



**HART**

**Neurodiversity**





# Hello there...

- **UX Designer**, worked at some amazing places including **HOYTS, Newscorp, Frog Design, Swissre** and **Optus**.
- I have backgrounds in **UX, design, communications, philosophy** and **psychology**.
- I write a fair bit on Medium... and have been writing a book...



**What do all of these people have in common?**





# Why I advocate

- I was tentatively diagnosed in 2007 with **Asperger's Syndrome**.
- I was rediagnosed (full diagnosis) in 2017 due to some work challenges as **Autism Spectrum Disorder Level 1 (ASD-1)**.
- A few weeks ago was diagnosed with **ADHD**.
- Realised there are far more people out there who are neurodivergent...
- Have advocated over the last few years for Autism Awareness Australia, and how I met my **amazing** partner Jo Abi (9Honey).







# Busting the Myths

- **A hidden disability isn't a real disability.** Don't act surprised when someone discloses. Don't say "*You don't look Autistic*" because no one can look Autistic.
- **Neurodivergent people have savant-like powers,** this is a poorly articulated Hollywood troupe.
- Same as **sociopathy** and **narcissism**, (because they don't have empathy) or
- Need to **use a label** to be **special** or **trendy** (ADHD)..
- **Vaccines cause Autism** - The Wakefield study is both discredited and retracted.
- **Self-diagnosis** is irrelevant.



# So what is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity = **Neurology + Diversity**

The Australian sociologist, **Judy Singer**, coined the term Neurodiversity in the late '90s. Singer described an inherent range in how the human mind functions regarding the functional processing of information, emotions and thoughts.

Neurodiversity defines a natural variation for how all do not think, learn or process information in the same ways. There is diversity in the way human brains function that was not consistently recognised until recently (Honeybourne 2020, p. 13).







# Let's talk Neurodiversity

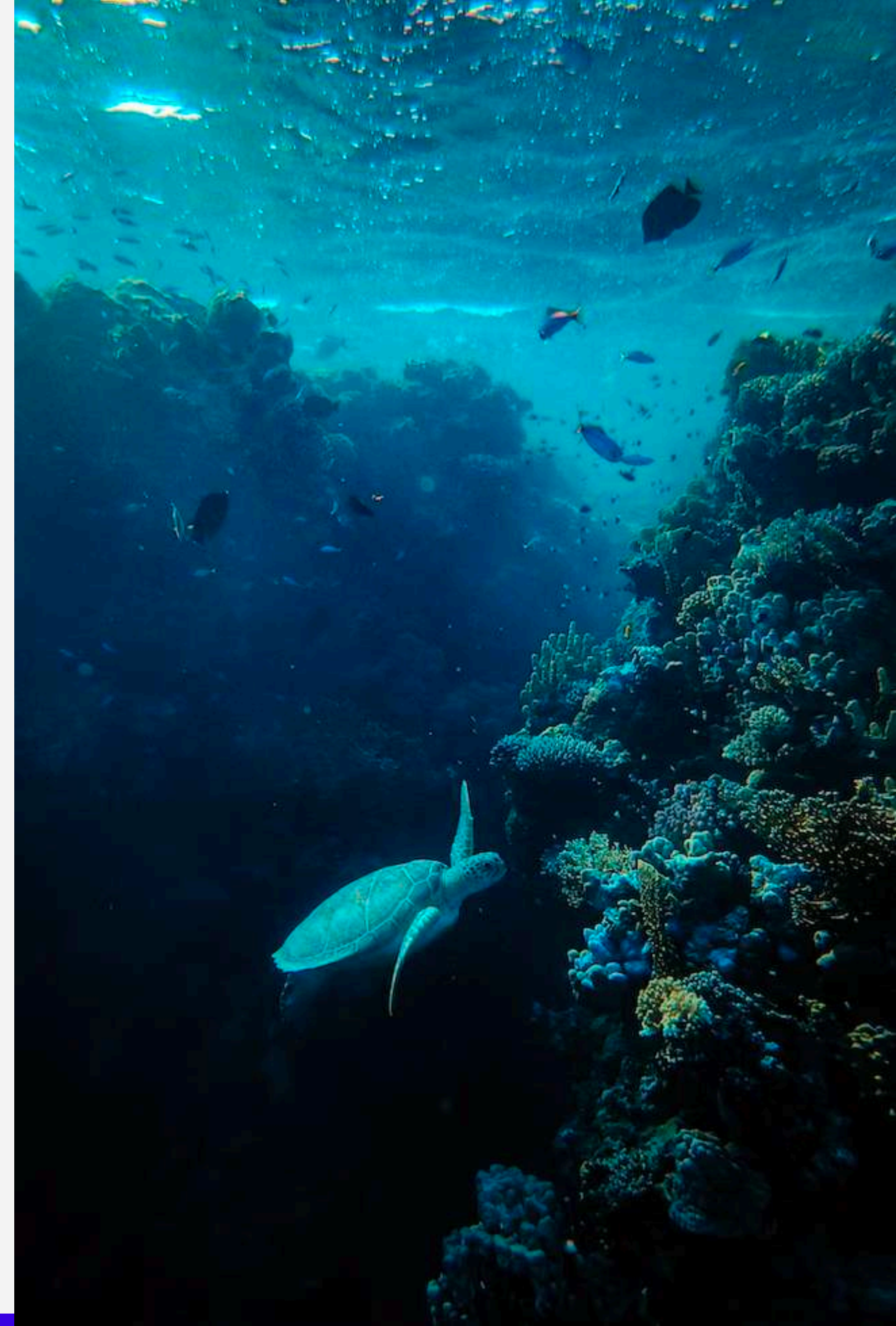
You can have diversity in a population, but no, an individual cannot be diverse. Neurodiversity is a sociological concept, and not a medical diagnosis as it's explaining a population variation (e.g. the differences).





