Adulting on the Spectrum: On a mission to make diagnosis more accessible to women

Andrew M. Komarow
Welcome to Adulting on the Spectrum, I'm Andrew Komarow an autistic certified financial planner. I co-run Adulting on the Spectrum with my co-host Eileen Lamb.

Eileen Lamb
Hey Andrew. I Eileen Lamb. I'm an autistic author and photographer from France. And in this podcast we want to highlight real voices of autistic adults, not just inspirational stories, but people like us talking about their day to day life. Basically, you want to give a voice to a variety of autistic people.

Andrew M. Komarow
Today our guest is Dolly. Dolly is a proud graduate of University of South Florida, Master's of Clinical Social Work program is now a licensed clinical social worker in the state of Florida with a pending doctorate in clinical sexology. Dolly is passionate about helping those with sexual health and wellness issues, anxiety, eating disorders, trauma and grief as an individual on the spectrum herself. Dolly also specializes in intersectional and inclusive Autism Spectrum Disorder evaluations and therapy. Dolly's affirming and empathetic approach to therapy will help you gain a sense of normalcy, help you dig deeper and help you make the change you desire for permanent happiness in the long term.

Dolly
And that's so beautiful.

Andrew M. Komarow
Thank you reminded me of a drug commercial right at the end in a good way. Like like a Zoloft commercial. Okay. Moving on.

Eileen Lamb
Hi, Dolly. Thanks for joining us today.

Dolly
Thanks for having me today. I'm a little nervous.

Andrew M. Komarow
All, good.

Eileen Lamb
We start our podcast only by asking your guests how they like to identify. And what I mean by that is what pronouns do you use? And what is your preference when it comes to autism identity person with autism autistic on the spectrum of that.

Dolly
So I use she her pronouns, and I don't really care. I'm proud to be autistic and you can call me anything you want heard. Heard lots of different things this past couple years. So I just just like to be part of the community in some way, and just happy to be here in general. So whatever you want to say is fine with me.

Andrew M. Komarow
So our first question, When and how did you get diagnosed? What do you think about the process? The good and the bad?

Dolly
Hmm, fantastic question. And this is a very complicated question, I think for all of us, especially for me personally, because I'm also a clinician, so I feel like there's some layers to that one. But for me, personally, I was in the middle of my master's degree program for clinical social work. So one would think that if you're autistic, you would be able to identify at this point, that you could be on the spectrum given this as part of your education. That was not the case for me. In fact, in the my social work program, specifically, there was not a lot of education at all about autism, which is very sad. We kind of had very short kind of glossing over it from when we worked on the DSM. And that was the only mention of autism that we had. So that's very disappointing, in hindsight. But one day in the middle of a program, I'm just hanging out at my house, and my best friend of 10 years comes to me, and she's like, so I have something really personal, I want to share with you, I've been really afraid to tell people about this. And she's 38 At the time, 38 years old at the time, and she says I've been recently diagnosed with autism. And I was like, Whoa, like, first of all, I'm halfway through my master's program. At this point, I'm pretty clinically good. I can handle myself clinically. And here's my best friend that I've known for so long, and like, how did they miss this? I'm like, you'll tell me everything about it. And she's like, Well, before we get into that, there's some things that I've noticed, that are very similar between the two of us. And I just want to share this, if you're open to it, I don't want to, you know, offend you in any way. I'm like, what, and then she started kind of word vomiting, all these things that one would come to know as, quote unquote, autism based off of like movies, and whatever we know. And, and she's like, No, no, that's not how that works for women. I was like, What are you talking about? And she really went into it and showed me some screeners and showed me some of the her diagnostic process and all of that, and I was like, Whoa, I felt like this really weird, like tunnel vision. And I was like this, how can this even be my life? I'm in my late 20s. Like, this is not even how can I have missed this for all these years. And she's like, the system stacked against us. And so, because of her I started exploring this part of myself and was, you know, pretty
sure but still kind of having this like imposter syndrome about it. And then I had to go all the way to North Carolina to see a specialist for adult women on the on the autism spectrum, and did a grueling weekend, a lot of pre work ahead of time, a lot of interviewing, I had to bring my, my wife and then I also brought my best friend, just to have, you know, multiple environments represented during the evaluation and after the evaluation, she's like, Yep, you're autistic and I was just couldn't believe it even today, in my 30s I still sometimes can't believe it, I still get this like imposter syndrome because, you know, there's just not enough out there that's accepting of all different types of people on the spectrum. You know, I am quote unquote, high functioning and anytime I tell people a lot of times they get that, Oh, you must be high functioning or Oh, you You're just a little bit autistic and just drives me crazy. Because the more I learn about autism, the more I learn about myself, I'm just like, oh, like, it doesn't work this way. And it just makes me feel like I've been asked more and more, but I'm slowly trying to break down those barriers and become more comfortable with myself and my diagnosis. And now my 30s. Now, being an actual licensed clinical social worker, I want to give back to my community because the process to get diagnosed for me, and I'm a privileged white woman, I was able to do that. But that's not accessible to a lot of people. And so I just wanted to be able to work within my community to spread the word and to be accessible to parts of the community that may not have the opportunity to find an actual diagnosis, they may be able to self diagnose, but there's a lot of stigma regarding that. And I know that having my diagnosis, even with my imposter syndrome, I'm still able to look back on that and say, Okay, I may not be believing it right now. But there is that piece of paper, and there are these screeners and I did score pretty high. So I must be autistic, and it's okay, I can be autistic. And so that that's how I got to where I am right now.

