

Uniquely Us
Gracefully Navigating the Maze of
Neurodiverse Marriage
Autism Faith Marriage

Chapter 1:

Navigating the Maze of Adult Autism
Identification and Acceptance
Finding the 'Lost Generation'

Chapter 1

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental issue that presents challenges in social communication and interactions.

Changing diagnostic criteria and misconceptions have prevented many adults with HFA from being diagnosed

Autism awareness is increasing while discrepancies persist in diagnosing adults with autism

- Stereotypes
- Misconceptions

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According to CDC the autism rate is 1 in 36 American Children

According to WHO the global autism rate is 1 in 100.

This could imply that autism is being diagnosed in children about 2.7 times more often than in adults

Reasons for this discrepancy include

- Lack of appropriately trained professionals
- Changing criteria over time
- Stereotypical views of autism
- Scarcity of research on adult autism

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The author's research has identified the need for

- Increased awareness of and training in diagnosis of autism in adults
- Enhanced support for ND marriages
- Additional research to understand the unique dynamics of ND relationships

The research was exploratory (new perspective in a relatively unknown topic) and phenomenological (used words and participant experiences to better understand the topic)

A 38 question survey was developed by a team of NT and ND people and evaluated for harm by a clinician on the spectrum

322 participants completed the survey (108 on the spectrum, only 10 were women)

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The first barrier in the maze: Getting a Diagnosis

Average age of Autism diagnosis (86% over age 30 with 77% identified at age 40 or older)— indicator of a ‘Lost Generation’

Nine of the 23 adults interviewed saw their diagnosis as a negative

Three saw the diagnosis as neutral

Eleven reported a sense of relief or positive response to the diagnosis

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The second barrier in the maze: Acceptance by both spouses

Dan's insights and JTG's diagnosis journeys

There are different responses to finding out later in life that you are neurodiverse or on the spectrum.

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The third barrier in the maze: Co-Occurring Issues

Co-Occurring issues may create symptoms that mask autism traits leading to treatments that do not work.

Medication based on a behavior cannot provide a solution if the root cause is differing neurology.

Co-Occurring issues include

Depression

ADHD

Anxiety Disorders

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Reasons evaluators gave for not making an adult autism diagnosis

General evaluators

- They are too successful at work
- They show too high of intelligence

Christian evaluators

- All marriages have struggles
- That is just a man thing
- These are common male-female communication issues

Mary Gable's Blog about how not having/accepting a diagnosis can impact the NT spouse

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(How To) Navigate the Maze of Identification and Acceptance of Autism/Neurodiversity

1. Find a provider with expertise and training in identifying autism in adults.
 - What diagnostic tools are used?
 - What training do they have for understanding adult autism?
 - Is the spouse's input being considered (it should be)?

Is a Formal diagnosis needed?

- Informal is probably fine for beginning your marriage work
- Formal may be needed/required if workplace accommodations are being requested or to document a disability.
- Full psychological evaluation is not always needed and does NOT ensure that autism will be addressed-you need to ask

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(How To) Navigate the Maze of Identification and Acceptance of Autism/Neurodiversity (continued)

2. Both Spouses need to accept the diagnosis and neurodiversity differences

Lack of acceptance will result in being stuck

Cognitive vs. True acceptance

Cognitive: “I or they seem to fit the profile”

True: This will require change of expectations, working through pain, and both of us to work as a team

An autism diagnosis is not a pass for not changing behavior by the ND partner

An Autism diagnosis does not mean that the ND partner is responsible for all of the change needed in the relationship

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(How To) Navigate the Maze of Identification and Acceptance of Autism/Neurodiversity (continued)

3. Work on the “double empathy problem”

Double Empathy refers to the challenges that exist when people with different experiences or neurotypes are interacting with each other; each person may struggle to empathize with the other

Differences in language, use of language, or comprehension can exacerbate the double empathy problem

When mixed neurotypes are communicating less information is shared and communication is less effective

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(How To) Navigate the Maze of Identification and Acceptance of Autism/Neurodiversity (continued)

Additional Insights may be found at

<https://www.youtube.com/@dr.stephaniec.holmes3536>

<https://www.christianneurodiversemarriage.com/>