

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

Chapter 4:

Navigating the Maze of Similarities and
Differences Among Different Types of
Neurodiverse Couples

Introduction to Women on the Autism Spectrum

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Most couples encountered by the authors
comprise AS/ND men and NA/NT women

Biological women are commonly missed and
diagnosed later in life after several mis-diagnoses

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Women on the Autism Spectrum

- There is a male bias in autism diagnosis due to camouflaging, special interests, and stereotypes
- Women must show greater distress or dysregulation to be diagnosed
- Delay in diagnosis is caused by ability to camouflage and manage well in life and careers
- Also special interests of women are often more socially acceptable than those of autistic men

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Autism manifests differently in females

- Females may exert more effort to appear neurotypical and have a heightened motivation for social interaction
- There may be increased social conflict with friends and siblings because of black and white thinking
- Interests are less mechanical and more relational
- Internalized difficulties may manifest as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders
- Eye contact may be appropriate
- Females on the spectrum tend to use prepared social scripts

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Autistic females commonly choose autistic partners instead of non-autistic partners

There are couples comprising autistic females and non-autistic males (7 couples in the survey)

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Common marital challenges AS/ND Male-NA/NT Female couples

AS/ND Men (n=87)	NA/NT Female (n=209)
Lack of Connection 77.78%	Lack of Connection 89.95%
Communication daily is difficult 75.56%	Communication daily is difficult 84.69%
I feel criticized 70.0%	Conflict Resolution is lacking/Conflict Avoidance 84.69%
Our Sexual Relationship 67.78%	My spouse cannot see my point of view 82.78%
Conflict Resolution is lacking/Conflict Avoidance 62.2%	Our Sexual Relationship 72.73%
My spouse cannot see my point of view 61.11%	My spouse's dysregulation (meltdowns) 61.72%
spouses' emotional dysregulation 48%	We do not have couples friends we both enjoy 57%
We do not have couples friends we both enjoy 48%	Spouse's dysregulation (shut down) 54.74%
There are no shared activities 40%	Lack of overall communication (curiosity, check-in courtesy) 54%
Communication daily is difficult 37%	We do not share time together in joint activities 52.9%
	My spouse is not interested in me 50.76%

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Common marital challenges AS/ND Female-NA/NT Male couples

AS/ND Female (n=21)	NA/NT Male (n=7)
Lack of Connection 42.86%	Our Sexual Relationships 85.71%
Our Sexual Relationship 38.10%	My spouse does not see my point of view 57.14%
Communication daily is difficult 33.33%	Lack of Connection 42.86%
State of our Finances 33.33%	We lack conflict resolution/avoid conflict 42.86%
Co-parenting 28.57%	I constantly feel criticized 42.86%
My spouse does not see my point of view 28.57%	

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Common Themes across the marital groups

- Lack of connection
- Sexual relationship
- Inability to have one's perspective seen (double empathy)
- Spouses dysregulation

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Double Neurodivergent Couples: AS to AS Couples

Three couples with three different experiences and their challenges

1. Both diagnosed as children and knew about their autism before marriage
 - Different sensory profiles, Preference for sexual activity, Dysregulation
2. Neither spouse was aware of their autism before marriage
 - Communication, different sensory profiles and impact on sexual relationship, parenting styles
3. Both spouses diagnosed after marriage
 - Bad marriage theology, parenting styles, sexual relationship, different sensory profiles, communication

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Double Neurodivergent Couples: AS to AS Couples

Common themes

- Communication was more challenging
- Competing sensory profiles and sexual preferences difficult to manage
- Dysregulated spouse is challenging
- Differing parenting styles

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Sensory Profiles

More than the 5 senses (taste, touch, hearing, smell, and sight), and include:

- vestibular system (sense of head movement in space)
- proprioceptive system (sensations from muscles and joints, perception of pain)
- exteroceptive system (including pressure, heat, cold, and pain)
- interoception (perception of internal bodily sensations, including emotional intensity and regulation)

Can be sensory aversive or avoidant; or sensory seeking or touch seeking

Sensory processing can be expressed as distinct preferences, or an individual might be unaware of their own body state, or intensity of their emotions

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Sensory Profiles (continued)

Four main sensory profiles:

1. Low registration
2. Sensation seeking
3. Sensory sensitivity (heightened awareness of stimuli)
4. Sensory avoiding

Individuals can have combinations of sensory profiles across different systems or body parts

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Neurodiverse Couple Type: Autistic Women with Non-Autistic Men (n=2)

- The men wanted to be seen and known, they seek a more attentive pursuit by their spouse
- The men want more communication and connection in their relationship
- The women do not feel they can be open about their neurodivergence in the church setting leading to exhaustion from masking
- The women noted that connection is easier when there is no conflict or emotional presence in the relationship

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Similarities among various types of Neurodiverse Couples

- A dysregulated AS/ND spouse can cause their spouse to experience trauma through verbal or psychological abuse
- When the AS/ND spouse shuts down, this can be experienced as neglect or abandonment by the NA/NT spouse
- Special interests of the AS/ND spouse when focused on helping people is a good thing in the community and can create negative impacts on their home and family

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Erica's Advice For the AS/ND sibling:

please understand that being on the spectrum explains your behaviors, but it doesn't necessarily excuse them

If you say something [or do something] hurtful, even if that's not your intention, please take responsibility for the hurt and seek forgiveness and reconciliation

If what you said or did caused a rupture to the relationship with your sibling, parents [or other relationships], take responsibility for the impact caused

When social settings create confusion for you we're doing our best to accommodate you and your sensory needs and feelings and would honestly appreciate the same consideration from you.

While you are unaware of the hurt you are causing because of self-referencing [of challenges with theory of mind], the sibling [or the other person in the relationship] can perceive and feel all of these emotions around them at all times

It becomes a superpower to the non-autistic and a heavy burden. We need time to process and overcome [unintentional] hurt that has been caused. If you cannot recognize the hurt you have caused, it is more difficult for the non-autistic person to believe you will not hurt them in that same way again [and thus erodes trust]

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Caution for The AS/ND Female

- A desire to belong and have friendships can lead to being manipulated and abused by so-called friends and boyfriends
- Women on the spectrum may be naïve and easily drawn into abusive relationships and not know how to get out of them
- More research is needed in this area