

Adulting on the Spectrum: Love on the Spectrum

Andrew M. Komarow

Welcome to "Adulting on the Spectrum," I am Andrew and autistic certified financial planner. I co-run "Adulting on the Spectrum," with Eileen Lamb, Hey Eileen!

Eileen Lamb

Hey everyone. In this podcast we want to highlight the real voices of autistic adults, not just inspirational stories, but people like us talking about their day-to-day life. Basically, we want to give a voice to a variety of autistic people.

Andrew M. Komarow

So today, our guest is Jennifer Cook (formally Cook O'Toole) was identified as being on the spectrum in 2011. An autism advocate. She is the author of nine best-selling books available in eight languages, including The Asperkid's (Secret) Book of Social Rules. Jennifer is the on-camera autism expert and Netflix's internationally celebrated series "Love on the Spectrum US". She sits on the Autism Society of America's Council of autistic advisors and is a multi-award-winning international presenter who has spoken everywhere from the White House to the National Institute of Health to royal audiences in Europe. In her work, Jennifer helps unzip hidden social cues for neurodiverse people of all ages, coaching them toward more connected and fulfilling lives and relationships. Welcome. Thank you

Jennifer Cook

Thank you so much. I appreciate it. I really appreciate being with you tonight.

Eileen Lamb

Hey, Jennifer, thank you for being here. That's pretty impressive bio, I gotta say, like, I didn't know about all of your achievements. So we start our podcast by asking our guests, how they like to identify? And I'm talking about in relation to autism, you know, some people prefer on the spectrum, autistic, person with autism, and also your preferred pronouns.

Jennifer Cook

Sure. So the first one, or the last one is easiest preferred pronouns would be she, her. And then to the to your first question, I love that you're asking this. So my preference when it comes to language regarding autism, is that I don't really have a preference. And I know that for some people, you know, well, certainly for me, I'm a word girl. And I get that words have power. I get that. I mean, I wouldn't be off writing books all the time, if I didn't think that right. So I understand that words have power. And I understand that to some people, you know, there is a massive personal heart difference to saying a person on the spectrum or a person with autism versus an autistic person using the word or not using the word disability, I realized that too many people, those choices, truly speak volumes. And so appreciate that you're taking the time to kind of ask that and roll with the roll with the guests

preferences, one of the things I try really hard to do is to say, you know, to folks, I will always do my best to respect their choices, you know, certainly, if at the same time, they won't mind that I'd rather get to the meat of whatever the question is, or the discussion is, I think so often, we get stuck in language in a way that makes them difficult, because we're trying so hard not to offend. And we're trying so hard to be respectful, that it can get difficult to, to really be able to be free and open with our questions when we don't understand something. And I'm much more I really want it to be you know, that asked me anything, as long as whatever you call me is a nice word. And I'm okay with it.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, that's actually how we both feel. I spoke for Andrew here. But, yeah, we like to ask people just because, you know, some people feel very strongly about it. But like, for instance, as long as you know, it's respectful. I don't care how people call me, for myself, I use like, on the spectrum, I even say it has Asperger's, which has become even more controversial. I know. Yeah, so yeah. Great. A good answer. It's nice to, uhm

Jennifer Cook

Be on the same page.

Eileen Lamb

Yes, yeah.

Andrew M. Komarow

I would say the vast majority of our guests earned it, they usually have a preference, but you know, you know, they're usually I probably the vast majority of people are, are not what you see online. So they usually are a bit more inclusive and understanding when you talk to somebody. So

Jennifer Cook

That's the, you know, that's that level of respect, there was I have to be honest, I have been very, very lucky, very fortunate in that on social media, I really have only ever had one person since you know, of late anyway, that I can think of where that I think of overall be kind of negative online and, you know, which, like,

Andrew M. Komarow

I can't go 20 minutes without negativity.

Jennifer Cook

I feel really fortunate. I know and I'm like, if I realize I'm inviting it in here, I know. I know. Well, and and one of the things that he was saying was about how you know the majority well the majority of people you know, speak this way and want to have person first etcetera, etcetera. And, and I just think it's so important that you know, one of the things that we on the spectrum can do, easily without meaning to write is to, is to because perspective taking is challenging is to be able to put is to be able to say like what we think as, as being obvious is sort of just what is across the board? And obviously, we know

that it's not. And I thought, well, you know what, this is a teachable moment. This is a moment when this person is kind of doing exactly that. Now, obviously, you know, if we're responding viscerally to something, it's, it's saying much more about whatever our response is, whatever our challenge is, than it is whatever the topic is, million years ago, I was a domestic violence counselor for the police department in Charlotte, North Carolina. And there was an argument that two people had were the case report came in and the officer was frustrated. I can understand why because he had underlying this is all about until all over a tomato, No, clearly, it wasn't over a tomato, right? And that's the thing is that earthquakes don't happen out of nowhere. There are always those pre rumbles as the tape. The tectonic plates are shifting. Well, it's the same thing. You know, in real time, I think you don't have blow ups over a tomato, there are obviously issues before and I think the same thing goes with with language is that we're really there are deeper issues and deeper wounds, perhaps that people are bearing when when they're talking about what their needs are. So I love the fact that you, you know that you ask it and it's fun that we have sort of a similar take on things.

