

# #1504 Neurodiversity is Strength

Intro 8-2-22

[00:00:00] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Welcome to this episode of the award winning Best of the Left podcast in which we shall take a look at what neurodiversity is and why it should be seen as a strength and benefit to society when accommodated properly, rather than a problem to be solved, or worse, ignored. Clips today are from "How to ADHD", a TED Talk by Adriana White, ADHD Essentials, The Neurodiversity Podcast, and a TED Talk by Elaine Halligan, with an additional members-only clip from Embracing Intensity. And just a thought to take with you: it doesn't get talked about much in the clips of the show today, but the curb cut effect is deeply at work in the world of neurodiversity accommodations. So I wanna make sure that everyone has a primer on that before we get started. The curb cut effect refers to the benefits that all of society gained when ramps began to be cut into curbs to accommodate wheelchair bound veterans. Because we thought to do a service for one disabled group, everyone with a rolling suitcase, every parent with a stroller and literally anyone of any of a million other circumstances you can imagine all benefited as well. And this same effect has played itself out over and over and over again in countless ways. As society has begun to make accommodations for more and more groups of people. And it is these sometimes surprising, mostly unintended, positive consequences we should all have in mind every time there's a new idea to make special accommodations for a particular group, because more often than not, a short time later, we begin to realize that the accommodations aren't so special and the group benefiting isn't so particular, because it turns out we're all better off.

## What Exactly is Neurodiversity? - How to ADHD - Air Date 1-18-22

[00:01:47] **JESSICA MCCABE - HOST, HOW TO ADHD:** "Neurodiversity" (noun) is the concept that there is natural variation in the human brain that leads to differences in how we think and behave. It's short for "neurological diversity".

Neurodiversity. The term was first coined in the 1990s by a sociologist named Judy Singer who argues that neurological differences, like autism, are just that: neurological differences. In other words, different brains work differently. Neurodiversity exists. Just like diversity exists in ethnicity, gender, and sexual

orientation. Those of us with ADHD, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, Tourettes, those who are neurotypical, and those who are autistic, all have brains that are hardwired to work and learn differently.

And even brains within each group are wired differently and have a spectrum of abilities. And while we can sometimes learn to mask those differences, those differences are still going to exist and trying to pretend they don't or being told that they shouldn't often comes at a high cost to our sense of self and our mental and physical well-being, often putting our brain's operating system at higher risk for the mental health equivalent of malware, such as anxiety or depression, which is why the neurodiversity movement exists.

The neurodiversity movement is a social movement historically led by autistic self-advocates and other neurodivergent activists, advocating for the acceptance of the autism spectrum as reflecting natural variations in the human brain, rather than a disease that needs to be cured. This movement has grown within the autism community as well as to other neurodivergent folks.

Hi, I have ADHD. While neurodiversity advocates might disagree on some things, and I obviously can't speak for everyone, there are a few key assumptions within the neurodiversity paradigm.

One: neurodiversity exists. Different brains work differently and have distinct strengths and weaknesses. Two: neurodiversity is valuable. Differences in how our brains work allow us to come at things from different perspectives, have vastly different skill sets, and accomplish more than we could if everyone's brain worked the same way. Three: the potentially disabling challenges that those of us who are neurodivergent face aren't necessarily inherent to our brain's differences, but often a result of the social and physical environment neurominorities exist within, which is highlighted perfectly in a blog post about the concerning condition called neurotypicality written from an autistic perspective. The blog, which is satire, presents a world in which neurotypical brains are the neurominorities and discusses how odd those brains would seem and the challenges they would face in an autistic world. A personal example: I am very nearsighted. If I didn't live in a society that provided glasses and contacts, I would be disabled.

The neurodiversity movement is a bit controversial in that it upends some of how we've thought about these things for a really long time. But most of the criticisms of the neurodiversity movement seem to come from misunderstandings of what it actually is.

A lot of critics of the neurodiversity movement argue that viewing autism as just a natural variation implies that autistic people don't need any support. But in response to this criticism, one autism researcher and advocate explains it well. Neurodiversity advocates generally consider autism to be both a natural variation and disability. Advocates, therefore, concurrently campaign for acceptance and respect for autistic people as valuable members of society, and also fight for appropriate support and services to meet the needs of the autistic community.

And the same is true of most ADHD advocates. We recognize that life is hard for us. And there are times where it would be easier to not have ADHD, but a lot of what we struggle with is because of environmental and social factors and can be mitigated through creating social and physical environments that account for and accommodate neurodiversity.

That doesn't mean we reject medical treatment. As a neurodiversity advocate with ADHD, I'm working toward a world that recognizes, appreciates and accommodates neurodiversity. I also have a therapist and take meds. Acceptance of my brain's differences and support for the challenges I face are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they both work toward the same. A better quality of life.

## **Autism and Neurodiversity: Different Does Not Mean Broken - TEDx Talks - Air Date 11-11-21**

[00:05:19] **ADRIANA WHITE:** We all know someone who's a little weird. Someone who's a little too eager, a little too enthusiastic. Someone who doesn't get the hint when you want a conversation to end, so you have to plan your escape. Someone who might think that you're on closer terms than you actually are. Someone who has very specific interests, and thinks that you are just as interested in all the same things that they like.

We all know someone like this, right? We all know someone who's a little... awkward. But what if I told you that some people who strike you as weird or awkward, they're not suffering from any kind of moral or character flaw? What if I told you that some people seem different to you because they're literally wired differently.

Conditions like autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and Tourette syndrome all fall under the umbrella of something called *neurodiversity*. The people who have these conditions are united by the fact that their brain structure is physically different. And that difference in wiring leads to different ways of thinking, communicating, and experiencing the world.

One of the main ideas behind neurodiversity is that different does not mean broken.

The term was created by a sociologist named Judy Singer in the 1990s to refer to the infinite and naturally occurring variability of the human brain, because we all have our own unique neurology, and with it, our own strengths and weaknesses.

The problem for a lot of neurodivergent people is that the world we live in was created with neurotypical brains in mind. And as a result of this, neurodivergent people have to put in extra work, constantly translating their thoughts and ideas and experiences from one frame of reference to another.

Things are getting better. We know more about conditions like autism than ever before. We're getting better at diagnosing various forms of neurodivergence. And we're getting better at creating more accessible environments that work better for everyone.

But that's not what I'm here to talk to you about tonight. I'm here to talk to you about the weird kids, the quiet ones, the ones who sit by themselves, the kids who overreact or underreact, or just act strangely.

The kids whose classmates will sometimes say to them, "Why are you doing that? Why are you being so weird?" The kids whose teachers sometimes will even say, "You know, they'd have more friends and they wouldn't get bullied quite so much if they just made a little effort to not be quite so weird."

