

Women and ADHD.... My personal experience.

'The Anonymous Doctor'



This is my story about learning I had ADHD as an adult. I am a Doctor, but I wish to remain anonymous but I hope other women will take encouragement from my story....

I always knew I was a bit odd, my parents, family and teachers did also. Was it the way everyone did A, and I always did B? Was it the constant chatter? Was it the intense daydreaming, and being stuck in my own head? Was it the passion behind my creative projects? Or was it my incredibly gullible nature? Was it because I was easily teased?

“Your child is gifted, her IQ is very high”. My parents are both in Mensa, it wasn't really a surprise, my IQ was going to be high too.

Years passed, and this increasing awareness of being different to others grew. Motor tics and bullying for being different ravaged my self-esteem. The relationship I had with my parents deteriorated, I was in pain. When I was 11, I drew and painted pictures of how I was feeling. A stick figure trapped in a multi-layered invisible bubble.



“My mind is always on, I feel trapped in an invisible bubble, there is something wrong between me and my environment. I feel different to other people, I need help” The conclusion from doctors was that I had anxiety. When I was a child, apparently ‘girls weren't neurodiverse’, they had “anxiety”. Having no help and no instruction book on

how to be “normal”; I did everything to blend in. I copied my friends. I became more and more interested in psychology, trying to figure out what this ‘bubble’ was.

Emotionally it was also hard. I had to keep it under control. I knew I could become angry, oppositional, emotional and very undiplomatic. Social conflict, change of routine and noise interrupting the peace, were three things to avoid.

In my final year of school, I had a new maths teacher. He was adamant about having



limited time to write things down from the board. He would even count the seconds left out loud. Unable to concentrate. The “bubble” was stronger than ever. The class was always too noisy. I stopped enjoying maths and I started to fail.

At university, I was met with lots of new challenges. In the auditorium I could not follow the lessons. I forced myself to go to the library everyday instead. Alone in a corner, where the lights were dim, noise -cancelling headset on my head, notes scattered all over the table, there I could finally be at ease.

The lack of focus, organisation and being unable to follow my classes, were showing. I started failing some classes. My organisation skills were met with judgment. “Be more rigorous” “Do it like this, I’ll show you”, “What are you going to forget this time?” Every birthday my friends would buy me a wallet to put in my bank cards, as I would constantly lose them. “Maybe now, you won’t lose them anymore.”

One exam that we had at university was a technical drawing exam. I’d always been good at drawing. Yet this exam was different. Why did I fail? Lack of effort or studying? No. I have another neurological condition as well as ADHD called aphantasia. I am unable to create a mental image, I also have no visual memory. This is unusual because many people with ADHD have excellent visual memory – perhaps the brain’s way of compensating for poor working memory – or perhaps just one of those differences that make those with ADHD ‘Big Picture Thinkers’ like to so many artists.

“Try harder” was always the motto. I had to invent a new process, a list of steps to recreate these drawings, while still being unable to visualise the next step in my mind. Unlike my peers, I had to adapt. I had to do B, instead of A. Obviously for this drawing

exam, I forgot to bring my colouring pencils. All this hard work, yet here I found myself once again, still completely lacking the basics.

The criticism of my character began to take a toll on how I viewed myself. The feedback I was getting from other people was inconsistent. “You are too chatty”, “you are too shy”,



“you are too serious” “you are not serious enough” “you are too bossy” “you are too direct” “you are too sensitive” “you don’t understand sarcasm and jokes” “you are too weird.” “you are too opinionated” “You don’t listen to other people” “you are self-centred” “You are too clumsy” “Why do you walk in such a peculiar way?” “Pay attention!” “You

need to learn to put your jumper the right way round”. I wouldn’t be offended, but it wasn’t good for my own internal self-talk and self-esteem.

After getting my degree, I would be constantly exhausted and overwhelmed at work and in life. I was also getting more unmotivated and bored. It wasn’t the workload. It wasn’t the pressure. I just didn’t know what it was. I asked for help multiple times. The harder my life was, the more I adapted, the further from the “stereotypes” I became.

Constantly having to invent new strategies and new coping mechanisms came with a heavy price. I was completely drained. Such chronic fatigue is common in those with ADHD. One day my life completely changed. I met another neurodivergent person. This person wasn’t a doctor, he wasn’t a neurodivergent advocate, he wasn’t specialised in spotting neurodivergent minds. Yet he did see it, instantly. When you are neurodivergent you are oppressed by a majority mindset – the traditional way of thinking – the traditional way of how it supposedly ‘should be’. The majority neurotypical people will judge your character based on your inability/inadequacy to perform certain work tasks or even simple everyday tasks, and to conform to the neurotypical way of seeing the world. A majority mindset and perspective that is unable to comprehend the other side of the coin because their minds lens is different from the 20% of us who are neurodivergent. Individuals with ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Dyslexia, Tourette’s syndrome and other thinking and learning differences are often marginalized, excluded and even oppressed – because other people just see what is often invisible to the majority. Other minorities experience prejudice and discrimination – sometimes this is unintentional and

the product of our culture, but neurodiversity is intersectional and spans gender, race and sexual orientation.

Looking back at my life. I did suffer from an ableist society. I also suffered from my own internalised ableism, the internal voice that tells you to “try harder” and the shame of not being able to do it. I spent my whole life changing and adapting myself to the world. I spent my whole life studying other people and adapting to their needs and not to mine.



Finally, everything made sense.

After being diagnosed, I joined groups that advocate for the neurodiverse community. I met some incredible people. I was finally allowed to be honest and be myself. I felt understood. No longer do I feel like the “odd one out”. I learned

brand new terms to explain what I was experiencing. Such as “alexithymia, “sensory processing” and “executive dysfunction”. I learned to work with my brain and not against it. I know what my weaknesses are and how to manage them, this time with healthy strategies. I changed my environment instead of changing things about myself that I could not change. I learned that communication between neurodiverse and neurotypical people is a two-way street. Things get lost in translation on both sides. Greater awareness and understanding would help reduce this loss in translation that too often leaves some feeling isolated and marginalized.

I had the option to choose being neurotypical or being neurodiverse. The choice is easy. Being neurodiverse is the biggest gift I have ever received. It pushes the boundaries of our mind. It comes along with an incredibly curious nature, creativity, the ability to spot errors, hyperfocus, a powerful memory and out-of-the-box thinking. Being neurodivergent teaches you to surpass yourself every day. It teaches you about resilience and self-acceptance. It teaches you to be humble, to forgive and to have the humility to genuinely accept others and especially for yourself. I don't yet feel confident to share this in my place of work – but in time, when I am ready, I will. ...I hope that my story will help others, wherever they may be on their own life journey.

Dr Anonymous.