

An Introduction to Neurodiversity in Higher Ed: History, theory, and first-person perspectives

Presented by: Sarah Silverman
to BCcampus

Part 1 of a 2-Part Workshop Series

Welcome and important notes

I am excited to learn with you today!

- This session will last around 1.5 hour and will have some opportunities to participate and ask questions
- Use your time, space, and tech however you want
 - Cameras on/off, moving around your space etc.
- You are invited to use the slides and handout however you would like
- The links to the outline and slides are found at:

Slides: <https://tinyurl.com/BCcampusND-Slides>

Handout: <https://tinyurl.com/BCcampusND-HO>

About me

- My name is Sarah and I use she/her pronouns
- My description: White woman with short brown hair and metal glasses frames (today I am wearing a brown and tan sweater)
- I teach instructional design and disability studies
- I have done faculty development and instructional design support for about 8 years
- I am Autistic - so I have a personal connection to neurodiversity
- My research interests include accessible and feminist pedagogy, Universal Design for Learning, and the history of the neurodiversity movement

How to participate today and after

- There are several ways to participate today, with no hierarchy or “better” and “worse” ways
- Some options include
 - Contributing using the chat
 - Writing, with pen and paper or an electronic device
 - Thinking without recording anything
- I have planned for accessibility, but live presentation may not be everyone’s favorite format
 - I invite feedback, use of these materials after today’s session, and am happy to talk one-on-one about this content as well

About you

I'd love to learn a little more about you.

Share your choice of

- Name
- Institution
- Role
- What interested you about this session?

Please use the chat to share

Goals

- Develop foundational literacy of the vocabulary and history of neurodiversity (including the terms neurodiversity, neurotypical, neurodivergent, and the relationship between the neurodiversity movement and the autistic rights movement)
- Become familiar with the idea of neurodiversity as an umbrella concept, not one experience
- Recognize general barriers that neurodivergent people face and how to work towards greater access
- Engage with several first-person experiences of neurodivergent students and staff

Introductory Reflection Pause

How have you encountered the term neurodiversity (and neurotypical, neurodivergent) in your life as an educator? Or more generally?

Who have you heard use the term?

What associations do you have with the term?

Please use the chat to share

Origins of my neurodiversity advocacy work

Have you seen or read headlines and titles similar to these?

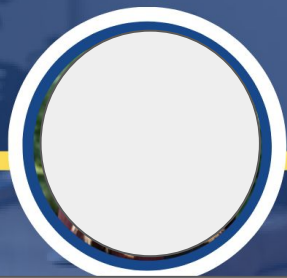
“6 Strategies to Help Neurodiverse Students Fully Engage in Class” - Edutopia

“Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage: Why you should embrace it in your workforce” - Harvard Business Review

What do you notice?

Center for Teaching Excellence
presents:

Supporting Neurodivergent Students: Staff and Faculty Training



Associate Director of College
Support-SJU



Assistant Director of College
Support-SJU

Session 1: Friday February 24, 2023; 10.30-11.30 am

Session 2: Friday March 3, 2023; 10.30-11.30 am

Zoom Link: <https://unewhaven.zoom.us/j/8586271601>

Through this workshop, attendees will learn more about autism spectrum disorder, presenting issues at the college level, and specific strategies to support students in the classroom and beyond. Principles of Universal Design Learning (UDL) will be discussed and implementations of these strategies and design aspects will be presented. Faculty and staff will be actively invited through virtual learning platform features to engage with one another and reflect on experiences working with autistic students.

**What do
you notice?**

Source:

https://www.newhaven.edu/_resources/images/_email/internal-communications/Supporting-Neurodivergent-Students-Training.pdf

