

How many neurodivergents should there be?

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Much debate about psychiatric diagnosis, or overdiagnosis, seems to assume that there is a fixed or natural limit on how many neurodivergent people there should be. Any time a diagnostic rates expand significantly for any given diagnosis, dismissals of that diagnosis as a 'fad' or 'brand' soon follow. This has been happening a lot more since the rise of neurodiversity movement, where many people reclaim categories such as 'autism' or 'ADHD' sometimes even without seeking clinical diagnosis. A similar thing has happened with the mass expansion of the 'trauma' concept, which is currently often dismissed as overused to the point of being meaningless. While some worries about classification expansion, for instance, those relating to aggressive marketing from pharmaceutical companies or from individual grifter therapists, should be heeded, here I question the underlying logic and ideology driving this discourse. What I am interested in is the tendency for such concepts to expand as and when neurodivergent people find them helpful. Whenever a great many neurodivergent people begin finding that any given classification genuinely useful, more tend to adopt it. But because this, the classification expands and is then instantly dismissed as a fad. This means that neurodivergent tend to only be granted recognition of labels they do not find helpful. To make sense of this, I suggest our collective understanding here is limited by ideological constraints. This lead to a kind of epistemic double bind, where we all accept that classifications are needed, but our classifications are only widely accepted if those receiving them tend to not find them helpful.