

Sarah Wheeler: Tangents, curlicues & life lessons from a nom...

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SPEAKERS

Katy Weber, Sarah Wheeler



Sarah Wheeler 00:00

And what they did is they looked for the genetic markers of ADHD, those dr. D for receptors or whatever they're called. And they found people in both versions of the tribe that genetic criteria for ADHD. And what they found was in the agrarian group, where they were all farmers, the ADHD years, were low status, they were undernourished, they were poor. But in the group that were still nomads, they were the most successful most kind of well regarded members of that group. And so these are kind of like the same genes having a very different outcome in different environments. And that was really helpful in me with for me with my work with kids like really explaining to people and people who work with kids how much the environment matters, but also for myself and being like, I'm a motherfucking nomad.



Katy Weber 01:00

Hello, and welcome to the women and ADHD podcast. I'm your host, Katy Weber. I was diagnosed with ADHD at the age of 45. And it completely turned my world upside down. I've been looking back at so much of my life, school, jobs, my relationships, all of it with this new lens, and it has been nothing short of overwhelming. I quickly discovered I was not the only woman to have this experience. And now I interview other women who liked me discovered in adulthood they have ADHD, and are finally feeling like they understand who they are and how to best lean into their strengths, both professionally and personally. Alright, I would like to share with you this review from a listener called one big contradiction who is on the Apple podcast platform in the UK. Your review is called Thank you. I have only recently started listening to your podcast. I'm now on episode 12 and have spent so much time nodding my head while relating to it, I am still waiting for my assessment. So I hope I can remember this helpful info when that time comes. Oh gosh, well, isn't that relatable and it reminds me that transcripts of all the episodes can always be downloaded over at [womenandadhd.com/transcripts](https://www.womenandadhd.com/transcripts). But please do not ask me to tell you which episode or interview contains what information about a certain topic because I honestly can't remember either. But thank you for the feedback and the review. I'm so glad these conversations have been providing insight

and relatable information as you await your assessment. Because honestly, for many of us, by the time we get our official assessment, it's mostly just a formality at that point. The real treatment begins much earlier when we start to identify with and relate to the information we're seeing online, and most importantly, starting to change our view of who we are and then we can apply simple strategies that help us work with our brains instead of against them. Okay, here we are at Episode 98, in which I interview Sarah Wheeler. Sarah is a writer, educational psychologist and neurodiversity trainer based in Oakland, California. I first discovered Sara through her substack newsletter called mom's spreading, she wrote a piece reflecting back on her adult ADHD diagnosis and it was just so compelling and nuanced and thought provoking and hilarious that I kind of started stalking her a little bit online after that, thankfully, she agreed to sit down with me for this conversation and talk about her own diagnosis journey and how she managed to spend 15 years studying and diagnosing ADHD in children without realizing she herself had ADHD. We talked about how a diagnosis in adulthood can feel both profoundly life changing and at the same time inconsequential. We also talk about internalized hyperactivity and girls and those good old fashioned ADHD tangents and long winded conversational curlicues, for which more than a few of us are known. And we talked about one of Sarah's favorite studies involving the Oriol tribe of northern Kenya and how environment and social factors can play an integral role in whether or not someone with ADHD thrives. It was such a pleasure talking to the extremely witty and entertaining Dr. Wheeler, so yeah, enjoy. Okay, so Sarah Wheeler, PhD, sounds like a TV show, right? Tuesday nights on Fox,

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Sarah Wheeler 04:13

really boring one.



Katy Weber 04:17

So I often talk about on this podcast, how it was the pandemic and lockdown that really like was the catalyst to my own personal implosion, and my meltdown that led to my ADHD diagnosis. I also like to joke that like, none of us ever came to our ADHD diagnosis because we were like, everything's going great. My life is wonderful. What's I needed a name for this superpower. But you kind of had you were diagnosed literally like a week before lockdown. Right in 2020.

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Sarah Wheeler 04:47

I was I got in there, right, right at the last minute.



Katy Weber 04:51

So this was not pandemic related. So what was going on that led you to kind of start connecting the dots and think I should look into that it was a friend of yours, right?

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Sarah Wheeler 04:58

Yeah, yeah, I had Well, you know, this always been like this. But you know, no one ever quite

Yeah, yeah, I had well, you know, I've always been like this. But you know, no one ever quite knew what to call it. I mean, I think it was motherhood in like a, you know, if I'm gonna put a one finger on it, the psychiatrists who assess me talked about, like, it's pretty common that like, there's one event that kind of is the straw that broke the camel's back for someone with ADHD, especially someone who has been compensating for a long time. So it might not just be that motherhood is hard, and everyone's struggling, but this could be the thing that really made it impossible for you to continue to function as an ADHD person. So yeah, I mean, I think, you know, motherhood, just really rocked my emotional regulation, which I realized was like, pretty delicate, or at least, you know, involving a lot of constant management that I wasn't able to do anymore. And I wasn't depressed, I wasn't anxious. I've been depressed and anxious before, you know, clinically in my teens and 20s, that it wasn't that, but I was really struggling with emotional regulation. And I was kind of in that place with kids, where I had two kids. The younger one was kind of sleeping, I was more like a human being in the world of humans. And I just was kind of looking at what I wanted to do work wise and feeling like, Why do I have all these ambitions? And like, so much incompetence? How can I be so how can I be like, I know, I'm smart. And there's things I want to do. And sometimes I'm really good at doing them and how come I just can't get it together. And also recognizing like, Oh, this is something that's always been there. It's just at kind of a pitch that's untenable right now. And then, like you said, my friend, Sarah, another Sarah, but without an age. So we know, that's a totally different demographic. She, she is like, maybe the smartest, funniest person I know. Really just an incredible mind. And she had recently gotten diagnosed with ADHD, and just so many things were kind of clicking into place for her. And she's also a very blunt person, which I really appreciate. She tells you the truth. And so I would be talking to her about these issues over and over, like, why can't I just get it together, or, you know, I have all these plans, like one week, and then they just disappear the next week, or I start kind of doubting them, or I just can't get started, you know, classic kind of things. And she was like, it's because you have ADHD. And you need to do something about that. So I finally was like, just to get her off my back. I was like, alright, I'll make an appointment for an evaluation. When then like, Sarah can stop harassing me about how I have ADHD. I know, I don't have ADHD, I'm good at school. You know, I have a PhD as you, as you mentioned, at the top, you know, I have I have good relationships. I've, I've been working with people with ADHD at that point for over a decade. And I really felt like I understood it. So I did it kind of to humor, Sarah. And then like, the evaluation, which was short, you know, maybe 20 minutes. And like, in that 20 minutes that the doctor was deciding I had ADHD. I too, went along that process like and by, you know, by the time it was done, I was convinced most mostly because of the questions he asked me, we're so different from the things that I've thought about people with ADHD being like all the little boys I'd worked with and the recognition for me and you know, things like, even stupid things like do you start things without reading the directions? And I was like, Yeah, wait, is this what we're doing? Are we asking these questions, because those are the things that I'm like, well, doesn't. Doesn't everyone have that? Or that I associated with ADHD? So? Yeah, so I got that diagnosis, like, I think, on a Tuesday, and then Friday was schools canceled, you know, we're gonna be in our homes for a little while. And that's how it all got rolling.



