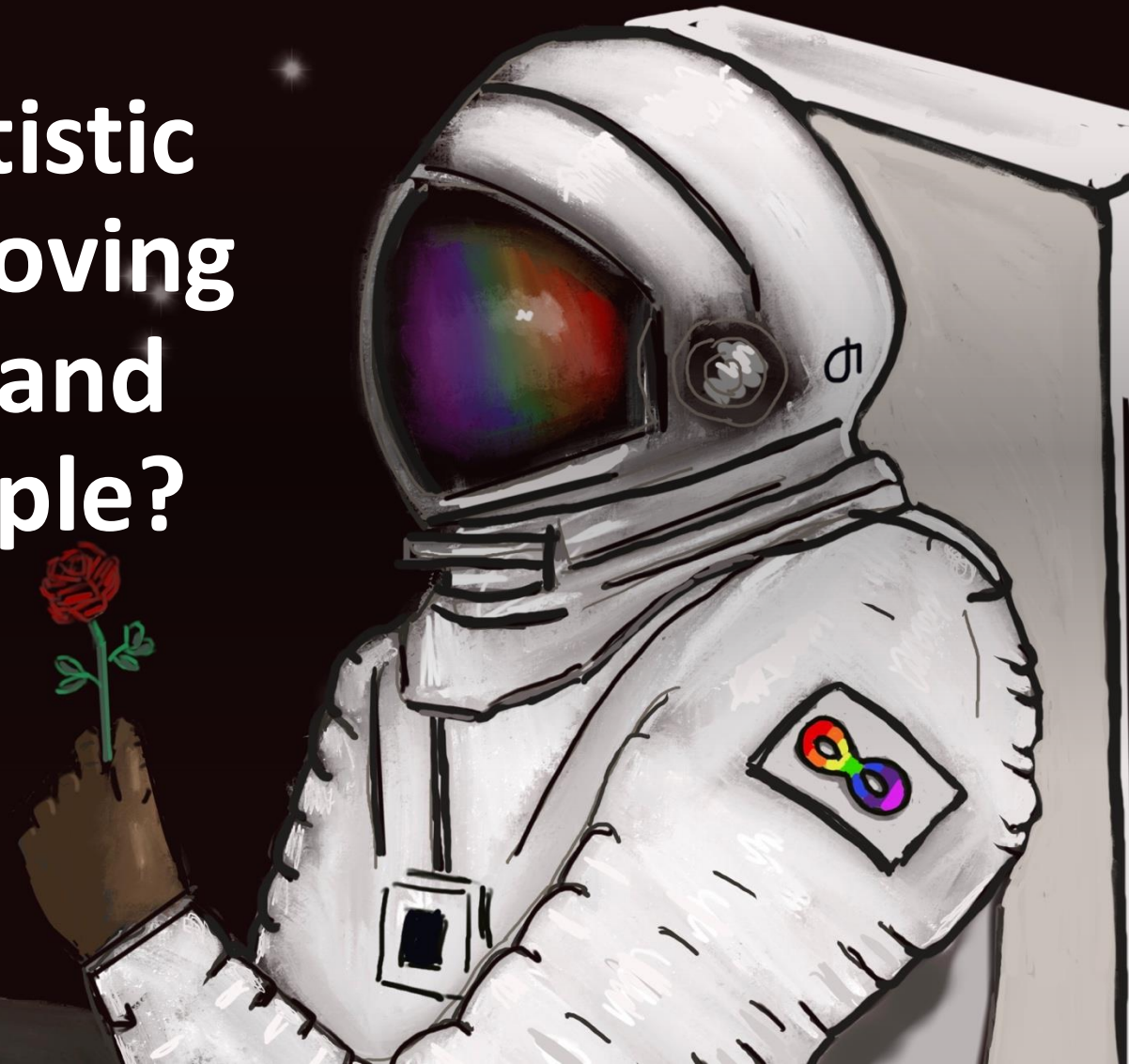
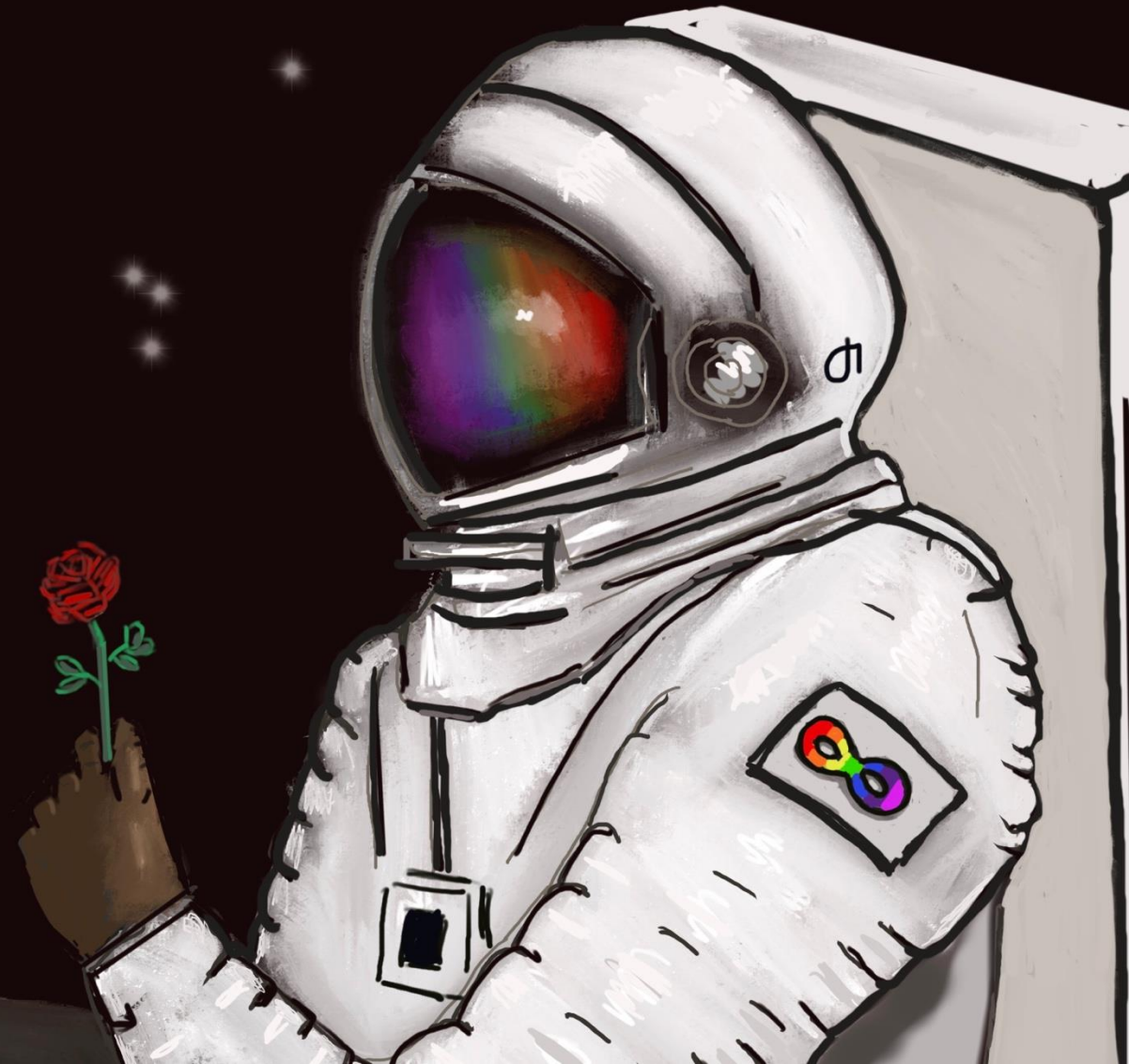
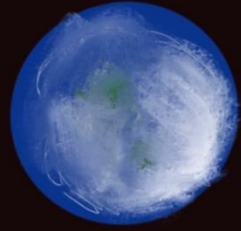


How can insights from autistic doctors contribute to improving understanding of autism and outcomes for autistic people?

Dr Mary Doherty
Clinical Associate Professor
School of Medicine, University College Dublin

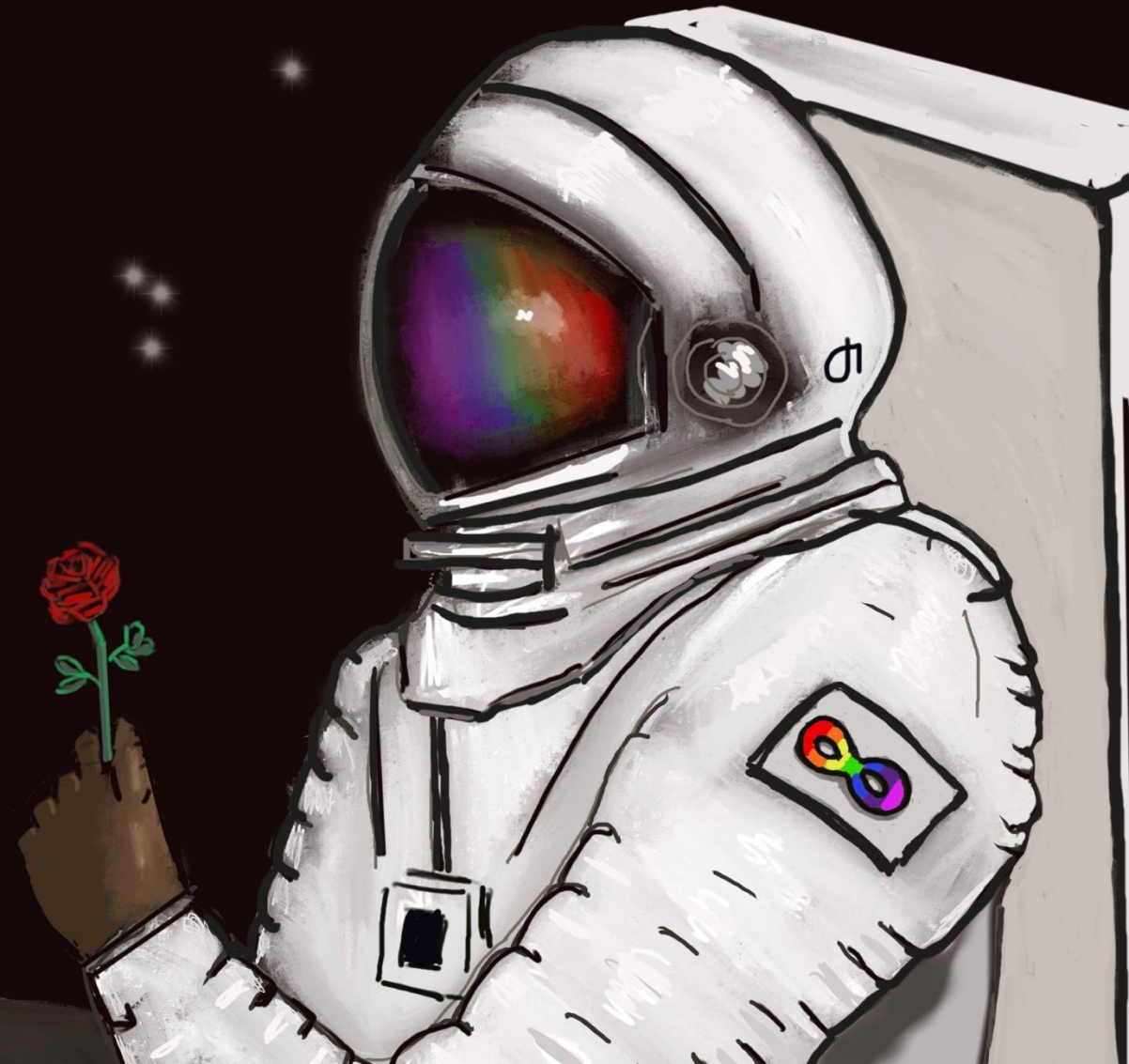
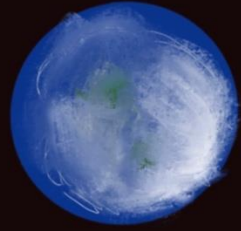
ARI / World Autism Organization, Sept 3, 2025





Artwork by Mr James Henderson
Autistic Doctors International Deputy Lead
Consultant Plastic Surgeon, Bristol, UK

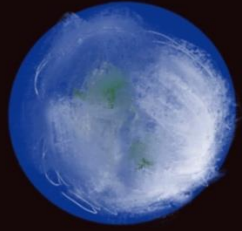
Positionality is everything





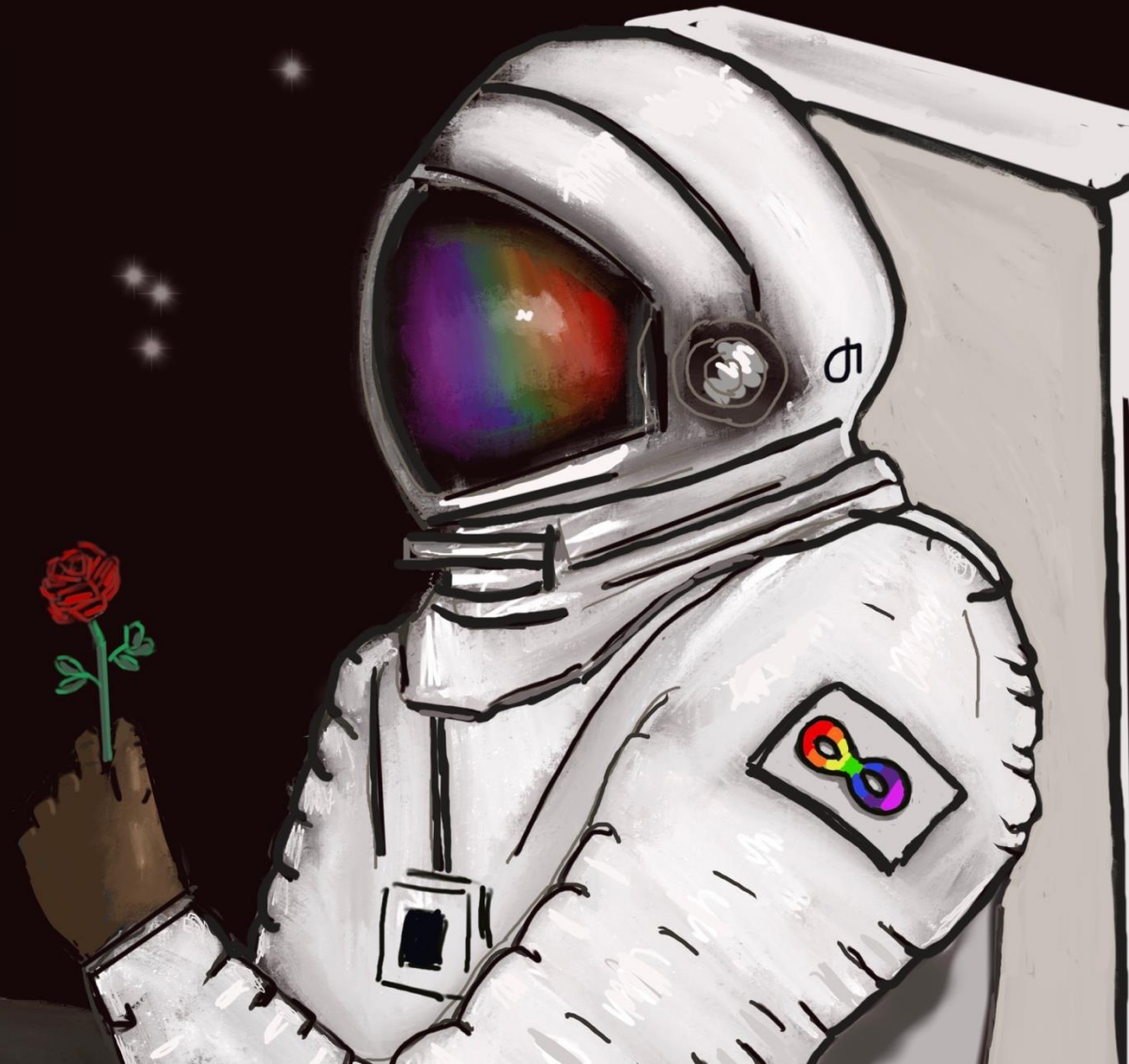
- *How did I get to be a consultant anaesthetist in my 40s before anyone realised?*
- *The way in which autism is framed will have a profound effect on outcome*
- *Neurodiversity-affirmative approach for optimum outcome*





Outline

- Autistic Doctors International
- Data from ADI Membership Survey
- Autistic Psychiatrists
- Recognising autistic people
 - Self, colleagues, patients, loved ones
- Diagnosis, Disclosure & Shame
- Healthcare Barriers & Autistic SPACE



PhD by Publication

Autistic doctors: leveraging insider perspectives to improve healthcare for autistic people



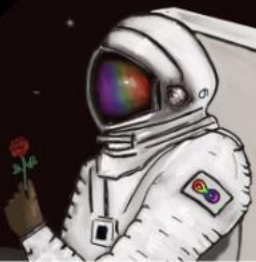
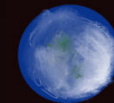
Name: Mary Doherty

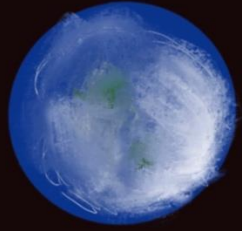
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6995-3745

5 papers:

