

Adulting on the Spectrum: Empowered by my diagnosis, navigating college and learning languages for fun

Andrew M. Komarow

Welcome to "Adulting on the Spectrum," I am Andrew Komarow, an autistic Certified Financial Planner. I co-run "Adulting on the Spectrum," with Eileen Lamb.

Eileen Lamb

Hey everyone. Hey, Andrew. My name is Eileen Lamb. I'm an autistic author and photographer from France living in Austin, Texas. And in this podcast, we want to highlight real voices of autistic adults, not just inspirational stories, but real people. Obviously, they're real, talking about their boring life. Basically, we want to give advice to people like us, and we want to hear from different perspective.

Andrew M. Komarow

And our guest today is Lucy Cross Wallace. Lucy is an undergraduate student studying Russian and Philosophy at Stanford University. She likes coffee, Margaret Atwood, novels and kindness.

Eileen Lamb

Hey, Lucy, thanks for joining us today.

Lucy Cross Wallace

Thank you for having me.

Eileen Lamb

Of course, it's, it's a real pleasure. We'll talk more about it. But you published an article that I really love. Yeah, we'll talk more about it. So we start by asking all our guests what pronouns and identity they prefer, like as far as autism, you like person with autism better autistic person and pronouns... you know, she, he so tell us.

Lucy Cross Wallace

I use she her pronouns. As a person with autism or autistic person, I don't really care, I think they kind of mean the same thing. So as long as people are being nice to me, I'm happy with anything.

Andrew M. Komarow

Awesome. So So we have some questions for you. And some of them and we ask a similar, you know, in the beginning to everyone, so when and how did you get diagnosed as autistic?

Lucy Cross Wallace

This is a fun story. Um, let's see. So I got diagnosed when I was 18. And autism was, was kind of, how do I back up to talk, I got diagnosed with it, I was 18. And I only got diagnosed after a bunch of other things were ruled out. And the backstory here is that I've had various forms of mental illness since I was about eight. This has been a huge part of my life for most of my life, and about how old was I maybe 17, I ended up spending quite a few months in hospitals, back to back in different parts of the country, seeing doctors who were not really sure what was wrong with me, or how to help me. And I finally ended up at a clinic that does differential diagnosis, and they diagnosed me with autism. And I was, I was very surprised by this. At first, I was expecting a different diagnosis, something more, something closer to a mood disorder or a psychotic, something I wasn't even sure. And I just had

when I heard the word autism, I pictured maybe like a seven year old boy who's sort of rocking back and forth looking at the ground and, and didn't understand sarcasm, which and that's not a value judgment. That's just that was the picture in my mind of autism. So I never thought that ASD could apply to me. But then I had these conversations with the doctor who diagnosed me. And and it started to make sense that all of these strange things about me that I had always considered quirks or defects actually fit together under this diagnostic label. And other people were like me. So at first, it was scary. And then it was incredible. And having that diagnosis has helped me understand myself and then work out the rest of my life.

Eileen Lamb

You know, every time we have a guest on this podcast, who is a girl or woman, I feel like our stories are so identical. It's just there is something about autism and, and women that is just that brings brings us together, you know, like you were saying, often people think about autism, and they're going to picture the white boy. And it's, it sucks for us because it makes it harder to get diagnosed. And I think it's important that we talk more about the differences between boys and girls, women and men when it comes to, to autism as a being diagnosed with autism changed how people perceive you, you think?

Lucy Cross Wallace

The most obvious way it changed how people perceive you was in terms of mental health treatment, because I was you know, institutionalized. We'll call it that. And doctors before had observed what I now understand are autistic symptoms, like kind of sometimes rooms would get really loud in hospitals, and I would just run out because after a certain point, I couldn't take the sensory overload. And I wasn't like trying to be defined or obnoxious or anything. I just I just couldn't stand how loud it was. Or there was one conversation with a therapist where she was talking really loudly and I just I think I started either crying or running out of the room. There's a lot of running out of the room now that I think about it. And so before I was kind of people told me to just stop doing that stop causing problems. Some people accused me of making up symptoms, all of that. And then once I had this diagnosis, suddenly the the doctors I was seeing seem to understand and were willing to help accommodate. And I remember there's there was one point where I was hospitalized very briefly, and I got there. And they said, We read in your chart that you're autistic and that you, you don't do well with noise. And you're 18. But we're just going to put you on the adolescent ward because it's quieter there. And I think that was probably the difference between like a hellish experience that could have lasted a really long time if I hadn't calm down. And a few days that weren't that fun, but it was so quiet and peaceful, that I could kind of return to a more normal state. And so for me, really, in a medical context, having that information made an enormous difference. And then beyond that, I've learned that sometimes if you just tell people, I'm autistic, they don't know what to do with that information. But if you attach it like, I'm autistic, so I might not make eye contact with you. And I hope it doesn't come across as rude, it's just difficult for me, then that makes certain conversations and interactions go more easily. So in terms of the medical setting, the autism diagnosis clarified a lot of things that made life easier. And then in my everyday life, I'm able to tell people that I'm autistic, and then use that information to make other things easier.

Andrew M. Komarow

What I really liked about what you said, too, is that, you know, autistic doesn't mean you know, it's not helpful, right? So for example, you know, saying the lights bother my eyes or give a migraine like, most people have had an experience of a bad headache, right? They can understand if they haven't been hung over. Right? Or they have a similar experience. Right? So I find saying, the light bothers my eyes,

you know, is so much more helpful, because everyone who's autistic is different. Right? And having a reason why is really important, but also at the same time, it's never an excuse for bad behavior. Right? Yeah. And, you know, there it's definitely can be a struggle, and there can be, you know, moments and, you know, apologize, you know, afterwards or see and things happen. But I do find that most people, like you said, want to be kinda want to try to do good or the right thing. So I guess, question, as far as just how of treatments changed, like medical treatments since the autism slash mental illness when they knew it was autism and everything else was a symptom of autism? You mentioned you've been hospitalized? Have you really been hospitalized much since being diagnosed? autistic? Has that been reduced to because knowing the reason why you're now able to maybe avoid some of those things? Or do you want to talk about that a little bit?

Lucy Cross Wallace

Yeah, absolutely. So I was basically I was in this is like an inpatient unit where I was diagnosed with autism. And they ended up going to one or two more places. And there were it wasn't like everything was caused by autism, there were some other illnesses that I was in sort of the I'm still dealing with. But what happened is, I went to a treatment place where they had treated autistic patients before and just knew what they were doing. So part of it was being more accommodating in terms of sensory stuff. Just like in an inpatient setting, having an autistic person be in groups of people talking all day is not a good idea, at least based on my interactions with some autistic people, and then the overwhelm that produces so understanding that like I needed a couple hours in a dark room just to calm down. There's some other other related parts. This is this is a phenomenon that I have tried to find information on in scientific papers and haven't found anything. I have a theory that autism and distress can sometimes result in psychotic like speech. So when I get very upset and disoriented, my speech changes, and I stop making sense. And I like speaking strings of Russian nouns or something. And most people find this unsettling, including me, and doctors saw, this is symptomatic of psychosis or something. But because I've observed this pattern myself and have had other people tell me this is when you get overwhelmed, this is anxiety. It's not these other things. And here's what you can do, like I've learned to manage that. I've also, so identifying emotions, alexithymia, the inability to read emotions. I didn't know that was an autism thing, or that I had it, I guess I didn't realize that other people were more in touch with their emotions. And a lot of therapy is like talking about your emotions, but it's hard to do if you don't know what they are. So after the autism diagnosis, things kind of backed up, and instead, and so instead of like how you feel some of the people treating me helped me understand what feelings were at all. So, So those are some examples of the kind of shifts that really helped. And I think maybe the most important thing is that when you have any sort of illness, there's like an imagined recovery that's maybe return to your baseline state of health or lack of symptoms. And I think for me, people were imagining like a normal college age kids life which is like you know, going out with friends and getting pizza in the middle of the night. In dating and parties, and I don't know why they were so big on parties, but they had that expectation for me. And I kept falling short of it. And feeling like I was failing or like I was, what just wasn't doing it right and all of that. And once I realized I was autistic, it helped me understand that that's never going to be my life. And that's okay. Like my version of health and recovery, are atypical because my brain is atypical. And so I want to hold myself to those standards instead of expecting something that's never actually going to be.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, you know, I get to do the same thing not for partying because I really struggle reason was never able to do was going to the university in person. I tried three different years in a row, and I just couldn't do it. So I actually graduated online. But what really stuck with me with what you said, is the losing your speech when you're overwhelmed, because that happens to me. And it's not even that I'm losing my speech. I mean, sometimes I stutter, which is, you know, but I just don't make sense when

