

Talking Disability Ep 2 – Autism – Transcript

CHELLA:

Hi everyone. Thanks for joining us again, and welcome to this episode of talking disability, a special series of the classics podcast.

My name is Chella Ward. I am a mostly non-disabled person for now, very few people are non-disabled forever. But I work on disability in the ancient world and on its reception, particularly in ableist prejudices in the contemporary world. I'm joined today by two guests who are going to be helping us to have a conversation about autism and neurodivergence and its relationship with the study of the ancient world. So thank you ever so much to both of our two guests for joining me. I'm going to pass to each of them in turn to introduce themselves briefly. So Ellie, could we start with you?

ELLIE:

Yeah, sure. Hi. I'm Ellie Mackin-Roberts. I am an autistic scholar. I am currently a material religion Research Fellow, and as the name suggests, I work on the materiality of religion in archaic and classical Athens and Attica. Great.

CHELLA:

Thanks, Ellie and Annis. Can you introduce yourself next?

ANNIS:

Yeah, I'm Annis Wiltshire, and I'm an undergrad at Oxford University studying Classics. I'm just about to go into my fourth year, so my final year, and I have Tourette's and autism and general neurodivergence.

CHELLA:

Thank you ever so much, both of you for joining us. We're really, really grateful that you made the time and also that you are here to tell us about your experiences. So thank you for that. I'm going to start with a question that sort of takes us back to the beginning of your interest in in the ancient world, and it's a fairly straightforward one, although everybody answers it in a slightly different way. And that's how did you find your way into classics? What was it that interested you about the ancient world? And Annis, should we start with you?

ANNIS:

Yeah. So I started with the sort of typical hyperfixation on Greek mythology when I was younger, and then when I was choosing my A levels, I found out that you could study Classics as like a thing, which I thought was crazy. And so I went to college, and I studied Classics A level, and then I sort of got hyperfixation on the Romans, like the Roman public more. And then, yeah, now I'm at University studying it.

CHELLA:

Brilliant, thank you. I'm hearing two things there. I'm hearing classic mythology and hyper fixation, and maybe we'll and maybe we'll come back to both of those at some point in the course of our conversation. But Ellie, do you want to tell us how you got interested in classics?

ELLIE:

Mine was a very, very different story. I flipped a coin, and here I am.

CHELLA:

Wow.

ELLIE:

I – growing up was – didn't have a hyperfixation on Greek mythology. I didn't have an interest in the ancient world at all, or really in history, I was very focused on art and becoming an artist. Through some sort of weirdnesses of the Victorian education system in the late 1990s I had to redo the last year of school, and one of the subjects that I did then was classical studies. And then I, I really enjoyed it, but it wasn't kind of necessarily something I was super into, but it just kind of got in my brain.

I ended up getting admitted to my top choice of Fine Arts School, and also got admitted to a Bachelor of Arts to do Classical Studies. And I couldn't decide. And so on the day I had to post, physically post in my form, I flipped a coin, and then from the moment that it came up, I knew I was going to do honours, do a master's, do a PhD, that this was sort of the thing, and I have been hyperfocused on that as an end ever since that point, a very long time ago now.

CHELLA:

Wow, that is an amazing story, and it reminds me of something we all too often forget,

which is the power of chance, the power of, you know, things that just happen that way, because they happen that way, and they're not necessarily all that easy to explain. I'm just thinking about hearing your two perspectives there.

I'm thinking that perhaps we should let listeners in on the question of where you are in the world, or where you were in the world, perhaps both when you were making those choices. I'm thinking about how that might also inflect the kinds of decisions you made. So Ellie, do you want to add a little note on location, and then maybe Annis you can add one as well, just so that the listeners can get the full picture.

ELLIE:

Sure. I grew up in Melbourne, in Australia. I did my undergraduate and my master's there. I actually came to the UK to do my PhD, and then I never left. So now I'm in the UK permanently, more or less.

CHELLA:

And what about you, Annis?

