

Gender and Autism



CWP adult autism assessment and diagnostic service

We are going to look at...

- What is gender and gender identity
- Why is it important to understand gender differences in relation to autistic people?
- What does the research say
- How to support somebody with ASD and a gender difference
- How you can seek further support if needed

‘Gender’

Everyone has a gender that they were born with - or assigned at birth; this is according to their genitalia

Everyone also has a gender that they identify with

These two things however might be different



Gender identity

“a person’s own internal sense of their gender”

Gender dysphoria

When people experience discomfort or distress when their birth gender is different from the gender they identify with – this is known as gender dysphoria

Gender diverse

is an umbrella term which relates to differences in gender identities and covers LGBTQ+



LGBTQ+ is an initialism that means:

L

Lesbian

G

Gay

B

Bisexual

T

Transgender

Q

Queer or

Questioning

People often use LGBTQ+ to mean all of
the communities included in the

“LGBTTTQQIAA”:

Lesbian

Gay

Bisexual

Transgender

Transsexual

2/Two-Spirit

Queer

Questioning

Intersex

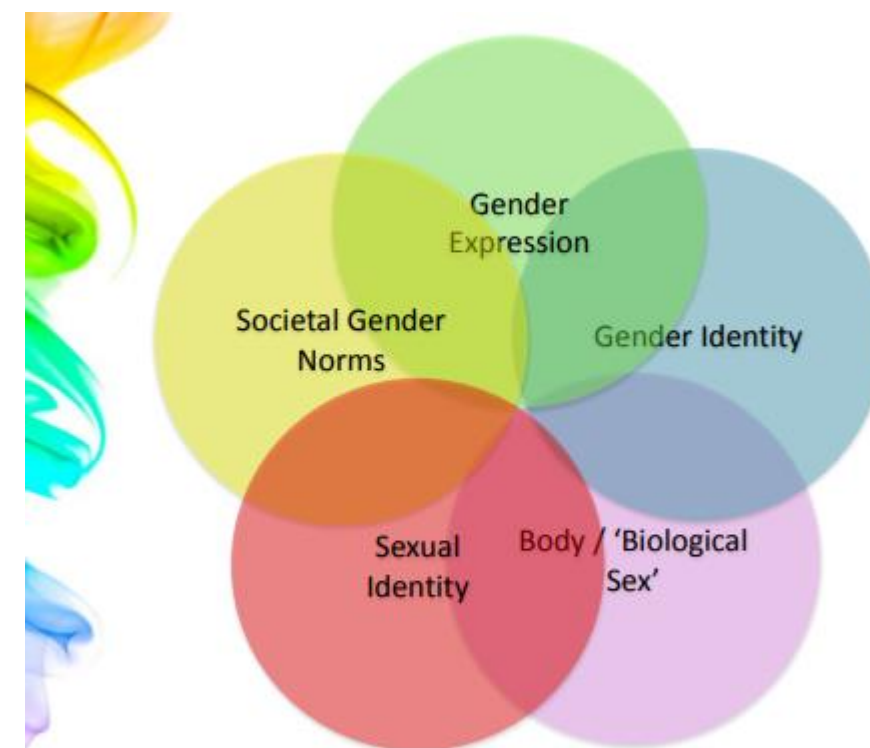
Asexual

Ally

- + Pansexual
- + Agender
- + Gender Queer
- + Bigender
- + Gender Variant
- + Pangender

See glossary at end of powerpoint for full definitions

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the best they can be



Why is it important to understand gender differences in relation to autistic people?



Nathan's Story



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There is some evidence to show a link between gender dysphoria and autism, and that autistic people may be more likely than other people to have gender dysphoria.

However there is little evidence about the reason(s) why, and some recent research suggests the link between autism and gender dysphoria is not so clear.

So what do we know...

During a research study, 8 to 10% of people seen in gender identity clinics met the threshold for an ASD diagnosis;

In the Netherlands study, 15% of people met the threshold (2010)

In the Australian study, 22.5% of people met the threshold

Yet only 1-1.5% of the population is formally diagnosed as autistic in the UK

These percentages are the same for the number of birth females and birth males

Higher rates of autistic people identify as genderqueer or non-binary.

Non-binary or genderqueer is an umbrella term for gender identities that are not solely male or female—identities that are outside the gender binary.

A much higher percentage of the autistic population also class themselves as asexual.

Asexuality is the lack of sexual attraction to anyone, or low or absent interest in sexual activity

Any thoughts?

Questions?



