

Understanding Your Needs

22 March 2024 Transcript

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Good evening and welcome everyone. Thank you for joining us tonight for Understanding Your Needs - the final event of our Understanding Unlocked series for Neurodiversity Celebration Week. My name is Danielle Gleicher-Bates and I am the co-founding Chair of neurodiversikey® joined by my co-founders Charlotte Clewes-Boyne and Emma Llanwarne.

First of all it's a pleasure to introduce our speakers: Lucy Barnes, a future pupil barrister at East Anglian Chambers; Sonay Erten a consultant solicitor advocate and AuDHD coach and speaker; and Sarah Willshire a solicitor at Sintons. If you didn't already know about neurodiversikey®, we launched back in October with the aim of making the justice system and legal sector neuroinclusive, mainly through education, training and raising awareness. We're a neurodivergent run non-profit and have recently been named 'Legal Sector Neurodiversity NPO' of the year in the SME News UK Legal Awards and finalists in the Women and Diversity in Law Awards.

As for the event we're going to discuss neurodivergent needs in the context of legal careers. We'll be watching a short video from Philip Steventon, also known as The Neurodivergent Lawyer, telling us about his experiences. But first, I'd like to give our speakers the opportunity to tell us a little bit about themselves so I'll open the floor up and let you fight over who goes first.

Sarah Willshire:

Go on then I will, sorry to jump ahead of you Sonay. So my name is Sarah Willshire I am a partner at a law firm in Newcastle called Sintons. And in September this year it will be 20 years since I walked through the door as a trainee solicitor so I've been qualified for 18 years and I've seen a lot of changes in the profession in that time. I personally was diagnosed with ADHD about 18 months ago like a lot of women in their 40s, it came about because my children were struggling and I was on a mission to find out what was wrong with them and it just made sense that that

was probably also what was going on with me. So I've spent the past 18 months kind of rethinking my life up until this point from the perspective of realising that I am neurodivergent. I suspect that I'm also autistic but don't have a diagnosis in that regard. And was just delighted to come on and be involved in this to kind of help other people within the profession because I do think that there are lots and lots of parts of my career that have been massively helped by me being neurodivergent and there are lots of parts of my career that I wish I'd known I was and I could have been kinder to myself and helped myself a bit more.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Thank you Sarah, I'll just pick on you now - Sonay.

Sonay Erten:

Yeah that's fine. So yeah I'm Sonay Erten I'm a consultant solicitor advocate so I'm self-employed, consulting at two different law firms. I was diagnosed with autism and ADHD at the age of 32 and that basically changed my life really. So that's why I became self-employed because I felt I couldn't be employed in a traditional law firm anymore, it just wasn't set up for me. I decided to become self-employed and then after that I discovered my other passions of coaching and being a professional speaker. So I decided to add those to my many hats I suppose. And yeah so that's why at the moment I'm both a lawyer and also a coach and also a speaker. I'm yeah a bit like you were saying Sarah, I'm very passionate about changing the legal profession when it comes to neuroinclusion so I've felt myself that it's the profession isn't as inclusive as it can be and I think that's the reason why I went self-employed. So when I was invited to do to speak here today I was just I felt really privileged because it's just so important and and what you're doing here is really important so yeah.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Thank you and on to you Lucy.

Lucy Barnes:

Fantastic. Lovely to hear from others who are neurodivergent in the profession. I just have to say that as well it's really really does make me feel like lighter and love the work that you're doing as well in neurodiversikey® like I think it's fantastic. So I'm Lucy Barnes, from October I will be a pupil Barrister at East Anglian Chambers. So I live in Norwich with my young family I have a two-year-old son and my fiance who's going to be my husband from next month. So I'm getting married

next month which amongst everything else I've got going on is quite a lot but I'm very excited so yeah can't wait for that.

I was diagnosed with dyspraxia at 18 I had to go through A Levels and GCSEs without any support from anyone. Particularly because being female it showed up differently so they didn't diagnose me until university when a friend who had a sister who was dyspraxic basically said to me I think you should see someone and get assessed because you remind me of my sister and she's very dyspraxic. I was like is that compliment? I don't know, but it was it was a great thing because then after that I started getting extra time in exams and that's when I started to see my full potential and I realised I couldn't get those grades at A Levels and GCSEs because I was trying to do something that I couldn't do with my brain.

So I'm very very passionate about this being being neurodivergent I'm very proud and also I'm very fascinated in the overlap between neurodivergence and being care experienced. So I'm from a foster care background I go by care experienced barrister on Twitter and I talk about the crossover - 55% of care experienced young people are neurodivergent so that's something I have a particular passionate interest on, and in May we'll be starting my organisation to mentor care experienced people in law which I'm really excited about. That's a lot on me but there you go.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Thank you and congratulations and yeah we can see the parallels between everyone's experiences already which I mean it's only been not even 10 minutes. But I'm going to share the video now from Philip Steventon, should Zoom actually comply, and that will take us about six and a half minutes and then we'll go on to our actual speakers.

Philip Steventon:

Hey everybody I'm Phil Steventon. I'm also known as The Neurodivergent Lawyer. I'm an experienced paralegal, I'm a trainee legal executive and I'm a disability inclusion associate. So I'm autistic and I'm probably ADHD but as far as being autistic goes, the way that I process the information around me is different to those who are not autistic and the way that I process this information is unique to me - same as it's unique to every other autistic person.

I find that I have a very, very, logical and methodical and process driven

brain. So when it comes to what I need in the workplace, I do well when I get written information, written instructions, regular feedback loops, clear expectations and clear boundaries on what I'm working on, clarity as to who I'm reporting to as well. Basically, the clearer the information you can give me the better I'm able to work and the more likely you're going to be able to see me at my best.

I think one of my biggest challenges is working memory which can come across to someone who doesn't understand as that I'm either not listening or I'm being ignorant or I'm just choosing not to process something that might very well be simple but it's just not sticking in there. I have to work with my brain the best way I can so that it does stay in there and I've often found that, you know, if I have it in writing as well, like I just said, it means that I'm able to just come back to it. I can reprocess it, I can ask any further questions that I need to. That's why I prefer getting instructions and information in writing because if you were just giving me instructions in a phone call there's no guarantee that I'd be able to process it properly. The better that I can understand myself, I'm hoping that the better my employers can understand me as well and that should lead, or it's supposed to lead, to a much more harmonious working relationship.

