NEURODIVERSITY WORKSHOP: Taster for BASW

Dr Lesley Deacon, Senior Lecturer in Social Work and Vice Chancellor's Research and Knowledge Exchange Fellow, NIHR ARC NENC Social Care Fellow

Ms Zeta Bikova, Senior Lecturer in Health, Wellbeing and Society

Lesley.deacon@sunderland.ac.uk
Zeta.bikova@sunderland.ac.uk

Universal Design for Learning

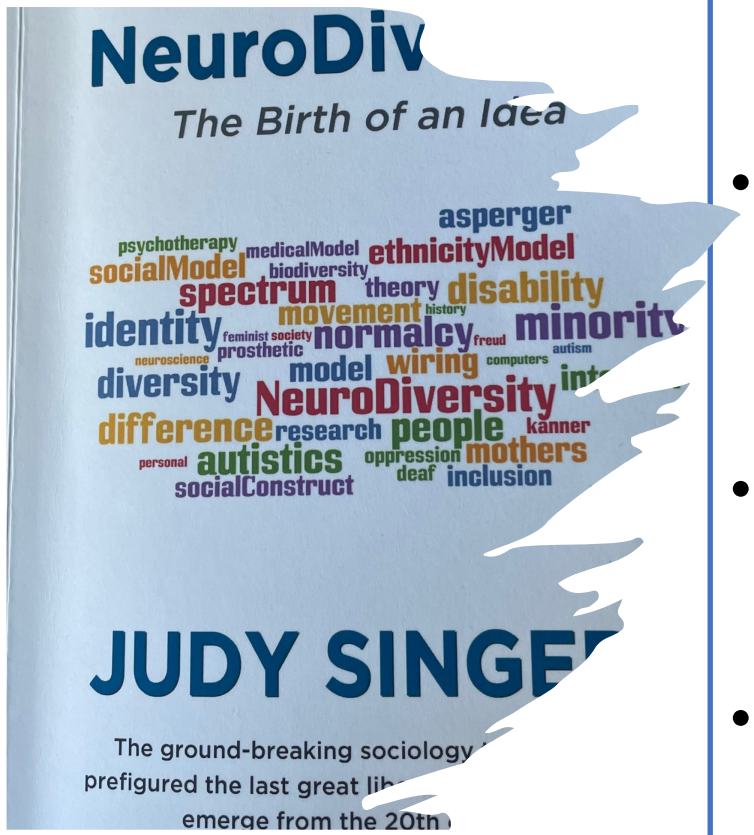
Plan for Today

- Briefly: What is Neurodiversity? What does it mean to be neurodivergent? Research Findings – adults with dyslexia.
- Lived experiences: work
- Trauma-informed practice in management

Feel free to ask any questions as we go!

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND

What is Neurodiversity?



- Judy Singer, autistic researcher (1998) is credited with the term in academia 'neurodiversity' - at first this referred to a political category within the autistic community. It related to autistic people taking ownership of being neurologically different.
- A new area of academic study has emerged: Neurodiversity Studies *see* Rosqvist, HB, Chown, N and Stenning, A (2020) *Neurodiversity Studies: A New Critical Paradigm*. London: Routledge
- Neurodiversity refers to ‘perceived variations’ from the ‘majority’ in cognitive, sensory, emotional areas (Rosqvist et al. *2020) p.1).
- Neurodiverse refers to everyone i.e. the whole population – with the current largest group referred to as ‘neurotypical’ and those who have variations as being ‘neurodivergent’.

Being Neurodivergent

Neurodiversity is a concept that recognises and celebrates the natural variation in neurological traits and differences among individuals. It emphasizes that conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others are part of the natural spectrum of human diversity rather than being solely seen as disorders or deficits.

Here are some common neurodivergent conditions:

- **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**
- **Dyslexia** **Dyscalculia** **Dysgraphia** **Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Disorder)**
- **Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)** **Tourettes Syndrome** **Giftedness**
- **Bipolar Disorder** **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)** **Anxiety Disorders**

It's essential to recognize and respect neurodivergence and provide support and accommodations when needed to help individuals with these conditions thrive and contribute their unique perspectives and talents to society. Additionally, understanding and acceptance of neurodivergence can reduce stigma and promote inclusivity and diversity in various settings.

- (Armstrong,2017)

Stats:

Approx. 15-20% UK population estimated to be neurodivergent but underdiagnosis, especially of girls and women, means this could be higher (various sources).

