



Affirming Psychotherapy for Transgender and Gender Diverse People: Understanding Affirming, Neutral, and Marginalizing Experiences in Therapy

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Introduction

- Transgender and gender diverse (TGD) people face barriers in seeking affirming psychotherapy services
- Currently, there are minimal guidelines established for working with TGD folx
- Past literature is told from therapists' perspective rather than TGD clients
- Present study aimed to gain better understanding of improvements necessary to create an affirming, effective therapeutic environment by getting data directly from TGD folx

Background

- TGD patients are often subjected to marginalization in social, cultural, political, and interpersonal settings (Austin & Craig, 2015; Heck et al., 2015)
- APA currently has guidelines, but some are ambiguous (American Psychological Association 2019)
- Some literature discusses TGD experiences, but not directly from the clients' perspective (Austin & Craig, 2015; Benson, 2013; Bess & Stabb, 2009; Heck et al., 2015)

Methods

- N=15 from Central Great Plains
- Participants viewed affirming, neutral, or marginalizing videos of therapy
- Quantitative analysis using Session Rating Scale
- Qualitative analysis of semi-structured interview

Results

Table 1. Summary of Session Rating Scores for Each Condition

| Condition | M | SD | n |
|---------------|-------|------|---|
| Marginalizing | 7.35 | 6.17 | 5 |
| Affirming | 38.56 | 1.50 | 5 |
| Neutral | 26.05 | 8.93 | 5 |

$F(2,12) = 30.83, Mse = 39.99, p < 0.001$

Results

Table 2. Themes, definitions, and examples

| Theme | Definition | Example |
|---|--|--|
| Therapists understanding the nuances between TGD identity and mental health. | Therapist understands how a client's TGD identity can play into the client's mental health in certain situations and be separate in other aspects and knows how to navigate these nuances | "It wasn't like here I am sitting here treating a trans person. It was, I'm here seeing a person who happens to be trans." |
| Therapists actively making an effort to mitigate fear of clients' marginalizing therapy | Therapist understands that clients have the possibility of being subjected to behavior that is marginalizing to their TGD identity and actively works to mitigate this fear | "They started a little bit reluctant, but I think you could kind of see the flip of a switch right when the therapist said 'everyone deserves to have access to accommodating therapy'" |
| Therapists fostering pride in a client's TGD identity | Therapist makes it a point to be affirming of the client's TGD identity, understand how their TGD identity plays a role in their day-to-day life, and helps the client foster a sense of pride in their identity | "[The therapist] was very much like I understand that this is something that has a real impact. Even if I don't experience that impact it sounds like it's really affecting you severely. So, I think it felt like they were being heard and they were being understood" |

Discussion

- Link between affirming behavior and more inclusive, effective therapy
- Affirming videos received highest ratings and least negative reactions
- New guidelines are necessary; neutrality is actually harmful

