

**It Doesn't Always Track:
Neurodivergence, Aside from
Cis/White Males Obsessed with
Trains**

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Disclaimers

- Much research speaks about “male” and “female” only, and with meaning of assigned gender.
- Some people prefer identity-first language, others prefer person-first language. I will aim for a mixture of both in this presentation.
- I will speak about groups I am not part of.
- Cis-het, white, neurodivergent males do have valid experiences

Defining Neurodiversity

From the UNC-SSW Neurodiversity Caucus:

Neurodiversity definition: “A range of neurological differences which include, but are not limited to, Autism Spectrum Disorders, ADHD, Dyslexia, and Tourette Syndrome; diagnoses that are not exclusive defining characteristics of an individual but are important and should be recognized and respected.”

Mission Statement: “Our mission is to amplify Neurodivergent voices by building visibility, safety, support, respect, alliance, and awareness through education and advocacy to enact positive change.”

Myths and Assumptions

ASD/Autism

- Violent
- Incapable of love/emotion
- Antisocial
- No sense of humor
- Caused by bad parenting

<http://adsd.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/adsdnv.gov/content/Programs/Autism/ATAP/Autism%20Myths%20and%20Misconceptions.pdf>

Down Syndrome

- Guaranteed severe cognitive deficits
- Unable to be active in society
- Always sick/always happy
- Unemployable
- Can't form romantic/deep relationships

<http://www.ndss.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/NDSS-Myths-and-Truths-2015.pdf>



The Problem: Who Is Considered

Neurodivergent females may not receive diagnosis until much later -- or ever.

“As a child I'd felt as though everyone but me had been given a manual on how to behave around other people.”

“I would misinterpret things at the primary school I worked at. I was making mistakes because I didn't get it. I got to a real low point.”

“‘There's no way I can be autistic and a clinical psychologist,’ I thought. ‘It's incompatible because autistic people don't have empathy. So if I'm autistic it means I can't be empathic.’”

—Edwards, 2018-

Why?

- Possible clinician bias (Mademtzi et al., 2018)
- Misdiagnosed with something else (Mademtzi et al., 2018; Arky, 2019)
- Fewer ““““problematic”””” behaviors (Mademtzi et al., 2018)
- Different presentation in the sexes (Werling & Geschwind, 2013)

However:

- Mussey, Ginn, & Klinger (2017): ASD presents with relative similarity in males and females, aside from potential minute clinical differences
- Other studies have reached similar conclusions (cited in Mademtzi et al., 2018)

REJECTION

SEXUAL SAFETY

SOCIAL SKILLS

Challenges

INDEPENDENCE

SELF-CARE

ACCESSING SERVICES

Race, Culture, and Neurodiversity

- General consensus that ASD occurrence does not significantly vary by race (Gourdine & Algood, 2014)
- Culture impacts perception of neurodiversity, meaning of diagnosis, and treatment (Ennis-Cole et al., 2013)
- Sometimes belated diagnosis reflects cultural understanding of ASD/other developmental differences (Ennis-Cole et al., 2013)
- Culture affects multiple factors: desires for professional guidance, desires for interventions, utilization of community resources, and more (Ennis-Cole et al., 2013)

Neurodiversity Panel

Acceptance

many African Americans are more accepting of developmental disabilities than other groups. Part of this has reminiscences of religion with the belief that God makes people the way they are. Others may say that the child will "catch up" and will remind others of another family member who at one point was delayed but eventually developed "normally". Therefore there maybe less of an urgency to "fix" a child who appears to be developing differently or slower than their peers.

www.autisminblack.com/culture.html

Intersectionality: Some Facts

- ASD/neurodivergence alone remains misconstrued as “debilitating disorder” (Kirkovski et al., 2013)
- Race impacts health (Newacheck et al., 2008, as cited by Gourdine & Algood, 2014)
- African American children with ASD showed more comorbid symptoms than Autistic children of other races (Jang et al., 2013)
- African Americans have more difficulties accessing health care and resources in the US (Gourdine & Algood, 2014)
- Black children’s ASD may be incorrectly perceived as behavior issues (Gourdine & Algood, 2014)

ASD and Gender Nonconformity

- Stagg & Vincent (2019): 14% of transgender and nonbinary subjects reported having ASD, only 4% of cisgender subjects reported ASD
- George & Stokes (2017): higher rates of gender dysphoria reported among Autistic individuals
 - Dysphoria can also mediate relationship between Autistic characteristics and sexual orientation
- Literature points to increased gender variance among those with ASD (George & Stokes, 2017)
 - Biological cause? ASD as hypermasculinity?

Thank you!

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