



360 Treatment Tools & Tips

An ADHD 360 3T's paper

Explorer Gene - Written by Heidi S

When people think of explorers and expeditions to new worlds and the discoveries throughout history, people often attribute these to prior planning, preparation, and organisation; traits that many of us with ADHD struggle to personally identify with. But how many discoveries, well-publicised and personal, could actually be attributed to traits found within the very assessment criteria for your neurotype?

- **Hyperactivity:** that itch to get up and go, feelings of restlessness, and the persistence to keep going
- **Inattentiveness:** 'daydreaming' about unknown places, topics of interest, or tangentially related things to the original topic of conversation
- **And (the big one here) Impulsivity:** 'I wonder...' and doing it, quick reactions, risk-taking ('if this works' and testing the known limits), seeking new experiences

The benefits of ADHD symptoms in human societies are highlighted by Thom Hartmann in his 'Hunter versus Farmer' hypothesis, which in short, says that those who experience hyperfocus are a benefit to society under appropriate settings, and distractibility is the fault of the subject matter, not the person. Whilst hunters needed more hyperfocus and gatherers needed less; farming is the evolution of society. Those displaying hunter-gather characteristics are not 'less evolved', they are simply disadvantaged by their environments... like they have the need to explore!

If we bring the criteria and the theory together, we can easily see that in the right environment, and with the right subject matter (something that interests and is important to you) your ADHD can be advantageous, **you can harness your explorer gene.**

Wait... explorer GENE? Yes, studies have found a correlation between the seven-repeat allele of DRD4 (positively selected during evolution) in those with ADHD. These analyses of the '7R' variants do suggest that they contribute to the inheritance of ADHD. In a study published online in 2005 by Williams and Taylor, which cited further studies by Levy et al (1997) and Swanson (2000), they looked at the high heritability (how 'well' differences in people's genetics account for a specific characteristic or trait) of ADHD from twin adoption, and family studies. This poses the question of: **"Is ADHD genetic?"**

Further studies point to yes! Williams and Taylor also identified and named multiple genes and other genetic 'bits and pieces' in that same study. With names such as DRD4 (and DRD5), DAT, SNAP-25, 5HT receptor-1B and 5HT transporter is a lot to take in, but they have been reliably associated with ADHD. This is perhaps why we see long family trees linked to certain job roles requiring the restlessness, physicality, and hyperactivity associated with ADHD. Currently, ADHD is considered to have a heritability of up to 80%. This level of heritability is much higher than other conditions and fuels the discussion and studies around the genetics of ADHD.

If there are genetic predispositions within ADHD and so many positive ways we can view and harness our symptoms, despite sometimes many of us struggling to see this due to the pressures of our external environment... who is proof of this 'explorer gene'?

Firstly, whilst this is theorised, we have Galileo. As the concept of ADHD 'didn't exist' in the field back then, many say that the Italian astronomer, physicist and engineer displayed many traits of ADHD.



Next is Bill Gates... impulsive spending is something many ADHD-ers can relate to, but Bill has harnessed and balanced that risk-taking behaviour and hyperfocus of interests, using that to his advantage when co-founding Microsoft and investing in other businesses for his vast portfolio. He is of course known for co-founding Microsoft and his philanthropic contributions.

Next is Scott Kelly – whilst never formally diagnosed (due to being born in 1964, and 'ADD' only being added to the DSM in 1980); This famous US astronaut who has commanded the international space station on three expeditions, and was a member of a year-long mission to the ISS, has openly spoken about how he felt his career was 'never an option due to his attention problems'. He has acknowledged in interviews if he were to be in school now, ADHD would have been picked up. What's more adventurous than space? Well...





How about being the first woman to reach the North Pole by dogsled (and on foot!) in 1986, and then in 1992 the leader of the first group of women to ski across Greenland? That goes to Ann Bancroft.

Another explorer is Brando Yelavich (an actual self-titled explorer, as well as an author and motivational speaker) was the first person to walk the entire coastline of New Zealand Aotearoa at the age of just 19, after growing up a self-described 'troubled kid' with both ADHD and dyslexia. Brando uses his passion and urges to explore to help direct his racing mind to deep questions about his life, fears, feelings and worries.



Simone Biles (the 7 medal-winning American gymnast) whose medical documents were sadly leaked online, made this difficult situation her own. She was quoted by ESPN following the incident, "I have ADHD and have taken medication for it since I was a child... having ADHD, and taking medication for it is nothing to be ashamed of, nothing that I'm afraid to let people know." Using her energy to focus on her sport, and take those risks in front of the world is made to look like a walk in the park by Simone.

And finally, ADHD 360's very own ambassador Nick Hollis. Nick sets off shortly to row across the Atlantic. His own 7-2-1 challenge shows his explorer gene in full effect. 7 summits, 2 poles, and a solo row across the Atlantic, all with ADHD on his side which has spoken openly about in interviews.



Whether your child's, or your own, explorer gene takes you to the ends of the earth or the end of your garden, or whether you discover a world-changing breakthrough or just a life hack/accommodation that works just for you. Remember that your genes have put you in a place where in the right environment, which is different for every person with ADHD, you have the ability to harness your explorer gene. Whilst the medical language regards everything outside of the standard (or 'normal') neurotype as an impairment, these impairments can be advantageous when in the right environment/situation.

So ask yourself, are you a hunter, gatherer, or farmer?



ADHD 360 Mobile & Desktop App

The ADHD 360 app is designed to help you keep yourself and your clinical team up to date with your ADHD symptoms and includes many useful tools.

It's free on the Apple App Store for mobile and desktop.



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