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SPEAKERS

Character 1, Character 2, Lis Malone, Steve Barclay, Anthony Gutierrez, Ryan Fleury, Rob Mineault

R Rob Mineault 00:06
Hey, and welcome to another episode of AT Banter.

S Steve Barclay 00:27
Banter, banter.

R Rob Mineault 00:29
Hey, this is the podcast where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Hey, my name is Rob Mineault, and joining me today, another full house, Mr. Ryan Fleury.

R Ryan Fleury 00:48
Hello.

R Rob Mineault 00:50
Mr. Steve Barclay.

S Steve Barclay 00:53
That would be me again.

R Rob Mineault 00:54
And Miss Lis Malone.

L Lis Malone 00:57
I forgot to bring the Oreos to this party.

R Rob Mineault 01:02
Oh, well, now you probably you sent them all to Canada.

S Steve Barclay 01:06
This is true. Lots of crumbs on the keyboard.

R Rob Mineault 01:10
Yeah, I still I still have half a box of mint oreos. But they still they keep forever.

R Ryan Fleury 01:20
Ewww

L Lis Malone 01:20
They're all preservatives.

R Rob Mineault 01:21
They're all in sealed Tupperware containers. They're fine.

R Ryan Fleury 01:31
Give me a break.

R Rob Mineault 01:32
I thought you were a doomsday prepper? You should know that you can keep Oreos forever in a sealed container. Okay, before we waste any more time should we go right into a hockey update? Because I'm sure that you guys are biting at the bit to share how all these hockey

playoffs are going. So I have given you guys some space, what's going on? What's, how are we doing, Steve? How's the Canucks doing?

S

Steve Barclay 02:03

Well, tonight we play Game Four against Edmonton. So far. We have lost one and one two. So if we can win the game tonight, we will take a stranglehold on the series. It's interesting to see how the media is playing it now because before the things started, it was like oh yeah, Edmonton is just going to wipe the ice with these guys. And now they're saying things like, well, the Vancouver Canucks are playing a beat-up Edmonton team. So they're already already started making the excuses. I didn't see what happened with the end of the Carolina game. Lis, what happened with your team?

L

Lis Malone 02:44

Oh, well, somehow the Carolina Canes pulled another one out. But the Canes are not my team. They're not my team. The Devils are my team. And they're not in the playoffs. So if Lis gets her way, the Rangers will be the Canes. And then Florida will be Boston. And then Florida will kick the Kings' ass and then go on to go up against whoever wins the Western Conference.

R

Rob Mineault 03:17

Man. So you heard it here first. Lis is playing 4D Chess. She's read The Art of War, like she's prepared. She knows exactly what needs to happen.

L

Lis Malone 03:34

You need to put a little thought into it. Yeah. the enemy of my enemy is my friend, you know? I want the Rangers to win - because I hate the Kings. But then I want them to get beaten by Florida. Yeah, it's like a whole cage match. You're doing a deep dive on it.

R

Rob Mineault 03:59

I think Lis might be the most serious out of everybody about this hockey thing. I don't know Steve, she's given you a run for your money.

S

Steve Barclay 04:07

Yeah, she can keep running.

R

Rob Mineault 04:16

If it actually ends up where a team that she's invested in ends up against the Canucks I don't

know, this will be this will be a true test of the podcast. Lis, who would you want to go to the Stanley Cup like out of everybody?

L Lis Malone 04:35
Who do I want to see in the in the finals?

R Rob Mineault 04:37
Yeah.

L Lis Malone 04:38
I would like to see, it's not likely but I would like in a perfect world to see Colorado and Florida. I think Florida still have its has a really good chance. But I don't know.

R Rob Mineault 05:01
So what happens if like Colorado does and then it's Colorado and the Canucks?

L Lis Malone 05:06
No, no it can't.

S Steve Barclay 05:10
Yeah. Because there's the Western finals first and then the Eastern finals. And those two teams who win that play, so Colorado, the Dallas Stars, Vancouver and Edmonton are all in the on the west. But only one of them can make it through. There can be only one.

R Rob Mineault 05:29
Yeah, I see. I just think it'd be it'd be really fun if we were at odds are somehow.

L Lis Malone 05:37
Hey, it still might happen. It could be Vancouver and Florida.

R Rob Mineault 05:46
I don't know we might if that ever happened we might have to do like a live stream of just like

I don't know we might if that ever happened, we might have to do like a live stream or just like you guys watching the final virtually together. I mean, that can be fun.

L Lis Malone 05:59

It's not one game. It's a series.

R Rob Mineault 06:01

That's true. Well, whatever. All right, four part series. Or just one of the last games, that one final game. We live stream and listen to you guys trash talk each other.

S Steve Barclay 06:17

If Vancouver makes it all that way, I'm pretty sure I got plans.

R Rob Mineault 06:21

Yeah, well, that's true. Don't want to be live streaming the podcast.

S Steve Barclay 06:36

It'll be on the projection screen outdoors with the neighbors if it's not raining.

R Rob Mineault 06:40

Very cool.

L Lis Malone 06:42


Fun.


S Steve Barclay 06:43


Yeah, it'll be fun.


R Rob Mineault 06:44

Well, thank you. Thank you for that hockey update. It sounds like things are going swimmingly for the Canucks anyways, and we'll see what happens.


 Lis Malone 06:53
We'll see. Stay tuned.


 Rob Mineault 06:55
Stay tuned. Alright, enough of that. Hey, Ryan.

 Ryan Fleury 06:59
Yeah, Rob.


 Rob Mineault 07:01
What the heck are we doing today?

 Ryan Fleury 07:03
Today we are speaking with a guest that was suggested to us by a friend of the show Ted Drake over at Intuit. I guess they were sitting around the lunch table one day and a topic of Aphantasia came up and Ted suggested we speak to our guest today. So Anthony Gutierrez, welcome to AT Banter.