As far as stimming goes as well, usually when I stim it's when I'm like, just playing with a pen in my fingers. So like, I'm at my desk, I'm reading something and I'm trying to process it. Usually what I do is I'm like, basically what I'm doing now, I'm playing with a pen in between my fingers. It's a little self-regulating movement that helps me try and expel a bit of like pent up energy if you will, a bit of pent up sort of distraction if you will, and doing this means that I'm able to like read like in much in as much detail as I can, what I need to do.

As far as advocating for my needs goes, it's been since early 2020 like lockdown one when you know I came forward and began my sort of digital identity as The Neurodivergent Lawyer, where I've been a lot more open with my identity, the fact that I'm autistic, and what I need in order to help me be at my best. Doing that has meant that I'm a lot more confident in being able to advocate for myself and what I need in terms of adjustments at work, best ways that you can communicate with me, like communicate works tasks, instructions, things like that, and also to just bear with me if there are times when I'm being quiet and I'm just trying to crack on with things, or I'm just trying to learn things in a way

that works for me.

But I think lockdown one and when we were all going online that definitely helped me sort of become a lot more prouder with myself and my identity because it is a part of who I am so why not be proud of it? But truth be told, that confidence in and that pride in advocating for myself, and being open and honest and forward about who I am, it has been shaken on a number of occasions because of comments and actions and words, that are said either about me or to me, that make me feel like I shouldn't have shared it. It's difficult to not be affected by it and it's difficult to not feel like maybe I should just go back into my shell. However it's not just me that it happens to, it happens to so many others as well and not everybody is as confident in talking out about it. I feel like if I'm not open and proud about who I am then that means someone else probably won't be as open and proud about who they are as they want to be.

Masking is exhausting when you're trying to sort of present yourself as being, for lack of a better term 'palatable' to the, you know, to the neurotypical world that we live in. And the unmasking journey is definitely a marathon. One term I heard is "it's a 'forever game'". You know, you don't just suddenly, you know, decide oh I'm going to unmask today and then that's going to be it, no, no, no. What I found is that it's a constant process of understanding yourself, understanding who you are, what you can do, what you can't do, and being okay with the fact that you are human, you're just as human as anybody else. It's accepting yourself, it's accepting who you are, you know. And it is a constant process as I've said, it's not going to happen overnight, and I think that unmasking and really properly understanding who you are and loving yourself for who you are, that is the best form of self-love that I think you can do.

Quite simply, find things that bring you joy and find people who bring you joy, you know. For me it's, you know, I'm getting involved in some new sports, I'm doing a lot more work for my communities, I'm getting involved with a lot more you know neuroinclusion work, and it's been really really fulfilling for me as well. And that fulfilment brings me a lot of joy knowing that I'm doing work that can benefit not just me but other members of my community. And surrounding yourself with people who bring you joy as well, people who talk well about you when you're not there, and people who want you to do well and want you to be well, and are happy to accept you for who you really truly are. Those are the kinds of people that you need in your tribe if you will. I would say that's the best thing

you can do for yourself. It's going to help you a lot with your self-confidence, your self-worth, understanding your purpose and your place in this world that we live in. If you're on the journey of unmasking as well, I feel that that's really going to help and I do wish you well if you're on that journey as well. Just know that I'm rooting for you. Good luck, wish you well, all the very best.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

And there we have it. A big thank you to Phil although not with us tonight for starting us off with some really insightful points there that I'm sure many of us can relate to. I think I saw some nodding as we went along but back to our speakers. We'd love to know what makes you different, so in your eyes what are your strengths and challenges as a neurodivergent person? And again I'll just let you all dip in and out.

Sonay Erten:

Yeah I'm happy to go first. The strengths one is a difficult one because being late diagnosed I was so used to all the negativity that I got growing up you know "you're not reaching your potential", "you've got your head in the clouds", "you're immature". So it's taken a while for me to actually realise what my strengths are. What really helped me is when I had ADHD coaching we had to do this character test and my top strength was love of learning which I just love the sound of because that is me to a tee, and that's definitely my AuDHD brain that's given me that strength. So that's something that's really been with me throughout my life and certainly helped me in my legal career. It's what led me to study law in the first place and also whilst I was training to become a solicitor I did my higher rights training at the same time, so I was in quite the unique position of qualifying as a solicitor advocate not just as a solicitor when I qualified.

And then when I was furloughed I was attending webinars to just keep improving my skills, improving my knowledge. There was no way I was going to sit there and watch daytime TV. That's just not for me except for the odd day but yeah, you know I get bored if I'm not constantly learning and then so that's probably why I also embarked on being self-employed as well. I love that challenge, probably a bit of impulsiveness going on there as well. And then becoming a coach as well again just keeping that learning.

Another strength I'd say is empathy and this is a strength that people have told me I have. I'm again not used to saying I have strengths. And

the reason why I picked that out because there's a stereotype of autistic people not having empathy and that couldn't be further from the truth. I get this sort of overwhelming sense of empathy so if someone is upset I'll cry for them even if they can't cry themselves I'll cry. If someone is celebrating something I'm really happy for them, like, genuinely. And I guess that really helps with being a lawyer at the end of the day. And I suppose the other skill or strength that comes from my AuDHD brain which is really useful for my career is motivated by deadlines as well so that that's stereotype of the ADHD who, Sarah's nodding, who literally just has a deadline and will leave everything to the last minute and then just work at you know a million miles an hour. That's great being a litigator you know you need that, so deadlines don't scare me, I need them in my life. But before I was diagnosed again I was really hard on myself like why do I keep leaving stuff to last minute? What's wrong with me? But yeah now I know that's what it is, I'm a lot kinder to myself knowing that I will get it done.

And a recent example, not necessarily my legal practice but when I did my TEDx talk last October and because of personal circumstances I actually had a bereavement, so I didn't have enough time to prepare my talk. I wrote the talk and finished it a week before the event and then memorised it. But again, because of that capacity to work toward a deadline I didn't stumble at all on the night so, I don't think I even needed the extra time because that's how I work best. So yeah I think that's all my strengths there that I can think of.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Thank you I mean I can definitely relate with the need for a deadline and working to the last nanosecond I'd say. If there isn't a deadline I think a lot of us it's well it just goes on forever doesn't it? But I'd love to hear from Lucy on your strengths.

Lucy Barnes:

Yeah so I definitely think I learned my strengths and I'm so fascinated I relate a lot so with like learning, like fascination for learning. So I bought a book called *The Power of Different* which is about being neurodivergent by Gail Salts I believe but I could get that wrong. And that really helped me kind of see my strengths. So I read that quite early into my journey kind of realising I was dyspraxic and realising oh okay that makes sense. So for me I definitely relate on the empathy and compassion but I also have out of the box thinking, and I have a really creative brain, and sometimes people say to me "how did you even think that?" and that is

the highest form of compliment and I do attribute that to being dyspraxic because there's an element of you know, where the brain is weaker in one area it shines brighter in another.