ANNIS:

I'm from Cardiff in Wales. Yeah. So classics isn't really a thing in Wales, so much like there's not much education for classics at the moment. And so the finding out that my college offered classics as a subject was really quite, like, unique in Wales. So it was, like, really exciting for me.

CHELLA:

Yeah, wow. Okay, brilliant. So that helps us, I think, to sort of understand your perspectives and where you were kind of coming from, what you were experiencing, I guess, when you made those decisions, or when those decisions happen to you? Maybe in the case of them being a little bit more down to chance.

Annis, do you want to maybe tell us, first of all, what hyperfixation is? You use the term, I think maybe some listeners might not be all that familiar with it. Do you want to tell us what that is? And then perhaps that could maybe fold into my next question, which would be, how has disability shaped your journey through classic so you're kind of both, I suppose, at different points in your interest in this discipline, or at least your involvement formally with this discipline. How do you think disability has kind of shaped your relationship with that discipline?

I guess that could be either in terms of the kind of more practical things, the sorts of locations where we tend to study these kinds of things, whether that's universities, schools, colleges, wherever that is. But I suppose it could also be more intellectual questions about whether you think there are connections between your interest in certain things and autism or neurodivergence. That's a lot of questions that I've just asked there. But I think what I'm interested in is how disability has sort of shaped your experiences.

ANNIS:

Yeah, so hyperfixation, to me is just like, sort of very intense, visceral interest in something. I feel like it's like it's more than just liking something, or more than just being interested in something, because sort of, I mean, for me, it takes over my life a little bit, but it becomes sort of, you know, you have to think about it all the time. It just feels wrong.

And so I think that was definitely something that helped me become more interested in classics, because once I'd hyperfixated, then I sort of couldn't stop it, and from there, I had to go to university to study it. And so I sort of tried really, really hard, and I really enjoyed trying really hard about it, like it was never something that I didn't really want to do. Because luckily for me, I'd managed to hyperfixate on a subject I could study at university, which is really cool.

Yeah, so neurodivergence, and that, that hyperfixation aspect, I think, is one of the really positive things about neurodivergence, because it makes people very passionate, and allows people to really intensively follow what they're interested in and really care about it, which I think is important.

CHELLA:

I imagine that could be very different for different people. It sort of depends on what you hyperfixate on. I suppose there are certain kinds of hyper fixation that are very valued in society. And you know, you made reference there to something that you were able to study at degree level, so that obviously gives you access to, you know, a particularly kind of privileged form of higher education. Presumably, for other people, they might hyperfixate on something that is societally not valued in the same way and so that can produce, I imagine, different outcomes for them.

ANNIS:

Yeah, so, like, I think, I struggle with the range of hyperfixations that I have, and then getting in the way of each other. So when I need to study or something, then I can't stop thinking about like something that isn't important to my degree. So it's important to me in a different way, and it gets in the way of when I need to study or something.

CHELLA:

Yeah, that's really interesting. Thanks for sharing that with us. I want to come back maybe to some of what you raised there, around some of the kind of challenges and difficulties, and maybe also to hear about what sort of strategies you might have come up with for that too. But we'll come to that in a moment. I'm interested to hear Ellie, your answer to this question about how disability has kind of shaped your journey through classics.

ELLIE:

Yeah, it's a really interesting one. I think I was the kind of person who just never had to work at school, like I always just got really good grades. And then, you know, in university again, I sort of didn't really have to work very hard. But then, when I – in my honours year, so in Australia, you do a three year pass degree, and then you do an honours year, which includes the thesis, mine was about 20,000 words, and when I discovered research, that's, I think, when it really kicked in for me, that I like, this was a thing that I could lock in, that I could try really hard and do really well because I wanted to. It's not that I didn't want to do my other work. It's just that, like I knew that I could sit down and in an hour and a half, write, you know, a 1500 word essay that would get me a 90. And so that's kind of juggling that, and I absolutely would not recommend that anybody do just coast through in the way that I did. And when I counsel neurodivergent students, I do say to them, you know, you have to learn how to study.

