs if the one she is using is not working. Flexibility in her schedule also allows for trying new things and making time for the activities she enjoys.

Self-concept. Evalyn is very outgoing and seems to be confident in herself. It was easy to interview her, because she was eager to talk about her experiences. She takes ownership of her struggles and knows how to build upon her strengths. Her family is supportive, and it seems that has played a major role in her self-development.

Experience of symptoms. Evalyn’s experience of her ADHD symptoms has changed as she has gotten older. Her symptoms have improved, and she thinks the years she was on medication may have contributed to learning how to manage them. She does still struggle with both internal and external distractions, but she has also learned what tools she can use to help her stay on track.

Will. Will is a 13-year-old white male who was interviewed just before his 14th birthday and starting his freshman year in high school. He went to public school through 3rd grade and was about to start his 6th year of homeschooling. He does not have an

official diagnosis of ADHD and has never been on medication.

Textural description. For Will, “being able to go at my own pace and not being rushed to do everything” is essential for his individual learning needs. He prefers homeschooling to his public-school experience, because homeschooling is “not so strict on the time schedule” and, therefore, “easier.” His advice to other families who are homeschooling a student with similar difficulties as he is, “Don’t be super strict...(with) getting things done in a certain amount of time or things like that,” and “Don’t expect more than, you know, than they can handle.”

I was fascinated to learn about the importance Will places on having a daily schedule, knowing how strongly he feels about going at his own pace. He uses a computer-based curriculum program that has his tasks for each day listed and marks them off as he completes them. He feels like this type of scheduling tool would be important to him even if he did not have ADHD symptoms. When he sees the lessons marked complete, it makes him feel “relieved a little, I guess.” The computer program also works well for him, because it has an audio feature that reads the lessons to him. Will gets distracted easily and feels like he always has to be doing little movements, like wiggling his toes.

Will is involved in extracurricular activities, like a homeschool band, but he does not currently attend a co-op. He did try one for a couple of years, but felt like it was “boring, harder than normal”. He would prefer to work later in the day than his current midmorning to late afternoon schedule “‘cause I’m more awake”. It is clear that the

individualized learning experience that homeschooling provides for Will is of vital importance to him.

Structural description.

Individualization. Will seems to feel that homeschooling is a much better option for him than public school. He places a great deal of value on going at his own pace. Although he has used other types of curriculum in the past, his computer-based lessons that he currently uses support his need for structure. If I were to define Will's individualized learning needs, I would use the term *flexible structure*. He needs to have his expectations laid out in a clear and organized manner, but he also needs for those expectations to be flexible to his individual learning pace.

Self-concept. I think Will is a very smart young man, but he might have a hard time communicating his knowledge to others, which can be frustrating for him. He really struggles internally when he does not do as well on a lesson as he thinks he should have. He seems to be a kid who needs a personalized learning experience that does not put him in a setting where he has to be compared to others or expected to keep someone else's predetermined pace.

Experience of symptoms. Will did not have a lot to say, but both his answers and his behavior showed classic symptoms of ADHD. He had a hard time staying focused on our talk and asked me to repeat questions a few times. There were also things that he could not remember, both from when he was in public school and from his homeschooling years and even mentioned his difficulty with his memory. Our interview took place in the summer, which made it difficult for him to remember a lot of detail

about a typical homeschooling day. He feels like his symptoms have interfered with his school on a level of about 9.75 on a scale of 1-10, so that says a lot about how much he is affected by his difficulties.

Morgan. Morgan is a 14-year-old white female who is currently in the 9th grade. She has a diagnosis for ADHD and takes medication for her symptoms.

Textural description. Morgan has always been homeschooled and is currently attending an online school. She has an outside teacher who she connects with often, and her mom's role is more to “make sure I’m, like, doing it.” She feels like the online school offers “all the benefits of public school mixed with all the benefits of being homeschooled, pretty much.” Her work is done mostly on the computer, where she reads the information and takes notes on a provided study sheet.

I think it definitely helps, because it makes me, kind of like, jot it down on paper, and it helps, so it doesn’t just go in one ear and right out the other. It helps to have something visual there when I’m doing quizzes that I can, like, review and look over.

For Morgan, choosing the timing of when she does subjects is helpful.

I feel like being able to kinda like choose how I do it throughout the day, like being able to choose like which subject I want to do first, and like how many of that subject I actually want to do a day, sort of a thing, really kinda helps me out there.

She also enjoys choosing her own topics when writing. Personalizing her education “keeps it more interesting and more intriguing for me to want to do it.” It’s important for

her to have something “in the mix that’s somewhat interesting to me.” If there is nothing for her to look forward to in her school work, she does not want to do it.

Her brother is around during the day, but she usually works by herself in her room. Being at her desk helps her to stay focused.

I used to do it on my bed, which was not good, ‘cause then I’d just get too comfortable and kinda like, just not, I don’t know. It helps me kind of get more in the mode and kind of like, okay, I need to get this done, sort of a thing.

She has attended co-ops in the past and really enjoyed them, but she is not currently attending one. She is involved in several extracurricular activities that provide motivation for her school work. “It kinda gives me, sort of like, a reward in some ways, to kind of like push myself to do better in school, so I can keep on doing those activities.”

Morgan has trouble focusing and described herself as "scatter-brained", so it takes her awhile to get started sometimes. She needs several breaks throughout the day. “I usually will have to take a break in between each subject, or sometimes I can go like two subjects, but I always need that little break, or I can’t focus.” She has some difficulties with hyperactivity, but it is more internal than external. “As far as the hyperactivity goes, just kinda like, when it gets kinda like late at night, my brain will kinda start soaring everywhere and sometimes makes it a little bit harder to go to sleep.” She has learned how to manage her symptoms better as she has gotten older.

When I was younger, I don’t know, since you don’t really know until it’s sort of like noticed, you just kind of have to deal with it and try to figure out, and you don’t know why you can’t sit there and focus. And then, I don’t know, kind of as

I've gotten older, I've learned a lot more how to deal with it and do a lot better in my school. It kinda helps when you also have teachers and parents and stuff that now know how to help you out in certain areas.

She feels like if she did not have ADHD, she'd be better at prioritizing her school work.

Since I am so, sort of like, scatterbrained with it, sometimes I'll prioritize little dumb things, like needing to organize my dresser in front of school. I feel like if I didn't have ADHD, I would kinda be like, school is way more important than this little unnecessary thing.

She likes the flexibility of her learning format and compares it to her ideas of what it would be like for her in traditional school like this:

If I were in public school, I would be like, you know, forced to get it done right that second. And with a live teacher there, I feel like I would definitely zone out some parts and not pay attention. So, I like the homeschooling, especially the textbook format, 'cause then I can go back and read over.

Morgan would, however, like to have more visually-based learning tools, such as videos and visual aids.

Her advice for other homeschooling families with a student who has ADHD symptoms is to "be patient, listen to what they're saying, and let them take those breaks when they need them and stuff like that." She feels like her experience is preparing her well for college, "'cause you're used to sitting there and having to get it done and, like, having to get all that work done on your own without a teacher standing there present."

Structural description.

Individualism. Morgan knows what her strengths and weaknesses are and does a good job of recognizing her individual needs. Because she has a different teacher every year through her online school, she has had to learn to adapt, somewhat, to the expectations of each teacher. At times, this has not been conducive to her best way of learning. She knows to incorporate breaks into her day, to work at her desk, rather than on her bed, and to make sure she is taking at least one class that really holds her interest. These are things that she has learned will help her stay on task and meet her goals.

Self-concept. Morgan is a very well-spoken young lady with a bubbly personality, who seems to have a positive outlook on life. Even though she described herself a few times as being “scatter-brained,” she seems to accept herself as she is, and she works within her strengths to find success. Through her homeschooling experiences, Morgan has learned to be an independent learner, which she believes will help her in college.

Experience of symptoms. She seems to be very aware of her symptoms, how they affect her, and what she needs to do to manage them. The inability to prioritize might be her biggest area of concern, but it does sound like she is working on that as well. Morgan described how it has been easier for her to learn to manage her symptoms since she became aware that there was a reason for them. Before she knew she had ADHD, she did not know why she could not focus, which must have been quite frustrating for her. Having that knowledge, however, has given her insight into how her mind works, and therefore, how she can find academic success.

Connor. Connor is a 12-year-old white male who is currently in the 6th grade. He is in his 5th year of homeschooling, which began in the 2nd grade. He has been

diagnosed with ADHD and is medicated for his symptoms.

Textural description. Connor does his best work in the morning. He starts school around 9:00-10:00 a.m. each day and ends around 1:00-2:00 p.m. He does not take many breaks. “I kinda work straight through.” He has one brother present during school time. “Well, my brother kinda makes me laugh a lot, and that’s kinda distracting.” Most of his work is done in workbooks, textbooks, and notebooks, but he prefers hands-on learning. He uses videos for math. He mentioned that it is sometimes helpful to “answer questions out loud to myself.” He attends a co-op that he describes as “fun. It’s really fun. You get to see your friends and hang out with them and do school.”

Connor had a hard time focusing at his old school but does better at home, because “it’s not that loud. I can go in my room, and I get done.” He struggles with attention, focus, and hyperactivity. Connor says the one-on-one help he gets from his mom helps him to be able to focus more. “Yeah, it helps to do it with my mom.” He feels like he would not get the same kind of help in regular school that he gets in homeschool. Math is challenging for him, so he would prefer doing “less math.” He gets frustrated with reading sometimes, too. For other kids who have similar difficulties and are thinking of homeschooling, Connor would tell them they would “have fun and enjoy it.”

Structural description.

Individualism. Connor did not share just a whole lot with me, but I feel like I got a pretty good idea of what homeschooling is like for him. Co-op seems to be very important to him. At home, getting one-on-one help from his mom seems to be the thing that helps him be most successful.

Self-concept. Connor is young and not much of a talker. However, I picked up on the fact that he is a fun guy and enjoys life with his family and friends. I noticed that he does get frustrated with his school work to some extent, but he seems to be able to separate himself from those frustrations and does not let himself be defined by them.

Experience of symptoms. Honestly, I do not think Connor realizes how much his symptoms have affected him, because his mom just works around his strengths and does not focus on his difficulties. It is obviously something that he knows is a problem, but he did not portray to me that he is too worried about it. It would be interesting to see how he progresses as he gets older and more autonomous in his learning. I would like to see what kind of tools he implements or skills he develops to deal with his symptoms independently.

Francesca. Francesca is a 21-year-old white/Hispanic female who was homeschooled for the last five years of her K-12 schooling (plus one extra year for repeating 12th grade). She is currently in college. She was never medicated for her symptoms.

Textural description. Francesca's description of her homeschooling experience started out as seeming to be negative.

For me, going to regular classes was better, because it was a schedule, and there were deadlines. Which with homeschooling, there's supposed to be deadlines, but it's your parent, so I had no motivation. So, I would stay in bed longer than I was supposed to, and like, I wouldn't do what I was supposed to do. That's why it

took me an extra year to graduate. I don't have self-discipline, and so the discipline in place at public schools is better for me.

At home, Francesca sort of took advantage of the system, so to speak. She would wake up late, not get started on her school work for a while, then takes lots of breaks "for snacks or whatever else." She did tell me that she feels like she works best in the evenings, so I am wondering if she had just planned to do her school work in the evenings, if she would have gotten more accomplished and been more focused. As it was, she seemed to always feel like she was behind, because there was the expectation (whether from herself or from her mom) that she should do her school work during the day.

She described a typical day as being "very messy, very scattered about". She fell asleep a lot, whether it was when her mom was trying to read to all of the kids together or when she was doing a lesson by herself. This was worse if she sat on her bed to do school work. It does not sound like there was a whole lot of oversight from her mother. She named both her mom and herself as teachers, but only mentioned mom being around if they were doing something together in the morning or if she went to sit at the kitchen table where her mom was. "Since I was older whenever I started, I could kinda do things myself and just go to her whenever I had questions or like if I needed help with writing or something like that."

Francesca did a lot of her work in textbooks, especially language arts. She used Math-U-See and really enjoyed the hands-on aspect of that. She also liked doing lessons on her computer when she was able to. She did not do well with language arts and does

not feel like she ever technically finished it. However, it seemed like she meant that she never got to the end of the particular curriculum she was using, which may not have been the best fit for her learning needs. Homeschool students with learning disabilities should have modifications and accommodations, just as traditional students with learning disabilities do. The expectation to do work (whether in quantity or level of difficulty) that was outside of Francesca's capabilities may have contributed to her lack of success.

Francesca went to a co-op for a couple of weeks but did not care for the format of the one class she tried. She is a visual learner and preferred hands-on learning, because it kept her interest better than other things. She loved to choose her own topics when writing, and that motivated her to get it done.

Choosing topics that interested me was the best. Like, especially for writing, I hated it whenever I had to choose from certain topics. Whenever I got to pick what I wanted to write about, I like went ham. Like, I did what I was supposed to do, and I got it done.

She talked a lot about getting distracted, both externally and internally, and described how her mind would go off on what I call *rabbit trails*. This is where one thing, maybe a word, might trigger a thought process that just goes from one thing to another, to another. Francesca did this internally when she was reading or being read to, but she also did it externally, when she would come across a song she liked, and then that would lead to listening to another song, and another, and so on. Difficulties with attention and focus are a problem for Francesca in other areas of her life, too. "I know I can't sit still. That's one thing. I don't know if that's, like, a problem, but I'll fidget a lot, or I'll look around at

other people. Like, not in one spot, ever.” She described how she uses doodling as a tool to help her focus in places like church. She “gets very nervous” in one-on-one situations and avoids eye contact. I am not sure if that is related to ADHD symptoms, but it could be. In college, she will “miss a whole page of notes,” because her mind was wondering.

Although Francesca had described her homeschooling experience as not being a very good fit for her learning needs throughout the first part of our interview, she then began to talk about how it was helpful to have one-on-one teaching from her mom. She mentioned the emotional benefit of being with her family where “everyone kind of understands your problems, and you can always go back and be like, ‘Hey, help me with this’, and you don’t have to worry about being left behind.” She also talked about having things “personalized to her learning style,” as opposed to a “cookie-cutter” experience that might be found in public school. She concluded that homeschooling “met her needs pretty much in every way, except for having deadlines and how you go about doing stuff.”

She also said some things that kind of explained further part of the disconnect I felt like I was getting in her feelings (that homeschooling was not a good fit and then that it met her needs in almost all areas). She has a younger brother (Brian, described in the next section) who also struggles with attention, and she feels like her mom took a lot more time with him. “I felt like sometimes I needed something, but she was dealing with Brian.” She wishes she could have had more field trips and things to make her learning more interesting.

I know a lot of homeschool families will go out on, like, field trips that pertain to what they're learning about, and we didn't really do much of that. We did a couple times, but I feel like more would have been better, especially for the way me and Brian learn.

For other families with students who have ADHD symptoms, Francesca would suggest, "If they're wanting to mess around or, like, walk around the room or something while you're reading, let them do it, 'cause it helps them focus" She said listening to classical music was helpful for her, "because it kind of gave my brain something to do while I was doing something." Using flashcards and writing things down was also helpful for her, as well as recording herself reading, so she could go back and listen to it. She feels like homeschooling prepared her for the future by giving her life skills, like cooking and independent learning. "The only thing that I wasn't prepared for was, you know, being late to class, 'cause that failed me a couple classes, being late did, a lot, so..." I felt like that statement circled back around to Francesca's lack of self-discipline and the lack of consequences she experienced as a homeschool student.

Structural description.

