

Scott Midkiff: Good evening. Thank you for joining us for our panel discussion tonight entitled, Bring Your Own Brain, Celebrating Neurodiversity in Stem Careers. I'm Scott Midkiff, the Vice President for IT and CIO at Virginia Tech, and I welcome you to this event. The Division of IT at Virginia Tech hosts one university wide- or even wider tonight- diversity event each year, hoping and helping to advance the discussion of the many diversity related issues that arise at the intersection of technology and the work of the university. We have a strong commitment to supporting open discussion on important subjects like this, believing that conversations, like the one you will hear tonight, help build understanding and help our society move forward past old biases, misunderstandings, and systemic discrimination. In the interest to this open discussion, I want to mention that the views expressed here are held by individuals and may or may not reflect the official positions of Virginia Tech. I want to thank our sponsors who are listed in the slides just shown, and it will be shown again at our intermission. I also greatly appreciate the work of our team in the Division of IT at Virginia Tech that has made this event a reality. Virginia Tech has a very important document, the Virginia Tech Principles of Community. If you do a search for principles of community at Virginia Tech, you will find it. I'm not going to read the whole document, but I would like to bring out just a few highlights. These principles are really adopted as being fundamental to our ongoing efforts to increase access and inclusion and to create a community that nurtures learning and growth for all of its members. Just a few of these five principles are a few highlights.

We affirm that the inherent dignity and value of every person to strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding. We affirm the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely. We encourage open expression within a climate of civility, sensitivity and mutual respect. We affirm the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and the university. We acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity. And we reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination.

With these ideals in mind, I again welcome you to "Bring Your Own Brain," a discussion about neurodiversity in the workplace. I'd like to introduce our moderator, Carolyn Phillips. Carolyn joins us from Atlanta, Georgia, where she is the co-director of the Center for Inclusive Design and Innovation at Georgia Tech. She is a frequent keynote speaker at international and national conferences and a guest lecturer at universities. Carolyn has published articles and journals, chapters in books and poetry focused on living with disability. She received her undergraduate degree from the University of Georgia, her master's degree from the University of Kentucky, and is a PhD student at Texas Tech. Carolyn lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her wife of over 20 years, their two children, and their family of rescue animals. Welcome, Carolyn.

Carolyn Phillips: Thank you so much, Scott. I appreciate that. And welcome everyone. I'm so glad that all of you are with us tonight for this very exciting event. At times, the most valuable thing

we've got, and I appreciate all of you, our participants, carving out time to spend just to dive in deeper with this exciting event that we've got going on here. This is really a dialogue. And I have learned so much through the process as we have met with each other as panelists, and so very thankful for Virginia Tech for pulling this awesome event together. It's a beautiful concept and I'm excited about a lot of what's behind this and also what we're going to be able to be sharing. So welcome to our attendees, welcome to our panelists, and very much appreciate our interpreters. Thank you, Mark and Desiree, and also our captionist.

CP: We are going to- just so you have a flow of what's going to be happening tonight- we're going to be going through some questions, some that some folks have already pulled together. And then around seven o'clock, we are going to do an intermission. But it's not over, so don't leave. It's more of a bio break and intermission break for about 10 minutes. During that time, we are going to be talking about an exciting book giveaway that we're going to be having at that point where you can sign up for that. And then we're going to be coming back in having some Q and A. So the key here is we want to make sure that you are entering questions as we move throughout this time together. And so then when we're coming back, then we'll have that Q and A, and then we'll be wrapping up around eight o'clock. So just wanted to make sure that everybody has an idea of the flow. I'd also, because one of the things whenever we have Zoom in this age of COVID, as we're collectively navigating this pandemic together. Just so you know which box is talking. So I am-I've got sandy blonde hair and

wearing a black sweater. And I've got behind me, Georgia Tech gold with a bunch of GT little icons, quite a few. So just so you'll be able to recognize me amongst all this sea of different panels. And I did also want to make sure that all of you know that this is being recorded. We've had a lot of folks who are registered, but also a lot of folks who wanted to be able to participate and hear the recording later. So just wanted to make sure where you are aware of that and that you'll also be able to access this resource later. And then I also, without further delay, want to go ahead and introduce our awesome panelists. As I said, I have gotten to know these folks and I'm very excited to be with them. I am very proud of my disability. I have learning disabilities; dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, auditory processing. And so very, very proud to be a part of this neurodiversity community.

CP: So I'm going to start off with Caroline Connell, who is actually Virginia Tech— she's right there, which is great. She is a technical communicator and support specialist. She works in IT at Virginia Tech. She's also been an international reporter, a line cook, a mechanical engineer, and MMA fighter, which is wow. And you ought to hear Johnathan and Caroline talk about that. I have never been an MMA fighter and (I know) a home care aid. She is also getting her PhD in human-centered design and performing ethnographic research for that. She really has looked at this prominent mix of methods and of approaching research from multiple philosophical and theoretical angles. It's very exciting and welcome, Caroline.

CP: We also have Johnathan, Johnathan Flowers. Dr. Flowers, he's a visiting assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy at Worcester State University. His research focuses on engaging effective computing and machine intelligence through phenomenal, (sorry), American pragmatism and Japanese aesthetics to transform how we think about user experience much needed. And is a human -slash- computer interaction across the breadth of identities and embodiments is what he focuses on.

CP: I'm very thankful also to have Rua, Dr. Rua M. Williams, who I have checked out her - their website. And their website is incredible. I definitely recommend you check it out. They are an assistant professor in the User Experience Design program at Purdue University. Their research focuses on engaging disabled people and testimony and design. To form research interventions on unethical research practices and to transform research inquiry into technology. It's such an important practice of work. And I have continued to learn from you, Rua. So glad that you're on the panel.

CP: And we have Sam farmer who wears many hats. Among these, Its author, father, husband, musician, computer consultant, and also autism spectrum community contributor and leader, which is great, diagnosed late with Asperger's syndrome. He writes a blog and articles for various media outlets and presents at conferences and support groups. Sharing stories, ideas, and insights as to how everyone, anyone can achieve greater happiness and success in the face of challenges and adversity. The book that

we're going to be giving out is Sam's book. A Long Road Down, A Long Walk Down a Windy Road, Small steps, challenges and triumphs through an autistic lens. Very, very cool. I have checked it out myself and so I'm very excited about that.

CP: So as we start this off, I just wanted to kinda center us on how this whole piece, this "Bring Your Own Brain Celebrating Neurodiversity and STEM workforce" came to be. Basically, it really is that people should be free and empowered to be who they are in the workplace is a powerful statement. Just like you heard Dr. Midkiff talking. Finding ways to overcome challenges that take our own courage and good judgment and really bring it every day. I love this idea of celebrating because employers and workplaces need to go beyond tolerance, beyond compliance, beyond acceptance, or just adjustment. It really needs to be about appreciation and also for affirming employees. So we are going to jump right in here and I'm going to turn this first question to Rua, so that they can give us their insight and then we'll move throughout the panel. The first question is, what is neurodiversity? So, Rua, talk to us.

Rua Williams: So neurodiversity is a term that was coined by sociologist Judy Singer. And I think a lot of people don't know where that term came from and that's what I'd like to answer here. This term was meant to describe the full spectrum of human neurology, similar to biodiversity for ecosystems. But the neurodiversity paradigm is a critical approach to understanding neuropsychological conditions and is centered around refusing pathologization of neurological difference.

Likewise, the neurodiversity movement is a loose collection of activism and advocacy to make society more equitable for neurodivergent people. So those differences are kind of important to keep in mind when you hear the word neurodiversity. So one thing I really think it is important to make clear is that while the idea of neurotypes are socially constructed, like race and gender, there are still material consequences of this construction by which neurodivergent people are denied equitable social relations. So that denial is enacted by people, neurotypical or not. And that, that is an operation and service of neurotypical like normative society. And that's where, that's sort of a very broad overview of the whole thing. Okay. I'm done.

CP:Oh, thank you so much, Rua. I appreciate that. Johnathan, talk to us.

