

Damian Milton video transcript

I: First of all, what is your name, and what do you do?

DM: Dr Damian Milton, I'm a lecturer at the Tizard Centre, University of Kent in the UK.

I: Awesome. I read your bio, and I noticed that you were diagnosed with Asperger's in 2009. How do you feel that changed your work and your studies?

DM: Well, originally, I was working in sociology and mental health and youth subcultures, and areas like that. My son was diagnosed in 2005, and that kind of changed my focus towards looking into autism and getting diagnosed myself. The more I looked into it, the more it became my area of study, in a sense. So it was mainly through my son's diagnosis first that led me into research in autism.

I: What are some of the key things that you have found while studying autism per se?

DM: The diversity, really. That ranging from the obvious things of people who are less verbal to people who are highly articulate, that kind of verbal, visible difference, that the spectrum is so wide. Because when younger, I didn't know I was on the spectrum or what it was about. I knew I was different, and defined that in different ways, but many years ago autism was thought to be this sort of very rare, non-verbal kind. And so understanding has really improved quite a lot in recent times.

I: In terms of the theme of this year's conference, which is 'the art of belonging,' how would you say that people with Asperger's have come along in terms with integrating into society?

DM: Well, I think there's a long way to go, because if you look at well-being measures, or employment rates, or educational achievement or progression after courses, autistic people tend to come out right at the bottom of all of these scales as a group. A lot of that is social in nature—not being understood, not accepted as who you are or your way of doing things, and being judged by standards you don't quite fit. And so I think a great deal of change could happen on a social level, in a sense, because a lot of the discrimination faced by autistic people is through a kind of ignorance or naivete about how to help people or how they could be in society. I think when looking at integration and inclusion, instead of trying to make people fit an ideal of what normal is or what society should look like, society needs to broaden its views about what and how people can be. I think in terms of inclusion, it's about understanding autistic ways of being, and accepting those and working with them.

I: And one final question—for those watching at home or on the Internet, what is the one message you would like to tell them in this video?

DM: Work with autistic people, not against their autism as if it was something separate to who they were.

I: Thank you so much.