Individualism. Francesca's interview was very thought-provoking. Her perspective is unique, as former homeschooler who has been out of school for a couple of years and is not sure that homeschooling was the best choice for her. She started out describing an experience that seemed to be very negative, speaking of how there were no consequences, so she did not do her work most of the time. She felt that the structure of a traditional school would have been better for her. However, later in the interview, she

began to talk about how being able to use focusing tools that probably would not be allowed in traditional school had been very helpful to her. She finally concluded that the lack of structure was really the only thing that made her feel homeschooling had not been a good fit for her, and she appreciated other aspects of the experience. Still, her initial negativity about her experience is important to make note of in this study.

Self-concept. Francesca was very forthright in her admittance to having a lack of self-discipline. She did not blame anyone else for this. She insinuated, though, that having the structure of traditional school may have helped her control it. It is possible that the lack of structure and consequences in her homeschooling experience exacerbated this natural tendency. It seems as though her self-confidence is somewhat lacking as well, as characterized in her description of how she cannot look someone in the eye if she is in a one-on-one situation. It was hard to tell in one interview how much these things affect her self-concept. She seems like a content person, overall, but it is obvious that certain areas of her life have suffered from these issues.

Experience of symptoms. Francesca certainly struggles with staying focused. Her mind wanders a lot, and she has a hard time getting started on tasks. She has found some tools to help with this, such as doodling while she is listening, playing music, and recording herself reading out loud. Her symptoms still affect her in college and being in live classes has presented a whole new set of circumstances that she did not experience in homeschool. She struggles with getting to class on time and being able to stay focused in a lecture setting. I wonder if she might be more successful in an online format where the

live aspect of class is eliminated. She would, of course, have to develop more self-discipline, but that will be needed in either setting to find success in college.

Brian. Brian, the younger brother of Francesca, is a 14-year-old White/Hispanic male who is currently in the 9th grade and has been homeschooled for 8 years. He has been diagnosed with ADHD but does not take medication for his symptoms.

Textural description. Brian does most of his school work in the afternoon to evening. He feels like he would work better during the morning time, but he “just can never seem to get up.” He has a designated room for homeschooling. He does his lessons out of textbooks and writes answers in a notebook.

Brian could not really describe a regular day of homeschooling, “‘cause we’re always busy. So, a regular day would be, well, as much as I can get done.” I sensed a lot of inner conflict with Brian. Although he seemed to be distressed about not having time to complete his school work, because they are “always so busy”, he also said, “Well, it’s kinda hard staying at home all day...It’s nice to be able to get out of the house and go do other things.” He is the only child left homeschooling in his family, so this may contribute to his need to interact with others outside the home. He does not feel that he has “*very* many friends, which...just makes life a little more boring.”

Brian has attended co-ops before but does not like them. “I felt like there was, like, too much pressure to get stuff done.” He appreciates going at his own pace, but he feels like he is behind. Brian says he does not think he would “last in regular school,” because “I feel like there’s too much pressure. There would be, like, too much stress.”

When describing his ADHD symptoms, Brian said, “I get distracted really easily, and sometimes I’ll just lose my train of thought and stop thinking. Like, my mind will go blank, so I can’t think.” He does not feel like hyperactivity is an issue for him. Music helps him focus. “It just kinda drowns out other sounds...I just go for instrumental.” He likes being comfortable. He suggests that others find what works best for them. He values the life skills he has learned around the house, like “learning to work on cars. You don’t get to learn that in public school.” Overall, he feels homeschooling is a “good” fit for him.

Structural description.

Individualism. Brian did not speak too much about his actual curriculum, so it was hard to tell if he felt it was compatible with his individual needs. It was clear, however, that it is extremely important to him to be able to go at his own pace. He made several remarks that referenced his need for flexibility in his schedule.

Self-concept. Brian does not feel he would be successful in traditional school, because the time pressure would be too much. He cited the same reason for not liking homeschool co-ops. Even in his homeschool work, though, he struggles with being behind. As he told me this, I sensed a feeling of defeat in his voice. I wonder how his self-concept might improve if he was able to experience some success in his school work. Brian would like to have more friends and suffers from boredom. He seems to be a little sad about these things, but he still thinks homeschooling is the best option for him.

Experience of symptoms. Distraction is the biggest challenge Brian has with his ADHD symptoms. He has a very hard time staying focused but uses music to help him.

Waking up in the mornings is very difficult for Brian as well. This problem was also mentioned by some other participants.

Ivy. Ivy is a 16-year-old white female, who is currently in the 11th grade. She has an official diagnosis of ADHD and currently takes medication for her symptoms.

Textural description. Ivy's experience seemed quite different from many of the other participants. She did not start homeschooling until she was in high school and had always attended public school before. Her anxiety related to being around other people was mentioned several times and seemed to be a major factor in the choice to homeschool. Unlike some of the other participants who said they wished they were around more people, she would rather not be in a group setting. "It's taken a lot of stress off of me...because less people. And so, I'm able to focus more and spend more time worrying about the project that's at hand, rather than the people." She also has a different experience in that her parent does not really seem to play much of a role in her schooling. She attends an online school where she has a different teacher for each subject. However, the only interaction she has with them is through email, and she indicated that she misses having a teacher available to help her, although she does sometimes have a tutor. She also mentioned that she experiences hyperfocus at times, where she will work on something for hours without realizing how much time has passed.

Homeschooling has been a good option for Ivy due to the flexibility to go at her own pace and avoiding being around people, which causes anxiety for her. "It's taken a lot of stress off of me...because less people." She feels like homeschooling is "a lot less stressful in the sense that I can go at my own pace...I'm not being at risk of falling

behind, because I lose focus.” The length of her school day is similar to traditional school, starting around 8:00-9:00 a.m. and ending around 3:00-4:00 p.m. The number of breaks she takes “depends on the day. Sometimes I can work for hours without stopping, and sometimes I have to stop, like, every ten minutes, because I can’t focus.” She does her school work at the kitchen table where she can spread everything out and not have too much to distract her.

Ivy does most of her work online. She likes to read the lessons and take lots of notes. “There are, however, videos they use, but it’s just kind of reiterating what’s already in the lesson, and I don’t like watching those, because it just kind of throws me off.” It was interesting that she said hands-on activities are stressful to her. “I like being able to read about things and write them down, because hands-on learning, for me...it stresses me out a little bit, because I don’t know if I’m doing it right exactly, ‘cause I’m the only one here.” Something that she really enjoys, on the other hand, is choosing her own topics for writing assignments.

Ivy's difficulties have interfered with her school work quite a bit, and she has extremes to her focusing. Sometimes, she experiences hyperfocus, and other times, she has to stop frequently, because she cannot stay focused. Ivy feels like her individual needs are being met, because there are not a lot of people around, which lowers her stress level. She can also go at her own pace. “Well, everyone learns differently, and I don’t think you can truly learn a subject unless it’s being taught in a way that you understand it.” She does miss having in-person interaction with a teacher, though. She feels like she would be able to “move at a faster pace” if she did not have ADHD, and “I wouldn’t have

to keep redoing things, because I lost focus and realize that I just read, like, five pages without absorbing any of it, because my mind was somewhere else.” As far as challenges, she feels like there are “a bit more options to get distracted at home, because I have all my stuff, and I have my animals. But I also believe it’s been more beneficial for me for learning than public school.”

She enjoys having music to help her focus:

When I turn on music, it does help me get in, like, focus mode. And so, I’ll set it so I can just listen to it a thousand times and just put it in the background for background noise, and it won’t be completely silent, and that helps me a lot, to be able to stay focused.

It was interesting, however, that she prefers music with words and said it will even help her remember things. “Listening to lyrics and singing the lyrics and reading, I can re-sing the lyrics while I’m taking a test, and I’m able to remember it more.”

Ivy’s suggestion for others:

I think that you don’t need to knock it before you try it, because I know some people are opposed to it...I think you just need to try whatever you can, and if homeschooling works, that’s great. And if it doesn’t, that’s great too. There are other options.

For those who struggle with ADHD symptoms and choose to homeschool, she says, “Find some kind of tactics that work for you, whether it’s writing out every single thing that’s on the page or...listening to music or creating rhymes. Just do that and stick to it, ‘cause it will help.”

She feels like homeschooling is preparing her for college, because the classes are “set up more like online college courses, so I’ll be familiar with the set-up when I go to college and take an online course.” Overall, Ivy feels like homeschooling has been a “positive” experience for her.

Structural description.

Individualism. Ivy’s perspective is important to include in my study. Her experience is different from all of the other participants', but it is likely that there are other homeschoolers with ADHD symptoms who have similar learning experiences. Or, there could be others who are considering homeschooling and would need to follow a similar format. In Ivy's case, she is the only child still at home in a single-parent household, so her mother has to work outside the home. Traditional school did not work for her. There are aspects to her experience that might be enhanced if she had more one-on-one teaching, which was something several other participants mentioned as being a benefit of homeschooling. However, doing online school is what is necessary for her family, and she seems to be doing fine with it. There are many ways to homeschool, and there are pros and cons to each. The important thing is to find what works best for each situation. Going at her own pace and not having to be around a lot of people are the two things that appeared to be most important in Ivy’s individual situation.

Self-concept. Anxiety seemed to be a central theme to Ivy’s self-concept. She has anxiety about being around many people, which is one of the reasons homeschooling works well for her. She also experiences anxiety at home, however, when she is unsure about whether she is doing an assignment or activity correctly, because there is no one

there to guide her. She does seem content in her current environment, though. She mentioned her animals several times and seemed to be very connected to them, so I wonder if they provide the level of comfort and companionship that is just right for Ivy, given her anxiety related to being around people. She did express confidence in the decision that homeschooling is the best option for her.

Experience of symptoms. Ivy struggles with focus in extremes. She sometimes cannot stay focused at all, and other times, she experiences hyperfocus. When she is highly distracted, it is difficult for her to maintain attention for more than ten minutes at a time. To help with this, Ivy uses music to drown out background noise and as a memory tool. When she is in hyperfocus mode, several hours can pass, and she does not even realize it. The interesting thing about this for Ivy is that it can be triggered by anything. It does not have to be something that is extremely interesting to her, as is often the case for those with ADHD who experience hyperfocus.

Ava. Ava is a 12-year-old Black female who is currently in the 7th grade. She has been homeschooled since her second semester of Kindergarten. Her mother did not report whether she had ever been medicated for her symptoms, but she did indicate that she was undergoing testing, and she expected a diagnosis of ADHD. She has attended co-ops and also takes some courses through an online school.

Textural description. Ava's school days seem to be fairly structured. She wakes up earlier than most of the other participants have said they wake up. I am not sure if this is an expectation in her family or if she is just more of a morning person. She also gets started on her school work pretty quickly and gets done around the same time in early

afternoon each day. She does some subjects through an online school and some with textbooks. She has different preferences for different subjects, but it sounds like she is happy with how it is all going now. She sits on the couch for math, but does her other subjects at “our counter, because the stools are kind of uncomfortable, so it helps to just kind of stay there and get through the school work.” Ava has flexibility with her pacing, but she also has deadlines.

I can go at my own pace on...all my subjects...It's just, I have to have, like, a certain percentage to get done on the computer, and I have to get all my subjects that I do in books for my co-op done by the next time we meet.

Ava had good things to say about co-op. “I like it, because a bunch of my friends, we’ve known each other for a really long time, are together in a class.”

She does not prefer hands-on learning, because “It doesn’t really help me that much...I won’t really know that much about it unless I really study it.” She feels like she learns more by reading, listening, or watching videos than actually doing things, but she also says, “to see it helps.”

Ava says her ADHD symptoms make things “really hard” for her. She struggles with attention, focus, and hyperactivity. Noise really bothers her.

If my sister’s in the room, it’s hard to focus, because she’ll have earbuds in, and I’ll hear little noises from it, and it’s really annoying...When people are having a conversation...when I’m trying to do work, it bothers me.

She does, however, listen to music while she does some of her school work. She listens to music with words, though, so it can be distracting. “It’s just like if I’m reading a

book, I'll have to turn off my music, because I'll start singing." She does not "really take breaks when I'm doing school that much...", but when she does, it is helpful for her.

"Sometimes, I'll do a few subjects, then I'll get up and move around for a minute. Then, I'll get back on the stool that we have at our counter and just move around on it and do school work."

Ava said audio books are very helpful to her. She feels like, if she did not have things like that to meet her individual needs, she would not get done with her work "when I'm supposed to." She says reading and writing are challenging for her, which sometimes brings about an emotional struggle, especially when she is around other kids at co-op. When asked if she would like to change anything, she said "not having as many subjects as I have to do." She is required to do every subject every day, and she has trouble accomplishing that.

Structural description.

Individualism. It seemed like Ava was fairly comfortable with her homeschooling experience, but she talked about how the work load was hard for her to handle. It sounds like she would benefit from a little more flexibility in her schedule/school work, but she has figured out how to make it work as best she can. Ava's schooling is a mixture of traditional homeschooling, online school, and a co-op. This is most likely because her parents have discovered that this is what works best for her learning needs. It was interesting, though, that she told me she does two sciences-one with her online school and one from a book. It could be possible that her mother just uses two different sources for her science, and Ava views it as two different courses. A tool that has made a big impact

on Ava's ability to learn is audiobooks. She seems to use these quite a bit to help her keep on pace with her classes, as she struggles with reading. She also uses music to help her focus but might benefit from it more if she listened to instrumental music, rather than music with words, as that can sometimes be more of a distraction.

Self-concept. Ava was very careful with her words, and I could tell that she was really thinking about her answers. Overall, she seemed to be content, but it was obvious that she struggles with self-concept to some degree because of her academic struggles. She spoke of how it is hard when she is at co-op and cannot remember how to spell even small words. This might evoke a feeling of embarrassment or not being as smart as other kids. Her confidence level likely suffers.

Experience of symptoms. Ava struggles with both focus issues and hyperactivity. She has a hard time completing all of her work each day, even though she does not take many breaks. I felt like she experiences a lot of pressure to accomplish more than she feels she is capable of doing. She is very bothered by noise and has a hard time sitting still. It is possible that a decreased work load, along with more breaks, might bring Ava more of a feeling of success.

Juliana. Juliana is a 19-year-old Native American female who graduated from high school last year. She was homeschooled 3rd through 8th grade, then went to private school for a couple of years before coming back to homeschooling to finish her last two years and graduate. She is currently a student at a major university. She has never taken medication for her symptoms.

Textural description. Juliana had brain surgery when she was 14 and had some complications related to that.

I was diagnosed with it (ADHD) after my brain surgery, because that's what the doctor suggested. But my mom had always noticed that about me whenever she was homeschooling me...I always kind of had those issues of, like, needing to have my own space, or I'll get stressed out. But I didn't really know that was a problem until I was diagnosed.

She appreciated learning the reason behind her focus issues.

Juliana's homeschool days were quite relaxed. "I don't do well with mornings. I'm not a morning person." She would take it easy in the mornings and then do her school work in the late afternoon and evening. "It really did work best for me. I still work that way. Like, all of my college classes, I kind of booked them to be in the late afternoon. And then, I do my homework in the evening." She was free to choose the order of her day and school work. "I never really had, like, a set schedule." She has three brothers who were present for her homeschooling, and they shared a designated school room with a large table. Juliana prefers working at a desk. "It helps to sit down at a desk, because if I get too comfortable, I'm just gonna get sleepy, and I'm not going to be very productive." Curriculum for Juliana was "kinda different each year." She prefers to "have an actual textbook in front of me" and "take very copious notes" but has "a hard time memorizing something off of a screen."

Juliana's mom was her main teacher, but she also attended a co-op for her last two years of school. This helped, "because my mom is not a math person or a science person.

So, I was able to get some help with that, and I really enjoyed that aspect.” It also provided for a social need that she was afraid of losing when she left private school.