 Anthony Gutierrez 07:24
Hello. Thank you for having me.

 Ryan Fleury 07:26
Thanks for being here.

 Rob Mineault 07:29
Yeah, thank you. Rumor is this is your first podcast ever.

 Anthony Gutierrez 07:35
The secret's out, I guess.



R

Rob Mineault 07:38

That'll teach you to talk to us before the mics come on.

A

Anthony Gutierrez 07:41

Yeah, yeah, thanks.

R

Rob Mineault 07:46

Well, listen, why don't we start things off by just telling the audience a little bit about yourself and what you're doing over there at Intuit?

A

Anthony Gutierrez 07:56

Yes. So I start off my career in advertising as a copywriter. Initially, I sort of meander through a career jumping around different companies until I landed at Intuit. And this is my first time as a content designer at that company. So what I basically do is I work with designers and other folks, and we create product experiences, and I work on conflicts specifically. And the lens in which I do that through is through language. So I write the messaging that folks have read or hear through text to speech. And that's actually how I know Ted Drake. So you know, I was working with him on some ARIA labels. And he's been a huge resource for me, he always makes himself available. And he's taught me a lot about how to write useful text to speech and the difference between that and Aria labels. So yeah, so long story short, we were just chit chatting and I brought up the idea, or I brought up the phenomenon of Aphantasia. And, you know, he invited me to speak to it at a Lunch and Learn, then, you know, I did that. And then he invited me or he suggested that I come on this podcast, so here I am.

R

Rob Mineault 09:05

So he's clearly angry at you for something if he recommended you coming on this podcast. I'm just kidding.

A

Anthony Gutierrez 09:13

Yeah, I must have rubbed him the wrong way.

R

Rob Mineault 09:15

That's right. Check the coffee every every morning. . Well, now this is really interesting, because before we booked you, I did a little bit of research going into this episode, and I had not heard of this thing at all. S I'm am really excited to sort of dive into this. Maybe I'll let you take the reins a little bit just set us up and sort of introduce Aphantasia to the audience. So tell us a little bit about what exactly it is.

A

Anthony Gutierrez 09:49

Yeah. So it's a relatively recent discovery. And it has a really interesting story behind that. But basically, it wasn't even a coined term until 2000. It's anticipated about 3% to 5% of the population actually has it. So it is rare. But that being said, it's not considered a disability or any kind of hindrance to cognitive ability. It's just really, the way I like to think about it, I is really just a conversation about how the brain processes imagination, emotion, and even memory. And, you know, I should also preface by saying I am no expert whatsoever, I am just a guy who lives with it. And I've poked around online to learn a little bit about it on my own. So I can speak to some of my own experiences and some of the things that I found online, but by no means, am I the authority on this. But basically, Aphantasia is the inability to use visual imagination or what sometimes people call you know, the mind's eye. And so in other words, it's just people who have Aphantasia, they don't have the ability to visualize. And again, it's not any kind of cognitive handicap. What's fascinating about it, actually, is that the brain compensates for that by using other parts of the brain to basically function. So that's the gist, but I think really, the best way to understand that Aphantasia and whether or not someone has it is to do a really quick exercise. So that'd be alright if I if I did a little thought exercise with y'all today.

R

Rob Mineault 11:25

Yeah, absolutely.

A

Anthony Gutierrez 11:27

Okay, cool. So I know some some folks who are listening might be blind or have low vision, but I think it's really it'd be really interesting to hear from those folks and what their experiences are with their imagination. So it's very simple. So just try to imagine an apple. And if it helps to close your eyes, feel free to do that. But just try to focus your thoughts on what an apple looks like. You know, try to imagine the color and the finer details of the Apple. Does it have a leaf, does it have a stem? Is it on a table, is it floating in space? I'll give you all like a couple of seconds to think about Apple. So, anyone here seeing an apple in their mind?

R

Rob Mineault 12:12

Yep,

S

Steve Barclay 12:13

yes.

L

Lis Malone 12:14

Yep.

A Anthony Gutierrez 12:15
So everyone here sees an apple.

R Ryan Fleury 12:16
Yep.

A Anthony Gutierrez 12:17
Yeah. Okay. No one here has Aphantasia.

R Rob Mineault 12:24
We're number one.

A Anthony Gutierrez 12:31
So there's different degrees of it. So you know, sometimes people might not see anything at all. Sometimes people see sort of a vague sort of outline of an apple or something very fuzzy, something black and white. How vivid was the detail for you all? Like, how detailed was that apple in your mind?

R Ryan Fleury 12:52
Well, mine was alternating between red and green. And then when you started suggesting the stem that started filling in the picture for me.

L Lis Malone 13:03
Yeah. I started moving my apple, two different scenes. Like kind of first I saw the apple and then I pictured it. Someone holding the apple, like looking at it in a supermarket..

R Rob Mineault 13:15
Lis could see Brad Pitt holding the apple in front of his groin.

L Lis Malone 13:21
He was he was hogtied, and he had the apple in his mouth. And I think I had a riding prop in my hand.

.....

R

Rob Mineault 13:33

Is there an opposite condition from this? Lis might have that.

L

Lis Malone 13:40

Is there is there hyper active imagination?

A

Anthony Gutierrez 13:46

Hyperphantasia. Yeah, so the ability to visualize imagination is always on the spectrum, right? So if you're seeing super vivid detail, you know, like when I did this exercise with my mom, my dad, my dad didn't see anything. And my mom was like, oh my god, it's yellow. It's on a table. I could paste the app like and hold it up. I'm like, alright, alright, calm down. So she has hyper Fantasia. So if you're able to visualize these really fine details, like the streaks, the dots, the variations of color, surrounding, or you

L

Lis Malone 14:18

can see the little tear coming out of Brad's eye.

