

## Building a community of inquiry for Pluralistic Practice

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**PLURALISTIC  
PRACTICE**

**POSITION PAPER**

# Building a community of inquiry for pluralistic practice

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## **ABSTRACT**

Pluralism offers a means of recognising the value of multiple voices and perspectives and has emerged as an increasingly significant guiding framework for making sense of the complexity and diversity of contemporary social life. *Pluralistic Practice* is an open access journal created with the intention of supporting the development of a global community of inquiry within which practitioners, communities, and citizens can share knowledge, experience, and evidence around the challenges and benefits of working pluralistically to facilitate individual and collective well-being, solidarity, and justice. The present article offers an introduction to how the journal will operate and what it hopes to achieve and extends an invitation to be part of this endeavour.

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# INTRODUCTION

A distinctive and pervasive aspect of contemporary society is the existence of a wide range of ways of thinking and practical strategies around how best to handle problems in living. In counselling and psychotherapy, as well as in other contexts such as health, social care, and education, it is not unusual, in interactions between practitioners and service users, for participants to express somewhat different goals and priorities, hold different views about what may or may not be relevant or helpful, and operate based on contrasting criteria for evaluating outcomes. In some instances, these differences are grounded in deep cultural fault lines associated with unresolved historical trauma, such as colonialism, gender violence, structural exclusion, and marginalisation. In other instances, different ideas about what is helpful or relevant may have their origins in popular culture or competing interpretations of scientific evidence. Increasingly, individuals and communities are faced with the task of reconciling or synthesising multiple perspectives and polarised cultural narratives

Pluralism is a philosophical concept that refers to the principle that multiple valid perspectives can be expected in relation to important issues of human existence. From a pluralistic standpoint, human progress has always been characterised by dissent, dialogue, and debate between alternative worldviews, theories, and perspectives.

The establishment of the *Pluralistic Practice* journal is motivated by a belief that the capacity of human service practitioners and clients to work productively together can be enhanced by a wider appreciation of the critical significance and practical implications of the concept of pluralism.

This journal has been established by a network of practitioners and researchers in the field of counselling, psychotherapy, coaching, and mental health recovery, but the journal is not restricted to knowledge production in the psychological and mental health professions. We believe that broadly similar issues and challenges occur in other professional fields and that trans-disciplinary sharing of experience will be mutually beneficial. The journal welcomes interdisciplinary perspectives on wellbeing in the widest sense. It therefore invites submissions from all fields, such as the natural sciences, engineering and technology, medical and health sciences, social sciences, and humanities including philosophy, literature, history, and the arts. We also welcome research within evolving and innovative domains, such as co-produced, participatory, practitioner-led and service beneficiary-led research.

The aim of the present paper is to introduce what the *Pluralistic Practice* journal hopes to achieve, and how it will operate. Following a brief summary of the meaning of the concept of pluralism, the construct of pluralistic *practice* is introduced as a means of referring to a broad range of interactions in which protagonists hold different ideas about how to proceed. This is followed by an exploration of some of the main questions that have been addressed by those seeking to develop a better understanding of pluralistic practice, the various methodologies that have contributed to this endeavour, and the role of *Pluralistic Practice* in supporting the development of a community of inquiry that might support individuals, groups, and communities to apply a pluralistic standpoint that promotes social justice and well-being.

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## CONCEPTUAL GROUNDING

The concept of pluralism refers to a philosophical position that, in relation to key questions of human existence, simple, monolithic theories are not consistent with everyday experience. Human creativity involves engaging with multiplicity: generating new ideas and trying out new solutions to complex, real-world problems. The emergence of a pluralistic perspective represents a key cultural shift away from totalising ways of thinking about the world, in the direction of an acknowledgement that it is not possible to attain an absolute or fundamental ‘truth’. Instead, a pluralistic stance assumes that dissensus, rather than consensus, is an inevitable aspect of cultural life, and that one of the unavoidable challenges of being human is to live with uncertainty and complexity.

A valuable perspective on this is complex system theory, which conceives reality as an interconnected network of complex systems, each of which is influenced by multiple interacting factors (see for example Thompson et al., 2016; Phelan, 2001). One example of a complex system is a human brain, which is complex at multiple biological levels including neural circuits, genes, architectural structures, and a range of inter-relating hormones. These components together generate ‘emergent’ phenomena such as consciousness, perception, attention, memory, mood, language, motor control, and the whole sphere of human imagination and creativity. Emergent phenomena also arise in such complex systems as traffic infrastructures, eco systems, the global climate system, social networks, market economies, and cultural movements.

