

# **Dating, Relationships, and Sex on the Autism Spectrum**

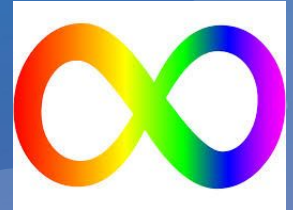
Chattanooga Adult Autism Symposium  
July 25th, 10:30am

Kayla Rodriguez & Spenser Norris

# Getting to know Kayla...

Kayla Rodriguez is **Puerto Rican** and was diagnosed with **Aspergers** when she was a child, but she **prefers to identify as autistic**. Kayla is originally from New York but **currently resides in Buford, Georgia**. After high school, she joined Autistic Self-Advocacy Atlanta and she learned advocacy in the Bobby Dodd Institute Ambassador Program, the GaLEND (Georgia Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities) program and the My Voice My Participation My Board program.

Kayla is very talented in writing and speaking and she has spoken in several panels and **she won the Golden Goal Goldie Award for Young Community Advocate and the Bobby Dodd Institute Empowers Luminaries Award**. She has just finished her first ever work experience, which was a paid internship at GCDD (Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities) and is currently figuring out her next step. **In addition to advocating for autistic people and people with disabilities, she plans to advocate for Latinx rights, diabetes healthcare, mental health and sexual assault survivors in the future**. In her free time, Kayla loves to play video games, watch movies especially animated ones, and hang out with her friends.





# Getting to know Spenser..

Spenser Norris is the Inclusive Employment Coordinator for the Inclusive Digital Expression and Literacy (IDEAL) at Georgia State University, an inclusive college program for students with intellectual disabilities.

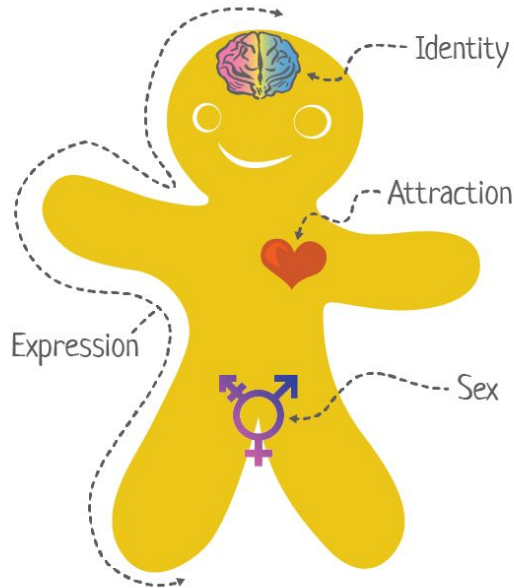
She has been working with the IDEAL since January 2017 and accepted a full-time staff position at Georgia State University's Center for Leadership in Disability in June 2017.

Spenser is a certified Georgia special educator, clinical rehabilitation counselor, and focuses most of her work on: inclusive postsecondary education, supporting folks with disabilities to find meaningful career opportunities, systems level advocacy and mental health and sexual health education and wellness.

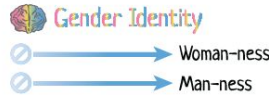
# Introduction to the Spectrum of Gender, Expression, and Sexuality

Autistic people exist in every part of each spectrum.

The Genderbread Person v4 by its pronounced METROsexual.com



⊖ means a lack of what's on the right side.



Identity ≠ Expression ≠ Sex  
Gender ≠ Sexual Orientation



Genderbread Person Version 4 created and uncopyrighted 2017 by Sam Killermann

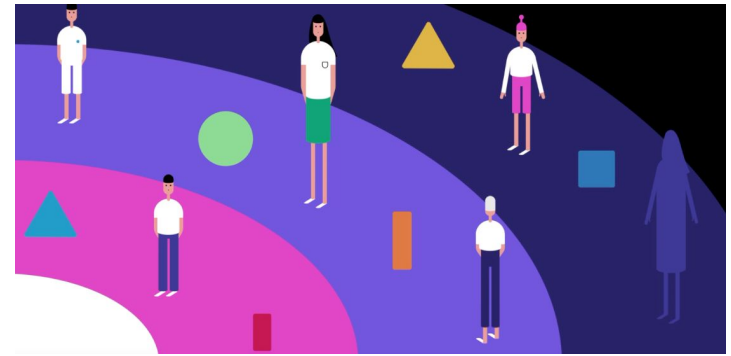
For a bigger bite, read more at [www.genderbread.org](http://www.genderbread.org)



# Messages about Autism...

## What do neurotypical people expect from Autism?

- What is the “image” that comes to your mind when you think of Autism?
- What does the media show you about Autism?
- “Children”’s disease, men’s disease
- Easily overwhelmed by sensitive information
- 



## How might that affect dating and relationships?

- Expectations and Stereotypes
- Assumption of Asexuality or Heterosexuality
- Lack of consideration and support for “adult” topics and population
- Not educated or supported in sexuality and exploration
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# What do autistic people want from relationships?