Because I never did. I didn't really learn how to study, actually, until I got into my PhD, and that was a really difficult learning curve for me, because it is a skill that you know you have to, to have. So in terms of the way that my autism affected the – affected me negatively. I guess that's sort of a positive and a negative. But when I discovered that I could come up with brand new ideas that no one had ever come up with before, that I found intoxicating. I think is the only way that I can describe it. And that has never gone away. That is still like a driver for me, and it spills into every aspect of, of my life, both in terms of my research, obviously, but also my teaching, but also in other aspects of my life.

I am a runner and I read a lot of scientific literature about endurance sport and about running. When I had my children, I read a lot of scientific literature about the cognitive

development of children, you know, all of these sorts of things. And in some ways, as – as Annis said, you know, these competing interests do become, can become an issue. There have been times when I knew that I had to work on one thing, but, but just absolutely couldn't stop working on something else.

In terms of, I think, more direct impact, my, my research now is about emotional and sensory engagement with the ancient world, and I have a very profoundly enhanced sense of sensory engagement with the world around me, as many autistic and other neurodivergent people do, and I think it gives me a really unique perspective on thinking about the sensory engagement with the ancient world. And so I spend a lot of time on sites that I study, you know, thinking about the environment and the way it makes me feel, and how that might relate back to the ancient world.

CHELLA:

That's such an interesting insight into not only the question of how you do research, because I can absolutely see that this kind of almost kind of voracious appetite for knowledge, for information, for making ideas, I can exactly see how that makes an amazing researcher, while at the same time appreciating, sort of, as you've both said, this kind of sense of competing demands on your time, all the time, that I imagine, could be quite overwhelming.

But that was a really interesting insight, Ellie, also into the question of how you actually choose the things that you study, so not just the kind of pedagogical questions or practical questions of how you study, but the sorts of choices you make.

And that kind of sensory world is so interesting to me, because I think for such a long time, work on the senses has sort of revolved around questions of, are there five senses, or are there nine senses, or, you know, kind of, what I mean by that is the attempt to build up a picture of a sort of normative sensory framework that could be sort of retrojected into the ancient past without, without perhaps thinking so much, although it's something that is happening much more now about the way that sensory perception is, of course, completely individual and is also societally influenced, like everything else about bodies and so therefore, is also a societal construction at the same time. So I think you're absolutely right, I think, to point out that this gives you this kind of really unique perspective, but I wonder whether it also pushes other researchers to think in more creative ways, in, you know, perhaps less normative, less ableist ways, also about the sorts of research they're doing on the senses.

ELLIE:

Yeah, I do really hope so. And you know that I quite recently published an article in the

Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies that explicitly talk about my experience as an autistic researcher and about an experience that I had at Eleusis, and how I kind of connect that through to the ancient world.

And when I was writing that, I really struggled with the idea of, like, should I actually publish this? Because once, once the cat is out of the bag, once I have put in a publication, I am an autistic researcher, I can never take that back, right? And, you know, it's that's a really difficult thing to grapple with. And one of the reasons that I very much decided to go ahead with it was a comment that I got after a conference paper that I did where – in which I didn't mention that I was autistic, but did talk about sensory expression, in which another researcher came up to me at the end, after like formal questions and said that, you know, that had really made her think about the way that she approaches the ancient world in a completely new way, you know. And this was about the quality of wearing of clothes that we put on our body, and how that kind of changes.

And, you know, lots of autistic people and other neurodivergent people have issues with clothing, and so it's something that, you know, I've really thought a lot about, and I make a lot of my own clothing because of that sensory kind of and she was just like, I had just never thought about it. Like, I take clothes out of my wardrobe and I put them on my body, and then I don't think about it again.

