

404 Error – Gender Not Found: Lived Experiences of Genderqueer Autistics Assigned Female at Birth

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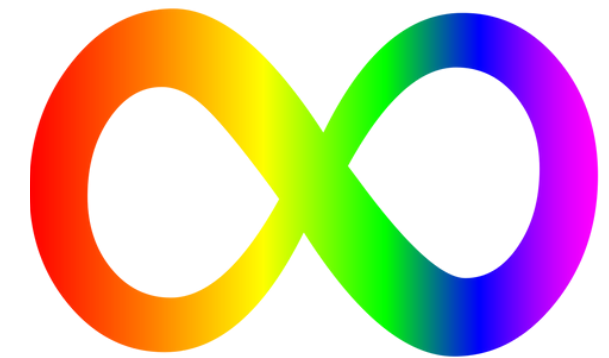
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TRIO

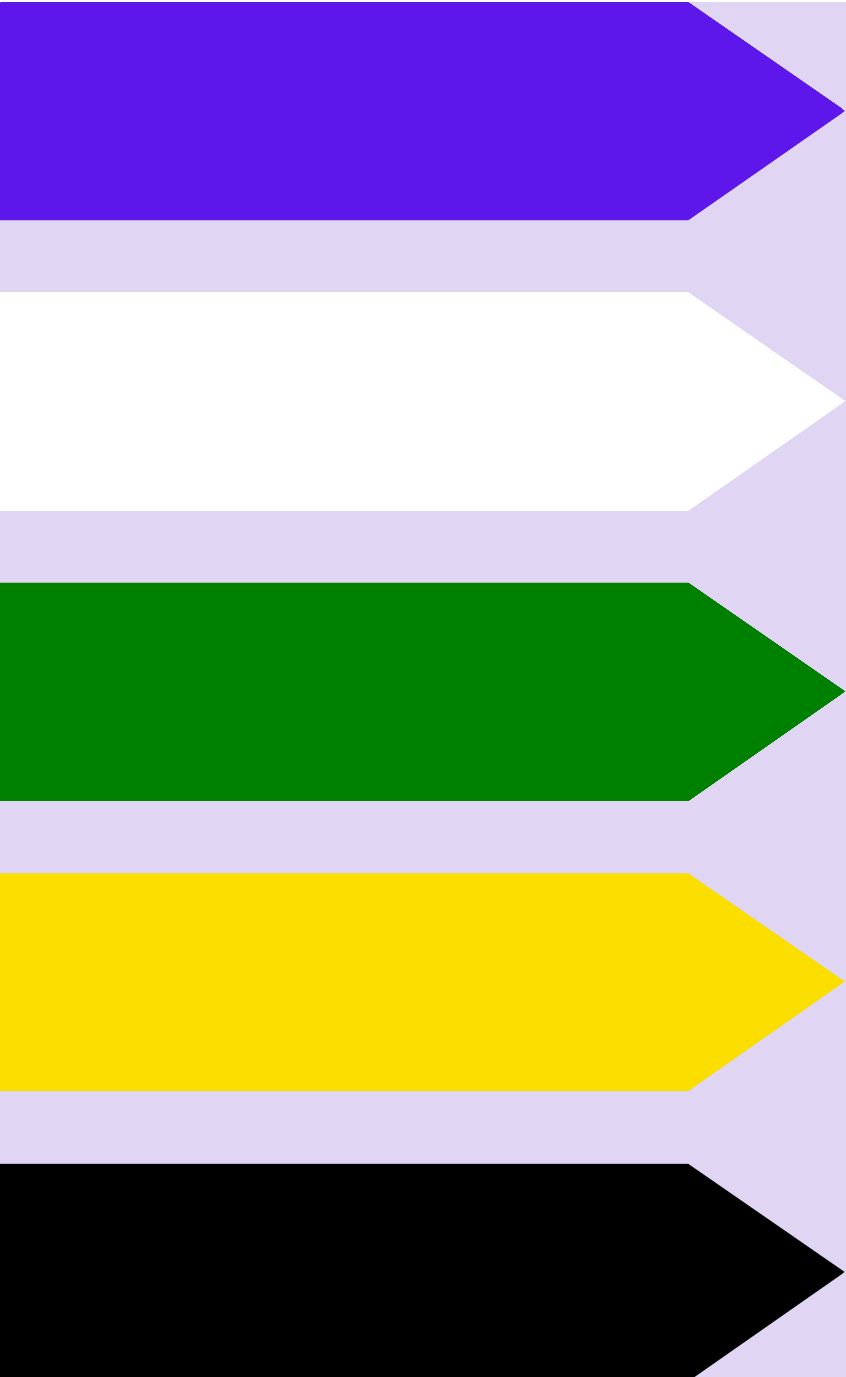
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Why This Topic? It's Personal

