Applying a neurodiversity affirmative approach to the pluralistic framework

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Abstract

Objectives: To date, there has been no research exploring the use of a pluralistic framework when working with neurodivergent (ND) clients. This research addresses the gap between theory and practice and explores therapist perspectives and experiences using the pluralistic framework as an ND therapist and/or when working with ND clients.
Methods: Eight pluralistic therapists were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. This study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to capture lived experiences and sense-making of the participants. The therapists had a range of experiences—some were ND themselves and working with ND clients.
Results: Six key themes emerged from the results: the importance of language; client strengths and cultural resources; collaboration and shared decision-making; demystifying therapy; learning events within therapy; and flexibility. These results were synthesised into two overarching themes: ND justice and the pluralistic model as a supportive framework for ND affirmative practice. The approaches within the participants' therapeutic interactions modelled a neurodiversity justice approach. There was a belief that the pluralistic framework could have been designed for neurological difference. There was a deep respect for client experience along with hearing the client, giving voice, and respecting choice embedded in the approach. The participants were able to use the model to facilitate client autonomy and normalise being part of their own processes both in therapy and in life.
Conclusion: This study provides insights into the experience of ND, which can be used to improve practice and increase knowledge in the field.

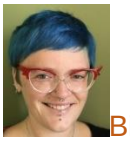
Implications for Practice and Policy

- The pluralistic model of therapy is particularly suited to working with difference. It may be beneficial for therapists working with ND clients to explore training in this framework.
- Therapists working within monistic approaches might act on recommendations of the literature review around potential barriers and means of addressing these barriers.
- The key themes in the findings of this research could inform other theoretical approaches. Embedding these concepts within any therapeutic framework will improve client engagement and outcomes.
- Client-facing research, as well as the usefulness and efficacy of adaptations, is also essential to inform therapeutic developments and therapist training.

Recent Publications

1. Cooper, K., Loades, B., & Russell, A. (2018). Adapting psychological therapies for autism. Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 45, 43–56.
2. Garrett, C. (2022). “There is beauty in diversity in all areas of life including neurological diversity” (Bella): A mixed method study into how new thoughts on neurodiversity are influencing psychotherapists' practice. Zeitschrift für Psychodrama Und Soziometrie, 21, 1–15.
3. Jaysane-Darr, A. (2020). Enabling and disabling emotional diversity: Negotiating autism spectrum disorder in therapeutic encounters. Children & Society, 34, 261–275.
4. Mack, J. (2019). Lived experiences of counselors providing counseling to adults with autism spectrum disorder: A qualitative phenomenological study. Doctoral Dissertation University of Northern Colorado.
5. Woods, R. (2017). Exploring how the social model of disability can be re-invigorated for autism: in response to Jonathan Levitt. Disability & Society, 32(7), 1090–1095.

Image



Biography

Danielle Mills initially trained as an integrative therapist and went on to train in Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy and Learning (EFP/L) with LEAP Equine. Danielle has also developed her training through The HERD Institute, where she is now a faculty member and runs the UK training for EFP/L. Danielle has recently completed a master's in pluralistic counselling and psychotherapy through IICP and incorporates this approach into her equine work. Danielle has a PhD in nursing studies from the University of Nottingham and works as an associate academic for both the University of Derby and the IICP.

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Notes/Comments: