

Tessa MacKay: Dyslexia, hyperrealism & neuroplasticity

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SPEAKERS

Katy Weber, Tessa MacKay



Katy Weber 00:00

So now you were diagnosed at a younger age, right? Yes, yeah. So tell me about growing up with an ADHD diagnosis. Yeah,



Tessa MacKay 00:07

it's interesting because my brother was diagnosed as ADHD later and is sort of throughout high school. And he, like, showed sort of classic symptoms that are signs and, and so obviously, my parents like classic sort of story. But I showed, like tendencies to have some sort of neuro divergence at an early, like, really early age. But then I was, I was the pieces that I'm told my parents and then I was diagnosed as having dyslexic tendencies. So it's interesting, because I remember at I think it was a year four, or year three or something I was in my class, and we're learning how to write letters us. And the teacher was telling us how to write the letter E like an elephant. And she wrote it on the board. And I remember this thing, you're just looking at the board and then looking at my paper, and looking at the person, the kid next to me who had his whole a4 sheets, with little letters, a all over it. And I looked at mine, and I just, I can't keep up with this kid. I've only got two E's. And the I drew elephants in the shape of ease. So they had like, every he had like a little tusks and horns, like, again, like it looks like a little elephant. Like that. I had like, maybe three elephants. I can't keep up. I don't know how I'm gonna possibly



Katy Weber 01:44

took the teacher very literally. Yeah, that's fascinating to me. I my son is he's nine. He's in the fourth grade. And I had never heard of dyspraxia until recently, because his teacher was really getting on him about his handwriting. And it's terrible, especially when he's stressed out and and has anxiety is, I can see it, you know, it manifests in his handwriting. And I was noticing that, like, the more she told him to concentrate on his handwriting, like, the harder it was for him to actually write anything like to articulate his thoughts, you know, yeah, see it, his brain working so hard, and, and I fell for him. And I actually remember asking I, you know, asking his teacher to be like, Look, we need to let off, like, lay off on this handwriting thing, because it's really not that important. Like, I think it's more for him to be able to kind of connect with his thoughts and his ability to communicate. But then when I went back into my old report cards, I had no idea that I was also like, had, I had this, but apparently, my teachers had all complained about my terrible handwriting. Oh, wow. I know, I have no memory of it until I had gone back to look at my old report card. Okay,



Tessa MacKay 02:59

so how did you get through that process of relaxing and writing? I just don't even



Katy Weber 03:05

I don't I have no memory of my childhood, which I think is actually not uncommon. Women with ADHD have like very little memory. And I don't know if it's just the trauma in chunks of life periods. Right. Yeah. I don't know if it's really just like, you know, feeling like I feeling like you're kind of going through the motions a lot of the time. Yeah, as a kid I don't like I just felt I don't have very, very lucid memories of any of my childhood. But I do remember my mom telling me that I was originally left handed and my kindergarten teacher forced me to become like, not only were Did you force me to become right handed, but then you complained about my terrible pitch. Seriously. But I was never diagnosed with anything. And so I'm curious, when I talked to women who were diagnosed with either dyslexia or dysgraphia, or some of the other learning disabilities, they often say that, like, they felt a little more. I don't know what the word is, like cared for, or you know, that there was some kind of ways in which there were modifications made for them. So, so they didn't necessarily have that experience of like, something's wrong, and nobody's noticed. So I'm curious, did you sort of feel like you? Did you feel like you were getting extra help when you needed it? Or do you feel like they were just way off in that diagnosis?



