Digital Agency and Professional Identity: Neurodivergent University Educators' Experiences on Twitter.

Michael James Scott

September 2025

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Bournemouth University for the degree of Doctor of Education

FACULTY OF
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION
BOURNEMOUTH UNIVERSITY

This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with its author and due acknowledgement must always be made of the use of any material contained in, or derived from, this thesis.

Acknowledgements

This thesis marks the culmination of a long and often unpredictable journey shaped by transition, disruption, and the search for belonging across educational spaces. From my early days in Further Education, through various roles in Higher Education as both a learner and a support mentor for neurodivergent students, to my current position of enforced pause due to chronic illness, this path has been far from linear. It has been, in many ways, a nomadic journey of identity, adaptation, and resilience, underscored by both struggle and renewal.

I would first like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Professor Julian McDougall and Dr Rachel Moseley, whose steady guidance, thoughtful critique and intellectual generosity sustained this project at every stage. I also thank my former supervisor, Dr Holly Henderson, whose early encouragement helped shape its foundational direction. I am especially grateful to the ALS support team at Bournemouth University: Deborah, Ildiko and Melissa. Your unwavering advocacy and practical support made my continued engagement possible.

My deepest thanks go to my family. To my partner, Naomi, your love, patience and quiet strength have grounded me more than you may ever know. You have held space for this work, and for me, in every sense. To my youngest child, Crystal, thank you not only for being my carer with such grace and compassion, but for accompanying me with humour, insight and fierce loyalty. You have been a co-navigator of this journey, and this thesis exists because of you.

This work was also shaped through connection and solidarity with peers. I would particularly like to thank Dr Poppy Gibson, a collaborator and generous thinker, whose work and presence in the Post-16 Twitter community helped refine and expand my ideas. I am also deeply grateful to Lucy Harding, whose encouragement and shared doctoral experience have been a source of mutual support, resilience and insight. Both of you exemplify the power of scholarly community and friendship. The Twitter-based Post-16 community, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, became a vital space of care, knowledge exchange and resistance. It was within these early digital encounters that the first contours of this research began to take shape.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to all neurodivergent educators, scholars and allies whose voices, challenges and innovations populate the digital third spaces that inspired this work. Your creativity, resistance and community have affirmed the necessity of reimagining how professional identities are lived and shared. Embracing the concept of the nomadic educator has helped me make sense of my own academic journey and begin to look ahead with renewed clarity and adaptability. In a world that often demands assimilation, your presence reminds us that other ways of being and knowing are not only possible, but vital. To those navigating precarity, reshaping

academia from the margins, or still searching for their space, this is for you.

Abstract

This thesis explores how neurodivergent educators in UK Higher Education negotiate professional identity and digital agency through Twitter. This engagement is traced from the onset of the first UK COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020 to the platform's acquisition by Elon Musk in October 2022. Drawing on a critical realist framework and grounded in my lived experience as an autistic, ADHD and dyslexic educator, the study investigates how digital third spaces can serve both sites of resistance and areas of precarity. Central to this research is the conceptualisation of Twitter as a hybridised third space where neurodivergent educators engage in identity performance, community-building and advocacy, often in response to structural exclusion and institutional ableism.

Methodologically, the study adopts a triadic approach that integrates autoethnography, participatory and multi-methods. This layered design enables a holistic examination of structure, culture and agency, foregrounding shared and divergent digital academic life experiences. Data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, revealing key themes including: the blending of personal and professional identity, strategic disclosure and identity curation; digital agency within third spaces; and the emergence of "survival professionalism" as a response to academic precarity.

Findings indicate that while Twitter provides neurodivergent educators with an accessible platform for epistemic recognition, self-authorship, and collective solidarity, it also presents challenges related to hypervisibility, burnout, and platform instability, particularly following its acquisition by Elon Musk. This thesis contributes to scholarship on digital pedagogy, neurodiversity in Higher Education and professional identity and offers implications for inclusive policy and practice. It argues for a rethinking of institutional norms to better support neurodivergent staff. It recognises the critical role of digital third spaces in facilitating alternative forms of academic presence and participation.

Contents

Acknowledgements **3**

Abstract **5**

Figures 9

Tables 9

Chapter 1: Introduction **10**

1.1 Rationale 10

1.2 Research Context 15

1.2.1 Higher Education & Neurodivergence 15

1.2.2 Twitter as a Digital Third Space for Neurodivergent Educators 22

1.3 Research Aims and Questions 24

1.4 Theoretical Framework 26

1.5 Methodological Approach 28

1.6 Contribution & Significance 29

1.7 Chapter Outline and Thesis Structure 30

Chapter 2: Literature Review **32**

2.1 Introduction 32

2.2 Scope, Timeline and Method of Review 34

2.3 Reflexivity and Positionality 36

2.4 Evolving Discourse on Neurodivergent Educators 40

2.4.1 Shifting Perspectives on Neurodivergence in Higher Education 42

2.4.2 Navigating Disclosure and Institutional Culture 44

2.4.3 The Role of Digital Networks in Neurodivergent Advocacy 46

2.5 Theoretical Perspectives 49

2.5.1 Performing Professional Identity 50

2.5.2 Intersectionality 53

2.5.3 Third Space Theory with Digital Identity Work 56

2.5.4 Critical Disability Studies and the Neurodiversity Paradigm 59

2.5.5 Neoliberalism Precarity 61

2.6 The Nomadic Educator: Concept 64

2.7 Summary 67

Chapter 3: Methodology **69**

3.1 Introduction 69

3.2 Philosophical Framework 70

3.3 Research Design Overview 74

3.3.1 Insights from the Pilot Study 76

3.4 Autoethnography 79

3.4.1 Performing Professional Identity through Autoethnography 80

3.4.2 A Hybrid Autoethnographic Approach 81

3.5 Participatory Research 82

3.6 Multi-Methods Approach 84

3.7 Methods 87

3.7.1 Autoethnography: Reflexive Narrative and Self-interview 88

3.7.2 Exploratory Online Survey 91

3.7.3 Padlet Exercise (as part of Enhanced Interviews) 93

3.7.4 Enhanced Semi-Structured Interviews 96

3.8 Ethical Considerations 97

3.9 Ensuring Trustworthiness and Reflexive Rigour 100

3.10 Summary 102

Chapter 4: Data Collection **103**

4.1 Introduction 103

4.2 Research Questions and Method Alignment 104
4.3 Participant Information for Padlet and Semi-Structured Interviews 109
4.4 Temporal Overview of Data Collection 110
4.5 Bringing the Data Together: A Sequential-Reflexive and Strength-Based Design 111

Chapter 5: Data Analysis 114
5.1 Introduction 114
5.2 Data Sources and Reflexive Thematic Analysis within a Critical Realist Framework 115
5.3 Online Survey 117
5.3.1 Familiarisation with the Data 118
5.3.2 Thematic Coding and Structural Patterns 119
5.3.3 Interpreting Structural Themes 121
5.3.4 Reviewing Structural Themes 123
5.3.5 Defining and Naming Structural Themes 125
5.3.6 Reflexive Design of Padlet Questions from Survey Theme 127
5.4 Padlet: Cultural Agency 129
5.4.1 Participant Engagement Styles 131
5.4.2 Familiarisation with the Data 132
5.4.3 Interpretation and Thematic Coding of Cultural Themes 134
5.4.4 Reviewing Cultural Themes 136
5.4.5 Defining and Naming Themes 138
5.4.6 Development of Interview Questions 140
5.5 Autoethnography Self-Interview 142
5.5.1 Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality in a Self-Interview 142
5.5.2 Familiarisation with the Data 143
5.5.3 Generating Initial Codes 145
5.5.4 Interpreting Agentic Themes 146
5.5.5 Reviewing Agentic Themes 149
5.5.6 Defining and Naming Themes 152
5.6 Semi-structured Interviews 154
5.6.1 Drew's Interview 154
5.6.2 Katrina's Interview 165
5.6.3 Nora's Interview 175
5.6.4 Flora's Interview 187
5.7 Reflexive Synthesis and Researcher Positionality 199

Chapter 6: Discussion and Findings 200
6.1 Introduction 200
6.2 Comparative Thematic Synthesis Across Datasets 201
6.2.1 Shared Themes Across Datasets 202
6.2.2 Survey and Divergent Themes 204
6.2.3 Padlet and Divergent Insights 205
6.2.4 Comparing Interviews with Self-Interview: Reflexive Divergence 206
6.2.5 Summary of Converging and Diverging Themes 207
6.3 Performing Professional Identity in Digital Spaces 209
6.4 Disclosure as Risk, Strategy and Structure 213
6.5 Digital Agency and the Third Space 216
6.6 Precarity and Survival Professionalism 219
6.7 The Nomadic Educator Revisited 222
6.8 Researching from Within: A Neurodivergent Perspective 225

Chapter 7: Conclusion 227
7.1 Overview 227
7.2 Synthesising the Research Questions: A Critical Realist Mapping 229
7.3 Core Insights through a Critical Realist Lens 230
7.4 Original Contributions and Alignment with Research Aim 232
7.5 Research in Transition: Structure, Self and Digital Disruption 234
7.6 Implications for Practice, Policy and Inclusion 234
7.6.1 Structural Barriers and Impacts of Ableism in Higher Education 235
7.6.2 Institutional Pathways to Neuro-Inclusive Reform 236

7.7 Directions for Future Research 237
7.7.1 Explore Alternative and Emerging Platforms 238
7.7.2 Attending to Intersectional Differences 239
7.7.3 Extending the Nomadic Educator Concept through Early Career Inquiry 240
7.8 Final Reflexive Insights 240

References 243

Appendices 259
A: Online Survey: Questions 259
B: Online Survey Responses 262
C: Semi-Structured Interview Questions 270
D: Self-Interview 271
E: Drew's Interview Transcript 276
F: Katrina's Interview Transcript 291
G: Interview Poster 302
H: Ethic's Review 303

Figures

Figure A: Whiteboard mind-map illustrating non-linear and multimodal literature engagement strategies 37
Figure B: Conceptual mapping of theoretical perspectives underpinning the Nomadic Educator (Section 2.6) 49
Figure C: The Interconnection of Narrative Inquiry, Self-Study, and Autoethnography through Reflexivity (Hamilton et al., 2008, p. 24) 73
Figure D: Insights from Pilot Study: Influences on Accessibility and Methodological Refinements 78
Figure E: Twitter recruitment post for online survey (2 February 2024) 92
Figure F: Sequential-Reflexive Data Collection diagram 113
Figure G: Screenshot of the exported data from Flora's exercise to Question 1 130
Figure H: Screenshot of Drew's exported data for Question 4 with text and image response 130

Tables

Table 1: Theoretical Framework Overview and Literature Review Integration 27
Table 2: The Triadic Framework 70
Table 3: Mapping Research Questions to Methods and Critical Realist Layers 75
Table 4:Pilot Study Participant Details (Anonymised) 76
Table 5: Analytical Contribution of Methods in Relation to Structure, Culture, and Agency 87
Table 6: Data collection methods with focus and RQ's 105
Table 7: Alignment of Research Questions with Methods, Theoretical Concepts, and Methodological Rationale 107
Table 8: Participant Overview 109
Table 9: Data source to with ontological, contribution and alignment with sub-questions. 116
Table 10: Initial Structural Patterns Identified During Familiarisation 119
Table 11: Structural layer- Summary of Themes and Initial Codes from Survey Data 120
Table 12: Searching for Themes- Structural Patterns emerging from Survey Data 123
Table 13: Refinement of Structural Themes from Initial Codes to Final Definitions 127
Table 14: Mapping Final Survey Themes to Padlet Research Questions 128
Table 15: Participant Engagement Modalities and Cultural Expressions 131
Table 16: Initial Culture Codes from Padlet Responses by Participants 135
Table 17: Cultural Themes and Sub-themes (Padlet Data) 139
Table 18: Initial patterns identified during Familiarisation with the Autoethnographic Self-Interview 144
Table 19: Initial Coding Structure-Autoethnographic Self-Interview 146
Table 20: Agentic Themes and Sub-Themes (Autoethnographic Data) 153
Table 21: Summary of Initial Patterns (Drew) 156
Table 22: Initial Codes Generated from Drew's Interview 156
Table 23: Summary of Thematic Interpretations from Drew's Interview Across Critical Realist Layers 158
Table 24: Summary of Initial Patterns 166
Table 25: Initial Codes Generated from Katrina's Interview 168
Table 26: Summary of Thematic Interpretation from Katrina's Interview Across Critical Realist Layers 170
Table 27: Summary of Initial Patterns 177
Table 28: Initial Codes Generated from Nora's Interview 178
Table 29: Summary of Thematic Interpretation from Nora's Interview Across Critical Realist Layers 180
Table 30: Summary of Initial Patterns 188
Table 31: Initial Codes Generated from Flora's Interview 189
Table 32: Summary of Thematic Interpretations from Flora's Interview Across Critical Realist Layers 192
Table 33: Divergent Themes from the Survey 205
Table 34: Summary of Converging and Diverging Themes Across Data Sources 207
Table 35: Mapping of Research Questions to Thesis Content 229
Table 36: Institutional Priorities and Strategic Actions for Neuro-Inclusivity within Higher Education 237

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Reflexive commentary Icon

Throughout this thesis, I integrate reflexive commentary as part of my commitment to transparency, positionality and critical engagement. These moments are marked by the following icon:

This icon signals when I, as a neurodivergent educator-researcher, draw explicitly on my lived experience, personal reflections and insider knowledge. This practice aligns with the principles of autoethnography.(Anderson 2006; Ellis et al. 2010; Crawley 2012; Adams et al. 2015) and Critical Disability Studies(Oliver 1990; Shakespeare and Watson 2001; Fricker 2007; Brown and Leigh 2018; Brown 2020; Legault et al. 2021; Walker 2021; Chapman 2023) positioning reflexivity as both a methodological and ethical necessity(Simons and Usher 2000; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009). The icon will be used at key points throughout the thesis to foreground these reflexive interludes.

Navigating the Sudden Shift to Remote Work

In March 2020, as the world abruptly transitioned into lockdown, I confronted an unfamiliar and overwhelming reality. As a neurodivergent educator accustomed to structured routines and predictable environments, the sudden shift to remote work dismantled the carefully constructed frameworks that enabled me to navigate my professional life. My days, once punctuated by in-person teaching, staff meetings, and casual corridor conversations, were replaced by an endless cycle of Zoom calls, asynchronous discussions and the persistent hum of digital notifications.

While the shift to online teaching was disorienting for many educators, it introduced additional layers of complexity for neurodivergent educators, including sensory overload, disrupted routines and increased cognitive demands associated with mastering new technologies and platforms. Furthermore, the loss of established support networks, vital for many neurodivergent individuals, compounds these challenges, notably affecting professional identity and agency.

In this context, *agency* refers to the ability of neurodivergent educators to independently navigate, shape and exert control over their professional practices and identities despite structural and institutional limitations. This conceptualisation aligns with Archer's (1995, 2007) View of human reflexivity as a central mechanism through which individuals navigate structural constraints, exercising agency through iterative engagement with their social and institutional environments (Bhaskar 2008; Archer et al. 2013).

These sudden changes often resulted in epistemic exclusion for neurodivergent educators whose communication, processing and sensory needs were inadequately supported by institutional systems. (Chapman and Carel 2022; Hamilton and Petty 2023). The emotional and cognitive labour of adjusting to these transformations was compounded by the precarity of academic roles and the demand to perform professionalism in increasingly digital contexts.

Twitter as a Digital Third Space

Yet, for the first time in my career, I was in an environment where sensory demands and social interactions became more manageable. Working remotely removed many sensory distractions common in a physical environment and lessened the exhausting demands of neurotypical social interaction. In this landscape, Twitter emerged as a vital third space, a digital environment beyond traditional academic structures, that provided a more controlled means of engaging with peers.

Third Space Theory, as conceptualised by Bhabha (2004), refers to hybrid spaces between formal institutional environments such as universities and informal personal contexts, like at home or within social spaces. These hybrid spaces allow individuals to negotiate identities and exercise agency beyond traditional institutional norms. Twitter's capacity to function as a digital third space aligns closely with McDougall and Potter's (2019) Conceptualise third spaces as negotiated environments where dynamic literacies emerge through social, situated and curatorial practices. McDougall and Potter (2019) emphasise how third space challenges traditional epistemological hierarchies by enabling agentive knowledge exchanges and boundary-crossing practices, resonating with how neurodivergent educators used Twitter to traverse institutional norms and construct inclusive communities.

In the context of neurodivergent educators, Twitter has served as such a third space, providing a digital environment for identity work, peer support and resistance to ableist academic structures (Carpenter et al. 2021, 2022; Scott and Gibson 2023). McArthur and White (2016) reinforce this framing, conceptualising Twitter as a "Third Place" that facilitates communal identity work outside rigid institutional hierarchies. Building upon this, Gabarron et al. (2023) offer a particular compelling perspective, demonstrating how digital platforms such as Twitter do not merely supplement existing academic practices but actively reshape the conditions under which professional identities are constructed, challenged and reimagined.

Gabarron et al. (2023) work emphasises that for neurodivergent individuals, these hybrid spaces become critical arenas for agency, enabling the contestation of normative expectations and the articulation of alternative professional selves. Hashtags such as #ActuallyAutistic and #EduTwitter have been instrumental in facilitating

these dispersed communities of practice (Wenger 1998), providing structural and affective scaffolding empowers neurodivergent educators to critically engage with and rethink dominant conceptions of competence, professionalism and belonging. In this sense, Twitter functions not simply as a communicative tool but as a transformative space where marginalised identities can resist, subvert and renegotiate the dominant ableist logics embedded within the academy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic (Leach et al. 2020; Carpenter et al. 2021) Twitter functioned as a third space environment offering neurodivergent educators an alternative to the rigid structures of institutional academia. Unlike traditional university settings, which frequently reinforce neurotypical norms and hierarchical forms of engagement (Gibson et al. 2022; Mellifont 2023) Twitter enabled asynchronous, text-based interactions that were often more accessible for individuals with sensory sensitivities, executive functioning differences or social anxiety (Brown 2020; Gabarron, Dorronzoro, et al. 2023; Scott and Gibson 2023). Yet, as Marwick and Boyd (2011) argue, platforms like Twitter operate within 'collapsed contexts', where audiences from multiple spheres converge, potentially heightening the risk of misinterpretation, surveillance and reputational precarity.

Post-Pandemic Twitter

While Twitter initially served as a digital refuge during the pandemic (Carpenter et al. 2021), Its role evolved post-pandemic into a more contested space for identity work, advocacy and professional agency. As universities reinstated in-person work while retaining elements of digital academia, neurodivergent educators had turned to Twitter not only to sustain professional networks but also to navigate the complexities of hybrid academic environments and to advocate for greater inclusion within higher education, as mentioned by Brown (2021); Gibson et al. (2022); Mellifont (2023); Scott and Gibson (2023).

Unlike platforms like LinkedIn, which often emphasise polished self-presentation within hierarchical structures, or newer platforms such as Bluesky, which are still emerging in academic spaces, Twitter has enabled spontaneous, lateral peer exchange. Its real-time nature, openness to network activism and emphasis on viral advocacy fostered a dynamic environment where neurodivergent educators blurred personal and professional boundaries (Papacharissi 2012; Carpenter et al. 2022a; Egner 2022). Through these affordances, Twitter became a platform for connection and a critical space for micro-resistance and professional transformation in the face of institutional norms (Mellifont 2023). As Egner (2022) notes, identity-based practices on Twitter, such as hashtags like #ActuallyAutistic, can facilitate individual self-expression and collective belonging while increasing exposure to public scrutiny and emotional exhaustion.

Despite the affordances Twitter has offered, increasing instability, particularly following its acquisition by Elon

Musk in October of 2022, has raised widespread concerns around platform precarity, declining accessibility and the risks of hypervisibility (Vidal Valero 2023; Clayton and Hoskins 2025). Hypervisibility, as discussed by Malik et al. (2019) and Gabarron et al. (2023) refers to the intensified public exposure, particularly through digital platforms, which increases an individual's vulnerability to misinterpretation and targets scrutiny. For neurodivergent educators, the recent transformations on Twitter (now called X) disrupted a critical digital environment that served as a community space and a platform for advocacy.

While some educators have transitioned to alternative platforms like LinkedIn or BlueSky, these new spaces have yet to fully replicate the complex affordances previously provided by Twitter, which functioned simultaneously as a digital refuge and a contested arena for professional resistance (Scott and Gibson 2023). Although Trevisan (2016) primarily focuses on disability rights advocacy and activist communities, the dynamics he identifies are equally applicable to disabled and neurodivergent educators who are navigating institutional marginalisation within higher education. Trevisan (2016) underscores that disabled individuals have historically relied on digital platforms for essential identity work and community building, emphasising that instability or commercial restructuring disproportionately disadvantages those already marginalised within institutional frameworks.

Moreover, Twitter's algorithmic preferences for amplifying controversial and viral content over nuanced discourse present a dual-edged scenario for neurodivergent educators. While these algorithms can notably enhance their professional visibility, they concurrently increase vulnerability to burnout and reputational risks (Malik et al. 2019; Gabarron et al. 2023). The tension is further supported by Skafle et al. (2024), their research illustrates the impact of social media algorithms in shaping public perceptions of autism. Such algorithm-driven dynamics risk misrepresenting authentic self-expressions and exacerbating emotional fatigue for educators engaged in advocacy or personal disclosure online.

The dual reality of empowerment and vulnerability is particularly noticeable for those navigating digital engagement while contending with the emotional and cognitive demands of managing neurodivergence in public-facing spaces (Mellifont 2023). These dynamics reflect wider shifts in the political economy of digital platforms, where once participatory spaces are increasingly governed by corporate logics that prioritise engagement metrics and monetisation over community accessibility (Aroles et al. 2020). The post-acquisition shifts in Twitter's moderation policies, interface features, and algorithmic visibility have exacerbated concerns around inclusion, especially for users dependent on accessible design and community continuity (Clayton and Hoskins 2025). These developments are not trivial; they represent broader structural challenges disproportionately impacting marginalised educators.

Neurodivergent educators often utilise social media not only for community building but to challenge

institutional hierarchies and engage in public scholarship actively (Carpenter et al. 2022). Platform instability, therefore, threatens both professional agency and the sustainability of digital academic participation. In this complex post-pandemic context, where empowerment, vulnerability, and precarity converge, this study situates its critical inquiry into how neurodivergent educators navigate digital academic life.

From Lived Experience to Collective Insight

This research emerged from these lived experiences. Specifically, it examines how neurodivergent educators navigated professional identity formation and agency amid rapid transformations in digital academia during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Autoethnography, grounded in my dual positionality as both researcher and participant, enabled deep reflection and offered a structured bridge between personal narratives and wider theoretical discourses (Hamilton et al. 2008; Adams et al. 2015). As Anderson (2006) and Adams et al. (2015) note, autoethnography is not merely anecdotal; it represents a rigorous and reflexive methodology that connects subjective experiences to broader social and institutional contexts, allowing personal narrative to function as legitimate scholarly evidence.

However, while my lived experience provides a valuable entry point for examining these themes, it is not an isolated case. Rather, it reflects broader systemic barriers faced by neurodivergent educators across the sector. Participant narratives reinforce this point. For example, Drew, a participant in this study, described the common experience of juggling multiple short-term contracts before securing a stable role, stating:

> *"I moved from doing lots and lots of part-time things, which obviously is a very common thing for someone neurodivergent, and it works really well for dopamine, doesn't it?"*

Similarly, Katrina described a precarious transition from guest lecturing and freelance workshops into a more secure teaching fellowship, illustrating a recurring pattern where neurodivergent educators are often funnelled into unstable, fragmented employment pathways. These experiences align with broader patterns in the literature, where neurodivergent and working-class educators report being systematically positioned within contingent academic roles that offer limited progression or stability (Brown 2020; Crew 2020). This structural marginalisation exacerbates the emotional and logistical challenges of professional life for those whose cognitive styles or support needs fall outside of normative expectations.

These narratives echo research that highlights the compounding effects of institutional ableism, precarity, and disclosure dilemmas in higher education (Brown and Leigh 2018; Mellifont 2023). Moreover, these conditions are often sustained by epistemic injustice, where neurodivergent educators' embodied knowledge is devalued or dismissed within dominant institutional cultures (Chapman and Carel 2022). As Pearson and Rose (2023) argue, many educators are compelled to engage in sustained masking and identity management as a response to the

pressures of professional surveillance and neurotypical norms. The cost of this invisible labour, both emotional and cognitive, is seldom acknowledged within academic frameworks of merit and professionalism.

By integrating participant voices, this study not only reflects my own journey but also situates it within a wider empirical and theoretical framework. Rather than presenting my experiences as unique, it highlights how the challenges I encountered, precarity, limited accommodations, and pressures to conform to neurotypical norms, are structural conditions shaping the professional lives of neurodivergent educators more broadly. This project employs autoethnography in conjunction with participatory and multi-method approaches, where neurodivergent educators engage in identity work, community building, and advocacy (Carpenter et al. 2022; Scott and Gibson 2023).

This study adopts a critical realist stance (Archer et al. 2013; Danermark et al. 2019) recognising that underlying institutional structures, social expectations, and individual agency shape the experiences of neurodivergent educators. By situating digital practices within this layered framework, I examine how structural factors and personal actions intersect to enable or constrain professional identity and agency.

1.2 Research Context

1.2.1 Higher Education & Neurodivergence

The Changing Landscape of Higher Education

Higher Education has undergone structural transformations, increasingly characterised by performance-based metrics, heightened precarity and the growing centrality of digital academia as a key site of professional activity. These shifts are driven by what Ball (2016) evocatively described as the “slouching beast” of neoliberalism, through which marketisation, competition and accountability cultures have fundamentally reshaped the nature of academic labour. Shore and Wright (2015) similarly contend that the sector has been reassembled around audit cultures, driven by rankings, metrics and managerial logics that permeate and organise the everyday realities of academic work.

These transformations profoundly impact neurodivergent educators, whose ability to thrive within traditional academic environments is frequently constrained by institutional ableism and entrenched expectations centred around productivity. (Brown and Leigh 2018; Mellifont 2023). Institutional ableism refers to the structural discrimination embedded within organisational policies and practices, which privilege neurotypical norms and systematically disadvantage neurodivergent individuals (Brown and Leigh 2018; Pearson and Rose 2021). These barriers are not merely operational but ontological, rooted in the deeper stratified structures of social systems that, as Sayer (2000) and Danermark et al. (2019) argue, perpetuate exclusion even in the absence of explicit

discriminatory intent.

Performance-driven policies such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) have established a culture of continuous evaluation in Higher Education, prioritising outputs, competition and visibility over more holistic conceptions of academic work. Shore and Wright (2015) argue that such audit cultures fundamentally reshape the purposes and practices of universities, subordinating intellectual and educational values to managerial logics of measurement, accountability, and market competitiveness.

In this context, academic labour becomes increasingly defined by its visibility and quantifiability, intensifying pressures that disproportionately affect marginalised groups within the sector. These performance-driven frameworks systemically disadvantage educators whose modes of knowledge production and communication diverge from neurotypical norms, leading to the structural undervaluing of cognitive diversity and non-traditional academic trajectories (Oliver 1990; Shakespeare and Watson 2001; Brown 2021). As a result, neurodivergent educators encounter entrenched barriers that constrain their capacity to participate in academic life, particularly where preferred patterns of engagement, interaction and scholarly contribution fall outside dominant institutional expectations.

The casualisation of academic labour has further intensified these challenges. Higher Education institutions increasingly rely on short-term, zero-hour and fractional contracts, cultivating an environment of instability and insecurity that disproportionately impacts neurodivergent staff (University and College Union 2021a). As Mason and Megoran (2021) argue that precarity within higher education undermines employment stability and erodes educators' sense of worth and belonging. This phenomenon is particularly acute for neurodivergent staff felt, who often experience heightened forms of institutional alienation and exclusion (Brown 2020).

Structural precarity is further compounded by disclosure dilemmas (Pearson and Rose 2023), restricted access to reasonable adjustments and systemic bias in recruitment, promotion and retention practices (Mellifont 2023). Dickinson et al. (2022) similarly highlight the shifting professional identities of educators navigating the blurred and often precarious boundaries between teaching, research and contingent academic roles, underscoring the profound implications for those whose academic trajectories already challenge normative expectations.

Research demonstrates that neurodivergent educators face persistent and systemic barriers to sustaining long-term academic careers, driven mainly by institutional ableism, structural precarity and the chronic failure to provide appropriate accommodations. Accommodations such as access to separate workspaces to meet sensory regulation needs (Brown 2021; Mellifont 2023; Scott and Gibson 2023). The casualisation of academic labour frequently compounds these barriers, with neurodivergent educators disproportionately confined to short-term

or zero-hour, or precarious contracts, particularly those from working-class backgrounds who experience intersecting forms of disadvantage (Crew 2020). Heightened vulnerability to burnout is a further concern, as the pressures to conform to neurotypical productive norms and institutional recognition reproduce patterns of exclusion and attrition across the sector (Grant and Kara 2021; University and College Union 2021a; Pearson et al. 2022; Mellifont 2023).

Collectively, these intersecting barriers expose deeper systemic inequities embedded within higher education structures, where opportunities for sustainable professional engagement among neurodivergent staff remain constrained. Legault et al. (2021) contend that such exclusion is not only structural but epistemic and cognitive, as institutional cultures privilege dominant neurocognitive norms and systemically marginalise alternative modes of knowledge production. Chapman (2021) similarly frames neurodiversity within a broader social ecology, emphasising how institutional power structures actively delimit the recognition and legitimacy of divergent cognitive expressions.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these dynamics by accelerating the shift towards digital academia, prompting many educators to turn to online platforms as sites of professional continuity, identity work and collective support (Leach et al. 2020; Carpenter et al. 2021, 2022; Vidal Valero 2023). During lockdown, Twitter in particular functioned as a digital third space, an informal, networked environment through which neurodivergent educators built professional communities, shared lived experiences and resisted dominant institutional narratives (McArthur and White 2016; Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022; Gabarron et al. 2023).

Drawing on Wenger (1998) concept of communities of practice Scott and Gibson (2022) conceptualise these formations as Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoPs): digitally mediated networks that extend the principles of shared learning, identity work and mutual support beyond traditional institutional settings. For neurodivergent educators, such digital spaces offered not merely visibility, but a means of reclaiming legitimacy and agency within academic structures that otherwise often fail to recognise their professional contributions (Trevisan 2016; Egner 2022)In this sense, the digital third space functioned as a critical site of resistance, enabling new forms of belonging, community-building and epistemic recognition for those systematically marginalised within Higher Education.

In the post-pandemic context, Twitter's role evolved, increasingly facilitating third space identity work while also exposing users to reputational risks, algorithmic bias and the psychological toll of hypervisibility (Malik et al. 2019; Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022; Gabarron et al. 2023). Given these structural exclusions, many neurodivergent educators continue to turn to digital platforms as alternative professional spaces, using them to navigate precarity, build peer networks and engage in advocacy. However, while research has documented

educators' digital engagement more broadly (Carpenter et al. 2021, 2022), few studies have directly centred the specific experiences of neurodivergent educators. This study addresses that gap by exploring how neurodivergent educators negotiate identity, community and professional agency in social media environments such as Twitter, amid shifting institutional and platform-based constraints.

Neurodivergent Representation in Academia

Despite growing discourse on neurodiversity within Higher Education, neurodivergent educators remain markedly underrepresented in permanent posts, senior roles and leadership positions (Brown and Leigh 2018; Brown 2020; University and College Union 2021a; Mellifont 2023). This underrepresentation is not a neutral phenomenon but the outcome of entrenched structural and cultural barriers that systematically constrain access to career progression. Brown (2020) argues that ableism is not peripheral but deeply embedded in academic culture, shaping dominant perceptions of credibility, competence and leadership potential in ways that privilege neurotypical norms. Similarly, Mellifont (2023) highlights how systemic exclusion is sustained through recruitment, promotion and retention practices that fail to accommodate neurodivergent ways of working and knowing.

As Lewis and Arday (2023) observe, these barriers are further intensified by race, class and neurodivergence, where multiple axes of marginalisation converge to exacerbate underrepresentation. Moreover, Crew (2020) draws attention to the compounding effects of class-based precarity, noting that working-class academics often face additional material and symbolic exclusions within the neoliberal university (Ball 2016; Cerro Santamaría 2020). Together, these analyses reveal that the limited presence of neurodivergent educators in senior academic positions is not simply a matter of individual deficit but reflects broader patterns of structural inequality embedded within the sector.

Disclosure, therefore, emerges as a critical dilemma within this broader landscape of structural inequality. Many neurodivergent educators report reluctance to disclose their neurodivergence due to pervasive fears of stigmatisation, diminished opportunities and being perceived as less professional or competent (Pearson and Rose 2021; Santuzzi and Keating 2022; Mellifont 2023; Pearson and Rose 2023). The risk of being judged against neurotypical norms often deters individuals from seeking necessary accommodations or engaging in self-advocacy, a reluctance intensified under conditions of precarious employment (University and College Union 2021a). Denisen (2024) further contends that such dilemmas are exacerbated by institutional frameworks that remain steeped in deficit-based models, which fail to recognise or value neurodivergent forms of professional engagement and contribution. In this context, disclosure is not simply a person's decision but a structurally situated risk, shaped by entrenched assumptions about competence, professionalism and academic legitimacy.

One of the most pervasive and enduring obstacles is the implicit expectation that educators conform to neurotypical standards of behaviour, communication and professionalism. Neurodivergent educators can be perceived as 'Intellectually capable but odd' or 'difficult to work with', perceptions that systemically contribute to their exclusion from grant collaborations, leadership roles and departmental influence (Brown and Leigh 2018; Pearson and Rose 2021; Chapman 2023; Mellifont 2023). Such perceptions are not merely incidental but reflect deeper structural biases within academic cultures that equate normative performance with professional legitimacy.

This dynamic fosters a self-perpetuating cycle of exclusion, whereby neurodivergent educators are consistently overlooked for advancement from dominant cultural expectations (Mellifont 2023). As Legault et al. (2021) argue, these exclusions are underpinned by epistemic and cognitive marginalisation, wherein non-normative ways of knowing, communicating and leading are systematically devalued within academic institutions. Consequently, neurodivergent educators are required to navigate a professional landscape that implicitly demands conformity while simultaneously denying recognition to the alternative contributions they are uniquely positioned to offer.

This lack of visible neurodivergent leadership further entrenches exclusionary dynamics within academia. In the absence of mentors who share their experiences, many neurodivergent educators internalise the notion that professional success necessitates masking or the suppression of authentic ways of being (Pearson and Rose 2021; Scott and Gibson 2023). Such internalised pressures reflect and reproduce institutional ableism, reinforcing normative ideals of competence and professionalism (Brown and Leigh 2018) and limiting the development of inclusive cultures.

The absence of neurodivergent role models in senior positions restricts opportunities for mentorship and advocacy and cultural and structural change (Scott and Gibson 2023). As Brown and Leigh (2018) and Scott and Gibson (2023) argue, the visibility of neurodivergent leaders is critical to challenging entrenched ableist norms and fostering institutional cultures that recognise cognitive diversity as a professional asset rather than a deficit. Without such representation, efforts to build a more inclusive and equitable academic environment remain profoundly constrained.

The barriers to disclosure are further compounded by the exclusion faced by neurodivergent educators. Many can experience a persistent double bind: disclosing their neurodivergence risk stigma, marginalisation, or being viewed as less competent, while choosing not to disclose can result in limited access to necessary accommodations and support systems (Brown and Leigh 2018; Pearson and Rose 2021). This dilemma is particularly acute for educators employed on fixed-term, hourly paid or zero-hour contracts. As Brown and Leigh

(2018, p. 987) note,

> *"In an environment where temporary, as-and-when contracts are more prevalent than permanent, tenured positions, employees are concerned about job insecurity. Individuals fear that by admitting to health conditions or disabilities, they may be worsening their chances for employment".*

Within such precarious employment arrangements, requests for adjustments may be perceived not merely as inconvenient but as evidence of unsuitability, further jeopardising opportunities for contract renewal or promotion (Mason and Megoran 2021; University and College Union 2021a). Such institutional dynamics can discourage transparency and reinforce cultures of masking, leading many neurodivergent educators to navigate their professional roles in silence or isolation.

Within this context, online professional spaces, particularly social media platforms like Twitter, have emerged as alternative environments where neurodivergent educators can explore identity work, share lived experiences and seek peer validation outside traditional academic hierarchies (Papacharissi 2012; Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022). Understanding how neurodivergent educators manage disclosure and negotiate identity in the digital spaces is a central focus of this research.

Institutional Ableism, Disclosure Dilemmas and Precarity

Higher Education continues to be shaped by entrenched norms that privilege neurotypical expectations of productivity, communication and career progression. These norms create significant barriers for neurodivergent educators, whose working patterns, sensory needs and cognitive styles often fall outside dominant institutional models (Brown and Leigh 2018; Mellifont 2023). Brown and Leigh (2018) discuss how ableism within academia is sustained through exclusionary policies and everyday cultures of 'professionalism' that pathologise neurodivergent modes of expression and productivity. Brown and Ramlackhan (2022) argue that ableism in academia is sustained through institutional structures and cultural expectations that privilege able-bodied and able-minded norms, systematically marginalising disabled academics.

Extending this analysis, (Legault et al. 2021) highlight how neurodivergent knowledge and ways of knowing are frequently epistemically marginalised, positioned as deviant or unintelligible within dominant academic frameworks. Similarly, Mellifont (2023) emphasises that neurodivergent modes of communication, learning and leadership are often rendered invisible or devalued within higher education systems that continue to prioritise normative cognitive styles. Institutional ableism in academia, therefore, can be viewed as deeply embedded within structured norms and practices that privilege neurotypical ways of working, often marginalising neurodivergent educators.

In summary:

Hiring and Promotion Systems: Academic hiring and promotion often emphasise linear career trajectories, rapid grant acquisition and extensive networking. Such expectation can disadvantage neurodivergent educators whose work may involve deep, hyper-focused scholarship or nonlinear timelines influenced by fluctuating executive functioning and energy levels (Mellifont 2023). Brown and Leigh (2018) highlight the underrepresentation of disabled and ill academics, questioning the inclusivity of academic institutions. Mellifont (2023) further critiques the ableist structures in higher education that hinder the inclusion of neurodivergent staff.

Workplace Cultures and Disclosure: The culture within academic institutions often discourages disclosure of neurodivergent conditions, creating environments where staff must weigh the risks of stigma and exclusion against the benefits of requesting reasonable adjustments (University and College Union 2021b). This situation is particularly acute for those in precarious or early-career positions, where disclosure may be perceived as a liability. Pearson and Rose (2021) discuss how autistic individuals navigate the complexities of masking and disclosure in professional settings. The University and College Union (2021b) also note that misunderstandings about neurodivergent conditions can lead to inadequate support and even disciplinary actions. UCU guidance emphasises the importance of creating inclusive environments that recognise and accommodate neurodiversity in the workplace.

Digital Hypervisibility: Engagement in online advocacy or community building can expose neurodivergent educators to institutional scrutiny and professional risks, despite these spaces offering solidarity and resistance against ableist norms (Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2023). Egner (2022) suggests how autistic individuals use Twitter to construct identity narratives, highlighting both the empowerment and vulnerabilities associated with digital presence.

These aforementioned experiences are not incidental but reflect what Bhaskar (2008) describes as the significance of ‘absences’, where structural and cultural omissions, such as the failure to recognise divergent ways of working, communicating and contributing, have real and enduring effects. Sayer (2000) similarly, argues that such misrecognition within institutional practices can sustain patterns of exclusion and marginalisation even when formal policies profess commitment to inclusivity.

Reflecting on my own academic trajectory, I have frequently encountered barriers that rendered disclosure a fraught and high-stakes decision. When I did request accommodations, the institutional response was often ambivalent or inconsistent, highlighting the persistent gaps between policy and practice. Common neurodivergent working styles, such as asynchronous communication, task batching or viable

productivity rhythms, were seldom recognised as legitimate. Instead, a pervasive expectation remains to conform to narrow definitions of academic professionalism grounded in neurotypical norms.

Institutional practices often frame neurodivergence through deficit-based, medicalised models that render neurodivergent needs unintelligible, marginal or burdensome with managerialism frameworks (Denisen 2024). In response, many neurodivergent educators engage in masking as a survival strategy, a form of identity labour that is not only institutionally incentivised but also profoundly emotionally depleting (Pearson and Rose 2021). Even digital spaces such as Twitter, often seen as sites of solidarity, can reproduce dynamics of risk and surveillance, with online identity work being algorithmically amplified and subject to professional scrutiny (Egner 2022). Across institutional and digital contexts, neurodivergent educators must continually negotiate visibility, professionalism and authenticity, often without adequate recognition or support. This study foregrounds these negotiations as critical to understanding how disclosure, identity work and precarity intersect within the 'third space' of contemporary academic life.

1.2.2 Twitter as a Digital Third Space for Neurodivergent Educators

Social media has become an increasingly vital part of academic life, offering educators new avenues for professional networking, informal learning, and public scholarship. For neurodivergent educators, these platforms can provide vital alternatives to the exclusionary dynamics embedded in traditional academic structures. During the pandemic, and extending beyond it, Twitter emerged as a particularly important space, not merely as a communication tool, but as what McDougall and Potter (2019) conceptualise as a digital third space. McDougall and Potter (2019, p. 5) describe such spaces as:

> *"informal, virtual/digital, metaphorical and physical environment… in which relationships between subjects are exercised in an intersecting area that crosses the dimensions of digital media, education, and culture".*

In other words, digital third spaces sit between formal institutional structures and informal personal life, enabling new forms of engagement, identity negotiation, and professional practice.

Twitter's flexibility, informality, and accessibility made it particularly significant for neurodivergent educators, many of whom often encounter barriers in navigating the norms of physical academic spaces (Brown and Leigh 2018; Mellifont 2023). Hashtags such as #AcademicTwitter, #PhDChat, and #EduTwitter enabled the development of virtual communities of practice where educators shared resources, engaged in critical discussions about higher education, and collectively resisted dominant institutional norms (Scott and Gibson 2022; Gabarron et al. 2023). These online spaces, far from being mere social forums, functioned as vital professional arenas in which knowledge production, peer validation, and collaborative sense-making took place

(Carpenter et al. 2022).

For neurodivergent educators specifically, these third spaces were especially significant. The asynchronous, text-based, and self-curated nature of Twitter lowered sensory, social, and cognitive barriers commonly present in traditional academic settings (Pearson and Rose 2023). The platform's character limits and casual communicative style also offered more accessible forms of engagement for those who experience difficulties with formal academic discourse or real-time interaction (Mellifont 2023). As Chapman and Carel (2022) suggest, mainstream academic spaces can often marginalise neurodivergent knowledge and modes of communication, reinforcing epistemic injustice. Twitter, in contrast, offered educators the means to share lived experiences and articulate professional identities in ways that resisted these exclusions.

Yet, identity performance in these spaces is far from straightforward. Papacharissi (2012, p. 1992) notes that digital platforms encourage what they term as "deliberative improvisation", the continuous and strategic adjustment of self-presentation amid algorithmically mediated, unpredictable audiences. For neurodivergent educators navigating multiple, overlapping audiences, students, colleagues, institutional leaders, and the general public, this improvisation is both necessary and precarious. The affordances of digital third spaces provide educators with opportunities to engage in identity work on their own terms, yet this often involves balancing authenticity with risk engagement.

Indeed, Twitter's affordances produce a dual dynamic of empowerment and vulnerability. On one hand, these third spaces enabled neurodivergent educators to challenge ableist academic norms, share underrepresented knowledge, and find solidarity and validation (Carpenter et al. 2022; Gabarron et al. 2023). On the other hand, these same spaces expose users to heightened scrutiny, reputational risk, and online hostility (Malik et al. 2019; Pearson and Rose 2021). Egner (2022) observes that while hashtags such as #ActuallyAutistic create opportunities for collective identity performance, both empowering and fraught. As Marwick and Boyd (2011) highlight, the 'context collapse' of social media, where diverse audiences converge unexpectedly, renders professional self-presentation highly unpredictable.

These risks are intensified for neurodivergent educators, who may already be navigating institutional cultures that penalise non-normative communication styles or non-linear career trajectories (Brown and Leigh 2018). Skafle et al. (2024) further note that algorithmic amplification often favours content aligned with dominant, neurotypical assumptions, distorting how neurodivergent identity is represented and perceived online. Denisen (2024) similarly argues that expectations of professionalism have extended into digital spaces, compelling educators to manage performances carefully, lest online engagement be misread or disciplined by institutions.

This tension is compounded by the often-uneven institutional recognition of digital engagement. While some universities have begun acknowledging the scholarly and pedagogical value of online advocacy and public scholarship (Brown and Leigh 2018; Scott and Gibson 2023), others dismiss social media work as informal or irrelevant. Wharmby (2022) cautions that such dismissal is widespread when digital engagement emerges from minoritised positions, including neurodivergent perspectives.

For many neurodivergent educators, including myself, Twitter thus operates as a space of both liberation and exposure. It has provided me with professional connections, peer validation, and opportunities for advocacy that would have been difficult to access in traditional academic environments. Yet, it has also exposed me to reputational risk, misinterpretation, and emotional fatigue. This experience is not unique. Neurodivergent educators consistently report navigating complex trade-offs between visibility, authenticity, and safety online (Egner 2022).

As a digital third space, Twitter functions as a critical site where neurodivergent educators construct, contest, and perform professional identities. While offering opportunities to subvert institutional ableism and generate alternative forms of academic capital, it also demands careful negotiation of platform dynamics, hypervisibility, and institutional expectations. This thesis explores these tensions by examining how neurodivergent educators navigate the affordances and constraints of Twitter and how digital engagement reshapes professional identity formation in contemporary higher education.

1.3 Research Aims and Questions

The primary aim of this study is to explore the intersection of personal and professional identity among neurodivergent educators in UK higher education as they engage with Twitter. The research focuses on how these educators navigate and shape their self-presentation and professional engagement on the platform during a critical historical period. The time period from the onset of the first UK COVID-19 lockdown on 23 March 2020 to Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter in October 2022. This timeframe captures a shift in digital academia, marked by increased reliance on social media for networking, advocacy and community formation (Veletsianos 2020; Carpenter et al. 2021; Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022).

For many neurodivergent educators, Twitter functioned as both a professional and personal space, where McArthur and White (2016) cite as "Third Place" which enables identity work, peer support and visibility amidst institutional marginalisation. The changes brought about by the Musk acquisition introduced uncertainty and disruption to these digital practices (Vidal Valero 2023; Clayton and Hoskins 2025) highlighting the platform's evolving role in shaping and sometimes destabilising digital professional identity.

This study seeks to understand the affordances of Twitter, critically examining its enabling features and constraints as a third-space environment where neurodivergent educators undertake identity work, assert professional agency and cultivate peer support networks (Boyd 2010; McArthur and White 2016; McDougall and Potter 2019; Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022). By applying Bhabha's (2004) notion of “third space”, Twitter is understood not purely as a communication tool, but as a hybrid space where the dominant institutional norms are negotiated and challenged.

Traditional academic structures have been widely critiqued for perpetuating systemic ableism and epistemic marginalisation, often limiting career progression and visibility for neurodivergent educators (Brown and Leigh 2018; Brown 2020; Mellifont 2023). Consequently, digital platforms such as Twitter offer spaces for circumventing institutional barriers, enabling neurodivergent educators to engage in digital practices that resist normative expectations strategically, amplify alternative forms of expertise and foster communities towards advocacy, mutual support and epistemic justice (Chapman and Carel 2022; Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2023).

By examining these dynamics, the research also considers the broader implications of online engagement for cultivating more inclusive cultures. It investigates how the digital practices and experiences of neurodivergent educators can challenge dominant notions of academic professionalism, thereby contributing to the creation of more flexible, accessible and equitable professional frameworks (Brown and Leigh 2018; Brown 2020; Scott and Gibson 2023) professionalism, particularly in the context of ongoing structural exclusion and underrepresentation of neurodivergent voices in leadership and policymaking.

This exploration is particularly relevant given persistent structural exclusions and institutional ableism, which continue to marginalise neurodivergent perspectives from leadership roles and policy development within higher education (University and College Union 2021b; Mellifont 2023). Moreover, by highlighting neurodivergent educators’ innovative forms of digital participation and community building, this study underscores the potential for practices to inform policies and institutional strategies that value cognitive diversity and challenge existing inequities (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. 2020; Chapman and Carel 2022; Hamilton and Petty 2023).

Therefore, this study is grounded in a participatory, critical disability studies framework that explicitly validates lived experiences and advocates for knowledge co-production with marginalised communities (Brown and Leigh 2018; Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. 2020; Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021). It acknowledges that genuine epistemic justice is not achieved only by inclusive representation but requires active engagement with research methodologies that challenge dominant knowledge paradigms and foreground alternative epistemologies (Fricker 2007; Chapman and Carel 2022). By employing a triadic methodological approach encompassing

autoethnography, participatory and multi-methods (Cargo and Mercer 2008; Adams et al. 2015) the research operationalises this commitment.

Furthermore, in response to increasing institutional scrutiny and the systemic undervaluation of digital scholarship, particularly when emanating from minoritising positions (Brown 2020; Mellifont 2023). It engages with the systemic marginalisation of digitally active neurodivergent educators, whose professional contributions are frequently rendered invisible, delegitimised or dismissed as non-traditional within dominant academic discourses (Brown and Ramlackhan 2022; Chapman 2023; Scott and Gibson 2023). These exclusions are not incidental but reflect broader structural biases that continue to shape what is recognised as legitimate knowledge and scholarly practice in higher education. In light of these dynamics, this study seeks to examine how neurodivergent educators navigate digital space to perform professional identity, assert agency and foster inclusive academic practices. This focus is articulated through the following main research question and supporting sub-questions.

Main Research Question

How do neurodivergent educators negotiate and develop their professional and personal identities on Twitter?

Sub-questions

- How do neurodivergent educators use Twitter to create and sustain third-space interactions, and how has this evolved over time?
- What role did the COVID-19 pandemic play in shaping the professional use of Twitter among neurodivergent educators?
- How does autoethnography contribute to understanding the challenges and affordances of digital professional engagement for neurodivergent educators?
- What institutional lessons can be drawn from neurodivergent educators' use of Twitter to inform more inclusive academic environments?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework that draws together critical realism, critical disability studies, digital third space theory, intersectionality and conceptualisations of identity, performance and habitus. Through the interplay of these perspectives, the research facilitates a multi-layered analysis of how neurodivergent educators navigate the relational tensions between institutional constraints and digital affordances and between structural exclusion and reflexive agency.

Table 1: Theoretical Framework Overview and Literature Review Integration

Theoretical Perspective	Focus within Thesis	Literature Review Section
Critical Realism and Neurodivergent Agency (Archer 1995; Bhaskar 2008; Danermark et al. 2019)	Provides the ontological and epistemological foundation, framing structure, culture and agency as layered realities shaping neurodivergent educators' professional lives.	**2.5 Theoretical Perspectives** (esp. Critical Realism)
Digital Third Spaces and Professional Identity (Bhabha 2004; McDougall & Potter 2019; McArthur & White 2016)	Conceptualises Twitter as a hybrid space for identity performance, community, and resistance beyond institutional norms.	**2.5.3 Third Space Theory with Digital Identity Work**
Intersectionality and Structural Exclusion (Crenshaw 1991; Brown & Leigh 2018; Lewis & Arday 2023)	Highlights how neurodivergence intersects with race, class, gender, and precarity to shape professional exclusion.	**2.5.2 Intersectionality**
Performing Neurodivergent Identity Across Spaces (Goffman 2021; Butler 2015; Papacharissi 2012)	Examines identity as emergent, negotiated, and performed across institutional and digital contexts.	**2.5.1 Performing Professional Identity**
The Nomadic Educator: Precarity, Capital and Reflexive Practice (Braidotti 1994, 2011; Reay 2004)	A provisional concept developed in this study to theorise fluidity, survival professionalism, and identity navigation under precarity.	**2.6 The Nomadic Educator: Concept**

The framework outlined above brings together critical realism, third space theory, intersectionality, theories of performance and the emergent concept of the *nomadic educator* to offer a layered account of neurodivergent educator's experiences. Critical realism provides the ontological foundation, recognising that structures such as institutional ableism, cultural scripts of professionalism, and individual reflexivity interact in complex ways to shape professional life. Third space theory extends this lens into digital contexts, positioning Twitter as a hybrid space where these dynamics are negotiated in real time. Intersectionality further illuminates how neurodivergence interacts with race, class and gender, producing differentiated experiences of exclusion and belonging.

Building on this, theories of performance and performativity highlight the embodied, affective and strategic labour involved in presenting identity across institutional and digital spaces. These accounts inform my use of the *nomadic educator* as an exploratory concept, a heuristic that tentatively captures the fluid, precarious and adaptive identity work enacted by neurodivergent educators as they move across contracts, roles and digital environments.

At this early stage, the *nomadic educator* concept is positioned as reflexive hunch rather than a fully developed model, informed by Braidotti's (2011) theorisation of nomadism and my own lived experience of moving across multiple contracts and roles during the COVID-19 lockdown, as well as dialogues with other educators in digital third spaces such as Twitter. This early framing was shaped by the continual shifting of roles, the precarious realities of zero-hour contracts, the uncertainty of professional stability, and the need to mask behaviours in order to conform to the normative expectations of the post-16 environment in which I was situated. Rather than presenting the nomadic educator as a fixed theoretical model, this study treats it as an emergent conceptual lens – one that is continuously refined, contested and reconfigured through thematic analysis, participant co-construction and autoethnographic reflection.

Thus, rather than treating the *nomadic educator* as a preexisting theoretical figure, this study explores it as a conceptual space made visible through participants' accounts, reflexive insights and the interplay between digital and institutional contexts. This framing acknowledges both the agentic strategies educators employ and the structural constraints they encounter. As the analysis in Chapter 6.7 illustrates, the initial hunch introduced here was empirically co-constructed and crystallised through participant narratives before being revisited in Chapter 7.7.3 as a more fully developed theoretical contribution.

1.5 Methodological Approach

This study adopts a triadic methodological framework integrating autoethnography, participatory research and multi-methods qualitative design to explore how neurodivergent educators use Twitter for identity work, resistance and community-building. The framework is grounded in a critical realist ontology (Archer 1995, Danermark et al, 2019), enabling analysis across stratified layers of structure, culture and agency. Its design reflects a commitment to epistemic justice, inclusivity and reflexivity, recognising no single method can adequately capture the layered and situated experiences of neurodivergent educators (Cargo and Mercer 2008; Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021). A full account of this methodological framework will be presented in Chapter 3.

Autoethnography provides an insider lens through which I critically examiner my own experiences as a neurodivergent educator, drawing on both analytic and evocative traditions (Anderson 2006; Ellis 2004). Reflexive commentaries, marked throughout the thesis, highlight how my dual position as insider and outsider shapes interpretation. This is particularly pertinent given the historical marginalisation of neurodivergent voices in research (Pearson and Rose 2021).

Participatory research principles underpin the design, positioning participants as co-constructors of knowledge rather than data source to be extracted (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Brown and Ramlackhan 2022). The use of Padlet created an accessible, asynchronous exercise which accommodated varied communication styles and affirming neurodivergent modes of expression. This collaborative stance responds to critiques of extractive research and aligns with Critical Disability Studies (CDS) commitments to relational ethics and shared agency (Brown and Leigh 2018; Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. 2020).

Finally, a multi-method design scaffolded the study, sequencing a qualitative survey, Padlet exercise, semi-structured interviews, and a reflexive account with a self-interview. Each strand was analysed using Braun And Clarke (2006) reflexive thematic analysis, ensuring coherences across datasets while allowing for both convergence and divergence (Denzin 2012; Flick 2018). This integration captured structural patterns, cultural norms and agentic lived experiences, producing layered insight into how neurodivergent educators negotiate professional identity within institutional and digital contexts.

To summarise, the triadic design reflects both methodological and ethical commitments: to hold complexity across structural, cultural and agentic levels, to centre neurodivergent lived experience as legitimate expertise, and to sustain accessible, inclusive research practice. These principles are elaborated further in Chapter 3.

1.6 Contribution & Significance

This study makes an original contribution to understanding how neurodivergent educators navigate professional identity and agency across institutional and digital spaces, by combining autoethnography, participatory research and multi-methods within a critical realist ontology (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019) and a critical disability framework (Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. 2020; Brown 2020), the research challenges dominant assumptions about academic professionalism, visibility and knowledge production.

Chapter 7 will explore these contributions in greater detail, organised into four interrelated domains: empirical, methodological, theoretical and reflexive. Empirically, the study foregrounds the lived experiences of neurodivergent educators who have been largely overlooked in the literature on academic identity and digital

engagement (Brown and Leigh 2018; Egner 2022). Methodologically, the research offers an accessible, layered approach to data collection that prioritises inclusion and reflexivity (Ellis et al. 2010; Mellifont 2023).

Theoretically, the study introduces two key conceptual contributions that will be unpacked later in the thesis. The first is the notion of *survival professionalism*, which describes how neurodivergent educators sustain their careers (Crew 2020; University and College Union 2021a, 2021b) and visibility through strategic digital engagement (Scott and Gibson 2023). The second is the *nomadic educator*, a provisional conceptual lens grounded in participant narratives and theoretical frameworks, including Reay (2004) and Braidotti (2011) to capture the adaptive and reflexive strategies educators use to navigate exclusion, precarity and shifting professional expectations.

Chapter 7 also reflects on the significance of reflexivity and lived experience in neurodivergent-led research, situating these practices as integral to both the process and outcomes of the study (Finlay 2002; Berger 2015). The chapter will conclude with practical implications, outlining how universities might better support neurodivergent educators through inclusive policies, flexible working structures and recognition of digital labour and advocacy (Mellifont 2023; Scott and Gibson 2023). Together, these contributions position neurodivergent educators not as exceptions within academic life but as critical actors shaping more inclusive and reflexive models of professional engagement.

1.7 Chapter Outline and Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured into seven chapters, each contributing to a critical and reflexive understanding of how neurodivergent educators negotiate professional identity across institutions and digital spaces.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 provides a critical review of the theoretical and empirical literature underpinning the study. It examines existing scholarship on neurodivergence, higher education and digital identity, with particular attention to the lived experiences of neurodivergent educators. Key conceptual frameworks are explored, including professional identity, third space theory, communities of practice, intersectionality and institutional ableism. These are synthesised to illuminate how neurodivergent educators navigate structural constraints, negotiate identity and exercise agency. The chapter establishes the conceptual foundations for the analysis presented in later chapters.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines and justifies the triadic methodological framework, combining autoethnography,

participatory research and multi-methods. It elaborates the study's ontological and epistemological positioning, rooted in critical realism and critical disability studies and explains how the shaped the research design. Key ethical considerations are discussed, including insider positionality, accessibility and relational ethics. The chapter also provides a rationale for the integration of multi-method qualitative approach.

Chapter 4: Data Collection

Chapter 4 offers a detailed account of how data were generated through the study's three methodological strands. It discusses the design and implementation of the online survey, participatory Padlet activity, semi-structured interviews and autoethnographic self-interview. Each method is situated within the broader participatory aims of the study, with attention to how it facilitated accessible and inclusive engagement with diverse perspectives.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

This chapter presents the findings developed through reflexive thematic analysis. It explores key patterns across the data, highlighting how neurodivergent educators navigate identity work, institutional challenges and digital community building. Participant narratives and autoethnographic reflections are woven throughout to centre lived experience and illustrate the relational and affective dimensions of professional identity work.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Chapter 6 critically interprets the findings through the integrated framework introduced in Chapter 2. It draws on concepts such as critical realism, third space theory, performativity and intersectionality to examine how neurodivergent educators reflexively navigate the tensions between institutional structures and digital affordances. The chapter positions Twitter as both an enabling space and precarious site for professional identity formation, advocacy and resistance.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The final chapter synthesises the study's contributions to theory, methodology and practice. It revisits the research questions and reflects on the study's limitations, including consideration of scope and transferability. The chapter also proposes practical recommendations for creating more inclusive academic environments and highlights directions for future research in digital scholarship, neurodivergent agency and professional identity in higher education.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Reframing Professional Identity and Digital Agency for Neurodivergent Educators

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the intersecting bodies of literature that underpin this thesis, focusing on how neurodivergent educators construct and negotiate professional identities across institutional and digital spaces. Existing scholarship on neurodivergence in higher education has often been framed as 'difference' through deficit-based or medicalised lenses, which position neurodivergent individuals as objects of remediation or accommodation (Oliver 1990; Shakespeare and Watson 2001). In deliberate contrast, this chapter foregrounds frameworks that conceptualise neurodivergence as socially situated, agentic and politically meaningful, approaches that align with the neurodiversity paradigm and its emphasis on identity, embodiment and structural critique (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. 2020; Chapman 2021; Walker 2021).

Drawing on critical disability studies, intersectionality, third space theory, identity performance and critical realism, this literature review contextualises the lived realities and professional practices of neurodivergent educators within both structural and digital spaces. These frameworks offer conceptual tools for examining how neurodivergent individuals actively negotiate marginalisation, precarity and normative expectations while simultaneously asserting professional agency and identity in often exclusionary academic cultures (Reay 2004; Brown and Leigh 2018; Clouder et al. 2020; Egner 2022).

In particular, third space theory (Bhabha 2004; McDougall and Potter 2019) and critical realism (Archer 1995; Bhaskar 2015) enable a layered analysis of the interplay between structure, culture and agency, illuminating how neurodivergent educators not only experience but also creatively respond to institutional constraints. This chapter, therefore, seeks to surface both the structural barriers and the agentic, situated practices through which neurodivergent educators construct meaning, foster community, and contest dominant narratives of professionalism in higher education.

Building directly on Chapter 1's conceptualisation of *digital third spaces* as hybridised environments for identity negotiation and resistance, this chapter examines how neurodivergent educators construct their professional selves within and against exclusionary academic structures. Extending this argument that professional identity work is embedded in both physical and digital spaces, this review critically synthesises historical and contemporary scholarship on disability, neurodivergence and higher education. It foregrounds the relational, situated and often contested nature of agency among neurodivergent educators operating at the intersection of structural constraint and digital possibility (McDougall and Potter 2019; Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. 2020; Chapman 2023).

Throughout the chapter, it is underpinned by my own positionality as an autistic, ADHD and dyslexic educator, practitioner and researcher. As outlined in Chapter 1, this insider perspective informs both the ethical commitments and interpretive frameworks that guide my engagement with the literature. The review is therefore not a detached survey but a reflexive, situated process of knowledge construction (Reay 2004; Berger 2015), shaped by lived experience and driven by a desire to centre neurodivergent voices, strategies and epistemologies. My position in the field provides insights into the everyday negotiations required to navigate normative academic spaces, as well as the ethical tensions inherent in researching a community of which I am a part (Grant and Kara 2021; Brown and Ramlackhan 2022).

My own professional journey has involved navigating the parallel terrains of academia and Twitter, each presenting distinct affordances and constraints. Within institutional settings, normative expectations around behaviour, communication and professionalism often necessitate 'masking'. An identity management strategy used to mitigate stigma and maintain legitimacy (Pearson and Rose 2021; Kidwell et al. 2023). In digital contexts, such as Twitter, these dynamics persist but take on new forms. The constant visibility, overlapping audiences, and platform volatility contribute to what I term *virtual masking*- a strategic modulation of self-presentation that responds to the demands of fragmented and shifting digital spaces (Papacharissi 2012; Egner 2022). Despite these challenges, Twitter has also functioned as a vital third space (McArthur and White 2016), offering opportunities for solidarity, community building and alternative expressions of academic identity that often remain inaccessible within formal academic institutions (Scott and Gibson 2022; Mellifont 2023).

The structure of this chapter is designed to reflect the layered complexity of the topic. Section 2.2 outlines the scope, parameters and methodological strategies used in selecting and evaluating the literature. Section 2.3 critically examines the role of reflexivity and researcher positionality, demonstrating how this shapes both the corpus and analytical orientation of the review (Dwyer and Buckle 2009; Berger 2015). Section 2.54 traces the historical development of disability discourses in higher education, charting the shift from deficit and medicalised models towards the emergence of the neurodiversity paradigm and associated critiques (Oliver 1990; Shakespeare and Watson 2001; Chapman and Carel 2022).

Section 2.5 introduces the thesis's composite theoretical framework, which combines established lenses of identity performance (Butler 2015; Goffman 2021), intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991), third space theory (Bhabha 2004; McDougall and Potter 2019), critical realism (Archer 1995, 2007; Danermark 2019), and critical disability studies(Booth 2016; Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. 2020; Brown 2020) with the emerging concept of the *Nomadic Educator.* This concept, developed through reflexivity through participatory narratives and lived

experiences, frames neurodivergent educators as mobile, adaptive agents negotiating fractured and fluid professional spaces (Reay 2004; Braidotti 2011). Section 2.6 focuses on the tensions of disclosure, identity performance and intersectional marginalisation, particularly in relation to institutional norms and precarity (Brown and Leigh 2018; Santuzzi and Keating 2022).

Section 2.7 explores digital third spaces and virtual communities as critical sites of resistance, creativity and community making. These spaces are further examined in Section 2.8 through a focused lens on Twitter, which is analysed as a case study in digital identity work and collective advocacy (Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022). Section 2.9 interprets how neoliberalism, institutional habitus and ableism interact to shape lived experiences and professional agency of neurodivergent educators within increasingly metricised academic environments (Ball 2016; Brown and Ramlackhan 2022; Mellifont 2023). Finally, Section 2.10 offers a synthesis of the chapter's conceptual contributions, identifying the theoretical threads that inform the subsequent chapters.

In positioning the literature this way, the chapter lays essential groundwork for understanding how professional identities are continually formed, adapted and contested by neurodivergent educators, operating both within and beyond the boundaries of the contemporary university.

2.2 Scope, Timeline and Method of Review

This literature review engages with scholarship published between 1990 and 2025, tracing the evolving conceptual terrain surrounding neurodivergence, higher education and digital engagement. The broad temporal scope enables a critical mapping of epistemological and institutional shifts that have redefined the position of neurodivergent educators within academia. These include the consolidation of the social model of disability (Oliver 1990), critiques of its limitations (Shakespeare and Watson 2001), the emergence and expansion of the neurodiversity paradigm (Singer 1999; Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. 2020; Chapman and Carel 2022) and the intensification of digital academic engagement, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (de Almeida et al. 2021; Carpenter et al. 2021; Egner 2022; Gabarron et al. 2023).

Literature was sourced from interdisciplinary domains: education, sociology, disability studies, digital media, feminist theory and critical realism, to reflect the multifaceted nature of neurodivergent educators' experiences. This interdisciplinarity was necessary to engage with the overlapping dimensions of professional identity, institutional precarity, ableism, disclosure and digital agency (Reay 2004; McDougall and Potter 2019; Brown and Ramlackhan 2022; Chapman and Carel 2022; Egner 2022; Mellifont 2023). The review aims not merely to synthesise themes but to interrogate dominant epistemologies, conceptual gaps and the normative assumptions underpinning academic knowledge production (Bourdieu 1990; Fricker 2007; Berger 2015).

While the thesis is situated within the UK higher education sector, international literature was incorporated where it offered conceptual depth or highlighted transnational structures shaping neurodivergent academic labour. For example, work on digital activism and epistemic injustice from North America and Europe was engaged to provide broader contextual framing (Trevisan 2016; Chapman 2023). However, I remain critically aware of the Euro-Western orientation of much of the literature, which reflects an ongoing gap in research concerning neurodivergent educators in non-Anglophone and Global South contexts. As Nair et al. (2024) argue, the neurodiversity paradigm has frequently been constructed through a Global North, white and Anglophone lens, one that risks erasing alternative epistemologies, cultural framings and lived experiences situated outside Western academic traditions. This limitation points to the need for further decentring of dominant knowledge systems and the incorporation of decolonial, locally rooted perspectives in future work.

The review process was grounded in a values-led and reflexively engaged search strategy. Emphasis was placed on identifying literature aligned with emancipatory frameworks, particularly, critical disability studies, feminist epistemologies and participatory paradigms (Harding 2004; Walker 2021; Anderson-Chavarria 2022; Hardy 2022; Chapman 2023). Keywords such as *neurodiversity, inclusion, professional identity, digital agency* and *reflexivity* were priorities across databases such as ERIC and Web of Science. Literature framed through deficit-based or medicalised language- using terms such as ‘impairment’, ‘disorder’, or ‘abnormality’ was not excluded outright but critically appraised and selectively included where it served to illustrate the dominant narrative requiring critique (Shakespeare and Watson 2001; Casanova and Widman 2021).

Studies focusing exclusively on neurodivergent students were generally deprioritised unless they offered insights into institutional norms, identity negotiation, or disclosure practices relevant to academic staff (Wood and Milton 2018; Clouder et al. 2020). Particular attention was given to literature authored by neurodivergent scholars themselves, whose contributions often situated, critically reflexive and affectively resonant accounts of navigating academic life (Brown 2020; Grant and Kara 2021; Pearson and Rose 2021; Walker 2021). Where quotations are included, they have been selected for their epistemic and rhetorical significance, preserving voice and perspective in line with methodological commitments to authentic representation and anti-ableist scholarship.

This analytical approach was shaped by my reflexive positionality as a neurodivergent individual and an insider-researcher, guided by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) thematic analysis and supplemented by insights from critical reflexivity (Finlay 2002; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009). Literature was engaged not only for thematic content but also the ideological and normative assumptions it reproduced about knowledge, professionalism and the academic subject. I was particularly attuned to texts that reinforced neurotypical ideals of speed, communicative ease and unbroken productivity, expectations that often

marginalise neurodivergent ways of being and working (Brown 2020; Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021; Chapman 2023). Brown's (2020) theorisation of ableism in academia is particularly instructive here, highlighting how institutional logics of excellence, productivity and performativity construct certain bodies and minds as less fit for academic legitimacy. Her work informs this review's orientation towards literature that not only critiques systemic barriers but also foregrounds agency, creativity and counter-hegemonic professional practices.

Finally, this review privileges scholarship that conceptualises neurodivergent educators as agentic, reflexive actors who contest and reconfigure professional norms, often through digital engagement. Because of this thesis critically examines the role of platforms such as Twitter in enabling or constraining such identity work, it was essential to engage with literature that considered both the risks and affordances of digital participation (Boyd 2010; Papacharissi 2012; McArthur and White 2016; Carpenter et al. 2022; Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022). In doing so, this chapter lays the theoretical scaffolding for the analysis that follows, attending to how neurodivergent educators perform, adapt and resist professional identity constructions across physical and virtual spaces.

2.3 Reflexivity and Positionality

My position as a neurodivergent insider-researcher is foundational to the framing and execution of this literature review. As outlined in Chapter 1, my lived experiences as an autistic, ADHD, and dyslexic educator significantly inform how I engaged with scholarship on professional identity, higher education and digital agency. This positionality is not incidental but central, shaping both the literature selection and the interpretative lens through which it is analysed. To maintain transparency and signal epistemic grounding of my approach, I employ a reflexive commentary icon throughout this chapter and subsequent sections of the thesis. This practice aligns with the principles of my hybrid autoethnographic methodology, which draws on both analytical and evocative traditions to integrate lived experience with scholarly critique (Ellis 2004; Anderson 2006).

Navigating neurodivergent traits, I adopted iterative, non-linear working methods, drawing on visual mind-mapping, thematic clustering and multi-modal resources rather than rigid categorisation. These strategies were not merely compensatory but reflect neurodivergent ways of knowing: epistemic approaches grounded in embodied experience and cognitive difference. My autistic pattern recognition enabled me to draw conceptual connections across disciplinary boundaries, facilitating a fluid and experiential synthesis of ideas that may not have emerged through traditional linear methodologies. **Figure A** provides an illustrative example of this process: a photographed mind-map contrasted on a whiteboard, through which I organised key concepts such as thematic clustering, pattern recognition and multimodal engagement.

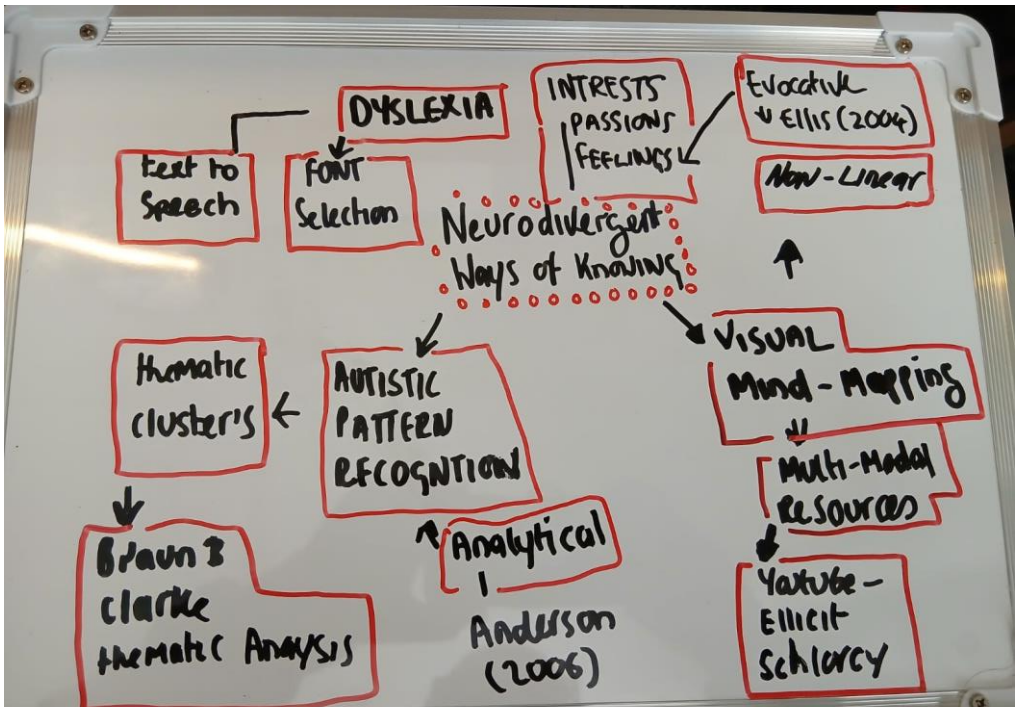


Figure A: Whiteboard mind-map illustrating non-linear and multimodal literature engagement strategies

As the figure shows, I anchored references such as Ellis (2004), Anderson (2006) and Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) alongside sensory and practical supports (e.g. text-to-speech, font selection) to scaffold my interpretive process in a manner consistent with my neurodivergent cognitive profile.

Insider status had conferred certain advantages. It enabled me to detect underdeveloped areas and silences within the existing research, particularly regarding the relational and situated nuances of professional identity negotiation, which may be less accessible to researchers without lived experience. As Grant and Kara (2021) explain, autistic researchers often bring distinctive strengths to qualitative inquiry, including heightened pattern recognition, attentiveness to overlooked details and a critical stance towards normative assumptions. These attributes enabled me to engage more deeply with the subtleties of professional identity, performance, and

disclosure. For example, I was able to attend not only to whether disclosure occurred, but to how it unfolded: contextually, contingently, and intersectional, across both institutional and digital spaces (Pearson and Rose 2021; Brown and Ramlackhan 2022; Kidwell et al. 2023). These are subtle dynamics often overlooked in deficit-framed or procedural accounts of disclosure.

However, at the same time, I remained attuned to the risk associated with insider research, including the potential for over-identification or the uncritical privileging of one's own standpoint (Finlay 2002; Berger 2015). To address this, I worked to maintain a reflexive analytic stance, recognising that while my experience provides valuable insights, it is neither exhaustive nor universally representative. As Adams et al. (2015, p. 30) suggest:

> *"As an ethnographer, I do my best to account [for] my identities, limitations and perspectives and show readers that while I use my experiences to offer insight into cultural experiences, the way I make sense of these experiences is not the only way to make sense of them".*

This perspective underpins my commitment to situated reflexivity, acknowledging the partial, embodied and dialogic nature of insider knowledge production.

This reflexive stance also foregrounds the importance of sensory experience in shaping epistemology. As Farahar and Foster (as cited in Brown 2020, p. 198) argue,

> *"From our perspective… the most important aspect of being Autistic is our sensory processing".*

Their statement challenges abstract and universalising theories of identity by highlighting the primacy of embodied experience, a principle that resonates with how I engaged with literature. Rather than privileging theoretical abstraction, I was drawn to work that echoed or illuminated my own sensory and affective realities, reinforcing the value of lived experience as a legitimate site of knowledge.

Consequently, my positionality influenced not only how I interpreted sources but also how I evaluated their relevance and epistemic integrity. I was particularly drawn to scholarship that challenged deficit-based narratives and instead foregrounded the creative, agentic and relational strategies employed by neurodivergent educators navigating exclusionary systems (Wood and Milton 2018; Grant and Kara 2021; Lewis and Arday 2023; Mellifont 2023). Such work aligns with the broader shift in critical disability studies, which reclaims lived experience as a valid, and often, transformative source of knowledge production and resistance (Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Brown 2020; Grant and Kara 2021; Walker 2021; Chapman 2023). At the same time, I engaged with literature that, while framed inclusively, subtly reinscribed normative assumptions about competence, professionalism or cognitive legitimacy, especially where neurodivergence was positioned solely as dysfunction or a burden.

This was particularly evident in work that failed to recognise neurodivergent modes of relationality, community-building and alternative forms of scholarly contribution. As Urbanowicz et al. (2019) suggest that autistic

individuals possess distinct strengths that are often undervalued within dominant research paradigms, particularly when their contributions fall outside normative frameworks of academic productivity. Pearson and Rose (2021) further emphasise how masking, conformity, and expression are related to professional and institutional spaces. Go Jefferies et al. (2025) extend this critique by drawing on Milton's (2012) *Double Empathy Problem* to identify the "social interaction mismatch" that occurs between neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals in workplace settings. They argue that these mismatches, often misattributed to individual deficit, reflect deeper systemic expectations around communication and professionalism that may marginalise neurodivergent ways of relating and contributing. My reading, therefore, was not neutral but actively shaped by experiential knowledge and a commitment to surfacing epistemic injustice within the field.

Crucially, my dual positions as both researcher and participant sensitised me to a recurrent and under-theorised disjuncture in the literature between the experiences of neurodivergent staff and students. While much of the existing research focuses on student support, the specific realities of neurodivergent educators, who must sustain long-term professional conformity, navigate institutional ableism and manage the risks of disclosure within competitive and often hostile environments(Gordon and Whitchurch 2010; Brown and Ramlackhan 2022; Kidwell et al. 2023; Mellifont 2023), remain comparatively underexplored. These roles are not interchangeable, educators are held to enduring standards of communicative fluency, reliability and intellectual output; norms that frequently marginalise neurodivergent models of knowledge production and professional expression (Pearson and Rose 2021; Walker 2021).

As reflected in earlier parts of this section, these expectations intersect with structural hierarchies and exacerbate the precarity of disclosure decisions, particularly in relation to career progression, collegial legitimacy and visibility within institutional and digital spaces. The performance of academic professionals remains deeply entangled with ableist ideals of consistency, productivity and communicative ease (Brown and Leigh 2018; Brown and Ramlackhan 2022). Neurodivergent educators must often navigate normative pressures that punish deviation and reward assimilation, even within ostensibly inclusive frameworks (Advance HE 2023). These dynamics are further intensified in digital environments, where hypervisibility and audience fragmentation introduce additional risk around identity performance and strategic disclosure (Malik et al. 2019; Gabarron et al. 2023; Skafle et al. 2024).

These interlocking pressures foreground the need to examine how neurodivergent educators have been historically positioned and, at times, marginalised within academic discourse. The next section (2.4) traces the evolution of literature on neurodivergence in higher education, highlighting the gradual shift from deficit-based framings towards more strength-oriented, socially situated understanding that emphasise agency, resistance and epistemic contribution.

2.4 Evolving Discourse on Neurodivergent Educators

The discourse surrounding neurodivergent educators in higher education has shifted over the past three decades, reflecting broader developments in disability paradigms, equity agendas and the reconfiguration of academic labour. Early constructions were underpinned by a medical or deficit model, wherein neurodivergence was framed as an individual impairment to be corrected through intervention or support mechanisms designed to normalise behaviour and performance (Oliver 1990; Harpur and Szucs 2023). Within such frameworks, neurodivergent educators were perceived as deficient or deviant, leading institutions to prioritise remediation over structural change (Brown and Leigh 2018). This approach not only marginalised neurodivergent staff but also reinforced ableist norms as the standard for academic competence and productivity (Merchant et al. 2020).

Although disability rights have gained visibility within higher education policy frameworks, systemic ableism continues to influence the conceptualisation and management of neurodivergence in academic institutions. Brown and Leigh (2018) contend that academic culture is still influenced by the notion of an 'ideal' academic figure, typically imagined as able-bodied, neurotypical and endlessly available, thereby disadvantaging those whose embodied and cognitive experiences fall outside this narrow ideal. Expanding on this, Brown and Ramlackhan 2022 (pp. 1232–1233) observe that

> "*In the competitive, neoliberal environment of present-day academia, time and effort spent on managing a condition and its effects means to lose out on important opportunities for being productive".*

The dominance of neoliberal performance metrics, such as publication output, grant acquisition, and sustained visibility through academic networking further adds to these inequities (Shore and Wright 2015; Ball 2016; Cerro Santamaría 2020).

Merchant et al. (2020) highlights that ableist cultures persist in academia, as evidenced by data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), which indicate that only around 4% of academic staff disclose a disability, a figure that lowers the estimated 18% prevalence in the general UK working-age population, suggesting widespread under-disclosure and institutional climates that disincentivise openness. This systemic silence is supported by the work of Botha (2021), who argues that institutional norms often frame disclosure as a disruption to professional expectations, particularly in environments governed by performative productivity. Similarly, Kerschbaum (2014) notes that disclosure is frequently positioned as an individual act of negotiation, rather than a shared institutional commitment to access and inclusion. These insights are not merely abstract.

During my own employment in a post-16 institution, I encountered similar dynamics, where concerns about stigma and professional credibility rendered disclosure a calculated risk, one I feel that ultimately backfired. Such lived experiences resonate with the broader literature, which shows that

disclosure is routinely treated as a personal burden, placing the onus on neurodivergent individuals rather than prompting structural change.

Alongside this, much of the literature on neurodivergence in higher education remains disproportionately focused on students. While this scholarship has been instrumental in enhancing inclusive pedagogical practices and informing the development of support services (Clouder et al. 2020; University and College Union 2021b). It has also led to a perceived neglect of the systemic challenges encountered by neurodivergent staff. As Denisen (2024) and Brown and Leigh (2018) the experiences of neurodivergent educators involve navigating additional layers of complexity, including institutional conformity, professional identity performance and intensified pressures around aforementioned disclosure. These dynamics render the staff experience qualitatively distinct, not only because neurodivergent educators must contend with the same disabling barriers that affect students, but also because they must do so while managing precarious working conditions (University and College Union 2021a) and maintaining perceived professional credibility.