As a middle school librarian, I really relate to those quiet, weird kids that I work with, because I was one of them. I ate lunch by myself a lot, usually outside because the cafeteria was too bright and too loud and just too overwhelming. I often only had one friend. And I spent a lot of time in the library, which may explain how I ended up as a school librarian.

But I also had these unexpected over-the-top meltdowns caused by sensory overload that were frequently misinterpreted to be intentional temper tantrums. I struggled with changes in routine and I didn't know how to begin or end a

conversation. But since I did well in school, nothing really happened. I was never recommended for an autism diagnosis as a kid. My parents did have my hearing check when I was five, because my mom complained that I never answered when she called for me. She would have to physically enter my line of sight for me to realize that she was talking to me. But I passed that hearing test with flying colors, and that was the end of it.

My parents did not know what autism was. In the 1980s and the 1990s when I was a kid, autism was something that was predominantly diagnosed in young white males who couldn't speak. So being a Puerto Rican and Mexican American girl who spoke relatively well, I didn't really have the traits that people associated with autism at the time.

It would take over 30 years for someone to make the connection. After five years of teaching special education and working with neurodivergent students every day, I learned that I had secretly been one of them all along. I'm part of what researchers call the "lost generation of autism." The phrase was coined in 2015 by researchers at the University of Cambridge to refer to a lot of different people: women, trans and non-binary people, people of color, all of whom have had their autism go unnoticed and undiagnosed for decades.

Instead, many of us were just seen as weird. And that lack of a diagnosis has had a severe impact on our lives. It has affected our mental health, our relationships, and even our career prospects. The National Autistic Society in the UK estimates that 85% of autistic college graduates are unemployed. Only about 10% of us might be married, based on studies from the University of Toronto and the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

The Center for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto found that autistic people are five times more likely to be diagnosed with conditions like anxiety and depression. And the Karolinska Institutet in Sweden has found that autistic people are 10 times more likely to die by suicide.

The trauma that leads someone to take their own life is not something that happens overnight. It is the result of years of feeling misunderstood and feeling like you're misunderstanding everyone else. As neurodivergent people, we constantly contort ourselves to fit the expectations of neurotypical society. We constantly bend to meet the standards and the rules of the people around us, but eventually, if we're not properly supported, we break.

My friend Scott used to read the phone book as a kid. I read the encyclopedia, but he really liked numbers. And Scott was a bit of a weird kid that grew up to

be a bit of a weird adult. He struggled to maintain relationships, but he was never diagnosed with any kind of neurodivergent condition. After knowing Scott for more than a decade, I began to suspect that he might be wired differently, like me.

But what I didn't know was how much he was struggling all on his own. Because like so many other neurodivergent people, Scott was suffering in silence. He put on a mask, a facade of being perfectly fine while simultaneously he was growing to believe that the world would be a better place without him.

The pandemic was Scott's breaking point. He died by suicide last October, and the world is worse off because he's gone.

Just as a rainforest with biodiversity is better equipped to adapt and respond to threats, humanity needs neurodiversity. We all benefit when we have different kinds of minds solving our problems, creating our works of art, and enriching our communities. But even if a neurodivergent person is not out there changing the world, their life still has value.

We talk so much as a society about the importance of kindness, but far too many of us will distance ourselves from people we don't really understand. We tell autistic people that they need to learn better social skills, but bridging that gap between autistic and non-autistic people can't fall solely on our shoulders.

Because when we're dealing with things like anxiety or depression or suicidal thoughts, we don't have that much left to give. We need you to meet us halfway. So tonight I'm asking you to rethink the word "weird." Take that letter E and move it down just a couple of spots and you'll end up with "wired." And that's the word I want you to take home with you tonight.

The next time you meet someone who strikes you as weird or strange, I want you to remind yourself their brain is probably wired a little differently than mine. And that's okay. They might be neurodivergent. They might have post traumatic stress disorder. They might have some other mental health condition. But you don't need to know their exact diagnosis to be more compassionate and patient and understanding.

We will all ultimately benefit from a world that is more empathetic and kind. And the neurodivergent kids that I work with every day, they deserve to live in that kind of world. They deserve so much more than what my generation had. So let's work together and make this world a better place for all of us.

# Giftedness is Not Achievement with Aurora Remember Holtzman - ADHD Essentials - Air Date 12-11-21

[00:14:40] **AURORA REMEMBER HOLTZMAN:** Twice exceptionality is being both gifted and disabled. Usually it's some sort of learning or thinking difference or other neurodivergence. So ADHD, autism, learning disability, are some of the most common ones. It is notable in that folks who are 2e have some areas that are in the very, very, very high range, but then they also have other areas that are significantly low. And so that gap between skills can be extremely frustrating and often one can mask the other. So they may get identified gifted, but the disability gets ignored or the other way around, or they may just appear to wash each other out and both get unrecognized.

[00:15:26] **Brendan Mahan:** I know for ADHD, it seems like either it's a wash or the ADHD gets diagnosed and the giftedness less so. My overall impression of giftedness is that it's kind of something we're not really paying very close attention to. And I mean that sort of culturally, it doesn't seem to get the kind of publicity that ADHD and autism and various other neurological disorders and neurodiverse challenges get.

And my best guess to that is that it's considered to be only positive, even though that's not accurate. People are just like, Oh, well, you're gifted, then you're just a smarty pants better than me. And so pbbbt. That's kind of my impression. Am I understanding that with any degree of accuracy?

[00:16:10] **AURORA REMEMBER HOLTZMAN:** Well, I definitely think it's true about why we don't talk about it as much, I think, and it's also, there's this like elitist idea, right?, that it's, you're somehow elitist if you talk about giftedness. But it is a very distinct cognitive profile when you have these huge peaks and valleys, and it does require a different approach to education. If you have people in your life that don't really understand you, it can be a problem. But as far as the identification piece goes, it can go both ways because there definitely are gifted folks who are ADHD and don't realize that they're gifted because a lot of our measures for gifted programs, for example, are not ADHD-friendly. The group tests: not ADHD-friendly. I was fortunate that my kid was able to actually show their ability in that setting, but that was, they were highly motivated in that moment.

But for me it took many years. I had friends that were all being identified and it wasn't till fifth grade that I was. And at that point I scored so high [unintelligible] my parents to send me to a full-time gifted program, which actually saved me from a very bad elementary experience. But then they tried to kick me out in high school for under performance.

So like my middle school years, I'm one of those weird ones that my middle school years were actually my best school years in terms of, uh, school fit. Cause I had a very small class. But as far as the identification piece goes, one thing that's interesting, because I'm also in parent spaces and adult spaces, is that parents are really hesitant to label their kids with a disability, but they're like totally happy to label their kids with giftedness if it applies.

But when you're in spaces with adults who were late-diagnosed, especially, they wish they were diagnosed sooner and they're not really fans of the gifted label because of how it was treated and the expectations that were put on them.

