

# Diversity and counseling psychotherapy

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## Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of diversity in Counseling. More specifically, the concept of diversity is defined and the issues of diversity that one may encounter in the counseling process are identified. Next, the proposed forms of counseling and psychotherapy are mentioned, one of which is analyzed in more detail. Diversity is found in a variety of issues related to ethnicity and race, physique, disability, religion, gender or sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, trauma, and other overlapping characteristics. Apart from the fact that the majority of forms of counseling are based on humanitarian values, diversity needs more specialized care, as different patients respond to different approaches.

## Keywords

Diversity, counseling, minorities, suggested treatments

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## Introduction

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This paper analyzes the concept of diversity in the context of counseling and psychotherapy, along with the challenges it presents as well as the therapies of choice for each issue. Finally, a selected approach is further analyzed. Diversity is defined as the uniqueness and heterogeneity of people and emphasizes the differences that all people have with each other. As a term, it can be divided into social, such as understanding and accepting individual and personal differences, which emphasizes the importance of fighting stereotypes and prejudices that lead to unequal treatment of people [1]. Within the context of counseling and psychotherapy, diversity takes on special significance and requires special handling. More specifically, the counselor needs to understand and accept the special nature of each person, and then highlight their abilities and talents. Other principles that are a prerequisite for successful treatment are: dignity, self-esteem, privacy and autonomy, integrity, transparency, respect, focus on the consequences of the action, and ethical care adapted to the individual needs and circumstances [2]. In summary, diversity is a challenge in counseling and psychotherapy, and even though the unique characteristics and needs of the individual are not considered, the obstacles grow within the therapeutic relationship.

## Diversity Issues

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The expansion of globalization and the emergence of rapid changes in modern socio-cultural environments highlighted the need to broaden the perspective of counseling psychology, to include the unique characteristics of individuals, considering biological, psychological, social, and spiritual elements of cultural and national identity [3]. Today, the main issues identified in therapeutic practice concern gender, race and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, but also religion, age, and physical integrity [4].

*Gender psychology* is a rapidly evolving branch of psychology that emphasizes the term gender as a social construct and reflects its importance as a factor in choice and interaction between people. Gender-related issues in the treatment process include career choice, eating disorders, and sexual violence for women, while for men, limited emotional expression, focus on strength and competition, homophobia, and the obsession with success [5].

Regarding racial and ethnic identity, the widespread globalization and migration wave of recent years highlights the need to understand individuals as cultural beings and the limitations of one-dimensional cultural evaluations [3]. Working with cultural minorities requires understanding and finding clinical meaning in how cultural dynamics contribute to the development and maintenance of the individual's problems, as well as his attitude to treatment [6].

Recently, in terms of gender and sexual orientation, the term sexual minority has taken on a new dimension, which reflects the occupation experienced by divergent sexual ori-

entations and identities in today's socio-political systems [7]. People who do not fall into the usual categories, experience ridicule, verbal abuse, and social exclusion [7] and show disproportionately high rates of anxiety or depression towards their heterosexual counterparts. Both patients who belong to a sexual minority and their therapists face great difficulties in treatment [8].

Based on the above, it is understood that the issues of diversity, require different approaches and special handling ways, for the treatment to be effective. At this point, some of the approaches aimed at a specific population are analyzed.

*Feminist therapy* developed through the second wave of the feminist movement and was a response to the oppression and restriction imposed on women based on gender [9]. In terms of content, modern feminist therapy operates under the basic principles of resistance to power imbalances in society, oppression, acceptance of diversity, and empowerment, while therapists rely on a variety of techniques within this broader theoretical framework [10]. Regarding race and ethnic identity, culturally sensitized therapies are considered as the treatment of choice. These are approaches that emphasize the therapist's understanding of the patient's background, nationality, and belief system [11]. In recent years, approaches that take multiculturalism and social justice as core values have also been used [12]. In addition, it is worth mentioning that for refugees and migrants, given the life-threatening conditions they have experienced and the unstable environments in which they live, an additional helpful approach would be desensitization and reprocessing through ocular movements [13].