Andrew M. Komarow

That is the absolute best answer to that question that we've ever got. And the longest, but you weren't. So you were diagnosed in 2011? Can you tell us about what that process was like? And you know, why you did?

Jennifer Cook

Yeah, so it was subsequent to my three children who are now like, super old, they're now 19, 16 and 13. But you know, go back 10 years or so. And, and I had much younger people, right. So they had just as adult, I have a daughter, and then two sons, and they had been diagnosed, very much more had to fight, you know, fight for my daughter's identification. She had all the boxes checked, but it was, you know, quote, unquote, she's not weird enough. And that to this day, I can still remember that being in thinking that was insulting even at the time, you know, but once they had all been diagnosed or identified, my father had passed away not long before, and my dad was looking back on it like a consummate classic, absent minded professor, he was young, he was a lawyer, he was brilliant. But you know, he would by accident, like go into the ladies room twice in the same manner, you know, in the same like social event, because he was so busy being socially anxious that he wasn't paying attention to where he was going or rocking back and forth that you know, the stuff, the stuff that we all know about. So I kind of thought, My gosh, there's got to be a connection. Clearly my dad was on spectrum. And there's got to be some kind of genetic link. And so could this be me sort of thing? The problem is, especially 10 years ago, there really wasn't any kind of good checklist, if you will, that was appropriate for laypeople not professionals to look at and say, Oh, well, this is what that means. And this is what that means, and especially how it might appear and in those identifying as girls as females, girls or women. And basically, I went I sat down with Tony Atwood's "Insight with a Guide to you know, for Asperger Syndrome." And I went through all of his bullet points and and the DSM at the same time. And I went through all of those bullet points and said, What could that look like for me? How might I be achieving the same end, but differently? And I literally came up with my own checklist, I It's something out now and I'll be happy to give you all the website because it's a free download, I came up with what I call the Chiclets Checklist. And it's that exact, you know, it's what I what I did back then and brought it into to my therapist who I had been seeing because I wanted to be do the

best job I could parenting my kiddos. And her reaction was really, uh, so why do you why don't be identified as being on the spectrum? Like, what are you looking for? What are you searching for? And I, you know, I just wanted everything to make sense. Really, I just wanted it to, I wanted the if then statements of my life to make sense. And so, you know, she said, this, this all works for me click check. Yes. And it was you know, but had that not happened. It was not something that that she were anybody else who was in healthcare in my life was looking was looking to identify it was something really that I had to go after myself.

Eileen Lamb

So what's, uh, what was your life like, before diagnosis? And after diagnosis? I know, when I had my diagnosis, I understand what you're talking about. The making things make sense. Yes. What change?

Jennifer Cook

What changed? I think, you know, there was such a forgiveness of self. I think that and I see you saying, Yep. You know, it's, I think there's a big difference. You know, if you're, if you're at the Special Olympics, and and there's some kind of road race and someone's running and perhaps they're visually impaired, you are not going to yell at them if they step on your foot, right like you're just not. Because you're aware that they are operating within a certain framework, and they're doing their darndest to get along. Right? Well, it's sort of the same thing. You know, when it comes to, you know, certain things, I was just as blind if you want to call it that, but you know, or at least as visually impaired, and I could look back and say to myself, you know, I wasn't trying to be a know it all, when I was a little girl, or, or I understand why I was trying to be, you know, trying to gain adults favor over other children's favor. Or, you know, I realized now that, that if I was saying this or and I hurt somebody's feelings, it's not because I didn't care. It's, you know, which I would have always told you, but it came across that way. For me, growing up, what I was always told was that I was too smart for my own good, which I don't think makes any sense anyway. But I think what that really equates to is that I sounded like a little professor. Right, and which is what Hans Asperger used that that was the phrase he used. And I know I did, I sounded like a little adult. And I did better probably with adults than I did with other kids with my peers, you know, looking back on it, now I can say, okay, you know, it all makes sense. I can forgive and say, I knew I was a good person all along. I never was trying to step on anyone's toes. I was never trying to make anyone put anyone else down by trying to elevate myself, you know, it was really just a person looking her whole life to try to figure out if A then B, but what's B what's A you know? So, again, I look back on, as I mentioned, by my dad having passed away before all this happened, I look, and I think of how hard he tried to blend and to fit, and to just make things easy. And they weren't for him, he actually passed away from lung cancer. And he started smoking when he was 13. And I know he was self medicating it was anxiety, it was social anxiety. My God, what if he had been born in a day like this, where he could have, you know, either had access to pharmaceuticals, that would have actually been able to be helpful, or, you know, therapy or an identification of some sort. So I feel very feel very blessed to have that perspective. And that insight.