# Breaking it down...

- **Neurodiversity** - Diversity of mind/thinking.
- **Neurodiversity** (as a socio-political movement) - Neuro-minorities seeking equity and a voice.
- **Neurodiverse** - A population that does not adhere to the majority of the statistical norms.
- **Neurodivergent** - An individual who is divergent of the neuro-normative.
- **Neurotypical** - An individual who is representative of the neuro-normative.







# It's the social model of disability

The social model of disability differs from the medical model of disability and is a different way of viewing the world. The social model recognises barriers that make life more complicated for people with disabilities. It states the individual isn't disabled; instead, the social structure within the context has the incapacitates to create barriers.





**Generalised vs. Specialised minds**



**ATTENTION TO DETAILS**  
Thoroughness  
Accuracy



**EXPERTISE**  
In-depth knowledge  
High level of skills



**DEEP FOCUS**  
Concentration  
Freedom from distraction



**DYSCALCULIA**



**ADHD**



**DYSPRAXIA**  
Developmental  
Coordination Disorder



**TOURETTE'S**



**VISUALISATION**  
Spatial  
Visual



**AUTISM**



**DYSLEXIA**

**ABSORB AND RETAIN FACTS**  
Excellent long term  
Memory and recall



**DLD**  
Delayed Language  
Development



**ACQUIRED  
BRAIN INJURY**  
Cognitive | Emotional | Physical



**CREATIVITY**  
Distinctive Imagination  
Problem Solving

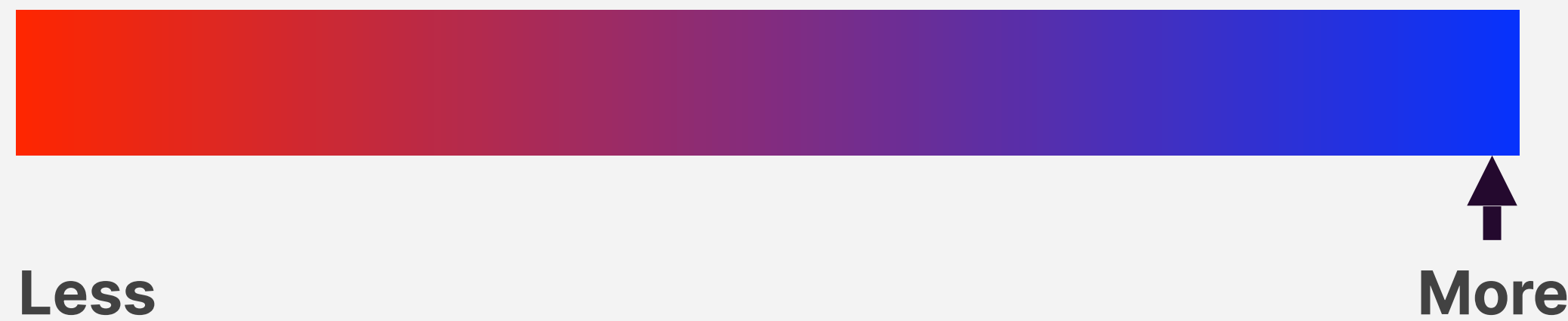
let's talk about  
**NEURODIVERSITY**



# It's all sensory.

What neurodivergence looks like

What people *think* it looks like







# **We're neuro-spicy**

We're a little more than the population norm...



