OPEN ACCESS
perspektywy kultury / *perspectives* on culture
No. 51 (4/2025)

Krzysztof Gerc
http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1124-2315
Jagiellonian University in Kraków
krzysztof.gerc@uj.edu.pl
Jean Marie Novak
http://orcid.org/0009-0002-0278-645X
San Jose State University, California
jean.novak@sjsu.edu
DOI: 10.35765/pk.2025..5104.22

Neurodiversity: Conceptualizing Self-Identity Conditions

ABSTRACT

The analysis of neurodiversity demonstrates that the identity of neuroatypical individuals is shaped by the dynamic interaction of personal and sociocultural dimensions, consistent with social identity theories and interactionist concepts of self-development. Neurodiversity functions as both a scientific and cultural category, approached through the lens of positive psychology, philosophy of mind, and inclusiveness research. It is also interpreted in terms of social narratives that redefine the meaning of neurodevelopmental diversity in the public arena. This article highlights the tension between an affirmative approach to neurodiversity and a critique of its vague terminology and limited falsifiability. It emphasizes that understanding neurodiversity as a framework for identity development requires integrating the psychological conditions of individual experience and self-knowledge with the cultural dimensions of advocacy movements and inclusive practices. The need for an interdisciplinary approach, integrating psychology, cultural studies, and social policy, to better understand the processes accompanying the identity development of neurodivergent individuals and to support their participation in social life is recommended. As a result, this approach allows for new research perspectives in psychology, cultural studies, and social policy planning to better understand and provide adequate guidance to neurodivergent individuals.

KEYWORDS: neurodiversity, neuroatypical, neurotypical, identity, inclusivity

STRESZCZENIE

Neuroróżnorodność: konceptualizacja własnej tożsamości

Artykuł podejmuje problematykę neuroróżnorodności jako kluczowego pojęcia współczesnego dyskursu psychologicznego i kulturoznawczego, akcentując jej znaczenie w procesie konceptualizacji tożsamości jednostki. Neuroróżnorodność, wyrosła z tradycji samorzeczniczej, a następnie rozwinięta w kontekście

Suggested citation: Gerc, K. & Novak, J.M. (2025). Neurodiversity: Conceptualizing Self-Identity Conditions. *Perspectives on Culture*, 4(51), pp. 345–360. DOI: 10.35765/pk.2025.5104.22
Submitted: 09.09.2025 Accepted: 01.12.2025

akademickim, stanowi alternatywę wobec paradygmatu biomedycznego, proponując ramy interpretacyjne dla rozumienia odmienności neurologicznych jako naturalnej zmienności ludzkiego funkcjonowania. Analiza pokazuje, iż tożsamość osób neuroatypowych kształtuje się w dynamicznej interakcji wymiarów osobistych i społeczno-kulturowych, zgodnie z teoriami tożsamości społecznej i interakcjonistycznymi koncepcjami rozwoju „Ja". Neuroróżnorodność funkcjonuje zatem jednocześnie jako kategoria naukowa i kulturowa – ujmowana w perspektywie psychologii pozytywnej, filozofii umysłu oraz badań nad inkluzyjnością. Bywa też intepretowana w kategoriach narracji społecznych, które redefiniują znaczenie zróżnicowaniu rozwoju neurologicznego w przestrzeni publicznej. W artykule zwrócono uwagę na pewne napięcie zarysowujące się między afirmatywnym ujęciem neuroróżnorodności a krytyką jej nieprecyzyjnej terminologii i ograniczonej falsyfikowalności. Konkluzja publikacji wskazuje, że zrozumienie neuroróżnorodności jako ram rozwoju tożsamości wymaga integracji wymiaru psychologicznego (indywidualne doświadczenie człowieka, samowiedza, kondycja) z kulturowym (ruchy samorzecznicze, praktyki inkluzyjne), co otwiera nowe perspektywy badawcze w psychologii, kulturoznawstwie, ale również w planowaniu polityki społecznej.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: neuroróżnorodność, neuroatypowość, neurotypowość, tożsamość, inkluzyjność

Introduction

The disciplines of sociology, philosophy, cultural studies, and psychology are currently interested in the self-identification of individuals based on their social, cultural, and structural interactions (Mauldin & Fannon, 2020). Simultaneously, there is the emergence of the concept of neurodiversity, along with the evolution of its definition and application, and reflection on inclusivity, as well as the acceptance of diversity in society. The theoretical framework of neurodiversity rests on the pillars established by positive psychology, along with others, including the concept of the seven vectors of development introduced by Arthur Chickering (Fung, 2021; Fung & Doyle, 2021). This framework emphasizes the rights of neurodiverse individuals and counters the discrimination of these individuals. As a cultural phenomenon, it is directly linked to the advocacy and self-advocacy movement of neurodiversity. The concept of neurodiversity radically challenges the views between the medical and social models of illness and disability, seeking a different perspective by drawing from framework of the ecological (Chapman, 2021) and interactionist models (Dwyer, 2022). It also considers the context of self-identity development, particularly for neurodivergent individuals.

