AchieveAbility

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Neurodiverse Voices: Calling for change from intersectional perspectives

Lead Editor: Professor Debra Kelly

Editors and Reviewers: Dr Ross Cooper, Dr Katherine Hewlett, David Hermanstein, Kevin Maskell, Becki Morris, Richard Pitts, Dr Melanie Thorley

Aims of the Journal

The **AchieveAbility E-Journal** is the research journal of AchieveAbility and shares the organisation's overall commitment to **promoting policy** and **delivering practice** for **successful educational**, **employment** and **training opportunities** for people who are neurodivergent and dyslexic.

In addition, the journal aims to:

- provide a forum for exchange and debate that informs policy, strategy and practice on Neurodiversity within our society
- support, promote and publish research-informed work of established and new academics and practitioners in the fields of education, training, employment, social justice and cultural change
- foster interdisciplinary work of Neurodivergent authors to find new audiences in the journal fields

Editorial Policy

While maintaining the research and editorial standards expected by more formal research-based journals, the *AchieveAbility E-Journal* takes an inclusive editorial policy to encourage the particular experience, original thinking and preferred communication styles, formats and media of contributors.

Peer Review and Editorial Process

The **AchieveAbility E-Journal** operates an Open Peer Review process with a panel composed of specialists in the field in accordance with the theme of each particular journal issue. All articles are peer-reviewed independently by those reviewers. Contributions selected for review receive a set of comments collated by the Editors to address before publication. These peer review and editorial processes are under continual monitoring to provide the best inclusive and consistent feedback for all our neurodivergent authors. The Editors reserve the right to exercise final editorial control in the interests of the overall coherence of each issue, while respecting the journal's policy of encouraging originality and preference in the forms of expression and format in the contributions submitted to the journal. All web link references supplied by authors have been published in good faith and we apologise if following publication in a few instances these may no longer be available.

Editorial Board

See **www.achievability.org.uk** for more details.

Guest Editors

Guest Editors may be invited to edit an issue of the journal by the Editorial Board, or may approach the Board with a proposal for a themed issue.

Publication Schedule

The **AchieveAbility E-Journal** is published annually in response to the issues and work being undertaken by AchieveAbility and its partner organisations. Its aim is to be timely and to intervene in current debates.

Contents

Welcome Statement

from the Patron and President of the Board of AchieveAbility

“I have a close personal interest in issues that affect autistic people and the wider neuro-divergent community, as well as a professional interest having previously chaired the Education Select Committee. As a result of this interest, alongside a cross-party, cross-sector group of Parliamentarians, autistic people, parents/carers, academics and health professionals, in 2016 I set up the Westminster Autism Commission.

Since 2012 I have been the Patron of the AchieveAbility charity. This third edition of the AchieveAbility journal is entirely devoted to neurodivergent authors. The quality and breadth of the voices that have contributed to this publication of *“Neurodiverse Voices: calling for change from intersectional perspectives”* is ground-breaking in the authenticity of their words. I am very pleased to provide my voice in support of this publication”

Barry Sheerman MP, December 2022

Foreword

from Tanya Zybutz, Dyslexia Co-ordinator, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

Welcome to the 3rd edition of the AchieveAbility E-Journal. The 'authentic voice' in calling for change is a timely theme and chimes deeply with my lived experience of heading a neurodiverse learners' unit in a Student Centre Team in Higher Education at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. But what exactly is the authentic voice? And whose positionality assesses the authenticity of this authentic voice?

There is much debate about labels gained through formal assessment – both the benefits and drawbacks – in our community. We know 'labels' in our current system, open access to DSA funding and all the benefits this can bring students. In this light, I like to talk to the students I meet about labels to liberate, to increase insight and understanding, but also as a way of reclaiming agency of processing differently and effectively that's enhanced through the IT, AT and specialist one-to-one support funded by the DSA. However, the students are increasingly sharing the idea that they feel the 'label' will enable them to feel authentic and that this is their primary motivation in going for an assessment. They believe the identification of a neuro-diverse 'condition' will validate the experiences they are having on their course and, almost as a secondary consideration, is the support that can be unlocked.

This has given me pause for reflection. Speaking with my valued colleague, Cheri Shone, I think she nails it when she speaks about the need for validation in terms of the students' educational marginalisation which has gaslighted their past experience of learning – the trauma of being schooled in a system seemingly designed to exclude, alienate and reduce self-esteem. Out of such validation comes the authentic voice; an informed understanding to scaffold the way we operate in the world and how the intersections of our neurodivergence (as defined by Kassiane Asasumasu) are configured. Such reclaiming of different brain processing involves developing bespoke, tailored strategies that celebrate individual ways of processing information and are, I believe, the vital first steps to authenticity.

This 3rd edition of the AchieveAbility E-journal profiles the authentic voices of neurodivergent authors and celebrates the reclaiming of different brain processing. The accompanying film by Dyspla profiles four of the authors and can be **accessed here**.

- **Lennie Varvarides**, the founder of Dyspla and award winning filmmaker, is one of our RCSSD alumni and so it is with great pleasure that we also introduce this film which includes my colleague Cheri Shone
- **Tanya Zybutz** co-ordinates the Dyslexia Service which she set up at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama twelve years ago. She has been a member of ADSHE (Dyslexia Tutors' Professional Body) since its inception and is a graduate of the first course (1993) to train dyslexia specialists in HE run by Ellen Morgan. Her special interests include the screening process in Higher Education, Professional Peer Supervision and, of course, the very specific challenges that face the dyslexic/dyspraxic training actor. Over the last five years, she has developed a keen interest in the role of mindfulness and how this practice can help a range of neuro-diverse students studying in HE, especially those in Conservatoire settings. Currently she is about to embark on a programme of academic support targeted to the needs of neuro-diverse staff who are engaged in submitting academic work for publication.

Tanya Zybutz Dyslexia Co-ordinator, The Royal Central School of Speech & Drama

Cheri Shone

"What is the authentic Neurodivergent voice? Is it a voice defined by processing, non sequential, scattergun, mispronounced? Hesitent, creative, inventive, confusing. What is authentic. Genuine. Original. Real. True. Rightful. Valid. Kosher. Pukka. Bona fide. Fully trustworthy according to the facts. What are facts? Something known to exist? Or something constructed with insight. An authentic voice changes with knowledge and shapeshifts through time."

Augmented Reality Holograms volumetrically captured and processed by DYSPLA. Humanities minds are a multitude of collaborative organisms that represent our sigular notion of consciousness. The ND brain is known to be particularly attuned. These works represent the collectivist nature of Neurodivergent cognition. Commissioned by Achieveability.

SCAN QR CODE FOR AUGMENTED REALITY

Calling for change from intersectional perspectives

This film produced by Dyspla profiles four of our neurodivergent authors for the third edition of the AchieveAbility journal. DYSPLA is an award winning arts organisation producing and developing the work of dyslexic and neurodivergent storymakers.

Lennie Varvarides founder of Dyspla is a former student of the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (RCSSD). The RCSSD host the virtual editions of the AchieveAbility E Journal. The foreword of this Journal has been written by Tanya Zybutz who co-ordinates the Dyslexia Service which she set up at The Royal Central School of Speech & Drama 12 years ago.

The imagery of the film has created a set of multidimensional visuals as a narrative for the overlayering intersectional perspectives of our neurodivergent voices in this journal. This film powerfully locates these voices within a multidimensional - neurodiverse framework.

These talking heads - who are all journal neurodivergent authors are:

- **Cheri Shone**, ND Consultancy, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, ADSHE, DNA Matters
- **Charles Freeman**, Director Charles Freeman Projects
- **Marcia Brissett-Bailey**, Author, SEND Expert, Neurodivergent and Dyslexic Advocate and Thinker
- **Lennie Varvarides**, Founder of DYSPLA and Advisory Member for the Mayor of London's Liberty Festival

These talking heads are an example of the diversity of our submissions. The journal is profiling 7 other authors. They are:

- **Ellie Thompson**, Communications Lead, Diversity and Ability
- **Sadia Mirza**, Trustee for Waltham Forest Dyslexia Association and Neurodiversity Advocate
- **Andrew Veasey**, FHEA, ADG FEHE as an Assistive Technology Trainer and Study Skills Lecturer, Assistive Solutions
- **Nola Sterling**, Beyond the Lens Podcast Producer, Research Associate for Design Against Crime Research Centre, Trustee at Clean Break and Women in Prison
- **Klaudia Matasovska**, PhD Candidate in Educational Sudies, Goldsmiths, University of London
- **Linda Pett**, AchieveAbility Advocate, retired Social Worker
- **Emma Louise Lane**, AchieveAbility Advocate and Creative Writing Facilitator, Recovery College, St Mungo's

Journal Lead Editor: **Professor Debra Kelly**

Editors and Reviewers: Dr Ross Cooper, Dr Katherine Hewlett, David Hermanstein, Kevin Maskell, Becki Morris, Richard Pitts, Dr Melanie Thorley

Introduction

Debra Kelly, Professor Emerita, School of Humanities, University of Westminster, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, Centre for *Language Acts and Worldmaking* King's College London,

Welcome to this 3rd edition of the AchieveAbility E-Journal in which the Editorial Board has achieved an ambition of bringing together a collective of neurodivergent authors. Each voice here calls for change across a range of diverse intersectional perspectives.

As our first contributor points out, there has been an increasingly widespread use of the term intersectionality. The term originated at the beginning of the 1990s in the academic field and in the particular context of the discrimination faced by Black women due to a combination – the intersection – principally of race and gender, but also of social class, (dis)ability and sexuality. A now broadened definition of intersectionality is generally accepted as being the study of overlapping, or intersecting, social identities and related systems of oppression, domination and discrimination; intersections then, not only of social identities and experiences, but also of injustice.

What follows here are a series of interventions which are at once informed by research and analysis and rooted in the personal experiences, in the professional and everyday lives and in the practices of neurodivergent people. This collective of voices therefore offers deep theoretical reflection on and practical insight into the complexities and realities of intersectional neurodivergent experiences.

Each of our authors demonstrates the ways in which neurodivergence is intertwined with multiple other aspects of identity and experience. A number of societal, professional and personal challenges encountered by neurodivergent people are discussed and analysed from varied perspectives or intersectional experiences: that of being differently abled; of equality, diversity and inclusion; of the experience of the workplace; of shame and trauma; of autism; of race; of gender; of sexuality; of dyslexia.

Overlapping conditions, layers of experiences, patterns of behaviour and the barriers posed by society are carefully teased out, terminology is clarified and exemplified, policy and attitudes are questioned and challenged, new ways of confronting and overcoming those barriers are debated.

The AchieveAbility E-Journal encourages contributions in varied formats and we move from the written text to the visual and video-based, ending with creative storytelling which embodies a neurodivergent aesthetic.

These neurodivergent voices make an urgent call for change from many intersectional perspectives; together they compel careful listening.

“If it’s not intersectional, it’s not relevant”: The importance of an intersectional perspective on disability and neurodiversity

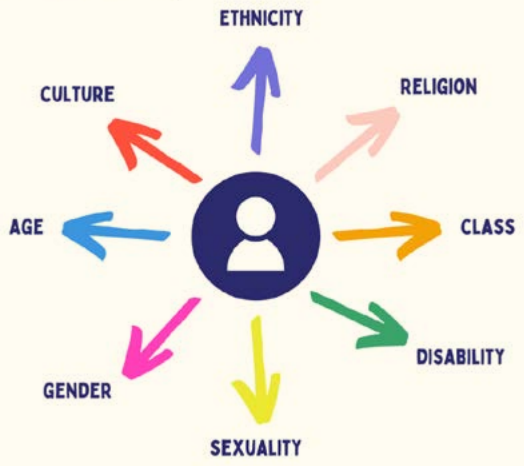
Ellie Thompson, Communications Lead, Diversity and Ability

We are seeing a surge in use of the term intersectionality outside the academic fields to which it has previously been limited.

When Kimberlé Crenshaw first coined it *(Crenshaw, 1991)*, she used the term to highlight the reality that the discrimination she and other Black women face is not solely related to their race, or gender, but to a combination of both. What Crenshaw brought academic attention to, and is now being understood more widely, is that the different aspects of our identity do not exist separately from each other. Instead, they combine and overlap to create different modes of discrimination and privilege.

Our experiences of neurodiversity and disability are similarly intertwined with other aspects of our identity, each of them, and all of them together, impacting the barriers that are presented to us by an exclusionary world.

D&A Diversity and Ability



What is the impact of this?

Enforcing calculations about what we can and cannot mask, and when

Some aspects of our diversity are always more noticeable than others. For example, our gender and skin colour will often, although certainly not always, be apparent before we even introduce ourselves. But often, although not always, our neurodiversity may not be evident until you’ve got to know us. In a world that is welcoming and inclusive to so few of us, research has shown that individuals often do what they can to hide, downplay, or cover any aspect of themselves that makes them different to the socially enforced norm *(Deloitte, 2013)*.

If we have multiple differences, we’ll often notice which ones are harder to mask and use this information to decide how we can best assimilate with the norm. Atif Choudhury, (CEO, Diversity and Ability) shares how he navigated this calculation as a young person:

> **As a brown man with dyslexia, struggling to fit in with a different language and culture was enough to contend with, but different skin colour was non-maskable for a child that wanted to fit in. Having to contend with a learning difference on top was too much to feel any pride. I was born in the context of learning isolation and confidence and self-esteem are easy casualties, especially when thinking differently was rarely rewarded and especially from people who looked so different from me *(Choudhury, 2020)*.**

Individuals may even be forced to mask in order to access vital aspects of their life. For example, for those who exist at the intersection of neurodiversity and/or disability, and being LGBTQ+, there is a common experience of feeling the need to choose which aspect of identity to share in a particular space; LGBTQ+ people who employ carers or personal assistants report avoiding revealing their sexual identity due to concern about risking access to support they rely on *(Equality Network, 2006)*.

Access to diagnosis and support

Under a social model of disability, we focus not on an individual’s diagnosis, but on the barriers they face in being able to access and participate in the world *(Inclusion London, 2015)*. This is in contrast to a medical model of disability, which places diagnosis at the centre of our experience and sees disability as a deficit that is inherent to a disabled person.

The social model is increasing in popularity as our collective focus moves away from diagnosis and deficit to understanding the barriers people face and how we can work to remove them. However, diagnoses remain an important aspect of our neurodiverse experiences and are still often the key to unlocking adaptations, services, and tools that break down barriers *(Kirby, 2020)*.

However, not everyone has equal access to the diagnoses they may need to survive and thrive. Our intersectional identities impact our ability not just to understand ourselves and neurodiversity, but also our ability to successfully pursue a diagnosis once we’ve reached a level of self-understanding.

“If it’s not intersectional, it’s not relevant”: The importance of an intersectional perspective on disability and neurodiversity

Ellie Thompson, Communications Lead, Diversity and Ability

Here are a few examples of how individuals may experience intersectional barriers to diagnosis:

- **Racism and racial stereotypes** can influence diagnostic assessors and psychiatrists into attributing behaviours to ethnic or cultural factors. For example, research found that paediatricians attributed communication differences in children from Black, Asian and non-white ethnic minority backgrounds to their ethnicity when White children presenting with the same differences would likely receive a diagnosis of autism *(Begeer et al, 2008)*.
- **Autism** has traditionally been conceptualised as an ‘extreme’ version of the male brain *(Furfaro, 2019)* and research has historically been carried out on male-dominated or exclusively male samples *(Kirby, 2021)*. As such, diagnostic processes seem to have a male bias, creating barriers for women to access diagnoses *(Wilson et al, 2016)*.
- **Class and socioeconomic background** impact the ability to access a neurodiversity diagnosis. Often people who experience socioeconomic disadvantage will have a delayed diagnosis or not be able to access one at all *(Able, 2007)*.

The myth of “I know how you feel”

When individuals do not ‘fit in’ with the dominant, accepted culture due to marginalised aspects of their identity, we often witness the formation of new co-cultures *(Hebdige, 1979)* or countercultures *(Egner, 2019)*. These can be defined as cultures that form between those who are excluded from the majority or dominant culture, usually centred around one shared characteristic, identity or experience *(Hebdige, 1979)*.

However, communities can in themselves focus solely on one aspect of identity, assuming a shared homogenous experience that can often neglect other intersectional experiences of disadvantage *(Botha and Gillespie-Lynch, 2022)*. This in turn leads to the exclusion of individuals who experience intersectional disablement from communities that were created by and for those with marginalised identities *(Egner, 2019)*.

We need to recognise that even within communities that form due to shared experiences of marginalisation, there is no universal shared experience. We can, and should, improve the inclusion of our spaces by keeping intersectionality at the forefront of conversations and acknowledging where even those voices within our community are being marginalised or ignored *(von Koettlitz, 2019)*.

“If it’s not intersectional, it’s not relevant”: The importance of an intersectional perspective on disability and neurodiversity

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Systemic inequity and injustice

In an intersectionally exclusionary society, the damage is felt on both an individual and universal scale. Establishing communities that do not make space for everyone contributes to national and global ill. Take, for example, the disability employment gap which was 28.4% in 2021 *(Department for Work and Pensions, 2021)*. It is evident that disabled people face additional barriers in accessing work when compared to non-disabled people (ibid). However, the barriers faced by individuals accessing work intersect. It has been found that disabled women were significantly less likely to be employed than both disabled men and non-disabled women *(Kim, Skinner and Parish, 2019)*. In addition, those who were employed were less likely to be in supervisory positions (ibid).

The impacts of exclusion cannot be understated and often link to individual and community-level trauma. Conversations about intersectionality are conversations about base-level safety and survival. There are deep, dangerous failings not just in the way society functions, but also in the way the concept of inclusion is approached and understood:

Can we justify that Black people are more than 4 times as likely as White people to be detained under the Mental Health Act? (NHS Digital, 2021). And how can we fathom the disproportionate overrepresentation of Black and ethnic minority groups in the criminal justice system? People of minority ethnicities make up 27% of the prison population compared with 13% of the general population in 2021 *(Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2021*). Meanwhile, half of those entering prison could reasonably be expected to be neurodiverse *(Sturge, 2021)*. So if we cross-reference these known facts, we deduce that Black neurodiverse people are among the most excluded, marginalised groups in our society *(Choudhury, 2022)*.

“If it’s not intersectional, it’s not relevant”: The importance of an intersectional perspective on disability and neurodiversity

Ellie Thompson, Communications Lead, Diversity and Ability

How can we ensure an intersectional perspective on neurodiversity?

The good news is that our understanding of neurodiversity has its very foundations in intersectionality.

When Judy Singer coined the term neurodiversity in the 1990s, she did so with a recognition that neurodiverse experiences form one aspect of the intersectional realities we face as we move through the world *(Singer, 2017; Botha and Gillespie-Lynch, 2022)*. What can we do to better acknowledge the intersections of our neurodiversity?

1) Commit to a social model of disability

Under a social model, our focus shifts from talking about disabilities to talking about disablement. The language of **disablement** allows for an acknowledgement that individuals do not have deficits but are instead actively **being disabled** by an environment and society that excludes them *(Thompson, 2021)*. Under this understanding, it is not just health conditions or physical differences that are met with these barriers; it is any experience of marginalisation: “Disablement can be considered a social construct […] If you apply the same line of thought to a person of colour living in a racist world, they are also ‘disabled’ by the daily struggles of fighting against racism and systems that weren’t built with them in mind” *(von Koettlitz, 2020)*.

One of the main ways we can show our commitment to intersectional inclusion is by upholding a social model of disability, and acknowledging the intersectionally disabling barriers individuals and groups face in accessing society.

2) Whose voices are you listening to?

