

Personal views on autistic people from different cultures

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Abstract: Individual accomplishment and job advancement are celebrated and encouraged in individualistic societies, and individuals must accept responsibility for themselves and their families. In contrast, in collectivist societies, the individual is first and foremost a part of the society, and he is expected to submit to the collective while also caring for its well-being and success. Several studies have been undertaken to determine the variations in perception, knowledge, and attitude regarding neurodivergent persons between Westerners and Easterners. However, few research have proposed an effective strategy that can be used across cultures. As a result, the purpose of this paper is to review prior research studies on attitudes toward autistic people in individualistic and collectivistic cultures in order to propose a potential intervention for raising neurodiversity awareness and acceptance in both Western and Eastern societies.

Keywords: autism spectrum disorder (ASD), collectivism, individualism, eastern culture, western culture.

Introduction

Understanding cross-cultural differences in attitudes towards individuals with autism is crucial for fostering inclusivity and support for neurodivergent individuals globally. Cultural frameworks significantly shape perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors towards autism, influencing how individuals with the condition are treated and integrated into society. This article explores various studies that highlight these cultural differences and their implications.

Cultural dimensions such as individualism and collectivism play a pivotal role in shaping attitudes towards individuals with autism. In individualistic cultures, personal success and career advancement are prioritized, leading to a focus on individual responsibility. Conversely, collectivist cultures emphasize community well-being, where individuals are expected to prioritize group harmony over personal aspirations. This fundamental difference can affect how autism is perceived and addressed within various societies. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition characterized by a range of social, communication, and behavioral differences that vary widely among individuals [1]. It is often described as a spectrum because of the diverse ways in which autistic traits manifest, influencing how individuals perceive and interact with their environment. Understanding autism requires recognizing these variations and the unique experiences of each person on the spectrum. Cultural perspectives play a crucial role in shaping how autism is perceived, diagnosed, and managed across different societies. As highlighted by Kitayama et al., culture influences self-concept, emotional expression, and normative expectations, which in turn affect personal motivations and societal attitudes [4]. These cultural frameworks can lead to significant differences in how autistic behaviors are interpreted—ranging from acceptance and support to stigma and misunderstanding. For example, Hobson’s early work emphasizes that perceptions of autistic expressions of emotion are deeply embedded within cultural contexts, affecting how caregivers and professionals respond to autistic individuals. Recognizing these cultural variations is essential for developing inclusive policies, effective interventions, and fostering social acceptance worldwide.

To promote culturally sensitive autism support, practitioners and policymakers should recognize and respect the diverse cultural narratives, beliefs, and practices that influence perceptions of autism [8]. Training programs should incorporate cultural competence to ensure that support strategies are appropriate and respectful of local customs and worldviews. Engaging communities in dialogue and advocacy can help reduce stigma and foster social inclusion, especially in cultures where autism is misunderstood or marginalized [10]. Furthermore, adopting a strengths-based approach that values autistic individuals' unique abilities, regardless of cultural background, can empower them and enhance their participation in society [13]. Ultimately, fostering an environment of cultural awareness and sensitivity will be essential in creating equitable and supportive spaces for autistic people worldwide.

Literature review

This literature review aims to explore personal views on autistic people from diverse cultural backgrounds, emphasizing how cultural beliefs, narratives, and social norms influence perceptions and treatment of autism. By examining existing research, the review seeks to identify commonalities and differences in attitudes across cultures, understand the impact of these views on diagnosis, treatment, and social inclusion, and highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity in supporting autistic individuals. Ultimately, this review endeavors to inform future research and practice by emphasizing the need for culturally aware approaches that respect and incorporate the diverse experiences of autistic people globally.

Historically, Western societies have viewed autism through a medicalized lens, often emphasizing deficits and abnormalities. Early research, such as Hobson's work in 1986, focused on how autistic children interpret emotional expressions, highlighting differences in social cognition [1]. Similarly, (Hobson et. al., 1988) examined facial recognition and emotional understanding in autism, framing it as a deviation from typical social processing [2]. These foundational studies contributed to a perception of autism as a neurological disorder characterized by impairments in social and emotional functioning, shaping Western diagnostic and treatment paradigms.

