



# Discovering Barriers to Diversity in Physical Therapy

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## Introduction/Background:

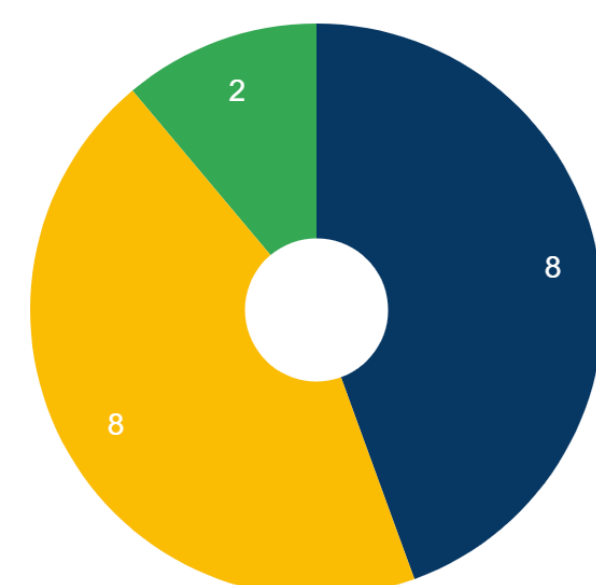
- APTA defines diversity: “the racial and ethnic populations that are underrepresented in physical therapy education relative to their numbers in the general population, as well as individuals from geographically underrepresented areas, lower economic strata, and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds”<sup>1</sup>
- 9.7% of DPT students identified as URM nationally.<sup>2</sup>
- In Minnesota, 96.75% of persons with PT licenses self-identify as White.<sup>3</sup>
- This study is the directive of the MNPTA

## Methods:

- Participants were PT/PTA professionals or students from Minnesota.
- Average Age: 34.17 ± STD 12.47
- Four 120 minute focus groups moderated by a PI.
- Discussed successes, barriers, and experiences encountered throughout their professional, educational, and personal life.
- Audio was de-identified, transcribed, cleaned, and coded line by line into NVIVO 12 (QSR International Pty Ltd, Victoria, Australia) software.

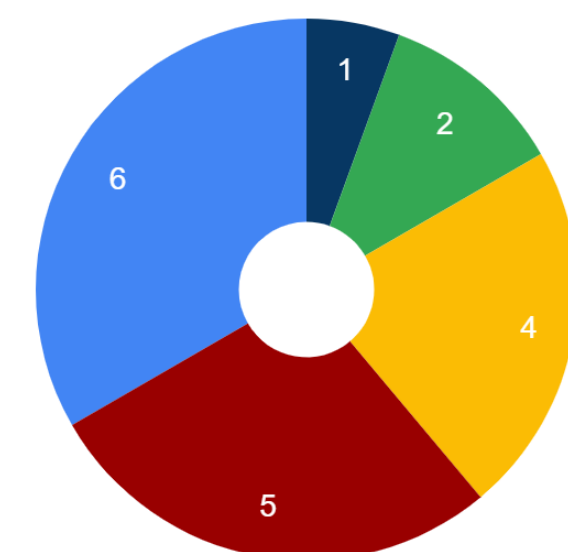
## Results:

Professional Designation of Participants



● PT (44.4%) ● SPT (44.4%) ● PTA (11.1%)

Race Distribution of Participants



● American Indian (5.6%) ● Mixed (11.1%)  
● African American (22.2%) ● Latino (27.8%) ● Asian (33.3%)

## Primary Themes with Illustrative Quotes from Focus Groups

<b>Barriers</b>	“...I was told early on that I wasn’t going to college from my teacher...in school there were opportunities to take...higher level courses even going to local colleges, but I was not even given the option to even be a part of that...”
<b>Diversity</b>	“And unless you see someone who looks like you doing what it is, then you can’t imagine it either.”
<b>Grit</b>	“...I vacillate between...not feeling sorry for myself and knowing...we are at a disadvantage but also having that fire like I’m gonna show you...”
<b>Divine Intervention</b>	“I’m a true believer that...things happen for a reason and...one of my dad’s friends says there are two...most important days in your...life, the day you’re born and the day you figure out why you know. I’m supposed to be a PT.”
<b>Suggestions to Improve Diversity</b>	“I didn’t have much access to healthcare (especially PT) when I was younger...therefore, there was not a lot of guidance on what there was out there to pursue.”

## Conclusions:

- Primary Themes from the focus groups were: Barriers, Diversity, Grit, Divine Intervention, and Suggestions to Improve Diversity.
- Subthemes were: Societal Challenges, Academic Experiences/Challenges, Financial Challenges, Diversity Challenges/Struggles, Awareness of Diversity, Need for Diversity in PT, Outreach, Mentorship, and Exposure.
- Focus group research provided more in-depth perspectives regarding diversity within the physical therapy profession.

## Implications:

- Recommend early and ongoing mentorship and outreach initiatives beginning in primary school to increase awareness of the profession.
- Sub-themes within this study will hopefully assist the MNPTA to create effective programs for URM individuals pursuing the PT/PTA profession.
- Address health disparities that limit URM from accessing physical therapy services.
- Future research: to continue this study design with participants from the LGBTQ+ community and the socioeconomically and educationally disadvantaged population.

## Acknowledgements:

- MNPTA
- MN PT/PTA schools
- URM focus group participants

## References:

1. Definition of Underrepresented Minority Populations in Physical Therapy Education. APTA, 2014.
2. Moerchen V, Williams-York B, Ross LJ, et al. Purposeful Recruitment Strategies to Increase Diversity in Physical Therapist Education. J Phys Ther Educ. 2018;32(3):209-217.
3. Phillips JM, Malone B. Increasing Racial/Ethnic Diversity in Nursing to Reduce Health Disparities and Achieve Health Equity. Public Health Rep. 2014;129(1\_suppl2):45-50.