

Autism and Neurodiversity: Intersectionality and Social Justice



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Autism and Neurodiversity: Intersectionality and Social Justice

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Speaker



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Session VI - Autism & Neurodiversity: Intersectionality and Social Justice

**Presenters: Dr. Steven Kapp & Dr. TC
Waisman with Dr. Christina Nicolaidis**

Introduction

- Steven: Define Neurodiversity
- TC: Intersectionality
- Steven: further discussion of overlap of ND/autism and intersectionality
- Christina: synthesize and reemphasize what was said
- Q&A

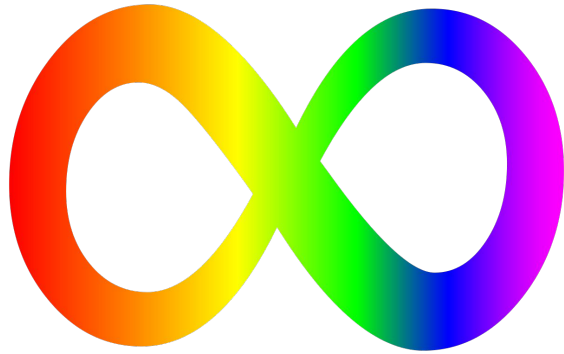


Dr. Steven
Kapp

Neurodiversity

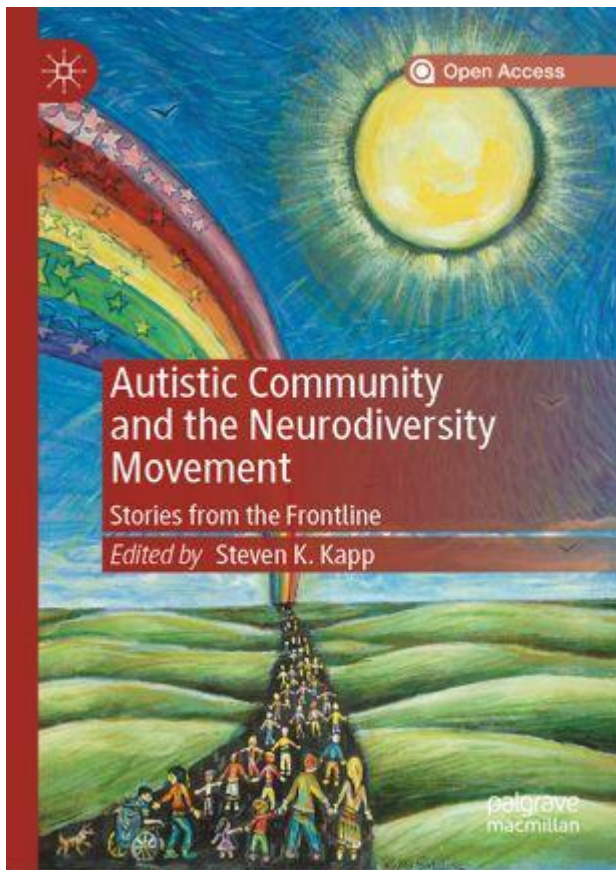
What is neurodiversity?

(Gillespie-Lynch, Kapp, Pickens, Brooks, & Schwartzman, 2017)



-
- The ‘fact’ of neurocognitive differences:
“variations in brain function that lead to differences in perception and bodily experience”
 - A framework that values those differences:
“Acceptance of neuroatypical people, like people with autism or depression or schizophrenia”
 - A movement advocating for the *neurodivergent*:
“An advocacy movement for people with neurological disabilities, based on acceptance and civil rights.”

What is neurodiversity?



“Neurodiversity, to me, means both a fabulous celebration of all kinds of individual minds, and a serious, holistic acknowledgment of the necessity of diversity in order for society to survive, thrive, and innovate. It means identity, belonging, and community. It means I am not broken, not alone, and neither are my siblings standing with me beneath that huge, multi-colored neurodiversity umbrella: we the autistic, the mad, the weirdly-wired, the queer, the crippled, and the labeled with neurodivergent diagnoses like flowers that glorify our beautiful bodies and minds.”
(Raymaker, 2020, p. 142)



Autism is a way of being.
It is pervasive; it colors
every experience, every
sensation, perception,
thought, emotion, and
encounter, every aspect
of existence.

(Sinclair,
1993)



Judy

History of neurodiversity movement

- Autism rights movement began in 1992 led by Jim Sinclair (Pripas-Kapit, 2020)
- *Neurodiversity* coined by autistic sociologist Judy Singer (1998) (Dekker, in Kapp, 2020), as a rhetorical frame for autism rights movement
- Movement has since expanded to intersectional cross-disability rights activism

Contested realities

(Broderick & Ne'eman, 2008)



Autism as disease
identity



Autism as



AUTISTIC PRIDE



Autistics Speaking Day

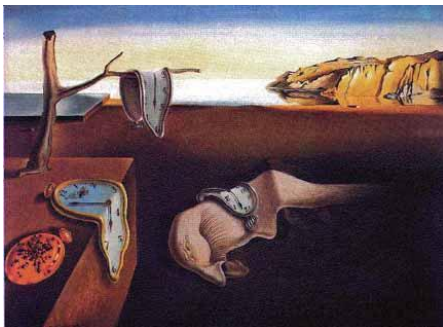


The *neuro-* in *neurodiversity*

8 years, 6 months, 4 days, 16 hours, 19 minutes, and 20 seconds

The Autistic Genocide Clock

Estimated time remaining before prenatal testing and routine abortion:



