



BEING LGBTQIA+ AND AUTISTIC

Katie Munday

A LITTLE ABOUT ME

- Katie Munday (they / them).
- Autistic, OCD, trans and queer.
- Community researcher on healthcare inequities.
- MRes in Gender Studies - exploring gender diverse Autistic adult's narratives.
- Autistic and living the dream – advocate and consultant.



Why talk about being Autistic and LGBTQIA+?

We exist! And we may need specific support and care as well as enjoying life differently. We are an important part of human diversity!



Lydia X.Z. Brown – Autistic gender vague researcher

Wentworth Miller – Autistic gay actor

Hannah Gadsby – Autistic genderqueer lesbian comedian

Julian Edwards – Autistic niizh manidoowag* lesbian writer and activist

Grace Lui – Autistic lesbian writer

*pronounced: niche manny-toe-ag – objiwe “2 spirit”

We exist - what does the research say?

- Autistic people report higher rates of asexuality (Attanasio et al., 2022)
- Autistic respondents were more likely to report engaging in polyamorous and/or consensual non-monogamous relationships (Sala et al., 2020)
- 6.5% - 11.4% of Autistic adults said they wished to be the gender 'opposite' of what they had been assigned at birth, compared with just 3-5% of the general population (van der Meisen et al., 2018)
- Autistic adults are approximately **8 times** more likely to identify non-heterosexual than their non-autistic peers (George & Stokes, 2018).
- Autistic women are **3 times** more likely to identify as homosexual than non-autistic women. (Weir et al., 2021).

Sorting through the boxes in my mind



Little old me



My story is one of trying to understand my neurology, gender, sexuality and trauma associated with my childhood and teen years.

And how these all fit together or fight against one another.

It is an ongoing journey.

Knowing I was neurodivergent

In my teens I was diagnosed with anxiety and given medication.

I was 'good' at school. cheeky but smart enough to get away with it, I often bent the rules to fit me.

I started working with neurodivergent young people, it all clicked; social anxiety, sensory sensitivity, weird and wonderful behaviours...

I spent nearly 30 years not knowing anything about my neurology.

There are a lot of ways where my being Autistic and OCD were missed, they were in plain sight but never picked up.

Knowing I was bisexual

Teenage years: the boys I was friends with fancied girls, so did I.

I didn't feel the same way about girls as I did boys – I liked them, I fancied them, but they also confused and intimidated me.

We had the same bodies but none of the same mannerisms, we very rarely liked the same things.

I felt like I should like boys and girls the same amount and in the same way (this was before I understand trans and non-binary identities too).

People fetishised my sexuality – boyfriends always told other men that I was bisexual!? Creepy badge of honour.

Knowing I was bisexual

Now I know that I can fancy anyone based on how they holds themselves, as well as personality and looks.

I am interested in polyamory but I am in a monogamous relationship.

I have married a cis man and we appear 'heterosexual' to others outside of the relationship – safety but also erasure.

I don't need to fancy or enjoy different genders and sexes at the exact same rate to be bisexual!

Pansexual also feels right but it took my long enough to say that I was 'bi' out loud to everyone.

Knowing and doing my (a)gender

After my diagnosis, I could finally sort out my gender!

Understanding my gender through Autistic and mental health lenses. For me they are entwined.

My Autistic-ness effects my gender expression: clothes, smells, body hair, haircuts, make up etc.

I am still working on this but understand things better through community online and research in this area.

Knowing and doing my (a)gender

I have socially transitioned: they / them pronouns, gender neutral title (Mx), gender neutral terms, masc leaning terms, I still wear the same clothes (comfort comes first!).

Very Autistically Autistic experience and gender are my special interests!

During my MRes on Transgender Autistic Stories I understood myself better. I finally had people to see myself reflected in!




**Stories from across the
"double rainbow"
trans and non-binary
Autistic narratives**

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In my research I spoke to 13 trans and / or non-binary Autistic people (people said to live under the double rainbow of neurodivergence and queerness).

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I wanted to know about their lives, what they thought about representation and their recommendations for "double rainbow" research.

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It was important for me to do this work as a trans masc non-binary Autistic person. So much of the work on transgender and Autistic experience is inappropriate and actively excludes us.

I wanted to do work for us, by us.

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We spoke about relationships, work,
family, trauma, love, hobbies, interests,
hopes and dreams.

The participants were so interesting and
amazing to talk to and so insightful too.