[00:18:14] **Brendan Mahan:** And my understanding of giftedness is that it's kind of a disability in its own.

[00:18:19] **AURORA REMEMBER HOLTZMAN:** It can be.

[00:18:20] **Brendan Mahan:** Because it's bringing this, like, level of drive and intensity that doesn't always work in some circles, maybe even most circles, and the asymmetrical development that comes with giftedness, which is just some parts of your abilities develop at different rates, right? You're not developing cognitively in an equal way, right? So it's almost like if we put it in physical terms, it would be like your left arm is just wicked long and your right foot has like the longest toenails in the world. And your right thigh is abnormally strong for like a young kid. And eventually this will all, you know, figure itself out and you'll have a normal looking body, normal brain, sort of-ish, but that's not how the development happens. It's not like uniform development across the board. It's peaks and valleys, and I can deeply understand, like, astrophysics when I'm 10, but I can't do my homework. Or I totally get all the math stuff, but I can't relate to my peers. And that's hard. That to me is a disability, even looking at it in sort of a different kind of lens of, like, I can understand astrophysics but I can't clean my room and I don't understand what my peers are talking about. Like that's gotta be hard too. Am I, do I have a good lens on this? Or am I missing something?

[00:19:44] **AURORA REMEMBER HOLTZMAN:** Yeah, definitely. And I think that's where it becomes, you know, a challenge to determine, is there a

disability outside of that or is it, you know, the goodness of fit of someone who's gifted, but not in an environment that's suited to them? I think the biggest clarification of that is that, if they were in an optimal environment then someone who's gifted would probably be able to demonstrate all of their potential or whatever that word, you know, that dirty word, I think sometimes - potential - at least for us. But I think someone with a disability, even in those optimal environments, they're still gonna need, you know, more accommodations or supports or that sort of thing.

One of the things that I didn't even really realize, I had always connected my ADHD traits with my chronic pain and fatigue, but I hadn't really realized until I actually got diagnosed and the medication helped my headaches that were caused, especially at the beginning of the pandemic when I was working from home, that executive functioning fatigue. It's exhausting. And so all these years I was coping through external strategies, but those external strategies take a toll.

## **Creating a Neurodiversity-Affirming World - Neurodiversity Podcast - Air Date 8-10-21**

[00:20:58] **EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS - HOST, THE NEURODIVERSITY PODCAST:** What are your ideas about what a neurodiversity-affirming world means to you? Like what would this utopian world look like?

[00:21:07] **JOEL SCHWARTZ:** Oh, it's hard to find a utopian world because there are so many conflicting needs at once.

I guess the biggest thing is a world where people's divergent needs are understood and validated as real and necessary, as well as society putting forward finances, accommodations, help, to really maximize the lives of folks who may be different. A lot of that I think comes from this American idea we have to all be so independent and super functional and work at jobs that really don't benefit anybody except for the people on top, and recognizing that there are so many different ways of having a valuable life. And just because it doesn't match my way of having a valuable life doesn't mean that we shouldn't have a world where others have access to what's valuable for them.

[00:22:03] **EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS - HOST, THE NEURODIVERSITY PODCAST:** I love that.

Why don't we back up just a bit and talk a little bit specifically about your background and how you got into this work. So I know that you're a clinical psychologist who supports neurodivergent clients, and you're also neurodivergent yourself.

[00:22:18] **JOEL SCHWARTZ:** Yes.

[00:22:19] **EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS - HOST, THE NEURODIVERSITY PODCAST:** Can you share a little bit about how being neurodivergent has influenced your development and understanding on the topics related to this cause?

[00:22:27] **JOEL SCHWARTZ:** Yeah. So I was diagnosed ADHD as a much, much younger person, but it wasn't really treat -- treated isn't the right word -- worked with, honored, it was just kind of this thing that we sort of knew I had. My parents I guess tried meds on me, but it zombied me out and they just said, Nope, we're not gonna try anything else.

And so I was lucky to have come from a family culture, been gifted with a brain that was somewhat interested in academics, and I was able to get through college pretty well without accommodations, always waiting till the last minute, pulling all nighters, getting myself completely sick, but able to at least do it and pass college pretty well.

I got to grad school where the workload suddenly increased, and that was just a tough traumatizing part of my life. I didn't understand why I couldn't do the things I used to be able to do. I sort of knew it might have to do with ADHD, but I didn't really know what that meant or how to really work with that. I wasn't aware of resources out there. The faculty didn't really know what to do about that. And I really faltered; the rest of my class graduated, took me an extra four years to finish my classes and get my dissertation done, to finally graduate. And that whole traumatic shaming experience was the beginning, as well as marrying into a family that, we know that my son is autistic, but we found out that my wife as well. And to the marriage was, and that started off me off on this tangent of what does the female presenting autism presentation look like? And we started delving into that.

And from there, I just discovered the neurodiversity paradigm. And that was maybe about six years ago, fully embraced it, have been educating myself, changing the way I think about things and work ever since. And it's culminated in a very vibrant career in starting this Facebook community of now 6,000 people, where neurodiversity is my bread and butter, is my business, but it also

is my bread and butter in life, that without this, without this idea, my own life wouldn't work. My marriage wouldn't work. My family wouldn't work. It became necessary to understand and accept these neurological differences for us all to have lives that work well for us.

[00:24:56] **EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS - HOST, THE NEURODIVERSITY PODCAST:** Yeah, the neurodiversity movement has really, well, just has grown so much because I think my awareness of it probably began around the same time that yours did. I had been in a clinical setting and was working with a lot of kids who were coping okay, they were kind of getting by, but not really. There was a reason that they were in my office. And looking back now and understanding so much more about neurodiversity and I can look back and go, okay, well, that was a diagnosis that clearly nobody had picked up on at that particular time. Right. And I feel like that has really influenced my work with my clients.

[00:25:38] **JOEL SCHWARTZ:** Oh yeah, absolutely. And when we come from this medical model DSM framework that is inherently stigmatizing of anybody who experiences life differently, but particularly these neurological differences, because they aren't disorders. They're not something that went wrong with somebody's life and disrupted their life due to trauma, it's how somebody was born. And when we've painted this in such a stigmatizing way, and clinicians are afraid to diagnose because they might be wrong or they might be stigmatizing somebody, or it's such a big label, you are really denying people a sense of agency and identity, a sense of being able to thrive in the world by understanding who they are, how they work, and what they need in order to succeed -- in their own way.

[00:26:27] **EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS - HOST, THE NEURODIVERSITY PODCAST:** Let's talk a little bit more about what you just mentioned. A major component of the neurodiversity movement is the goal of changing the language surrounding neurodiversity and diagnosis, because as you mentioned, psychology has for a long time pathologized traits that we see in neurodivergent people. So what are some of the changes that you see happening with language, and why is this such an important piece, and I guess how can people continue to do that in their own lives?

