

## Zelda:

Alright before we sorry. Do you have any questions for me? sure. So, it's a funny sort of thing that My husband likes to say that my hobby is collecting hobbies. and so, I have a tendency to dive deep into whatever I'm most interested in. So, for, and this is over a period of years. But you know, if I get really, I got really interested in barcraft. So, I bought all the things, and I bought all of the tools and the different liquors and spoons and triggers, and that type of thing. And then, now I'm like he's gotten. He's stayed in that and makes himself a beverage every other night, and I'm like I'm done same with dungeons and dragons and Mini painting. I bought all of the things dive deep, watch all the videos. and it just really lends itself to that. the hyper focus that I have with my ADHD is that I'll just it. It's like the only thing I want to like engage in, and I'll put other things aside. and so, for me, it's you know I've done that with so many different things, rock climbing and you know, reading a particular author, or whatever. And so, for me, it's I am a jack of all trades and a master of none. so that's for me. It's and but yeah, it's just it's definitely something that is not helpful when I'm in one of those modes when there's other things that needs to be done. And so that's in the. you know, when there's like actual responsibilities. I want to dive down deeply into something to the detriment of the things that are. you know, income bringing and things like that. Yeah, yeah. So, I'll dive deep into, you know, like I said with the d and d, so I dived in deep into miniature painting and Terrain building and all of that. And then I was like woodworking, really like woodworking, and I bought all of the tools for woodworking, and I have miniatures that are half painted still left on the shelf. it's interesting. So, my diagnosis is very recent. I so I didn't. I couldn't put a name to like who I was. I obviously thought I was lazy. I thought that I just couldn't get organized, and I just couldn't. you know, if I just did this one thing, and I bought this one planner, and I did this right thing. Then I would get better at whatever I was doing and so for being in environments. Where you know, my neurodiversity is not really recognized. It feels very normal to me, unfortunately. because now I'm realizing oh, my brain works differently. And what could have been is, it's been the that one of the hardest things of like what could have been had I had. I recognize my neurodiversity earlier. and so, when I it's, it's been interesting in finding the opposite of like diving into the world of learning more about ADHD. And all of that is that I feel like. Wow. these are my people like these are. This is my home like this is, this is me like, and so it's it. It is illuminating it and kind of life, bringing in a sense to being like I'm not that person that the world has kind of told me I was. It's just, I'm different. And that's okay. And so, it's almost been the opposite revelation of being like, oh, there's this whole bright. you know, Rainbow colored world, and I've been living in the Wizard of Oz, black and white and so yeah, when I have those opportunities to have that that rainbow? it's very different. So, I don't know if I answered the specific question. But It's because it's so new it still feels like. I'm just that I'm used to that. And so I just kind of mask and suffer through it. I would say that it was a little of both, so I grew up in such a way that I was really I in the in more on the inattentive side ADHD. So, when I look at my history of you know high school and that type of stuff. I understood all the content. And so for me, I just was. I was not applying myself. you know, like I just You know. Why. Why didn't you get your homework done? Why didn't you do this thing? Why didn't you do you know Xyz? And then But I had. I had enough knowledge base to get through it. So in high school I didn't really have to do anything beyond score. Well, on tests. But then my entrance into to university. I look back on it now, and I go. Oh. this is why I this is so hard is like I couldn't just skate by on the like the little bit absorbed knowledge that and so I had to do these things that I would see other students doing, you know, making note cards and reading, and all of that. And so it was. I think it's a lot more. There's a little bit

from high school of the like, hey? Why haven't you applied yourself? You're I remember my mom and dad saying you're so much smarter than this and that kind of stuck with me. And so then it once getting in the university, and all of that I I it became much more internalized, I believe, and so then it'd be like, Oh, if I just. you know, would get out of like. So that was when Harry Potter 4 was coming out. and it'd be like, Nope, I'm reading this entire thing right now. and I'm not going to go to class because I'm reading this thing because I'm hyper-focused, and I look up, and I'd be like, Oh, my goodness. I'm halfway through my class. I should have gone, you know, like, and then that internalized laziness, feeling and then, just, you know, even in my current workplace of feeling like. I see all of this quote unquote productivity of people who are like ahead of the game and for me. And I found this in college. I thought it was just because I worked well under pressure. but I need that deadline and I didn't I? And so like people would be like, Oh, yeah, I've been working on this project, and I'm like, Oh, I don't need any. I'm not doing anything until you know, literally the day before something? Is it necessarily to be done at work? And so feeling like. yes, it's a bit of a I guess it's internal, and then work also some of my supervisors have been like when you really need to do Xyz by this time. And you just need to set aside time every day to do your emails because I tend to get behind on emails because they don't learning. Now, they don't bring up that serotonin level. It's not very exciting, you know. So But for me it's like. I'm much more excited to do the big projects and that type of stuff. So these smaller details go away. So it has affected some performance reviews that I've had. Well, now a again, this is I mean, it's within 6 months. It's very new. So, looking back on it now, I feel like It's very I'm trying to think of like the right words. It's hard. It's hard to look at these things that I go like this just doesn't suit my strengths like This thing that I'm getting docked on. or that I'm not seen as a professional. I've been called as a young professional where I you know I'm 40 years old. I'm married. I'm getting my Ph.D., I'm not a young professional, but I've been told I'm a young professional which is so fun. But with that it's like I also don't feel the freedom to share that with my supervisors because of the stigma of ADHD. So with that I don't want. I don't feel comfortable saying, oh, I have, ADHD, and this doesn't play to my strengths, because I have a perception both myself of like what ADHD used to be in the eighties nineties. and that's just stuck with it. And so it's hard because of like, Hey, there's this whole aspect of me that I'd like to share. because I think it would really help. But I don't feel comfortable, because then there is this. at least within my field, like this hyper productivity, expectation. And so with that, I don't feel comfortable, saying, hey, I might not produce the same way. But I'm still working hard. Yeah. yeah. Well. I have a very, very supportive husband. And so at first he was a little like when I was like I would like to go get tested for this. He's like kind of filled a little off. But like he just felt a little like, you know, like, is it necessary? Or whatever? And but I was like, no, I really want to get tested. And he's like, okay. And then, just even as I've shared more things with him. and like even sharing silly Instagram reels and stuff like that of like somebody explaining it. A feature of ADHD. He's like, Oh, yeah, that's you. Oh, yeah. And like, he's just like he's learning in the process. But he has felt he has been very in in such a way. Like, oh, yeah, like, I get that about you like that makes sense like. that's great. And so it's a safe place to be when you know I'm able to talk about those things. And honestly, he's probably really the only one I've really talked to about it, because, even you know, a funny example was this last weekend, and this is kind of goes off the question. But, like my folks were in town, and I was bringing it up. And they're like, Are you, gonna you know. good medication. And then my mom made like a funny like getting all like zapped up with stimulants kind of like action. And I was just like, no like, that's not what it's about, like I just wanted to like.

There's just a lot of it's just that same thing of this. I don't feel there's a there's a very small number of people that I feel comfortable sharing minor diversity with And luckily my husband is one of those safe people. And so, it is a great place to be like. you know, I'm really struggling. Today, I'm having a low capacity day. But and he recognizes that. Okay, that's a low-capacity day. And then he also recognizes when I'm like in my zoom email. And I'm like, we're gonna build this project. And we're gonna get it done. So it's been yeah, it's been safe. It's been really nice. Yeah, so yeah, I think for me. there's a couple of people in my circle that I feel like, oh, yeah, I feel comfortable sharing this with And I have shared with a few friends. And they're like, oh, yeah, that that makes sense, but then it's like it's done in over with him. It's never talked about again. And then there's other folks. So, the community that I have found myself in over the years and is a community. That kind of feels like ADHD is made up. or you don't need drugs. You just need to get outside and exercise more. And it's that very typical nineties boy example that you think of with ADHD of just a really hyperactive boy, and I'm like, but women are the most highly under diagnosed. you know, gender. And you know, I'm like, I've tried to get statistics. And to some of those people who I feel very safe with, I feel like I can share those. And they're like, oh, yeah, this totally makes sense. but with the other elements of the community, I just kind of them like I'm I understand. there's this stigma about it, and it's very much like you don't need to worry about drugs. You'll be fine. Just do that type of thing, and that is something I am pursuing is to see if I can get the medication to help. But yeah. So, it's just with that kind of like. it's sort of a made-up stigma, and like for instance, that there was a woman who I know who her daughter was just recently diagnosed. and she was in tears about it and was in tears about her getting medication for it, and it just it just spoke to me that I'm like. no, you don't need to like this is a fine thing like yes, approach things with a discerning eye, and all of that. But like this is like a safe like. She's not going to have to go through what I have gone through. in a sense, because she's 13, this this girl and I'm like, I'm so glad that she'll have a just an understanding of herself that I never had until I was 40. And so But this one with the this mom was in tears about that. And I was just like, it's not a bad thing. This is not a bad thing like this is who we are differently, and that's totally great. It was so frustrating. so yeah, that's why I don't feel comfortable sharing. recently, it's been very positive like. I think finally, kind of like having that like. hey? Like I said, like, hey, I'm not lazy like this is this is I'm learning about myself, and has been like. So just I said it the word early, but it's just illuminating. You just feel like somebody turned the light on and so that has been really positive to kind of be able to walk through this and just not have this weighted pressure on of Just yeah, like, I'm not. I'm not performing. I'm not doing well. I'm all of those things. And so when I think back to those other, you know, historically. it's not regret, but it is like a sadness that I think about of not being diagnosed earlier. so that I'm not having to cause to kind of like. I wish that I would have had those things so I could have had some understanding of like. Here's how your brain works. And here's how you can be successful in whatever field you pursue, because it's not really about productivity, productivity, productivity. It's about finding the right places for you, and finding, you know the systems that happen to work for you and that type of thing. And so for me, it's been. It's more of the sadness when I look back historically. not frustration, or anything like that, and not even, you know. Frustration that my parents, or anything. Because You know, being the age that I am, I it really was I. I remember my parents love Dateline, you know, and they love 20/20, and they watched all these shows, and every time ADHD was talked about it was young boys who are bouncing off the walls, as they would say and I didn't fit that I that was not me and so I don't. There's no blame, but there is like a what could have been feeling of you know what? I have not gotten every letter grade available. in college, including W's and eyes and Fs, and all of that. I got every letter great. And it's like, how had I had the support systems and had the those types of things? there's yeah, it's a

sadness about it. But I'm really there's a lot more hope now is probably the best way to describe the feeling of like I'm ready to dive into this, and to really explore who I am, and to really kind of learn what works best for me, and to understand that I ebb and flow emotionally and regulation and all that. A lot more. So if people are not in front of me. I really lose track of them. That's been really hard. I so I have a good like. I'm really a friend of mine. and it's funny now that I think about it. A dear friend of mine like when we would have groups of people together. she would say. She'd call it. She'd say, user superpower. And it was just the ability to go and engage with people and funny. Now, looking back on it is probably the, you know, actually realizing this right now, that is probably my ADHD of just being able to engage and connect with people, and share silly stories and all that. But so I'm good in the moment. But in regards to friendships. that. I you know, I look back at my university relationships. and I cannot say that I have had a good connection after the fact. It's like, it's like it's out of sight, out of mind. for me. And that's actually very hard, because they were very, you know, very good friendships, and then I'll have this moment, you know, like, oh, I need to text, you know, Sarah. and if I don't do it right at that moment it's gone again. It's just out. it's like it. Sarah is off the map. you know. and for someone like that, I'm like, okay, I've lived with this person for multiple years in the same house as a roommate, and we experience so much life and laughter and relationships, and all those things together. And yeah, I'm like, I haven't connected with you know people for years. and luckily I have one dear, dear friend. who, you know, has been my friend since the University. and it's like she adopted me. That's the way to say it, you know, like she's just like it does not matter where we're at, and it does not matter whatever if I happen to have that moment of like. Oh, I need to text joy. then. And I text her. It's just like we've picked right back up where we were. There's no hurt feelings. There's no you haven't talked to me in forever. There's all that. So there's like that one person is like, I'm just gonna be connected and all that. And then there's the rest of my friends over the years that I think. and I wouldn't. I don't know for sure, but have sort of been like, just like, Okay, she's out of the picture. She's gone like, I'm not going to engage with her anymore. So that's been, it's been hard. I'm glad to have joy and have my one person who's like, oh, you're good like she, you basically is like, we're sisters. It doesn't matter like she just like sucked me into her life. But all my other people I'm like, oh, no, I'm sorry I've been talked to you in 6 months to a year or more. I still feel very fond of about them. I don't know how they feel about me. I think what's very frustrating especially learning about my diagnosis. is that ADHD is very complex. and I and as I dived into even other neurodivers, individuals. Not necessarily. ADHD, I'm like it is. It is so complex. There is no one stereotype that applies and it's frustrating, because and it comes back to some of that sadness about the previous about my life is that had people had a broader understanding of what ADHD can encompass. I I probably could have gotten support way earlier. and that's hard. And so like, if and I've had, you know. you know some people go like when I, the few people that I have brochure with they they're like, no, you're not ADHD like. It's just like their first response. And I'm like, but I am like you know, I that all of these characteristics of inattentive ADHD, not hyperactive ADHD And so because hyperactive is so prominent in mainstream. you know, that is very frustrating. And I think the stigma about medication and an adh. I kind of mentioned that, you know, with my mom, is like and this is even something with even with my husband trying to be like, well, like no, like the ADHD medication is different. then, what everybody thinks it's not just, you know, speed for kids is a thing that I remember hearing about, and it's not it that is, is not the elements that it is. And so what's so frustrating is that the stereotypes that exist for ADHD. and I think for most of our individuals is that it's like it prevents care for people who need it stigmatizes it, and it doesn't allow for people to want to share like I like myself, and it's just been so. it's been hard to get help, you know, to even talk to my primary care, physician to even be like here I'm feeling these things. I'm

feeling lost, and immediately. for mine. They're like, oh, you have depression inside. I might and then. But I also think Xyz and you know, finding out now, you know, like depression, anxiety also morbid, have comorbidity with. you know, ADHD. And so it's just. It's especially for women. it's so frustrating, you know there's a statistic that it's the most highly under diagnosed for women. And it's also the most highly diagnosed for the ages 18 to 35 of all ADHD populations because people are finally like. no, it presents differently in women. And so yeah, I've rambled. Sorry. I don't know. I got your question. Yeah, you have. I wanna follow up on you mentioned stigma around medication. Yeah. Well, for me, like. So yes, I do 100% believe that there's a stigma about medication. There is a number of Netflix documentaries. I think it's one's called. Take your pills. that is, you know, like about taking your medication, and it being abused, and all that, and yes, it can be abused, if it's not. you know, monitored by a psychiatrist, you know what or your primary care, physician it. And if it's used outside of the world of ADHD, absolutely, it can be abused just like any other drug. and I, there's so many mainstream media TV shows. that basically are like stigmatize ADHD and medication use by being like. I think it's like the unbearable Kimmy Schmidt or the that one. I can't remember the name of it. But the mom in that is like, oh, I just need to get my kids on for parenting is really what it's about and not an engagement. but they're like, I just need to get my kids on drugs. And you know, I it's also in meet the Schmidt. I think that's it. I can't remember the name of the show. I'm terrible. B. Shows that I don't think we watch a ton of. But let the gal Moira, I I remember seeing a clip of her and talking about like that type of thing. And so it's just like, there's this idea that, like. okay, if your kids hyperactive, all you gotta do is get them on drugs, you know. and it has nothing to do with engagement with them and all of that. And then, like I said, there's been all of the my parents were like that still, probably are addicted to TV news shows. and they watch all of these exposes and things and all that, but really it's never looking at the proper usage of it. It's looking at the abuse of it. And so then it's seen that ADHD medications either make people into zombies or it's going to get them hyped up. And you know, like that type of thing. And so. and then trying to pursue a you know, like I said with that mom who's had her daughter on that. She's so worried about her daughter being on medication. And I'm like, but if it could help her, why would we not want to do everything that we could do to help that person. in the same case, if somebody is a type, one diabetic, you would want them to have the medication that they need, and so or that would help them, and so I don't know it. It makes me frustrated to see that, because for myself, then again, it comes down to the like. Would I ever share that with anybody outside of my husband like? I don't know if I would that if I you know, if I can get some. I don't know if I ever would share that with folks, even my parents. because of the that, unless I can continue to have long conversations with them. to kind of like, help destigmatize and explain what drugs do the drugs do and how they're helping with regulation. And that type of thing. So It's something I'd like to do, because I do wonder if it would be beneficial. I just with the shortage and all of that it's hard to access that right now. TV shows, etc. So I think that might be a good big time? I love games. I love games so. Yes, So in your I don't think it's prominent at all in in media and in gaming. so there is one game that I played recently. on the recommendation of a friend is spirit fair, and I feel like there's wha a couple of characters in there. that that have a little bit more representation of neurodiversity. But when looking at games as a whole. It's not there, it's not represented, it's it is If anything, it's made fun of and that's you know I can't picture it. There was some. I was like a first person. I don't even remember the name of it, but it was. There was a side character that had ADHD, and he was hyped up and wild, and all of that. But they didn't explicitly say that it's never explicitly said in names. I cannot imagine one. one game where it is explicitly mentioned for any level. it's always implied it's never talked about which is. you know, it's sad to me when I think about, you know, like people who are dating, I thought to see yourself. I mean, we're

seeing that in I remember E to totally go off traffic like I remember the first time watching wonder, woman and being like for the first time there was a superhero movie that was primarily centered on a woman and all other superhero movies beforehand. They were side characters. They were. They were part of a team or whatever. And so like. I remember crying in the theaters. Being like this is amazing to see this and to see myself in that. And I and I remember reading the media. I I am. I am white, so I don't feel this, you know. I don't have that understanding. But I remember people who are people of color in my world, watching back Panther for the first time. And they're like, Wow, like I see me. And so then, within gaming. there's none of that. There's nothing for a verse and same with other media. There's not really great representations I feel like of neurodiverse people. in in a traditional media. Even so traditional video. And all of that. So to a loss. I think. So that's what's frustrating. So I do think spirit fair does a good job of. There's one character in it. And I want to see I'm gonna Google while we're on here, because I can't remember that I go like. Oh, this character is handled in such a kindness to them that I you're like, oh, like I, they're not stigmatized that they're accepted as they are, and this little green character I can't remember his name I like a little frog, not a big frog like a little. If you had a really messy room. it's like I'm gonna look at this for your characters. And I'm gonna find it...okay....You'd be Stanley. I think that was him and so he was young and little, and it's again not explicitly stated. But he was a character that to me at least. did not display neurotypical. Let me put it that way. and so for me, I was like, Okay, this is. it was just like, okay, you come out when you want to come out. You do your one miners when you want to do them like. There was just like the main character in that was just kind of like engage with them as they needed. And so I really liked that. Is that there. It just felt like there was more of a kindness and grace and empathy towards that person to be who they were then. trying to be like. you know, and not that a game will necessarily do this. But to be like, okay, no, you gotta clean up your room and you gotta do your stuff, and you got it, you know, like, it's just like, No, you do your thing like so. yeah, I would say. I really liked that about weird fair But regarding ADHD, and maybe Stanley is also in the HD. Who knows? but I don't. I don't think that there's I don't think I've seen that in in in gaming so Well Yeah, yeah, let me think about that. I think I think, allowing it to first of all to be to be stated.

