

EPV1692

Navigating the Intersection of Autism and Gender Fluidity: A Case study of psychotherapy in a Neurodivergent Adult

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doi: 10.1192/j.eurpsy.2025.2157

Introduction: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental condition that modifies how a person perceives their surroundings, communicates and interacts with others. Autistic individuals often experience executive dysfunction, impaired social cognition, likewise differences in perception and information processing that can make it challenging to describe their internal sense of gender and gender-related needs. This case report presents the therapeutic journey of a young man diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome who entered dynamic supportive psychotherapy to address social and emotional challenges, likewise identity issues.

Objectives: This poster aims to explore the clinical complexities arising from the presence of gender neurodivergence in individuals with ASD and its impact on their presentation, assessment and management. It seeks to highlight the unique challenges faced by autistic individuals in navigating gender identity, emphasizing the need for tailored clinical approaches.

Methods: A descriptive case report of a patient with ASD and gender neurodivergence, drawing on clinical records, patient interviews and psychotherapy sessions, psychological assessment and a non-systematic review of relevant literature.

Results: A case report presentation of a 29-year-old man diagnosed with Asperger syndrome during adolescence. Due to adaptation difficulties and anxiety he started seeing a child's psychiatrist and then transferred to an adult setting. He had intermittent visits to a community mental health service initially and, over the last two years, attended biweekly psychotherapy sessions at our hospital. Early psychological assessments revealed challenges with social interactions, confused and bizarre thinking patterns, identity diffusion, and a tendency for ruminative self-reflection. Treatment was interrupted at the end of 2023 due to a psychotic episode with dissociative phenomena, leading to the introduction of antipsychotics. After stabilization, psychotherapy resumed. During the course of therapy, conversations revealed a complex narrative around gender identity, including reflections on multiple genders and gender fluidity.

Conclusions: This case highlights the intersection of neurodiversity and gender identity, illustrating how individuals on the autism spectrum may experience and navigate gender in unique ways. The therapeutic process explored gender fluidity as an evolving self-concept, emphasizing the importance of inclusive approaches in psychotherapy. The report underscores the need for mental health professionals to be attuned to diverse expressions of gender identity within neurodivergent populations and advocates for flexible therapeutic frameworks that accommodate both neurodiversity and gender diversity.

Disclosure of Interest: None Declared

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Improvements in self-efficacy and attachment security during the psychodrama group process among young women: A mix-methods study

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doi: 10.1192/j.eurpsy.2025.2158

Introduction: Mental illnesses are more common in women than men, and common illnesses such as anxiety and depression often begin in youth. Young women are disadvantaged both in terms of developing mental illnesses and in terms of gender-based discrimination. In this respect, protective, preventive, and empowering interventions targeting young women can be a good investment in terms of protecting their mental health. The youth period is the focus of protective and preventive interventions due to its nature as the initial period of frequently seen mental illnesses. Empowerment can reduce vulnerability during this period.

Objectives: This study aimed to examine quantitatively and qualitatively whether the self-efficacy and attachment dimensions of the participating young women changed as a result of an empowerment-themed psychodrama group therapy.

Methods: The study has a longitudinal design with mix methods. After the local ethics committee approval, an announcement was made online, and the participants were included in the study after face-to-face meetings. Young women between 18 and 25 years who do not have a current psychiatric diagnosis, without suicide attempts and alcohol or substance use disorder, were recruited. Seventeen psychodrama sessions, each lasting three hours, were conducted. Role reversal, pairing, and mirror techniques were mainly used in the sessions. Warm-up games and group games were selected following the theme of empowerment. The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSS) and Experiences in Close Relationships- Revised (ECR-R) were applied to the group members before starting the psychodrama sessions and after the sessions ended. In addition, the group members' processes were investigated using qualitative methods after the sessions had ended.

Results: Thirteen young women completed the psychodrama group sessions without more than 20% absence. Statistically significant increases were observed in the initiation ($z=-2.310$ $p=0.021$), resilience ($z=-1.973$ $p=0.049$), maintenance effort sub-dimensions ($z=-2.355$ $p=0.019$), and GSS total score ($z=-2.357$ $p=0.018$) of general self-efficacy after the intervention. When the sub-dimensions of ECR-R were evaluated, statistically significant decreases were observed in both avoidant attachment ($z=-2.831$ $p=0.005$) and anxious attachment ($z=-2.864$ $p=0.004$). Qualitative analysis showed themes of self-confidence, modeling, and universality.

Conclusions: Psychodrama group psychotherapy is suitable for developing self-efficacy and increasing secure attachment in young women as a preventive psychiatric intervention.

Disclosure of Interest: None Declared