Andrew M. Komarow

Well, what about a little bit more about your, you know, your career, if any, you know, before diagnosis? Because as somebody who was in a profession and switched it to have a focus, you know, after things made sense, although there's, you know, did, did you have a background that, you know, led you to do what you did, and you switched, are you just like, I got this now...

Jennifer Cook

You know, no, so I was at that point of stay-at-home mom, my degree was an American. So school was my thing, I loved academics, I went to Brown and Columbia, they were you know, so that certainly goes to, you know, spit in the face of the idea that one cannot be good and scholastics and also be on the spectrum, as you both know, obviously, right? You know, I, my degree was in American Civilization, which is like a blend of media, popular culture and American literature and history. But what does that have to do with any of this? Absolutely zero. I went to grad school and social work, but that looking back on that, it was I was trying to figure out people and how they worked. I was trying to figure out interpersonal dynamics, you know, and how if you say this, or ask this kind of question in this way, this is the response you're gonna get, or this is what to do if you want this kind of response. I was basically doing a social skills lesson for myself. That's what I was making grad school into. And I can say my honors thesis At Brown as an undergrad was on Barbie. So what I say is, I was like, studying how to be a woman, right? Like in late 20th century America, I was because that was it was about post world. Barbie is a post war, modern didactic tool of femininity, blah, blah, and other words, how Barbie is like, representing women or not. I was studying my way to being you know, to mask, that was my mask was studying.

Andrew Komarow

I was going to say almost differently, that your degree is masking there.

Jennifer Cook

Yeah, so completely. And so instead of intuiting things, I was intellectualizing them, you know, but basically, no, I, you know, I, after grad school, I taught a little while, I had been a domestic violence counselor, I taught a little while, and then I got pregnant and I wanted to stay home when my kids were, at least until my youngest was in kindergarten, that was my plan. What I started doing, but basically, when the kids were being diagnosed or identified things or things were just a little different with them. The professional started asking you, well, why are you doing that? Why are you doing this? Why are you doing this? And you know, sometimes that was in a not accusatory way, but in a questioning kind of way, but more often than not, it seemed like it was in a huh because that's kind of interesting, what's up with that kind of way. Which also eventually led to the whole me getting identified because it means what they were doing and how they were acting made sense I suppose to me, but But no, the truth is that that I was asked, there's an expression if three people say something to you, in a short period of time, it's the angels talking to you. Well, I don't know about that. But in one week period, I had three people say to be professionals in my kids lives say that I either needed to write a book, or start a school, starting a school was the funniest thing I had ever heard of, because I had, like I said, like, you know, what, what were they then? You know, eight, five and two, I mean, two year old. Yeah, sure. I'm gonna start a school that sounds sounds, you know, doable right now, or

what was within my wheelhouse, but I could sit down and read a book. And I thought, you know, it didn't take it seriously until one therapist in particular said, it's very possible that what you say about the way you're teaching your kids the way you're parenting them, because I was doing a lot of like educational things with the kids too. But the way you're teaching them the way you're parenting them, could change the way that we understand and approach children and people who are on the autism spectrum. How do you say no to that? You just can't. So long story long, I guess, but trying to be short. I sent it I wrote a book in six weeks I sent in a manuscript were rather the proposal to JKP Jessica Kingsley publishers, and that was a Monday. Wednesday, I got an email from this lady Jessica. They are could I possibly did I have the rest of it? Could I send it? I did have the rest of it. I could send it I did. I then realized this. Jessica was Jessica Kingsley, the CEO. And it happened to be that my manuscript had landed on her desk. And I don't know why to this day just happened to be that way. And by Friday, I had a book contract. And before that book was out, my second one was already in contract. And it's just never Yeah. So when I say this was this was like meant to be somehow it. It just was, you know, it just all the pieces fell into place.

Eileen Lamb

That's pretty incredible. I mean, as someone who's, you know, I have two books, I was published twice. And I know how hard it is to find a publisher or even just taking care of every agent. So yeah, that's, that's pretty impressive. And I see what you're saying when you said like, it was meant to be a little bit like this, like, yeah, sometimes things are meant to happen. Do you have any advice for people who are looking to specialize in like your career and like, really follow their dreams? Because for a lot of autistic people, I mean, I know I'm that way where I need to be doing what I love. And you know, you can say it's the same for everybody. But I think when you're on the spectrum, like you really have that one thing you're good at, and you want to do, like how what advice you have for people who, while looking to do the same as basically what you did?

