

The role of Speech & Language Therapists working with autistic females.

Heidi Keeling

Independent Speech & Language Therapist &
Nottinghamshire NHS Foundation Trust



equalstrands@gmail.com & heidi.keeling@nottshc.nhs.uk



Heidi Keeling – Equal Strands (@Autism&AspergerConsultancy)



@EqualStrands

Prevalence (a few statistics)

3:1 is the male to female ratio
(Lomes et al 2017)

2:1 autism with intellectual
disabilities

15:1 autism without intellectual
disabilities

Lorna Wing (1981)

Bancroft et al (2012)	Females	Males
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Diagnosis by 11 years old	1:5	1:2
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Misdiagnosis given	42%	30%
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Diagnosis has made NO difference to the way support is offered	49%	39%
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Autistic communication differences and disabilities



DSM5

- A. Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts
- B. Restricted & repetitive patterns of behaviour
- Sensory Integration
- C. Symptoms present in early developmental period

What does it look like?

- Planning ahead in conversation.
- Surprises the listener when the person occasionally misses the social point
- Double processing (non-literal versus literal).
- Improvement in communication with familiarity.
- Hyper-alertness (sensory & communication).
- Interaction more social (than male) but led by peers (Gould & Ashton-Smith, 2011)
- More active imaginations (fantasy world and imaginary friends). (Gould & Ashton-Smith, 2011)
- 'Linguistic camouflage' (Borse et al, 2019), mirroring, and **masking** underlying needs (i.e. not a speech or a language problem).

Diagnostic and clinical bias?

Hans Asperger originally thought NO FEMALES were 'affected by Asperger Syndrome'. He later revised this idea. "symptoms fully fledged after teenage onset" (Gould 2011).

DSM5 & ICD10: is the clinical diagnostic criteria written with men in mind?

Failure to identify, assess and service autistic women (and girls) based on male phenotype is a form of discrimination

(www.autisticwomenmatter)





**Kezza &
heidi keeling:
equal strands**

A word on tricky subjects

Many females are not referred for diagnostic assessment – not disruptive enough. More likely to follow mental health than neurodevelopmental pathways.

Autistic mothers: fear of children being taken into care (autismwomenmatter.org.uk) means reluctance to ask for diagnosis.

FALSE accusations of ‘fabricated and induced illnesses’ in autistic families. Follow @Shona_Mu for upcoming research.

What are the barriers and risks?

Social and pragmatic problems

- Working out inferred meaning
- Problems with central coherence. Processing load involved in getting the bigger picture.
- Social communication (understanding) does not match up with general ability including speech and language.

Related to and resulting in

- Generalised and social anxiety
- Depression
- Selective mutism for some
- Internalising/ externalising behaviours.
- Misdiagnosis of labels that stick!
- Avoidance behaviours (including gradual but persistent school refusal)
- relationships can be problematic
- Undisclosed childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence, and vulnerable to sexual attacks.

What can we do...

think... **is there an underlying social communication need?**
(because others may not)

- Social and pragmatic communication assessment (for differential diagnosis)
- Accessible Information Standards (2016)



Social communication assessments

SLT specific

- linguistic analysis/ERRNI for narrative abilities. Linguistic markers!
- ‘Understanding paragraphs’ (CELF4/5): for understanding and use of ‘language for thinking’ (including inference)
- Children’s Communicating Checklists and Communication Checklists Adults
- Autism Research Centre (Reading the Mind in the Face, **Social Communication Questionnaire** and other free to download assessments)

Therapy and intervention

Resilience: How to compliment the person's current knowledge of communication.

Identity: developing the person's narrative.

Skills: check, clarify, and repair

Strategies: Identifying the person's known 'expert mate'.

Therapy: Role of comic strip conversation

Time!