**Eileen Lamb**

That's amazing that you were able to get a professional diagnosis. I know it's not, it's not easy for for everyone, especially when we're adults and women. For instance, I went through the same process you did very similar. What's, uh, what advice would you give someone who's looking to, you know, into getting a diagnosis? Or they're, they're wondering about themselves? If maybe they're on the spectrum? What, what advice would you give them?

**Dolly**

I tell my clients this, I tell anyone to come in contact with this. And that's a fantastic question. It's don't give up. At the end of day, you know, yourself best. There are a shocking number of terrible clinicians out there, and I'm sorry, community, but a lot of you are really, really bad at what you do every day, I get a ton of clients who are just like, oh, I had this experience or that experience. And it's very tragic. And at the end of day, if you've done your research, and you identify with these things, and it means something to you to have this label, and you find empowerment with it, run with it, like don't give up, if you have a clinician that's not hearing you, or maybe may not be as educated in certain areas, because of your gender, or because of your age, or a number of other factors. There'll be a clinician out there who will do it for you. Not that they'll just give you a diagnosis, but there'll be an educated clinician out there who will provide an evaluation that is accurate and precise, and will meet you where you're at, and actually pay attention to you and listen to you and give you what you need. So my advice would be don't give up, you know, if you know who you are, at the end of the day, nobody can tell you what your experiences are and how you've grown up in life.
Andrew M. Komarow
Now, question, at what point though, for some, you know, because, you know, it kind of goes both ways, right? Because then you also hear all, you know, other people who are not really artistically like, oh, well, I’m, I may be a little bit on the spectrum myself, right. Yeah. Or, you know, use it as, oh, I have some of these traits well you’re human. So you share some human traits, right? You know, but at what point if somebody goes for a diagnosis, and they get, you know, a different one or multiple at? What are your thoughts on? What is to know when you’ve got the right clinician and the right diagnosis? And what are your thoughts on self diagnosing and sharing that?

Dolly
Yeah, very good questions. So this is tough, because again, you do know yourself best. I and I can only speak from my perspective as me as a clinician, how I evaluate and all of that, but I’m very upfront from very beginning, this is the criteria, you can’t just be a little bit autistic, right? You can’t be a little bit of something in one area, you have to meet criteria across all environments across your entire lifespan. And so a good clinician will take your screeners and use that as a jumping off point. Because we’re human, right? I’m sure we’ve all done it before, where we’ve read something like a horoscope, right, and you’re like, oh, that sounds like that could be me. Right. And so with a screener that really is just your specific perspective that we take and run with, right? We use it as part of our, our questioning period, right? So you may read something and say, Oh, that’s definitely me. But then when I asked you questions about, okay, that’s you, what about at this time? What about here? What about now, and then we start breaking down some of those, you know, questionable periods to really find the accuracy of your experience. At the end of the day, for me personally, I do have very precise and very expansive evaluations, because I don’t want there to be any questions, you know, I want to say at the end of day with like, a 40 page evaluation that we did every screener every question, identified every single environment, every single opportunity that we can to review to make sure that you have no questions. You know, like me, I want to make sure there were no questions. I don’t feel that imposter syndrome. And so sometimes, I mean, if you feel at the end of it, that you’re not getting what you want. That's a conversation I will have from time to time, you know, I'll be honest with them, okay. Why is it so important for you to have the autism diagnosis specifically and not an accurate diagnosis for yourself? Let’s break that down for a minute. But a lot of times it is just someone who has been shuffled from provider to provider and haven’t had the right voice to advocate for them at that point. So thankfully, it's more rare that Get someone who’s just so focused on the autism diagnosis itself and not actually the truth.

Eileen Lamb
I know you’re not on social media much, but there is a community of autistic adults out there, or suspected autistic. We think that their sense of self and is more important than a professional basically, that they know themselves better than a professional. Therefore, if they think they’re autistic, and the Internet tells them, they’re autistic, the professional is wrong. And I think that’s where we’re getting at, like, where is the line between it’s a privilege to get a diagnosis. Yeah, agreed, because of
money and other factors, yes, but at the same time, you do not know better than a professional in most cases, you know,

Dolly
And I definitely, this is so tough, because as a human who was also a social worker. So in my heart, I care I’m compassionate, of course, I would want anyone who doesn't have that access to a formal diagnosis to just say, you know, what, this is what I feel. And that’s what I’m gonna roll with. That's lovely. However, as a clinician, as a professional, there are so many factors that come into play, and so many different differential diagnoses that could be in play to like, it may not be autism, you may be checking off a lot of boxes, but it could be a different sensory disorder, it could be so many other things. And so the issue is, at the end, the day that the the industry is broken, like we need to be able to offer accessible, educated clinicians to the masses, so that people don't have to rely on a self diagnosis. It’s hard for me to get behind a self diagnosis, even though I know that's important for the community. I'm very much split in the middle as a human and also as a clinician, but the self, the self diagnosis is tough for me.