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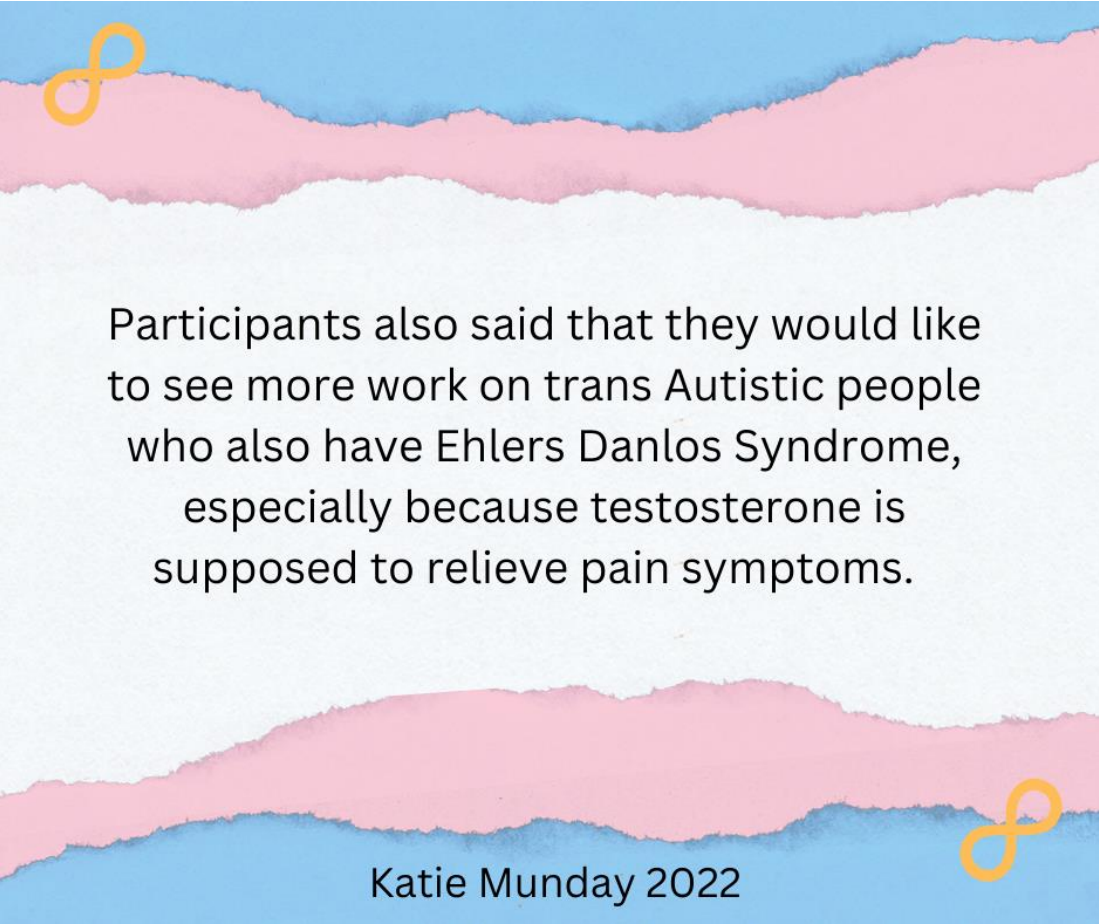


They had many recommendations!

Including talking to more non-binary
people and Black Indigenous Autistic
People of Colour in research.


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Participants also said that they would like to see more work on trans Autistic people who also have Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, especially because testosterone is supposed to relieve pain symptoms.

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Most of all, the participants wanted researchers to listen to them about their experiences – they wanted trans Autistic people to be taken seriously as experts of our own experiences.

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<https://autisticltd.co.uk/research/>

What makes understanding ourselves so difficult?

Stereotypes of Autistic people

- Misdiagnosis / late diagnosis (access issues)
- Seen as social awkward or “disordered”.
- Gender or (a)sexuality can be seen as a ‘symptom’ of being Autistic (‘rigid thoughts’ ‘obsessions’ ‘special interests’).

Many of us enjoy sexual intimacy, affection, and romance, but we often aren’t given the tools to do so **safely**:

- Non-speaking people can have their needs and interests dismissed.
- RSE – is not always available, especially for those educated at home.
- Age and stage appropriate – means different things to different children and young people. Adults too as they can be infantilised!
- Can’t be assumed that Autistic and / or LD people are not interested in sex or intimacy.

Alexithymia complicates things too!

From Greek meaning “no words for emotions”

- Difficulty identifying feelings.
- Distinguishing between feelings and the bodily sensations of emotional arousal.
- Difficulty describing feelings to other people.

Common in Autistic individuals. Culturally bound - ‘difficulty’ to identify and describe may be due to communication and language differences between Autistic people and non-Autistic people (exp: rating pain from 1-10)

Alexithymia complicates things too!

- What does it *feel* like to be a certain gender or sexuality? What does arousal *feel* like? Consent and boundary setting.
- Gender and sexuality exploration can be hard to process.
- Puberty / HRT changes emotions, interoceptive signals and sensations (facial hair, body fat, height).
- Reduced or very active sex drive due to sensory differences. Maybe involved in kink / BDSM (more on that later).
- Gender and sexual fluidity can be difficult to process for concrete thinkers.