[00:26:55] **JOEL SCHWARTZ:** I think the biggest change in language we see is the embracing of identity-first language among autistic people. So I just used it instead of using people with autism or on the autism spectrum, which seek to separate autism from the person, and you hear this a lot. You're not your autism. You're so much more. Well when it's something that's inherent to how you

sense, how you feel, how you interpret, how you react, it's an inherent part of who you are. There's no separating your neurology from who you are. It's not like depression, which might be periodic.

But for those of us who are neurodivergent, there is no separating it. So there's this idea of embracing it as an identity instead of a pathology. So we're seeing people use "autistic person." In many ways you see that in the disability community: "I'm a deaf person" instead of I'm a person who's hearing impaired, I'm a blind person and there's an embracing of identity.

With ADHD, we don't have a term, unfortunately, that is non-pathologizing, because the D is in there. So we're seeing a lot of people calling themselves an ADHDer or an ADHer, taking the D out of it. I call myself an intentionally different and hyper-interested dude. So there is this embracing of the idea I'm not a person with ADHD, I'm an ADHDer, or an ADHer, and hopefully we can develop some kind of language around ADHD that isn't pathologizing. And also doesn't miss the whole point of it, 'cause ADHD is a misnomer. That's not really what having ADHD is about. It's not a deficit of attention. It's a different use of attention, with both strengths and weaknesses. And so calling it a deficit and focusing on attention is a big reason why there's so much misdiagnosis and misidentification and misunderstanding.

[00:28:50] **EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS - HOST, THE NEURODIVERSITY PODCAST:** This type of neurology can be disabling. But a lot of times that's more, if you look at the social model of disability, it's more about the fact that we don't provide accommodations.

I agree with the people who would say Oh, well, you know, ADHD is my superpower, that that's really minimizing that, that doesn't really take into account the reality of that. But there are some characteristics that come along with it that aren't all bad.

[00:29:12] **JOEL SCHWARTZ:** Mm-hmm. I'm very keen on both ideas. So just personally, when COVID hit and so many people were faltering and freaking out, I was like, I already have this online presence that I've cultivated, 'cause I love new technology, novel and shiny things. I was very easily able to pivot. I came up with like 25 amazing ideas. Sometimes it's hard to focus on one of those ideas, but with a little bit of help and a little bit of consultation with folks and I was able to pivot in a way that allowed our business to grow and be pretty successful.

And I think that's directly tied to my ADHD. And there were many times in my life where when other people are in crisis, that's when I've got all the ideas and time kind of slows down. And I can see things that other people don't. And in a way that is a superpower.

But it's also incredibly disabling in other contexts. And I think that's the main thing is that it's all contextual. And most of the context in which neurodivergent people live is geared towards neurotypical functioning. And so these arbitrary things, like you have to learn this skill in one semester of school and get graded on it, and that affects the rest of your life. Well, why is a semester a thing? Why is a quarter a thing, right? Why can't I learn that over a year and a half? And maybe that year and a half I actually mastered better than the person who figured it out in a semester and then left it. Forgetting to pay bills and things like that, if there was some kind of accommodation where I could register as an ADHDer, and they could give me a little leeway and some extra -- I know this is kind of utopian, but if that was something there, then I wouldn't be late on bills. I wouldn't miss things. I wouldn't have late fees. Little things like that can make a difference.

## **Neurodiversity is a super power not a problem - TEDx Talks -Air Date 11-25-19**

[00:31:06] **ELAINE HALLIGAN:** This is a picture of my son, Sam, as a baby. And 23 years ago, when I held him in my arms, I never ever imagined that one day I would be shouting at this beautiful little face. But somehow I just didn't recognize myself, and I turned into a screaming banshee.

So I invite you to be really honest with me. And I'd love you to put your hands up if, as a child, your parents ever did this to you. Did they ever nag you? Yeah. Uh, repeats instructions over and over again? Yeah. Remind you to get the homework done? Tell you off for having the floordrobe on your bedroom floor. Yeah? I did all of these things and I cajoled.

And did your parents ever bribe you, threaten, and perhaps even punish? I did all of these things. I just didn't know how to get the best out of my children. I didn't understand their needs. I didn't understand my son's temperament. I think once I even threatened to cancel Christmas. I know that was harsh. I was going to ban my children from the internet forever. And I think once I just wanted to ground my son till he was 24. I found it really, really exhausting. And I didn't understand my son's inborn temperament, and it took us a long time to work out

that he was very sensitive, extremely impulsive, which means there was no self control button, and incredibly intense in his emotions.

And very, very quickly, he became labeled as the naughty one. And it started early, at nursery school. I would be met at the nursery gate and it would always be "Mrs. Halligan, we have not had a good day." At age three and half, my son would be given a report card of he's not listening, he can't sit still, he's aggressive with the other children. And so very, very quickly, he was almost written off and labeled as the naughty one.

It was an emotional rollercoaster ride with many what I call low parenting moments. And I call those my LPMs and I've had lots of them.

And one particular LPM I'd love to share with you. It's many years ago and I remember this incident as if it was yesterday. And this LPM was on a London train on a cold, dark winter's night. And Sam and I were rushing from our timeout behavioral center, rushing home and we boarded this train and it was incredibly busy. It was deeply unpleasant, very crowded, but we were lucky enough to grab a couple of seats.

And as we sat down, I could see that all the ingredients there were for a perfect storm. Sam was cold. He was hungry. He was tired. And everyone around on the train was just desperate to get home. Everyone more touchy than the other, just wanting to get home.

And Sam suddenly in the seat starts kicking. He starts kicking his leg. And I say to Sam, "Stop it." And there's a lady standing there and he's kicking his leg against her. "Stop it, Sam. Don't do that." I asked him several times and he continued to do it. And it looked for all intents and purposes that I was completely out of control, which I was, and that my son was dysfunctional.

I pleaded with him. I nagged him. I bribed him. I threatened him. I said, "Stop doing that to this lady!" And quite naturally, the lady standing there was getting more and more upset. Her "tut"s and her "huff"s and she was visibly upset. And suddenly she turns to me and she says this: "What your son needs is a darn good smack. He needs discipline." I didn't know what to do with myself. I felt so embarrassed. I didn't know what to do. And suddenly on this packed London train, where is so much as making eye contact with another passenger's frowned upon, I find myself standing up and I'm making a speech to everyone. And I say to them, "I'm dealing with a child on the autistic spectrum. I need your support, not your judgment, as my son is differently wired. He's not being a problem, he's having a problem. But the last thing in the world I'm going to do is smack

my child for having a problem. Now, will someone just help me leave the carriage at the next station?"

Well, you can imagine. The silence was excruciating. No one knew where to look or where to put themselves. And then suddenly this lovely passenger, I think it must have been a father, just said, "Yeah, will you leave that poor lady alone? She's doing the best job she can." And then suddenly the whole carriage descends into heated argument about how should we discipline children, how little we know about autistic spectrum, was I doing it right or wrong? And is smacking an effective form of discipline?

