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I think the biggest contribution of every generation is to break the biases of the previous one. In the past two decades we've seen this with #metoo, #blacklivesmatter, #lgbtqi, increasingly #disabilityrights and now #neurodiversity.

As a Gen X person of privilege - pākehā, educated and straight - I've been aware that I haven't been affected by too many biases, with the most pronounced being born a woman at a time in which the set up of many of our social and professional systems are still based on male values and male needs (despite over a century since achieving female voting rights and 40 years efforting for a more gender equal way of life. Good things take time, aye.)

So when I got a diagnosis for ADHD last year, I got a taste what it was like to feel like the "other". To be in a minority.

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, however it's been noted many times that us ADHDers don't suffer from a lack of attention, rather, too much of it (Māori got it right with defining ADHD as Aroreretini: attention goes to many things).

Despite the pure luck of the circumstances I was born into, nurtured in a loving, loud, Catholic, working class family of six, I always felt different growing up, didn't know why, and hid my shame around this.

I'd pretend that I understood things when I didn't because I'd zoned out from boredom or was distracted by anything other than what was required. I struggled with big emotions, "over-reacting" as my mother would mutter under her breath multiple times a week. I was highly sensitive to rejection (perceived or real) and assumed that most people didn't like me. My school report was an annual copy and paste of "not reaching potential" "disruptive in class". I moved in the world with a cloud of not being good or intelligent enough hanging over me all the time.

Amazingly I got through my twenties with some success in advertising and then did a big pivot into community development. I noticed that when I was interested in something, I was unstoppable, with a level of energy, attention and passion marvelled at by others. But then I would find myself in a pit of inertia, a rut of inaction, delaying tasks for weeks, months and then years. What was wrong with me? I'm dumb, useless and lazy, that's what.

Depression and anxiety ramped up as I soldiered through raising children. I attributed my mental health struggles to moving from Wellington to Kāpiti and parenting a baby and toddler full-time.

In an effort to understand myself I dived into personal development. I took courses and programmes, read books, and worked with a therapist. I volunteered for an education charity whose mission was to uncover human potential. I didn't get a whiff of ADHD then but I discovered the power of coaching. I also discovered that this was what I was born to do. Coaching people was me.

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After our third child was born, I set up a career coaching practice. There were many things that worked well. I could call the shots, be creative and innovative, take action on new ideas and decisions quickly, use my powers of empathy, perception and activation all day with people, and ultimately have the flexibility and freedom to prioritise my kids.

Unconsciously, I protected myself from others noticing my different brain wiring for many years. I didn't realise at the time, but the name for this is masking. One of the most successful ways I masked was to work for myself. No one would witness my chronic procrastination, my reactivity and anxiety, my struggle with business development, and my inability to focus on things that didn't interest me.

When researching potential ADHD for my youngest son early last year, there were many penny-drops reading the symptoms, and in June 2021, I was diagnosed with adult ADHD (the "inattentive" type, rather than the archetypal and more visible "hyperactive").

As I've gone about life pretending to be more like neurotypical people to be accepted and fit in - this being the 'other' has surprising upsides that make a lot of sense. People with ADHD - and other "others" like those on the autism spectrum, those who have a different skin colour or sexual orientation and those who are differently-abled - we're known to be especially empathic, creative and non-judgemental, and we possess a keen sense of social justice. We've had challenges that make us more attuned to others' pain and struggles. Don't get me wrong, privilege is also a spectrum, biases are on a spectrum, and I'm

grateful for what I do have every single day.

Supporting the uniqueness of each of my clients, identifying the multitude of things they do exceptionally well, and creatively harnessing these strengths to reach their goals, is what I love doing most and what I'm best at. And I know from my own and my clients' experiences, that ADHD is a competitive advantage. Our brains are wired for interest so when we're captivated by something we can reach a level of expertise in a very short time (thanks to something called hyper-focus), we don't shy away from taking risks, we're innovators and are exceptionally creative. People with ADHD are intuitive, enthusiastic, honest, and see opportunities that others don't. Over the past 7 years supporting women in business and professionals to reach their goals, I've noticed a trend: people with ADHD thrive in the business world. ADHD is a competitive advantage. As are other differences.

When we're willing to break the bias, including breaking the biases we have about ourselves, we can truly harness our potential and the potential in others. From a neurodiversity perspective, rather than being problematic, individuals with ADHD and others on the neurodivergent spectrum, are the spark plugs of society, the shakers and movers, the people who bring about revolution and change.

And as I deepen my acceptance of my own differences, I notice that others are inspired to do the same. Breaking the bias is big, important business for all of us.

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