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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**

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### **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.

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