Barriers to Healthcare (2)
Autistic Doctors
Autistic SPACE
Autistic Psychiatrists

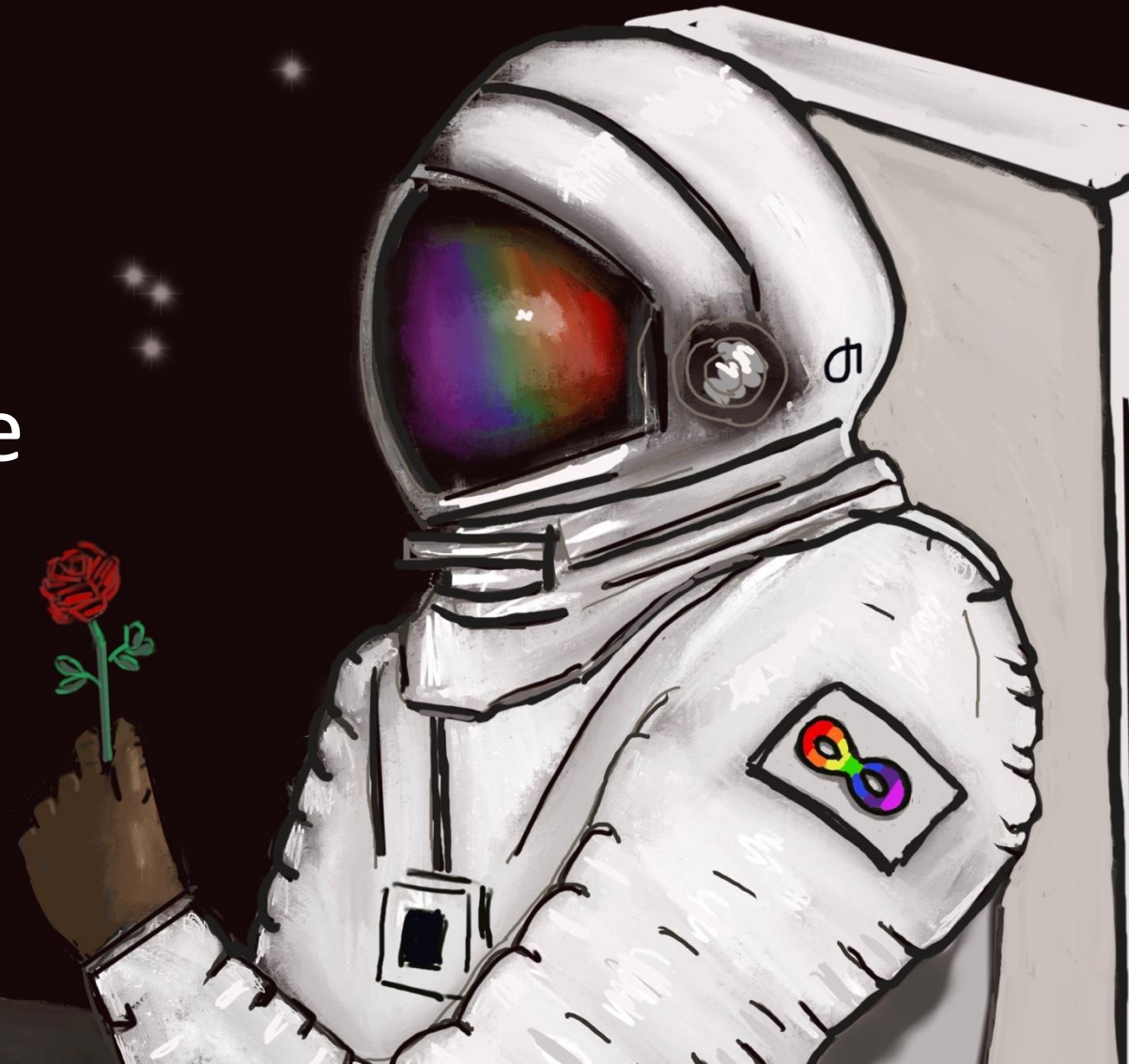
January 2025

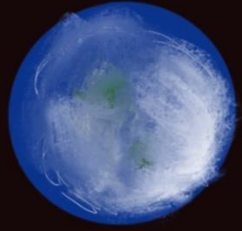




Learning outcomes

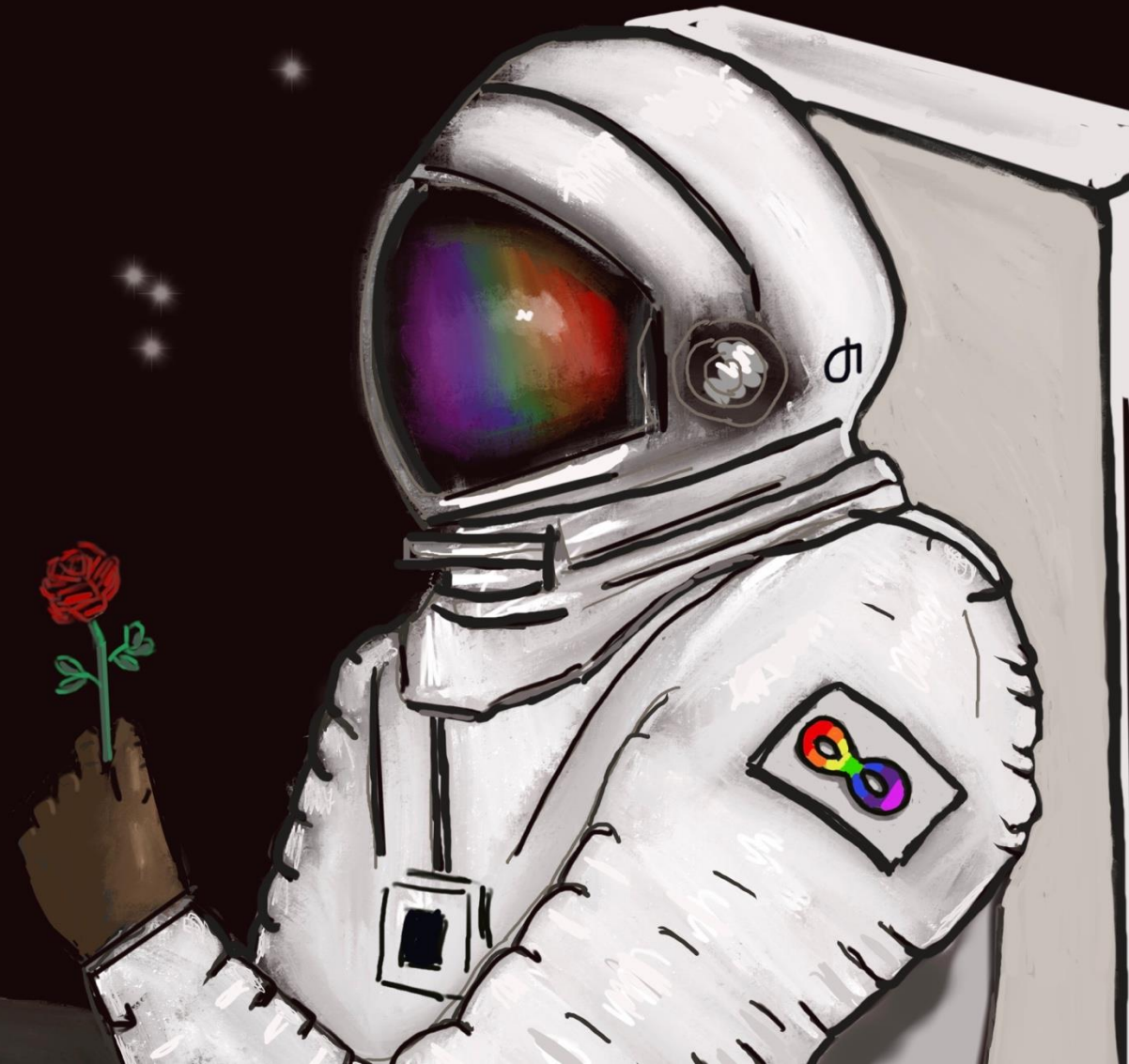
- The goal is for all healthcare providers to become not just autism aware but **autism competent**

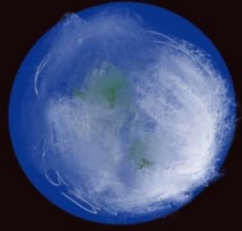




Learning outcomes

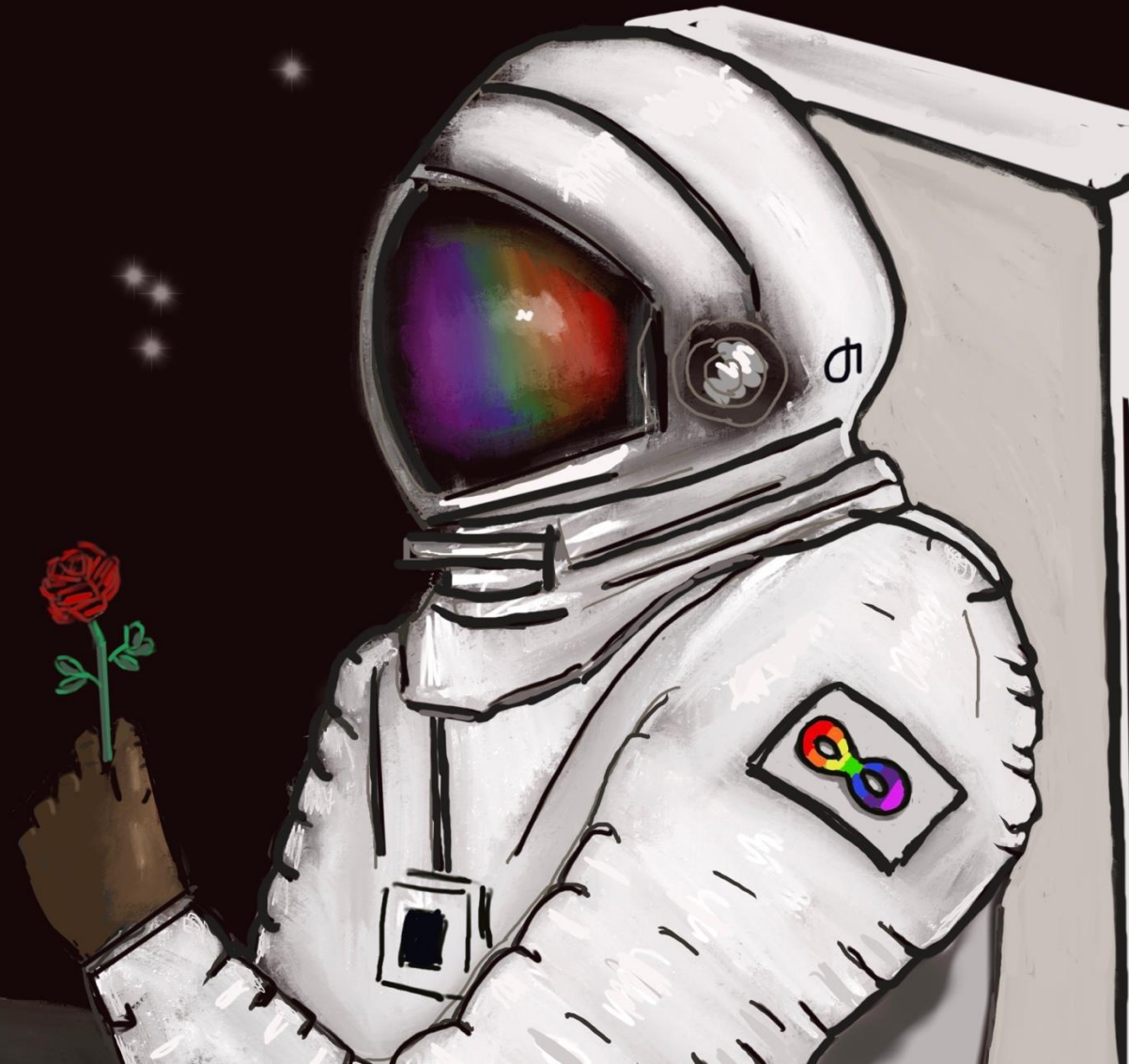
- The goal is for autistic kids to grow up **confidently autistic**





Today's Question

- How can insights from autistic doctors, including autistic psychiatrists, contribute to improving understanding of autism and outcomes for autistic people?



AUTISTIC DOCTORS INTERNATIONAL (ADI)



[HOME](#) [ABOUT US](#) [OUR TEAM](#) [OUTPUTS](#) [CONTACT US](#)

WELCOME TO

Autistic Doctors International (ADI)

Do you identify as autistic and have a medical degree?

[MESSAGE US ON FACEBOOK](#)

autisticdoctorsinternational.com
mary@autisticdoctorsinternational.com





Autistic Doctors International
Outputs from our members



Dr Mary Doherty and Dr Sebastian Shaw - Healthcare barriers for autistic adults



Barriers to healthcare and self-reported adverse outcomes for autistic adults: a cross-sectional study | British Medical Journal Open



A full CIRCLE: inclusion of autistic doctors in the Royal College Of Psychiatrists' values and Equality Action Plan | The British Journal of Psychiatry



Considering autistic patients in the era of telemedicine: the need for an adaptable, equitable, and compassionate approach | British Journal of General Practice Open



Recognising autism in healthcare | British Journal of Hospital Medicine



Autism: making reasonable adjustments in healthcare | British Journal of Hospital Medicine



Supporting autistic doctors in primary care: challenging the myths and misconceptions | British Journal of General Practice



Autistic doctors: overlooked assets to medicine | Lancet Psychiatry



The neurodiversity concept viewed through an autistic lens | Lancet Psychiatry



Autistic role modelling in medical education | Education for Primary Care



Vive la difference! Celebrating and supporting autistic psychiatrists with autistic doctors international | British Journal of Psychiatry Open



Autism in general practice | Australian Journal of General Practice



On Diagnosis | Secretly Autistic GP



How to prepare Autistically for COVID-19: Essential tips from an Autistic Doctor | Reframing Autism



What it is really like to be an autistic doctor



Secretly Autistic GP



Stories from the Spectrum: Harri Wilson



The Autistic Doctor: How finding my neurokin helped me to embrace my identity



Recognising human variation



This Doctor Can: The autistic doctor

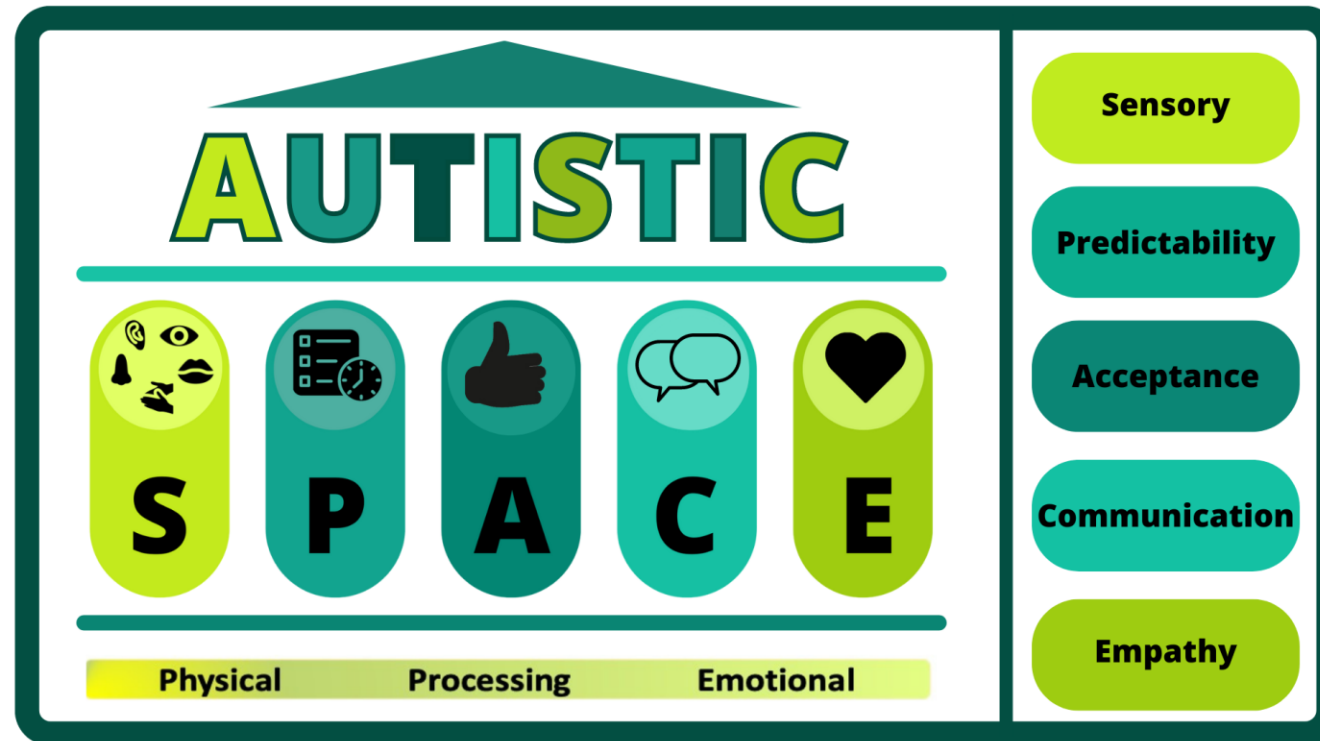


Neurodiversity in practice: autistic anaesthetists can be an asset

[https://linktr.ee/
autisticdoctors](https://linktr.ee/autisticdoctors)



Autistic SPACE: A novel framework for meeting the needs of autistic patients in healthcare settings



Metrics

Downloaded 20,435 times



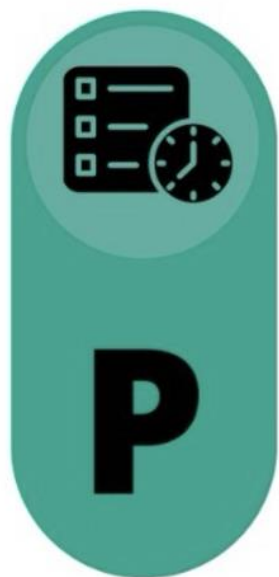
>20K downloads!!

