

THE
FRAME

my



WORLD

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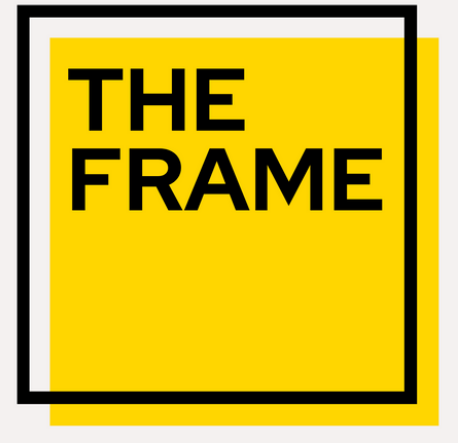
From the artist...

Neurodiversity is a subject is close to my heart. I am also on a personal journey with regards to my own mental health, and have only recently discovered a few ADHD and anxiety tendencies of my own.

In this piece I wanted to convey how someone who isn't neurotypical see's the world, which is a little different to others. However, because of this superpower, we can bring exciting ideas, creativity and spontaneity to sometimes, let's face it, a bit of a bleak world! I hope as the viewer looks more closely at the piece, they will see the multi layered details, for example the text in the rips of paper describing what Neurodivergence is.

by Jess
aka Destructivart

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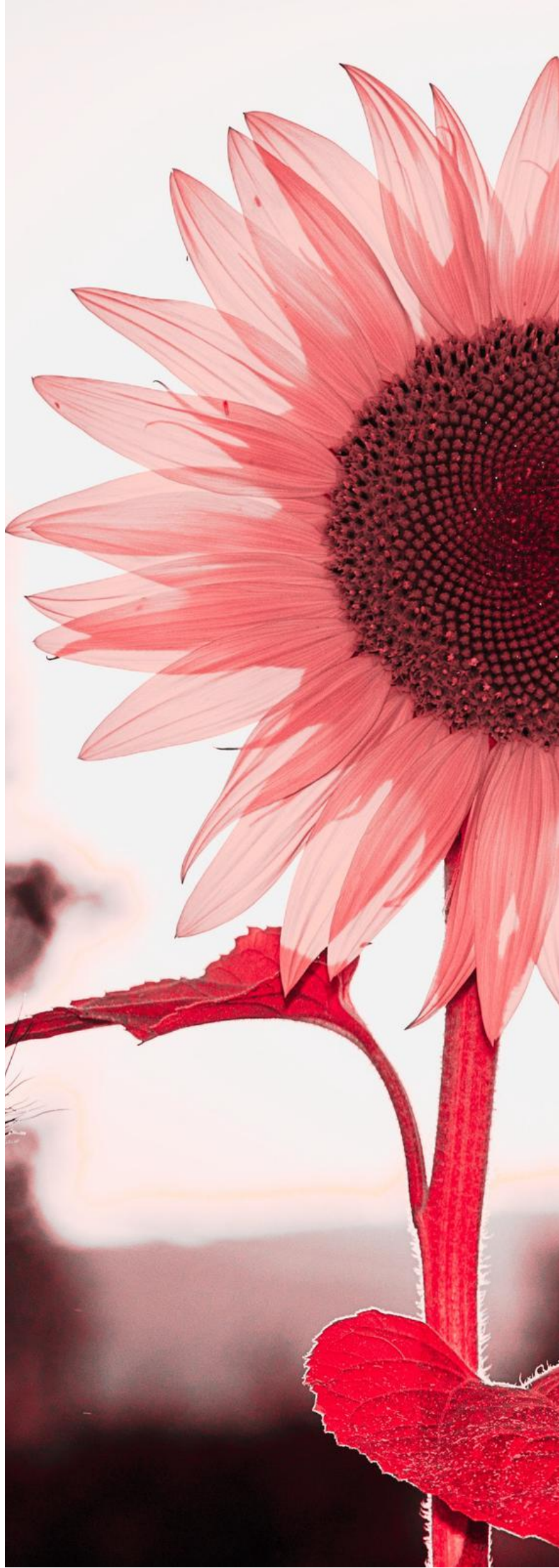
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Welcome to the fourth(!) issue of 'the Frame'

I've wanted to put together a magazine for a long time. I have a young-ish memory - not sure where I am or what else I'm supposed to be doing, but I'm pretty sure we're on a school trip somewhere. I'm supposed to be listening to some kind of talk or presentation, but I instead decide to use my exercise book to create an entire newspaper, dedicated, inexplicably, to the British biscuit Jammie Dodgers.

There are innumerate examples like these in my school-age days. After years of school reports comprised mostly of 'just needs to focus and stop disturbing the other children', and variations of 'David is a clever child but doesn't apply himself', I left school at 16 with one GCSE, my incredible underperformance one of those unexplained mysteries I might see on... well... 'Unexplained Mysteries'. The feeling became, like for so many with this condition I have met since, that I was the common denominator in a lifetime of unfulfilled promise and failings.

And I carried with me the accumulated weight of those feelings, their crushing mass a festering monolith where a sense of self should have instead been able to bloom. Fortunately, I'm now afforded a hindsight and an acronym in ADHD which allows me to view those years of my life with a very different perspective.

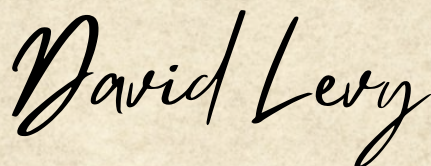
I was a fully grown adult gleefully embracing middle age by the time I was diagnosed with ADHD, and as for many, it was a diagnosis which came about because I happened to hear someone talking about their own symptoms and experience, and it felt like they were talking about mine. When I was diagnosed the psychiatrist said, and he meant it with sympathy, "David, this wasn't a particularly difficult diagnosis to make." There's an awful lot of people who are just waiting for their accidental moment of clarity, and that's why it's so important we keep talking out loud or writing or painting our experiences. You never know who might need to see it.

I've wanted to put together a magazine for a long time. It sat in my mind and in barely-touched notebooks for years alongside other moments of creativity that saw no follow-through, but now, in my post-diagnosis world and after finally getting the support I've needed, every time someone asks the question "yeah, but what difference would a diagnosis or medication make anyway?" I think of how The Frame actually exists and isn't just another discarded dream, and I smile. Probably internally - that might be a bit of an odd response otherwise.

The Frame is just a blog with narcissistic personality disorder if it only contains the thoughts of me, so I want to sincerely thank everyone who submitted to this issue, asked about submitting to this issue, and to those that read it. I say this in every introduction, and it's true every issue but this one has a special importance for me, but the openness and honesty and expression contained in these following pages is absolutely extraordinary.

I also wanted to mention that some of the articles are punctuated by pictures created by artificial intelligence (AI). This is deliberate because (a) I want to magazine to look nice, but also (b) as a nod to a client with whom I've been working, who uses AI to develop pictures and artwork as a way of expressing emotional states, where his neurodivergence may make accessing the appropriate words a difficult challenge.

I hope we've done your stories justice.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Levy". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "David" and "Levy" being significantly larger and more stylized than the rest of the letters.

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Natalia-Nana Lester-Bush is an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion specialist and consultant in London, for multiple academic institutions and national charities.

Chelsey Randall-Wright sat down with Natalia-Nana to discuss neurodiversity, barriers, and what inclusivity looks like.

Could you start by telling us a little bit about yourself?

Hi, yeah. I'm Natalia Nana. My pronouns are they/ she. I am an Inclusion and Belonging Consultant for a National Heritage charity in the UK.

And how did you end up starting to work in inclusivity?

Initially, I worked on cultural community projects when I graduated from university 20 years ago. It was just after we had race riots in Birmingham, Bradford and Oldham which were a real shock because they are multi-ethnic communities. The government realised you've got different communities living side by side, but they're not actually integrated, they don't have cohesion; or harmony.

I was working at an international charity, and they were focusing on gender equity and recognizing that

actually, while you've got loads and loads of women working there, funnily enough, it's still the men who are the leaders. I started volunteering on their inclusion working group and using my background in gender studies. That evolved to include, "Well, actually, what about LGBT+ equality and what about racial equality?"

Could you define what inclusivity means from the perspective of a large national charity?

Oh, good question because we talk about diversity and inclusion and now, we talk about equity, diversity and inclusion so you have to talk about all three together – Diversity is having people with different identities – using a space, being employed, being volunteers and being visitors. But we realized it's not enough to just invite people with different identities to come along if they don't feel included – if they don't feel equal, if they don't feel safe and positive. So, inclusion is about trying to make sure that everyone who comes feels that they have a sense of belonging. Equity is really looking at how you do that in a way that is fair? Fairness doesn't mean the same for everyone, fairness is actually often the opposite. Fairness means you do something in a way that you can help someone, say, with a disability or neurodiversity to be just as included as someone who is neurotypical. That often means treating them differently to enable them to have the same quality of experience. That for me is true inclusion.

What are the most common barriers you come up against in this work?

There's a few that are always repeated. One is resourcing – it's huge work trying to take people on a journey to change. It's trying to change people's hearts, minds, ways of thinking, ways of behaving, ways of working. Also, policies, structures– all of that takes a lot of time, effort and investment. So, that's one challenge of getting the proper resourcing from an organization to do that when people are busy and money is tight. Then, you've got the human challenge – nobody likes to be told they need to change and this work is really vulnerable, challenging and uncomfortable and there are particular areas of extra sensitivity such as when talking about race, gender and sexuality. So, you've got to deal with both the practical and logistical challenges and also the human.

How do you promote inclusivity without appearing tokenistic or overcompensating?

That's a really good question. I think from my side, the biggest factor is if you're genuine then it isn't tokenistic. If you focus more on that and one's true intention, rather than how it appears because what will look like tokenism to one person will look like representation to another. Like, for instance, *The Little Mermaid*– the Disney film just came out. There's lots of racist backlash about it and lots of people saying, "Oh well, it's tokenistic. Disney, you're just doing it to appear woke." Though it could be dismissed as a tokenistic stunt– you see videos of little black girls, whose faces light up when they see a woman who looks like them being the main Disney character and you go, "Oh that's representation. That is making them know that they can be a princess as well." So, from my side, I try not to think about appearance too much and instead focus on what the motivation is for doing it. If your only motivation is how it looks, well then, it's tokenism. If you're doing it as part of a wider program for genuine equality and fairness, then it's not.

Can you ever have too much inclusivity?

Short answer, no, but what I want to recognize is that rights can contradict each other. So, for instance where you've got issues of people's religious beliefs and we

want to have freedom of religion where that can– because of their interpretation of faith, lead them to have deep beliefs that go against someone else's identity, that can be a real problem. Because then you've got to say, well, whose inclusion do we prioritise here? I would still say that the issue there isn't too much inclusion, the issue is not enough resource, time, care and dialogue for people to truly understand the reasons for inclusion being so important and to make an environment so inclusive where people feel that whatever their beliefs or identities across a whole spectrum, they're all welcome and valued. So, it's not that you can have too much inclusion, unless that you can have inclusion that's been done badly.

What have you learned about neurodiversity from your work?

Loads. Neurodiversity is probably the main area along with gender diversity that I'm really focused on absorbing more experience and understanding of now. My journey in neurodiversity really began years ago though, when I was a teacher and having to adapt resources for people who have dyslexia and that's where I started learning about visual processing and understanding about people who find too many visuals overwhelming. I had done deaf studies years before I became a teacher so I had learned about how you can have this thing called visual noise where there's too many images, it can be distracting and overwhelming and difficult for your brain to process. So, for me, it's been a long journey out of my interest and studies in deaf communication and my teaching of kids who mainly had dyslexia or developmental processing challenges and now, more recently focusing on identities like autism and ADHD which I'm being assessed for myself and has really helped me understand the different ways that people need to take in information.

I think one of the main things I've learned about neurodiversity is how socially constructed it is. Someone has drawn a line and said, "Well, this is typical. This is divergence." So, for instance, learning more about autism and following autistic accounts on Instagram and learning about what socially accepted stimming– which is where people of different identities or even all identities, do physical things to themselves.

Neurotypical people will pace, bite their nails, will suck their thumbs as children, will do lots of things that are seen as acceptable and these are all stimming, it's ways of expressing our emotion and frustration and leaking it out of our body but we're doing it in a way that is socially acceptable whereas an autistic or otherwise divergent person might be shaking their hands rapidly and that is seen as weird, or scary, or embarrassing when actually, it's just a different version of biting your nails or pacing up and down or grunting at your desk, which is seen as acceptable. So, I think one of the biggest things I've learned about neurodiversity is much like race and gender, how socially constructed they are but how very real, life-damaging and consequential they are too.

What does a fully-inclusive environment of the future look like for you?

I have no idea, but I know it when I see it.

I love that answer.

Sadly, I can't even conceive of it because there's my dream self which can imagine it and then there's the reality, where even leaders who were on board with this stuff still just have so many gaps and it's not a priority in their real daily lives that I'm not sure if we'll ever get there without a serious extra push of serious investment. What it would absolutely require is for people with majority power identities to do so much internal wrestling. I don't see they're ready to do that, but a fully-inclusive culture would be where everyone can safely be themselves whilst of course, respecting others' presentations of that as well. But no, that wouldn't even be fully-inclusive. The minimum should be where everyone can safely be ourselves. The dream would be where we can joyfully, fully, freely. I'm a Christian and the part that I most hold to is that God wants us to have life to the full and there's a quote I love by some dead white guy saying, "The glory of the divine, the glory of God is a human fully alive." That's my faith and I think for me that partly grounds my passion for absolute genuine diversity and inclusion.

Tell us a random fact about yourself.

I have five full names. There you go.

Do you have a message you'd want to share with neurodiverse people?

Oh. I think one thing I'm thinking about a lot at the moment is as part of my ongoing decolonizing and decapitalizing journey is divesting from the need for external authority, which is part of my Christian deconstruction as well. That links to neurodiversity and saying, actually, self-diagnosis is sufficient. Why do we need a doctor, generally, a Cis straight male who is following guidelines which were generally created by middle class, white Cis straight men based on the identities of middle class, straight white men. Why do we need them to determine whether or not I have ADHD or autism or any other identity? Actually, just knowing yourself is the most important thing and similarly, there is absolutely zero shame at all - like I said, I'm going through an ADHD assessment because for me, having language to it can then help with finding support. It can help access things and for me, the label has helped me understand myself and importantly, to explain myself to others.

Do you have a favourite piece of neurodiverse reading - a channel, a social media account, a podcast?

I absolutely love Lauren Melissa Ellzey - @autiennele on Instagram - she's fantastic.

Thanks so much for your time, Natalia-Nana!

WHAT WE'RE READING

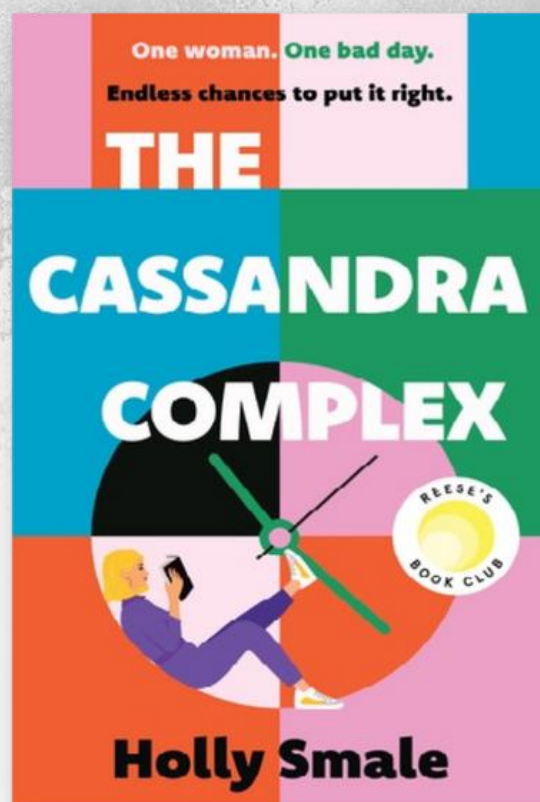


In a society that often expects conformity, Laura James' memoir, 'Odd Girl Out,' shines a much-needed light on the world of neurodiversity. With honesty and vulnerability, James takes readers on a captivating journey of self-discovery, shedding light on her experiences as a woman on the autism spectrum. Her compelling memoir challenges societal norms while emphasizing the importance of embracing neurodiversity.

'Odd Girl Out' is a deeply personal and introspective account of James' life as an autistic woman. Through vivid storytelling, James explores her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, providing a unique insight into her journey of self-realization. The memoir delves into the challenges she faced, the difficulties of navigating social interactions, and the tireless efforts she made to fit in.

'The Cassandra Complex' follows the story of Cassandra Mortmain, a young woman with a unique mind that holds both remarkable abilities and challenges. Cassandra's neurodivergent traits are at the heart of the narrative, as she navigates a world that often fails to understand her perspective. The novel explores her struggles with anxiety, sensory sensitivities, and the extraordinary ways in which her mind processes information.

Holly Smale's novel is a captivating tale that ventures into the very depths of neurodiversity. Through a compelling narrative and a neurodivergent protagonist, this book invites readers on a thought-provoking journey, unravelling the complexities of the human mind and celebrating the beauty of diverse cognitive experiences.



writing
submissions





**The
Problem
Was
Never
Me**

**by
Meg Hopkins**

The Problem Was Never Me.

Nobody noticed. Someone, a teacher or a parent, should have realised earlier - that my brain worked differently. But it took till twenty and an autistic friend (isn't it funny how we all find each other without even trying) to realise that I wasn't the problem. It's been two years now, since my diagnosis, and my relationship with myself and the world has changed in ways I never imagined. Before I was too loud or too quiet, always shrinking myself down to avoid unintentional mistakes that no one would let me off the hook for. The problem was me and I hoped it was a phase; something to grow out one day, as if I would just wake up and become a shiny person able to float through the world. No need to calculate my tone or accent, to analyse what the best response would be and how to make it seem authentic, no need to work out what exactly is meant by a remark. My mind would be quiet and my own, not concerned with the inner working of everyone around me and their relationships to each other.

Now I know that the problem is external. It is a society that expects autistic people to pretend to be anything but autistic - except where it could help them profit (silicon valley I'm looking at you). It's a world that simultaneously vilifies and infantilises us - or, especially if we're women, erases us completely. When I think of my autistic friends they're nothing like the parodies of us in the media. There is so much the goodness in them; the way they can effuse on their interests, their brightness and senses of self, their identities outlined in multicolour eyeliner and the way they make me feel I can be my self. But there's a darkness too but blink and you might miss it. Undoubtedly, it's there. It's the way we have to fight all that we have internalised, the bullying and the exclusion. The problem may be external but that doesn't mean I can float just yet.

When I was diagnosed, I was angry. I had been denied my identity because I didn't present as some autistic boys did almost a century ago and I had to hide myself for fear of being rejected by the people who should have held me close. I mourn for that autistic child, overwhelmed and confused by a world that did not hold a space for me. Maybe if I had worse grades or liked trains they wouldn't have noticed that I wasn't just shy, that the pit in my stomach in school, the panic attacks and sitting alone by the wall were all signs that I needed something I wasn't getting. What I needed most of all, what I think that we all need is to be accepted. Understood too. The feeling of meeting my autistic friend for the first time, the way that I felt reflected, as if everything did just flow, that sheer understanding that joined us together is a feeling I will treasure for ever. But not everyone can understand why I need to do things on schedule or how I can get trapped in the dreaded waiting mode. For what it's worth I don't understand why allistic people do a lot of things. I just accept that they do. Even if we can't understand one another, we need to accept each other and make space for needs - whatever they may be.

I couldn't imagine liking myself two years ago. Part of me wished I wasn't autistic. I mourned for all that I could have been if only I was born some other way. I don't feel any of that now. I love being autistic, it is the scaffolding which structures all of my being. I cherish my neurodivergent my friends and how the understanding of having a minority mind ties us together. I can view my past self with kindness, even when she made mistakes. I've come to fear telling people that I'm autistic, preempting some probably well-intended but undoubtedly still offensive comment, like the time at a job interview I was told 'you don't seem autistic, you're not like the people on TV, you're normal' (being told I don't look autistic is still on my bingo card but I'm sure it'll happen). Being someone's first autistic person is a big job and, frankly, I don't always want to do it. Being autistic, in my opinion, isn't a superpower - I find that patronising. But it's not a bad thing either. It's just a thing. A mere difference. What's disabling is living in a society that makes no allowances for that mere difference. It's a punitive system and I'm exhausted by it. Autistic people deserve better. And if you've seen the depression and anxiety rates, our life expectancies and the suicide rates you'll know we need better. And fast.