You see, everyone on that carriage was judging me and my son based on his behavior. He was labeled permanently "silly" for locking himself in a cupboard at school for five hours. "Stupid" for, at one school, setting the fire alarm off. He was labeled "naughty" at another school for letting the farmyard animals out. Sam had this romantic notion at this school where there was a lovely farmyard of animals, some chickens and some hens, I think there was a goat and a sheep. And Sam had this idea, "No, no, no. These guys should be living back on Wimbledon Common." So he let them out. He had good intentions, but they didn't go to Wimbledon Common. They migrated down to the busiest arterial road in London, the A3. And so Sam age five and a half was responsible for causing traffic chaos.

There is a Buddhist monk called Thich Nhat Hanh. And he says, when you plant a lettuce, if the lettuce doesn't grow, you don't blame the lettuce. You don't shout at the lettuce, say "What a naughty lettuce! What a stupid lettuce!" You look at the conditions the lettuce is in. Does it need more water? Does it need less sun? Or does it need a different fertilizer? But you don't shout or blame the lettuce.

But our son was permanently blamed -- to such an extent that by the age of seven, he had been excluded from three schools in so many years, and he was written off by those who should have cared for him. Three school expulsions in three years. We just didn't know which way to turn. And I'll never forget a friend calling me who worked at the local education authority. And she said, "Elaine, um, is everything alright at home?" She said, "I've just seen Sam's name is on the list of children missing from education."

How had it come to this? My husband and I sought professional advice and we were left with conflicting professional opinions and so many diagnoses it left Sam as the Alphabet Kid.

He was diagnosed with pathological demand avoidance, oppositional defiance disorder. We didn't know who to trust or believe. Our traditional education system here was desperately trying to take our beautiful circle and shove it into a square. And it just wasn't working. And every day at school was deepening the damage by making Sam more stressed and more anxious.

But I just sensed that actually Sam was a good person. I sensed he was misunderstood. And I sensed he -- there was something there that we had to find. And he was like a rock covered in mud. But if we could just wipe back the mud, I sensed that we would find perhaps a sparkling diamond.

So what did we do? Well, we didn't understand Sam. We didn't understand his behavior. We didn't understand his temperament. So we sought help. And I can honestly say that was the best thing we could have done. The positive parenting support we got as a family, it transformed our lives. It transformed our son's life. And it gave me a completely new career, as a parenting coach. And I haven't looked back since.

And when we started to realize that Sam's main issue was severe dyslexia, then the magic started to happen because we started to have more empathy and more understanding with where the behavior was coming from.

You see, all behavior is a form of communication. All behavior has a cause.

So what did my husband and I do? We started to speak to Sam differently. We started to notice that the small steps of improvement he made, the progress, the effort, the attitude, as opposed to the end result. And his self-esteem grew. We started to listen and validate all those feelings of anxiety, frustration, anger, and we gave him other ways to deal with his emotions. In other words, we made him more emotionally intelligent. And we also gave him chores to do in the house. We started to build up his independence and self-reliance, to enable him to become a young man who could really think and act for himself.

You see, when your sense of self-esteem is strong, only then can you start working with your strengths and accept those weaknesses without it lowering your self-worth.

So Sam became a young man who really thrived with his creativity, his problem solving strengths, his resilience, because of course he'd failed so much in his life. And the proudest day for us as parents, for Tony and I, was when Sam finished his formal education as head boy. That's him standing there in bright yellow trousers. I have to ask you gentlemen, how many of you would wear

bright yellow trousers? But here was a young man truly comfortable in his own skin.

He left school, went into the workplace, and suddenly with his skills of problem solving and creativity, he became an adventurer. And he did something truly mad called the Mongol Rally. In 2015, he drove from London to Mongolia. As you do. 18,000 kilometers across Europe, at the Caspian Sea, through deserts, all in a 1.2 liter scooter car. My anxiety levels went through the roof. And when he came back, I knew life was never going to be the same again.

And the following year, he did another what I call death-defying adventure: this time something called the Rickshaw Run. I don't know whether you've heard of it. It's mad. You have to be mad to do it. And you drive the equivalent of an eight horsepower lawnmower from north India all the way down to Kochi in Kerala. And you do it in a tuk-tuk. The only difference this time is that little tuk-tuk at the end, the orange one with the New Zealand and the Scottish flag, held also his sister Izzy, Sam's sister Izzy, and also me -- that little face in the back was me.

And I can honestly tell you my hip flexors have not recovered since. It's not easy pushing yourself into a rickshaw.

Like another well known dyslexic, Sam today is an entrepreneur. And he is in his most joyful zone working to his strengths. He's at his happiest when he is working on his classic car business, buying and selling Range Rovers and Land Rovers.

So what's the moral of this story? Well, if you are sitting as a parent with a difficult child, let me tell you there is always hope in the face of adversity. And if you perhaps have a child who's different or neurodiverse: biology is not destiny. But first we need to stop this blame game. And the next time you see a parent really struggling with a child, just stop, press a pause button, reframe, and think just perhaps this child is not being a problem, but maybe they are having a problem.

## **The Utility (or Futility) of Labels - The Neurodiversity Podcast - Air Date 7-7-22**

[00:44:19] [EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS - HOST, THE NEURODIVERSITY PODCAST](#): I think that's one of the big movements within, well, disability rights and neurodiversity in general, is understanding

that making things accommodating is good for all people. It's not just good for the people who maybe it was originally developed for, you know, we create things to solve a problem, but then sometimes that solution has a broader appeal.

[00:44:39] **BRANDON TESSERS:** You know, I talk a lot about like intergenerational transmission from family systems work that humans are really, really good at solving problems, generally speaking, and really, really terrible at revisiting old solutions to find out whether they're still necessary or whether there's better options or whether something that used to be helpful is now harmful.

So things just kind of continue and build over time. And I think there's a lot of that in therapy. I think in education, I mean really every big industry, but all these things make sense when they're developed and then new and different things happen and we build and we grow and we wanna be ready to adapt and change.

That's kind of, to me, the core of the approach of working in a neurodiversity affirming way, is that everybody's different. It's not just, we want to have different methods for different neurotypes or anything. Those are still big categorizations. It's how do we work in a way that is specifically about tuning into the person in front of us and developing something for them specifically.

[00:45:34] **EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS - HOST, THE NEURODIVERSITY PODCAST:** I'm curious, you were talking about revisiting past solutions and seeing if they are still helpful or necessary or perhaps even harmful. Is there an example that you could give of that?

[00:45:43] **BRANDON TESSERS:** Yeah. Sure. It's funny, cuz the example that I have been using when I've been giving presentations for this concept for like years and years is hand shaking and it's a very different context now after the pandemic, or not after the pandemic, after the pandemic began, right? If you talk to like anthropologists and, different people have different theories about the origin of hand shaking, but generally speaking, it's mostly thought to be a way of demonstrating mutual vulnerability that you're meeting a stranger on the road, and it's dangerous. If I let you hold my hand, that's a pretty good sign to you that I don't intend you harm because I wouldn't make myself that vulnerable and vice versa.

Of course. If you ask somebody right now to develop, Hey, we need a kind of universally recognized greeting that you give to strangers that you've never met

and maybe hundreds of people in a day, in a busy day. Since the development of germ theory, we would never in a million years say, Let's touch each other on the hands for a minute.

So it made sense in that context. Because what we do, a lot of this work and these theories and stuff that's based around executive functioning, is the management of finite resources. We only can notice so much. And generally we notice things that are problematic. So if we put a solution into place and it solves the problem and doesn't cause a problem in and of itself, then it just sticks around. Because the way that we learn is by observing others. So our parents are doing it and we pick it up and then our kids pick it up from us until it causes a problem. Which why I love that this is the one that I've been using for five years. Cuz now, honestly there have been some episodes, my wife and I rewatch a lot of the same shows over and over, and there are episodes of shows where it's from before 2020, and somebody's a germophobe and the joke is what a weirdo. And then in a new context, it's like, Why are they all making fun of that person?

[00:47:27] **EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS - HOST, THE NEURODIVERSITY PODCAST:** We're all a little bit there now. I mean, I don't shake hands with people a ton, but it feels weird now.

[00:47:32] **BRANDON TESSERS:** The brain, so I'm a big fan of the cognitive miser theory, which is the idea that the brain only spends resources if it has a reason to do so, including even resources like attentional resources, so even noticing a thing in the first place. What that means is that we hate having to spend those resources on something. We hate when there's something that we've never had to think about before and now all of a sudden we have to think about it. It's uncomfortable, unpleasant, sometimes even painful. And of course you see a lot of reactions from people who will do many, many different things to be able to persist in not paying attention to something.

Effectively saying, No, no, no, we're fine. This isn't a problem like everybody's saying that it is, cuz if I acknowledge that there's a problem, I have no choice, but to pay attention, which means that I can't pay attention to whatever other thing I was looking at instead that I would rather do.

[00:48:20] **EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS - HOST, THE NEURODIVERSITY PODCAST:** You and I are both aware of how much the landscape surrounding, specifically, neurodiversity has shifted a lot in the last few years. I think I was reflecting on that when I was thinking about what we were going to talk about today. And I was realizing how long it's been since you

were last on the podcast. And I know my outlook on things has changed quite a bit. What are some of the major changes that you've noticed? And, if they have, how have they influenced you?

[00:48:48] **BRANDON TESSERS:** I agree. There's been a lot of changes recently. That's part of the reason that I wanted to use that word to talk about the specialty that we're engaged in, cuz we could of course use different words to talk about, you know, "twice exceptional", as an example that I know you do a lot with, is not that different than "neurodiversity" as a label, but it's because we kind of saw it coming. Like, wasn't neurodiversity one of the words of the year?

[00:49:11] **EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS - HOST, THE NEURODIVERSITY PODCAST:** I think last year. Yeah.

[00:49:13] **BRANDON TESSERS:** And I think the pandemic did accelerate a lot of that. Cuz a lot of social interaction shifted to asynchronous formats and online formats where communication's a little bit different and people were starting to see things and resonate.

So it's hugely more widely known. I mean, I've been on panels, people have just found me randomly and said, Oh, you talk about neurodiversity. Will you come join this panel? Cuz it's a hot topic. And I think there's upside and downside to that. The greater awareness is great, but also, like we were just talking about, people want things to be simple.

So when they become aware of something like neurodiversity, they either wanna reject it or simplify it so that they can figure it out and kind of add it to their toolbox, add it to their vocabulary. So what's interesting to me is how much active debate there is going on about all the different elements of, honestly, everything involved in neurodiversity.

Some people will stake hard-line positions. So as far as how that's impacted me, honestly, it's freed me up a lot because the truth is that we're all figuring this out and that's always been the case. That's not how we generally go about it, you know, in our culture. It's more, Here's what's known to be true. Learn it. And then you can maybe develop from there. I think a lot of what's great about neurodiversity is that when you're engaging with that paradigm, it requires that you acknowledge that you don't know. You really don't know anything about anything. We have theories and those theories can be useful.

And we can come up with predictions that turn out to be accurate, even at a high rate, but we still never know. And as a neurodivergent person, I love that. And I

know not everybody does. But I love being able to take some words and define them, you know?

[00:50:58] **EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS - HOST, THE**

**NEURODIVERSITY PODCAST:** Yeah. You talk about just the questioning and the awareness. And I feel like there are people who - even when you talk about, like, the big five personality model and openness to experience, and specifically, like, just the ability to consider new and different ways of conceptualizing something - there are some people who are very open to that and who are constantly reevaluating and kind of shifting and changing and adapting their beliefs or their perspectives, and then there are other people who are much more less likely to do that. I think that through the neurodiversity movement, for me, it's caused me to question a lot of things that I thought I already knew.

[00:51:39] **BRANDON TESSERS:** I'm obsessed with language generally, like always have been, right? I know, actually, you and I are constantly going back and forth on Twitter about our Wordle things, right? Language is incredible. And I use that a lot in my work because when we're talking about, I know I've mentioned a couple times already, attentional resources, the things that guide how that attention is spent, that dictate what things are admitted into conscious awareness and what things are not, one of the things that we can manipulate most easily there to make changes, is language.

So, you know, that experience, I believe it's actually, technically, called Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon, but I could be wrong about that, where you learn a new phrase or a new word and then all of a sudden you notice that thing seven times in the next three days and you're like, Wha? I've never seen this in my life, now it's every... obviously for the most part, it was always there. It's just that without the language to be able to identify it, it's not seen as significant. One way of talking about those intentional processes is that our brain is separating the signal from the noise, or at least attempting to. But we're wrong all the time so new language identifies new things as signals. Our experience moment to moment and day to day is shifted because of these new concepts and new words and new conversations that we're having.

[00:52:53] **EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS - HOST, THE**

**NEURODIVERSITY PODCAST:** I think along with those new conversations that we're having there are a lot of adults who are realizing that they're neurodivergent later in life. And when I talk to people, I notice that there are just a lot of mixed feelings surrounding that, which might be anything from relief to finally understanding themselves, um, to grief because they recognize

that they've lost so much time without having that awareness, or even resistance because, um, it's difficult to accept what that might mean for them.

When you're working with adult clients, is there anything that you notice about that process in helping them adapt to that new information?