Translated to
Traditional Chinese
French

Doherty M, McCowan S, Shaw SC. Autistic SPACE: a novel framework for meeting the needs of autistic people in healthcare settings. Br J Hosp Med (Lond). 2023 Apr 2;84(4):1-9.



AUTISTIC



Physical

Processing

Emotional

Sensory

Predictability

Acceptance

Communication

Empathy



medical education

WHEN I SAY | Open Access |

When I say ... neurodiversity paradigm

Sebastian Charles Keith Shaw, Megan E. L. Brown , Neera R. Jain , Riya Elizabeth George, Sarah Bernard, Megan Godfrey-Harris, Mary Doherty

First published: 19 November 2024 | <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.15565>



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REVIEW ARTICLE · Volume 24, Issue 4, P129-137, April 2024 · Open Access

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Autism and anaesthesia: a simple framework for everyday practice

[S. Brown](#)¹ · [K. Rabenstein](#)² · [M. Doherty](#)^{3,4}

AUTISTIC

S P A C E

Physical Processing Emotional

- Sensory
- Predictability
- Acceptance
- Communication
- Empathy



British Journal of General Practice

bringing research to clinical practice

Editorials

Overcoming barriers to autistic health care: towards autism-friendly practices

Mona Johnson, Mary Doherty and Sebastian CK Shaw
British Journal of General Practice 2022; 72 (719): 255-256. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp22X719513>



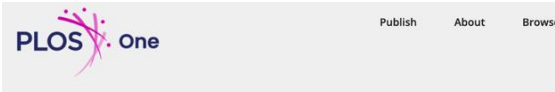
British Journal of General Practice

bringing research to clinical practice

Editorials

Supporting autistic doctors in primary care: challenging the myths and misconceptions

Mary Doherty, Mona Johnson and Carole Buckley
British Journal of General Practice 2021; 71 (708): 294-295. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp21X716165>



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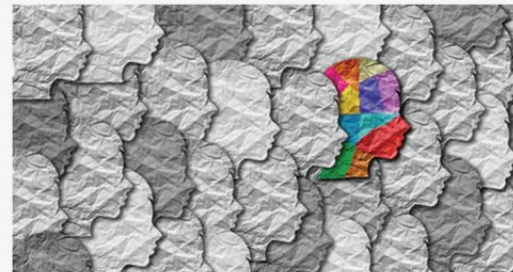
Reasonable adjustments for autistic clinicians: A qualitative study

Helen Smith , Sebastian C. K. Shaw, Mary Doherty, Jonathan Ives

Published: March 25, 2025 · <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0319082>



Neurodiversity in practice: autistic anaesthetists can be an asset



Neurodiversity

Autistic SPACE for Inclusive Education

[Elaine McGoldrick](#) , [Aoife Munroe](#) , [...], and [Mary Doherty](#)



Frontiers in **Psychiatry**

The experiences of autistic doctors: a cross-sectional study

Sebastian C. K. Shaw^{1*}, Alexander Fossi², Laura A. Carravallah³, Kai Rabenstein⁴, Wendy Ross² and Mary Doherty⁵



Impact Factor: 5.2 / 5-Year Impact Factor: 6.2

JOURNAL HOMEPAGE



Open access | Research article | First published online October 17, 2023

Barriers to healthcare and a 'triple empathy problem' may lead to adverse outcomes for autistic adults: A qualitative study

Sebastian CK Shaw, Laura Carravallah, and Mary Doherty. View all authors and affiliations

OnlineFirst | https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613231205629



Home / Archive / Volume 12, Issue 2



General practice / Family practice
Original research

Barriers to healthcare and self-reported adverse outcomes for autistic adults: a cross-sectional study

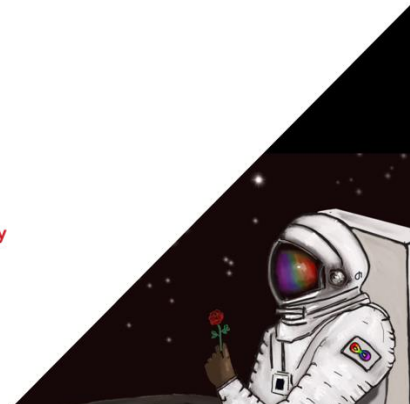
Mary Doherty, Stuart Neilson, Jane O'Sullivan, Laura Carravallah, Mona Johnson, Walter Cullen, Sebastian C K Shaw



PDF



PDF +
Supplementary
Material

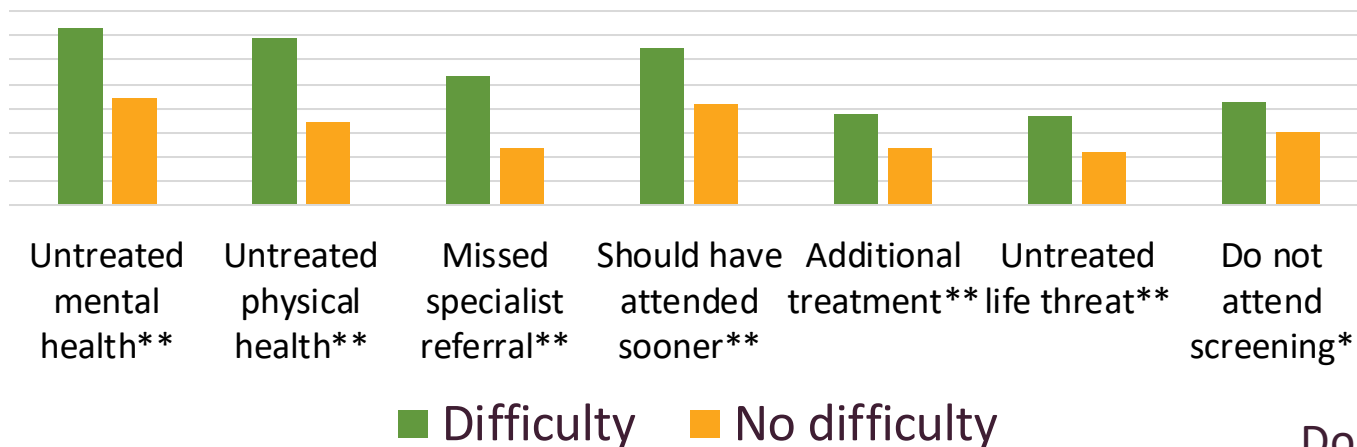


Healthcare barriers lead to adverse outcomes

- Known healthcare disparities
- Known mortality gap
- Known access barriers
- Patient/provider communication
- Sensory sensitivities
- Knowledge of autism



• **Barriers associated with adverse health outcomes**

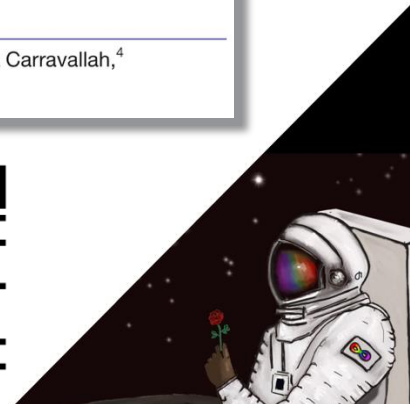
• **Prior negative experience**



Open access Original research

BMJ Open Barriers to healthcare and self-reported adverse outcomes for autistic adults: a cross-sectional study


Mary Doherty ¹, Stuart Neilson,² Jane O'Sullivan,³ Laura Carravallah,⁴ Mona Johnson,⁵ Walter Cullen,⁶ Sebastian C K Shaw ⁷



Key findings

- 78% of autistic respondents avoid using telephone
- Most common barrier to healthcare access (60%)
- **Avoid / delay GP visit due to not feeling understood (55%)**
- Sensory difficulties in waiting room
- Executive functioning / planning difficulties
- Concerns around disclosure of diagnosis
- Communication difficulties
 - Doctors (53%)**
 - Receptionists (46%)**
 - **Associated with **all** adverse outcomes



THE  TIMES

Home UK World Comment

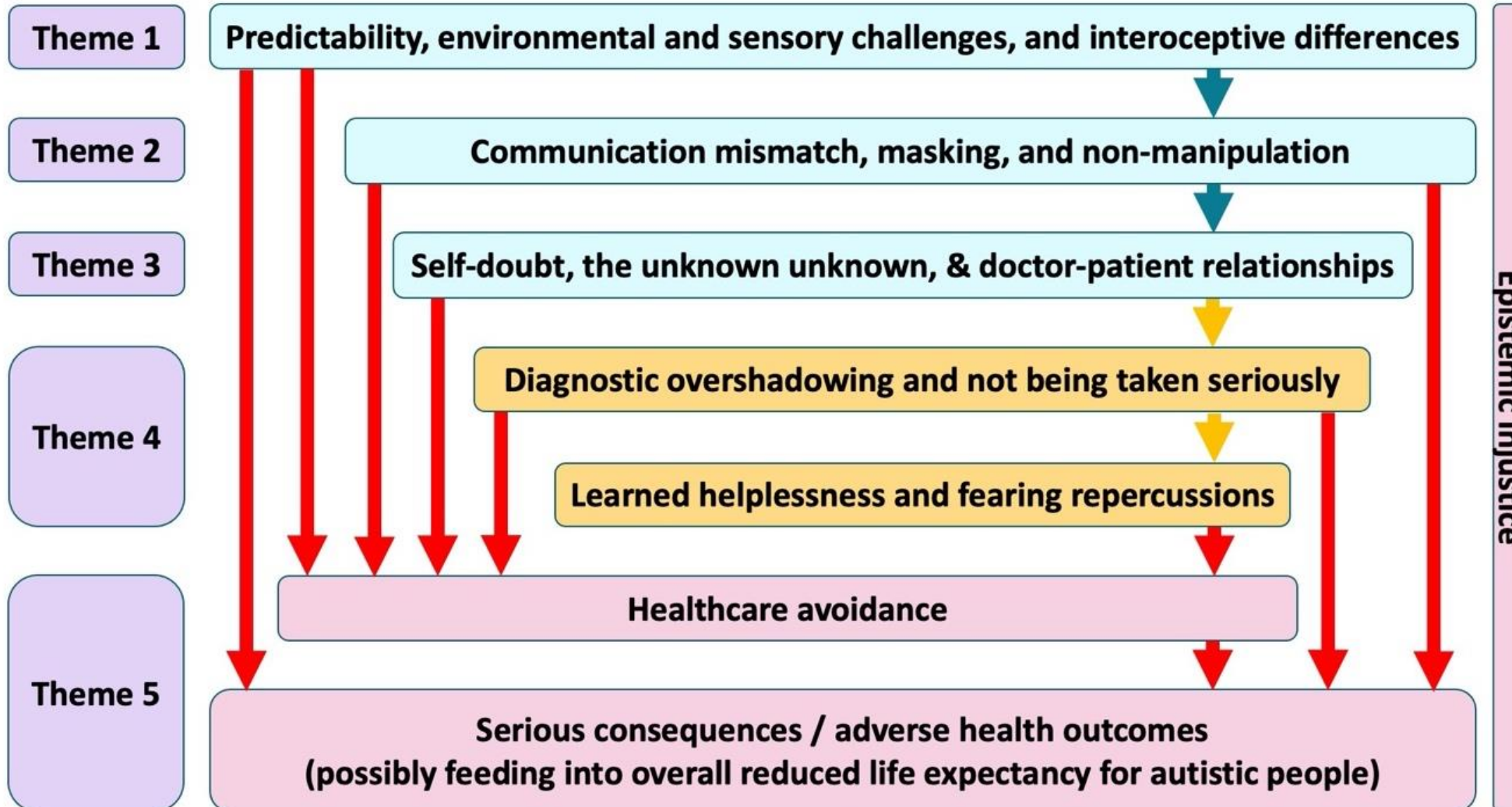
INTERVIEW

I'm a doctor and autistic. This is why I kept my diagnosis secret

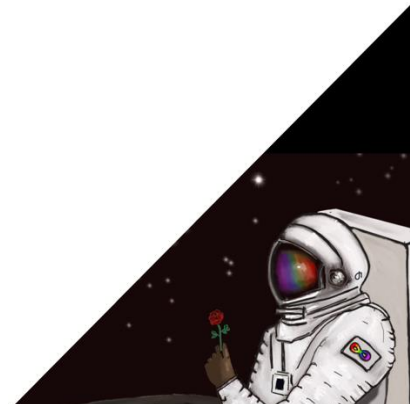
Consultant anaesthetist Mary Doherty worried her career would be threatened when she was diagnosed at 45 — but discovered she wasn't alone