A

Anthony Gutierrez 14:21

So congratulations, you are part of 2.6% of the population. It's also a rare cohort of people just like Aphantasia and most people live in the middle, right? Right, which is just Aphantasia which, yeah, most people have that just less intricate detail. They're able to make out you know, the idea of an apple, the outline of an apple but it's not super, super detailed, like a like a hyper realistic boat, for example. And then the thing between Phantasia and Aphantasia It's called Hypophantasia. And that's basically just the outline of the apple, no real details, maybe just the shape and maybe a blurry image. But there's something there, right? And for people who have Aphantasia, there's nothing, it's absolutely, you know, totally blank. So anytime, you know, we did these medical, you know, the exercise is like counting sheep, or like, imagine the successful version of your future self. You know, I always had this is just metaphor, I always had the mind's eye was just a metaphor, like, I had no idea that people were actually seeing pictures in their mind, right? And when I found out about it, it was 2020. And, you know, like everyone else, I was just kind of hanging out at home trying to train to spend the time. And I was just poking around YouTube and I stumbled across this video, and I forget what it was called that it was something around like, people who don't have a mind's eye or something like that. And that's kind of an interesting, catchy title, like, let me see what this is all about. So I started watching it. And, you know, I'm really intrigued at first, and I'm sort of thinking this is like, these are other people, right? And then long and behold, I start to realize, wait, it's like an eye, people can see things in their mind. And I had to pause the videos, I have to do this exercise right now to see if I have this thing. And it's really one of the few times in my life where my jaw has naturally just dropped on its own. I can count like maybe three times in my life where I've

genuinely just been so surprised, and shocked by something that my jaw would actually just drop. And this is one of those moments, right? And it was during the pandemic of all times, right. So I had nothing to do but just sit with my blind thoughts, right? It was just kind of sitting there. Like, I can't really imagine anything, oh, my god, like people are probably sitting at home and just sort of playing movie reels in their mind to pass the time and I'm over here, not being able to do that. So, you know, at first, I didn't do very much research into it at that time that I was sort of interpreting it as like some sort of, you know, you know, a disability of sorts, right? I thought that oh, man, is this why my memory is so bad. This is why my sense of direction is so bad. Like, am I going to be able to be successful in life, like all these kind of questions came up. And then I did a little bit of research and I came to find out that no, your brain compensates does other things. For example, people with Aphantasia, they use a verbal scaffolding to help them remember things. So they think in words and concepts instead of pictures. So, you know, I might not be able to imagine where I left my keys in the house. But I know exactly where they are. I can go find them. And the part of the brain that's being used is the medial frontal cortex. So that's the area of the brain that identifies errors and inconsistencies. So basically, what the brain is doing is just like fact, checking, it's just sort of like making a mental list of visual characteristics, visual characteristics, but not actually visualizing the right. And it's matching that with external images, right, so what you can actually see. So it's really fascinating to think like, just like how different people process information and how, how we're all kind of living in our own little, you know, world so to speak. All of our brains are so different. And you would never know, right? You would never know whether someone has Aphantasia or doesn't have Aphantasia, or whether they have Hyperphantasia, for example. So, yeah.

L

Lis Malone 18:11

so just from my own curiosity, if someone was to put an apple in your hand, you can see the apple, you can smell the apple and you feel the apple. We take the apple away does that memory linger at all? Or is it just gone? It's absolutely got just gone?

A

Anthony Gutierrez 18:30

Yeah. Yeah.. So yeah. And I had no idea that people actually can retain, you know, I knew that photographic memory was a thing, right? People could have that. But I thought that was some sort of phenomenon. I didn't realize it was a spectrum there too.

R

Ryan Fleury 18:45

Yeah. Interesting.

R

Rob Mineault 18:48

Well, yeah, and that is really interesting. And I guess for us, like, who have like, say, normal memories, like somebody with a photographic memory must look at everybody else and go, oh, what you can't do this? You can't just actually just recall everything perfectly? But I guess my question is, so for example, like so everything comes out of memory. Like if someone's just ask you, hey, what's a horse look like? And your brain processes that, you don't have a visual

image to work from? So what do you pull the details from? Your memory? Like you just know, okay, well, it's a, it's got four legs, and it's usually got a mane and a tail. Does that how does your brain actually work?

A

Anthony Gutierrez 19:36

I mean, you pretty much nailed it. It goes back to the verbal scaffolding. It's details. It's a list of details and concepts around those details. So legs are for walking. A body holds the legs and so you kind of piece that picture together as an idea, but not as an actual. So he asked me to draw a horse I'm gonna have a lot harder of a time but if you asked me to describe a horse, I could do that in great detail.

R

Rob Mineault 20:00

Right. I didn't even think of drawing but yeah that must really factor into the same thing with like, say maps or whatever. If someone was to be like, hey, can you draw a really crude map of your neighborhood. Just some of the cross streets and stuff? Like, that's just something you would have a problem doing.

A

Anthony Gutierrez 20:23

Yeah. I mean, it's hard to link it specifically to Aphantasia. I could just also be really bad with directions (which I am), I'm sure a poor sense of direction just somehow plays a role in that. But I could not draw my neighborhood - I mean, if you asked me where, where things are, and asked me to put a map together, I would be totally useless.

R

Rob Mineault 20:47


That's really interesting. And I can totally see how, you know, if you, if you just grew up with this, it would come as a shock that, that there was a difference between, you know, the way you process imagery and the way that other people process imagery, because when's it ever going to come up?