Andrew M. Komarow
Well, I think you said it really well. You said when somebody is asking you to come for a diagnosis, you said, Well, why isn't official diagnosis important to you? Right? And I think the answer to that is pretty, you know, important. There’s one thing to like, diagnose it for yourself and not tell anyone else and

Dolly
Just to feel empowerment with yourself. And that’s great. Let's work on therapy, let's get you all the skills you need to communicate. So you know, feel better in social situations, what have you. But, you know, a lot of it's like test accommodations or to have conversations with family or like, just to feel legitimate in some way.

Andrew M. Komarow
So wait, wait, wait, I thought getting diagnosed as autistic later in life was so you could yell at parents on the internet? Are you telling me that’s not the reason we seek out a diagnosis? (all laugh)

Dolly
Oh man, me personally, I had enough to go on to feel okay with a self diagnosis. I’m a clinician, I did all the research, I did screenings, great I could I could be okay with that. And then not tell anyone. But it got to a point where I had been, I've been masking my whole life. I'm still masking. Now I'm masking now in this interview, like I just am really struggling at this point in life to learn how to turn that off. And that’s something I’m personally working on with my own therapist is how to turn off the masking and be comfortable with being myself around people. And I feel like that started with my official diagnosis. I felt like a liar until that day in North Carolina when I was given that piece of paper and said, No, this is this is true. And I was like, Wow, I can't like this piece of paper allows me to go to my mother, my family and say, Hey, I'm not making this up. I’m not just being dramatic. I know that I've been making
it so far. And you think that I'm wonderful and amazing and can hold my own. But actually, I am struggling on the inside. And I finally have words to describe how and why that's happening. And that's what a self diagnosis is missing.

Eileen Lamb
Yeah, good. I mean, not there is a good or

Dolly
I'm so very firmly seated on it, it's so tough, because I'm very firmly in the middle about that.

Andrew M. Komarow
One thing that I really like any transition it perfectly was how you changed your business in a way that it was already headed because of your diagnosis, to also help other people. And I say that because I was a financial planner, before I was diagnosed, and I changed my business to really focus on an underserved population. Right, that I felt like a patent, like, you know, just like a calling to, like have a really better term. And I, you know, wanting to help people who like, literally what you said couldn't afford it needed it. Just and I want and I know I mean, my this is called play across spectrum, there's no chance I would have started that if I wasn't. And one of the hardest things with starting it was also telling my own story. Right? Was that was a part of why people may want to work with me. So just how did you? How did your business or your career change? Like before and after diagnosis? And is it mostly the same? Because you're, you have a pretty you cover a fair amount of areas, right? And your PhD is not in autism, right? It's still in something else. So if you just talk about like the direction you're headed and how that's changed.

Dolly
So, um, I did not know that I've started my own private practice. So and this all became clear because I'm autistic. And now that I know I'm autistic and like, that makes a lot of sense. But I went through school for a very long time. This is like a running joke in my circle. So I graduated with like 430 credits, one bachelor's degree but like enough to where if I if I'd gone for like one more semester I'd have like four or five, because it just kept changing my major over and over again, I truly had no idea where I'd end up in life because I just genuinely loved everything. I could see myself doing everything, but then the passion would fizzle out and move on to the next thing like so autistic, right? And then I just kind of happened in this field. Because I was in a law program. I was in a pre law like a legal studies bachelor's program, and the provost called me and he's like, listen, you've been here for too long. This is the degree that you're going to get now. I was like, I guess it's my life now. So I got my bachelor's, I was like, well, I need to go to law school. Right? That's the next thing. And I was planning on going to law school and some things happened. I was adopted. And I had a department children and families fee waiver. And it wouldn't cover law school at the time, like graduate school. So like, what can I do that's cheaper, I want to work in policy in law, right. And so I went to get masters in social work. And like, a social worker when I was little, I can do this. And then I ended up in this program. I'm like, Oh, this is therapy. I literally had no idea ended up being really good at it. And I'm really loving it. And I was like, Well, I can work in policy, when I get out. This is this, like, I still do the same thing. And then I fell
into therapy, like Matt, like micro one on one work. And I was like, Wow, I’m actually really good at this, I could read people really well. And now that I have my autism diagnosis, I’m like, Oh, I understand that that something I had to learn very early, like, I read people very quickly, and adjust myself very quickly to meet their needs. And that actually ended up being like this amazing superpower I have, and I’m so good at therapy because of it. I’m so thankful for that. And so when I so I recently left a previous job, that’s more macro is more of like an administrative type, social work job. And I got into doing psychotherapy this past year, more, more frequently, like full time therapy instead of part time. And then I was like, you know, being my artistic self, I’m like, what’s the next thing I’m already bored? Like, what can I do now, and it’s like, start my own business. So like, here’s my practice. And I just immediately know that I would have these two very different sides of the practice. So it’s called share of Florida. So sexual health and recovery, empowerment of Florida. And so sexual health is just all things under that umbrella, you know, LGBT issues, couples, families, all that, and then recovery, empowerment. And what I pictured when I wrote in recovery, empowerment was really just meeting anyone where they’re at in terms of their recovery in general. And I felt like that included, recovering from masking and recovering from this neurotypical world that we’ve been walking through, silently, not even realizing it. And that included, you know, grief and loss and anxiety and depression and, and OCD and eating disorders. And because it’s all inclusive, like a lot of times when you’re autistic, you’re not just autistic, there’s a lot more that goes along with it. And so I felt like this just a very natural, a natural way that I move forward with that. And I work with other wonderful community providers, and we work on the evaluation together. And we make sure that again, that it’s across interdisciplinary fields, and that everything’s being met, and that you get one hell of an evaluation afterwards, because I just want people to have the most precise answer for them. Because that’s what I needed at the time, a really precise answer, that was really logical. And that left out no questions. And that’s what I tried to provide. And that’s just a very natural course, a natural way that I ended up here.

