

Raegan Cotton: Facing young adulthood with ADHD

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SPEAKERS

Raegan Cotton, Katy Weber



Katy Weber 00:00

Yeah, I was really interested when you reached out to me because it's true. I, I interview guests, you know, I started this podcast because I was diagnosed at the age of 45. And so I like looked out, looked back at the span of my life through motherhood and, and university and babies, and it was just like ADHD everywhere, right? And so yeah, like, I have a tendency to interview a lot of women who are in the same position as me, oh, and perimenopause. Like, it's just, you know, this whole long laundry list of all of these ways in which it manifests itself. And so I'm always I love whenever I hear, you know, women in their 20s, or listening to the podcast and relating to, because I feel like, it's my gift to you, right? I'm like, you can avoid the 20 years of depression and anxiety and questioning that some of us went through, I feel like that would be so wonderful. So when you reached out to me, and you were like, you know, I feel like generationally, there's a lot of interesting, you know, just, I feel like you have a lot of thoughts, and I want to hear about them, because I think it is super interesting to kind of find out what it's like. You know, I have had guests who were diagnosed in their 20s. But just sort of what it's like in the moment, and also, with what we know, because often when I interview often when I when I interview women who were diagnosed either in childhood, or in high school, or in or in, even in their 20s. That was 20 years ago, and it still felt like even if you were diagnosed, it didn't matter because nobody knew anything about ADHD or what it looks like in women. And we're only just really coming to like a, an explosion in terms of our understanding about what it is. Well looks like, and how different it is for women and men. Yeah, so yeah, so I can't wait. So let's get started. First of all, I want to hear about your I want to hear about your diagnosis and when you were diagnosed and kind of what was going on for you that led you to think maybe this is ADHD, for



Raegan Cotton 02:11

sure. There's like, I know, I feel like for all of us, there's like so much to it, it's hard to even get it into one, one kind of snapshot. But yeah, like you were saying, so I'm I'm 25 now I was diagnosed when I was 24. It's been interesting, for sure, growing up like undiagnosed. And I

think actually really, the most interesting thing is that I have two younger brothers. One of them is two years younger than me. And he was diagnosed pretty much right off the bat when he was like, I don't know, 12 he started having a lot of like, academic problems. And it just was like, alright, let's, let's get him tested, let's do all the stuff. And I mean, in a lot of ways, like he is and was like the stereotype of like, you know, when you say, Oh, you get this ADHD diagnosis, you think of a little boy climbing around on the walls. Like, that was never me, that was my brother. So, you know, it was pretty easy, I guess to just see that and be like, like for the people around us for students, or sorry for teachers around us and like our kind of community to just be like, Oh, yep, done ADHD. And then like, I kind of was two years older, I did not get any of that recognition or like, awareness really, at all until I kind of sought it out on my own when I was really struggling at a later time of my life. But yeah, it's it's been definitely interesting. So I actually in high school, while I should go back a bit, I have always been told, you know, Oh, you're so smart. Like you're so capable. You're so this and that. And I've always in a way, like no, not but I've also never really felt like I've been successful in noise that I want to be successful. And I've like, never really been a good student academically, like just not, you know, in a way that I think, when you like talk to neurotypical people, and you're like, Oh, I wasn't a good student. They're like, yeah, yeah, like we all get in. No, like, I was really not a good student. I don't think y'all, y'all know what I'm saying. Um, so yeah, I just was really struggling in school, but I always kind of got by like, I don't know if it's because of my gender. I don't know if it's because I was like, just kind of more quiet and reserved, where I kind of flew under the radar and a lot of ways that I was struggling. Honestly, I in middle school, I started like, copying homework off of my peers and like really just kind of tried to get through in whatever way that I could without like, letting anyone know that like, I mean, I didn't even know I was struggling. I just couldn't do it. I just was like, I'm trying to keep doing these things that everybody says you have to do to be successful and like, I didn't know how to do that. So I was just trying to figure it out kind of the best way that I could always and you know, it's so funny because like looking back I totally would sit in class and like, talk to like the boy next to me. And then the teacher would come around and be like, hey, like James, stop talking like you're distracting Reagan. And it was like very often that they would not see me as like the troublemaker kind of because I was generally pretty quiet and reserved, but then I'd be like, bouncing off the walls, you know, like talking to the students next to me, but they just, they wouldn't expect it. So that was kind of interesting, always. And, you know, there's like, 100 examples of things that I messed up and didn't like, succeed in, in the academic world, growing up, and just, I feel like I never read a single book that we were supposed to read through high school, like, I just would like, listen in class, when they were discussing the, like, the book report or whatever. And I would get through somehow, and I would understand the big picture enough that I could like, figure it out, connect the symbolism and kind of just make it through. So I mean, I don't know, you know, I think that's a pretty ADHD thing, but definitely had some funky coping mechanisms always. And so then in high school, I was like, really struggling, I couldn't really get by with my kind of sneaky coping mechanisms that I now know, or coping mechanisms as well, I was struggling a lot more academically, but like, still, in the case that I was getting by I was getting these c's, even though I was like, I was like failing tests, but that I do all the homework. So then I like got all the points to like, get me to this kind of average, you know, fly under the radar. But I was really struggling, I was struggling depression, I was struggling with anxiety, my anxiety got really bad. When I was in high school, like out of control, I, I felt like I could not function, I couldn't do anything. And it was at that time that I mean, I was like, going out it with my mom all the time. Like, my room was a mess, like I could not keep it clean. And just like really struggling with like day to day things outside of school. And like the things that my peers were doing, like applying for colleges was like, really not something I even knew how to do or like what to do. And it did have a lot of support. But it was just really, it became really difficult. And I actually thought, like, I believe was like my senior