A


Anthony Gutierrez 21:05


Yeah, exactly. You know, when you think about visual based learning, I don't know if y'all had this exercise in school where they'd show you an image, and then they take it away. And they ask you to describe they show you a series of images and take them away, and then ask you to describe what you saw. That was a very difficult exercise for me. So I had trouble remembering what images I saw, because I didn't retain that information in a visual form. So yeah, it all kind of comes back to how your brain kind of compensates for these things. And you wouldn't know. I mean, the again, this thing was only really discovered in 2015, actually was discovered in 2009. So actually, it's pretty interesting story if you guys are interested. Yeah. So basically, there was this guy named Adam Zeman. And he's the professor is a British professor from the University of Exeter. And there was this gentleman, this 65 year old man who underwent heart


surgery. And after the surgery, he lost his ability to imagine. So at this point, they coined the term "blind imagination", but it was only really being talked about in the context of a physiological change that's caused by external circumstances. So it wasn't being talked about as a naturally occurring condition of birth, like, this is something that people have. And so they published his article about this guy, you know, losing his ability to imagine, and a magazine published it, published an article about it. And this led to a ton of people reaching out to the publication claiming that they also had the inability to visualize images. But for them, it's always been that way. So this leads to more research this guy, Adam Zeman, who was part of that initial study, he starts to dig into this a little bit more, and 2015 - that's when the term Congenital Aphantasia was coined. And that's when he kind of did another study. And he revealed more outliers on the both ends of the visual imagery spectrum. So that's where he kind of discovered that there are people who have Hyperphantasia, and you know, all the different variations in between. And then from there, a lot of media outlets like New York Times started covering it, and even more people started reaching out about it. So it's just kind of like snowballed from there. And in the last sort of eight years or so it's just been a ton of research has been emerging about it. They've had an appearance in a TV show. It was the one with Steve Carell. It came out in 2020.

 Rob Mineault 21:47
Yeah, please.

 Anthony Gutierrez 23:38
Space Force. Yeah. So there was a episode on Space Force, where, you know, there's two characters talking and I haven't watched the show, but one of the guys is sort of like a guard or he's a soldier or something like that. And, you know, actually, I could play that clip. I have it right here if you guys want to hear it...

 Rob Mineault 23:57
Let's do it. Sure.

 Anthony Gutierrez 23:58
Yeah, let me see it. Probably better to so you guys can hear it....

 Character 1 24:04
We're gonna get our story straight. The guy who spilled the saucer was a rich white guy in a Where's Waldo t shirt. See, that's what specific people will buy it. I don't know. I can't picture it. You can't picture people believing it?

 Character 2 24:20

C Character 2 24:20
No, I can't picture what you're describing. I don't have that ability.

C Character 1 24:25
Okay, close your eyes. Ronald McDonald on a surfboard. What do you see?

C Character 2 24:34
Nothing. Just like staring at a blank page.

C Character 1 24:37
Oh my god. You have no imagination. That's, that's adorable.

C Character 2 24:45
It's real condition. Aphantasia.

C Character 1 24:48
Yes, it is, sell yourself. So what are your strengths?

C Character 2 24:53
No, that is one of my strengths. I can stare at a cereal box and it's like watching HBO to me....

A Anthony Gutierrez 24:58
Yeah, just, you know, he's talking about his experience. And she's like, can you imagine this? And he's like, you know, actually, I can't I can't imagine this, I have this thing called Aphantasia. And they dedicate these, like two minutes to this this thing, you know. And I thought that was really interesting that, you know, it's starting to make an appearance in the mainstream. So, yeah, and then in 2019, there was one of the first people that was showed up in that study that that Adam Zeman conducted, he started a network called the Aphantasia Network, which is basically just a hub for different people to learn about Aphantasia and to connect with one another. And it's global. They've had conferences, they've done art installations with people who have Aphantasia, and people who have Hyperphantasia and sort of juxtapose those two types of installations, you know, for, you know, how people create art with different ways of processing imagery. So, yeah, very fascinating topic. And it's gaining a lot of speed right now. There's so much research being done on it, that I was not able to keep up with it. So my knowledge really only goes up to like, 2021 or so. But between then and now, they've done a lot of research on what's the relationship to memory, what's the relationship to ADHD, Autism,

dreams, right? Right. Yeah, so I'll pause there. But there's really a fascinating overlap of dreams and how that works. Because people with Aphantasia can still dream, they still have visual imagery in their mind when they when they may sleep at night.

R

Rob Mineault 26:26

Okay, that's really interesting so please tell us a little bit more about that. Because that was one of the things that I was thinking about, how will how does that work then?

A

Anthony Gutierrez 26:37

So the distinction here is that people with Aphantasia are not able to visually recall images, images on command, but it can happen on autopilot. So if you're sleeping, if you're dreaming at night, your brain is capable of conjuring up imagery - you just can't do it at will. So ever since I found out about having Aphantasia I'd been extra conscious of those moments, right before you fall asleep, you know, right before you enter that dream state. And I can tell you that, you know, in my experience, I have been able to visualize scenes, and they're a little bit blurry, they're not super detailed, right. But they're much more than what I'm able to do during my waking hours. And it just sort of happens naturally. And sometimes it's so vivid, vivid, that it wakes me up, like I'm about to fall asleep, but the visual imagery is so striking that it kind of causes me to stay awake for another couple of seconds. And so, yeah, really fascinating.

R

Rob Mineault 27:35

So sort of tagging on to that then ... so if Aphantasia is kind of like, to put it into sort of simple terms, if things like visual imagery of objects, if we think of that in terms of file cabinet, where somebody says, okay, think about a horse. So in your brain, you know, you go over to the filing cabinet, and you pull out a picture of a horse and there you go, that's your visual imagery for you. But for somebody with with a Fantasia, the filing cabinets locked, like whatever, like that part of your brain. It can't actually go get that image to to pull it up to use, do they? Do they know why that is? Or, you know, what, what's kind of the research Ben on just what kind of things causes it because I noticed that it can be congenital, like you can be born with it, but you can also develop it. And in fact, the way that they discovered it was this fellow that that acquired it after a surgery. So have they made that connection? Do they know precisely what part of the brain is? is acting differently that that causes this?

