

THE HUNTING PARTY

WHY UNCERTAINTY IS MAKING HUNTERS IMPORTANT AGAIN

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PROMOTIONAL EXTRACTS FROM *THE HUNTING PARTY*

Deficit compared with what?

ADHD, attention and the environments around us

The Hunting Party is a personal exploration of neurodivergence, uncertainty and the different forms of attention human groups need. In these extracts, Chris Kempt reflects on recognising ADHD at 51 and asks whether behaviours described as deficits can sometimes be better understood as a mismatch between a person and the environment around them. The argument does not deny impairment or dismiss treatment. It asks what else the same cognitive machinery may be for.

CHAPTERS 2-3 / PAPERBACK PP. 17-20 AND 25-26

EXTRACT 1 / CHAPTER 2 / PP. 17-18

What I do have is a growing suspicion that we repeatedly make the same mistake when judging people: we observe a behaviour in one environment, decide what it says about the person, and forget to ask what that behaviour might be for.

The child who cannot sit still in a classroom.

The employee who becomes restless after eighteen months.

The person who notices every conversation happening around them but forgets the instruction directly in front of them.

The entrepreneur who keeps starting things.

The colleague who asks why everyone is following a process nobody can defend.

The person standing away from the scrum, apparently doing nothing, because they are waiting to see where the ball comes out.

We have names for some of these behaviours. Quite a few of the names imply that something has gone wrong.

Maybe sometimes it has.

But before deciding that, there is another question worth asking.

What if the environment is part of the diagnosis?

EXTRACT 2 / CHAPTER 3 / PP. 19-20

Deficit Compared With What?

What if evolution didn't produce a best human brain because there is no best human brain?

A tribe composed entirely of Socrates would presumably be fucking unbearable and possibly starve while debating the definition of lunch. But a tribe with no Socrates at all might keep doing something catastrophically stupid because everybody agrees that this is simply how lunch has always been obtained.

I keep coming back to that because, once you accept the possibility that there is no optimum human brain, quite a lot of the language we use about people starts to look strange. We talk about intelligence as though more is always better, attention as though there is a correct amount, sociability as though there is a desirable setting somewhere between hermit and Labrador, and behaviour as though it can be assessed independently of whatever environment the person happens to be standing in. When somebody sits outside the range we have decided is normal, we give the difference a name. Sometimes that name is extremely useful and sometimes the difference is genuinely disabling, but there is an assumption hiding underneath all of this which increasingly bothers me, which is that the normal range is normal because it is intrinsically better, rather than because we have designed a great deal of modern life around it.

This is one of the reasons I have become increasingly uncomfortable with the term ADHD. I am not denying the collection of behaviours it describes. I recognise rather too many of them. I can lose something I was holding thirty seconds ago, begin making a cup of tea and find myself reorganising a cupboard, disappear into something interesting for hours while becoming almost physically irritated by something boring, and experience a meeting in which nobody has said anything new for fifteen minutes as a form of low-grade torture. If somebody wants evidence that my attention does not always behave in the manner expected by modern institutions, I can probably supply it without leaving the house.

What bothers me is the interpretation embedded in the name. Deficit compared with what? Disordered for whose purposes? Even hyperactivity, which at least describes something observable, depends heavily on what the person is being asked to do. Put a child in a chair for six hours and movement becomes hyperactivity. Put the same child somewhere where movement is useful and it becomes movement. I don't mean that as the reverse argument that ADHD is secretly a superpower and everybody should throw away their medication, because some of the consequences are obviously shit. Forgetting important things is not a hidden evolutionary gift. Losing track of money isn't improved by calling it cognitive diversity, and if your attention repeatedly prevents you doing something you desperately want or need to do then the impairment is real.

What I am less sure about is whether impairment tells us what the underlying machinery is for.

My working word for my own experience is Hyperattention. It feels closer to what actually happens. My attention does not seem absent, quite often there is too much of it, spread across too many things, until something crosses some internal threshold and almost all of it suddenly points in one direction. I can be failing quite badly to attend to the thing somebody wants me to concentrate on while simultaneously noticing the conversation at the next table, somebody entering the room, a change in the music, a dog behaving oddly, a person whose body language has shifted and a sign I didn't consciously realise I had read. Then something becomes interesting and the room can almost disappear. That doesn't feel like a shortage of attention. It feels like attention being allocated according to a different set of priorities.

EXTRACT 3 / CHAPTER 3 / PP. 25-26

Medicine quite reasonably has to deal with the person living in the environment that actually exists. If somebody cannot organise their life, maintain relationships, work, sleep or do the things they want to do, telling them the trait might hypothetically have been useful somewhere else isn't treatment. We don't live on the Pleistocene savannah, and I would personally prefer not to start.

But the existence of impairment doesn't close the larger question.

Why does so much variation persist? Why do we repeatedly find people whose attention, relationship with novelty, appetite for risk, comfort with routine and tendency to explore differ so dramatically? Why can the same person look hopeless in one environment and unusually capable in another?

Perhaps at least part of the answer is that the variation is useful.

Normality then becomes a slightly different concept. Normal is statistically useful and clinically necessary, but normal is not the same thing as optimal. If there is no best human brain, being close to the average does not make somebody the finished version of a person any more than being unusually tall, short, fast or strong does.

This is why I don't want Hyperattention to become another heroic identity. Replacing Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder with Attention Gifted Wonderful Person would be exactly the same mistake facing the other direction. If there is no best human brain, mine doesn't get to win either.

Hyperattention is useful to me because it changes the question. Instead of asking why attention is missing, I can ask where it is going, what attracts it, when it broadens, when it narrows, which environments make it useful and which make it chaotic. The Farmer idea adds another question that I had previously neglected: who takes whatever people like me find and turns it into something dependable?

That feels much more like an ecology.

THE HUNTING PARTY

Why Uncertainty Is Making Hunters Important Again

Chris Kempt



ABOUT THE BOOK

The Hunting Party: Why Uncertainty Is Making Hunters Important Again explores why some people see patterns, risks and possibilities that others miss, why the same characteristics can look dysfunctional in one environment and invaluable in another, and why this kind of mind may matter more again as the world becomes less stable.

Chris Kempt began understanding his own ADHD at 51. The book uses that recognition, alongside experiences from business, creativity, illness and recovery, to explore how different kinds of minds respond to unstable systems.

Extracts from Chapter 2, 'Why Are They Doing This?' (pp. 17-18), and Chapter 3, 'There Is No Best Human Brain' (pp. 19-20 and 25-26).

The ebook is currently free on Amazon

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