you said it. I was like, that happened to me. And I'm like, Is it because I'm speaking English, but I'm a native French speaker. So to me that, that was the reason I never thought maybe it would be like autism related, but it makes a lot of sense that it will be because its impact. You know, it's when my, yeah, I'm overwhelmed. And I can control my emotions. So if you find you said, you were looking, I mean, I would love to learn to hear more about that. Are there any studies because that is so interesting.

Lucy Cross Wallace

It's something, yeah...I was trying to find articles on like psychotic, like speech and whatnot, because I'm also just very interested in psychiatry, and I couldn't find any scientific things when I checked. But then in terms of in like, online, autism communities, I heard the term intermittent speech or unreliable speech that I liked a lot, because I'm certainly not non verbal, as you can tell right now. But the idea that like, there are times when I when my speech is unreliable, I thought that was a good term to describe it. I guess another thing that I could add is, I, I since realizing this about myself, I've used different apps that can like I've pre programmed them to say certain things. Like, "I need water," "I need my meds." "It's too bright." "It's too loud", the three the common ones. But I think once you once you start finding the challenges, then you can solve them just make life better.

Eileen Lamb

That's a great idea. And I know, we talked about it before we started recording, but you speak several languages to do you want to tell us more about that. I know you speak Russian and we talked about a little bit of French tell us?

Lucy Cross Wallace

Yes. I don't want to give myself too much credit. I started learning Spanish when I was 11. And it was kind of for a silly reason because I had a friend in the class who got a better score than me on the test. And I was very mad about that and wanted to do better. So I first perceived the language out of kind of pettiness. And then I realized I loved it. So that was fortuitous. So I started Spanish. And when I was 14, I started learning French and my grandmother was French. And so she we talk over the phone every week, and she had me reading absurdist plays. She even suggested that we put on absurdist plays in French for the whole family. And I thought it was a great idea except that they don't speak French or like absurdism. And I said, aside from that, it sounds wonderful. And then I picked up on it pick up Russian, I started learning Russian, a couple years ago, and it's hopefully going to be my major at Stanford. I just love languages, learning languages is like an opportunity. It's like a constant experiment with my own brain. Like how do I best learn how do I optimize this process? How do I challenge myself? Yeah, it's and then it's it's gotten me into Russian figure skating. So that's also really exciting.

Eileen Lamb

So cool. I love languages, too. You often hear that autistic people like math, and numbers like that would be Andrew. Maybe that's a guy thing. guy thing. But I love languages too. And speaking of Andrew, his name is Russian. Can you tell us what it means? Because I don't know.

Lucy Cross Wallace

Well, I think commodities mosquito. I don't know it is immediately Russian, but yeah, well, but I saw what I would the way I remembered that word is. I mean, can you guess what "kosma" means

Eileen Lamb

"Kosma" would be nightmare to me.

Lucy Cross Wallace

Excactly. There are a lot of Russian words taken from the French. So I remember that a "kosma" is a "kashmir" and mosquito is a nightmare.

Eileen Lamb

Hmm. It's so fun. Andrew, you're a nightmare then.

Andrew M. Komarow

I don't know if I prefer to be a nightmare or mosquito. So I guess neither are that great. So...

Eileen Lamb

Ah yea, mosquito is probably better.

Andrew M. Komarow

Thank you. So yeah.

Eileen Lamb

I went early off script, I'm just like so into this conversation. I know. But yeah. Now there is the question that I so wanted to ask you and

Andrew M. Komarow

Well do you want me to go? Do you want to flip it and then you could pick?

Eileen Lamb

Okay, no, I want to ask it's right now because it's burning my lips as the expression. So we both read I mean, a lot of people read your article about the neurodiversity movement, I guess. And after you were diagnosed, you kind of were into the idea they were sharing, right. So what did you like about it? And then what made you realize that that's just wasn't good, I guess. Can you tell us more about that?

Andrew M. Komarow

And for the people who may not be familiar with the article, we will link to it in a chat. But if you could talk about like, nobody read it, who's listening.