In contemporary Western contexts, perceptions of autism have shifted towards recognizing neurodiversity and emphasizing strengths alongside challenges. There is increasing awareness of the diverse experiences of autistic individuals, with research highlighting their unique abilities and perspectives. For instance, studies like (Cope et. al., 2022) explore autistic adults' self-reported strengths in the workplace, challenging traditional deficit-based views [13]. Additionally, research on autistic masking (Pearson et. al., 2021) sheds light on the complex social strategies employed by autistic individuals, emphasizing the importance of understanding their lived experiences rather than solely focusing on deficits [12]. Overall, Western perspectives are gradually embracing a more nuanced and strengths-based understanding of autism, promoting inclusion and acceptance.

The review of existing literature highlights the profound influence of cultural perspectives on how autism is perceived, diagnosed, and supported across different societies. Western views tend to emphasize individual differences and neurodiversity, fostering greater acceptance and advocacy efforts [2]. In contrast, Eastern and indigenous cultures often interpret autism through traditional beliefs, myths, and community-centered support systems, which can both hinder and facilitate understanding depending on the context [8]. Cultural attitudes significantly shape diagnostic practices, access to healthcare, and therapeutic approaches, with some cultures experiencing stigma and social exclusion that impact autistic individuals' well-being [10]. Furthermore, recent research underscores the importance of recognizing autistic strengths, communication needs, and the diverse experiences of autistic adults, emphasizing that cultural context influences their self-perceptions and

societal interactions [11], [13]. Overall, the literature demonstrates that personal and societal views on autism are deeply embedded in cultural norms, affecting every stage from diagnosis to social inclusion.

Suitable approaches for non-philology students. Non-philology students learn English not for deep grammatical analysis but to be able to use it in communication. Therefore, the following approaches are considered effective:

Methods and materials

Positive Cultural Representations of Autism. Empirical evidence indicates that some cultures foster positive representations of autism, emphasizing acceptance and neurodiversity. Lilley et al. (2020) documented that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia hold attitudes that include acceptance and the importance of looking after each other, despite also experiencing shame and stigma [8]. Similarly, the autism rights and neurodiversity movements advocate for viewing autism as a natural variation rather than a disorder, promoting pride and celebrating neurodiversity [21], [22]. These movements have contributed to societal shifts, with events like Autistic Pride Day emphasizing positive identity and community belonging [21]. In non-Western contexts, studies from Indonesia and Hong Kong reveal that cultural beliefs can influence positive perceptions; for example, some Indonesian religious beliefs frame autism within spiritual or moral frameworks that foster acceptance, while Hong Kong autistic students report positive experiences in postsecondary settings when supported by inclusive practices [18]. Furthermore, social media ethnographies in Brazil show that autistic communities actively share personal experiences that highlight strengths and resilience, contributing to a more nuanced and positive cultural narrative [6]. Overall, these findings suggest that cultural contexts that promote understanding, pride, and acceptance can foster more positive representations of autism, which in turn support well-being and social inclusion.

Results and their discussion

Inclusive Practices in Various Cultures. Research demonstrates that inclusive practices vary across cultures but can significantly impact autistic individuals' participation and acceptance. In Australia, Lilley et al. (2020) found that community attitudes towards acceptance influence diagnosis and support, with some communities emphasizing familial care and social inclusion [8]. In educational settings, studies from Hong Kong and the UK highlight that flexible teaching strategies, peer support, and accommodations facilitate positive educational experiences for autistic students [18], [18]. Similarly, in South Korea, Lee et al. (2025) reported that organizational support and strength-based employment policies enable autistic employees to leverage their characteristics as strengths, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment [19]. In sports and physical activities, Akbulut et al. (2025) identified that sensory accommodations, inclusive policies, and staff autism education improve participation among autistic adults [17]. Moreover, in healthcare, Mason et al. (2021) emphasized that tailored communication support and societal awareness can improve access and quality of care for autistic adults [9]. These examples illustrate that culturally adapted inclusive practices—ranging from educational accommodations to employment support—are crucial for fostering participation and reducing marginalization across diverse cultural settings.

