

## Outer Space Case: A Revelation Revolution

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### Abstract

This paper affirms my belief that social media provides morphing platforms of potential where neurodivergent users can reach in for belonging, reach out to humanity, form identity, and perform unmasked in a self-woven network. I have written this while considering social media affordances as aids to human neurodiversity, including examples. Here I offer thoughts following research and my lived experience that has led me to state this hypothesis. It is viewed through a liquid lens to show how identity blooms as it will when growing in a sensory third space – virtually extending in a fertile creative environment.

### Introduction

Actor and comedian Jim Carrey lives large with ADHD and dyslexia. In his film ‘The Mask’, he dons a disguise while stepping out into the world and distracts the status quo from his own vulnerabilities. While in the real world, he diverges. Rather than shrinking himself to preconceived ideas of who a neurodivergent person should be, he has taken and shaken the limits of the media snow globe with sheer panache and visionary visibility. Carrey spoke of artfully dodging self-denial in his commencement speech at the Maharishi University of Iowa: “Your need for acceptance can make you invisible in this world. Don't let anything stand in the way of the light that shines through this form. Risk being seen in all of your glory.” (Jim Carrey, 2014, para. 17). Suburban ennui makes for a gated mind. Without eye-opening outings and the stimulation of fresh human company, we are left to wilt like unwatered flowers. Genetic inbreeding of our thoughts will ensue. Possibilities in life are thwarted. These limitations are manifest tenfold for minority groups, and the impact grows in devastation for the already mentally isolated among us. Social media can function as high-roofed houses inhabited by open hearts and like-minded humanity. I see there somewhere called speakeasy, but a licit establishment, where the suffocating illusory mask we so often feel obliged to wear can be cast

aside. A room of relief to enable the stretching, strengthening and subsequent growth of identity. I contend that this elusive sensory third space can be found floating and virtually embraced in social media land. My essay seeks to traverse the digital landscape and magnify why I see it as a place of endless possibilities for the combined minority groups who are working on breaking free from the restrictions of what were unimaginatively nebulous classifications and redefining themselves as better suits their fabulous forms. My script will introduce you to this diverse cast of well-rehearsed good actors and place them in a scenic location – a panoramic setting – one where they are able to shine truly. Social media is a sensory third space where neurodivergent users can access support, share their lived experiences, and embrace the art of maskless communication.

## **Neurodivergence**

Neurodivergent is an umbrella term representing certain developmental disorders that encompasses but is not limited to autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bipolar, dyslexia, dyspraxia, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Hapa and Asian American autistic rights activist Kassiane Asasumasu coined the term ‘neurodivergence’, referring to neurocognitive conditions that depart from dominant neurotypical functioning (Walker, 2014, as cited in Logan, 2020, p. 5). It is estimated that between 10% and 20% of the world’s population comprises people with this wide range of mental orientations, as reported by Deloitte in 2022. Australian sociologist Judy Singer coined the term ‘neurodiversity’, which is hailed as a breakthrough advocacy swing with unlimited social potential (Craft, 2023). It is a recognition of our differences and a celebration of the individuality implicit within human identity (Singer, 1998). Kate Ellis and Gerard Goggin note how traditional media has been slow in the accessibility uptake for users with specific needs. Despite this dragging effect, disability media activism has grown exponentially while minority groups refuse to be cornered as voiceless charity cases or have their value as both viewers and content creators disregarded within this space (2018). In his seminal work on what makes a ‘great good place’, sociologist Ray Oldenburg writes of our human need for environmental mercy and occasional distance from those who just happen to be nearest us (1989). This need only expands for the neurodivergent who already struggle to fit in with what is widely perceived

by society to be acceptable behaviour and are commonly stigmatised for their individuality. Oldenburg's coined term 'third space' refers to a casual but vital escape room. If our first place is home, and the second is work, what of the people who might struggle with communal or individual comfort in either of those places? A third space then becomes a literal lifeline that loops back to rather than obscures themselves (1989). The ability to wield one's strengths without feeling overwhelmed becomes us and is a levelling force. How to reclaim and own the neurodivergent person within? Transcendent travel opens doors and overrides the gatekeepers of old. A sensory space is required, one which offers a level of environmental control that is so often fleeting when mixing with neurotypical people – socially pliable media.

## **Identity**

Individual growth requires room to move, whether physically or mentally. It is noted by Brenda Danet (2001, as cited by Charles Soukup, 2006) that in an online environment, the conversational emphasis can shift toward identity play, where we can then choose to honestly represent who we wish to be (p. 425). This presents a fluid opportunity to rise to ourselves or dress up as we will, depending on mood or headspace. Safe private and public spaces are vital for oppressed individuals to collectively explore their identities and flourish, as stated by Jamie Logan (2020). Even as knowledge spreads, backlash occurs, and the dance toward acceptance is at times joyful but also erratic as shaped by the current hierarchy and defined by political persuasion. But progress is steady, and communities at large will only be enriched by this long overdue assumptive shakeup. Neurodiversity research by Monique Botha and Kristen Gillespie-Lynch concludes that autism can no longer be defined as a condition that limits social interaction but is a social identity and culture unto itself – one replete with role models and reinforced room for individuals to move within and flourish in turn (2022). Neurodivergent users can readily access positive support from credible sources on social media. Learning the truth about their unique thought processes goes a long way toward self-acceptance for people who have been slapped with 'lazy' labels. Twitter has a wide variety of educational groups where individuals can drop in as fits their energy levels, learn how to own their identities and leave with boosted morale: 'Understood' aids people in self-acceptance while leading and guiding them through diagnoses, 'Decoding Dyslexia CA' spreads knowledge of reading or learning difficulties, and

