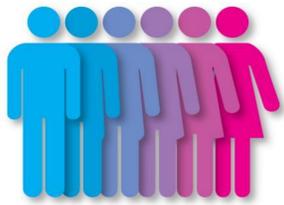


AUTISTIC TRAITS IN GENDER DYSPHORIA



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Introduction

Gender dysphoria (GD) is a marked incongruence between one's experienced and assigned gender and a persistent and strong desire to be of the other gender^{1,2}.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is defined by problems in social communication and interaction, in addition to repetitive behavior and specific interests¹.

One systematic study has described the co-occurrence of GD and ASD with an ASD prevalence of 7.8%, ten times higher than could be expected from the prevalence of ASD in the general population³. So far, patients with GD were only screened for the strict criteria of ASD³, leaving broader expressions of ASD or autistic traits in GD underreported.

Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to investigate autistic traits in children with gender dysphoria.

Materials and methods

A group of 539 children diagnosed with GD was investigated and compared to a healthy control group (N = 232) and a sample of children clinically diagnosed with ASD (N = 554)⁴. All parents of GD children completed the Children's Social Behavior Questionnaire (CSBQ) to screen for ASD-related problems⁴. A total CSBQ score of 38 or higher is suggestive of a classification of ASD⁵.

Between group differences were analysed using multivariate general linear modelling (GLM) analysis followed by post-hoc multi-comparison with Bonferonni correction.

Results

A multivariate GLM analysis revealed an overall group difference ($F = 689.682$; $df = 7$; $p < 0.05$). Post-hoc analyses demonstrated that significantly more autistic traits were present in children with GD compared to healthy controls ($F = 587.150$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.05$) (see Figure 1). Less autistic traits were found in the GD group than in the ASD group ($F = 437.150$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.05$). Of the GD participants, 15.4% met the threshold score of 38 or higher, suggestive of an ASD diagnosis.

Possible theory of the GD and ASD co-occurrence

1a. Children with ASD have more attention to details⁷. They might have more attention for a special part of their identity development, e. g. cross-gender toy preferences or dressing. Small changes might get more awareness in these children because of their increased attention to details (see Figure 2).

1b. Most children with ASD are sensitive to obsessions⁷. Therefore, their awareness of changes in identity development could develop into an obsession and may lead to the development of feelings of GD (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Possible theory

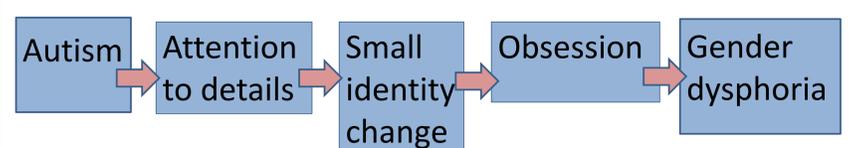
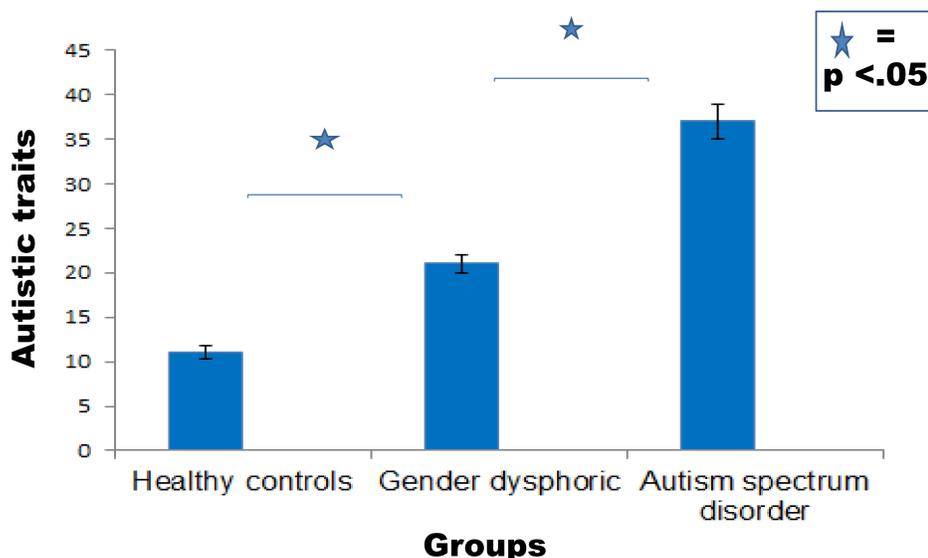


Figure 1: Autistic traits in gender dysphoria



Conclusion

Children with GD score in between the healthy control group and the ASD group with respect to the amount of autistic traits (prevalence of ASD 15.4% for GD participants). These findings not only confirm previous research that GD and ASD co-occur³, but also indicate that broader expressions of ASD occur in GD. Children with ASD could be more susceptible to develop GD because they have more rigid thinking and obsessions^{3,6,7}. Besides, identity development might be different in children with autistic traits (see Figure 2).