Tessa MacKay 04:36

I think you just have to look at the times really, and I think I was really lucky with being sort of, you know, identified with having learning disabilities or you know, difficulties and at a young age, so then that just sort of became a part of my identity and, and knowing that about myself, made me feel a little like more comfortable, obviously. But at the same time, the teachers had no idea how to really handle it. I think, although still, I felt I got the sense that I was still a bit of a guinea pig for trying to figure out how to teach me basic English and Maths and then clocks reading clocks. I can't, I only learned how to read clocks maybe a couple of months ago. And I remember the teacher, multiple teachers tried teaching me how to read analog clocks instead of the principal, and they just eventually gave up because it was just too difficult. So I think, yeah, I think, like, you're saying, you don't really remember big chunks of your childhood, but I said, they remember the periods in which I felt really sort of swamped and overwhelmed. And the inability to, to respond to things or just feeling that sort of different disconnect from the group. A lot. And it's Yeah, it's really interesting, those sorts of things. But I'm just trying to think of another scenario. Definitely learning language. And I stopped. When I got to high school, I was really lucky, I had a good group of friends. And then, sort of towards the end of high school, like I dropped out of maths and English, just because I was just falling behind it was the the curriculum was designed to be for students who would achieve that ever certain pace, and I could just never catch up with them. So I would constantly fall short of like, 10 or 20%, under, like average, on most of my subjects. And no matter how hard I tried, I just felt it. Never really, if my effort was never commensurate to the scores I was trying to get. So yeah, that was that was quite disheartening. And so I got to the point where, and I have been drawing as early as I can remember. So I guess, you know, during all my test papers are covered in edibles. Such a daydreamer, and it's interesting, like, I can't quite discern between what's dyslexic and what's ADHD, and, and maybe you can help provide some insight into that as well. So I'm just trying to unpack everything, but um, I was such a daydreamer. And remember coming home to school, hope for him from school once and telling them I had a great maths class, and then told her all about the birds that were outside and I've got so but um, yeah, just really, really struggling at school, but drawing and, and an art became a place that I would just escape to every day. So that, you know, I've got a lot to thank, for by school experience, because I was able to do that, and had those experiences as well. So, yeah, and had really good supportive teachers around me that you as a little different needed some help. And I think that, that helped a lot, having sort of your peers and teachers that understand you, even if they can't really help you, in the ways of you achieving higher marks in academia. That makes that counts for a lot because it just otherwise you feel a bit more on the outside, I think. Yeah.



Katy Weber 08:59

And so so what, how old were you when you were diagnosed? with ADHD?



Tessa MacKay 09:04

Yeah, I was diagnosed with ADHD when I was goodness.



Katy Weber 09:09

I think 18 years or so. Okay. All right. teams. And was your brother's experience with academia the same?



Tessa MacKay 09:18

No hit? Could you really Yeah, he was good. He would. He would. He really enjoyed school and he got good marks. But he needed he was a medication to help him focus because he was just the trouble trouble kids. So yeah, and then I l'm on medication to help with my writing. So yeah, then that's that's been very helpful for me. So yeah.



Katy Weber 09:49

And what was your parents reaction when they found out Oh, not



Tessa MacKay 09:54

surprised at all. I think. I think they just want to see You may, you know, every parent just wants to see their kid, not struggle at something so, and seeing my brother, how it's affected my brother and helped him and supported him, they're pretty assured that it will help me as well. Writing is just been really tricky. And I think with, with basic stuff like text messages and emails and getting back to people, there's just so much anxiety around that basic stuff, for me, that it's actually pulling me away from the work I need to be doing. Which is, you know, painting and etc. So when you sort of start to see those, like, you start to carve out your day, and you go, geez, oh, I spent like a good three hours trying to write basic emails to people, that should take me like half an hour or at most an hour, you do realize how much time you're you're pulling yourself away from, from the work you need to be doing. So I think that that's when I started to ask for help. And yeah, look, look at other options. And the Aerosmith program is fantastic for that, too. So, yeah,



Katy Weber 11:16

yeah. And it's funny how much we beat ourselves up for not wanting to or not being good at some of the most like, ridiculously mundane tasks. Yeah, like responding to people in email, or even just chores. You know, like, I remember just feeling like, so much weight was taken off when I was thinking about all of these terrible ways that I'm sleeping. I'm such a terrible homemaker. And I'm so messy, and my whole family must be so disappointed in me. And then I just remember, self loadings being like, yeah, who likes to do dishes? Like, of course, you don't like doing dishes? It's boring. Why would you like to dad? And I just remember just being like, Oh, right. Like, that's absurd. Like, why would I want to be good at those? Yeah, like, I put all my focus in the wrong places. And I think we have a tendency to, like, put value into things that we can't do. Because like, it's almost like it mystifies you, like other people are good at these things. And so, and I'm not, so you put like an you put like, an inflated value on those. Yeah. And really, some of those things are trivial.



Tessa MacKay 12:25

Exactly. Yeah. Exactly. Like, oh, my goodness, I just remember and I still like this, like, I just I have to if I have to be somewhere on time. Oh, man, it's so hard. I remember out I'll get to the place like a day before or like the like, the wrong day or something. And then I'll try and get there on the right day. And I'll get there two days after like, it just wouldn't. It was just so I know sorry. tricky. Arriving at a place that in place and time on the right time. Yeah, it's just and you just feel Yeah, those those basic things are really hard in friends as well is like I really, if I'm with somebody, I'm with them as well. But it's I have to remind myself to really reach out to my my friends. And it's not nothing, obviously nothing personal. Just get so focused on what what is in your immediate world. Yeah, so just hearing all that from your other ladies that you've interviewed as well. It's just really interesting. All those sorts of things that you relate to. little interesting little things. Yeah. Right.