year of high school. Once I did start getting a treatment for my depression and anxiety of seeing a therapist at the time, and I kind of was like, I think independently, I was like, I think I have ADHD, like I really cannot do a lot of these school things. And at the time, I was really just thinking of, you know, kind of the main first thoughts that people think folks with ADHD struggle with like school, you know, and then when you get older, like work, but I had no awareness of like the emotional regulation, like the kind of greater sensory overwhelmed things at the time. So I was just saying, like, I really can't do school, I'm really struggling, I don't know what to do. And I try to talk to my mom about it. And like, you know, bless her heart, like she looked at me and was like, well look like she, you know, she looked at me, she looked at my little brother, and she was like, You are not the same. Like, he's, he's got ADHD, like, he checks all the boxes, like, yep. And she was like, I think you're just really depressed and anxious, like, um, was kind of just like, hesitant. And so then I really didn't know and I obviously didn't know that there were gender differences. I didn't really, like look into it too much. It was just one of these like fleeting things. And so then we, I went to my psychiatrist, and my mom came with me and we had like, a discussion about like, do you have ADHD? And basically, they were kind of like, maybe like, a, you know, like, my, my mom just kept being like, you know, like, you are not this running around like that you don't have these things you do not check these boxes, like you're different. You know, you're intense, like there were these other terms used, but really, it kind of was like chalked up to depression anxiety. The psychiatrist did give me one prescription like, she was like, well, let's just let's just see how it goes for Ritalin and I remember I took it like once, maybe twice. And it made me feel so sick. Like I had such bad side effects that I just was like, I can't do this like no and I never took it again. And then was your brother Anna cater to New Dawn. He was on and off but not really ever consistently. He really didn't get a ton of treatment in that realm. I think he's doing a lot more now as he's gotten older, but his support came more in the sense of like, he was transitioned to a smaller private school with much smaller classes and like a lot more teacher attention and teacher focus whereas I was you know, I like to say the guinea pig. I was the oldest I was enrolled in our big bigger public high school where I was a number not a name, like, teachers didn't really know me that well, and I could fly under the radar. And so that's kind of what I did. And my brother got support in different ways, like academic, you know, changing schools, whereas I was like a junior at that point. It would have been a lot for me to change schools and I didn't really want to honestly, it would have disrupted everything but yeah, not really, like, dabbled in it. tried it, but I don't think he was ever truly medicated and like a consistent way. So yeah, it was it was fascinating.



Katy Weber 10:37

Okay, so yeah, so you, you went to the psychiatrist, and they thought, Okay, you might have ADHD, maybe what? What then happened?



Raegan Cotton 10:47

Yeah, it was kind of like, well, we'll give it a shot. Like, I don't know, it was alright.



