

# TRI-STATE WEBINAR SERIES

## Autism Spectrum Disorder and Females

Presented by:

Megan Hoeffy and Cara Woundy



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education



# Tri-State Autism Spectrum Disorder Webinar Series

This presentation is a collaborative effort between the following:



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

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# Presenter Information



Megan Hoffey works at the Colorado Department of Education as a Technical Assistant Consultant on the Autism Team. She was diagnosed with autism when she was four. She believes there are many gifts along with blessing associated with the diagnosis. Her personal experiences in the special education system provide her team with a unique and valuable perspective.



Cara Woundy works as an autism specialist with the Colorado Department of Education. She is an occupational therapist and school psychologist who has worked in Massachusetts and Colorado supporting students with autism spectrum disorder.



# Learner Objectives

Participants will:

- Identify the differences between females and males with ASD.
- Recognize why females are difficult to identify.
- Explain the importance of early identification.
- Explore interventions specific to females with ASD.

# Presentation Summary

Girls with Autism Spectrum Disorder are under identified. In this webinar, we will explore how to identify characteristics of females with ASD through the use of home videos. We will also highlight important factors to consider when planning interventions for females with ASD.



# How prevalent is ASD in females?

“The true male-to-female ratio is not 4:1, as is often assumed; rather, it is closer to 3:1.”

Loomes, R. et. al. (2017)



# Why are there such disparities between female and male identification?

- Diagnostic criteria was derived from research on males.
- Assessments are based on a male dominated sample.
- Gender Bias


Aspy & Grossman (2015)



“Megan’s age appropriate-type behaviors kept her from getting the help she needed.”

-Kristi (Megan’s mother)





“The failure to identify girls has **cumulative repercussions**. At the **individual** level, without identification, a girl continues her course of development without critical interventions and becomes **increasingly at risk** for depression, anxiety, and victimization. At the **system** level, the **failure to identify girls who have ASD perpetuates this failure for future generations.**”

-Ruth Aspy (OCALI, 2015)



# IT'S A GIRL THING

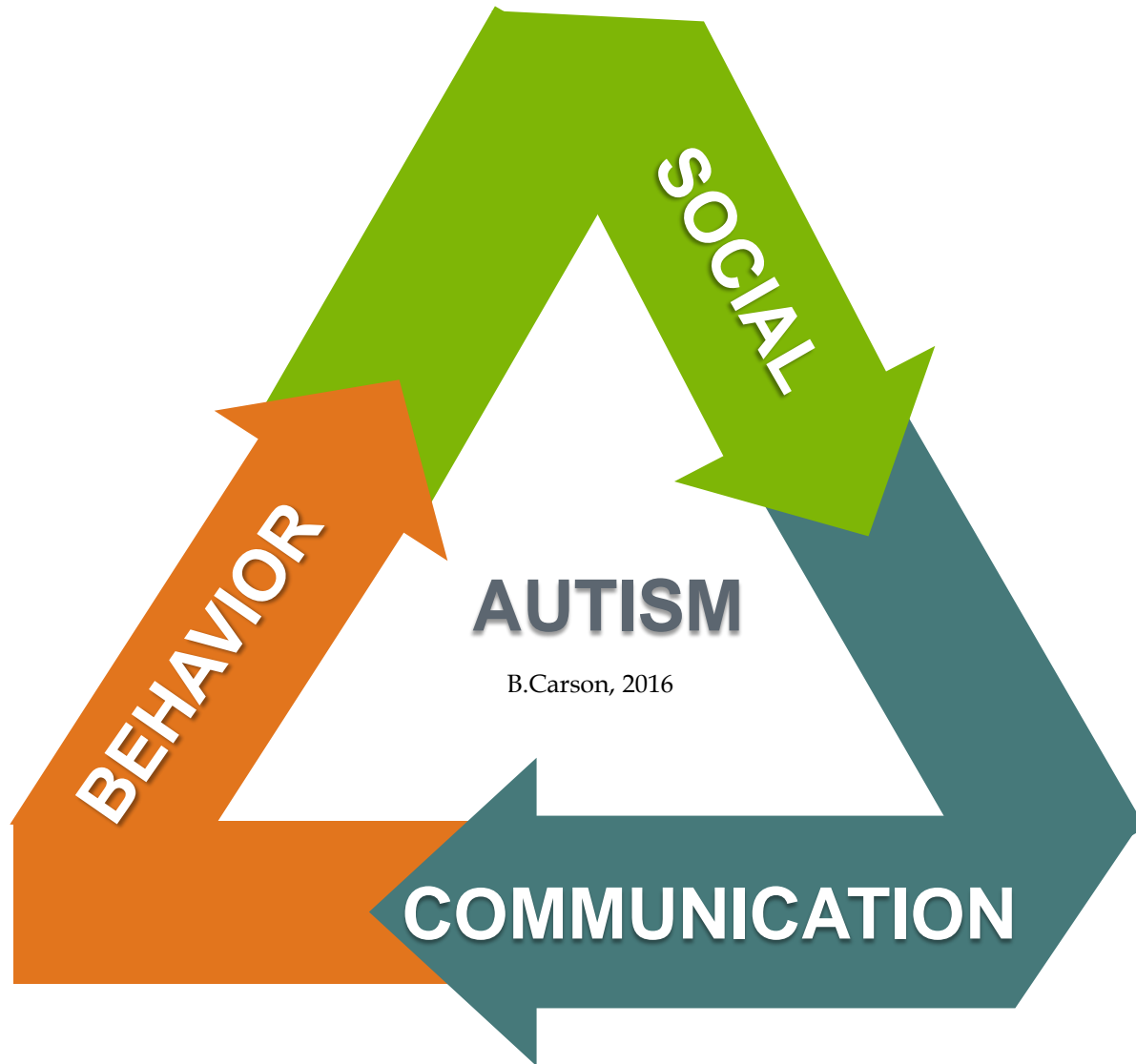
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# Parent Observations of Characteristics

