Autistic Sociocultural Immunity Challenges Neurotypical Paradigms

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I'm Jax Bayne & I realised two things at an early age: 1) I was different from my peers, and 2) I didn't really understand how or why I was so different. No one seemed to be willing or even able to clearly explain it to me. I didn't realise until much later on in life, but I've always seen and processed things in ways most others don't. As a child, I never related much to my peers and spoke to adults like intellectual equals, challenging them when they failed to make logical sense. I'd get scolded for being "defiant", a "troublemaker", and for not doing things the "right" way. I'm not an expert in any field. I don't have any official certifications, accreditations, formal work experience, or anything else to distinguish me as an authority on any subject. All I have to offer you today are the insights that I have acquired simply by attempting to understand what exactly it is that makes me so different.

Firstly, I will be giving some context specific definitions for the key points of this talk which include *paradigms*, *trauma*, *cognitive dissonance*, *sociocultural systems*, *materialism*, and *autistic sociocultural immunity*. The reason I am defining these terms is because they provide context for one of the main reasons conflict between autistic and neurotypical individuals exists, which is how autistics have a level of immunity to the overarching materialistic paradigm infecting global sociocultural systems and perpetuating trauma responses. Next, I will show how all of these concepts are related and why they're necessary to understand when discussing the challenges autistics face living in neurotypical predominated societies. Finally, I will be proposing some suggestions on how we can make adjustments to the societies we live in as well as to our own ways of approaching these problems. I hope that what I share with you all today helps to recontextualise a little bit of what is going on in our world, and by extension, within ourselves.

To be alive is to experience a unique individualised reality shaped by our subjective perspectives and interpretations. The beliefs and filters we rely on to process our experiences are called *paradigms.* A person's paradigms are similar to computer programs. They operate much like self-modifying code which subconsciously updates itself to improve the individual's functioning on the basis of new data. When newly received information conflicts with our current paradigms, something akin to a "systems error" occurs. This often unpleasant sensation is referred to as *cognitive dissonance*.

If a person experiencing cognitive dissonance has adequate internal & external support systems, they can successfully undergo a *paradigm shift*. This allows them to accommodate the newly acquired data & integrate it into a new paradigm, or worldview. While paradigm shifts can be challenging, painful,

and even disturbing experiences, they are often also exhilarating, exciting, and rewarding. Paradigm shifts are necessary for humans to learn, grow, heal, and positively change our lives. A person cannot realise their full potential without breaking free from old paradigms to experience new ones.

When a person does not have the internal & external resources needed to process information which conflicts with their current beliefs & understanding of reality, they may experience *crisis* and perceive themselves as being unsafe. The reaction that the mind & body have in response to the system's inability to adjust to the situation at hand can create a state of trauma. When a person, child or adult, doesn't have the necessary resources to process an *adverse event* at their disposal, a *trauma*, or unhealed wound, can develop. Traumas shape our paradigms, as paradigms develop according to our life experiences.

In the globalised culture that formed after the advent of international travel and the internet, a global paradigm developed that prioritises *materialism*. Materialism maintains that a person's value is not intrinsic, but rather based upon the material goods or services they control. This has caused great suffering for people who were devalued by this paradigm, as we all have a basic human need to be seen and heard for who we are, not what we do. People who are devalued by their society since childhood become *traumatised* adults. Their need to be seen and heard without judgment was *never* met.

So what does it mean to the individual when the society they live in is sick and dysfunctional due to the glorification of corrupted cultural values and paradigms? How does it impact a person's development when the systems in place are working against them instead of for them? How does this adversity shape a human being? If the current social customs & established cultural norms of the society one exists in are literally broken, unhealthy, and detrimental to the wellbeing of the individuals within it, wouldn't it make sense to develop an immunity to those customs and norms? One possible answer to these questions can be found by considering the fascinating topic of *neurodiversity,* specifically *autistic sociocultural immunity*.

Sociocultural systems include "the institutions, roles, norms, and values as they exist outside the individual." [1] While the autistic experience & expression differs greatly from one individual to the next, an interesting commonality that unites autistics is a level of immunity to *sociocultural systems*. It's this immunity that is at the root of most interpersonal conflicts autistics experience, especially when they are living in materialistic cultures. What this immunity affords autistics is an ability to detect aberrations in our environments more easily than neurotypicals from a very young age.

Although autistics do not automatically internalise social customs & cultural norms the way neurotypicals do, we can learn to study, mimic, and even adopt them to a certain degree despite how unnatural they may feel or how nonsensical they may seem to us. This process is called *masking*. Without the automatically internalised sociocultural norms influencing our paradigms as heavily, autistics often point out, question, and even challenge what we feel are arbitrarily established protocols

and standards that neurotypicals will simply ignore or be silent about for fear of the potential ramifications.

There isn't as much consideration for the possible consequences of doing this as an autistic because the inherited cultural paradigm of conformity and preserving the status quo in order to achieve an esteemed position in the current system isn't there for us to the same extent. What's there is simply a desire to learn and understand something that doesn't make logical sense to us. There's little to no thought given about how simply pointing out something we notice, asking questions about something we don't understand, and challenging that which doesn't make sense might impact our social status because to us, society is simply a group of individuals, and it's the individuals that the matter most, not the arbitrary constructs we have created. To autistics, if something is no longer serving us, it's only logical that we get rid of it and replace it with something that works better.