Katy Weber 09:18

So let this new identity just marinate in the wasps nest of your home for the next four months, right?



Sarah Wheeler 09:25

Sarah Wheeler 10:12

Totally. Yeah, I was like, I had about 48 hours to be like so in my feelings about it. And I described in an essay I wrote about it, like, coming down from like, the upstairs where I'd had this appointment with a psychiatrist that was virtual. And asking my husband kind of the questions that the psychiatrist had asked me, like, I was kind of in shock, and I was like, do I not read the directions? You know, do I like not finish things? Do I like interrupt a lot? And he kind of thought I was joking. He, you know, he was like, Yeah, you You know this stuff about yourself, but I don't think I really did in that way. So I got to kind of be shocked for a few minutes and right then I had to parent two small children in an apartment for two years. Yeah,



Katy Weber 10:13

yeah. Well, I mean, so many of us had that similar experience of like, I don't know what you're talking about. I'm not first of all, I'm not hyperactive. And, you know, not identifying with the idea of hyperactivity. And then at the same time, like realizing, like, I wish I could have a surveillance video of my diagnosis appointment with my own GPA, because I was like, I showed up with all the paperwork, because I had printed out all these self tests, because I was worried I was gonna forget what to talk about. And so I had all these self tests and checklists, and I like showed up good strategy. And I'm like fumbling with all this paperwork in front of her. And it was the same thing, she would ask me questions, and I would like, immediately start launching into my life story with every question. And the same idea where I was like, I'm not hyperactive, but then she would ask me questions like, Do you have a hard time? Like, how do you feel when you're stuck in traffic? And I was like, I want to rip my steering wheel out of the dashboard and throw it out the window. And I'm like, oh, okay, I see where we're going with it.

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Sarah Wheeler 11:07

That's so funny. I did have a moment a small epiphany, talking with my women's group about the Enneagram. And I don't know if our listeners are you, Katie are into the Enneagram. I find these things are always kind of fun to play around with. So the Enneagram seven is kind of like the ADHD type. And I was like, I'm not a seven. I'm a four. I'm an artist. I'm a brooding artist. And there was another woman in the group who was very much a seven and very kind of classically seem like ADHD. And she was talking about this question that you asked people to kind of help determine their Enneagram, which is if you're behind someone in traffic, and there's a left hand turn white, and they can go and they decide to stop and you're behind them. What are you thinking? And she said, she's thinking, like, I have so much to do. And that's, and I was like, Oh, my god, yeah, that's the only thing to think. So that was a moment. I was like, Ooh, maybe I'm, yeah, I'm a seven. That was before I got my diagnosis and, and was helpful. But But the other thing about hyperactivity that I learned, that was really helpful, for me is the way that it presents differently for girls and women. So it's not just that, I mean, yeah, statistically, girls do tend to at least get diagnosed more with the spacey ADHD, that is more kind of internalizing, and not be hyperactive. But also, hyperactivity is talking a lot. It's having a lot of thoughts rapidly racing in your head, you know, it's waking up first thing in the morning with a song that you have to sing out loud, which happens to me, you know, more days than not. So that kind of changed my perception too. And it helped me in the diagnosis that I make of children, that hyperactivity can exist for girls, but it usually doesn't look like fidgeting or, you know, bouncing off the walls.



Katy Weber 13:06

Hmm. Well, I think a lot of us just didn't realize that that's not what everybody's experiences, right. And, you know, I still sort of feel like there is a part of me, that is still kind of gaslights, myself, a lot of the time where I'm like, this is just what everybody goes through, right? Like, this is not there's nothing abnormal about having, you know, not only one song, but then also like the other one that's in the background, this are like trying to harmonize with myself in the shower. So I'm like, trying to sing two pitches at once. And my I was trying to explain this to my husband once where I'm like, do you ever try to do that when you're trying to harmonize with yourself while singing a song and he would look to me like, I was insane. And I was, like, I've said too much.



Sarah Wheeler 13:44

Go on to your ADHD Facebook group for that, you know, let your husband be.



Katy Weber 13:50

Yeah, and I think it's only through talking to so many women at this point who were diagnosed in adulthood, who were, you know, really good in school, and, and had really high expectations of themselves and really pushed themselves and really, like, you know, got through white knuckling it their whole, you know, through most of their adult life, and then have gotten to this point now, where it's like, you know, we're just a ball of anxiety, right? And so it makes so much sense to me that so many of us are diagnosed with depression and anxiety at some point in our adult life. And I still can't decide how I feel about the term comorbidities which I actually am curious with you as an educational psychologist. What are your thoughts on this idea that there's comorbid he's because for me, I'm at this phase where I'm like, everything feels like just trauma from being undiagnosed. You know, like, I don't know if, you know, women who are sort of I've talked to women who were diagnosed with ADHD and bipolar or ADHD and OCD where I'm like, I said, trip like, can you? Is this even possible? I feel like I'm constantly trying to figure all of that out how that operates.