- Neurodiversity framework positions autism as essentially biological
 - Feature of being autistic, not supporter of the movement (Kapp, Gillespie-Lynch, Sherman, & Hutman, 2013)
 - Autistics more likely to define autism internally (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2017)
- Autism as 'hard-wired' part of the self (Ortega & Choudhury, 2011)
 - Autistic traits heavily overlap with personality traits (Schwartzman, Wood, & Kapp, 2016)

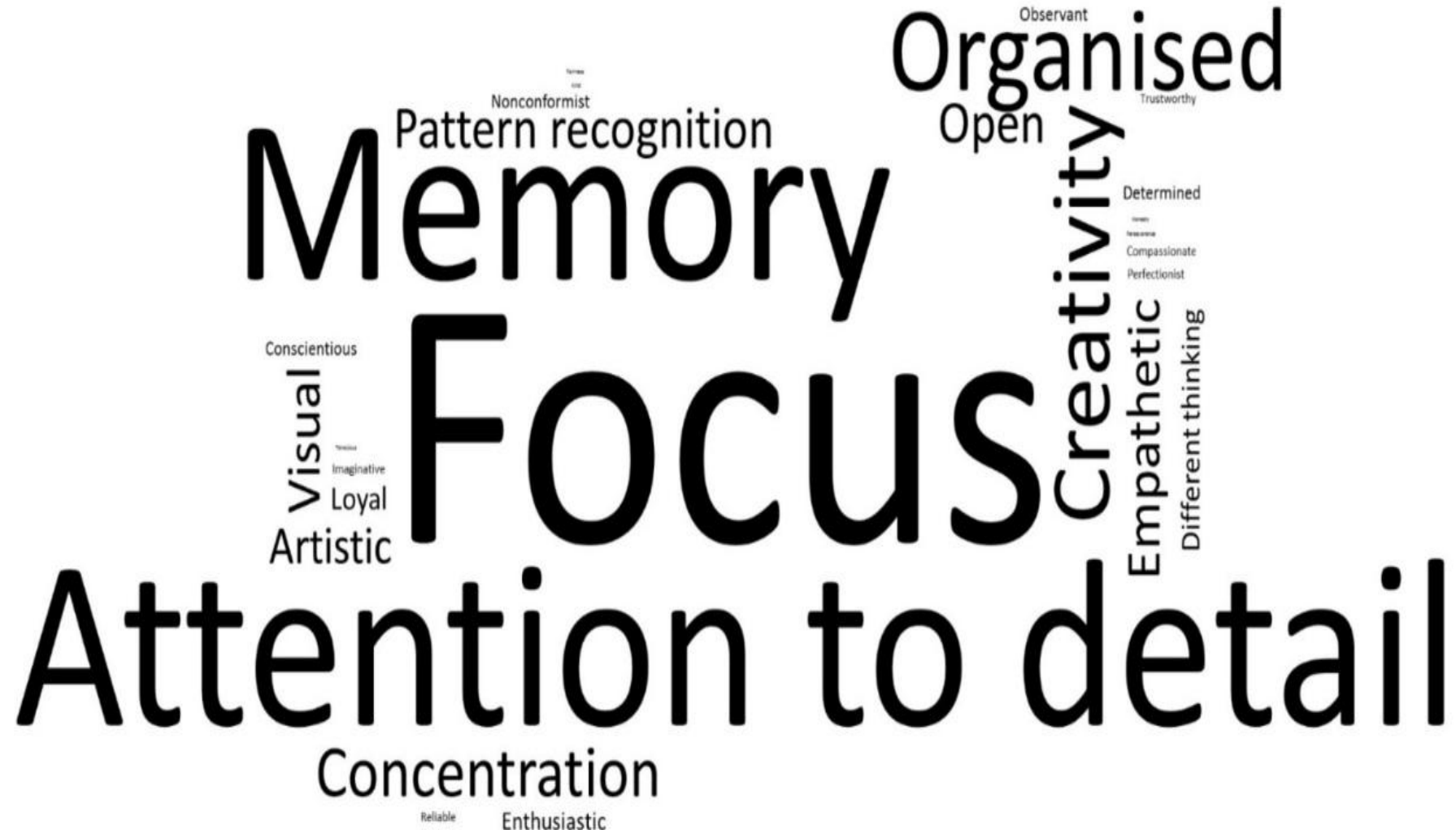
The *diversity* in neurodiversity



-
- Autism viewed as a *complex* difference (Russell et al., 2019)
 - Values experiential expertise and leadership of autistic people
 - Autistics had highest autism knowledge, related to lower stigma (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2017)
 - Quality of life (QoL), not 'cure', supported (Ne'eman, 2010; Robertson, 2010)

