

# Autistic Consumers' Perspectives on Gender-affirming Mental Health Services

Brittany Lindsay, M.A. & Jonathan M. Campbell, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, College of Education and Allied Professions

## What Traits are Associated with Autism?

- Persistent difficulty with social interactions and communication:
  - Nonverbal communication
  - Social reciprocity
  - Forming and maintaining relationships
- Repetitive or restricted interests, activities, or behavior patterns

## Disparities in Identifying Autistic Individuals

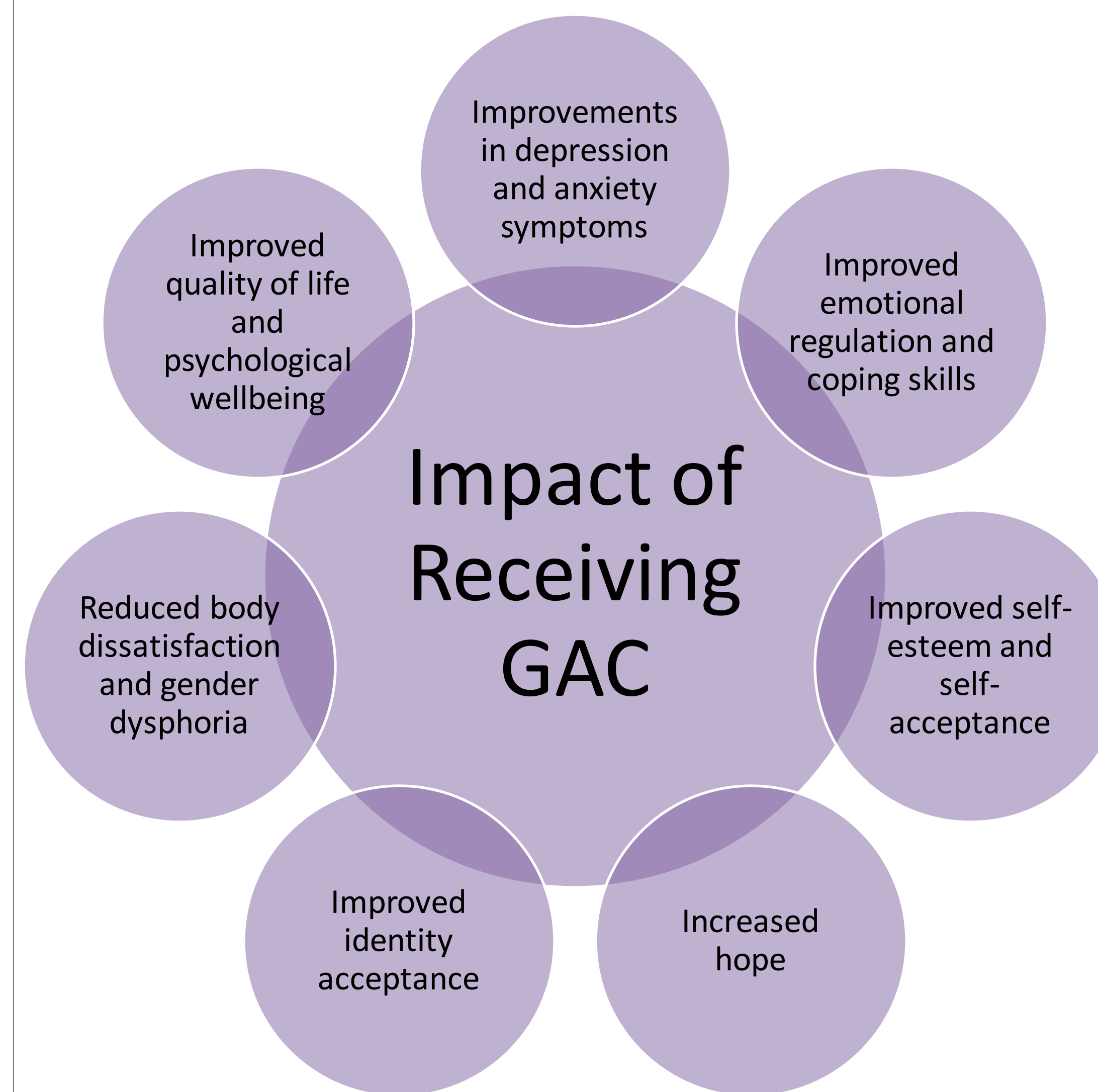
- Historically, autism has been diagnosed less among children of color than White children
  - Recent CDC data found no significant differences between identification of autism in Black and White children
- Among children without intellectual disability:
  - Black and Hispanic children are less likely to be identified as autistic than White children
  - Children in underserved communities are less likely to be identified as autistic

## Co-occurrence of Autism and Transgender or Gender Diverse (TGD) Identity

- TGD individuals overall have:
  - Higher rates of autism-related traits
  - Greater likelihood of having been diagnosed with autism
  - Higher self-report rates of belief that they have undiagnosed autism
- A desire to be “of the opposite gender” more common among autistic vs. allistic individuals
- Despite many theories, the etiology of this relationship remains unclear. Potential explanations include resisting social norms and weakened sex differences.