because again, you know, I find that there's a lot of hiding sometimes of at least at least in my perspective, or masking at least of ADHD symptoms, for instance. That there's the ability to be open and be themselves so to share that and to share. I think. different aspects of that neurodiversity. you know, like people love to say that all ad she folks are creative. That's that may be true. That may not be true. But there's some really wonderful things about neurodiversity. And like I think, highlighting that also, if possible, I'd love to highlight some of the struggles. of that individual to say like. you know for myself, like with the inattentive aspect of like it's it is very hard for me to focus on something that does not fire all those serotonin elements, and so, you know, like my husband will walk by, and I'm zoned in on something that is firing all of that, and he'll talk to me, and it's like I have the mute button pressed on the world around me. And so, being able to share that both in. It's positive and negative, of like hyper focus, of being able to like, dive in and make a project and to work on it and make something really interesting. while also going like that hyper focus can be detrimental. And it can stress you out and burn you out. And those elements, I think, being able to. I think it'd probably have more dialogue than a lot of games have. I think that because neurodiversity is so it's so diverse. I mean, it's a terrible one to say. But it's so broad that to say, okay, we're gonna have a person who has Autism or person with ADHD in the game, and then, just to follow all of those tropes of like this is what it looks like. I think just can, we would continue to damage it. But then, able to have that person in the game to say like, oh, this is this is just one aspect, my friend, my other friend

who has this, who's maybe never in the game. they do. X y z year. they are. you know, they just kinda highlight. the broadness of it, because well, stereotypes can sometimes be true. They are rarely, always true. And I think that is really necessary for the understanding, for folks to. for neurotypical people, if they are playing a game with that, to have that understanding. And then for the neurodiverse people who would be playing that and then seeing elements of themselves, but also recognizing, like, Yeah, that that part's not me. But this person can encompass. And I can see myself in them and in parts of it. So I think. if yeah, I just I really think that by. you know, in game development. Of course, like I know, like in movies and stuff, they have like cultural coordinators and that type of stuff and involving folks with that neurodivers element within the game design would be key also. because then they can give voice to hey that that feels hurtful or that doesn't feel hurtful or that really exemplifies my aspect. My friend over here has this aspect, so I think that would be key in in that in the development of it to involve others so that just one last question for you and it's just a kind of is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience. Yeah, I think. I don't think there's anything else I just I would love for folks to opportunities in it just in general to refute stigma because I think you know, even watching the show like I don't watch it, but I know of it like the good doctor like, I know, that does not encompass. Or maybe it doesn't even rightly portray someone who has Autism So that, like there's so many elements out there that I go like I would love to see projects that involve individuals from the individual's voices. because I think that is so key and understanding the complexity of diverse or diverse individuals. So I think that. I, yeah, consultants are a great thing. I guess so. But yeah, no, I think you know, there's a lot. It's come a long ways. But there's a long ways yet to go and in and helping neurotypical and or diverse individuals understand? the depth and breadth of neurodiversity.

## **Rosco:**

you know, for me a big one was when I was in college here at MU...oh, 16 years ago, I suppose, now, and undergraduate, and I was just spectacularly failing head of school, I mean, like in the craziest way, you know, I would enrolling classes every year, but then I just could not find I could not attend them. I would go for maybe 2 weeks or something, and then I would literally just stop going. That was like depression and sleep apnea at the time. But I was also like super functional and other aspects of my life. I joined a music fraternity here on campus and got really involved in that to the point of eventually becoming president of it, and we grew it from it was almost dead when we joined it, me and my friends, and those we grew it from, like 12 people to about 65. And so I was functional on other aspects of my life as my point. And but not academically here. And you know. as I was dealing with the clash of trying to reconcile this, and why was behaving such so wildly and stupidly, not stupidly but atypically. I, you know, started to really like. have grandiose fantasies involving Francis Quadrangle and the architecture involved in it. And yeah, that was not. Now I recognize that, as you know, like a mild maniac episode. You know, it didn't present with any visual hallucinations or auditory hallucinations, but it was exhilarating for lack of a better word. I think, a I just didn't find it interesting. It takes a really good teacher to catch me, and I came from call me public schools in the music program that had really good teachers and to be totally frank here, say no name. You building The music department at that time was not full of heavy hitters. caught me there. There were. There were a few there, and still are some great teachers, but some of the leadership. The band director at the time. You know, he was dealing with his own struggles, personal addictions to pills, stuff like that. And it just it didn't catch my respect. And I wasn't interested. But I really I had my heart set on becoming a band director like a high school band director so hard that I really couldn't admit to

myself that I wasn't. And I, you know I was like a golden musician child, all state band choir. It came in as a vocal and instrumental major, which every music professor will tell you don't do cause there's no way in hell. You're gonna have 10 h to practice a day. You know. You're lucky to get in. They're happy if you get into really so. And I was also a kid that never really had to work in school, you know. You can imagine I. I was a I was a C minus student, probably on average. But I got a 30 something on my act. So learning to have to work when it wasn't enjoyable in an academic sense, was new to me and so and beyond that, I mean, I was struggling with my religion. I was struggling with my sexuality. It was really a perfect storm in a lot of ways, I mean, when you're a kid growing up in Missouri in the nineties. They don't present bisexuality as an option to you. You know you're either straight or gay, and you get bullied by both sides. You know the gay people tell you you're really gay. The straight people tell you you're feminine a faggot so like that's where I was. It was a lot to deal with for any 18 19 20 year old. That's yeah. I I've had a lot of those I mean in a non. I don't know if we want to consider sexuality neurodiverse, because it seems pretty basic compared to a lot of you know what ADHD, autistic and schizophrenic people go through. But you know, some of my first experiences were like a working at subway in town, and I think another, probably teenager, came in and was trying to scam a subway sandwich out of subway, and I saw right through it, and I didn't give him the sandwich. and he spelled out like faggot with sugar packets on the floor around the corner when I wasn't looking. and I actually like caught him right in the middle of the act, you know, and that was always, you know, and I was in control myself at the time to laugh at him and chase him out of my store. But you know, it's not to say it didn't make an impact on me. It was the first time anybody had ever taken the time. This is boggled me that he would take the time to do that with sugar packets on a subway floor and that was not accommodating. So just in terms of like experiences like that that's foundational to my personal psychology, that one and then, I mean since then, certainly in the Mental health system. I was just in the Midmo Mental Health Center of the hospital psych ward over there, Ludi Ben, for a week, and shortly after Covid and as part of that manic episode, and you know they do their best in there. They really do. They have no funding compared to what they need, and it's hard but the diagnosis I got was by polarity, and I think I may have talked to a counselor a. you know. or someone with full therapist credentials, psychologists, credentials, maybe for a period of 20 min in my 7 day long. Stay there, you know. And so they did their best with that diagnosis of bipolarity. But you know, no one in that situation, even in in the very place you'd think someone would talk to you or ask you about. I know they're just there to keep you safe, and it's not therapy. But and you know, if they had asked me, and I was a honest with them, which I'm not sure I would have been you know. I thought people were coming to kill me, and I was constantly in fear of murder. You know, I never got violent or anything like that. But it would have been nice for them to recognize that. Maybe this guy that's sitting there is experiencing something that's a beyond what it looks like on the outside, you know. And even then you know the way I went into the psych ward, I ran to my parents, and I was babbling what must have sounded like gobbly gook to them at the time. and that that was. you know, and they kinda tease me and razz me for and made fun of. But they have no idea what's going on. You know they don't. they don't. And should. It's hard to hold a manic person responsible for being prideful or Egotistical, because it's hard not to be in that state, you know you're full of all those brand chemicals that put you there. And so my own parents and my girlfriend at the time were not accommodating to me. I mean they did the right thing. They held my hand and walked me in, but in terms of just being able to accommodate and understand that it wasn't there. And I really didn't hope for it, because I think that's too much to ask of most people. talking about this stuff. Is there a reason why? Well, my interpretation of the experience may differ from a mainstream medical interpretation. I didn't want to be stigmatized as

loony. Also, I feel like maybe it's a better technique in a schizophrenic, so-called schizophrenic episode to just observe and not act. Reddit for our Columbia, Mo. And our Missouri, you know, which combined have over 100,000 subscribers, and I'm a prolific commentator on those, because I feel some weird self-duty to help guide our political discussion in a more constructive and positive direction, and to see if we can tone down and build more bridges between Conservatives and Liberals in the State of Missouri, because we have near total breakdown on that issue. You know I'm an LGBT historian. And to just get the 2 camps together to talk about trans issues is they don't even have the same language and so when I try to build these bridges, which I think my ability to do. That is in part because of perhaps things. You know. Dyslexia, for instance, is so associated with creativity, and being able to think, put yourself in other people's shoes. Things like that, you know. Sometimes I make these appeals trying to mild out conversations, build a bridge or whatever. And of course the psychological projection comes from the other side, and I get accused of all sorts of horrible motives and things that are not me. And so yeah, every time I make, I mean, there's not a day that goes by. I don't make a comment on Reddit these days and feel misunderstood. But it doesn't surprise me, I should say that, Ill know what I'm doing, I'm not naive, Oh, yeah. yeah, I think I filter myself more. I so sometimes maybe have a little bit more of a mask. I mean, I'm authentic in person, but I like to meet people where they're at, and some people are higher than me and have better understanding on things, and some people are lower than me, and I don't. I don't like. I'm enough of a communicator that I can. I'm flexible enough to be understood when I want to. But if I were to unleash. if I can say that egotistically unleash my full brain power in certain conversations, I would be misunderstood. So I've just learned to shut up sometimes to get by. Well. no. But if you're gonna try to push progress forward. I don't think the world is gonna be. Yeah, yeah, I do I suppose I don't beat myself up over it, though, because I think that's just life. So yeah, my girlfriend, at the time of that psychotic break was real great, and she walked me in and held my hand to the psych ward, but we had been on rocky ground for some time. due to my own infidelity. No fault of hers really and the rocky ground, I should say the bigger problem with the rocky ground was probably our incompatibility. But I wanna put the moral responsibility on me for that decision. And yeah, it was hard with her. She does. She did not come equipped to understand the things I was trying to tell her about my experiences. You know I tend to look at things through a more philosophical and metaphorical filter or creative filter sometimes, and she, I would describe her as a pretty, so entrenched materialistic scientist, which is great, which is all fine and dandy. But she's a very grumpy person, you know, and I think that in part is because she didn't want to hear the things that I was trying to say, you know, or tell her about my experiences. So I think that basic incompatibility which was largely due to my own divergence from my atypical neuro divergence from her more normal thing broke that relationship up, you know, and it was a real one. I've been Ill asked her to marry me during that psychotic episode which is a stupid decision to make in any sort of all through state of consciousness, you know. But I'm glad it happened now, because I'm with a much more compatible very much. But it was the nerve divergence that probably was the base of that. Noah? Can you hear me? Sure, can hey? We don't know what happened. I was setin way back and not touching nothin, and the window just closed. Do you hear my last question? I don't know where you got cut off at what was your last question? Oh, yeah, work relationships for awful. I mean, they were okay. But so I worked for as a truck driver for Shakespeare's over decade, Shakespeare's pizza frozen pizza, and I've been like all over Missouri doing that but you know when I was there. I absolutely just masked myself as a very dumb Stoner, because I was addicted to THC self medicating the other stuff. Yeah. I won't say addicted. Because I guess that's physiological. I was psychologically dependent, even physiologically dependent, because I was taking big doses, you know, like 200 300 400 milligrams,

sometimes daily large doses of THC, not healthy doses. And yeah, and I just, you know, mask myself is a can you still hear me? I'm just checking. Just mask myself as a as a as a big Stoner, and a kind of dumb, unaware fella, which was not far from the truth. When you're on 200 milligrams. THC, you can play that role pretty well, but you know, I stuck around. Shakespeare's over a long time. I first did it cause I just needed money, and I wasn't. I couldn't work in the Gerbs Deli, because that bored me to death. So, driving all over Missouri without my boss over my shoulder to deliver pizzas was great and, as about, you know, earlier than that, I had started writing oodles of Wikipedia articles about Missouri culture and history and all sorts of things whatever. And so I was like, well, this is great Shakespeare's Gonna pay me, you know, \$12 an hour to research demography and cultural diversity in Missouri. And to really get to know this state like the back of my hand, I've been to every small town, every county multiple times, usually sometimes dozens of times. And I try to eat local restaurants. I chat at people about politics. Sometimes I play the Conservatives sometimes I'll play the Liberal, you know, whatever you know, I just gather information. Watching. The pandemic was wild. and I think I'm off the topic now, but you know, doing all that. My point is that I was masking to them, and they still don't know to this day that they were. I was doing a good job delivering the frozen pizzas, but they were paying me \$15 an hour, so that I could really research Missouri and Missouri history, demography. And it's present day people, you know. It wasn't they wouldn't believe me if I told him. Anyway. So you know. Why. Why tell them. Well, I think the one thing is to stop viewing it as a negative. That's the big one, really. You know, schizophrenia in particular. We know we know pretty well from studies that it is not unusual in South Asia and East Asia for people to hear voices that tell them to do positive things. I think the large reason why Western society and you know, Americans in particular. why American schizophrenics, so called. Schizophrenics, you know, hear such horrible things sometimes, and it's cause they expect it. They expect the voices to tell them to murder someone, or that someone's coming to kill them, or something like that. And I think that expectation turns into reality. And that's a that's a socially constructed expectation. We need to realize that. So I think, moving the language in the field of schizophrenia, at least from schizophrenia to a schizotypal spectrum. you know, like our artistic forbearers have done. would be the move to make, you know, and just changing the language and how we talk about it would be great for us. Well, the one for schizotype people is that you're crazy, that you're loony, that you have that your experiences aren't based in reality. But I think, as far as, like cosmology and physics can tell, you know. And philosophy. experience is reality. We're not even sure matters real, as far as I can tell. I mean, it seems real. It seems like everything's real. But as to understand why non, material things aren't as real as material things, and I've never. And you know. there have been times when I have led musical theater productions from the drum set. and I think you know. That's I don't know how much know about musical theater, but that's very weird. Usually the person who leads you through the show is the piano player. You know the key. The conductor usually is the piano person with the vocal essence. The drummer is kind of second in command, because Drummer has a lot of power over tempo music, that kind of thing. It's really hard to fight a drummer. If a drummer decides they wanna do something. You know Saxon player can do whatever drummer has to be there solid the entire time. And there's been multiple productions, you know, where we're my awareness has minority virgins, I think, has given me the ability to be aware and quickly quickly shift between tasks that need to be done. Especially, you know, just a billion little adjustments a second that feels like sometimes, you know, with music, and sometimes you play a note ladder to get the bass player back in line. Are you playing up softer to get, you know, signal a vocalist? Come in that kind of stuff, and if you have a really neuro, diverge it in a helpful way person behind a drum set or piano as a musician a person like that can really help, you know, coordinate and organize a group of 30 people trying to

put on a show. Well, I'm just spying on your whiteboard here unfairly to you, and I see a constant, the word concentration And so I did want to touch that that has always been difficult for me. Staying focused enough to be grounded enough to be functional is always a challenge. Can you ask your question again, because I got distracted with your whiteboard. Oh, it was. It was kind of like a open question, like, Oh, gosh! I don't know. Tons . I'm a talker. Yeah, you'd want to cut me off before I finished. But Hello! You know, I just it's exciting to see this kind of research going on. And as terms of my experience, you know, if you hadn't used the word neuro divergent, I wouldn't have sought you out on Reddit. I don't remember who messaged to. I must have messaged you for your post. Yeah. And you know, if you hadn't used the right language I wouldn't have sought you out and that just goes to show the power of and the need to research this kind of stuff. So we can. You know, it's so it'll be a snowball effect.

## **Lisa:**

I think, one for me. When I was growing up I didn't really understand social queues. A whole lot. a really proud moment from my childhood is when I was. I think, a freshman in high school. I was walking with somebody and talking with them at the same time, and they kind of beard away a little bit, but they were still talking to me, and that was the first time that I remember realizing they wanted me to follow them instead of just not saying anything, and like going the same way that we had been going. It's been like, Oh, well, I guess they're done talking to me so a lot of little things like that, like social queues? Or if somebody said. Can you do whatever this thing is? Or do you want to do whatever this thing is, but they were implying that I should do it. I did not understand that at all. I would just be like, no, I'm good So you weren't picking up like they were trying to like hang out with you and wasn't registering yeah, or like So I think a lot of it was a social anxiety, too, like if I was around like my friend's parents or something, and they needed me to help with something. I wouldn't realize that they were asking me to help with the thing, so I just wouldn't. And at 1 point they like to my parents about how uncooperative I was. But I just didn't realize that like, Hey, can you do this actually meant, go, do this. take it very literally. Yeah. I think those are the only ones I remember at the moment for social queues specifically When I was growing up, my mom also told me that she thought it was on the autism spectrum. My mom is a speech pathologist. So she works with a lot of like kids who have autism. And she would, she would say that because I had a lot of sensory issues so like I didn't wear denim until I was like 14, because I just couldn't handle how done I felt on my skin. And like always, you know, using a team report to take tags out of stuff. My grandma would buy me outfits, and I just would tear them off as my mom tried to make me wear them, because there was one little piece of fabric that was itchy or something like that. so I don't know if those are all related or not, but she would definitely be like, that's not normal. What is wrong with you? So she has videos with me. When I was in first grade like throwing a whole fit in the hallway, because there was a wrinkle in my sock inside of my shoe. I was having a hard time putting my shoes on without my sock wrinkling like under my foot, and I just could not ignore it. So I guess, like taking my shoe off and trying it again until you myself, and try again and getting really frustrated. And then we were going to be late, because I was taking forever to put my shoes on so that kind of stuff sensory wise. I've been a lot better with it in adulthood. I haven't really had very many things that I just can't ignore anymore. But growing up, it was definitely a huge thing. Sure relatives, to not realize that I had those kinds of sensitivities and be personally offended that I didn't like whatever shirt they got me for my birthday, because it had the sequence sewn into it, or something that makes it makes a lot of sense I take a really overwhelmed, and sometimes I'll look for just like a way to get out of this situation, so

