

Hear Us Out: The Lived Experiences of Non-White OT Students Being Educated With Predominantly White Peers

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According to the Racial Reports for the 2019-2020 School Year AOTA Survey, 73% and 77% of doctorate and master's students, respectively, identified as non-Hispanic White (Harvison, 2021). This statistic highlights that the current racial and ethnic make-up of OT students does align with America's population (Brown et al., 2021, Wilbur, et al., 2020). In order to uplift the voices of these non-White students, this qualitative study seeks to answer the question: What are the lived experiences of non-White OT students while being educated in programs with predominantly White students? This study utilized a phenomenological qualitative methodology. Following IRB approval, five participants who are currently enrolled in an entry level OT program were recruited from COTAD Instagram accounts and CommunOT. Participants attended OT programs in various US regions; three participants identified as Black, one as Bengali American, and one as Latinx. Several semi-structured interviews and participant checks took place virtually over the course of 3-4 hours. Videos from each interview were recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted through the identification of bins and categories, and subsequently theme statements. Three main themes emerged: 1. As a student of color, it is a meaningful experience to find people who look like me, 2. Being in a classroom of predominantly White students involves navigating preconceived notions from White peers and faculty, as well as personally internalized preconceptions, and 3. As a non-White student, there is a commitment to making change, however there must also be active support from White peers and institutions. Uplifting the lived experiences of these five non-White OT students is an initial step towards building awareness to create more inclusive OT programs. They provide insight into the unique challenges experienced in OT school and outline suggestions for change in our programs.

References

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