Building on this, recent scholarship has posited that neurodivergent educators are often positioned out of step with dominant professional norms, leading to heightened mask behaviours and internalised pressures to over-perform (Botha 2021; Pearson and Rose 2021). While these strategies may offer short-term protection, they are ultimately unsustainable and contribute to emotional exhaustion, burnout and mental health deterioration (Botha 2021; Pearson and Rose 2021; Mellifont 2023). Over time, this can lead to disidentification from institutional values and, in some cases, premature exit from academic careers (Brown and Leigh 2018; Mellifont 2023). Rather than fostering genuine inclusion, such cultures intensify precarity by demanding assimilation into professional norms that systemically disadvantage neurodivergent staff.

In response to these constraints, many neurodivergent educators turn to digital platforms as alternative sites for professional identity negotiation and community formation. Insights by Carpenter et al. (2022), Egner (2022) and Scott and Gibson (2022) demonstrate how online spaces such as Twitter provide opportunities for self-advocacy, solidarity-building and the performance of more agentic and authentic professional selves. However, these spaces are not free from risk, as Fiesler and Proferes (2018) and Malik et al. (2019) caution, the hypervisibility inherent to digital platforms can expose individuals to reputational scrutiny and audience collapse, especially when institutional norms are contravened.

I have experienced this duality first-hand: while Twitter has enabled me to articulate a more truthful professional identity and engage with a neurodivergent educator community, it has also brought with it concerns about surveillance and backlash from colleagues or leadership. These tensions, between institutional conformity and the affordances of digital spaces, form a critical backdrop to this thesis. In the

section that follows, I explore how disclosure, precarity and identity performance are shaped by the interplay of institutional structures and digital participation, particularly for neurodivergent educators navigating these intersectional spaces.

2.4.1 Shifting Perspectives on Neurodivergence in Higher Education

Historically, neurodivergence in higher education was predominantly framed through a medical model of disability, which constructs cognitive difference as a pathology requiring correction. This deficit-based paradigm has long emphasised normalisation, behaviour compliance and individual remediation, thereby positioning neurodivergent educators as problems to be fixed rather than individuals entitled to structural support. As Hamilton and Petty (2023, p. 4) observe:

> *"The medical model of disability positions [the] neurodivergent individual as deficient, with support viewed as a corrective to 'normalise' the individual, rather than changing the environment".*

Walker 2021 (p. 61) extends this critique by linking the medical model's emphasis on conformity and correction to broader capitalist logics, arguing that it is *"highly compatible with capitalism and other related aspects of prevailing culture"*. This association reinforces dominant norms of productivity, conformity and value that are deeply embedded in neoliberal academic cultures (Ball 2016; Taylor 2018; Mason and Megoran 2021; Chapman 2023).

Prior to the early 2000s, neurodivergent educators were largely absent from scholarly discourse, typically subsumed under broader categories such as "disabled faculty" and viewed through compliance-focused frameworks that prioritised legal accommodation over epistemic inclusion (Haegele and Hodge 2016; Brown and Leigh 2018; Lindsay and Fuentes 2022). From the late 1990's however, the emergence of critical disability studies and the social model of disability began to challenge these deficit narratives by shifting focus onto the structural and cultural barriers embedded within higher education (Oliver 1990; Shakespeare and Watson 2001; Crew 2020).

This shift was further catalysed by the neurodiversity paradigm articulated by Singer (1999) which conceptualised cognitive differences such as autism, ADHD and dyslexia as natural variations rather than pathologies. Building upon this foundation, more recent scholarship foregrounds neurodivergent educators not as problems to be accommodated but as knowledge producers with distinct epistemological contributions, particularly within inclusive pedagogies, digital communities and participatory research spaces (Chapman and Carel 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022; Mellifont 2023). These evolving frameworks challenge ableist norms in academia and call for a reimaging of what constitutes scholarly value and professional legitimacy.

Contemporary scholarship has deepened critiques of academic culture by exposing how entrenched norms, such

as competitiveness, performance productivity and narrow metrics of excellence, systemically marginalise individuals whose cognitive and communicative styles depart from neurotypical standards (Casanova and Widman 2021; Brown and Ramlackhan 2022; Mellifont 2023). These norms are embedded in standardised work models, promotion criteria and audit-driven cultures that valorise speed, visibility and linear achievement, thereby excluding those whose working rhythms are non-linear, episodic or sensory-sensitive, particularly educators with autism or ADHD (Booth 2016; Taylor 2018; Chapman 2023; Lewis and Arday 2023). As a result, neurodivergent educators are frequently forced to navigate institutional terrains that remain implicitly calibrated to neurotypical performance ideals, while their contributions are undervalued or rendered invisible.

Although discourse has shifted to acknowledge neurodiversity as a potential academic asset, influenced by the neurodiversity paradigm first articulated by (Singer 1999) and developed further by Chapman (2021, 2023), institutional adoption of these ideas is frequently partial and tokenistic. Diversity strategies often rely on compliance-oriented frameworks that foreground representation without confronting the structural norms that perpetuate exclusion (Brown 2020; Mellifont 2023). Policies that claim to support inclusion may, paradoxically, reinforce the status quo by focusing on individual adjustment rather than institutional transformation (Merchant et al. 2020). Universities may articulate a commitment to neurodiversity rhetorically, yet fail to dismantle the underlying logics of neoliberalism, ableism and epistemic conformity that continue to shape professional identities and lived realities of neurodivergent staff (Ball 2016; Chapman and Carel 2022; Lindsay and Fuentes 2022).

As a disabled academic (…with chronic health conditions including fibromyalgia), I frequently encountered institutional cultures that equate value with output, visibility and conformity, standards that rarely align with my lived reality. Walking with a stick due to fibromyalgia makes some aspects of my disability visible, yet my autism, ADHD and dyslexia remain invisible and often misunderstood. These conditions affect how I process information, manage executive function and respond to fluctuating energy levels, all of which shape my ability to meet linear targets and engage in routine administrative tasks. The institutional emphasis on speed, self-promotion and performative productivity privileges neurotypical norms and leaves little space for alternative cognitive and communication styles. Despite the rhetoric of inclusion, daily practices often reflect the tensions explored in critical scholarship, between visibility and erasure, accommodation and transformation and highlight the need to reconceptualise academic professionalism in ways that recognise and value neurodivergent contributions.

The persistence of exclusionary academic norms has tangible and often detrimental consequences for neurodivergent educators. Despite increased visibility of neurodiversity discourse, institutional cultures continue to frame neurodivergence as a professional liability, particularly in contexts demanding leadership, informal

networking or high-profile visibility (Lewis and Arday 2023; Mellifont 2023; Denisen 2024). Perceptions of atypical social presentation or emotional dysregulation, often shaped by neurotypical norms, render neurodivergent staff vulnerable to marginalisation, with disclosure framed as a risk rather than a route to support (Chapman 2023; Pearson and Rose 2023).

This dynamic is shaped by the affective and cognitive labour required to manage identity performance in environments where deviation from normative conduct is pathologised or penalised (Walker 2021; Brown and Ramlackhan 2022). The cumulative effect creates a structural disincentive to disclose or to challenge the status quo, reinforcing a cycle of silence, precarity and masking. Understanding these shifting paradigms, between symbolic gestures of diversity and the structural inertia of academic institutions, is essential for this thesis. They shape how neurodivergence is framed by institutions, interpreted by colleagues and negotiated by neurodivergent educators themselves.

2.4.2 Navigating Disclosure and Institutional Culture

Disclosure of neurodivergence in academia is neither a singular decision nor a fixed state; rather, it is an ongoing, context-dependent negotiation shaped by institutional norms, employment precarity and the pressures of professional identity performance. Neurodivergent educators must continually weigh the potential benefits of disclosure, such as access to accommodations, authentic identity expression or peer solidarity, against the risk of stigmatisation, exclusion or reputational harm (Crew 2020; Santuzzi and Keating 2022; Wharmby 2022; Chapman 2023). These decisions rarely occur in isolation but are entangled within broader institutional cultures that privilege normative behaviours and modes of communication. As such, disclosure becomes less about individual agency and more about navigating the implicit expectations of ‘acceptable’ academic conduct (Brown and Ramlackhan 2022).

While formal disclosure may, in principle, activate institutional support mechanisms, the lived experience of many neurodivergent staff reveals a more precarious reality, particularly for those employed on casual, fixed-term or otherwise insecure contracts (Crew 2020; University and College Union 2021a; Bell 2023). Fear of being perceived as less competent or ‘difficult’ or uncollegial often leads educators to suppress or mask aspects of their identity, even in institutions that publicly promote inclusion (Denisen 2024). Unofficial narratives of ‘covering’, a strategy of concealing neurodivergent traits to conform to dominant expectations, remain widespread, especially in environments governed by unspoken neurotypical norms (Santuzzi and Keating 2022; Pearson and Rose 2023). These expectations are reinforced not only through policy but also in everyday interpersonal dynamics, where assumptions about communication fluency, responsiveness and relational ease are often uncritically treated as professional standards.

The emotional and cognitive labour involved in managing such expectations is vividly captured by Lewis and Arday (2023, p. 1307), who recounts the experience of an autistic academic: *"My biggest issue in academia is having to hide my autism… I just can't be myself"*. This commentary underscores how the institutional framing of professionalism can constrain neurodivergent expression, shaping not only who is seen as competent but also who feels permitted to fully participate. While masking may mitigate short-term risk of exclusion or stigma, it frequently results in emotional exhaustion, diminished authenticity and chronic impostor syndrome (Pearson and Rose 2021).

Despite widespread diversity rhetoric, institutional practices in higher education continue to frame neurodivergence through deficit-based, medicalised paradigms that demand diagnostic verification and procedural conformity. As Delhoume et al. (2024) observe, such practices embed medical models within access protocols, compelling neurodivergent individuals to navigate bureaucratic systems that privilege standardisation over inclusion. This framing not only reinforces the view of neurodivergence as deviation but also shifts the burden of adaptation onto individuals rather than prompting structural reform. Scott and Gibson (2023, p. 37) criticise this imbalance, observing that:

> *"Too often, institutions focus chiefly on the needs of learners, which, while essential, should not be in lieu of the needs of those who educate them".*

Their analysis highlights how institutional approaches often neglect neurodivergent staff, reinforcing individualised models of accommodation. Beaux et al. (2024) similarly challenge the rigidity of "one-size-fits-all" educational models that place ongoing adaptation pressures on those who 'differ' from normative expectations.

In response to these constraints, some neurodivergent educators adopt counter strategies such as disclosure and public advocacy, using identity assertion as a form of epistemic and institutional disruption (Scott and Gibson 2022). While these acts may foster visibility and challenge dominant norms, they often come at a cost. Denisen (2024) and Lewis and Arday (2023) caution that openly neurodivergent staff are frequently excluded from leadership, advancement and informal networks due to entrenched stereotypes around reliability, resilience and sociability. These intersecting exclusions underscore the need for systemic transformation that moves beyond individualised accommodations and recognises the structural dimensions of neuro-inclusion.

In my own professional practice, I have encountered dynamics in personal and structural ways. The decision to disclose my neurodivergence has rarely been straightforward. It is not simply a matter of knowing my rights or understanding institutional policy, but of navigating an environment where disclosure can carry implicit professional risks. As a neurodivergent educator, I must constantly assess whether my openness about my neurodivergence will lead to support and solidarity or whether it will result in exclusion, diminished credibility or assumptions of incompetence.

These considerations are further complicated by the visible aspect of my disability: walking with a stick due to fibromyalgia, paired with the invisibility of my neurodivergence. While the former may prompt recognition or sympathy, the latter often demands sustained masking, constant impression management and the suppression of cognitive and sensory differences to fit within dominant norms of academic professionalism. The emotional labour of deciding when, how, and to whom to disclose is a continual part of my professional identity work.

My experiences are far from isolated; research and union reports have demonstrated that neurodivergent educators face institutional conditions that render disclosure an ongoing negotiation. The University and College Union (2021b) highlights how casualisation, managerialism and performance-driven cultures intensify precarity for disabled staff, disincentivising disclosure even in institutions that outwardly promote inclusion. Solomon and Du Plessis (2023) further observe that most inclusion policies remain student-centred, leaving neurodivergent educators marginalised in both policy and practice.

Within such contexts, disclosure is not a singular act, but a relational and iterative process shaped by normative expectations around competence, communication and resilience. As Brown and Leigh (2018) and Mellifont (2023) suggest, institutions often place the burden of adaptation on the individual, reinforcing cultures of silence and self-surveillance. For neurodivergent educators like myself, this means that professional identity work is not simply about self-expression, but about constant calibration between authenticity and conformity, solidarity and surveillance and survival and transformation. These dynamics will be explored further in the following sections, where I examine how structural and cultural conditions shape the possibilities and limits of disclosure, identity negotiation and academic belonging.

2.4.3 The Role of Digital Networks in Neurodivergent Advocacy

In response to limitations of institutional recognition and the constrained affordances for professional identity expression (Pearson and Rose 2021; Lewis and Arday 2023; Mellifont 2023), neurodivergent educators have turned to digital platforms as alternative spaces for advocacy, peer support and identity negotiation (Scott and Gibson 2022). These platforms can operate as third spaces where marginalised educators can challenge dominant narratives and articulate their professional identity on their own terms and assert more affirmative, agentic representations of neurodivergence (McArthur and White 2016; Egner 2022). Twitter, in particular, has been widely used to build connections, share knowledge and establish virtual communities of practice (Wenger 1998; Scott and Gibson 2022), especially during periods of institutional withdrawal such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Carpenter et al. 2021; de Almeida et al. 2021; Scott and Gibson 2022).

For neurodivergent educators, online spaces function as vital infrastructures for visibility, community-building and epistemic exchange. Hashtags such as #ActuallyAutistic, #ADHDAcademic and #NeurodiversityinHE can

foster dynamic peer networks that, although loosely organised, sustain meaningful connections and collaboration (Carpenter et al. 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022). These platforms act as virtual communities of practice, where educators engage in reciprocal learning, advocacy and mutual support, particularly in contexts where institutional cultures may be exclusionary or unaccommodating (Scott and Gibson 2022). Gabarron et al. (2023) using 'BERTopic modelling', demonstrate that autistic Twitter users regularly engage in discussions not only about lived experience, but also about identity, advocacy and socio-political issues, highlighting the depth and breadth of discourse generated within these digital ecosystems.

These online interactions are not merely social exchanges; they represent critical practices of knowledge production and identity negotiation (Papacharissi 2012). They can enable neurodivergent educators to share scholarship, build epistemic credibility and navigate professional norms on more inclusive and affirming terms. In doing so, such platforms operate as counter-hegemonic spaces that challenge dominant narratives and can enable new forms of academic participation grounded in neurodivergent praxis (Chapman and Carel 2022; Egner 2022).

Daddow (as cited in Brown 2021, p. 102) describes Twitter as *"a veritable riot of colour, a constant flow of pictures, memes, gifs, cartoons, tables, graphs and charts"*. This vivid depiction captures the multimodal and often overstimulating nature of digital participation, which presents particular cognitive and sensory demands for neurodivergent educators. While such environments may offer enhanced opportunities for expression, creativity and community-building, they also necessitate active strategies of self-regulation and boundary management to prevent sensory overload or burnout (Booth 2016; Pearson and Rose 2021; Hardy 2022). These challenges mirror the conceptual orientation of the *nomadic educator,* who must continually navigate shifting contexts, digital, institutional and embodied, while adapting modes of engagement to remain visible, connected and professionally legible (Reay 2004; Braidotti 2011).

Yet digital participation is far from universally emancipatory. The affordances of online visibility are counterbalanced by the reproduction of institutional dynamics such as surveillance, precarity and the politicisation of disclosure. As Fiesler and Proferes (2018) demonstrate, educators who disclose aspects of their neurodivergence online may encounter heightened scrutiny, context collapse and reputational risk, particularly within algorithmically governed spaces that privilege normative modes of engagement. Malik et al. (2019) similarly, note that educators' online practices often blur boundaries between personal and professional identity, rendering moments of disclosure both more public and more confusing.

For university staff on fixed-term or insecure contracts, these conditions frequently precipitate digital masking, self-censorship or strategic silence, mirroring the same institutional pressure that shapes offline professional

identity performance (University and College Union 2021b, 2021a; Solomon and Du Plessis 2023). Therefore, these complexities reinforce the need to understand digital agency not as inherently liberatory but as entangled with broader structures of academic labour and risk.

In my own use of Twitter, I have often experienced the platform as both liberating and fraught. On the one hand, it offers a space where I can engage in more agentic and authentic identity work, such as sharing insights, advocating for neurodivergent inclusion and connecting with others who live similar professional realities. This digital context feels more permissive than institutional spaces, where disclosure often invites risk of demands for justification. Yet, this very visibility carries its own form of exposure. The boundary between self-expression and professional scrutiny is often porous. Posts intended to build solidarity, or foster dialogue can be misinterpreted, taken out of context, or viewed through institutional lenses that problematise rather than understand.

I have found myself engaging in what I can only describe as *virtual masking*, curating how I present my neurodivergence, moderating tone and anticipating how diverse audiences, from students to more senior colleagues, might respond. This resonates strongly with the concept of “audience collapse” (Marwick and Boyd (2011) and underscores the affective labour of being ‘present’ online while remaining professionally legible. Like many others navigating this terrain, I oscillate between connection and caution, expression and restraint, which is an ongoing negotiation that mirrors the adaptive, often precarious stance of the *nomadic educator* (as in Section 2.6).

Despite the risks and ambivalences as noted previously, digital platforms remain indispensable infrastructures of care, resistance and alternative professional identity formation for neurodivergent educators (Scott and Gibson 2022, 2023). They can offer vital spaces for sharing research, building visibility and challenging the epistemological exclusions embedded in institutional cultures. For example, Fletcher-Watson et al. (2021) emphasis that inclusive research involving neurodivergent individuals as co-producers of knowledge not only enhances methodological richness but disrupts hierarchical knowledge systems that can lead to marginalised voices in academia.

Similarly, Baillargeon et al. (2024) note that while digital platforms can replicate medicalised framings of neurodivergence, they also hold considerable potential for enabling users to construct alternative epistemic communities, spaces in which experiential knowledge and self-advocacy reframe dominant narratives. These insights illustrate that digital platforms are not merely tools of communication, but socio-political arenas in which neurodivergent educators can contest marginalisation and cultivate professional legitimacy. As such, their continued use reflects a form of digital agency that is both strategic and necessary, an adaptive response to the

epistemic and structural exclusions within higher education.

2.5 Theoretical Perspectives

This section introduces the five interrelated theoretical perspectives that form the analytical framework of this thesis. These lenses provide a critical foundation for examining how neurodivergent educators navigate and negotiate professional identity, agency and exclusion with both institutional and digital contexts. By drawing on identity performance (2.5.1), intersectionality (2.5.2), third space theory (2.5.3), critical disability studies and the neurodiversity paradigm (2.5.4) and neoliberalism, precarity and capital (2.5.5), the discussion foregrounds the dynamic interplay between structural conditions, social positioning and individual strategies.

These theoretical insights not only illuminate the lived complexities of neurodivergent academic life but also underpin the exploratory conceptualisation of the *Nomadic Educator* in Section 2.6. The visual mind-map (**Figure B**) based on a working whiteboard model, summarises these perspectives and their interconnections, illustrating how they collectively support the thesis's critical analysis of digital agency, institutional constraint and professional identity negotiation.

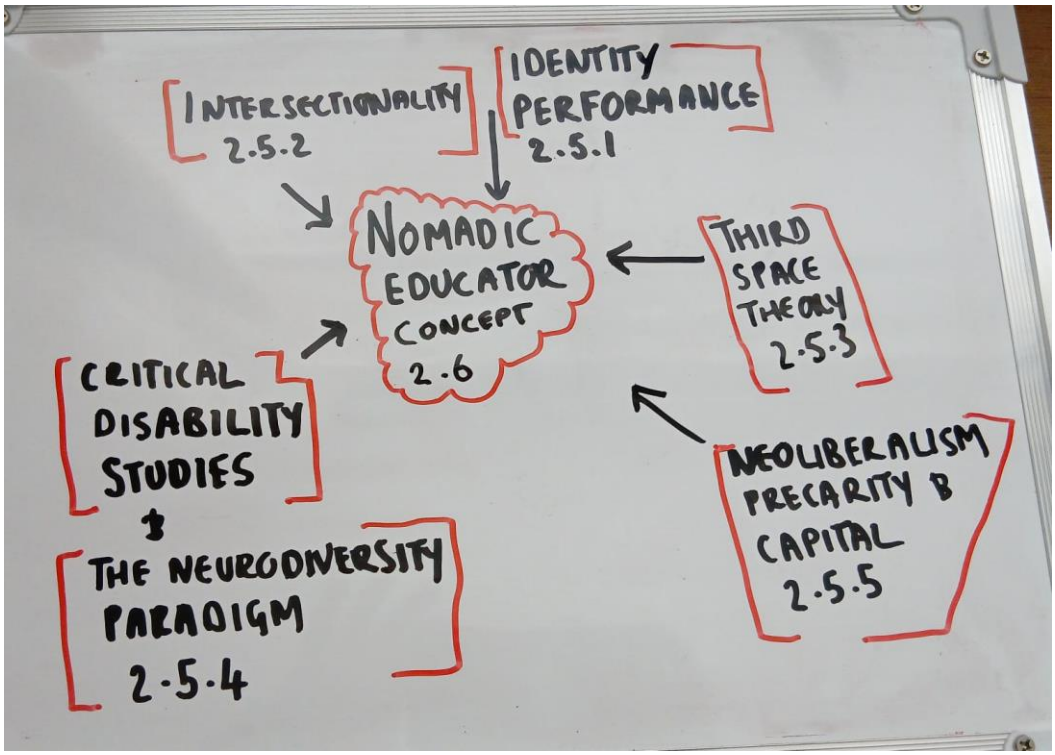


Figure B: Conceptual mapping of theoretical perspectives underpinning the Nomadic Educator (Section 2.6)

A critical realist framework (Archer 1995, Bhaskar 2008; Danermark et al. 2019) underpins this study, providing the ontological and epistemological foundation for examining neurodivergent educator's experiences. Critical Realism emphasises the layered reality of structure, culture and agency, highlighting how institutional ableism,

performance metrics and unspoken neurotypical norms shape by do not wholly determine professional life (Archer 2007, Bhaskar 2008; Shore and Wright 2015). Through reflexivity, understood as Archer's (2007) "internal conversations", educators deliberate on their contexts and navigate disclosure dilemmas, access barriers and pressures of professionalism (Brown and Leigh 2018; Mellifont 2023).

Digital platforms such as Twitter can therefore be read as hybrid spaces where reflexivity is enacted socially as well as individually, enabling forms of agency that resist structural exclusion (Papacharissi 2012, Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022). These practices can exemplify Archer's notion of "double morphogenesis", where individuals both respond to and reshape structural conditions. By situating digital mechanisms: such as institutional misrecognition and epistemic justice (Fricker 2007; Chapman and Carel 2022), that constrain or enable identity work. This framing provides the grounding through which the subsequent perspectives on identity performance, intersectionality, third space theory, critical disability studies and neoliberal precarity are engaged.

2.5.1 Performing Professional Identity

Expanding on the foundations established in Chapter 1, this section explores how professional identity is not an inherent trait, but a situated and often constrained performance shaped by institutional and cultural norms. Drawing on Goffman's (2021) dramaturgical model and Butler's (2015) theory of performativity, and Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, this discussion examines how neurodivergent educators must continually negotiate visibility, legitimacy, and belonging within academic spaces. These frameworks reveal that professionalism is not simply enacted but policed and reproduced through implicit norms that make neurotypical behaviours such as fluency, composure and emotional neutrality, traits not universally accessible or desirable to all.

In traditional in-person academic contexts, the front 'stage' (Goffman's 2021) comprises lectures, meetings and professional events, spaces with unspoken expectations around fluent, affective self-regulation and social adaptability. For neurodivergent educators, meeting these expectations often necessitates masking: the suppression or modification of behaviours perceived as divergent (Pearson and Rose 2021; Radulski 2022). Pearson and Rose (2021, p. 53) define autistic masking as:

> *"The conscious or unconscious suppression of natural responses and adoption of alternatives across a range of domains including social interaction, sensory experience, cognition, movement, and behaviour."*

This performative strategy, while adaptive, comes at a psychological cost, as Arday recalls (Lewis and Arday 2023, p. 1307):

> *"My biggest issue in academia is having to hide my autism… it takes me ages to understand… What restricts me professionally speaking is that I just can't be myself".*

This reflection captures the emotional dissonance and processing burden that accompanies masking, where

performing professionalism becomes a form of erasure rather than expression. The cumulative effect is not only psychological strain but a structural silencing of neurodivergent ways of being within a system that privileges conformity over authenticity.

Butler (2015) extends Goffman's analysis by framing identity not as voluntary performance, but as reiteration of institutional norms that shape what is recognisable as 'professional'. For neurodivergent educators, this means that "masking" and "camouflaging" become necessary for professional survival rather than freely chosen tactics (Radulski 2022). These behaviours are not just individual acts of adaptation, but responses to the systemic privileging of normative ways of being, speaking and appearing within academia. Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus, the internalised dispositions shaped by one's social history, offers further insight. Habitus beneath consciousness, guiding how individuals perceive, interpret and respond to their environments.

In higher education, dominant institutional habitus reflects a narrow cultural repertoire aligned with whiteness, middle-class status and neurotypical norms (Crew 2020; Lewis and Arday 2023). These expectations are reinforced through routine academic practices that reward confidence, charisma and strategic self-presentation (Taylor 2018; Lewis and Arday 2023; Mellifont 2023). Reay's (2004) work is especially useful in foregrounding how institutional habitus constrains as much as it enables, in the context of neurodivergent educators often having to engage in affective labour, code-switching, and scripting to be perceived as competent and legitimate (Mellifont 2023; Denisen 2024).

Building on these frameworks, identity can also be understood as emergent from situated, reflexive practices shaped by power, disclosure and agency (Archer 2007; Bhaskar 2015). This perspective emphasises that neurodivergent educators are neither wholly determined by structural norms nor entirely free in their self-presentation; rather, professional identity is continually negotiated across institutional and digital contexts.

In digital spaces such as Twitter, this negotiation disrupts Goffman's clear boundary between front and backstage. Performances are shaped simultaneously by overlapping audiences, requiring what Papacharissi (2012) terms "deliberate improvisation"- tactical adjustment of tone, visibility and authenticity in response to shifting contexts. These improvisational practices can also be read as forms of reflexive resistance (Archer 2007), in which neurodivergent educators critically engage with institutional norms while experimenting with more agentic expressions of identity. Such dynamics prefigure the concept of the *nomadic educator*, tentatively part-developed in Section 2.6, where identity work is understood as adaptive, precarious and continuously reconfigured across multiple terrains of professional life.

Within this framework, professional identity becomes not only a performance of competence but an

embodiment of socially sanctioned norms. As Lewis and Arday (2023, p. 1309) observe," A predominantly while, Eurocentric and highly neurotypical sector rigid cultures that define what and who is considered scholarly". In such environments, neurodivergent educators often find themselves in a paradox: to be included, they must suppress the very traits that define their neurodivergence, leading to what Mantzalas et al. (2022) identify as autistic burnout, characterised by exhaustion, cognitive overload and the erosion of their authentic 'selves.

Digital platforms such as Twitter can both exacerbate and disrupt these dynamics. As Marwick and Boyd 2011 and Papacharissi (2012) argue, social media platforms often facilitate *context collapse*, where diverse audiences: students, colleagues, and institution leaders converge in a single communicative space. This convergence destabilises personal-professional boundaries and amplifies the visibility and vulnerability of neurodivergent educators (Gabarron et al. 2023; Skafle et al. 2024). The performance of professionalism extends into these digital spaces, where impression management, audience awareness and reputational risk are magnified (Malik et al. 2019; Gabarron et al. 2023).

Nevertheless, Twitter can also function as a digital third space (Bhabha 2004; McDougall and Potter 2019), where neurodivergent educators construct more fluid, authentic academic identities beyond institutional constraints (Scott and Gibson 2022). Its asynchronous nature allows for reflective engagement, reduced sensory overload and autonomy over disclosure (Beaux et al. 2024; Le Cunff et al. 2025). The *Guiding Empowerment Model* was developed by Beaux et al. (2024), and the *FEDIS+R* framework by Le Cunff et al. (2025); both emphasise the importance of flexible, paced communication in reducing cognitive load and enhancing accessibility for neurodivergent users. These digital affordances enable advocacy, peer connection and identity experimentation, features often absent from formal academic spaces (Scott and Gibson 2022).

However, these affordances are contingent and unevenly distributed. As Egner (2022) cautions, digital identity work remains shaped by platform dynamics, audience expectations and the broader politics of visibility. What begins as a backstage space for authenticity can quickly become an extended front stage under professional surveillance. Thus, digital environments offer strategic reprieve, but do not resolve the structural burdens of identity performance; they simply reconfigure the terrain upon which these burdens are negotiated.

My own experiences mirror many of the performative tensions discussed here. Within institutional settings, I have often masked my communication style, working rhythms and sensory needs to meet implicit expectations of fluency, neutrality and adaptability. These performances, while necessary for perceived professionalism, have left me emotionally drained and uncertain of where authenticity ends and performance begins. As Pearson and Rose (2021), masking can become a survival strategy, but one that erodes well-being over time. This resonates with my own sense of professional disorientation, where belonging often

feels conditional on suppression.

Twitter, by contrast, has offered a partial reprieve. The asynchronous nature of the platform has enabled me to engage on my own terms, providing space to share lived experiences and connect with others navigating similar challenges (Scott and Gibson 2022; Beaux et al. 2024; Le Cunff et al. 2025). It has allowed for a more grounded sense of identity and agency beyond institutional scripts. Yet this relief is complicated by the constant risk of context collapse and surveillance (Boyd 2010; Marwick and Boyd 2011; Papacharissi 2012). Digital spaces, while offering authenticity and advocacy, remain structured by the same norms they sometimes help resist. For me, navigating identity across these environments means holding tension between exposure and expression and constraint and community.

The next section examines how these performative dynamics become even more complex when identity is viewed through the lens of intersectionality. Neurodivergent educators' experiences are not only structured by ableism but are compounded by overlapping systems of exclusion.

2.5.2 Intersectionality

While identity performance frameworks such as Goffman's dramaturgical model and Butler's theory of performativity help illuminate how individuals manage impressions under social pressure, they do not fully account for who is most compelled to perform, under what conditions, and at what cost. Intersectionality offers an analytic lens for addressing this gap. As Crenshaw (1991) argues, systems of oppression are not experienced in isolation; race, gender, class and disability intersect to produce complex forms of marginalisation that are qualitatively different from any single-axis analysis. For neurodivergent educators, intersectionality reveals how their experiences are shaped not only by ableism but by the racialised, classed and gendered contours of academic institutions.

These intersecting systems structure both the formation and performance of professional identity. For example, neurodivergent Black educators may experience what Fierros and Conroy (2002) refer to as "double jeopardy", a fusion of racism and ableism that results in heightened scrutiny, diminished legitimacy and increased professional precarity. Lewis and Arday (2023) illustrate how neurodiversity in academia is often perceived through a "white lens", reinforcing the marginalisation of racialised neurodivergent individuals. Their autoethnographic reflections demonstrate how the performance of professionalism becomes entangled in racialised norms of academic excellence, where whiteness and neurotypicality operate as silent but dominant benchmarks.

Intersectionality also illuminates how professional exclusion is intensified by precarious employment structures,

which disproportionately affect those negotiating non-normative identities (Mason and Megoran 2021; Bell 2023). For neurodivergent educators, the decision to disclosure is further complicated by these intersecting pressures, as anticipated stigma and institutional risk shape whether and how identities are revealed (Santuzzi and Keating 2022). These dynamics align with wider concerns about epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007; Chapman and Carel 2022), where neurodivergent ways of knowing are devalued not because of their substance but because they challenge dominant norms of rigour and professionalism (Brown and Ramlackhan 2022). These insights shed light on neurodivergent educators' professional trajectories are mediated not only by disability but by the systemic entanglements of precarity, epistemic exclusion and institutional culture.

In such contexts, disclosure is not simply a personal or strategic act; it is a politically situated decision that is mediated by intersecting power relations. Black neurodivergent educators, in particular, are more likely to have their behaviours misread as defiance, incompetence or lack of collegiality, reinforcing deficit narratives (Lewis and Arday 2023). Stephens (2022) further illustrates how these misreadings are compounded by institutional cultures that render Black Neurodivergent women hypervisible and simultaneously invisible, subjected to intensified scrutiny yet excluded from full epistemic and professional recognition. These situations not only render authenticity precarious but also constrain access to leadership roles and scholarly legitimacy (Solomon and Du Plessis 2023).

Gender further adds to these exclusions, as Brown (2021) and Pearson and Rose (2021) Note, women educators are disproportionately burdened with emotional labour and institutional caretaking. This burden is not only a result of societal expectations but is also reinforced by institutional cultures that often undervalue or overlook such labour. For instance, the report by Williams et al. (2024) highlights how women of colour frequently engage in excessive caretaking roles, managing the emotional discomfort of others to maintain organisational operations, often without recognition or compensation. Similarly, studies have shown that female professors are more likely to receive special favour requests from students, leading to increased emotional labour compared to their male counterparts (El-Alayli et al. 2018).

When neurodivergence intersects with gendered expectations, the consequences can be particularly punitive. Traits commonly associated with ADHD, such as impulsivity, disorganisation or emotional intensity, may be interpreted as confidence or creativity in men, but as irresponsibility or instability in women, reinforcing both diagnostic biases and institutional marginalisation (Hinshaw and Scheffler 2014). Walker (2021) extends this critique by highlighting how neuroqueer individuals challenge normative boundaries not only of cognition but also of gender, making them doubly vulnerable to institutional pressures to conform. Neuroqueer theory, thus, provides a valuable lens for understanding how neurodivergence and gender non-conformity intersect to resist, not simply to resist but also to endure the normalising forces embedded in academic and professional life (Botha

2021; Walker 2021). Similarly, Hooks (2005) critiques these institutionalised norms of care and control, emphasising how expectations of emotional conformity are often weaponised against those who cannot, or refuse to perform them.

Class, too, exerts a structuring force in the experiences of neurodivergent educators within higher education. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, the cultural norms governing academic spaces, such as linear thinking, verbal fluency and confidence in self-presentation, are often aligned with middle-class neurotypical expectations (Lewis and Arday 2023). For working-class neurodivergent educators, these implicit cultural codes can feel both exclusionary and disorienting. Crew (2020) argues that working-class academics often experience academia as an alien landscape, where institutional rituals, expectations and informal networks are inaccessible or unintelligible. These exclusions are exacerbated for neurodivergent educators, whose ways of thinking and communicating may already fall outside accepted academic norms.

Breslin and Currant (2024) Similarly, highlight how institutional discourse around neurodiversity often fails to account for classed experiences, thereby adding to the barriers to recognition and inclusion as a neurodivergent educator. Dwyer et al. (2022) further show that neurodivergent educators from marginalised socio-economic backgrounds face disadvantage, not only through lack of access to support but through structural invisibility. Together, these perspectives demonstrate how class and neurodivergence intersect to produce a professionally and epistemically marginalised status that is too often rendered invisible by dominant academic cultures.

As a white, male-presenting, late-diagnosed neurodivergent educator, I am acutely aware that my professional experiences are shaped not only by neurodivergence but also by the relative privileges of my positionality. While I have encountered the emotional labour of sustained identity performance: masking, managing impressions, and navigating disclosure, my embodiment of institutional norms has often buffered me from harsher forms of misrecognition. I have not, for example, had my neurodivergence interpreted through the intersecting lenses of racialised deviance, class-based illegitimacy or gender incompetence. This recognition aligns with Booth (2016) and Bell (2023) who stress the importance of avoiding a monolithic understanding of neurodivergence, while still acknowledging collective struggle.

My standpoint, informed by feminist standpoint theory (Harding 2004), shapes how I interpret both institutional and digital spaces, spaces that can be simultaneously constraining and enabling depending on one's intersecting identities. Digital platforms such as Twitter have offered a partial reprieve from the institutional pressures. However, I remain aware that my use of these platforms is still conditioned by my relative safety in occupying them. What might be read as advocacy from me may be interpreted as defiance, disruption or disorder from a queer woman of colour or a working-class educator

challenging dominant norms (Walker 2021). For me, intersectionality is not just an analytic framework but a lived reminder that visibility, expression, and safety are never evenly distributed, and that my capacity to speak openly is shaped by the very structures that silence others.

Intersectionality, therefore, offers more than an abstract analysis; it provides a necessary lens through which to understand how professional identity work is differently mediated by race, class, gender, and neurotype. As explored above, disclosure, authenticity, and visibility are not evenly available to all neurodivergent educators; they are conditioned by positionality and shaped by institutional expectations that often favour whiteness, masculinity, middle-class norms, and neurotypical behaviour. For some, institutional conformity is a survival strategy; for others, it is an impossibility. My own experience, as a white, male-presenting, late-diagnosed neurodivergent educator, has afforded me relative safety in navigating academic spaces, a safety not always extended to others whose identities intersect in more visibly marginalised ways (Booth 2016; Walker 2021; Bell 2023)

Digital spaces, however, complicate this picture. As I discuss next, these environments can both mirror and disrupt institutional hierarchies, offering new possibilities for identity performance, visibility, and community. The concept of the *third space* provides a valuable theoretical framework for examining these dynamics.

2.5.3 Third Space Theory with Digital Identity Work

Bhabha (2004) notion of the third space describes a hybrid cultural realm where dominant binaries, such as centre margin or coloniser/colonised, are unsettled, allowing for new meanings, negotiations and identities to emerge. While originally developed in the context of postcolonial cultural theory, third space thinking has since been extended to digital domains (McDougall and Potter 2019). McDougall and Potter (2019), for instance, reframe third space as a way of conceptualising an online environment where professional and personal selves intersect, blur and are continually reconstructed.

For neurodivergent educators, digital third spaces, particularly platforms like Twitter, offer opportunities to navigate and express professional identities beyond the constraints of traditional academic environments (Scott and Gibson 2022). These conventional settings in academia often function as ‘first spaces’, characterised by institutional structures and normative expectations that prioritise extroversion, linear communication and emotional control and confident self-presentation (Mellifont 2023). Such an environment can marginalise neurodivergent ways of communicating and being, reinforcing pressure to mask, conform or remain silent (Booth 2016; Pearson and Rose 2021; Radulski 2022).

In contrast, digital third spaces afford alternative modes of identity work, enabling neurodivergent educators to

engage in meaning-making, peer support and professional visibility on their own terms (Papacharissi 2012; McArthur and White 2016; Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022). Alongside these dynamics, Twitter has also been conceptualised as a *Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP)* where educators extend peer dialogue, collegial support and professional identity work beyond institutional boundaries. For neurodivergent educators, such VCoPs offered vital counter-spaces to challenge exclusionary cultures and to make visible forms of knowledge often undervalued within traditional academic hierarchies (Brown and Leigh 2018; Mellifont 2023).

These practices, however, are marked by what Papacharissi (2012) terms "deliberate improvisation", as educators continually adjust self-presentation across shifting and sometimes converging audiences. In this sense, digital third spaces both afford and constrain identity work. While they enable alternative forms of authenticity, connection and advocacy, they also expose participants to hypervisibility, reputational scrutiny and the affective labour of managing digital presence (Wharmby 2022; Gabarron et al. 2023). For neurodivergent educators, the negotiation of professional identity within these environments is therefore simultaneously liberatory and precarious, shaped by both the solidarities of online community and the risks of digital surveillance.

Daddow (cited in Brown 2020, p. 102) characterises Twitter as *"a veritable riot of colour, a constant flow of pictures, memes, gifs, cartoons, tables, graphs and charts,"* highlighting its sensory richness as explained in Section 2.4.3.Research indicates that neurodivergent individuals often find digital media more accommodating for communication, allowing for controlled sensory input and reduced adherence to neurotypical social norms (Chatterjee et al. 2023).Conversely, these digital spaces are not frictionless, Marwick and Boyd (2011) concept of "context collapse" illustrates how audiences converge within a single communicative space, amplifying the risks of misinterpretation and reputational harm.

For neurodivergent educators, this collapse of boundaries demands intricate identity work, as they must navigate conflicting expectations while managing potential exposure. While Papacharissi (2012) suggests that Twitter enable networked self-presentation and selective engagement, such affordances are often constrained by platform logics and algorithmic biases that favour dominant voices (Baillargeon et al. 2024; Clayton and Hoskins 2025). This can render marginalised users, including neurodivergent individuals, less visible or overtly visible in ways that attract scrutiny or harassment (Egner 2022; Gabarron et al. 2023; Skafle et al. 2024).

Moreover, hypervisibility and ambient surveillance (Malik et al. 2019) raise the stakes of disclosure, particularly when institutional cultures remain risk-averse and slow to accommodate alternative communication styles (Legault et al. 2021; Mellifont 2023). As Scott and Gibson (2022) argue, Twitter can function as a virtual community of practice, offering educators opportunities for networking, mutual support and knowledge exchange. However, these interactions are often shaped by implicit norms of visibility, productivity and digital

performativity that can reinforce neoliberal academic expectations (Shore and Wright 2015; Ball 2016; Brown and Leigh 2018; Taylor 2018; Cerro Santamaría 2020; Mason and Megoran 2021).However, *Virtual Communities of Practice* (Scott and Gibson 2022) offer vital support structures for neurodivergent educators, they are not immune to the tensions outlined previously.

Participation within these digital spaces requires navigating visibility and performance in ways that can reproduce the very neoliberal norms they seek to resist (Brown and Leigh 2018; Taylor 2018). The affective labour involved in sustaining a digital presence, articulating identity, responding to others, and maintaining relevance can be exhausting and unevenly distributed (Ball 2016; Legault et al. 2021). Moreover, while affinity hashtags and participatory engagement foster belonging, they also expose educators to surveillance, co-option, and institutional misrecognition (Fiesler and Proferes 2018; Malik et al. 2019; Egner 2022; Gabarron et al. 2023). Thus, VCoPs must be understood as both spaces of possibility and sites of negotiation, where neurodivergent educators enact professional identity within and against prevailing academic structures.

These dynamics echo and extend the performative pressures outlined in Section 2.5.1, where professional identity was shown to be shaped by implicit expectations of composure, fluency, and strategic self-presentation. In digital third spaces, these expectations are not dismantled but rearticulated through new modalities of visibility and interaction. While platforms like Twitter enable asynchronous communication and afford a sense of autonomy over identity expression, they also demand ongoing labour in the curation of self and audience engagement, labour that remains unequally distributed and differently felt (Radulski 2022; Legault et al. 2021). As such, performing professional identity online involves navigating a new front stage, one in which neurodivergent educators may find greater expressive agency, yet still operate within systems of normativity and precarity. This interplay between constraint and creativity, surveillance and solidarity, underscores the hybridity of digital third spaces and positions them not as liberatory per se, but as contingent arenas where neurodivergent professionalism is continually negotiated.

In my own practice, digital third spaces, especially Twitter, have been instrumental in constructing a professional identity that feels more agentive and authentic than is often possible within formal academic spaces. These environments have offered solidarity, peer validation, and practical strategies for navigating the emotional and structural demands of institutional precarity. Yet, like many neurodivergent educators, I have also experienced the disorienting effects of context collapse. The simultaneous presence of trusted colleagues and institutional observers has complicated efforts to ‘drop the mask’, making expressions of vulnerability and authenticity both empowering and precarious. Digital engagement, while offering respite, requires a continual recalibration of self-presentation in response to shifting audience dynamics and platform

norms.

These layered tensions between visibility, legitimacy, and authenticity are central to understanding the identity work neurodivergent educators perform across digital and institutional contexts. The following section turns to critical disability studies and the neurodiversity paradigm to deepen this analysis and to provide the conceptual groundwork for rethinking identity through the lens of the *Nomadic Educator*.

2.5.4 Critical Disability Studies and the Neurodiversity Paradigm

The conceptual insight offered by Critical Disability Studies (CDS) provides an essential framework for understanding how disability, particularly neurological difference, is produced, managed and resisted within higher education. Moving beyond the limitations of the medical model, which locates deficit within the individual, CDS foregrounds the structural, cultural and epistemic forces that shape disabled individuals' experiences (Fricker 2007). Oliver (1996, p. 22) stated that,

> *"Disability is the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities".*

This reconceptualisation enabled a shift from a medicalised discourse of 'cure' and 'deficit' to a broader analysis of systemic exclusion and oppression. Within the context of higher education, this has implications for understanding the institutional norms that shape and often constrain the participation and recognition of neurodivergent educators. The present study situates itself within this CDS tradition, while also extending its reach by bringing it into dialogue with the neurodiversity paradigm and lived experiences of neurodivergent educators.

Within the context of UK higher education, these structural concerns are substantiated by sector-level data. Advance HE (2023) the report indicates that only around 7 per cent of academic staff declare a disability, with disclosure rates falling at a large rate at professorial levels and among racially minoritised groups. As Brown and Leigh (2018, p. 986) observe "ableism in academia is endemic", with institutional culture often reinforcing deficit-based assumptions about competence, productivity and professionalism. Sub-section 2.5.2 explores how these exclusions intersect race, gender, and class, while 2.5.1 considers the identity performances required to navigate such norms. Together, these discussions highlight how disclosure decisions, professional legitimacy and visibility are shaped by structural expectations and assumptions about normativity.

It is within this context that the neurodiversity paradigm offers an alternative framework for reimagining difference, not as dysfunction, but as a natural and valuable form of human variation (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. 2020). Coined by Singer in the late 1990s, the concept of neurodiversity conceptualises neurological difference as

part of the biodiversity of the human species (Singer 1999; Clouder et al. 2020, p. 758). This shift in framing is important for neurodivergent educators, whose lived realities are often interpreted through pathologising lenses. Chapman (2023) builds on this work by rejecting the idea of the 'neurotypical' as a normative ideal, instead calling for a wholesale rethinking of what counts as cognitive legitimacy within knowledge-producing institutions.

A key conceptual distinction lies in how the terms *neurodiversity* and *neurodivergence* are deployed. While neurodiversity refers broadly to the spectrum of natural human cognitive variation, neurodivergence specifically denotes individuals whose ways of thinking and processing differ from the dominant neuro-normative standards, standards shaped not by objective biology but by socio-political mechanisms of epistemic and cognitive marginalisation (Legault et al. 2021).

As Legault et al. (2021, p. 12845) explains,

> *"neurodiversity is a term of inclusion, whereas 'neurodivergence' is a term of exclusion… everyone can be said to be neurodiverse, but it is almost impossible for everyone to be neurodivergent".*

This distinction is important to educational research, where institutional claims to inclusivity may obscure how neurodivergent staff are still positioned as 'other', subject to forms of marginalisation, bureaucratic scrutiny and forced adaptability.

These critical paradigms gain further relevance when examining how neurodivergent educators engage with institutional cultures. Walker (2021, p. 55) suggests that,

> *"The neuro-in neurodiversity is most usefully understood as referring not just to the brain but to the entire nervous system",* extends the discussion to questions of embodiment, affect and daily navigation of institutional demands. The neurodiversity paradigm, when situated with a CDS lens, provides language and legitimacy to experiences of masking, burnout and epistemic injustice, realities which remain largely unaddressed in discourses of staff development and academic professionalism.

Digital spaces, like Twitter, offer a critical third space where these tensions are negotiated and resisted. As explored further in Sub-section 2.5.3, social media platforms allow neurodivergent educators to construct alternative professional identities, share coping strategies and build communities that challenge institutional silencing (Scott and Gibson 2023). Scott and Gibson (2022) describe these dynamics in terms of 'virtual communities of practice', noting how Twitter facilitates peer validation, collective resistance and visibility on terms set by neurodivergent users themselves. Yet as CDS reminds us, digital empowerment does not negate offline structural inequalities. Rather, it creates a complex interplay of agency and constraint, in which neurodivergent educators must continuously navigate context collapse, surveillance and shifting platform norms.

As a neurodivergent educator, the neurodiversity paradigm has been essential in enabling me to make sense of my lived experience. Rather than internalising narratives of inadequacy or failure, I have come to recognise the structural nature of the challenges I face. The affirmation of difference as valuable, not pathological, has given me a critical language for resisting institutional norms and asserting professional agency. This perspective also underpins the methodological and ethical stance of this research. By framing neurodivergence as a site of knowledge, rather than deficiency, I aim to centre voices that are often silenced or sidelined within dominant academic discourses. These paradigms offer both a theoretical and practical lens through which to explore how professional identity is negotiated, resisted and reimagined by neurodivergent educators.

Taken together, CDS and the neurodiversity paradigm provide complementary critical lenses for examining the systemic production of disablement and the situated strategies of neurodivergent resistance. While CDS grounds this work in an analysis of structural power and institutional normativity, the neurodivergent paradigm affirms difference as an epistemic and political resource. These perspectives align with the theoretical insights introduced in the previous sub-sections on identity performance, intersectionality and third space dynamics, by offering a framework through which to interpret how neurodivergent educators navigate, survive and reimagine their professional lives within higher education.

Building on the critical insights offered by CDS and the neurodiversity paradigm, both of which foreground the structural production of disablement and the political potential of difference, the following section turns to the broader neoliberal restructuring of higher education. Here, the focus shifts to how institutional norms, market-driven logics and academic capital intersect to produce forms of precarity that disproportionately affect neurodivergent educators, which leads to exclusion even within inclusive policy environments.

2.5.5 Neoliberalism Precarity

Neoliberalism has reshaped the landscape of higher education, embedding market logic, performance metrics and managerialism into the everyday conditions of academic life (Taylor 2018; Cerro Santamaría 2020). These structural shifts are not neutral; they disproportionately affect neurodivergent educators, whose cognitive and communicative practices often ‘differ’ from institutional norms premised on hypervisibility, self-auditing and the production of quantifiable outputs (Shore and Wright 2015; Ball 2016). Ball (2003, p. 216) furthering this argument, conceptualises performativity as,

> *“a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation” that operates through judgements, comparisons and displays, functioning as mechanisms of control and coercion.*

These performances, whether enacted by individuals or institutions, are treated as proxies for value,

encapsulating ‘quality’ through metrics such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and National Student Survey (NSS) outcomes (Shore and Wright 2015). Therefore, neurodivergent educators may be positioned as lacking or deficient, not because of any inherent shortcoming, but because their contributions do not always conform to what Ball (2003, p. 216) terms as the “moments” of promotion or inspection that stand as symbolic representations of academic worth. In this context, the “terrors of productivity” (Ball 2003, p. 216) are not simply metaphors but material forces that constrain identity, shape opportunity and manufacture precarity.

Building on this, Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of *habitus, capital* and *field* provide a valuable lens through which to understand how neoliberal metrics intersect with these dominant academic norms to systematically disadvantage neurodivergent educators. The *academic habitus* is influenced by Western, middle-class and neurotypical values, such as implicit expectations around assertiveness, rhetorical fluency and unspoken social codes (White and Lowenthal 2011; Lewis and Arday 2023; Mellifont 2023). These tacit “codes of power” (White and Lowenthal 2011, p. 283) privilege those who intuitively perform normative academic behaviours, often to the exclusion of neurodivergent ways of knowing and communicating (Denisen 2024).

Wright (2021) further demonstrates how public education settings reinforce dominant habitus that delegitimise alternative expressions of knowledge, particularly when shaped by digital or sensory-rich contexts. Within such a *field* (Bourdieu 1990) neurodivergent educators may possess alternative forms of *capital,* including embodied insight into inclusive pedagogy (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021; Gibson et al. 2022), divergent cognitive strategies and digital literacies developed through marginalised forms of engagement (Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022; Chapman 2023). Yet, these assets often lack convertibility into institutional recognition or reward, revealing how dominant hierarchies of value render certain knowledges and practices invisible.

The result is a subtle, yet persistent form of *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu 1990) enacted through daily micro-judgements and exclusions that signal who ‘fits’ the academic mould (Brown and Leigh 2018). Rourke (2017) highlights how sensory and communicative preferences associated with autism frequently clash with normative academic expectations, reinforcing the sense of ‘dislocation’ that neurodivergent scholars may experience. In response, such scholars are routinely compelled to mask, adapt and perform normative professionalism often at the expense of their wellbeing and epistemic agency (Pearson and Rose 2021; Wharmby 2022; Lewis and Arday 2023).

The neoliberal emphasis on temporal capital: speed, efficiency and constant productivity exacerbates precarity for neurodivergent educators. Mountz et al. (2015) describe the contemporary academy’s demands for “fast scholarship”, characterised by relentless publishing, constant networking and rapid dissemination of research. For neurodivergent educators whose executive functioning and energy levels may differ, this intensified tempo

creates structural exclusion and may lead to ‘burnout’. (Booth 2016; Mantzalas et al. 2022). Kaufman et al. (2024) further articulate this concern as neurodivergent and disabled educators who have experienced intensified pressure under neoliberal temporalities, confronting the paradoxical demands to simultaneously slow down to accommodate their cognitive needs and speed up to meet institutional expectations. This tension generates an unsustainable precarity marked by stress, professional isolation and career stagnation.

Neoliberal conditions have also enabled contractual precarity as a normative feature of academic life (University and College Union 2021b, 2021a). Neurodivergent educators can be overrepresented in short-term, fractional and casualised roles, limiting their access to stable income, career progression and institutional support (Crew 2020; University and College Union 2021b, 2021a; Mellifont 2023). Disclosure in such a precarious context becomes fraught with risks, potentially jeopardising employment renewals or collegial relationships due to stigma, stereotypes regarding neurodivergent capabilities (Crew 2020; Solomon and Du Plessis 2023). Institutional policy further this position by seeing accessibility as a personal responsibility, requiring neurodivergent staff to advocate for their own needs, often through bureaucratic processes steeped in medicalised deficit-focused language (Casanova and Widman 2021).

Despite their strong digital capital, such as cultivating online networks, sharing accessible knowledge and engaging in public advocacy, neurodivergent educators often find these contributions remain structurally unrecognised within institutional logics of academic value (Scott and Gibson 2022, 2023). As explored in Section 2.5.3, platforms like Twitter function as third spaces that enable more agentive and authentic identity performance, yet, as Section 2.5.1 discussed, this identity work remains fraught under neoliberal regimes that reward only institutionally legible forms of professionalism.

Moreover, as Marwick and Boyd (2011) argue, the affordances of social media can collapse boundaries between audiences, exposing educators to reputational risks as previously discussed in Section 2.5.3. This is particularly a concern for those occupying multiple marginalised positions. As shown in Section 2.5.2, intersectionality reveals how neurodivergent precarity is compounded by racialised, gendered and class-based exclusions that intensify scrutiny and constrain access to institutional capital (Crew 2020; Lewis and Arday 2023). These dynamics echo the structural critique established in Section 2.5.4, where Critical Disability Studies (CDS) and the neurodiversity paradigm collectively frame these exclusions not as individual deficits but as institutional failures to accommodate epistemic and embodied difference.

As a neurodivergent educator-researcher, I have encountered these dynamics not as abstract theoretical concerns but as embodied realities. The continual need to adapt my cognitive style, sensory regulation and communicative expression to align with institutional norms of academic

professionalism is both emotionally taxing and epistemically limiting. Although I contribute through inclusive pedagogy, digital community-building and reflexive scholarship, these forms of capital are seldom acknowledged within prevailing evaluative frameworks. Instead, I find myself investing considerable emotional and cognitive labour into performing normative behaviours that do not reflect my authentic self, contributing to anxiety, instability and a persistent sense of marginalisation. My experiences reinforce the preceding analysis: the precarity faced by neurodivergent educators is not an incidental by-product but a structurally produced outcome of neoliberal regimes that reward only narrow, market-convertible forms of value.

This analysis leads to a central contention: neoliberal metrics do not simply neglect neurodivergent educators; they actively manufacture precarity by validating only those forms of capital that align with institutional market logics (Taylor 2018; Cerro Santamaría 2020). Such a system marginalises those whose contributions resist commodification, including forms of care, relational knowledge and alternative epistemologies. A transformative response must therefore go beyond inclusion, requiring a reimagining of both what constitutes valuable capital and how the academic field itself is structured (Bourdieu 1990; Chapman 2021; Wharmby 2022).

The following Section 2.6 builds directly on these theoretical insights by tentatively developing a conceptual framework for the *Nomadic Educator* which synthesises themes of identity performance, third space, intersectionality and neurodivergent resistance to propose new ways of theorising academic practice under conditions of precarity.

2.6 The Nomadic Educator: Concept

The preceding sections have outlined a multi-dimensional analytical framework through which to understand the lived realities of neurodivergent educators in the UK higher education. By drawing together critical theories of identity performance, intersectionality, third space, neurodiversity and neoliberalism, this chapter has shown how neurodivergent educators must continually negotiate professional legitimacy within institutions that are structurally aligned against cognitive, communicative and sensory differences. The convergence of performative norms, precarious conditions and digital visibility foregrounds the need for a conceptual lens that describes these dynamics but also enables an analysis of how neurodivergent educators adapt, resist and reconfigure their professional identities in response to them.

In response, this section introduced the tentatively conceptualised Nomadic Educator as an exploratory framework that emerges from, rather than precedes, the critical insights developed in Section 2.5. The term is not used to imply aimlessness or disconnection, but rather to capture the relational, situated and often fragmented strategies that neurodivergent educators employ as they move across institutional and digital spaces. As Braidotti (2011) suggests, *nomadism* offers a generative metaphor for theorising subjectivity that

resists ‘fixity’, embraces multiplicity and foregrounds agency inherent in movement and reterritorialization. Applied in the context of neurodivergent educators, nomadism can be suggested as a way of conceptualising professional identity not as a stable endpoint but as a negotiated process shaped by exclusion, adaptation and experimentation.

At its inception, the *Nomadic Educator* was conceived less as a fixed model and more as a reflexive hunch, shaped in part by my own movement across multiple contracts and roles during the COVID-19 lockdown, as well as informal exchanges with other neurodivergent educators in digital third spaces. This positioning emphasises its provisionally: the Nomadic Educator is not a predefined typology but an emergent lens, continuously refined through empirical analysis and reflexive engagement. The concept draws together a critical synthesis of theoretical strands: Bourdieu’s (1990) accounts of capital and habitus, Reay’s (2004) articulation of the “institutional outsider within”, Braidotti’s (2011) theorisation of *nomadism* as a strategy of resistance, and the identity theories of Bulter (2015) and Goffman (2021). This interdisciplinary assemblage situates the *Nomadic Educator* at the intersection of precarity, performance and digital hybridity, emphasising how neurodivergent educators improvise and adapt across shifting institutional and online terrains.

The *Nomadic Educator* is therefore not a prescriptive identity type, but a conceptual scaffold developed through iterative engagement with the theory, empirical data and lived experience of the participants in this study. It is grounded in a critical realist ontology that acknowledges the stratified nature of reality, where agency operates within and against structural and cultural constraints (Archer et al. 2013; Danermark 2019). Critically, this conceptualisation did not emerge as a predefined theoretical framework used to filter the existing literature. Rather, it developed inductively during the literature review, fieldwork and analysis stages of the thesis, which are revisited in Section 6.7.

Informal exchanges with neurodivergent peers during the COVID-19 lockdown in the UK prompted early reflections on fragmentation, identity dissonance and the role of digital platforms in navigating these tensions. These experiences, coupled with recurrent patterns in the data (See Sections 5 and 6), prompted the search for a concept capable of holding together the fluidity, constraint and resistance in neurodivergent educators’ narratives. By naming this figure the *Nomadic Educator,* the intention is to foreground how neurodivergent educators work within a continually shifting landscape of expectations, risk and possibilities (Braidotti 2011; Chapman 2023; Scott and Gibson 2023), as discussed in Section 2.5.

Neurodivergent educators' navigation across institutional front stages, digital third spaces and personal epistemologies is not a linear journey toward stability, but an ongoing process of negotiation (McDougall and Potter 2019; Goffman 2021; Egner 2022; Beaux et al. 2024). As such, the *Nomadic Educator* functions as a

conceptual device that emerges through the synthesis of five interrelated dynamics: identity performance (Section 2.5.1), intersectional marginalisation (Section 2.5.2), digital hybridity (Section 2,5,3), epistemic resistance (Section 2.5.4) and neoliberal constraint (Section 2.5.5). It offers a provisional framework for understanding how identity is neither wholly determined by structure not freely constructed but made possible through the critical labour of navigating multiple, and at time conflicting, fields, including the institutional field of higher education, the digital field of social media and online communities, the epistemic field of knowledge production and the affective and embodied field of lived experience.

This framework is therefore both analytic and reflexive. It enables the interpretation of participant experience, institutional structures and digital practices through a critical lens that acknowledges the constraints of the present while attentive to the 'possibilities of becoming' (Braidotti 2011). It also reflects my own standpoint as a neurodivergent educator who has moved across roles, platforms and pedagogic spaces, often seeking epistemic safety, professional recognition and community. In this way, the *Nomadic Educator* is not only a theoretical construct but also a situated articulation of movement, constraint and survival in an academic culture that values coherence and conformity yet offers limited space for genuine difference.

My own trajectory resonates with many of the patterns identified in this thesis. As a late-diagnosed autistic/ADHD/dyslexic educator, I have assembled a fragmented professional identity across temporary contracts, informal peer networks and digital platforms. However, in line with feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding 2004) I recognise that my perspective is 'privileged' but also partial. The concept of the *Nomadic Educator* is thus not presented as a conformation of personal experience, but as a reflexively constructed and empirically grounded framework shaped through engagement with theory, data and lived realities.

Although the empirical chapters will engage more directly with participants' narratives, early analysis already suggests that this kind of contingent navigation is a recurring feature of neurodivergent professional life. As Lewis (In Brown 2021, p. 308) reflects,

> *"Every day is a negotiation of what is achievable and the associated contingencies. However, despite these issues, I have been included, and I do participate".*

While Lewis's account cannot be taken as representative of all neurodivergent experiences, it illustrates the paradoxical coexistence of inclusion and constraint, an interplay that is central to the nomadic sensibility theorised here. The *Nomadic educator* captures a mode of professional being that is not about escaping institutions, but about surviving, adapting and occasionally subverting them while seeking spaces of epistemic legitimacy and collective recognition.

To reiterate, this thesis does not present the Nomadic Educator as a fixed theoretical endpoint, but rather as an evolving conceptual tool whose strength lies in its responsiveness and provisionality. It emerges from the intersections of theory, lived experience and empirical insight and its contours are shaped by the diverse and uneven experiences of neurodivergent educators. The chapters that follow will be further refined, challenged and reworked through participants' accounts of navigating identity under conditions marked by instability, marginalisation and digital mediation. It is offered here not as a universal framework, but as a situated and reflexively developed lens through which to interrogate the affective, epistemic and political dimensions of professional identity in a transforming academic landscape.

2.7 Summary

This literature review synthesises the theoretical themes underpinning the professional identity work of neurodivergent educators across higher education institutions and Twitter. It has traced an epistemological shift from deficit-based and medicalised understandings of neurodivergence (Oliver 1990; Shakespeare and Watson 2001; Goodley 2014; Anderson-Chavarria 2022) towards frameworks informed by critical disability studies (Oliver 1990; Shakespeare and Watson 2001; Titchkosky 2011; Goodley 2014; Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. 2020) and the neurodiversity paradigm(Walker 2021; Chapman 2023). This re-framing positions neurodivergence not as an individual impairment but as a politically and socially situated form of cognitive variation (Chapman and Carel 2022).

Within this critical framing, the literature reveals how neurodivergent educators must navigate professional roles shaped by neoliberal metrics, institutional habitus and embedded ableist norms (Ball 2016; Brown and Leigh 2018; Mellifont 2023). These conditions frequently generate precarity, particularly where institutional expectations of accelerated productivity, seamless communication and behavioural conformity dominate (Mountz et al. 2015; Kaufman et al. 2024). Disclosure, under such pressures, becomes a strategic and often fraught negotiation, requiring careful judgement about authenticity, credibility and risk (Pearson and Rose 2021, 2023; Santuzzi and Keating 2022).

Digital spaces, especially Twitter, have emerged as third spaces for identity construction and collective resistance (Papacharissi 2012; Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022; Chatterjee et al. 2023). These environments allow for more agentic and authentic identity work (McDougall and Potter 2019; Scott and Gibson 2022), although this potential is constrained by the risks of context collapse and institutional surveillance (Marwick and Boyd 2011; Egner 2022; Gabarron et al. 2023). Intersectionality is essential to understanding how neurodivergence is experienced alongside other axes of oppression, including race, gender and class (Crenshaw 1991; Stephens 2022; Lewis and Arday 2023). These overlapping identities intensify marginalisation and shape the consequences of professional visibility, disclosure and institutional legitimacy (Fierros and Conroy 2002; Fiesler and Proferes

2018; Brown 2020; Lewis and Arday 2023; Solomon and Du Plessis 2023).

In response to these tensions, this chapter introduces the beginnings of a conceptual framework of the *Nomadic Educator* (Braidotti 2011) as a provisional conceptual framework that captures the dynamic, situated and often precarious identity work of neurodivergent educators. Rather than viewing identity as fixed, the *Nomadic Educator* reflects a continual process of adaptation and resistance across platforms, roles and institutional landscapes (Reay 2004; Braidotti 2011; Scott and Gibson 2022). Taken altogether, this chapter has mapped a complex and evolving scholarly terrain, one that repositions neurodivergent educators not as passive recipients of inclusion policy, but as active navigators of identity, agency and epistemic resistance. By integrating critical disability studies, third space theory, intersectionality and the neurodiversity paradigm, it provides a robust theoretical foundation for examining how digital agency and structural constraint shape the professional lives of neurodivergent educators.

This synthesis now directly informs the methodological design of the study. The following chapter outlines a triadic, reflexive research framework that combines autoethnography, participatory and multi-methods approach within a critical realist ontology (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019). In doing so, it translates the theoretical insights developed here into a methodological commitment to centring the neurodivergent voices, disrupting normative epistemologies and honouring alternative ways of knowing and being in academic life.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework guiding this thesis, which explores how neurodivergent educators navigate professional identity and institutional precarity across higher education and digital environments. Central to this inquiry is the conceptualisation of Twitter as a *third space,* a hybrid site where identity performance, professional engagement and peer connection intersect in complex and often contested ways (Bhabha 2004; McDougall and Potter 2019; Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022). Grounded in the theoretical scaffolding developed in Chapters 1 and 2, this chapter advances a reflexive, layered and critically situated methodological approach. It is informed by critical realist ontology that conceptualises social reality as composed of stratified and interacting domains of structure, culture and agency (Archer 1995; Sayer 2000; Danermark et al. 2019). This framing is important for grasping how neurodivergent educators' professional lives are shaped by ableist norms, institutional constraints and personal strategies of resistance and survival (Brown and Leigh 2018; Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Mellifont 2023).

To explore these dynamics, a triadic methodological framework is employed, integrating autoethnography, participatory research and multi-methods. This approach attends to the value of insider knowledge, the ethical imperative of epistemic justice and the textured, situated, embodied realities of neurodivergent academic life (Botha 2021; Pearson and Rose 2021; Beaux et al. 2024). The chapter also embraces reflexive methodologies that acknowledge the researcher's positionality and entanglements of embodiment, advocacy and academic practice (Finlay 2002; Le Gallais 2008; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009; Ellis et al. 2010; Berger 2015; Dodgson 2019).

In this way, this methodological design resists deficit-based paradigms by centring neurodivergent perspectives and reimagining research as a co-constructed, emancipatory space of inquiry. One that foregrounds lived experience, challenges epistemic exclusion and values neurodivergent knowledge production (Botha 2021; Grant and Kara 2021; Pearson and Rose 2021; Beaux et al. 2024). It aims to generate knowledge that is not only methodologically rigorous but also inclusive, participatory and attuned to the politics of representation and power within academic research. Each method has been purposefully selected to illuminate a particular layer of the social world, while also supporting a cohesive and inclusive inquiry into the lived experiences of neurodivergent educators.

The framework combines:

1. **Autoethnography**—as the primary analytic strand;
2. **Participatory Research**—providing insights into cultural and community dynamics;
3. **Multi-Methods**—contextualising participants' experience with broader structural patterns.

Table 2 summarises the contribution of each strand within this triadic framework.

Table 2: The Triadic Framework

Layer	Method	Contribution
Personal / Agency	Autoethnography (Primary)	Reflexive engagement with lived experience, identity performance, and digital agency.
Cultural	Participatory Research	Co-construction of knowledge on community practices, disclosure, and precarity through Padlet and interviews.
Structural	Multi-Methods	Mapping patterns of precarity, digital engagement, and institutional practices via survey and qualitative triangulation.

This methodological configuration is deliberately aligned with the study's theoretical commitments. By mapping data collection and analysis onto the domains of agency, culture and structure, the framework supports a holistic yet critical reflexive account of neurodivergent academic life (Archer 1995; Sayer 2000; Danermark et al. 2019). Autoethnography anchors the design, foregrounding the researcher's own situated knowledge and analytic priorities (Anderson 2006; Ellis et al. 2010). Participatory and multi-methods enrich this orientation by offering dialogic and systemic perspectives, engaging with co-constructed meanings and power dynamics across digital and institutional settings (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Botha 2021; Beaux et al. 2024). In this way, the triadic framework enables the research to engage meaningfully with the complexities of identity negotiation, disclosure and institutional precarity, while upholding principles of epistemic justice and inclusion (Fricker 2007; Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Grant and Kara 2021).

The structure of this chapter is as follows:

- Section 3.2 outlines the philosophical and epistemological framework.
- Section 3.3 provides an overview of the research design.
- Sections 3.4 to 3.6 elaborate on each strand of the triadic methodology.
- Section 3.7 outlines the specific methods used for data generation.
- Sections 3.8 and 3.9 address ethical considerations and validity.
- Section 3.10 summarises the chapter.

This chapter focuses exclusively on the methodological rationale and design. The subsequent chapters (4–6) will present the data collection, analysis, and findings. By separating these components, the thesis maintains clarity and coherence while ensuring that methodological decisions are understood independently of the data itself.

3.2 Philosophical Framework

This section discusses the philosophical foundations shaping this research, positioning it within a critical realist

ontology (Archer 1995; Sayer 2000; Danermark et al. 2019) and a critical disability studies (CDS) perspective (Oliver 1990; Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. 2020; Botha 2021). These are further informed by feminist standpoint theory, which emphasises the epistemic significance of marginalised knowers and the partial, situated nature of all knowledge (Hill Collins 2000; Harding 2004). Together, these perspectives provided a robust theoretical lens through which to examine the interplay of structure, culture and agency as neurodivergent educators. Institutional precarity is not simply an individual burden but a structurally produced condition, embedded in ableist norms that shape academic habitus and define whose identities are legitimised within the field (Bourdieu 1990; Brown and Leigh 2018; Mellifont 2023).

At the cultural level, neurodivergent educators must continually negotiate dominant expectations of professionalism, often engaging in complex forms of identity performance and making to conform to institutional scripts (Papacharissi 2012; Pearson and Rose 2021). Digital platforms such as Twitter offer a partial reprieve, functioning as third spaces where alternative narratives and professional practices can emerge, though not without visibility or risk (Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022; Gabarron et al. 2023). These interwoven domains underscore the need for a methodological approach that does not isolate experience from structure but instead situates lived realities within broader systems of power and epistemic exclusion.

Critical realism allows for a stratified understanding of social reality, conceptualising it across three ontological layers: The empirical (experienced events), the actual (events that occur whether observed or not) and the real (underlying mechanisms and structures) (Archer et al. 2013; Bhaskar 2015). This layered model is particularly valuable for unpacking how ableism, institutional norms and digital platforms shape educators' lives in ways that are not always immediately visible but remain materially consequential (Brown and Leigh 2018; Brown and Ramlackhan 2022; Lewis and Arday 2023; Mellifont 2023; Scott and Gibson 2023).

Complementing this, the CDS framework rejects deficit-based and medicalised views of disability, instead locating disablement in the interactions between individual bodies and structural, cultural and political barriers (Shakespeare and Watson 2001; Titchkosky 2011; Goodley 2014). It provides the vocabulary to interrogate institutional practices that render neurodivergent ways of being unintelligible or burdensome (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. 2020; Botha 2021). CDS also aligns closely with the neurodiversity paradigm, which asserts the value of cognitive difference as a form of epistemic diversity rather than pathology (Walker 2021; Chapman 2023).

Feminist standpoint theory deepens this analysis by situating knowledge within the lived experiences of those marginalised by dominant epistemic frameworks. It asserts that 'marginalised knowers' can offer stronger objectivity precisely because their *standpoint* reveals the limits of dominant paradigms (Hill Collins 2000; Harding 2004). As (Urbanowicz et al. 2019) argue, the lived experience of neurodivergence is both shaped by structural

constraints and marked by agentic responses, requiring an approach capable of holding both dimensions in tension. This is especially pertinent for a study led by a neurodivergent researcher, whose insights are not peripheral but central to the production of situated, reflexive and transformative knowledge (Le Gallais 2008; Grant and Kara 2021).

My ontological positioning is also shaped by lived experience. Navigating the overlapping demands of institutional systems, cultural norms and professional expectations as someone who is autistic, ADHD, and a dyslexic educator has given me first-hand insight into how structural forces are neither abstract nor distant; they are lived and embodied. I have encountered the tensions of performing professional legitimacy while masking neurodivergent traits, of negotiating disclosure in spaces shaped by ableist assumptions and resisting deficit framings that locate difference as dysfunction. Critical realism has, for me, offered a framework through which to make sense of these experiences, not as isolated events but as situated within a stratified reality where structures, cultures and agency co-exist and interact. It enables me to theorise these 'moments' without collapsing them into either personal failure or structural inevitability. This ontological stance reinforces my commitment to a methodology that centres lived experience while critically examining the systems that shape it.

These ontological commitments are enriched by an epistemological stance rooted in feminist standpoint theory and critical disability studies. Both traditions challenge dominant, positivist epistemologies by foregrounding the legitimacy of situated and embodied knowledge (Hill Collins 2000; Harding 2004; Botha 2021). Within academic institutions, neurodivergent ways of knowing are often marginalised, reframed through deficit models or reduced to diagnostic categories that obscure their epistemic value (Ingouf 2021; Stephens 2022; Lewis and Arday 2023; Denisen 2024).This thesis contests such framings by positioning neurodivergent knowledge as not only valid but essential to understanding the lived complexities of professional identity in higher education.

Urbanowicz et al. (2019) advocate for research practices that centre neurodivergence expertise, moving beyond pathologising discourse and towards strength-based approaches. Botha (2021) Similarly, argue that neurodivergent methodologies must directly confront epistemic injustice by advancing accessible, community-oriented research that honours the plurality of neurodivergent experience. My insider position offers an epistemic proximity to the research context, yet it also requires a reflexive approach that resists the temptation to speak for or over others (Le Gallais 2008; Berger 2015). To navigate this complexity, I adopted a participatory approach that allowed participants to shape the research on their own terms. This was accomplished by designing the Padlet exercise and conducting semi-structured interviews, both informed by previously mentioned methodological principles. These approaches encouraged participants to express their experiences in ways that felt accessible, meaningful, and non-extractive (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Bergold and Thomas 2012; Van Zyl and Sabiescu 2020).

These commitments also reflect the axiological foundation of this thesis. As Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 161) remind us, “inquiry is inherently value-laden”. Accordingly, values of epistemic justice, inclusion and accessibility are not peripheral concerns, but are embedded at the core of the study’s design and execution (Fricker 2007; Botha 2021; Chapman and Carel 2022; Hamilton and Petty 2023). This stance aligns with wider efforts to challenge knowledge-based exclusions and foster more equitable research environments for neurodivergent educators (Advance HE 2023). For example, decisions concerning participant anonymity, the representation of data, and the use of reflexivity were made with careful attention to the unevenness of power that often shapes research involving marginalised communities.

Reflexivity is not treated as a methodological accessory but as a central principle guiding the research process. As Finlay (2002) and Berger (2015) argue, reflexivity is particularly vital in insider research, where the researcher’s proximity to participants can create both opportunities and ethical risks. Drawing on Hamilton et al. (2008) model (**Figure C**) of interconnected narrative inquiry, self-study and autoethnography, I approach reflexivity as an ongoing, iterative process. It is embedded throughout the research design, data collection and analysis phases. This helped ensure that my positionality did not overshadow the diverse perspectives of participants but instead remained open to contestation, revision and accountability.

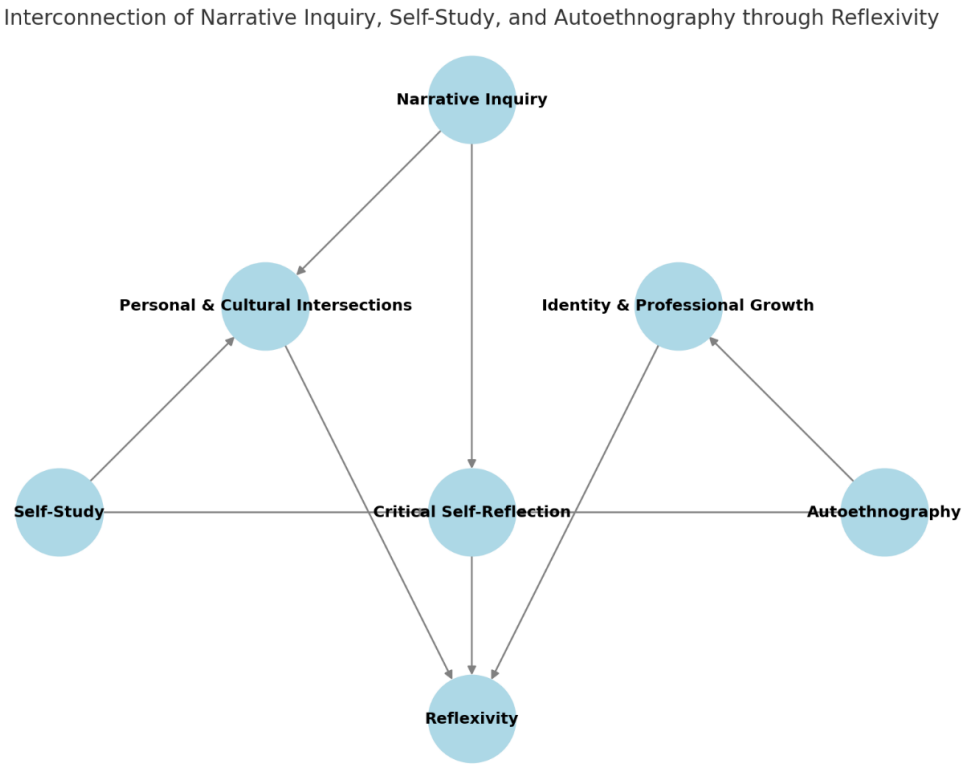


Figure C: The Interconnection of Narrative Inquiry, Self-Study, and Autoethnography through Reflexivity (Hamilton et al., 2008, p. 24)

Therefore, the philosophical framework outlined here underpins the triadic methodological approach developed

in the following section. It provides the conceptual grounding for an inquiry that is critically situated (Heron and Reason 1997), ethically responsive (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Fricker 2007), and methodologically reflexive (Finlay 2002; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009). In particular, it supports a research design attuned to the complex realities faced by neurodivergent educators as they navigate institutional structures and digital platforms (Botha 2021; Scott and Gibson 2022; Mellifont 2023). The next section outlines how the philosophical commitments are operationalised through the study's overall design and integrated methodology strategy.

3.3 Research Design Overview

The research design in this study integrates a deliberately asymmetrical triadic framework composed of autoethnography, participatory research and multi-methods. This design is grounded in the philosophical commitments outlined in the previous section, particularly the emphasis on reflexivity, epistemic justice and situated inquiry (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Finlay 2002; Fricker 2007). The triadic structure reflects both the theoretical and practical priorities of the project, enabling a multi-perspectival analysis of the professional and digital lives of neurodivergent educators. Each methodological strand was selected not for symmetry, but for its capacity to offer distinct yet complementary insights into the interplay of institutional structures, cultural narratives and individual agency (Archer 1995, 2007; Danermark et al. 2019).

Autoethnography forms the conceptual and analytical foundation of the design. As both a method of data generation and a reflexive mode of analysis, it positions my lived experience and insider perspective as a neurodivergent educator as central to the inquiry (Ellis 2004; Anderson 2006). This strand enabled sustained engagement with the entangled dynamics of professional identity, digital agency and institutional precarity and served as a generative site for developing the *Nomadic Educator* concept. Rather than treating this concept as a pre-determined theoretical model, it was approached as provisional and exploratory, open to refinement through dialogue with empirical data and theoretical insight (See Section 2.6).

To extend and extend the insights afforded by autoethnography, a participatory strand was developed that prioritised inclusivity, accessibility and participant autonomy. Informed by early pilot feedback and supervisory guidance, Padlet was selected as the principal participatory tool due to its asynchronous, multimodal and low-barrier affordances (Zainuddin et al. 2020; Jong and Tan 2021). These features aligned closely with cognitive, sensory and emotional needs articulated by neurodivergent educators (Botha 2021; Pearson and Rose 2021). More than a data collection mechanism, Padlet became an expression of the participatory ethos, allowing contributors to engage on their own terms and in ways consistent with the values of epistemic justice and distributed agency (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Bergold and Thomas 2012).

The third strand, a multi-method component implemented through an online survey, provided exploratory contextualisation and broadened the analytical scope of the study. It contributed to the triangulation of findings and facilitated the identification of broader patterns related to structural inequality, disclosure and platform use among neurodivergent educators (Denzin 2012; Santuzzi and Keating 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022; Mellifont 2023). Rather than fragmenting the analysis, the survey data enriched the study's interpretive depth by situating lived experiences within wider institutional and socio-cultural dynamics.

Framed within a critical realist ontology, this integration of survey data foregrounded how participants' experiences are shaped by structural constraints, cultural expectations and individual agency (Archer 1995, 2007, 2013; Danermark et al. 2019). The patterns revealed through survey responses, particularly regarding disclosure practices, institutional barriers and platform use, provided a contextual scaffold for exploratory insights developed through the Padlet activity, autoethnographic self-interviews and semi-structured interviews. In Chapter 5, each method is analysed independently to preserve its epistemic specificity, with the survey findings serving as a comparative anchor. This layered analytic strategy reflects the methodological asymmetry and

prepares the ground for the thematic synthesis in Chapter 6, where cross-cutting themes such as identity performance, risk, agency and precarity are brought into critical dialogue (Fletcher 2017).

The research is guided by the following overarching question:
How do neurodivergent educators negotiate and develop their professional and personal identities on Twitter?

Table 3 maps the alignment between the sub-research questions, corresponding methods, analytical foci, and relevant critical realist layers. This framework illustrates how each method contributes to a stratified understanding of digital identity negotiation, structural precarity and institutional transformation.