We kind of got, like, that social aspect of it, because I was in private school, and that was something that I told her I was going to miss...It ended up working out really well. I made a lot of friends, and I really enjoyed being in co-op...I think it was a really nice, like, just a happy medium. So, it wasn't like completely homeschooling by myself, and it wasn't having to be in a brick and mortar school either.

Going at her own pace was important for Juliana. Her mom “very much let me work at my own pace, which is helpful, that...I wasn't bound to any certain schedule.” Hands-on learning helped her “create some kind of connection” with what she was learning. She preferred to have “a guide and to know exactly what's expected of me”, rather than to choose topics she was interested in for writing and such. I was intrigued to find that she liked to have control over the timing, but not the content of her learning.

Juliana gets “very easily distracted,” and noise really “frustrates” her. This was a problem with three brothers, so she had to find a place to “isolate myself...to be able to get my work done.” The activity of others makes her “anxious” and generates hyperactivity in her. It causes her to feel like, “Oh, my gosh. I don't know what I'm doing. I need to get up. I need to do something. I can't focus.” Identifying these things in herself allowed her to gain control over them.

She says her mom was “a great resource.” She helped her academically, but also emotionally. Being in an environment that met her academic and emotional needs boosted her confidence, and she feels, helped her meet her goals.

I just found that whenever I was in an environment where my individual needs weren’t being met fully, I wasn’t confident in myself... So, being homeschooled, it was really nice, because it was made sure that I was staying on track and that I wasn’t getting stressed out and that I was getting my school work done, all those kinds of things. It was really helpful.

A challenge Juliana discussed was a lack of social interaction. “I feel like homeschoolers do kinda have to try harder to put themselves out there and make friends, just because you are a little more isolated just being at home with your siblings.” She wishes “that we had gotten involved in a co-op earlier, ‘cause I really enjoyed all the connections that we made there.” She acknowledged the other social opportunities available for homeschoolers as well.

There are homeschool afterschool things that you can do. There’s homeschool basketball teams and bands and stuff. I didn’t really do a whole lot of that, but I played with it a little bit, and that helped me to kind of stay involved and make those connections.

In the beginning of Juliana’s homeschooling journey, “allowing my mom to be the teacher was kind of weird.” Over time, she realized that no one “knows their own kid better than a mom does and recognizes whenever their own child is upset or struggling.” She now wishes she had been homeschooled “all the way through” school, because “it

just goes by so fast.” She cherishes that time that she had with her family. “I don’t know that I fully recognized that while I was homeschooled...I think it’s a great option for a lot of families.” Juliana feels that homeschooling was the best choice for her.

It’s definitely a very personal decision, I think. But for me, personally, it has definitely helped with my hyperactivity and my trouble focusing, just being able to have that attention...I think it’s a really great option for kids that are struggling with those things. I enjoyed it and it turned out really great for me. I’m kind of trying to follow the same model throughout college too.

She did acknowledge, though, that it might not be the best fit for everyone. “I would just say to give it a chance. And it’s okay if it doesn’t work. I don’t think there’s just a one-size-fits-all for school.” She suggested that students coming from a traditional system come into it with an “open mind” and be receptive to growing closer to their families. “It’s a really, really neat experience to be able to be that close with your family and to have your parent or whoever teach you. It was a really sweet time for my family. I really enjoyed it.”

She feels like her homeschooling experience gave her a “strong foundation” and “well-prepared” her for college She learned how to be academically independent through homeschooling, and it “gave me all the tools that I needed to be successful.” Overall, Juliana “loved being homeschooled.”

Structural description.

Individualism. Juliana really impressed me with the way she had come to know herself and strived to meet her personal goals in spite of her struggles. She wanted to go

to college, so she worked hard to discover her best learning methods that she could carry over and find success in that endeavor. She found that she accomplishes more in the late afternoon and evening. She also needs to be in a quiet area and works best at a desk.

Reading from a textbook and taking notes provides the best learning outcome for Juliana. She also recognizes that her emotional needs must be met in order for her to be academically successful. Her family, and especially her mother, provided that emotional support for her while she was at home. She is in college now, but she maintains a very close relationship with her family and knows that she can still depend on their support.

Self-concept. Juliana presented herself as a confident young woman who was genuinely appreciative of her homeschooling experiences and the extra time it allowed her to spend with her family. She has had to overcome a lot of adversity in her short life due to her health issues, and it seems to have fueled her quest for achievement. It really seems that her strong family ties laid the foundation for her success. Although she acknowledged her difficulties with ADHD symptoms, she did not convey them as being a hardship, but rather as a challenging part of herself that she had learned to manage.

It is important to take note of the fact that social needs were very prominent for Juliana. It sounded like she might not have had much social interaction during her early years of homeschooling. When she went to private school for the first couple of years of high school, she made many friends and realized that she did not want to lose that, even though she thought that homeschooling better met her academic needs. When she returned to homeschooling, joining a co-op really helped to fill the social gap that had been missing before. Juliana seems to be a very well-rounded, happy young adult.

Experience of symptoms. Distraction due to noise seemed to be Juliana's main symptom complaint. Growing up with three brothers in the house probably made it difficult for her to focus. She learned that she needed to go to a quiet place by herself in order to get her school work done. Like anyone with ADHD symptoms, Juliana had to find the process that worked best for her. Sometimes that involved cramming at the last minute, but she got it done in her own way. It sounds like she has a good bit of self-discipline and knows what she needs to do in order to be productive.

Michael. Michael is a 12-year-old Native American male currently in the 6th grade. He is Juliana's younger brother. He has been homeschooled for a total of five years but spent 3rd grade at a private school. He has never been medicated for his symptoms.

Textural description. Michael says his mom is "really strict about me doing school" but is relaxed in letting him move around as he needs to and take breaks. "She'll let me sit in a bean bag chair and read or go in the kitchen to get a snack and do my school." He has a brother and a friend present while he is doing school most days. The friend is homeschooled with him, and the brother sometimes helps when he has questions. It sounds like he has a pretty consistent routine from day to day. He works mostly at a table in a designated school room but will move into other areas of the house to meet his comfort needs. "And my mom will just, like, let us go wherever we want to work." He uses mostly textbooks and workbooks, as well as printed papers, for his assignments but uses a video program for math.

Michael sometimes uses hands-on learning, such as “little blocks to add up the math on,” so he can “see it.” He goes at his own pace to some extent. He mentioned watching his math videos “as many times as I want” if he does not understand it. He says his mom “just really wants me to really focus in and try to learn... basically, get the learning of a real school, but at home.” Michael’s mom lets him “take my time and actually learn and think about it, and so that’s probably an advantage I have in homeschooling.” He said, “I think that I’m learning a lot... It’s kind of hard to do the work, but whenever I figure it out, I really learn a lot...”

Michael said his mom “gives us challenging stuff”, but he knows she is trying to “get the best out of us.” He does recognize that his ADHD symptoms affect his learning to some extent. “If I didn’t have the attention deficit, I think I probably could get my school work done quicker, so... It does hurt a little bit to have the attention deficit, but it doesn’t affect me too much.” He sees it in other aspects of his life as well.

Michael feels like lack of focus is the symptom that affects him most. “Some days I’ll be really focused in, and I’ll get all my work done, and other days... I can’t do it at all.” On those days his “brain just doesn’t want to focus”, and it might be because he “didn’t sleep well or something.” He also gets distracted from outside noises, like barking dogs, but “my mom says that I’ve got better homeschooling.” He uses silly putty as a tool to help him “focus in a lot.” Michael feels that he has more opportunity to “get to do a lot of sports” as a homeschooler than he would if he was in private school, “because my mom doesn’t have to pay, like, you know, a bunch of money to be homeschooled, and so my

mom lets me do activities.” Having this avenue of releasing energy helps him with his attention span.

Michael thinks it is a little more challenging in homeschooling to get to “know a lot of people,” but he appreciates the friends he has been able to make since joining his co-op. “I know a lot of people, because I go to a co-op.” He feels like he has the opportunity to get to “know them really well, ‘cause there’s not as many people there.” He did not feel like he was able to get to know kids at the private school very well, because “we didn't really have much time to talk a lot. But in co-op, we can talk more and kind of be more relaxed.” Co-op seems to fill the gap for Michael’s social needs, while also providing a less stressful academic environment.

I like it, because it's not, you have to wake up every day. It's kind of like, you get to see your friends, but only one time a week. And so, every week, I can't wait for Tuesday to see all my friends. I really like it.

If he could change anything, he would like to go to co-op twice a week instead of once, so he “could see his friends more.”

Michael feels like homeschooling prepares him well for college, because his mom gives him lots of opportunities to do different things, such as science camp and sports. He hopes those things might help him get a scholarship one day. Although he did not have any specific advice for other families, Michael thinks homeschooling is a good choice for kids who have difficulties like he does. “I would say definitely do homeschooling, because it helped me a lot...I think homeschooling is one of the best ways to focus in more.”

Structural description.

Individualism. Michael talked more about his social needs than his academic needs. Friends are very important to him. Even though he goes to a co-op, is involved in several different sports and activities with other kids, and even has a friend who comes to his house three days a week for school, he still would like more interaction with other kids. With this being said, though, Michael also recognizes that his one year in private school was not a good fit for his learning needs, so he appreciates the balance that attending a co-op provides between being around other people and learning in the way that is best for him. It seems that the relaxed atmosphere of his homeschooling environment, the flexibility of being able to take breaks when necessary, and the ability to go at his own pace are very important to Michael's academic success.

Self-concept. Michael was a lot of fun, and I could tell that he loves to talk! I would just barely get a question out, and he was already answering with a very detailed answer. Of course, this is expected from a young man who is so socially-minded. I can see him going into some type of career where he is around a lot of people every day. I thought it was interesting that he felt like he knows his co-op friends better than he knew his private school friends, being that he only goes to co-op one day a week and private school was five days a week. It could be because he only went to private school one year, but this is his third year at the same co-op. He has had a longer time overall to get to know his co-op friends, even though he only sees them only once a week. For being so young, Michael seems to deal with his challenges quite well. He acknowledged that some

things are harder for him because of his attention deficit, but he does not seem to define himself by his struggles.

Experience of symptoms. In terms of symptoms, Michael spoke mostly about not being able to focus or pay attention, and it was obvious that this is a problem for him. It was interesting, however, that he did not think he had any difficulties with hyperactivity. He showed some common signs of hyperactivity throughout the interview. He talked very quickly and had a lot to say. He was also fidgeting the whole time. He started coughing at one point and needed to go get a drink of water. It seemed to help him get through the rest of the interview to be able to get up and walk around a bit. It could be that no one has ever talked to him about what hyperactivity is, so he does not recognize it in himself. I did not feel it was my place to suggest that he may have those tendencies. With as quickly as he spoke, I tend to think that his mind is probably always running on high, which might make it harder for him to focus his attention outwardly. This may be the reason he often does not hear people when they speak to him, as he mentioned a few different times in the interview. Once Michael learns to manage his symptoms well, I believe they could actually be a strength for him in the right career field.

Timothy. Timothy is a 12-year-old white/Hispanic male who is currently in the 6th grade. He has always been homeschooled and does not take medication for his symptoms. He attends a homeschool co-op.

Textural description. Timothy seems to have a pretty consistent daily routine. He does chores in the morning and school during midday, “so that way, I’m not doing school in a messy place.” He has lots of siblings and they all do their school work “just all at one

table, kind of right by each other.” However, he likes “doing it on the couch, ‘cause I’ve got more room to do it on.” He seems pleased with this arrangement. Timothy uses mostly traditional curriculum. “I do a teensy bit of computer lessons, and some textbooks, and just, like, you know, regular school books and paper.”

Some classes are just at home, but others are done through his co-op. For Timothy, the co-op provides spiritual, social, and academic value. “It gives me a good source of God’s Word, and what He says and everything.” Although this is his first year at his current co-op, he is “making some friends right now.” He goes to class once a week. His teachers “give you assignments, you work on it, and then when you come back, you turn them in.” He seems to enjoy the structure of this co-op. “My old co-op, it wasn’t really...doing a lot of homework and everything. But now, I’m doing a whole lot of homework. So, I really think that this is a good co-op. I really, really like it.”

Timothy is able to go at his own pace a bit. The way he explained it, I think he was referring to completing daily assignments either on his own or with a sibling who works at the same level as him. Sometimes, homeschool families will combine lessons for kids of similar ages, especially for subjects that are not as likely to have to go in a specific order (history, science, etc.).

I kinda have my own pace. I do some, I do different math than one of my brothers. One of my brothers does the same kind of math I do. Uh, I think on some subjects, I go at my own pace, and some I don’t.

The fact that he is in a structured co-op tells me that, at least for those classes, he has to go at the expected pace. He said he did not really ever get to choose topics that are interesting to him.

In describing his difficulties with symptoms, Timothy said, “If I don’t really care for a subject, and it’s challenging, then I just kinda lose focus on it.” In order to maintain focus on something, he has to “keep it on my mind.” If he is thinking about something and gets distracted, though, “I’ll just lose it.” He can also “kinda just lose focus” when he is “very tired or I feel like doing something else.” It helps him to get up and move around sometimes. “I’m really fidgety, because I just really want to do another thing.”

Timothy does not seem to have many tools to help him with his symptoms. He mentioned a “fidget spinner,” but it seemed like he uses it more as a toy than as a tool. He does not like to listen to music, because “noise...makes it worse.” He did mention biological needs, however. It seems like if those needs are met, then he does pretty well. He admitted that he sometimes rushes through his work if other kids are done, so that he can go play with them.

If somebody else is done with their homework, and I know that they’re playing or something, then sometimes, it just really gets, I really want to get done really fast, so I just kinda, you know, just go really faster. Sometimes not better, but faster.

He mentioned that the curriculum used by his co-op, Classical Conversations, might be good for other kids with the same difficulties he has. He really likes the memorization songs that are used and the fact that you can get up and do movements to the songs. “So, like, you make a song of it, then it kind of helps...And some songs, you

can stand up and do sign language for them too.” Timothy also would tell others who are considering homeschooling that “it’s a lot easier. You do most of the same subjects. And it takes, like, half the time, too. And you’re not just sitting around, either. You can actually stand up and move and do some of them.”

He is a very well-spoken kid for his age and mentioned that he is very sociable, which will help him in the future. “I think it’s preparing me good, really, and I know how to socialize.” Overall, he feels like homeschooling is “a lot of fun” and is a positive experience for him.

Structural description.

Individualism. Timothy does his school work during the middle of the day, and it usually only takes a couple of hours for him to complete it. He follows the curriculum of his co-op and did not really seem to have anything specific that catered to his individual learning needs, although this format seems to work well for him.

Self-concept. Timothy is a very pleasant kid, and it was a pleasure to talk to him. He is very well-spoken for his age and seems to have a positive outlook on his homeschool experiences and on life in general. He is very proud of his social skills and assured me that he would have shaken my hand if we had been able to meet in person. His ADHD symptoms do not seem to affect his self-concept in any negative way. He is a confident young man.

Experience of symptoms. Although he mentioned both focus and hyperactivity difficulties, Timothy did not seem to be as symptomatic as some of the other participants. It could have something to do with his age, and therefore, the amount of work required.

He only has school for a couple hours a day. If he had longer school days, he might have more difficulties with staying focused. I do not know if this is something his parents have done purposively, because they know what works best for him, but it seems to be working. I would be curious to know if he struggles more as he gets into high school and has a larger work load.

Ben. Ben is an 18-year-old white male who just graduated from high school last year and was homeschooled his entire life. He was never medicated for his symptoms.