Meg is 22 years old and was diagnosed as autistic two years ago whilst at University. She is currently living in London and working in financial services, but writing whenever she can.

Instagram: @meg_eleanor

To Label or Not to Label?

by Dr Poppy Gibson



Dr Poppy Gibson is a neurodiverse educator.

Poppy works as Senior Lecturer, and her key interests involve children's psychological development and mental health and wellbeing.

Poppy holds a Doctorate in Education from Oxford Brookes University. Poppy's doctoral thesis was awarded the 'Most Downloaded' from EThOS databases in Autumn 2020. Her thesis explored young girls' experiences of using social media, online interaction, and communication with others online in a 'third space', and how these interactions build up a social reality and impact upon identity formation.

To label or not to label?

The number of diagnoses of neurodivergent conditions is on the rise, and the use of labels is expanding. This special issue of The Frame talks about neurodivergence. The other contributors may have been diagnosed with a condition or they may have self-diagnosed a condition. They may have been born neurodivergent, or they may have an acquired neurodivergence, which is situational and can be resolved through treatment. If you as the reader have been diagnosed as neurodivergent, does the label help or hinder your life? Are neurodiverse labels harmful in creating a prophetic fallacy? This opinion piece questions the value of a label.

The reason this is so close to my heart? I had sepsis 8 years ago, and was hospitalised in intensive care for 9 days. Since this time, although my physical recovery was fairly quick, my mental recovery has been a slow and difficult journey. After meeting a sepsis specialist earlier this year and talking with them about my lingering symptoms and behaviours, they told me they suspect I have Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). We all know PTSD develops after a traumatic event, but did you know that PTSD is classed as an 'acquired neurodivergence'? I certainly didn't. And with someone with ADHD, I wasn't expecting to find anyone suggest further labels for me. But what have I done with the specialist's suspicion? Nothing. I haven't been to see my GP because I feel that I am coping. Would an official label of PTSD help me or

“
...a label can help
you accept who
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knowledge to
understand who
you are further...
”

make me feel better? I don't think it would. So for now, I do not wish to have this disorder confirmed or denied. But the question of whether a diagnosis would help the healing process is something I reflect upon often.

Labels and understanding behaviour

Perhaps labels are useful in better understanding ourselves. For example, if you are feeling stressed that you can't concentrate, struggle to manage your workload, and are being impulsive- could a neurodivergence be behind your behaviours? Having a label might help you accept these behaviours as part of who you are, and can provide peace for some people who are wondering why they find

certain tasks difficult. Having a label can make it easier to connect with other people with the same label, or at least to read books, articles and websites about your diagnosis. Perhaps a label can help you accept who you are, and seek knowledge to understand who you are further. Labels don't excuse our behaviours, but they can explain them.

The role of social media in labelling neurodivergent conditions

Social media plays a big part in spreading awareness of neurodivergence. Is this helpful, in allowing the viewer to recognise if they may have a condition? Or is this harmful, if TikTok ends up acting like a medical measure stick? For many people who have not felt able to speak to their family or friends about their suspected condition, finding social media content that resonates can be reassuring. Finding role models with certain labels who are living happy and successful lives can remind the rest of us with the same label that we, too, can find coping strategies for our behaviours.

Labels and seeking support

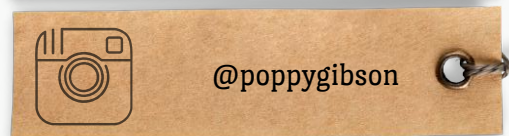
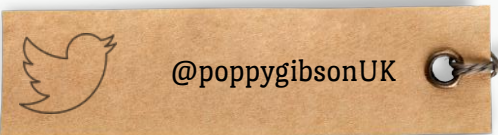
Diagnostic labels can be of value when seeking support; labels can help caregivers ask for signposts, labels can help when asking for treatment as it gives the practitioner a clearer idea of the type of behaviours that may need support. Some people may wish to explore different treatments, interventions or medications; having a label is necessary for these next steps of treatment to be prescribed.

Labels and prejudice

Although we are seeing greater acceptance of neurodivergence in society, even the word 'neurodivergence' is often misused by those who are still learning about the term. Back to my earlier ponderings about PTSD, I do think that if the condition was confirmed, it might cause alarm to family, or friends, or even my employer; and perhaps this is why I do not wish to undergo assessment at this time. We do not wish to be treated differently because of our labels; however we know that often people's prejudice comes from a place of ignorance, and I believe that our societal understanding of neurodivergence is still in its baby stages.

Final words

If you feel that you may have a neurodivergent condition, and you feel that you would like to be assessed, then do it. Often the first step can be contacting your GP. If you have a feeling that you align with a certain condition, but you don't feel the need to have it proven or disproved, then don't. If you are coping, then maybe you feel you don't need to rock the boat. But if you ever feel you aren't coping, and your daily function becomes trickier and things start to slide, then please: Find out if the label fits.



ADHD AND THE WORKPLACE: HOW NEURODIVERSITY IS A SUPERPOWER IN BUSINESS



Business Leader Magazine's Alice Cummings spoke to Leanne Maskell, Director of coach training company ADHD Works, about her business, ADHD in the workplace, and much more.

For those who don't know, can you explain a little about what ADHD is, and then a little about your company ADHD Works?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition, usually diagnosed after symptoms of inattention, impulsivity and/or hyperactivity significantly disrupt a person's life. It means we have a different 'operating system' to 'most' people – our brains are structured differently, making us neurodivergent.

It's associated with a 30% developmental delay in executive functioning skills such as planning and self-awareness, but also strengths such as innovative thinking and resilience.

ADHD Works empowers people to understand, support and harness ADHD through tailored coaching, training and resources for individuals and organisations. Having almost lost my life to ADHD before being diagnosed at 25 and working in mental health and disability legal policy, I combined my personal and professional experience to help others struggling with ADHD to make it work for them. It's amazing to see this grow, having trained over 20 new ADHD coaches around the world in less than a year!

What led you to become an ADHD coach?

After being diagnosed, I wrote a book to understand what ADHD actually meant for me. This led me to learn more about the condition and support available, including ADHD coaching which can be funded through the Government's Access to Work scheme.

That book would never have made it off my laptop without me having ADHD coaching! After I self-published it, I was inundated with messages from people seeking support, as waiting lists for NHS assessments can be up to seven years in the UK.

ADHD coaching was so life-changing for me in being supported by someone who understood what I was experiencing that I decided to train as an ADHD Coach myself with ADDCA, and haven't stopped since! I'm extremely grateful to be able to use my experiences and learnings to help others in this way.

You took the leap from working in law to becoming an ADHD Coach and establishing your business, ADHD Works. What led you to take this leap?

After self-publishing 'ADHD: an A to Z', Microsoft invited me to train them on neurodiversity, which made me realise this could be a job. My ADHD leads me to constantly 'connect the dots' between different situations, and working in mental health and disability law, I understood first-hand the challenges that organisations and individuals were experiencing in navigating ADHD.

As ADHD has only been diagnosable in adults since 2008 in the UK, our society's understanding has been collectively changing, especially in recent years where there's been a significant increase in people learning they've been living with undiagnosed ADHD.

It was a combination of knowing I was in a position to make meaningful change by supporting people through this, and my ADHD impulsivity that led me to quit my full-time job during the pandemic to become an ADHD Coach, but I'm very glad I did.

Well-known business leaders such as Sir Richard Branson, Bill Gates, and Walt Disney all had ADHD, and some have referred to ADHD as their 'superpower'. What characteristics of ADHD do you believe made these high achievers so successful?

People with ADHD are 300% more likely to set up their own businesses, probably because we think outside the box and are natural innovators.

Our natural impulsivity makes us fearless in taking risks combined with constant curiosity and questioning the status quo results in creative, brilliant leadership.



Having ADHD can feel like having an ideas-machine for a brain, and in the right environment, we can turn these into reality to be incredibly successful. Our interest-based nervous systems and hyper-focus can make us extraordinarily 'productive', especially when doing something we love.

This isn't always healthy, as over 30% of workaholics have been found to meet ADHD criteria, but it can see incredible results.

In what ways can companies best adapt themselves to be more accessible to individuals with ADHD?

Having a clear reasonable adjustment policy for people with disabilities, particularly neurodivergent conditions, is an easy and effective step to ensuring everybody understands the support available to them.

Training employees (especially managers) on these processes, and on working with neurodivergent people in general, can be really helpful to ensure they're implemented consistently. If they are UK-based, encouraging and supporting employees with Access to Work applications is a brilliant way of helping them to access Government funded support like ADHD Coaching and administrative support.

We also offer ADHD Champions training, empowering employees with ADHD expertise, coaching skills and exercises to have effective conversations about neurodiversity in work. This can be a brilliant way of raising awareness whilst creating an inclusive environment at work where people can thrive because of their ADHD, not in spite of it.



You have helped organisations like Disney and Microsoft, how did you get into contact with these companies and what kind of advice did you give them?

Microsoft contacted me via social media after I published 'ADHD: an A to Z', asking me to train their Women at Microsoft Group on neurodiversity. I did it on my lunch break from my law job which was very surreal!

Disney recently contacted me via my website, as their health insurer AXA was starting to offer neurodiversity assessments for employees and they wanted to provide effective follow-up support within the workplace. Firstly, I spoke in an event at Disney's London office alongside AXA, sharing my own experiences and insights as an ADHD Coach.

Disney then went on to become our first certified ADHD Champions employer, offering in-depth training in ADHD knowledge and coaching skills to 200 mental health first aiders. The sessions empowered employees to feel confident talking about neurodiversity at work, with follow-up workbooks for employees with coaching exercises and signposting to support.

What kind of discrimination against ADHD can be found in the workplace, and how can employers combat this?

The most common form of discrimination I see is a failure to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act. This is usually due to a lack of procedures and education relating to invisible disabilities, which can trigger legal duties on employers to make changes to 'level up' the playing field for disabled employees.

There's been a 30% increase in the amount of disability discrimination cases relating to neurodivergent conditions in the employment tribunal, the compensation awards for which are uncapped.

People with ADHD can also be discriminated against directly or indirectly, such as by being put on performance plans because of their ADHD symptoms, or having career opportunities denied to them because of this. Employers can combat this with education, training and practical measures such as having clear policies in place about neurodiversity.

How has employment improved over the years to be more inclusive, if it has at all?

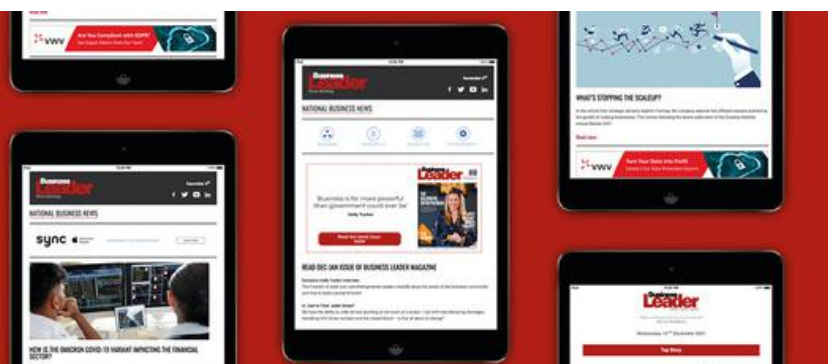
To see world-leading companies like Disney and Microsoft running ADHD training in their companies demonstrates real improvements in how neurodiversity is perceived within the workplace. In my experience, conversations about inclusivity relating to people with invisible disabilities has skyrocketed, as ADHD Works has been inundated with demand from organisations on this.

As awareness and education has increased in the last few years, it's clear to see that conversations are happening, but it's important that these are followed up with action to truly be inclusive. For example, it's great to see organisations using our free sample reasonable adjustments policy and adapting this accordingly to ensure support is available.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced employers to become more inclusive with accommodating different working styles for everybody – now it's about ensuring things don't go backwards.

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What advice do you have for people who think they have ADHD?

Consider what makes you think you have ADHD, and what you'd like to do next. A diagnosis can be helpful (especially if you'd like to access medication), but highly inaccessible, with 7-year NHS waiting lists for assessments and private options costing thousands of pounds.

By learning about how ADHD symptoms show up for you, including your challenges and strengths, you can stop beating yourself up for things outside of your control and start working with yourself. Simply learning about ADHD through credible resources, and connecting with others in similar circumstances can be extremely validating.

You can also apply to Access to Work without a formal medical diagnosis, which can help you access life-changing support such as ADHD coaching. If you're struggling, you're struggling – and deserve support!


What makes a great business leader?

I might be biased – but ADHD! A willingness to put the purpose of the business above ego, tireless dedication and passion, and an understanding of our own strengths and challenges. A great leader is curious: they're not afraid to make mistakes and learn from them, to be vulnerable, and seek support where needed.

The impulsivity, fearlessness and risk-taking associated with ADHD is what's led ADHD Works to become so successful in such a short space of time. As I think differently to 'most' people, I can spot solutions and end up 'acting before thinking' – a very helpful asset, especially when combined with my ability to hyper-focus on things I'm interested in.

Ultimately, a great business is what makes a great business leader, so having the right culture, support and team to inspire you every day, and stop you from burning out, is key. Get the foundations right so you can focus on what you do best!

This article was originally published in Business Leader Magazine and Online.



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name: sterling pohlmann

title: 'how I cope with mental illness

bio: Usually found with his nose buried in a book, Sterling Pohlmann pays special attention to reading and writing Sci-Fi while ignoring housework, much to his wife's dismay. He served in the Army, lived for several years in Hawaii, and spent a month in Japan. He is a bad cook, a good guitarist, and no one laughs harder at his jokes than he does. He was born in Salt Lake City, Utah in 1979 where he currently lives with his wife of 12 years.

twitter: [writeratworkI](#)

PRIORITY



My schizoaffective diagnosis came in 2002. This means I experience hallucinations, white-knuckle highs, and soul crushing lows simultaneously. I write this in the hopes that it can help others manage their own illness better.

Stick To A Routine

Doing the same thing every day - day in and day out-may not sound exciting, because it's not. But it keeps me on task helping me avoid lost time due to being easily distracted. Knowing what I need to be worrying about in the present allows for appropriate responses to external and internal concerns. It also helps my body to know when it's time to wake up, go to work, or go to sleep. Knowing where I need to be and what I need to be doing based on what time it is also helps reduce general anxiety and stress.

Medication

Taking meds every day is one of the most crucial aspects of managing mental illness. I get meds through the VA. Not everyone has reliable and affordable access to care and meds. And while meds aren't the only piece to the puzzle, they are crucial to stability for me. One of the biggest struggles is to find a combination of meds that work for you. Side effects are common and sometimes you have to pick which ones are tolerable. For example, after taking a new med, I was less foggy mentally. It was like when the winter inversion is lifted by the spring rains and you realize just how far you can really see. I'm holding down a full-time job and am an A student in college. These things were impossible for me just a few years ago. Being high functioning is rare with or without the right meds. Some people can while others can't. Self loathing is a common result of the shame of our struggles. But just because you may not be able to do what I'm doing now does not mean you can't get to a healthy and stable place even if that place looks different than the one I'm in.

Getting Regular Restful Sleep

Restful sleep is the hardest one for me. I'm a night owl and often can't sleep until five minutes before my alarm goes off in the morning. And when things quiet down at night and I'm left to my own devices, my thoughts go to extremely dark and unhealthy places. Hence, night-time is the hardest part of my day. I meditate to go to sleep. It doesn't always work, but after years of nightly practice, it is now easier than ever. Sleep is important for everyone, but getting good, regular, restful sleep is crucial for those of us with a mental illness. It is every bit as critical as consistently taking meds. Without it, my focus and concentration dips, while my frustration and anger rise. My medications do a good job of making me tired, but meditation helps me control my mind instead of letting my mind control me.

Diet and Exercise

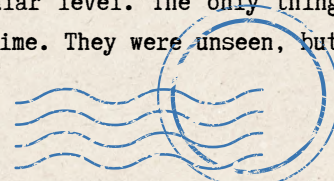
Workouts are painful, but they help me process negative emotions physically. While a body like Dwayne Johnson's won't happen, that is not my goal. My goal is to keep my body healthy because I can't have a healthy mind in an unhealthy body. My medication is more effective when I'm physically healthier. Not everything can be solved by a good night's sleep, medication, and exercise but they give me a fighting chance at keeping my demons at bay. Life is not about avoiding problems. It's about fighting to give yourself problems you are good at solving. Your success may look different than mine, but it will be no less successful.

Create a Healthy Living Space

Be aware of what your mind and body are consuming and adjust what's unhealthy to what is healthier. A Sci-Fi book I read talked about a stasis field that kept the crew of a spaceship alive. To create the life you want requires turning your living space into a stasis field that builds you up instead of letting you down. Good music, good books, and positive pictures displayed all play a role in your mood. These elements play to your advantage or disadvantage. Choose wisely. But the biggest issue isn't decluttering your apartment, car, or by putting up pleasant light and soothing music. Establishing and enforcing boundaries is critical. Sometimes it's not going to a party. Sometimes it's calling off of work. And other times it's cutting out unhealthy people from your life like a precancerous polyp. Most mentally ill people attract people who feed on the vulnerable like moths to flame. And to those people you will always be whatever version of you they had the most power over. With them growth is impossible, but without them growth is inevitable.

Synchronicity

Much in the same way that an orchestra rarely is carried aloft by one single player, all of these elements work together to provide me with a healthy and stable baseline. The effect on my mental health is a product that is more than the sum of its parts. All I can do is tell you what works for me. You must find what works best for you. I believe optimizing a few areas of my life by 1 or 2 percent have had an immense impact. You can't change who you were. You can't even change who you are. But everyday you wake up is a chance to change who you become. It's like working out. If you look in the mirror right after you work out, you will see no difference. But if you do it everyday for a year, you will. These coping mechanisms work the same way. It is amazing how strong I became once I had no other choice. It's like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly in the sense that once it forms a cocoon, it is broken down to the cellular level. The only thing that remains are its wings, which were there the whole time. They were unseen, but they were always there, as are yours.



DIAGNOSIS: ADHD F90.2 MIXED TYPE BY JESS ESMOND

Let's begin with a history for context, albeit a less formal one than I gave in the seemingly endless forms I had to fill out for my ADHD referral. My brain has always moved in 20 directions at once, with thoughts bouncing, racing, scrambling over each other, regardless of whether I'm trying to work, sleep or socialise. Mentally, I am exhausted and physically simultaneously like I'm over stretched and made of tangled elastic and wound so tight with anxiety that I'm going to about to implode.

Surely this was a "normal" way to think and feel, other people didn't find life so constantly overwhelming. I was just poor at regulating my thoughts and behaviours. I wasn't even aware women could have ADHD. But like many others, I had a growing awareness of the condition and neurodiversity, and I started to feel like maybe there was a reason I'm, well, me.

When discussing the possibility of my own ADHD with friends, no one seemed surprised, but quite a few were cautious. One friend asked me, "Would diagnosis really change anything for you?".

Frankly, I had been diagnosed with anxiety and depression over and over again and after 20 years in and out of mental health care and therapy I was resigned to the fact that I would never understand myself. I'd always be a bit of a mess, unorganised, emotional and anxious. Plus it was complicated to get a diagnosis and the waiting lists were long.

But I persisted, and spoke to another friend, who has ADHD and joined the ADHD womens Reddit, where I read hundreds of threads of different peoples experiences and symptoms. It was a revelation, it was like reading my own words, although I told myself I was probably just making it up.

I also read up on the options of private diagnosis, as I was impatient as always to jump ahead and not thinking about what it would mean if I was actually diagnosed, I impulsively booked an appointment in a month's time.

The run up to the diagnosis was somehow simultaneously stressful and dull. I was horrified to learn you have to do a lot of pre diagnosis paperwork. Forms where you have to write about I your lived experience thus far, your basic details, and a form where someone close to you has to detail how you come across. The last one is hard to find when you find it hard to foster and maintain connections with family and friends due to emotional regulation, which can be a symptom of ADHD.

I thought I had outdone myself by sending the forms a week early, only to have the doctor email me the day before to tell me they hadn't received any forms and could I please complete them promptly. This was followed by an evening spent in bits, realising I'd written them and hasn't saved them, a common pattern.

I completed them in a panic, struggling to complete forms I'd already filled out and worried I'd get wrong. I imagined the doctor telling me I was an idiot and that I'd wasted their time, my own low self esteem once again rioting with free reign around my brain kicking up anxiety and fear, another symptom of ADHD.