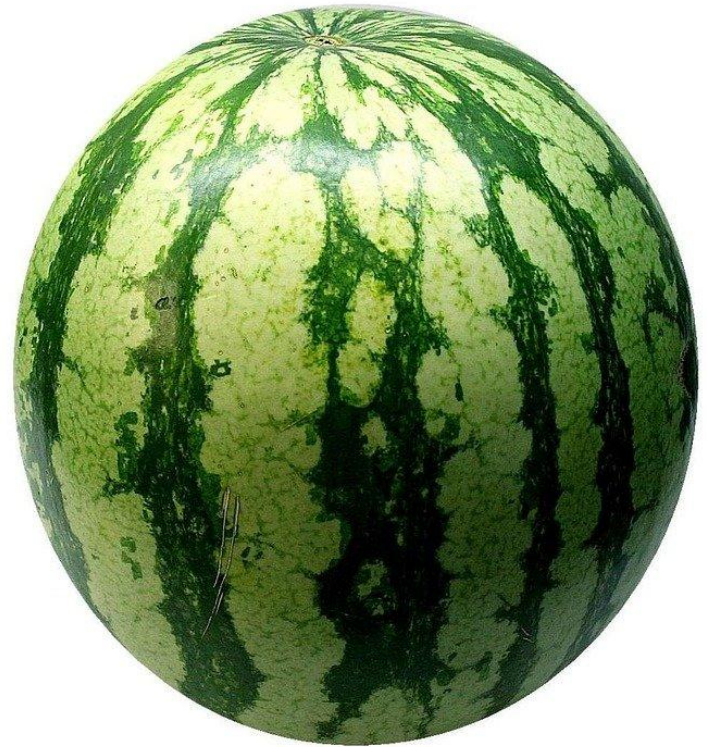
Neurodiversity,
Equality,
Collaboration,



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HEIDI KEELING

Life maps

- Central to 'post diagnostic support'
- Focus on the past, present, and future (Strydom & Herbst, 2007)



**Lisa's water melon
metaphor to describe
'masking'**

Barriers for Speech & Language Therapists

**Are we the last to
be involved?**

Mission statement:

- Speech & Language Therapist is central to the MDT
- Speech & Language Therapist are THERAPISTS and can do intervention for autistic people without intellectual disabilities.

A word from Kezza

When I was emotional I was seen as aggressive. I was just emotional. It was the way I was communicating.

I was rebelling against the system.

Don't see just the behaviour or just the mental health. See what I was trying to communicate.

The way I expressed myself made it harder for professionals to locate what was going on.

A parent might be saying x,y,x but it is really a,b, and c that is going on. Take time to listen to parents.

A social view on communication...

Think Autism:
Communicating in the
public sector

[https://www.youtube.com
/watch?v=47dhnbeJzTY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47dhnbeJzTY)



Follow these (to name a few)



Agony Aunty

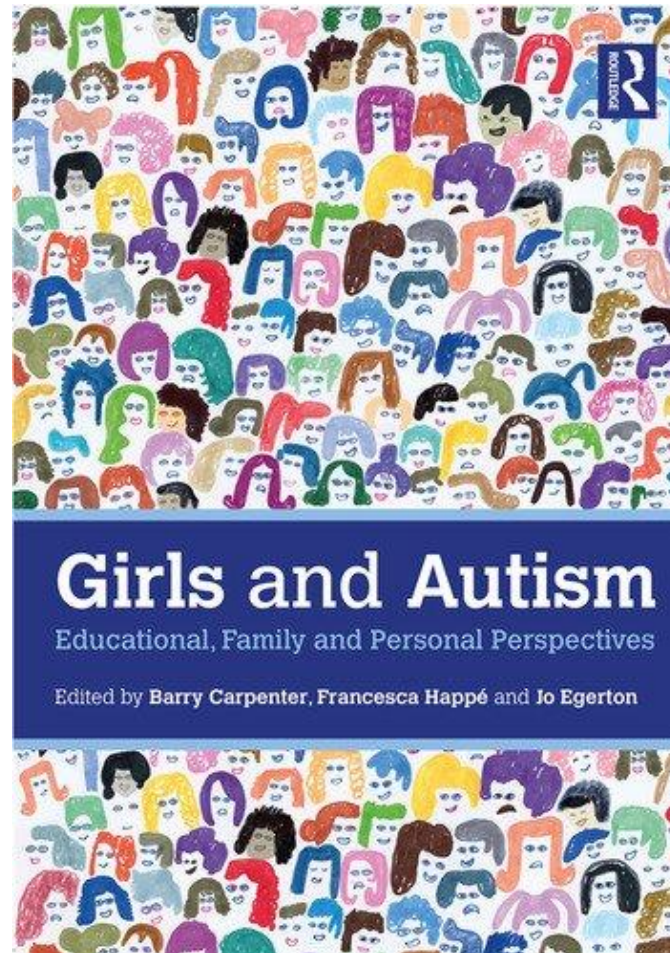


Purple Ella



#ActuallyAutistic
@Shona_Mu

(Nearly) hot off the press



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