Katy Weber 10:52

That's why we're sorry. So you took a little in and you didn't feel you made you feel nauseous or Yeah,

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Raegan Cotton 10:59

yeah. And then I went off to college, and I was super busy. I moved from Southern California to Denver, Colorado, where I live now to go to school. And yeah, I just kind of was thrown into college and kind of forgot about ADHD thing. You know, I was really struggling with depression, anxiety. But it's really hard to get treatment for that when you're a college student, even on campus. I remember like, if they were going to continue prescribing me my antidepressants that I was taking, it was \$110 copay every time and they made you go every like month to check in. And I didn't have the time didn't have the money. Like that was half my paycheck, you know. So I kind of just stopped, let it all go power through college. Definitely. I definitely, like loved my classes. I know that that's like, definitely an ADHD thing. But I started studying criminology and within sociology and political science and psychology, and I just got like, so sucked in. I loved it, I still love it. I wish I could go back and just do school like that forever, but only take the classes that I want to take. And the ones that are interesting to me. And if you look at my GPA for like my common core classes, ones you have to take and then the ones that I chose to take, it's like, worlds apart. I mean, you could just see it, it was like C minus C, versus like, I was doing really well in my other classes where I could write and read. And

**Katy Weber 12:32**

I could always do that with attendance too, right? Like the classes I loved. I would be there no matter what time of day it was, and then the classes that you could tell I was just like, desperately trying not to flunk. Yeah, go to

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Raegan Cotton 12:46

just stop by. Exactly. So. Yeah, that was that. And I definitely like struggled there's a ton of ways that I could like when you one of the questions you asked, like, what are some of the things that you look back and see, we're definitely ADHD like in college, I wrote this paper one time. Obviously, I wrote it the night before it was due, I misread the prompt, I missed a key detail that said, like, you know, pick one example and and write your paper about this. And I missed that. I picked I think two or three and I structured my paper on like two or three different things. And the professor I remember wrote, like, you didn't follow the prompt, too bad. It's a really good paper. See? And I just remember being like, what, like, first, I was so mad. I was like, What is he talking about? And then of course, I reread the prompt and I'm like, it says one like, right one example like, what? What the heck, like, what is wrong with me, you know? So there's like a ton of examples like that, that just stand out through college. And you know, I did make it through like, I'm very grateful for that. But, um, yeah, then what I guess mid 2020, or beginning of 2020 I was having a lot of trouble like with depression, anxiety, and I don't know, I untreated ADHD amidst general chaos. So yeah, that's kind of where I was like, I'm really struggling, like, I was stuck in my house all the time. I'm working remote. I do love my job. But I'm like, Oh, my gosh, I'm just stuck in my house. There is so much going on. Just it feels like everything's compounding. I had a lot of family stuff going on at the time. And so I just, I was really feeling out of control, like in a way that I hadn't felt since probably high school when I was at my worst mental health space. And I was like, you know, took a lot of time, took a lot of dealing with insurance and figuring out online like how to get help, but then I got connected with a therapist and pretty early like I think at our intake, she kinda was like picking

up on some things and was like, Have you ever like, considered ADHD like And I explained, you know, oh, in high school it was dabbled with, but never really. Nothing came of it. She was like, let's just do this Quick Exam, like this quick assessment. And I mean, I checked literally all the boxes, like, and I even then I still was like, oh, okay, like, continued on. And it wasn't until like, a few weeks later where I just was like, Oh my gosh, like, everything makes sense. Like, this is it like, oh my gosh, and she was on that introduced me to like, look like women like, fam presenting people like, do a lot to hide this and do a lot to display like these traits differently than men. And that's kind of your stereotype. So that led to that led to my diagnosis, everything in the world suddenly made sense. I had a full night of like, maniacally journaling, just like, and this thing like recounting my entire life, you know, being like, and this thing happened, oh, my gosh, and the laundry like, oh, that's why I can't do this thing in the morning. Like, I could never do anything in the morning. And I just, I never knew like, that was the thing. I always was like, I can't work in the morning, like, I can't do it. I need some time to warm up, like, more time than other people need. So yeah, that's what led to my diagnosis. And it's honestly changed everything in my life.



Katy Weber 16:28

So the amazing, I love hearing stories, when will you know when a therapist either suggests it or is like fully on board? Because I feel like there's so many stories where women are like, No, I was they think I'm just depressed and anxious. And I was like, if a therapist is not willing to see the connection between a life of depression and anxiety and being undiagnosed, then they, you need a second opinion. Because it's just like, you know, even when you were talking about going with your mom, and like that idea that like, well, you don't exhibit these hyperactive symptoms that your brother did. So maybe you're just depressed and anxious. And it was like, No, there's no such thing as being just just to figure out what the source is. And it was so many of us it was this fact that, like, we felt like we didn't know what was wrong with us, or like we're saying, like, I just can't do that thing. And it's not like I don't want to it's not like I you know, don't feel like it like there's a legitimate paralysis there. That is really, really difficult to articulate.



