Review

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Trust, Boundaries, and Ethics: Building the Therapeutic Relationship in Psychological Counseling

Güven, Sınırlar ve Etik: Psikolojik Danışmada Terapötik İlişkinin İnşası

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ABSTRACT

The therapeutic relationship is recognized as one of the fundamental components of the psychological counseling process, taking the form of a dynamic process shaped by trust, collaboration, and professional boundaries between the client and the counselor. Ethical principles serve as fundamental guidelines ensuring that this relationship is maintained within a professional framework that prioritizes the client's well-being. The purpose of this review study is to examine the role of the therapeutic relationship in the psychological counseling process within the context of trust, professional boundaries, ethical responsibilities, and ethical dilemmas. Additionally, the study addresses the professional development processes of psychological counselors and counseling candidates, the functions of the therapeutic relationship in clinical practice, the dynamics shaping the counseling process, and its role in the effectiveness of the therapeutic process. In this context, the national and international literature was reviewed; theoretical and applied studies on the therapeutic relationship, therapeutic alliance, boundary violations, ethical decision-making processes, and professional responsibilities were examined from a holistic perspective. The literature indicates that a trust-based therapeutic relationship supported by ethical principles enhances the effectiveness of the psychological counseling process, strengthens client satisfaction, and contributes to the sustainability of the therapeutic process. Furthermore, the maintenance of professional boundaries, the development of ethical sensitivity, and the promotion of multicultural competence are essential for the healthy continuation of the therapeutic relationship.

Keywords: Therapeutic relationship, ethics, border, psychological counseling, trust

ÖZ

Terapötik ilişki, danışan ile danışman arasında güven, iş birliği ve profesyonel sınırlar temelinde şekillenen dinamik bir süreç olarak psikolojik danışma sürecinin temel bileşenlerinden biri olarak kabul edilmektedir. Etik ilkeler ise bu ilişkinin danışanın yararını gözeten profesyonel bir çerçevede sürdürülmesini sağlayan temel rehberler arasında yer almaktadır. Bu derleme çalışmasının amacı, psikolojik danışma sürecinde terapötik ilişkinin rolünü; güven, profesyonel sınırlar, etik sorumluluklar ve etik ikilemler bağlamında incelemektir. Ayrıca çalışmada psikolojik danışmanların ve danışman adaylarının profesyonel duruş geliştirme süreçleri ile terapötik ilişkinin klinik uygulamalardaki işlevleri, danışma sürecini şekillendiren dinamikleri ve terapötik sürecin etkililiği üzerindeki rolü ele alınmıştır. Bu kapsamda ulusal ve uluslararası alanyazın değerlendirilmiş; terapötik ilişki, terapötik ittifak, sınır ihlalleri, etik karar verme süreçleri ve profesyonel sorumluluklara ilişkin kuramsal ve uygulamalı çalışmalar bütüncül bir perspektifle incelenmiştir. Literatür, etik ilkelerle desteklenen güvene dayalı bir terapötik ilişkinin psikolojik danışma sürecinin etkililiğini artırdığını, danışan memnuniyetini güçlendirdiğini ve terapötik sürecin sürdürülebilirliğine katkı sağladığını göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte profesyonel sınırların korunması, etik duyarlılığın geliştirilmesi ve çokkültürlü yeterliklerin desteklenmesi terapötik ilişkinin sağlıklı biçimde sürdürülebilmesi açısından kritik öneme sahiptir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Terapötik ilişki, etik, sınır, psikolojik danışma, güven

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Introduction

Although the effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship in the psychotherapy process remains a subject of debate in the literature, the healing role of the client-therapist relationship has long been recognized within the field of psychology (Winslade et al. 1997, Beutler and Harwood 2002, Overpelt et al. 2025). The varying findings in the literature regarding the impact of the quality of the client-therapist relationship on the therapeutic process indicate that debates regarding the nature and measurability of the therapeutic relationship continue, and that the concept has not yet been fully accepted in a well-defined manner (Greenhalgh and Heath 2010).

