



## **Odd Girl Out: An Autistic Woman in a Neurotypical World**

*Laura James*

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From early childhood, Laura James knew she was different, but it wasn't until her mid-forties that she found out why. A successful journalist and mother to four children, she had spent her whole life feeling as if she were running a different operating system to those around her. This book charts a year in her life and offers a unique insight into the autistic mind and the journey from diagnosis to acceptance. Drawing on personal experience, research and conversations with experts, she learns how 'different' doesn't need to mean 'less' and how it's never too late for any of us to find our place in the world. Laura explores how and why female autism is so under-diagnosed and very different to that seen in men and boys and explores difficulties and benefits neurodiversity can bring.

## **Odd Girl Out: An Autistic Woman in a Neurotypical World Details**

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Author : Laura James

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## **From Reader Review Odd Girl Out: An Autistic Woman in a Neurotypical World for online ebook**

### **Anna says**

I picked up 'Odd Girl Out' from a library display of new acquisitions, as NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity had intrigued me. Laura James' memoir focuses on 2015 and 2016, just after she was diagnosed as autistic, with interludes recalling the past. She is a really engaging and thoughtful writer, conveying with humour and pathos her difficulties dealing with the world. I read the whole thing in one sitting and found it involving and thought-provoking. In fact, I was vaguely unsettled to find how much I related to James, particularly her problems with food, reaction to Brexit, and obsession with reading. (Perhaps fittingly, I read 'Odd Girl Out' on a day when I didn't feel like going outside so read library books on the sofa for 12 hours.) This is a really great memoir, as she shares her experiences while placing them in a wider context to promote better understanding of autism in women. My only real complaint concerns the title, another example of the 'girl' trend. I find it annoyingly infantilising how often adult women are referred to as 'girl' in book titles at the moment. Why? Does girl scan better or something?

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### **Roxy says**

An interesting first hand account of the autism spectrum written from the point of view of one living with the condition herself. We don't see too many reports from the female side so this was a great read.

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### **Girl with her Head in a Book says**

For my full review: <http://girlwithherheadinabook.co.uk/2...>

Laura James was an ordinary woman - married, four children, successful career. But then she was diagnosed as having Asperger's Syndrome. Odd Girl Out is in parts memoir as she looks back on her life and re-examines how her long unnoticed autism has stalked her along the way, but the book is also an attempt to understand better what it means to be on the autistic spectrum. Female memoirs have become increasingly common in recent years but James engages with her subject with a great deal of intelligence and with a clear desire to look not for sympathy but for solutions, not for a cure but for improved consideration. No matter one's relationship to autism, whether or not one is within the spectrum, James' perspective is an interesting one and well worth the heeding.

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### **Dominique says**

I love this book for its gritty realistic description of the obsessive, disorganised and chaotic daily life a lot of us with Autism live with.

I could have done with a little less Tony Attwood said x,y or z and a little more from actual autistic women

on the reality of how horribly hard it is to find Services or professionals who's focus or research is on Autistic Adult Females rather us being an after thought.

However this book also made me realise something. I feel as marginalised & ignored by the autistic community as I do by the neurotypical community. I've tried contacting the clinic Tony Attwood runs asking where to find help & support for single autistic females trying to live independently and got no response. I contacted Autism Queensland and got told there are no services available for people like me. I want online and found stuff for girls 6-13, Autistic mum's, parents of autistic kids and so on but nada zip zero zilch for single autistic adult females. So where do the 14 & up females go to ask about dating, sex, periods, Oh shit I might be pregnant, dealing with housemates, buying a car, avoiding abusive or toxic relationships, what exactly does HR mean by other admin duties, finding a bra you don't hate, where can I find Autistic friendly corporate clothing for women and all that other shit call real life

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### **Laurie says**

After wondering all her life why she seemed different from other people, in her mid-forties Laura James was diagnosed with both Ehlers-Danlos and Asperger's (and I suspect she may have synesthesia, too, although she doesn't say so). Over the course of a year, she learns all she can about these disorders, and things start making sense to her- and to her husband. It's not that she's been a failure- she was highly successful, with four children and a career as a journalist. But there had always been situations that caused extreme discomfort, sometimes even leading to a meltdown. Crowds, uncomfortable clothing, sensory overload- even some colors- are all things she tries to avoid.