A

Anthony Gutierrez 28:49

Yeah, so I'm pulling out my notes because I want to make sure I'm representing this accurately. It's a very complex thing. There's one theory that a neuroscientist has that could possibly explain why Aphantasia occurs, and it's has something to do with the process of childbirth. So when the brain isn't fully developed in those moments, right when you're born, it's very common, I guess, is something I didn't even know. Babies actually have a series of mini strokes. But thanks to neuroplasticity, a baby's brain is usually able to adapt and build more neurons in that developmental stage. But in the case of Aphantasia, those tiny pathways that's really due to visual imagery. It's, I think, in the frontal cortex, I don't know exactly what the

name is, but it's in the front of your brain. I'm just remembering the graph I saw it needs to transport information from the back of the brain so that that pathway has been compromised. And so you're not able to do that. But in my case, it might actually be genetic. Because you know, again, when I found out I called my mom and my dad and my dad was totally confused. Like for a lot of people who have Aphantasia when you do that exercise - you know, imagine an apple, right? It's very strange. Like, why are you asking me to do this? Why would you ask anyone to do this? It's not something that, you know, that's in the norm, right? So my dad was very confused by me asking, and then eventually, I got to pull it out of him. And I wasn't able to see anything. So in my case, it might actually be genetic. The research is still unfolding. They don't exactly know what the exact reason is, but it could be a multitude of different things.

R

Rob Mineault 30:24

Yeah, no, I can imagine. I mean, to the fact that, you know, 2015, was, it was the first time that you know, they actually named it as a condition. That's not a lot of time - nine years is nothing in terms of, of medical research, and especially anything to do with your neurological research takes a long time to figure out and a lot of studies on a lot of different people. So I can just imagine, for a lot of people, this was a real illumination. I could just see people, if you didn't know, this was an actual thing. You could just be like, Yeah, I just have a crappy memory, or like, whatever is people are asking me to draw a map in my neighborhood, and I can't, that's just, you know, whatever. You know, I have a bad memory, or I just have bad recall. No one would think that your brain is actually working completely differently than other people's. That's right. Yeah, it's just it's just neurodiversity. At the end of the day, yeah. It's just a different way of the brain working. Yeah. Which is fascinating, right? Like, the brain is just amazing. It's an amazing thing. And we know so little about it, or how it works. Yeah, there's all kinds of different like crazy conditions, like have you ever heard of - what's it called - synesthesia?

R

Ryan Fleury 31:45

Yeah.

R

Rob Mineault 31:46

Have you ever heard of that where people associate or are different letters, and words and numbers appear in their head as colors? ,

A

Anthony Gutierrez 31:57

Oh I have. I have heard of this. I didn't remember the name. But yeah, yeah. That's fascinating.

R

Rob Mineault 32:04

Right, like, yeah, exactly. Like, I know what it is like, That blows my mind. Like you'll say to somebody, like, you know, what's Wednesday? What color is Wednesday? And they'll be like, well, like Wednesday is purple. Like, and they'll just say it like, what are you stupid? Like, of

well, it's Wednesday is purple. Like, and they'll just say it like, what are you stupid? Like, of course Wednesday's purple. Like, everybody knows that. Yeah, it's just it's fascinating stuff. Like, how does all this work and how does it happen?

A Anthony Gutierrez 32:28

Yeah, I wonder like, do they see the word in their mind? And the word is just so happens to be a color? Or is it just the color? I'm interested to know that.

L Lis Malone 32:37

You're totally you're talking about? Synesthesia?

R Rob Mineault 32:39

That's right, that one.

L Lis Malone 32:43

I'm not an expert, but I always thought synesthesia is when two or more senses sort of flip flop, or combine. Where people describe that they can. They're seeing what they hear. So if you hear if you say if you if they hear the word Wednesday, they start to create a visualization. It's sort of like a, like, a cross wiring of our senses, that the brain somehow will create different senses based on the stimulation from another sense.

S Steve Barclay 33:17

You're right. There's a bunch of different types.

 33:24

A good topic for June.

R Rob Mineault 33:35

It is fascinating. And there's, you know, there's there's a definite link to blindness with that too because, I don't recall if that you're born with, or that you can develop over time, or how it all works, but, and honestly, we probably don't even know. We probably probably haven't even figured that out yet. Because like I said, near anything neurological, it takes so long for us to really understand what's going on in our brains. But it's, it's it's always just so fascinating. Yeah.

A Anthony Gutierrez 34:10

A Anthony Gutierrez 34:10

And one thing I always find interesting is you know, what type of work folks like that end up getting into right, like brain being wired a certain way. You know, Aphantasia, for example, people who have that tend to be more in the sciences in the math industry, right? Because they work more in facts, you know, going back to that, that scaffolding right there. They're using the part of the brain that's, that's used for fact checking. So that tends to lend itself really well to those types of professions. Whereas Hyperphantasia is more common amongst creative professionals. They're not mutually exclusive. You know, I am a writer, I would consider myself a creative. But yeah, I do tend to prefer more fact based writing. So in other words, you know, Thompson, for example, his writing style is almost like a field blog. And I really appreciate that kind of writing because it gets to the point and I'm getting the information that I need. Something like *The Great Gatsby*, for example, where, you know, you have like six pages describing what color a certain door might look like, right? Those types of books really frustrate me, because I'm not seeing anything in my mind. And so I'm just sort of like, you know, chewing on each word, trying to get through it, and just give it take me to the point. So yeah, I definitely prefer more like fact based or like more outcome based storytelling.

R Ryan Fleury 35:33

So can that be taught? Because we're told that you can generate new pathways and the you know, we're always learning so can you learn to see?

A Anthony Gutierrez 35:43

That's a great question. That's been something I've been trying to do, actually, ever since I found out that I had it. I'm like, Okay, I'm gonna make a conscious effort to try and visualize and, you know, I don't stick with it every single day. But yeah, I do consciously try to make an effort to see if I can work that muscle a little bit. I don't know. I don't know, if it's something you can you can train, you know, maybe I can get back to you in five years.