# Difference in Empathy

**Cognitive - Think.** The ability to understand someone else's perspective and what they might be thinking and feeling.

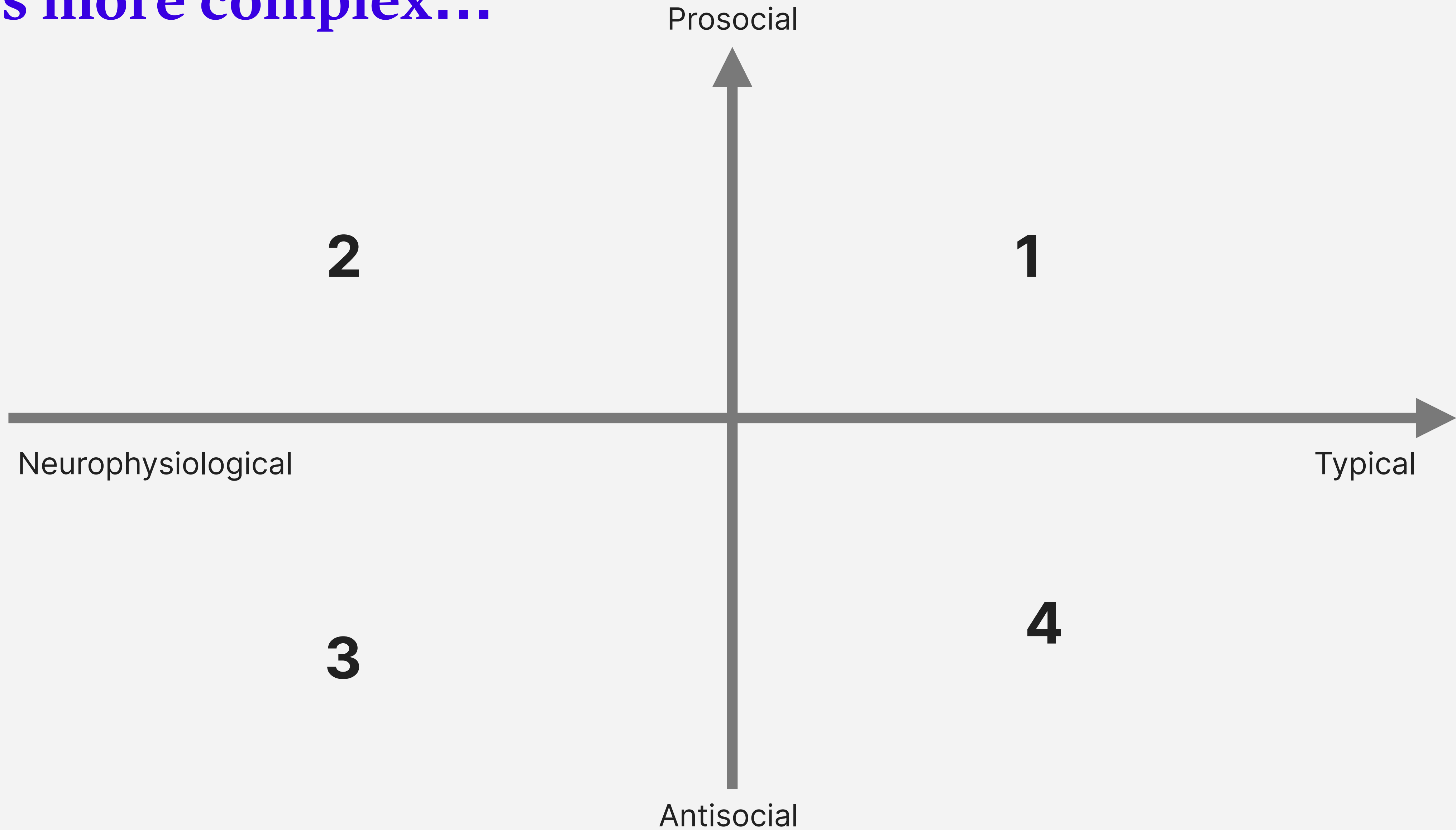
**Affective / Emotional - Feel.** Is the is feeling with someone.

