

Autistic Women and Girls:

Assessment, Assessment in later life and lived experience

Wednesday January 27th 2021 at 6:30pm-8:45pm via Zoom Webinar

This event will be recorded

6:30: Opening address from Dr Maria Migone, Chair of the event

6:35: Presenter 1 Jody O'Neill (*pre-recorded*)

Jody is an award-winning autistic writer and performer with over 20 years' experience working in the theatre, film and TV sector in Ireland and internationally. Her critically-acclaimed play, *What I (Don't) Know About Autism*, premiered in 2020 in co-production with the Abbey Theatre, and in association with The Everyman (Cork) and Mermaid County Wicklow Arts Centre. It will return to the stage in late 2021 for live and internationally streamed performances. Funded by Dublin Theatre Festival's Future's project, she is currently developing a project called *Seaside Conversations*, working with disability service users to explore their experiences of the pandemic. With support from the Arts Council, she is researching and developing a new play about female autism. She is also working on commissions for new plays from Youth Theatre Ireland and Mermaid. She lives in Wicklow with her partner and son.

Autistic writer and performer, Jody O'Neill talks about the experiences that led to her autism diagnosis in 2019 and also the creation of her play *What I (Don't) Know About Autism*. In a whirlwind overview, she explores some of the challenges she faced spending 39 years as unknowingly neurodivergent in a largely neurotypical world - school, employment, friendships, parenting and the art of learning to ask questions.

6:50 Presenter 2. Jacinta McComish (*live*)

Jacinta is a qualified Counselling Psychologist with current Chartered membership of the Psychological Society of Ireland. Jacinta attained her honours degree in psychology at the School of Psychology, NUI, Maynooth. Jacinta went on to complete her Master's degree in counselling psychology at the School of Psychology, Trinity College, Dublin. During this time, she completed a number of placements working with children, adolescents and adults with behavioural, cognitive, and emotional difficulties. Jacinta also gained more specialised experience working with young adults with Asperger's Syndrome registered with the AS Project at Trinity College. Jacinta also completed an additional course in psychometrics at Trinity College. She specialises in working with and supporting clients and their families in seeking assessment in relation to autistic spectrum disorder and in subsequent psycho-educational work with both children and adults. In clinical practice, Jacinta takes an integrative approach to working with people, drawing on different psychotherapy approaches to provide psychological intervention adapted to the individual's needs.

Whether making the decision to request an autism assessment for your child or for adults exploring the idea of seeking an assessment for yourself you are bound to have lots of questions about the process. This presentation aims to bring you through that process, providing you with additional

information on the assessment procedure. The focus will be on the specific traits and presentation of women and girls in the context of an autism diagnosis.

7:05: Presenter 3. Louise Claffey (live)

Louise received a diagnosis of autism as a child, and since then has occasionally talked about her experiences as an autistic person in public, most notably in Dublin Castle in 2016, and hopes to do more of it in the future. She is currently studying history and political science at Trinity College Dublin and enjoys photography and fiction in all forms.

Louise's speech will cover her experience of being diagnosed during childhood and the effect that getting a diagnosis during childhood has had on her as she has grown up and gone through life, including the effects it has had on her access to help and supports, as well as her self-esteem.

7:20: Break (5 min)

7:25: Presenter 4. Aisling McKenna and Niamh Doody (pre-recorded)

Aisling is in her final year of a professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at Trinity College Dublin. Prior to commencing the doctorate, Aisling spent two years at the National Centre for High Functioning Autism at Great Ormond St Hospital for Children. Aisling has a special interest in the area of assessment of complex cases and presentations of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Especially the assessment of adolescent females and those with co-occurring mental health difficulties such as anxiety, anorexia nervosa and selective mutism. Aisling was previously involved in the development of an autism spectrum disorder assessment pathway for children presenting with selective mutism.

Niamh is a Clinical Psychologist in Training with the University of Limerick. She completed her undergraduate degree in psychology in Maynooth University and her masters degree in Clinical Neurodevelopmental Sciences at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience, at King's College London. Niamh has experience working in a specialist neurodevelopmental assessment service for adults in London, as well as a research assistant on the Longitudinal European Autism Project (LEAP).

Aisling and Niamh will be speaking about their experiences of working in different specialist autism services in the U.K. Their talk will touch on their learning and experience at these services including the background to these services and what they provide for service users, professionals and researchers

7:40: Presenter 5. Una Sheehan (pre-recorded)

Una is a retired national tour guide, fascinated by the contexts of the past, with degrees in archaeology and history of art from UCD, qualifications and experience in journalism, & teaching in further education (UK). Lived abroad (Rome, London), still searching for answers to life questions that mystified me, returned home to care for parents. Hearing about a young child diagnosed with autism, I searched for a book about this & at last found the beginning of the answers I needed, culminating in diagnosis of ASD/L1 (Asperger's Syndrome) age 70! Very late diagnosis elder, but not

too late to find a proper reality check at last, and the great bonus of becoming part of the autism community in Ireland, meeting up with people of like mind, and real expertise at a time when we are valued and respected at last. Thanks to all who helped me along the way.

Una's presentation outlines her reasons for seeking assessment although she was nearly 70 at the time, and her responses to the result as well as to the wider context of autism community research now. She had three reasons: personal, testing, and protection. She discovered in a book on autism, that testing might provide answers to lifelong questions. A rigorous assessment by a psychologist confirmed the answers, and that made it a positive experience for her.

7:55: Presenter 6. Elaine McGreevy (live)

Elaine Mc Greevy is a Speech and Language Therapist with 25 years of experience, based in Northern Ireland, working in the NHS and independent practice. Elaine has worked as a lead clinician since 2001, involved in setting up and developing diagnostic and speech and language therapy services for autistic children and young people. Elaine applies a pro-neurodiversity framework in her clinical work, ensuring that neurodivergent children are supported using a strengths-based, positive approach. Elaine advocates passionately for services for autistic children and their families that meet their needs. She promotes positive understanding of autistic children and young people through her bespoke training sessions for parents, health, educational and voluntary sector colleagues. Elaine's contribution to autism speech and language therapy services was recognised with the Autism NI Laura Millen Award in 2011. Elaine and early years colleagues at Glenbrook Surestart, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust won the National Autistic Society Professional Awards in the early years and education category for "Inspirational Education Provision – Primary School and Early Years" (2019).

In this brief presentation, the impact of gender and autism stereotyping contributes to missed diagnosis, possibly mis-diagnosis, and stigma will be discussed. The male : female diagnostic discrepancy in autism prevalence has led to researchers to focus on this area in recent years. While this has resulted in a broader understanding of how autism presents in different people, the gendering of autism has also created further autism stereotypes that results in those who do not fit the stereotype failing to be identified, as well as excluding the experiences of non-gender conforming autistic people. Factors influencing the diagnostic process will be discussed, including the role of masking. The presentation finishes with implications for supporting autistic people

8:10: Break (5 min)

8:15: Panel Discussion (live)

8:45: Chair closes event

For 2 CPD points please email: autism@psychologicalsociety.ie

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