

Is Daniel dyspraxic or clumsy?

In between flashing his tackle in the US, Daniel Radcliffe revealed he has dyspraxia. But is the condition a middle-class illusion? **Joanne Christie** finds out

Harry Potter star Daniel Radcliffe recently revealed he can't tie his shoelaces – a surprising admission from a 21-year-old millionaire. And it is not because the boy wizard has mislaid his magic shoe-tying spell. In fact, he suffers from dyspraxia, a neurological condition affecting co-ordination.

Radcliffe – now appearing naked in the Broadway production of *Equus* – is not alone. Dyspraxia is four times more common in males and affects up to 10 per cent of the population, with 2 per cent displaying severe symptoms.

But the condition has its sceptics.

To some, dyspraxia is a condition used by middle-class parents unable to comprehend their clumsy child's poor mental ability – and wasted, expensive education.

"Whenever a child is not succeeding, parents will try to resort to some medical label to explain it," says Professor Julian Elliott, an educational psychologist

at Durham University. Prof Elliott believes in dyspraxia but is cynical about the high prevalence rates.

"I can't imagine 10 per cent of people have it. I am clumsy. I can't ski and I can't skate and I am sometimes a bit disorganised, so I guess I am on the continuum

some-where," he says. "But I'm not far enough to rate as a clinical case."



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When you have huge prevalence rates, what you get is cynicism when genuine people with these problems come along."

Although dyspraxia is essentially the medical term for clumsiness, many also have problems with memory, language and organisation. The exact cause

is unknown, but it's believed that areas of the brain that control motor function can't transmit or process signals properly.

Civil servant Valeria Turner, 36, was diagnosed as dyspraxic three years ago. She describes herself as accident-prone, and says she

struggles to run or ride a bicycle. "As a child, I was always just considered clumsy or not very attentive," she said.

Many sufferers carry symptoms into adulthood. There is no cure, but children are often given occupational or speech therapy.

Dyspraxia expert Amanda Kirby, medical director of the Dyscovery Centre at the Uni-



VALERIA TURNER

versity of Wales, says the condition can be difficult to live with. "What task doesn't involve movement?" she asks. "Dyspraxia affects all areas of a person's life. Because of their difficulties, dyspraxic children may have been bullied at school and probably failed to reach their potential."

Turner agrees. "I grew up with low self-esteem," she says. "You think you're not trying hard enough and the other kids are trying harder."

But Kirby says sufferers often learn to cope: "In adulthood, you've got the opportunity to avoid things. Poor handwriting is one of the

most common problems with dyspraxia, but as an adult, you don't have to write, you can use a keyboard."

Turner still struggles with time-management and tasks such as cooking and cleaning. Her clumsiness has even put a strain on her marriage.

"I had tried to explain my limitations to my husband but I think a part of him thought I was trying to find excuses for being so clumsy," she says. "The diagnosis definitely helped my marriage."

"I'm always looking to test myself, trying new things. I don't mind if I look stupid, so long as I keep trying."

some dyspraxia symptoms:

- Difficulty distinguishing sounds from background noise.
- Poor hand-eye co-ordination with tasks such as tying shoelaces or catching a ball.
- Clumsy gait and movement with difficulty changing direction.
- Lack of hand dominance (using either hand for different tasks).
- Poor at using both sides of the body at once for activities such as cycling or aerobics.

for a full list of symptoms go to www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

DANIEL RADCLIFFE