Eileen Lamb
What do you think is the most helpful thing during an autism evaluation? When I did mine, there was there were so many layers to it, they were like interviews, the family, they were like, a questionnaire that I would fill out and then like, my husband would fill out about me, so we could compare our answers, then they were of course the, you know, observation, then they were like the cognitive test. I mean, there’s so many tests, what do you think is the most useful out of those and you think any of those could be like maybe, you know, put away I also did the I can’t pronounce it, the ink test or Rorschach is that how you say it?. She said, like, there’s no evidence for it. But she was very curious, just for her own say. And she noticed that I, you know, I didn’t see a lot of people in the income, I would see like dogs and animals interacting, which, you know, the little research there was about it was, but yeah, she didn’t use that. But she was curious, anyway, all that to say, what what, what do you think is the most important part of the evaluation?

Dolly
the most important, um, that’s really tough to answer. I really do believe and every component of the evaluation, because it’s also important, because if you take away any bit of that you’re really missing just an important chunk of information or important viewpoints. So for example, if I’m just getting a self
report, I'm just getting your perspective, which could be like I mentioned earlier, if you are reading something, sometimes we read into things a little bit too much, or we like we try to justify a little bit, it’s a very natural human thing to do. And so sometimes it might score really, really high or even really, really low if we’re not paying attention to a lot of our symptoms, right? So having other people who can complete those same things in the comparing so imperative, the observation so important, is what you’re telling me I could be seeing something totally different in real life, getting friends and family members also super important. Like for example, it’s to parents, it’s really interesting for me to see how two separate parents respond on those questionnaires, because I can see who’s like more absent than the other like that’s really an interesting dynamic to kind of play into that I think. I really believe and the evaluative process that we have right now, I can't think of just based off of like how I complete the evaluation, I can't think of anything that I would do differently. So for me, personally, I try to do the first meeting in home, if possible, assuming they’re not on like the other side of the state. And I don’t know if a lot of clinicians do that. But I, before I meet anyone, I try not to talk to them on the phone for very long, I try to have a very fresh, first first view of them in their environment, I asked them to give me a tour of their house, and I see how they walk around the house, how they describe things, how they move, when they don’t think they’re being watched, because they don’t think the evaluation is started yet. So I try to catch them before they even know, like, what our relationship is going to be. And then we sit down, and we talk about everything. And that’s just our first meeting, we just kind of go over the DSM, all those things. And this is, you know, after they’ve completed a self report, cuz I don’t want to take the self report in any way. And at that point, I determine Okay, maybe we’ll get this family member or this or that, and then we kind of go from there, depending? And then there’s also, you know, do they need to go to neurologist for a brain scan? or is there other like community providers, who will just strengthen the test even more, strengthen the evaluation even more? And then we kind of go from there? And also depends on what are their final, like hopes for the evaluation? Are they trying to get test accommodations? Are they trying to just have this for themselves? It is, you know, what is the purpose of it too, and that kind of determines how the flow of the evaluation will go as well.

Eileen Lamb
I really liked watching them before the actual evaluation thing, my but well, the person who diagnose me in you know, I did a therapeutic assessment. So at the end, she I don’t know if you’ve heard of them, they were created by Stephen, Stephen Finn. You can Google it, it’s very interesting. But at the end of the assessment, the psychologist writes you a letter like to you like it’s personal. And anyway, in the letter that she was telling me, I noticed the first signs before we even started the evaluation, because I was watching you in the waiting room, and you’re just like, rocking back and forth, while waiting for me to you know, escort you from the waiting room to the and I think that is like such a smart thing to do. You know, you observe people like in their environment, environments, when they don’t know they’re being watched. Because that’s when they’re like, natural, I guess, you know, and because once you’re in the room, I feel like you’re almost like, more likely to like mask and you know, like, put on a show or so. Yeah,

Dolly
And I and I've actually caught it, where it's the flip of that. And this is why I really like doing that. Because they won't, they'll just be on their own just appearing, quote, unquote, normal, whatever that is. And then when they get in the room, they think the evaluation started, that's when you'll see certain behaviors. And that for me, I can tell at that point, is it someone just seeking a title? Or is it someone who is legitimately on the spectrum? And so I kind of keep that in mind, too, is like, and then I use that to compare with the assessments like, these are huge gaps in the assessments, like in certain areas, or, you know, is a self report, is it accurate?

Eileen Lamb
You know, that's, that's great.

