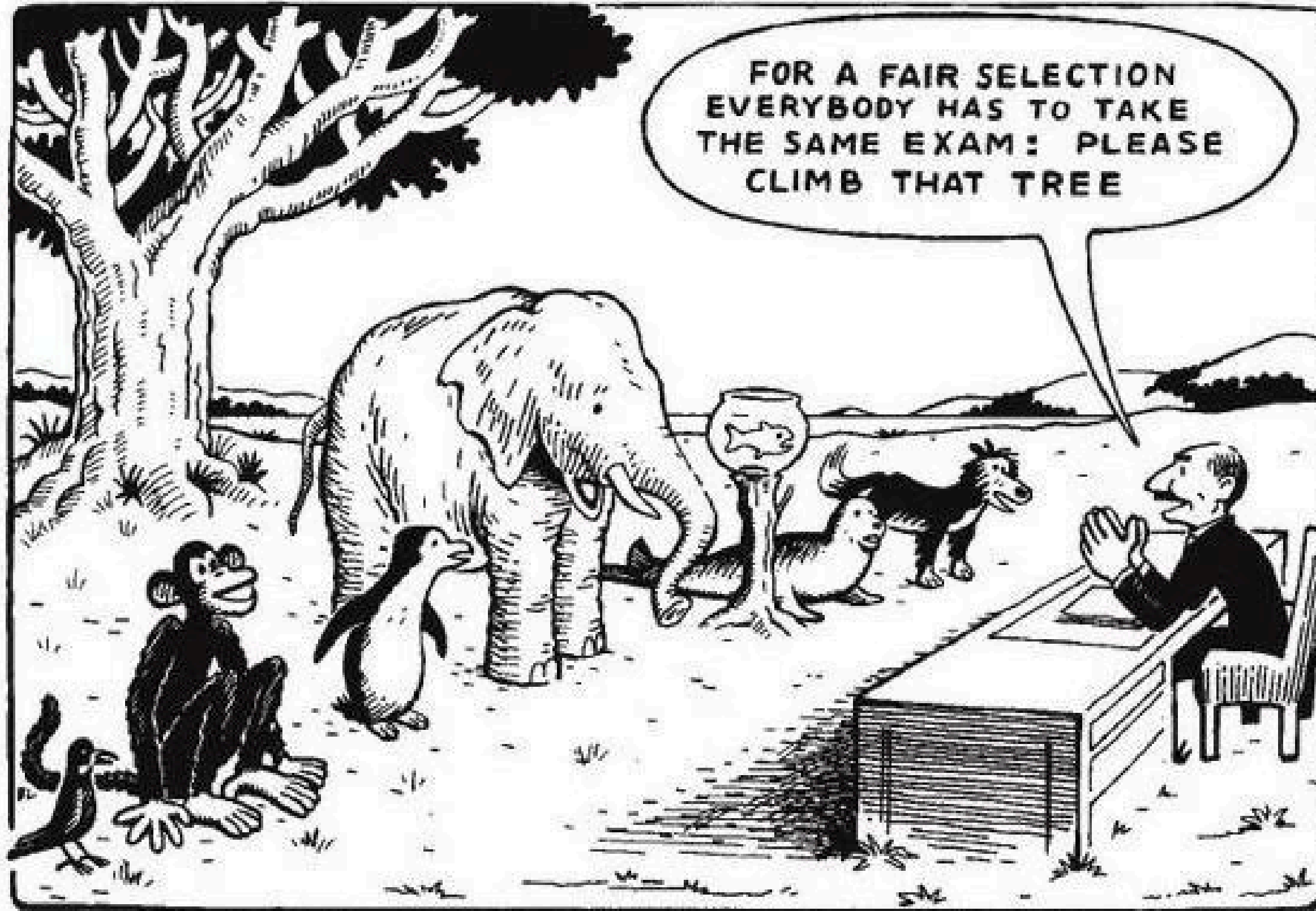




NEURODIVERSITY AFFIRMING PRACTICES FOR PATH INTL. PROFESSIONALS

Melanie Dominko-Richards,
MS. CCC-SLP, HPCS

PATH Intl.
Region 2 Conference
2024



-BARRY LINTON

INTRODUCTION

- BS in Education from Seton Hall University (May 2011)
- MS in Speech–Language Pathology from Seton Hall University (May 2013)
- ASHA Certificate of Clinical Competency (Nov. 2014)
- PATH Intl.:
 - Registered Instructor (Feb. 2013)
 - Equine Specialist in Mental Health & Learning (Feb. 2015)
 - Registered Therapist (Sept. 2016)
- Board Certified Hippotherapy Clinical Specialist (Sept. 2017)
- AHA, Inc. Board of Directors (May 2019)
- AHA, Inc. President, Board of Directors (May 2022– April 2025)



