



Gender and Sexual Identity in Neurodiverse Youth

Brandon S Ito, MD, MPH
Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry
Director of Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion,
Tarjan Center at UCLA
Department of Psychiatry & Biobehavioral Sciences
UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine



Disclosures

- No financial disclosures
- Identify as adult, neurotypical, able-bodied, cisgender, male

Learning Goals

- Describe co-occurring autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and gender dysphoria (GD)
- Discuss areas of controversy and limits of data
- Provide recommendations working with trans- and gender-diverse (TGD) youth with ASD

Learning Objectives

- Describe data on co-occurring ASD and GD
- Verbalize limits and gaps in the current studies
- Identify 1 or more recommendations when working with TGD youth with ASD

Why this matters

Forbes

45,858 views | Nov 15, 2017, 01:25pm

There's Growing Evidence For A Link Between Gender Dysphoria And Autism Spectrum Disorders



Zhana Vrangalova Contributor @ Pharma & Healthcare



The Atlantic

HEALTH

The Link Between Autism and Trans Identity

Confusion over why autism is so prevalent among transgender people may be limiting their access to medical care.

BRYONY WHITE NOV 15, 2016



HEALTH CARE

Autistic Children Pushed to Become Transgender?

By WESLEY J. SMITH | November 19, 2018 4:11 PM



Children play on a giant rainbow flag as they take part in a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) pride parade in Taipei, Taiwan, October 28, 2017. (Tyronne Siu/Reuters)

NATIONAL REVIEW

An astonishing 17 pupils at a single British school are in the process of changing gender, The Mail on Sunday can reveal.

Most of the youngsters undergoing the transformation are autistic, according to a teacher there, who said vulnerable children with mental health problems were being 'tricked' into believing they are the wrong sex.

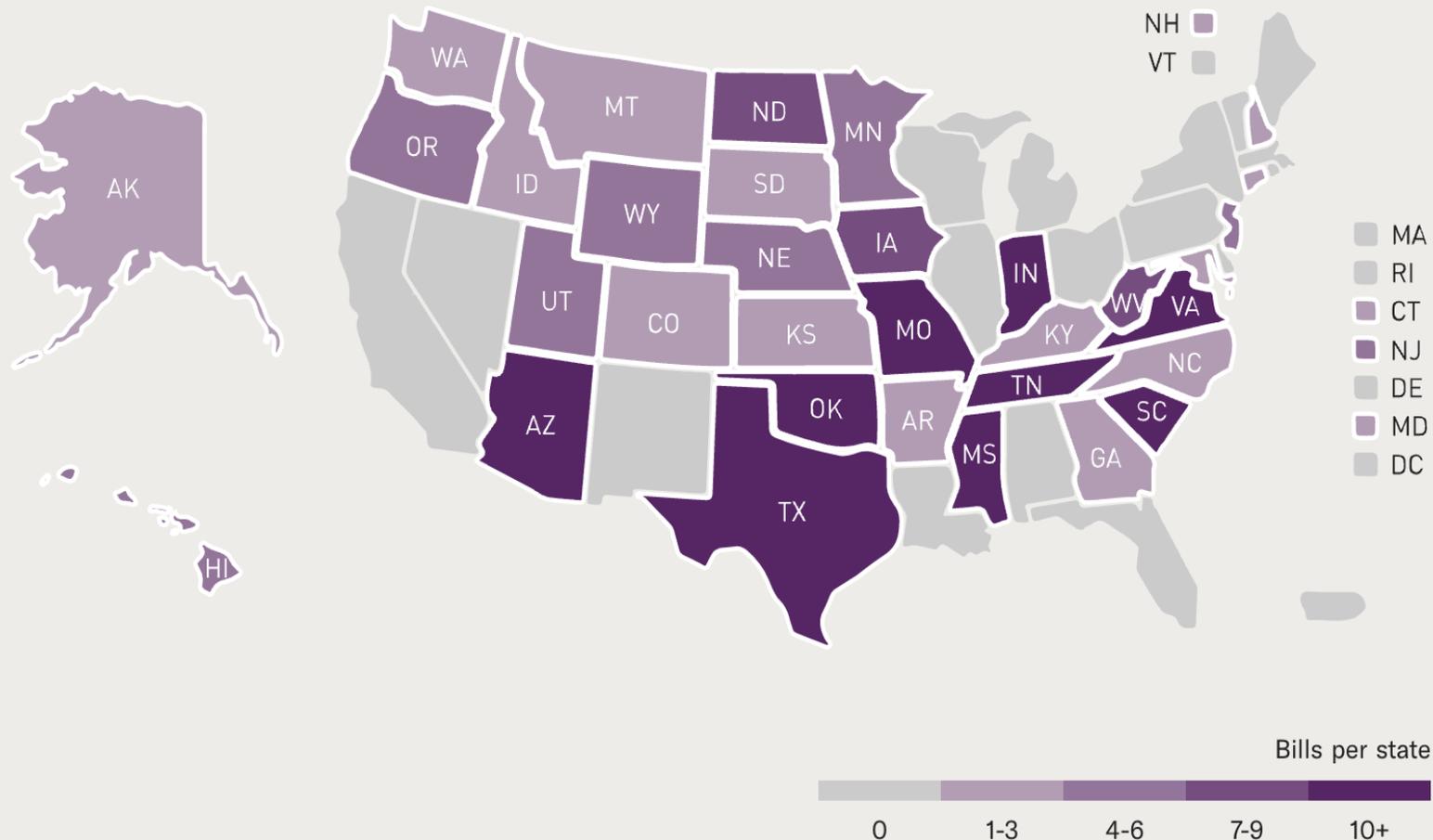
The whistleblower says few of the transgender children are suffering from gender dysphoria – the medical term for someone who feels they were born in the wrong body – but are just easily influenced, latching on to the mistaken belief they are the wrong sex as a way of coping with the problems caused by autism.