Neurodiversity and Self-Identity

Alicia A. Broderick and Ari Ne'Eman (2008) recognized the importance of self-identity in autism, and also that it involves an invisible disability. Currently, scientists are becoming increasingly more interested in developing a universal self-identity development model along with defining specific characteristics in neurodiverse individuals. The concept of self-identity is a complex and multifaceted construct, referred to, among other things, as "self-representations." It represents a form of self-knowledge that encompasses the unique characteristics of a person, that are identified by that person, and which distinguish them from other members of the population. Self-identity significantly transcends the boundaries of the somatic (body) context. In Deaf culture, the concept of self-identity is characterized by Stein E. Ohna's (2004) knowledge of the individual, which includes basic personal characteristics and an understanding of who one is. Identity development is also closely linked to current and past experiences and the interactions between the person and their surrounding social environment (Chen, 2014). Personal, social, and community roles constitute the foundation of self-identity. These roles are organized in a hierarchy of importance, and there is a tendency to select those that are the most meaningful to the individual (Davis, Love, & Fares, 2019). According to Ohna (2004), self-identity development is an interactive process. There is a close connection between experiences derived from interpersonal processes and language, which enable the person to understand what is being experienced. Therefore, it is impossible to separate the personal and sociocultural dimensions of self-identity. Laura Mauldin and Tara Fannon (2020) also emphasize the importance of physical characteristics in the formation of self-identity. Hence, self-identity is a form of self-definition based on social relationships and individual characteristics.

Social identity theory developed by Henri Tajfel assumes that there are two key aspects related to an individual's functioning in a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The first is personal identification, that is understood as a set of individual characteristics which include abilities and/or intelligence, and the second is social identification, which is understood as the self-concept created by the individual based on the knowledge of belonging to a given group, in addition to the emotional connection associated with that group. Social group identification is extremely important for an individual and, if associated with a positive self-evaluation, it increases the motivation to maintain identity with that group. However, if there is a decrease in the positive self-evaluation of the group, it can lead to a decrease in personal self-esteem. In this case, an individual can apply one of three basic strategies. The first strategy is social mobility, which involves the individual leaving the group and moving to a group with a more positive social environment. The second strategy is social creativity, which involves the ability

to transform a negative evaluation into a positive one, thus reevaluating and reappraising a situation that threatens the positive evaluation of the group. The final strategy is social change. It is understood that the individual has the ability to develop a positive self-image and be perceived positively by group members from a different group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity theory addresses group processes, intergroup relations, and the foundations of the social-self. It was originally developed and applied to understand social phenomena such as racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Its basic premise is the tendency for individuals to perceive themselves through the lens of various social categories, which include religious and gender affiliations, age cohorts, and membership in specific organizations (Cadsby, Du, & Song, 2016). Social identity is defined as part of an individual's self-concept that is derived from membership in any type of group and includes the values one holds and the emotional meaning one attaches to membership in that group (Chapman & Dammeyer, 2017). Belonging to a social group and finding one's place within it complements and develops self-representation and its value. Vivian L. Vignoles (2018) and Daan Scheepers & Naomi Ellemers (2019) emphasize that social identity theory consists of two aspects. One is the psychological dimension, which describes the cognitive processes underlying the definition of personal social identity and is based on the assumption that people strive for positive social identification. The second is a socio-structural dimension, which addresses how people cope when dealing with negative social identification.

Lech Witkowski (1988) states that one's sense of identity (the equivalent of self-identity) is mostly socially constructed and built through the individual's cognitive abilities within the sociocultural environment. This perception proposes a perspective on human identity that is completely different from that proposed by Tajfel (1979). According to Witkowski a self-identity profile that encompasses the triad of competence, concept, and condition is more appropriate. This process of identity formation/development is unique in that it occurs through continuous interaction between the individual and that individual's sociocultural environment. It has been defined by Witkowski as "contact in action" (1988, p. 113). Identity development progresses from the acquisition, or lack of, competence in interactions with other people both culturally and socially, thereby forming a self-concept, and finally leading to the condition of self-identity. Witkowski states that in addition to the process of identity development, its formation is also influenced by social mechanisms of identity maintenance. Three basic types of identification processes participate in identity formation, "recognition" of the environment, "reflection" of expectations existing in the environment, and the process of creating an ideal "self." The author of this concept notes that the manifestation of a developmental crisis depends on which identification process encounters potential obstacles (Witkowski, 1988, p. 118).

