

Policies, Practices, and Pedagogies: A Qualitative Study of LGBTQ+ Representation in the Physical Therapy Profession

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Introduction:

- APTA collects demographic data regarding racial diversity, but ignores gender and sexual diversity¹
- In the U.S., 4.5% of adults identified as LGBTQ+²
- In Minnesota, 4.1% of adults identified as LGBTQ+²

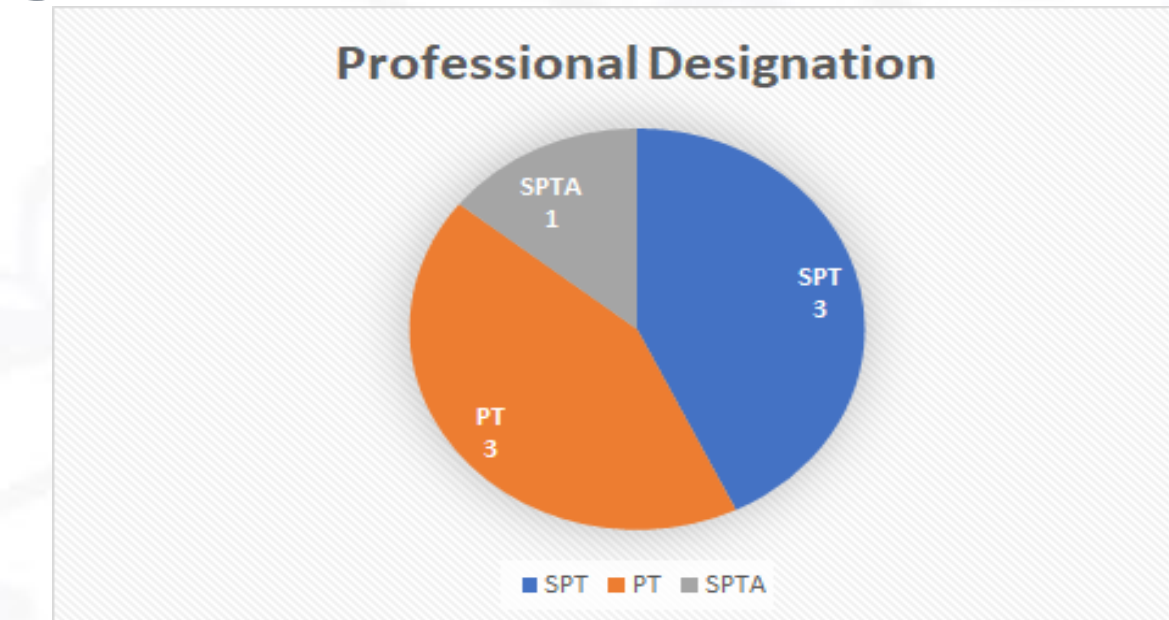
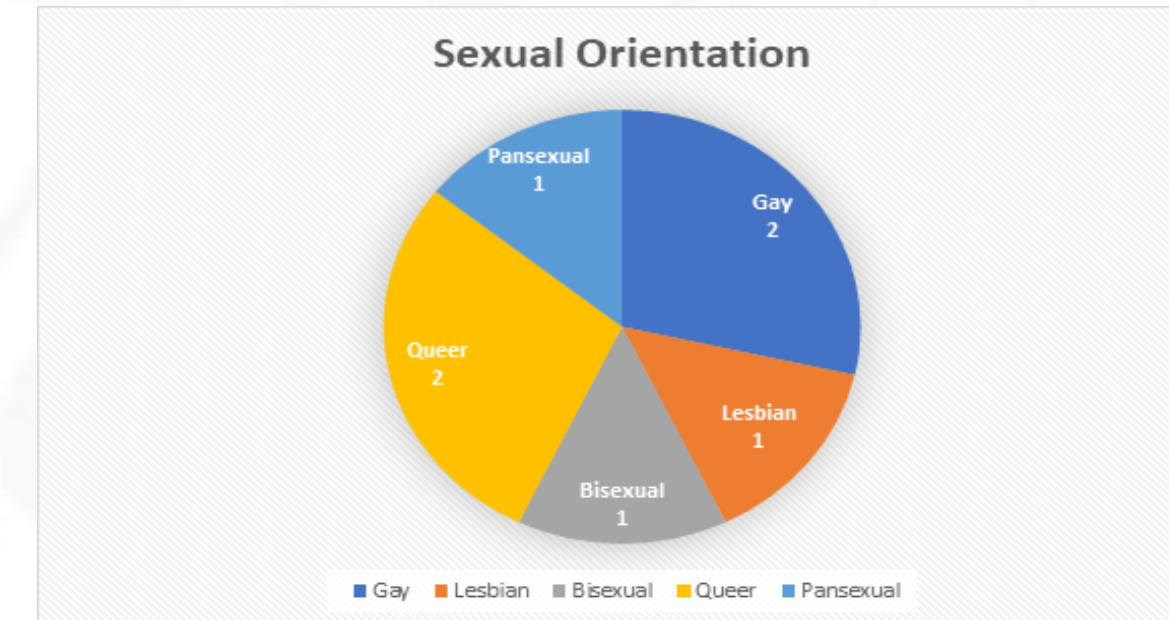
Objective:

- Gain an improved understanding of the shared experiences and the potential underlying barriers that practicing and student PTs and PTAs from gender/sexual minorities in Minnesota encounter
- Results of the study will be used to assist a MNPTA task force to improve diversity in PT/PTA education and practice in Minnesota

Methods:

- The seven participants were practicing PT/PTAs or students from Minnesota
- Recruitment through flyer via email and distributed at MNPTA educational events, or personally invited by PI
- 90 minute online focus groups moderated by a PI.
- Discussed choice of career path, perceived barriers, shared life experiences, and thoughts of improving LGBTQ+ acceptances and equality.
- Groups were audio recorded, de-identified, transcribed, cleaned and then imported into NVIVO 12 (QSR International Pty Ltd, Victoria, Australia) software and coded.

Results:



Major Theme	Example
Belonging	<p>“I felt pretty distant as soon as I got into high school. It felt that way even more so than middle school. I didn't get along with most people and couldn't identify with them.”</p> <p>“Upon arriving at college... just being part of seeing more queer people, having more queer kind of icons or role models or people, made me feel like I could breathe a little bit and be myself growing up.”</p>
PT/ PTA School	<p>“Diversity is kind of huge for creating a welcoming climate. And I don't know about other PT programs in particular, but in general PT programs do a terrible job of all kinds of [diversity] recruitment.”</p> <p>“So I think when we think about gender diversity in positions of leadership, it's having a place at the table where those higher-level decisions are being made. Because of someone's lived experience, they will hold that community at the center of those experiences and those choices.”</p>
PT Clinic	<p>“[In the clinic], I personally have been in many, many, situations where I am the token. That puts a lot of undue stress on me. It puts all LGBTQ+ representation on me. I'm a certain personality that could work with that here and there, but it becomes exhausting. And when you don't see yourself in other people, it becomes very isolating.”</p> <p>“So I think when we think about gender diversity in positions of leadership, it's having a place at the table where those higher-level decisions are being made. Because of someone's lived experience, they will hold that community at the center of those experiences and those choices.”</p>
Support	<p>“My father was a very strong advocate that his family was not going to ‘fall cards’, whatever that meant. So, he stood by me. “I don't understand that, but you're my daughter, so I'm not going away.” I jokingly say that my father was more upset with me telling him that I was vegetarian.”</p> <p>“[The reaction from] my dad was a little different. He has heavier expectations, and he's more traditional and everything like that . . . there was one night when my sister was over and we were talking about sexuality and gender and my dad was out in the living room watching a movie..I went out and I said “Hey dad, you know, I just have something that I want to tell you”. . . And I just said, “I like guys and girls. I just wanted to let you know”. He didn't really respond. He didn't really acknowledge it very much. He was not really engaging. And now I just feel I can't go back to the topic. That was maybe five or six years ago.”</p>

Conclusion:

- Participants shared similar experiences across multiple aspects of their lives and encountered similar barriers and challenges as student and practicing PT's/PTA's in Minnesota.
- Future research should be conducted to explore the solutions proposed by participants and determine if there are other common major themes that exist

Clinical Relevance:

- Important to understand barriers that LGBTQ+ PT's/PTA's face in order to address the health disparities that exist in the Physical Therapy profession in Minnesota.³
- Create an environment that is more inclusive and more representative of the growing diversity that exists in physical therapy by putting potential solutions into action
- Important to have PTs who are educated on the health disparities that exist in the LGBTQ+ and uniquely understand their patient's needs

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- Dr. Kristin Lefebvre
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References:

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2. Harrison S. Counting LGBT Communities: SAGE and the 2020 Census. SAGE. Published February 14, 2020.
3. Hill F., Condran C., Pluss A., Fons L., and Bell K. (2019). *Introduction to LGBTQ+ Competency Handbook for Physical Therapy*. PT Proud