Andrew M. Komarow
And also, like a flip side to is, it's really funny. So when I was first diagnosed, I didn't believe it for a little while, or a while, because like, how was it so obvious? And I had a lot of stereotypical signs. All right, with with minus one I have advantageous so the opposite of seeing in pictures. So that was confusing. But then the other part was, oh, I don't have a routine, do I? Or I'm not anxious, because I've never No, no, why not having anxiety is like, I've always you're like I was I was talking to somebody, I'm actually hiring. And I'm, like, so convinced they are ADHD, and they're like, but I think everyone else is lying. If they said they don't answer questions this way, right? Because it's just like who they are. Like I said, I don't have a routine, or I'm not anxious, or you know what, that's just all I've ever known. So to me, it's, it's different. Like, that's why having an assessment from someone else is important, because, like, I have such a strict routine. It's insane. Yeah, but yeah, I didn't think I did. I didn't think I had one at all.

Dolly
Well, nobody's ever pointed out to you, right? Yeah. Yeah, I think it's so interesting, because when I was 16, I, so in my teen years, I had some very tumultuous times. And I went, I went to seek some help. And they said that I had OCD. And I really believe that because it was very apparent that that would be as a clinician, I'm like, okay, that makes sense. It's a pretty obvious diagnosis for the time. But now in hindsight, I'm like, Oh, my God, that's, you know, that's not OCD, all of that is autism, and had that person been educated on how girls teen girls would present with autism, I could have had my diagnosis at 16 and probably would have had so much help and had a completely different, you know, young 20s life completely so it's just interesting. There's so many things that I've done in my childhood that even now I'll get a flash of a memory and be like, what? Oh my god, it's like so obvious like that together.

Andrew M. Komarow
Which one comes to mind when you say that?

Dolly
I can't even get, It's like so first of all, I have this thing. I didn't even realize I was doing this but so a very specific story. And I literally, sometimes when I can't fall asleep, I still remember this. You guys
have those moments were like, oh, boy, that happened. So I've always felt like a step behind. Like I just like always like, ah, like, it's a step behind everyone. And I remember I was up in New York, and I was visiting with my grandmother and my uncle. And my uncle, my grandfather, unfortunately passed away. And my uncle was living, like, moved in with my grandmother to help her. And we were upstairs and he was he likes to tease really hard. Like, he's a hard teaser. It's a very like, like, middle aged Italian man thing to do. You know, I don't know if you guys know that culture at all. But so he'd be teasing me all the time. And like, really, borderline could be mean, you know, but like, it's funny. It's funny, haha. And then I had like, taking it a step too far. Like, I was trying to, like, keep up and like respond to it. And I had said something that I was like, Oh, this will be funny, like, Haha, but he didn't laugh. And it was, it was super, like, I still think about it was really, it was really mean. And I didn't mean it. It's not like I had any there was nothing behind it. I was just trying to keep up with that situation. And it was just like moments like that my entire life. Like being a step behind is trying to keep up with the conversation or the jokes or the thing just trying to like fit in. And it's it's moments like that, that really stick out that I just can’t take back and, and I I’ve never had a conversation with him about my autism. I don’t even know if he knows I’m autistic actually. But I’d love to be able to use that story as an example. But a part of me is fearful to bring that up. Because I feel like a guy like him would be like, you’re totally fine. You're not autistic, you know, like, you know, and so it’s just those moments stick out so bright in my mind, and it just painful makes me cringe before falling asleep. It's like why the fuck did they say that? Oh, sorry. Can I say that?

Andrew M. Komarow
Yeah, this is called "Adulting on the Spectrum. " Yeah, there we go. Eileen, you have to curse here. So it's all three of us.

Eileen Lamb
Can we do it in French?

Andrew M. Komarow
Sure. Go for it.

Eileen Lamb
Putain

Andrew M. Komarow
Sounds so much nicer. Um, so okay, we might this parts have been cut out, we might have to redo this twice because Eileen might kill me. But Eileen, English not being our first language. She thought a sexologist met like you give sex tips. I think kind of like a mixologist.

Dolly
And I'm about it, please keep this in.

Andrew M. Komarow
Yes. So she did not understand what you’re going to school for. And honestly, other than I know, it’s not sex tips. I also don’t really know what your PHD involves. Um, so and again, your practice covers a lot more than autism. And I actually think that we have had more individuals come on our podcast so far. And it’s obviously not a statistical sample. But let’s say we’ve had 10. So far, I think more than half have not been straight. And they’ve all been autistics. So there’s definitely an overlap there?