It is not enough for your panels, boards or employee resource groups to be neurodiverse; they need to be diverse in gender, race, class, age, and all other experiences through which individuals experience marginalisation. Interrogate your neurodiversity work to ensure it is truly diverse, and that you’re making space for all neurodiverse voices.

3) See everyone as an individual

Remember that there is no homogeneous experience of neurodiversity. In last year’s *AchieveAbility E-journal*, we discussed how we can avoid the harmful problematisation of difference by creating an anticipatory welcome where we expect and celebrate diversity in all its forms *(Thompson, 2021)*. But although an inclusive culture reduces the level of disclosure and self-advocacy required of employees, there is still no such thing as a ‘one size fits all’ inclusive environment. It is essential to make space for everyone to share their individual needs, working styles and preferences: “Our window to the world shapes the world we live in, paints that world, and makes us far from neutral in any situation we find ourselves in” *(Choudhury, 2022)*.

An intersectional approach truly is the only relevant one. We have the opportunity to advocate for a world that doesn’t consider neurodiversity in isolation but acknowledges it as one aspect of our complex and unique lived experience. Let’s take that opportunity.

▷ Link to document references

Neurodiversity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the Levelling Up Agenda

Charles Freeman, Director Charles Freeman Projects

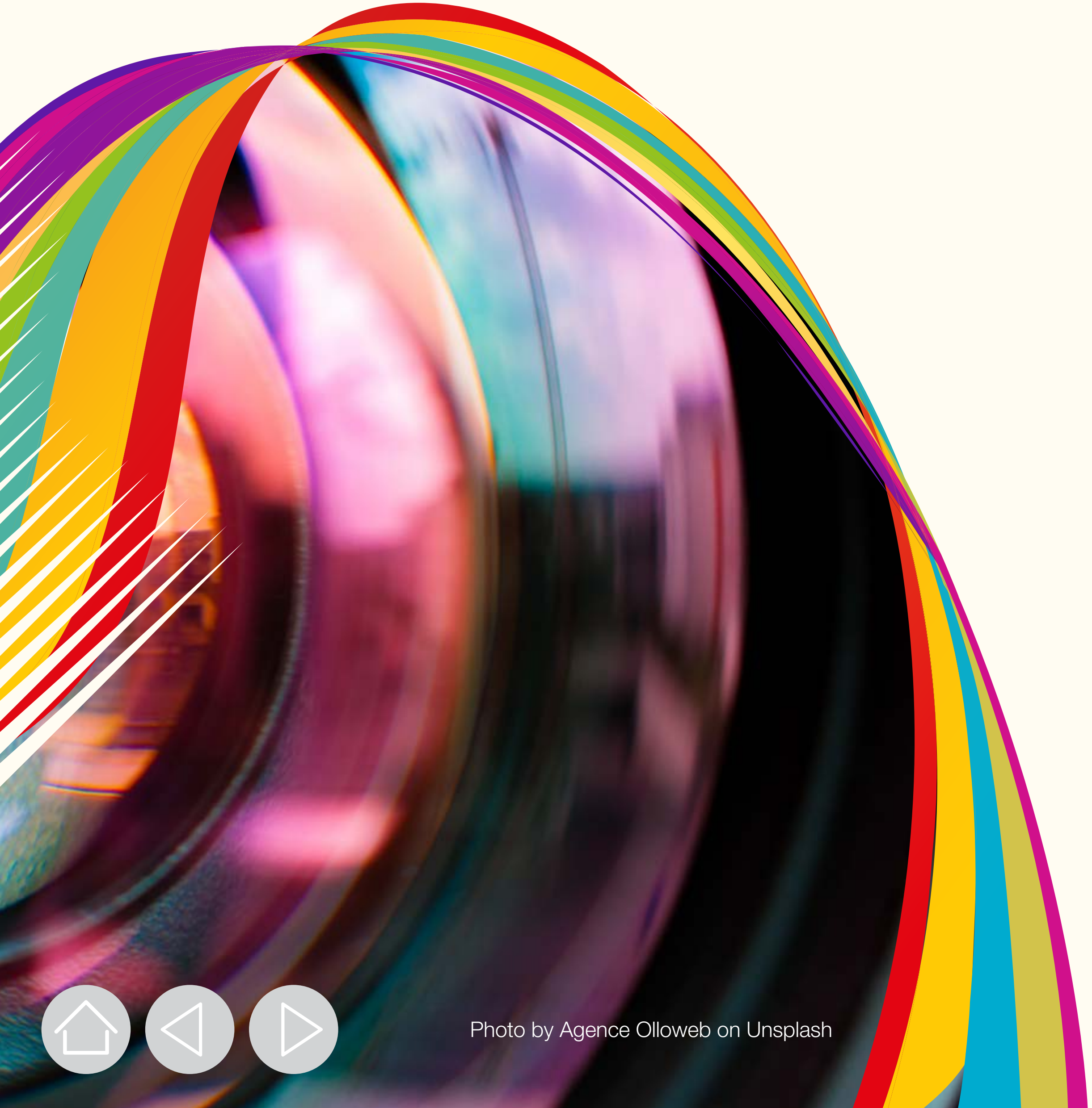

Photo by Agence Olloweb on Unsplash

Neurodiversity is seldom viewed through the lens of economics. Yet, economic history and economic geography add a vital dimension to the discussions about Neurodiversity and Social Justice.

This contribution seeks to illustrate the way this can be approached:.

- Changes in the Labour Market transformed normal and frequently beneficial human differences into disabilities which can exclude Neurodivergent People (ND) from good quality jobs.
- The people first to perceive the risk of exclusion were those with an expectation that their children would get a professional job. Neurodivergence has consequently had a paradoxical relationship with other elements of the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda.
- This association of neurodivergence with people from professional backgrounds helped make it acceptable for Government to deny access to diagnosis and support. This denial of access to support has amplified inequalities and the risks of ND people being excluded from the labour market.

Defining Terms

The understanding of issues relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion have evolved through time *(UK Diversity Timeline, 2022)*. A Glossary of Terms is provided below.

Changes in the workplace have driven an agenda forcing up levels of education attainment.

Successive industrial revolutions have changed the way we work. Progressively through time, employers have needed workers who are increasingly adaptable so that businesses could take advantage of new technology. The changes in technology used in the work place have driven changes in the education system.

Table 1 - Industrial Revolutions

(adapted from Institute of Entrepreneurship Development, 2022)

Industrial Revolution	Rough Date	Driver	Technology Change	Change In work Mode
1st	**1765**	Steam	Increased mechanisation	Reduced agriculture and craft, increased mining and primary industry more collective working.
2nd	**1870**	Gas & Oil	Increased mobility and technological advancement	Growth of factory working.
3rd	**1969**	Electricity and Telecoms	Use of electronic telecommunications and computers	Growth of Office Work and the Service Economy.
4th	**2000**	Information Technology	Use of data digital technology and the internet	Reduction in secretarial staff, self-supporting employees expected to use tech devices.

Governments responded to the changing needs of the economy by first introducing compulsory education, then raising the school leaving age, introducing a national curriculum, and setting targets to increase the numbers of young people attending higher education. This has led employers to require job applicants to obtain increasingly higher levels of accredited qualifications.

Table 2 - Growth in Qualifications and Highly Skilled Jobs 1960-2020

Year	% of Population with 5 GCSE Equivalents *(House of Commons., 2012)*	% Of Population in Higher Education *(House of Commons., 2012)*	% Of Workforce working in Professional Scientific or Technical Jobs[1] (often taken as a proxy for graduate jobs) *(Office of National Statistics, 2019)*
1960 - 1979	20%	8 %	23%
2000 - 2020	80%	(50 %(BBC, 2019))	36%

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[1] Graduate Jobs defined to include Professional, Scientific and Technical, Public Administration and Defence, Banking and Insurance.

Changes in the economy have caused ND conditions to become increasingly visible

The estimated percentage of ND people in the population (frequently stated to be between 15% and 20%; *Montvelisky, 2021*) is based on the testing thresholds used to assess for neurodivergent conditions in the population rather than by counting the number of ND people who have been assessed *(Kirby, 2022).* In theory, if the tests and criteria remain constant, the estimated incidence in the population will be constant through time. Furthermore, the incidence of dyslexia and other ND conditions is thought to be roughly equal regardless of socio-economic group, gender, or ethnicity *(International Dyslexia Association, 2022)*.

The number of people who get assessed as having an ND condition is substantially below the estimated incidence in the population. The British Dyslexia Association estimates that 10% of the population are dyslexic. However, they report that only 20% of dyslexic pupils are diagnosed in school *(BBC, 2019)*. In Higher Education the gap is smaller, 6.5% of students are identified as having neurodivergent conditions, but this is still only 45% of the estimated 15% of the total population who are ND *(House of Commons, 2021)*.[2] A large percentage of these students are assessed and access support for the first time while at university.

The percentage of ND people who have been assessed has not remained constant through time. In his history of dyslexia, Philip Kirby notes the first cases of dyslexia were observed in the 1870s *(Kirby, 2018)*. This was roughly the time the number of children attending school was starting to increase. Prior to 1870, ND people in the labour force were largely invisible. ND traits may have been viewed as eccentricities (leading to stories of 'nutty professors') but did not lead to exclusion from employment. Indeed, Helen Taylor argues that the different ND thinking styles have been essential to human evolution and the development of human society *(Taylor, 2022)*.

Philip Kirby then notes that in the UK research and interest in dyslexia drifted between the wars, before taking off in the 50s, 60s and 70s. The History of ADHD is similar with a significant growth in the number of cases being diagnosed in the 1990s *(Edge Foundation, 2018)*. The number of cases of Autism Spectrum Condition increased by nearly 800% between 1998 and 2018 *(University of Exeter, 2021)*.

Philip Kirby rightly ascribes the increased awareness of dyslexia (and other ND conditions) to activist parents. However, less attention has been given to changes in the economy. The growth of the knowledge-based economy during the 3rd and 4th industrial revolution, has led to an increased requirement to obtain qualifications. Changing Human Resource Management Policy has also placed growing emphasis on compliance with behavioural norms *(Morgan, 1986)*. This in turn has increased pressure on ND people making it harder for them to succeed at school or in the workplace without support.

ND people who happily, and semi-invisibly, held professional jobs in previous generations and were not diagnosed (often the White male 'nutty professors') have been forced to become visible, seek support or have even been squeezed out *(Freeman, 2021)*. In keeping with the social model of disability *(Doyle, 2020)*, ND people have not changed but have increasingly been disadvantaged by changes in the economy and society. Hence while in terms of gender and ethnicity the professional labour force in the UK has become more diverse since the 1970s, in terms of neurodiversity it is probably more homogeneous than was the case in the 1950s.

The demographic profile of people who gain access support for ND conditions tend to mirror the demographic profile of people obtaining professional employment.

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[2] Note ND students taken as sum of students with Specific Leaning Difficulties (34% of all students with disabilities) plus Students with Communication Difficulties / Autistic Spectrum Condition (4%) total 38% of the 17% of students who disclose a disability = 6.5% of the student population. Note also assuming dyslexic students do not have a higher propensity to go to university than the rest of the population, these figures suggest more dyslexic students are assessed at while in Further Education or Higher Education than were assessed at school.

Neurodiversity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the Levelling Up Agenda

Charles Freeman, Director Charles Freeman Projects

During the past 50 years the demographic profile of people entering professional occupations has changed significantly. In many ways it has become more equitable, particularly in relation to gender. However, top jobs are still on average more likely to be held by White men living in relatively prosperous areas. The same pattern exists in terms of young people who can access assessments and support for ND conditions. This suggests biases in the education system and capacity to navigate a hostile environment, influence who gets support, rather than the actual incidence of ND conditions in society.

Table 3 - Senior Civil Service Employment

(The Social Mobility Commission, 2021) incidence in population in brackets[3]

	Male	Female	BAME	Working Class
1996	83%	17%	4% (7%)	18% approx.
2020	54%	46%	9% (14%)	18% (39%)

Table 4 - Demographic Profile of Entry Level Solicitors

(Solicitors Regulatory Authority, 2017)

	Male	Female
1970s	90%	10%
2016	40%	60%

	BAME
1982	0.25%
2016	14%

In the 1970s it was estimated that as many as five times more boys were dyslexic than girls *(Critchley, 1970)*. Very little data was collected relating to the incidence of dyslexia by ethnicity, but as Amanda Kirby notes "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence" *(Kirby, 2020)*.

Similarly in terms of economic geography, access to professional occupations remains significantly lower in areas with high levels of deprivation than is the case in more affluent areas (*The Social Mobility Commission, 2020*; see Table 5).

The Joseph Roundtree Foundation investigated the relationship between Special Educational needs and poverty. In their report they note that while in most instances the highest concentrations of pupils with special educational needs are located in neighbourhoods with the highest levels of poverty, the highest incidence of assessed dyslexia tends to be found in affluent areas.

The Roundtree report goes on to explain this in terms of a significant level of under diagnosis of dyslexia in areas with high levels of poverty. *(Joseph Roundtree Foundation, 2016)*. The Roundtree study also shows that 50% of children with SEND status living in poverty have a label relating to behaviour. Amanda Kirby points out that an undiagnosed ND condition is often a cause for children being given this label *(Kirby, 2022)*.

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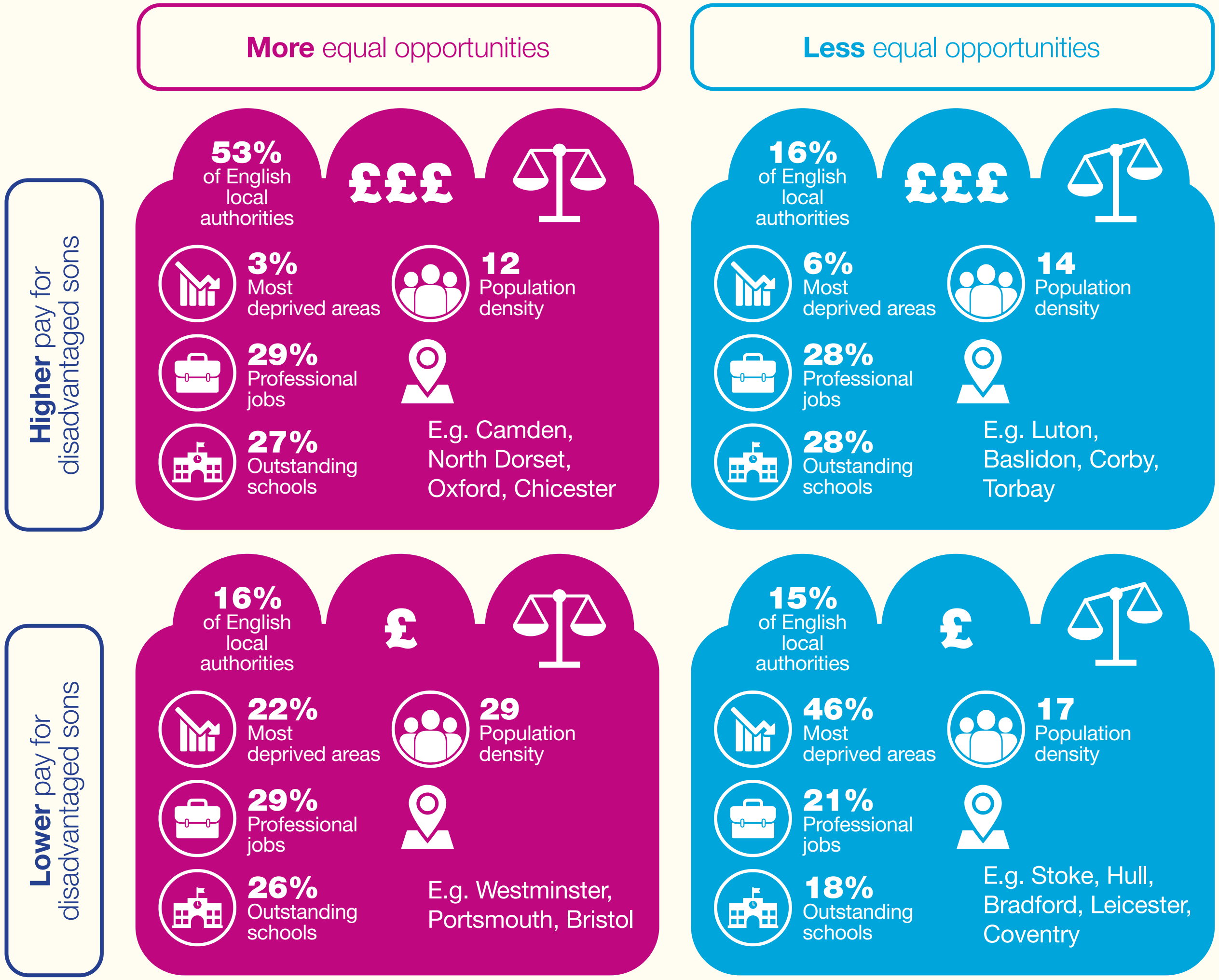
[3] Note the representation of BAME and working class population in total UK population is stated in brackets.

Neurodiversity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the Levelling Up Agenda

Charles Freeman, Director Charles Freeman Projects

Table 5 - Disadvantage and Equality of Opportunity Across Areas

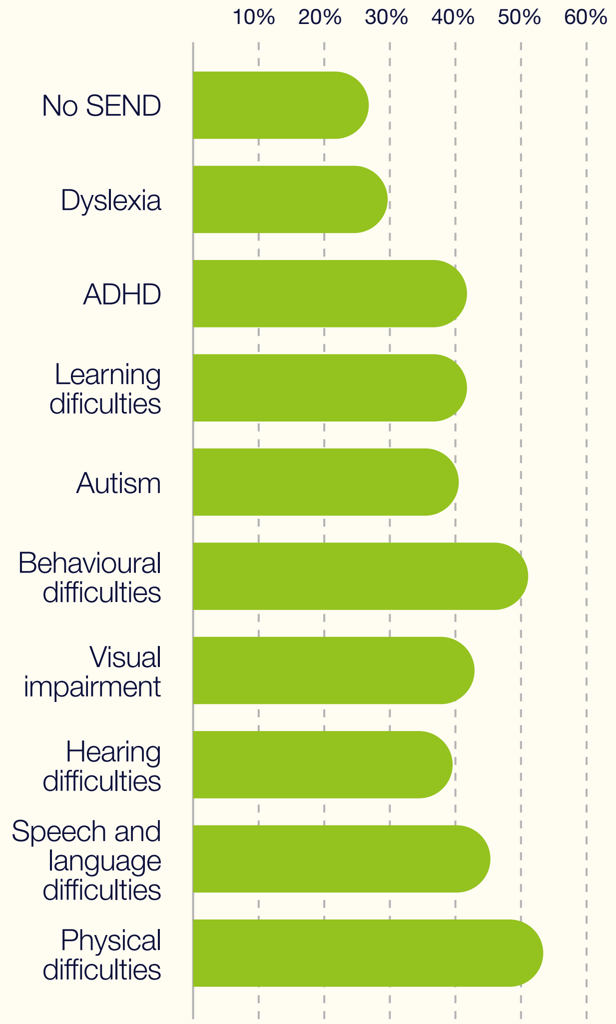
(The Social Mobility Commission, 2020)



	More equal opportunities	**Less** equal opportunities
Higher pay for disadvantaged sons	53% of English local authorities £££ 3% Most deprived areas 12 Population density 29% Professional jobs 27% Outstanding schools E.g. Camden, North Dorset, Oxford, Chicester	16% of English local authorities £££ 6% Most deprived areas 14 Population density 28% Professional jobs 28% Outstanding schools E.g. Luton, Baslidon, Corby, Torbay
Lower pay for disadvantaged sons	16% of English local authorities £ 22% Most deprived areas 29 Population density 29% Professional jobs 26% Outstanding schools E.g. Westminster, Portsmouth, Bristol	15% of English local authorities £ 46% Most deprived areas 17 Population density 21% Professional jobs 18% Outstanding schools E.g. Stoke, Hull, Bradford, Leicester, Coventry

Table 6- Percentage of children living in Income poverty at 9 months by SEND Status

(Joseph Roundtree Foundation, 2016)



ND people most at risk of social exclusion live in the most deprived areas.

