APAGS TRAINING VIDEO:
Research with Transgender Communities Transcript
Transcript

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"This presentation is the second in a series of webinars presented by the APAGS Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns. We hope to address issues of interest to graduate students in psychology related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues.

This webinar will provide a brief overview of some topics related to conducting research with transgender communities.

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This webinar's objectives are:

1) To provide an overview of issues to consider when conducting research with transgender communities, particularly related to participant recruitment and sampling.
AND
2) To pose questions to promote dialogue and critical thinking among psychology students and psychology training programs.

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Background & Significance

As the broader body of LGBT research has grown in recent years, so too has there been an increase in transgender-related scholarship, particularly within the field of psychology.

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Despite this relative increase in transgender-related scholarship, the psychological research literature has still focused primarily on certain subgroups within transgender populations, while the experiences of other subgroups have remained largely invisible. Some researchers, however, are beginning to acknowledge the heterogeneity of transgender communities and diversity of transgender identities.

However, as researchers consider broadening their scope to be more inclusive of the experiences of various transgender sub-communities and diverse transgender identities, there exists the very real problem of accomplishing this without merely paying lip service to the intention of inclusivity, while also balancing specificity. That is, as work in this area increases, it's

recommended that researchers be aware of the diversity of transgender communities and therefore be intentional and sensitive to the groups they are planning to work with.

Furthermore, as we continue to strive to increase research on diverse transgender identities, scholars should not only be mindful of the *variety* of *transgender* identities, but also other social identities transgender individuals hold, such as racial or ethnic identities, and sexual orientation identities, to name a few.

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Before continuing on, we also want to acknowledge the sordid history of transgender populations' relationship with psychology. For many years, trans people have been studied as objects of interest within the psychological literature, often pathologized and further stigmatized within that same literature. Psychologists are often seen as gatekeepers to medical transition procedures within transgender communities. As a result, it will be important for psychological researchers to acknowledge not only the current state of psychological research related to transgender populations, but also the past relationship of this population with psychology.

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Though covering all the possible issues one might encounter while conducting research with transgender communities would be well beyond the scope of this short webinar, we do want to focus on one issue in particular. Namely, the inclusion and participation of the transgender community in the design and implementation of research, as opposed to a "psychological expert" entering the community to do research. As mentioned just a moment ago, transgender individuals have historically – and still presently - not always had positive experiences with either psychologists or researchers. As a result, many trans individuals may be wary of unknown researchers who seek to *come in* to the community to conduct research studies. Historically, trans voices have not been integrated in the psychological research literature. The agenda that has been set has most often been that of the researcher. As a result, more research is needed which focuses on topics and concerns that are relevant to the experiences of transgender persons.

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Therefore, researchers can consider the ways in which they can empower participants throughout the entire process. By including community members in the process, researchers may find that transgender leaders and community members may provide critical feedback on research questions or overall research design. Thus, openness to such feedback can help strengthen the relationships between researchers and community members.

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We are deliberate in our use of the word "collaborate" here in the context of research. That is, research should not only maximize the voices of transgender people, but also be actively *informed by* and accomplished through the deliberate engagement of transgender persons. Ultimately, this will have a greater impact on those same communities than research that is conducted from the relative safety and sterility of academia.

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Therefore, as researchers consider studies that might examine the lived experiences of transgender individuals, researcher visibility for a period of time within that community is vital.

Toward this end, spend time in the community. Give back to the community. Expect that it will take time to build trust.

Through our own personal experiences and through our training, we have a lot to offer any number of groups in the way of services. Consider the ways in which you might be able to serve this community as an additional level of advocacy and activism. In this way, hopefully we can find ways to really hear from members of the community not only *what* issues would be important to address in a scholarly way, but also *how.* Research that starts from and is ultimately informed by the population itself that stands to either benefit from or be harmed by that same research can have a profound impact.

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After intentionally establishing which populations one wants to work with, the next step is to carefully examine both the overall research goals, and the appropriate research design to accomplish those goals.

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Building off of previous points, throughout this process, researchers can consider the ways they can increase the active participation and collaboration with transgender participants.

Furthermore, the specific language researchers might use will inform the participants who might be drawn to or interested in the research. Careful consideration of language and recruitment strategy is essential. For example, a researcher interested in particularly capturing the experiences of genderqueer individuals might consider contacting community centers or using Internet-based approaches, rather than contacting organizations that provide medical services.

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Given how diverse transgender populations are, to discuss more discrete recommendations in this short presentation would be a disservice. As a result, we wanted to highlight some additional questions for discussion that can spur your thinking as you consider working with transgender communities.

First, what are your motivations for conducting research with transgender populations? Being able to identify your motivations prior to beginning can also help you to center your goals and objectives.

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Second, what are your concerns for conducting research with transgender populations? Being able to articulate some of your concerns, whether emotional, intellectual, logistical or otherwise, can help you to focus your main research objectives.

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Finally, who will the research benefit? Will it ultimately bring positive or negative effects to the community you are working with? And is there a way to increase the benefit to transgender participants and broader transgender communities? It's not enough to consider merely the impact on the *broader* transgender populations. This is important, yes! But also consider the ways in which the participants themselves might be able to benefit from the research study. Brainstorm with colleagues about what this might look like, and particularly consider the ways in which your study can be a collaborative process with your participants, draw on their expertise and perspectives in order to generate further areas of possible benefit.

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Before ending, we once more wanted to reiterate that this webinar is intended to cover only a limited scope of topics related to transgender research. For those interested in learning more about other aspects of transgender research, such as basic transgender community definitions and terminology, we have included some links to resources that could serve as a starting point for learning more about these other concepts.

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As in any area of study, a certain amount of growing pains can be expected as researchers endeavor to expand the field fast enough to remain relevant, while also taking care to attend

respectfully to the wants and needs of the population that the research is focused on. It is critical that the benefits of any research study outweigh the potential costs, especially to the population of interest. Therefore care should be taken to consider the questions posed in this presentation before beginning any study, as well as making the time to both evaluate progress while the research is happening, and to thoughtfully examine the strengths and struggles of the project after it is completed. It is through conscientious collaborations that communities are built in which everyone can benefit from the results.

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Here is a listing of references for the content of this webinar.

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