Autism and Gender Roles

Sharon Azarakhsh
California State University, Stanislaus

Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is an important health issue that should be considered more as many children and adults are dealing with this problem nowadays. Autism is a disability that impairs a child's ability to interact and communicate with others. This disorder is more common in boys than girls, and the ratio of boys to girls with ASD is frequently reported as 4:1.

CONTACT

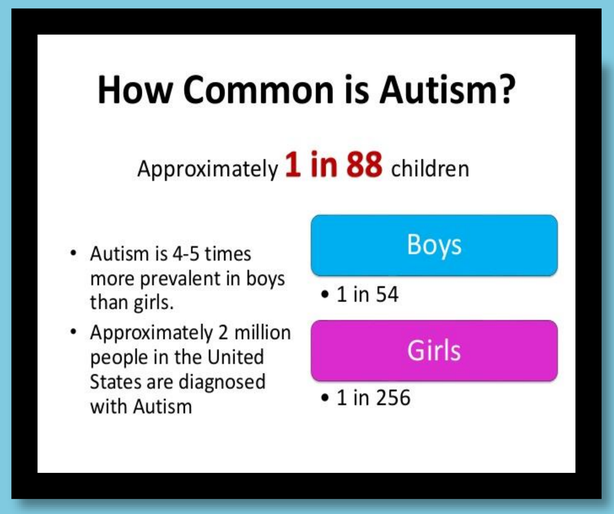
Sharon Azarakhsh
CSU Stanislaus
Email: sazarakhsh@csustan.edu

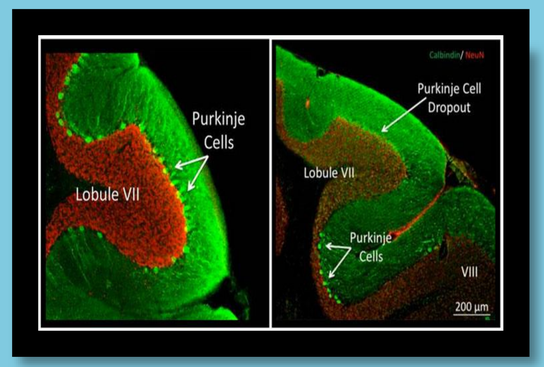
Research Question

The reasons behind autism remain a mystery to many psychologists, psychiatrics, and neurologists; no one knows for sure what causes autism. Autism has been associated with many genetic and environmental causes; it is not a single disorder, but rather a complex disorder that has distinct causes but they often co-occur.

Background and Literature Review

Characteristics of autism are listed as the child's inability to interact (lack of eye contact), poor communication (incomplete statements), and repetitive behaviors (rhythmic gestures). Autism is due to both genetic and environmental factors. The reduction of Purkinje cells in the brains of autistic people can shape their temperment. On the other hand, environmental and cultural factors can influence an autistic girl or boy to react differently in social interactions. Females in Western societies are often expected to be considerate and more socialized. Some girls with ASD may develop strategies to mask their insufficiencies in indentifying people's emotions. Therefore, these girls are less likely to disclose the deviant behavior that would attract the concern of parents and caregivers, which decreases the detection and diagnosis of ASD in girls and young women. Girls with ASD are diagnosed on average considerably later than boys. Also, most media representations of ASD are of boys, and services are designed largely for them. Girls are a nearly invisible population within ASD, and they are "understudied" and "underserved."





Dramatic dropout: Mice exposed to maternal infection in utero (right) lose patches of Purkinje cell in the cerebellum, unlike controls (left).

Implications

Based on my research, I personally believe that the number of people suffering from autism will increase in the next few years. This is my prediction: there will be more consideration to this issue, and many new findings will be revealed in the future. Maybe the male-to-female ratio will become smaller; more girls will be reported to have autism if we consider the idea that females had been "understudied" and "underserved." Hopefully, there will be more attentions and more services provided to them.

Significance

Autism is a neurological disorder that has become a serious health issue these days. This disorder should be considered and studied precisely as there are still some vague assumptions regarding its causes and the influence of gender role in developing it. The sex difference and the effects of it in autism seem to be unavoidable in ways such as environmental and cultural expectations that lead males and females to react differently.

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