noise can still be one for me if I'm I have a really. I have a pretty big family. There's I have 5 full siblings, and if there's like a family gathering or anything. There's a lot of people talking and just being around. I'll tend to try to find somewhere else to be At 1 point. We had all gone out to like a national park, but everybody was hanging out and talking, and it was just too much for me. So I went and fell asleep in the car by myself, because it was like a tolerable noise level from being in the car. I've had a couple of panic attacks in social situations just from being overwhelmed with the newness of a situation. But I don't think that's necessarily like a audio visual processing, just a not knowing what's expected of me, or what I'm supposed to be doing, and feeling like people are watching me, not know what to do. Sure. I can't think of any specifically at the moment. Hmm! like, how would I make things more accessible or like like how, not having on support, has affected me. I think I tend to isolate myself sometimes like I really do enjoy people and being around people. But it's really hard for me to get comfortable with new situations. So sometimes I tell people like people that I'm extremely comfortable with in a new situation is sometimes okay and a situation I'm extremely comfortable with new people is sometimes okay. But new people in new situations are just like a recipe for disaster. so there are times that I've just not done things. Not gone out with friends because they were going out, and it was somewhere that I had never been before or see. like, maybe not taking advantage of certain opportunities, because I didn't know who was going to be there sometimes. Yeah, I would say that it's weird, because, like, I kind of feel excluded. But I know that nobody is excluding me except for myself, so I do feel left out a lot. But I don't feel like people I don't know. Does that make sense like I do feel left out. But then I'm like, well, you just did it to yourself. It's not like nobody invited you, but then I feel like, if I keep not going to things people are gonna stop inviting me. And then I'm gonna end up alone. Yeah. it's like super overwhelming. Yeah. Yeah, right? Yeah. yeah. let's see with colleagues. I think sometimes it's that I'm I'll be less available to help with certain things like So I work in admissions at Msu. And if there's like a college fair or something like that that needs covered. I'll like to come up with something else to do, so that I don't have to cover a college fair, because collegefairs aren't like part of my main job, but I could still cover them sometimes if I needed to. And it's just like there's a lot of people. It's something that I've never done before. So it's like a kind of the expectation thing again. and I'll be like, Oh, why, as you do this other thing, or like I'll schedule something else, so that I have another thing that I have to do. So I think sometimes I come across as being like unhelpful or unavailable. And then, in terms of like friendships. there's definitely things where see? Like? No, I don't know. I lost my train of thought there. Sorry. Oh, yeah, yeah. So with my family. I didn't. My family likes to do hugs, and I do not like hugs specifically with my family on. For some reason I don't know. It like makes me feel like trapped and like forced to be too like closer to them than I want to be. I suppose so. I think I think my family has probably felt like I'm I don't know, like I don't know. Sometimes it's made them feel like I don't love them or like I'm just being kind of a jerk, or like withholding affection, because I'm mad or something. But that's not why I just don't like hugs. Yeah, yeah. I think, like same emotional reaction, different physical stimulation. If that makes sense. I think in general it would be some recognition of letting people take breaks from things when they need to. and not like. Like. I wish it was more acceptable to like step out of an event. and then like, come back in when you were more ready to, instead of feel like you're gonna leave for a minute. People will either assume you're entirely gone or be like Oh, hey! Where did you go like what happened like? Try to get you to explain why you're doing what you're doing when you just like to remove yourself from the situation for a little bit. yeah. And then I think, just in general like more. I feel like it would be kind of dramatic to expect, but like written directions for processes at places like, if you go to a restaurant if it was put on the menu like, if you were going to go up to a cash register to pay, or if, like, your server was going to take your

check, because that kind of thing is like I like. If I don't know exactly what I'm doing, I will just not do anything. And then it gets weird. Yeah. yeah. Cause like, there are so many places that do things just a little bit differently. And it's like, in general, it's like, okay, probably one of 4 things is going to happen, but I'm not sure what I'm supposed to be doing right now. Like, do I need to wait here for my server to come back and pick up the check and like, take my card or do, is there somewhere around the corner that I'm supposed to go pay before I leave that kind of stuff. just more like written expectations for the location, I guess, for what they do and what they're going to be doing? Yeah, is either to initially avoid the entire thing altogether. Like. like, if I like, walk up to a menu and I don't understand them, and you, instead of asking any questions about it, I will just walk away and like, not do like, I will just choose not to interact with it. If it's something where, like I found myself in a situation where I don't know what I'm supposed to do next, I'll kind of just like. Honestly, I will get so overwhelmed that I have no idea what to do, and I'll sit there until somebody asks me like, Hey, do you need blah, blah, blah, or, yeah, you can. Oh, like, do this over here because I was like short circuit. And like. Well, I I'm very much like I'm gonna go on the website and figure out what it is before I even go and like, know what I'm doing? Like, I'm like. like, I'll Google a menu for somewhere and decide what I would be ordering before I even go, so that I'm not getting there. Being faced with the menu and not knowing what I want or like, not knowing what's in something One of the issues that I have with depression is like sleeping. I have a really hard time making up in the morning. Sometimes when I start to get like overwhelmed or having a more depressive episode. So I think that comes off to a lot of people as either not caring about where I'm supposed to be, or what I'm doing. or just being lazy. and like not wanting to be there like not putting enough energy into it. because there have been several times in my life where I'll have something that I need to do like. That's really important, like going to work or like. Mostly it's going to work or going to class, or something like that, and I just I don't know. I wake up, and it's too late to do the thing, and I don't know what happened, because, like I said, alarms. I have people who call me to try to get me to wake up. I had someone like. Come, knock on my door at 1 point when I was in college, and I still just didn't wake up and I'm sure to whoever was teaching the class that I kept sleeping through. They just thought I didn't care, or that I was skipping, or they didn't have anything better like. I thought I had something better to do. But I like I just lost a whole letter grade in the class because I missed too many classes because I couldn't get up because my depression? yeah. So I think, like people ascribing meaning to actions that it sometimes feels like you don't have any control over can be one or people getting, for I think I think sometimes I feel like people get frustrated with my anxiety because they think that something is not a big deal I'm like, why can't you just do the thing like I have a ton of anxiety around phone calls like I would probably just bleed out and not call 9 1 one. Because I like I can answer the phone just fine. If somebody calls me and I can answer it. But an outgoing call, for some reason, is just like crazy overwhelming for me, unless I know I'm calling the computer. If I know I'm calling like a Walgreens line, and it's just gonna tell me something, and I'll push a button, and then it'll let me know when my prescription is ready, like that's fine. But calling a human person is like just almost out of the question. I will have my husband call them for me. Yeah, because if I'm supposed to, it's just never going to happen. so people don't understand that a lot, and it'll be like, it's not hard what's wrong with you kind of it'll be frustrated that I don't do something, or they'll think that I'm not being proactive about it, because I don't want to do like this one little aspect or something like that. No, I think like having the cameras off is helpful. Knowing that I don't have to do. It is helpful. and I, yeah, like, it's like, it's fine. I think I'm just like it's almost more like second hand anxiety from thinking about all the times I've had anxiety, anxiety about anxiety. Yeah. I get that one of my professors this semester Dr. War asking for volunteers. Yeah. Oh, yeah, I was,

gonna say, accessibility wise for that kind of stuff. I'm much more likely to schedule something if it's available to schedule online. something like that. I have a friend who the doctor she goes to. She goes to the doctor because they're the only one that will schedule her online instead of calling or I had one. I had one I was very thankful for, because I told her about my ongoing phone call anxiety, and she said, oh, okay, well, I'll just make a little note here that we need to always schedule you again before you leave, so you don't have to call back later to do it. And then, if we don't that I'll call you so you can just answer it to schedule instead of meeting to call us, and that worked out super well, and I was very appreciative of her. I feel like I'm a very prepared person. I think a lot about all of the things that can go wrong. So I have a lot of solutions for things that do go wrong. like being on a field trip, and I was the only person who had bandits in my purse kind of thing or like always bringing it. When I used to take my lunch at school I had, like a whole zip block baggy just full of like plastic forks, because, like, I didn't ever want to not have a fork, or like right now, I always carry straws, because I have sensitive teeth, and I don't ever want to not have a straw. So if somebody needs one of those things, and I'm the person who has all the things. And then I also think it makes me really efficient sometimes with things, because I think through everything that's going to happen. And I can like. I'm very proud of how fast I get through the tsa at the airport, because I've like been rehearsing in my head for the last 3 days the best order to take off my shoes into like, have my laptop out of my bag, and all that kind of stuff which is like kind of sad, but like that is one of the things that I'm really that I do like about myself. Is not that not the overthinking that leads to it. But the efficiency that comes from it, I think. but is it the pre-check free, tsa pre-approval? I've thought of doing that, but I've never done it before, because it's new. Not a whole lot myself. When I was well, I used to be really into like the ones the Mmos I used to really be into those Warcraft Yeah, that kind of thing. And I just got busy with like other stuff. But my husband still plays games a lot. So I hear about them sometimes. Hmm! My first thought for representation is like the Percy Jackson series. I know that most of those characters are like, have ADHD or Dyslexia. and I think it's a more positive representation, but I don't feel that it necessarily addressed really any of what living with that is like as I from just seeing that they had it. Probably. Hmm! That is a wonderful question. I think probably the most important thing would be that the character has some way did they overcome it. so that, like you can see it as a struggle, but not a total disability. If that makes sense like. Not that the character can't do something. but seeing how much more difficult it is for them to do it Yeah, exactly. Hmm! I feel like on some level frustration. because there's a lot of things that are just frustrating. I don't know how much of it or at what point. But I feel like that's an overarching feeling that comes along with it a lot of times. I think for a lot of things like, there are some things that like you like I want to say. For people who have like more disabling autism or something like that, there are things that are obvious and like, Oh, this is this, this and this, and this is what you have. And here's your diagnosis, your diagnosis. But then I think there's also things like, when I was growing up with like depression and anxiety. It would like my family's reaction to that was, yeah. Depression is a real thing, but other people get it like you don't have depression, and because it's all happening inside your own head. you don't know what everyone else. You don't know what normal is, because the experience that you're living is your normal experience. So I think it's just crazy that there are a lot of things that you don't realize are neuro divergent until you start to see that other people around you aren't thinking that way. You're feeling that way or having the same reaction to that stimulus. for me. There's always kind of this constant like. do I actually have this problem, or am I just like somehow conditioning myself to believe that I do. But really I'm fine and normal, and other people have it a lot worse kind of thing if that makes sense. Growing up. I think they might kind of now, but I remember leaving a doctor's appointment, and they had asked me, like all of the depression screening

questions, and I guess I answered them like quote unquote wrong, because that was like the truth for me, like, what do you like to do for fun? And I was like, I don't really have anything I like to do for a fun like what nothing is fun like that kind of stuff. And I remember leaving. And my mom was like. you need to tell them the things that you do, because, like you sounds like you're depressed. They're just like, Oh. well, shoot, mom, that's probably because I am, you know, like, but it never crossed her mind that I would be just well, I've been on medication, and that's been really helpful in general. And then also understanding, like what is going on, and kind of feeling like I could accept it because I had. There are people at my school when I was in high school that, like survived suicide attempts, and I was like, Oh, well, compared to them, like, maybe I'm not depressed because I've never like tried to hurt myself. But then there were things like I almost broke up with my boyfriend like every winter, because I just didn't enjoy seeing them anymore, because I was like seasonally one of my more depressed times of year. I was like, I want to want to see you, but I don't want to see you, and I don't understand why I don't want to see you. So I must just not like you. and it took a while for me to realize, like, why, I was feeling that way, because I just like wasn't getting like whatever like, you know, like the things that are supposed to release the happy chemicals in your brain. Just don't release enough happy chemicals, and nothing makes you happy. and be on medication and not feel like. I can't say that I have depression because I've never tried to kill myself, you know. for some people I do definitely like. My brother was saying something about it at some point he was like it. I don't know, expressing that he thought. I guess when I was pregnant, that I shouldn't have been taking anything because it might or might not be like super heart, like harmful to the baby. and I was like, well. what did I say? I think I said. well, maybe, or maybe not, being harmful to the baby is a lot better than like the baby, not having a body to grow in anymore. So they just stuff like that where people don't take it as seriously because and like it. It is weird because there's definitely a point where it's like if somebody is having suicidal ideations. But then somebody else is literally pleading out. Then, like the person who's literally pleading out is probably a higher priority for saving, like right at this moment. because it is like your little internal battle. But that's not to say that it's not serious. It's just you can't ever see how bad it is or isn't. and people get uncomfortable, not being able to see that. So they like they get like people just don't know what to think. And they people judge what they don't understand. So it makes them nervous, I think. to believe that somebody is struggling with that because they don't know. They just don't know like on what level, or how much or how to handle it. So I think a lot of people tend to just kind of reject it which can be isolating for the other person, too. Hmm No, I think I'm good.

### **Jessica:**

the easiest, but well, okay. So the pandemic actually was. I mean, I got my diagnosis when I was 40, but During the pandemic I had been off. Medication for some time. My! I've been having some anxiety after 2,016 has many of us had and my doctor's solution was to take me off of my myatarol and then due to some work changes and interns changes. I wasn't able to get it back. and I was living in California at the time, and they're much, much more strict about it there. And there were no psychiatrists anywhere in my county who are taking a new patient. So I just I couldn't get it back, no matter what I did. And when the pandemic hit it was maybe the first time I'd really understood that

this was a disability. It was not an inconvenience which it had kind of been it. It had been a very large one. It had made lots of things difficult school work, sometimes relationships, I would imagine but all of my coping mechanisms were taken away at that point. I couldn't change my environment. I couldn't go anywhere. I couldn't talk to anybody. I couldn't and I couldn't think I couldn't. I couldn't work. I couldn't. I couldn't focus and it really a things that I needed to be doing? It wasn't able to do. And maybe part of that was just the fact. There was pandemic going on. I know a lot of us were having trouble, but I really felt like at that time nothing that had worked for me. In sort of getting myself back on track or staying on track was available to me anymore. And my work really suffered. And it, yeah, really, it really felt like a crisis in a way that it never had before. And it actually wasn't until I moved here that I was able to get back on my medication. So Columbia has been good to me so far. prior to that, I mean school. You know, I grew up in the seventies and eighties, and add, was not recognized in girls at all. It just didn't exist in girls. It was thought to be a boy thing, and it meant that they couldn't stay in their seats, and they ran around the room, and they had no. you know, self-control at all. And So someone like me who would struggle, and you know my hyperactivity might have manifested by, you know, cutting up paper under my desk all day. Which is what I did, or, you know, pouring numbers glue in my hands around my hands, you know, like I always had to be doing something but that wasn't recognized as hyperactivity. And my. you know, the inability to focus was, of course, you know. diagnosed as laziness and failing to meet my potential and you know, there just there was no help. There was no like. Well, let's get a tutor who can help her, you know. Return to her work after you know she gets off track. There was no I don't even know what like medications were available. I wanna say, Ritalin was available to voice at the time. I feel like I'd heard that word at some point. but yeah, it wasn't. It wasn't until my brother was diagnosed, and he's 18 years younger than me. And we're basically the same person. He was diagnosed and explained his experience of it. And you know, the light went on, and I it just went. Oh, my God! My whole life makes so much sense now. yeah. Anyway, I don't know if that really answered the question. yeah, you said he was diagnosed first. Yeah, yeah, in college. He went to. He went off to college and really struggled. so my family tree is a little weird. So when I talk about my siblings and my mom in this context, I'm gonna be talking about my birth family who I found when I was 20 when I talk about my childhood and my dad. I'm *gonna* be talking about my adoptive dad and I was raised as an only child. So. But my younger brother was like 18 months old, and I found my birth family, and so he's always known me as his sister And so he went off to college and was really struggling, and both are our mom and his dad both worked in education, specifically special education. And they had. What he didn't know is, they knew all along that he had HD. ADHD, but they lived in a really small town, and telling anyone in the school that he had, ADHD meant that he was going to go into Special Ed. which is not where he belonged. He just needed help, so they've been helping him in the ways that they knew how all through, you know, elementary and high school. And then he went out into the world at college and was like. you know, there was no, there was no help. There was no one there to guide and to redirect and to, you know, put these tools in place and put the systems in place for him. and so he got his diagnosis and and they, you know, explained to him. And this was the big revelatory moment for me, too, when he was explaining this to me is, it's not that we can't focus. It's that we focus on everything at once. You know, we can't tune anything out. It's not it's not a matter of, you know. We're not hummingbird flying from one thing to the other. It's just like it's all happening at once, and we don't really have control over which thing is going to be taking our attention, which thing is, gonna be loudest at that moment. And sometimes it's all too loud, which I think is what was happening in early Covid. For me everything was just very loud. let's see. What do you mean when you say everything was very loud? I mean, yeah. So yeah, I guess it's not even a mistake to say it

that way. The first time I was prescribed at all it was 5 milligrams. It was like nothing. And I took that 5 milligram tablet, and 15 min later everything got quiet, and I mean that literally, like everything, got quiet. It was a it was a quiet I had never known in my entire life. and it was I didn't hear the traffic noises. I didn't hear the hum of the refrigerator. I didn't hear the you know. Whatever else was going on creeks in the attic. The dogs in the backyard, you know, like all of this stuff, is constantly there. I can't tune it out. you know. and suddenly it was all gone, and I was talking to my family, and that's all I was doing. and it was just so quiet. And II it's never happened that way since. But I will never forget that moment. It was yeah, it was really again revelatory and so visually same thing, you know, like right now, my office is mess. Not a good thing. I can see it all. I can't. I can't not see any of it actually just took my beds right before we got on the call. So we'll see how that changes over this time over the time. That we're here. But actually II was explaining my husband not long ago. I was up on a Saturday morning or something, and I had just taken my meds. And I started smiling. It's like what I'm like it just the experience of looking at this messy kitchen 5 min ago. It was like an overwhelming. Insurmountable just mountain of things that I didn't know what to do with. And now I can see that I need to pick that up. I need to wipe that down. I need to wash those. I need to put that away. And it's like, that's the difference. And yeah, I think that that encapsulates the experience right there. yeah. excellent. Thank you. Everything's a kaleidoscope image. And then suddenly, it's the photograph. for your neurodiversity. Oh, God, my job is exactly that. My job is so I'm an admin in the School of Medicine. and I got this job because my friend needed help and I needed health insurance, and he liked me, you know. Not because I have tremendous admin skills which I do not. This is not my field. This is not my expertise and my job is to hold in memory. Multiple tasks across long periods of time involving multiple people with. And the tasks are almost identical, but not quite so and it's just it's kind of my worst nightmare, like I just, you know, here schedule schedule a meeting sometime in October for these 7 executives. you know, like. And these people, can't they? They don't have 15 min that overlap, you know. and yeah, just all of the kind of like project management sort of things that I end up having to do, and there's nothing I can do about it. You know I can make all the lists in the world, which is kind of my primary coping mechanism. You know. I try to keep my environment as tidy as possible. I have very, very bright post. It's for the things that I absolutely can't, you know, like handle right this minute, but need to remember. But I will end up, you know, that becomes just part of the noise at some point. And I struggle. It's like it's these things sound so simple and they seem. you know, it's not a well paying position, because most people would be able to do this job. And I really struggle. my contributions tend to be more in the creative and content driven areas. you know, assign me documentation. I'll do that in heartbeat. I'm good research, great, happy, happy to do that. You know. Edit. Your Powerpoint got it, you know. Reorganize your stuff. but what it comes down to the stuff that I'm really hired to do is. It's miserable, and it takes me forever, and God help me if someone walks through the office door when I'm in the middle of it. It's I may or may not get back to it that day, because something else may now seem more important. And then I'll start all over again the next day with another list, and hope that I got everything from the day before. And yeah, that I looked up the God! I forgot the acronym, the it's like employment, something that has that sort of maintains the accommodations for different disabilities, and I looked up both ADHD and just executive function. you know, disorders. And yeah, I mean, it's basically make lists that's kinda like, here's some software to help you make lists. But I will forget that I have the software. I will use it for a week, and then something will happen, and then I will forget that it exists back to making a paper list. So yeah, it's a yeah. There's not a lot you can do when that's just the job. So So my actual field. I'm a writer and editor. I edit novellas for a publisher in New York, and I have been editing a magazine for the past 3 years. It's about to finish its run in October. I've been working in that field for