Lucy Cross Wallace

The article being the college piece?

Andrew M. Komarow

The one with the NCSA on Medium?

Lucy Cross Wallace

That article! Oh, yes. Okay. So the neurodiversity movement, let's see. So after I got diagnosed, I was in the hospital, I got out of the hospital, I started at Stanford, there's a very social justice focused, culture at Standford. And there's nothing wrong with wanting to support social justice. But there it did feel like having a kind of oppressed identity, gave people social status and moral authority. And I realized that autism kind of became a way to cash in on that. So I'm going to be very blunt. Like, by by getting into this hole, I'm autistic, I have a disability really, society is the oppressor. You know, I'm

disabled by society, not by any intrinsic impairment, if society were more accommodating, I wouldn't even have a disability. And so I got into this way of thinking, because it was being reinforced by my environment, it really matched a lot of the, the way, I think a lot of my generation looks at kind of society, being fundamentally oppressive. And, and I was angry, frankly, that I had spent a lot of years struggling a lot with people not knowing how to help me, and it taken so long to get this diagnosis. And so I think this was a neat way to place my anger, just direct my anger at this concept of society, and feel like I was being victimized. And in reality, I was never victimized, it was just unlucky and unlucky to get diagnosed. But it was kind of an addictive way of seeing the world that made me feel righteous, it was very black and white. And it was it got a little bit delusional after a certain point. A lot of a lot of this has to do with these online echo chambers, especially Tumblr, where I think people with these extreme ideas about, you know, disability being exclusively caused by society, sort of congregate. And I believe this is what I wrote about in the article for the National Council on severe autism, how there are these cognitive distortions that you will some forms of neurodiversity activism, and places a while ago, so I'm forgetting some of the specifics. I think that black and white thinking, the dichotomous thinking of like, either you're with us or against us, either you're ablest or you agree with everything I have to say about disability. I think that way of thinking really gets in the way of having conversations. At a certain point, I thought that if people use specific words, or if they disagreed with my perspective on this book, or that movies representation of autism, or they called me a person with autism non autistic person, then they were ablest, and they were part of the problem, and I needed to re educate them or separate myself from them. So there was kind of that sense of things. I think the other the other part of that, that I look back on and think what on earth is just denying the reality that some people are very severely impaired by autism. And just because I'm not doesn't mean, I get to make these blanket statements about, you know, every you know, autism is great, and we should accept autism and not try to cure it. I don't know and appointed me the spokesperson of all autistic people. I don't I get to speak about my experience, but I I can't generalize and say how other people see the world or what other people want. So I think the the enthusiasm for justice, and the sense of certainty can really go haywire. And that's what happened with me.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, you give me so much hope. I mean, listening to you talk and knowing that someone who first thought, you know, this movement, I don't even know how to call it was great. And, you know, when you look at it on paper, it's, it is kind of nice, this idea of neurodiversity, some part of it, some parts of it are nice, but it's everything that goes around it, the delivery, the bullying the, like you said black and white, but like it's To me, it's extremism, you know, it's like you're either with us, like you said, or you're you have self ableism You're a terrible mother. I mean, you Go kill yourself. I mean, it's just like, just for saying like personas person with autism instead of autistic or using a puzzle piece symbol instead of the Infinity loop. I mean, it's for such little things, but most importantly, is to meet the severe autism side because my son is, I mean, autism is still a disability to me, even though I'm considered high functioning. But compared to my son, Charlie, who I mean, he's, you know, he's aggressive towards other himself, you can communicate beyond basic needs, that there's a lot of destruction, he's probably not going to be able to live an independent life. And to hear that they don't even acknowledge that severe autism is a thing. It's just, to me. It's, it's crazy. And I always ask myself, I wonder if there is hope with these people, if they, they can change and like, listen to another perspective and hearing your story is just, I don't know, makes me hopeful. I, I don't think a lot of people are gonna be like you and but who knows. So thank you so much for sharing this part of your story. It's truly amazing. And I think a lot of people in parents are gonna be and other autistic, very happy to hear this perspective.