Witkowski's triadic concept of identity is applied in this article with reference to the analysis of the phenomenon of neurodiversity. It is based on the assumption that competence corresponds to the self-assessment of personal social competence, and that self-concept corresponds to the self-assessment of the individual, and that the specific core of identity is a condition of the self-concept which is manifested in self-narratives.

When belonging to specific groups with varied social categories, such as gender or ethnicity, which consequently have rigid and closed boundaries, leaving the group may seem impossible (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Additionally, a group stigmatized by society may also strengthen self-esteem through even stronger identification and engagement in activities promoting so-called social change or social creativity.

Neurodiversity – From Traditional Self-Advocacy to Scientific Conceptualization

The publication *Neurodiversity: Discovering the Extraordinary Gifts of Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, and Other Brain Differences* by Thomas Armstrong (2010) cites neuroscience and positive psychology as sources for the conceptual development of neurodiversity. It addresses approaches that highlight resources and characteristics that distinguish individuals rather than emphasizing their deficits. It also assumes that diversity is conditioned by significant differences in neurological functioning and, therefore, does not necessarily imply a significant deficit of sensations, emotions, existential and intellectual experiences, or various manifestations of participation in the fullness of life. Neurodiversity refers to the recognition and acceptance of multiple variations in the functioning of the nervous system, especially in the context of neurodevelopmental differences in humans. This includes understanding that there is natural variation in brain structure and function, leading to differences in perception, learning, communication, and behavior. Over time, neurodiversity has emerged as a new approach, offering an alternative to the biomedical model. For example, it aims to depathologize diagnostic conditions such as autism and, under all circumstances, move away from labeling autism as a profound disorder.

Dorota Pufund (2025) proposes a contextual map for the concept of neurodiversity distinguishing it into three contexts: epistemological (containing a certain description of reality), sociological (a semantic and axiological community), and theoretical-methodological (studies related to neurodiversity). When describing the phenomenon of neurodiversity, it is also worth considering the cultural aspect, as the characteristics of individual and social group development are currently described as a synergistic effect of the interactions of elements established by genetic and environmental norms. The way in which

the potential for certain traits is defined and estimated to manifest individually or socially is significant.

An American journalist Harvey Blume (1998) states:

> Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general. Who can say what form of wiring will prove best at any given moment? Cybernetics and computer culture, for example, may favor a somewhat autistic cast of mind.

This seemingly exclusive journalistic message reflects the importance of neurodiversity for Western cultures in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Neurodiversity is highlighted as the quality of life of individuals whose neurological development differs from the so-called typical developmental trajectory. It presents characteristics of individuals with their own identity, personality, and unique analytical cognitive style (Armstrong, 2010), while simultaneously emphasizing and specifying the difficulties in their social lives along with perceived psychological complications. In contemporary discourse, neurodiversity is sometimes referred to as an "umbrella term," encompassing autism spectrum disorders (ASD), ADHD, dyslexia, Tourette syndrome, hypersensitivity, and even obsessive-compulsive disorder (Mellifont, 2021).

When discussing neurodiversity, it is worth recalling that when the neurodiversity hypothesis was emerging in the 1990s, it was considered controversial for many years (Broderick & Ne'eman, 2008; Jaarsma & Welin, 2012). The disturbance of physiological functions was understood as a manifestation of biological diversity, reflecting a specific alternative to the neurological and cognitive functioning characteristics of the majority of the population (Broderick & Ne'Eman, 2008).

Steve Silberman (2015) describes the circumstances surrounding the formation of the first organization in the 1990s of autism self-advocates known as the Autism Network International. In 1998, one of the movement's co-founders, Jim Sinclair (1998), published on his website the first definition of the word "neurotypical" (NT) – used both as a noun and an adjective. It described individuals with a typical neurological profile. In subsequent years, and somewhat based on this definition, the antonym "neuro-atypical" (Sinclair, 1998) arose. This term is currently avoided, and the commonly used equivalent of "neuro-atypical" is "neurodiverse." According to supporters of its use, including the autistic self-advocates, the term protects against the medicalization of selected neurodevelopmental disorders, especially those of a lesser degree of severity, and also against the exposure of developmental deficits, emphasizing the different functioning characteristics exhibited, for example, by individuals with ASD (Furgał, 2022).

