

Thriving Connections: Bringing Awareness to the Dyslexic Experience of Self and Others

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Purpose of the Study: This research explores how adult female Dyslexics perceive their social interactions and sense of self, using a Positive Psychology 2.0 (PP 2.0) lens. Historically, dyslexia research has focused on educational challenges in childhood. This study shifts the focus to the lifelong, social, and emotional dimensions of dyslexia—highlighting meaning, mattering, and identity development in adult life.

Why It Matters: Dyslexic adults, particularly women, are at higher risk for:

- Mental health challenges, including anxiety and suicidal ideation
- Low self-esteem and self-concept
- Stigmatization and social misunderstanding

This study aims to reframe dyslexia from a deficit-based model to a strengths- and meaning-based understanding, providing insights to enhance emotional well-being and social belonging.

Methodology in Brief:

- Design: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
- Participants: 4 adult females with formal diagnoses of dyslexia, aged 30–74
- Data Collection: In-depth, semi-structured online interviews
- Analysis: Thematic coding and existential interpretation through a PP 2.0 lens

Key Findings:

1. Social Interactions: Safe vs. Unsafe

- Participants categorized social environments as either safe (accepting, understanding, supportive) or unsafe (judgmental, dismissive, misinformed).
- "Dyslexic social interference" (e.g., word-finding issues, memory lapses) often triggered feelings of exclusion or the need to mask their identity.

2. The Dyslexic Persona Continuum

A novel conceptual model emerged showing three stages of identity:

- Hidden Dyslexic: Pre-diagnosis or early stage; marked by shame, confusion, and masking.
- Socially Described Dyslexic: Identity shaped by others' perceptions and societal definitions; often includes self-minimization.
- Empowered Dyslexic: Strong self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and resilience; identity defined internally rather than externally.

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3. Meaning and Mattering

- Participants thrived when they felt they mattered—not just for their performance, but for who they were.
- Safe, affirming relationships and environments enabled deeper self-acceptance and post-traumatic growth.

Implications for Practice

For Academics and Researchers:

- Expands the scope of dyslexia research beyond education and cognition to include existential well-being and social identity.
- Introduces a new model—the Dyslexic Persona Continuum—that can inform future qualitative and quantitative studies.
- Highlights the need for gender-focused dyslexia research, given the unique challenges reported by adult females.

For Clients and Practitioners (Therapists, Coaches, Educators):

- Encourages strength-based, emotionally informed support models for Dyslexic clients.
- Suggests that fostering self-mattering and safe social environments can significantly improve well-being outcomes.
- Reframes dyslexia as a unique processing style with both challenges and powerful strengths—like empathy, intuition, and big-picture thinking.

Conclusion:

Dyslexia is more than a learning difference—it shapes how individuals engage with the world and perceive themselves. This research invites a deeper, more human-centered understanding of the Dyslexic experience, advocating for systems of support that honor both the struggles and strengths of those with Dyslexia.