- Majoring in Psychology and Deaf & Sign Language Studies at Central Washington University
- Accessibility Studies and Anthropology minors
- Founder of North Central Washington Library for Education on NeuroDiversity (NCW LEND)
- Autistic genderqueer parent of Autistic genderqueer kids
- All assigned female at birth
- All late-diagnosed



Language Notes & Definitions



Autism Spectrum Disorder - a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by differences in social and communication performance, stimming behaviors, and specific special interests

(“Autism Spectrum Disorder,” 2013)

Identity-first language = positive social identity

(Botha et al., 2021)

Genderqueer - a gender experience that does not align with binary definitions such as male, female, transmale, or transfemale.

- non-binary, agender, demi-gender, bi-gender, two-spirit, pangender, genderfluid, and more

(Richards et al., 2016)

Introduction and Background

- Autistic + AFAB = late/no diagnosis
 - historical focus on males
 - different expression
 - masking/camouflage
 - lack of behavioral or cognitive problems

(Dworzynski et al., 2012; Kirkovski et al., 2013; Tubío-Funqueiriño et al., 2021; Lai et al., 2015)

- Co-occurring conditions/misdiagnosis
 - OCD, anxiety, depression, bipolar, tic disorders, borderline personality disorder, and more

(Lai & Baron-Cohen, 2015; Lai et al., 2015)

- Late or missed diagnosis = absent/delayed support



Introduction and Background

- Autistic + AFAB = more likely genderqueer
 - More socially inclined/aware of societal expectations?

(Lai & Baron-Cohen, 2015; Nobili et al., 2018; George & Stokes, 2018; Walsh et al., 2018)

- Gender-associated autism research largely binary & sex-based



Research Questions

How do genderqueer autistic people assigned female at birth experience gender and express their autistic traits? Can this information help improve access to diagnosis?