Table 3: Mapping Research Questions to Methods and Critical Realist Layers

Research Question	Method(s)	Analytical Focus	Stratified Layer(s)
RQ1: How do neurodivergent educators use Twitter to create and sustain third-space interactions, and how has this evolved over time?	Participatory (Padlet + Interview) + Autoethnography	Digital culture and community dynamics	Culture + Agency
RQ2: What role did the COVID-19 pandemic play in shaping the professional use of Twitter among neurodivergent educators?	Multi-Methods (Survey + Interview)	Structural change and precarity dynamics	Structure + Agency
RQ3: How do my neurodivergent perspectives and lived experiences relate to this research?	Autoethnography (including self-interviews)	Reflexivity, positionality, insider-outsider dynamics	Agency
RQ4: What institutional lessons can be drawn to inform more inclusive academic environments?	Participatory (Padlet + Interview) + Multi- Methods	Structural recommendations and epistemic justice	Structure + Culture

These research questions are situated within a critical realist ontological and epistemological framework, recognising identity not as a static attribute but as emergent and relationally shaped by the interplay of structural constraints, cultural discourses and agentic practices (Archer 1995, 2007, 2013; Danermark et al. 2019). This stratified perspective supports an analysis attentive to both macro-level institutional practices and micro-level acts of resistance and meaning-making (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019). Such a framing resonates with McDougall and Potter's (2019) account of digital third spaces and Scott and Gibson's (2022) conceptualisation of Twitter as a space where neurodivergent educators construct professional identities and challenge normative expectations.

Before turning to a detailed account of each methodological strand, it is important to outline the pilot study that informed the operationalisation of this triadic framework. The pilot study was not simply a technical test of tools

and procedures but a critical phase that illuminated how methodological design could more effectively align with the needs, expectations and lived realities of neurodivergent educators. It affirmed the importance of accessibility, reflexivity and epistemic inclusion as design principles (Bergold and Thomas 2012; Botha 2021; Grant and Kara 2021). The insights gained directly shaped decisions regarding platform selection, data collection pacing and the flexible structuring of participatory activities, ensuring the study remained responsive to its ethical and theoretical commitments.

3.3.1 Insights from the Pilot Study

During the taught phase of the EdD, I recruited three participants from the *Autism Researcher Network North(*ARNN), a Twitter based community of neurodivergent educators. The anonymised participants (see **Table 4**) were Alex (a mid-career lecturer in digital education), Elizabeth (an early-career researcher in psychology and education) and Edd (a gender diverse mid-career lecturer in childhood studies). Each took part in a semi-structured interview and a group Padlet exercise. These activities were used to trial methods, test accessibility and generate early themes around identity, advocacy, COVID-19, third space engagement and activism.

Table 4:Pilot Study Participant Details (Anonymised)

Pseudonym	Role/Background (anonymised)	Interview Duration	Participation in Padlet Exercise	Demographic Details (anonymised)
Alex	Dr, university lecturer in digital education (UK-based, PhD)	48 mins	Present (camera off)	White, male, mid-career academic
Elizabeth	Dr, researcher in psychology & education (UK-based, PhD)	42 mins	Present	White, female, early-career researcher
Edd	Lecturer in education/childhood studies (UK-based)	45 mins	Present	White, gender-diverse, mid-career academic

- Group Padlet Exercise: Duration 1 hr 10 mins; all three participated.

The pilot confirmed three key lessons:

1. Accessibility: synchronous formats risked excluding participants due to sensory sensitivities and fluctuating energy. Asynchronous participation was therefore embedded across Padlet and Survey strands.
2. Method refinement: feedback showed Padlet worked best as an individual, multi-modal exercise, while structured self-interviews provided a more manageable form of reflexive engagement than open ended writing.
3. Ethics and sequencing: participants emphasising the importance of optional camera use, breaks between

methods, and careful sequencing of interview questions from less sensitive to more personal topics.

This formative phase reinforced the need to align methodological choices with commitments to epistemic justice, reflexivity and neurodivergent-informed ethics (Fricker 2007; Botha 2021; Chapman and Carel 2022). It established a working balance between rigour and inclusivity and laid the groundwork for refinements across the study, while also highlighting the role of reflexive journalling and autoethnographic vignettes in capturing the dual researcher–participant perspective (Huber 2024).

The methodological framework was therefore shaped not only by theory but also by the pilot itself, which refined decisions, exposed barriers to participation and embedded accessibility from the outset (Van Teijlingen and Hundley 2002; Bergold and Thomas 2012; Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021).The pilot combined three activities: **(1)** trialling Padlet as a participatory space; **(2)** preliminary autoethnographic self-interviews; and **(3)** informal dialogues with neurodivergent colleagues. A Padlet 'mapping' activity also surfaced early thematic categories—professional identity, neurodiversity, social media and COVID-19, third space, activism and Twitter experiences—that later informed the research questions (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Based on these insights (**Figure D**), the following methodological refinements were implemented:

- Integration of Padlet as a core participatory tool, shaped by the pilot feedback.
- Embedding asynchronous participation across Padlet and Survey strands.
- Adoption of a structured self-interview and protocol with the autoethnographic strand
- Design of scaffolded semi-structured interviews with Padlet contributions used personalised entry points in conversations.
- Redesign of online survey with attention to cognitive load, device accessibility and clarity of language through supervisory feedback.

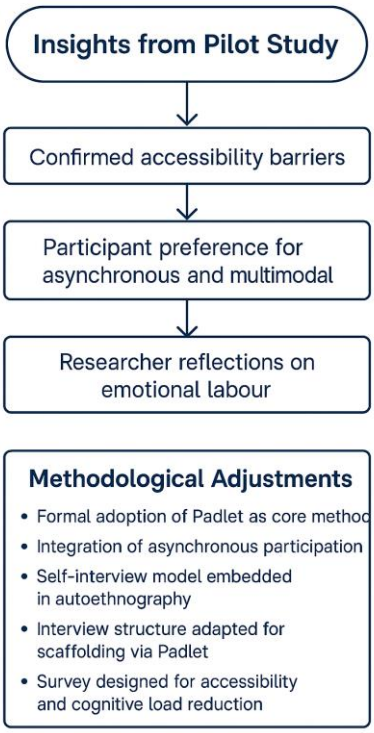


Figure D: Insights from Pilot Study: Influences on Accessibility and Methodological Refinements

The pilot's influence extended beyond technical refinements; it deepened the alignment between the study's methodological architecture and its ethical commitments. Informed by participatory research principles (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Bergold and Thomas 2012). The experience highlighted the need to design not merely *about* neurodivergent educators but *for* and *with* them, centring relational, sensory and affective dimensions of participation. The pilot affirmed that accessibility cannot be retrofitted at the point of data collection; it must be built into the research design from the outset (Botha 2021; Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021). This insight aligns with calls in neurodivergent and disability studies to dismantle normative assumptions about what constitutes legitimate participation, rigour and evidence (Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Brown 2020; Pearson and Rose 2021).

The pilot phase also surfaced resonances between accessibility adaptations trialled, particularly the use of Padlet, and my own experience as a neurodivergent researcher. Many of the barriers raised by participants echoed the challenges I had encountered in navigating academic and institutional research spaces (Botha 2021; Chapman and Carel 2022). One particularly telling instance occurred during the university ethics review process, where the committee insisted that a neurodiversity "specialist" be present during the interview with participants. This request not only overlooked the agency and preferences of the neurodivergent educators involved, many of whom expressed a desire for peer-level dialogue but also undermined my own position as a neurodivergent insider-researcher with lived expertise. The implication that

external validation was required to ensure ethical integrity reflected a broader institutional discomfort with neurodivergent-led research and a failure to recognise experiential knowledge as legitimate (Fricker 2007; Botha 2021; Chapman and Carel 2022). The pilot phase thus reinforced the need for a design that was only accessible, but epistemically just, centred on trust, co-production and recognition of neurodivergent researchers and participants as knowledge-holders in their own right (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021).

3.4 Autoethnography

Autoethnography forms the analytical and reflexive core of the triadic framework developed for this thesis, anchoring the exploration of professional identity among neurodivergent educators. It was selected as the central strand not only for its capacity to foreground lived experience and insider knowledge, but also for its suitability for examining how professional identity is enacted, constrained and reimaged within both institutional and digital contexts (Ellis 2004; Anderson 2006; Adams et al. 2015; Mellifont 2023; Scott and Gibson 2023). As Ellis et al. (2010, p. 275) note, "Autoethnography is a means of writing and analysing personal narratives to reveal broader cultural insights". This strand aligns with the study's critical realist ontology by enabling analysis of stratified interplay of structure, culture and agency as embodied and navigated in everyday academic life (Archer et al. 2013; Danermark et al. 2019).

Autoethnography is, however, often contested in academic research, Two well-established critiques capture the core concerns: Delamont (2009) warns of its potential for self-indulgence and solipsism, while Sparkes (2000) notes that its legitimacy has been questioned in terms of rigour and trustworthiness. These critiques echo broader anxieties that autoethnography risks producing overly subjective or anecdotal accounts with limited generalisability. I was mindful of these concerns and adopted Anderson's (2006) model of analytic autoethnography, which combines personal experience with systematic analysis and theoretical engagement. My self-interview was thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive framework and integrated with the survey, Padlet and interview findings, ensuring my narrative was one strand within a triangulated design rather than a standalone memoir.

At the same time, I drew on Ellis's (2004) evocative style to capture lived experience in first-person vignettes, such as reflections on the March 2020 lockdown, but analysed these in relation to wider cultural and structural dynamics including disclosure, precarity and ableist expectations. This hybrid stance – blending analytical depth with emotional resonance, echoes Ellis et al. (2010) and Adam's et al. (2015), who argue autoethnography is rigorous when individual experience is situated within broader contexts. To counter the charge of solipsism, I signalled my positionally explicitly through reflexive icons and commentary, analysed participant data before returning to my own, and used sticky-note memos to trace shifts in thinking. This aligns with Crawley (2012) and Le Roux (2017), who emphasise reflexivity and transparency as essential to maintain rigour.

My use of autoethnography was therefore embedded within a multi-method, critical realist design. My self-narrative was not privileged over participants' voices but placed in dialogue with them, highlighting both alignments and divergences. For example, in Chapter 6.6 (Precarity and Survival Professionalism) I note, via a reflexive icon, how I sometimes deleted tweets I considered too personal; a cautious act that aligned with Katrina's strategic framing of success and Drew's concerns about visibility on temporary contracts. Rather than undermining rigour, such contrasts surfaced the heterogeneity of neurodivergent academic life and contributed to crystallization (Denzin 2012). I, thus, conceptualised the *ethnos* of my autoethnography not as my own story in isolation but as the shared professional and digital culture of neurodivergent educators on Twitter, shaped by precarity, disclosure dilemmas and third-space practices.

Engaging in autoethnography was thus both intellectually generative and emotionally exacting. Reflexive interludes, marked with an icon through this thesis, became analytical checkpoints that transparently signalled when I was shifting between researcher and insider perspectives. These interludes were not merely a stylistic afterthought; they enabled me to sustain the writing process and model a strength-based approach aligned with neurodiversity-affirmative perspectives (Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Fletcher-Watson et al. 2019). They also illustrate how pattern recognition, associative thinking and sensitivity to context, often associated with neurodivergence, can be mobilised as valuable analytic resources. In this sense, my insider perspective is not a liability to be bracketed but a vital epistemic tool for examining the cultural scripts and institutional conditions that shape neurodivergent academic life.

3.4.1 Performing Professional Identity through Autoethnography

Building on the methodological rationale outline in Section 3.4, autoethnography proved valuable for examining the performative dimensions of professional identity, especially as enacted by neurodivergent educators in constrained institutional contexts (see Section 2.5). Drawing on Goffman's (2021) dramaturgical model and Butler's (2015) theory of performativity, this research's preliminary insights suggest that professional identity is not a fixed attribute but a socially mediated and continuously negotiated performance (Kerschbaum 2014; Brown and Leigh 2018; Pearson and Rose 2021; Radulski 2022; Mellifont 2023).

Within academic environments shaped by ableist norms, neurodivergent educators, including myself, frequently contend with institutional demands that prioritise coherence, conformity and normative professionalism (University and College Union (UCU) 2021b; Mellifont 2023). These demands are often at odds with our embodied realities, communicative preferences and neurodivergent forms of relationality, creating friction between authenticity and acceptance(Kerschbaum 2014; Botha 2021; Pearson and Rose 2021). The performative nature of identity in this context is further amplified by structural precarity and the absence of institutional frameworks that meaningfully support neurodivergent ways of being (Wood and Milton 2018; Merchant et al. 2020).

Reflexive engagement with my own academic trajectory uncovered the emotional and cognitive labour involved in sustaining these professional performances. Autoethnographic self-interviewing allowed me to revisit key moments in which I navigated expectations to mask neurodivergence, perform intellectual fluency and embody institutional ideals of the 'competent academic', a figure often constructed through neurotypical assumptions of reliability, communication and affect (Finlay 2002; Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Brown and Ramlackhan 2022) These narratives of masking and strategic disclosure (see Section 3.4) reflect a broader dilemma: whether to remain authentic and risk marginalisation or to conform and experience dissonance. This tension resonates with what Radulski (2022) describes as the paradox of camouflaging, both a protective mechanism and a site of personal cost. These experiences were not isolated but situated within broader systems of audit culture, performance metrics and normative professional scripts (Ball 2003; Shore and Wright 2015; Cerro Santamaría 2020).

Digital spaces like Twitter introduced new dimensions to this identity work. As a third space (Whitchurch 2013; McDougall and Potter 2019; Obexer 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022) Twitter enabled me to explore alternative forms of professional visibility grounded in neurodivergent solidarity, advocacy and community-building (Egner 2022; Chatterjee et al. 2023). However, these same platforms are also sites of hypervisibility, risk and surveillance. The phenomenon of 'context collapse (Marwick and Boyd 2011) foregrounded the complexities of managing multiple audiences, including institutional peers, students and wider public audiences (see Section 2.5.3). My digital identity performance was thus characterised by strategic improvisation, curated disclosure and constant vigilance, echoing the challenges participants also face. As Ingouf (2021) notes, they are not immune to the broader dynamics of power and exclusion.

Therefore, the autoethnographic strand offered personal insights but also functioned as an interpretive frame for participants' narratives. The act of writing and analysing my own experiences fostered an attentiveness to the subtleties of others' disclosures, hesitations and strategies of self-presentation (Ellis 2004; Adams et al. 2015; Le Roux 2017). Shared patterns emerged around negotiating institutional precarity, managing identity boundaries and enacting professionalism under surveillance. These resonances were not simplistically equated but analytically leveraged to identify both shared conditions and divergent strategies, while remaining sensitive to positional and contextual differences (Dwyer and Buckle 2009; Berger 2015). This insider-outsider dynamic, simultaneously being part of and analysing the community under study, enhanced ethical rigour and epistemic richness of the research, anchoring it in both lived and theoretical insight (Hill Collins 2000; Harding 2004; Le Gallais 2008; Grant and Kara 2021).

3.4.2 A Hybrid Autoethnographic Approach

While Section 3.4 outlined the methodological rationale for hybrid autoethnography, this sub-section situates

that choice within broader epistemological debates concerning legitimacy, standpoint and neurodivergent ways of knowing. Autoethnography has been critiqued for its perceived lack of rigour and excessive subjectivity. Rather than restating these concerns, already discussed in Section 3.4, the focus here is on how such critiques reveal deeper epistemic hierarchies. These hierarchies privilege disembodied rationalism and linear argumentation, while marginalising forms of inquiry that are experiential, relational or affectively expressive - often the very modalities through which neurodivergent individuals construct meaning (Botha 2021; Walker 2021).

Within this context, feminist standpoint theory (Hill Collins 2000; Harding 2004) provides an alternative grounding, arguing that marginalised social positions offer epistemically privileged vantage points from which to interrogate institutional power structures. For neurodivergent researchers, the exclusion of embodied and affective modes of knowing represents not only a methodological debate but a form of structural epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007; Botha 2021). Recognising and resisting these exclusions is therefor both a philosophical and political commitment. Grant and Kara (2021) argue that neurodivergent scholars bring distinctive strengths to qualitative inquiry, including sustained focus, emotional sensitivity and non-linear, associative reasoning. These capacities align particularly well with the recursive, layered processes of autoethnography. A hybrid approach – balancing analytical rigour with evocative narrative – thus enables neurodivergent ways of knowing to be expressed as both valid and valuable, disrupting the boundaries of what counts as “proper” academic research.

In this sense, the hybrid model adopted here was more than a methodological choice, it was also an epistemological stance and an act of resistance. By validating alternative knowledge practices, the approach foregrounds the legitimacy of non-normative, neurodivergent epistemologies as rigorous, situated and critically generative.

3.5 Participatory Research

Participatory research formed the second strand of this study and was rooted in the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR), which emphasise collaboration, shared authority and mutual respect in knowledge-making (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Israel 2013; Wallerstein et al. 2018). This orientation aligns with the epistemological commitments of critical disability studies and the neurodiversity paradigm, which foreground the legitimacy of lived experience, challenge ableist research norms, and advocate for the redistribution of epistemic authority (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021; Walker 2021; Botha 2021). In this way, participatory research in this thesis was not a methodological add-on, but an ethical and political stance to counter the structural and epistemic exclusions often embedded in conventional academic research (Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Wood and Milton 2018).

The participatory strand was designed to operationalise these principles through methods that centred accessibility, co-production and situated ethics. Following Van Zyl and Sabiescu (2020), ethics were approached as relational and context-specific rather than abstract or universal, requiring continual reflexivity and attentiveness to participants' cognitive, sensory and affective needs. This emphasis was enacted not only through ongoing iterative consent with participants but also through consultation with neurodivergent supervisors, ensuring the design remained grounded in inclusive and responsive practice (Bergold and Thomas 2012; Berger 2015). Participatory methods were also understood as fostering relational and affective solidarities that could extend beyond the immediate research encounter (Fricker 2007; Dwyer et al. 2022; Beaux et al. 2024), a commitment that was particularly salient given the institutional isolation often reported by neurodivergent educators.

This strand was enacted through the use of a Padlet-based activity and semi-structured interviews. Padlet was chosen for its accessibility and alignment with neurodivergent communication preferences, such as sensory regulation, low-pressure engagement and flexible pacing (Zainuddin et al. 2020; Jong and Tan 2021). Its asynchronous, multimodal features enabled participants to engage at their own pace, revisit ideas and contribute to formats that suited them best, thereby facilitating more thoughtful and agentive participation (Gill-Simmen 2021; Jehad Ali and Ahmad 2022). For autistic and ADHD participants particularly, these features enhanced processing, reduced anxiety and supported authentic engagement (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021; Chapman and Carel 2022).

Semi-structured interviews extended this inclusive ethos by providing space for narrative engagement and co-construction of meaning (Brinkman and Kvale 2015; Denzin and Lincoln 2018; Galletta 2020). Building on the reflective groundwork laid by the Padlet exercise, interviews were designed to be participant-led, prioritising autonomy, sensory comfort and conversational pacing (Hill Collins; Harding 2004; Titchkosky 2011; Rose and Kalathil 2019). Conducted online via Zoom, they were tailored to participants' preferences regarding timing, environment and sensory settings (Krome 2021; Lee et al. 2022; Svihus 2024). Participants were invited to keep cameras off, take breaks or reschedule where needed, reflecting a complexity-informed approach to diverse needs (Leach et al. 2010).

Throughout this strand, reflexivity as an insider-researcher was central. My own neurodivergent ways of knowing – associative thinking, reflective pacing and multimodal expression – resonated with participants' practices and shaped my design ethos. The interviews and Padlet exercise became co-constructed spaces where lived experience, theoretical insight and relational ethics converged (Ellish and Bochner 2006; Rose and Kalathil 2019). Rather than treating resonances between my experience and participants' as anecdotal, these were theorised as structural patterns of navigating precarity, ableism and identity performance in higher education (Archer et al. 2007; Brown and Leigh 2018; Botha 2021).

In this way, the participatory strand complemented the autoethnographic strand by extending and deepening its analytical reach. While autoethnography enabled introspective exploration of identity negotiation, the participatory methods foregrounded relational, collective and dialogic aspects of neurodivergent academic life. Together, they enacted what Hill Collins (2000) and Harding (2004) describe as standpoint-informed epistemology, making visible both the exclusions faced by neurodivergent educators and the adaptive, agentic strategies they deploy to resist and reconfigure professional identity.

3.6 Multi-Methods Approach

This final section expands the rationale, structure, and reflexive positioning of multi-methods strand within the triadic framework. As outlined in Section 1.5, this framework integrates autoethnography, participatory research and multi-methods underpinned by a critical realist ontology. Whereas the earlier overview introduced the methodological strands and their relationship to critical realism, the present section develops this further by detailing how multi-methods was operationalised to examine the interrelations between structural conditions, cultural meanings and individual agency. It also elaborates on the philosophical underpinnings, practical design decisions and ethical commitments that informed the inclusion of an exploratory online survey alongside other qualitative methods. As such, this account reflects on how integrating multiple methods can enhance epistemic justice and cognitive accessibility throughout the research process.

Multi-methods formed the third strand of this study's triadic framework, complementing the introspective depth of autoethnography and the collaborative insight generated through participatory research. The rationale was both philosophical and pragmatic. Philosophically, the study is grounded in critical realism, which demands analytical attention to the layered interplay between structure, culture and agency in shaping social phenomena (Archer 1995, 2007, 2013; Danermark et al. 2019). Practically, a multi-method design was necessary to address the multifaceted complexity of neurodivergent educators' identity work, disclosure practices and digital engagement across institutional and third-space contexts (Chapman and Carel 2022).

This identity work unfolds within systems shaped by ableist academic habitus (Brown and Leigh 2018; Mellifont 2023), performative pressures embedded in neoliberal governance (Ball 2003; Cerro Santamaria 2020), and exclusionary epistemic norms that marginalise neurodivergent ways of knowing (Fricker 2007; Chapman and Carel 2022). Moreover, digital spaces such as Twitter operate simultaneously as sites of resistance, community-building and professional networking, while also exposing users to platform toxicity, context collapse and hypervisibility (Boyd 2010; Papacharissi 2012; Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022). Within this context, the online survey was designed to function diagnostically, offering an intital exploratory view of structural insights that shape neurodivergent educator's working conditions and digital practices.

This exploratory survey gathered qualitative data on identities, institutional roles, platform use and experiences of professional precarity, disclosure and support. It contextualised individual narratives within broader sectoral issues, such as the overrepresentation of neurodivergent educators in precarious contracts (UCU 2021a, 2021b) and the strategic use of Twitter to negotiate professional identity, seek community validation and engage in advocacy (Boyd 2010; Papacharissi 2012; Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022; Chatterjee et al. 2023; Gabarron et al. 2023).

Therefore, in methodological terms, it is important to distinguish multi-methods from mixed methods, While mixed methods typically combine quantitative and qualitative strands across paradigms, multi-methods retains coherence within a single epistemological and ontological stance (Mik-Meyer 2020). In this study, the survey, Padlet exercise, semi-structured interviews and autoethnographic self-interview were integrated under the unifying logic of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), rather than representing a blending of paradigms. This approach enabled coherence across diverse datasets while remaining faithful to critical realist foundations.

In line with Leech et al.'s (2010) discussion of legitimation, methodological diversity also supported rigour by ensuring inferential consistency across datasets and consequential validity in relation to participants' experiences of disclosure, precarity and identity negotiation. Stephens-Griffin (2019) has similary argued that autoethnography achieves greater analytical and ethical rigour when embedded within a wider multi-method framework; a logic applied here, where insider reflexivity was held alongside participant accounts and structural patterns in institutions and Twitter. While some scholars have developed multi-method frameworks for text analysis (Alejandro and Zhao 2024), this study differs in applying a single analytic method across varied data forms, emphasising interpretive integration rather than methodological proliferation.

Concurrently, the multi-methods strand was never intended to overshadow the other qualitative methodologies but rather operationalise all methods within it aforementioned. It was integrated as one element of a stratified research design consistent with critical realism, which demands attention to both observable patterns and the underlying mechanisms that produced them (Danermark et al. 2019). Exploratory survey results sensitised me to themes later explored in depth through Padlet exercise, semi-structure interviews and the autoethnographic self-inquiry. For instance, recurring survey responses around masking, platform fatigue and reluctance to disclosure, informed follow up questions and prompted further reflection on the socio-affective labour of digital engagement. These themes resonate with literature on the emotional toll of masking and identity management (Pearson and Rose 2021; Radulski 2022), the precarious positionality of neurodivergent educators (Brown and Leigh 2018; Mellifont 2023; Kaufman et al. 2024) and the performative demands of digital platforms that simultaneously offer community advocacy and risk.

While each strand of the triadic methodology aligned with a specific ontological dimension – structure (survey), culture (Padlet and interviews), and agency (autoethnography) – these were not treated as silos, but triangulation enabled an interwoven analytic strategy that traced how these layers co-constructed neurodivergent educators' professional identity performances. As Denzin (2012) and Heale and Forbes (2013) suggest, methodological triangulation can enrich interpretation by validating findings across diverse sources. In this study, triangulation was a theoretical and ethical construction intended to hold in view both generalisable trends and situated experiences, institutional logics and digital resistances, affective labour and structural constraint.

Working across these interconnected strands also required a sustained attentiveness to my own positionality. As a neurodivergent researcher, I was aware that triangulation was not a neutral or detached process. Moving between abstraction from the survey, collaborative account and introspective narratives often brought affective and cognitive challenges. At time the survey data felt emotionally distant, while the other qualitative contributions surfaced more situated experience demanding greater interpretative sensitivity. This oscillation required ongoing reflexive labour to synthesise across modalities while remaining alter to epistemic tension and risks of representation.

Engaging with the multi-methods strand therefore became both methodological and ethical. I was conscious of how complexity could be flattened into metric or affect diluted into themes, and resist extractivist tendencies in which participants knowledge is mined without reciprocity (Godrie 2025). Instead, I sought to value neurodivergent knowledge as relational, embodied and situated (Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Grant and Kara 2021), mirroring the forms of care that neurodivergent educators extend but are rarely afforded institutionally. This required a continuous reflexive awareness of my role as insider, witness and analyst, not erasing tensions but allowing them to remain visible as part of a more accountable research practice.

Accessibility considerations were equally central. The online survey, delivered through Qualtrics, was intentionally designed to be accessible across multiple devices, with an estimated 10–15-minute completion time displayed at the start (see Section 3.7.2). By enabling asynchronous participation in familiar environment and on preferred devices; the survey supported engagement across diverse sensory, cognitive and situational needs. Padlet further facilitated multimodal and non-linear expression, aligning with findings that it enhances engagement and inclusivity (Zainuddin et al. 2020; Jong and Tan 2021). These design choices reflected this broader epistemological commitment to valuing diverse ways of knowing (Grant and Kara 2021; Urbanowicz et al. 2019).

Finally, the decision to separate data collection (Chapter 4) from data analysis (Chapter 5) was not academic convention but through my own cognitive processing style as a neurodivergent researcher.

Following insights from Urbanowicz et al. (2019) and Botha (2021), I adopted a phased structure that allowed me to work in manageable stages. This decision supported sustained engagement with the data, reduced the risk of being overwhelmed and enabled analytic clarity, reflecting a broader ethic of care, attentive both to participant accessibility and to my own embodied limits.

3.7 Methods

As outlined in the preceding sections, the data generation strategy for this project was grounded in a triadic methodological framework designed to explore the dynamic interplay between structure, culture, and agency. This framework was operationalised through three complementary methods, each contributing to a layered and relational understanding of neurodivergent educators' professional identities and digital practices. The methods included 1) Autoethnography, incorporating narrative reflexivity and self-interviewing, 2) A Padlet-based participatory exercise 3) semi-structured interviews that built upon insights generated through the earlier methods. Together, these approaches enabled the exploration of how neurodivergent educators navigate precarity, identity performance and digital engagement within and beyond higher education institutions.

Each method was deliberately selected to align with the project's critical realist ontology and participatory ethos. The aim was to generate a dataset that could account for the realities experienced by neurodivergent educators across institutional and digital settings. **Table 5** summarises the distinctive analytical contribution of each method, mapped against the structural, cultural and agentic dimensions central to the study's research questions and interpretative framework.

Table 5: Analytical Contribution of Methods in Relation to Structure, Culture, and Agency

Method	Analytical Contribution
Autoethnography (Reflexive Narrative and Self-interview)	Illuminates how personal experiences of precarity, disclosure, and identity performance are situated within institutional and digital contexts. Enables reflexive engagement with insider-outsider dynamics, and positions embodied knowledge as epistemically valid (Ellis et al. 2015; Anderson 2006; Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Botha 2021).
Participatory Research (Padlet + Interviews)	Facilitates the co-construction of knowledge around digital agency, third-space identity practices, and collective narratives of resistance. Supports cultural meaning-making and participant agency in inclusive, asynchronous formats (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Botha et al. 2024; Grant and Kara, 2021; Zainuddin et al. 2020).
Multi-Methods (Survey + Integration)	Identifies structural patterns and initial themes (e.g., casualisation, disclosure practices, digital engagement). Contextualises individual experiences within broader institutional dynamics and enables critical

	pattern recognition (UCU 2021b; Mellifont 2023; Danermark et al. 2019).

The integration of these methods was intended to produce a reflexively layered dataset, consistent with a critical realist commitment to investigating how structure, culture and agency intersect in everyday practices of neurodivergent educators. The following sub-sections offer a procedural account of each method's design, accessibility features and role in the overall data generation process.

3.7.1 Autoethnography: Reflexive Narrative and Self-interview

The reflexive strand of this project was operationalised through two primary data-generative techniques: reflexive narration and self-interview. As outlined in Sections 3.3.2 and 3.4, these methods are situated within the autoethnographic strand of the triadic framework and draw directly on my positionality as a neurodivergent insider-researcher. The approach adopted here resonates with the project's commitment to agentic inquiry, critical reflexivity and epistemic justice: principles grounded in critical realism and feminist standpoint theory and further shaped by neurodivergent and critical disability scholarship (Finlay 2002; Harding 2004; Archer 2007; Fricker 2007; Botha 2021; Grant and Kara 2021; Chapman and Carel 2022).

In philosophical terms, both methods are aligned with the agentic layer of critical realism ontology, enabling a focused exploration of how identity, agency and self-understanding are negotiated through reflexivity (Archer 2007). While structural and cultural mechanisms shape the broader terrain, reflexive narration and self-interview foreground the personal deliberations and situated strategies through which individuals actively engage with and respond to those conditions (Crawley 2012). This mirrors the ontological stratification articulated in Section 3.2 and the reflexive praxis outline in Section 2.3 of Chapter 2.

Reflexive narration was employed as a structured and iterative process of writing and analysing first-person accounts of lived experience (Ellis 2004; Adams et al. 2015). These written reflections were grounded in my positionality as a neurodivergent educator navigating professional identity across institutional and digital terrains (Brown and Leigh 2018; Chapman and Carel 2022; Scott and Gibson 2023). As discussed in Section 3.4.1, such narrative acts were not merely anecdotal but functioned as sites of analytical labour; spaces through which I could examine the dynamics between self-understanding and structural constraint and epistemic positioning (Fricker 2007; Delamont 2009; Le Roux 2017).

Reflexive writing, in this context, served to render visible the embodied dimensions of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990) where the layered effects of neurotypical expectations, academic performativity and structured norms are sedimented within the self. As theorised by Bourdieu (1990) and further developed by Reay (2004) and Taylor (2018) *habitus* is not passively internalised but enacted through dispositions and practices shaped by the

interplay of structural norms, institutional fields and personal histories. This relational dynamic, in turn, shaped the possibilities for being and becoming within academic spaces, particularly for those whose ways of knowing and being diverge from normative expectations.

These reflexive accounts thus became a means to unsettle normative assumptions, tracing how digital engagements and institutional encounters co-constitute academic subjectivities (Butler 2015; Brown and Leigh 2018; Taylor 2018). Informed by Hamilton et al. (2008) model of interconnected reflexive practices, the narratives were deliberately composed to surface internal contradictions, tensions around disclosure and moments of agentic resistance. For instance, reflections on the affective labour of masking were not treated as isolated experiences, but as entry points into the causal mechanisms of institutional ableism and epistemic exclusion (Brown and Leigh 2018; Chapman and Carel 2022). In this sense, reflexive narration functioned both as a methodological device and a critical act, generating situated, embodied knowledge that challenges the structural and cultural exclusions embedded within higher education (Fricker 2007; Adams et al. 2015; Brown and Leigh 2018; Danermark et al. 2019; Chapman and Carel 2022; Huber 2024).

Building on these reflexive narratives, I incorporated self-interviewing as a dialogue extension of the autoethnographic strand, which intended to deepen engagement with my own identity work and to surface latent tensions across institutional and digital contexts. Informed by Anderson's (2006) model of analytic autoethnography and Crawley's (2012) framing of the feminist self-interview, I devised a series of prompts aligned with the project's research questions and emergent thematic concerns. These included prompts on digital identity performance, professional precarity and the ambivalence of visibility on Twitter (Brown and Leigh 2018; Chapman and Carel 2022; Egner 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022; Mellifont 2023).

Conducting the self-interviews in a recorded format enabled a deliberate shift from spontaneous reflection to a more structured and recursive mode of inquiry. This dialogic approach to reflexivity fostered moments of contradiction, clarification and analytical reappraisal, opening spaces for what Archer (2007) describes as the "internal conversation": the reflexive discussion through which individuals negotiate the interplay of institutional conditioning, social structure and personal aspiration. These methods are not presented as neutral tools, but as inherently value-laden and epistemically situated practices. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize that all inquiry is value-bound, shaped by the researchers' perspectives and contexts. Harding (2004) argues that acknowledging one's social position enhances objectivity, challenging traditional notions of neutrality. Fricker (2007) states how power dynamics influence knowledge production, introducing the concept of *epistemic injustice* to describe the ethical implications of such disparities.

As outlined in Section 3.3.2, these theoretical commitments require an ongoing reflexive audit of my analytic positioning. While I did not formally record analytic memos, I made regular use of a large whiteboard to capture

key emotional responses, contradictions or points that felt significant or unresolved. This visual process enabled me to externalise thoughts I wished to revisit, trace developing lines of inquiry and remain attuned to moments of defensiveness, avoidance or sudden clarity in the interpretation process. This practice resonates with Finlay's notion of "reflexivity as critical self-awareness", which encourages researchers to oscillate between empathetic immersion and analytic distancing. It also aligns with Sköldberg's (2009) notion of layered reflexivity, which foregrounds the recursive interplay between data, self, and context. In this way, reflexivity was enacted not as an embedded and iterative stance, integral to the ethical and epistemological orientation of the research.

Importantly, reflexive narration and self-interview functioned not only as modes of data generation but as mechanisms for activating the layer of personal agency within the study's critical realist framework (Archer 2007; Danermark et al. 2019). These methods generated insights into how a neurodivergent educator actively negotiates institutional norms, cultural discourses and professional expectations, often through moments of tension, resistance or strategic conformity. This aligns with the critical realist position that individuals are not merely shaped by structure and culture but possess the capacity for reflexive engagement and transformative action (Fletcher 2017; Danermark et al. 2019).

The resulting autoethnographic data illuminates how agency is both enabled and constrained in context, particularly in relation to identity performance, disclosure and a sense of belonging within academic environments. These dynamics resonate with the lived realities of neurodivergent educators navigating precarity and institutional ableism (Brown and Leigh 2018; Lewis and Arday 2023; Mellifont 2023; Kaufman et al. 2024). As explored further in Chapter 6, these insights also provided conceptual grounding for the development of the *Nomadic Educator*, a lens through which to theorise the fluid, situated and adaptive dimensions of neurodivergent academic identity. Taken together, reflexive narration and self-interview constituted a vital element of this project's methodological design, enabling the production of situated, embodied knowledge grounded in critical realist and neurodivergent epistemologies.

These approaches foregrounded agency as a lived and reflexive process, allowing for engagement with the personal, cultural and structural dynamics shaping neurodivergent educator identity. By positioning my own subjectivity not as a methodological complication but as a generative analytic resource, this strand produced rich insights into how precarity, performance and belonging are navigated across institutional and digital spaces. This layered reflexive work strengthens the coherence of the autoethnographic strand within the broader triadic framework and also lays the foundation for the thematic analysis presented in Chapter 5 and the conceptual synthesis of the "Nomadic Educator" explored in Chapter 6.

While the autoethnographic strand offered a deeply situated and reflexive account of lived experience, the online survey complemented this by providing a broader view of sectoral patterns, enabling the study to

contextualise individual narratives within the structural dynamics of higher education. Section 3.7.2 outlines the design, implementation and analytical contribution of the online survey within the multi-methods strand within the broader triadic methodological framework.

3.7.2 Exploratory Online Survey

The online survey was designed to address the structural layer of this study's critical realist ontology, offering a complementary perspective to the cultural and agentic insights explored through participatory and autoethnographic methods. As outlined in Sections 3.3.4 and 3.6, the exploratory survey formed the basis for the qualitative element within the triadic framework, facilitating both breadth and contextual depth within this inquiry. Situated within the critical realist commitment to examining the interplay of structure, culture and agency (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019). The initial survey enabled the mapping of macro-level patterns that shape neurodivergent educators' engagement with Twitter and institutional life.

The rationale for including a survey extended beyond descriptive utility. Informed by Denzin's (2012) work on triangulation, this method supported the generation of initial data that could reinforce, nuance or contest qualitative findings emerging from the other strands. In doing so, it contributed to what Sayer (2000) terms a stratified explanatory account, one that moves beyond surface regularities to examine deeper conditions and mechanisms structuring experience. In practice, the survey offered initial indicators of broader trends, such as precarious employment, digital advocacy and disclosure practices, providing a scaffold against which qualitative narratives could be interpreted.

The survey questions were loosely aligned with each of the three layers of critical realism, although their principal function was to illuminate structural conditions (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019) and provided an initial dataset which further questions could be developed for the other strands of data in a sequential order of the Padlet exercise followed by the interviews . Occupational questions captured contract types, length of service, discipline and workplace disclosure, shedding light on institutional constraints and affordances that shape the lived experiences of neurodivergent educators (Sayer 2000; Brown and Leigh 2018; Mellifont 2023). Additional questions focused on cultural attitudes, such as perceptions of Twitter as a professional third space (Whitchurch 2013; McDougall and Potter 2019; Obexer 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022), and individual agency, including uses of Twitter for advocacy, peer support or identity work (Carpenter et al. 2022; Egner 2022).

The survey was implemented through Qualtrics, following training and supervisory guidance from Dr Rachel Moseley. As part of this process, I received dedicated instruction on question design, logic flows and accessibility considerations. Dr Moseley and the other supervisors reviewed multiple drafts of the survey and provided feedback on language clarity, inclusivity and alignment with the study's aims. Dr Moseley's expertise in autism research was invaluable in shaping an instrument that was both rigorous and attuned to the needs of the

neurodivergent participants. Once the iterative revisions were complete, and I was satisfied with the balance between breadth of content and the time commitment required from participants, the final version of the survey went on Twitter (see **Figure E**) which directed potential participants to the Qualtrics platform and outlined the study's aims, scope and ethical assurances.

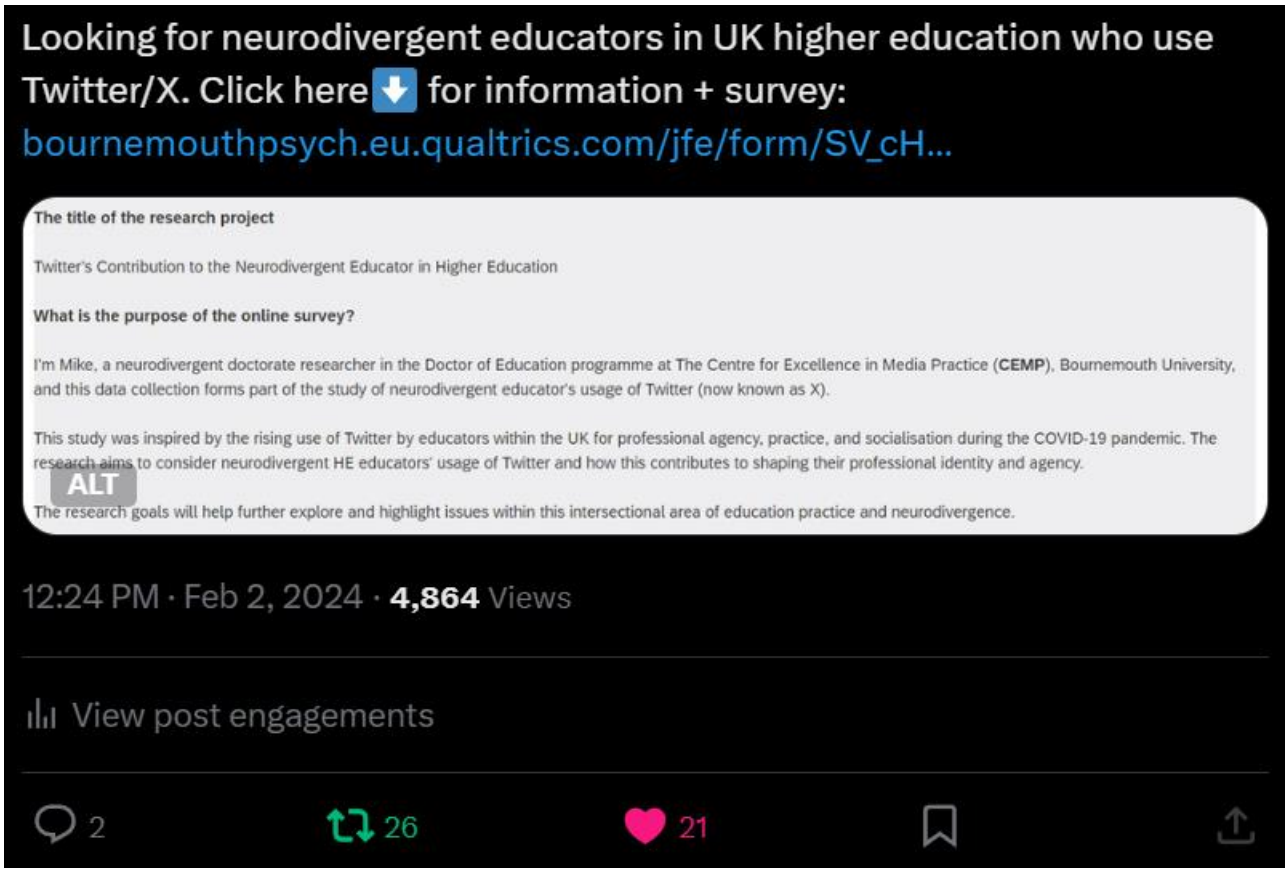


Figure E: Twitter recruitment post for online survey (2 February 2024)

Accessibility remained central to the survey's implementation, consistent with the study's broader commitment to inclusive, participant-led and non-extractive research practices (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Bergold and Thomas 2012; Grant and Kara 2021). These principles, rooted in participatory methodologies and critical disability studies, informed the structure and delivery of the survey to ensure it was attuned to neurodivergent access needs (Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Clouder et al. 2020). In recognition of common neurodivergent preferences for predictability and reduced cognitive demand, the order of questions was deliberately structured to minimise cognitive load (see **Appendix A**).

The survey began with straightforward demographic and factual items before progressing to more interpretative and attitudinal prompts. This ordering aligns with inclusive research design principles that accommodate executive functioning differences and support accessible participation (Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Clouder et al. 2020; Pearson and Rose 2021). Recent research underscores the importance of such considerations: Stacey and Cage (2023, p. 272) note that autistic participants,

"paid careful attention to the meaning of words, and at times were unable to respond accurately and in a meaningful way", particularly when questionnaire items lacked clarity or sufficient context.

Designing the survey required sustained engagement with questions of access, cognitive load and neurodivergent usability, concerns that were not abstract but personally familiar. As someone with ADHD, autism and dyslexia, I am acutely aware of how even well-intentioned research instruments can become cognitively overwhelming, particularly when they front-load complex, ambiguous or emotionally taxing questions. During the early development phase, I found myself repeatedly testing the survey to gauge its sensory and cognitive rhythm by doing the survey and sharing closed access to a few of my neurodivergent peers; as to how it felt to move through each section, where mental fatigue might set in, and which formats felt most accessible.

These reflections, combined with feedback from my peers and supervisory support, led to a deliberate restructuring of the question sequence. By beginning with factual, low-stakes items and reserving reflective prompts for the later stages, I aimed to minimise executive load and increase participant comfort. This ordering strategy reflected not only inclusive design principles but also an effort to model the kind of access-sensitive practice that neurodivergent researchers and participants often advocate for but seldom encounter. In this sense, the survey was not only a data-gathering tool but also a methodological artefact shaped by lived experience, community insight and the commitment to build research spaces that do not reproduce the very exclusions they seek to critique.

The online survey served as a foundational mechanism for capturing the structural conditions shaping neurodivergent educators' professional and digital experiences. Rather than functioning as a standalone instrument, it contributed to a layered analytical strategy contextualising and triangulating the insights derived from autoethnographic and participatory methods. Its integration within the triadic framework reflected the study's epistemological commitment to inclusivity (Stacey and Cage 2023), reflexivity and methodological complementarity. By illuminating sectoral trends, such as precarious employment, uneven disclosure practices and patterns of digital engagement, the survey offered a critical backdrop against which personal narratives could be more meaningfully interpreted.

Building on this structural perspective, the next section explores the participatory strand of study. Specifically, it outlines the rationale and implementation of the Padlet exercise, which was designed to foreground cultural meaning-making and to facilitate asynchronous, accessible engagement with neurodivergent participants.

3.7.3 Padlet Exercise (as part of Enhanced Interviews)

Aligned with the participatory principles outlined in Sections 3.5, the Padlet-based activity was integrated in this

project as an asynchronous, multimodal pre-interview exercise to enhance accessibility, agency and methodological coherence. This method was drawn on foundational participatory research literature, particularly Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) argument that meaningful inquiry should be conducted with rather than *on* participants, emphasising mutual respect, power-sharing and community ownership for knowledge. In parallel, Heron and Reason (1997) advocate for co-operative inquiry as a mode of participatory research that recognises participants as co-subjects, active agents in cycles of reflection, action and shared understanding. Together, these perspectives underpin a shift away from extractive research practices and towards dialogic, inclusive methodologies that foreground participants' lived expertise and epistemic authority.

Informed by participatory traditions, the Padlet exercise was designed not only to elicit participant reflections but to embed their voices structurally within the inquiry, enabling them to influence how their experiences were framed and interpreted. Rather than treating accessibility as a technical add-on, the use of Padlet reflected an epistemological commitment to the co-production of knowledge and the centring of neurodivergent perspectives within a shared process of meaning-making. This aligns with Le Cunff et al. (2023) co-design methodology, which positioned neurodivergent students as active collaborators in shaping research agendas. Similarly, Nimbley et al. (2024) identify shared power and autism-affirming approaches as facilitators of ethical co-production with autistic individuals. In this regard, Padlet was not simply a tool for gathering data, but a deliberate methodological intervention that enacted inclusive values in practice, affirming that how we design research directly shapes whose knowledge is recognised, whose voices are heard and whose realities are legitimised.

Padlet's asynchronous, multimodal design was thus a critical feature rather than a procedural convenience. It offered participants the ability to reflect and respond at their own pace, thereby minimising cognitive load and accommodating executive functioning differences often experienced by neurodivergent individuals (Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Botha 2021; Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021; Grant and Kara 2021). These design choices were grounded in a broader ethical imperative: to create spaces of participation that are not only accessible but also affirming. Botha (2021) and Fletcher-Watson et al. (2021) argue that inclusive research must resist normative assumptions about communication, cognition and temporal engagement by adapting to participants' embodied and cognitive realities. In this sense, Padlet became more than a preparatory activity; it served as an enactment of the project's wider methodological commitment to epistemic justice. In doing so, it exemplified what Fletcher-Watson et al. (2021) describe as inclusive research design and what Botha (2021) frames as a necessary counter to structural ableism within academic methodologies.

A growing body of literature supports the use of Padlet in participatory contexts, particularly in educational and reflective settings that value accessibility, agency and multimodality. Zainuddin et al. (2020) demonstrate that Padlet's visual layout and multimodal functionality promote engagement and inclusive interaction, particularly

for learners who may not feel confident in conventional, text-heavy platforms. Similarly, Jong and Tan (2021) highlight how Padlet enables accessible, non-linear contributions and improves clarity and confidence in student writing, features transferable to participatory research with neurodivergent adults. Gill-Simmen (2021) provides further evidence of Padlet's value for cognitive engagement, showing how it fosters metacognitive reflection and knowledge construction in asynchronous learning environments. From a participant's experience perspective, Jehad Ali and Ahmad (2022) found that Padlet reduced stress and improved depth of engagement among postgraduate students, particularly those marginalised by the demands of real-time, synchronous participation. These insights converge with critical disability perspectives and affirm Padlet's capacity to serve not just as a data collection interface but as a reflexive space that supports epistemic justice and participant autonomy (Botha 2021; Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021; Pearson and Rose 2021).

The choice to adopt an asynchronous, flexible model was informed by feedback during the pilot phase (Van Teijlingen and Hundley 2002) and by my own lived experience as a neurodivergent insider-researcher. During the design of this activity, it became evident that conventional synchronous methods often reproduce the very barriers: cognitive, sensory, and affective, that this project sought to challenge. These are not abstract or incidental obstacles: they are embedded in the assumptions of normative academic practice. As Saigot (2023) highlighted, asynchronous tools and media afford neurodivergent individuals a more autonomous and cognitively manageable mode of interaction, particularly in settings where sensory modulation and communication flexibility are essential. At the same time, Beaux et al. (2024) argue for the structural recognition of online learning and research environments to address the equity gap faced by neurodivergent participants, emphasising the value of asynchronous modalities in promoting inclusive epistemic engagement.

Dark (2024) further advocates for the flexible application of inclusive research principles, noting that neurodivergent researchers, particularly those working within their own communities, are uniquely positioned to recognise and navigate these barriers. Dark's (2024) proposed *Eight Principles of Neuro-Inclusion* underscore the importance of rethinking not just methods but the broader research environment itself with explicit attention to epistemic agency and actionable inclusion. In this light, the Padlet activity became a deliberate intervention into the methodological status quo, one grounded in care, flexibility and a shared commitment to reimaging how research is done with and for neurodivergent communities.

Rather than imposing a normative mode of participation, the platform enabled participants to reflect and respond asynchronously and autonomously, reducing communicative barriers and affirming the epistemic legitimacy of diverse expressive forms (Fricker 2007; Beaux et al. 2024). Crucially, the Padlet was not a stand-alone tool but functioned as a scaffolded prelude to the interviews (see Section 3.7.4), supporting participants in identifying relevant themes ahead of time. This layered design aligns with inclusive methodological frameworks

that recognise the importance of minimising cognitive load and fostering participant-led dialogue (Jong and Tan 2021; Pearson and Rose 2021). Entering the interviews with prior reflection fostered a sense of ownership with an aim to reduce pressure on spontaneous recall, enhancing both the depth and ethical integrity of participant engagement (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Bergold and Thomas 2012). As such, the integration of Padlet within the participant strand evidences a deliberate commitment to neurodivergent access and epistemic justice, foregrounding participant agency while operationalising core principles of participatory and inclusive research design.

The Padlet activity thus operated on two interlinked levels: as an independent source of qualitative data and as a scaffold that enhanced participants' preparedness for the interviews (Smith et al. 2012; Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Gill-Simmen 2021). Its multimodal and asynchronous affordances fostered more inclusive participation, minimising communicative and cognitive barriers often encountered by neurodivergent individuals (Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Clouder et al. 2020). Beyond enabling access, the method cultivated participant-researcher collaboration, affirming a participatory ethos grounded in trust, epistemic recognition and relational ethics (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Fricker 2007; Grant and Kara 2021). Participants were not positioned as passive respondents but as active co-constructers of the research process, shaping its direction through reflective, self-curated contributions across multiple modes (Chapman and Carel 2022; Beaux et al. 2024).

As discussed further in Section 3.7.4, the insights developed through this exercise informed the quality and depth of the subsequent semi-structured interviews. Within this design, Padlet was not a peripheral or supplementary tool but a critical methodological layer that enriched accessibility, reflexivity and the co-produced nature of the participatory strand (Bergold and Thomas 2012; Botha 2021).

3.7.4 Enhanced Semi-Structured Interviews

The final method of the data generation strategy involved the use of enhanced semi-structured interviews, intentionally designed to build upon and deepen the insights surfaced through the Padlet exercise. This layered and participant-responsive approach (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Cohen et al. 2018) sought to foreground participant agency and respect neurodivergent communication styles, positioning the interview not as a neutral data extraction encounter but as a dialogic, co-constructed space (Dwyer and Buckle 2009; Bryman 2016). Drawing on inclusive research traditions and critical disability scholarship, the design of these interviews was influenced by calls to embed flexibility, sensory awareness and respect for neurodivergent modes of engagement (Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Clouder et al. 2020; Grant and Kara 2021).

Rather than adhering to rigid questioning structures, the interviews in this study were structured to be adaptive and responsive to each participant's contribution, whether pre-prepared via Padlet or shared spontaneously during the interaction. This approach reflects best practices in ethically grounded qualitative research, where the

interviewer attends carefully to the participant's communication preferences, paces and framing of experience (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Cohen et al. 2018). Such responsiveness is particularly vital when working with neurodivergent individuals, as it enables a more inclusive and dialogic form of engagement that affirms the participant's epistemic authority and resists traditional power hierarchies often embedded in research encounters (Barron 1999; Hume 2024).

While Bergold and Thomas (2012) offer a broad foundation for participatory methods, Hume (2024) provides a targeted framework for conducting interviews with multiple neurodivergent participants, emphasising methodological access as a relational and ethical act. Hume's (2024) chapter calls for a shift away from logistical notions of access towards practices grounded in trust, consent and co-creating meaning. Principles that shaped that aided the interview model used in this study. In this way, the interviews were not just tools for data generation, but co-constructed encounters shaped by prior reflection, accessibility considerations and a commitment to neurodivergence-affirming research design (Botha 2021; Grant and Kara 2021; Chapman and Carel 2022).

The enhanced semi-structured interviews were designed to sustain alignment with the project's triadic methodological structure. While the survey addressed structural conditions and Padlet exercise aided in cultural narratives, the interviews offered a focused space for participants to express their agentic strategies and interpretive insights into navigating institutional and digital environments (Danermark et al. 2019; Grant and Kara 2021; Scott and Gibson 2022). This approach supported the critical realist objective of capturing stratified social realities by enabling participants to articulate the interplay between external constraints and personal agency. The triadic methodological framework of data generation: autoethnography, participatory methods and enhanced interviews, was both theoretically informed and pragmatically responsive to the cognitive, sensory and affective needs of neurodivergent participants, particularly within an insider-researcher context (Delamont 2009; Dwyer and Buckle 2009; Berger 2015; Urbanowicz et al. 2019).

This layered and reflexively grounded methodological design necessitated equally careful attention to ethical considerations in relation to power, positionality and the responsibilities of conducting research with and as neurodivergent participants. The following section outlines the ethical frameworks and protocols that informed the study.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This research was guided by a commitment to situated, relational and reflexive ethical practice that was embedded throughout the design, data generation and interpretation stages of the research. While the study was not invasive in the traditional sense, it was formally categorised as high-risk due to its engagement with neurodivergent adults, a population recognised as vulnerable in relation to the university's research ethics

framework. Formal approval was granted through Bournemouth University's Ethic Review process (see **Appendix H**), which details the ethical checklist, participant information and consent protocols underpinning this study. Rather than treating ethics approval as a procedural hurdle, I approached ethics as an ongoing, embedded process, informed by the study's alignment with participatory values and critical disability scholarship. This approach is supported by Nicolaidis et al. (2019) who highlight the ethical complexities of working with autistic adults, emphasising the need to avoid tokenism while centring participant autonomy.

Similarly, Brake et al. (2024) propose a person-oriented and trauma-informed model of autism research ethics, arguing that situated ethical practice must account for prior experiences of harm and structural marginalisation. Le Cunff et al. (2023) further reinforce the importance of co-design and collaborative decision-making in participatory neurodiversity research, noting that ethical research must involve neurodivergent individuals, not just as participants but as epistemic contributors to methodological development. Horton et al. (2024) extend this argument by calling for reflexive dialogue within participatory research, positioning ethics as a continuous negotiation rather than a fixed protocol. This orientation is echoed in (Chapman 2023) who critiques extractive research logics and urges the cultivation of structurally aware, community-rooted methods. Collectively, these perspectives affirm the view that ethical responsibility in research involving neurodivergent communities must be ongoing, dialogic and structurally responsive; principles that informed this study from its inception.

This ethos of ethical praxis was reflected in several practical strategies throughout the study. Informed consent was not approached as a single event but as an iterative process revisited at each stage. Prior to engaging in the survey, Padlet exercise or interviews, participants received plain-language information sheets outlining their rights, the aims of the study and details of data handling protocols. Consent was confirmed separately for each phase and could be withdrawn at any point up until thematic analysis, with data still removable depending on usage. Such an approach aligns with established ethical guidance for research with marginalised populations, particularly neurodivergent individuals, who may require differentiated pacing and clarity (Beail and Williams 2014; Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021). This also reflects the recommendations of Chapman and Carel (2022) who stress the importance of epistemic justice and respecting diverse cognitive needs.

In keeping with the participatory ethos of the project, participants were also invited to review and revise their interview transcripts before analysis. This not only respected participant agency but ensured accuracy and accountability in representing personal narratives, particularly where discussions touched on disclosure, masking, burnout or institutional exclusion. Member checking in this form serves to enhance credibility in qualitative research (Birt et al. 2016) and, in the context of disability and neurodiversity research, acts as a form of epistemic justice (Fricker 2007; Chapman and Carel 2022).

Accessibility and cognitive inclusion were embedded by design rather than added as retrofitted adjustments (see

Section 3.7). The Padlet exercise (Section 3.7.3) was structured asynchronously to reduce time pressures and allow participants to use expressive formats, including text, audio, images and hyperlinks. These affordances aligned with known neurodivergent preferences for multimodal, low-pressure environments and were supported by inclusive digital research methods (Zainuddin et al. 2020; Jong and Tan 2021; Dark 2024). Similarly, the interview formats were flexible, allowing participants to choose between video or audio-only, or text-based responses and to schedule around their cognitive energy levels. These measures resonate with Brake et al. (2024), who advocate for trauma-informed research design, are attentive to historical harms and fluctuating access needs. Such design principles also reflect Fletcher-Watson et al. (2019) who call for participatory structures that embed neurodivergent access from the outset.

My dual role as a neurodivergent educator and insider-researcher demanded sustained reflexivity, particularly regarding insider status and power dynamics. While shared identity enabled trust and rapport, it also introduced the risk of projection or over-identification (Dwyer and Buckle 2009; Berger 2015). To mitigate this, I approached interviews as relational and co-constructed dialogues, deliberately framing participants as peers rather than subjects. I was attentive to the situated nature of each exchange, foregrounding participant expertise and resisting assumptions of shared experience. As Horton et al. (2024) argue, ethical research with neurodivergent communities requires reflexive dialogue that positions knowledge production as a mutual and situated endeavour. This emphasis on relational ethics is further reinforced by Van Zyl and Sabiescu (2020) who conceptualise community-based research as grounded in intersubjective ethics and iterative responsiveness. Such values align with longstanding participatory traditions that prioritise ongoing negotiation and attentiveness over procedural compliance (Simons and Usher 2000)

Privacy and confidentiality were safeguarded by allowing all participants to select pseudonyms, with identifying details removed from transcripts and research outputs. Given the sensitivity of professional experiences of marginalisation and precarity, anonymity was essential. Even when discussing publicly available content (such as Twitter use), this data was treated as personal narratives and anonymised accordingly, adopting the cautious and participant-centred stance recommended by Fiesler and Proferes (2018). All digital data was stored securely in compliance with GDPR and university protocols, with audiovisual materials deleted following transcription and participant verification.

Given the emotional demands of discussing identity, ableism and institutional exclusion, well-being was prioritised throughout the research process. Participants were offered breaks, signposting to support services and the option to withdraw consent after the interview. This attention to care reflects the neuro-inclusive research ethics recommended by Nicolaidis et al. (2019) and Botha (2021), which emphasises safety, autonomy, and reciprocal trust. Follow-up emails were also used to check participants' well-being post-interviews, reflecting a commitment to non-extractive, relationship-based research grounded in disability justice. This approach

resonates with calls for ethical research practices that centre care, reciprocity and the dismantling of hierarchical researcher-participant dynamics (Grant and Kara 2021; Chapman 2023; Beaux et al. 2024). Similar to guidance from participatory and community-based models, such relational ethics aim to foster trust, reduce harm and affirm the agency of neurodivergent participants throughout the research process (Nicolaidis et al. 2019; Horton et al. 2024; Godrie 2025).

These ethical strategies collectively shaped a continuous and situated practice that extended beyond procedural compliance. By embedding principles of accessibility, consistency, reflexivity and care throughout each stage, the research aimed to enact the ethical commitments at its core. The approach was relational, collaborative, and critically responsive to structural inequalities. This aligns with the broader call within critical disability studies to move away from extractive models of inquiry and towards practices that recognise neurodivergent participants as active and respected contributors to the research process (Nicolaidis et al. 2019; Chapman 2023; Beaux et al. 2024; Horton et al. 2024; Godrie 2025).

3.9 Ensuring Trustworthiness and Reflexive Rigour

This study approached rigour as a reflexive and situated process, consistent with its critical realist ontology, neurodiversity paradigm and Critical Disability Studies (CDS) framing. Rather than applying universal or positivist benchmarks of validity and reliability, the research instead adopted trustworthiness, credibility and coherence as more contextually appropriate markers of quality (Archer et al. 2013; Danermark et al. 2019; Chapman and Carel 2022). These criteria were operationalised in ways that aligned with neurodivergent values of transparency, access and epistemic justice (Fricker 2007; Nicolaidis et al. 2019; Beaux et al. 2024).

A key dimension of rigour involved sustained self-reflexivity. My position as a neurodivergent insider-researcher shaped all aspects of this project, from research design to analysis. This dual role necessitated ongoing reflection on how my lived experience informed and potentially constrained my interpretations. Following Tracy (2010, p. 842) who describes self-reflexivity as *"honesty and authenticity with one's self, one's research and one's audience"*, I used reflective first-person narrative to make visible my assumptions, analytical decisions and methodological choices. Braun and Clarke (2022) highlight that reflexive thematic analysis demands an active and visible researcher, acknowledging that meaning is co-constructed through analytic engagement rather than being discovered as pre-existing. By making this analytic influence explicit, the research attends to what they term 'conceptual and procedural clarity', enhancing transparency and enabling readers to follow the interpretative process with critical insight (Braun and Clarke 2022).

To support credibility, this study employed methodological triangulation across three distinct but interrelated methods: autoethnography, a Padlet Exercise and semi-structured interviews. This design enabled the research questions to be explored from multiple epistemic positions, creating opportunities for convergence, divergence

and deeper theoretical insight (Denzin 2012; Flick 2018). Triangulation in this context was not pursued to 'verify' findings in a positivist sense, but rather to explore the phenomenon of digital identity work through diverse lenses, aiming to enhance contextual depth and support the development of situated interpretive meaning (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Denzin 2012; Flick 2018).Rigour was also supported through a reflexively structured analytic process. Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) thematic analysis provided a coherent yet flexible framework for identifying patterns across the data, while remaining attuned to the situatedness of each narrative.

Although much of the early coding and interpretive work was initially conducted using hand-written notes and 'memoing', a practice that supported cognitive accessibility, these notes were not fully retained due to a prolonged break in the research process. However, the development of the themes is documented throughout the data collection and analysis chapters, and core analytic decisions are traceable through the thesis narrative itself. In line with Braun and Clarke (2022) emphasising transparency and reflexive engagement over procedural rigidity, the analytical process is made visible through a detailed thematic write-up and the explicit articulation of interpretive reasoning. This approach also reflects Tracy (2010) criterion of sincerity, which foregrounds self-reflexivity and transparency as central markers of qualitative quality. Rather than treating audit trails as procedural requirements, the study adopts a reflexive and situated perspective in which analytic decisions are communicated honestly and contextually, allowing readers to critically engage with how the research was conducted and interpreted.

At a certain stage in the research process, many of my hand-coded notes, including margin annotations, analytical memos and theme sketches, were inadvertently discarded during a period when it was assumed that I would not be able to continue the doctorate due to significant health issues. At that time, the project was effectively paused, and the loss of the materials caused considerable stress and a temporary sense of disorientation. However, prior to the disruption, initial coding, transcript review and early theme mapping had already been typed and embedded into earlier stages of the data collection chapter. When my health stabilised and I returned to study in January 2025, I was able to continue drawing analytic insight from the saved electronic materials and transcripts, refine the thematic structure through a renewed albeit adapted engagement with the data.

While I regret the physical loss of my earlier paper notes, the experience reinforced the value of reflexivity, flexibility and cognitive accessibility in research design. Consistent with Clarke's (2022) guidance on reflexive thematic analysis, I maintained a focus on transparency and interpretative coherence rather than rigid procedural documentation. The final thematic structure reflects this ongoing, situated engagement with the data, rather than being compromised by the absence of one stage of material artefacts.

Rigour in this study, therefore, was not conceptualised as a procedural checklist, but as a reflexive, ethical and epistemic stance grounded in the values of Critical Disability Studies and the Neurodiversity paradigm (Botha 2021; Walker 2021; Chapman and Carel 2022). Participant quotations, reflexive narratives and multimodal contributions were intentionally included to invite readers to engage critically and empathetically with the lived realities presented. This strategy aligns with Tracy's (2010) notion of *naturalistic generalisation*, where resonance emerges through relational understanding rather than through replicability.

Through triangulation, positional transparency, and dialogical engagement, the research aimed to produce findings that are trustworthy, contextually meaningful and structurally aware. Methodological integrity was achieved not through adherence to standardised benchmarks but through an ongoing commitment to analytical reflexivity, conceptual clarity and interpretive coherence (Tracy 2010; Braun and Clarke 2022). Within a critical realist framework, validity and reliability were thus redefined as reflexive integrity, relational accountability and situated trustworthiness, criteria that acknowledge the co-constructed, partial and contingent nature of qualitative knowledge (Tracy 2010; Archer et al. 2013; Braun and Clarke 2022; Chapman and Carel 2022).

3.10 Summary

This chapter has established a triadic methodological framework grounded in critical realism and Critical Disability Studies, integrating autoethnography, participatory research and multi-methods. Each method was selected to align with the study's layered analytic focus on structure, culture and agency (Archer et al. 2013; Danermark et al. 2019). Autoethnography illuminated the personal and agentic dimensions of digital and professional identity work; participatory elements enabled co-constructed insight into shared experiences, and the multi-method strand provided contextual breadth and structural perspective. Together, these approaches supported a design capable of engaging with complex institutional and digital terrains while remaining responsive to neurodivergent access needs and values (Danermark et al. 2019; Nicolaidis et al. 2019; Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Grant and Kara 2021; Chapman and Carel 2022).

At the heart of this chapter is an ongoing commitment to reflexivity (Finlay 2002; Archer 2007; Grant and Kara 2021). My dual roles as neurodivergent insider-researcher required sustained attention to how lived experience shaped the research design, data interpretation and ethical orientation. Through structured self-interviewing and narrative reflection, understood here as both epistemic and performative practices, the research mobilised reflexive insight into intuitional and digital habitus I occupy (Reay 2004; Archer 2007; Crawley 2012). In doing so, I critically engaged with moments of affinity, discomfort and epistemic tension; experiences that revealed the layered negotiations of identity, power and belonging with both institutional and digital spaces (Anderson 2006; Ellis et al. 2010).

This reflexive posture was not a methodological afterthought but embraced as a constitutive epistemological

commitment, functioning simultaneously as a methodological device and an ethical stance grounded in transparency and epistemic justice (Fricker 2007; Chapman and Carel 2022). Rather than striving for neutrality, reflexivity was operationalised here as a mode of critical inquiry in the recognition that all knowledge is situated, value-laden and shaped by the entanglement of personal narrative with broader structural and institutional forces. This approach aligns with feminist and critical realist perspectives that reject objectivist detachment and instead emphasise the epistemic significance of positionality, embodiment and internal conversation in social inquiry (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Finlay 2002; Harding 2004; Reay 2004; Archer 2007).

Building on this reflexive foundation, the chapter has also foregrounded ethical and accessibility considerations as integral methodological commitments rather than procedural obligations. Informed by CDS and feminist standpoint epistemologies, ethics was conceptualised as a situated, relational and structurally aware practice, one that demands attentiveness not only to formal protocols but to the material, cognitive and affective conditions of participation (Harding 2004; Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Beaux et al. 2024). Strategies such as iterative constant, multimodal participation formats and participant data review were intentionally embedded to mitigate hard and enhance inclusion, particularly in recognition of the diverse sensory and processing needs of neurodivergent contributors (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2019; Nicolaidis et al. 2019).

These methodological choices reflect an ethical stance grounded in the epistemic authority of lived experience and a refusal to obscure neurodivergent needs under the guise of universal design. As an insider-researcher, my own encounters with institutional inaccessibility further underscored the importance of designing research processes that not only accommodate difference by actively reconfigure normative assumptions about participation, communication and agency. In this way, ethical practice was aligned with a broader critique of extractive methodologies and shaped by a commitment to epistemic justice, mutual recognition and structural accountability (Fricker 2007; Chapman and Carel 2022)

In closing, this chapter has argued for a methodological approach that is rigorous, situated and ethically attuned. By aligning theoretical stance, method selection and researcher positionality, the design reflects the study's broader commitment to inclusive, non-extractive knowledge production. The integration of ethnography, participatory and structural data sources supports an analysis capable of engaging with both individual narratives and institutional dynamics. This provides a coherent foundation for the forthcoming chapters, where the complexities of digital agency, identity performance and institutional precarity are examined through a lens that remains grounded in both reflexive insight and methodological clarity.

Chapter 4: Data Collection

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the data collection process employed to examine how neurodivergent educators negotiate and perform their professional and personal Identities on Twitter, conceptualised as a dynamic third space. As outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, this study adopts a critical realist framework and a triadic methodology design comprising an online survey, Padlet-based activity, semi-structured interviews and autoethnographic reflexive narration with a self-interview. These methods were selected to capture the interplay between structure, culture and agency (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019)

Rather than repeating earlier justification, the rationale for each method is summarised briefly with reference to Section 3.3 for methodological reasoning and Section 2.5 for theoretical orientation; The methods align with the study's ontological layers: surveys address structural patterns, Padlet aided in illumination culture dynamics, and interviews explored agentic strategies and identity work. Alongside these methods, I incorporated reflexive narration throughout the thesis and conducted an autoethnography self-interview, which mirrored the structure and themes of the semi-structured interviews. This approach enabled me to critically examine my own positionality and insider perspective while contributing a parallel analytical strand. The self-interview functions as a site of narrative reflexivity, allowing for a deeper engagement with the interplay of structure, culture and agency from my own standpoint (Archer 1995, 2007; Harding 2004) as a neurodivergent educator. These reflections supported both methodological transparency and theoretical integration, as discussed further in Sections 3.3 and 3.9.

This process also foregrounded ethical and accessibility considerations. As discussed in Section 3.8, data collection was designed to be asynchronous (apart from the interviews), multimodal, and adaptable in order to minimise sensory, cognitive and affective barriers (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2019; Beaux et al. 2024). Ethics was therefore understood as a situated and relational practice, shaped by structural critique and ongoing attentiveness to participant experience (Berger 2015; Grant and Kara 2021). The chapter concludes with a chronological overview of the data collection timeline and a bridging summary to Chapter 5, which details the reflexive thematic analysis process used to interpret the data.

4.2 Research Questions and Method Alignment

As introduced in Chapter 1, this inquiry responds to a growing need to understand how digital platforms shape academic identity, belonging and disclosure for marginalised, neurodivergent educators. The development of the research questions was shaped by a range of conceptual influences, including third space theory, precarity, and professional performativity, each examined in depth in Chapter 2. A particular focus is placed on the emergent concept of the *Nomadic Educator*, used here to frame the contingent, reflexive and often precarious navigations educators undertake across both institutional and digital terrains. These theoretical commitments underpin the triadic methodology framework introduced in Chapter 3, which integrates multi-methods, participatory research and autoethnographic reflexivity to examine identity formation with a hybrid academic

landscape.

The study's overarching research question is supported by four interrelated sub-questions:

1. **How do neurodivergent educators create and sustain third-space interactions, and how has this evolved over time?**

2. **What role did the COVID-19 pandemic play in shaping the professional use of Twitter among neurodivergent educators?**

3. **How does autoethnography contribute to understanding the challenges and affordances of digital professional engagement for neurodivergent educators?**

4. **What institutional lessons can be drawn from these practices to inform more inclusive academic environments?**

These questions emerged iteratively in response to the literature gap (Chapter 2), my own lived experience and insider perspective (Chapter 1 onwards) and methodological reflection (Chapter 3) and were further refined during the survey design phase to support conceptual openness and participant autonomy. Each question aligns with one or more layers of the critical realist stratification. These conceptual and methodological layers were further mapped in Tables 6 and 7, which illustrate how each research question aligns with the study's data collection methods, theoretical concepts, and the layered logic of its triadic design.

Table 6 below presents each sub-question, indicating how specific data collection methods, namely, the online survey, Padlet exercise, semi-structured interviews, and autoethnographic self-interviews, address and enrich our understanding of each domain.

Table 6: Data collection methods with focus and RQ's

Research Question	Data Collection Methods	Focus and Rationale
Main Research Question: How do neurodivergent educators negotiate and develop their professional and personal identities on Twitter?	**Survey, Padlet, Interviews, Autoethnography**	This overarching inquiry guides the entire multi-methods design. Data from all methods collectively address this question through an iterative, reflexive framework (Archer 2007)

1. **Twitter as a Third Space** In what ways does Twitter blend personal and professional roles for neurodivergent educators, and how do structural factors (e.g., academic norms) shape these interactions?	**Online Survey, Padlet, Semi-Structured Interviews**	The survey identifies initial trends and perceived community engagement (Jong and Tan 2021). Padlet facilitates asynchronous reflections on how personal and professional spheres intersect (Digital Futures Institute n.d.). Interviews provide in-depth narratives linking structural influences on educators' reflexive strategies for third-space collaboration (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015). Skafle et al. (2024) further highlight how social media platforms influence identity perception among neurodivergent individuals, offering valuable insights into how Twitter serves as a site for both empowerment and vulnerability.
2. Pandemic Impact: How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the usage of Twitter by ND educators?	**Online Survey, Semi-Structured Interviews**	The survey captures self-reported changes in Twitter engagement during remote work and isolation phases. Interviews illuminate participants' reflexive accounts of pandemic-driven stressors and emergent digital support networks (Carpenter et al. 2020). This aligns with critical realist views of structure-agency interplay (Archer 2007).
3. Researcher's Neurodivergent Lens: How do my neurodivergent perspectives and lived experiences	**Autoethnographic Self-Interview, Reflexive Narrative**	Self-interviews mirror participant prompts, capturing the researcher's insider experiences (Adams and Manning 2015). Memo-writing documents real-time reflections on positionality, ensuring reflexivity and transparency (Ellis 2004). This approach acknowledges personal

relate to this research?		interpretative lenses while maintaining analytical distance (Archer 1995).
4. Inclusivity Implications: What implications arise from these virtual communities for the facilitation of inclusive environments for neurodivergent practitioners in higher education?	**Semi-Structured Interviews, Padlet, Autoethnography**	Interviews reveal participants' views on institutional norms and potential inclusive measures (Marwick and Boyd 2011). Padlet fosters collaborative discussions on inclusive versus exclusionary practices in online academic networks (Minkler and Wallerstein 2003). Autoethnography provides a reflexive lens on how these practices intersect with the researcher's own experiences, amplifying calls for institutional change (Le Gallais 2008). The role of social media in shaping neurodivergent identity, as highlighted by Skafle et al. (2024), further supports the significance of inclusive online spaces.

In addition to aligning data collection methods with each sub-question, **Table 7** below maps these connections to the broader theoretical and methodological frameworks introduced in Chapters 2 and 3. This visual summary illustrates how each method is underpinned by a clear conceptual logic and how the study's triadic design supports coherence across philosophical, methodological, and practical levels.

Table 7: Alignment of Research Questions with Methods, Theoretical Concepts, and Methodological Rationale

Research Question	**Method(s) Used**	**Theoretical Concept(s) from Chapter 2**	**Methodological Justification (Chapter 3)**
Main RQ: How do neurodivergent educators negotiate and develop their professional and	Online Survey, Padlet, Interviews, Autoethnographic Self-Interview	*Nomadic Educator* (Braidotti; Reay), Identity Performance (Goffman; Butler),	Triadic framework (3.1), Multi-Methods (3.5), Reflexivity and Insider Research (3.3, 3.9)

personal identities on Twitter?		Third Space (McDougall & Potter)	
RQ1: Twitter as a Third Space – How does Twitter blend personal and professional roles, and how do structural factors shape these interactions?	Survey, Padlet, Interviews	Third Space (McDougall & Potter, Egner), Digital Identity, Habitus	Digital ethnography and cultural meaning-making (3.7), Interview rationale (3.6)
RQ2: Pandemic Influence – How has the COVID-19 pandemic shaped Twitter usage, engagement, and identity work?	Survey, Interviews	Precarity, Digital Agency, Structural Constraint (Brown & Leigh, Mellifont)	Sequential-reflective logic (3.2), Structural dimensions in survey design (3.5)
RQ3: Researcher's Reflexivity – How do my neurodivergent perspectives and lived experiences intersect with and shape this research?	Autoethnographic Self-Interview, Reflexive Narration	Narrative Reflexivity, Insider–Outsider Dynamics, Nomadic Educator	Autoethnography (3.3), Narrative Self-Study (3.7), Reflexivity and Positionality (3.9)
RQ4: Inclusivity and Community – What implications arise from these virtual communities for the facilitation of inclusive environments for neurodivergent practitioners in higher education?	Interviews, Padlet, Autoethnography	Epistemic Justice (Fricker), Advocacy, Belonging, Platform Affordances	Participatory Methods (3.4), Ethical Positioning (3.8), Cultural Layering via Padlet (3.7)

The first question engages predominantly with culture and agency, exploring how educators navigate shared norms and relational practices in digitally mediated third spaces (Whitchurch 2013; McDougall and Potter 2019;

Egner 2022; Obexer 2022). The second foregrounds structural influences, particularly in relation to pandemic-induced shifts in academic practice and digital reliance (Carpenter et al. 2021; Scheeren et al. 2022). The third question speaks directly to agency and reflexivity, positioning autoethnography as a method of self-inquiry and epistemic practice that generates critical insight into professional identity performance (Anderson 2006; Le Gallais 2008; Mellifont 2023). The fourth question bridge's structure and culture, inviting participant perspectives on institutional norms and digital inclusion to inform broader questions of access and justice (Fricker 2007; Clouder et al. 2020; Pearson and Rose 2021).

These questions not only guided the design of each method but also reflected ongoing tensions in my own academic life, around legitimacy, visibility and neurodivergent disclosure. As detailed in Chapters 1 and 3, reflexive narration was embedded throughout the study, not as an add-on but as a critical mode of inquiry. The autoethnographic self-interview mirrored the semi-structured interviews in structure and content, enabling me to examine my own experiences through the same analytical lens as participants. This approach, grounded in both methodological and ethical rationale (Sections 3.7.1 and 3.8), ensured that my insider status was neither silenced nor over-emphasised but critically situated within the analytical process. In doing so, the study foregrounds the epistemic value of neurodivergent experience while remaining alert to the risk of projection and over-identification (Fricker 2007; Le Gallais 2008; Berger 2015; Chapman and Carel 2022). As the design evolved, I became increasingly aware that the research questions were also reflective prompts for my own inquiry. The iterative refinement of these questions through pilot work, literature and field engagement created a recursive alignment between theory, method and reflexivity that underpins the data collection strategy described in the following sections.

4.3 Participant Information for Padlet and Semi-Structured Interviews

Participants were recruited through an open call published via a Twitter poster (see **Appendix G**). Interested individuals contacted me directly via my university email address, and we exchanged of emails prior to scheduling the Padlet activity and interview, which was conducted via zoom. Each participant was provided with a Participant Information Sheet and signed a Participant Agreement Form, in line with the approved ethic protocol (see **Appendix H**). To maintain confidentiality, all participants choose their own pseudonyms. The participant overview is presented in **Table 8** below.

Table 8: Participant Overview

Pseudonym	Role/Background	Career Stage	Interview Duration	Neurodivergence
Drew	Lecturer in Higher Education; background in secondary teaching and widening	Early career researcher, with 15+ years in education	53 mins	Dyslexia (diagnosed 2009), ADHD (diagnosed 2023), possible autism

	participation	practice (experienced practitioner-researcher)		(self-identified)
Katrina	Assistant Professor; previously teaching fellow and tutor in violence/abuse studies	Early career (5 years in HE)	40 mins	Autistic (late-diagnosed, post-2015), acquired brain injury (2014)
Nora	Professor in Higher Education; leadership role in Scotland focusing on social inclusion and cultural diversity	Senior career	56 mins	ADHD (inattentive, diagnosed mid-40s), possible autism
Flora	Senior educator with National Teaching Fellowship; blended teaching/research contract	Mid-career (PhD 20+ years ago; senior on teaching side, earlier on research side)	56 mins	Dyslexia (diagnosed 1988); later identified traits suggesting broader neurodivergence
Mike (self-interview)	Post-16 practitioner in media production and professional practice; Higher Education mentor and study skills tutor	Early career	40 mins	Dyslexia (diagnosed 2017), Autism (diagnosed 2021), ADHD-inattentive (diagnosed privately)

4.4 Temporal Overview of Data Collection

The sequence of data collection followed a sequential–reflective model, where each method informed the next stage of inquiry. The following timeline details key data generation activities:

- Online Survey: Launched 2 February 2024; closed 8 March 2024
- Survey Results Exported: 22 April 2024
- Padlet Exercise Created: 30 April 2024
- Interview Recruitment Poster Created: 28 March 2024; shared on Twitter: 5 April 2024
- Semi-Structured Interviews Conducted:
    - Drew: 3 May 2024
    - Katrina: 10 May 2024 (morning)
    - Nora: 10 May 2024 (afternoon)
    - Flora: 31 May 2024
- Autoethnographic Self-Interview: 4 June 2024

- Transcript Review with Participants: 6–17 June 2024

This sequencing allowed for iterative refinement of instruments, ensuring responsiveness to emerging insights and alignment with participants' access preferences. Such adaptiveness reflects the critical realist commitment to methodological flexibility in uncovering social realities (Danermark et al. 2019) and acknowledges the epistemic importance of inclusion foregrounded in critical realist studies (Fricker 2007; Chapman and Carel 2022). By allowing early findings, such as patterns of disclosure and accessibility changes identified through the survey, to shape the design of the Padlet and interview phases, the study operationalised a reflexive and participatory logic (Grant and Kara 2021; Pearson and Rose 2021). This approach allowed for neurodivergent modes of engagement but also enacted the ethical principle of iterative consent and situated co-construction of knowledge, consistent with disability justice frameworks that resist extractivist methodologies (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2019; Urbanowicz et al. 2019).

4.5 Bringing the Data Together: A Sequential-Reflexive and Strength-Based Design

Following the temporal overview of data collection in Section 4.4, this section explains how the strands of data come together to form a coherent and sufficient dataset. As outlined in Section 3.3.1, insights from the pilot study informed the survey and Padlet design, ensuring that early learning directly shaped subsequent phases. This overall logic was sequential and reflexive, underpinned by a critical realist ontology and a participatory ethos of epistemic justice (Fricker 2007; Chapman and Carel 2022).

