



**AchieveAbility**

AchieveAbility E-Journal | **Issue 4** | Winter 2023 *ISSN 2634-0798*

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# Neurodiverse Voices: Intergenerational Differences

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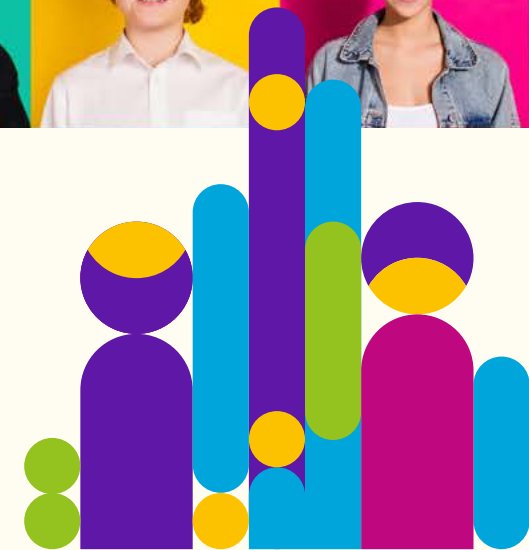
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The ***AchieveAbility E-Journal*** is the research journal of AchieveAbility and shares the organisation's overall commitment to **promoting policy** and **delivering practice** for **successful educational, employment and training opportunities**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

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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

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All articles are peer-reviewed first independently, and then agreed collectively, by the Editorial Board. Contributions selected for review receive a set of comments to address before publication, collated by the Editorial Board. We actively use a variety of ways of feedback and invite contributors to express their preference. 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

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- **David Hermanstein**
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## Publication Schedule

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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.



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# Welcome Statement

from the Patron and President of the  
Board of AchieveAbility

Since 2012 I have been the Patron of the AchieveAbility charity, one aspect of my close personal interest in issues that affect autistic people and the wider neurodivergent community. This fourth edition of the AchieveAbility e-journal is devoted to the research, knowledge, experiences and creativity of its neurodivergent authors. The quality and range of contributions to this issue, 'Neurodiverse Voices: Intergenerational Differences', is outstanding.

These voices are ground-breaking in the authenticity of their words and I am very pleased to provide my support to this publication.

**Barry Sheerman**

MP and Chair of the Westminster  
Autism Commission, December 2023

# Foreword

from Josette Bushell-Mingo OBE, Principal and CEO  
The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (RCSSD) has a rich history of creative thinking and production, with over 30 programmes from award-winning research, knowledge and scholarship, applied theatre, and technical and performing arts. We are part of a global network creating new creative knowledge to inform and drive forward new thinking in the creative industries and societies. As Principal of the RCSSD – also neurodivergent – I am delighted to include the innovative AchieveAbility e-journal as part of our ongoing work. We know it is unique as a platform for the voice of the neurodivergent (ND) person.

The RCSSD strives to celebrate difference in all that we do, and we join AchieveAbility in celebrating the value of 'different minds in different formats' through this publication that promotes ND research and creative thinking.

# Introduction

David Hermanstein, Dr Katherine Hewlett, Professor Debra Kelly and Becki Morris



This 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the *AchieveAbility E-Journal* looks at the increasing profile of neurodivergent people and their intellectual capital across the generations. This theme of ‘intergenerational differences’ is voiced by a wide range of contributors who also span the generations. Their contributions are presented in both more formally academic and in alternative and creative formats.

We know that neurodivergent people can be keen researchers and deep divers of information and creative, empathic thinkers for social change. Sometimes our past experiences can make us hesitate to write our research, or imposter syndrome kicks in – am I good enough?

Every year AchieveAbility commits to publishing an e-journal issue, within the academic setting of a scholarly journal, on specific topics and key themes which offer opportunities for people to share their research, work, lived experience and creativity. Previous themes have included the inclusive workplace, good practice in the workplace in a time of COVID-19 and intersectionality and neurodiversity.

The e-journal offers a positive challenge to some neurodivergent people who may not have received this experience within formal education and the platform to express themselves in formats which are fitting to their work, creative thinking, experiences and expression.

All our authors provide a significant contribution to the intellectual capital of our neurodivergent community and demonstrate the value of this thinking to our wider society. The intergenerational theme was chosen due to its reoccurrence in previous, but differently themed, e-journals. We felt it was a theme that was crying out to be told through our author’s voices, and supported by our Editorial Board.

The aims of this theme are to encourage conversation as part of the national and global narratives of neurodivergent people and our lived experiences. What is our past? What are our influences? Where are we now? Do we share similarities in themes and experiences? What is our future? What emerges is a powerful collective voice eager to shape priorities for our future and for the next generations.

The range of contributions in this issue is outstanding in its passion and in the knowledge and insights of each discussion. These range from individual and collective academic research, to thought-provoking opinion and testimonial pieces – sometimes underpinned by research, sometimes directly addressing the reader/viewer with lived experience, sometimes using the power of creativity, sometimes using a combination of all these – to creative expression in novel and poetic forms. The celebration of difference is integral to the collaborative nature of this e-journal.

**The value and power of neurodivergent voices is key to our ethos.**



# Differences and Similarities between Generations. Can we support each other collaboratively?

Ann Dean, Researcher at the University of Greenwich



This article explores the differences and similarities between generations, whether there is collaborative support and, if so, what this entails. This supposition evokes thoughts of the position I find myself in as a mature neurodivergent student who also works as a non-medical helper (NMH), provided by Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), supporting autistic undergraduates at university.

**Education sets the context for the article, in addition to my professional standpoint as a teacher and personal perspective as a mature neurodivergent (dyslexic) academic.**

The discussion of the generational divide is accomplished by using the qualitative paradigm and the method of autoethnography to support my self-reflection by examining the intersections between the 'Self as a Social Construct' that helps me understand my objective world as suggested by Gergen (2016:110). In addition, the political and cultural customs and expectations that are entrenched in personal experiences at university with 'Education as a Social Construction' as indicated by Dragonas, et. al., (2015: ix) is used. This supports me in representing the experience of the younger generation of autistic university students as they unravel their understanding of themselves (Adams et al., 2017; Ellis et al., 2011; McIlveen, 2008; Méndez, 2014; Wall, 2006).

This leads in turn to comparing and contrasting what similarities and differences the generations have whilst considering if, in these social constructs, we are collaborative and supportive of each other using a further social construct of 'Generational Theory' as denoted by Strauss and Howe (1991).

I conclude with whether this works for me and the students I support in an educational context, considering the generational differences. Additionally, could this be applied to a wider generational context of generations which are supportive and collaborative?

# Differences and Similarities between Generations. Can we support each other collaboratively?

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## Autoethnography As Essay Methodology

To undertake this introspection, I used the qualitative methodology of autoethnography defined by Wall (2006:146):

**[...] a qualitative research method that allows the author to write in a highly personalised style, drawing on his or her experience to extend understanding about a societal phenomenon.**

This is extended by Adams et al., (2017) who suggest that it offers accounts of personal experience (auto) that are reflective, informing readers by describing and interpreting (graphy) aspects of cultural life (ethno) that others may not be aware of. Furthermore, Méndez (2014) points out that an autoethnographic stance has advantages as the narrative is readily available and Ellis and Adams (2014: 254) state, “personal experience, acknowledging existing research, understanding and critiquing cultural experience, using insider knowledge” supports this notion.

**Still, a limitation may be that honesty, self-disclosure and validity must be carefully considered (Mendez, 2014). However, this helps me carefully reflect on my NMH helper role within the university culture, being an academic myself supporting the autistic undergraduates on DSA, and share my insight.**

## Non-Medical Helper

My role as NMH is personal one-to-one bespoke support (study skills, mentoring and assistive technology training) provided to students with a disability, such as autism in this instance, as defined in the Equality Act 2010. To access this support, they need to be awarded a DSA grant by Student Finance England (SFE, 2022) which helps with the extra costs of support. This is paid directly to the NMH Provider who employs me (SFE, 2022) to enable access to their studies more equitably.

However, to access this grant autistic students need to have a clinical diagnosis of autism, which is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition affecting them behaviorally socially, emotionally, and academically at university, with strengths and limitations (Bolourian et al., 2018). The use of diagnosis first language will be used in this article as it is preferred by those with autism because it is a concealed disability that is part of their persona (Dunn and Andrews, 2015). The diagnosis is a requirement to apply for DSA because evidence of the disability has to be provided with the application.

Having a diagnosis and being labelled follows the ‘Medical Model’ of disability as a ‘condition’, that needs appropriate ‘treatment’ as stated by Llewellyn & Hogan, (2000:158). Yet, in my NMH support role, I am advised to follow the ‘Social Model’ by Haegele & Hodge (2016:197) suggesting that it is “not one’s bodily function that limits his/her abilities, it is society”. I subscribe to a more nuanced balanced approach to students’ differences, creating a bespoke Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for them based on the specific requirements they wish to share with me (Berghs et al., 2016). As a neurodivergent person supporting them, I feel I can be more nuanced and share with them my differences, expertise and experiences professionally, so that they may begin to trust and respect me as a mature person.



# Differences and Similarities between Generations. Can we support each other collaboratively?

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To accomplish this, I draw on my lifelong experiences of work, and in-depth knowledge as an academic, teacher, professional, parent and mature person spanning several generations. I listen carefully in my supporting role during the planned sessions by being open-minded to their needs and taking time to engage them on a common ground. In addition, I share my experiences and differences whilst maintaining professional boundaries.

Reflecting on my NMH role the respect and trust that I gain from young autistic students, who are more than a generation apart, are due to me sharing my recent academic understanding as a doctoral student. Additionally, I use the experience of my prior qualifications and my accredited knowledge of autism, as an ally and advocate (Martin, 2020).

Moreover, as I deliver study skills support, mentoring and assistive technology this gives me an all-around perspective of every aspect of support. However, on further reflection, I feel it is not only this that puts them at ease enabling them to engage with me. It is that I am not judgmental or condescending, treating them equally, giving praise, encouragement and practical advice irrespective of the disclosure of their neurodivergence, culture, identity, or sexual orientation (Cooper et al., 2017).

Furthermore, I take time to ask if there are resources they have that help them, giving them time to reciprocate creating active learning and engagement with social interaction to help build a “social identity” as stated by Cooper et al., (2017: 845) that they can find difficult. They appreciate me taking the time to listen and share resources with me. Additionally, knowing the culture of the university enables me to signpost them to services within and outside the university when this is required or outside my remit (Hillier et al., 2018); this also supports them to self-advocate.

Having provided this support for nearly 5 years, I have neither encountered prejudice nor barriers being a mature person or experienced not providing them with the support they need as a much younger generation. This is reciprocated as I have been sent many messages from the students telling me how well they have done and thanking me for my support.

Information on the support in a NMH role and the requirements are on the **Student Finance England** (SFE, 2023) website. This is mainly professional memberships as a qualified teacher (Department for Education, 2023) and **The Ask Autism Training** by the National Autistic Society (NAS, 2019) to specifically support autistic students.

## A Comparison of Generational Differences and Similarities

To expand on the notion of the generational differences and similarities that I experience in the context of this article, the culture of university study, research and academic requirements, there needs to be an understanding of what is considered a generation and why. In Figure 1 from the recent book by McCrindle and Fell (2021), initiated by the ‘Generation Theory’ of Strauss & Howe (1991: 32), are the colloquialisms for the generations.

There have been naming variations for these cohorts. Furthermore, Kingstone (2021) and Rudolph et al., (2021) both suggest that this is a “socially constructed concept” that can be due to age, culture, and common historical events and experiences that occur during a generation up to the age of 20, for example, political events, war or more recently the Covid-19 pandemic, in addition to the social constructs of education and self (Dragonas, et. al., 2015 and Gergen, 2016).

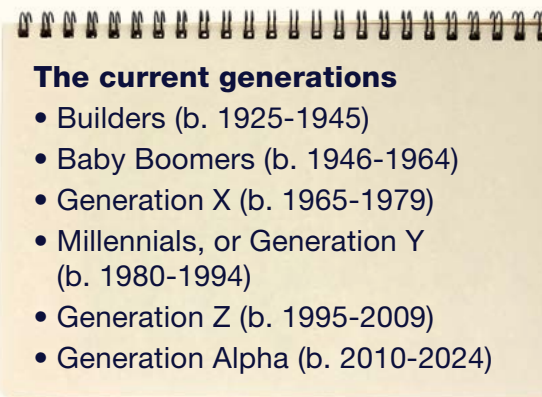


Figure 1: McCrindle & Fell, (2021: 22) Generational Change



# Differences and Similarities between Generations. Can we support each other collaboratively?

Ann Dean, Researcher at the University of Greenwich

There is contention around the Generational Theory which has been used in the main to compartmentalise the generations for employment needs by businesses which gave rise to labelling, stereotyping and discrimination (Parry & Urwin, 2011). This has however, over the last 10 years, gradually begun to be eroded with organisational training, guidance and employment tools with awareness campaigns from the UK Government with the Autism Strategy 2021, as reported by HM Government (2021).

In this generational construct, I am in the 'Baby Boomer' generation whereas the students I support will likely be in 'Generation Z', two generations apart from me. In considering the generational differences as discussed, this suggests I would be significantly different to them due to the period I grew up in. Yet in the current context of a cohort in academic study, they are more similar to me than those of my generation as discussed by Parry & Urwin (2011: 79) who suggest there is a need to "first to disentangle cohort and generational effects from those caused by age or period", which indicates a similarity not based on generation, but similarity of interest. This appears to put me at a different advantage because I am aware of the 'Generation Z' life experiences, whereas they have not experienced most of mine, but the similarities of the recent Covid-19 pandemic and study are common to us both (Parry & Urwin, 2011).

My role of NHM and academic surpasses the notion of generation and similarities, floating undeterred by age, mine and theirs, which "debunks the notion of a generation" as stated by Rudolph et al., (2021:946) who further suggest that lifespan should be considered:

**The lifespan perspective is a well-established alternative to thinking about the process of ageing and development that does not require one to think in terms of generations.**

**The lifespan perspective frames human development as a lifelong process which is affected by various influences – not including generations – that predict developmental outcomes.**

However, younger minds in 'Generation Z' are far more malleable and accepting of new and varied ideas such as the new Artificial Intelligence (AI) that is gaining traction in a digital world (Costa et al., 2019; Gunduzalp, 2021; Lyashenko & Frolova, 2014). Being a 'Baby Boomer', I need to make sure that this difference does not cause a 'Digital Divide' by keeping up my 'Digital Practices' with assistive technology as noted by Costa et al., (2019: 567).

Yet it should be noted that the digital age has changed research, perspectives and attitudes, but also caused stress anxiety and sometimes addictive use of the internet, especially for autistic students (Shane-Simpson et al., 2016). This is different to my need to use the internet purely for work and study because the internet only became part of my generation in the '90s. However, I do need to try and "keep up with this younger generation" as noted by Costa et al., (2019: 566). So, there are some generational similarities across my lifespan and differences between a teacher and students with a common ground to work on via digital tools and academic study (Gunduzalp, 2021).

## Is there collaboration and support between the generations?

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Before undertaking research information for this article, I had not considered if there was collaboration and reciprocal support between myself as an NHM and the autistic students. Yet once I started to reflect on our interactions in the learning and support sessions, and on messages and emails, I realised that there was far more to our professional relationship than I first thought. Lyashenko & Frolova (2014: 496) point out that, "intergenerational learning has always existed since mankind appeared, as knowledge has always been transferred from the old to the young" indicating that support from me helps them learn across generations. However, I further suggest from my experience that this is reciprocal collaboration and support because the students share their experiences on their course, which I am not necessarily familiar with, in addition to how and what helps them manage their studies.

# Differences and Similarities between Generations. Can we support each other collaboratively?

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I also learned new subjects of study from aeronautics and quantum physics to biochemistry, mathematics and English literature. In addition to learning a new aspect of how they learn or a new digital tool or resource they use, that helps me keep up-to-date and sometimes transfers to support other students (Cohen, 2023).

This notion of collaboration and support across generations is upheld by Heffernan et al., (2021) and Dauenhauer et al., (2016) who both indicate that “intergenerational” and “multigenerational” learning needs to be supported as generations are living longer and more people are engaging in “lifelong learning”. This suggests older generations such as ‘Baby Boomers’ are mixing with younger ones and positively supporting one another, as I do with autistic students (Dauenhauer et al., 2022). Furthermore, a recent online *Forbes* article by Cohen (2023) states this is the first time there have been “five generations in the workplace”, mostly working collaboratively. Although he also suggests there can be tensions and clashes between generations, but if the younger generation can listen to the older generation, the latter can impart their wisdom. Then the older generation can be supported by the younger ones to stay relevant and continue evolving and learning. This has helped me see that this is a two-way process of generational reciprocal support and collaboration that happens in my NMH role with autistic students from various universities, studies and needs.

## Conclusion

To conclude my autoethnographic reflection on being an NMH helper for the last 5 years in the context of supporting the autistic students at university receiving DSA support, I will consider my reflection, the generational differences and similarities and whether we support each other collaboratively.

Firstly, researching and writing this article has been a rewarding experience and insight into why my NMH role is more effective than I realised for autistic students. This is due to my understanding of their individual needs for academia, professionalism and an open honest non-judgmental approach that supports them within the university culture. In addition to being founded on the fact that I inhabit the shared academic world and I am neurodivergent.

Secondly, the intersections of the socially-constructed concepts of self (being neurodivergent) and education, linked to generational theory and concept are transcended in my role and academia, where collaboration and support across generations, lifelong learning, along with neurodivergent experience converge. This is also supported by the concept of lifespan experiences. Hence commonalities of interest emerge, which in this instance are academia and our life-long learning which are the reasons for our limited differences and similarities. Even though I am at least two generations apart from them, suggesting I would be significantly different to them due to the period I grew up in, the generational divide is overcome by me being an academic and lifelong learner and thus an apparent anomaly to the theory of generations because I support and collaborate with the autistic students which is, in turn, reciprocated.

Finally, I feel honoured to have supported autistic students over the last 5 years on their academic, as well as life journey and felt appreciated on equal terms.

To conclude, keep on learning, engaging and listening with an open mind and we can transcend generations and neurodivergence expanding this to other areas of our lives.

# Breaking Away from Past Generational Concepts of Autism.

*Contextualising Autistic People's Experiences of Employment from a Neuro-Trait-Interaction Perspective.*

Jessica Dark, Ph.D Student, Birkbeck, University of London and Founder of ND Perspective

In this contemporary commentary I draw from my doctoral thesis on autistic people's experiences of diagnosis disclosure in the workplace to discuss how the mainstream understanding of autism is inherited from past generational concepts, many of which are not conducive of current clinical and community insights.

In pursuit of a more representative understanding of autism, I draw from the teachings of 'autism embodiment', the view that autism is an integral informant of a person's cognitive and physical experience of the world (De Jaegher, 2013). I also draw on the notion of 'epistemic enablement', the consideration of how cognitive-processing traits interact with different aspects of the environment (Catala, Faucher & Poir, 2021) to present a neuro-trait-interaction perspective by which to research autistic communities. In application of this approach, I consider personal, social, and environmental informants of autistic experiences. I also demonstrate how a neuro-trait-interaction approach to research may reduce the reliance on drawing from past generational concepts leading to epistemic justice, a more representative understanding of autistic people's experiences of work, to be reflected in research (Catala, Faucher & Poirier, 2021).