In psychological wellness, what we think of as a diagnosis emerges from a complex system of inter-related factors, demanding a nuanced perspective beyond reductionist explanations (Fried, 2021; Fried & Robinaugh, 2020; Robert, 2022). For example, a person’s experience of ‘persistent low mood’ could be described in reductive simplistic terms as resulting from any one of the following: a chemical imbalance; incongruence; the effect of socio-economic deprivation; unhelpful patterns of cognition and behaviour; a product of genetics; the effect of trauma; or the result of alienation from nature and the natural world, and so on. Each of these explanations may have some practical utility, and each may describe one factor at play in the person’s complex system of living. However, it is impossible to draw direct lines of causality between any one of these factors and the person’s emergent experience. This complexity calls any single model of human distress into question, including the dearly-held theories at the heart of any one therapeutic modality or professional field.

In the wider context of human society, multiple complex systems are precarious or facing collapse at the ecological, economic, and political levels. It is now accepted in many fields that reductive, simple explanations and solutions will be insufficient to make sense of and rescue these systems (see, for example, Beaumont and de Coning, 2022; Fried and Robinaugh, 2020; Turner & Baker, 2019; Kreienkamp & Pegram, 2021; Ambika & Kurths, 2021). Complex system thinking involves a capacity for conceptualising across multiple, interrelated domains, looking beyond homogenising narratives and single-issue perspectives.

The concept of pluralism has been widely used in the fields of politics, philosophy, and inter-faith relations, as a counterargument to ethnocentric and authoritarian impulses that seek to privilege one faith or political ideology over others (Connolly, 2005). A successful and influential example of such an initiative has been the Pluralism Project ([www.pluralism.org](http://www.pluralism.org)), established in 1991 by the Arts, Humanities and Divinity Schools at Harvard University, which has worked to build mutual acceptance and understanding across religious traditions in the USA. In

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similar fashion, a pluralistic ethos underpins much current thinking in the field of counselling and psychotherapy, in relation to respect for the contribution of multiple practices, theoretical perspectives, and research methodologies (Leichsenring et al., 2018; Slife & Gantt, 1999). Pluralism in healthcare has been articulated through perspectives such as medical pluralism (Penkala-Gawęcka & Rajtar, 2016) and the biopsychosocial-spiritual framework for practice (Saad et al., 2017). The related concept of pluriversality – the co-existence of different ways of making sense of the world – comprises a core principle within the global struggle to overcome the legacy of colonialism (Escobar, 2016).

Pluralism represents a cornerstone of cultural inclusivity, religious tolerance, and democracy, and a source of support for those who oppose absolutism and extremism in all walks of life (Viney, 2022; Wendt & Slife, 2009). Pluralism provides a stance from which epistemic privilege – the assumption that the knowledge held by those with socio-political and academic status and training is always more valid than the knowledge of ordinary people – can be challenged (Novis-Deutsch, 2020; Smith et al., 2021).

In addition to the use of pluralism as a values position that supports equality and respect for difference at a societal level, there also exist many everyday scenarios in which a pluralist stance is enacted in routine interactions between individuals and within communities. In a wide variety of practical situations, protagonists may have beliefs or values that are, for them, in that moment, utterly right and true, but quite different from the beliefs or perspectives of the other. Attempts to reconcile differences, embrace and accommodate diverse perspectives, find common ground, or generate new co-produced solutions, are disrupted in interactions between people when one party has more power and privilege than others. Effective dialogue and debate may also be undermined by the polarising effects of social media, and the scarcity of sociologically and psychologically safe enough arenas in which competing standpoints can be explored.

Pragmatic attempts to deal with multiple or complex perspectives can be understood as instances of pluralistic *practice*. Across many fields of professional work – not just in psychotherapy but also in health and social care, education, community work, environmentalism, spiritual direction, law, criminal justice, and management – there is a growing scepticism about the possibility of identifying a single valid intervention or approach to service delivery that can be equally applied to all clients and communities (Nehrig et al., 2019). Faced with standardised models of service provision that may have a poor fit with their needs, many clients protest, become passive recipients, or refuse to engage with service provision. From a practitioner perspective, financial constraints and cut-backs may inhibit opportunities for negotiating an individualised approach, or there may be a requirement to conform to an evidence-based service protocol that allows only limited flexibility to meet diverse needs.