Empowerment through Cultural Understanding. Cultural understanding plays a pivotal role in empowering autistic individuals by shaping perceptions, reducing stigma, and fostering self-advocacy. Studies by Han et al. (2023) and Akbulut et al. (2025) highlight that societal attitudes and organizational support influence autistic adults' self-esteem and identity development [12], [19]. For

instance, in the UK, community-based programs aimed at stigma reduction and self-acceptance have been recognized as vital for mental health and social integration [12]. Cross-cultural research by Kim et al. (2022) reveals that awareness of cultural biases and implicit biases can influence attitudes towards autism, suggesting that culturally sensitive education can promote empathy and acceptance [11]. Furthermore, research on autistic identity development indicates that understanding and embracing cultural differences can foster a positive sense of self, as seen in studies of autistic youth in Hong Kong and South Korea, where supportive environments and recognition of neurodiversity enhance self-advocacy and resilience [18], [19]. The social media analysis by Zou et al. (2009) underscores that perceptions of consensus and shared beliefs within cultures influence behaviors and attitudes, implying that increasing awareness of diverse cultural perspectives can empower autistic individuals to challenge stereotypes and advocate for their rights [3]. Overall, fostering cultural understanding not only reduces stigma but also enables autistic individuals to develop a strong, positive identity, leading to greater empowerment and societal participation. Evidence indicates that many cultures harbor stigmatizing attitudes and misconceptions about autism, which can hinder diagnosis, support, and social integration. For instance, in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia, negative ideas such as shame and social isolation are prevalent, leading to potential underdiagnosis or misdiagnosis of autistic children [8]. Similarly, in Pakistan, parents often frame their child's condition within Islamic discourse, balancing positive meanings with experiences of rejection and stigma from family and community, which influences their views on intervention and support [5]. Cross-cultural research further reveals that societal perceptions of autism are deeply rooted in cultural beliefs about normality, disability, and social roles, often resulting in negative stereotypes that impact autistic individuals' mental health and societal participation. Moreover, studies comparing South Korea and the United States show that explicit stigma and implicit biases vary significantly across cultures, with Koreans more likely to associate autism with negative traits and to desire social distance, reflecting cultural values emphasizing group harmony and conformity [11]. Such stigmatization not only affects societal attitudes but also internalizes within autistic individuals, leading to internalized stigma that correlates with poorer mental health outcomes [12]. These findings underscore that cultural perceptions can perpetuate misunderstanding and marginalization of autistic people, often rooted in misconceptions about their differences being deficits rather than diversity.

Variability in Support Systems Across Cultures. Research demonstrates considerable variability in the availability and nature of support systems for autistic individuals across different cultural contexts. In Hong Kong, autistic students report positive experiences in postsecondary education when supported by flexible teaching strategies and understanding peers and educators, highlighting the importance of culturally adapted support mechanisms [18]. Conversely, in Aboriginal communities in Australia, limited access to diagnosis and support services, compounded by negative attitudes, can impede early intervention and ongoing assistance [8]. In South Korea, organizational support that emphasizes neurodiversity and strength-based approaches has shown promising outcomes for autistic employees, fostering empowerment and positive self-identity [19]. However, in many regions, societal and institutional support remains inadequate or inconsistent, often influenced by cultural beliefs about autism. For example, in Pakistan, social stigma and religious interpretations shape parental decisions about intervention, sometimes leading to rejection or concealment of diagnosis [5]. Additionally, the structure of employment support varies; in the UK, autistic adults face barriers in hiring processes, with some employers lacking awareness or accommodations, reflecting cultural differences in workplace inclusion [13]. Overall, the support

systems' scope and effectiveness are deeply intertwined with cultural values, societal attitudes, and resource availability, resulting in disparities that influence the life trajectories of autistic individuals worldwide.

