

# Sari Solden: Why ADHD is different for women

Sat, 12/4 12:53PM 52:34

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

adhd, women, people, diagnosed, book, difficulties, life, understand, diagnosis, feel, medication, adults, point, learning, focusing, struggle, brain, talking, shame, find

## SPEAKERS

Sari Solden, Katy Weber

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Katy Weber 00:00

Wow, this is such a treat to be able to interview you because like I said, your book was the first book I read after I was diagnosed. And I read, or I listened to it, and then I re-listened to it again recently, in preparation for this interview with this, like year of behind me, and it was really interesting to sort of have that different perspective of, you know, when I first read it, it was just like, I was going through that feeling of like, you know, like, the like, the book says, You mean, I'm not crazy, and I'm not lazy, and I'm not stupid. And and this is not just me, like, there's so much of, I think what is so profound about your book, is that, you know, there is a lot of shame in these private experiences that, you know, self care, and hygiene and sort of a lot of these things that I was realizing for the first time was a shared experience among women with ADHD. And now a year later, I'm like, Yeah, but I still have ADHD. Right. So now it's like, just meaning that, like, there's a lot of things that are still a struggle, you know, like, even even with the diagnosis behind you, like you still are living with this and sort of what does that mean?



Sari Solden 01:11

That's why Yeah, no, that's a really important point to explore. Because our last book, and if you read radical guide for women, you know, I mean, that is the point of it is that you have to, this is a chronic condition, you know, your brain and all the stuff you're going to do for medication, all that strategies, tips, tools, whatever, that's your brain, that's not you, and you have to sort of untangle those two things and come to terms with it, this is Chrono is nothing, and you don't want to approach it, like you want to get over it, because that's who you are. And you just want to get help for your brain difficulties and accept them because they're chronic, and then the rest of is getting on with your life like you are and you know, and accepting and valuing yourself. So that is important. Yeah. So you know, you sometimes it's framed, like, okay, take this medication or get a diagnosis, and you'll get over this and that's not true, you know, and you don't want to get fixed, you know, right. Absolutely. Yeah. Furniture get fixed.



Katy Weber 02:06

Yes. And I sort of feel like there is so much literature out there that that comes, you know, that that it revolves around that idea of like, will cure it, you know, and and get out, you know, master your ADHD, and a lot of that can be really problematic.

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Sari Solden 02:20

It is that is the most problematic. So that's why we wrote that other book, which is really helping a lot of women right now. Because, you know, wrote the first book and 95 Originally it was published. And so then this is, years later, the radical guide is, is to disavow women of that of what you just said, right? What is the goal? Yeah, the goal is not to get over who you are, you know, so.



Katy Weber 02:42

So I did want to ask you, because I know you wrote your first book 30, almost 30 years ago, which blows me away edition.

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Sari Solden 02:48

Yeah. Revised Edition was in 2005.



Katy Weber 02:54

Which is what I'm assuming I listened to because I listened to your you read the audio book. So that would have been the Revised Edition.

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Sari Solden 03:00

Oh, that was even much later. That was when I put out the audio book. So yeah.



Katy Weber 03:06

But what I do like, you know, what I have been asking throughout this throughout my interviews with women, and even though I know you're sort of on as the as an expert, I am curious about your personal experience with your diagnosis, like how old were you and what was happening in your life that led you to sort of make these connections when practically nobody was making these connections? I mean, when we say you were a pioneer and women in ADHD, you're really the first one off the boat.

S

Sari Solden 03:32

Yeah, exactly. I feel like, No, that's a really interesting question. Because, yeah, it was in the very early 90s. And yeah, I didn't your question was what made you think you had ADHD? I