Sarah Wheeler 14:54

Yeah, me too. It came from your beautiful brain. First of all, like I mean, just the Turner and comorbidity it's like the language that we use in the world of diagnostics is so behind, like the world of neurodiversity, and like what people actually want to be talking about when they talk about brains. I think there is true coexistence that's somewhat unrelated. But you know, you can never really prove that, like, I see kids all the time who have learning disabilities, and anxiety or learning disabilities and ADHD. And it's just like you said, it's like, Uh huh, yeah. So you're telling me that they don't pay attention? Well, you know, learning is hard. And sometimes you can, if you do a thorough assessment, you can get at the root of that. That's why like, you know, I hate the except in circumstances where it's just kind of the means to an end. And you already know that someone has ADHD. For kids, I really don't like the like, go to your pediatrician fill out a questionnaire, bam, you have an ADHD diagnosis, because so many things can look like ADHD. And a kid could not be paying attention, because they, they're really struggling with the learning concepts, things like that. But you can talk yourself and I do as a

psychologist, because I like to talk. But also because I think this stuff is tricky. And it's so culturally constructed, you can talk yourself into circles about, yeah, whether it was chicken or egg with comorbidity, right, like you said, or, but really, what the point is that's helpful for people is like, what would we do differently? If we knew these things were related or not? And that I find helpful is like, Okay, if you know, somebody is showing depression, and they're showing ADHD, is it helpful to think about them as related? I would think so and think about how do we treat them together? Or what if we focus on one would we expect to see the other one to feel, you know, less difficult, rather than, like, let's just, you know, see these treat them as separate things is usually not so helpful.



Katy Weber 17:00

Yeah, yeah, I find I talk myself in circles all the time. I literally, I feel like I've been doing nothing but living and breathing ADHD since my diagnosis. And with this podcast, and I do not feel any clearer in my idea of like, what it even is we're talking about. And I think that's what I related so much to the essay that you wrote a year into your diagnosis, calling by my name, where you were kind of reflecting on this journey of being diagnosed and your own sort of internalized ableism. And you know, how a lot of the time it feels like we're pathologizing lovely children, or lovely people who are just weird and wonderful, and in unable to conform in certain harsh environments like school and the workplace. I feel so often like, what are we even talking about? When we talk about ADHD? Are we talking about the traits of difficulty, the struggle, you know, the evidence of struggle throughout your entire life, what a lot of psychologists are looking for, which is like, you know, what are the what's the lifelong evidence of this being an impediment? You know? And is that something that you can manage and treat and heal, so to speak? Or are we talking about neurodivergent brains that have this sort of, you know, ebbs and flows when it comes to environments that where we thrive versus environments, like new motherhood and middle school, and, you know, all these other tired college were like, we can't we can't flourish, and we really, really struggle. And we don't know why. So I'm curious, like, with all of your background, working, especially with children, like what are we even talking about? What What are you talking about when you talk about ADHD?



Sarah Wheeler 18:45

Well, I struggle with that, too. I do think that, you know, there is a distinction between and I see this in, you know, I'm sure you do, too, in the kind of social forums that I'm a part of, there are people, for example, ADHD years who really are suffering, you know, they might value some things about their ADHD, but it's really daily a source of pain for them, and really, really keeping them from having a happy life. You know, I wouldn't characterize myself that way. And I had some kind of impostor syndrome, about having an ADHD diagnosis, which is the thing I think, you know, if I have ADHD, it has made me feel like an impostor. Also in other situations, so it's kind of funny.



Katy Weber 19:30

I always I always say that a pretty good indication of you having HD ADHD is chronic self doubt about the ADHD exactly



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Sarah Wheeler 19:38

like, Oh, well, I know someone else. Yeah. So so but then there's people like, you know me, where I think more like you said, the traits and the characteristics are really valuable to understand. And I think you're seeing this conversation in the world of autism a lot that autistics are saying like, yeah, we do have a lot in common, but there's kind of what people are talking about, like profound autism that Like, we still want to value people, and there's positives to that, but where people like really are going to need substantial support. And then there's Autistics who feel like most of what I need could happen if the environment was just a little bit more flexible to who I am. So I see that in my diagnostics, and I and I talk a lot with my colleagues about like, Who do we give diagnosis who don't we, the DSM, you know, requires you in order to have ADHD, you have to be impaired by it, according to the DSM because they think it's a disorder. And so there are psychologists, I heard some on a podcast the other day, and it kind of pissed me off who really don't give ADHD diagnosis to, you know, someone who has a B plus average and in college, and they even kind of their snarkiness around like, and then they told me that they get A's and B's, and I was like, Get out of my office, you, you know, you impostor. And I understand that I get how, you know, research becomes complicated if, you know, you start broadening the category. But I also think you don't know what's going on inside someone's head, you don't know what they are doing to compensate. And what is getting them to the place where they look like they're functioning, you don't know what somebody's potential is. So just to say like, oh, you know, you don't get into driving accidents, and you have a successful marriage, you don't have ADHD, it's discounting, personal experience. So I when I do assessments, I, you know, I always even for the little kids, I really want to get as much as possible understanding what their processes internally, because especially with girls or other compensators, it's not always matching up to what people see. So I think it's unkind and also often inaccurate to refuse to diagnose people if they don't show a certain level of impairment. And you have to acknowledge that people are compensating and you know, that the impact of that will often be positive in the short run, but sometimes in the long run, it's really damaging for people.



Katy Weber 22:13

Right? And he just sort of ended up in this illogical loop where it's like, well, you weren't diagnosed as a child, so you can't possibly have it as an adult. And, and yet, at the same time, being like, Well, I was, you know, white knuckling it through my childhood. And now, here we are, the question is, like, at what cost? Was I getting those A's? Yeah. And

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Sarah Wheeler 22:29

they've changed that, you know, they've changed. Even the, you know, the folks who designed the DSM, who I don't think, talk about ADHD, the way that we do on this podcast, you know, they've changed some of those rules to make it so that, you know, even for a childhood

diagnosis, symptoms don't have to present before age seven. And for adult diagnoses, they can they can come on later, as well. Because there are like, you know, my my psychiatrist said there, are these inciting incidents that really make the tip of scales for people. Yeah,



Katy Weber 23:06

I mean, I certainly asked that question a lot. When I was first diagnosed, I asked that question of myself, which was like, how much? am I struggling? How much did I struggle in various times in my life, too? And, you know, I could just pick people out now where I'm like, oh, yeah, Jane, she's a hot mess. I bet she has ADHD. And then I'm, like, oh, that's how people probably see me. Like, you have that moment of that reality check where I'm like, oh, yeah, that's pretty much how I present to other people.