Research is ongoing around the topic of gender dysphoria and autism, and the reasons for increased rates of gender dysphoria within the autistic population is not clear, but there are several hypotheses-

- **Gender identity develops differently in neurodiverse people**
- **Autistic people are less bound by social 'norms' and therefore more free to be themselves.**
- **It could be because of rates of testosterone inutero (in the womb).**
- **They have also looked at biological genetic and environmental factors but further research is needed.**

Another possible link between Gender disorders and ASD could be the presence of intense, obsessive interests on a gender-specific theme ([12](#)). The distinction between an obsession with gender issues as a symptom of ASD and GD co-occurring with ASD is of paramount importance in the process of planning the correct treatment pathways ([Frontiers | Case Report: Adolescent With Autism and Gender Dysphoria \(frontiersin.org\)](#))

Those with Asperger/Autism may be less susceptible to buying into the prevailing binary gender identities and instead more readily identify or know that they are non-binary or transgender. Less constrained by the strong societal messages and more inclined to be oneself, individuals with Asperger/Autism may more readily identify as Transgender than their non-autistic counterparts who may be more susceptible to strong societal messages about remaining their gender assigned at birth. [Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Asperger/Autism – The Asperger / Autism Network \(AANE\)](#)

Why is this research important?

It is clear gender clinics need to screen referrals for autism so people can access the right support, and reasonable adjustments can be made.

Scientific research on this is just beginning, but small-scale studies suggest that social and communication differences between autistic brains and neurotypical brains may increase the experience of gender dysphoria in people with autism, leading to greater differences in gender self-expression.

Some opinions on gender identity from autistic individuals...

Dr Wenn Lawson, autistic advocate, researcher, and psychologist, said: *"The non-autistic world is governed by social and traditional expectations, but we may not notice these or fail to see them as important. This frees us up to connect more readily with our true gender".*

Madge Woollard, autistic pianist, said: *"Although we are not transgender ourselves, my wife and I both identify as non-binary (though we are happy using the pronouns 'she/her'). We find we get on particularly well with transgender people, and those of different genders. I think there is a huge overlap with autistic people and transgender people. There are also a lot of non-binary autistic people around. I think this is because a lot of us don't really fit in socially, and this extends to ideas around gender."*

How to support people with autism and gender differences...

- Use the persons preferred pronouns (he, she, they, them)
- Use of the persons gender affirming name
- Modification of clothing expression – gender affirming clothing
- Pursuit of gender-affirming care/language

How you can access further information and support on gender identity:

NHS support

- Gender Dysphoria - NHS website
- Gender Identity Clinic – this can be accessed via your GP. There is a long wait for this service, so its always useful to seek support via your GP and also charities/online forums whilst you wait.

Charities and organisations you may find helpful

- Stonewall
- Mermaids UK
- GIRES
- Young Minds

Discussion

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Appendices

Other helpful resources

Glossary:
Definition:

Lesbian

A lesbian is a female homosexual: a female who experiences romantic love or sexual attraction to other females.

Gay

Gay is a term that primarily refers to a homosexual person or the trait of being homosexual. Gay is often used to describe homosexual males but lesbians may also be referred to as gay.

Bisexual

Bisexuality is romantic attraction, sexual attraction or sexual behaviour toward both males and females, or romantic or sexual attraction to people of any sex or gender identity; this latter aspect is sometimes termed pansexuality.

Transgender

Transgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. It is sometimes abbreviated to trans.

Transsexual

experience a gender identity inconsistent or not culturally associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Two-Spirit

Two-Spirit is a modern umbrella term used by some indigenous North Americans to describe gender-variant individuals in their communities, specifically people within indigenous communities who are seen as having both male and female spirits within them.

Queer

Queer is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities that are not heterosexual or cisgender. Queer was originally used pejoratively against those with same-sex desires but, beginning in the late-1980s, queer scholars and activists began to reclaim the word.

Questioning

The questioning of one's gender, sexual identity, sexual orientation, or all three is a process of exploration by people who may be unsure, still exploring, and concerned about applying a social label to themselves for various reasons.

Intersex

Intersex is a variation in sex characteristics including chromosomes, gonads, or genitals that do not allow an individual to be distinctly identified as male or female.

Asexual

Asexuality (or nonsexuality) is the lack of sexual attraction to anyone, or low or absent interest in sexual activity. It may be considered the lack of a sexual orientation, or one of the variations thereof, alongside heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality.

Ally

An Ally is a person who considers themselves a friend to the LGBTQ+ community.

Pansexual

Pansexuality, or omnisexuality, is sexual attraction, romantic love, or emotional attraction toward people of any sex or gender identity. Pansexual people may refer to themselves as gender-blind, asserting that gender and sex are insignificant or irrelevant in determining whether they will be sexually attracted to others.

Agender

Agender people, also called genderless, genderfree, non-gendered, or ungendered people are those who identify as having no gender or being without any gender identity. This category includes a very broad range of identities which do not conform to traditional gender norms.