Johnathan Flowers: So my understanding of neurodiversity is not entirely distinct from Rua's understanding. In fact, I'm thankful for Rua, am thankful to Rua for presenting the broader history of the term. I wanted to or want to expand a little bit more on tail end of it. So as a socially constructed way of thinking about human neurological diversity, neurodiversity is also intersectional. So, insofar as it is a socially organized category, it intersects with other categories like gender, sexuality, and specifically race. And so far as neurodiversity presents or is made visible in different ways based on different embodiments. So when I think about neurodiversity, I not only think about the broad diversity of human neurological embodiment, but the ways in which that embodiment intersects with other, other modes of

being in the world. So again, as socially constructed neurodiversity as it intersects with other categories of identity has material consequences, some of which are amplified through the various intersections of other ways of being in the world.

CP: Oh gosh, powerful. Thank you so much Johnathan. Now Caroline, what do you want to add?

Caroline Connell: I have very little to add to that other than my definition is much more functional. Even my graduate work is not in a field related to this. So my understanding is everyone, everyone is unique and neurodiverse people are typically diagnosed with a cognitive or intellectual disability like dyslexia or auditory processing disorder which I have, or autism spectrum, which I've also been diagnosed with. And by the way, I am a white, middle aged female with short curly hair. I have a blurred background and I'm wearing an orange top.

CP: Thank you, Caroline. I appreciate it. Sam. Talk to us. And I think your mic, if you ... yeah.

Sam Farmer: Thank you very much, Carolyn. Great to be here tonight with everybody, with the panelists, et cetera. Pretty much what I think of neurodiversity has already been said by my fellow panelists. I'll admit that my view is relatively simplistic in terms of just looking at the neurodiversity as a movement that views neurodivergent individuals as people with normal human differences in behavior. I also see it as a viewpoint which maintains that brain differences

should not be looked upon as deficits, which are abnormal and which would therefore be in need of correction. Those of us who are wired a little differently, perhaps than most people, don't need to be fixed. We don't need to be cured of anything. We're fine just the way we are, and to have this kind of diversity in the greater society I just think is a beautiful thing that's worth celebrating.

CP: Thank you very much, Sam, I appreciate that. We're going to move on to our next question, which is, why should neurodiversity be celebrated and encouraged in STEM fields? And once again, I think it's great that we're focusing on celebrated, as opposed to, tolerated and all of that. And so that's very, very strong. And so Johnathan, talk to us, What have you got?

JF: So in my view, neurodiversity should be supported and encouraged in all fields of studies, STEM included. But where STEM is concerned, neurodiversity is especially important as like the STEM fields are often sites from which the marginalization of neurodiverse people emerges, right? So as an example, the pathologization and the medicalization of neurodiverse individuals, which leads to understandings of disability is something to be fixed or the broader concept of the disability dangle have distinct consequences for the lived experience of neurodiverse individuals. So more neurodiverse individuals in STEM means more valuation of our lived experience and less emphasis on eugenic or other projects that view neurodiverse individuals as things to be fixed. And we should also be especially sensitive to the ways that our

understanding of neurodiversity in STEM is grounded in structures of race and gender. So while STEM should celebrate and encourage neurodiversity, it should also do so with like an eye towards the ways that it interacts with race and reinforces particular racialized understandings of neurodiversity.

CP: Thank you so much, Dr. Flowers. I appreciate that. Caroline, what do you want to add?

CC: I agree with Sam and Johnathan that neurodiversity is not something that we should be trying to fix. And like other groups of people and other diverse groups, neurodiverse people contribute different perspectives and methods to their teams. And any new views and new methods are going to be valuable for teams. And they should be celebrated. And the more diversity in general and diverse individuals in particular are appreciated and respected and invited, the more equitable workplace, and hopefully society maybe, will be.

CP: Thank you very much. Sam, what do you want to add?

SF: Predictably, I agree with everything that Rua and Caroline and Johnathan have had to say about this, Regardless of the field of endeavor that you're dealing with, neurodiverse people bring value to the table by virtue of their unique perspectives and approaches. There are a number of highly prevalent traits that neurodiverse people bring to the workplace. Outside the box thinking. Big picture thinking on attention to detail, analytical abilities and a capacity to strongly

focus on tasks for relatively long periods of time are just a few common examples of traits that are commonly found among neurodiverse people in the workforce. And likewise, underrepresentation in the workplace is to me a very serious issue, which really needs to be addressed in that if it isn't addressed, it adversely affects both the workplace and the neurodiverse individual who would love to be part of something bigger than him or herself in being able to succeed in the workplace. When you consider the fact that people who live their lives prior to Asperger's being a diagnosis, Albert Einstein is actually one who comes to mind who likely would have been diagnosed as neurodiverse. I think that sheds light on all the untapped potential among those who are neurodiverse and not employed represent a lot of untapped potential that ought to be leveraged for the good of everybody.

CP: Thank you. Sam. Dr. Williams, talk to us.

RW: So, I also believe that neurodivergent people should be supported in all fields of study and practice. But like Johnathan, I also have a particular concern about underrepresentation in STEM fields because feels like technology and medicine have immediate day-to-day consequences for disabled and neurodivergent people. And so, to be brief, autistic doctors means better medical care for autistic people. And more autistic biomedicine specialists mean potentially fewer biomedical studies that have a eugenic aim to eliminate Autistic people and so on. So that's sort of where I think about this issue, but I also wanted to take a minute to recognize that actually a lot of people have this notion that STEM fields are actually a

place where neurodivergent people, including autistic people thrive. But that's really misleading. First of all, most of our impressions about the traits that make autistic people well-suited for STEM fields are based on stereotypes that are not really well validated in the research. But also there's only certain kinds of people that get to be quirky like that, right? And so we may have this sort of trope in our heads of like the eccentric, quirky STEM person, it's usually like Sheldon Cooper, and then everybody else who's quirky like that is not actually allowed to play. And so it's important to check yourself when you're thinking, and we can have these assumptions about neurodivergent placement in STEM.

CP: Thank you so much and very well said, I know we have been in dialogue about many of these things and I just continue to learn very much from you. Thank you. So I'm going to move on to the next question, which is what barriers do highly qualified, neurodivergent individuals, including those who have autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and or auditory processing disorders face during and after the hiring process? Caroline, do you mind kicking us off with this?

CC: Sure. Hiring committees and people in general feel affinity for adults who are similar to them. So the more you differ from their expectations, often, maybe the more negatively they might see you. So for me, as a female in STEM, that's a little bit outside what some people expect. And then as a female in STEM who might say different things or is very direct, when I talk to folks, I think that that could impact me negatively in

interviews. And then after being hired, being pigeonholed is a big thing based on stereotypes. I have been offered to do some, some tedious, tedious tasks. Hey, why would you think I would want to do that? And my graduate research is qualitative. And folks, you know, I think that that might be surprising for some people. Asking for accommodations can be a stigma. And maybe, perhaps because we're, it maybe takes a little bit longer my opinion, to get to know and understand a neurodiverse person, it might be harder to create those networking opportunities at work.

CP: Thank you so much, Caroline. I and you definitely touch on some very, very important points, and I appreciate you sharing that. Thank you. Sam. Talk with us. What have you got?

SF: Carolyn, the way I see it is that a big barrier to be overcome is really lack of familiarity with, and acceptance of, the ways in which neurodiverse people think and conduct themselves. What we don't understand is something that would likely be questioned or even feared, certainly could be rejected. Where I believe education becomes very critical in this regard, so that the methods and the behaviors of how neurodiverse people function, that if people become more aware and better educated along those lines, then that's a way to try to knock down this particular barrier. I'm a big advocate of neurodiverse and other people doing that educating, because they're the ones living this reality. They're the ones I think, perfectly fit to do this sort of education. And the more people understand, the greater the likelihood of acceptance. And of potentially hopefully I'd like

to think embracing of neurodiverse people in the workforce with more education, with greater learning and understanding of neurodiversity, you could hopefully see this barrier come down.

CP: Thank you, Sam. Rua, I'm turning it to you.

