Autism and Girls Explained

Boys are diagnosed with ASD at rates 4-5 times more than girls. Historic research has tended to focus on boys, and thus measurements, instruments and what we know about how Autism presents is based primarily off of the male experience. Increasingly, researchers and clinicians are beginning to understand the different female presentation. Below are some things that are important to understand about why females present differently.

More Socially Motivated

Girls and women tend to be more socially motivated. This means that a) they have more practice socializing and thus more social skills b) develop sophisticated strategies to adapt to a neurotypical social world. Based on brain scans, a female’s social brain looks equivalent to a neurotypical man’s social brain. For this reason, girls present with much fewer social-communication “deficits”. This is one of the reasons girls go undiagnosed at such alarming rates.

Masking

Women and girls on the spectrum often use sophisticated strategies to camouflaging or blend in socially. Such things include: repressing or hiding stimming behavior, studying and coping social behavior, analyzing body language, scripting and rehearsing conversations, or being overly accommodating/helpful to others.

Internalization

Girls are more likely to internalize repetitive behavior. This can look like internalized stimming (repeating the same sentence, phrase, or counting). Repetitive behavior can also look like disordered eating, listening to the same song on repeat, repeating the same meals every day, and so on.

Culturally Appropriate Interests

“Rigid” interests (i.e., special interests) is another trait of ASD. Clinicians are often looking for bizarre and obsessive interests. Girls tend to have more culturally blending interests (dolls, barbies, Disney) and women (psychology, theater, environmentalism, advocacy, and the arts). The intensity of interest will be similar, but it may come across as looking incredibly “passionate” or “creative” or “academic”.

Source: meganannaneff @Neurodivergentinsights.org