



NEURODIVERSITY

An Introduction For Lawyers

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WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

Neurodiversity is a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation

- All brains work differently – whether you are **neurotypical** or **neurodivergent**
- Many forms of neurodivergence include differences in communication & thinking
- 1 in 7 people can be considered neurodivergent



Neurodivergent individuals include those with Autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, Tourette Syndrome, intellectual disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, and acquired cognitive disabilities.



“**Neurodiversity** may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general.

Who can say what form of wiring will prove best at any given moment?”

- Harvey Blume (1998)

NEURODIVERSITY AND THE LEGAL PROFESSION

- Research from the National Association for Law Placement suggests between **2.5% and 3.5% of law school graduates self-identify with having a disability.**
- NALP surveys also find a **salary disparity** for disabled lawyers
- But the NALP 2019 Diversity Report tells a story, too:
 - **0.55% of lawyers self-reported having a disability.**
 - 0.59 % of associates and 0.46% of partners self-reported disabilities.
- **ABA Mental Health Study** (Krill et. al, 2016):
 - 28% of lawyers suffer from depression
 - 19% suffer from anxiety
 - 12.5% have ADHD

STIGMA & MICROAGGRESSIONS

“Everybody’s a little autistic. We’re all on the spectrum.”



“Why don’t you understand that? It’s so easy!”

“I never would have known if you didn’t tell me.”

Microaggressions are rooted in ableism. **Ableism** is prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination against people with disabilities. A lot of ableism is entrenched in the belief neurodivergent people are “broken” and need to be “fixed” and act more neurotypical.



NEURODIVERSITY AS AN ACCEPTANCE FRAMEWORK

- Shifting towards acceptance rather than awareness
- Why we need neurodiversity (according to neurodivergent people):
 - Mutual understanding
 - Tolerance and acceptance as a positive part of society
 - Being respected as an equal
 - Equal opportunity
 - Equity

BEING INCLUSIVE OF NEURODIVERSITY

- Starting from the top down with **openness and vulnerability**
- Aligning people to their strengths
- Having open and meaningful communication
 - "How to work with me"
- Implementing **universal design**:
 - "Design of buildings, products or environments to make them accessible to all people, regardless of age, disability or other factors"
- Encouraging neurodiverse **mentorship and leadership**