- Interview 1 Video

# Triad of Characteristics



Researchers are estimating that the prevalence of males to females with ASD is 3:1.

- A. True
- B. False



Researchers are estimating that the prevalence of males to females with ASD is 3:1.

- A. True
- B. False



# WHAT DOES ASD IN FEMALES LOOK LIKE?

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Megan's home videos



# Repetitive Behavior/Restricted Interests

- Pool video





# Repetitive Behavior/Restricted Interests

- Camouflage these traits
- Interests are either social in nature or not uncommon for females their age.
- The intensity is atypical.



# Social

- Swing video



# Social

- Follow others
- Have one or two friends
- Observe before engage



# Communication

- Train Video



# Communication

- Use canned speech
- Imitate other's gestures
- Small talk is challenging
- Scripted conversations
- Talk about area of interest
- Quiet and shy



# Communication

- Tea party video

# Does Megan have pretend play skills?

- A. Yes, she set up a tea party.
- B. Yes, she played with dolls.
- C. No, her play was scripted.
- D. Both A and B



# Does Megan have pretend play skills?

- A. Yes, she set up a tea party.
- B. Yes, she gave the stuffed doll a drink.
- C. No, her play was scripted.
- D. Both A and B





# Key to Identifying Females

- Compare with other GIRLS in similar age-group
- Conduct interviews with family and teachers
- Observe in a variety of settings
- Interview female student
- Use clinical judgment rather than cut-off scores

# A WHOLE NEW WORLD

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Females live in a different social world than males.  
How can we meet their specific needs?

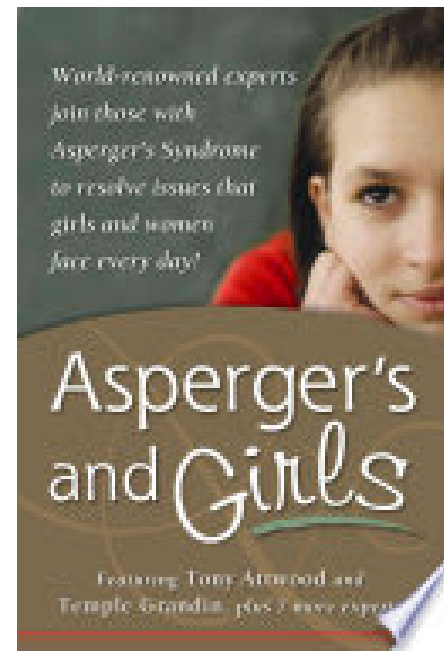


# School

- Interview 4

# Friendships

- Meet social expectations
- Understand social hierarchy
- Handle bullying and mean girls



Iland, L. (2009)





# Knowledge is Power

“The knowledge of my autism has helped me in so many ways. For a person with Asperger’s Syndrome, not knowing is a form of torture in and of itself. So finally having a name, a definition, that I can apply to myself has helped tremendously and been an incalculable worth to me.”

