

Editorial: Re-imagining Neuro-inclusive Therapeutic Services

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This is the second themed issue that this journal has published on neurodiversity. Both this issue on *Reimagining Neuro-inclusive Therapeutic Services*, and the 2022 issue on *Autism and Intersectionality: Implications for Systemic and Relational Psychotherapeutic Practice and Research* came out of presentations at the biannual *Autism and Systemic Practice Conference*.

In July 2025, the 5th Autism and Systemic Practice Conference takes place on *Multi-Spectra Living and Intersectionality*. This online conference has been groundbreaking in that it has highlighted the experience of autistic people in systemic therapy. Autistic people's voices have been missing in the literature and practice of systemic therapy bar a couple of pioneering texts. It has been hard to get learning about autism into the mainstream of systemic practice. But this conference has taken off – perhaps because presenters speak from within their own experience as autistic people, as therapists, as service users, as members of the public.

At the 2023 annual conference of the National Autistic Society, almost all presenters, professional or otherwise, were neurodiverse. This is a phenomenal change from the early days of conferences “on” autism where attendees tended to be made up entirely of professionals whose neurotypicality was assumed. Medical researchers compared brain scans in their heavily funded research on the cause and cure of autism. Occasionally an autistic person will be generous and courageous enough to face the sea of professionals and share their experience. It was one-up from the wheeling out of a lone case example in which problems were foregrounded over abilities and joy.

Our profession of psychotherapy has much reparative work to do in relation to the neurodiverse communities. We need to look back only a few decades to the scientists who were investigating what came to be known as autism within a paradigm of eugenics. Hans Asperger apparently handed over a list of his clients to the Nazi regime as they met criteria as “undesirables” and were exterminated in the 1939-45 European Holocaust. Current and recent research into the cause and cure of autism still aims for the eradication of an entire population group - autistic people.

The need for the psychotherapies to decolonise practice includes looking at how we have made theories about other people, and how we as professionals *and others* then treat them. Decolonisation is not a short-term project, nor does it involve a simple tweak in policy or theory. Decolonisation involves a flip in relations of power so knowledge from within oppressed communities gets to authorise which knowledges apply or speak for them. Knowledges that have been suppressed need to be aired, created, valued, and positioned so social, political and professional practices change. *"Nothing about us without us!"*

Beth Levy opens this issue with a paper about autistic therapists. *"Can therapists be autistic?"* it's a bold paper in that Beth shatters the othering categories of "us" and "them" constructed historically by neurotypical professionals. In fact, many more psychotherapists now say they are autistic or have other forms or combinations of neurodiversity. Professional culture, discourse and power is changing.

David Steare's and Amanda's paper *"Crash the Clinic"* shows a system in crisis which puts autistic people and their carers at risk. It's another act of generosity from a parent of an autistic child to take to the time to describe what it is like interacting with professional systems, trying to get basic acknowledgement and support. There is a lot of learning in this paper of how we can change as professionals to be more responsive and respectful. David's poems run like a witnessing commentary as he struggles to manage his anger with the professional system.

Two papers speak to the role of substance use by neurodiverse young people. Denis Murray's paper, *"Improvisational practice: engaging neurodivergent young people with addiction and mental health problems"*, shares experiences he has had of working with neurodiverse young people and makes suggestions of how artwork, questions and letter writing can be engaging.

Monica Whyte's paper, *"Self-medicating in a difficult world"*, discusses the use of substances by some neurodivergent people. She outlines changes that could be made to substance misuse treatment services to remove barriers to accessing substance misuse treatment that neurodivergent individuals often encounter when trying to change their relationship with substances.

Fran Lassman's and Hannah Reynolds' paper, *"Here Be Dragons: an autistic woman and clinical psychologist's reflections on narrative therapy"* is an engaging exchange of writings between the authors. The collaboration weaves poems and reflections by Hannah, an autistic person in therapeutic conversation with Fran, a non-autistic clinical psychologist and narrative therapist. Their collage shows their journey together and how narrative therapy can be a powerful therapy for autistic/neurodivergent people.

Click here for *5th Autism and Systemic Practice Conference* on 10th & 11th July 2025. Click here for conference presentations on the *Systemic Practice YouTube channel*.

Many thanks to the authors and reviewers of the papers in this issue. If you are interested in writing or reviewing for the journal, please email us editors@murmurations.cloud

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