

# Actually Autistic Educator

## Episode 3.5: Famous Autistics in Popular Culture TRANSCRIPT

Hi all, welcome back to another mini episode of Actually Autistic Educator. We've had some serious topics talking about the ableism autistics regularly face, so I thought we deserve a chance to highlight some cool autistics that you might not be aware of, so welcome to famous autistics in popular culture!

While autism is different in all of us, the way our brains work can often make us amazing at different things, from research to acting to even sports – for some of us, not me. As we discussed in our last episode, masking is a common thing autistics are forced to learn, with an interesting side effect being that many of us end up connecting strongly with theatre, where performing is what everyone does, and some common autistic traits around creating scripts and formulas for facial features can end up putting us ahead of our non-autistic peers, so there are numerous famous actors who have spoken publicly about being autistic.

Probably the most famous is Anthony Hopkins, whose numerous roles include Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs*, as well as Odin in the Marvel movies. With two Academy Awards, four BAFTAs, and two Emmys, plus a knighthood for his acting, he's a great example of why anyone claiming they can't hire autistic actors for autistic roles because autistics can't handle acting or aren't good enough actors, is BS and covering up for their ableism.

Actress Daryl Hannah was very big in the 80s and 90s, with major roles in movies like *Blade Runner* and *Splash*, later played an assassin in *Kill Bill*, and recently appearing in the Netflix series *Sense8*. When a child in the 60s, her parents were advised to put her in an institution because of her autism, but fortunately her mother fought back and changed the environment, not the child, with great results.

Another famous actor is Dan Aykroyd of the original *Ghostbusters*, who actually co-wrote the movie and said in interviews that it was inspired by his strong interest in the paranormal - a great reminder to

educators and therapists that instead of pushing us away from our special interests, if we are allowed to pursue them many of us end up highly successful because of them.

Not an actor, but a similar experience of autistic interest creating a profession, Clay Marzo is a highly ranked professional Hawaiian surfer, who is spoken of having an intense focus on surfing, which led to him winning major surfing competitions while as young as age 10! His passion became his career.

Another sports professional is Breanna Clark, a paralympian who won the Gold medal for the US in the Women's 400m at the Rio 2016 Paralympics, amongst numerous other wins and titles.

Back to media, Hannah Gadsby is an actor, comedian, and writer, who jumped to popular awareness with her Netflix comedy special *Nanette*, which received an Emmy Award for Outstanding Writing, and is a great example of what I often see in autistic senses of comedy - we frequently notice patterns of behavior or socialization that others gloss over, by being forced to the sides we get a great view of human nature and the many weird things neurotypicals do that are so ingrained no one realizes how weird they actually are, which is a great recipe for comedy.

Another writer is Jorge Gutierrez, a non-speaker as a young child, who co-wrote and directed the Fox movie *The Book of Life* in 2014, which was nominated for a Golden Globe Award, wrote and directed the Emmy nominated *Son of Jaguar* short for Google, and is currently writing and directing the Netflix Animation film *Maya and the Three*.

Finally, the inspiration for me doing this segment was actor and writer Wentworth Miller, known for his leading role in *Prison Break*, which got him nominated for a Golden Globe for best actor, or where I know him from, Leonard Snart/Captain Cold on the CW's *Flash* and *Legends of Tomorrow*. He also wrote the screenplay for the film *Stoker* from 2013. He's been

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someone I really respect for several years for his work standing up for gay rights and what he views as his responsibilities as a gay actor, talking openly about his experiences with depression, and about body positivity. He recently shared his autism diagnosis on Instagram and I am so happy that someone I've admired for a while now is another member of our autistic community.

When producers of movies and tv shows that are focused on autistic characters claim that it's not ableism that causes them to not hire autistic actors and writers, it's just that autistics aren't good enough, this list clearly shows them to be wrong. If you want to profit off a marginalized group but refuse to employ them - to be clear, you are being exploitative, and you're almost certainly going to get your depictions wrong, because you will only ever have an outsider's perspective about our lives.

And while media is important because depictions in movies and tv shows can seriously shape the way society thinks about and treats autistics, we can't stop there. The same principle also needs to apply to other fields. Think of the "experts" who are teaching about autism in your field - how many are actually autistic? If you have been to a training about autism, was the lead presenter autistic? Are the books and resources you recommend to autistics or non-autistic parents written by actual autistics to get a firsthand account?

If you're not autistic and listening, thank you, and I'd also ask for you to think about what you could be doing in your profession to uplift autistic voices and perspectives. If you're a parent of autistic children, please, listen to what we are saying about the things that have harmed us versus helped us rather than what other non-autistics say they think about what we need. And to the autistics listening, no matter what autism looks like for you, your perspective and thoughts and self have serious value. You are an expert in your own brain, and you deserve a society that appreciates you just as you are. If you have

thoughts you'd like to share, reach out to me by direct messaging on Twitter or Facebook, I'd love to chat.

Before we wrap up, I wanted to say that for this episode I've focused on people who have identified themselves as autistic, but as we've talked about before, there are serious barriers to diagnosis for many people, especially people of color, women, and people who lack insurance. Likewise, the labels we use now are different from what would have been used in the past. This means we only scratch the surface of the variety of amazing autistics who are currently alive and who have come before us.

Related to this, I'd like to also shine a spotlight on some autistics who I think deserve to be famous.

Autistic Typing is the pseudonym of woman who described herself as an "indigenous Autistic mother of Autistic children, passionate about sharing knowledge, healing trauma, and building community in alignment with my cultural values." I follow her on Facebook and Twitter and she shares and hosts great conversations and provides excellent education.

Kerima Cevik is the creator of the hashtags #AutisticWhileBlack and #AutisticAphorism, and has testified before the Maryland State Assembly on disability related bills. On Twitter and her blog "The Autism Wars" she writes about disability rights, autistic inclusion, accommodation, communication rights, and representation. <http://theautismwars.blogspot.com/>

Finally, Autistic Science Person is the pseudonym of an autistic self-advocate and graduate student in auditory neuroscience. They are on the board of Neuroclastic, an autistic-led nonprofit, and write about disability justice and how to support autistics on Twitter, Facebook, or their website <https://autisticscienceperson.com/>

Thank you to everyone for listening, we'll be back September 1st with a full episode wrapping up



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our three-part series on autistic communication, this one focused on autistic empathy and common misunderstandings about how autistics and non-autistics empathize and communicate with others. As always, I'd love to connect via Facebook or Twitter at Actually Autistic Educator, and please share, review, and subscribe to support this podcast.

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