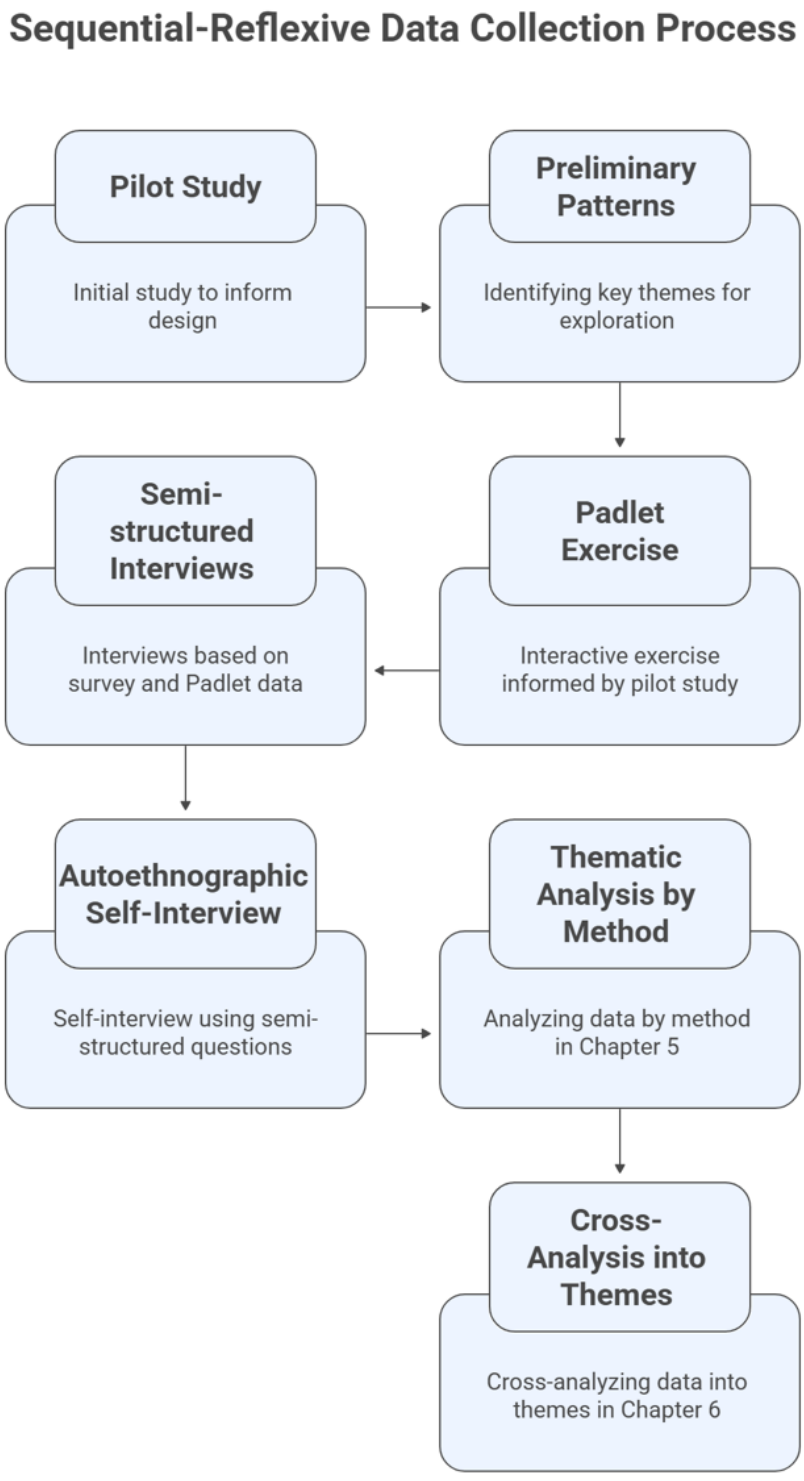
I adopted a strength-based ethos (Urbanowicz et al. 2019), situated within the neurodiversity paradigm discussed in my literature review (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2019). This guided both methodological and ethical choices: transcripts were produced in a non-verbatim but participant-verified form to avoid unnecessary repetition or mispronunciation; consent was sought each time participants' words were used. This reflected a participatory ethic of care, aiming to think critically *with* participants rather than *about* them.

The design was intentionally multi-layered, recognising that no single source could capture the complexity of neurodivergent educators' professional and digital practices. The survey aided toward initial questions set out from the pilot study and provided structural mapping of disclosure patterns and employment precarity; the Padlet exercise surfaced cultural scripts of belonging and professional identity through multi-modal contributions; semi-structured interviews elaborated agential strategies for coping, masking or resisting; and my self-interview provided a reflexive account of positionality and lived experience. Each interview lasted 40-60 minutes, and while some responses were concise, this reflected neurodivergent communication styles and the multimodal affordances of the Padlet exercise.

The dataset's sufficiency is demonstrated through recurring themes that appeared across all methods (See Chapter's 5 and 6). For example, *survival professionalism* was described in the survey as exhaustion and curation under structural pressures; surfaced in Katrina's Padlet posts as boundary-setting; emerged in my self-interview as masking and over-preparing; and appeared in Flora's and Nora's interviews as redesigning environments or muting hashtags. Viewed through Denzin's (2012) notion of crystallisation and framed within a critical realist ontology, these patterns reveal *survival professionalism* as shaped by structure, reinforced by culture and enacted through agency.

Figure F (see below) illustrates this sequential-reflexive design, showing how the four strands interlocked and evolved in dialogue with emerging insights. Thematic integration occurred through Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (2006), enabling triangulation across sources and layers of reality (Archer 1995; Heale and Forbes 2013; Danermark et al. 2019). In approaching the study as a neurodivergent insider (See Section 6.8) meant the findings were not just *collected* but *co-constructed*. Autoethnography became dialogic, unsettled as often by participants' differences as by recognition. The recurrence of key themes: disclosure, precarity, digital agency and survival professionalism, demonstrates how the use of multi-methods aided in the robustness of the data set.

Figure F: Sequential-Reflexive Data Collection diagram



Chapter 5: Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study through a method-aligned analysis of five interrelated data sources: an online survey, a Padlet-based exercise, semi-structured interviews, an autoethnographic self, and my own reflexive narration as a neurodivergent educator-researcher. Each dataset is analysed independently to preserve its epistemological specificity and contextual richness, while also contributing to the study's overarching inquiry:

How do neurodivergent educators negotiate and develop their professional and personal identities on Twitter?

The analysis is situated within a critical realist ontology (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019) which enables a layered examination of structure, culture and agency. As outlined in Chapter 3, this ontological framework supports a non-reductionist reading of lived experience, recognising that individual action is shaped by, and shapes, wider institutional and sociocultural dynamics (Sayer 2000; Archer 2007; Bhaskar 2008). Each method was selected and analysed in alignment with one of these ontological layers: the survey explored structural patterns, Padlet and Interviews aimed to illuminate cultural narratives, and the self-interview provides insight into agentic negotiation and reflexive narration weaves throughout the thesis as an embedded interpretative strand.

The interpretation process is guided by the integrated theoretical perspectives introduced in Chapter. These include the performance of professional identity (Butler 2015; Goffman 2021) where identity is understood as a negotiated and often masked performance shaped by institutional norms and expectations (Pearson and Rose 2021; Radulski 2022). Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; Stephens 2022; Lewis and Arday 2023; Solomon and Du Plessis 2023) offers an essential analytic lens for understanding how race, class, gender and neurotype interact to shape uneven experiences of disclosure, visibility and legitimacy within academia. Third Space theory (Bhabha 2004; Whitchurch 2013; McDougall and Potter 2019; Scott and Gibson 2022) provides a conceptual lens through which to view Twitter as a hybrid and contested site of identity negotiation, situated between institutional constraint and digital autonomy.

Critical Disability Studies (CDS) and the neurodiversity paradigm (Oliver 1996; Singer 1999; Fricker 2007; Brown and Leigh 2018; Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al. 2020; Chapman and Carel 2022) foreground the structural production of disablement and reframe neurodivergence as an epistemic and political resource rather than a deficit. Finally, theories of neoliberalism, precarity and academic capital (Bourdieu 1990; Ball 2003; Shore and

Wright 2015; Taylor 2018; Mellifont 2023) acknowledge how institutional metrics and performative expectations marginalise neurodivergent contributions by privileging normative academic behaviours and outputs. These intersecting perspectives position Twitter not merely as a communication platform, but as a precarious third space in which neurodivergent educators exercise digital agency, mobilise identity strategies and resist institutional ableism through everyday acts of visibility, advocacy and curation.

Each data source offered distinct yet complementary insights into how neurodivergent educators use Twitter to engage professionally, construct identity and navigate or resist structural exclusions. Rather than presenting findings thematically from the outset, this chapter retains a method-by-method structure to honour the distinct epistemologies and ontological strata each method reflects. The next section outlines the analytical framework and rationale for this structure in greater detail, including how the data was interpreted using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis within a critical realist framework (See Section 5.2).

5.2 Data Sources and Reflexive Thematic Analysis within a Critical Realist Framework

As outlined in the previous section, this chapter is structured around a method-specific analysis of five interrelated data sources. This section elaborates on the rationale for that approach, outlining how Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) and the critical realist model of structure, culture and agency were applied across the datasets (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019).

The analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) six- phase model of reflexive thematic analysis: familiarisation, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition and report production. This recursive and iterative approach allowed for meaning to emerge through cycles of reflection, refinement and embodied interpretation. As discussed in Section 3.9, this analytical approach was selected for its compatibility with interpretative methodologies that foregrounded subjectivity, positionality and situated meaning-making (Finlay 2002; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009). Rather than treating analysis as a neutral act of categorisation, I approached interpretation as a contextually embedded process shaped by my standpoint as a neurodivergent insider-researcher operating within similar digital and institutional systems as participants (Finlay 2002; Harding 2004; Le Gallais 2008; Botha 2021; Grant and Kara 2021; Chapman and Carel 2022).

The analytic process was also underpinned by a critical realist ontology, specifically the stratified model of structure, culture and agency (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019). As detailed in Section 3.2, critical realism enabled a layered reading of social reality through three ontological domains: the empirical (experienced), the actual (observable) and the real (underlying generative mechanisms) (Bhaskar 2008, 2015; Archer et al. 2013). This ontological stratification enables analysis of how identity formation, digital practice and institutional

exclusion are shaped by the interaction of structural constraints, cultural discourses and agentic responses (Sayer 2000; Archer 2007; Danermark et al. 2019). It further supports a non-reductionist methodological orientation that acknowledges the influence of often invisible but causally significant forces, including institutional ableism and epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007; Mellifont 2023). This framing directly shaped the design and structure of this chapter, where data is interpreted in relation to the ontological stratum it best illuminates.

While the findings here are presented method-by-method, this organisation reflects more than practicality; it honours the ontological and epistemological distinctiveness of each dataset. As outlined in Section 3.3, this project adopted a triadic methodological structure to ensure that the analytical layers of structure, culture and agency were each directly addressed through appropriate methods. Thus, the online survey attends to the structural factors; the Padlet captures cultural dynamics, and the autoethnographic self-interview/ semi-structured interviews engage with personal reflexivity and agentic decision making. This layered separation is theoretical: each data type was selected not only for what it revealed, but how it aligned with the ontological dimensions of the research questions and critical realist logic (Sayer 2000; Archer et al. 2013)

Table 9 below summarises how each data source aligns with the critical realist strata of structure, culture and agency and outlines its contribution to the study's sub-question and analytical focus.

Table 9: Data source to with ontological, contribution and alignment with sub-questions.

Data Source	Ontological Layer	Primary Contribution to Analysis	Aligned Sub-Questions
Online Survey	Structure	Initial insights in platform usage, identity disclosure, and institutional dynamics	1, 2, 4
Padlet Exercise	Culture	Participant-led reflections on identity, community, and the construction of professional third spaces	1, 2, 4
Autoethnographic Self-Interview	Agency	Reflexive account of identity performance, emotional labour, and	1, 2, 3

		methodological positioning	
Semi-Structured Interviews	(1st) Agency (2nd) Culture& Structure	Personal narratives of digital engagement, institutional precarity, and inclusion	1, 2, 4

Note: These mappings reflect the triadic framework introduced in Chapters 2 and 3, integrating theory and method across layered domains of inquiry.

As detailed in Section 3.9, all data sources were analysed using the same reflexive thematic framework. Codes were generated inductively from the data and refined through repeated engagement with the research questions and theoretical perspectives introduced in Chapter 2. Within each method section (5.3-5.6), I present the themes specific to that dataset, preserving the communicative modality and epistemic framing of each. Cross-method synthesis, which includes thematic convergence, divergence and conceptual integration, will be explored in Chapter 6.

Importantly, the autoethnography strand does not function solely as a discrete dataset (See Section 5.6) but shapes the interpretative logic of the entire analysis. As outlined in Section 3.4.2, I adopted a hybrid autoethnography approach that combines Anderson's (2006) analytical autoethnography, which treats the researcher's position as a site of theory-building, with Ellis et al. (2010) evocative autoethnography, which centres affect, embodied experience and emotional resonance. Reflexive narration was thus woven through the thesis as a fifth data source, enabling both resonance and epistemic friction in relation to participants' accounts. These moments of alignment and unsettlement reflect what Finlay (2002) calls "reflexive unsettlement" and offer an additional interpretative dimension for exploring how identity, visibility and belonging are negotiated in digital third spaces.

Reflexivity was therefore not merely a methodological choice, but an ethical and epistemological commitment. Interpretation was approached as a relational, iterative and embodied act, situated within the structural, cultural and agentic contexts that shape neurodivergent academic life (Adams et al. 2015; Botha 2021; Grant and Kara 2021). The next section begins with the analysis of the online survey, which explored institutional structures, professional engagement and disclosure practices among neurodivergent educators using Twitter.

5.3 Online Survey

5.3.1 Familiarisation with the Data

The online survey generated responses for thirteen neurodivergent educators working within UK higher education, ranging from 25 to 64 and representing a broad range of academic disciplines, contract types and positionalities. As outlined in Section 4.3, the survey ran for just over five weeks, opening on 2 February and closing on 8 March 2024. It was published via Twitter, targeting relevant academic and neurodivergent communities and also circulated through the Bournemouth University Monthly PGR newsletter to reach doctoral and early career researchers. This multi-platform approach was designed to maximise accessibility and relevance while aligning with the study's focus on digital engagement and professional identity. The survey instrument itself, described in Section 3.7.2 (see **Appendix A**), combined demographic questions with open-ended qualitative prompts that invited participants to reflect on their Twitter usage, identity disclosure, professional practice and experiences of institutional culture. This design allowed for both initial structural insights into respondent profiles and qualitative data suitable for thematic analysis in order to produce further questions that attuned to these experiences in the Padlet exercise and Interviews.

In line with Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase model of reflexive thematic analysis, I began with a familiarisation phase. This involved reading and re-reading the open-text responses to develop a sense of recurring concerns, affective registers and thematic threads. Particular attention was paid to the ways in which participants articulated their motivations for using Twitter, the tensions surrounding professional visibility and disclosure and the challenges posed by institutional environments. As discussed in Section 3.9, familiarisation was not treated as a detached reading but rather as an embodied analytic practice shaped by positionality, affect and ethical responsiveness (Finlay 2002; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009).

Initial reflections during this stage were printed and annotated by hand. I used highlighters, margin notes and memo-ing to track emotional tone, recurring expressions and potentially significant phases. These tactile methods helped me engage closely with each account and laid the groundwork for later coding. As the process unfolded, highlighted material and notations were incrementally transformed into preliminary codes, which informed the analytic development presented in the next section. From the outset, many participants framed Twitter as a purposeful alternative to the constraints of institutional life. It was described as a space for professional development, self-expression and peer support. These functions frequently responded to feelings of marginalisation, precarity and exclusion within academic environments. These initial observations support the classification of the survey data within the structural layer of the critical realist framework, wherein digital engagement is interpreted as shaped by broader institutional conditions, access to resources and uneven professional legitimacy (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019).

Table 10 summarises the key patterns that emerged during familiarisation. While still provisional at this stage, these patterns reflect how participants' engagement with Twitter was entangled with structural limitations in their working environments, whether through fixed-term contracts, limited opportunities for disclosure or a lack of neurodivergent recognition within policy and practice.

Table 10: Initial Structural Patterns Identified During Familiarisation

Key Pattern	Description
Professional Networking	Using Twitter to build contacts, visibility, and career progression beyond institutional boundaries.
Information Seeking	Accessing academic content, research opportunities, and sector updates in ways institutions did not provide.
Community Support	Seeking belonging and peer affirmation as a counterbalance to workplace isolation.
Challenges of Twitter	Encountering platform-level harms (e.g. harassment, burnout, algorithm fatigue) that compounded professional stress.
Blurring of Boundaries	Navigating tensions between personal authenticity and professional identity management online.

These emerging structural themes laid the groundwork for the coding and interpretation phases that followed, as discussed in Section 5.3.2.

5.3.2 Thematic Coding and Structural Patterns

Following the familiarisation phase, I progressed to systematic coding of the open-text survey responses. I used an inductive approach grounded in Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis, allowing patterns to emerge through repeated engagement with the data. While coding was coding without a predefined framework, interpretation was shaped by the critical realist lens underpinning the study. Specifically, I attended to how institutional structures, professional norms and digital infrastructures mediated participants' experiences and practices.

Each segment of text was reviewed for language that suggested constraint, resistance or strategic adaptation. Markers of how neurodivergent educators navigated their professional identities within institutional structures were not designed for neurodivergent ways of being. This process, grounded in critical realism, sought to identify underlying mechanisms that shaped surface patterns (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019). Recurring references to disclosure risk, institutional friction and professional silencing informed the generation of initial codes and the

identification of structural themes.

A particularly striking example came from one participant, who reflected on the consequences of publicly sharing their neurodivergent identity:

> *"I posted a mini podcast… about my autistic needs and strengths. My employer praised me, but my department and manager reprimanded me for talking about my needs publicly… I was accused of suggesting my colleagues weren't doing their jobs. I was extremely distressed, removed my workplace from my profile, and became more of an activist… in response to the disability discrimination"*

While this account clearly resonates across multiple ontological layers, including cultural norms around professionalism and agentic resistance through activism, I interpreted it primarily through the lens of structural constraint. The decisive factor for me was the institutional response: a formal reprimand for disclosure that reflects the material conditions under which neurodivergent educators must navigate visibility, legitimacy and risk. In this context, the participant shift towards activism is not solely a matter of identity performance, but a strategic response to institutional sanction. The case was therefore coded under institutional exclusion, disclosure risk and managerial control. As it illustrates the ways in which systemic ableism constrains expression and compels digital redirection (Fricker 2007; Brown and Leigh 2018; Mellifont 2023).

All initial coding was conducted manually and reflexively on printed copies of the survey responses. I annotated these by hand, used colour-coding to identify emerging patterns and grouped related responses by topic and tone. However, as noted in Section 3.9, these original working documents, including early thematic groupings and in-text reflections, were unfortunately lost during an extended period of leave from my doctoral studies. What remained were two key artefacts: a summary table of the initial codes and themes compiled electronically prior to interruption, and an early draft of this analysis chapter. These materials became a foundation for the refined analysis that follows. While this process introduced some discontinuity, it also sharpened the later stages of interpretation by requiring a return to the core analytical question and a re-engagement with data through a more explicitly structural and theory-informed lens. For transparency, an unannotated copy of the survey responses is included in **Appendix B**.

The following table summarises the structural themes and initial codes derived from the survey data, illustrating how participants' engagement with Twitter was shaped by institutional constraints, professional precarity and the search for legitimacy and recognition with higher education.

Table 11: Structural layer- Summary of Themes and Initial Codes from Survey Data

Theme	Initial Codes
Professional Networking & Visibility	Job-seeking via Twitter; gaining external examiner roles; building profile outside institution
Information and Knowledge Access	Following researchers for updates; sharing articles; informal CPD; sector news and updates
Community and Peer Validation	Seeking ND community; feelings of belonging online due to offline exclusion; peer-led recognition
Identity Disclosure and Advocacy	Disclosing neurodivergence; being reprimanded for openness; transitioning into activism
Digital Precarity and Platform Risk	Harassment, exposure to hate speech; burnout; shifting use post-Musk or due to hate speech
Managing Visibility and Boundaries	Use of multiple accounts; anonymity for safety; deleting content after disciplinary experiences

5.3.3 Interpreting Structural Themes

The structural codes generated through initial analysis were developed into broader interpretative themes that reflect how neurodivergent educators used Twitter in response to institutional exclusion, professional uncertainty and systemic constraints. These themes extend beyond descriptive categorisation and instead represent underlying mechanisms, such as precarity, epistemic marginalisation and the performance of professional legitimacy, that shape digital practice within higher education (Archer 2007; Fricker 2007; Mellifont 2023). The analysis remained attentive to how these mechanisms operate across the stratified remain domains of structure, culture and agency (Danermark et al. 2019). This section focuses specifically on those themes anchored within the structural layer, as framed in **Table 11**.

As the data illustrates, participants turned to Twitter not simply as a tool for professional networking but as a strategic and sometimes necessary response to institutional conditions that inhibited their visibility, expression or sense of belonging. This aligns with a main research question, which asks how neurodivergent educators negotiate and develop their professional and personal identities on Twitter. The findings also contribute to sub-question 1, as they show how educators cultivated and sustained digital third spaces to mitigate institutional exclusion and enhance professional presence.

For example, one participant described how Twitter supported academic progression through opportunities that may not have been available through institutional channels:

"Gained external examiner post through Twitter…have been offered academic posts because of my

Twitter profile"

This insight contributed to the theme **Professional Networking and Visibility**, reflecting on how social media was used to extend professional legitimacy and bypass exclusionary hiring practices (Carpenter et al. 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022; Mellifont 2023). Another common theme concerned the use of Twitter as a means of accessing professional knowledge and sector updates. For instance, one participant noted:

"I follow researchers and experts in my field and in fields that interest me… to get updates on their research".

This was interpreted as **Information Access and Informal CPD**, highlighting how Twitter filled structural gaps in institutional CPD offerings and research communication. These responses related to Sub-Question 4, which asks what institutional lessons can be drawn from digital practices, namely, the need for more inclusive knowledge-sharing structures within academia.

The theme of **Community as Structural Response** also emerged. Several participants described using Twitter to build peer connections and counter the sense of marginalisation experienced within academic settings. For example, a participant described the value of being able to share ideas and support with *"other ND people".* Similarly, another participant highlighted how the digital community filled the void left by institutional disconnection. These responses demonstrate strategic adaptation but reflect how Twitter served as a response to the absence of structural inclusivity, reinforcing the relevance of the structural layer.

Participants also described platform-level risks, such as harassment, burnout and governance changes, particularly in relation to Elon Musk's takeover. One participant observed:

"I deactivated and moved to Blue Sky… I had almost 3000 followers but couldn't tolerate hate speech"

This was interpreted through the theme **Digital Precarity and Platform Harm,** acknowledging how structural changes to the platform environment shaped both the feasibility and emotional sustainability of participation. This speaks to the infrastructural dimensions of digital engagement and the fragile conditions under which neurodivergent presence must be sustained.

Finally, the theme **Boundary Management and Platform Strategy** captured how some participants navigated completing demands for authenticity and safety. One such participant remarked:

"I have two accounts: one for my professional persona, and one for an education charity"

This strategic use of platform affordances reflects efforts to negotiate institutional risk and audience management, particularly in contexts where public neurodivergent identity can provoke scrutiny or reputational harm.

The emerging structural themes discussed above are summarised in **Table 12,** which builds upon the coding

presented in **Table 11** by grouping initial codes into interpretative categories that reflect shared structural experiences and responses.

Table 12: Searching for Themes- Structural Patterns emerging from Survey Data

Emerging Theme	Subthemes
Professional Networking and Visibility	Job opportunities via Twitter; academic profile building; offers for external examiner roles and collaborations
Information Access and Informal CPD	Accessing research and news; sector knowledge gaps filled via Twitter; following academic discourse not accessible in institutions
Community as Structural Response	Using Twitter for belonging when isolated institutionally; connecting with other ND academics; sustaining inclusion
Disclosure Risk and Institutional Sanction	Reprimands for public identity expression; adjusting professional personas; withdrawal of affiliation due to employer response
Digital Precarity and Platform Harm	Platform toxicity, hate speech, exposure to harassment; platform shifts due to governance (e.g. post-Musk ownership)
Boundary Management and Platform Strategy	Dual accounts; anonymous or pseudonymous use; strategic visibility decisions to mitigate institutional risk

These themes demonstrate how digital engagement was frequently shaped by the structural exclusions and risk conditions of academic life. Twitter became a compensatory third space in which neurodivergent educators constructed identity, sought visibility and asserted epistemic legitimacy in response to institutional silence. These findings support the main research question but also provide critical insight into Sub-Question 1(third space interactions), Sub-Question 2 (post-COVID platform use) and Sub-Question 4 (institutional lessons). The following section reviews the internal coherence and analytical robustness of the themes as part of the refinement phase of reflexive thematic analysis.

5.3.4 Reviewing Structural Themes

Following on the identification of key structural themes, I revisited the survey data to assess the internal coherence, conceptual clarity and interpretative robustness of each theme. This phase aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2022) fourth stage of reflexive thematic analysis, reviewing themes not as fixed outputs but as evolving constructs that require further scrutiny, refinement and iterative testing against the coded dataset (Braun and Clarke 2022). The themes developed in 5.3.3 were thus examined for both empirical and theoretical alignment, ensuring they offered explanatory value within the study's integrated theoretical framework; drawing on critical

realism, third space theory, identity performance, intersectionality and CDS and the neurodiversity paradigm(Crenshaw 1991; Archer 1995; Bhabha 2004; Butler 2015; Brown and Leigh 2018; Danermark et al. 2019).

Working from the summary **Table 12**, I systematically re-engaged with the coded extracts to evaluate whether each theme captured distinct dimensions of the structural mechanisms at play. This included identifying overlap, ensuring sub-themes were analytically distinct and eliminating redundancy. Some initial categories, such as 'digital visibility' and 'external validation', were folded into the broader theme of **Professional Networking and Visibility** after I noted that their underlying mechanisms were rooted in a common experience of institutional marginality and strategic visibility seeking (Scott and Gibson 2022; Mellifont 2023).

Additionally, I reassessed whether each theme meaningfully addressed the main research question and relevant sub-questions. In particular:

- **Sub-question 1** (third space interactions) was most clearly captured across the themes of Community as Structural Response and Boundary Management, as participants discussed how they constructed online spaces to express aspects of their identity not afforded within institutional settings.

- **Sub-question 2** (impact of COVID-19) surfaced most strongly in relation to Information Access and Digital Precarity, where participants noted a pandemic-driven shift toward increased reliance on Twitter for learning, connection, and coping with institutional withdrawal.

- **Sub-question 4** (institutional lessons) was embedded throughout all structural themes, which collectively highlight how neurodivergent educators compensated for gaps in recognition, development, and community through their digital practices.

While these themes reflect shared constraints, they also differ in emphasis. For example, **Digital Precarity and Platform Harm** highlighted the risked of engaging in these online spaces, showing that Twitter was not always a solution but a precarious third space often shaped by governance shifts, exposure to hate speech and burnout. The **Disclosure Risk and Institutional Sanction** theme also required careful review. Although reflexively I recognise overlaps with cultural and agentic layers, I retained it in the structural domain due to the material and reputational consequences participants described. Reprimands, fear of surveillance, and institutional responses to neurodivergent identity expression were not just personal experiences but indicative of systemic forces governing visibility and performativity within higher education (Archer 1995; Fricker 2007; Brown and Leigh

2018).

In reflexive terms, this review phase also prompted me to reconsider my own interpretative position. As a neurodivergent insider-researcher, I recognise a strong resonance with the theme of **Community as Structural Response,** and at times felt an emotional pull to amplify its prominence. However, I remained attentive to the risk of over-privileging themes that reflected my own experiences. Instead, I returned to the data to ground decisions in analytic consistency and ontological alignment. This helped ensure that the final themes were conceptually justified, theoretically coherent and grounded in the lived realities of participants, rather than simply mirroring my own narrative.

Overall, the reviewed themes offer strong analytical insight into ways neurodivergent educators engage with Twitter to resist, adapt to and challenge structural exclusions embedded in higher education. They also illustrate the value of combining a critical realist ontology with reflexive thematic analysis, enabling a dual focus on lived experience and the generative mechanisms shaping it. The next section moves to the final phase of the analysis: defining and naming each theme to clarify its theoretical contribution and analytical distinctiveness.

5.3.5 Defining and Naming Structural Themes

In line with Braun and Clarke's (2022), reflexive thematic analysis involves defining and naming themes in a way that captures their conceptual and interpretative core. Rather than just labelling themes descriptively, this phase requires the researcher to refine each theme into a concise analytical argument that reflects both the data-driven meaning and the theoretical perspective guiding the study (Braun and Clarke 2022). As such, this study is informed by the perspective of a layered critical realist ontology (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019) along with theoretical insights from third space theory, CDS, intersectionality and the neurodiversity paradigm (Crenshaw 1991; Bhabha 2004; Brown and Leigh 2018; Chapman and Carel 2022).

During the review phase (5.3.4), it became evident that the initial theme labels, while descriptively accurate, did not always capture the structural tensions or the strategic decision-making embedded in participants' accounts. As a result, I refined the names to foreground institutional constraints, digital navigation, and agentic responses more clearly. These changes also ensure that each theme resonates more strongly with the main research question and Sub-questions 1, 2,4, particularly in terms of how neurodivergent educators use Twitter to respond to structural exclusion and construct alternative spaces.

The theme **Professional Networking and Visibility** was renamed **Strategic Visibility and Career Navigation** to emphasise the active, agentic choices participants made to extend their reputational presence and access career

opportunities in contexts where institutional routes were limited. This shift highlights Twitter as more than a neutral platform: it has become a deliberate tool for bypassing exclusionary systems and asserting professional value (Scott and Gibson 2022; Mellifont 2023). **Information Access and Informal CPD** was revised to **Knowledge Seeking Beyond the Institution**, to reflect how participants turned to Twitter to compensate for institutional deficiencies in training, inclusion and knowledge-sharing. This revised theme captures both the structural gaps educators faced and the creative ways they assembled learning networks outside formal systems (Carpenter et al. 2022; Scott and Gibson 2023).

The original theme, **Community as Structural Response**, was renamed **Digital Community as Structural Counterspace** to more clearly align with third space theory (Bhabha 2004; Whitchurch 2013; McDougall and Potter 2019). The term 'counterspace' better reflects the oppositional function these online communities served, acting as refuges from institutional marginalisation and enablers of shared meaning-making and mutual affirmation (Fricker 2007; Botha 2021). **Disclosure Risk and Institutional Sanction** were reframed as **Risk, Reprimand and Identity Disclosure** to place greater emphasis on the professional and reputational consequences of visibility. This revised name reflects both the institutional surveillance described by participants and the emotional toll of navigating hostile or punitive reactions to open neurodivergent identity expression (Brown and Leigh 2018; Pearson and Rose 2021).

The theme Digital Precarity and Platform Harm was updated to Platform Precarity and Structural Burnout, which better captures how digital risks, such as harassment, governance changes and algorithmic fatigue, interact with participants' workload, wellbeing, and institutional vulnerability. This framing also reinforces that burnout was not personal or psychological but structurally induced and compounded by platform instability (Egner 2022; Gabarron et al. 2023; Skafle et al. 2024; Clayton and Hoskins 2025). Lastly, **Boundary Management and Platform Strategy** became **Navigating Boundaries and Professional Risk** to reflect the calculated identity curation participants engaged in through dual accounts, anonymity or curated personas. This revised theme foregrounds the structural risks participants associated with online visibility, particularly for those in contingent roles or operating within unsupportive cultures. Participants described navigating multiple, overlapping audiences: including colleagues, students and senior leadership, while calibrating their disclosures accordingly.

These findings resonate with broader literature on the politicisation of online identity and the pressures of performative professionalism. For example, Fiesler and Proferes(2018) and Malik et al. (2019) explore how online disclosure can result in surveillance, reputational harm and professional misrecognition within algorithmically governed spaces. Skafle et al. (2024) further highlights how algorithmic amplification can distort neurodivergent expression, while Mellifont (2023) and Denisen (2024) note that non-normative self-presentation online is often penalised in academic settings. Within such digital terrains, self-censorship and strategic curation function not

only as affective labour but also as survival strategies shaped by employment precarity, institutional ableism and epistemic injustice.

To clarify the interpretative process undertaken during this phase, **Table 13** summarises the evolution of structural themes from initial codes through emerging concepts to finally theoretical grounded theme names.

Table 13: Refinement of Structural Themes from Initial Codes to Final Definitions

Initial Codes	Emerging Theme	Final Theme Name	Justification for Renaming
Job-seeking, collaborations, and profile visibility	Professional Networking and Visibility	**Strategic Visibility and Career Navigation**	Emphasises agency in extending professional presence amid structural exclusion.
Sharing research, accessing CPD, and informal learning	Information Access and Informal CPD	**Knowledge Seeking Beyond the Institution**	Reflects platform use as a workaround for gaps in institutional development and inclusion.
Peer support, ND affinity networks, and workplace isolation	Community as Structural Response	**Digital Community as Structural Counterspace**	Frames Twitter communities as third spaces that oppose institutional marginality.
Professional reprimand, fear of surveillance, and sanctioned disclosure	Disclosure Risk and Institutional Sanction	**Risk, Reprimand and Identity Disclosure**	Highlights the reputational and structural consequences of online neurodivergent self-expression.
Platform toxicity, harassment, burnout, and algorithmic manipulation	Digital Precarity and Platform Harm	**Platform Precarity and Structural Burnout**	Captures systemic causes of burnout rooted in governance shifts and hostile online environments.
Dual accounts, pseudonymity, audience segmentation, and professional caution	Boundary Management and Platform Strategy	**Navigating Boundaries and Professional Risk**	Reflects calculated identity performance shaped by institutional scrutiny and employment precarity.

5.3.6 Reflexive Design of Padlet Questions from Survey Theme

These initial insights developed from the survey data (Sections 5.3.1-5.3.5) directly informed the design of the Padlet activity. As the first method in the data collection sequence (See Section 4.4), the survey illuminated some

structural tensions that framed neurodivergent educators' professional identities, particularly around visibility, institutional exclusion and digital precarity. These findings laid the groundwork for crafting open-ended Padlet prompts that would invite reflective engagement with cultural and affective dimensions of professional life online. In alignment with the study's critical realist ontology, the Padlet questions were structured to explore the ontological layer of culture, complementing the structural emphasis of the survey while enabling participants to express more embodied, narrative, and multimodal responses.

Drawing on the six refined themes presented in **Table 13,** the Padlet prompts aimed to encourage reflection on identity performance, community belonging and emotional contours of third space interaction, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The table (14) below summarises how each Padlet question was conceptually grounded in the survey analysis and linked to the relevant structural themes and ontological layers:

Table 14: Mapping Final Survey Themes to Padlet Research Questions

Padlet Research Question	Aligned Structural Themes	Ontological Layer
Q1. How do neurodivergent educators negotiate and develop their professional and personal identities on Twitter?	Strategic Visibility and Career Navigation; Risk, Reprimand and Identity Disclosure; Navigating Boundaries and Professional Risk	Structure / Agency
Q2. In what ways do ND educators harness the potential of Twitter as a catalyst for fostering 3rd space interactions?	Digital Community as Structural Counterspace; Knowledge Seeking Beyond the Institution; Navigating Boundaries and Professional Risk	Culture / Agency
Q3. How did the COVID-19 pandemic change how ND educators use Twitter?	Platform Precarity and Structural Burnout; Digital Community as Structural Counterspace	Structure / Culture
Q4. How do virtual communities impact the creation of inclusive spaces for ND practitioners in HE?	Digital Community as Structural Counterspace; Risk, Reprimand and Identity Disclosure; Knowledge Seeking Beyond the Institution	Culture / Structure

Conducting the survey offered valuable structural insights into how neurodivergent educators use Twitter, but it also felt emotionally distant. While the responses revealed clear patterns around disclosure, risk and institutional exclusion, I found the format limiting. The fixed-response structure and brief written answer lack the nuance and

emotional tone that I was hoping to understand more fully. As someone who values the textured, fragmented nature of neurodivergent expression, the survey data felt 'flattened', important but incomplete. This left me wanting to create space for greater depth, flexibility and accessibility in the next phase of the study.

The Padlet activity was developed with that goal in mind by allowing for multimodal, asynchronous input, I hoped to invite more affective, narrative and reflective engagement. It also acted as a gentle prelude to the interviews, helping participants surface ideas and feelings they might not otherwise have voiced in a live conversation. Designing Padlet this way was a response not only to the limitations of the survey but also to my own discomfort with rigid academic formats. I wanted the process to feel more like an invitation than a questionnaire, one that could hold complexity, contradiction and care.

5.4 Padlet: Cultural Agency

This section presents an analysis of the Padlet-based activity, which formed the second strand of qualitative data in the study. As detailed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.7.3), the Padlet activity went live on 30 April 2024 and was distributed one week prior to each participant's semi-structured interview, via a private link accessible only to the researcher and the individual participant. This temporal spacing enabled participant to engage reflexively with the same set of pre-determined questions at their own pace and in their preferred communication modality. The consistent structure of the exercise allowed for comparability across responses while upholding the principles of inclusive research design (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2019; Grant and Kara 2021).

All four neurodivergent educators: Nora, Drew, Katrina and Flora (pseudonyms) engaged with the same layout of reflective prompts. Flora's response (**Figure G**) and Drew's response (**Figure H**) serve as illustrative examples of the uniform structure. Each participant had the autonomy to select their preferred format, including written text, bullet points, emotive symbols and audio narration. This design aligned with the neurodiversity paradigm's emphasis on accessibility, multimodality and cognitive justice (Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Chapman and Carel 2022). It also reflects inclusive pedagogical values, particularly Hamilton and Petty's (2023) argument for diverse digital expression in co-produced knowledge spaces and adheres to participatory research ethics tailored for neurodivergent communities (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2019; Beaux et al. 2024).

:Padlet

Mike Scott 5/02/2024

Exploring Neurodivergence on Twitter(4)

A Research Inquiry into Neurodivergent Educators' Experiences

Q1: How do neurodivergent educators negotiate and develop their professional and personal identities on Twitter?

Engaging in communities, sharing insights, and leveraging unique perspectives. Use hashtags, connect with other neurodivergent educators, and contribute their expertise through tweets, threads etc. Openly discussing mine and their experiences. Having their neurodiversity openly on their profile.

0

Figure G: Screenshot of the exported data from Flora's exercise to Question 1

Q4: How do virtual communities impact the creation of inclusive spaces for ND practitioners in HE?

I can edit and think much more before I share an idea. Especially at a conference it makes me much more likely to engage than in person

0

What will people think?

When I first started posting on Twitter I guess I was worried about making every post perfect by dyslexia means that often isn't the case however now im not self censoring like I used to I'm much more open to owning that identity the misspellings the miss phrasing and saying do you know what it's about? The ideas and getting them out there and actually owning the fact I'm dyslexic and sometimes it doesn't come out in the best way. I still worry though some people see that as a bad thing that some people might choose to not engage with me due to my neurodivergence.

0

Figure H: Screenshot of Drew's exported data for Question 4 with text and image response

The Padlet format functioned not only as a data collection tool but as an 'affectively tuned third space'

(Whitchurch 2013; McDougall and Potter 2019) where participant could narrate their experiences without the constraints of institutional expectations. The analysis in this section draws upon the cultural layer of the study's critical realist ontology (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019), examining how shared digital practices, communicative strategies, and emotional expressions, mediate identity work, peer interaction and community-building among neurodivergent educators in higher education.

5.4.1 Participant Engagement Styles

Participants engaged in the Padlet exercise through distinct modalities that reflected their communication preferences, affective pacing and strategies of self-representation. These differences were not incidental but central to the interpretative logic of this data set. In line with the cultural layer of the study's critical realist ontology (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019), participants' narratives were informed by their lived experiences within specific institutional systems, digital norms and cultural expectations. The use of multimodal formats directly responded to the study's inclusive design principles (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021; Grant and Kara 2021) and reflected broader arguments within the neurodiversity paradigm regarding communication access, affective authenticity and cognitive justice (Chapman and Carel 2022; Hamilton and Petty 2023).

Table 15 summarises how each participant engaged with the Padlet activity, highlighting stylistic tendencies and interpretative features.

Table 15: Participant Engagement Modalities and Cultural Expressions

Participant	Format	Stylistic Features	Interpretive Notes
Nora	Audio	Narrative, reflective, affect-laden storytelling	Deeply embodied and relational, aligning with Ellis et al.'s (2010) model of evocative autoethnography.
Drew	Written text and images and audio	Structured reflections with themed headings, reflexive commentary	Demonstrated analytical clarity and iterative identity positioning through layered responses.
Katrina	Written text	Direct, concise, and affectively charged, with the use of an emoji and plain language	Reflected emotional immediacy and vulnerability, often toggling between caution and candour.
Flora	Written text	Pragmatic, instructional tone with focus on strategic	Presented an agentic stance prioritising digital safety, affective

		practices	boundaries, and professional navigation.

These engagement styles mapped onto cultural logics that underscored how Twitter was experienced as a space of both connection and restraint. For example, Nora's audio submission did more than relay information; it narrated embodiment, temporality and affect with a depth often less accessible through written text. This stylistic choice resonates with theoretical work on neurodivergent epistemologies, where sensory expression and affective communication are not merely stylistic variations but integral to meaning-making and epistemic legitimacy (Botha 2021; Beaux et al. 2024). Nora's decision to record her response foregrounded emotional tone and rhythm, elements that can be muted in written formats, illustrating how accessible, multimodal contributions can challenge normative expectations of academic expression.

Drew demonstrated a richly layered communicative style, blending audio narration, visual media (cartoons and photographs) and written commentary. Hi approach aligned with Hamilton and Petty's (2023) emphasis on "neurodiverse digital pedagogy" while also positioning Twitter as a third space for performative identity work (Whitchurch 2013; McDougall and Potter 2019). Katrina engaged through brief text entries, punctuated by a single emoji " :/ " to convey uncertainty, highlighting the subtle interplay of affect, digital literacy and emotional labour in neurodivergent expression (Zolyomi and Snyder 2023; Baillargeon et al. 2024; Hume 2024).

In contrast, Flora submitted well-organised responses, text-based responses articulated through a concise and pragmatic tone, outlining strategies for visibility, boundary-setting and digital self-advocacy. Flora's insights revealed an underlying logic of "survival professionalism" (Taylor 2018; Mellifont 2023), situating her Twitter use as a compensatory response to institutional exclusion. Collectively, these divergent formats underscore how multimodal and asynchronous participation can enact cognitive justice and foster epistemic inclusion within neurodivergent research contexts (Urbanowicz et al. 2019; Grant and Kara 2021; Chapman and Carel 2022).

5.4.2 Familiarisation with the Data

In line with Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis framework, the familiarisation phase involved multiple immersive readings and re-listening of the Padlet responses submitted by Nora, Drew, Katrina and Flora. Each participant had engaged with the same set of pre-prepared questions (see **Appendix C**), yet their responses reflected strikingly different modes of expression and emphasis. This phase marked the first stage of interpretation, where surface-level observations began to suggest cultural patterns, particularly around professional identity performance, digital boundary work and the emotional labour of neurodivergent self-representation.

Participant contributions revealed shared reference points around visibility, community and institutional constraint. Nora's audio narration conveyed time-based reflections shaped by her emotional state and fluctuating energy levels, while Flora's written format presented pragmatic strategies for maintaining professional coherence and safety in precarious professional environments. These stylistic differences suggested more than just communicative preference; they revealed how participants were situated within, and responding to, cultural and institutional norms around expression, professionalism and belonging.

As theorised in Chapter 2, identity construction in higher education is mediated by dominant institutional habitus, which privileges linearity, affective control and confident self-presentation, norms that often marginalise neurodivergent forms of expression (Bourdieu 1990; Lewis and Arday 2023; Mellifont 2023). This expressive variation was therefore not incidental but reflected how participants negotiated and resisted expectations through subtle rhetorical and aesthetic choices. The Padlet data illuminated this negotiation clearly, participants used tone, modality and structure to adapt or subvert normative demands, enacting what Taylor (2018) and Botha (2021) might be described as survival strategies that bridge institutional exclusion and digital agency.

This early phase of interpretation revealed six initial focal areas that recurred across participant responses: 1. Identity negotiation and disclosure
2. The affective and functional purpose of Twitter use
3. The formation of community and third-space belonging
4. Institutional constraint and precarity
5. Emotional and cognitive costs of digital engagement
6. Personal strategies for boundary-setting and visibility management

This was not treated as a fixed theme, but as an interpretative signpost that emerged through active engagement with the multi-modal material.

Affective tone and stylistic modulation across the Padlet responses served as interpretative cues, revealing how participants used modality to navigate identity, visibility and institutional constraint. Nora's vocal hesitations and rhythmic pacing conveyed layers of meaning that would likely be flattened in text, resonating with Botha's critique of neurotypical norms in academic discourse and her argument for legitimising embodied, affective and situated forms of neurodivergent knowledge production. Drew's multimodal layering of imagery, reflective text and audio narration exemplified Hamilton and Petty's (2023) call for "compassionate pedagogy", where communication flexibility and expressive diversity are central to fostering epistemic justice for neurodivergent learners. Flora's pragmatic tone and strategic boundary-setting reflected what might be conceptualised as

“survival professionalism” – a framing consistent with Mellifont's (2023) identification of adaptive responses to institutional ableism and precarity in higher education.

Katrina's contribution, though brief, offered a distinct form of affective communication. Her use of succinct phrases and the “:/” emoji to signal uncertainty represented a minimalist yet affective strategy that aligns with Zolyomi and Snyder's (2023) and Baillargeon et al. (2024) work on alternative affective expression and the communicative work involved in non-verbal meaning-making. Rather than being read as superficial or lacking depth, this mode of expression invites interpretation through the lens of neurodivergent communication, where clarity is not always linear and where ambiguity or brevity may reflect cognitive processing preferences or emotional safeguarding. Katrina’s response, therefore, extends the theoretical conversation around expression by illustrating how even constrained forms of engagement can carry epistemic and emotional weight. Collectively, these stylistic choices functioned as cultural situated strategies, revealing how participants negotiated academic norms while asserting alternative modes of presence, legitimacy and agency within the digital third space.

5.4.3 Interpretation and Thematic Coding of Cultural Themes

Following the familiarisation phase, initial coding was conducted using Braun and Clark's (2022) reflexive thematic approach to identify cultural themes within the Padlet data. This process mirrored that used for the survey and was guided by the study’s critical realist ontology, which views culture as a mediating layer between structural conditions and agency (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019). Codes reflected both explicit content, such as references to professional identity, community or institutional barriers and subtler features, including emotional tone, modality and rhetorical structure. In this way, the analysis captured not only what was said but how it was expressed and what is signified within broader digital and institutional contexts navigated by neurodivergent educators.

Several provisional codes emerged with strong recurrence across participants:

- **Curated Visibility –** decisions around what to share or conceal to manage professional image and psychological safety
- **Affective Calibration –** efforts to manage tone, emotion and vulnerability within the public gaze
- **Boundary Work –** separating personal/professional roles and setting communicative limits
- **Epistemic Framing –** asserting the legitimacy of lived experience as knowledge, particularly in non-traditional formats.
- **Digital Fatigue and Withdrawal –** narrations of exhaustion, disconnection, or protective disengagement from digital spaces.

These codes were shaped by insights from Section 5.4.2 and were cross-referenced with earlier theoretical work on performance, digital agency and cultural marginality (Reay 2004; McDougall and Potter 2019; Botha 2021; Hamilton and Petty 2023; Mellifont 2023). This theoretical framework supports the analysis of how neurodivergent educators navigate and resist institutional norms through varied expressive strategies.

The table below (**Table 16**) summarises the initial cultural codes generated from the Padlet responses, highlighting the distinctive expressive features of each participant and the interpretative insights that informed the early stages of thematic development.

Table 16: Initial Culture Codes from Padlet Responses by Participants

Participant	Key Expressive Features	Initial Cultural Codes	Interpretive Notes
Nora	Audio narration with emotional pacing, reflective tone	Emotional labour, self-regulation, affective storytelling, temporal self-awareness	Expression was embodied and relational, resisting normative academic expression; aligns with Botha's (2021) call for legitimising affective knowledge
Drew	Multimodal: written text, themed headings, cartoon imagery, audio	Layered identity work, neurodiverse pedagogy, performativity, iterative reflection	Drew's approach exemplified Hamilton and Petty's (2023) concept of compassionate, multimodal pedagogy supporting epistemic justice
Katrina	Minimalist text with strategic emoji use (":/"), direct statements	Ambiguity, affective signalling, emotional safeguarding, micro-resistance	Non-verbal cue use (emoji) aligns with Zolyomi and Snyder (2023) on alternative affective expression and Baillargeon et al. (2024) on communicative labour
Flora	Structured bullet points, pragmatic tone, strategic focus	Boundary management, survival professionalism, strategic visibility, self-	Flora's response reflected Mellifont's (2023) framing of survival professionalism

		containment	in response to institutional ableism and precarity

5.4.4 Reviewing Cultural Themes

This section reviews the cultural themes identified in the preceding stage of analysis (Section 5.4.3), following the same reflexive thematic analysis process outlined in Section 5.3. However, the emphasis here shifts to cultural dynamics, specifically exploring how neurodivergent educators perform, adapt and negotiate identity through communicative and affective practices within the digitally mediated third space. This analytical step is situated within the cultural layer of the study's critical realist ontology (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019) which conceptualises culture as a mediating domain in which meaning is produced through shared norms, situated practices and diverse modes of expression.

The initial review of codes produced three candidate themes:

1. **Navigating Emotional Visibility**
2. **Performing Strategic Authenticity**
3. **Asserting Situated Belonging**

These were evaluated for internal coherence, distinctiveness and conceptual richness. As with the survey analysis, the process involved comparing extracts within and across themes to ensure they captured the complexity of participant expression while maintaining analytical clarity.

The theme **Navigating Emotional Visibility** captured how participants managed the affective dimensions of their self-presentation on Twitter. For example, Nora's use of vocal tone to signal exhaustion or cautious optimism was not merely stylistic but conveyed embodied states of well-being, resistance and legitimacy within digital academic spaces. Drew's use of humorous or playful images functioned as a buffering strategy, softening more critical reflections while retaining emotional resonance. Such communicative acts illustrate the complex emotional labour involved in being visibly neurodivergent online, where self-expression is simultaneously a mode of coping and a means of claiming space.

This theme was initially broad and required refinement to exclude more deliberate performance of professional identity, which was later categorised under the second theme. Once separated, the theme centred on how neurodivergent educators regulate visibility and vulnerability in digital environments. These findings align with Botha's (2021) call to legitimise embodied, affective and situated modes of knowledge production and reflect Chapman and Carel's (2022) framing of epistemic injustice as it relates to affective expression. They also resonate

with (Beaux et al.'s (2024) emphasis on designing research practices that respect neurodivergent modalities of communication, where tone, pacing and multimodal expression carry epistemic weight. The theme thereby foregrounds how emotional visibility is not a matter of personal expression, but a site of negotiation shaped by digital norms, institutional power and the pursuit of cognitive and affective justice.

The second theme, **Performing Strategic Authenticity,** captured the calculated ways participant revealed, concealed or curated their identities in response to both platform affordances and institutional constraints. Flora's text-based reflection exemplified this theme, where transparency was carefully balanced against risk and authenticity was constructed not as an unfiltered truth but as a selective, strategic act. This resonates with Radulski's (2022) Conceptualisation of autistic masking as a form of adaptive identity work shaped by neurotypical privilege and institutional expectations. While initial overlaps with emotional visibility were noted, further thematic review clarified this theme foregrounded authenticity not only as disclosure but as a claim to credibility and legitimacy within the shifting norms of academic culture. Participants' narratives revealed how digital spaces, particularly Twitter, operated as "networked publics" (Boyd 2010), where the performance of identity is both public and contingent, subject to institutional gaze and audience interpretation.

Drew's blending of humour, personal insight, and affective layering reinforced Egner's (2022) argument that Twitter enables individual and collective identity narratives but also requires constant self-monitoring to remain intelligible within dominant discourses. These acts of "strategic authenticity" also align with Obexer (2022) account of identity negotiation in third spaces where blended professionals must navigate multiple and often conflicting identity scripts. Butler (2015) theorisation of performativity provides a further lens, framing authenticity not as a fixed essence but as a socially intelligible performance reiterated under normative constraints. This theme thereby encapsulates the tension between external expectation and internal strategies of self-representation, foregrounding the affective labour and epistemic negotiation required of neurodivergent educators. As Skafle et al.'s (2024) note, social media platforms both reflect and shape perceptions of autism, offering opportunities for resistance but also reproducing hierarchies of legibility and legitimacy.

The final theme, **Asserting Situated Belonging,** examined how participants expressed a need for connection and epistemic solidarity within the bounded conditions of institutional precarity and cultural marginalisation. Katrina's brief yet symbolically resonant use of an emoji, combined with sparse textual disclosure, exemplified this theme in minimalist form, an affective gesture signalling a desire to be seen without overexposure. By contrast, Drew and Nora articulated more expansive narratives around shared understanding, digital affinity and peer recognition, often referencing other neurodivergent educators and communities. Their contributions reinforced the role of social media in scaffolding what Scott and Gibson (2022) term a Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP), wherein informal networks foster collaborative identity work and resistance to professional

isolation.

This theme was initially intertwined with digital resistance but was refined to centre the concept of affective and epistemic belonging. Drawing on McDougall and Potter's (2019) conceptualisation of third space, participants' narratives illustrated how digital platforms functioned as in-between spaces that enabled new relational practices beyond institutional gatekeeping. Hamilton and Petty's (2023) emphasis on inclusive and compassionate pedagogies further supports this framing, highlighting the importance of relational inclusion for neurodivergent wellbeing. From a critical disability studies lens, Kerschbaum's (2014) call for a "new rhetoric of difference" resonates with participants' situated acts of identity articulation, while Merchant et al. (2020) underline the value of insider perspectives in challenging disabling academic cultures.

Moreover, the theme intersects with Fricker's (2007) notion of epistemic injustice and Legault et al.'s (2021) critique of cognitive marginalisation, as participants asserted their right not only to speak, but to be believed and recognised as knowers. Dark's (2024) Neuro-inclusion principles further underscore the necessity of designing research environments that do not merely include neurodivergent voices, but actively centre their modes of expression, connection and knowledge-making. As such, **Asserting Situated Belonging** captures more than social affinity; it signifies a political and affective stance towards community-making within exclusionary systems.

5.4.5 Defining and Naming Themes

This section further consolidates the cultural themes identified through iterative coding and thematic review of the Padlet exercise, drawing interpretative insight from Sections 5.4.3 and 5.4.4. Each theme was conceptualised as a cultural pattern that illuminates how neurodivergent educators navigated affective, expressive and communicative demands in digital academic space. Rather than treating identity construction as a fixed process, the themes articulate how participants performed situated meaning-making within an online third space (Whitchurch 2013; McDougall and Potter 2019). The process of naming these themes was not only descriptive but also conceptual. It involved identifying shared social meanings, affective practices and communication norms through which neurodivergent educators negotiated presence and legitimacy within digital academic culture.

The themes were reframed to emphasise cultural dynamics of performance, meaning-making and affiliation that mediate between structural expectations and agentic expression. The revised thematic names foreground the sociocultural logics at play, rather than purely emotional or strategic dimensions. This also allows for clearer alignments with Chapter 2's theoretical discussion of culture as a domain shaped by norms, discourse and symbolic interaction.

The renamed themes are as follows:

- **Cultural Scripts of Affective Presentation**
- **Performative Authenticity and Credibility**
- **Claiming Belonging through Cultural Affiliation**

Each theme captures what participants expressed but also how they expressed it, through tone, format, structure and multimodal creativity. These acts of expression were culturally situated, shaped by the tacit norms of academic spaces and the wider neurodivergent experience of navigating institutional marginality.
The following table outlines these themes and their associated sub-themes:

Table 17: Cultural Themes and Sub-themes (Padlet Data)

Cultural Theme	Sub-theme 1	Sub-theme 2
Cultural Scripts of Affective Presentation	Affective Signalling through Tone and Modality	Emotional Labour and Communicative Legitimacy
Performative Authenticity and Credibility	Balancing Risk and Disclosure	Curating Presence for Academic Recognition
Claiming Belonging through Cultural Affiliation	Minimalist Connection and Relational Cues	Epistemic Solidarity and Community Building

Each theme reflects a distanced mode of cultural negotiation:

- **Cultural Scripts of Affective Presentation -** examines how tone, rhythm, format and modality served as interpretative cues for navigating emotional and professional presence, offering insight into the hidden labour of affective self-regulation.
- **Performative Authenticity and Credibility –** addresses the calculated strategies participants employed to appear authentic without becoming vulnerable, capturing the tension between institutional visibility and identity protection.
- **Claiming Belonging through Cultural Affiliation –** articulates the ways in which relational identity was constructed through subtle and overt references to neurodivergent community, inclusion and shared epistemic values.

Together, these themes reflect the cultural layer's function as a mediating domain of meaning-making, highlighting how neurodivergent educators co-construct legitimacy and identity within and against dominant academic norms. These themes will be expanded upon in Chapter 6 through comparative thematic synthesis

across all data strands.

5.4.6 Development of Interview Questions

The thematic analysis of the Padlet exercise served as a foundational stage for generating targeted interview questions, guiding both the self-interview and semi-structured interviews. As outlined in Chapter 3, this study follows a triadic methodological structure, with each method contributing to the layered ontology of structure, culture and agency (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019). The Padlet focused on the cultural layer, illuminating how neurodivergent educators navigate emotional, expressive and identity-based norms within digital spaces. Drawing from the cultural themes developed in Section 5.4.5, I translated emergent insights into interview prompts that allowed participants to elaborate on their digital practices, relational positioning and personal experiences with greater depth and nuance.

This phase was meant to function as a methodological extension of the earlier Padlet findings. The interviews were conceived as dialogic continuations, allowing participants to deepen or reframe prior reflections and to explore complex themes in a more narrative and interpersonal context. In designing the questions, I prioritised alignment with the cultural themes while also ensuring coverage of the broader research questions that guided the entire study. These included how neurodivergent educators perform identity online, how they experience inclusion and exclusion within digital academic spaces and how they adapt to changing platform dynamics.

Theme 1: Cultural Scripts of Affective Presentation

Focus: Emotional expression, modality, tone, and the hidden labour of self-regulation in online spaces.

Aligned Questions:

- What strategies do you use to filter or prioritise content you engage with on Twitter/X, particularly related to your field?

↳ Speaks to affective regulation and content curation as a way of managing emotional and cognitive overload.

- How do you balance the use of Twitter/X for personal and professional purposes, if at all?

↳ Addresses the negotiation of emotional tone and presence across professional and informal contexts.

- Can you share any positive experiences you've had using Twitter/X?

↳ Links to affective affordances of the platform and emotional presence in professional identity-building.

Theme 2: Performative Authenticity and Credibility

Focus: Strategic identity curation, disclosure practices, and maintaining credibility within digital academic spaces.

Aligned Questions:

- How do you perceive the overall impact of Twitter/X on your professional development as an educator?

↳ Engages with institutional expectations and performance of professionalism through digital presence.

- Have you encountered any challenges or barriers in using Twitter/X for professional networking or information dissemination?

↳ Explores the constraints shaping strategic presentation and institutional legibility.

- Do you use Twitter/X for both formal and informal purposes?

↳ Addresses the navigation between performative roles, hinting at strategic boundary-setting.

Theme 3: Claiming Belonging through Cultural Affiliation

Focus: Relational identity, peer solidarity, epistemic belonging, and cultural affiliation with neurodivergent communities.

Aligned Questions:

- In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter/X, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous?

↳ Explores engagement styles as a relational strategy for inclusion or boundary-setting.

- What is your primary purpose on Twitter/X?

↳ Opens space for identifying relational goals, such as finding community, advocacy, or peer support.

- Can you elaborate on any other ways you use Twitter/X whether for professional or personal purposes?

↳ Signals multiple roles and communities of belonging that participants may interact with.

Supplementary Questions (General or Broad Scope)

These address broader structural, contextual, or agentic issues relevant to the study as a whole and not solely to the cultural layer.

- Has your use of Twitter/X been influenced in any way by the COVID-19 pandemic?

↳ Tied to temporal and contextual shifts in digital practice; aligns with Sub-RQ2 but crosses all thematic layers.

- How do you define your neurodivergence?

↳ Useful in self-interview for framing participant narrative but not tied to a single cultural theme**.**

Designing these questions was an iterative and at times emotionally layered process. As I reviewed the Padlet responses, I was struck by how participants used subtle cues: emojis, syntax, humour, and visual rhythm to manage how they were read. This prompted me to include questions that invited participants to unpack not just what they said but how they expressed it. As a neurodivergent researcher, I recognised many of these strategies from my own digital practice. I often feel more comfortable drafting tweets than speaking live, as it gives space to edit tone and pre-empt misunderstanding. This reflexive awareness shaped the interview design: I didn't just want to extract stories but to offer participants a way to narrate their digital identity on their own terms. Combining theme-based and general questions allowed room for divergence, encouraging insights that might challenge or expand the initial codes. Ultimately, the goal was to ensure that

interviews were both anchored and open; structured enough to explore core themes yet flexible enough to accommodate lived complexity.

5.5 Autoethnography Self-Interview

5.5.1 Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality in a Self-Interview

The development of the interview questions, as outlined in the preceding section, marked a critical juncture where the methodological became reflexively personal. The same framework used to construct questions for participants was turned inward as I engaged in a self-interview (See **Appendix D**), treating my own narrative as a legitimate source of data. This act of methodological symmetry was deliberate: by applying the same thematic structure and critical realist lens to my own experiences, I sought to both mirror and interrogate the forms of digital agency under examination. The self-interview thus served as both a continuity of method and an intensification of reflexive practice, bridging my roles as researcher and participant in this inquiry.

As detailed in Chapter 3, I adopted a hybrid autoethnographic approach that integrated analytic and evocative strands, drawing specifically on Anderson's (2006) formulation of *analytic autoethnography*, I used this perspective to enhance interpretive depth and methodological transparency. While Anderson (2006) emphasises the value of systematically analysing personal experience as sociologically significant, I positioned the self-interview as a generative site for thematic extraction that aligned with the coding procedures used across other data sources. This ensured analytic parity with participant interviews while also enabling a situated interrogation of how my own digital practices revealed broader agentic strategies within academic and social media platforms.

This analytic process was further shaped by Crawley's (2012) conceptualisation of the *feminist self-interview* as a critical space for surfacing relationality, positionality and power. In this context, the self-interview was not merely a site of personal reflection but a deliberate, critical, engaged method that foregrounded my own situatedness within the research. It employed the same analytical framework used with participant data,yet ,simultaneously exposed and interrogated the limits of that framework. By making my positionality visible and open to scrutiny, the self-interview functioned as both a methodological mirror and a challenge to normative research hierarchies.

At the same time, this process remained grounded in the reflexive narration that threads throughout the thesis, positioning self-analysis as a sustained epistemological stance rather than a methodological afterthought. This dual orientation was further enriched by Ellis's (2004) work *on evocative autoethnography*, which foregrounds the emotional texture and affective resonance of lived experience as meaningful analytic contributions. Consistent with the study's critical realist ontology (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019) my self-narrative was

not treated as an introspective monologue but as an agentic account situated within and shaped by wider structural and cultural forces. My digital practices were contextualised by institutional expectations, the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and significant platform-level shifts, especially following Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter (Clayton and Hoskins 2025). These dynamics created evolving conditions under which digital agency was enacted, restrained and reconfigured.

The analysis presented in this section directly responds to Sub-question 3: **What role does autoethnography play in understanding the challenges and affordances of digital professional engagement for neurodivergent educators?**

The decision to include my own narrative was not solely methodological but also grounded in a commitment to insider-led knowledge and epistemic justice (Le Gallais 2008; Grant and Kara 2021; Chapman and Carel 2022). My positionality, as a neurodivergent insider-researcher, was embedded in every stage of the research process and shaped my interpretations of participants ' accounts, particularly around themes of precarity, digital fatigue and visibility. Conducting the self-interview blurred the boundaries between method and meaning-making, surfacing moments of both analytical clarity and emotional friction. While I anticipated a degree of detachment, I encountered unexpected affective intensity, particularly when revisiting experiences of misrecognition, masking and strategic silence.

Listening back to my own words was at times disembodying, as if it were analysing someone else, yet at other points, especially when recalling digital withdrawal or miscommunication, the emotional resonance was immediate and sharp. These dissonances revealed the invisible labour involved in crafting a 'professional' digital self and reminded me that autoethnography is not only a tool for generating insight, but also a practice of inhabiting vulnerability. Reflexivity, in this context, became more than a methodological stance; it was an ongoing ethical and epistemological commitment to making myself visible within, and accountable to, the analytic frame.

The analysis that follows applies the Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis six-phase framework to thematically examine the self-interview data. To maintain analytic consistency and allow for meaningful cross-data comparison, the coding schema mirrors that used in participant interviews. The resulting themes speak not only to my own experiences but also to broader questions of agency, identity and precarity, all of which are further developed through synthesis in Chapter 6.

5.5.2 Familiarisation with the Data

During the familiarisation phase of the autoethnographic self-interview, I engaged in a sustained process of

immersion, listening back to my recording and reading the transcript multiple times using speech-to-text software. This was a strategy I used throughout the thesis to support processing and attentional focus when reading large amounts of text. Consistent with the agentic layer of critical realism (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019), I approached this phase not as an act of introspective recall but as an interpretive encounter with lived experience situated within social structures and mediated by cultural norms. The goal was to surface how personal agency was enacted in response to platform changes, institutional pressures and evolving relational contexts.

Early in this process, several recurring patterns emerged. This included reflection on neurodivergent identity, emotional responses to online misrecognition, the intensifying role of Twitter during COVID-19 and the progressive shift from active participation to more cautious, curated engagement. The familiarisation phase also revealed how digital presence was shaped by a blend of affective motivations (e.g validation, belonging), strategic concerns (e.g. visibility and risk) and embodied realities (e.g. burnout, impulsivity, discomfort with surveillance). These insights provided the foundation for coding and thematic construction in subsequent phases.

The patterns outlined in **Table 18** reflect the key interpretative threads that emerged during the familiarisation stage and provided the conceptual ground for subsequent phases of coding and theme development.

Table 18: Initial patterns identified during Familiarisation with the Autoethnographic Self-Interview

Pattern	Description
Neurodivergent Identity	Reflections on how autism, ADHD, and dyslexia shaped digital engagement, tone, and communicative boundaries on Twitter.
COVID-19 Intensification	Heightened use of Twitter during lockdown as a means of maintaining professional visibility, relational continuity, and academic motivation.
Digital Belonging	The importance of Twitter in connecting with neurodivergent educators and inclusive academic communities, especially in early doctoral stages.
Miscommunication and Risk	Discomfort around online misinterpretation, impulsive posting, and the perceived scrutiny of academic Twitter users.
Strategic Adaptation	A shift toward selective sharing, use of hashtags, post deletion, and increasingly passive engagement over time.

This initial phase highlighted the tension between connection and caution, visibility and self-protection. It also made clear that my experiences, while deeply personal, were informed by broader structural forces such as institutional ableism, platform instability and shifting norms of academic professionalism online. These patterns

were elaborated through formal coding in the next analytical phase.

5.5.3 Generating Initial Codes

Following the familiarisation phase, I moved into systemic coding of the self-interview transcript using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis framework. Rather than using software such as NVivo, I adopted a more holistic and embodied approach to interpretation. One that aligned with my neurodivergent cognitive style and sensory preferences. Specifically, I printed out the transcript and engaged with it physically, using two colours to highlight different dimensions of the data: one *for tangible actions* (e.g. tweeting, deleting, sharing) and another for *abstract* or *affective states* (e.g. emotional withdrawal, identity masking or self-regulation).

This kinaesthetic method allowed for a more emotionally grounded and accessible engagement with the data. I often find digital-only modes of interaction emotionally distancing and cognitively flattening, which can inhibit the interpretative intuition and affective responsiveness needed for reflexive analysis. By working with physical materials, I was better able to engage in what (Botha 2021; Chapman and Carel 2022) identify as neurodivergent ways of knowing, practices that centre embodiment, emotional salience, and nonlinear processing. It also aligns with Dark's (2024) principles of neuro-inclusion, which advocate for methodological flexibility and the validation of alternative epistemic styles in research design and interpretation. This method thus reflected a broader commitment to epistemic inclusion by resisting normative expectations around digital analysis tools and honouring alternative cognitive and sensory approaches to meaning-making.

Coding was both inductive, which allowed meaning to emerge organically from the narrative, and deductive, which was informed by the thematic categories already established through the previous participant data of the Survey and Padlet, as well as the overarching research questions. Each code was interpreted through the lens of an agentic layer of critical realism (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019) which is understood not as a fixed label but as a situated response to structural and cultural constraints.

As noted in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.9), the original annotated paper copies used during this process have unfortunately been lost. However, the coding notes and thematic categorisation were transcribed during the process and have since been preserved and integrated into this analysis. These notes were later organised into broader agentic themes to maintain alignment with the cross-method coding structure developed in the earlier sections of this chapter. The initial codes presented in **Table 19** are categorised into tangible actions and abstract or affective responses, reflecting the dual coding strategy I employed during manual analysis. This distinction aligns with the agentic focus of the study and supports a more nuanced understanding of how behavioural expressions and internalised meaning-making co-constitute neurodivergent digital agency.

Table 19: Initial Coding Structure-Autoethnographic Self-Interview

Tangible Actions	Abstract / Affective Responses
Posting and deleting tweets	Masking and self-monitoring
Using hashtags for visibility	Navigating misrecognition and fear of misinterpretation
Following/unfollowing accounts	Impulse regulation and emotional withdrawal
Participating in hashtag communities	Balancing authenticity and credibility
Sending DMs to initiate collaboration	Feeling scrutinised or surveyed
Retweeting cautiously	Anxiety over digital permanence and institutional visibility
Bookmarking and curating content	Strategic silence and self-protection
Reducing frequency of posts	Oscillation between belonging and alienation
Tracking engagement with research-related tweets	Sensory and cognitive fatigue related to hypervisibility

The distinction between tangible and affective codes provided a layered foundation for the next analytic phase. Building on this dual-coded structure, I began clustering related codes into broader thematic categories, paying particular attention to how the expression of agency was shaped by intersecting structural, cultural and digital conditions. This stage of the analysis aligned with Braun and Clarke's (2022) third phase: interpreting themes and involved moving beyond descriptive coding to develop interpretative groupings that captured the complexity of my evolving relationship with Twitter.

5.5.4 Interpreting Agentic Themes

Moving on from the initial coding structure, I proceeded to interpret and cluster related codes into broader agentic themes. Here, I moved beyond descriptive categorisation to explore the deeper meanings and interpretative relationships between codes, attending closely to how expressions of agency were shaped by institutional constraints, digital affordances and affective experience. This stage required sustained reflexive engagement, which Finlay's (2002) describes as “negotiating the swamp” of entangled subjectivity and situated knowledge. Rather than aiming for fixed objectivity, I embraced the iterative, uncertain nature of meaning-making in qualitative research. My decision about how to group and interpret codes was informed not only by empirical proximity to the data but also by my lived familiarity with the affective labour of digital professionalism. This entanglement resonates with Alvesson and Sköldberg's (2009) conceptualisation of reflexive interpretation as a multi-layered process involving interaction between empirical material, theoretical

positioning and the researcher's self.

Through repeated re-engagement with the transcript and highlighted codes, I began to identify critical junctures where tangible actions, such as deleting posts or curating content, intersected with affective responses, including self-doubt, fatigue and strategic withdrawal. These intersections, or what Pousti et al. (2021) frame as reflexive moments in virtual research, acted as key indicators of agentic deliberation. They revealed how decisions about visibility, engagement and silence were not just behavioural choices but situated responses to complex power dynamics across institutional and digital spaces. It echoes findings by Skafle et al. (2024) who observe that social media spaces both enable and constrain the articulation of autistic identity, an ambiguity that played out across many of my own decisions on Twitter. Interpreting these coded moments through this reflexive, theory-informed lens helped surface the multiple and often conflicting logics underpinning digital agency as a neurodivergent educator.

The interpretative process resulted in the construction of three overlapping yet analytically distinct themes. These themes reflect not only concrete behaviours but also the affective and strategic deliberations through which I navigated the challenges of digital visibility, misrecognition and professional identity performance. They were not developed as static categories but a dynamic articulation of agency, emergent through the recursive tensions between personal intention, structural constraint and platform transformation.

1. **Strategic Presence and Withdrawal**

This theme captures the oscillation between active participation and intentional absence. It includes practices such as deleting tweets, avoiding comment threads or limiting posts to professional updates. These actions were often driven by internalised caution and the need to manage potential reputational risk. Instead of being read as disengagement, they represent calculated forms of agentic self-preservation, what Skafle et al. (2024) might call protective boundary-setting in response to platform-based exposure.

2. **Negotiating Belonging and Misrecognition**

This theme reflects the affective push and pull between moments of inclusion and instances of misalignment or surveillance within digital academic spaces. It echoes the patterns previously identified in the Padlet analysis under the theme Claiming Belonging through Cultural Affiliation (see Section 5.4.5), particularly in relation to *Minimalist Connection and Relational Cues* and *Epistemic Solidarity and Community Building.* During the self-interview, I described how hashtags, retweets and informal engagement created fleeting but meaningful links to others, micro-moments of affirmation that signalled shared values or identities. However, these connections were often fragile and contingent, disrupted by algorithmic shifts or interpretive breakdowns.

However, these connections were fragile and often disrupted by algorithmic filtering, unreciprocated responses, or the subtle dynamics of academic hierarchies. The emotional weight of being misread or overlooked was palpable, surfacing as moments of strategic withdrawal or increased self-monitoring. As Botha (2021) reflects, autistic scholars frequently navigate academic spaces marked by epistemic tension, where recognition is conditional and participation may be interpreted through pathologising or exclusionary lenses. Rather than neutral, digital belonging was something I experienced as conditional and contingent; it demanded ongoing interpretative labour and often came at a cognitive or emotional cost.

3. Performing Professional Identity

This theme captures the layered negotiations involved in managing credibility, authenticity and visibility within digital academic spaces. As I reflected during the self-interview, what might appear as routine acts, posting research updates, participating in online discussions or sharing milestones, often required significant behind-the-scenes labour. These moments were not neutral forms of communication but highly managed performances, shaped by internalised norms and institutional expectations. This aligns directly with the theoretical framing in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.5.1) where professional identity is conceptualised not as a static trait but as a *situated and constrained performance* (Butler 2015; Goffman 2021).

Drawing on Goffman's (2021) dramaturgical model and Butler's (2015) theory of performativity, my use of Twitter involved carefully staged performances of fluency, confidence and composure, pre-emptively shaped by how I anticipated my posts might be read or misread by a blended audience. These performances were not freely chosen but conditioned by institutional norms that define and constrain what counts as 'professional', often necessitating masking strategies among neurodivergent educators (Pearson and Rose 2021; Radulski 2022). Bourdieu's (1990) concept of *habitus* further illuminates how such performances are not solely personal adaptations but embedded responses to socially structured environments. As Reay (2004) argues, *habitus* must be understood not just as individual disposition but as a product of institutional structuring, shaped through repeated interactions with dominant norms that reinforce particular ways of being, speaking and appearing.

My reflex to self-regulate, curate tone, and anticipated reception was not innate, but developed through sustained exposure to academic cultures that valorise neurotypical behaviours such as assertiveness, emotional neutrality and charismatic self-promotion. Lewis and Arday (2003) expand this critique by highlighting how higher education remains shaped by white, Eurocentric and neurotypical norms that marginalise those who do not conform. Their work reinforces that professional identity performance cannot be disentangled from structural inequalities. For neurodivergent educators, the demand to be 'legible' within such systems often entails affective labour, scripting and the suppression of cognitive or communicative difference. These performances are agentic but constrained, survival strategies within institutional spaces that reward conformity

over authenticity.

My experience on Twitter both reflected and resisted these norms, while context collapse intensified the need for impression management (Marwick and Boyd 2011), asynchronous and peer-curated interactions offered temporary reprieve. These affordances aligned with the concept of Twitter as a digital third space (Whitchurch 2013; McDougall and Potter 2019; Scott and Gibson 2022), allowing for a more neurodivergent-authentic form of professional engagement. However, as Egner (2022) cautions, these spaces remain shaped by the broader politics of visibility and recognition, requiring constant recalibration between self-expression and institutional legibility.

The three themes constructed through this interpretative process: **Strategic Presence and Withdrawal, Negotiating Belonging and Misrecognition** and **Performing Professional Identity**, offer a layered account of how agency was enacted with the self-interview. Each theme illustrates a distinct but interconnected set of responses to institutional constraints, digital platform dynamics and affective labour. While grounded in personal experience, these themes also resonate with broader patterns identified in participant data, particularly around identity performance, precarity and the conditional nature of digital inclusion. Importantly, the themes illuminate how neurodivergent digital agency is not static or uniform, but emergent, reflexive and shaped by an ongoing negotiation between safety, visibility and relational recognition.

Naming and defining these themes were emotionally charged. I had initially thought of my choices on Twitter, what I posted, deleted or withheld as individual quirks or habits. But through this analytical process, I came to see them as deeply patterned responses to the pressures of being seen, and mis-seen, in both institutional and digital contexts. Performing professionalism, navigating fragile belonging and withdrawing for self-preservation were not isolated acts but interwoven strategies shaped by years of subtle messaging about what was permissible, intelligible or 'professional' for someone like me. This stage of the analysis reminded me that reflexivity is not only a practice of looking inward but of looking structurally, of seeing oneself as shaped by systems, not just sensations.

5.5.5 Reviewing Agentic Themes

This section reviews three major themes identified in Section 5.5.4: **Strategic Presence and Withdrawal**, **Negotiating Belonging and Misrecognition** and **Performing Professional Identity** and situates them within the agentic layer of critical realism. This ontological layer emphasises individuals' capacity for reflexive deliberation and intentional action in response to the constraints and affordances of their social environment. (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019) These themes are now examined in relation to the main research question: **How do**

neurodivergent educators negotiate and develop their professional and personal identities on Twitter? More specifically, in Sub-Question 3, **what role does autoethnography play in understanding the challenges and affordances of digital professional engagement for neurodivergent educators?**

The theme *Strategic Presence and Withdrawal* encapsulates how I consciously curated visibility and invisibility on Twitter to navigate the emotional and cognitive demands of digital engagement. This echoes Egner (2022) identifies as "strategic silences within autistic digital identity work, moments where disengagement is an active response to epistemic overload, surveillance or risk. Egner (2022) situates these "strategic silences" within a broader collection of agentic practices that shape both individual and collective identity narratives, highlighting how autistic users navigate a space simultaneously laden with opportunity and risk. From a critical realist standpoint, such actions reflect the agent's embodied navigation of cultural expectations, rather than passive compliance or disengagement. These reflexive choices can be seen as agentic adaptations to a socio-digital field where visibility is both opportunity and threat, as discussed by Marwick and Boyd (2011).

The second theme, *Negotiating Belonging and Misrecognition,* centres on the tension between the desire for community and the risk of misreading, exclusion or tokenism. These findings align with Barroso-Moreno et al. (2024) categorisation of inclusive education narratives on social media, which reveal the epistemic hierarchies that govern who is recognised as an authoritative voice. Their analysis shows that belonging in digital disability discourses is often conditional, shaped by platform norms and dominant representations. For neurodivergent users, this results in heightened epistemic labour, as one must constantly modulate tone, narrative form and disclosure strategies to avoid misrecognition or tokenism.

This resonates with Botha et al. (2022) who describe autistic community connectedness as both empowering and effortful, requiring emotional labour to align with shared values, affirm identity and navigate the tensions between authenticity and inclusion. While their work focuses broadly on autistic community belonging rather than Twitter specifically, the underlying dynamics of epistemic negotiation and relational labour echo my own experiences in digital spaces.

The final theme, *Performing Professional Identity,* illustrates how I enacted professional legitimacy through strategic self-presentation, drawing on Twitter's affordances to balance authenticity with risk management. This aligns with Goffman's (2021) dramaturgical perspective, where the "front stage" of digital engagement becomes a site for managing impressions in line with perceived audience expectations. Similarly, Butler's (2015) theory of performativity helps conceptualise how repeated acts of professional disclosure and boundary-setting contribute to the ongoing constitution of identity, not as a fixed essence but as something enacted through constrained and situated repetition.

These insights are especially relevant to the negotiation of professional presence on Twitter, where formal and informal registers blur. As Carpenter et al. (2022) observe, educators used hashtags and other digital signals to manage both peer visibility and professional credibility, often blending affective authenticity with disciplinary positioning. Similarly, Chatterjee et al. (2023) document how users in the #ActuallyAutistic community perform identity through discourse shaped by intersecting norms of embodiment and recognition.

In my case, the performance of professionalism was not a conscious roleplay but a reflexive practice of navigation. As I reflected in the self-interview:

> *"I focus on sharing my role as an educator/academic, my current research, and my professional development activities on Twitter, rather than my general daily life… I can be impulsive due to my ADHD and might post a tweet but later delete it if I feel it's too personal".*

This quote illustrates the affective tension between visibility and vulnerability, between the desire to engage authentically and the risk of being misunderstood or exposed. Butler's (2009) concerned with the precarity of recognition, the idea that identity becomes "liveable" only when it is rendered intelligible within public norms, speaks directly to this dilemma. Twitter became a space where my neurodivergent identity was both affirmed and surveilled, offering fleeting moments of resonance but also continual pressure to self-edit.

Looking back at my Twitter practice through the lens of this analysis, I now recognise how much of my digital self-presentation was shaped not by explicit institutional rules but by a gradual internalisation of what felt appropriate, legible and safe within academic cultures. Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus and Reay's (2004) account of its institutional formation helped me understand that my behaviour online: curating tone, withholding posts, anticipating misreadings, emerged not from personality quirks but from social conditioning. As I reflected during the self-interview:

> "I'm mindful of not sharing too much personal stuff, except for topics like neurodiversity, as I'm an advocate for it".

Through the process of self-analysis, I came to understand these strategies not as acts of caution but as patterned responses to a professional field where visibility is both a necessity and vulnerability. Initially, I had viewed moments of posting and deleting as impulsive or idiosyncratic. Autoethnographic reflection allowed me to reinterpret them as agentic responses to structurally embedded expectations, shaped over time by tacit lessons about credibility, emotion and intelligibility. Twitter, in this light, was not just a neutral tool for communication but a dynamic and often contradictory space where professional identity was constantly performed, negotiated and sometimes withheld.