Raegan Cotton 17:33

Yep, yeah. Not knowing if like, I'm like, Am I making this up? Like, is this am I lazy? You know, like, why can't I do this? Just that feeling of like, why can't I do this? Like, yes, happening?



Katy Weber 17:46

And then also wersal? Well, and just, you know, also, I think your story is so similar to so many of us in terms of like, you, it's never noticed in with teachers, if you're not being disruptive, right? Which so you know, if you are not jumping around, if you're not like, you know, taking chairs or doing whatever annoying the teacher, then why would the teacher bother to suggest it or even diagnose it like all of those diagnoses and boys when they're kids is because they were disruptive. And so the teachers like we need to fix this. We need to make this person less disruptive. And girls are so much more inclined to be likable, right? And to try to like be that. Hey, so I thought it was interesting what you told the anecdote about the boy who got a job. Oh, I



Raegan Cotton 18:33

think that's like so many times gender,



Katy Weber 18:36

gender stereotype right there.



Raegan Cotton 18:38

Yeah. They're like, Oh, you're distracted Reagan, like, she's trying to work. Like, now I'm looking back like, oh my gosh, like,



Katy Weber 18:46

what? I know, I didn't even realize that until after my diagnosis, how many times I was separated from the group in elementary school and middle school were like, we'd be in these like desk clusters. And my teacher would pull my desk away, or I'd have to sit all by myself, or I'd have to sit next to the teacher's desk as punishment, because I was always talking and I was like, oh, like, I never would have remembered. I never would have remembered that if I hadn't been like thinking back about like, what are the signs when I was a kid? What an



Raegan Cotton 19:15

isolating feeling to as a kid to be like, Oh, I've been pulled aside and you know, I gotta sit by the teacher. Like, that's a good feeling. Oh, I



Katy Weber 19:24

know, oh, don't even get me started. And then also that that stereotype, I think we fall into a lot, which is like, you can't possibly have ADHD because you have good grades, you know, or like this, this reinforcement of the stereotype that ADHD only happens to people who are like a total hot mess on the outside, and, you know, demonstrably a hot mess, whereas so many of us do really well in school. And so many of us do really well in our jobs, and we actually are quite high functioning. And so people say you can't possibly have ADHD and you're like, No, no, you don't understand like that. What you're seeing, there's the that's just the iceberg. You know, like the iceberg analogy of just like you don't understand what's going on behind the scenes.



Raegan Cotton 20:08

Absolutely. I really felt that even when I was given the diagnosis, like I had so much doubt of like, is this a thing that I'm putting on for myself? Like, am I just saying that I have ADHD to, to like, make myself feel better like say that, you know, this isn't my fault and to like dismiss that

blame? And you know, really like I think I brought that to my therapist. She was like Reagan I think she could tell I was spiraling in the way that like we ADHD ears do where it were like minimizing our own stuff she was absolutely if it helps I'm I'm a professional here like you have ADHD you don't need to say that you're putting this on yourself like this is a confirm thing so we can like move on and kind of that like validation just helps so much to be like you are not crazy like this is this is real. Don't talk yourself out of it. Like don't minimize what you've gone through and what is real.



Katy Weber 21:08

Yeah, right. I try to remind myself of that all the time which like that impulse to set that impulse to self doubt that constant questioning and then the subsequent minimizing like yeah, that is the ADHD talking all



Raegan Cotton 21:21

Exactly exactly.



Katy Weber 23:20

Okay, so now you talked a little bit about how life has changed since your diagnosis. I feel like we have that, you know, that emotional roller coaster of like, oh my god, this explains everything. But then also followed by like, wait a minute, I'm still in isolation. I'm still in pandemic, I still can't work in the morning are all of these like ways in which you now have to kind of manage what what you now understand as ADHD? How do you think how do you feel like life has changed for you? Since your diagnosis?