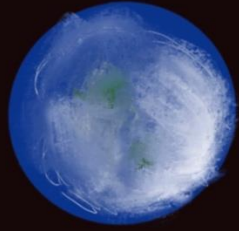


How access barriers might lead to adverse outcomes



Triple
empathy
problem

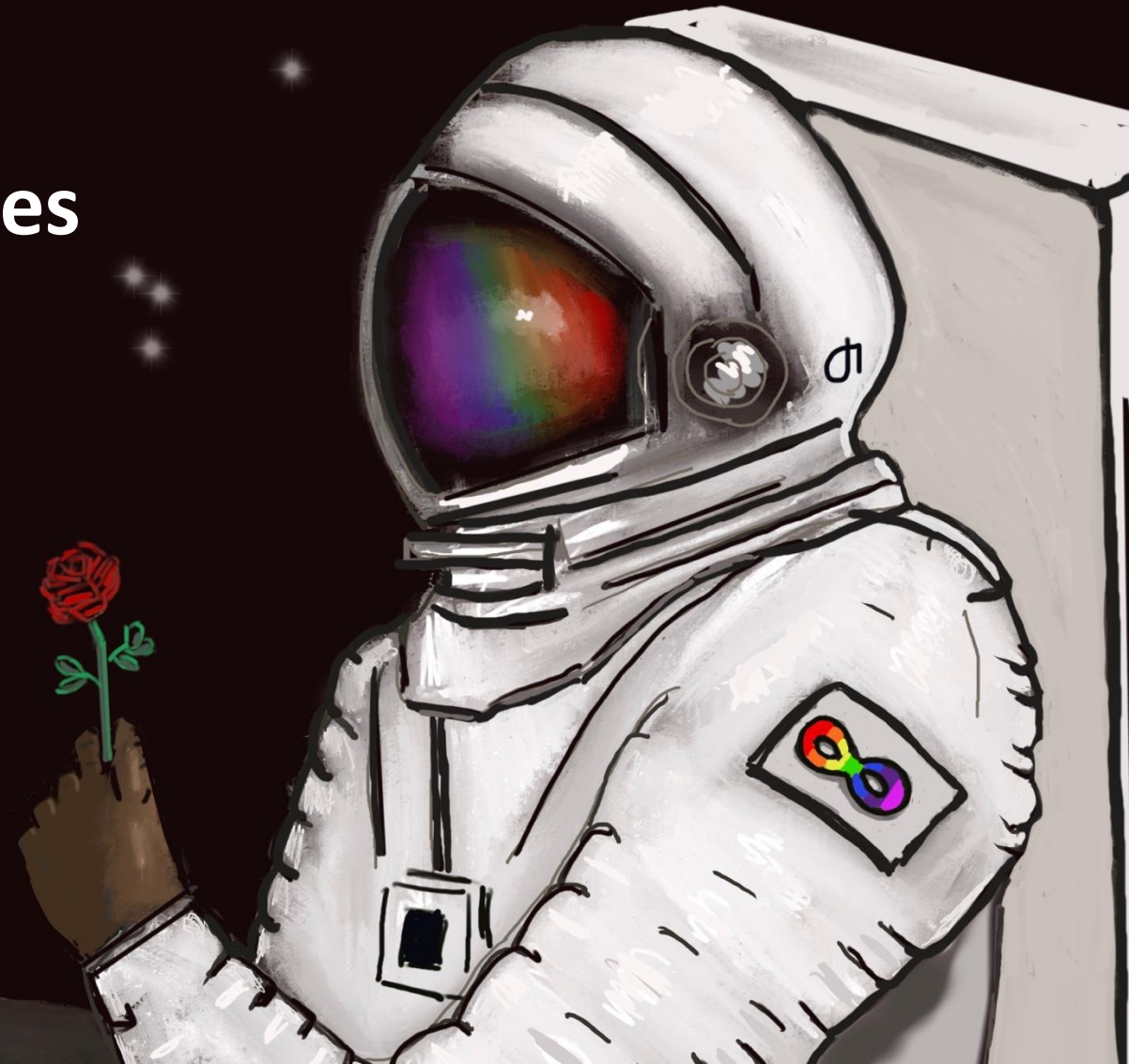


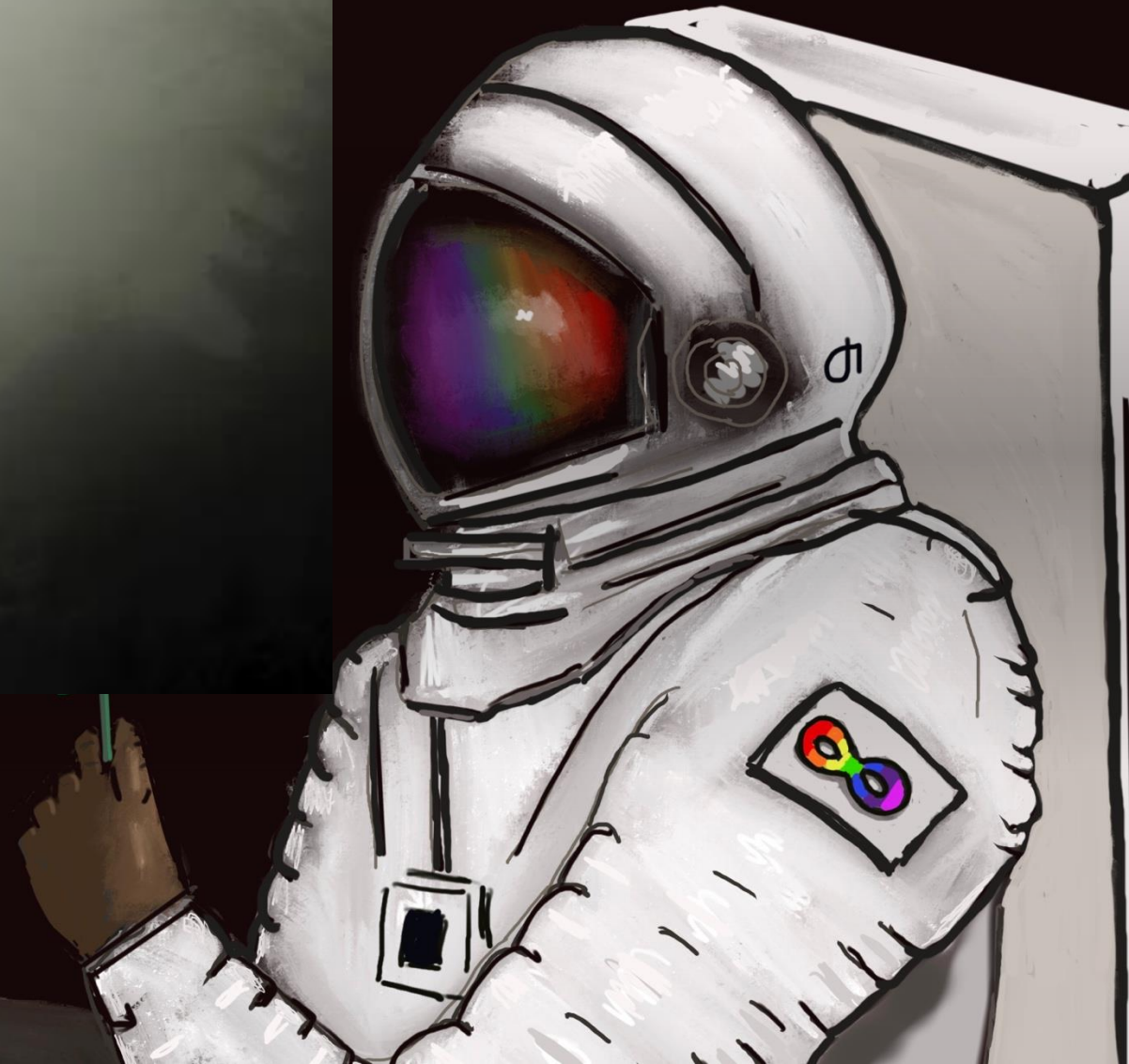


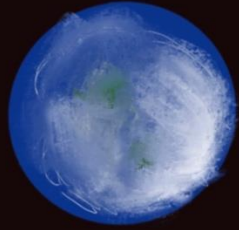
Autistic psychiatrists' experiences of recognising themselves & others as autistic

Dr Mary Doherty
Clinical Associate Professor
School of Medicine, University College Dublin

American Psychiatric Association Annual Meeting
Los Angeles, May 21st, 2025







What do we know about autistic doctors?

ORIGINAL RESEARCH article

Front. Psychiatry, 18 July 2023
Sec. Autism

Volume 14 - 2023 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2023.1160994>

This article is part of the Research Topic

Break the Stigma: Autism

[View all 16 Articles >](#)

The experiences of autistic doctors: a cross-sectional study



Sebastian C. K. Shaw^{1*}



Alexander Fossi²



Laura A. Carravallah³



Kai

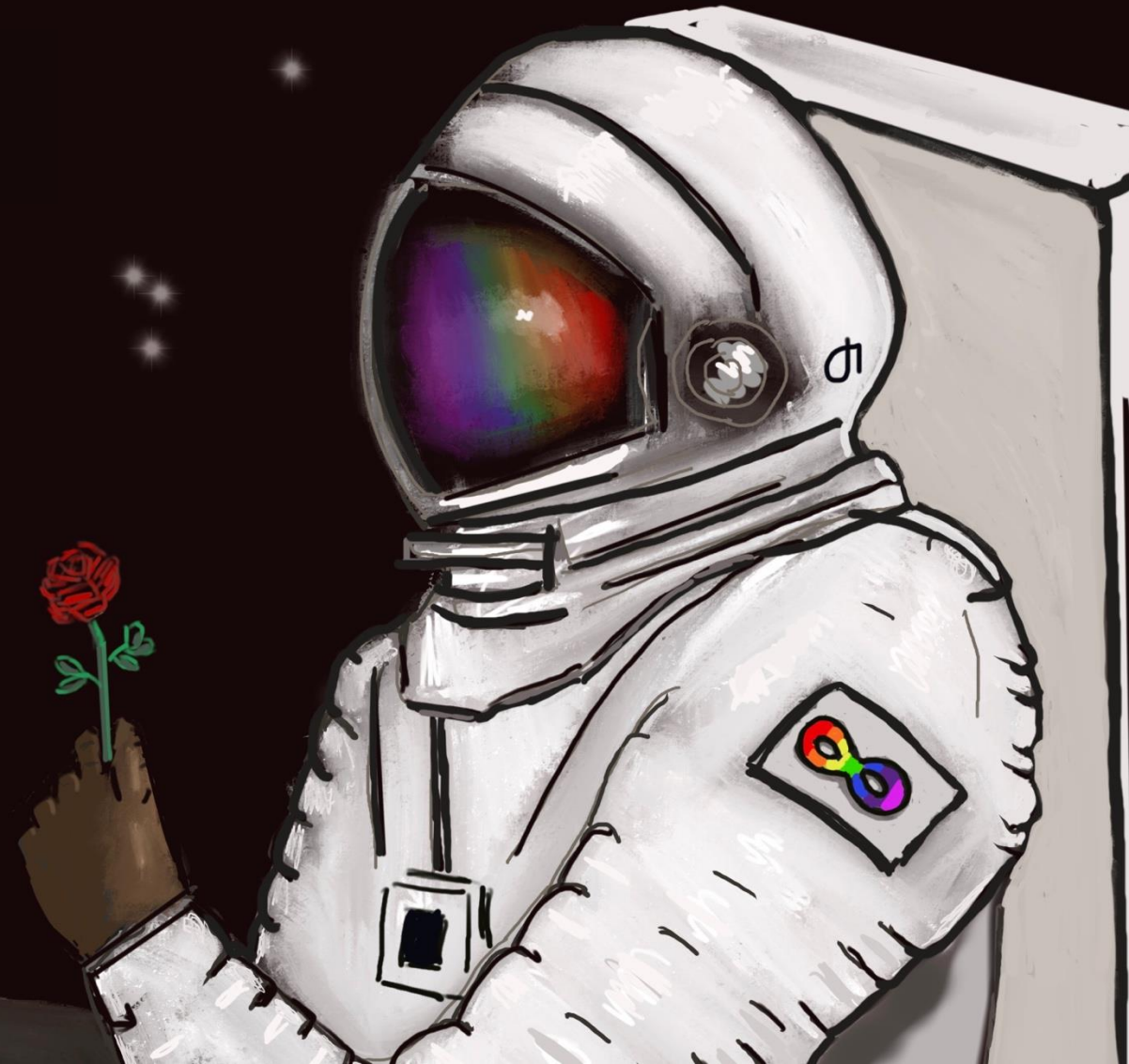
Rabenstein⁴



Wendy Ross²



Mary Doherty⁵



ADI Membership survey

- Center for Autism & Neurodiversity, Jefferson, Philadelphia
- Analysis ongoing, quantitative paper published, qualitative in preparation
- 225 responses
- 60% in UK
- 2/3 formally diagnosed
- Age at dx: 3 – 61 yrs
- Consultant : Trainee : Other roles

1. General Practice
2. **Psychiatry**
3. Anaesthesia

Shaw SCK, Fossi A, Carravallah LA, Rabenstein K, Ross W, Doherty M. The experiences of autistic doctors: a cross-sectional study. Front Psychiatry. 2023 Jul 18;14:1160994.

ORIGINAL RESEARCH article

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The experiences of autistic doctors: a cross-sectional study



Sebastian C. K. Shaw^{1*}



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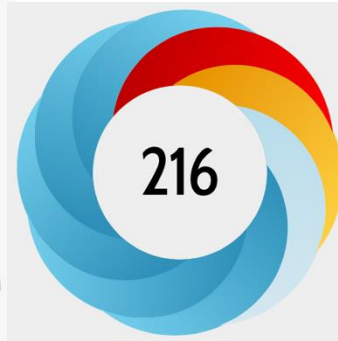
Kai Rabenstein⁴



Wendy Ross²



Mary Doherty⁵



216



Disclosure

ORIGINAL RESEARCH article

Front. Psychiatry, 18 July 2023

Sec. Autism

Volume 14 - 2023 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2023.1160994>

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Break the Stigma: Autism

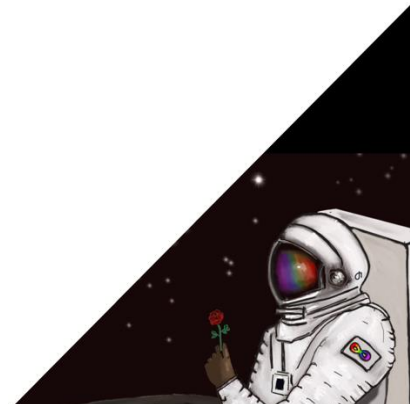
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The experiences of autistic doctors: a cross-sectional study

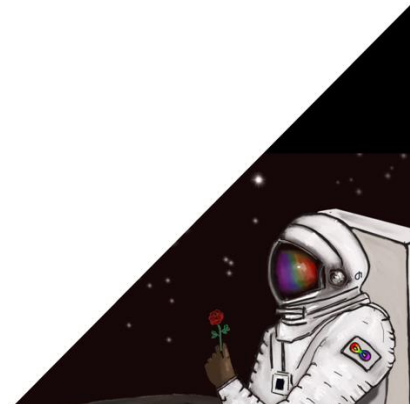
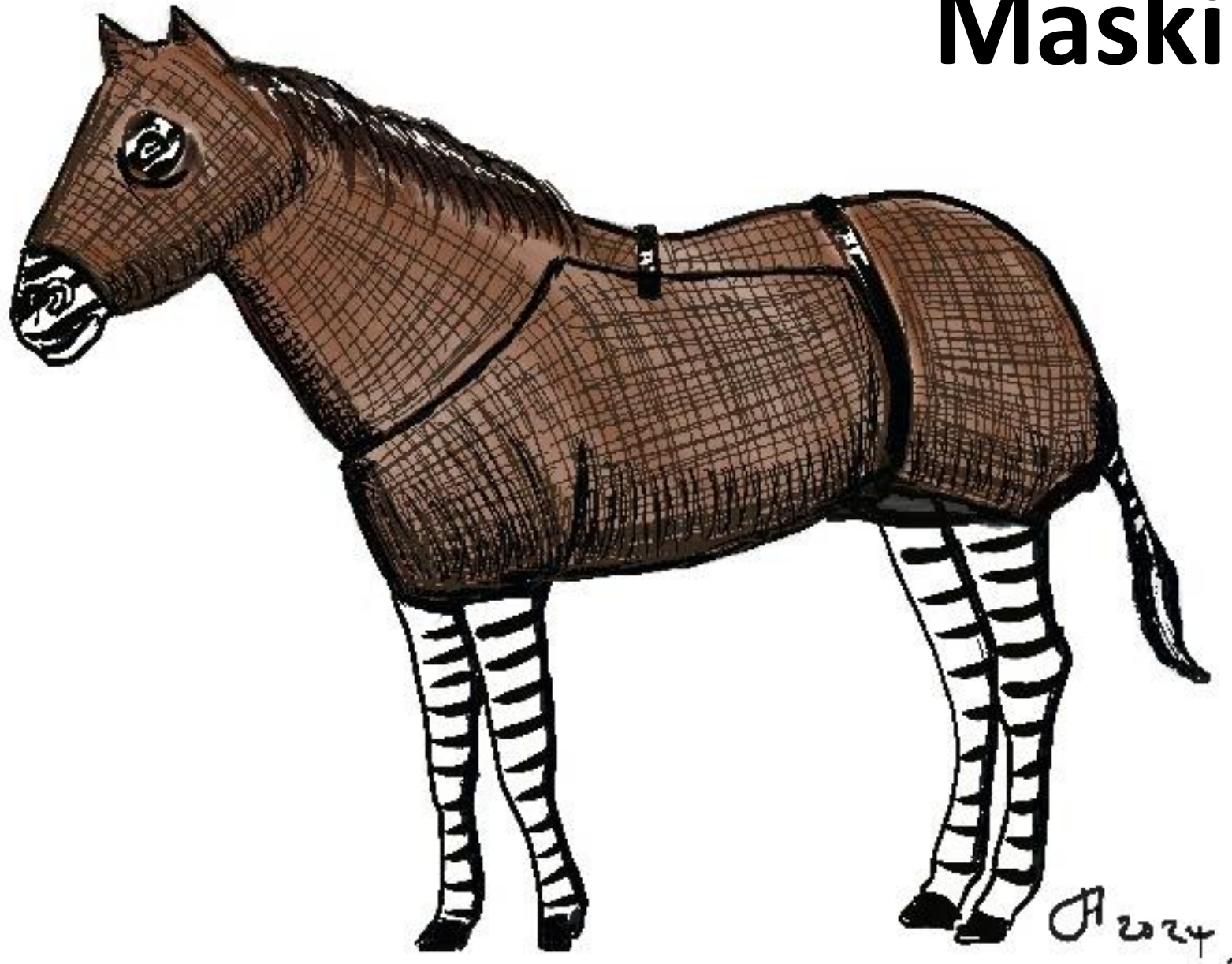
 Sebastian C. K. Shaw^{1*}  Alexander Fossi²  Laura A. Carravallah³  Kai Rabenstein⁴  Wendy Ross²  Mary Doherty⁵



- One third had disclosed to their supervisor/consultant (32%, n = 73)
- **Less than a third had disclosed to their colleagues (30%, n = 68)**
- One fifth had disclosed to occupational health (19%, n = 44)
- Nearly a fifth had disclosed to human resources (16%, n = 35)
- A minority had disclosed being autistic to patients (8%, n = 19)



Masking & shame



The experiences of autistic doctors: a cross-sectional study

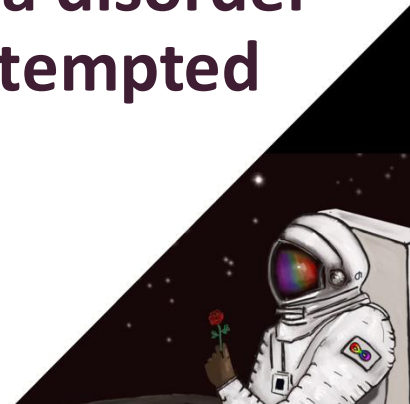
 Sebastian C. K. Shaw^{1*} Alexander Fossi² Laura A. Carravallah³ Kai Rabenstein⁴ Wendy Ross² Mary Doherty⁵



ADI survey: Mental health

- Suicidal ideation 77%
- Suicide attempt 24%
- Self-harm 49%
- Autism as difference 83%
- Autism as disability 52%
- Autism as disorder 13%
- Preferred term: Autistic doctors 64%
- Considering autism to be a disorder was associated with preference for “doctors with autism” ($p < 0.001$)
- **Considering autism to be a disorder associated with having attempted suicide ($p = 0.019$)**

Shaw SCK, Fossi A, Carravallah LA, Rabenstein K, Ross W, Doherty M. The experiences of autistic doctors: a cross-sectional study. *Front Psychiatry*. 2023 Jul 18;14:1160994.