Based on years of research in psychology, Yalom (2012) defines the therapeutic alliance as a healing force. Establishing a genuine and sincere relationship between the client and the counselor is considered an absolutely essential prerequisite for an effective therapeutic process (Cunha et al. 2025). According to Rogers (1995), the therapeutic relationship is a professional relationship that develops between the client and the counselor, in which the client discovers their ability to use it for growth and change. Winnicott (1971) states that psychotherapy is a process involving "two people playing together," emphasizing that it is a "joint and simultaneous collaboration" between the two individuals. Similarly, Corey (2013) describes psychotherapy as a collaborative process in which the client and therapist work together to find solutions to concerns.

According to Rogers (1957), who emphasized that there are six fundamental conditions for change to occur in the therapeutic relationship, psychological contact, the client's situation, the counselor's consistency, unconditional acceptance, empathy, and communication are vital for change. Recent studies have similarly demonstrated that the therapeutic alliance strongly predicts the outcomes of psychological counseling (Centonze et al. 2023, Goldman and Goldstein 2023, Pugh et al. 2023).

In the psychological counseling process, the counselor's personal characteristics and skills are a key factor in determining the quality of the therapeutic relationship (Corey 2013). Research shows that the counselor's empathy, sincerity, respect, and sensitivity play a critical role in the counseling process (Rogers 1957, Norcross and Lambert 2018). Rather than limiting themselves to knowledge and theoretical competence and treating the process mechanically, counselors who adopt a sincere, reassuring, and ethically sensitive approach support the client's process of change (Wampold and Imel 2015, Martin-Cuellar et al. 2021). While the psychological counselor is sometimes viewed as the sole source of therapeutic power during the counseling process, the counselor's commitment to the client's best interests and well-being—in addition to therapeutic power—emerges as an ethical requirement throughout the counseling journey (Voltan-Acar 2012, İkiz and Totan 2014).

The therapeutic relationship is addressed within a descriptive framework in this review, and concepts such as trust, boundaries, and ethics are examined from a holistic perspective. In the literature, it is observed that these concepts are typically examined in separate frameworks (Corey 2008, Herlihy and Corey 2015, Franke and Riecher-Rössler 2021). It is believed that addressing the theoretical and practical dimensions of the interaction between these concepts would contribute to the field.

This study was conducted as a review of published research in the field to examine the importance of the therapeutic relationship in the psychological counseling process, the principles for establishing this relationship, how ethical principles guide the relationship with the client, and the ways in which psychological counselors can develop a professional stance within ethical boundaries. Review studies systematically examine and evaluate research conducted on a specific topic, presenting the accumulated body of knowledge in a comprehensive manner (Cronin et al. 2008). At this point, the relevant literature was examined from a broad perspective using English keywords such as "therapeutic relationship, psychotherapy ethics, trust in psychotherapy" and Turkish keywords such as "terapötik ilişki, terapötik ittifak, etik, psikolojik danışmada sınırlar, trust relationship," and has been examined from a broad perspective, with particular emphasis on studies published between 2000 and 2025; the fundamental

approaches, existing studies, and findings derived from these studies have been evaluated. Studies focusing on the therapeutic relationship, ethical principles, and professional boundaries during the process of inclusion in research were given priority. The research was conducted between January 2026 and February 2026.

Establishing a Therapeutic Relationship with the Client

The therapeutic relationship, which lies at the heart of the psychological counseling process, is regarded as one of the most powerful determinants of change and growth. Principles such as empathy, unconditional acceptance, and genuineness—as articulated by Rogers (1957)—facilitate change by fostering the client's sense of trust. According to Corey (2013), trust and the therapeutic relationship—which are the most fundamental means by which a client can open up—are common to all theories, regardless of the preferred school of thought or the techniques used. The following are concepts frequently emphasized in the literature regarding the therapeutic relationship.

