

# Autism in Women: Where We Are on the Spectrum a Survival Guide for Adult Female Diagnosis.

A Book Proposal

By: Rachael Bell

## **WORKING TITLE: AUTISM IN WOMEN: WHERE WE ARE ON THE SPECTRUM A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR ADULT FEMALE DIAGNOSIS.**

### **Book Description:**

This book will explore the research on autistic women that has been made in recent years. It will brush over the history of autism in the United States, while also focusing on the current research, and what has yet to be explored when it comes to women on the spectrum. Aside from research, this book will house testimonials from women about their diagnosis and what they currently do as professionals. It will have end-of-chapter questions with workbook sections at the end of each chapter to help retain knowledge. After reading this book autistic women should have a firm foundational understanding of what autism is, how it presents in women, what it means for them, and what is currently being researched.

### **About the Author:**

My name is Rachael Bell, I am a 22-year-old graduate student at the University of Central Florida where I am pursuing a master's degree in Rhetoric and Composition. I was diagnosed with autism at the age of 18, which is considered early for a woman. After my diagnosis, I was confused and found little to no resources for adult females. This book is a book that I would have greatly appreciated after diagnosis, and I believe it can help many women who have felt like there is something wrong with them or don't belong. In undergrad, I studied creative writing which gave me a profound love for the written word. Combining both my graduate and undergraduate studies along with my diagnosis, I am uniquely situated to write this book. I hope to gather all the current research in one place so that other women and their loved ones don't have to hunt for it.

### **Target Audience:**

Autism advocates, autistic women, autistic people, families and friends of autistic people, researchers, and scholars. This book is for the autistic community which is approximately "Around 1% of the world's population has autism spectrum disorder. That's more than 75,000,000 people, according to researched conducted by the CDC" (Elias). This book is geared toward women, who are only a fraction of that total, "Various studies suggest that the ratio of autistic males to females ranges from 2:1 to 16:1. The most-up-to-date estimate is 3:1" ("Autistic Women and Girls").

### **Market Research and Comparative Titles:**

#### **Comparative Titles:**

1. *A Little Less Broken: How an Autism Diagnosis Finally Made Me Whole* by Marian Schembari. Publisher Macmillan, released on 09/24/2024. This book is about author Marian Schembari who was diagnosed with autism at the age of thirty-four. She goes through her life from first love to having children. She provides research and the history of autism within her book (Schembari).
2. *How Not to Fit In: An Unapologetic Guide to Navigating Autism and ADHD* by Jess Joy and Charlotte Mia. Published by Harper Collins Publishing released on 04/16/2024. This book is a workbook in which the authors Joy and

Mia who were both diagnosed as adults provide history, research, and how being undiagnosed affects mental health (Joy and Mia).

3. *Unmasking Autism* by Devon Price PhD. Published by Penguin Random House, released on 04/05/2022. Dr. Price uses his own experiences as an autistic adult who masks along with research, history, and personal profiles, to reveal the phenomena that is masking (Dr. Price). This book is seen as a tool to help autistic people stop masking and accept themselves.

### **Market Research:**

This book fits within these competitive titles because it combines many aspects from each, testimonials like *A Little Less Broken: How an Autism Diagnosis Finally Made Me Whole* by Marian Schembari, workbook aspects like *How Not to Fit In: An Unapologetic Guide to Navigating Autism and ADHD* by Jess Joy and Charlotte Mia, and history and research like *Unmasking Autism* by Devon Price PhD. It will focus specifically on women, how autism affects them, and how it presents in women to hopefully make late diagnosis less of a natural occurrence. I believe choosing Penguin as the publisher would be a good option since Harper Collins and Macmillan both have recent publications centered around women with autism and Penguin does not.

### **Jacket Copy:**

*Autism in Women: Where We Are on the Spectrum a Survival Guide for Adult Female Diagnosis*, explores autism in women. With the recent upticks in diagnosis in women and the lack of female adult-centered material, this book aims to fill the gap. It provides the reader with a firm foundation of the history of autism in the United States, how it presents itself in women, what to do after diagnosis, what current research around the globe has concluded, and where research is headed. Have you struggled with finding all the necessary research and history about autism? Have you wondered why fewer women are diagnosed or why they are diagnosed late in life? Have you been diagnosed and asked what is autism? Then you are in good company! Author Rachael Bell aims to answer those questions and more within each chapter of this book. Each chapter delves into the nitty gritty of autism and concludes with optional workbook sections to help the reader not only retain the information but also help them gather their thoughts and understand what is going on. It will also include testimonials from autistic women, how they felt after being diagnosed, and where they are now. So, if you are interested, let's crack this spine and get to work!

## **Book Outline**

### **Introduction: Where We Are on The Spectrum:**

The introduction will lay out the foundational history of autism in the United States which is needed to read this book. It will be about ten pages long and will explore how autism came to be recognized. The introduction will house these quotes and present questions that will be answered within the book. Here are three example quotes that are to be used in the introduction, the first reads “Around **1%** of the world’s population has autism spectrum disorder. That’s more than 75,000,000 people, according to researched conducted by the CDC” (Elias). The second quote reads, “Various studies suggest that the ratio of autistic males to females ranges from 2:1 to 16:1. The most-up-to-date estimate is 3:1” (“Autistic Women and Girls”). The third example quote will provide a working definition of autism, “Autism spectrum disorder

(ASD) is a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave. Although autism can be diagnosed at any age, it is described as a ‘developmental disorder’ because symptoms generally appear in the first 2 years of life” (“Autism Spectrum Disorder”). This introduction will lay the foundation of the book, but it will not be necessary for those who already have an understanding of what autism is.

