



# Neurodivergence & Creativity

**BEN ERIN**  
*(Final Year Med Student BSMS)*

# Why study ND and creativity?

- Disproportionate physical and mental health challenges for neurodivergent people <sup>(1-4)</sup>.
- Societal stigma and discrimination contribute to these challenges <sup>(5)</sup>.
- Societal attitudes surrounding neurodivergent people need to be challenged.



# Creativity

## What is it?

Standard definitions argue creativity requires both '**originality**' and '**usefulness**'. (6)

Definitions linked to culture:

- Western- related to the creative **process** and **outcome**
- Eastern- a form of **revelation** and **self-discovery**. (6)

Short answer:

***its difficult to define***

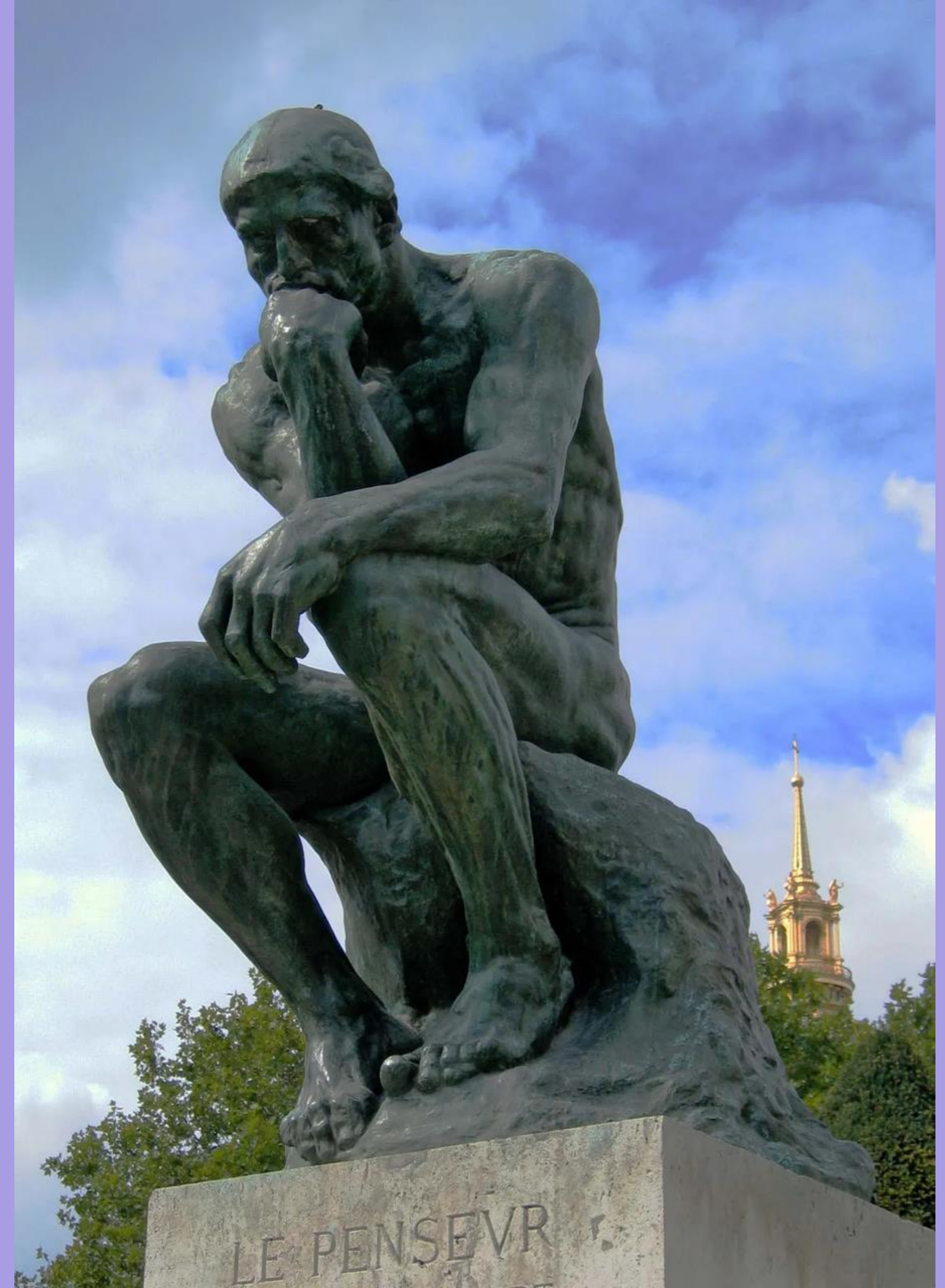


# What is known about ND & creativity?

Several quantitative attempts to capture this relationship.

