
ADHD – TIME FOR A NAME CHANGE

1 EXCEPTIONAL QUALITIES OF ADHD PEOPLE

Many great people such as Winston Churchill, Leonardo De Vinci, Edison, Einstein, Henry Ford and Benjamin Franklin had the classic characteristics of ADHD. ADHD adults are nearly four times more likely to be entrepreneurs than their non-ADHD counterparts (Mannuzza et. al., 1993). This suggests ADHD people have some exceptional qualities with exhausting side effects. This paper explores ADHD's positive qualities and how parents, teachers and society can support the flourishing of those qualities.

ADHD people share many of the characteristics of giftedness as shown in the parallel lists below:

Behaviours Associated With ADHD (Barkley, 1990)

Poorly sustained attention in almost all situations
Diminished persistence on tasks not having immediate consequences
Impulsivity, poor delay of gratification
Impaired adherence to commands to regulate or inhibit behaviour in social contexts
More active, restless than normal children
Difficulty adhering to rules and regulations

Behaviours Associated with Giftedness (Webb, 1993)

Poor attention, boredom, daydreaming in specific situations
Low tolerance for persistence on tasks that seem irrelevant
Judgment lags behind development of intellect
Intensity may lead to power struggles with authorities
High activity level; may need less sleep
Questions rules, customs and traditions

2 CHARACTERISTICS OF ADHD

The letters ADHD stand for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The condition is characterised by impulsive and poorly managed behaviour, and problems in attention, short-term memory and classroom learning. ADHD people typically act before they think and under-perform for their intellect in the classroom. Barkley (1988) notes that ADHD children can concentrate intently on something that interests them or provides immediate feedback and reinforcement. He concludes it is not attention that is the problem, but a disability in rule obedience that follows.

It is a highly hereditary endowment with some slight differences in those parts of the brain that are responsible for self-monitoring (Green, 1997). There is also a correlation with very low birth weights, parent smoking and other factors that may cause some brain damage during the foetal and infant stages. The condition is not caused by diet, parenting or environment (Muir, 2000). Nor is the condition more common today than in previous years, it has simply been labelled as ADHD rather than being described as naughty behaviour.

It is estimated that ADHD is present in two to five percent of the population and is identified six times more often in boys than girls (Goodyear and Hynd, 1992).

Between ages 10 to 13 the frontal lobes in the brain that control self-management rapidly mature, although the process is not completed until adulthood (Healy, 1990). This enables some ADHD children to mature sufficiently such that they can manage their behaviour as teenagers well enough that they are no longer regarded as ADHD.

However the genetic endowment is life long. In adults it is characterised by restless energy, rapid onset of boredom and deficient short-term memory. It is also characterised by passion, utter commitment to areas of interest, high energy, creativity, slightly maverick behaviour, resilience to setbacks, willingness to engage in moderate risk taking and an eclectic range of activities.

3 CELEBRATING THE POSITIVE QUALITIES OF ADHD

People with ADHD have strong qualities that can be encouraged and celebrated. As Greenspan (1993) put it, “Parents and educators often concentrate so hard on a child’s learning ‘problems’ that they ignore or downplay the child’s many strengths. Imagine what would happen if you were to spend 90% of your time doing tasks that were difficult for you. What if you had to play tennis left handed?”

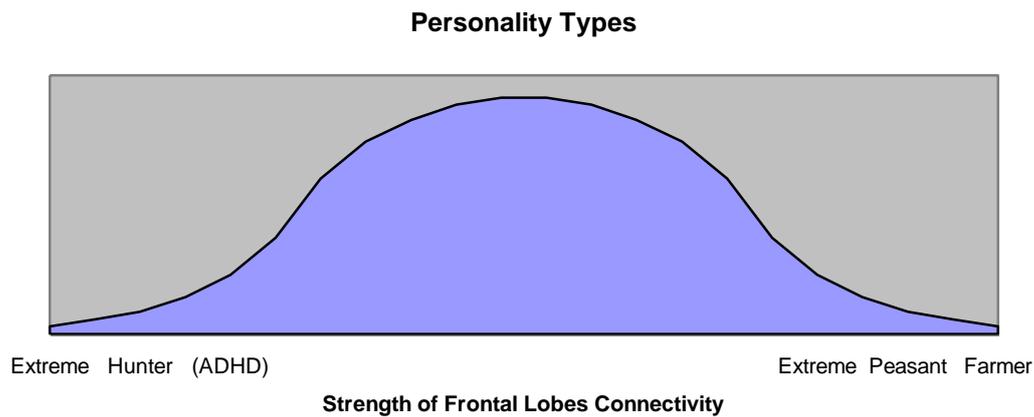
Positive Psychology is an emerging field pioneered by Martin Seligman, drawing on groundbreaking psychological research. It is steering the profession away from its narrow-minded focus on pathology, victimology and mental illness to positive emotion, virtue and strength. Seligman’s latest book, *Authentic Happiness* (2002), enables people to identify their signature strengths and concludes that to gain authentic happiness people should use their signature strengths in their daily activities. This enriches the experience and acts as a buffer against their weaknesses. In the case of individuals with ADHD, the signature strengths are many: creativity, energy, enthusiasm, resilience to setbacks and independence to name a few.