didn't think about that. There wasn't anything that we were talking about about ADHD without hyperactivity at that point. But a lot of great things came together at the same time. I had been really, but I had been trying to solve this mystery of what I've been struggling with for it was about age 40, for 40 years, massive disorganization, you know, severe and chronic disorganization. Shai, not talking at all not being able to organize my thoughts, you know, but very smart and hard working. I, I just was struggling, you know, and I was very smart is called twice exceptional, we call it now for that term is for people who are twice exceptional, like, they're both ends of the bell curve, like you're really smart, but you have all these severe challenges. And that sort of even a harder thing to understand. So it didn't matter how much I was achieving, I would just create more stuff that I couldn't control. You know, I was very frustrated. And so but I wound up at a counseling agency for and they had a special program for adults with learning disabilities, but it was in a counseling agency. So I always was looking at adults with differences like this in the context of who they are and their self and their relationship and their self concept. So it was just a lucky place that I ended up. I was majoring in Minority Mental Health and just through that process, program, I got connected to this other program. And to work at this program, I had to take a test, a learning disability test, it was the first time I ever had incredible difficulty that was discovered, you know, they gave me some crazy memory tests that I imagined other people could pass. And they gave me sort of nonsensical looking Mershon looking people and told me their names, and then they'd go back to it. And I couldn't remember a thing. And so it was the first time I saw wow, I have a severe problem with memory that I've been trying to compensate for all my life I had no idea about then in my spare time in between clients, I was surrounded by books about learning disabilities, and I was looking through to find an answer to what the severe and chronic disorganization was all about. And you know, they discussed it in terms of learning disabilities, at least I saw something identified there. And then a couple books started coming out into my office, one was driven to distraction, which was great, but it was the first time we understood that adults had difficulties even though they might have lost their hyperactivity, but it was still mostly about men and people who used to be hyperactive. And it was until a little bit later that we started talking about how people could have these difficulties without having ever had having hyperactivity. And that's when we started understanding women also had something like this. So I did read that book, lazy, you mean, I'm not lazy, stupid or crazy. And that was the first time I saw adults in general, described in a way that made me think, wow, I think that's me. I went to a conference cross country, the first ADHD conference in Ann Arbor. And it was what hundreds of adults for the first time gathered together. And it was the first time I described in my book, how I saw that adults pass for normal outside that I was two and that this is the first time people were just like women, where it was like going through their purses and throwing all the stuff around and like interrupting and you know, writing on their hands when they want to remember something, it was like the first time that everybody was with their tribe, that I understood this was a real thing. And then I did take a had a diagnostic evaluation at that point, you know, complete neuro psych evaluation, I saw this huge split between my performance which was really low in my verbal, which is extremely high. And, you know, showed some of the difficulties with working memory and, and all these other organizational issues. But basically, I you know, I couldn't stay awake, I had sort of like this borderline narcolepsy Vera, my whole life, I couldn't stay awake, very sleepy brain. And I could women's stuff, I couldn't go shopping, I couldn't go grocery store, I was so overwhelmed all the time, by all the sensory input, I couldn't filter out. You know, even at that point in the agency, I couldn't imagine people were sitting at the staff table writing notes and talking to each other, or like, going from one room to another, it was just demands for notes. And in noise from outside, I was just like, it was a nightmare. You know, for me, I didn't know what was going on. And then I really had a dramatic response to the, to even a small amount of medication had that time and I started talking, I started speaking up in groups, I started organizing my thoughts, I stayed awake. And it really just a

little bit of medication really helped, you know, changed my life. And but I had clients at the time. So I started studying them and looking at them and tracking the differences between women and men. And that's where, you know, even if they have the same differences, the shame that the women felt about these difficulties, you know, are really so apparent that I started really focusing on it. Yeah,



Katy Weber 08:29

that's a topic that we discuss a lot in my interviews with women, which is, you know, that the domestic pressures, and kind of, you know, how so much of the self doubt, when it comes to like, Is this even ADHD? Or am I just fill in the blank, right? Am I just lazy? Am I just disorganized? I think you know, like, I feel like a lot of the time I'm like, maybe I'm not maybe this is an ADHD, maybe I'm just a feminist. Living in this misogynist country. I feel like so many of these specific issues that women are facing, come down to our role in our domestic role, our role as wives our role as mothers and the expectations, the domestic expectation



Sari Solden 09:19

that that's what my book really focused on. I think that's why it was so popular. Besides people identifying themselves and understanding shame, it was about that. What happens when women feel they can't meet these cultural roles. So it wasn't just this arrow is all the way back with cultural roles that they've learned to idealize and internalize. And even if intellectually, they don't believe it anymore. Deep down, they still compare themselves ruthlessly to other women and in these domestic sick areas that conflicts so much with their executive function difficulties. That's where the shame and the hiding and the embarrassment and the disparities and power and the relationships often come because women still feels like the 1950s in my office, really, no matter who these women are, what they've achieved Deep down when they can't do those domestic things very well, they feel such shame. And like I had someone write to me the other day said, you know, who would think that like, argument about the pots and pans was, you know, made me think about many ways that I could die, you know, something so poignant because, you know, there's still this shame no matter how successful you are about like, you didn't do the pots and pans or why the dishes in the sink for three days or why didn't you follow the laundry, you know, even if the men are helping with tasks, it's there's still these deep gender role it feelings of failure when women can't do these things as the same way or easily. And so it's really hard for people to understand you as woman and people you live with.



Katy Weber 10:41

Right? And and I think so much so many of us come to this diagnosis through recognizing that emotional toil, or the emotional toll of being undiagnosed, right, and living this life kind of undiagnosed and not understanding what is actually going on. And so you're beating yourself up, and, and so but then at the same time, the DSM has nothing about emotions. And so again, it's like, I feel like it, you were going in circles in terms of like, how hard it is how hard it must be to educate women as to what this actually is.



Sari Solden 11:17

Yeah. And it's like you say, it's so much better now. Because when I, you know, finally wrote this book, and luckily, it was at a time where internet was just beginning to be used, believe it or not. And so that allowed women to start talking to each other, and define their own experiences for themselves to go to conferences and gather together. Because I didn't know I was really confronted by a huge amount of resistance from the male dominated field, you know, academics were really used to controlling this field and telling parents about their kids. But all of a sudden, adults, men and women were coming into the field. And they were and they were taking over and, and they changed the whole field and women and drove the whole change by going to their doctors and saying, No, this is real, this is who I am. So women really by talking to each other, like you said, really changed the face of this. And it's hard to imagine, I know for you guys that we didn't talk to each other before that through there wasn't the internet. And so what people were even more and more isolated, they had no way to find these things out. And so once that happened, it this is just built and built and built where women are talking to each other all around the world now.