OBJECTIVES

WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY

RESPECTING LIVED EXPERIENCE

SELF-ADVOCACY & IDENTITY

PRESUMING COMPETENCE

STRENGTH-BASED GOAL SETTING



WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

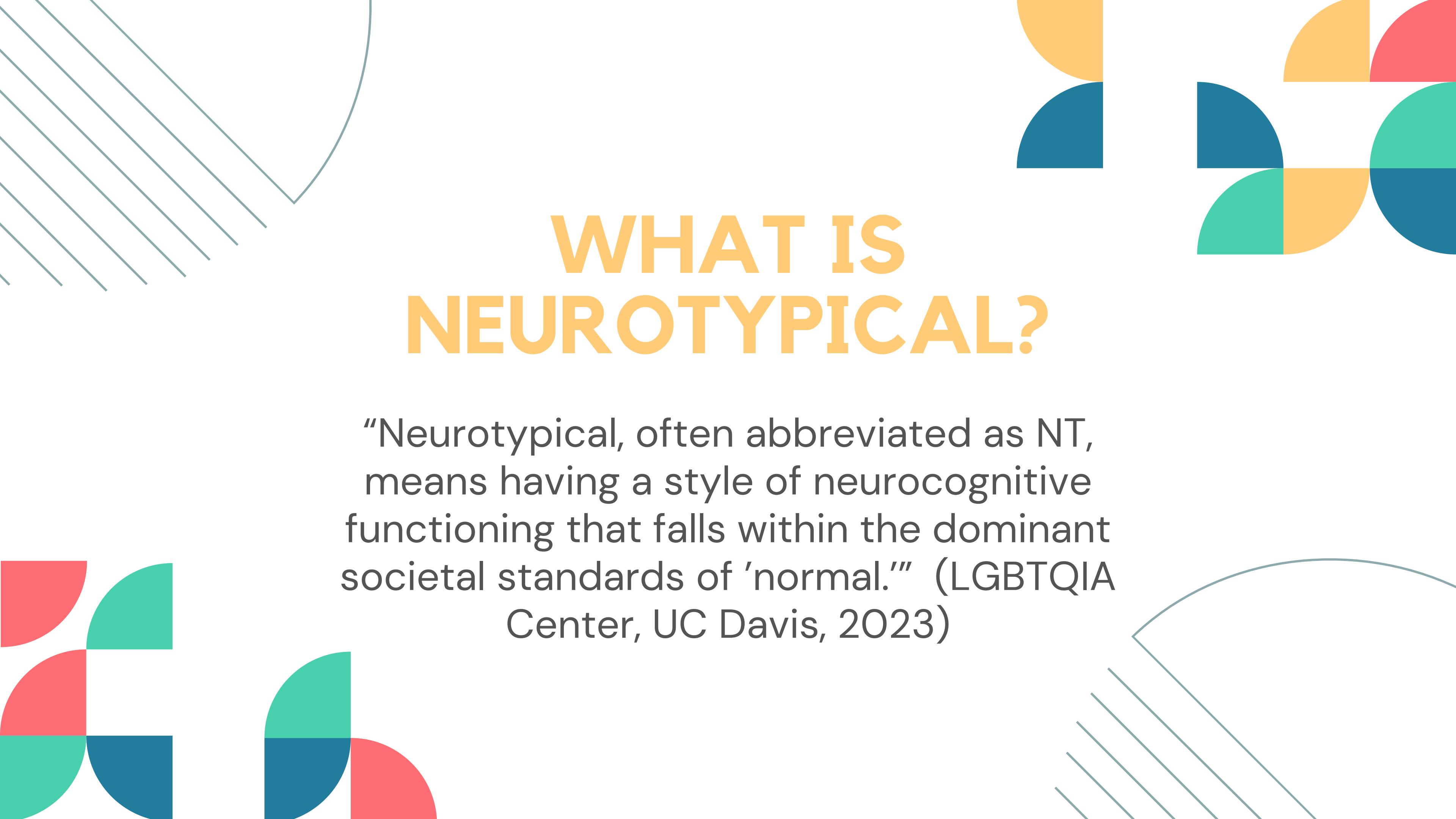
“the concept that recognizes the natural variance within human brains, how they work, and how they interact with their environment” (Singer, 1998)