[00:53:34] **BRANDON TESSERS:** Yeah. I mean, like you said, there's for sure trends, right? Like, we can put like the most common experiences into some buckets, some categories. Although generally, if I'm working with somebody, they like neurodiversity, right? They've come for that reason. So for the most part, it's people who are finding utility in that new label. But what I tell people, whether it's clients or in presentations are just - I mean you know, I info-dump on people all over the place about neurodiversity, it's like all I think about - is that labels, including diagnoses, especially mental health diagnoses, right? These are disorders, not diseases. They're collections of symptoms that we have found it useful to group together, and it is useful and it's valid and it's real. And, they're still constructs. We made them up. We made them up cuz they're useful. They're arbitrarily applied. Two different diagnosticians will give two different responses about what a person is or is not.

So what I try to talk about generally is there are many, many, many accurate ways to define any given thing and the accurate, the accuracy of any one of those ways doesn't detract from the accuracy of any other. I can hold this up, and of course your podcast listeners, aren't seeing it, but it is a pen and I can say it's a pen, or I can say it's a writing instrument, or I could say it's a metal object about yea long and cylindrical. All of those are accurate. So we're not really so concerned about what's accurate. We're concerned about what's useful. If I need to write something and I ask you, Hey, you have something I can write with?, it's important that you and I both have a label for this as a pen or a writing implement. If there's an electrical short and I need to, like, I need something about three inches long and made of metal. And I ask you for that, it's important that we both identify this as that, otherwise we'll never consider it as a possible solution. You get a new label - ADHD, autistic, dyslexic, whatever label, neurodivergent, I mean, there's a reason I like that big umbrella term - you're still you, you're still, every other label that ever applied to you still applies. But if there's utility in this new label for you - if it for some reason enables you to do something new or something different, whether that's something like getting accommodations in a school system or at the workplace, or whether it's just a different way to engage with yourself and observe your experiences or find like-minded people to build community with - if it's useful to you, it's a good label. If it's not useful to you, it's a bad label. And I don't care if you gave it to

yourself, and I don't care if a doctor gave it to you. If it's helpful, it's good. If it's not, it's bad.

## Neurodivergence and Queerness with Leela Sinha - Embracing Intensity - Air Date 5-23-22

[00:56:08] **LEELA SINHA:** A huge number of people that I know who are trans arrive at transness saying, I didn't even know it was an option. Most of the trans folks I know, because of my own orientation, most of the trans folks I know are trans-masculine and trans feminine folk have much better visibility. So even as trans identities become more visible, there are an enormous number of people who grew up thinking, "wow, I wish I could be a trans woman, they get to transition," and not realizing that maybe they wanted to go the other way. That's something else that I happen to talk about, is how we have access to neuro-divergent-friendly sexuality education, and how people do or don't find out that it's a possibility to be queer. That it's a possibility to be trans. That it's a possibility to be all the rest of the alphabet soup.

Mariah says, "in Spokane, we have a poly politician considering a run for county commissioner, and the entire left is having to grapple with what that is, what it will mean. Respectability politics." Holy crap, what a thing to deal with. And that intersects with this queerness and neuro divergence, thing too. Like, "well, we don't wanna have a disabled queer, we don't wanna have a neuro divergent queer as the face of whatever. If we're gonna put a queer up front, they have to be abled." queer representation is overwhelmingly biased toward a very particular kinds of body types. Very particular kinds of gender presentations. There's one kind of androgyny that's okay, and it's skinny and white and no older than 35, and all the other kinds of androgyny are marginalized.

In spaces that are, I have a whole rant about this but we're not gonna go there, in spaces that are for women and non-binary people, which is so problematic, the challenge for assigned male at birth non-binary people coming into those spaces, especially if their presentation looks more masculine, is huge. So we have this idea of inclusion and then we have what we're actually willing to put out in public because we feel like it makes us respectable.

This kind of choice making, especially in public political spaces, goes all the way back, goes all the way back really, but we see an example of it with Rosa

Parks and, I forget her first name, Colvin, the 15 year old pregnant teenager who did it three months before Rosa Parks, but they decided not to make her the face of the movement because she was 15 and pregnant and they were trying to make a political decision to [inaudible] and how that would affect the community. But also that means that in history, we're not remembering her as a pioneer, which we should.

Mariah says, "I should have invited my mom to this talk too. She's down. I had to explain kink to her the other month, and fortunately she got it pretty quickly. She's 74." Awesome. That's great. There are definitely the leaders, the sexuality educators, the leaders of our communities are of that generation. They're of our parents gen -- my parents' generation, my mom is in her late 70s my dad is 80, and I'm grateful for that. And of course the AIDS epidemic killed off most of our elders, not all of them, but many, many of our elders got killed off or burned out in the epidemic. The lesbians were taking care of the gay men in many cases, that's the only people who would do it.

It's good that we have elders. We should have a lot more elders. Being in solidarity, being in inclusion, having people remember that there has been a pandemic in living memory, because people are like, "oh, there hasn't been a pandemic since 1918," and I'm like, "are you sure though? That's not how I remember it."

Carrie says, "this feels like an ignorant question to someone that doesn't have kids. What percentage of kids wonder about their gender identity?" It is going up exponentially. I don't have kids either, but my experience of my friends' kids and my community's kids is that gender fluidity and gender questioning and things related to that are probably, this is a number I'm pulling outta my ass, but it feels to me like it's at 50% or higher. It feels to me like most kids are like, "huh, what pronouns should I use? What gender am I? I think I'm gonna try this pronoun for a while, okay mom." And that's, I'm sure, influenced by the fact that all the people I know are liberal sexuality educators, Unitarian Universalists. The people that I know that are parenting are parenting in very particular ways, but the number of kids that you hear about that are like, "no, I'm a boy. I know you think I'm a girl, but I'm a boy," seems to be extremely high at this point. Yes Aurora, I think they're taking gender identity less for granted. I think that's absolutely true.

And the other thing, again, bringing it back to neuro divergence and queerness, is as we become less pathologizing of neuro divergence, and as we offer neuro divergent kids better structures, more nourishing structures for them, for their brains, they're going to develop into the robustness of their neuro divergence.

And this goes to, Leo, what you were saying about all the things that we can love about ourselves and the ways that we are and the ways that our brains are, as kids move into the robustness of their neuro divergence earlier, they're more likely to understand what all the implications are and they're spending less time and energy masking. They're spending less time and energy trying to be different from who they are. So they're spending more time and energy asking who they really are and then expressing that and feeling safe, hopefully, with the adults in their lives, to interact around that and to express that and to ask for what they need around that. Younger kids asking for clothing that's not the gender that they're assigned at birth. Asking for haircuts, asking for hair color changes.