Aspergers is no longer an official diagnosis, it's all ASD/ASC (condition)

ABSTRACT
Little research has been conducted, understanding the impact of educational-inclusion and workplace anti-discriminatory policies on lived-experiences of people with dyslexia. This paper consequently analyses qualitative-biographical accounts of 15 adults with dyslexia; applying the social relational model of disability to conceptualise these. Findings illustrate, the embodied-experiences of dyslexia defined within a *disabling*-educational system and *discriminatory*-workplace; culminating in psycho-emotional impact on participant's self-esteem leading them to pathologise experiences of failure through an individualistic deficit-explanation of self. The article concludes suggesting these lived-experiences *must* be acknowledged in education to develop inclusive practices adequately preparing individuals for adulthood, not just for the workplace.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 7 February 2019
Accepted 18 August 2020

KEYWORDS
Dyslexia; psycho-emotional; assistive technologies; disability; impairment; reasonable adjustment

Deacon et al. (2020)

- **Impact of** educational-inclusion and **workforce anti-discrimination policies on people with dyslexia**
- Biographical interviews – 15 adults (following 442 surveys, Macdonald and Deacon 2019)
- Educational narratives of 'failure' regardless of when they attended school. Experienced words such as 'thick, 'stupid', 'Lazy'. These experiences led to challenges in accessing employment
- Assistive technology has improved and can help. But this is not the only 'reasonable adjustment' that may be needed. Some cannot connect with organisations' internal systems and software was rarely updated. Assumption made that neurodivergent people automatically know how to use them (often not used in education settings at all)
- **Most significant barrier in employment** – managers' attitudes e.g. perceptions of incompetence. This impacted on how 'reasonable adjustments' were embedded. William (2016) 'implementation gap'.
- Psych-emotional impact on self-esteem, 'the pain of getting it wrong is like torture' = **Trauma**

Lived experience: work

- **There have been a lot of challenges that I have faced in my teaching career. Even though I have struggled with a number of issues, my desire and love for helping and teaching students has always made me continue in this profession. Here are some of the main challenges that I have experienced:**
- **Difficulty with Focus and Attention**: I have often struggled to maintain focus on tasks, especially those that are repetitive, or I simply do not find interesting. I will always get the task done but with frequent errors.
- **Impulsivity**: Impulsivity is something I really struggle with. Impulsive decision-making, speaking without thinking, or interrupting colleagues during meetings is something I do a lot. I am also very impulsive when I write which is another reason why I make mistakes.
- **Organization**: Staying organised can be a significant challenge for me at times. I sometimes have trouble keeping track of appointments, tasks, and paperwork. This has led to me missing meetings and losing documents.
- **Procrastination**: Procrastination is another very common issue for me. I often may put off important tasks until the last minute, causing stress and a lower quality of work.
- **Difficulty with Multitasking?** While some people with ADHD excel at multitasking, I find it challenging to juggle multiple tasks or switch between tasks quickly.

Lived experience: work

- Work has been really difficult, at times. I have experienced **burn out** a lot... I've had to take time off work to recover. It's only since I was diagnosed with **Autism** that I realised just how much masking I was doing both at work and in my whole life. I thought, I won't get diagnosed because I can engage socially, but the reality is that takes a MASSIVE amount of effort that at times is unsustainable = burnout. Since being diagnosed I have not experienced burn out as I have learned to understand myself better, give myself time to recover and have an incredibly supportive manager!
- Bad experiences? When managers have sprung something on me in the middle of a meeting and expected a response straight away. When I've been told the information is out there so I should know how to find the answer. Being called out in front of team members for getting the social rules wrong! Managers raising their voice at me and then criticising if I get upset. Long meetings that go on and especially ones that don't stick to an Agenda! Access to work is not always the answer and it can take a long time – easier to have things in place
- What works? Allowing me to ask follow up questions at the time, days or even weeks later. Giving me information in advance where possible so I can prepare better. Understanding that I won't come for coffee/meals as the extra social contact is too exhausting – it doesn't mean I am not a team player! I've got my own office where I can 'hide' as I get overwhelmed by being around people, so I need time alone to decompress.

No such thing as high functioning autism: We have SPIKY PROFILES

So, I have a PhD, but I struggle with zips and bottle lids and struggle to talk to staff in shops.

All autistic people are individuals. We have a saying: If you've met one autistic person, you've met one autistic person…

Solution: Working with, not to…

- Deacon et al. (2020) - trauma leading to negative self-esteem
- Avoid assumptions about a person's experiences or skills.
- Talk to them about what they need and support them to get that.
- Think outside of the box – we all have different learning (working) preferences – there is no one-size-fits all. Universal Design for Learning.
- Take a Trauma informed approach to engagement as this approach supports everyone to thrive.
- Developing safe and trusting relationships with people can foster more positive environments.
  - **Safety – physical, psychological, emotional**
  - **Trustworthiness – build trust**
  - **Choice – share decision-making**
  - **Collaboration – value their knowledge and experience**
  - **Empowerment – validate them and listen to them**
  - **Cultural consideration – responsive to individuals' needs**

REF: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice

Thank you for Listening!
Any Questions?

