Autigender and Neuroqueer: Two Words on the Relationship Between Autism and Gender That Fit Me

These two words helped me figure myself out more. Passing them along.

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Autigender

Autigender is not explicitly saying that “My gender is autism” – it’s not about saying you are a boy, girl, enby, autism, whatever. It’s about your relationship with your gender.

Specifically, gender is a social construct. The primary deficit of autism includes difficulties interpreting and understanding social constructions. This means that we have a disability that inherently makes understanding gender part of our disability.

Because of this, we can have exceptionally complicated and unique understanding of what gender is, how it affects us, and how we express gender.

Autigender is a word that describes this unique, complicated relationship. So when a person is saying that they are autigender, what they are saying is more or less that their understanding of gender is fundamentally altered by their autism.


So what about a person who says they are autigender, and that IS their gender? Well, I think this still describes the relationship with their gender – Specifically in this case, their autism affects their understanding to such a degree that they just can’t be any more descriptive with regards to gender. That leaves the only word they have – autigender.

_Candidly Autistic — What exactly is autigender? I’ve seen it used a…_

“Autigender” is a term that some autistic people use to describe their relationship with gender. Specifically, it means that they feel that their autism affects the way they perceive
and feel about gender.

Unfortunately, a lot of people interpret this as meaning that people think “autism” is their gender, which results in a lot of rage-filled posts on social media about how your gender cannot be a disability. Because, of course, it can’t. Autism is a neurotype, not a gender.

But this is a complete misunderstanding of the term.

No one who calls themselves “autigender” is going to write “autism” next to the word “gender” on a questionnaire.

The fact is that autism is a neurotype that specifically affects our perceptions and understanding of social conventions, norms, etiquette and mores.

Nor does it affect every autistic person the same way. One person may pick up on social norms easily but may struggle with small talk while another remains oblivious to social norms but can banter easily with strangers in line at the checkout.

It’s well documented that there is a significantly higher rate of gay, bi, trans, ace, and gender-queer people in the autistic community compared to the non-autistic community. What researchers haven’t figured out yet though is whether autism is in some way related to gender and sexual orientation or whether autistic people are just less brain-washed by society into following heteronormative stereotypes.

In other words, are there really more gay/trans/queer/ace autistic people, or do they just figure it out/come out of the closet more readily than non-autistic people?

We don’t know yet.

What we do know is that there are some people who feel that their ability to think of themselves as a particular gender is affected by their autism. This feeling is shared by enough autistic people that they have dubbed themselves “autigender.”

I don’t call myself autigender, but I get it. Gender is confusing to me, too.

I don’t feel offended by the idea of autigender. But some people really do. They feel it insults other non-binary and genderqueer people, that it mocks and makes light of their relationship with their gender. Autistic community leaders try to remind people that if you don’t like the term, you don’t have to use it.

But if it gives some people a feeling of belonging and helps them describe what must be a very complicated emotional response, then you should support them and let them call it what they want.

If someone feels their autism is affecting how they perceive their gender, let them call themselves autigender.
Considering how many LGBTQA+ autistic folk there are, I think there’s something in that one way or another.

7 Cool Aspects of Autistic Culture » NeuroClastic

#ActuallyAutistic #AskingAutistics – have you ever head of AutiGender?

What do you think about this term?

Do you relate to the experience of #AutiGender?

— NeuroDivergent Rebel (they/them/Xe/Xem) ?? ???? (@NeuroRebel) April 1, 2021

Neuroqueer

I originally conceived of neuroqueer as a verb: neuroqueering as the practice of queering (subverting, defying, disrupting, liberating oneself from) neuronormativity and heteronormativity simultaneously. It was an extension of the way queer is used as a verb in Queer Theory; I was expanding the Queer Theory conceptualization of queering to encompass the queering of neurocognitive norms as well as gender norms—and, in the process, I was examining how socially-imposed neuronormativity and socially-imposed heteronormativity were entwined with one another, and how the queering of either of those two forms of normativity entwined with and blended into the queering of the other one.

So what does it mean to neuroqueer, as a verb? What are the various practices that fall within the definition of neuroqueering…

Neuroqueer: An Introduction

A neuroqueer individual is any individual whose identity, selfhood, gender performance, and/or neurocognitive style have in some way been shaped by their engagement in practices of neuroqueering, regardless of what gender, sexual orientation, or style of neurocognitive functioning they may have been born with.

Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities
Just as intentionally liberating oneself from the culturally ingrained and enforced performance of heteronormativity is sometimes referred to as queering, intentionally liberating oneself from the culturally ingrained and enforced performance of neuronormativity can be thought of as neuroqueering.

The concept of neuroqueering represents a rich and important intersection of the fields of Neurodiversity Studies and Queer Theory.