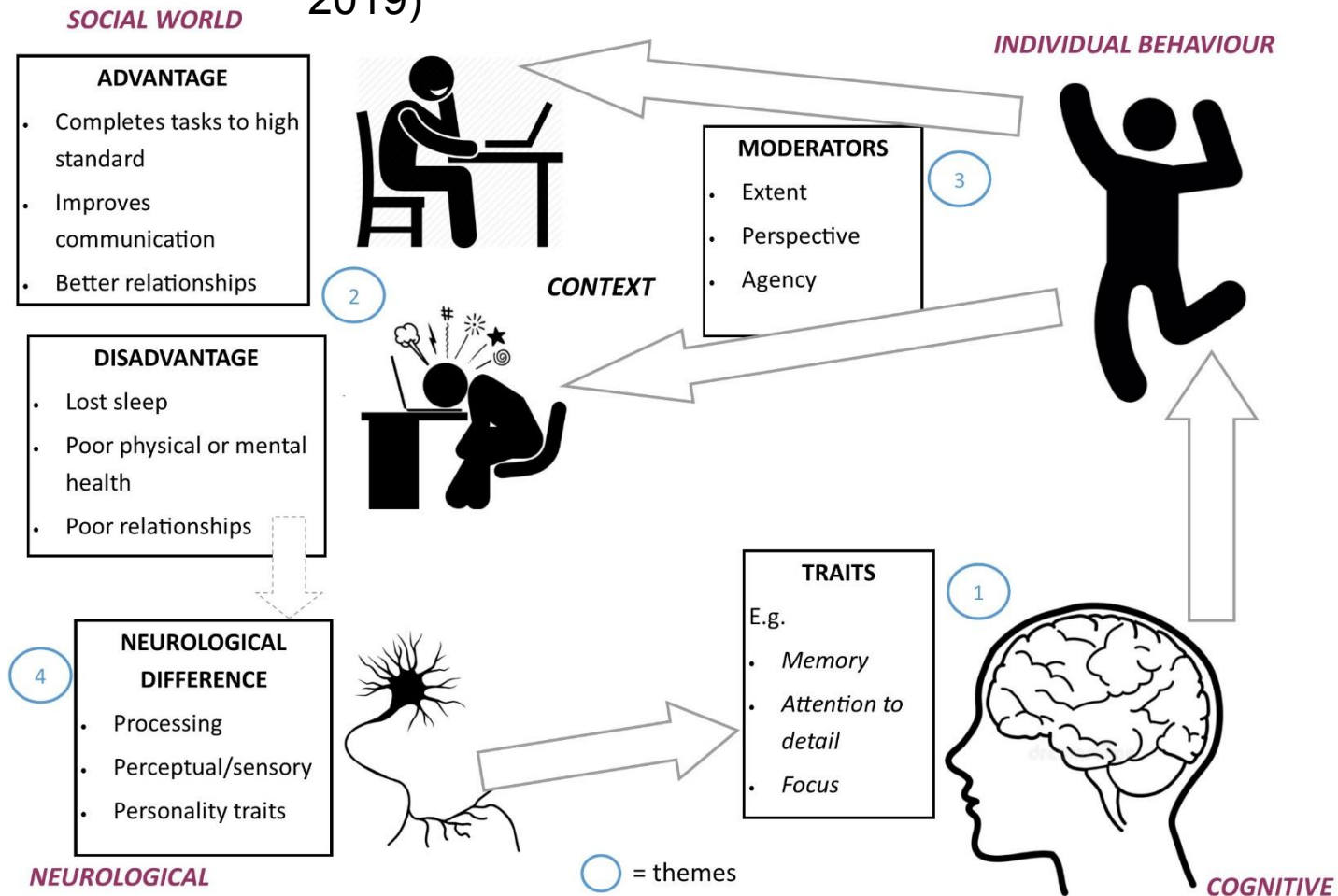
Word cloud of advantageous traits

(Russell et al.,
2019)



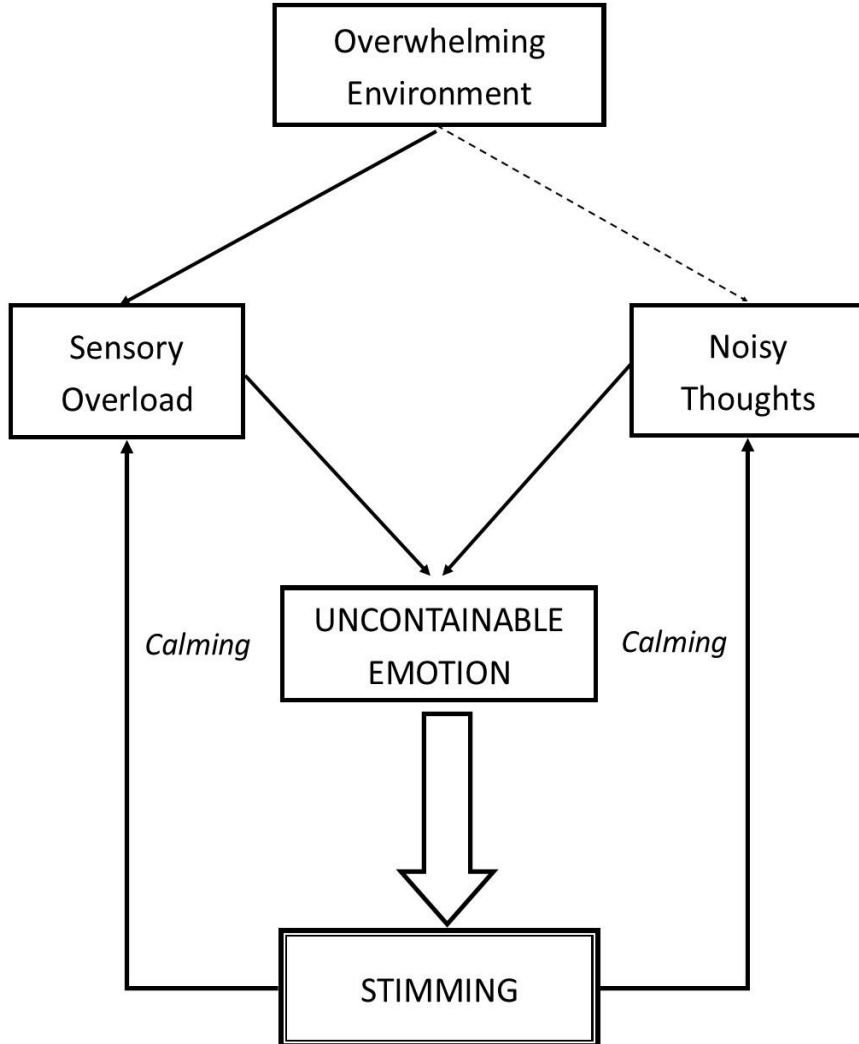
Conceptual map of whether or not traits were experienced as advantageous