Katy Weber 12:27

Yeah, it is mind blowing. I mean that I think that's the the one most common reaction I get from refer reviews of the podcast, which is like I finally I feel less alone. And I feel like I'm you know that there's nothing wrong with me that I'm listening to other women who are bright and accomplished, who are experiencing the same kind of secret things that I've been going through this whole my whole,



Sari Solden 12:49

I think that's the most therapeutic thing, I think for women is to because when they hear other women who are successful, and you know, really wonderful women, and then they are described the same struggle. So they have, they're forced to sort of shift their own self image, you know, it's it's a cognitive shift, because they say, wow, you know, I can see their strengths, I can see who they are. And so they start to internalize a new self, no narrative.



Katy Weber 13:14

Right? Yeah. And I and I feel like I've said this before. In the podcast, which is like, I feel like half the quote, unquote, treatment of deich of ADHD is that self realization, and that shifted narrative, and just understanding and the research that comes with, like, you know, realizing where your behaviors are coming from?



Sari Solden 13:39

Well, I mean, it's just tricky. And, you know, therapists have a long way to go with helping women with ADHD, because this is, again, there's your brain, there's, you know, and your behaviors and your difficulties. But if they do it, but if they don't come from a non pathologizing point of view, or see yourself over your symptoms, and help you really heal, not cure, heal, which means like, see yourself as hole, and hold on to both these sides of yourself, your strengths, your weaknesses, you have challenges, like everybody, and then you also have who

you are as a person, your core traits, and it's much more complex than just controlling, you know, the way you pay attention. And there's layers and layers of ADHD, not just because it's different, because of the hyperactivity, it's because of the late diagnosis, like you said, and because then you have layers and layers of shame, and layers and layers of not understanding your experience and filling in the blanks in all sorts of distorted ways. And that's what therapy for ADHD is really about, you know, you can have coaching and all these other things. But often women who weren't diagnosed too late, have many layers of Shamans in distorted self narratives and hiding and withdrawing and it just snowballs. So that's why therapy for ADHD for women, you know, has to be more prominent.



Katy Weber 14:57

Oh, right. Yeah, and I think Again, like once, once women start to understand what is actually happening, then they're able to kind of move forward and advocate and ask for the accommodations that they need. One of the major patients being therapy, it, like I just noticed, and like, even in the smallest details in my life, like going to a doctor's office and saying, like, you're throwing a lot of information at me, I'm gonna need you to write this down, or can you send me an email? Or you know, or?



Sari Solden 15:25

Exactly, no, I mean, that's like, one of the main things we do in therapy, you know, it's like this communication skill with, which I think many young women are much better able to do than older women, you know, I find that new generation of women whose value diversity now aren't so embarrassed by it, are more willing to advocate for themselves. And that's what really changes thing, when you can say things like that, that is a really hard thing to say, we feel such shame in a doctor's office or any place where informations coming at you and to be able to say, I should describe I, you know, I have difficulty with, you know, remembering this, I need you to write this down, or can you give it to me in the way I need it? That's a huge thing. And that's, you know, really what women struggle with, because they feel like, you know, they're embarrassed. So they feel like revealing those difficulties means something terrible about themselves.



Katy Weber 16:13

Yeah. And, you know, even with my relationship with my husband, I think one of the biggest realizations I had was how I was valuing so much what he brought to the table, I wasn't paying any attention to what I brought to the table. And I think that that's another thing too, that comes with that understanding, just like being able to realize what you what gifts you do have, as opposed to focusing and I don't know if that's like, again, if that's like a dopamine thing where we were, I know, Halliwell and rady, talk a bit about the, you know, the, the devil on the shoulder. And that idea that, like, we tend to kind of focus on the negative, you know, as a result, but that idea of like, how we undermine the things that we do bring to the table, because we're focusing so much on what we're not doing, right, we're



Sari Solden 16:57

focusing on the negative, it's, and it's often in that role, that's the most difficult for us when we're at home or with our husbands and executive function. So we already are very easy, you know, to blame ourselves, often their spouse isn't even bringing that much negativity, it's often what's coming from you, yourself. And you're exactly right, women don't value these things that they're good at, because they're invisible, maybe they don't value the all the invisible, caring, emotional, well, taking care of people and all the invisible things that that they do, or visible, but not so dramatic is the dishes in the sink. So women automatically, you know, compare themselves and and lose power in the relationship because they don't. And then they don't see that their partners also struggle most time with some everybody struggles. So they're only saying, oh, ADHD is like the worst thing in the world, they could be married to a, you know, a bipolar person or a, you know, alcoholic, or anybody who's got their own struggles, but they only see that ADHD is like the worst thing in the world. So women do this to themselves, because they didn't have a very self soothing voice growing up, they didn't have anybody helping them understand. You know, that's not you, that's your challenges. And that's, you know, this is who you are as a person, no advocacy. And so, they part of therapy is helping them develop or groups, helping them develop that internal valuing voice.