Textural description. Ben's school day was flexible, and his mood often affected how each day went for him. Sometimes, he would get his work done quickly and have a short school day. Other times, he may have gotten frustrated with his work and ended up having a longer day. "It depended on the day, but I took my time and tried to do the best I could with what I had."

His mom was his main teacher for academic subjects, but his dad helped with more of the life lessons and hands-on learning. He has two younger brothers who were born closely together after Ben was already in school, probably first or second grade. It sometimes took "a lot of patience" when they were distracting to him as little guys. His best learning time was midmorning when he was "wide awake, ready, just had breakfast, had enough energy to get through all of it." He did his best work sitting at the dinner table, where he could sit up straight and spread his work out in front of him. He tried to do school work in a comfortable place, "but it just ended up being relaxing and being distracting." It was interesting that he made the statement, "...it was very helpful to get out of my comfort zone, because in reality, school isn't very comforting." It made me

think that he was uncomfortable with school, so he felt he must be uncomfortable while doing school work. It could be that he just got too relaxed and could not keep his focus on his school work if he was in a comfortable spot. There were other students who mentioned that working on their bed made them sleepy, so this could have been the case for him as well.

Ben “worked better out of books” when he was younger, but as he got older, he realized that he “learned better both with audio playing and visually, really. Visually was very helpful with me with everything I did.” He did really well with one curriculum, Teaching Textbooks (which is a math curriculum), that was done on the computer and allowed him to go back and relearn a topic if he had not understood it the first time. He mentioned that “when I was younger, it was mostly my mom really pushing me to do what I needed to do, helping me with everything I needed.” Then, “as life progressed over the years, I got more responsibility”, even though she was always there to help him.

Ben attended several different co-ops during his homeschooling experience. He saw a lot of value in co-op participation, such as “broadening education, itself, and having friends to do it with. Because with the co-ops, we would do things...that we wouldn't normally do at home. And not only would I learn new things, I learned those things with...friends.”

Ben feels his most valuable resource was having his parents around to help him, because they “know me better than anyone else.” He learns best from “actually doing it, getting it, and practicing it,” rather than “talking about it a whole lot and reading about it a whole lot.” Going at his own pace was very important to him. “I did go at my own pace,

and it was really good for me.” His mom allowed him to do that for the most part, but also gave him deadlines, which he felt “wasn't too much, wasn't too little, you know. I was being pushed to do good, but I wasn't also babied along.” Choosing topics that interested him was important too. He especially enjoys art and music, and by including those into his school day, it motivated him to get the rest of his school work done.

Music really helped his learning as well. I could tell this is something that he is very passionate about. “Music really shaped my mind...helped me learn...it expanded my capabilities.” He also talked about how it helped him emotionally and even mentioned how he liked to listen to music that “...had the same mindset as me whenever I'm doing school work. Makes me have the same feels, emotionally, mentally, whatever I'm doing, in order to focus, mentally, emotionally on what I'm doing.” I thought the acknowledgment of the emotional connection that he has with music was really insightful. We all have those emotional connections to music, but for him to be able to verbalize that as a learning tool was unique.

“I've always had a struggle with remembering things and learning things at times. It's not nearly as bad as it used to be.” Ben struggled a lot with memory issues, especially when he was younger, but he also admitted that he “would daydream a lot.” He added, though, that “as I grew, I didn't grow out of it, but I learned how to deal with it, almost control it.” He thought it was important that he learned to stop comparing himself to others so much.

He was challenged by most aspects of school at some point or another, depending on the school year, his age, and other factors. One thing he said that stood out was, “As I

grew, 'cause homeschooling for your life is a long time, you get to know many different versions of you. The challenge was finding what worked for me at those times." He seemed to be aware of who he is and how he has changed as he has gotten older and faced different challenges. Ben was honest about the fact that his attitude had a lot to do with how things went for him in school. "So, really how I felt every day during my education was really what made it happen or turned it into a train wreck."

Ben's advice to other homeschooling kids with ADHD symptoms was to "take your time and learn who you are and who you think you might be and really think about what you really want." He felt homeschooling prepared him for the future by allowing him the time to try different things that might not be possible if he had gone to regular school. For example, he was able to get a job at 15 years old and also had time to explore interests to find out whether things would be a good career fit for him. "So not only was I able to do what needed to be done, I was able to do more and broaden my skills and education itself."

Structural description.

Individualism. Ben's homeschool experience evolved with him as he grew up. When he started homeschooling, he was an only child who had all of his mom's attention. He did mostly traditional book work at that time. After his two younger brothers came along, Ben's struggles with focus probably became more evident, because there were more distractions within his environment. As he got older, he began to realize that auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning was more beneficial to him, so much of his learning went in that direction. His mom included things that were important to Ben, such

as art and music, into his school days, and that motivated him to get through the things he did not enjoy as much, so that he could get to the fun things. Flexibility was another key aspect to his success. Ben had structured flexibility, in that he had a certain amount of work that he was required to complete each week, but he could choose when it was completed during that time frame. This seemed to work well for him, giving him boundaries, yet allowing him to go at his own pace.

Self-concept. Ben is a very interesting young man who has come to know himself very well as he has progressed through life. I could tell he was really thinking about his answers, and he seems like he is probably a deep thinker in most things. He is very appreciative of his parents and the opportunities that they made available for him while he was in school. Ben is currently working at the same job he started with when he was 15, doing an internship at a church with a worship pastor, and staying on as a mentor in the homeschool band that he played in through school. He is leaning toward music ministry as his future career. Although he has struggled with self-confidence, it sounds as though he has been able to discover areas in which he can excel. He seems to be a bright young man who is a hard worker and just wants to be the best version of himself that he can be.

Experience of symptoms. Most of Ben's ADHD symptoms seemed to be related to attention and focus. He did a lot of daydreaming when he was younger. He mentioned memory issues, but I am curious as to how much of it was an actual working memory issue, as opposed to an issue with being able to focus and register things into his memory when they happened. If his mind was elsewhere, he would not be able to file information

into his working memory for recall. A lot of kids with ADHD have problems with working memory, but also cannot focus well. He mentioned that his daydreaming was like “having a conversation with himself.” There are a few other participants who, like Ben, are pretty quiet kids and mentioned having a bad memory. It makes me wonder whether most of their dialog takes place internally, causing most of their attention to be internal as well. Like several other participants, Ben lost his train of thought during the interview.

Composite Textural Description

The main research question for this study was: How do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms describe their individual experiences within a homeschool environment? The range of experiences represented in such a small sample of participants was significant. Among the 12 participants, there were students who do all of their schooling at home, those who participate in co-ops, those who utilize online school, and those who do a combination of these options. For some, co-op is extremely important to them, and for others, it is not a good fit at all. Reading traditional textbooks and taking detailed notes is the best learning method for some, but others prefer audio, visual, or hands-on learning. Some need an active social life, but others would rather be by themselves most of the time. Music is an essential focus tool for certain kids but a noisy distraction for others. Taking all of this into account, it is clear that homeschooling is a very individualized experience, and even among those with ADHD symptoms, learning needs vary greatly.

The first subquestion was: How do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive the individualized approach of homeschooling? Individualization was important to all the participants. Each of them viewed the individualized approach to homeschooling within their own experiences, though, so there was variability in how it was perceived. However, there were a few things that seemed to be common themes for most of the participants, such as having some level of flexibility. Several had deadlines for completing a certain amount of work but had flexibility in scheduling when to do their lessons within that timeframe. Too much flexibility was a problem for some students, such as Francesca, who felt that there was not enough structure to keep her on track when she was being homeschooled. Her younger brother, Brian, felt he was behind, because he takes too much time to complete lessons. On the other end of the spectrum, Ava felt overwhelmed by the amount of work required of her each day. Most of the participants seemed to fall somewhere in between these two extremes, and it is possible that parenting style plays a role in the extent of flexibility that can be found in any given homeschool.

One-on-one teaching and learning was also mentioned as being something that was personalized to the participants' experiences, and most did not feel this would be possible in a traditional school setting. The only student who had a different perception of one-on-one learning was Ivy. She uses an online school format with different teachers for every subject and does not have access to them other than email. Her mother does not act in a teaching capacity, so Ivy mentioned that she misses having one-on-one interaction with teachers like she had when she was in public school. This is a very telling example

of how different each homeschool student's experience can be and how it depends greatly on family situations and choices in the way learning takes place.

It was very interesting that all three of the students who had graduated, along with Evalyn, who is a senior, talked about how much they value their relationship with their families, and especially their parents. In addition to having close relationships and being able to spend more time with their families than students who attend traditional schools, Ben, Francesca, and Juliana all talked about the emotional support their parents provided for them, helping them navigate through the difficult times of both academics and life, in general. Because all of the students who discussed this were older, it is possible that the maturity that comes with age or the ability to look back and evaluate experiences may be what brings this aspect to light for students.

There were several things that participants viewed as being possible in homeschooling that they did not perceive as being possible for students in traditional schooling. Some of these things were listening to music while working, doodling or walking around while listening, taking breaks as necessary, and working in a comfortable, quiet place. Most students also felt that the ability to spend more time on subjects they have a harder time understanding without feeling left behind was specific to the homeschool experience. Ivy stated that she appreciated not feeling like she is falling behind when she loses focus as a student with ADHD symptoms. The participants seemed to feel as though they had more control over both their learning and their environment in a homeschool setting than they would in a traditional school setting, and this was beneficial for their individual learning needs.

The second subquestion was: What are the factors of individualized education in a homeschool environment that current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms consider to be important? Several participants conveyed the opinion that they would not have as many academic problems if they did not have ADHD symptoms. Therefore, being in an environment where they can have an individualized learning experience is very important to them. Connor and Brian both said that they did not think they would succeed in a traditional school setting. Connor stated that this was due to the lack of one-on-one help and Brian, due to the time restrictions. Juliana did not think that she would have been able to reach her goal of attending college if she had stayed in a traditional school because she was not confident or doing her best work in an environment that was not personalized to her needs. When Michael was in private school, he felt that he was not getting the help he needed, because the class continued to move on, even when he did not understand something.

Ivy and Francesca both pointed out that everyone has different learning styles and being able to have a personalized education makes academic success more likely. This was evident in the different things that participants reported as being important to their individualized education. Evalyn noted that going at her own pace helped her to not get stressed out. Similarly, Ivy spoke about how being in an environment without a lot of people around helped to keep her anxiety under control. Will preferred having the structure of a daily list of lessons to complete, having his lessons read aloud to him on the computer, and getting information in small chunks. Morgan felt that school is more interesting to her if it is personalized to her needs. Ava believed that she would not be

able to complete her school assignments if she did not have tools in place to meet her individual learning needs, such as being able to use audio books.

The third and final subquestion was: What factors do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive as challenging within a homeschool environment? There were a variety of challenges expressed by the participants. As would be expected from students with ADHD symptoms, inability to focus and dealing with distractions were common challenges. Difficulties with particular subjects, such as math, reading, or writing, were also cited often. Michael, Brian, and Juliana all mentioned that it was harder to find friends, but Michael and Juliana had both been able to overcome this struggle by joining a co-op. Some of the more personal challenges were mentioned by Will and Brian, who both admitted getting up in the mornings is hard for them; Morgan, who had a tough time prioritizing; and Ava, who felt like her daily workload was too heavy. Francesca's challenges were different from those of the other participants in that she felt her environment was too relaxed and lacked deadlines. This made it more difficult for her to stay on track, because she does not have much self-discipline. Ben mentioned that he did not get enough fresh air. He said that he just would not think about going outside for long periods of time, but when he realized it, he would take his school lessons outside to complete them.

The research question and subquestions were addressed through the participant interviews. Although the sample was small, the heterogeneity of the participants and their experiences demonstrated the individuality of homeschooling with ADHD symptoms. There were similarities in multiple participant stories, but no two experiences were

exactly the same. There were also those whose experiences or perceptions were quite different from most of the other participants. Each one filled an important role in comprising the essence of a homeschool student with ADHD symptoms.

Composite Structural Description

The three global themes that emerged within this study are *individualism*, *self-concept*, and *experience of symptoms*. Following the thematic terminology and structure of Attride-Stirling (2001), each of the global themes emerged from a group of organizing themes, and the organizing themes were developed through several basic themes, all of which will be explored in this section (Table 5).

Individualization. The global theme of *individualization* was derived from the organizing themes of *schedule*, *environment*, *curriculum*, *learning tools*, and *outside the home*, each of which was developed from several basic themes. Individualization refers to personalizing the homeschooling experience to the support the individual needs of each student. The participants discussed each of these areas in great detail according to their own experiences, and I will expound upon them in the forthcoming paragraphs.

Schedule. The basic themes that led to the organizing theme of *schedule* were *flexibility of school day*, *going at own pace*, *breaks*, and *time for other activities*. Two students followed a school day schedule that is similar to that of traditional students, starting around 8:00-9:00 a.m. and ending around 3:00-4:00 p.m. However, most participants reported a variation in how their school day is structured. Some of the younger students completed their lessons in 2-3 hours during midday. Other students started later in the day and work into the late afternoon or evening.

Table 5

Global Themes, Organizing Themes, and Basic Themes Derived from the Interviews

Global Themes	Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Theme I: Individualization	a) Schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility of school day • Go at own pace • Breaks • Time for other activities
	b) Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility in location • Ability to use tools not accepted in other environments
	c) Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varied types of lessons • Student choice • Multiple sources of curriculum • Ability to change with need
	d) Learning Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one • Tools that fit learning style • Choice in use of learning tools
	e) Outside the home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ops • Extracurricular activities • Varying social needs
Theme II: Self-Concept	a) Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations of self • Self-motivation • Self-confidence
	b) External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others' expectations • Strategies for meeting social needs • Support system
	c) Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges due to learning needs • Individual coping tools • Success/satisfaction with homeschooling experiences
	d) Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of belonging • Sense of accomplishment • Stress/anxiety

(table continues)

Global Themes	Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Theme III: Experience of Symptoms	e) ADHD Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academics Effects • Relational effects • Symptom management
	a) Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal distractions • External distractions • Hyperfocus • Tools to help focus
	b) Hyperactivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fidgety • Need to get up and move • Brain hyperactivity
	c) Impact on learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more one-on-one • School takes longer • Curriculum choices/interest level affects learning • Flexibility is key
	d) Change over time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to manage • Finding what works
	e) Behaviors noticed during interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real-time loss of focus • Memory problems

Some of the factors cited as reasons behind scheduling choices were the students choosing the time of day when they feel they can complete their best work, parents' work schedules, and family dynamics. The most prevalent factor of the actual length of the school day for the majority of students, however, seemed to relate back to their ADHD symptoms. Many students commented that they feel their school work takes a lot longer than it should, because they cannot focus. They were distracted easily and had to reread material to be able to process it. A few students mentioned that they have a hard time waking up in the mornings or find themselves falling asleep during the day. They also required more breaks than they would if they did not have ADHD symptoms, so it takes longer to get their school work finished.

Going at their own pace was essential on a few different levels for many participants. On a daily basis, these students seemed to need more time to complete lessons, for the most part, as discussed previously. Flexibility to amend a daily schedule if a student needs more time for a particular lesson is helpful. Evalyn liked being able to take as much time as she needs for each subject, so a flexible schedule is important to her. “Sometimes, I’ll get one subject done in 30 minutes, and the other, I need to take a lot longer to get finished, because it’s more complicated, or I’m having trouble understanding it.” Evalyn was done with two years of high school math when she started high school, but it has taken her longer to get through English, highlighting the flexibility of learning she has experienced based on her individual needs. Going at her own pace allowed her to complete the subjects that are easier for her and devote more time to the others. Allowing students to go at their own pace requires flexibility in planning for the homeschool parent. This may mean extra work to continuously adjust schedules and make sure all required material is covered, but it seems to be quite important to students with ADHD symptoms and can greatly affect their level of success.