Katy Weber 13:37

I'm endlessly amazed at how these like seemingly random struggles from throughout my life, you know, all play into this one diagnosis like this one neat little package and such an incredible way we were like, Oh, right. You know, even just the term hyperactivity is something that so many of us don't relate to in the beginning, because yeah, you think of like a little boy who's being hyperactive. And we were like, Well, that wasn't me, I was staring at the burden. Right? But then when you start to kind of reinterpret, hyperactivity, and how it manifests itself in your thoughts and your brains and impulsivity and like, rage, like oh, yeah, okay, fine. I check all up. And now it's like, oh, I like really deeply relate to the

hyperactive ADHD now, the king intense foster care? Yeah, we're just like the mood swings and



Tessa MacKay 14:36

all of that. Yeah, I'm trying to not get so emotionally just like triggered by stuff too. But it's a double edged sword for me because I'm an artist. So you inherently the work that you do, you're just like you're, you're, you're inherently trying to, like feel understood for your work as an artist and then when when you Working with people or clients or something and, you know, debate happens or an issue happens. It's just two double edged sword because you obviously it's very you care about the work very hard to take things personally. But yeah, that activity or that emotional regulation, regulation, right.



Katy Weber 15:23

Yeah, exactly. I mean, I can't even imagine as an artist dealing, you know, I just finished putting together a course. And now I'm trying to sell it. And that's the part I hate the most is the self promotion, the selling? Yes, it's such an emotional rollercoaster for one minute. I'm like, I send out an email. And I'm like, okay, you can buy this thing. And then it's crickets. And then I'm like, I've made a terrible mistake. Nobody wants this thing. This is the worst thing ever. Right? What have I done? I've made a fool out of myself. And then, you know, one person buys it. And I'm like, Yeah, no, I have to do this. And I have to do this. And I'm gonna make it and you know, when you get back on the track, where you're just like, I'm gonna do all of those commitment calls. Yeah. It's exhausting. And I'm just so I mean, there's so much subjectivity when it comes to like selling and as an entrepreneur, right. And it's so like, that is the thing that drives me crazy. Because I can't work for other people. committed that part. I just can't. I've tried it many times. And I can't stick with the job longer than two years. So that part is out of it. So I'm curious, like, you know, I've had that issue with him as an entrepreneur, I can't even imagine the, the that emotional rollercoaster of being somebody who is so incredibly objective Lee talented as an artist, I mean, you are incredibly talented. So you must get compliments, you know, on your work, but at the same time, I know, as somebody with ADHD, what an emotional roller coaster it must be to then always sort of feel like yeah, am I actually, you know, are people saying, you know, like, what is the subtext and all of that. So, now, when you reached out to me, you had talked about, like, your sort of reflections on just on your path as an artist and looking back at, at how ADHD has played into that? Curious, fascinating? What are some of your reflections?



Tessa MacKay 17:16

Yeah, so going back to, you know, school and education, I left when I was just, just before year 12. And, and I remember going, Okay, well, I'm going to study art. And that's, that's how I'm going to be obviously, and then I went into, you know, University on a three disability portfolio. And I thought, Okay, well, they should have some support there for artists as well who've struggled with with, you know, the written units, and, and I really struggled at uni. And again, it's just that whole theory and conceptual side that I really struggled at, because what I expected from university was technical was was learning the technicalities of painting and sculpture and, and, and Fine Arts, I didn't realize it was going to be so concept heavy. And I just associated that with so much writing. And also, I found it really hard to do that deeper reflection of asking the questions beyond questions. And, and, and so I found that, again, I don't bet on myself. So personally, and I found, like a bit of I found I was questioning myself after first year. And although there's quite a high dropout rate, I just got so anxious. And, and so I left and I thought, well, I'm just going to approach art in the way that I am craving. And then eventually I'll come back to uni when I'm ready, because it seems like I'm just too young to go to uni. So I did, I went out and I painted a series of portraits. And then that came back to uni The next year, I deferred for you and then came back. And the same thing I just really struggled. And so I, I thought I sort of made a pact with myself. And I thought, Well, look, I love the technicalities of painting. I love the skill involved. And I thought if I could just pay if I could just focus on that and do that to the best of my ability. Hopefully, that will just speak louder than whatever conceptual underpinning I could come up with. So hopefully people can just sort of see it like that. And so I've just really, essentially I just have focused on that for years and I've gone down the path of hyperrealism which is like very technical, technically based realism. And so I guess you Yeah, what I've realized, though, is I've sort of painted myself into a corner in some ways because I've not the art world is inherently fickle, and, and you need to be able to discuss your works, and have, you need to be able to have a conversation about the work and your intent. And, and, and that sort of aspect of being an artist. I, it scares the crap out of me. And I'm not, I'm really not good at it. So I've avoided that by by one going down a technical path, but then also just not practicing that. So now I'm going back to the books, and now I'm trying to, like expose myself to Yeah, theory and philosophy and discovering why it is. What is it about painting that I love? And why do I paint and all those questions, stuff that I've never focused on in the time? It's really, really difficult. But it's exciting as well. It's, it's sort of showing me sides of myself, that I'd never, never thought I would find challenging and rewarding. And, yeah, it's really interesting. So sort of like a longer answer to your question.