It is noted that only 22% of autistic people are currently in employment (The Autism Employment Gap, 2021), this figure is low even when compared to other disability groups. It is recognised that autistic people experience stigma (Grinker, 2020) and discrimination (Lai et al., 2020) associated with the autism diagnostic label. Consequently, research has evidenced that autistic employees are apprehensive about sharing their diagnosis with their employer (Buckley et al., 2021) for fear of negative repercussions (Wood & Happé, 2021; Romualdez et al., 2021), even foregoing reasonable adjustments at work due to fear of poor evaluation (Johnson & Joshi, 2016). Therefore, how autism is depicted in research, and how autistic employees are perceived by their employers, are important research considerations.





# Breaking Away from Past Generational Concepts of Autism.

Jessica Dark, Ph.D Student, Birkbeck, University of London and Founder of ND Perspective



## Past and Current Generational Considerations

The first concepts of autism were established by Kanner (1943) and Asperger (1944/1991) during the Second World War, both of whom drew from small-scale behavioural studies with boys (Silberman, 2015). Due to the past generational focus on boys, autism is now regarded as holding male bias, thus exclusionary of females (Milner et al., 2019) and people who do not meet these rigid behavioural depictions. The early conceptualisations of autism are also thought to focus on deficits that cause personal and social harm (Dinishak, 2016). Consequently, the early understanding of autism has led to false beliefs, stereotypes (John, Knott & Harvey, 2017) and poor representation of autism in the media (Draaisma, 2009), contributing to how autism is negatively perceived today.

Current conceptualisations of autism, such as those shared in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5) present a broader, and thus more inclusive, understanding than previously considered (APA, 2013). However, despite clinical repositioning, mainstream research often prioritises the understanding of the diagnostic characteristics ‘Social Communication and Interaction’ over ‘Restrictive and Repetitive Behaviour’, despite being presented as equal dyadic components in diagnostic criterion (APA, 2013). Thus, the partial focus on neuro-trait expression captures an unrepresentative understanding of autism in the literature.

Mainstream research also considers autistic people's ‘deficits’ from a neuro-normative perspective (Doyle, 2020). As such, research has been known to include harmful and derogatory terms (Botha & Cage, 2022), thereby reproducing misconceptions, and reinforcing stereotypes (Botha, 2021).

**It is evident that new ways of understanding and supporting autistic people are required, so that challenges borne from past generational concepts of autism can be overcome, and autistic people can be appropriately supported to gain meaningful employment outcomes.**

## The Neuro-Trait-Interaction Approach

Throughout the following headings I reframe the autism diagnostic criteria, social communication, social interaction, and restrictive and repetitive behaviour (APA, 2013) to consider how the autism neuro-traits, sensory processing differences (Ayres, 1979), monotropic thinking (Murray et al., 2005) and across-neuro-type communication exchanges (Crompton et al., 2020) interact with the physical and hidden workplace environments. Discussions hereafter centre on why continuing to draw from past generational understandings of autism is problematic, and how application of a neuro-trait-interaction approach can support a more representative, current-day understanding of autism to materialise.

### Sensory Processing Differences

**The first autistic processing trait to be considered as an informant of autistic people's experiences of work is sensory processing differences.**

Sensory processing differences have been recognised since the 1970s with Ayres (1979) establishing the early research understanding. Many autistic people have differences in how they experience their primary senses sight, touch, smell, and hearing, in addition to vestibular (balance), proprioception (praxis), and interoception (internal sensations), with different ranges of responsiveness to what is commonly seen among the general population (Lane et al., 2019). The impact of the work environment is dependent on that person's unique sensory system. Therefore, a person's sensory profile may be reflective of the general population, hypersensitive, or hyposensitive within different sensory systems (Galiana-Simal et al., 2020).



## Breaking Away from Past Generational Concepts of Autism.

Jessica Dark, Ph.D Student, Birkbeck, University of London and Founder of ND Perspective

**Having a different sensory system is not innately negative, with these processing differences being attributed to desirable characteristics, such as being insightful, creative, and caring (Acevedo, 2020). However, hypersensitive responses to sensory stimulus have also been attributed to a decline in wellbeing, including a trigger for anxiety (Normansell-Mossa et al., 2021; Galiana-Simal et al., 2020), a contributing barrier when engaging in social activity (De Vries, 2021), and an informant of poor mental health outcomes (MacLennan et al., 2021).**

The notion that people have different perceptions across different neuro-types is new in relation to the overall understanding of the human psyche. Consequently, sensory processing differences are often overlooked in autism research in preference for discussing social communication and interaction challenges. However, many autistic people regard sensory processing differences to inform complex support needs (MacLennan et al., 2021). Therefore, more research is required that discusses how different sensory profiles inform workplace experiences and the supports that are required.

How an autistic person regulates their body in relation to the sensory environment is noted as being different to majority processing. A common autistic regulatory response to sensory overstimulation is to move the body in a repetitive way, referred to by the autistic community as 'stimming' (McCarty & Brumback, 2021). Stimming, includes behaviours such as manipulating objects in hands, tapping, and rocking (McCarty & Brumback, 2021; Kapp et al., 2019). Past generations did not understand the regulatory nature of these sensory behaviours. As such, 'treatment' centred on autistic people suppressing their natural movements as a way of appearing 'normal' amongst the prominent neuro-type.

The past generational interpretation of autistic behaviour and treatment thereafter are important considerations to the discussion of how autism is understood and supported. It is now recognised that past generationally informed therapies have a detrimental impact on autistic people's emotional health and wellbeing (Kirkham, 2017; Sandoval-Norton et al., 2019) and there is ongoing concern that harmful and unregulated treatments for autistic people continue to be used to this day (Spectrum of Harmful Interventions for Autism, 2018).

The current perspective regards stimming as supportive of positive emotion and promotes regulation of the sensory environment (Charlton et al., 2021; Kapp et al., 2019). However, Kapp et al., (2019) evidenced that stimming is not very well understood by colleagues of autistic employees. Similar to past therapies that aimed to normalise autistic behaviours, Kapp noted that autistic employees were being asked to stop their natural movements by their colleagues at work. Reprimanding natural autistic behaviour is both invalidating to autistic experience and has the potential to restrict regulation and impede productivity.

Creating a nuanced understanding of autistic experiences will ensure that employers recognise why certain autistic behaviours are different to the prominent neuro-type, in hope that better work and wellbeing outcomes for autistic people are achieved.



# Breaking Away from Past Generational Concepts of Autism.

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## Professional Relationships in the Workplace

**Communication, by the very nature of the autistic neuro-type, is an important consideration when researching autistic people in work.**

Professional dyadic relationships are relational processes between an employee and their manager or wider organisation (Liden et al., 2016). It is noted that for mutually beneficial relationships to form an element of trust (Robledo & Donnellan, 2016) and mutual understanding (Ferris et al., 2009) is required. However, when there is hierarchical structure, there is also a power disparity whereby those who are in less senior positions may be silenced by their superior who has more power (Anderson, 2020).

The role of a supportive team member may be even more crucial for diverse groups than the general population, particularly in relation to work expectations, goal setting, and discussions associated with inclusion, and acceptance (Liden et al., 2016). Different communication preferences across different neuro-types (Crompton et al., 2020; Davis and Crompton, 2021) can make this process challenging.

**Social communication is intuitive to many neuro-types, however deciphering meaning from communication is often a more conscious process for autistic people (Baron-Cohen, 1995).**

Past generational theorising of autism has assumed that autistic people's communication skills are innately defective. However, social communication is informed by majority neuro-type processing 'norms' (Doyle, 2020). Therefore, communication could be regarded as not being universal, but rather, a set of rules that are decoded by the recipient (Hall, 1979) informed by different variables including country, context (Bonvillian, 2020), and their neuro-type positionality (Milton, 2012).

Despite the reliance on applying social and cultural 'rules', there is no universal 'human' way to interact and interpret each other's communication. However, the teachings of social etiquette encourage people to judge how other people physically look (Maran et al., 2021), communicate (Sasson et al., 2017) and move their body (Kapp et al., 2019) and interpret these behaviours from their personal perspective. As such, misinterpretation may occur when inferring behaviour from different neuro-type positionalities (Milton, 2012) due to having different frames of reference during the communication exchange. Consequently, the same neuro-type communication is evidenced as being more effective than across-neuro-type communication exchanges (Crompton et al., 2020; Davis and Crompton, 2021). It would therefore be beneficial for further research to consider how different neuro-types can be supported to form across-neuro-type relationships and interpret across-neuro-type communication in work.

## The Physical and Hidden Work Environments

**Past generational considerations of autistic people's support needs have largely focused on what the autistic individual can do to adapt themselves to their environment, rather than considering the social model of disability (Campbell & Oliver, 1996; Oliver 2010), and how barriers within the environment can be removed or adapted in support of autistic people.**

As such, when considering autistic people's experiences of work, it is beneficial to recognise challenges relating to both the physical and hidden work environments, such as wider organisational processes. The hidden aspects of an organisation include non-physical workplace considerations, such as the detail of a job specification and role, the company's recruitment process, through to an employer's expectation on their employee's visibility at work.

## Breaking Away from Past Generational Concepts of Autism.

Jessica Dark, Ph.D Student, Birkbeck, University of London and Founder of ND Perspective

It is now recognised that many autistic people display differences in cognitive thinking and attention, as explained by monotropic thinking (Murray et al., 2005).

Monotropic thinking is theorised as a cognitive processing trait that focuses on the finer detail of a situation rather than the wider picture (Murray et al., 2005). Monotropic thinking is likely to inform thinking patterns referred to as hyper focus, whereby someone can attend to a task, to a high standard, for an extended period, informing the development of specialised interests and talents (Murray, 2019).

Due to autistic people processing information in different ways, how these cognitive traits interact with hidden workplace considerations warrants discussion. For instance, some autistic employees require clear working processes that are free of ambiguity, to work effectively (Normansell-Mossa et al., 2021). Autistic people may also have specific interactional preferences, such as relying on routine, and find uncertainty anxiety provoking (Normansell-Mossa et al., 2021).

Furthermore, distinct communication preferences may require consideration, such as communicating via email over verbal communication and face-to-face communication over the telephone (Howard & Sedgewick, 2021). By considering autistic people's individual neuro-traits, and their interaction with the work environment, it is hoped that a more reflective understanding of autism will be established in the literature, leading to an increased understanding of autistic people's support needs at work.

Photo by Tachina Lee on Unsplash



# Breaking Away from Past Generational Concepts of Autism.

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## Concluding Remarks

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In this article I have drawn from the concepts of autism embodiment (De Jaegher, 2013) and epistemic enablement (Catala, Faucher & Poir, 2021) to discuss the value of conceptualising autistic people's experiences in relation to neuro-trait-interaction with the physical and hidden work environments. I have explained why research must progress beyond past generational concepts of autism and how a neuro-trait-interaction approach can inform a less stigmatising way of researching and supporting autistic people in work. I have demonstrated that not all aspects of an autistic neuro-type are problematic and that some neuro-traits may inform highly desirable qualities and skills that are beneficial for the workplace. However, there are also aspects of the autistic expression that significantly diverge from prominent neuro-type ways of thinking, behaving, and communicating that must be understood, and supported if better employment outcomes for autistic people are to materialise.

The approach outlined in this article is new when compared to common literature presentation, thus there is plenty of scope for further development of approach and discussions hereafter. For instance, many autistic people will experience neurodivergent traits that surpass the autism diagnostic criteria, so future research may like to consider a person's individual presentation beyond the neuro-traits discussed in this article to reflect understanding of complex neuro-profiles. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to consider autistic people's experiences of work in relation to intersectional considerations (Crenshaw, 1989), such as sex, age, gender, level of support needs, communication modes, race, ethnicity, geographical location, socioeconomic status (Cascio, Weiss & Racine, 2020) and how stage of career informs autistic people's experiences of work differently.

The current mainstream understanding of autism is borne from past generational concepts that are unrepresentative of how autism is understood today. Thus, action is required to ensure research is conducted in line with current community-informed considerations. To accomplish this goal, I propose that research must be conducted in the culture and context by which it occurs (Barnes, 2004), recognise autism as an integral informant of a person's cognitive and physical experience of the world (De Jaegher, 2013), and consider neuro-trait interaction (Catala et al., 2021) with the physical and hidden work environments. Through adopting this neuro-trait-interaction approach, I believe epistemic justice for autistic people in research can be achieved, leading to better understanding, increased support, and improved employment outcomes for current and future generations of autistic people to materialise.

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to Professor Almuth McDowall and Professor Harriet Tenenbaum for doctoral supervision.

Thank you to Dr Kirsty Lauder (my peer mentor), Penny Speller (Study-Skills Tutor), Ben Morris (fellow PhD student) and the AchieveAbility Editorial Board team for your support when editing this article.

The author was supported in this research by the payment of doctoral fees through a Graduate Teaching Assistant contract from the School of Business, Economics & Informatics at Birkbeck, University of London.

# Navigating the Intergenerational Experience of Neurodivergence using the VLR® and the Biopsychosocial Models.

Cheri Shone, Specialist Support Tutor and Cheri Shone Consulting

We come to all knowledge at a historical point in time, building on and reevaluating the understanding of past generations. The aim of this article is to unpack the current historical context of neurodivergence and to use that knowledge as a basis to build a new understanding.

The premise is that through this informed understanding it will be possible for a neurodivergent person to work strategically to regain a belief in themselves and their abilities. There are several barriers to this process, each neurodivergent individual has a unique expression of their intersectional lived experience and that means it requires a bespoke understanding. It is also true that neurodivergence is often narrowly framed as a barrier in an educational or work context and consequently much of the focus is then on adjusting the individual or environment to 'improve performance'. Another barrier to this reframing is the emotional and psychological damage created by the misunderstanding of neurodivergence and its impact on the lived experience.

This understanding was absent from the support I received while at university and my practice comes out of navigating these barriers myself. The registered Validate, Link and Reframe Model (VLR®) is a framework I developed to support students navigating the emotional and psychological barriers to challenging internalised negative self-beliefs about their neurodivergence. The proposal is that it is possible to develop a more individual, holistic and nuanced understanding of neurodivergence through an integration of my VLR® (see Figure 1) and the Biopsychosocial Model (see Figure 2). By using these models as a framework, it is then possible to explore the complexity of the individual intersectional lived experience to facilitate a unique informed understanding for each person. The article interrogates this proposal by setting out the theoretical underpinning of the proposal and then exploring how to use this understanding 'in process' through an intergenerational pilot case study. For a further definition of terms please see the glossary at the end of this paper.

# Navigating the Intergenerational Experience of Neurodivergence using the VLR® and the Biopsychosocial Models.

Cheri Shone, Specialist Support Tutor and Cheri Shone Consulting

## The Historical Context

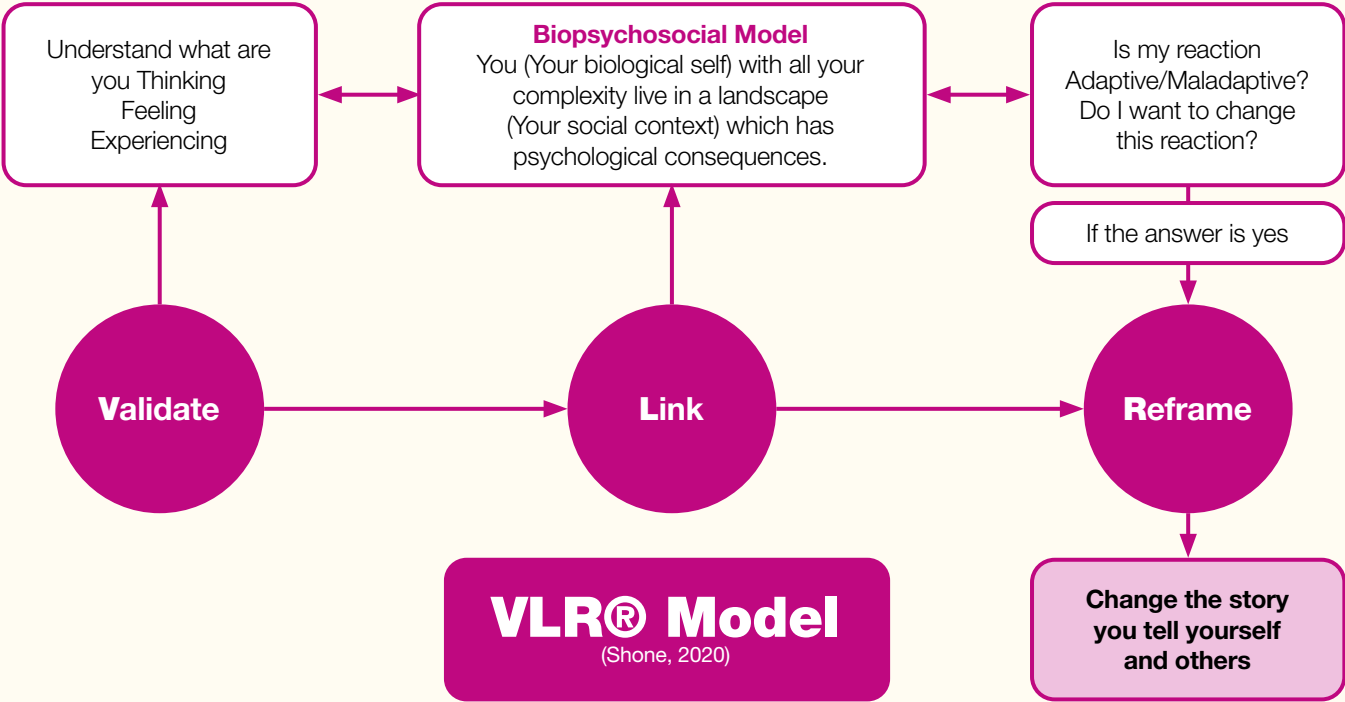
In the last two decades the understanding of neurodivergence has moved from a medical construct, one of disability to that of difference, a social construct. While this understanding has changed, the first time a neurodivergent person is introduced to this reframing is often when they come into contact with someone who works in the field of neurodivergence such as a Specialist 1:1 Support Tutor. Currently these medical and social models are largely treated as mutually exclusive. The proposal here is that both these framings of neurodivergence are vital to understanding an individual neurodivergent profile and that the psychological and emotional consequences of these two frameworks need to be understood if the neurodivergent person is to develop an informed understanding of themselves and their processing.

However, the psychological trauma of navigating the educational system in the absence of this context often creates a barrier to effectively reframing a more positive neurodivergent identity (Shone, 2022). The Validate, Link and Reframe Model (VLR®) offers a dynamic lens through which it is possible to mitigate the impact of the past negative lived experience captured in the Biopsychosocial Model (Whelpley et al., 2023). These past negative experiences can create a psychological barrier to engaging with the process of reframing erroneous ideas about neurodivergence.

## The Theoretical Frameworks

An important part of reframing is the role of language. In the Validate, Link and Reframe Model (VLR®), the concept of good and bad reactions have been replaced with either adaptive reactions or maladaptive reactions. An adaptive reaction will produce a desired outcome and maladaptive reactions will not produce the desired outcome. This mitigates against the element of self-blame of good and bad and focuses on the desired outcome. The Biopsychosocial Model (Whelpley et al., 2023) neatly captures the Medical (**Bi**opsychosocial), Psychological (**psi**ychosocial) and Social (**so**cial) components of the lived experience of being neurodivergent. The proposal is that by viewing the Biopsychosocial Model through the Validate, Link and Reframe Lens (VLR®), it is possible for the neurodivergent person to reclaim agency and build resilience.