Highly intelligent, she and her second husband created a life that allowed her to succeed and still be protected from things that stressed her. Getting her diagnosis explained so much about her, but she'd already gone a long way towards accommodating her problem. The diagnosis meant she could find out how other people dealt with having autism and allowed her to be in contact with people who faced the same problems.

The book follows her over a little over a year's time, with sections of current time alternating with her past. It's a really interesting read, but I could never quite get invested in her story. There is a dryness to her prose that seemed somehow stand-offish, even though she talks about some really painful events. Perhaps part of being autistic, perhaps part of being a journalist, used to presenting facts. A four star read; I recommend it to anyone with a person with autism in their circle, because it might really help them to understand that person.

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### **Eleanor says**

My funny, beautiful, smart, beguiling granddaughter lives on the Autism Spectrum, and while her parents have chosen to be very open with her about it, at only 8 years old she lacks the personal introspection and awareness to be able to fully articulate when her responses to the world are driven by her ASD challenges. We're pretty good at figuring it out most of the time, but we have all surely thought at one time or another, "What are you thinking? Why did this set you off?"

Because Laura James was diagnosed with ASD as an adult, she'd had a lifetime of wondering those things about herself, so when she offers us an unflinching look at life through her own windows, she shed great

light on some of the mysteries we encounter regularly with our granddaughter.

Reading the passage below, which comes very early on in James' memoir, I felt as though I might be reading my granddaughter's thoughts, because this is so much like her:

I need words. If I'm not reading words, listening to them, or saying them out loud I feel jittery. Not anxious, more of a kind of scared. A sense of unease, as if something is going to happen. Like the rumble on a track that speaks of a train about to whiz by.

I thought of the feeling I sometimes get in my legs from a very mild case of what I presume to be restless leg syndrome. I can be sitting quietly and be suddenly overtaken by a gentle sort of undulating feeling in my legs, accompanied by the growing sense that if I don't get up and move right away my leg might just explode. I had never connected this feeling to the physical/visual/auditory responses my granddaughter must deal with constantly, but now that I have it feels like someone has just handed me a wonderful new tool to help me understand this person I love so very fiercely. Will this make a difference in how I respond to her when I think she's just being "antsy?" You'd better believe it.

Further, when James describes her rich inner life, I gleaned a sense of comfort from imagining that my granddaughter's might have some striking similarities.

....I would create imaginary worlds in my head and would sit still for hours coming up with the rules for this parallel universe. In this new world in my head....Mealtimes were optional...At school, you could choose what to do...Every day the library was stocked with new books. No one shouted or raised their voices. If you ever broke a rule, a proper grown-up explained why it was a rule and why it mattered, and then you were simply told - kindly - not to do it again.

I highlighted dozens and dozens of passages reading this book because they either gave me some insight into my granddaughter's way of experiencing the world, or because they sent up caution flags that might be helpful to address as she moves into her teens, or, most happily, because it is wonderful to know that, while James' has struggled mightily with many challenges, she has a full life, complete with her own family.

James relates her experiences with marital strain and mental health crises with great honesty, and in such a way as to be useful for readers who may themselves be on the spectrum.

For the rest of us, *Odd Girl Out* is a fascinating and educational read.

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### **Kayo says**

I wanted to like this book. It was just not for me.

Thank you to author, publisher and Netgalley for the chance to read. While I got the book for free it had no bearing on the rating I gave it.

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### **rosamund says**

Having been diagnosed with autism as an adult, I thought I would find more to relate to in this book. But reading this showed me again that the phrase, "If you've met one autistic person, then you've met one autistic person" is true: we may share some traits, but we are not all the same. My dissimilarity to James is not the problem I have with this book though: it is simply not very well written. James was diagnosed with autism in 2015, and this memoir chronicles the following year of her life. So it was written very swiftly after her diagnosis, and I think this may be part of the reason it feels so rushed and poorly analysed: James did not give herself time to really reflect on what had happened, and so everything in the book feels very surface-level. Her writing is repetitive -- she talks again and again about how she struggles when her sons leave home for university, and spends a lot of time talking about the Brexit referendum, often writing one paragraph and then following it with another paragraph that repeats exactly what she said in the preceding paragraph in slightly different words. She has worked as a journalist and I think that also shows in her writing: she rapidly gets across facts, but does not analyse anything in depth, in much the way a short article is written.