But it's kind of, you know, I appreciate the idea that the work that I do can influence the way that other people approach the ancient world. And in some ways, I also think, like, of course, I should think that because a lot of other scholars influence the way that I view the world, the ancient world, or otherwise. And so why not me influencing others? But that's kind of another story I suppose.

CHELLA:

What's so wonderful about what you've just described there is the way that it really opens up how we think about the ancient world, because I find that, you know, very often, sort of older discussions about disability or neurodivergence in the ancient world have tended to revolve around the question, well, was there such a thing as autism, for example, in the ancient world, was there such a thing as neurodivergence, which is a sort of attempt to close down ancient experiences through the prism of what we understand now to be modern experiences.

And it also, I think, sort of forgets the shorter history of understanding disability and neurodivergence even in the modern world, which has changed drastically, thanks, you know, in no small part, to disability justice movements around the world over the last few years. So you know, if we can, if we can understand that relatively short history,

then surely it should be the case that we can't understand disability or neurodivergence as something static that we can simply kind of identify in the ancient world.

But what I love about the way that you've just framed your research is that it's not really about asking those kinds of closing down questions. It's much more about asking the kind of opening up questions, how did people in the ancient world experience their clothing? What – what – what sort of multiple forms of experience did they have, including those experiences that we might relate to from the point of view of the present, but also including those experiences we might not at all relate to from the point of view of the present.

And that seems to me to be a really fundamental thing that talking about disability, talking about neurodivergence, also talking about our experiences, your experiences particularly, might sort of help us to unlock within the way that we think about the ancient world that seems fundamental to me and really important.

ELLIE:

Yeah, and not just about disability either, but also about sort of other things, like class, socioeconomic status. You know, a part of the work that I do is on clothing and the brow on clothing catalogue. And when we look at the way that clothes are described as like fine or coarse, we think about the way that those things feel.

But also, what does that mean that a person is giving a garment to the Goddess, to Artemis in this case, which is obviously something highly prized, because you don't give trash to the gods, but it's still described as coarse that perhaps is the most expensive thing that that family can afford. And it is still not fine quality. And so it unlocks, I think, a whole bunch of other conversations that we need to have about other people in the ancient world.

CHELLA:

Yeah, I think that's so fascinating. And is that, would you say that's similar for you Annis, your neurodivergence disability has affected the things that you study in the ancient world? Or do you see them as completely separate things,

ANNIS:

I think in a purely, like, logistical way, I guess, it's affected me in terms of what I can access. So often I'm not able to go to lecture, or I'm not able to go to sit in libraries because of – maybe because of Tourette's that, you know, it's just uncomfortable for

me. So in terms of, literally, like, being able to access materials, sometimes that has affected what I can study in terms of what I choose to study myself.

I am very interested in neurodiversity and disability in – so I'm really interested in the Roman Republic, and I found very little sort of research on disability and neurodiversity in the Roman Republic, when it most likely would have been very, very prevalent. And so I think it's an aspect of that that I'm really interested in, because I haven't sort of specialized in a specific thing in the Roman Republic. It's just sort of as a concept, is what I'm interested in, that dimension of disability. And. And people who think slightly differently, I think is such an important part of it that is completely, sort of not looked at. Or if it is looked at, it's like a chapter in a book where it's like, oh, you know, also there are disabled people, and then you move on, rather than it being like most people were probably disabled or neurodivergent or all sorts of different things.

And I get it, especially because I look a lot of at Cicero speeches and sort of audience in terms of Cicero speeches, and the idea that anyone could go, anyone can go to like a legal speech or speech in the forum in Rome. But then realistically, when you think about it, there's so many limitations in terms of, like, class, disability, all these kinds of things. So you know, most people won't be able to just take a random day off and go see a speech in the forum. Some people might not be able to physically access the forum. And when you start thinking about things like that, the sort of general statement of, oh, anyone can access these speeches becomes a lot more complicated. So yeah, it's something that I do find really interesting.

CHELLA:

I think that's such a good reminder of what I think disability studies. One of the things I think disability studies has really taught us in the study of the ancient world, which is to think about who the we is. You know, in those kinds of big we statements, we all could go to this speech, well, who does that really mean? Which always ends up bringing us back to those categories of, you know, disability, class and economic status, gender, racialization, all those kinds of categories and end up coming back in.

So I think that's really one of the really interesting things that we've been sort of forced to, to confront by the advent of disability studies within the study of the ancient world, which I think you're totally right, even though it's a sort of massively growing field, there do seem to still be kind of gaps, and sometimes that that seems to be to do with evidence. It seems to me, there are certain forms of disability that were sort of easy to evidence that didn't require us to do kind of big paradigm shifts in terms of how we thought about disability. I'm thinking of limb difference, for instance, which there's often kind of material evidence for.

And you know, when you compare, for instance, study of neurodivergence in the ancient world with other kinds of disability, I think, first of all, it seems to be much more difficult to kind of access information or evidence or kind of proof, but also it then asks the question, well, what does it mean to go looking for proof? You know, since what we're talking about, if we apply a kind of social model, you know, what we're talking about is social exclusion, or a kind of process of social othering, rather than, you know, a particular condition that we might be able to call neurodivergent. That's, of course, the point of the term neurodivergence is to make that that kind of social model shift in that way. It's sort of more difficult, maybe, to identify in the ancient world, or at least demands of us something different with regard to the ancient world, asks us to make a shift that I think is quite helpful. Do you think that's fair way to characterize it?

ANNIS:

Yeah, I think it definitely also draws into the idea of neurodivergence not being a set of different things, like at different categories of things. So just because we've, I mean, this is my opinion, but just because we've sort of separated into autism, ADHD, Tourette's, etc, we agree to categorize it. And so whereas, actually, I think neurodivergence is very fluid, and it's very difficult to categorize. And I think obviously the difficulties getting diagnoses is very – like it shows that quite a lot. So in looking at ancient evidence and trying to find, oh, that person's autistic, because X, Y or Z, I just think is unproductive when it's such a fluid sort of thing to be and thing to feel.

CHELLA:

Yeah, absolutely.

ELLIE:

I mean, the interesting parallel with that, sorry, just to jump in,

CHELLA:

No, please.

ELLIE:

Is sort of the how trendy it became for a little while to talk about PTSD in ancient armies, and, you know, trying to diagnose Alexander with megalomania or whatever, you know, and that kind of came became, like quite a trendy thing to do for a little while, and then suddenly, and I think rightly, a lot of people like, but what's, what is even the point that

we're trying to make here. So, you know, yes, maybe we might want to go, okay, Cicero clearly, is a highly autistically coded individual. But actually, what's the point of making a statement like that? If it doesn't tell you anything about Cicero and it doesn't tell you anything about us, then it's just all – I don't know, I can't think of anything.

CHELLA:

It all seems a bit pointless, maybe.

ELLIE:

Yes, exactly.

CHELLA:

Yeah, I – watching the kind of rise and fall of retrospective diagnosis, which is what you're kind of both describing there, I think has been actually really fascinating, because for me, as I was sort of saying earlier, this has been a moment where we thought that we were going to prove that the ancient Greeks and Romans were exactly the same as us in the present, to the extent that we could diagnose them with precisely the same conditions with which we ourselves are diagnosed in the present. And we discovered that, in fact, not only was that not possible in many circumstances, it also didn't really help us to understand very much about the ancient world.

And I'm always more interested in my work in disability studies, is always more interested in the question, how does this help us to displace a norm, more than it's interested in the question, how does it help us to kind of retroject normative ideas like diagnosis, for instance. So I think that is a really important point that you're both making there. Yeah.

ELLIE:

And as you said before, Chella, like we only have to look into the recent past. When I was a kid, I was late diagnosed because when I was a kid, growing up in the 90s, girls weren't autistic, like they just weren't. And so it wasn't even a thing that I could have been diagnosed with. And you know, I was misdiagnosed with many other things, as many autistic women and girls are.