Set against a professional world that is dominated by a drive for consistency and measurable expertise, is an everyday world that is characterised by a dazzlingly complex plurality of ways of knowing that arise from intersecting cultural traditions, identities, and individual pathways of lived experience, and a constant churn of human creativity, innovation, and capacity for improvisation and play. Points of contact between different perspectives represent occasions when some kind of pluralistic practice becomes possible.

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# DEVELOPING PLURALISTIC PRACTICE: KEY QUESTIONS AND AREAS OF INQUIRY

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The nature and scope of pluralistic practice is intrinsically emergent and open-ended. One significant area of inquiry has focused on professional contexts where attention to practitioner and service user diversity may be particularly relevant. For instance, the practitioner strategy of broaching difference was initially developed as a skill to be used in cross-cultural therapy (Day-Vines et al., 2007). Subsequently extended to other areas of practitioner-client difference such as age, gender, social class, neurodiversity, and disability, broaching is an example of an important practical skill that has been widely embraced by pluralistically-oriented practitioners. A further practice-based strategy and programme of research consists of initiatives to integrate cultural attunement (Khan, 2023) into the design of services. Other studies have explored the process of repairing conflict and ruptures arising from practitioner-client difference, and the potential harms caused by a failure to acknowledge such differences (e.g. Eubanks, et al., 2018).

Shared decision-making has become a cornerstone of practice in health and social care, and a major topic for both research and practice development in the psychological and psychotherapeutic fields. No matter how many treatment or intervention options may be available, or how significant the cultural or other differences between a practitioner and service user might be, when health or social care decisions are shared, it is necessary to work together to agree the most acceptable and appropriate way forward. Research and practice development around shared decision-making encompasses a wide range of sub-topics: practitioner skills and attitudes, providing service users with information, supporting service users to engage in the decision-making process, accommodating client preferences, and identifying key areas around which agreement needs to be reached (e.g., overarching goals, specific tasks or sub-goals, and methods/activities for accomplishing tasks). Research has also looked at how the process of shared decision-making is influenced by the social and organizational context within which it takes place (e.g., Dahlqvist Jönsson et al., 2015; Fox, 2021).

Exploring and activating the client's personal strengths and cultural resources represents a crucial aspect of pluralistic practice in many situations. There are many valuable healing and learning activities that operate outside the domain of evidence-based professional expertise. For example, many people cope with stress, depression and trauma through engaging in strategies that are readily culturally available, such as walking, listening to music, art- and craft-making, reading, travel, spending time with animals, or gardening. The literature on client strengths and resources encompasses such topics as: how individuals and groups use cultural resources to cope with problems in everyday life and build social capital; practitioner skills and attitudes in relation to working with strengths and resources; and adjunctive activities that are offered alongside standard interventions (McLoed, 2018).

Other areas of inquiry that contribute to the development of pluralistic practice include studies of relational aspects of collaborative and co-productive working; working with multiple stakeholders and professional colleagues; development of feedback tools and strategies for ensuring that treatment remains in alignment with client goals, preferences and knowledge-by-experience; and ways of using language that accommodate the consideration of multiple perspectives. In addition, research and practice development has also been carried out around training and supervision for pluralistic practice. These areas of inquiry, and the



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research questions associated with them, are not intended to comprise a comprehensive or definitive list. Instead, they offer a tentative and preliminary mapping of a field that can be expected to continually evolve.

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## METHODOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

The *Pluralistic Practice* journal is strongly committed to the principle that both research and practice should aim to address social injustice and promote citizen participation and empowerment, and that research can only contribute to the accomplishment of these goals by embracing methodological diversity. Any attempt to impose a hierarchy of evidence inevitably leads to the privileging of some ways of knowing over others, with the consequence that potentially valuable voices, perspectives and insights are suppressed or ignored. By contrast, a pluralistic approach to research and inquiry calls for dialogue between researchers, practitioners, service users, and anyone else with an interest in the topic being investigated. Such a stance requires honest and respectful discussion of the merits and limitations of all knowledge sources.