In some of the most interesting parts of the book, she talks to autism experts, but she rarely talks to other autistic people. At times, I felt this was damaging -- James' own experiences of autism seem to be relatively lacking in trauma, and if a book sets itself up to be an explanation what it's like to be autistic, I felt she needed to explore further how frightening living with autism can be. Yes, there is certainly a place in which to celebrate the advantages autism gives us, but it's also important to explore the ways in which living in neurotypical society can traumatised us and lead to abuse. James does not really touch on this. Overall, this book felt like an expanded article to me, rather than a clearly conceived memoir, and as such did not work. While I felt some of the information it provided about being autistic was good, it lacked depth, and I ended up frustrated. I would strongly recommend reading *Songs of the Gorilla Nation* by Dawn Prince-Hughes if you wish to get a fuller understanding of growing up with undiagnosed autism, or are simply seeking solace.

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### **Jill Starley-grainger says**

I don't have autism (or at least I don't think I do), but I do have people in my life who have Asperger's (aka high-functioning autism).

My friends and family with Asperger's are wonderful, intelligent, often successful at work and sometimes have lifelong partners, but most people, including me, simply do not comprehend some of their behaviours or challenges. And in many cases, I don't think they even do!

This personal account resonates so much. I kept finding myself thinking, 'Oh yes, that's just what XXXX does', and then Laura often goes on to explain the WHY behind the behaviour.

So it's not just a personal account. It's also informative, helpful and, yes, the cliched inspirational. The inspiration comes from the fact that Laura learns to accept and deal with the diagnosis, and that both she and those in her life learn that just because people with Asperger's do things differently, that doesn't mean it's wrong. In fact, it can be often enlighteningly right.

This has certainly helped me gain perspective on my friends and family with Asperger's, but I also feel that it would help women who may not have Asperger's, but who have always felt slightly on the fringes of life, not quite sure why they don't fit in. So in that regard, it's not just about Asperger's so much as society's need to crowbar women into preconceived ideas of how women should act.

Thank you so much for writing this, Laura!

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### **Simon says**

In general, this whole book felt more like a selfpitying diary with a few autism fun facts thrown in than like a memoir dealing with being autistic in society.

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### **Camille says**

What a read. In her memoirs, Odd Girl Out, Laura James tells of her life growing up and living as an autistic person, and of finally getting a diagnosis at 40-something and dealing with it.

As a teacher, I had some training on learning needs, part of it was on how to help children on the autistic spectrum cope with learning in the classroom. Although I understood what I had to do, I never really connected with the ordeal autistic children have to go through at school as I simply didn't understand it - I say children here as this was my line of work, but autistic adults can also struggle with society as it is. Laura James makes you feel it and live it as if you were in her shoes. And, oh my word, how overwhelming it all is. Parts of the books had me in tears I was so emotionally invested in in. I felt like reaching out to Laura and tell her I heard her. I finally understood.

Laura, what an amazing book you've written. Mental hug to you!

Disclaimer - I was contacted by the publisher for a review. Thank you for the copy of the book.

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### **Kirsty says**

3.5 stars.

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### **Jo says**

Odd Girl Out: An Autistic Woman in a Neurotypical World is a raw and startlingly honest account of what it is like to be on the autistic spectrum. Laura James always felt that she was different, but it wasn't until her mid forties that she finally got her diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder, (ASD). Odd Girl Out chronicles Laura's memoirs from when she was first diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome in August 2015, through to December 2016. This book was incredibly insightful and informative, and once I started to read I couldn't stop. It made me nod in agreement, it made me cry. This is also an uncomfortable read at times, but an important one. I feel that everyone who is affected by autism, individuals themselves, parents and

professionals, should all read this book.

I wanted to read this book as my youngest son has ASD, he was diagnosed at the age of three in 2011. I like to read books on the subject of autism so that I can better help and enable him to live as independent life as possible. Knowledge as they say is power. I have read many parenting books and autism books by professionals, such as Tony Attwood, Simon Baron-Cohen, Steve Silberman (NeuroTribes was such an interesting read) and Temple Grandin. I do find that books written by individuals on the autistic spectrum, are by far the most helpful to me. They explain candidly about what it is like to be autistic. Odd Girl Out is one of those books. But never before have I read a book that is so raw, that has been stripped to the absolute bones so that all emotions are exposed, and all with the intention of helping individuals who are on the spectrum, and in particular, women. I felt that I was hugely privileged to be allowed into Laura's world, to read her innermost thoughts and to share her experience in the world as an autistic woman. In doing so I felt like I learned so much more about my son's condition and that now, some of his behaviours make more sense to me. I feel that it is very hard for a neurotypical person to fully understand what autism is, in fact I scrub that, I will never understand what it is like to be autistic, but by reading such book's as this, I now have more underrating.