So I'm really kind of proud of that and I'm an idea generator. My brain is just an idea box so that is something that I think is really special and really great at solving problems. I mean even ones out of my control like even just being able to study my GCSEs and A Levels without having that extra time you know. I was really thinking about creative solutions and I think in the legal profession all we're doing is solving problems, so having a brain wired to solve problems is really really beneficial and when I get into hyperfocus my fiance has to actually feed me because I can't. I'm like in it and I can't get out of it, so it's a massive strength, not for my diet but it is a massive strength in the sense I get a load of stuff done. And people always compliment me for my time management and again, I think that is because related to being dyspraxic and also care experienced. So I definitely think there are some strengths to it.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Wonderful and I do have one suggestion for the hyperfocus feeding is you need a Wallace and Gromit style contraption. That's that's the neurodivergent answer I think, and onto Sarah now.

Sarah Willshire:

Yeah so it's it's very very similar I have to say, but I think one of the things with me is that I think when when you grow up, because I was very late diagnosed I was 41 when I was diagnosed, and I had most of my career not really you know knowing what was going on with me. And I think when you grow up being neurodivergent it's almost like life is this game, and everybody else knows the rules, and automatically knows the next move. And you don't. And you very easily can say the wrong thing, or do the wrong thing, or upset people, and you're misunderstood a lot. And for me, what that translated into is I am really very deliberate in how I explain things. So I'm really really good at training people and explaining complicated ideas in a really simple way because I've been misunderstood and I've not come across right so many times that I've turned that into a skill. So I love training people, I love delivering training sessions.

And the other thing that I'm and it's coming across tonight, I'm just watching you all and thinking this is this is clearly a neurodivergent strength, but I'm just so passionate when I'm when I'm interested in

something and when you know when it I'm allowed to be creative and I'm given the sort of permission to go for something you know. I get so excited and I get so passionate and I inspire other people.

So one of the massive highlights of my career was about seven years ago. I moved to a little firm in Newcastle that nobody had really heard of, wasn't really on the map and I went with a colleague, two colleagues, and I had this idea that I was going to set up this new team and it was going to be you know an amazing, incredible team and I just threw everything I had at it. My boss at the time said look, you know the market, you know the work, just go for it, just you know, do whatever you want. And I hyper-focused for seven years. And by the time I actually left that firm last year, by the time I left that firm, we'd gone from a little team of three people and no one had really heard of us, to a massive team of 13 people where we were nationally known for the work we were doing and we were billing in excess of a million pounds every year.

And people still say to me now like "God how did you do that?" and I am absolutely certain that I did it because I'm neurodivergent, and somebody said to me for the first time in my life "we believe in you, go and do something brilliant" and they supported me. And I just went for it and the results were incredible. And I don't think it was particularly me, I think it was my brain. I think anybody who's neurodivergent could do that if they're in the right situation, with the right support. And that's why I'm really passionate about raising awareness that neurodivergent people, they can supercharge a business, because if you were to say to anybody neurodivergent "Tell me now, you know, is there a system, is there a process, is there something that we do at our workplace that just doesn't make sense, that you know you could improve it, you could change it? How would you make things better?" I can guarantee that neurodivergent people are going to have amazing ideas which are going to totally improve efficiency, which are going to really impact and you know help the business. But a lot of the time we're just too scared to say anything and nobody asks us. But I genuinely think that if you know we were invited to sort of lean into that side of our brains, I think it would benefit everybody, the businesses, us. I really feel like that's how I've got to the point that I'm at in my career.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Brilliant and I think, you know, leaning in to really being neurodivergent that's a great point and I think a lot of the time we, especially when we're late diagnosed, we grow up thinking that we have all of these

challenges, and as you're all demonstrating now those challenges, well perceived challenges, are actually huge strengths or can be channelled to be huge strengths. But on challenges, let's have a look at what our challenges are so, I think let's go in the same order. I think Sonay that you started last time.

Sonay Erten:

Yeah well my, I suppose bane of my life, the challenge is Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria. So to anyone who doesn't know what that is, it's a characteristic probably all ADHDers have, if not most of them, which is this sort of overwhelming pain or feeling in response to either actual or perceived rejection. And the way that's come about so, there's an American psychiatrist Dr William Dodson that coined the term, and he says that by the age of 12 children with ADHD will receive 20,000 more negative messages than their neurotypical peers. And so, you can see as someone gets older how many negative messages that they're getting and so, no wonder we're sensitive to rejection, not just because of the way our brains wired but because of that.

And it's something that I've had throughout my life so I sort of struggled to get into the legal profession. I had a bit of a roller coaster, a lot of rejections and after each rejection I gave up on my dream career. I'd say no I'm not going to be a lawyer anymore, I'll do something else, and then every time I kept coming back because I didn't like anything else as much. But it's you know it's made me sort of quit jobs, it's made me quit projects, give up interests because of that overwhelming feeling. And I'm pretty sure it's partly why I became self-employed as well because that sort of being rejected from the traditional environment. I was like fine, I'll do it myself then. So kind of a bit of strength there but yeah that's that's my main thing especially when it ties into impulsivity as well. So, that quickly making a decision because of that feeling of rejection has been a massive challenge for me.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Thank you. Yeah that's a really tough one and similarly, it's very common to have lower self-esteem which is unsurprising you know, growing up in a world that's not built for you and then being told that you're the problem all the time. But yeah, Lucy if we move on to you.

Lucy Barnes:

So, I definitely struggle with kind of auditory processing difficulties and also the fact that people think dyspraxia is just being clumsy. It's

definitely not and there's a lot of, kind of, cognitive aspects to it as well. So that kind of stigmatic thing of, you know, it literally used to be called 'clumsy child syndrome' so, which is deeply stigmatic. But you know, having that kind of auditory issue so I often rearrange names or words around in my head. I often don't understand silent letters. So, just the other day, there's a town just outside of Norwich called Windom but it's spelled Wymondham.

So that's how I pronounce it. So, to me that sounds logical because that's how it's spelled, but to others they can't seem to understand that. So and that also I find that difficult when with other, kind of, aspects of protected characteristics. So for example, people who have different surnames that I actually can't pronounce and then I feel quite embarrassed because I know people are really kind of protective, rightly so, over their names and they see it as important. But then for me, I actually can't and even if I ask them I have short-term memory difficulties so, then I'm going to forget, and it's just those kinds of issues can be really difficult for me in understanding names, letters.

