

# Intersectionality and Autism

## Population Overview

- 1 in 54 children are estimated to have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the U.S. (CDC, 2019)
- 1 in 45 adults are estimated to have ASD in the U.S. (5.4 million people) (Fox, 2020)
- Boys are diagnosed with ASD 4:1 compared to girls (APA, 2013, p. 57)
- White children are diagnosed with ASD more than Black or Hispanic children (CDC, 2019)
- ASD diagnosis is positively correlated with socioeconomic status (CDC, 2019)

## Intersectionality

Basic autism statistics don't necessarily tell the whole story.

Intersectionality plays a role regarding gender identity, race, culture, sexual orientation, disability identity, and more.

## Disparities in Autism Diagnosis

Girls are diagnosed later than boys and less likely to receive an official clinical diagnosis despite meeting objective diagnostic criteria; one systematic review concluded the true ratio is closer to 3:1 (Loomes et al., 2017).

Black, hispanic, asian, and other minority children are more likely to be diagnosed later and to receive inaccurate diagnoses (such as conduct disorder) compared to white children (Mandell et al., 2009).

## What explains these disparities?

- Access to ASD assessment and screenings
- Clinician bias (Cheslack-Postava & Jordan-Young, 2012; Mandell et al., 2009)
- Diagnostic tool bias (Harrison et al., 2017)
- "Camouflage" hypothesis - girls may be socialized to compensate for ASD symptoms based on gender role expectations (Petrou et al., 2018).
- Possible differences in ASD expression by gender (Cheslack-Postava & Jordan-Young, 2012)

## Research

Very few peer-reviewed studies on evidence-based practices for ASD adequately report on race and ethnicity. Of those that do, the majority of participants are White (West et al., 2018).

## Additional Disparities

### Social and Employment

Measured by third-person reporting, autistic boys rated statistically significant higher scores on social inclusion measures than autistic girls (Morán et al., 2019). As cited by Shefcyk (2015), adult autistic women are socially isolated at higher rates and employed at lower rates than adult autistic men.

### Healthcare

Black and Latinx parents of autistic children report poorer quality of healthcare interactions compared to white parents (Magaña et al., 2015). LGBTQ+ autistic people have poorer health outcomes and higher unmet healthcare needs compared to their straight, cisgender peers (Hall et al., 2020).

### Note on LGBTQ+ Identity

A large analysis suggested that trans and gender-diverse individuals are more likely to be autistic compared to cisgender individuals (Warrier et al., 2020). More research is needed to identify the exact percentage of autistic people who identify as LGBTQ+, but evidence suggests the number is higher than the neurotypical population.

### Note on Disability

83% of autistic people have at least one co-occurring developmental diagnosis; 10% have at least one psychiatric diagnosis (Soke et al., 2018)

## Resources for Further Learning

- [Autistic Women & Non-Binary Network \(AWN\)](#)
- [Autistic Self Advocacy Network - LGBTQ+ resources](#)
- [All the Weight of Our Dreams: On Living Racialized Autism](#)
- [Fund for Community Reparations for Autistic People of Color's Interdependence, Survival, and Empowerment](#)
- [The Color of Autism Foundation](#)
- [Twainbow](#) - group for LGBTQI+ autistic folx
- [GrupoSalto](#) - Spanish-speaking support group
- [Felicity House](#) - community-center for autistic women in NYC
- [Girls Night Out](#) - program for adolescent autistic girls in Kansas City

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