Models of mental difference: tools for self-understanding?

Nina de Boer (Radboud University)

In this presentation, I explore how models of mental difference – as put forward by proponents of the neurodiversity movement – can serve as tools for (resourceful) self-understanding. First, I justify why models of mental difference can – or should – be viewed as tools. Like maps, models of mental difference are abstractions whose use should be justified by our epistemic or emancipatory goals. One of these goals is providing self-understanding. Second, I address how models of mental difference shape people's self-narratives by allowing them to imagine possible alternative scenarios for themselves. I hypothesize that models of mental difference are resourceful when they 1) are in line with people's experiences, and 2) allow people to imagine what should (not) be changed for them to flourish. Finally, I compare the social and the relational model of mental difference with these requirements for resourceful self-narratives in mind.