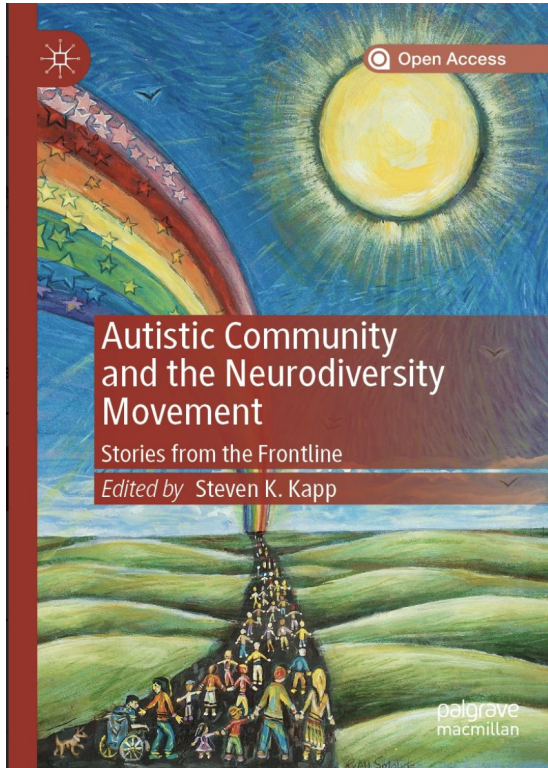
A Neurodiversity “literacy”

Disabled scholar Ada Hubrig wrote about the need for a “disability literacy”

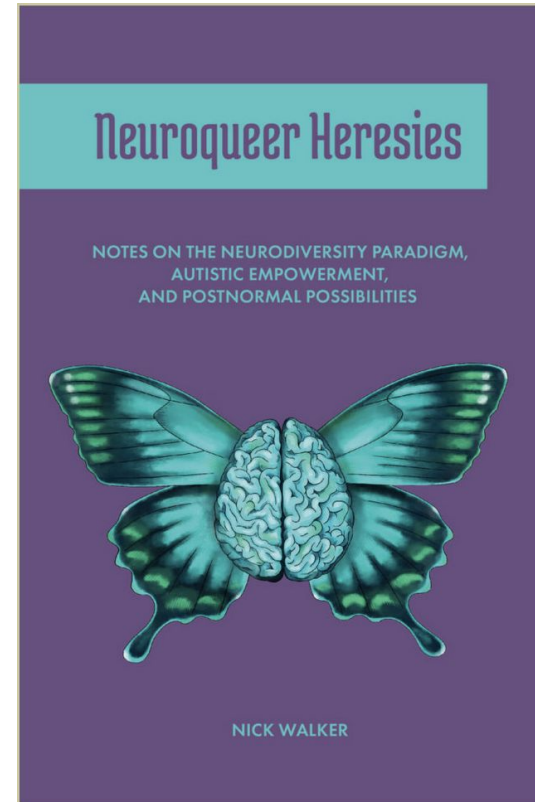
“Disability literacy means not just understanding what disabled people are saying and organizing for, but understanding the nuances and contexts of why and how we say these things” (Hubrig 2023)

What would a neurodiversity literacy look like?

Key texts and figures



Nick Walker
Ari Ne'eman
Lydia X. Z. Brown
Shane Neumeier
Eric Garcia
Donna Williams
Jim Sinclair
Steven Kapp
Damion Milton



Working definition of the term “Neurodiversity”

The range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits,
regarded as part of normal variation in the human population

-paraphrased from Merriam-Webster definition

Neurodiversity has roots in Autistic Self-Advocacy

- Autistic community formed online in the 1990s
- Draws on legacy of deinstitutionalization activists in 70s and 80s
- Based on the core principle that Autism is not a disorder, but a difference
 - Even so, it can still be a disability
- Focus on acceptance rather than cure
 - Opposes abusive treatments (like shock), many types of behavioral modification therapy
- Lead by autistic adults (vs. “autism parents”)
 - Self-advocacy
- Key American organization: Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN)
 - Previously Autism Network International, INLV

Where did the actual term “neurodiversity” come from?

- Grew out of online Autistic community
- Concept originated on the “Independent Living listserv” in the 1990s
- Also mentioned in Time Magazine by writer Harvey Blume
- General concept was discussed concurrently by multiple thinkers and activists
 - E.g. INVL listserv poster Tony Langdon wrote about a “neurological diversity of people. i.e. the atypical among a society provide the different perspectives needed to generate new ideas and advances, whether they be technological, cultural, artistic or otherwise.”

Neurodiversity as a paradigm

A paradigm is a set of assumptions

An example of a paradigm shift is the emergence of heliocentrism

A true paradigm shift is destabilizing, because, as neurodiversity scholar Dr. Nick Walker says, a paradigm shift is

“a shift in our fundamental assumptions... that requires us to redefine our terms, recalibrate our language, rephrase our questions, reinterpret our data, and completely rethink our basic concepts and approaches.”