My favorite articulation of Queer Theory’s transcendence of the limitations of essentialist identity politics is a single sentence penned in 1997 by queer theorist David M. Halperin. In his book Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography, Halperin wrote:

“Queer,” in any case, does not designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions; rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance.

This post-essentialist articulation of the meaning and potentials of queer also perfectly sums up my conception of the meaning and potentials of neuroqueer. Neuroqueer is not a mere synonym for neurodivergent, or for neurodivergent identity combined with queer identity. Neuroqueer is active subversion of both neuronormativity and heteronormativity. Neuroqueer is intentional noncompliance with the demands of normative performance. Neuroqueer is choosing to actively engage with one’s potentials for neurodivergence and queerness, and the intersections and synergies of those potentials. Neuroqueer is about recognizing the fundamentally entwined nature of cognition, gender, and embodiment, and also about treating cognition, gender, and embodiment as fluid and customizable, and as canvases for ongoing creative experimentation.

Neuroqueer transcends essentialist identity politics not only by treating identity as fluid and customizable, but also by being radically inclusive. Neuroqueering is something anyone can potentially do, and there are infinite possible ways to do it and infinite possible ways to be transformed by it. The term neuroqueer points to a horizon of creative possibility with which anyone can choose to engage.

Coming to Terms

I didn’t have the vocabulary for what I felt back in Southern Baptist Texas in the 1970s and 80s, but I was uncomfortable with and resistant to gender norms as a kid. They felt: silly, arbitrary, oppressive, confining, unnecessary, counter-productive, irrational. They did not make sense. They did not fit.
A small, shareable anecdote of the ways norms went against my grind, from a lifetime collection:

I didn’t openly express myself in dress much—I was deathly afraid of being noticed and totally unsure about what I felt—but I would splash some color in. I opted for a pink tinted coating on a new pair of eyeglasses once. Kids at school gave me grief, but I liked them and came to wear them as a defiant badge and also a sort of shield. My father had the coating removed.

Several burnouts and a retirement later, I have zero capacity for masking, for attenuating myself to the sensibilities of surrounding bigots and bullies. I enjoy my pink and my flower print Thai fisherman pants and wistfully wishing I could dial my gender to my pansexual, polyamorous, genderpunk, genderqueer mood.

Autigender and neuroqueer are the best fits I’ve found after a lifetime of seeking. Perhaps a term that fits even better will emerge. Perhaps it’s already out there for me to discover. I’ll keep reading other queer autistics as we help each other figure ourselves out.

For another perspective, this piece on gender norms and gender dysphoria from Stimpunk Betsy Selvam is wonderfully crafted. Here’s an excerpt.
I am twenty and confused,
heaving prayers of smoke
up to heaven.
I am scared of
becoming woman.
I am scared
because I know
what happens
to girlbodies and womanbodies.
Am I really confused
or just scared?
Sometimes I’m boy
Sometimes I’m girl
but
Most times I am... I am...

**Smoking Secrets** by Betsy Selvam

**Main Takeaways**

- Autigender is not explicitly saying that “My gender is autism” – it’s not about saying you are a boy, girl, enby, autism, whatever. It’s about your relationship with your gender.
- The primary deficit of autism includes difficulties interpreting and understanding social constructions. This means that we have a disability that inherently makes understanding gender part of our disability.
- Because autigender describes the relationship with gender, an autigender person’s gender can be, well anything.
- “Autigender” is a term that some autistic people use to describe their relationship with gender. Specifically, it means that they feel that their autism affects the way they perceive and feel about gender.
- Autism is a neurotype that specifically affects our perceptions and understanding of social conventions, norms, etiquette and mores.
- Neuroqueering is the practice of queering (subverting, defying, disrupting, liberating oneself from) neuronormativity and heteronormativity simultaneously.
- A neuroqueer individual is any individual whose identity, selfhood, gender performance, and/or neurocognitive style have in some way been shaped by their engagement in practices of
neuroqueering, regardless of what gender, sexual orientation, or style of neurocognitive functioning they may have been born with.

- Neuroqueer is not a mere synonym for neurodivergent, or for neurodivergent identity combined with queer identity. Neuroqueer is active subversion of both neuronormativity and heteronormativity.
- Neuroqueer is intentional noncompliance with the demands of normative performance.
- Neuroqueer is about recognizing the fundamentally entwined nature of cognition, gender, and embodiment, and also about treating cognition, gender, and embodiment as fluid and customizable, and as canvases for ongoing creative experimentation.
- The term neuroqueer points to a horizon of creative possibility with which anyone can choose to engage.

**Neurodiversity and Gender**

For more on neurodiversity and gender, visit “?? Neurodiversity and Gender: You Hit So Hard With All the Colors That There Are”.

Read “Neurodiversity and Gender”