Twitter Thread by Sonny (genderless ageless space-being)



Sonny (genderless ageless space-being)
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I've been thinking a bit about being openly or obviously 'other'.

My life experiences have been fairly unusual, & while I do enjoy communicating about this, it can also be quite othering being perpetually the odd-one-out in a group who folks ask to explain stuff.

THREAD

And while it's well-intentioned, and I think it's important that folks actually listen to autistic/trans/POC/etc people when it comes to understanding our experiences, it can also be a lot of pressure when I'm the only autistic nb non-white person in a group of cis white folks

And over time even when folks listen and are respectful, I feel that self conscious, and also worried that they are placing me on a sort of 'pedestal of otherness' that actually can stop them from truly empathising and understanding.

To start to understand folks who are different, it's important to both acknowledge how different experiences can be(esp if yours are more 'typical'), but also acknowledge that they are not SO different that you should not try to challenge yourself to try and understand better

We should not be stopping at "I can't possibly understand what it's like to be you" but instead always be trying, even with the knowledge that it might be difficult. This is the perhaps the kind of labour that NTs, cis, white, and other dominant groups owe marginalised identities

This train of thought is making me remember how, even in my fairly multicultural central London primary school (and maybe secondary), there were times when all heads turned toward me whenever China/Asia was mentioned.

I didn't even talk much about that part of my heritage in school, so it was weird to be made jarringly aware of others' sense of my difference.

Now I do a lot of writing and training around autism, and also talk sometimes about gender identity and race (especially being very mixed and growing up between two cultures), but even so there is a discomfort about the idea I might be seen as being ‘on the clock’ *all the time*

I also worry that by deciding that certain individuals who are happy to talk about their experiences ‘hold the knowledge’ on the experience of difference, folks will feel less able or challenge themselves less to explore their own differences

It breaks my heart a little every time I hear ‘I find x really difficult... oh but ofc it’s nothing like how it must be for autistic folks’, bc it’s usually so well intentioned but so often it’s ppl who are neurodivergent themselves, struggling to recognise their own differences

We need to be able to look inward AND outward. Yeah, you might not understand what it’s like to grow up with the colour of your skin marking you out as different, and it’s important to realise that it’s probably v different to that one time you felt out of place due to appearance

That requires looking outwards and really trying to grasp what those feelings might be like, but also believing when those who have that experience describe it.

But also if we want to understand better, it helps to challenge our own senses of being ‘normal’ in any respect by looking inward. Why do you think you are ‘normal’? What do those assumptions mean and what privilege might that convey?

What (possibly secret) parts of ourselves aren’t ‘normal’ (and by that I mean typical or expected) and how does it feel to live with that? Does that provide any insight into living with other differences? And what might recognising those parts mean for each of us?

For a lot of people who realise they are autistic later in life, it can be about a process of unearthing and acknowledging those parts that are different, that we might have repressed or hidden due to fear, shame, and the pressures of what is supposedly normal.

It might be a lot harder trying to understand what it feels like for others who differ when we are repressing our own differences.
(And no, that doesn’t mean that ‘we’re all a little bit autistic’!)

So much of the negotiation around access needs and boundaries is also related to this. We *all* have access needs, but society has largely been designed so that one set of needs are not seen as needs at all but as just how things are normally. Everyone else’s needs are ‘special’.

This benefits no one, as those whose needs are deemed ‘special’ or different often need to fight for basic access, and are expected to be grateful for basic accommodations.

Meanwhile, those who manage on ‘typical mode’ might not recognise their own setup as being a result of systems accommodating to their needs, so don’t have the tools to handle it well when things change-

whether that’s because they need to work with someone with different needs to them, or because their own needs change.

Clearly there’s a lot more I can ramble on about on this issue..!
Again this is me making a tweet thread instead of a proper blog post because I have too much to write about on my list already...