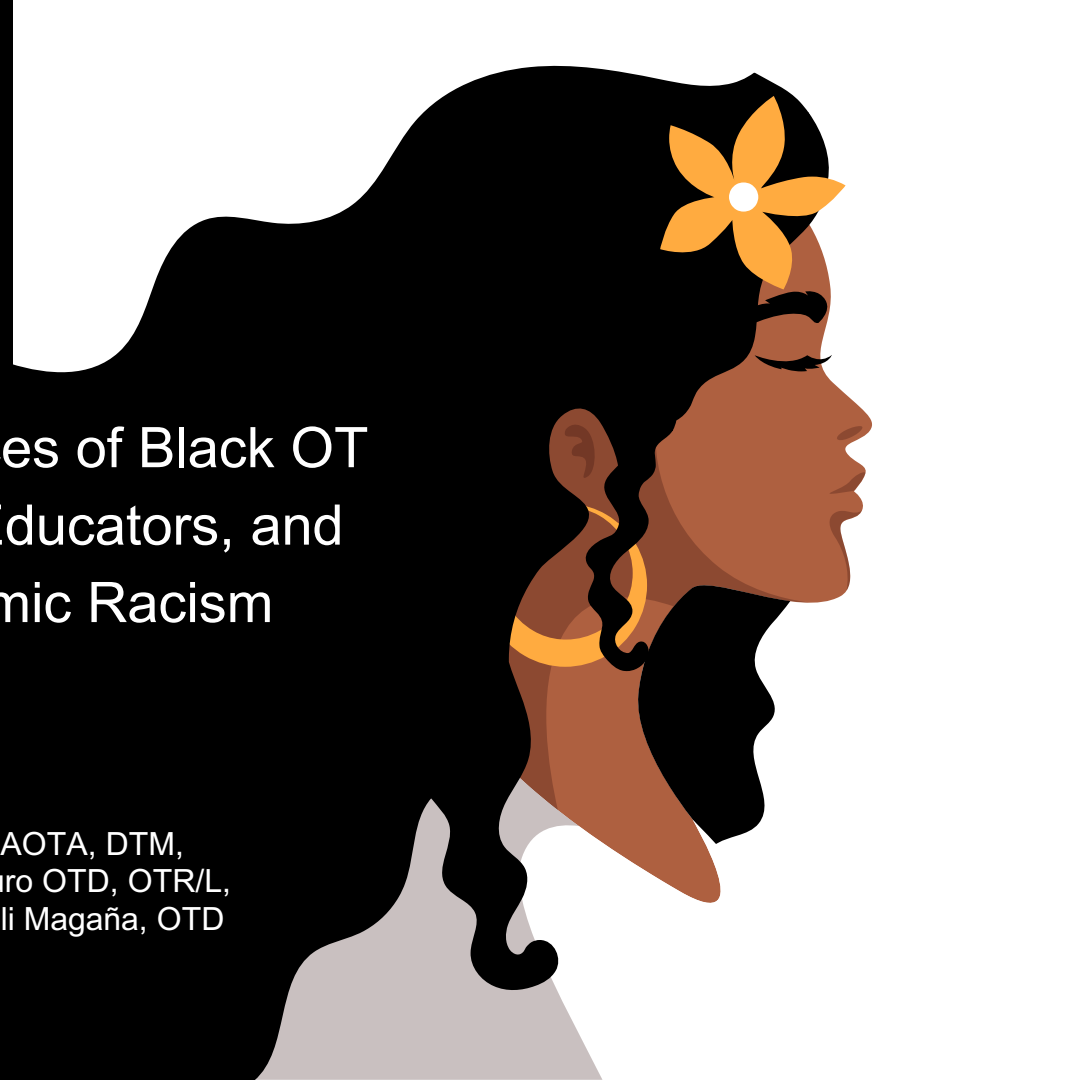


Breaking the Silence: Voices of Black OT Students, Practitioners, Educators, and Leaders Facing Systemic Racism

Nardia Aldridge, Ph.D., OTR/L, FAOTA, DTM,
Chloe Hill MOT, OTR/L, Kyrah Maduro OTD, OTR/L,
Lydia Armand, OTD, OTR/L & Dayeli Magaña, OTD



Objectives

01

Explore and analyze the lived experiences of systemic racism among Black occupational therapy students, clinicians, educators, and leaders to deepen understanding of its impact on occupational engagement, identity, and well-being.