2023 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The ACLU is tracking **269** anti-LGBTQ bills in the U.S.

Choose a state on the map to show the different bills targeting LGBTQ rights and take action. While not all of these bills will become law, they all cause harm for LGBTQ people.

[View past legislative sessions.](#)





People become emotional while watching discussion of SB 140, a bill that prevents medical professionals from giving transgender children certain hormones or surgical treatment, before it gets final approval at the Georgia state Senate in Atlanta in March 2023. (ARVIN TEMKAR/ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION/AP)

LGBTQ+

Anti-trans laws are targeting autistic youth and those with mental health conditions

How have recent debates about state laws restricting the rights of transgender people impacted your mental health?

Survey of 820 LGBTQ+ youth aged 13-24 between Sept. 14 to Nov. 5, 2021

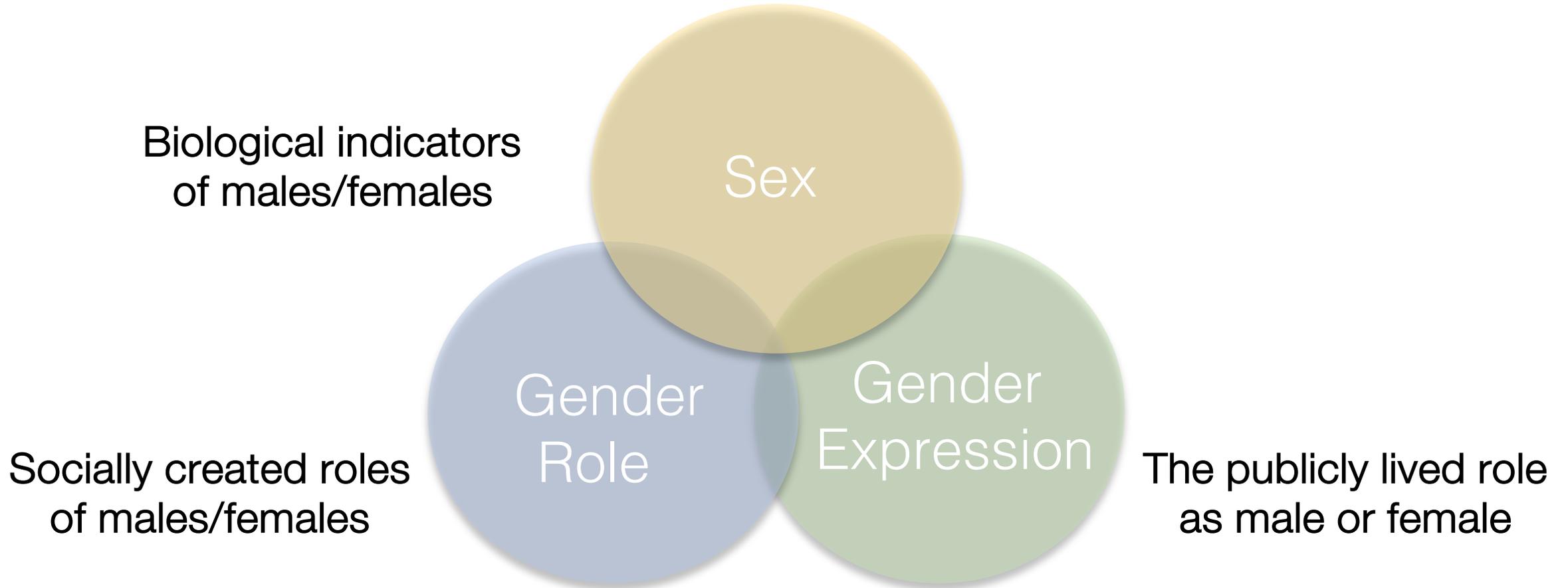
■ Negatively ■ No impact ■ Positively



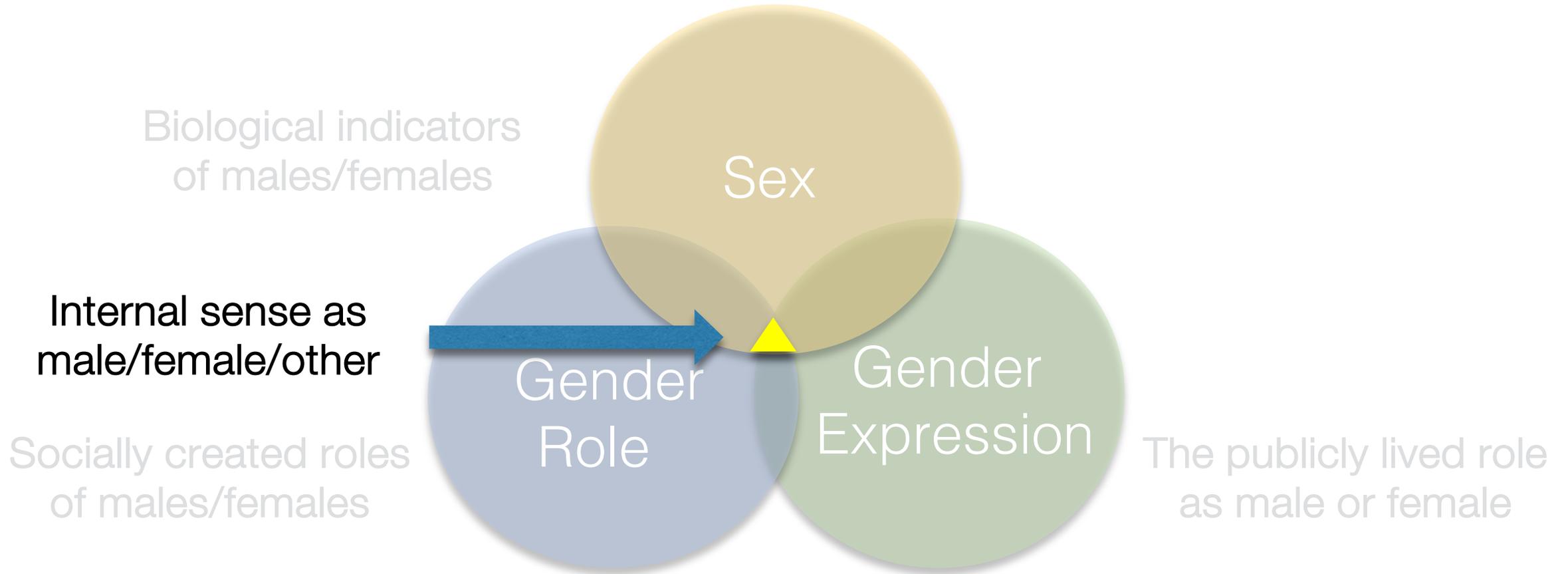
Data: [The Trevor Project](#); Chart: Jacque Schrag/Axios

Gender Identity and Gender Dysphoria

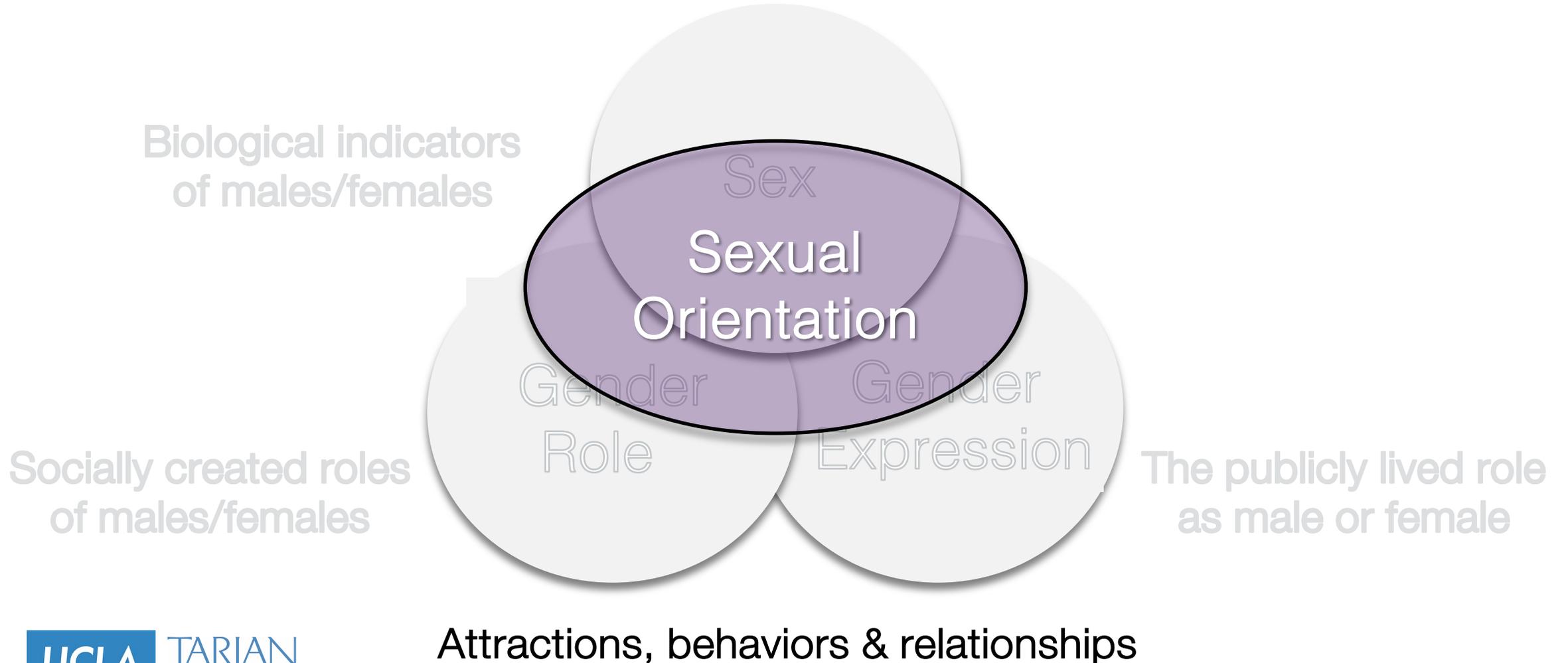
Components of Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation



Components of Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation



Components of Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation





J BRUIN: AN INTRO TO GENDER, SEXUALITY, & EXPRESSION

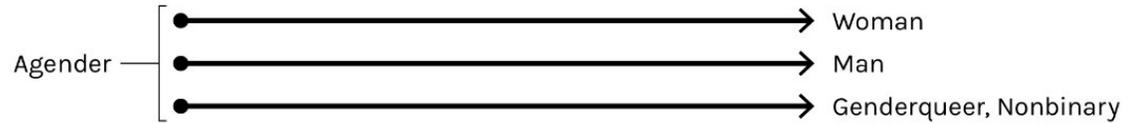
SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH ★

The classification of an infant's sex. This has biological, social, and legal implications.

- Female
- Male
- Intersex

GENDER IDENTITY 🌿

A person's concept of their own gender.



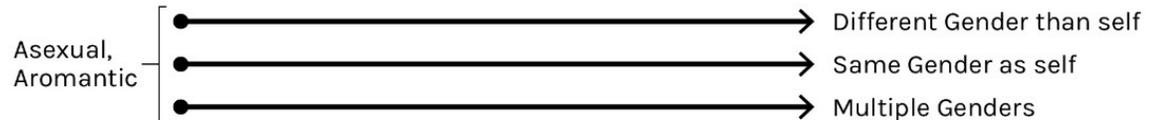
GENDER EXPRESSION 👕

The ways that a person expresses their gender.



SEXUAL AND/OR ROMANTIC ATTRACTION ❤️

A person's romantic and/or sexual attraction to another person(s) based on their sex/gender.



Gender Dysphoria in Children

- **Difference between experienced and assigned gender:**
 - (*) Strong desire to be or insistence they are the other gender
 - Strong preference for wearing clothing typical of the other gender
 - Strong preference for cross-gender roles in imaginative play
 - Strong preference for toys, games, activities of the other gender
 - Strong rejection of toys, games, activities of their assigned gender
 - Strong preference for playmates of the other gender
 - Strong dislike of one's sexual anatomy
 - Strong desire for the physical sex characteristics that match experienced gender

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Gender Dysphoria in Adolescents & Adults

- **Marked incongruence between experienced and assigned gender:**
 - Incongruence between experienced/expressed gender and primary/secondary sex characteristics
 - Strong desire to be rid of primary or secondary sex characteristics
 - Strong desire for primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender
 - Strong desire to be of the other gender
 - Strong desire to be treated as the other gender
 - Strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender

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Core Symptoms of ASD

- Deficits in social communication and interaction
 - Social-emotional reciprocity
 - Non-verbal communication
 - Developing, maintaining, understanding relationships
- Restricted, repetitive behaviors
 - Movements, use of objects, speech
 - Insistence on sameness, routines, or ritualized patterns
 - Highly restricted interests
 - Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input

Co-occurring Gender Diversity and ASD

Gender Dysphoria and ASD

- Prevalence:
 - GD: 1 in 10,000 – 50,000 (0.005%)
 - ASD: 1 in 50 – 500 (1-2%)
- In gender-referred youth:
 - ASD = 6.3 – 12.3%
 - Children with ASD **7.6 times** more likely to wish to be opposite sex
 - Individuals with ASD report a higher number of GD traits

Screening Items

- Gender Dysphoria Questionnaire for Adults and Adolescents (GIDQY-AA)
 - 27-point questionnaire
 - Sensitivity = 90.4%, Specificity = 99.7%
- Utrecht Gender Dysphoria Scale (UGDS)
 - 12-items, 5-point Likert scale
 - Sensitivity = 88.3%, Specificity = 98-99.5%