13 years, but it's not one that really pays. And you don't. You know it's freelance, and it's either volunteer or freelance one or the other. So you know you don't help insurance out of that. And our little corner tanked during the pandemic. So I was. That's why I ended up getting a day job again, because I hadn't had one in a few years and I'll tell you that community holy crap! The majority isn't very diverse, like everybody gets it. Everybody understands everybody's either autistic or ADHD, or some combination of the 2 plus. There's depression and anxiety, you know. I don't know if you include that neurodiversity or not. But oh, you do. Oh, okay, yes. Also. major depressive disorder over here. so yeah, like, it's the neurotypicals are the weird ones like we just don't understand how they and they're usually in a in a managing editor position. And we're so grateful because there's no way we could keep all of those balls in the air at once. and yeah, like So one of my friends who is writing full-time, and actually the one that lives in Columbia who we moved here for and she and I were just online every day, and just kind of commiserating about how hard it suddenly had become. And she's autistic. Her husband has ADHD but he thrives using like exactly the right role for him. So he just gets to hyper focus all day on the thing he loves, which is great. I think we should all have that But yeah, I mean there was never. There was never a moment where either of us were like, oh, I don't know what you mean by that, like, what experience are you having like? It was just everyone. Everyone in our lives was and have been like again every time I go to a convention. Everybody gets it. and the new ones who are just, you know, entering the field. you know. Part of it is, you know, finding the people who have the same creative interest that you do. And that's great. But I think there's also a real sense of like, oh, these people really understand me on a different level. And you know, I found my people. and I don't know if that's just like. or whatever people tend to be creative, I think. In general. a yeah. That's a good question. I don't even know that it's, you know. True. You know, empirically. It might not be, it just seems. Let me know it's my observation. There, there, I'm sure there are plenty of creative, neurotypical people. And I can't think of any more diverse people who are not yeah, why is that? I don't know. I think we are. I don't know. We I think maybe we're forced to interpret the world in in various ways to try to make it make sense and allow us to function within it, and maybe that maybe there's something about that that makes us one reflect that interpretation back at the world, and whatever our chosen medium is Or maybe it's just that we're curious and constantly distracted. And there's something you know, I mean, right? Writing is great. And it's never come easy for me. a. I was kind of on a good trajectory with that before I started editing for money. How that kind of derailed that but it was hard, you know. You sit down. You're kinda like staring at the blank screen. And I mean you. You write right, you're you have to do it as part of your job, and that blank page can be really intimidating. And it was always hard to get into that kind of routine when it comes to like visual media. Oh, my God, I will just lose days if there's something tactile, something visual. yeah, time stops existing. yeah. Yeah. I wish I could do that for money. Now. So great my health insurance and health insurance. I mean, just in my family, my household. My dad never understood. He yeah. He was just mad at me all the time, because I didn't. I just didn't function the way he thought I should. I was interested in things that he was not interested in and didn't do well in the subjects that he did, and math in particular, was a nightmare for me, and he's an accountant and an accountant of the old school variety where you know this is before excel. So it was a really long sheet of paper with little tiny spaces, and if someone was like, well, I'd like to project a different number. He had to go in with an eraser and recalculate every column, and he absolutely correct every time. So that's not me. That kind of precision is not in my makeup. And so yeah, I mean, I definitely, always felt misunderstood within my adoptive family. They? They just didn't understand how I functioned. I didn't have the same. I didn't see anything the same way. I didn't excel in the same ways. I didn't struggle in the same ways. And you know, aunts

and uncles were always very kind about it. But my But it was also still very clear that I was adopted. Anyone wants to have nature versus nurture conversation. I've got opinions. cause I'm just like my real family, my whole family. yeah. a. And I mean, I think you know, in any work role as well anytime. I've had, you know, a similar job to this, like Early, you know, in my early twenties, I you know, held various like bookkeeping. And whatever those kind of low-level office positions. yeah, it, you know. It seems like it should be easy. My boss here at the School of Medicine has been great like he understands these things. So when I told him. Look, I'm really struggling. Here's what's going on with me. I really have a hard time doing this job. And here's why I really wanna do well at it. But you know he he's been really great about it, you know. He understands, and he accepts that I'm not gonna be the high powered like personally, you know, executive assistance that he wanted. Maybe but Most of the time they don't understand that it's looked at as a personal failing, so did that answer the question. I don't know. I feel like you're looking for. Someone Oh, I mean, yeah, the obvious one that we're lazy. you know. We're lazy. We're stupid. We don't care about anyone but ourselves. Because we're seeing staring off into space. And we're supposed to be doing something. We're very busy when we're staring off into space. There's a lot going on there. yeah, I mean, the laziness is the big one, you know. You hear that your whole life. that if we would just focus that, we're that we're doing it on purpose, that we can change this, we can control this if we just, you know, did something that they do. yeah. And we internalize that, you know. I say, we I of course I can't speak for everyone except that I've heard so many other people, you know, say the same thing. You know we internalize that, and we believe it until someone tells us it's not the case until someone at 40 years old told me that. No, that's not the case. You're fine. Yes, this isn't. You're not broken. You're just, you know you're different. And you're not a bad person. You're not a lazy person. You're a person with a disability, you know. That's a huge that's huge. So Yeah, yeah, I think so. Yeah, I would call it a professional community. But also, yeah, most of my friends are in there. And yeah, I think so. Here in town. Not so much. My social circle has not really grown much. I have one Science Fiction book club that I attend. But it's me 2 psychiatrists, 2 psychologists, a real estate magnate, and some high level. It guy. So none of them neuro diverse category, I think. a well, maybe they do. Not that I've seen. Not that I would have detected But yeah, so I don't. Again, I feel like my boss understands me. And then my sort of secondary boss, who's about to become my primary boss, is also my friend. So that's a little complicated, but you know he gets it. He's a psychologist, so he has some understanding. my husband's somewhere on the spectrum, we don't know quite where, but definitely not the same spot that I am. And he's very understanding as well. though he does not, you know, share the same struggles. Don't you know, we kind of go back and forth on this one because he's worked freelance. Basically his whole professional career. And he has managed to design his life in a way that really kind of accommodates. how he functions! to the point that, like it, I thought it was being silly, but he bought a roll of black masking tape. What is that for? Well, the glare or the reflection around the bezel on the TV drives me crazy. I'm like what? And he went over with the black masking tape, and oh, my God! The sense of relief, the release of tension that I didn't even realize was there. I didn't know that I was noticing this like very slight reflection on the bezel of the freight TV. So he's managed to do that for himself. He notices what's bothering him, and he fixes it. He gets rid of it. but they're very small things like that. So again, I feel like there's gotta be some kind of you know. He's on the spectrum somewhere. So hmm! I So something comes to mind, except that I did not have a diagnosis at the time. so I didn't. I didn't know what I was overcoming. I just knew that I had overcome something. but in my mid twenties I was a you know, computer hobbyist at a time when the Internet was still very new and the web consisted of almost nothing. And I was just really interested in how networking worked. And I had met some people online who knew and I had

the opportunity to well, someone that I had worked with at one of the worst jobs I ever had, which was completing mortgage documents which are the most tedious, most boring, and yet must be so precise things you could possibly encounter in your life, and of course, obviously not the job for me. but someone in IT that I had been talking to there left, and had gone to Ericsson, who had recently bought a datacom company based where I lived. That was like at the time the only competitor to Cisco. Obviously, Cisco won that fight. But he said, you know, we're having trouble filling seats. I know you're interested in this. You want to come interview? And I said, Yes, of course I'd love to And I you know it was a group interview, probably first group interview I'd ever done. I, you know, didn't do great, you know. But I said, You know I really am interested in this, and tell me what I need to learn, and I'll go learn it. And they said, Okay, and they gave me a list. And so I did that I went back, and I studied, which is not an easy thing for me to do. I again didn't know why, but you know it helps when it's you know, something I'm interested in. But it was definitely some like high level stuff that does not sit in my brain easy. very kind of abstract you know, Internet protocols and that But I went back 3 months later and I interviewed again. They and I got the job. And I was the first woman in the Systems Integration team at Ericsson Dnip and I got to spend the next 3 years testing wide area network routers and reading Rfcs for fun and yeah, I mean it. It was really hard. It was a really hard job again, like hard in in some of the same ways as this one is but just because there's a lot of detail that you have to kind of remember and keep in. Keep organized and apply correctly. But I was really proud of myself that I was able to get that job and keep that job? because it was hard, you know yeah and yeah, when I look back now, it's like, Wow, I that I had to do a lot of things that do not come naturally to me in order to accomplish that. So Oh. oh, I think about that all the time. Yeah, I really do. I just I feel like the way the world works is not. It's not designed for us. everything from education to the way we silo tasks in in a business environment. And I don't know how to redesign that I mean for. So what my one of my kids is definitely I mean, I thought ADHD, but I think later on she got a as an adult. She got an autism diagnosis. But I had put her in Montessori, because that would have been life changing for me, you know. That's a great way for people like us to learn, you know. and she thrived there and then was miserable when she went back into regular public school. but I mean it. Yeah, it's just. It's a huge question. I feel like, I mean, maybe what you're doing will help But I don't know what the reach is. Gonna be, you know, when you're dealing with a in each group like, you know, gamers which so many of us are already diverse, you know. a. I mean I love the I love the idea. And I do want to go check out those games that you listed. I hadn't played any of them, so I didn't, you know, volunteer for that part. So but I do want to go check those out because it sounds really interesting. I don't know. I feel like I don't know if understanding or so port is possible in a generation. but I feel like there's gotta be a way to redesign the way that we function in an office. And maybe there are examples out there that I'm not aware of where even the person who has to schedule the calendar invites gets to contribute creatively, you know. I guess that's on my mind right now, because I actually requested that and was shot down so It was told that I should limit my aspirations to being a better admin. So while he understands he does not. He does not want me to leave my lane so. yeah. I don't know. That's a tough one. If you get good answers, I really want to hear them be able to make any of your data public. But yeah, I'd be really curious. I would be very curious to know how other people and tackle these. how you tackle them. I'd love to hear your thoughts. but I think that's not how it works. So Hmm. hmm! I guess just that one of the things that that I'm really curious about now. and have just become curious about it is like how this happens. In the first place, you know. Are we born this way? I think to some degree we are. But there's also, I know, some research into childhood trauma. Now that seems to indicate that our brains form differently, depending on you know our early experiences in life and if that's the case,

that's something maybe we could address, you know. so I yeah, I don't know. I don't know where the research stands on all of that right now. again. It really just occurred to me a couple of days ago, and start thinking about that and looking into it, I guess cause my therapist brought. Harris is very trauma focused not something I've ever been but she's very like, let's look at this and then I think I came across an article about that. Yeah, I subscribe to one of those you know, ADHD newsletters or something. So I don't know if that's relevant to you or anything that you're going to be doing? I guess I just bring it up, cause it is something that I would like to know about myself and about why we have this huge population of people who have trouble functioning in this society. And is there anything we can do about it beyond completely changing the society. I'd love to find a solution from either direction or both. But yeah, yeah.

## **Haley:**

Oh. wow, that's a great question that I was not prepared for. the story that captures my experience with neuron diversity. Yeah. So it's easier for me to answer that question because I don't. I don't have a particular story that pops in the mind. it's more of a series of life events. So as far as you know, someone asked me like, what does it mean to me to be not a virgin. I'm like, well, everyone's experience is different. But for me. things that I particularly experience is I have trouble processing multiple sources of audio. At the same time. like, for example, I was doing data collection, and my boss was trying to talk to me while we were in a room full of screaming children, and I was just like, I'm sorry I can't have a conversation right now, and he was so confused. And he didn't get it. and you know, Tim, blindness affects my daily life. you know, like I zone out a lot. So when I was a kid, you know. they call me a daydreamer. They used to call me the walking dictionary because I was always walking around reading a book because we weren't allowed to play video games at school. So I was always reading because I had to keep myself distracted or otherwise, you know, occupied in order to pay attention to other things. So I would say that probably the most the way that things the most negatively affected me. is probably the rigid rejection sensitive just for you associated with ADHD. so like the timeliness. Wasn't that big of a deal in like high school undergrad. I was always able to rally and do things last minute and still perform extremely well. I would say that in grad school I had to get a lot better at managing that time blindness, because now I can't do things last minute and still perform well, because this is a much higher level. I would say that I always struggled to create and maintain friendships throughout my life. In fact. I didn't really have friends until I got to college. I just like. Didn't understand the unwritten social rules of high school. and like people just thought I was weird and didn't really want to be friends with me. I didn't follow roles that I didn't understand why they existed right? If someone told me to do something. I would ask why. and if the explanation was not adequate, I would not do it. And you know. So I made friends in college with other people that are related to a lot more. so I was in engineering. And I, finally. you know, have people with similar interest that has the had similar behaviors that I did. and I made a lot of friends then, and what I figured out in my is that all of my closest friends. our neurodivers, in some way, because we just kind of understand each other better. And so that's not something that we all necessarily knew when we became friends. But I'm realizing that the happy, healthy friendships in my life are mostly other people who are neuro diverse because they don't have the same hang ups when it comes to Why

did you do her say this? You know. people used to tell me I have no filter. I just say whatever pops into my head. which is pretty accurate a lot of the times. I think one of the reasons that I had so much trouble making friends in high school is because I would to say whatever popped in my head. And people don't like that. they think it's rude and so that led to a lot of like self censoring and people pleasing behaviors like you know, like saying something, and then being like, Oh, I didn't mean it this way. I meant that. you know, like kind of this constant feeling of being misunderstood and feeling the need to explain myself and one of the most free things that I experienced within this past year. One of my newer friends. She's a parent, and I said something about parenting in general that I realized right after I said it could be interpretive as negative towards her right. And so then I back on, and I was like, Oh, no, I didn't mean you're a bad parent. I'm sure you're an excellent parent. I just meant that, like all of these things make it like really difficult, you know, and she was like. hold up! Hold up! You do not have to apologize or explain yourself to me. I did not assume that you meant anything bad by that. I'm not. Gonna assume that you mean something when you say something else. I'm just gonna take what you say for what? What it says. And that was just like this huge wave of relief like. you know, these are my people. I don't have to police myself around my near under virgin friends, because they inherently understand that, like I say what I mean, and I don't have any underlying meeting. that was I don't know if I answered your question or not. my biggest comp, my biggest coping mechanism is avoidance. Right? So if I'm uncomfortable, I leave But if I'm at work I can't really do that right. so like when I'm around my family. and that makes me uncomfortable. So I insist on driving my own car everywhere when I visit home. so that I have the freedom to leave if I need to leave But when I'm in a work situation. So repeat the question because I had a thought. I feel trapped. If it's if it's a situation where I can't walk away. I feel trapped. I feel stifled, you know. Sometimes I'll start to panic. I'll go really hard on masking. you know. and do my best. You know I am. I am capable of handling things like that. But it takes a toll right? So My biggest accommodation that makes that is made. The biggest difference in my life is the ability to work remotely. And that's something that my program that's really what was But when I have things that forced me to be in person. which was really my whole life before 2,020 right? I realized that my quality of life and my ability to perform increased so much once I was able to work from home. because, having the control over my environment. being able to take my time and decompress when I'm task switching task switching, made a huge difference. But yeah, when like when some when I tell someone, you know, I have trouble with multiple sources of audio at the same time, and they keep talking to me. Anyway. it makes me feel invalidated. It makes me feel not heard. It makes me feel misunderstood. It makes me feel like I don't belong. absolutely. I actually wrote a paper that has some good references on masking. I'm just gonna pull that up real quick, so that I can. let's see. that was one moment. So my structured okay. masking refers to hiding one's authentic self in order to gain greater social acceptance, a common coping mechanism for neuro divergent individuals. According to Dr. Sasha Hammondi, 2,023 board certified psychiatrists and ADHD clinical specialists, masking involves conscious and unconscious methods of camouflaging symptoms by mimicking behaviors of neurotypical people. I thought that was such a great definition. So, Dr. Hermandi, I actually follow her Instagram for a couple of years. And then I realized that she actually wrote a book. And so I bought the book and I started reading it. And that's where I found her definition. And I really like it. So I'm gonna continue using it. Yeah. So masking and boss, conscious and unconscious methods of camouflaging symptoms. So that's more about masking, but more about masking for me individually. It is most of my life I didn't realize that's what I was doing. I didn't realize that other people don't have to try that hard to get other people to like them. And that was kind of mind blowing. I was like, this is just how you are like. okay? And then you think right, well, what's wrong with just being how I am.