Katy Weber 21:30

Yeah, no, it was interesting. When you're talking, it was uh, you were reminding me of Naomi, Osaka. And that kind of issue that she's going through right now with the the cut that the tennis player who is refusing to talk to the media, because she was protecting her mental health. And so she was getting fined for not talking. There's been this button, so then she had to drop out of the French Open, I think it was the French Open. Goodness, because she's she doesn't want to speak to the media afterwards. And she finds it too stressful. And so now at least just the fact that she's taken the stand, you know, Nike and some other companies are like backing her. And now there seems to be this backlash against this forced, you know, the fact that athletes are forced to do these promotional tours and talk to the media that they absolutely hate doing. And they obviously feel a lot of anxiety and stress around it. I'm like, and I really relate to that deeply. I'm like, you're an athlete. Why this? You know, it's the same idea of like, you don't have to be good at everything. Yeah. And if these things are bringing you stress, don't do them.



Tessa MacKay 22:33

Exactly. Yeah. It's like a threat, I think. Yeah, it's like it is it's actually a physical, like a threat on your body completely. Because I would say to my lectures, which is no, no art lecture would ever want to hear this, I'd say are the art speaks for itself? And you do not say that. That's a huge No, no, but I just I genuinely believe that. But I yeah, it is you do have to show up in ways that are so challenging, right?



Katy Weber 23:07

I think communicating ourselves in a way that in a way in which we fundamentally feel understood can be so difficult for people with ADHD. I'm just listening to Sarah Solons book on women with ADHD. And she was talking about the same thing, which is like, and this book was written ages ago, this is one of the very first book on on women with ADHD. And she was talking about, you know, how we tend to kind of clam up and be very quiet and kind of Yeah, draw in social situations, because you feel often feel like you're betrayed by what's coming out of you. Because sometimes you can't even you can't even communicate your thoughts very well. And you never know what's going to come out.



23:46

Yeah. Like,



Katy Weber 23:50

I just like talking about, like, avoiding social situations, because you can't predict what mood you'll be in when you can't write and it's like, so for your own safety. You're just like, I'm not gonna I'm not gonna put anyone in that position. I can't guarantee a what's gonna come out of my mouth or like be if I'm going to be happy or sad. Like, there's so much about the way that we communicate that feels like a betrayal to ourselves sometimes that often we just end up like, clamming up and then somebody's like, how are you? I'm good, thank you. And then and then we get labeled the quiet one, even though we are anything but quiet when given you know, the right yeah, the right combination.



Tessa MacKay 24:33

So many situations, I would go home and I'd just be processing what's just happened and I'll be thinking reliving the experience and, and when I'm when I'm deep into painting, often I won't see people, you know, just my husband, we just see each other and he's a writer, director. So he's the same sort of, like introvert as well. He spends like weeks in his room. And he, he's, he just sees his wife and his cat. That's about And so, but then when we go into social situations, because we've been so in a quiet place for so long, you do have to really psych yourself up. But it, it's even harder because you because of, you know your dispositions as well in social situations. So this is great chatting with you because it's a good, it's, it's good for me to practice talking. I think that's, it genuinely is Yeah, I love it, which is great. Well,



Katy Weber 25:33

I know and I think that my husband is a bonafide introvert. He always says, you know, he's always been one. And you know, I used to ask him a lot, like, what do you love about me what, you know, I know why I chose you. But I could never figure out why he chose me. And, and he would always say, ridiculous things like, well, when I'm with you, I feel like I'm by myself. And I'm like, well, that sucks. But as an introvert, that's like the greatest compliment, right? Because he's like, I don't feel any. You know, he was like, I knew the moment I met you, I felt no anxiety, I felt no awkwardness, like, I just felt at peace. And I was like, the best compliment an introvert could give. But for me, I was sort of like, Okay, I get it. Like, I guess that's a compliment, right? Because I can never, I can never decide if I'm an introvert or not. Because like I love, you know, one on one conversations. And I think something that I think a lot of us, I don't know, if it's women with ADHD or just ADHD, but like, I feel a constant desire to connect with people. So I can get very lonely feeling if I'm just like, at home, doing my own thing, like I, I feel, I always feel like I'm missing out, you know, that meme of like, I don't want to go to the party, but I really want to be invited to

