

Mind Matters: Making Space for Neurodiversity in Mental Health Care



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Agenda

1. Introduction Round
2. What is Neurodiversity?
 - a. Recognizing Neurodiversity
 - b. Definition & Relation to Mental Health
 - c. (In-)Accessibility and Stigma
3. Reflection and Group Work
4. General Discussion



Introduction



Anna Ajlani, BSc MA
PhD Student @ JKU

Research interests: Health Inequality, Medical and Assistive Technologies, Qualitative Methods



Miriam Massoumzadeh, BEd MSc
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Research interests: Neurodiversity, reading and writing disorders in university students and secondary level II students.

Introduction Round

- What's your name?
- What do you do?
- Do you have any specific interests or questions for the workshop?



The Project: ATLab | DyslexiaLab

- **Collaboration** between the Institute Integriert Studieren (IIS), Department of Sociology with a focus on Innovation and Digitalization (SID) and the Research Institute for Developmental Medicine (RID)
- **3-Phase-Process:**
 1. RID: Diagnostic testing for reading and writing disorders (dyslexia), reports & recommendation for university accommodations
 2. SID: Qualitative Interview about Barriers and Socio-Technical Management Strategies
 3. IIS: Technological Consultation
- **Aim:** Creating an inclusive campus with support and assistance for neurodivergent students



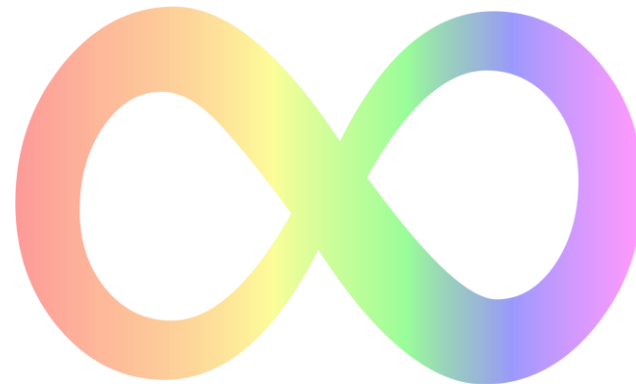
Case Study

Max (43 years old) goes to the doctor for a general check-up. He feels healthy, but wants to make sure he hasn't overlooked any health problems. When he fills in the forms, he is very careful not to make any mistakes and makes sure that everything is precise and accurate. During the examination, he asks many precise questions, especially about the details of the tests and their purpose. In the consultation itself, he appears calm and speaks in a monotone, keeping his answers short and direct, avoiding small talk or casual conversation. The doctor notices that Max sometimes pauses briefly before answering questions and that his eye contact seems somewhat unusual - sometimes averted, sometimes very intense. It is difficult for the doctor to assess how attentively Max is following the conversation, or whether he might occasionally drift off in his thoughts.

What could be behind Max's behaviour?

What is Neurodiversity?

- **Definition:** Neurodiversity describes the natural diversity of neurological differences in human thinking, feeling, and behavior
- **Perspective:** Recognition and appreciation of neurological differences as part of human diversity
- **Neurotypical:** Descriptor of individuals who do not face challenges due to neurological differences



Common neurodivergent conditions and their prevalence

- Dyslexia (Reading and writing disorder): 6-8%
- Dyscalculia (Mathematics disorder): 3-7%
- AD(H)D (Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder): 2-10%*
- ASD (Autism spectrum disorder): 1-3%
- Tourette syndrome: 0.5-1%



Neurodiversity and Mental Health

Comorbidities:

- ADHD
- Developmental Coordination Disorder
- Anxiety
- Executive dysfunction
- ...

Long-term sequelae in dyslexia:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Substance abuse
- Academic failure
- ...



How do these circumstances affect individuals in their daily life?

