

Abstract

The lesbian experience of gender has only been qualitatively studied using a small sample of women in the United States. This study seeks to extend that knowledge to a group of women in the UK, in order to investigate the type of gender-related concerns lesbian clients may bring within their therapy. It reveals that the experience of being different with respect to gender is impactful. Being the 'odd one out' was met with a lack of acceptance and engendered feelings of isolation and a sense of not belonging. This affects self-esteem and can even evoke suicidal ideation. Acceptance, often found through group membership, was liberating and enabled greater flexibility of gender expression. This suggests that the acceptance of the therapist may be healing, although further research would be required to investigate this. Whilst this study reveals these explicit gender-related issues, it also shows that an experience of gender difference can impact on a lesbian's relational style, suggesting gender may pervade other aspects of therapy, not least the therapeutic relationship itself.