the party. Right. And so there's that sense of like, always looking and searching. And I think that that's something that we have. A lot of us have that need, you know, and I know, in ADHD 2.0. And I think even in the driven to distraction book, like they talk about connection and vitamin C, and how that is one of the biggest ways that we can actually treat ADHD is to talk to other people with ADHD and feel that connection and feel like we're not alone. And there are other people with these weird quirks who, you know, have trouble brushing their teeth and like random things that you're like. Right? And how like, that feeds us in a way that is not necessarily typical of an introvert. You know, we we crave a sense of connection that never quite feels right. A lot of the time in most social situations. Yeah. Then you're like, Oh, I just want to go home.

T

Tessa MacKay 27:52

Yeah, it's time. Let's go. Yeah, that's so true. It's you don't even really need to say to somebody, I'm ADHD or something, you just you just you just feel it. I feel like people with any sort of, though, yeah, your eye divergence is like, you just sort of, you feel it in the room. And there's that connection. It's really, really fascinating. And then when eventually it does come out the dyslexic or whatever, it's Yeah, it is just, sparks just sort of happened. It's just you kind of go, Oh, Okay, there we go. But my friend, he sort of, he was diagnosed late. Later in life, and he, he's just, he's like, I can't believe this is my whole life just sort of explained and why I'm the way I am and yeah, is it's so it's so fascinating. Yeah, I think, I think COVID as well. How, how you were saying before, how a lot of women are being diagnosed now later in life because of the lockdowns and missing in their kids and reflected to themselves. It's just yeah, that's very fascinating. It's like,



Katy Weber 29:12

Well, yeah, and I think now, it'll be interesting as everything really sort of goes back to quote unquote, normal or hopefully not back to normal. But as we start to, like, I don't want to return to what things were but I think, like as we start opening up and getting back into a more routine, it'll be interesting to see like was this just was a lot of this actually ADHD or just the trauma of the pandemic and everything happening, like, you know, but then again, I think something that is very endemic to ADHD is constantly wondering if you actually have at best and I'm like, I feel like that's usually a sign you have constantly wondering, is this actually it and you can't start thinking about it and you can't stop doubting and you're like, I don't know. There's often times where I'm like, I don't know, maybe I'm just a feminist living in a massage in his world and like we had Trump for last four year like this. I'm, I have PTSD from living in this company. Maybe that's all this is right? And so much noise. So right that I go back to this fence sense of like, no, the fact that I'm like, manically obsessing over whether I have ADHD, that is pretty much

guarantee that I actually have, but like you said, like, fine, you know, finding other neuro diverse neuro divergent people. Is there is that sense of like home, you know? And yeah, there's an feeling like so accepted, because there really is like, the weirder the better. Like, we'll take it, whatever, you're in a safe place.



Tessa MacKay 30:48

The conversation just branches out, touches anything and everything. Really. Yeah. And then people start dropping syncing quotes. It's Yeah.



Katy Weber 33:00

Okay, so tell me more about the Aerosmith program, because you had mentioned it in one of our correspondents when you said you were working on strengthening your neurological pathways. Yeah, I don't know anything about this program. So



Tessa MacKay 33:11

tell me about it. Yeah. It's quite a mouthful. And how did you find Yes, so? Well, gosh, it's like another silver lining of COVID. Because they both my mum had a bit aware of this program. Aerosmith from Barbara Aerosmith. created it. And, and her I guess her argument is that the brain and this is, you know, back when people thought brains were fixed guess we were just born with brains. That couldn't change. But her argument was there was neuroplasticity. So, you know, obviously, we know that now. But that's the whole that's sort of the bedrock of why Aerosmith is what Aerosmith is, is to help connect neuro pathways that had, you know, people had had stroke, people, there is a disconnect there and people. And so my mom was aware of this program when I was little, and, you know, even sort of pitched it to me to go over to Canada and do the course, but it was just the wrong time. And I just don't know, but since COVID, they've, they've started doing an online online courses for people, which has been great. And, you know, I do an hour, four days a week. And, and honestly, it's just it's been one of the best best things because when I can read clocks, and then I've just felt like I've been able to progress in things that I've never been able to progress in before. And one of those things is writing I can I can write emails a little better. I can listen, listen. I can read books for that in like a in a noisy environment with that, and remember what I've read, which is, yeah, nuts. And well, yeah, yeah, it's all those rules, simple little things that you just know that you need a very particular environment to do. But now it's a lot more easier to do those basic things. And it's, it's fascinating. So everyone starts off, all the students start off with clocks. And they start off with three hand clocks. And then eventually, you do a series of exercises within

