

ADHD Is More Than Deficits

Researchers in this qualitative 2019 study that surveyed ADHD adults on what they felt were their unique strengths, and found six core themes with 19 sub-themes.

Cognitive Dynamism

“The ceaseless mental activity that was reported by all participants”, which includes “spontaneous and non-sequential thought processes, flashes of images, as well as episodes of intense mental focus.”

- *Divergent thinking*
- *Hyperfocus*: “akin to a state of flow... intense concentration, energized attention, complete absorption in an activity that produces intense feelings of enjoyment”
- *Creativity*
- *Curiosity*: “inquisitiveness, openness to experience, a desire to learn”

Courage

“Confronting fear and dealing with uncertainty” which includes attributes “associated with equity, social justice, and human rights”

- *Non-conformist*: “They spoke about always having felt different... People with ADHD often do not fit in and so they become outsiders”
- *Adventurousness* - This “tends to be associated with risk-taking in ADHD” but participants in the study described being adventurous as fun.
“It’s interesting because being spontaneous, that’s kind of being impulsive...it’s the same thing...say an action can be described as impulsive if you say something inappropriate... or spontaneous if you say something which might be cute or might be funny..”
- *Bravery*
- *Integrity*
- *Persistence*

Energy

Participants described having high psychological, physical, and spiritual energy.

Spirit “relates to a subjective experience that embraces higher aspects of self, sense of purpose, and meaning in life”

“All participants described being distinctly aware of being connected to something much bigger than themselves”

Humanity

- *Social intelligence*: “I find it nice to be able to connect to people or meet people and find out more about them...find out their stories that I don’t know. It just makes me feel good you know... the positive social butterfly aspect I suppose”
- *Humor* : “When asked what they would miss if their ADHD went away, all the participants said it would be their sense of humor”
“Research on humor found that it fostered well-being by encouraging tolerance and compassion towards self and others, a sense of identity with humanity and self-acceptance”
- *Self-acceptance + Recognition of feelings*: “All the participants said that their ADHD made them more sensitive than other people, but that this enabled them to recognize feelings in self and be aware of the emotional states of others.”

Resilience

“People who cope well with stress are said to be resilient”

- *Self-regulation*: Described as a “protective strength, but it can demand mental exertion or degress of self-control that eventually could cause psychological fatigue”
“SR is adaptive, which means that different SR strategies can be acquired, learned, and practiced”
“You have to behave totally differently, and that’s something... that adaptability and being able to adapt yourself to any situation, I think would be something I’d attribute to ADHD”
“It’s a bit of a catch-22 because it is trying to find a balance between not being over aroused and not being bored...sort of walking a tight rope and trying not to fall down either side”
- *Sublimation*: a psychological concept where socially unacceptable impulses are transformed into socially acceptable behavior
“It’s all about channeling the energy, channelling the energy and learning how to do that in a way that actually is useful, helpful, and not overly intrusive or overly stressed”
“We choose careers, we choose situations, we choose social environments that are friendlier to the way we are at processing information.”

Transcendence

- *Appreciation of beauty and excellence*: “A process of noticing talent or beauty in the environment and associated feelings of awe, wonder, elevation, and admiration”
“It has been correlated with “openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness, absorption, and positive affect”

Research has found that ABE is a distinct trait found in musicians, who are better at self-regulating due to their regular music practice, experience “specific emotional responsiveness” and benefit from emotional bonds formed through music.

Many of these qualities are included in the Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues, meaning they are relevant to people in general, with or without ADHD. But the core themes of Cognitive Dynamism and Energy, and the subthemes Divergent Thinking, Hyperfocus, Nonconformist, Adventurousness, Self-acceptance, and Sublimation were not catalogued in the CSV. The researchers proposed that these attributes in particular are specific positive aspects of ADHD.

Source: [Sedgwick JA, Merwood A, Asherson P. The positive aspects of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: a qualitative investigation of successful adults with ADHD. *Atten Defic Hyperact Disord*. 2019](#)

(accessible through sci-hub.tw)