“Do You Have Anything You Wanna Ask Me?”: Examining the Relationship between Questions and Conversational Enjoyment in Autistic and Non-Autistic Teens

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Background

- Asking questions during conversation is a social skill that is often targeted in autism interventions[3, 5, 6]
  - Non-autistic individuals report greater liking of conversation partners who ask more questions[1]
- Question asking differs in autistic individuals compared to non-autistic individuals[2]
  - Autistic children ask fewer questions than non-autistic children, and the types of questions they ask are qualitatively different[4]
- **However**, it remains unclear whether autistic individuals enjoy being asked questions during conversation
  - It is also unknown whether the effect of questions on conversational enjoyment differs by context
    - Ex., neurotype-matched vs. neurotype-mismatched peer interactions

Objectives

Measure associations between the **number of questions heard by participants** and **conversational enjoyment** in autistic and non-autistic teens during neurotype-matched and neurotype-mismatched conversations.

Hypothesis

Non-autistic participants will report **greater conversational enjoyment** when their conversation partners ask **more questions**, but this **might not be true for autistic participants.**

Methods

Participants

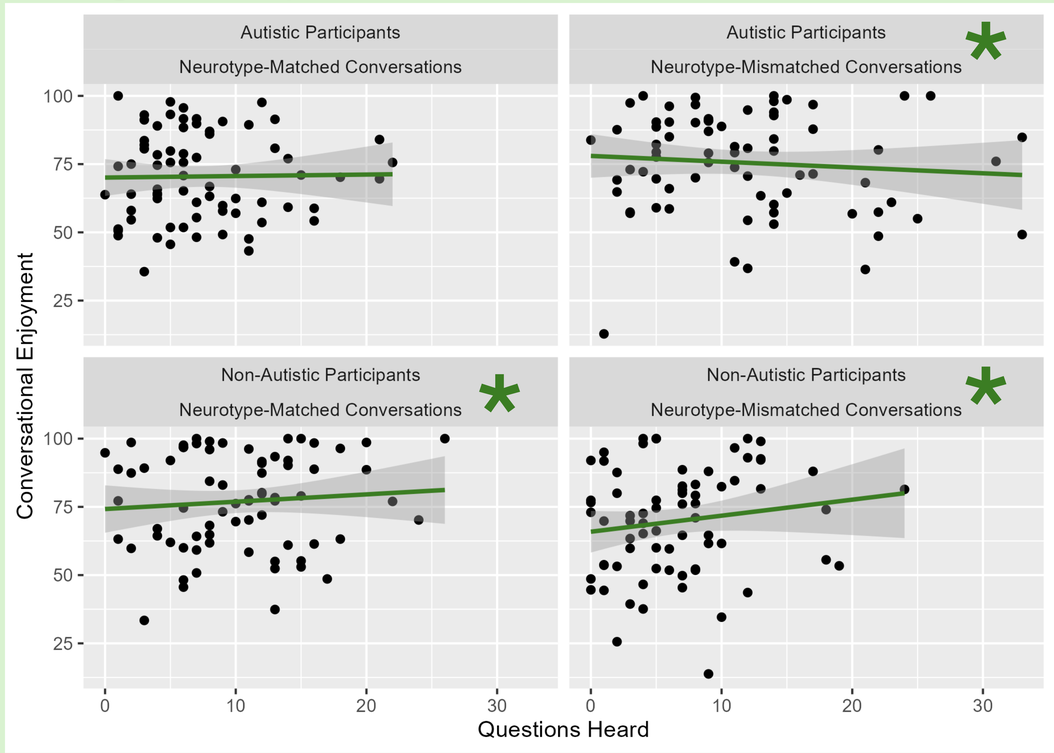
- 72 autistic teens
  - *M* age = 14.81 years, *SD* age = 1.20 years, *F* = 30
- 72 non-autistic teens
  - *M* age = 14.11 years, *SD* age = 1.74 years, *F* = 30
- Each teen participated in two conversations: one neurotype-matched and one neurotype-mismatched

Procedure

- During Zoom study visits, experimenters told pairs of teens to “chat and get to know each other”; experimenters turned their cameras off, and teens conversed for 6 minutes
- Participants rated the conversations according to 5 statements on a Likert scale from 1 (“completely disagree”) to 100 (“completely agree”)
  - “I felt interested in this conversation.”
  - “I felt comfortable talking to this person.”
  - “The conversation went smoothly.”
  - “I felt my partner cared about what I said.”
  - “I was able to get my points across.”
- Questions heard by each participant in each conversation were tallied by a trained human annotator

Results

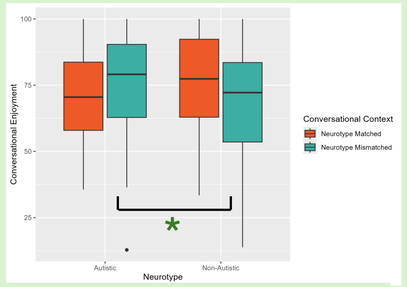
Questions heard significantly influence conversational enjoyment in autistic and non-autistic teenagers, dependent on conversational context.



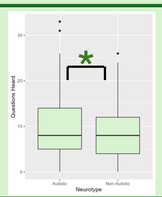
According to general linear models, questions heard had a **positive** effect on conversational enjoyment for **non-autistic** participants in **neurotype-matched** conversations (β = 0.003, *p* = .001) and in **neurotype-mismatched** conversations (β = 0.008, *p* < .001). Questions heard had a **negative** effect on conversational enjoyment for **autistic** participants in **neurotype-mismatched** conversations (β = −0.003, *p* < .001), and **no effect** in **neurotype-matched** conversations (β = 0.001, *p* = .53).

Preliminary analyses used general linear mixed-effects regressions controlling for participant and conversation.

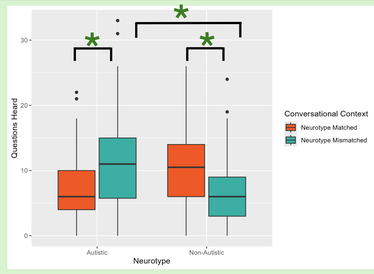
Non-autistic participants reported lower conversational enjoyment than autistic participants (β = -0.08, *p* = .03).



Additionally, there was a significant interaction between neurotype and conversational context on conversational enjoyment (β = −0.11, *p* =.04).



There is a significant effect of neurotype on questions heard, such that autistic participants heard more questions than non-autistic participants (β = −0.46, *p* <. 001)



Significant interaction between neurotype and neurotype-match on questions heard (β = −0.91, *p* < .001), driven by autistic participants in neurotype-mismatched conversations and non-autistic participants in neurotype-matched conversations, who heard significantly more questions. Supports prior findings that non-autistic individuals ask more questions than autistic individuals.

Discussion

- Non-autistic participants: questions heard **positively** impact enjoyment
- Results for autistic participants depended on conversational context
  - Neurotype-matched conversations: questions heard don’t impact enjoyment
  - Neurotype-mismatched conversations: questions heard **negatively** impact enjoyment
- It is important to extend our understanding of autistic people’s perspectives on questions to inform interventions and our general knowledge of communication
- Limitations
  - Small effect sizes
  - Data collection is ongoing
  - Data processing is ongoing and will provide more context (e.g., total speaking time)

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References & Acknowledgments

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