This layered understanding reinforces the value of autoethnography as a means of surfacing hidden dimensions of professional life that often go unspoken, especially for neurodivergent educators. By tracing how I navigated these themes in real time, the autoethnographic self-interview revealed not only *what* I did but *why* those choices mattered and how they were entangled with broader dynamics of recognition, risk and epistemic labour. Having explored the interpretative significance of these agentic patterns, the next section consolidated this analysis by defining and naming the core themes derived from the autoethnographic data. These themes offer a conceptual map of how digital agency was enacted through reflexive practice, affective strategy and identity performance, framed within the agentic layer of critical realism. As with the cultural analysis of the Padlet data (5.4.5), the following section rearticulates these findings to clarify their theoretical coherence and prepare for comparative synthesis in Chapter 6.

5.5.6 Defining and Naming Themes

This section consolidates the agentic themes developed through reflexive thematic analysis of the autoethnographic self-interview, building on interpretative insights from Sections 5.5.4 and 5.5.5. Each theme has been conceptualised as a mode of agentic deliberation, capturing how professional identity was negotiated through conscious and constrained decision-making within the digital environment of Twitter. In line with the agentic layer of critical realism, these themes do not present behaviour as purely individual or expressive, but as intentional actions situated within enabling and limiting conditions (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019).

The process of naming themes involved sustained reflexive iteration, guided by how decisions around presence, tone, and content reflected deeper tensions between professional legitimacy, personal authenticity, and perceived risk. Rather than categorising these themes solely as emotional reactions or behaviour styles, they are framed as strategic negotiations, practices through which I enacted digital agency in response to internalised academic norms, platform affordances, and the shifting politics of visibility. These themes speak directly to the structural and cultural dynamics explored in earlier Sections, while foregrounding the agent's perspective in navigating and responding to such dynamics.

The finalised themes are as follows:

- Strategic Calibration of Visibility
- Boundary Work and Relational Risk
- Curating Legibility through Professionalism

Each theme is grounded in both practical action and reflexive reasoning and is supported by sub-themes that articulate the layered decisions, tensions and adaptations involved in online identity performance. Together, they can demonstrate that autoethnographic insight can offer a nuanced account of digital agency, not a singular

trait but a as constellation of situated strategies.

The following **Table 20** outlines the finalised agentic themes and their corresponding sub-themes, each representing a distinct mode of reflexive negotiation identified within the autoethnographic self-interview. These sub-themes capture the layered strategies through which digital presence, professional credibility and personal boundaries were managed in response to institutional norms and platform dynamics.

Table 20: Agentic Themes and Sub-Themes (Autoethnographic Data)

Agentic Theme	Sub-theme 1	Sub-theme 2
Strategic Calibration of Visibility	Withholding, Deleting and Post-Event Editing	Timing, Tone, and Anticipated Reception
Boundary Work and Relational Risk	Balancing Disclosure and Protection	Managing Audience Blending and Context Collapse
Curating Legibility through Professionalism	Performing Academic Norms via Hashtag/Thread Use	Minimising Divergence to Maintain Credibility

Each theme is now elaborated briefly to clarify its conceptual scope:

Strategic Calibration of Visibility: captures how my digital presence was shaped by an ongoing negotiation between openness and caution. Acts such as deleting tweets, adjusting tone, or delaying posts were not arbitrary but reflected a reflexive assessment of perceived risk and potential misreading. These strategies enabled control over what was visible, when, and to whom, highlighting the temporal and emotional labour involved in digital engagement.

Boundary Work and Relational Risk: reflects the effort to navigate the blurred lines between personal and professional audiences. This included managing the scope of self-disclosure, especially around health and neurodivergence, and interpreting when visibility might lead to misunderstanding, tokenism or disciplinary backlash. The sub-themes here centre on protective discretion and the challenge of managing intersecting publics in a collapsed context.

Curating Legibility through Professionalism: describes how I adopted institutionally recognisable academic signals, such as structured threads, research hashtags, and polished phrasing, to perform legitimacy. This involved minimising apparent neurodivergent divergence in favour of norm-compliant presentation. While these practices enabled professional visibility, they also required selective self-editing and affective masking to avoid

marginalisation.

These themes reflect the agentic layer's function as a site of reflexive decision-making, where identity is neither imposed nor freely chosen, but enacted through situated negotiation. The themes extend the structural and cultural dynamics explored earlier by highlighting how neurodivergent agency is crafted in motion: responsive to constraint, sensitive to risk, and shaped by a continual recalibration of self-expression, credibility and belonging. These themes will be integrated into Chapter 6, where they will be synthesised across all data sources to explore shared and divergent patterns of digital identity work among neurodivergent educators.

5.6 Semi-structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews formed a key component of this study's multi-layered analytical design, offering contextualised insights into participants' lived experiences as neurodivergent educators navigating digital and institutional landscapes. Aligned primarily with the agentic layer of the critical realist ontology and secondarily with cultural and structural layers. This method enabled an in-depth exploration of how individuals articulated their digital engagement, responded to platform shifts and negotiated institutional barriers. As summarised in the previous tables, the interviews contributed most directly to understanding how agency is enacted through personal narrative, particularly in relation to precarity, professional identity and inclusion.

Each participant completed a Padlet exercise in advance of the interview, which acted as a reflective scaffold and formed part of an enhanced semi-structured interview design. This approach enabled participants to visually organise and externalise their thinking in relation to the main research question, which in turn provided both structure and reassurance during the live discussion. The Padlet contributions served not only as a prompt sheet and stimulus material but also as a means of supporting the expression of complex or emotionally nuanced ideas. This multimodal, participant-led enhancement allowed for deeper insight and more meaningful discussion than the semi-structured interview alone might have permitted. The flexible, dialogic format allowed key themes linked to Sub-Questions 1,2 and 4 to surface organically. Accordingly, the analysis presented in this section builds upon the earlier survey, Padlet and autoethnographic data, while providing a dialogic space for participants to frame their own experiences in relation to broader structural and cultural conditions.

5.6.1 Drew's Interview

Familiarisation with the Data

Drew's Interview offered a reflective and agentic account of navigating life as a neurodivergent educator, blending personal and professional identities within digital and institutional contexts. Early in the conversation, he introduced himself playfully as "neuro-spicy", signalling a preference for self-definition over rigid diagnostic

labels. This framing reflects a broader strategy of authenticity that shaped how he used Twitter, not only to communicate research and teaching practice but also to make neurodivergence visible in ways that challenged normative expectations. His openness functioned relationally, helping his students feel "seen" and normalising difference with academic spaces. While not framed explicitly as pedagogic, his use of Twitter operated as an informal teaching and connection tool, illustrating a clear exercise of agency.

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged as a critical turning point in Drew's platform use. With traditional academic events cancelled, he turned to Twitter as a primary means of connection, especially with others committed to widening participation and inclusive pedagogy. He described posting more regularly, sharing everyday routines alongside professional updates and drawing comfort from the presence of like-minded peers. This intensified engagement reflects how structural disruption prompted renewed agentic participation, allowing Drew to co-construct a supportive third space where personal and professional roles were entangled and affirmed.

Throughout the interview, Drew contrasted the openness he experienced online with the limitations of institutional culture. He described a persistent lack of understanding from neurotypical colleagues and noted that many peers were hesitant to be visibly neurodivergent in professional contexts. Twitter, in contrast, offered an environment where authenticity felt safer and where opportunities such as speaking engagements and collaborations emerged organically. While his comments about changes to the platform were cautious, he did remark on a shift in atmosphere post-pandemic, suggesting some ambivalence about its evolving culture. These observations subtly highlight structural and cultural tensions between inclusive digital spaces and more risk-averse institutional environments.

Drew's description of his online network underscored a preference for relationships that developed through shared understanding and a sense of mutual regard. He emphasised building connections based on trust, authenticity and common values rather than strategic intent, often reflecting on how these ties extended beyond the platform in collaborative work and personal friendship. Rather than positioning networking as a means to professional advancement, Drew framed these relationships as a natural extension of meaningful engagement with others who shared his commitments. These accounts reflect a cultural orientation towards community-building grounded in relational authenticity, suggesting Twitter served not only as a professional tool but also as a space where credibility and belonging were cultivated through informal, values-led interaction.

Table 21 below summarises the key interpretative patterns identified during the initial phase of thematic familiarisation with Drew's interview data.

Table 21: Summary of Initial Patterns (Drew)

Initial Pattern	Descriptive Summary
Blending of personal and professional identity	Drew used Twitter to present an integrated self, where openness about neurodivergence supported both self-expression and student connection. This reflected a deliberate agentic stance that challenged institutional norms.
Deepened engagement during COVID-19	The pandemic prompted a shift in Drew's use of Twitter, intensifying his engagement and turning the platform into a third space for connection, solidarity, and academic presence.
Digital visibility as a form of inclusion	Drew described visibility on Twitter as affirming and necessary, contrasting it with the caution and misunderstandings he encountered within his institution. This pointed to underlying cultural and structural misalignments.
Value-led peer connection and community	He emphasised relational, trust-based engagement over strategic networking. These organically developed ties extended into collaborations and reflected a cultural emphasis on shared values and authenticity.

Generating Initial Codes

Initial coding of Drew's transcript focused on capturing meaning across the agentic, cultural and structural layers of the critical realist framework. Codes were generated inductively and reflected Drew's own language where possible, allowing emergent patterns to remain grounded in lived experience. His agentic positioning was evident in expressions of neurodivergent identity as both a pedagogic strength and a professional stance, particularly in his use of Twitter for visibility, self-definition and student connection. These were reflected in codes such as "authentic presentation", "neurodivergent self-labelling" and "self-disclosure as support".

Cultural and structural dynamics were also evident across the interview. Drew's emphasis on value-led connection and informal peer engagement gave rise to codes such as "relational reciprocity" and "shared discourse as affiliation", while his observations on institutional misalignment and disclosure unease were reflected in codes like "neurotypical assumptions" and "emotional labour invisibility". Collectively, these initial codes reflect the layered negotiations Drew undertakes in presenting a professional identity that is both situated and resistant. **Table 22** below summarises these codes and their analytical focus.

Table 22: Initial Codes Generated from Drew's Interview

Code	Description
Authentic presentation	Strategic blending of personal and professional identity to express neurodivergence.

Neurodivergent self-labelling	Use of informal and non-clinical terms (e.g. “neuro-spicy”) to assert identity on personal terms.
Self-disclosure as support	Framing personal openness as beneficial for students and peer relatability.
Relational reciprocity	Building peer connections through mutual trust, respect, and shared values.
Shared discourse as affiliation	Expressing belonging through cultural references and community-informed language.
Neurotypical assumptions	Recognition of academic norms that obscure or devalue neurodivergent experiences.
Emotional labour invisibility	Unacknowledged effort is involved in sustaining openness and relational professionalism.
Declining platform safety	Subtle expression of discomfort with changes in Twitter culture and atmosphere.

Searching for themes using Critical Realist Ontology

This section interprets Drew’s interview through the three-layered lens of Archer’s stratified ontology: structure, culture and agency (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019). While analytically distinct, these layers interact to shape how neurodivergent educators navigate identity, inclusion and visibility in digital and institutional contexts.

Structural Layer: Navigation Institutional Incoherence

Drew’s narrative reflects the invisibility of institutional support, highlighting a discrepancy between surface-level diversity rhetoric and the actual lived support for neurodivergent educators. He alluded to workplace contexts that lacked meaningful follow-through, relying instead on individual educators to interpret and embody inclusion. This experience echoes critiques of structural ableism within higher education, where neurodiversity remains insufficiently integrated into core institutional logics (Brown and Leigh 2018; Clouder et al. 2020)

The second structural theme concerns the emotional labour of disclosure, especially the imbalance between the sustained effort required to remain visibly neurodivergent and the minimal institutional response. Drew reflected on having to repeatedly signal his neurodivergence without meaningful follow-up or structural change, noting that while he was open, his disclosure rarely prompted deeper engagement or support. This ongoing expectation to self-advocate became another form of unrecognised labour: persistent, internalised and institutionally unsupported. His experience reflects Botha's (2021) argument that neurodivergent educators often carry the weight of inclusion work, shouldering responsibilities that institutions fail to systematise or reward.

Cultural Layer: Visibility and Shared Norms in Digital Space

Drew's account demonstrated a strong alignment with the cultural values of the neurodivergent Twitter community. One major theme was authentic visibility, evident in his self-descriptions using humorous terms like "neuro-Spicy" to signal both confidence and solidarity. These acts reflect broader online discourses in which self-labelling functions as a form of agency and cultural participation (Egner 2022; Barroso-Moreno et al. 2024).

A second cultural theme was relational engagement over networking. Drew described building connections based on mutual respect and shared values rather than engaging in transactional academic networking. His interactions were shaped by a sense of informal solidarity and personal resonance rather than by status or strategic gain. These connections often blurred personal and professional lines but were held together by a third-space culture of emotional openness and epistemic affinity. This reflects wider dynamics within neurodivergent digital spaces, where professional identity is negotiated not through traditional hierarchies but through shared norms of support, authenticity and co-presence (Whitchurch 2013; Obexer 2022; Scott and Gibson 2022, 2023).

Agentic Layer: Identity Work and Strategic Positioning

At the agentic level, Drew exercised strategic self-disclosure as pedagogy, choosing to share elements of his identity in ways that modelled inclusive practice for students. Rather than retreating for visibility due to institutional risks, he leaned into openness as a form of empowerment. This illustrates the kind of reflexive identity work that foregrounds lived experience and contributes meaningfully to collective knowledge production and inclusive pedagogical practice (Nicolaidis et al. 2019; Chapman and Carel 2022).

The final theme, resilient identity performance, emerged in Drew's adaptive use of Twitter, where he maintained authenticity and boundaries despite the shifting platform dynamics. His emphasis on routine, humour and selective engagement demonstrates a conscious negotiation of online presence that enabled him to sustain agency while resisting normative expectations. This behaviour resonates with Archer's (2007) concept of meta-reflexivity, where individuals engage in sustained internal deliberation to critically evaluate their social context and pursue action in line with personal values. Rather than conforming to institutional scripts or digital performance norms, Drew's reflexive practice constituted a mode of identity work grounded in integrity and self-awareness, mobilising agency within and sometimes against structural and cultural constraints.

Table 23 summarises the six key themes from Drew's interview, mapped against structural, cultural and agentic layers of the critical realist framework, and highlights how each theme contributes to understanding neurodivergent identity navigation across digital and institutional contexts.

Table 23: Summary of Thematic Interpretations from Drew's Interview Across Critical Realist Layers

Theme	Ontological Layer	Interpretive Note
Invisibility of institutional support	Structural	Highlights the gap between policy rhetoric and lived institutional practice for neurodivergent staff.
Emotional labour of disclosure	Structural	Describes the unacknowledged personal toll of being visibly neurodivergent in unsupportive environments.
Authentic visibility	Cultural	Reflects the affirmation of identity through informal self-labelling and expressive online discourse.
Relational engagement over networking	Cultural	Shows preference for value-based connections over instrumental academic networking.
Strategic self-disclosure as pedagogy	Agentic	Uses openness as a pedagogical tool to model inclusivity and reduce stigma among students.
Resilient identity performance	Agentic	Demonstrates adaptive, reflexive identity work under shifting platform and institutional conditions.

Reviewing Themes

The six themes identified from Drew's interview illustrate how neurodivergent educators negotiate digital and institutional terrains through intersecting structural, cultural and agentic practices. These findings contribute directly to the main research question by evidencing how professional and personal identities are constructed through reflexive digital engagement. They also inform Sub-Question 1 by clarifying how Twitter supports third space interactions rooted in relational affinity; Sub-Question 2 by showing how platform dynamics shape emotional and practical engagement; and Sub-Question 4 by highlighting institutional failures and educator-led inclusion practices.

Invisibility of institutional support

Drew's account highlighted the gap between disclosure and systemic response:

"No one in the department's ever really asked more about it… You have to do the work yourself". This disconnect reflects institutional inertia in enacting inclusive rhetoric often fails to translate into material change. As Brown and Leigh (2018) argue, academic ableism often persists beneath the surface of formal diversity commitments, enabling structural silences around neurodivergent inclusion. Wharmby (2022) similarly critiques the expectation that neurodivergent individuals must 'self-accommodate', bearing the burden of navigating unsupportive systems. This insight is further supported by Mellifont (2023) as this disconnect is part of a wider trend in higher education, where the aesthetics of inclusion mask institutional disinvestment in meaningful change. Together, these perspectives frame Drew's narrative within a wider structural context of neglect and

silent exclusion, directly addressing Sub-Question 4.

Emotional labour of disclosure

Drew's experience of repeatedly asserting his neurodivergent identity, despite limited institutional recognition, illustrates the emotional toll of disclosure:

> *"There's a general assumption that if you've said it once, that's enough… but it's like you've got to keep repeating yourself".*

His reflection captures the ongoing emotional labour involved in asserting identity, where inclusive practices are static or absent. Brown and Leigh (2018) argue that disabled staff are frequently made responsible for enacting their own inclusion, navigating systems that assume disclosure is a one-off administrative act rather than a sustained negotiation. Beaux et. al (2024) similarly critique institutional models of support that rely on reactive, diagnosis-based interventions, highlighting the need for proactive and adaptive frameworks that recognise disclosure as a "fluid, relational and context-sensitive process". This theme highlights how precarity and institutional silence compel neurodivergent educators to perform repeated self-legibility, particularly in the absence of proactive support (Sub-Question 4).

Authentic Visibility

Rather than rely on formal descriptors, Drew used informal cues, such as humour and familiar language, to signal aspects of his identity: *"I make jokes about being neuro-spicy… but it's still a way of telling people something real".* This illustrates how digital spaces enable partial, playful disclosure that still conveys legitimacy and fosters belonging. Egner (2022) explores similar dynamics in the context of Twitter, showing how neurodivergent users engage in aesthetic and affective meaning-making that supports both personal authenticity and community values. Chatterjee et al. (2023) further demonstrates how identity signalling among #ActuallyAutistic users often relies on multimodal and humorous expressions, especially for those with motor differences, reinforcing digital culture as a space for reframing normativity. This aligns with Beaux et al.'s (2024) *Guiding Empowerment Model*, which advocates for liberatory, context-sensitive models of self-representation that decentre formal disclosure in favour of relational, participant-led expression. Such practices contribute to third-space identity work, enabling neurodivergent educators like Drew to resist rigid professional norms through nuanced, culturally resonant visibility strategies (Sub-Questions 1 and 2).

Relational Engagement Over Networking

Drew's use of Twitter was not rooted in careerist goals or strategic visibility but in fostering reciprocal relationships and emotional resonance: *"I want to hear someone's story… not just the polished bits".*
His digital presence prioritised dialogue, emotional resonance and everyday honesty over the strategic self-promotion often associated with academic networking. This relational orientation reflects a broader

neurodivergent ethos of community-building grounded in mutual recognition, peer affirmation and affective labour. Botha et al. (2022) explore this in their study of autistic community connectedness, emphasising how such spaces enable solidarity, shared values and the co-construction of meaning, often positioned as a countercultural response to dominant individualist norms.

This mode of engagement aligns with Scott and Gibson's concept of Twitter as a Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP), in which neurodivergent educators participate through situated, relational practices rather than competitive performance. Barroso-Moreno et al. (2024) identify how Twitter serves as a platform for disseminating the lived experience of discrimination and structural exclusion, enabling neurodivergent users to voice critical perspectives and challenge dominant narratives around inclusion and expertise in education. Drew's approach exemplifies this shift: his engagement on Twitter operated as a form of digital agency that resists institutional cultures of individualism, instead embracing relational authenticity and mutual support (Sub Questions 1,2 and 4)

Strategic self-disclosure as pedagogy

This theme captures how Drew consciously leveraged disclosure as a pedagogical strategy to foster inclusion, model reflexivity, and normalise neurodivergence in academic contexts. His narrative positions openness as an ethical and professional stance rather than a risk-averse calculation.

> *"I feel it's the only way I can do my job properly… if I say to the students, 'Look, I've got dyslexia, you are going to get some typos in your feedback', they tend to then not complain… but it also helps some of them go, oh, you are willing to share that you are not perfect… We'll give something back and be honest about our struggles".*

Drew's approach aligns with the insights of Kidwell et al. (2023), who discuss the complexities of disclosure versus masking in the workplace. They highlight that disclosure can lead to increased authenticity and trust, but it also involves navigating potential risks associated with stigma and bias. Drew's proactive disclosure serves as a model for students, demonstrating that acknowledging one's neurodivergence can be a strength rather than a liability. Santuzzi and Keating (2022) and Denisen (2024) both emphasise the strategic nature of disclosure, noting how neurodivergent individuals must navigate institutional expectations and the emotional labour involved in making themselves legible to others.

Drew's use of personal experience as a relational bridge supports this view: his disclosures are not only protective but pedagogically generative, enabling him to model inclusion and challenge dominant deficit-based assumptions about neurodivergence. This reflects what Arnold and Mundy (2020) term *praxis pedagogy*, a form of teaching model rooted in reflexive, socially engaged practice where lived experience becomes a site of knowledge production. In this way, Drew reframes vulnerability as an intentional and agentic act that

strengthens student engagement and disrupts normative academic scripts and embodies a critical pedagogy of presence.

Resilient Identity Performance

Drew's account reveals a dynamic, reflexive form of identity work that navigates professional demands while asserting neurodivergent legitimacy. Rather than presenting a coherent, linear self, Drew embraces multiplicity and strategic adaptability, embodying the kind of fluid negotiation Braidotti (2011) associates with nomadic subjectivity. His capacity to hyper-focus, pivot across projects, and create pedagogical space for difference signals a refusal to be bound by institutional scripts. This iterative navigation between exposure and protection, structure and autonomy, is central to the nomadic sensibility, which understands professional identity as a process shaped by exclusion, adaptation, and situated knowledge-making.

Drew's refusal to mask, paired with his epistemic legitimacy as an educator, highlights how neurodivergent professional identity is assembled through continual movement between spaces of constraint and possibility, whether institutional, digital, or affective:

> *"Actually, if the day job's getting boring, I can find an interesting side project… I can really hyper-focus on something I'm interested in for a period, and then you can take it away from me. That's lovely".*

In resisting these norms, Drew's practices engage with Bourdieu's (1990) concept of *habitus*, referring to the internalised dispositions shaped by one's position within a social field. Within academia, this field is structured by normative expectations around expertise, productivity, and professional comportment. Neurodivergent identity, in this context, often disrupts the assumed alignment between habitus and institutional capital, creating a dissonance that must be negotiated. Drew's adaptive strategies, including his capacity to hyper-focus, shift across projects, and selectively disclose, exemplify a form of *resilient identity performance* in which legitimacy is not assumed or passively bestowed, but actively enacted through continuous negotiation of risk and recognition.

This aligns with Brown and Leigh's (2018) argument that ableism in academia remains endemic, with disclosure often framed as a liability that jeopardises credibility. Rather than viewing Drew's refusal to mask as an act of defiance alone, it may be more accurately read as an epistemic claim to space, a performance of legitimacy within a field that typically marginalises difference (Fricker, 2007). Brown (2020) further emphasises that disabled academics often develop tactical performances to survive exclusionary norms, suggesting that resilience is not simply a matter of personal character, but is also structurally conditioned. In this sense, Drew's resilient identity work exemplifies the logic of the *Nomadic Educator*, not through abandoning the academy, but by reshaping his place within it through iterative and strategic movement.

Drew's narrative illustrates how resilient identity performance is not merely an individual coping strategy, but a

dynamic form of critical labour. His ongoing negotiation between institutional scripts and neurodivergent embodiment demonstrates how legitimacy is asserted through reflexive agency rather than normative conformity. This aligns with the *Nomadic Educator* framework introduced in Section 2.6, which conceptualises professional identity not as a fixed endpoint, but as a contingent process shaped by movement across institutional, digital, and affective terrains. Drew's capacity to remain professionally visible without masking, to adapt pedagogically without disavowing neurodivergence, and to claim epistemic space within an ableist field exemplifies the kind of situated adaptability Braidotti (2011) associates with nomadic subjectivity.

These layered acts of navigation, across disclosure, institutional capital, and affective labour, constitute a form of epistemic resistance grounded in lived experience and oriented toward both survival and transformation. Such identity work foregrounds resilience not as neoliberal grit, but as a strategic, reflexively negotiated response to exclusionary norms, offering insight into how neurodivergent educators contest marginalisation while assembling professional selves attuned to authenticity, relationality, and change.

Defining and Naming Themes

Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis, this section finalises the interpretative phase by defining and naming the themes that emerged from Drew's interview. Each theme was mapped onto one of the three critical realist layers: structure, culture or agency (Archer 1995; Danermark 2019). The naming process aimed to clarify each theme's analytical contribution, link it to relevant literature and connect it to the research questions, especially Sub-Questions 1, 2 and 4. Where appropriate, sub-themes are included beneath each overarching theme to clarify distinct yet related dimensions of meaning.

1. Invisibility of Institutional Support

Aligned to Sub-Question 4

Sub-themes:

- Lack of proactive response following disclosure
- Self-accommodation as a default expectation
- Symbolic inclusion versus material support

This theme captures how Drew's disclosures to his department were met with institutional silence and inaction. Despite formal inclusion policies, Drew was left to navigate his needs independently, reflecting systemic neglect. This theme foregrounds the persistence of ableism behind institutional rhetoric.

2. Systemic Misrecognition and the Emotional Labour of Disclosure

Aligned with Sub-Question 4

Sub-themes:

- Repetitive self-legibility in institutional contexts
- Disclosure as an ongoing emotional burden
- Mismatch between policy and practice

Drew's account illustrates how institutional cultures frequently misrecognise neurodivergent identity as something that requires a one-off accommodation, ignoring its ongoing nature. This theme emphasises disclosure as a form of unacknowledged affective labour shaped by ableist norms.

3. Authentic Visibility through Cultural Signalling

Aligned with Main RQ and Sub-Questions 1 and 2

Sub-themes:

- Humour and informal language as affective disclosure
- Partial visibility and legitimacy
- Expressive Rhythm and Tonal Flexibility in Third-Space Communication

This theme illustrates how Drew constructs epistemic presence and relational legitimacy through culturally resonant forms of expression, including humour and informal language, strategic partial disclosure and tonal flexibility, positioning Twitter as a third space for authentic and affective identity performance.

4. Relational Engagement as Countercultural Practice

Aligned with Sub-questions 1, 2 and 4

Sub-Themes:

- Prioritising story-sharing over networking
- Digital presence as reciprocal and honest
- Solidarity and recognition through affective labour

Drew's use of Twitter resisted careerist norms, favouring emotionally grounded, peer-focused interactions. His approach reflects a neurodivergent counter-normativity grounded in mutual recognition and care.

5. Strategic self-disclosure as Pedagogical Praxis

Aligned with Sub-Questions 1, 3, and 4

Sub-Themes:

- Reflexive identity work in pedagogical spaces
- Normalising neurodivergence through lived experience
- Ethical disclosure as relational practice

Drew's approach to disclosure functions as a reflexive strategic pedagogical tool rather than a response to deficit framings. His use of lived experience within teaching spaces reflects a form of reflexive identity work that fosters mutual recognition and models inclusion. This deliberate integration of neurodivergence into professional practice aligns with the sub-themes and highlights how Drew's disclosure practices are not isolated acts but ongoing strategies that challenge normative conceptions of expertise and enhance inclusive learning environments.

6. Resilient Identity Performance and Adaptive Professionalism

Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Question 4

Sub-themes:

- Adaptive legitimacy through fluid engagement
- Performing epistemic resistance to institutional norms
- Resilience at iterative, situated agency

Drew's professional identity emerges not as fixed or linear, but as fluid, adaptive negotiation across institutional, pedagogical and digital terrains. His ability to hyper-focus, pivot across projects and blend openness with pedagogical care signals a resilient professional stance shaped by neurodivergence rather than constrained by it. These agentic responses reflect a form of epistemic resistance, where legitimacy is asserted through continuous, situated recalibration rather than conformity. Drew's narrative illustrates strategic resilience in response to exclusionary norms, exemplifying how neurodivergent educators sustain professional presence and authenticity without masking or abandoning their identity.

5.6.2 Katrina's Interview

Familiarisation with the Data

Katrina's interview offered a layered and reflexive narrative of negotiating neurodivergence within academic and

digital contexts. Her account foregrounded identity as dynamic and intersectional, shaped by her late diagnosis, acquired brain injury and gendered expectations within care and professional roles. Her initial reflections on autism were interwoven with personal histories, and she frequently positioned herself as both participant and observer in academic spaces, commenting on how difference is experienced and made legible.

Katrina described using Twitter as both a practice and an affective resource, particularly during the pandemic, when it served as a feminist space of solidarity. Her engagement was not framed in strategic terms but was characterised by mutual recognition and care work, including amplifying others' achievements and managing affective labour through careful curation. This deliberate shaping of her digital environment into a supportive echo chamber reflected a need for emotional safety in a period marked by disinformation and heightened institutional strain.

While she engaged professionally on the platform, Katrina also highlighted how personal and political values informed her use, especially in relation to inclusion, gender and trans rights. These positions were maintained through selective muting and curatorial strategies that blurred the boundaries between professionalism and protection. Post-pandemic shifts in Twitter's algorithmic logic were described as disruptive, destabilising the trusted networks she has built and diminishing the spaces' earlier sense of cohesion.

Katrina's reflections on visibility and credibility were nuanced. She noted how playful or creative self-presentation could invite engagement, yet this was balanced against concerns around institutional perceptions. The interview also revealed critical awareness of the exclusions embedded even within inclusive spaces, particularly in how dominant narratives about autism circulate through research oriented toward narrow demographic groups. Her observations suggested a broader critique of epistemic dominance and the uneven politics of voice on the platform.

Table 24 summarises the initial interpretative patterns that emerged during the familiarisation phase of Katrina's interview, capturing key aspects of her digital engagement, identity positioning and responses to platform and institutional dynamics.

Table 24: Summary of Initial Patterns

Initial Pattern	Descriptive Summary
Intersectional identity and neurodivergence	Katrina framed her neurodivergence through multiple lenses, including late diagnosis, gender, and acquired disability, revealing a complex, situated sense of self.

Emotional curation of digital space	Twitter was described as a curated echo chamber during COVID-19, designed to preserve well-being and foster supportive, feminist interaction amid widespread disinformation.
Feminist solidarity and care work	Her engagement was driven by recognition and care, with emphasis on celebrating others' small wins, especially for women balancing academic and caregiving roles.
Post-pandemic algorithmic disruption	Changes to the platform's algorithm were perceived as eroding earlier stability and filtering, disrupting relational and professional rhythms previously sustained online.
Creative self-presentation and credibility	Katrina noted that playful or creative presentation could enhance engagement but required careful balance with institutional expectations and potential reputational risk.
Critical awareness of epistemic exclusion	She raised concerns about dominant representations of autism on Twitter, questioning whose voices are amplified and how community narratives are constructed and used.

Generating Initial Codes

Initial coding of Katrina's transcript focused on identifying key meanings across structural, cultural and agentic layers, directly grounded in her language and reflective tone. Coding remained inductive, closely tracking shifts between personal insights and digital or institutional commentary. Katrina's narrative revealed a reflexive, agentic approach, particularly regarding her use of Twitter as a curated platform for professional care and affirmation. Agentic-level codes captured Katrina's management of digital identity and credibility, such as "playful self-branding", "aesthetic curation" and "care-as-presence". These codes reflected subtle strategies of self-positioning within institutional expectations rather than direct resistance. Her use of humour and personal tone for controlled visibility emerged through coding as strategic vulnerability management.

Culturally, coding highlighted feminist solidarity, emotional labour and digital codes. Relevant codes included "micro-celebration culture", "algorithmic disruption of belonging" and "support-oriented sharing". Her reflections on pandemic-era digital interactions further reinforced these codes, emphasising relational and affective community building. Structural codes captured Katrina's implicit critique of representational vias within autistic digital communities, resulting in codes such as "epistemic narrowing" and "white centric discourse". Although institutional barriers were indirectly addressed, reflections on performativity and curatorial practices highlighted implicit responses to exclusionary structures. Collectively, these codes illustrated how Katrina negotiates legitimacy and belonging in fragmented, digital-mediated spaces.

Table 25 outlines the initial codes generated from Katrina's interview, reflecting patterns of meaning across agentic, cultural and structural domains within her narrative.

Table 25: Initial Codes Generated from Katrina's Interview

Code	Description
Playful self-branding	Use of humour and informal language to present a distinctive digital persona while maintaining professional reach.
Aesthetic curation	Careful selection of content tone, imagery and language to shape an emotionally safe and credible online presence.
Care-as-presence	Digital engagement is framed as emotional labour and mutual support, particularly for peers balancing multiple roles.
Micro-celebration culture	Emphasis on recognising small achievements as a feminist practice of validation and solidarity.
Algorithmic disruption of belonging	Reflections on how changes to platform structure undermined the coherence and safety of curated peer networks.
Boundary work	Strategic muting, unfollowing or disengagement is used to maintain well-being and manage professional risk.
Support-oriented sharing	Engagement with others' content framed as care rather than self-promotion, particularly during COVID-19.
Epistemic narrowing	Critique of dominant identity discourses within online neurodivergent spaces as exclusionary or overly reductive.
White-centric discourse	Observation of racial homogeneity and lack of intersectional inclusion in mainstream autistic narratives online.

Searching for Themes in the Critical Realist Ontology

This section interprets Katrina's interview through the three-layered lens of Archer's (995) ontology: structure, culture and agency. While presented analytically as distinct, these layers intersect to shape how Katrina navigates identity, affective labour and credibility with institutional and digital spaces.

Structural Layer: Disruption of Digital Infrastructure

Katrina described Twitter as having once offered a form of digital stability, an "echo chamber" of curated safety and feminist solidarity. However, post-pandemic algorithmic changes disrupted this infrastructure, making the space feel fragmented and less affirming. This shift reflected not only a technical transformation but a structural

weakening of peer visibility and connection. What was once a third space for relational engagement became increasingly unpredictable, mirroring the broader precarity experienced by neurodivergent educators operating within marginalised epistemic frameworks (Barroso-Moreno et al. 2024).

Cultural Layer: Feminist Digital Care Practices

A key cultural theme in Katrina's interview was the enactment of care through digital engagement. She described using Twitter to amplify the achievements of others, particularly women in academia, framing these acts as everyday resistance to competitive academic cultures. This practice of micro-celebration reflected a form of feminist digital care, grounded in solidarity, emotional reciprocity and mutual recognition. Her approach aligns with the ethics of slow scholarship, where care and relational practice are positioned as forms of collective resistance within neoliberal academia (Mountz et al. 2015).

Similarly, Taylor (2018) emphasises the emotional labour involved in navigating academic life, highlighting how feminist scholars often reframe visibility through practices of feeling, failure and connection. Katrina's actions mirror these ideas, using small gestures to build affective ties and resist extractive logics of professional self-branding. Her choices reimagined credibility not through metrics but through shared values and situated acts of care.

Cultural–Agentic Layer: Curated Engagement for Coherence and Care

Katrina's approach to digital participation was characterised by deliberate curation, combining boundary-setting with adaptive self-regulation. She described muting, unfollowing, and selectively withdrawing from Twitter as strategies not of disengagement, but of emotional preservation and epistemic clarity. These practices allowed her to sustain a coherent sense of self amid the platform's shifting norms and emotional demands. Rather than seeking constant visibility, Katrina engaged reflexively, responding to her own cognitive rhythms and levels of emotional capacity. This aligns with Archer's (2007) notion of autonomous reflexivity, where agency involves actively shaping one's environment to meet internal needs.

Simultaneously, her actions reflect Marwick and Boyd's (2011) concept of context collapse, highlighting the challenges of blended audiences and the need for audience management. Her selective participation also echoes patterns seen in Virtual Communities of Practice (Scott and Gibson 2022), where community belonging is maintained through curated interaction. For Katrina, managing digital presence was an act of self-preservation as much as relational care, balancing authenticity with sustainability in ways that affirm neurodivergent needs and values.

Agentic Layer: Identity Performance Through Aesthetic Framing

Katrina's digital self-presentation was shaped by intentional aesthetic choices that enabled her to remain visible without feeling overexposed. She described using tone, imagery and subtle humour to express elements of her neurodivergent identity while maintaining professional boundaries, reflecting a calibrated approach to presence that navigated both opportunity and vulnerability. This mode of identity performance can be understood through Butler's (2015) concept of performativity, where identity emerges through iterative acts shaped by social context, and Archer's (2007) notion of reflexivity, highlighting Katrina's ongoing internal dialogue about what to share and with whom.

Rather than offering a fixed portrayal, her self-presentation shifted in response to perceived audience, platform dynamics and institutional pressures. This reflexive adaptability exemplifies a form of agentic identity work that foregrounds situational judgement and personal integrity, aligning with Biesta's (2016) emphasis on subjectification as a process of becoming through engagement with the world.

Table 26 summarises the four key themes from Katrina's Interview, mapped against structural, cultural and agentic layers of the critical realist framework. It highlights how each theme contributes to understanding how neurodivergent educators maintain coherence, credibility and care in navigating identity within digital and institutional spaces.

Table 26: Summary of Thematic Interpretation from Katrina's Interview Across Critical Realist Layers

Theme	Ontological Layer	Interpretive Note
Disruption of Digital Infrastructure	Structural	Highlights how algorithmic and cultural shifts undermined Twitter's reliability as a third space for inclusion.
Feminist Digital Care Practices	Cultural	Frames affective engagement, celebration, and amplification as collective resistance to competitive norms.
Curated Engagement for Coherence and Care	Cultural–Agentic	Shows how boundary-setting and selective participation serve both self-preservation and relational authenticity.
Identity Performance Through Aesthetic Framing	Agentic	Captures the use of calibrated self-presentation as reflexive identity work under dynamic social expectations.

Reviewing the Themes

Katrina's interview offers nuanced insights into how platform shifts, cultural belonging and self-presentation practices shaped her digital engagement during and after the pandemic. Her narrative reaffirms the thematic patterns identified across the study, while also introducing distinct variations that reflect her positionality as an early-career academic navigating intersecting neurodivergent and feminist identities. This section reviews four core themes drawn from her data, linking her perspectives to the study's critical realist framework and existing theoretical literature.

Structural: Disruption of Digital Infrastructure

Katrina reflected on how algorithmic and commercial changes following Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter disrupted the relational coherence she had previously cultivated. During the height of the pandemic, she described Twitter as a manageable and affirming space, explaining how she had curated it into a "complete echo chamber" that promoted well-being and focus. However, the structural shifts in platform functionality undermined this stability. She noted:

> *"I've seen a lot of people I don't follow. I don't see a lot of the posts that I would want to see… the is no echo chamber".*

This perceived loss of control aligns with concerns raised in the literature regarding the erosion of Twitter's affordances as a reliable third space for marginalised users (McArthur and White 2016; Gabarron et al. 2023). The shift from chronological and relational curation to algorithmic amplification is not just a technical update, but it signifies a structural constraint that reshapes the platform's capacity for epistemic inclusion. As discussed in Chapter 2, Twitter's third space potential (McArthur and White 2016; McDougall and Potter 2019; Scott and Gibson 2022) has become increasingly unstable in the post-acquisition context (Vidal Valero 2023; Clayton and Hoskins 2025), a transformation that Katrina experienced as a loss of professional and communal anchoring.

Cultural: Feminist Digital Care Practices

A central motif in Katrina's reflections was the role of Twitter as a space for feminist solidarity and affective labour. Unlike instrumental networking, her participation was grounded in mutual celebration and affective solidarity. She described how, during the COVID-19 lockdowns, Twitter became "a much more, from my perspective, pro-women space". Where academics supported each other by recognising smaller achievements and validating decisions, such as working part-time. Her contributions centre on uplifting others: *"I was able to celebrate and support women… I have a role here on Twitter".*

This prominence on affective presence and communal encouragement aligns with the concept of feminist digital care practices, where platform participation resists neoliberal productivity norms through acts of collective

validation (Hill Collins 2000; Mountz et al. 2015). The care-based reciprocity Katrina describes exemplifies how Twitter functioned as an alternative to competitive academic environments, echoing research that positions digital spaces as sites of affective affiliation and resistance (Carpenter et al. 2022; Gabarron et al. 2023). Her experience reinforces the cultural significance of these practices for neurodivergent educators who seek to build inclusive and sustaining professional networks beyond institutional hierarchies.

Cultural-Agentic: Curated Engagement for Coherence and Care

Katrina's feed curation extended beyond visual preference, serving as an intentional strategy for delineating the personal from the professional. Confronted with an overwhelming volume of misinformation and hostility, she explained that she muted and unfollowed users to protect her mental health, creating a feed that was "supportive" and "healthy". This form of boundary-setting was not indiscriminate but strategically navigated. For instance, in cases where professional consequences might follow from publicly unfollowing colleagues, she opted for muting as a more discreet approach:

> *"If they are people in which I feel like it would be harmful to unfollow…I can mute them".*

These agentic practices reflect what Egner (2022) describes as strategic identity curation, a mode of online engagement that balances authenticity with emotional self-preservation. Within the critical realist framework, such actions illustrate the interplay between cultural and agentic layers, where structural pressures are met with personal, embodied responses. By actively shaping her digital environment, Katrina enacted a form of coherence that protected both her sense of professional legitimacy and her psychological well-being. These practices resonate with broader discussions in Chapter 2 regarding the careful labour involved in managing visibility, particularly under conditions of digital hyper-surveillance and reputational risk (Boyd 2010; Malik et al. 2019; Scott and Gibson 2023).

Agentic: Identity Performance Through Aesthetic Framing

Finally, Katrina spoke candidly about her intentional approach to self-presentation. She explained that her Twitter profile was crafted with *"a bit [of] creative… how you present yourself"*, noting that humour and curiosity often drew others into conversation. Her bio and content strategy blended personal interests with academic identity, reflecting a style designed to appear both engaging and credible. This form of calibrated self-styling exemplifies identity performance through aesthetic framing.

As Goffman (2021) theorised, social actors actively manage impressions to fit audience expectations, a concept extended in digital contexts by Papacharissi (2012) and Egner (2022), who highlight the improvisational and strategic nature of online identity work. For neurodivergent educators, this mode of engagement enables the negotiation of complex visibility demands, where the goal is neither full transparency nor complete anonymity

but a sustainable form of professional presence. Katrina's creative presentation represents an agentic effort to assert identity under conditions of platform instability and uneven audience expectations.

Defining and Naming Themes

Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis, this section finalised the interpretative phase by defining and naming the key themes that emerged from Katrina's interview. Each theme is mapped onto the structural, cultural, or agentic layers of the critical realist ontology (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019). The naming process clarifies the analytical contribution of each theme, situates it within relevant literature and connects it to the research questions, particularly the Main Research Question and Sub-Questions 1 and 4. The sub-themes are included beneath each overarching theme to reflect layered dimensions of meaning within Katrina's digital-professional narrative.

Structural Theme

1. **Disruption of Digital Infrastructure**

   Aligned to the Main Research Question and Sub-Question 1

Sub-themes:

- Loss of chronological and relational engagement
- Algorithmic amplification as exclusionary
- Platform instability as professional disruption

Katrina described how Twitter's evolving algorithmic structure undermined its earlier function as a reliable third space. She notes the shift away from relational and chronological content towards attention-driven metrics, which disrupted her capacity for meaningful interaction. This disruption destabilised both community belonging and professional continuity, signalling a structural transformation that diminished Twitter's inclusive potential. The theme aligns with McArthur and White's (2016) notion of third place erosion and reflects how neurodivergent educators experience infrastructural change as a form of exclusion (Gabarron et al. 2023; Vidal Valero, 2023)

Cultural Themes

2. **Feminist Digital Care Practices**

   Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Question 4

Sub-themes:

• Mutual celebration and emotional reciprocity

• Resistance to competitive academic norms

• Affirmation as a mode of care

In contrast to using Twitter for career-oriented networking, Katrina engaged with the platform as a space for mutual affirmation and support, choosing to highlight others' work and maintain emotionally meaningful interactions. Her approach reflects a feminist ethic of care (Hill Collins 2000; Mountz et al. 2015), foregrounding connection and mutual support over competitive, individualistic self-promotion. These affective exchanges function as micro-resistances to institutional norms of self-promotion, aligning with research that frames Twitter as a site of collective care and inclusive identity-making (Botha et al. 2022; Egner 2022; Barroso-Moreno et al. 2024)

3. Curated Engagement for Coherence and Care

Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Question 1

Sub-themes:

• Feed curation as boundary-setting

• Emotional regulation through selective participation

• Protection from overexposure and epistemic burnout

Katrina's approach to curating her Twitter Feed, including muting hashtags, managing audience visibility and unfollowing destabilising accounts, was not motivated by aesthetic preference but represented a deliberate tactic of affective boundary-setting. These practices operated as agentic interventions that supported emotional coherence within an increasingly accelerated and unpredictable digital environment. Rather than conforming to the platform's expectation of constant connectivity, Katrina engaged in selective disengagement as a care-oriented strategy. This theme spans both cultural and agentic dimensions, demonstrating how neurodivergent educators adopt bespoke digital practices to sustain presence while avoiding cognitive and emotional overload.

Her actions align with findings from Kaufman et al. (2024) who discuss the concept of "slow scholarship" as a form of resistance to neoliberal academic pressures. Additionally, Le Cunff et al. (2025) highlight the importance of managing the cognitive load in digital contexts, particularly for neurodivergent users, supporting the notion that tailored strategies are essential for sustainable engagement. Furthermore, Horton et al. (2024) advocates for reflexive and community-sensitive practices within neurodivergent engagement, underscoring the participatory integrity reflected in Katrina's digital curation.

Agentic Theme

4. Identity Performance Through Aesthetic Framing

Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Question 4

Sub-themes:

• Aesthetic choices as credibility work

• Managing tone, imagery, and affective signals

• Partial self-disclosure through stylised presence

Katrina's aesthetic engagement on Twitter, including use of tone, emojis and creative profile presentation, reflects a strategic and agentic performance of identity that affirms presence while managing vulnerability. These stylistic choices enable her to curate a timeline that was effectively resonant, professionally credible and emotionally sustainable. Egner (2022) observes that autistic Twitter users often construct positive identity narratives through deliberate online engagement, actively rejecting medicalised framings by reframing perceived deficits as a source of affirmation. In a similar way, Katrina's creative expression can be understood as a mode of epistemic legitimacy, blending humour and visual coherence to assert credibility, cultivate belonging and foster relational connection within her digital academic network.

Such practices are consistent with wider research on how neurodivergent individuals adapt digital environments to better suit their communicative needs. Simpson et al. (2022) describe how users engage in "critical infrastructuring" on platforms like TikTok to ensure that platform conditions support neurodivergent ways of expression. Gualano et al. (2024) further show that individuals with invisible disabilities often rely on visual and tonal framing to navigate online self-presentation, enabling them to disclose aspects of identity in a controlled and context-sensitive manner. Katrina's digital identity curation exemplifies the intersection of affect, agency and visibility, where stylised presence operates simultaneously as a protective measure and an inclusive communicative practice.

5.6.3 Nora's Interview

Familiarisation with the Data

Nora's interview was marked by an emotionally layered account of late-diagnosed inattentive ADHD, which she framed as both a personal revelation and a turning point in her professional life. Her narrative traced a trajectory from long-standing self-doubt to diagnostic clarity, catalysed by the compounding pressures of shielding during lockdown, solo living post-divorce and abrupt institutional transitions to online teaching. She described this

period as a state of “executive defunction derailment”, capturing how the intersecting demands of domestic management and technological adaptation overwhelmed her cognitive resources.

The retrospective framing of ADHD as an explanatory lens, reshaping what had previously been understood as personal shortcomings, positioned her diagnosis as a critical moment of identity reconstitution. The emotional tone oscillated between relief and residual disbelief, particularly when describing how others perceived her as professionally competent despite internal chaos. Professionally, Nora described a stark contrast between her previous and current institutional contexts. At her former university, minor requests for pedagogical flexibility were met with suspicion and resistance, ultimately leading to a breakdown in trust and prolonged sick leave.

Nora framed her departure as both necessary and disillusioning, citing ableist responses to disclosure and a broader hostility to differentiated need. In contrast, her new leadership role in Scotland, deliberately chosen for its lack of fixed teaching duties, was framed as both cognitively sustainable and affirming. Rather than requiring formal accommodations, she was able to construct her working patterns around her neurodivergence. These reflections highlighted a relational dynamic between professional agency and institutional design, where the affordances of role structure directly shaped her capacity to thrive. The affective shift between the two accounts was notable: institutional misrecognition in the first was replaced by validation and trust in the second.

Nora’s engagement with Twitter featured prominently as a site of identity articulation and informal advocacy. Her decision to publicly disclose her diagnosis via a personal thread was presented as both a deliberate act of openness and a means of resisting the affective burden of masking. The overwhelming positive response, particularly from early-career researchers, was described as unexpectedly affirming, with many readers expressing relief and resonance. Through Twitter, she developed mentoring relationships and contributed to broader cultural shifts in how neurodivergence is perceived within academic networks. However, she also expressed a sense of loss and disconnection following the platform’s decline post-acquisition, noting that newer platforms lack the same mediacity and relational depth. Her account underscored the dual role of social media as both an inclusive third space and a fragile ecosystem, increasingly susceptible to change beyond users’ control.

Throughout the interview, Nora positioned authenticity and relationality as central to her academic practice, both in digital and institutional contexts. She described blending personal and professional content online, resisting polished academic branding in favour of an open, multimodal presence. This same ethos shaped her teaching, where she used self-disclosure to model inclusivity and normalise diverse cognitive strategies. Importantly, she linked institutional inclusion not to large-scale interventions but to small, everyday practices, such as improving disability forms, funding writing retreats or offering hybrid participation options. Her reflections emphasised that cultural inclusion often hinges on attentiveness to detail, rather than performative

polices. Collectively, her account exemplified a form of digital enable, relational professionalism grounded in lived experience and oriented towards cultural change from within.

Table 27 below summarises the key interpretative patterns identified during the initial phase of thematic familiarisation with Nora's interview data.

Table 27: Summary of Initial Patterns

Initial Pattern	Descriptive Summary
Diagnosis as identity reconstitution	Nora's late ADHD diagnosis was framed as a turning point that recontextualised past experiences and reshaped her understanding of self and capability.
Institutional misrecognition versus fit	Her account contrasted punitive responses to disclosure in her former institution with the validation and agency afforded in her current role.
Digital advocacy and public mentoring	Twitter was positioned as a third space for visibility, solidarity, and informal mentoring, particularly for early-career neurodivergent academics.
Relational authenticity and small-scale inclusion	Nora emphasised honesty, blended personal/professional identity, and low-barrier adjustments as key mechanisms for fostering meaningful inclusion.

Generating Initial Codes

Initial coding of Nora's transcript traced structural, cultural and agentic patterns closely aligned with her phrasing and affective tone. Coding emphasised insights into neurodivergent identity, institutional inclusion and digital agency, capturing Nora's narrative shift from systemic exclusion to self-advocacy, with Twitter as a catalyst for professional confidence. Agentic codes reflected how Nora framed her diagnosis as reshaping professional identity, notably "identity reconstruction, "diagnosis as narrative anchoring", and "strategic disclosure as affirmation". Her use of personal storytelling through digital mentorship demonstrated intentional agency, captured by codes like "relational authenticity" and resisting academic identities.

Cultural codes highlighted Nora's emphasis on care, solidarity and institutional optimism. Examples included "care through low barrier inclusion", "relational trust in digital space", "normalising neurodivergent in pedagogy", "networked affirmation" and "peer-led cultural inclusion". The impact of Twitter's decline emerged through "loss of community coherence". Structural codes revealed institutional shortcomings and possibilities. Codes included "disclosure met with suspicion", "ableism in workload disruption", "exit as survival" and later, "designing-in-inclusion", illustrating how structural support could align effectively with neurodivergent needs. **Table 28** outlines the initial codes generated from Nora's interview, reflecting key interpretative patterns across

the agentic, cultural and structural domains.

Table 28: Initial Codes Generated from Nora's Interview

Code	Description
Identity reconstruction	Diagnosis provided a retrospective framework to reframe past difficulties and affirm self-understanding.
Strategic disclosure as affirmation	Public sharing of diagnosis was used to challenge stigma and foster solidarity, particularly with ECRs.
Relational authenticity	Blending personal and professional content online to foster genuine connection and resist polished branding.
Digital mentorship	Twitter used to support and advise peers through lived experience, creating informal mentorship dynamics.
Care through low-barrier inclusion	Everyday institutional acts (e.g. editing forms, hybrid access) framed as meaningful inclusionary practices.
Networked affirmation	Described positive feedback loops on Twitter as crucial to identity validation and collective recognition.
Normalising neurodivergence in pedagogy	Used self-disclosure in teaching to model inclusivity and reduce stigma around cognitive difference.
Disclosure met with suspicion	Former institution responded to accommodation needs with distrust, prompting breakdown in professional trust.
Exit as survival	Leaving toxic role described as an act of preservation amid burnout and institutional inaction.
Designing-in inclusion	Current role intentionally structured to accommodate neurodivergent working preferences and cognitive needs.

Searching for Themes in the Critical Realist Ontology

This section interprets Nora's interview through the layered framework of Archer's (1995) critical realist ontology: structure, culture and agency. While treated analytically as distinct, the layers frequently interact in lived experience, shaping Nora's reflections on diagnosis, digital engagement, institutional (mis)recognition and professional growth.

Structural Layer: Institutional Misrecognition and Role Incompatibility

Nora's earlier professional context was marked by sustained institutional misrecognition. Her disclosure of neurodivergence was met with suspicion, inaction and a lack of structural responsiveness. She recounted

excessive workloads, unclear expectations and tokenistic support that deteriorated her well-being. The absence of flexible processes or anticipatory adjustments reflects how institutions often maintain rigid role structures ill-suited to neurodivergent cognition. This theme illuminates the failure of inclusion-by-policy when unaccompanied by meaningful re-design or relational trust.

Structural-Agentic Layer: Designing-in Inclusion for Cognitive Sustainability

In contrast to her previous role, Nora's current institutional environment was described as intentionally structured around her cognitive and sensory needs. She emphasised how clarity of role, supportive leadership and open dialogue allowed her to re-engage in work without burnout. This shift was not purely structural; it emerged through her active involvement in shaping her work context in ways that reflected her neurodivergent preferences and values. Nora's capacity to critically evaluate her environment and advocate for appropriate adjustments reflects what Archer (2007) terms "autonomous reflexivity", a mode of internal deliberation in which individuals purposefully align their social context with their personal concerns. Through sustained self-reflection and constructive dialogue with colleagues, Nora was able to convert former constraints into enablement's, demonstrating the transformative potential of reflexive agency within supportive institutional frameworks.

Cultural Layer: Practices of Micro-Inclusion and Relational Advocacy

A defining cultural thread in Nora's account was the significance of small-scale, relational acts of inclusion. She described how amending HR language, encouraging hybrid accessibility, or normalising rest were everyday interventions that challenged ableist norms. Rather than engaging in large-scale resistance, she practised what might be described as 'relational advocacy', where empathy and situated understanding were deployed to shift culture incrementally. Her emphasis on dignity, openness and non-performativity stands in contrast to dominant academic cultures premised on competition and conformity (Mountz et al. 2015).

Cultural–Agentic Layer: Modelling Inclusion Through Public Reflexivity

Nora's digital engagement, particularly on Twitter and through podcasting, exemplified a form of agentic cultural labour through which she enacted situated digital agency. Rather than positioning herself as a personal brand, her online presence was guided by a reflexive commitment to epistemic generosity, sharing embodied knowledge of diagnosis, burnout recovery and neurodivergent navigation in academia. These narrative practices functioned as informal mentorship, cultivating a participatory space for relational learning and mutual recognition.

In doing so, Nora modelled a peer-led form of cultural change-making that challenged dominant academic norms of individualism and expertise. Consistent with Egner's (2022) analysis of identity narratives within

#ActuallyAutistic discourse, her storytelling fostered a sense of disrupted credibility and community affiliation. Through iterative self-disclosure and carefully mediated visibility, Nore used digital platforms to bridge professional identity with collective advocacy, advancing inclusion not through institutional reform but through relational epistemologies and shared culture work.

Agentic Layer: Diagnosis as Reframing and Professional Realignment

Nora described her ADHD diagnosis as a turning point that reframed earlier experiences of burnout, allowing her to reinterpret them not as personal failings but as misalignments between institutional demands and neurodivergent needs. This enabled her to critically reassess her professional identity, reject unsustainable norms of hyper-productivity and pursue roles aligned with her values. While Cohen et al. (2024) explores this dynamic in the context of college students, their findings: highlighting how diagnosis often prompts reflective calibration and adaptive change, remain resonant in Nora's case. Her account exemplifies Archer's (2007) concept of meta-reflexivity, where internal conversation catalyses purposeful reorientation of self and practice.

Table 29 below summarises the five themes from Nora's interview, mapped across structural, cultural and agentic layers of the critical realist framework. Each theme illustrates how reflexive agency, institutional positioning and digital engagement shaped her evolving professional identity and inclusionary practice.

Table 29: Summary of Thematic Interpretation from Nora's Interview Across Critical Realist Layers

Theme	Ontological Layer	Interpretive Note
Institutional Misrecognition and Role Incompatibility	Structural	Illustrates how rigid structures and suspicion undermine neurodivergent sustainability and wellbeing.
Designing-in Inclusion for Cognitive Sustainability	Structural–Agentic	Captures how Nora shaped and was shaped by an inclusive institutional setting aligned with her neurodivergence.
Practices of Micro-Inclusion and Relational Advocacy	Cultural	Highlights everyday acts of inclusion as a relational counter-narrative to ableist academic norms.
Modelling Inclusion Through Public Reflexivity	Cultural–Agentic	Shows how Nora's digital storytelling functioned as informal mentorship and cultural change-making.
Diagnosis as Reframing and Professional Realignment	Agentic	Frames diagnosis as a reflexive anchor for self-understanding, enabling purposeful identity and career shifts.

Reviewing the Themes

Nora's interview offers layered insight into the interplay of structural barriers, cultural navigation and agentic transformation in the professional life of a neurodivergent educator. Her narrative confirms established patterns across the dataset while introducing specific nuances around diagnosis, leadership, relational inclusion and digital expression. This section revisits the five critical realist themes, drawing on literature to contextualise each theme and support the interpretive analysis.

Structural: Institutional Misrecognition and Role Incompatibility

Nora's earlier academic role was marked by systemic barriers that exemplified institutional misrecognition. Her requests for minor adjustments, such as spreading out her teaching schedule, were met with accusations of using her disability as an excuse:

> *"I got told that I was using the disability as an excuse… the first time I mentioned anything I just got stonewalled".*

This reflects a broader pattern of epistemic injustice, where neurodivergent individuals' self-knowledge and experiences are dismissed or devalued within institutional contexts. Chapman and Carel (2022) note that societal norms often obscure or invalidate autistic modes of flourishing by denying both the credibility of neurodivergent testimony and the conceptual resources needed to articulate these experiences.

Such patterns are echoed in Lindsay and Fuentes (2022) systematic review, which demonstrates how ableism in academia operates through discrimination, exclusion, and a lack of institutional responsiveness, factors that erode disabled staff's well-being and constrain their career development. Nora's experience of being stonewalled and disbelieved following her disclosure exemplifies this pattern of exclusion. As Scott and Gibson (2023) argue, institutions must move beyond tokenistic inclusion and design systems that proactively support neurodivergent staff through inclusive processes, tailored accommodations, and cultural change. Nora's account reflects the cost of institutional inaction and the pressing need for structural redesign within higher education institutions to embed cognitive diversity as a foundational, rather than exceptional, element of academic life.

Structural-Agentic: Designing-In Inclusion for Cognitive Sustainability

Nora's move into her current academic role marked a pivotal departure from previous environments that failed to recognise or accommodate her neurodivergence. Instead of being required to fit into a rigid framework, she described being encouraged to contribute to shaping her role in line with her cognitive and sensory preferences. This included clarity around expectations, open communication with colleagues and leadership that actively supported sustainable workload arrangements.

"I'm working in a team where I feel completely accepted. I'm allowed to have boundaries, I'm allowed to say no… And the work is interesting".

Rather than treating accommodations as reactive or exceptional, Nora's current institution integrated her preferences from the outset, allowing her to flourish without compromising her well-being.

This shifts what Archer (2007) describes as "autonomous reflexivity", a form of agency wherein individuals critically evaluate their social contexts and take purposeful action to align them with their internal concerns. Nora's experience is an example of how neurodivergent educators can transform constraints into enablement when institutional structures are flexible and affirming. Jones (2023) similarly, found that autistic academics in UK higher education often thrive when environments offer clarity, predictability and inclusive accommodation, though such settings remain rare. Brown and Leigh (2018) further highlight how the intensification of academic workload pressures exacerbates burnout, underscoring the need for sustainable, person-centred approaches. Collectively, these perspectives reinforce the argument that inclusion must be designed-in from the start, not retrofitted, enabling neurodivergent staff to enact professional agency without compromising wellbeing.

Culture: Practices of Micro-Inclusion and Relational Advocacy

Nora articulates a cultural strategy of inclusion rooted in everyday relational acts that subtly reconfigure institutional norms. Rather than advocating through confrontation or formalised equity work, she embraced what might be termed *relational advocacy:* shaping practices through trust, empathy and attuned responsiveness. This is exemplified in her account of altering an HR disclosure form, where ADHD was previously unlisted. After raising this gap informally with a senior colleague, who was also late diagnosed, she noted that *"he was horrified… and said, 'I'll fix it'"*. Later, a mentee wrote to thank her, describing how "for the first time… there was a box for me" when disclosing her own neurodivergence. These instances reflect a participatory ethic of change led by lived experience. While Fletcher-Watson et al. (2019) focus specifically on participatory autism research, their emphasis on the value of lived expertise in shaping inclusive practices resonates strongly with Nora's interventions around ADHD in institutional policy. This reflects a broader shift towards participatory cultures of change in higher education, where relational insight and situated experience inform systemic reform (Brown and Leigh 2018; Legault et al. 2021)

Nora also enacted inclusion through her advocacy for hybrid access and the normalisation of rest, challenging dominant culture expectations of constant visibility and physical presence in academia. She explained that:

"If you do it online… people who might not want to go through the hassle of dealing with the architectural obstacles might just be more comfortable taking part".

This approach reframed access not as a logistical inconvenience but as a cultural value, foregrounding participation over presence. Such an ethos resists the institutional logic of competitive performativity, critiqued

by Mountz et al. (2015) which privileges availability and output over care and sustainability. Instead, Nora promoted a relational model of professionalism, in which inclusion was cultivated through flexibility and mutual respect.

Her framing of accessibility as an everyday ethic mirrors Beresford and Boxall (2012) argument that user-led knowledge and relational insight are critical to shaping practices that support marginalised communities. It also aligns with recent work by Barroso-Moreno et al. (2024), who emphasise how inclusive digital spaces promote belonging through collaborative, low-barrier participation. By insisting that rest, hybrid formats and flexible rhythms were not exceptions but necessities, Nora subtly redefined what belonging looks like within academic culture. These cultural interventions, while modest in scale, illustrate how neurodivergent educators reshape norms through participatory, care-informed strategies grounded in lived knowledge.

Cultural–Agentic: Modelling Inclusion Through Public Reflexivity

Nora's digital engagement represents a deliberate mode of agentic cultural labour, where visibility becomes a tool for solidarity rather than self-promotion. Her Twitter and podcast work were not oriented towards personal branding but shaped by what she called "being generous with the stuff I've learned the hard way". This aligns with Egner's (2022) analysis of identity narrative in the #ActuallyAustistic community, where online storytelling fosters "disrupted credibility" by privileging lived experience over institutional status. Through narrating her later ADHD diagnosis and experiences of burnout, Nora reframed vulnerability as a shared epistemic resource, inviting others into an evolving, relational pedagogy of mutual recognition.

This participatory reflexivity was not just personal but pedagogical, as Nora put it, "Every time I share something vulnerable online, I feel like I'm doing a tiny bit of mentorship". This echoes Braidotti's (2011) concept of the *nomadic subject*, wherein identity is not anchored to fixed categories but is continually reconfigured through affective, situated encounters. For Braidotti, nomadic subjectivity resists static or essentialist framings by foregrounding the fluid, relational and performative nature of becoming.

Similarly, Nora's reflexive storytelling does not aim to present a coherent, singular self but instead embraces partiality, uncertainty and vulnerability as epistemic resources. Her willingness to" share something vulnerable" exemplified the nomadic ethic of being-in relation, where identity is co-constructed through acts of narrative generosity that foster mutual recognition and learning. In this way, Nora's digital practice becomes not just a mode of expression but a micro-political intervention, one that unsettles normative expectations of professionalism and reclaims visibility as a means of solidarity.

Agentic: Diagnosis as Reframing and Professional Realignment

For Nora, receiving an ADHD diagnosis marked a pivotal shift in how she understood her professional journey. It reframed years of exhaustion, task paralysis and sensory strain not as personal shortcomings but as consequences of an environment that did not accommodate her needs. “I used to think I was lazy”, she reflected, “but now I understand it was the environment that was draining me”. Diagnosis did not represent closure but instead opened space for reflective self-understanding and reorientation. Cohen et al. (2024) writing on the diagnostic experiences of college students with ADHD, observe that diagnosis often triggers a process of narrative reconstruction and strategic adaptation. Although their participants were younger, their insights are applicable to Nora’s case, where diagnosis facilitated a move from internalised deficit to sustainable identity work.

This shift aligns closely with Archer’s (2007) concept of *meta-reflexivity,* wherein individuals critically evaluate their social relationships and choose practices that reflect their internal concerns. For Nora, this involved stepping back from institutional norms that rewarded overperformance and masking. She explained, “It was the first time I thought maybe I don’t have to keep proving myself in a system that doesn’t see me”. Her narrative resonates with Botha et al. (2022), who found that receiving a neurodivergent diagnosis often enhances individuals’ sense of community connection and validates lived experience through shared epistemological frameworks. Diagnosis thus served not only as self-validation but as a strategic point of departure from harmful professional expectations. Nora began to prioritise values-led work grounded in rest, clarity and relational inclusion rather than trying to survive within performance-based models of academic success.

Defining and Naming Themes

As with previous iterations of this analytical phase (see Sections 5.6.1, 5.6.2), this section concludes the interpretive process by defining and naming the key themes that emerged from Nora’s interview. Each theme is mapped to at least one of the three critical realist layers: structure, culture or agency and aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Questions 1,2 and 4. The naming process clarifies the analytical significance of each theme, foregrounds its connection to the broader dataset, and links it to relevant conceptual and empirical literature. Sub-themes are listed beneath each overarching theme to reflect internal differentiation and depth within Nora’s narrative of professional and digital identity.

1. Institutional Inaction and Epistemic Exclusion

Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Question 4

Sub-themes**:**

• Disregard for minor access requests

• Disbelief following disclosure
• Tokenism and structural rigidity

Nora's earlier academic role was characterised by a systemic failure to acknowledge and support her neurodivergence. Her reasonable requests, such as an adjusted teaching timetable, were met with suspicion and dismissal, highlighting a form of epistemic exclusion wherein neurodivergent testimony was devalued (Chapman and Carel 2022). This theme reflects Lindsay and Fuentes's (2022) findings that institutional ableism manifests through silence, inaction and discriminatory disbelief, all of which Nora encountered. Her experience highlights the cost of institutional inertia and the ongoing need for proactive inclusion (Scott and Gibson 2023). Structural barriers not only undermined her wellbeing but also delegitimised her lived knowledge, reinforcing the call for resigned academic systems that centre cognitive diversity from the outset.

Structural–Agentic Theme

2. Inclusion by Design: Reflexive Reconfiguration of Role

Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Question 4

Sub-themes:
• Collaborative design of work expectations
• Role fit and cognitive alignment
• Affirmative boundaries as self-sustainability

In contrast to earlier exclusion, Nora's current academic role demonstrates how structurally inclusive environments can enable agentic flourishing. Here, she was invited to shape her workload around her sensory needs and relational style, resulting in greater clarity, flexibility and acceptance. This transition reflects Archer's (2007) concepts of *autonomous reflexivity*, where self-evaluation drives purposeful social engagement. Rather than being retrofitted into an inflexible system, Nora's role was co-constructed, exemplifying Jone's (2023) observation that inclusive leadership practices grounded in neurodivergent needs can foster sustainable professional trajectories. Her account reaffirms Brown and Leigh's (2018) call for workload models that resist burnout and centre wellbeing as a principle of institutional design.

Cultural Theme

3. Micro-Inclusion and Relational Advocacy

Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Question 4

Sub-themes:

• Everyday acts of inclusion through lived insight
• Peer-led change through informal mentorship
• Reframing access as a shared value

Nora's inclusive practice was not confined to formal advocacy but embedded within relational interactions and everyday institutional life. Through small but impactful actions, such as advocating for ADHD visibility on HR forms, she influenced change from within, fostering what Fletcher-Watson et al. term "participatory ethics". This reflects a care-informed strategy of advocacy, where inclusion is shaped by trust, conversation and situated understanding (Legault et al. 2021). Nora also promoted hybrid access and the normalisation of rest as cultural values, not accommodations, resisting norms of performativity and presence (Mountz et al. 2015). These acts align with Barroso-Moreno et al. (2024) who argue that inclusive digital cultures rely on everyday low-barrier participation that affirms belonging through care.

Cultural–Agentic Theme

4. Reflexive Visibility as Pedagogical Solidarity

Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Questions 1 and 4

Sub-themes:

• Sharing lived experience as epistemic generosity
• Public reflexivity as mentorship
• Fluidity of identity across digital spaces

Nora's engagement on Twitter and podcasts foregrounds her use of personal storytelling as a tool for mutual recognition and solidarity. Her public reflexivity, sharing diagnosis, burnout and recovery, was shaped by a pedagogical impulse to 'mentor' through lived insight. Egner (2022) identifies similar dynamics in autistic Twitter communities, where identity narratives serve as counter-hegemonic practices that validate non-normative experiences. Nora's narrative approach aligns with Braidotti's (2011) nomadic subjectivity, where identity is relational, evolving and performative. In this frame, visibility becomes cultural and agentic practice: a means of recognising professionalism through openness, shared vulnerability and epistemic care.

Agentic Theme

5. Diagnosis as Narrative Reframing and Intentional Reorientation

Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Questions 2 and 4

Sub-themes:

• Shifting from internalised deficit to environmental critique
• Values-led realignment of professional goals
• Diagnosis as a catalyst for meta-reflection

Receiving an ADHD diagnosis allows Nora to reinterpret years of struggle not as personal failure but as symptomatic of a non-accommodating environment. Diagnosis served not as closure but as a site of narrative reconstruction, enabling new forms of self-understanding and agency. This mirrors Cohen et al.'s (2024) findings with late-diagnosed ADHD college students for whom diagnosis acts as a turning point, prompting reflection and adaptation. Nora's shift represents Archer's (2007) *meta-reflexivity,* in which internal dialogue leads to values-based reorientation. Rejecting performance-based academic models, she embraced clarity, boundaries and authenticity, echoing Botha et al. (2022) who highlight how diagnosis can strengthen epistemic connection and community belonging among neurodivergent individuals.

5.6.4 Flora's Interview

Familiarisation with the Data

Flora's interview revealed a detailed account of her lived experiences as a neurodivergent educator, particularly regarding the influence of dyslexia and potential additional neurodivergent traits on her professional practice and identity formation. Flora described an early diagnosis of dyslexia on a memorable date and recounted experiences navigating educational and institutional contexts, highlighting variations in support provided across educational stages. She emphasised the notable lack of practical support during her PhD studies, where institutional responsibilities fell onto her supervisors due to inadequate neurodiversity support structures.

Throughout her narrative, Flora frequently articulated the complex intersections between neurodivergence and her pedagogical approach, portraying dyslexia as both a challenge and a distinct strength. For instance, she highlighted how her dyslexia fostered creativity and innovation in her teaching, enabling her to develop diverse, multi-modal explanations to accommodate varied learning styles among students. Conversely, Flora candidly discussed ongoing struggles with writing, explaining her reliance on assistive technologies, particularly AI-based tools, to maintain parity with neurotypical colleagues.

Flora's reflections on her professional identity revealed tension between her high-level qualifications, including recognition as Principal Fellow and National Teaching Fellow, and her comparatively modest formal job title. This mismatch underscored deeper structural contradictions with her institutional experience. Flora detailed how universities often publicly celebrated her neurodivergence, strategically branding her as an innovator in teaching and learning. However, such institutional visibility rarely translated to meaningful career progression or adequate

systemic support.

A substantial portion of the interview centred on Flora's engagement with Twitter as a digital third space. She described the platform as essential, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, for maintaining professional connections, accessing timely resources and engaging in supportive conversations. Flora spoke positively of Twitter, noting how routine interaction, such as weekly educator chats focused on neurodiversity, provided essential peer support and opportunities for collaboration. Despite these positive experiences, she acknowledged occasional negative interactions that prompted her to withdraw temporarily, highlighting the emotional labour and caution required when managing her digital professional identity.

Meaningfully, Flora emphasised recent trends toward open disclosure of neurodivergent identities by senior academics on Twitter. She viewed this phenomenon as transformative, creating an inclusive environment where neurodivergent identities could be openly discussed and normalised within academia. This collective openness, she argued, broke down traditional academic personas, fostering a sense of solidarity and acceptance previously absent from the institutional contexts.

Table 30 summarises initial patterns identified during the familiarisation phase of Flora's interview, directly reflecting the language and emphasis used by Flora herself.

Table 30: Summary of Initial Patterns

Initial Pattern	Descriptive Summary
Institutional mismatch in support	Public celebration of Flora's neurodiversity by universities contrasted sharply with limited practical support.
Pedagogical innovation from neurodivergence	Flora utilised creative, multi-modal strategies to support diverse learner needs, drawing directly from her dyslexia.
Positive digital peer interactions	Twitter provided crucial community support, professional opportunities, and collaborative networking.
Cautious online engagement	Negative interactions on Twitter caused Flora to carefully manage and sometimes withdraw from digital exchanges.
Collective visibility of neurodivergence	Flora described a transformative shift toward open disclosure and mutual recognition among neurodivergent academics.

Generating Initial Codes

Following the familiarisation, the transcript was systematically coded to highlight significant experiences and

meaning in Flora's narrative. Codes were inductively developed, explicitly grounded in Flora's language and reflections, with an emphasis on structural, cultural and agentic layers consistent with Archer's (1995) critical realist ontology.

Structural codes emerged predominantly from Flora's descriptions of institutional interactions and limitations within academia. Examples included "institutional tokenism", reflecting how universities publicised her neurodivergence without providing meaningful support and "career progression mismatch". Capturing gaps between her achievements and institutional recognition. Agentic codes captured Flora's proactive strategies, particularly around pedagogy and writing. These included "adaptive pedagogical strategies", highlighting how she leverages her dyslexic creativity in teaching, and "strategic use of assistive technology", reflecting her intentional use of AI tools to manage writing challenges.

Cultural codes were particularly evident in Flora's discussion of online interactions on Twitter. Codes such as "digital community support" captured positive experiences of peer recognition and collaboration via regular Twitter use. Conversely, "cautious digital engagement" highlights her careful emotional regulation and self-presentation following negative exchanges. Finally, cultural-agentic codes included "online boundary management", reflecting Flora's deliberate curation of her Twitter interactions to ensure emotional safety and professional boundaries.

Table 31 summarises key initial codes developed from Flora's interview transcript, providing brief descriptions to clarify their focus and significance in relation to her lived experiences as a neurodivergent educator.

Table 31: Initial Codes Generated from Flora's Interview

Code	Description
Institutional tokenism	Universities publicly highlight Flora's neurodiversity without adequate practical support.
Career progression mismatch	Disparity between Flora's formal job title and her high-level professional achievements.
Adaptive pedagogical strategies	Employing creative, diverse instructional methods derived from neurodivergent cognitive strengths.
Strategic use of assistive technology	Intentional use of AI tools to manage writing challenges and maintain parity with colleagues.
Digital community support	Beneficial Twitter interactions providing collaborative opportunities and mutual peer recognition.

Cautious digital engagement	Careful management of Twitter presence and interactions following negative responses or criticism.
Online boundary management	Actively curating digital interactions to ensure emotional safety and maintain professional boundaries.

Searching for Themes in the Critical Realist Ontology

This section interprets Flora's interview through Archer's critical realist ontology of structure, culture and agency (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019). Though analytically distinct, these layers interweave within Flora's lived experiences as a neurodivergent educator, influencing her professional identity, pedagogical practices and digital interactions.

Structural Layer: Institutional Tokenism and Career Constraints

Flora's narrative reveals structural inconsistencies in institutional support, particularly in how universities publicly highlight her neurodivergence without offering substantial practical accommodations or career advancement. Flora recounted how her neurodivergent identity was prominently featured institutionally to showcase diversity, yet meaningful support structures, notably during her doctoral studies, remained conspicuously absent. These institutional contradictions resonate with wider critiques of ableism in higher education, highlighting the superficial engagement of universities with genuine neurodivergent inclusion (Brown and Leigh 2018; Clouder et al. 2020)

A related structural theme identified was the discrepancy between Flora's recognised professional achievements and he relatively modest job title, indicating systemic institutional barriers to equitable recognition and advancement. Despite her qualifications as Principal Fellow and National Teaching Fellow, structural inertia limited her progression, highlighting tensions between meritocratic narratives and actual structural practices (Merchant et al. 2020; University and College Union 2021a, 2021b)

Agentic Layer: Reflexive Adaptation in Pedagogy and Writing

Flora exhibited strong agentic reflexivity, deploying adaptive pedagogical strategies that leveraged her neurodivergent strengths, particularly creativity fostered by her dyslexia. She proactively adapted instructional methods to diverse student learning needs, explicitly developing multi-modal teaching techniques. Such agentic strategies reflect the capacity of neurodivergent educators to engage in reflexivity, responding creatively to structural constraints by aligning personal strengths with inclusive pedagogical practices (Arnold and Mundy 2020; Hamilton and Petty 2023).

Additionally, Flora strategically employed assistive technologies, notably artificial intelligence tools, to mitigate challenges associated with academic writing. This intentional technological adoption exemplifies agentic reflexivity, whereby Flora actively negotiated professional parity with neurotypical colleagues, strategically managing her neurodivergent traits to sustain productivity and professional credibility (Saigot 2023; Le Cunff et al. 2025).

Cultural Layer: Digital Community as a Third Space for Professional Engagement

Flora's narrative indicated that Twitter functioned effectively as a digital third space, providing crucial community support, fostering professional dialogue and facilitating collaborative opportunities. She particularly highlighted routine interactions, such as weekly educator discussions, as critical moments of informal, collaborative discourse that enhanced professional and pedagogical development. This aligns explicitly with Scott and Gibson's (2022) conceptualisation of Twitter as a Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP), where educators form supportive networks and foster research collaboration beyond traditional institutional frameworks.

Moreover, Flora described a supportive cultural environment cultivated through digital interactions, reflecting third-space characteristics of informal knowledge exchange and professional identity development (Whitchurch 2013; Obexer 2022). These interactions offered her valuable relational resources distinct from formal institutional contexts, underscoring the role of digital platforms in shaping professional identity and community within higher education.

Cultural-Agentic Layer: Selective Digital Engagement and Boundary Management

Intersecting culture and agency, Flora described how negative interactions on Twitter influenced her approach to digital engagement. Following instances where empathetic responses were negatively received, she chose deliberate withdrawal and cautious re-engagement, opting to reserve Twitter for formal, professional interactions. Flora articulated a clear threshold for disclosure, strategically redirecting personal or sensitive conversations to alternative, more private communication channels, such as Teams or face-to-face interactions. This careful management illustrates reflexive boundary-setting strategies, balancing professional authenticity with the need to protect her emotional well-being and institutional reputation. Flora's experience resonates with scholarly discussions on digital identity management, highlighting how users consciously navigate and curate their digital presence to maintain professional coherence and emotional safety within dynamic and sometimes unpredictable online spaces (Papacharissi 2012; Obexer 2022).

Cultural–Agentic Layer: Collective Disclosure and Normative Shifts in Neurodiversity

Finally, Flora identified transformative shifts towards collective disclosure and open dialogue about neurodivergent identities among senior academics, primarily facilitated through Twitter. She described how

public disclosures by prominent academics fostered greater cultural acceptance, breaking down traditional academic personas that previously marginalised neurodivergent identities. Flora's observations reflect a broader cultural–agentic dynamic, where individual acts of disclosure collectively reshape normative frameworks, creating inclusive academic cultures and reducing stigma associated with neurodivergence (Egner 2022; Barroso-Moreno et al. 2024).

Table 32 summarises these thematic interpretations drawn from Flora's interview, clearly mapped to Archer's critical realist ontology. Each theme illuminates distinct but interconnected facets of Flora's experiences, revealing how she navigates and negotiates her professional identity within digital and institutional contexts.

Table 32: Summary of Thematic Interpretations from Flora's Interview Across Critical Realist Layers

Theme	Ontological Layer	Interpretive Note
Institutional Tokenism and Career Constraints	Structural	Highlights discrepancies between institutional public rhetoric of inclusion and the practical support and recognition provided to neurodivergent educators.
Reflexive Adaptation in Pedagogy and Writing	Agentic	Illustrates proactive strategies to leverage neurodivergent traits creatively and use assistive technologies strategically for professional effectiveness.
Digital Community as a Third Space for Professional Engagement	Cultural	Reflects how Twitter acts as a crucial third space, facilitating supportive professional interactions and informal collaboration beyond traditional institutional frameworks.
Selective Digital Engagement and Boundary Management	Cultural–Agentic	Demonstrates intentional boundary management and cautious self-presentation strategies in digital spaces, balancing visibility and authenticity against emotional vulnerability.
Collective Disclosure and Normative Shifts in Neurodiversity	Cultural–Agentic	Highlights senior academics' public disclosures on Twitter, facilitating normative shifts and fostering inclusive academic cultures regarding neurodivergent identities.

Reviewing the Themes

Flora's interview provided nuanced insights into structural barriers, cultural dynamics and agentic strategies in her professional life as a neurodivergent educator. Her narrative reinforced broader dataset patterns while offering distinctive perspectives on institutional tokenism, pedagogical innovation, digital community

engagement and strategic disclosure practices. This section revisits each of the five critical realist themes, contextualised with Flora's direct reflection and scholarly literature.

Structural: Institutional Tokenism and Career Constraints

Flora explicitly described structural contradictions in the support she received as a neurodivergent educator, highlighting a disparity between institutional representation and material inclusion. She articulated a sense of being tokenised for diversity branding, recounting:

> *"The higher education institutions that I have worked for have used me to be a mouthpiece and to actively have my dyslexia and #Neurodiversity on my profiles…yet there was no support, and it was left to my PhD supervisors because they didn't do neurodiversity at that particular university".*

This illustrates a clear case of symbolic inclusion that lacks substantive institutional backing, mirroring patterns of ableism identified in the literature (Lindsay and Fuentes 2022).

Beyond the absence of support, Flora also notes the institutional devaluation of her professional expertise:

> *"I hold some qualifications which are well beyond the scope of my job title, like principal fellow or national teaching fellow. But my job title doesn't necessarily reflect that".*

These layered experiences point to systemic misrecognition, where neurodivergent academics are publicly celebrated yet structurally constrained, reflecting broader critique of surface-level diversity discourse within higher education (Breslin and Currant 2024). Clouder et al.'s (2020) narrative review further underscores this disjunction, observing that while institutions often support services and employ inclusive language, there remains an "apparent dislocation" between what is provided and what is genuinely needed, demonstrating that good intentions alone are insufficient.

