Background

While there are more autistic people of color talking about their lived experiences on the autism spectrum through social media networks and writing, there are some segments in the autistic community that are still overlooked. Not many people of color are in autistic communities, and there are still just a few examples of role models in the community who are people of color (e.g., Lydia Brown, Finn Gardiner, Moreniке Onaiwu, Alexis Toliwer, and Lamar Hardwick). Autistic identity tends to lack intersectionality, where social factors such as race, gender, sexual identities, culture and class should be considered when explaining how one expresses being autistic in a neurotypical world.

Aims

The purpose of the survey was to not only identify intersectional experiences of autistic people of color globally, but also explore how autism affects they are viewed by their communities and barriers that prevent them from fully participating in their communities. The survey served as a collection of suggestions on building community among autistic people of color.

Methods

• The survey was targeted towards autistic people of color in Facebook groups that are managed by the autistic community. Facebook groups with only autistic people of color were included. It was easier to reach out to more people online since most community building is in the autistic community happens online.
• The survey was anonymous, meaning that participants didn’t have to reveal their names and names will not be mentioned in the results or future writings related to the survey.
• All questions were open-ended questions where participants answered in essay form. The format allowed for people to add more content to their replies. The format also allowed for the participants to express various identities (e.g., identity in essay form. The format allowed for people to add more content to their replies.
• Core questions in the survey were about the following topics:
  • How one describes themselves and their identity other others, in terms of autism?
  • Autistic
  • “experiencing life differently”
  • Aspie
  • I have (Asperger’s, autism, etc.)
  • I’m on the spectrum
  • Examples of common responses to core questions

Results

• As of April 13th, 2017, thirteen participants filled out the survey. It was created and disseminated to various Facebook communities on April 3rd.
• Common Gender Pronouns: She/her and they/their
• Spectrum of gender identities represented in the survey: cisgender female and male, trans female, non-binary (female leaning), genderqueer, and gender-fluid/two-spirit
• Almost all sexual orientations mentioned in the survey were non-heteronormative (gay, asexual, pansexual, bisexual, grey-sexual, queer, and lesbian). Just one person identified as heterosexual. Responses were mostly leaned towards LGBT+ identities.
• Age
  • Ranged from 22 years of age to 51 years of age
  • Mean: Approximately 33 years (since one person mentioned that they are over 35 years old, and not revealed their exact age, the exact age average may vary)
• Out of the thirteen participants, two people live in Australia and two more are currently in Canada. Majority of the participants live in the United States of America, and seven of those participants live in major metropolitan areas.
• Racial/Ethnic Identities reported in the survey
  • Multiracial/mixed
  • Black
  • Chinese
• How do one describe themselves and their identity other others, in terms of autism?
  • Autistic
  • “experiencing life differently”
  • Aspie
  • I have (Asperger’s, autism, etc.)
  • I’m on the spectrum

Conclusions

• The study will continue through the summer, in hopes of obtaining more data and variety of narratives. I will also add a local component to the study; I am looking to host a meetup in May for autistic people of color and allies, where they could discuss similar issues and solutions mentioned in the survey. It will targeted towards autistic people and allies in the Chicagoland area.
• In promoting or researching autistic identity, we must consider not only racial and ethnic identity. We must also be open to spectrums of sexual identities, geographies, socially acceptable terminologies for autism, and genders when discussing how a person lives daily life as an autistic person. Those factors effect how one identifies with being autistic.
• The autistic experience should not be limited to autism itself. As one lives daily life as an autistic person. Those factors effect how one identifies with being autistic.
• The autistic experience should not be limited to autism itself. As one lives daily life as an autistic person.

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Identifying as an Autistic Person of Color

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