Raegan Cotton 23:50

Yeah, it's changed a lot. Honestly. Just having that awareness, like being able to tap in and recognize like what is happening as it's happening. Specifically, with like, being overstimulated has helped me so much recognizing like, you know, I would come over to my partner's house after a long day, and I get his place. And he's watching like a football game or something or a game and I'm trying to talk to him and like, the game is on in the background and like work, the dog is running around, and we're trying to figure out dinner and I would just, like, freak out sometimes. And then he'd be like, what is like, are you good? And I was like, it's loud, like, but I never really knew why that was the case. And so it was hard for both of us. And now, I guess recognizing that, like, I'm able to be like, okay, like I can support him in doing the things that he wants to do and like remove myself or even have that anticipation of like this might be a little overwhelming. And I know why. And I can use that to kind of like better mediate the session. To prevent me from getting past that threshold that's been really helpful with like the emotional regulation piece and just knowing I get stressed when there's weird noises, I can't talk when the TV's on or you know this or that is happening. That has helped immensely. I'll also say I am now medicated, not not with the riddle, and that made me sick. But it has helped so much. And what are you doing instead? Yeah, I take Vyvanse now, okay. And it's been much better, much, much, much better. We, I had a lot of support from my psychiatrist, and my therapist, which

has really helped me because I had a lot of apprehensions about taking this medication. I think that's another thing like growing up and being the age that I am. And growing up when I grew up, like I had such a stigma around medications, and I still have some anxiety. But I like to think it's a healthy anxiety. But just growing up and being like, you know, seeing my peers, abusiveness like this, yeah, I'm hearing it in the news, and you're seeing articles on like, that this medication is being abused, and it's being over, administered. And, you know, I don't really know the details on all that, but I know that I saw my peers in college and even high school, like, abusing this medication and using it to like, become like a superhero, and all this stuff. And so I was like, very scared to take it as, like, always been a rule follower, and also knowing I can be really impulsive of like, is this what I really want to introduce in my life? Like, what type of like, crutch is this gonna be? And how could this like, spiral out and create more problems in my life when I don't want that? But it's helped so much.



Katy Weber 26:52

Yeah, well, and also we have addictive personalities and to decide exactly,



Raegan Cotton 26:55

I've never smoked a cigarette, because I know, I cannot smoke a cigarette, you know what I just, yeah, I never let myself do it once. And so I definitely have that addictive personality that I think is quite not not alone in that. But really, like, talking with those professionals and understanding like, this is like true support, like people take medication for all different reasons, like working through that stigma. And knowing that I like have professionals supporting me who like they're, you know, they're gonna know if, if things go out of hand, like, that's, that's their job, they've got my back, and like, that feels really good, just to lessen that personal anxiety. And then also, like, I believe it was my therapist was like, Look, Greg, and like, even if you want to take this for, if you take this for a year, that's what you decide is the best thing. Like, really, the goal is to like, have enough space in your brain to build the tools to build the practices, and like the coping mechanisms and strategies that are going to be healthy. And if you use this to support you through that, then you know, we could revisit like, obviously I was I can always decide to stop or change. I have tons of agency in that way. But just being like look, after a year, you can say I don't want to take this medication anymore, and you're probably still going to be way better off because like I'm working with this therapist, we're working on skills, we're working on that regulation and like having the space to implement and actually build these practices into habits has been so so helpful. So that's definitely changed in a in a really good way.



Katy Weber 28:39

Yeah, I love that that's a great perspective too. Because I feel like my you know, I've talked about this with other guests, my history with antidepressants was always sort of feeling I would get trapped in that cycle of like, this medication doesn't feel like it's working so let's up the dose and then I would have constant questioning which is like okay, if this is how bad I feel on the medication, imagine how bad I'll feel off the medication and so that I have to keep upping the dose and never being like maybe this is the wrong medication but just I guess always feeling like a so much mental real estate was taken up wondering if the medication was

working and then I'd be like, You know what, maybe it's just easier to go off everything and start from you know, start from scratch and like that's my baseline and so I like the fact that you are you know, the your hand holding that you're getting from your therapist and just in terms of like this medication is supposed to free up that mental space as opposed to making it feel even more crowded which is what I sometimes think

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Raegan Cotton 29:46

medication Yeah, I had the same experience when I was in college taking antidepressants as well to like very much the same and I was just like I'm done for like a lot of reasons like the finances worse on the time, the energy all of it. I was just like, I think can't do this, I stopped. And, you know, it was what I had to do at that time. And I think it really got me to where I am now. But I do wish I had more support



Katy Weber 30:11

at that time well, and then you think about, you know, the the quote unquote abuse of steel stimulants, right with in college especially, and how it's gotten this reputation of being this controlled substance. And it's so expensive and like, the way in which it seems to be going, it seems to be splintering off from like SSRIs. And antidepressants, like when like antidepressants are so easy to get. They're like pennies, pennies, a bottle, compared to the expanse that so many of us, especially in the US are experiencing with with these with stimulants, right, like It blows my mind, though, the hurdles that we have to go through in order to get this medication and the overwhelming expense. So many of us have to have this medication. Like, I don't know what I'm getting, I guess just the stigma that is rising with stimulants. And it's this the stigma is from the fact that it's being abused, right. And I don't think it's necessarily being abused. I think it's just being used in, like, in a way in which like, if it was more available, it was more widely available, or young people understood the, you know, what was happening, and that this was helpful to them, like, yes, you know what I'm saying? Like, I feel like, we're likely nobody's using it.