Gender Identity Disorder and ASD

Autism Spectrum Disorders in Gender Dysphoric Children and Adolescents

[Annelou L. C. de Vries](#) , [Ilse L. J. Noens](#), [Peggy T. Cohen-Kettenis](#), [Ina A. van Berckelaer-Onnes](#) & [Theo A. Doreleijers](#)

[Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders](#) **40**, 930–936 (2010) | [Cite this article](#)

- 204 children and adolescents (115 M, 89 F)
- Gender identity assessed at least 1 year apart
- DSM-IV TR
- DISCO-10

Gender Identity Disorder and ASD

- Children (7-10 years):
 - GID with ASD: 6.4%
 - GID-NOS with ASD: 13%
 - 6/7 male, 6/7 with GID did not persist
- Adolescents (12-18 years):
 - GID with ASD: 6.5%
 - GID-NOS with ASD: 37.5%
 - Much higher rate of persistence: 78%

Combined children and adolescents: 7.8%

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Gender Dysphoria and ASD

- In individuals with GD:
 - Autism Quotient (AQ) = 5.5%
 - Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS) = 54% (27% “severe” range)
 - Asperger Syndrome Diagnostic Scale (ASDS) = 23%
- In individuals with ASD:
 - CBCL = 0.5 - 5% with gender variance
 - Self-report - 3.8% with self-reported GD

