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**Disorders of Learning and Achievement: An IPA Exploration of the
Lived Experience of Diagnosis and the Role of Growth and Fixed
Mindsets**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

in

Psychology

At Massey University

Palmerston North

New Zealand

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2017

Abstract

People with disorders of learning and achievement such as Specific Learning Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder experience consequences that extend to many areas of life. The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of being diagnosed with such a disorder, and investigate what role growth and fixed mindsets play in that experience, aiming to identify factors that had been positively contributory. Interviews from four participants living in small-town New Zealand were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Diagnosis was viewed as beneficial for the access it granted to intervention, and detrimental for its capacity to elicit stigma, and become such a dominant presence as to inhibit individuality. Identity development centred around diagnosis and the ways participants either accepted or pushed against 'labels.' Negative consequences included withdrawal from learning environments and negative peer influence which was particularly salient during adolescence. Developmental stage affected the way symptoms were experienced and the success of interventions which needed to be implemented early and targeted appropriately to be maximally successful. Participants viewed their difficulties as fixed and immovable but employed growth mindsets in the development of strategies and perseverance to work around their difficulties, taking responsibility and control of their learning as they matured. Maturity also brought conceptualisation of the self as different but capable/worthy and in some cases, better for the challenge learning difficulties had contributed to their lives. They believed support people (e.g. educators) could be most helpful when they adopted growth mindsets toward learning, appreciating individuality and flexibility, tailoring their teaching and support to the individual needs of their students.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Kirsty Ross, for her enduring calm and generous guidance. I feel honoured to have had such a supportive, knowledgeable, and genuinely kind person to walk me through this hugely daunting process. You have made it seem (at times) like a walk in the park.

I want to thank my family for always encouraging me and celebrating my achievements. My partner deserves much credit for supporting me through my long (very long) years of study; his patience is incredible.

I need to thank my daughters for providing me with constant motivation to better myself, I know I've only achieved this much to show them it can be done.

Lastly but certainly not least, I must thank my wonderful participants for sharing their time and insight with me. I feel privileged to have been someone they imparted their stories to and only hope I have done them justice.

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