Katy Weber 18:16

And also, understanding that the voice you hear in your head is not always necessarily the truth. I think that was something I learned from Dialectical Behavioral Therapy. And, and I think a lot of women I have interviewed came to DBT, intuitively through you know, because so many of us were diagnosed with other mood disorders. So you know, we've we've, so many of us have found value in something like DBT and CBT. As you know, even before we understood what ADHD was,



Sari Solden 18:44

yeah, and then those kind of skills I guess, about radical acceptance. I mean, that's the same kind of idea that there's that originally came from DBT you know, that I do you know, that you use pain, we all have pain about things we can't control or we don't have any say over others. We have to face the painful often frustrating, difficult reality sometimes of living with a unruly brain. But we don't want to add to it. We don't want to add from pain we all and add suffering suffering comes from, oh, this isn't fair. What's wrong with me? Or why can't I do this? Or I'm such a loser. I'm just gonna I gotta get over this. I can't let myself do anything else to like, get over this. This is terrible. So all this stuff you say to yourself about your ADHD is what moves us from pain to suffering and that's what you know, radical acceptance is about is about, you know, just facing the reality of what you're dealing with and figuring it out what you need to do and then accepting the difficulties and then not being engulfed by it and not avoiding it or disowning who you are or not running away from or fearing who you are. I mean living with ADHD is tough enough but it's not half as tough is as this feeling of disowning who you are and wanting to get rid of who you are and and avoiding all of life because you don't think you're entitled to To embrace it all, because you have clutter difficulties all around you, or you can't, you know, do domestic things very well. So it takes a lot of work to really accept and hold both sides of all sides of yourself.



Katy Weber 20:12



Katy Weber 20:12

Yeah. And I think you and Michelle Frank, that was so well said, and I think you talked about that a lot in your book, the difference between radical acceptance and just, you know, not being open to improvement, or what's the word I'm looking for, like just feeling resignation,



Sari Solden 20:28

almost, yeah, that acceptance, people are afraid of that word, they think it means resignation, or just settling for something less or passivity. And acceptance is like the most active hardest thing you'll ever do. And it's ongoing, and it's constant, whether it's ADHD, or other kind of adversity. So acceptance is a very active process. It's not what people think. And you can do whatever you want, you might not be able to do it in the same way that other people do, which might lead you to a very unique kind of experience, because you have to work around in a different way. But it certainly doesn't mean that you're, you know, you're going to have to be held back, you're held back by pushing away who you are, and hiding who you are, that's what holds you back.



Katy Weber 21:06

And I there is a lot of confusion, too, in terms of how we talk about ADHD, because I often, you know, I get very confused because sometimes I will refer we'll talk about ADHD as though it's a genetic brain function. And this is something you need to learn to live with. And but then there's also the ADHD, which is your behaviors and the traits that you know, you need to manage and train and master. And, you know, the way you know, I think that idea of like, getting over some of the problematic behaviors like forgetfulness or distraction, and it can be sort of difficult to think about what exactly are we talking about with ADHD is it



Sari Solden 21:45

is, it's not one thing, that's why it's confusing, and I don't like the term ADHD, I don't really use it anymore, you know, because, first of all, it changed over the years, so many of us were stuck way back in the Add thing, you know, the H really threw a lot of us many years, you know, it just changes all the time. And I prefer, you know, when describing it to describe the actual difficulty. So I'd much rather say women with executive function difficulties, which is, you know, management of certain kinds of functions that, that make coordinating logistics difficult. So executive function, I always use neurodiversity now, instead of, you know, ADHD, because it's not, you know, it's not blaming, and it's non pathologizing. And it's actually valuing diversity and we're, everybody's brain is different. And so, because there's not one ADHD brain, it's just misleading. And, you know, yeah, eventually I like to say, like a dopamine imbalance or something, and eventually be just like thyroid or something where, you know, it's not a big deal. You just needed to correct the, you know, some work with imbalances and, and manage your lifestyle, like, with any chronic, you know, condition. But yeah, I'm not a big fan of the word ADHD.



Katy Weber 22:54

Yeah, that's, that's a question I'll save for later. But yeah, I asked everybody in my class,



because it was so problematic, and I think really keeps a lot of women from from pursuing a diagnosis, or at least researching what exactly it is. Because it's such a confusing acronym.

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Sari Solden 23:11

I know, I've been answering some of your questions as we go, because that's



Katy Weber 23:13

fine. We this is the beauty of ADHD. It's all over the place. Yeah. If you were to something about neuro diversity, and you asked

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Sari Solden 23:21

me well, in your questions, like, what do I prefer to call it? So that's why I answered that.



Katy Weber 23:28

Well, yeah, so if you if you could rename it today, what would you do? Would you call it?