(Russell et al., 2019)



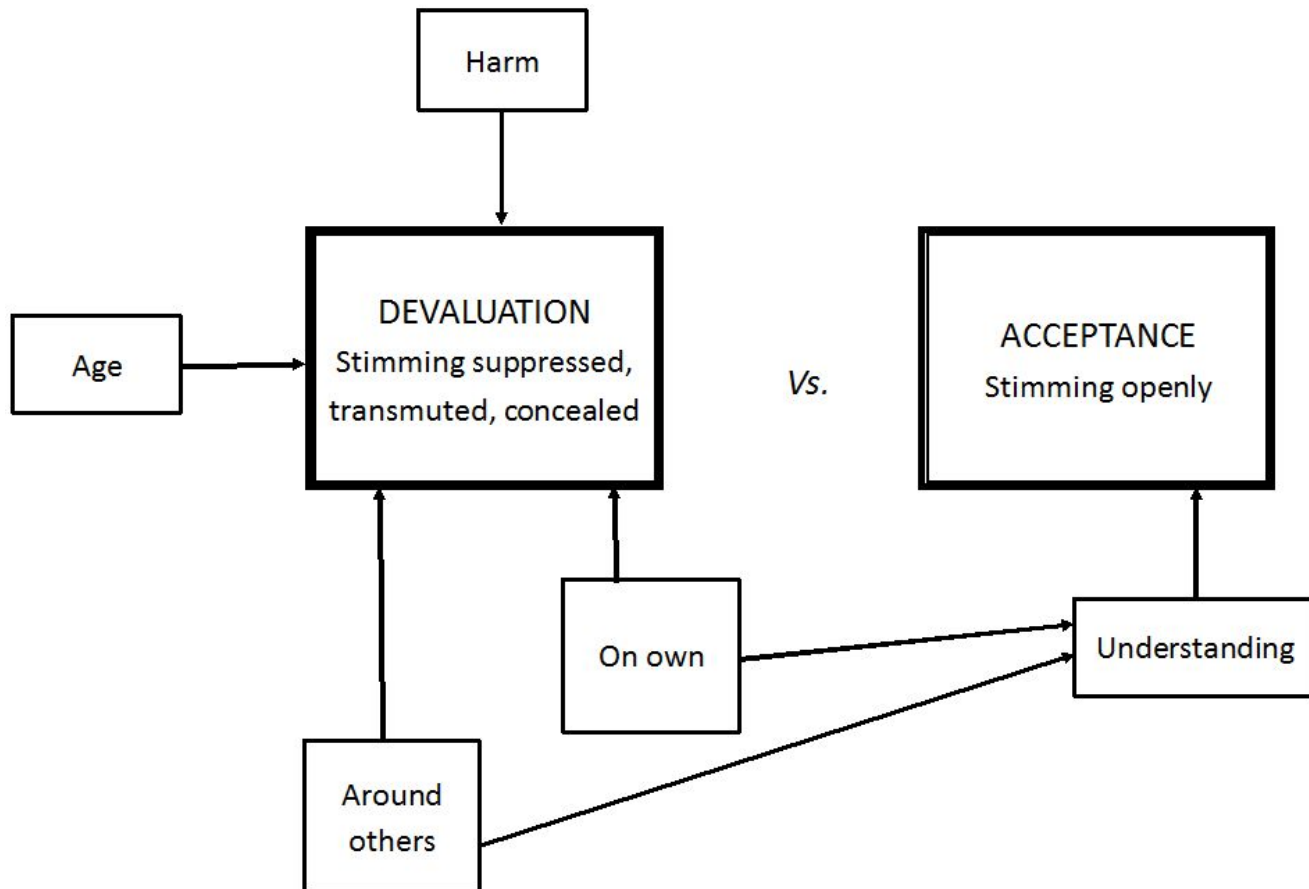
Traits as coping mechanisms: stimming

(Kapp et al., 2019b)

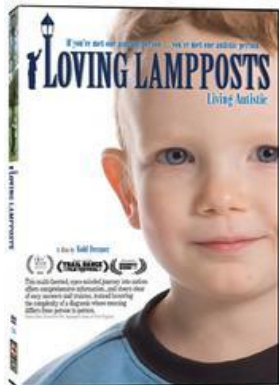
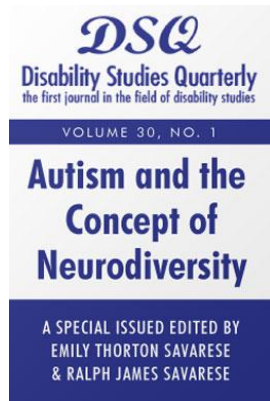
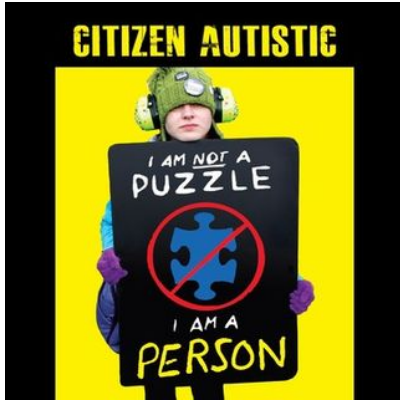


(De)stigmatisation of stimming

(Kapp et al.,
2019b)