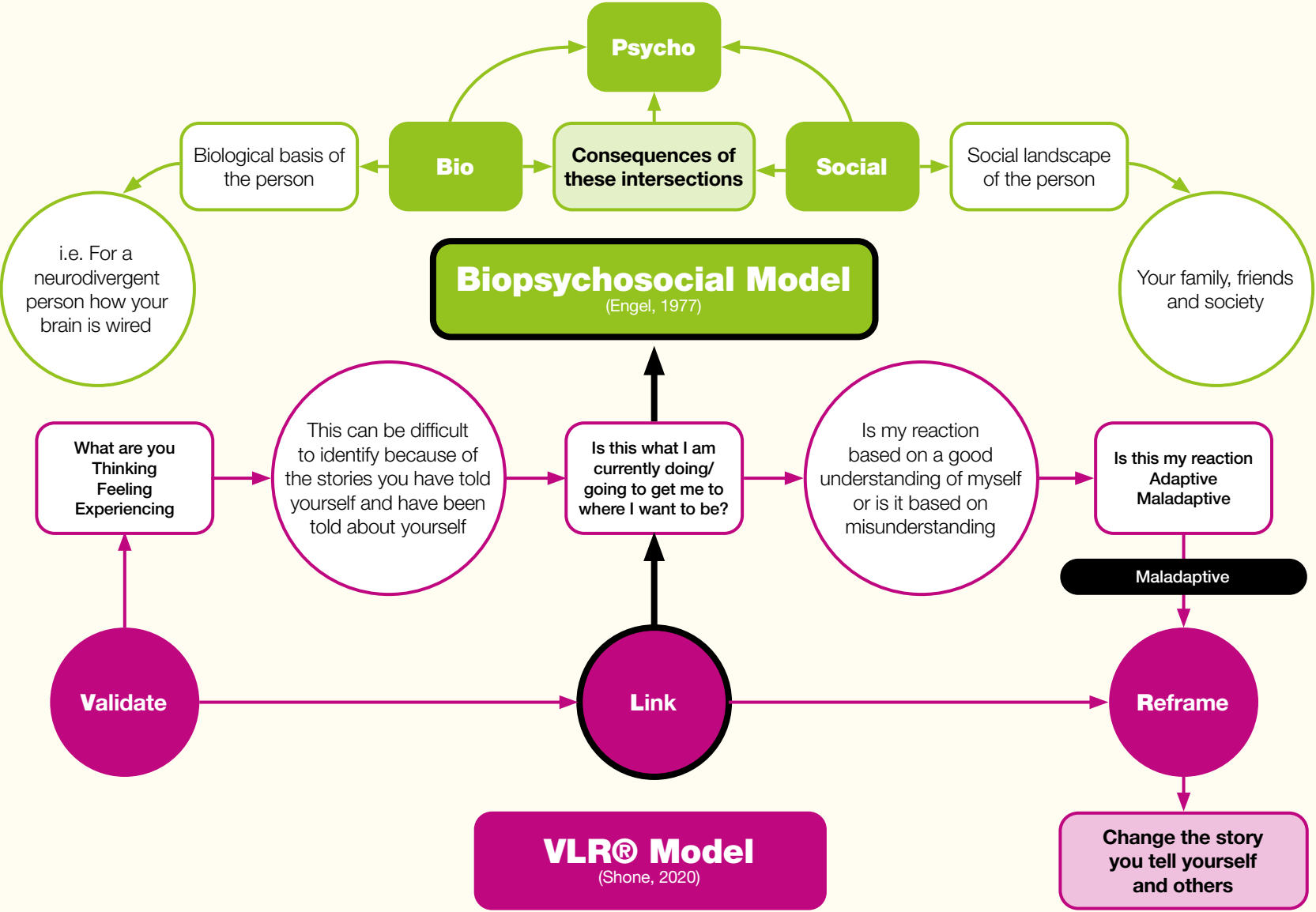
Figure 1: A graphic representation of the VLR® model process



# Navigating the Intergenerational Experience of Neurodivergence using the VLR® and the Biopsychosocial Models.

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Figure 2: A graphic representation integration of the VLR® and Biopsychosocial Model (Whelpley et al., 2023)



### Note on how to engage with the models

The way these models are constructed implies a sequential linear or circular flow from one step to another. This is not how human beings process information in general but is particularly not true for the neurodivergent brain. I have conceived the interaction in sequential relationship, but they should be seen as tethers for unpacking insights. You may make a Link before you can Validate what you are feeling. Reframing may mean a previous Validation is now no longer true. What you once thought was a biological imperative may be learned behavior in the light of new evidence. The elements of the models should be seen as a set of criteria through which you can make informed decisions.



# Navigating the Intergenerational Experience of Neurodivergence using the VLR® and the Biopsychosocial Models.

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## Context of the Case Study

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Neurodivergence is an invisible 'disability' and evidence suggests that people with learning difficulties are seen as intellectually inferior (Lisle, 2011, cited in Alexander-Passe, 2015: 84). This often creates a marginalised identity, particularly in the educational environment, and if it is not understood and effectively supported can create Complex Post Traumatic Stress disorder (PTSD) in the neurodivergent individual (Shone, 2022). In the absence of an informed understanding of their processing it is easy for a neurodivergent person to internalise the failure of the system to support their learning as an indication of their lack of ability.

Educational institutions have become aware of the need to support neurodivergent learners and mitigate the obvious distress they can experience within the system. However, the therapeutic language that frames this inclusion of neurodivergent learners can in fact create even more stigma.

Ecclestone and Hayes (2009: xi), problematise the rise of therapeutic language in education and propose that it reinforces the concept of the 'diminished self' with language such as 'vulnerable or at risk learners' which they suggest encourages people to see themselves as 'flawed and vulnerable' (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009: xiii). The most damaging aspects of this construction of the self is the 'internalisation of the categories' and the process of 'self-stigmatisation' that flows from the identification with those negative categorisations (McNamara, 2019: 50). It is therefore little wonder that shame is often the result of a marginalised educational experience (Shone, 2022).

## The Case Study:

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### How the integrated the VLR® and Biopsychosocial models are used to navigate a personal configuration of neurodivergence with verbatim examples of the insights gain through this reframing.

The pilot case study offers an insight into the process represented in Figures 1 and 2. It explores a student's emergent perception of their neurodivergence through this process and how that affects her relationship with her neurodivergent mother who has not had the benefit of this reframing process. The subject of the case study has just completed her first year at university and has accessed 1:1 Specialist Tutorial Support based on the above models for the duration of that year. The focus of the case study is an example of an observed anecdotal trend in the Specialist 1:1 Support sessions and a proposed topic for future research.

When the student first accessed her 1:1 Specialist Support Sessions her framing of her neurodivergence was seen through the medical (**Biopsychosocial**) lens. Her neurodivergent processing was framed entirely as a deficit underpinned by the self-stigmatisation that flows from a marginalised learning identity. Two of the beliefs she held about herself that were illustrative of that internalised self-stigmatisation were 'I am not academic' and 'I can't write'. In addition to the self-stigmatisation through the medical (**Biopsychosocial**) framing of her neurodivergence, the student's mothers perception of her own neurodivergence would have echoed this and, as suggested by Scott (2004: 129), she could 'feel to blame for passing it on' because neurodivergence is heritable:

**'My mum was genuinely like, Oh my god I have created another version of me, this is horrendous, so she can pinpoint things in me.'**

The daughter's perception of her mother's response to recognising her own neurodivergent traits in her daughter was that she found the idea 'horrendous'. Anecdotally, this is not an uncommon response for parents and perfectly valid if neurodivergence is seen through a deficit lens because they will be aware of the difficulties their child will inevitably face through their own lived experience. This is why the first step to transforming the understanding of neurodivergence is **Validation**. It is imperative to understand both the negatives and positives of neurodivergence and what understandings configure that individual neurodivergent profile.

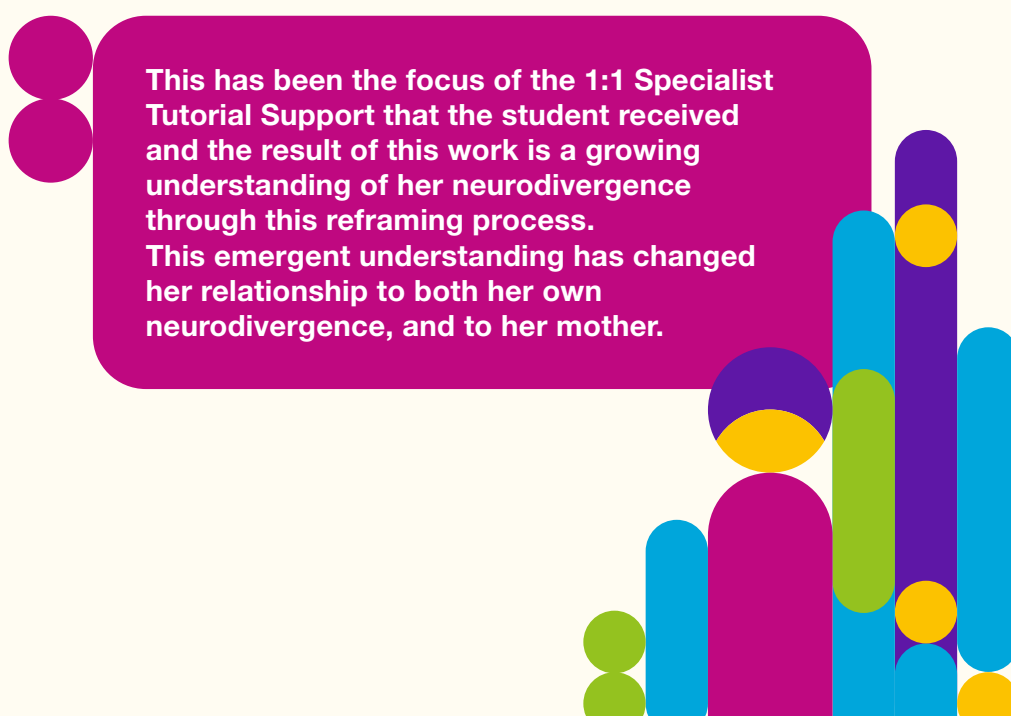
# Navigating the Intergenerational Experience of Neurodivergence using the VLR® and the Biopsychosocial Models.

Cheri Shone, Specialist Support Tutor and Cheri Shone Consulting

Neurodivergent people have been divorced from their internal Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966, in Alexander-Passe, 2015: 105) by an external social configuration of themselves as less capable and less intelligent, and they have internalised these tropes. They need to reclaim that control in order to develop a strategised, informed understanding of themselves and their processing:

**An individual who possesses an internal Locus of Control 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 Locus of Control perceives that future performance in tasks is based on the assistance of others (environmental). (Rotter, 1966, in Alexander-Passe, 2015: 105)**

To develop an internal Locus of Control what needs to be Validated are the intersections of the Biopsychosocial configuration of the neurodivergent profile through an understanding of the biological underpinning of the particular neurodivergence. This involves unpacking the social context of that understanding and a recognition of the psychological impact of that configuration.



**This has been the focus of the 1:1 Specialist Tutorial Support that the student received and the result of this work is a growing understanding of her neurodivergence through this reframing process. This emergent understanding has changed her relationship to both her own neurodivergence, and to her mother.**

## Using the integrated Validate, Link and Reframe (VLR®) and the Biopsychosocial Model as a tool for Reframing: changing the story you are telling yourself and others (see Figure 2)

As the student has worked towards understanding and the reframing of her neurodivergence she has developed an insight into the tensions that have existed between herself and her mother that are directly related to their neurodivergent processing. The neurodivergence that they share is dyslexia and it is well documented that ‘deficits in time perception’ (Gooch et al., 2010) and ‘impaired short-term memory’ (Treacy et al., 2013) are features of the dyslexic profile and timekeeping in particular has been a point of tension in their relationship in the past.

Unpacking the trigger point, ‘time’ in this case, can be understood by using the Validate, Link and Reframe (VLR®) and Biopsychosocial Models as a context for exploring the understanding of the internal and external forces at work. The first step is to Validate because neurodivergence is poorly understood and is often misconstrued as being oppositional. This lack of understanding of neurodivergence can lead to stigmatisation and a trauma-informed responses to daily activities. Van der Kolk (2014: 17) says that ‘traumatized people have a tendency to superimpose their trauma on everything around them’, and this makes it difficult for them to decipher what is happening in their environment and can lead to heightened or defensive responses. This heightened response is often seen as dysfunctional and perceived as an unnecessary overreaction to perfectly normal events.

However, I would suggest that this ‘overreaction’ is how anyone would respond to a misunderstanding of their integrity and not a dysfunctional response. The lived experience of ‘elastic time’ is one of shame and failure and stigmatisation in the absence of the understanding of the biological underpinning of the processing deficit. If the underlying processing is not understood, the observed consequences of that processing can be labelled as intentionally disruptive. The simple fact of being late can then be experienced as a crisis that validates the negative socially- constructed tropes about your ability, which can then internalised as an indication of your worth as a human being.

# Navigating the Intergenerational Experience of Neurodivergence using the VLR® and the Biopsychosocial Models.

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The next step is to locate the biological underpinning of the processing issue in the neurodivergent profile. There are two key factors at play here, the elasticity of time, and working memory issues which can result not only in forgetting things, but also the task at hand (i.e. getting out of the house on time). By locating the 'problem' within 'elastic time' and the issues with memory, it is possible to address the past socially-misinformation constructed perceptions of 'being late' when this processing issue was, in the past, seen as the neurodivergent person being naughty or obstructive. Reframing is addressing the fact that what has been internalised as a personal failure was, in fact, a direct consequence of their neurodivergent processing. Through unpacking the trigger events with this framework, the neurodivergent person will then be able to gain some insight into why they are in a heightened state of arousal due to their past negative experiences with their timekeeping, as well as locating the issue firmly in the biological underpinning of their processing. In this case study, both the student and her mother have an anxiety around timekeeping which the student is now understanding through this contextualising process:

**'It made me understand her a lot more and why she does certain things, things like to a point that genuinely physically stress her out. I understand why she reacts the way she does now'**

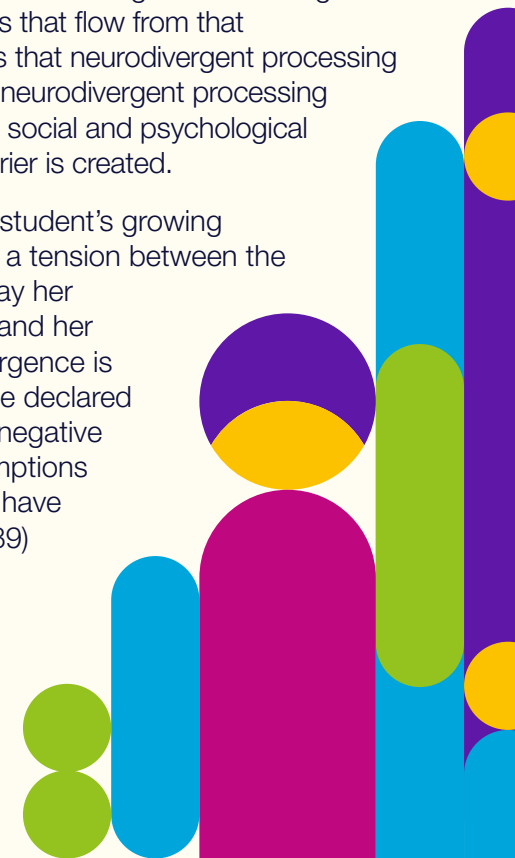
By locating the biological basis of the processing issues and understanding that the anxiety in relation to time is informed by experiences in the past where their neurodivergent processing was not understood or taken into account, it is possible for the student to reframe both her own and also her mother's heightened reaction to timekeeping. This grounds her in an understanding of her processing and helps her locate her misinformed construction of self through the socially erroneous negative tropes that are a consequence of a misunderstanding of her neurodivergence. It is through this process she is able to regain her belief in her ability and strategise to minimise the impact of the processing difference and regain an internal Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966, in Alexander-Passe, 2015:105).

Therefore timekeeping, which had previously caused anxiety and trigger points for arguments, can now be understood through the lens of neurodivergence:

**'I can digest why she does what she does more easily.  
I can pinpoint where she is coming from.  
Now we both just name 'it' and the situation deescalates.'**

'It' encompasses an understanding of the biological underpinning of the particular processing deficits, the erroneous socially-constructed interpretation of that processing and the psychological consequences of that interpretation. If one now considers the possible scope for the misunderstanding of neurodivergent processing and the psychological consequences that flow from that misunderstanding, it gives an idea of the barriers that neurodivergent processing can create. While the biological underpinning of neurodivergent processing is the root of the difficulties experienced, it is the social and psychological consequences of that processing where the barrier is created.

While this is a really positive outcome from the student's growing understanding of her neurodivergence, there is a tension between the ways she sees her neurodivergence and the way her mother experiences her own neurodivergence and her daughter's changing view of herself. Neurodivergence is a hidden disability. It is something that has to be declared and this allows people to 'pass' and avoid the negative attributions of other people's ill-informed assumptions about their ability. This is particularly true if you have no counter-narrative. Alexander-Passe (2015: 89) calls it a 'toxic cycle of concealment'. The mother's generationally-informed understanding of her processing would have been largely grounded in the medical/deficit model of neurodivergence which is a fertile breeding ground for misunderstanding misattribution and shame.



# Navigating the Intergenerational Experience of Neurodivergence using the VLR® and the Biopsychosocial Models.

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This shame comes from not being acceptable and is implied in the mother's reaction to the student's growing understanding and embracing of her neurodivergence:

**'What she finds really odd is all the things I am finding really useful about myself or things that I am actually starting to like, they're all the things she was told to change'**

Brené Brown (2018) says that shame comes from not feeling worthy of belonging and that fitting in is about changing who you are to be accepted. She goes on to say that belonging requires us to be who we are and part of who we are is neurodivergent. In the absence of a counternarrative to the medical/deficit model of neurodivergence, the mother is left bewildered by her daughter's embracing of her neurodivergence. When talking about her emergent understanding of herself the student says,

**'I come off with real highs with all the things I am learning about myself, but she just brushes it off, she won't connect with what I am saying.'**

In essence the student is asking her mother to re-examine herself and her beliefs about who she is in relation to her understanding of her neurodivergence. This may very well require her to undo the 'changing' she has done to 'fit in' and would almost inevitably involve acknowledging how her neurodivergence has had a negative impact on her life because the framing of neurodivergence for her generation was largely negative. The above statement suggests that the student is embracing her processing and thriving with her new understanding of herself, but that her mother is resistant to this reframing, as the student said,

**'If it was me, I would be angry that my child has got to have a better experience.'**

While this may not be the case for her mother, it does speak to the intergenerational tensions that may develop in the presence of very different understandings of what it means to be neurodivergent.

## In conclusion

The pilot case study explored the student's changing perception of their neurodivergence and how that examination affects her relationship with her neurodivergent mother. The student's emergent perception of herself is grounded in the integration of the Validate, Link and Reframe (VLR®) and the Biopsychosocial model (Whelpley, et al., 2023) which captures two current key frameworks of neurodivergence, i.e. the Medical and Social Models of neurodivergence. Key to this reframing is mitigating the trauma-informed self-stigmatising response common to the neurodivergent profile through the validation of the Validate, Link and Reframe (VLR®) lens. Validating and naming their response allows the neurodivergent person to link the barrier they are facing on both the biological processing level as well as locating socially-constructed misunderstandings of the processing that they have internalised.