Gender Identity

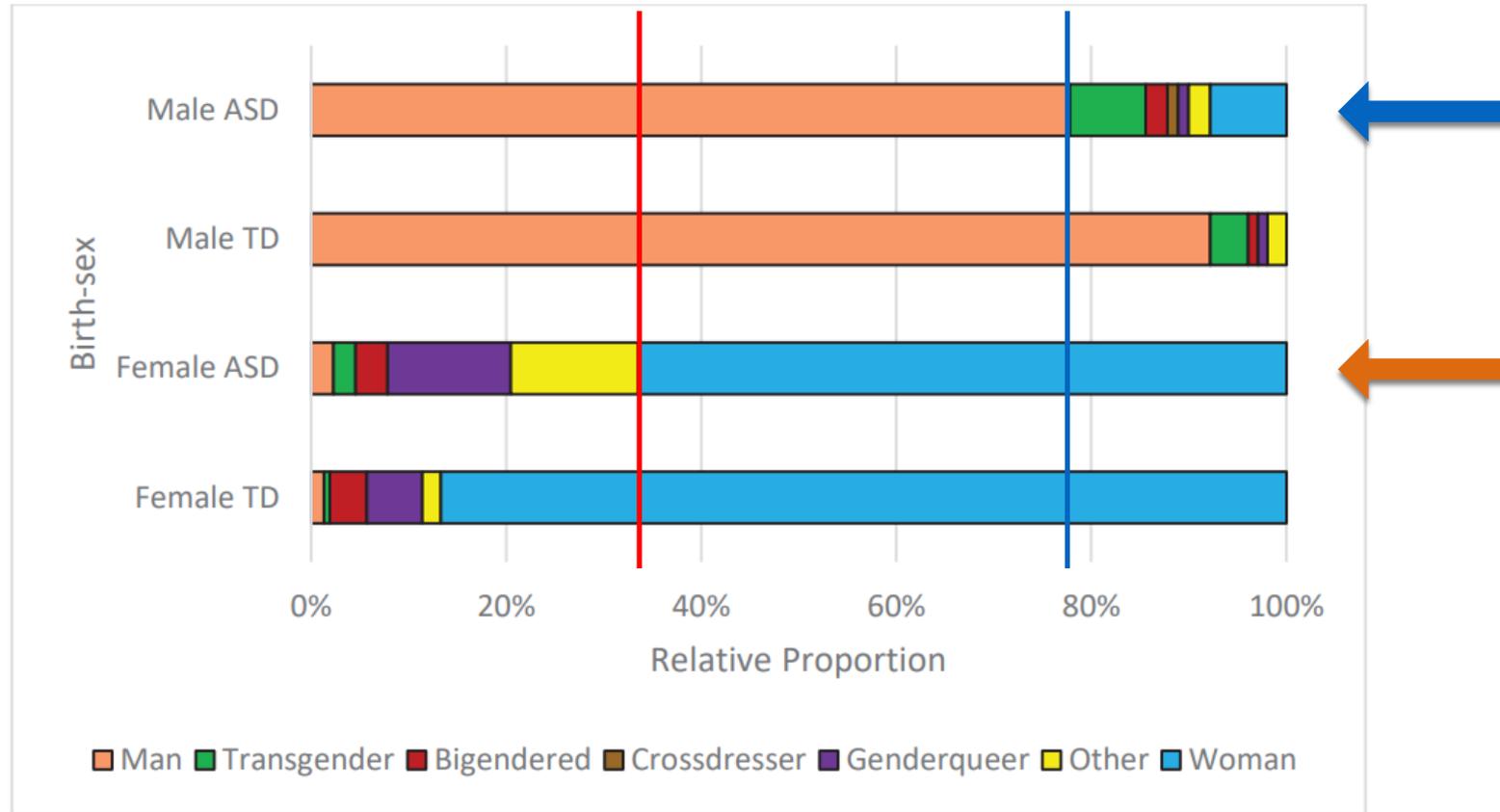
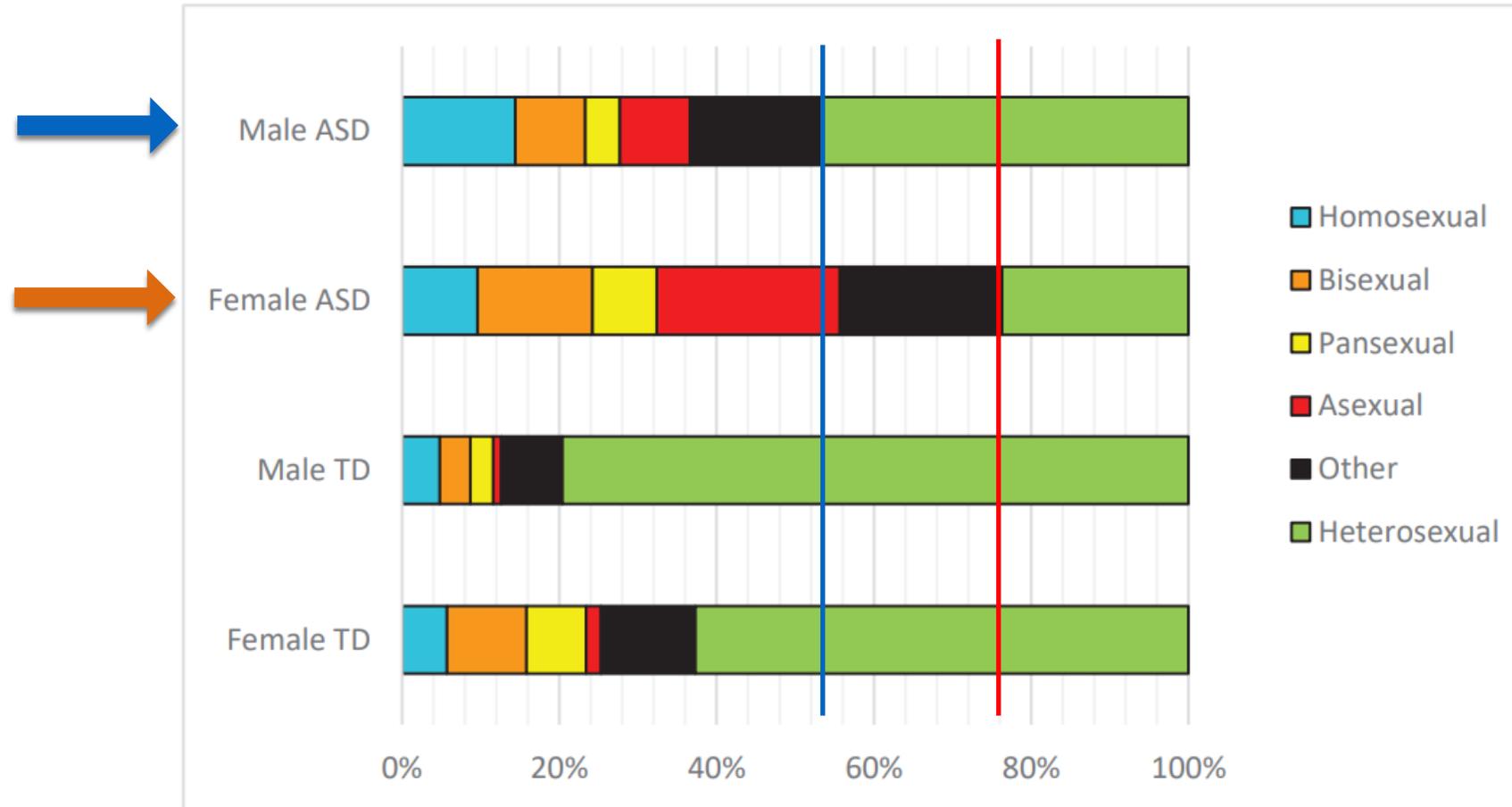


Figure 4.1 Gender Identity by relative proportion reported by respondents by diagnosis and birth-sex