the two hand clocks like equal length heads, you read the cipher, which one's a minute hand to the hour hand, and then you read the clock, and try and get your time down, as well. So it's about accuracy and speed. And then eventually, they'll add another hand. So you'll have three hands, and then you'll have four hands, and then it goes all the way up to 10 handed clocks. So I think four hands now, so it's, but it's, it's, the way it's designed, is that everyone learns at their own pace. And they're, it's sort of tailored so that you feel like you're achieving something every day. So you get that sense of achievement. And, and every day is you do have to sort of, you do have to apply yourself and work at it every day. But you feel like you get something back from the effort that you put in, which is great. And then you sort of notice that over the course of a week or a month, you've gone from here to there, which is just so I've never experienced that school. And I just associate clocks, and that sort of way of mode of thinking with school and, and education. So I think it's for me, it's done more than just the ability to read clocks and decipher time and, and what it's trying to teach me, but it's done a lot to my sense of self and my, my own self worth as well. Like, I've got a lot more confidence. And a lot more, a lot more karma going into the things that I've have anxiety built around. So yeah, the being able to, like the fact that I feel like I can write an email, just, it's, it means so much. It's insane. How much that's changed my sense of self confidence. Really? Yeah. So I'll keep going with this for probably over a year, the whole course. And so you every student starts clocks, but they have a sort of a cognitive assessment, which goes through, I think for for something else. And then you with, with that assessment, you sort of see the difference. Areas that your strengths and your, your weaknesses are in. So I'm good at visual stuff. But I'm really bad at the comprehension concepts as well. Time and, and reading and writing. So there's kind of things that I'm going to focus on. And yeah, see what happens. So yeah, it's an interesting journey. That's amazing. Yeah, it's, it's interesting.



Katy Weber 38:34

So is the school specifically for adults with dyslexia? Or is it just sort of a assess what your learning needs are in the beginning, and so it's really for anybody.



Tessa MacKay 38:48

I believe it's for anybody, but I know a lot of the students I practice with have, you know, learning difficulties. So it could be dyslexia, it could be ADHD. Yeah, it could be any anything. And I think that the point of doing the assessment is to get a sense of how people's brains work, so that they can sort of accommodate whatever they need, really. But I practice with students who are like, under 10 years old, and then my mum's gonna start as well, which is really cool. So yeah, and she's, you know, in a 16. So, yeah, it's gonna be interesting. I think that having students from such a wide range is for them would just

be really fascinating because adapting to different generate different generations. So like from my mum, for instance, they've started a program that caters for I guess, they call them senior, senior people, but it's to it's to Get your brain active and, and, and sharp. So but for me, I'm, I'm trying to re connect those those neurological connections that are just not sparking, and I need them to spark. So, yeah. And then some kids who are going through school, it's just sort of a bolster for the experience at school as well. So, yeah, everyone goes in with their own intention.



Katy Weber 40:31

Now does your mother does she did you get ADHD from her? I don't know. It just so Has she has she now re evaluated her life? Like



Tessa MacKay 40:45

I put the question to her and we just don't know. It's so fascinating. Yeah, she, she, they Yeah, she thinks dyslexia is definitely come through her family. And because her dad dropped out of school early and said it her brother and they've all like foster kid, they've all focused on one thing, and they've, they've been really successful at doing this one particular specific thing. So yeah, it wouldn't be interesting, but my brother and I are IVF kids, so not sure if it if it doesn't come from my mom's side, it will come from my dad's but I don't know. The dead because it's that was the dad's side was the donor. So yeah, it's um, yeah, I have no idea a bit of a mystery box.



Katy Weber 41:40

Yeah, I know, I'm in my father's the obvious candidate. But, but because he's just he's much more of the, you know, kind of scatterbrained inattentive, you know, packrat kind of person. And so when as soon as I connected the dots, I was like, Oh, yes. Okay, this is I clearly got it from him. I my mother has passed away. And so I like, I really wish I could have conversations with her about it, not only because so much of my childhood, she was very confused. As to why I did so poorly in school, you know, and like, so many conversations, like, you know, she, you know, she would say things to me, like, well, not everybody goes to university. And I know, she was trying to make me feel better at the time, you know, it's not for everybody. That's like, that's what you would say, as a mother to make your child better. But now looking back, I think, like, God, like it was comments like that, that really, like, you know, my self esteem really took a hit, because my self esteem was so tied to my inability to kind of show intellect. Yeah. You know, and, and like you're saying, with email writing, like, it's your sort of like, it doesn't, it seems like a little