Neurodiversity as an integrative disability model



(Kapp,
2013)

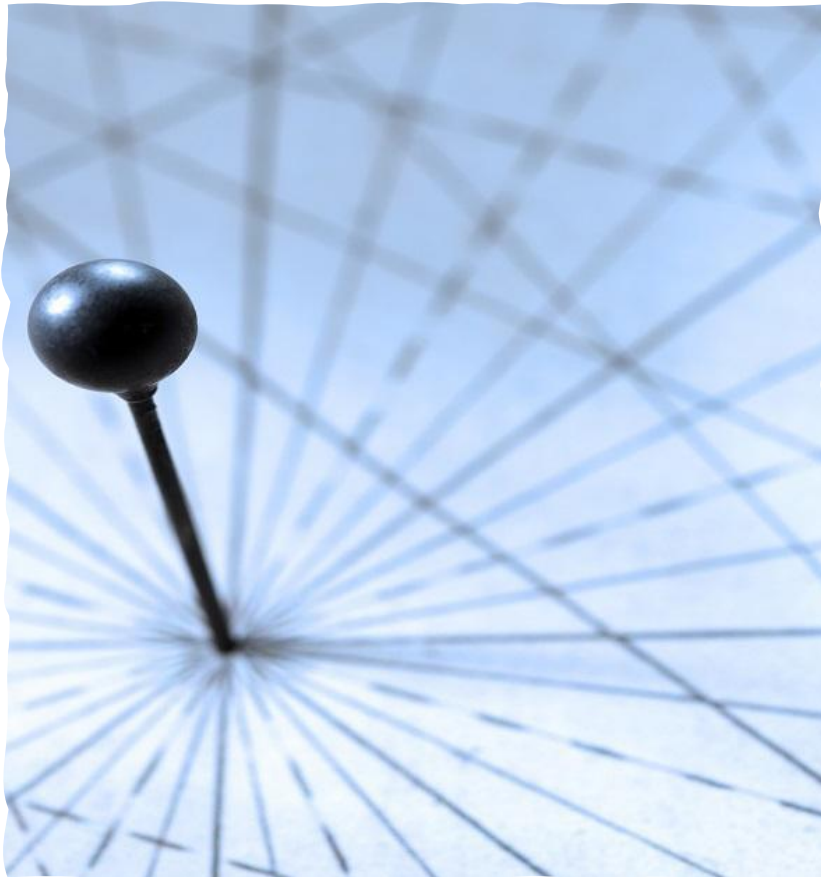
- Advocates support celebrating *and* ameliorating autism (Kapp et al., 2013)
 - Autistic people often define *autism* in nuanced ways (Kapp et al., 2017)
- Neurodiversity scholars critique social-first views of autism
 - Critique social motivation (Kapp, Goldknopf, Brooks, Kofner, & Hossain, 2019) and social cognition theories of autism (Dinishak & Akhtar, 2013)
 - Support for dynamic brain-body, person-environment interactions



Dr. TC
Waisman

Intersectionality

Intersectionality



DEFINITIONS

- N. American focus
- Where two or more lines intersect when defining one's identity
- Where multiply-marginalized individuals experience multi-issue realities
- Analytical framework: interlinking systems of power and how they afford us dis/advantages, gives us power or oppresses us

“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives”

Audre Lord



History

- Roots in 19th century Black feminist thought from Sojourner Truth to contemporary feminists including Kimberle Crenshaw, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Nikol Alexander-Floyd etc.
- Term used in critical studies: gender studies, queer studies, ethnic studies, disability studies, sociology, literature, history etc.

Sojourner Truth 1797-1883

Intersectionality & power



- Connected to the concept of intersectionality is the question of power
- Historical systems of power constitutively uphold themselves in a way that continues to oppress marginalized individuals in society
- Intersectionality **is not about** flipping power role
- Intersectionality **is about** giving equal room for voices of those traditionally oppressed to create more egalitarian society and find innovative solutions to current barriers

Intersectionality & disability



- Intersectionality essential to discourse about inclusivity
- Intersectional view of disability:
 - Those with disabilities often have other intersections that need to be considered in research, policy making, and implementation of practices
 - Challenges associated with disability is not the fault of the individual but rather a systemic issue
 - Promotes equity and social justice for disabled individuals