Sexual Orientation



Gender Diversity and ASD

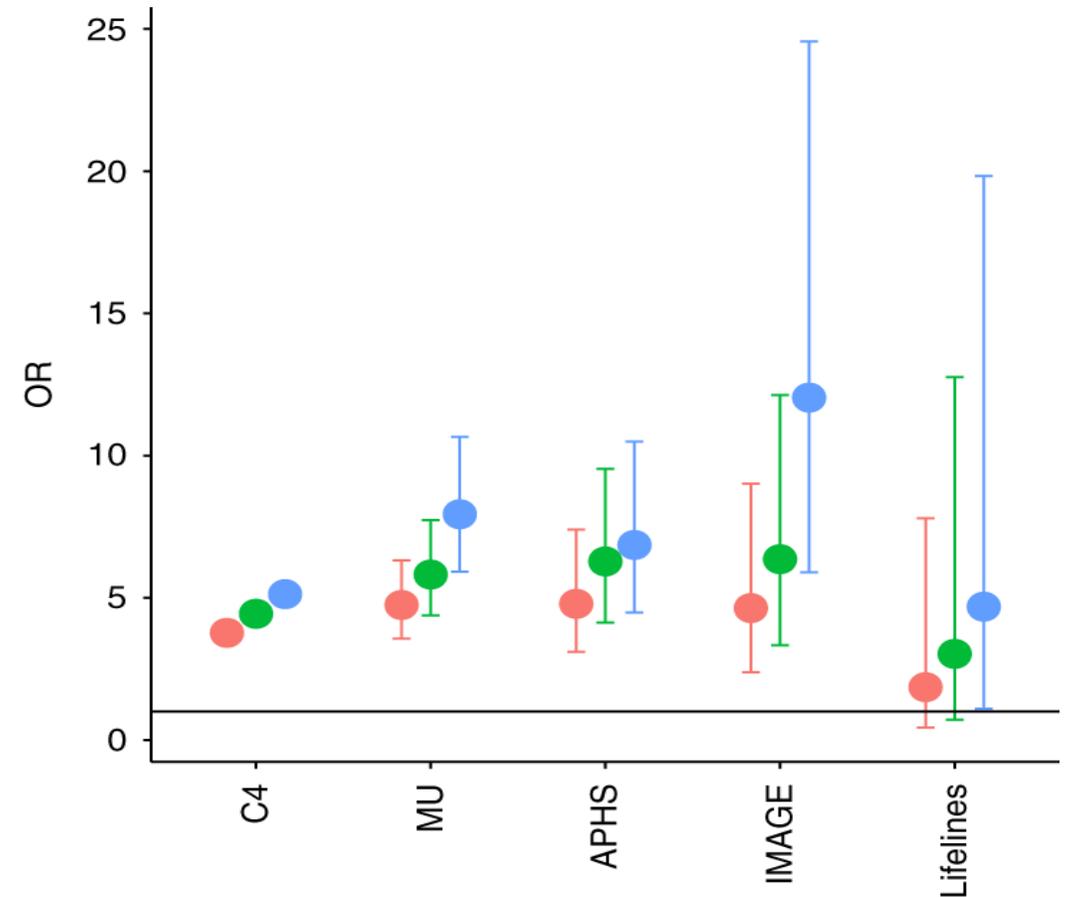
Article | [Open Access](#) | [Published: 07 August 2020](#)

Elevated rates of autism, other neurodevelopmental and psychiatric diagnoses, and autistic traits in transgender and gender-diverse individuals

[Varun Warriar](#) ✉, [David M. Greenberg](#), [Elizabeth Weir](#), [Clara Buckingham](#), [Paula Smith](#), [Meng-Chuan Lai](#), [Carrie Allison](#) & [Simon Baron-Cohen](#) ✉

[Nature Communications](#) 11, Article number: 3959 (2020) | [Cite this article](#)

- N = 641,860
- OR = 3.0 – 6.4



Reference category ● Cisgender male ● Cisgender ● Cisgender female

Controversy Related to Gender Diversity and ASD

Biological Theories

- “Extreme Male Brain” Hypothesis
 - AQ scores higher in transmen (natal females)
 - Similarities between females with ASD and transmen (natal females) with GD
 - Significantly higher Type S and Extreme Type S “Brain Types”

Biological Theories

- **Perinatal**
 - High birth weight associated with high GNC and ASD traits
 - Higher scores with advanced paternal age and high sex-sibling ratio

Biological Theories

- Genetic influences
 - Higher rate among twin sibling pairs
 - Association between GD and genes involved in sex-hormone signaling
 - Elevated ADHD and other psychiatric disorders in TGD individuals

Social Theory

- **Social Learning Theory**
 - Gender is learned
 - May create risk and protective factors for GD
- **Theory of Mind deficits**
 - Higher GD with increased AQ scores
 - Bullying impacts gender development
- **Social Exclusion**
 - Explains difference and provides community

Cognitive Theory

- Difficulty in describing gender identity
- Cognitive rigidity and difficulty with ambiguity
 - Understanding of gender as only binary (male or female)
 - Challenges separating gender from sexual orientation