Neurodiversity – A Perspective Against the Medicalization of Selected Disorders

In contrast to the disorders characterized in terms of abnormalities inherent in the biomedical model, the neurodiversity paradigm describes: ASD, ADHD, and other disorders, as manifestations of the natural variability of the human central nervous system, which, when confronted with the barriers of a neurotypical environment, present with a sense of inadequacy (Bölte et al., 2021). These barriers currently include misunderstandings and inappropriate treatment from the perspective of the neurodiverse individual (i.e., receiving unconstructive or derogatory criticism, arbitrarily being interpreted as having negative intentions, being described as lazy, or in situations where neglecting duties it is explained as a deterioration in the psychophysical condition). On the other hand, proponents of the neurodiversity paradigm emphasize the positive aspects of the functioning of neurodiverse individuals. For example, individuals with ADHD are creative, innovative, determined in pursuing goals, have the ability to take risks, and are able to hyper-focus (Nicolaou et al., 2011). This neurodiversity movement also focuses on designing environments tailored to the needs of specific individuals so that they can function as effectively as possible (Cierzniewska and Podgórska-Jachnik, 2021; Pisula et al., 2024). A constructive approach to these ADHD characteristics may be essential, especially in school, academic, and professional environments (Chrysochoou et al., 2022; Pisula et al., 2024).

Neurodiversity, therefore, means adopting a new perspective on people with neurodevelopmental disorders, thereby providing an alternative to the biomedical model. The goal of this perspective is to avoid stigmatizing ASD, ADHD, dyslexia, and other conditions associated with pathological implications of a diagnosis specific to the disorder that is linked to the biopsychosocial and social models of disability. Neurodiversity conventions even advocate for abandoning the term "disorder." This perspective provides the basis for, among other things, an alternative to the term "autism spectrum disorder," (ASD) to "autism spectrum conditions" (ASC) instead. The term ASC was introduced by Simon Baron-Cohen (2017) to avoid the term disorder. He recognized that the term "disorder," due to its negative connotation, may devalue the competences of individuals with autism. The term "conditions," however, signals that these disorders can vary in severity, and that individuals with these disorders should be treated by society in the same way as other people, rather than viewed as having traits stemming from a different way of perceiving the world.

As previously mentioned, in addition to individuals with ASD, neurodiversity over time has come to also include individuals with ADHD, Tourette syndrome, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, and sensory impairments (Price, 2022). Neurodiversity, in its broadest and most controversial definition, is

recognized primarily as a philosophy of social acceptance and the promotion of equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their neurobiological characteristics (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012). Additionally, and indirectly, beyond the signaled criticism of the excessive medicalization of disability issues with biological and psychological etiology, the concept also stems from resistance to the dominant belief in contemporary disability discourse that disorders are exclusively dysfunctional (Armstrong, 2010).

Neurodiversity proponents also document the continuing lack of full acceptance in certain communities regarding the differences in the functioning and perception of reality between neurodiverse and neurotypical individuals. Proponents of neurodiversity highlight the unavailability of systemic solutions that would foster the self-fulfillment of the neurodiverse group. They see this diversity as an evolutionary process, in which the effects can be observed in the changes in the structure of the brain, made possible by its specificity and its ability to adapt within a unique ecosystem. For example, instead of treating autism as a serious developmental disorder, with clinically detectable symptoms or behaviors associated in most cases with distress and impairments in individual functioning, there is neurodiversity, a concept that is still controversial in various circles. However, in this framework, specific autism spectrum conditions (ASC) exemplify the diversity of traits that characterize humans.

Proponents of this concept point out that the category "disorder" should only be applied when a person experiences primarily negative consequences as a result of their condition, when changes in their environment do not lead to improved functioning, as in cases with severe depression, schizophrenia, and other disorders. ASD, ADHD, and other disorders, in addition to difficulties in functioning manifested in specific areas, also encompass positive aspects (such as specific talents, the ability for detailed analysis, mathematical reasoning, etc.). In addition, optimal functioning depends largely on a supportive environment. Therefore, according to proponents of the neurodiversity concept, ASD should be considered a different developmental pattern rather than a disorder. Simon Baron-Cohen (2017) advocates against stigmatizing individuals with ASD due to their differences, but instead focusing on developing their strengths and individual abilities, which are, to some extent, related to autism itself. The enormous role played by a supportive environment is highlighted for the optimal development and satisfactory functioning of people with ASD. Due to their specific developmental needs, they often require different conditions to function as those offered to neurotypical people.

Simon Baron-Cohen (2017) states that although there are clear and undeniable differences between autistic and neurotypical people in terms of brain structure and activity, neuronal functioning, genetics, learning processes and behavior, these differences should not be treated as a disorder requiring deep

therapeutic intervention. Rather, they should be understood as a developmental variation that forms an integral element of an individual's identity.