In the case of neurodiversity, the paradigm shift is from a “pathology” paradigm (a normal brain and a pathological one) to one of diversity

The Neurodiversity Paradigm

Neurodiversity paradigm is a set of principles (quoted from Dr. Nick Walker's book *Neuroqueer Heresies*)

1. Neurodiversity – the diversity among minds – is a natural, healthy, and valuable form of human diversity.
2. There is no “normal” or “right” style of human mind, any more than there is one “normal” or “right” ethnicity, gender, or culture.
3. The social dynamics that manifest in regard to neurodiversity are similar to the social dynamics that manifest in regard to other forms of human diversity (e.g., diversity of race, culture, gender, or sexual orientation). These dynamics include the dynamics of social power relations – the dynamics of social inequality, privilege, and oppression – as well as the dynamics by which diversity, when embraced, acts as a source of creative potential within a group or society.

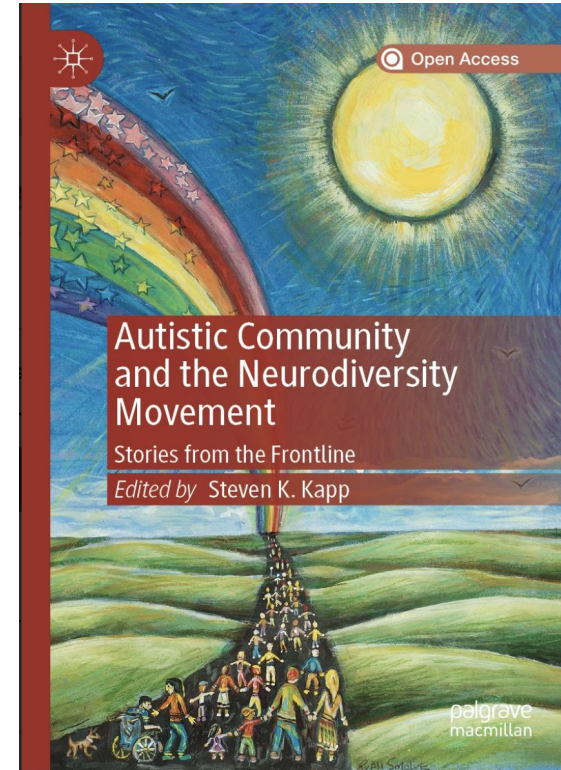
The Neurodiversity Movement

A social justice movement that seeks civil rights, equality, respect, and full societal inclusion for neurodivergent people

Began with the Autism rights/self advocacy movement, but is now larger

Not a single, organized group but a collection of groups and individuals that do social justice activism using the neurodiversity paradigm

Much of the terminology that we will now explore was developed in different corners of the ND movement



Don't Mourn for Us: The first neurodiversity manifesto

Jim Sinclair wrote a speech that was delivered at the 1993 International Conference on Autism in Toronto later turned into an essay called “Don't Mourn for Us” as a type of letter to parents of autistic children.

“Continuing focus on the child's autism as a source of grief is damaging for both the parents and the child, and precludes the development of an accepting and authentic relationship between them”

“Don't mourn for us” has remained a common refrain for the movement

Neurotypical and Neurodivergent

These terms are contested. Here are definitions to help get the conversation started:

Neurotypical: Having a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards

Neurodivergent: Having a style of neurocognitive functioning that does not conform to societal expectations. Someone who is neurodivergent may have a diagnosis of Autism, ADHD, learning disability, another mental disability or a mental illness, but may also not.

