

Promoting Healthy Sexuality Across the Domain of Occupational Therapy

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BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

Sexuality is a multifaceted construct that spans occupation, client factors, and context (WHO, 2006). Despite being well-positioned to address components of sexuality in clinical practice, occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) and students rarely get enough training to do so competently (Eglseder, Webb, & Rennie, 2018; Mc Grath & Sakellariou, 2016).

The purpose of this capstone project was to improve the practice of addressing sexuality through occupational therapy. To achieve this, the project was comprised of two components, with each component focusing on a distinct population that often experiences sexual health disparities.

- Component 1: Develop personal clinical skills by completing **advanced clinical practice** rotation in setting that provides occupational therapy for services regarding sexuality.
- Component 2: Educate OTPs on **LGBTQ-inclusive practice** by developing online continuing education course.

Service members experience higher rates of sexual dysfunction, and healthcare providers who serve military members often do not address sexual health, especially if the service member is gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Rerucha, Runser, Ee, & Hersey, 2018; Surís, Link-Malcolm, Chard, Ahn, & North, 2013).

Members of the LGBTQ community experience higher rates of health disparities largely attributed to negative experiences and fear of discrimination from healthcare professionals, which is associated with an underutilization of healthcare services (Casey et al., 2019; Institute of Medicine, 2011; James et al., 2016).

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Person-Environment-Occupation

The primary theory guiding the development of this project was the Person-Environment-Occupational Model of Occupational Performance (PEO; Law et al., 1996). This model considers how occupational performance is composed of the interaction between the person, the environment, and the occupation being performed.

Sexuality and Occupational Therapy

Sexual activity is considered an activity of daily living and a component of social participation (AOTA, 2014). Sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) can both be determinants of how people engage in certain occupations and should be considered by OTPs to truly be considered holistic practice (McRae, 2013; West & Zimmer, 1987).

IMPLICATIONS FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Occupational therapy is well positioned to address sexuality and OTPs should promote education regarding how sexuality intersects with many aspects of the domain of occupational therapy. The following actions could promote better understanding throughout the profession:

Students

- Advocate for sexuality to be included in curriculum
- Include sexuality in self-directed assignments and capstone projects
- Join organizations like COTAD or GLMA that promote cultural sensitivity and diversity

Clinicians

- Include SOGI as standard intake questions for all clients
- Adopt LGBTQ-inclusive practice and train all staff
- Include SOGI in electronic health record
- Seek continuing education opportunities about sexuality

Educators

- Include sexuality in curriculum and demonstrate influence across the domain
- Include LGBTQ people in case studies and discussions on social influences on health
- Educate on SOGI data management best-practices
- Complete Safe Zone training

METHODS

Advanced Clinical Practice

- Completed 8 week clinical rotation with OTP that works with service members and specializes in sexual activity
- Observed sexual health professionals from other disciplines
- Educated OTPs how to better address sex and intimacy with clients
- Developed case study on client

Educate OTPs on LGBTQ-Inclusive Practice

- Reviewed literature and best-practice Completed similar interdisciplinary trainings
- Interviewed health professionals with experience in LGBTQ health education
- Collaborated with AOTA-approved continuing education provider
- Developed and recorded presentation
- Created materials to promote course

RESULTS

All planned activities were completed, and all objectives were met. This project was successful in promoting healthy sexuality through occupational therapy.

Advanced Clinical Practice

- Managed full case load by end of rotation, including all evaluations, interventions, and documentation
- Strengthened interdisciplinary clinical relationships
- Improved OTPs understanding of addressing sexual activity in different settings

Educate OTPs on LGBTQ-Inclusive Practice

- Created evidence-informed training using best practice resources

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