Dolly
Oh, my god, I have so much to say about this. Thank you so much for bringing it up. So first of all, to address your main concerns. Sometimes it does involve tips, but not like what you think most the time it’s education, communication skills. So sex, sexology sex therapy, it’s a very broad umbrella. It’s literally anything that would fall under sexual health and wellness, that could be couples struggling in their relationship that could be a woman who was raped and is working through her sexual trauma, that could be a person working through their transgender journey, that could be someone who’s gender nonconforming, and really just working through their gender identity in general, it could be people on the LGBTQ plus spectrum, like it’s literally anything under the sexual health and wellness umbrella, which I know is really broad, but that’s why it’s share in Florida. It’s everything under there. And so you know, sometimes there’s tips involved, you know, like I read this book, so you can take anything out of it. But at the end of day, a lot of a lot of those clients end up being a lot of older people who tragically were not educated growing up and really think about that, you know, I think millennials and younger, we’re very privileged to have the access of the internet. Unfortunately, porn is more prevalent, but we have the access of the Internet to be able to learn about our bodies and learn more than what’s just presented in school, whether that be an abstinence only school, or even just that really awful sex ed, you get where you’re like women have periods and boys have penises. That’s it, work with that. And so like how are you supposed to expect civilization to know how to communicate feelings or emotions or how to have relationships appropriately. And that’s where I come in. So the PhD is just a specialization, but it also ends up allowing me to also become board certified in sex therapy so that when I received the PhD and the board certification, I can officially be a certified sex therapist and not just provide sexual health and wellness therapy. So that’s what that is. But on your point, this is so fascinating, because I’ve been following this I definitely want to do some work in in this realm in the future, especially when I work on my dissertation, but autism and queerness in general, just you know, there’s the whole LGBTQ plus spectrum, gender issues, trans issues that is very often overlapping. And I think that’s so fascinating because I’ve always kind of pictured autistic people as being these like, really cool evolutionary like aliens. Like we’re like the next step in and evolution as being a human because I feel like we’re just really, really powerful. I know we struggle in certain areas in terms of like what the social norm is, but like that was created by neurotypical people. So I, you know, I think that we’re in the next step. And that just makes me feel better. And so when I think about that, I think it’s also really cool that we see a lot of trans people or gender non conforming people or, you know, LGBT, LGBTQ plus people who are also autistic, because I feel like, because they, because autistic people just kind of think differently, I feel like we’re more open to alternative viewpoints, and we’re able to identify those parts of ourselves more frequently. And so I think that’s really just cool. We’re not as closed off, I feel like when neurotypical people, there’s just sort of weight of societal norms on their shoulders. And so I feel like maybe they’re less likely to understand those parts of themselves, or I don’t know what the connection is, but I would really love to find out one day.
Eileen Lamb
Yeah, well love that too. Yeah. So I came out last year as a bisexual, it's something of

Dolly
Welcome to a club! Nice

Eileen Lamb
I'm not really sure why, but I just felt like so ashamed of it. And the fact that I'm married to a man, I feel like I'm not allowed to say I'm bisexual because it's like, well, you're married to a man. So why would it matter that you're bi, you know? And I've tried joining some bisexual groups, and well, not bisexual, but like LGBT stuff, and it's like the bisexual part of the community. Like, oh, yeah, okay, well, maybe I'm not ready to talk about this part of myself yet, because I felt I feel like every group I belong to, which is being autistic being bi I don't, I don't belong. Like there's always like some sort of, I don’t know,

Andrew M. Komarow
Yeah, there's a stigma there. Yeah, I was married to a man previously, and I'm very open with that. I am very proudly bisexual, I refuse to say anything otherwise, because it is important for that representation for that exact reason that you just said, Eileen. I had been with him for six years. And so most of my friends like kind of only knew me till I had gotten married a little too young, let's be honest. And so most of my friends only knew me during that period. And so they didn't even realize that I was bisexual, and my friends and even my family because I'd been out since I was 14, even my family I feel like they just totally forgot about it like whoa, we worked that one out. She married a man, it's totally fine. We're gonna be okay. Like, I feel like that's what happened. So when I got divorced, I started dating and I was dating men and women, because I'm bisexual. And I'm just, you know, I follow where my attraction goes. And when I started dating my current wife publicly, I had the worst time and that’s when I really knew because at this point, I was older. You know, when you're when you're a teen and you say you’re bisexual, everyone's kind of rolls their eyes or like, whatever. But now that I'm I was in my late 20s. And I’m dating this woman publicly was like, Oh, you turned lesbian? You're gay now. And I'm like, that's not how that works. I've always been bisexual. You people especially have known this, I didn't just like wake up and decide to be gay. Like, that's how that works. And so yeah, Eileen, it’s it's rough out there. It’s because the majority of the gay community thinks you're dirty. Lesbian committee thinks you're dirty and the majority of the stright committee just thinks that you're, you know, attention seeking attention seeking greedy I hear that all the time. You’re just greedy. Or that you think you're like promiscuous like you'll just fuck anything that walks like, that not how that works. Like granted, some people are polyamorous and I do therapy for some of those people who may need it, but and that's totally fine and lovely. But not every bisexual person is going to be polyamorous. And to clarify, not every polyamorous needs therapy.

Dolly
No, thank you
Andrew M. Komarow
Just because they are polly, I don't think you meant that

Dolly
No thank you for that clarification. Yes. Thank you, of course. Very open to anything of course. Yes. In fact, I think I'm going to go as far as saying I think polyamorous relationships are sometimes the best relationships because at the end of day, polyamorous people all it is is communication and love. Like it's not that you're unable to commit. It's like you're committing to everyone that that you find in your heart to be with at that time. So I think that's lovely.

Andrew M. Komarow
We had an advocate Jillian whose podcast isn't out yet. Who was polly and an autistic advocate and she really talked about it.

Dolly
Awesome.

Andrew M. Komarow
A lot. And it was really, no, it was enlightening, because it's not what like you might think, right? Not knowing anything. It'd be like just, you know, like, guide me, right? It was even it was open. It was very enlightening.

Dolly
Yeah, I have a very dear friend of mine who's very proud and open, polyamorous person and I just live so vicariously through her I'm like, get a girl. So, so happy for you, a tad bit jealous.