Trust

Establishing a trusting relationship at the beginning of the therapeutic process is made possible by defining the principles from the very first session and providing information about the rules and methods to be used. In particular, providing an explanation regarding confidentiality, the counselor being well-prepared for the session, and having a firm grasp of the necessary information about the client—all while establishing an accepting rapport without adopting a judgmental attitude—are decisive factors in easily establishing this relationship (Rogers 1957, Corey 2016, Norcross and Lambert 2018).

Empathy

For psychological counselors to understand the needs and desires of their clients in the relationships they establish, they must be empathetic. The skill of empathy—defined as the ability to understand the client's inner world from their perspective and to reflect this effectively—is considered the most fundamental skill that must be possessed and developed for the therapeutic relationship. Indeed, the literature demonstrates that the therapist's level of empathy is significantly associated with psychotherapy outcomes (Elliott et al. 2011, Clark 2014, Nienhuis et al. 2018).

Collaboration

Therapeutic collaboration is the working relationship between the client and the counselor aimed at bringing about change (Goldstein 1998). Collaboration, which plays a significant role in the progression of the therapeutic process, is also a key determinant of therapeutic outcomes (Shedler 2010) and is therefore essential for facilitating change throughout the counseling process (Leonard et al. 2018). Research indicates that therapeutic collaboration is a strong predictor of psychotherapy outcomes (Remmers 2021). Therefore, encouraging the client's active participation, jointly setting goals, and jointly evaluating the process are crucial for strengthening the therapeutic alliance (Flückiger et al. 2018).

Respect

When a client recognizes the respect their counselor has for them, they realize they are valued and important, and feel accepted. Respecting the client as a free individual and showing respect for the life experiences they bring to the counseling setting—thereby making them feel important—means taking a genuine interest in them. The goals of showing genuine interest include building trust between the client and the counselor, helping the client feel more at ease, and creating a safe environment (Corey 2016, Voltan-Acar 2018). According to the American Psychological Association (APA) (2017), respecting the client's autonomy and right to make decisions, seeking the client's input, fostering collaboration, adopting a non-judgmental approach, and taking the client's values into account enhance the quality of the therapeutic relationship.

Ethical Boundaries and Boundary Violations

Ethics refers to the moral principles adopted to establish specific rules for proper conduct (Corey et al. 1998). The fundamental way to practice within the bounds of ethical guidelines in psychotherapy is to develop ethical awareness, which is not a one-time occurrence but requires ongoing commitment and is of great importance (Eberlein 1987, Whiteley 1997). Ethical dilemmas are defined as a situation in which a counselor is unable to decide which decision is more appropriate and beneficial for the client and experiences a conflict between the available options (Bond 2016). The prerequisite for dealing with ethical dilemmas is knowing ethical decision-making strategies and possessing ethical sensitivity and awareness (Pope and Vasquez 2016).

While there is a lack of extensive research in the literature on ethical boundaries and dilemmas, the existing studies primarily focus on confidentiality (Fennig et al. 2005, Jain and Roberts 2009, Akfert 2012, Çetinkaya-Yıldız 2019), as well as boundaries and interpersonal relationships related to sexual, emotional, or financial exploitation (Hardal 2011, McNulty et al. 2013, Black 2017, Franke and Riecher-Rössler 2021, Harrison et al. 2025) and professional competence (Akfert 2012, Camadan 2018).

Privacy

The principle of confidentiality in the counseling process has a long history and is regarded as one of the most fundamental ethical principles for maintaining the therapeutic relationship (APA 2017). The principle of confidentiality means, in essence, that the information, feelings, and experiences shared by the client in therapy must not be disclosed to third parties without the client's consent (Corey 2016). In addition to respecting the client's privacy, protecting information that emerges during the counseling process without the client's full consent is one of the counselor's fundamental responsibilities (Çetinkaya-Yıldız 2019). In a study conducted by Say (2021), it was found that when the boundaries of confidentiality are not discussed at the beginning of the therapeutic process—regardless of the type of therapy—the therapeutic relationship is compromised.