The origins of the term “Neurotypical”

- Popularized by autistic activist Laura Tisoncik and other activists on the satirical website “Institute for the Study of the Neurotypical”
- As Tisoncik recalled, the spoof project was designed to turn “the tables on the dehumanization done to autistic people by autism researchers.”
- Neurotypical in this usage did not mean “normal,” rather it was a fake diagnosis with which to satirize the reductive, infantilizing, and pathologizing attitude of many towards the autistic community.
- Neurotypical thus is a way to refer to people who do not fall into a “minority neurotype” such as Autistic, ADHD, Dyslexic, and others”

The origins of the term “Neurotypical”

- Neologism that came out of the Neurodiversity movement
- Described in Steve Silberman’s book “Neurotribes” as one of the enduring contributions of Autism Network International, the first Autistic-run Autism organisation
 - “...turned the diagnostic gaze back on the psychiatric establishment and registered the fact that people on the spectrum were fully capable of irony and sarcasm at a time when it was widely believed that they didn’t ‘get’ humor.”

Some highlights from the “Institute for the Study of the Neurologically Typical” (satirical)

“What Is NT?”

Neurotypical syndrome is a neurobiological disorder characterized by preoccupation with social concerns, delusions of superiority, and obsession with conformity.

How common is it?

Tragically, as many as 9625 out of every 10,000 individuals may be neurotypical.

Is there a cure for NT syndrome?

There is no known cure for Neurotypical Syndrome. However, many NTs have learned to compensate for their disabilities and interact normally with autistic persons.

Could I be NT?

Take the Online NT Screening Test”

Source: Archived version of the
[“Institute for the Study of the
Neurologically Typical”](#)

Some highlights from the “Institute for the Study of the

**Institute
For the Study of the
Neurologically Typical**



"The common belief that (persons) with pervasive developmental disorders are humorless is frequently mistaken." - Stephen Bauer, M.D., M.P.H.

[D](#)

Online NT Screening Test

Choose the answer that is most nearly correct for you.

Your Name: Your Email Address:

A friend has brought you to a party. You

Your boss is giving you instructions for an important task that must be finished by the end of the day. You

Your computer won't start. You

Someone hands you the channel changer. You change the channel on the TV set to

Your mother walks into the room and asks you what you think of her new dress. You

Some highlights from the “Institute for the Study of the Neurologically Typical”

NT Theory of Mind

Chris Slater, [Neuro-Typical Specialist](#)

I have always wondered about the NT mind -- how it functions, what stimuli triggers the characteristic "socializing", along with the diverse social delusion that is encountered when one NT meets another or sees and greets them. It has been in my 18 years of studies and experience to present the ISNT with my

Mind you that my studies are yet from over -- there is more to be learned from these common beings. I am studying and dispersing information as I can rationally conclude from my work. (And perhaps save my

The basis of the theory revolve around two principles -- unlike the autism "Folk Psychology vs. Folk Psychology" so claim to be autism, the true nature of the Neuro-Typical can be described as follows:

Source: Archived version of the [“Institute for the Study of the Neurologically Typical”](#)