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Sari Solden 23:33

Well, I just I always just describe it as women with a neuro, you know, I describe it more, you know, women with executive function problems. Now, that could be due to many different things. But I mean, think it more captures the actual struggle. No, I don't think it's important to label everything specifically, you know, because with ADHD is a syndrome and it's chronic, it's not constant, it's variable depending on where your environment is, or sometimes you will, you'll be focusing great sometimes you'll do things even better than other people. So it's just a broad base broad brush kind of approach, and it's why it's difficult for women out and it's become like a, you know, Joe Klein ADHD is not, it's not taken very seriously, it's become, you know, just stereotypical and, and it doesn't help women understand that. You know, that they have something they're coping with it isn't what you traditionally think of as ADHD prevents them from often from still from getting diagnosed, even though that's, you know, improved a lot.



Katy Weber 24:32

Yeah, I think you know, it was really surprising to me when I was diagnosed because I wanted to shout it from the rooftops as as many women I think when they are diagnosed realize, you know, this is such a revelation and the general reaction when I said I was diagnosed with ADHD was oh, I'm so sorry as though I said I was dying I'm sure right. All illness right. Yeah,



Sari Solden 24:55

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Sari Solden 24:55

no, and that's why I say otherwise, it becomes something that you like you excite exci is like, you know, like a mole or like a cancer or something like that's how it is thought of, you know, and it's, you know, great that you had that impulse to tell people because most older men are in the old days whether you know, most women are hiding that like and so because of the reaction that often from people have from the media or from just other stereotypes that ADHD is this crippling terrible thing and it's just who you are, I mean, it's how your brain functions you lose you see things in a fresh perspective, it causes some crazy things in your life but it also makes you know, other things possible that other people wouldn't pursue.



Katy Weber 27:05

So now, since the pandemic, there has been quite a increase in ADHD diagnoses, and also all across, you know, in ASD diagnoses and self diagnoses. So we've got the rise of Tik Tok and social media and just this, you know, the these relatable memes that I think a lot of people are seeing, having a lot more time to scroll through social media seeing themselves in these videos in these memes, feeling like Oh, my goodness, like I feel see in the in a way that I have never felt seen before. And, and, you know, so I feel like there's been this incredible rise in that in diagnoses. But then at the same time, there's also been this rise in the backlash of like, Oh, it's just trendy, oh, it's probably not ADHD, it's probably something else, you know, seek a medical diagnosis, which I think you should but, you know, I think that there, there's sort of hand in hand with this increase has been this backlash, like, Oh, everybody doesn't have ADHD. That's not possible. It's something else. Right.

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Sari Solden 28:07

That's since the beginning, though, that kind of backlash has been there. From the beginning, though. It just takes different forms. And it wasn't on social media yet. But yeah, nobody believed that the Add was real at all, you know, and nobody. So there's always been backlash of conservative groups. I remember, I Scientology had a big thing about it, you know, and Ritalin was a big deal. And, you know, when I first went to get medication, you know, the pharmacists wouldn't tell me at all, what kind of medication they had, because they thought we were casing the joint, you know, that we're all drug addicts. And, you know, it was very shame based from the beginning. So there's always been a backlash. I think that a pandemic. Yeah, I think just being on Zoom now, and being able to seek mental health treatment, much more easily has helped. And, and I think that a lot of women, you know, they just were forced to stop, they were overwhelmed, like you were saying, by kids and everything right in front of them, and all these pulls on their attention. But there's also more easily access to information and to connection. But I think it also maybe was a tipping point for a lot of women like, okay, they, they sort of were holding it together, and then then they were able to see well, okay, I can't escape this anymore. This is what happens in you know, real time in real life. And so I think that just became much more prominent, as well as more evident as well as this rise in connectivity from internationally and just the whole field exploding. In my 95. Nobody ever heard of it, basically women with ADHD. And so it's just been dramatic. And, you know, Europe was always behind us. And now, you know, internationally, everybody is understanding this now. So it's just the volumes of people and ways to connect have grown so much.





Katy Weber 29:50

I think it's it's much more than 10% of the population.



Sari Solden 29:55

Women. Yeah, but women are or



Katy Weber 29:59

do you think it's much more More than, you know, you hear that percent of the population, but



Sari Solden 30:03

then that is more I haven't heard 10% Because it was more like 5% When I was coming up, so



Katy Weber 30:10

maybe I'm wrong, I'm rounding up. Right, I



Sari Solden 30:13

just haven't been so connected to what they're saying. Now, at first, they thought that, you know, women, we're just a very teeny percent, though, you know, and so then it got equal. And so I don't I don't know, the latest estimates. But I'd be interested if you find that somewhere.