Autistic psychiatrists' experiences of recognising themselves and others as autistic: a qualitative study

Published online by Cambridge University Press: **30 October 2024**

Mary Doherty , Nick Chown, Nicola Martin and Sebastian C. K. Shaw



Article

Figures

Supplementary materials

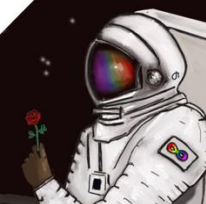
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Metrics

BJPsych
open

RCPSYCH INTERNATIONAL
CONGRESS 2023 ABSTRACTS

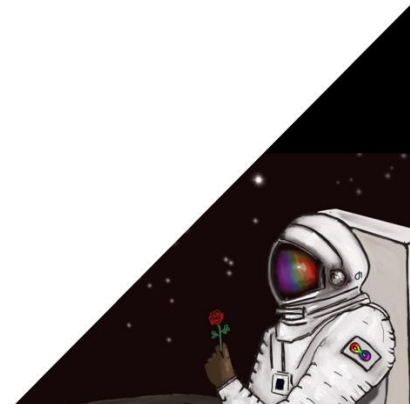
BJPsych Open



Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

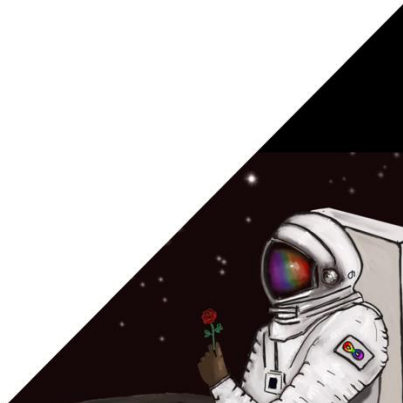
- Qualitative methodology
- The study of human experience
- Elements of lived experience which are meaningful to individuals
- Idiographic focus
- Small, homogenous group

IPA acknowledges and embraces the researcher's insider perspective, prior knowledge and **subjectivity**... and uses this to access experiences and data from **participants which might not otherwise be obtained**



Participants

- 8 participants, all based in UK
- Recruited from ADI Psych
- 6 consultant psychiatrists
- 2 associate specialists
- CAMHS / GAP / Old age / Liaison / ID / Academia
- 1 childhood dx, 2 adult dx, 5 self-identified



Participant demographics

Name	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
Age	50-55 yrs	35-40 yrs	40-45 yrs	45-50 yrs	35-40 yrs	40-45 yrs	40-45 yrs	75-80 yrs
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Ethnicity	White / other	White British	White / other	White British	White /other	White British	Indian	White / other
Employment	Full time	Full time	Part time	Part time	Full time	Full time	Full time	Retired
Experience in psychiatry	15-20 yrs	10-15 yrs	15-20 yrs	20-25 yrs	10-15 yrs	10-15 yrs	10-15 yrs	> 40 yrs

- CAMHS / General Adult Psychiatry / Old age / Liaison / Intellectual Disability / Academia
- Pseudonyms changed to Participant numbers

3 Themes

- 1: Recognising oneself as autistic
- 2: Recognising autistic colleagues
- 3: Not recognising autistic patients
- *BJPsych Open. 2024;10(6):e183*

“We don't recognize ourselves from training... if we don't recognize ourselves as autistic... how on earth can we diagnose patients accurately?”

Autistic psychiatrists' experiences of recognising themselves and others as autistic: a qualitative study

Mary Doherty, Nick Chown, Nicola Martin and Sebastian C. K. Shaw



Positionality in diagnostic assessments

I think I'm autistic

I take things literally

I need routine

I rock a lot if alone

Lights & sounds bother me a lot

Mental health is not great



That sounds just like me

I'm not autistic

You are not autistic

Wrong diagnosis



Current Issue



News From Current Issue

Thursday, October 31, 2024

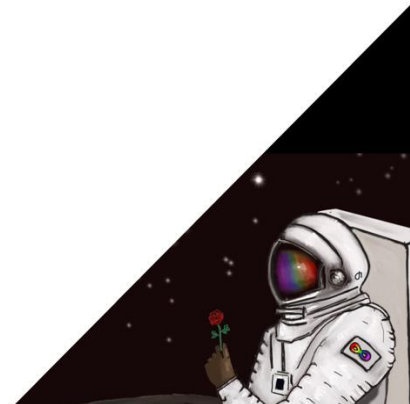
Psychiatrists With Autism Share Their Journey of Self-Discovery With Researchers



Psychiatrists who are unaware that they themselves are autistic may fail to recognize the condition in their patients, according to a [study](#) issued in *British Journal of Psychiatry Open* that interviewed autistic psychiatrists and compared their experiences.

"The diagnostic criteria for autism remain deficit focused and do not appear to include the possibility of an autistic person thriving. Therefore, successful psychiatrists may fail to

see themselves reflected in these criteria," wrote Mary Doherty, M.D., of University College Dublin in Ireland, and colleagues.



Psychiatrists are discovering they're autistic – and it's making them better doctors



By [StudyFinds Staff](#) · Reviewed by [Steve Fink](#)

Research led by Dr. Mary Doherty, University College Dublin School of Medicine

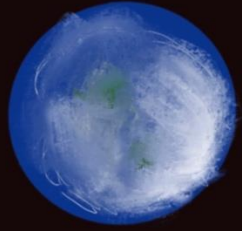


(Credit: Ground Picture/Shutterstock)

“In what might be the **medical equivalent of a plot twist**, researchers from the UK have discovered that some of the very psychiatrists who diagnose autism in others are themselves autistic – they just haven’t realized it yet.”

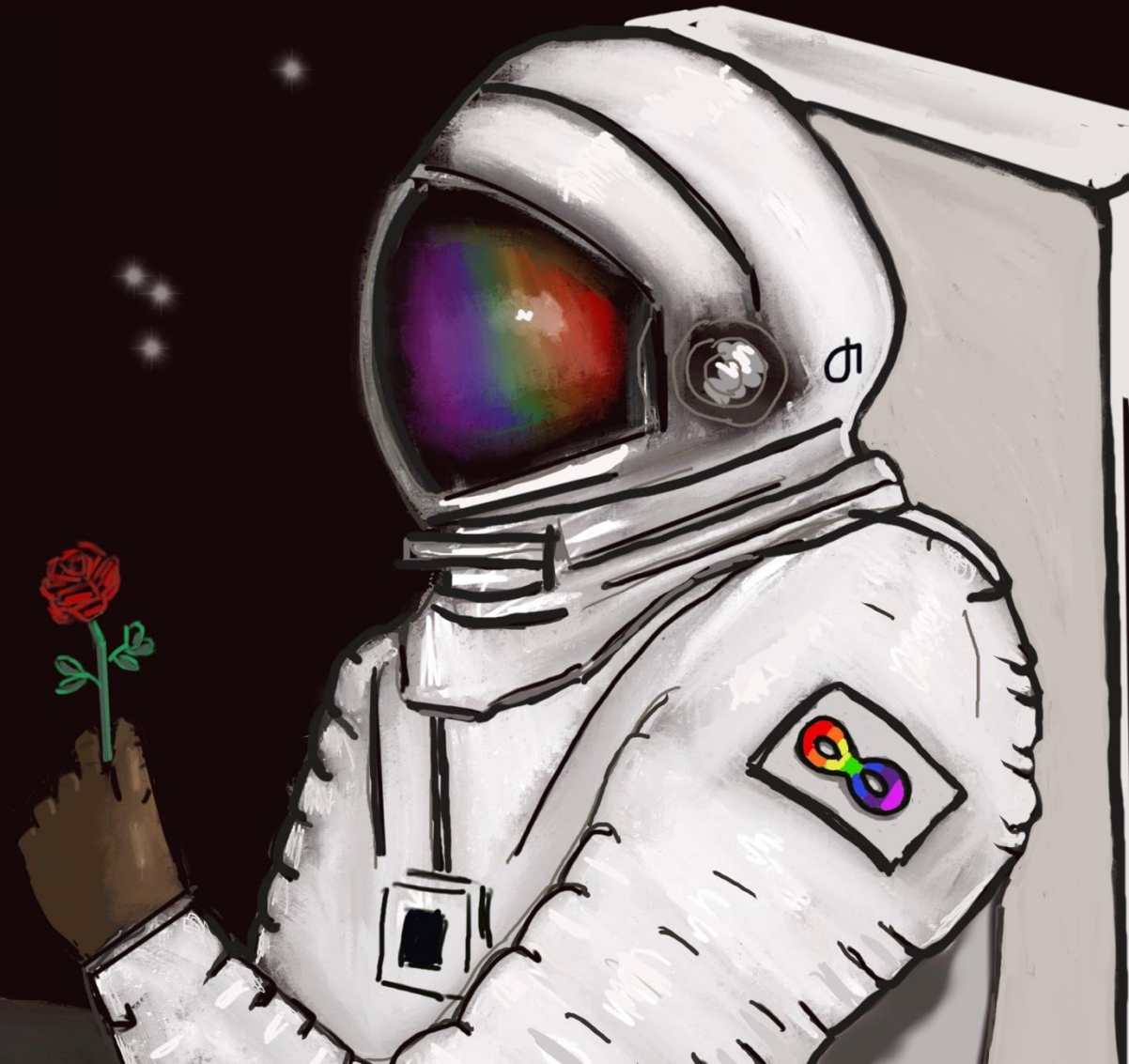
DUBLIN — In what might be the medical equivalent of a plot twist, researchers from the United Kingdom have discovered that some of the very psychiatrists who diagnose autism in others are themselves autistic – they just haven’t realized it yet.

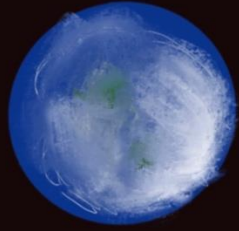




Diagnosis & disclosure

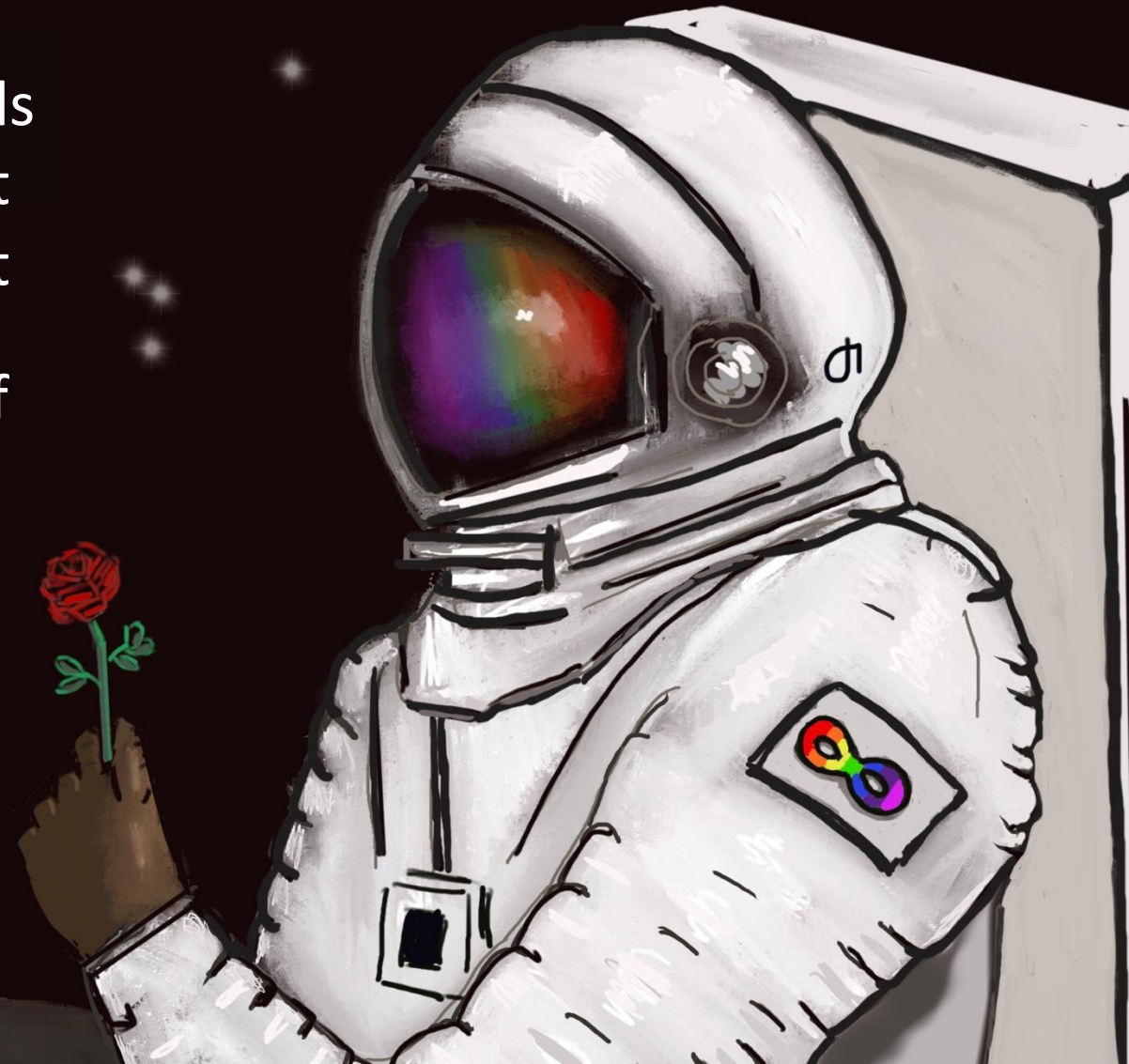
- Reasons to seek formal diagnosis
- Reasons to avoid formal diagnosis
- Reasons to disclose
- Reasons to avoid disclosure





Barriers to disclosure

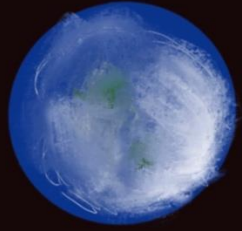
- Negative attitudes
- Negative consequences
- Disbelief
- Loss of credibility
- Diagnostic criteria as a barrier
- Stigma & stereotypes
- Myths & misconceptions
- Lack of role models
- Fear of judgement
- Disclosing without diagnosis
- Keeping control of the narrative
- Witnessing reaction to others
- Uncertain outcomes
- Self-disclosure in psychiatry