Sarah Wheeler 23:37

What these diagnoses tell us, I mean, us in our late diagnoses, I don't know if you'd agree with me is like, we don't really know how people see us. Especially if we're, you know, we have a lot of successful skills. We've been able to, like look okay, to a lot of people, and I'm not the kid who got sent to the principal's office all the time. And that probably has to do somewhat with, you know, how I look and present to and not just my personality. But you know, that was kind of what was so intense too, about the diagnosis was like, I didn't know people saw me this way. And some of the conversations realizing that were very simple, like the one with my husband of like, Wait, I've known you for 20 years, and you've never told me this. Well, I didn't think too



Katy Weber 24:22

well that the example you gave in your essay about the how you rip open bags, where he was just like there's something like eat where your husband was like, I just thought it was cute.



Sarah Wheeler 24:31

Yeah, yeah. Right, that you just kind of find a wherever it's easiest to just smash it open and then Spill it out.



Katy Weber 24:40

I'd like to take a moment to think better help for sponsoring this podcast. If you're a regular listener of this podcast, you know, I am a big proponent of therapy therapy provides me the best opportunity for verbal processing something that is so important for my kind of brain and my sense of self. What I love about BetterHelp is that it's not a crisis line. It's not self help it is professional therapy that's done securely online from the comfort of your home. They assess your needs and match you with your own licensed professional therapist. And it's available for clients worldwide. So you get access to a broad range of expertise that might not be available to you locally. It also tends to be more affordable than traditional offline therapy and financial aid is available. If you visit their website and read their testimonials. There are actually quite a

few reviews that specifically reference help with ADHD as a special offer for listeners of the women and ADHD podcast, you'll get 10% off your first month, simply sign up at betterhelp.com/women ADHD, that's BetterHelp [help.com/women](https://www.betterhelp.com/women). ADHD, and there's a link in the show notes. This podcast is sponsored by BetterHelp. Now I'm curious, getting back to the essay that you wrote a year into your diagnosis. So it's been a year more than a year since you've written it. And And I'm curious as your Has anything changed for you, because you said something in the essay where you said, you know, diagnosis is both life changing and inconsequential. And for me, I relate to that. But I don't know if I could elaborate on that. Can you elaborate on on how that what that means?

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Sarah Wheeler 26:15

Sure, sure. I have so many like drafts of that essay that went into every little point for way longer than anyone cared to read. Maybe I'll do like the director's cut for all the ADHD errs, who can like who are interested in the content and also can indulge my tangents. But I would love to elaborate. I I love when people whenever anyone's like, say more, I'm like, How long do you have? Yeah, so I mean, I think it's inconsequential. What I meant was like, you're like, Well, I'm still me. Not in like a bad way. But my ADHD people I have found now care but like, My husband doesn't care if I'm ADHD or not. He wants to know, you know how to communicate with me on like, a more specific level than whatever my label is. Although he does show me all the ADHD tic TOCs that's very sweet of him. Because I'm not on tick tock. He's like, Baby, here's look at what this the ADHD ears are doing to find things in the fridge. It's very cute. And he is not ADHD, here's the like, oh, is everyone this way? I'm like, not you. So in that way, it felt inconsequential, like, you know, you just wake up the next day, and you're still you and you've always been you. And then the life changing, you know, I think is for for many people, for me, pointing towards some interventions, I guess. Although, I think for me a lot of what's changed and what's changed even in the year since I wrote that is just around like kind of understanding myself better. I mean, I did try meds for a little while I took some Wellbutrin. And then I forgot to take it a lot. I'm, as I'm sure many of our listeners can relate to. And then I was like, well, if I'm not really taking it all the time, and I'm not really noticing a difference does it matter? But I just kind of started to think about myself in a different way and structure my life in a slightly different way that is not always successful. But that felt did that did feel consequential, you know, that I've started to think more about like, really understanding what I'm good at and what I am bad at slash hate and trying to like set up, you know, my professional life to be like, what if I just like, mostly didn't do the things that I hate? Could I do the kinds of work where like, I just get to be, you know, me at my smartest most of the time and then that other shit, you know, someone else does. I'm trying there's varying success, but so things like that as well consequential. I've worked on myself Regulation A lot, mostly around parenting. And it's not always successful. How old are they? Well, now they're four and six.



Katy Weber 28:56

Oh, and that's still you're still in the thick? Yeah, I'm

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Sarah Wheeler 28:59

in it. As they say, I still wake up every night. So sorry for the mamas of younger kids. Like, sometimes it gets better. Sometimes it doesn't. But I really mirror my kids. And a friend of

mine, Chris Martin, who is a writer and writes about, you know, his neuro divergence wrote something about like that empathy, that extreme empathy, of like, part of that is a gift. And part of it is like when your kids get upset, you're like really taking it on. So that's something that happens to me a lot. And it was really helpful for me to frame it the way that Chris did, as like, this is like sensitivity. And it's not like I'm not an angry person. I'm not a bad person. But if I can reduce my sensitivity to this, if I can learn how to slow things down a little bit, if I can be kinder to myself, take little breaks from all the overwhelm. Maybe it'll get a little easier and it's gotten a little easier, which is measurable.



Katy Weber 30:02

Yeah, I mean, it is so hard with parenting because children are just Do you know, they should all over any sense of like serenity, right? Like you really are like in it. So I mean, it's there's only so much you can do to regulate your environment when children exist. But I feel like so much of this diagnosis and even the term diagnosis, I'm starting to move away from right I had a guest, she had a dual diagnosis of ADHD and autism, and she was talking about the identity, you know, that this is really about how you identify and being able to kind of reframe your self concept and kind of how you are able to look at why you do the way you would, why you do what you do. And to not feel you know that there's anything wrong with you, right. And like, when you say these things out loud, it feels so oversimplified, but I think really like at the core of this identity is just recognizing you not only are you amazing at a lot of things, but you're going to only focus on the things you suck at, because it's more interesting to you, right? And how that like, affects your sense of identity so much, because it's more interesting to think about all the things you suck at. And our brains do that. They just do. Right? Yeah, cuz and so I'm like, for me, it's like building this muscle to start recognizing and acknowledging and accepting what I am good at. I remember you talked about the bus trips that you take with your four year old, and that sense of like novelty and adventure and, and how you miss that, like, just that was like the, you know what you're so great at as a parent, right? And it reminded me that I used to do that with my daughter living in Brooklyn. My favorite thing to do with her was when we had like a day where I'm like, Oh, my god, how am I going to get through an entire day with this three year old, we would get on a bus. And we would just ride the bus around Brooklyn because it was so much to see. And then we would end up going to IKEA in Red Hook. Because you know, I could dump first of all, I could dump her in the daycare for however long they would take her sometimes like half an hour sometimes now they have daycare at the IPO? Well, not daycare, but they had like a little kids center, right? Like a little ball pit and stuff.



