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**Book review:**

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### Book Review:

*We see things they'll never see: Love, Hope and Neurodiversity*

by Chantelle Jessica Lewis and Jason Arday (Princeton University Press, 2025)

'It does not have to be inevitable that a whole swathe of society feels the weight of ableism, racism, and capitalism. We can make different choices both structurally and interpersonally in terms of how we understand and make space for difference' (p.186).

Framed as an urgent call to action, Lewis and Arday offer a wide ranging and compelling narrative of how the neurodiversity movement offers new and important ways to push back against harmful cultures and other 'isms'. The book is deeply personal, with the authors interweaving their own experiences of 'neurodivergence, Blackness and class' (p.2) with their sociological research training. In so doing, they take an activist lens, offering not only a critical analysis of 'neurotypical power and domination' (pp. 2-3) but possibilities for change and a reimagining of a society that is truly inclusive: 'None of us are free until we're all free' (p.63). In this sense its laudable aspirations are for wider recognition of neurodiversity generally, making it clear that there are, in fact, no winners in a neurotypical society. The book's emphasis is on the embodied experience, which the authors describe as 'the lived, felt and physical experience of what it means to navigate ableism and disability' (p.xiv). Citing Nirvana's 'Come as you are', the authors explain that to come as you are requires significant work to 'expose and dismantle the structures that impact everyone's abilities to be themselves' (p. xv). The book is situated as a conversation - as public scholarship which crosses sectoral boundaries, extending sociological conversations beyond academia.

As reviewers we undertook to discuss this book collaboratively, as its themes are central to Charlotte's doctoral research (Exploring Autistic Girls' Experiences of Mainstream School), and the book chimes with our supervisory discussions over the past few years, including how to write about neurodiversity for different audiences and communicate research findings in different ways. The notion of 'hope' here also strongly resonated for both of us, as we carry out our research in close collaboration with people in diverse contexts, including children and young people. It also links to doctoral research by Sally Thomas (2026) which drew on the concept of 'critical hope' in her work around hopes and fears for the future with young people with SEND in Rotherham.

The book is structured to incorporate song lyrics, punctuating each chapter and the authors even include a suggested playlist on page xxi. The lyrics work to offer an innovative way into thinking critically about neurodiversity, enabling the reader to connect the writing with the

wider social and cultural context. Notably, the selection of music that has been important to the authors over the years, situates their experiences in a particular time and place. When the songs are familiar they might trigger memories and feelings of nostalgia. This is a refreshing way to demonstrate how engaged scholarship entangles with social and cultural life and never exists in a silo. It also shows the powerful and affective experience of music, though the focus is on song lyrics rather than the broader affective and embodied encounter of music (cf. Harvey, 2026). The 'creative inquiry' inherent within the book reinforces its hopeful nature: 'human beings have a lot in common, and the only way to respect, collaborate, and learn together is through a loving framework of acceptance, discipline and forgiveness' (p.16). Music, of course, is often a site of 'coming together', and, appropriately considering the book's title, a line from 'Live Forever' by Oasis, at the time of publication crowds of intergenerational fans convened for the Oasis reunion tour.

The first two chapters of this book ('Sowing The Seeds of Love, Tears for Fears, 1989', 'What's Love Got to Do with It, Tina Turner, 1984') consider the importance of loving one another, learning from neurodivergent folks and broadening the ways in which we *listen* to one another's ideas (again linking with the music 'thread' throughout). The authors recognise that we can not simply 'love our way out of systematic inequality' (p.54), but instead argue that hope may be found in restructuring society with 'a loving framework of acceptance, discipline and forgiveness' (p.16). They argue that we must first recognise our embodied relationship with current and historical societal structures (p.57) before we can create a future where we all feel 'worthy of love' (p.57).

In chapter three, 'I'll See You on the Dark Side of the Moon (Pink Floyd, 1975)', the authors carefully navigate the reader through complex historical understandings of neurodiversity, mental health and their intersections with gender, race and class for how we understand, listen and love one another today. As critical disability scholars, Lewis and Arday encourage us to 'look more at the failures of institutions' (p.82), the 'social and political structures that surround us' (p.82) and the rhetoric that presents itself within our everyday lives and interactions. They argue that it is crucial to acknowledge and push against dismissive and deficit historical perceptions of disabled lives if we are to 'build solidarities across difference' (p.80). Instead we should learn from one another and create a future built on love rather than the continuation of 'pathologizing' and 'pitying' (p.81) disabled people's lived experience.

Chapter four, 'The Great Beyond (REM, 1999)', explores education as an important space for creating a hopeful society built upon resistance due to its capacity to act as a platform by which 'society reinvents its hierarchies' (p.109) and encourages learners to engage with learning through ways that are 'natural and kind to ourselves' (p.111) and to our peers. Consequently, the authors argue that dismissing innovative pedagogical practices and

focusing on academic performance need to be rebelled against so that everyone might be valued.

The reader is encouraged to recognise the interrelatedness of race, class, capitalism and ableism by rethinking critical movements and thought throughout history in chapter five 'A Design for Life (Manic Street Preachers, 1996)'. The authors emphasise the importance of understanding our histories to enable us to resist and push against what they describe as neurotypical hegemony and the effect of 'empire, slavery and colonisation' (p.142) on our everyday lives and interactions with others.

Capitalism's impact on our self-actualisation and connections with others is continued into chapter six, 'Everything is Everything (Lauren Hill, 1998)', which provides critical analysis of value and who might be considered a 'worthy participant in the means of production' (p.63). This chapter also examines the myths of meritocracy and the reproduction of the elite class for the 'existence of a stratified and intensely felt class structure' (p.175) that continues to keep neurotypical hegemony afloat.

In the seventh and final chapter, 'For Tomorrow (Blur, 1993)', the authors provide a radical manifesto, pointing to what they describe as a 'critical but loving framework' (p.188). The manifesto is broadranging in terms of scope and scale, with its final request that we 'value time', a call that feels more challenging than ever in our current era: 'Time to heal, time to understand and time to imagine more equitable futures for us all. Intentionally valuing time creates courage, compassion and connection' (p. 206).

The Afterword 'Talking about a Revolution or Behind the Wall? Educationally Subnormal Schools in Britain' (Tracey Chapman, 1988; 1989) highlights the devastating experiences of Black adults sent to Educationally Subnormal Schools (ESN schools) in the 1970s, drawing on activist community practice by Tej Adeleye, which includes oral histories and archival work. The authors offer this example of practical action which applies the principles of 'love, hope and solidarity' (p.212), navigating challenging and traumatic histories while remaining optimistically committed to building a better and more equitable future. It is a powerful ending for an important book.

The trauma of non recognition and of a society which privileges the able-bodied and neurotypical ripples across all communities, though by no means are the effects felt and experienced equally. The question for readers is how to keep up this momentum, how to put words into action, and how collectively we take on the responsibility for this work. Music, here, resonates with poetry in Audre Lorde's important words, as a 'vital necessity of our existence' (2019[1984], p. 26).

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## **Bios**

Charlotte White is doctoral researcher in the School of Education at the University of Sheffield, funded by a WRDTP doctoral scholarship (ESRC). Her research explores autistic girls' experiences of mainstream school and takes a creative, arts-based approach.

[Jessica Bradley is senior lecturer in literacies and language](#) in the School of Education at the University of Sheffield. She undertakes community based and co-produced research in creative health contexts, and she is currently researching collective journaling practices among mothers and birthing parents, including for a project funded by the British Academy / Leverhulme Trust in collaboration with Wellcome Trust. [She is co-editor-in-chief of Language and Intercultural Communication](#).