Lucy Cross Wallace

Thank you for saying that. I've gotten a fair number of emails from parents and from autistic people who are like, I don't understand what's going on. I said, a person with autism and not and then I got in trouble with people on Twitter or Twitter is just bad. But it's really ironic that like, a movement that's about accepting Autism is also about all these intricate social rules that you have to like in any sort of blunder where you say something you're not supposed to say is treated. So unforgivingly. Like, aren't autistic people, the ones who don't pick up on social cues and misspeak and misinterpret context? It's it's just, yeah, I mean, I think Neil neurodiversity. If you really believe that people have different brains, then you need to accept that people think differently. That's the missing piece. Okay, your question?

Andrew M. Komarow

No, I think that's so great. And I've had similar conversations. And, you know, one of the reasons I really liked this podcast is Eileen, and I don't agree on everything, not even close. We have arguments over whether or not to, you know, certain podcast guests, right. One of us wants one, one of us don't, but we both have to agree. And, you know, to try to see other sides and perspectives. But it's so interesting that, you know, the neurodiversity movement, right, that, you know, thinking differently, right, is how I describe it. And so it's so interesting is, I guess, the only word that comes to mind that in a movement that's dedicated to thinking differently, we want everyone to think exactly the same. And I remember in April, I shared I, you know, your article at least once without giving much an opinion. Can we all just agree not that we should not be assholes? Right? Like, like the things some people say to Eileen? Right? The things that we see, can we just agree that that's not an acceptable response or behavior? And I couldn't get that. And I'm like, we need to be able to get there, though, that, you know, I think it's a long ways to go but really appreciate you speaking out, because so many, I think, are afraid because of the energy that it takes for Eileen can speak to this more than probably anybody on the planet, right? You know, dealing with the the hate, right? And just a lot of people don't have the time, the willpower, the energy to want to respond to all of these comments, and all of these, just everything. And I think one of the issues, and I think you mentioned in your article, and I realize I'm rambling is, you know, that parents can't respond. Right, you know, we're alienating the people who want to listen to us. And what I've noticed, since April is, you know, a year ago, if I would say I was autistic and making a comment, I was almost more respected. And now, it's like, parents are afraid that I'm going to attack them for just saying the simple wrong thing. And I'm just noticing a change. And I really hope that as a community, we don't go too far. Right, and that we realize that different people can have different opinions. And that's okay. That again, you know, we are talking about a group of individuals that for the most part, at least, according to clinical diagnosis lacks the ability to see things from other people's perspectives. So it also shouldn't be that surprising that that's hard for us. But on the other hand, I'm going to challenge you so your article was with the National Council of Severe Autism, which I would argue is the other extreme, right. So did you go from one extreme to another or was it just that was a good outlet for you to share your article similar to Autism Speaks as a good outlet and medium for us to share this podcast? Or did you find yourself what what was the moment where you realize the Actually Autistic Movement or the part of the movement that you were associated with? Maybe not all of the movement? Not everyone were assholes. And what what was the moment when you realize that and do you think you went too far?

Lucy Cross Wallace

I first want to address when did I realize that the hashtag actually autistic was not the group with which I want to be associated because that's an easy one. I think seeing the parent bullying so I'm just gonna my headphones are about to die Yeah, so with the actually autistic hashtag actually autistic, it was with a bullying I there was just that's a line if a group of people is bullying other people in the name of justice I'm done I'm out. There was also a last fall there's you know, the Sia movie music with

the the autistic character and there was a 62nd clip and Twitter freaked out and I wrote a piece called, "You Don't have To Be Autistic To Play An Autistic Character." Because that's how acting works generally. And, and I realized as I was writing it, that the hashtag, actually autistic isn't actually autistic people, because I'm actually autistic. And I disagree. Therefore, I'm not hashtag actually autistic. It's just like a tribalistic language game. And I just thought I, so I have a disability. That doesn't mean you got to tell me how I should fit and that there was just that moment of irritation and anger. So that's, that's when I realized I didn't want to be associated with that. I want to go back with what you asked. While prepositions are hard. You said NCSA? I think you said it's the opposite extreme.

Andrew M. Komarow

Yeah. Or it's been accused of or, or even just my opinion, is it's, they it's, it's another end of the spectrum, as someone might say.

Lucy Cross Wallace

Yeah, could you? Could you say a little more about what you mean by that?