Sarah Wheeler 32:08

Oh, man, I can't really does it right. Right. And



Katy Weber 32:12

so I could not. So we would like go there and eat for like \$1. And then I could drop her off in the little kid center. And I could just wander IKEA in a daze until it was time for me. And until my buzzer went off, and I had to go collect her.

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Sarah Wheeler 32:26

Katie, you are describing my perfect day. Right?



Katy Weber 32:29

Right. Like it was so funny because I had so much guilt around all of that, which was like, Oh, I'm you know, I'm not being present with her. And I'm not sitting in the floor and doing all the things that parents are supposed to do. And, and so like so much of those moments. So much of this, I think has been like reframing those strikes or just being like, oh, no, that was like a fun day for all of us. Like that was and it ate up like eight hours, which was also great.

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Sarah Wheeler 32:55

Yeah, it's amazing the space that you create, when you stop shitting on yourself, you're like, I have so much time. I have so much energy. I don't even have to be like encouraging myself, but just the absence of shitting on myself for everything is like, there's just a lightness. I wish I knew like the key to that. I feel like when I have little, you know, they're not even leaps but like, you know, baby steps in shedding on myself last throughout my life. I don't really know what does it. But I can feel like I felt that with my parents recently, like, oh, there's a little bit less pressure on my chest about that. But that makes me so sad. Like, I hear you going to IKEA. I'm like, You're you're you got it all figured out. I'm like, You're a genius. And you're just like, Oh, what a you know, what a negligent mother.



Katy Weber 33:45

This was the best I could come up with.

S

Sarah Wheeler 33:48

I think it is brilliant. That has been consequential for me about an ADHD diagnosis has been like really leaning into the strengths. And it's not just like as a compensation or like a you know, trying to fight the negative thoughts. It's really been like its own separate, beautiful thing. And yeah, and it's identity stuff like you mentioned. And a lot of it I think I've learned from seeing the strengths of like other women with ADHD mirrored for me, either women I know, or women kind of I see on social media or like I'm in, you know, Facebook groups with, I have this, like academic mothers and with ADHD Facebook group that like makes me is definitely like my safe place. And the strengths are like I didn't have names for those either. So it's like not just I didn't have a name for how bad I was at finishing something I started. It's like I also didn't have a name for the fact that I always see connections that like I just constantly I want to make connections between things and I don't stop until I can see the whole picture of something and how it's all related. And sometimes that gets me in trouble. Right? We can, our listeners can think of scenarios. You know, like when you know, someone's trying to have a linear conversation, or I'm a consultant in a job and they're like, no, no, just do your one piece. And I'm like, No, I need to know how the company works. And all the organizations well, but my, my friend Courtney said to me once, she was like, Do you think you like understand

intersectionality better because of your ADHD? And I was like, why? Thank you, Courtney, who was not ADHD? I was like, Yeah, I do. So giving like that a name is so exciting. Or, you know, even giving a name for like the adventurer, or I think about the like, Nomad role a lot. I don't know if you talked on this podcast about the like, the Kenya study of ADHD. Do you know that one?



Katy Weber 35:54

I know it from your essay. But you know, and I know, there's also the famous book, which I haven't read yet about farmers and hunters. But that same concept, right? Yeah,



Sarah Wheeler 36:05

right. Yes. I can't really read like nonfiction idea books. I just have to kind of have someone describe them to me. I'm like, give me the bullet points.



Katy Weber 36:15

I was gonna say, usually, you could get the gist of a book from a two minute tick tock video, which is why tick tock is so awesome. Because you're like, who needs to, you know, you could get you could get to the like, core of the issue. Really?



Sarah Wheeler 36:25

Yeah. I'm a skimmer. So like, I can read a novel, you can't skim a novel. But those Yeah, those books are hard for me. So I'm always behind. But yeah, it's it's a study that was done like 15 years ago, in a tribe called like, I don't know how to pronounce, I think the Oriol in northern Kenya. And basically, it's like, my favorite piece of research ever. They this tribe was like, very unique, because at some point, they were all hunter gatherers. And then at some point, a section of the tribe broke off and became farmers agrarians. And so they had these totally, you know, genetically similar related groups that were doing living very different lives. And what they did is they looked for the genetic markers of ADHD, those dr. D for receptors, or whatever they're called. And they found people in both versions of the tribe that genetic criteria for ADHD. And what they found was in the agrarian group, where they were all farmers, the ADHD years, were low status, they were undernourished, they were poor. But in the group that were still nomads, they were the most successful, most kind of well regarded members of that group. And so these are kind of like the same genes having a very different outcome in different environments. And that was really helpful in me with for me with my work with kids, like really explaining to people and people who work with kids how much the environment matters, but also for myself and being like, Oh, I'm a motherfucking, Nomad, like, so I was trapped in the suburbs, no offense to our suburban listeners, but I am a City Mouse, and I feel really good in I can be dropped down into any city in the world. And I'm like, Well, I got this. And the country is cool, too. You know, there's bird noises and stuff to keep me busy in the country. But suburbs are really hard for me. They're just, I don't really know how to get like the the social energy that I really need to feel good and regulated. And, and monotony is hard for me. So I was trapped in the suburbs last month. And I mean, in a great, it was a lovely time. But for me, that

kind of context was hard. And I was really I spent a few days being a total jerk to everyone. And I was just like taking it all out on my husband. And then I was like, Oh, this is hard for me. I'm a nomad in the suburbs. And I just have to do some combination of trying to be a little bit smart about it, and figuring out like, what does a nomad in the suburbs do? Do they walk like along the big kind of stretch of highway to the Cold Stone Creamery and like, get whatever they want and you know, listen to loud music while they do it. Or do I just accept that this is going to be hard, and this isn't for me. So that's I use the Nomad frame a lot. And again, I think of that as a string. So that's something that I you know, I really discovered I knew it cognitively before I thought I had ADHD, but I was applying it to other people.