‘Phenomenally Autistic’ is an example of the many neurodivergent people who offer inspiration for others to own their identity and live creatively large. The concept of the neurodivergent community as being a group of people who are lacking is being steadily challenged as evidence proves that they are instead biologically individual and a constant representation of diverse humanity (Silberman, 2015). Although it is not a physical space but symbolic by nature, the digital world can transcend this difference and work well as a third space when visitors use it to explore real-world community issues as a platform for advocacy (Soukup, 2006).

## **Advocacy**

Social media offers moderated rooms of opportunity where the marginalised can meet to bolster each other both singularly and as a combined concern. Private groups range from generalised to more specific assistance; Facebook examples include the Neurodivergent Cleaning Crew, which focuses on sharing tips to help people stay on top of their home cleaning tasks, and the Neurodivergent Educators Australia group provides support for people who work in the education sector and are diagnosed as neurodivergent themselves or who think they may be. There are also public groups which welcome allies such as the Global Neurodivergent Community, and these spaces are fertile gardens of advocacy growth. Hashtags are an organic method of disseminating information about social movements. These are common categorisations on social media sites including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, TikTok and Twitter. Some of the most popular current hashtags promoting neurodiversity and gathering the neurodivergent crowd are #neurodivergent, #neurodiversity, #neurodivergentperformers, #neurodivergentqueer, #adhd, and #autismacceptance. As campaign magnets for like-minded niches to cluster around, they are virtually symbolic of advocacy. Analysis of the hashtags #ActuallyAutistic and #AskingAutistics has been conducted by Justine Egner via the Twittiverse, showing widespread identity construction supported by collective advocacy ingenuity. By breaking out of stereotypical conceptions, autistic Twitter users create deeper meaning in their lives from within these groups. Innovation reigns supreme, while negative cultural assumptions are positively rejected (2022). Betts et al. explore the cultural impetus that arose from the neurodivergent written experience throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and how it normalises the diversity of human identity while shining a light on the tyranny of treating this

with pressured medicalisation. Humans have a right to own their story and tell it how they will without the enforcement of direction and limitations of boxing (2023). In a time when isolation was enforced upon communities, we can learn from the ones who are familiar with these conditions as their lived experience and see how they not only cope but thrive regardless. This is observed by Leadbitter et al. as a social and political wave of tremendous impact that has been charged by the internet and upheld on the platforms existing in the digital world. The autistic community have been trailblazers of the neurodiversity movement, steadily promoting the validity of individual autonomy and the concept of self-advocacy (2021).

### **Maskless Play**

Social interaction is a complicated mental manoeuvre for the neurodivergent. The need for concealment of self when in the company of others to better fit in is a constant and exhausting process. ‘Masking’ is a term used to describe the act of camouflage when feeling essentially obliged to appear neurotypical. Beth Radulski writes on this coping mechanism for those with autism and ADHD. The constant monitoring of social cues to cover up who you are reveals the danger that is so often inherent within this human experience. From casual exposure to strangers and wider social rejection, education and employment discrimination to legal vulnerability, the situation is precarious and often lonely (2023). What entails is continual stigma management, whereby human contact handling takes up valuable energy that could be actively employed elsewhere within a virtual space – one where individual control is built in. When communicating online, less effort can be spent on specific masking practices to appear socially qualified, as described by Perry et al. – practising facial expressions, maintaining eye contact, and sticking to a standard script (2022). What can work here is the ownership of readily available strengths and the honouring of a dedicated sensory space rather than forced false exposure. This is where a pragmatic approach toward social science can make a dramatic difference in the possibilities of a neurodivergent life. According to Hans Joas et al., the combination of logic and creativity reveals an overgrown path toward a visionary exchange of ideas. Society places a value on creativity, its propensity to spread knowledge and the potential to revisit problems and innovate solutions (2011). Social media now provides a sensory space whereby otherwise marginalised people can afford to stretch out, reveal their true capabilities, and share them with the world at large. This

brings limitless scope to the arts and sciences and hope for a finer society (Joas et al., 2011). Cambridge professor and cognitive neuroscientist Simon Baron-Cohen speaks of a future where neurodiversity is not just accepted but assumed and respected as an alternative way of thinking (2019). Humanity benefits from the coming together of two new frontiers ... psychological understanding and online interaction. The innate ability to hyperfocus, entrepreneurial instinct and novel content creation distinctions within the neurodivergent crowd are an ideal fit for social media.

## **Conclusion**

My philosophy towards neurodivergency arose from asking myself who I truly am, and not accepting who society tells me to be. In this essay, I am talking about a revolution of like-minded people who have decided not to be categorised and housed in societal cells but instead to break free from the shackles and celebrate the phenomenon that is us. I have found the ideal place to be, a space that I can drop into at will and without diminishment, demonstrate the real me. Social media is a place where people who happen to be neurodivergent can name themselves, dress as they will and be who they say they are on any given day.

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