



# Neurodivergent Women in the Workplace

By Grace Owens

# Introduction



Pip Jamieson shared her initial struggles with dyslexia when entering the workforce:

- She felt ashamed of her dyslexia.
- Now, she is known as "Delightfully Dyslexic" and is the founder of *The Dots*, a professional network company for creative work.

In a podcast titled *The Hidden 20%*:

- Pip Jamieson discussed the challenges she faced as a dyslexic woman starting out in the workplace (YouTube, n.d.).
- She highlighted how her dyslexia eventually became her superpower and a source of creativity (*Being dyslexic helps me get creative*: *One tech entrepreneur on her sources of inspiration*, n.d.).

# Introduction

- Neurodivergent women aged 20-40 encounter societal and behavioral barriers:
  - These barriers are related to gender norms and workplace biases.
  - On a daily basis, they face biases linked to both their gender and stereotypes associated with neurodiversity.
- How companies handle these challenges is essential for growth:
  - Addressing biases against neurodivergent women is critical.
- The analysis will demonstrate:
  - How companies can include neurodivergent women.
  - The benefits of inclusion.
  - Strategies for HR departments to promote an inclusive culture.

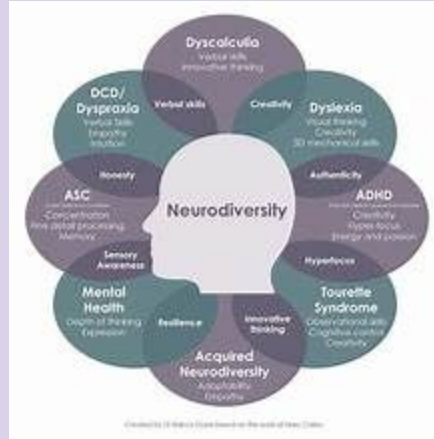


THE NEURODIVERGENT WOMAN  
PODCAST



# Neurodivergence

- Definition of Neurodiversity/Neurodivergent:
  - A non medical term describing individuals whose brains develop or work differently for some reason (Neurodivergent: What it is, symptoms & types, n.d.).
- Examples of Neurodivergent Conditions:
  - Autism
  - Dyslexia
  - ADHD
  - Various cognitive functions that are natural and not deficits to be corrected.



- Challenges in the Workplace:
  - Global workplaces fail to accommodate neurodivergent traits, especially for women.
  - This leads to significant disadvantages for neurodivergent individuals.
- Impact on Women:
  - Women face biases surrounding social competence, empathy, and emotional intelligence.
  - Neurodivergent women who do not meet these expectations are perceived as:
    - Incompetent
    - Ill-suited for specific roles
    - Unsuitable for promotions and strong work performance.

# Diagnosis of Neurodivergent Women

- Challenges in Diagnosing Neurodivergent Women:
  - Women are underdiagnosed or misdiagnosed due to diagnostic criteria primarily tested on men (Cook et al., 2024, p. 506).
  - Diagnostic procedures for autism often focus on social interactions or difficulty maintaining friendships.
    - These procedures identify a lack of friendships as a diagnostic marker for both genders.
- Gender Differences in Autism Diagnosis:
  - Research shows autistic boys tend to have fewer intimate friendships.
  - This pattern does not apply in the same way to autistic girls (Cook et al., 2024, p. 507).



- Impact of Diagnostic Gaps:
  - A continuous lack of resources and support for neurodivergent women, particularly in professional environments.
- Workplace Challenges for Autistic Women:
  - Women may exhibit strong analytical and problem-solving skills but struggle with social interactions.
  - These social difficulties can lead to misunderstandings and misjudgments in workplace settings.