The degree of methodological diversity that currently exists in relation to pluralistic practice can be illustrated through consideration of the body of research-based knowledge that has developed around the topic of shared decision-making, demonstrating the breadth and depth of consideration possible. Examples of studies of shared decision-making that have employed different types of research approach include: randomised clinical trials (Langer et al., 2022); development of measures of patient satisfaction with the shared decision-making process (Valentine et al., 2021); online patient surveys (Crawford et al., 2021); theory-building research synthesis (Resnicow et al., 2022); development of models for shared decision-making (Elwyn et al., 2017); various forms of systematic review (Tan et al., 2022; van der Horst et al., 2023; Venturo-Conerly et al. 2023); mixed methods evaluation of training (Ramon et al., 2017); participatory action research (Ammentorp et al., 2018); conversation analysis of practitioner-client communication during shared decision-making (Cantwell et al., 2022; Land et al., 2017); qualitative content analysis of recordings of practitioner-client communication (Chen et al., 2019); comparison of methods for analysing practitioner-client communication (Menichetti et al., 2021); qualitative analysis of client interviews around their experience of shared decision-making (Gibson et al., 2020); analysis of longitudinal qualitative data from clients (Tracy et al., 2022); qualitative analysis of interviews with practitioners around their experience of implementing shared decision-making (Ankolekar et al., 2021); guideline development projects (Sweeney et al., 2022); qualitative interviews with guideline developers (Kim et al., 2021); organisational case studies (Hessinger et al., 2018); client case studies (Fitzpatrick et al., 2023); ethnographic participant observation (Spinnewijn et al., 2020); and service user autoethnography (Fox, 2021).

## SOCIAL JUSTICE ORIENTATION

*Pluralistic Practice* encourages authors to address the question of how their research study or reflection on practice relates to social justice and to building a more equitable and sustainable society (Smith et al., 2021). The studies of shared decision-making listed above are predominantly concerned with how to enhance the effectiveness of a service or treatment episode for specific clients, patients, or families. However, research into shared decision-making (and other elements of



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pluralistic practice), may also have wider societal effects. For example, proponents of the wider adoption of shared decision-making argue that such practices build equality and inclusion for individuals and families from marginalised communities, by empowering them to participate in health care and to make sure that they receive the kind of treatment that they need (Durand et al., 2014; Williford et al., 2023). While it is essential to acknowledge that sensitive use of shared decision-making, or any other pluralistically-oriented form of practice, will never be sufficient to compensate for structural inequalities such as poverty (Carlson et al., 2022), it is nevertheless important to recognise that counselling, psychotherapy, and other fields of health, education and social care, each need to take responsibility to do what they can to make their own distinctive contribution to the creation of a more just society.

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## A COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

In the light of this social justice orientation, *Pluralistic Practice* aligns with a long-established movement within the professional and research communities to find better ways to make published research more accessible and relevant to practice (Bryan et al., 2021; Nosek & Bar-Anan, 2012). Within the field of counselling, psychotherapy and mental health recovery, dissatisfaction with traditional journal publishing has been expressed by many sources (Buchanan et al., 2021; Burke et al., 2021; O'Reilly, 2020). An increasing proportion of research studies are initiated and co-produced by clients and service users that aim to create a counterbalance to academic privilege and narrowness of focus (Faulkner, 2017; Fine & Torre, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2021). Within the wider field of academic publishing, there has been a steady growth in the number of academic journals that are either open access or offer an open access option to authors. Some journals also host dialogue and comment forums or invite practitioners to act as reviewers. These strategies make it easier for practitioners and other stakeholders to read research articles and to be involved in influencing and shaping research, interpreting the meaning and significance of findings, and co-designing strategies for using research to inform practice.

*Pluralistic Practice* is an open access journal that aims to promote dialogue between multiple perspectives. A key aspect of the approach to knowledge generation espoused by the journal is the encouragement of active engagement by practitioners, service users and other stakeholders. This will be accomplished by supporting different genres of writing (such as reflective, hybrid, and auto-ethnographic forms), trans-disciplinary involvement from a range of professions, occupations and academic disciplines, an open review process that includes non-academic reviewers (i.e., practitioners, service users and interested members of the public), and publishing both invited and submitted comments on articles. *Pluralistic Practice* uses an open review process that allows reviewers and authors to be identified in a supportive and collegial review processes.

