



# Being Transgender and Autistic in an Ableist World

Jude Merit

*University of Sunderland, United Kingdom*

## ABSTRACT

Transgender autistic individuals navigate a world that is often unaccommodating to both their gender identity and neurodivergence. This study explores the lived experiences of transgender autistic adults, highlighting the compounded effects of ableism, transphobia, and social exclusion. Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, the research examines key themes such as gender identity, masking, medical and social discrimination, mental health, community belonging, and self-advocacy. Participants describe the challenges of being misunderstood, having their gender identity invalidated due to their autism, and facing systemic barriers in healthcare, employment, and social spaces. Many report the exhaustion of masking both their autistic traits and gender expression to conform to societal expectations, often at the cost of their well-being. However, the study also highlights resilience, with participants finding empowerment through online and in-person queer neurodivergent communities, advocating for themselves, and embracing their identities. The findings underscore the urgent need for intersectional policies, increased awareness, and inclusive practices that affirm and support transgender autistic individuals.

**Keywords:** Transgender identity, autism, ableism, intersectionality, neurodiversity