- Systematic reviews often find mixed results. For example, one found there are fewer creative autistic people compared to the general population, but they did show higher levels of originality. <sup>(7)</sup>
- Another found no relationship between ADHD and creativity but advocated for further research. <sup>(8)</sup>
- Inconsistent and unclear results in the case of dyslexia and Tourette's. <sup>(9,10)</sup>

***Does this mean there is no relationship?***





# What is known about ND & creativity?

- Creativity is complex and hard to measure <sup>(6)</sup>.
- Non-inclusive creativity measures used in some of these studies <sup>(11)</sup>.
- Studies don't consider the opinions of ND people themselves.



# Our Approach

## QUALITATIVE METHODS

- Centering the perspectives of ND creative people.
- No definitions of creativity imposed on them.
- Researching ‘with’ ND people not ‘on’.

## ASKING WHY

*“Why might there be a relationship between ND and creativity?”*



# Recruitment



- Aimed to recruit 8-12 people with a diagnosis of neurodivergence, eg autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia or Tourette's.
- Each participant was studying or had previously studied a creative course.

# Procedure

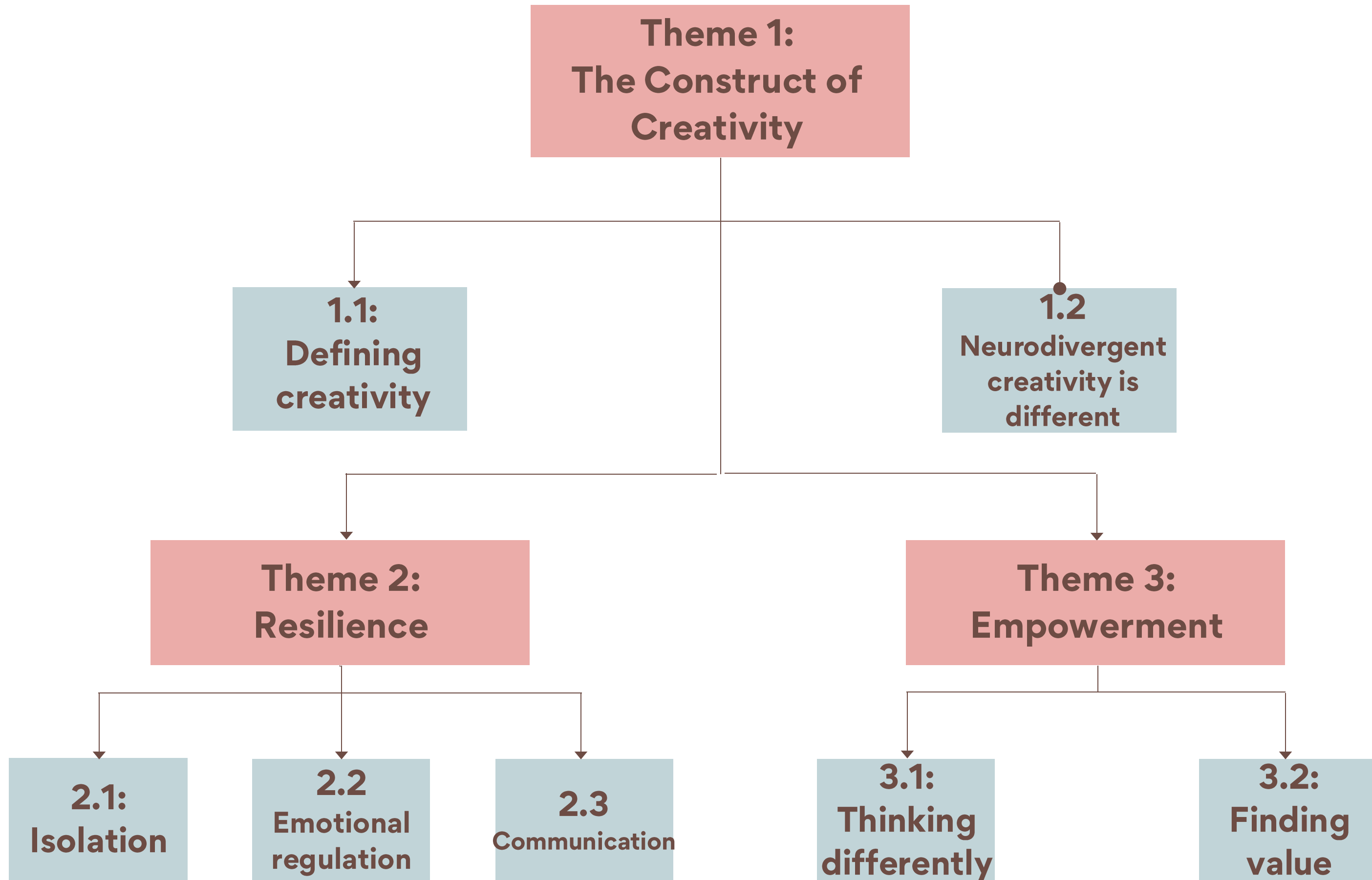
- Interviewed 10 neurodivergent people who had been involved with a range of creative courses.
- Semi-structured interview
  - What does it mean to be creative?
  - What does it mean to be ND?
  - Why might there be a relationship between ND and creativity?
- Inductive thematic analysis using approach of Braun & Clarke.