Katy Weber 30:30

Yeah, maybe I'm just thinking about it. You know, I, when I explain ADHD to my children, I have a daughter who's in high school, and then I have a son who is in fifth grade. And so you know, once I was diagnosed, of course, I was looking, I've been looking at everything they do, and with a fine tooth comb, and everything my parents did, and and so I, you know, explain it to them. Like being left handed, you know, where I say, you know, imagine my daughter's left handed, and that's about 10% of the population is left handed. So I'm always like, you know, imagine if, when I was a kid, and actually, when I was a kid, I'm old enough that my kindergarten teacher forced me to become right handed, right. And so I was originally left handed, I was forced to become right handed. And then when I looked back at my report cards, after my diagnosis, it was just like, criticism about how my handwriting was terrible, and, and how messy it was, and how I had to focus on being neater and I was like, I was like, Come on, guys. But I was saying, you know, like, imagine not having scissors that were for lefties. And and then everybody said, Why can't you cut, you know, or not having a left handed desk? And so that seemed to be like the analogy that works best when I when I talked to my kids about, you know, the idea of accommodations? And how, you know, instead of saying, Well, I guess you just can't cut, say, what do you need to be great at cutting. And I think that was something

that a big a big shift for me, just in terms of, you know, I was also in the gifted program growing up. And so my parents always would talk to me about the fact that like, you know, you have this really high IQ, but your grades are terrible. And they wanted me to feel good about myself. And so they would say things like, well, not everybody can get good grades, it's fine. You don't have to go to university, you don't have you know, you have street smarts instead of book smarts. They used to say, right. And I, you know, I think they were meaning well, but now looking back, I realized how What a blow that was, to my sense of self, right and

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Sari Solden 32:27

impossible for you to really get an accurate view of who you are and what your actual abilities were. And so I was saying, it's so important to be able to see that whole picture that just say, Oh, you're smart, or no, you're not capable, but to be able to say, and, you know, yes, and is a really important concept that these are all both true. And everything can be many things can be true at the same time. And so I think that's when, like you said, when you're smart, well, for girls, that's why they don't get diagnosed, whether they're often they're, they're not stereotypical. There's, if they're smart, and they have a structure around their house or at school, or they have support, or they're compensating or internalizing and being overworking, perfectionistic you know, it's very hard for people to get an accurate picture of them, they're people pleasers, often, they're not bothering you, they're not hyperactive acting out little boys. And then often, you know, eventually they become depressed or anxious, when they're women, and then that's seen and treated or not, but often that's secondary to the ADHD and when that's understood and treated, then the depression anxiety often you know, are much better go away. Imagine coping with all this stuff without knowing of course, you're going to be depressed and anxious. But at some point, women or girls, they don't hit a wall usually till later if they are smart and and in inattentive, because, but when they go to college, sometimes or, or even, you know, after college, when they get married, or have careers or children at some point, they're not able to do manage, like other people, maybe they were able to be like earlier, and then they hit a wall and then they don't know why what just hit you know, even though it's been we've been controlling it or compensating their whole life at some point, they hit a while, and then they get diagnosed if they're lucky.



Katy Weber 34:15

Yeah, you know, I, I'm the youngest and only had older brothers, but I'm amazed at how many women I have interviewed so far who had siblings who were diagnosed with ADHD and showed more stereotypical, you know, hyperactivity, disruptive traits. And they were labeled as like the good kid, right? So they were the ones who the parents were grateful they're just like, Oh, you're easy. You're not a lot of work. Thank you. And they and they held you know, and and then they sort of developed so much anxiety and like I said, that people pleasing and like the pressure to be the good kid who held it all together. And then you know, at some point all exploded

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Sari Solden 34:56

right now, I don't want to you know, it's my job not to bother you. You know, my parents are all we already have their hands full, they say yeah, that's very common and, and so they just keep it inside and in the boy gets treated and everybody understands what's going on. And they are

just takes many more years for anybody to understand or just get lost or hide and and nobody understands the difficulty that they're dealing with a common thing for girls and then women, I mean, their biggest coping mechanism is often hiding, even once they're diagnosed sounds like you, maybe your generation, you know, and the women you talk to are more out there, once they get diagnosed, and they know what's going on, or they're on medication that they're not as, even if they have some embarrassment or shame, it sounds like you guys are more forthcoming with like, this is, you know, this is like real. And this is what I need and like advocacy for yourself. Instead of hiding so much. I don't know that but you find?



**Katy Weber 35:55**

Yeah, I mean, I think that I do see a lot of advocacy, I think when you're diagnosed in adulthood, just because I've, we have so much empathy for you know, like, I feel like, if I can save one woman from going through what I went through in terms of the misdiagnosis and just, you know, always feeling like, you know, I've been diagnosed with depression and anxiety, I was diagnosed with PPD and PPA, and I was on, you know, various cocktails of medications. And always felt like it wasn't working, but also felt like well, if it's this bad on the medication, imagine how bad it will be off the medication. And so you know, always sort of upping the dose and feeling like, why am I depressed? I have a good life. So there was that confusion too, which was like, Where is this depression even coming from? So, you know, just the putting, you know, connecting the dots and putting this puzzle together. It's just feels like yeah, immediately you're like, if I could save somebody who's going through this, it'll be worth it.



**Sari Solden 36:52**

Yeah, but I mean, yet also the how do you but willingness to advocate and open to other people about what you need? That's what you know, for yourself?



**Katy Weber 37:03**

Yeah, although I think I think we do have a gift for just blurting things out. And being an open book, I've never really been very good at, like, keeping things to myself. So I feel like that is an accidental ADHD gift for sure. Which is like if I can help somebody else by by blabbing on. And I always used to call myself Sofia from the Golden Girls where I was like, I don't know if I had a stroke. But like, I just say, I have no self censor. So I've used it to my advantage.