I zoned out towards the end of the appointment, missing the doctor's diagnosis and closing comments. Had I been diagnosed? I was feeling fidgety and vulnerable after an hour and a half of discussing my history and the feelings and behaviours which I had become skilled at intensely masking and internalising.

"What comes next?" I asked them, not wanting to admit my mind had drifted off.

"We'll be in touch with a report and to discuss medication."

Medication means a diagnosis of something, right? He's definitely just going to diagnose you as an idiot, the unhelpful voice in the back of my head shouted.

4 days later the diagnostic report arrived. Mixed type ADHD, a combination of inattentive and Hyperactive/impulsive. Having to read a 9 page report on yourself is pretty demoralising, but it was reading my own experience, and reading the words “diagnosis: ADHD F90.2 Mixed Type” something somewhere inside me clicked, a small seed of acceptance.

I am different, I am neurodiverse. My brain doesn't have to function a certain way, there is a reason why my brain often feels like scrambled egg.

No, ADHD isn't a reason for everything in my life, nor my only personality trait. I'm still me, but I am learning to understand myself, and maybe learn to accept myself. Even better, there are lots of other people like me, whose minds also function in a myriad of different ways and that ADHD is not simply a diagnosis of an illness to be cured. It's a condition, it's life long, you're born with it, I was born with ADHD and I will always have ADHD and I am proud of this diagnosis for myself.

Yes, it does mean that certain things in my life are harder, things that the non ADHD-er might not think about much at all, organisation, memory, impulse control, high rejection sensitivity and reactivity. But that's not because I'm bad at life, that's not even a thing. That's my low self esteem, another common ADHD trait in women. Diagnosis and accepting myself as neurodiverse has given me confidence and clarity in ways I have never felt before.

My diagnosis is relatively fresh, and I've kept it to myself, even though part of me thought I'd just run headlong into my new ADHD life (whatever that is) and figure myself out and “get better”.

Unsurprisingly, this is a very ADHD thought. But that's not how minds or neurodiversity works, it's not a case of fixing or curing, it's about acceptance and accommodating, and that starts with finally starting to accept and accommodate myself.

Jess Esmond is a trainee counsellor
You can find her on Instagram: @jezmondy

David Levy, editor of 'The Frame', founder of www.adhdcounselling.uk, and a BACP-registered counsellor, shares his top tips for ADHD-ers:

- **Don't let the criticism or scepticism ruin your day, let alone question your identity. It's neurodiversity's turn. For neurodiversity, see: race, religion, sexual identity, gender identity, anxiety, depression... the list goes on. Educate yourself; allow others to be educated by you.**
- **Allow yourself to fail. One experience and all experiences are not the same thing.**
- **Learn to use a tool before judging yourself on the success in adopting it. Don't give up on your to-do list because you didn't use it yesterday. Practice. Refine. Build the relationship between your mind and an action.**
- **Define your tasks. What does your to-do list need to contain? What are you struggling with? What's the purpose of the exercise you're about to do? What's an acceptable result?**
- **Plan the person, not the work. How much can you realistically expect yourself to complete? You may have 8 hours of work, but how many times have you planned to do everything and struggled?**
- **Change is not the challenge. Maintenance and tolerance of lacking change is. You may have found a habit that works. Resist the urge to modify it, change to a different app, or 'start again'. Remember you have ADHD. Think like an ADHD person. Maintenance is medicinal.**
- **Psycho-educate yourself in a way that works for you.. Yes, there are a lot of excellent 200-300 page books out there. Do you usually read 200-300 page books and retain the information? Look to podcasts, YouTube, et al. Find support in the form that works for you. Online support groups can be affirming and validating, and counselling support can be invaluable as you navigate some difficult emotional waters.**

MY UPHILL BATTLE WITH SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

by Shavel Gordon



My predicament is common among young girls and women between 16 and 24. Approximately 1 in 10 adults, including me, suffer from social anxiety disorder. So, I'm not alone, but it indeed does feel that way. Here are a couple of fun facts about me:

- My primary school teacher said I didn't speak very often because I thought I was better than other students.
- My co-worker said I had a mental disability because of not completing tasks the way they wanted me to.
- My tutor thought I had another mental disability because I took a long time to understand mathematical equations and solutions.

From these experiences, you can see a general pattern. That is, any individual who is different from everyone else, especially in a society that praises extroversion, will be seen and treated as an outcast. Don't get me wrong, I believe that society admires people who are distinctive in very unconventional ways. But this usually happens when they're not too different from the status quo. This statement can often ring true when speaking on issues such as sexism and racism. But that's another conversation for another day (and article).

It is my understanding that many people with social anxiety can relate to at least one or even many instances of my experience. We have all been made to feel atypical and unintelligent due to our anxiety. You may have also missed out on many opportunities because of brain fog. A term that describes feeling less astute than usual and makes it more challenging to think as clearly as you usually would.

You have probably also been overlooked because of not speaking as much as others. Ever been afraid of raising your hand in class? Or even simply contributing an exciting idea may have seemed difficult for you. Trust me, I've been there a thousand times (and I still do!). But here's a secret: I promise you it does get better.

At least, it did for me. But instead of telling you to just speak and ignore the judgemental looks of others, to go out there and live a little and to stop worrying about what others will say. Instead, I would say it's okay to battle with social anxiety.

Yes, you read that right; it really is okay. Don't believe me? Read this statement carefully: anxiety is normal, at least in small doses; the bad thing about anxiety is that it can be activated in situations that aren't dangerous to humans. For instance, in a seemingly stressful situation, our body goes into fight or flight mode. The major problem with anxiety sufferers is that our body is constantly in the fighting stage, which causes us to react to harmless situations as if they are dangerous to our overall safety and health. Yes, this leads to the anxiety symptoms you always have, such as being restless, problems with concentrating, rapid heart rate, and difficulties with eye contact, among many others. That is why we feel anxious. Now, you may have been wondering when I will stop and finally tell you how life with social anxiety can get better. Well, here it is!

Firstly, it is essential to give yourself enough time to heal.

Things got better when I slowed down and gave myself the time to heal from past trauma. I became more patient with myself and was more forgiving of my awkwardness. With the help of multiple mental health professionals, I learned to accept myself and get to the root of my social anxiety. This involved being hit with the realisation that I needed others to be more patient with me and to give me more time to think carefully about my answers. I also made small plans and followed different steps, enabling me to practice my social skills much deeper. Throughout this process, I evaluated my progress after each social event, from which I noticed that many people also have awkward moments. So, I wasn't completely alone, and perhaps I wasn't always being judged as harshly as I thought. Maybe, it was all in my head.



Secondly, learn to accept yourself.

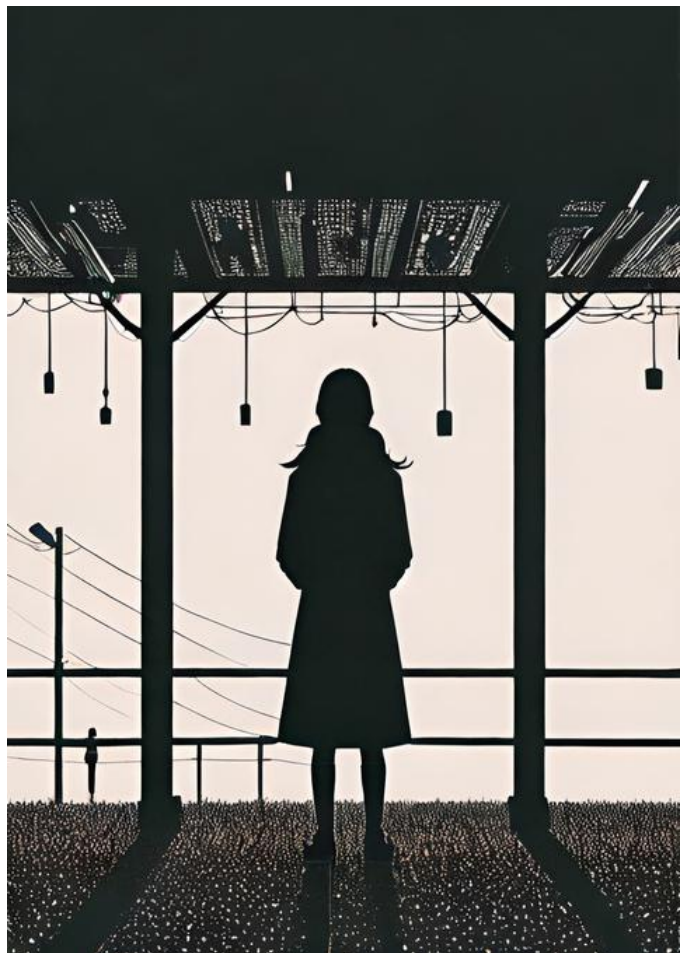
I also learned about the importance of accepting myself first and trying to understand that I am not a superhuman. I may make mistakes when socialising, and that's alright with me - I am not perfect. I have also recently discovered the many strengths exhibited during my many social interactions. These are being empathetic, being a good listener, and paying great attention to minutiae details. I am also understanding, can predict a conversation's direction, and am profoundly analytical. Imagine what more incredible things you can discover about yourself after embarking on a journey of self-acceptance.

Thirdly, be proud of your weaknesses.

I am very proud of my weaknesses: being unable to fully assert myself during large group interactions, suffering from brain fog on some days, and being anxious around high-level authority figures. From all these beautiful yet painful qualities, I have discovered that many of my socially anxious attributes can also be linked to introversion. After a long day socialising with everyone in sight, I need to recharge my social batteries. I also prefer one-to-one conversations rather than having to interact with large groups of people. And, yes, I still accept social invitations and cancel them all at the last minute.

Finally, always remember that change is possible.

A vital point of this very, very, very seriously long article is that change is possible. No matter how difficult it seems.



Improving your social skills may take some years, but taking your time is essential. You will eventually get there. Trust me, I scoffed whenever anyone gave me this exact advice. And may I suggest one more tidbit of advice? Whatever you do, do not ever shy away from life-changing opportunities. If that's too difficult, take tiny steps towards those opportunities until you get there. Trust me, I've done it.

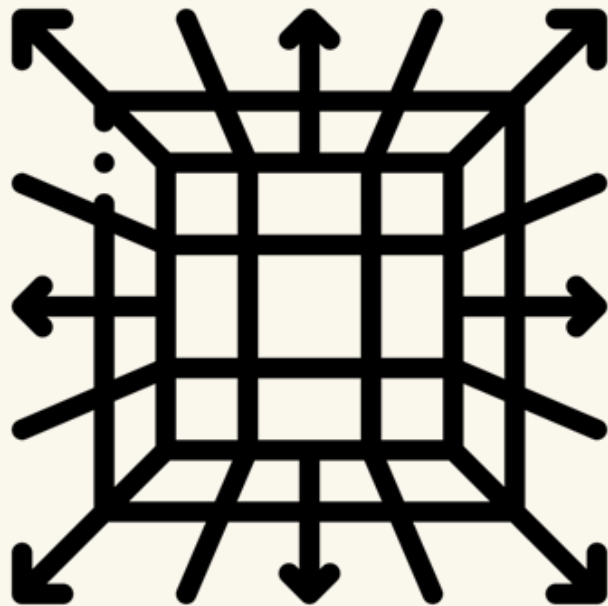
Shavel Gordon is a 22-year-old reader, researcher and writer. She is also an amateur exerciser, with a focus on moderately healthy living half of the time. She hopes to use her degree in psychology to support other individuals in the field of clinical psychology.

Shavel can be found on [LinkedIn](#).



A DISTRIBUTED SENSE OF SELF by Hart Caplan

Ever since I was a kid, I've had the feeling that I inhabit spaces differently than others. That suggests that I had—and, I suppose, still have—an idea of how others inhabit spaces. That's not quite true, because how does one know how others have the felt sense of inhabiting a space, such as the room I'm sitting in, for instance, as I compose these words?



about hart caplan

Hart Caplan is a counsellor and writer, based in Vancouver.

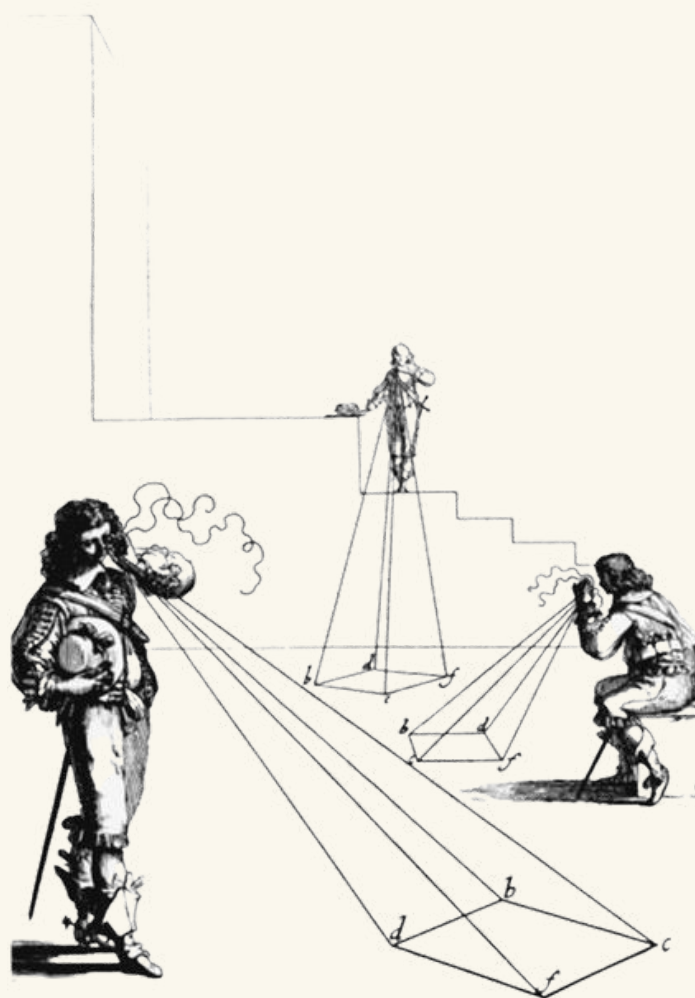
Specialising in ADHD and Neurodiversity, Hart is a Counsellor and Co-Founder of Nightingale Counselling and Research.

Hart's recent writings include "Perfectionism, Part I: The Problem of the Product", "A Dream is a Wish Your (Neurons and/or Unconscious) Makes", "Feelings vs Emotions" and "Representations of 'Everything': a Movie, a Philosophy, and a Dream".

His practice can be found at www.nightingalecounselling.com

These are difficult questions to answer, because they presume information about oneself and about other selves that are, by their nature, difficult to investigate. These are questions that are not scientific, because they resist a certain kind of investigative thinking that science demands: i.e. an examination at a distance. A scientific investigation is a type of inquiry that demands a certain vantage point, a particular point of view. This isn't that. Please don't misinterpret me here—I am not making the case that science and its vantage point are bad. It's not about badness; it's about appropriateness, and it's about pragmatics. This is an instance where looking through the scientific lens has produced a thin narrative out of the richness of being a person. And that thin story with its impoverished language impacts those of us with neurological differences.

So this isn't science. Cool. This is just a lone person sitting in a room trying to glean and then understand something about his own experience of that space and then trying to glean and understand something about his experience of the experience of that space. The reason for the inquiry, and the reason I think it is important to try to relate something about my experience of simply sitting in a room is to try to describe the differences in our experience of the world. But... that's not quite right either: it's not an experience of "the" world. It is the experience of "a" world. To my way of thinking, there is no "the" world. We experience a thing we call "the" world in ways others—and I'm not talking about exotic others who live on the other side of the planet and speak different languages, etc.—do not. This is what I'm indicating when using the word neurological. Neurology is the term we use—or at least this is how I use it—to describe the way we experience "the" world as "our" or "a" world. When we reference neurological differences or neurodiversity, this is what it means. To say that I have a neurological difference isn't to say that there is a difference in me but that the difference emerges in my relationships with aspects of my environment.



Abraham Bosse (c 1648). "Study from Maniere universelle de M. Desargues", Descargues, 1977, p. 107.

Ever since I was a kid, it has felt to me that when I am in a room, I am in the whole of the room. It felt, and still feels, like the thing that I call myself is somehow distributed throughout the whole of the room. I remember as a kid thinking that it felt like I was everywhere in the room... that I was in all the corners. I didn't have a name for it then and perhaps that is precisely why I never spoke about it. I didn't have a name for it and talking about things without names and descriptions is tough. I now have a name for it: I think of it as having a distributed sense of self. I now think that it is part of the experience of being a person with adhd. My point here is not that all folks with adhd have the same distributed sense of self I am describing about my own, but that those with neurological profiles different from those we call typical may inhabit spaces, well... differently. You don't know until you ask. And you don't know that you can answer or what you will answer until you know there is room for difference. I hope this kind of work can participate in making that space.

I didn't know how others experienced being in a room, but it was my intuition that my experience was different than others. Being an old guy now, I think that still holds. I am a Counsellor, and one of the things that I get to do on a daily basis is ask people questions about their experience of being a person. That, maybe, sounds odd. It feels a little odd as I look at the sentence on my screen. But that is the job. Well... that is my job. As I have come to understand it, It's not my job to ask, "what is the difficulty that you are struggling with and how can we work to solve it?" Rather, it is my job is to ask, "what is like to be the person that you are, and by sharing the kind of person that you are—your experience of space and time and inanimate objects and relationships and yourself and death—how can we understand the thing that you call the difficulty you are struggling with and given all that... how will you proceed?"

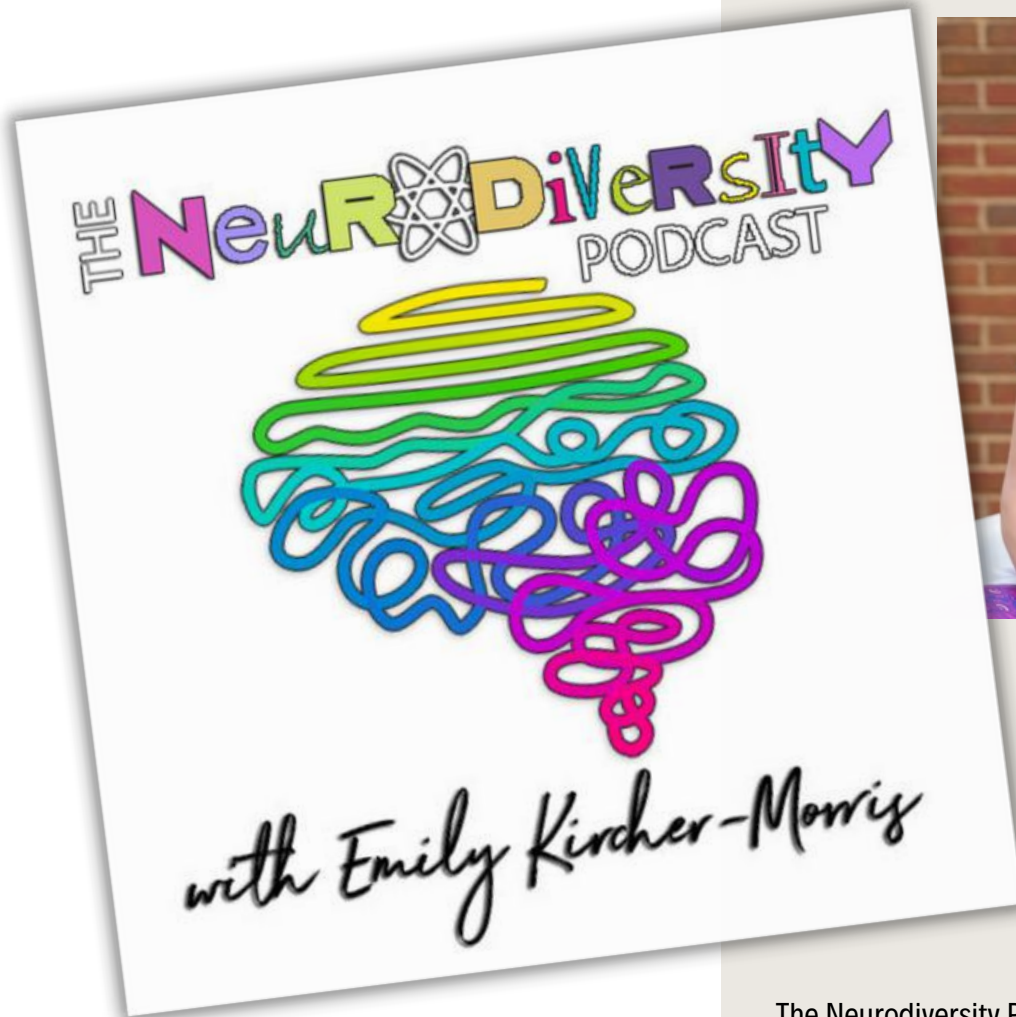
The kid that I was sensed that he was different from the people surrounding him. I didn't have the language to describe my sense of myself in a room, but I did know that I didn't hear others speak about their experience in a way that was familiar to me, and I didn't read stories that represented that sense of being a distributed self. As I look back on my younger self, I don't think that I thought that everybody had a similar feeling about themselves in the world. I think that I felt different and weird. And feeling different and weird in a moment when I desired to feel typical made me at odds with myself.