This process offers a space to reframe, strategise and scaffold their weaknesses and reconnect with their strengths, regaining an internal Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966, in Alexander-Passe, 2015: 105) and a belief in their own ability. It is clear from the student's statements that she is embracing her neurodivergence through this process and that this is a viable framework for effective positive reframing of the neurodivergent lived experience. This process has emerged out of my own lived experience and my work with neurodivergent people and it is my belief that it offers a framework to transform the understanding of neurodivergence and its impact for the individual, but also for those that are working in the sector. By embracing the complexity of the intersection between medical (biological), psychological, and social understanding of neurodivergence it is possible to examine the unique individual neurodivergent lived experience. Through this process it is possible to facilitate the identification of the generic and individual factors at play, identifying where they cause barriers and where the factors are protective. Research capturing this complexity using the proposed frameworks would develop a more empowered and nuanced understanding of what it means to be neurodivergent.

# Navigating the Intergenerational Experience of Neurodivergence using the VLR® and the Biopsychosocial Models.

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## Glossary of Terms:

**VLR®:** The Validate, Link and Reframe Model (VLR®) is a framework developed and registered to the author Cheri Shone. It was developed as a way of managing stress triggers in the Specialist 1:1 Tutorial sessions allowing the neurodivergent person to move past the triggered state so that they could interrogate the configuration of their individual neurodivergence.

**Biopsychosocial Model:** The Biopsychosocial model was originally developed by Engel (1977) and aimed to capture and include the social and psychological aspects of the configuration of illness in the biomedical field. It has subsequently expanded beyond the initial medical confines and is now used as a framework in many disciplines.

**Locus of Control:** Locus of Control is a psychological concept used to capture how much an individual believes that they have control over the outcomes in their lives. It was originally conceived by Rotter who developed a **Locus of Control Scale**.

**Neurodivergence/Neurodivergent:** I am using the terms neurodivergence/neurodivergent to encompass all of those who are marginalised by their processing; this includes those who are dyslexic, dyspraxic, ADHD and ASD as the proposed model can be applied to all neurodivergence.

**Validate:** Because neurodivergent people's processing is misunderstood, they internalise this misunderstanding as reality. Validating is the process of interrogating the individual lived experience of neurodivergence, examining all the intersections which influence that experience; these include race, age, sex, family dynamics, among others.

**Reframe:** I use the term Reframe to capture the process of examining the beliefs one holds about oneself through the lens of the Biopsychosocial intersections for their validity. For example, being dyslexic means that you will always have a problem with spelling, this is not an indication of a lack of intelligence but an indication of a dyslexic profile. One can then decide how much effort you put into spelling correctly and remove the shame of incorrect spelling because it is only an indication that you are dyslexic and nothing else.

## Links to more information:

For more information on the processes and software I used to create this article follow this [link](#).

For more information on my work visit [my website](#).



# The Neurodiversity Movement: A Tipping Point

Nancy Doyle and Almuth McDowall

“Stop telling me I am wrong.”

“Support everyone to find their thing – not just computer scientists.”

“Listening to children (voice matters).”

“I want to be given the chance to climb the ladder.”

## What did we do?

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Recent work conducted by our research centre surveyed **990 neurodivergent adults** and found that, while tailored adjustments were important for staff retention, the most motivating factor for employees was **career satisfaction** (McDowall et al., 2023).

We then conducted action research with **100 participants**, which this paper outlines. Taken together, these two pieces of community engagement research signpost the need for more **relational, positive, value-based research** in which neurodivergent people are not just acknowledged and accommodated, but are **actively empowered** to fulfil their potential in education and work.

# The Neurodiversity Movement: A Tipping Point

Nancy Doyle and Almuth McDowall

These were  
as follows:

01

**Professor Nancy Doyle,**  
who is a white ADHDer and  
Psychologist researching  
Neurodiversity at Work  
and who has worked in  
employment support for  
over 20 years.



02

**Judy Singer,**  
who is a semi- retired Autistic  
Sociologist and parent /  
daughter within a Jewish  
family who were refugees  
from Europe, who worked in  
community / family support  
for around 30 years.



03

**Whitney Iles,**  
who is a Mixed Heritage  
Autist/Ticcer who works  
in trauma recovery,  
promoting peace in  
communities affected by  
systemic violence and  
supporting those in the  
criminal justice system.



04

**Marcia Brissett-Bailey,**  
is a Black Dyslexic who has  
worked in special needs  
education for over 30 years.  
and published a book called  
'Black, Brilliant and Dyslexic'.



05

**Dr Joanne Cotton,**  
who is a white neurodivergent  
psychologist and ADHD expert  
researching how to optimise  
wellbeing for neurodivergent  
individuals across the lifespan.



\*Note: Profs. Doyle and McDowall from The Centre for Neurodiversity at Work would like to note that we have recently become aware that Judy Singer's views regarding the trans community diverge significantly from our own. We do not support her views. However, she played a part in this event. We debated her inclusion in this document and sought views from trans people in our academic community. We want to be transparent and accurate in the historical record and concluded that to obscure her part in this debate would be dishonest. We hope that going forward, open inclusive and respectful discussions can be restored. Neuroinclusion is for everyone, that is, for us, the whole point.

# The Neurodiversity Movement: A Tipping Point

Nancy Doyle and Almuth McDowall

After the panel had a brief discussion, we invited contributions from the community (described below).

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## Why did we do this?

The neurodiversity community is typically excluded from research about neurodiversity. It is important to change this as there is a large gap between what is currently researched, and what neurodivergent people are concerned about.

By inviting community members into the discussion and recording their thoughts without undue limits, or existing funding, we create opportunity for co-production at the earliest stage of research.

**Our focus was the different experiences of neurodivergent people throughout the lifespan: childhood – community and education; higher education and transition to work; workplaces and economic opportunity; beyond work and the role of neurodivergence in wider society.**

In the third issue of the Achievability E-Journal, the foreword notes the need for community agency and voice in driving research (Cooper et al., 2022). Similarly, researchers focused on specific conditions have lamented the exclusion of autistic voices in autism research (Bottema-Beutel et al., 2020) and dyslexia research (Robinson, 2021). Coproduction is a concept in which people with lived experience are included not just as subjects, but as active participants in setting research agendas, crafting research questions, conducting studies, evaluating and reporting findings (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al., 2019). In practice, this often materialises as a coproduction board, in which a group of stakeholders represent their community and liaise with researchers (Le Cunff et al., 2023),

At the Centre for Neurodiversity Research at Birkbeck, University of London we have formed a group of neurodivergent researchers and doctoral students, all with an interest in furthering neuroinclusion in organisational policy and practice.

The neurodiversity community has historically been excluded from research about neurodiversity (Walker, 2021). It is important to change this as there is a large gap between what is currently researched, and what neurodivergent people are concerned about. By inviting community members into the discussion and recording their thoughts without undue limits, or existing funding, we create opportunity for co-production at the earliest stage of research – the part where we just listen.

Our focus was the different experiences of neurodivergent people throughout the lifespan: childhood – community and education; higher education and transition to work; workplaces and economic opportunity; beyond work and the role of neurodivergence in wider society.

## What is this article about?

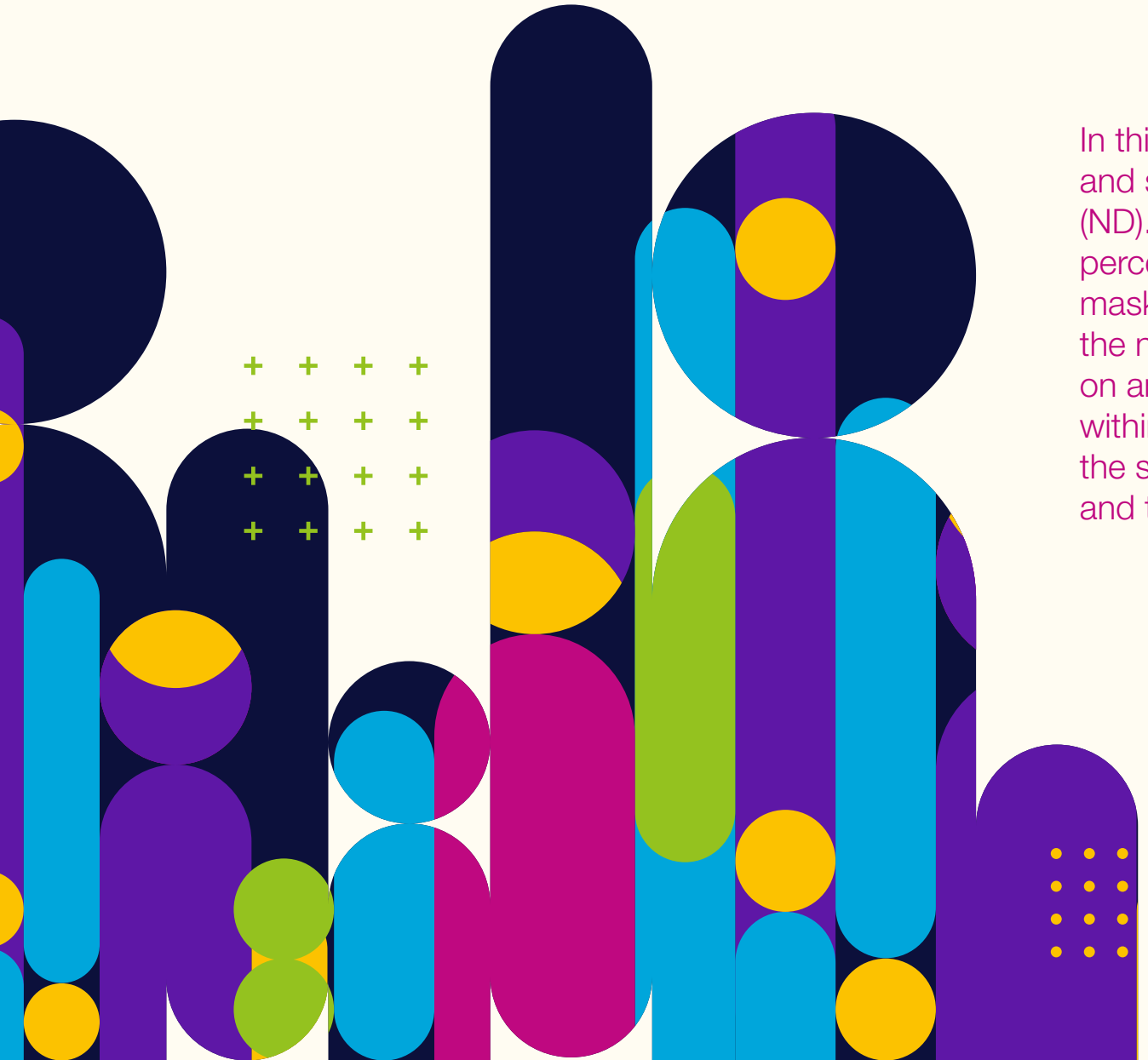
In this article, we give some details about our process and document the themes that were important to the neurodiversity community members present. Although we focused on different life stages, the themes were remarkably similar. We have summarised the themes that were discussed in the sections below.

We have also noticed an overarching theme, which is the sense of transition, that the neurodiversity concept is at a pivot point of acceptance and inclusion. Though there is still a long way to go for equality, the community has its own identity in a way that it didn't in the 20th century.

[www.achievableability.org.uk/files/1706881599/nd-movement-a-tipping-point-v3-1.pdf](http://www.achievableability.org.uk/files/1706881599/nd-movement-a-tipping-point-v3-1.pdf)

# The Paradoxes of Diverse (or Divisive) Identities

Naomi Folb



In this contribution, I delve into personal challenges and societal constructs related to neurodivergence (ND). Framing questions around evolving perceptions, I navigate concepts like compensation, masking, and the nuanced nature of identity within the neurodiverse community. The aim is to reflect on and address the intergenerational experiences within the realm of neurodiversity and to emphasise the significance of diverse representation in literature and the evolving concept of "belonging".

I explore discussions about masking and unmasking in the neurodiversity movement and underscore the importance of diverse representation and the impact of psycho-historical events on coping mechanisms and identity. I propose creativity as a therapeutic avenue to unravel the complexities of discrimination and foster open conversations about what it means to be neurodivergent and deserving of institutional opportunities and dignity.



# The Paradoxes of Diverse (or Divisive) Identities

Naomi Folb

## Introduction

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When I became involved in academia, I had two objectives: the desire to belong to the world that had rejected me and the aspiration to comprehend what it entailed to be part of it. Given my profound aversion to school and its reciprocal disdain for me when I became a teacher, the irony was not lost on me.

**I used to believe I could reconcile these paradoxes, forging a harmonious unity. However, as I delve further into my exploration of neurodiversity or simply ND, I am apprehensive about such consolidation. Why?**

For the fifteen years I have worked in inclusion and neurodiversity, I have argued that inclusivity hinges on belonging. I entered academia for belonging, leveraging my immense privilege to pave my way. My entry into research was driven by a quest for inclusion yet it yielded more questions:

- Can one still be termed dyslexic after acquiring reading and writing skills, or does this signify 'getting over it'?
- Does one compensate for impairment, or does compensation inherently carry shades of ableism?
- If most people experience a touch of OCD, dyslexia, ADHD, or autism does being officially diagnosed as such hold any significance?

I sometimes fret about disseminating my insights adequately and, on bad days, whether anyone even cares. Are myriad neurodiverse voices echoing in an echo chamber, or is a genuine change underway? Optimism compels me to say yes.

## Masking and unmasking

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I am a very organised person. I could even say I was hyper-organised: I have meticulous to-do lists and keep multiple journals to (deep) compensate for my forgetting (short-term memory deficit). While this hyper-organisation may be a learned coping strategy that enables me to function effectively (cope) in contexts that I find rewarding, I still struggle to have a sense of belonging in academia. I still fear being unmasked.

Herein lies two parts: the psycho-historical events that have led to my emotional response and interpretation and the structural changes I have made to my daily routines to cope with the demands of academia. I want to explore how I have historically (deep) compensated for my impairment and identify some challenges I have faced in trying to conceptualise this compensation as a form of masking. I acknowledge that conveying these complex ideas can be challenging due to my history of discrimination (disability) as a dyslexic writer. I am disabled by a requirement to write linearly in the domain of academia, while my impairment affects my working memory and ability to organise thoughts linearly.

To begin, I will dig a bit into the argument about the concept of compensation in the context of disability. Initially, the idea of compensation emerged in the early discussions about disablement. It was extrapolated from medical discourse (which categorises individuals with a recognized condition to get support or resources), suggesting that individuals who were blind or partially sighted compensated for their disability through heightened hearing. I refer here to 'A Critical Condition' (Hunt, 1966), in which Paul Hunt takes the position that within this notion of compensation lies an assumption about productivity capacity and normality. Therein lies an assumption that any deviation from a 'normal' body is ill-equipped for productivity in schools, workplaces, or social communities. Applied to invisible, hidden, or non-apparent disabilities and individuals who identify or are self-identified neurodiverse, there are myriad complexities.

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## Masking

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Within the disability field, there is an increasing focus on ‘masking’ or camouflaging, which involves adopting an identity to fit in with the aim of belonging. We might emphasise the distinction between ‘belonging’ and ‘fitting in’. To put it simply, a child in school might claim to like football in a bid to fit in. But let us say that a child only cared about knitting, but out of fear of being excluded or discriminated against, kept their interest in knitting hidden or suppressed altogether. They fit in, but they do not belong.

We need to acknowledge that some individuals may choose not to disclose their neurodiversity due to concerns about discrimination. While some argue individuals should not wear masks to fit in due to the stress and exhaustion it entails or to challenge discrimination, I am interested in how neurodiverse individuals conflict with systemic structures that may discriminate against those who think differently.

I have worked on cases with an organisation that did not want to hire someone who identified as neurodiverse because they felt they could not fulfil the job requirements. Prejudices and stereotypes prevail. I have internalised some of these prejudices to fit in, but my masking does not lead me to belong. I think it is critical for those who have the privilege of speaking as neurodiverse not to claim to speak for their tribe.

When discussing masking or not masking, we must consider the existence of invisible standards that may benefit the majority but disadvantage a few. Evaluating these standards may require time, resources, and space, but failing to accommodate diversity in schools and workplaces will cost society more.

**Understanding, creating awareness about the history of disability, particularly eugenics, and implementing effective knowledge-sharing practices, like mentorship, are essential steps toward promoting diversity and inclusivity. These efforts will require more than a shift in perspective, acknowledging that diversity is an asset rather than a hindrance.**

It requires understanding how and why concepts like masking and disclosure are nuanced and cultural, bound up with disabling practices. What is an invisible barrier to inclusion in one setting might be a concept of productivity or a mode of productivity that can be learned and taught. In another, it might be noise or a lack of understanding about the conditions required to relax and avoid paralysis. To challenge discrimination, we need to foster a supportive and open discussion.

Disclosing neurodivergence is a personal choice. A lack of training or policies does not justify sharing sensitive information about a disclosure (Kirby and Smith, 2021). A supportive environment should be created through education and policies, fostering empathy for neurodivergence. Organisations should not avoid hiring neurodiverse individuals but anticipate challenges and identify support needs. They need to address work errors sensitively, offer support in neurodiverse-friendly meeting spaces, and implement ongoing neurodiversity awareness programs with clear agendas and materials in advance.

We often talk about the idea that one solution does not fit all. Perhaps we should also consider how we replicate biases in our processes and projections toward the ideal body (or cognition). Once we can start to talk about impairments sensitively, we can negotiate the understanding that it is a human right to be enabled to be a proactive member of a workforce or institution.

**Once we break down the disabling practices internalised as accepted norms, we might paradoxically recognise that our impairments are not immobilising barriers to belonging but that the practice of discrimination is a form of ostracization.**

# The Paradoxes of Diverse (or Divisive) Identities

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## Shame, marginalisation, and representations of disability

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My journey as a philosopher, creative, and teacher is serendipitous as it is privileged; many others possess sharper intellect and skills, well-equipped to dissect the intricacies of difference, advocacy, and change.

In my pursuit of knowledge, I have been distracted numerous times, and my tangential approach to thinking is depicted well by Katie Boxall's (2015) conceptualisation of dyslexic thinking as a rhizome. She visualises her thought as organic and growing with roots, which sparked my imagination since it encapsulates lateral thinking within a system that privileges linearity. Though lateral thinking holds advantages, I often yearned for the ability to chart a linear forward path devoid of upward or downward considerations. This conflict led me to see myself through the eyes of the other, as the existentialist philosopher Sartre (1943) put it. One key point of his text explains how shame forms by recognising yourself as failing in the eyes of others. This conceptualisation of shame facilitated my philosophical exploration of neurodiversity, intertwining with my curiosity about psychology and the intricacies of the human mind.

### Shame

When I turn to write on a whiteboard, spelling doubts trigger my fear of appearing incompetent, just as reading aloud to a class evokes anxiety. I know my intonation can falter, or words can be missed or mispronounced, just as the Pulitzer-winning poet Philip Schultz depicts in his book *Dyslexia*:

**I sometimes put an extra syllable in arthritis, pronouncing it arthurtitis, as if it contained the name Arthur. I often add or subtract syllables in words without knowing I'm doing it ... I refused to read my work in public all through college. Out of fear of stuttering; stage fright. (Schultz, 2011, 107)**

Reading about his sense of shame validated the fact that, despite my passion for knowledge and desire to belong, an impairment remains a part (but not all) of who I am. When I first set out to make sense of my identity and impairment, I engaged in the debates contributed by Michael Oliver (1996) on visible (in contrast to invisible or non-apparent) disabilities. Mike Oliver challenged the medical view of disability by highlighting its role in societal discrimination and the undermining of individual empowerment and autonomy. Oliver's critique asserts that disability is a social construct, perpetuating oppression and discrimination, fostering a learned sense of helplessness while depriving individuals of their human rights and dignity.