Although not all participants reported that they take regular breaks during their school day, most said that more breaks would be helpful. Even a short break to get up and go to the restroom helps Timothy to refocus, but Michael sometimes needs a longer break to go outside and burn some energy. His mom lets him take breaks to “play a game or go bounce on the trampoline...get a snack if I’m hungry” when he feels like he “can’t think anymore.” Francesca reported, “I would take a lot of breaks, like for snacks, or whatever else.” Her frequent and extended breaks, however, seemed to be used as a way to avoid

school work. These examples suggest that taking breaks may be beneficial for homeschool students with ADHD symptoms but should probably be closely monitored by parents to ensure that students do not allow the breaks to consume too much time.

For some participants, homeschooling makes it possible for them to have time for other activities that might not be possible if they were in traditional school. Ben mentioned being able to get a job at a young age. “I was able to get a job at 15. Not a lot of kids have enough time in order to do that. And I got a bit of a head start financially in life.” Evalyn took advantage of a flexible homeschooling schedule to take music, dance, and theater classes to help her reach her goal of a career in musical theater. Michael hoped his extra time participating in sports will help him get a college scholarship.

Environment. The basic themes of *flexibility in location* and *ability to use tools not accepted in other environments* formed the organizing theme of *environment*. The participants had varying needs concerning the location where their school work was completed. Some families have designated school rooms, whereas others utilized the dining room table as a school desk. Some students preferred to work in their bedrooms away from distractions, but others found too many distractions in their bedrooms (electronics, bed, etc.) and worked better in the main areas of the house. Ivy tried working in her room before, but “with my room, having my stuff, it was easier for me to lose focus.” Several students mentioned that they needed to be in a setting that is a little uncomfortable, so they do not fall asleep while they are working. Brian, however, needed to work in a comfortable place, because being uncomfortable was a distraction for him. “Sitting up just kinda bothers me. Like, I focus too much on that. It distracts me.”

There are a lot of tools that the participants reported using to help them focus, and many of these might not be acceptable in a traditional classroom setting. Music was mentioned many times as a focusing tool. Some students reported the need to be moving around or doing something to retain information while listening. Francesca and Evalyn indicated that it helped them to doodle while listening. Francesca shared how drawing helped her pay attention in church.

For a while, at church, instead of taking regular notes, I would actually draw my notes. And that helped a lot, especially 'cause it was more visual, and it gave me something to do other than just listening and writing words.

Neither girl thought doodling during lessons would be allowed in a traditional school setting, because the teachers would probably think they were not paying attention, despite the fact that it would help them focus. Francesca also found it helpful to record herself reading aloud, but, of course, this would also be distracting to others in a regular classroom setting.

Curriculum. The organizing theme of *curriculum* was derived from the basic themes of *varied types of lessons, student choice, multiple sources of curriculum, and ability to change with need.* Most participants spoke of multiple types of lessons that they use for different subjects. Ava, for example, used computer-based lessons for “science, math, and language arts” and book-based lessons for “geography, another science, literature, writing, and I think that’s it.” Several students used traditional textbooks for most of their subjects, but they also used math programs that incorporated videos and hands-on manipulatives or computer-based learning. Francesca gave a good description

of how these programs are helpful. “Whenever I was doing Math-U-See, I was doing fractions, so I had all the blocks and layovers. I’m a very visual person, so that helped a lot. And it gave me something to do...building with blocks and stuff.” Varied types of lessons seemed to be a common theme for most participants.

Student choice in curriculum was not quite as consistent among participants. Although they all had preferences for the types of lessons they felt helped them learn the best, not all of them were utilizing those types of lessons on a daily basis. Several mentioned that they would like to have more hands-on or visual lessons than were incorporated into their schooling. One thing that was important to most of the participants was having a choice in what they are learning. Ben’s mom incorporated art and music into his school day, and he viewed it as a reward for completing his other work.

I was able to look forward to something that was a part of school...and then have a reward within school to look forward to, to really push myself to do good, so I can get through all of that and then have the fun at the end of it.

Morgan said that she has to have some topic that is interesting to her, or she “...will not sit down and do school, just ‘cause my brain is kinda like no, you could be, like, watching Netflix or something different.” Ivy and Francesca both stressed how much more they enjoy writing when they are able to choose their own topics. Ivy explained, “I like it a lot, because, for me personally, writing about something that I want to write about means I’ll have a better-quality paper.”

The options of curriculum available to homeschool families is significant. Among the small sample of participants for this study, there were those who use traditional

textbooks, video-based programs, computer/online programs, curriculum designed by co-op teachers, and hands-on learning. Having curriculum available from multiple sources enables homeschool families with students who have ADHD symptoms to personalize the learning experience.

Varied types of lessons, student choice, and multiple sources of curriculum all culminate in the last basic theme of ability to change with need. An advantage of homeschooling is that changes can be made when something is not working. As Evalyn pointed out, if a student is not finding success with a particular curriculum choice, it is possible to “use different programs and not just the same program over and over.” Ben also saw this as a benefit over traditional school, where he felt like everything is assigned for the whole group, rather than focusing on what each individual needs.

Learning tools. The basic themes of *one-on-one*, *tools that fit learning style*, and *choice in use of learning tools* led to the organizing theme of *learning tools*. One-on-one teaching and learning is a benefit that most of the participants found essential to their success in learning. Connor even felt that he “probably wouldn't be able to do it” if he did not have the one-on-one teaching that his mom provided. Ivy, on the other hand, lacked one-on-one teaching due to her circumstance of attending online school in a single-parent family and acknowledged that it would definitely be a help to her as well. “I do miss going through the study guides with the teacher, like, in person, ‘cause that helped a lot.”

Being able to use tools that fit one's learning style was discussed during all of the interviews. Morgan, Ivy, and Juliana all described taking very detailed notes. Will reported doing better when he had his lessons read to him using the audio feature on his

online curriculum. “I can follow along, so there’s not as big of a chance of me getting distracted and losing my spot.” Ava requires audio books in order to keep up with her co-op classes. “In my co-op, I have to read a book in three weeks, and I have almost all the books on audio...And it really helps me to get through it all.” Other participants need to have some kind of a visual or kinesthetic experience to really process the information well.

Most participants expressed some sort of personal choice when it comes to the learning tools they used. The older students seemed to have done particularly well in determining what they need to be most successful. Some of the younger students seemed to be quite dependent on their parents to provide them with tools that may or may not be helpful. It was clear, however, that discovering which tools provide the best support is an individualized process that happens over a good bit of time, along with trial and error.

Outside the home. The organizing theme of *outside the home* came about from the basic themes of *co-ops*, *extracurricular activities*, and *varying social needs*. All but one of the participants had attended a co-op at some point or were currently attending a co-op. Of those, eight perceived it to be a positive experience that they enjoyed very much. Although Morgan was not attending a co-op, she shared, “I loved co-op. It kinda helped with the social aspect of homeschooling. I got to make a lot of friends, and I don’t know, it’s just a lot of fun, and it was helpful.” Francesca, Brian, and Will, however, viewed it as a negative experience due to added time pressures or lack of fit with learning needs. Ivy was the only participant who had never been a part of a co-op, but her anxiety

related to being in groups of people indicated that she might not find it to be a good fit either.

Apart from co-op, the participants described many extracurricular activities in which they involved themselves. Band, choir, sports, drama, church, art, science camp, dance, and field trips kept them busy and offered them a wide variety of opportunities to explore their interests, broaden their skills, and interact with others. It is important to note that the social needs of the participants varied to a great degree. On one end of the spectrum, there was Michael, who had friends through co-op, sports, church, and even a friend who homeschools with him three days a week, yet he still would prefer to have more time with friends. "I would like to have more people around me, so I could, like, maybe know more people at home...so I could talk to more people if I ever get bored or something." On the other end of the spectrum, there was Ivy, who chose homeschooling largely because she does not like to be around a lot of people. "I have anxiety and having to be in a room with lots of people made it harder for me to focus than it already was." Ivy was not involved in extracurricular activities and did not attend a co-op, and she was content with her choices. Most of the other participants fell somewhere in between these two extremes, but their need for social interaction was just as individualized as all of the other aspects of their homeschooling experience.

Individualism was an ongoing theme throughout the interviews. Much could be attributed to the individualization of homeschooling in general, but for these students their experience as homeschoolers with ADHD symptoms extended the personalized experience. Because of their particular challenges having a learning experience

customized to their own needs is essential to their academic success and emotional well-being.

Self-concept. The global theme of *self-concept* came about from the organizing themes of *internal, external, academic, emotional, and ADHD symptoms*. This theme was a little unexpected and was probably the most organic theme that emerged, in that it came about from responses that were completely unrelated to self-concept but yet revealed a great deal about how the participants view themselves.

Internal. The organizing theme of *internal* resulted from the basic themes of *expectations of self, self-motivation, and self-confidence*. Some of the students expressed that they expected more of themselves academically than they were able to produce. Will gets upset with himself when he does not do well on lessons. “Sometimes if I can’t do it right, I feel like I should be able to do it right.” Brian feels that he should be able to accomplish more in a day than he does. “I’d like to do every subject every day, if I could focus long enough.” Both Morgan and Ben recognized that students with ADHD symptoms might sometimes use their symptoms as an excuse to have low expectations of themselves and cautioned others that this was not an acceptable practice. Morgan warned:

You can’t always use your ADHD as an excuse. Sometimes you gotta sit down, and you just gotta, like, get it done, even if you are being sort of scatter-brained. You kind of need to teach yourself how to prioritize, even though it might be hard.

Self-motivation seemed to be a trait that is formed over time. As students get older more and more of the responsibility for learning is transferred from the parent to the

student. Of course, as with all other aspects of homeschooling with ADHD, the level of self-motivation is highly dependent on each individual's situation and personality. For example, Juliana and Francesca, both homeschool graduates, had different reports of self-motivation. Juliana had a goal to go to college and worked very hard to discover what she needed to do to be successful in that endeavor.

Being homeschooled really allowed me, personally, to just learn in the very best way possible and to be able to reach my goals...I really wanted to go on to college. I can't say that that necessarily would have happened if I had just stayed on the traditional public-school route, because I was kind of getting looked over, because I couldn't focus.

Francesca, on the other hand, stated that she had no motivation and actually took two years to complete 12th grade. "That's why it took me an extra year to graduate. I don't have self-discipline..." She has also gone on to college but has a constant struggle due to her lack of self-discipline. Both of these examples display how self-motivation, or lack thereof, can affect these students positively or negatively.

Self-confidence seemed to be something that most of the participants struggled with on some level. Juliana, although now a quite poised college student, was not confident in herself when she was in traditional school where her needs were not being fully met. Ava described her frustrations when she is completing work at co-op. "It's hard when I don't know how to spell the words, like, when I'm at co-op, and I need help spelling the words, even though they're not that big of words." Ben struggled with comparing himself to others and wondering why he is not able to do what they do.

“Comparing myself to others was definitely something that really messed with me as well...I've always kinda struggled with confidence to a certain extent.” Even with these examples, however, most of the participants gave the impression that they have healthy means of dealing with their bouts of low self-confidence and were able to move forward with an overall positive outlook on life.

External. The basic themes of *others' expectations, strategies for meeting social needs, and support system* formed the organizing theme of *external*. Just as with almost every other aspect of homeschooling with ADHD symptoms, the impact of others' expectations varied according to individual circumstances. Remember that Ava reported that she feels a lot of pressure because of the number of subjects her mother requires her to complete each day. “It’s really hard to get, like, what I need to get done in a day.” Francesca, however, felt like there were no “consequences for not doing things by a certain time.” Will’s suggestion to other families was that they not “...expect more than, you know, than they can handle at a time,” suggesting that balance is key with these students.

Looking at how social needs are met in a homeschooling situation is important when thinking about self-concept. A few participants indicated that it is sometimes difficult to meet people. As was previously discussed, however, many of the participants are involved in co-ops and/or extracurricular activities that help to provide the social interaction that they need. Especially outgoing students, such as Evalyn and Michael view their activities outside the home as an essential part of their homeschooling experience. As Evalyn put it:

I get to interact with more people. I'm very extraverted. I like being around people. So, it really helps me being in an environment with other kids who might have the same kind of learning as me and same kind of social upbringing as me.

Ivy and Will do not have as much of a need for social interaction and are not involved in as many activities outside the home. Once again, the individual needs of each student have proven to be the driving force behind the experience.

Support systems play a major role in every young person's self-concept, and homeschoolers who have ADHD symptoms are no different. Because students with ADHD symptoms often struggle academically and, sometimes, socially, their self-concepts can suffer. Several of my participants stressed that they truly value the time that they are able to spend with their families. Ben, Francesca, and Juliana all emphasized that their parents had been a tremendous help emotionally, in addition to academically. Ben shared this about his parents:

My parents have always been there for me, and for them to be there for me and to help me learn was better than any teacher of any kind, not necessarily a public-school teacher, not a co-op teacher, or any other teacher, 'cause they know me better than anyone else.

Ava and Evalyn both appreciated the support they receive from co-op teachers. Ava said, "I like my tutor. She explains the subjects well, and it helps." Ivy seemed to feel like she was mostly on her own and could use a bit more support in her homeschooling efforts, as the only access she has to her online teachers is through email.

Academic. The organizing theme of *academic* was derived from the basic themes of *challenges due to learning needs, individual coping tools, and success/satisfaction with homeschooling experiences*. In terms of self-concept, challenges due to learning needs often have a negative effect on homeschooling students with ADHD symptoms. For example, Will gets upset with himself when he gets a lot of questions wrong on his lessons; Ava gets frustrated when she does not know how to spell words; Brian seems sad that he is behind where he feels he should be in his studies; and Connor becomes irritated when his reading takes too long. “I have to read a lot. That kind of gets frustrating after a while, but I don’t, like, get mad. It’s just how long it’s taking.” Although each of these examples has been mentioned previously in this report, it is important to bring them up here to show how the students’ self-concept can be affected by their academic struggles.

Even though self-concept can be negatively affected by academic challenges, most of the participants have been able to find some level of academic success by utilizing tools to manage their individual needs. Even seemingly little things can greatly affect how these students view themselves through their homeschooling experiences. Will feels “relieved” when he finishes a lesson and sees it marked complete on his computerized daily schedule. “It makes it easier for me. I can see what I need to do every day.” Having that tool allows him to experience small victories throughout the day and know that he is moving forward. Ava’s use of audio books allows her to continue at the same pace as the other students in her co-op class, which she does not think would be possible if she had to read the books herself.

Several students mentioned that their level of success/satisfaction with their homeschooling experiences is directly related to their level of interest in what they are learning. This is possibly because people typically do better when working on things they are passionate about. Participants talked about how they enjoy having things like music, art, cooking, carpentry, and auto mechanics as a part of their learning. The ability to choose topics of interest in writing assignments was also mentioned as providing satisfaction in learning. Morgan described, “I could be as creative as I wanted with it, just do whatever with it as long as I got it in on time, and that made it more fun, so it made me want to do it more.” This conversation of self-concept as related to academics would not be complete, however, without bringing up Francesca’s lack of satisfaction with her academic success as a homeschool student with ADHD symptoms. Because she did not feel that she had been academically successful as a homeschool student, she struggles with feeling confident in her abilities as a college student. “If I didn’t have difficulty focusing, I don’t think school, in general, would be that big of an issue, and now I would be able to just go and sit like a normal person, take notes. It’d be fine.”