This is one of the fundamental experiences of being a person with adhd: a pervasive sense of internal tension, because difference and weirdness are not compatible with the feeling of ease. No doubt that is an experience that all people have, whether one tends towards a more typical engagement with their world or one has a neurological difference. I will say that the latter simply carries a heavier metabolic. That in itself is part of the resource intensive nature of having adhd: the back and forth feeling that persists for decades, for some the whole of their life, about whether my experience of myself in a world is ordinary and regular or somehow weird and other. And this also points to a second order difficulty: neurological differences present differently in different contexts or environments. There will for all of us, whether typical or diverse, be environments that are more and less hospitable places for us to inhabit. The difference in sense of hospitality between the more typical and the more neurologically diverse is one of duration and intensity. That is, being in an inhospitable place to a person with a more typical neurology might provoke emotional and bodily states of discomfort or dissatisfaction. For a person with, say, adhd, it can produce sensations of profound panic, restlessness that would make the Buddha squirm, or fatigue that feels like all metabolic resources have been surrendered. But in other circumstances that are more hospitable, I can surprise myself and find resources I didn't know I had to persevere. Here's the problematic question that those of with neurological differences must constantly ask: which one us is going to show up, the person who is looking for a way to escape or the one who perseveres? Without foreknowledge of the way that one is going to show up in any given situation, it becomes challenging in the extreme to plan a day or a week or a year down the road. Without an understanding about the parts of our world that are more or less hospitable to the people we are, it will always be a crap shoot which version of ourselves we will find.

At the risk of overstaying my welcome, let me finish with an irony and a kind of kicker to this exploration of a distributed self in space: our experience of time is the precise opposite. As I feel distributed in space, I feel equally gathered up or compressed in time. And this, in my telling of the story, is what produces such strong reactions to inhospitable places: the feeling that what I am experiencing now in my thinking or my emotional state or my bodily sensation is gathered up around, tight to me, and in that state the idea of a future that is any different than my experience in this present is nearly impossible to imagine. And even if I can imagine it cognitively, it doesn't land emotionally.



I think that is largely true that those of us with adhd live in a kind of eternal present: i.e. an experience of enduring now-ness. And as I look into this thing that I call the future, that feeling of perpetual now-ness is fine as long as the experience of now is fine. But when my experience of now-ness feels dangerous or tedious or uncomfortable—cognitively (dissonance), emotionally (dysregulated), or bodily (pain or discomfort)—that experience of the future that I have described in the language of the eternal present, that gathers the past and future into the difficult present... well... it would be weird if a person whose past and future were wholly colonized by their difficult present didn't react in horror or panic.



The Neurodiversity Podcast with Emily Kircher-Morris is an absolute gem. Emily's passion for neurodiversity shines through in every episode, making it a truly enlightening and uplifting experience, while her thoughtful questions and active listening skills ensure that each episode is filled with valuable knowledge and practical strategies.

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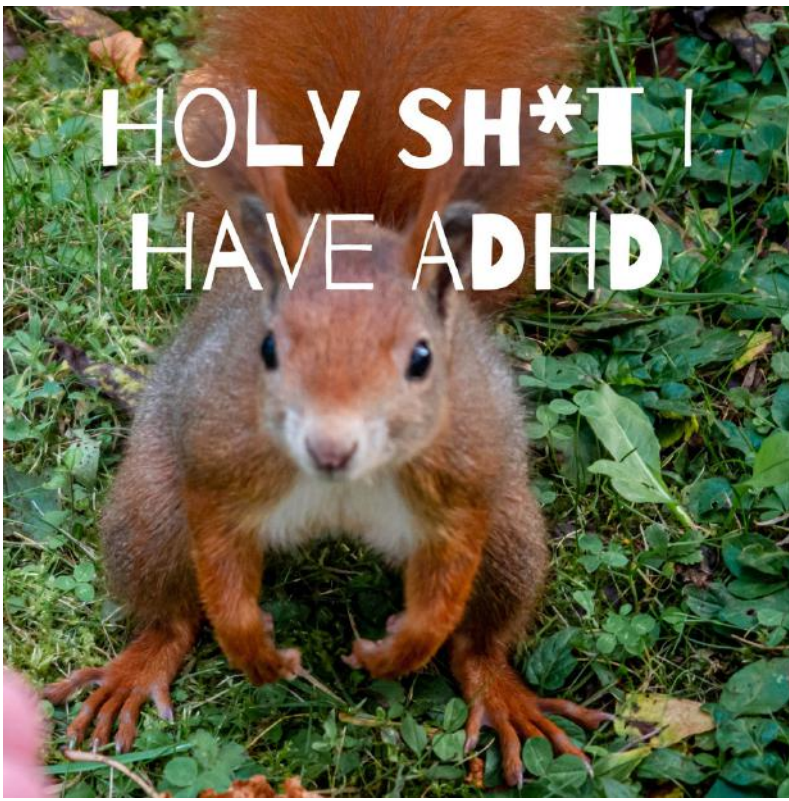
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PICK OF THE PODS

THE BEST PODCASTS FOR YOUR EARS AND YOUR MINDS



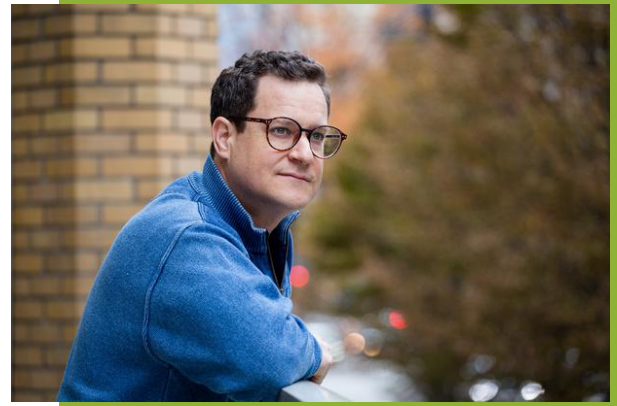
Holy Shit I Have ADHD started in 2021 when hosts Robbie McDonald and Jordan Lane realized they were dealing with the same unusual experience at the same time - getting an ADHD diagnosis in midlife.

HSIHADHD began as a place for Robbie and Jordan to share their experiences of adult ADHD discovery with others, in hopes that other undiagnosed adults might recognize their own stories by hearing ours. There are already more than enough ADHD podcasts out there aimed at increasing productivity, life hacks, and taking charge of your to-do list, so HSIHADHD focuses on people and their stories, sharing the ups and downs that come with getting a new understanding of yourself later in life.

HSIHADHD has since released more than 60 episodes, with Robbie and Jordan occasionally being joined by guests who share their own stories of adult ADHD discovery.

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Jordan Lane
Credit: Ryan Walter Wagner
(www.ryanwalterwagner.com)



Robbie McDonald
Credit: Ryan Walter Wagner
(www.ryanwalterwagner.com)


Listen to: Episode 67 - 'BBC vs. ADHD w/David Levy

First Released: 1st June 2023

Shameless Plug Alert

Editor of The Frame David Levy joins Robbie and Jordan to discuss the BBC Panorama documentary and to talk through some of the responses from both sides of the fence, as well as his own thoughts on the matter.

Along the way they learn what's new with David's counselling practice, and why he doesn't like thinking of stimulants as "medication."



YELLOW BOY

by Fionntán Macdonald

It must have begun with the bear. Whether it was the breathy falsetto, the spongy belly that begged to be squeezed, the creases drawn around his eyes in the old illustrations that made even those beady black marbles seem kind, or the velvety coat of the stuffed toy he lay with while he slept as a child; it became evident that he was fixated. Soon everything the little boy could see or touch had to be yellow, just like his favourite toy. It must have begun with that fat mustard bear with the red t-shirt.

It made sense, his parents thought. Their own parents had read the books years ago and they themselves had loved the old Disney films as children. Those were the first things they'd shared with the boy that made him stop rocking or flapping and focus on something. He seemed to follow the yellow bear across the screen, watching its face. They had struggled to get this level of attention from him before. He never seemed to look them in the eye, but always fixed his gaze on their lips or their noses. They imagined he was following the sounds, trying to grasp the words and gum them out, as infants do, until they can form the necessary sounds.

They became less sure over time. They often recalled that the first word he spoke wasn't 'Mama' or 'Dada,' as would be expected. He was atypical from the start.

They'd wanted him to crawl, it seemed about time. He'd been making these motions over and over as he lay on the floor, these sort of twitches and flaps of his hands and feet that he would repeat infinitely. They assumed he was trying to move himself along, so they thought they'd help him get there. They put the bear on the TV one day and put the boy at the end of the rug it sat on. He had always sputtered and grunted until they moved him up close and they thought he would crawl to the yellow bear when they refused to lift him. So the experiment began.

He lay there for a moment, eyes fixed on the set and the kind creases of the eyes before he started to slap at the floor.

"Phmphf!"

He looked to the two big people who gave him his bottles and changed his clothes who seemed unconcerned by his predicament. He bicycled his uncertain legs and flapped his arms on the floorboards.

"Glawh!"

Still nothing from the big people. They were just sitting there on the sofa, staring at him. They were normally so helpful.

"HUMPFH!"

Nothing. They just smiled and watched him. He'd have to do it himself. So he slapped his little hands on the rug (the big ones shifted), he raised himself onto his mushy elbows (they leaned forward), he transferred his weight to his fleshy thighs (edge of their seats) and balled up his puny fists. With one big motion, the sharp swelling of his parents' lungs and a single great pull: he yanked the rug towards him.

The TV skittered across the floor and settled two feet in front of the baby, who looked up at the yellow bear and smiled.

"GAH!"

The big ones crumpled, outsmarted by an infant. They struggled to grasp how this little brain worked: in some ways so advanced, able to solve problems and apply some element of thought to situations like this, but not crawling or speaking yet. They'd been around children before and none seemed to behave like the little boy they had brought into the world. So they had to re-strategize.

The rug was disposed of, the TV was placed back in its usual position and the baby was laid back on the floor. He seemed happy, at first, to watch the bear from that position, but he soon became impatient.

He glanced at the big people, then back to the bear, then again to his parents. They leaned over with anticipation, expecting him to crawl, but he just looked at them again and furrowed his translucent eyebrows. Suddenly, he spoke.

The first coherent syllable he ever wrapped his gums around was, "Help".

His parents would later cite this as a defining moment, one where they really should have discerned that their firstborn son was a little different, that his young brain developing in a way perhaps weren't prepared for. They were new parents though, they were hardly sure what a child was really supposed to be like, maybe this was just his personality. It was normal for a child to find comfort in familiar things. So what if everything had to be yellow now? It brightened up the joint.

He was just particular. He had his favourite colour and he liked to stick with it, so when he would rip off any clothes that weren't bright turmeric they didn't think much of it, they just put him in a yellow onesie. They didn't mind having to paint his room, it had needed a coat of fresh colour ever since they'd bought the house and the saffron walls made the room look sunny. So what if all he would eat was scrambled egg or tinned sweetcorn. He was just particular.

It wouldn't become much of an issue until he was older, when his siblings arrived and his differences became evident. The other children were easier and seemed to develop differently too. Social skills came quickly, they were soon able to circulate rooms full of adults and hold simple conversations, often drawing people into their orbits like little blonde suns.

He was a moon, circulating on the circumference of their field, always orbiting but rarely colliding with them. If given the opportunity he would remove himself from the sphere completely and retreat to a quiet corner to read.

People always seemed so complicated and it was becoming increasingly hard for him to gauge their reactions to things. He didn't understand until much later that it was because he was ageing and that dynamics shifted as people grew. It seemed to him that things had been perfectly fine before, everything with an order and process that could easily be understood but now things were so uncertain, so hard to read.

Books made sense to him, he could see it all in his head and each character's thoughts and emotions were evident to him on the page, not veiled with an obtuse facial expression or clouded by some small inflection of the voice he was supposed to glean meaning from. Why couldn't people be more straightforward and just explain themselves like the characters he read about did? He began to wish people would just tell him what to do and how to feel, to just take it out of his hands since he seemed so incapable of understanding their strange world with all its hues of meaning and shades of grey.

He liked his yellow world, bright and simple and uniform. He liked the simple little bear in the red t-shirt and his friends who could all be so easily understood.

He began to see this warmer, cuddlier reality as his frame of reference for the wider world he had to exist in. It became easier for him to understand people if he could look at them as one of the characters he understood so clearly. His little sister was like the pink piglet the bear was so fond of; small and anxious but sweet and reliable. His younger brother was a lot more like the tiger who seemed to cannon into the other animals' peace and ricochet out again with hyperactive energy.

He became more comfortable interacting with the world in this way and began to see himself like the boy in the books who entered into the adventures of the animals at intervals. He was a voyeur in the world of social cues and unspoken signals, unable to comprehend the messages that passed between breaths, unspoken and elliptical, and was much happier watching from the confines of his yellow sphere of relative safety.

It was only much later that he would come to understand why he had to view the world in this way.

In his adulthood he became aware of a theory regarding his beloved bear and all his friends. The hypothesis was that each of the characters represented a pathology, and could be linked to a definite psychiatric diagnosis. He discovered that a pair of doctors had devised a test by which a person could answer a questionnaire and be aligned with the characters, who each represented a different archetype.

His curiosity peaked, he began working his way through the test. It operated on a sliding scale with the respondent marking their position from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" and he worked his way through the first few until he was suddenly struck dumb by the ninth statement.

I have been sad most of my life.

He paused for a moment and reflected on a small boy who retreated into a world of yellow; simple, uniform, easy to understand. He thought about the child who read books alone in the playground at school, the boy who rarely seemed to make friends and never seemed to keep them. The peculiar teenager who spent long nights alone in a bedroom that once seemed so sunny but now had faded into the xanthous yellow of decay.

Strongly Agree.

He completed the test. He didn't expect it to offer much insight, but in truth it had. His sister was a lot more like the piglet than even he realised. This character represented anxiety, with which his sister was diagnosed in adolescence. The tiger which reminded him of his younger brother, so charged and eruptive, was an easy analogue for ADHD. His brother would be diagnosed in his early twenties.

His own weighting was not what he would have wanted. He was not so like the boy at all, and his beloved bear was the one he shared the least with. He closely resembled a small kangaroo who was not often focused on, a side character with a minor role, who represented Autism.

He had been fifteen when his diagnosis was confirmed, and when he had begun to wrestle with how his mind operated. He had receded, often, into his yellow world as the young joey had done with his Mother's pouch in the old books and films he so loved and he was still looking for a way to get back to that honey tinted haven he once had.

In this way he was not surprised. He had always known he was atypical, now knowing he was neurodiverse he felt relief if anything. Now he knew why he was so particular, why he had struggled so much to understand the world around him. The label of Autism became to him another haven, another yellow world. Safe. Uniform. Easy to understand.

The pathology test revealed that he was a 97% match for Autism, and a 100% match for chronic depression. This was represented by the droopy, blue donkey which he had never really liked as a child. The one who's mood was chronically low, who was always despondent and who seemed to experience his entire stream of consciousness in a state of abject hopelessness.

He hated that he was the donkey.

He would find out as he aged that neurodiversities are not mutually exclusive to each other. Living with both ASD and Chronic Depression would always be difficult for him, no matter what he did, but in a way he was glad to finally understand it, to be able to deal with it in some way. Even through the lens of Winnie the Pooh.

He started writing. He remembered how he used to escape into the pages of his books, and he wanted to make more worlds he could escape to. He hoped he had found a way, finally, to make people understand the boy in the yellow world.

Fionntán is a writer from Belfast who writes poetry, prose and drama. Fionntán says: "I am fascinated by the diverse, the atypical and the altogether different and hope to make a career writing about the strange and unusual things that fascinate me."

Fionntán is on social media through the page Fionn's Notebook, which can be found on Facebook and Instagram.

www.facebook.com/FionnsNotebook
www.instagram.com/FionnsNotebook

DIFFERENT MINDS

The connection between mental illness and creativity

by Sally Alexander



A connection between artistic creativity and “madness” has long existed in the popular imagination, and can be traced back to ancient times. Plato, for example, saw poetry as an irrational art, and inspiration as a form of divine madness: “And as the Corybantian revellers when they dance are not in their right mind, so the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are

composing their beautiful strains: but when falling under the power of music and metre they are inspired and possessed...For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him.” Similarly, Aristotle asked the question in the fourth century BCE: “Why is

Sally is a thirty-year-old woman living with autism and ADHD and also in the process of recovering from a long-term eating disorder. Her own experiences and those of her neurodivergent friends and family have made her passionate about neurodiversity, mental health and recovery.

She can be found on Instagram at @shazdolls, where she pursues her hobbies of toy photography and writing.

Her poem 'Autism Acceptance' can be found on page 77

it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry, or the arts are melancholic?”

Many artists throughout history have shown signs of eccentricity or melancholy; some have even revelled in it. The Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century prioritised intense emotion and individualism over the prevailing scientific rationalism of the era. Lord Byron expressed it well: “We of the craft are all crazy.

Some are affected by gaiety, others by melancholy, but all are more or less touched”.

From a scientific point of view, little is understood of the neural basis for creativity, but researchers have noticed that it often appears in conjunction with mental illness.

Neuroscientist Nancy Coover Andreasen writes that, “Studies of creative individuals....indicate that they have a higher rate of mental illness than a noncreative comparison group, as well as a higher rate of both creativity and mental illness in their first-degree relatives. This raises interesting questions about....the predisposition to both creativity and mental illness.”

Some scholars have dedicated themselves to retrospectively diagnosing historical figures. Ashley Robins’ 2010 book *Oscar Wilde - The Drama of His Life* put forth the idea that the famous author had Histrionic Personality Disorder. As part of his research, Robins undertook an unusual and innovative experiment: he asked a group of Wildean scholars to complete a psychological questionnaire as if they were doing so for Wilde himself.

Professor Michael Fitzgerald’s 2005 book *The Genesis of Artistic Creativity* explored the lives of twenty-one famous writers, philosophers, musicians and painters whom Fitzgerald argued met the criteria for a diagnosis of autism. Having

diagnosed hundreds of individuals during his professional career, Fitzgerald examined the eccentricities of figures such as Hans Christian Andersen, Immanuel Kant, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Andy Warhol. Fitzgerald has since been criticised for the subjective nature of his conclusions, but, as Dr James McGrath acknowledges, “In celebrating autism and creativity, Fitzgerald’s work presents a vital counterpart to dominant assumptions that autistic people lack both empathy and imagination.” Moving away from the common association of autism with STEM subjects, Fitzgerald makes the case that autism offers a unique perspective on the world leading to the creation of new and ingenious ideas and artworks: “These persons with autism reject received wisdom and are emotionally immature....autistic intelligence is unconventional, unorthodox, akin to the intelligence of true creativity.”

Psychologist Peter Chadwick’s 2001 book *Personality as Art* suggests that what the world calls mental illness is in fact a necessary component of artistic creativity. Advocating an artistic rather than a scientific approach to psychology, he suggests that the modern world’s “obsessions....with therapeutically engineered normalisation, integration, mood stability, impulse management and rational living have....made us now quite pale

and tepid” in contrast to the larger-than-life artistic personalities of the past.

Although mental illness may have shaped many artists and helped them reach their full creative potential, there are of course many on whom it also had a devastating effect. Numerous artists have died by suicide - among them Vincent Van Gogh, Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath - while others have suffered as a result of poor impulse control, mood instability, disordered eating, or substance abuse. Of course, stigma and ostracism have also played a role: feeling at odds with the world might inspire creativity, but it can also lead to isolation, depression and despondency.

