



A Situated Expectancy-Value Perspective for Understanding ADHD in College Students



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ADHD and Motivation

- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by difficulties regulating attention, hyperactivity, and poor impulse control¹
- ADHD includes motivational components^{2,3}, but few studies have used motivational frameworks from educational psychology to conceptualize academic motivation for students with ADHD^{4,5}.
- We sought to complement established neurobiological mechanisms with the socio-cognitive perspective of Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (SEVT)⁶.

ADHD in the Context of SEVT

Expectancies. Limited prior work suggests ADHD may decrease college students' expectancies for success⁷. We also assessed expectancies for managing time and organizing work (i.e., executive functioning).

Hypothesis 1: Students with ADHD at a selective college will report lower expectancies for executive functioning – but not necessarily content mastery – compared to their non-ADHD peers.

Values. Some evidence indicates ADHD may negatively impact college students' values⁷, but this may not hold in a mastery-oriented collegiate environment.

Hypothesis 2: Students with ADHD at a selective, mastery-oriented college will value academics similarly to their non-ADHD peers.

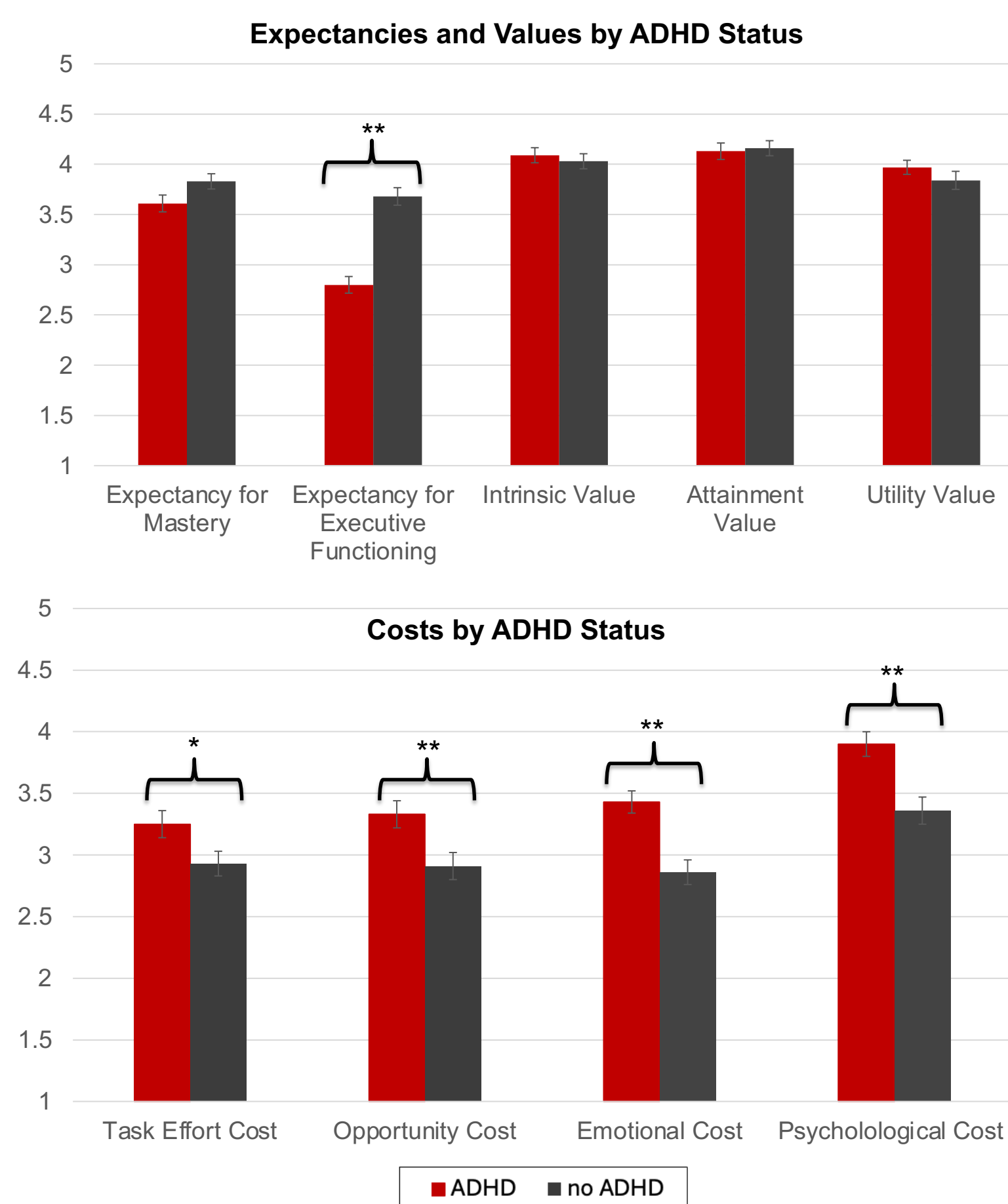
Costs. Students with ADHD may experience higher costs due to difficulties with focus and organization (effort cost) leading to less time and energy for other pursuits (opportunity cost). Given amplified negative emotion⁸, emotional and psychological costs may also be elevated.

Hypothesis 3: Students with ADHD will report higher costs of all types than their non-ADHD peers.

Mixed-Methods Approach

- Surveys were given to students at a selective liberal arts college to assess **expectancies** (for mastery, for executive functioning), **values** (intrinsic, attainment, utility), and **costs** (effort, opportunity, emotional, psychological).
- Half the sample had a formal ADHD diagnosis ($n = 103$). Half reported no ADHD ($n = 99$)
- Students with ADHD also provided narrative accounts of cost ($n = 79$): *"In what ways do you perceive your ADHD causes you to struggle more in your life at college?"* Narratives were used to:
 - center the experiences of students with ADHD,
 - triangulate survey responses, and
 - capture costs not reflected in survey items.

Quantitative Analysis



Qualitative Analysis

- Inductive and deductive approaches were used to create a scheme with 12 distinct codes⁹. Strong inter-rater reliability ($\kappa = .84$) was established. Three major themes were extracted:

Theme 1: Students' struggles reflect difficulties with self-regulation.

"Forgetting that things are due is the hardest part...It's also difficult to motivate myself to start work and not procrastinate."

"I would sit for hours trying to read, being unable to focus for more than 10 mins."

Theme 2: ADHD negatively impacts well-being

"It made me feel really horrible about myself..."

"If you were only to look at my grades you wouldn't think I'm struggling, but if you see the work and pain and anxiety that precedes all my grades you'd see more of a struggle."

Theme 3: Things take more time for students with ADHD

"I often find myself taking twice as long as my classmates to do readings and homework."

"I don't commit to many social activities because I know I'm going to be sitting around paralyzed for a while before I can do any actual work"

Conclusions

- Moving beyond neurobiological mechanisms, SEVT is a useful framework for conceptualizing the motivational challenges faced by college students with ADHD.
- **Expectancies** for executive functioning were lower among students with ADHD, suggesting that it may be fruitful to consider expectancies beyond mastery of content. Future work could connect this to students' self-efficacy for self-regulated learning¹⁰.
- **Values** remained high among students with ADHD in a mastery-focused learning context.
- **Costs** were where the key challenges of ADHD manifested most clearly, reflected in both scale and narrative responses. The cost dimension of SEVT must be considered for a complete characterization of motivation among students with ADHD.
- Connecting ADHD to SEVT provides access to relevant intervention approaches targeting:
 - low expectancy beliefs, especially because students may overestimate their degree of impairment¹¹
 - high costs via reappraisal interventions or structural changes (e.g., instructor cost audits)

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