# Biases and Intersectionality

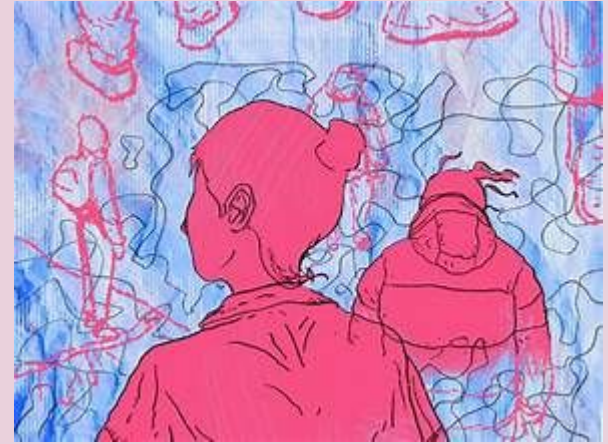
- Intersection of Gender Bias and Ableism:
  - Gender biases intersect with ableism (discrimination against individuals with disabilities), creating significant challenges for neurodivergent women.
- Role of Intersectionality:
  - Intersectionality provides a framework for understanding how various aspects of identity (e.g., race, gender, social class, sexuality) interact to create unique experiences of privilege or oppression (Intersectionality, n.d.).



- Pressure to Conform:
  - Neurodivergent women face pressure to conform to societal norms.
  - This often leads to "masking," where individuals suppress their neurodivergent traits to appear "normal."
- Consequences of Masking:
  - Significant psychological stress
  - Increased risk of burnout
  - Decreased job satisfaction
  - Disengagement from work (Cook et al., 2024, p. 507)

# Stereotypes

- Stereotyping as a Key Bias:
  - Neurodiverse women face damaging stereotypes.
- Examples of Misinterpreted Traits:
  - Direct communication styles may be seen as rudeness.
  - Difficulty with eye contact may be perceived as disinterest (Russo et al., 2023, p. 47).
- Impact on Career Progression:
  - Prejudices influence performance evaluations, leading to:
    - Unfair assessments
    - Limited opportunities for promotion
- Perceptions of Neurodivergent Women:
  - Often seen as less approachable or team-oriented.
  - These perceptions negatively impact career growth (Komarow et al., 2020, p. 36).





# Barriers

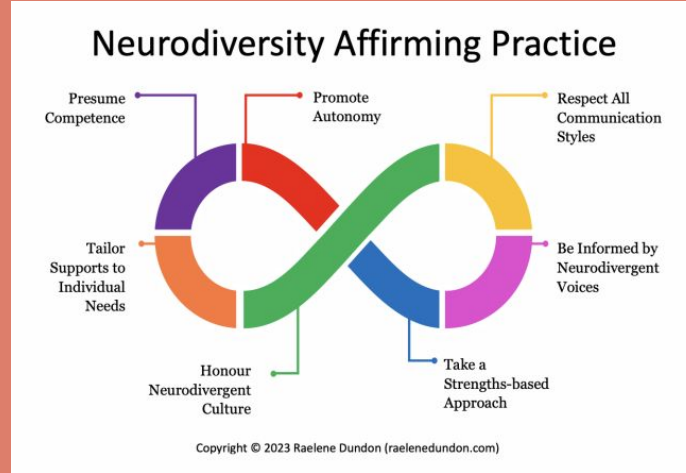


- Barriers to Career Advancement for Neurodivergent Women:
  - Stereotypes portray them as less competent or incapable of handling leadership roles.
- Impact of Assertiveness Stereotypes:
  - Assertiveness, valued in leadership, may be perceived as aggression in neurodiverse women who struggle with social cues (Goff et al., 2022, p.19).
  - This double standard limits career mobility, especially in male-dominated fields.
- Exclusion from Professional Networks:
  - Neurodiverse women are more likely to be excluded from:
    - Informal networks.
    - Mentoring opportunities for career advancement (Goff et al., 2022, p.19).
- Consequences of Limited Support:
  - Lower job satisfaction.
  - Reduced productivity.
  - Higher turnover rates among neurodivergent females.



# Storytelling to Promote Change

- Storytelling as a Powerful Tool:
  - Storytelling can effectively change perceptions within organizations.
  - Promoting dialogues about successful neurodivergent women helps shift social and cultural attitudes to reduce stigmas.



- Shifting Focus from Deficits to Strengths:
  - By emphasizing the unique skills of neurodiverse women, companies can:
    - Change the narrative from perceived weaknesses to strengths.
    - Foster a more supportive and inclusive work environment (Russo et al., 2023, p. 48).

- Benefits of This Approach:
  - Encourages empathy among employees.
  - Highlights the strengths that neurodivergent employees bring to the table (Russo et al., 2023, p. 47).

- Corporate Examples:
  - Companies like SAP have successfully implemented storytelling campaigns.
    - These campaigns demonstrate the accomplishments of neurodivergent employees.
    - Lead to a more inclusive culture within the organization.

