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## **Neurodiversity: Autism is not a disorder and does not need to be cured**

By Hope Gillette, Oct 22, 2013

Neurodiversity suggests there are many different “normals” when it comes to the brain.

The concept of neurodiversity is usually talked about in reference to autism, though it can be used to describe other neurological conditions like ADHD and dyslexia. Under this principle of thought, these conditions are not viewed as disorders of the body, but rather as naturally occurring variations within the human genetic code.

Neurodiversity suggests autism and similar conditions are not meant to be “cured” but rather accommodated. Such thinking has been considered controversial, even though, according to the Autism Speaks Foundation, more and more scientific evidence is being uncovered to support the neurodiversity frame.

According to research, conditions like autism, have a stable prevalence in human society as far back as can be measured, and this indicates genetics and environmental factors—not disease or injury—is usually at work.

“Neurodiversity is a concept and social movement that advocates for viewing autism as a variation of human wiring, rather than a disease,” wrote experts from the National Symposium on Neurodiversity. “As such, neurodiversity activists reject the idea that autism should be cured, advocating instead for celebrating autistic forms of communication and self-expression, and for promoting support systems that allow autistic people to live as autistic people.”

### **Why neurodiversity is gaining popularity**

The neurodiversity movement started back in the late 1990's when a sociologist named Judy Singer—who was on the autism spectrum herself—invented a new word to describe conditions like autism, dyslexia, and ADHD. Singer felt autism and like conditions were unfairly categorized as disorders and impairments when many autistic people are in fact highly intelligent in areas not registrable on verbal IQ tests.

To prove her point, Singer began to compare such neurological differences to terms like “biodiversity” and “cultural diversity,” indicating that it was possible for there to be many different variations of “normal” when it came to the human brain.

“Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general,” stated journalist Harvey Blume in 1998 when the term first hit mainstream media. “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.”

### **What are the principles of neurodiversity**

When it comes to neurodiversity, it is important to realize this concept is not only being widely accepted by researchers but is also being supported by much of the autism community.

According to PBS, the goals of the neurodiversity movement include:

- Recognition that people on the autism spectrum do not need to be cured.
- Moving away from terms such as “disorder” and “disease.”
- Revising conventional thoughts on what normal behavior is.
- More control over when, how and why people receive treatment for autism.

Another large factor in the neurodiversity movement is finding employment for individuals on the autism spectrum. Those who adhere to the neurodiversity process of thought believe, just as some people are talented in areas of math or science, individuals on the autism spectrum also have special, employable talents.

For example, individuals with autism typically have a high level of concentration for technical tasks as well as the ability to do repetitive tasks exceptionally well. These qualities are ideal for someone looking to gain work in the area of software testing, and in fact, some software companies already recruit employees with autism. Of the employees at the Danish software company Specialisterne, 75 percent have some form of autism.

### **Why there is controversy surrounding neurodiversity**

Individuals on the autism spectrum are often suited for specific jobs, like software programming.

It may not seem like reclassifying neurological differences would be subject to controversy, but not everyone is sold on the idea of neurodiversity.

Those who are against the process feel a number of individuals on the extreme end of the autism spectrum will lose out on important treatment methods and support services.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 94 percent of children with autism require health or related services beyond those required by children not diagnosed with autism.

Supporters of the neurodiversity concept, however, indicate this is not the case.

Neurodiversity isn't about ignoring the particular needs of individuals on the autism spectrum; it is about creating a deeper understanding of the autism spectrum, creating appropriate educational and support aids, getting government aid, and providing individuals with a voice in their own treatment process.

“We don't pathologize a calla lily by saying it has a ‘petal deficit disorder,’” wrote Thomas Armstrong, author of a book called *Neurodiversity in the Classroom*, as reported by Wired. “Similarly, we ought not to pathologize children who have different kinds of brains and different ways of thinking and learning.”