



**UW AUTISM CENTER**  
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## **Introduction to Neurodiversity and Autistic Culture**

**Natasha Lewis Harrington, PsyD**  
**August 8, 2019**

## Workshop Objectives

Participants will be able to identify:

- Views and goals of the neurodiversity movement
- Common disagreements between the autistic community and the parent/professional communities
- Current efforts to bridge the gap between groups

## Who Am I?

- Dr. Natasha Lewis Harrington, Psy.D.
- Postdoctoral fellow at the UW Autism Center, previously a UW LEND fellow at the Child Development Clinic
- Autistic, involved with the neurodiversity/autism acceptance movement since college

## Who Am I?

- Volunteer (teacher's aide and community group)
- Respite provider
- ABA therapist
- Nanny
- Psychologist-in-training

## Why Am I Here?

- Providing therapy that is affirming of autistic identity and ways of being
- Offering an autistic perspective and community voice to parents, colleagues, and the public
- Finding common ground between the professional and autistic communities

# WHAT IS AUTISM?

# What Is Autism?

## DSM-V Criteria

- Impairment in social/emotional reciprocity
- Impairment in nonverbal communication
- Impairment in interpersonal relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

## Alternate Perspective

- Difficulty with typical expectations of reciprocity
- Reduced or atypical nonverbal communication
- Atypical approach to social relationships, difficulty understanding typical interpersonal expectations



## What Is Autism?

- At least two of the following:
- Repetitive or stereotyped behavior or language use
- Patterns of rigidity or ritual
- Unusual interests or unusually intense interests
- Atypical responses to sensory input (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

# NEURODIVERSITY 101

# What Is Neurodiversity?

**Neurodiversity** is like religious diversity or racial diversity: the idea that humans naturally come in all different kinds, in this case different types of brains (Walker, n.d.).

# Neurodiversity

## Medical Model of Disability

- Having a disability means something is wrong with your brain or body
- Treatment should focus on preventing or removing impairment
- Seeks to make people as typical as possible
- The problem is in the person

## Social Model of Disability

- Disability is a problem caused by living in a world that only accommodates typical needs
- Impairment is not disabling if barriers are removed
- The problem is an interaction between the person and their environment (Identity-First Autistic, n.d.)

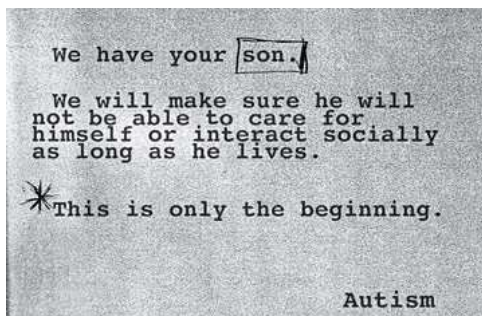
## Research on Identity

Research has found connections between mental health outcomes and:

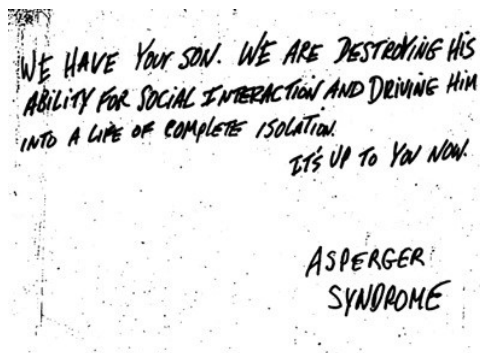
- Feeling accepted as an autistic person by others
- Self-acceptance as an autistic person
- Level of camouflage (Cage, Di Monaco, & Newell, 2017)
- Positive autistic identity—specifically, viewing autistic people positively as a group and identifying with that group (Cooper, Smith & Russell, 2017)

# HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT

# NYU Child Study Center Ads



(Cripchick, 2007)



# Autistic Self-Advocacy Network



(Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, n.d.)

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US



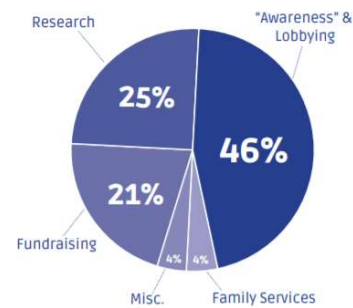
# Conflict with Autism speaks

The autistic community expresses concerns about:

- Funding priorities
- Representation on its Board of Directors
- History of dehumanizing advertising campaigns (Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, 2018)

## Autism Speaks' Budget

source: Autism Speaks 990 Non-Profit Tax Exemption Form, 2016\*



(Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, 2018)

## Concerns About ABA

The autistic community worries that ABA will continue to incorporate:

- Neurotypical assumptions
- Compliance training
- Stressful interventions (Socially Anxious Advocate, 2015)

# AUTISTIC CULTURE

# Autistic Culture

## Person-First

“Person with autism”

Popular with parents and professionals

Emphasizes the autism as secondary to the person

Many non-autistic people view person-first language as affirming

## Identity/Community-First

“Autistic person”

Popular with self-advocates

Portrays one’s autism and personhood as inextricable

Many people perceive person-first language as demeaning (Brown, 2011)

# Autistic Culture

World Autism Month



(Autism Speaks, n.d.)

Autism Acceptance Month



(The space dragon, 2017)

# Autistic Culture



(sesamestreet, 2018)

# Autistic Culture



(rainforestgarden, 2019a)



# Autistic Culture

Steve Asbell



(rainforestgarden, 2019b)





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# DISCUSSION

**Questions?**

**Thank you for attending!**

# Contact Information

**Your Instructors:**

Natasha Harrington      [uwautism@uw.edu](mailto:uwautism@uw.edu)

**Director of Training and School Services:**

Robin Talley      [rtalley@uw.edu](mailto:rtalley@uw.edu)

**Training and School Services Coordinator:**

Lena Tsui      [lbsui@uw.edu](mailto:lbsui@uw.edu)

**UW Autism Center:**

Phone      206-221-6806

Email      [uwautism@uw.edu](mailto:uwautism@uw.edu)

Website      <http://uwautism.com/>