The demographic profile of ND people most at risk of the worst outcomes in terms of unemployment, school exclusion and justice system interventions is, however, concentrated in the most deprived areas, as these negative outcomes are concentrated in these areas.

In a report to HM inspectorate of Probation, Amanda Kirby notes that 25% of unemployed people and one third of people facing justice system interventions are neurodivergent, although in most instances undiagnosed *(Her Majestries Inspectorate of Probation, 2021)*. Separately, Kirby points out a very high suspected incidence of neurodivergence among young people who face exclusion from school *(BBC News - Wales, 2020)*.

The highest levels of Unemployment, School Exclusions and Justice Interventions are to be found in the most deprived neighbourhoods. 40% of people on out-of-work benefits live in the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods *(HM Government, 2010)*. Similarly, higher rates of school exclusions are seen in areas of deprivation. Pupils going to school in the 10% most deprived areas experience a permanent exclusion rate was 0.12 per cent and a fixed period rate of 7.1 per cent. This compares with 0.07 per cent and 3.41 per cent respectively for those going to school in the 10% least deprived areas *(Department for Education, 2019)*. Literature also highlights the complex relationship between crime and poverty. Young people living in deprived communities, who are not in education or employment or training, are at much higher risk of facing justice interventions than their contemporaries *(Justice Matters, 2015).*

Table 7- Percentage of 16-to-64-year-olds, who were unemployed and not in full-time education, by ethnicity and qualification level
(Office for National Statistics, 2020)

Highest qualification held	All	Asian	Black	Mixed	White	Other
All	3%	4%	6%	5%	3%	4%
Level 4 and above	2%	4%	6%	3%	2%	3%
Level 3	3%	6%	7%	6%	3%	8%
Level 2	3%	5%	7%	6%	3%	9%
Below Level 2	5%	7%	10%	11%	4%	6%

Table 7 illustrates the impact of multiple disadvantages. In the 25% most deprived areas 45% of the population achieve level 3 qualifications, in the 25% least deprived areas 70% of the population achieve level 3 qualifications. *(Department For Education, 2020)* Minority populations also tend to be more likely to live in deprived neighbourhoods. In the 10% most deprived areas 16% of the population are Asian and 15% Black *(Gov.uk, 2020)*.Overall, the Asian population makes up 8% of UK total population and Black community 3.5%. *(Office for National Statistics, 2019)*.

Policy which makes it difficult to access assessment and support for ND conditions amplifies disadvantage.

Philip Kirby draws attention to the “struggle for recognition” of dyslexia *(Kirby, 2018)*. A similar struggle has occurred in relation to other ND conditions. Kirby is candid in explaining that one of the reasons why the Department for Education was reluctant to allow recognition of dyslexia was economic. The Government did not wish to find funding to support the 10% of the population who were dyslexic.

This battle continues to this day. The current Government is proposing further changes which will make it more difficult for parents to challenge decisions relating to the provision of special educational needs (*The Guardian, 2022*). In essence a hostile environment has been established. Parents seeking support for ND children frequently have to fight the Local Authority, pay for assessments *(Dyslexia Compass - EU funded Report, 2022)* and take cases to tribunals. This significantly disadvantages people with limited financial resources or experience of legal process.

Table 8 – Everyone is neurodiverse; roughly 15 to 20% of the population have neurodivergent conditions, roughly 50% undiagnosed; the worst outcomes in terms of school exclusion, unemployment, homelessness and justice interventions appear to be concentrated among those people who have not been assessed.

Everyone is Neurodiverse %A +%B+C% =100%

A% have different thinking styles but do not have neurodivergent conditions.	**B%** have ND traits but don’t meet criteria for Diagnosis (Balls in Buckets) *(Kirby, 2022)*	**%C** an estimated 1 in 7 in the Population meet criteria for ND diagnosis *(Roberts, 2022)* **X% +Y% +Z% =Total of ND people.**
All Unassessed	All unassessed	**X%** - ND People unaware they are ND, Successful may never find out they are ND or be assessed unless a Child is Diagnosed.
		Y% - Between 20% *(BBC, 2019)* and 50% *(House of Commons , 2021)* of ND people are assessed
		Z% - Unassessed ND but struggling. Worst outcomes in terms of Low Education Attainment, Unemployment, Homelessness and Justice Interventions found in this group , who are disproportionately located in the most deprived neighbourhoods. *(Her Majestries Inspectorate of Probation, 2021)*

The consequences of this policy of non-recognition and denial of support have been disastrous in terms of equality and inclusion. A gulf has opened between the life chances of ND people, who are able to access support and those who are not. The 20% of ND young people from largely professional families who assess support in schools, mostly go on to achieve 4 GCSE passes and live successful working lives. The ND people most at risk of the severest negative consequences tend to go unassessed, tend to live in deprived neighbourhoods and are disproportionately drawn from minority populations.

The equation of costs and benefits in relation to provision of support has also changed. In the 1970s the risk of someone who did not achieve 4 GCSE passes being excluded from the labour market was relatively low. At that time this group made up 80% of the labour force. However, in 2020, the unemployment rate for the 20% of people without 4 GCSES was nearly twice that experienced by people who have achieved 4 passes (see Table 7).

The life cycle costs of not providing support to ND people in terms of benefit costs, health interventions and possible justice interventions, significantly exceeds the costs of early interventions *(BBC, 2019).* Amanda Kirby notes that early assessment of ND conditions could save the prison system alone over £400m per year *(Kirby, 2022)*. The University of York estimated in 2010 that the life cycle cost of non-intervention to support an autistic person, who is not in employment education or training, to be over £200k per person *(Coles et al., 2010)*.

The economic case for adopting an approach of proportionate universalism *(Allison, 2021)* in relation to Neurodiversity Assessment and Support is now extremely strong. Universal assessment and support are needed to avoid stigmatising the support offered *(British Dyslexia Association, 2022)*. The most intensive support, however, needs to be focused on those most at risk: in particular young people who are at risk of exclusion from school, young people who are not projected to achieve 4 GCSE passes and people of all ages experiencing more than 6 months unemployment.

The best way of protecting ND people from economic and social exclusion is early intervention, which ensures those most at risk are most certain to get support. This requires the levelling up of support so that ND people living in the most deprived communities get at least as much access to the support and are empowered to share the same level of aspiration as ND people living in more prosperous areas.

Glossary of Terms relating to both Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Government Regional Policy.

Equality - equality means fairness: Individuals, or groups of individuals, should not be treated less favourably because of their protected characteristics *(University of Edinburgh, 2022)*.

Equality also means equality of opportunity: ensuring that those who may be disadvantaged can get the tools they need to access the same, fair opportunities as their peers.

The Equalities Act 2010 recognises and gives protection to several protected characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

In this context most neurodivergent conditions fall under the government's definition of Disability *(GMB Union, 2018)*.

Diversity - is recognising, respecting, and celebrating each other's differences. A diverse environment is one with a wide range of backgrounds and mindsets. This will help foster a culture of creativity and innovation *(University of Edinburgh, 2022)*.

The economic importance of diversity was illustrated by David Ricardo in 1817 *(Bragg, 2021)*. Ricardo's Theory of Comparative Advantage demonstrated how if two nations (or workers) each specialised on what they are best at both would be better off. Charles Handy amongst others has drawn attention to the risk of group think *(Handy, 1985)*. When everyone in an organisation or group thinks the same way and shares the same beliefs, it may feel very positive, but it becomes more difficult for group members to be critical or suggest alternative options. Consequently, the risk of poor decision making is greatly increased.

Inclusion - creating an environment where everyone feels welcome and valued. The creation of an inclusive environment requires an understanding of unconscious bias, and positive approach to the management of these biases *(University of Edinburgh, 2022).*

Inclusion is a concept which applies to communities of all kinds. Shortly after being elected in 1997, the then Labour Government established the social exclusion unit. The Government defined Social Exclusion as "what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown" *(The Guardian, 2002)*.

Neurodiversity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the Levelling Up Agenda

Charles Freeman, Director Charles Freeman Projects

Multiple Deprivation - The 1997 Labour Government noted that the highest rates of social exclusion were frequently found in quite small geographical areas, it therefore (in 2000) started to publish the index of multiple deprivation *(Gov.uk, 2019)*.

The index plots a range of indicators including unemployment, income levels, incidence of crime, education attainment, and incidence of poor health e.g. heart disease. Poor performance against each of these indicators frequently, but not always, co- exists in the same neighbourhoods.

Intersectionality - the term Intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics 'intersect' with one another and overlap *(Kirby, 2021)*.

Inequality related to different forms of disadvantage sometimes compound themselves. Intersectionality provides a lens through which compound disadvantage of this type can be investigated *(HM Government, 2022).*
For example, in sport participation is lower among women than men, in most minority communities than British White communities, in deprived areas than in more affluent areas and among people with disabilities than able bodied people. However, as each factor of disadvantage is added the reduction in participation is magnified *(Rowe, 2004)*.

Levelling Up - The Government's Levelling Up White Paper defines Levelling Up in the following terms *(Gov.uk, 2022)*: "Levelling up requires a focused, long-term plan of action and a clear framework to identify and act upon the drivers of spatial disparity.

Evidence from a range of disciplines tells us these drivers can be encapsulated in six 'capitals'

- **Physical capital** - infrastructure, machines and housing.
- **Human capital** - the skills, health and experience of the workforce.
- **Intangible capital** - innovation, ideas and patents.
- **Financial capital** - resources supporting the financing of companies.
- **Social capital** - the strength of communities, relationships and trust.
- **Institutional capital** – local leadership, capacity and capability"

Social Model of Disability - Nancy Doyle writes that the Social Model of Disability is best explained as the civil rights view of disablement. It separates impairment from disability and focuses on the responsibility that society holds for the disablement of others.

For example, if everyone was taught sign language at an early age a deaf person would no longer be disadvantaged. If towns were built and planned with physical disabilities in mind and there was no social stigma attached to looking or sounding different, then having a physical impairment would no longer be disabling *(Doyle, 2020)*.

Link to document references

‘Imagine’: a better place for neurodivergent adults to navigate through their workplaces

Sadia Mirza, Trustee for Waltham Forest Dyslexia Association and Neurodiversity Advocate

Photo by Arlington Research on Unsplash

Imagine – a word that in John Lennon’s world calls for peace and unity. Whilst I hum this iconic song in my mind, I’m going to take liberties by hijacking its title and changing its narrative because, as a fan of pop culture, the word ‘imagine’ and the tune are synonymous to me. Imagine a world where learning differences are properly understood by the majority, and not just by a minority, amongst whom many identify with such a difference or find themselves supporting people with learning differences either through their profession or personal relationship, such as parent and child or teacher and pupil.

‘Imagine’: a better place for neurodivergent adults to navigate through their workplaces

Sadia Mirza, Trustee for Waltham Forest Dyslexia Association and Neurodiversity Advocate

I want to share my thinking that could reflect many others who belong to the neurodivergent world. Many of us consider we have a gift of being dyslexic and neurodivergent. We make up at least 10% of the population *(British Dyslexia Association, 2022)*. That is one in every ten people. This relatively large presence means there are many fields of work that dyslexics thrive in because of our unique strengths. We dyslexics thrive due to our ability to simultaneously navigate multiple layers of understanding in graphic design, the IT industry, broadcast journalism, sports and music. We are, however, still poorly understood as dyslexic and neurodivergent people within wide areas of society. This leads to additional and unnecessary challenges for a neurodivergent person. Whilst it is tempting to write about all the different areas, the focus of this contribution is on working dyslexic and neurodivergent adults who are trying to navigate through their workplaces. Often the workplace has a culture of a lack of basic knowledge and training on neurodiversity and therefore about those who are neurodivergent.

> Neurodiversity recognises that all humans are diverse in terms of how their brains are wired, and therefore learning differences, particularly those that fall in the minority, such as dyslexia, autism spectrum disorder, dyspraxia, to name a few, should not be viewed as ‘disabilities’ but rather celebrated as different abilities and where each and every ability brings different strengths and contributions to the world
> *(Walker, 2021).*

For instance, we often hear that dyslexics are ‘big picture’ thinkers. Thomas West (1997) discusses this concept in his book *In the Mind's Eye: Visual Thinkers, Gifted People With Dyslexia and Other Learning Difficulties, Computer Images and the Ironies of Creativity*. It is often said that dyslexics make excellent entrepreneurs with their ability to see the wider or bigger picture or think ‘out-of-the-box’. This is in contrast to the ‘linear’ thinking process often attributed to neurotypicals; a process in which a systematic and logical step-by-step pattern is followed when processing information which is excellent and much needed in fields involving science and mathematics.

However, it is the ‘illogical’ thinking process of dyslexics that attract organisations like GCHQ who like to hire neurodivergent thinkers due to their ability to think creatively and across different perspectives, making connections that perhaps a neurotypical person may not make. In my own experience, this big picture thinking is quite accurate, but I like to believe that I like details too, as I like to be thorough and learn about every point or angle of a subject matter. The key difference is that I approach the details differently, i.e. in a non-linear fashion, to a neurotypical person, by starting off with looking at the bigger picture and then making my own way to the details. It is this focus on different thinking processes, and the strengths of each that makes the concept of neurodiversity so appealing and less degrading towards the minority neurodivergent people. Conversely, regardless of the neurodiversity perspective, medical terminology in relation to learning differences should be avoided. For example, words such as ‘symptoms’ should be scrapped in favour of ‘characteristics’. ‘Strengths’ and ‘traits’ are also acceptable.

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There is a potential problem with the concept of neurodiversity, even though I consider myself an advocate for it and have just spent the past three paragraphs discussing the term. The issue for me is about the practicality of using the term neurodiversity in the everyday reality that many dyslexic and neurodivergent people face in the workplace because people might not associate neurodiversity with disability. This brings me to the medical model of disability (originally coined by psychiatrist Dr Thomas Szasz in the mid-1950s) and the current model which is based on social justice and created by ‘disabled’ people, the social model of disability (devised by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation [UPIAS] in 1976). The former model suggests that the ‘disabled’ person is the problem with their ‘inability’ to do certain tasks that so-called able-bodied people are ‘naturally’ able to do requiring special measures to be put in place to assist the disabled person. In clearer terms, to use the example of a dyslexic person in the workplace, if such a person has sensory requirements because they are unable to tolerate overstimulation in the office – too much noise, for – instance – then they are seen as the one with the problem for having such sensitivities, not the environment itself.

The social model of disability challenges the medial model by rightly shifting the magnifying glass and pointing it towards the inadequate environment that disables the person by not catering to the needs of the individual in the first place. The UPIAS (1976) and many proponents of the social model in the years that followed suggested this was a fairer and more accurate standpoint. Such a view certainly helps from a mental health perspective, as disabling environments, including unsupportive management styles or inadequate organisational structures, could negatively impact not only our ability to carry out certain tasks, but also our self-esteem. To return to my earlier point about the ‘potential problem’ with neurodiversity, there is nothing wrong with the concept but the focus on the celebration of different neurological strengths could divert attention away from it still being classed as a disability under the *Equality Act 2010*, albeit because of the environment and not the person.

Whilst every neurodivergent person has different workplace journeys, my own journey has had the occasional challenge linked to my neurodivergent profile, with the lowest moment impacting my mental health negatively and to the point where I was compelled to question my own abilities. This was all due to unsympathetic attitudes and a lack of understanding of neurodiversity in my workplace. It took gradual self-education, which involved attending support groups for dyslexic people, to gain a better understanding of not only neurodiversity but also my rights and entitlements as a neurodivergent person *(Waltham Forest Dyslexia Association [WFDA] and AchieveAbility, 2022)*. This journey brought to my awareness that a huge part, if not all, of the problem was not due to me, but more often due to an unsupportive work environment. For example, one of my roles included an induction period at the start of my employment (as most jobs do). The induction process involved being ‘shown the ropes’ in nearly every aspect of the role and the manner in which the showing of the ropes was done often by giving guidance verbally, the occasional practical demonstration of a task (usually involving spread sheets or databases) and undertaking interactive online training.

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Leaving aside verbal instructions, which are often difficult for many dyslexics to retain, the latter two learning approaches are not in theory a cause for concern but, from my own experience, the issue lies elsewhere. I refer to this as the concept of ‘explained once and then never again’. To clarify, once the induction checklist items have been ticked off as ‘complete’, there seems to exist an understanding that the employee now must now, ‘miraculously’, have a full grasp of that ticked-off task. In worst case scenarios, dare they deviate from expectation levels in the form of ‘mistakes’ or ‘oversights’ – albeit accidental – they have no ground for giving explanations, as after all they were shown how to do the task and therefore they knew exactly what to do, and will therefore be subjected to performance reviews. This approach by employers is ‘flawed’ in my opinion, and needs revising. The induction period should perhaps be renamed an ‘introduction’ period. This is because for dyslexic people like me, a ‘one-off’ explanation, no matter how thorough, and no matter how well we comprehend it at the time, is simply not enough for the newly learned information to stick in my mind. Many neurodivergent people need to revisit tasks and information. For example, do them or go over them a few times, they need to ponder over them, make mistakes and within reason, question them and fully experience them over a reasonable period of time before the task or information becomes embedded in the mind and before the possibility of being subjected to any performance review. Calling out an employee for a piece of information they should have known because they were ‘taught’ it over a year ago, and have never revisited it since, because it’s simply not come up, is unjust.

Sadly and frustratingly, not all neurodivergent people who are dyslexic or have other learning differences have reached as far in their understanding as I or others have. Some still take the medical model perspective by placing themselves at the centre of the problem and almost believing the stigma that surrounds dyslexia. One neurodivergent friend of mine still refuses to tell prospective employers about her dyslexia as she considers it an embarrassment or a sign of a lack of intelligence and feels it will put employers off from hiring her. I often hear of similar fears in my support groups.

> I want to imagine a truly neurodivergent-friendly world where neurodivergent people have a better understanding of themselves as truly exceptional individuals with a multitude of strengths and potential. A world where they know that they could tap into this potential when in the right environment and, despite falling into the minority, they know they have just as much to offer as the majority.

As discussed already, many difficult workplace situations are the result of the ignorance of the people who run such organisations, set up inadequately for neurodivergent people. For this reason alone, referring to dyslexia as a disability could be viewed as a necessity in the face of navigating these disabling environments. Furthermore, *Section 6 of the Equality Act (2010)* states that a person is considered disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day tasks. Dyslexia is such for some, though this is arguably down to the disabling environments, as per the social model. The legislation also places a legal duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments, accordingly.

To further compound matters, in my experience, it is not uncommon for many dyslexic people to identify with other learning differences, such as ADHD (or ADD), dyspraxia, dyscalculia or autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The characteristics of each difference often either overlap or differ with one another, but whatever the case having co-occurring learning differences means that the needs of such people may be wide-ranging compared to having a single difference.

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Employers could benefit from training about co-occurring differences and therefore gaining a better understanding of how reasonable adjustments may need to go beyond simple assistive aids or adjustments to do with screen size, screen brightness, written instructions. For example, someone with both dyslexia and ADHD might be prone to distractions due to an inability to sustain attention for long periods (a common ADHD/ADD trait), whilst also experiencing visual stress (a common dyslexia trait). Such people benefit from taking frequent breaks, as well as screen adjustments *(ACAS, 2022)*.

