






It's Different for Girls



Girls on the Autism Spectrum
A Parent's Workshop by
Drumbeat Outreach

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The Plan

- Film clip
- What are you seeing 
- Different for Girls
- Diagnostic criteria
- Suggested Strategies 
- Madeleine's perspective
- The end 

Limpsfield Grange School for Girls



Getting a diagnosis

<http://www.itv.com/news/meridian/2018-03-27/autism-in-girls-leaves-families-waiting-years-for-help>

Activity

- Write down something you have learnt from your experience of having a girl with social communication differences



How are girls different to boys?

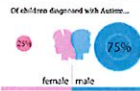


- *"We are definitely seeing an increase in women and girls being diagnosed. Girls are diagnosed later than boys at age 12 upwards. It is when they hit puberty that it becomes more obvious. Often they are on the periphery of social groups. They have learnt their social skills by intellect, not naturally or instinctively. Teenage girls are very socially demanding on each other and AS girls can be marginalized, teased and bullied."* Judith Gould
2011 lead consultant clinical psychologist at Lorna Wing Centre

How are girls with autism different from boys with autism

- Same profile of skills but more subtle in presentation
- Less likely to be physical in response to a negative emotion- confusion, frustration, anger etc
- More likely to turn emotions inward
- Good social imitation skills- what Tony Attwood calls '*copying and camouflaging*'
- More motivated to learn and quicker to grasp key concepts
- Often remain quite childlike even during physiological changes such as puberty

Statistics



- 4 : 1 - average figure
- 2 : 1 - ASD and SLD
- 8/10 to 1 at higher intelligence levels
- females are **under represented**

Interesting to note figures in pathological demands avoidance - PDA more like 1:1

Are there symptomatic difference (Gillberg and Kopp 2010)

- Different voice or speech (50% girls 20% boys)
- Motor tics (40% girls 15% boys)
- Deviant style of gaze (50% girls 30% boys)
- Lacks best friend (30% girls 70% boys)
- Difficulty completing activities (30% girls 5% boys)
- Follows other children like a shadow (40% girls 10% boys)
- Demand avoidance (65% girls 20% boys)



Why are girls harder to diagnose?

Strengths mask deficits

THE GIRL WITH THE CURLY HAIR HAS FOUR STAGES OF SOCIAL INTERACTION:



First Concerns—most likely through mental health services.

- Obsessive compulsive disorder
- Eating disorders
- Personality/ mood disorders
- Selective mutism
- Anxiety and depression
- School refusing
- Self harming behaviours
- Attwood (2015 conference) 1 in 3 adolescents with ASD criteria for clinical depression.



NAS You Need To Know Campaign 2010

YOU NEED TO KNOW

- 71% of children with autism have at least one co-occurring mental health problem, while 40% have two or more
- 1 in every 10 children who access CAMHS has autism
- Just one third (32%) of parents of children with autism believe that CAMHS have improved their child's mental health.
- 9 out of 10 parents told us that the mental health problems faced by their child had had a negative impact on their own mental health (88%) and on the family as a whole (91%)

The diagnostic criteria



- Diagnostic criteria based on the conventional 'male' presentation of ASD.
- Current screening tools not reliably identifying ASD in females
- Girls more adaptable and able to compensate for aspects of ASD
- Are the right questions being asked at diagnostic interviews?
- Is the clinical environment the best place to observe the difficulties?
- Often SCQ from school highlights no issues

What happens if they go under the radar?

- <http://www.itv.com/news/meridian/2018-03-28/mo-shares-her-thoughts-about-living-with-autism/>

Gender stereotypes



- "Women are affected by Autism in the same way as their male counterparts however they are doubly challenged by the added assumptions that society places on their female gender" Dr Jacqui Ashton Smith, Executive Director of Education NAS
- Problems related to the autism spectrum are combined with society's expectations re looks, fashion, gender stereotyping, social aptitude, ability to empathise, dating, marriage and motherhood etc.

So what does it look like?



But unlike Hooper's story, Julia seems to avoid the clips her hands over her ears.

Social Interaction



- better at 'faking it' - copying peers - masks symptoms
- on the periphery of social activities, blend in
- often led by peers rather than initiating contact
- more aware of social expectations
- feel a need to interact socially
- Can do social and 'behave' at school but..... the 4 o' clock explosion

Social interaction



- socially immature
- passive aggressive to control
- primary school - "mothered" by other girls
- secondary school - bullied
- parents often 'engineer' or 'organise' friendships
- dependent on mothers - best friend
- may have one special friend

Social Communication



- Girls generally have superior linguistic abilities to boys of a similar cognitive level.
- Repetitive questioning.
- In society girls are expected to be social in their communication but they do not 'do social chit chat or make meaningless comments to facilitate social communication'.
- Little idea of social hierarchy and how to communicate with people of different status

Social Imagination



- Girls have better imagination and more pretend play
- Many have a rich and elaborate fantasy world with imaginary friends
- Girls escape into fiction and some live in another world
- When involved in solitary doll play they have a 'script' and may reproduce a real event or a scene from a book or film

Social Imagination



- lack of reciprocity in their social play
- can be controlling or domineering
- Often really care what their peers think

Special interests and routines



- The male stereotype of autism has clouded the issue in the diagnosis
- New diagnostic criteria for girls being developed by Tony Attwood
- Boys are more hyperactive and physical and have interests in technical hobbies and facts
- More passive and collect information on people rather than things
- Their interests are similar to those of other girls - animals, soaps, celebrities, fashion
- Perfectionism
- It is not the special interests that differentiate them from their peers but it is the quality and intensity of these interests.

FIGS - FIGHTING INEQUALITY FOR GIRLS ON THE SPECTRUM





<https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/talk-to-others/2015-07-27/girls-on-the-spectrum-and-their-special-interests>

Common recorded qualities for Girls

- Honest
- Determined
- Experts on certain topics
- Kind
- Speak their minds
- Enjoy solitary activities
- Perfectionists
- Reliable and trustworthy friends
- Artistically creative
- Often liked by adults but misunderstood by peers



Jennifer O'Toole

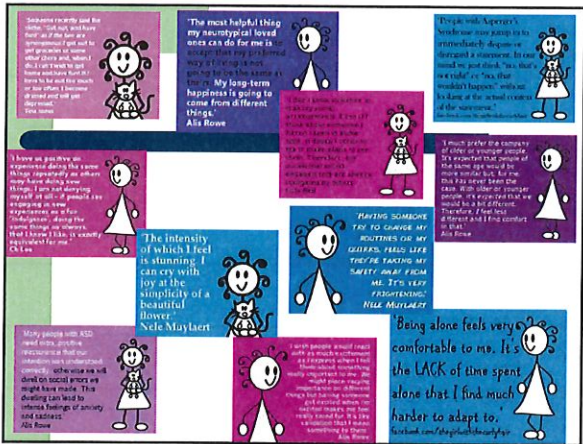


- “The words used to describe women on the spectrum come down to the word ‘too,’” O’Toole says. “Too much, too intense, too sensitive, too this, too that.”

Understanding of self

- Who am I if I do not know that I have autism?
- What is autism and how does having it affect me?
- How do others see me?
- How can I influence how others see me?
- Where can I be what I am?





So what do they need?

- Support
- Information
- Inspiration
- And most of all a Voice - a good listening to...





To end

“The result of failing at navigating socially for an autistic girl can have an impact on her identity development that ripples into adult life. Succeeding at relationships - at least somewhat - is a key developmental phase for girls in this society that becomes a crucial bridge to adulthood. Without some social achievement and connection, a girl's identity can falter and suffer” Zaks 2006
