

Actually Autistic Educator

Episode One: Rejecting the Blue

June 2021

Overview

Jeanne (she/her) speaks with 3 other autistic individuals regarding how the focus on white boys and men in research has missed large sections of the autistic population and harmed those who fall outside of this model. Gigi (she/her) shares how her experience as a young black woman led to misdiagnosis, and about the importance of learning from marginalized communities who are out there looking for a platform. Morgan (they/them) talks about how gendered expectations on communication disproportionately impact people assigned female at birth and how this can cause changes in how autism presents in different marginalized communities, and shares how an outsider's perspective can cause physical harm to disabled individuals. Amanda (she/her) shares how as a black woman adopted by white parents she was denied access to an autism diagnosis because "it's really more of a white boy's thing" and about the need to find diverse representation of autistics.

Key Points:

- The focus on autism as a predominately white male condition has caused serious problems in the field of mental health for diverse autistics, both in creating diagnostic criteria that frequently misses how autism may present in other communities due to socialization differences, and also in forming biases where practitioners are less likely to correctly apply existing diagnostic criteria or consider referrals for testing for individuals outside the expected race and gender.
- Autistic individuals have consistently been underappreciated for the role they could serve in giving educators & health professionals a more accurate understanding of autism from the inside, rather than only learning about it from an outsider's observations. Listening to a diverse collection of autistic perspectives will dramatically improve your ability to diagnose and support autistic clients, students, coworkers, or family members.

- Time: 42:00

Quotes:

"Being a black woman put me in a different light to some of these doctors ... So they gave me the diagnosis they thought fit" [depression rather than autism]. Gigi

"I look back through the lens of autism and I know that those things that were happening to me weren't depressive episodes. They were meltdowns, they were shutdowns." - Gigi

"If people weren't involved who were from communities of color when we started building out these diagnostic criteria, how is that going to impact how many people are getting misdiagnosed?" - Jeanne

"People who are assigned female at birth have this socialization pattern drilled into them from such an early age about how we're expected to smile, we're expected to be empathetic. We're expected to emotionally support and validate other people, that people who are assigned male just don't have that same level by a landslide. But then as a result, if we are only viewing autism through the lens of these young boys ... it completely misses how that socialization impacts the ways that autism comes out in us." - Jeanne

"I think the way in which light it up blue and all of the classic problematic tropes around a classically male presentation of autism bring home for us is that our community is more diverse than anybody knows." - Morgan

"At one point my parents were ... told that, 'I mean, we would consider autism, but that's really more of a white boy's thing.' So, I did not get any actual medical confirmation that that was what was going on until I was in my 20s." - Amanda

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“There is a lack of consideration of the experiences of people of different races and different neurotypes and different socioeconomic statuses because a choice that might not make logical sense to you, you don’t know what calculation someone else is making to make those choices.” - Amanda

“People who want to do this really need to make the effort to come into autistic spaces and accept the fact that you might be uncomfortable in this, because this is not a space that is meant to cater for you. And this might be like a new thing for you. And that’s OK. Be willing to accept and learn and take correction. Be willing to do the thing you were asking autistic people to do for you.” - Amanda

“We don’t need others to save us or ‘speak’ for us, we just need people to listen.” - Jeanne

Studies referenced:

Milner, V., McIntosh, H., Colvert, E. et al. “A Qualitative Exploration of the Female Experience of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)”. Journal of autism and developmental disorders 49, 2389–2402 (2019)
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Mandell, David S et al. “Disparities in diagnoses received prior to a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.” Journal of autism and developmental disorders vol. 37,9 (2007): 1795-802.

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Warrier, Varun et al. “Elevated rates of autism, other neurodevelopmental and psychiatric diagnoses, and autistic traits in transgender and gender-diverse individuals.” Nature communications vol. 11,1 3959. 7 Aug. 2020.

Mehran, Vogel, Ortega et al. “Commission on women and cardiovascular disease: time for a shift in women’s health.” The Lancet, Volume 393, Issue 10175, (2019): 967-968.

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