The mode of operation of *Pluralistic Practice* has been influenced and inspired by theory and practice around communities of inquiry and post-normal science. The concept of a community of inquiry originates in the writings of the educational philosopher John Dewey, who argued that authentic and sustained learning occurs when a group of learners engages in open dialogue within which different perspectives can be explored. A particularly compelling approach to implementing the community of inquiry process in classroom and other contexts was articulated and widely applied by Ann Margaret Sharp and her colleagues (Sharp, 1987; Sharp & Shea, 2018; Gregory & Laverty, 2018). Important emphases in Sharp's ideas



include the necessity to critically explore underlying conceptual assumptions, and acknowledgement of the emotional, interpersonal and ethical nature of inquiry.

The notion of post-normal science was developed by Funtowicz and Ravetz (2003) as a means of supporting the contribution of scientific research and knowledge to complex real-world issues. The authors proposed that 'normal' science, as defined by the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn, is never sufficient to provide reliable guidance in respect of real-world issues, because it is essentially based on a strategy of reducing reality to a set of separate domains, and accumulating knowledge in each of these areas. Research evidence created in such a manner is always incomplete and does not readily map on to complex real-life situations characterised by high degrees of uncertainty. Funtowicz and Ravetz (ibid.) suggest that the kind of professional consultancy carried out by expert scientists who interpret the practical relevance of scientific evidence, is also not adequate, because experts tend to have a limited perspective grounded in a single discipline. They argue that what is needed, instead, is a more inclusive form of 'post-normal science', in which studies are carried out, and evidence is evaluated, within inquiry communities that include not only scientists from different disciplines, but also practitioners from different occupational groups, and citizens with first-hand lived experience. In a review of 30 years of the application of post-normal science in a range of contexts, Kønig et al. (2017) concluded that effective utilisation of this type of approach occurs when a trans-disciplinary network that has been assembled to focus on a specific area of practice, is able to develop a capacity for open dialogue based on transparency, humility, and trust.

*Pluralistic Practice* is located within an expanding community of inquiry that already comprises conferences, a practitioner network ([pluralisticpractice.com](http://pluralisticpractice.com)), training programmes in more than 20 colleges and universities, and a substantial published literature including textbooks and research studies. The *Pluralistic Practice* journal aims to augment the on-going work of this community by providing an arena for extended discussion of key issues, as well as functioning as a means of reaching out to a wider constituency of individuals who might be interested in keeping in touch with new developments in pluralistic theory and practice. The existing pluralistic practitioner network includes several project groups working on topics such as training, supervision, arts-based methods, trans-disciplinarity, and diversity. The journal will provide further opportunities for project groups to share their learning in ways that have the potential to inform and inspire colleagues. It is anticipated that articles and commentaries in the journal will function as catalysts for the emergence of further project groups and other initiatives. The journal will also encourage members of the practitioner network to gain experience in reviewing research articles, writing for publication, and fulfilling leadership roles through involvement in the International Advisory Board and Editorial Board.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS WELCOMED BY *PLURALISTIC PRACTICE***

*Pluralistic Practice* is committed to supporting the use of different forms of writing that enable a diverse range of contributors to express their insights, evidence and experience in ways that are appropriate for them (Ellemers, 2021).

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## RESEARCH STUDIES

The journal encourages submissions that report research findings on any aspect of pluralistic practice, using any appropriate methodology. Authors will be expected to communicate in ways that engage a broad audience, including the use of supplementary online files to document technical information. Research studies should make a specific connection between the study that has been carried out, and implications for real-world understanding and pluralistic practice.

## THEORETICAL ARTICLES

An important dimension of a pluralistic approach to practice is that it is informed by a philosophical concept – pluralism – that can be understood in different ways. Using the concept of pluralism to guide practical action therefore involves critical reflection around the meaning of this term, in ways that have the potential to inform and enrich its applicability. For example, there are links between pluralism and concepts such as animism, complexity, decolonisation, intersectionality, multiculturalism, perspectivism, justice, causation, pragmatism, postmodernity and many other conceptual and theoretical domains. How pluralism is understood, and applied in practice, is also informed by wider philosophical analysis and debate around ontological and epistemological issues. Examples of conceptual and theory-building analyses that enhance the practical implementation of a pluralistic standpoint include Carlyle (2017), de Freitas Araujo and Osbeck (2023), Johnson (2017), Novis-Deutsch, (2018, 2020), Oddli et al. (2022) and Stone (2006).