What can Autistic LGBTQIA+ joy look like?

- Thinking outside the box! Being more accepting of ourselves and others
- Self-stimulating behaviours / stimming (exp: twirling in a dress, applying makeup, stroking stubble / facial hair)
- Sensations (exp: chest binding, different perfumes and colognes)
- Creativity – exploring who we are and how we want to be in the world
- Communities – online and in person
- Following our interests – my MRes and PhD studies for example

- Gender euphoria – the immense feeling of happiness and ‘coming home’ (exp: new name and pronouns being gendered correctly, compliments connected to gender e.g. being called ‘handsome’ as a trans masculine person)
- Choosing how we make our families (polyamory, queer platonic, no children, living alone, ‘fur babies’)
- Loving who we love openly and authentically
- Coming out and being accepted for who we are neurologically and queerly

Contact me

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Autistic and Living the Dream

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LGBTQIA+ TRAINING

Autistic sexuality

Supporting young people

Being Autistic and trans

Affirming care

+ much more!



Contact Katie Munday
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Resources

Autistic gender & sexual divergence resources: <https://aucademy.co.uk/2021/10/03/autistic-gender-sexuality-diversity-growing-list-of-resources/>

Jamie on Gender: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0K66PRkB0Cw>

AIM for the Rainbow: <https://rainbowaim.com/>

Resources for supporting LGBTQIA+ Autistic young people: https://icannetwork.online/autistic-lgbtqia/?fbclid=IwAR0GA2WTZ7Fy5QnmSdQzn1zypEgVD5OApLDNS7kQ6hbrM_Gb4dUmnLxJzxY

Trans 101 – Neurodiversity

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dM8R2AJ5R1Q&list=PLvFaLzWu7x2USFajuNeWUtf-0yzgcGJRp&index=5>

Living Under the Double Rainbow: Transgender and Non-Binary Narratives:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.34886.75843>

Exploring the experiences of Autistic transgender and non-binary adults in seeking gender identity healthcare: <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/aut.2023.0003>

On the Intersection of Queerness and Neurodivergence with Nick Walker and Dan Glenn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2M7KFsXhW3Q>

Gendervague: <https://www.aane.org/gendervague-intersection-autistic-trans-experiences/>

Autigender: Could gender and autism be entwined? <https://rainbowaim.com/2021/05/02/autigender-could-gender-and-autism-be-intwined/>

What is autigender?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0959q3y?fbclid=IwAR3V8SVQDTjmw4DzYTMpclrGKJK0HhOI5D-QyeJ-LsyEz2iytqkBWSHgjh0>

Identifying as queer is harder for those with autism: https://trauma.blog.yorku.ca/2021/02/identifying-as-queer-is-harder-for-those-with-autism/?fbclid=IwAR0SGsQyv9aQ9v5g-BZI1RDPzrVj4Tr2fY8pQZ_PXVvomQHWptcbgJ6iOZM

van der Miesen A.I.R. et al. (2018). **Prevalence of the Wish to be of the Opposite Gender in Adolescents and Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder.** *Archive of Sexual Behaviour*, 47, 2307-2317.

Weir, E., Allison, C., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2021). **The sexual health, orientation, and activity of autistic adolescents and adults.** *Autism Research*, 14 (11), 2342-2354. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2604>

Largest study to date confirms overlap between autism and gender diversity

https://www.spectrumnews.org/news/largest-study-to-date-confirms-overlap-between-autism-and-gender-diversity/?fbclid=IwAR2NhmCvIOq4a-DAwDba96jvEnmjD7jiojC_bfmIbRyS6mWFR0VWmw9IhxY

Queering gender through a neurodivergent lens <https://medium.com/artfullyautistic/autistic-and-nonbinary-queering-gender-through-a-neurodivergent-lens-8d26e4765c60>

Being trans and on the spectrum younger me struggled to fit in https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/life/being-trans-and-on-the-autism-spectrum-younger-me-struggled-to-fit-in/?fbclid=IwAR0HgWTZ0kxM_DsQkCIIUEP9xwdZ0dzUm301sYcsdGPvOYtJr_F4diGsec

Sexual orientation, gender identity and neurodiversity https://neuroclastic.com/double-rainbows-sexual-orientation-gender-identity-and-neurodiversity/?fbclid=IwAR2qnCSYofLB2YskH3TH60enTQW1UOpI1iMu6w_iqx_sMQh7Vzns_W3JstE

What is intersex? <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/gender-identity/sex-gender-identity/whats-intersex#:~:text=Intersex%20is%20a%20general%20term,male%E2%80%9D%20or%20%E2%80%9Cfemale%E2%80%9D.>