Andrew M. Komarow

Sure. So I will say that I think the NCSA in a lot of ways is built on the opposite of the neurodiversity Actually Autistic movement. Where some of the articles I would say, are a little their their response to the hashtag actually autistic, but in an equally black and white hatred way.

Eileen Lamb

I disagree. See?

Andrew M. Komarow

So or, or some of the articles can be just not like every actual person uses that hashtag, actually autistic uses it in a negative light, and Eileen will probably disagree again.

Eileen Lamb

I do, I disagree.

Andrew M. Komarow

Which is okay. Can we still do the podcast next week? Eileen?

Eileen Lamb

No. (all chuckle)

Andrew M. Komarow

Oh, moving on, continue.

Lucy Cross Wallace

So let me say a little bit about the context of that article. Jill actually reached out to me and said, this was when I wrote a piece in Colette in the fall. And she said, I really liked it. And we kind of wrote back and forth. And she told me more about having two severely autistic kids whom she loves to pieces who who can't take care of themselves and are very significantly impaired. And also the the challenges of getting hatred from the hashtag, actually autistic people online. And so that was a conversation that had been kind of slowly developing over a few months. And she said, Would you be interested in writing a piece about the cognitive, the cognitive biases in the neurodiversity movement?

I think it'd be helpful for parents. And I said, Sure. And so I wrote the piece. And so I, I wrote an article, because it seems like that blog reaches parents who feel very alienated by a lot of the conversations about autism, I would say it's extreme because severe autism is extreme by definition. And so the statements about autism on that blog aren't going to apply to me generally, because I don't have severe autism. And I think that I don't, I don't know that I've read anything that I would describe as hateful. I think their blog posts, especially the ones by parents, and the anonymous ones, tend to be impassioned, and like, the pain is very palpable, because it's painful to, you know, have a parent have a person you love, so severely impaired and have that really limit their abilities. And I'm just redefining impairment. But I've never, I don't think I've seen anything hateful. If I had, I wouldn't publish there. And I'm also not like going from being a hashtag, actually autistic crusader, to a crusader for anything else. I'm more interested in sharing ideas, and thinking carefully and entertaining. Lots of possibilities. That's actually a rule I have for myself, is if I ever published anything, then I need to be willing to engage with the opposite opinion. Um, so yeah, I mean, I think it's a good question. Like I have a tendency to go to extremes in many areas of life, and it's something I have to watch out for. But I don't think that's what that was.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, I agree and what you said about, you know, their articles are from a place of hurt and suffering, because they witness their children like, struggles everyday. I mean, that's what I live with my son Charlie. And unless you live it, you have no idea what it's like, honestly, just because like you have an autism diagnosis doesn't mean that you would understand this. Level three, autism and even like level three, autism is still a broad spectrum, actually, you know, but when you're really on that end of the spectrum, I mean, it is so tough and if these kiddos and adults because you know, what they grow up into adults, were able to talk and advocate for themselves on social media, which they can do, there is no way they will tell us that they want that, that they want the struggles to stay, you know, and I understand how that can be seen as extreme to say, well, I want the autism away. But people have to understand that this is so much different from level one autism, you know, Asperger's level one autism being high functioning, however you want to call it to meet two different diagnosis and in the media, you really must be only hearing the inspirational stories, and this is why I like this podcast because I want to hear from people. You know what, they have autism, they don't do much with their life. Some people are gonna, you know, their inspirational story, they're gonna be like, author, I guess, my story is kind of inspirational. But that's not the case for everyone. That's the point. And that's why that website can seem extreme, but it's exactly what you said one more time. I mean, honestly, I like hearing you talk how you express yourself so beautifully. And it's amazing to hear it from someone else. I mean, we've never talked before today, and yet I feel like, yeah, we get it like, you know, I feel you and yet thanks again for for your perspective.

Lucy Cross Wallace

There's I mean, that's also I, I heard these stories of having seen how parents get harassed, relentlessly, online. And then I thought, Oh, this is this is Emily Dickinson, right? If I could start stop one heart from breaking, I shall not live in vain. I co founded the kindness club in high school. I don't know that I stopped any hearts from breaking. That seems a little ambitious. But just having heard from a couple parents who reached out and said, thank you so much for writing this that made that article worth it to me.