Katy Weber 39:32

I love that and now the next time I walk by some, you know, I drive by somebody who's walking along the side of the highway, I'll have a totally different point of view. I'll be like, yes, you go,



Sarah Wheeler 39:42

brother. You air drum to no doubt like it's nobody's business. Yeah.



Katy Weber 39:49

Yeah. And I remember talking when I interviewed Casey Davis of who also I don't know if you know her, she she kind of rose to fame on Tik Tok with her account domestic listeners. As a therapist who talks a lot about the moral neutrality of domestic life, right? And that there, you know, we are not morally terrible people if we can't fold our laundry, and I remember saying to her, like, I was like, you were the first person who gave me permission to not want to do these things. I'm like, how sad is it that I live in this, you know, that we live in this society where that voice is just not heard by women? And I was like, you know, because I'm always on this podcast being like, is this ADHD? Or am I just an angry fucking feminist living in this country in this time period, where I'm like, so many of us are getting diagnosed right now. And also, like, I'm always questioning, like, Is this is this a fake epidemic? Are we being over diagnosed? Is there something else? Or is it just this confluence of like, you know, we're finding out more about what this is what this is an adult women, you know, more women are kind of relating to this. And so it's just this, this, you know, apex of information where we're all getting diagnosed. And this is great and wonderful. But there's always this part of me in the back of my mind that's like, oh, no, maybe we're all just like, Am I just part of the problem? And especially when people get diagnosed after listening to my podcast, and they write me and they're like, thank you. I'm so glad you know, thanks to you that I got diagnosed. And I'm like, Oh, God, am I am I part of this like, Mass? You know, hysteria?



Sarah Wheeler 41:17

Yeah. pathologizing women for not wanting to fold laundry. I don't mind putting the laundry in, by the way, but I will never see it through to completion.



Katy Weber 41:26

I'm totally fine. As long as I set a timer, and I remember to put it in the dryer the same day, which is like a major win. For me. Everything is great. Until the folding the folding is just that's it I hit a wall. Yeah, I kind of fall apart. Right? Well, and I talked about this in the past on the podcast, too, with my teenage daughter because she has to do her laundry now. And she just has she has a dirty hamper, and a clean hamper. And she refuses to fold her laundry. And I'm like, but you have to fold your laundry. And she's like, why? And I'm like, because it will be wrinkled. And she's like, I don't give a flying fuck if it's wrinkled. I don't but you know, she's like, she refuses to feel shame. Right. And so, you know, I often think about that in terms of how I view her where I'm like, you have the audacity to not feel shame around so many self care tasks, and so many household chores where I'm so envious of that ability. Because I'm like, God, there's so many things that I don't do and just feel guilty about not doing them when I should be saying, Does this even need to be done? Or like you said, right, like, can I how do I outsource this? Because I don't have time for this?



Sarah Wheeler 42:30

Yeah, this is why I'm not worried about the youth. I think they you know, I know they're like addicted to screens, whatever. I mean, so are we, but they're gonna be great. They're really figuring some stuff out. Yeah, I mean, the way that I fold laundry, it might as well be in a hamper. I mean, it is wrinkled, no matter what. But I have started to give myself permission to just let go of some of that stuff. And I don't know what my husband would say about it. But I think we do a good job checking in about like, again, like how can I have a strengths based approach to domesticity of like, the things that I like to do are like fun puzzles, you know, around like scheduling like it to the, to a certain extent, I do kind of enjoy that. Or communication with like, my kids, friends, families, but like, I'm not going to return the paperwork, I you know, I don't, I don't fold the laundry really that much anymore at all. Actually, now that I'm thinking about it, and it's, it's kind of beautiful.



Katy Weber 43:29

I just pulled the clean clothes out of the pile that's to be folded parentheses of because, you know, if I if I can wear the clothes fast enough, and then I just goes back in the laundry, and then the then the fold pile doesn't exist anymore. So I've just tried to like, minimize.



Sarah Wheeler 43:44

Yeah, see, that's very enticing. It's a little dangerous for me. I also live in like a small apartment with four people. So like, my, I do have friends, like my friend Sarah, who I talked about has a lot more space than I do. And I get a window into like, what my brain would do if it had a little more room because I also I don't love clutter and stuff with all its you know, so I do have a threshold. But I think if I had more space, I would be doing some naughty things with my methods in my head, my hoarding and



Katy Weber 44:17

well, right. It's true what you said about organization and I always find it interesting that tick tock because you know, everybody on tick tock is neurodivergent because we're like moths to a flame when it comes to social media like that, especially in these those tiny little two minute videos. It makes sense that everybody hanging out there is they're all nerd divergence. But but so it's funny to me the little like niche communities that are created out of that, right. So like there's this whole like spreadsheet porn element of tic tac where people will love videos about Excel and learning about Excel. And you might be like, at first glance, you might be like, well, that's odd, but I'm like, No, it makes perfect sense that like there's this whole subset of neuro divergence who are just Like, Oh yeah, show me how those codes work.

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Sarah Wheeler 45:03

Totally. We all have our thing. No, yeah, no, I just want to watch Tiktok videos of like you walking around IKEA by yourself. That's like that would be my porn is like parent doing something weird that regulates them, or right are me walking around the side of the highway in suburban Maryland.



Katy Weber 45:22

When I was diagnosed with ADHD, it completely turned my world upside down. I looked back at so much of my life, my grades in school, my multiple careers and hobbies, my friendships, my marriage, motherhood, my relationship with food and my body, like all of this with a new lens. And it was overwhelming to say the least, if you've been diagnosed with ADHD, and you're feeling blown away by this new insight into your brain and how it operates, I totally understand I can help you begin to sort through this chaos, explore who you are and how your brain operates. So you can finally start to lean into your strengths and begin to use them to your advantage moving forward. Together, we can work to identify what obstacles you've been facing, and create strategies to help you start living a more fulfilling gratifying life, head over to [women in adhd.com/coaching](https://www.adhd.com/coaching) to book a 30 minute initial consult with me. So we can figure out if my brand of one on one coaching is right for you. Again, that's women and [adhd.com/coaching](https://www.adhd.com/coaching). And you can find that link in the episode show notes. So okay, what the question, I love to ask everybody, and I have no answer myself. But if you could rename ADHD to something a little less complicated or confusing, would you call it something else?