Many confidentiality issues can be prevented by properly obtaining written informed consent at the very beginning of therapy. In addition, it is important to clearly outline the boundaries of confidentiality to both child clients and parents, in order to protect the client's privacy while also providing parents with sufficient information throughout the process (Younggren and Harris 2008). The American Counseling Association (ACA) (2014) emphasizes that this not only protects the client's rights but also allows the therapeutic relationship to develop on a foundation of trust.

Bilateral Relations

This is an ethical issue that arises when a relationship involving a role distinct from the counseling relationship exists between the counselor and the client (Herlihy and Corey 2015). As stated by the Turkish Association of Counseling and Guidance, multiple roles that could compromise objectivity or lead to abuse or exploitation of the client must be avoided (Erdoğan and Aslan 2022). These dual relationships, which manifest in many different ways, involve a professional maintaining both a professional and a non-professional relationship with a client, or promising to maintain such a relationship in the future (Knapp and Fingerhut 2024).

Romantic relationships between a therapist and a client are considered highly detrimental both to the client and to professional ethics (McNulty et al. 2013). In such situations, taking prompt action, seeking supervision, seeking support from colleagues, or undergoing psychotherapy are seen as effective ways to resolve the issue (Pope and Vasquez 2016).

Professional Competence

Competence is a professional requirement that necessitates a psychological counselor operating solely within the boundaries of their field of training (Bond 2016). The absence of clear legal regulations regarding professional competence and other boundaries in Turkey can occasionally lead to challenges for mental health professionals (Aktürk et al. 2024). The Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards (ASPPB) (2015) defines professional competence as the functional application of the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values necessary to ensure the protection of the public in the practice of the profession. According to Ginzburg et al. (2012), competence is a concept that describes the extent to which a counselor is an expert in their field. This phenomenon is also one of the indicators of how effectively each counseling session will proceed (Ginzburg et al. 2012). In a study conducted by Arslan and Sommers-Flanagan (2018), it was observed that although counseling students have a high level of awareness regarding the field, they exhibit low awareness regarding the need to refrain from providing counseling on topics in which they are not competent.

Various models for ethical decision-making processes have been proposed by different researchers. One such model is the one developed by Corey, Corey, and Callanan (1998), which presents an eight-step roadmap. In this model:

1. Identifying the problem or dilemma,
2. Determining what the problem or potential problem is,
3. Review of relevant ethical guidelines,
4. Familiarity with applicable laws and regulations,
5. Accessing consulting services,
6. Identifying possible solutions,
7. Analyzing the outcomes of possible solutions,
8. Making the best decision.

Almost all models share many common features and similarities. What is important here is for all professionals working in the field of mental health to develop a clear understanding of what they should do when faced with ethical boundaries and dilemmas (Oktay and Oktay 2018).

Ways to Develop Professional Poise for Consultants

Growth and professional development in psychological counseling require a continuous, lifelong process. A study has shown that the development of a counselor's professional identity involves requirements such as adapting to expectations, trust and freedom, differentiation and integration, continuous learning, and working with clients (Moss et al. 2014). The literature indicates that the following topics, in particular, are addressed regarding the competence of psychological counselors:

Values and Beliefs

In the psychological counseling process, it is important for the counselor to confront their own value systems, beliefs, and biases to ensure that personal values are not imposed on the client (Bergin et al. 1996, Pope and Vasquez 2016). It can sometimes be challenging for psychological counselors to recognize their own values and resolve value conflicts with clients. It is believed that this situation often stems from counselors' lack of knowledge regarding how to openly address their own values, needs, and beliefs with clients, particularly when value and belief conflicts arise (Randall 2023). In particular, when counselors are sensitive to their clients' values, this helps reduce biases that may arise when working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds and strengthens the therapeutic relationship (Pedersen et al. 2015).