RW: I thought I keep forgetting to describe myself. I'm a white person with glasses and an asymmetrical hair cut that the Zoomers don't like. I'm wearing a lemon shirt with lemon earrings which you probably can't see – anyway. So our traditional practices in hiring and onboarding are inherently ableist. And this is not just for neurodivergents, this is all across the board. So, for example, people are conditioned to interpret certain behaviors as markers for trustworthiness or suspicion. So the obvious example is eye contact, which many autistic people avoid, is interpreted as a sign if someone is engaged, honest, and credible. But for an autistic person, I'm looking away when you're speaking may be essential to engagement. So they're actually doing this so that they can hear you better. And it's not because they don't care. So when you can't filter the aural information without filtering some sort of other modality of sensory perception, then that's essentially a way to self accommodate. What's more concerning now is that we're developing technologies to integrate into the hiring process and sometimes pitched as making it more equitable. But they're actually exacerbating these social biases, making these assumptions about how the candidate may fit based on how they have appeared on camera. And these are very narrow bigoted assumptions and also they are implicated in racial issues. So many of these computer vision

applications don't recognize darker skin tones and don't have an understanding of culturally different communication norms. So it's just, it's a mess.

CP: You're exactly right. It is a mess and I definitely hear you, Rua. Thank you. Johnathan?

JF: I too keep forgetting to describe myself. I'm a black man with glasses and a Mohawk, which the Zoomers find incredibly amusing for some reason. But with regards to hiring, I would say the hiring process itself could be positioned as a barrier specifically for neurodiverse folks with different kinds of executive functioning. So insofar as the stressors of traditional hiring processes may make our executive functioning more difficult, traditional hiring processes place neurodiverse folks at a disadvantage because they're not organized around our experience. And moreover, when these hiring processes, most often done through electronic platforms, eventually terminate in a disclosure of one's disability status, disability is often classified in an extremely narrow way. That is in every, so to give a more personal example, in every hiring application system that I have used, ADHD has never appeared. And so, insofar as disability is classified in extremely narrow ways, it may become more difficult to request accommodations for one's particular neurodiversity, right? Moreover, one of the things that I also take from this is that insofar as there are some modes of neurodiversity that are absent in these hiring platforms, there are some modes of neurodiversity that are not thought of as needing to be accommodated in the hiring and onboarding process. Which again, sets up an entirely new set of

barriers. How do you ask for an accommodation when your neurodiversity is not viewed as needing one?

CP No – excellent points. And Johnathan, I know you and I talked about this as a person with learning disabilities, I feel like that a lot of times it's a constant education and I am supposed to be a poster child of what that looks like. And, even still running into barriers of applications not being accessible, any number of other pieces not be inaccessible. Even in this age of 508 and ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act, we just celebrated 30 years – and I know, Johnathan, you and I agree, that that really is the floor, not the ceiling, or way beyond, and so just thinking about all of those things and the barriers and still do exist. And then we're not even at the point of preconceived notions that are often completely misunderstood. Rua, that example that you gave, once again so tangible of, "maybe I'm not looking at you because I need to not look at you to hear you – to interpret that." Very, very important. And I think there's a whole lot here that a lot of folks could benefit from. So thank you all. We're going to move on to our next question. And this is, how have workplaces changed with respect to neurodiversity, and what still needs to be addressed? And I think that many of us can have a long list of what needs to be addressed. And so Johnathan, I'd love to turn it to you.

JF: Oh, sure. So in my view, they generally haven't, right? So for example, open floor plans and co-working spaces are not inclusive for neurodivergent people. So for example, for me, the amount of distractions in an open floor plan where

co-working space can lead to particular kinds of sensory overload or an inability to remain focused on a single task. And so when these issues intersect with race, it reinforces some implicit assumptions that people of color, and specifically, neurodiverse people of color do not belong in these spaces or do not have the capacity to perform at the standards say, required of these spaces. And so when these issues are recognized, they're only limitedly recognized through, through the lens of whiteness and through the cultural and social norms of whiteness, which places neurodiverse people of color at an even bigger disadvantage. And so finally, there's also, as Rua mentioned earlier, the perception of some forms of neurodiversity as better suited for some kinds of tasks and not others, which results in the construction of a particular image of the neurodiverse Savant who was recruited on the basis of assumptions about their neurodiversity, and not the actuality of their neurodiversity or how that intersects with their understandings of the work duties to be performed.

CP: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Yes, I absolutely appreciate you bringing up the very important points that you touched on there, race and also thinking even about built environment. Rua, talk to us.

RW: Johnathan talked about a lot of important things related to these trends and workplaces for open floor plans and so-called flexible hours, but then they're actually not flexible because there are no rules about them. And so it gets used against you in the end, there's like a reason like "oh, you weren't here when we wanted you to be

here." You know, those kinds of games get played a lot, especially in startup culture. But one of the most toxic trends in workplaces related to neurodiversity is this idea that neurodivergent people are, as Johnathan mentioned, suited well, to just specific kinds of tasks. And so they will actively recruit people into these very limited positions. And so it's really amounting to the new sheltered workshop where autistic people are recruited based on these stereotypes about Autism and put in work that prioritizes these menial, repetitive tasks where there is no opportunity for career advancement. And I see this a lot coming out of Silicon Valley and other tech companies on the West Coast and big companies that are like "we're doing a neurodiversity hiring initiative" and it's really just this very weird, extractive, exploitative plan about like "we're going to take these people that we basically view as robots and use them as cheaper [inaudible]." That's so gross. And so I would like to see more people pushing back against that assertion and start understanding people as complex. And we're not all gonna count the toothpicks for you when you drop them on the ground. Okay. And that's a joke about Rain Man. And if you don't get it, then I think that's probably better for you in the end.

CP: Well said. Well said, Thank you very much, Rua. Caroline, what do you want to add?

CC: I can't say whether workplaces have changed because I've changed geographic regions and in some places I knew I was on the spectrum and other places of works I didn't know or I didn't disclose. And as far as my suggestions about what needs to be

addressed, I'll get that in the next question.

CP: Okay. Thank you. Caroline. Sam, what have you got?

SF: Carolyn, Likewise, I have no good way of knowing admittedly or of figuring out the degree to which workplaces have changed to accommodate neurodiversity. I do read or hear every once in a while about the occasional corporation or company that has decided to embrace neurodiversity by introducing neurodiverse hiring initiatives. But I have no way of really knowing how effective these workplaces' accommodations are, because I am admittedly removed from those hiring processes and from those workplaces just by virtue of the fact that where I work, I've worked for 25 years. It was really my good fortune to have been hired there and to have succeeded there over all these years without the need for special accommodations. I'm extraordinarily fortunate in that regard. I acknowledge that many people are not as fortunate as I have been. But it's a tough read. One article that I published for The Hill about a year ago focused on Dell Technologies' Autism hiring program. And from what I read and from what I researched, the neurodiverse employees and their managers all seemed very happy. They felt empowered in ways that they hadn't been prior to being hired. Managers had said that they had learned a great deal. Having these types of neurodiverse employees who they have the joy of managing. And that's one thing that sticks out to me as I was doing the research for that article. On that, I'll admit I really don't have that much to add.

CP: Okay. Thank you very much. Sam. I appreciate that. A couple of things when I'm looking at this question through the lens of, once again, learning disabilities, specific learning disabilities, I am very aware of the power of assistive technology. Even just navigating this webinar tonight, I'm very thankful that I have a screen reader that is reading the chat for me. That also that we have the captioning, very appreciative also of being able to have the ASL interpreters. So there's a lot of, I think, progress. But Johnathan and Rua, you're exactly right about the open floor plans and how that has not been very good for a lot of folks within our community. I know in order to write emails, I use my voice and that does not go over great in an open floor plan. And listening to emails, it can be very fatiguing having a headset on all day. So, while there are some true advances when it comes to technology, I think we still have a ways to go that some of these things are not just exactly something that people would see as accommodations that make a lot of sense. The fact that we're still having to fight for our rights in a lot of ways. So, I was also thinking and we'd like to, Johnathan, circle back and talk in a few minutes maybe in the next section around race, because I know that we have a ways to go in that space. So we'll talk in more detail and I appreciate what you have shared earlier around this. So I'm going to move on to the next question just in the interest of time, but know that definitely want to come back. So what steps – and this is a very important question – what steps can educators and employers take to create a more inclusive and accessible and supportive environment for employees? For this one, we'll start off with

Sam. So Sam, what are your thoughts?