## **Chapter 1: The Female Phenotype:**

Chapter one will walk the reader through current research on autism or as Bargiela et al. calls it, “Autism spectrum condition (ASC)” (Bargiela et al.) and autistic Women. This will start out with a discussion on the theories that autistic women have a phenotype (Bargiela et al.). Here is an example quote to be used in the chapter: “One proposed explanation of the ascertainment bias against females with ASC is that there is a female autism phenotype; a female-specific manifestation of autistic strengths and difficulties, which fits imperfectly with current, male-based conceptualisations of ASC ” (Bargiela et al.). This chapter will explore the possibilities of what the phenotype is and what researchers have concluded. It will end by briefly touching on camouflage and how autistic women “‘fly under the radar’” (Lai et al.), which leads into chapter 2. The author will offer her thoughts throughout the chapter to make things lighter for the reader. This chapter will conclude in roughly twenty-five pages. This includes two pages for the workbook question and answer section, and four notebook pages for additional thoughts. Example questions: What are you hoping to learn from this book? What are your initial thoughts on what was discussed in chapter one? Does it make you feel any different about your diagnosis?

## **Chapter 2: Like Chameleons We Camouflage:**

This chapter will dive deeper into the camouflage or masking. It will explore Lai et al.’s research, what Lai et al. concluded, and have three short vignette testimonials from autistic women who will speak more later on in the book. They will share their experience camouflaging or masking with the reader. Here is an example quote to be used in the chapter, “In contrast to individuals who receive diagnoses in childhood, some individuals are only identified later in life and may ‘fly under the radar’ for many years partly because of learnt strategies to conceal social difficulties. These late-diagnosed individuals tend to suffer from concurrent mental health challenges potentially related to long-term stress in adaptation to daily life in the society (Lai and Baron-Cohen, 2015)” (Lai et al.). The author will offer her thoughts throughout the chapter to make things lighter for the reader. This chapter will conclude in roughly twenty-five pages. This includes two pages for the workbook question and answer section and four notebook pages for additional thoughts. Example questions: Do you feel that you camouflage or mask or have you done so in the past? Can you relate to the experiences in the testimonials, if so, how? How do you feel learning about this topic?

## **Chapter 3: Late Diagnosis and How it Affects Us Mentally:**

This chapter will explore Webster and Gravis’ research on late diagnosis and how it affects autistic women. Their research ties in the phenotype (Bargiela et al.) and camouflage (Lai et al.). Here is an example quote to be used in the chapter, “Based on the women’s narratives, it could be argued that girls and women with ASD actually benefit from facing challenges in their life. Moreover, removing these challenges may actually prevent them from developing the self-efficacy to engage in problem solving as adults. Previous research (Ashby and Causton-Theoharis, 2009) indicates that when adults with ASD are assumed to be incompetent, they can

become exhausted with the effort of constantly proving their skills” (Webster and Gravis). The author will offer her thoughts throughout the chapter to make things lighter for the reader. This chapter will conclude in roughly twenty-five pages. This includes two pages for the workbook question and answer section and four notebook pages for additional thoughts. Example questions: Can you relate to constantly feeling the need to prove yourself? Do you or your loved one feel that this is an accurate conclusion?

### **Chapter 4: How Autism Affects Us All:**

Chapter four will discuss where research is headed and what the autistic community hopes it finds. It will house 3-5 vignette testimonials from women of all walks of life. These testimonials will showcase their careers, families, and other struggles and successes they might have. This chapter will end with this quote and a discussion on how these vignettes reflect Webster and Gravis’ findings, “Probably, the most striking finding was that the women in this study refused to see themselves as victims. In contrast, they felt the decisions they had made when faced with particularly difficult challenges, and the manner in which they had constructed a new sense of identity following their diagnosis with ASD had enabled them to become self-efficacious and successful women. Across the stories, there is a message of hope and positivity, showing women with ASD can lead successful and productive lives within society” (Webster and Gravis). Each vignette will focus on different things but all will conclude with where the women are now, how they are doing, and what their lives look like. Whether that is career, relationship, or health related. Here are some examples of them within Chapter 4.

1. Vignette – One woman’s journey to diagnosis and exploring her career.
2. Vignette – One woman discussing her journey through unmasking and how it affected her.
3. Vignette – One woman’s journey through navigating marriage and children.

The author will offer her thoughts throughout the chapter to make things lighter for the reader. This chapter will conclude in roughly twenty-five pages. This includes two pages for the workbook question and answer section and four pages for additional thoughts. Example questions: Do you feel that Webster and Gravis’ quote is an accurate representation after reading the testimonials? Can you see your loved one in the women who gave the testimonials, or can you relate to the women who wrote the testimonials?

### **Chapter 5: Where We Hope to Go From Here:**

This chapter will conclude the book. It will house the author's testimonial and her thoughts on where the research is headed. It will reiterate the fact that not much research has been conducted, but that there is hope for autistic women. That maybe in the future, girls will be diagnosed sooner and correctly. This chapter will conclude in roughly twenty-five pages. This includes two pages for the workbook question and answer section and four notebook pages for additional thoughts. Example questions: Do you feel that your view of autism has changed since reading this book? Do you feel hopeful or disheartened by this conclusion of research, and why? Do you better understand yourself or your loved one?

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