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'I wish they would have brought it up': Towards meaningful conversations about size in psychotherapy

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Version: Poster

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'I wish they would have brought it up!': Towards meaningful conversations about size in psychotherapy.

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Postgraduate Research Student Online Poster Competition, 2020.

Preliminary Findings: People of Size (POS) experience a series of barriers to productive conversations about size and weight stigma in their psychotherapeutic relationships.

Weight Stigma

The 'social devaluation and denigration of people perceived to carry excess weight'

(Tomiyaama, 2014). (Emphasis mine)

Small but growing body of evidence for impact of weight stigma in psychotherapy:

Davis-Coelho et al (2000), Courtney (2008), Moller (2014)

Rothblum (2018).

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Method

Stage 1 – online questionnaire with clients of size about experiences of psychotherapy.

35 detailed qualitative responses (70 responses overall)

Participants from UK, US, Canada & Australia

Phenomenological, Thematic Analysis

Stage 2 – pending ethical approval. In depth interviews. **Client and therapist experience of productive/affirmative therapeutic dialogue about size.**

Is the environment accessible and welcoming?

'I've had issues with furniture with a provider, but I'm too self-conscious to ask them to get a waiting room chair with no arms, so I try to squish in and balance on the end of the chair.' (16:6:13-14).

'... there was a rack with medical pamphlets, including literature about diabetes, weight loss, and bariatric surgery. I often found myself side-eyeing those particular pamphlets before each session began.' (7:4:13).

No

Yes

Do I perceive my therapist to be understanding of weight bias/thin privilege?

'I have never had a therapist who was fat-positive. I would be surprised if a thin person could ever understand what it is like to be fat.' (16:6:15).

'I was nervous that... talking about my fatness would prompt my therapist to start recommending weight loss when that wasn't what I wanted.' (5:2:1-2).

No

Yes

When I bring up size, is it received with acceptant, empathic understanding?

'Therapist said I needed to join Weight Watchers in order to continue therapy. I had an eating disorder at the time.' (9,11:6:5).

'I...very briefly, had a psychological health professional who...made a remark about people eating themselves to death or smoking because they were "too scared to do it the quick way" (!!) (16:14:21-22).

No

Yes

No



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Do I feel empowered to address the situation?



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Meaningful Conversation

I want to talk about it!

Silencing

I am clearly a person of size, and there is no way that wasn't affecting the rest of my concerns in therapy. How my body interacts with the world around me, and how I treat it has a lot to do with my anxiety and other concerns. Having a space to interact with that would have been helpful.

(11:11:10-13).

References

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