Continuous Development

An effective psychological counselor must be open to change and committed to self-improvement (Corey 2008). This is because the counseling process itself is a process of change and transformation. It is important for a competent psychological counselor to possess clinical skills, knowledge, and ethical awareness (Hackney and Cormier 2008). When considering the stages of professional development for psychological counselors, it is evident that professional requirements differ at each stage (Rønnestad et al. 2025). A study found that psychological counselors spend significantly less time on their career development compared to their personal-social and academic development (Anctil et al. 2012). A key common thread in the literature on the professional development of psychological counselors is the emphasis placed on supervision training. Supervision and mentoring are seen as important elements in the professional development process of licensed psychological counselors, as they foster change, growth, and progress and strengthen professional careers (Litherland et al. 2023).

Fees

The Turkish Association of Psychological Counseling and Guidance (Türk-PDR) states in its code of ethics that the issue of fees in the psychological counseling process must be addressed in accordance with the following principles (Türk PDR Derneği 2021).

1. The counselor should refer individuals who have difficulty paying to social welfare or public institutions that offer similar services free of charge or at a lower cost.
2. When determining fees, the financial circumstances of clients and the going rate for such services in the local area should be used as criteria.
3. The counselor should not accept goods, engage in barter, or enter into an agreement to receive a service in exchange for the services provided.

The fee, clearly established at the outset of the process, is not merely a monetary payment; it also conveys the message that the client is receiving professional assistance and that the counselor is not in the role of a caregiver (Lemma 2003).

Ethical Awareness

Ethics serves as a guiding principle that a psychological counselor must internalize and carefully uphold at every stage of the counseling process (Akfert 2012). However, the need for counselors to assess the most appropriate course of action regarding the client in such situations can give rise to ethical dilemmas. Ethical decision-making models can be utilized to resolve these ethical dilemmas (Erdoğan and Aslan 2022). A study has shown that the issues involving the most ethical dilemmas among psychological counselors are confidentiality and competence (İkiz et al. 2017). Ethical awareness—which reflects the counselor's awareness of professional standards and their own values and beliefs—ensures that the counselor is more mindful of respecting the client's rights, autonomy, and confidentiality (Kitchener 1984, Remley and Herlihy 2014).

Supervision

Supervision refers to the process by which a more experienced and knowledgeable professional assists a less experienced individual to ensure professional competence and enable the delivery of better services (Horrock and Smaby 2006). Supervision is essential for a psychological counselor to develop a professional identity (Çetinkaya and Karaırmak 2012). Just as the therapeutic relationship is central to the client's change, the supervision relationship can be viewed as a phenomenon central to the professional development of the person receiving supervision (Meydan and Koçyiğit-Özyiğit 2016). In a study that examined the views of counseling candidates undergoing supervision training in Turkey as a case study, it was found that the participants reported that receiving supervision improved their communication and empathy skills, contributed to their therapeutic skills, and provided them with professional experience (Erbaş et al. 2020). The supervision process, which should be based on trust, collaboration, and open

communication, must comply with organizational and ethical standards and be focused on cultural sensitivity and professional development (Kangos et al. 2018).

Boundary Awareness

Behaviors such as non-harming, compassion, and benevolence are fundamental concepts of the therapist-client relationship in therapeutic settings. However, a counselor's lack of professionalism, undesirable personality traits, and emotional vulnerability can pave the way for various boundary violations (Aravind et al. 2012). In addition to prioritizing the client's well-being, the counselor may sometimes face challenges in striking a balance between their own values and life experiences and ethical guidelines when making decisions about how best to assist the client. It is important to recognize that any relationship that exploits or harms the client constitutes a breach of boundaries and is unethical (Corey 2016). At the same time, knowing how to manage any emotions that might negatively impact the therapeutic relationship with the client requires a professional demeanor. (Amaglo 2022). This awareness prevents the counselor from projecting their personal values, beliefs, or emotional processes into the therapeutic process in an inappropriate manner, thereby supporting the client's autonomy and strengthening the therapeutic alliance (Zur 2007).

Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity involves understanding all of the client's differences such as their ethnic background, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, and socioeconomic status and conducting psychotherapy interventions within this context (Sue et al. 2015). Research shows that it is important for psychological counselors to demonstrate cultural sensitivity when working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds (Güçlücan 2016). A study conducted with Black students indicates that counselors' perceptions are influenced not only by the counselor's race but also by their cultural sensitivity. The findings of the study indicate that counselors' development of cultural competence is vital for multicultural counseling practices (Pomales et al. 1986). Years later, in 2025, the results of another study also showed that cultural sensitivity remains an issue in psychological counseling. The findings of this study, conducted by Su-Kubricht and colleagues (2025) with Asian clients, reveal that the reasons for distrust of counselors include collectivist traits such as prioritizing family and preserving reputation, as well as cultural differences in communication styles and therapeutic processes. Cultural sensitivity is strongly linked to therapeutic effectiveness and is an integral part of an ethical and healthy psychological counseling process (Hays 2008).

Discussion

In psychological counseling, the therapeutic relationship is a process composed of many components, including empathy, ethical principles, and professional boundaries, in addition to the techniques used (Norcross and Lambert 2018). According to Rogers (1957), the principles of empathy, unconditional acceptance, and genuineness are the most fundamental elements in establishing a trust-based connection with the client and creating a healing atmosphere. The results of a psychotherapy meta-analysis—based on 295 studies published between 1978 and 2017 that examined the relationship between the therapeutic alliance and client recovery—reveal that the therapeutic relationship is moderately associated with treatment outcomes in face-to-face psychological counseling, whereas it is less effective in internet-based therapies involving less human interaction (Flückiger et al. 2018). In their study, Baier and colleagues (2020) demonstrate that clients respond more positively to the process when the therapeutic relationship is strong, and their findings indicate that the therapeutic alliance plays a critical role not only at the beginning of the counseling process but at every stage. These findings demonstrate that the art of building a relationship with a client must be grounded in human values and ethical principles as much as in technical knowledge.

The literature emphasizes that adherence to ethical guidelines is one of the fundamental sources that ensures the reliability and sustainability of the counseling process (Corey et al. 1998, ACA 2014, Herlihy and Corey 2014). The ACA (2014) emphasizes that one of the fundamental responsibilities of a psychological counselor is to prevent harm to the client and to promote the client's well-being. At this point, factors such as confidentiality, respect, and sensitivity to cultural values come to the fore (Herlihy and Corey 2014). In their study, Gutheil and Brodsky (2008) emphasize that boundary violations—particularly in situations involving emotional entanglements or breaches of confidentiality—can negatively impact the client's healing process. Research indicates that maintaining ethical sensitivity during the counseling process is one of the fundamental building blocks that protects the client.

Ethical decision-making processes in clinical psychiatry and mental health practice often give rise to complex and multifaceted situations (APA 2017, Knapp et al. 2026). The clinician may sometimes have to choose between the client's autonomy and their safety, or between the principle of confidentiality and legal responsibilities. In the studies examined within the scope of this research, it is observed that ethical dilemmas are primarily addressed in terms of confidentiality, professional conduct, competence, and therapeutic relationships. A study conducted with children and adolescents shows that clients expect a clear and explicit explanation regarding the boundaries of confidentiality and that they have reservations about confidentiality. It is emphasized that clearly discussing these boundaries—and even addressing situations where these boundaries may be crossed—may require repeated exploration within the context of the client's cognitive and emotional capacity, all while avoiding ethical dilemmas (Kafka et al. 2024). It is believed that in-service training and professional support regarding ethical dilemmas can ensure the continuity of psychological counselors' professional development (Camadan 2018). Ethical sensitivity requires a decision-making process that integrates theoretical knowledge with clinical experience and professional judgment (Knapp and Fingerhut 2024). In this context, the proper management of ethical dilemmas not only safeguards the client's best interests but also reinforces the social credibility of professions providing mental health services.