## Final comments on the hyper-focus ability of ADHD

[01:01:39] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today, starting with *How to ADHD* explaining neurodiversity. A *TED Talk* by Adriana White discussed the lost autistic generation. *ADHD Essentials* talked about making accommodations for gifted and disabled kids. *The Neurodiversity Podcast* discussed creating valuable lives across diversity. A *TED Talk* from Elaine Halligan described her experience with an autistic child and the difference it made to get the right help. And *The Neurodiversity Podcast* looked at the value of finding proper, meaningful labels. That's what everyone heard, but members also heard a bonus clip from *Embracing Intensity* discussing ableism in the LGBTQ community.

To hear that and have all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into the new members-only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support) or shoot me an email requesting a financial hardship membership, because we don't let a lack of funds stand to the way of hearing more information.

To wrap up today, I just wanna tell a little bit of my own story. I was diagnosed with ADHD back in junior high, and then again in my early 30s when I thought maybe I should take another look at this and see if this is part of my problem, basically. The absence of the ability to focus is much harder to parse out today because of the systemic causes that are creating falling attention spans across the board, but ADHD can still be seen for what it is partly by looking at the other symptoms. It's not just an inability to concentrate, the one that sticks out for me that I didn't even know about until recently is the ability to hyper focus. So it actually goes both ways, and for me, the inability to focus usually applies

to things that I either don't care about or things that I'm being told I need to focus on or things I need to learn something along those lines.

I was terrible at getting good grades in school. Hopefully, obviously not because I couldn't understand the information, but because I could not get myself to be interested in what people were telling me to be interested in. However, when I got to choose the topic to focus on and do a research paper, I aced it and my report was used as an example to the class of how to do this research paper correctly. And yet, I still failed that class. That's a real story that happened in my English class when I was, I don't know, 15, I failed that English class because I refused to do any of the other required reading, but my teacher, who understood clearly that something interesting was going on in my circumstance, she didn't force me to repeat the class, she just had me read a book about the Holocaust, *Night* by Ellie Wezel, and gave me the credit I needed to pass.

That teacher may not have been able to think in terms of neurodiversity at the time, in late 90s or early 2000s, and I have no memory of my untreated ADHD ever being discussed with any teachers past junior high, maybe, but she still knew that I was in need of some sort of accommodation, not to be forced to fit into a system that clearly didn't work for me. I think about that fairly often and appreciate what she did. She wasn't the only one. Not only did I fail her class, I nearly failed out of high school entirely. Only because a slate of teachers who saw that something interesting was going on and this kid doesn't really deserve to fail out of high school even though he definitely deserves to fail my class. They basically agreed, "okay, D minus. Go. Go somewhere else. Find your own way. This is not the place for you."

After high school, I went on to have a difficult time at several jobs that weren't a good fit for me. And what I figured out, only years after this show became my job and I didn't have a boss anymore, was that the problem I had with all of those jobs wasn't so much about the jobs as it was with having a boss. And it wasn't the bosses either. I never had any bosses that I didn't like personally, but it just wasn't a good fit for me to be managed anymore than it was a good fit for me to be a student. In fact, of the half a dozen jobs or so that I think I had, I think more than half of them, I was threatened to be fired. It wasn't because I couldn't do my job, wasn't good at my job, or any of those things, it was because of this conflict with me and resisting authority or just resisting or being frustrated with systems that were set up that I felt constrained by and agitated against.

The only job I had that somewhat fit my personality was as a delivery driver, because I could be out on the road for nine hours a day without anyone telling

me what to do. Now, of course, delivery driving isn't a very mentally stimulating job, so that's when I got into political talk radio. The first notes I ever took, writing down the names and time codes of clips that I wanted to edit out and share on what would become this show, were written on those "sorry we missed you" door tags from the delivery company.

And it was when I had the idea for this show that the hyper focus really kicked in again. Once I had a project I was interested in, no one could pull me away. I spent every evening and huge chunks of time on weekends building this show and making episodes. Luckily, I don't think I ever had this particular accusation thrown at me, but I have heard since that kids with ADHD often are thought of as lazy. They are thought of as, not just that they're unable to focus, but they're unwilling to put in the work. They're not willing to get up and do what is required of them out of a sort of sense of laziness. And of course, people who know about ADHD realize that that's a terrible and untrue stereotype, but I've also been able to see it in my own life. When these particular instances of hyper-focus kick in, it's incredibly easy to disprove the idea that laziness was the reason I wasn't getting things done previously.

Now, obviously this show has been a, a constant part of my life since then, started in 2006, but the pattern of hyper focus on projects has continued occasionally throughout the years. And as a matter of fact, I'm actually in the middle of one right now. I actually found it incredibly difficult to produce today's episode and I'm a little bit worried about future episodes going forward, because producing this show is tearing me away from this new research project I'm working on. And when a person like me gets into a hyper focus mode, it is almost physically painful to be taken out of that state of mind. It was only a week or two ago, about 10 days ago, that I, I got an idea for this project and it has just grabbed a hold of me.

I've read half a dozen books in 10 days, usually at about three at a time, you know, switching between them. I've had some audio books going at three times. Speed. I've had others on eBooks. I'm highlighting copiously. I've got a whole system set up for organizing my notes. And yet I still struggle to focus when reading.

As I always have, and those are just two sides of the same coin. And the point is the more I've learned about how ADHD works, the more I've been able to see myself reflected in the diagnosis. And as we talked about in the show today, there are benefits to labels when they help you make sense of what's happening.

And it helps in explaining what's happening to those around you as well. I mean, knowing my. Helps in knowing how to deal with them, not just for me, but for Amanda, who has to deal with me from the outside, which I suspect is harder than dealing with myself from the inside. So to some of the show, basically diversity is strength.

Making accommodations is good and it helps to know yourself. And last thing, if you like me struggle with reading speed or comprehension or focus or anything like that, I suggest at least checking out bionic reading. It's a pretty new concept. It went a little bit viral back in may when examples of it were being passed around social media.

I don't think it's been run through a full set of scientific studies or anything like that. But I was one of the, I think many people who saw it and immediately felt a benefit in my reading speed and focus. Or commenting on the internet about how they didn't have to reread anything when it was done through the bionic reading font, which is something that they usually had to do.

Uh, some others said that it was more relaxing, that it didn't necessarily change their speed, but their eye sort of their, there I muscles like physically relaxed when using this new font. And those are all things. Sort of jive with my experience. So I don't know if it's gonna be one of those things that fits perfectly into the curb cut effect, because you may love it if you need it, but other people hate it.

They either don't need it. Or they have a neuro divergency that is affecting them in a way that makes it a very unpleasant to see the bionic reading font. So it's very much a to each their own scenario, but I do feel like a lot of people who didn't necessarily feel like they had a reading problem will actually still find it helpful.

So if it even might be helpful for you. Check it out at [bionichyphenreading.com](http://bionichyphenreading.com) or search around for articles, describing the concept as always keep the comments coming in at 2029993991. Or by emailing me to [Jbestofleft@bionichyphenreading.com](mailto:Jbestofleft@bionichyphenreading.com). Dot-com that is gonna be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening.

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