R Ryan Fleury 36:09

Is there research being done in like teaching models?

A Anthony Gutierrez 36:13

I don't know. Okay, I'm gonna take note of that, because I am really curious to know if that's something I feel like that would be a natural progression, right? Once you learn all these, all these facts about it, like how do you fix it? Right?

S Steve Barclay 36:24

Yeah, seems like a good study for a grad student or something.

A

Anthony Gutierrez 36:30

Ya know, like I said, you know, they went from like, a couple of research studies here and there and 2018, 2019 to like, hundreds. When I was doing my initial research for the presentation I looked into it. By the time I got to 2023, you know, the amount of research that was being done was just overwhelming. Like, I couldn't even I couldn't even spend the time to digest all of it, it was so much. So I would assume that in the next five years or so that they'll, they'll have more of a deeper understanding of how to how to fix it.

R

Rob Mineault 37:04

Although, you know, to be fair, maybe it's not something that needs to be, you know, quote unquote, fixed. It's neurodiversity, it's your brain working differently than other people's and really, you know, that there's, there's nothing wrong with that. And in fact, you know, there's going to be strengths and weaknesses, just like you know, everybody else. So adding on to that idea, though, because I'm curious - when you learned about, about it, for yourself, personally, did that have an impact on you? Like, were you were you kind of like, oh, man, this makes so much sense now, because I can't do this, or I can't do that. What kind of what kind of impact did it kind of have on your day to day life when you learned about the condition?

A

Anthony Gutierrez 37:52

Yeah, so one thing that I found to be really interesting is how people with Aphantasia process trauma or even managed relationships. So, you know, I've been known to kind of, you know, with certain relationships and stuff, it's like, I don't really maintain those friendships, as well as maybe some other people might. And I think the reason comes back to this idea of out of sight, out of mind, so you're not visually thinking of anyone in your mind. So therefore, it's very easy to let time pass and, you know, for lack of a better way of saying it, like you kind of forget about that person in a way. And so, you know, just kind of made a lot of sense why I haven't maintained certain friendships or relationships, why I don't really have a feeling of homesickness. Like, I've traveled a lot, I've gone around the world and and at no point did I ever feel like I missed home. So that, you know, and then that I have any trauma personally, but when I was doing some research, you know, somebody came up around how, you know, people who have dealt with trauma, it's not that they don't feel pain, or they don't suffer through that experience, but they tend to move on a little differently than those who don't have a Fantasia because we think about it, you know, if you have a family member who has passed away, it's a lot harder to deal with that when you can see them in your head when you can really picture their face, their facial reactions, their, you know, their posture, their demeanor, versus when you don't have that ability, right. So that those are sort of the connections that I was making as soon as I found out about this whole thing. And just kind of explained a lot. And I think that when I brought this up to some my friends who you know, who have wondered why don't really, you know, make more of an effort. It makes sense to them as well.

L

Lis Malone 39:42

Because I always have to bring it to the into the gutter, already, Rob's already sweating. He's like, Oh, God, here we go. So with this way of thinking, or the way the mind works, it because you know how men are very visual beings when it comes to the mating ritual. So, if you have

Aphantasia, does it make it harder to picture let's say someone you're attracted to with maybe less clothing on? I'm trying to I see I'm trying to say this as delicately as possible. I'm gonna get you know, wants

S

Steve Barclay 40:32

To know if you can undress people with your eyes.

A

Anthony Gutierrez 40:34

Yeah, the the answer is no. Sadly. That sounds like it'd be a really cool superpower. But no, no, I don't have that type of X ray vision.

S

Steve Barclay 40:45

Yeah, I can totally see it impacting relationships. Because having a go, do you want to be my boyfriend and you going, I can't see it? I can't imagine.

L

Lis Malone 41:00

Is there an element of 50 First Dates to this? So like, each time? Just some like someone disrobed, it's like you're seeing those boobs.

A

Anthony Gutierrez 41:15

Wow. In a way, in a way, I mean, I would say it's probably more relevant to like, surrounding environments. So like, you know, I'm with my girlfriend, and we're going somewhere. Oh, we were here last summer, I was like, Oh, I have no sense of like, oh, I don't remember, we were ever even here. I mean, I remember we were here, but I don't remember the surroundings, right? It's like completely, like, in that sense, it's like 50 First Dates that you can take the same place over and over again, just as content. Sunsets, for example, this is something else I kind of realized is that, you know, some people like to watch the sunset, they hang out for a couple minutes. And they, they, you know, they go, right, and I'm the type of person that really wants to sit there. Like, I gotta take all this in, because the moment I walk away, it's gone. Maybe other people it might be, you know, they take that with them. And they, you know, they can they can see an intent they want. So the whole idea around, you know, you see it once you see them, you see when you see them on paper thing when people have Aphantasia.

R

Rob Mineault 42:14

Wow, see, I can really see that, you know, there's there are real pros and cons about it. But you're definitely some pros. I mean, that would be cool. Like seeing a sunset for the first time, like, every night. Like that's the there's no limit. That's like really cool.

A

Anthony Gutierrez 42:33

It's nice. I will say though, so, you know, brought up the keeping, managing relationships and keeping in touch with people. Not to confuse that with a lack of empathy, right? Because that was one question that came up when I presented to, you know, at Intuit is does Aphantasia affect empathy, like not being able to see people in your mind not being able to visualize? Do you somehow become more detached? And I would say, it's actually the opposite, that you kind of use your emotions as a way to feel your way through experiences. So for example, as a Content Designer, to kind of bring it back to my role. You know, I really build empathy with customers, right. And so I sort of feel my way through the product experience, I don't necessarily go out and create product experiences by saying like, Oh, like, this is the right visual design. This is the right elements, I don't like compose it with the elements and the sort of demon like this is good design, I really take it from the customer's point of view. And I sort of have that dialogue in my mind of what they're going through as they click on each screen as they're going through their reading from top to bottom. So I take a very empathetic approach. And it kind of goes back to that verbal scaffolding, right? Like I'm playing the role of the user, and I'm hearing what they would hear in their own internal chatter. And I try to use that language in the content that I write as well. And so yeah, with it, sort of, you know, I guess it can go either way. There's so many factors that lead to whether someone's empathetic or not empathetic. But I wouldn't associate Aphantasia with a lack of empathy, because it could be the very the opposite.