Emotional. *Sense of belonging, sense of accomplishment, and stress/anxiety* were the basic themes that formed the organizing theme of *emotional*. Most people’s self-concept is largely affected by their sense of belonging, and it is no different for students with ADHD symptoms who are homeschooled. Co-ops and extracurricular activities provide a social outlet for most of the participants, but close familial relationships also fill the need for belonging. Juliana confided, “My family really is gonna be, like, my best friend at the end of the day and the end of everything. That really helped me, too,

knowing that you can be friends with your family, and it's okay" Ivy, who struggles with social anxiety, expressed an alternative need for belonging. She does not have a strong desire to be a part of groups, but her animals play a very important role as companions and seem to be connected to her personal identity.

Having a sense of accomplishment improves self-concept for homeschool students with ADHD symptoms. Juliana emphasized that she had to learn to give herself the tools necessary to reach her goals. This indicated that taking ownership of her learning has generated a sense of pride in her accomplishments, thereby positively impacting her self-concept. An important lesson that Ben learned was to stop comparing himself to others and find his sense of accomplishment in his own unique abilities by figuring out "who I am according to who I am, not according to who else there is in the world." Students who seemed to be in a less structured environment, such as Francesca and Brian, reported a lower sense of accomplishment, due to not progressing well in their studies. "I mean, it's kinda hard trying to, like, push through things. Like thing after thing after thing. It can get a little overwhelming sometimes. But you can't go too slow, or you get behind like me," Brian disclosed. Ironically, the student who seemed to have the most structured environment, Ava, also reported a lower sense of accomplishment, but due to a heavy daily workload that she has a hard time completing. The students who have a structured, yet flexible, environment seemed to thrive best.

Stress or anxiety was brought up by several participants. Evalyn, Will, Ivy, and Juliana all experience stress when they do not understand something in their school work. Evalyn needs to learn at her own level, "because if it's too hard for me, I'm gonna get

stressed out, I'm gonna get anxious, and it's gonna start freaking me out." Being able to go back and relearn a concept before moving on is helpful with this, as is having a support system in place to help them calm down and keep their struggles with school work in a healthy perspective. Juliana's mom fills this role for her.

She's really great about calming me down. Because whenever I get overwhelmed about, like, even if on the first question, I think I don't know the answer, I'm not 100% sure about it, I get really stressed. And my mom recognizes all of the signs whenever I get stressed.

Time is a major stressor for Brian and Will, who both have opted out of attending co-ops. Brian "felt like there was, like, too much pressure to get stuff done." Michael and Ivy both indicated that homeschooling had relieved stress that they experienced in traditional schools, although for different reasons. Ivy has traded her anxiety of being around too many people in public school for anxiety pertaining to a lack of teacher interaction and direction in her online school. She feels the social anxiety was more crippling, however, so she continues in the environment she feels best meets her needs. Michael, on the other hand, felt like private school was:

...kind of a lot of stress, because I had to wake up early, and it was just kind of more difficult, and it was harder for me to get more rest and stuff...Homeschooling is a lot easier, because it's easier to relax more.

ADHD symptoms. Finally, the organizing theme of *ADHD symptoms* came about from the basic themes of *academic effects*, *relational effects*, and *symptom management*. Although there is obviously a lot of overlap within the organizing and basic themes, I

believe it is crucial to look at all the different aspects in terms of the global themes. I will be exploring how the participants experience their ADHD symptoms in great depth within the next section, but now I want to look at their symptoms in light of how their self-concept is affected.

As was previously discussed, academics are greatly affected by ADHD symptoms. When students cannot focus, are easily distracted, or constantly feel that they need to be getting up and moving around, they have a hard time completing their work. This makes it difficult to move forward and find success, leading to a low self-concept, at least in terms of academics, which is often correlated with intelligence. Students with ADHD symptoms may feel that they are not as smart as those who appear to be more successful academically. These problems are not completely resolved for students with ADHD symptoms who are homeschooled, but there appear to be more opportunities to personalize the learning experience in ways that can provide the best possible academic outcomes. Therefore, the students are able to discover their prominent strengths, or intelligences, as Gardner (2006) would describe it.

The line of questioning within the interviews did not directly address how relationships are affected by symptoms, but there were some statements made that seemed relevant to self-concept, and thus, important to mention. Michael described a few different scenarios in which he was not listening to others when they were speaking to him, because his mind was elsewhere.

It's hard because the attention deficit, it kinda holds me back more on just, like, focusing in and trying to get everything done... Sometimes my dad or my mom

will be talking to me, and I won't listen to them, and I'll be like, "Wait, what did you say," and they'll be like, "You didn't hear a word I said?" I'm like, "No, I wasn't focusing."

This behavior, although typical of someone with ADHD symptoms, can be frustrating to the other person who might feel as though they are being ignored. A strain on the relationship is probable if this is an ongoing problem. Ben's struggle with comparing himself to others, who may not have ADHD symptoms, definitely affected his self-concept for a time. This could have led to isolation or resentment if he had not come to terms with accepting himself within his own abilities.

Learning how to manage ADHD symptoms seems to be the key in developing a positive self-concept. The participants who have been able to recognize their difficulties and utilize tools that help them find success seem to be the ones who have the most positive outlook on life. That is not to say that these students do not still struggle with their ADHD symptoms, and probably their self-concept at times, but having their symptoms well-managed provides a healthy baseline to which they can always return. Juliana described it like this. "I recognize that I have to try a lot harder to focus. I have to give myself the tools that I need to be successful. But it hasn't completely hindered me from learning. I've found that I am capable."

Experience of symptoms. The global theme of *experience of symptoms* resulted from the organizing themes of *focus*, *hyperactivity*, *impact on learning*, *change over time*, and *behaviors noticed during interview*. Because all of the previous themes are directly related to the participants' experience of ADHD symptoms, there will certainly be more

overlap in this section. However, it will complete the picture of what it is like to be a homeschool student with ADHD symptoms by diving deeper into how the specific symptoms are experienced on a personal level.

Focus. The organizing theme of *focus* was formed from the basic themes of *internal distractions*, *external distractions*, *hyperfocus*, and *tools to help focus*.

Daydreaming, in different forms, was the most common internal distraction cited by participants. Some just mentioned generic daydreaming, whereas others described in detail how one thought would lead to another and so on until their mind would be completely off of the task at hand. Timothy acknowledged that biological needs could be a distraction for him. “If I don’t need anything, like, if I’m not hungry or thirsty or need to use the restroom, then that helps a lot.” Several of the participants also mentioned having a hard time waking up in the mornings or staying awake while doing their school work. For example, Francesca noted:

It would take me like two hours just to do my reading, because I would keep falling asleep or be, like, reading and then doze off and be, like, “I need a nap.” So, I’d go take a nap for an hour.”

External distractions were quite a bit more varied. Some participants lose focus if they are too comfortable, but others are distracted by being uncomfortable. Music is a necessity for some and a distraction for others. A few mentioned that having their phones or other electronics available is distracting, but others view them as a handy tool to use to look up words they are thinking about, so they can put them out of their minds and move on. The activity of other people distracts some students, but not others. The ability to

identify distractions and amend one's environment to minimize them could be viewed as a benefit for homeschool students with ADHD symptoms, but only when homeschool students and their families make a meaningful effort to make such changes.

Only two participants discussed their experiences of hyperfocus, but it proved interesting enough to include in the report. Hyperfocus occurs when a person becomes so focused on something that they do not realize anything else that is going on around them or how much time has passed. Ben and Ivy both experience hyperfocus at times. Ivy explained, "Along with having difficulties focusing, I also experience times where I just, hours go by, and I don't even realize it." Her times of hyperfocus are a distraction from other needs, such as eating and taking bathroom breaks. She neglects her personal needs, because she is distracted by whatever she is hyperfocused upon. I found this to be quite fascinating. Ben portrayed hyperfocus as a positive aspect of his education. "I was able to accomplish more when I had all of it just sitting there, almost like tunnel-vision, where you focus on one thing and that's it."

Tools to help focus have been discussed throughout this report and have proven to be fairly individualized to each participant's needs. Generally speaking, however, homeschool students with ADHD symptoms need to be in a setting where they work best (desk, couch, floor, etc.) with limited external distractions and something to keep their mind/hands busy (music, doodling, note-taking, etc.) while they are learning. These things, along with short breaks for movement and resting the brain, seem to generate the highest level of focus for most students.

Hyperactivity. The basic themes of *fidgety*, *need to get up and move*, and *brain hyperactivity* produced the organizing theme of *hyperactivity*. More students acknowledged problems with focus than hyperactivity, but difficulties with hyperactivity showed up in little things that the participants might not always recognize as hyperactivity. For example, almost half of the participants admitted that they tend to fidget when they are sitting still. They may be wiggling their toes, spinning or leaning back in their chair, or tapping their fingers, but it all relates back to an experience of hyperactivity. When I asked Will about his experience with hyperactivity, he said, “Yeah, I can’t really sit still. I’m wiggling my toes.”

Other forms of hyperactivity are more pronounced. The need to actually get up and move is something that Morgan and Juliana both mentioned. Because Morgan goes to online school and has outside teachers, she has had to deal with teachers in the past who “just don’t understand that I can’t just sit still and, like, do all of this for hours and hours. I need to get up and move.” She has also had teachers, though, who “understand, okay, after this you need to get up, you need to move, just so I will do better in school and meet my goals.” Ironically, Michael was the participant who spoke the most about needing to go outside and play sports or jump on the trampoline, yet he does not feel that he struggles with hyperactivity. It could be that his opportunities to burn off energy help to keep him in balance, so he does not feel that he is hyperactive.

Brain hyperactivity was only directly recognized by Morgan when she talked about how her brain will not shut down at night, so she can sleep. However, several participants described an internal dialogue that happens inside their minds at lightning

speeds, taking them on a wild mental goose chase. This indicated the occurrence of brain hyperactivity for them as well. I was especially fascinated with Evalyn's description of this type of event.

I might see a word, and I start thinking about that specific word, and then it'll trigger other thoughts. And I'll go from thinking about Alexander Hamilton to musicals to *Wicked* to Idina Menzel to *Frozen* to Disney to *Lilo and Stitch*.

Impact on learning. The organizing theme of *impact on learning* came about from the basic themes of *need more one-on-one*, *school takes longer*, *curriculum choices/interest level affects learning*, and *flexibility is key*. Homeschool students with ADHD symptoms generally need more one-on-one help than students without learning challenges. Juliana and Evalyn both believe that the one-on-one help that they receive, whether from a parent or a co-op teacher, enables them to better focus on their studies. Evalyn considered it important enough to give as advice to other families who have students with ADHD symptoms who might want to homeschool.

If you're not around to help your child do stuff, have someone at hand who will or get them in co-ops where they can have someone. Maybe even think about hiring a tutor or something to really help them get it.

Ivy, who does not receive much one-on-one help unless her mom hires a tutor to help her, made sure to note that she would benefit from more individualized attention while doing her school work.

Because homeschool students with ADHD symptoms struggle with staying on task or even getting started on a task, school work often takes longer to complete, leading

to extended school days. Whether they have trouble prioritizing their school work over other things they would like to do, like Morgan, or simply struggle with focusing long enough to finish assignments, like several other students, a longer school day is par for the course for many homeschool students with ADHD symptoms. It should be noted, however, that this is not the case for all participants. Timothy and Connor both reported a fairly short length of school day. Timothy said it only takes him “an hour or two hours or two hours and thirty minutes” to do his school work. He starts after his chores are completed midmorning and is finished by early afternoon. Although these were two of the youngest participants with arguably fewer academic demands than the older students, it is possible that their parents purposively design their schooling in a way that results in a shorter school day in order to meet their individual needs.

Curriculum choices and interest levels certainly affect learning for homeschool students with ADHD symptoms. Ben noted how much more successful he became in math once he was able to change to a computer-based curriculum that allowed him to go back and relearn any topic with which he was struggling. “It really helped me focus once I was able to find what best suited me.” Other participants mentioned curricula that uses videos and hands-on manipulatives, enabling them to use multiple avenues for learning material at their own pace. Having assignments in which they are interested in the subject matter gives these students more motivation to try to stay focused.

For homeschool students with ADHD symptoms, flexibility is key to their educational success. Going at their own pace, changing things that are not working, and schooling in a location and during a time of day that best meets their needs are all vital

for academic achievement. Everything points back to the importance of individualized learning.

Change over time. *Learning to manage* and *finding what works* were the basic themes that formed the organizing theme of *change over time*. Learning to manage ADHD symptoms over time is something that some of the older participants felt was a result of getting to know themselves and accept who they are and how they learn. Juliana even said that it made a difference to her when she received a diagnosis and realized that there is a reason for her struggles. “It was very helpful for me to be able to know that about myself, to be able to know how I work and get things done.” This made it easier for her to acknowledge that some things might be a little harder for her, but she is capable of learning.

Finding what works is an ongoing process for these students and their families. A multitude of factors have been explored in this study, and often, trial and error are the only way to determine the best recipe for success for each individual. This takes much time, perseverance, patience, and of course, flexibility, as needs will most certainly change over time. Families who choose homeschooling for their students with ADHD symptoms should be committed to finding what works in order for these students to be academically successful.

Behaviors noticed during interview. The organizing theme of *behaviors noticed during interview* came from the basic themes of *real-time loss of focus* and *memory problems*. One of the interesting things that happened during the interviews was that many participants displayed common ADHD symptoms during our conversations. I

should have expected this, but it had not occurred to me that it would happen until it did. At least half of the participants experienced real-time loss of focus during their interview. This meant that they lost their train of thought and had to ask me to repeat a question or remind them what we were talking about. Memory problems were evident as well, in that some could not remember enough about certain aspects of their experiences to share them with me. Will's interview was in the summer, and he had a hard time remembering what a typical school day is like for him, "cause it's been a few months since I've been in school." Ben admitted that he has a hard time remembering things that he has just been told, although this problem was worse when he was younger. Francesca suggested that students with ADHD symptoms should write down anything they are trying to learn, so that they do not forget it.

Flashcards. I know for me, I couldn't remember anything, so write everything down. 'Cause your brain will go a whole different direction, and you'll forget what you were doing, so just write it down as soon as it comes to your brain.

Summary

To conclude this chapter, I will summarize the answers to the main research question and the three subquestions. Current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms describe their individual experiences within a homeschool environment as being very personal to their particular learning needs. Although there were some similarities between participant descriptions at times, no two experiences were exactly the same, even between siblings. Individualized learning proved to be a central theme to homeschooling as a student with ADHD symptoms. Current or former

homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive the individualized approach of homeschooling within their own experiences, so their perceptions had a great level of variability. However, it was common to hear that students had developed individual learning practices that they did not believe would be acceptable in a traditional learning environment, such as listening to music, doodling while listening, and moving around at their own leisure.

The factors of individualized education in a homeschool environment that current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms consider to be important include going at their own pace, one-on-one learning, and flexibility, to name a few. More than anything, these students expressed that the ability to mold their learning experience to their own needs was the most important factor in their success. Current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive, just as all other things, a variety of challenges within a homeschool environment. The inability to focus and dealing with distractions seemed to be on the top of the list, though, showing that ADHD symptoms often supersede the learning experience for those who experience them, even within a homeschooling environment. The next chapter will conclude the research project with a discussion of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and social implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the personal experiences of current or former homeschool students, ages 12-21 years, who had been diagnosed with ADHD or have reported symptoms relating to attention, focus, and/or hyperactivity that have negatively impacted learning, but have not been formally diagnosed. The following research question and subquestions were used to guide the study:

Main Question:

How do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms describe their individual experiences within a homeschool environment?