SF: Carolyn, I think it's critical that in the workplace culture, that a culture be cultivated in which it is safe and ideally encouraged for a neurodiverse employee to reveal his or her diagnosis or diagnoses, so as to educate her colleagues as to how she can best contribute and to explain the accommodations upon which she would depend on in order to be able to be successful. With education along those lines of educating your colleagues and your management, can come that kind of understanding. And ideally over a time, a transformation of the workplace culture along those lines. People can be taught, ideally, you'd hope, to embrace diversity in all of its varieties, acknowledge the value that it brings to the workplace. And not just with respect to neurology, but with respect to all the other ways in which humanity shows its inherent diversity. With respect to gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity. Right on down the line of all those categories, and again, acknowledge the value that diversity in all those formed can bring to the workplace, without which, arguably, the workplace isn't reaching its full potential.

CP: Okay. Thank you, Sam. Caroline, you promised that you had more to expand upon in this question, so I'm going to turn it to you.

CC: Absolutely. And I might get a little bit in the weeds. Maybe, well first, reduce the procedural hurdles to getting our workplace accommodations. So for example, I had to redo or change my workplace accommodation for sound sensitivity. And I had the

documentation, but because the group at my employer changed their form, they made me resubmit my documentation. And wait you change your form, so I have to go back in and do this again? Yes, you do. And in the interim, my physician had changed. So it just didn't make sense. Also, sometimes the diagnostic criteria vary. So according to some scales, I wouldn't show up as Autistic because I'm just too darn functional and friendly. So that could potentially be a problem. As far as coworkers, actively question your biases regarding neurodiverse, like, stereotypes. So when you're for example, if you're interacting with me, question, "am I treating Caroline this way because I know she's on the Autism spectrum and this is what I know about the Autism spectrum or am I treating Caroline this way because of my direct personal experience having worked with her before?" So kinda question, how you come to situations and think about neurodiversity. And I would, like, maybe don't place too much emphasis on first impressions, because when I'm extra nervous and I first meet somebody, I, like other people, but I'll drop things or maybe that'll show up a little bit worse. So I think it might take a little longer to get to know me or another neurodiverse person.

CP: Thank you. Yes. So we can definitely hang in the weeds with you, we definitely hear you. All right. Rua, talk with us.

RW: So I would like to bring up a few things first. A lot of times we'll say "Autistic" and this is a neurodiversity panel. And so neurodiversity is much broader than Autism. But sometimes some of the more concrete experiences or even data that we have are

related to Autism, right? And so for example, I have a statistic that is related to Autistic people, but that doesn't mean that this panel is not about neurodiversity, more broadly construed. But, 86% of Autistic people, regardless of education level, are underemployed, right? And so I say that because I want to make it very clear that there is nothing that Autistic people writ large can do to improve that situation. That is all on society and in the workplace. Like that's on y'all. It's your turn. Okay? And so I want to talk a little bit about whether one of these things that we see a lot in the disability community is something that Christiania Obey Sumner calls hostile accommodations. And this is when someone asks for adjustments that make it easier for them to do their work based on some aspect of their disability, and the organization makes getting this accommodation so stressful, that it almost becomes easier to do without it. So just because somebody gives up, it doesn't mean that they didn't actually need that accommodation. And so the step that I really want to talk about here is that organizations need to start believing disabled people when they ask for their access needs. And giving these accommodations without arguments, suspicion, doubt, or scrutiny, but certainly not hostility. They need to stop relying on the ADA to decide what they have to do and what they don't. The ADA is the bare minimum, and for disabilities, and for some kinds of disabilities the ADA isn't even the bare minimum. Like Judy Heumann said, "I'm tired of being excited about an accessible bathroom. If I have to be grateful for a toilet, how am I ever going to be equal?" So as a collection of disabled people we're very used to

getting grateful for crumbs. So sometimes you'll think you're doing a great job because we're so grateful. That doesn't mean that you're actually doing a great job.

CP: Thank you. Rua, and, you know, I was talking to Judy not terribly long ago, specifically actually about this subject and you're right on, your right on, and I definitely hear you. Johnathan, what do you want to add to the conversation?

JF: So, Rua already mentioned hostile accommodations, but if we think about hostile accommodations through the lens of race, I mean, even the very process of diagnosis is beset with particular kinds of hostilities. What might be recognized as standard diagnostic criteria in, say a white person with ADHD is recognized as oppositional behavior in a person of color with ADHD. And to this end, I want to echo what Rua said. It's not simply enough to comply with the ADA. The ADA is a floor and not a ceiling. You have to do more than that, and one of the things that you can do better is trust neurodiverse people when they express a need for accommodations. And specifically, if we're going to talk about within education, we might start by re-framing our understanding of what it means to provide reasonable accommodations, by reconsidering what is and is not reasonable in light of broader ways of being in the world. So, insofar as I have any advice to give educators, it's one, trust neurodiverse people when we ask for accommodations. And trust that we understand our own experience of neurodiversity. And also, at least for educators, one of the things that we need to do is recognize

that an accommodation is not an imposition on the organization of our classroom. It is a necessary adaptation of a structure that was not designed for the student in question. And if we bear that in mind, I think we can take broader steps towards actually granting student accommodations rather than fighting them.

CP: Thank you, Johnathan. I think one of the important pieces, and I think you stated it well, and Rua too, is that there is this very important connection between what's happening in the classroom and then how that transitions into the workplace and how all of that is connected. And so, the conversation is far from over when it comes to, what does inclusion really look like, and accessibility look like, and supportive environments look like when it comes to folks with disabilities, us with disabilities, but also definitely when it comes to neurodiversity. No doubt that is true. I'm wondering, a little bit more, and I appreciate all the great questions we're seeing, quite a few coming through and so please keep those flowing. And we definitely will be addressing as many of those as we can so thanks for the interaction. Johnathan, we had talked about, you had mentioned, And this flows with this question in particular, diagnosis and that when it comes to, that there's privilege even in diagnosis, I knew that was definitely true. When I was being diagnosed with learning disabilities, they were like, "Oh! Only boys have dyslexia" and I was like, "What?" You know? So, even having to fight that battle against science and about DSM fours and fives and threes and twos, all of that. So do you mind talking for just a moment Johnathan about

that? And then what we're gonna do is we will wrap up right after you speak and we'll move into our intermission. So Johnathan?

JF: Oh, sure, right? So one of the things that we have to understand is that things like the DSM and the diagnostic criteria we use to say, evaluate neurodiversity, are not neutral, right? They do not proceed from an objective, neutral standpoint. They proceed from an in cultured, socially organized standpoint. And if I may be so bold, they proceed from a standpoint of neurodiversity as it presents in white individuals. And so when we talk about diagnosis, to your point, right? When we talked about diagnosis with regards to my experience when we think about, say, ADHD and the ways in which diagnosis criteria for ADHD and in folks who identify as women lags behind the diagnostic criteria for folks identified as men, more specifically, folks identified as white men, right? We see the very large difficulties in say, diagnosing across different identities, right? So for example, my diagnosis was a decades-long process. And I was very lucky to have particular kinds of support structures. But other folks of color I know, they did not actually receive diagnosis until later on in life because what would have been the manifestations of their ADHD were treated as oppositional behaviors, right? So we need to recognize that our diagnostic criteria are culturally situated, as are the diagnosticians, and if we are not aware of our cultural situations in these processes, we fail to provide the necessary support for the people who need it.

CP: Well said, well said. Rua, I saw you shaking

your head a lot. Do you want to jump in on this?

RW: No, I think Johnathan covered it.