In terms of age, although not a minority, children require very different handling than adults. Therapies through play and art, are a primary way of expression of the child, provide a creative way of relaxation, and at the same time, contribute to their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being [14]. In addition, due to the direct influence and development of children in the family environment, the seriousness of the role of the family is perceived. Thus, family therapy is also a treatment of choice regarding the population of children [15]. Next, the proposed approach to diversity issues related to gender, sexual identity, and orientation is analyzed in more detail.

## An approach analysis

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*Affirmative therapy* for *LGBTQI* individuals is a general treatment perspective, which has emerged as a response to conversion therapy and has at times been enriched with cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic, and humanistic orientations. Despite the diversity of this therapeutic approach, a review of the literature indicates that affirmative therapy, in all its aspects, shares the same principles, requiring the individual therapist to challenge a pathological view of homosexuality, to develop work-appropriate knowledge with *LGBTQI* individuals and incorporate this knowledge into their therapeutic approach [8].

The affirmative treatment of *LGBTQI* consists of four main issues: a. dealing with the negative attitude of therapists against *LGBTQI* individuals, and the adoption of a positive attitude, b. the acquisition of accurate knowledge regarding the experiences of *LGBTQI* individuals, and their heterogeneity, c. Investigation and integration of the experiences and heterogeneity of *LGBTQI* individuals in the context of treatment, d. Involvement and confirmation of the challenges regarding inequalities of power [16].

Other guiding theories about the therapist of the affirmative approach are the following: "*Reflection*" - the therapist, considering his upbringing, perceives the privileges, and prejudices that arise from a heterotypical and binary gender society. "*Participation*" - by actively participating in life, one becomes acquainted with gender issues, while at the same time actively fighting for social justice and change. The "*creation of an affirmative treatment scenario*", i.e., an attitude of understanding towards *LGBTQI* individuals, affirmative language, and the use of the preferred name by the patient, openness about the commitment to provide affirmative treatment to all patients, regardless of sexual orientation or identity. Finally, "*challenging heterosexism and binary sex*", to open space for different narratives [17].

Affirmative therapy can also be considered as a set of principles and techniques that would be useful not only for those who self-identify as *LGBTQI* but also for people who are directly related to them, such as children with *LGBTQI* parents. Other research supports the usefulness of affirmative therapy that can be applied to everyone, as well as to psychotherapy in general [7].

Finally, despite the large volume of research and the focus on *LGBTQI* populations and the functional treatment for them, it is worth mentioning that the term "*sexual minority*" is quite broad. It is therefore difficult to reach a unified approach, as there is considerable diversity between gender and sexuality boundaries and among other cross-identities in terms of risk factors and protection, as also rates of mental illness [8].

## Conclusion

In the context of providing effective treatment and appropriate counseling services, mental health professionals need to adapt to a wide range of differences between their patients to include background and characteristics such as ethnicity, race and culture, nationality, religion, gender and sexual orientation, health levels, age, socioeconomic status, occupational and educational issues [3]. The special needs of people involved in minorities pose particular challenges to the treatment process and require, more than just the essential ingredients of successful treatment [2]. In response to this request, a plethora of new approaches have emerged that attempt to capture the essence of humans and to understand in-depth the issues and their history [6].

In summary, the therapeutic process must widen its lens to a level that it includes the peculiarities of different individuals. The uniqueness of each person is a given and

requires, in fact, handling that suits it. However, specific groups of the population and minorities, need even more attention. These people are often categorized, marginalized, and subjected to verbal and mental violence, while at the same time their needs and history are completely ignored. A competent therapist initially creates treatment conditions, which make the individual patient feel safe. Then they assess the situation, considering the circumstances that played a role in it, deeply understand the difficulties they face and can identify, as also highlight their special strengths and talents. Despite the obstacles that arise in treating diversity issues, specialized therapies can be very effective for different diversity issues.

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