Jennifer Cook

Yeah, you know, I think and that's a great question. The truth is that what I did, what I do evolves so much, it has changed so much. Yet, there is a truth to it all. I think I'm an entertainer, I love to teach, and I love to entertain. Background in the theater, I think that makes has made public speaking easy for me. So put it all together. And whether that is you know, what I'm doing with the folks who are on "Love on the Spectrum," or whether it was in writing things and doing, you know, lessons for my kids when they were little. For me, it's been about, like you just said, Eileen, knowing my strengths, knowing what I'm good at trusting what I'm good at. Because I think we all do have a sense, just as much as maybe we've had a sense of what we're not so hot at and what our challenges are, you know, but knowing I'm in my zone when I'm doing. And I also think that keeping the enough variation in the because otherwise, it's like, you get that mental itch that ADHD like, we've got to have enough change, at least for me, I have to have enough change room a little bit day to day, or else I just start to feel worn down. So it's that balance between finding routine and then also finding enough to be different. But I think if you can find, to simply know what you are genuinely good at, then you can find ways to integrate that into almost any specific career, I think. I think you've got to be willing to, you have to be willing to listen and take feedback, that can be really hard. I think for a lot of us it's very, very hard to disassociate critique of what we might do, and critique of who we are, and they're not the

same thing. You know, and that can be really hard to discern which is which, at least I certainly, you know, I can I can remember very clearly in my second book, The secret book, that's "The Secret Book of Social Rules." I really was just in the proposal for that I wasn't even I was not doing a good job in the proposal because I was being a little bit blindsided. I wasn't taking the time to show as much as I as I needed to. And I almost lost the proposal for a book that has now sold almost 100,000 copies, like, you know, you have to you have to stop and be willing to say, okay.

Andrew M. Komarow

99,000 more than you, right Eileen?

Jennifer Cook

It's not a competition, not a competition. I think that what's important is that in that moment, you know, my editor said, Don't waste my time, you know, and I could have just crumbled. And there was part of me that did want to hide under a desk and just like, never show my face to the sun again. But what he was saying is, you're not giving me enough, you're not doing enough of a job here. You need to it when I did, you know, 24 hour I set and I said, Can you give me 24 hours to do a better job of this explanation in the proposal? And she said, Yes, but that was, you know, 24 hours later, she was like dancing on the ceiling going, this is going to be one of the most fundamental books we have. Okay. But I think in that moment, had I crumbled, had I crawled away in which I wanted to do that it doesn't matter how good of an entertainer doesn't matter how good of a speaker I am, doesn't matter how good of a writer I was, it would not have mattered for a lick. But what did matter was that in that moment, I could say, I hear you, this is a social skill that I learned it right. I mean, I hear you, thank you. Give me another shot, and then Darn, it all did my best to do it. And I think it's when we do those things that we really show, perhaps even show ourselves what we can do.

Eileen Lamb

So I have a hot question for you. You go, by Cook (formerly O'Toole). So that means you've had some success or struggles with relationship can you share about those?

Jennifer Cook

Sure. And that's a very fair question. Yeah. And I put the formerly O'Toole, sometimes people don't say it anymore, which is just fine. But because my older books say O'Toole. And so you know, for a good while people knew me is that. And now obviously, I mean, in personal life, you know, I'm actually remarried. And so, you know, so personally, it's neither of those names that I go by. But Jennifer Cook seems it seems like an easy transition. And yeah, absolutely. That was a very hard time in my life. I was divorced, five years ago. And I have to say that I'm, it's I do think it's entertaining the both times that I've been married, I've married somebody on the spectrum. So yeah, I think that's telling, you know, maybe maybe it's for me that I'm used to I know, there's like a there's an unknown quality. I think that you know, I know that on the show, a lot of a lot of people have asked, well, does it have to be or did it have to be the people were going to marry or date somebody on the spectrum? And absolutely not. Right? I do not think by any stretch of the imagination that if you're going to have a successful relationship and happen to be on the spectrum, that you're going to have to be with

somebody who's on the spectrum. But clearly, for me, this seems to be a thing. And I think probably if we want to get into the psychobabble, I'm sure it has something to do with my father having been on the spectrum. And you know, we can go all the way back into my childhood, right. But I think that, for me, had I had to come through that type of breakup, and then being by myself and then getting remarried without really understanding who I was, I can only imagine how much harder it would have been. So I'm very grateful. I'm very grateful that I had that under my belt, you know, beforehand. And I'm very grateful that my kids have grown up knowing who and how they are as well. I think it's helped them to be forgiving of the human beings that their father and I are, we still have a very good relationship, which I'm very glad of. Because it's important. And you know, their stepdad is a very different human being. But it is it is fun to see how I can still and he can do it with me. You know, I could see oh, you're having your that's an Aspie moment for sure. That's, you know, that's a little moment right there. It's very much of a yin yang experience. And I like that. So yeah. I don't know if that answers your question.

Andrew M. Komarow

No, that answers it perfectly.

Jennifer Cook

I've been waiting for somebody to ask me that nobody ever has. So I've been waiting for that. So yeah, yeah.

Eileen Lamb

That's funny. It seems like such a

Jennifer Cook

I know. Because you're on the spectrum. I know.

Eileen Lamb

I know, I need to know.

Jennifer Cook

Especially if I'm giving dating advice, for Pete's sakes, you know.

