

# *Sexuality and the Spectrum:* Lessons on Sex, Dating, and Love, Autism Style

Amy Gravino, M.A., C.A.S.

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**RUTGERS**

Center for Adult Autism Services

# Join the Conversation!

❖ Slido QR code





# Overview

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- ❖ Introduction
- ❖ Firsthand perspective of a woman with ASD
- ❖ Questions



# Who Do You Talk to About Sex and Dating?

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- ❖ Family
- ❖ Therapist or Counselor
- ❖ Religious leader
- ❖ Friends
- ❖ Don't have anyone to talk to/Don't feel comfortable talking about it





# Myths vs. Truths

## About Autism and Relationships

- ❖ **MYTH:** Autistic people are asexual/don't have sex
- ❖ **TRUTH:** Autistic people do have sex!
  
- ❖ **MYTH:** Dating an autistic guy is exactly the same as dating an autistic girl
- ❖ **TRUTH:** Autistic girls and women are not the same as autistic boys
  
- ❖ **MYTH:** Individuals with autism are all straight
- ❖ **TRUTH:** Individuals with autism identify with many different sexual orientations

# Let's Talk About Sex!

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- ❖ Sex is everywhere, but we are uncomfortable having serious conversations about it.
- ❖ This is especially true when the conversation involves individuals with disabilities.





# A Whole New Language

## ❖ The Secret Language of Emojis



# A Whole New Language

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<https://youtu.be/UztioBpKIRk?t=66>



# So Why Is It Important?

- ❖ Because sexuality isn't assumed to be part of the human experience for autistic people
- ❖ Because sex begins long before sex begins
- ❖ Because communication is key
- ❖ Because the consequences of not providing accurate and comprehensive sex ed are too great



So what better way to understand the unique sexual experiences of individuals on the spectrum...

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...Than with a real life Naughty Autie to tell you all about it!



# About Me

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- ❖ Founder and president of A.S.C.O.T Consulting, LLC and Certified Autism Specialist (IBCCES)
- ❖ Relationship Coach at Rutgers Center for Adult Autism Service (RCAAS)
- ❖ International public speaker (“Dr. Ruth of the Autism World”)
- ❖ Featured in film version of *In A Different Key: The Story of Autism* based on the New York Times Bestselling book.
- ❖ Co-author with Dr. Peter Gerhardt and Dr. Jess Cauchi of book chapter, “Sexuality and Sexuality Education with Individuals with Autism: What You Should Know but Probably Don’t” in *Handbook of Quality of Life for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder* (2022, Springer).
- ❖ Serves on Boards of Yes She Can, Inc., Golden Door International Film Festival of Jersey City, and the Scientific Advisory Board of SPARK.
- ❖ Award-winning author of *The Naughty Autie*



But in 1996, like most any  
13-year-old girl...

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# HOWEVER...

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Age of First Interest  $\neq$  Age of  
First Experience

- ❖ There was a disconnect between what I was curious about and learning opportunities that I had to explore it.

# Puberty Predicaments: Me, Myself...

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- ❖ Feeling disconnected from my body

- ❖ Period pains

- ❖ Self-esteem and suicide





# Puberty Predicaments: ...And Others

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- ❖ Misunderstandings about how puberty affected me
  - ❖ Emotional impact of adolescence on growing individuals with autism
- ❖ No time to “talk”
- ❖ Questions But No Answers