Subquestions:

1. How do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive the individualized approach of homeschooling?
2. What are the factors of individualized education in a homeschool environment that current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms consider to be important?
3. What factors do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive as challenging within a homeschool environment?

Participants were given the opportunity to discuss the academic approach that was incorporated into their homeschooling environment and describe their feelings regarding whether homeschooling was a good fit for their learning needs. Furthermore, inquiries

were made into the participants' ideas regarding important factors that led to any academic achievements or challenges that prevented success, including significant components they found to be beneficial or disadvantageous. The result is a complete depiction of each participant's perception of homeschooling as a student with ADHD symptoms.

I utilized a phenomenological design for this qualitative study, following the model of Moustakas (1994). This provided a structure that focused on the experiences of the participants, rather than the interpretations of the researcher. As a component of this model, I employed *epoche* to bracket myself out of the study through a thorough explanation of my own experiences in relation to the research topic. This practice allows the readers to come to their own conclusions about whether my background impacted the study in any significant way.

Data were collected through interviews that provided an in-depth understanding of the personal experiences of current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms. The interviews allowed the participants to reflect on their thoughts and feelings of homeschooling during K-12 years. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' modification of van Kaam's structure, which emphasizes horizontalization through significant statements (Moustakas, 1994). This process revealed themes that were verified against each transcript. Individual textural and structural descriptions were prepared for each participant, and then a composite description of the essence of homeschooling with ADHD was presented.

The key finding of this study was that homeschooling as a student with ADHD symptoms is a personalized experience. Although there were some commonalities between certain participants, no two experiences were exactly the same. Each participant perceived their experience in their own unique way. The three global themes that emerged from the data were *individualization*, *self-concept*, and *experience of symptoms*. It seemed that most everything that the participants described in their interviews could fit into one of these three themes. Often, their experiences overlapped into more than one theme, showing how each of these areas plays a significant part in the participants' experiences as homeschool students with ADHD symptoms.

Interpretation of the Findings

Before discussing each of the themes of this project in light of the existing research, it is important to revisit the theoretical framework that guided the study. Gardner's (2006) MI theory was used as the theoretical framework of this study, because it embodies the idea of individualized learning. Under this theory, intelligence is defined as the capacity a person has to process a certain kind of information and includes:

- Musical Intelligence
- Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence
- Logical-Mathematical Intelligence
- Linguistic Intelligence
- Spatial Intelligence
- Interpersonal Intelligence

- Intrapersonal Intelligence
- Naturalist Intelligence

Although each person will have one or two intelligences that seem to be dominant, it is believed that everyone operates from a combination of intelligences. The idea of discovering and working within a child's strengths, rather than focusing on their deficits, is inherent to MI theory. Those strengths can then be utilized to bridge the gap to areas of weakness in order to increase overall capabilities. Gardner believes that everyone possesses all eight intelligences, and some just need to be nurtured more than others (Koch, 2007). Armstrong (2012) supports this type of strengths-based perspective of neurodiversity, rather than the weakness-based perspective of disability, stating that it can provide students a more positive educational experience and lead to lifetime success.

Upon analyzing the data from participant interviews, it became obvious that using the MI theory to guide this research project was the right choice. All of the participants shared information about how they prefer to learn, although they probably did not realize that they were describing their dominant intelligences at the time. Some just said something short and to the point, such as Ava's comment, "I like reading and listening." Ben, on the other hand, provided a very detailed description about how music has impacted him in significant ways, even helping him improve his capacity to learn. Students were also forthcoming about the areas in which they are not as strong. Evalyn struggles with writing, and Francesca admitted that she has "no self-discipline." It was fascinating to hear the participants talk about their own perceptions of personal abilities and how they use them to their advantage in learning.

Theme 1: Individualization

The theme of individualization of education in homeschooling families that Morton (2010) described certainly rang true in my study as well. In this section, I will describe how the existing literature from Chapter 2 compared with my findings concerning the theme of individualization. It is structured by the organizing themes that led to the global theme of individualization.

Schedule. Several participants described how they have a hard time waking up in the mornings or staying awake during the day. Wiebe et al. (2013) discussed the difficulties associated with adolescents with ADHD and lack of sleep and how it is detrimental to academic success. The freedom to accommodate extended sleep schedules and follow a nontraditional school schedule can be a benefit for these students, but only if there is proper self-discipline or oversight from a parent to ensure that school work is completed when the student is awake and alert. As an example, from two homeschool graduates that I interviewed, Francesca fell behind in her school work partly because she fell asleep often during the day and did not complete her work when she was awake. She has failed a couple of classes in college, because she has a hard time getting to class on time in the mornings. Juliana, on the other hand, knew she was not a morning person, so she took it easy in the mornings and completed her assignments in the afternoon and evenings. She has followed suit in college, scheduling all of her classes for the afternoon and completing homework in the evenings.

Environment. In terms of environment, a few of my participants noted that the tools that they use to help them focus would not be acceptable in a mainstream

classroom, because these things could be a distraction to other learners. Several students use music to drown out other sounds, some read aloud to help them remember, and others need to walk around or move while listening. These behaviors would not fit in the traditional standardized classroom setting that Galves and Walker (2012) described as “rigid” and “stultifying” (p. 34). Participants also described how flexibility in location aids them in successfully completing school work. Some prefer to sit at a table, because being a little uncomfortable motivates them to finish their work sooner. Others view being uncomfortable as a distraction and prefer to sit on a couch or beanbag. Being able to take breaks to go outside for some fresh air, get a snack, or use the restroom helps participants to refocus and concentrate better when they are working.

Nonconformity to a traditional classroom environment often leads school personnel to refer students for a diagnosis (Watson, 2011), but Mares et al. (2007) recommended modification of the school environment as a possible alternative to standard ADHD treatments. All of my participants, whether or not they had been formally diagnosed with ADHD and regardless of medication treatment, felt the flexibility of their homeschooling environment was a positive aspect of homeschooling. Jennens (2011) noted that there is a lack of research available concerning families who chose to homeschool for a time, but then returned their children to mainstream schools, possibly skewing the literature towards those who have found success with the homeschooling experience. This is possibly true in my study as well, although I did have two participants who had homeschooled for a time, went to a private school, and then came back to homeschooling, claiming it was a better fit for them.

Curriculum. As discussed in Chapter 2, there has been a shift in the last couple of decades in public schools in the U.S. towards test-driven curricula, resulting in a standardized way of teaching meant to help students pass a standardized test (Tanner, 2013). This makes it quite difficult for teachers to evaluate their students' individual needs and use creativity to provide personalized learning experiences. (Burks et al., 2015). Homeschool environments, on the other hand, usually consist of ample one-on-one instruction (Duvall et al., 2004; Jackson & Allan, 2010) and learning experiences that are tailored to each students' needs and interests through a variety of methods (Anthony, 2015). Participants were exposed to a variety of different learning modalities based up on their individual needs. Some used traditional textbooks, some used online programs, some went to class once a week at co-ops, some used video lessons, and some used a blend of different types of curricula to meet their needs in each subject area. This fell in line with the Institute of Education Sciences (2016) survey that provided data supporting that an eclectic mix of curriculum is used by most homeschool families. The idea that you can change something if it is not working seemed to penetrate throughout my participants' perspectives of learning, concurring with Rothermel's (2011) findings.

Hanna (2012) found in a rare ten-year longitudinal study of homeschooling families and their academic choices that homeschooling families became much more reliant on internet sources and expanded their curricular selections in order to better meet the individual needs of each student. My participants who had been homeschooling for several years all spoke about how their curriculum had changed over the years and several mentioned that online learning had been added to their academic repertoire.

Carpenter and Gann's (2016) study showed how the role of homeschooling parents morphed from that of a teacher to that of a facilitator as students reached high school and participated in more diverse learning modalities. Such was the case with the older students in my sample as well, many of whom mentioned the benefit of learning to work independently as a high school student in preparation for college courses.

Learning tools. Loten (2011) contended that, for students with SEN, individualized learning and one-on-one teaching is a critical factor of academic success. Three components that increase AET were identified-intensive instruction, explicit instruction, and cognitive and emotional support. Although my study of students with the specific SEN of ADHD symptoms did not directly address academic success, and instruction methods were only shared from the student perspective, the participants did provide insight into the teaching methods used and how well they considered them to be working. One-on-one teaching was commonly mentioned and always viewed as a positive aspect of the homeschooling experience. Intensive and explicit instruction seemed to be more likely to be used with the younger participants, as older participants moved towards more independent learning. It was interesting, however, that the older participants seemed to truly value the emotional support provided by their parents, but this element was not mentioned by many of the younger participants. This could be interpreted to mean that Loten's three components of AET play a role in the academic success of homeschool students with ADHD symptoms, but the importance of each component to the student may be more pronounced at different times depending on the students' ages.

Jones (2013), who has conducted one of the only other studies of homeschool students from their own perspectives, concluded that student choice, encouraged and supported by authority figures, promotes internalized motivation for learning. All of the participants' reports in the Jones study were positive, describing a good balance between parent-led and student-led learning, engagement in academic activity, and familial support. My participants, as homeschool students with ADHD symptoms, described a similar experience with a few exceptions. Only one participant in my study reported a negative reaction to her homeschooling experience, although she even concluded by the end of the interview that it met most of her needs. Student choice in learning was important to most of my participants, and they all seemed to have solid familial support. Although individualized learning experiences are inherent to homeschooling, having a strong support system in place also seems to be an important piece to a homeschool student's success.

Outside the home. Co-ops were of great importance to most of my participants, although there were a few who did not prefer the co-op experience, due to pacing issues or learning preferences. For those who did enjoy their co-ops, social interaction and expanded academic opportunities were most often cited as benefits. Although I explored the homeschooling experience through the eyes of the students, rather than the parents, Anthony's (2015) claim that parents are often willing to give up some of the freedom of homeschooling to a co-op in order to best meet the needs of their students seems to hold true within the current sample.

Van Schalkwyk and Bouwer (2011) conveyed the importance of understanding the homeschooling experience in light of the different microsystems that overlap in the homeschooling environment. There were many discussions with my participants of the different facets of each unique homeschooling experience. Each participant had their own individual reality consisting of microsystems that defined the personal identity of their homeschool. Some students even reported that their involvement in co-ops, extracurricular activities, and jobs was much different from that of their siblings. This supported the idea that each homeschool student has a unique experience, based on his or her own personal needs.

Theme 2: Self-Concept

Murphy (2014) found positive self-concept to be a benefit of homeschooling. This was confirmed through my study, for the most part. However, self-concept is a multifaceted notion. It is possible for homeschool students to have a positive self-concept in relation to their overall identity, but not as much in specific areas, such as academics or social interaction. The identifying themes that led to the global theme of self-concept are discussed below.

Internal. According to Riley (2015), the student-led, individualized learning that often takes place in homeschools, as opposed to the extrinsic behavior/reward system that is often used in conventional classrooms, may result in increased intrinsic motivation. Neuman and Guterman (2016) reported that homeschooling parents perceive independence and autonomy within their children as a direct result of the lifestyle of homeschooling. This indicated a social constructivist viewpoint in which these traits are

formed through experiences and environment, not merely academic pursuits. Intrinsic motivation was certainly present for some of my participants, but not all. Because my participants have all reported having ADHD symptoms, it is possible that these symptoms could be a factor in how much intrinsic motivation is developed. It did seem that those who claimed to have intrinsic motivation (although they did not call it by name) were more likely to convey a positive self-concept as it relates to their school experience.

External. Cook et al. (2013) indicated a lack of research concerning how homeschool students feel about their social lives, although most homeschooling parents report satisfaction with social opportunities for their students. In one small study of homeschooling students with learning disabilities, each of the three participants had experienced frustrating social interactions but had found their own niche in which friendships could blossom (Loten, 2011). The majority of my participants seemed happy with their level of social interaction. Most are involved in co-ops and/or extracurricular activities that help to fill the need to be around other kids. One student, who is not involved in a co-op, seemed a little sad when he reported that he did not have very many friends. Another, who is heavily involved in a co-op and other activities, in addition to having a friend at his house for homeschooling three days a week, stated that he wished he could be around friends more often. A couple of my participants, however, were content to be involved in few, if any, activities and did not have a desire to be around more people. The need for social interaction, as every other aspect of homeschooling as a

student with ADHD symptoms, is highly dependent upon each student's personal needs, indicating that it might have more to do with personality than anything else.

Academic. Self-concept can be negatively affected by academic challenges experienced by homeschool students with ADHD symptoms, but the ability to utilize personalized learning tools minimizes this effect for my participants. Student choice and interest in the subject being learned made a big difference in self-concept for my participants as well, resulting in much more satisfaction with the learning experience. These findings lined up well with Loten's (2011) idea that individualized learning is a critical component of academic success for students with SEN and Bannier's (2007) claim that the teaching methods of homeschooling teachers-complete mastery, appropriate pacing, retention, curriculum evaluation, and learning style accommodations-should be recognized by mainstream developmental educators. The individualized homeschool learning experience for students with ADHD symptoms allows many of them to find academic success, thereby reducing the negative impact on self-concept.

Emotional. Having their social needs met is an important component to emotional well-being for my participants. However, having a sense of accomplishment and learning to manage stress and anxiety also play a big role. Kendall and Taylor (2014) reported that students who were removed from traditional school settings as a result of their special needs not being met experienced a marked positive shift in their emotional, psychological, and, sometimes, even physical well-being once the stress of that environment was no longer present. There were a few of my participants who had been in traditional school settings and felt that their homeschooling environment was much less

stressful. Interestingly, there were a couple of participants who even reported the homeschool co-op setting to be stressful and had opted out of participation for that reason.

ADHD symptoms. Dolgun et al. (2014) conveyed that ADHD has shown to have an adverse effect on quality of life and self-concept, especially relating to school. My participants, although able to incorporate a lot of accommodations that might not be possible in a regular classroom setting, undoubtedly still struggle with the effect their ADHD symptoms have on their lives, both academically and otherwise. The stigma that often coincides with ADHD for students in traditional learning environments can be damaging for self-concept (Bussing & Mehta, 2013). However, this did not seem to be as prominent of a problem for my participants. In fact, some of the younger participants did not seem to be bothered by their difficulties much at all, possibly because their parents shape their homeschool days in a way that plays to their strengths, rather than focusing on their challenges.

Recent research has suggested that the academic shortcomings of students with ADHD linger into adolescence, debunking the previous idea that symptoms and associated problems at school taper off at puberty (Birchwood & Daley, 2012). All of my participants were between the ages of 12 and 21 years, and all still struggle with ADHD symptoms, even into college. Learning to manage their symptoms seemed to be the differentiating factor in those who are more successful and those who have a harder time as older adolescents and young adults. A structured, yet flexible, homeschooling environment seems to provide the best outcome in learning to manage their symptoms

and find success. Langberg et al. (2013) had recommended that students with ADHD would be better prepared for high school if there was a focus on homework organizational skills and classroom performance issues in the early years. Although the need for organizational skills would certainly align with the findings in my study, classroom performance issues are taken out of the equation for homeschool students. The absence of the expectation to conform to a classroom setting, which may not be the environment that is most conducive to their learning needs, could be seen as a benefit for students with ADHD symptoms.

Theme 3: Experience of Symptoms

ADHD was listed as one of the top diagnoses of children with SEN whose parents elected to home educate (Cook et al., 2013). As was stated in Chapter 2, at the time of this study, I was only able to locate one other article in which homeschool students with ADHD had been directly studied. Duvall et al. (2004) compared the academic performance of two homeschool students with ADHD to two traditionally schooled students with ADHD. A slight advantage was found in the progress of the homeschooled students, based on academic gains over a period of five months as revealed through standardized tests and rate-based measures. Because the purpose of my research was not to measure the academic success of the participants or to compare them to traditionally schooled students, but rather to explore their personal experiences, the only similarity between the two studies is that both purposefully and directly included homeschool students with ADHD (or ADHD symptoms) in the sample. In the rest of this section, I will focus on the findings of my study in relation to the experience of homeschool

students with ADHD symptoms compared to what has been found in the literature concerning mainstream students with ADHD.