CHELLA:

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So can we talk a little bit about the kind of more practical

challenges, or what have some – what are sometimes called barriers, but which we might also call inaccessible environments, inaccessible societal attitudes, those kinds of things. Have you faced those in your kind of journey through classics? Is that something you've kind of come up against? You mentioned Annis already the question of libraries sometimes not, not being particularly accessible spaces for you. Are there other kind of challenges, barriers that you want to bring to listeners' attention?

ANNIS:

I think one of the things I struggle with a lot is lectures, because I often can't go to them for various reasons. The, the way that universities are set up now is lectures are often recorded so you can access them online. But the issue is that system's never very good, so often you can't access the things that you're promised you can access. So it might be a situation of, I'd rather not go to this today, because I'm not feeling up to it. That is okay. I'll be able to look at it later online, and then you check later and it's not there. That kind of thing, of, I guess the promises of accessibility in order to make out an institution accessible, you know, to, to provide for people, but then not actually following through into something that is accessible, I think, is one of the main problems I have is, yeah, things not fulfilling what they're telling you that they're doing in terms of access.

CHELLA:

I'm sure that will be something that lots of listeners will relate to also, because this is often the complaint that is very, very rightly made, you know, by disabled students, is that sure, accommodations may exist on paper, but are they consistently applied in such a way that every day I can rely on them, and that being able to rely on accessibility is a different question to whether or not accessibility might exist in theory, or whether people, whether they're lecturers or administrators, might want it to exist in theory. It's that question of consistency, of will it be the case that every time I need access to a lecture that will be easily available. I'm sure that's something people will relate to.

ELLIE:

And also the specificity of accommodations. This is something that I find much more with my students than, than I sort of ever found as a student. But because, you know, you tick a box, you tick I have depression, I am autistic. I have ADHD, and then the form that gets spit out has just generic accommodations. Perhaps the student doesn't need extra time on exams, but they do need to sit in a quiet room, and that's, so I'd be really

interested to hear what your experience of the specificity is as well Annis. Sorry, I don't mean to question over you Chella.

CHELLA:

No, you can question that's fine.

ANNIS:

I think is one of the things is different, different people tell you you can do different things. So for example, I'll talk to like, you know, like my librarian, and they'll say, it's totally fine for you to tic in the library, but then if I'm in the library and I'm ticcing quite badly, then I'm disrupting people, and it's not my fault, but it's also it's disruptive. So it does make you feel uncomfortable, even if you've been told it's okay. And so that that kind of thing is, is very much like, you know, people telling you, and because they said, oh, it's okay for you to take or it's okay for you to take in this, like, class or whatever, means that it's fine now and you're not going to be uncomfortable about it anymore.

It's like, I think in terms of specificity, my university is quite good in that we have very detailed, like, student support plan, so you have, like, a meeting with a with someone and can sort of say exactly what you want to say. I don't know how like recent this is, because it's it's something that I found really useful as coming to uni, that whenever I get a new teacher or a new professor, I can give them the student support plan, and it will have, in my words, basically exactly what I want to tell them about my experience. And I found that really useful and specific for the exam sort of regulations. It's a little bit more rigid in terms of, you know, these are the things you agree you have access to, so choose which ones that you think would help you. But yeah, for me, it's actually quite good. But I'm, I don't know how reflective that is of other places.

CHELLA:

I think that is really interesting. You said a number of interesting things there Annis that I just want to pull out just so that I make sure that listeners heard them. I noticed the importance of explaining in your own words, you know, that this is an accessibility plan that allows you to say what you want to say. That perhaps seems like a good counter maybe to the idea that everyone has to – that, that Ellie's raising the, the problem of everyone having to fit into specific boxes in terms of accommodations.