The developments that have taken place in the field of disabilities since I began engaging are worth considering. Tom Shakespeare's (2006) contributions have been especially pertinent since his position problematizes the dichotomy between impairment and disability. Shakespeare argues that mental and psychological strain, such as that described above by Schultz, may arise from both physical impairment and social discrimination: "is a complex interaction of biological, psychological, cultural, and socio-political factors, which cannot be extricated except with imprecision" (Shakespeare, 2014: 26).

Shakespeare's understanding and approach to disability and impairment embrace the complexity of the entwinement between social discrimination and cognitive impairments. Shakespeare's perspective underlines the importance of providing psychological support and psychoeducation, as well as raising awareness around the impact of disablement to achieve inclusion, uphold human dignity, and define the (human) rights of individuals facing social challenges and multiple forms of discrimination.

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## From equality to equity

Over the years of working in neurodiversity advocacy and awareness, I have explored the distinct writing styles of individuals who self-identify as dyslexic. In developing *Rebelling Against Spelling Press (RASP)*, my ambition was to publish dyslexic writers and to offer an audience alternative representations of dyslexia that were unavailable to me when I was at school.

My premise was that writers who identify as dyslexic express a distinct writing style that had something to do with bottleneaking ideas to words, signifying the failure of language rather than the mind. I hoped to increase positive representations of dyslexia in literature and enable and empower writers to explore differences through narratives away from a traditional (spiky) profile or list of shortcomings, faults, failures, or even gifts and publish stories and voices stifled by a system that privileges linearity.

I walked straight into the problem of the plurality or intersectionality of identity. Through conversations with individuals, creatives, and writers within the neurodiverse community, I came to negotiate the complex, dynamic, self-determined, and ever-shifting nature of identity. We are not just dyslexic as many aspects of our identities (gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) affect the way we think, write and make meaning, so I came to believe calling writers dyslexic writers rather than writers who identify as dyslexic was reproducing hetero-normative, ethno-normative, and cis-normative ideologies that result in the inequalities I wanted to address.

This paradox thwarted my ambition to explore differences in narratives within a system that privileges linearity. Simultaneously, my curiosity about neurodiverse narratives and voices redirects my attention to the broader question of representation. A recent presentation by a student caught my attention.

Her arguments outlined the necessity of representing disabilities in children's literature to foster inclusion. Her argument made some strong points:

- Harmful stereotypes are often the only ways that the media portrays special needs. Indeed Ellis (2019) found upon reviewing popular media that individuals with special needs are often depicted as pitiable, pathetic, sinister, and evil.
- Children who identify as ND ought to be defined by their character, not their impairment. She refers to Hayden's (2020) argument that positive representations of special needs require the characters to have agency not just be subjected to events. The representation of children with impairments who are empowered by their nature, not by disabilities is critical.
- Books can be the connection point between readers and children. Reading books about children with impairments who face disablement enables them to develop compassion over pity (Lea, 2015).
- Significantly, while kids identified as ND see themselves less in books (only 3.4% of characters are ND), this has consequences for all children since it is through books that children come to reckon with, explore, consider, and negotiate the nuances of the multicultural nature world they exist within (Bishop, 2015).

Her argument advocated for equitable portrayal and against the marginalisation of neurodiverse children in plots and narrative imagination, highlighting the significance of 'strength-based representation'.






# The Paradoxes of Diverse (or Divisive) Identities

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Perhaps witnessing her talk closes a circle for me, that the prejudices towards impairments are not imagined. It explains why I used to be triggered reading classic texts like Ronald Davis's *The Gift of Dyslexia* (1994), where dyslexic thinking is conceptualised pejoratively as daydreaming. A lack of focus, and attention, that needs remediating. Whereas in the literature authored by dyslexic writers, there are numerous examples that there is not space here to explore, of the ways that impairments are complicated, explored and captured as walkways and access points to the imagination.

I value the evolving perspectives on diversity in recent literature, signifying a positive shift toward a responsible and accountable approach to representing diversity over the past two decades. Despite these advancements, the value of shifting rhizome thinking in dyslexic writing and lateral narratives remains elusive. However, with the increasing accessibility of technology and the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Natural Language Processing (NLP), neurodiverse individuals now have more opportunities to overcome challenges related to traditional writing styles that may restrict ideas to words, contributing to a more equitable environment.



While the rise of AI underscores our limited understanding of human consciousness and intelligence, there is optimism that the convergence of human and artificial thought presents a unique opportunity. In the words of the renowned American political philosopher John Rawls, to improve the lot of those worst off.

## (Bio)diversity and sustainability

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Despite the long legacy of the disability movement, the challenges faced by individuals with invisible disabilities in integrating into schools and communities remain ambiguous. Those who identify with invisible or non-apparent disabilities continue to grapple for the right to define themselves and advocate for the accommodations they require (Topping, 2023).

As a neurodivergent belonging to Generation X and after decades of engagement in disability discourse and the neurodiversity movement, a fervour persists within me to shed light on, comprehend, and deliberate on these insights:

### 1. Diversity and Representation

Recognising the importance of diversity and representation is vital for everyone, not just when they become relevant to influential stakeholders. Each company, organisation, and institution shapes its own culture and norms. Lack of awareness often indicates benefiting from it. It is crucial to actively implement strategies that foster a sense of belonging for all individuals.

### 2. Affordability of Diversity

Embracing diversity is a strategic investment, not a costly endeavour. Building a diverse workforce and student body is resourceful, fostering high-quality contributions from individuals with impairments. Recognising differences cultivates motivated, creative, and inclusive communities. Neglecting policies, strategies, training, and support is more costly.

### 3. Significance of Self-Identification

Choosing how to identify is personal. While this might seem inconsequential to those outside marginalised communities, self-definition is a form of empowerment. Demonstrating consideration by addressing individuals as they want to identify is an act of respect, not pettiness.



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## 4. Diversity as a Strength

Actively embracing diversity goes beyond ethical and legal obligations; it represents a strategic imperative that actively attracts, optimises, and sustains talent, fostering innovation and organisational growth. It can enhance customer relations and contribute to a more productive workforce. Companies that hire individuals with disabilities foster customer loyalty, contribute to employee engagement, and create a positive and thriving organisational culture.

## 5. Transparency and Continuous Improvement

Transparency means evaluating how the culture benefits and utilising feedback for growth. It includes identifying areas where criticism arises, distinguishing unproductive critiques, and emphasising a culture of continuous improvement. It is crucial to provide tools guiding individuals with invisible disabilities toward self-identification. Instead of imposing limitations on energy, space, or resources and perpetuating stereotypes, the focus should be cultivating environments where individuals can actively ask: 'Guide me to make this work'.



## Why we need psycho-education

I entered academia driven by a desire to make education more accessible and inclusive and have come to view 'belonging' as the cornerstone of my findings. Despite the importance of the legal aspects, aiming to determine if an individual is disabled and what reasonable adjustments are needed, a broader person-centred approach requires engaging with individuals about their preferences, choices, and needs.

Gaining institutional and organisational validation, access, developing coping mechanisms, and gaining psycho-education stem from a primary diagnosis (Young et al., 2020). But getting a diagnosis presents a paradox, entailing a conflict between the desire for acknowledgment and the fear of falling into stereotypes. The historical bias towards diagnosing boys with neurodiversity has distorted research and diagnostic criteria, as ascertainment bias leads to skewed gender distribution in diagnoses, so research inadequately captures the female and other under-represented groups, such as those in Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic communities experience (Kirby and Smith, 2021). Increasing awareness of masking behaviours in self-identified neurodiverse individuals further complicates diagnostics. This masking may be conscious and driven by a desire for belonging but paradoxically comprises teachable skills that make organisations and institutions accessible.

An enhanced understanding of this paradox of neurodiversity among therapists, educators, and psychologists would foster greater acceptance and awareness of the complexities of divergent identities. While psycho-education can provide individuals with essential skills for managing advocacy practices, I hope for further research into how creativity can function as a therapy to unravel the nuances and paradoxes of neurodivergent identities. Although a diagnosis is crucial for self-education, rights advocacy, and establishing healthy communities, we might enrich our understanding of discrimination through creative expression.

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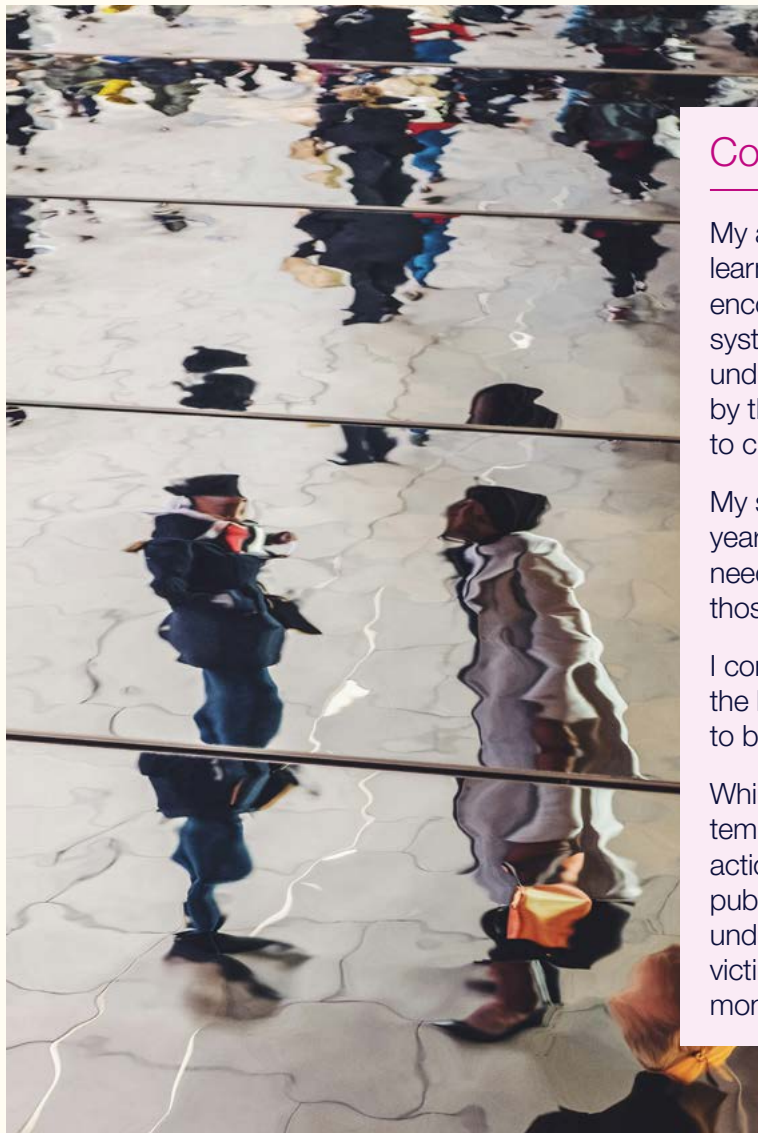


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## Conclusion

My ambition to be a better teacher and better writer emerges from a sense of duty to share what I have learned in my pursuit of psycho-education and advocacy practice. At one point in my teaching journey, I was encouraged by a colleague to read the work of Bruce D. Perry (2006). These insights into the parasympathetic system were effective at guiding me toward the path of viewing teaching as a matter of connection. My understanding of how this might be significant to the field of special education has been shaped considerably by the autistic advocate Temple Grandin (2013) who discusses the challenges of the sensory system, and how to cultivate awareness and self-development.

My students and clients today seem more candid about their struggles and needs than those of 10 or 20 years ago. Yet further strides are required to dispel the notion that all students need to be treated equally. We need to strive towards promoting the values of equity and improving a lot of those who are worse off, including those who experience impairments and suffer from disabling environments.

I contend that inadequate awareness of diversity persists. I remain committed to the idea that understanding the history of disability, psychoeducation, and creative therapies can support cultures in which individuals need to be discussed more openly and without shame.

While those of us with impairments, who have wiggled our way inside that box, however superficially and temporarily, may not always be aware of the prejudices we hold or how they influence our thoughts and actions. I believe it is our duty as individuals who identify differently, regardless of whether we choose to publicly identify as such, to remain aware of our histories, but look forward to more positive actions and understanding. Encouraging and empowering people who identify differently not to position themselves as the victim, but brave enough to keep these conversations open about what it means to be normal, worth the time, money, and resources of the institutions that determine the needs and rights of those without visibility or voice.

# Dyspraxic Diamond

Esther Efemini, Dyspraxia Foundation



For me, I would liken Dyspraxia to the poor cousin of all the Neurodivergent conditions. It is a condition that is frequently shrouded in ignorance and misconceptions. According to the Dyspraxia Foundation, Dyspraxia affects 5% of the population.

In an article by Sanaeya Yezad Daruvala (2020) natural diamonds symbolize strength and resilience. I think that aptly describes me. Being dyspraxic, you must have strength and resilience to live in a world that does not cater to you or your needs.



## Early Years

Growing up, I knew I was different but could not put my finger on it. I could articulate words on some days and not on others. How could I explain this to people without sounding like I was mad? Why would I bump into the door frame as I walk through a door? Why could I not hold something without dropping it, even when concentrating? Why could I be hugged on one day and not bear to be hugged on another day? Why does my polo neck feel like it is going to strangle me?

I still can't tie my shoe laces or trainer laces. I stuff them in my shoes or trainers. If only Burberry did Velcro trainers, I would be the poster woman to wear them. I am a child of the late '60s. Having a diagnosis was not a thing back then. You were described as slow or not trying hard enough. I was told I was a late talker and didn't stop talking when I started talking. Looking back, I realise my mother found me challenging. I was a curious child. The "Why?" child, I remember asking my mum why the moon appeared everywhere; frustrated, my mum would silence me, and silencing me left me reluctant to speak. Looking back, she did not have the capacity to engage as her education was limited.

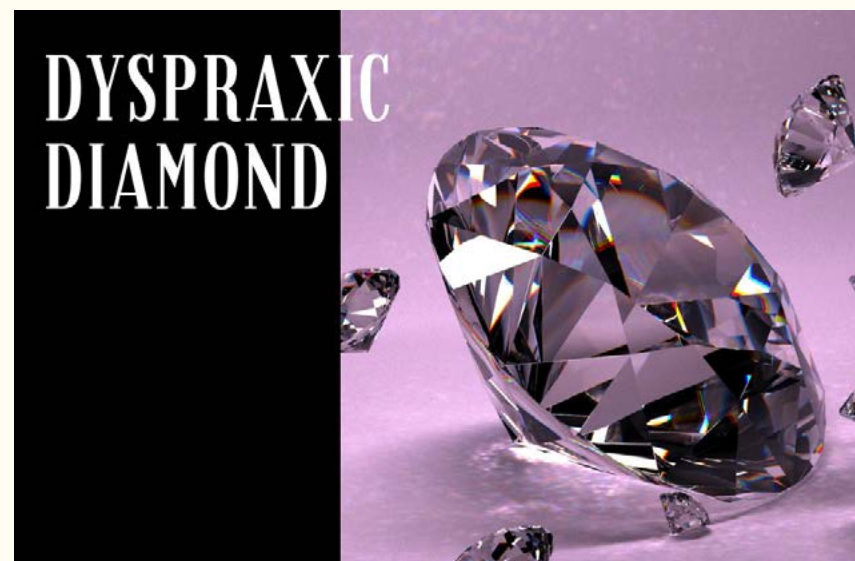
I always wished I could have a new brain because I forgot things. For example, on a trip to the shops to get cornflakes, I would tell myself, "Don't forget cornflakes". I would get to the shop and forget, remembering the first part of corn, and I returned with a tin of corn.

The look of disgust I received from my mum. Hearing the words "What's the matter with you?" was expected. "You never do as you are told". Unbeknownst to her, I was trying my best not to displease her. I could not understand why my brain forgot constantly. I would always hit my head with my hand. Shouting, "You are so stupid". I would repeatedly say this to myself. I hated myself for forgetting things.

## School Experience

School was worse, and I was constantly kept in at break and lunch due to incomplete work. My hands would ache after a short period. When I complained that my hands hurt, I was criticised for not doing enough work.

School reports were littered with 'she is bright but lazy'. If only they knew how hard I was working. My mum wasn't happy with my school reports.



**Chess was my go-to, my way of escaping my circumstances. I excelled at chess and played in many tournaments, but that was not enough to make my mum proud of me. I excelled in Netball, which was strange. I played positions, Wing Defence Centre, Goal Defence, and Goal Attack, and I enjoyed swimming.**

## Supervision Meeting

"Esther, how are you?" My supervisor, Jayne, said. "I went through your Literature Review and am unclear on what you mean. Talk me through what you mean."

**I talked through the ideas and themes I wanted to discuss in my Literature Review for my PhD. Jayne said, "What you just said and what you have written is not the same. I think there is an issue here. You may have Dyslexia, so you should go for an assessment." In my head, I thought I had written down what I said. I thanked Jayne and left.**

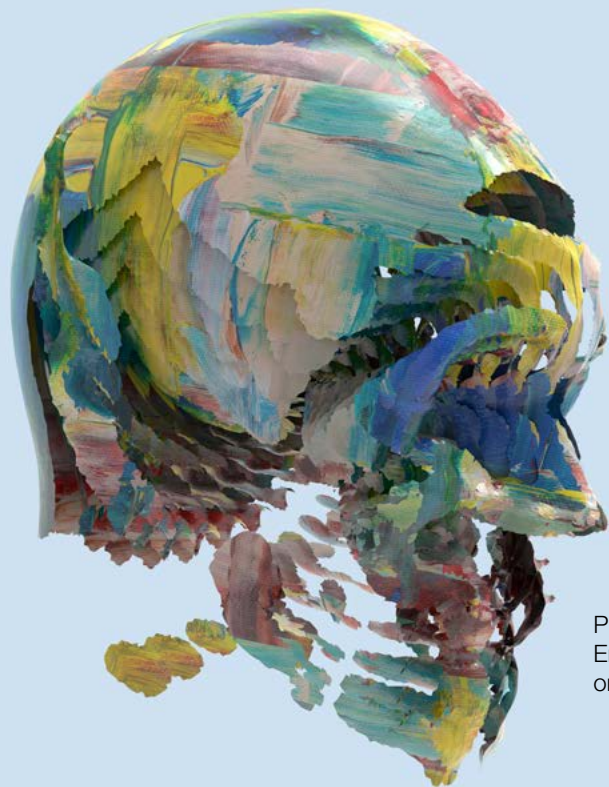


Photo by  
Erick Butler  
on Unsplash

## Day of my Assessment

Fast forward to September 21st, 2001. It was a warm autumn day. The leaves on the trees were a bonfire red. I exited the station and walked down the hill. My stomach started to churn. Today was the day I was going for my diagnostic assessment. Anyone would think I had an illness. Thoughts were running through my head. My biggest fear was that the psychologist would say he could not find anything wrong and I was stupid. I got stressed travelling to places that I did not know. In my right hand, I held my A-Z tightly. Having the A-Z didn't make sense, as I could not read the maps anyway. I would usually ask someone on the way for directions. A short woman with a dog that appeared to be taking her for a walk and not the other way around walked directly in my path. "Excuse me, please could you tell me where Falmouth Road is?", I said. The dog looked at me and sniffed my leg. The woman started giving directions, but my focus was on the dog. I had already flat-lined, embarrassed to ask the woman again for directions. I thanked her, crossed the road, and entered the sweet shop. The shopkeeper was a lovely man with a touch of Christopher Biggins. "It's the next road on the right, love." "Thank you very much!" I hurriedly left the shop.

