

# **Mothering and Attention Deficit Disorder: The Impact of Professional Power**

**Thesis submitted by**

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## STATEMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS

This thesis has been made possible through the support of many people as follows:

Supervisors:

Primary Supervisor            Professor Rosamund Thorpe

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Editorial Assistance         Dr Dorothy Gibson-Wilde

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this country and overseas the debate on what causes Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and the interventions necessary is conducted fiercely along with claims and counterclaims as to the validity of the disorder. It appears that everyone has an opinion on the real-ness or otherwise of ADD. What is missing from this debate, which takes place in the media, in academic circles and in the general community, is the day to day reality of living with ADD, as a woman or as a mother. This thesis explores the relationship between power and knowledge in the competing discourses on Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). It also examines the ideology of motherhood and the construct of difference.

The research for this thesis took place in North Queensland and tells the stories of women affected by ADD, primarily the mothers of children with ADD. In telling their stories, the women identify their children as different, in that they learn and experience the world differently. They articulate that their child's difference attracts stigma and blame, not so much to the child, but to the mother of the child, as she is seen by many in the general community and by professionals as causing her child's difference. The women also report that their families are different and that they live different lives from commonly accepted norms.

This thesis demonstrates that these women struggle, usually unsupported, to parent their children and that some women are also supporting husbands who may have ADD, thus revealing that they endure enormous physical and emotional workloads. These workloads and the isolation and marginalisation that occur within their families and in the general community affect their physical and mental health. This thesis also reveals that some mothers are subjected to verbal and physical abuse from their children. This research demonstrates that abuse is not confined to the home as women experience abuse from by both professionals and governments which seek to normalise the mothers and their children.

Not content to be labelled as bad mothers, the women challenge professional discourses which hold them responsible for having different children and different

families. These women create their own discourse on ADD which is based on their experience of having ADD or parenting children with ADD. Their knowledge is used to advocate for families and individuals and to provide, where possible, practical strategies or support.

This thesis recommends that a strengths based focus needs to be implemented, especially within the education system and professional practices to prevent abuse. It also calls for professionals to work alongside families to implement programs and strategies that support family members. Additional research is called for to explore what it means to be different and how difference impacts on all members of the family. Another area of crucial further research would be to determine how fathers can contribute more fully to raising their children and supporting their partners. In conclusion this thesis argues that difference is a currency that runs through our society and that society has choices to make regarding difference. It can choose to pathologise difference, or it can embrace difference as a vital part of humanity.

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