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Raegan Cotton 31:35

The narrative is what I had always held and seen as being so problematic, like, you're absolutely right.



Katy Weber 31:43

But you're right, we fear it. We think it's like heresy.

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Raegan Cotton 31:46

Yes, exactly. And, you know, even just thinking like, of being on a college campus and how drugs, various drugs are more or less acceptable, like the social implications of that, like the racial implications, the the history of different medications and where they come about, and

who is allowed to have what is is fascinating to me. But just, the narrative was a big thing, just growing up and being like, oh, that's like math, like they're giving kids math, and that's what I grew up hearing. So then it's like, I'm in high school, struggling and I'm like, I don't want to take meth like, what, that's not gonna help me. And having to really unpack that and be like, Whoa, like, this is not where we are. This is not what it is. And that was definitely the case.



Katy Weber 32:39

YEAH. Alright, so then, yeah, what other kind of observations do you have in terms of Gen Z? Millennial? Gen, I guess you're still millennial, right? Gen Z is?



Raegan Cotton 36:43

Yeah, I know.



Katy Weber 36:45

I feel like Millennials like huge category.



Raegan Cotton 36:48

I know I'm on the cusp, I was born in 96. So I never know where I fall in that, but I've definitely straddling a weird line. And I think, I think really the, the gender difference comes with, just omitting in what we think about ADHD as just omitting the like emotional regulation, omitting the non like, school and work pieces are the things like I see it as, as, like, I don't know how to articulate this, but just when you're struggling in like school, or you're struggling in work, for some reason, like that is much more accepted and like, validated than struggling with those emotional and like interpersonal kinds of things. And I think, in a lot of ways, like, that has led to, I mean, there's a ton of reasons why men are, are diagnosed more than women, but I think it's like, Oh, if there's a man struggling with work, or with school, like, that's a big problem, we need to be sure that that person is getting a lot of support. Not really considering, like, you know, that, of course, men have emotional regulation problems too. And, and those are valid and need to be treated as well. And then, you know, we have women on the other side, who we're gonna go through way greater lengths to still succeed in these academic and like, traditionally, you know, male masculine dominated Spaces, we're doing a lot more to get through and to be seen as successful. But when we're struggling with our mental health, like, that is not, that's not validated. That's, that's, oh, you're depressed, you're anxious. And there's not this urgency of like, oh, my gosh, why are all of these women struggling? Why are all these people struggling? And it's really like, what we as a society, prioritize. And, you know, that's doing well in school that's doing well and in work, and really is dismissive of the fact that we're all people with like, very wide scopes of life. And, you know, we're more than our like, capitalistic output, we we have merit in and of ourselves and our health and our well being and that healing is so important. So I think that's kind of a big thing that I've seen, just in those gender differences.



Katy Weber 39:20

Yeah. And I think, you know, your generation has the crippling student debt. Absolutely. Which, you know, so you have that butting up against the overwhelming pressure to like succeed in your 20s and because you're seeing all of these like social media influencers and tick tock influencers who are you know, making piles of money at such a young age, and it's I feel like there's, you know, the pressure is much greater on your generation in terms of like success at a young age. When the the it's just impossible. I mean, like the you have, you still have to go you still have to get a call Education, but then you end up with crippling debt for the rest of your life as a result. And yeah. But there's still that pressure that you have to like, live by yourself and have all of these accommodations, like having, you know, the great house and car and career that just aren't available to you anymore. And yeah, it's the reality just doesn't reflect the dream in a way that I thought was for my generation at all.