And then what you realize is that like the people that really care about you. do you like you just how you are Absolutely. So I had another boss in the last year who laid out an expectation. So for context, I had 2 different jobs that school year. and one of them was the situation that I spoke of earlier, where. you know, I felt a little invalidated right? And this person also had said something to me like Well, everyone experiences that when I was talking about executive dysfunction. and that made me so mad. But of course I can say thing, because that's my boss. Right? What am I gonna do? Call him out? No. their consequences. So a time that I felt really supported was my other boss for the other job that I had that semester we were brand new working together. She didn't know me that. Well. We had just met. and she was setting expectations for the coming year. expectations, you know. She was really excited for me to have an in person office down the hall from her. and I said, Oh, that's okay. I don't need an office. And she was just kinda you could tell she was kind of like taken aback, like she thought I'd be really excited about that right. And She was like. Oh, well, how are you gonna do your hours here? And so then that led into a whole conversation, where I explain to her that I have ADHD. and that I do much better working from home than I do in person, and I explained that like, if there's anything that she needs me to be there in person, for I'm happy to do that. But I would prefer not to have scheduled hours that were in person, so that I could just run with my focus and do my projects at my own pace and she just accepted that immediately. She didn't question me. She didn't. She didn't try to talk me into being in person. She didn't try to talk me into taking the office. she just said, oh, I didn't realize that. Thank you for sharing that with me. I understand. And that's no problem. in shock a little bit. You know, I had never had anybody just except what I told them in relation to a work thing like I've always had to justify and give other reasons other than my narrow divergency other than you know, but she literally just listen to me. paid attention to what I said, and then accepted my response, and that was just the best Oh, there's a lot of those. great. Yeah, for sure. Okay. Situations where I've been misunderstood. And what was the other were excluded, excluded, and misunderstood. Right? Umhm. okay, so basically. like all of elementary and high school. you know, people would just kind of avoid me like they would, they would group off, and you know, I would try to join the groups, you know, but like it was kind of like when you walk up and everyone goes silent like that happened a lot like they didn't want. They didn't want me to hear what they were talking about, because they thought that. you know they knew that. I speak a lot without thinking right? So if it was private is something I didn't want to be shared other times. They just didn't want me to be a part of whatever they were doing. you know, and that's just something that I kind of got used to early on But The results of that is that because I didn't have those formative friendships and relationships at that age where you're supposed to be learning how to people. I had severely delayed development. because of that. So like that means that you know those mistakes that people always make when they're teenagers right? I didn't have that experience until college. and so I lost some friends that were very important to me at that time, because I didn't understand the consequences of my actions. And like how I did things. I really struggled, forming and maintaining relationships. I didn't date anybody until I was 21, and I feel like I'm just now in a place where I could. being a healthy relationship. But that was like such a especially dating such a huge learning curve that like I didn't start on at the normal time. If that makes sense. So now I'm in my thirties. and I don't know how to be in a relationship which is fine. I have a lot of love and acceptance from my friends. and I'm pretty happy in general, like I'm much happier than I would be had I gotten married in my twenties like I wanted to thank goodness that didn't happen. Well, I think that one of the most important things that we're kind of already doing is awareness right? So another thing is that, like, I wasn't super socially aware. and so I don't know the last, like 5 or 6 years of, you know, like big systemic problems like racism, etc. Right? So you know, I kind of grew up in a little

bubble. And I was like, Oh, this is. people aren't racist anymore. No, no, people are still very racist. And there's still a lot of hate towards the rainbow, mafia, and all that stuff. So I don't draw on that a whole lot because it's very impressing. But And the great thing about social media becoming bigger is that there's so many short informational videos on these topics. on neuron divergency. People talking about their experiences with different neuro emergencies. And that's really helped. that's helped show what other people's experiences are like. That's made me feel less alone. That's made me feel We're understood in general. I think awareness has helped a lot. but I think maybe more important than well, not more important necessarily. But another important thing is that follows up with that awareness is policies that actually help right working from home should be an accommodation that I can. You know. just close to my employer that I have 80 each day, and this is the accommodation I need, and then they have to do that instead of like begging for this accommodation. Right? I've been very fortunate over the past couple of years that everyone has been pretty understanding and kind of just given me what I asked for, because I do my job well, you know, and or even that I can work from home effectively. But you know, I think awareness. policy. education, really? we shouldn't have to hunt down videos on the Internet to become educated about neurodiversity. And how in our diverse individuals experience things that should be part of learning about how people are different in general at a younger age. Right? So there's a really good offer. of children's books. I can't remember what his last name is, but his first name is Scott, and he wrote like my shadow is Peak hero. My shadow is purple. So these are children's books that it explain what it's like to be trans. or to be I can't remember the entire book. But the plot was basically there was a little boy who like to wear dresses, and my shadow is pink, right? And He was trying to explain to his dad that you know he just liked to wear dresses. He preferred to wear dresses. and it was such a sweet. good book, right? So I feel like it would be great if from a younger age we could teach children about neurodiversity in the same way. And I know that there are some books like that that do exist. I don't know. I don't know how prevalent that is because I don't have children. I don't work with children. I found out about these other books on Instagram. but yeah, that's kind of my thoughts on that. I don't know if I answered your question, or if I just kept remaining. Oh, that is a good one. Misconceptions or stereotypes that I find to be particularly harmful. yeah, that ADHD doesn't exist, that people are just lazy. Right? I was today, years old when I realized that when other people say that they are being lazy. It means that they can do the thing, but they don't want to. I thought that that being lazy was when I couldn't do something that I was trying very hard to do. And I relate to that a lot because. you know, sometimes my brain just won't do what I need it to do. And now that I have access to the medication, I mean, that helps a lot. But you know, it's hard. It's hard to find executive dysfunction. and you know it's like I'll have 2 or 3 days a week where I just work for like 12 or 14 h straight, and I get all my stuff done and I barrel ahead, and it's super productive. But then, for those days. those 2 or 3 days in a row is are immediately followed by burnt out by not functioning for a day or 2, which really it's really hard, because, you know, we still have meetings we still have. You know, we still have to show up for things. even when we're feeling that way. And I I guess this misconception that ADHD is just an excuse to be lazy. or that it's not real, or that it's You know that sort of thing. that entirely depends on the situation. so I don't like loud noises. large group settings with a lot of background audio are hard. but you know I'm fine with people just coming up to me and starting conversation, saying, Hi. It makes me feel good. if it's in a work context where I have to be prepared to answer a certain way, and I can't just wing it right. So like. if I'm meeting you and we're just chatting, and it's not urgent or important, right? But if it's in a work context or like, you need an action item for me. I really struggle with herbal instructions like this entire interview. You know you asked me a question. I asked you what was the question again did I answer it? you know. if it

involves any form of instructions. I need it to be written down. if it's in a a work context, right? This is a low stakes, low pressure thing. So you know it's fine for me to ask you to repeat yourself, but some people get really frustrated when you ask them to repeat themselves. And they don't wait for you to take notes. They say the whole thing again quickly. so in a work context. I want time to be scheduled. I want to know what's happening so that I can be prepared for it. I want an email with scheduled time. preferably with questions. And I need to have answers prepared for basically anything where the consequences are high. I want scheduled time information ahead of time preparation. as far as people approaching me in public don't sneak up behind me That really makes me jump when people like walk behind me and stuff I don't know why it's not like I have any actual bad experiences with that. But yeah, I think I answered the question. All right. Oh, good, good! So in that context, I think the most important thing is that the Npcs model appropriate responses to you're in divergent people's works and necessary accommodations. Right? So I think that whichever direction that goes the important part is that the appropriateness is more or the appropriate responses are modeled. a lot of people just don't know how to respond. And it's easier to avoid us. so yeah, and I think that there should be. It all depends on what age group your audiences. Right? If this is for adults, then I think doing gloom is absolutely realistic, like, I think that something like. I don't know if you've ever played Gosh! I'll find the link and send it to you. But it's basically like you're trying to survive on no budget. And this empathy. And oh, it's called spent. It's called spent. Yeah. So something like that for someone with a narrative version playing in that and like having to overcome these things. That would be a great way to teach empathy to adults. And you know, Garner, more understanding, putting them in that situation themselves and then limiting what they can do about it. based on available accommodations, would be a great mechanism for adults, and would quickly teach them, like the reality of these things. but if we're talking about a younger audience. you know, middle schoolers, young teenagers. I would focus more on maybe less something less serious, some mistakes Great not at the moment. But if I think of anything, I will send you an email because a lot of times I'll remember something later that I'm like, oh, I should have said this.

## **George:**

Hmm. I think I might need more prompting like a positive story. Negative story, any kind of story. Hmm. yeah. yes, I can do that. I will also add OCD to the list because I forgot that earlier and it's relevant to my story. So I just think that I move about the world with a lot of extra operating tasks running in the background, compared to a lot of other people, is kind of how I describe it. As I move through everything that I do with a sort of several extra layers of lenses that I think embody my neurodiversity, and just or just ever present, not not always bad, not always good but just always influencing what I do, how I think and how I exist, how I respond, how I react and just how I go about my day to day life. Really, it's the metaphor of just yeah. I've got a couple of extra tasks always influencing my Mo. When you, when you say you go throughout your day with those extra tests are you talking about like in an internal monologue, telling you that you need to do extra tasks or not necessarily an internal monologue. It's just that I'm generally often aware of like extra things that I will have to do, or that the way I am thinking about going about something is as a result of my neuro divergence, just from like my day to day routines. How I approach my job how I approach my

relationships. it's just yeah. It's always something that's ever present and sort of pushing me to do things in one in in my own particular way, to satisfy what would feel best to me is like the most efficient way I know how to do things is because of my narrow divergence, a weird metaphor that are not accommodating to your neurodiversity. I try to avoid them. I generally know what those triggers are going to be and what environments are going to be uncomfortable and or hostile. and so I often will put myself into situations where I know that I can make those accommodations, or that those accommodations will be provided to me because I just stop being able to function in a lot of discomforting spaces. whether that's by dissociating panic attacks and things like that, and just having to remove myself. Or oh, really. willing to share some examples. Sure. So, thinking about it from like my job, I can talk about it in a couple of ways my job. I took a job where I could work from home a majority of the time, because I work better at home. When I go to conferences. I know I need to, you know, room with myself or a peer who understands myinary divergence I need to always be aware of like what my obligations are when I can take rest, when I cannot be in those situations. Ha! You know, have a lot of self. Talk about. It's okay. If you leave you can you can. You can. You can always go if it gets bad. Social situations that something, too. I prefer to do things close to my home. I prefer to do it in places I have been before, so that I'm not uncomfortable or overstimulated in a new environment while trying to socially engage with people. so it goes the same for work, too. I think that my department right now is particularly accommodating. And again, that's a large reason why I am working in the place that I am is because anytime I'm just like, no. today's a bad brain day. I don't have it. No spoons. They're like, Yeah, I get it. That's fine. You do what you need to do in order to either be productive or to rest whatever your body and brain needs. And that's really nice. It takes off so much of the like negative self talk and the pressure and the doubt that I feel that often comes with being neuro divergent in a professional setting, and has allowed me to just be more comfortable with my own productivity, feel supported. you know, and have people understand that just sometimes you just don't got it. the leeway or reassign a task to someone else. That's helpful, it is, and also just treating me like in it. Autonomous adults be like, yeah, we know you're an adult. You know the best ways for you to be handling what you need. So yeah, we'll let you do that and offer you the support that we are able to. in many ways, not in others. Oh, yeah, absolutely thinking back to grad school. My adviser was just not at all accommodating to doing things outside of a very rigid. always in person, always like this. Always, you know, a very neurotypical work. I don't even know if that there is a quintessential neurotypical experience. But everything that she was about was so antithetical to the way I was able to do things like I need to work in the mornings. She wanted us to have all our meetings in the in the evenings and afternoon, and then by that point in the day I'm spent She wanted us to always be in person. She wanted us to like be in situations where I was always very uncomfortable, very overstimulated. And I yeah, demand work in ways that we're not productive to me. And I just was shut down most of the time struggling to meet those demands. Oh, God, I mean my self efficacy just tanked my impostor syndrome. you know, was through the roof. I an inverse relationship. I just had no confidence I was always anxious and depressed. always, you know. Second, guessing myself, I was angry much of the time. I think that the only reason I got through my program was on spite. That was how I could channel my energy into something. And it was just. I think the hardest part was just seeing somebody knowing that they were perceiving me in a way that was so counter to my own identity as someone who does good work and is capable of good work. And you know. I think I'm pretty smart and just like the constant berating and like a questioning of my intelligence identity, productivity, you know. like this idea of laziness. it just yeah. It made me feel really bad all the time. Was that your question kind of forgot? yeah, yeah, absolutely. Being misunderstood is probably the thing that impacts my emotions most significantly. I just I find it

very difficult when people are misunderstanding me or like assigning their own ideas of me that are counter to my own beliefs of self. I just find that disintegrating as an experience Hmm. I think that there's something on the positive sign, radical about moving through the world in the way that is good for you. And again I am afforded the opportunities to do this. I have a lot of privilege. I am in a job that allows me to do this. I am in relationships that allow me to do this, and it feels I mean almost empowering to be existing in those spaces. it's sort of anti-capitalist spaces where nerds, virgins is not a negative and most of my friends are also nerd to virgin, which helps It's when I am forced into these situations of. you know, having to mask a lot having to. if I even understand the dynamics that are present in the situation at all. Sometimes they escape me. Just that discomfort that I feel of like off fuck. This isn't, you know, my day to day. This isn't the people who I'm usually around that accept me so positive. I think it's very cool sucks. That's not. Everybody thinks so. Hmm! Probably yellow and orange and red colors of the sun. dark drowning blue. Yeah. I don't really have too many negative experiences. I both my parents are. I think, nerd, divergent. they are not formally diagnosed, being of the boomer generation that does not go to therapy, etc. Sometimes my nerd diversions and my mom's can be a little tense between us. but I don't know how much of that is in our divergence, and how much of that is just a parent child dynamic within my relationships. Everybody's pretty understanding. it can be a challenge. Again, it's these misalignments like, I am a very have to be organized, scheduled, rigid routine to be successful person, whereas one of my partners is much more sporadic and spontaneous. always late. And so that is an issue when we have to come together to get things done. whereas you know. Yeah, so. But on their side of it my rigid schedule can be difficult for them to. you know. tailor themselves, too. And then I'm also extremely kind of chaotic and forgetful. And we'll forget a lot of things if I don't have that structure. But it it's really just with good communication. We really get through it pretty easily. again, being able to surround myself with accommodating and understanding. People goes a long way. I think when you're clear, it just happens to be perfectly honest. I'm not trying to make any, you know, sort of essentialist connections between neuro divergence and queerness, but I think politically they are of the same sort of, you know, unbreaking of boxes sort of outlook on life. And so queerness and neuro divergence I feel like are compatible perspectives in life. And so. yeah, all, my friend, all my friends, are clear and most get rid of capitalism. oh, really, I just think about like production, like bodies, labor capitalism, like the rigid systems of work and labor, are so antithetical to a lot of people's needs abilities and preferences, whereas, like, yeah, I get it, we have to do things for society to function, but we could be a lot more accommodating of letting people do things within their own way. And again, it's this whole idea of like, we are responsible, autonomous adults just because we don't work in the same way as somebody else does not mean that our work should not be valued or is poor poorly done so? You know I do think one of the things that has come out of the pandemic is this sort of harder? Look at these structures of you know, management oversight working from home accommodations, disability. It has brought that more to the foreground, and I think that some good changes have come out of that, and I'd like to see it continue like that. In my own particular sphere, it is not being lost. And this is, you know, something that you know, we just. We have conversations regularly about is, Okay, well, we were doing it this way during the pandemic. should we start, you know, having these mandatory in person things? How do we, you know, find that balance of accountability and flexibility? and I just think people are much more open to the conversations now. And so, even if we are trying to figure out ways to be, you know, to get some different structure, you know, pre pandemic structures back. It's with this new lens. that is a lot more inclusive. So yeah. Yeah, that's why I went back. And it was like, Oh, yeah, don't forget to add OCD, because that is the one I think. I have that is most frequently misrepresented. I think. OCD, as ADHD is often

misrepresented. This idea of just this. you know. hyper, vigilant. nervous. vibrating with you know, an you know, anxious intensity. Person? like. Yeah, it can be disruptive in that way. But that's not the entirety of my experience with ADHD euro. CD, and it's not this like. have to be clean afraid of germs. Person like this can be manifestations of. you know the internal narrative in your head, but that's not what it is. yeah, I mean, I think it would just be a question of feel like, Hey, Bud, like, look at this product that you're putting out. How much did you actually know about these diagnosis, and like what the lived experience of ADHD or OCD. Actually is when you constructed this character, I'd encourage them to think about what harms are you perpetuating in doing this? And also, I'm not a big fan of the idea of like putting neuro divergence as somebody's entire personality trait and making it a story. right? It's kind of like the whole, like queer character conundrum like it's great to have canonically queer characters, because representation is important, but if that is the only, that's not the only facet of somebody's identity, right? Like the stories about like, Oh, God! Here's a queer person they have trauma. The queer trauma is the story of this TV show book, etc., etc. when life is a lot more complex than that. And it doesn't always have to be about trauma. whether it's about neuro divergence or queerness. intentionally. some. VR like it's not one. I don't know if I would call it a game as much as a simulation I've done. VR. Simulations where it's like, what is it like to be. you know, a person with autism, you know. What is it like to be overstimulated? And I've done some of those as far as video games. I think that often we I don't know if this is the global, we but I tend to ascribe themes of queerness or divergence to characters where it may not necessarily exist. yeah. So in the I think you and I both played the last campfire. Yeah. And I don't believe that there were intentional themes of neuro divergence or queerness in it. But as I was playing it was really helpful for me. As a way to process. PTSD. and so I was actually thinking about it as like a trauma recovery sort of lens and a working through trauma and, like, you know, mindfulness and meditative game, even though I don't believe it was structured to be like that. And I thought it was a yeah. So I put my own meaning towards it in a way that was helpful for me. I think it's more is like, I can interpret the story that the game may or may not be trying to tell, and like, like extrapolate my own experiences and connect it to my own experiences. trying to think because it's been a while since I've played it like the themes in last campfire were about death. But often there were you would encounter these characters. that were unreachable. You were not able to help them like you heard their story. You heard that they were struggling? but you weren't able to help them as a character like that was just a non playable action. And the point that I sort of like framed on that was like, you know, yeah. like as much as sometimes I do want to help people as much as it is in my nature to care. Take people, especially people who have had trauma. That is also an independent journey that they are on and you can't force it until you know they are also ready. So I saw it both in terms of like myself, as a character, but also the Npc. You know, who was experiencing trauma and like, was I self isolating. And I was like, Oh, man, yeah, I've been there. I know exactly what that experience is like Do you mind if I Google it just to refresh my memory to see if I have played any ones that are intentional. Let's see. So this is not coming up in the Google search. But I'm thinking of every like academic that's ever been portrayed at a video game ever. So you get 2 versions right? You get the mad scientist, and then you get the very hyper diligent almost to the point of not really being able to perceive other people's feelings academic. And I think both of those characters are directed. Version. Even if it is just coded. I'm still looking to see. I think a lot of Npcs are coded in a divergent. yeah, I'm not seeing anything as far as intent characters that I have knowingly. You ask this, the crazy person and video games. Have you seen that? yeah, anybody with these over the top stereotypical autistic identities? again, what is our conception of their divergence. I do believe that they are scripted to embody many of the stereotypes associated with it with people who have