Creativity can, however, also be used as a way to improve mental health. “Expressive therapies” refers to the use of the creative arts as a form of therapy, in which therapists help their clients to use various artistic mediums for self-discovery and healing. There is a wealth of evidence both anecdotal and empirical for the mental health benefits of practices such as journaling, creative writing, painting, sculpture, and crafting. Oscar Wilde said that “mere expression is a mode of consolation” - perhaps creativity is the mechanism by which the brain attempts to counteract the suffering of mental illness.

HEAD FULL OF IDEAS?

This fanzine relies on the contributions of the people that read it, whether it's in the form of art, poetry, photography, essays, articles or personal experiences – as long as it's mental health related, and:

- An original piece.
- In any language, but includes an English–language version.
- Ensures confidentiality and anonymity.
- Doesn't discriminate against any protected characteristic.

To submit a piece for a future issue, please email to:

editor@theframefanzine.com

Along with

- The name you'd like used as author.
- A short piece of biographical information.
- Any social media accounts or websites you'd like added to your bio.



**THE
FRAME**



by Anna Brewski

Instagram
@anna.brewski

Anna says: "is a short musing about one particular difference in the way that neurodivergent and physiodivergent individuals are accepted in society, alongside a crochet pattern for a fidget toy"

Coping via Crochet

(plus: a fidget toy crochet pattern)

These days, I rarely leave the house without a crochet hook and a ragged ball of wool. Crochet has become a coping mechanism, a means of surviving uncomfortable situations that I simply don't feel 'wired' to deal with. As a neurodivergent individual in a world full of 'normal' people, these situations tend to crop up a lot. But crochet helps by keeping my fingers busy and my mind occupied; it imposes both physical and mental separation from the outside world. I typically get overwhelmed by a crashing tsunami of external input that someone else could simply brush aside, or consumed by a persistent, gnawing anxiety that refuses to budge. But with crochet, I can stay just that little bit further away from it all. After all, it is harder for that lingering fear to creep in or the cascade of noise and information to sweep you under, if some part of you is simply not there, but rather resolutely counting stitches



inside your head. Looping the wool over the hook over and over stops me from incessantly picking at the raw cuticles of my nail beds; focusing my gaze on the orderly rows of stitches is one way of lessening the glare of too-bright light and 'should I be making eye contact or not?'. With crochet, I can get by.

The term 'stimming' is often used to describe the coping mechanisms some neurodiverse individuals use to manage stressful situations. Typically a repetitive movement or vocalisation, stimming can help by soothing, blocking out external sensory input, or relieving built-up emotions. Crochet, you could say, has become my means of 'stimming'. But whilst I am able to crochet freely in public, some individuals are ashamed of their stims and feel like they must stifle them. This is because common stims, be it flapping your hands or biting your nails, clicking your tongue in a quiet room or humming softly in a loud one, are just not 'socially acceptable'.

Why not? We know that it is wrong to ridicule someone using crutches, or mock a person's hearing aid; why should an 'undesirable' self-soothing behavior shown by a neurodivergent individual be treated any differently? After all, the crutches, the hearing aid, and the behaviour serve much the same function: they are adaptations to manage in a world that isn't quite suited to that person's needs. The only difference is that the former help the body whilst the latter helps the mind.

It would be ideal if all coping mechanisms were unconditionally welcomed without disapproving glares or muffled sniggers. However, all too often those - like me - that identify as neurodivergent are forced to hide the strategies and stims we use to get by. By shaming us for our ways of managing, society refuses to fully accept our differences.

So for now, I continue to bring my crochet hook and wool with me. It helps me stay that little bit more in control. Plus, it often produces useful things - such as this soft, tactile, infinitely-looping fidget toy.



Method:

- Ch 15. Sk 1 chain then sc into the back loops of the remaining 14 chains.
- Bring the two ends of the crochet piece together, twisting one by 180° to form a twisted loop. Sl st into what is now the top of the other end of the piece.
- Change colour. Ch 1 then sc into the same stitch. [2 sc in the next stitch, 1 sc in the stitch after that] for the rest of the round. When you come to the join for the first time, continue on, so that you end up working into both sides of the crochet piece. Sl st into the first stitch of the round.
- Change colour. Ch 3 then dc into the same stitch. [2 dc in the next stitch] for the rest of the round. Sl st into the topmost chain of the ch 3.
- Change colour. Ch 1 then sc into the same stitch. [2 sc into the next stitch, 1 sc into the stitch after that] for the rest of the round. Sl st into the first stitch of the round. FO and weave in the loose ends.

Notes:

- This type of fidget toy is great because it is so versatile. You can twist it, feed it through itself, attach it to a keyring or bag, and slide it comfortably onto your fingers. This particular pattern makes a toy that fits most medium-sized fingers. If you want a larger fidget toy, either ch 18 (instead of 15) in step 1, or use a larger-sized crochet hook.
- This fidget toy is also unusual because of its mathematical properties. It is a Möbius strip: an infinite loop with just one side. Trace a line along its surface and keep going until you get back to the beginning; no matter where you start from, you'll cover all faces of the ring without ever lifting your finger off the toy.
- Customise your fidget toy by varying the colours or crocheting additional round.
- Customise your fidget toy by varying the colours or crocheting additional rounds.

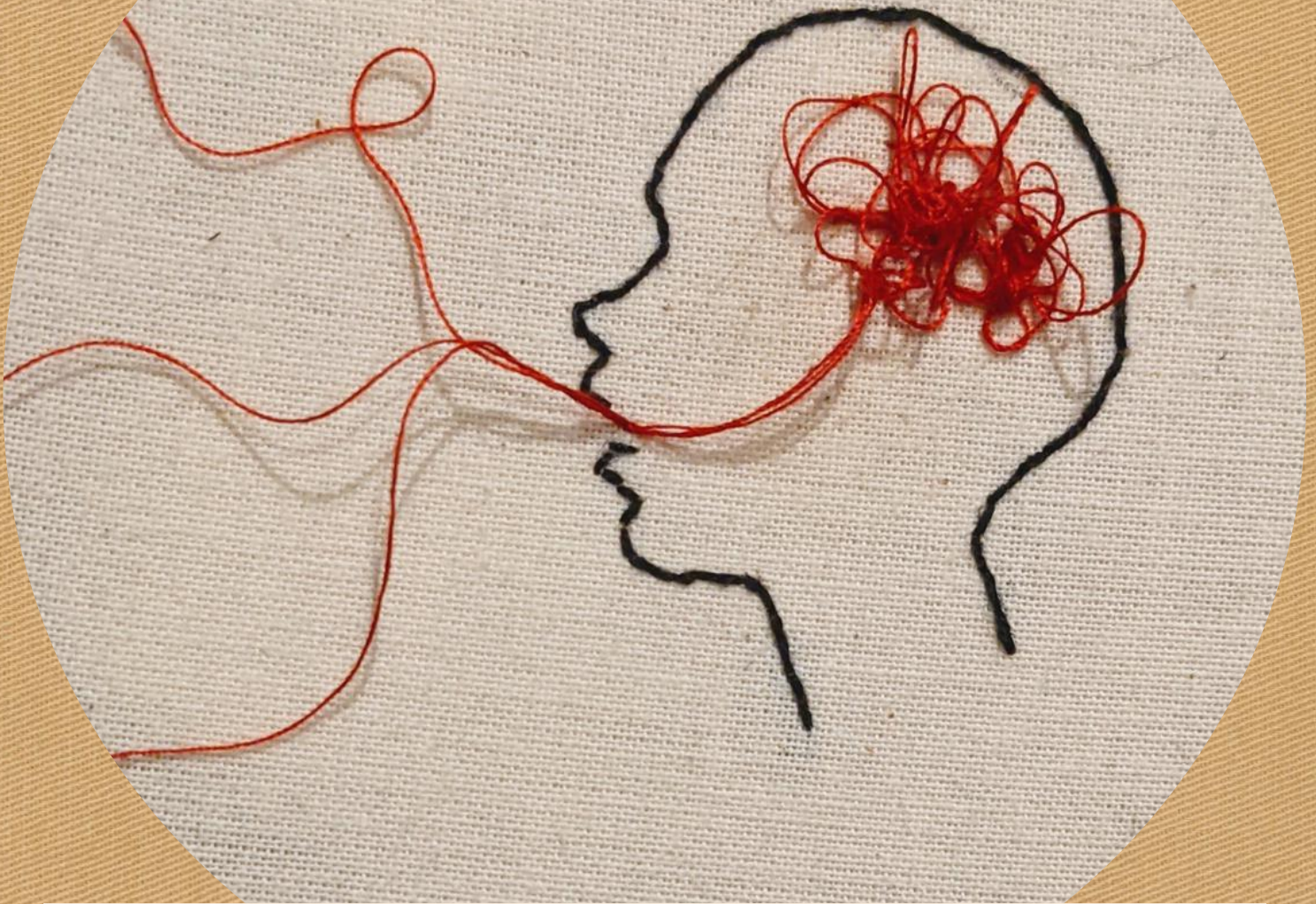
You will need:

- DK wool
- 3.5 mm crochet hook
- Scissors
- Wool/tapestry needle

Stitch index (US terms):

- Ch - chain
- Sc - single crochet
- Sl st - slip stitch
- Dc - double crochet
- FO - fasten off

... by Lily ...



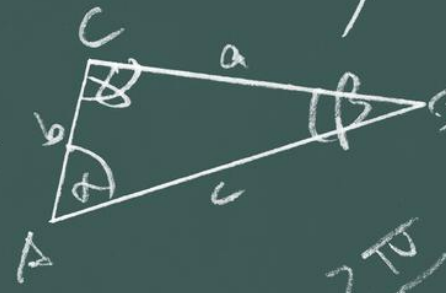
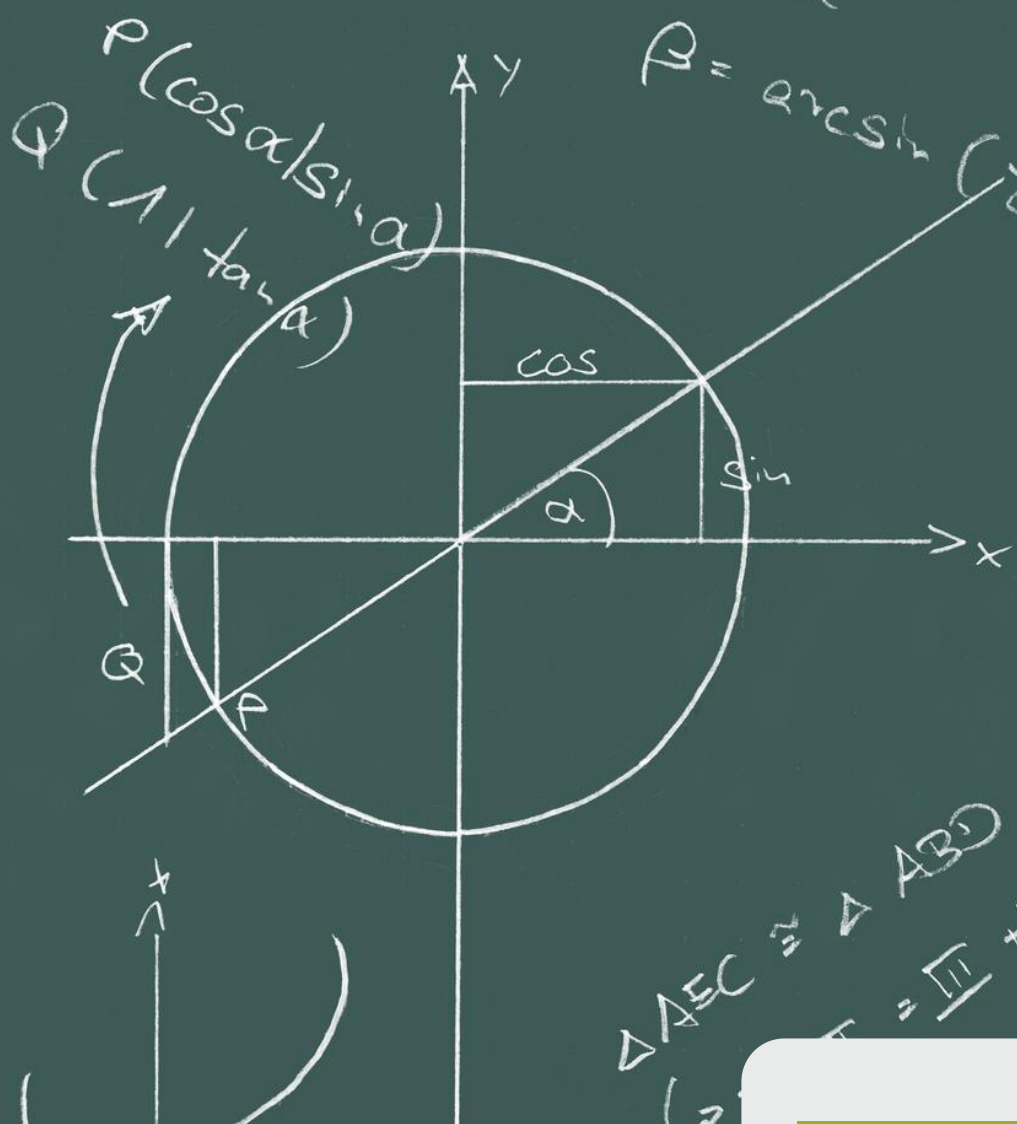
I'm Lily - a textile artist (amongst other things) who's brain is a bit of a tangle - neurodivergence and a history of poorly mental health - which I wasn't aware wasn't everyone's experience until I was diagnosed. My brain can become a jumbled mess of information bubbles and swirls that became lost in translation between my thoughts and the formation of speech (out loud or written) - it can be crushing and isolating. Sometimes the words that fall out of my mouth bear little resemblance to what I want to get across.

I think that's part of why I gravitated towards a textile practice. With meticulous structure, threads weft together and become predictable, cohesive; a wider fabric. They can be singled out and followed, stitch by stitch. Without consideration thread will degrade into a knotty mess. It's a way of being creative that allows for those lapses in focus, or mis-translation. It forgives you being distracted and lets you continue anyway. You can make sense of it, and I can make sense with it.

Lily is on Instagram @lilyo.textiles

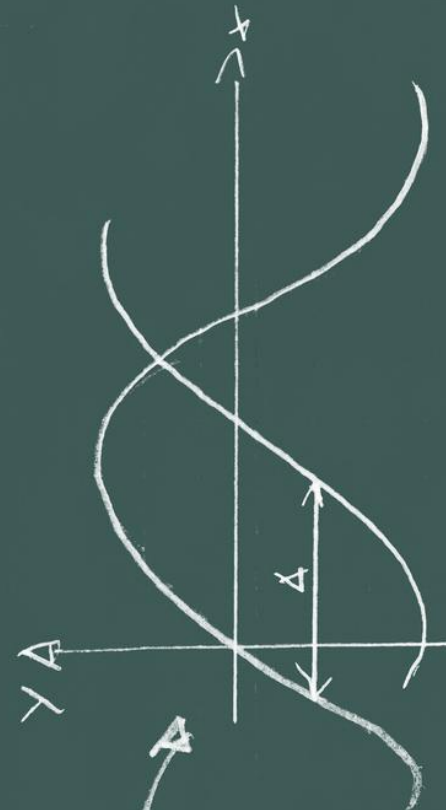
$$\frac{\sin \beta}{\sin \alpha} = \frac{a/b}{1/\sin \alpha}$$

$$\beta = \arcsin\left(\frac{a/b}{\sin \alpha}\right)$$



$$\Delta AEC \cong \Delta ABD$$

$$c = \sqrt{a^2 + b^2 - 2ab \cos \alpha}$$



$$c^2 = a^2 + b^2 - 2ab \cos \alpha$$

$$\cos \alpha = \sqrt{1 - \sin^2 \alpha}$$

$$\tan \alpha = \frac{\sin \alpha}{\cos \alpha}$$

**MASKING MATHS:
DYSCALCULIA AND ME**

?	?	?	?
?	?	?	?
?	?	?	?
?	?	?	?

BY PETER CHERRY

$$E = \frac{\sigma}{\epsilon}$$

$$x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

I was 33 when I started talking about my dyscalculia. One of the overriding memories I have of this time is talking on zoom with a close friend. I felt embarrassed and ashamed to explain that I had never passed a Maths GCSE and that I would have to attend an adult education centre to re-sit it. I remember the buzzing in my ears, the heaviness in my stomach and the struggle to vocalise words and feelings that would prefer to remain unspoken. It reminded me of something similar I went through with the same friend some twelve years earlier when I came out as gay. In fact, I still refer to first talking about my dyscalculia as my 'second coming out'.

Lifestyle changes triggered by the pandemic forced me to face my dyscalculia. Prior to 2020, I had been teaching comparative literature at a university in Turkey. I had been in a relationship which had ended badly, and I was struggling to find work back in the UK. I was hauled up at my parents' house with the signs and symbols of my adolescence all around me and no moving out date in sight. It felt as if my previous independence and freedom were now a thing of the past and that dyscalculia was condemning me into a new state of perpetual adolescence.

I had made a career decision which at the time seemed to make sense: to draw on my years of teaching English as a foreign language in Istanbul, my PhD in comparative literature from Edinburgh University and my time teaching at universities in Turkey to retrain as a secondary school English teacher. However, I soon found that this was not a wise choice after all. I was ineligible, because of my lack of a Maths GCSE which was of course down to my dyscalculia.

Dyscalculia, pronounced to rhyme with Julia, affects 6% of the UK population (roughly the same amount as dyslexia), and can manifest in difficulties understanding place value, memorising numerical facts, reading numbers and mental calculation. The UK's only organisation dedicated to supporting the 2-3 million children and adults with dyscalculia, the Dyscalculia Network, estimates that research and awareness of dyscalculia is about ten years behind its more famous sibling, dyslexia.

Anecdotally I can believe this. When I first explained that I had not passed my Maths GCSE with those that interviewed me for a teacher training course I was met with a puzzled look - 'what is dyscalculia? We work in education and why haven't we heard of it?'. In actual fact, some of the Dyscalculia Network's Board of Trustees have been researching, writing and campaigning on dyscalculia for about thirty years yet none of this work seems to have reached the eyes or ears of our Prime Minister. His proposed 'Maths to 18' policy has made no concessions to the millions of kids struggling with dyscalculia in classrooms up and down the country. It is still baffling to me that there are many maths teachers in classrooms up and down the UK that have received no training to deal with dyscalculia.

It wasn't that dyscalculia had not appeared in my life up until this point but, like one of the Dyscalculia Network's resident experts Cat Eadle was later to tell me, I am 'an effective masker'. I often avoided maths like the plague and used calculators practically every waking moment of my life. I can remember many occasions secretly sneaking into toilets to calculate bills. In the days when paying with cards was less common, I would often habitually put down a big, round number knowing that I didn't need to worry about calculating the exact amount. Money had always been a secret source of anxiety for me as I shifted between periods of intense frugality and overspending. Dyscalculia also appeared in my persistent habit of being late to things or, as even today, missing a bus because I misread the numbers. Then there are all the other ways numbers are in our lives that affect people with

dyscalculia, from calculating amounts for a recipe, to keeping track of reps during exercises, all the way to counting calories when dieting. To remember PIN numbers, for example, I have to associate them with a historical date, like 1453 for the Ottoman invasion of Constantinople, 1917 for the Russian Revolution or 1945 for the end of World War II.

I think masking is something of a toxic trait of mine. Whether it refers to my sexuality or my dyscalculia, I find it a little too easy to put up a front or hide my true feelings. I grew up in a town in West Sussex where the local secondary schools were still gender segregated. At my school, boys were expected to be good at maths, science, and technology - it was even emblazoned on the school tagline which referred to itself as a 'school of enterprise and technology'. In assemblies, the headmaster even spoke of boys' natural affinities to all things mathematical and technical.

I, on the other hand, was a voracious reader who excelled in English and often won the best marks for the subject in my year group. It was my abilities in English versus my performance in maths that had first led primary school teachers, and my concerned parents, to refer me to an Educational Psychologist when I was 10. I had been 'diagnosed' (a word I don't like this as it implies something was wrong with me) with dyspraxia and dyscalculia. Recently, I found and re-read the assessment. I couldn't help laughing when I read how I had sought to distract the educational psychologist with maths questions by talking about a book I was reading and something I'd seen on TV.

This was the time when the word 'gay' was still a byword for anything rubbish, bad or lame. English was most certainly a 'gay' subject and sometimes it felt its status was confirmed by the fact that I seemed to be good at it and terrible at maths. I used to lie to friends and classmates about the fact that I had to go to the 'special educational needs' centre for maths - 'masking' it with stories about how I actually had to go for special classes as I was so gifted at maths!



