

Understanding Gender Identity in a Survey of Autistic Individuals



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Main finding: It is important to bring methodological innovations in gender identity measures to surveys of autistic individuals, given the substantial transgender autistic population.

Introduction

- Higher co-occurrence of autism and transgender identity in general.
- Population has increased in the past few years.
- Innovation in the social sciences and humanities can inform implementation in autism research.
- We use responses from a 2018 study to improve upon gender identity measures.

Methods

- Data from the Pennsylvania Autism Needs Assessment – a 2018 survey of 1,527 autistic adults recruited from Medicaid claims and community organizations.
- One way frequencies, including counts and proportions, were generated using two question.

Questions Used and Responses (frequency and proportion)

Which category best fits your gender?	N	%
Male	1,016	66.5
Female	418	27.4
Other (all answers)	35	2.3
Other (binary answer)	8	.5
Other (nonbinary answer)	27	1.8
Missing	58	3.8
Total	1,527	100

Do you identify as transgender and/or gender nonconforming?	N	%
Yes	61	4.0
No	1,019	66.7
Prefer not to answer	33	2.2
Missing	414	27.1
Total	1,527	100

Results

- “Other” or qualitative answers reflected identities outside of the gender binary and fluid views of gender more broadly.
- High amount of missingness for question around transgender identity could point to stigma or increased heteronormative pressure in the autism community.
- Mismatch of how respondents answered indicates the questions were not reflecting the identities of the population.
- This population is growing. Measurements that authentically represent this population are essential to autism research activities.

Example of two question approach using best practices:

Which best describes the gender identity you align with?

Check all that apply:

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| Man | Nonbinary |
| Woman | Agender |
| Cisgender (the sex you were assigned at birth matches your current identity) | Genderfluid |
| Transgender (the sex you were assigned at birth does not match your current identity) | Genderqueer |
| | Questioning |
| | Not listed (please specify): |

Do you consider yourself part of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community? If yes, please answer how you typically describe your identity connected to that community.

- Yes (please specify)
 No
 I don't know