experienced trauma PTSD people who may be OCD people with autism for sure. but again, I don't necessarily know that I would say, oh, yes, this is a nerd of urgent person, or I would be like, they have really written this with some stereotypes in mind. I mean, I think it's like with anything. There are some bad actors and some people who are doing very well. Some people who may not know that they're doing it intentionally well again can't speak for last Campfire if they knew what they were doing, but I thought that that was one of the most tender representations of trauma that I have ever seen in a game. but I do know that. Yeah, some people aren't sock. I mean, I yeah, I think I think there's all types. And I do enjoy that. There has been a more intentional push towards representations, especially of mental health in video games. If we can connect that to. You know, this sort of idea of neuro divergence. that, I think, is quite nice. Can you say a little more about that? Yeah, I just think I know there have always been games, you know, that are impactful and powerful and meant to be more emotional. but I do think that themes of mental health in games are becoming a lot more prevalent. queer in the you know off of those are queer games or queer coded or done by queer developers. so I think that that's nice. I'm thinking of, like. am I thinking of Celeste? Hmm! I think it. I think there's room for both. I think there's room for intentional representation in characters. But then I also think that there's room for sort of these again, more coded, or hmm like less defined identities, because again, it allows you to see yourself within the game without the parameter just being more explicit. And again, it's this whole like, I use this example all the time. Queer approaches versus queer identity. Like to be queer is one thing right? You hold a queer identity, but you can also, at the same time. and they're not, and they are can be exclusive, or you move through the world queerly. You have queer perspectives and queer outlooks on life, though you yourself may not hold a queer identity. And so when I think about coding, it's sort of like, yes, these characters can move through the game in these ways that are representative of experiences. perhaps not having that explicit identity. And I think that it's okay. I think there is room for both when it gets to like. Why didn't they? You know this person's clearly autistic. Why didn't they say that? What are they afraid of? I think it's can be more nuanced than that. representation. so I'm thinking about Celeste now, because I think that that's a more explicit example of like this is a character who is working through mental illness. and I think, yeah. the storylines are important to tell. I think storylines is probably one of the most important pieces of representation. Visual representation. I did like in the last campfire you could assign anybody non binary. I thought that was really nice. that was. And yeah. you could have like representation sliders for can't remember everything. But I've played multiple games where there's, you know, gender masculinity, femininity pronouns on a sort of like Slider basis, like present absent going one where they are, the other so like having the option for the person to insert themselves into games is a nice way to do representation right again, having that flexibility Yeah, but it's not the ability to co- construct a narrative in a video game? if that's not a game feature. just having multiple representations of people in games, I think, is important, whether that's through main characters or Npcs. and again, not sensationalizing or othering these characters, but just presenting them as hey. this is a and especially not making everybody with narrow divergence or queerness, evil or bad, or like. Oh, there goes someone! So, putting their foot in their mouth again. stereotype that, like autism, automatically means that you are a a genius, and right there. So we have the savon characters. so it goes both ways. So I am the kind of person that I can't watch sad movies. Listen to sad music like I'm I don't dig the knife in, you know, like how a lot of people really like to sit in an emotion that they're processing. I don't like to do that. I need to do the opposite, and so I find it reinforcing of my trauma and discomfort to play games that are darker, that are heavier, and that don't have regular infusions of positive experience and representation. So I don't particularly like games that are about exclusion. That force me to, you know, engage in situations that I have done a

lot of work to not be in So again, like thinking about last campfire like it was a sad story. but altogether it was kind, it was loving, it was positive it was comforting so like, even though it had not, I wouldn't say dark themes, but it had themes of loss and death and longing. It was still positive and motivational. It's like a therapy rather than explicit. Focus on like I don't know. I don't know if I'm making sense. I'm trying to conceptualize a game where I would be. I just I wouldn't want to play it. I think also, things that are important to gameplay. are the mechanics so thinking about like the actual construction of games. I find a lot of things visually and auditorially overwhelming. I need a lot of flexibility to turn things off so that I can play games to enjoy them, because I do have auditory processing sensitivity. less visual. It's my mine is much more auditory like. Sometimes I will be playing a game, and I will realize that I had been associating, and I am deeply uncomfortable. And I need to do like grounding exercises. And I'm like, Oh, it's because of the way you know, this game was constructed, or something like that. So that's something I'm always thinking about when I play games. for you.

## **Frankie:**

I think I could start with the types of friendships that I experience. I'm really close with a few other neuro diverse folks. And I've kind of struggled with maintaining friendships over the course of my life. But the people in my life now who know me and know me as the autistic me, and he unmasked me. really see me so. I think something that really captures that is my relationship with my best friend she and I can go yeah couple of weeks without talking, but then. when we do talk, we it could get through anything and everything and get to world piece by the end of the conversation. and it's not like just anything is surface level. Everything is really like down to the core of every kind of thing, driving everything, finding all the connections, and she and I think, in very similar ways. But we also have very different opinions on a lot of things. And so we end up having these really deep and philosophical conversations almost by accident. And it doesn't make a lot of sense to our neurotypical peers, the way that we communicate with each other. but there's just a sense of we get to explore these really big complex ideas with each other, and really to one some big stuff without having to filter or sensor anything. And I think I lived the majority of my life masking a lot. So by being able to have somebody who sees that and celebrates it with me, and is just really excited to be able to go on these deep dives with me. It's a really meaningful part of my life. Yeah, So I wasn't diagnosed or assessed for Autism. until I was 28 and I had been assessed for and diagnosed with ADHD when I was in my early twenties. but have been given all of these diagnoses beforehand that just like didn't quite fit, so like depression and bipolar. And there was, you know, a working idea of borderline for a while, but like that did never fit, and I was on all these medications, and I was doing all this therapy. And it just it wasn't right. It wasn't working. And the things, now that I've learned are autistic traits. Things like thinking really deeply about very small moments has been sort of pathologized by my treatment team in the past. And you know, people talk about like excessive rumination, or for separating And that's just the way that I make sense of the world, because there's so many things socially that completely go over my head that I want to understand all the way around something and through it and inside out. and know what to expect. But yeah, when we talk about masking I have for the majority of my life describe myself as kind of like a chameleon or a

shapeshifter and becoming sort of whoever needed to be in the room to either be accepted, be loved, be valued, be perceived in a positive light, and I didn't know that that was me just trying to blend in with other people to take the focus off of my discomfort, for where I was. After my assessment and diagnosis of Autism. I've spent a long time trying to figure out like, what is my real personality? What do I like? What are my interests, what things are important to me and a lot of the things that I did and had done were, and because other people told me that they were valuable, and not because I wanted to actually do them. You know most places aren't accommodating, even if they say they are. They only kind of scratch the surface. And you know, talk to you know, a hundred autistic folks. And there's going to be a hundred different combinations of support needs and sensory needs. So there's not ways to accommodate for every single support need in community spaces. But I think when we talk about accessibility. A lot of the stopping point is at like physical accessibility, so like wheelchair ramps. But even then, like there are so many places that have wheelchair ramps that lead directly to a flight of stairs or wheelchair ramps that lead directly to a you know a door that is inaccessible. So like. Oh, I think the thing that really stands out to me is how so many places in our community are talking about how they value disabled people, but they really don't. In a way that's meaningful. They're not really inclusive. For the variety of needs that we have. Yeah, I mean, like. In our home space, for example, like we could and can control a lot more than we can out in the world. I think a really good example of this for me is that I'm really sensitive to lights and sounds particularly like overhead fluorescent lights. They make me dizzy. They make me nauseous. They make my head like feel cloudy and my heart race when I am in I mean when I'm in spaces with overhead lights, I get just really nervous. So that I mean, think of any environment that has overhead fluorescent plates, like most places that or in the community, because it's just like what you do when you build a building. That's how you do it. And it makes me really uncomfortable. And so, you know, I can accommodate for that myself, but the responsibility is placed on me individually, as opposed to places that say that they're welcoming and inclusive. But are still using things that I, many autistic folks have said like these lights hurt me or these like really loud music at a restaurant. Not even like if you're out of the club, you're out at a restaurant trying to have a meal, and the music is so loud that it feels like your eyeballs are shaking in your head. And some places are willing to turn the music down. Some places are willing to dim the lights. But that's really only if we're like feeling safe enough to ask, and or if we have, you know, an extroverted friend who's in the group, who is willing to ask for us? Yeah, absolutely. In my new job. I worked in a job for a while that was primarily with neuro diverse folks. And so this was pre diagnosis. This is my own understanding. And so I always had, like a really good connection with the folks who were neurodiverse, and I felt really disconnected from the you know the folks who were offering services because it felt like we were speaking totally different languages, and I thought it was just initially because I didn't understand the hierarchy of the business, or whatever. But really it was just like there's a there's a way of communicating between. You know, people with similar lived experiences that is just inaccessible. If you don't speak that language, if you don't know that experience. And so, going into my new work, I knew I wanted to talk about my Autism as you know, a positive thing. Because it's something that it took me long enough to realize, and I am really excited about it, and I'm proud of it, and I'm not ashamed of it, because for so many years I thought there was something wrong with me that I wasn't trying hard enough. That wasn't improving enough in therapy or with medication, and that it was my fault. And so now I experience such a huge amount of relief because of this diagnosis, because I understand the way that my brain works. It's just like a whole new world for me. So I knew when I went into this new work that I wanted to share that because I wanted to be authentic and that's still really vulnerable. But I've gotten much more comfortable with my supervisor and with some of my colleagues. And saying. I

don't understand what you mean. Can you be more concrete, or I know I'm missing a social queue here. Can you help me understand what's going on? And rather than it being like an I role thing or like a oh, you're just being overly analytical, or whatever it's like, not a big deal. And it's really supporting. And I think the piece of this that stands out the most is that it's not. It's not a big deal to them to my colleagues. And I think that was the thing that I was the scariest about when I was debating whether or not to disclose. because self disclosure is an important decision to make. and I knew I wanted to share that, but I didn't know when. But the responses that I've gotten have enriched my work experience so much that I am grateful for it every time I, and able to help other people understand the way that my brain works, because it's so different from their understanding. And we also work with neurodiversity in my work. So having the lived experience as an important context has completely changed the way that. And you know that that some of the folks that I'm working with are moving forward in their careers. So like it's like some really meaningful change. yeah. like. Unfortunately, too many to name? I've had lots of very close friendships over the years, and lots of very close friendships, and really abruptly in ways that I still don't understand. one of my preferred stems is to listen to the same song or the same album on. Repeat for like hours, days, whatever like. There's an itch in my brain that's being scratched by this song, and I love it, and I love to just like dance with it. Move with it, whatever the thing is. and I'll just listen to it all the time. And I had a very close friend who was also my roommate at the time. Who I didn't. I also didn't realize at the time that they were making fun of me for this stem. Granted at the time I didn't know it was a stem. but they would like be like, Oh. their home! So of course, this song is on. And then I started unconsciously avoiding my house. If I wouldn't go home because I wanted to listen to my music. but I couldn't be around the person that was making me feel uncomfortable for what I was doing, and so I didn't understand that they were mocking me. Then, also this friendship ended so abruptly after our housing change. It happens. And I still think about it. I don't want to, but I'm still just so confused about what happened. But there. their choice to not be friends with me any longer like. I don't understand it, but I can respect it. I guess I don't like it at all. but a lot of the things that I'm recognizing now the things that they didn't. I appreciate it in our relationship were my more prominent autistic traits. and the more that I recognize that the more that it hurts maybe not like explicitly, because I didn't recognize that I was autistic at that point. but I think that there were probably some things over the years socially that it happened that it built up some patterns and things just like enough was enough. I guess I don't want to say yes or no, because I want to give them, you know, the benefit of the doubt. but also like the things that stand out as conflict points are things that I also know now in my relationships are things that people value about me. and also like people that value my Autism. So I don't want to necessarily say that that was the reason that the friendship ended, but that, I think really significantly contributed to it. Oh, it's so complicated! mostly pride and excitement, because. like I was saying earlier, I mean for years, and like decades, I'm talking not just like a blip, but many years since I was young have been in some sort of therapeutic relationship. doing some kind of treatment always on this like quest for healing. And I wasn't doing it right. And I wasn't doing enough, and just like from being so young and being told that like something isn't right about me that's exhausting. But to know now that I get to like, celebrate the parts of me that I had tried desperately for decades to like, get rid of and destroy, but, like those parts of me, are meaningful and exciting, and I love them. and like I will certainly miss social queues. I will certainly misunderstand things. I will certainly struggle with things. but that doesn't make me a bad person. and so I can have so much more compassion for myself and my younger self to like. I can love on myself in the most like healing way. So like, take care of my inner child. Like when I talk about my Autism, so much of it is like a celebration of the parts of me that I had tried to get rid of.

and was told that we're wrong. But they're not so like there's absolutely love and pride and celebration there. But also, you know, being late discovered. Not knowing this part of who I am until I was in my thirties. there is a lot of trauma, and there is a lot of grief and a lot of embarrassment and shame that comes up that you know that I'm moving through it easier now because I think so much of what I'm learning about myself is that a lot of the things that have been misunderstandings have been because people weren't unclear with me, and that people's words and actions and words and intentions were very different. And so that's always been confusing for me. but being able to reconcile my place and my own history, not, as you know, this poor pitiful thing. but as like someone who was not being adequately supported. and not as someone broken and needing to be fixed, but like just somebody who sees the world differently, like. there's so much lightness that comes from that at like the grief of holding on to that, and the shame and the burden of all of that has been so heavy for so many years that it's like an elephant, had been standing on my chest, and is no longer standing on my chest like I feel like I can breathe. So it's a lot. It's complicated. Hmm! I think it'd be lots of covers. I think it's kind of like a. I guess swirling, swaying kind of like. If you think of the way that sun reflects off of water. there's, you know the blues and greens and whites and yellows. maybe the odd splash of orange and pink, of how light or Fr. it's not just one thing. You touch on that a little bit. I will definitely say that my relationships are so much more fulfilling for me and for other people. After I've learned this about myself after I've been diagnosed because I and so I'm asking, and I don't always do it intentionally. I think when I just go into spaces when I meet new people, the wall immediately comes up, and it's just a habit, over years and years, of having to blend in, to survive or to be this particular brand of me, to survive. What to be seen is valuable enough to spend time with that as I've learned to unmask, and as I had. and getting to know these parts of myself. I think I'm more me in relationships, and the people that are in my life see that ease in me, and they see that excitement and enthusiasm, and like want to be with me in that, and do not love me in spite of my disabilities, but like kind of because of them, because, like. I'm a really good friend. I make mistakes, really good friends, and I'm really close with the people that I care about, and I make sure that they know that they're loved by me, and I take care of people as much as I can. but I also am not like I'm not willing to just be the only person taking care of others anymore. And I think that's been, I think, the biggest gift 2 is that I can now receive care and love from people, instead of just being the one who has to give it. I mean, just ask like, ask out of curiosity, ask out of interest. ask us about the things that we care about, the things that we're excited about or like what's sitting heavy on our heart that day? because. you know, people say that they care about neurodiversity. They say that they care about Autism. but it's This. Still, the community understanding around Autism is very You know, it's the good doctor. It's atypical. It's very white, very male. It's very eurocentric and that's not a clear or fair representation of what it is. spectrum for a reason. And so I think by getting to know autistic people in the way that you know neurotypical say that they want to be friends with people and then really like. do it, you know, like express interest in us, and we will share our interest. I think, also, people need to understand, too, that the way that autistic folks might present in our relationships is not necessarily the way that they would expect. Like, we're gonna tell you all about our favorite things because we want to share in that emotion with you like we want to share in that excitement. And finding somebody who is going to be with you in the excitement and not in the Oh, my God! I don't want to talk about this for the third time, and told me this already, and blah blah blah, and like. I want people that are gonna just be excited with me in my excitement. Not just bored about what it is that I'm talking about. because I'm vaccinated by brains and plants and colors. And I want to talk about art. And I want to talk about this weird plant that I saw when I was on a walk. You know I have really vivid steps in my brain that I want to talk about, and I just need somebody to offer like a little

nugget of what's on your mind, and to that there you go, and for them to actually care. Because we do care. We're and we care about other people. We just might express it in a way that is not what you're expecting. yeah, I do think it is incredibly nuanced. I think people need to be ready to and able to make space for the uncomfortable parts of our disabilities. just like they would for people without disabilities like. There's times that we console our friends when they're going just going through it. And you know, like we can make space for uncomfortable emotions. And that's a way that lots of people expressed care for each other. And so by being able to make space for people to unmask, knowing that the parts of somebody that may have initially presented might not be the full picture of who this person is like. That's kind of the reality of how friendships evolve. And I think to recognize that masking isn't necessarily like a bad thing to be avoided, and lots of people mask neurotypical mask to. I just it's not quite as taxing And so for non-autistic folks to get to know us from a place of compassion and love, to know that as we are getting comfortable with people that we will gradually show up more authentically and show up more as ourselves. I think I think it just We need to be given permission to move at our own pace. because I can't really rush that process either Oh, man, there's a whole list. There's a whole rabbit hole there, dude. I think the TV Autism tropes are ones that are pretty harmful. like, I was saying before. You know the assumptions that it's a predominantly white or male or savant kind of diagnosis. those are the things that really like upset me. And like the thing about trains like how autistics are like obsessed with trains. or Minecraft like the things that stand out about the way that people understand us? there could be better representations, I think, you know, if I get in there again. There, baby steps, baby steps. But I think that something that would really just like benefit all of us as a community is just for people to ask us and also be okay with us, telling them gradually we're showing them gradually. Autism? yeah, I mean, like shows, like the good doctor, for example. main character is autistic. He is a surgeon. he's also played by a neurotypical actor. which is a whole can of worms there. but he. the actor, not the character. The actor got his information about Autism, and he did his research about how to portray an autistic person from Autism speaks which you know it's not great. Didn't ask autistic people. he didn't say, you know, maybe this is not the most credible source of information for Autism, but it is the one with probably the most money and then he portrays. You know, some of some of the depictions are all right, but he portrays really negative stereotypes around Autism and while there is a certain kind of thought patterns and rigidity that might feel really similar when it comes to portrayals of like what it's like to be autistic. it just feels very insulting for that to be like the most like a prominent depiction of what okay is. And then people judge other like people judge autistic people out in the real world after seeing that and make assumptions about Autism based off of one or 2 shows that inaccurately present Autism. Are you saying that it's not a legitimate representation, or that there needs to be a broader range of representation. I think it needs to be a broader range, but also, I think it's can we cause for just a second? Okay. so I think we need a broader range of representation about Autism. But I think it also needs to be portrayed by people with lived experience and you know there's all sorts of he in filmmaking in TV about accurate representation. And how so many actors have been, you know, coming under criticism for portraying disabled people with mobility is who are not disabled and sort of capitalizing off of this story of our lived experiences without knowing what it means. And some people are like, oh, it's just storytelling. But that's not the point. The point is that there is a real harm being done to the same old people while non-disabled people are capitalizing off of that. I think the same thing goes for Autism and autistic folks. or tremendous actors. So I think, you know, it's a good idea to bring them into this process as well, in a more meaningful way, because we can display that lived experience differently. I recently heard someone make this criticism about You know the way that TV Autism and movie Autism is portrayed. And in particular, like with the good doctor, for

example. this person that talked about how you know so much of this. This actors. Understanding of Autism is from Autism, speaks, and from people who are who are very limited on that in their understanding of like internal workings, of what it means to be autistic. So the way that so there's the way that this person is portraying. Autism is from a very limited view. And they don't understand the inner word workings of what it's like to live in our body in our brain. and so they are performing it, based off of essentially like purely stereotypes. They're not understanding autistics, especially autistic, who managed so I think 2 of the best representations of Autism that I have seen. because it shows and talks about masking. One is heartbreak high. The character of Quinn is tremendous, and she's played by an autistic actor. and then the other is, I think it's called. Everything's gonna be okay and I think character's name is Matilda, and she is also played by an autistic actor, and both of those characters. or a tremendous representation of what it's like to live in this experience where they talk about masking, and they understand the nuance of our social relationships, and it feel so much more real. And it's like it just feels good to see it, because it feels. And you know it's real. because autistic folks we don't always act like the good doctor. We can be brilliant in our own ways. We also don't have to be brilliant at all like there's no expectation that because you're autistic, you're also like a genius. some of us are, we don't have to be. So I think a fuller representation of what it means to be autistic So it starts by letting us tell our own stories I don't know if it's explicitly probably not explicitly named but my favorite series is the legend of all that and I know it's actually definitely not like canonically, no one in this is you know, written into the story as xyz thing. However. It is my understanding. that sell that particularly the Zelda from breath of the wild and tears of the kingdom is autistic. And the way that she commits herself, the way that she feels things, the way that she expresses her emotions. just like the depth of her commitment and emotion. just feels really familiar. But then, also link in this story. doesn't talk. which I find comforting. I can still be the hero, and you don't have to say a word and you feel a link to him. It's feel a link to him. So I know it's not like this character is explicitly named as autistic, or they are diverse or disabled, or whatever but to me. because of my lived experience, and because of the way that their story comes across. I feel a very deep connection to all that, and to link in this particular generation of games Not that I have personally played I've watched other playthroughs of teams. right. and that ones that have like best eyes physically played. I think I watched my partner play Oh, what's it called to the moon? I think it's called. And you know, not seeing in the entire game, but seeing parts of it. I think that was a pretty good representation. trying your member specifically. You've played this game right? I'm remembering something about the bunnies. Can you jog my memory a little bit? character creates a lot of bunnies, paper bunnies But she's not the one who is autistic. If she is okay, I had it backwards initially, but now I can remember So I think there! Something about the bunnies and her making things and giving them that that. Well. just like filling her house with the same things like that feels very familiar, like getting a bunch of the same thing and filling your house with it, or making a bunch of the same things. I'm an artist, and so much of my visual representation and my paintings are very similar to each other because it's not so much the outcome. It's more just like the playing with the shapes and the process. And then, you know, there's a mess on a canvas afterwards. So like the funniest thing stands out. But then I think the other thing that that I remember about this game is that any of the autistic traits that this person was presenting weren't done in a way that was like she should be embarrassed about it. or she should stop it or like it's bad or wrong. It wasn't pathologized and she had people who were like loving to her. which you know, kind of touches on the things that we talked about with. it's important to have people who care about how much you care about step and know how deeply. You love things because it's not about the thing. It's about the way that we feel about the thing. you haven't encountered a lot of actual representation in games. Is that correct?

