

## **Diversity in Neurodivergence: Girls and Women with Autism**

### **Program Description**

This dynamic, 2-hour workshop provides participants with an overview of autism in girls and women, including an introduction to the neurodiversity paradigm and identity-first language. Common overviews of autism state that the neurodevelopmental disability occurs four times more often in boys; however, this is based on incomplete research evidence that does not consider different ways that girls can display autism symptoms. In-depth research across the lifespan considers historical diagnostic bias towards boys, which informed current autism criteria and behavioral manifestations. This newer knowledge reveals that girls and women are often diagnosed later in life than their male counterparts.

This workshop introduces autism from a feminist, strengths-based neurodiversity perspective and explores historical points of view on autism and gender. An in-depth look into the Female Autism Phenotype theory explains why girls and women with autism often go unrecognized and the consequences of under-diagnosis. Together, participants will discuss successes and challenges in their fields and collaborate on methods to improve gender-competent care for individuals with autism.

### **Learning Objectives**

Upon completion of this workshop, participants should be able to:

1. Explain why girls and women with autism are underdiagnosed;
2. Describe characteristics of the “female autism phenotype”;
3. Examine biases and microaggressions experienced by autistic women;
4. Demonstrate the importance of timely diagnosis and appropriate interventions for quality of life of autistic girls and women;
5. Acknowledge gender diversity across the autism spectrum, including transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming neurodivergent people;
6. Recognize that variations and non-stereotypical presentations of neurodiversity exist across all genders, including males;
7. Adopt a spirit of humility and attitude of learning about challenges and needs of neurodivergent girls and women;
8. Explore ways autism assessment, diagnosis, and services can improve for girls, women, and LGBTQ+ people across the lifespan;
9. Implement culturally competent care related to gender within one’s profession.

### **Target Audience**

This program is intended for professionals, students, self-advocates, and parents across the field of developmental disabilities who want a broader understanding of autism in women and girls.

### **Contact Hours**

2.0 contact hours

### **Program Agenda (2.0-hour program)**

1:00 - 1:20 PM	Overview of neurodiversity paradigm and identity-first language
1:20 - 1:40 PM	Background of gender and autism
1:40 - 2:00 PM	Introduction to the Female Autism Phenotype
2:00 - 2:15 PM	Break
2:15 - 2:35 PM	Masking Autism Traits
2:35 - 2:55 PM	Introduction to LGBTQ+ diversity on the autism spectrum
2:55 - 3:15 PM	Consequences of Late Diagnosis and the Importance of Gender-Competent Care

### **Faculty**

**Caroline Garrett, MSW** is a graduate of the UNC Chapel Hill School of Social Work and earned Bachelor of Social Works and Psychology degrees from Meredith College. Caroline is an autistic self-advocate and weaves personal experiences into their research, advocacy work, and direct practice with people who have disabilities. Caroline has worked with individuals with autism and developmental disabilities across the lifespan for five years and operates from lenses of neurodiversity, intersectionality, social justice, and anti-oppression. Caroline currently works as a Service Navigator with NeuroNav, facilitating the development of person-centered plans for individuals with developmental disabilities enrolled in the California Self-Determination Program. Caroline's research interests lie in the intersection of autism, mental health, and gender and they plan to pursue clinical licensure to focus on holistic, person-centered mental healthcare with neurodivergent individuals.