The Dyscalculia Network is a Community Interest Company founded in 2019 by two maths teachers and dyscalculia specialists, Cat Eadle and Rob Jennings. We are the only organisation in the UK dedicated to raising awareness of dyscalculia and maths difficulties, supporting employers, educators and parents with dyscalculic employees and children, and empowering and advocating for adults with dyscalculia and maths difficulties.

The Dyscalculia Network hosts the UK's only exclusive dyscalculia specialist assessor and tutor list connecting adults and parents to the services they desperately need. We also provide training for employers, educators and parents through online and in-person CPD events and, through our social media, we amplify the voices and concerns of people with dyscalculia. We aim to make life easier for people with dyscalculia and to make them feel seen and heard.

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info@dyscalculianetwork.com



[@DyscalculiaNet1](https://twitter.com/DyscalculiaNet1)

Peter Cherry works as a Communications Officer for an NGO in Moldova. He volunteers for the Dyscalculia Network and is a member of both its 'adults with dyscalculia' advisory team and general advisory board. He also has worked as a teacher of English to speakers of other languages, a bookseller and as a lecturer at universities in Turkey and in the UK. He has written an academic book, *Muslim Masculinities in Literature and Film*, published by Bloomsbury based on his PhD which he completed at University of Edinburgh in 2017. His dream is to one day write a book about dyscalculia.

Peter tweets about dyscalculia and more besides at [@peterjcherry](https://twitter.com/peterjcherry).

This kind of shame lasts a very long time. I was reminded of those feelings on that zoom call. I winced as I thought about that walk into the special needs centre I took every time I had Maths. I used to feel everyone was watching me as I made way into the centre. It felt like I was stepping across some threshold in which everyone outside was functional and 'normal' and I was marked as somehow deficient or lacking. I wondered what sort of mystical alchemy was in other peoples' brains that meant they understood all these things like percentages and mean values. It all looked like people could interpret another language that I was excluded from.

Those thoughts and that shame returned in the adult education classes. Every Thursday, I went to those lessons and saw adults whose lives and achievements were on hold because they hadn't yet managed to get that magical C grade. These were adults who spoke other languages, had raised children, or dipped into novels while they waited for their maths lessons.

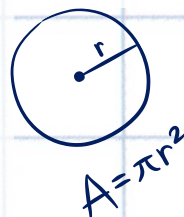
The conditions were bad: at one maths class I attended, there were four computers to be shared around thirty students. The classes comprised of those who were clearly dyscalculic, those who were not educated in the UK but needed a Maths GCSE for work to those who had evidently led difficult lives up to this point but were trying to turn things around. I was able to switch to a class closer to my home where there were more computers, but the over-stretched teachers admitted they'd never taken any training on how to support people with dyscalculia. Surely most adults there had dyscalculia whether it had been detected or not? A few people on those courses told me how they'd studied subjects like English or Art or History at university, but maths had just always alluded them and so, while their friends progressed with careers, they felt doomed to take endless maths courses - like a particularly heinous ring of Dante's Inferno.

I was lucky and a job opportunity outside of education emerged for me. I was able to drop those Maths classes and I still don't have a Maths GCSE.

But I live with the constant fear that I'll lose my job, face employment insecurity again and be back in one of those maths classrooms. We underestimate just how brave you must be to be different in some way or not fit societal expectations of achievement. And I still think of the bravery of some of those people in that class sitting their maths GCSEs multiple times. My respect is surpassed only by the anger I feel at the lack of resources: the broken computers, crowded classrooms, and overworked maths teachers with little to no training in dyscalculia support. Is this really a system that is ready to be extended to 18?

I think the only way I can effectively deal with these feelings: to reject the shame and deal with the anger is resist the urge to mask. This is why now, months from turning 36, I've turned into something of a dyscalculia activist in my spare time. Becoming involved with Dyscalculia Network has shown me that there are many more like me out there that are quietly suffering with everyday maths or struggling to find work due those pesky, wretched Maths GCSE grades so beloved of our lawmakers. My view is unequivocal: numeracy is a crucial part of our lives, but the GCSE system simply does not work for many. Government time and energy is better spent on a system focused on numeracy skills for life and an alternative to the GCSE.

I hope it's only a matter of time before dyscalculia is a word firmly ingrained in our common consciousness. A matter of time before dyscalculia can be as widely known and researched as dyslexia, or even other forms of neurodivergence. I don't feel we live in a society that is sensitive to those who struggle with numbers and maths. Rather than forcing them to feel shame with GCSE re-sits or to study till they're 18, how about we create a system that supports them with the skills they'll need to excel in life and empower them to use numeracy to thrive. How about we help those with dyscalculia feel that they don't need to mask?



A hand-drawn diagram of a circle with a radius line labeled 'r' extending from the center to the circumference. Below the circle, the formula $A = \pi r^2$ is written in blue ink.

$$W = \int_{t_1}^{t_2} W \cdot dt$$



Could you start by telling us a little bit about yourself and what you do?

After spending my youth struggling in chaos, like a growing number of other adult females, I was late diagnosed with ADHD at 37 years old (I am 39 years old now). By this point I was already a coaching psychologist from Colchester who had set up the award-winning business 'Find Your Spark'. This was initially to support at-risk young people but has since expanded to supporting children, parents and ADHD adults.

Getting the ADHD diagnosis led to everything making sense for me, it was as if a lightbulb had been switched on in my head. My late diagnosis was due to ADHD misinformation, mostly that ADHD is something only 'naughty boys' had and something you grew out of. As a result, generations of females like me have been missed and/or misdiagnosed, and the NHS has not set up to have the required level of support available to help adults with ADHD. This has had a massive negative impact on many people here in the UK and globally.

I now deliver ADHD Awareness Psychoeducation group sessions to adults and parents to raise awareness and understanding into this still misunderstood and stigmatised condition. I also deliver ADHD Coaching, and BRIEF Solution Focused therapy to adults and young people with or without an ADHD diagnosis.

Q and A

PT 2

Michelle Shavdia, Psychologist and founder of 'Find Your Spark', an organisation providing ADHD Coaching, Brief Solution Focused Therapy and anger and anxiety healing for parents, children and young people.

Can you tell us a bit about 'Find Your Spark'?

Find Your Spark helps parents who want to support and understand their ADHD neurodivergent children better and themselves. We help solve their problems with any anxiety, anger and ADHD related challenges. We also help ADHD adults. We solve this problem through ADHD Coaching, therapy and Psychoeducation and awareness sessions. They choose us because of my personal lived experience as well as our professional experience, and because we know the importance of making parents and children feel understood and supported, and their experiences listened to, acknowledged and validated.

How did you end up working with parents of ADHD people?

I began working with parents in 2016/17, as I began to realise that I would be able to help a greater number of young people if I worked with their parents as well – they were more likely to talk to others about the benefits, and I would not only reach more people but also have a larger, lasting impact on those that I did work with. I have now begun delivering ADHD Awareness sessions to parents who want to support their ADHD children better but do not know how. These take place in venues across Essex and we are looking at offering more specialised sessions in the future as well.

Could you tell us a little more about the work you do with ADHD children?

I support them with their challenges with emotional regulation, working memory, and executive function, so helping remind them of things and giving them tips on how to calm their heightened emotions down. It helps having ADHD when working with ADHD children as you understand their brains intuitively and why they find things difficult.

What would you say are the main concerns of the parents of ADHD children?

Currently it seems to be anxiety, self-harm, emotional regulation and transition, as well as issues to do with behaviour, resilience, and coping skills. School-based anxiety is common, as are challenges with sensory processing.

What are the challenges of the work you do?

I would say the main challenge would be some people not fully understanding neurodivergence, and therefore dismissing or belittling it. However, it often spurs and motivates me on to raise awareness and train people, as I see the effects and the problems their dismissiveness causes, particularly in young people.

I'd imagine you come up against a lot of stereotypes and misconceptions in both parents and children. Any in particular?

The general stereotype and misconception of ADHD is that it's something that only naughty boys have, who can't sit still. It's a stereotype which has led to generations of females being missed and/or misdiagnosed, as well as those who were more inattentive than hyperactive being overlooked.

Why is ADHD such a big 'thing' now?

It's only since 2008 that we've known ADHD was not something you just 'grew out' of, and is in fact a lifelong brain condition. With this new education comes greater awareness, and we've come to see the typical ADHD stereotype of it being something only 'hyperactive, naughty boys' had was inaccurate. There's generations of people, in particular females, who are now adults who got missed and are not being assessed and diagnosed for it.

Any messages to send to the readers you'd like to share?

I'm hugely passionate about ADHD, and about trying to help raise awareness so people can get assessed and diagnosed. Their lives have been lived long enough without understanding – whether that's from others or from themselves. The labels that come with an undiagnosed condition like this can be hugely damaging, causing ongoing mental health problems, and in the worst-case scenarios, threat to life, with ADHD people five times more likely to take their own lives.

The more ADHD awareness there is, the less we're seen as mad, bad, lazy or crazy, and the more people come to understand, as I have done, that I'm not useless, it's just I have a somewhat compromised prefrontal cortex, the area in the brain which processes executive function, emotional regulation, and working memory. Yes it might mean messy thinking, but messy thinking can also be creative thinking – one of ADHD's strengths, seen in the right context.

I personally wouldn't be without my ADHD now I've learned so much about it. The strengths of ADHD aren't celebrated nearly enough, such as innovation, creativity, kindness, intuition and high energy, which is why I am delivering ADHD Awareness sessions across Essex, to do just that.

We hold events throughout the year – just check on the website for the next one, or email amanda@findyourspark.co.uk

**FIND YOUR
SPARK**

ADHD

AWARENESS SESSIONS



With Michelle Shavdia, ADHD Coach and Psychologist, and founder of 'Find Your Spark'

An informative session covering:

- the background of ADHD
- overlapping neurodivergent conditions
- ADHD symptoms, challenges and strengths
- neurodiversity in education, employment and social change
- routes to diagnosis
- ADHD treatment, tips and tricks
- boundaries
- ADHD coaching offers

Michelle has a BSc (Hons) Degree in Psychology from Warwick University and an MSc (Dist.) in Coaching Psychology from the University of East London as well as 12 years' experience of coaching, mentoring and delivering inspiring talks to young people.

For more information or to book, email: amanda@findyourspark.co.uk

**Location: Colchester, Essex
Includes complimentary refreshments and free parking.**

**FIND YOUR
SPARK**

www.findyourspark.co.uk



[@findyoursparkuk](https://twitter.com/findyoursparkuk)

Artist Submissions





Charlie French

www.charliefrenchfineart.com

@charliefrenchfineart

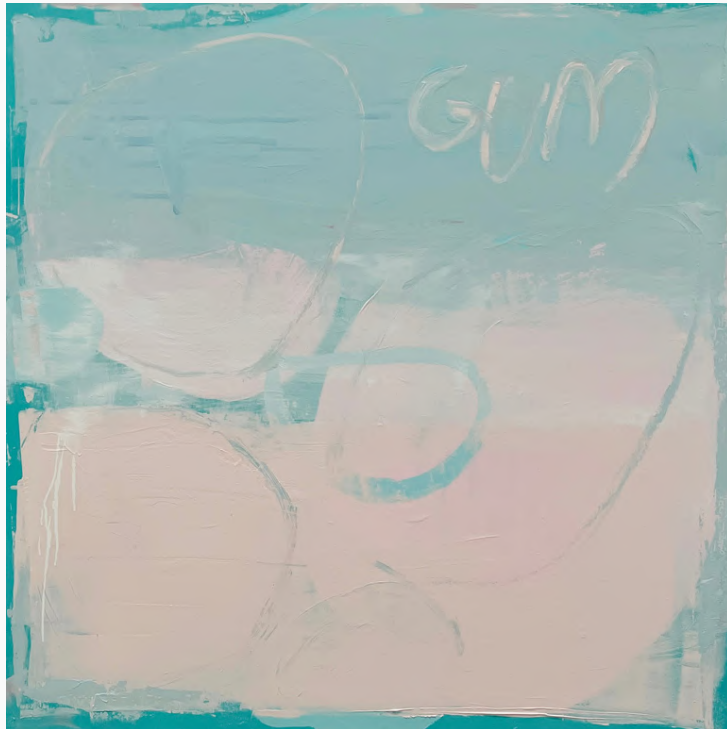
Charlie French is an intuitive abstract painter, known for his compositions of bright and colorful shapes. Currently, Charlie resides in London, England and focuses primarily on large-scale paintings. Charlie's process is to be free, and embrace a blank canvas as an adventure in imaginative freedom. He loves textures, layers, geometric shapes and freeform markings he calls Charlie's Designs. Recently, Charlie has been inspired to create abstract landscapes, but always returns to his beloved and sought-after series: in the fathoms below, morning in Paris and snowy day.



At the age of 16, Charlie developed Down Syndrome Regression Disorder (DSRD), and lost his ability to communicate and engage with the world for over five years. Slowly he emerged to a plateau of stability choosing then to pursue his passion for art. Working with tutors and attending classes Charlie honed his skills. While he unquestionably favors specific color palettes and tools, Charlie welcomes new techniques and thrives on continued learning. Art is Charlie's passion, Charlie's therapy and Charlie's choice: he paints almost daily, and is dedicated to his practice.



This drive and commitment has been featured in Creative Boom, Texas Monthly, Channel Kindness, D-Magazine, @aatonau, Dig.ni.fy, and others. Brand commissions and collaborations include Michaels Stores, The Texas Rangers, Demdaco, Mohawk Industries and Crayola to name a few. His art is featured in the US and abroad in both private and corporate collections. Charlie has exhibited in the US, Mexico, and the UK.



Charlie French is a long time supporter of the Down syndrome community. In Q1 2023, his donations raised over \$10k for organisations supporting disabled children and adults.

www.charliefrenchfineart.com

David Kirkman



These original hand-embellished pieces are limited to 30 of each edition. Encapsulating positivity, support, and resilience through combining aspects of my original abstract paintings and a very well-known bear. The characters of Winnie the Pooh have been attributed to representing different mental health conditions, these amazing characters show that everyone deserves love from both themselves and others. My paintings are how I escape so I know how important looking after YOU, is. After all, we are all very special.

These pieces use modern digital art and hand-painted details creating a unique limited edition artwork. Each piece has a digitally drawn character overlaid on top of a picture of one of my original abstract paintings. The scene is then digitally created and printed onto 280gsm soft cotton paper. Finally, time is taken to carefully add hand-painted details to each print. The finished piece is numbered and signed and comes with a certificate of authenticity.

A UK-based artist David Kirkman was born in 1985 and was introduced to painting at a young age by his late grandad a local artist himself, who encouraged him to try different mediums and styles. Working primarily with acrylics, he creates big, bold, colourful and contrasting paintings and mixed media prints. Through acknowledging and managing his own mental health he started abstract painting, finding the ability to create whilst being in the present not only helped therapeutically but also allows David to create the pieces he is so well known for today. His work promotes wellness, positivity, and joy. David is an exciting emerging artist who shows his work in galleries, exhibitions and Art fairs across the UK, online and has also been featured in publications and zines such as, Collect Art, Cista Art and Artist Talk Magazine.

www.dkirkmanart.com

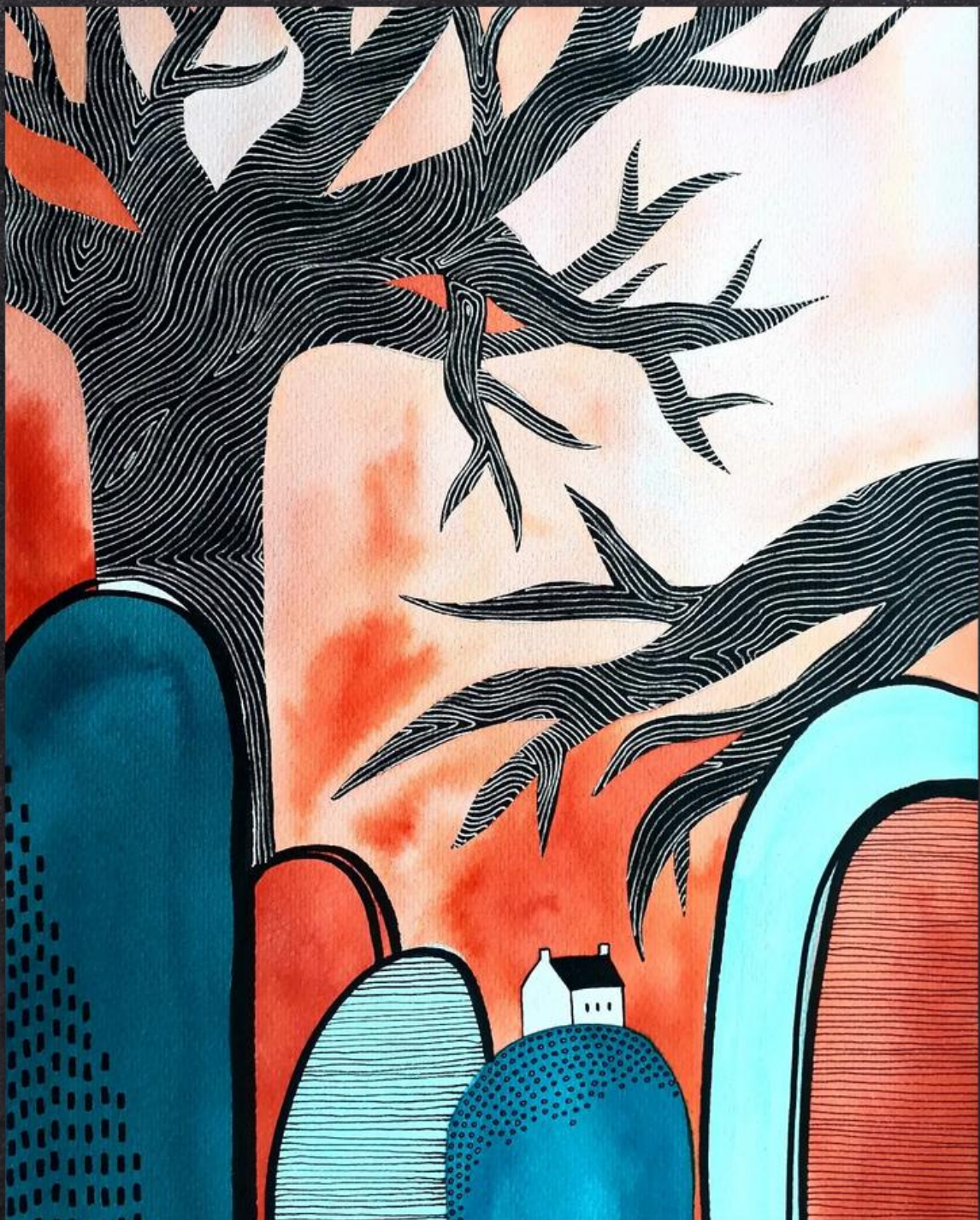
DELPHI CAMPBELL



The wearable-object is a work is called "the isolation sock" and it was made as a way to de-stimulate myself when I am anxious or overwhelmed.

www.delphicampbell.com
Instagram: @delphicampbell

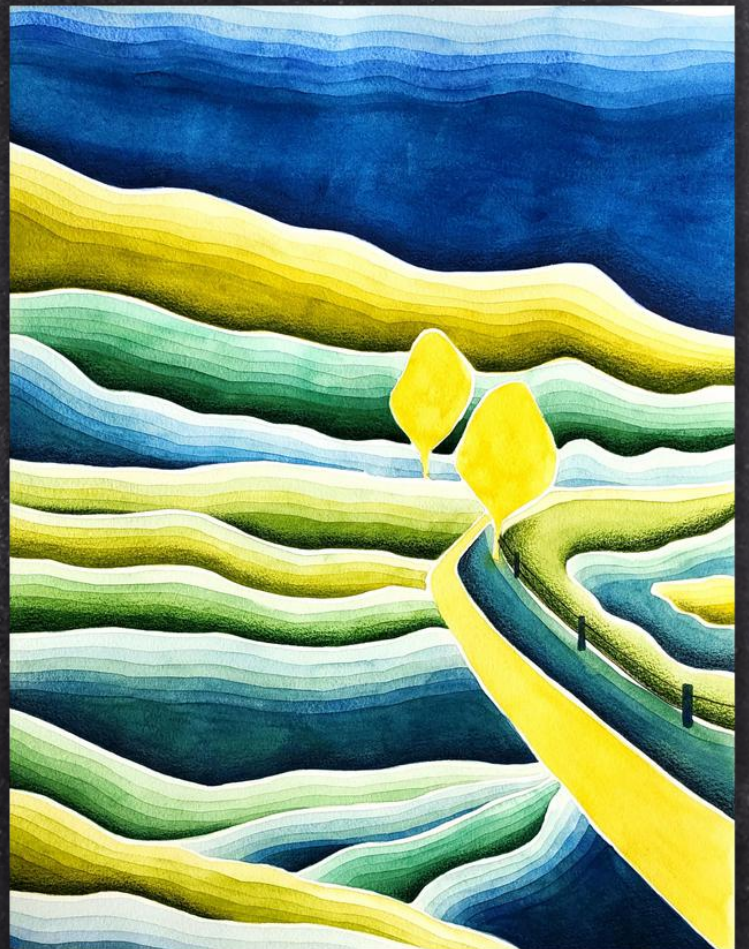
LOUISE ABEL





INSTAGRAM: @LOUISE.ABEL.DESIGNS
WWW.LOUISEABELDESIGNS.ETSY.COM

LOUISE'S CURRENT FOCUS IS ON CREATING CONTEMPORARY WATERCOLOURS WITH MIXED MEDIA, PAINTING UTOPIAN SCENES OF PEACE, SOLITUDE AND NATURE. AS AN AUTISTIC PERSON WITH SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES AND FREQUENT SENSORY OVERLOAD, SHE FINDS COMFORT IN THE TINY REMOTE HOUSES OFTEN SEEN IN HER WORK AND ENJOYS THE THERAPEUTIC NATURE OF SIMPLICITY AND REPETITION, MAKING COLOUR THE STAR OF THE SHOW. DESCRIBED AS "A HIT OF DOPAMINE", "A VISUAL TREAT" AND "EXTREMELY SOOTHING" BY VIEWERS OF HER WORK, LOUISE HOPES THAT SHE CAN EVOKE A SENSE OF JOY AND SERENITY IN AN OTHERWISE CHAOTIC WORLD



LOUISE ABEL

@AUTISTIC_PHOTOGRAPHER



I'm Ed, I have Autism and I have a passion for photography.