Agentic: Reflexive Adaptation in Pedagogy and Writing

Flora proactively leverages her neurodivergence in pedagogical contexts, describing her methodical adaptations:

> *"When I go teaching…I will explain it one way and then make sure I've got two different ways of explaining the same thing…I like to be able to have a very practical example, a theoretical example and a picture example".*

This multimodal pedagogical strategy exemplifies agentic, reflective pedagogical practice: a conscious, self-directed effort to refine teaching and writing in response to learners' diverse needs. It aligns with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which advocates for multiple means of representation, engagement and expression to promote equity and access (Espada-Chavarria et al. 2023). Hamilton and Petty (2023) further describe such adaptive practice as a compassionate, strength-based pedagogy that foregrounds cognitive diversity via varied explanatory methods. Spaeth and Pearson (2023), writing as neurodivergent academics, emphasise that multimodal strategies serve both inclusive pedagogy and agentic empowerment, enabling educators to enact

reflexive adaptation as a pedagogical method and an epistemic stance.

Flora described her proactive engagement with AI as a means of overcoming writing challenges, noting that the ability to produce initial drafts in her own words and refine them through AI tools significantly improved her ability to communicate:

> *"The big change has been being able to write stuff in my own words, dumping it into AI and saying make my English better…I'm now keeping up with my peers because I'm actually able to articulate clearly".*

This reflects an agentic form of adaptation in academic writing, whereby digital tools are strategically employed to enhance fluency, clarity and confidence. Recent research supports this practice, indicating that generative AI platforms such as ChatGPT can assist neurodivergent students by enabling real-time text refinement and improving overall readability (Zhao et al. 2025).

Bai et al. (2024) further demonstrate that AI-supporting writing environments offer continuous, formative feedback, which can be especially beneficial for writers navigating linguistic or cognitive barriers. These technologies act as scaffolding tools, supporting self-expression and mitigating stigma often associated with language use. In this sense, Flora's narrative aligns with broader findings that highlight AI as a mechanism through which neurodivergent academics can negotiate inclusion, productivity and peer parity within higher education institutions.

Culture: Digital Community as a Third Space

Flora's narrative highlights how Twitter operated as a dynamic third space, affording a sense of professional belonging and informal support that was often absent within institutional structures. She reflected:

> *"I would say it's massive. I pick up so much from Twitter because it's short, it's succinct… you connect with people far quicker… you can engage with the person more directly".*

This sense of immediacy and relational accessibility positions Twitter as what McArthur and White (2016) described as a "digital third place", a gathering site characterised by low barriers to entry, informal dialogue and communal ties. Such spaces offer a cultural counterpoint to the more hierarchical and bureaucratic environments of higher education, where neoliberal marketisation often reinforces managerialism, performance surveillance and marginalisation of non-normative identities (Cerro Santamaría 2020; Brown and Ramlackhan 2022).

Flora's account reveals how Twitter functioned as a third space that culturally scaffolded her professional identity through informal, peer-driven practices. Flora described Twitter as *"99.9% of the time… a positive and very supportive experience"*, highlighting how the platform fostered cultural inclusion and affective validation through shared epistemic engagement. This reflects McDougall and Potter's (2019) account of third space

learning, where digital media enables reflective and creative practice beyond traditional educational boundaries. This aligns with Whitchurch's (2013) notion of third space professionals, as Flora enacted a hybrid professional identity not confined to institutional recognition but validated through fluid online affiliations. As Scott and Gibson (2022) argue, Twitter can serve as a Virtual Community of Practice, enabling sustained professional development through reciprocity, immediacy and cognitive accessibility. Flora's narrative thus explains how digital third spaces can offer relational, epistemic and cultural counterpoints to traditional academic environments.

Cultural-Agentic: Selective Digital Engagement and Boundary Management

Flora's approach to digital engagement reveals a strategic calibration of presence and withdrawal shaped by affective feedback and platform dynamics. Following a negative interaction: "I replied to somebody being empathetic, and I got bitten…then I came off Twitter", Flora chose to disengage temporarily, taking time to rebuild her confidence before re-engaging. This aligns with Papacharissi's (2012) view of Twitter as a space where the self is performed in front of overlapping audiences, requiring users to continuously negotiate how they present themselves. Flora's selective withdrawal illustrates agentic reflexivity, where disengagement becomes a protective strategy in response to affective strain. Skafle et al. (2024) similarly observe that autistic individuals often regulate their social media use to avoid emotional exhaustion, emphasising the importance of safety and clarity in digital interaction.

Flora's platform choices further demonstrate intentional boundary management. Flora stated:

> *"I'll only focus on responding to tweets from the National Teaching Federation… And if I want to talk to people about their personal ailments, then we'll do that on Facebook or…Teams".*

This form of selective participation reflects Boyd's (2010) argument that users navigate "networked publics" by managing audience visibility and shifting contexts. Flora's strategic separation of personal and professional exchanges resonates with Obexer (2022) analysis of third space identity work, where individuals positioned between formal roles and informal practices must constantly negotiate the expectations of multiple domains. By allocating sensitive discussions to closed networks, Flora maintains emotional integrity while sustaining a credible public professional identity. This illustrates how neurodivergent educators can exercise agency not only in what they say, but in where and how they say it.

Cultural-Agentic: Collective Disclosure and Normative Shifts

Flora's reflections on increased visibility among senior academics:

"Some of these Russell Group University professors actually coming out and saying, I'm autistic or I'm ADHD" highlights the significance of collective disclosure in shaping more inclusive cultural norms within higher education. This aligns with Egner's (2022) analysis of # ActuallyAutistic Twitter, where public narratives function

as acts of resistance against deficit-based framings, enabling both personal validation and communal solidarity. Flora's reaction, "You think, hooray, this is progress… before you know it, all of these people who façade", illustrates the cascading effect of visible disclosure in shifting perceived norms.
The study by Satterlund et al. (2025) offers empirical support for this phenomenon: they found that tweets using # ActuallyAutistic were more likely to reflect social identity, perceived injustice and efficacy in relation to activism in contrast to #Autism tweets, which emphasised support provision. Their regression analysis demonstrated that perceptions of injustice and efficacy were significant predictors of communicative actions like experience sharing and information dissemination, practices Flora implicitly celebrates as culturally transformative.

Moreover, Flora's insight *"once somebody says it…someone else will go, actually, so am I*" illustrates a process of cultural transformation grounded in relational disclosure and collective legitimacy. This mirrors what Egner (2022) identifies as the narrative power of platforms like Twitter to disrupt internalised stigma and construct shared autistic identities. Rather than isolated acts, these disclosures become socially patterned responses to shifting norms, where visibility functions as validation. As Grant and Kara (2021) argue, recognising the value of autistic perspectives within qualitative research not only affirms individual capacity but also challenges epistemic hierarchies that marginalise neurodivergent modes of knowing.

Flora's account aligns with this claim by portraying disclosure as both agentic and epistemologically generative. Clouder (2020) similarly emphasises that genuine neurodiversity inclusion depends on the widespread visibility of neurodivergent academics across institutional levels, not only through formal accommodation but through cultural acceptance. Thus, the ripple effect Flora describes reflects a deepening cultural-agentic shift, wherein personal revelations contribute to a broader redefinition of what constitutes professionalism and credibility in higher education institutions.

Defining and Naming Themes

As with previous iterations of this analytical phase (see Sections 5.6.1, 5.6.2 and 5.6.3), this section concludes the interpretive process by defining and naming the key themes that emerged from Flora's interview. Each theme is mapped to at least one of the three critical realist layers: structure, culture or agency. This is also aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Questions 1, 2 and 4. The naming process clarifies the analytical significance of each theme, foregrounds its connection to the broader dataset, and links to relevant conceptual and empirical literature. Sub-themes are listed beneath each overarching theme to reflect internal differentiation and depth within Flora's narrative.

1. Structural Constraints and Symbolic Inclusion

Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Question 4

Sub-themes:

• Public diversity branding without material support

• Misrecognition of professional expertise

• Disconnect between institutional discourse and practice

Flora described institutional contexts where her neurodivergent identity was publicly celebrated yet structurally unsupported. Her experience of being positioned as a diversity figurehead, "used me to be a mouthpiece and to actively have my dyslexia and #Neurodiversity on profiles", reveals a symbolic inclusion divorced from substantive institutional change. This mirrors Lindsay and Fuentes's (2022) critique of ableist inertia and Clouder et al.'s (2020) observation of "dislocation" between institutional rhetoric and practice. Further, Flora's comment that "*my job title doesn't necessarily reflect"* her high-level credentials illustrates systemic misrecognition, consistent with Breslin and Currant's (2024) critique of performative equality within academic structures.

2. Agentic Pedagogy and Writing Through Reflexive Adaptation

Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Question 4

Sub-themes:

• Multimodal instruction for inclusive learning

• Self-aware adaptation through AI tools

• Confidence-building via communicative scaffolding

Flora's teaching method, grounded in explanatory variation, "a practical example, a theoretical example and a picture example", reflects agentic reflexivity in pedagogical design. Her multimodal approach aligns with Universal Design for Learning (Espada-Chavarria et al. 2023) and Hamilton and Petty (2023) emphasis on compassionate adaptive practice. In writing, Flora strategically employs AI to overcome linguistic barriers: "*dumping it into AI and saying make my English better… I'm now keeping up with my peers".* This illustrates how generative tools support inclusion and articulation, as confirmed by Zhao et al (2025) and Bai et al. (2024), who identify AI as beneficial for neurodivergent academics navigating communication and confidence gaps.

3. Digital Community as Third Space and Professional Anchor

Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Questions 1 and 2

Sub-themes:

• Informal peer support as an epistemic resource

• Belonging through low-barrier interaction

• Hybrid identity beyond institutional boundaries

Flora's characterisation of Twitter as "a positive and very supportive experience" encapsulates its function as a third space: supportive, informal and relational. Her comments on speed and directness, *"you connect with people far quicker"*, highlight its immediacy and accessibility. These qualities resonate with McArthur and White's (2016) idea of digital third places and McDougall and Potter's (2019) vision of third space learning. Whitchurch's (2013) concept of the hybrid professional also applies, as Flora constructs her identity beyond institutional gatekeeping. Scott and Gibson (2022) reinforce this, portraying Twitter as a Virtual Community of Practice fostering peer validation and professional autonomy for neurodivergent educators.

4. Cultural-Agentic Boundary Work and Strategic Engagement

Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Question 1

Sub-themes:

• Emotional regulation through digital withdrawal

• Context-sensitive audience curation

• Tactical compartmentalisation of personal-professional spheres

Flora's temporary disengagement: *"I got bitten… then I came off Twitter"* shows affective boundary work where withdrawal becomes a self-protective tactic. This reflects Papachrissi's (2012) framing of social media as spaces requiring performance calibration and Skafle et al.'s (2024) findings that neurodivergent users actively modulate engagement to avoid emotional fatigue. Her preference for platform segmentation: *"If I want to talk to people about their personal ailments, we'll do that on Facebook or…Teams"* demonstrates deliberate audience management, consistent with Boyd's (2010) and Obexer's (2022) observations about navigating networked publics through context-specific participation.

5. Collective Disclosure and Epistemic Transformation

Aligned with the Main Research Question and Sub-Questions 1 and 4

Sub-themes:

• Cultural visibility through shared narratives

• Normalisation of neurodivergent identity
• Disclosure as epistemic and relational practice

Flora's observation that senior academics are "coming out and saying, I'm autistic or I'm ADHD marks a cultural shift towards collective disclosure. This mirrors Egner's (2022) analysis of #ActuallyAutistic Twitter, where public storytelling fosters resistance and solidarity. Flora's reaction: "*You think hooray, this is progress... before you know it, all of these people who façade"* illustrates a cascading norm shift in visibility. Satterlund et al. (2025) empirically support this, showing how communicative action on Twitter is driven by perceptions of injustice and efficacy. Flora's insight that *"once someone says it…someone else will go, actually, so am I"* reflects the relational logic of cultural discourse as identity validation and norm redefinition. This also aligns with Clouder et al.'s (2020) calls for visible inclusion and Grant and Kara's (2021) advocacy for recognising neurodivergent narratives as legitimate forms of knowing within academic discourse.

5.7 Reflexive Synthesis and Researcher Positionality

Engaging with the full arc of the data in this chapter: survey results, Padlet contributions, interviews and my own autoethnographic reflections, was both an analytic and affective journey. Patterns of structural exclusion, digital curation and reflexive adaptation emerged across each method, revealing the precarious balancing act that neurodivergent educators must perform between institutional expectation and authentic selfhood. At times, the resonance between participant narratives and my own experiences was striking.

Drew's account of precarity, Flora's strategic digital boundary-setting and Katrina's aesthetic identity work all reflected dynamics I have lived. Their words often echoed my own; moments of masking, navigating tokenism or seeking solidarity online were not abstract phenomena, but shared conditions that shaped our professional trajectories. Rather than distancing myself from these affinities, I embraced them as analytical insights, recognising that insider knowledge offered depth, not distortion, when approached with methodological reflexivity.

Throughout this process, I became increasingly aware that the digital spaces we inhabit, particularly Twitter, operate as both refuge and risk. The agentic moves made by participants in these spaces reminded me of my own attempts to forge professional legitimacy amid shifting norms, burnout and institutional ambivalence. Revising my self-interview, I was reminded that the research question was never wholly external; it grew from the conditions we described and lived. This chapter, then, is not merely a

presentation of data but a partial mapping of a shared topography, one shaped by resilience, compromise and critical hope. As we move on into the next chapter, these individual and collective threads will be drawn together into a thematic synthesis that examines how identity, agency and survival professionalism coalesce in the figure of the neurodivergent educator.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an integrated discussion of the study's findings, drawing together insights from the five interrelated sources: the online survey, Padlet exercise, self-interview, semi-structured interviews and an ongoing reflexive narrative commentary. While the first four datasets were analysed method-by-method in Chapter 5, this chapter synthesises the findings thematically across those methods and layers. The reflexive narrative, drawn from my experiences as a neurodivergent academic, is integrated throughout this thesis and will culminate in a concluding reflection in Chapter 7. Collectively, these sources offer a nuanced account of how neurodivergent educators navigate professional identity, digital engagement and institutional constrained through Twitter.

The synthesis builds on the previous analytical stages in chapter 5, where the analytical process culminates in the production of a coherent narrative that is organised around four overarching themes, developed through inductive coding, theoretical integration and reflexive insight. Each theme reflects one or more dimensions of a critical realist ontology (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019) focusing on structural conditions, cultural practices and agentic positioning. This analytical framing enables a deeper engagement with how neurodivergent professional practice is constrained or enabled across digital and institutional contexts.

In this study, triangulation functioned as a methodological and interpretative strategy to integrate and deepen understanding across multiple forms of data. As Heale and Forbes (2013) define triangulation as the use of multiple methods to enhance confidence in findings by compensating for individual limitations. For instance, the survey offered breadth, while the Padlet and interviews added depth and personal context. My self-interview and reflexive commentary provided insider insight and positioned interpretation as part of the analytic process. Denzin's (2012) notion of *Triangulation 2.0* supports this dialogic approach, where tensions between datasets are treated as generative rather than contradictory. Flick (2018) further frames triangulation as a means of conceptual development. The final themes from Chapter 5 were brought together through this integrated process to construct the four overarching themes in this chapter.

Conceptual frameworks introduced in earlier chapters are revisited to support the synthesis. The notion of *Third Space* (Whitchurch 2013; McDougall and Potter 2019; Obexer 2022) is used to understand Twitter as a hybrid space where personal authenticity, professional performance and collective agency are negotiated. The evolving figure of the *Nomadic Educator* is also re-engaged to frame how neurodivergent educators navigate institutional demands and digital participation. Drawing on Braidotti's (2011) notion of nomadism, this theme is understood as a critical, situated subjectivity that resists fixed identities and traverses multiple boundaries. This aligns with participants' strategic movement across formal and informal spaces to assert agency and belonging. Reay (2004) further supports this framing by conceptualising habitus as a fluid and reflexively reworked, rather than static. Together, these perspectives illuminate how neurodivergent educators respond to structural constraints through adaptive, mobile practices grounded in critical self-awareness.

Aligned with Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) concept of multi-layered interpretation, my reflexive voice is embedded throughout this chapter, especially where my lived experiences resonate with or diverge from those of participants. These reflexive insights are not treated as supplementary but are integrated within the analytical process, recognising that interpretation is shaped by positionality. Each theme presented in this chapter, therefore, performs three overlapping roles: it synthesises findings across datasets, interprets them through conceptual and empirical lenses and incorporates reflexive commentary. The final theme revisits the Nomadic Educator concept, using the data to refine its meaning. The chapter concludes with a reflexive synthesis that bridges into Chapter 7, where the broader implications for practice, theory and policy are considered.

6.2 Comparative Thematic Synthesis Across Datasets

Having analysed each dataset independently in Chapter 5, this section offers a comparative synthesis of findings across the five datasets: survey, Padlet, self-interview, semi-structured interviews and reflexive narrative commentary. This integration enhances analytical depth and supports the construction of the four overarching themes presented in the remainder of this chapter. Grounded in a critical realist framework, the synthesis reflects the interplay of structure, culture and agency (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019), illuminating how digital engagement and professional identity are negotiated within institutional and personal constraints. Triangulation played a key role in enabling both conceptual integration and interpretative depth. As Heale and Forbes (2013) explain, triangulation enhances trustworthiness by drawing on multiple perspectives, while Denzin's (2012) notion of "Triangulation 2.0" highlights its potential to generate insight through divergence, not just convergence. In this study, for example, the theme of digital disclosure was confirmed across the Padlet and interviews yet nuanced in the survey by differences in participants' career stages. This illustrates how triangulation supported the development of layered, cross-cutting insights.

The following sub-section identifies five core themes that recurred across all datasets, providing the conceptual foundation for the more focused thematic analyses that follow in Sections 6.3-6.6

6.2.1 Shared Themes Across Datasets

A number of themes emerged consistently across the five datasets, highlighting shared experiences among neurodivergent educators while also revealing the distinct contributions of each method. Each theme was enriched by the unique affordances of the different data sources, allowing for deeper insight through varied modes of engagement. The following five themes represent core patterns that informed the development of the four overarching thematic sections that follow in this chapter.

Blending of Personal and Professional Identity

The concept of Twitter as a "third space"- A hybrid space between personal and professional spheres, surfaced repeatedly across the survey, Padlet, Interviews and self-reflection. Survey Participants described Twitter as a space for authentic expression, while interviewees and Padlet contributors elaborated on the performative negotiations required to maintain credibility and protect vulnerability. In my own reflexive account, I engaged with these same dilemmas: deciding how, when and to what extent to share elements of my neurodivergent identity in professional spaces. This theme reflects the cultural and agentic dimensions of the critical realist ontology and responds directly to Sub-Question 1.

Community, Belonging and Peer Support

Twitter was consistently positioned as more than a professional tool, it was described as a site of relational belonging, validation and solidarity. Survey respondents spoke of "finding my people" while interviewees described building a network grounded in shared neurodivergent experiences. The Padlet data offered affective expressions of mutual care, and my own experiences reinforced how Twitter functioned as a community space in contrast to the institutional isolation often felt in academia. This theme is located within the cultural layer of critical realism and intersects with Sub-RQ2 in showing how digital engagement reshapes access to the professional community.

Disclosure and Authenticity

Decisions about when and how to disclose one's neurodivergent identity were a recurrent concern across the datasets. While some participants disclosed openly as an act of solidarity or advocacy, others chose selective or non-disclosure due to fears of stigma, tokenism or reputational risk. Interviewees framed disclosure as a situational and strategic process, often shaped by workplace culture and career stage, while Padlet responses conveyed ambivalence, balancing a desire for authenticity with caution. Survey responses revealed additional

nuance, particularly regarding early-career educators, who reported greater hesitancy in disclosure. My own reflexive commentary echoed these complexities as I, too, have navigated the fine line between advocacy and self-protection in digital and institutional spaces.

This theme reflects a dual positioning within the structural and agentic layers of the critical realist framework. Structurally, disclosure is shaped by institutional norms and power dynamics. Agentically, educators make active decisions regarding visibility and self-presentation. The theme aligns directly with the Main Research Question, as it centres on how identity is negotiated and performed and with Sub-Question 1, by illustrating how disclosure practices shape and sustain third-space interactions. It also speaks to Sun-Question 4, offering insight into the institutional barriers that limit inclusive engagement and authentic self-expression.

Professional Utility of Twitter

Participants across datasets recognised Twitter as a valuable platform for informal learning, professional visibility, advocacy and knowledge-sharing. The Padlet and interviews revealed how participants used the platform to access networks, promote inclusion and build academic capital outside of formal structures. My own engagement mirrored these patterns, using Twitter to develop a public voice and engage with supportive networks. This theme maps onto the cultural layer by illustrating how norms of academic engagement, peer validation and knowledge exchange are recognised in digital spaces that foreground neurodivergent ways of knowing and relating.

Simultaneously, it connects with the agentic layer, as participants exercised strategic agency to circumvent institutional gatekeeping, build visibility on their own terms, and foster alternative routes to professional legitimacy. These findings contribute to understanding how neurodivergent educators sustain professional identity within a hybrid digital space, directly speaking to how third-space interactions are shaped and maintained over time. They also demonstrated how the COVID-10 pandemic intensified reliance on platforms like Twitter for professional visibility, connection and support, transforming digital engagement into a critical component of academic survival and growth (Maps with Sub-Questions 1 and 2).

Challenges and Coping Strategies

Despite its benefits, participants also identified significant emotional and cognitive demands associated with maintaining a professional presence on Twitter. Common concerns included exposure to ableism, the emotional toll of platform toxicity and burnout arising from the pressures of hyper-visibility and constant self-curation. These experiences were particularly acute for those navigating already-precarious institutional conditions, where online engagement was often simultaneously a source of community and a site of surveillance.

This theme intersects with the structural layer of critical realism by highlighting the broader institutional and socio-technological conditions that produce stress and vulnerability, such as the lack of institutional recognition for digital labour, the exploitative attention economy of social media, and ableist discourses that circulate in public-facing platforms. At the cultural layer, these challenges reflect norms of productivity, visibility and 'professionalism' that neurodivergent educators must either conform to or resist in digital contexts. In response, the agentic layer becomes evident in how participants actively developed coping mechanisms, such as curating their digital feeds, limiting their posting during flare-ups or periods of fatigue and engaging in selective discourse. These strategies exemplify the reflexive, adaptive agency necessary to sustain engagement without compromising well-being.

This theme is particularly relevant to Sub-Question 1, as it explores how third space interactions are navigated over time, often requiring educators to balance openness with protection. It also aligns with Sub-Question 2, showing how the COVID-19 pandemic intensified digital reliance while increasing the emotional and cognitive labour of online participation. Critically, it contributes to Sub-Question 4, by revealing institutional blind spots around wellbeing, inclusion and support for neurodivergent academics. Participants' coping strategies were often necessitated by the absence of meaningful institutional provisions, highlighting the need for more inclusive digital and workplace policies that recognise emotional labour and neurodivergent access needs.

6.2.2 Survey and Divergent Themes

The survey highlighted divergent ways in which neurodivergent educators experience and perceive Twitter. Participants described a wide spectrum of approaches to disclosure, ranging from open self-identification and advocacy through to cautious or withdrawn engagement due to reputational concerns. Patterns of platform use also varied in emphasis. Some participants viewed Twitter as a strategic tool for networking, visibility and professional development, while others adopted a more passive or carefully curated approach, shaped by concerns about toxicity and sustainability. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was similarly mixed: for some, it intensified engagement and offered opportunities for community building, whereas for others it reinforced scepticism or disengagement.

Perceptions of safety and emotional well-being emerged as a further area of divergence. A number of educators reflected on the affective labour involved in negotiating hostility and discrimination, with some describing withdrawal or reduced participation as a protective response. Other emphasised the continued value of community connection despite these risks, balancing caution with sustained involvement. Therefore, these findings provide a panoramic perspective on how neurodivergent educators can navigate Twitter as a third space for identity work. The divergent themes align with Sub-Questions 1,2 and 4, spanning all three layers of the

study's critical realist ontology. Survey data, thus, helped captured initial themes in Twitter usage, disclosure practices, and perceptions of institutional risk, suggesting that disclosure is both a cultural and agentic act shaped by evolving norms and individual risk assessments. These themes are presented in the **Table 33** below.

Table 33: Divergent Themes from the Survey

Theme	Divergent Experiences
Engagement Styles	Some participants described Twitter as a proactive space for networking, professional development and career advancement, using it strategically to build visibility and share research. Others preferred passive or highly curated engagement, limiting activity to observation or information-gathering. A smaller number withdrew altogether, citing toxicity or time constraints.
Disclosure Responses	Disclosure practices ranged from open advocacy and identity performance through to anonymity or silence. For some, disclosure was empowering, enabling activism and visibility; for others it was framed as risky, prompting careful curation or avoidance. Institutional vulnerability and reputational concerns often shaped these decisions.
COVID-19 Effect	The pandemic intensified engagement for several educators, who turned to Twitter for community, pedagogic exchange, and professional support. Others reported little or no change in their use, and in some cases the pandemic reduced participation, reinforcing disengagement from online professional spaces.
Platform Perception	Views of Twitter as a space for professional practice diverged sharply. Some participants emphasised its value as a strategic tool for career development despite challenges. Others highlighted its psychological and emotional toll, with toxicity, trolling and discrimination prompting withdrawal, deactivation, or deliberate curation of feeds to reduce exposure.

6.2.3 Padlet and Divergent Insights

The Padlet exercise, as explored in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.4), revealed marked contrasts in how each participant engaged with the activity, reflecting distinct affective strategies for negotiating academic identity and digital expression. Nora's use of audio narration conveyed embodied emotional depth and relational temporality, challenging dominant, text-centric academic norms. Drew adopted a rich multi-modal approach, blending written text, images and voice, to construct a layered identity narrative grounded in neurodiverse pedagogy and reflective authenticity. In contrast, Katrina's sparse textual input, punctuated by a single affective emoji, demonstrated a minimalist yet impactful mode of boundary-setting and emotional signalling. Flora's contributions, by comparison, employed a structured, pragmatic tone that prioritised strategic visibility, affective containment and professional coherence.

These divergent approaches illuminated two key insights: the value of asynchronous reflection and the significance of multimodal expression. Participants' use of voice notes, bullet points, and even humour demonstrated how communication preferences directly shaped their engagement. The Padlet format enabled slower, more deliberate contributions, allowing participants to pace their responses in ways that aligned with their cognitive styles and emotional needs. As such, the Padlet phase affirmed that providing non-linear, accessible participation pathways can invite more profound reflexivity and reveal nuanced dimensions of identity work that may otherwise remain obscure in more conventional data collection formats.

6.2.4 Comparing Interviews with Self-Interview: Reflexive Divergence

Reflecting on my own autoethnographic interview, I became actively aware of how my experiences diverged from those of the other participants, particularly in terms of digital strategy, affective orientation and identity work. While many shared themes emerged across the dataset, my own account was shaped by a different set of pressures and imperatives. Where others often described Twitter as a space of *expression, connection* or even *transformation,* I experienced it as a site of *deliberate calculation:* a place in which maintaining professionally viable demanded continual monitoring, self-editing and boundary management.

While Drew and Nora used visibility as a relational and pedagogical strategy, sharing lived experiences to foster solidarity, I approached visibility with greater caution. I often withheld, deleted or edited Tweets, timing my posts around anticipated audience reception. This was not an arbitrary habit but a reflexive strategy, driven by fear of misreading or backlash. In contrast, Katrina navigated visibility through *aesthetic framing* and *stylised partial disclosure*, using emojis, tone and profile design to communicate presence while preserving emotional coherence. Katrina's engagement through curated, appeared softer in tone, performing legitimacy through coherence rather than control. My strategies were more tightly bound to self-protection than relational invitation.

Similarly, where Flora and Nora described practices of multimodal pedagogy and workplace redesign as empowering acts of adaptation, I often found myself performing *professional legibility* as a way of defending against marginalisation. For me, the adoption of structural threads, academic hashtags, and polished phrasing was less about confidence and more about being taken seriously. These practices were a kind of shield, designed to minimise perceived divergence and reduce professional risk. Katrina's aesthetic framing, by contrast, blended creative identity with credibility, allowing her to assert a more fluid and playful presence. While I leaned toward normative visibility, she embraced tonal flexibility to carve out affective resonance without overexposure.

Relationality emerged as another point of divergence. I frequently experienced online interaction as a risk-laden terrain, concerned with audience blending and the emotional cost of being misunderstood. In contrast, Drew described Twitter as a space for peer solidarity, and Nora framed her public storytelling as a form of epistemic generosity. Katrina's feed curation practices: muting hashtags, managing audience exposure, unfollowing destabilising content, echoed my own instinct toward cautious engagement. Yet even here, our motives diverged slightly. Katrina's approach foregrounded *care* and *emotional coherence,* aligning with feminist digital ethics; mine stemmed from a sustained anxiety around professional legitimacy and reputational harm.

Taken together, the reflexive divergences point to a theme I can now name as "survival professionalism" (see Section 6.6), a mode of digital self-presentation defined by caution, control and continuous recalibration. Rather than expressive or expansive identity work, my digital engagement was often driven by the need to remain *credible* and *legible* in the face of structural exclusion and cultural misrecognition. This is not to say that the other participants were untouched by similar forces, but the way I responded was more defensive than transformative, more about *not being undone* than about being fully seen. This survivalist stance doesn't negate agency; it reframes it as a labour of endurance, not resistance.

6.2.5 Summary of Converging and Diverging Themes

To consolidate the comparative insights drawn from the survey, Padlet, interviews and autoethnographic data. **Table 34** presents a thematic synthesis that highlights both convergence and divergence across sources, as this enabled triangulation of all the datasets used by each method. Each theme reflects shared patterns among neurodivergent educators while also revealing the distinctive affordances and constraints of each method. The table maps each theme against the three layers of the study's critical realist ontology: structure, culture and agency, and positions the autoethnographic interview not only as a methodological component but as a reflexive counterpoint.

This synthesis reveals that while themes such as *identity blending* and *peer support* appeared widely across datasets, the meanings and modalities of expression varied significantly. The divergent account presented in the autoethnographic interview contributed to the naming of a new concept, "survival professionalism", which underscores the strategic and affectively loaded labour required to remain credible in hostile or exclusionary environments. This reflexive divergence deepens the analytic frame, emphasising that alignment across themes does not equate to uniformity in experience.

Table 34: Summary of Converging and Diverging Themes Across Data Sources

Theme	Survey	Padlet	Interviews	Autoethnography	Critical

					Realist Layer
Blending of Personal and Professional Identity	✔ Broad trends in blended usage	✔ Rich multimodal expression	✔ Detailed identity narratives	✔ Reflexive tension around curation	Culture & Agency
Community, Belonging and Peer Support	✔ Found 'my people' comments	✔ Mutual validation posts	✔ Collegial support narratives	✔ Sense of connection and safety	Culture
Disclosure and Authenticity	✔ Patterns of selective disclosure	✔ Ambivalence and caution	✔ Strategic decisions based on context	✔ Positional risk and intention	Structure & Agency
Professional Utility of Twitter	✔ Informal learning trends	✔ Creative engagement examples	✔ Career/visibility strategies	✔ Platform as a professional lifeline	Agency
Challenges and Coping Strategies	✔ Platform exhaustion noted	✔ Humour and boundary-setting	✔ Strategies to manage overload	✔ Dissonance and digital withdrawal	Structure & Agency
Institutional versus Digital Disclosure	⊖	✔ Nuanced institutional contrasts	✔ Tactical withdrawal in the workplace	✔ Dual identity experience	Structure
Survival Professionalism	⊖	⊖	✔ Emerged in autoethnographic self-interview	✔ Strategic control, caution, and affective labour	Agency (shaped by Structure & Culture)

Note: ✔ indicates a theme emerged prominently; ⊖ indicates minimal or no data contribution

The shared themes outlined in **Table 34**: blending of personal and professional identity; community, belonging,

and peer support; disclosure and authenticity; professional utility; challenges and coping strategies; institutional versus digital disclosure; and survival professionalism, emerged from both the cross-method synthesis and the detailed re-examination of each dataset. These themes provided the analytic foundation for the four overarching discussions that structure this chapter.

Each reflects a crystallisation of patterns across sources while preserving the distinct interpretive contributions of each method. Section 6.3, *Performing Professional Identity in Digital Spaces*, explores how identity is enacted through Twitter's hybrid affordances. Section 6.4, *Disclosure as Risk, Strategy and Structure*, addresses disclosure as a complex and often ambivalent negotiation within institutional and digital logics. Section 6.5, *Digital Agency and the Third Space*, frames Twitter as a liminal, agentic space enabling experimentation with identity, care, and connection. Section 6.6, *Precarity and Survival Professionalism*, examines how neurodivergent educators navigate institutional exclusion through adaptive, often emotionally taxing strategies of self-presentation and resilience.

Together, these thematic strands converge in Section 6.7, *The Nomadic Educator Revisited*, where the conceptual figure initially introduced in Chapter 2 is reflexively reinterpreted. No longer a fixed typology, the Nomadic Educator emerges as a heuristic lens—one shaped by digital precarity, shifting institutional conditions, agentic improvisation, and the pursuit of epistemic legitimacy across uneven terrains. Finally, Section 6.8, *Researching from Within: A Neurodivergent Perspective*, reflects on the methodological and epistemological significance of conducting this research as an insider.

The autoethnographic dimensions of the project, initially conceived as a complementary thread, proved essential in capturing the complexity of the field. My lived experience became not only a bridge between theory and data but a tool of critical reflexivity. This recursive engagement with the data, particularly through iterative listening and informal 'memoing', enabled a re-reading of the research questions through the lens of embodied understanding. In this way, insider reflexivity was not a limitation but a resource, one that enriched the analytic process and deepened the study's interpretive reach.

6.3 Performing Professional Identity in Digital Spaces

One of the most persistent themes across all data sources was the performance of professional identity in digital spaces, specifically how neurodivergent educators navigate, negotiate and enact their professional selves on Twitter in strategic and purposeful ways. This aligns with both the Main Research Question and Sub-Q1, engaging with Twitter as a third space in which participants blend their professional and personal identities.

This blending exemplifies the critical realist view that identity is shaped by structural conditions such as institutional norms and platform cultures while being enacted through agentive practices. Sayer (2000) emphasises that, from a critical realist standpoint, social structures possess real causal powers that both constrain and enable action. Echoing this, Archer's (1995) morphogenetic approach delineates a temporal cycle in which existing structures condition agency, agents act, and those actions then reproduce or transform the original structures. In this context of neurodivergent educators' engagement on Twitter, this suggests a dynamic process: structural forces initially shape how educators frame their identities; their visible practices: tweets, replies, profile choices, represent agentive enactment; and over time, these practices contribute to the evolution of both institutional expectations and platform norms.

Participants recurrently describe Twitter as a space where their professional identity was not merely stated but performed through tweets, retweets, bio curation and selective disclosures. Drew emphasis on this with a strong sense of intentional self-presentation:

> *"I don't see how I can support students from different backgrounds without being honest about my own background, my own privileges, but also my own challenges… I've always been an open book".*

Drew also contrasted this openness with institutional expectations of polished professionalism:

> *"There's something about colleagues who feel like they have to be the perfect sage on the stage… turn up in a suit on Zoom. Why would you do that? You're in your house"*

Flora similarly reflected that Twitter offered validation when academia did not:

> *"99.9% of the time it is a positive and very supportive experience on Twitter…It's allowed me to feel like a professional and be treated as one even when the institutions haven't".*

This aligns closely with Goffman's (2021) dramaturgical metaphor of self-presentation, where social interaction is likened to a theatrical performance. Individuals manage impressions by controlling appearance, manner and setting to shape how they are perceived by others. Twitter, in this sense, functions as a digital stage where professional selves are consciously curated and maintained. Butler (2015) extends this by proposing that identity is performative, not a fixed or inherent quality, but something constituted through repeated acts within normative frameworks.

From this perspective, professional identity on Twitter is not only expressed but brought into being through ongoing patterns of engagement such as tweeting, replying and bio updates. As Katrina explained:

> *"I think I changed [my bio] a few times, because I was trying to decide how much of myself to put on there… whether to include the neurodivergent bit or not. In the end, I did, but only once I felt comfortable and established".*

Katrina's account illustrates how identity on Twitter is not simply revealed but strategically enacted and

continually revised to align with perceived expectations and evolving comfort. These acts produce the illusion of a stable identity while remaining embedded within institutional and cultural norms.

For neurodivergent educators, these performances are shaped not only by expectations of professionalism but also by endemic ableism within higher education. Brown and Leigh (2018) argue that academia enforces normative standards of productivity, visibility and 'sanity', marginalising those whose embodied and neurodivergent identities deviate from the ideal. This ableist environment exerts pressure on individuals to conceal or manage their differences, compelling them to perform an identity that aligns with institutional norms. In digital spaces such as Twitter, professional identity thus becomes a strategic performance where neurodivergent educators navigate disclosure carefully, curating bios, tweets and interactions to assert credibility while mitigating risk associated with being perceived as 'less professional'.

Building on this analysis, participants consistently described Twitter as a dynamic third space that enables experimentation with authenticity while challenging institutional norms of the "ideal academic". Drew articulated this effectively: "Twitter feels like my staffroom…only better. I can be informal but still be taken seriously". Drew's comment exemplifies the third-space dynamic that McDougall and Potter (2019) describe, where informal, formal, private and professional selves converge in dialogic exchange, enabling educators to transcend rigid academic boundaries. Flora reinforced this point when she noted:

> *"I use it to share research, yes, but also jokes, memes... stuff that shows I'm human. That's a conscious choice".*

Such curation of self extends beyond self-branding; it serves as an act of resistance, an intentional reclamation of a professional identity that does not comply with traditional, sanitised norms. Nora echoed a similar sentiment when she observed:

> *"Sometimes it's just a tweet that says, 'I'm still here', and that's enough. It's me saying I exist in this space, even if I'm not doing it the way others do".*

Nora's reflection affirms the view that digital presence can be a quiet assertion of authenticity, an act of presence that resists performative professionalism by making space for vulnerability and continuity on one's own terms. As Papacharissi (2012) argues, social media invites users to engage in "networked self-presentation", where expressions of identity are filtered through both personal intention and the platform's structural constraints. These performances are not neutral but are always situated within broader social expectations of legibility and coherence. Nora's engagement exemplifies this, offering a slow, quiet yet deliberate counter-narrative to dominant academic performances.

Egner's (2022) work on the # ActuallyAutistic community similarly highlights how such expressions function both

individually and collectively, enabling users to assert presence, share lived experience, and reconfigure what counts as credible or valuable knowledge. In this sense, neurodivergent educators' use of Twitter becomes not only a communicative act but a performative one, enacting new professional norms that centre authenticity, care and survival over conformity. Yet these acts of disclosure and self-curation are not without consequence. Participants, including myself, through autoethnographic reflection, described an ongoing tension between authenticity and exposure. I reflected:

> *"I want to be open about my ADHD and autism because it might help others. But I also know that being too open could be misread as unprofessional or unstable".*

This encapsulates the "double bind" of visibility: authenticity can foster connection but simultaneously invites judgement, particularly within a digital space conditioned by platform metrics, algorithm-driven visibility and "collapse audiences" (Marwick and Boyd 2011).

These dilemmas were especially pronounced in the discussion of bio and profile management. Nora explained that she once included "ADHD academic" in her bio but removed it when applying for jobs, fearing that it might prejudice first impressions. This choice highlights how Twitter bios serve as digital front stage, sites of heightened identity work that are inherently selective and politically charged (Goffman 2021). As Pearson and Rose (2021) indicate, such performances respond to both institutional norms and broader stigmatising structures. In this respect, neurodivergent educators undertake emotional and strategic labour to manage their visibility, resisting exclusionary norms and asserting alternative professional selves, even when this complicates their digital presence.

This dynamic intersection of authenticity and exposure also reshapes what counts as valuable in academic spaces, echoing Bourdieu's (1990) theory of habitus and symbolic capital. Through their performances on Twitter, educators negotiate and reconfigure the dispositions that define academic legitimacy (Reay 2004). As Flora observed, "people take you seriously on Twitter because you're honest about struggling. That's something you don't get in staff meetings", demonstrating how transparent self-presentation can convert personal vulnerability into a form of credibility.

Survey data further supports this, with respondents intentionally blending personal and professional context, and reports that Twitter allows expression of identity facets that are constrained in physical academic settings. In applying Bourdieu's framework, the digital performances become vehicles for accruing symbolic capital, enhancing professional standing not by traditional markers such as publications or institutional affiliation but through relational authenticity enacted performatively on Twitter. Reay (2004) underscores how habitus is both shaped by and productive of field norms, suggesting that such intentional digital identity work can indeed recognise broader understandings of professional identity within higher education.

Reading and analysing this section surfaced a strong sense of recognition: the strategies described by the participant, curated bios, careful disclosures and deliberate performances, closely mirror my own experiences navigating digital academic spaces. Like many, I have balanced authenticity with caution, aware that being open about my neurodivergence might foster connection but also risk misinterpretation. Twitter, for me, was not a space of expression but of *survival professionalism,* a way to remain visible and credible while managing institutional expectations and internalise precarity. This was not identity performance for performance's sake, it was strategic, agentic and shaped by structural exclusions. As I wrote this section, I realised that digital authorship is not just a mode of resistance but a labour of endurance, a way of asserting presence on our own terms in environments that often fail to recognise our full selves.

6.4 Disclosure as Risk, Strategy and Structure

A salient theme that emerged across the data sources is the complex, strategic nature of disclosure, where neurodivergent educators continuously negotiate *when, where,* and *how* to reveal aspects of their identities. This theme connects directly to Sub-Q1 (Identity presentation) and Sub-Q4 (environmental influences), highlighting a contrast between digital platforms like Twitter and institutional academic settings. In digital space, particularly Twitter, participants described disclosure as a route to authenticity, connection and epistemic belonging. The platform's relative informality and immediacy enabled educators to control the timing, tone and audience of their disclosures. Drew noted:

> *"It's easier to say you're neuro-spicy online. You get to decide how much to show. In meetings? It's different. There's judgment".*

Such reflections illustrate how online platforms can support agentic acts of identity performance, even when bounded by the platform's visibility logic. Egner (2022) and Papacharissi (2012) argue that the affective affordance of networked publics allows for layered self-presentation that is emotionally expressive yet curated. These findings are echoed by Gualano et al. (2024) whose work on virtual self-representation highlights how neurodivergent users selectively reveal or mask aspects of identity in response to perceived safety and control.

In my own experience, I found that Twitter offered a sense of expressive freedom that institutional contexts rarely afforded. Sharing aspects of my neurodivergence online felt less risky, almost like a controlled exposure, compared to navigating disclosure in university meetings or formal review processes. This mirrored many participants' accounts and deepened my understanding of how digital platforms function as affective third spaces. Analytically, this process helped me see disclosure not only as a personal decision but as a patterned response to wider structures of academic precarity and professional expectation,

shaping and shaped by one's digital habitus. While online disclosure allowed for measured visibility, participant experiences within institutional settings revealed a far less permissive terrain, where disclosure could trigger suspicion or resistance.

By contrast, institutional environments frequently presented a more constrained and riskier context. Disclosure in academic settings was often entangled with processes of legitimisation, requiring formal documentation, navigating HR systems or risking informal judgment tied to performance and workload. Nora's experience poignantly illustrates this tension:

> *"Whilst talking openly about my disability on Twitter was a positive experience, being open with my employer wasn't"*

Her expectation of support was shaped by prior online validation, but the institutional response was one of scepticism and resistance. As she reflected elsewhere:

> *"It was like I had to prove I was struggling… they didn't believe me until it became visible. But by then, it was too late, I'd already hit burnout".*

These insights exemplify what Lindsay and Fuentes (2022) identified in their systematic review of 33 studies, which found that the most frequently reported experiences among disabled faculty were negative attitudes, lack of accommodation and challenges around disclosure. Their analysis demonstrates how systemic ableism is embedded in academic culture, where deviation from normative expectations is often met with disbelief or resistance.

Santuzzi and Keating (2022) expand on this critique by conceptualising disclosure as a prolonged, strategic dilemma rather than a one-off act. They note that neurodivergent staff often delay disclosure until difficulties become visibly disruptive, by which time meaningful support may be harder to obtain. This dynamic is excavated by institutional practices that frame disclosure through a lens of permanence, power and proof. By embedding it within HR systems, diagnostic verification and performance monitoring. Such framing casts disclosure not as a relational or rights-based act but as a potential liability, reinforcing a culture in which neurodivergence is seen as a productivity risk rather than a dimension of identity to be supported. This logic sustains what they describe as a "disclosure gap" where many choose to remain silent until crisis forces their hand.

Reflecting on these dynamics, I am reminded of my own experience during my PGCE training, where the requirement to undergo an occupational health risk assessment raised uncomfortable questions about legitimacy, capability and compliance. While one adjustment, access to a quiet workspace, was useful, the rest felt more like a procedural necessity than a genuine effort to accommodate neurodivergent needs. There was no space for the fluctuating nature of energy, sensory overwhelm, or anxiety. Each day

presented different challenges, yet the institutional frameworks demanded consistency, predictability and a narrow vision of "fitness to practise". As a result, I often found myself masking my traits and internalising stress to maintain the appearance of professionalism, especially in the classroom. Disclosure became a double bind: to reveal too much risked stigma, but to say nothing meant silently absorbing the institutional pressure to perform neurotypicality. By the end of the two years, this constant self-monitoring had led to burnout. Looking back, it is clear that the risk of disclosure was not just interpersonal; it was structurally embedded in a system that equated support with standardisation rather than responsiveness.

While many accounts reflected caution, delay or distress around institutional disclosure, this was not universal. Katrina's experience offers an important contrast, suggesting that disclosure can also lead to affirmation and support when the institutional culture permits it:

> *"When I disclosed, I was really nervous, but it turned out fine. My head of department was understanding and actually asked what they could do to help--I didn't expect that. It made me feel like I could be honest without consequences".*

Such accounts remind us that the risks of disclosure are not inherent to neurodivergence itself but rather produced through inconsistent institutional norms and responses. Katrina's positive experience may be the exception, but it also points to what is possible when academic environments are guided by empathy, co-production and inclusive leadership.

This echoes Chapman and Carel's (2022) conceptualisation of epistemic agency, in which neurodivergent individuals are understood not as passive recipients of diagnostic labels but as active negotiators of how their knowledge, experience and identities are expressed, often subverting dominant epistemic hierarchies. Their work illustrates how systemic testimonial and hermeneutical injustices silence or distort neurodivergent voices, thereby making invisible alternative forms of flourishing and undermining the capacity for self-advocacy.

Therefore, these findings show that disclosure transcends a simplistic choice to 'come out' as neurodivergent. Rather, it constitutes a textured, evolving process, shaped by structural constraints, calculated risk, shifting strategic aims and the ongoing negotiation of power. While the digital affordances of Twitter allowed many participants a more agentic space for identity expression, these acts of self-disclosure remained deeply embedded within broader institutional, cultural and professional power dynamics. This theme speaks directly to both Sub-Q1 and Sub-Q2 by demonstrating how identity work is conditioned by the environments educators inhabit. Moreover, it reveals that digital environments may offer, at least temporarily, relief or resistance, spaces where epistemic agency can be exercised outside the surveillance and rigidity of institutional systems.

6.5 Digital Agency and the Third Space

Neurodivergent educators in this study consistently described Twitter as a hybridised third space, positioned between personal expression and professional practice, through which they exercised digital agency to construct and perform their identities. This conception aligns with Whitchurch's (2013) theorisation of third space professionals in higher education, who operate between institutional boundaries, often innovating in roles that do not fit neatly within academic or administrative domains. Flora, for instance, described her use of Twitter as *"very definitely very targeted and very focused*", noting its roles in facilitating professional engagement, real-time information retrieval and spontaneous collaboration beyond formal academic settings. Flora's account reflects Obexer's (2022) argument that blended professionals actively navigate the ambiguities of digital space using them to develop professional identity through interaction, self-presentation and connection.

Bhabha (2004, p. 55) first conceptualised the third space as an interstitial, hybrid domain where cultures meet, negotiate and generate new forms of identity. Bhabha describes it as a space which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the:

> "meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew".

Building on this, McDougall and Potter (2019) argue that digital platforms, such as Twitter, operate as a third space for dynamic literacies, peer exchange, and porous knowledge networks that transcend formal academic structures.

Neurodivergent educators in this study frequently positioned Twitter as such a space. Drew explained, "*Twitter became my only real academic discourse community*", describing how the platform substituted for a more traditional cohort during their doctoral studies. This highlights how the digital agency was enacted through strategic engagement in a hybridised space for professional and emotional support. Nora echoed this sentiment, emphasising the relational and dialogic value of Twitter:

> *"I found the community on Twitter far more helpful…there was a sense of reciprocity that you don't always get with colleagues in your institution".*

Nora's account confirms Twitter's role as a discursive third space, one that enabled affective connection, epistemic contribution and professional identity formation beyond formal workplace constraints. These narratives align with Obexer's account of the "blended professional" who navigates and shapes their identities in liminal digital-professional terrains. In such spaces, professional agency is not merely reactive but actively exercised in ways that challenge and reconfigure traditional boundaries of academic legitimacy. This confirms Bhabha's (2004) conception of the third space as a site of negotiation and transformation, where meanings are

continually reworked and subjectivities are made possible.

This emphasis on relational connection and professional community was echoed by other participants. Katrina initially joined Twitter to *"build my profile"* but soon discovered that it also served as *"a space that's safe for me, healthy and helpful"*, evolving into a site of mutual care and feminist solidarity, particularly during the pandemic. Katrina's experience exemplifies Egner's (2022) observation that neurodivergent individuals often cultivate collectivised digital identities that resist deficit-based narratives through affirming social connection. Similarly, Flora described Twitter as offering a form of peer support rarely found in institutional settings:

> *"It is actually hugely productive to know that you're not on your own… putting your paw in the air and someone always answers".*

Flora even proposed that Twitter should be recognised by university occupational health teams as a legitimate supplement to institutional provision. From a critical realist perspective, these experiences reveal a disjuncture between the formal structures of academia and the affective participatory affordances of digital third spaces (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019). This further affirms Bhabha's (2004) conception of the third space as a generative site where new social practices and solidarities can emerge through reconfigured cultural and relational dynamics.

Through the self-interview I conducted, I positioned myself as both participant and analyst, core elements of analytical autoethnography. This reflexive method enabled me to recognise how autoethnography allowed me to lower my guarded stance around my neurodivergent traits and anxieties, speaking openly in a way I rarely could in academic contexts. Anderson (2006) emphasises that analytic autoethnographers must be fully visible, actively reflexive and committed to linking personal experience with broader social theory. In staying present in both the research on Twitter and the narrative, I practised exactly this form of engagement, uncovering layers of experience that traditional qualitative methods might overlook.

This approach also aligns with Crawley's (2012) feminist self-interview concept, which values the researcher's body and voice as legitimate sources of knowledge and treats the interview as a co-constructive, relational process, even when the 'other' is oneself. My reflection of *"Twitter became my support network"* illustrates how autoethnography surfaces affective, embodied and professional dimensions often hidden in conventional studies. It highlights the insider-within perspective, showing how I enacted digital agency by actively shaping my identity and support structures within a third space. This reflexive practice aided Sub-Q3 by revealing how neurodivergent educators both authorise and enact identity through autoethnographic means in digital environments.

Agency within the digital third space extended beyond self-expression to active shaping of the environment itself. Many participants described intentional curation strategies to protect their mental health. Katrina spoke of constructing a *"feminist echo chamber*" by unfollowing accounts that negatively impact her mood, adding, *"I don't see anything wrong with that, it's not denial, it's self-care*". This exemplifies Papacharissi's (2012) argument that digital agency can manifest as acts of self-protection in a space vulnerable to hypervisibility and conflated audience, a phenomenon Marwick and Boyd (2011) term "context collapse". By selectively filtering content, users assert control over their digital boundaries in ways that preserve their well-being.

Drew's observation that he collaborated on a book with someone he *"never met in real life"* but just knew from Twitter illustrates how digital platforms can incubate significant academic relationships. Lewis and Arday (2023) reflect on the barriers faced by neurodivergent scholars, particularly when intersecting with marginalised identities, arguing that mainstream academic networks often exclude those who do not conform to dominant norms. In this context, Twitter, in contrast, provided Drew a viable alternative: a boundary-crossing third space where collaborative intellectual partnerships could flourish beyond institutional gatekeeping.

Nora reinforces this dynamic, reflecting:

> *"The best thing about it was finding other neurodivergent people who were ahead of me in academia, and realising I wasn't broken, I just hadn't had the right support".*

Nora's experience highlights how communal validation and knowledge sharing on Twitter can act as professional development and a form of epistemic repair. These efforts align with Scott and Gibson's (2022) concept of virtual communities of practice and Braidotti's (2011) notion of nomadic subjectivity, fluid, relational identities shaped through collective digital solidarity.

However, participants also acknowledged that this digital agency is contingent and vulnerable to shifts in platform governance. Under Elon Musk, Twitter's algorithm was reconfigured to prioritise engagement, often amplifying content unrelated to users' curated interests, undermining its utility as a supportive third space (The Economic Times 2025). Nora lamented, *"The feed doesn't make sense anymore*", while Drew recounted that a long-running DM (direct message) thread was truncated to new messaging limits, prompting him to migrate to WhatsApp. Katrina's *"echo chamber"* similarly unravelled, as the algorithm began surfacing irrelevant or even harmful content; she observed, "I've seen a lot of people I don't follow… it's the marketisation of the space".

These frustrations echo findings by Vidal Valero (2023), who report that many scientists are withdrawing from Twitter in response to algorithm-driven unpredictability that breeds anxiety and erodes trust. When the digital environment shifts beyond user control, the capacity to exercise agency within the third space diminishes

dramatically. Despite these challenges, the enduring legacy of Twitter's third space remains evident in participants' accounts. For flora, the formative ethos persisted: "*those people are still using it in the same way*", suggesting that mutual care continues even as the platform's design shifts. From a critical realist perspective, this resilience reflects Archer's (2007) notion of reflexivity: individuals maintain agency by purposefully adapting their engagement strategies in response to structural changes. In this context, digital reflexivity enables users to sustain third-space relations, even when the affordance of the platform itself becomes destabilised.

Writing this section brought a bittersweet recognition, like many participants, I experienced Twitter as a vital third space, one where my neurodivergence was not as marginalised as it was perceived in institutional settings. Yet, I have also witnessed its decline, and with it, a sense of disorientation about how to rebuild that space. It is looking likely that I will have to find a different platform to thrive in once again. These shifts reinforced that digital agency is not fixed but contingent, shaped by evolving structures and personal reflexivity. As both researcher and participant, I have come to see, in line with Archer's (2007) theory of reflexivity, that sustaining third spaces requires active, ongoing negotiation. It is not enough to find such spaces; they must be consciously nurtured, adapted and sometimes reimagined.

6.6 Precarity and Survival Professionalism

The accounts of neurodivergent educators in this study reveal that professional and personal identity formation on Twitter was often less a matter of self-expression than a response to enduring structural pressures. Rather than reflecting unfettered choice, participants' engagement on the platform illustrated a strategic negotiation with precarity: one shaped by institutional insecurity, cultural marginalisation, and the cumulative strain of emotional labour. Viewed through a critical lens, these practices exemplify how agency is exercised within and in response to structural constraints.

In this context, I have come to frame these adaptive strategies as survival professionalism: a working mode of digital and institutional navigation characterised by caution, calibration and resilience. While not yet formalised as a concept within existing literature, survival professionalism captures a patterned mode of professional agency, one oriented not towards idealised success but towards visibility, credibility and psychological preservation in environments where normative expectations are unaccommodating and support systems are limited. This concept, emerging from both participant accounts and my own reflexive positioning, foregrounds the labour of endurance that underpins the professional lives of many neurodivergent educators.

Survival professional ism materialised vividly in the data. Katrina admitted to curating a narrative of success, "I always made sure to frame it as overcoming things, not as struggling… there's just no space in academia to be openly overwhelmed", while Drew warned that "*You can't disappear. Not if you're on a temporary contract and want to be rehired".* These comments show how structural precarity and employability pressures contour what can be said online and how it must be said. As I noted in the self-interview, *"I'm more careful about what I share… I might post a tweet and later delete it if I feel it's too personal"*, signalling a continuous cycle of cautious curation designed to maintain credibility without exposing vulnerability.

Nora's reflections extended this theme through her strategic openness. While she rejected the idea of projecting a *"fake persona*", stating *"it's just too complicated to try and stick to a sort of fake persona, so the world will have to cope with the real thing"*. Nora also acknowledged that her feed gave a comprehensive *"snapshot*" of her life: "*you would've known quite a lot about my life, about my political beliefs, about my addiction to Audible, about my dog, my daughter*". Despite this openness, her self-presentation remained intentional; she described moments of impulsive tweeting followed by reflection, particularly when sharing academic frustrations:

> *"Possibly the thing that… you'd say, Nora [talking about herself in 3rd person] do you want to put it out there that you think an article you're writing is terrible when somebody out there is going to review it at some point?".*

This represents one end of the survival professionalism spectrum, where full openness and authenticity about neurodivergence foster solidarity and community but also carry institutional and professional risks, as visibility can invite misrecognition or penalisation within precarious academic structures.

Flora occupies the cautious end of the survival professionalism spectrum. Having been urged by successive universities to act as a public "mouthpiece" for neurodiversity:

> *"The higher education institutions that I have worked for have used me to be a mouthpiece and to actively have my dyslexia and #Neurodiversity on my profiles".*

Flora is actually aware that digital visibility can rebound offline. When a single reply turns hostile, she will *"go reserved… become an observer until I get comfortable again to re-engage*", deleting the tweet and reverting to formal, low-risk content. This retreat, she explains, is driven by *"fear of repercussion"*, having seen her neurodivergence *"used as a weapon"* by medical and managerial gatekeepers in the past. In Flora's case, institutional branding amplifies her exposure while precarity sharpens her caution, turning every post into a calculated wager between solidarity and sanction, and an unmistakable manifestation of survival professionalism.

These strategies are deeply shaped by the neoliberal transformation of higher education outlined in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.5.5). Shore and Wright (2015) notion of "audit culture" shows how rankings and performance

metrics recast academic labour as a competitive, self-surveilling enterprise. Cerro Santamaría (2020) echoes this, arguing that marketisation subject's universities to efficiency logics that intensify pressure on staff to behave as entrepreneurial actors. Such "governing-by-number" compels educators to produce audit-friendly outputs, curate reputational visibility and suppress perceived "weaknesses" such as disability disclosure.

For neurodivergent academics, this yields a paradox of hyper-visibility without support: difference is noticed but rarely accommodated. Crew's (2020) study of working-class academics illustrates how intersecting identities magnify this precarity, making and displaying non-normativity doubly costly. (Mason and Megoran (2021) go further, framing precarity as a form of dehumanisation that corrodes well-being and academic freedom. In clinical training settings, Bell (2023) observes that neurodivergent professionals are still expected to "conform to hidden cultural codes", reinforcing the dynamic identified by participants here.

One survey respondent captured a core tension: *"I only disclose online because the institution isn't safe"* Here, *"safe"* signals reputational and psychological security, the ability to speak without jeopardising career prospects. Participants described moderating self-expression to avoid institutional censure, a practice that illustrates survival professionalism as strategic authenticity. Flora highlighted a parallel dynamic offline: requests for workplace adjustments were *"seen as awkward or demanding"*, whereas Twitter offered an affirming space where peers exchanged practical workarounds and emotional support. Such informal mentorship fostered a collective sense of competence and solidarity, counterbalancing institutional isolation. While many participants described institutional constraints, Katrina offered a compelling counterpoint. She reflected that her university responded proactively to her requests, stating:

> *"They were really flexible, changed deadlines, adjusted expectations when I explained how I work. It made me feel I didn't need to hide who I am".*

This example demonstrates how cultural and institutional responsiveness can meaningfully reduce the need for survival professionalism. When structures are adaptive and neuro-affirming, educators like Katrina feel less compelled to seek alternative spaces for support online.

Several respondents described turning their timelines on Twitter into living CVs: *"My Twitter feed is part of my CV now. It's how people see that I'm active, involved, employable"*, using curated achievement posts and reflections to pre-empt institutional scrutiny and signal legitimacy. Yet this strategic display carried hidden costs: as Nora noted, she routinely *"lifts others up"* by mentoring junior neurodivergent scholars, boosting their work, and sharing survival tips, labour that remains invisible in workload models. Reflexively, I recognise the same pattern in my own practice: after an early tweet about burnout, I shifted to sharing lessons learned rather than raw struggle, balancing authenticity with professional self-protection while providing peer support that our institutions still overlook.

Sub-Question 4 asks how Twitter's informal third space can guide the creation of more inclusive academic environments and, through *survival professionalism*, highlights two practical lessons that have emerged. Firstly, structural flexibility matters: participants used Twitter to trial peer-support networks, asynchronous mentoring and nuanced, non-medicalised self-disclosures; universities could emulate this by ring-fencing time for collegial support, recognising emotional labour and offering low-stakes disclosure routes that minimise risk. Secondly, institutions must rethink visibility: rather than penalising non-normative presence, they should value diverse modes of contribution and acknowledge that professionalism takes multiple forms. Survival professionals, therefore, serve as both practice and signal: showing that neurodivergent educators often thrive not because of institutional structures, but despite them, and remaining universities that lowering the cost of authenticity is a prerequisite for truly inclusive academic cultures.

6.7 The Nomadic Educator Revisited

Returning to the concept of the *Nomadic Educator*, it is now possible to more fully articulate its contours and contradictions in light of the empirical narratives explored throughout this chapter. Initially introduced in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.6) as a provisional concept shaped through theoretical engagement and lived experience, the *Nomadic Educator* has emerged as a not a fixed identity or stable position, it emerges as an orientation, a set of reflexive situated practices developed in response to the shifting terrains of academic life, digital engagement and institutional precarity. This orientation is not freely chosen; instead, it reflects the layered strategies neurodivergent educators deploy to remain professionally visible, intellectually engaged and personally intact in environments where the conditions of belonging are often unstable, and the rules are unevenly applied.

What this study reveals is that nomadism is not characterised by rootlessness or voluntary escape, but by contingent navigation. The movement described by participants: between contracts, platforms, roles and communities, was often initiated not by choice but by structural necessity. Digital third spaces, especially Twitter, offered opportunities for temporary grounding, moments of connection and recognition that were not always possible in formal institutional settings. Yet these spaces, too, were fragile and increasingly difficult to sustain. Participants described their professional identities as curated, improvisational and strategically assembled across both digital and institutional domains. Such navigation echoes Braidotti's (2011) theorisation of the nomadic subject as a critical, mobile position that resists dominant narrative by inhabiting in-between spaces, foregrounding multiplicity, relationality and transformation.

However, the empirical material presented throughout this chapter also suggests that the term "Nomadic

Educator" must be revisited in dialogue with more recent literature on digital nomadism and precarious academic labour. While popular discourse often frames nomadism as aspirational and entrepreneurial, studies have increasingly pointed to the ways in which such mobility is shaped by corporatised expectations and labour market deregulation (Aroles et al. 2020; Christoph 2021). de Almeida et al. (2021) highlight how the COVID-19 pandemic reframed remote work and lifestyle fragmentation as normative rather than exceptional. In many ways, the pandemic offered a real-time experiment in digital academic nomadism, where educators were expected to operate with maximum adaptability and minimal support. For neurodivergent educators in this study, these conditions were not novel; they were already navigating structural gaps long before the pandemic, using digital platforms like Twitter to share knowledge, build peer networks and rework the performative demands of academic professionalism.

Participants' digital labour was deeply entangled with institutional absence. Twitter became a space where affective solidarity, informal mentoring and epistemic recognition could be cultivated, even if temporarily. As Hermann and Paris (2020) observe, the nexus between mobility and remote work is rarely unstructured; it is shaped by technological affordances, commercial logics and normative expectations about visibility and productivity. The ability to be constantly available, flexible and responsive was valued across both digital and institutional settings. Yet these values often conflicted with neurodivergent ways of working. Participants describe digital fatigue, identity fragmentation and the pressure to constantly manage visibility across intersecting audiences. In this context, digital nomadism was not freeing; it required careful calibration. One participant noted that *"every tweet feels like a CV entry"*, encapsulating the way digital presence becomes a form of survival professionalism.

The survivalist stance was not simply reactive, however. It was a generative form of professional practice. This study identified a mode of identity work that involved cautious visibility, strategic omission and reflexive calibration across changing environments. What I have termed *survival professionalism* captures this reality; a pragmatic assemblage of adaptive behaviours that enable educators to remain present, credible and legible despite institutional indifference or exclusion. As Fikriy et al. (2023) note, digital nomads often face blurred boundaries between personal and professional life, where maintaining stability requires both emotional labour and logistical dexterity. For participants, this labour included curating their digital spaces to reflect professional legitimacy, carefully disclosing neurodivergence when it felt safe to do so and withdrawing when hypervisibility became too costly. These tactics were not just personal; they were relational and patterned, rooted in a broader landscape of structural inequality, algorithmic bias and institutional precarity.

What becomes clear through these findings is that the *nomadic educator* is not a singular figure. Rather, it is a conceptual scaffold that helps make sense of the varied, intersecting strategies educators employ to sustain their

professional selves. It is not reducible to digital nomadism, nor does it imply limitless mobility. Instead, it speaks of situated reflexivity, what Reay (2004) called the “permeability” of habitus, that allows educators to reshape their dispositions and practices in response to changing conditions. The narratives in this study suggest that such reshaping is not always empowering. It often involves exhaustion, grief and a sense of dislocation. Yet it also contains forms of resistance and care: moments where participants actively redefined professionalism on their own terms, co-constructed communities of practice and enacted solidarity through micro-acts of mentoring, sharing and witnessing.

Reflexively, my own understanding of the Nomadic Educator has shifted over the course of this research. I initially conceived it through the lens of personal experience, drawing on a career characterised by short-term contracts, hybrid roles and reliance on Twitter for recognition and community. At that point, it felt like a necessary metaphor for survival. But through engagement with participants’ accounts and in dialogue with critical theory, I came to see that nomadism is not only an effect of exclusion. It is also a form of agency: partial, situated and often provisional, but no less meaningful. Gargano and Throop (2017) describe the academic nomad as someone who constructs continuity through digital platforms and hybrid learning. For educators in this study, continuity was not inherited but built, crafted through iterative identity work, shifting communities and shared epistemologies of resistance.

In revisiting this concept, I now understand the Nomadic Educator as a critical figure that holds together contradictions. It is both a response to marginalisation and a refusal of fixed institutional norms. It is both a labour of endurance and a form of collective reimagining. It foregrounds the structural conditions that make nomadism necessary while also illuminating the strategies educators use to remain visible, connected and agentic. It is a figure shaped by affective labour, digital curation and structural negotiation. It is one that complicates the idea of academic professionalism by highlighting the work of those who operate in its margins, adapting, resisting and surviving.

As such, the Nomadic Educator remains an open, relational and reflexive concept. It does not seek to categorise but to illuminate. It invites us to reconsider how academic identities are performed, recognised and sustained in a sector increasingly shaped by precarity, hyper-visibility and platform capitalism. It asks institutions, researchers and policymakers to attend more closely to the realities of those whose professional lives do not conform to linear trajectories or normative expectations. The educators in this study were not wandering without purpose; they were navigating with care, purpose and imagination, crafting identities that, while provisional, were rooted in lived experience, epistemic agency and solidarity.

6.8 Researching from Within: A Neurodivergent Perspective

Undertaking this research as a neurodivergent educator and insider-researcher has been both intellectually generative and personally disorienting. From the outset, I assumed that digital space, particularly Twitter, might enable more authentic professional identity work than most institutional contexts. That assumption still holds, yet the iterative process of listening, (re)coding, reflecting and re-listening to participant narratives (often with the aid of text-to-speech software) repeatedly unsettled how I understood agency, disclosure, precarity and belonging in academia. Rather than maintaining a formal reflexive journal, I relied on stick note jottings or whiteboard writing, captured while re-reading transcripts or revisiting the codes. These fragments, though ephemeral, became a chronological trace of shifting understandings. They are now woven through this commentary, enabling me to expose the 'working out' of interpretation.

In Alvesson and Sköldberg's (2009) terms, I moved deliberately through "multi-layered interpretation": beginning with surface description, moving to theoretical interrogation and finally inspecting the ideological and autobiographical layers that shaped each claim. For example, unlike others in this study, Katrina described a supportive and stable institutional environment. This contrast prompted a reframing of the *Nomadic Educator*, not solely a survival strategy, but as an intentional way of navigating professional identity even in contexts of relative security. My initial design cast autoethnography as a supplementary strand prior to enacting the research. It soon proved indispensable during the pilot study.

As a neurodivergent academic, the boundary between the personal and professional is neither stable nor easily compartmentalised. I therefore adopted a hybrid autoethnographic-reflexive writing model, drawing on both Anderson's (2006) *analytic autoethnography*, with its emphasis on visible researcher self, reflexivity and theoretical engagement, and Ellis's (2004) evocative "The Ethnographic I" approach, which privileges storytelling, scene-setting and embodied reflection, the latter of which I privilege within my reflections. Throughout this hybrid model, I worked with a twofold process: I maintained reflexive analytic and narrative insights as I drafted each chapter, weaving in dialogue with participants, internal uncertainty and moments of emotional struggle. This method allowed me to treat lived experience not as anecdote but as epistemically generative, articulating not only *what* I observed but *how* I came to see or question it, acknowledging the 'insider' in the writing space itself.

As the study progressed, I became increasingly aware that my interpretative lens was never static. There were moments when participants' accounts destabilised my assumptions, not because they were unfamiliar but because they exposed nuances I had overlooked. I had entered the research expecting to hear echoes of my own experience, but instead, I found diversity within shared neurodivergence. This multiplicity demanded a more

dialogic stance, one where I had to hold space for difference while still acknowledging resonance. It also meant recognising that being an insider did not guarantee shared meaning, as Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 58) caution, insider status:

> *"automatically provides a level of trust and openness…but may negatively affect the research if participants assume… and leave out more detailed explanations".*

This required me to engage in ongoing reflexive interrogation, not only of the data, but of the assumptions I brought to it. I had to move beyond recognition and towards a more layered understanding of difference, one that acknowledged the uneven terrain of shared identity. In this sense, insider research became less about positional proximity and more about ethical attentiveness: a willingness to listen beyond the familiar and to let discomfort unsettle easy interpretations.

This dynamic of listening beyond recognition reshaped how I approached the analytical process itself. I began to understand autoethnography not as a way of writing about the self but as a way of writing with the self, making visible the interpretative labour that underpinned each analytical decision. This resonates with Ellis's (2004) conceptualisation of evocative autoethnography as a practice that invites readers into the emotional and embodied world of the researcher. For me, this was not simply about affective honesty; it was a methodological imperative. The very act of interpretation became an iterative negotiation between what I thought I knew and what the data demanded I reconsider.

In this way, I had to acknowledge when emotional resonance clouded analytical clarity. For instance, in reviewing Flora's narrative of platform fatigue and cautious retreat from Twitter, I found myself over-identifying with her sense of burnout. My initial memos framed her decision as emblematic of digital disillusionment. It was only later, upon returning to the transcript and reflecting more critically, that I realised her stance was less about withdrawal and more about strategic recalibration—a theme that only emerged once I had bracketed my own narrative from hers. As Berger (2015) notes, reflexivity in insider research is not a one-off declaration but a continuous process of positioning and repositioning in relation to the data, participants and the field.

Similarly, my reflections on institutional culture were shaped by my own precarious academic status. I recognised that, at times, I could over-emphasise structural exclusion, even if participants described relatively supportive environments. Le Gallis (2008, pp.145-155) warns that insider researchers must remain alert to the tension between familiarity and over-identification, ensuring that the researcher's lens does not overshadow participants' meanings. For me, this required ongoing attunement to complexity, listening not only for shared refrains but also for quieter divergences.

Throughout this process, the writing itself became a mode of inquiry. Working iteratively between data and theory, I found myself employing what Adams et al. (2015) described as a "reflexive storying" approach, where insights were not presented but performed through the text. In doing so, I attempted to render visible the emotional labour of writing from within; writing as someone who was not only theorising neurodivergence but living it in real time. This included not only reflections on platform engagement and academic identity, but also the embodied disruptions of the research process itself, cognitive fatigue, illness and the emotional toll of revisiting painful professional memories.

This interweaving of personal and analytic registers allowed me to remain accountable to the epistemic commitments of the project (See Chapter 3): to situate knowledge production within the textures of lived experience and to recognise that understanding is always partial, always becoming. Insider research, in this sense, was not a vantage point to be claimed but a practice of situated responsibility. A form of vulnerability that Ellis (2004) argues is required for genuine autoethnographic truth-telling. As I close this chapter, I do so with greater humility about what it means to research 'from within'. The insider position did not offer easy access or universal insight but rather demanded an ethics of attentiveness: to the stories of others, to the stories I tell myself, and to the entangled process of telling them together. If anything, this project has taught me that reflexivity is not an endpoint or a disclaimer but an orientation: a continual invitation to pause, examine and write in ways that honour the complexities we inhabit.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Overview

As the final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 7 serves to synthesise the research findings and articulate the overall conclusions. It draws together the insights developed in the preceding chapters, demonstrating how the study has met its objectives and advanced understanding of digital agency and professional identity for neurodivergent university educators. Building on the detailed discussion of results in Chapter 6 and the conceptual foundation laid earlier, this chapter highlights what has been achieved through the research and how it relates back to the thesis's core theme. In doing so, Chapter 7 provides a cohesive roadmap of the study's contribution and sets the stage for the final reflections and recommendations.

To frame this conclusion, the chapter begins by revisiting the study's aims and research questions. The research set out to explore how neurodivergent educators in UK higher education negotiate their personal and professional identities via Twitter. This chapter reflects on how the empirical findings address those questions. In particular, the evidence presented in Chapter 6 is used to illustrate how participants navigated the affordances

and constraints of the platform to assert professional agency and build community. These outcomes are interpreted through the study's theoretical lens: adopting a critical realist perspective (Archer 1995; Danermark et al. 2019) has helped to reveal the interplay between structural factors and individual agency in these educators' experiences, while the use of third space theory frames Twitter as a hybrid environment where institutional norms can be both challenged and reimaged. By aligning the findings with the original research questions and theoretical framework, the chapter demonstrates how the study has fulfilled its aims and contributes new insights to existing knowledge.

The chapter also provides a brief reminder of the triadic methodological approach underpinning this research. As outlined in Chapter 3, the study combined autoethnography, participatory methods and multi-methods to form a comprehensive and inclusive research design. Chapter 4 detailed how these approaches were implemented in practice: from personal narrative and digital exercise to an online survey and interviews. Chapter 5 explained how the data were analysed using a reflexive, thematic lens. Recalling this multi-stranded methodology underscores the foundation of the study's findings and highlights that the conclusion drawn here rests on a robust, reflexively managed research process integrating multiple lenses and perspectives. This context helps the reader appreciate that the insights presented in the conclusion are grounded in a sound and innovative framework.

With this context in place, Chapter 7 moves on to synthesise the key findings and articulate the study's contributions. It begins by integrating the results with the theoretical insights from earlier chapters, thereby highlighting how this research extends current understandings of neurodivergent educators' digital agency and professional identity. This includes identifying novel conceptual contributions that emerged from the analysis, which supplement the application of third space theory and critical realist thinking in the higher education context. The chapter then considers the implications of these findings for policy and practice: it offers recommendations for universities and the wider sector to foster more inclusive academic environments, including recognising online engagement as a valuable form of professional activity and providing better support for neurodivergent staff. Furthermore, directions for future research are outlined to encourage continued exploration of this topic, such as investigating similar dynamics on other social media platforms or in different institutional settings, in or outside the UK, in order to build on the groundwork laid by this thesis.

Finally, the chapter reinforces the importance of researcher reflexivity that has been threaded throughout the study. Consistent with the approach discussed in earlier chapters, a reflexive commentary is incorporated here to acknowledge how the researcher's positionality and lived experience have influenced the interpretation of the findings. By maintaining this reflexive lens in the concluding analysis, the thesis underscores its commitment to critically examining the knowledge production process. This ensures that the conclusions are not presented as

neutral or detached observations but as insights shaped by a self-aware, ethically conscious research practice.

7.2 Synthesising the Research Questions: A Critical Realist Mapping

The thesis is anchored by one overarching research question:

> *How do neurodivergent educators negotiate and develop their professional and personal identities on Twitter?*

To probe this question in depth, four interrelated sub-questions were pursued:

1. **Third Space dynamics:** How do neurodivergent educators use Twitter to create and sustain third-space interactions, and how has this evolved over time?
2. **Pandemic effects:** What role did the COVID-19 pandemic play in shaping the professional use of Twitter among neurodivergent educators?
3. **Methodological insight:** How does autoethnography contribute to understanding the challenges and affordances of digital professional engagement for neurodivergent educators?
4. **Institutional implications:** What institutional lessons can be drawn from neurodivergent educators' use of Twitter to inform more inclusive academic environments?

What began as distinct sub-questions soon revealed their entanglement as participants' experiences illustrated the mutual shaping of professional identity, agency and structural constraint. **Table 35** illustrates where and how each question is addressed across the thesis, underscoring the study's iterative, multi-modal design and the reflexive dialogue between data, theory and method.

Table 35: Mapping of Research Questions to Thesis Content

Research question	Key chapters/methods
Main RQ – Identity negotiation on Twitter	Ch. 1 (conceptual framing); Ch. 2 (literature on professional identity & digital agency); Chs 4–5 (survey, Padlet, self-interview, participant interviews); Ch. 6 (cross-method thematic synthesis)
Q1 – Third-space interactions over time	Ch. 2 (third-space theory); Chs 4–5 (survey trend data; qualitative vignettes); Ch. 6 (Theme 3: Digital Agency in the Third Space; Theme 1: Performing Professional Identity)
Q2 – Impact of COVID-19	Ch. 1 (pandemic context); Chs 4–5 (participant reflections on lockdown and hybrid work); Ch. 6 (narratives of isolation, adaptation, platform reliance)
Q3 – Role of autoethnography	Ch. 3 (autoethnography as primary analytic strand); Chs 4–5 (self-interview, reflexive diary); Ch. 6 (integration of personal narrative with participant data)
Q4 – Institutional	Ch. 2 (structural critique of ableism); Ch. 6 (Theme 2: Disclosure as Risk and

lessons for inclusion	Strategy; Theme 4: Precarity and Survival Professionalism); Ch. 7: 7.6 (recommendations & implications)

Questions – CR Layer:

- Q1 – Cultural layer (Padlet, interviews, autoethnography)
- Q2 – Structural and cultural layers (survey, interviews)
- Q3 – Agentic layer (autoethnographic, self-interview)
- Q4 – Structural and culture layers (survey, interviews, policy implications (see Section 7.6)

The mapping of research questions to methods and findings (see **Table 35**) was organisational but also ontological. By adopting Archer's (1995, 2007) structure-culture-agency framework enabled me to locate each question within a distinct stratum of reality. Following Bhaskar (2008), I worked with a depth ontology that distinguishes between the empirical (what is observed), the actual (what occurs whether observed or not), and the real (the generative mechanisms producing those events). This stratified approach moved the analysis beyond a purely interpretivist account: rather than only describing participants meanings, it sought to explain how those meanings were enabled or constrained by structural conditions (such as employment precarity, audit cultures and institutional ableism), cultural scripts (such as normative ideals of professionalism) and individual agency (such as reflexive disclosure choices). In this way, critical realism was both a philosophical backdrop and a generative tool that shaped how each question was approached and how the layered answers were synthesised.

As my reflexive awareness developed, the questions themselves functioned less as fixed destinations and more as analytic lenses. Early expectations that Twitter would prove unequivocally empowering were complicated by participants' accounts of fatigue, volatility and reputational risk. These productive tensions reinforced the value of holding space for contradictions and multiplicity, consistent with Finlay's (2002) framing of reflexivity as "negotiating the swamp" of positionality and interpretation. Therefore, the reflexive stance ensured that the synthesis which follows remains responsive to evolving insights rather than prematurely resolved.

7.3 Core Insights through a Critical Realist Lens

Drawing together the evidence presented in Chapter 6 (see Sections 6.3-6.7), this section distils four interconnected insights: *blended identity work, Twitter as third space, survival professionalism and platform instability.* The purpose here is not to repeat descriptive findings but to explain them through the study's critical realist lens. In doing so, the analysis demonstrates how the insights emerged from the interplay of structural, cultural and agentic mechanisms (Archer 1995, Danermark et al. 2019).

Blended Identity work illustrates how neurodivergent educators merged personal and professional selves on Twitter, often through strategic disclosure and profile curation. A surface reading could treat this as individual self-presentation, but a critical realist stance shows that such blending was shaped by generative mechanisms: institutional ableism, reputation precarity and cultural ideals of the "Ideal academic" (Brown and Leigh 2018). Agency lay in how participants chose to reveal or conceal aspects of themselves, but these decisions were always constrained by systemic forces.

Twitter as a third space was framed by participants as a liminal "staffroom", enabling informal peer dialogue and validation absent in institutional settings. Here, critical realism explains not only what participants did, but *why* this space mattered at specific historical moments such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The platform's role expanded during the pandemic because structural absences in institutional communication created a vacuum that Twitter filled. Its cultural scripts of community and recognition enabled new forms of legitimacy, allowing neurodivergent educators to assert presence despite institutional marginalisation.

Survival professionalism, theorised in this study, captures how educators stragetically managed visibility, disclosure and identity performance to withstand precarity. While an interpretative approach might view this simply as adaptive coping, critical realism highlights the underlying causal mechanisms: neoliberal audit cultures, short-term contracts and normative expectations of productivity. These structures compelled educators to frame their digital presence in ways that balanced authenticity with professional credibility. Survival professionalism thus represents constrained agency, illustrating how identity work is both creative and defensive under systemic pressure.

Platform instability introduced further structural vulnerability. As Twitter's governance and algorithms shifted after 2022, participants encountered toxicity, volatility and reduced control over their feeds. A critical realist explanation situates this instability as structural mechanism that curtailed agency, just as institutional barriers had done. Digital third spaces are therefore not neutral backdrops but socio-technological systems that can both enable and constrain professional identity work depending on their evolving logics.

To conclude, these four insights provide an integrated explanation of how neurodivergent educators negotiate identity and agency within shifting digital and institutional terrains. They reveal identity as a blended, reflexive and dynamic project formed at the intersection of constraint and creativity, risk and resilience. This synthesis also refines the conceptual figure of the *Nomadic Educator* (see Section 6.7), now grounded in empirical evidence: an adaptive strategy that embodies *survival professionalism*, traverses structural and digital disruptions and continually repositions itself in pursuit of epistemic legitimacy. In this way, the explanatory depth of critical realism illuminates not what participants did, but why these practices emerged as necessary strategies

with contemporary higher education.