I rearrange stuff quite a lot in my mind so I do find that really difficult. That coupled with my short-term memory, but I have created a creative workaround around that and I have like a two-minute rule. So if I can do something in two minutes then I do it in two minutes. Otherwise, it will enter the abyss of my mind and I will never be able to claw it back. So, I have that and I have to write down deadlines in my calendar instantly. Otherwise, again I just, my short-term memory, I'm a little bit like a lite version of Dory from Nemo. So, I can be literally a bit like that at times.

So I definitely struggle with that and then also following instructions can be really really difficult for me. I really have to ask people to really break it down, what they're saying even if they're like these are really simple instructions. I'm like yes, simple to you, that's not simple to me. And I find that really difficult so I do ask for very precise instructions. Sounds like instructions from you Sarah will be great actually so, you know really simple instructions help me.

And then just the anxiety aspects that can come with dyspraxia at times. So I'm really self-conscious when I eat - and a lot of legal networking revolves around eating - because I hold a fork in a different hand and I eat slightly differently to other people so I sometimes have anxiety around that, that I have to kind of manage. And that kind of relates to a later conversation about masking as well so I'll talk a bit

more about that, but I definitely do on the whole see more strengths than weaknesses though, but I think it's important to have a good grasp on both.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Definitely, and you raised really important things about the misunderstanding of what, in particular, dyspraxia is. It's we actually covered this in our event the other day Fake News, that it's not just clumsiness. It's like the other neurotypes, encompasses executive function differences, which for anyone listening that's you know, Lucy I think you mentioned I mean this is a great example because I can't remember, so working memory, things like having to write things down, the auditory processing. All very common and they don't typically form the general kind of public understanding. It's just very specifically dyspraxia is clumsiness and that's it, but in fact you have organisation, everything to do with that kind of inbuilt PA that's in your brain. And Sarah what about you?

Sarah Willshire:

Oh I think I'm the opposite of you Lucy. I wrote down my list of challenges first and I had nine, and then I wrote down my strength that I could barely think of two, and I think that comes from my biggest challenge. I'm doing lots and lots of work about this at the moment and for me the biggest challenge that I have is the stigma, of shame, around being neurodivergent. So a lot of children who are neurodivergent fall into the category you know the typical 'ADHD is an eight-year-old boy who can't sit still and you know is climbing the walls'. It's not like I was - it's not a very quiet, very self-controlled girl who is top of the class, who bless me plays the viola, badly, but played the viola. You know, was in all the extracurricular activities, went to Sunday school you know, did everything that was expected, top marks at A Level, went to Oxford University, went into law and you know became a solicitor.

And so for me, there was just this inner sense of shame. I felt like I was broken and defective on the inside and but I was, it's what I was saying before, I was meeting all the expectations. I was playing the game with all the neurotypical people and by objective standards I was passing. You know I was winning because I was getting the top marks and I got into Oxford. And I had this just core of shame where I knew that there was something wrong with me and it was only a matter of time before I was exposed and where I you know I was found out. So for me that then translated into massive impostor syndrome. Massive fear you know, of

failure and I think that that's kind of what I've struggled with most of my life.

But specifically in the world of work and I do, you know what, I was so delighted when I was diagnosed to find out that some of these things had a name. So I always talk about how the enemy of a neurodivergent person is the word "just" because do you know what, if we could "just" do this, why don't we "just" sort that out?, "just" make yourself do this task. And it's like no, actually. There's a medical reason why I can't "just" do it.

And so for example, one of the things that I really really struggle with is what's called PDA which is Pathological Demand Avoidance. And I like to describe it like, you know when you're in a, there's a movie, and they're doing a heist in an art gallery and going to steal this painting off the wall. And they go to take the painting off the wall and all of these metal gates just appear from the ceiling, and they just drop down, and the people get trapped inside a metal cage. And they just can't move and they can't escape. And it feels like my brain just does that.

So, I'll say right, you know what, I really need to do this really important thing today or I really want to do this really lovely thing and my brain will just go no, we're not doing that sorry. No, no, we're not, we're just not. No, no discussion, just no. And the amount of time and energy that I have wasted over the years hating myself and being cross with myself and not understanding myself, whereas actually now that I know that there's a name for that, you know when things feel like it's too important, and for me it's always something that will help me you know. It's always "tomorrow I want to make sure that, you know, I drink enough water". And then tomorrow I will not drink a single drop because, you know that would benefit me. So for me just being able to understand that these things have a name was, you know, was incredible and to start forgiving myself and accepting that this isn't a deep secret, you know, a shame, that I've got, it's part of my condition, made a massive difference.

The other one that's very very work related and I was again delighted to find out this was a thing, is our concept of time. As people, neurodivergent people so, we have two ideas of time. We either have right now or we have not now. And not now basically could mean in 10 minutes' time or it could mean never, and it probably does mean never to be honest. And so realising that, and I'm very much like you Lucy, if I can do something quickly right now I just have to do it because otherwise the chances are that I won't do it.

But then the other one that is delightful when you work in a legal environment where you've got so much to do, where there's so much coming at you, phone calls and emails, and you know documents to draft, and to do lists, and things, and it was the understanding the concept of 'object impermanence'. So this is the idea that within a neurodivergent brain, if you cannot see something or if something isn't smacking you in the face, you can genuinely forget that it exists. And that as a concept to neurotypical people is just insane. But my favourite one example of this which I think helps people to understand is there was a lady on a Facebook group that I'm on and she really really needed to send her passport somewhere. It was an official thing, she had to send it off. And pathological demand avoidance had kicked in and she hadn't done it, and she hadn't done it, and she hadn't done it, and it was now like, totally critical.

She had to post this passport today or she was going to get in trouble. And she was so proud of herself because she put the passport in an envelope, she'd gone to the post box, and she posted her passport. And then she'd gone home feeling really proud of herself. And then she remembered that stamps exist. Because up until that moment her brain had totally forgotten that in order to post a letter you needed to put a stamp on it. And she genuinely just put it in an envelope and put it in the post box with no stamp on it. And that, I explained that to my neurotypical husband and he was just like "What? Like how ridiculous!" and I'm like "No you don't understand, we can genuinely forget that things exist if we don't, you know, if we don't see them or we don't remind ourselves". So what I do workwise is I have to use my inbox as my to-do list so I have my emails and that's what I, if there's an email there that needs to be dealt with then I know that there's something there to remind me. So I don't delete any emails until I've dealt with them and I can see them. And if I need to do something I will email myself and put it in my inbox so that I know that I have to do it, because if it's not something there to remind me I will genuinely forget that it exists.

