

CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY WOMAN: PERCEPTIONS OF
PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS AND LESBIAN WOMEN AS AN ELEMENT OF
SATISFACTION IN COUNSELING (226 pp.)

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The purpose of this study was to gather information from female professional counselors and lesbian women about their perceptions of the characteristics of a healthy woman. These perceptions, whether similar, different, or multiple, may play a role in lesbians' counseling experiences and ultimately the perceived level of satisfaction with those experiences.

This study utilized Q methodology to investigate female professional counselors' and lesbians' perceptions of the characteristics of a healthy woman. It involved 55 participants sorting 58 statements identifying various views of the characteristics of a healthy woman on a continuum from *most important* (+4) to *least important* (-4). Results included correlation of the factors, factor analysis, and the computation of factor scores. From the data, three significant factors emerged: Factor 1: Peace, Love, Dove (Health Through Meaning Making); Factor 2: It's All About You (Health Through Self-Focus); and Factor 3: Do you Love Me? (Health Through Love, Relationships, and Belongingness). Factor 1 emphasized strength and spirituality and disregarded physical health. Factor 2 centered around emotional health constructs, namely independence and boundary setting, and Factor 3 seemed to be relationally focused.

The findings indicated that there are multiple perspectives held by women on what it means to be a healthy woman. Between group and within group differences were found. Factor 1 was more likely to include lesbians, Factor 2 included all counselors, and Factor 3 included all lesbians with the exception of one heterosexual counselor.

The findings raised several questions. First, is it possible that being a counselor overrides other parts of one's identity or viewpoints? Do counselors have similar viewpoints of what a healthy woman is, regardless of their sexual orientation or other characteristics? If so, one might wonder if counselor education programs are training counselors to have similar views on what it means to be a healthy woman, for instance, embracing a view of being healthy that emphasizes independence and empowerment, and perhaps, this view is discrepant with that held by other groups. This study sheds light on possible future research, training, and the perspectives of women's health.