If I try to imagine an ideal workplace scenario, prospective employees would have disclosed their dyslexia and/or other learning difference(s) to their prospective employers at the recruitment stage, without fear of being considered inadequate for the role they have applied for *(WAC Report, 2018)*. The learning difference would not have been a cause for concern provided the job was suited to the candidate’s strengths and abilities. A workplace ‘needs assessment’ would have been arranged and conducted within the first 6-8 weeks of employment, and reasonable adjustments, if not already in place in the environment, would have soon followed, without significant delay *(Lexic, 2022)*.

To stretch my imagination further, we would not find ourselves caught up in attempts at educating our co-workers about our unique characteristics. We wouldn’t be questioned about ‘forgetting’, but instead be provided with a bit of time to recall information, because after all, it is not that we were not listening or that we forgot, it is our slow working memory that needs just a bit of time and care. Lengthy verbal instructions would instead be provided in writing or alternative formats at all times; a request to change the direction of a desk to the right way would not be met with confusion, and quiet time or ‘time out’ to rest one’s overactive mind would be guaranteed.

Unfortunately this imaginary world is at present just that – imaginary – for many, as it could not be further from many people’s experiences in the workplace. I not only speak of my own past experiences, but of those of several of my neurodivergent acquaintances, too. Our reality in the workplace has not been without our fair share of challenges, in matters as basic as wanting our differences to be understood beyond just ‘problems with reading and spelling’ and reasonable adjustments not being implemented without obstacles or in a timely manner.

The consequences of such mindsets and poor practices can be harmful. An acquaintance of mine who has dyslexia described how she was put under performance review because her work was apparently not up to standard, and this judgement was made despite not only the absence of adequate adjustments but also a lack of appreciation of her needs. Whilst under this process, she was sent for an occupational health assessment, as though, in her own words, her issue was ‘medical’. Following this, she was subjected to what she described as micro-management by her then management. A managing style, which clearly gave the message that this employee could not be trusted when left to her own devices. It should not be a surprise that this culture of penalising first before seeking to understand leads to some people quitting their jobs before they are effectively ‘asked’ to leave.

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The above example is not uncommon as many dyslexic people (or who are neurodivergent) share similar experiences. To give another example, a dyslexic friend of mine, a lover of animals, was made to leave two veterinary assistant-type jobs by her employers as she struggled to retain verbal instructions or needed instructions to be repeated. Her employers did not have the time and resources to do so, but in all honesty it felt like their attitude was ‘not wanting to put in the extra effort’.

> The mental health implications of being penalised or driven out of a job because of your learning differences cannot be ignored. Such negative experiences leave some mentally and physically drained, not to mention make a neurodivergent person prone to imposter syndrome amongst other mental health issues.

To be made to feel incompetent by employers, when in actuality the employer simply needs to be educated on neurodiversity and to nurture inclusivity and equality in order to support a change in their attitude and tweak their practices, is for some soul-destroying. The damage to my friend's self-worth was profound as it took almost two years for her to return to paid work whilst trying to regain her self-worth and work on her personal development through various schemes offered by her job centre.

Inclusion and diversity has been a hot topic in workplaces for many years with many organisations making serious changes amongst the workforce to ensure equality of opportunity for minority groups. More positive change is needed for neurodivergent people, not only as a disadvantaged and underrepresented group but also as a misunderstood group that many employers, let alone wider society, know little about. As mentioned previously, neurodivergent people, such as dyslexics have a range of skills and talents that could be made the most of if only these were identified in the first place. Whilst some organisations, such as GCHQ, have picked up on such strengths, others could follow suit. It is, after all, the employer who is also going to benefit.

Nurturing the talents of neurodivergent people would not only drive wider cultural change amongst workforces, but some may see their organisations thrive as they reap the benefits of such a wide range of strengths. It will also coincidentally increase confidence amongst neurodivergent people and encourage them to talk about their profiles without fear of stigmatisation. Further positive action could come in the form of incorporating disability or reasonable action ‘passports’, which would mean conversations and needs would be formalised in a document, without the need for a neurodivergent person to re-explain their profile and needs if a line manager changes, as the document would be passed on.

Am I suggesting that there are not any inclusive employers out there? Of course there are. The excellent organisation Exceptional Individuals was set up in 2015 by Matt Boyd to provide advocacy and training on neurodiversity. They have trained a select few employers (referred to as 'Exceptional Individuals Partners') on neurodiversity; these include Aldi, Ford and the Law Society. Yet it still feels such trained organisations are few and far between and the burden seems to be falling on neurodivergent employees to promote the work of Exceptional Individuals. In my own experience and those of my neurodivergent friends and peers many organisations, including our own employers, had not even heard of Exceptional Individuals until we flagged up their incredible work. This begs the question, is their work being effectively promoted? If not, this is even more alarming considering that Exceptional Individuals carry out needs assessments that are funded entirely by the Government, a factor which one would assume should attract employers, yet certain employers are still opting to pay for such assessments themselves. Does the Government or the media need to play a bigger role in promoting the work of Exceptional Individuals? Does the lack of awareness indicate an underlying issue, i.e. a lack of priority given to the neurodivergent population? These are questions worth considering.

To assist this culture change, the Government set up a scheme for employers called *Disability Confident (2014)*. This is a scheme that organisations can sign up to voluntarily to show a commitment towards supporting and championing inclusive practices. Signees demonstrate this inclusiveness through their recruitment, behaviour and culture. There are three levels to the Disability Confident scheme: Disability Confident Committed (level 1), Disability Confident Employer (level 2) and Disability Confident Leader (level 3). All organisations sign up to the first level initially before progressing onto the higher levels. Organisations that sign up are, in theory, committed towards equality in the workplace and must complete self-assessments to progress from one level to another. Yet it remains to be seen how effective this scheme is for neurodivergent people in terms of actual and timely adjustments for them in carrying out their day-to-day tasks and awareness raising amongst neurotypical co-workers.

Whilst this scheme sounds promising in encouraging a wider cultural change amongst workplaces, it has received some criticism around accountability. True accountability should invite the voice of the people at the crux of this scheme: disabled people. By simply confirming that you are employing disabled workers by providing the relevant statistics, which is a requirement of the scheme, is not enough to ensure their wellbeing in the workplace.

The final and most optimistic piece of my imagination, which I hope will be a reality one day, is a reality where neurodiversity is not some random buzzword, but a word that brings with it widespread knowledge of differences. This includes tolerance for such differences and where making room for them through our language and practices is an actuality, not a mission. A reality where people of all abilities and strengths are not only valued but sought after, with specific differences such as dyslexia nurtured and catered to in working environments.

And last but not least, a reality where disclosure is not met with scepticism but in fact desired by prospective employers. I hope one day (to steal more of Lennon's lyrics!) little or no explanations will need to be given on neurodiversity because there would not be a need to in the first place as neurodiversity would be cool, embedded and appreciated in the enabling environment that one chooses to work in and in the mindsets of those who run the organisations.

You may say I'm a dreamer (well, I do have ADHD)…
but I'm not the only one…

Link to document references

Neurodivergence, Shame and Trauma

Cheri Shone, ND Consultancy, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, ADSHE, DNA Matters

Photo by @felipepelaquim on Unsplash

This contribution outlines how some of the mechanisms of shame play out in people's lives through the lens of dyslexia. It is by no means a comprehensive interrogation, but is intended as a provocation to stimulate debate.

The proposed mechanisms are based on Brené Brown's (2010, 2015, 2018) work on Shame, the idea of Locus of Control developed by Rotter (1966), Bessel van der Kolk's (2014) work on Transforming Trauma and the work of Rosemary Scott (2004). Although this contribution is focused on the consequences of negative experiences for adults, it is in the early years that many of these negative experiences are laid down and adapted to. It is these early experiences that then form many of the patterns that we see in adulthood. It is often when a child first goes to school that the processing issues emerge although it can be identified before then, particularly if the parent is neurodivergent themselves.

Neurodivergence, Shame and Trauma

Cheri Shone, ND Consultancy, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, ADSHE, DNA Matters

As we know, life experiences for the neurodivergent person are as complex and individual as those for the rest of the human race. Brown (2018) outlines the universality of the experience of shame, “to feel shame is to be human”. The particular way shame is experienced by the various neurodivergent groups may have different triggers and coping mechanisms, but the experience of shame and shame due to neurodivergence is almost universal. To explore these themes, we will be focusing on the following areas as experienced by someone with a dyslexic profile as follows:

- A hidden identity – early years
- School: Institutional Disablement
- Locus of Control
- Trauma
- Metacognition as a way out

A hidden identity – early years

The Power of Vulnerability

Listening to Shame

Here are two links to Brené Brown’s Ted Talks which outline the impact of shame that has been drawn from her research into shame and vulnerability.

In her Ted Talk, Brown (2010) proposes that it is connection that gives life its purpose and meaning and that shame unravels this connection. She poses the question: “Is there something about me that if people know that I won't be worthy of connection?”

For those who are neurodivergent the message they get from an early age is that their neurodivergence, which at this stage is usually an unnamed and unknown difference, makes them ‘unworthy’ of connection. It is the very nature of a hidden and misunderstood neurodivergence that creates a fertile environment for shame to develop. If a child or those who are caring for them does not understand why they are failing to thrive, it is very easy for them to internalise the systems inability to support them as their own failure. It is these messages that are rife for those who are neurodivergent as the processing issues commonly associated with the neurodivergence are often misunderstood.

The hidden nature of neurodivergence means that it is often experienced as an isolating, individual and shameful failure to thrive. So how does this play out in a dyslexic person's life?

> “The brain is a cultural organ – experience shapes the brain”
> *(van der Kolk, 2014).*

> “Illiteracy is very much related to shame”
> *(Ingesson in Alexander-Passe, 2015).*

School: Institutional Disablement

Poole *(in Alexander-Passe, 2015)* states that the current UK school system for a dyslexic child is based on a model of "constructed failure" because a child is "required to continuously fail educationally for many years before identification and interventions are considered" and Alexander-Passe (2015) goes on to say that this means that "failure is a mandatory element of the diagnosis of an invisible disorder". The consequences of this are that the student is often failing for years despite their best efforts to navigate the school system with all the concomitant damage that is done to the child's mental wellbeing.

Is it then any wonder that Scott (2004) says: "I believe that the abuse of dyslexic children is accepted in the school system in a way that is comparable to that experienced by ethnic minorities before the earliest race-relations legislation". When one factors in the intersectional complexities of race, class and sex the scale of the problem is clear.

How dyslexic processing can affect the experience in the classroom

> "Dyslexic students are commonly humiliated by teachers"
> *(Edwards in Alexander-Passe, 2015).*

> "Some teachers perceived them as not only more difficult to teach but also less intelligent"
> *(Frymier and Wanzer; Gersten, Walker and Darch in Alexander-Passe, 2015).*

Like every human being, dyslexic students are affected by fluctuations in energy levels, however, because of the specific areas of processing weaknesses, poor phonological decoding, slow processing speed and poor working memory when these fluctuations happen to a dyslexic student they can completely derail the student's ability to function in a classroom. This means that what is possible one day may be unachievable the next and this can be interpreted as the student being lazy or uncooperative if the underlying processing issues are not understood by the teacher and this can sour the teacher student relationship.

School then becomes a threatening environment, full of shameful and humiliating experiences where the dyslexic child is being required to fail repeatedly for many years building up a negative self-image that can take a lifetime to repair. To navigate this hostile environment, the dyslexic child will develop strategies in the absence of an understanding of their processing difficulties or how to scaffold them. This can lead to maladaptive coping strategies such as becoming the class clown, being overly compliant and focused on perfection or getting somebody else to do your work. The failure the dyslexic child experiences then becomes internalised as their own failure rather than a failure of the system to support them. This lack of understanding of the biological underpinning of their processing can then become a traumatised embodiment of the medical model of disability rather than seeing it through the lens of the social model. The question this poses is how this early experience can play out in the lives of adult dyslexics.

Locus of Control (LoC):

> "An individual who possesses an internal LOC perceives that his ability to perform in future tasks is based on his own abilities and skills (internal responsibility), whereas an individual with an external LOC perceives that future performance in tasks is based on the assistance of others (environmental)"
> *(Rotter in Alexander-Passe, 2015).*

A dyslexic person's early experiences would mitigate against developing an internal locus of control. The cost of the system's inability to support the dyslexic person's processing would derail the opportunity to develop effective strategies and their belief in their ability to perform tasks based on their own abilities and skills. The solutions they do develop in the absence of in-depth understanding of the processing difficulties can be maladaptive. The focus becomes avoiding the negative outcomes in the environment; this can take the form of perfectionism, avoiding stressful situations and an overreliance on or rejection of external help.

These inventive, if maladaptive, strategies require a huge amount of energy which is then not available to explore what the actual issues creating barriers are and developing strategies to support them. Alexander-Passe (2015) suggests that dyslexia, like other hidden identities (e.g. homosexuality), can attract stigmatisation and the hidden nature of the difference allows people to 'pass' and consequently avoid the negativity of being categorised and marginalised by other people's negative assumptions. The energy that goes into hiding dyslexia would be much better spent developing strategies that can create effective replicable processes that will scaffold the weaknesses in processing, using their strengths and help to develop a belief in their skills and abilities.

But as we have seen thus far, the lack of informed understanding of dyslexia and an education system that requires failure in order to receive support creates an environment where the dyslexic person is much more likely to see themselves as an 'ableist' society sees them, less capable than those without a disability *(Alexander-Passe, 2015)*. It is therefore reasonable to assume that it is the differences in processing associated with particular tasks that undermines the dyslexic person's self-image and can create feelings of shame. As we have seen from Brown's work it is shame that unravels connection. Both Brown (2018) and Van de Kolk (2015) identify the importance of connection to other people and categorically state that it is fundamental to good mental health, but how can a dyslexic person create good connections when they are concealing or constantly having to justify such a fundamental part of who they are? It is this concealment or justification that underpins the traumatised embodiment of the medical model of disability. We as a society see illiteracy as shameful and the experience of living with dyslexia is all about the problems of acquiring literacy, to paraphrase Brown, "there is something about me (i.e. that I struggle with literacy), that if other people find out I won't be worthy of connection."

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Trauma

> "I think this man is suffering from memories"
> *(Sigmund Freud cited in van der Kolk, 2015).*

> "We remember insults and injuries best: The adrenaline that we secrete to defend against potential threats helps to engrave those incidents into our minds"
> *(van der Kolk, 2015).*

It would be fair to say that dyslexic people are on the receiving end of many negative tropes and those with hidden identities reported a "higher incidence of negative experiences than those with physical disabilities" *(Snyder in Alexander-Passe, 2015)*. These cumulative negative events over time are experienced as trauma and can result in the dyslexic person developing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). There are two types of PTSD: a single incidence impact such as being humiliated in a classroom; or Complex PTSD the cumulative impact of daily failure *(Scott, 2004)*. The question then is what are the consequences of PTSD for the dyslexic person?

Van der Kolk (2014) suggests that "traumatised people have a tendency to superimpose their trauma on everything around them" and this makes it difficult to decipher what is happening in their environment. Education is already a fraught environment for those who have dyslexia and a difficulty deciphering what is happening in the classroom/tutorial session could make it difficult for them to engage fully in the learning experience. This understanding indicates how trauma can present in ways that are not immediately explicable if the dyslexic profile is addressed in the absence of an understanding of how the trauma of school can present in adulthood.

Metacognition as a way out

> "Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn't require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are"
> *(Brown, 2018).*

What Brown (ibid) says about "being who we are" to belong suggests that in order to remove the othering shame that occurs with a hidden identity it has to be embraced and in order to embrace it, it has to be understood on both a functional and emotional level. A metacognitive understanding of the processing issues related to dyslexia and how these issues are understood and interpreted in society is vital if the dyslexic person wants to transform the way they operate in the world by building functional effective strategies. This understanding has to be underpinned by an insight into the emotional impact that being dyslexic has had and how that plays out in the way they operate in the world for this transformation to take place. An understanding of the emotional impact of schooling that is not grounded in a metacognitive understanding of the processing deficits and strengths and the systems that marginalise, once again locates the 'dysfunction' within the individual, they now not only have dyslexia but are often diagnosed with mental health issues. Van der Kolk (2014) states that "being a patient, rather than a participant in one's healing process, separates suffering people from their community and alienates them from an inner sense of self." By grounding a dyslexic person in their processing in the absence of labels of dysfunction it is possible to create understanding, develop replicable strategies that will develop an internal locus of control through the knowledge that they will be able to accomplish any task using their own abilities, skills and strategies. By making explicit how society's lack of understanding of dyslexia feeds into marginalisation within the education system will give them the tools to participate in their own healing by simply asking the question: How is this related to dyslexia?

Conclusion

I am myself dyslexic, which has informed my understanding of dyslexia and its consequences. I have used Rosemary Scott as a reference throughout my own thinking and for me her insights have been transformative and I would consider her book to be seminal in the understanding of dyslexia. However, the book was written 16 years ago and despite her great insights and sensitive understanding of the impact that being dyslexic can have, there are statements that in fact feed into the negative tropes around dyslexia if you do not understand them from the perspective of a dyslexic person themselves. For example:

> "Should dyslexics wish to protest on their own behalf, they do not have the print media available to them because of their disability. Their main symbol of protest has to be verbal. Since they also have speech and language difficulties, even this route is impaired"
> *(Scott, 2004).*

This statement indicates how recently these negative views were held by someone who was informed about dyslexia from a clinical standpoint, but with little understanding of how support could scaffold the deficits of the dyslexic profile. It is my belief that these views are still prevalent. I and many of my fellow dyslexics have done the work that has allowed us to strategise our way out of this marginalised identity. When COVID-19 hit and there was a panic in the media about the loss of educational opportunities that children would experience, it made me reflect how easily the neurodivergent child is marginalised with no equivalent panic about their access to an appropriate education. The thing that gives me hope is the online communities of dyslexic academics who are raising these issues in their institutions, and I will end with a quote from Bessel van der Kolk:

> "Finding a responsive community in which to tell your truth makes recovery possible"
> *(van der Kolk, 2014).*

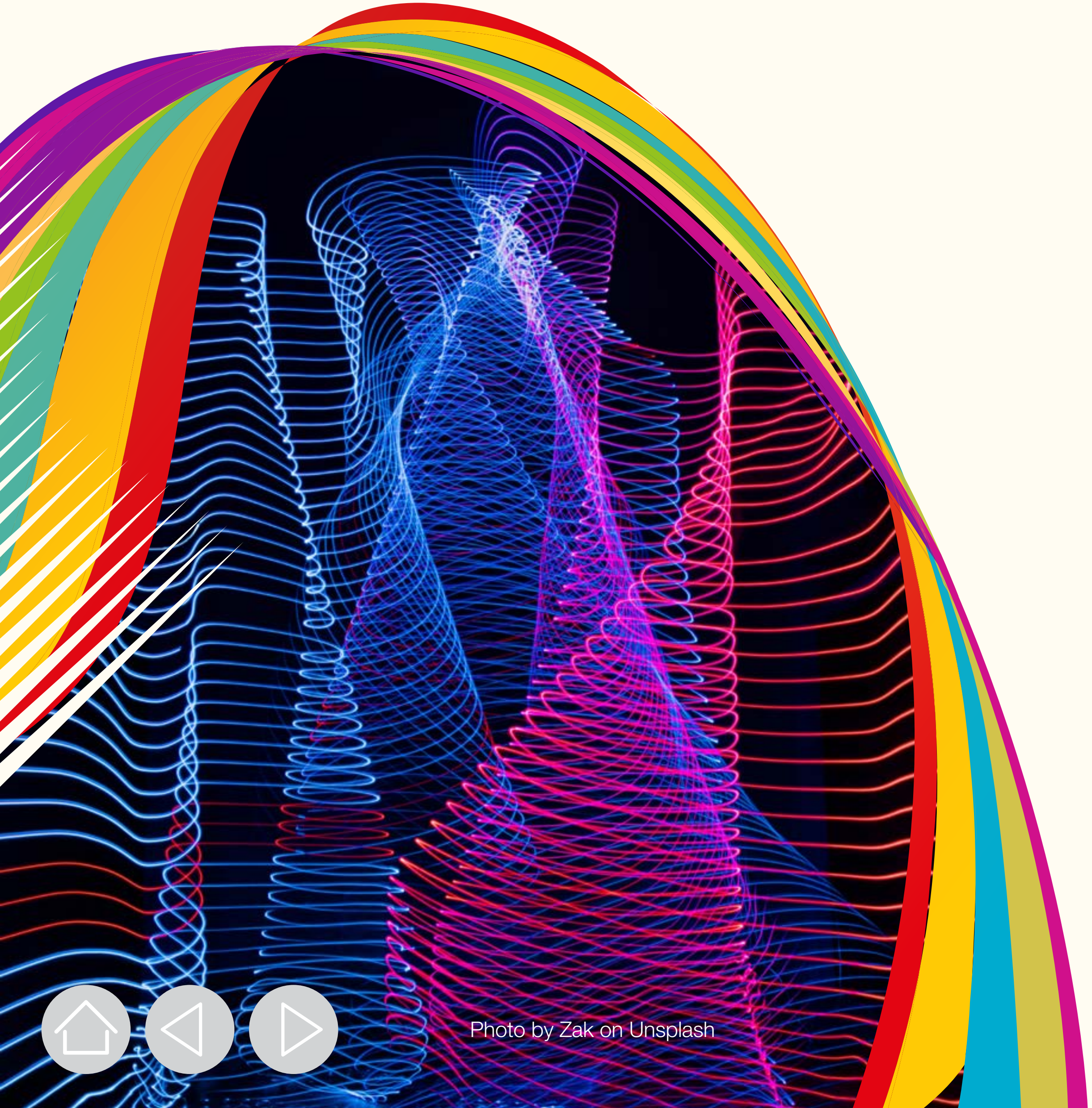
Terminology

- **Neurodivergence:** Those marginalised by their Neurodiversity
- **Neurotypical:** Those not marginalised by their Neurodiversity
- **Metacognition:** An overview of the way you think

Link to document references

Autism and Associated Neurodivergence

Andrew Veasey, FHEA, ADG FEHE as an Assistive Technology Trainer and Study Skills Lecturer, Assistive Solutions



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This contribution focuses on my experience of being a neurodiverse male in my late 30s assessed as being autistic, dyslexic and dyspraxic and my experience of working within disability support roles over the last thirteen years. I am a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and an Associate Fellow of the Dyslexia Guild FE HE.