And I think that's quite difficult because one of the key skills about being a lawyer is being very organised and being very thorough and you know making a plan and following through on it. And again, this is where the shame comes in, you know. If somebody chases you on something that, you know, you were supposed to do and actually you genuinely forgot that, you know, you said you would do it, that just makes you feel very unprofessional. It makes you feel, you know, ashamed of yourself because how can you possibly have, you know, forgotten to do it? And

again, it just comes back to understanding that these things are beyond your control, that they're not character flaws, that you're not defective, you're not you know less than. You're actually a normal neurodivergent person struggling with these things and you can then start to, you know, work around them. And for me, it all sort of fell into place once I got the diagnosis and once I really started to think about, you know, what it meant for me on a daily basis.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Yeah that's, I mean, I think the shame and the stigma is something so many people experience and what you mentioned about, you know, coming across as potentially unprofessional - I think it's a real problem but not necessarily in the way that people think. The problem is, from my perspective, our you know kind of social expectations and ideas of professionalism. Like why is working in a certain way, in a way that doesn't meet your needs, somehow professional? We need to kind of move away from that, and that brings me on to my next question which is: do you think that the legal sector recognises that neurodivergent people have both strengths and challenges? And I'd like to start with Lucy as someone who's about to enter the profession because I think obviously perceptions change as we progress throughout life and yeah I think it'd be interesting to hear your thoughts first.

Lucy Barnes:

Yeah so I definitely think it's starting to in some ways and I think that's really really positive. And I think that but the sad thing, it varies from set to set and it varies from firm to firm and it varies from barrister to solicitor. And for me, I'm attracted to chambers that lived their values rather than just sort of preaching them, and that's something that kind of gave me encouragement actually, when you see a chambers and they've got people that are neurodivergent they and they kind of support them, they have an officer who's very dedicated towards you know meeting our needs that's sort of massive green flags for me. So I do think there are some great initiatives and there are some great firms and some great chambers doing some great things for neurodivergent people. But then there is the flip side of that, that that's not the norm and I and I think that that's what we need to kind of address and kind of work on.

And I don't like having to consistently explain myself and that's kind of how it can feel and I've been, at times in the past, I've not asked for reasonable adjustments or anything like that because I felt maybe at a

disadvantage if I did so. I definitely didn't do that my final pupillage round where I got pupillage because at that point I was like I'm tired of this, you either take me as I completely am, or I'm not coming anyway. So that was the kind of mood I'd got into. But it does take a lot of self-belief to do that and I think self-belief can be a bit of a challenge until we've kind of gone through the motions of who we are, and figured that out and figure out what we've got to bring to the table. So I'm hoping that the legal profession will evolve and I do see it doing so, so that's kind of gives me a lot of positives, but I think unfortunately it's the judiciary potentially and higher up that that could be posing, kind of issues, for that.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Yeah I mean I completely agree with that and you know as someone who hasn't entered the profession yet as well. But Sarah what are your thoughts?

Sarah Willshire:

Yeah so I feel like, kind of, the old dinosaur because I've sort of been in the profession for coming up to 20 years and I mean I would definitely definitely say that we are in a very different place now to when I started in 2004. I mean, looking back to when I was sort of a junior lawyer, I remember you know mental health, well-being at work you know, none of that was even a thing. You literally were there to, you know, record your time, bill, and you know, to pay your dues, and to put your time in. And the idea that you know, you would expect your manager to meet with you and see how you were doing you know, just generally. And I definitely think that as a profession we have moved away from that and more towards recognising people as individuals.

I also think that COVID, this might sound a bit controversial, I think that COVID generally for society had an unexpected possibly positive outcome in the sense that there were a lot of women, like me, who had carefully constructed their lives around this deep shame and this sense that they were, you know, defective in some way, but they had structures and systems in place and outwardly they were coping and they were seen to be successful. And then COVID and lockdown stripped away everybody's coping mechanisms. It stripped away people used to go to the gym, people who you know had systems in the office, and it locked us all in the house with our families or on our own, and it took people back to basics. And I think that, you know, a lot of people then ended up suffering with mental health issues as a result and, you know, coming to terms a lot more with themselves.

And there's a lot of women and men who I know sort of I refer to as the 'forgotten generation' - the 40 year olds who were just discovering that you know neurodivergence is a thing. And I think it shook all of us and it, you know, made us realise that, you know, what the way that we'd been living our lives was this construct that wasn't very authentic. So I think that that's what's caused a massive massive shift and I can see a lot of sort of people my age so sort of the 40, 50 year olds within the legal profession are generally sort of reassessing how we were trained and what we were told. And fortunately those people are sort of the powers that be sort of in equity and up positions and I do think that there's this sense sort of at management level, that actually do you know what the world has changed as a result of COVID and as a result of lockdowns. And we have to recognise that. And we have to, you know, acknowledge that.

The other thing that I really like, and someone said this to me the other day, I can't take credit for it but I love it, is she said to me that there will be a massive change coming in the legal profession and in lots of other professions when the next generation of lawyers start coming through the ranks because all of the people who are my age like I said, our children are struggling, you know, they're not doing very well. We look into what is wrong with them and, you know, we find out they're neurodivergent. We realise that's what's wrong with us and we fight tooth and nail to make sure that our children don't go through what we went through.

So for example, I've got a 10-year-old and a 12 year old. They are diagnosed, they are on medication and I am teaching them to be proud. I am teaching them to own it. I am teaching them to tell people that they've got ADHD and I'm teaching them to advocate for themselves. So when they, you know, get to adulthood, and when they enter the world of work, they are not going to mask, they are not going to, you know, fit in and, you know, hide in the corner. They are going to demand to be recognised and supported. And I think that I think that's coming. I think you know the younger generation as they come through they will just insist that they are supported and they are recognised and I'm really excited to see that happen because I think it's long overdue.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

It would be amazing to see. For example, in 30 years, imagining the judiciary being neurodiverse for example. That's, I mean, it's a bit of a mind boggling thought at the minute. We don't even have gender

diversity really amongst the judiciary or any other type of judiciary diversity. And I think going back to the COVID-19 pandemic, that was really tough for a lot of people but I actually experienced the opposite in a way, that it really opened my eyes up to wow, why is life a lot less stressful? I can do all of the things I was doing before but I'm not incredibly burnt out in a really short period. And that really triggered for me the realisation that I was multiply neurodivergent. So I'd be interested to know whether the pandemic and, you know, being thrown into remote working, although obviously having stressful elements, was that helpful or a hindrance to you in terms of your neurodivergent needs? And I'll just open that up to anyone.