Andrew M. Komarow
So we're friends on Facebook, Dolly even though we've never spoken before, and you shared a meme that was something along the lines of you like instantly can know like where an actor or actress was from in like a TV show. And like I'm like, Oh my God, there's somebody else like this because I meme was made about it and share like me and my wife like we do the same thing. So can you talk about that and does it go as far as voice or just walks?

Dolly
Are you ready for this

Andrew M. Komarow
Yes, please play

Dolly
This is the most useless superpower I have. I really wish I got the math gene like you Andrew I. Oh man. This is so funny. And it does go to voices and I'll explain how in a second. So and it's only extends to movies I have seen so this would be whatever I mean I do watch a ton of movies but this is only limited to actors that I have personally seen in movies but I'm telling you it does not matter how much makeup they have on what type of disguise they have how young or old they are. Within seconds, I'd be like, Oh, that's that guy from that thing. And they're like, No, it's not like no, I promise you, that's that guy from that one thing. And I like and I'm like IMDB. It's like it's an ongoing competition in my household, IMDB that and I'm right every single time and it went as far as just recently we were watching "Friends". I had never seen "Friends," that I remembered growing up. I don't think I had and I know I I watched some weird stuff growing up, but I'd never seen "Friends," growing up. And so I was rewatching I was watching Friends," and my wife was rewatching. And we watched them all back to back. And there's this one scene where Phoebe's in the coffee shop playing her guitar. And this blonde woman comes in and she starts playing with her. And I'm like, That's Tommy Pickles from Rugrats and Katie's like what? You know, like that's Tommy Pickles from Rugrats IMDB. And I shit you not this blonde, middle aged woman who did not have the voice of Tommy Pickles from our Rugrats was in fact, Tommy Pickles from Rugrats, from when I was in kindergarten or whatever and I was right. It's so funny. And I love it. I like I live for that like finding I've never been wrong.

Andrew M. Komarow
So but so actually, like literally within a half hour like prior to this podcast, I was talking about Comedy Central roasts, and we were talking about like people in them and I'm like, Oh, yeah. And I'm talking to my wife. I'm like, oh, yeah, and that really skinny chick immediate Whitney Cummings. Oh, but we're like, How did we, How did she know that? I just said that really skinny chick. Like, Whitney Cummings is really skinny. But

Dolly
I talked to my partner the other day, and I was like, you know, like Dave Buscemi. And she's like, do you mean Pete Davidson? Because that's a day for me. And she knew that. Steve Buscemi who has the weird eyes and Pete Davidson were the same person but I met Pete Davidson even though I said Dave Buscemi, like that's got to be a marriage thing, right?

Andrew M. Komarow
Yeah, no, exactly. No. 100% No, it was just like, or not even or just knowing like, I don't know if your partner has at least a similar scale. I think so mine my wife is definitely better than me with it. But the differences we we both watch different TV shows. We have an ongoing joke though that like the one show that we really haven't seen that I haven't seen a purse is Desperate Housewives. So she can't remember where somebody from but I don't know, either. We're like, Desperate Housewives. Yeah, so

Dolly
That is like mind forces.
Andrew M. Komarow
Yes, exactly. Yeah. Usually between one of us like we can like get it or like watching like the Death Note movie. I’m like William Defoe, or just like, you know, I don’t even Yeah, but I can’t tell you beforehand, just like, yeah, I, hey, we can’t be the only ones that was communicated via Facebook group or something. Yeah. So thank you, Eileen, for bearing with us on that one. So

Eileen Lamb
That’s great. That’s a great skill. I mean, it’s a great skill. Often I see like, I’m like, I know this person. And then it drives me crazy, because I can’t remember from where I know the person, you know, I have the opposite issue. So I have to go back to IMDB. Look at the person and then make sure that all Yeah, it’s from there. So it’s

Dolly
Whoever invented IMDB like chefs kiss

Andrew M. Komarow
I think Jeff Bezos owns them now because Amazon on IMDb. So

Dolly
Really?

Andrew M. Komarow

Dolly
I have many thoughts.

Andrew M. Komarow
Okay, anyway.

Eileen Lamb
Alright, let’s do this quickfire question. So it’s kind of easy, I think, is we have a question. And you answer. First thing that comes to your mind.

Dolly
Oh, no. It’s not the same thing over and over again. I get really nervous on the spot. I’m really terrible at trivia, or like, Family Feud. I love Family Feud on my own. But like if we’re board games in general, I’m the absolute worst on like family game night, so I’ll do my best.

Andrew M. Komarow
Oh, see, I’m the worst at family game night because I am the most competitive person on the planet. My wife got very mad at me a few weeks ago, because I was playing Candyland with my three and a
half year old daughter when I had well, not just that, but I'm like I was pretty sure those are the rules. And I think my wife's trying to like can't get me like, just let her win it's Candy Land. I'm like, you will let your rules

Dolly
It's an important value to instill in our children that there it's okay to fail.

Andrew M. Komarow
But I'm like if you need to follow the rules. How can you follow the rules if I don't know what they are? So I let my my daughter win Candyland,

Dolly
You let your daughter win, okay, Andrew, she's like, four. I'm competitive. But also I'm always a step behind. And all my friends choose these like unnecessarily complicated, like games, obscure games that we have, like a whole cabinet of these random games, and they always pick the worst ones. And I'm like, Guys, I can't play this with you. I'm gonna be miserable whole time. And also, I'm competitive. I'll just be cussing at you the whole time. So just go get a drink. Hang out over here. I'll see you later. That's how I play games.