CP: I think he did too, I think he did too. All right. Very good. So we have talked about quite a few things. And, as I said, I'm seeing some really good questions. So just to get our panelists thinking, when we get back, definitely would like to talk about the intersectionality of race a little bit more. And what that looks like within our neurodiversity space. Also, what are accommodations? Lots and lots of questions coming through around accommodations and having to beg, if you will, as one of the terms that I'm seeing here popping up and I know that's incredibly frustrating, but would definitely want to talk about that. Also, some really good questions when we're talking about LGBTQIA in some of the intersectionality there. And what would be one of those, like, one thing that you would want to make sure that folks know who are listening. What is that one thing or two things that you would want to make sure that folks know when it comes to employment. And not just STEM. Y'all are make an excellent points about that. It's not just STEM fields, but what does that really look like? So we have a lot to cover for sure. Anything that anyone would like to add at this point, we have about two minutes before we're going to go ahead and take our break and do our intermission.... Alright. So we can go ahead and I think take our break. And then what we'll do is we will be back in about ten minutes. We do want very much for everybody to keep sending us these questions. They're excellent. And so we also want to make sure that folks are aware

that you can sign up and we'll be sharing that information in just a moment for the book giveaway. And all you'd have to do is fill out the form that is actually going to be shared in the chat. And there is a QR code that's actually going to be on the slide. I love those QR codes as a person with dyslexia. It sure does make my life easier just to have my camera and it just showed up on there which is great. So I do appreciate the way that technology continues to evolve to help a lot of us. And so what we'll do is we'll go ahead and get back together in ten minutes. So at 7:10, we will be back together. So thank you all and enjoy your little break. And we look forward to seeing all of you in just a bit. Thank you. Great job panelists really appreciate it.

[pause with guitar music playing for intermission]

CP: Yeah. Hi. Welcome back, everyone. Welcome back. I'm so glad that you all are back on with us and we're gonna get started.

Thank you very much. Thank you, Mark. Yes. And so yes. Great questions have been coming through and I've been receiving texts and emails saying how much folks are learning. And I appreciate all of that, all the feedback. And definitely once again, really appreciate Virginia Tech having this event to celebrate neurodiversity in STEM fields. Definitely a great conversation and stirring a lot of dialogue. So we're going to start off just like I had promised with several questions that have been coming through. And I do hope that all of you

continue to put questions in and we will respond to as many as we can. This is a dialogue that can continue after also, I'm happy to answer questions after the fact too, just know that. So we're going to start off, Dr. Flowers, is that cool? If I send my first one over to you, and it's a really good one that's basically focused – a couple of them actually, are focused – on what does that look like when it comes to that intersectionality that you've been talking about. And there was one in particular, I'm just going to read it out loud. And it says, "This is my first attendance and introduction to neurodiversity. I've been doing DEI" (I assume that's diversity, equity and inclusion) "work for over 30 years. Dr. Flowers mentioned that the intersection of race and other identities with neurodiversity. Are there steps or a movement that places neurodiversity within the larger scope of diversity or individuals that do so? Do you mind addressing that one?"

JF: Yeah. So honestly, there a lot of folks in the broader field of disability studies that do this kind of work to bring together the intersection of race and disability. One scholar who's been pretty central to my own work is Sami Shalk, who writes about disability at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. But one of the things that I do want to point out is that there has been a long history of African Americans and Black folks who have disabilities but aren't noted as neurodiverse or noted as disabled. Right? So we think about Audrey Lord, for example, which is one that I keep coming back to because in my scholarship and my reading, I cannot read Audrey Lord except through the lens of her experience of disability, her

experience with cancer. Right? And so, to answer your question, yes. There are folks who are doing this work. But I also want to re-frame it by saying that, in order to do these works, in order to answer your question, there are histories that have been intentionally hidden that need to be uncovered so that we can further have the conversation about the intersection of race and disability as not a new thing, but something that has been intentionally pushed to the side.

CP: Thank you so much. Really appreciate that. And we have a couple other questions and then we do have someone who would like to ask their question as an accommodation and that's A-OK. So I'm going to ask two more questions and then we'll come right to the question that will be the voiced. So one of the questions that's here, I think this is, I think it's interesting. This says, "no one should ever have to share or disclose their disability. I'm having trouble seeing why one should do that if they do not want to. While I see that it could, there could be advantages, there are many potential complexities in these scenarios. I hope that you can clarify that point." And who would like to address that? Rua? I see your hand up, would love to turn this one to you.

RW: Yes. So this is very important because disclosure should not be forced, and there are some protections even in, like, the formalities and bureaucracies of the ADA around this, in that you're not always expected to prove or provide medical evidence of a specific kind of diagnosis for an accommodation you can get like, you don't have to say, you don't have to prove that you have

spina bifida, right? But you do have to sometimes you will be asked to prove that you have some kind of hearing impairment. And it's just like general, it's fluid and messy, but I don't think that anybody should have to disclose the specifics, especially if they're not trying to get an accommodation, because we're not here to be object lessons for other people. That's not what disclosure is about. Disclosure can be a form of activism in the sense that you are exposing yourself as a representation of the diversity of human experience and sort of getting people to understand that there are differences out there that people often will hide. But the forcing somebody to disclose is just really inappropriate. And something that I do, is I do something I call ambiguous disclosure sometimes. So if I'm meeting with somebody – and this is a little bit less common now because everybody's been doing Zoom or whatever – but I will formerly when I was told that I had to do a phone call, I was can we do a video call? I need to be able to type. Sometimes I have a neurological condition and I cannot always articulate with speech. I didn't say anything about what that condition is, but it gives me a little taste will this person except my explanation and give me this accommodation, or are they going to be mean about it? And if they're going to be mean about it, maybe I don't want to deal with them.

CP: Thank you, Rua. Really appreciate that. Johnathan, one of my favorite authors, Audrey Lord, "Our Silence will not protect us." So I'm going to turn it to you, my friend.

JF: So I agree with with Rua, no one should ever be

forced to disclose their disability. Indeed, requirements that one disclose one's disability when it's not necessary to receive an accommodation are forms of what Sara Ahmed call "stopping," right. It's a demand that you explain your presence in a space that was not intended for you. So nobody should ever have to disclose their disability, nor should anyone have to justify their request for an accommodation beyond what is strictly required by the institutional structures. Now that said, like Rua, I also engage in, in some kinds of subtle forms of disclosure. Since my primary profession is teaching, in my syllabi, I build in language about accommodations that typically seeds the universities, own policies, and I tend to make clear to my students that I have some kind of neurodiversity, which I think creates a space for students to be more open with requesting accommodations from me. And requesting new ways of organizing the class to better enable them to participate in the learning environment, right? And so when I, I present that example as a strategic form of disclosure to help create a better space, because after all, who's going to challenge, you know, a professor with a disability in the classroom... well, okay, that's, that's kind of a bad example because people do it. But insofar as I engage in that strategic disclosure, it, I think it eases the process of, of students reaching out to me and being more comfortable requesting necessary accommodations.

CP: Thank you so much. Caroline, what do you want to add?

CC: I think I'm going to add on to their disclosure

forms with more situational disclosure. For example, I tell people, I forget meetings. No matter how many reminders pop up, if I look away, please just come get me. It's not that I'm blowing off your meeting. I don't necessarily explain what the neurological reasons are. I don't even know what they are. I just forget more meetings than other people. And I guess in class I have had experiences where I "can I please have the teaching notes?" Can you please, can we please not do this completely auditorially? And often, folks don't comply and I don't feel like just justifying, it just doesn't seem worth it, I can get what I want verbally. And it's really frustrating. And as far as disclosure, of course we shouldn't force it. But, you know, there's, there's been situations where you just disclose and it can be used against you. You can be pigeonholed, marginalized. And I've had a very negative experience in this regard. So I'm very shy about disclosing. And this is my first public event where I am identifying as on the Autism spectrum. So the experiences vary.

CP: I totally agree. Well said in Caroline, thank you. I know I told you that before that I'm thrilled that this is your first event. And I know what it's like to actually come out of the closet with your disability. I get it. And so thankful that you did that, I've learned a lot from you and excited about that. I was just going to answer real quick. From my own perspective that disclosure, absolutely everything that the panelists have said. It is not easy. There are times when you want to do that. There are times that I test, I like the way you said that, Rua where you're just testing some of that when it comes to disclosure, but I will say

disability is undeniably linked to rights. And so that's where the law is behind us, and that's part of why I am very proud to say I have a disability. I don't say I have a learning difference. A lot of people say that, I don't say that, so I'm going to move to the next question and then we'll go to the auditory question. So in just one moment. I was thinking about this during the break. Here we go. "I have watched my 11-year-old, amazingly creative, STEM, loving child with ADHD lose all of his joy in middle school this year." That breaks my heart and thank you for sharing that with us. "I feel like these issues of exclusion from STEM start so young. He is trying so hard. And now I see that it isn't going to be any easier for him as he grows up. What advice would you give to neurodiverse kids for getting through school and not just giving up on education and their dreams." And I love seeing the hands shoot up and I have my own thoughts about this, but I'm going to turn it to you, Dr. Williams.