Inspired by Danchev's (2011) exploration of the crucial role of the manifesto within the history of art, we are also keen to explore the possibility of publishing manifestos: call-for-action articles that present a case for new policies and forms of practice. Examples of recent manifestos that might be relevant for many pluralistically-oriented practitioners include the exhortation by Grzanka (2020) to take intersectionality seriously, the proposal by Kaslow et al. (2022) that training for counsellors, psychotherapists and other mental health practitioners should shift to a capability-informed lifelong learning approach that emphasises the ability to address social problems, and Benjamin's (2020) call to decolonise UK therapist training following the death of George Floyd in 2020.

## PRACTICE REFLECTION ARTICLES

The journal invites anyone with an interest in pluralistic practice to reflect on and share their experience. For example, in relation to the topic of shared decision-making, explored earlier in the present paper, it would be possible for a practitioner or client to write about their own learning and development around this way of working, to describe a specific episode or case, or to reflect on the personal meaning of a book, article, or line of research. Beyond shared decision-making, there are many aspects of pluralistic practice, such as exploring goals, using feedback, and achieving a shared understanding, where both practitioners and service users can make significant contributions to knowledge. A distinctive element of a practice reflection article is 'counterstorytelling' – recovering, honouring and giving voice to narratives that are seldom heard (Costa et al., 2012; Dutta et al., 2022) as a means of extending and interrogating existing theory.

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An important strand of practice reflection writing uses autoethnographic methods, such as Stirling's (2020) account of what happened when they allowed a previously reserved part of their identity to become known to a therapy client, and the analysis by Gandhi (2021) of how experiences of internalised colonisation shaped their development as a therapist. Collective autoethnography represents an approach to reflection on practice that fits particularly well with the idea of a community of inquiry, because it arises from a dialogical inquiry process. Examples of collective autoethnography that might serve as templates for practice reflection papers include a study by Asfeldt and Beames (2017) of multiple threads of meaning and experience associated with wilderness therapy, an account of the creation of counternarrative accounts of therapist personal therapy (Råbu et al., 2021) and reflections on intersectional identity in therapist training (Speciale et al., 2015).

*Pluralistic Practice* also invites practice reflection articles that do not make explicit use of autoethnographic methodology. Examples of practice reflection writing in which the author speaks directly to the reader while addressing pluralistic themes include Webb's (2011) exploration of the limits of therapist compassion and care in relation to working with a suicidal client, and the co-produced reflection on the therapeutic process of a client with issues around plural and dissociative identity by Blunden and Billie (2021). Writing based on practice reflection has been particularly valuable in relation to the development of how to understand and work inside situations of cultural pluralism, white privilege, and minority stress, such as the depiction by Long et al. (2020) of the experience of being a black client with a white therapist, and Zahid's (2023) exploration of how an episode of cultural microaggression unfolded during a therapy training workshop. Practice reflection articles have also proved to be valuable sources in relation to the development of communities of inquiry. Within the network of practitioners, researchers and educators developing the Power Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018a, 2018b), examples of influential practice reflection pieces include an account of how it was applied within a youth mental health service (Aherne et al., 2019) and within a peer support group (Griffiths, 2019), a reflexive exploration of its personal significance (Amari, 2023), and a report on how it was integrated into a social work training programme (Fyson et al., 2019). Within the narrative therapy and community work network, a substantial number of practice reflection articles have been published, such as case reports on narrative therapy with clients experiencing social anxiety (Raina, 2022) and with a perpetrator of domestic abuse (Stoddart, 2022), and an innovative approach to decolonising therapy practice (Christensen, 2022).