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Sarah Wheeler 46:39

I love this question so much. I kind of like really overthought it and I really should just like show you my you know, my brainstorm someday, because one of my favorite special activities that makes me feel regulated is like, if someone is trying to like, name a product or something, I will just go to town coming up with like, 40 ideas, and most of them are dumb, but they make me laugh. But so they didn't end up as funny as I thought. But you know, I was thinking like, the all or nothing neuro type. It's like the all or nothing, which applies to so many different situations like energy conversation, you know, work that I really feel like that, that is something that a lot of us experienced. And then I was thinking about, like, one more thing green. You know, like one more thing in terms of like, I always have one more thing to say, which is one more thing, or there's always like, you know, one more thing I missed, like, and I started to laugh about it. But like earlier this week, I went into test a kid in my in my office, I haven't been in in a while.

And I was so good. I did such a good job, Katie like slowing down. And I actually planned the night before I like made a checklist that I actually went back and looked at did I have all the materials I needed? And of course, I don't have my own stuff, like, you know, equipment for this stuff, because I'm kind of a serial denial denier and like moocher about what I need. So I'm always like, you know, hitting up somebody and being like, oh my god, I'm so sorry. I'll bring you wine. Can I use your thing? So I borrowed stuff from different people. But I like did it in time. It wasn't an emergency. And I was so proud of how thoughtful I had been turning a new page. And then I got into the office with this nine year old. And I was like, I completely forgot the first test I gave this kid I've completely forgot the like material, the blocks that he needed to use to like show me he had, you know, spatial organization, just totally, I forgot the like form that he needed to write on. And I was just like, how was it always one more thing? I really thought through this, I did my best and like, my brain just wasn't planning the future like this. So one more things ease. Yeah,



Katy Weber 48:55

I love that. That reminds me of the few abysmal years I spent as a copy editor because I you know, I was a journalist for years and years. And it was really, I one thing I loved about copy editing was headline writing. It was really fun. I worked at The Daily News for a while and it was like, they were so serious about their headlines that I would sometimes work on one headline for my entire shift, right? And I'd be like, emailing my husband being like, what do you think of this pod? And he'd be like, yeah, no, that's terrible. Start to get you know, but it was like, I loved that part of it. But the copy editing was such a nightmare. I'm like, because it didn't matter how many. No matter how many corrections you made there, you'd always miss something. Right? And that's the only thing anyone would see the next day. And I was like, this is like some sort of strange element, you know, level of hell, that, you know, no matter how many things you see problems you solve, you're gonna miss something. And that's the only thing that's gonna matter. And I'm like, how much like, that is totally how my brain works. Like, it doesn't matter what how many good things I do. I'm only going to think about the one bad thing I did.



Sarah Wheeler 49:55

Yeah, yeah, totally. Right. Or like the one thing that you need to to complete something when you are hyper focused on it, I actually asked the librarian the other day to print out this was very scary the list of books that I owed. And I mean, it was like, you know, like, if you get tickets at the arcade, like, you want to just see the tickets keep coming out of the slot. And you're like, Yeah, this was like the opposite where like, the little receipt rolled out, and it like kept rolling. Like it went through one little roll, and then it scrolled again. And I was like, ah, suck. And so I like faced this list. And I love our libraries. I was like, I gotta make it right with you all. And then I went home, and I went, like, crazy trying to find all these library books. And I kept, I was watching my son, my son and daughter read with my husband, and he was like, putting them to bed. And they were kind of having a cookie night. Like, I think they could have used my calm energy. And I kept being like, in a minute, when I find one more book, I'm gonna go sit with them. And I'll like, rub somebody's back. And you know, I'll be like, super engaged. And then I was like, wait a minute, I think I saw Star Wars Revenge of the Sith, you know, Lego, whatever is on the upper shelf of this bookshelf. And then I so there's that hyper focus one more thing, too. Yeah,



Katy Weber 51:12

I like that. There's something about tangents too. I feel like that's one thing I've been much better at, which is like, I can start to see a tangent happening, especially if I'm like talking to my husband or something or my kids where I'm like, Oh, just so you know, I'm about to go on a tangent. So this is like last exit before toll, right? Like, if you want to, if you're not up for this, we can just abort right now. But I'm just letting you know. And he's like, no, no, it's fine. I'm here for it.



Sarah Wheeler 51:38

I love the like, the trigger warning or whatever. Yeah, I am consultant for my work with a psychologist based in Kentucky. His name's Matt Lowry. And he's an autistic psychologist, and he assesses people for autism and ADHD. And he's brilliant. And he told me a few things. I was consulting about it and, you know, autistic clients that I work with, but he taught me a lot about myself in this, you know, consultation, inadvertently. And he was talking about, you know, he said, You know, I'm sure, whatever, there's gray areas to all this, but he was like, artistic speaking tangents. Like, we really go off into like, a long, deep thing, like, Oh, you want to talk about birds? Let me talk to you about like, all the birds. He's like, ADHD, ears, speak and curly cues. And I was like, I put, I was like, Oh, my God, Matt, you're killing me. This is what I do. I don't go, I just go like here a little bit, here a little bit, here a little bit. And then I think later that night, I was I met a friend of a friend at a bar, who my favorite kind of new person to meet just like super fun and engaged and kind of messing with me a little bit. And at some point, he was like, You're speaking in ellipses. And I was like, That's just how I talk. But nobody ever tells me the truth.



Katy Weber 52:52

I remember somebody pointing that out on Twitter that people with ADHD use a lot more not only ellipses, but m dashes. And I was like, so called out where I was like, basically, that's how you can diagnose somebody is how many M dashes they use in regular like, paragraph, you know, regular communication. I was like, oh, yeah, that's a total thing.



Sarah Wheeler 53:11

In my writing, I mean, I'm all about run on sentences. And it's, it's, I mean, it would be bad, but I don't know, no one, no one seems to complain very much. So I'm just going with it.