**Sari Solden 37:33**

Yeah, no, like, so I answered your question, but like, what are some of the advantages and I always say, you know, ADHD saved me from the life of artificiality and superficiality and mediocrity that I wanted, like, I wanted to conform, I wanted to fit in, and I couldn't, you know, I tried, and I couldn't, so it just kept pushing me to buy and I had to be really, really interested in something. So I had to keep things interesting to keep moving on to find things that were really a value to me, and really meaningful. And even that was much harder for me to, to write or to organize my thoughts, I had to keep digging deeper, until I found some, you know, really pearls at the bottom of my piles kind of, but I had to keep going. And so I couldn't just like, Okay, I had

I, you know, I had it kept pushing me and so, so that was, that's a good thing of ADHD that, you know, you're gonna want to, you know, find something that's really, you know, compelling for you, like, that's the key actually to, to find something compelling to help move you, you know, discipline, like, instead of this discipline, as like a braiding yourself and, and punishing yourself, it's like disciple from the same word as disciple to follow with love. And, you know, that's the key with ADHD to find something compelling, that draws your attention to move toward, not just a negative kind of, you know, way to control yourself or fix yourself, wait until you're all better kind of and until women say, oh, gotta wait till I'm all organized before I let myself feel entitled to have a life, you know, and like, that doesn't work. So, you know, finding something that's really exciting and out and getting support that you need, because you're going to need support to fill in some of your gaps here with executive functioning, and to keep moving towards an exciting future for yourself that's meaningful to you.



Katy Weber 39:13

I think that's another thing we talk about a lot, that comes up in conversation a lot is how problematic the term superpower can be. For many people, because, you know, there is a lot of grief, there is a lot of regret in an adult diagnosis, there is a lot of that like what could have been, how did nobody see the signs, you know, how could my life have been different and, and so what I love about your approach with the radical acceptance to is that idea that like, in you know, once you see yourself and you can start to, you know, once you understand what is actually happening, you can start to lean into your strengths and you can start to, you know, see your gifts and then it's like you're you do radically transform in terms of who you are, and you can kind of look at it as a superpower. It's, you know, You can appreciate it for so many of

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Sari Solden 40:02

the gifts Yeah, but it's also really important to point out like, you know, it's not like oh, it's a great gift you know, it's not just a great gift it's you know, you don't want to underestimate or undermine you know or non validate the really high level of difficulty it is to get to that gift so that's why I said really has to be all yes and it can't just be oh this is great because it's difficult and so you got to really you know, that's part of the superpower to to say okay, well what do I need to make this engine go you know, I need the fuel I need the support I can't go on this journey all by myself kind of so yeah to not you know, if you're getting help you you want somebody who can help you see your gifts and your strengths and help you move toward that but you don't want to underestimate you know, the difficulty level



Katy Weber 40:47

I love that? So, yeah, I mean, I guess my my last question is, you know, what are what do you love most about your ADHD?

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Sari Solden 44:27

Oh, well, that's those are what I said before. Like, I answered the question that I ran. I mean, what I have loved about it is like, yeah, it made me have to keep going to find a unique way to live, you know, that I couldn't just settle for ordinary life. Because I couldn't I tried and I

live, you know, that I couldn't just settle for ordinary me. Because I couldn't find and I couldn't do I couldn't, you know, I graduated college a long time ago and went home tried to become a housewife, which is a joke. But I think I would have you know, like, you know, I was trying to do all that for about like, three months, you know, I'm married, and I tried to, like play that role. And it was like a nightmare. And so I couldn't do that, luckily. And, you know, it was many more years before I understood why it was very difficult. But like I said, it propelled me to keep trying to search, and I would hit a barrier. And then I go another way, and I keep me keep going. I didn't know what else to do. You know, I said, like, I'm like Monday said, I, I only do two things. Well, you know, paint and garden, you know, but sometimes you have very narrow skills, but they're good. And I took me a while to find out exactly where was a good fit for me, you know, and so I think you just have to keep going with ADHD and, and that settle for something that doesn't fit you because that won't work. And that's the good thing about ADHD just won't work. And, and so you have to keep going till you find something that's, that works for you. And marry well, like how well says, you know, marry the right person?



Katy Weber 45:55

Oh, my goodness, yes. I think, you know, intuition is something I think that is, is such as a muscle to build when it comes to following your gut and kind of going with, like you said, like, what you're compelled to do. And I think, you know, intuition is something that when you have lived your life on diagnose, do you really kind of stop listening to yourself, you're, you're told that you're doing things wrong, that by your teachers and, you know, by society in so many different ways, and that I think we tend to lose a lose touch with our intuition. I think that's such an important thing to rebuild as

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Sari Solden 46:32

of right, right, and usually have really good intuition. You know, once once it's released, you know, but I think it's mostly also because you're just coping so hard, I'm used just takes all your energy that when you're undiagnosed or untreated, you don't always like going through some jungle and you don't really know what's going on or the way out. And so it just takes tremendous amount of energy. So you just don't even have the luxury of, of, oh, let me stop and see what I want or where I want to go, you just keep going. And so I think that's what happens when you find the right person to help you or the right medication or the right group of people, then you can, you know, sort of see the light and then you can sort of find your way through it with your intuition.