Bag of Shame

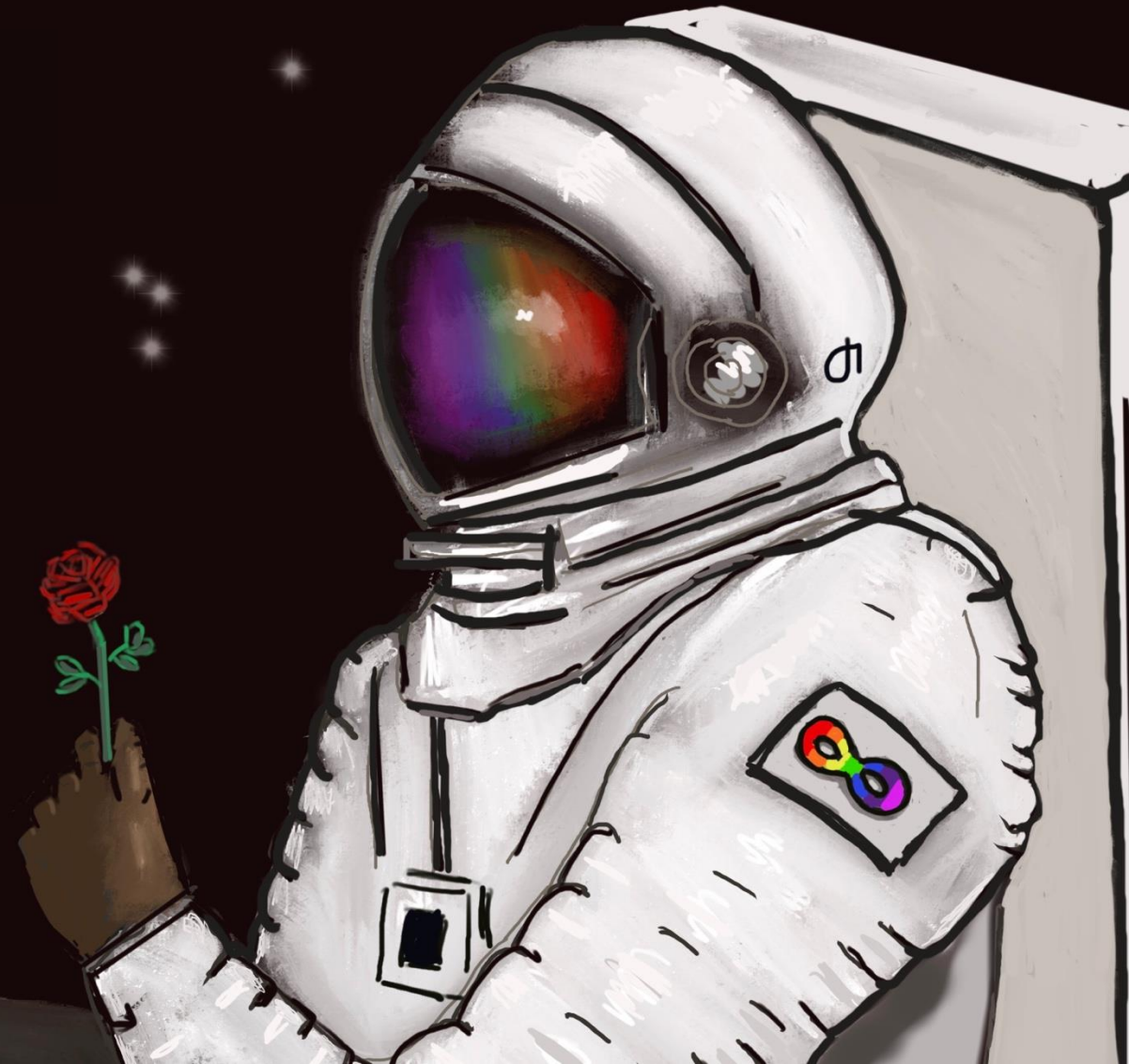
JH




Paralinguistic indicators of shame

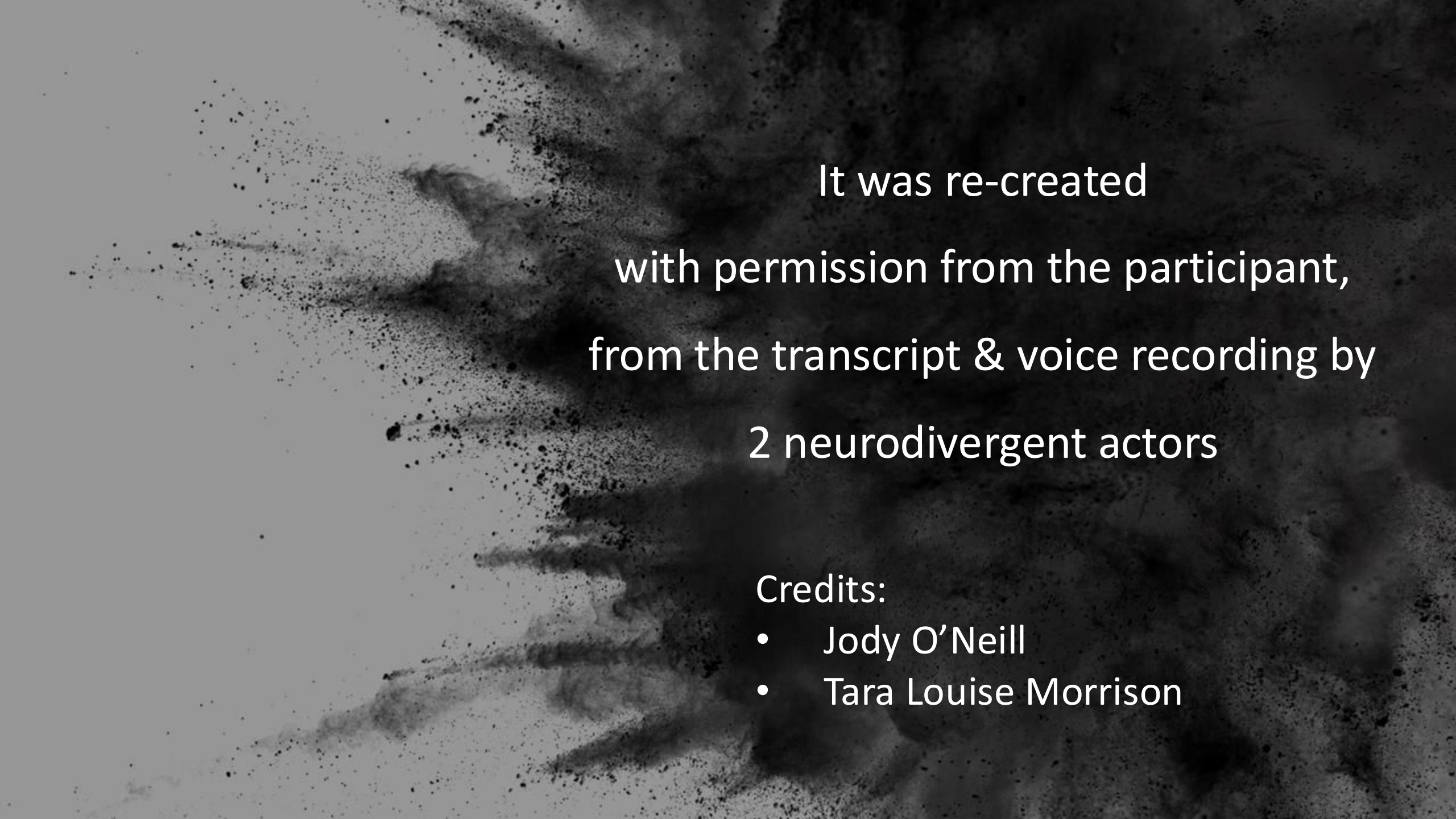
- Hesitation
- Self-interruption
- Laughed words
- Pauses

- Over-soft articulation
- Irregular rhythm
- Filled pauses
- Stammer
- Fragmented speech
- Rapid speech





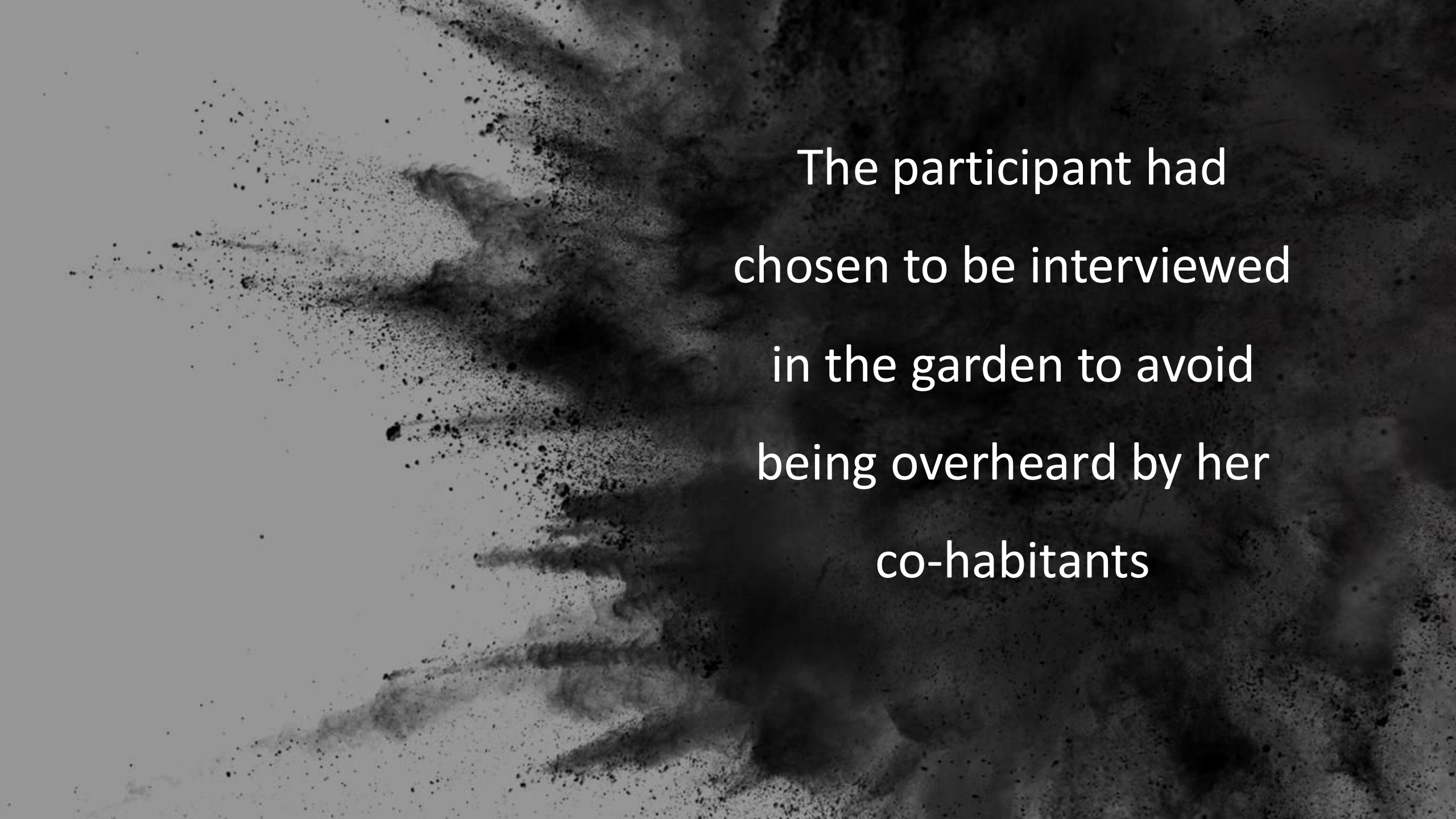
Next, we have a short video
clip recreated from one of the
participant interviews



It was re-created
with permission from the participant,
from the transcript & voice recording by
2 neurodivergent actors

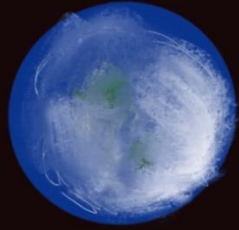
Credits:

- Jody O'Neill
- Tara Louise Morrison



The participant had
chosen to be interviewed
in the garden to avoid
being overheard by her
co-habitants

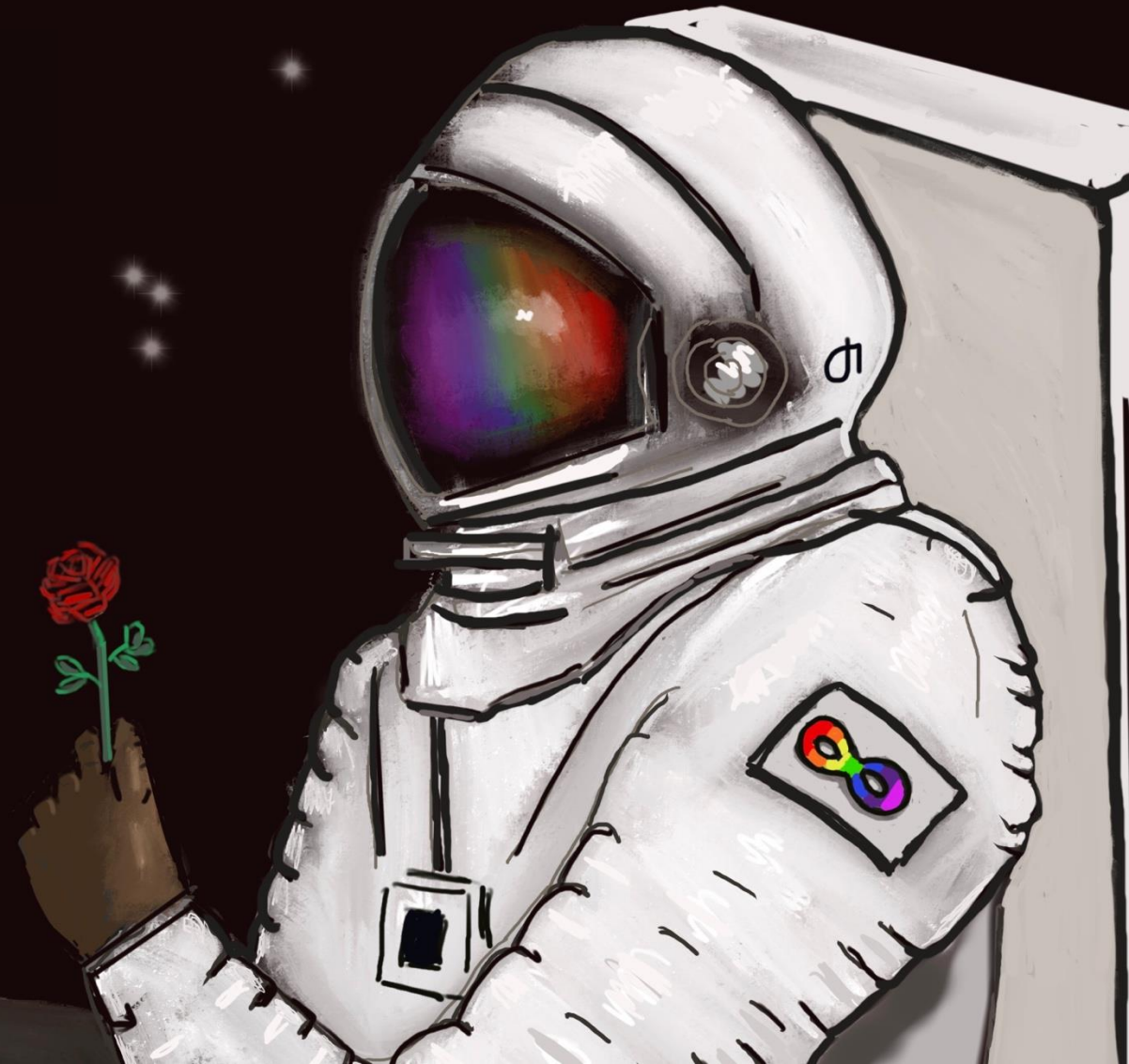




Sources of shame

- Childhood messages
- Family
- School
- Peers

- Social rejection
- Bullying
- Workplace conflicts



Autistic Psychiatrists: Silenced by Shame

An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of the Reasons for Non-Disclosure and Avoiding Formal Diagnosis

Mary Doherty^{1,2,3}, Nicholas Chown¹, Nicola Martin¹, Bernadette Grosjean^{4(Ret)}, Eddie Chaplin¹

¹London South Bank University, UK; ²University College Dublin, Ireland; ³Brighton and Sussex Medical School, UK; ⁴Harbor UCLA, USA

American
Psychiatric
Association

Annual
Meeting

Los Angeles
May 2025

Introduction

- Recognition of autistic physicians is recent
- Autistic Doctors International (ADI) is a vibrant community of >1200 members
- Psychiatrists are second largest speciality
- Open disclosure is rare
- Autistic psychiatrists face similar challenges to gay psychiatrists 50 years ago
- Autistic psychiatrists recognise that many neurodevelopmental specialists are also autistic
- Psychiatrists who do not recognise themselves as autistic risk missing the diagnosis with autistic patients

Methods

- Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA)
- Qualitative methodology with idiographic focus to understand how participants make sense of their own experiences
- Purposive sampling - participants were members of a subgroup of ADI for autistic psychiatrists
- Loosely structured interviews
- Autistic-led research team
- Following initial analysis, interviews reviewed for paralinguistic indicators of shame:
 - Hesitation
 - Self-interruption
 - Laughed words
 - Pauses
 - Stammer
 - Irregular rhythm
 - Filled pauses
 - Over-soft articulation
 - Fragmented speech
 - Rapid speech

Barriers to sharing autistic identity

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| • Negative attitudes | • Lack of role models |
| • Negative career consequences | • Reluctance to disclose without diagnosis |
| • Disbelief | • Fear of judgement |
| • Loss of credibility | • Uncertain outcomes |
| • Stigma & stereotypes | • Witnessing reaction to others |
| • Diagnostic criteria as a barrier | • Keeping control of the narrative |
| • Myths & misconceptions | • Self disclosure in psychiatry |

Discussion

- Shame may act as deterrent to open disclosure by autistic psychiatrists
- Shame may act as deterrent to seeking formal autism diagnosis by self identified autistic psychiatrists
- Shame is linked to poor self esteem and poor mental health outcomes including depression and suicide
- Shame is described as "the master emotion" leading to shame avoidance and shame anxiety
- Recognition of the impact of shame may offer avenues towards self-compassion & improved mental health for autistic people
- Non-disclosure perpetuates shame and stigma
- Non-disclosure may prevent colleagues in psychiatry recognising themselves as autistic
- Whilst disclosure is a personal choice, inadvertent harm may occur when autistic people in prominent and influential positions, such as psychiatrists, feel unable to openly acknowledge being autistic
- Exploring generational shame in families may improve mental health for autistic children
- Role modelling by openly autistic psychiatrists may help shift culture towards a neurodiversity affirmative approach to autism

Participants

- 6 consultants, 2 senior specialty doctors
- Four child psychiatrists, four adult psychiatrists including intellectual disability, old age & liaison
- All based in United Kingdom
- Seven in current practice, one retired
- Two participants had formal autism diagnosis received in adulthood
- One had childhood PDD-NOS diagnosis and self-identified as autistic as an adult
- Five self-identified as autistic

Results

- Overarching theme is shame
- Perception of self as defective
- Desire to hide one's autistic identity
- Disclosure dilemma
- Formal diagnosis seen as unnecessary
- Avoiding formal diagnosis due to perceived obligation to disclose
- Avoiding diagnosis avoids disclosure
- Generational shame
- Role modelling and advocacy

Exploring autistic identity, diagnosis seeking and non-disclosure, the overarching theme is "shame"

Sources of shame

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| • Childhood messages | • Social rejection |
| • Family | • Bullying |
| • School | • Workplace conflicts |
| • Peers | • Generational shame |

Conclusion

Acknowledging autistic shame may offer a pathway to self compassion and improved mental health

Contact:
MaryDoherty1@ucd.ie
AutisticDoctorsInternational.com



AMERICAN
PSYCHIATRIC
ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL MEETING
May 17-21, 2025 • Los Angeles



Name	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
Age	50-55 yrs	35-40 yrs	40-45 yrs	45-50 yrs	35-40 yrs	40-45 yrs	40-45 yrs	75-80 yrs
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Ethnicity	White / other	White / British	White / other	White / British	White / other	White / British	White / other	White / other
Practice	Full time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Full time	Full time	Full time	Retired
Career	15-20 yrs	10-15 yrs	15-20 yrs	20-25 yrs	10-15 yrs	10-15 yrs	10-15 yrs	> 40 yrs

