Looping effects, neurodiversity and self-diagnosis

In this talk, I examine the interaction between psychiatric classification, neurodiversity, and the growing phenomenon of self-diagnosis through the lens of looping effects. Building on Ian Hacking's notion of interactive kinds, I argue that diagnostic categories such as ADHD and autism actively shape how individuals understand, experience, and express themselves - and, in turn, how these patterns feed back into and transform the categories themselves.

First, I analyze looping dynamics such as prototype looping, symptom overlap looping, and "diagnostic career" looping, and examine how they structure diagnostic practice and provide an alternative explanation for symptom heterogeneity and comorbidity.

I then show how neurodiversity discourse transforms these dynamics by shifting diagnostic categories from deficit-based descriptions to identity-based interpretations and by enabling bottom-up reinterpretation of labels. This shift contributes to the rise of self-diagnosis, particularly in online environments, where algorithmic amplification and experiential narratives stabilize diagnostic prototypes outside clinical contexts.

While self-diagnosis can be emancipatory and epistemically valuable, it also raises concerns about misdiagnosis, medicalization, and the erosion of clinical expertise. My analysis highlights the need to reconceptualize psychiatric diagnosis as a socially mediated process and to critically assess how looping effects shape both individual trajectories and the evolution of diagnostic categories.