Intersectionality

After being diagnosed with my neurodiverse conditions I saw them as fundamental to my identity and thus I simultaneously saw them as part of my own intersectionality. Intersectional Justice states that: “The concept of intersectionality describes the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination ‘intersect’ to create unique dynamics and effects” *(Intersectional Justice, 2022)*.

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Accessing a diagnosis

Obtaining a dyspraxia diagnosis whilst a student is significantly easier than receiving an autism diagnosis as many educational establishments are linked to Tutor Assessors or Educational Psychologists who are registered with organisations such as the Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (PATOSS). The Dyspraxia Foundation website provides tailored insight across the age range *(Finding Help, 2022)*.

The National Autistic Society has similar information on its website exploring the route to an autism diagnosis. This states that: "There are three ways that people are referred to us for an assessment: NHS, Local Authority, Self-referral" *(National Autistic Society 'What We Do', 2022)*.

My personal experience of the diagnostic process is that it was significantly easier to obtain my dyspraxia diagnosis as my university had an established relationship with an educational psychologist. After a short wait of two weeks, I could see him, and the appointment went well. In contrast, I was on the NHS waiting list for over a year for Asperger Syndrome diagnosis and was promised I would be seen quickly as I was studying and my course leader at the time had seen autistic traits. Out of frustration and, fortunately, with access to funds, I was able to secure a private assessment within days. I am aware of other people who have also had to pursue a private assessment because of the waiting list and level of need/access to support. I had felt a sense of injustice in the need to pay for an AS diagnosis assessment and was also quite angry that the psychologist who diagnosed me with dyspraxia some eight years previously had not mentioned anything about Asperger Syndrome or Autism to me.

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Moving forward a couple of years, I was undertaking a PGCHE and needed to receive an updated dyspraxia diagnosis to receive Disabled Students Allowances (DSA) funding. Fortunately, I knew of a psychologist nearby to where I was working and I was able to receive an updated dyspraxia diagnosis and my dyslexia and dysgraphia diagnoses were also given. The process of obtaining dyslexia and dysgraphia diagnoses is identical to the process of obtaining a dyspraxia diagnosis if a student. However, dyslexia and dysgraphia are not assessed from a medical perspective.

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Neurodivergence – a gift or a hindrance?

I first came across the term ‘neurodivergence’ whilst I was studying the Post Graduate Certificate: Teaching Adult Dyslexic Students in Higher and Further Education at London Metropolitan University between February 2009 and June 2010. As such, I believe that neurodiverse thinking is valuable although some ‘components’ of the neurodiversity itself may be conflicting. For example, I am aware that Asperger Syndrome needs may conflict with dyslexia needs.

The last decade has given rise to the increase in awareness of autism and its individual impact. Autistic scholars and academics have been providing access to their research on Twitter and I have connected with several of them including Dr Robert Chapman. From meeting others online, I can appreciate the positivity and strengths that being on the autism spectrum can bring to the table. Through studying my own PG Diploma Autism Spectrum Conditions: Higher Education, I have gained an increased understanding of the impact of my Asperger Syndrome and the positive impact it can have overall. For example, my memory is particularly good and I generally have good attention to detail.

> I have also noticed strengths in my dyspraxia over the last twenty years. For example, I am empathetic and don’t tend to judge others, and am able to relate to other neurodiverse people.

Both myself and others with dyspraxia have difficulties with the legibility of our handwriting. However, it is widely recognized in many employment settings that handwriting is not as important as many job roles using technology now, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Having a disability and working with disability support – my thoughts

I have worked in several roles within the Disability Support sector in both Further Education Colleges and several Universities. Having a disability and working within disability support can be very useful as it enables me to empathise with the needs of disabled students. However, I have also experienced discrimination in the workplace owing to my dyspraxia and Asperger Syndrome in the past. I am pleased to report that this is not the case with my current employer.

How do I see my intersectionality as a neurodivergent person?

I see being neurodivergent as a fundamental part of my identity. Looking back as I approach my fourth decade, I can see signs of all my neurodiversity being present from when I was a child. I have recently read a *Guardian* article that states: “Others are so-called ‘high-functioning’ a sub-group that includes those with Asperger Syndrome, the condition named after the Austrian paediatrician who in the 1940s worked with a group of children he famously termed “little professors” *(Silberman, 2015)*. Even as an undergraduate student with undiagnosed Asperger Syndrome I was always seen as a geeky guy who wanted to teach. People often used to say I acted ‘quirky’ and if I was interested in the topic then I would be able to convey all my knowledge to others. This is consistent with a Women’s Day article in which the writer states that “my ability to intensely focus on reading literature as a special interest or obsession eventually led to my doctorate in English” *(Malia, 2017)*. So, autism can be a strength.

Owing to my dyslexia, I can visualise concepts relatively easily and can see the bigger picture. For example, whilst training students on how to use an assistive technology program such as TextHelp, I can see wider examples of how they could use the programme beyond their current assignment.

My own experience of life is consistent with the Emerge Professionals quote: “The hallmark of Asperger’s is the propensity to learn and even excel academically. There are rarely any noticeable learning disabilities or developmental delays that impact the individual’s ability to perform in school or at work. Many adults with autism excelled in school and are wildly successful in their careers. They may struggle with sensory sensitivities and social interaction” *(Emerge Professionals, 2019)*. I have managed to work in the Adult Education Sector for thirteen years which has largely been successful, and students often provide excellent feedback on the support that I have provided to them. To develop my social skills, I have been engaging with the local Autism Support Group for eighteen months and regularly contribute to the WhatsApp group and attend monthly events. I can empathise with other members and socialise separately with some members fortnightly.

Emerge also states that “late Diagnosis for Asperger’s Syndrome is common” *(Emerge Professionals, 2019)*. Personally, I believe my diagnosis was later as I did not struggle academically at school and only had difficulties with Art, D & T and PE which were not important in the school’s league tables. My schooling was largely structured, and the only concern academically was that my handwriting was difficult to read – this was later confirmed as part of my dyspraxia diagnosis at the age of 18.

Robert Chapman (2021) expressed that:

> “Many realised they were tired of being represented as tragic deviations from supposedly normal functioning, and they were also often traumatised by ensuing attempts to treat or cure their autism”.

Through studying for my Post Graduate Diploma in Autism, I have developed an appreciation of how useful my autism can be and would not want to be ‘cured’ of autism – I see it as fundamentally part of what makes me, me. I have set out to try and educate others on how autism can be used in a positive way.

To conclude, I believe that being neurodivergent is a gift that also simultaneously has some barriers which can be overcome through Assistive Technology. I feel that being neurodivergent is fundamentally part of my identity and I embrace it as part of my personal and professional identity.

Diagnosis Definitions

Asperger Syndrome

The Asperger Foundation states that: “Asperger’s Syndrome is a pervasive developmental condition that falls within the autistic spectrum. Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people as well as how they experience the world around them. Asperger’s Syndrome is sometimes referred to as High Functioning Autism (HFA) or Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC). It can affect people of all genders and ages within all cultural and social environments” *(Asperger Foundation, 2022)*. Owing to the changes in the DSM diagnostic manual, people who were previously diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome would now be diagnosed as autistic. This would apply to me.

Dyspraxia

The Dyspraxia Foundation states that: “Dyspraxia is a common disorder affecting fine and/or gross motor coordination in children and adults” and that “it occurs across the range of intellectual abilities” *(Dyspraxia Foundation, 2022)*. The Dyspraxia Foundation’s comment is indicative of my professional experience and of my own academic background.

Dyslexia

The British Dyslexia Association states that: “Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed” *(BDA, 2022)*. Like dyspraxia, “dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities” *(BDA, 2022)*. I have taught dyslexic students from Pre-GCSE level through to Doctoral (PhD) level.

Dysgraphia

Psychology Today states that: “Dysgraphia is a learning disability that results in impaired handwriting, impaired spelling, or both in someone of normal or above-average intelligence” *(Psychology Today, 2022)*. It is now approaching a decade since I was diagnosed with dysgraphia, and I can recognize that my handwriting has always been a challenge throughout my education career and in the workplace. Thankfully, I don’t tend to have to do much handwriting anymore, thanks partially to changes in the use of technology which took place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

▷ Link to document references

Why was Black Pride initiated and to what extent is it still necessary?

Nola Sterling, Beyond the Lens Podcast Producer, Research Associate for Design Against Crime Research Centre, Trustee at Clean Break and Women in Prison

Photo by Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash

I am an intersectional neurodivergent feminist and racial equality advocate who has an understanding of colonial legacies and their enduring ramifications. This contribution introduces my research, which is to better understand a uniquely positioned group of society at the intersection of race and sexuality.

My research was originally conducted in my final year of a degree in Sociology and Politics at Goldsmiths, University of London. My studies were focused on geopolitics, methodologies of the South, colonial studies, critical race theory and intersectional feminism. This gave me a tremendous understanding of the construct of race and gender and how they intersect with sexuality making the Black Queer experience extremely challenging. The investigation discussed here happened through an interdisciplinary study combining the political theory of imperialism and anti-blackness with sociological approaches to intersectionality and research methods. Thus I sought to identify if there are differences in the level of connection and belonging focusing on comparisons of UK Black Pride and Pride in London.

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A brief history of Pride

The context of this investigation was the emergence of UK Black Pride and why it is distinct from the mainstream Pride in London, in light of the central involvement of Black Queer women in the Stonewall riots of 1969 in New York City which led to an early iteration of Pride, the Christopher Street Day Parade (now known as Pride). A few years later in 1972, the first UK Pride festival followed formed by the UK chapter of the Gay Liberation Front *(Lorenzo, 2019)*. This poses the question of the title here: Why was Black Pride initiated and to what extent is it still necessary? This may be symptomatic of the delegitimisation of mainstream Pride festivals which have come under global scrutiny for their corporate sponsorships and who they allow to have a presence at the festival, thereby resulting in the alienation of the very people it was created for and by. The corporate structure of the mainstream Pride festival is reminiscent of the appropriation of Black Queer culture as a mainstream popular culture without acknowledgement or remuneration to its originators *(Hall, 1993)*.

Background

Amidst extreme racial tension following the stark health inequality caused by COVID-19 and the murder of George Floyd in 2022 Rhammel Afflick, Head of Communication at Pride in London, resigned over his concerns about racism. As one of the most senior Black Queer volunteers, this was momentous. Afflick candidly states that over the seven years of working his way up, he became disillusioned by the blatant disregard for the voices of Black people in the organisation, plus their failure to implement meaningful anti-racist anti-discriminatory practices within the organisation: “I’m saddened to say that I’ve lost all confidence in the leadership’s ability to successfully address the adversities faced by our multifaceted communities” *(Afflick, 2021)*. This was further commented on: “PinkNews (a UK-based online newspaper for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in the UK and worldwide) commented that Afflick is clear that he and other Black volunteers have been ignored, despite efforts by him and others to better policy and put intersectionality at the heart of decision-making” *(Smith, 2021)*.

At the same time, Afflick was requesting Pride in London use an intersectional approach to address the ‘matrix of oppression’ faced by Black queer individuals *(Hill Collins, 2002)*. Homophobia and critical debates about racism are on the rise in Britain. According to the London Metropolitan Police, reported homophobic hate crimes across London increased from 1,488 in 2014 to 2,308 in 2018. Following a violent homophobia attack on public transport the then Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, said: “We must not, and will not, accept this homophobic and misogynist violence in our society. Solidarity to Melania and Chris, and to all in the LGBT+ community for everything they endure for simply being who they are” *(Busby and Noor, 2019)*.

The political climate for Black Queer people in Britain was further compounded by the highly criticised Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities Report 2021 claiming:

> Too many people in the progressive and anti-racism movements seem reluctant to acknowledge their own past achievements, and they offer solutions based on the binary divides of the past which often misses the point of today’s world
>
> *(Sewell, 2021)*

These statements affect all those at the intersection of race and sexuality, making Britain an extremely hostile environment to be Black and Queer due to the rise of homophobia and discussions on racialised inequalities being trivialised by the Race and Ethnic Disparities Commissioner. This provokes questions regarding how the Queer Black Diaspora experiences connection and belonging in Britain and why the Black Pride festival movement has spread globally.

Research problem

The problem here is if Black Queer women were at the front and centre of the Stonewall riots that evolved into Pride, why do we need Black Pride as a subsidiary? It appears that Black Pride is a response to anti-blackness inside the mainstream LGBTQ community. In 2018 “Stonewall cut ties with one of the UK’s biggest queer events, Pride in London, after they rejected concerns over the lack of diversity. These diversity concerns continued to persist for Pride in London, which led to the entire advisory board quitting” *(Robledo, 2021)*.

UK Black Pride founder Lady Phyll notes that since Pride's formation it has become aligned primarily with white cisgender men and their agenda, resulting in the exclusion of Queer Trans Intersex People of Colour (QTIPOC) from the main Pride space, unwittingly perhaps but evident nevertheless from the emergence of Black Pride events globally *(Robledo, 2021)*. This indicates that the mainstream Pride festivals have been colonised by white middle-class men and their homonormative agenda. This power dynamic may be understood as patriarchy, white supremacy and capitalism in the mainstream LGBT community resulting in further marginalisation, alienation, and lack of connection for the Black Queer Diaspora.

Researcher Self-Reflexive Statement

As noted in the introduction, I am an intersectional neurodivergent feminist and racial equality advocate who has an understanding of colonial legacies and their enduring ramifications. Thus for the wider research I have drawn on the works of Patricia Hill Collins and her intersectional theory of the matrix of domination. This research allowed me to better understand a uniquely positioned group of society at the intersection of race and sexuality: the Black Queer Diaspora in Britain. The resignation of Rhammel Afflck catalysed my interest in the topic although Queer Histories are something I became interested in following viewing the documentary *Paris Is Burning* (1990) in 2020.

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An Intersectional Approach

As a key thinker Patricia Hill Collins is referred to throughout my research, chiefly her theory on intersectionality the matrix of domination (2002). As Afflick (2021) notes, an intersectional approach to policy must be used in the development of any future initiatives to promote equity for Black Queer people, particularly where they have multiple axes of oppression impacting their interaction with the social world. Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) note that power operates by disciplining people in ways that put people's lives on paths that make some options seem viable and others out of reach. To understand the harm experienced by Black Queer people and the unique experiences of adversity they face an intersectional approach must be used.

Research Hypothesis

The research I carried out was an interdisciplinary study combining the political theory of imperialism and anti-blackness with sociological approaches to intersectionality and research methods in the absence of qualitative data on the experiences of belonging and connection of Black patrons attending Pride festivals. This close analysis of responses from empirical data collated from surveys and interviews with Black patrons of Pride festivals attempts to elucidate why Black Pride exists and thus explain to what extent the patrons of UK Black Pride believe it is still necessary within an alleged post-racial Britain *(Clarke, 2021)*. Although Black Pride festivals are global, my research was based on a small study that focuses its attention on understanding the experiences of Black patrons of Pride festivals. This is achieved by using a mixture of surveying and interviewing people who identify as Black and Queer and have attended UK Black Pride and Pride in London to contrast their experiences of connection and belonging.

The key aspects identified within the literature reviewed for this research project can be organised into four categories of which two overlap: first, Black Queer Histories of Resistance against Oppression; second, the Formation of Communities and Social Action which overlaps with the first category; third, Colonial Legacy, Anti-Blackness and the Black Queer Diaspora; fourth, Belonging and Connection.

This study sought to contribute to the theme of belonging and connection by gathering qualitative data on the experience of Queer Trans Intersex People of Colour (QTIPOC) relating to their first-hand accounts of attending Pride festivals. To understand these feelings of belonging and connection or the lack thereof and alienation, their narratives required analysis using an intersectional framework.

The scholarly work reviewed for this research project was sourced via digital library search using keywords: LGBTQ intersectionality, Black Pride, UK Black Pride, why we need Black Pride, Black Queer Histories, Stonewall history. This was followed by searches of sources cited in the literature from the keyword searches.

The majority of the literature reviewed on UK Black Pride concerning belonging and connection came from LGBT and mainstream media outlets, although there was a considerable amount of scholarly work on Canadian Black Pride. In particular, Smith (2020) explores in detail the global Black Pride movement and proposes that it is part of a much broader theory within Black Queer Studies positing Black Pride as a diasporic and transnational movement. This can be understood as exploring Black Pride's potentialities as an accessible global network for the Black Queer Diaspora engendering a form of Black Queer tourism.

In a similar vein, Lynn's (2014) unpacking of Claudia Jones's theory of 'triple oppression' brought clarity to a large body of work on Black Queer histories of resistance. This covers intersectionality, recognising that Black Queer women were front and centre of many historic resistance movements such as the Stonewall riots. For example, the Combahee River Collective with their early iteration of intersectionality that rejected what they called 'white women feminism' as inadequate in addressing their multi-dimensional battle with oppression. All of this action made Black Queer women visible by marking a strange distinction between Feminists and Lesbians *(Taylor, 2017)*. Jordan-Zachery (2012) argues that through the process of self-naming their sexuality, Black Lesbians challenge their invisibility which is central to Black feminism. Perhaps the Combahee River Collective's distinction was to show solidarity for their Lesbian sisters' constant erasure.