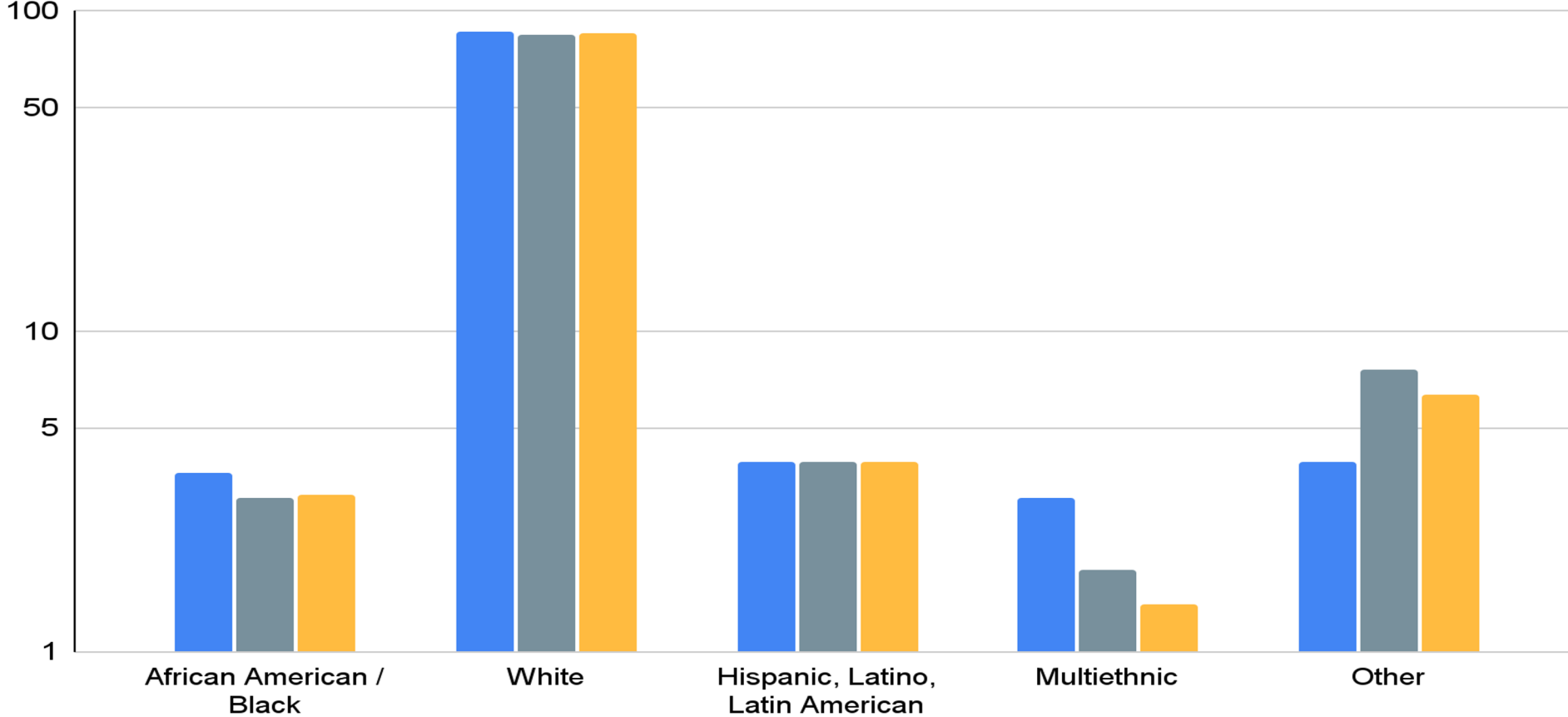
02

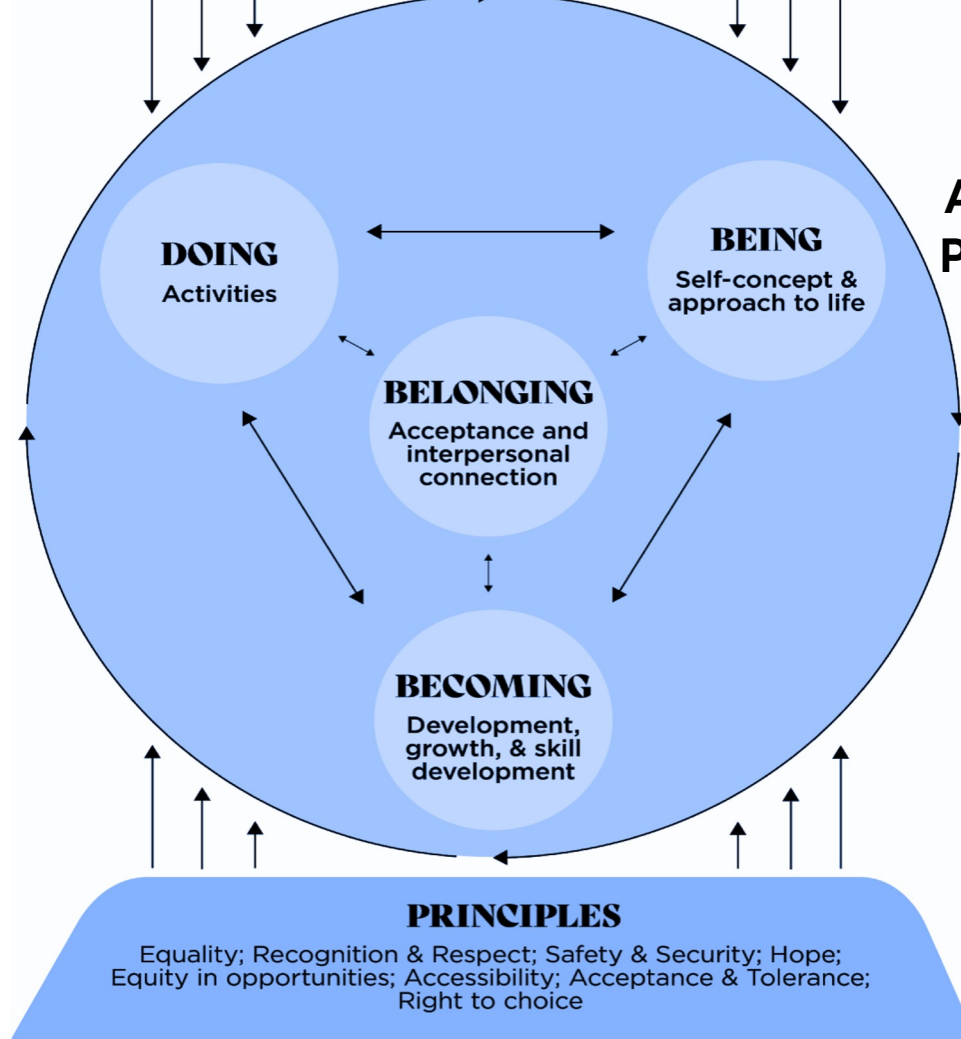
Identify and evaluate strategies and interventions recommended by Black OT community members that effectively address systemic racism, enhance professional development, and promote occupational justice within occupational therapy education and practice.