WHAT IS NEURODIVERGENT?

“Neurodivergent, sometimes abbreviated as ND, means having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of ‘normal.’ A person whose neurocognitive functioning diverges from dominant societal norms in multiple ways – for instance, a person who is Autistic, has dyslexia, and has epilepsy – can be described as multiply neurodivergent.”

(LGBTQIA Center, UC Davis, 2023)

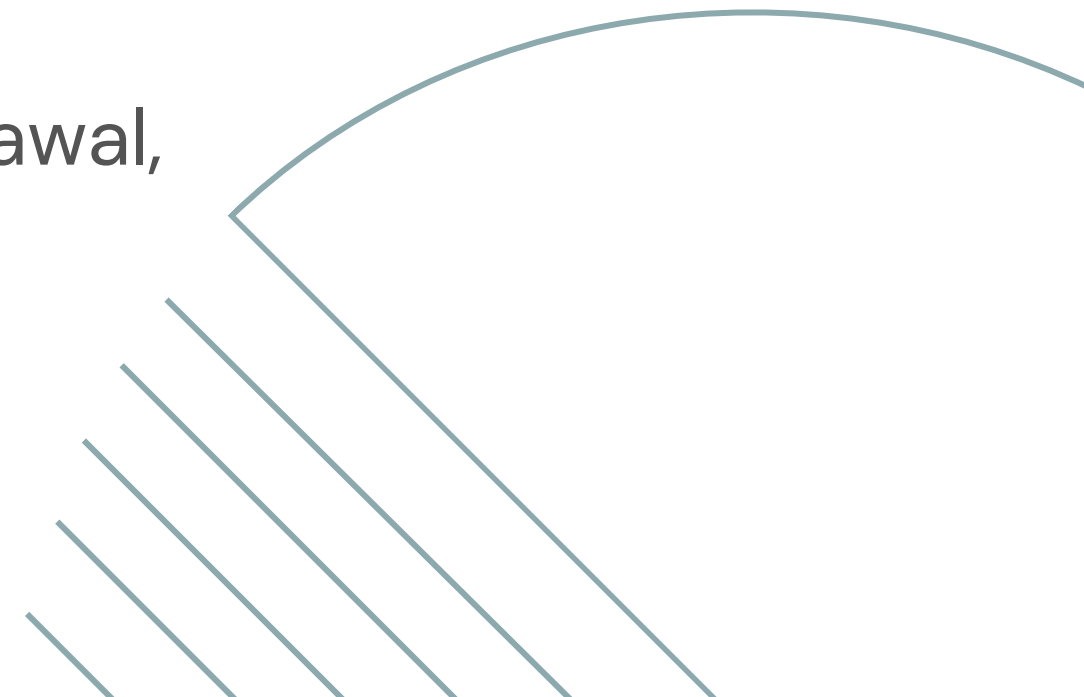


WHAT IS NEUROTYPICAL?

“Neurotypical, often abbreviated as NT, means having a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards of ‘normal.’” (LGBTQIA Center, UC Davis, 2023)