Sonay Erten:

Yeah I'd say it was it was great for me because, like you, that's where I realised I was neurodivergent because all of a sudden I wasn't exhausted all the time and that was realising, you know, I wasn't masking anymore because obviously I'm at home, so I don't need to mask. And that's what started eventually realising that I was neurodivergent. But yeah, the remote working has been absolutely vital for me. I can I'm more productive because I'm in a comfortable environment. I'm not sat in an open plan office with people talking at you or talking across you constantly, bright lights, commuting into central London, which is just horrible when you're autistic and you have over sensitivity to senses. So yeah, I don't know how long I would have necessarily stayed in the profession if the pandemic hadn't happened because I, at the time, I was diagnosed with severe anxiety and depression because of everything and the lack of my diagnosis of autism and ADHD. So yeah, like you it was a really good thing for me I suppose.

Lucy Barnes:

I think for me it was a bit of a mix because it was definitely great in the sense I could sort of manage my own workload and plan around being neurodivergent and I found that, you know, not having to network in person was great. I'm actually not much of a fan of going to Inns of Courts and at that point, you know, studying for the bar course, the qualifying sessions that we have to do you have to usually, traditionally, do them in person at the Inns of Court which is actually a really daunting experience for me as a dyspraxic and it causes a lot of anxiety. And I learned to kind of network online, which has been fantastic for me. I've met some actually really genuine connections online so, I found different ways.

The part that I found hard is, I guess all brains are completely different and although I'm dyspraxic, I'm also a bit of an extrovert. But yeah I mean I, like, I'm introverted in some ways but also I like people, like the right people, not all people. Oh my goodness. But you know and I like to, you know, be around my friends and I like to be having fun so, I think that aspect I found really difficult of just, kind of, being that extroverted person but I think on the whole it was positive for being dyspraxic for sure.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

And as well with networking there's the, it's not just the physical, interpersonal aspects. It's the intersectional elements like I think you mentioned about class before. Well.

Lucy Barnes:

Well absolutely yes.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Yeah and yeah it's just so many different social norms and if you have overlapping social identities that don't fit within the stereotype of the lawyer then it becomes so many more layers of difficult. And Sarah, what are your thoughts?

Sarah Willshire:

Yeah, so I displayed typical ADHD hyperfocus. So at the time, I was head of a team of 13 people and we were a very small firm. So we furloughed nine people and went down to three. So me, a part-time solicitor, and a paralegal. And I went into 'I'm good in a crisis' mode. So I was just like right, stand back, I'll roll my sleeves up, I can do nine people's work, don't you worry about that. My husband also worked full-time and neither of us, you know, were furloughed and at that point we had a six-year-old and an eight-year-old, who I now know are both ADHD and possibly autistic. And I just went into crazy 'I can do everything' mode.

So I was working 12 hour days, trying to homeschool my kids and failing. I'm hoping they're going to end up being YouTubers because they watched so much YouTube during the lockdown that they surely to God must be able to get some benefit out of it. And I just, that is one of our strengths actually, that we're really really good in a crisis, and I just threw myself into it. Suffice to say that you can only sustain that for a short period of time and about 18 months later, once things had got back to normal a bit and, you know, people were coming back to work, I ended

up in a period of burnout and felt ashamed of myself for not being able to, you know, sustain it. So, for me it massively impacted my mental health and again I think it was when I started to realise there was other things going on and started to look into, you know, the concept of being neurodivergent for me and and for my kids.

And one of the things that I am quite ashamed of, but I'm working through my shame, is that I realised during lockdown that one of the things that I had done in my career to, sort of, mask and, you know, persuade people that I was a neurotypical lawyer, was to hyperfocus on work to the exclusion of everything else. So, I would routinely, you know, work crazy hours, miss bedtime with my kids, you know, and constantly be thinking about work, and focusing on work in a, you know, in a way that wasn't particularly healthy for me family-wise or or mental-health-wise. And I think part of the diagnosis was realising that and then I've sort of worked through that. And you know, I'm now medicated and in a much better place. But I think it was, a moment, anybody who, you know, was working at the time, it was a moment whether you carried on working or whether you were furloughed, it was a moment in time where you did sort of have to stop and think about your life, about the way that you, you know, run things, about the coping mechanisms that you have.

And like I say I do think, although this may be controversial, that some good came out of it, because there were a lot of people who were just so busy surviving that they hadn't stopped to think actually, I'm, you know, I'm miserable. I'm not enjoying my life, this is not working for me. And a lot of those people are now people that I'm friends with because they discovered they were neurodivergent as well and we're all now doing a lot better. So yeah, it was a tough one my lockdown experience I'm not going to lie.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Yeah it sounds very hard. I think, you know, there were some obviously positives but it was a rough ride for many of us. I think, you know, it drew a lot of us into realisation that we're neurodivergent and then, you know, we go back to so-called normal life - ish - and again everything is thrown again. And I think it's very easy for neurodivergent people to fall into that hole of hyperfocus on work, almost to prove your worth I suppose. It, you know, kind of gets entangled with the imposter syndrome, the self-esteem issues, but of course as Sonay mentioned there are those kind of golden aspects of the remote working, like the accessibility.

And for me, so one thing I do, which you can't even see is, I stim. I have it's like a little bit of putty and remote working nobody knows what I'm doing. Well, I've obviously just told you but yeah that, so that reminded me of, well Phil's video actually made me think of that because he mentioned stimming with a pen and obviously you can do that off camera. And things like that make such a difference but are so noticeable in the working environment and it's about kind of social acceptability but also being, fitting that model of professional. What does a professional person look like and do? And I'm just wondering whether any of you have found any differences in for example, remote working and the visible kind of signs of being neurodivergent, whether you're actually able to be a little bit more yourself because of remote working?

Sarah Willshire:

I'll go on that one. I do have to say there is one slightly negative consequence in that I used to do quite a lot of conference calls before lockdown, and I was perfectly happy with it being just a call. So we all, lawyers used to pay for, like, a central number and everybody would dial into this phone number and you would all have a big conference call. And then with COVID and everybody going online, people suddenly were like "why just have a phone call when we can actually have a video and we can see each other?" and for me I'd be perfectly happy for no one to see me ever. And just, I mean, I can just about cope with hearing my voice. So that's a negative because now even a quick call that should just be a call, is a video, which I'm not massively impressed with.