This book is also such a breath of fresh air. I am sick to the back teeth of reading about 'cures' and how we need to find a 'cure' for autism. I agree wholeheartedly with Laura when she says that we need to put more resources in place, to have early intervention and help available to parents, rather than ploughing money into researching a cure. Autism is simply different, not less, once again I agree with Laura when she says that autistic brains are wired differently. Just as I find it difficult sometimes to understand my son, he too in turn, most probably finds it difficult to understand me.

Books such as Odd Girl Out are vital. We need voices from the autistic community. This is a fascinating read that features Laura's opinions as well as voices from leading autism professionals such as Tony Attwood, Sara Wild (head teacher at Limpfield Grange, a school for girls on the autistic spectrum) and Dr Judith Gould, a Consultant Clinical Psychologist. and the Lead Consultant at the Lorna Wing Centre for Autism. All of these factors make for an incredibly informative book, but one that I also read as a story. By the time I had finished the book, I felt terribly sad. I wanted to carry on reading, to learn more about Laura's life. It felt like she had become a close friend, I knew her that well.

I would like to thank Laura for writing such a powerful and emotive book. It brought a lump to my throat while reading it because of her sheer honesty. She definitely pulls no punches and I liked this. Laura James will help so many autistic individuals and their families by sharing her personal story, and in particular she will help so many women, who for too long have been misunderstood and misdiagnosed.

This book really is a must read... for everyone.

With thanks to Bluebird Books for Life who sent me a hardback copy for review purposes.

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### **Gaia says**

This is an autism memoir, of a woman with autism. Laura is married and has four children, she gets diagnosed later in life (when her children are teenagers-ish). I quite liked reading this book. I recognised quite a few things (even if some might work a bit differently for me). I of course didn't recognise the motherhood parts, I have no children and I have no intention of ever having any (though I do have animals).

I also didn't recognise the parts to do with EDS and POTS, as I don't have these diseases.

I liked that Laura spoke with some experts and quoted them in the book. The story spans a period of Laura's life but sometimes goes back in time and describes an earlier time period. A couple of times I was a bit confused but mostly this format worked for me and it was nice to find out things about Laura in this way.

One small thing I missed, was that nowhere in the text it was mentioned when Laura decided to write the book / memoir. Unless I missed it, of course! (Which is totally possible, concentrating is hard for me and sometimes I do miss things). It's not a big thing or anything, but I was expecting for it to come up some time in the text and it didn't.

Overall I enjoyed learning about Laura and her life and I enjoyed recognising some things from my own life. I am amazed at how Laura managed to deal with all the things she did. I enjoyed this memoir and found it a nice read.

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### **Kales says**

I have been conflicted with this book since I started reading it. I believe it had good information and insight into Laura's journey with being diagnosed with autism at age 45. She obviously spoke to a lot of professionals and interviewed psychologists in order to learn more. A lot of that was put into this book but I guess I wanted more.

I struggled with how this book was formatted and how it revealed information. Like I would have liked to start with Laura's moment of diagnosis and instead that was only near the end. And then there were these weird sections where the font and date changed. I didn't understand what those sections were because they were never explained. They were like flash backs mixed with journal entries. I didn't quite understand the personal antidotes behind them. And then instead of organizing it by subject or story it was organized by date of when the revelation or event occurred. Which I do understand but it made it difficult when we would go from being in the middle of a story and then to a professional explanation, then to a new story and then back to the original life story. It was a disorienting for me.

And I think that while yes, this is great for women on the spectrum and provides a voice for a marginalized community, this was very much filtered through the lens of a 45 year old woman. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. I believe fully that this book should be on the shelves and a story that needs to be told. As a 26 year old woman, I found a lot of the life stories difficult to relate to, specifically her empty-nester-syndrome, the marriage problems and the motherhood sections in general. Because the story was told in such a clinical manner -- which I appreciated at parts -- I struggled pushing through the sections I had little to no relation to. Again, not bad, just not for me at this time in my life.

Overall, the information was good and valid and will be helpful in my research. But the formatting and the method of storytelling was one that was difficult for me to get through.

Conclusion: Keep but only because I highlighted in it

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