## RETROSPECTIVES

Retrospective articles allow researchers or theorists to look back at how their ideas and understanding have developed, or to offer a critical appraisal or re-appraisal of the contribution to knowledge and practice made by someone else or a research team. In relation to the aims of the journal, retrospective articles may function to explore social justice themes or underlying philosophical perspectives that may have been implicit in published studies, or to show the interaction between personal life events, social factors, and the production of knowledge. It is hoped that those who write retrospectives will find the process personally meaningful, and that readers will gain a better appreciation of the stories and aspirations that lie behind conventional scientific reports. We particularly welcome retrospective accounts written by new researchers, such as the accounts by Williams (2020) of what they learned from completing a study on how people who identified as autistic talk about difficult personal issues, Dawson et al. (2021) on the unexpected

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emotional impact of involvement in a video documentary inquiry project on loss and grief, and the challenges and satisfactions associated with being a mental health service user consultant in a randomized control trial (Lea et al., 2020). There are also many inspiring and informative retrospective pieces that have been written by leading academic researchers such as the lessons learned from a career as a service user researcher and activist published by Rose (2020), and personal and cultural contextualisation of their personal research programmes offered by Etherington (2017, 2020), Faulkner (2017), Fine (2013), Lieblich (2006), and in an edited collection curated by Hoshmand and Martin (1994). Similar retrospectives have been produced by research teams, for instance Huet et al. (2014) on the accomplishments of art therapy practitioner research, and Thomas et al. (2018) on a large-scale longitudinal domestic violence action research study. Other examples of retrospective writing about research have focused on specific research studies, such as the story of how a team providing a narrative family therapy service arrived at an ethically acceptable design for an outcome study of their work with clients (Ejbye-Ernst & Jorring, 2017), or how members of a community health project handled a crisis caused by inaccurate media reporting of their study (Groot et al., 2021). Granek and Nakash (2016) produced a valuable retrospective account of the dissemination phase of their research into stressful aspects of working in healthcare.

*Pluralistic Practice* also welcomes retrospective writing around the development of therapy services, such as the account by Hoggett et al. (2022) of the work of the radical, community-based Battersea Action and Counselling Centre. An important aim that underlies the wish to carry retrospective accounts of research is to make it easier for practitioners and students to appreciate what is involved in carrying out a research study, and the fact that what is normally reported in a typical research article only tells part of the story of what actually happened in a study, and what it meant to those who were involved. It is hoped that this kind of reflective narrative writing about research may encourage practitioners to access or re-visit the original research studies and see them in a new light. An example of such synergy can be found in the classic qualitative study of the experience of recovery from sexual abuse, conducted by Morrow and Smith (1995) and the later retrospective, descriptive, and easy to read story of this project that is available in Smith (2009).

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Pluralistic Practice* is also open to articles that review books, and research studies published in other journals. Such reviews may be framed as *Practice Reflection* pieces that focus on how a particular book or study influenced one's practice or self-understanding or may be presented in a more conventional review style. Book reviews are seen as a way of increasing the visibility of valuable academic work. They can help to place work into the broader context of previous work on the topic and the wider literature. We are encouraging critical appraisals of published work, which we hope to be an effective means of fostering debate around theoretical analyses and practical applications.

## COMMENTARIES

As members of a community of inquiry, pluralistic practitioners are invited to engage with the contributions made in *Pluralistic Practice*, which offers a platform to encourage dialogue and plurality of views. There is space for commentaries on

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each article published by *Pluralistic Practice*. Commentaries offer a personal and collegial response to the article, and professional and practical perspectives are especially encouraged.

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## OTHER TYPES OF ARTICLES

In addition to the categories of article outline above, *Pluralistic Practice* is open to other types of writing that might straddle the boundaries of these forms or reflect innovative or experimental approaches to professional communication. Authors are invited to contact the editors to discuss their ideas for articles that are not covered by the current author guidelines.

## JOURNAL REVIEW AND PUBLICATION STRATEGY

While being open to contributions that reflect a wide range of topics and methodologies, as outlined above, the overarching aim and purpose of the journal is to support the further development of pluralistic ways of working with individuals, families and communities to promote health, well-being and social justice. Authors are required to contextualise their contributions in relation to key pluralistic theories, principles, and practices.

Submissions are welcomed from people from a wide background, including practitioners, researchers, students, and clients. *Pluralistic Practice* actively aims to encourage new and innovative voices, and to recognise their potential contributions as key to the development of pluralistic thinking. The Editorial Team will provide support and opportunity to new authors to develop their publications through operational support and the provision of nurturing commentary.

Submissions to *Pluralistic Practice* will only be accepted through the [journal portal](#). All submissions will be read by one or more members of the editorial team, to assess their relevance to the aims and policies of the journal. Articles that are in principle suitable for publication will be sent out to two or more reviewers. At least one reviewer will normally be a practitioner in a relevant field or approach. The review process is conducted in a spirit of collegiality (Ponton, 2014). An anonymous review process is normally adopted. Reviewers are encouraged (but not required) to develop relevant sections of their review for publication as commentary pieces.