# Social Difficulties Lead To...

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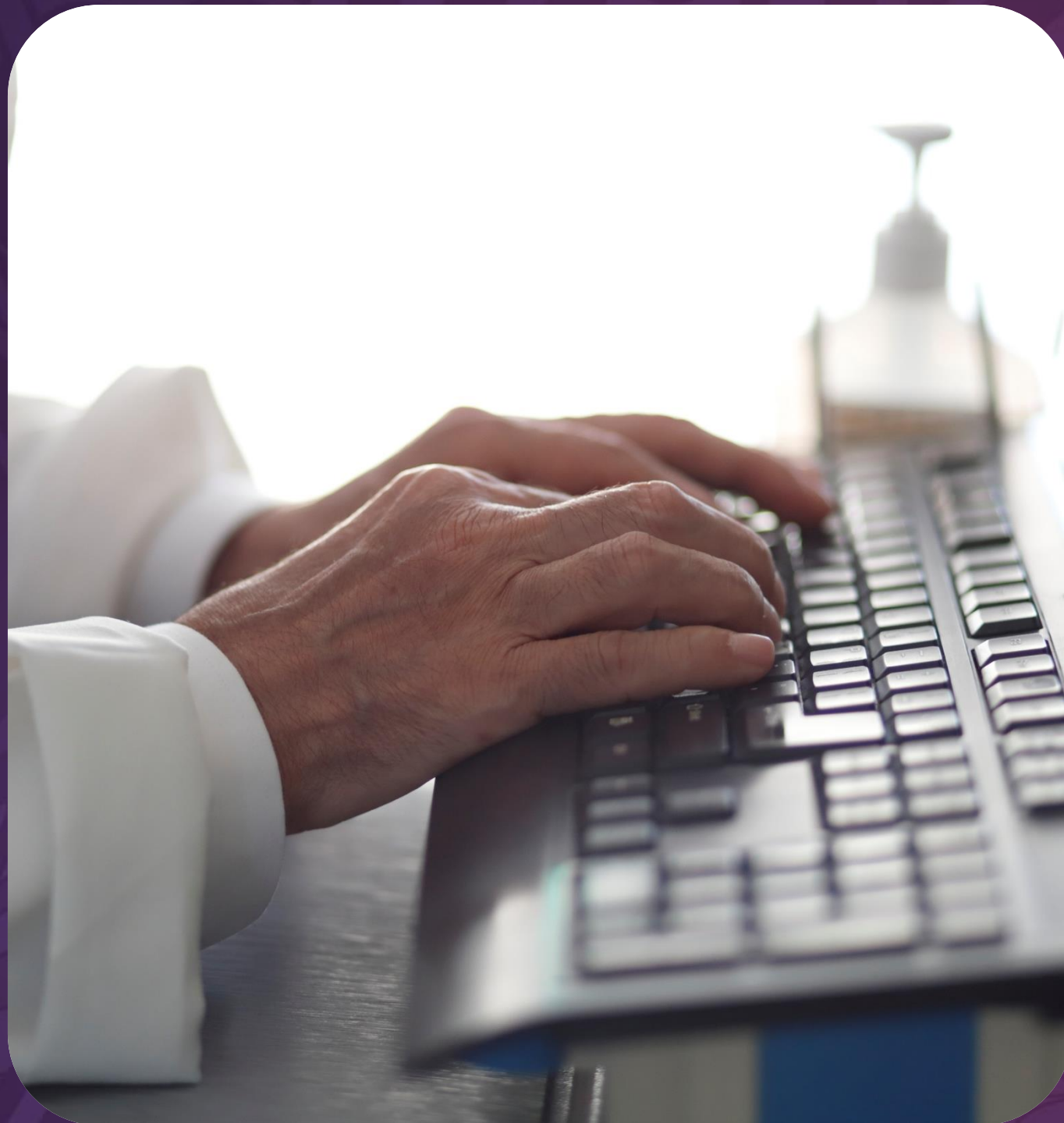
- ❖ Finding friendships online
- ❖ Learning about sex from peers and online
  - ❖ Reading erotica
- ❖ Fact vs. fiction





# Autism and Internet Safety

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❖ Vulnerability to predators

❖ Saving the breast for last

# The disappointment of real life opposite sex experiences...

- ❖ Falling for the boy next door (or across the street)
- ❖ Crush conundrum
- ❖ First French kiss