Correspondingly, I found that the writings of Patricia Hill Collins, mainly *Black Feminist Thought. Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2002), is a broadening of the ideas of the Black Feminist movement. Hill Collin's notion of intersectionality is particularly helpful in understanding the experiences of the Black Queer Diaspora being uniquely positioned using her theory of the matrix of domination. I used this theory when analysing the results from the data.

In a plethora of literature on colonialism, sexuality, homo/transphobia and anti-blackness, Alexander (1994) offers an explanatory theory on naturalising heterosexuality as law and how it shapes the definition of respectability, Black masculinity and nationalism, highlighting the inseparable connection between formerly colonised Caribbean nations seeking legitimacy and anti-gay laws such as the Sexual Offences Act 1986.

The literature and scholarly work reviewed interact symbiotically to answer the research question comprehensively. There are many similarities between intersectionality and anti-blackness, chiefly in the way they affect the individual's experience of the social world through marginalisation. Anti-blackness maps onto intersectionality. However, intersectionality broadens as it acknowledges the way collective forms of oppression deepen the impact felt by the individual and thus needs to be addressed in a multidimensional fashion. Both approaches differ in how they respond to the question but are intertwined in a linear pattern.

The theme of Belonging and Connection is central to this research and looks at the embodiment of spatial temporalities and the experiences they create for individuals who are subjected to minority stressors. Minority Stress theory according to Balsam et al. (2011) relates to unique stressors experienced by minoritised individuals and its correlation to the disparities in mental health and psychological distress. Within the theme of Belonging and Connection, we see Black joy being used as a form of resistance against oppression, at the intersection of race and sexuality, fostering the agency of QTIPOC to choose joy. This joy is found amid anti-blackness, homo/transphobia, imperialism and lack of equity. Lady Phyll, founder of UK Black Pride, notes this takes courage and power which is what inspired the 2021 UK Black Pride theme "Love and Rage" *(Robledo, 2021)*.

The colonial legacy of homo/transphobia within the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) communities *(Alexander, 1994)*, further compounded by racism within the LGBT community, is a harsh reminder of the pernicious effect of imperialism on formerly colonised people. Balsam et al. (2011) concluded that "racism within LGBT communities, LGBT-POC may also experience heterosexism within racial/ethnic minority communities and specifically within their own cultural communities" *(Balsam et al, 2011)*. Attention was drawn to racism in the LGBT communities in the UK with the #EndLGBTQRacism campaign 2015. Ironically it was not publicised by mainstream LGBT media outlets. Smith (2020) defines this manifestation of anti-blackness as the "homonormative politics of London". Lyell and Bannon note that the dominance of the white gay middle-class men's agenda is ubiquitous in mainstream LGBT communities *(Lyell and Bannon, 2015)*.

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Whilst undertaking the literature review for this research, a substantial body of work was uncovered pertaining to the connection between colonialism, homo/transphobia and its complex links to the post-colonial psyche which Fanon explains in detail in Black Skin White Masks (originally published in 1952). Equally important, another part of the colonial legacy is the emergence of the politics of respectability and its impact on anyone who falls outside the performance of respectability. Ziegier perfectly captures the pressures of respectability, “another type of ‘law’ infringement to a burgeoning black middle class that performed ‘respectable’ representations of gender roles which concealed one’s sexual practices in an effort to promote racial uplift” *(Ziegler, 2016)*. This consequently results in double ostracisation from Black and White societies. The Black Queer body is under constant surveillance being constantly policed for its deviance.

Conclusion

The central focus of my own research was on the experiences of the Black Queer Diaspora concerning their feelings of belonging and connection in their personal accounts of attending Pride Festivals. It therefore sought to identify if there are differences in the level of connection and belonging focusing on comparisons of UK Black Pride and Pride in London. This has not been addressed previously in other studies. Although Smith's (2020 PhD thesis) *Apprehending Black Queer Diasporas: A Study of Black Pride Festivals and Their Emplacements* is a detailed account of the origins of Black Pride Festivals and how they have become a global movement, it fails to ask the Black patrons of Pride festivals to describe their personal experiences which is what my own research seeks to address.

My own findings were analysed of the following themes: Outsider syndrome, Belonging and Empowering the Black Queer Diaspora to elucidate why Black Pride exists and thus explain to what extent the patrons of UK Black Pride believe it is still necessary. The overarching pattern that emerged from the analysis is that UK Black Pride is necessary for QTIPOC because firstly, they experience discrimination and alienation in mainstream queer spaces and are often forced to create their own alternative spaces that are racialised and segregated. Secondly, representation is essential in the presents of alienation and othering caused by being a minority group at the intersection of multiple axes of oppression which forms a ‘matrix of domination’ *(Hill Collins, 2002)*. UK Black Pride provides representation in a meaningful culturally-relevant way. Lastly, social-political action is key in moving the conversation forward regarding the rights of the Black Queer Diaspora. UK Black Pride can provide advocacy by amplifying the voices of the QTIPOC in an effort to improve their experiences in the social world. To analyse the data within the themes, it was essential to use an intersectional framework. To think inclusively about oppressions and how they interlock *(Hill Collins, 2002)* allows us to understand how multiple layers of oppression contribute to the experiences of QTIPOC.

Nola Sterling, Beyond the Lens Podcast Producer, Research Associate for Design Against Crime Research Centre, Trustee at Clean Break and Women in Prison

Terminology

Black/People of Colour

Historically, the term Black has been used to describe racialised people of African descent. However, in Britain, the term politically Black was introduced in the 1970s. *The Guardian* notes it as "the idea that anyone from a group affected by racism could identify as politically Black, to form a united group" *(Wilson et al., 2016)*. The Mission Statement from Lady Phyll on the UK Black Pride website describes UK Black Pride as "Europe's largest celebration for LGBTQI+ people of African, Asian, Caribbean, Latin American and Middle Eastern-descent" *(Opoku-Gyimah, no date)*. As the central focus of my analysis is UK Black Pride, I draw on Lady Phyll's definition of Black and use it interchangeably with People of Colour (POC) to signify people of African, Asian, Caribbean, Latin American, Indigenous and Middle Eastern descent.

Queer

It is necessary here to clarify exactly what is meant by Queer as it has multiple meanings as Gill posits "Queer signifies doubly as both an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities and as a descriptor for an anti-normative posture characteristic of communities or individuals who may or may not live under the LGBT umbrella" *(Gill, 2012)*. Although this may be true, for the purpose of my research I use the term Queer to refer to those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual and non-gender conforming.

Black Queer Diaspora

The Black Queer Diaspora is a frequently used notion in Black Queer Studies and yet it is a concept that is challenging to define neatly. It cannot be simply defined as the scattering of people from their original country to other places like the African Diaspora (*Oxford Dictionary*). The phrase Black Queer Diaspora is used to refer to a concept of alienation caused when Blackness and Queerness intersect. Allen writes that "the terms black, queer, and diaspora between the porous strokes I have added here have already begun to be elaborated beyond the metaphors and concepts offered by any one of these constituencies, and beyond false dichotomies of essentialism and anti-essentialism" *(Allen, 2012)*. Gill claims, "blackness and queerness are differently articulated depending on the contexts in which they appear. Each contributes, however, a turbulent dynamism or fluidity to the construction of the black queer diaspora. Black queer subjects come to understand themselves and the world in which they live through some form of black queer subject positioning that is located in a space of perpetual flux 'resembling diaspora'" *(Gill cited in Smalls, 2017)*.

This can be understood as the Black Queer Diaspora creating a philosophical, psychological culture, a local culture in the absence of a physiological geographical place of belonging. Similarly, in this research the phrase Black Queer Diaspora is used to describe a convergence of Blackness and Queerness inside a metaphysical dimension where Black Queer people co-exist with shared experiences of alienation and paradoxically belonging.

Link to document references

LGBT Voices of Pupils with SEND

Klaudia Matasovska, PhD Candidate in Educational Sudies, Goldsmiths, University of London

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This contribution particularly discusses the LGBT voices of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), who are also sometimes referred to as neurodivergent. I also acknowledge the fact that many neurodivergent people have overlapping conditions and that increases the differences as perceived by society.

The Equality Act 2010 is there to give people from marginalised groups the message that everyone deserves to be valued. In reality, many neurodivergent people can face multiple societal barriers daily. A lot of them have several overlapping conditions which will affect the way their thought processes gain meaning from a situation, context or content. The more differences a person has in terms of the society's 'normal', the more difficult it is for them in terms of those 'normal' systems. It is important to acknowledge that neurodiverse people who also identify as LGTB have even more barriers posed by society, partially due to layered stigma.

LGBT Voices of Pupils with SEND

Klaudia Matasovska, PhD Candidate in Educational Sudies, Goldsmiths, University of London

Before I embarked on my PhD studies at the Educational Department at Goldsmiths, University of London, I had worked as a SEN teacher and a Behaviour Lead in a School for the Blind. As someone who identifies as bisexual, it was very important to me to educate the children and young people in my school about the different types of protected characteristics, many of which were also shared amongst the school community members. Prejudice is a learned behaviour and children and young people with SEND often face stigma. Society's perception of disabled people concerning intimacy can pose its challenges. Within the educational context, one of the challenges is pupils with SEND having their right to access 'sensitive' information questioned *(Toft and Franklin, 2020)*. The 'sensitive' topics include LGBT Relationship and Sex Education related concepts, such as intimacy, gender identity and sexual orientation. There also seem to be ongoing issues regarding neurodivergent pupils' views being taken into consideration when it comes to decision-making about their intimate lives. While it is generally acknowledged that people with disabilities have the same rights to sexual and reproductive desires and hopes as those who are unaffected by disability, society has overlooked their sexuality, reproduction-related anxieties and desires as well as human rights *(Addlakha et al, 2017)*.

My colleagues and I were determined not to let the fear, felt amongst a small number of our other colleagues, affect the pupils' opportunities to learn about 'sensitive' concepts. We understood the importance of talking about inclusive education, including LGBT Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). A lack of teachers' subject knowledge regarding LGBT+ concepts can unintentionally cause LGBT+ students to feel isolated *(Harris et al., 2022)*. We wanted to avoid this and therefore, we put lots of effort into training our colleagues on how to deliver effectively an inclusive LGBT RSE curriculum to the pupils. This was important so that once trained they would have the tools and confidence to talk about any topic with the pupils which was one way for the pre-existing stigma and fear to dissipate.

The LGBTQ/SEND intersection became very important to me around this time because I realised that both LGBT and SEND were very much missing from research and other educational discourse around RSE. The existing literature regarding this intersection was rather limited, with many LGBT+/SEND studies usually involving participants with verbal and mild intellectual disabilities (IDs), focusing mostly on topics around safety and abuse prevention *(Turner and Crane, 2016)*.

The next logical step for me was to liaise with a national LGBT charity that worked on delivering LGBT Inclusion training programmes to (mainstream) schools. They helped with our efforts to make our school more LGBT inclusive and relied on the SEN knowledge and expertise of me and my colleagues to make their programme more SEN-friendly. For example, we would produce programme posters in braille to help pupils access this information which included the key facts about the Equality Act 2010 and its purpose. As educators, we needed to feel that this type of intervention would be meaningful to our learners, most of whom had more complex SEND and all of whom were registered blind.

With regards to teaching neurodivergent learners with sensory impairments, one must bring the information to them in a way that makes their learning fully possible and accessible. In other words, abstract information often does not help. Therefore, it was important for us to establish a 'real' LGBT-inclusive setting via initiatives, such as 'Rainbow Clubs'. These were largely pupil-led and presented a way for our pupils to meet and interact with 'real life' LGBTQ role models and peers via open discussions. Amongst the topics of their choice were same-sex relationships, gender identity, pronouns, dead-naming and so on. No topic was forbidden, and they thanked us for the opportunity not to be viewed as 'child-like' or asexual. Some of these students wrote poems about their 'rainbow' experience and felt empowered by these opportunities which enabled them to think more deeply about their own identity and sexual orientation because now they had the tools to do it.

Their involvement in creating a more LGBT inclusive school environment went beyond participating in Rainbow Clubs. They understood the importance of having uni-sex toilets and neutral-coloured uniforms available which also sent a clear message to any visitors that we were an LGBT+ inclusive school. They had an input into the school's policies to make more changes reflecting their interests and needs. They also arranged with the school's library staff to have their chosen LGBT-themed storybooks printed in braille. There was no fear around any topic and all initiatives on our part were inspired by the pupils' interests and curiosity.

We also included them in adapting the curriculum so that it would be more LGBT inclusive and reflective of the September 2020 inclusive RSE guidelines. For example, in Art we would introduce a list of famous works of artists who were related to different intersections including artists, such as Frida Kahlo, who was both bisexual and disabled. I would also invite LGBT people living with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) to come to my RSE lessons to give a talk about the societal barriers they faced due to their disabled, LGBT identities.

The growing understanding of intersectionality, alongside further academic 'maturing' in terms of theory and praxis, suggests its continuing relevance for comprehending issues of privilege and subjugation *(Grand and Zwier, 2014)*. My own experience with implementing LGBT aspects into the overall culture of my former SEN school setting has inspired me to make the LGBTQ/SEND intersection the basis for my PhD research. The other reason behind my decision was the research gap concerning this subject. The existing global literature available at the time largely involved the most able learners with SEND. This paucity of research on LGBT inclusion in the context of classrooms serving pupils with SEND will hopefully be less of an issue in the future as intersectionality is becoming an increasingly popular framework in terms of interpreting the interrelated nature of prejudice and discrimination *(Carastathis, 2014)*.

Speaking from my own experience, the LGBTQ SEND intersection is one intersection SEN practitioners are less comfortable with compared to other intersections. I am hoping to understand the underlying reasons behind this in more depth via my research in the next few years.

Every young person should be able to see themselves, and their family, represented in their school curriculum, in the books they read, on posters on walls and in worksheets. This involves everyone with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, including disability, faith, race, ethnicity and trans and non-binary pupils. Research suggests that the curriculum is strongly binary, making it hard for the children and young people who do not place themselves within the gender binary to come out at school *(Paechter, Toft and Carlile, 2021)*. We should start with teaching about LGBT/SEND inclusive concepts in the very early stages of schooling and having a truly inclusive curriculum is key in this process.

Since the start of my PhD studies, I have consulted many SEN practitioners, school leaders and academics about effective ways of supporting LGBT+ pupils. It is very encouraging to see that the SEN school culture concerning LGBT+ inclusion is starting to change, gradually. There is no such thing as 'normal' but sadly our society has perimeters which identify what 'normal' is. The more conditions neurodivergent individuals have the more differences they have as perceived by the society which means there are more barriers for them. I am hoping my PhD research will impact the values and ethos as well as the curriculum of SEN settings in such a way that they will be fully inclusive regarding LGBT neurodiverse pupils and thus minimise the spectrum of barriers currently posed by the society. Schools' neurodivergent-friendly approaches to LGBT inclusion would make the biggest difference to lives within a society that is neurodiverse.

Link to document references

The nature of intersectionality concerning the neurodivergent individual

Linda Pett, AchieveAbility Advocate, retired Social Worker

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This contribution relates to the nature of intersectionality concerning the neurodivergent individual. Neurodivergent individuals can frequently address the challenges of the neurotypical markets; by adopting a Dickensian, Micawber-like “hopeful expectation” that "something will turn up”.

Change demanded by the neurotypical market tends to be managed via mitigations and adaptions. These frequently create a circular experience of hope, adaptation and then a sense of failure. Neurodivergent thinking processes, are processed as negative characteristics and are rarely accepted as a human right.

Nonetheless, entrepreneurs such as Richard Branson, Lord Sugar, Anita Roddick, Richard Branson, Jamie Oliver, and the Ikea founder Ingvar Kamprad created radically different outcomes *(Tickle, 2015)*. My MA dissertation written in 2021 reflected an attempt at a psychosocial analysis of this dynamic. This contribution draws from that research *(Pett, 2021)*.

The nature of intersectionality concerning the neurodivergent individual

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That work addressed multiple levels of disadvantage experienced by one in ten of the population who are neurodivergent and dyslexic. Most research looks at the functional aspects of the acquisition of literacy skills. Others look at the lived experience of individuals who are neurodivergent and have dyslexia. The research I conducted revealed multifaceted intersections which have received limited academic exposure.

The research highlighted a pattern of outcomes which, in my opinion, suggest a set of predictable 'microaggressions', with comments such as 'failure to work', 'loss of promotion' and the imposition of outcomes that do not meet the needs of the individual. I believe these situations constitute aggression which creates an atmosphere in which a neurodivergent and dyslexic person will struggle to be recognised.

Glazzard (2017) looked at the dynamics of neurodiversity in the area of teacher training. The focus is non-confirmatory to neurotypical targets, rather than the skills and talents the students/ workers could bring to the role, and he states that "competing policies result in the marginalisation of people with disabilities". Glazzard identified a pattern around administrative tasks that appeared to be dealt with by raising concerns about standards rather than providing appropriate support which would have been available under the Equalities Act 2010. Adaptations by the agency such as extra administration support were not accepted, with Glazzard going on to state that "most trainees highlighted different ways in which they felt they had experienced discrimination".

Neurotypical reactions toward neurodivergent conditions and 'hidden disabilities' such as dyslexia can produce counterproductive reactions. Individuals make judgements based on their life experiences and programmed bias. When presented with an articulate and able individual they may react with confusion as this person does not meet their expectation of 'intelligent'. This can produce a rigid and unhelpful response in which the dyslexic individual must conform and change themselves to fit the expectations of others.

The concept of 'intersectionality' was originally conceptualized by the Black feminist lawyer and academic Kimberlé Crenshaw. She used intersectionality as a method to analyse and then consider how to resist social injustice. Recognising the intersections of injustice between race, gender, social class, (dis) ability and sexuality, Crenshaw focused on the fact that no social identity category exists in isolation; they create reciprocal constructs, which simultaneously act and react within the prevailing cultural and economic discourse. This provides a mechanism by which we can understand the experience of marginalisation through multiple combinations of identities. For example, an individual may experience discrimination because of their dyslexia/neurodivergence, but they will also experience additional discrimination because of their gender, class, sexuality, physical disability, and race.

Intersectionality offers a way of analysing the complexity of these psychosocial interactions. Change can only occur when these intersections are understood and acted upon. Atif Choudhury (2022) points out that it is only the case for those with neurodivergent conditions where society finds it acceptable to insist that individuals move away from their true selves. The potential for societal injustice is heightened as individual identities are determined by social constructions which then facilitate the continuation of an individual's position as a disadvantage or advantage. These "key intellectual problems that a group of people seeks to address can only be understood through several lenses" *(Butler in Frosh, 2015)*.

> The lens of intersectionality exposes the interrelationship between individual policies, actions, reactions, and realities of a neoliberal society. This may create opportunities for the realignment of our social constructions.

The nature of intersectionality concerning the neurodivergent individual

Linda Pett, AchieveAbility Advocate, retired Social Worker

My own research sought to address how the inability to process the written word logically and sequentially impacted an individual's human consciousness, potentially rendering them marginalised and 'othered'. Gavin Reid (2009) identified that research and interventions into the neurodivergent and dyslexic focus primarily on deficits regarding the acquisition of literacy skills, thereby ignoring the complex individualised issues which neurodivergent people face and the mechanism by which such individuals manage to either prosper and succeed or 'fail'. Davis and Braun's (2010) *The Gift of Dyslexia* also identified how the definition of the 'symptoms' of dyslexia fails to acknowledge the positive possibilities of being neurodivergent and dyslexic.