Pseudonym	Creative course	Neurodivergent identity
Amanda	Fine art	Autistic
Brian	Fashion design	Autistic
Caleb	Creative arts	ADHD
Delilah	Fine art	Autistic
Eddie	Music	Autistic
Fabian	Fine art	Autistic
Grace	Animation	AuDHD
Hana	Creative writing	Autistic
India	Fine art	Autistic
Jasmine	Music	Autistic
<i>*AuDHD represents the coexistence of autism and ADHD</i>		



# Results

# Themes



# Theme 1: The construct of creativity

- **Diverse definitions of creativity from our participants**
- *“Being creative to me definitely means being different... to make the outcome different from the norm.”- Caleb*
- *“I actually think you are being creative means... seeing things from other people's own perspectives.”- Delilah*
- *“All I'm saying is that creativity can only come from where there is passion. Where there is love for creativity.”- India*



# Theme 1: The construct of creativity

- **Neurodivergent creativity is different**
- *“Autistic people are genuinely creative on their own, in their own way. We're not creative based on how people want us to be... We are creative based on our experiences, based on how we understand our autistic experience and language.”-Hana*
- *“There are things that I see in depth, that other [neurotypical] people I work with don't see when it comes to creative mindsets.”- Jasmine*

# Theme 2: Resilience

- **Our participants used creativity to build resilience against social isolation**
- *“So I really wish people would understand that autism is not something you isolate people about. You make them feel less of themselves”- Hana*
- *“isolation has made me be able to stay on my own, giving me the freedom and privacy to reflect on several things in life and then after reflection I go about exploring and then writing down”- India*

# Theme 2: Resilience

- Our participants appeared to build resilience through regulating their emotions using creativity.
- *“The passion [for music] has come from the fact that whenever I was troubled and I listened to music, it takes me to a far place... it gives me this calmness and it's more conducive for my mental health.”- Jasmine*
- *“[creativity] is a distraction to the fact that I am autistic and has made my mental health sound and stable because if you don't have anything that you're passionate about then you wouldn't have anywhere or anything to channel all your energy and attention to”- India*



# Theme 2: Resilience

- Our participants appeared to build resilience against their challenges with social communication through creativity.
- *“I panic... I can't keep association, I can't keep conversations, I can't maintain eye contact and all of that. So, it's sometimes difficult. Because a lot of people might think that you're not bold enough or you're less than them.”- Caleb*
- *“Because I don't want to interact with people because I have some, you know, when I want to talk, I just paint it”- Amanda*

# Theme 3: Empowerment

- **Creativity empowered participants to embrace their neurodivergent traits as strengths. For example, their ability to think differently (eg hyperfocus) was advantageous in creativity.**
- *“Because our brains are inherently like wired differently... we end up just thinking of things that other people wouldn't “- Grace*
- *“We don't want to just like casually like watch and enjoy, but like we want to take part in it. Autistic people... can be so hyper focused on their passions that they will throw themselves into it completely and find creative careers that way.”- Grace*

# Theme 3: Empowerment

- **Creativity helped our participants to find intrinsic worth in a society that they felt often marginalised or stigmatised them.**
- *“I've always seen myself as someone who might be neglected in the society because of the way I feel at times, because of the way I reason at times, because of my lack of understanding people, my lack of communication with people, who is feeling neglected in the society”- Fabian*
- *“But then I had some kids who were on my neck quite disturbing me and making me feel like I'm a different being.”- Hana*



# Theme 3: Empowerment

- **Creativity helped our participants to find intrinsic worth in a society that they felt often marginalised or stigmatised them.**
- *“being an autistic person. It has affected me negatively. And being a creative person, it affects my life positively.”- Eddie*
- *“I think being creative makes me feel special, happy. I'm proud of who I am. I feel like it is something I can hold on to. I feel like I have this gift. I think I mentioned that I feel creativity is like a gift to me.”- Brian*