**Empathetic - Act.** Is the doing part of empathy, it goes past just feeling and drives us to do.





# It's more complex...







### BEAR

Gets up and goes to bed when the sun rises and sets.



### LION

Loves an early start and an early night. Mornings are your jam.



### WOLF

Trouble waking in the morning. Only gets going at night.



### DOLPHIN

Struggles to fall asleep and stay asleep. Often feels tired.

## Difference Sleep Patterns

There are four sleep chronotypes: **bear, lion, wolf, and dolphin**. Bears are the most **common**, and dolphins are **rare**.

Your chronotype is likely to shift from childhood to adulthood and again when you get into your later years.

The four chronotypes have distinct differences, and these affect **alertness, productivity** and **circadian rhythms**.



# Autism/ADHD in women compared to men looks very different.



According to Dr Attwood, women are harder to diagnose and are often misdiagnosed with co-morbid conditions and/or incorrectly treated (Generation Next 2016).

- 1 - **Masking** is a crucial trait to the a potential 'female autism phenotype'.
- 2 - Women and girls are more likely to 'mask' or camouflage their differences, which makes diagnosis far more difficult.
- 3 - **Gender bias** tends to overlook or misdiagnose.
- 4 - Generally are **logical reasoners** compared to emotional, and process empathy very differently.
- 5 - Tend to **hyperspecialise** in more commercial areas.