Raegan Cotton 40:30

Yeah, and the stakes are higher. I mean, like you said, like, you come out of college with all this debt, I have debt, and most of my peers have debt. And it's this, alright, you got six months before you're going into repayment, like, what are you going to do you better, better get on that, like, better find a job. And there's not a ton of great job opportunities. There's not a ton of, you know, resources for finding that. And you are just pushed really hard, really fast into like, real adult world, and the stakes are really high, you now have loans, you now have all of these things you rent is astronomically high. And you know, we're way underpaid is like a generation and just looking at inflation, looking at how how we as a generation are doing like the stakes are really high. And it's very hard. It's it's really hard. People don't know what to do they feel lost. And then we're in the middle of environmental crises. And, you know, I know a lot of young people, a lot of people my age, neurotypical, ordinary neurodivergent, are feeling really compelled to move to work that they are passionate about. And unfortunately, that work doesn't often pay very well. So stakes are definitely higher as well.



Katy Weber 41:51

Yeah, that's nothing new. I know, I remember it's not, but I do remember feeling like having this realization with my teenager, recently, where I was like, your generation is really the first who doesn't know if you're going to make it to adulthood. Like, I've sort of feel like there's this nihilism this that's in, in all of your life decisions, right? Like, I'm like, Why have children? What is it we're destroying the earth? Like, there's an imminent seed, to the destruction of the earth that didn't exist when I was in my teens? And 20s? Yeah, and so, you know, there was always that question of, like, do I have children do I not and we had all obviously, as women had a lot more opportunities, you know, there was less pressure to sort of be a housewife, and any of that, but like, I feel like with, with the new, with a much younger generation, like, this is really the first time where you base all of your life decisions with a sense of like, we may or may not make it, you know, and, and like, how does that even, like, I was thinking of this out loud with my teenager, and then I stopped myself and I was like, how am I like, destroy, like, I was, like, should I even not mention my bad mother, if I'm even mentioning that this reality exists? But like, I was, like, how does that even affect any, you know, the way you approach decisions, you know, like, how does it approach saving money? You know, why bother, you know, how does it

approach? Yeah, working towards anything, you know, with that looming sense, in the background of always just being like, well, we're fucked. Anyway. So what's the point? Yep. And that's like, that defines their generation. Yeah. It does that

R

Raegan Cotton 43:29

I don't know. Like, how much of this is like ADHD? I do think I suspect some of it but like, I get pretty infatuated with like, these thought loops, you know, that rumination of like, oh my gosh, what are we doing like what am I doing? Seeing that bigger systems connect? I think for me and just my passions has been both a blessing and a curse because I feel like it's really propelled me to like push myself get out of my comfort zone like do more and like be better, but it also is this like, a very heavy weight to carry is like having so much pressure that you put on yourself and you know, trying really hard to step back and not putting the weight of the world on yourself and you know, knowing that I will never as an individual like right the wrongs and make make life. What am I trying to say? That like justice, liberation, those like humanity components are not my I cannot do that. I cannot write those wrongs as an individual. That does not mean that I can be complacent, you know, there are absolutely things that I can do and so it's definitely this like, give and take of like, I am deeply passionate, I care so deeply, but then also being like, sometimes I'm like, I can't do this anymore. Like, it's too much, you know, like, I work in, I work in a nonprofit space, working to get young people engaged in politics. And really, it's incredible. I couldn't do anything else. Like, I'm so deeply passionate about it. And I feel very lucky to have a job that I care so deeply for, and get to connect with, like, really amazing. My coworkers are amazing, like, like minded peers, who pushed me but it's also I know, we all really do struggle with like, it's heavy stuff. It's it's not. We care deeply. And that's why we do this work. So it has mental health implications as well, for sure.



Katy Weber 45:43

Oh, yeah. And I think that that is something you constantly like, like you said, you're constantly writing that, you know, at what point is it too much? At what point do I really have to start thinking about self preservation, versus, you know, helping others and doing the work that not a lot of other people are able to are willing to do? And so feeling that calling but also realizing that somehow that calling is leading to a sense of self destruction that you feel like you're implicit in?

R

Raegan Cotton 46:11

Yeah, absolutely. And that savior complex to



Katy Weber 46:14

Yeah, right. Oh, my God. elements, we

R

Raegan Cotton 46:17

feel that pretty heavy too

feel that pretty heavy too.