Within my MA research, I acknowledged the bias that my own dyslexia brought and how the concept of 'burden' needs to be seen as a social construct. I used research that resonated with my own and the lived experiences of dyslexic individuals who took part in the studies within the workplace and education, and these experiences reflected a sense of trial and burden. It recognised, challenged, and celebrated the notion of a dyslexic/neurodivergent community or social space. Bourdieu *(in Roksby and Hillier, 2005)* conceptualised a "social space" as a group of people who occupy similar or neighbouring positions. The acts of marginalisation of a person may also help to create that social space or community.

A community of dyslexic/neurodivergent subjects can share a sense of space with similar elements in common. For example, neurodivergent and dyslexic individuals have diverse characteristics. However, one common characteristic is we are not linear thinkers. Information is not processed in the linear sequential order which is the established order for the majority of the population. Katherine Hewlett stated in 2022:

> "Neurodivergent individuals navigate many linear pathways through systems that manage our world when their cognitive thinking is not linear."

The fact they can do this at all shows the very high level of intellectual capability the neurodivergent mind can attain, whilst still engaged in their own cognitive thinking approaches". While Ehardt (2009) asked society to consider dyslexia not as a disorder "but as a strategically designed adaption, which provides an advantage. Dyslexics have potentially useful traits, in design, empathy and creativity, these are lost in the drive toward productivity" .

My own MA work sought to consider the interaction between complex dominant discourses within education and employment. The main aim was to examine the notion that people who are dyslexic/neurodivergent mask their difference and contort their presentation to fit into the demands of a neoliberal world.

Goffman, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956) used theatre analogies to depict individual face-to-face interactions. He describes how we present ourselves to the world as in 'front of the house'. We all present information about ourselves which creates predictability within an interaction. Therefore, we give information that defines us as suitable, trusted, and capable. Non-conformity to these predetermined behaviours can result in stigma. Backstage, however, individuals can relax, remove their disguise and be their authentic selves. How then does the dyslexic subject present in front of the house?

The neoliberal performance of a neurodivergent dyslexic is monitored through habitus, which values "Market, Management and Performance" *(Ball, 2016)*. This results in covert and overt processes within the dominant hegemony that bring unconscious and conscious processes into the lives of the neurodivergent and dyslexic subject. When the neurodivergent and dyslexic subject fails to perform, despite having the apparent intellectual ability to complete a task, they often feel humiliated, anxious, and exposed. They are judged by a 'neoliberal' glare, of confusion, a sense that someone is not trying and ultimately a conclusion of failure.

The nature of intersectionality concerning the neurodivergent individual

Linda Pett, AchieveAbility Advocate, retired Social Worker

Street (2003) describes literacy within neoliberal culture as being seen as “neutral and universal” as if it were autonomous and unrelated to “the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it”. Therefore, the current hegemony of literacy inculcates an “autonomous model of literacy” and is viewed as being benign in its effects. As discussed earlier, the current belief system is that the neurodivergent and dyslexic subject needs to be corrected using prescriptive, and predetermined methods. These are employed to ensure the dyslexic subject is proficient within the dominant cultural models of literacy.

The advent of social media, which carries with it cultural and ideological assumptions of literacy, has enabled an online environment which both embraces and challenges these assumptions. It is a social space which uses visual communication designed to grab the individual’s attention without the use of the written word. Does this produce the possibility of connecting without words, perhaps moving towards a philosophical turn in social media? The philosophical analysis of social media has its foundations in Goffman’s presentation of self (1956) and Bourdieu’s notions of social capital and social space. However there is little research into the impact of social media as it interacts with the neurodivergent/dyslexic population. What we do know, anecdotally, is that many neurodivergent people gravitate to technology and social media as an immediate and effective way of expression.

Riddick (2010) identified that those who live with being neurodivergent and dyslexic see themselves as “poor readers”, placing the blame within their control and seeing themselves as unable to succeed; success is attributed to luck. Strong readers view their achievements as enabled by their innate ability. Within self-doubt there is a sense of the development of “learned helplessness”. Riddick uses Seligman's (2006) notion of learned helplessness to explain how “individuals placed in a negative situation, from which they cannot escape and over which they feel that they have no control, will become apathetic and demoralized” *(Riddick, 2010)*.

Nicholson (2015) uses Seligman’s positive health model as a conceptual framework for a positive psychology *(Seligman, 2008)*. This model considers the meaning of “happiness”, breaking it down into “quantifiable aspects”: positive emotion (the pleasant life), engagement (the engaged life) and purpose (the meaningful life). Nicholson adapted this framework to consider how neurodivergent and dyslexic individuals might fit into this narrative. He suggests that this can be achieved by recognising the barriers, the negative internal language fostered by a negative narrative. An approach which embraces difference enhances a positive narrative which pragmatically supports the identified needs of the neurodivergent and dyslexic individual. Nicholson is recognised for making progress in terms of legislative frameworks and of diverse areas of research leading to an increase in awareness. However, he maintained that the labelling of disability, and its sense of disempowerment and ultimately of disengagement, was at the expense of the individual. Nicholson’s ideas continue to be used in more recent research and narratives concerning the neurodivergent and the dyslexic.

As discussed earlier, the lens of intersectionality exposes the interrelationship between individual policies, actions, reactions, and realities of a neoliberal society. This, in turn, potentially creates opportunities for the realignment of our social constructions. In this context, global communications have indeed changed with increased emphasis on the universal language of images. There is also an increasing understanding of what we mean by intersectionality and our neurodivergent community is growing to have a voice. While Atif Choudhry (2022) could still say that “neurodivergent individuals are unable to breathe, to bring their true authentic selves to their work”, there is also evidence that we are starting to bring our true authentic selves to all we do.

Link to document references

Charting an ND lived cultural experience of communication for movement therapy

Emma Louise Lane, AchieveAbility Advocate and Creative Writing Facilitator, Recovery College, St Mungo’s

Photo by Ahmad Odeh on Unsplash

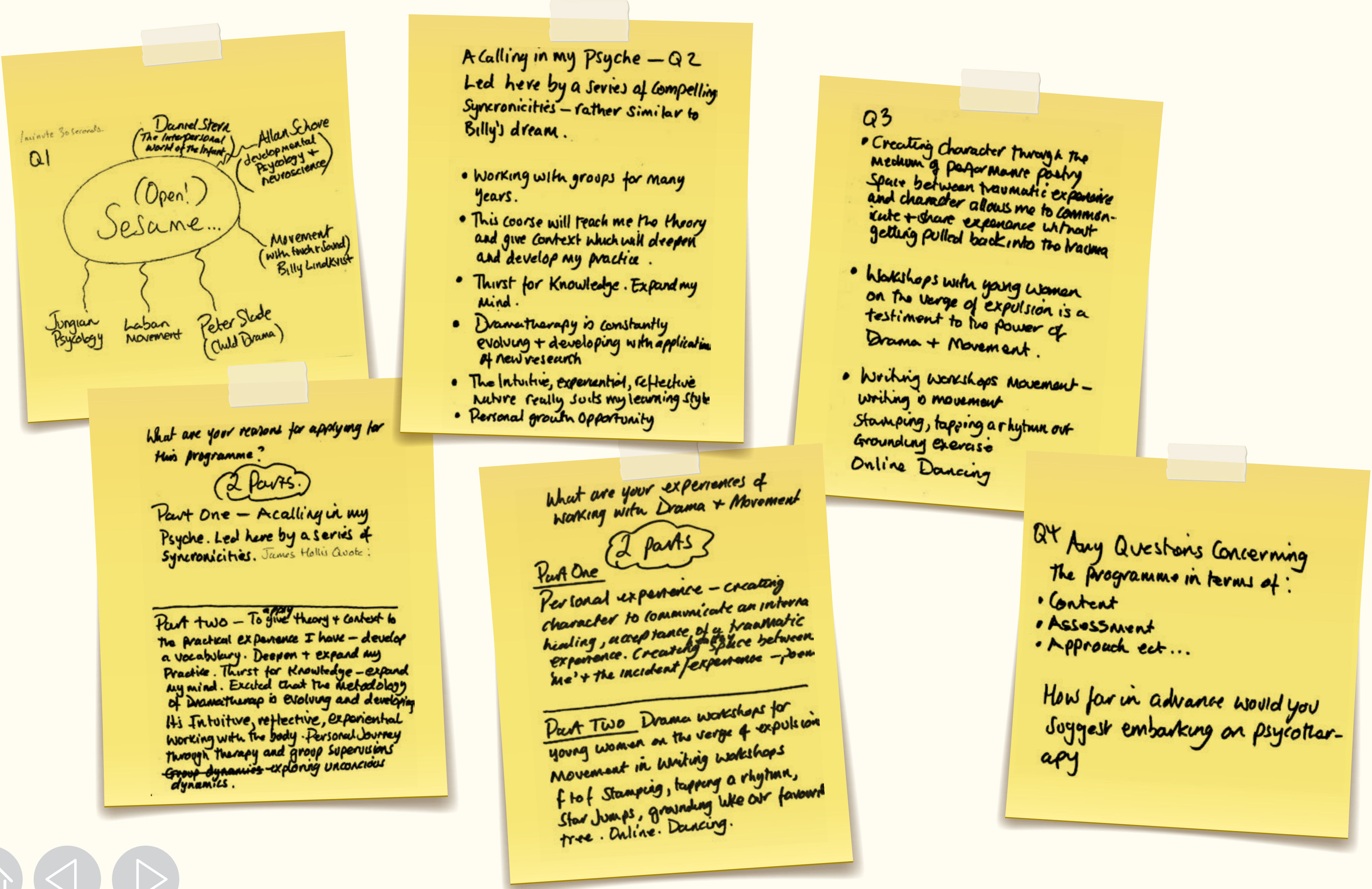
The YouTube video (detailed below) happened as I was required to produce information about my lived experience in the interview for the MA Drama and Movement Therapy at The Central School of Speech and Drama.

YouTube video

Basically, I was going insane for two weeks trying to record the video on my laptop at my desk at home. Every waking moment was consumed by the content. I had mind maps and post-it notes all around the place and 10,000 draft videos that did not feel right.
In the end, unable to cope with the intense energy in my body, I grabbed my phone and went for a walk in nature to ground myself. A moment of impulsiveness and connection led to me recording this video “off the cuff”. I was unable to explain this process at the time, but wondered if it would somehow shine through. I feel proud of this video below and I hope it could be useful to others. My approach was as a multi-disciplinary project. Myself being the project.

Charting an ND lived cultural experience of communication for movement therapy

Emma Louise Lane, AchieveAbility Advocate and Creative Writing Facilitator, Recovery College, St Mungo's



1 minute 30 seconds

Q1

(Open!) Sesame...

Daniel Stern (The Interpersonal World of The Infant)

Allan Schore (developmental Psycology + neuroscience)

Movement (with touch + Sound) Billy Lindkvist

Jungian Psycology

Laban Movement

Peter Slade (Child Drama)

What are your reasons for applying for this programme?

2 Parts.

Part One – A calling in my Psyche. Led here by a series of Syncronicities. James Hollis Quote:

Part two – To ~~give~~ apply theory + context to the practical experience I have – develop a vocabulary. Deepen + expand my Practice. Thirst for Knowledge – expand my mind. Excited that the Metodology of Dramatherap is evolving and developing. Its Intuitive, reflective, experiential working with the body. Personal Journey through therapy and group supervisions ~~Group dynamics~~ – exploring unconcious dynamics.

A Calling in my Psyche – Q2

Led here by a Series of Compelling Syncronicities – rather similar to Billy's dream.

- Working with groops for many years.
- This course will teach me the theory and give context which will deepen and develop my practice.
- Thirst for Knowledge. Expand my Mind.
- Dramatherapy is constantly evolving + developing with application of new research
- The Intuitive, experential, reflective nature really suits my learning style
- Personal growth opportunity

What are your experiences of working with Drama + Movement

2 parts

Part One

Personal experience – creating character to communicate an interna healing, acceptance of a traumatic experience. Creating poetry space between – 'poem me' + the incident/experience

Part Two Drama workshops for young women on the verge of expulsion Movement in Writing workshops f to f Stamping, tapping a rhythm, Star Jumps, grounding like our favourite tree. Online. Dancing.

Q3

- Creating character through the medium of performance poetry Space between traumatic experience and character allows me to communicate + share experience without getting pulled back into the trauma
- Workshops with young women on the verge of expulsion is a testiment to the power of Drama + Movement.
- Writing workshops Movement – writing to movement
  Stamping, tapping a rhythm out
  Grounding exercise
  Online Dancing

Q4 Any Questions Concerning the Programme in terms of:

- Content
- Assessment
- Approach ect...

How far in advance would you suggest embarking on psycotherapy

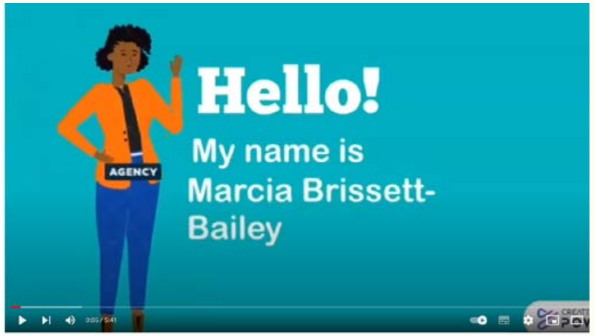
Black and Dyslexic

Marcia Brissett-Bailey, Author, SEND Expert, Neurodivergent and Dyslexic Advocate and Thinker

Marcia AKA The Black Dyslexic – Winner of the British Dyslexia Association Adult Award 2022 – has also recently been identified as being among the Top 50 Influential Neurodivergent Women in 2022. She was nominated for the Stereotype Buster of the Year category in the 2021/22 Celebrating Neurodiversity Awards.

Marcia is an influencer and narrative changer, speaker, author and featured in *Forbes*, a visual creator, provoking the representation of dyslexia and neurodiversity. She is currently a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, Information, Advice, Support, Service (SENDIASS) Case Officer.

Marcia talks in this film about her experiences as Black and Dyslexic



Hello!

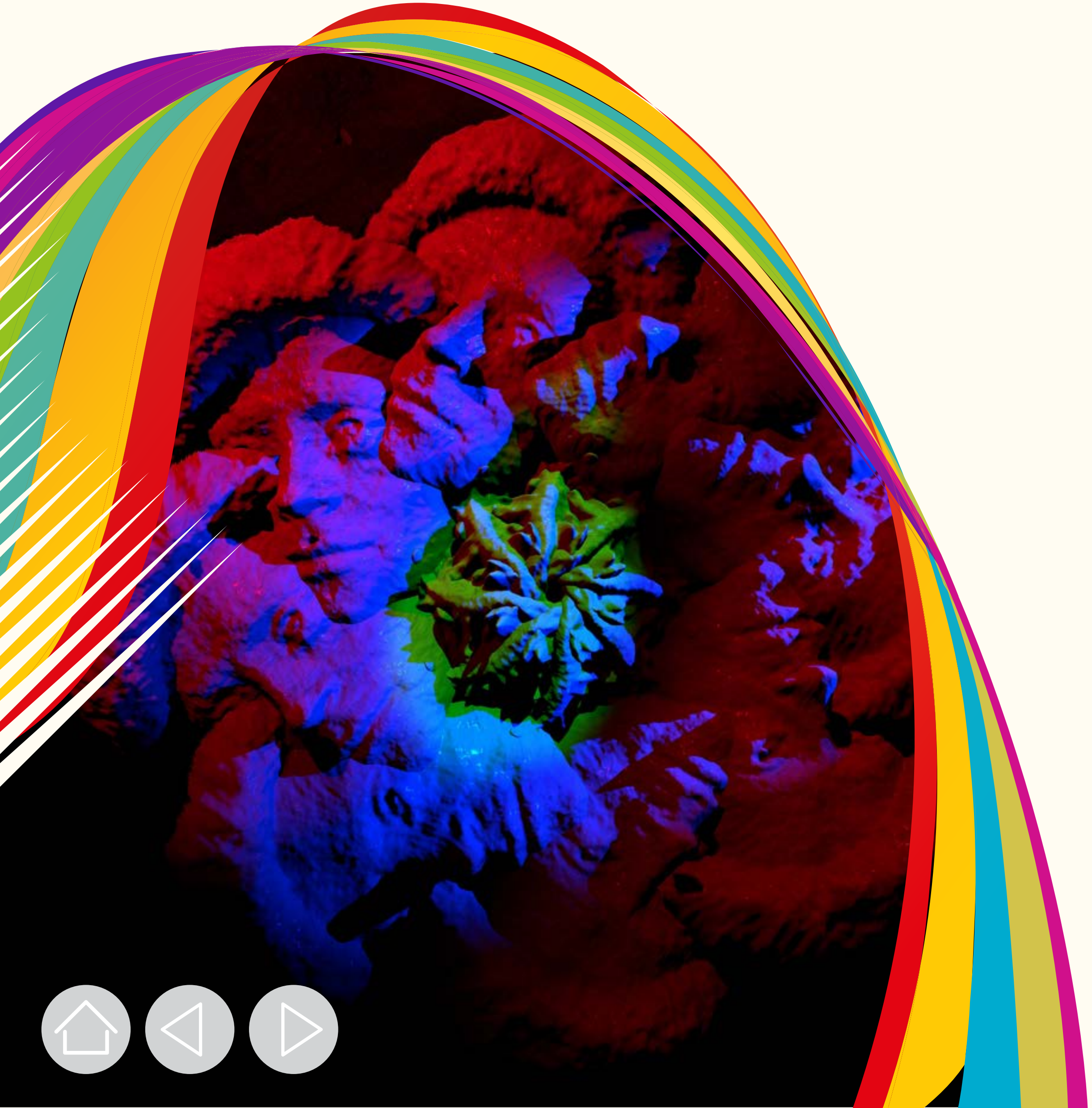
My name is Marcia Brissett-Bailey

YouTube video

Creative production:
Ayana Bailey
CEO of Yani Creation -
Dyslexic by Design

DEAR BRIAN 16 short moments of loathing

Lennie Varvarides, Founder of DYSPLA and Advisory Member for the Mayor of London's Liberty Festival



DYSPLA STATEMENT:

DYSPLA is an experimental multi-media art studio developing Neurodivergent Storymakers through subversive means. Working predominantly in Moving Image, VR, AR, Photography, and Poetry, DYSPLA is building a case for the existence of the Neurodivergent Aesthetic (NDA). With the continuous support of Arts Council England, DYSPLA is pioneering new ways to mix technology and poetry in storymaking.

Our goal is to amplify the neurodivergent voice across mediums and communities. We've defined the term Neurodivergent Aesthetic as the emblem of playful and intuitive storymaking. The NDA is about the experience and the process of making, while being neurodivergent. We collaborate only with Neurodivergent artists to raise awareness of the ethical and humane reasons for inclusion. DYSPLA is a celebration of difference in the form of gritty, raw, complicated, explorative and esoteric artmaking.