"Here goes", I said to myself as I knocked on the door. The door opened, and a man resembling John Malkovich appeared before me. I wanted to call him John, but that was not his name. He led me to an office. The office looked like a cramped library.

"Please take a seat", he said. I sat down, my hands clammy. I dropped my A-Z. Why did this have to happen now? "Please do not worry", he replied. We discussed my history of difficulties, and I did some diagnostic tests that lasted over two hours. I hated doing the memory tests. I could feel myself wanting to cry as these triggered painful memories of failure and inadequacy. John was not giving much away. Finally, he said, from the findings, your difficulties are consistent with Dyspraxia. I had never heard of it. Dyspraxia. It was a long walk back to the station. My emotions were mixed with relief and anger.

## Disclosing my diagnosis to Family Members.

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"Mum, I went for my assessment, and the Educational Psychologist said I have Dyspraxia". Dyspraxia! How did you catch that? She said. Dyspraxia is not something you catch. I explained in the best way that I could – emphasising the sequencing difficulties. "Remember Mum when I was younger, and you asked me something, and I struggled to remember. I recapped "Corngate". "Yeah", she said slowly. She is struggling to remember herself. "It's due to Dyspraxia". I saw her eyes glaze over. I don't think she understood at all. I suppose it was a lot for my mum to take in. But she finally piped up and said I had done well despite my condition. I explained that it is not an illness and there is a strong possibility that it is genetic. She said "OK" and asked if I wanted something to eat. That cue was to say she wanted to move on to something else.

Looking back, I should have referred myself for some form of Dyspraxic Coaching. There were some problematic dark days. I wanted to sue the primary school; I wanted my essays for my degree and master's to be re-marked. However, it was too late. I was in the second year of my PhD, and it was a bit too late to request that now. It was about moving forward. I got clarity, but it did not remove all the hurt and disappointment from the past.

## Mum, I want a new pair of hands for Christmas.

One year, my youngest son did not request toys but a new pair of hands; in his own words, his hands were "rubbish". I felt that déjà vu feeling. I could see some similarities. His school report is that he is bright but does not do enough work. It pained me to see his self-esteem hit rock bottom. At this point, I left my teaching career as a Criminology lecturer and worked as a Learning Support Lecturer. My Assistive Technology Tutor, Atif Choudhury, encouraged me to take a course at London Metropolitan University, a Post Graduate Diploma in Dyslexia. Returning to study in the field of SEN was a challenge. I had the constant battle of telling myself how I could support people with SEN if I had my challenges. I remember leaving a conference and leaving my coat behind. At the back of my mind was that I did not want my son to suffer like I did at school.

So, I took the plunge and became a parent governor of my son's school. So, I worked closely with the SEN coordinator and navigated the process of getting my son an assessment from the same educational psychologist who had assessed me.

We unpacked the assessment together. I informed the school and my son was given reasonable adjustments for exams. He was allocated a mentor as well. My youngest son's perspective of his diagnosis is very different from mine. I think this is because he was diagnosed at a much earlier age and was willing to engage with the support offered. With changes in technology, he navigated the school system better. He even returned to his old school to mentor Year 10 students at risk of being excluded.

As an individual coming from Generation X, the landscape of neurodiversity has changed over the years. So much work needs to be done to raise the profile of Dyspraxia. More work needs to be done to embrace neurodiversity, particularly with those coming from ethnic minority backgrounds. The education system needs an overhaul. In the workplace, neurodiversity issues should not be seen as a tick-box exercise. Neurodiverse individuals need to be supported by being offered counselling specific to their neurodiversity so they can tap into their true potential and embrace their talents.

**To conclude if I met my 10-year-old self. Do not worry; there are challenges, but you have successfully overcome them.**

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# Three Inspiring Journeys of Discovery

James Carroll and interviewees from St Mungo's, Wayne Chin, Jason Why and Dan Sutton, Three Men.

When considering who to include in these talking-head videos our first thought came to interviewing students and teachers from St. Mungo's Recovery College which provides an inclusive learning, training and employment service for those who have accessed a St Mungo's service

[www.mungos.org/our-services/skills-and-employment/recovery-colleges](http://www.mungos.org/our-services/skills-and-employment/recovery-colleges)

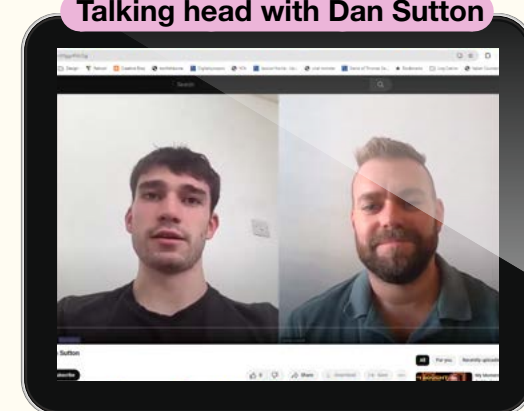
Having worked at the Recovery College between 2018 and 2022 as the Digital Inclusion Lead, I knew it was a safe space for neurodivergent people to gather together to learn and work. We created and delivered several versions of the Digital Skills for Life, a course run with the expertise of AchieveAbility and of the social enterprise Diversity and Ability <https://diversityandability.com> with the overarching aim of equipping ND students with the confidence and skills for today's digital world.

With the support of Emily Catlow (the Recovery College's current Health and Well-being Lead and a leading advocate of ND within St. Mungo's), we reached out to three individuals who were involved with the Recovery College, and who are neurodivergent, to be interviewed for a talking-head on the intergenerational theme of this issue of the *AchieveAbility E-Journal*.

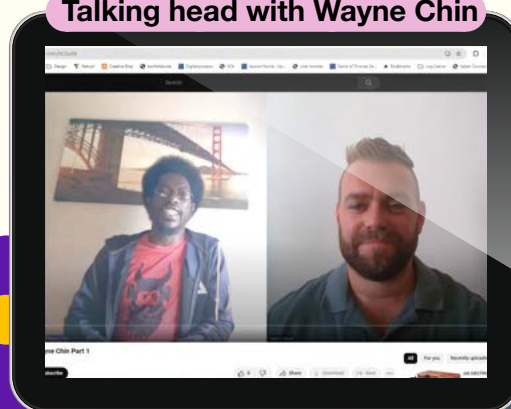
The viewer is taken on three different journeys across three generations with a focus on the subject's educational experiences. What's particularly unique about these journeys is that, although they happened at different times, they are all linked by a common thread: the constant and obvious lack of understanding in the UK educational system on how to best support neurodivergent students.

**The viewer may have their own experience of being neurodivergent in the education system or may wish to understand that experience better. These talking heads aim not only to educate us about these three experiences in particular, but also to spark debate on how we support the neurodivergent students of today and the future.**

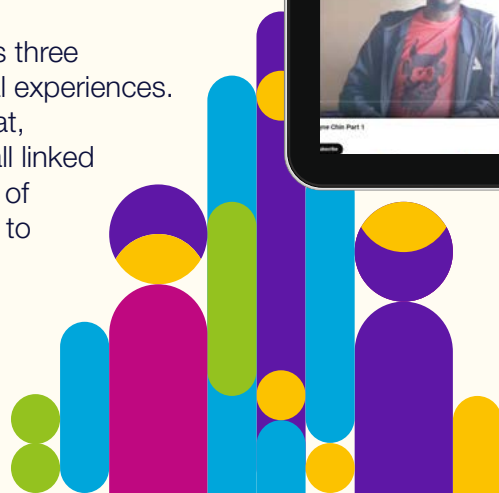
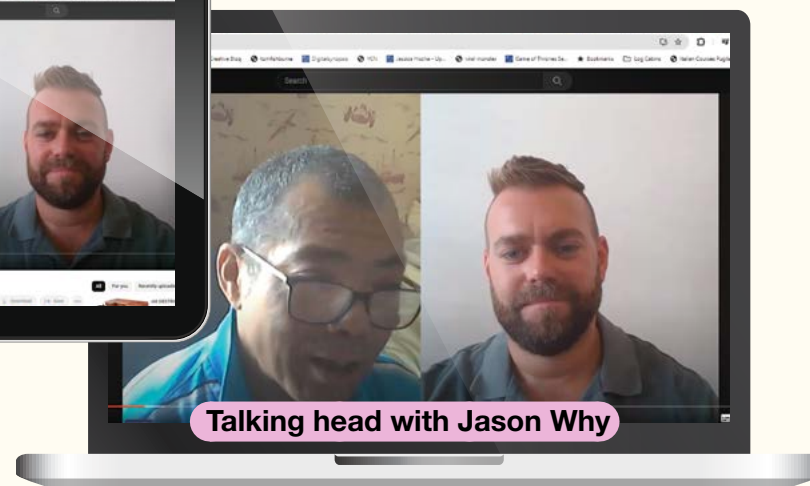
Talking head with Dan Sutton



Talking head with Wayne Chin




Talking head with Jason Why





# Breaking the Code

Genevieve Mackenzie, Academic Researcher and Author



G.B. Mackenzie completed her doctorate in Developmental Psychology and Education at the University of Toronto, focusing on ADHD and literacy among adolescents, and has authored several peer-reviewed articles in her field. She is the author of two children's books: *Breaking the Code. A novel about a boy overcoming more than his dyslexia* (2021) and *The Mystery Behind the Shenzhen Nongke Orchid. A Story about ADHD and Making and Maintaining Friendships* (2021).

These books are research-driven and highlight that anyone can overcome personal weaknesses through using one's strengths to succeed. She is familiar with the struggles students with learning exceptionalities have due to her own learning disabilities and ADHD. However, despite a learning exceptionality you can overcome any obstacle. These books are inspiring, fun and instill compassion in children with and without learning exceptionalities.



## Breaking the Code

Genevieve Mackenzie, Academic Researcher and Author

Holding your newborn for the first time all you hope for is health and “normalcy”, but “normalcy” doesn’t exist. Instead there is neurodiversity.

Across the sea of people there are different strengths and weaknesses. The story, from which two extracts follow below, is told from various perspectives but, in the end, empathy is promoted due to weaknesses resolved through strengths igniting power and motivation. This makes society work and there are discoveries to be made across generations. *Breaking the Code* is a fictional story but, just like in reality, there are strengths held by everyone that once revealed can be impactful across time.

**The light that lit the realisation of a world where success has no boundaries irrespective of ability or disability. This notion is encompassed in *Breaking the Code*.**

### The Royal Ontario Museum:

As I thought about making a historic discovery, my attention quickly began to turn to one particular piece of parchment. There were 11 lines, and each of the lines looked uniquely different from the rest. The lines were all in code. The first line was written in numbers and the rest in letters.

The document, called the Multiverse Manuscript, looked like this:

#### Multiverse Manuscript

14 5 22 5 18 19 5 20 12 9 13 9 20 19

**GSV FMREVIHZO HFN LU PMLDOVWTV RH FMYLFMWWW WALUAPHS JHUUVA IL TLHZBYLK**

**HTSIELVASESUSAOTNUEDD**

**ROU DELNSES BASETILII EDEN OT EB ERDTREAU**

**EW VELI JL Z DVYSK ND POSSIBILITIES**

**TSIXE TON SEOD DNE NA**

**VC MCBZ SM SCXYC NSOOZFOWJ SM TQB NLBO ZZFHDBWJ HL EYZA ND  
CGPWWCEAKYTG**

**QEFP KLQFLK FP LCQBK JFPPBA**

**XG XCOO UJUSZMO MKII GCFMSM VDLUZOAWDC JNOYXOVVB OFR UMDVRHTZWNWIMG OU  
LRMRTH RVFOEXTH MVRV DVLFSROMS**

I heard though my headset “The Multiverse Manuscript is handwritten in an unknown writing system. The vellum on which it is written has not been carbon-dated due to the damage on it. This damage has been caused over the years. The Manuscript is named as a result of the multiple number of verses or lines that appear, each in their own unique form.

## Breaking the Code

Genevieve Mackenzie, Academic Researcher and Author



The Multiverse Manuscript has been extensively studied by both professional and amateur code breakers around the world. However, the Multiverse Manuscript has never been deciphered, and its mystery has generated worldwide curiosity. It is unknown who wrote the Multiverse Manuscript, but perhaps when it is deciphered, it will provide insight into its authorship.”

**I couldn't take my eyes off the parchment.**

### Eight Years Earlier

By the age of four, I had memorized all the books in my collection that had been read to me. There were 67. I had counted them.

My books were lined up on the shelving unit in my bedroom. Below my bookshelf was the oak desk, painted black, that my parents bought me recently so I could get ready to do my homework. My black oak desk matched my bedside table and dresser. Next to my dresser was a small closet. I had a circular maple bed painted in black. It had a Star Wars duvet cover featuring storm troopers.

School work should be easy, I thought, as I danced around my room pulling clothes out of my dresser drawers, because I had been told I had a remarkable memory. I could look at an image, such as a detailed picture, and be able to accurately recall the drawing in vivid detail quite some time later. For instance, I was able to recall elements such as the colours and the positions of objects and the different people illustrated in the picture.

I once memorized the skyline of Toronto and was able to recall where all the buildings were, how tall they were and any specific features that they had. I could also recall anything that I heard after listening to it only once.

For instance, after listening to a song, I was able to sing the lyrics, even if my singing voice wasn't the greatest in the world!

My parents researched my type of memory and found that what I had was called an eidetic memory: the ability to recall images, words and more from memory with high precision after only one viewing. However, my ability to recall would last a long time, and that was very unusual for an eidetic memory.

**Bryan, who was going into Grade 1, called me the “Memory Man.”**

Dad and Mom knew my memory would help me at school, and they were looking forward to my beginning school almost as much as I was. They certainly expected me to be at the top of the class. But sometimes things don't happen the way you expect them to.

### Seven Years Later

I was diagnosed with dyslexia in Grade 1. At the age of 12 and in Grade 6, I could not read a single word. I felt school wasn't for me. Reading was central to school, and I just couldn't do it.

During kindergarten and Grade 1, it slowly became apparent to my teachers and parents that I was using my brilliant memory to repeat the words I had heard in the stories read to me. But I couldn't recognize letters in the alphabet and couldn't make out individual sounds, let alone read sentences and comprehend paragraphs found in books.

I was desperate to learn to read.

Due to severe dyslexia and not being able to read, I was often bullied and teased by other students. If I had one wish, it would be to just be normal. That meant being able to read.

**Suddenly, my attention turned to  
The document, called the Multiverse Manuscript**

## Breaking the Code

Genevieve Mackenzie, Academic Researcher and Author

On the car ride back into Toronto, I once again remarked upon the different perspective you had when flying as opposed to just being a passenger.

“It is kind of like the different perspectives you have gained through deciphering the Manuscript,” remarked my dad. “Like the line ‘Never set limits.’ There was a part of you that thought you wouldn’t be able to read. But you worked hard during March break to overcome that hurdle. Through that program, you have come to learn how to read. This teaches us no matter how difficult the situation is, you should ‘never set limits’ on yourself.”

**I thought about what my dad was saying, but then I asked, “What about ‘The universal sum of knowledge is unbounded’? Mrs. Strachan told me that the collective wisdom across generations doesn’t have any boundaries.”**

“Yes, and I think I would agree with her,” my dad replied slowly. He was focusing on driving the car back to our condo. He went on, “That deciphered line suggests that the collective knowledge gained, starting from the beginning of time, is not limited. It is not finite, meaning it is not measurable.”

“Just like ‘potential,’” I acknowledged thoughtfully, adjusting my hat. “It can’t be measured.”

“Right,” replied my dad. “No one can tell you the extent of your potential.”

“And this leaves us astounded,” I responded, sitting up straighter in my seat. “My teacher, Ms. Crystal, believes people have unlimited potential and that it can’t be measured.”

“I agree,” said my dad. “People are far too complex, and that complexity interacts with one’s environment. This in turn could produce an outcome that may never be expected. So, someone’s potential is difficult to guess, let alone measure. There are so many people that seem ordinary, but when there is a serious challenge, they become extraordinary people,” he commented, focusing on the road ahead.

**I was struggling to understand what my dad was trying to tell me, but what I did get from it was that one’s potential was something that could never be predicted.**

“The next line, is “Our endless abilities need to be treasured.”” I cleared my throat. “Erik, in my class at school, told me that perhaps it means that in anything we do, we can always improve upon it. My memory and my new reading abilities could be considered endless, and I do ‘treasure’ them.”

“But what about ‘An end does not exist’?” Dad asked.

Following a moment of thought, I said, “I think that line is connected with the previous line. We can continue to move forward and develop our ability and add to our knowledge. There is no ‘end’ to this.”

My dad continued, “This notion is often missed. That means sometimes we think that our abilities are fixed and can’t be improved. I think you have come to realize these past few weeks that this is not true.”

“The next line confuses me, though.” I repeated the line to my dad, saying, “‘We walk through life facing ubiquitous illusions.’ How does not seeing reality accurately fit in with the rest of the Manuscript?”

“Well,” replied my dad slowly, “I think the next line provides some insight.”

“You mean,” I responded thoughtfully, “‘Our understanding of limits reflects mere delusions’?”

## Breaking the Code

Genevieve Mackenzie, Academic Researcher and Author

Photo by Fletcher Pride  
on Unsplash

**“Think about what you learned these past few weeks, Cayden. You used your strengths to overcome your weaknesses. You really wanted something and went after it with persistence and hard work. You had a goal and achieved it,” he said proudly.**

Our discussion of the Manuscript during the car ride back home provided me with the clarity I needed to understand the meaning of its messages. I continued to think about the meaning of the lines and how they related to my experiences and abilities.

Back home, I was still on a high as a result of flying the tricycle gear aircraft with my dad. Increasing my excitement was the fact that in a couple of hours, my family and I were going to go to the ROM. At the ROM, I was finally going to get to show the deciphered Multiverse Manuscript to the curator responsible for the ancient artifacts section of the museum. I would also be rewarded publicly for my accomplishment.

### Celebration:

Once my family and I reached the museum, we went directly to the ancient artifacts section. I led the way. As we approached it, I could immediately hear and see people gathered together. I saw Mrs. Strachan. She was the first to congratulate me. She was happy for me, and she gave me a hug. Ms. Crystal was next to her, and she congratulated me, too, and shook my hand.

There were Greg and Caine, as well as other teachers and students, ancient artifacts curators and people I didn't know. There were even some journalists and photographers. There were probably close to 100 people in attendance.

Everyone crowded around a small stage with a microphone standing on it. The curator of the ancient artifacts section at the museum asked that I come up onstage.

As I stepped onto the stage, I could hear applause. I felt my whole-body tense up. But slowly, I began to relax as I looked around at the teachers, friends and family who had been an important part of this journey with me.

I felt overwhelmed with emotions. But most of all, I felt pride in my abilities as I held up the poster board that I had put together. Pride was not something I had previously felt very often. However, now I recognized the importance of valuing one's abilities and of being proud when accomplishing something.