1. Hope for authenticity, kindness, interest, commitment, trust.
2. Some are less interested in “hook-ups” and nonmonogamy.
3. Some are interested in marriage and long-term relationships, others are not.
4. Relationships are hard to navigate, but worth it.
5. Same and as varied as neurotypical responses.



# Barriers Autistic People Face to Dating

- **Societal Expectations, Assumptions, Stereotypes, Ableism**
  - Assumption of sexuality, gender, ability, etc to participate in relationships and sex
  - lack of social coaching services related to relationships and dating
- **Heavy reliance on social cues and nonverbal communication in dating world**
- **Lots of “reading between the lines”**
  - **Lack of understanding related to expectations in relationships and sex education**
    - Executive functioning as maintenance in relationship
  - **Lack of “safe spaces” or unawareness of safe spaces where people can meet in a more authentic and reliable, “safe” setting**
  - **Lack of extensive social groups and support networks of “wing men and women” who can act as social coaches and peers**
  - **People’s intentions aren’t tangible and able to be seen.**
    - Difficult to identify other’s needs



# Current Dating Trends

- **Online Dating**
  - Reading intentions and social queues through online platforms is difficult
  - Lots of slang, generational terms, nuance
    - nudes and hook-up culture
    - Ghosting, catfishing, etc.
- **Bars, Large Events, Parties**
  - not sensory friendly - loud noises
  - hard to initiate conversation especially with strangers



# Multiple Marginalized Identities

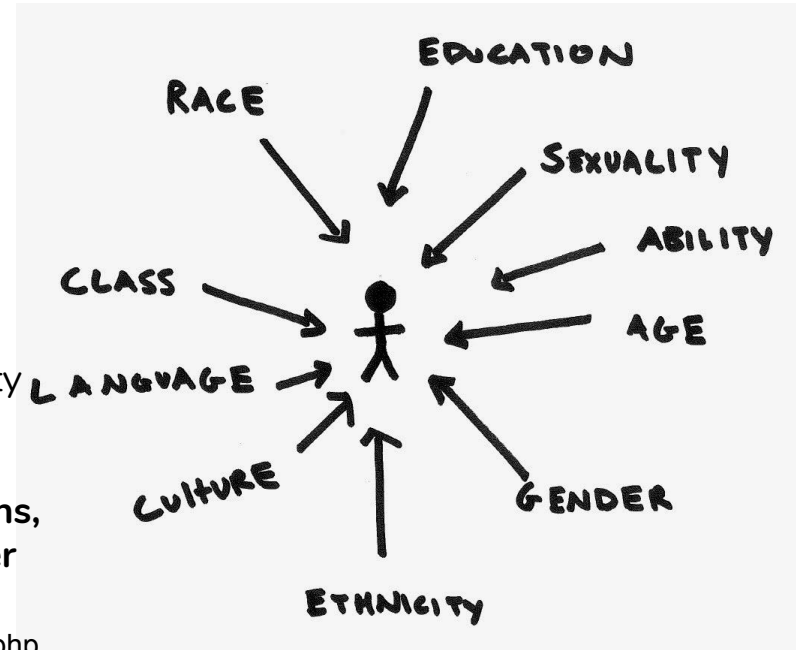
Neurodiverse and Autistic People can also be:

1. Black and Brown or Indigenous - BIPOC
2. Latinx
3. Gay, Straight, Lesbian, etc (LGBTQQIA+, 2PTNB)

Ableism and Racism, Sexism in LGBTQIA+ communities  
Homophobia, Transphobia, and Racism, Sexism, in Disability  
Communities

Research suggests that autistics are more likely to be trans,  
nonbinary, etc and are more likely to struggle with gender  
dysphoria.

Source: [https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2019-07/aru-sft071619.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2019-07/aru-sft071619.php)



# Autism and Healthcare

## Our Suggestions

- Trauma Informed comprehensive sexual health education including and highlighting diversity in all senses.
- Parenting and Reproductive Health Education with Neurodiverse considerations
- Many more...

## What do you suggest?

Resource:

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Real-Talk-Improving-Quality-of-Sexual-Health-Care-for-Patients-with-Disabilities.pdf> -

ASAN discussing improving sexual health care for people with disabilities

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# What's happening in Atlanta.

- Compassionate Atlanta - Community Conversations with and for folks at the intersection of disability and LGBTQQIA+2STNB - 1 Sunday each month on zoom!
- Autistic Self Advocacy Atlanta (ASAA) - 1x per month on zoom
- Emory PCORI Young Women on the Autism Spectrum Group - 2x per month on zoom
- Barry Lee - Ripe Podcast (Disability & Sexuality)
- Southern Fried Queer Pride - Arts nonprofit focused on queer, Black, POC liberation.

# What is happening in Chattanooga?