RW: Yes. So this is actually something that I have researched. And so that's why I raised my hand so quickly. But I want you to know that this is a very common experience for disabled and neurodivergent and also racialized children. That by the time you get to middle school, the social exclusion has gotten so intense that it's sort of killed your joy. Usually we have found that varies. Sometimes just one bad teacher that they have first or second grade and the tag along the impacts of that catch up with them in middle school or something of that nature. I just wanted you to know that this is something that the community has experienced and that we're all here for you about. And so,

something that would be helpful. I mean, if your child is aware of their differences, it's going to be really good to form a positive sense of disability identity in childhood. A lot of times we shelter our children from their diagnoses and we shelter our children from other people like them, and that's not what we want to do. I don't know what you're doing. I'm just bringing it up for the rest of the audience. But also know that the way that we do education is inherently flawed for all children in this nation. And so it's not remarkable that your child feels sort of shut out of STEM, even though they have this inherent interest in it. And to seek out opportunities for learning that are outside of the school system. Because public school's garbage and private school is also garbage and schools are only prisons...hahaha, anyway. Next person.

CP: Thank you. All right. Johnathan, you're next and then Caroline.

JF: So I can generally speak to this because that was kind of my experience. Fun fact, I wanted to do engineering and varying things related to space as a child and a teenager. But as would as what happens with many racialized and other STEM students with disabilities, you're convinced not to do it because you are not apparently capable of doing it. Here I am with a PhD in philosophy, go figure, anyway. So my advice would be parallel to Rua's. Find spaces that you can encourage your child's interest and you can encourage them to explore and develop and run with that interest beyond the educational system, because the educational system will only accommodate them, it

will not provide, or it will rarely provide the spaces to nurture and cultivate their interest, right? And insofar as I make that distinction, one of the things that I would also do is simply pay attention to the ways that they understand, explore, and engage with their particular interest in STEM. Because given their neurodiversity, it will not parallel the ways that, say neurotypical folks will explore their own interests. And if you can cultivate that, if you can, as Rua said, establish a sense of strength within their own identity, get them to recognize that there is nothing wrong with them, they simply approach problems differently, and that's a good thing. Then you can help – and I really hate using this word – you can help them develop a kind of resilience to the kinds of nonsense that the broader society will throw at them. But the most important thing you can do is encourage them and find them avenues to explore their interests without the crushing boundaries that emerge from an ableist society.

CP: Thank you so much, Dr. Flowers. And I'm going to move it on over to Caroline and then Sam will have something to add. So Caroline.

CC: I had a different experience and I think it relates a little bit to intersectionality. So as a young girl growing up in school, I wasn't diagnosed, I was just weird and ostracized and I thought gender norms were dumb. I never got it. So everyone thought said I was gay. Like I don't even guess what are you talking about? I'm going to go do what I want to do. But when we went to the junior high, all of the girls started getting less

smart in math and science. And I looked around in my, in my classrooms and the really high achievers in younger grades, my fellow girls didn't seem as interested anymore. So the fact that I wasn't in touch with whatever force drove them to, to maybe less want you to succeed didn't hit me. So that was interesting and positive. As far as neurodiverse people weren't encouraged in STEM, I think it should go part and parcel with encouraging women and people of color and folks in general to continue in STEM careers. And I think a good way to do that is more individual activities and individualized plans, like Johnathan said. And personally, group work with peers who are very mean to you and in school grades it can be problematic. And paying attention to what what might be going on when the teacher is not in the classroom.

CP: Thank you, Caroline, really appreciate that, and I know that that wisdom comes from a place of pain. And so thank you very much for sharing. Sam talked to us, What have you got?

SF: So I struggled being young, particularly as a young musician, attending a small private school that had very limited musical offerings. It was a great source of frustration for me, that along the lines of what Johnathan and I believe Rua said as well, I think reinforces the point that if you feel really passionate about something and if your needs in that area aren't getting met by the school that you're attending, don't let anybody or anything stop you from pursuing it outside of school. Which is inevitably what I had to do, really for my own sanity. Taking private lessons outside of school, going to summer camps that had music programs. Good

ones. Don't let anybody or anything get in the way of your passion. In terms of the self-esteem building process, it's of critical importance that if you have a passion or a talent, particularly something that you're proficient at, that cultivating those can work wonders in terms of positioning you for future strong self-esteem. And to make it happen in any way that you can. Regrettably, not everybody has the opportunities that others do, and that really pains me deep inside to have to admit that as being the reality. But do all you can to cultivate your passion and your talent.

CP: Thank you Sam. I'll just add real quickly as we, actually open up the mic for our person who is going to be speaking. Just thank you very much for sharing about your child. In middle school, middle school's tough and school can be tough for those of us who are definitely in that tribe, if you will, of neurodiversity, it does get better. I have one of the best jobs you can imagine. I see it as a dream job. I have no problem getting up and going to work because I work with amazing folks at the Center for Inclusive Design and Innovation. And where my disability is not just tolerated, but definitely embraced and celebrated along with everybody else's diversity. So it does get better. I'm happy to support in any way I can. And I would also encourage, just like Rua was saying, getting connected within the disability community. We have an incredible independent living community. We have an amazing learning disability community, ADHD community. And I think that that can be incredibly helpful. I know for my children that's been incredibly important for them to get connected and

know other folks. So that just like I feel instantly bonded to the folks on the panel because I know we understand each other on some very important levels, so all right. Let's turn to the next question.

April Marone: I can't remember what it was because I am tired. Yeah.

CP: Go ahead. April.

AM: Okay. I'm sorry.

RW: Don't apologize, you're fine.

CP: Yep. No worries.

AM: The thing something about my college, they're not working with my hearing loss or not. I was born hearing so I still have my speech, but I was asking about captions. And the better captions, they have the worst captions. They but at least they're trying on that. But with the Autism, when I communicate via text to my instructor, I've asked him time and again to try to put it more literally because I am severely literal. And he says he can't understand me and ask other students to help me instead or asked me to ask them instead, the students are not there to do that. He is. And the tutors are the tutors try their best. And I don't have an A average anymore. In every class I have an A average, except his, now I have a B. Yes.

That's not right because I struggled to even keep that [inaudible] Yeah. My question is how to get them to do that.

CP: Okay. So, thank you very much, April. Thank you. Appreciate you sharing, panelists who would like to go first, and I can also address this too. Rua, looks like you're on.

RW: Yeah. Thank you for asking this question and I'm sorry that you're struggling with this. For the captioning, your school's Disability Resource Center or disability student services, whatever they're called, they are supposed to provide you captioning and not just auto captioning, real live cart. And if they're not doing that, they're fighting you on that. They're trying to get away with not paying for a service that you are entitled to. So all I can really offer you at this moment in time is conviction that you are entitled to real cart and not just auto captions. But that doesn't help much when that conviction doesn't convince the DRC. Right. But all I can do is to affirm you deserve real captions. As far as sort of the Autistic to alistic, Nero-type, cross translation issues with your instructor, this is a challenge and it's sometimes unique based on what the subject matter is in the class. And it can be really demoralizing for the instructor to tell you to ask your classmates. Because if you don't have a good relationship with some of your classmates, then that just like turns you into to like a sideshow. So one of my recommendations is though, to rely on friendships and it doesn't have to be a friend in that class, but somebody that you trust can help you do this translation task. And sometimes it's another Autistic person. There are some people we call them "allistic whispers." And so that's my most practical advice that I have for you, but as

far as getting him to understand his responsibility to you, that can vary based on sort of the subject matter of the class. But I want to also affirm for you that you are right to want your instructor to help you understand the course material. That is something that you're allowed to want.

CP: Thank you, Rua. And Johnathan, your hands up.