Negative Stereotypes and Their Impact. Negative stereotypes about autism persist across many cultures and have tangible adverse effects on autistic individuals' well-being and societal participation. For example, brief video-based studies reveal that non-autistic adults tend to rate autistic children more negatively than non-autistic children, especially when audio cues are present, indicating rapid formation of unfavorable first impressions influenced by stereotypes [14]. Such biases can lead to social exclusion, bullying, and reduced opportunities for autistic children and adults. In educational settings, autistic children are often perceived as less capable or more disruptive, which can result in lower expectations and limited support, affecting their academic and social development [16]. Furthermore, societal stereotypes contribute to internalized stigma, where autistic adults may adopt negative beliefs about themselves, impacting mental health and self-esteem [12]. The media portrayal of autism also plays a role; some children's books and social media content reinforce stereotypes by emphasizing deficits over strengths, which can shape public perceptions and reinforce biases [15, 23]. Additionally, research shows that autistic adults are often misunderstood in healthcare and employment contexts, with stereotypes leading to inadequate support and discrimination [9, 13]. These pervasive negative stereotypes hinder efforts toward acceptance and neurodiversity, perpetuating a cycle of misunderstanding that affects policy, support, and the lived experiences of autistic individuals globally.

Conclusion

Evaluation of Supporting vs. Opposing Evidence. The evidence supporting diverse cultural perspectives on autism highlights both positive and challenging aspects. On the supportive side, research demonstrates that many cultures foster inclusive practices, promote awareness, and develop community-based support systems that empower autistic individuals [4], [8], [23]. For instance, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities exhibit acceptance and pride, which can facilitate better diagnosis and support outcomes [8]. Additionally, studies reveal that recognizing autistic strengths—such as creativity, attention to detail, and resilience—can enhance employment opportunities and social inclusion [7], [10], [19]. The emergence of autistic culture and movements advocating neurodiversity further exemplifies positive shifts toward acceptance and self-advocacy, emphasizing that autism is a natural variation rather than a deficit [21], [22], [24]. Conversely, opposing evidence underscores persistent stigmatization, misunderstanding, and negative stereotypes across many cultural contexts [1], [2], [5], [14], [20]. These negative attitudes often lead to social exclusion, discrimination, and barriers to diagnosis and support, especially in communities with limited awareness or entrenched cultural beliefs that view autism as abnormal or shameful [8]. For example, in some societies, autism is associated with social stigma, shame, or misconceptions about causality, which hinder early diagnosis and access to services [5]. Furthermore, research indicates that societal attitudes can influence how families and individuals perceive autism, sometimes leading to concealment or masking behaviors that complicate support efforts [20], [21], [23]. Overall, the supporting evidence emphasizes the potential for cultural practices to foster acceptance, empowerment, and positive identity development. In contrast, the opposing evidence highlights the ongoing challenges posed by stigma, misunderstanding, and cultural barriers. The strength of each perspective depends on the specific cultural, social, and

policy contexts examined, with many societies still grappling with negative perceptions that impede progress toward full inclusion. Considering the breadth of evidence, the more compelling perspective is that cultural attitudes toward autism are multifaceted, with significant potential for positive change alongside enduring challenges. The supportive evidence convincingly demonstrates that cultures can and do develop inclusive practices, promote awareness, and foster autistic pride, which are crucial for improving quality of life and societal integration [4], [7], [8], [21], [23], [24]. These examples suggest that cultural transformation is possible and that societal attitudes can shift toward acceptance and neurodiversity. However, the opposing evidence remains compelling in highlighting the persistent barriers created by stigma, misconceptions, and cultural beliefs that view autism negatively [1], [2], [5], [14], [20]. These barriers are deeply rooted in social norms, religious beliefs, and historical misconceptions, which require sustained effort and targeted interventions to address.

In conclusion, while the evidence of positive cultural practices and movements is encouraging and demonstrates that change is achievable, the enduring presence of stigma and misunderstanding underscores the need for continued, culturally sensitive efforts. The most convincing perspective recognizes that cultural perceptions of autism are dynamic and can be shaped through education, advocacy, and community engagement. Therefore, fostering environments that promote awareness, acceptance, and respect remains essential for advancing the rights and well-being of autistic individuals worldwide.

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