Given the diversity of types of articles published in *Pluralistic Practice*, and the expectation that authors may stretch and operate in the margins between genres of article, reviewers will be expected to adopt and make explicit the evaluation criteria that are consistent with the stated aims and epistemological position of the author(s). To make this possible, authors are invited to be clear about their practice and academic context, the aims of their paper, the epistemological stance being adopted (e.g., for a research paper, in the Method section), and if appropriate to share their own assessment of the limitations of the work. For instance, authors submitting work that employs a structure that falls outside of traditional, colonial, Global North conventions, are encouraged to refer to the specific decolonised imaginaries and worldviews that have informed their work. A growing body of work is paying attention to the ways that researchers can decolonise or de-link their thinking and practising from Western norms. For example, Thambinathan et al. (2021) synthesised a range of important decolonising theories to develop four principles of decolonial qualitative methodology. Roy (2023) draws on their own

self-hood and professional experience to illuminate the principles of Indigenous research and counselling practice, and Johnston (2019) explored their 'insider' researcher position as someone with personal experience of psychosis.

Transparency about the purposes or aims of an article or study, and in research studies the methods of inquiry employed by the author, will enable reviewers and readers to make appropriate and coherent critical evaluations of the work. To support this transparency, authors of experimental, marginal, and 'outsider' forms of writing are invited to make clear in their submission:

- The problem, concept, aspect of practice, or issue they are exploring in their writing, and what they hope to achieve in the writing.
- The philosophical, cultural, or creative perspectives that have informed their approach, and why.
- What they consider to be the most appropriate and relevant evaluation criteria for readers and reviewers to assess the relevance and usefulness of the work.
- What they consider to be the strengths and limitations of the work, in relation to their stated criteria.

We hope that the *Pluralistic Practice* journal will offer a radical space for writers who situate themselves outside the mainstream – often alienating – structures of academic publishing, enabling us as a community to benefit from experiences and perspectives that are currently silent or marginalised. Such authors might draw from Indigenous, embodied, narrative, co-creative, non-Western, or otherwise decolonial forms of thinking, practising, and writing. As pluralistic authors develop and make use of these and other alternate ways of understanding research and professional reflection, we hope that innovative and rigorous approaches will result, leading to more humanising paradigms of research.

A pluralistic stance includes appreciation of the diversity of ethical values and positions that exist within different communities. Authors must declare which ethical frameworks have guided their approach and should discuss in the submission itself how ethical decisions were taken during their work and their writing, to protect the rights and dignity of any person or persons involved in the work.

Articles will normally be expected to be formatted in accordance with the [style manual](#) of the American Psychological Association. Authors who believe that their work might be more effectively communicated in another format, or wish to include visual or audio material, are encouraged to discuss their requirements with the editors.

Dialogue in relation to articles published in *Pluralistic Practice* will be facilitated through both invited commentaries initiated by the editors, and a moderated open dialogue thread. Commentaries will only be published under the actual name of the individual offering the comment; to ensure transparency and mutual accountability, submissions that use pseudonyms will not be accepted. Authors will be encouraged to respond to comments.

An aspect of *Pluralistic Practice* that is particularly close to the hearts of the members of the inaugural Editorial Board, is a wish to publish articles that are written in a direct manner that is meaningful and accessible to those who are outside the academic bubble. We will encourage authors to take this injunction seriously and hope and expect that readers will use the open dialogue facility to

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challenge authors – where necessary – to further explain their terminology in ways that allow their ideas to be more fully appreciated.

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## INVITATION TO BE PART OF A PLURALISTIC PRACTICE COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

We hope that, in this article, we have been successful in communicating the extent to which the concept of pluralism has enlivened and deepened our work as practitioners and researchers. We also hope that we have been able to offer a sense of the possibilities associated with a pluralistic stance, in relation to bringing together insights and evidence from different individuals and communities, in ways that have the potential to benefit us all. An inevitable aspect of espousing a pluralistic position is the acceptance that it is seldom possible to know or define exactly what will turn out to be the best way forward. We encourage you to consider what we have written as an invitation to engage with and contribute to the development of a pluralistic practice community of inquiry and make your own mark on how it might evolve.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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