Focus. Daley and Birchwood (2010) suggested that EF deficits and inattentive symptoms, rather than hyperactivity/impulsivity, should be the focus of ADHD interventions, as those seem to be the culprits of academic dysfunction. Although EF deficits were not directly addressed in this study, inattentiveness proved to be much more predominant as an academic challenge for my participants than hyperactivity. Both internal and external distractions loomed as the most obvious culprits for lack of focus. However, hyperfocus was mentioned as an occasional issue for a couple of the participants as well. For my participants, the ability to minimize distractions and incorporate focusing tools into their learning experience made a big difference in their ability to stay on task and successfully complete assignments.

Hyperactivity. As was previously stated, hyperactivity was not presented as much of a problem for most of my participants. However, there were several who described being fidgety, needing to get up and move, or experiencing brain hyperactivity (where their mind just goes and goes, not allowing them to relax or focus on the task at hand). The research from Chapter 2 that addressed hyperactivity mostly related to how relationships are affected, both in the home and with peers. Colley (2010), Tarver et al. (2014), and Paidipati and Deatrck (2015) discussed how family relationships can be strained due to the behavior of children with ADHD. Mulligan et al. (2013), however, contended that the behavior of these children is more a result of a stressful environment than a cause of it. Although a few of my participants noted that their parents need a good

deal of patience, mostly from having to repeat themselves over and over, none described strained family relationships. Of course, I was only getting the students' perspectives, not the parents, and there were no direct questions about family relationships. Those who did offer information about this topic described supportive and positive relationships.

Impact on learning. Students with ADHD have a historically more significant deficit in academic performance than their non-ADHD peers (Tarver et al., 2014). When evaluating the relationship between childhood ADHD diagnosis and high school academic outcome, Kent et al. (2011) found that this group:

1) received lower grades; 2) took fewer advanced level courses; 3) failed significantly more academic courses; 4) were rated by teachers as performing more poorly; 5) had poorer school attendance; and 6) were more likely to drop out before graduation. (p. 458)

My participants were not questioned about these specific factors. In reality, not all are as relevant to homeschool students as they are to traditional students, so it is difficult to make a comparison. There are so many different ways that homeschooling can be implemented and so many different homeschooling philosophies that rating the above factors across the population of homeschooling students who report ADHD symptoms might not be feasible. However, most of my participants seemed to be progressing well academically. There were a couple of exceptions to this, as one participant reported feeling that he is behind in his school work and another, who had already graduated, reported taking two years to finish 12th grade due to a lack of structure and self-discipline. These two participants were siblings, so it is possible that

parenting/homeschooling style plays a role in academic success for homeschool students with ADHD symptoms. That is a topic for another study. Generally speaking, my participants reported finding greater academic success in a structured, yet flexible, environment where they could go at their own pace, had ample one-on-one instruction, and had the opportunity to incorporate subjects of interest into their curriculum.

Change over time. Learning to manage ADHD symptoms over time was something that the older participants in my study acknowledged as being central to their success. It was unclear if this is a process that happens with age and maturity for some or if it is explicitly taught. However, my oldest participant admitted that she still struggles with managing her symptoms, which has affected her negatively in college. The ongoing search for curricula and teaching/learning methods that work best for each individual homeschool student with ADHD symptoms also seems to be an inherent part of the process. An eclectic mix of curriculum choices and learning methods that evolves with experience and with the changing needs and ages of their children is commonly seen among homeschooling households (Institute of Education Sciences, 2016). Participants who had homeschooled for several years reported that there had been many changes in their homeschooling experience over the years, as they and their parents have tried to figure out what works best for individual needs.

Behaviors noticed during interview. It was interesting that several of my participants exhibited behaviors, such as real-time loss of focus and memory problems, which are common symptoms of ADHD, during their interviews. This is something that I did not find reported in any previous research, most likely because there are very few

studies available in which homeschool students or students with ADHD were personally interviewed (Murphy, 2014; Hareendran et al., 2015). I felt it was noteworthy to report, as it could be beneficial to future research projects concerning the population of homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation that was expected for this study was that the three young adult participants (ages 18-21 years) might not fully remember their experiences as homeschooling students with ADHD symptoms, because they had graduated prior to the interviews. Their perspectives of how they felt and perceived homeschooling may be interpreted through the lens of a young adult, rather than a child. Although it proved to be true that some seemed to interpret their experience through the lens of a young adult, I felt it provided a unique perspective that added to the depth of the study and could be contributory to future research. Remembering their experiences as homeschoolers did not seem to be an issue for the young adult participants, but ironically, some of the participants who are current homeschool students had a hard time remembering aspects of their experiences. For example, Will, who was interviewed during the summer, had a difficult time remembering what a typical school day was like for him, because it had been a couple of months since he had been in school. This brings up the next possible limitation that had been previously expressed-the range of ADHD symptomatology that may be experienced by different participants. I believe this did play a role in the perceptions the participants conveyed. Some viewed their symptoms as a major difficulty, but others did not seem to be as bothered by them. It is also possible that the

type of ADHD symptoms the participants exhibit-hyperactive, inattentive, or combination-could have resulted in different perceptions of their academic experiences.

Other limitations came to light as the study progressed. It is possible that some participants may not have shared enough information to get the full picture of their homeschooling experience. Those who are naturally quiet did not always answer with great detail, and I could have done a better job on some of the interviews of asking more questions to fuel the conversation, rather than just moving on when they were not forthcoming. I also did not ask about other learning challenges that may be present, such as dyslexia, that may also affect learning.

Although gaining the student perspective was an important component of this study, it is important to note that the student perspective was the only one that was obtained. Therefore, there may be aspects of the participants' homeschooling experiences that are not fully understood. Interviewing the parents, in addition to the students, and/or observing the students in their learning environments would have provided a more complete depiction, but it also may have skewed the reader's or my own interpretations of the students' portrayals of their perspectives of their experiences. Therefore, it is best to list it as a limitation and suggest the extended inquiries as a possibility for future research.

Another limitation that arose was the lack of knowledge regarding how the experiences of homeschool students with ADHD symptoms compare to those of traditionally-schooled students with ADHD symptoms. It is possible that the experiences would prove to be similar if I also interviewed students from mainstream classrooms who

have ADHD symptoms. I have not found any literature from which a comparison can be made. Further, homeschool students with ADHD symptoms may have the same difficulties in a homeschool environment that they would have in a regular classroom, but they are not viewed as behavior issues, due to the difference in expectations of the two environments.

It became clear throughout the interviews that other factors, such as personality, parenting style, and teaching methods, play a big role in the participants' perspectives of their homeschool experiences. Everything cannot be contributed only to their ADHD symptoms. I attempted to provide as much detail as possible of each participant's personal story, so readers can evaluate the many different aspects of the experience and make an informed decision as to whether their own circumstance might benefit from the knowledge provided here.

Of course, the small size of the sample should be recognized as a limitation, although age range, ethnic diversity, and gender were all well-represented for a study of this size. Further, all of the participants were from the same general region of the United States where homeschooling is quite prevalent and many social and academic opportunities exist outside of the home. Experiences might be very different for homeschoolers from other geographic locations who may not have access to as many options.

Finally, it is important to reiterate the experience of *epoche* that I, as the researcher, shared in this study. Although I provided detailed information about my own relationship to the subject of homeschooling with ADHD symptoms in Chapter 3 and

how I was personally affected by this study in Chapter 4, some may view my personal connection as a limitation. I believe that the process of *epoche* has allowed me to present unbiased findings, but it is ultimately up to each reader to decide whether they agree with me.

Recommendations

Some suggestions for future research have been mentioned in previous sections of this report, but I will reiterate and add to them here. This research project has provided foundational knowledge about a population that is understudied. To my knowledge, there is no other study available that has explored the experiences of homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms. Therefore, it can be used as a foundation on which many other studies of this population can build.

In order to gain a more complete picture of the experience of homeschool students who have ADHD symptoms, it would be helpful to interview their parents and/or add observations to the data-gathering process. This would help to fill in the gaps where there may be limited understanding from the student interviews and provide more detailed background information. Knowing the specific type of ADHD each participant experiences-attentive, hyperactive, or combined-would also provide extended knowledge of the phenomenon. Although questions were asked about whether the participants' difficulties were more with focus, hyperactivity, or both, it was not always clear whether the self-reports would have concurred with formal diagnoses.

Because this was an exploratory study, there are many aspects of the findings that could form research problems for future studies. The impact that parenting styles and

homeschooling philosophies have on the level of academic success or self-concept of homeschool students with ADHD symptoms would be interesting to discover. The comorbidity of other learning or psychological disabilities, along with ADHD symptoms, and the impact they might have on a homeschooling student's experience would expand the knowledge-base in the research fields of homeschooling, ADHD, and the other disabilities that would be chosen for study. As with most other studies, focusing in on specific demographic groups within the population would bring about a wider understanding of the phenomenon. A wide range of ethnicities were included in the current study, but there were no discussions about what role the participants' ethnicities play in their experience as homeschool students with ADHD symptoms, if any.

This research project has provided a good bit of information about the essence of the phenomenon of being a homeschool student with ADHD symptoms, but there is much more that can be learned. It is my hope that the research of this population will continue to grow, and existing homeschool students with ADHD symptoms or others who are considering homeschooling will benefit from the knowledge that is gained.

Implications

The previously understudied population of homeschool students with ADHD symptoms was explored in this study. The exhaustive literature review presented in Chapter 2 revealed no studies that specifically involved this population through their own perspectives, giving the current research a foundational position. Cook et al. (2013) and Parsons and Lewis (2010) had suggested that gathering information from homeschool students, rather than their parents, was a way that the research needed to be expanded.

These authors, along with Kendall and Taylor (2014) and Kunzman and Gaither (2013), had also called for further investigations into specific SENs, such as ADHD, as related to the homeschool experience. The current research project succeeded in expanding the literature in both of these ways.

Students with ADHD symptoms whose success has been limited in a conventional classroom, which is a common occurrence (Birchwood & Daley, 2012), may find the results of this study useful when they and their parents are considering the academic environment that would best meet their needs. With the homeschooling population growing so rapidly (Institute of Education Sciences, 2014) and more than 11% of school children in the United States having been diagnosed with ADHD (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015), it is likely that a number of these students are currently being homeschooled or will be in the future. Understanding how the individual needs of current homeschool students with ADHD symptoms are being met and whether they are finding success in this alternative learning environment will help families to determine whether homeschooling would be a viable educational option for their students with ADHD symptoms, thus providing them with an alternative way to achieve their educational goals.

Educators and school boards may be able to use the findings of this study to determine whether it would be in some students' best interest to offer alternative means of learning, such as a hybrid home/school model. The academic co-op set-up in which many of the participants were well-engaged could provide a prototype for traditional schools to follow. Home educators can use the scenarios presented to address any

existing deficiencies and modify their methods to promote higher opportunities for academic success for their students. One area that stood out as particularly relevant in this capacity was that it might benefit students with ADHD symptoms or other learning disabilities if their parent educator(s) were trained in how to properly use curriculum modifications and accommodations to meet their students' learning needs.

Future researchers and educational planners for ADHD students, whether in traditional or alternative learning environments, can use the limitations of this study to further advance the knowledge-base for this population and bring about better learning opportunities for these individuals. Looking even deeper into the experiences of homeschool students with ADHD symptoms and comparing them with those of traditional students with ADHD symptoms would broaden the understanding of the impact environment has on academic success. Each bit of knowledge that is added to the literature for this population will bring about an increased opportunity for these students to find ways to gain confidence in their learning capabilities and, thereby, extend their unique way of thinking and accomplishing goals into the workforce in capacities they may not have previously considered. Society at large will benefit from having individuals with ADHD share their creativity with the world on a much broader scale.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the personal experiences of current or former homeschool students, ages 12-21 years, who report having ADHD symptoms. I was successful in that endeavor. Through this exploration, the three global themes of *individualization*, *self-concept*, and *experience of symptoms*

emerged. Individualized learning proved to be the cornerstone of the experience of being a homeschool student with ADHD symptoms. Although some similarities could be established among the group, as a whole, each participant's story provided a distinct perspective, reminding the reader that a personalized approach to learning is key to the experience. With that said, there were a few things that emerged as items that generally seem to lead to a satisfying academic experience. Students who learn in a structured, yet flexible, environment where they can go at their own pace, have one-on-one instruction, and utilize focusing tools that meet their individual needs tend to report the most gratification with their academic progress.

Homeschool students with ADHD symptoms have not previously had a voice in the literature. Now, however, the conversation has been started and the door has been opened for the academic community to respond. These students have given a glimpse into their daily lives, vulnerably sharing struggles and boldly professing successes. As a researcher, I was humbled that these young people chose to allow me to tell their stories, and I believe that their courage will pave the way for others who are searching for the educational path that will best meet their needs as a student with ADHD symptoms.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Note: Questions will be tailored to the participant, based on whether they are a current or former homeschool student.

Research Question: How do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms describe their individual experiences within a homeschool environment?

1. How long have you been homeschooled, and if you've ever gone to regular school, how long did you go there?
 - a. If you've ever gone to regular school, please tell me how you compare being homeschooled to going to regular classes.
2. Tell me how a regular day of homeschooling is for you.

If it is not provided by participant, ask:

- a. Who is your teacher?
 - b. Are your siblings or other people present during your homeschool time?
 - c. During what time of the day you typically complete school work?
 - d. Where do you complete school work?
3. Tell me about your school work.
 - a. What types of lessons do you do for different subjects? Are they done on the computer, in workbooks, by reading textbooks and answering questions, by watching videos, etc.)
 - b. Do you attend a cooperative or support group? If so, how do you like it?
 - c. What other teaching or learning methods does your teacher/parent use (go at your own pace, choose topics that interest you, hands-on learning, lectures, etc.)? Which do you like best?

4. Please tell me about your difficulties with attention, focus, and/or hyperactivity.
5. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being not at all and 10 being very much, how much do you think the difficulties you just described have interfered with your school?

Subquestion #1: How do current and former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive the individualized approach of homeschooling?

6. Tell me about anything in your homeschool experience that you feel meets your individual needs.
 - a. Now thinking specifically about your difficulties with attention, focus, and/or hyperactivity, tell me your feelings about your individual learning needs being met through your homeschooling experience.

Subquestion #2: What are the factors of individualized education in a homeschool environment that current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms consider to be important?

7. What do you consider to be important about designing your education to meet your personal needs in your homeschool experience?
 - a. Why are these things important to you?
 - b. What role do you feel your difficulties with attention, focus, and/or hyperactivity play in your ideas about what things are important?

Subquestion #3: What factors do current or former homeschool students who report ADHD symptoms perceive as challenging within a homeschool environment?

8. Tell me about anything in your homeschooling experience that you feel is challenging.

- a. Why is it challenging?
- b. What role do you feel your difficulties with attention, focus, and/or hyperactivity play in your ideas about what things are challenging?

Conclusion:

9. Tell me about anything you would like to change about your homeschooling experience.
10. What suggestions would you give to other families with students who have difficulties with attention, focus, and/or hyperactivity who are homeschooling or are considering homeschooling?
11. How does your homeschooling experience prepare you for your future activities (e.g. job, college, social or family responsibilities, etc.)?
12. Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about your homeschooling experiences before we conclude our interview?