## Breaking the Code

Genevieve Mackenzie, Academic Researcher and Author

Here was what I showed the assembly of people in front of me:

### Multiverse Manuscript

14 5 22 5 18 19 5 20 12 9 13 9 20 19

Never set limits

GSV FMREVIHZO HFN LU PMLDOVWTV RH FMYLFMWWW

The universal sum of knowledge is unbounded

WVALUAPHS JHUUVA IL TLHZBYLK

Potential cannot be measured

HTSIELVASESUSAOTNUEDD

This leaves us astounded

ROU DELNSES BASETILII EDEN OT EB ERDTREAUS

Our endless abilities need to be treasured

EW VELI JL Z DVYSK ND POSSIBILITIES

We live in a world of possibilities

TSIXE TON SEOD DNE NA

An end does not exist

VC MCBZ SM SCXYC NSOOZFOWJ SM TQB NLBO ZZFHDBWJ HL EYZA ND

CGPWWCEAKYTG

We need to teach ourselves to use one's abilities in face of disabilities

QEFP KLQFLK FP LCQBK JFPPBA

This notion is often missed

XG XCOO UJUSZMO MKII GCFMSM VDLUZOAWDC JNOYXOVVB

We walk through life facing ubiquitous illusions

OFR UMDVRRHTZWNWIMG OU LRMRTN RVFOEXTH MVRV DVLFSROMS

Our understanding of limits reflects mere delusions

The onlookers applauded again once I presented my poster.

“Thank you,” I said into the microphone. “While I deciphered the lines, I had help along the way from my family, friends and teachers.” I paused for a moment.

“I think the Manuscript’s message tells us that we all have strengths that can help us overcome obstacles,” I continued. “If we are determined, we can find a way to achieve success. It took me 12 years to learn how to read. But following the encouragement of my parents and my teacher, Mrs. Strachan, I found a unique program that worked for me. It fit with the way my brain worked. The brain of the author of the Multiverse Manuscript could have been consistent with my own, meaning he or she could have had dyslexia as well.”

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# The Phenomenology of Neurodivergence across Generations

Lennie Varvarides, DYSPLA

Part 1: Hermeneutic — from the Greek word, **Ερμηνευτική** (Ermineftikī) which means definition or interpretation.

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Neurodivergence is passed down. This traditionally unwanted gift was passed down through all my Cypriot forefathers and mothers before it reached me. Rife on both sides of my paternal grandparents born to colonised British Cyprus (1878–1960) and their grandparents, born to another oppressor — The Ottoman Empire (1571 -1878).

For over 150 years my ancestors were born **Φτωχός** (ftochos/poor). They were the forgotten **παιδιά** (paidia/children) of Empires. Equally hungry from poverty, plentiful at the turn of each century. Their destinies were mapped out like the destinies of all the young peasants in their village. Marriage and poverty awaited with eager guarantee and without the prospect of social mobility intervening.



# The Phenomenology of Neurodivergence across Generations

Lennie Varvarides, DYSPLA

**Their *gift*, collectively acknowledged as illiteracy, was therefore justified, because genetics offer guarantees on one's bloodline.**

My maternal grandmother was born in the 1930s and finished school at 10 years old, which was the normal age for peasant children under British rule. She would be described as illiterate by today's standards with this limited formal education. Not *dyslexic* and not *autistic* — just poor, illiterate and difficult.

Education is power and withholding education for the peasantry classes was politically motivated by their oppressors. As a result of the absence of education, the descendants of poverty continue to feel the effects of their class, allowing trauma and dependency to trickle forward into the future like genetics, DNA, blood, and even temperament.

**This hand-me-down cognition, shaped and battered 7 generations of, “mad” “stupid” and “slow.” Old colloquial labels for learning differences that will fester on one's self-esteem, for as long as knowledge about these differences is absent.**

At the age of 21, my Grandmother was the first person and the first woman in her family of 9 siblings to leave the occupied Island. Uneducated. Unable to read or write, she found value in her hands through **Δουλειά** (Douleiá/work). This industrious Seamstress migrated to the United Kingdom during the boom of the British Rag Trade in the 1950s; grateful for the opportunity to escape her abusive husband and probably the stress of bringing up her 4 young daughters without his financial support.

**Economic migration was the reward from the British Empire in exchange for one's colonisation.**

My mother joined her mother when she was 9 years old and benefited from free British education until she was 15 — a privilege available in Britain since 1944 which was not offered to the children in the British colonies until the 1960s. My father, who was also born into poverty in the late 1940s, stayed in school until he was 12 years old. This was only made possible because his father had died after an accident at work and his mother received compensation, which bought my father two extra academic years.

A privilege his older siblings did not receive because secondary education was not free in Cyprus under British rule meaning that only the middle and upper classes were educated. But even with this *extended* education, he was still struggling to learn. His older siblings would tease him, saying education was wasted on him. He was not called dyslexic, he was called “simple.”

**Not reading, not being able to read, only fills one with shame because memory dexterity is the most valued skill in everyday life.**

The older generation blamed the children for being *stupid* — for not being academic. They did not blame themselves. Or society. I was called a vegetable by my father because he thought I was unteachable. I was 8 and he was oblivious to words like dyslexia at that time. He would not have considered that the educational system might be broken, only that his children were. For many immigrants, this *gift* of neurodivergence would have represented an unappealing “slow mind” and would have brought shame to both the child and the parent.

If one is told they are stupid and undeserving, well it follows that they will go on to call their children the same. That's why it is called a cycle. The damage continues.

**I wonder if there is/was a link between children from colonised/occupied countries and the endemic of low self-esteem.**

When my father married my mother he was aware of his academic limitations in comparison to her, “British education” — but his generation and the one before did not experience the same level of “educationism” that we have today.

# The Phenomenology of Neurodivergence across Generations

Lennie Varvarides, DYSPLA



There is an overt and inherent level of discrimination and snobbery around education—it is a form of classicism that continues to create further divisions in society because the type of education one receives is perceived to signal one's value, intellect, ability and economic standing.

An explanation in the White Paper of the **World Literacy Foundation** report in 2018 illustrates how the problem of illiteracy and functional illiteracy is still an endemic global issue in the twenty-first century among the lower economic classes:

**[...] As a result, they often face welfare dependency, low self-esteem, and higher levels of crime. Moreover, people with a low level of literacy have limited ability to make important informed decisions in everyday life as they struggle with tasks such as filling out forms and applications, understanding government policies, reading medicine or nutritional labels... (WLF, 2018).**

By 2022 the situation still has not improved for disadvantaged primary-aged children with only, “51% [...] reaching the expected standard of reading at Key Stage 1,” as cited in the **Government National Statistics** attainment report. I bring this up to highlight that poverty has always been the greatest insult to educational attainment—with or without the knowledge of the “*gift*”.

In fact, most state primary schools do not test for dyslexia and never formally discover what a child's neurological and/or developmental differences are — which doubles their disenfranchisement. Therefore no matter how much *progress* we think awareness about neurodivergence brings, working-class neurodivergent children experience more barriers in British schools, with some Academies turning neurodivergent children away in an attempt to protect their school's academic average.

With my heritage and my parentage, I grew up thinking people like us did not get educated. I was the first person in my family to go to University, but I remember my mother telling me it was a wasted opportunity. She wasn't against education, she just didn't think art school offered one. This alternative route into higher education offered something new, something my family and my ancestors never had — **creative freedom**.

The only saving grace in my story is that I became invisible once my parents accepted I didn't have any potential. This confirmed to my young brain that I too was undeserving which I thought was why my parents had given up on me. My adult self would call this a form of neglect but the poet in me reframed it as, “Imaginative Leave” — absent parents equalled an undisturbed childhood spent in imaginative play — invisibility offers its own freedom.



**My *gift* was soon to become a golden ticket — a carved path towards a healthy mind. I felt my imagination expand in this isolation. I was engulfed in an imaginary world of constant play that never felt like pretence. It always just felt like I was playing in the future.**



# The Phenomenology of Neurodivergence across Generations

Lennie Varvarides, DYSPLA



Part 2: Descriptive – from the Latin word, *descriptivus*, meaning describing forms, structures, and usage without making value or judgement.

Judgement generates value and there is a difference in how people are treated based on these established value systems. One's gender, class, education, personality, health, connections and confidence are in constant observation.

The females in my family travelled through their childhood with speed, transforming into reluctant teen brides by necessity or by force. No one was interested in their minds or in their dreams. They were valued by their youth – their years of good fertility, and tolerated by their husbands. This might sound provincial, but even in the early Noughties, my father was also concerned about my prospects of getting married and having a family too.

As the matriarchy approached menopause, they were judged more harshly according to their other descriptive labels; *Mad, Difficult, Cold, Stressed, Unhealthy, Broken, Over-sensitive, Argumentative, Manipulative and Depressed*. Discredit someone's mind and your argument wins a victory. The men in my family had descriptive labels too – **παλαβος** (daredevil), **Χαζος** (stupid), **τεμπέλης** (lazy), **ψεύτη** (liars). They were womanisers, gamblers, and bigamists.

**These words carved the “baggage” of my undiagnosed parents and grandparents. Their baggage, destined to leave a harsher mark on their offspring.**

Secretly, we all feel the annoyance of emotionally unregulated people. Who can deny feeling put out when other people interpret the truth in their unique way? Who is not short-tempered when others need longer to get to the point? We just have to look at our own complicated relationships to realise that being neurodivergent comes with conflict and that conflict looks different across generations and across intersectionality. Of course, things have changed over the last 80 years, but trauma lingers in the bad habits learnt and repeated by our parents.

It's hard to identify which part of one's personality is formed by their DNA, their class, their education, their neurodivergence, their trauma, or their menopause – especially when so many of our parent's generation remains undiagnosed. Even now, many working-class students may not get diagnosed until they enrol at university – and even then, only the lucky ones.



# The Phenomenology of Neurodivergence across Generations

Lennie Varvarides, DYSPLA

I was one of those lucky ones who was diagnosed during my BA at Camberwell College of Arts in London at the age of 19, before that, I was left to watch my identity evolve into a series of negative statements, destined to feel uneasy, unsafe, insecure, exposed, withdrawn and alone in education.

**Yet even with this feeling of isolation and humiliation, I was desperate to learn how to read and felt destined to create stories. I pretended I could read books, imagining what the book might be about based on the images, but once the picture books were no longer available, I was exposed.**

**When a child is treated differently, they are aware they are different.**

Reading. Writing. Memory Recall—value systems the West worships. I learnt early on that I would never be able to gain validation because I was unable to read, write or recall facts like the other children. No wonder my gift was unwanted for most of my childhood and adolescence. This kind of gift is not Orthodox, it does not feel like a positive attribute in the family home, the classroom, the workplace, or society because difference is rarely celebrated... until they are and the only distinction between the two tends to be one's endurance.

As a society, we are quickly taught what to value and what to discard and such traditional value systems are still rife in the classroom and the class system today. Being neurodivergent doesn't only compromise how one learns, it shapes temperament, unregulated emotions, short tempers, frustration, and one's executive function abilities—all of which affect one's personal and professional development and relationships.

My grandmother and mother do not have the luxury of “self-awareness” or the ability to recognise their “intersectionality”. These are middle-class academic exercises. Instead, growing up with these matriarchal figures— who were also the breadwinners—was a lesson in resilience.

I didn't always like the *gift*...I recall wondering if I too was “mad” because I was always talking to myself... to my characters. I feared that I may have crossed the line in adolescence when the voices made more noise. Was this all still part of my *gift*? Did the *gift* generate the imagination... Was my *gift* my access to my imagination? The voices continued into my MA in Writing for Performance at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

**This is where I was to first meet my gift—in the arms of play. This was to be the magic that saved me, even when I couldn't name it at 5, 8, 11, 13, or 16.**

Yet, imagination and play were seen as frivolous—even laughing was considered “silly.” Instead, one had to be productive. Respectful. Deserving. Reserved. Serious. Organised. Focused. Academic. Capable...and if one could not be those things or pretend to be those things—then survival was threatened.

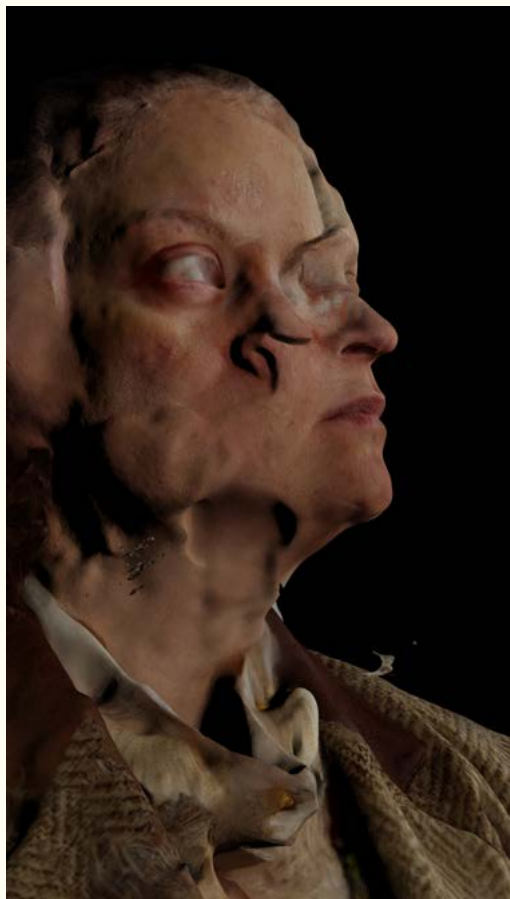
**I could spend all day in the library, leafing between pages of reference books. Desperate to touch the past and change my future.**





# The Phenomenology of Neurodivergence across Generations

Lennie Varvarides, DYSPLA



## Part 3: Narrative—from the Latin word, *narrativus* meaning telling a story

**Dyslexics were born to create, that's my mantra. The ones that do — do it against all the odds and they do it first as children — through play.**

“Playing” is world-building in the imaginary landscape children desperately need for their development. That is how it started for me. I know that's how it starts for all children...but all children grow out of playing with imaginary friends...I never did!

**If it wasn't for play I would have been lost. Playing helped me to regulate my emotions — to turn my anxiety into poetry — to role play the spectrum of humanity — it all helped me to learn how to think and how to create. I learned to fall in love with language through play, through dialogue I learnt how to read, through acting I learnt how to feel.**

In play a child invents — but a neurodivergent child is doing more than this — they are disappearing and reappearing on their terms within an alternative reality — the imagination becomes a physical place for them — a real space — which is why *play* always feels real for children and more so for the neurodivergent child.

Yet the word “playing” is belittled by adults — my mother and grandmother could not see the benefit of it. For them, playing was a form of selfishness. An excuse to be lazy. A way of ignoring your family. To some extent I think my mother was right...play was a way of avoiding or being separate from the family dynamics... but as a child, especially a young child under 10, I would not have been conscious of this. Looking back on my childhood, I wanted to be alone because I never felt comfortable around my mother.

The difference between my experience and that of my mothers and my grandmothers, now in their 70s and mid-80s, is that they never explored the power of play. They were never allowed to be children so never learnt about the joy that comes from it.

Parents and Grandparents forgot that play is powerful — that play expands minds — that *play* recreates *life* — it doesn't only mimic it. As an adult working in the creative sector, I still *feel* like I am playing — I feel able to prolong this play, to *get away* with it even now. If I had to describe my neurodivergence; my Dyslexia, my ADHD, I would say...

**It is first a feeling. An inspiration that hits like a punch. It is a feeling that sits on the gut. On the skin. In-between ideas as if each idea is sprouting before you have a moment to breathe. To stop. To think. To chew on a word as it slips out – regardless of sound. Speaking before thinking, getting it all mixed up in a sentence that won't sit still.**

# The Phenomenology of Neurodivergence across Generations

Lennie Varvarides, DYSPLA

I believe my family's neurodivergence not only affected how they learnt but also how they lived — how they managed and interpreted their feelings and interactions. Emotions are after all just cocktails of dopamine, endorphins, oxytocin, serotonin, and the lesser-known glutamate, which all impact how the brain neurotransmitter communicates with each fibre of our being.

Maybe that's why even traditionally joyous events like Birthdays, Christmas or Weddings never seemed to make my mother or grandmother happy. Those calendar moments quickly became stressful events that would eventually be spoiled.

**“When you stop doing things for fun you might as well be dead.”**

*Ernest Hemingway*

The way we are wired; the way the chemicals in our brain direct our emotions — our attitudes, are all interwoven and all impact our essence. Our *feelings — emotions*, are just chemicals linked to our genes that write the makeup of our personality which directs our story. Lifestyle, life experience and socioeconomic factors shape us — but our DNA, our *chemistry*, is a portrait of our *Neurodivergence* — and only this additional awareness of the science can improve our prospects of living happier, of working better.

As a community, we do not only think differently, we are made of a different balance of chemicals with alternative connective tissues, affecting not only our brains but our whole bodies. So, when we try to tell the story of Neurodivergence, we must not only focus on learning, perception and interpretation but also on the neurology and biology of our unique humanity.



Part 4: Interpretive—from the Latin word, *interpretari* which means explain, expound and understand

**Time allows for change.  
For attitude to become more accepting.  
For one's value to be understood.  
For education to improve.  
With time comes more tolerance of oneself and then, hopefully, more patience towards our mothers.**

Even having this awareness about the *gift* is a privilege that my mother and grandmother would never have the opportunity to contemplate. It took three generations to have the time to reconsider what this *gift* is, how to use it and more importantly, how to forgive it.

My grandmother hid in manual labour, my mother hid in her own way too. They both picked one thing to get good at and stuck to it against all the odds. They worked so that they would not have to live. Work was the excuse they needed to avoid their emotions. They worked instead of connecting; worked, instead of loving, instead of seeking out any form of joy, because joy needs other people and to need people means you are willing to trust them.

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## So if you neither need nor trust anyone, Jane becomes a dull girl.

Maintaining relationships or building healthy ones isn't something they did. All three of us find it hard to get close to people. That's something that has not changed over the generations. Understanding evolves when others grant it permission. By this, I mean that it always takes an advocate to lean into a person's life and softly intervene. It might be a friend or a family member, but it often is a teacher who first sees a person as they are.

The first to see me/my dyslexia and not make me feel ashamed was my tutor at Camberwell College of Arts. It was 2001 and I felt like the mask could finally be ripped off. This permission to embrace my gift was a game changer, but confidence needs time to mature and it would not be until 2006 that I would start publicly moving towards the *gift*.

I use the word publicly deliberately. I felt and still feel that there are two very different relationships with my neurodivergence. The private "mess" and the public "message". Being on message means celebrating all the attributes neurodivergence personally brings. The instant energy to create and to self-reflect with an apparent ease.

Privately, I was creating sporadically in a messy way. Inspiration would hit randomly. Little poems and philosophical ideas would be scratched into random bits of paper or inside the margins of old books. I would have lots of unfinished journals all around me. New ideas sprouted without ever receiving the attention or focus to finish.

I knew how to make art, I just never had the confidence to shout about what I had made. Promoting oneself always felt uncomfortable. Making art privately was easy, publicly sharing it always felt far more work and at times even quite impossible.



**Sharing one's work, like sharing one's life is where I still struggle because the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. We learn how to live and how to love from our parents – but the worst thing we learn from them is how to value ourselves. Insecure parents make for insecure children and I am still trying to learn how to navigate negativity.**

I always felt like creativity found me among the neglect. Maybe I had romanticised my childhood loneliness and personified creativity to act as a companion. Maybe that's normal – maybe neurodivergent children are more hyper-aware of their emotions, and maybe that's why as adults we crave artistic expression.

