0:05 It's really important that clinicians look beyond the stereotype media portrayal of autism.

0:10 The people presenting to you on a daily basis may be any age, any gender and of any intellectual

0:17 ability. They may also be from any professional background, from a hairdresser to a doctor.

0:24 It's really important that when looking at people in your clinics on a daily basis, you

0:30 do not restrict yourself to thinking about autism for people who have careers in computer

0:36 science or engineering as this will not give you a wholly accurate view.

0:45 I think the fascination about autism is precisely because of the nature of the condition itself.

0:51 It's because it's such a strong suggestion of a different way of being human.

0:56 Some people might sort of view me and think, OK he doesn't have a partner or any kids,

1:01 why isn't he writing a book a week? After all he's autistic.

1:05 I think there's something inherently dramatic in autism or certainly in the possibilities that

1:10 autism appears to offer. Particularly after the success of Barry Levinson's film Rain Man in 1988.

1:19 The expectations involved in autism, that come from representations

1:25 in literary and popular culture can be dreadfully burdensome and unrealistic.

1:34 My name is Professor Stuart Murray and I am

1:37 Professor of Contemporary Literatures and Film in the School of English at the University

1:40 of Leeds. My major research interest is in cultural

1:43 representations of disability, especially autism. Work I came to do following the diagnosis

1:50 of 2 of my sons with autism around 15 years ago.

1:54 I think one of the things that's always interested me about autism, is that unlike a lot of other medical

2:00 conditions, such as schizophrenia, or such as cancer, which have always been understood

2:06 within medical context. Autism was not widely known before the 1980's fictional narratives

2:12 which came to tell its story. So, in many ways a majority audience their

2:17 first idea, of a certain age certainly, their ideas of what the condition is to be understood

2:24 as came from those films and came from that fiction.

2:30 This is the main topic of my book. So my book is called, Naming Adult Autism: Culture, Science,

2:41 Identity and it's published in July 2017 by Roman and Littlefield International. So it's

2:51 an academic book. Literary critical approaches, which are my

2:57 field, crossing into autistic perspectives, which I haven't really got a choice on that,

3:05 so I thought well I'll just embrace this and write about how autism is portrayed in science

3:14 and in literature. Stereotypes are a huge problem. I mean, there

3:22 is the phrase 'You've met one autistic person, you've met one autistic person.' But if we

3:30 were to say, you've encountered one fictional autistic character, it's probably a white,

3:41 male, high, very high achieving person in IT or in sciences. That stereotype is burdensome.

3:55 Often the cultural representations of autism have nothing to say about the day to day experience

4:01 of living with autism. About having your breakfast, about getting the bus and those kinds of things.

4:06 There's a kind of rarified atmosphere of special difference that comes in to play when the

4:12 condition is represented and that does no good in many cases to those people who are

4:21 encountering with the world, living with the world, living with families, living often

4:24 with questions of treatment and with intervention. The metaphors, the storylines if you like,

4:30 the idea of characterisation, which has been key to those various cultural narriatives,

4:36 I think it's clear that they find a way not just in to general public understanding of

4:40 what the condition is, for all that we're much better now than we were say 10 - 15 years

4:45 ago, but also I think to some degree current psychiatric, medical, clinical practice,

4:51 current ideas of treatment, current ideas of intervention.

4:56 Much of the diagnostic language around autism is still dominated by deficit. So people with

5:03 autism lack something. They have an absence of, they have problems with, they have difficulties

5:10 with. There's that sense that autism is a de facto negative condition, like a lot of

5:15 other cognitive disabilities as well. But because there's the imprecision about its

5:20 diagnostic markers, because there's no blood test for it. Because it has to be understood

5:26 in terms of evaluation, through talking and listening and dialogue. There is, and because

5:33 of course it's a spectrum condition as well, there is a real feeling I think, that those metaphors

5:39 can kind of come to predominate, that autism almost becomes the thing we make when we investigate

5:49 what it is. I mean even little things like, the common use of the verb 'suffer'. So, she

5:54 suffers from autism. Now I would never want to say that autism doesn't involve suffering,

6:00 it doesn't involve suffering at all times, it can involve suffering. But often we use

6:04 the verb suffer when we simply mean has. So so-and-so suffers from autism, well maybe

6:11 they do, maybe they don't, but suffer is not a substitute for has. Suffer is a way in which

6:16 we've internalised the idea that the condition functions in a certain kind of way.