thing, but when, when that ability to communicate becomes so ingrained in how you view yourself, you know, in the world, absolutely. And it's something you can't master when you're so you're able to master other things. And I think that's what becomes so confusing to us is the fact that it's like, we can be very good at some things, but we put all of our focus in the things we are not good at, because those are the mysteries to us. Those are the puzzles place. And, and then you have a teacher or teachers who say things like, Well, why aren't you consistent, you need to be consistent, you need to get A's in every subject. And then that emphasis, you know, the, you know, the sense of worth, as you're growing up is, is unlike your ability to be good at every year, and which is just impossible, right? And so I think there are a lot of people who, you know, who don't think that way, I think they're sort of like, I'm good at x, y, and z, and therefore I don't have to be good at A, B and C, but I think we're like, No, we have to be good at every bit of everything. And if we're not, we will focus on the one thing we are terrible at and that we you know, our self worth will become wrapped up in that one thing we



Tessa MacKay 44:01

can't Yeah, I yeah, it's fascinating get through school. It was it was, oh, she's like, I'm not good at anything else. But art. And that's just that was just the narrative I built and and so I put so much effort into into art, which is good because it's meant that I've arrived. I've had my own unique path. But yeah, it's really really reassessing the how you got to where you are now is such a journey and trying to express yourself through it all as well. Yeah, yeah. Very interesting.



Katy Weber 44:44

Are you think about you think about like elite athletes, right, who have put all of their focus and energy into being an athlete and then they get an injury and their career. Yeah, and you're just, like, completely rebuild your life, right. Like it's all it's almost At that point, you're sort of, like, I'm grateful I'm not really good at anything. No, I don't have to go through whatever hardship it must be to you to lose that one passionate thing you're really great at. Yeah, right. It's so interesting the ways in which we gloss over immediately the things that we were talented in. And, and then only, you know, our narrative becomes such a focus on the few things that seem to elude us. Yeah.



Tessa MacKay 46:18

But, you know, culture sort of, like, I guess your, that the world around you reinforces that so much. Like, for instance, I, I, I finished this artwork that was a large artwork for an Art

Prize. And it was it took me about four months to do and I put all my eggs in one basket with this work. And when I got it done, and I thought, okay, I've literally had no income for four months. And now it's time to get a job. And I thought, Okay, well, I'll get something that can accommodate painting as well. So just a cafe job. And I've always done cafe work since I was I can remember so. But it was a bad employee, because I would just be casual. But then I would have a pinch point with my art now say, I have to go. So I would leave and worst employee ever. And then I'll come back. So like, my resume had like, maybe three months here two months, there was I never had a consistent job. And I was 26 when I finished this work. And I remember trying to apply for basic cafe roles, like just jobs, casual jobs, dishes, all that sort of stuff. And one I was too old. And so it's too expensive to employ as a casual. I couldn't get a job anywhere and and I thought, Ah shit, I really have to know I really have to make up work to sell some paintings because I'm unemployable. No other skills on my resume. So yeah, the world in which I've created for myself and odd I really have to make that work for me. So yeah.



48:18

Yeah,



Katy Weber 48:18

so so now if you could rename ADHD to something else that would be a little more relatable, especially to women. Have you thought about something that you would



Tessa MacKay 48:31

call it same as ADHD? I think all like, oh, labels should just have cute animal faces on them. And should every letter should be. Oh, my God, I love what you say from some sort of animal tales. And like, no, but no one can read it except for people with neuro divergence. I've always



Katy Weber 49:00

loved right, big Panda, bears. And elephants. That would be fantastic. That's my favorite answer. I'm kind of getting bored of asking that question too, because I feel like we don't know. And then sometimes people ask me like, what would you call it? I'm like, I don't know. I don't have an answer. But I don't know. I feel like I can't come up with a good reason. It's so I feel like ADHD, just the more I learn about it, the more complicated it is, and the harder it is to even sort of explain to people and I think, you know, like, I get more

and more frustrated, even talking about it with people who don't get it, you know, yeah, I've stopped trying to I've stopped trying to explain it to people because it's so often, when I first talked about this diagnosis, I was so happy. And yet there were so many people in my life who were like, Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. So get smaller terminal. I was expecting a high five, but it's okay. No, right. Yeah, yeah, totally. And even you know, and I talked about this with my husband too, with our kids, like, you know, my son, my son, we're going to get him assessed this summer when school is over. And he's very nice. And my husband's very worried about the stigma. And you know, is he going to think of himself as lazy if he has ADHD, and I was like, You don't get it? Like, he's gonna think of himself as lazy, no matter what. Right? But if he if he can have a sense of where this is coming from, and the why, like, you know, just he doesn't understand the importance behind the why of ADHD, right, that had just having that explainer makes everything a little bit. It doesn't it doesn't mean we're not gonna have emotional regulation issues or rejection sensitivity to Korea, or like all of these things that plague us. But I think it just makes it a little bit easier. So



Tessa MacKay 51:04

true. If my folks are like, Oh, don't worry, she's just, she's she's just a kind emotion. She can't regulate her emotions. She can't express herself. It's Don't worry. It's just ADHD. That would be so good.



Katy Weber 51:18

Thanks, Mom. Or it would be although, although I would probably also get annoyed and be like, why I'm acting the way I'm acting. Don't tell me what you know, it'd be like somebody be like, do you have your period? Do you have ADHD right now?



Tessa MacKay 51:31

Is that what's happening? Yeah, yeah, totally. No, I'm, I've got so much to thank for my parents. So they are Yeah, they they're amazing. The seriously amazing. Yeah, I'm sure the same with your folks as well, just what they went through and what they didn't know. But they would try so hard to understand and wrap their head around what was going on and how they just felt helpless. I think the more knowledge, the better. It has



Katy Weber 52:05

been comforting to when I've spoken to women who were diagnosed, you know, 20 years

ago as opposed to last year. Yeah. That there really was no idea about what it was 20 years. Exactly. And if you were diagnosed, people had no idea what this meant to do with it. You know, there was still a sense that you would like outgrow it. Yeah, exactly.

 Tessa MacKay 52:23

Yeah, you grow out of it. Yeah. Oh, you're just right. Put in the weird club. Yeah. Which is, you know, cool. Well,

 Katy Weber 52:34

yeah. But it's still just yeah, it feels like we're all just kind of walking around those living experiments finding out about this interesting. Yeah. crazy thing together. Like we're all on this one drug trip. Whoa, that is so cool.

 Tessa MacKay 52:50

No, it's it's fascinating with because I feel like a imposter in my own field, if that makes sense. And, and I relate to people with neuro divergence of all backgrounds, and kids edibles all sorts of things. But I find that the art world is just so fickle, and quite often. That's, that's something that I'm learning to explore a bit more of, or just even explore the sense of what it feels like to be a bit of an outsider in that world in that space. Yeah, I'm not sure how to sort of explain it, but that the feeling of being an imposter in your own field, or in never feeling good enough. Yet, that sense of never never being enough. Yeah, yeah. It's, it's a fascinating thing, once when, when things trigger you to feel like that. Yeah. How do you how do you do? How do you handle with that feeling that sense? And that sort of comes up in you? Oh, God.

 Katy Weber 54:11

Usually I'd say I'm never gonna do this. I'm just like, I've made a terrible mistake, and I'm going to crawl into a hole. That was the answer you were looking for. But I'll remember that. Yeah. You know, but it's the same thing. You know, I mean, maybe there is some comfort in just knowing that this is part of the package. She's like, yeah, I think, you know, the one thing my podcast has never, I've never pretended to, like, have the answers for anyone. And I actually feel like in some way, that's kind of the appeal of these conversations. Is that like, a lot of the time we're just digging through the garbage. Yeah. Trying to make sense. Yeah. Exactly. And, and, and that in, I think, I think that is where the therapy is like, I think that's where we start to really kind of I wouldn't even say like, that's

where the self improvement is. But I just feel like that is kind of how we heal. And that's how we learn about ourselves. Yeah, it's the knowing that I don't Yeah, I don't think being like, I'm going to figure out the five tips to being a successful entrepreneur, like I, like, I think we get stuck in that trap, that the answer is always around the corner, and that somehow we're going to, we're going to figure it out, and everything's going to be happy forever. And, you know, I think, if we stop trying to buy into that fallacy, that that, you know, yeah, is achievable. And more, so just feel like, Okay, how can I just like, you know, understand why I feel this way, likely, you know, like, this is I'm pouring my heart out and doing something that is really meaningful to me. And then if and then if I ask people, if I have the goal to ask people to pay me for it, there's just cricket. It's like, you know, but you realize that that's sort of a universal experience. If I throw that out there and you laugh with recognition that I feel better about myself, at least because I'm like, Okay, I'm not the only person. That's right. So, all right. Well, I feel like I've kept you longer than I should have. Oh, no, thank you. So thank you.



Tessa MacKay 56:15

I hope I sound like I've just rambled the whole time. So thank you so much. That's the beauty of these conversations. God I hope I made sense, but no, thank you so much.