

NERDD BLOG

Living Neurodiverse in a Neurotypical World



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Chocolate Ice Cream Readers THE SUBTLE ART OF MASKING

BY ANA MARIA

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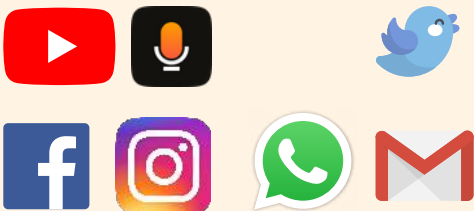
IS THERE AN OPPOSITE OF ANXIETY? - 6

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I read in article some time ago that women (and every other non-white cis male boy), especially, due to societal expectations, are underdiagnosed with Autism and ADHD. This is due in large part because women have classically been taught to make themselves small in comparison to men (UGH...). What this translates into for a person who is neurodiverse is that they become EXTREMELY good at Masking.

What the heck is masking? (I can almost hear some of you ask this question.) There are a lot of fancier definitions, but the simplest way to understand it is that you learn to behave in the way that is expected. You become very good at blending in and looking/sounding/behaving like "normal" or neurotypical people would be expected to behave.

For example, early on in life, I realized that others perceived my rate of speaking as "really fast" and thereby hard to understand. Self-deprecating humor comes naturally in these situations because we are people pleasers and we crave human connection even if we don't really understand all the dumb rules. So I quickly used my wit to say that my mouth and my brain weren't in sync and my mouth couldn't catch up to my fast thoughts.



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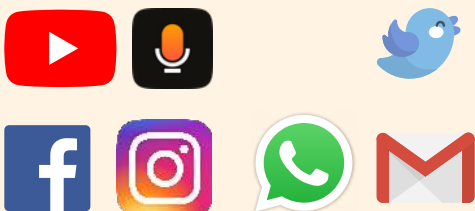
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To me this was sort of a joke, but I wasn't entirely wrong. Just like there is a name for tripping over your words (stuttering), there is also a name for trying to fit a bunch of words into each breath. It's aptly called cluttering. I have since come to believe that I do this to compensate for my lack of working memory. I say as much as I can (or blurt things out, which people mistake for rudeness) so I won't forget what I was going to say.

Anyways, the way I mask my cluttering is to purposefully slow down my speech pattern to the point where it sounds almost patronizing so others can grasp my words. Being bilingual, this happens in English and Spanish and it's a conscious effort. When I forget to mask, it's usually something people make fun of.... Which has always SUCKED.

That's just one of many examples, but another fun side effect of masking is that Neurodiverse people, especially those who are late diagnosed, often don't know what they like or what they're "supposed to" like. This tidbit blew my mind the first time I heard it. It rang true for me as I struggled to find my identity growing up, even in deciding things like what did I want to be when I grew up.

Second grade was a turning point on this one for me. Our language arts teacher divided us into different groups of ice cream flavors for our reading levels. The highest level reading group was chocolate,



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Chocolate Ice Cream Readers

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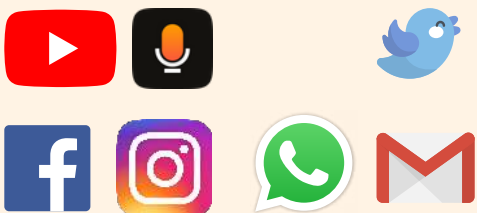
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which was the group I was assigned to. I can remember sitting around a table with the rest of my chocolate reading group and being given some kind of assignment by the teacher. My takeaway from this memory is that I wanted to create a Fashion Magazine. That was a dream job to me.

Later that year, someone figured out I could sing (since I'd been in church choir from the age of four) and I was picked to sing a solo for a class performance. The incredible takeaway from this was the reaction I got from other people. My singing impressed people and thereby labeled me as special. So, even though I felt nerves at being in public scrutiny, my dream quickly changed to singer. (That was obviously a better answer, right?)

Despite that, the "fashion magazine" editor in me remained alive and well. At 9 years old, I would create custom stationery for my cousin in Cuba who was my pen pal at the time. I spent tons of time obsessing about the perfect clipart and sifting through fonts until the words I was writing looked like they might be misspelled. I created album titles for my mom, became a scrapbooker, and overall the world of graphic design really permeated my world.

Ultimately I would get my Bachelor's of Fine Arts in Interior Design, but even my professors often remarked at my strength in putting



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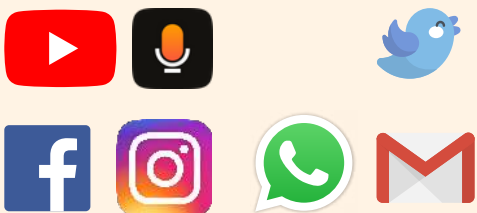
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together a well organized spec book and making it look good. My unique style of note taking even got my three classes worth of notes for History of Furniture and Architecture collected as part of the work that would allow my school to remain certified to give a valid interior design degree. My mom always called me a writer. My dad showed me so many cool things growing up. He had his own newspaper, which he made in the xerox machine style before it could all be formatted on a computer. He was a sign painter at one point and taught me how to change letters into other letters if I ever made a mistake. These were the fun I grew up with.

This blog feels like a chance to give second grade me, who hadn't begun to mask quite as much yet, her magazine after all... and that's really exciting.