Another aspect of the research is the development of professional identity among psychological counselors. The study by Gibson, Dollarhide, and Moss (2010) demonstrates that novice counselors must take on transformative roles in the development of their professional identity; it also highlights that the integration of personal values with professional roles is critical for professional success. Similarly, the longitudinal study by Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) shows that therapists' professional development processes continue throughout their careers and that factors such as supervision, mentoring, and peer support have a profound impact on this process.

For psychological counselors, establishing a professional demeanor early on is of critical importance not only in terms of personal competence but also in terms of ethical consistency and professional credibility. Dollarhide and Miller (2006) emphasize that strengthening school counselors' professional identities during the supervision process enhances their ability to manage the ethical dilemmas they will face in the future. A similar study by Chu, Wippold, and Becker (2022) demonstrates that multicultural counseling competencies and counseling candidates' development of sensitivity to diverse cultural identities enhance both client satisfaction and the effectiveness of the therapeutic process.

A review of the current literature reveals that the therapeutic relationship is not merely a collection of technical interventions, but rather a multidimensional structure that emerges from the interaction of elements such as trust, professional boundaries, and ethics (Norcross and Lambert 2018, Cunha et al. 2025). While trust helps build a relationship between the client and the counselor within healthy boundaries, professional boundaries ensure that the ethical and professional framework of the therapeutic relationship is established (Knapp et al. 2026). Ethical principles, meanwhile, serve as a guide that ensures the relationship proceeds within a framework that prioritizes the client's best interests (Franke and Riecher-Rössler 2021). It is important to view all these concepts not as independent of one another, but as elements that reinforce and support one another.

A large portion of the studies included in the research are based on qualitative or theoretical data, while quantitative and experimental data are limited. For this reason, the findings presented offer an interpretive

framework based primarily on a synthesis of the existing literature. Although various theoretical approaches have been incorporated in the discussion of concepts such as the therapeutic relationship, ethical boundaries, and professional stance, no comprehensive and comparative analysis encompassing all schools of psychotherapy has been conducted. This has resulted in certain differences in approach being addressed only to a limited extent. Finally, although this study was prepared based on national and international literature, there is a possibility that some relevant studies may have been excluded due to limited access to publications in specific databases and languages. This situation partially limits the generalizability of the findings.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that professional boundaries, trust, and ethical principles form an important and holistic framework for the client-therapist relationship. In this regard, this review, which aims to evaluate these concepts within a holistic framework, is considered to make a conceptual contribution to the field in terms of the continuity of the therapeutic relationship. A review of the literature suggests that the art of establishing a relationship with the client and the therapeutic alliance is a synthesis of ethical sensitivity, professional conduct, and an empathetic approach. The proper management of ethical dilemmas is one of the most fundamental elements in safeguarding the client's best interests and ensuring the profession's credibility. For psychological counselors and aspiring counselors, this field is indispensable for the development of their professional identity. It is critically important—both for the well-being of clients and the sustainability of the profession—that they develop not only technical knowledge but also ethical sensitivity, professional instincts, and cultural competence.

Future research examining the impact of the therapeutic alliance, cultural sensitivity, and ethical awareness on the experiences of clients and counselors-particularly within the context of different demographic groups and long-term processes-could make significant contributions to the literature. In addition, increasing the number of experimental and longitudinal studies on the supervision experiences of psychological counselors and counseling candidates could contribute to a more comprehensive assessment of clients' perceptions regarding trust, professional boundaries, fees, and ethical practices during the therapeutic process. To better understand the role of the therapeutic relationship in clinical practice, it is important that future studies be supported by empirical research using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches. It is believed that studies examining the impact of trust, therapeutic boundaries, and ethical decision-making processes on client outcomes will strengthen both the theoretical and practical aspects of the literature.

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