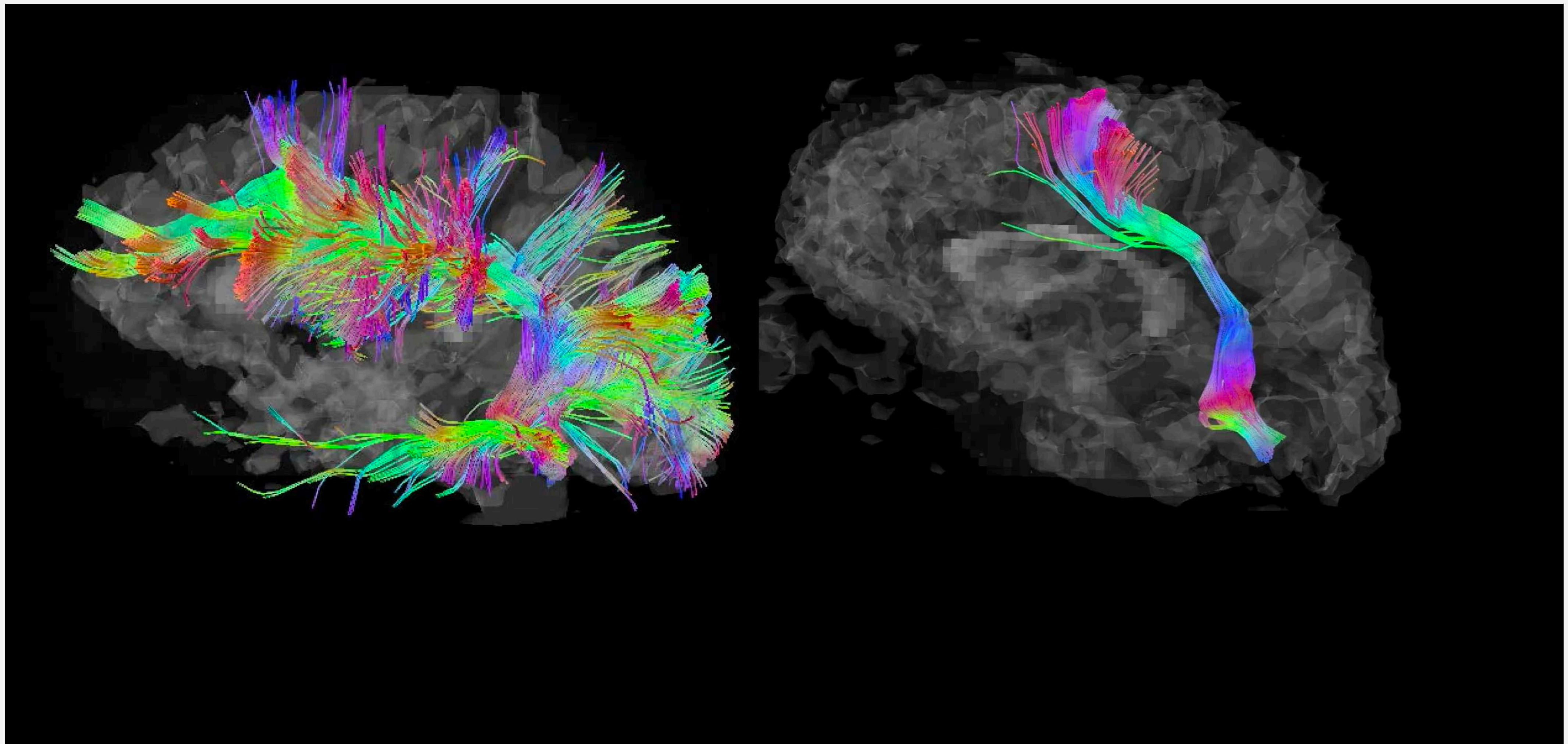


# Some Neurodiversity Stats

- **1 in 7 are Neurodivergent** — According to the [latest UK studies >15%](#) are diagnosed as neurodivergent. Meaning, all levels of service fail to cater or recognised these people.
- **65% of Neurodivergent [employees surveyed](#)** (N = 462) feared around the stigmas and discrimination from management and fellow employees.
- **[IDF](#)** is the only military actively recruiting **Autistics** to serve in their **Ro'im Rachok Unit**.
- According to the [CDC](#), there is a significant epidemic of need in the workplace to accomodate. Accommodations for ADHD and Autism are surprisingly cheap.
- **[NIH](#)** reported an overrepresentation of neurodivergent individuals within STEM fields. The study suggests systemised thinking means these individual have a neuro disposition to working in complex systems that businesses unaware of.



# Neurodivergent vs. Neurotypical







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Humans are **evolved problem-solvers**. And our behaviours, traits, and neurology result from the evolutionary process.

**Evolutionary psychology** explains that trait success is the direct result of a natural process (Polger, 2019). As such, successful behavioural traits have a physiological and biological explanation and are a part of the success of our evolutionary history (Cosmides & Tooby, 1997).







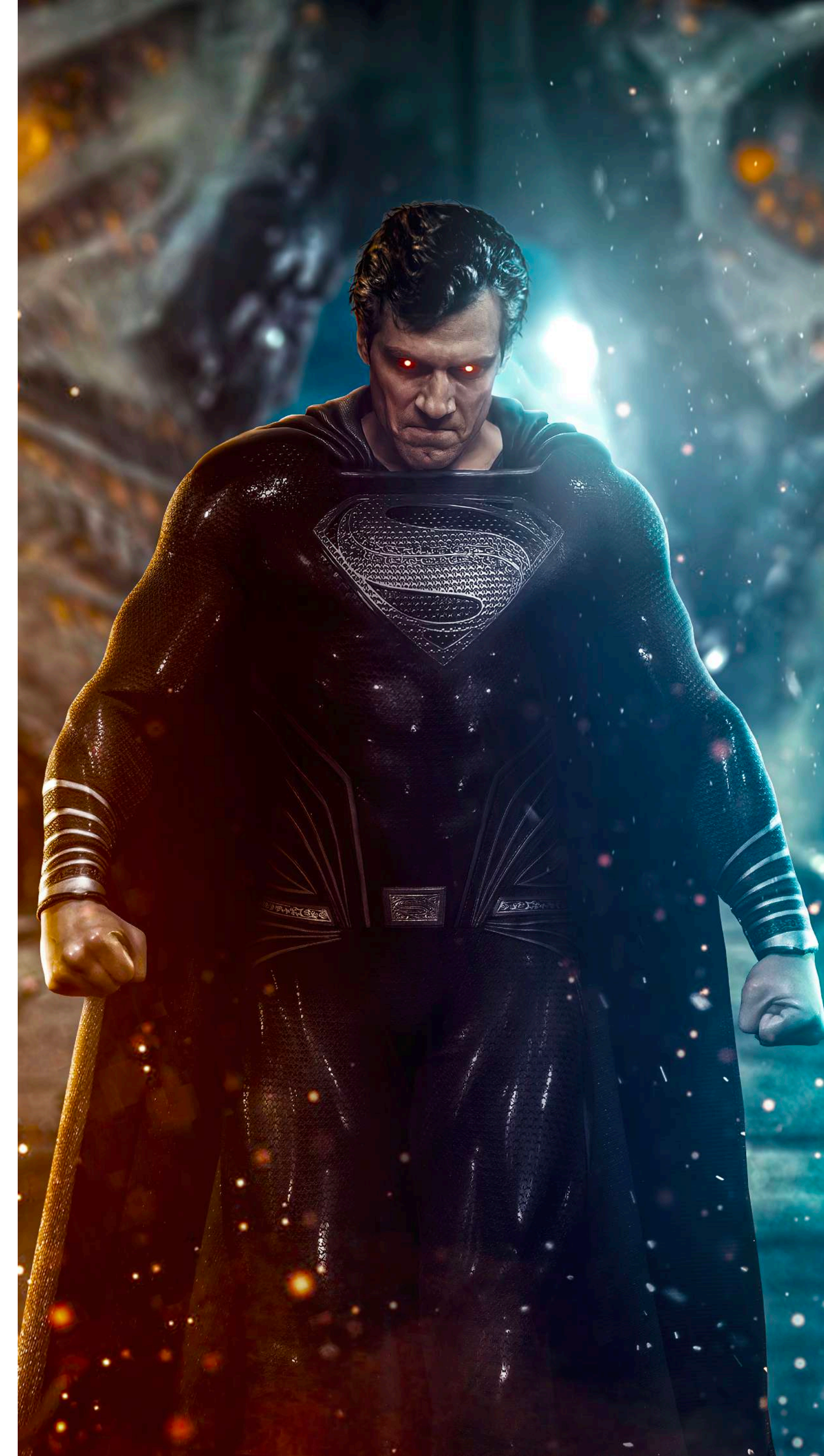
# How to explain Neurodivergency





# Our Kryptonite

- Last-minute or random **changes**.
- **Sensory challenges** and/or **processing**.
- **Unclear communication** (not processing verbal instructions, or not in writing)
- **Cost of masking** and efforts to fit in.
- **Burnout** and **meltdowns**
- **Food sensitivities**
- **Rejection** sensitivity.
- **Executive function** - Being organised and time management.
- **Low tolerance** to boring or too easy stuff... (PDA)