In contrast, the core paradigms of neurotypicals often align with those of the cultures they were born into and raised around unless something seriously distressing occurs that causes the individual to question the legitimacy of the sociocultural systems that allowed the adverse event to occur. However, the aversion to experiencing a paradigm shift is so strong that more often than not, humans of all neurotype may use denial as a *coping mechanism* to avoid reevaluating their most fundamental beliefs and preconceived notions about themselves and reality.

For autistics, the ability to ignore sensory data of any kind tends to be weakened. It is very difficult for an autistic to deny something that all the data they have collected thus far indicates as true, even if it conflicts with their current beliefs. As a result, autistics are often more receptive to the possibility of allowing their paradigms to shift. In neurotypical predominated societies, it is a very unusual trait to not only be able to perceive the aspects of reality that are most heavily filtered through the subjective biases & filters created by people's paradigms, but also to feel comfortable speaking out about these often ignored subjects. Because of this, it can be very difficult for neurotypicals to understand and to accept how autistics can have this increased capacity in adjusting their beliefs about themselves and the world so readily.

When a person's strongly held beliefs about the world and people are challenged and that person knows no other way of being, it can be really scary. People of all neurotypes may reject or discard information that causes them to experience cognitive dissonance. Those who experience a lot of trauma are often most reluctant to allow themself to undergo a paradigm shift and consider a new perspective. Due to past traumas they experience the unknown or the unfamiliar as threatening. When autistic people, by their way of being, demonstrate that conformity to the current societal norm is often unnecessary, that is challenging to neurotypical preconceptions of what reality is. It follows that neurotypicals who feel their paradigms are threatened may humiliate, abuse, and ostracise autistics to discourage them from being nonconforming.

This is where we see so-called treatments like Applied Behavioural Analysis come into play. Neurotypicals who value the status quo being preserved see that autistics challenge it and thus attempt to force us into suppressing our autistic traits. Just by being autistic, we cause neurotypicals to think about what they believe defines a person's worth in society, and most of them don't want to do this, which is why autistics are repeatedly shunned, bullied, gaslit, and made to feel ashamed for simply being who we are.

It's important we understand that while there tend to be communication difficulties between autistics and neurotypicals due to the lack of shared sociocultural context, there doesn't have to be cruelty or violence in the disagreements. It's possible for two people to not fully understand or agree with each other and still act compassionately and respectfully toward one another. So what exactly is going on in our globalised society that's causing the conflicts to become so extreme and painful?

This is where we bring it back to the materialistic aspects of our current society's cultural paradigm and how it's causing *generational trauma* to occur. Generations of attempting to conform to unhealthy standards & unrealistic ideals of behaviour dictated to us by the materialistic mindset that our self-worth is defined by our ability to produce and consume goods and services in our society has left us broken as a species. This collective trauma manifests to different degrees and in different ways across the neurotypes and global cultures, but it's due to being traumatised that simple discussions of divergence and inclusivity transform into ideological wars.

We have been existing in the primal tribalistic survival mentality seen in pack animals in the wild for too long now. For generations, we have been living in a culture that is traumatising its members. When a person is traumatised, they become separated from their authentic self, their empathy, and their ability to consciously recognise and evaluate their paradigms. They become intermeshed with their worldviews, conflating their inherent identity and sense of self with their beliefs, opinions, preferences, and values. They can't see the difference between themselves and these ever-changing mental constructs that are simply tools to help interpret and process the sensory data that's being received. Anything we are unfamiliar with or that displeases us for any reason is immediately labelled a threat and dismissed, "cancelled". This makes it next to impossible to have productive conversations about positive cultural change, diversity, and unity.

This is why it's so important for children to be given proper internal & external resources to process adverse experiences, such as helping them develop mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotional regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness skill sets as well as providing them with loving, non-judgmental relationships that allow them to express themselves authentically and receive the unique differences of others without criticising, shaming, blaming or forcing conformity onto them. If children are not able to be seen and heard fully nor taught how to process distressing situations in a healthy manner, they risk developing in such a way that they struggle to relate to the challenges, pain, and joy of

other beings. This can make it harder to connect with people who have minds that don't work the way theirs do.

When a person struggles to connect, they may have a hard time knowing how and when to practice tolerance and be accommodating with the difficulties others have. To improve neurotypical and autistic relations, as well as the overall quality of life for all neurotypes in general, we need to start focusing on addressing the dangers of our current materialistic cultural paradigm as well as providing better support and resources to anyone who has experienced trauma in their life. It is important for us to begin to come together as one species so we can start supporting one another in the healing process instead of further traumatising each other. When we start to heal our traumas collectively, we heal ourselves also, as we are all part of the collective.

If we worked together both with those who are a part of our own communities as well as with those who are not, we could start to heal some of the generational trauma that is perpetuating itself by infecting each new generation born into it. Understanding and teaching children that every single human being has a fully unique way of experiencing, processing, & interacting with reality, their own personal experiences that shape their paradigms, and their own fully individualised role to play in the sociocultural systems they are a part of is the starting point for creating a better, brighter world. Autistics learn early on that our way is not the only way to be as we are consistently told we're wrong, but the truth is that there is no real deficit in the way that autistics socialise. For so long, we've been told that we're socially impaired, but the reality of the situation is simply that we socialise differently from the neurotypical majority. In addition to our social differences, society has tried to force us to fit into roles that are unhealthy and told us to aspire toward standards that are unrealistic. It's time we change the cultural narrative that there is a "right" and "wrong" way to exist in a society. This is the first step in helping to build a more equitable, inclusive, and compassionate future.