Gender bias in autism: Girls overlooked in the diagnostic criteria

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Abstract

Autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, is a neurodevelopmental disorder found in roughly one in 68 children. It is characterized by socio-communicative impairment and repetitive behaviors that interfere with an individual's ability to function. Although it can be found within any racial and ethnic group, it is much less commonly diagnosed among females than males. Further insight shows that the diagnostic criteria for females across multiple diagnostic tools require more severe autistic symptoms and greater cognitive and behavioral issues. This paper investigates the cause behind the gender gap between males and females diagnosed with autism. Through multiple studies and articles, it was discovered that a specific phenotype exists for most autistic females, the phenotype being the ability to mask symptoms and mimic social behaviors/cues of peers without autism. These traits commonly found in females causes autism to go unnoticed or misdiagnosed leading to detrimental mental health effects on girls and women. This founding called for more attentive observations from researchers, as well as revisions to current diagnostic tools for a clearly defined symptomology of autism in females. The articles used in this paper are from *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, Autism, Social Work in Mental Health, Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders,* and *Research in Developmental Disabilities,* all of which specialize in publishing works on disorders, especially autism. This research is extremely important to prevent late diagnosis of autism in females. There exists a profound need for advanced research to close the gender gap in this growing field. It is not uncommon to find girls who have been misdiagnosed for depression until they are re-diagnosed for autism at the age of 17. To prevent future generations of females secretly suffering from autism to go undiagnosed, it is pivotal to properly educate and train professionals, such as social workers, medical practitioners, and teachers to identify the appropriate symptoms in girls. Providing updated diagnostic tools is the first step towards the right direction regarding this critical issue.

Biography

Esther Jung is a rising high school senior attending from Southern California. Her motivation to support those with special needs, especially autism, has led her to dedicate time outside of school to autism-related activities. As the President of Autism Speaks student organization at her school, she aims to educate high school students and other people in her community about autism.

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