Neurodiversity-Affirming Interventions

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VIEWPOINT

A Framework for Neurodiversity-Affirming Interventions for Autistic Individuals

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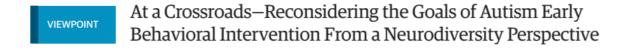[1] Department of Psychology, Stony Brook University
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Neurodiversity-affirming approaches to interventions

- Not "fixing broken people"

At a Crossroads—Reconsidering the Goals of Autism Early Behavioral Intervention From a Neurodiversity Perspective

- **What is neurodiversity**
  - Growing influence
  - Applicable "across the spectrum"
- **Challenging autism researchers**
  - What is the goal of intervention? (NOT loss of Dx)
  - What *are* good outcomes?
    - Adaptive? Social? Stigma reduction? Communication
- **What can we do?**
  - Inclusion of autistic voices
  - Recruit autistic researchers
  - Encourage expression of child needs
  - Goals should involve shared decision-making
- **Neuroscience and strengths-based approach**

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Identifying NAIs

- Interventions across lifespan *and* across the spectrum
- reframing the goals of interventions: focus more on supporting strengths (including social strengths)
- *not* to *ignore* or *downplay* challenges of autistic people
  - Focus on essential skills (e.g., elopement) and not on necessary tools (e.g., harmless stimming)
- growing body of interventions that do precisely this

Community Perspectives

- 2 large studies (Gurba and colleagues)
- almost all participants had
  - heard of neurodiversity
  - agreed that autism supports should seek to advance understanding, acceptance, supportive response to feelings, needs, and behaviors
  - improve quality of life
- Support need for NAI for autistic youth
  - "support Autistic ways of being, moving, playing, communicating, and socializing."
- value of knowing autistic-generated and -supported theories
- utilizing autistic peer-support
- inclusion of autistic adults in profession, design, and delivery
- recognizing value of lived experience
- placing importance on collaboration of autistic and non-autistic people

Dwyer et al., under review; Bent et al., in press

NAIs

- Facilitating interdependence (not just independence) across the lifespan
  - *not* focusing on instrumentality as value
  - Focusing on human value
- Prioritizing physical and emotional safety
  - "integrating the diagnosis"
- Inclusive contexts & spaces
  - Training others *over* changing the person
  - As intervention programs/models
  - Considering intervention targets (e.g., who are we targeting?)
  - Including in the research itself
- Maximize strengths
- Consider the environment
- Learn from intersecting communities!

Lerner, Gurba, & Gassner, 2023

NAIs in Autism Care Demonstration

- What is a NAI?
  - Fidelity
  - How it intersects with evidence-based practice
- Building community-based capacity for feedback
- Integrating autistic perspectives into ABA
  - Centering the perspectives of the community
- Consider the environment
- Continue to learn from intersecting communities!

Questions