

“It Defines Who I Am” or “It’s Something I Have”: What Language Do [Autistic] Australian Adults [on the Autism Spectrum] Prefer?

Simon M. Bury · Rachel Jellett · Jennifer R. Spoor · Darren Hedley

Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) conducted a survey in 2019 sent out broadly across Australia. OTARC were interested in what autism terms Australians diagnosed with autism preferred, and what they found offensive, and why. A brief overview of the paper:

“198 participants rated six terms individually for preference and offensiveness, and we found that *Autistic*, *Person on the Autism Spectrum*, and *Autistic Person*, were rated most preferred, and did not differ statistically.

Ratings of offensiveness were not overly high, but *Person with ASD*, *Person with ASC* and *Person with Autism* were rated most offensive. When asked to rank the terms in order of preference, *Autistic* was most often ranked in first place as most preferred, but it was also highly rated in the last position, showing a split in participants on this term. However, when comparing the rankings, *Person on the Autism Spectrum* was most commonly ranked highest overall.

When asked why they picked their most preferred and offensive term, we found 6 themes that helped explain people’s decisions. 1) *Being autistic is core to my identity* – that is participants thought autism was integral to how they saw themselves. 2) *Having autism is part of my identity* – these participants stated autism was important, but only a part of their identity. 3) *Diversity within the spectrum* – this was most preferred by those who liked a term including ‘spectrum’, as it highlighted to them the broad variation and individuality of autism. 4) *I am different not disorder* – this theme primarily rejected the use of medical terms (e.g., disorder/condition). 5) *Language can stereotype and stigmatise* – this theme rejected terms people thought were used to stereotype. 6) *Pragmatic* – preference was based on which term were most clear as a communication tool.

Overall this research showed that there is no real consensus amongst people with a diagnosis of autism on what term is preferred. We suggest it is important to ask people their personal preference and use that, but that *Person on the Autism Spectrum* is a reasonably safe option if you don’t know someone’s personal preference, and that terms with ‘disorder’ or ‘condition’ should be used sensitively.”

To view the paper the publishers provided this link <https://rdcu.be/b2kbn> that allows people to view a ‘read-only’ version of the full text. This link has been approved to be shared.