Full Neurodiversity Workshop

This is an interactive workshop led by two neurodivergent academics from the University of Sunderland, Dr Lesley Deacon and Ms Zeta Bikova. Lesley is also a qualified social worker and Zeta is a qualified educator, focusing on special educational needs.

The aim of the workshop is to share knowledge of concepts such as neurodiversity, neurodivergent and neurotypical. We support practitioners to better understand differences in practice and management styles that can empower **all** people. This is achieved through a mix of PowerPoints, research, group tasks, personal testimonies and application to practice environments.

The workshop takes a positive approach in which difference is valued and normalised following universal design principles. We come from the perspective that if spaces are *neuro-comfortable* then everyone can flourish!

Workshop format:

- What is Neurodiversity?
- What does it mean to be Neurodivergent?
- Sharing key points from our research.
- Personal testimonies.
- Using a trauma-informed, universal design, neuro-comfortable approach.
- Useful resources.

£750/ workshop

(price for 2023/4 academic year)

We can provide this Workshop either in person (2.5 hrs) or online (3 hrs) to a maximum of 20 participants.

If you are interested in engaging us to provide this Workshop, please contact:

lesley.deacon@sunderland.ac.uk

University of Sunderland

Alternative Resources we have found useful

CIPD

Home / Knowledge hub / Guides / **Neurodiversity at work**

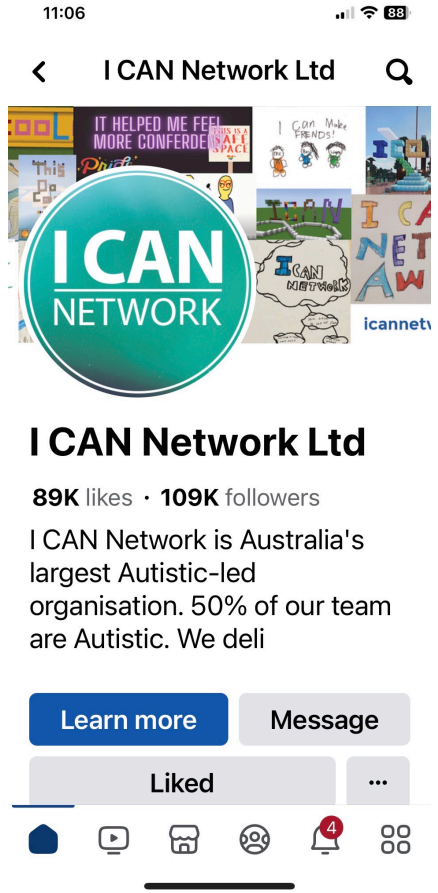
PDA SOCIETY
Pathological Demand Avoidance
Part of the Autism Spectrum

How to ADHD

@HowtoADHD 1.57M subscribers 320 videos

Have ADHD? Know someone with ADHD? Want to learn more? You're in th...

howtoadhd.com **and 3 more links**



https://exceptionalindividuals.com/candidates/neurodiversity-resources/neurodiversity-quizzes/

References

Armstrong,T. (2017). *The Power of Neurodiversity*. London: Hachette Books.

Deacon, L, Macdonald, SJ and Donaghue, J (2020) '"What's wrong with you are you stupid?" Listening to the biographical narratives of adults with dyslexia in an age of "inclusive" and "anti-discriminatory" practice' *Disability and Society.*

Macdonald, S.J. and Deacon, L. (2019) 'Twice Upon a Time: Examining the Effect Socio Economic Status has on the Experience of Dyslexia in the UK'. *Dyslexia*, pp.1–17.

Macdonald, SJ and Deacon, L (2019) 'Disability Theory and Social Work Practice' in Payne, M. and Reith-Hall, E. *The Routledge Handbook of Social Work Theory.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Milton, D., Martin, N. and Melham, P. (2017) 'Beyond Reasonable Adjustment: Autistic-friendly Spaces and Universal Design', *Autism and Intellectual Disability in Adults,* Vol (1).

Riglin,L. (2021). Investigating attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism spectrum disorder traits in the general population: Wh. *The Jornal of psychology and psychiatry*. 3(3), pp.2-8.

Singer, J (1998) *Disability Discourse*. Maidenhead: OUP.

William, L. (2016) 'The Implementation of Equality Legislation: The Case of Disabled Graduates and Reasonable Adjustments', *Industrial Relations Journal,* 47(4).