Andrew M. Komarow
You're talking to Eileen who's a professional poker player, by the way.

Dolly
Are you really?

Eileen Lamb
Well, not anymore, but I used to be. Yeah, wow. Good times. I guess that's kind of cliche autistic people. Isn't it? Like anyway, all right quickfire questions? What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

Dolly
Okay, there's you can always succeed. There's always a way find a way or make one.

Eileen Lamb
What do you like to do to relax?

Dolly
Well, literally nothing. My ideal day is doing literally nothing. I lay on the bed or the couch and not move at all in silence and darkness is my ideal day. That's how I would like to spend my birthday.

Eileen Lamb
Well, you're easy as this. Will send a message to your wife.
Dolly
She knows.

Eileen Lamb
What's your favorite food?

Dolly
Sushi, Asian food and the whole group of Asian food in general. I can't really say what is my favorite. I love all Asian food no matter what the background is. It's delicious.

Eileen Lamb
What's your favorite movie?

Dolly
Okay, I don't have one. I literally was just talking to my wife about this last night because I knew not you specifically. But I was like, Hey, I hope nobody ever asked me this question. And you just did. So I'm glad that we took care of that. Right. Um, we are working on my top 10. Currently, I'm in that top 10. It's not finalized. In no particular order. It's Forrest Gump. Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. Jurassic Park. For a lot of different reasons. Those are the top three so far, but I am Oh, Midnight in Paris. But the whole issue with that is who directed it. But I do love the simplicity and beauty of that movie. It's a great fall asleep movie. Jurassic Parks and cinematography wise is fantastic. And obviously, they totally just changed the game in terms of meet TVs and film. But sorry, this is like one of my things. So I'm just not going to get into that more.

Eileen Lamb
Oh, what's your favorite TV show?

Dolly
Oh, God. Oh, that's even worse question. I don't have one.

Andrew M. Komarow
You give a bunch?

Dolly
No, there's just so there's just so many for many different reasons. So I'm a very, like, I'll watch something for like a feeling or for like a reason. And so I had like, there's something for everything. And I just don't have a favorite. I just truly love watching TV and film. And I love watching different directors style and different cinematography. And I love catching like, Oh man, I love that shot they used or like, oh, that lighting they chose was so perfect. Like, that's why I watch TV and film. So I just think that's so fantastic. So I don't really have a favorite because it'll hurt my soul to name off anymore.
Andrew M. Komarow
Favorite TV show that has an autistic character?

Dolly
Okay, and this is for nostalgia reasons for probably Gilmore Girls. And again, these are all like autistic coded people. I would say. Okay, um, oh, what was one recently? I watched one recently, I was like, Man, that was so good. They're so autistic. What was it?

Andrew M. Komarow
Claus?

Dolly
No,

Andrew M. Komarow
The Bridge.

Dolly
There wasn't many that I've watched where they have been like, in writing script wise, autistic like in character. I like catching like that person's autistic. Like, I watched I really like House. I feel like he's, he's probably autistic. And that's from like, forever ago. And that's a fun drama to binge watch and get sucked into. Grey's Anatomy, I love Cristina Yang. She's probably my autistic hero. I watched all 17 years of that during quarantine. That was perfect quarantine.

Andrew M. Komarow
I have something to admit. I have seen every single episode as well. And sadly it started before quarantine.

Dolly
Oh, I haven't excuse then. Yeah, can you imagine watching at the time was 16 years, my poor wife so I have when it comes I'm very specific with my film and movies. Like if I start something, I gotta finish it and it's all consuming. So I walked downstairs probably a week into quarantine last year and Katie had just like put on sorry, keep sitting here. My wife had put on like she was like probably a couple episodes into the first season just like as background TV as she was working and I just kind of sat down like God, what is this? And then poor thing. 16 seasons worth and like this one was on you. You put it on, you should know that. Eventually this is your fault.

Andrew M. Komarow
And you just have your new practice in Florida and you're diagnosing other people so if other people are being like, Oh man, I identify with the lady from Bob's Burgers or I might be autistic or or just whoever if somebody wants to contact you reach you where can they find you and contact you
Dolly
ShareOfFlorida.com. Florida spelt out I didn't think about it when I made the domain. So it's not FL it's Florida. That's my dog by the way if you can hear her sorry.

Eileen Lamb
No, she waited for the end of the podcast smart girl.

Andrew M. Komarow
Good. So thank you so much really appreciate you coming on you are great.

Dolly
Thank you all so much for having me. I really appreciate being here and getting to know all of you and having this conversation I don't get to speak to a lot of autistic people often and you kind of mentioned at the beginning Andrew how not really on social media and and it's just I feel like really overwhelmed in those chats those groups, I feel like there’s a lot of things and and as a clinician, it’s hard to see a lot of it. And as an autistic person. It’s also hard to see some of those other things. So I just feel like this has been a really great safe space to be able to like finally connect and talk about things with people. So I really appreciate it anytime, do it anytime with you guys,

Andrew M. Komarow
Thank you so much. Thank you.