4 PERSONALITY TYPE OR ABSOLUTE CONDITION?

ADHD should be viewed as one end of a spectrum of personality types rather than an absolute condition, disorder or dysfunction. Hartman’s (1999) model for ADHD as evidence of ‘hunter’ characteristics to be viewed in comparison with those characteristics of ‘peasant farmers’ provides a good framework for this concept.

People exhibit degrees of ADHD (or hunter) characteristics. Hartman argues that at the other end of the spectrum are those who exhibit peasant farmer characteristics. These could be described as people who are orderly, cautious, focussed and obedient. The peasant farmer description comes from the model of peasants obediently planting rice in rows, watering it, tending it, harvesting it, then eking out the rice till the following harvest.

The distribution of these characteristics could look like the graph below:



ADHD is viewed as the extreme hunter archetype, those individuals with the weakest frontal lobes. Medical research has confirmed the correlation between weak frontal lobes and ADHD behaviour. With this view it makes as much sense to say that somebody *has* ADHD as it is to say a person *has* tallness. Tallness and shortness are just two ends of a spectrum.

Bradshaw (2002) described a man in his 60s who had been the archetypal accountant all of his life; orderly, cautious, precise and calm. However his personality had undergone a radical change. He became a highly creative artist, painting in bright reds and oranges. He also acquired the artist's temperament; volatile, excitable, passionate and creative. A brain scan showed that he had a disease that was eating into the frontal lobes of his brain. The doctors concluded that he had always had strong creative abilities but the frontal lobes of the brain that provide self-management had been so strong that they had suppressed the creative side of his personality.

This correlates closely with ADHD. The suppressive abilities in the frontal lobes of the brain are weak or immature, such that their spontaneous behaviour bubbles out like Mount Vesuvius. Ritalin is a drug that assists ADHD people to manage their behaviour by speeding up the functioning in the frontal lobes. Some adults choose to take Ritalin when they need to concentrate on a task, but do not take it when they choose to be spontaneous and creative.

5 A HISTORY OF THE CURRENT DEFINITIONS

ADHD is a relatively recent term. Prior to the 1980s, individuals with difficulties maintaining attention would have been labelled as having "minimal brain dysfunction", referring to the belief that they had attained minor brain injuries, most likely during birth. The 1980s led to the more humane, and appropriate, titles ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and ADHD with ADD describing "spacey", forgetful daydreamers and ADHD referring to those hyperactive and impulsive children that also had difficulty focusing. In 1994, the American Psychiatric Association unified ADD and ADHD into four distinct "types" of ADHD:

Types of ADHD (Taken from the 2000 APA definition)

1. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Predominantly Inattentive Type (ADHD-I)

2. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type (ADHD-HI)
3. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Combined Type (ADHD-C)
4. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Not Otherwise Specified (ADHD-NOS)

As we can see, ADHD is simply the most recent in an evolution of taxonomies created in order to more appropriately and more accurately define and describe a particular set of traits.

6 EFFECT OF POSITIVE LANGUAGE

“Would a rose by any other name smell as sweet?” Actually, no! Names count. The language we use to describe things alters our perception of them. The current label of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder has maximum focus on the challenges posed and no recognition of the qualities. For example ‘attention deficit’ could be described as ‘noticing everything’, and hyperactivity could be described as ‘very high energy’.

7 POSSIBLE NAME

Let’s change the name! ADHD is about deficit and disorder. Our reading of ADHD related academic articles had a ratio of over 500 articles on research into negative aspects of ADHD for every one article that had a positive focus.

We suggest a new name that focuses on the positive qualities such as creativity, action orientation and high energy. A few suggestions are given below:

- ✓ Hunter Personality Type (as used by Thom Hartmann)
- ✓ Tom Sawyer Personality Type (as suggested by Martin Seligman)
- ✓ Leonardo – creativity, thinking outside the box
- ✓ Carpe Diem Personality Type
- ✓ Latent Entrepreneur Personality Type
- ✓ Differently Focussed
- ✓ Marco Polo
- ✓ Crocodile Hunters

Below we have discussed how two of these names could be applied to what is currently called ADHD.