Hmm. well, I think a lot of developers and video game creators didn't initially realized how many of us were out there. disabled folks. It's kind of just been assumed to just be in the shadows and lurking in the corners of society. but like realistically. there is a lot of us out there. And so I think if we are trying to. I think we're in this age of like, especially like indie game developers trying to capture the player with the really developed story. there are parts of the stories that stand out in reality and extend into the lives of those of us who play the games. so like it makes sense to have a fuller representation of who your hero can be I think a really good example of a game that I really love. That sort of plays with the idea of who a hero is the Game Spirit Fair. which again, is not an explicitly named disabled person. But the character is not a male. and is also not white. And she still, like, like the entire story of spirit, there is still captivating, and is like, Oh, it! It captures such a loving story without it having to be the same protagonist. And I think that it's yeah. It's different. If we are actually getting to play as a human with similar experiences to what we have not just, you know, relating to the alien or the dog, or whoever in like the side characters. But we get to be. And we get to experience what it's like to be the main character that like, and to have other people care that we're the main character. That's a big question. I think having options is really important, and choices of how things look and how it's presented. even down to like the character design, like having a customizable character like I know. That's a like a silly thing. But to be able to make it. Look how you want it to look, and if you want it to represent you that it can. And you know this is a common thing. This with autistic folks is that you know, we have multiple diagnoses. We're not just, you know, one thing, and a lot of us experience hypermobility and so a lot of the some of the some a lot of the issues with hypermobility can come down to pain in the joints, in pain, in a hands in particular. I know that's where a lot of my issues live in my hands, and so combat heavy games over a course of time are really inaccessible for me to play, even if I am so, into the story that I really don't want to put the game down, and so. having I don't know if, like story mode is necessarily the right way of doing it, but or like the right term for it. But I think. having options where, if you want to do it this way, you can, and if you want to do it this way you can. But there's not one and only way to like win the game. or whatever the case is. And something that like. I'm gonna come back to Zelda for a second. because I think it's a good example. I'm currently playing my way through tiers of the kingdom and my spouse also has recently played it as well. And they played through it pretty much, did like the main storyline. and like Ping, bing, boom done kind of thing now, after completing the game, they've come back and they're doing like side quest and stuff. But I really wanted to like avoid doing the main quest as long as possible, because I wanted to like, see the whole map and explore the whole world and do all of this. Not all of that quest, because that's just like too much. But like I want to be able to have options for the way that I play and not to be punished for doing the side quest as opposed to the main story. is like there are certain things that you just can't get through if you don't have enough life, right? So to have options, to still play the side stories, or to dig really deep into certain things. or just do surface level stuff. but to have some, maybe some variability with it versus Hmm, I think yes and no, because I think there is so much that gets. There's a lot of pressure on that main story. But you learned so much about the world and the way that things work through the side stories. And I think that's a really that that feels like if a good representation is the way that I understand the world is that I'm more of a sidewest kind of person. I'll do the main quest if I need to like cause. Typically, I need to do those things to survive. But the things that help me make sense of stuff is by doing the things around the main thing first. I think, no matter what direction you move in with representing the neurodivers experiences. my hope for whatever the outcome is that the protagonist, the neuro diverse protagonist. is met with love with compassion, with support. because I think, for so many of us who lived being unsupported or having unmet support needs. I think that would be a really

awesome get to this community to just like, give us a chance to play through and feel it, and to have at least one character who just sees the person and gets them, then loves them unconditionally. Because I think that that is something that is really true for a lot of people is that yeah, good disabled community. Sometimes we can be incredibly isolated. and also the power, the strength that comes from having just one person who like genuinely cares about us. I, it just helps us survive. So I think that having that one person that is in the story, not as a necessarily playable character, but as somebody who encourages and like backs up the main character. I mean. I think both of those things can exist at the same time, like we can talk about the challenges of being autistic while also supporting somebody like we don't have to agree with every single thing that an autistic person says or does. But we can also support them like there's there are ways of integrating accessibility into our way of interacting with each other. And we can also disagree. I just because we disagree with somebody doesn't mean that we're going to withhold support. Yeah, thanks, for let me tell her stories.

## **Nanette Cozy:**

Not that I can think of ,Okay, I might have to think about it. My brain is still waking up today. Hmm! We always come back to that one as well if you would like, yeah, I'm trying to think of an example from like my adulthood. Like one that pops up really easily from my childhood was I tended to like overdo things a little bit like not always see where the social lines were when I was younger, and it took II think I got really good at it eventually. But I once like we were my friends and I. This was in like first grade. I think we were all like doing little air kisses to each other like goofy little like French kisses, and I kiss my friend on the cheek. and everyone in the like in this little pot of kids was like, why did you do that? Why did you kiss your friend? And I was like, well, I thought, that's what we were doing. And II think that that like and it was such like an innocuous thing, and like I might be the only person who remembers it. But it was II think it was kind of like an example of always like having to be careful that I'm not taking things like. not always seeing how big my personality is. Maybe in regards to others like I'm always just a little bit louder or a little bit more excited, or maybe a little more upset. So the like. My emotions are bigger, and sometimes my actions get a little bigger without me realizing I don't think I've ever like hurt anyone with that? But I've incurred a lot of like social shame with that It started with other people, I think, when I was a lot younger. but I got really good at like holding myself back as I got older, and then, after I was diagnosed and I started to kinda understand how Ad. HD. Affected my life, I started to come back out and be a little bit more comfortable with just being a big personality. And I still get like if I'm if I'm just a little too loud at a restaurant, or laughing a little too hard at a joke, or telling a story. That's a little too long. I think most of the people in my life are still pretty good at not. They're not trying to shame me, but they may tease me a little bit. And so it's I. It took me a long time to understand the difference between someone just giving me a little bit of like harmless teasing and that like shame and teasing from when I was younger. and not having sort of like an emotional reaction to it in the way that I used to Yeah, or thinks about that. So like, do you have a lot of scenarios like that in your head? For sure. Yeah, absolutely yeah. And a lot of it's from when I was younger or like, because I don't always have like, there's a lot of holes in my memory. Like I the things that most people like details that most people would remember. it. It just depends on whether my brain was recording it in that instance. But

embarrassing moments, I think, like everyone, whether you know. neurotypical or neuro divergent folks remembers embarrassing stories, but mine are usually based on just like such a silly misunderstanding or just you know. I often like it ends up becoming just like I'm just too thoughtless or just too big for the moment. And so yeah, those are the things that really stand out like II once I once ran into one of my old softball teammates from. But if this was in high school that it happened, but it was someone I had been on a softball team with a couple of years previous, and I confused her with my cousin, who I hadn't seen in a long time. and so I was talking to her as if she were my cousin. And I don't know. I have no idea whether that struck her as odd the way I was speaking with her, but I didn't even realize it until later, like hours later, that I was talking to a different person. And so like just those kinds of like mix ups and misremembering and those sorts of things. Probably. sometimes it's like really embarrassing, and sometimes it's just probably totally innocuous. Let me ask you this? You said, how do I? How does it feel? So it can get? And I think, I'm gonna get a little emotional. Alright. some of my childhood stuff I've got some like emotional and psychological abuse from when I was a little kid, and so sometimes those things overlap So I tend to. If I feel like I'm not being believed, or if I'm if I'm being misunderstood, I can get extra emotional. So that's where that's coming from right now. But I think that there's so much shame attached to feeling like But a lot of the symptoms of ADHD are associated with laziness and with choice. and I think a lot of neurotypical folks are unable to understand how executive dysfunction can be debilitating, but also kind of invisible and so, whereas someone else might be choosing to put something off. II might be sitting there desperately, wishing I could just complete a task, or, you know, wishing that I hadn't missed that deadline and so a lot of it becomes like shaming self shaming and just assuming that you're letting people down, or that they're making assumptions about your intentions. so. for instance, I'm taking classes online. Through the J school and I haven't II wasn't diagnosed until after I graduated undergrad. And so taking graduate classes online, I've never had accommodations before, and I don't really know how best to go about them. And so I met with the you know. III didn't ask for deadline extensions, because in my head I thought that asking for deadline extensions as one of my accommodations, even though it's a very typical ADHD accommodation. I thought that thou was asking for too much for myself, and that if I did ask for it, that the professors would see me as lazy, or that I was just looking for excuses to not do my work. and because I put a lot of stock in being a good student. I really shot myself in the foot. And I actually missed out on some points in a class. And II still did. Ok in the class. but II missed out on some points because II truly just forgot. And it wasn't an intentional thing. It wasn't even like a like an executive dysfunction like just getting it done. Kind of thing it was that like I got my days mixed up multiple times. And so II didn't even ask for the accommodations, because I was afraid it would make me look like a bad student. But then, not having the accommodation made me a worse student. And so I get the fear of being perceived as lazy or not smart or apathetic, actually makes me less likely to seek out accommodations. Yeah. But III realized that that was a ridiculous thing to do to myself, and so I have an appointment tomorrow to get my accommodation updated. yeah. And I also. And this is probably just a bit too much of a tangent. But I've done. II have read a lot about like the kind of the myth of laziness that that we have this idea in our heads, but it's never really been. you know. Procrastination is the thing that everybody struggles with most of the time. When people put things off they don't mean to. They're not like choosing to be bad at something or choosing to let people down. but I've also I used II actually went to several therapists through college, and after telling them that I was really struggling with focus and really struggling with getting things done, and I was told multiple times by multiple mental health professionals. Well, your grades look good. You have good grades. So I really, I think you've just developed some bad habits. We really need to work on those bad habits. And What it

meant was that I just kept like pulling that shame in on myself because I believed them. and it meant that when I started my first career in teaching, I was a high school English teacher, and I even had students with ADHD, and at the time I had fully, you know. bought that, you know I oh, I don't have it. My sisters and my mom are all diagnosed, but I don't have it because I have good grades, so I've just learned bad habits from them and Anyway, I didn't do well as a teacher and it was kind of the first time that I had like really failed at something and it really led to like a major mental health spiral in my mid twenties. That and I don't. I was like it was reinforced by the people around me that like, well, you're so smart. You clearly just aren't trying hard enough. And like that that term, like, just, you're just not trying. Or can you just try to focus more? Can you just try to get more sleep so that you're, you know at your best? those things all take years to kind of like heal from and unlearn about yourself. is wonderfully supportive of me and I don't think I would have been able to keep the job if she hadn't been incredibly patient and accommodating for me when I was trying to get my medications figured out. and just I had. You know it. It had been a couple of years since I left teaching. I had done other things, and I got into my current role. And I fell behind. And I was. I was really struggling, and I met with my boss, and instead of sayings that I that she was disappointed, or that you know I was in trouble, or like. or, you know, kind of putting it on me as like this is clearly your fault. She came at it with a perspective of I know that when you do your work it's great work. I know you're really talented at this. So can we talk about ways that we can help you? Do your best. And it was unbelievably validating, and I know that she has worked with other folks who have similar neuro divergence, who deal with those sorts of things. And so, instead of coming at it from like a, you are the problem. And you need to fix this. And you need to try harder and you get you need to get your you know your act together. She came at it from clearly. There's a problem, and I want to help you solve it so that we can both get you know what we need and feel it. And you can feel like you. You have everything you need to succeed. And so we built up some like really basic accommodations and accountability stuff. And I've been working here for 5 years now. And that was like a couple of months in And so it that was. It was huge. And I felt so validated that, like she knew that I'm a talented person, and that you know the struggles I have don't negate that they're, you know, challenges to overcome so that we can do better together. So that was pretty lovely. Any at all. And can you give any specific examples? so, my. as we've all gotten older, my most of my immediate family have received diagnoses. I think my so. My parents are divorced, but and it was not a good marriage, but both of them kind of in their middle age were diagnosed and figured that out my siblings, and so that, like the I think the hyper sensitivity that the emotional dysregulation that was kind of running rampant in my family when I was young, led to some pretty dark places. And Has fortunately improved, as we've all gotten older, and started to take care of ourselves and understand what's going on. But coming from a family that even though it was mostly on diagnosed when we were young, coming from a family that all our brains worked in a similar way, and then coming out into the world where not everybody feels, you know acts that way, and behaves that way was up a pretty big like culture shock, and also kind of the sort of the source of some of that like initial shaming that I with my husband specifically. So we started dating in high school and we broke up for a year in college got back together. And I was what you know. I guess the buzz word now is masking I had learned to keep my personality in check for the most part, I mean, I was still always just a lot like goofy and bouncing off the walls, but like I had really branded in and tried to behave in certain ways. And so I think that when we got married right out of college age 22, it's been 10 years now. We he! He has had to re adjust to like the who he married versus who, I've you know, kind of like. Come out of my shell and become and I'm so grateful that he's been so accepting of me, and patient and he's dealing with his own like anxiety, a pretty intense anxiety and depression. And so

like, we've had to give each other a lot of patience. But it's actually only been in the last few years that he has kind of become more honest about some resentment he's carried. About my, you know. Lack of like chores and keeping up with housework. And he wasn't. He wasn't always very honest with me about what he thought. My motivations were because all he could see was that he would ask me to help with something I would say absolutely, and then it wouldn't get done and so there! I didn't see until you know more recent years that that there was some like some real resentments doing and some real hurt on his part And so we've had to really talk through like what it means for me to like, forget to do something, and then come up with solutions, and even though it takes more support for me to get things done around the house that that those things are worth it. because I wanna be a good partner, and he needs he needs that support. He needs someone who, you know he can. He can rely on. And so those extra things that we do like, you know, for charts and checklists, and checking in with each other about you know how we're doing and what we need. That those, even though it's more work than maybe the average person would need to help get those things done. It's worth it because he understands better now that if I forget to do something I'm not doing it to, you know. so that so that he has to, or I'm not doing it to hurt him or to get out of things. And so there, we I really wish he had like said those things sooner in our marriage. But we're a lot stronger because of it that that we're able to talk about those things now, and it has actually helped him be more honest about his anxiety, and why, you know, certain things will affect him more than others. And it's really helped. But it really there was some like kind of. I would classify it as like dry rot that I didn't even notice in our relationship, because we weren't talking about those things. I don't have any follow up questions on that. I was. Thank you? Oh, man! I will say that like I think it's getting better. A, you know, up until. And I'm sure you've like encountered some of this in research that up until you know, 2030 years ago the vast majority of research on ADHD was done on children and men, and on male children. And so there's been a lot more discussion, open discussion about how it affects women. a lot more acceptance of. you know, for anyone struggling with like neurological issues and mental health issues. There's more acceptance of like getting help for that. But like the thing that's really sticking for me right now. The thing that I feel is such a huge stigma that is having real measurable effects on people with ADHD, specifically, is, the idea of stimulant medication being just the widespread abuse of stimulant medication and people lying about ADHD symptoms in order to access that medication. and the real effects of it are that you know the Dea has refused to increase quotas for those ingredients, and it's been an incredibly difficult year for me, because I haven't had consistent access to my medication, and that hasn't been the case for me, for almost oh, gosh! For 4 or 5 years now that I've been on Medication and it's been terrifying. And it's affected my work and my Relationships. and my self Esteem. And that the actual like, I mean, if you look at the you know the statements made by the FDA by Dea and by politicians. they the reason they're not doing it is because they think that the increase in demand for ADHD Meds is due to abuse and deceitfulness when the numbers really just don't bear that out. And so the idea that yeah, the stigma against stimulant medication, which is I, it is absolutely a life saving medication for a lot of people. I don't feel comfortable driving if I don't have my meds, because I know I'm not as good of a driver without them I don't and without proper treatment for ADHD, a lot of people succumb to substance, use, and depression, which can be fatal. And I think that understanding from a harm reduction standpoint, and that's more of like a policy thing that like trying to get stimulants out of the market is not the way to treat those who do have substance use problems when it comes to stimulants, and by taking, by restricting that use. You're actually really hurting a large subset of people in the process who desperately need that medication in order to function properly from day to day. So that that's a big one sticking out to me. I think society, understanding