## What is Gender-Affirming Care (GAC)?

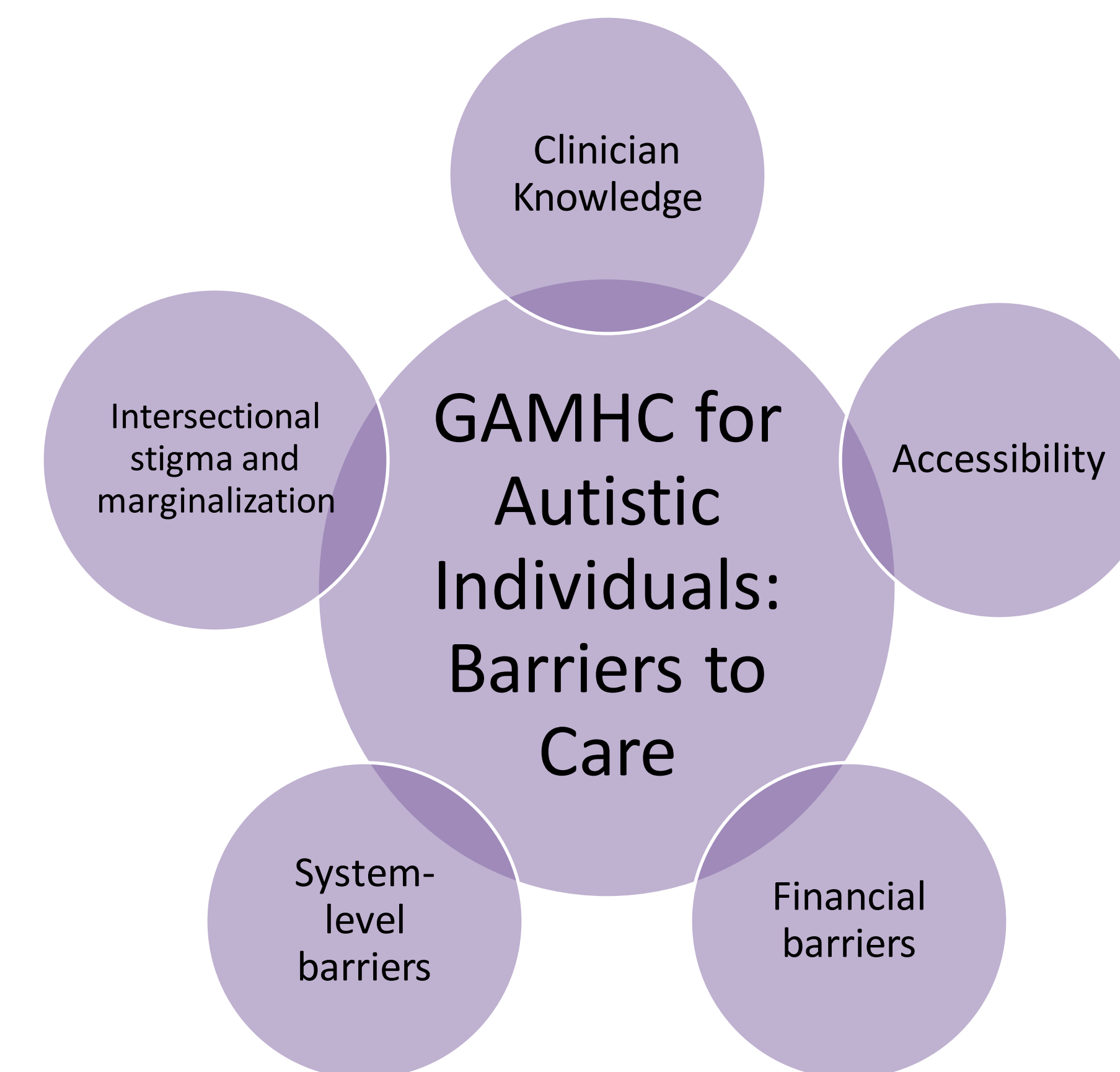
- Care that acknowledges gender identity and impact of gender identity on social, medical, legal, and/or psychological dimensions of one's life
- Broader than care specifically related to transitioning



## Minority Stress and TGD

- Higher rates of mental health difficulty found in minority populations are largely a result of stressors in the social environment
- Accessing GAC can moderate the impact of minority stress
- TGD people of color (POC) may experience
  - Increased stigma and microaggressions
  - Increased risk of psychological distress
- Difficulty in accessing GAC when compared to White TGD individuals

## Barriers to Gender-Affirming Mental Health Care (GAMHC)



## Purpose of Proposed Study

- To assess the perspectives and preferences of autistic TGD individuals who have sought and/or received mental health services

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the experiences and perspectives of autistic TGD individuals who have sought or received mental health care?
- What suggestions do these individuals have for mental health clinicians on how clinicians can best meet their needs?
- How might perspectives of autistic TGD individuals differ between POC and White individuals?

## Proposed Study: Participants

- Autistic traits
- At least 18 years of age
- Previously sought or currently seeking/receiving GAMHC
- I will be recruiting equal numbers of White and POC individuals

## Proposed Study: Measures

- Screening questionnaire
- Autism Quotient (AQ)
- Semi-structured interviews
- Member-checking survey

## Proposed Study: Procedure

- Participants will complete online screening questionnaire
- Individuals who fit study criteria will be invited to complete semi-structured interviews through zoom
- Interviews will be coded with NVivo using grounded theory
- After preliminary study conclusions are drawn, member-checking questionnaires will be sent to participants

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