Criticisms and Controversy

- Studies rely on single item on CBCL or parent report
- Biological theory does not explain GD in natal males
- Majority of studies within specialized gender clinics
 - Reliance on SRS and AQ
 - ASD higher among clinical groups
- Access to care and evaluation

Diagnostic and Treatment Challenges

- Understanding spectrum of gender is difficult
- Lack of expert providers and services
- Little knowledge about the impact of gender affirming treatments on core ASD symptoms

Diagnostic and Treatment Challenges

- Significant difference between individuals
- Differentiating gender diversity from cross-gender identities
- Supporting families coping with multiple diagnoses
- Differentiating symptoms of ASD vs. other psychiatric diagnoses

Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

- Lack of data with race or ethnicity
 - Risk of additional health disparities
- Limited community participation in research
- Risk of difference and diversity being seen as illness
- Lack of data on intersectional identities for risk *and* resilience

Supporting TGD Individuals with ASD

Importance of Treatment and Support

- Diagnosis of GD and ASD can impact socialization, sexual functioning, peer relationships, and medical care
- Early intervention can reduce risk of anxiety, depression, suicidality, trauma, negative health outcomes and family rejection

Importance of Treatment and Support

- **Gender affirming treatment**
 - Higher satisfaction with life and treatment
 - Lower suicidal ideation and behavior
 - Improvement in mental health conditions

Needs of Youth with GD and ASD

- Urgent Gender Needs
- Impact of Neurodiversity
- Gender Exploration and Expansiveness
- Bias and Harassment
- Confidence and hope for the Future

Diagnostic Considerations

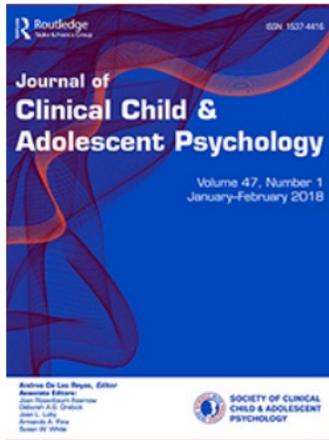
- For individuals with GD:
 - Screen for ASD, developmental, and social difficulties
 - Screen for psychiatric symptoms
 - Identify family and community supports

Diagnostic Considerations

- For individuals with a diagnosis of ASD:
 - Thorough history including questions on gender identity and sexual orientation
 - Identify urgency and areas of distress

Treatment Considerations

- For individuals with GD and co-occurring ASD:
 - 1) Provide spectrum of gender identities, education and enhance family support
 - 2) Elicit goals and expectations for care
 - 3) Encourage gender expression and exploration
 - 4) Refer for expert medical evaluation
 - Particularly urgent for children before puberty



Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology

ISSN: 1537-4416 (Print) 1537-4424 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hcap20>

Initial Clinical Guidelines for Co-Occurring Autism Spectrum Disorder and Gender Dysphoria or Incongruence in Adolescents

John F. Strang, Haley Meagher, Lauren Kenworthy, Annelou L. C. de Vries, Edgardo Menvielle, Scott Leibowitz, Aron Janssen, Peggy Cohen-Kettenis, Daniel E. Shumer, Laura Edwards-Leeper, Richard R. Pleak, Norman Spack, Dan H. Karasic, Herbert Schreier, Anouk Balleur, Amy Tishelman, Diane Ehrensaft, Leslie Rodnan, Emily S. Kushner, Francie Mandel, Antonia Caretto, Hal C. Lewis & Laura G. Anthony

Gendervague: At the Intersection of Autistic and Trans Experiences

By Lydia X. Z. Brown

ARTICLE

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June 22, 2016 From the National LGBTQ Taskforce Blog

tags: [autistic](#), [genderqueer](#), [health care](#), [LGBTQ](#), [mental health](#), [trans](#)

I'm an autistic activist deeply invested in queer politics, and I've managed to fumble my way around without ever developing a conventional understanding of gender. Growing up, everyone around me assumed I was a girl based on the genitals I was born with, but I always felt deeply uncomfortable with being labeled a "girl" or "woman." I don't feel like a woman, but I know I'm not a man either. I now identify as genderqueer or non-binary. It wasn't until partway through college, though, before I began to question what gender might mean to me, my explorations largely kindled by developing important relationships with many openly trans autistic people through my activism.



Summary

- Individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder may be more likely to identify with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations out
- TGD youth with ASD may have difficulty in expressing and exploring gender identity
- Refer and collaborate with clinics and clinicians with expertise early in treatment
- Involve diverse voices in treatment and research

Resources

WPATH

FENWAY  HEALTH

UCLA Gender Health Program

UCLA Health

[For Patients & Families](#) [Conditions We Treat](#) [Why Choose Us](#)

[Find a Doctor](#)

[Home](#) [Medical Services](#)

Gender Health

The UCLA Gender Health Program ensures that all patients have access to compassionate, inclusive, and equitable care.



Resources



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Twitter: twitter.com/UCLA_Tarjan



Thank you!