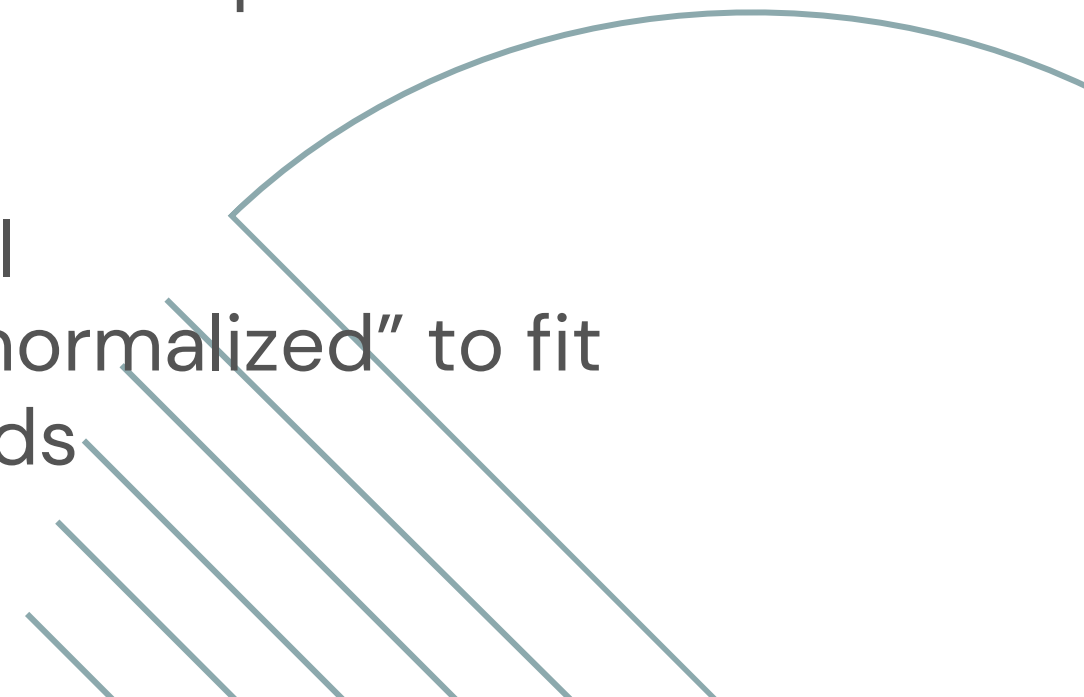
RESPECTING LIVED EXPERIENCE

- The idea emerged from neurodiverse self-advocacy
- Empowerment
- Not based on “neurotypical standards”
 - Needs and experiences vary widely
 - Not a “one-size fits all” approach
- Respecting how someone shares their lived experience
 - All forms of communication are valid
- Identity, interests and talents, and coping skills (DePape & Lindsay, 2016).
 - Indifference, pride, hopelessness
 - Interests turn into talents
 - Self-awareness, social withdrawal, alcoholism