(In-)Accessibility and Stigma

- **Educational Barriers:**

- Strict curriculums and high barriers to exam accommodations
- Lack of adequate learning tools
- Insufficient resources for educators

- **Social & Occupational Challenges:**

- Dilemma of disclosure
- Inadequate support and accommodations
- Limited access to assistive technologies

- **Intersectional Factors:**

- Socioeconomic, gender or ethnic differences exacerbate otherization



(In-)Accessibility and Stigma

„I enjoyed writing short stories before my teacher started scolding me for grammar mistakes in front of the class in 5th grade.“

DyslexiaLab Interviewee, m, 23

„If I hadn't believed that I was stupid for all these years and known that it's a condition, I might have gone to university and aimed for a leadership position.“

DyslexiaLab Interviewee, f, 46

„I've come to accept the fact that I'm a snail on the highway... But I've developed many safe routes along the way“

ATLab Interviewee, m, 38



Common Coping Strategies



- Self-Stigmatization & Isolation: Avoiding group settings
- Safe & Discreet Workarounds: Taking pictures of lecture slides, eLearning
- Excess Labour: Spending free time to keep up with neurotypical peers
- Assistive Technology Use: Noise-Cancelling Headphones, Text-to-Speech, AI -> Focus on mainstream device integration to avoid questioning

Quiet Reflection (3 min)

- Think about your institution: Where does (in-)accessibility due to neurodivergence appear in your daily worklife?
- Was neurodivergence addressed in your education and training? Have attitudes towards inclusion changed throughout the years?
- What is already working well in your company/country regarding neurodiversity and what could be done better?



Group Discussion (15 min)



1. Form Groups:

- Divide into small groups of 4-5

2. Discuss:

- Share current practices and challenges related to inclusivity and sensory environments
- Brainstorm new ideas and strategies for a more accommodating environment

3. Identify Actions:

- Agree on 3 specific measures you intend to take or continue to improve inclusivity and reduce sensory overload in your practice

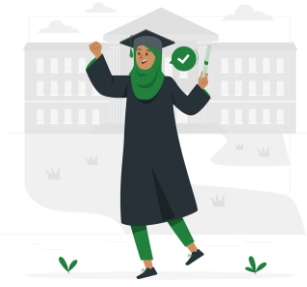
4. Share:

- Prepare to share your results with the larger group

Recognizing and Including Neurodivergent Individuals in Diverse & Inclusive Environments



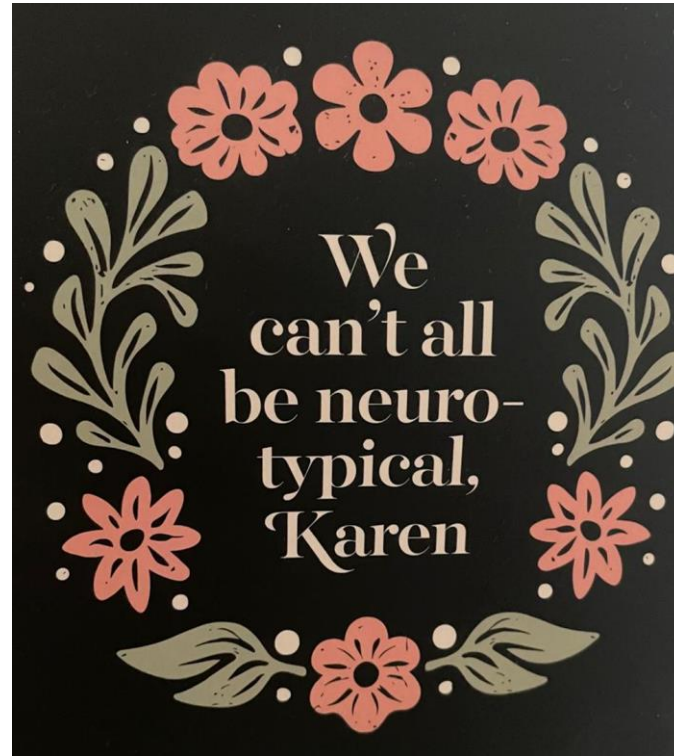
Takeaways



- Neurodivergence is not an indicator of intelligence or effort – excess labor behind the scenes is quite common
- Stigmatization increases the risk of self-isolation, anxiety and depression
- Calm working environments and the right (technological and social) assistance can help to avoid miscommunication and foster a wide range of talents
 - Disability Rights Motto „**Nothing About Us Without Us**“: Participation is key!
- What are you taking home from this workshop?



Thank you for the discussion!



We would be happy to stay in contact and/or answer further questions!

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