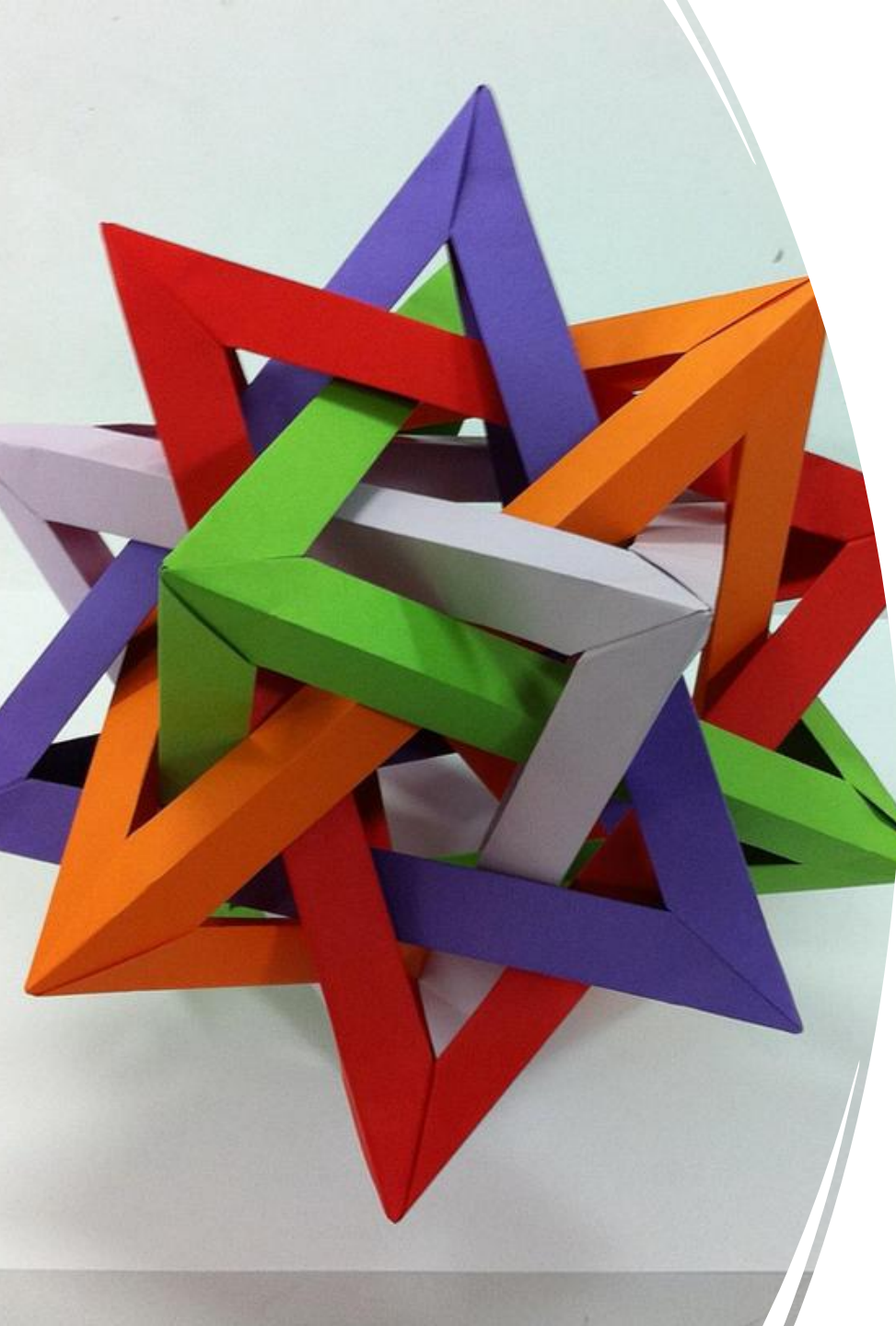
Autism in Adulthood

Mary Ann Liebert, Inc. publishers

www.liebertpub.com/aut

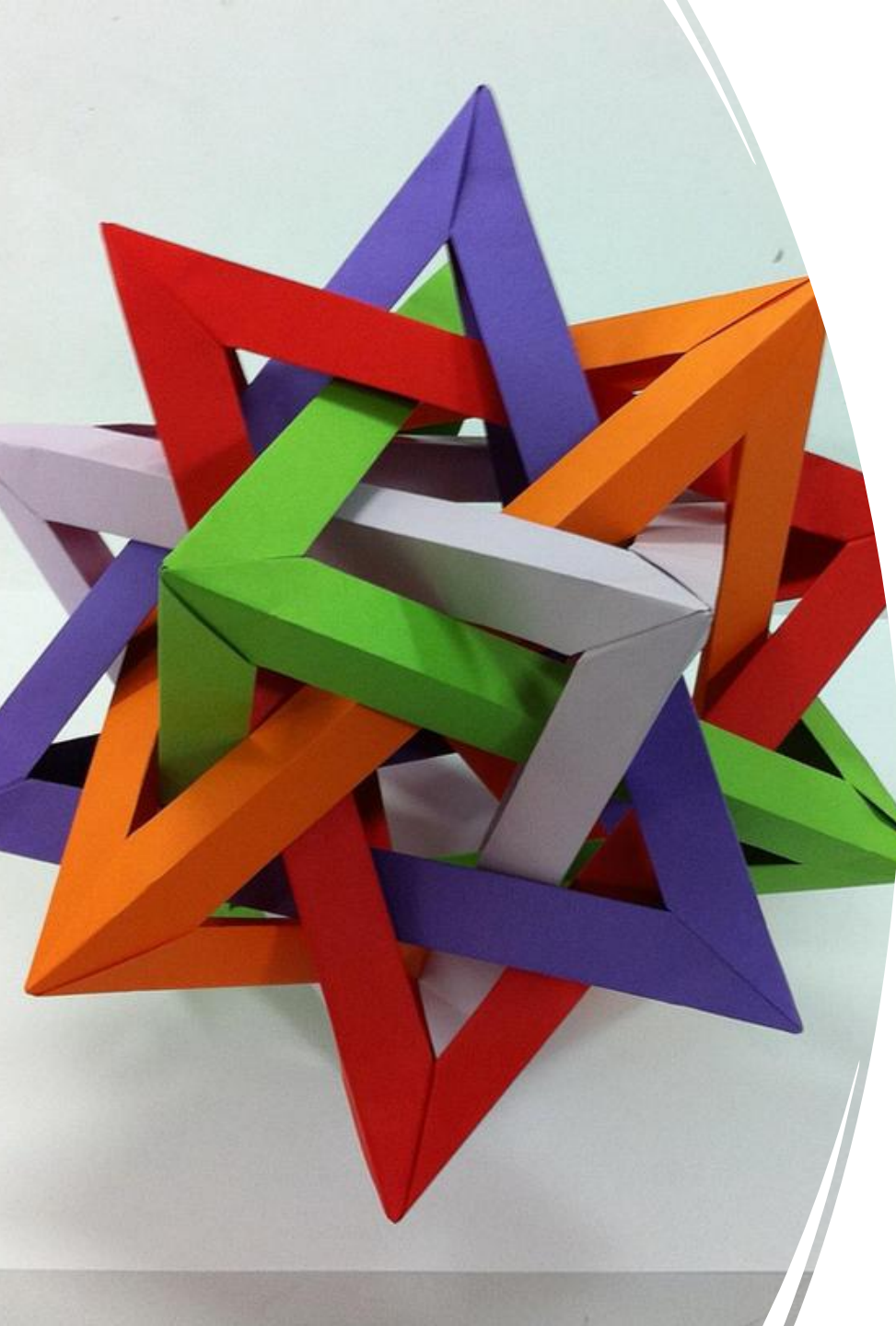
Intersectionality & autism research

- intersectionality is not meant to reduce Autistic individuals to a singular identity called disability
- Intersectionality is consistent with social model of disability, concept of neurodiversity, and adds clarity regarding how multiple social identities interact with a disabled and Autistic identity.
- Community-based participatory research



Intersectionality & autism in practice

- **Diagnosis:**
 - Autism underdiagnosed in Black and Hispanic people; limited access to support services when diagnosed
- **Higher education:**
 - Relegated to autism awareness day/week
 - Focused on perspective of autism that rarely includes intersectional perspectives e.g. LGBTQ+, Black, Asian, Latinx, Indigenous, or other co-occurring medical challenges



Intersectionality & autism in practice

- **Safety:** Cultural stereotypes can make it doubly dangerous to be Autistic and Black, Latinx, Indigenous, or have co-occurring medical identities such as schizophrenia etc.
- **Academia:** emotional & professional burden to be token, symbol, icon, 'natural experts' on all things autism (especially intersecting with race, LGBTQ+ etc.)
- **Research:** questionnaires designed by researchers from non-marginalized communities can be skewed towards particular privileged perspective and may not accurately represent intersectional autism community

Furthering the Intersectionality narrative



- Not all oppression is equal
“ain’t I a woman?”
- Liberation on one road can oppress individuals on another road
- Love (not just oppression) should be considered in narratives of intersectionality



My story

The story of intersectionality
