

Symposium: *Mindshaping: Development, Diversity, and Individual Differences*

Ian Apperly: *A Mindshaping Perspective on Diversity and Individual Differences in Mindreading*

One objective of the mindshaping framework is to challenge claims that mindreading is the principal explanation of human social abilities. A second objective is to explain how potentially intractable social reasoning is made tractable. I will argue that this helps us think about a significant neglected puzzle: Why do adults who clearly have the full suite of mental concepts continue to vary in their mindreading abilities? Mindshaping implies that the ability to use mental concepts for mindreading depends upon socially constructed expectations, schemas, and norms. I subject myself to these in order to appear rational and reasonable, and you can apply them to guide inferences about my thoughts and feelings. It is, however, likely that our exposure to these expectations, schemas, and norms will vary. You should therefore find it easier to mindread me if we are more similar, and you will be a better mindreader overall if your mindreading has the flexibility to cope with varying degrees of your similarity to other people. I will present evidence in favour of both predictions from a new mindreading task based upon “crowdsourced” stimuli that capture ecologically valid variability in mindreading explanations, and a diverse sample of 2500 adolescents and adults. I conclude that mindreading involves the flexible application of mental concepts. This is enabled by mindshaping, and it varies because we are not shaped equally.

Víctor Fernández Castro (University of Granada): *The Neurodiversity Paradox: a mindshaping solution*

In recent decades, the neurodiversity movement has sought to create conceptual space for recognizing atypical or divergent cognitive profiles as potentially constitutive of personal and social identity. Inspired by biodiversity, this movement holds that cognitive diversity is a natural and valuable phenomenon for collective functioning. Its activists reject both the default pathologization of natural human variants (such as autism or schizophrenia) by institutional psychiatry and the default normalization of their conditions, which risks downplaying their disabling character in certain contexts while still insisting they can be integrated into personal or social identity.

Following Walker (2021), the movement can be defined by three claims: neurodiversity is a natural and valuable form of human diversity; the idea of one normal or healthy type of brain or mind is a culturally constructed fiction; and the social dynamics manifesting in regard to neurodiversity are similar to those of other forms of human diversity, including power inequalities and creative potential. However, this definition reveals an important tension between two claims: cognitive diversity as a natural phenomenon (biologically preconfigured) and openness to contestation (the categories through which we conceptualize this phenomenon are open to social contestation).

To resolve this tension, I draw on the mindshaping view (Zawadzki 2013, 2021). According to this view, when we ascribe or self-ascribe mental concepts (such as beliefs or desires) or socially recognizable identity concepts (such as child, spouse, or student), we are tacitly triggering, justifying, and specifying relevant norms of how to behave, cognize, and feel. These discursive conceptualizations help shape behavioral dispositions and expectations that facilitate coordination on cooperative projects. These projective features have two dimensions: a backward-looking evaluation, in which a person's behavior is justified by the identity judgment or mental state ascription, and a forward-looking prescription, in which the person is X, therefore they should act in certain ways from now on. These dimensions manifest in various uses of ascriptions: justificatory and exculpatory purposes, pedagogical purposes, showing inconsistencies, or declaring commitments.

This view of discursive conceptualization helps address the neurodiversity movement's tension. At the sub-personal level, the mindshaping view is compatible with variable biological preconfigurations of traits and dispositions. At the personal level, some of these traits are partially conceptualized using terms like "autistic" or "ADHDer," recognizing that these terms have projective and regulative

functions. The fact that this projective character has a normative dimension specified by commitments means those commitments can be contestable. As McGeer (2019) puts it, “mindshaping is inescapable, social injustice is not”. That identity and mental concepts are associated with regulative practices does not imply the norms themselves cannot be questioned. What counts as behaving well or badly under a concept is itself contested and contestable terrain. Thus, we can view the neurodivergent struggle as a struggle over the normative expectations associated with identity and mental concepts. It disputes that such expectations must be naturalized as part of biological preconfiguration, especially those that assume deficit by default. This does not deny biological cognitive styles; it simply means our social niche should not assume that all social expectations created by mindshaping dynamics are necessarily based on such biological dispositions. What is being contested is not merely a matter of disputed scientific facts. Rather, the neurodiversity movement is contesting the very normative content of the concepts we use, concepts that have fundamental consequences for how we navigate our social environment and, more importantly, how we perceive ourselves.

References

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Ildikó Király: *Mindshaping in the context of development*

Mindshaping is based on the premise that some cognitive tools —such as (over)imitation, natural pedagogy, and the imitation of fictional agents—enable people to cooperate effectively and successfully without the application of mindreading (theory of mind), namely without having to pay attention to the thoughts or mental states of others. These competencies are available to children at a very early age, but the mechanisms underpinning them are controversial: is mindreading necessary for them to be functional and flexible? The mindshaping model emphasizes that these tools can and should support behavioral coordination and cooperation without attributing intentions and beliefs to others. In this presentation, I will present empirical evidence on the characteristics and central mechanisms of the above competencies in early childhood. The focal question is whether the tools of imitation, pedagogy, and understanding fictional characters are suitable for achieving subtle social cooperation or not, on their own, without simple forms of theory of mind.