

Female Autism Spectrum Disorder and Understanding Rigid Repetitive Behaviors

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Abstract : Female ASD is seldomly studied separately from males. Further, females with ASD are disproportionately underrepresented in the research at a rate of 3:1 (male to female). As such, much of the current understanding about female rigid repetitive behaviors (RRBs) stems from research's understanding of male RRBs. This can be detrimental to understanding female ASD because this understanding of female RRBs largely discounts female camouflaging and the possibility that females present their autistic symptoms differently. Current literature suggests that females with ASD engage in fewer RRBs than males with ASD and when females do engage in RRBs, they are likely to engage in more subtle, less overt obsessions and repetitive behaviors than males. Method: The current study utilized a mixed methods research design to identify the type and frequency of RRBs that females with ASD engaged in by using a cross-sectional design. The researcher recruited only females to be part of the present study with the criteria they be at least age six and not have co-occurring cognitive impairment. Results: The researcher collected previous testing data (Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R), Child or Adolescent/Adult Sensory Profile-2, Autism/ Empathy Quotient, Yale Brown Obsessive Compulsive Checklist, Rigid Repetitive Behavior Checklist (evaluator created list), and demographic questionnaire) from 25 total participants. The participants ages ranged from six to 52. The participants were 96% Caucasian and 4% Latin American. Qualitative analysis found the current participant pool engaged in six RRB themes including repetitive behaviors, socially restrictive behaviors, repetitive speech, difficulty with transition, obsessive behaviors, and restricted interests. The current dataset engaged in socially restrictive behaviors and restrictive interests most frequently. Within the main themes 40 subthemes were isolated, defined, and analyzed. Further, preliminary quantitative analysis was run to determine if age impacted camouflaging behaviors and overall presentation of RRBs. Within this dataset this was not founded. Further qualitative data will be run to determine if this dataset engaged in more overt or subtle RRBs to confirm or rebuff previous research. The researcher intends to run SPSS analysis to determine if there was statistical difference between each RRB theme and overall presentation. Secondly, each participant will be analyzed for presentation of RRB, age, and previous diagnoses. Conclusion: The present study aimed to assist in diagnostic clarity. This was achieved by collecting data from a female only participant pool across the lifespan. Current data aided in clarity of the type of RRBs engage in. A limited sample size was a barrier in this study.

Keywords : autism spectrum disorder, camouflaging, rigid repetitive behaviors, gender disparity

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