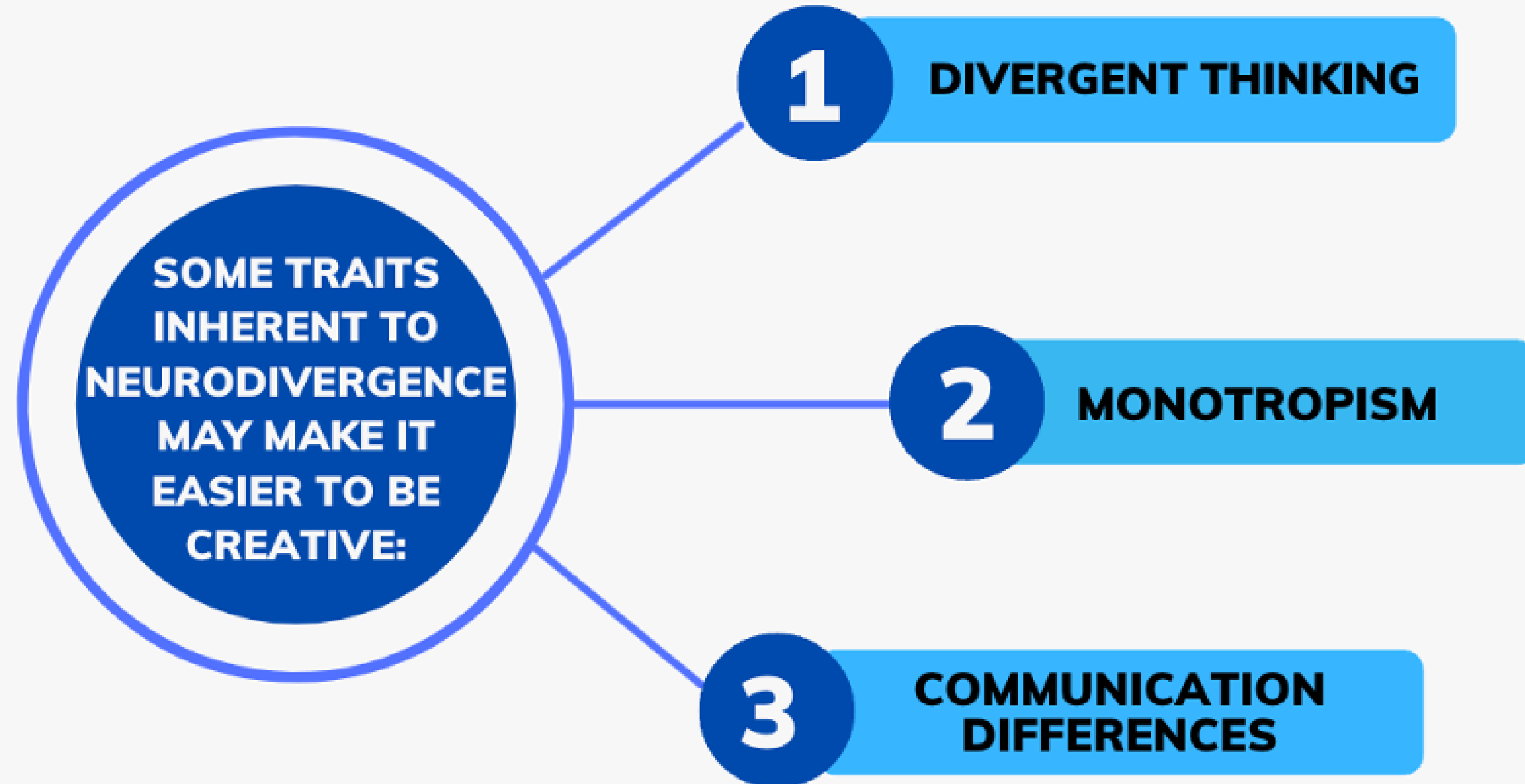
# Two Hypotheses:

# SOCIAL ISOLATION HYPOTHESIS





# INNATE TRAITS HYPOTHESIS



# Strengths & limitations

- These results are not generalisable, but this was not the aim.
  - Instead, this methodology recognised the subjectivity behind creativity. Also gave voice to ND people and allowed their views to generate new understanding.
- We allowed anyone with a ND diagnoses to take part and so results are not specific.
  - May have benefited from researching just one form of ND eg autism, to produce more robust insights.
- Studying a creative course  $\neq$  creativity.
  - However, our methodology allowed for differing perceptions of creativity among participants.



# Conclusions

- It is plausible that neurodivergent people may be **more creative** than the general population.
- It's time to **think differently** about neurodivergence.
  - Deficit-based model can lead to self-stigmatisation rather than self-compassion.
- Research needs to continue challenging notions of 'normal'.
- By doing so a more inclusive and accepting society can be formed that embraces all the different colours of the mind.

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Thank you!