Andrew M. Komarow

I mean, but you also weren't giving dating advice when you first got married. So what better way to learn from so then from somebody who's failed and then learn how to succeed in a lot of ways, right?

Jennifer Cook

Well, I'd like to think that I didn't fail. In fact, I would say that I didn't, I would say that I had a really successful relationship with another human being. And that means that that other human being is also probably not perfect. I'm probably very human. And so the best marriage I could have that would be something that's always going to be in relationship to that other person, and then what they are, what

he's able to do or not able to do or does or doesn't do. So I think that failure would have come if I had not taken care of myself and not taking care of my children. But I think so I don't think that's fair.

Andrew M. Komarow

That's a lot of words for saying the best decision for your happiness was to find somebody else who would make you happy or not stay in a bad relationship. Sorry, it took me a little while to follow. So I just want to make sure I was translating that for other people, too. And that's understood. And

Jennifer Cook

I'm glad that you did, and I'm glad that you did. And like I said, I try to do it in a way that is respectful anyway. Because I think that everybody grows after experiences, like divorce. But that all being said, you know, dating and being married are very different things. That, you know, one is that one is what I was giving advice on "Love and Spectrum," is really like about making friends, if you will, as friends with benefits, you know, if you will, it's that little bit of like leveling up the friendship game, and learning how to make small talk. Yes, but also be able to be playful in a way that is sincere. It's so tricky, I get that. But they're, they're very different things. And that's why when I say I've been waiting for somebody to ask the question, I've been shocked that nobody, nobody did you know, here I am giving dating advice, but I think the point is that, that they are very different things being you know, married for we were married for 17 years. So long, a long while. But I have to say that I am definitely in love with and married to my best friend now who was my daughter says it's proof that you can marry your celebrity crush, because I met him through my autism work. And he was he was a fan. So there you go.

Andrew M. Komarow

So you worked with Netflix, there was a show that again, "Love on the Spectrum," I mean, a lot of people have, you know, seen it spoke about it. Can you tell us what, you know, how positive you know, surprises that you saw, you know, going into it like, or, and also to, you know, what was wrong, but tell us just like positive, like good and bad. You know, and this is more from like, the actual behind the scenes, like not with the people but with like Netflix themselves? Like, what did you experience?

Jennifer Cook

Right. So my, my experience has been with Cian O'Clery, who's there, who is the producer and the director, rather, he was the director of the series when they were in Australia as well. And I had been I watched it in Australia, I was very impressed with it, I have to admit. And when they brought it here, you know, he was still in charge he Netflix had picked up the Australian series and then worked with him to decide that they wanted an American series. So I didn't have to. Well, I didn't know I was interacting with Netflix. Until really until after the show came out, we were doing publicity. But because then it was I'm working with the you know, with the Netflix marketing team and things like that. However, I didn't realize how that that my original work that that they filmed that Cian and the team filmed had to be evaluated by an okay by Netflix beforehand, before, before basically, I got the job, I thought I already I didn't even realize that that tells you something. Because I had been flown to, actually to Nashville. I had a great experience. That's the truth. It sounds you know, like, I don't know,

like I wouldn't even believe it myself. But Cian did such a great job of trying to show a diverse representation of the spectrum and I don't mean that necessarily in like the terms of you know, would he have loved to have somebody of every every shade and or of every representation. You know, when it comes to representing the LGBTQ+ community? Oh my gosh, of course, of course if we could have had more than six people to that would have been enormously wonderful. What he focused on doing as far as diversity was trying to show diverse spectrum. In fact, there was actually there was

Andrew M. Komarow

I will say having watched the show and I was trying to avoid it but then like you're coming on the podcast I can't avoid it any longer. And then my wife's like yes because she loves no offense, trash reality dating TV and so yeah. And so I will say that we both commented that the diversity that you're describing we do feel was done really well. Like there was obviously like a lot of effort put into it and I'm sure people are complaining somewhere about lack of it because people do but I was very impressed with you know, the diversity from just again like you know, because it isn't spectrum that just from extended also. It seemed like it was done really well. I couldn't think of like oh man like maybe like that type of or something like didn't really, you know, come to mind.

Jennifer Cook

So there's a phrase that I have heard before autism porn. And you know, the idea being right that that it's like some kind of voyeuristic. Just, you know, like, "let's all watch the autistic people now", right? And what I loved was that this wasn't that I don't I don't watch like trashy reality shows I, you know, I don't I it's just not my thing, which but I have no judgment on those who do. But I wouldn't want it to be part of one. Does that make sense? Like, I just, I couldn't, I couldn't have looked at myself in the mirror, because I really would have thought, jeez, everybody thought of this, you know, and I couldn't have done that. What was pretty cool, though, was you know, getting to get into travel, getting to do the work, getting to, you know, pop into these real families and these real homes where people are genuinely about to have these super important life moments. And getting to be part of that, that was pretty dang cool. The only stressful this the only stressful moment that happened in the whole thing was getting ready for one filming or one scene. And the outfit that I had on had flowers and apparently couldn't have flowers, because at some filming technical, something couldn't have. And so we had to run to a TJ Maxx at nine o'clock in the morning in LA to try to find clothes to stick me in, and I ended up getting dressed in somebody's driveway. So there you go, there was that was a little tumultuous. Besides that it really was a great experience. I have to say it felt respected, and listened to, if not a little tired, sometimes. But yeah, it was it was an amazing thing.

Eileen Lamb

I was gonna ask yeah. The other people behind the scenes like were there any accommodations for you? And the other people like how our, the, the people, I don't know how much you can tell us but I am curious?

Jennifer Cook

No, they were amazing. And you know, like I said, for me, the only and it was really stressful actually like having to having to run to a store to have to change to get an outfit, you know, come back and then shave it, I was prepared for what I was going to be wearing, I was prepared for what I was going to do. And suddenly, you know, it's 110 degrees, and we're running to get clothes that are unfamiliar, and I'm in dressing rooms trying things on and blah, blah, blah, and then we're back in the driveway, trying to that was the only time that it was a little bit chaotic. And even at that the producers kept going, are you okay? Are you okay? And so I had I but not okay, I could have said no, I really just need to like, sit, you know, I really just need to stop. So the owness was put on me, which is where it should have been, you know? And maybe maybe I should have said, No, I think I need a moment. But but you know, they're there. That's a lesson to learn, I suppose. But I think probably I did better by not stopping the momentum. The producers, you know, in that to really handle everything the producers, they were, they were fantastic. You know, I could if if the, like one of the participants that I was working with, kind of after we finished she kind of kept getting up and was going off and going off. They said okay, she's She's had enough, we're gonna go outside and like down the pool, because we need to be rolling. That's what we're going to do when we're going to talk to you, and then we're gonna be done because she doesn't need us in her house anymore today. And even though they would have liked to have done more filming, it was it was more important that the people who were doing the filming felt like they were being accurately represented on camera. And, you know, I know you were saying Andrew about knowing Dani into it, like, that's the same right with each of the people, I think that everybody needed to be happy with, with themselves and the representation that was on film. And I think that wasn't so you know, wasn't at any point that Dani speaks for autistic women, or Abby does or Subodh speaks for autistic men, you know, we're that I would speak for anybody other than myself. And I think that was there was a lot of respect. Built in there as well.

Andrew M. Komarow

So no, I mean that that's great. I mean, you know, like spilling the tea. It's a little disappointing, but, you know, try to find something else negative before the podcast ends.

Jennifer Cook

But all I can give you is the like the freaking out about the dress thing and that was a little freaky.

Andrew M. Komarow

So 10th anniversary of your book, right? You wrote it one year about literally, like about after you've been diagnosed, you assume didn't know nearly as much about autism as you did then. You also, you know, so I mean two things. So, you know, was the first one first, what is changed since you wrote the original book? And what did you get wrong?

Jennifer Cook

That's a great, those are great questions. Okay, so I'll go with what did I get wrong first, because I don't think it was so much wrong as my eyes opened. And I'm so proud of that. So there was a section there is a section on dating, which is now much there's much more to it than in the original. But I noticed in going through it that I everything was he/her. Right? So there were no there was that,

you know, 10 years ago, the use of the them or they pronoun wasn't very common, right. So because I am a word nerd, I would say things like, you know, everyone needs to do it for him for himself or her him or herself, because that is grammatically correct. But that leaves out a big portion of the population, I realized, you know, so that needed to change, I needed to make sure that because there are illustrations, and there needed to be sort of a more androgynous looking character as well, there was a very clearly looking, you know, identify as male or female, like high school or teenager, but there needed to be somebody who was probably more of a they and there needed some to be somebody who was a darker hue, and I was really excited to be able to have a chance to, you know, to have a say in that changing because obviously, I didn't draw them. But to be able to say, you know, have a say in that changing, but that's for sure. One thing that could have been better. The other thing that changed, right, is social media. I mean, 10 years ago, you're talking about like, it was it was a to be able to say like your Facebook wall. What, like, you know, like MySpace had just died. And it was just Facebook was like the thing, and it was the wall not like your page. And again, it was Facebook was the thing, right? Like, you know, and so there was no Instagram, there's no Snapchat, there was no Discord. There's no nothing, you know, so there was no discussion of like, not taking this kind of photograph of yourself. And even if your boyfriend or girlfriend or partner simply says, you know, it's not going to go anywhere, bla bla bla, okay. But sometimes breakups happen and what happens when there's a breakup, and some of these feelings are really hurt that that that, you know, being aware of things like that. So, um, that's what I would say, I would say, the top the subjects around, dating around gender and sexuality and around social media totally, totally revamped. Because they had to be I mean, they just, it wouldn't be it wouldn't even make sense. It was almost laughing, you know, almost comical.

Andrew M. Komarow

But anything in regards to your understanding and autism that you learned in the past? So you got it all? You got your understanding right?