But I do think, I think it was you Sonay, who talked about when you were at home during lockdown you just realised that you weren't exhausted all the time and that's so true because I see it with my kids and I experience it myself. So currently I work in the office on a Monday and Tuesday. I do Wednesday, Thursday from home, and I'm in the office on a Friday. And by the time I get to a Friday night I am just absolutely exhausted because the effort of being in the office, and just being around people, and trying to block out the person next to you who's having a phone call, the light's not quite right and it's shining in your face, you know, you keep having to get up. I get up and go to the toilet a lot because I can't sit still, you know, all the time. And you don't realise how much that takes out of you, and then a lot of your time at home on a weekend is just you literally recovering from that social hangover of just having to be around people.

And I see it with my kids, bless them. They're at school five days a week and they come home on a Friday and, you know, they need the whole weekend just to recharge and just, you know, to be by themselves and, you know, not have to to mask and pretend they're okay. And I used to work full-time in the office before COVID. I don't know how I did it to be honest, but I can definitely now, last week or the week before some lovely people organised in the office meetings on my two days off. So, I did a full week in the office and I got to like the Friday morning, and I'd already done four days in the office, and I was literally honestly I could have cried I was so tired. And I remember being a junior lawyer and once saying to a girl, a lady, who I shared a room with explaining to her "oh my God I was so tired this morning I just, you know, I didn't know how I was going to make it into the office" and her turning around to me and saying "Sarah, you can't just not come to work because you're tired" and that stuck with me because - she was very neurotypical, she was lovely - but, you know, for a neurotypical person tired means oh, you know, "I stayed up a bit late last night", you know, or, you know, "I've exercised a bit too much, I'm a little bit more tired than usual".

But to a neurodivergent person, you know, the "I'm tired" literally means "I have used every ounce of my mental and physical energy to arrive at work today, and I don't know how I'm going to actually make it through the day". And that has always stuck with me and now of course, I understand where my "I'm tired" is very different to, you know, somebody else's. And again it's about once you understand then you can be kind to yourself and you can start to, you know, help yourself rather than beating yourself up and "why can't you just be like everybody else?". So for me, it's definitely a good thing that I can recharge on a Wednesday and Thursday and then, you know, I don't have to do the full week in the office.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Thank you. I've just seen the time. So, we're overrunning slightly but I'd still love to hear from you Lucy and Sonay briefly, and then I think we'll briefly cover masking, and then we'll be done for tonight.

Lucy Barnes:

So I was so intently listening to Sarah that I forgotten the question here we go with short-term memory loss I'm really sorry.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

I mean, now that you've said that it's now just deleted from my brain. But

I think it was

Lucy Barnes:

A perfect example.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Neurodivergence in action.

Lucy Barnes:

Yes.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

I think basically, it was about, I think I mentioned that I'm able to, like, stim off camera and so, yeah, leading on from that, is there anything that you're able to do remotely I guess that you wouldn't be able to do or it's less accessible in person?

Lucy Barnes:

I think just the element of managing my own workload and doing, I'm quite independent as a person in general so, I think having that aspect of it is really important. I think for me I'd be like Sarah, I need a mix like every day and I start to get that kind of social overwhelm with, you know, being around too many people. Particularly in the professional environment because I find that in the professional environment I find it that bit harder. Like my fiance's neurodivergent so that, you know, I'm in a very safe home life with that and likewise with my friends. Like, it just feels especially, it kind of crosses over with being care experienced because care experienced young people as well, we're hypervigilant. A lot of us have Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder which also affects the brain in a similar way to dyspraxia. So sometimes it's hard to tell which one is which, but I tend to feel less exhausted when I'm around safe people, and I tend to find that the legal profession feels less safe to me on the whole.

Although some individuals have proven me wrong on that and do feel very safe to be around, but in general, because you've obviously got that professional sort of side of you, you're having to think and again then class comes into it. We swear a lot from council estates and you can't do that in a professional environment. And if you're in any sort of environment when you're having to restrict being a part of yourself, which I think think we do in the profession, whether it's masking or you know not being our full self if we come from council estates like me, you

know, it is exhausting having to, you know, be a different version of you even if you are still trying to be that same person. So I do think that having the balance really works best for me.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Yeah and that kind of having different versions of yourself, I think is a struggle more for neurodivergent people because it's that lack of authenticity almost which a lot of us struggle with. But moving on to Sonay.

Sonay Erten:

Yeah kind of, sort of, what Lucy was saying about managing your own time. So, this is not so much from working from home but being self-employed. I've been able to manage the time I spend on video calls so, like you're saying Sarah, you know, they can be really exhausting. A normal phone call is actually a lot less exhausting. And so now I specifically - if I've got too many so usually it's about three, maybe max four video calls, I'll do in a day and then that's it - I won't put anything in there. And then in between, I can lie down, go do housework, something that, yeah I do enjoy housework which is weird when you've got ADHD, but I find my ways to motivate myself, but that that relaxes me. Whereas if I was in an office and then doing a video call and then where do I go to relax? Under the bright lights of the office? No. So that does help definitely. Yeah I think that's it.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Thank you. Yeah it sounds like really, across the board, that autonomy is such an important part of managing a career as a neurodivergent person. It's being able to cater to our own needs and the lesser extent of, I guess, masking which is what we'll move on to next. So, what is masking to you in the context of a legal career? How does that manifest for you? And I think we'll start with Sarah, if that's okay?

Sarah Willshire:

Yeah so, I had to really really think about this because it's very interesting. And once you realise, once you're diagnosed, and you start to realise that a lot of how you behave is masking, then instead of it happening automatically, and you not being aware of it, it suddenly becomes something that you're painfully aware of, and it becomes harder and harder to mask. Which in one sense is good but in another sense then you lose your sort of ability to, you know, be compliant and fit in at work.

But I think for me, I've sort of thought about my career and I have struggled with mental health throughout my life and I would say that probably on the inside, I am quite a depressed, very quite negative person, but the number of people who say to me at work "oh my goodness, you're always positive, you're always smiling, you know, you're so chatty and you're so lovely" and for me, that's massively part of it. So I always have this massive smile on my face at work. It also translates into that people-pleasing, you know. I will never say no to anything, even if I am absolutely drowning and, you know, I can't, I don't have any capacity to take something on. I will always take it on because it just won't occur to me to say no.