L

Lis Malone 44:05

How does how does the condition affect your writing? Because I was just even thinking right now, as you were saying that, as I write, sometimes I visualize the word be something how to spell it, and I will, I mean, maybe, and maybe I am a Hyperphantasia person that has, as we kind of have already demonstrated, so does that does that interfere with any of your creative process? And that because I see that as a tool for me to always be able to, like, visualize things and get those words, you know, visualize the words and thinking.

A

Anthony Gutierrez 44:42

In terms of like spelling, or are you thinking?

L

Lis Malone 44:44

Yeah spelling sometimes. For me, it's even just language structure. Thinking of, you know, moving things around in my head with plot and storyline or dialogue, or things like that.

A

Anthony Gutierrez 45:01

It's a really interesting question. You know, you might be composing this story, if we're talking about a story, right? You might be visualizing in visual components, like, you know, this, this happens here, this is the scene. Whereas I think, for me, at least, it's more about the concepts,

and the feeling behind those concepts, like, what is the feeling that the audience or the character is going through, and I sort of feel my way through the story in that way, versus seeing it in a tangible sense. So it's just kind of a different way to get there. There's lots of examples of writers who have who have Aphantasia, they tend to be in the sciences, or the science fiction, which I think is really interesting. But there are a lot of writers and I figured they probably just go about it in their own way. So lots of lots of different ways into the creative process.

R

Rob Mineault 45:49

So in terms of the medical model of all of this, so it's not considered a disability. But is there are there a lot of like groups out there is there a sort of a community of people who are coming together that, that share that condition that, that are sort of able to support each other, or even just kind of share stories in terms of like building up the research and what the lived experience of, of living with this is? Yeah,

A

Anthony Gutierrez 46:23

The best research resource that I have found is called the Aphantasia Network. And I've mentioned this a little bit, but it's one of the very first people who were in that initial study that was back in 2015, they started this network, and that's an online community, you can go there. There's lots of, you know, research that you can link out to, there's lots of sort of like personal accounts, people talking about their experiences, people asking questions, and then having a sort of like a thread where people can comment and respond to that, and just have a dialogue about it, right? Because for a lot of people, they might not know that they have this. And when they first find out, they wonder what life is like for other people, if there's any similarities. And that was one of the shocking things for me when I when I started looking at the application network about seeing other people's experiences, like oh, my God, like I can really relate with this. So yeah, if anyone you know who's listening has Aphantasia, I'd recommend the Aphantasia Network. It's a great resource.

R

Rob Mineault 47:28

And we'll make sure that we include that in the show notes as well. Well, Anthony, we want to thank you so much for coming on and chatting with us. This has been fascinating. I'm really going to be keeping an eye on the research and because I'm really curious to see how this all shakes out and what they continue to discover about the condition but we really appreciate you suggesting the topic and and for coming on.

A

Anthony Gutierrez 47:53

Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me.

R

Rob Mineault 47:55

Yeah. Anytime you want to come back and chat. We're happy to have you. Okay, thank you so

mean. Anytime you want to come back and chat. we're happy to have you. Okay, thank you so much. You guys. Have a good day.

R Ryan Fleury 48:01
Thanks

L Lis Malone 48:03
Great meeting you.

A Anthony Gutierrez 48:04
Great meeting you too.

R Rob Mineault 48:06
There you go. Man.

L Lis Malone 48:08
That was really interesting stuff.

R Rob Mineault 48:10
I know. I was trying to when I was doing research today, I was like literally like being like, what would that be like? Like, that'd be so weird. If I couldn't think of what a horse looks like, if I couldn't picture a horse in my head.

L Lis Malone 48:25
Yeah, exactly.

R Rob Mineault 48:29
Yeah, yeah, it's really interesting. It's really face fascinating how the brain works, and works around things. Because, like, honestly, you would think that, like, on paper, when I first heard about this and started reading about it, I was like, this must be awful for these people. Like they must really hamper their ability to do things. But as it turns out, no, not at all. They're totally writers and creatives, people who are far more creative than any of us all have this condition. And, you know, they just, they're just doing it in different ways. So, yeah, love it.

L Lis Malone 49:04

You know, when you make that joke, when you just see something just awful and you you say oh, I can't unsee that. Yeah, apparently some people can.

S Steve Barclay 49:14

That's a whole other thing. Like people who experienced trauma and get stuff out of their head. I wonder if they process trauma better.

R Rob Mineault 49:23

Yeah, I betcha they do. I think post stress and stuff is probably a lot less likely to happen with with people with Aphantasia. Or even you know, I would think that it would be a pro if you were like some sort of a First Responder. Because you always hear about that right where Cops and Firemen and you know, they're they have to go to like auto accidents and see really horrific things. And it really haunts them or really, you know, affects them. But for somebody with this I mean, maybe they would be a more you wouldn't affect them as much. As something like a first responder, they're not constantly being haunted by really horrific things that they're seeing constantly. Yeah. So I mean, it could definitely play up play a really positive role.

L Lis Malone 50:12

Well, not well, not not so good when here's the description of the suspect. And now keep keep that in your head of what you're looking for.

S Steve Barclay 50:21

But he could you could process that as a list, right?

R Rob Mineault 50:24

That's true.

R Ryan Fleury 50:30

Yes. Again, it depends on where you are on the spectrum, right?