Leanna Marie Manning (She/They)
Instagram: @LeannaLemon
www.leannamanning.com



Through the sensory experience of mark making, Leanna builds confidence and imagines worlds that are expansive and feel good to be a part of. She turns to art when she feels stuck, when she's overwhelmed, and when she doesn't know what to do. Her creative practice helps locate herself in her body in a world that's often chaotic to be a part of.

Leanna is a neurodivergent writer, editor, and creative. She plays with materials that feel good to touch, to see, to smell, working with the sensorial and affective level of her materials and neurodivergences.

APRIL BERMUDEZ



@APRILBERMUDEZART



Alexia is a bookmonger, writer and noticer in Birmingham, UK. She set up Back To Books Brum in 2019 as a radical & representative bookspace and uses her Instagram platform to resist oppression and expand understandings of queer, disabled and neurodivergent living.

Instagram:
[@backtobooksbrum](https://www.instagram.com/backtobooksbrum)

I long for the time to come; the time we are re-forging as we look closely to each other and the land and the water and all the glorious beings on this planetary atomic mass. The time where neurodiversity and neuroexpansion are reclaimed as essential to our living systems; the time where we are loved and revered for the divine spirits we are. I know there will be a time for us to be embraced again and given space to channel our magical energies.

The strides to this liberated life are long; we are kept company along the way by bursts of colourful connection that gift us beauty, lightness, belonging. I find myself in so many autistic and neurodivergent people's words, their perspectives ringing truer than my own heartbeat. The heartbeat I only distantly detect in my interoceptive deficit. We ND family often find each other before we find the Western words formulated for us, which are both a blessing and a curse.

My way of being is listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5) twice, but my being is not disordered or disorderly. I am natural, whole. I am love.

And the words we have yet to write excite me. The flow in how we neurodivergent creatures connect and create fills me with wiggly-fingered joy. We build new spaces because we must. Autistic, ADHD and other boxy containers transform in our mouths to neuroexpansive. Neuroqueer. Neurally diverse.

There is so much love in all of us, as we fight to breathe and thrive. Our liberation is the world's liberation because we can never truly perform for the chaoses of capitalism. Listen for us... we are already where we all need to be.

Instagram:
@autistic.art.ist



James is a 20 year old environmentalist, writer
and photographer

AMELIA WANGHAIN



This is my artwork about my experience of people commenting on my autism and how the impact of commenting is often overlooked and quickly forgotten by the speaker but held onto by the other. This is a redraw of an artwork originally a part of a series focusing upon how people speak about people based on features such as birth marks disfigurement acne etc compared to how they treat hidden disability's such as autism. This drawing is a self portrait so it is all a lit my own experience.

SARA SOUSA



instagram: @ssousafineart
www.saravmsousa.co.uk

Sara is a thirty-year-old semi-verbal Neurodivergent autobiographical self-portraiture artist who explores, engages, captures and portrays their disabilities through creativity. Everyday life portraits help create a visual narrative on self-development and building empowerment by embracing their voice, advocacy and pride being a part of a strong yet poorly misunderstood community. Portraits capture vulnerable moments such as sadness, confusion, overwhelm and recovery from burnout after decades of masking conditions.



'A BUDDING MIND'



'A BUDDING MIND'

**ELLIE
WILLIAMS**



'A BUDDING MIND'

@ELLIEJOANNAWILLIAMSARTIST

What's the link between the Moon and Seaweed? I'll try to explain...

Any artist attempting to comment on her work faces an inescapable irony, since for her, drawing comes before writing; and creating precedes talking. The language of images, colours, lines and marks will always reach the brain before a word or sentence.

*"I have reached a time where words no longer help...
...Description and analysis degrade,
Slipped land from what has been."*
Thom Gunn

Since I am dyslexic, this is especially true for me. I was halfway through a Fine Arts Degree before I was diagnosed as neurodiverse. So instead of finding myself in the giant university library surrounded by art books, rather I became immersed in the medical section amongst brain scans, reading wave charts, and gazing at rainbow neuron images.

The time spent drawing images of the brain was a struggle to make representational sense of internal complexities. My development as an artist began with a preoccupation with portraiture, heads and then brains. As a child, my writing was mirrored, and I needed an alternative visual language. Images and themes in my work emerged and then began to merge.

The initial theme was my distortion and confusion around language, expressed in repeated portrayals of a baby's head. These images in time became increasingly abstract.

Moon

Moonlight rays

Waves

Brainwaves

Reading waves

Veins neurones vines

Reaching Fingers

Tendrils

Seaweed

Increasingly, my paintings showed blurring around the sensory and cognitive elements in the brain, sometimes, one side of the brain is often shrouded in darkness, like the moon. Also, like the moon, which as well as having a visible (though inscrutable) face, has its dark, unknown side. Its craters signify the dents and buffets expressed both internally, and out there in the world.

I have always found it easier to read through red. So as an artist, this colour has become my friend. Stitching in the work is both a literal and metaphorical expression of my striving to stitch together ideas and understanding – a struggle to piece together and make sense of my feelings; and perhaps to better integrate the two sides of a dyslexic brain.

The neural pathways which link the brain's two hemispheres are also the source of my fascination came to correspond with similar shapes mirrored in the natural world. The tendrils of seaweed and branches merged with neuron images in my mind and the craters and crescents of the moon with brain scans and the shape of a cranium. I now understand that this expresses a yearning for healthily-extending neural complexity, the tendrils which reach for fuller understanding and wholeness.

And so to the tendrils of seaweed, laid bare by the retreating tide, pulled by the cosmic power of the moon.

This brief account of my work took me 2 weeks to write; to paint it would have taken me 2 days; but to understand it and work it through completely?

A lifetime.

P O E T R Y

Submissions

Girl With Autistic Female Friends

With shock I saw it on the diagnostic criteria.
If she has many autistic female friends
This too could be a symptom.
My friends are a symptom?
I thought they were just interesting. They are!
One speaks fourteen languages; another
Programmed a light-up dress to wear. Then there's
The one who loves her dinosaurs, and
The Riot Grrl who always wears yellow.
They're the ones who said have you considered?
And you are amazing! And now they're a symptom
And you're offering me therapy. Mate, I don't need
Therapy, if these are my tribe. Just your yes, autistic
To finally free me to be the sort of woman
That they unashamedly are.

by Claire Thomas Hawnt

Claire wrote this poem when she embarked on her journey to be diagnosed with autism two years ago. Like lots of autistic women, it was originally Claire's similarity to her autistic female friends that prompted her to investigate whether she might be autistic too, and she was shocked to see on the diagnostic criteria that having a number of autistic friends is an indicator of potential autism in an individual.

Claire been writing non-fiction, fiction and poetry for most of her adult life, and has had pieces published in Crystal, Heroica, The Guardian, and a number of other outlets.

Never quite good enough

Never quite understood friendships
as young as four or five

Never quite focussed enough
to learn in school and thrive

Never quite patient enough
for the long winded activity

Never quite clued up enough
to understand your hostility

Never quite attentive enough
to work out your intention

Never quite disabled enough
to trigger an intervention

Never quite well behaved enough
to make you proud

Never quite brave enough
to speak my feelings aloud

Never quite good enough
to achieve what others find easy

Never quite confident enough
to simply just be me

Let me tell you something
you are enough

So change how you speak to yourself
you have learnt how to survive

You are enough
your patience has got you this far
your creativity has lead you here

You are enough
your compassion has gifted you
knowledge
your growth has taught you
boundaries

You are enough
so take pride in who you are
because darling you're incredible

You are enough
the world needs more people like you
so let your weird shine bright

You are enough
you've found your wonderful people
but above all you've found you
and you are the star

Hannah Walker

Empathy Curse

I am told I am blunt
intimidating even
I don't mince my words
she says it exactly how it is

I cannot hide if your
new haircut looks shit
or the idea you had
was weak I'll admit

But if I see your sadness
I will completely crumble
I will take on that pain
the torment is humble

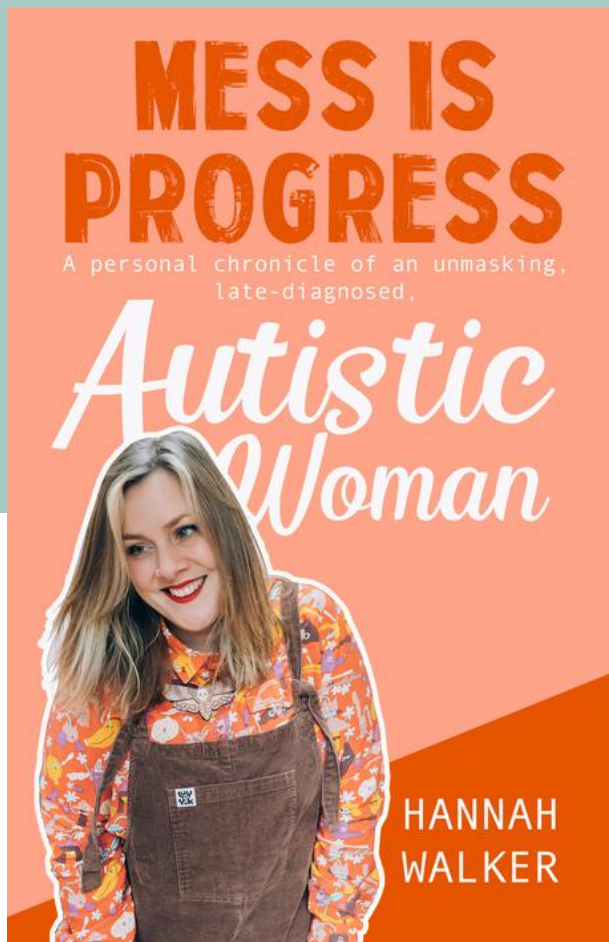
Physically and emotionally
I feel it all under my skin
the destruction and injustice
my heartache begins

I cry at the hopelessness
the state of our earth
each infringement, transgression
becomes even worse

The news is switched off
because I can't bear all the fight
as I lie trapped in my mind
the grief stealing my night

The pain of my loved ones
even strangers too
can be so deep and intense
oh the empathy, if only you knew

Yes I'm Autistic
and my perceptions diverse
but trust me they penetrate
with this empathy curse



A Neurodivergent writer and photographer from Somerset, UK. Hannah is an actually Autistic voice, advocating for true representation in the media and improved support in healthcare and education for the next generation of Autistic girls. Sharing her personal thoughts and unravelling post-diagnosis so that other missed or mis-diagnosed women feel less alone.

'Mess is Progress: A personal chronicle of an unmasking, late-diagnosed, Autistic woman' is available on Amazon - Kindle & Paperback editions.

Review: "Like so many late-diagnosed Autistic women, I have read ALL THE BOOKS. I haven't, I'll be honest, had great experiences with self-published books in this genre but this appealed to me and I'm glad I took a chance. The author has clearly absorbed and integrated the most up to date understandings of AuDHD and this shines through without dominating her personal narrative. The format is unconventional - mostly poems, interspersed with a few letters and pieces of prose. And they're good. The beauty of being autistic is in here along with the challenges of self-acceptance and self-compassion. I struggle with these things too and found this book very validating and - well, anything that makes you go a bit easier on yourself has to be a good thing. Thank you Hannah, I'm glad you were brave enough to publish this, I think I will return to it when I need a bit of something to read with my blanket and hot water bottle!"

The following is an excerpt from Hannah's book.

100% Autistic

Who me? Yes.

Unmasking is not to be taken lightly. The imposter syndrome is so strong some days it's hard to ignore. Am I acting more Autistic since my diagnosis and unmasking journey? 100% I am. Folding back the tired old mask(s) means not holding back and hiding who I am anymore. There's been so many times since July that I've just been like "who even am I?" But slowly, softly, like David Attenborough describing a rare bird in the rainforest, whilst also trying not to alert said bird and scare it off, I'm discovering who was locked up inside for so long.

I'm not quite there yet with showing the entire world - yes I've written a book, but as I currently type, this book is just here and not yet **there**, *motions to big wide world with an outstretched arm*. I'm more unmasked at home than anywhere else. I am more "me" around my close friends (weirdo magnet) and my sister because they get it. I am at my most Autistic when I'm alone, (this might sound obvious) but I have had to also unmask to myself. Flapping and clapping my hands with joy is a regular occurrence now whilst the house is empty. Talking to myself, dancing, swaying, stimming, repeating words aloud that I like, the cat thinks I am positively bonkers (spoiler; I am!). Previously I was writing to do lists and mostly getting so frustrated with myself about why I could never achieve things in a day like a "normal" person. Constantly berating myself for being useless. Now I'm embracing the low energy days of rest as much as the high-energy days of productivity, they are both valid.

The noise cancelling headphones that James bought me have got to be the most wonderful aid to my autism ever. Asking him for them took a lot of courage and I had to fight my own internalised ableism. It felt too cliché to have them as an Autistic person but once I wrestled that nagging bear to the ground and got what I needed, just wow. I was already wearing earplugs to bed every night and have some day time ones to lower decibels in busy places like shopping, restaurants or *shudders* kids parties. The noise cancelling headphone-cans are just another level. I can listen to music, podcasts or brown noise whilst doing anything from housework, to computer work. I use them to block out Mila's cartoons, she needs them to decompress after school and I need to not hear them after a long day, except now we can exist in the same room together with both our needs being met. I even had them on with some music whilst reading the other night because James was fidgeting with something whilst he was reading and who am I to over-rule a need to move/stim. The gym, the supermarket, the school run, the uses are endless and liberating as fuck.

It's not all revelations and rainbows. Presenting more Autistic also makes me realise just how much of a people-pleasing zombie I was before. I rarely voiced my needs until it was too late and I was having a meltdown that I could no longer avoid. This means that now I'm unmasking, I feel like I am being more demanding (shush Hannah, it's called setting boundaries). The post diagnosis burnout is so long, just when I think - this is it, I realise it is not. Honestly I'm not sure if I'll ever feel like I did before. This listening to my body and mind lark has made me realise just how debilitating being Autistic can be, how on earth did I make it this far in life without having a breakdown? Oh yeah, that's right, I didn't. Breakdowns I might add, that I kept to myself, I waded through that pain alone because I was too scared that my loved ones would run for the hills if they really knew what went on inside my head.

The beauty of being more authentic to myself and others is the worst of my brain struggles can actually be nipped in the bud before it escalates. Sure sometimes I still need to shutdown and not speak when I'm overwhelmed but that's ok.

*Hugh Jackman shimmies across the stage and belts out
"This is Me" à la the Greatest Showman*



@hannah.poems



@hannahtheautistic



DEAROSE'S

AT

BARNDORCH

SOONER

MARRAMAL

Check the board.

Check the menu.

Check the board whilst pretending to check the menu.

Pull an expression of someone considering...

Nachos

Play 'what would you buy with your £3 compensation?'

Play 'what would you buy now they state calories on the menu?'

Wonder if you can legitimately eat that date.

The one in the sandwich bag.

The way you like to.

The way you do at the cinema -

Sucking and spitting out the stone

When it's dark and no one can see.

But it's not dark.

And it's Gatwick airport.

Which is a little inappropriate?

Even if it is 2023.

And in 2023 we're 'fucking polite!'

Eat your stale sandwich instead.

Tin foil clenched in your fist.

Regret giving up your vape.

BY MIRANDA HOAN

Wonder if there's anywhere you can buy one.
Wonder if you need the thing that girl has -
A tiny razor that shaves off the hairs on your face that you never
knew existed but probably have some vital role like I don't know...
 Keeping you warm?
Watch as she seasons the table.
QR blanketed in DNA snow.
Wonder if you should do something outrageous like...
Buy a Garmin
Realise ur card will get declined.
And it's not that outrageous.
Settle for Heat Magazine instead.
Wonder who in customer service you can complain to.
About your flight.
About your brain.
About the realisation that you're not a finished product
About the fact that those men chanting in the orange tops are
probably on your flight.
Take a deep breath and pretend you don't exist.
Write about your feelings.
Realise they're not that profound.
Stand up.
Carry on.
See what happens.

Miranda is a neurodiverse lesbian writer whose work explores desire and identity through a queer lens. Her poetry has been published in journals internationally, including T'art Press, Babyteeth Arts, The Rrrromp, and Perspective Project. She is a regular on the London live poetry circuit with recent performances including; Canon Fodder, Rhymes & Stitches, and Poetry LGBT.

Her slate of short films have successfully won funding and premiered at BAFTA qualifying festivals, and her debut novel *The Second Adolescence* was recently longlisted for the 2023 Comedy Women in Print Unpublished Manuscript Prize. Day to day Miranda works as a freelance copywriter.

Miranda can be found on Instagram @thirstypoems

Autism Acceptance

A poem by Sally Alexander

Life is such endless confusions,
Lost in allistic delusions,
Aren't you sad, and aren't you tired,
From telling them how you're wired?

Are you tired of all the fight and the strife?
Tired of faking neurotypical life?
Tired of shouting in a tongue none understand,
Tired of struggling in a hostile land?

You speak the diagnostic name
And they say, "Oh, that is a shame."
Never mind if you're kind or witty,
You'll still get that sad look of pity.

The misapprehension is so frustrating,
And all the confusions are unabating,
From "Why can't you just be sane, man?"
To "Oh, wow, you're just like Rainman!"

"Have you heard, my niece's mother's
Cousin's stepfather's brother's
Roommate's friend...yes, he has it too!
He's an accountant – why aren't you?"

A diagnosis may take some time
(Professionals think rushing's a crime),
And then when your mind is in a whirl,
They say, "You can't have it – you're a girl."

"Still, you must with quiet heart, patient ears,
Listen to experts who've studied for years,
These worthies know far more about your kind
Than anyone who's lived with such a mind!"

"Quiet hands, sit tight, and keep on masking,
No talk, no stimming, no question-asking,
So you say you struggle to fit at school
Well, have you tried acting more normal?"

"Well, this girl is certainly a mystery,
Her long misdiagnosis history,
Her anxiety, unfounded blues,
And her audacity to school refuse!"

"Well, I don't know what ails this child,
She's difficult, reckless and wild;
She must be acting up, looking for attention,
Take away her headphones, put her in detention!"

The world wants to make us small,
So we can't bother them at all.
Why ever don't they try to hear?
Would they rather we disappear?

Suffering from autism? That's not my plight!
It's the endless, ongoing, exhausting fight,
Against a world that isn't made for me to fit,
Doesn't it want me – not even a bit?

"Why can't you be like everyone else is?"
"Why aren't you a mathematics whizz?"
"If we make an exception just for you,
Don't you see, everyone else will want one too!"