# This sums up some of the challenges...

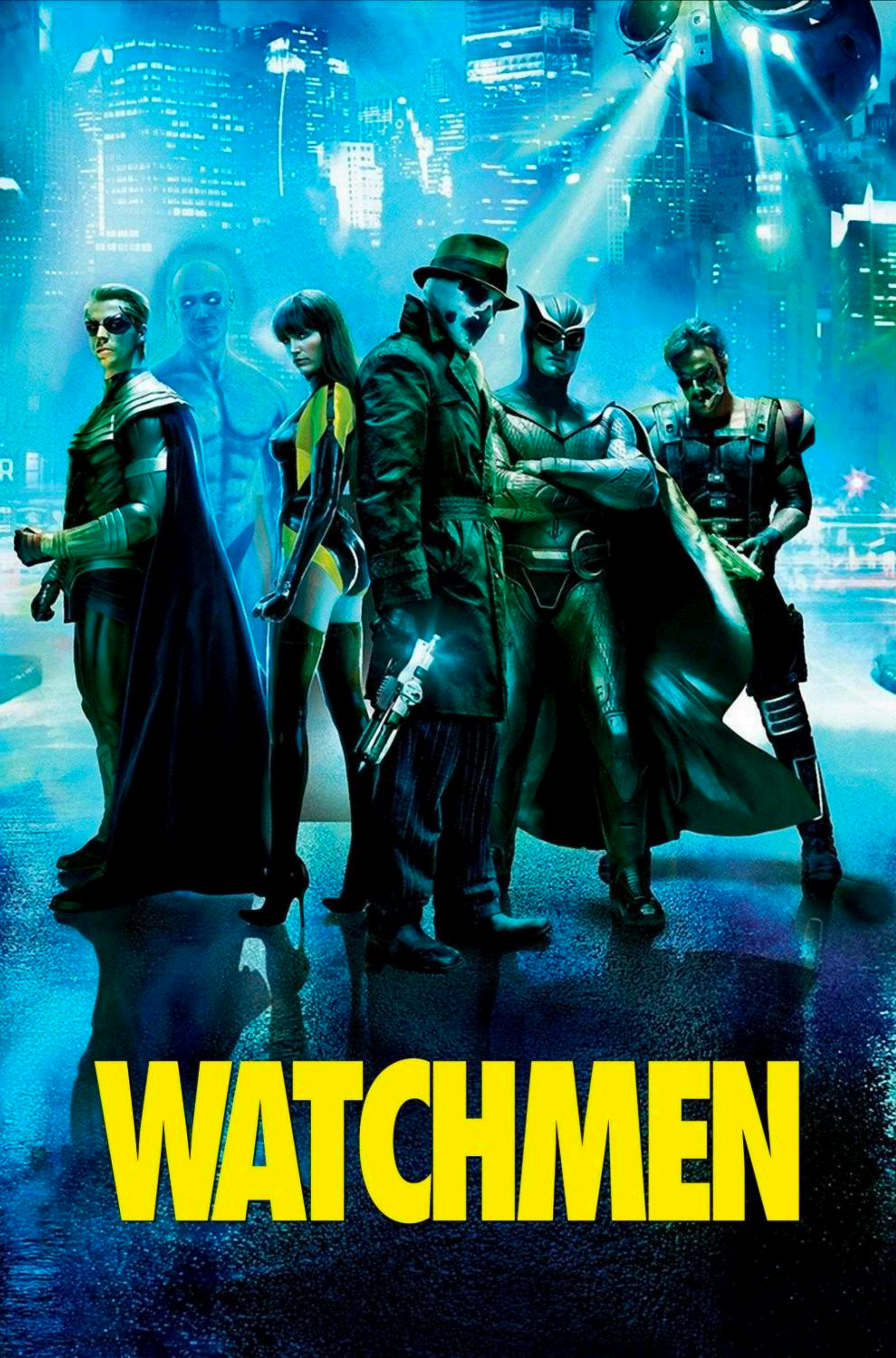


My autistic ass when given verbal instructions



@lifeinautismworld





# Our Superpowers

*We're a specialised mindset, which means we cannot multitask.*

- **High-degree of accuracy** in pattern and visual based tasks.
- **Advantageous long-term memory.**
- **Increased productivity** due to "hyper-focusing".
- **Specialised thinking.**
- **Make very different connections** on data or problem. Thus, Able to solve hard problems.
- **Expert knowledge.**



So, how *does*  
this work in  
real life?





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Neurodiversity is a benefit to the workplace because there is access to a specialised set of skills based on neuro-wiring.

Like an elite athlete, neurodiverse individuals have skills above the neurotypical average for pattern recognition, talent for numbers, focusing on tasks, finding unique solutions or long-term memory (Honeybourne 2020).



# Workplace challenges



**Missing social context** - Due to limitations with "*Theory of Mind*", Autistic tend to miss the social cues. <90% of communication is non-verbal, >7% is from words. Autistic tend to only hear the words, and thus may respond or interpret incorrectly to social convention.



**Burnout due to masking/camouflaging** - For Autistics with strong cognitive skills, the expense of fitting in is burnout. Burnout is due to suppressing stims, too much sensory input without a recharge, forcing eye contact, too much change, and acting to pass as normal.



**Sensory inputs and triggers** - Lighting, sound, smell, etc.. may affect different individuals differences, and consequently, act as a barrier.



**Regression due to overload** - Skills are lost due to a cognitive load and pressures of fitting in.





**I know this sounds like a strange argument, but why would a *lightbulb* be akin to a *human rights issue*?**

- Simply put, LED is far more sustainable for the environment and green initiatives and are cost-effective.
- With too many ASD people, the sensory environment is a massive barrier to obtaining a suitable place to work and staying in the role.

[Link about LED lights](#)



