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Introduction to Neurodiversity and Autistic Culture

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Workshop Objectives

Participants will be able to identify:

- Views and goals of the neurodiversity movement
- Common disagreements between the autistic community and the parent/professional communities
- Current efforts to bridge the gap between groups



Who Am I?

- Dr. Natasha Lewis Harrington, Psy.D.
- Postdoctoral fellow at the UW Autism Center, previously a UW LEND fellow at the Child Development Clinic
- Autistic, involved with the neurodiversity/autism acceptance movement since college



Who Am I?

- Volunteer (teacher's aide and community group)
- Respite provider
- ABA therapist
- Nanny
- Psychologist-in-training



Why Am I Here?

- Providing therapy that is affirming of autistic identity and ways of being
- Offering an autistic perspective and community voice to parents, colleagues, and the public
- Finding common ground between the professional and autistic communities



WHAT IS AUTISM?



What Is Autism?

DSM-V Criteria

- Impairment in social/emotional reciprocity
- Impairment in nonverbal communication
- Impairment in interpersonal relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

Alternate Perspective

- Difficulty with typical expectations of reciprocity
- Reduced or atypical nonverbal communication
- Atypical approach to social relationships, difficulty understanding typical interpersonal expectations



What Is Autism?

- At least two of the following:
- Repetitive or stereotyped behavior or language use
- Patterns of rigidity or ritual
- Unusual interests or unusually intense interests
- Atypical responses to sensory input (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)



NEURODIVERSITY 101



What Is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is like religious diversity or racial diversity: the idea that humans naturally come in all different kinds, in this case different types of brains (Walker, n.d.).



Neurodiversity

Medical Model of Disability

- Having a disability means something is wrong with your brain or body
- Treatment should focus on preventing or removing impairment
- Seeks to make people as typical as possible
- The problem is in the person

Social Model of Disability

- Disability is a problem caused by living in a world that only accommodates typical needs
- Impairment is not disabling if barriers are removed
- The problem is an interaction between the person and their environment (Identity-First Autistic, n.d.)



Research on Identity

Research has found connections between mental health outcomes and:

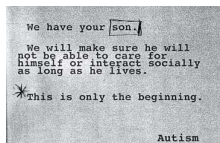
- Feeling accepted as an autistic person by others
- Self-acceptance as an autistic person
- Level of camouflage (Cage, Di Monaco, & Newell, 2017)
- Positive autistic identity—specifically, viewing autistic people positively as a group and identifying with that group (Cooper, Smith & Russell, 2017)



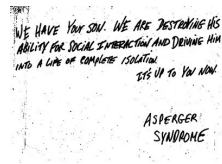
HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT



NYU Child Study Center Ads



(Cripchick, 2007)



Autistic Self-Advocacy Network



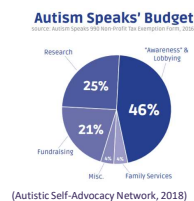
NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US
(Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, n.d.)



Conflict with Autism speaks

The autistic community expresses concerns about:

- Funding priorities
- Representation on its Board of Directors
- History of dehumanizing advertising campaigns (Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, 2018)



Concerns About ABA

The autistic community worries that ABA will continue to incorporate:

- Neurotypical assumptions
- Compliance training
- Stressful interventions (Socially Anxious Advocate, 2015)



AUTISTIC CULTURE



Autistic Culture

Person-First

"Person with autism"

Popular with parents and professionals

Emphasizes the autism as secondary to the person

Many non-autistic people view person-first language as affirming

Identity/Community-First

"Autistic person"

Popular with self-advocates

Portrays one's autism and personhood as inextricable

Many people perceive person-first language as demeaning (Brown, 2011)



Autistic Culture

World Autism Month



(Autism Speaks, n.d.)

Autism Acceptance Month



(The space dragon, 2017)



Autistic Culture



(sesamestreet, 2018)



Autistic Culture



(rainforestgarden, 2019a)



Autistic Culture

Steve Asbell



(rainforestgarden, 2019b)



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DISCUSSION



Questions?

Thank you for attending!



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