Methods

TECHNIQUES

- Semi-structured interview
 - Zoom
 - Email
 - Spoken/written English

PARTICIPANTS

- Legal age/status
 - 2 under 25;
 - 2 over 40
- Genderqueer
- Autistic
- AFAB

RECRUITMENT & COMPENSATION

- Social media post
- Snowball method
- **Small gift card**

INTERVIEW CONTENT

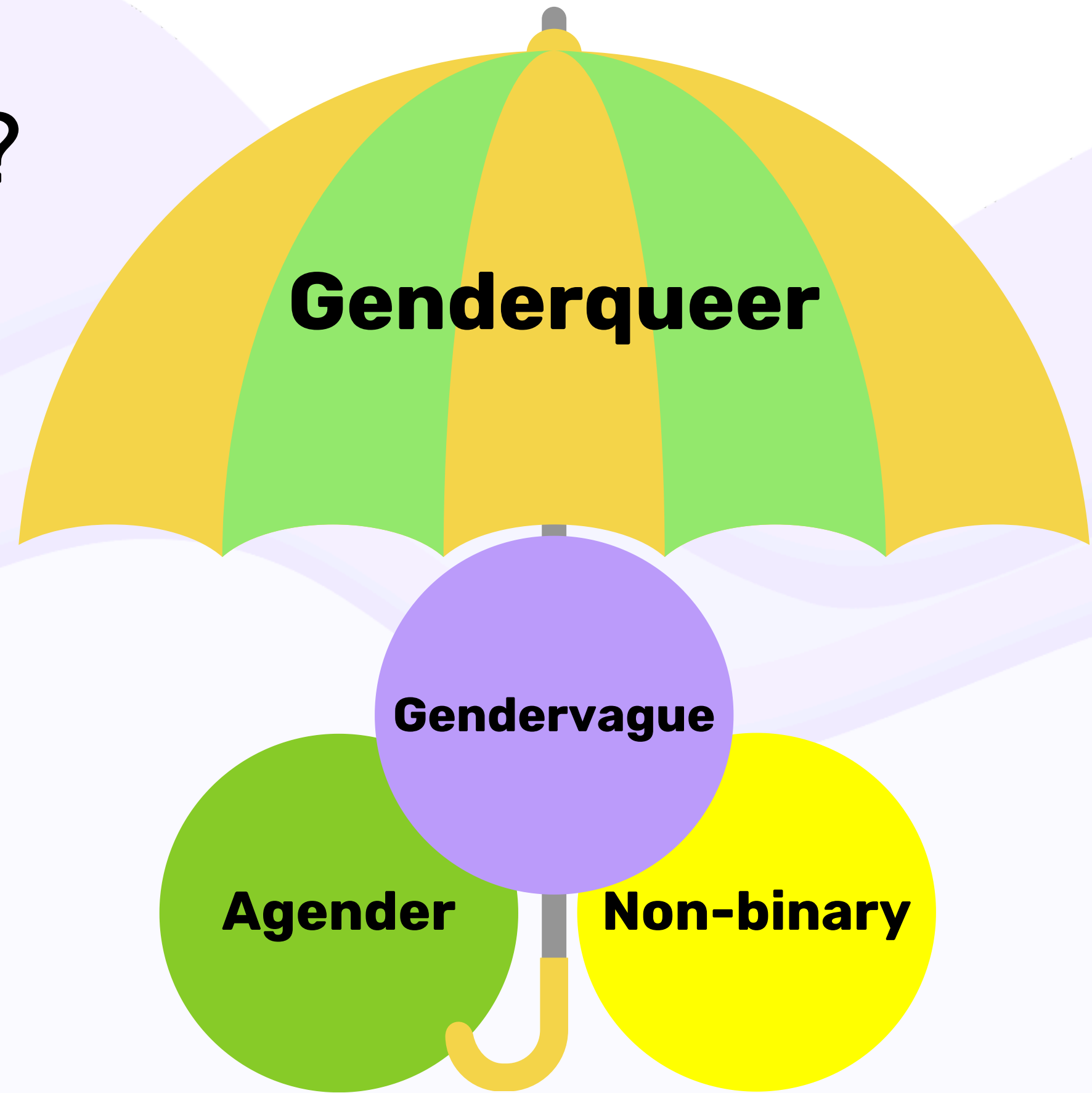
- Experience of gender
- Inventory of autistic traits (from RBQ-2A)



People from marginalized communities should be compensated for their time, whenever possible!

What's Your Gender?

Is my gender *Morticia Addams*?
I mean, sometimes that's my
vibe. Sometimes it's a lot more
Gomez. ***These aren't genders,***
these are just aesthetics or
performances.



The Autigender Experience

Autigender - an experience of gender that is so entwined with the autistic experience it cannot be separated; a gender that is experienced only through the autistic lens

(Valvano & Shelton, 2021)

It's like I'm colorblind....
Everyone talks about the *important differences* between red and green but **they look the same to me.**

**Gender? It's not... a thing.
It's not a specific thing.**

I always thought *gender roles* were silly... I didn't understand why things were the way they were.

I never really felt like a girl.

Feels like a **404 not-found error**, right? **Yeah, gender not found...**
Just not there.

I don't feel like I've ever had a *clear enough definition* of what **gender** is, to have an opinion on **whether it applies to me or not.**

The Autigender Experience

My grandmother really wanted a **granddaughter**. My parents really wanted a **boy**. They got me. Everybody ***could have been happy***. But no, **it didn't work out that way**.

I really struggled because part of *masking* for me was like **playing into being a girl...**

When I was shown people can be non-binary, it opened a whole new world, kind of like... **I don't have to choose!**
I can be... myself!

Well, it's your genitals. Clearly it's not.