*-Twirling Naked in the Streets and No One Noticed*



# Hopes for the Future

- Interview 5



# What hopes do you have moving forward?

- A. I will identify more females with ASD.
- B. I will shift my focus towards girl-specific interventions.
- C. I hope to read a book on Girls and ASD.
- D. All of the above





# Some final words

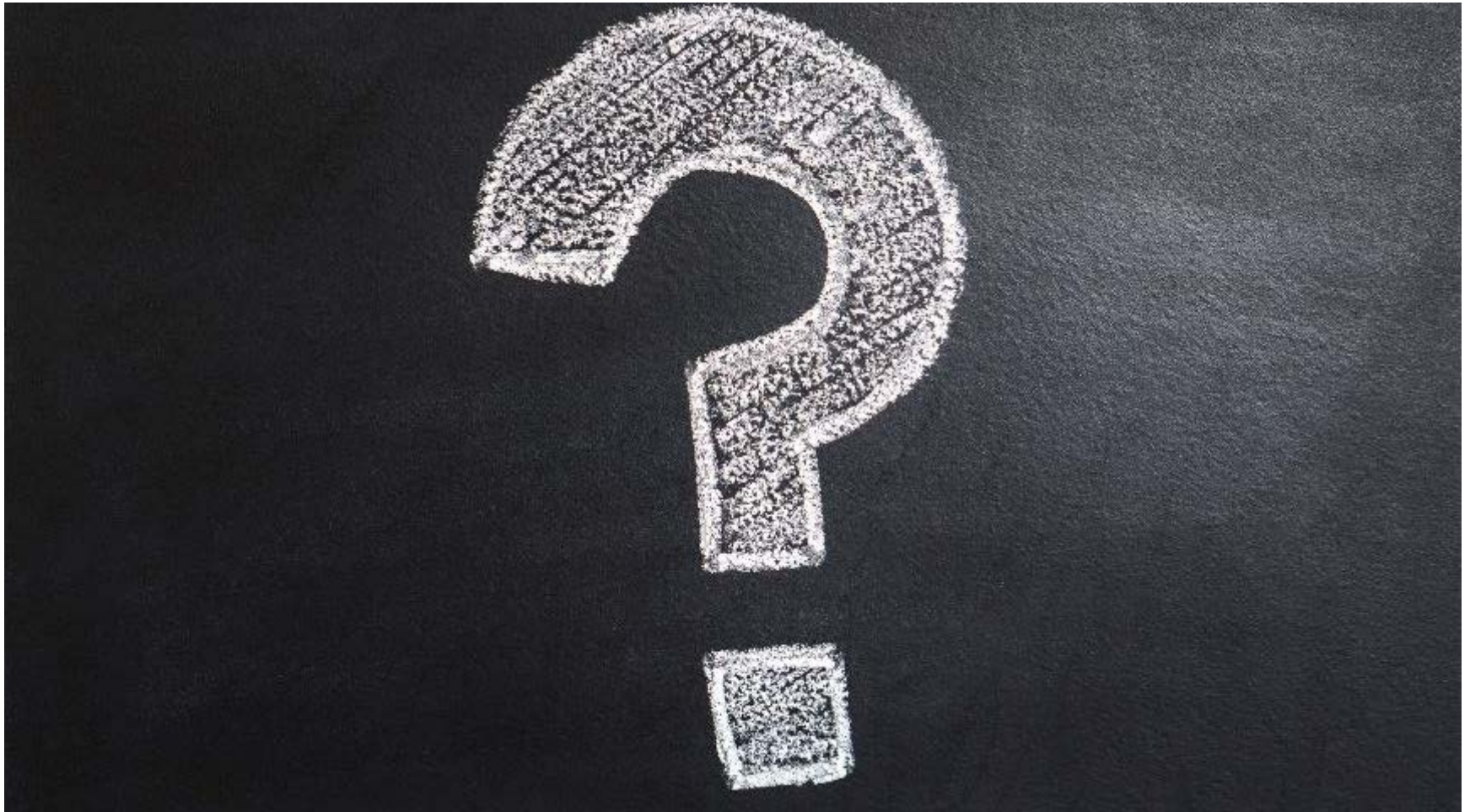
- Interview 6

# Final Words

A special thanks to Kristi and Megan Hoffey for opening up their lives to us. This webinar would not have been possible without them.

THANK YOU!!!

# Questions?



# THANK YOU!

Megan Hoffey

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# Questions

1. Why are females under identified?
2. What are some differences within the presentation of ASD in males and females?
3. What makes a female with ASD more prone to anxiety and depression?
4. Name an area of focus to help females with ASD?

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