This kind of satire is still being done today

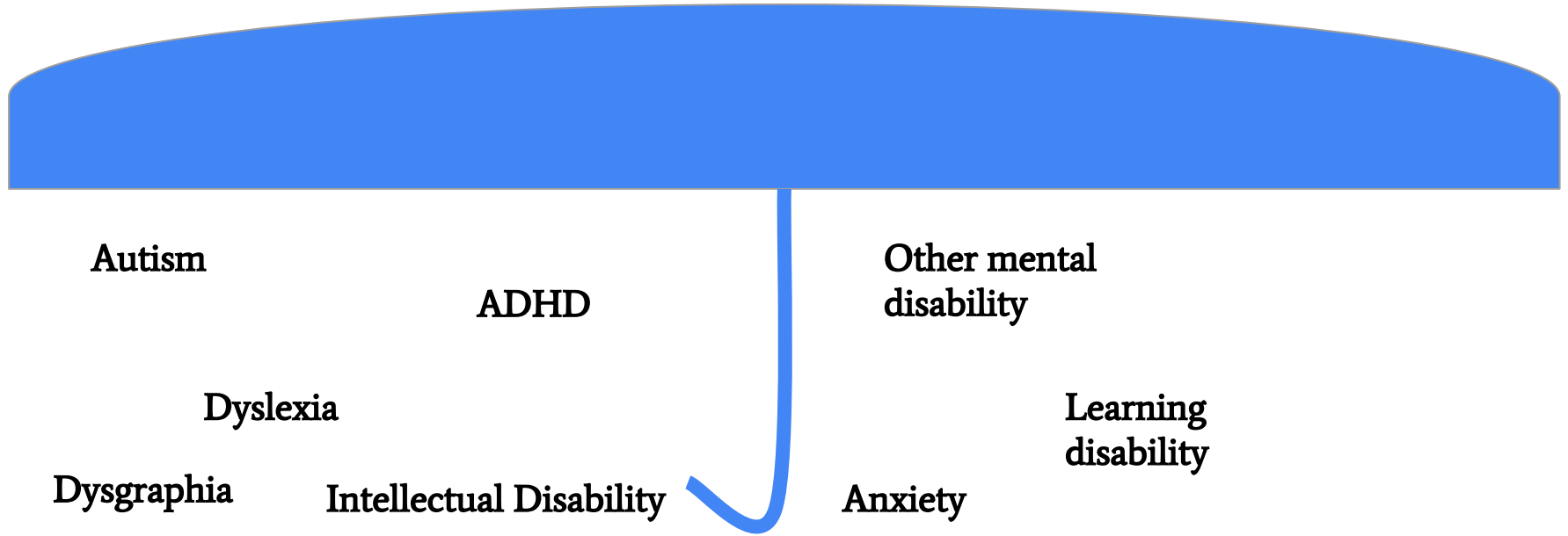


Comedian Joe Wells: “My brother is not Autistic” (start at minute mark 2:50)

The origins of the term Neurodivergent

- Coined by activist Kassiane Asasumasu, who goes by “Neurodivergent K” online
- Means having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the **dominant societal standards** of "normal."
- Developed to be more inclusive of a range of experiences than just autism and expand the neurodiversity conversation
- Neurodivergent is also a political term - aims to form a political consciousness and coalition among people who experience the worst effects of the “Pathology” paradigm

Experiences under an umbrella, not one condition



Recommended resource: [Exceptional Individuals](#) guide to Neurodiversity

Key takeaways

- Neurodiversity, neurotypical, and neurodivergent are sociopolitical rather than biomedical terms
 - Neurodivergent is not a euphemism for Autism, ADHD, or even “diagnosed intellectual, developmental, or learning disability,” or mental illness
 - It is an umbrella term that brings together many different experiences of cognitive diversity that differs from societal norms
 - There is no test for neurotypicality or neurodivergence other than experience or identification with a group under the ND umbrella
- The Neurodiversity paradigm comes to replace the prevailing “pathology paradigm” (one normal human mind)
- The Neurodiversity movement has focused on self-advocacy, the leadership of neurodivergent people, opposition to pathologizing language and coercive treatment

Reflection opportunity

1. Was there anything new or particularly impactful from the information presented in the first part of the workshop?
2. Recall that neurodivergent people often do not fit in with the assumed norms of cognition and behavior in society...What are some of the assumed norms in higher education that are likely to impact neurodivergent students?

Please use the chat to share

Neurodiversity paradigm: There is not one “right way”

Consider moving away from...	...towards
Verbal participation is expected or required...	...multiple ways of participation are encouraged and respected (written, spoken, synchronous, asynchronous)
Students are expected to work productively in groups or other collaborative environments...	...collaborative learning is expected to require scaffolding, development of mutual understanding, and sharing of communication needs
“Students can request accommodations if certain course policies don’t work for them”...	... accommodations are a tool that not all students will use. Flexibility with different ways of doing things will be important

First-person perspectives (conducted on
handout)

Choose one of the three first-person narratives (start on pg. 3)

Questions:

1. How could the neurodiversity paradigm help reshape this person's experience (in higher education, or more generally)?
2. In what ways do the norms of higher education potentially make it more difficult for this person to participate?

Wrap up

Next workshop is: February 27, 2025 9:30-11:00 PT

Topic: Applying your knowledge of neurodiversity in teaching, learning, and advising

We will discuss practical topics such as

- Differences between legal compliance and inclusion with respect to neurodiversity
- Navigating complex teaching and advising situations that involve neurodiversity
- How diagnosis interacts with neurodivergent identity
- And more!

Questions and staying in touch

If you are interested in hearing more about these topics, you can subscribe to my newsletter: <https://beyondthescope.substack.com/>

Email: sarahsilverman24@gmail.com

Linkedin ([link to my profile](#))

Website: www.sarahemilysilverman.com