It's in your genes? Again, clearly no.

Well, it's just how you feel. But what's ***feeling gender?***

Sometimes I feel like wearing a dress and sometimes I feel like wearing cargo pants, but that's not ***feeling like a gender***.

Pressure to Perform Gender



PEERS

FAMILY



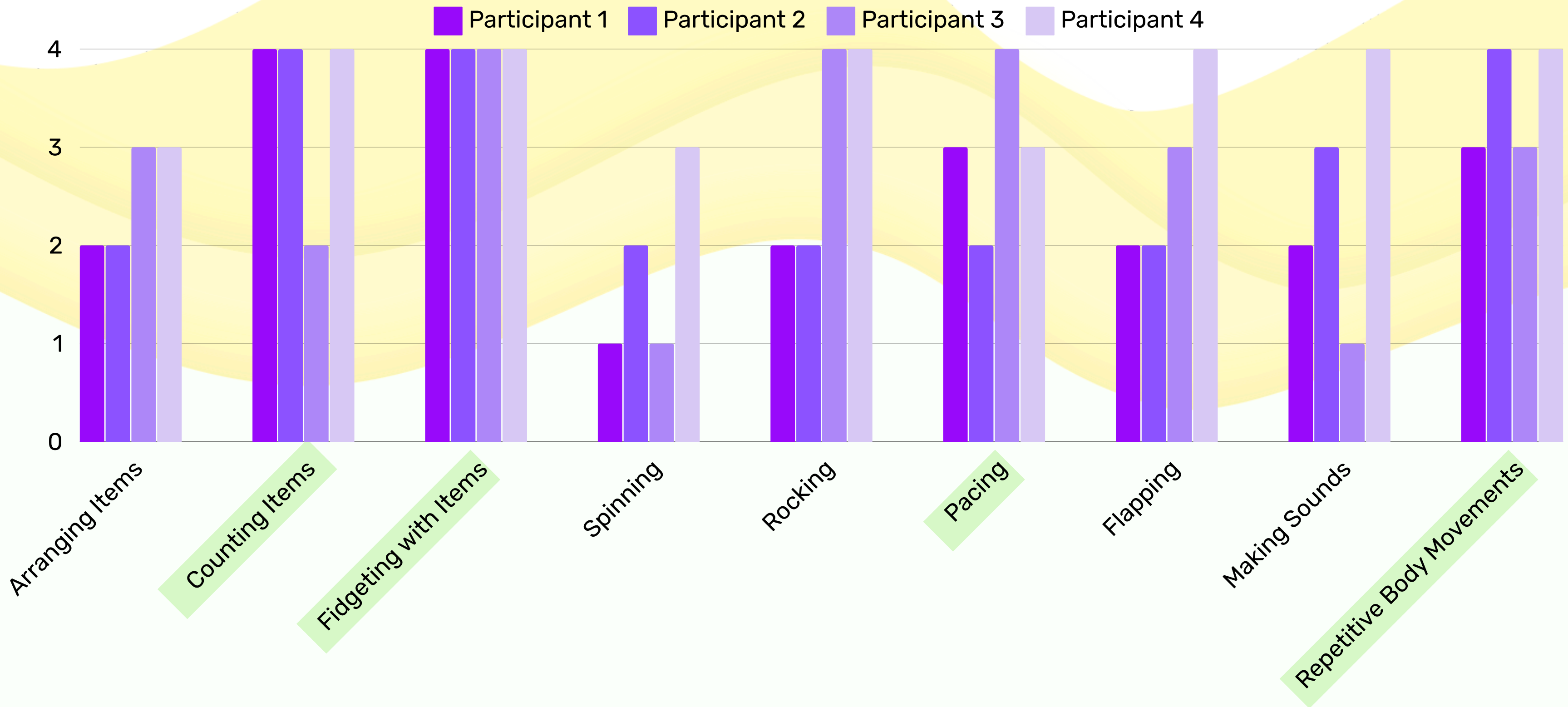
RELIGION



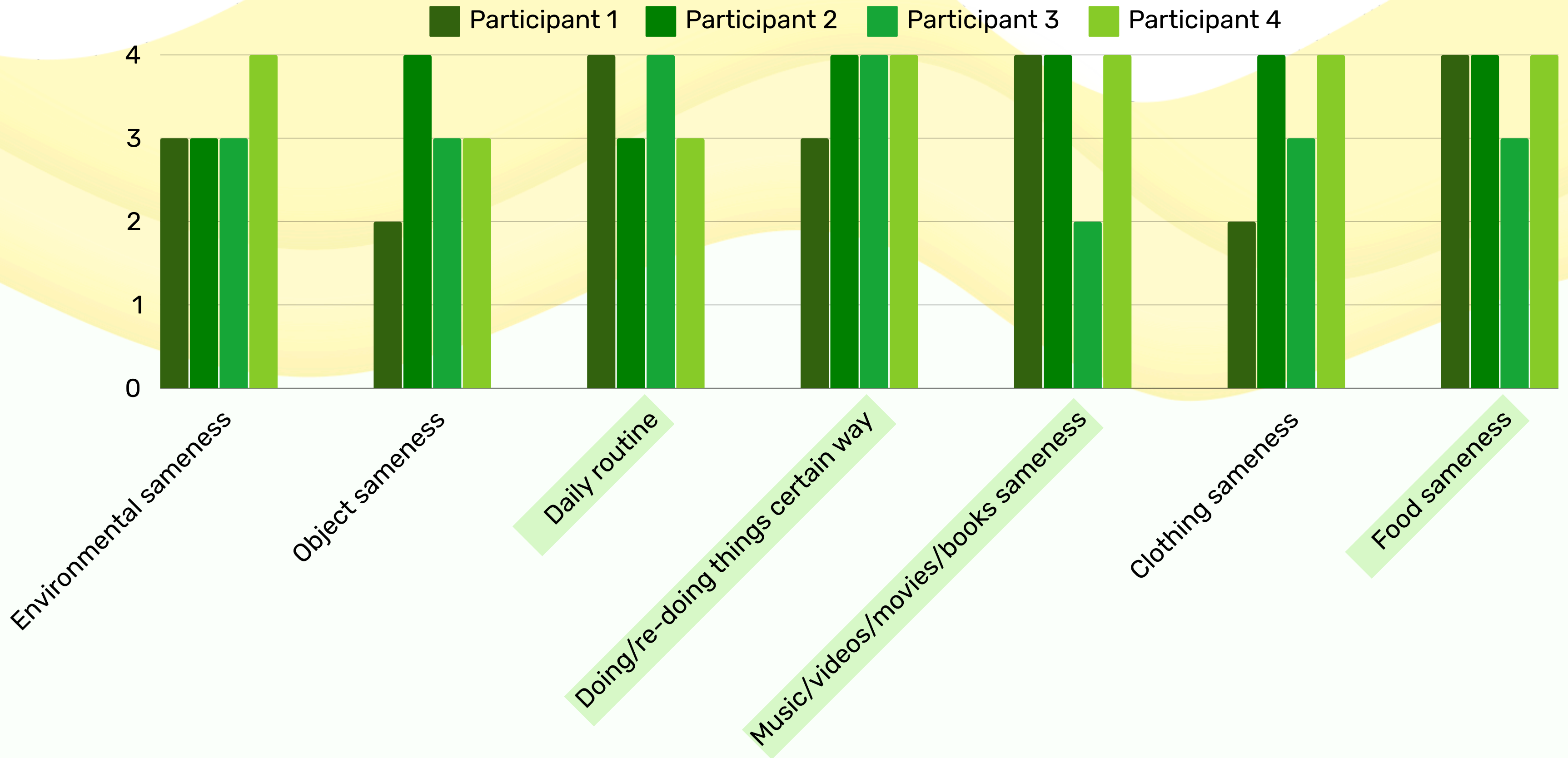
SOCIETY



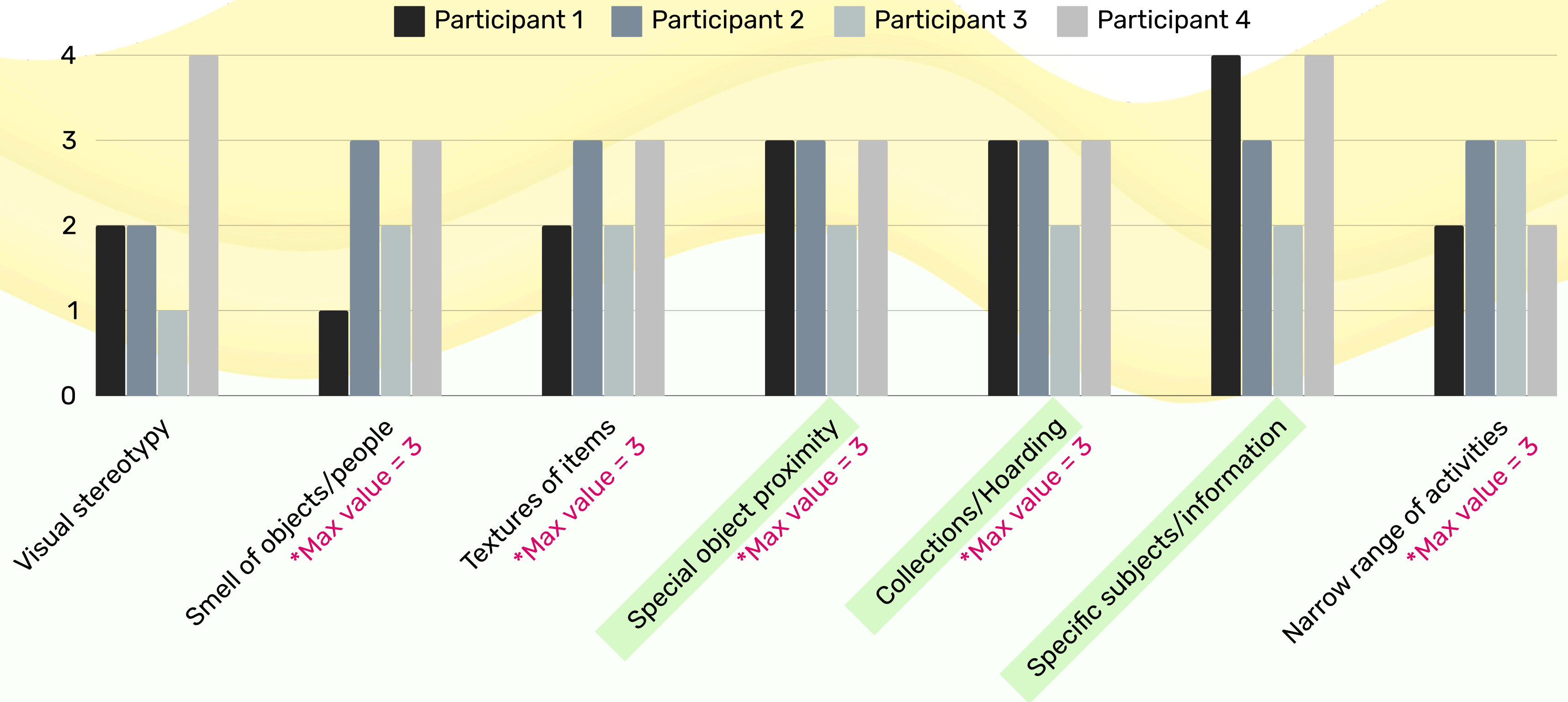
Repetitive Behaviors



Preference for Sameness



Special Interests



Discussion/Conclusions/Implications

LIMITATIONS

- Sample size
 - Pilot study
- Self-selection/convenience sample

STIMMING BEHAVIORS

- Fidgeting, counting, pacing, repetitive body movement
 - might not be flapping

PREFERENCE FOR SAMENESS

- Doing/re-doing, same food, daily routine, repetitive media

SPECIAL INTERESTS

- Collection, carrying special objects, specific categories of study or interest

FUTURE RESEARCH

Continue to seek **common expressive autistic traits** among genderqueer autistics AFAB to improve access to diagnosis; consider whether the relationship between autism and being genderqueer AFAB is strong enough to **call for autism assessment when present** in clinical settings.

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