JF: Yeah. I want to reaffirm what Rua said. You are entitled to actual cart captioning. That's not being provided for you, you need to ... and it's really bad to say that you need to keep requesting it because that is something you're entitled to. As for your professor not communicating with you. Again, I want to echo what Rua said, if you know someone, if you have a friend, a person you are comfortable with who is willing to be that bridge between you and the professor, make use of them. And it really again depends on the subject matter. But one of the things I would like to say in response to this concern is this isn't on you. This is a failure of the professor's responsibility to provide a safe and open educational space for your learning. This is a failure of them to take responsibility to enable the best educational experience that you can. So this is not on you, this is not something that you should take on yourself as a personal failing. This is and that's realistically, that's the one thing that I wanted to make clear for you. This is not on you.

CP: Thank you. I appreciate that, Johnathan. Too, I can also jump in, April, and I put my email address, but we provide cart and all of those things. Happy to get you connected. The law is on

your side and just like you're hearing from Rua and Johnathan. We're going to move back to the Q & A. We've asked about three of the questions in the Q & A, and so we're going to keep working our way down because these are such great questions. Here's another one. "This panel is so different from my classes, interpreters, captioning, and its description of panelists, et cetera. I was wondering if the panelists think that it is reasonable to expect schools and employers to provide this without request from students/employees. Getting the accommodations requires disclosure as well as several hoops." I definitely hear you. Who wants to – Johnathan's hands up. Go Johnathan.

JF: So one of the things that I study in philosophy is the institutional structures. And so it's not... So, yes, it is reasonable to expect an institutional structure to provide space for all of the all of its members, especially if it claims to do so. That said, given the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that it's super easy to provide a whole bunch of the accommodations that many folks with disabilities have requested, there is no reason why we should not expect institutions to continue to provide these things going forward. Now, not to be a cynic here. Whether or not they will do it is another question, right? So to your, question, yes, I think it is reasonable to expect institutions to provide or at least make available these kinds of services. And yeah.

CP: Thank you, Johnathan. And once again, kudos to Virginia Tech and the team in the IT department for pulling this together and really going above and

beyond, it's much more than compliance. Rua, what have you got for us?

RW: So like Johnathan, I agree that it's not unreasonable to expect. For one thing, we know that many of the accommodations that people struggle to request are things that help everyone. Captions, in particular, are known to help everyone sort of keep focus and, sort of deal with some of the ambiguity that happens in verbal communication better. So we know that we have studies coming out of Rochester Institute of Technology that has a deaf school that show the captions help everyone. But not just any captions. Real captions and real captions are done by real live human beings and not an artificial intelligence that is based on machine learning that gets a lot of words wrong. At the same time, real captions are real human beings and they deserve to be paid for their labor. And it is actually kind of exhausting. We have two ASL interpreters here because they had to take shifts because it's exhausting to sign and listen and interpret for like an hour at a time. It's exhausting. Now that doesn't mean that the institutions don't have the money for it. But we also have to, we have to like want our revolution while also respecting the other people that are involved in getting us that revolution. And so I just, I want people to remember that captionists are humans and we almost never see them. Unlike we do get to see the ASL interpreters. But I just want everyone to remember that they're real humans and also as real humans, they sometimes don't hear what we're saying either. And so they also sometimes get the captions wrong or they don't know the jargon. And so we all have to work together to be more accessible to the

captionist so that we can all benefit from the services.

CP: Thank you, Rua. Yes. Thank you, Johnathan. Yes. We have a lot of this. It's once again, by modeling it. Just like I said, kudos to Virginia Tech and the IT team here and the folks pulling this together, once again, going above and beyond. And it's gotta be with intention and happy to describe and discuss any of that with you. And thanks so much for the question. Next question. "Autistic people are not a monolith and being on the spectrum doesn't inherently give you an understanding of our societal, historical, and cultural context. How can organizers of events, trying to center neurodiversity voices make sure that they are finding neurodivergent and diversity people who have a refined understanding of neurodiversity. For example, not using outdated concepts developed by eugenicists and that word's hard for me though, my screen reader says it a little differently. So I apologize. Rua, your hands up, please.

RW: Hi. Yes. So we often talk about the validity of lived experience. And when you're talking about people who experience oppression and discrimination, we want to default to that person about their own experience. But that does not mean that all neurodivergent people have done the work necessary to be advisors outside of their own lives. So, for example, people on this panel have done more historical research than, you know, somebody's 17-year-old cousin or something. And that doesn't mean that it's not to establish some sort of hierarchy of credibility, but there is such a thing as an Autism expert or whatever. That is,

it's not just about self-advocacy and advocating for your own individual experience. It's about making informed, conscientious discussions that serve the broader community. And that's where we talk about intersectionality being very important. And understanding the history of the disability rights movement and understanding the history of the neurodiversity paradigm and movement is essential to making informed, claimed and supporting organizations that are looking for advisement on neurodiverse and neurodivergent issues. But it is very difficult, I think, from the institutional perspective to tell the difference between somebody who is making their advisement on issues all about their own experiences and somebody who is basing their advisement on a broader historical analysis. And I think I don't really trust the institutions to recognize eugenicist science when they're built on eugenicist science, so I don't really know how to answer those question other than there are Autistic and neurodivergent people that have experience being consultants in this manner and look for experienced consultants and not just like, the one person that you know.

CP: Thank you, Dr. Williams. I appreciate it and thanks for also pronouncing and the word for me correctly, my screen reader to read it right, as you know. So thank you very much. All right. We've got another great oh, Caroline. Yes, please.

CC: Hi. I can speak to this and what I'm going to say is not necessarily going to align with what Rua said. But I might be the example of somebody who is not aware of the history and who speaks from my own personal experience. And I, in my experience, is

coming from a place of deep and respectful interdisciplinarity. So I include religious voices in my research, police voices. And there's just this huge disconnect between academe and practical and other applications. So I would like to not have a situation where voices who, for example, adhere to the same philosophical or theoretical position are privileged over other voices. And, in this panel, we're all very happy that we have a diverse range of backgrounds and approaches to disability in general, I would think. So, I think it's a little bit dangerous to try and restrict the voices unless you're going for a particular target and a particular message. But in a panel, for example, where you want to have a range of views. What we have here might be a little better.

CP: Thank you. Appreciate that, Caroline, and thank you, Rua. We will move to the next question. So does the panel think that labeling it just shifted on me. I apologize. "Does the panel think that labeling that we inevitably do to describe people helps or hinders inclusion?" Talk to me, What are your thoughts, Johnathan? Your hands up, please.

JF: So I'm going to get super philosophical here, right? So usually if we, if we put aside, say, diagnostic criteria, the label is used to designate a particular kind of experience and insofar as it's used to designate a particular kind of experience, we have to remember that labels typically designate a range of experience. So if I say something sounds loud or if I say a color is blue, I'm not being specific about the intensity of the noise or the specific kind of blue I am describing a range of experiences of loud and blue. I would say similar

kinds of things. Talk about, or similar kinds of things function when we talk about identities, right? When we say somebody is neurodivergent, we're describing a specific way of interacting, of transacting with the world that proceeds from the ways that we are organized as, as organisms, right? We're also talking about a mode of social understanding, right? In a social identity category that has material consequences for how people interact with the world. So I don't think it hinders inclusion. It only hinders inclusion when you start treating these labels, not as designations of experience, but as rigid boundaries that are used to say, exclude populations, right? And so insofar, and yes, there is that there are boundaries, but insofar as we take up the labels in a say, a disciplinary or authoritative or policing sense, that's where we get into, get into the problems. But simply recognizing and naming somebody's experience as neurodivergent is not a problem. In fact, if we fail to do so, we flatten out everybody's experiences and we fail to recognize the unique ways we transact with the world.

CP: Thank you and I can hang right there with you in that philosophical but very tangible example. Rua, what have you got for us?

RW: I like questions like this because they bring up an important topic that's often discussed in the disability community, but also in parent advocacy communities. And so what happens is there's a lot of "do we really need labels?" Like label jar is not people and we're all people and it's very much like, "I don't see color," but different. And so

the thing is, that disabled and neurodivergent people, especially children, are marked and labeled as different even if they're not given a clinical label. And so it's important not to confuse the label for the barrier to inclusion and to understand that, that barrier to inclusion exists within societal biases and stigmas. And the label itself is not responsible for it. So it's not the labeling that's the problem, it's the culture that has constructed the label in the first place. And to just sort of understand and sort of strategically recognize the utility that labels can have, but also their disproportionate access. But yeah, the labels are not the problem to inclusion.

