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How Autism is Potentially Harder to Diagnose in Females

1. Introduction

- “You don’t act like you have autism, girls can’t be autistic, are you high functioning? You have autism? I’m so sorry. These are just a few of common misconceptions of females that may be diagnosed with autism.
- Autism, or autism spectrum disorder, is a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech, sensory, and sometimes nonverbal communication.
- Because autism is a spectrum disorder, each person with autism experiences different levels of strengths and challenges. The ways in which people with autism learn, think, and problem solve can range from highly skilled to severely challenged. Some people with autism may require significant support in their day to day life while others may need little to no support and live life entirely independently.
- Several factors may influence the development of autism at a young age, and it is often accompanied by sensory sensitivities and medical issues such as gastrointestinal disorders, seizures or sleep disorders, as well as mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, hyperactivity, and inability to pay attention to anything for a certain amount of time.

2. Body paragraph #1

- The first appearance of autism in historical literature was in 1911 by Eugen Bleuler who was a psychiatrist from Switzerland, who used the term to describe a

unique cluster of symptoms that were traditionally thought to be symptoms of schizophrenia.

- The Greek word *autos*, autism was originally used to describe extreme social withdrawal that was common with psychiatric diseases that presented with psychosis. It is not known that autism and schizophrenia are two unrelated disorders, autism was not classified as its own disorder in any diagnostic manual until 1980.
- Historically, electroconvulsive therapy methods have improved and are currently used to treat psychiatric illnesses such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. ECT involved passing small electric current through the brain and intentionally trigger a brief seizure. The resulting seizure episode is hypothesized to change brain chemistry in a way that reduces mental health symptoms such as uncontrollable agitation and self destructive behavior.
- The evidence base for a dietary treatment approach is mixed and restrictive diets are not a recommended treatment method by most autism research and physician groups.

3. Body Paragraph #2

- For a very long time and even to this day, a lot of individuals only believe males or think that males are the only people who can be on the spectrum, this is because females tend to portray it a lot differently than males.
- Females are more likely to self-diagnose and diagnose themselves before any doctor even brings autism into the topic of conversation.

- Stimming may look different than the typical flapping, females are more likely to engage in behavior such as biting nails, listening to repetitive sounds or music, or pushing their lips up against their gums.
- Overlapping diagnoses such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, ADHD, and anorexia can get in the way of diagnosing autism.

4. Body Paragraph #3

- Boys are five times more diagnosed vs. females, females are normally diagnosed, if ever, after the age of fifteen. This is mainly because of social communication, men struggle to mask in social scenarios, meaning it is harder for them to hide their emotions or being socially uncomfortable
- Sensory overwhelm, social cognition differences, executive functioning, interoception, and camouflaging being a way to cope are multiple ways females hide their symptoms.
- Females are more likely to internalize, especially with emotions such as anxiety and depression.
- Evidence is more common to be missed within females, fewer or less obvious signs of restricted interests shown by females, such as Disney films or psychology, and in men they are showed as numbers or dinosaurs.
- Behavioral and preliminary neuroimaging findings suggest autism manifests different in females.

5. Conclusion

- There are a lot of common misconceptions that come with really any diagnosis for any group of people or individual, and I think we need to start recognizing and

doing our research to be more knowledgeable of our surroundings and not judgmental towards anyone.

- Autism has no treatment, however early recognition, as well as behavioral, family, and educational therapies may reduce symptoms and support development and learning skills.
- A lot of individuals only believe males or think that males are the only people who can be on the spectrum, this is because females tend to portray it a lot differently than males.
- Stereotypes from doctors, in earlier years and the specific phrase, “you have a girl, it’s not autism.”
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