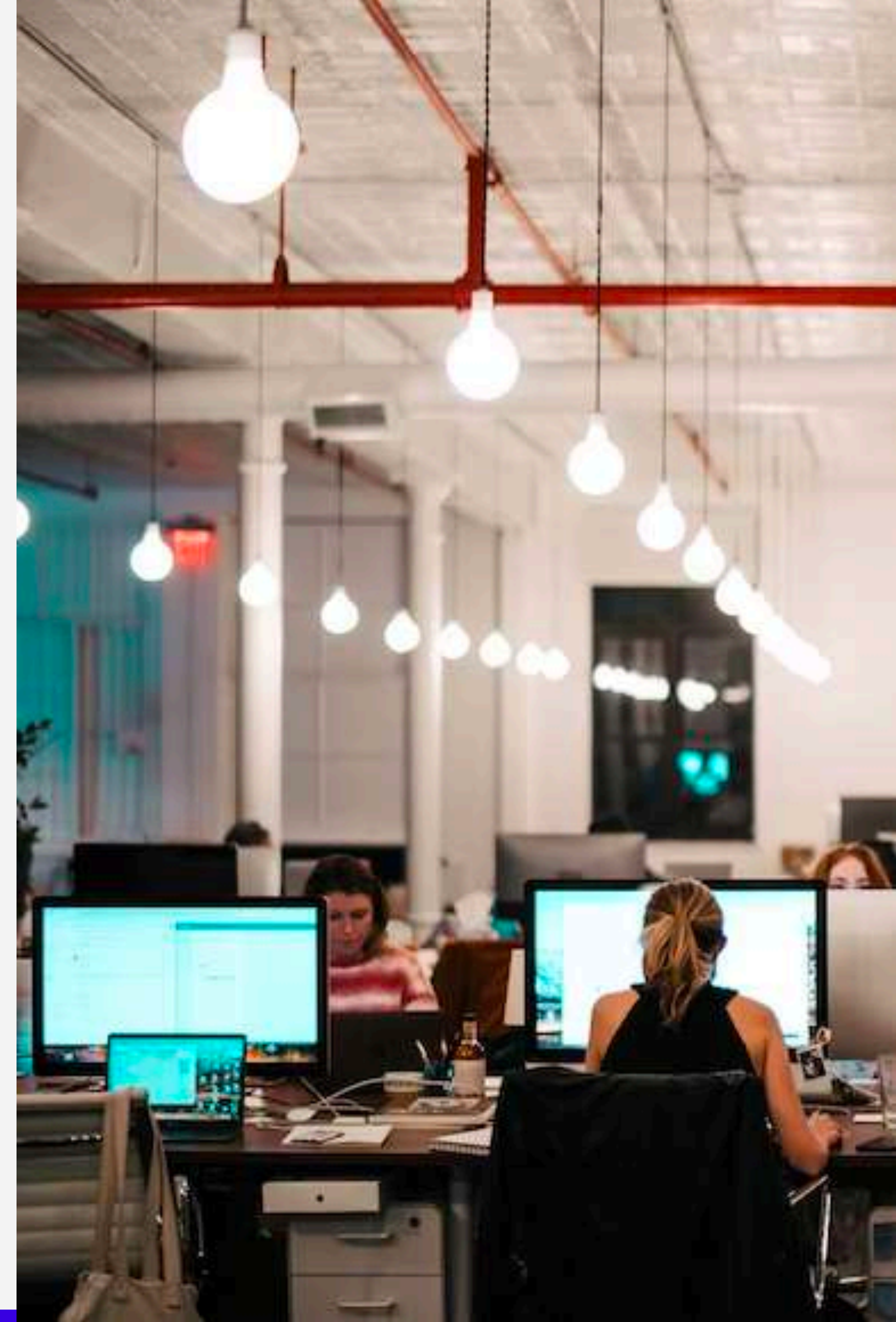
# Workplace stats

- **Worldwide, 1 in 44 are autistic** — According to [CDC 1 in 44 children](#) are diagnosed as autistic.
- **<30% autistic individual are unemployed** — In Australia, the unemployment is [31.6% in 2018](#). Post-COVID states this is closer to [85% based on studies](#).
- **Abuse is rife with autistic women** — According to a French study [92% of autistic women survey](#) (n = 225) had been abused or sexually assaulted.
- **9 out of 10 autistic will retire to poverty** — APS data from the Disability Royal Commission stated that autistics are disproportionately affected by unemployment, and thus will retire to poverty.



# Managing the workplace.

- **Calm and safe working environments** — Look at the sensory influences. Depending on the individual, consider the sensory as an allergy to sound, light or touch.
- **Clear communication**, use concrete and specific language, and write instructions in active voice.
- **Flexibility** for working at our best. WFH should not be viewed as a privilege.
- **One point of contact**, a person who directs the culture and workload for the neurodivergent employee.
- **Transparency** around team culture, workplace practices and business processes. Explain *'the why'* a business or workplace does something.





A person in a dark jacket stands on a grassy hill, silhouetted against a vibrant sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm orange glow over a city and a body of water in the distance. The sky transitions from a deep orange near the horizon to a dark blue at the top.

# Workplace benefits

- **Reduced turnover** and lowers hiring costs.
- Ability to **solve hard business** problems.
- **Reduces Groupthink**, due to introducing neuro-patterns.
- **Lower turnover** of staff.
- **Difference in memory** and **thinking styles**.
- Places employees into roles that are **more applicable** to the **mental modes** and **skillsets**.
- **Affinity** to consumers (preference for good).



# A bit of a plug...

- [Autism Awareness Australia](#)
- [Austin What's Next?](#)
- [The ultimate resource](#)
- [Xceptional](#)
- [Wingfinder](#)
- [Shamus Hart - Medium](#)





**Questions?**



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