

TRANS(CENDING) RECOVERY: DISCUSSIONS WITH TRANS AND NON-BINARY FOLKS ON EATING DISORDER RECOVERY

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Background: Despite eating disorders having the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric disorder, there is a deficiency in research and evidence regarding its prevalence, treatment, and prevention methods (Arcelus, Mitchel, Wales & Nelson, 2011). Existing research shows that transgender individuals are at the highest risk for developing eating disorders, and yet there are no treatment programs designed with this community in mind, creating lasting effects on those within the community who attempt to access support.

Aim: The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the experience of transgender and non-binary individuals regarding recovery from an eating disorder. Further uncovering the impact of gender identity on the recovery process.

Methods: Individuals who identify as under the transgender umbrella and having engaged in eating disorder recovery for a period of one year+ were interviewed in a narrative format. Participants provided a 60 to 90-minute narrative interview, which was then compared and analyzed using a thematic analysis.

Results: The experiences of eating disorder development and recovery of transgender and nonbinary individuals are unique and complex. Nevertheless, the research suggested commonalities regarding: experiences of transphobia and gender discrimination, pressures related to conforming to cisgender body expectations, discrimination in health and mental health settings, and both positive and negative experiences in utilizing the internet as support.

Discussion/Implications: The findings of this study led to the development of implications for practitioners regarding the need for additional training on transgender issues as well as general eating disorder knowledge, creating supportive and inclusive environments, and the development of transgender specific treatment programs integrating gender identity into eating disorder recovery. Utilizing the power of lived experience this study was able to trans(cend) the societal understanding of recovery through discussing the current culture of eating disorder treatment, hopes for future program development and changes.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the impacts of gender identity on the recovery process through developing basic understanding of transgender specific needs within mental health recovery.
2. Provide inclusive support to transgender and non-binary individuals regarding eating disorder recovery.