7.4 Original Contributions and Alignment with Research Aim

This thesis makes four interrelated contributions to knowledge and practice: empirical, methodological, theoretical and reflexive. Each is grounded in the study's critical realist ontology, which framed the exploration of digital academic life in higher education through the interplay of structure, culture and agency. These contributions are explicitly aligned with the overarching research aim: to explore how neurodivergent university educators negotiate identity and agency on Twitter in response to institutional constraints, and what this means for inclusion in higher education.

Empirical Contribution: Illuminating Neurodivergent Academic Experience

The study offers a distinctive empirical insight into the digital professional practices of neurodivergent university educators within the UK. It is one of the first UK studies to centre staff rather than students, addressing a critical gap. By combining survey data (Chapter 5.3), Padlet activity (Chapter 5.4) and Interviews (Chapter 5.6), the research revealed how disclosure, affective presentation and tokenisation are negotiated in precarious contexts. For example, Katrina's careful balancing of disclosure and Flora's experience of tokenisation illustrate the pressures faced. These finding demonstrate that Twitter was not peripheral but a professional lifeline, particularly during COVID-19 (Chapter 6.4) enabling community, advocacy and identity recalibration when institutional channels faltered.

Methodological Contribution: A Triadic, Inclusive and Neurodivergent-Led Framework

This thesis advances a distinct framework that integrates critical realism's stratified layers of structure, culture and agency (Archer et al. 2013; Danermark et al. 2019) with inclusive, neurodivergent-led praxis (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2021; Dark 2024). While triangulation is often employed to seek convergence across methods (Denzin 2012; Flick 2018), my design embraced complementarity and divergence between lenses, deliberately mapping the survey, Padlet and autoethnography to different ontological strata. This alignment enabled structural conditions (e.g. employment patterns and disclosure practices) to be illuminated through the survey; cultural scripts of belonging, affect and professional practice to surface through the participatory Padlet exercise (Holland 2001); and agency to be examined through autoethnography and flexible interviews, where lived experience was negotiated and performed (Archer 1995; Ellis et al. 2011).

At the heart of this framework was a sustained commitment to inclusivity. Accessibility was not an afterthought

but a guiding principle: methods were designed to accommodate diverse communication and processing styles, while also enabling me to engage reflexively with my own positionality as an insider researcher. For example, the Padlet method was developed in direct response to the pilot study and my own experience as a neurodivergent academic. By enabling asynchronous, multimodal contributions: ranging from bullet points, text to voice notes, and images, it respected varied processing styles, sensory needs and communication preferences. Pairing Padlet with the interviews provided additional depth, allowing participants to expand or contextualise their contributions. In practice, this design fostered meaningful engagement from individuals who might otherwise have been excluded by synchronous, text-heavy, or conventionally formatted interview techniques.

To my knowledge, this triadic stratified design has not previously been applied within neurodivergent research. Frameworks such as Fletcher-Watson et al.'s (2021) six considerations for inclusive neurodevelopment research and Dark's (2024) "Eight Principles of Neuro Inclusion" provide valuable reflexive guidance, but they do not articulate a layered methodology that embeds inclusivity across the structural, cultural and agentic dimensions of inquiry. My framework tentatively extends these principles by operationalising them in a structured critical realist design that balances analytic nuance with practical accessibility. Thus, it represents a novel contribution, not only inclusive in principle, but methodologically articulated across stratified layers, neurodivergent-led in practice and participatory by design. It offers a transferable model for disability-just educational research that can demonstrate how accessibility and analytic rigour can be mutually reinforcing.

Theoretical Contribution: Survival Professionalism and the Nomadic Educator

The thesis contributes to two original theoretical developments. Firstly, *survival professionalism* captures how neurodivergent educators sustain legitimacy through defensive labour: masking, selective disclosure, and strategic digital presence, under conditions of precarity and ableism (Chapter 6.6). Secondly, the *Nomadic Educator* (Chapter 6.7), drawing on co-constructed insights from participants, encapsulates adaptive movement across digital and institutional spaces. These concepts extend debates on professionalism by shifting focus from linear progression to survival, adaptability and fluidity. They are emergent yet resonant beyond this dataset, with potential application to other marginalised groups navigating higher education.

Reflexive Contribution: Neurodivergent Insight as Analytic Method

A further contribution lies in centring reflexivity as a generative, situated and neurodivergent-informed analytic practice. Rather than treating reflexivity as a methodological appendix, I embedded it throughout the study via stick notes, self-interview and embodied reflection. This approach demonstrates how insider reflexivity can be positioned as a methodological strength, contributing to epistemic justice by making visible standpoints often excluded from academic discourse. In doing so, the study shows how reflexive, neurodivergent ways of knowing

can enrich practitioner-research and challenge traditional assumptions of neutrality.

Implementation and Implications

The most significant applied insight is that Twitter functioned as a digital third space, vital for disclosure, advocacy and belonging, yet, invisible within institutional frameworks. This finding carries direct implications: universities must recognise and value such digital engagement within workload allocation, promotion criteria and inclusion policies. This recommendation aligns with the theoretical contributions of survival professionalism and the Nomadic Educator, show how digital practices are not marginal add-ons but essential to sustaining neurodivergent educators in contemporary higher education.

7.5 Research in Transition: Structure, Self and Digital Disruption

The study offered a focused, critical-realist examination of how neurodivergent university educators craft professional identity on Twitter. Depth, accessibility and reflexivity shaped the design, and my insider status was treated as an analytic resource rather than a bias. A purposely small qualitative sample, explored through autoethnography, participatory research and multi-methods, enabled a layered understanding of participants' digital and institutional lives. From June 2024 to January 2025, research activity was paused while I managed significant health challenges and withdrew from both employment and study. This affected plans for longitudinal follow-up with students using a similar framework, an avenue that may have offered valuable comparative insight beyond the doctorate.

Nonetheless, reflexive notes gathered during this period were converted into early analytical drafts, helping to maintain coherence in the overall analysis. Meanwhile, wider structural developments reinforced the study's relevance. The worsening UK academic labour market in 2025 amplified the emergence of "survival professionalism", while algorithmic changes and corporate shifts at Twitter fragmented the very communities and participants examined in this thesis. These dynamics inform the recommendations for supporting inclusive digital third spaces beyond a single platform (see Section 7.6.3)

Changing personal circumstances and shifting structural conditions did not weaken the research; rather, they provided additional insight into the forms of precarity under investigation. In critical realist terms, agency is always shaped in relation to structure, through an evolving interplay of constraint and possibility. As such, the insights developed in this study are both contextually grounded and transferable to wider debates on digital identity, institutional marginalisation and neurodivergent professional agency within higher education.

7.6 Implications for Practice, Policy and Inclusion

The findings help to address Sub-Question 4: *What institutional lessons can be drawn from neurodivergent educators' use of Twitter to inform a more inclusive academic environment?* Drawing on the study's critical realist framework and the thematic insights presented in Chapter 6, this section identifies actionable implications for sector-wide practice and reform. While Twitter functioned as a third space for identity work, connection and epistemic resistance, its affordances were not simply expressions of digital agency but responses to exclusionary academic cultures and precarious employment norms.

As such, the burden of inclusion cannot fall solely on individual adaptation or digital creativity. Institutional changes must confront the systemic constraints limiting neurodivergent educators' capacity to thrive. This includes rethinking disclosure frameworks, valuing alternative professional contributions and embedding flexible, low-risk pathways for support and recognition. Sustainable inclusion requires not only digital responsiveness but structural accountability.

7.6.1 Structural Barriers and Impacts of Ableism in Higher Education

Despite increasing awareness of neurodiversity within higher education, systemic inequalities persist. The most recent UCU data shows that 38% of academic staff with disclosed disability were on fixed-term contracts in 2021-22, up from 32% the previous year (University and College Union 2021a; 2023). Hourly paid and zero-hours positions have also climbed since 2019-2020. Reports from UCU and Advance HE confirm that insecure contracts compound inaccessible workplaces, driving neurodivergent staff towards "survival professionalism": a strategy of polished self-presentation and reduced visibility design to protect credibility under chronic precarity (University and College Union 2021b; Advance HE 2023).

Evaluation regimes reinforce these inequalities. Brown's (2021) collection on ableism shows how productivity metrics, public-facing performance and conventional communication styles elevate neurotypical norms and marginalise alternative ways of working. Bell's (2023) review of neurodiversity in the medical workforce echoes this pattern: retrofitted accommodations rely on self-disclosure and inconsistent managerial goodwill rather than systemic design. These reactive practices place the burden of adjustment on individuals, adding hidden administrative labour and amplifying fatigue. Scott and Gibson (2023) provide qualitative evidence that neurodivergent educators frequently navigate systems built for neurotypical cognition, turning to informal peer support to bridge structural gaps.

A neuro-inclusive university, therefore, requires more than ad-hoc adjustments. Dwyer recommends proactive universal design: flexible workload models, quiet workspaces, sensory-considerate styles and non-linear career paths. Leadership should audit polices for ableist assumptions, co-create accommodation with neurodivergent

staff and resource dedicated support teams who can act without requiring formal diagnoses (Brown 2021; Scott and Gibson 2023). Shifting from retrofitting to structural accountability reduces reliance on "survival professionalism" and enables authentic, sustainable contribution.

Institutional ableism endures when universities interpret neurodivergence through a medical-deficit lens. Casanova and Widman (2021) show that policy discourse still positions neurodivergent staff as problems to be managed rather than as knowledge producers. This framing shapes promotion criteria, workload models and mentoring schemes that presume neurotypical communication and executive functioning. Mellifont's (2023) corroborates this, detailing how expectations around networking, grant writing and "professional" demeanour create hidden barriers that neurodivergent academics negotiate daily.

Progression into leadership requires structural reform. Mellifont (2023) notes that misinterpreted communication styles and inconsistent adjustments hinder advancement, while Patton (2019) demonstrates that universal, opt-in accommodations lower negative attributions and normalise varied work practices. Dwyer et al. (2022) add that inclusive workload models, sensory-considerate spaces and transparent accountability metrics benefit all staff, not only those who disclose neurodivergence. Embedding universal design shifts responsibility from the individual to the institution and begins to dismantle ableist assumptions.

Disclosure remains a calculated risk. Santuzzi and Keating (2022) highlight that career prospects, peer attitudes and organisational climate all influence decisions about being "out" at work. Connection to supportive communities helps mitigate this risk: Botha et al. (2022) find that autistic scholars who feel part of a wider counter-culture report higher well-being and resilience. Yet, Rose and Kalathil (2019) warn that co-production initiatives fail when neurodivergent participants lack equal authority or resources. Genuine neuro-inclusivity, therefore, hinges on shared decision-making structures, transparent leadership pathways and community-centred policy formation, priorities the next section translates into actionable recommendations for higher education.

7.6.2 Institutional Pathways to Neuro-Inclusive Reform

Addressing the structural barriers outlined above requires an institution-wide shift from reactive accommodation to proactive design. The recommendations below synthesise participant insights with best practice in inclusive policy and offer a roadmap for universities seeking to embed neuro-inclusivity in their core operations. Below is **Table 36**, which outlines key institutional priorities, actionable recommendation and their intended impacts for advancing neuro-inclusivity in higher education.

Table 36: Institutional Priorities and Strategic Actions for Neuro-Inclusivity within Higher Education

Priority Area	Actionable Recommendation	Intended Impact
Universal Design	Integrate accessibility principles into workload allocation, meeting formats, digital platforms and assessment criteria.	Reduces individual disclosure burden and normalises diverse working practices.
Flexible Work Models	Formalise remote, hybrid and staggered scheduling; provide sensory-considerate workspaces.	Supports varied cognitive rhythms, mitigates fatigue and increases retention.
Inclusive Merit Frameworks	Redefine promotion and hiring to value pedagogical innovation, community engagement and non-linear career paths.	Expands leadership pathways and recognises neurodivergent strengths.
Structured Peer Support	Establish mentoring schemes and affinity networks for neurodivergent staff with dedicated institutional resourcing.	Enhances retention, fosters knowledge exchange and informs policy from lived experience.
Streamlined Adjustments	Create a single, transparent process for requesting ergonomic, technological or pedagogic adjustments, with clear service-level agreements.	Removes administrative hurdles and destigmatises support-seeking.
Continuous Awareness Training	Embed neurodiversity content in staff development, leadership programmes and curriculum design workshops.	Challenges deficit framing and builds a shared vocabulary for inclusive practice.
Governance and Accountability	Align neuro-inclusivity goals with institutional strategy, set measurable targets and publish annual progress reviews.	Ensures sustained leadership commitment and enables sector benchmarking.

7.7 Directions for Future Research

While this thesis offers a focused a timely contribution to understanding how neurodivergent university educators negotiate professional identity on Twitter, it also highlights several areas that merit further exploration. Drawing on a critical realist framework, the study examined the dynamic interplay between structure, culture and agency across multiple method strands: survey data, Padlet responses, semi-structured interviews and autoethnographic self-interview/reflections. This multi-layered design allowed for a nuanced analysis of digital engagement, institutional precarity and identity performance. However, future research could broaden the empirical scope by including a wider range of platforms, institutional types and international contexts.

Further inquiry might also extend the methodological lens, incorporating longitudinal or comparative studies to better capture temporal shifts in digital practice and professional identity. For example, variation across UK institution hierarchies, such as between post-1992 universities and those classified within the Russell Group, may lead to differing expectations regarding digital visibility, disclosure and performances of professionalism. Internationally, contrasting cultural norms around disability disclosure and academic identity, particularly between more individualist and collectivist societies, may also influence how neurodivergent educators engage with digital platforms. Expanding this work could therefore broaden understanding of how structural exclusion and cultural norms continue to shape neurodivergent academic experience, both online and with the evolving landscape of higher education.

Three key areas I recommend for future research are highlighted below.

7.7.1 Explore Alternative and Emerging Platforms

In light of Twitter's (now re-named as 'X') ongoing structural shifts and functionality, future research could explore how neurodivergent educators are adapting to alternative platforms such as LinkedIn, Mastodon, BlueSky and TikTok. As discussed in Chapter 6, participants described withdrawing from Twitter due to algorithmic changes, accessibility concerns and ideological shifts associated with the leadership within Twitter. These developments suggest a broader shift in the ecology of digital academic life and call for further examination of how professional identity, community and advocacy are negotiated across such platforms.

Research in this area should consider how platform-specific affordances shape identity performance and visibility, and whether alternative platforms offer more inclusive and sustainable third spaces. Instead of viewing digital migration as a simple matter of technology substitution, future inquiry should attend to the relational, cultural and agentic dimensions that underpin these transitions. For neurodivergent educators, platforms such as LinkedIn, Mastodon, or Bluesky may not replicate the previous functionality of Twitter but reconfigure the terms of engagement: offering different norms, expectations and affordances around disclosure, interaction and epistemic participation. LinkedIn's professional framing, for example, may encourage certain performances of credibility and success while constraining more vulnerable or subversive expressions of identity. Mastodon's decentralised structure, by contrast, invites alternative network logics that can facilitate community but may also reproduce exclusivity through technological or cultural inaccessibility. Meanwhile, Bluesky remains in flux, with its open protocol raising questions about moderation, discoverability and trust.

Comparative studies across these platforms could thus reveal how neurodivergent educators recalibrate their practices in response to emerging affordances and how these recalibrations reflect broader structural dynamics

in higher education and digital culture. Such research would benefit from adopting a critical realist approach that foregrounds the interplay of structure, culture and agency, highlighting how educators' decisions to leave, remain or adapt to change are not just personal preferences but could also be responses to precarity, shifting platform norms and evolving community values. Moreover, attending to the lived experience of platform transition, including feelings of loss, continuity and experimentation, can offer valuable insights into the fragility and potential of digital third spaces in a time of sociotechnical instability.

7.7.2 Attending to Intersectional Differences

Despite recognising intersectionality in both the literature review and the analytic framing of this thesis, the scope of the participant sample limited a sustained investigation into how race, gender, class and queerness intersect with neurodivergent identity in digital academic spaces. Future research, therefore, needs to begin with more intentionally diverse recruitment strategies, engaging participants who occupy a range of social locations and career stages, to capture the layered nature of marginalisation in higher education. A richer understanding of intersectionality will clarify how structural power operates differently on, for example, a queer, racialised early-career lecturer than on a white cisgender professor, even when both identify as neurodivergent.

The next wave of studies could examine how intersecting identities shaped digital agency, disclosure and the sense of institutional belonging across multiple platforms. Researchers might ask: *How do racialised neurodivergent educators navigate the racialised politics of visibility on LinkedIn? How do trans-scholars calibrate self-presentation strategies on decentralised networks like Mastodon?* Such questions invite comparative, platform-specific analyses that foreground the diverse tactics individuals deploy to mitigate risk and cultivate community, revealing how platform affordance and institutional norms jointly condition identity performance.

Methodologically, a critical realist, intersectional enquiry would profit from multi-site ethnography, participatory visual methods and longitudinal designs that trace evolving patterns of engagement; such approaches reveal the structural, cultural and agentic mechanisms shaping digital practices while capturing affective dimensions of belonging, fatigue and resilience. Conducted reflexively, attuned to researchers' own positionalities and the ethical duty to amplify under-represented voices, this work can both enrich the empirical evidence base and guide context-sensitive institutional policies, moving beyond generic inclusion statements towards practices that recognise and address the compounded exclusions faced by multiply minoritised neurodivergent educators, thereby fostering a more nuanced, equity-focused understanding of digital professional life and cultivating genuinely inclusive third spaces within and beyond the academy.

7.7.3 Extending the Nomadic Educator Concept through Early Career Inquiry

Finally, the conceptualisation of the Nomadic Educator developed through this thesis marks both a theoretical contribution and a personal departure point. Framed through the lens of fluidity, adaptability and strategic navigation, the concept emerged from the lived realities of neurodivergent educators negotiating digital and institutional terrains. As an early career academic, I see this as an invitation for further development, particularly through postdoctoral research that can test, refine and expand its relevance across varied academic pathways. The metaphor of nomadism, rooted in movement, relationality and resistance, offers a generative framework for understanding how identity is continually reassembled amidst changing structural and cultural conditions.

Future work in this area might focus specifically on the early career stage, where precarity is often most acute and where institutional belonging is yet to be secured. Investigating how nomadic strategies unfold through short-term roles, grant applications, shifting affiliations, and uncertain futures could reveal how neurodivergent educators enact agency within constraint. These moments of transition may not only involve heightened vulnerability but also catalyse forms of resilience, community-making and epistemic creativity. By tracing these dynamics, future inquiry can extend the conceptual utility of the Nomadic Educator while contributing to more inclusive theoretical and institutional frameworks that recognise the complexity of early career development for neurodivergent academics.

7.8 Final Reflexive Insights

This closing section offers a deliberately personal vantage point on the research journey that has culminated in this Doctorate in Education. In keeping with the thesis's autoethnographic and participatory ethos, these reflections are not appended to but interwoven with the analytic work; they are part of the meaning-making itself. As a neurodivergent early-career academic who has navigated chronic illness and structural exclusion, I have researched *survival professionalism* while living it. My earlier role as a mentor to neurodivergent students exposed the gaps that institutions routinely overlook. Listening to participants speak of masking, digital communities and precarious contracts, I repeatedly heard variations of my own story. The membrane between data and memory has therefore remained intentionally porous.

At times, I encountered versions of myself in the narratives I analysed: the tension of visibility, the dread of misreading and the delight in co-production within the neurodivergent communities. These were never abstract categories; they were lived realities. Such resonance underscores the necessity of sustained reflexivity in research shaped by lived experience and affirms the scholarly value of allowing emotion, contradiction and vulnerability to surface on the page. Completing the doctorate while contending with long-term illness and unemployment demanded stamina, self-advocacy and personal sacrifice. Having stepped away from secured

employment for health reasons, I met a higher education landscape reshaped by austerity, marketisation and precarity.

Yet amid these constraints, hope endures. The figure of the Nomadic Educator, developed in this thesis, now serves both as a scholarly contribution and a personal compass. It reframes marginality not as deficit but as generative space: a vantage point from which new forms of knowledge, care and collaboration emerge. The nomadic educator is more than an academic surviving turbulence; they legitimise scholarship in overlooked spaces, asynchronous dialogues, digital refuges, hybrid pedagogies and quiet acts of refusal. Born of structural hardship, the concept is nevertheless grounded in collective creativity and solidarity.

I cannot yet delineate my postdoctoral path with certainty. What I can affirm is a continuing commitment to embodied, reflexive and justice-oriented knowledge making. This thesis is one articulation of that commitment: a record of leaning in motion and of identity in dialogue with systems, people and platforms. It upholds my practitioner-scholar conviction that education is the attainment of certainty but the sustained courage to pose difficult questions and to invite others into the questioning.

As this thesis draws to a close, I offer a final reflection, not in prose, but in poetry. What follows is both a synthesis and a send-off: a creative rendering of the journey, the theory and the solidarity that underpin *The Nomadic Educator.*

The Nomadic Educator

I. Digital Footprints on Shifting Ground

In halls once lined with ivory and ink,
we found our refuge in the scroll,
Where threads became our seminar,
and hashtags made us whole.
The walls of academia were tight,
too loud, too stark, too blind,
So we stitched new space from fragments,
leaving structure, not self, behind.

II. Third Spaces in Collapse and Bloom

Between the metrics and the mask,
we carved a space to breathe,
A screen-lit agora of care,

where silence learned to seethe.
Tweets rose gently like quiet banners,
professional, yet raw,
We turned 280 characters
into a kind of law.

III. Survival is a Kind of Knowing

We logged in with our diagnoses
hidden in digital sleeves,
Wielding wit as our armour
and hyperlinks like sheaves.
This was not just performance,
but a kind of resistance,
Not only presence, but repair,
and an ethic of persistence.

IV. Autoethnographic Echoes

I wrote not as a witness,
but as subject and as site,
My data worn like fabric,
threaded through each sleepless night.
Sticky notes and audio loops,
a method shaped by flux,
Tracing how identity
is forged within the crux.

V. From Precarity to Praxis

Contracts broke like promises,
the academy held sway,
Yet through each fractured tenure,
we still found another way.
Nomadic not through drifting,
but with strategic grace,
A dance of structure and of culture,
and the agency we place.

VI. The Platform Shifts, But Not the Need

X became a troubled refuge
where once our stories stirred,
The algorithms turned away,
but still we wrote and heard.
Though Twitter changed beneath us,
we migrate, scaffold, bend,
Community, not platform,
was always the end.

VII. To Those Who Walk Beside

To those who teach between the lines,
whose knowing isn't neat,
Who labour under silence
and plant resistance at their feet,
This thesis is not conclusion,
but a compass and a call,
That neurodivergent futures
need not be small at all.

References

Adams, T. E., Holman Jones, S. and Ellis, C., 2015. *Autoethnography*. Oxford New York: Oxford University press.

Advance HE, 2023. *Equality in higher education: Staff statistical report 2023* [online]. York: Advance HE. Available from: https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/equality-higher-education-statistical-reports-2023-data-tables.

Aguilar, J. M. and Rütti-Joy, O., 2023. Language Teaching in the 'Third Space': Identity Trajectories and Professional Development Needs. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 33, 99–114.

Alejandro, A. and Zhao, L., 2024. Multi-Method Qualitative Text and Discourse Analysis: A Methodological Framework. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 30 (6), 461–473.

Alvesson, M. and Sköldberg, K., 2009. *Reflexive methodology: new vistas for qualitative research*. Second edition. London: Sage.

Anderson, L., 2006. Analytic Autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35 (4), 373–395.

Anderson-Chavarria, M., 2022. The autism predicament: models of autism and their impact on autistic identity. *Disability & Society*, 37 (8), 1321–1341.

Anon., n.d. Service users and social policy. *In*: .

Archer, M. S., 1995. *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* [online]. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press. Available from: https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9780511557675/type/book [Accessed 25 Mar 2025].

Archer, M. S., 2007. *Making our Way through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility* [online]. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press. Available from: https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9780511618932/type/book [Accessed 25 Mar 2025].

Archer, M. S., Collier, A., Norrie, A., Bhaskar, R. and Lawson, T., 2013. *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

Arnold, J. and Mundy, B., 2020. Praxis pedagogy in teacher education. *Smart Learning Environments*, 7 (1), 8.

Aroles, J., Granter, E. and De Vaujany, F., 2020. 'Becoming mainstream': the professionalisation and corporatisation of digital nomadism. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 35 (1), 114–129.

Atkinson, P., 1997. Narrative Turn or Blind Alley? *Qualitative Health Research*, 7 (3), 325–344.

Bai, Y., Kosonocky, C. W. and Wang, J. Z., 2024. How our authors are using AI tools in manuscript writing. *Patterns*, 5 (10), 101075.

Baillargeon, P., Yoon, J. and Zhang, A., 2024. Who Puts the 'Social' in 'Social Computing'?: Using A Neurodiversity Framing to Review Social Computing Research. [online]. Available from: https://arxiv.org/abs/2410.15527 [Accessed 9 May 2025].

Ball, S. J., 2003. The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18 (2), 215–228.

Ball, S. J., 2016. Neoliberal education? Confronting the slouching beast. *Policy Futures in Education*, 14 (8), 1046–1059.

Barron, K., 1999. Ethics in qualitative social research on marginalized groups. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 1 (1), 38–49.

Barroso-Moreno, C., De Las Heras-Cuenca, A. M., Bañares-Marivela, E. and Rayón-Rumayor, L., 2024. Categorising inclusive education and disability narratives, actors and expertise on Instagram, YouTube and Twitter. *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research*, 13 (1), 16.

Bazeley, P., 2021. *Qualitative data analysis: practical strategies*. 2nd edition. Los Angeles London New Delhi Singapore Washington DC Melbourne: SAGE.

Beail, N. and Williams, K., 2014. Using Qualitative Methods in Research with People Who Have Intellectual Disabilities. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 27 (2), 85–96.

Beaux, H., Karimi, P., Pop, O. and Clark, R., 2024. Guiding Empowerment Model: Liberating Neurodiversity in Online Higher Education. [online]. Available from: https://arxiv.org/abs/2410.18876 [Accessed 7 May 2025].

Bell, D. C., 2023. Neurodiversity in the general practice workforce. *InnovAiT: Education and inspiration for general*

practice, 16 (9), 450–455.

Beresford, P. and Boxall, K., 2012. Service Users, Social Work Education and Knowledge for Social Work Practice. *Social Work Education*, 31 (2), 155–167.

Berger, R., 2015. Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15 (2), 219–234.

Bergold, J. and Thomas, S., 2012. Partizipative Forschungsmethoden: Ein methodischer Ansatz in Bewegung. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol 13, No-1 (2012): Participatory Qualitative Research.

Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, H., Chown, N. and Stenning, A., 2020. *Neurodiversity studies: a new critical paradigm*. London New York (N.Y.): Routledge, Taylor & Francis group.

Bhabha, H. K., 2004. *The location of culture*. London ; New York: Routledge.

Bhaskar, R., 2008. *A Realist Theory of Science*. 1st ed. London: Taylor & Francis Group.

Bhaskar, R., 2015. *The possibility of naturalism: a philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences*. Fourth edition. London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Biesta, G. J. J., 2016. *The beautiful risk of education*. London New York: Routledge.

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C. and Walter, F., 2016. Member Checking: A Tool to Enhance Trustworthiness or Merely a Nod to Validation? *Qualitative Health Research*, 26 (13), 1802–1811.

Booth, A., Sutton, A. and Papaioannou, D., 2016. *Systematic approaches to a successful literature review*. Second edition. Los Angeles: Sage.

Booth, J., 2016. *Autism equality in the workplace: removing barriers and challenging discrimination*. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Botha, M., 2021. Academic, Activist, or Advocate? Angry, Entangled, and Emerging: A Critical Reflection on Autism Knowledge Production. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 727542.

Botha, M., Dibb, B. and Frost, D. M., 2022. 'It's being a part of a grand tradition, a grand counter-culture which involves communities': A qualitative investigation of autistic community connectedness. *Autism*, 26 (8), 2151–2164.

Bourdieu, P., 1990. *In other words: essays towards a reflexive sociology*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. and Adamson, M., 1994. *In other words: essays towards a reflexive sociology*. Nachdr. Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press.

Boyd, D., 2010. Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. *In*: Papacharissi, Z., ed. *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*. New York: Routledge, 39–58.

Boyd, D., 2015. Social Media: A Phenomenon to be Analyzed. *Social Media + Society*, 1 (1), 2056305115580148.

Brabazon, T., 2016. *The University of Google* [online]. 0 ed. Routledge. Available from: https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781317012825 [Accessed 25 Mar 2025].

Braidotti, R., 1994. *Nomadic subjects: embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory*. New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press.

Braidotti, R., 2011. *Nomadic theory: the portable Rosi Braidotti*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Brake, J., Cox, S. and Palmer, P., 2024. Recognizing Past and Present Experiences: Toward a Person-Oriented and Trauma-Informed Approach to Autism Research. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 26 (1), 477–491.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2), 77–101.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2022. *Thematic analysis: a practical guide*. London ; Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE.

Breslin, H. and Currant, N., 2024. Higher education needs to get to grips with the language of neurodiversity. *WonkHE* [online]. Available from: https://wonkhe.com/blogs/higher-education-needs-to-get-to-grips-with-the-language-of-neurodiversity/ [Accessed 10 May 2025].

Brinkmann, S. and Kvale, S., 2015. *InterViews: learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Third edition. Los Angeles London New Delhi Singapore Washington DC: Sage.

Brown, N., 2020. *Ableism in Academia: Theorising experiences of disabilities and chronic illnesses in higher education*. London: UCL Press.

Brown, N. and JSTOR (Organization), eds. 2021. *Lived experiences of ableism in academia: strategies for inclusion in higher education*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Brown, N. and Leigh, J., 2018. Ableism in academia: where are the disabled and ill academics? *Disability & Society*, 33 (6), 985–989.

Brown, N. and Ramlackhan, K., 2022. Exploring experiences of ableism in academia: a constructivist inquiry. *Higher Education*, 83 (6), 1225–1239.

Bryman, A., 2016. *Social research methods*. Fifth edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Butler, J., 2009. *Undoing gender*. Transferred to digital printing. New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J., 2015. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. First issued in hardback. New York London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Cargo, M. and Mercer, S. L., 2008. The Value and Challenges of Participatory Research: Strengthening Its Practice. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 29 (1), 325–350.

Carpenter, J. P., Trust, T., Kimmons, R. and Krutka, D. G., 2021. Sharing and self-promoting: An analysis of educator tweeting at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Computers and Education Open*, 2, 100038.

Carpenter, J., Tani, T., Morrison, S. and Keane, J., 2022. Exploring the landscape of educator professional activity on Twitter: an analysis of 16 education-related Twitter hashtags. *Professional Development in Education*, 48 (5), 784–805.

Casanova, E. L. and Widman, C. J., 2021. A sociological treatment exploring the medical model in relation to the neurodiversity movement with reference to policy and practice. *Evidence & Policy*, 17 (2), 363–381.

Cerro Santamaría, G. D., 2020. Challenges and Drawbacks in the Marketisation of Higher Education Within

Neoliberalism. *Review of European Studies*, 12 (1), 22.

Chapman, R., 2021. Neurodiversity and the Social Ecology of Mental Functions. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16 (6), 1360–1372.

Chapman, R., 2023. *Empire of Normality: Neurodiversity and Capitalism*. London: Pluto Press.

Chapman, R. and Carel, H., 2022. Neurodiversity, epistemic injustice, and the good human life. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 53 (4), 614–631.

Chatterjee, R., Fears, N. E., Lichtenberg, G., Tamplain, P. M. and Miller, H. L., 2023. Identity and Discourse Among #ActuallyAutistic Twitter Users With Motor Differences. *Journal of Motor Learning and Development*, 11 (3), 525–540.

Cheah, C. W., Koay, K. Y. and Xiang, K., 2023. Uncovering the Voices of Marginalized Minorities in Public Policy Research - A Critical Review of the Image and Text-Based Vignette Method. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22, 16094069231163429.

Christoph, M., 2021. Digital Nomadism as a Key Perspective of Changes in the Labour Market. *Lifelong Learning*, 11 (1), 39–58.

Clayton, J. C. and Hoskins, P., 2025. *Elon Musk takes control of Twitter in $44bn deal* [online]. BBC News. Available from: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-63402338.

Clouder, L., Karakus, M., Cinotti, A., Ferreyra, M. V., Fierros, G. A. and Rojo, P., 2020. Neurodiversity in higher education: a narrative synthesis. *Higher Education*, 80 (4), 757–778.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K., 2018. *Research methods in education*. eighth edition. London New York: Routledge.

Cohen, S. L., Shavel, K. and Lovett, B. J., 2024. College Students with ADHD: A Selective Review of Qualitative Studies. *Disabilities*, 4 (3), 658–677.

Cornwall, A. and Jewkes, R., 1995. What is participatory research? *Social Science & Medicine*, 41 (12), 1667–1676.

Crawley, S. L., 2012. Autoethnography as Feminist Self-Interview. *In*: Gubrium, J., Holstein, J., Marvasti, A., and McKinney, K., eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft* [online]. United States: SAGE Publications, Inc., 143–160. Available from: https://methods.sagepub.com/book/handbook-of-interview-research-2e/n10.xml.

Crenshaw, K., 1991. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43 (6), 1241.

Creswell, J. W., 2015. *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. Los Angeles London New Delhi Singapore Washington DC: Sage.

Crew, T., 2020. *Higher Education and Working-Class Academics: Precarity and Diversity in Academia*. 1st ed. 2020. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Czerniawski, G., 2018. *Teacher Educators in the Twenty-First Century: Identity, Knowledge and Research*. 1st ed. Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group.

Danermark, B., Ekström, M. and Karlsson, J. C., 2019. *Explaining society: critical realism in the social sciences*. Second edition. Abingdon, Oxon New York, NY: Routledge.

Dark, J., 2024. Eight principles of neuro-inclusion; an autistic perspective on innovating inclusive research methods. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, 1326536.

Davis, R. and Crompton, C. J., 2021. What Do New Findings About Social Interaction in Autistic Adults Mean for Neurodevelopmental Research? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16 (3), 649–653.

De Almeida, M. A., Correia, A., Schneider, D. and De Souza, J. M., 2021. COVID-19 as Opportunity to Test Digital Nomad Lifestyle. *In*: *2021 IEEE 24th International Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work in Design (CSCWD)* [online]. Presented at the 2021 IEEE 24th International Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work in Design (CSCWD), Dalian, China: IEEE, 1209–1214. Available from: https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/9437685/ [Accessed 26 Mar 2025].

DeJonckheere, M. and Vaughn, L. M., 2019. Semistructured interviewing in primary care research: a balance of relationship and rigour. *Family Medicine and Community Health*, 7 (2), e000057.

Delamont, S., 2009. The only honest thing: autoethnography, reflexivity and small crises in fieldwork. *Ethnography and Education*, 4 (1), 51–63.

Delhoume, F., Codello, P. and Oiry, E., 2024. Neurodivergence : les organisations inclusives limitées par l'omniprésence du modèle médical ? Les enseignements d'une Synthèse Interprétative Critique: *Revue internationale de psychosociologie et de gestion des comportements organisationnels*, Vol. XXX (81), 61–92.

Denisen, C., 2024. No one wants to understand me enough to make it better: The neurodiversity paradigm and its opposition to the medical model. Doctoral. [online]. University of Iowa, Iowa City. Available from: https://iro.uiowa.edu/esploro/outputs/doctoral/No-one-wants-to-understand-me/9984698054802771.

Denzin, N. K., 2012. Triangulation 2.0. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 6 (2), 80–88.

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S., eds. 2018. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Fifth edition. Los Angeles London New Delhi Singapore Washington DC Melbourne: SAGE.

Dickinson, J., Fowler, A. and Griffiths, T.-L., 2022. Pracademics? Exploring transitions and professional identities in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47 (2), 290–304.

Dodgson, J. E., 2019. Reflexivity in Qualitative Research. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 35 (2), 220–222.

Dwyer, P., Mineo, E., Mifsud, K., Lindholm, C., Gurba, A. and Waisman, T. C., 2022. Building Neurodiversity-Inclusive Postsecondary Campuses: Recommendations for Leaders in Higher Education. *Autism in Adulthood*, aut.2021.0042.

Dwyer, S. C. and Buckle, J. L., 2009. The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8 (1), 54–63.

Egner, J., 2022. #ActuallyAutistic: Using Twitter to Construct Individual and Collective Identity Narratives. *Studies in Social Justice*, 16 (2), 349–369.

El-Alayli, A., Hansen-Brown, A. A. and Ceynar, M., 2018. Dancing Backwards in High Heels: Female Professors

Experience More Work Demands and Special Favor Requests, Particularly from Academically Entitled Students. *Sex Roles*, 79 (3–4), 136–150.

Ellis, C., 2004. *The ethnographic I: a methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek Lanham New York Oxford: AltaMira Press, a division of Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. Inc.

Ellis, C., Adams, T. E. and Bochner, A. P., 2010. Autoethnography: An Overview. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol 12, No-1 (2011): The KWALON Experiment: Discussions on Qualitative Data Analysis Software by Developers and Users.

Ellis, C. S. and Bochner, A. P., 2006. Analyzing Analytic Autoethnography: An Autopsy. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35 (4), 429–449.

Ellis, P. and Kirby, A., 2023. *Neurodiversity and education*. First edition. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin.

Erstad, O. and Silseth, K., 2023. Rethinking the boundaries of learning in a digital age. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 48 (4), 557–565.

Espada-Chavarria, R., González-Montesino, R. H., López-Bastías, J. L. and Díaz-Vega, M., 2023. Universal Design for Learning and Instruction: Effective Strategies for Inclusive Higher Education. *Education Sciences*, 13 (6), 620.

Fals-Borda, O., 1987. The Application of Participatory Action-Research in Latin America. *International Sociology*, 2 (4), 329–347.

Fierros, E. G. and Conroy, J. W., 2002. Double jeopardy: An exploration of restrictiveness and race in special education. *In*: Losen, D. J. and Orfield, G., eds. *Racial inequity in special education*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 39–70.

Fiesler, C. and Proferes, N., 2018. "Participant" Perceptions of Twitter Research Ethics. *Social Media + Society*, 4 (1), 2056305118763366.

Fikriy, A., Sani, A., Omar, S. A. S., Thaheer, A. S. M., Ishak, M. F. and Shuib, F. H., 2023. Digital Nomads: Who Are They? *International Journal of Academic Research in Economics and Management Sciences*, 12 (2), 614–623.

Finlay, L., 2002. Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research*, 2 (2), 209–230.

Fletcher, A. J., 2017. Applying critical realism in qualitative research: methodology meets method. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20 (2), 181–194.

Fletcher-Watson, S., Adams, J., Brook, K., Charman, T., Crane, L., Cusack, J., Leekam, S., Milton, D., Parr, J. R. and Pellicano, E., 2019. Making the future together: Shaping autism research through meaningful participation. *Autism*, 23 (4), 943–953.

Fletcher-Watson, S., Brook, K., Hallett, S., Murray, F. and Crompton, C. J., 2021. Inclusive Practices for Neurodevelopmental Research. *Current Developmental Disorders Reports*, 8 (2), 88–97.

Flick, U., 2018. *Doing Triangulation and Mixed Methods* [online]. 1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road London EC1Y 1SP: SAGE Publications Ltd. Available from: https://methods.sagepub.com/book/doing-triangulation-and-mixed-methods [Accessed 27 Mar 2025].

Freire, P., 2018. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 50th Anniversary Edition*. 4th ed. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Fricker, M., 2007. *Epistemic injustice: power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford New York: Oxford University Press.

Gabarron, E., Dorronzoro, E., Reichenpfader, D. and Denecke, K., 2023. What Do Autistic People Discuss on Twitter? An Approach Using BERTopic Modelling. *In*: Hägglund, M., Blusi, M., Bonacina, S., Nilsson, L., Cort Madsen, I., Pelayo, S., Moen, A., Benis, A., Lindsköld, L., and Gallos, P., eds. *Studies in Health Technology and Informatics* [online]. IOS Press. Available from: https://ebooks.iospress.nl/doi/10.3233/SHTI230161 [Accessed 25 Mar 2025].

Galletta, A., 2020. *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication* [online]. New York University Press. Available from: https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.18574/nyu/9780814732939.001.0001/html [Accessed 18 May 2025].

Gargano, T. and Throop, J., 2017. Logging On: Using Online Learning to Support the Academic Nomad. *Journal of International Students*, 7 (3), 918–924.

Gill-Simmen, L., 2021. Using Padlet in instructional design to promote cognitive engagement: a case study of undergraduate marketing students. *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education* [online], (20). Available from: https://journal.aldinhe.ac.uk/index.php/jldhe/article/view/575 [Accessed 16 May 2025].

Go Jefferies, J., Rhoads, M., Vogus, T. J., Satornino, C. B. and Broderick, A. A., 2025. A Neurodiversity Perspective on Fostering Marketplace Inclusion by Bridging Ability Mismatches. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 44 (2), 234–236.

Godrie, B., 2025. Resisting scientific extractivism: A post-extractivist policy of knowledge production with marginalized communities. *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* [online], 18 (1). Available from: https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/ijcre/article/view/9326 [Accessed 15 May 2025].

Goffman, E., 2021. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Goodley, D., 2014. *Dis/ability Studies* [online]. 0 ed. Routledge. Available from: https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781134060832 [Accessed 13 May 2025].

Grant, A. and Kara, H., 2021. Considering the Autistic advantage in qualitative research: the strengths of Autistic researchers. *Contemporary Social Science*, 16 (5), 589–603.

Green, L. W., 2006. Public Health Asks of Systems Science: To Advance Our Evidence-Based Practice, Can You Help Us Get More Practice-Based Evidence? *American Journal of Public Health*, 96 (3), 406–409.

Gualano, R. J., Jiang, L., Zhang, K., Shende, T., Won, A. S. and Azenkot, S., 2024. 'I Try to Represent Myself as I Am': Self-Presentation Preferences of People with Invisible Disabilities through Embodied Social VR Avatars. *In*: *The 26th International ACM SIGACCESS Conference on Computers and Accessibility* [online]. 1–15. Available from:

http://arxiv.org/abs/2408.08193 [Accessed 6 Jun 2025].

Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S., 1994. Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *In*: Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S., eds. *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: SAGE Publications, 105–117.

Guest, G., Bunce, A. and Johnson, L., 2006. How Many Interviews Are Enough?: An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability. *Field Methods*, 18 (1), 59–82.

Haas, A., Abonneau, D., Borzillo, S. and Guillaume, L.-P., 2021. Afraid of engagement? Towards an understanding of engagement in virtual communities of practice. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 19 (2), 169–180.

Hacker, K., 2013. *Community-based participatory research*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE.

Haegele, J. A. and Hodge, S., 2016. Disability Discourse: Overview and Critiques of the Medical and Social Models. *Quest*, 68 (2), 193–206.

Hamilton, L. G. and Petty, S., 2023. Compassionate pedagogy for neurodiversity in higher education: A conceptual analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1093290.

Hamilton, M. L., Smith, L. and Worthington, K., 2008. Fitting the Methodology with the Research: An exploration of narrative, self-study and auto-ethnography. *Studying Teacher Education*, 4 (1), 17–28.

Harding, S. G., ed. 2004. *The feminist standpoint theory reader: intellectual and political controversies*. New York London: Routledge.

Harpur, P. and Szucs, B., 2023. Using the new disability human rights paradigm to create higher education leadership opportunities. *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law*, 23 (1–2), 144–162.

Heale, R. and Forbes, D., 2013. Understanding triangulation in research. *Evidence Based Nursing*, 16 (4), 98–98.

Hermann, I. and Paris, C. M., 2020. Digital Nomadism: the nexus of remote working and travel mobility. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 22 (3), 329–334.

Heron, J. and Reason, P., 1997. A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3 (3), 274–294.

Hill Collins, P., 2000. *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Second edition. London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Hinshaw, S. P. and Scheffler, R. M., 2014. *The ADHD explosion: myths, medication, money, and today's push for performance*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Holland, D. C., ed. 2001. *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. 1. Harvard Univ. Press paperback ed., 2. print. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.

Hooks, B., 2005. *The will to change: men, masculinity, and love*. 1. paperback edition. New York London Toronto Sydney: Washington Square Press.

Horton, E., Goldschmied, A. Z., Knops, M. J. J., Brownhill, L. A., Bycroft, A., Lloyd, A., Tones, D., Wiltshire, B., Toro, C. T. and Jutley-Neilson, J., 2024. Empowering Voices: Fostering Reflective Dialogue and Redefining Research Dynamics in Participatory Approaches With the Autistic Community. *Journal of Participatory Research Methods* [online], 5 (3). Available from: https://jprm.scholasticahq.com/article/122455-empowering-voices-fostering-reflective-dialogue-and-redefining-research-dynamics-in-participatory-approaches-with-the-autistic-community

[Accessed 21 May 2025].

Huber, G., 2024. Exercising power in autoethnographic vignettes to constitute critical knowledge. *Organization*, 31 (1), 49–65.

Hume, R., 2024. An Inclusive Methodology for Research with Multiply Neurodivergent Participants. *In*: Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, H. and Jackson-Perry, D., eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of Research Methods and Ethics in Neurodiversity Studies* [online]. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 215–231. Available from: https://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-031-66127-3_13 [Accessed 21 May 2025].

Ingouf, L., 2021. Neurodiversity and Online Communities: Why They Matter. Honors. [online]. Mississippi State University, United States. Available from: https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/honorstheses/126/.

Israel, B. A., ed. 2013. *Methods for community-based participatory research for health*. 2. ed. San Francisco, Calif: Jossey-Bass.

Jehad Ali, A. M. and Ahmad, A. M., Mofeed, 2022. A Comparative Study of the Effectiveness of Using Padlet in Distance Learning: Viewpoint of Postgraduate Students. *Journal of Education and e-Learning Research*, 9 (2), 95–102.

Jenkins, R., 2008. *Pierre Bourdieu*. Rev. ed.; Repr. London: Routledge.

Johnson, R. B. and Onwuegbuzie, A. J., 2004. Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come. *Educational Researcher*, 33 (7), 14–26.

Jones, S. C., 2023. Autistics working in academia: What are the barriers and facilitators? *Autism*, 27 (3), 822–831.

Jong, B. and Tan, K. H., 2021. Using Padlet as a Technological Tool for Assessment of Students Writing Skills in Online Classroom Settings. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 9 (2), 411–423.

Junco, R., Heiberger, G. and Loken, E., 2011. The effect of Twitter on college student engagement and grades: Twitter and student engagement. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 27 (2), 119–132.

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A., Johnson, M. and Kangasniemi, M., 2016. Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72 (12), 2954–2965.

Kaufman, E. C., Chennault, C. and Molana, H., 2024. Slow(ed) Scholarship. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, Vol. 23 No. 5, 379-401 Pages.

Kerschbaum, S. L., 2014. *Toward a New Rhetoric of Difference*. Place of publication not identified: National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).

Kidwell, K. E., Clancy, R. L. and Fisher, G. G., 2023. The devil you know versus the devil you don't: Disclosure versus masking in the workplace. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 16 (1), 55–60.

Kirschner, P. A. and Lai, K., 2007. Online communities of practice in education. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, 16 (2), 127–131.

Krome, L. R., 2021. A review of Zoom utilization in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Education Thinking*, 1 (1), 11–26.

Le Cunff, A.-L., Ellis Logan, P., Ford, R., Martis, B.-L., Mousset, I., Sekibo, J., Dommett, E. and Giampietro, V., 2023.

Co-Design for Participatory Neurodiversity Research: Collaborating With a Community Advisory Board to Design a Research Study. *Journal of Participatory Research Methods* [online], 4 (1). Available from: https://jprm.scholasticahq.com/article/66184-co-design-for-participatory-neurodiversity-research-collaborating-with-a-community-advisory-board-to-design-a-research-study [Accessed 20 May 2025].

Le Cunff, A.-L., Martis, B.-L., Glover, C., Ahmed, E., Ford, R., Giampietro, V. and Dommett, E. J., 2025. Cognitive load and neurodiversity in online education: a preliminary framework for educational research and policy. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, 1437673.

Le Gallais, T., 2008. Wherever I go there I am: reflections on reflexivity and the research stance. *Reflective Practice*, 9 (2), 145–155.

Le Roux, C. S., 2017. Exploring rigour in autoethnographic research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20 (2), 195–207.

Leach, M., Scoones, I. and Stirling, A., 2010. Governing epidemics in an age of complexity: Narratives, politics and pathways to sustainability. *Global Environmental Change*, 20 (3), 369–377.

Leach, M., Scoones, I. and Stirling, A., 2020. *COVID-19 – a social phenomenon requiring diverse expertise* [online]. Institute of Development Studies (IDS). Available from: https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/covid-19-a-social-phenomenon-requiring-diverse-expertise/.

Lee, K., Fanguy, M., Bligh, B. and Lu, X. S., 2022. Adoption of online teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic: a systematic analysis of changes in university teaching activity. *Educational Review*, 74 (3), 460–483.

Leech, N. L., Dellinger, A. B., Brannagan, K. B. and Tanaka, H., 2010. Evaluating Mixed Research Studies: A Mixed Methods Approach. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4 (1), 17–31.

Legault, M., Bourdon, J.-N. and Poirier, P., 2021. From neurodiversity to neurodivergence: the role of epistemic and cognitive marginalization. *Synthese*, 199 (5–6), 12843–12868.

Lewis, C. J. and Arday, J., 2023. We'll see things they'll never see: Sociological reflections on race, neurodiversity and higher education. *The Sociological Review*, 71 (6), 1299–1321.

Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G., 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*. Nachdr. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage.

Lindsay, S. and Fuentes, K., 2022. It Is Time to Address Ableism in Academia: A Systematic Review of the Experiences and Impact of Ableism among Faculty and Staff. *Disabilities*, 2 (2), 178–203.

LoBianco, A. F. and Sheppard-Jones, K., 2007. Perceptions of Disability as Related to Medical and Social Factors. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 37 (1), 1–13.

Losen, D. J. and Orfield, G., eds. 2005. *Racial inequity in special education*. 2. print. Cambridge, Mass: Civil Rights Project at Harvard Univ., Harvard Education Press.

Madriaga, M., 2010. 'I avoid pubs and the student union like the plague': Students with Asperger Syndrome and their negotiation of university spaces. *Children's Geographies*, 8 (1), 39–50.

Malik, A., Heyman-Schrum, C. and Johri, A., 2019. Use of Twitter across educational settings: a review of the literature. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 16 (1), 36.

Mantzalas, J., Richdale, A. L., Adikari, A., Lowe, J. and Dissanayake, C., 2022. What Is Autistic Burnout? A Thematic Analysis of Posts on Two Online Platforms. *Autism in Adulthood*, 4 (1), 52–65.

Marwick, A. E. and Boyd, D., 2011. I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, 13 (1), 114–133.

Mason, O. and Megoran, N., 2021. Precarity and dehumanisation in higher education: *Learning and Teaching*, 14 (1), 35–59.

McArthur, J. A. and White, A. F., 2016. Twitter Chats as Third Places: Conceptualizing a Digital Gathering Site. *Social Media + Society*, 2 (3), 2056305116665857.

McDougall, J. and Potter, J., 2019. Digital media learning in the third space. *Media Practice and Education*, 20 (1), 1–11.

Mellifont, D., 2023. Ableist ivory towers: a narrative review informing about the lived experiences of neurodivergent staff in contemporary higher education. *Disability & Society*, 38 (5), 865–886.

Merchant, W., Read, S., D'Evelyn, S., Miles, C. and Williams, V., 2020. The insider view: tackling disabling practices in higher education institutions. *Higher Education*, 80 (2), 273–287.

Milton, D. E. M., 2012. On the ontological status of autism: the 'double empathy problem'. *Disability & Society*, 27 (6), 883–887.

Mountz, A., Bonds, A., Mansfield, B., Loyd, J., Hyndman, J., Walton-Roberts, M., Basu, R., Whitson, R., Hawkins, R., Hamilton, T. and Curran, W., 2015. For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 1235-1259 Pages.

Nagy, P. and Koles, B., 2014. The digital transformation of human identity: Towards a conceptual model of virtual identity in virtual worlds. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 20 (3), 276–292.

Nair, V. K., Farah, W. and Boveda, M., 2024. Is neurodiversity a Global Northern White paradigm? *Autism*, 13623613241280835.

Nicolaidis, C., Raymaker, D., Kapp, S. K., Baggs, A., Ashkenazy, E., McDonald, K., Weiner, M., Maslak, J., Hunter, M. and Joyce, A., 2019. The AASPIRE practice-based guidelines for the inclusion of autistic adults in research as co-researchers and study participants. *Autism*, 23 (8), 2007–2019.

Nimbley, E., Maloney, E., Buchan, K., Sader, M., Gillespie-Smith, K. and Duffy, F., 2024. Barriers and facilitators to ethical co-production with Autistic people with an eating disorder. *Journal of Eating Disorders* [online], 12 (1). Available from: https://jeatdisord.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40337-024-01076-y [Accessed 1 May 2025].

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E. and Moules, N. J., 2017. Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16 (1), 1609406917733847.

Obexer, R., 2022. Lost in third space: Identity work of a "blended professional" in higher education. *Studies in Technology Enhanced Learning* [online]. Available from: https://stel.pubpub.org/pub/02-03-obexer-2022

[Accessed 15 May 2025].

Oliver, M., 1990. *The politics of disablement*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Oliver, M., 1996. *Understanding Disability* [online]. London: Macmillan Education UK. Available from: http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-1-349-24269-6 [Accessed 11 May 2025].

OPB News, 2023. *Neurodivergent educators build connections but face unique challenges* [online]. OPB. Available from: https://www.opb.org/article/2023/12/16/neurodivergent-autism-adhd-teachers-educators-education-schools-disability-oregon/.

Ortega, F., 2009. The Cerebral Subject and the Challenge of Neurodiversity. *BioSocieties*, 4 (4), 425–445.

Papacharissi, Z., 2012. Without you, I'm nothing: Performances of the self on Twitter. *International journal of communication*, 6, 18.

Patton, E., 2019. Autism, attributions and accommodations: Overcoming barriers and integrating a neurodiverse workforce. *Personnel Review*, 48 (4), 915–934.

Pavlenko, A., ed. 2004. *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Pearson, A. and Rose, K., 2021. A Conceptual Analysis of Autistic Masking: Understanding the Narrative of Stigma and the Illusion of Choice. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3 (1), 52–60.

Pearson, A. and Rose, K., 2023. *Autistic masking: understanding identity management and the role of stigma*. Shoreham by Sea, West Sussex [England]: Pavilion Publishing.

Pearson, A., Surtees, A., Crompton, C. J., Goodall, C., Pillai, D., Sedgewick, F. and Au-Yeung, S. K., 2022. Editorial: Addressing community priorities in autism research. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1040446.

Pink, S., Horst, H. A., Postill, J., Hjorth, L., Lewis, T. and Tacchi, J., 2016. *Digital ethnography: principles and practice*. Los Angeles London New Delhi Singapore Washington DC: SAGE.

Pousti, H., Urquhart, C. and Linger, H., 2021. Researching the virtual: A framework for reflexivity in qualitative social media research. *Information Systems Journal*, 31 (3), 356–383.

Radulski, E. M., 2022. Conceptualising Autistic Masking, Camouflaging, and Neurotypical Privilege: Towards a Minority Group Model of Neurodiversity. *Human Development*, 66 (2), 113–127.

Reay *, D., 2004. 'It's all becoming a habitus': beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25 (4), 431–444.

Richardson, J. G., ed. 1986. *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. 1. publ. New York: Greenwood Press.

Rose, D. and Kalathil, J., 2019. Power, Privilege and Knowledge: the Untenable Promise of Co-production in Mental "Health". *Frontiers in Sociology*, 4, 57.

Rourke, R. D., 2017. Habitual favourites: A sensory sociology of autism. [online]. University of London, Goldsmiths. Available from: https://research.gold.ac.uk/20955/1/SOC_thesis_RourkeR_2017.pdf [Accessed 12 Mar 2024].

Saigot, M., 2023. Unveiling Technorelief: Enhancing Neurodiverse Collaboration with Media Capabilities. [online].

Available from: https://arxiv.org/abs/2310.00949 [Accessed 20 May 2025].

Santuzzi, A. M. and Keating, R. T., 2022. Neurodiversity and the Disclosure Dilemma. *In*: *Neurodiversity in the Workplace* [online]. New York: Routledge, 124–148. Available from: https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781003023616/chapters/10.4324/9781003023616-5 [Accessed 25 Mar 2025].

Satterlund, N. M., Miron, A. M. and Pino, Z. D., 2025. Empowering a Disabled Identity: An Examination of Goals and Antecedents of Autism Activism on Twitter. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 35 (2), e70078.

Sayer, A., 2000. *Realism and Social Science* [online]. 1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd. Available from: https://sk.sagepub.com/books/realism-and-social-science [Accessed 25 Mar 2025].

Scheeren, A. M., Howlin, P., Pellicano, L., Magiati, I. and Begeer, S., 2022. Continuity and change in loneliness and stress during the COVID -19 pandemic: A longitudinal study of autistic and non-autistic adults. *Autism Research*, 15 (9), 1621–1635.

Scott, M. and Gibson, P., 2022. Twitter as a Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP): New connections and research collaborations. *Birmingham City University Education Journal Magazine*, 3 (1), 32–33.

Scott, M. and Gibson, P. F., 2023. Designing Institutional Systems that Support Neurodivergent Educators. *Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching* [online], 16 (2). Available from: https://journals.gre.ac.uk/index.php/compass/article/view/1432 [Accessed 25 Mar 2025].

Shakespeare, T. and Watson, N., 2001. The social model of disability: An outdated ideology? *In*: *Research in Social Science and Disability* [online]. Bingley: Emerald (MCB UP), 9–28. Available from: https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1016/S1479-3547(01)80018-X/full/html [Accessed 25 Mar 2025].

Shore, C. and Wright, S., 2015. Governing by numbers: audit culture, rankings and the new world order: GOVERNING BY NUMBERS. *Social Anthropology*, 23 (1), 22–28.

Simons, H. and Usher, R., eds. 2000. *Situated ethics in educational research*. London ; New York: Routledge.

Simpson, E., Dalal, S. and Semaan, B., 2022. 'Hey, Can You Add Captions?': The Critical Infrastructuring Practices of Neurodiverse People on TikTok. [online]. Available from: http://arxiv.org/abs/2212.06204 [Accessed 6 Jun 2025].

Singer, J., 1999. Why can't you be normal for once in your life? *In*: Singer, J., ed. *Neurodiversity: The Birth of an Idea*. Annandale, NSW: Trine Books, 1–10.

Skafle, I., Gabarron, E. and Nordahl-Hansen, A., 2024. Social media shaping autism perception and identity. *Autism*, 28 (10), 2489–2502.

Smith, E. F., Gidlow, B. and Steel, G., 2012. Engaging adolescent participants in academic research: the use of photo-elicitation interviews to evaluate school-based outdoor education programmes. *Qualitative Research*, 12

(4), 367–387.

Spaeth, E. and Pearson, A., 2023. Reflective Analysis on Neurodiversity and Student Wellbeing: Conceptualising Practical Strategies for Inclusive Practice. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 11 (2), 109–120.

Sparkes, A. C., 2000. Autoethnography and Narratives of Self: Reflections on Criteria in Action. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 17 (1), 21–43.

Stacey, R. and Cage, E., 2023. "Simultaneously Vague and Oddly Specific": Understanding Autistic People's Experiences of Decision Making and Research Questionnaires. *Autism in Adulthood*, 5 (3), 263–274.

Staudt Willet, K. B., 2019. Revisiting How and Why Educators Use Twitter: Tweet Types and Purposes in #Edchat. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 51 (3), 273–289.

Stephens, K., 2022. The Gendered, Racialized, & Dis/Abled Experiences of Neurodivergent Black Women Graduate Students Across Higher Education. [online]. University of Massachusetts Amherst. Available from: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/entities/publication/427119c8-aa33-442a-b2fa-a2ff509a2742 [Accessed 10 May 2025].

Stephens-Griffin, N. D., 2019. A Millennial Methodology? Autoethnographic Research in Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Punk and Activist Communities. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol 20, No 3 (2019): Qualitative Content Analysis I.

Svihus, C. L., 2024. Online teaching in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Education and Information Technologies*, 29 (3), 3175–3193.

Taylor, Y., 2018. *Feeling Academic in the Neoliberal University: Feminist Flights, Fights and Failures*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Teddlie, C. and Tashakkori, A., 2010. *Foundations of mixed methods research: integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences*. Nachdr. Los Angeles: SAGE Publ.

The Economic Times, 2025. Elon Musk's big announcement on algorithm tweaks, customisable feeds for X, tech mogul says 'too much negativity…. *The Economic Times* [online], 4 January 2025. Available from: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/global-trends/elon-musk-algorithm-tweak-x-twitter-elon-musks-big-announcement-on-algorithm-tweaks-customisable-feeds-for-x-tech-mogul-says-too-much-negativity-/articleshow/116945403.cms [Accessed 12 Jun 2025].

Titchkosky, T., 2011. *The question of access: disability, space, meaning*. Toronto Buffalo London: University of Toronto Press.

Tracy, S. J., 2010. Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16 (10), 837–851.

Trevisan, F., 2016. *Disability Rights Advocacy Online* [online]. 0 ed. Routledge. Available from: https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781317537069 [Accessed 25 Mar 2025].

University And College Union, 2023. *Precarious work in higher education – update August 2023* [online]. London: University and College Union. Report. Available from: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/14007/Precarious-work-in-

higher-education--update-August-2023/pdf/UCU_- [Accessed 17 Jun 2025].

University and College Union (UCU), 2021a. *Precarious Work in Higher Education: Insecure Contracts and How They Have Changed Over Time* [online]. London: University and College Union. Available from: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10899/Precarious-work-in-higher-education-May-20/pdf/ucu_he-precarity-report_may20.pdf.

University and College Union (UCU), 2021b. *Neurodiversity in the Workplace* [online]. London: University and College Union (UCU). Available from: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12406/Neurodiversity-Guidance/pdf/Neurodiversity_A4_guide_January_22.pdf [Accessed 1 Feb 2022].

Urbanowicz, A., Nicolaidis, C., Houting, J. D., Shore, S. M., Gaudion, K., Girdler, S. and Savarese, R. J., 2019. An Expert Discussion on Strengths-Based Approaches in Autism. *Autism in Adulthood*, 1 (2), 82–89.

Van Teijlingen, E. and Hundley, V., 2002. The importance of pilot studies. *Nursing Standard*, 16 (40), 33–36.

Van Zyl, I. and Sabiescu, A., 2020. Toward intersubjective ethics in community-based research. *Community Development*, 51 (4), 303–322.

Veletsianos, G., 2020. *Learning online: the student experience*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Vidal Valero, M., 2023. Thousands of scientists are cutting back on Twitter, seeding angst and uncertainty. *Nature*, 620 (7974), 482–484.

Walker, N., 2021. *Neuroqueer heresies: notes on the neurodiversity paradigm, autistic empowerment, and postnormal possibilities*. Fort Worth: Autonomous Press.

Wallerstein, N., Duran, B., Oetzel, J. G. and Minkler, M., eds. 2018. *Community-based participatory research for health: advancing social and health equity*. Third edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Brand.

Ware, H., Singal, N. and Groce, N., 2022. The work lives of disabled teachers: revisiting inclusive education in English schools. *Disability & Society*, 37 (9), 1417–1438.

Waterfield, B., Beagan, B. B. and Weinberg, M., 2018. Disabled academics: a case study in Canadian universities. *Disability & Society*, 33 (3), 327–348.

Wenger-Trayner, É., 2008. *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity*. 18th printing. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wharmby, P., 2022. *Un-typical: how the world isn't built for autistic people and what we should all do about it*. London: Mudlark.

Whitchurch, C., 2009. The rise of the blended professional in higher education: a comparison between the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States. *Higher Education*, 58 (3), 407–418.

Whitchurch, C., 2013. *Reconstructing identities in higher education: the rise of 'third space' professionals*. London: Routledge.

White, J. W. and Lowenthal, P. R., 2011. Minority College Students and Tacit 'Codes of Power': Developing Academic Discourses and Identities. *The Review of Higher Education*, 34 (2), 283–318.

Williams, A., Kim, A., Coleman-Burns, P., Koines, A., Soberano, E. and Burnside, N., 2024. *Thriving Staff of Color:*

Imagining Higher Education Institutional Transformation [online]. National Center for Institutional Diversity(NCID), University of Michigan. Available from: https://ncid.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/report-thriving-staff-of-color-cascade-ncid.pdf [Accessed 10 May 2025].

Wood, R., Crane, L., Happé, F., Morrison, A. and Moyse, R., 2022. *Learning from Autistic Teachers: How to Be a Neurodiversity-Inclusive School*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Wood, R. and Milton, D., 2018. Reflections on the value of autistic participation in a tri-national teacher-training project through discourses of acceptance, othering and power. *British Journal of Special Education*, 45 (2), 157–171.

Wright, K. A., 2021. A broader spectrum of habitus: An autoethnographic exploration of adolescents, technology, and media in the domestic field and the field of public education. Doctoral. [online]. University of Oregon. Available from: https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/bitstreams/5cdbb1ee-bed6-4148-8102-93d1a7eef567/download [Accessed 12 May 2025].

Zainuddin, N. M. M., Azmi, N. F. M., Yusoff, R. C. M., Shariff, S. A. and Hassan, W. A. W., 2020. Enhancing Classroom Engagement Through Padlet as a Learning Tool: A Case Study. *International Journal of Innovative Computing* [online], 10 (1). Available from: https://ijic.utm.my/index.php/ijic/article/view/250 [Accessed 26 Mar 2025].

Zhao, X., Cox, A. and Chen, X., 2025. The use of generative AI by students with disabilities in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 66, 101014.

Zolyomi, A. and Snyder, J., 2023. Designing for Common Ground: Visually Representing Conversation Dynamics of Neurodiverse Dyads. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 7 (CSCW2), 1–33.

Appendices

A: Online Survey: Questions

Original Online Survey Questions from Qualtrics

To ensure clarity and consistency, the final version of the Qualtrics survey included the following core items and prompts. Each item was phrased in accessible language, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity for participants with varying cognitive and reading preferences:

Demographic and Professional Background

“What is your age range?”

18–24

25–34

35–44

45–54

55–64

65+

“How many years have you worked in higher education?”

1–3 years

4–6 years

7+ years

“Which of the following best describes your current role?”

Lecturer

Senior Lecturer

Professor

Research Fellow

Administrator with teaching duties

Other (please specify)

Neurodivergent Identification and Disclosure

4. “Which of the following neurodivergent conditions or identities do you identify with? (Select all that apply)”

Autism

ADHD

Dyslexia

Dyspraxia

Other (please specify)

“On Twitter (or Twitter/X), do you publicly disclose your neurodivergent identity or diagnoses?”

Yes

No

Sometimes

Not applicable

Twitter/X Usage and Engagement

6. “On average, how often do you post (tweet or retweet) on Twitter/X?”

Multiple times a day

Daily

Several times a week

Weekly

Less than weekly

Rarely/Never

“What are your primary purposes for using Twitter/X? (Select all that apply)”

Professional networking

Sharing research

Teaching/learning resources

Advocacy for neurodivergent issues

Personal interests

Other (please specify)

“Do you participate in academic Twitter chats or hashtags (e.g., #AcademicChatter, #PhDChat)?”

Regularly

Occasionally

Never

Perceived Community Support and Accessibility

9. “On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), please rate the following statement: ‘I find the Twitter/X community supportive regarding neurodivergent-related discussions.’”

10. “How would you rate the accessibility of Twitter/X’s interface for your neurodivergent needs (e.g., text readability, ease of navigation, alternative text for images)?”

- 1 (Very Poor)
- 2 (Poor)
- 3 (Average)
- 4 (Good)
- 5 (Excellent)

Impact of COVID-19 on Twitter/X Engagement

11. “Have you changed your Twitter/X usage due to the COVID-19 pandemic?”

- Increased significantly
- Increased somewhat
- No change
- Decreased somewhat
- Decreased significantly

12. “If your Twitter/X usage changed, which factors influenced this shift? (Select all that apply)”

- Transition to remote work
- Reduced in-person support
- Seeking community or peer advice
- Increased free time
- Mental health considerations
- Other (please specify)

Open-Ended Reflections

13. “Please share any additional comments about your experiences as a neurodivergent educator on Twitter/X (e.g., challenges, highlights, hopes for the future).”

B: **Original Padlet Questions**

Q1: “How do neurodivergent educators negotiate and develop their professional and personal identities on Twitter?”

Participants’ reflections revealed that Twitter could serve as a space where they feel comfortable “info-dumping” or sharing specialised knowledge without the social hesitations that might arise in face-to-face settings.

Q2: “In what ways do ND educators harness the potential of Twitter as a catalyst for fostering 3rd space interactions?”

The Padlet included a clarifying note defining *3rd space* as a digital environment that blends elements of physical and virtual realms to foster community and collaboration. Responses indicated that Twitter functions as a “boundary-crossing” site, where

participants can share academic knowledge alongside personal experiences, thus breaking down conventional hierarchies.

Q3: "How did the COVID-19 pandemic change how ND educators use Twitter?"

Many participants linked the pandemic to an overall increase in digital engagement

Q4: "How do virtual communities impact the creation of inclusive spaces for ND practitioners in HE?"

Posts emphasised the *flexibility* and *reflective capacity* afforded by text-based communication.

B: Online Survey Responses

P1

What is your age group? 55-64

What sex are you? - Female

What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?- Established Academic: 7+ years of working within Higher Education

Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X? - Free

In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform? - Actively engage by Tweeting /DM's/ Networking

Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic? - Yes : I used it less because I had less time during the pandemic.

Do you use Twitter for formal and Informal purposes? Formal and Informal

Can you elaborate on any other ways you use Twitter, whether it's for professional or personal purposes? I used Twitter for finding information about topics I am interested in which would in itself be posted by people I follow (for example a link to an article they read or wrote), statistics, research, discussion between other neurodiverse people and so on.

In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter? Less than 1 hour

What is your primary purpose on Twitter? Following interesting people such as other neurodiverse people or people who work in public health

Can you share your positive and negative experiences with the Twitter media platform?

I don't like how unkind people can be when commenting on other people's posts. I feel this has got worse since it changed to X and I no longer use the platform for this reason.

When do you usually use Twitter: Before and after usual working hours and weekends

P2

What is your age group? 55-64

What sex are you? - Female

What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?- Established Academic: 7+ years of working within Higher Education

Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X? - Free

In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform? - Actively engage by Tweeting /DM's/ Networking

Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic? No

Do you use Twitter for formal and Informal purposes? Formal and Informal

In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter/X? 3-4 hours

What is your primary purpose on Twitter? I have two accounts: one for my professional persona, and one for an education charity (for which I am the main admin). I use the personal one for networking and personal development and the charity one for awareness raising and publicity.

Can you share your positive and negative experiences with the Twitter media platform? No real negatives, provided I ensure that the 'following' tab is live and never look at the 'for you' thread. (I avoid the politics and clickbait - Brexit taught me that lesson. It was really toxic.) It is a huge bonus for research participant recruitment and event advertising - don't know what I'd do without it.

When do you usually use Twitter: Before and after usual working hours and weekends

P3

What is your age group? 35-44

What sex are you? - Male

What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?- Mid Career: 4-6 years of working within Higher Education

Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X? - Free

In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform? - Actively engage by Tweeting /DM's/ Networking

Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic? - Yes : Increased enagement, more followers and linked to more communities of practice.

Do you use Twitter for formal and Informal purposes? Formal and Informal

Can you elaborate on any other ways you use Twitter, whether it's for professional or personal purposes? To build and sustain communities of practice

In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter/X? 10-20 hours

What is your primary purpose on Twitter? Networking and understanding research and progression within my field

Can you share your positive and negative experiences with the Twitter media platform? More awareness of issues happening within my profession

Helped raised the profile of my research

Enabled more citations to my research work

Connected me with researchers completing work in my area

Gained external examiner post through Twitter (was contacted by another uni)

Have been offered academic posts because of my Twitter profile

When do you usually use Twitter: During the working day/week: Mon-Fri, 9 am - 5 pm

P4

What is your age group? 35-44

What sex are you? - Female

What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?- Early Career: 1-3 years within Higher Education/ achieving a doctorate...

Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X? - Free

In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform? - Actively engage by Tweeting /DM's/ Networking

Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic? - Yes : I think while I was always on twitter, the discourse changed as more folk joined and shared thoughts on eg online pedagogy

In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter/X? 3-4 hours

What is your primary purpose on Twitter? Sharing ideas and support with I have two accounts: one

When do you usually use Twitter: Both, during the working day and after work

P5

What is your age group? 35-44

What sex are you? - Female

What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?- Mid Career: 4-6 years of working within Higher Education

Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X? - Free

In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform? - Actively engage by Tweeting /DM's/ Networking

Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic? - No

In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter/X? 1-2 hours

When do you usually use Twitter: During the working day/week: Mon-Fri, 9 am - 5 pm

P6

What is your age group? 25-34

What sex are you? - Female

What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?- Early Career: 1-3 years within Higher Education/ achieving a doctorate...

Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X? - Free

In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform? - Remain anonymous, read 'Tweet's', search hashtags

Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic? - No

Do you use Twitter for formal and Informal purposes? Formal and Informal

Can you elaborate on any other ways you use Twitter, whether it's for professional or personal purposes? I follow researchers and experts in my field and in fields that interest me professionally or personally, to get updates on their research.
In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter/X? 1-2 hours
What is your primary purpose on Twitter? Gathering information from specific communities, such as Neurodivergent communities, Covid cautious community, etc.
Can you share your positive and negative experiences with the Twitter media platform? Positive experiences have been interacting with other researchers and educators in similar fields, building connections and even developing some work opportunities from this. Negative experiences I would say is dealing with a lot of trolls, and seeing more and more inappropriate posts containing racism, ableism, transphobia etc.

When do you usually use Twitter: Both, during the working day and after work

P7
What is your age group? 45-54
What sex are you? - Female
What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?- Early Career: 1-3 years within Higher Education/ achieving a doctorate...
Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X? - Free
In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform? - Actively engage by Tweeting /DM's/ Networking
Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic? -Yes: I was very lonely and the Autistic community were a life saver. There was #NotAloneTalk and that was very good for keeping connected with people.

Do you use Twitter for formal and Informal purposes? Formal and Informal
Can you elaborate on any other ways you use Twitter, whether it's for professional or personal purposes? It's an excellent way of keeping up with the latest publications in the field of study. It's also good for understanding contemporary discourse in the Autistic community but also education matters.

In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter/X? 5-10 hours
What is your primary purpose on Twitter? Reading academic literature but also reading tweets that are interesting.
Can you share your positive and negative experiences with the Twitter media platform? I am fascinated with reading research and integral viewpoints and Twitter has a community of academics, they post regularly. This is not the situation on other platforms, e.g. Blue sky. There are academics there but folks have stayed on Twitter.

The negativity is related to anti semitism and anti-Trans hate speech going unchecked. I can't tolerate this. I deactivated and moved to Blue Sky, I had almost 3000 followers but couldn't tolerate the hate speech. I thought I would experience the same sense of community on Blue Sky but it's not the same. I tried Instagram, Mastadon and Discord but Blue Sky is the most preferred from that list.

I really wish Twitter was safe for everyone. I am back there but not interacting or reposting, just liking posts. I am happy that the Autistic community, and others see there still.

When do you usually use Twitter: Before and after usual working hours and weekends

P8

What is your age group? 45-54

What sex are you? - Female

What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?- Established Academic: 7+ years of working within Higher Education

Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X? - Free

In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform? - Both, depending on the reasons for using Twitter/X. I was previously very active (daily use) but have deleted all my tweets and stopped posting because of Elon Musk's policies and approach, particularly since the Gaza genocide.

Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic? -Yes: I used Twitter to maintain a sense of academic community more, including in my role supporting doctoral researchers. I also used it to follow experts on covid and pandemics, to educate myself and protect myself and my family.

Do you use Twitter for formal and Informal purposes? Formal and Informal

Can you elaborate on any other ways you use Twitter, whether it's for professional or personal purposes? Keeping up with friends and colleagues who live far away

In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter/X? Less than 1 hour

What is your primary purpose on Twitter? (Before effectively leaving): to learn about important topics like racism, social justice, transgender activism, and to share my academic work and build community with others working in my area

Can you share your positive and negative experiences with the Twitter media platform? Positive: sense of community, learning a lot about others' perspectives and experiences. Negative: realising how racist, sexist, transphobic people are; seeing Zionists defending genocide.

When do you usually use Twitter: Both, during the working day and after work

P9

What is your age group? 25-34

What sex are you? – Other, Non-Binary

What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?- Early Career: 1-3 years within Higher Education/ achieving a doctorate...

Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X? - Free

In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform? - Actively engage by Tweeting /DM's/ Networking
Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic? - No
Do you use Twitter for formal and Informal purposes? Formal and Informal
Can you elaborate on any other ways you use Twitter, whether it's for professional or personal purposes? Keeping up with friends and colleagues who live far away
In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter/X? 5-10 hours
What is your primary purpose on Twitter? To connect and network with educators, to share ideas and experiences and for fun
Can you share your positive and negative experiences with the Twitter media platform? Negatives:
The ads are awful. I've never been more mansplained than anywhere else, especially male early career academics. Never older men who are secure in themselves and their careers. For example, men repeating the very point I've made in different words back to me as if to re-explain the point I've just made. It's extremely frustrating.

Positives: I've made some really deep connections using this site. I've had books and gifts sent to me. I've even been head hunted by a professor who offered to supervise me. Practically head hunted. But I worry that I cannot reciprocate all of this kindness.

When do you usually use Twitter: Both, during the working day and after work

P10
What is your age group? 45-54
What sex are you? – Female
What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?- Early Career: 1-3 years within Higher Education/ achieving a doctorate...
Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X? - Free
In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform? - Actively engage by Tweeting /DM's/ Networking
Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic? - No
Do you use Twitter for formal and Informal purposes? Formal and Informal
Can you elaborate on any other ways you use Twitter, whether it's for professional or personal purposes? In the past used it to follow sports teams progress and interact with other lincoln City fc supporters.
In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter/X? 1-2 hours
What is your primary purpose on Twitter? Connect with friends and also professionals, Also to know whats going on in the qorld. also... far less stressful to see news than watching the news as control of what read.
Can you share your positive and negative experiences with the Twitter media platform? I had negative responses from trolls just once so I then stayed off the platform for a couple of weeks, but otherwise has been very sportive. Especially for connecting with other autistic academics.

When do you usually use Twitter: Both, during the working day and after work

P11

What is your age group? 25-34

What sex are you? – Male

What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?- Mid Career: 4-6 years of working within Higher Education

Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X? - Free

In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform? - Remain anonymous, read 'Tweet's', search hashtags

Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic? – Yes: Teaching

Do you use Twitter for formal and Informal purposes? Formal

Can you elaborate on any other ways you use Twitter, whether it's for professional or personal purposes? Influence people about the world

In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter/X? 5-10 hours

What is your primary purpose on Twitter? Influenced and teach

Can you share your positive and negative experiences with the Twitter media platform? It bring people together and make learning easy

When do you usually use Twitter: During the working day/week: Mon-Fri, 9 am - 5 pm

P12

What is your age group? 35-44

What sex are you? – Female

What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?- Established Academic: 7+ years of working within Higher Education

Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X? - Free

In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform? - Actively engage by Tweeting /DM's/ Networking

Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic? – No.

Do you use Twitter for formal and Informal purposes? Informal

In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter/X? 1-2 hours

What is your primary purpose on Twitter? Keep up to date

When do you usually use Twitter: Both, during the working day and after work

P13

What is your age group? 45-54

What sex are you? – Female

What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?- Early Career: 1-3 years within Higher Education/

achieving a doctorate...

Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X? - Free

In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform? - Actively engage by Tweeting /DM's/ Networking

Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic? – No.

Do you use Twitter for formal and Informal purposes? Formal and Informal

Can you elaborate on any other ways you use Twitter, whether it's for professional or personal purposes? I'm never quite sure whether activism is classed as professional or personal because it's actually a mixture of both.

For example, I post very personal and vulnerable things about mental health that are very personal, but my intention is for this to be awareness raising and education and activism.

professionally, I might use it to generate themes as part of my professional CPD, as well as finding out about upcoming webinars, especially the free ones.

I very occasionally post things such as a picture of me, hiking or doing some self-care, just because I think it's good to have a balance and remind myself life isn't just about working or networking or activism.

In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter/X? 3-4 hours

What is your primary purpose on Twitter? I started initially using it for professional networking, information and sharing original tweets.

After my autism diagnosis and later PTSD diagnosis in 2022, i started to use it for raising awareness about being an autistic speech and language therapist. I posted a mini podcast I'd made that talked about my autistic needs and strengths. My employer praised me for this but my department and manager reprimanded me for talking about my needs publically and saying that I see things that my colleagues often miss and my manager, then accused me of suggesting that my colleagues missed really important things and were not doing their jobs and therefore I was publicly admitting that my colleagues are doing a bad job. I was extremely distressed about this, and immediately removed where I worked from my Twitter profile and started to become more of an activist in the way I posted things, largely in response to the disability discrimination. Shortly after, I also started a mental health blog, which I also post on Twitter. So, to summarise, my primary purpose is neurodivergence/mental health awareness raising, disability justice activism and education - as well as networking and protein a peer support network that I run.

Can you share your positive and negative experiences with the Twitter media platform? mainly positive experiences, – peer support from other similar interests, networking which has included getting myself known and creating some career opportunities (this was incidental rather than intentionally done), it's been a good way to advertise and grow the peer support network that I run @ndsltuk

I find it's a good way to gauge other peoples reactions to my ideas. it has helped me to feel like I am part of or belong to a community of like-minded people

This is how I met the cofounder of ndsltuk.

I am inspired by other peoples activism, and it has helped me to grow in confidence and not be so scared to say how I feel about things or worry so much about the consequences of how I am seen. I am mostly getting positive feedback.

I love that people post up-to-date research, which is keeping me updated with the latest research in my field.

Negative - addictive. And my mental health is not so great, I can become slightly obsessive and find it hard to move away from scrolling.
Sometimes I feel that I need to post original things in order to maintain a public face. It can be hard not to compare yourself to others sometimes, especially when you see some really good things that inspire you.
I have seen some really nasty comments made to some of my peers who have been targeted and police involved. This does worry me as at the back of your mind, you're often worrying when it will be you that they target
When do you usually use Twitter: Before and after usual working hours and weekends

C: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview Questions:

1.How would you define your neurodivergence?

2. What stage would you say that your career as an educator/academic is at?

3. Are you a free or paid user on Twitter/X?

4. When do you usually use Twitter?

5. In total, how many hours per week do you spend using Twitter/X?

What is your primary purpose on Twitter?

In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform?

Has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the Covid-19 pandemic?

Do you use Twitter for formal and informal purposes?

Can you elaborate on any other ways you use Twitter, whether it's for professional or personal purposes?

Can you share your positive and negative experiences with the Twitter media platform?

How do you perceive the overall impact of Twitter/X on your professional development as an educator/academic?

Have you encountered any challenges or barriers in using Twitter/X for professional networking or information dissemination?