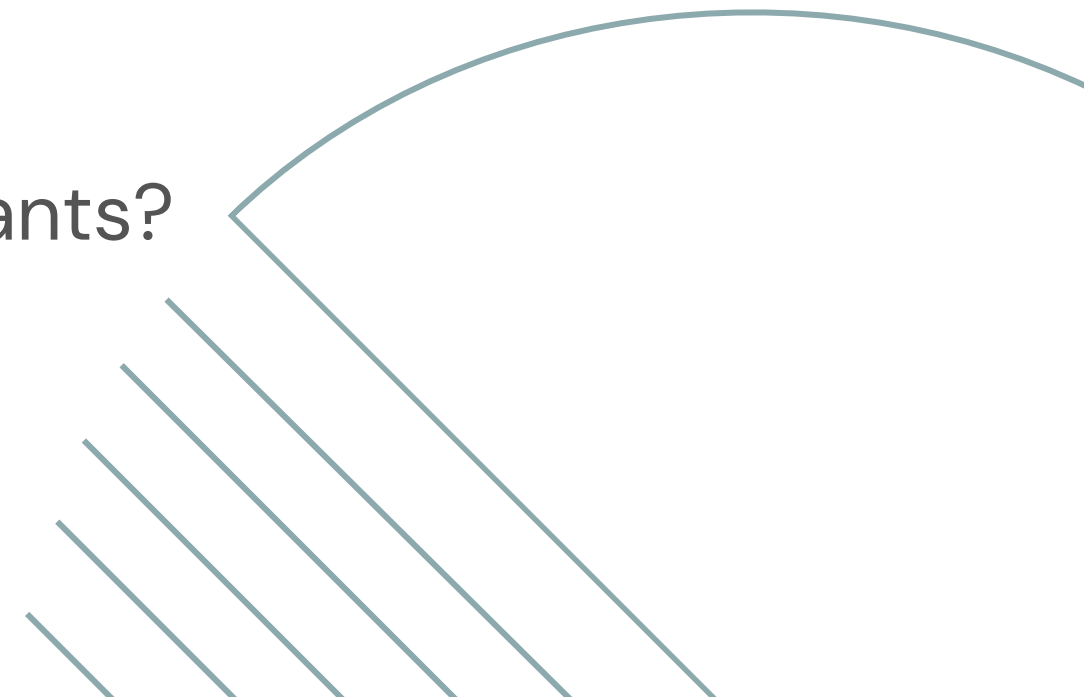
SELF-ADVOCACY & SELF-IDENTITY

- “Identity–first” language vs. “person–first” language
 - Many autistic individuals choose to be referred to as “autistic
 - Part of identity; cannot be “cured” or “fixed”
 - Personal preference
- Identify affirming
 - Reduces anxiety & depression
 - Reduces masking
 - Stimming
 - Reduces sense of feeling like a burden
- Sensory Processing Disorder & Spoon Theory
- Consent
- Neurodivergence is normal
 - Does not need to be “normalized” to fit “neurotypical” standards
 -



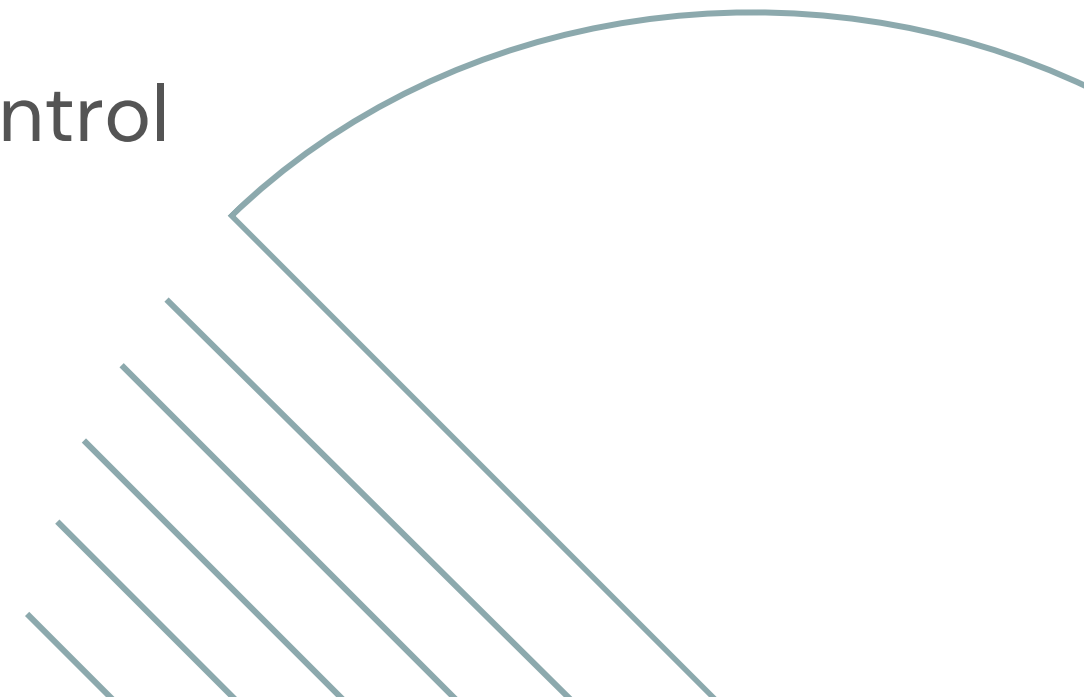
PRESUMING COMPETENCE

- Accept all forms of communication
 - Spoken language
 - Use of the term “non-verbal”
 - Augmentative and alternative communication
 - High-tech vs. low-tech
 - Sign language
 - ASL
 - Sign approximations
 - Gesture
 - Body Language
 - Facial Expressions
 - Vocalizations
 - Drawing
 - Writing
- Include and adapt
 - What more can be done to meet the needs of neurodiverse participants?