References

- Doherty et al. Autistic psychiatrists' experiences of recognising themselves and others as autistic: a qualitative study. *BJPsych Open*. 2024;10(6):e183.
- Shaw et al. The experiences of autistic doctors: a cross-sectional study. *Front Psychiatry*. 2023;14:1160994.
- McCowan et al. A Full CIRCLE: inclusion of autistic doctors in the Royal College of Psychiatrists' values and Equality Action Plan. *Br J Psychiatry*. 2022;221(1):371-373

my mother... it's a personal insult to her to say that her daughter was just so dysfunctional as a child... I remember my parents being very worried and showing me as a specimen to each other... what is wrong with her



I can't be this thing

if she'd even tried a bit harder to be a bit more normal

I was a bit of a horrid child

an odd child

very odd but also very able

One participant described herself as "easily disliked" by peers, by groups of people, easily rejected, as if there was something wrong"

One participant shared their diagnosis with their local specialist autism team. "They were very surprised that any autistic doctors existed... I think they wondered if I had really had a proper diagnosis. I then presented a patient at one of their MDTs... it was deeply unpleasant being watched for signs of autism... it was so bad that as soon as I finished... I couldn't stop crying for about 20 minutes and it's still tearing me up now and I have never felt like that before"

Autistic Psychiatrists: Silenced by Shame

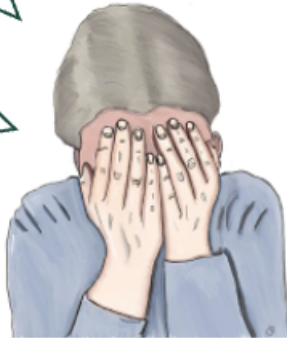
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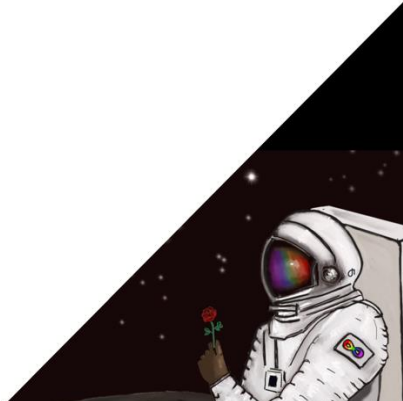
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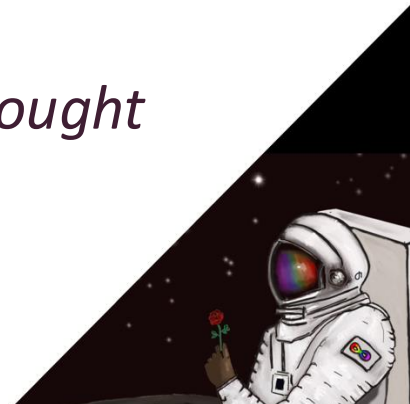
Reflections on recognising oneself as autistic

- *“I felt terribly uncomfortable; I did a lot of telephoning and speaking to other people who had worked with him and saw him in multiple settings and decided yes, he did have autism... and... what did that say about me?”*
- Did everyone know?
 - *“Do you think there's any chance or am I being a total hypochondriac here... could I have like the girl's version of ASD?”*

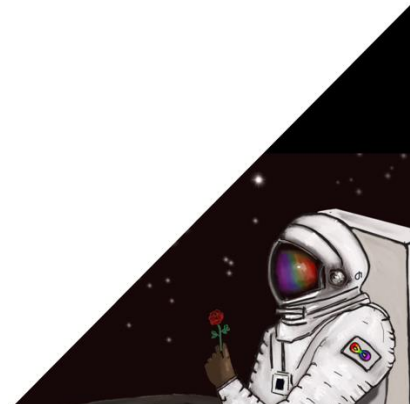


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- Did everyone know?
 - *“Do you think there's any chance or am I being a total hypochondriac here... could I have like the girl's version of ASD?”*
 - *“She went ‘how's that taken you so long to realise’ and she's like ‘I thought you knew already’... I was like... ‘well, no’.”*



“When she said that I felt a bit like oh gosh... so she's known this behind my back and not said anything and then I felt a bit like humiliated... maybe other people would know... [I] felt a bit thick being a psychiatrist who's had seven years of therapy who would diagnose and recognise autism in other people... For me not to realise that until like 40 was a bit like... whoa, that's ridiculous.”



Reflections on being an autistic psychiatrist

The idea that actually to have a disorder like autism you must have a functional impairment and therefore by definition there's **potentially something wrong with you doing your job**

so mild... that it doesn't matter or... somebody clearly did not do a good job at the assessments if they have given you that label... **or if you really have that then you are probably in the wrong job**

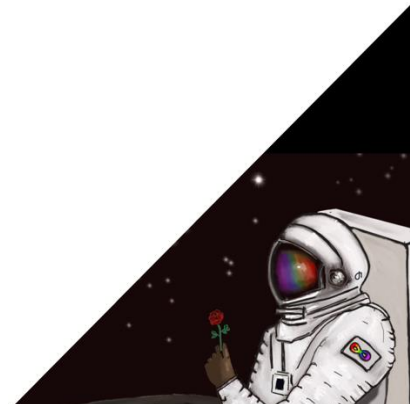
Because psychiatry and doctoring and academic work is **so cerebral...** I worry that people would think well **if there's something wrong...**

couldn't possibly have empathy... they won't be able to communicate...



Reflections on parenting – generational shame?

- One of them masks massively and **really tries to be normal** and she's learned... **she's done really well** and she's got friends
- One doesn't want any friends ever... **I suppose more recently I've been more positive about it...** but you need to be able to interact with people... to have social skills to cope at work and at school... we need to help you to get to that level
- One of them is... **uncomfortably similar**, uncomfortably because I can see it being a problem
- No... so far I haven't seen anything, **she seems quite alright**

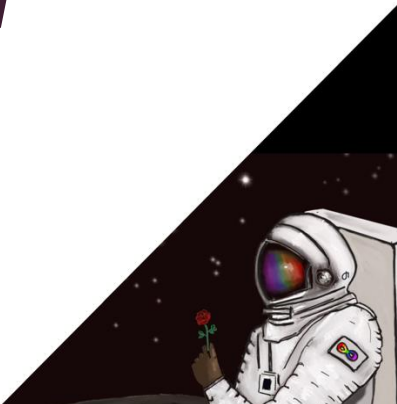


Reflections on parenting, stigma & shame

“I remember thinking how can this person be a mother if they’re autistic... how are they going to get their child’s state of mind...”

“is that actually emotionally safe for this person to be a mother...”

“if I was thinking that as a doctor with a training in psychiatry there's no way other psychiatrists are not gonna think that about me”



“Being watched for signs of autism”

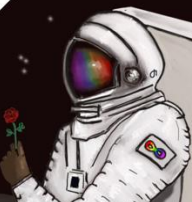
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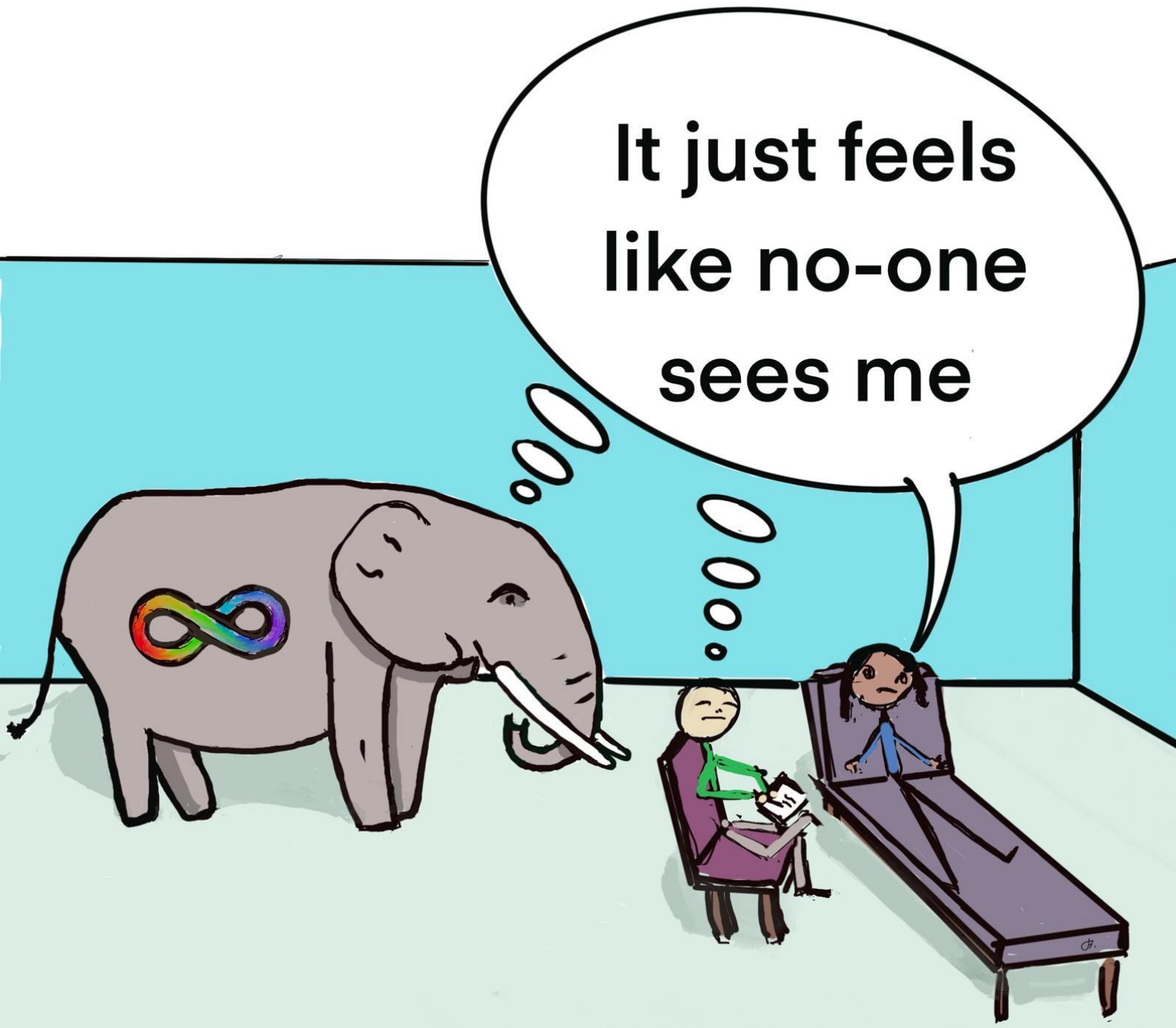
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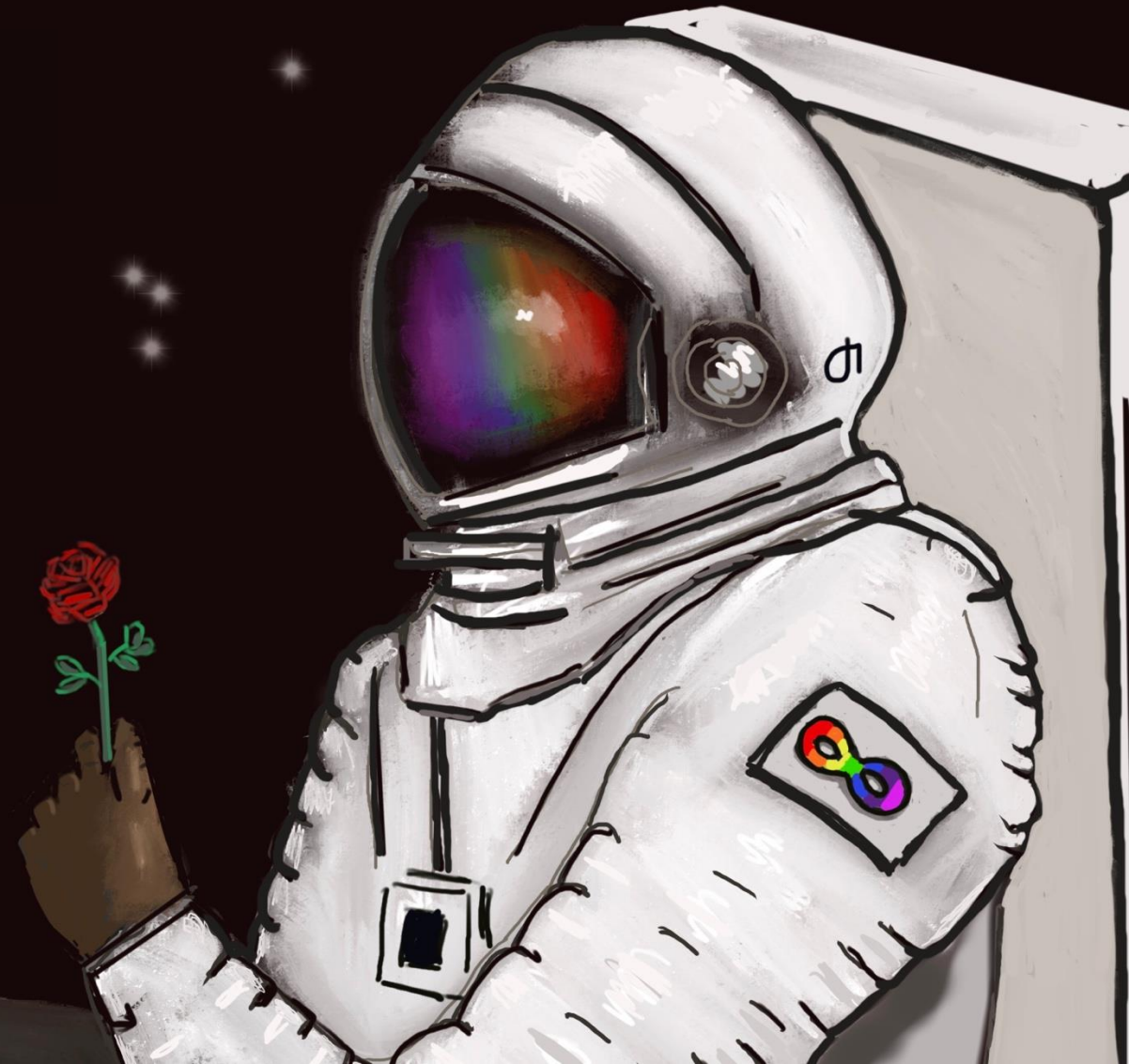
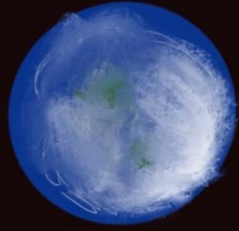


Shame: “the master emotion”

- Identity
- Self as defective
- Deeply painful
- Affiliative shame

- Shame avoidance
- Shame anxiety
- Chronic shame

- Self compassion
- Shame competence
- Disclosure *if safe*
- Role modelling



The antidote to shame is vulnerability.

Because shame dies when spoken about in safe places.



“Shame needs three things to grow exponentially: **secrecy, silence, and judgment**”

“When it comes to shame, understanding is a prerequisite for change”

- Dr Brené Brown

Shame dies when spoken about in safe places

- Ann Voscamp



Vulnerability

- Sensory Overload
- Meltdown
- Shutdown



The art of medicine

My autistic meltdown: the impact of autistic sensory needs

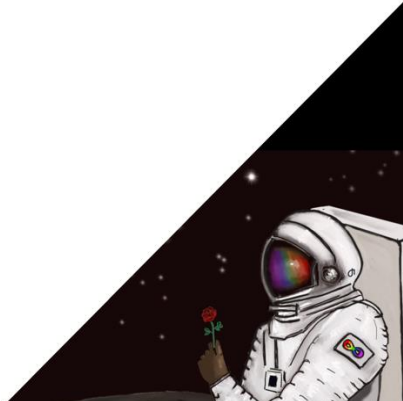


Future Surgery / Women in Surgery, RCS
ExCel, London, Nov 15, 2022

"Participants did not disclose their autism diagnosis for fear of consequences from peers and staff. These negative associations **promoted a sense of shame**. A culture of silence about being autistic was embedded in their experiences."