Neurodiversity and Supporting Human Development

The concept of neurodiversity, particularly as it pertains to autism, was initiated by autistic individuals communicating via the Internet. The term was coined by sociologist Judy Singer (1999) in her article "Why Can't You Be Normal for Once in Your Life?" where she described a "Problem with no Name" and proposed a new category framing autism as a difference. She introduced "Neurologically Different" to add to the familiar political categories of class/gender/race which augment the insights of the social model of disability (p. 64). Contemporary findings indicate that the concept of neurodiversity emerged within the autism community on the Independent Living discussion list, where, as early as 1996, reflections on the cognitive value of neurological differences were already taking shape.

On the other hand, according to proponents of the concept of dysfunction (e.g., Armstrong, 2010; Fenton & Krahn, 2007; Ortega, 2009), the manifestation of ASD results from a developmental pathway that differs from normative development. In keeping with the search for terminological clarity commonly expected in the social sciences, the concepts of "disorders" and "differences" are placed in a relatively universal, hierarchical conceptual system, independent of culturally determined referents (Gerc & Jurek, 2017).

Pier Jaarsma and Stellan Welin (2012) distinguish two approaches to neurodiversity. One is the narrow and the other is the broad approach. The broad approach assumes that individuals with ASD demonstrate neurological differences resulting from a distinct developmental trajectory. This approach affirms that all neurological differences are aimed at fostering social acceptance and achieving comparable capabilities for neurologically atypical individuals. However, it is controversial among researchers of neurodevelopmental disorders and is difficult to empirically verify. On the other hand, the narrow approach assumes that only individuals with relatively high cognitive functioning (i.e., those with ASD, ADHD, and dyslexia) can be perceived as neurologically diverse, while those with poorer functioning can be perceived as exhibiting a disorder or disability. According to Jaarsma and Welin (2012), only the latter approach appears to have sound justification and to translate significantly into an improved quality of life for individuals with ASD.

It is worth referring here to the concepts distinguished by David J. Chalmers (2010), which perfectly correspond to the issue of neurodiversity, including the phenomenal mind and the psychological mind. As Chalmers assumed, the phenomenal mind refers to the way a specific person or other organism feels

and experiences something (as cited in Bremer, 2010, p. 195), while the psychological mind, also known as the intentional mind, " ... concerns the mind as the cause of behavior, or mind used to explain particular behaviors of a person" (Bremer, 2010, p. 195). Chalmers's proposal is consistent with the assumptions of both the broad and narrow approaches to neurodiversity, with the caveat that, in the broad approach, the concept of the phenomenal mind applies to all individuals showing symptoms of a disorder, while in the narrow approach, it applies only to so-called well-functioning individuals.

Broderick and Ne'eman (2008) analyze cultural discourse surrounding autism in their essay, "Autism as Metaphor: Narrative and Counter-Narrative," framing the dominant trend of treating ASD as a group of disorders, and presenting the concept of neurodiversity as a contrasting narrative. According to these researchers, autism spectrum disorder is also an important part of an individual's identity. By showing how the metaphor defining the disorder has evolved alongside views on autism, the authors emphasize the strong dependence of labeling related to cultural, social, and scientific contexts. They also believe that research demonstrating the positive aspects of autism could help challenge the current image of this disorder in society and, consequently, contribute to reducing prejudice against individuals whose neurobiology differs in certain respects.

Academic and open-access virtual databases indicate that there are over 300,000 publications concerning individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders including ASD, ADHD, and dyslexia that are currently considered as examples of neurodiversity. However, the vast majority of these works address the etiology (genetic, environmental) or physiology of neurodevelopmental disorders, along with the symptomatology which together create a specific picture of the disorder. A small percentage of the cited publications address the organization of contemporary life for neurodiverse individuals, manifested, for example, in systemic efforts to develop coherent solutions ensuring a supportive environment for both neurotypical and neurodiverse individuals, the availability of alternative and augmentative communication tools, and, above all, providing adults with neurodevelopmental disorders who need substantial support with appropriate living conditions, in line with deinstitutionalization principles (see: Bolak, Gerc, & Perzanowska, 2024).

Research studies in the literature (Zablotsky et al., 2019) indicate that neurodiverse individuals statistically constitute approximately 15–20% of the population, but only a small percentage of this group requires significant support in daily functioning. Anxiety is the most common co-occurring mental health problem among neurodiverse individuals, occurring five times more frequently than in the general population (Nimmo-Smith et al., 2020). Symptoms of anxiety disorders are more common in this group of individuals, who simultaneously experience more socio-emotional and cognitive difficulties (Keefer et al., 2018). Results from a 2015 study (Wigham et al., 2015) show that both

hyper- and hyposensitivity were significantly associated with repetitive motor activity and pressure to engage in stereotyped behaviors, and that both were related to anxiety and intolerance of uncertainty. Later studies replicated these results regarding intolerance of uncertainty (Wingham et al., 2015).