is the story of *love*

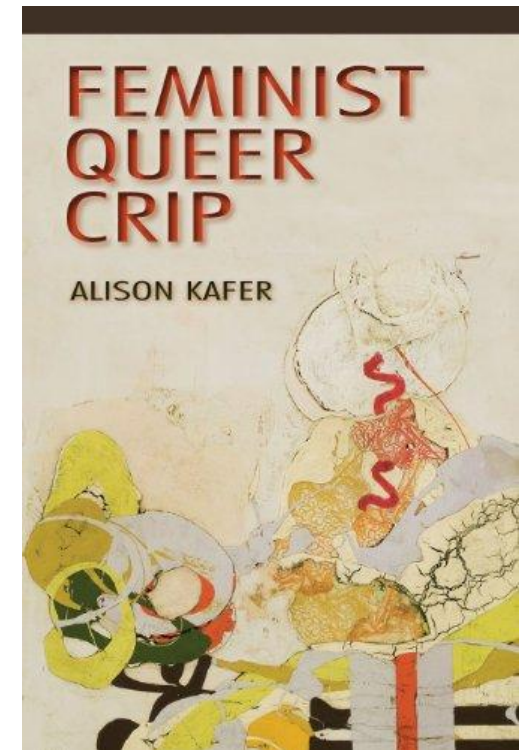


Dr. Steven Kapp

Neurodiversity and
Intersectionality

Neurodiversity and Intersectionality

- Gender, sexual intersections with autism prominent among neurodiversity activists, scholars
 - No cis men among founding members of autism rights movement, “neurodiversity” coiner
- Participation in advocacy, research high among women, gender and sexual minorities
 - Coined “neuroqueer” to recognize intersection, subvert ableism, heterosexism (Egner, 2019)
- Indeed, biological attribution of causality reduces stigma against gay people (Haider-Markel & ...)



Further intersections for autism, neurodiversity

to be pro
**NEURO
DIVERSITY**

@jtknoxroxs



is to be
**ANTI
RACIST**



- Concepts used in neurodiversity activists that originate with people of color
 - Participatory research, which uses an emancipatory perspective for Autistic people
 - “Passing” as neurotypical (somewhat akin to passing as white, straight, etc.)
- Yet more work to welcome those disadvantaged by race, immigration, class
 - e.g. Black autistic college students less likely to identify as disabled but also to feel self-efficacious (Shattuck et al., 2014)



Dr. Christina Nicolaidis

Take Home
Messages for Autism
Researchers

Intersectionality Lens

Status Quo

- Centers dominant group (e.g., white, middle-class, cis males in US or UK)
- Ignores issues of diversity or power

Disparity

- Focus on individual marginalized identities
 - E.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, SES, county

Intersectionality

- Additive: Multiply marginalized = greater barriers
- True: Multiply marginalized = totally different experience

Neurodiversity Paradigm

Status Quo

Autism as Disease

Medical Model of Disability

Deficit Focus

Focus on Individual (or
parent)