Jennifer Cook

Apparently, I got it, right. I don't know. Yeah, going by going by the results. I got it, right. What's funny is though, that when I started this book, it started off as a journal for myself of going, Oh, wait, that's a social rule. I didn't know that social rule, hold on. And I'm like, literally, this is right after I was diagnosed, and I'm like, writing them down, writing them down. So so my therapist at the time was the one who said to me, you know, like, what are you doing? And I said, well, I'm basically making my own little book of social rules here, because they're all these things that like everybody else knows, I don't know, apparently, like, I'm playing the game of life without any directions here. And so I'm gonna have this for myself. And she said, you should submit that to your publisher, that could be a book and I said, nobody would want to read it. It is now in eight languages. It is like and all this stuff. Clearly. Mind blown girl here does not really know what the world how common my own experience, you know, is and was. So So yeah, but But no, the thought processes that are that were in there were still legit. Which is kind of cool.

Andrew M. Komarow

That's good. Yeah.

Jennifer Cook

Yeah.

Andrew M. Komarow

So another just question on the book, you chose to keep the title the same. And which also amazes me, you chose to keep the title and you've only got one person ever annoyed at you on social media. So can you tell me and you know, how you seem to either, you know, avoid that what was the reason to, you know, keep the title and for other people, like, you know, Eileen, who is diagnosed with, you know, that term and other people who are just trying to, you know, like, get by being,

Jennifer Cook

Asperger syndrome and the word Asperkids is what you're saying?

Eileen Lamb

Yes, yes.

Jennifer Cook

Yeah. I mean, I know, I'm just putting it out. Yeah, absolutely. You know, well, first of all, as the author, I didn't have entirely the choice because in the end, it's a publishers decision. So yeah, so um, that's a little bit part of the story, a big part of the story. But that being said, kind of went back to that Asperkids became its own brand. And because there were there were five books in the series, that were the Asperkids this, the Asperkids that the Asperkids this to just have one that had been in fact most popular of the series, like the first book is called Asperkids. So you know, it's part of part of a collection, if you will. So the interest from the publisher in removing that altogether was not there. So that really, I didn't really have an option. But I came to be okay with it. Because, you know, it really did end up being more about sort of a movement or a, like I said, a brand that meant something different to people. And I'm cool with that. I'm cool with that part. Yeah, I would have I mean, if I probably if I had had my others, I probably would have changed it, but then it would have been a totally different book, and people would have been like, what the heck wouldn't have been the 10th anniversary of something, it would have been its own, it's like a new book altogether.

Eileen Lamb

Since you have any dating advice for for people, whether I mean, I'm sure you can do a lot. Especially maybe people who are coming out of a relationship or marriage like getting back into into dating?

Jennifer Cook

Yeah, you know, I think that and getting back into dating is such such a different thing too right? But yeah, I think that being able to take your time and know yourself, truly is above and beyond the primary thing, because I think where you get into trouble is when you find yourself in a situation that you're looking for completion in another person. Because when that happens, you know, it was that

old expression, if you don't know what you stand for you're fall for anything, it's that same thing, right? If you can be put up on a pedestal, the pedestal can be ripped out from underneath you to just as fast and you go from lying down to the ground fell flat on your face. You know, I think that it really it when it comes down to it. It's building on a foundation of friendship. And that's why the skills that and I'm not saying you have to be friends with someone beforehand. But when it comes down to it, you got to be able to be friends with somebody, as well as lovers. And if you can't be it's not gonna work, you know. And so that's why I think that those quote unquote, secret social roles of, you know, slow sharing, revealing little bits about yourself, not all at once, but taking your time looking for common interests, but being okay, with trying things that are outside of your comfort zone. You know, looking in conversation to do what you all what you all do here, which is, you know, open ended questions tell me more about this, as opposed to creating interview situations. That's like the worst thing you can do, right when it's just da da da, as opposed to having a dialogue.

Andrew M. Komarow

And part of it is open-eneded, like, what do you want? What do you what do you want to be when you grow up are super open ended? Right? It's very hard for us, but we're asking, like, more like leading than open ended? Because I know what you mean,

Jennifer Cook

Yeah, use the tell me more thing. Like tell me more can always get you more. Can always take you further, because you're trying to get someone to like paint a picture for you. Because the more that they can show you about what's going on in their mind, the better you can aren't going to be able to relate to it and ask more questions and have more of a follow up. And the reality is there's nothing you can say not one single thing that you can say that's going to make you more interesting to that person than if you can get that person to talk about themselves and can find interesting things about what they're saying and can find interest in what they're saying. Because if we feel like we are being paid attention to being seen and heard, then we're going to like that whomever is making us feel that way. And that's really that's like the key that's you know, the ultimate effort look everything is hard before it's easy that we know that right and we know the body language can be tricky it's like this it's it is like a whole completely different another language but I think that if we can be interested by being or be interesting by being interested, we can remember the simple fact that in ancient Greece Hygena who is the Goddess of Cleanliness is best friends with Aphrodite, Goddess of Love. I don't think this is by accident, I think you know some basic hygiene. Never heart anybody right? You know, manners and and the doorbell rings sorry. Keeping manners together and complementing when we think something when you think something that's complimentary, except for perhaps about someone's body shape, because that is not something we talked about in the beginning for sure. Right. But a compliment when you think it to say it, I think that goes a long way.