Katy Weber 47:10

Mm hmm. Yeah, incredible. For me, this has been such an incredible journey and I look forward to learning more sometimes I feel like the more I learned the less I know about ADHD but

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Sari Solden 47:23

because it's so limiting in that name, what you're saying is you just the more you learning about human beings, I mean, really, when it comes down to it, these just, we're all human beings, we all have differences we all have things we do well things we are challenged. And so I

think the bigger broader lens is you get into this longer and longer is like okay, here's a diverse human being like all of us and what works for you and and what do you need to become more of who you are more easily



Katy Weber 47:46

Beautiful. Now with the with the workbook, they are the radical guide for women with ADHD is it feels like it's a book club, you know, women have book clubs around this radical guy, do you have an official outline that you offer?



Sari Solden 48:01

I don't, you know, we thought we would do that right away. A lot of people do started doing it. So like adda, who's the National Association for adults with learning with the Add, add add.org They, they have a book club there that someone leads based on our book, a lot of people use it for I use it in my groups, I don't use it as a strict workbook, I use a lot of the, you know, I pare it down a little bit. So to make it more easy to use, but yeah, it can be used in a lot of different ways. And people do use it all over the place. And yeah, we never got around to like licensing that or whatever. And I would hope if people use it, you know how people buy the book. But people are using it. And I think it is a great guide but because we like it because it's not just about ADHD, it's about you as a woman and a lot of it sees gender issues for women not claiming space for themselves not taking center stage and their self not using their voice and you're all women have these issues. And for women with ADHD, it's even more important to to claim that space even though you're still disorganized or struggling. So that's sort of the key don't wait until you're over your ADHD. That's my final thought, you know, because I see people in their 70s 80s they've waited their whole life spent seven hours a day trying to figure out how to cook dinner, you know, or how to do this or do that. And you know, they waited and now, you know, you don't want to wait because that's not going to help you, you know, have any extra energy or any more excitement or it doesn't help stimulate your brain to just focus on everything that you're not good at all day.



Katy Weber 49:31

Right? Yeah, I feel like I you know, that's one lesson I need to learn more, which is like you don't have to be at your wit's end to ask for help. I think that's something that we bring out a lot as women too, that I feel like I have to do all of this by myself until I am literally at my breaking point.



Sari Solden 49:47

No, no, you don't want to do that. Yeah, for help is a huge issue for women of ADHD and maybe for all women but for with ADHD they feel like that is like a reveal about themselves that they don't want other people To see and so even with kids his idea of you know, fostering interdependence and saying, I'm not very good at this, I'm good at this, how about you go do this with your aunt and I'll do this for them and just, you know, how can we all help each other and we all can value diversity, and we all have difficulties, we all struggle, so moms don't have



to hide this terrible secret from their kids. And they always say, I don't want the kids to be like me. But you know, if they do have same, you know, traits or tendencies, you don't want them to feel like you're saying shame, something shaming or about them either. So So yeah, that's what I do to help myself, this is how I value differences and difficulties. And so we're all in this together, kind of, you know, would be the ideal,



Katy Weber 50:38

that's beautiful. Like I said, I feel like with every diagnosis, your book should be the prescription required reading.



Sari Solden 50:46

therapists have used it for many years, I mean, that's sort of what helped get it like launched. And I do want to, you know, put a plug for my other book, too, which is sort of lost in the shuffle adult journeys through adulthood, which I've just got the rights back to now and I've just put out on audio tape. So I'm promoting that now because it's hard to find in the hardcover and in the print cover now, but it's just been put out in audio and so that's a great book wrote that in the middle there about for men and women in mental health professionals about you know, what happens after you understand your brain then what about that search for meaning and identity and, and then what happens when you get successful with that crisis of success? About then how do you control things, you know, that double edged sword about? Okay, now I'm doing well, but now I'm just creating more things to, you know, control. And so that's a really good book, too. So those three books that I think they're on audio and on Kindle,



Katy Weber 51:37

awesome. Yeah, I almost exclusively listen to my books, but I that's good to know. So I will put a link to that in the Episode Notes as well.



Sari Solden 51:45

How am I okay, well, you'll tell me later when this is gonna be out there. But



Katy Weber 51:49

this is going to be airing on December 6, which is my official one year anniversary. Oh, yes. So thank you. Oh, are you kidding? It's the honor is mine. This is such a treat. And I feel like such a wonderful you know, celebration that for me for this journey to be able to pick your brain and have you thank you so much for sitting down with me. And wow,



Sari Solden 52:11

it's really amazing that you've just spent a year and we obviously look like yours. Owning the

whole field here. I mean, like you learned so much, and you've helped so many people even in one year. It's amazing.



Katy Weber 52:21

Well, yeah, that's I read I'm like, this is hyper focus at its best.



Sari Solden 52:28

Thank you so much, Katie.



Katy Weber 52:29

Yeah, thank you. It's been a real pleasure.