CP: Yes. Thank you. Yes. We're moving right through these and I appreciate everybody doing that. So the next one: "Are folks who suffer, but folks with traumatic brain injury considered neurodiverse? How do you disclose/not disclose TBI neurodiversity without getting stigmatized? Thoughts on supervisors who openly/ or behind closed doors, mark TBI /neurodiverse people?" And I saw those hands go up. So Rua, and then we're going to go to Johnathan.

RW: TBI is absolutely condition of neurodivergence and I will fight anybody who says otherwise, the neurodiversity tent is intentionally very large and encapsulates all kinds of neurological differences and TBI is one of those. TBI is also, by definition a traumatic injury. And so it's very important to understand the differences between somebody who's like born... the differences in disability identity that might arrive from somebody who was born a certain way versus somebody who acquired a

disability through a traumatic event. And I also want to point out something like over 50 percent of homeless people have a TBI. And that's not just because homeless people are getting their heads kicked in by police, but that is also part of it. But also that people with TBI have a harder time maintaining employment because people are so awful to people with TBI. And so your question about disclosure at work and getting the accommodations that you need. This is where I get really practical. You have to work on strategy. And so maybe you're in a position where your strategy is, if you disclose your employer and they treat you like crap and you leave, or maybe your strategy is you can't afford to leave the job, so you find other ways to work through it. And this is where I recommend doing your damndest to find a community that supports you. Because your job is not going to support you because capitalism doesn't care. So I'm really sorry that you have dealing with workplace issues, but I wish you the best and please connect with disability advocacy organizations and other people with TBI.

CP: Thank you, Rua. Johnathan. And then to Sam.

JF: I would absolutely say that TBI is part of the broad umbrella of neurodiversity. Because again, as Rua said, you know, we should make a distinction between acquired neurodiversity and somebody who was, who was born neurodiverse. I think that's problematic in a variety of ways. But with regards to the second half of your question. Again, you need to be strategic about your disclosure. If there's a very practical reason to disclose, find the appropriate mechanism through which you can

disclose to get your accommodations, then don't talk to anyone else if it's not necessary. But on the other hand, that will be an intensely personal choice and dependent on the situation you find yourself in. As for supervisors who openly or behind closed doors mock TBI or neurodiverse people, report them. Engage whatever institutional mechanisms are available to address that kind of discrimination. Find an ally, a colleague, somebody who would be willing to stand up for you. This is something that I typically tell my students. Right? It doesn't matter if you're in my class or not. If you're having an accommodation issue, you can come talk to me and I will do my damndest to figure out how to make it work for you. Even if that involves going to talk to my colleagues. So again, this, this will be dependent on your situation. But enlisting an ally or engaging the mechanisms available for reporting discrimination are ways to do that.

CP: Thank you, Johnathan Sam, what have you got?

SF: Well, it was my privilege to meet two very remarkable people, Of all places, in a Wegmans supermarket in the, in the market cafe area, where I spent much of my time writing my book. One of the people was a woman who was running her own business, employing people to work for her. And the other one was a younger gentlemen with a traumatic brain injury, who she decided to hire really because that was the kind of person she was. She had a big heart. She saw in this individual a world of potential. The potential to transform somebody's life who up to that point had had a very, very difficult life stemming from the fact that he had a

TBI, including sadly, abuse from his parents. And she saw in him a world of potential, hired him, and the floodgates opened. And she had him doing just wonderful things, going off overseas to discover new adventures, new ways to really make the most out of life. And it was so remarkable to me that really it comes down to the employer. Who's the employer we're dealing with? How big of a heart does that employer have? Is that employer the type of person who values being able to make a difference in the lives of other people? Or is it an employer who, sadly, would be inclined to discriminate in the worst possible way? It underscores the importance of being aware of the personalities of the people with whom you associate. And that's either make you or break you.

CP: Good points. Thank you, Sam. We are almost at time. So I'm just gonna do a real quick give us one thought, closing thought. Across the board. Caroline, I saw you're not [inaudible] saved you for last. All right. Dr. Williams, with your beautiful, beautiful little one there. Do you mind just giving us a closing thought and then I'll turn to Johnathan, Sam, and then Caroline.

RW: I don't know if I have a closing by because I also have this very angry baby

CP: Well, yay for angry babies.

RW: So I guess my closing thought is about neurodivergence and neurotypicality and how they're both kind of fake. So the idea of a neurotypical person is based on a statistical aggregate like the bell curve. And the norm, and statistics is built

on eugenics and the norm does not exist. At the same time, there are people who experience disproportionate social exclusion based on their divergence from that fake norm, and there are people who act in service of the norm. And so when we talk about neurotypical people, we're kind of talking about a mythological person that doesn't exist, but there are actual people who make choices in service of neurotypicality. And those are the people that are making choices in service of neurodivergent oppression. And so that's something to think about,

CP: Definitely to think about. Thank you so much. Johnathan?

JF: So, to build off of what Rua said, the choices that people make in service of neurotypicality when compounded, become institutions that are organized around ableism and are not accessible. So insofar as neurodiverse individuals have to transact with these institutions to actually participate in a society, we encounter unnecessary barriers that are not our fault. And I say this to position the institutions and the structures that one defined neurotypicality and neurodivergence as predominantly at fault for the kinds of marginalization, the kinds of discrimination, the kinds of challenges that neurodiverse people face. So it's not on us. It's on the institutions, it's on the structures, that's on the choices that maintain those structures and, and perpetuate our exclusion from a broader society. So again, it's not on us, it's on a broken society.

CP: Thank you, Johnathan. Sam. One quick thought.

SF: Thank you, Carolyn. And thank you to all the panelists. This has been a wonderful event that I'll never forget. It pains me to know that in the society in which we live, that this is much, much easier said than done. But ultimately I can't find it in me to abandon the mantra that I've kind of adopted, which is to be who you are at all costs.

CP: Thank you, Sam.

SF: Because if you're not, the world is missing out on the real you.

CP: Thank you very much.

SF: Do it in spite of whatever challenges or adversity or prejudice that you may encounter. Regardless of that, embrace who you are, accept who you are, be who you are. And for all of those who signed up in the contest to receive a book, or should you decide? To purchase the book after the event. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for supporting my book. I am I can be reached at samfarmerauthor.com. There's a contact page there. Anything that you want to ask me comments about this event? About the book? What have you? Yeah. Feel free. samfarmerauthor.com Hear from you. If I do hear from you, I'll get back to you in short order.

CP: Thank you so much. Yes. Thank you. Caroline, what do you got?

CC: I know we're over and thank you to the attendees that are still with us. Johnathan and Rua

spoke about socially constructed barriers and institutional barriers for neurodiverse and other people. I'm going to talk about the individual approach from it. Don't be a barrier as an individual in your interpersonal relationships. And I would suggest people do that by questioning yourself and your own biases in how you interact with those around you. Is it based on what you think they are or how your direct experience with these folks. And to whatever extent you feel comfortable, engage in advocacy and policy, work to try and help others. But I think the, the minimum and it's a very helpful minimum is to as an individual and make sure you're not a barrier. And thank you all.

CP: Thank you very much. We're going to leave it there. Big thanks to all the panelists. Excellent job. Thank you so much to our, I'm hearing shout-outs actually seen shout-outs for the captionist. Thank you, Mark. Thank you, Desiree. Thank you so much to our captionist into our ASL interpreters. Mark, beautiful, Desiree Great job. Big Thank you to Virginia Tech. Thank you to the whole team that pulled this awesome event together. Well done. I've been in a lot of events like this and this one's by far one of my absolute favorites. And thank you very much Dr. Midkiff for supporting this. We appreciate your leadership, Scott. If you want to review this again, I want to send this out to some folks. It has been recorded. There are resources in the video absolutely will be posted and I'm sure one of our awesome support folks are going to post this for us in the chat, but it can be found in it.vt.edu/neurodiversity. With that, I wish you all well and thank you so much for your time and

attention. Go out and do great stuff in this world.
And please keep educating about neurodiversity and
let's keep celebrating. Take care everybody.