The anxiety experienced, along with the accompanying feelings of loneliness and being misunderstood, is often reported by neurodiverse individuals and can lead to impaired social and cognitive functioning. This can clearly impact educational achievement (disproportionate to the intellectual abilities of neurodiverse individuals), and lead to negative experiences related to acquiring knowledge. Therefore, well-planned interventions for neurodiverse individuals are critical for preventing anxiety-provoking situations, especially since many neurodiverse individuals experience the effects of a lack of adequate support (Sarrett, 2018). Researchers highlight a vicious cycle of mutual feedback, in which difficulties in functioning, which may result from an inappropriate living or work environment contribute to, among other things, a decreased sense of personal worth, which deepens the functional problems of neurodiverse individuals (Kenna, 2023). For this reason, it is important not only to address social actions, but also to adapt the living space of neurodiverse individuals according to their sensory, attentional, and educational needs.

Currently, it is assumed that an adequate, targeted approach to the predispositions and limitations associated with neurodiversity is crucial for ensuring the quality of life of individuals with various disorders (Chrysochoou et al., 2022). Both neurodiversity and neurological disabilities pose different challenges and create opportunities and possibilities for societal and public programs.

Conclusion

The concept of neurodiversity is currently controversial among specialists, and some researchers believe it does not constitute a falsifiable scientific theory, but it can serve as a basis for methodologically sound research. Objections to the concept include the use of vague terminology and its rejection of previously accepted scientific findings. Concerns expressed by critics of the concept of neurodiversity address the potential negation of previously developed systemic solutions in the diagnosis, therapy, and education of ASD individuals. A similar approach is taken by those who call autism a disorder, primarily due to the semantic definition of the term. They do not perceive the term "disorder" as pejorative, but simply as a description of a phenomenon that, in their opinion, deviates from the norm according to established criteria. This is not a social norm, but a neurological one, as most people are neurotypical because their nervous system functions in a specific way. For them, the disorder hinders the fulfillment of their personal needs, because even with accommodations, they

recognize their limitations. However, there are strategies that can potentially avoid this paradox. The first is to recognize the vulnerability that is unique to most neurodiverse individuals, expressed in the existence of the high probability of harm that can occur due to a deficit in certain competencies and/or means of self-protection. Considering that a person is vulnerable can also lead to the risk of being treated as "compassionate" and thereby underestimating the potential of that individual.

A strategy based on a narrow understanding of the concept seems more beneficial for addressing the challenges that accompany society's acceptance of neurodiversity and its cultural integration. This clearly suggests that individuals with ASD, for example, who function poorly on cognitive and social levels, and require extensive support, justify that they should be recognized as disabled. On the other hand, ASD individuals who function well but are characterized by neurological differences related to a path of socialization, communication, and emotion that differs from the normative path, may accept, under these circumstances, that their developmental trajectory need not ultimately be adverse or unattainable.

To achieve this goal, it is essential to have adequate support from the environment, and to be open and willing to understand the differences in the functioning of neurodiverse people, which requires, among other things, establishing a social education program that provides adequate and comprehensive knowledge on this topic. Additionally, on the part of the neurodiverse individuals, they need to make an effort to leave their personal comfort zone and search for a niche that provides opportunities for these individuals to develop their potential in a safe environment.

References

Armstrong, T. (2010). *Neurodiversity: Discovering the Extraordinary Gifts of Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, and Other Brain Differences*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press. Retrieved from: https://extranet.uj.edu.pl/lib/ujagiellonski/,DanaInfo=site.ebrary.com+docDetail.action?docID=10392468&p00=armstrong%20neurodiversity (access: 30.04.2012).

Baron-Cohen, S. (2017). Editorial perspective: neurodiversity – a revolutionary concept for autism and psychiatry. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 58(6), 744–747. DOI: 10.1111/jcpp.12703.

Bolak, E., Gerc, K., & Perzanowska, A. (2024). *Model wspólnotowego miejsca zamieszkania dla osób w spektrum autyzmu*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo JAK.

Blume, H (1998, 30.09.). Neurodiversity. On the neurological underpinnings of geekdom. *The Atlantic.* Retrieved from: http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1998/09/neurodiversity/305909/

Bölte, S., Lawson, W.B., Marschik, P.B., & Girdler, S. (2021). Reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable: The WHO's ICF system integrates biological and psychosocial environmental determinants of autism and ADHD: The International Classification of Functioning (ICF) allows to model opposed biomedical and neurodiverse views of autism and ADHD within one framework. *BioEssays*, 43(9), Article no. 2000254. DOI: 10.1002/bies.202000254

Bremer, J. (2010). *Wprowadzenie do filozofii umysłu*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM.