Eileen Lamb

Exactly. Yeah, if one person feels less alone, reading our words, to me, it's, it's exactly how I feel. It's just receiving those messages from parents and other autistic because there are a lot of autistic people, people with autism like us who feel the same way. But they've been bullied into silence. And

that is a very sad thing like it takes. We've reached a point where it takes bravery and courage to speak about our own diagnosis and say something against the vocal minority. I think they're the minority. I don't have any proof. See, I'm gonna admit it. But to me, they're just so vocal that they've silenced the rest of the autistic population into into silence, and those who don't even have the luxury to be on social media will of course, get to advocate for themselves. So yes, it's really impressive that you have the bravery to publicly admit that you were wrong. I mean, go Andrew. Yeah,

Andrew M. Komarow

Yeah. So I guess this is the part I wrote for the record. But anyway, okay. So what I find most surprising, but I find it really impressive about you, it's almost like most impressive is the fact that you admitted you were wrong, which is such a hard thing for the vast majority of the human population to admit when they are wrong, but not just saying you're wrong, or you're sorry, and saying you won't do it again. But you know, coming up with, you know, ways to try to fix it and to not do it again. I mean, you disengage from that community. So clearly, I mean, it seems like you'll never, you know, go down that path again. But what about others who, you know, so when I want when I shared your article, and I remember sharing the article, and I just said, here's an article, I find it a really interesting perspective. That is true, then it is better. That was true, then it is true today, I find it an interesting perspective. I don't agree with all of it. But there were some really well written points that resonated with me, and even the ones I agreed or disagreed with. It was the type of thing that I don't see written enough. And I don't think you're the only one who feels that way or has similar thoughts. But there's so many people who are afraid to To speak up, for lack of a better term and to share their thoughts or opinions. If it was hard for me just to share the article without giving any context without any comment. How? What advice would you give to somebody who, you know, is that a similar point to where you were, they're looking to just get diagnosed? They're just diagnosed as an adult, they're looking for the community, for somebody who's fallen, you know, in one way or another, right down this rabbit hole? Right? What advice would you give to somebody like that, you know, to help bring them out, right? Or to help them at least even see all the perspectives and really, as you said, just help people not be assholes to each other horribly, should be the goal. And that shouldn't be that an impossible standard? Where do we go from here?

Lucy Cross Wallace

I think I've been asked this question before about sort of de-radicalizing, how do you help people do that? I think that one of the things that helped me, see, radicalize myself, or we'll call it that is seeing the effect of other similar perspectives. So I was on Tumblr, and at the same time that I was kind of, I don't, I wouldn't say that I actually believe people, but advancing these really troubling things about autism, I was getting all these messages about like, you know, if you're, you have this skin color, this gender, this, whatever this. I don't know, ethnicity, whatever, insert immutable characteristic here, you're complicit in blah, blah, blah. And there were a lot of messages, like, if you could stop scrolling, and take this action to support this organization. And it was good. It was like, getting to a point where I was thinking constantly about how I was ostensibly complicit in all of these awful things. And I knew rationally that I couldn't morally be held responsible for like things that happen before I was born. But then I was so worried about things being problematic. And was I complicit in this and what are they supporting this? And what about privilege and guilt, and thinking about everything in terms of privilege and guilt was like, was just kind of feeding my brain. And, and so and at the same time, like thinking this, this new moral purity of like, everyone around me has to have the exact same beliefs about autism. Otherwise, they're ablest and I can't, I can't even talk to them. Because then I'm enabling ableism, or something like that. It was it just made me really, really miserable. The number of books and movies I enjoyed it, like I stopped letting myself enjoy certain things. I thought the Netflix show, Atypical was pretty good. I like the first few seasons, but then someone on Tumblr was like, that's

actually very problematic. And I was like, Okay, I guess I can't like Atypical anymore. So I think the best appeal to someone who's who sort of radicalized might start with like someone who's close to them, saying, just in a non judgement, non judgmental, descriptive way, I've noticed that you are really, like, you're lashing out at people and you're enjoying TV shows and all that and you don't seem very happy with this. Is it worth exploring other perspectives? And just starting with that, because I think once I had that realization, I was able to be more self-aware and have a little bit more insight. But just starting with the fact that I was actually miserable beneath all the smoke righteousness. I mean, that's where I began. And that's where it started unraveling. So maybe that would work for others.