the role that stimulants can play in helping people with ADHD and Archile. And you know, dementia and the other uses for those medications. that those things. it's really an essential treatment for a lot of people. It might, it might help to expand access. change our medications over in this household and like, and the cruel irony of having jump through so many hoops just to get the meds that would help you jump through hoops like that. I can't. When I'm out of my medication it makes it so much harder to force myself to call, you know, 5 or 6 different pharmacies to find the medication. All of the extra red tape around. That makes it really difficult. oh, let me think about it? I know I've touched on a couple. hmm! I think. One of them is that you know that idea that kids with ADHD don't do well in school. That one affected me very demonstrably like I did great in school because I really loved learning and The problem was that in order to get the grades. I was hurting myself. I was staying up all night, I was, you know. drinking way. Too much caffeine I was. I ended up with, like a lot of, you know, kind of like chronic digestive stuff. And like stress related physical health issues. Because of the extra effort I had to put in just to get things done to focus, and all of that So the stereotype that you that that like, you know, someone has a DHD. Because they're bad in school, and they're bouncing off the walls all the time, and those you know that it's not necessarily the most inaccurate. It's just not accurate to everyone who has that issue. And then I think another one is that and this applies to folks on the autism spectrum as well. The idea that neuro divergent folks are bad at social skills or lack social skills. And that in my experience has absolutely not been the case. I'm I've become very adept in social situations. I'm a really good communicator. And part of it, I think, is just having to be so vigilant. About making sure that I'm not, you know, overstepping social mores. You. You study it in order to make sure that you don't hurt anybody's feelings, or that you're not. You're not distracting everyone with, you know your antics or whatever. But and then I think, from the from the autism side, and I can't speak to that from personal experience. But I have. I have witnessed folks who have a diagnosis, or who are undiagnosed, but, you know, have self diagnosed on the spectrum, who are very socially adept, and amongst both amongst the neuro divergent community, because we all understand each other very well. I think. It's not that. It's not that they have poor social skills. It's that they have different social skills and also, folks who are masking. We, we learn to do it and people with Asd end up. I think can become very, very socially aware and socially adapt because they've studied it. And they've put some, you know. some scripts in place to make sure that they are, you know, following neurotypical mores and expectations. so I, yeah, I think the idea that that we don't have social skills is a very silly concept. We just have different ones. But when you ask autistic people what they want out of training. It's never social skills. And I'd also, if I could just add on to that, I feel like people who neurotypical folks who will like have a misunderstanding with someone who's either, you know, who has ADHD or is on the spectrum and then makes fun of them or shames them for it, or has like a really negative and cruel reaction to me. That's their social skill problem like that's what we're doing is making excuses for poor behavior from people who just need to be generally more accepting and empathetic of others. And I think I think that's another conversation we need to have like, how about? Instead of expecting everyone to follow your rules? We learn we learn new rules, including just being a little bit more patient with people. Hope you have a second mic to drop. I can you tell that I think about all of this. Yeah, let me think about it. So yeah, this is kind of a silly well, it's not silly it. I actually think that it's one of the things that I have found most valuable about having. ADHD I have I am a very curious person, and I jump from interest to interest for that obviously means that I my hobby, is collecting hobbies I jump from. I jump from things and I for a long time would think of myself, you know, like Jack, of all trades, master of none like I'm never gonna be an expert in anything. And I, you know, had some. I was embarrassed by that. But It's not really the case, and something that I'm really proud of is that as I've gotten older, I've

noticed. So my, I'm really close with my brother in law. My! My husband's youngest sibling! He's 8 years younger than me. and so, because Joe and I got together when we were really young. I've known I've known Benjamin for a long time. and he really grew up with me kind of as an older sister. and what I've started to notice with him and with my younger sister and with a few friends. if they've heard me go on like a big hyper focused tangent about a topic that I got really into and studied and really enjoyed learning about. They'll reach out to me when they want advice about it. And the fact that I have so many different areas of interest over the years that have, you know, picked up so much means that I'm not an expert in anything. But I do know enough to point people to resources and so, having this like wealth of interests and random bits of information. I've earned kind of the like honorific of like human Google, or like human Wikipedia that, like I've got random bits of trivia that I can share. There's always something that I can like contribute. and that's something that I've become very proud of And started to understand that that's like that's a plus side of my A DHD, that like I can connect with a lot of people in a lot of different areas of interest, because I jump from thing to thing. It's okay that I haven't just focused on one pursuit for my entire life. I know a lot. I know a little about a lot. Are you a habitual Wiki Browser? Oh, heck, yeah, yeah, I had to start. I had to start contributing monthly because I use it so much. I thought someone posted Blue Sky. I saw a post recently somewhere. It was like I am. I am a machine that turns blue Wikipedia links into purple ones going down the rabbit hole. Hmm! I think. Well, I suppose this is a more specific thing, and it's something that I've noticed online, just kind of in spaces where people are discussing neuro divergence. that there's this growing movement of people who claim that a DHD. Is not a disability, that it's a difference. And that if it were just. if society were just different, that it wouldn't even be considered a disorder. There's also the argument that like well, if we lived in caveman times like, you know, hunter gatherer societies we would just be really good at that and it wouldn't be a it wouldn't be a disability. and I understand that there's like an impulse to defend yourself and to celebrate the positives of having a neurological difference. But, I do think that we tend to within our own community tend to end up arguing over that, as you know, like it doesn't really matter to me that, like if society was just different, then this wouldn't be a problem for me. It's society's not different. And actually, we have. We can point to, you know. historical figures who clearly struggled in their lives that that could have been neuro divergent, that that society shifting into a more. You know, digital age didn't create this and that it doesn't matter what's causing it to be a disability. It's still a disability. And I wouldn't want to like celebrate the positives of this disorder. to the desk, to the detriment of advocating for accommodations and broader treatment. And more research into it. And I think I had something else to share, but it has completely escaped me. Yeah. I can't. I can't think of anything right now. Alright, then, I'm going to do that.

## **Amy:**

give me an example of what you're looking for. Okay? So for reference, I work at a communication field with people that to find a little wild The way I generally describe my autism is it's almost like translating the way I would normally think and speak into another language, for normally. I work a lot with an international audience, anyway. So it's a lot of picking up on the very specific cultural norms and things like that. Or the way people speak. Oh, Hello, cat, don't do that. Thank you. So that way

I'm translating what I actually intend to say into Norm, you speak for me, or just in general, I talked generally quite different than a lot of autistic folks, I mean, because of one of my special interests, you see, is communication. So that's a weird overlook. yeah, I'll give you a one of each. A friend of mine's name is Aaron. He's more traditionally, he's a guy. He's more traditionally autistic. What you think of. When you think of an autistic guy he tends to be very blunt. And if you ask for something example, people are like, give me feedback on this. He's like, well, this part kind of sucks. This is horrible. You should try again. and you know it sounds awful to someone who is not autistic, but he is giving you actually what he thinks that he's just very blunt and honest about things. It took people a long time to realize there isn't quite the same level of like chatting on a person. You know what I mean when, like an army says that there's some sort of almost passive aggressiveness to it. He's just saying exactly what's on his mind. You said, Give feedback if you're out of feedback, he's like, all right. I got you so just very straight into the point. Yeah. but it's different from how you communicate. for me. One of the things that affects me most with my autism is, it takes me a long time to think about like how I feel about things or decisions. So there's a lot of times where someone's like asking me an opinion on like where do you want to go to lunch? I'm like, okay, so give me like, 3 h, and I'll get back to you. Give you 3 h. And so it takes a lot of time for you to make decisions on stuff. Yes, I have. It's a hard for me to tell what my own opinions are very well. I've heard this is apparently related to autism, but I tend to pick up on other people's emotions pretty hard, so it's hard to separate out what I'm feeling. This is what just the people around me are feeling. what feelings does that invoke? If you do. and communication is a thing I care a lot about. I'm pretty good at communication, not the flex but as an example we were having some problems at one of my old works, and everyone was like, Oh, yeah, everyone else is being wild. And they realize they had autism. They're like, actually, I think it's your bad, just because I have the communication disorder. I'm like, Cringe things like when I get overwhelmed by things where I'm like that you can't yell at me. which you shouldn't be yelling at work anyways, but you know how that is. It does feel very much like a lot of times, especially in competitive fields. I work in games people are very interested in like tearing a part of each other, so the autism or easy things like that to pick a part of that that would be easy fodder for them. so what they do the thing where? Because they assume I because I bought them, they assume I'm stupid. so they'll do things that like normally to pick up on where they're being like passive, aggressive, or something. But if I'm like, Hey, that person was being passive, aggressive, they're like, no, no, you misunderstood. I'm like I did not. But that excellent okay. you said, you work in games. I do. Yeah, I'm a community manager. really love my current work. They've been great For me. It's very hard to just sit in one place for long periods of time. So I just kind of work whatever I feel like it. So I'll be up at a lot time to like 2 Am. My time, just like talking away to the community. And my bus so like, great have fun, go wild. Can. Yup and they've always been good to about. How do I describe? what other people are big a little bit iffy. we had a co-worker for a little bit. Who is like trying to still credit for my work and stuff, and they're like. Good question you're asking again, feeling things that generally need more time to give you an actually good response. more time than the interview is allocated, or usually to get a good idea of how I'm feeling about a certain situation. I usually need to like. Sit by myself somewhere where I can't feel other people's emotions either. So I could just narrow it on what I'm thinking. I think this is great, very joyous. I pity not autistic people. I really enjoy. a lot of. I seem to have like a lot more small joys that I've noticed other people have, which is great things like even just like I really like textures so like I could sit here just like play with a string for like an hour, which is rather silly, but like very fun. There's also a lot of things normally do that I don't really understand why they do that. It seemed just like over complications, especially with communication things like weird lying, or like weird flexing. And the

way you speak things like that. I don't understand it whatsoever. you know or say what they mean? Is that what you're saying? There? Yes, it's more straightforward and open about how you're feeling. Oh, I often tell people I really can't lie. I cannot. I don't know how to. I have to prepare like a week ahead of time, if I want to even try very different experience. But no, me. Oh, I really like textures and circles. I do a lot of moving my hands around a lot. Things like that, or the way I walk is very circles. I love circles. I. It's something about the different distribution of weight that I think is a thrusting but that's about all I could describe about that. Oh, sure, I don't know if but the relationship with my family so big L on that one. But in terms of friends and colleagues, I worked in games. So many of people are. If they're not autistic, which it's a pretty small percent that actually are, they are socially accurate enough that it's like it's mostly not great enough, and my office and tends to work. Well, did you say? Family, did you say? Big owl? Yes, a big loss. Excellent. Yeah. So communication. So you're doing a lot of like email blast and social media and 13 to 60 year old young men. So like very Mimi. Not necessarily that I fit in. There's definitely times when there's differences, but there's enough they won't notice whatever social queues I'm not putting off, especially It's very exhausting to try to act like an army. I can. Usually, the word is passing. I can usually pass quite well if I'm focusing on it. But the way I generally describe it to people it's like, y'all, just like, you know, subconsciously like, Oh, you're showing body like with this stuff for me. It's like putting on a big act where I have to focus on every little minute movements. I don't do that naturally. So it's like, okay. And then we do this spatial expression and make sure we got this tone. It's very exhausting. at work? I don't, Bob. The only time I really bother to try to pass anymore is that, you know, unfamiliar situations where it's really not safe, usually like when I'm out in public things like that. But I'm generally of the opinion of if my autism bothers you big L for you. many things. I'm also physically disabled. I a lot of times I'm using a cane I've had a lot of things where people will like drag their children away from me like I'm go smack them with something I don't know what by it, but people in general, because I act weird, tend to get a little iffy. I think it's also as a some presenting little thing I'm an easy target for if Amen, or like Dad, straight ladies to pick on, because that generally autism falls the lowest on the picking order for social things. It normally culture. Oh, yeah, for sure. I think a lot of the things that upset Normies about how I act is just. I peculiar peculiarities like, if you've ever heard of Normi's talk about like the very strict code of adequate of like the Victorian times for the like. Why did they do that? That's silly. There's a lot of that that still exists in modern times that I'm like, why do we insist upon this? And they're like, I don't know. We just do. It's important. You gotta do it. And I'm like, Well, why do you have examples of those, or A lot of the eye contact, especially with like critical scenarios where people get so offended if you don't make eye contact doesn't bother me as much, because I've trained like a very small little autistic kid. But for a lot of my autistic friends, for, like I don't, I don't want to do that. And then people get bad ideas about who they are as a person. and people judge them a lot on these weird social queues as opposed to their actual actions. Yes, my question are, what are the misconceptions or stereotypes that you find to be particularly harmful or frustrating? I got big opinions on again. I work in communications very much like again, empathy driven, etc. There's a lot of misconception that again I can't communicate at all which obviously I can I have a career with, or that I'm worse than an not autistic person? I found a lot of my autism helps quite a bit with communication. So I could generally figure out what people are, gonna miss. It's also a lot of misconception that again. the autism makes me stupid, or in some manner I have a lot of people who again. I have the same achievements in life. Either way, we think my stuff is very impressive before they realize I have autism. And then afterwards they do the very. almost talking down to you like a child a big thing in the autistic community. That's a bit of a like Yikes is. Most of the communication about the autistic community is from like parents of the autistic child. So there's this

way of like, almost like, we don't get to talk to it for a self, because we got a communication problem. And I'm like, why I can communicate fine. Why can't I talk about my own experience? The as an autistic person. Obviously, we love representation here very good anytime. I see anything like autism and TV, etc. I get very excited. It's always written by someone who's like, I have an autistic friend. Or, Oh, my child is autistic. example, there was a video game that came out recently of VR game. I was very hyped about, and then I did some research, and it's like we were really inspired by our child's experience and our, you know, experience raising them. And I'm like. it's not quite the same. I see why the misconception comes in, because a lot of times there isn't that bridge really between autistic speaking and like, normally speaking, so a lot of times. It's hard for when autistic people talk for norms to understand them and vice versa. But it's a frustrating one to not actually be able to speak for yourself, and parents get so much wrong and see it. It's more of a like a bad thing than it truly is, because they don't understand, you know. is to talk to people who are actually the first themselves versus going to parents or be a lot of work in this field where they go to like day programs and stuff like that. especially complicated, too, is an autistic person who has a bad relationship with my family, because then I don't have a quote unquote. Anyone who is allowed to speak for me. You know what I mean? Yeah. And are you on like a no contact with your family? Or I currently speak to them, because, I support my younger sister, and they're paying her way through college. But once she graduates I will not be talking to them again. Let me think about that. I think a lot of times. I don't really think of it as a separate thing, especially Obviously, I have anxiety as well. That feels more like a quote unquote disability, whereas autism feels almost like part of my personality. I you know. it's hard to differentiate. What is a quote unquote me without autism, whereas me without anxiety is easier to imagine. what do you mean? I think the best example I'd have for you of anxiety is mostly just times when things that would make me just make me less anxious. For example, grocery stores are hard on me because I have chronic pain as well as the Kane, a lot of times that pretty much will wipe me out for the whole day, and it's generally a very anxiety and ducing experience. So I feel like there's so much like stepping around it, or like assumptions. I wish people just like ask me, especially with again with the autism. I generally pretty hard to offend. If you're not trying to offend me, I'm really good at telling people's intentions. I wish people would just say what's on their mind more because it's weird being able to tell that there's some extra layer. I'm not understanding of how they're talking around me, but I also can't directly approach it, either, because they're not really willing to talk about. I think they people are generally quite afraid of offending autistic people. But again, you're not go off and like, if you have bad opinions of autistic people like, Yeah, that's pretty normal. That's how you know. That's how the media portrays us like you're not going to offend me. I'd rather you learn Not particularly. We're a game about robots, so no human. I have I? I'm saying it at that point of voice, specifically, because a lot of times it feels very like, that's the main character trait like. well, if you've seen like back in the early 2,010. This we like being gay was just considered cool where they're like, and that's the gay friend, and he's like wearing a feather boa. You're like, Okay, I got it. Yep, we're cool or very again, talking down or making it seem like just like this character, but worse, because now they have some sort of neuro divergency to them. just to be like, cool and hip. So they're in there. But they don't have like any Even the development feels very. I watched a youtuber called cat black, where really ador, she happens to be trans. she's been trans on the Internet for like over a decade. And she's talked a lot about how trans representation in media a lot of times is for like baby trans folks, so like that first experience of like, you know, the first couple of years of being trans. It's not a lot of representation of what it's like after you've kind of like figured your stuff out and just live in your life. I feel like the same kind of vibe, for, like no divergence or like autism. I've seen some games that are good about anxiety. I have to look it up again. but I feel like

again a lot of the like. Psychological horror tends to be good about that. I really like psychological horror in terms of autism. I've never seen good representation anywhere. I'll be real, at least not by anything more big and mainstream. that a lot of times when again, especially when autistic people are portrayed. It's the betrayal of autistic dudes, usually, which is very different than autistic fem folk. especially because a lot of times autistic do have a bad tendency of obviously overgeneralization, etc., etc. But if they get a lot more help for their autism, but they sometimes lead into that too much when they do the thing where they'll just be bad, and they know they're being bad. But they're like, I got a disability. What are you gonna do about it? To not be empathetic or to not, you know, work on this stuff. example for you. I watched the good doctor. I think it's on Netflix. I really liked it for a couple of episodes, and then they got to the part where they let the main character. Who's autistic really run all over this black woman who? Her main character was like, she's too empathetic, I'm like, why, why is that? Okay? not played by an actual autistic person. You. It's also a weird one, because I would say I act more like her, the over empathetic state. So it's weird. Generally the portrayal of autism is very. almost selfish. And again, very, not empathetic at all, very much. It's kind of running over boundaries and stuff. That's not who I have as a person. So it's very off putting and correct me if I'm wrong. But isn't this stereotype? Often that autistic people aren't capable of understanding others feelings? Oh, yeah, which is funny. What again, I empathetic to the point where it's like my therapist calls me a highly sensitive person, or whatever I can't think about things. If people are feeling too loud, my roommate tends to have really strong emotions, and I'm like, Can you be a little quieter with, though it's like That is a good question. I'm going to think about that one for a second. I do think. for sure, more research into outside of the stereotype again, autistic men, I think it's very much worth speaking to autistic women, too, because if you're not, if you don't grow up as a dude, you do have to learn the mask. You don't get the. Did you just have a disability quite the same way? So that struggle between you don't have the option to not look autistic. But then, every time you walk out of the house it's like a war ground. You know what I mean. It's like a warground where you're like constantly on the Feds and acting. You know what I mean. You're like, all right. I cannot look like I have a disability. Yes, I think a lot of what I miss an autistic portrayal to is again that struggle between trying to be true to yourself and true to who you are while still it being acceptable to normi standards. it's an interesting one where I go back to again cat, black, white, or I think she's great where she talks a lot about passing as a trans person or like for a lot of people. Even if you don't want to look like that it's a safety thing. So even if you're like, this is just strictly worse. And I don't like this a lot of times. You. It's just not safe to not try to be acceptable. And there's always this pressure. Even when you are in a quote, unquote, safe space. you're so used to trying to fit into normally standards to be safe, that it's hard to just like. Let it go. It seems like a lot. You right? that act quote unquote, autistic again where they did. Still, they're like, why are you talking like the heck of this weird hybrid zone? Where don't quite talk well enough that I tend to read it like Quirky nor me. What if you were? not you, but like you. Would you want to see that character I think for me it's about striking that balance of like not too much just about the pain and suffering of disability, just the small ways that disability affects your daily life more than it is about just autism, or just whatever you got. Not that I can think of now.