Broderick, A.A. & Ne'Eman, A. (2008). Autism as metaphor: narrative and counter narrative. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 12(5–6), 459–476. Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/6421135/Broderick_A_and_Neeman_A_2008_Autism_as_metaphor_Narrative_and_counternarrative (access: 28.08.2024).

Cadsby, C.B., Du, N., & Song, F. (2016). In-group favoritism and moral decision-making. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 128, 59–71. DOI: 10.1016/j.jebo.2016.05.008

Chalmers, D. (2010). *Świadomy umysł*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Chapman, M. & Dammeyer, J. (2017). The significance of deaf identity for psychological well-being. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 22(2), 187–194. DOI: 10.1093/deafed/enw073

Chapman, R. (2021). Neurodiversity and the social ecology of mental functions. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(6), 1360–1372. DOI: 10.1177/1745691620959833

Chen, G. (2014). Influential Factors of Deaf Identity Development. *Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education*, 3(2). Retrieved from: https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/ejie (access: 20.05.2025).

Chrysochoou, M., Zaghi, A.E., & Syharat, C.M. (2022). Reframing neurodiversity in engineering education. *Frontiers in Education*, 7:995865. DOI: 10.3389/feduc.2022.995865

Cierzniewska, R., Podgórska-Jachnik, D. (2021). Neurodiversity and (Semantic) Space for Academic Inclusion of People on the Autism Spectrum. *Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education*, Vol. 10, No. 20, 71–88. DOI: 10.35765//mjse.2021.1020.04

Davis, J.L., Love, T.P., & Fares, P. (2019). Collective Social Identity: Synthesizing Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory Using Digital Data. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 82(3), 254–273. DOI: 10.1177/0190272519851025

Dwyer, P. (2022). The Neurodiversity approach(es): what are they and what do they mean for researchers? *Human Development*, 66, 2, 73–92. DOI: 10.1159/000523723.

Fenton, A. & Krahn, T. (2007). Autism, neurodiversity and equality beyond the "normal". *Journal of Ethics in Mental Health*, 2(2), 1–6.

Fung, K.L. (2021). Preface. W: L.K. Fung (ed.), *Neurodiversity: from phenomenology to neurobiology and enhancing technologies.* Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 15–17.

Fung, K.L. & Doyle, N. (2021). Neurodiversity: The new diversity. W: L.K. Fung (ed.), *Neurodiversity: from phenomenology to neurobiology and enhancing technologies*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 1–18.

Furgał, E. (2022). *Dziewczyna w spektrum*. Ożarów Mazowiecki: Wydawnictwo Biała Plama.

Gerc, K., Jurek, M. (2017). Rozwój zaburzony czy odmienny – próba analizy pojęciowej w odniesieniu do stanów ze spektrum autyzmu. *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Psychologica*. Studia Psychologica 10. FOLIA 238, 189–207. DOI: 10.24917/20845596.10.12.

Jaarsma, P. & Welin, S. (2012). Autism as a natural human variation: reflections on the claims of the neurodiversity movement, Health Care Analysis: HCA. *Journal Of Health Philosophy And Policy*, 20(1), 20–30. Retrieved from: http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:457919/FULLTEXT01.pdf- (access: 20.07.2024).

Keefer, A., Kreiser, N.L., Singh, V., Blakeley-Smith, A., Reaven, J., i Vasa, R.A. (2018). Exploring Relationships Between Negative Cognitions and Anxiety Symptoms in Youth With Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Behavior Therapy*, 49(5). DOI: 10.1016/j.beth.2017.12.002.

Kenna, T. (2023). Neurodiversity in the city: Exploring the complex geographies of belonging and exclusion in urban space. *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 189, 370–382. DOI: 10.1111/geoj.12512.

Mauldin, L. & Fannon, T. (2020). They Told Me My Name: Developing a Deaf Identity. *Symbolic Interaction*. DOI: 10.1002/symb.482.

Mellifont, D. (2021). A Qualitative Study Exploring Neurodiversity Conference Themes, Representations, and Evidence-Based Justifications for the Explicit Inclusion and Valuing of OCD. *International Journal of Information, Diversity and Inclusion*, 5(2), 111–138. DOI: 10.33137/ijidi.v5i2.35067.

Nicolaou, N., Shane, S., Adi, G., Mangino, M., & Harris, J. (2011). A polymorphism associated with entrepreneurship: Evidence from dopamine receptor candidate genes. *Small Business Economics*, 36(2), 151–155. DOI: 10.1007/s11187-010-9308-1.