I was making my husband laugh before because I was preparing for this and I was saying, do you know, it's not even that I will say yes to things. It's somebody will ask me to help them with something and my brain will go "I don't know if I've got time to do that" so, as well as saying yes, I will then suggest other things that I could do to help that person, that they didn't even ask me to do, that I don't have time to do, and I don't want to do. But the masking part of me goes "you must make this person love you, so you must offer to do everything for them" and then on the other side of that, and it always comes back to shame for me, it's this not wanting to show any weakness or to show that I'm struggling.

So I have in my career had moments when I really should have put my hand up and said I'm not coping, I'm not doing very well. And I just couldn't because, you know, I couldn't let that massive, I couldn't let people think that I wasn't coping and particularly in the legal profession. I think I was drawn to, sort of, the legal profession because you know what I was saying before about how if life is this game and everybody else seems to know the rules and we're just pretending that we understand the rules? Then we love massive big signposts which say to us "if you do this you are behaving correctly and you will get a big tick and everybody will love you".

And I think in law, things like time recording, you know, if you hit your time recording target then you can show that you're doing what you're supposed to do. You know, billing targets if you're billing, you know, more what you should be billing or in excess of what you should be billing, you know, that's a good indicator that, you know, you're doing well. And I think for me and I think maybe for a lot of neurodivergent people, masking becomes hiding behind that. So, you know, you focus massively on I'm going to make sure I do, you know, meet my targets and I'm going

to exceed my target. And often, you know, what's actually going on behind the scenes is you're sacrificing your family time, you know, you're sacrificing your physical or mental health but, you know, you're achieving because you're making these targets.

So for me, it's very much the masking is people-pleasing, always saying yes, and almost not checking in with the 'real me' to see how I feel, or whether I want to do it. Just automatically saying yes and going along with other people, and that's something that I'm really having to work on. I am doing a lot better, I have to say now. I am trying, you know, trying to stop and think "can I actually do this? Should I do this?". But it's that automatic, the masking is automatic. I just want to say yes, and I just want to please you, and I'm not engaged with my real self. And I think in law, you can get a bit carried away with, you know, being this idea of a 'perfect lawyer' and hitting all your targets.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

Yeah I think you're spot on there and with the people-pleasing I think that's made even more, kind of, a problem really if you've been socialised as a woman because of course, there are the stereotypes with people-pleasing and I guess, kind of, conformance. But let's move on to Sonay. What's masking for you?

Sonay Erten:

Well, I just had a revelation Sarah, whilst you were speaking, because I've always been described as smiley. I have a big smile on my face and I'm guessing that's now a mask. So because I'm still in the early stages of diagnosis so, it's barely been a year, year and a half, so I still don't know where the mask ends and the me starts. So and it's something that I'm battling with and I'm pretty sure the anxiety and depression is as a result of that constant masking. And I think with the legal profession, kind of a bit of what you were saying there Sarah, it does encourage it as well because there is this traditional mould of what a lawyer looks like.

And I've been perfectly aware that I don't look like that at all. You know, I'm an ethnic minority, female lawyer who's neurodivergent. I'm very different to that mould and I think that the profession doesn't help in that sense. You know, I've experienced a bit like what you were saying Lucy earlier about judges not being very inclusive. I've had judges treat me differently to my opponent. I've walked into a chambers and been asked "when is the lawyer arriving?" So stuff like that, it makes me mask even more, even though I can't change how I look but I try and look as

best as I can as what a lawyer looks like. You know, I'll wear a suit, I'll wear heels, even though I hate heels, and just try and speak differently as well. So I guess going back to what we were discussing earlier about working from home, I am able to drop that mask, but I think very much within those traditional environments it's still very difficult.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

That's really interesting, especially about, you know, like dress code as yeah, as anyone socialised as a woman, we're expected to look a certain way, not in the same ways that anyone socialised as a man is. And then that plays into sensory sensitivity and other things. Lucy what's masking for you?

Lucy Barnes:

Well, I feel like dyspraxia helps me in a way because there are actually aspects of it that I can't physically mask. Like if I was to wear heels I would break my neck so, that helps me because I physically can't, so I won't. So, I think that that does help. I mean the spatial awareness elements of dyspraxia likewise, like there, I can't, there's nothing I can do to make myself walk in a straight line, like it just, I do veer and I just don't have that spatial awareness that other people do. So there's elements of it that I don't feel like I can mask but then the elements that I can, has definitely showed up to me in social avoidance and avoiding particular situations where I know that the situation, given my dyspraxia, will make me very very anxious.

Like I've said so, fancy dinners, again that's class-based as well but also dyspraxia. I'm very conscious when people are watching me eat. That's one of the things that's really triggering for me and I find it really tough. And then the class element of why is there more than one fork? It's just too much at that point. So I do tend to try and avoid those situations. So I know that that's kind of an element of it and in general, just trying to behave like neurotypical people in those sort of environments, like that people would. I've even tried at certain points in my life, I haven't the last two years where I've kind of got that self-belief generated, but past then I was like, I tried to eat the other side of my hand, I eat in the wrong hand but who decided that anyway? First and foremost, who got to decide that?

But you know, I used I tried to do that, and I've tried, you know, to mimic the way people walk and I've tried to do those things but I ultimately realised that that's too exhausting and I got to the point where I was like,

, you know, I'd rather be disliked for who I am than liked for who I'm not. And when I realised that, that was when things unlocked for me, and that was when I decided actually, I wasn't going to mask anymore. And the thing I still struggle with with masking is class-based, so accent. I'm actually from Essex believe it or not, but this accent is from years of masking because I didn't sound like this five years ago. So you know, the elements where I do mask are still, I'm still trying to regain my sense of class identity back in the profession. But yeah, in terms of, kind of, being neurodivergent, I've kind of come to terms with the fact that this is who I am, and if other people don't like it then that's their issue.

Danielle Gleicher-Bates:

And that's a really powerful way to be able to see it. And I mean going, you know, on a kind of comedic note, back to the all the different forks. I mean, neurodivergent people are often portrayed as being weird for having special interests or niche interests. I mean, we have rules on forks now and that's not weird, you know? I think, you know, social norms are not what they're all cut out to be and interesting that you say about mimicking other people, you know, that's a form of masking and even compensation. And we've run over quite a bit now so, I'd just like to thank all of our speakers so, Lucy, Sonay, and Sarah, and my colleagues, my co-founders Emma and Charlotte. But of course, all of our attendees, thank you so much for joining us tonight. Yeah thank you so much for joining us, we hope you have a great weekend and that we'll see you again soon.