Founder - **Lennie Varvarides**

Creative Producer - **Kazimir Bielecki**

Lennie and Kazimir are artists who celebrate intuitive creativity in being neurodivergent

DEAR BRIAN 16 short moments of loathing

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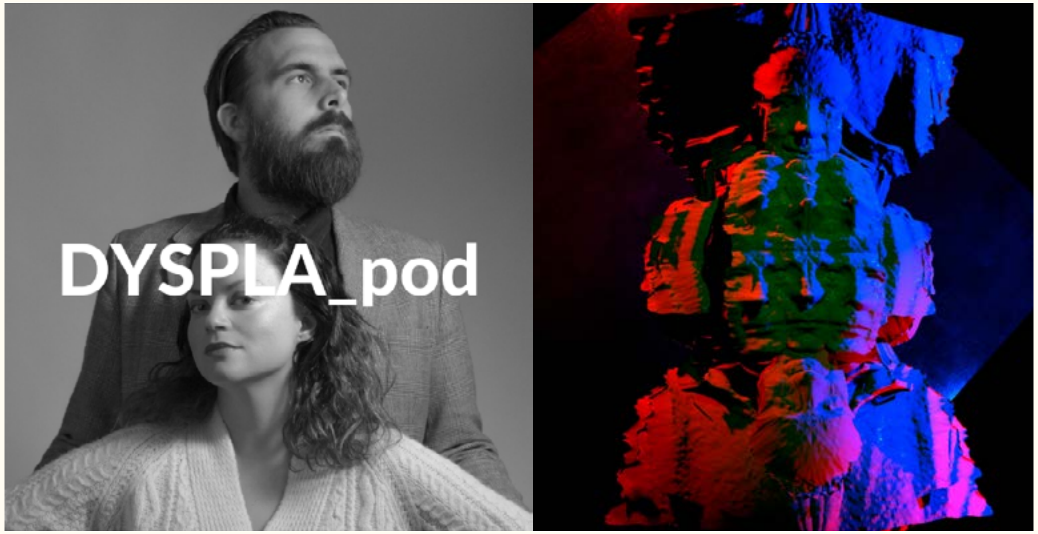
WHAT IS THE AUTHENTIC ND VOICE:
Neurodivergent humans are relentless rebels; their authentic voice fails to conform and succeeds in alienating a society that is unkind to us – weirdos!

DEAR BRIAN

16 short moments of loathing

By Lennie Varvarides, Oct 2022

These verses have some strong language please read these in the context of the emotion conveyed in the poetry and we hope no-one is offended



I

I see you. I love you. I believe in you
— Words you said you would say
to compensate for the fact that they were never said.
Not by the adults, not the damaged adults littered
around your tattered hood of holes less equal… you said.
Used to mould action that benefits only one… you said.
Not light not expansion not beautiful.
Love was war… you said selfish unauthentic it was distance
— an attempt to sever the paralysis.

II

Yesterday, when we spoke,
you gave me something
— some truth that this is enough
— a feeling I can heal with
— the notion that I can comfort my own neglect,
my own discomfort,
my own lost faith.
I can be a mother to myself
— to my hurt
— to my hate.
I can kiss and hug and heal this watery face.
I can save what time is left
— with love, my own, for a human worth loving.

DEAR BRIAN 16 short moments of loathing

Lennie Varvarides, Founder of DYSPLA and Advisory Member for the Mayor of London's Liberty Festival

III

What part of you should remain?
— The jump
— The hop
— The skip
between now and then?
The float above my head?
The concrete?
The chalice?
The race?
— the beat?
— the flush?
— the blood that rises too easily?
The excitement of New?
The joy of simple thought?
The carved silhouettes from morning fog?
I would trade it all for speed others can read
so that I can love you on the other side of paper.
I would temporarily
swap the way you dream
to taste the apple and know more about red
The kind that does not consume shame.

This poem was written by Will, aged 15, 2022

IV

So what? So I said I would change you!
Why should that be met with silence?
Your sulk sinks into the skull
like a boy pushed off his bike
Did I not say I would return?
– after digestion
– after exploration
– after the other side of red and green
To this ageless place to sit by your example.
To follow your free thought down muddy paths.

V

It is Sunday the 16th of January.
I did not keep any of my promises.
You said, *Wake early and walk*.
Were you disappointed?
I should have rectified it but I didn't.
You gave me another chance to
to start again. I heard you say, *Now is a good time*.
But good advice gets no response.
The kind that I too have often given
in moments of optimism and energy.
But eagerness grows only less eager.
Am I annoying, Brian?

I AM WISHFUL
BAVE
I AM WISHFUL WILL
SMILING WILL
SMILING WITH CAUTION
LOOK AT HOW I SMILE
A CHEEKY CHAPPY CHANTING
LOST IN BARS
WISHFUL ME ABLAZE
HOPEFUL ME
CLEAVER ME
I HAVE I AM A CHANCE
I AM I HAVE A CHANCE
A FUTURE BY CHANCE
LUCK FEEL ME
LUCKILY ME
IF ONLY I STAY CLEAN
OUT OF TROUBLE
I CAN'T PROMISE FOR LONG ENOUGH
I CAN'T PROMISE
TO FLOAT TO THE SURFACE
LIKE A CORK
LIKE A CORPSE
LIKE A HUNGRY FISH
LIKE I AM HERE BY CHOICE
LIKE MY DADS DREAMS OF COLLEGE
BUT WE BOTH DIDN'T GET THIS FAR
BY CHANCE

I AM A LITTLE FURTHER

BY CHANCE
BY CHANCE
BY CHANCE
BY CHANCE
BY CHANCE

COMMISSIONED BY THE ADHD FOUNDATION · CREATED BY DYSPLA · WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY WILL, AGED 15

I DONT KNOW
I CANT
I HAVE NO IDEA

I CANT THINK

OF ANYTHING
IM
NOT
SURE
I CANT
PICK

ITS TOO MUCH
ITS TOO HARD

TOO
MANY
CHOICES

IM
SCARED
OF GETTING IT
WRONG
NOT SURE WHICH
TO CHOOSE

I CAN'T THINK
I FEEL TIRED
ITS TOO HARD

COMMISSIONED BY THE ADHD FOUNDATION · CREATED BY DYSPLA · WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY MIA, AGED 12

DEAR BRIAN 16 short moments of loathing

Lennie Varvarides, Founder of DYSPLA and Advisory Member for the Mayor of London's Liberty Festival

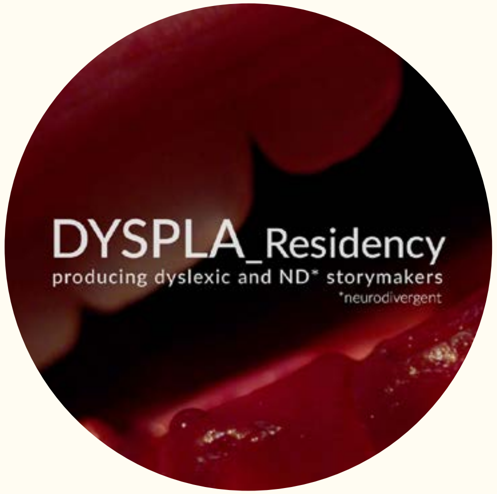
VI

I sense a lack of patience brewing.
In truth – the feeling is mutual.
Let's be honest with it …
We never were *real* besties…
not the way we should have been.
There were times,
I did not have your back and you did not
have my head in tack.
Maybe you just don't really get me.
Brian?

DYSPLA Storymakers Residency 2022

VII

Let me start by saying
I hope you can forgive
my recent outbursts.
You have always been
more forgiving than me
— especially when I need
your forgiveness.
That's why I keep coming back.
Because you take me back.
You will take me back won't you, Brian?



DEAR BRIAN 16 short moments of loathing

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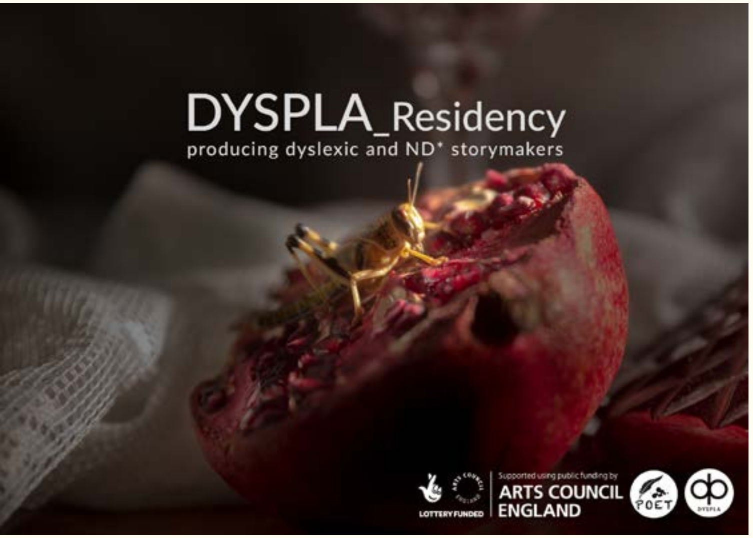
VIII

This is the eighth letter now
and while I do not write
to receive a response…
a response would be nice.
How long will the silent treatment last?
Brian, please come home.
— you selfish fuck. I've said I am sorry
what more do you want?



IX

Last night sleep over dinner did win.
I took joy in the pain of hunger
–survived the night
Woke up early like my promise
to win your favour, Brian.
I went for a jog and ate breakfast late.
Something new is happening.
'Foryou' pages call this 'good habits.'
Does this progress bring us closer?
The more I master you - the more we…
Is this joy?
The kind you were looking for?
I feel like…we are, 'Time'
- mineral - beautiful.
What an odd thing…especially
to the late bloomer…

X

I'm tired of being slow
of never outgrowing these feelings.
Of being messy and chaotic.
Maybe it's the New Year.
The long holiday ruminating.
Something feels wrong, Brian.
When are you coming home?

XI

Dreams are absorbing your abuse
picking up the slack.
Storylines too cruel to endure
I choose to wake up.
Peace now exists in reading.
A pursuit that boiled my skin
now seeding new skin.
Some call it withdrawal,
I call it primal, mental, survival.
All I want these days is solitude
…even from you, Brian.

DEAR BRIAN 16 short moments of loathing

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XII

Brian, have you noticed my letters are getting longer?
You said if I stay on my own long enough
I would start to hear these inner workings
— and you were right.
You are always right.
That's something I hate about you.
You are smarter than me.
Smart is sexy so I guess that makes you hot.
You're hot Brian, but this was my idea
— I had this thought independent of you…
I bet you think you laid the foundation.
Maybe you even think you should get credit
for how far I have come?
But you don't get any credit
–your fragility slowed us down, Brian.
I believed all those things you said
in the beginning when we were first together,
and I started writing them down.
— all those horrible things you said
But you didn't like that, did you, Brian?
You didn't want any evidence - you wanted to be a hero.
You wanted to say, "It's going to be Okay"…and "I love you".
Fuck it, Brian - this isn't love.

360 Short Film

XIII

I didn't mean it.
Please can we be on the same side?
I want the fighting to stop.
Let's not be stupid anymore.
Or wrong. I don't want to feel bad.
Or stupid. Or wrong. I want to feel normal.
I want to feel in control of something.
Even if that is only you.
I want to feel I have some strength.

I want to love everything about you.
I want you to be my home again.
I want to feel like I have a future.
I want the laughing to stop.
Even if it is me laughing.

DEAR BRIAN 16 short moments of loathing

Lennie Varvarides, Founder of DYSPLA and Advisory Member for the Mayor of London's Liberty Festival

XIV

Mornings are exquisite immersed in darkness.
In these hours, I feel you are mine.
That we are close. That you are home.
We are in sync with nothing to attend to but our thoughts.
This early, they belong to us evenly.
We have no rivals. You wake me gently
with the sound of bells I have learnt to respond.
We are open. Words are sweet.
Mine and others. This is how I drift away.
Did you see where we went - what we did?
I danced and I was murdered for it.
He moulded my moves without a face.
The knife was biblical. He was a liberator.
The streets were full of joy.
I was scared of the music - the people…
I was not prepared… but the strange
energy won me over. He taught me to dance
The man without a face. I pushed to find his rhythm.
I feared something. I didn't or I couldn't turn around.
His knife saved me from knowing. He sliced
through my reality. Once dead,
I ran to another place to the child.I stayed with the little boy.
Fat with milk. His mother unaware of where he was.
I found him in the public library… After the dancing
–the last place we were together.
He was sleeping on the floor. The guard was unconcerned.
I screamed too loud– I woke him.
Held him in my arms. Fed him bottle milk
he was not accustomed to. I tried to reason
with the guard to call the police… to find his mother…
but the guard was lost to the long hours
close to death at his desk.
It made me realise that I want a baby, Brian, so come home.

Short Film,
Washed Up Babies,
2017

DEAR BRIAN 16 short moments of loathing

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XV

If you are feeling awkward about my last letter
let me say I have changed my mind.
I want to be slim not pregnant
bending hurts my toes need more face time
my ass needs less room my heart needs more light
my steam needs a kettle my voice needs a stage
my sexual-self needs a crush I'm tired of this shape
— it doesn't represent me.
Brian, say something nice for fucks sake.

XVI

This is the last letter I will write to you, Brian.
I feel you need a break or maybe I need a break.
So this letter will be short…
3 words short. Not "I love you" –
That seems cheap
— like I am trying to sell you something.
Or trick you into doing something
you have not consented to.
No — those three words are worthless.
How about
– *"Hate not I"*
— what do you make of that, Brian?
"Hate Not I"
— We could still turn this around
You know, Brian.
We could be the envy of the world.

Words Not Walls, 2020 - Public Art Exhibition

Cheri Shone

"What is the authentic Neurodivergent voice? Is it a voice defined by processing, non sequential, scattergun, mispronounced? Hesitent, creative, inventive, confusing. What is authentic. Genuine. Original. Real. True. Rightful. Valid. Kosher. Pukka. Bona fide. Fully trustworthy according to the facts. What are facts? Something known to exist? Or something constructed with insight. An authentic voice changes with knowledge and shapeshifts through time."

Augmented Reality Holograms volumetrically captured and processed by DYSPLA. Humanities minds are a multitude of collaborative organisms that represent our sigular notion of consciousness. The ND brain is known to be particularly attuned. These works represent the collectivist nature of Neurodivergent cognition. Commissioned by Achieveability.

SCAN QR CODE FOR AUGMENTED REALITY

Calling for change from intersectional perspectives

This film produced by Dyspla profiles four of our neurodivergent authors for the third edition of the AchieveAbility journal. DYSPLA is an award winning arts organisation producing and developing the work of dyslexic and neurodivergent storymakers.

Lennie Varvarides founder of Dyspla is a former student of the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (RCSSD). The RCSSD host the virtual editions of the AchieveAbility E Journal. The foreword of this Journal has been written by Tanya Zybutz who co-ordinates the Dyslexia Service which she set up at The Royal Central School of Speech & Drama 12 years ago.

The imagery of the film has created a set of multidimensional visuals as a narrative for the overlayering intersectional perspectives of our neurodivergent voices in this journal. This film powerfully locates these voices within a multidimensional - neurodiverse framework.

These talking heads - who are all journal neurodivergent authors are:

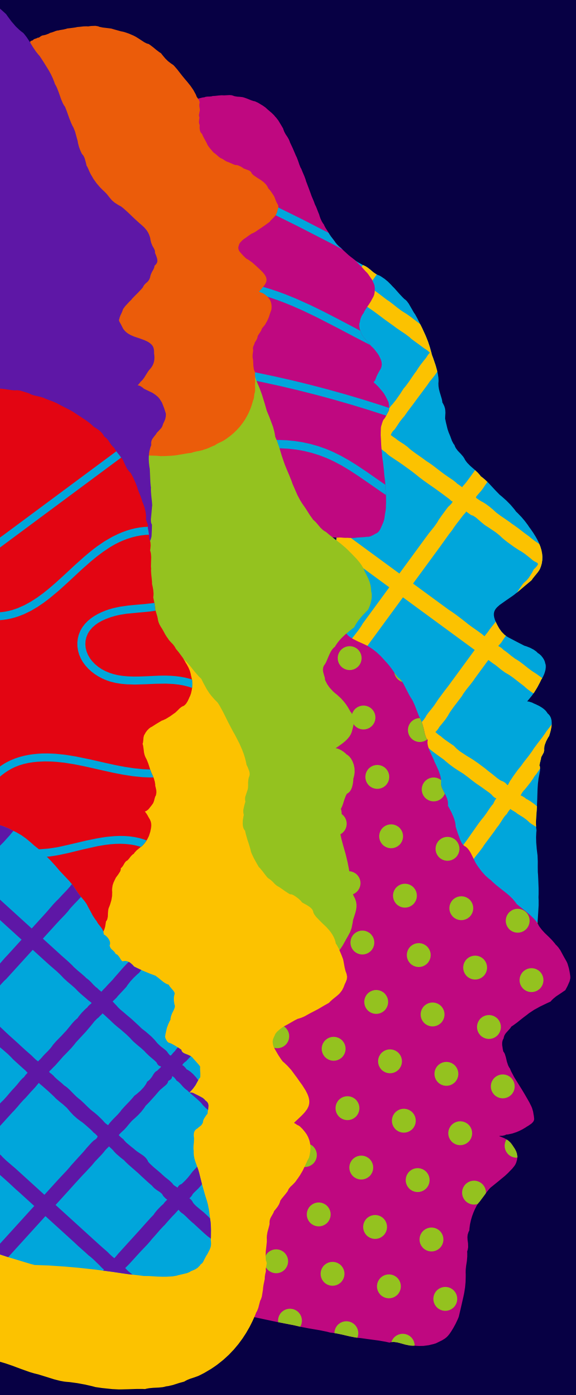
- **Cheri Shone**, ND Consultancy, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, ADSHE, DNA Matters
- **Charles Freeman**, Director Charles Freeman Projects
- **Marcia Brissett-Bailey**, Author, SEND Expert, Neurodivergent and Dyslexic Advocate and Thinker
- **Lennie Varvarides**, Founder of DYSPLA and Advisory Member for the Mayor of London's Liberty Festival

These talking heads are an example of the diversity of our submissions. The journal is profiling 7 other authors. They are:

- **Ellie Thompson**, Communications Lead, Diversity and Ability
- **Sadia Mirza**, Trustee for Waltham Forest Dyslexia Association and Neurodiversity Advocate
- **Andrew Veasey**, FHEA, ADG FEHE as an Assistive Technology Trainer and Study Skills Lecturer, Assistive Solutions
- **Nola Sterling**, Beyond the Lens Podcast Producer, Research Associate for Design Against Crime Research Centre, Trustee at Clean Break and Women in Prison
- **Klaudia Matasovska**, PhD Candidate in Educational Sudies, Goldsmiths, University of London
- **Linda Pett**, AchieveAbility Advocate, retired Social Worker
- **Emma Louise Lane**, AchieveAbility Advocate and Creative Writing Facilitator, Recovery College, St Mungo's

Journal Lead Editor: **Professor Debra Kelly**

Editors and Reviewers: Dr Ross Cooper, Dr Katherine Hewlett, David Hermanstein, Kevin Maskell, Becki Morris, Richard Pitts, Dr Melanie Thorley



The views expressed in articles in the AchieveAbility E-Journal are those of the authors of the contributions, and do not necessarily coincide with those of the Editorial Board or of the Editor(s) of a particular journal issue.

Brief Guidance Notes for Contributors

Proposed contributions should be sent to the Editorial Board. Enquiries and other communications should be sent by e-mail to: **achieveabilityn@googlemail.com**

Queries concerning the format and presentation of articles may be addressed to the Editor(s) of the specific journal issue in question.

The journal uses standard British English, and the Editors reserve the right to alter usage to that end.

Please make sure that all of the quotations, statistics, other research referred to, etc., are fully and correctly referenced. The journal uses the Harvard (author-date) Reference System within the body of the article, together with a full list of references at the end of the article (each reference needs to include the name of the author(s), the full title of article/report/book, the date of publication).

References may be listed either in the order in which they appear in the article, or in alphabetical order of lead author surname.

Please do not use website addresses in the body of the article (use the author-date system) and, if required, add the website address to the end of the reference. Here are some examples of referencing:

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Use as few notes as possible. If you think a note is necessary, make it as brief and to the point as possible and please use footnotes (not endnotes) numbered in Arabic (not Roman) numerals. Illustrations, diagrams, graphs, etc., are welcome.

Designer **Kendall Bickford** owner of **KB Graphics LTD**

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Ellie Thompson

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