L Lis Malone 50:33

It depends on the context of that particular ID for you know, how fast you would have to do it and how, you know. Interesting, it's just interesting.

R

Rob Mineault 50:44

But yeah, for sure. And the fact that it is also a spectrum. I mean, it's not, it's not a on and off thing. You can definitely be anywhere in the spectrum. And I'm sure that all of us, we're probably at different places in that spectrum.

L

Lis Malone 50:57

So do you guys think, I mean, okay, I definitely think I'm hyper. Where do you where do you all think you are?



51:05

That's probably mid range. Yeah, I think that's right. My imagery wasn't all that vivid, but and it changed very quickly as he was talking. And then when when he stopped suggesting different scenarios and stuff, it settled into something completely different. And it was based around a memory of my uncle had apple orchards. And I was I got to thinking about blight. And then I saw apple that had played but it was just like a flash, like, just, it doesn't didn't stick with me or anything. So I don't think I'm I don't think at the top end of it.

R

Rob Mineault 51:44

Yeah, yeah, I'd say I'm probably somewhere in the middle.

L

Lis Malone 51:49

I know I have a very vivid memory, or, and very vivid imagination. So I can I can recall a lot of things even childhood that I very clearly.

R

Rob Mineault 52:10

I do wonder if Hyperphantasia is linked to say, a photographic memory because I would think that if you would have a very good memory if you're able to recall things very vividly like that. Maybe it's linked to that.

L

Lis Malone 52:25

You know, it scares what really creeps me out are the people that have that amazing ability. I think it's Eidetic memory. No, I know I don't have that where they can recall a page from a book and remember exactly where they saw that. That isn't an incredible type of recall. I don't have I don't have that. Yeah, impressive. No kidding. Yeah, but it's I know people i i know someone who has that in this. They creep me out every single time. Like why don't like that just seems

like it seems like so exhausting. But I guess that's just how their brain works. And so it's amazing for them. And what seems exhausting to one is you know, just walk in the park to someone else.

 Rob Mineault 53:09

Well, that was cool. All right. Anything else to say about that? Or shall we get out of here?

 53:15

Hey, did you hear the crazy medical story today? You know, a guy was admitted to the hospital with 25 plastic horse toys up inserted up his rectum? Doctors have described his condition as stable.

 Ryan Fleury 53:30

Oh, wow.

 Rob Mineault 53:35

Wow, you you got me there. I thought this was might be an actual story.

 Lis Malone 53:44

It was like a Daddy After Dark joke.

 Ryan Fleury 53:49

New AT Banter segment.

 Rob Mineault 53:56

Yeah, a lot of horses in this episode.


 Lis Malone 53:58

A lot of visualizations.

 Ryan Fleury 54:03

If you're a Patreon member you can access the Daddy After Dark inkes

If you're a Patreon member, you can access the Daddy After Dark jokes.

- R** Rob Mineault 54:08
Sorry to all those listeners who don't have Aphantasia, they're gonna have to consider that I've had mental image now for the next 20 years. I'm glad to see that Steve's dad jokes are continuing to thrive here at AT Banter. Our audience seems to like them.
- R** Ryan Fleury 54:27
No letters of complaint.
- L** Lis Malone 54:32
We're gonna we'll do the Daddy After Dark disclaimer. You know, dad joke or daddy after dark, you decide.
- R** Rob Mineault 54:44
See, we have all the best ideas at the end of the show.
-  54:49
While we have to keep doing the show forever and ever and ever and ever, because we got all these great ideas one day now we'll put them into something.
- R** Rob Mineault 54:59
We're pulling the trigger on this cookbook, alright? Just so everyone knows, I'm serious about this. We make this promise to our audience.
- L** Lis Malone 55:10
We're gonna make it happen and what, sell it on Amazon?
- R** Rob Mineault 55:13
We'll start putting your your recipes together. I'll start working on they'll start working on mine.
- S** Steve Barclay 55:19
...

We got a family cookbook

R Rob Mineault 55:21
The Barclay's?

S Steve Barclay 55:22
Yeah Barclays and Wilson's yeah. We've gathered together all of our favorite family recipes and my brother in law keeps it up to date and adds things as they as they come up.

L Lis Malone 55:33
We need all all originals. We don't want this to be a plagiarized cookbook.

R Rob Mineault 55:38
Yeah, no, it has to be our own special spin on things. Okay, yeah,

L Lis Malone 55:42
We're going original and give people the reason to buy it.

R Rob Mineault 55:48
Actually I have a good sloppy joe recipe that I've been I've been experimenting with.

L Lis Malone 55:52
Sloppy Robs? Sloppy Robbie.

R Rob Mineault 56:00
Yes, see?

L Lis Malone 56:02
We are such a team.



R Rob Mineault 56:04
Workshop this shit. All right, well, some for the audience to look forward to.

R Ryan Fleury 56:16
I can't wait to release my cinnamon toast haggis.

R Rob Mineault 56:24
Wow. How to how to make the mouth water and the stomach turn simultaneously.

R Ryan Fleury 56:31
Mouth waters and your sphincter shuts,

R Rob Mineault 56:35
Or opens.

L Lis Malone 56:37
You don't want your sphincter to shut if your stomach is a turning, no.

R Rob Mineault 56:51
Eject! Alright, hey Lis.

L Lis Malone 57:01
Hey, sloppy Robbie.

R Rob Mineault 57:04
Where can people find us?

L Lis Malone 57:07
We can be found at www.atbanter.com.

R

Rob Mineault 57:11

They can also drop us an email if they so desire a cowbell at cowbell@atbanter.com

S

Steve Barclay 57:20

They keep telling me their social media out there but who cares.

R

Rob Mineault 57:25

Ah, all right. I think that is going to do it for us this week. Big thanks, of course to Anthony for joining us and we will see everybody next week.

S

Steve Barclay 57:41

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