But I also was interested in the, this idea about the librarian, you know, letting you know that it's OK to tic, but of course, the librarian is not themselves in charge necessarily of all of the social aspects of that environment. And this is always a kind of interesting question, isn't it, around accessibility, which is that the things that are within your

control, and this is something I think about, you know, as someone who teaches, you know, the things that are in my control, I can have a relative sense of how accessible those things are and how accessible I make those things to the students in the classroom. But there are also things that are outside of my control. In other words, it's not just ableism that I create that shapes the classroom experience in my classroom. It's also all kinds of societal ableism, maybe what I would call in my work, narrative ableism, so the kind of ableism that comes from the sorts of stories that we tell in the world about disability and neurodivergence.

So there are sort of limits I, I, I suppose, to what someone is able to, to control. Are there? Have you had, Annis, good experiences of spaces that you have felt someone has done something that has made this space accessible to me? Or do you think there's still that kind of tension between feeling like it's OK to do something even if you've been told it's OK to do it?

ANNIS

One of the good things was when I was doing my student support plan, because especially with Tourette's, when, when people hear Tourette's, they have a very sort of quite limited idea of what it is. And so being able to, yeah, fully express the exact things that I struggle with. You know, that like the tics for me are one of the things that I struggle least with with Tourette's because there's so many different things that it encompasses, but people don't really understand that quite often. So being able to sort of express that with the sort of student support was really good.

In terms of more like social, so I ended up founding the Oxford's like Neurodivergent Society. And that as a space is, is amazing because you're just surrounded by people who really do sort of get what it's like. So you all kind of struggle in these situations. One of the things we'd be doing was like study group sessions. So if people weren't comfortable going to a library because they were stressed about, you know, needing to stim or move around or tic, then they could come to our – like we'd book a room and then everyone could just study in their own way. And that's one thing I found really, really helpful with it is that creating that space where – even, even in a library or in class where they say, you know, you can take or you can move around, it's OK. Realistically, it's actually quite difficult to let yourself do that. So creating a physical space where you can go to and you can study in a way which is productive to you and you don't have to stay in your room, I think is something that was really important to me.

CHELLA:

So that idea of creating alternative spaces, communities where you're not subject to,

you know, those same kinds of, of expectations. What about you, Ellie? Are there things that you can think of, either that have been put in place or that you've put in place, that have made the subject or its locations more accessible to you?

ELLIE:

I think I, I do now a lot of work on my own because being alone I think is a thing that I need. And I think in terms of like a physical environment, I've always been very lucky that I've been able to have a single occupancy office, which is very important to me. And sort of that is something that I kind of coming back to what Annis was saying about the other issue is competing accessibility needs, right, that there are some people who as an accessibility need silence and there are some people who need to move and make noise and click pens and whatever, you know, and having that variety of spaces in which those things can occur and everybody gets to have a space that is accessible to them and their needs. And, and right, this is not just like for neurodivergent people, but neurotypical people have space requirements as well. Like it comes back to that, like when we raise up the lowest, the, you know, we raise everybody up, we raise everybody's experiences.

In terms of kind of my own barriers, I suppose I mean, one of the things that I struggle with so much is the social aspect of having to promote oneself, being 'on'. I love performing, I love giving lectures, I love giving papers. I view it like a performance. And in those spaces I am very aware that I am very high masking. And then, but then often I have just a huge crash after. And I really struggle with kind of the extended nature of multi day conferences and, and those sorts of things. I can't teach back-to-back because I can't go from one performance to another performance. I need to have space to kind of sometimes go and sit underneath my desk in my office and pretend that I don't exist in the world for half an hour and those sorts of things.

And I like, there are definitely things that I think have negatively affected my career progression as well around kind of particularly social interaction around, yeah, kind of being awkward and not being able to promote myself very well and not being able to, you know, perform in interviews very well. I get very anxious, those sorts of things.

So yeah, I, I think that, you know, there are benefits and, and downfalls, I think. And I'd be also like quite interested to hear what you think about this Annis, particularly in the context of your excellent sounding neurodiversity club. I wish I had had access to something like that.