STRENGTH- BASED GOAL SETTING

- Strength/social model vs deficit/medical model
 - Medical model = the individual is the problem that needs to be fixed
 - Medical origins can be helpful but do not define someone's value or diminish their lived experience
 - Results in losing independence and control of one's life
 - Social model = society creates barriers/ is inaccessible
 - Society removes physical, social, and emotional barriers
 - Results in increased accessibility in all parts of society
 - Increased independence and control
 - (Brînzea 2019)

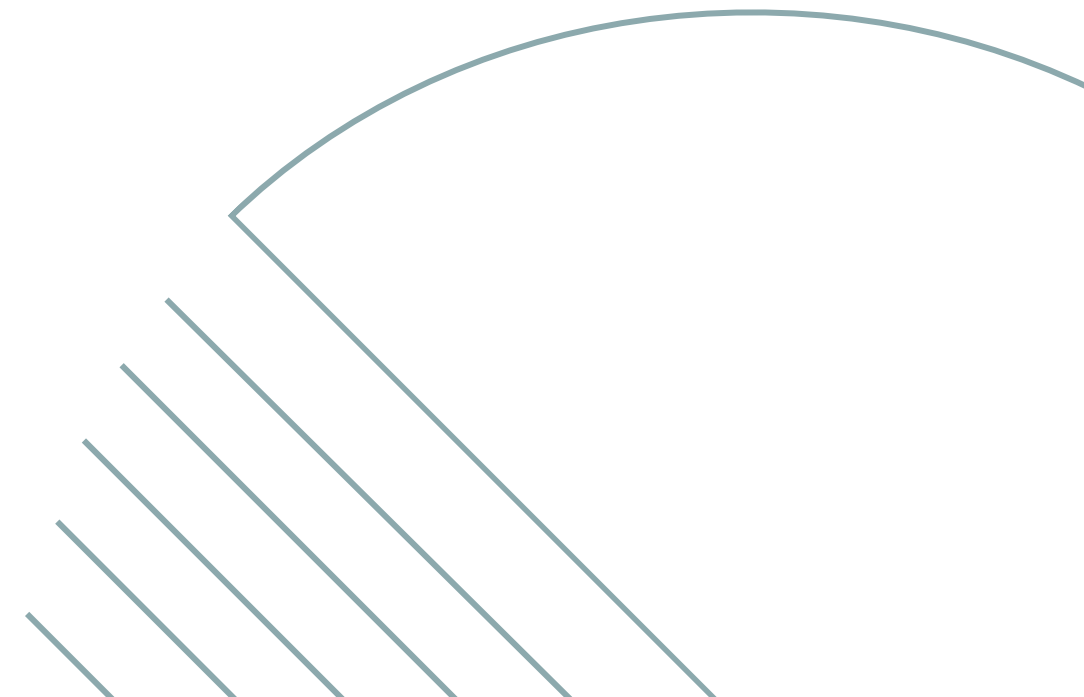


STRENGTH- BASED GOAL SETTING

- Unique strengths & contributions
 - “Such strengths may suggest an evolutionary explanation for why these disorders are still in the gene pool. A growing number of scientists are suggesting that psychopathologies may have conferred specific evolutionary advantages in the past as well as in the present. The systemizing abilities of individuals with autism spectrum disorder might have been highly adaptive for the survival of prehistoric humans.”
(Armstrong, 2015)
- Many companies are changing hiring practices to be more inclusive and welcoming to neurodiverse employees
 - Increased productivity
 - Increased quality control
 - Increased innovation

STRENGTH- BASED GOAL SETTING

- What are the participants' interests?
- How do PATH Intl. professionals incorporate participant interests into mounted and unmounted lessons?
- How do PATH Intl. professionals support participant needs?
 - Sensory supports
 - Predictability
-
- Collaboration
 - With participants, families, & other professionals





SUMMARY

No two brains are the same and no two people experience their lives in the same way. As PATH Intl. professionals, we need to continue to foster programs and organizations that are inclusive and listen to the voices of those that we serve.

Please reach out and collaborate with the neurodiversity community and other professionals; but most importantly, continue to do your own research on ways in which you can include neurodiversity affirming practices into your setting.



THANK YOU!

melanie.dominkorichards@gmail.com

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