How do you navigate and manage your online presence and interactions on Twitter/X to maintain a positive professional image?

What strategies do you employ to filter and prioritise the content you engage with on Twitter/X, particularly related to your field of expertise?

How do you perceive the role of Twitter/X in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within the academic community?

Have you observed any trends or changes in the use of Twitter/X within your academic field over time?

How do you balance the use of Twitter/X for personal and professional purposes, if at all?

D: Self-Interview

Mike: Yeah. I think we're recording now, so we can just begin.

Interviewer: How would you define your neurodivergent?

Mike: I would describe my neurodivergence as having dyslexia first, which was diagnosed in 2017 during my bachelor's degree. After that, I was encouraged to seek a diagnosis of autism, which I pursued and was confirmed in 2021. While working as a specialist mentor, I felt like I had ADHD. I eventually did some self-diagnostic tests and went to a private organisation, and it was confirmed that I have inattentive ADHD. I have all three conditions confirmed medically, but it's challenging to categorise them because my autism and ADHD symptoms can vary day by day. That's where I currently stand with my neurodivergence.

Interviewer: Okay. What stage would you say that your career as an educator or academic is at?

Mike: I would say I am an early career. I'm still in the early stages as an educator.

Interviewer: Okay. Are you a free or a paid user on Twitter?

Mike: I'm a free user. I don't believe that I should have to pay for Twitter when similar provisions were already available in some form before the takeover by Elon Musk and the subsequent changes. So, yeah, I remain a free user on Twitter.

Interviewer: Okay. When do you usually use Twitter?

Mike: I used to use Twitter a lot more in the past, specifically from 2020 to 2022, during the COVID lockdown and up until Elon Musk took over. I would typically spend a few hours a day on Twitter, mostly during my break times like first thing in the

morning, during lunch, and for about an hour in the evening. On average, I'd say I spent about two to three hours per day on Twitter, but I didn't use it during work hours. Currently, I use Twitter much less, only about one to two hours a week. I usually check it in the morning before starting work.

Interviewer: Okay. How many hours per week do you spend on Twitter from 2020 to 22? I guess that would be around 20ish; you're saying two to three hours a day, 14 to 20?

Mike: Yeah. Between that, I would say between 14-20 hours.

Interviewer: Okay. Right.

Mike: But now, very infrequently, so the usage has just dropped off because I don't feel as connected to the current iteration of Twitter.

Interviewer: Okay. What is or was your primary purpose on Twitter?

Mike: Originally, I signed up for personal reasons on Twitter. This was just before I did a PGCE through my local college, and it was just because my tutor on that course mentioned Twitter. I had previously used it in the past while I was still at university, but I didn't get on with it at that time. I kind of made a new account, and then it was mostly for personal curiosity more than anything. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic happened, and it became more about professional networking and collaboration. My primary purpose back then, I guess overall, would have been for professional practice and networking. An element of that was personal, and now it is still currently for professional networking and collaborating.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous on the platform?

Mike: It's an interesting question because I think it just depends. An example I can give is that I used to be more active on the platform, engaging by replying, reposting, or retweeting. However, there have been times, including now, when I tend to be more anonymous or passive. Currently, I think it's because of the way the platform and its algorithms have changed. I'm not seeing my usual content, so I feel disconnected from the information I'm receiving. If I do see something interesting, I occasionally repost or like it. Between 2020 and 2022, I was much more active in various communities, such as the educator community, the neurodivergent community, and the post-16 community. There were weekly activities you could participate in by following hashtags, and I was much more engaged during that time. However, the community aspect has dropped off for me, and as a result, I've become more anonymous and in the background on Twitter.

Interviewer: Okay. Was your use of Twitter influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown?

Mike: When I first started using social media this time around, it was mainly for personal reasons and out of curiosity. However,

when the Covid-19 lockdown hit, I was still finishing my PGCE and I wanted to feel connected, like I was in the classroom. That's when I started using it for professional networking to stay connected. The community aspect has dropped off, but I still actively try to keep up with networking. Even though I'm not seeing particular tweets from someone, I might look them up on Twitter. Originally, I used social media as a one-way source of information, but the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way I receive and interact with information. It made me more active on the platform as I started receiving responses from other people.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you use Twitter at the time for formal and informal purposes?

Mike: Yes, it's still a mix of formal and informal. I don't think I can separate my professional identity from my personal identity. While I try to be reserved with sharing personal information, I mainly use Twitter for formal purposes, like connecting with educators and academics who share similar interests in neurodiversity and creative research methods. However, I occasionally post informal tweets, such as seeking suggestions for dealing with health issues like IBS. So, I use Twitter for both formal and informal purposes, depending on the situation.

Interviewer: Right. Okay, thank you. Can you elaborate on any other ways that you used, I guess Twitter, whether it was for professional or personal purposes, but maybe you've just answered that?

Mike: I haven't used Twitter for purely personal purposes; I think I've reached a limit with how personal I get. When I reach out to someone in a direct message to collaborate, the interaction becomes more professional. For example, I collaborated with someone I met on Twitter through a DM, which led to us co-authoring a couple of papers and participating in conferences together. This relationship started from an initial conversation on Twitter, so there's a hint of personal connection, but the purpose was mainly professional. I've used Twitter as a tool to further my professional networking and development, like a springboard for my career growth.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you share any positive and negative experiences from Twitter?

Mike: I've had some negative experiences that I want to talk about first. Sometimes I've posted things without fully understanding the context, and my words have been misinterpreted. I think my neurodivergent brain may have had trouble expressing myself clearly at times. There have been instances where people, particularly certain academics on Twitter, have criticized me when I was just trying to understand a specific term or concept. This made me more cautious about what I share. It's not a common thing, though, as those individuals are not very active on the platform. I still use Twitter for my intended purposes, but I'm more careful about what I post, knowing that others may interpret my words differently than I intend. That's the downside of it.

I have connected with other professionals through Twitter, which has led me to attend different events and join the professional doctorate program at Bournemouth. If it weren't for Twitter, I wouldn't have known about the program. These conversations have also led me to do further reading and contact people through direct messaging. The positive aspects of using Twitter include getting real-time and current information, as well as making connections with a broader range of

positions in Post-16.

Interviewer: Okay. How do you perceive the overall impact of Twitter on your professional development as an educator or an academic?

Mike: Looking back, especially from 2020 to 2022, I believe that this time period had a significant impact on my professional development. I was part of various communities of practice, engaging in conversations and sharing current academic papers. This experience, spanning from completing my PGCE to pursuing my doctorate, allowed me to grow as an academic and educator. Through Twitter, I could connect with other people, have meaningful conversations, and arrange virtual meetings. This interaction greatly enhanced my understanding and knowledge, surpassing what I might have gained solely from an in-person university experience. The global reach of Twitter provided diverse perspectives and suggestions, even if I didn't agree with everything. This broad spectrum of information has shaped my professional identity during my doctoral studies.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you encountered any challenges or barriers in using Twitter for professional networking or information dissemination?

Mike: Yeah, I think sometimes I may have misunderstood someone's post or their intent on social media, and that's because of my own neurodiversity. Sometimes I take things quite literally and struggle to understand sarcasm, especially when the platform limits the number of words you can use, like Twitter. In a real-time video meeting, I can pick up on body language and gestures to better understand the conversation.

It can be challenging to explain complex issues in a limited space, but I still find Twitter valuable for professional networking, especially for educators. Despite the algorithm making it harder to find connections, I prefer it over LinkedIn, which I find more focused on business. On Twitter, I can connect with people based on shared interests, and it feels more holistic and easier to manage.

Interviewer: Okay. How do you navigate and manage your online presence and interactions on Twitter to maintain a positive professional image?

Mike: Yeah. I have learned from past miscommunications and now I'm more careful about what I share. These days, I try not to share too much personal information unless I'm seeking advice on a specific topic like IBS and want to learn from others' experiences. I still use Twitter the same way I did in 2020 and 2022. I post updates about my thesis, collaborations with students, or conferences I'm attending, and see if others are working on similar things. I sometimes use hashtags to reach a wider audience. However, I can be impulsive due to my ADHD and might post a tweet but later delete it if I feel it's too personal. I'm mindful of not sharing too much personal stuff, except for topics like neurodiversity, as I'm an advocate for it. I prefer to reserve day-to-day personal stuff for in-person interactions or other platforms, not Twitter. In summary, I focus on sharing my role as an educator/academic, my current research, and my professional development activities on Twitter, rather

than my general daily life.

Interviewer: Okay. What strategies do you employ to filter and prioritise the content you engage with on Twitter, particularly related to your field of expertise?

Mike: This is about a time when hashtags were widely used, around 2020-2022. There were events where people discussed topics like creative research, post-16 education, and further education. These discussions would take place at a specific time each week, and participants could follow along by including a specific hashtag. By using the hashtag, you could access previous discussions, creating a sort of knowledge bank. However, this doesn't work as effectively now because Twitter has made changes. Some hashtags have disappeared, while others are still in use. Personally, I still follow and engage with hashtags like EdD and PhD, but some other hashtags related to Twitter have vanished. I used to use hashtags and occasionally bookmarked content. There used to be a function to bookmark interesting posts. I didn't actively block users unless I thought they were bots, which were easier to spot back then. Now, it's so common to have bots immediately like or retweet your posts. I noticed this while sharing an infographic for my research. Despite being able to block them, new ones would keep popping up, so eventually, I just ignored them.

Interviewer: Okay. How do you perceive the role of Twitter in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion within the academic community?

Mike: I felt that universities were more active on Twitter in 2020 and 2022, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. Students and senior academics would engage in discussions, creating a positive feedback loop that influenced the universities' official accounts. However, I've noticed a shift in the university's social media presence. Instead of focusing on Twitter, some universities are now using platforms like TikTok, LinkedIn, and blogs. While this shift is understandable, I still believe that Twitter remains a strong platform for sharing diverse voices, and it's important for universities to continue supporting these conversations.

I believe it's unfortunate that between 2020 and 2022, there was a significant shift in the way universities addressed diversity, equity, and inclusion. Previously, senior figures within universities would openly discuss a wide range of topics, but now it seems that some universities are focusing more on specific issues while neglecting others. Twitter used to be a safe space for discussing these important matters, and I think it's crucial for universities to continue these discussions, as it sets an example for everyone else, from senior staff to students. It's disheartening to see that universities now tend to limit their discussions to internal platforms or professional networks like LinkedIn, and this shift has left a noticeable gap. As a result, fewer students and early career academics are engaging in conversations about diversity and inclusion. I believe it's a missed opportunity because universities used to leverage platforms like Twitter to spark meaningful discussions and even organize conferences on important topics like neurodiversity. I've seen the positive impact of these discussions firsthand, and I hope that universities will reconsider using platforms like Twitter to promote diverse and inclusive conversations.

Interviewer: Interesting. All right. Have you observed any trends or changes in the use of Twitter within your academic field

over time?

Mike: I have experience in various academic fields. I used to work as a post-16 educator focusing on creative media, but now I am more interested in learning development, student learning, and neurodiversity. It seems that the academic community's presence varies depending on the subject. Currently, I'm not seeing much academic content on Twitter, which may be due to changes in the posts from the university and senior figures in the subjects I am interested in. It feels like a step backwards for me because I believe that Twitter can be a valuable tool for educators to discuss important topics related to their field. I've noticed that more professional posts are being shared on LinkedIn, but I miss the real-time connection and interaction that Twitter offers. This trend is something I've been thinking about lately.

Interviewer: Okay. Right. The last question is, how do you balance using Twitter for personal and professional purposes, if at all?

Mike: When I first started, my social media presence was more personal, but it became more professional as I transitioned from teaching to pursuing my doctorate. Negative experiences led me to pull back on sharing personal details. During the COVID-19 lockdown, I shared more of my daily life, but now my social media approach is mainly professional as I focus on networking. I follow people, see what they're up to, and sometimes have to actively search for their posts due to the algorithm. This makes me less likely to share personal details unless prompted, and even then, I limit how much I share. I used to be more open about my feelings and thoughts during the lockdown but not so much anymore.

[END]

E: Drew's Interview Transcript

Mike: Hi, Drew. Welcome to this interview. Just to begin with, can you confirm that you've read the participant information sheet and you are happy to participate in the interview today?

Drew: Yep. Absolutely. I've read the participant sheet and am more than happy to continue.

Mike: Thank you. To start, we have some demographic questions, light ones to begin with. The first question is about how you define your neurodivergence.

Drew: Ooh, that's a really good question. I suppose primarily, I'd say I am dyslexic. I got diagnosed with dyslexia back in 2009, so that's probably the one that I use quite a lot. I got an ADHD diagnosis last year (2023), so I am becoming more confident with saying I have ADHD. But I suppose the term I use more commonly than both of those is neuro-spicy.

Mike: I've come across that one.

Drew: Yeah. Mainly because I'm sure there is some autism in there, but I'm never going to get diagnosed because it's such a faff to get diagnosed and there's no benefit to doing that when I already know I'm neurodivergent. So, neuro-spicy tends to fit me quite well because I don't have to then fit in one of the labels.

Mike: I find your perspective interesting. Thank you for clarifying that point. I have a two-part question regarding your diagnosis and the stage of your career as an educator. First, at what stage of your career would you say you are as an educator?

Drew: Okay. That's a really interesting question, I suppose. There's not a simple answer because I completed my PhD back in 2019, so we're like five years on from that now. I suppose in the general terminology, I'm an early career researcher kind of thing. But before I did my PhD, I worked as a teacher in a secondary school and worked in widening participation outreach. So, this isn't my first career. Saying your early career when you're 41 feels a bit strange. I suppose I fit the box of an early career researcher, but I think it's complex when you talk about an identity as an educator when you've worked in education for 15 years.

Mike: Yeah, I'm not trying to put you in a box or anything, but as a whole or as an academic, it depends on how you define your identity. That could put you somewhere in the middle.

Drew: Yeah, exactly. I'd say I'm probably an experienced practitioner-researcher and I'd say middle of my career there. But if you were looking at traditional terminology, still that early career box, which seems a bit strange.

Mike: The second part of that question is how did the neurodivergence element or neuro-spicy synthesise with your professional career?

Drew: Again, that's a really, really interesting question. I got diagnosed with dyslexia quite late in life in 2009. I was, can't do maths, I think 26, somewhere around there. I got diagnosed when I first did an open university module as a student and one of the tutors went, "You are getting the author's names wrong on this. Why are you getting them wrong?" I literally couldn't see why they were wrong and was in tears to a student support person. They're like, "Do you think you might have dyslexia?" I was like, "No, I haven't got dyslexia." Let's just get you checked just in case. Very dyslexic. That made a lot of things looking back, make sense. I suppose this thing about diagnosis, is that I thought all my past problems have been answered by being dyslexic because a lot of the things could be explained with that.

Then what happened was, I was doing my PhD part-time. I was working in a traditional university part-time and worked as an associate electorate at the open university part-time in the last few years. I moved from doing lots and lots of part-time things, which obviously is a very calm thing for someone neurodivergent and it works really well for dopamine, doesn't it?

Mike: Yeah.

Drew: Being in a more formal nine-to-five role in my current role that I'm at, with the university, working from home. I've worked from home for many years now since before the pandemic and I was really struggling with that. I couldn't understand why I couldn't do some basic tasks. Like I'd sit there and start at the computer screen and go, why can't I just send these emails? Why can't I just do this? Why can't I just do that? That's not my dyslexia doing that kind of thing. Something wasn't right. One of my friends was going through the ADHD diagnosis process. She's like, do you think? I'm like, "I'm not sure." But anyway, as you know, there's lots of places where you can get diagnoses these days and there's the screening form. So, I did the screening form, they're like, "Mm-hm." Then went through the diagnostic process privately and they're like, "Yep. Absolutely. Both types of ADHD."

Actually, bringing it back to the kind of question about my identity, it's been really helpful having those because I've always been open and honest about my dyslexia. I think it's dyslexic academic where you're marking students' work. I feel it's the only way I can do my job properly. Because if I say to the students, "Look, I've got dyslexia, you are going to get some typos in your feedback. I'm sorry." They tend to then not complain that they've got typos in their feedback, but it also helps some of them I think go, oh, you are willing to share that you are not perfect in inverted commas with us. We'll give something back to you and be honest about our struggle's kind of thing.

Getting my ADHD diagnosis has been very, very similar to that of actually going to my colleagues, look, I've got this thing, this is how my brain works. There are some days I'm going to be hyper-productive. There are some days where I'm going to do nothing at all, and I'm sorry, we can't fix that. That's just what we've got to work with. But actually, let's look at the strengths that brings me as an academic and work in that way. So, I think owning that identity has been really important for me, especially in the last probably year or so since the ADHD diagnosis.

Mike: Yeah, that's really good. You said that and you keep bringing it back to as part of your identity, which is one of the main things is how personal and professional neurodivergent element impacts those.

Drew: I was just going to say, I think it's really interesting because I don't see how I can do what I do in the sector I do without owning that identity. My research is in social justice and widening participation in those areas. I don't know how I can support students from different backgrounds without being honest about my own background, my own privileges, but also my own challenges. So, I've always been kind of very much an open book when I talk about my identity with people. But I've had colleagues go, why would you tell people these things? It's like, why wouldn't? Literally, my brain can't understand why I wouldn't.

Mike: Is that from a person who is neurotypical?

Drew: Yeah. They are always neurotypicals doing it. But quite often older colleagues. I think there's something about the changing the way we work within society. But I also think there's something about some of the colleagues who maybe struggle with belief that they belong in the role they're doing, means they perform a lot more. It's like we can extend it out the performance of id-ing that. Well, why would you teach from a room where people can see the things behind you? Why

wouldn't you put a background up instead? Because this is where I am, that's part of my identity. They're almost like, they feel like they have to be this perfect sage on a stage kind of thing so the students can park their academic credentials, rather than relying on the fact they do know what they're talking about, and actually, okay, I'm going to turn up teaching in a hoodie.

What I'm going to say is really useful. So actually I'm justifying why I'm there because of what I do, not what I look like or those things that some colleagues feel like they have to turn up in a suit on Zoom. Why would you do that? You're in your house.

Mike: Yeah. It's what the traditional classic version of a teacher or educator would be defined. So that lends itself to Twitter really, and how that has impacted your personal and professional identity. One of the things, I'll just start with a general question is when do you use Twitter? Is it a nine-to-five thing? Is it after work?

Drew: Yeah. That's an interesting question because I use it a lot less than I used to. So, it used to be all the time, literally from when I get up to when I go to bed throughout the day in various different ways. I have to say since the Elon Musk takeover, I've just detracted more and more because there's so much stuff on there now that I don't want to see. I think I almost feel like the only way I can protect myself from some of that stuff is just not to go on there because filtering doesn't work anymore. Blocking people doesn't seem to work anymore. So, I've detracted a lot more, and I think a lot of people that I would've interacted with a lot have also done the same. So, it means that there's people I'd have those conversations with often who aren't in that space.

Mike: Do you think they've migrated off the platform or they're more 'lurking'?

Drew: I think lots of people are lurking. I think because sometimes when I do put something up, I still get reasonable engagement with some of the things that I say. I have to say, I post more things on LinkedIn now…

Mike: …Ok

Drew: Yeah. I feel like A, it's a bit of a safer platform, but B, because it's slightly longer form, you can put that nuance in what you say that gets lost on Twitter. In the olden days, that sounds terrible, isn't it? But back when I first started using Twitter, actually not having the space for that nuance meant you could have some really good conversations because someone would challenge something you wrote and you could build upon it and have a conversation.

Whereas now if you don't get that nuance in your tweet, you just basically get people that are going to come for that tweet and misinterpret you because that's what they want to do in some ways, if you know what I mean.

Mike: Yeah.

Drew: You're just like, is it just best not to put it out there? Because I can't be bothered to fight.

Mike: Yeah. I think one of the other questions was the positive and negative experiences with the Twitter platform. Looking between the COVID pandemic, the first lockdown to when Elon Musk took over. That's from May 2020, to '22. So, think about it that way, the positive and negative.
Drew: Yeah. Okay. If I go back a little bit from that, start with contextualising it because it'd be helpful for you. I started using Twitter as a part-time doctoral student back in 2012. Well, before. It was even before I started my PhD. In fact, I went to a sociology conference. I joined it there because there was a workshop session about how to use Twitter and I made a few friends in the sociology space. My part-time doctorate was a post-92 university with no other part time PhD students. All the other ones in education were doing EdDs. So, there was no cohort or anything like that. Actually, Twitter became kind of my only real connection to other people doing PhDs and sociologists.

I suppose I invested a lot of time in there around going to conferences, what I did of building a network on there, so I had that support network you don't get, that you'd have in a brick university. I think as we moved into the pandemic, that support, that network then in many ways became a lot of my contacts with other people that I'd want to have conversations with other than friend-type conversations, what's the weather like, what's on TV kind of thing. It was my only real academic discourse community because they were the people I could have the conversations with that...There were no face-to-face events so I couldn't have them around coffee. That was one of the real strengths of Twitter is still having that connection to all of those people despite our disconnection from the real world.

But I suppose one of the other things that then shifted as I shared on the Padlet is because there was more time to connect with those people, I was connecting on things that weren't just what I was reading or the conference we were at. It was like, well, this is the thing I did as well as today. Here's a photo I took around the neighbourhood when I went for my daily walk kind of thing. I think because...

Mike: …More of the personal coming into the professional.

Drew: Exactly. Yeah. I think those interactions would have happened with those people, but they happened in the post-conference or seminar- glasses of wine we'd have a couple of times a year. Because that wasn't there. It's like I wanted that connection still.

Mike: Yeah. You wanted to be seen, I guess.

Drew: Yeah.

Mike: Rather than just as in a professional role or like, Hey, I'm Drew and this is me.

Drew: Exactly.

Mike: With that, it links into question two on the Padlet, which is about third-space interaction. I do have a question, with your

network connections that you got through Twitter, did you then meet any of these online or in person? So springboarded from Twitter. Twitter was the ‘thing’ that connected you, the network together in some capacity, and then you've gone on to do a conference together or you've met in person?

Drew: Yes.

Mike: Tell me about some of them.

Drew: Oh, yeah, lots of them. I think there's both. There are people I've connected with in real life and then carried on those communications with Twitter that probably then wouldn't have the connection still because when you meet someone at a conference, do you ever see them again? Sometimes, you don't. But one, the person I wrote a book with last year, we hadn't met in real life until we started writing the book and we've been talking on Twitter for years. So, there's definitely a number of things like that. But also, there's been things where I've been invited to go and talk to a group of students or go and talk at a conference because somebody knows me from Twitter. There's been lots of connections kind of that way.

I have to say, none of them have really been sought out though. They've always been organic connections that we found something in common and we've gone, let's do something together. Whereas I know some other people probably use it in a much more strategic way of going, Ooh, there's an opportunity that I can make that connection with somebody quite senior.

Mike: So, you knew it was a very natural occurrence that just happened to be another stage from there.

Drew: Exactly. Yeah, it's almost like, do I think this person on the same page as me? Is it someone I'd actually like to spend some time with and do something with? Yes. Then let's do it. Rather than going, oh look here's that professor, I can tweet on Twitter and maybe make this professional connection that will be useful to me. I find that really challenging.

Mike: Is some of those connections neurotypical-neurodivergent? Have they been open or varied?

Drew: It's really interesting, isn't it? Because I think we have a question of are people diagnosed or not diagnosed? That's a whole other thing. But of the ones I've met and made connections with off Twitter, we've got on in real life, lots of them have been neurodivergent in various different ways. But equally, there's people when I got my ADHD diagnosis and told them, were like, "Well, I'm not surprised." I think there is something about neurodivergent people finding neurodivergent people quite often. Because let's be honest, if you can cope with a neurodivergent person having a conversation about their topic of interest and you don't run away, you're probably a little bit neurodivergent yourself. Otherwise, you'd be going, why is this person talking to me about something that's three miles an hour?

Mike: Exactly. Moving towards the Elon Musk takeover, has that changed the way you've used Twitter and those connections? Has that sort of changed as well?

Drew: Yeah, I suppose there's a couple of ways it's changed. I think one of the biggest things that pushed me away from Twitter is, I don't know if you remember that quite soon after he took over, they started putting limit caps on how many DMs you could send to people. I have a really good friend who it's literally just a constant message between the two of us all day, every day. We used to do DMs on Twitter, so I would be there replying to messages to her and I'd check my timeline and do some stuff on Twitter at the same time. Because they capped how many messages you could send, and it stopped working, we moved our conversation to WhatsApp. So actually, I'm not constantly on Twitter.

Mike: You confirmed a point for me as well there.

Drew: Yeah. I'm not having that in my Twitter DMs anymore, so I'm not on Twitter for another purpose. So, I probably don't particularly go on as much as I did before, which I suppose is one thing. The thing is when he messed up all the timelines, it's now become a little bit hard to find things in the way. Like you used to be able to go to your timeline and scroll down for five minutes and see everyone that you followed what they posted in the last few hours and go, oh, do I want to interact with that? I don't. I want to interact with that, job done. Whereas now...

Mike: Yeah…

Drew: Yeah, it defaults to the for you strip, which quite often is stuff that is definitely not for me. So, then you have to go into the other timeline. It just becomes maths, doesn't it? You stop doing it because it's not a quick thing you can do while you're making a coffee. You almost have to put aside some time if you want to find some meaningful stuff in the load of rubbish on there.

Mike: That's not how the app worked, wasn't it? As you said, the timeline that the tweets, the hashtag, and what people do around the hashtags and those seem to have, in my opinion, drifted away.

Drew: Yeah. I think there's also something for me, and it's really hard to prove anything, isn't it?

Mike: Yeah.

Drew: But I almost feel that I'm getting served a lot more things on my timeline that are the polar opposite to things I believe in and want to read about. Because that discord breeds engagement, doesn't it? I just don't want to engage with some of those things. I don't want to have a discussion with someone who has a polar opposite opinion. because It's not a debate. It's you are never going to listen to me, I'm never going to listen to you. So, it's almost like, why do I want to expose myself to some of those things that make me so sad about the world?

Mike: As a neurodivergent person, the likelihood of you engaging with that is a lot less.

Drew: Yeah. I think it's interesting, isn't it? Because I think as a younger neurodivergent person, not diagnosed at the time, but I

would've absolutely engaged with those things because you know that means something's wrong on the internet. I can't go to bed. That probably typified what I used to be like in the early 2000s. Almost like if someone said something that was wrong, I had to correct it because... Whereas I think as I've got older, I'm a bit like, do you know what? I never can convince that person. It's not worth my energy and you only have a limited amount of energy in the day and that's not what I want to spend it on.

Mike: Definitely. There's a question here about how you perceive the overall impact Twitter has had on your professional development as an educator or academic. Because as you said, you've had two types of careers but they're kind of similar. You're still an educator, but just thinking...

Drew: I think it's been fundamental. It's been really, really important because I think it stopped me ending up down a siloed career route because I have connections with people in all sorts of different universities in all sorts of different places. I can see what they're doing and what's going on and I can see the bigger picture of higher education. I look at some of my colleagues not connected in that way, and they end up very much doing their day job, day in, day out, and stay in that job for many years and never progress because they can't see the opportunities that are out there or what's going on in the wider sector. I think without Twitter, I would never have had that appreciation of thinking wider.

But also, I think one of the big affordances for me of Twitter is it overcomes some of my anxieties about communicating and connecting with people. I wouldn't go up to someone I didn't know in a room and go, "Hi, I'm Drew. This is what I do. Please talk to me." But I will absolutely do that on Twitter. If someone's talking about something that's rather, that's really great, you might be interested in this other thing that I've done that relates to what you're doing. That feels natural and normal on Twitter. That's probably what your neurodivergent brain wants to do in real life, but would never do it in real life because that just feels weird to me. I don't know.

So, I think it's been really important in helping me maybe make those initial connections with people so then I feel confident to go up to them in the room and go, "Hi, I'm Drew. I met you on Twitter." At least it doesn't feel like you're talking to a complete stranger. You feel like you...

Mike: Yeah, you made the initial connection. I think one of the challenges of being neurodivergent is that communication in some capacity and also the self-confidence to overcome your communication difficulty. That happens in various ways to neurodivergent people. I think for me, my dyslexia sometimes it impacts my speech, my confidence, and then it can go down to a rabbit hole where I'm stumbling over my words. So I think the online space for me has made my career a bit better than where I was in a traditional role as an FE practitioner in creative media. I think that saved me in some ways, having Twitter during the right time and creating those networks, as you said, the varied connections and different backgrounds as well, which I think is important.

Knowing that you have those people to talk to, I'd say I'm used to because I do feel now that even though we're not really talking about the aftermath of the Elon Musk takeover, that sort of dropped off a bit now and it's hard to keep those connections up. One of the ways you've just mentioned is LinkedIn, which I'm seeing myself an uptick of those I used to interact

with on Twitter now, at least in their professional role, post that kind of content on there.

Drew: I do wonder if LinkedIn is gradually changing to be more friendly to the sort of things I like to do with it. Because I think when I first looked at LinkedIn years ago, I went, I don't like this. This is really corporate and performative, and 'here's my three ideas for the week'. It just all felt a bit fake. Whereas I think now there are more people sharing more things that feel like the things that they used to share on Twitter. So, I feel more comfortable to go, like for example, put a post up the other week, "Hi, I did this workshop, it was great". Here's some things that came out of the workshop. That's the sort of thing I would've used to have put on Twitter. I went, no, I'm going to put it on LinkedIn because it is sharing things with other people, but also, here's me staking my claim that I do these sorts of things without going, Hi, I do workshops.

Mike: Yeah. I'm assuming you get the interaction with that content like you would have used to with Twitter. You might get some new connections as well.

Drew: Exactly. I think what I've noticed in probably the last month or so is there's more people that are now connecting with me that I used to know, used to connect to on Twitter, or know from face-to-face spaces. I've seen a request from someone I actually know rather than what you said, requests from people I'd never met before. It's nice to connect to new people, but I almost feel like some of that network is rebuilding that I used to have on Twitter now in a space that feels probably safer.

Mike: Yeah. I feel like there is an element there we're missing on LinkedIn, are you're still using Twitter in some capacity, aren't you?

Drew: Yeah.

Mike: LinkedIn is taking more over the professional side, would you say?
Drew: Yeah, I think it is a much more professional side. I think there's something... I'm not even quite sure it is, but I wonder if there's something about the fact because your LinkedIn is professional and linked to what you do as a day job for most people, that people are a bit more measured about how they talk, how they interact with things on there. So, it's you are interacting, have lovely conversations, but you don't get some of the reactive negative comments that you might go on Twitter where people just don't think because they're in the moment of replying. I think, I don't know. I feel people might use LinkedIn maybe more purposefully so are a bit more...

Mike: Professional?

Drew: ...thoughtful and measured about how they interact.

Mike: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Have you observed any trends or changes in the use of Twitter within your academic field over time, like you and your network?

Drew: Yeah, I suppose it's really interesting. I think I wrote a blog many years ago when I first started using it, ranting about the fact that people should use Twitter to have conversations, rather than just share information. That's certainly something I think is better over time. People went from this broadcast thing of, I've written a new paper, I've written a new paper to actually, let's have a conversation about something relevant and interact with other people. Because one of my arguments is social media is social. It's not a bulletin board to put information up. It's a place to connect with people. I think it got better for that, but I almost feel like we're going the other way now that because people are retracting a bit because they don't want that negativity. Certainly, I'm doing it I'm going back to using Twitter more as a, here's something new I've written, here's an event that's happening. Here's this bit of information I'm putting out in the world rather than let's have a conversation about something, which is a shame really.

Mike: Yeah. I guess then how do you perceive the role of Twitter in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within the academic community? How have you seen that? Again, thinking about before and during the COVID Pandemic?

Drew: Yeah. I suppose one of the things that I found it really useful for is trying to, when I'm organising events or when I'm putting together edited publications and things that I actually think about the diversity of people that I invite to be involved in those things because I'm aware of them because they exist in my social media space, if that makes sense. So rather than ending up with that quite narrow way of, well, we know these people, so we'll invite these people to these things that becomes the same group of people.

Actually, Twitter has really helped keep my eyes open to the range of people that can be involved in things. So, making sure people do get invited to things that go through a whole spectrum of different identities and career stages and things because you can access them and you know who they are. I think for me that's one of the biggest problems in academia with some of the diversity and inclusion things is quite often it's not wilful exclusion of people. It's because you don't know people who are working in the space. You don't invite them to get involved in that conversation because you don't know they exist because they're not the straight white men who are really good at shouting about the fact that they do this stuff and they're an expert in it. Because I think you find people from all sorts of minoritized groups often tend to be more insular and less shouty about the great stuff they do, which is often of far better than a lot of the straight white men. But I think there tends to be a lot less self-promotion from those groups because they're too busy doing stuff, which I think Twitter that has been really good for actually making some of that visible that normally remains invisible.
Mike: Do you think that's then starting to trend into the actual places in higher education? In the institutions itself?

Drew: Yeah, I think it depends, I suppose is the answer, which is probably not the answer you want. But I think...

Mike: No, it's an honest one.

Drew: I think it's making those conversations more visible about we need to keep things diverse, whether actually making a change when you come down to appointing people to roles and you get a shortlist and you end up with the particular person is another question. That's to do with the pressures of job markets and things like that, which I think is a whole other side of

things. I think there is something that often goes unsaid that is important in that because some people tend to be more open on social media than they may have once been, that if you are shortlisting for a role, there might be some consideration of knowing somebody that you don't know. Or are we sure we want that person in the room because they're quite outspoken? Those sorts of conversations happen. I think it's often not said, but I wonder how many people from backgrounds that are quite vocal about issues that are contentious don't get to those final appointments. Those don't get invited to things because people are worried that that Twitter persona might be their real persona, if that makes sense.

Mike: I think that then comes back to the how much of a performative nature is your personal and professional identity on Twitter. What is it? How would you see that balance? Is there a separation now?

Drew: Yeah, it's interesting. I suppose I've always been aware of it [their identity] because I've worked in secondary schools before. So, I've always been aware of the fact that if I wouldn't want a board of governors to read something, I wouldn't put it on the internet. I think coming from that background and being made hyper-aware when you work in schools of that probably tempers what you do on there. I know, with some of the younger generation... I shouldn't say younger generation, I'm 41, should I?

But I think some of the people that have grown up on social media maybe don't have that same pause. They could actually, do I want this out there? Do I want that to be there in a number of years' time? I do wonder if over time that's going to change. Yeah.

Mike: It might be to do with the generation you've grown up with social media has been integral.

Drew: Yeah. I think also, there's been some quite high-profile cases where people's tweets have been used against them. I think some people that are more pragmatic may think more about it than they used to. I think some people just don't have an ability to filter what they say, so they'll worry about it when it becomes an issue for them. But like if we look at the example of the academics that had their social media scrolled by the DFE and they had files on them going, Well, we won't work with these academics because of their positions on certain things. I think that that is a key consideration for some people that want to do work in that sector. I suppose that maybe this is one benefit of being neurodivergent, I guess is that my career trajectory isn't shaped by what I think I should be doing and what...

I tend to jump on a lot of opportunities that sound interesting and they're things that I want to do because I know interest is what sustains my attention kind of thing. Whereas I have friends and colleagues who are very good at curating a career around, well, I should work towards this particular really big grant because that's going to get me the next rung on the ladder kind of thing. They end up researching things that they're doing great research, but it's not the thing that's... I'd much rather

Mike: Got an interest in?...

Drew: ...juggle six or seven different projects that I'm interested in than maybe curate this particular career that fits norms, I

guess.

Mike: Yeah. I've a slight tangent, but, how does your neurodivergent perspectives and lived experience, your background as a secondary teacher and then your current one. How does that then relate into your current professional and personal aspects with using Twitter and the research or the work you are doing currently?

Drew: Yeah. I'm not entirely sure, I suppose ...

Mike: Has it changed the lived experience? Like just going through the COVID-19 Pandemic, has that made you think about things in a different light, or has it gone back to normal, you're working routine?

Drew: …I don't know. I suppose I don't know because, for me, I had a good pandemic. Yeah, because I don't have particularly have anything else going on except caring responsibilities. But because there's just two of us that live in the house, there's no kids around and I've been working from home before the pandemic actually, I think there was something about having a neurodivergent brain in a pandemic that was lovely because there were no social obligations that I had had to do because you couldn't...

Mike: This is what I was trying to think about...

Drew: Yeah, because you didn't have to meet people. But equally, I wanted to fill my days with doing stuff. So, I managed to do a lot of little projects during the pandemic. I was like, I need a break from work, but I still wanted to do something. Oh, I'll write that paper that I've been meaning to write for a long time, but I've not had the time to do it. So for me...

Mike: …Has that continued then?

Drew: Yeah, I think it has. If we look at my current employment status, I'm in a 0.7 FTE role, which is my standard day job. But then I also have a teaching job. I also do freelance work. I do freelance workshops. So, I think actually, I really like this not having one full-time job because I can mix and match what I'm doing a bit. Actually, if the day job's getting boring, I can find an interesting side project. There's at least something interesting going on. Whereas I think if I look back over my career history where I was very much about being in a full-time job, I probably didn't stay in most roles for more than two to three years. I think, looking back on it now with the ADHD diagnosis, I think a lot of that was, okay, I've lost interest in doing that and there's nothing fulfilling...

Mike: Creativeness?

Drew: Yeah, there's nothing fulfilling in creativeness, so I need to move on. Whereas I've been working for the university I'm working for now for five years in various different roles. I've been teaching with them for five years anyway. I have no intentions of moving on from that university now because A, it's a fractional role, so I'm still doing things outside, but B,

because of the sort of size and scale of the organisation, there's lots of opportunities within the day job to pick up little project type bits of work. So, it's not like I'm doing one nine-to-five job that's the same from one year to another year. I'm doing those core bits of the job. Yes. But then there's all sorts of interesting, or do you want to get involved in this task and finish group, which is a nice three-month-long project and then we'll go away? For a neurodivergent brain, that's music to my ears. It's like, oh, I can really hyper-focus on something I'm interested in for a period, and then you can take it away from me. That's lovely.

Mike: Does it work in the opposite way in the negative aspects of the neurodivergent traits? So if you are having a bit of executive dysfunction-ing to step away a little bit as well.

Drew: Yeah. I think there's a couple of things, and as I alluded to early on, that's why I got diagnosed because I was sitting there staring at an admin task that should take five minutes and I'd been there for three hours. I think one of the things I really used to struggle with still do a bit, is to give myself permission to go, you don't have to sit at the computer from nine to five. It's a nine-to-five job, but actually, if you want to go out and go for a walk for an hour and then come back and do two hours' work in one hour because that's how a neurodivergent brain works, you're still doing the right amount of work. Why do you think you need to be stuck to this desk? I think there's something about neurotypical ways of working that just don't take into account how productive a neurodivergent person can be. We get into that presenteeism thing, don't we?

Mike: Yeah.

Drew: I work 27 hours a week, so I must be sitting at my computer 27 hours a week.

Mike: I don't think it would work. Well, again, in my own honest opinion, the way I work is quite similar to yours. I feel like if I need to step away from the computer again because I'm disassociating and need to walk around the house and self-regulate, that's more meaningful than being stuck in a college or a university. Then it's like, well, I can either go to the office or the classroom, and then people are going to notice I'm not quite with it.

Drew: Yeah. I think that is one of the biggest negatives of working in terms of a big university with lots of structures is although I'm working from home, so all my meetings are online, there are a lot of meetings. If my brain isn't going to work, it isn't going to work sometimes. But equally, meetings are an interesting beast for a neurodivergent person. God, if you've gone off on my specialist subject and you're not going to give me the time to speak on it, that's equally frustrating. You know when you're sitting there and you're going, well, I could solve this in three sentences if you just let me speak. Why have 12 people gone around houses?

Mike: It's like putting your foot on the accelerator and the brake at the same time. Your brain is just like, come on.

Drew: Yeah. I suppose that's one of the nice things about moving to online meetings rather than face-to-face meetings is at least there is an outlet sometimes via chat box to just go...

Mike: Infodump?

Drew: Well, info dump, but also go, I think you're all missing the point. Actually, the point is this. Whereas you wouldn't... You'd have to wait your turn in a room to say, wouldn't you? But sometimes...

Mike: …You wouldn't just stand up and declare.

Drew: But when you just want everyone to just stop so you can go, why have we gone down this track with this conversation that's completely irrelevant to the problem you're trying to solve? Can we not just solve the problem and move on? So yeah.

Mike: I think that's our neurodivergent trait working in also a good way because that lends itself to that diversity and quality. Because oftentimes, we can see a pattern that other people may not spot. It's good to have a variety of people within a working group or even if it's an online capacity to get together and to be able to collaborate in that way. Whereas I think if it was in an in-person setting, there'd be a hierarchy?

Drew: I think that which brings this point I think is really important. It's actually colleagues' understanding how to maximise the value of neurodivergent colleagues is really important. I worked in a previous role in a university. This is while I just had the diagnosis of dyslexia. I just said to my boss, I was like, "I can't. I'm dyslexic. I won't be able to spell things. I can write these strategies. I've got great ideas. Won't be able to spell for toffee." He was almost the parallel opposite of me, completely neurotypical and pedantic as anything with grammar and spelling and stuff. So instead of going, well, that's not good enough. He literally went, "Right. Give me your draught and I'll fix it." So, I used to do all the ideas. He used to do all make it sound right in English, which was perfect.

Mike: It fit.

Drew: It was perfect. It fitted so well and we did so much good work because literally, it wasn't like, well, I need to fix you to make you fit in the model. It was like, okay, if you can't do that, I'll do that bit and you do the other bit and sort it.

Mike: Reminds me, just to kind of finish up, really, that is something in question four, which is about virtual communities and the creation of inclusive spaces. Two of the themes I identified from that question is enhanced communication, which you've already clarified the chat box and things. This second part, which lends itself to what you just said about fitting together, is this professional identity acceptance about discussing overcoming self-censorship and embracing the neurodivergent identity. I think you've embraced it, and they've embraced it, and it's overcome any negative connotations or reactions that you might have usually had in maybe a different role.

Drew: Yeah, I think there's also something there for me around if you feel able to be your authentic self, you can quite often then give yourself permission just to work as your brain works and then say to someone else, "I know this isn't quite right, but I don't know why it's quite right. Can one of you fix this? Who's got a neurotypical brain whose brain can?" Rather than before, I

would probably get myself into paralysis when I was doing things because I couldn't get the right phrasing or a word for a bit of something I was writing so I just stopped doing it and wouldn't make any progress.

Whereas now, I'm really happy to send draughts of things to people going, that's what I want to say, but it doesn't make sense at the moment, but this is the point I'm trying to make. Which then allows me to focus on doing stuff that's more useful. I suppose I probably do that on Twitter sometimes as well. Like, I've got this idea, but I'm not quite sure how to make it happen. Can someone help kind of thing? Rather than suffering in silence and all...

Mike: Yeah. I guess for me, and again, you can say your piece on it, but for me, Twitter is the kind of sometimes that helps solve a problem or get you thinking. Particularly as a neurodivergent person, an idea or thought would pop into your head, not almost intrusively, but it'd be around maybe some sort of your role or an idea or a project that you wanted to do and to get it out there and then for people to respond to new ideas, I think. I thought it was wonderful.

Drew: Yeah. I also think one of the things I found it really useful when I was doing my doctorate was articulating ideas. So actually that thing that you might normally do in a room with other people talking about what you're trying to make sense of, make sense to then make sense of it, to be able to write about it. I use Twitter an awful lot for that. I'd be reading something I say I'm thinking about this thing, what do other people think? Actually, it would form that kind of discourse community that you'd get if you were in an office with someone that I've never had the luxury of being in an office with other academics because...Twitter was that space for me of do you know what, I'm going to put these ideas out there and have that conversation to try and understand better what I'm trying to say, if that makes sense.

Mike: Yeah. I think we'll just finish with where are you at now in terms of your professional and personal identity on Twitter? What is the future looking like for you with that in terms of your Twitter usage?

Drew: Yeah, it's really difficult because I was hoping that all the ‘good people’, would migrate from Twitter to one of the other alternative platforms that came out. I had lots of hopes for Spoutable. That seemed like it was going to be a safer alternative. Very similar architecture, a very similar way of working developed by a guy who seemed to have the right principles of what the world should be like kind of thing. But there just wasn't the traction of people that I interact with that moved across to it. So, I tried and it just felt like shouting into an aether. I tried...

Mike: like for me with Blue Sky at the moment.

Drew: …I was going to say I never tried Blue Sky. I tried Mastodon and that just confused me. It was so many layers of what am I connecting, where am I meant to be? Just didn't work. I suppose left LinkedIn as somewhere where people seem to be going and sharing things. So, I post stuff over there, but I wouldn't post regularly the way I used to do on Twitter. It's not the sort of place I would just throw a couple of ideas I'm having. It's a place I'd maybe share something I've written or something I was thinking of writing or a webinar that I'm thinking of about to go, or something that came out of a workshop we organised. I still have conversations I used to have on Twitter there, but they'll be more substantial if you see what I mean. I feel like I've lost in

some ways that public space to just put some ideas in the universe because my brain stopped working. I'm lucky that I do have a number of colleagues on WhatsApp and various different places, spaces that I can still have those conversations in a more private space with.

Mike: So, that's the third space coming back.

Drew: Yeah, I think so, and I think that's probably where those day-to-day conversations that I used to quite have on Twitter. I've probably moved away from because it's just...

Mike: …You just have reasons for that.

Drew: Yeah. Whether things will get better over time, who knows? But maybe I think there is a blind hope in me that at some point, it's going to have to get better again because it's destroying itself almost?
Mike: Yeah. I'm going to leave the speculation there. I'm going to stop recording.
[END]

F: Katrina's Interview Transcript

Mike: Katrina, can you confirm that you're a willing participant for this interview?

Katrina: I am enthusiastically consenting.

Mike: Okay, brilliant. What I want you to think about is how you would define your neurodivergence? in the sense that, are you a late diagnosis?

Katrina: Yes, I was late diagnosed, after my child. That's quite common with women and quite common with late diagnosis. My son was diagnosed. I don't know what year. 2015, possibly, and then after that, I was as autistic. Prior to that, so in 2014, I had an acquired brain injury as well.

Mike: Has that impacted you at all? Like, has it exacerbated some elements of your…

Katrina: My sensory aversions are much more significant. I now can't be in a room with chalk.

Mike: Okay, that's interesting.

Katrina: Weird ones. Nothing substantial or really useful. Not bright lights, chalk.

Mike: Well, you take that as a positive. You can flip the narrative and make that into a positive can't you.

Katrina: And useful, like in the spaces that we work within, we're not in old-fashioned universities with chalkboards, but I could never be an academic in the 1800s. I was a woman, obviously, so I wouldn't be able to do it anyway, but also with the chalk.

Mike: Yes, brilliant. What stage would you say your career is at as an educator/academic?

Katrina: Early career. I've just completed my PGCAP, which is my fellowship ofthe HEA.

Mike: Okay. How many years have you been an educator?

Katrina: This is my third year. Fourth year. Hang on. 2019 is when I started. Five years. About four and a half years.

Mike: Okay. It's just for context, really, when I'm doing the cross-analysis.

Katrina: I started as a PGR as a guest lecturer, and tutor. And doing workshops and guest lectures. Then in 2021, I became a teaching fellow, and then in 2022, I became an assistant professor.

Mike: Brilliant. That's really good. Just out of interest, are you a free or paid user of Twitter/X?

Katrina: Free.

Mike: When do you usually use Twitter? Is it any time? Is it between working hours or does it vary?

Katrina: Any time, really. It does vary quite a bit. It's always on in the background.

Mike: Yeah. In line with that, in total, how many hours per week would you say you're using Twitter? You can compare this to the 2020-2022, and now, currently. You can frame it in the context between the COVID lockdown and up to now.

Katrina: I'm using it less now. During COVID, a lot, like probably two hours a day.

Mike: Is that, consistently, like a solid two-hour block, or it'd be like dip in, dip out?

Katrina: Dip in, dip out. Dip in, dip out.

Mike: Yes. Brilliant. What would you say, again, thinking about the 2020-2022 time period, what would your primary purpose be on Twitter?

Katrina: Building my profile.

Mike: Is that, in a sense, for professional purposes?

Katrina: Yeah.

Mike: Okay. In your experience, do you actively engage with Twitter, or do you primarily observe and remain anonymous? Or is it a mixture of both?

Katrina: A mixture of both.

Mike: Can you give any examples of that?

Katrina: Sometimes it would be looking at what was topical at any one time. I would maybe look at specific hashtags around Chris Whitty. Some of it was about information gathering, and understanding what was happening in different parts of the world, and different parts of the country. That would be more observational stuff. The stuff that I was actively engaging with was stuff relating to my work.

Mike: That makes sense.

Katrina: Whether that was on the topic that I teach on, because when I was first teaching… [removed to maintain anonymity] So, yes. I was more about kind of had to move my very first year of teaching. I'd done a term and then we'd teach online on the test of violence and abuse. It was sometimes just trying to understand what the landscape looked like, what were other people doing, how were they doing it.

Mike: Like good practice and shared practise.

Katrina: Yes. Yes. And making sure that it's still research-informed when people research projects. Projects were stagnating but students still needed to be taught so I was engaged in those conversations, retweeting stuff, talk about my own stuff as well.

Mike: In line with that, has your use of Twitter been influenced in any way by the COVID-19 pandemic? You just mentioned a bit of that, but is there any other ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the use of Twitter?

Katrina: I think it became much more of a, from my perspective, feminist space like the celebration, because, of course, the impact of COVID on different-- Women do the majority of care work in the majority of cases. Not every case, but the majority of cases. So, lots of academics with children suddenly at home were finding it much harder, like homeschooling alongside trying to teach and trying to do the work. I think it was experienced differently than it was experienced by a lot of men who also had children.

And I just found that it became a much more, from my perspective and who I'm following, pro-women space, around

celebrating the smaller successes or the smaller achievements of people. And validating that, "I'm going to go part-time because I just cannot manage it", absolutely, that's great. These are the things that you can do to try and mediate some of the impacts on your career and advice and support the people you didn't know other than in this third space really.

Mike: Did that help you in your own lived experience?

Katrina: I wouldn't say it helped me in my lived experience of struggling but it gave me a sense of-- I don't know what the word I want is.

Mike: Fulfilment, purpose?

Katrina: Maybe fulfilment, but kind of validated my position or my role or who I was on Twitter. Because I was able to celebrate and support other women and it was like, "Yeah, I have a role here on Twitter." The purpose, maybe, is that I can do positive things for other women in this space, so I should be in this space. This is a space that's safe for me, this is a space that's healthy and helpful, and is good for me to be in. I have a sense of belonging within the space because I can help other women.

Mike: I think that helps with one of the questions here in which you've shared some of the positive experiences of your use of Twitter. But has there been any negative experiences of your use of Twitter during that time?

Katrina: Fake news. I think it's more than an issue.

Mike: Right. Did you then avoid Twitter or what did you do?

Katrina: No, no. No. I would say I hadn't really thought about this until recently. I started to curate Twitter much more, so it became an echo chamber. I got rid of all the people who I felt were in any way harmful to my mental health or my well-being, so I wasn't seeing them.

That's changed with the way the algorithm's changed since X, of course, but during the period of time that you're exploring in particular, I absolutely curated Twitter down to a fine art so that it became a complete echo chamber for me. I personally don't see anything wrong with that actually.

I get other people's perspectives when I get to watch Piers Morgan on a YouTube channel. But during this period of time, I felt like we were being bombarded with so much fake news and conspiracy theories, so much harmful media that I found it really useful that I was able to create this nice supportive feminist echo chamber for myself.

Mike: That's really good. That's a really useful insight. I appreciate that.

Katrina: But X has changed it.

Mike: Yes. I mean, we're not talking too much about the X thing but we kind of allude to that. So, you can say how has it been now in terms of that curated echo chamber? You mentioned the algorithms. Has it impacted you in that sense, now that it's been taken over?

Katrina: I've seen a lot of people I don't follow. I don't see a lot of the posts that I would want to see. So, yeah, there is no echo chamber.

Mike: You might not have an answer for this, but why do you think that is?

Katrina: I think it's because of the marketing of it. Like people can pay now, people can sponsor posts, you can boost posts so that they're seen by more people. I think that's an element of the marketisation of Twitter that people can be put into feeds that they don't want.

Mike: I guess my next question is, how do you perceive the overall impact of Twitter on your professional development as an educator?

Katrina: I think it's been useful in terms of seeing how other people-- I think it comes back to what we talk about before as good practise. And being able to identify things that people found useful, what's good practise. Certainly, as I've been doing the fellowship work, we've done sessions on giving audio feedback or say using podcasts as an educator and how it can be a useful pedagogical tool where I first encountered a lot of those things via Twitter. A lot of the more innovative approaches, I would say, I was introduced to it via Twitter.

Mike: And then you've developed that in your own professional space?

Katrina: Yes.

Mike: Yes. That's really good. Have you encountered any challenges or barriers in using Twitter for professional networking or information dissemination?

Katrina: Barriers? No, I wouldn't say so.

Mike: That's okay. How do you navigate and manage your online presence and interactions on Twitter to maintain a positive professional image of yourself?

Katrina: I wouldn't say it is a wholly professional image of myself.

Mike: Do you think it's personal and professional, like you're drawing both elements, and this is who I am?

Katrina: Yes

Mike: And it's?

Katrina: Having a mixture of different things presented on my timeline and sharing different things. I think I added a photo on this on Padlet in terms of what my tagline is, because the first one is silly and alludes to the unusual topic that I teach. It's being a bit creative in terms of how you present yourself on Twitter. We, people, being more interested, engaging maybe.

Mike: Have you seen that because you do navigate Twitter in a creative way, You've had more interactions with people?

Katrina: Yes. So, people ask me specifically about that.

Mike: What strategies do you employ to filter and prioritise the content you engage with on Twitter? You've mentioned this before.

Katrina: Yes, mostly I'm following people, muting people. I muted a lot of people during COVID. I followed many people.

Mike: Sorry to interrupt, is this all related to your field of expertise or is it a mixture? You know, for a different…

Katrina: Yes, it is. Predominantly my field. Because I do a lot of work on violence abuse and family violence, there's a lot of transphobia within some feminist spaces so we just need to mute. If they are people in which I feel like it would be harmful to unfollow them for my professional thing. People in my department, for instance, it could have negative consequences, but I can mute them. And if I mute them, then the algorithm is stopping me from seeing other posts which are similar to theirs.

Mike: You just alluded to another element of another question. You talked about transphobia, and I guess thinking about that and thinking about your professional and personal identity, how do you perceive the role of Twitter in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within the academic community? Do you feel like you're a part of that by excluding those kinds of more harmful posts?

Katrina: No, I don't think I'm doing that. I don't know if I can answer that question.

Mike: Okay. Is that because of personal reasons or is that…

Katrina: No. I mean, Twitter still feels very white-centric as well, even when we talk about neurodivergence. Yes. Even when we talk about neurodivergence. And I have friends and colleagues who talk about neurodivergence and being they're autistic themselves for instance, and they'll do studies via Twitter about things such as, "Oh, what do we prefer? Do we prefer 'autistic' or do we prefer a 'person with autism?' or do we prefer 'Asperger's' in some cases? And why they're problematic and harmful?"

Well, we're getting really highly educated likely people who understand identity, first language, and embodied processes, and how we exist phenomenologically in the world. And then you're publishing, and that's being printed in the papers around, "Oh, well we should all be called 'autistic', actually. Because Hans Asperger had links to the Nazi party and autistic people hate that."

Well, I mean, that's true, but I feel like there are millions of us, actually, and I don't think we should be recruiting very specific groups of people from Twitter in large surveys, admittedly, and saying this is what the community wants when we recruit from a very specific aspect of the community. For me, that feels really exclusionary even when we are collating and analysing particular autistic voices, do you know what I mean?

Your work here is very specific about neurodivergent educators' experiences. You're not talking about every single neurodivergent person's experience of what it was like to be in COVID. You're being very specific about it. And I find it really exclusionary actually that the way in which we can engage as educators or researchers or however it is that we're engaging in Twitter also means it's easier to recruit people. And then we're creating guidance around how we should be engaging with our autistic students.

Admittedly, I'm again conflating neurodivergence with autistic but that's my experience so that's why I'm going off neurodivergence. It's much broader than that, there are loads of different forms, but I find it actually really exclusionary in many ways because of the type of neurodivergent person that engages with Twitter.

Mike: Alright. Okay, that does make sense. Yes, you've related it to the white-centric stuff as well, and it should be more diverse. In what ways have you used Twitter that has become a third space? That's taking yourself, and it might be you're interacting with people via DMs on Twitter, or you've become part of a WhatsApp group, or through your institution, it's become more of a hybrid space, so in terms of its online and it's in person.

Katrina: Okay. Not quite. I haven't had something quite like that, but I've had something related. There is a writing retreat that during COVID ran a competition on Twitter. Your supervisors nominate what you've done, how you've managed that. And so, I was nominated for various things that I've been doing within my department. Which meant than, my prize was a weekend or like three days, three weekdays at the writing retreat when we were allowed to do that eventually.

On Twitter, this space of things that I was following, I then was nominated for it after asking my supervisors if they would be happy to do that. I then went to the writing retreat and met a group of people at the writing retreat, one of whom was on the judging panel for the competition. And now we have an online space for the writing retreat thing on Twitter where we tag each other in posts when we go to the writing retreat. And then we'll have a conversation about, "What are you working on? What's the focus? Are you doing a book? Are you writing a seminar? Are you finding a new module?" It's like a hybrid thing. It started on Twitter and then created a real-- But ultimately, it's a Twitter relationship. It's a Twitter thing that is a hybrid between real-life things.

Mike: Yes. So, Twitter was a catalyst, essentially. That's a useful example, for me, in terms of answering my question, of what ways Twitter can be a catalyst for these third-space interactions. In this case, initialised through Twitter, it became in-person, but it also then goes back online. That was a really good example.

The other half of the question is about-- I'll just ask, how is your work in person different to how you worked online in terms of inclusiveness because of your neurodivergence? And if you prefer maybe a hybrid role? You like to work online with your work. Or you like to do some days of in-person teaching? But thinking about inclusivity in terms of…

Katrina: Yes, I would prefer to do it all in person. That would still be my preference. Even though it's not my skill set currently, but it is. It will be my preference, yes.

Mike: And why would that be? Why would you prefer in person?

Katrina: I think it's because I find it difficult to hold space for students in online settings.

Mike: Did you have any negative experiences with the online phase, if you will, during the COVID pandemic? Is that why?

Katrina: No.

Mike: It was nothing to do with that. In the future, would you consider hybrid or would you just…

Katrina: I just forget, like even in hybrid, when you're in the room and there are some people in the room and some people online, I just forget the people that are online. I just forget that they're there.

Mike: Because they're hidden.

Katrina: Yes, they're behind me. I just forget that they're there. A lack of object permanence. And having done things, hybrid, where I've been online, I find it really difficult to engage in teaching when other people are in the room and I'm just like a floating head or whatever. Then you find my attention is difficult when it's online. As a student, sometimes, like when I've been doing my fellowship, I'm answering emails, I'm changing module guides, I'm not wholly focussing on whatever it is that they're talking about. I always feel, when I'm teaching online it's like, "Are they even focussing on me or are they checking their emails?"

Mike: Yes, because of your role.

Katrina: Because that's what I do.

Mike: No. I totally understand that just because of my own experience of working remotely. If I attend a conference

sometimes, I admittedly multitask and not very well sometimes, just depends. I think it's all tied to my energy level, I guess. If my energy level is low, the likelihood is I'm multitasking and I'm not paying attention to or doing one task very well. I suppose if you're in person, you're wholly concentrated in the task at hand. I guess, do you feel more professional then? Because you're doing it in person it's that role you've assumed that the identity of the educator.

Katrina: No.

Mike: It's not a professional thing?

Katrina: That's interesting. I had some peer review of my teaching that was done, and they said what they found was interesting is that I taught with the students. Like when I teach, I teach with the students. I hold space or have conversations with them as I'm teaching. I don't like lecturing, so it's like a collaborative classroom kind of pedagogy of working with them.

Because most of them are mature students, they're social work students, they're doing CPD courses. Lots of them have been out of education for a long time and then they're coming back in and they're not confident in the classroom. I mean, I have the role of the educator, of course, just an interesting reflection.

I have the role of the educator, but I work really hard actually to be like, "Yeah, but you're also an expert. You're an expert in your practise, you know your field, you know who you work with, and you know your community better than I ever will. We will work together in this classroom space to see how you could teach students to understand what you already know." I'm teaching them to teach social work students, it’s meta… There's elements to that.

Mike: That participatory pedagogy, isn't it?

Katrina: Yes, exactly. That's really hard to do online when you are the educator, ultimately.

Mike: Would you say it's inherent because there's a hierarchy just because it's online that it's you doing the speaking and then you've got a load of little boxes in Zoom all looking at you and it's harder to then collab with them?

Katrina: Yes. This is particularly on my neurodivergence; I don't like to be perceived, like I don't like knowing that people can see me.

Mike: That's interesting.

Katrina: I feel, in a classroom when you're all together in the way that I construct a classroom and engage with students, is that I am because we are. I am part of a system, and it all moves together when we work. I'm just one little part of the people working together to navigate challenges, when I'm in a meeting that I am teaching in. And it's different because I've done conferences online and that feels different, I think. Because I put a presentation up and I feel like no one can see me and I'm

just talking to the presentation. Lack of object permanence again. I'm talking to the presentation and forget people are watching me. But when I'm trying to do the pedagogy that I care about and I'm passionate about working with. I feel like they can all see me because they're all looking at the screen and therefore, I feel like I'm being perceived. I don't like the fact that I exist, and they can see me.

Mike: When you say perceived is that part of, I guess, your neurodivergent, essentially?

Katrina: Yes. I feel like I'm invisible. I'll walk down the street and won't acknowledge people because they can't see me because I'm invisible. I'm obviously not invisible, and logically I know that I am not invisible, but at the same time, I am.

Mike: Blind.

Katrina: Yes.

Mike: I guess there's an element thereof, are you actively masking or that's a more passive thing that you're doing?

Katrina: Yes, I think it's more passive than masking. It's masking when I'm teaching online because then it's a performance. In a way, I don't have to do it in person…

Mike: …In person, because of your pedagogy practise it isn't. Therefore, would you say it's more inclusive for yourself because you've done it in such a way that it's easier for you to manage and to do the role as the educator as well?

Katrina: Yes.

Mike: So, it's helping you with your neurodivergence but it's also, again, informing your educator role as well?

Katrina: Yes.

Mike: Brilliant. I guess there's two more questions, which is, have you observed any trends or changes in the use of Twitter within your academic field over time? You can, refer to it from 2020 to 2022, till now, has there been a change in your academic field within Twitter, or have you not seen any change like with your colleagues or…

Katrina: I think there's been more discussions around cancel culture, the transphobia issues, people being much more open for some harmful views. Feeling that, "Well, this is just part of academic debate." I've certainly seen an increase in that but, again, I'm not sure whether that's because of Twitter moving to X, meaning that I'm just able to see more stuff rather than posts, that's the only thing now. Because I know like in 2020, when I muted some people because of their particular view, that there would have been changes now that didn't need protecting me from that.

Mike: Right. Okay. The last question really that I have…how do you balance the use of Twitter for your personal and professional purposes, if at all?

Katrina: No, I don't think I do balance it. I'll just shove everything on there.

Mike: Is it just an impulsive trait?

Katrina: No, it's habitus now. It'll be like, "Oh, I've got these students, let's share this with Twitter. We're doing these activities, let's share this."

Mike: Do your students go on to your profile? Have you had interactions from your students on any of your tweets?

Katrina: No. Not currently, but previous students.

Mike: In the past, but not currently.

Katrina. Yes.

Mike: That's okay. I guess, then thinking about the overall question is, how does your role as a neurodivergent educator negotiate and develop their professional and personal identity on Twitter? Is it a separate thing?

Katrina: Yes, it's just knit. You know where I am, who I am, here you go,
there's some stuff.

Mike: Are you quite open with your neurodivergence, online?

Katrina: Yes.

Mike: Are you open with your neurodivergence, again this is alluding to question four, which is about inclusive spaces, but are you open with who you are in terms of your neurodivergent in your professional role in your university?

Katrina: Yes.

Mike: Has there been any challenges or adaptations that have helped you within your role in your current university?

Katrina: No. I'm very lucky. I was built for this. I feel like whoever created my department and my field had a brain just like mine.

Mike: That's wonderful. That's wonderful to hear. Have you got any other insights in terms of Twitter, or how you've used it, or how it's impacted any part of your professional or personal identity at all?

Katrina: I don't think so.

Mike: That's brilliant. I'll stop the recording there.

[END]

G: Interview Poster

Bournemouth University

Neurodivergent Educators Needed for Interviews

Study of Twitter's Contribution to Neurodivergent Educators In Higher Education

We are looking for four participants for Enhanced Interviews to help explore how neurodivergent educators used Twitter during the first COVID-19 lockdown in the UK (March 2020) until Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter (October 2022).

WHO

You must identify as neurodivergent, whether self-diagnosed or medically diagnosed with conditions such as Autism, ADHD, etc.

You should have worked as an educator in a higher education institution in the UK between March 2020 and October 2022.

You should have used Twitter for professional or personal purposes at any time between March 2020 - October 2022.

WHAT

Participants are expected to finish a **Padlet task** by answering questions in their preferred creative style, such as writing, images, photos, or any other artefacts that can help explain why they use Twitter. This task should take no more than an hour to complete. Later, participants will be **interviewed on a separate date** for up to an hour to discuss their Twitter usage and the artefact they created during the Padlet task.

WHY

Participating in this project may not immediately benefit you, but it is hoped that this work will create new understanding and guidance for neurodivergent people and create real-world impact for those working within Higher Education institutions.

Contact

Mike Scott
EdD Researcher
MSCOTT3@BOURNEMOUTH.AC.UK

H: Ethic's Review

Research Ethics Checklist

About Your Checklist	
Ethics ID	53372
Date Created	22/11/2023 13:56:56
Status	Approved
Date Approved	15/01/2024 16:45:06
Risk	High

Researcher Details	
Name	Mike Scott
Faculty	Faculty of Media & Communication
Status	Postgraduate Research (MRes, MPhil, PhD, DProf, EngD, EdD)
Course	Postgraduate Research - FMC
Have you received funding to support this research project?	No

Project Details	
Title	Twitter's Contribution to Neurodivergent Educators In Higher Education
Start Date of Project	12/10/2023
End Date of Project	30/08/2024
Proposed Start Date of Data Collection	15/01/2024
Original Supervisor	Julian McDougall
Approver	Research Ethics Panel

Summary - no more than 600 words (including detail on background methodology, sample, outcomes, etc.)

Note: Whilst Twitter has changed its name to X and the ongoing changes made by Elon Musk, I will be referring to it as Twitter.

This study investigates how neurodivergent educators, including the researcher, use Twitter and how it impacts the development of their professional identities and practices. The inspiration for this research comes from the increased use of Twitter by educators in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study employs autoethnography as its primary methodology, focusing on the neurodivergent community of higher education educators. The goal is to create an inclusive and responsive research process for the neurodivergent participants.

The research also involves participatory elements, engaging neurodivergent educators as active participants to ensure the study is meaningful and relevant to their experiences. A mixed methods approach is used, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to comprehensively explore the diverse aspects of neurodivergent educators' experiences on Twitter/. This approach allows for both depth and systematic understanding while adapting based on continuous collaboration.

A key focus is on Twitter/X as a 'third' space for neurodivergent educators, contrasting it with more formal professional settings. The study examines how factors like socio-cultural background and remote work influence professional identities. The aim is to contribute to

academia's understanding of how professional identities are enacted by neurodivergent educators, potentially shedding light on the impact of online spaces on credibility and identity evolution.

The initial recruitment of participants will be facilitated through the Twitter platform using an online Qualtrics survey link. Following survey completion, participants will be given the option to express interest in participating in a focus group or interview. Ideally, this will be fifty participants. This is to initially set explorative questions and collect demographic data which will be useful for the interview sampling method.

The focus groups will participate in a collective mapping exercise using Padlet, which will be available for a week. During these sessions, participants will work together to create various pieces such as images, text, and web links. The exploration will focus on several key questions, including how neurodivergent educators use Twitter, how they present their professional identity on the platform (anonymously, partially, etc.), why they joined in the first place, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their Twitter usage. Afterwards, there will be a 1-hour Zoom session at an agreed-upon date and time to discuss the materials generated from the Padlet exercise. The focus groups will consist of two groups with three to four participants chosen via convenience-based sampling.

After conducting two focus groups, each consisting of three to four participants who were selected based on convenience sampling methods, we will use criterion sampling methods to schedule interviews with three participants.

Recognising neurodivergent educators as a 'vulnerable group,' extra time will be allotted for activities to ensure sufficient processing and understanding. This accommodation aims to make participants fully aware of the expectations and their right to withdraw if they feel overwhelmed or stressed during any activity.

Anonymity is a crucial aspect of this study due to potential conflicts between participants' views and their roles as educators. Each participant will agree upon a pseudonym before the collective mapping exercise, and ensuring their privacy in both the collaborative and singular Zoom sessions.

Filter Question: Does your study involve Human Participants?

Participants
Describe the number of participants and specify any inclusion/exclusion criteria to be used
I am looking to recruit a maximum of 50 participants who identify as neurodivergent, whether they have been medically diagnosed or self-diagnosed, to complete an online survey. Furthermore, I hope to select up to eight participants for focus groups and three for interviews from the initial 100 survey participants. **inclusion/exclusion criteria** We are inviting neurodivergent educators to participate in this study. To qualify, you must meet the following requirements: **1.** You must be neurodivergent, which means you can be formally diagnosed with autism, ADHD or any other neurodivergent condition, or you can self-identify as neurodivergent. **2.** You should currently work in a teaching or academic support role in Higher Education in the UK, or you should have worked in such a role during the pandemic since the first lockdown of March 2020. **3.** You should be using Twitter or X for two or more reasons listed below: A) Professional practice reasons include attending workshops, community events, presentations or similar activities. B) Socialisation with educators on Twitter for personal and/or professional reasons. C) Engagement in communities that are either neurodivergent or educational-related, which can be through online/offline or hybrid spaces linked through Twitter.

Do your participants include minors (under 16)?	No
Are your participants considered adults who are competent to give consent but considered vulnerable?	Yes

If Yes, provide details (e.g. recipient of health or care services etc., cognitive impairment, prison inmates, BU students - see related help guide)
Neurodivergent conditions refer to neurological and cognitive conditions, such as:

● Autism
● ADHD
● Dyscalculia (difficulty with math).
● Dysgraphia (difficulty with writing).
● Dyslexia (difficulty with reading).
● Dyspraxia (difficulty with coordination).
● Intellectual disabilities.
● Mental health conditions like bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder

It's crucial to recognise that neurodivergence can impact people in diverse ways, manifesting in cognitive limitations, anxiety, and stress. Essentially, neurodivergence signifies a brain that operates differently from the norm or "neurotypical" individuals, leading to distinctive social preferences, learning approaches, communication styles, and environmental perception. Consequently, neurodivergent persons encounter distinct obstacles and possess exceptional abilities.

Is a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check required for the research activity?	No

Recruitment

Please provide details on intended recruitment methods, include copies of any advertisements.

In order to gather participants for the survey, my plan is to create a social media post on Twitter that includes a direct link to the survey. Additionally, I am an admin of the 'Neurodivergent Academics' closed community group, and I intend to advertise the survey there as well using the same post with a link to the survey.

At the end of the survey, participants will be given the option to opt-in for the focus group/semi-structured interviews. They will receive the participant information sheet via email.

Do you need a Gatekeeper to access your participants?	No

Data Collection Activity

Will the research involve questionnaire/online survey? If yes, don't forget to attach a copy of the questionnaire/survey or sample of questions.	Yes

How do you intend to distribute the questionnaire?

online

If online, do you intend to use a survey company to host and collect responses?	Yes

If yes, please provide details of survey company.

Qualtrics

Will the research involve interviews? If Yes, don't forget to attach a copy of the interview questions or sample of questions	Yes

Please provide details e.g. where will the interviews take place. Will you be conducting the interviews or someone else?

The interviews will be conducted by myself, and take place on Zoom, with each participant receiving an individual link. The interviews will be conducted on Zoom, with each participant receiving an individual link. The session will be recorded for transcription purposes, and each interview will last approximately one hour.

Will the research involve a focus group? If yes, don't forget to attach a copy of the focus group questions or sample of questions.	Yes

Please provide details e.g. where will the focus group take place. Will you be leading the focus group or someone else?

The focus group will be conducted by myself, and take place on Zoom, with the participants receiving a invite.

The session will be recorded for transcription purposes, and each interview will last approximately one hour.

Will the research involve the collection of audio recordings?	Yes
Will your research involve the collection of photographic materials?	Yes
Will your research involve the collection of video materials/film?	Yes
Will any photographs, video recordings or film identify an individual?	Yes

Please provide details

As part of the collective mapping exercise, participants may use various materials such as photographs, images, and text. These materials may potentially reveal their identity. Similarly, during focus group sessions or interviews, video or audio recordings may also identify each participant. To ensure their privacy, I will not make any copies of the recordings and will keep them secure by only accessing them through the cloud function on Zoom. I will discuss this matter with the participants before the mapping exercise, focus group, and interviews, and include it in the participant sheet to obtain their informed consent at every step. After downloading the audio recordings into a secure OneDrive folder for transcription purposes, the cloud recordings can be destroyed.

Will any audio recordings (or non-anonymised transcript), photographs, video recordings or film be used in any outputs or otherwise made publicly available?	No
Will the study involve discussions of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, criminal activity)?	Yes

Please provide details and measures taken to minimise risks

As part of this study, we will be discussing the life experiences of individuals who identify as neurodivergent, in relation to their job roles, careers, use of Twitter, and social interactions. It's important to note that the personal circumstances of participants may contribute to feelings of stress or anxiety during the study. Additionally, the subject matter of the study may be emotionally charged for participants.

To ensure the well-being of participants, I will pause for breaks if needed, and inform them at the start of each activity that they can take breaks if they feel overwhelmed during the discussion. If a participant needs to reschedule an activity due to valid reasons impacting their health or well-being, I will accommodate their request. If a participant becomes overwhelmed during the session, they are free to leave at any time. I will then follow up with an email to check in on them and discuss options for rescheduling at a later time.

The questions will be reviewed by my supervisor team, specifically Dr. Rachel Moseley, who is responsible for evaluating the aspect of Neurodivergence within my study.

There are also mental health-related resources given in the P.I.S. that I will signpost participants to if they decide to stop participating or feel overwhelmed at any point in the study.

Will any drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) be administered to the participants?	No
Will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potential harmful procedures of any kind?	No
Could your research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or have negative consequences for the participants or researchers (beyond the risks encountered in normal life)?	Yes

Please provide details and measures taken to minimise risks

As part of this study, we will be discussing the life experiences of neurodivergent educators and their use of the Twitter/X platform for professional practice and socialisation. It is possible that participants may feel overwhelmed during any of the activities involved in the study (survey, mapping exercise, focus group, interviews) due to their neurodivergent traits or behaviours. To minimize this risk, we will inform them of the resources provided in the participant information sheet.

Participants will have the option to choose from three referral services:

- www.mind.org: A search engine for specific topics related to mental health

- Samaritans: A freephone service that provides 24/7 support (116 123)

- Education Support: 08000 562 561 / www.educationsupport.org.uk: a service that provides specific advice and help related to education and mental health

Based on feedback from the pilot study, we have altered the mapping exercise. It will now run a week prior to the focus group on Zoom. This change lessens the burden of tasks required and considers the extra time needed for processing within the exercise.

We also recognise that in rare circumstances, I, as a neurodivergent individual and researcher, may become overwhelmed due to the same neurodivergent traits that can cause anxiety and stress. This can happen during the mapping exercise or an interview. We will, within reason, cut the activity short and review whether to reschedule at the participants' convenience

Will your research involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	No

What are the potential adverse consequences for research participants and how will you minimise them?

Participants may feel anxious or mildly distressed when discussing topics related to their life experiences as neurodivergent individuals. However, the stress caused by these topics is similar to the stress they encounter in their daily lives and is not expected to have a significant impact on their mental health.

The survey will be reviewed by Dr. Rachel Moseley, who is a criteria supervisor for this study. They will carefully examine each question and design before participants are involved. This process will reduce the risk of leading participants to feel stress or anxiety while taking part.

Other methods have been tested in a pilot study, and as a result, the mapping exercise has been modified to run independently before the focus group Zoom session. Participant grouping will remain small, with 3-4 individuals, as feedback from previous participants indicated that they were satisfied with this arrangement. This should also help to reduce anxiety and stress levels.

Consent

Describe the process that you will be using to obtain valid consent for participation in the research activities. If consent is not to be obtained explain why.

Before participating in the study, the participants will have access to an Information Sheet at the beginning of the online survey. They will be required to read it and confirm their agreement to participate in the research. If they agree with the statements and wish to take part in the study, indicating their consent will be necessary.

If the participants choose to continue with other activities, such as the focus group, they will receive a similar information sheet and consent form, which they must consent to again.

Do your participants include adults who lack/may lack capacity to give consent (at any point in the study)?	No
Will it be necessary for participants to take part in your study without their knowledge and consent?	No

Participant Withdrawal

At what point and how will it be possible for participants to exercise their rights to withdraw from the study?

The Participant Information (PI) sheet ensures that participants can cease active participation at any point during the survey, but once they submit responses, data withdrawal is only possible for those who enroll in follow-up activities and generate a unique identification

code. Withdrawal can be communicated directly to the researcher through various channels, including Zoom chat, email (mscott3@bournemouth.ac.uk), or during activities. If a participant chooses to withdraw, the researcher will provide information on the implications, with the possibility of retaining anonymized data for research purposes. Additionally, the revised Participant Information Sheet for Surveys and Focus Group/Interviews outlines the further use of information, clarifying that personal data may be used to support future research projects for up to five years post-study. Withdrawn participants can request data deletion within a 60-day window if not already anonymized, but anonymized data may be retained for five years in BU's Research Data Repository with unrestricted access.

If a participant withdraws from the study, what will be done with their data?

If a participant decides to withdraw from the study before submitting the initial survey, we will retain the information collected unless they specifically request its removal.

However, once a participant has submitted the survey, data withdrawal is impossible unless they participate in follow-up activities and create a unique identifying code for their data.

If a participant engages in follow-up activities but does not complete them fully (e.g., the mapping exercise or focus group), we will retain the provided data unless they request its deletion, this will need to be done within a 60-day period, as it holds ongoing relevance to the study and will be part of the thematic analysis.

The anonymised data will be kept for up to 5 years for use in articles and related academic outputs.

Participant Compensation

Will participants receive financial compensation (or course credits) for their participation?	No
Will financial or other inducements (other than reasonable expenses) be offered to participants?	No

Research Data

Will identifiable personal information be collected, i.e. at an individualised level in a form that identifies or could enable identification of the participant?	Yes

Please give details of the types of information to be collected, e.g. personal characteristics, education, work role, opinions or experiences

Our study requires only a name (does not have to be their real name) and email address from participants for two purposes. Firstly, we will use it to notify them about the findings of the study and provide information about future research. Secondly, it will enable us to contact them if they want to take part in the follow-up stages of the project.

We respect the confidentiality of our participants, hence the name and email addresses will be stored separately from the rest of their data, and there will be no link between their survey responses and email addresses. We will not download the names and email addresses of the participants, and they will remain on the Qualtrics servers. To communicate with the participants, we will send messages directly through the Qualtrics platform or our secure institutional email if it is a follow-up activity, focus group or interview. If any participant wants to delete their name and email address, we can do so at any point.

Will the personal data collected include any special category data, or any information about actual or alleged criminal activity or criminal convictions which are not already in the public domain?	No
Will the information be anonymised/de-identified at any stage during the study?	Yes
Will research outputs include any identifiable personal information i.e. data at an individualised level in a form which identifies or could enable identification of the individual?	No

Storage, Access and Disposal of Research Data

During the study, what data relating to the participants will be stored and where?	All data regarding the participants will be securely stored in an encrypted and password-protected folder on the MScott3 (Mike Scott) account. This account is a secure Bournemouth University OneDrive account and will be shared with Professor Julian McDougall, Dr Holly Henderson, and Dr Rachel Moseley. The researchers and

	supervisors mentioned above will be the only ones granted access to the collected data. Moreover, the data will be anonymised and will not contain any personal information that can be used to identify individuals.
How long will the data relating to participants be stored?	Anonymized data will be stored for up to five year's while we attempt to use it for our future studies. Personal information, including email addresses, will be stored on Qualtrics for up to five years and removed afterward.
During the study, who will have access to the data relating to participants?	Only Prof. Julian McDougall, Dr. Holly Henderson, and Dr. Rachel Moseley will have access to participant data via the OneDrive account (MScott3).
After the study has finished, what data relating to participants will be stored and where? Please indicate whether data will be retained in identifiable form.	Anonymised survey responses, transcriptions, and Padlet materials will be kept on Mike Scott's OneDrive account. However, the names and email addresses of the participants will not be downloaded from Qualtrics. Instead, they will be stored on Qualtrics' secure servers for a period of up to five years.
After the study has finished, how long will data relating to participants be stored?	Anonymised data will be stored over a period of up to five years, with six monthly reviews after the study's completion. Personal information with not be download but stored on Qualtrics secure server, for a period of up to five years, with six monthly reviews after the study's completion.
After the study has finished, who will have access to the data relating to participants?	Mike Scott
Will any identifiable participant data be transferred outside of the European Economic Area (EEA)?	No
How and when will the data relating to participants be deleted/destroyed?	Data will be anonymized and stored on Mike Scott's OneDrive account. Any personal information, such as names and email addresses, collected through Qualtrics will be deleted from their servers and will not be retained for more than five years. The review of the retention of all data, both personal and anonymized, will be conducted every six months after the study is completed.
Once your project completes, will your dataset be added to an appropriate research data repository such as BORDaR, BU's Data Repository?	Yes

Dissemination Plans

How do you intend to report and disseminate the results of the study?	
Peer reviewed journals,Internal Report,Conference presentation,Publication on website,Other Publication,Public Engagement Activities	
Will you inform participants of the results?	Yes
If Yes or No, please give details of how you will inform participants or justify if not doing so	
If they choose to give us their email address for this purpose, we will contact participants via their email to update them on the results of the study.	

Final Review

Are there any other ethical considerations relating to your project which have not been covered above?	No

Risk Assessment

Have you undertaken an appropriate Risk Assessment?	Yes

Researcher Statement

JOURNALISM / BROADCAST RESEARCHERS: I confirm that I have consulted and understand the Research Ethics Supplementary Guide: For Reference by Researchers Undertaking Journalism and Media Production Projects (available on the Research Ethics page)	Yes

Attached documents

Summary of Activities 53372.docx - attached on 27/11/2023 11:55:07
PAF-Focus Group.docx - attached on 27/11/2023 11:55:13
PAF-Interview.docx - attached on 27/11/2023 11:55:20
PIS Focus_Interview.docx - attached on 04/01/2024 12:01:18
PIS_Survey.docx - attached on 04/01/2024 12:01:27