Andrew M. Komarow

And how very autistic of you to have a train doorbell by the way, so

Jennifer Cook

That's someone leaning on the doorbell. Oh, my whole family knows that nobody should be ringing the doorbell right now. No one is answering the doorbell. So that's great.

Eileen Lamb

It sounds like a train. Yeah, yeah.

Andrew M. Komarow

No, I thought you got a train doorbell, and it was like on purpose.

Jennifer Cook

Yeah, no, no.

Eileen Lamb

I know, you know, social media 10 years ago. I mean, not really. It was different back then. But are you on social media now? And if so, where can people find you?

Jennifer Cook

Sure, so Instagram is probably the easiest way for everybody I think. Right? So it's just @JenniferCook_author. And on Facebook, it's the same thing. It's Jennifer Cook, Author. And I try really, really, really hard to respond to as many messages and questions as I possibly can. It's becoming a little bit impossible, but I am trying so people should definitely feel free to at least reach out.

Eileen Lamb

Awesome.

Andrew M. Komarow

So we're switching it up. But so I'm asking the quickfire questions. Which is frustrating because usually I try to throw in some, like really random ones that are to throw off Eileen. And so now I don't get to do that this time. So, so yeah, we just ask someone questions like just what comes to your mind like quick like, you know, don't overthink this right? You know, impossible task. So, so we're gonna go. Do you have a favorite author? If so, who other than yourself, of course.

Jennifer Cook

Yeah, definitely other than myself. Okay, so growing up, it would have to be well, two. It'd be Lucy Maud Montgomery for Ann of Green Gables and Laura Ingalls Wilder for all the Little House on the Prairie books.

Andrew M. Komarow

Rock paper, scissors.

Jennifer Cook

I seem to go with rock. So apparently rock.

Andrew M. Komarow

Favorite alcoholic drink?

Jennifer Cook

Okay. As long as it has a strong flavor that is not necessarily the alcohol like a Bloody Mary. Love the the mixture. A Margarita love the citrus. It's so yeah, so hide the liquor part of it and I'll be happy.

Andrew M. Komarow

Okay.

Jennifer Cook

Oh, no wait my favorite is Bee's Knees.

Andrew M. Komarow

What's that?

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, what's that?

Jennifer Cook

So it's from like the 1920s. And it is gin and honey syrup. And something else that I'm forgetting. It's not very complicated. But it's just it's delicious. If you have to look up how to use these, I've only gotten to add like really good restaurants where you've got a really good bartender, but if you are, it's good stuff.

Andrew M. Komarow

What is your favorite fictional portrayal of autism in the media?

Jennifer Cook

I will tell you the honest truth is that I have not watched many. I can't. It's just it seems like I guess when you're living it, to watch entertainment that represents it, you know, isn't so entertaining. And so it can be a little bit tiresome and tiring. So I have to admit that I haven't really watched much.

Andrew M. Komarow

When you were a child, what was your dream job? Or what did you envision your would be?

Jennifer Cook

Okay, one of two things. An author seriously, or a dancer. Possibly a Rockette, but it was a Rockette until I realized if you did the Rockettes then you'd like could never do a solo so then maybe not the Rockettes. But yes, I danced for 20 years. That was my one of my loves growing up. So,

Eileen Lamb

Can you still dance?

Jennifer Cook

Can I still dance? Heck yeah. I can still boogie. Yeah, I just have to make up excuses now.

Andrew M. Komarow

I'll make up excuses not to dance. I'm, I'm the worst.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah same. No coordination.

Andrew M. Komarow

I wasn't diagnosed with autism again until later. But our fourth grade teacher wanted the whole class to do like Earth Wind and Fire, like, you know, performance for the talent show. And then were me. And two other kids. At least one of them was certainly autistic, the teacher didn't know he didn't know I couldn't dance or sing or do anything. So he had us, I thought was the coolest thing ever. He got sunglasses and a shirt that said like security and a hat. So I just got to walk out in front of the stage with my arms crossed, and I just stood there. And I thought it was so cool. So like, being so inclusive, you know, for the people who couldn't, you know do that.

Jennifer Cook

Oh, no.

Jennifer Cook

Yeah, that was really creative. Yeah.

Eileen Lamb

I love it. Cool story.

Andrew M. Komarow

So, well, thank

Eileen Lamb

Thank you for joining us.

Jennifer Cook

My pleasure. I love the questions you guys ask great questions.

Andrew M. Komarow

Thank you.

Eileen Lamb
Thanks.