Nimmo-Smith, V., Heuvelman, H., Dalman, C., Lundberg, M., Idring, S., Carpenter, P., Magnusson, C., & Rai, D. (2020). Anxiety Disorders in Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder: a Population-Based Study. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50(1). DOI: 10.1007/s10803-019-04234-3.

Ohna, S.E. (2004). Deaf in my own way: Identity, learning and narratives. *Deafness and Education International*, 6(1), 20–38. DOI: 10.1179/146431504790560609.

Ortega, F. (2009). The cerebral subject and the challenge of neurodiversity. *Biosciences*, 4, 425–445. DOI: 10.1017/S1745855209990287.

Pisula, E., Płatos, M., Banasiak, A., Danielewicz, D., Gosztyła, T., Podgórska-Jachnik, D., Pyszkowska, A.M., Rumińska, A.E., & Winczura, B. (2024). *Neuroróżnorodność na polskich uczelniach. Doświadczenia osób studiujących:*

w spektrum autyzmu, z ADHD i z dysleksją. Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls. DOI: 10.62634/9788382943139.

Price, D. (2022). *Unmasking autism: Discovering the new faces of Neurodiversity*. Harmony Books.

Pufund, D. (2025). Analiza krytyczna koncepcji neuroróżnorodności w kontekście spektrum autyzmu. *Niepełnosprawność i Rehabilitacja*, 97(1), 20–31. DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0055.1963.

Sarrett, J.C. (2018). Autism and accommodations in higher education: Insights from the autism community. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 48, 679–693. DOI: 10.1007/s10803-017-3353-4.

Scheepers, D. & Ellemers, N. (2019). Social Identity Theory. In: K. Sassenberg & M. Vliek (eds.), *Social psychology in action: Evidence-based interventions from theory to practice*. New York: Springer, 129–143.

Singer, J. (1999). "Why can't you be normal for once in your life?" From a "problem with no name" to the emergence of a new category of difference. In: M. Corker & S. French (eds.), *Disability and discourse*. Buckingham/Philadelphia: Open University Press, 57–67.

Silberman, S. (2015). *Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity*. New York: Avery. DOI: 10.1353/anq.2015.0057.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J.C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In: W.G. Austin & S. Worchel (eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations*. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 33–37.

Vignoles, V.L. (2018). Identity. In: K. Deaux & M. Snyder (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of personality and social psychology* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 288–316.

Wigham, S., Rodgers, J., South, M., McConachie, H., & Freeston, M. (2015). *The Interplay Between Sensory Processing Abnormalities, Intolerance of Uncertainty, Anxiety and Restricted and Repetitive Behaviours in Autism Spectrum Disorder*.

Witkowski, L. (1988). *Tożsamość i zmiana. Wstęp do epistemologicznej analizy kontekstów edukacyjnych*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK.

Zablotsky, B., Black, L.I., Maenner, M.J., Schieve, L.A., Danielson, M.L., Bitsko, R.H., Blumberg, S.J., Kogan, M.D., & Boyle, C.A. (2019). Prevalence and trends of developmental disabilities among children in the United States: 2009–2017. *Pediatrics*, 144(4), art.20190811. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2019-0811.

Krzysztof Gerc – PhD in humanities, assistant professor in the Department of Management and Social Communication at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, psychologist, therapist. The main areas of his theoretical and research interests include: rehabilitation psychology, psychological issues of chronically and terminally ill people, and social science methodology. In the field of rehabilitation psychology, a particularly important aspect of his work focuses on the functioning of individuals with developmental disorders in diverse contexts, such as clinical, intrapsychic and cultural-systemic contexts, as well as the

problematic issues involving social inclusion, especially those related to individuals with a varied trajectories of neurological development along with their families. He is also involved in research on assessing the effectiveness of therapeutic support offered to people with developmental disorders from the perspective of taking into account psychological and socio-cultural factors.

Jean M. Novak – PhD, CCC-SLP, Full Professor, Emeritus of Speech and Language Pathology, Department of Communicative Disorders, San Jose State University, CA, USA. Her expertise is in the area of bilingualism, multiculturalism, interdisciplinary collaboration, resiliency, and early identification of children with special needs predominately Autism, ADHD, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Behavior Disorders, in addition to Mental Illness and Schizophrenia. She has published in these areas as well as presented and taught nationally and internationally in Canada, China, England, Guam, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Poland, and all over the United States. She has been involved in various projects and research with Autism Tree Project Foundation in San Diego, California for many years. She is passionate in her commitment to help autistic children and their families consider future implications and improve overall quality of life.