**EXPLORING THE SELF-DIAGNOSIS EXPERIENCES OF AUTISTIC WOMEN AT THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER AND AUTISM**

**Francis Routledge1, Yani Hamdani1,2, Naomi Thulien1,3**, **Meng-Chuan Lai1,2**

**1University of Toronto, 2Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 3St. Michael’s Hospital**

**Objectives:**Autism, commonly diagnosed as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in medicine, has been heavily researched from a neurobiological perspective and described as a disorder consisting of deficits in communication, interaction, and expression. This biomedical way of understanding Autism has placed emphasis on research involving genetics, co-morbidities, and ways to address biological and behavioural deficits. Less attention has been paid to lived experience perspectives of Autistic people - the profoundly personal and emotional experiences of assessment, diagnosis, and health-related labels. Moreover, male and childhood lenses underlie how Autism is commonly understood and diagnosed. Limited understandings of Autism for non-men contribute to misdiagnosis, under-diagnosis, and diagnosis later in life, leading to consequences for health as well as access to supports and services. As a result, many adults, particularly women, have relied on or arrived at self-diagnosis. The purpose of this study is to explore the self-diagnosis experiences of Autistic women at the intersection of gender and Autism and aims to (1) describe self-diagnosis experiences of Autistic women, (2) examine how understandings of self-diagnosis, gender, and Autism shape their self-diagnosis experiences, and (3) explore the implications for them and their lives.

**Methodology:**This is a current study, and data collection is ongoing. Up to eight self-diagnosed Autistic women living in Ontario will be recruited to participate in their choice of a virtual interview or open-ended written questionnaire. Using two data collection methods will allow participants to choose a method that aligns closest with their preferences in sharing their lived experiences. The study aims to centre lived and personal experiences to enrich understandings of self-diagnosis through accessible data collection methods. Reflexive thematic analysis will draw on critical Autism studies and intersectionality as a conceptual framework that seeks to challenge underlying assumptions, deficit-based, and pathologizing ways of understanding Autism by exploring power relations and examining the ways intersecting systems of oppression overlap to advantage and disadvantage individuals and groups based on social locations. Qualitative coding will address the research aim to explore the self-diagnosis experiences of Autistic women at the intersection of gender and Autism. This will involve: 1) exploring what constitutes as self-diagnosis, 2) exploring the aims of self-diagnosis, and 3) examining how self-diagnosis, gender, and Autism are represented.

**Results:**This poster presents the preliminary results of an ongoing critical qualitative study. Preliminary results suggest that examining the self-diagnosis experiences and processes of self-diagnosed Autistic women provides a novel lens for understanding and challenging prevailing representations of Autism and gender and understanding the intricacies of self-diagnosis and its consequences.

**Discussion/ Conclusion:**Examining the self-diagnosis experience and process of self-diagnosed Autistic women will provide a novel lens for understanding representations of Autism and gender and the intricacies of self-diagnosis. This analysis will provide a critical foundation for creating needed support to address Autism diagnostic barriers, health care apprehension that women experience, and insights into a process undertaken by many Autistic adults who are not clinically diagnosed.

**Correspondence:**

**Francis Routledge**

**Rehabilitation Sciences Institute**

**University of Toronto**

**500 University Avenue**

**Toronto, Ontario, M5G 1V7**

**francis.routledge@mail.utoronto.ca**

**Yani Hamdani**

**Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy**

**Rehabilitation Sciences Institute**

**University of Toronto**

**500 University Avenue**

**Toronto, Ontario, M5G 1V7**

**y.hamdani@utoronto.ca**

**Naomi Thulien**

**MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions**

**Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute**

**St. Michael’s Hospital**

**30 Bond Street**

**Toronto, Ontario, M5B 1X1**

**naomi.Thulien@unityhealth.to**

**Meng-Chuan Lai**

**Child and Youth Mental Health Collaborative**

**Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, SickKids, and the University of Toronto**

**100 St. George Street**

**Toronto, ON, M5G 3G3**

**mengchuan.lai@utoronto.ca**