

## 30DayTheri 20: Neurodivergence

I see my therianthropy as caused by/a form of neurodivergence, and I'm going to explain why. This is something I have written about before on the old Alt+H forums, but as I cannot find that post, I will try to rewrite my case, hopefully improving it, rather than copy-paste. Though I will probably cross-post this to the new forums once it's done. Anyway:

Lets start by listing some of the traits that overlap between kin experiences and neurodivergence. Note I use the umbrella term deliberately. While some examples are typically associated with autism, it's not exclusive (e.g. sensory issues are also present in [ADHD](#), [cerebral palsy](#), and whatever [giftedness](#) is). Will link sources whenever I can.

- Not making eye contact (therian logic: threat display in many species)
- “Improper” facial expressions (grinning also a threat in many animals)
- Sensory processing/sensitivity (sensory shifts usually seen as differing attention or sensitivity to stimuli, rather than physically having inhuman senses)
- Differences in proprioception and body map (phantom shifts)
- Differences in mental state and cognition (mental shifts)
- Unusual walking gaits and postures, sitting positions
- Feelings of alienation or disconnection from others ([autistic](#) and [adhd](#) people seeing themselves as “alien”)
- [Identification with animals more than humans](#)

[This tumblr post](#) covers a lot of these overlaps using hypothetical examples of a person with autism and a person with therianthropy. They seem to do similar things, but for different reasons. For example, “Jeremy likes to sit in strange positions. He does this because it puts pressure on certain parts of his body in ways that feel good and sitting this way helps him stay calm and focused. Jeremy is autistic. George likes to sit in strange positions. He does this because it feels more natural to him to act as though he has four legs and sitting this way reduces the dysphoria he usually experiences when sitting normally. George is a therian.”

That's all well and good but... can people always tell why they are doing something? [The introspection illusion](#) would indicate this is not as reliable as we might hope. I tend to slam my hands down on the nearest surface when I'm excited. Related to handflapping or canine playbows and excited tippy-tapping? Or consider my lifelong chewing behavior- sensory stimming, or dog behavior? And don't dogs chew for sensory stimulation too?

So is that it? All therians and otherkin are “just [diagnosis]” and mistaking it for something else? Well, no, it's not that simple. Informal polls have indicated a higher prevalence of neurodivergent diagnoses in otherkin, but it's not a one-to-one relationship. [This scientific research paper](#) found a higher prevalence among therians of self-reporting a diagnosis, and higher scores on the Autism Spectrum Quotient. However, the ASQ is *not* diagnostic, it merely indicates trends and shared traits that warrant further inspection. The same paper also found Therians were no different from controls on traits like

personal growth, purpose and self-acceptance, and that the therian identity may have been protective against some negative effects, like anhedonia.

It can't be ignored that many therians/otherkin do not have a diagnosis of a neurodivergent condition, even having sought one out (i.e. thus circumventing the issue of just not being able to see a professional). A lot of therians and otherkin consider the possibility of mental illness when first questioning. I literally asked my therapist (whom I was out to about my therianthropy) whether I could have been on the autism spectrum, and after going over it with me in detail, she concluded I was at most subclinical, and didn't meet diagnostic criteria, missing an entire subsection of traits. I know other therians who have had the same experiences- finding that they check the boxes on certain traits, but just don't-quite'-fit clinical criteria.

Now, as a counselor, I know better than most exactly how much diagnoses are affected by culture, norms, and are ultimately somewhat arbitrary and nebulous. But it should also not be ignored that mental illness, regardless of diagnosis, is always defined by causing distress or impairing function- something that doesn't apply to many cases of nonhuman identity.

This is why I am specific in saying I believe therianthropy is a form of neurodivergence, rather than a mental illness. I see it as emerging from functions and activity of the brain, of being one of many diverse ways a brain can be wired. Because of this, it overlaps in traits with other forms of neurodivergence (like autism, ADHD and others). It's another circle on the big Venn diagram. So questioning whether a certain behavior like chewing is an "autism" thing or a "therianthropy" thing is a little bit like asking whether emotional dysregulation is an autism, adhd, bpd, etc. thing. It belongs to all of them and isn't the defining factor of any. Because modern diagnostic labels are based on clusters of symptoms, these overlaps can result in dual diagnoses, though not always (e.g. if a person's symptoms are mostly in the overlap of autism and adhd, they might be diagnosed with both, whereas another person's experiences may be much more one than the other, and they only get/need one label). So a person can be a therian and have no other label, be a different form of neurodivergent and not a therian, or both a therian and have another neurodivergent label. And all three of these people would share certain but not all traits and experiences.