# Communication

## SUPPORTING SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

### *Neurodiversity-Affirming approach*

1. Validate and increase their confidence in their abilities to socially communicate
2. Educate around differences between ND and NT communication styles
3. Develop self-advocacy, self-determined autonomy and problem-solving skills
4. Advocate about social differences and acceptance of these differences as diversity
5. Advocate for accommodations and supports needed for them to thrive

*nurture speech pathology*

- Role of Communication:
  - Communication shapes social realities, not just exchanges information.
- Importance of Inclusive Language:
  - Promotes a culture where neurodivergent women feel valued.
- Key Practices for Inclusion:
  - Rethinking performance evaluations to accommodate diverse needs.
  - Normalizing alternative communication styles.
  - Providing flexible work arrangements.
- Strategies for Implementation:
  - Training managers to identify and support diverse communication styles.
  - Using inclusive neurodivergent language in:
    - Job descriptions
    - Performance reviews
- Offering neurodiversity awareness workshops for all employees (Komarow et al., 2020, p. 37).

# Overcoming Challenges

- Impact of Traditional Gender Expectations:

- Women are often penalized for not conforming to stereotypical behaviors.
- Neurodivergent women may display traits perceived as counter to these expectations, such as:

- Being overly direct.
- Appearing emotionally detached.



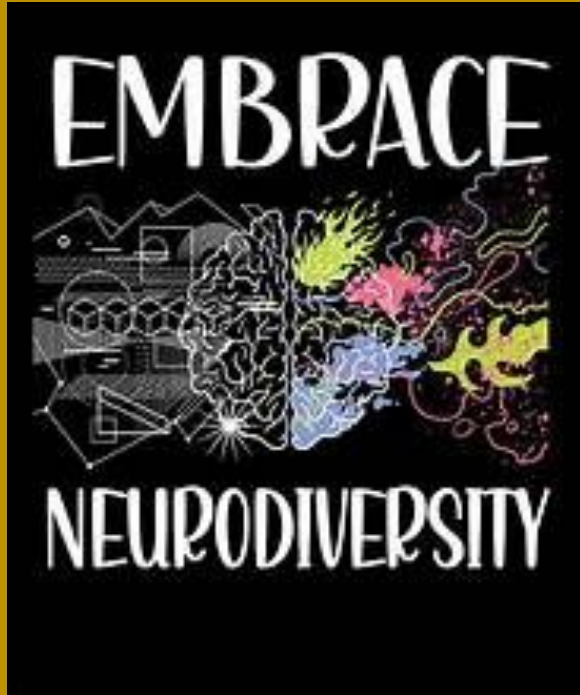
- Role of HR Departments:

- Challenge gendered norms to ensure fair evaluations.
- Implement strategies such as:
  - Bias training.
  - Redefining leadership criteria to focus on outcomes rather than traditional gender-based behaviors.

- Benefits of Promoting Diverse Leadership Styles:

- Improves team dynamics.
- Enhances innovation (Naidoo, 2022, p.3).

# Neurodivergent Skills



- Strengths of Neurodivergent Individuals:
  - Excel in fields requiring:
    - Creative thinking.
    - Attention to detail.
    - Problem-solving.
- Benefits of Embracing Neurodiversity:
  - Increased innovation and productivity (Russo, 2023, p.51).
  - Unique perspectives contribute significantly to team success, as demonstrated by companies like Microsoft.
- Advantages of Inclusive Workplaces:
  - Attract diverse talent and improve employee retention rates (Praslova, 2008).
  - Seen as desirable employers, leading to a competitive market advantage (Praslova, 2008).
- Impact on Employee Retention:
  - Valued and supported employees are less likely to leave.
  - Reduces turnover costs and enhances organizational stability.

# Conclusion

- Importance of Inclusivity:
  - Creating an inclusive work environment for neurodivergent women is essential.
  - Offers a strategic advantage for organizations.



## ● Future of Workplace Diversity:

- Integrating neurodiversity into diversity and inclusion initiatives is vital.
- Supports the development of equitable and sustainable organizations.

- Benefits of Addressing Biases:
  - Recognizing and addressing biases faced by neurodivergent women enables:
    - Unlocking untapped potential.
    - Driving innovation
    - Enhancing employee satisfaction.

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