## **I was able to manoeuvre the narrative about myself and understand the intergenerational consequences of how I met my neurodivergence on a daily basis.**

Creative expression is a liberator and an equaliser when pursuing a career in the creative industry. My gift – this immediate access to self-expression, ideation and philosophic thought, is not something I take lightly.

I recognise that being an artist in any culture is a privilege and that I have a unique position as a leader in this new neurodivergent landscape. Both as a female and as a founder, but also as a working-class Neurodivergent artist.

As such, I sense the social responsibility to be both an advocate as well as an activist for my community. I believe that neurodivergence is an immense gift – but also recognise that only a few will ever really benefit from it – and as such neurodivergence is a wasted resource for many. By this, I mean that not all neurodivergent people get the opportunity to discover their potential – let alone reach it.



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DYSPLA—the arts organisation I founded in 2009 and incorporated in 2013 with Kazimir Bielecki, is an attempt to create a brave space where these subjects about creativity, neurodivergence and society can be theatricalized and where a collective peer-to-peer community can flourish.

Community is the only way out of our own PTS and reflection is the only way to create meaningful artwork, so this marriage of community and collaboration seems like a fruitful way forward.

If it were not for my *gift*, my dyslexia, my ADHD, my neurodivergence, DYSPLA (short for Dyslexic Play), would not exist. But on a larger and more terrifying scale...if dyslexia did not exist, if neurodivergence was wiped out of society, there would be an absence in the cultural landscape of humanity's progression.

**To learn more, follow these links:**

**How Personality Traits Are Developed and Change Over Time**

**Functional Illiteracy**

**[www.theguardian.com/education/2019/mar/03/literacy-white-working-class-boys-h-is-for-harry](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/mar/03/literacy-white-working-class-boys-h-is-for-harry)**

Photo by Greg Rakozy on Unsplash

# Dyslexia Journal – How Times Have Changed With Dyslexia & Me

Nick Park, Blessed with a dyslexia gift until death do us part



Let me raise the curtain by informing that I currently work for Royal Mail – as what is commonly known as a ‘postie’ – in Epping. I should further express that I am part of the team that writes for the company’s official magazine, unpaid. I have also lived a chequered life and want to embrace the future by earning an extremely comfortable wage. My aim is to make this reality by mixing in the positive achievements in my life book to date; writing is a major ingredient.

Maybe the perfect platform to commence is as a toddler. I was an extremely late developer in relation to uttering my initial words. It took me three years prior to opening my mouth. A sign that dyslexia was imprisoned.

I recollect that I struggled with reading and writing whilst in primary education. The two collaborated together culminating in my sentence structuring being weak. Consequently, my choice of words happened to be quite limited and hovered with me into adulthood. Punctuation was not at a high calibre. Full stops were the only individual I knew the rule of as a youngster. With the difficulties ablaze, other subjects like mathematics were of poor standard.



## Dyslexia Journal – How Times Have Changed With Dyslexia & Me

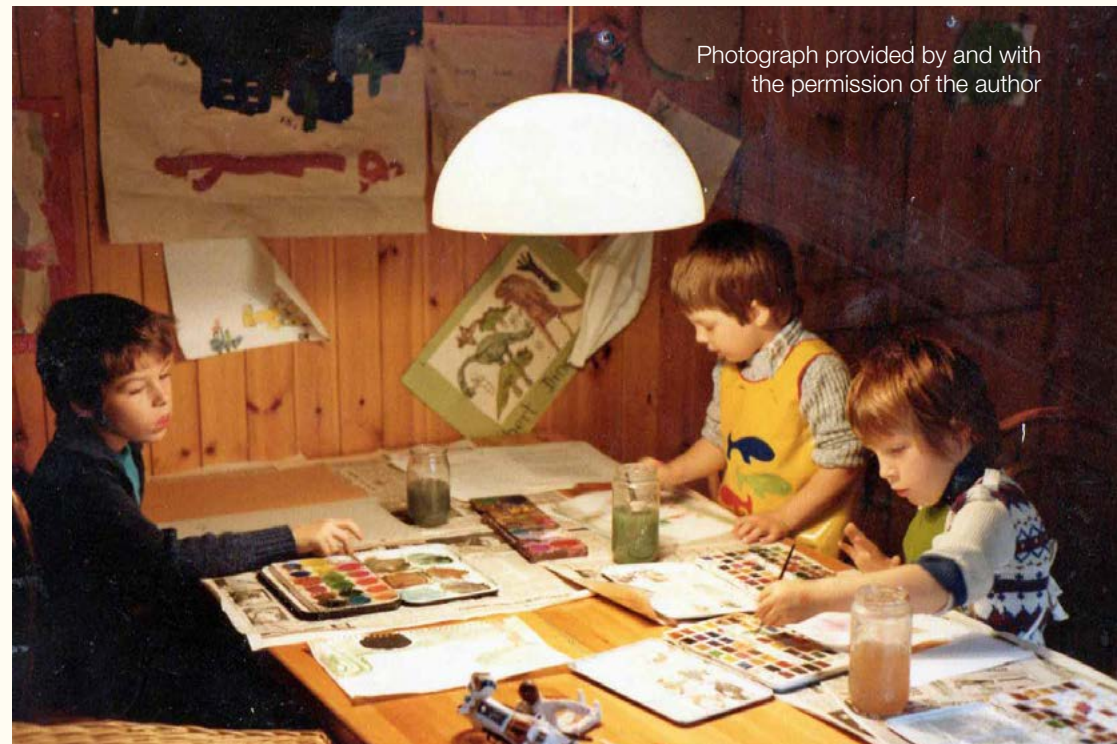
Nick Park, Blessed with a dyslexia gift until death do us part

**In Key Stage Two, as it is known now, I remember venturing along to reading classes. There was a support teacher present to manoeuvre us all onto greater heights with our reading. Mrs Corbett was her name. It helped however over a long duration as I improved with my reading. There was a brief period where I endeavoured to digest books for children, written by Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl and Phil Redmond to mention a few.**

In my early thirties, following a blank period in my twenties, I returned to my fondness for reading and targeted the Harry Potter sequels. I would advise any young reader at whatever level to sample them. The story is, partly, tied to an educational background which is a familiarity. I guarantee that you will be absorbed, and the reading bug might unfold.

Personally, I prefer fictional works of art as opposed to non-fiction. A reason being is that the writing in them comes from the head culminating in the ideas flowing on the page. My partner is my number one fan and is my composer, orchestrating me to write a book. She enlightened me on a lady by the name of Sally Gardner who is a novelist and sustains dyslexia. This woman is an icon to me and an individual who I am trying to follow in the same footsteps as.

In relation, as part of my athletics career, I have fought through two London Marathons. I treat my reading like training and have an aim to read ten pages of a book per day. You can limit this to even less, or more, depending on your daily schedules. I am adamantly of the notion that this will keep the subject of reading an enjoyable equation. You will also discover that improvement will follow, but expect it in small snippets and not large dosages as a dyslexic.



Photograph provided by and with the permission of the author

I became aware that I was tarnished with a learning difficulty in my remaining years within primary education. I discovered from my parents that it was a communication problem-stroke-speech impairment. Word searching can hamper my everyday life, even nowadays. As a child I was very shy and nervous. This, intertwined with a communication issue, is never a wonderful concoction. It just made finding the proper word more of a nightmare. In formal interviews I never highlight my full potential. Although I have overcome hurdles, I continue to word search occasionally. I should add that I am talked about in a book in relation to this trouble. It is titled *Dyslexics I Have Known or Reaching for the Stars* and was written by Bevé Hornsby in 2001. You will unearth my involvement in the remaining paragraph on page 28 and finalised on the following page. Nowadays I try to let my writing do the talking through networking with publications I produce stories for. This is solely one platform where I keep my fingers crossed and hope a door may eventually fling open. In my mind it could be a dyslexia response to glory no matter what area of expertise you are linked with.

## Dyslexia Journal – How Times Have Changed With Dyslexia & Me Nick Park, Blessed with a dyslexia gift until death do us part

I have fond memories of venturing to Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital where I was gifted with the marvellous support of Janet Lee. She was a speech and language therapist at the Newcomen Centre in the establishment. She moved me on in leaps and bounds and was the first of many one-to-one individuals who have progressed my overall learning skills. Our relationship was inaugurated when I happened to be in junior school. I firmly feel that if the curtain was raised in infant school or even nursery that I would not have fallen with my educational abilities. Maybe I would have been diagnosed at an earlier phase in life.

**Nowadays dyslexia can be detected in children in the early development. Immediately the support is inaugurated with the family hotly informed and involved. Sadly, the system failed me although it was the 1980s, a far cry from today.**

I remember, and it could be linked to a dyslexia brain, an avenue where I excelled at primary school. I was top of the class amazingly. It arose when I auditioned for the school Christmas play but only featured as a backing singer, the choir. But, a year later we had class performances where we had to recite a poem. I was the only person who said aloud each verse, which was about 10 to 12 in total, word for word.

The remedial group however become a regular feature throughout my childhood. Although as a dyslexic I tended to gain my learning experience away from the classroom environment.

At secondary school, Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham Boys School, I was cognisant of the fact learning difficulties were imbedded. Personally, it was especially tough having two brothers who were in the highest groups for everything. Whereas I was slumped in the lower echelons.

**One area of interest I did excel at as a teenager was scouting. In defence, we did carry out adventurous activities throughout and not chained to a desk, a weakness. This pastime could be a journal independently.**

Positively, I managed to gain extra time, in 1990, for exams but not because of dyslexia. At this precise moment I was not identified with the disability. I needed it to distinguish what the question meant plus me being slow in my pursuit. Both writing and expressing it on the page is a massive symptom of dyslexia.

Dyslexia did not explode into my life until I departed the schooling scene. I was 18 years of age and my mum happened to stumble upon a book written by Dr Bevé Hornsby, a leading lady in the dyslexia field. The book was entitled, *Overcoming Dyslexia. A Straightforward Guide For Families And Teachers*. As she read, from my acknowledgement, tears were dripping. I carried many signs associated with dyslexia. This resulted in my mother writing to this lady in the dyslexia sphere.

**Dr Bevé Hornsby tested me herself for the condition. She diagnosed me and gifted me with dyslexia. I staunchly believe it is a gift. Apparently, I received a performance IQ of 125.**

I was an extremely young man back then and it was a turning point for me. Especially when reaching my 30s which I shall divulge imminently. It was hard realising that I had already wounds inflicted having not being presented with the word dyslexia next to my name as a child.

Initially I fell into a profession as a gardener. This was with guidance from my parents. In conjunction I got a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in horticulture at Southwark College.

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Five years later athletics drifted into my life. I became a member of Kent Athletic Club. They are like my family. I have completed the London Marathon twice and in creditable times. I remember vividly that on one track evening, if memory serves me correctly, I turned up at the arena slightly earlier than usual. I decided to hover in the car listening to the radio. It was an extremely long time ago and my memory is vague in connection to who the guest speaker happened to be on the frequency. What I do know is they were in conversation with the broadcaster concerning the subject of dyslexia. I do not recall their exact wording, but they mentioned that if dyslexic people are endeavouring to achieve a goal, then they will push themselves to the limit. They will go that extra mile to reach that accolade. This is my motto in life.

**As a dyslexic the inaugural baptism of my enjoyment for writing grew even stronger in September 2004. I wanted to advance myself in life and had just finalised a garden design course at Merrist Wood College. I was passionately fond of the written aspect of the course. It persuaded me on venturing on a new journey which is still ongoing.**

I enrolled at Lewisham College in the hope to gain a spot on the GCSE English course. I should add that during schooling I received a grade D for English with much help from my parents. They tweaked my coursework here and there. Consequently, at this stage I was not the greatest so was pointed in the vicinity of the pre-GCSE class. The aim was to fine tune my English skills. I achieved this and a year later was awarded onto the English GCSE evening class at Lewisham College. I remember our teacher taking a large group of us to a theatre near to Trafalgar Square. We watched 'Romeo & Juliet,' which was an entertaining show. In addition, I stated that I suffered from dyslexia. This spiralled in me receiving one-to-one tuition, weekly. Robin Pilcher was the gentleman who supported me. He was also a role model and an individual who I still admire enormously.

I learnt a vast amount from Robin and others since. They have improved and made my sentence structuring a strong force. This includes using words I know the meaning of. My punctuation has also blossomed. This is down to dyslexia being more of a common topic in society today. One role model I admire and aspire to be like is Jay Blades. He is a grand person who has achieved and accomplished magnificently in his field of work. Adding more, he is a wonderful advocate for dyslexia and forces me to pursue with my ambitions as he is of a similar age. It is recognised in education at all levels and the support is evident. Immediately I was astonished by this. I eventually got a C for English GCSE which made me massively proud.

I would persuade any dyslexics, whatever their age, to open a novel and begin reading. Books are not the only mode of the enjoyment of reading. My advice will be to grab a magazine or locate a news story on the internet linked to a subject of interest. It will stem from there. If reading is not a major passion then, as stated earlier, begin by reading a couple of pages per day. Endeavour with this project when you are not tired as it will be deemed a churning bore. If books are also not your thing, then why not turn to an iPad and cherish the reading element via this. Remember that reading can be galvanised in different formats. You could even join a reading group online or in person and taste the delights. In my dyslexia view, it is a vital piece of medicine if you want to excel with writing. It has built up my repertoire of words greatly. One downside is that I suffer with an underactive thyroid and fatigue creeps in.

**'If books are also not your thing, then why not turn to an iPad and cherish the reading element via this'**

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Those in the educational business are taught what symptoms to identify. Once identified then the help is available. I am fortunate to have those that are close to me being involved in the schooling environment. Also if you build a relationship with those who are there to move you up the ladder, then blossoming times are in sight. In contrast during the 1980s and prior to that, the only adult in the class was the teacher orchestrating the subject. Rarely was there an extra person. If there was, they were seen to help the whole class and not a singular pupil.

With me intertwined with dyslexia it made a huge impact on my mother and father. As a primary school teacher my mum laboured, grinding out a qualification in this area of expertise. Eventually she became the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) at the school where she worked.

Since college I have gone on to receive a degree in journalism at the School of Journalism, Media and Culture (JOMEC), Cardiff University. A mere dream as a youngster. It astounded me the amount of equipment awarded when beginning my degree path. As well as a computer I was given a dictaphone. Also offered were learning programmes uploaded to the computer. These would help me with typing assignments. In addition, there was a note-taker in my first year for lectures. This shows how important the issue of dyslexia is in the 2000s.

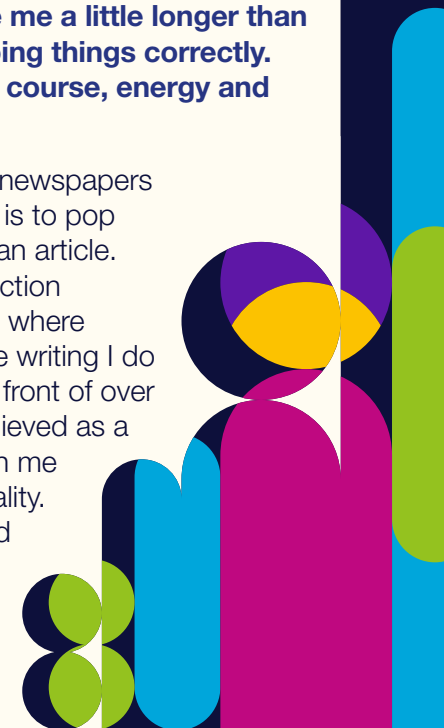
I acknowledge that politicians and the high-powered know about neurodiversity and I fiercely believe that a large influx of money should be placed in the pot. If this emerges, then others with similar conditions to me can achieve in life. Something I would love is to stand up in the Houses of Parliament and express this to an MP from the Cabinet.

I am now currently in the early stages of writing a fictional scorcher. I am determined to make this a successful project and have a vast array of ideas for the book. I also have a blog on football. Plus write, unpaid, for quite a few publications which I enjoy massively. As a dyslexic and with the advice from others, mostly my partner, mum, dad. Plus, my younger brother, who is a primary school teacher also, I have adopted my own writing style. The only negative with me is my handwriting at times can be a lot to be desired. No one is perfect.

I would relish the opportunity to work and write in the media world, in journalism. Researching is another area that appeals to me and an enjoyment I cherish. This is where my love is. I just require a fantastic person to believe in my qualities. This is coming from someone who is severely dyslexic and 50 years old; with only a few grey hairs here and there.

**Furthermore, being dyslexic though it does take me a little longer than others to adapt to a new way of learning and doing things correctly. I just require someone who has the time and, of course, energy and patience who believes in what I can offer.**

I read match reports on football encounters in national newspapers and pray that I could write like this one day. One target is to pop along to a few Premiership thrillers and piece together an article. Things like this give me the drive, henceforth. In conjunction I recently turned back the clock and returned to school where I received a prize at their 'Speech Day.' This was for the writing I do for the past-pupils association. I collected my award in front of over 800 witnesses and this was something that I never achieved as a teenager. It was a tear-jerking experience and has given me the momentum to pursue my dreams, making them reality. The only way to achieve this is to believe in yourself and never give up the fight. Never throw in the towel. This is a dyslexic for you speaking from the heart. Watch this space and name in a positive stance.





# “Out There”

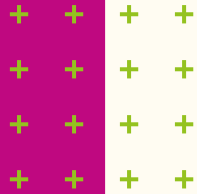
Joyce Dutch, Neurodivergent Advocate

I have to rest  
I have to fight to get basic services  
to survive, get fed and watered  
I am not powerless  
I have a voice  
I have breath  
I have **DETERMINATION**  
and **WILL** to intervene to  
ensure things are better for  
those that come after us  
I care deeply, some say I am  
too sensitive  
I believe I am intuitive,  
creative, innovative  
I am who I am,  
what I am

My life journey like anybody else has  
shaped me into the person I am  
It is my chaos, lack of order, thinking  
outside the box because I do not fit in it  
It enables me to mix it, to read through  
observation of body language  
To feel the energy in the room  
To harness that energy  
To be together, to unite, to collaborate,  
to be one, even though we are many  
We are different, we are unique,  
we are individuals, we may have  
common themes that are similar  
Life experiences, circumstances,  
not so similar, some horrific,  
some nice, some OK  
We learn, we grasp knowledge,  
understanding, we change, adapt,  
we are like no other  
We are homo sapiens, human beings  
It does not matter about gender, race,  
sexuality, ability  
We are a herd species  
We need each other  
We need so much when we are young,  
to be nurtured, love, to feel safe

Maslow's pyramid of needs  
Bowlby's theory of attachment to a  
significant other  
We are powerful, we can be assertive,  
also calm, passive  
We can be pleasant, easy going,  
happy go lucky  
We can be many things at different times  
What is important to me is this  
That I am me that I am free  
That I can just be myself, no airs, no  
graces, what is not said on the tin  
I feel safe, to allow myself to feel,  
to reconnect  
To acknowledge and finally to accept me  
My sense of self  
My identity  
I know who I am  
I do not worry anymore  
What others may say, feel or stare  
As long as you do not put your hand on  
me, harm me, touch me  
Do you think I care  
Life is too short  
The time I have left is my time





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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.





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*Differences and Similarities between Generations. Can we support each other collaboratively?*

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