*"It's almost like... if you have it...
**it's a dirty secret, and you don't let
people know"***

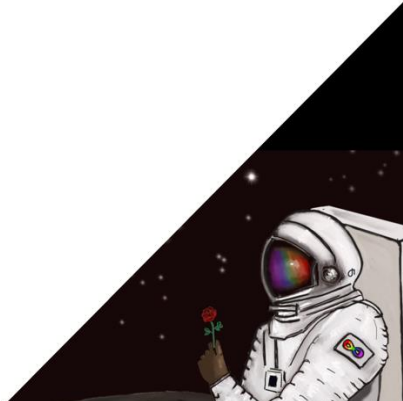
Cooper et al, under revisions

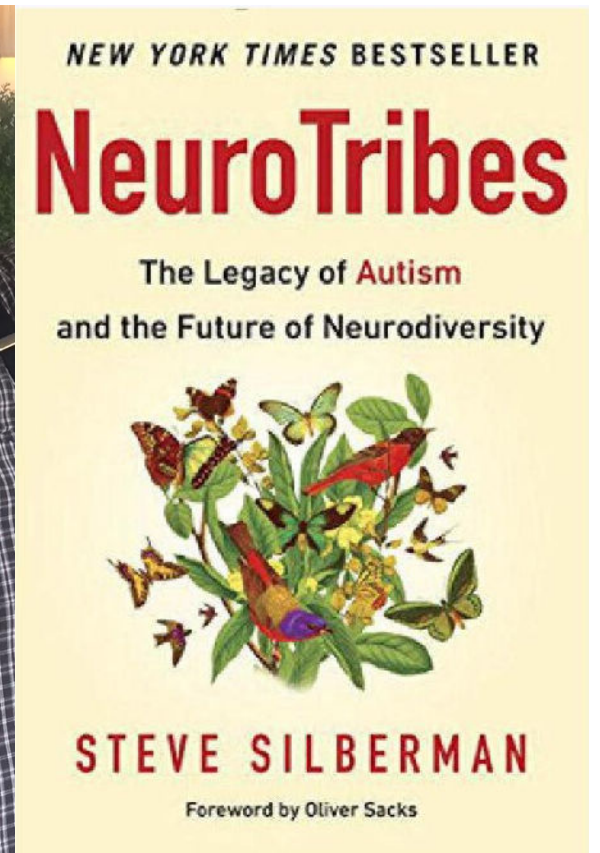
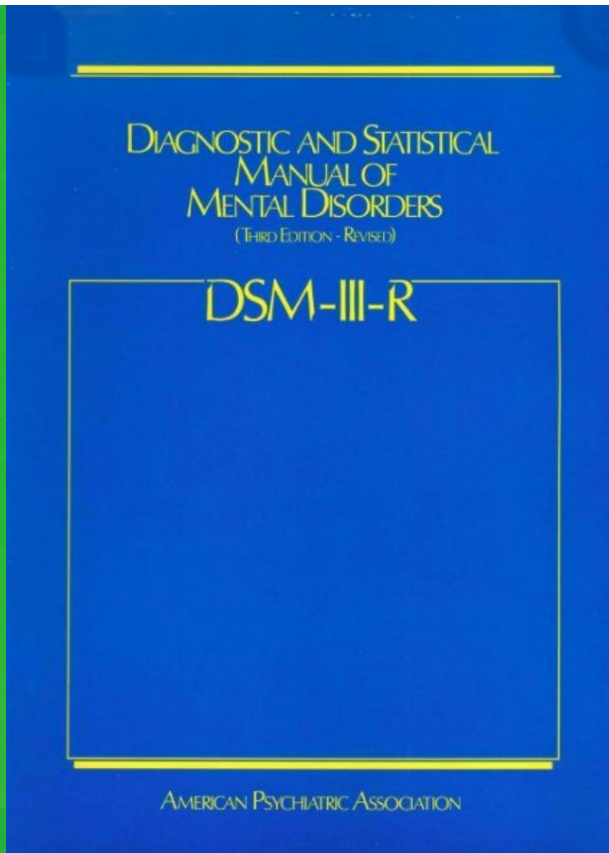
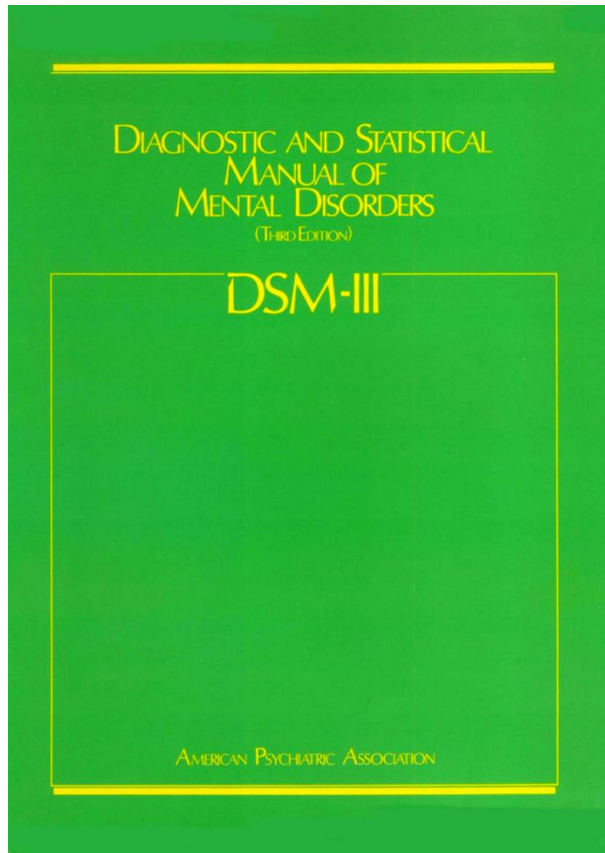


“If you behave... as though you're ashamed of something, then you... send the message that it's something to be ashamed of... and for other autistic people... it was important for me to... not act as though I'm ashamed of it”

“Everyone thinks of me as a weird, odd thing. But just seeing other people, like owning it, made me want to own it”

Cooper et al, under revisions

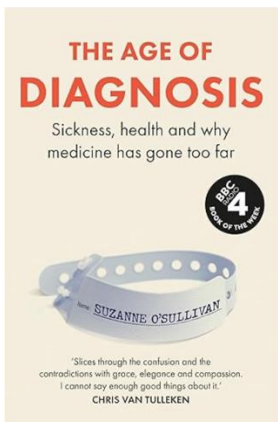




“The DSM-III was the product of a mind that exhibited many classic qualities of autistic intelligence”

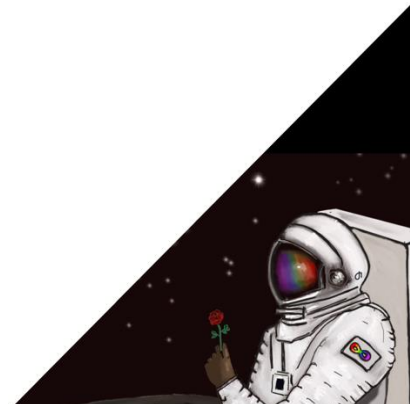
Steve Silberman, Neurotribes, pg 384



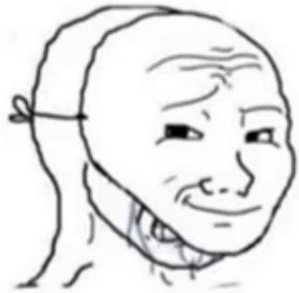


9 out of 10 autistic people over 50 are undiagnosed

O'Nions et al, 2023



Telling neurotypicals I'm autistic



I'm actually autistic.



I don't think you are
Everyone is a bit autistic!!
No ur not you're hot

But you made eye contact!

immediate infantilising

You're not like my 5 Yr old autistic nephew!!

Telling autistic people that I'm autistic

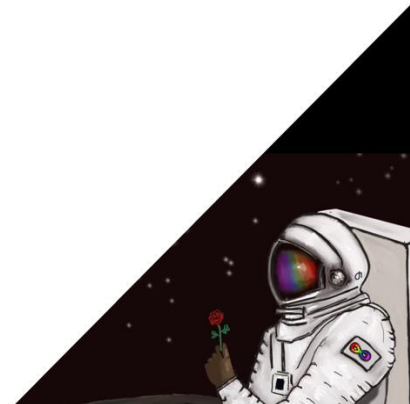


I'm autistic

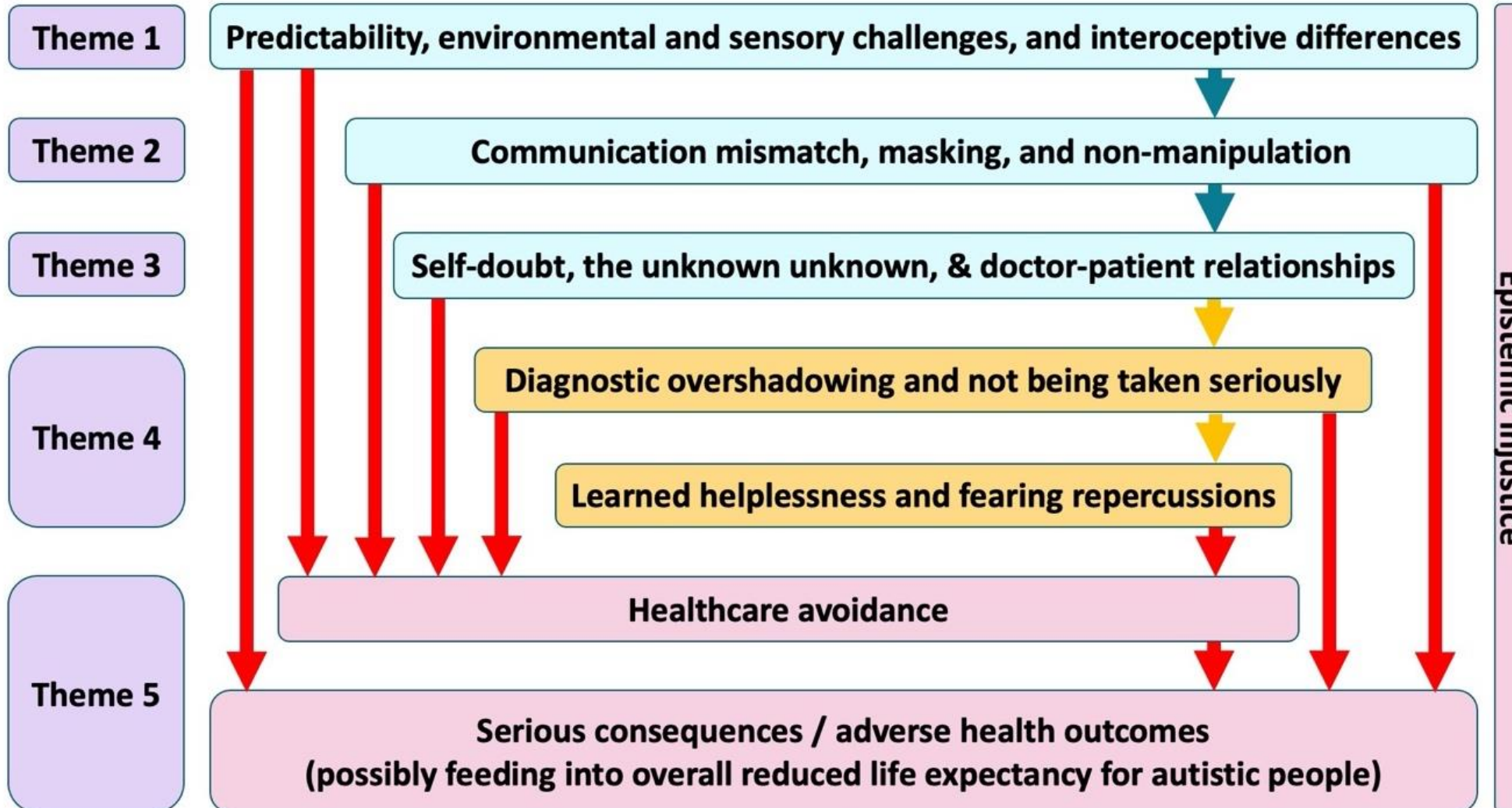


We know

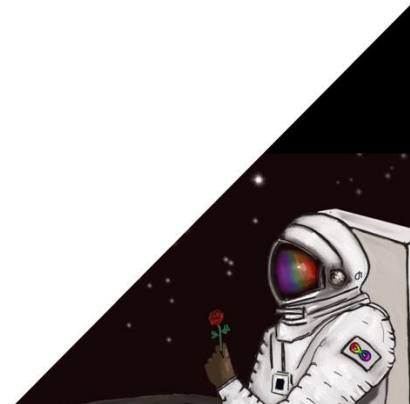
- If you know you are autistic
- You are pondering disclosure
- Consider – we may already know



How access barriers might lead to adverse outcomes

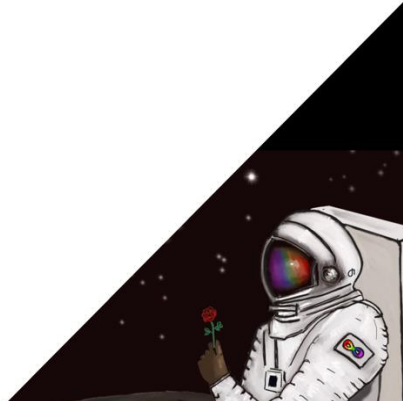


Shame as an affective determinant of health



“The autism wars” - trading shame?

- Autistic people shamed for being autistic
- Parents experiencing vicarious shame
- Healthcare professionals – lack of training – not meeting milestones
- Educators – academic performance or behaviour
- Autistic advocates and autism parents
- Autistic advocates and autism researchers



The autistic psychiatrist who diagnoses (autistic) patients

Anna Rebowska was encouraged to pursue a role that required less talking, she tells Helen Rumbelow



The presence of autistic psychiatrists remains taboo, so many choose to keep their diagnosis hidden

SHUTTERSTOCK (POSED BY MODELS)

Helen Rumbelow

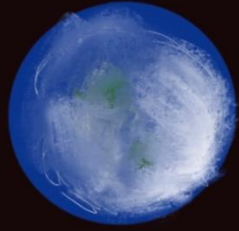
Tuesday April 15 2025, 12.00am, The Times

Final Reflections

“What are we doing to the next generation if all the successful autistic people are in hiding?”

Dr Anna Rebowska
Forensic CAMHS Consultant
ADI CAMHS Lead



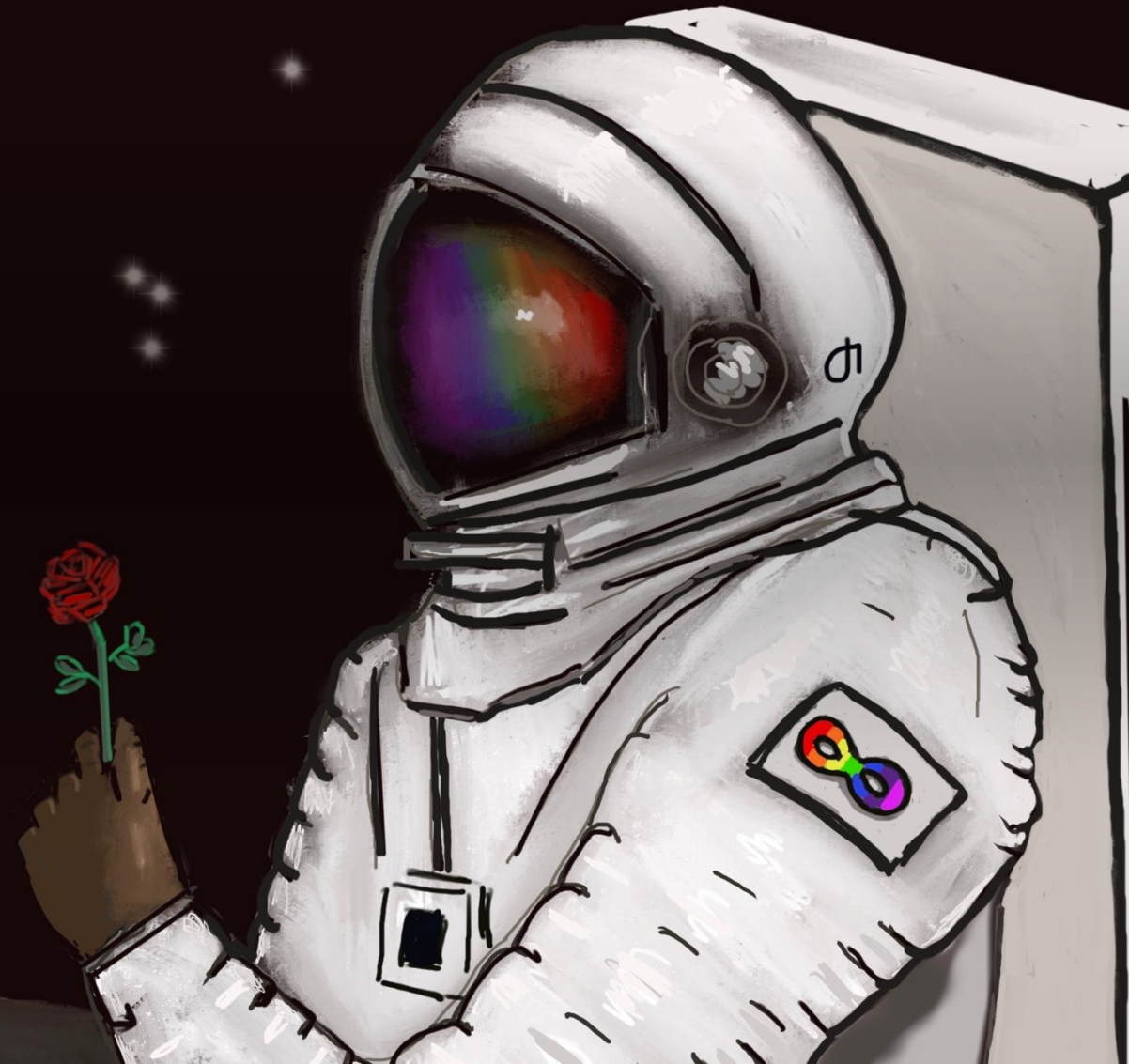


AutisticDoctorsInternational.com

<https://linktr.ee/autisticdoctors>

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OPINION / VIEWPOINT

Weaponized heterogeneity only harms the most vulnerable autistic people

BY MARY DOHERTY / 17 APRIL 2023

TOPICS:

SCIENCE & SOCIETY



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Gerardo Weckesser / iStock



Weaponized heterogeneity

- Monotropic attention
- Spiky profiles
- Sensory issues

- Autistic inertia
- Autistic burnout

- Unreliable speech
- Benefits of stimming

“Splitting the autistic community in two based on level of disability or support needs is a false dichotomy.

If you are not autistic, it may seem inimical to suggest that autistic people should not be considered as two separate groups, but those of us who live this reality know that we have far more in common across the spectrum than our differences might suggest”