Katy Weber 53:24

Well, and yeah, and I always have a difficult time trying to come up with a headline, or to coming up with a title for these podcast episodes. Because I'm like, what did we do? What do we talk about? And so I'll usually I'll settle on something. And then, you know, I have a like, a little promo where I'm like, Yeah, you know, we talk about anxiety, and somebody will be like,

Oh, I'm super excited. I really want to listen to this episode about anxiety. And I'm like, Well, you know, we talked about it for like, 10 seconds. But we have like, I have the hardest time trying to figure out what I'm like, what do we even talk about? I

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Sarah Wheeler 53:55

don't know. There's always one more thing. That's why I mean, in my newsletter, my title is always have like, it's like this and this and this and this and this



Katy Weber 54:04

beautiful segue. So let's talk about your your newsletter, how people can find more of your writing. I know you're you're quite a prolific writer and in beyond your own mom's spreading but where can somebody find you?

S

Sarah Wheeler 54:18

Sometimes, Katie, I go through phases, man, I'm in a rut right now. And it's like, I wouldn't even call it writer's block. I'm just like, Yep, I'm not feeling it. But then I'll yeah, then I will have prolific bouts. Yeah, I write a substack newsletter. It's called mom spreading. It's loosely about you know, parenting, just being a person I think and certainly we touch on ADHD. Because that's everywhere. For me. I write for the parenting site romper a lot and do other freelance work, but you can find a lot of my work on romper. I also do consultation with families. I'm not really good enough to be like an adult ADHD coach, maybe someday but I I work with families trying to help figure out how to support their neurodivergent kids. And I have a website for that at Sarah Wheeler phd.com. And if there's any Bay Area listeners or listeners who are into stuff around public schools, I started a little organization last year called Get Schooled Oakland. And we have a website under that name, where we're working to kind of get parents to choose more diverse range of public schools and



Katy Weber 55:30

cities like Oakland. Oh, awesome. Okay, well, I'll put links to all of that. Show Notes. And

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Sarah Wheeler 55:35

that's my set. Can I wrap up? Can I give a ADHD recommendation? Uh, yeah, absolutely. So I already told you, if anybody's made it this far from the beginning to my my rantings that, that I have trouble with nonfiction kind of books. And I really struggle with ADHD books, like I want to learn, but you know, there's the pathologizing vibe, some of some of them, but even the celebratory ones, I just want it to be an article, I can't deal with the fat. So it's always interesting to me that I'm like, I don't feel like this book was written for an ADHD person. Or maybe it's just not written for me. But felt like one HD book that helped me so much that I could totally read cover to cover is Joan Wilders book help for women with ADHD, you could order it like it's an Amazon books. So you can get it like straight to your Kindle for a few bucks.

Or you can get a paperback. And it's just like short, the anecdotes really changed my life, like lots of recognition for me in her descriptions of, of different women's experiences. And then I just I liked the strategies.



Katy Weber 56:47

That's amazing. That's really good to know. Because I gave up reading along though, you know, a while ago, I've listened. It's almost exclusively, it's sometimes I'll listen to a book where I'll be like, I need to own this, and then I'll buy it after listening to the audiobook. But it's funny because I listened to a lot of audiobooks. And I listened at like one and a half speed. And, you know, I'm like, I love this. And I will, you know, I'm like listening to them. And I'm like, This is so profound. Unfortunately, I'm not going to retain any of it. And I'll never remember it. But I can tell you if I liked the book or didn't like



Sarah Wheeler 57:15

the app. I can tell you, I think whether or not I read it, I could definitely if I remember I read it, I can tell you how I felt about it. And then sometimes there's a few things. Yeah, I can't do audio, I just zone out. I or I start singing no doubt in my head



Katy Weber 57:30

or whatever. Yeah, well, no, I have to be doing it while doing something else. So I'm like I there's certain activities that that can anchor me like driving or walking my dog or like there's certain way there's certain I can't just sit and listen to an audiobook. That's agonizing. But yeah, oh, God, no torture. But yeah, but once I gave up reading and started listening exclusively, I listened to like three books a week now. It's crazy. Like, I'm very excited about that.



Sarah Wheeler 57:53

A lot of ADHD ears really, really love that. Yeah, the 1.5 speed podcast or audiobook podcasts I can do. Because they they end, but like I got into a good podcast recently. And then I realized there were like, two more seasons, and I just got overwhelmed.



Katy Weber 58:11

Yeah, I know. You know,



Sarah Wheeler 58:12

I still one that has a long story that you know that that arcs over time, I was like, I can't wait that long to find out what happens.



Katy Weber 58:19

Well, I know that's kind of what's happening with this podcast, where it's like, I've been doing it long enough now where it's like, people don't know where to start. And I'm like, that's gonna for somebody with ADHD, having this many episodes is actually a detriment. So I'm like, What do I do in this situation? Because they're all my babies. But they're all They're all



Sarah Wheeler 58:34

bound. You know, they're independent. We can pick up and start anywhere. Yes, I



Katy Weber 58:41

like that part of it too. Well, thank you so much for sitting down with me and letting me pick your brain a bit about about your thoughts of your life and your your diagnosis and all everything in between.



Sarah Wheeler 58:54

Thank you for having me, Katie. Thank you. And it's such a joy to talk to other people with similar brains and just like to envision that, you know, the listeners out there, just like our our little crew of weirdos, it just feels so it feels cozy. I don't have to I don't have to pretend I'm not a kook. So



Katy Weber 59:14

Rachel Jade. Oh, Jade she's such a hot mess. Yeah, I love it too. It's it does feel like we speak a different language I feel I always say it feels like unbuttoning a two type pair of jeans. That's what I feel like when I talk to other women with neurodivergent women. So thank you so much, Sarah. It's been an absolute pleasure. Thank you and there you have it. Thank you for listening and I really hope you enjoyed this episode of the women and ADHD podcast. Also you know, we ADHD ears crave feedback, and I would really appreciate hearing from you the listener. If you're a fan of the podcast, please take a moment to leave me a review on Apple podcasts or audible and if that feels like too much and I get it Then just take a few seconds right now to give me a five star rating, or share this episode on your own social media to help reach more women who maybe have yet to discover and lean into this gift of neurodivergent. See, and they may still be struggling and don't even know why. And if you'd like to find out more about me and my one on one coaching for women with ADHD, head over to [womenandadhd.com/coaching](https://www.womenandadhd.com/coaching) and you can always find that link in the show notes. I'll see you next week when I interview another amazing woman who discovered that she is not lazy or crazy or broken. But she has ADHD and she is now on the path to understanding her neurodiversity and finally, using this gift to her advantage, take care till then