Twitter Thread by Al Robinson



Al Robinson
@DrAlanRobinson

So, as I said in reply to @NortherlyRose's thread below, here's a thread on #autism and #ageing.

This is purely from a personal experience perspective as someone diagnosed in their early 50s. /

> Good idea to do a thread. Autism and ageing needs much more visibility. I share your experience of feeling older than I am. Partly due to early onset of physical conditions associated with ageing (hearing loss, Dupuytren\u2019s Disease) and partly due to burnout. Possibky connected.
>
> — NortherlyRose \U0001f308 (@NortherlyRose) January 3, 2021

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I've written lots already about how I grew up not knowing that I'm #autistic. A good catch-all for that writing is here, maybe:

https://t.co/recFFdkXGx

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My adult life from say 18 to 40 had ups and downs like anyone's. There was much to enjoy, and I was enthusiastic about learning and about using my learning in my career as an engineer / analyst.
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But, as is common for undiagnosed autistic people, this was mixed in with episodes of depression and anxiety and a sense of being different.

By the time I was 40, I wanted to retire. My wife remarked that I was starting to behave like "an old man".
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I had (and still have some) "old man hobbies": astronomy, ham radio, motorcycling, advanced driving.

And I *really* felt the pressure of being the "wage earner" with no option but to carry on earning the salary to which I and my family had become accustomed.
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I *desperately* wanted someone to look after *me*.

Please understand that this was not an accusation aimed at anyone in my immediate family; it was a general exasperation about the situation I found myself in.
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Expressing these feelings to family, friends, medical professionals elicited this type of response:

"You're still young! You have plenty of life left! Wait 'till you get to *my* / *our* age! You're supporting everyone and that's a *good* thing!"

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In other words "Don't be silly, shut up, I don't know what the fuck you're on about, man up(*), suck it up"

(*) thanks mum ■■
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And so I arrived at 50, self-medicating with every legal addiction I could find, lost. Six months later, burnout hit and I all but gave up.

Then came the realisation of autism and eventual diagnosis.
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Sorry - that's a long introduction to the topic of the thread, which is looking at the future from the perspective of someone diagnosed in later / middle life.
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Autism DX has given me permission to give myself permission to be kind to myself. So there's an awful lot of positive disentangling myself from expectations coming from that.
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I'm allowing myself to consider that I don't *have to* follow the same life trajectory as my neurotypical colleagues. I don't have to aim to retire to a life of relative luxury.

Importantly, there is no shame in opting out of that.

(I'm privileged to have a choice).

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But still, when I've discussed early retirement with e.g. medical professionals, eyebrows have been raised; "You're still young! What would you do?".

Neuronormative expectations, again.
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What I'm now realising is that I would be quite happy to live the life of a content & relatively active 70 year old *now*; reading, drinking coffee, walking dogs, engaging with people via social media.
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Where does this pressure to be productive until you die come from?

I am tired.

Doing two degrees and a post-doc meant that I didn't start work until I was 26 and I've now done 27 years at the same company.
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I know that many people work from age 16 to 70; twice as long as I've done so far. Well done them. Not for me.

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I see little opportunity for job-related joy in the future like I experienced when I started work (learning at a fast rate, being super appreciated by everyone as I flexed my unique skills).

My memory seems to be failing & *I* think it's not just typical age-related stuff.
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A combination of burnout, autism, possibly adhd-related issues, and yes age too, mean that I'm losing touch with my distant past as well as the last few minutes and seconds.

My drive to impress at work is fading.
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Partly I think that's a good thing. Burnout forced me to re-evaluate my relationship with work. Where I had previously used my successes at work and the way I was valued at work as maybe *the* foundation of my self esteem,
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now my foundation is *me* and my right to an equitable life where there is no shame in loving and expressing my *true self* (hence my-later-than-I-wished exploration of and rejection of gender stereotypes)
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But, whilst my 13 coaching sessions with the lovely and incredibly wise @FelicityMorse has allowed me to attenuate my drive to control and fully know my future & instead joyfully embrace its possibilities and allow myself to be happily vulnerable and open to it,
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I still come back to my thread from earlier in the year below, asking "How can #autistic people best embrace their final trimester?"

https://t.co/lI2vYvlHw8
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> How do we approach later life as autistic people?
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> "Conventional wisdom" says that it's time to ease off the chase for "success" and take pleasure from relationships, friendships, leisure pursuits, and community activity.
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> All of these *can* be problematic for autistic people. /
>
> — Al Robinson (@DrAlanRobinson) July 12, 2020

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I think I've come to the natural end of this thread (and hit Twitter's limit on thread length!)

It might read a little melancholy, but it isn't, really.

I am now happier, I think, than I have ever been.

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I'm now understanding and respecting my autistic self, thanks to the wonderful shared experience of #autistic Twitter, medical science, and the "official" endorsement of my diagnosis (which is really a magical charm that I use to defeat imposter syndrome, see below)
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https://t.co/xn2GHu8ab9

@threadreaderapp unroll please