8 HUNTER PERSONALITY TYPE

Hartmann (1999) in his book ‘Attention Deficit Disorder – A Different Perspective’ argued that ADHD is the classical hunter’s archetype. He reframes the characteristics of ADHD as positive qualities for hunting. ‘Attention deficit’ he redefines as ‘noticing everything’. As a hunter heads off across the savannah, he is constantly

looking out for what might eat him and what he could catch and eat. In the classroom this is seen as being distracted by noises and activities instead of focussing on the student's own work.

When the hunter sees prey, he becomes single minded, focussed on pursuit and capture. This characteristic in ADHD people shows up in their mono-focus on those things that interest them. In adults this is the characteristic that drives entrepreneurs to pursue their business when others would have given up.

Hunters will take some personal risks to catch their prey, while those at the other end of the spectrum would prefer to stop for a strategic plan. Even if hurt, they will return to hunting another day. This behaviour is seen as impulsiveness, risk taking and a failure to learn from mistakes. However these can also be seen as qualities of 'giving it a go', and bouncing back from setbacks, essential qualities especially in sales, entrepreneurship and risky activities.

Hunters need high levels of energy for the hunt. This is seen in the classroom as hyperactivity, with energetic children struggling to sit quietly.

9 LATENT ENTREPRENEUR PERSONALITY TYPE

We are business and innovation consultants and have worked with several hundred entrepreneurs, and a much larger number of potential entrepreneurs. The more of these extraordinary people we met, the more we saw ADHD characteristics that had provided both destructive and creative elements to their lives. Even more surprising, when we suggested to these people that they could probably be described as ADHD, we were met with relief. They would typically say they knew there was something about them that had made it hard for them to succeed at school and in many other aspects of their lives, despite their evident abilities. Sadly many also described the misery of being sent to boarding school because their parents could not cope, or they believed the rigid structure of the school would help them settle.

Some research supports the idea of the link between ADHD and entrepreneurship. Mannuzza et. al. (1993) found that ADHD adults are nearly four times as likely to be entrepreneurs than their non-ADHD counterparts. The entrepreneurship literature (eg Green 2002; National Commission on Entrepreneurship, 2001; Caird, 1993; Martin, 1996) describes the traits and behaviours of entrepreneurs in words that closely match the qualities of ADHD. Hartmann says, "When writing my first book, I heard from a psychologist who specializes in ADD [ADHD] that perhaps as many as half of all entrepreneurs have ADD [ADHD]. Now, a few years later and after conversations with thousands of entrepreneurs around the country, I've come to the conclusion that nearly all entrepreneurs have ADD [ADHD], to one extent or another. I'm speaking here of those individuals who create or participate in dynamic, thriving, ever-growing, ever-changing companies."

This name, Latent Entrepreneur Personality Type focuses on the inherent qualities such as:

- Insatiable curiosity, bored by mundane tasks but enthusiastic to explore new ideas.

- Moderate risk taking, disregarding the obstacles that prevent others from starting.
- Adaptability, learning as they go to overcome difficulties.
- Strong intrinsic motivation
- Intense bursts of energy
- Impatience for early results, acutely aware of whether the goal is getting closer, *now*.
- Independence - needing autonomy and often preferring to be a leader or a loner than a cog in a large wheel.
- Action orientation

The name LEPT also conveys the idea that this is a normal personality type at one end of a spectrum rather than a brain disorder.

Entrepreneurs are not the only career group who display behaviours in the ADHD spectrum. Intrapreneurs are entrepreneurs inside organisations who commit their efforts to making new ideas happen. They are similar to entrepreneurs who seek autonomy but have less need to be their own boss. Many in the creative sector such as artists, musicians, comedians and actors have ADHD characteristics, as do many sales representatives, competitive sports players and politicians.

The LEPT label would make it easier to celebrate the exceptional qualities of LEPTs, bring joy to those who are currently negatively labelled, and find constructive ways of helping them to express their best qualities.

10 ACTION STEPS

We have written this paper because we would like to see several developments. These are:

- Debate on the labelling of ADHD by experts.
- Discussions with educators on ideal learning processes to support the growth and learning of students in the ADHD spectrum
- Celebration of ADHD in magazines and other general readership outlets so parents of ADHD children can more easily support and cherish their exhausting offspring.

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