I'm not suffering because of my autistic brain,
I'm suffering from allistic-inflicted pain,
Tired of faking it, worn out behind my mask,
Acceptance: by now, that's really all I ask.

Sally is a thirty-year-old woman living with autism and ADHD and also in the process of recovering from a long-term eating disorder. Her own experiences and those of her neurodivergent friends and family have made her passionate about neurodiversity, mental health and recovery.

She can be found on Instagram at @shazdolls, where she pursues her hobbies of toy photography and writing.

Her article 'Different Minds' can be found on Page 36

I used to berate myself for things beyond my understanding.
I used to hate myself for things I didn't know to control...

Why are you zoning out like that? Learn to listen.
Look at me when I'm talking to you. So rude.
Nose in a book again? Watch the pavement, watch the clock.
I'm supposed to believe you just forgot?
When your memory recall expands countless fantasy fiction
and you could spout the dictionary back to me?
Don't lie.
Why were you late? How can you put on weight
when you eat so little, so weird?
That's not attractive, you know. You should learn to cook.
Why can't you just follow the rules? You're so lazy.
So much potential but you never follow through.
You claim such empathy but when can I rely on you?
Your attention drops out, you're bored.
You're hoarding receipts for something you never believed in,
trying to own a hobby with no consistency? Don't make me laugh.
You need mastery. Of your own body. Routines.
Don't tell me each triviality feels like a scream,
how ridiculous, you're so melodramatic.
You're an addict.
You're doing that too fast, you'll miss things.
Why are you so slow, you're drowning in the spreadsheet.
Why didn't you just ask me? It's not weak to ask for help
but why are you so helpless? Overly devoted, stop that.
No one wants to hear that.
I don't need to know every detail of your trauma,
everyone knows you're making it up...
Or making it worse.
Be quiet! What right have you to be heard
on some fleeting fanciful notion that you'll then soon abandon?
Look at this floor. Littered with your inability,
your inadequacy to just get up, get on,
just like the rest of us.
What's wrong with you? Why are you so confused,
untangle your tongue, speak straight.
Why do you ask me what I said every time I ask a question?

Cara could tell you many things about herself, most of which are true but few that would make sense. Her work is often uncomfortably, brutally honest and interrogates trauma in a way which might not be completely healthy. The poetry is melancholy and angry but tells the story of evolving identity and the ever-present spectrum of mental health.

Cara is on Instagram @polar_truths

LEARN TO LISTEN

BY CARA PLEYM

Then answer it so quickly, is it just to mock me?
Oh no, it's just to interrupt me and why is your voice so loud?
Be quiet. Learn to listen.
Why are you bitching about something everyone else can handle?
Wrangle your emotions better, they're showing.
The waterworks, ah yes, here we go.
Tomorrow you'll be bounding about,
what do you have to complain about?
You've missed the deadline again, focus.
Just make the appointment for the dentist,
haven't you washed your sheets? Your hair?
Why is every cupboard bare and every drawer open?
You hoping someone will come in and fix this mess you made?
Don't parade this parody at me,
we all have a little ADHD. I'm forgetful too
and focus is not a unique identifier,
what, we can't work as hard as you?
Oh look, another award. No, don't ask me to smile.
I told you that you were fine.
A liar. A pretender. Didn't you do a PhD?
Didn't finish? Ha. I'm not surprised.
Can't disguise yourself so well at that level can you?
Effort always shows, and you...
well, you're not exactly trying.
Close to dying? Cue rolling eyes.
Another cry for attention.
You live in a different dimension,
get your head out the clouds.
Do something that will make me proud.
Just one honest day's work.
Show me your worth by neurotypical standards.
Don't seek answers in these false communities.
They'll lead you down the garden path,
there is no hope there,
for the despairing looking for excuses.
Abusing the system.
Be quiet!
Learn to listen.

I AM ROWENA. I AM HOUSE AND BED BOUND THE MAJORITY OF THE TIME. I HAVE STRUGGLED HUGELY FOR MY WHOLE LIFE, BUT LIKE SO MANY, WAS FORCED TO MASK AND PRETEND THAT I WAS OK. I HAVE SUFFERED FROM POVERTY, TRAUMA, ABUSE AND HOMELESSNESS, THROUGHOUT MY LIFE. FINALLY, NOW I HAVE A DIAGNOSIS OF ME/CFS (IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS, YOU REALLY SHOULD) AND I AM WAITING FOR AUTISM AND HAVE CPTSD DIAGNOSIS. THESE DIAGNOSES EXPLAIN WHY NO MATTER HOW HARD I HAVE WORKED, AND I HAVE BEEN WORKING SINCE I WAS 12, MY LIFE ONLY EVER GOT HARDER.

CREATING HAS ALWAYS A BEEN A SPECIALIST SUBJECT FOR ME. I CREATE CONSTANTLY. EVEN WHEN I AM SO ILL I CAN BARELY MOVE, MY MIND STILL MAKES THINGS. WHAT I SHARE HERE ARE WORDS. BUT I HAVE A BACKGROUND IN FINE ART WITH A CONCEPTUAL SCULPTURE BA FROM CAMBERWELL, THE UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS LONDON. AND AM A FULLY QUALIFIED AND EXPERIENCED UPHOLSTERY. WITH MY OWN SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS WHEN I AM WELL ENOUGH TO WORK.

I AM NOW TRYING TO USE WORDS AND WORK THROUGH THE DECADES OF UNPROCESSED TRAUMA AND ASSERT WHO I TRULY AM IN THIS WORLD.

ROWENA'S INSTAGRAM: @ROWENAUPHOLSTERY

THE RHETORICAL POEM

WHAT IF
WHAT IF I AM NOT THE PROBLEM

WHAT IF YOU STOP AND CONSIDER
WHAT IF THAT'S NOT THE WAY TO HELP

WHAT IF INSTEAD OF
TELLING ME WHAT NOT TO FEEL B
INSTEAD OF
TELLING ME WHAT I NEED

WHAT IF YOU STOP AND CONSIDER
WHAT IF YOU ARE THE PROBLEM

WHAT IF YOU STOP
WHAT IF YOU THINK
WHETHER YOU HAVE
EVER ACTUALLY HEARD ME

BECAUSE YOU NEVER REALLY HEARD YOU

ROWENA MURPHY

I MADE MYSELF SMALLER

I MADE MYSELF SMALLER
SO I COULD WALK AMONGST YOU

BUT YOU COULD HAVE GROWN INSTEAD

I MADE MYSELF SMALLER
SO YOU WOULD NOT HURT ME

BUT YOU COULD HAVE RAISED YOUR EYES INSTEAD

I MADE MYSELF SMALLER
SO YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE

BUT YOU COULD HAVE OWNED YOUR FEELINGS
INSTEAD

I MADE MYSELF SMALLER
SO WHO I WAS, WAS ACCEPTABLE TO YOU

BUT YOU STILL SAID I WAS NOT

I MADE MYSELF SMALLER
EVEN THOUGH IT HURT

I MADE MYSELF SMALLER
BECAUSE YOU COULDN'T BE BIGGER

I MADE MYSELF SMALLER
BECAUSE YOU SAID YOU NEEDED THAT TO LOVE ME

I MADE MYSELF SMALLER
BECAUSE YOU WERE TOO SCARED TO ALLOW
YOURSELF TO GROW

BUT NONE OF IT HELPED. NOT ME, NOT YOU
IT ONLY HELPED TO KEEP THE PAIN

SO I MADE MYSELF BIGGER
AND NOW IT'S UP TO YOU TO FOLLOW

'Hunting For Rabbits'

by Jacqui Wanstall

Jacqui is on Instagram at @jaqs_basement, and at @neurospicythanet for neurodivergent coffee mornings

I'm neurodiverse..
That means my brain's upside down.
It means I always need to know
where the toilets are in town.
I've got a head like a shed
and the inside is a state..
Full of music and worry,
half-written songs and heartbreak.
It feels like.. hunting for rabbits
while you're diving in the sea,
or adjusting your aerial
when you've sold your TV.
Like.. ice-skating on sand
or putting fire in balloons.
Its impossible and crazy
and.. I've run out of spoons!
I'm neurodiverse
but people think I'm carefree
because I wear so many masks
that they can't always see.
I'll question everyday norms,
if they don't make any sense.
Like.. "why are we queuing for the ladies
when there's no queue for the gents?"
As a salmon swims up river
I stand out from the crowd,
and I carry ear plugs
'cos neurotypicals get loud.

"Honestly, I'll eat it.
This meal you cooked looks great.
I'm just separating foods
so they don't touch on my plate!"

I have the same song repeating
for weeks on my phone.
I want to punch noisy eaters
and I love being alone.
I won't answer your call,
I'll watch it ring in my hand.
I'll come out with you tonight
as long as everythings planned.
I can read a whole newspaper
but I can't read your face.
I haven't lost my marbles, man,
they're just all over the place.
And these meds I'm on just mean
I do my crazy shit quicker,
but they do me no harm..
my brain can't get that much sicker!
I have a motherboard and wires
but no-one soldered them in..
Pinning a tail on the donkey
but I haven't got a pin.
I know my own emotions
but cant always vocalise them
so I paint pictures with words
and whack it all in a poem.
I'm not typical or normal
and I wouldn't want to be.
So I'll keep hunting for rabbits
while I'm diving in the sea!

My name is Jaq Wanstall. I am a Ramsgate-based poet performing on the local poetry scene and a multiple poetryslam winner. I was recently diagnosed with ADHD and I am studying a psychology degree. I also organise coffee mornings locally in Thanet for neurodivergent adults to meet peers for friendship and support. I find writing therapeutic and it's very satisfying making people laugh with comedy-poetry about the ridiculous observations of my life. It is a good way for me to process the world around me.

'Somewhere' by Apollo Spencer

It stole me.

A quiet whisper in the night of something south of sanity.
An adventure,
with no signposts for a blazed trail and I think,
maybe somewhere,
out beyond the fears that bind me within my own fingertips
is that which I have always been without.

So, I follow it,
Somewhere into the depths of my own chaos
and graze my tender humanity
against the jagged edges of the subconscious.

It's almost familiar,
like a trap made to kill me slowly,
so while I breathe in my own toxic air,
I slip further from awake.

But somewhere in there,
among all this,
is the shell of what once was I
and she begs,
with all the urgency of memories and ghosts
who have no time left with which to bargain...

Please, get up! I did not die for this!
It cannot be so easy,
this book is not yet done.
And on and on she cries of the efforts of the men and women
who bled to bring me this far,
And further still.

But what of rest?
I know it is not spared for the wicked
but what of the weary?
The lost?
The misanthrope?
Is there not darkness among even the stars
that they too know of when life screams no more.
Is there so little mercy?
...Hello?

Apollo is an artist and poet, originally from Georgetown Guyana. Based now in London, they started their professional writing career at age 18 and eventually returned to their childhood passion of writing and performing poetry. They are soon to release a poetry book entitled 'Stained Glass Silence'

Instagram: @apollothescribe

RICHARDETTINGER

'Mondsüchtig'

Sometimes we forget who we are.
And then there is an uncanny quietness.
It is like a

p
r
e
d
i
c
t
t
o
n
for the next
storm.

My grandmother told me to never look straight into the full moon.
And now I'm standing still like a deer awaiting the car to hit.
Our ability is buried in self-doubt.
Every attempt becomes pretending in the eyes of truth.
But the eyes that are not allowed to see.
What is trust if we cannot even trust ourselves?

And then disregarding the signs for the next storm, we are still not prepared.

RICHARD ETTINGER

'Strangling Collar'

Or like a grab from someone who pulls you away from an incoming train
I woke up when she told me the truth

A young woman's oranges are slowly falling out of her bag as she stares
Our eyes meet, everything but her – seems gray
His hand at the back of my collar – cuts off my throat

It was nice, and I kept it going
Act that she wouldn't notice – which strings to pull that mine wouldn't attach
Many moons passed

Hissing dry air hits my wet unbuttoned torso
Oranges for whom? She looks worried
A loud signal, advancing, dazzling white lights – fireworks in my brain

Faces I had to pull to make her mine
Played superstition made its way into my belief
Until she left me in our beautiful blue


Quietness – she hands me one of her oranges.

Richard Ettinger is a 2nd-year Erasmus student at Reading University, UK, from Heinrich Heine University, Düsseldorf, Germany, studying English Literature and Philosophy. His journalistic writing has appeared in the German regional newspaper Rheinische Post and the German nationwide newspaper Jüdische Allgemeine. He got published in the Wild Greens Magazine recently and he regularly presents his work at open mics.

Instagram: @richard_ettinger

Scrabbel;

By Elena Sirett (they/them)

 @elenasirett

www.elenasirett.com

My dyslexia scrambles words
Scrabble is a nightmare
Crosswords are worse
I have all the answers but nothing slots together

I apologise I apologise ceaselessly
On job applications on writing submissions to friends and lovers
I apologise and say
I know it doesn't look like I'm trying but I am

The problem with your grammar is that there isn't any
That parents evening comment stung
We were studying The Road by Cormac McCarthy
When Cormac McCarthy uses no grammar its a bold artistic choice
A symbol on the page of humanities disintegration of desolation
When I do the same its not good enough
I am that same disintegration because I dont miss apostrophes on purpose

So I react I hurl commas where they dont belong
I make it rain commas
When told to put a full stop at the end of every sentence I go down the lined
page and place dots
on the end of each row
I dont know what a semicolon is and at this point Im too afraid to ask
Even if I asked and was told Id forget
These things just wont stick

Grammar is my enemy but still I love words
Despite our issues
I love words with an untethered ferocity
Perhaps I love them out of spite
I write for the teachers who told me I couldnt write

Born and raised in Camden Elena Sirett (they/them) is an eclectic writer, performer and musician. They enjoy adapting ancient myths for our contemporary lives, they enjoy yelling and screaming while playing acoustic guitar, they enjoy revealing and conveying the queer, neurodivergent and mentally ill psyche through a combination of written and musical styles.

Elena studied English Literature at Newcastle University and completed a Masters degree in Critical Theory at Goldsmiths.

They are currently working on their one person show Maenad, along with a variety of other projects in the fields of fiction writing, storytelling and music. They are also a Content Assistant for Evolve Productions.





Alcohol

Sometimes I don't know why I even drink.
Feeding poison liquids into my poor gut.
Making my mind feel fuzzy as I blink.
Then the next day I find myself in a rut.
Thanks to hang-xiety, I can't clearly think.

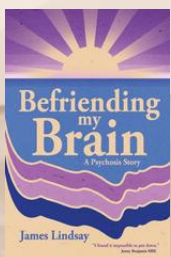
Ok so I've had loads of good nights out.
But were they good because of the beer?
Or the friends that were knocking about.
Sober evenings are not such a bad idea.

I am determined to start drinking smarter.
I want a beverage that is zero percent.
My body deserves much better.
Morning headaches I want to prevent!

All of my poems I've written while sober.
Apart from this one, absurdly hungover!

Write it down

Feeling anxious? Write it down.
Feeling depressed? Write it down.
Feeling angry? Write it down.
I can do this all day.
When I start putting pen to paper.
Those hard feelings start to go away.
I go from being scared to safer.
The sky of my mind is no longer so grey.
Thoughts pour from my head, like a tap releasing water.
Make themselves at home in my notebook, where they stay.
Then I read them back and they are clearer.
This process is so therapeutic, I must say.
Plus after you give it a try, it gets much easier.
There are no rules and there is no right or wrong way.
So write it down, I promise you'll feel better.
Let that lovely imagination come out and play.
Offload any problems and see them become lesser.
It can help you keep anxiety at bay.
Give it a go, you can thank me later.



James is an author and mental health advocate from Hertfordshire, UK, and a previously featured contributor to 'The Frame'.

His first book 'Befriending My Brain: A Psychosis Story' was published in 2023.

James is on social media at -
Instagram: @JamesLindsay_23
Twitter: @JamesLindsay23

'Post Diagnosis'

by K.A. Watter.

I say to my friends
I just want to be normal

They try to soothe me
What's normal, really?

I meant normal as in
healthy
Normal as in steady,
stable
- not constantly in flux

Normal as in atypical
average
standard
Just your regular ol'
run of the mill person

In university
they teach us the importance of statistical averages

Scatter graphs are displayed
statistical anomalies highlighted in red.
A mathematical stop sign
It's as if my lecturers are saying
Be anything but this

Post-diagnosis
I find myself empathising with outliers
- the outcasts and scatter brains
The singular red dots
I think
it must be lonely out there
outside the circles of normality
looking in from a distance
at what they can never be

Terrified
I find myself pouring over numbers
hoping to see myself in medians and modes
- signifiers of the norm

I study bell graphs obsessively
picturing myself enclosed in their lines
If I could just fit in...
curl into their curves
prove
I can sit within the parameters of normality
then maybe, I'd finally be at peace with myself
Maybe.

Instead
I see myself
in a jagged mountain line
flitting
between extremes

One day
I'll scale the peak
touch the clouds
Bathe in their glorious sunlight

The next
I am at the bottom
trapped in some sordid valley
Caked in the dirt I am forced
to dredge through
Cold, alone
and without a rope

For me
there is no medium place.
No middle ground
on which I can settle

What is normal, really?

Numbers can be skewed

Averages can create a false reality

No-one has 2.5 kids

and you are unlikely to meet a Swede with 1 and a half legs

I am striving toward something that does not exist

Still, there is comfort in the averages

The predictable outcomes

The stability I see in others

What is normal, really?

In the end I didn't find my median

my perfect middle place

I could not contort

to fit a box

not designed for me

My normality could never be captured in numbers

Post-diagnosis

I realised

my normal is a feeling

of inner peace and perfect contentment

of balance

and equanimity

It is knowing my place in the world

and being ok with it.

It is knowing who I am-

seeing my illness for what it is

and loving myself

anyway.

K.A. Watters is children's author, poet and policy assistant from Glasgow. She has bipolar disorder and often uses her writing to help cope with her condition. Themes in her work include mental health, feminism, familial love, Scottish pride, queer identity, love and loneliness.

You can find Kirsty's work on Instagram (@kawatterswriting). She has previously been published in Gutter Voices and Winnow Magazine.

CAREESE HUTCHINSON

Muscle memory

The time that passed throughout my adolescence crumbled me.
Manufactured into my brain, into my heart,
to reject.
To stay stuck in my own bed became fate. I protect my heart
fiercely.
Hugs feel alien. All people do is add to the accumulation of
aching I've endured.
All people have done my whole life is ask why?
Why is she different. Unconventional.
So right away I flinch with a hug, when people showcase their
love, my friends, my relationships that threaten to wither and
rip.
For the reason that I don't know how to maintain anything.
It's so exhausting,
to allow people in.
One day hugs won't feel so strange. And my muscle memory
won't be to flinch.
I'll soak the love in. I won't be afraid.

Skin

Teenage years repeatedly felt like something was amiss.
And it still is.
A jovial young girl, I revelled in dreams.
Then I grew to the age of confusion,
and I reached for what it felt like to be free.

Understanding makes me scream for the times I had, before I
became conscious.
Of myself. Of my actions. Of my trembling hands.
I needed a soul to connect to,
someone like me. To understand.
So much that I'm woven into the complexities of you.
And I can't leave your arms, can't be alone.

I'm a decent height but I struggle to reach into neurodiversity.
I embraced my books but found nothing that taught me the
hidden rules of existing.
Alone and piercing cold, you held me close,
Throwing all tightly contrived rules out the window.

I never liked fitting into boxes, but still I wanted to feel seen.
I know now I'm not destined.
I think I just want him.
I covet the emotion behind those lips of his.
I long for the home beneath his skin.

- FROM THE DESK OF CAREESE HUTCHINSON -

DESK OF CAREESE HUTCHINSON -

CAREESE IS A SECOND YEAR
ENGLISH AND FILM WITH
TELEVISION STUDIES STUDENT.

THEY SAY: "I'M AUTISTIC AND I
ENJOY READING, WRITING,
POETRY, WATCHING FILMS AND
MUSIC. I REALLY WANT TO BE
AN AUTHOR WHEN I'M OLDER
AND I WRITE POETRY IN MY
SPARE TIME."

CAREESE IS ON
INSTAGRAM AT
@_CHARIS_Writes

...in our next issue...



Available November 2023

all about... Family

**Have we been getting
family wrong?**

**What does it mean to
be in a family?**

**Does being in a family really
mean anything at all?**

**What has being in your
family meant for you?**

**Your stories of love and loss;
success and tribute.**

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