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You Can Go Your Own Way

MY OWN APPROACH TO ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

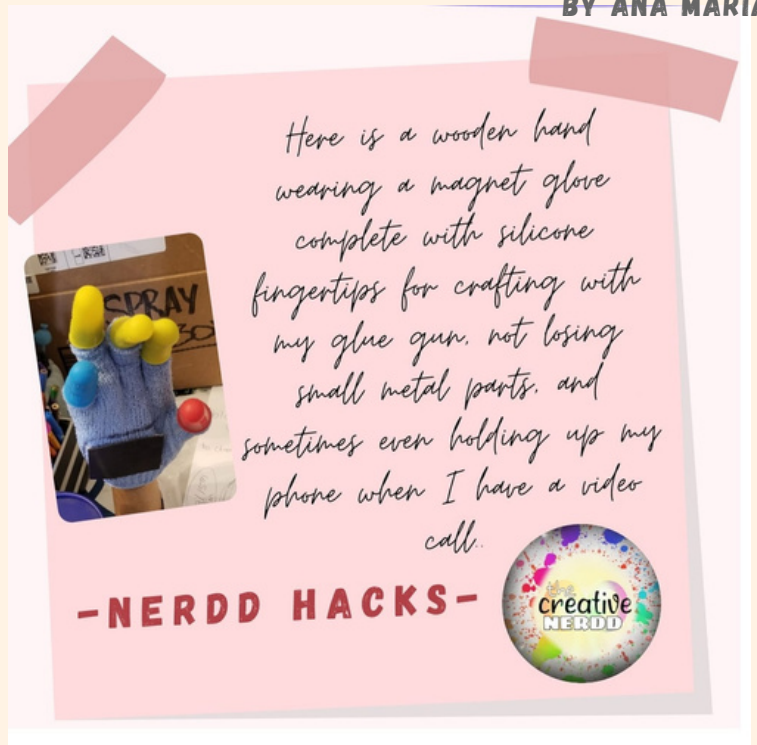
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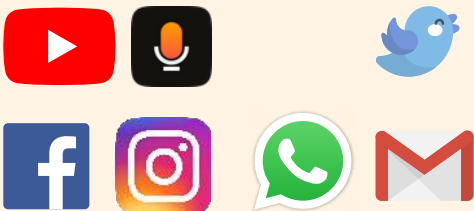
CHOCOLATE ICE CREAM READERS: THE SUBTLE ART OF MASKING - 1

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Here is a wooden hand wearing a magnet glove complete with silicone fingertips for crafting with my glue gun, not losing small metal parts, and sometimes even holding up my phone when I have a video call.

-NERDD HACKS-



Here is a wooden hand wearing a magnet glove complete with silicone fingertips for crafting with my glue gun, not losing small metal parts, and sometimes even holding up my phone when I have a video call. 😊

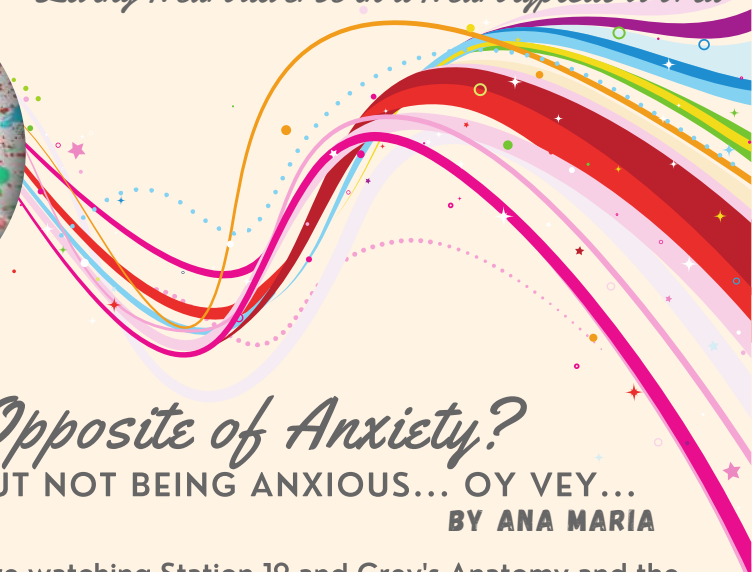
If it doesn't exist, make it. If it can do multiple jobs, even better. Basically, there's nothing to it, but to FIND A WAY to do it!

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Is there an Opposite of Anxiety?

ANXIOUS ABOUT NOT BEING ANXIOUS... OY VEY...

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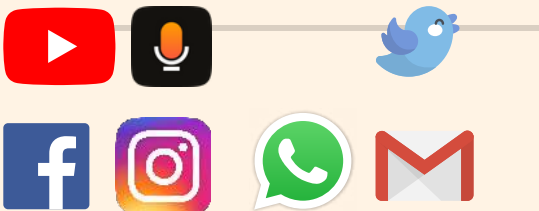
So I'm sitting here watching Station 19 and Grey's Anatomy and the whole time I've had this uneasy feeling like bracing for a bad plot twist but it's not exactly like a panic attack. It's expectation without payoff.... No palpitations, no racing thoughts, and no fear.

I've been calmly but consistently aware of it the whole time I've been watching. Earlier I thought maybe it was because we lost a major character last week. Then all of a sudden, it dawned on me that I might be giving myself anxiety about not being anxious....

And I couldn't even finish the thought without laughing! Only someone with Anxiety could be so talented as to get anxious about not being anxious... LMAO

The best part is that I'm still really not anxious about any of it. I just wanted to jump at the chance to write down a funny story before it left my head....

It's a really nice change of pace, actually. 😊



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NERDD-Ball Comedy

SILLY PUNNY PUN PUNS

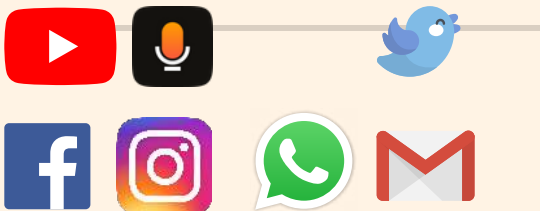
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