

# Origin & Development of Neurodiversity

Nathan Albano, Community & Self-Advocacy Trainee



## Abstract

The concept of neurodiversity was first used in 1998 as a framing device for people with certain kinds of developmental disabilities. In recent years it has become increasingly common place, yet its usage, academically or otherwise, still varies broadly, and the movement it represents has been met with some controversy. The neurodiversity paradigm is a holistic rethinking of what it means to be "disabled," and a human being.

## Goal

The goal of this project is to summarize the history of neurodiversity and critically analyze its academic definition(s), usage, and controversy, compare my findings to my own lived experience, and identify areas for further research or theorizing.

## Method

I conducted a literature review of 5 articles and books found using Google Scholar and InfoHawk+ with search terms "**neurodiversity**" and "**neurodiversity and controversy.**"

## Findings

Judy Singer is credited with coining the term "**neurodiversity**" in her 1998 sociology honors thesis<sup>1</sup>, in which she describes the birth of a new autistic culture online and claims the "**neurologically different**" as a new social category akin to class, race, and gender<sup>1</sup>.

As the term grows a neurodiversity movement develops<sup>2, 1, 3</sup>, and Nick Walker makes a distinction between the biological fact of neurodiversity and the "**neurodiversity paradigm**" - an alternative to the "pathology paradigm" and medical model of disability<sup>2</sup>.

Resistance to the neurodiversity movement emerges as some providers and families of those with high-needs see autism as something to be treated and cured, as opposed to a **natural difference** which is disabling due to societal barriers and stigma<sup>4, 3</sup>. The false claim that neurodiversity only views autism as a gift is also perpetuated<sup>4, 5, 2</sup>.

"**Neurodiversity studies**" emerges in academia as the neurodiversity paradigm grows beyond critical autism studies<sup>3</sup>. Fields like sociology are utilizing the paradigm and exploring the social position of neurodivergents<sup>5, 3, 2</sup>.

## Conclusions

Neurodiversity began as a way to contextualize the differences between those with autism and "**neurotypicals**," and since has evolved into a key concept in disability identity and social politics. The neurodiversity paradigm, as it describes the natural variability among minds as a component of healthy human diversity, implies that there is no "normal" or "correct" style of mind, and questions the **social hierarchy** that benefits those who conform, and punishes those who do not. From my experience and readings, I've learned that although this term and concept are in flux, its theorizing of a better world is constant.

## References

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- (3) Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Nick Chown, Anna Stenning / Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Nick Chown, Anna Stenning. *Neurodiversity Studies : A New Critical Paradigm (Edition 1)*. 1st ed., vol. 1, Routledge, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429322297>.
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