Gender Queer

Gender Queer is an umbrella term for gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine—identities which are thus outside of the gender binary and cisnormativity.

Bigender

Bigender is a gender identity where the person moves between feminine and masculine gender identities and behaviours, possibly depending on context. Some bigender individuals express two distinct “female” and “male” personas, feminine and masculine respectively; others find that they identify as two genders simultaneously.

Gender Variant

Gender variance, or gender nonconformity, is behaviour or gender expression by an individual that does not match masculine and feminine gender norms. People who exhibit gender variance may be called gender variant, gender non-conforming, gender diverse or gender atypical, and may be transgender, or otherwise variant in their gender expression. Some intersex people may also exhibit gender variance.

Pangender

Pangender people are those who feel they identify as all genders. The term has a great deal of overlap with gender queer. Because of its all-encompassing nature, presentation and pronoun usage varies between different people who identify as pangender.

Resources

<https://www.spectrumnews.org/features/deep-dive/living-between-genders/>

<https://www.aane.org/sexual-orientation-gender-identity-aspergerautism/>

Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8KUmOvUrlc> Autism and gender documentation, 11 minutes long.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRmgczXpDCE> Nathans story, 3 minutes long.

Some people identify as asexual and here explains asexuality -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMhix4nr_0g

Books

Resources for gender-expansive autistic youth, families, and professionals

Book	Author(s)	Target audience	Topic
Supporting Transgender Autistic Youth and Adults: A Guide for Professionals and Families	Finn V. Gratton	Professionals and families	Advice for professionals and parents on supporting autistic transgender youth and adults
The Gender Creative Child	Diane Ehrensaft, PhD	Professionals and families	A developmental psychologist discusses caring for trans and gender-expansive children
How to Understand Your Gender: A Practical Guide for Exploring Who You Are	Alex Iantaffi and Meg-John Barker	Teens and anyone who is interested	An exploration of ideas around gender encouraging reflection
Sex is a Funny Word	Cory Silverberg	Children and their parents / guardians	A very inclusive and non-gendered book about puberty and growing up
Alien Nation	The Proud Trust	Children and their parents / guardians, schools etc.	A book by young trans people about gender, using the metaphor of aliens who live on different planets
The Gender Quest Workbook: A Guide for Teens and Young Adults Exploring Gender Identity <i>(free PDF)</i>	Rylan Jay Testa	Teens and young adults	A workbook for teenagers and young adults to explore and reflect on their gender identity
Uncomfortable Labels: My Life as a Gay Autistic Trans Woman	Laura Kate Dale	Teens and adults	A memoir by an autistic transgender woman

Podcasts

PODCASTS	
Name	Subject
How To Be A Girl	Parenting a trans daughter
The Gender Diaries	Two mothers with young trans sons
Pride and Joy	Queer and trans people talk about parenting

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Support groups

GROUPS & ORGANISATIONS	
Name	Details
Mermaids	Charity supporting transgender, nonbinary and gender diverse children and young people, their families, and professionals involved in their care. Services include vetted online communities for young people in different age groups and parents, local groups across the UK, legal help, and training for professionals.
Gendered Intelligence	Trans-led charity that aims to improve the lives of trans and non-binary people in the UK, specialises in supporting young people. Has resources for young people, families, professionals, teachers and schools.
LGBT Foundation	Manchester-based charity to support the needs of LGBT+ people. Has a list of local groups including those for trans people and trans youth.
Stonewall	Charity providing information and signposting for LGBT+ young people as well as parents/carers and schools.
Switchboard	Helpline offering confidential support and advice to members of the LGBT+ community. Operates 365 days a year, 10am to 10pm.
Mindline Trans+	Emotional and mental health support helpline for anyone identifying as transgender, non-binary, genderfluid etc. Operates Mondays and Fridays, 8pm - midnight.
The Clare Project	Trans support and social group based in Brighton and Hove but open to anyone wishing to explore issues around gender identity. Has a monthly drop-in group specifically for neurodivergent people in Brighton.
GIRE (Gender Identity Research & Education Society)	UK wide organisation whose purpose is to improve the lives of trans and gender diverse people of all ages. Offers training for organisations and schools, and resources on topics including education, employment, healthcare and law.
Spectra	London-based CIC with a focus on sexual health and emotional wellbeing. Services for trans people include: counselling, peer mentoring, social groups and medical advocacy. Services for LGBT+ young people include counselling and youth groups.
Galop	Charity supporting LGBT+ people who have experienced violence and abuse. Provides advice, advocacy and support to LGBT+ young people, and training for professionals and organisations about the needs of LGBT+ people who are victims of abuse and violence.

Thank you for attending