# One (Im)perfect High School Moment

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❖ Senior prom

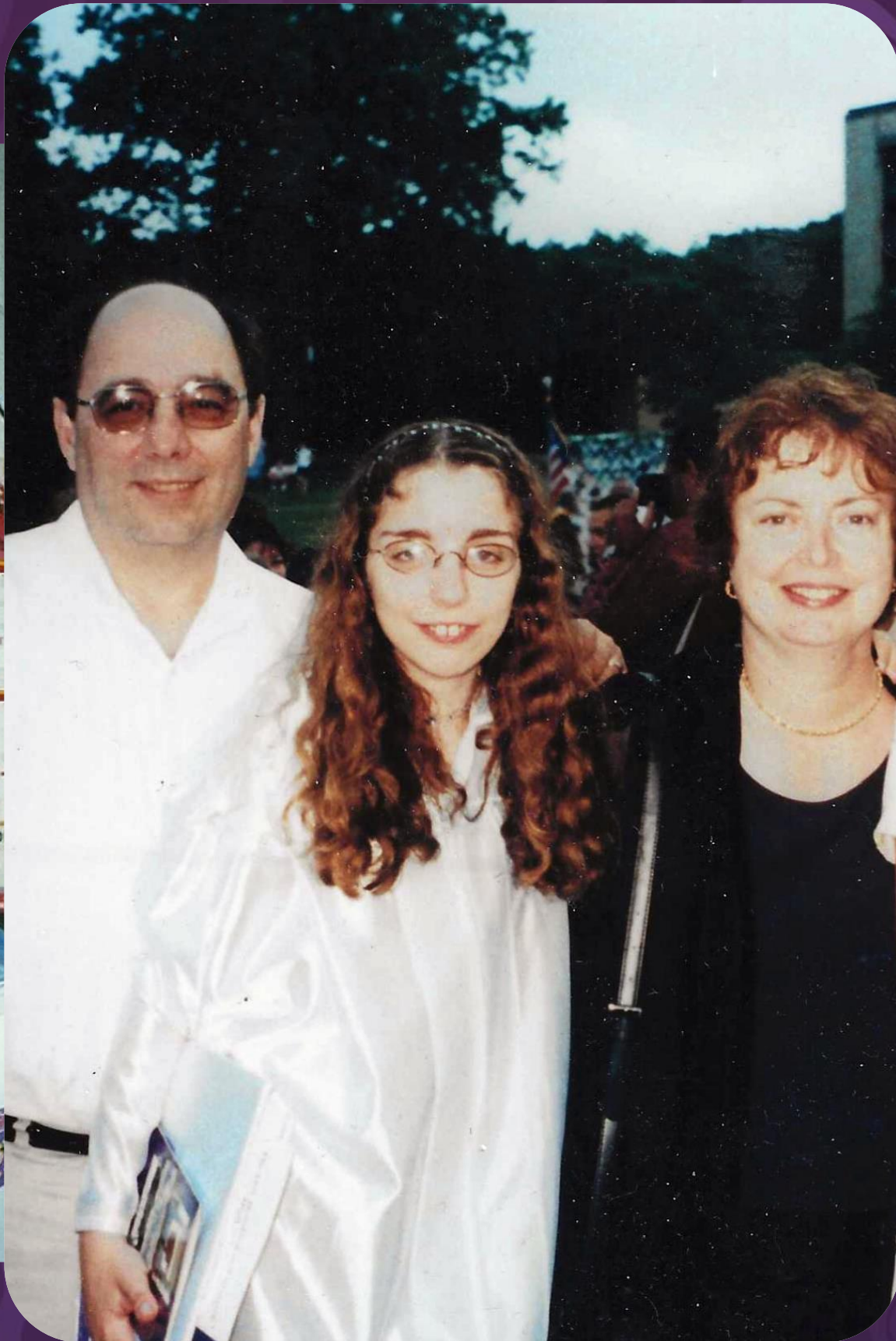
❖ Expectations vs. reality

❖ Poetry in motion



# Part 2 tomorrow...

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# Contact Information



## RUTGERS

Center for Adult Autism Services

amy@amygravino.com amy.gravino@rutgers.edu

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### *Social Media (Scan to Follow)*



# Questions

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ANY  
QUESTIONS?