Neurodiversity

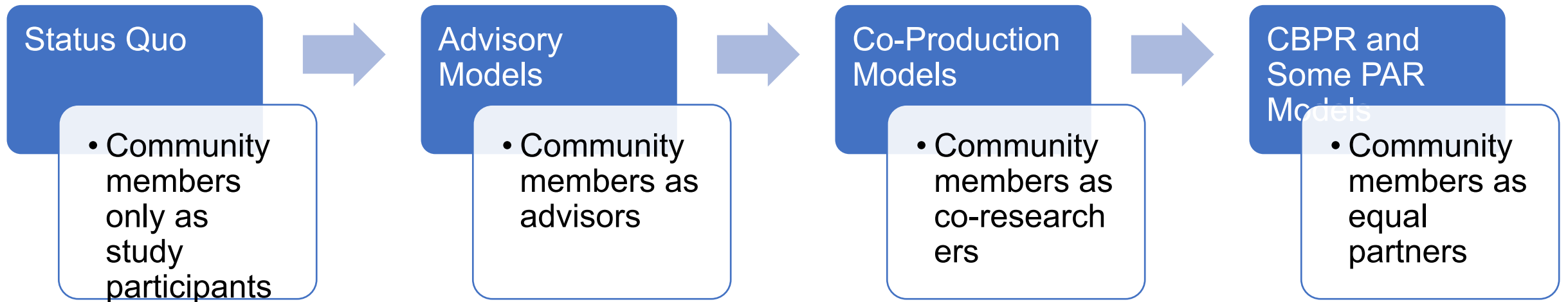
Autism as Identity

Social Model of Disability

Strength-Based

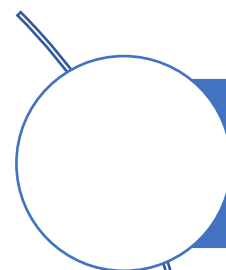
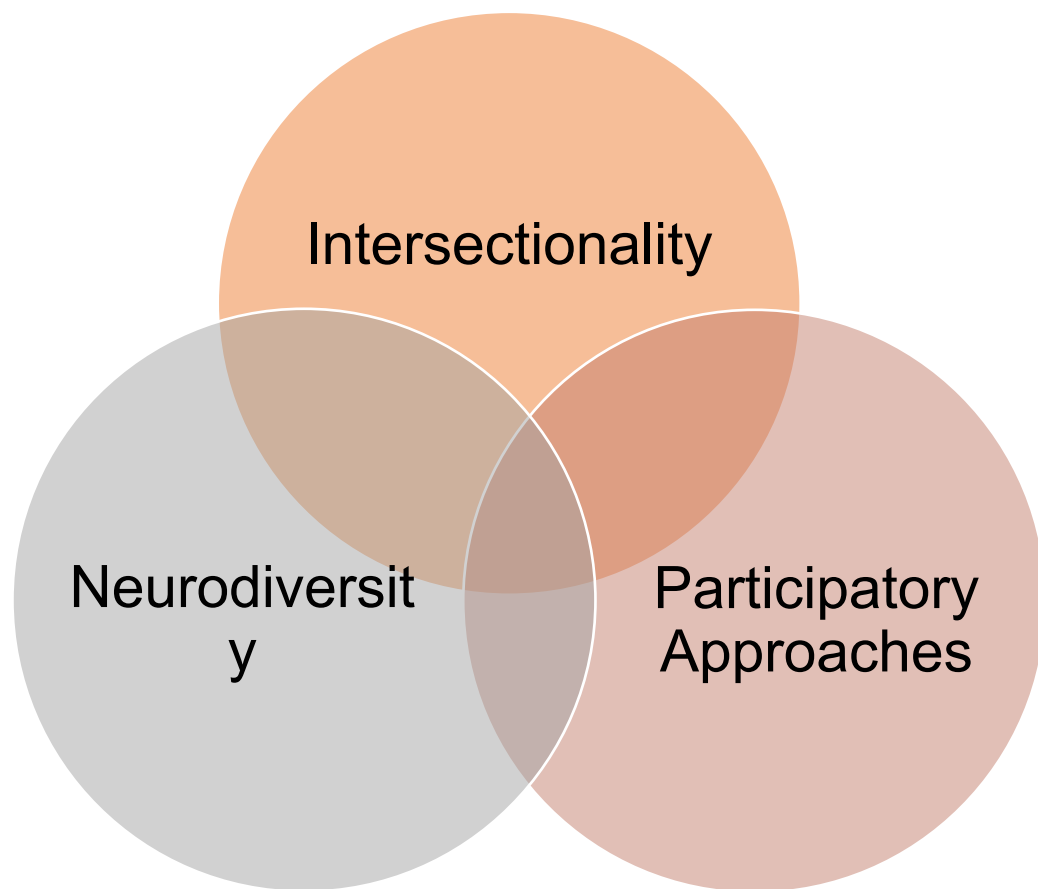
Individual in Context

Participatory Approaches*

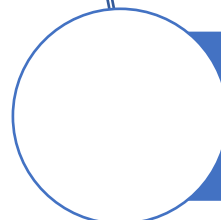


* In addition to efforts to increase diversity in academia / support insider researchers

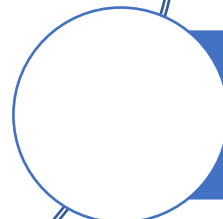
Putting it All Together



Can you think of an autism study in each part of the diagram?



Where do you want your own research to fall?



What will it take to make that happen?

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Questions & Answers



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Coming Soon: INSAR STC Anti-racism Resources Repository
Email StudentCommittee@autism-insar.org for more information

Presentation Discussion Resources

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/resources/books/empowering-leadership-a-systems-change-guide-for-autistic-college-students-and-those-with-other-disabilities/#:~:text=About-,Empowering%20Leadership%3A%20A%20Systems%20Change%20Guide%20for%20Autistic%20College%20Students,our%20Empowering%20Disabled%20Leaders%20project>

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