Andrew M. Komarow

And once it started unraveling, how long did it take for you to unravel? I guess is the way to describe it.

Lucy Cross Wallace

It was um, well, there there were different kinds of so my perspective on on, I guess what you'd call social justice changed pretty quickly. That kind of came first.

Andrew M. Komarow

What was your position on social justice before it after it briefly?

Lucy Cross Wallace

Um, well, so I'm for social justice. Are you for or against social justice for, I worried that we're getting really focused on identity categories, especially race and gender to the point of the essentializing them. I love Martin Luther King Jr. style, kind of content of character, enlightenment humanism, like really focusing on our shared humanity instead of a centralizing racial categories. And so I would, I would like to see more of that and less of the kind of focusing on identity in a divisive way.

Eileen Lamb

That Yeah, thank you so much for sharing this perspective. I love everything we're talking about today. And you, you're in a college you went to a Stanford. That's right. Um, what is it like being an autistic college student and can you talk about Stanford that is in in many ways seems to be the leading many neurodiversity initiatives.

Lucy Cross Wallace

I love Stanford's neurodiversity program. They're amazing. They, they had the transition orientation basically, I moved in five days before everyone else. And I had the the program staff, including their program coordinator, who is autistic herself and had just graduated, she showed me around campus helped me get comfortable, I hid in my room while everyone else was moving in trying not to freak out because of the loud sounds. They helped me navigate the accommodations process. They've just been incredible. So I I'm really grateful for that. And I'm also just so glad I went into college with the autism diagnosis, because it kind of gave me a lot of myself. That's not right. grammatically it let me give myself permission to, you know, agree that I will just wasn't going to eat with people in the cafeteria that much, because it's too exhausting for me. And before I would have been like, you should do that you should try to be more normal, you should go to parties, you should try to socialize. And after the diagnosis, I was just like, No, I'm not going to make myself miserable. And I still managed to make friends and have good relationships. But I just accepted that my college life wasn't going to be like the average one. And I was going to be totally fine with that. And then another thing is I took average courseload at Stanford is like 15, maybe up to 20 units. I took nine my first quarter that's

really low. It was kind of hard because there's this this kind of overachieving culture, push, push, push, but I had to accept that I had these disabilities and I had that limitation. And no matter how many units everyone else in my dorm was taking, I was going to do what was best for me. And I do not regret it.

Eileen Lamb

Really amazing to hear that some university colleges, is that a word, colleges? They do have some accommodations, I mean, in France that would never happen. So I'm glad you're able to, to enjoy college in your own way. And I think in that way, your diagnosis helped a lot like you said, you put less pressure on yourself to do things like you're expected to. So that's, that's really good. All right, so we wrap up all our podcasts with some quickfire questions. Basically, I'm going to ask you some questions and you tell me the first thing that comes to your mind. Okay. What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

Lucy Cross Wallace

Because whenever possible, it's always possible.

Eileen Lamb

What do you like to do to relax? I like to lie with my feet up on the wall, my friend and I call it deep flooding our legs. But like you lie like this and your feet are up here. This is your head, and the blood comes down. And it's nice. What's your favorite food?

Lucy Cross Wallace

Coffee? What's your favorite film? Movie TV show? you might know this one, Raw? That's like a French feminist cannibals. I'll put it that way.

Eileen Lamb

Never heard of it. Yes. And actually, I don't know if Are you on social media much other than writing on other websites? Because now, if you want to tell our listener where to find you on social media, you can tell them now and any, you know, anything you've written. We'll put it in the in the comments so people can find you and read all of your great posts.

Lucy Cross Wallace

Thanks. I'm actually not on social media. It makes my life feel like a performance and I don't like it. So I can't really be found there.

Eileen Lamb

That's fair. Well, thank you so much for joining us today. It was seriously so amazing. Speaking with you. And I had a great time.

Lucy Cross Wallace

Too bad, that we couldn't do it in French.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah. That's because of Andrew.

Andrew M. Komarow

I'll work on that.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, thank you. Thank you.

Andrew M. Komarow

Thank thank you so much for the perspective and thank you so much for having the bravery to admit you're wrong.

Lucy Cross Wallace

I'll be wrong again. Probably. So I'll admit that too.

Andrew M. Komarow

Perfect.