I think masking, high masking is something that particularly female – women and girls with autism and other neurodivergences are very good at. And that's not always a very

helpful thing. There are times when I know that I can pull up a mask that I put on very purposefully in the same way that any neurotypical person would what, you know, do the same thing, like when giving a conference paper, right? You're not the same person as when you're sitting at the pub having a drink with like your closest friends. But I, yeah, there are, there are times when I mask unintentionally, when I get very anxious and then I feel like I've said the wrong thing. Or when I'm really tired and I can't mask and it kind of starts to slip and I really struggle again with those sorts of things. And yeah, so I think just the social interaction aspect of it. Sorry, that was a really long winded way of saying I'm a really awkward, weird person in general.

CHELLA:

It wasn't long winded at all, no. That was very interesting and also brought up the idea of masking and high masking, which we hadn't yet had the opportunity to talk about. I'm aware of time and that we probably ought to kind of close up. I feel like I could talk to you both for a lot longer, but I feel like we ought to perhaps sort of close up.

My final question for you then is what would be the one thing if listeners could only take sort of one thing from this podcast that they could sort of go out into their lives and, and, and make the world better for, for people who live with autism and neurodivergence, what one thing would you want them to, to take away? That could be something that you just want them to know about. It could be something from your work that you think is interesting, but it also could be something in terms of accessibility that people could do in practical terms that would make a difference. Yeah. What's your kind of one takeaway thing? I'll come maybe to you first, Annis, and then, and then to you, Ellie.

ANNIS:

I think for me, I think for both neurodivergent and neurotypical people, it's just like not caring so much about everything. It's something that I struggle with a lot is just taking everything too seriously and when I, the thing that's made me feel a lot better about everything is just stop worrying so much about whether I'm doing things right and how I perceived and that kind of thing. So both for neurodivergent and neurotypical people, I think just just stop taking yourself so seriously, especially in an academic context.

Like especially when I came to uni, it felt like it's such a high pressure environment where you've got to constantly prove that you deserve to be there and you always have this sort of impostor syndrome and all that kind of thing. So it's always taking everything so seriously when actually it's just quite, quite fun to like look at all the things I'm interested in and when I'm able to be a little bit more casual with it and, and don't view

it like the end of the world, I think that's when everything's better. But also when my neurodivergence comes in handy a lot.

CHELLA:

That's really good advice, thank you. What about you, Ellie?

ELLIE:

It's sort of, in a similar way, like lean into who you are. I think, you know, my research became super exciting when I started leaning into the sensory experiences that I was having on sites and it has kind of opened up some really interesting and exciting research and teaching avenues for me. And that has been all about just leaning into who I am and how I experienced the world.

I think the other thing I'd just sort of to really reiterate what Annis said, which I think is excellent advice, is to just not care so much. I think that I can speak for both of us. And please correct me if you think I'm misrepresenting you, Annis. It's not about not caring. Actually, it's because we care deeply, right? We wouldn't do this if we didn't care deeply, if we weren't passionate, if we weren't excited by what we do. But it's not caring what other people think about how much you care.

CHELLA:

That's such a good way to put it and I love that you sort of opened up this way into the ancient world that is actually about being curious about your own experiences in the world. I think that's also a really great thing for the listeners to take away. Unfortunately, we will have to draw it to a close there. Before we do, I want to say thank you to you both so much. I've learnt a huge amount. I'm sure the listeners will have learnt a huge amount too. But thank you for making the time in your extremely busy schedules, but also for sharing all of those experiences with us.

We will put some links in the description. So we'll make sure that we put a link to the article that Ellie mentioned in the Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, the one that talks about using her experience to think through experiences in the ancient past. We'll also make sure that we put a link to Neuro Infinity, the student society that Annis mentioned, so you can go and take a look at all the fantastic work that that community is doing.

Thank you ever so much for joining us. This has been an episode of Talking Disability from the Classics Podcast.

We hope to see you again next time.