Katy Weber 46:19

And I think and I think people, I think because we are Yeah, because we think really, really deeply. And I think we are like really run by our emotions. Like, it's, I love having a positive spin on ADHD. And I think there's so many wonderful qualities about it, but it is not a superpower. Like, it just drives me crazy when people like or dismiss the emotional gravity of life of ADHD and are sort of like, No, this is the greatest thing that ever happened to you. And like that toxic positivity just drives me crazy. And I certainly don't feel like, well, then you have to swing in the opposite direction and talk about how it's like a real it's a disorder and take it seriously, but, you know, because that bothers me. But, yeah, I just feel like it's so nuanced. And that's why I feel like we kind of, are figuring it out one conversation at a time, right? I've just been like, what is happening? And how do we deal with it,



Raegan Cotton 47:15

you're right, that that's such a toxic approach. I mean, I know, I definitely have skills, I have things about ADHD that I definitely like and make me a better person. But I think a lot of that comes from like, we really got to step back on that one and think about everyone's like power and privilege and the identities we hold and the space that we grew up in, and the ways that we can succeed. And I know for me, like, I am both, I'm very grateful. But I'm also very aware of like how my identity and my privilege growing up, like really did help me succeed and get to the space that I'm in now. And that, you know, you could look at me and say, Oh, you're successful, you're like a successful person. And the metric that we use is, it's just, it's so rooted in like, what export we put out, like how productive we are for society, and you know, even in school, like really marking students for, for things that are, you know, just training them to be good workers and get things done and productivity and productivity and output. And this is not about the means not about how we're doing it, what we're getting there. And so like, I mean, I think, yeah, there's there's definitely a bunch of skills, I've also struggled very greatly. But, you know, I grew up where my parents could afford to send me to tutoring. And they would help me and my brother could get put into a private school because they could afford that. I grew up in a pretty moderately wealthy, like white suburban home and like, how did that when I had those really impulsive outbursts and I got in trouble in a, you know, bigger way than just being reactive in class or something. I was given a pass, because, you know, I'm like, Oh, she's like a cute white woman. She's like, a sweet, you know, like, all these things we put on women and we put on whiteness, and we put on the passes that we give to people because of their identities. Like, I do think, I hate hearing that, like, Oh, it's a superpower because I just think like, how much of of that mindset comes from



Katy Weber 49:32

the accommodations that you have? Yeah, like,



Raegan Cotton 49:34

yeah, so that other people don't



49:36

have and, and



Raegan Cotton 49:38

I just think we kind of need to step back on that and be like, Okay, we all work hard. That's true. We all are struggling, but like some of us have different tools and different resources. And I think that gets minimized when you start talking about that. That approach. Yeah, no, that's a great point.



Katy Weber 53:23

Okay, so one thing I like to ask my guests is if you could rename ADHD to something that's a little less confounding or problem that can be thought about what? What would you might call it?



Raegan Cotton 53:36

Yes, I have. And I've thought about this like, even before, before this question was posed, because I've never really felt like that ADHD like label fits. I mean, it does in a million ways, but it also doesn't. I don't have a name, I will say, but I wrote down regulation, because I think that's a key thing. I think that's a key misunderstanding and a missed consensus. And I think something that has to do with processing, something that has to do with regulation, I think those are my, that's the direction I would go for renaming it because I know I just they, I don't have a deficit of attention. Like, you know, I really don't it's just that I can't regulate it. I can't get myself always to do what I know needs to be done or even. Sometimes, I don't remember what I need to be doing that needs to be done. It's it's bigger than that. It's bigger than not having that focus piece. Yeah,



Katy Weber 54:49

but unlike you said, it's it really doesn't hit home until you start factoring in or once you start. Really understanding the emotional aspects and sensory processing right where you're like, those were the two things that really hit home for me. So the fact that neither sensory or emotional as mentioned in the DSM or even in the in the name itself, I find, just sends people down the wrong rabbit holes. I love thinking about how by the time you're 45, you know, how much more will we know about this nurse about neurodiversity? And how many more accommodations will we see in the classroom or in our workplaces? And absolutely, this pandemic and working from home has blown up a bit of that like nine to five narrative that so many of us struggled with so much and then leave open this idea that like, everybody has their own productivity windows and everybody works differently and that we can we can accommodate for all of those. There's not like that worker, that industrialized worker.



Raegan Cotton 55:53

Exactly, exactly. Yeah. Of course, I, you're preaching to the choir here.



Katy Weber 56:01

Awesome. All right. Well, I will look forward to seeing how it goes over the next 20 years. But thanks



56:08

to a little bit of eminent eminent do mixed with purpose.



Raegan Cotton 56:14

You're rolling with it, so



Katy Weber 56:16

awesome. All right. Well, thanks again. Lovely to talk to you.