■ OT 2023 ■ OT 2018 ■ OT 2014

Race Percentages Adapted from AOTA 2023 Workforce & Compensation Survey





Ann Wilcock's Occupational Perspective of Health (OPH)

(Wilcock & Hocking, 2015)



Demographic Data

Students

Variables		Frequency	
Sex	Male	1	
	Female	14	
Age	22-25	9	
	26-30	5	
	30+	1	
Region	Midwest	5	
	Northeast	3	
	Southeast	4	
	Southwest	1	
	West	2	

Practitioners

Variables		Frequency
Sex	Male	2
	Female	7
Age	22-25	0
	26-30	5
	30+	4
Region	Midwest	0
	Northeast	0
	Southeast	8
	Southwest	1
	West	0

Educators

Variables		Frequency
Sex	Male	7
	Female	51
Age	20-30	1
	31-40	16
	41-50	26
	51-60	11
	60+	4
Region	Midwest	5
	Northeast	19
	Southeast	17
	Southwest	15
	West	2

Code/Theme	Students	Practitioners (COTA/OTR)	Educators/Leaders
Lack of Representation (Isolation, “Only One”)	Reduced belonging	Underrepresentation in workplaces	Conditional inclusion in academia
Microaggressions & Systemic Racism	Classroom climate	Fieldwork & workplace racism	Institutional discrimination
Overworked and Undervalued- (Unequal Opportunities)	Academic validation concerns	Questioned expertise	Heightened scrutiny for advancement
Emotional Labor & Identity Negotiation	Conformity	Code switching, documentation	Masking, self monitoring
Mentorship as Protection (Black Gravitation)	Need for role models	“Outlets of representation”	External networks as safe spaces
“Black Tax” vs Tokenism (Pressure to Represent)	“Diversity Person”	Pressure to educate and professionally manage racist clients	Being the change and creating safe spaces
Psychological and Career Impact	Anxiety, low retention	Emotional exhaustion, leaving the profession	Burnout, leaving academia

Lack of Representation Across the Career Continuum

Student

“Because we do not have Black faculty, we do not feel safe going to our faculty and being heard...”(P.15)

“Do you know what it feels like to be the only Black person in the whole class? I hate when they say, ‘Pick a partner, pick a group, or pick someone,’ and I look around, and nobody wants to pick me...” (P.11)

Practitioner

“I’m the only Black OT there.”
(P.8, COTA)

“No Black OT’s, there is one Hispanic OT and she is the owner of the company. The rest of the OTs are all white.”
(P. 2, OTR)

Educator/Leader

“You know, there’s a lot of different professions, where you can go through the whole school year and never see yourself. Including our profession. You’ll never see that one Black professor.” (P. 2)



Mentorship Across the Career Continuum

Black Gravitates to Black

Student

“Building a relationship with another Black student helped me cope... we supported each other through difficult times.” (P. 6)

Practitioner

“She's actually my former CI, She'll call, and she'll check up...you can still feel the cohesiveness, and that we are a team, even though we don't necessarily see each other.” (P. 6-COTA)

“I was like WOW! And then we did breakout groups, and everyone was talking about their experiences with racism, and I was like, oh, my gosh! I'm not by myself. It was the best feeling ever” (P. 9-COTA)

Educator/Leader

“There are those reminders that I am where I need to be, and being a person in education because I didn't have someone else that I could look up to when I was in OT school. There weren't any other Black faculty. So when I went through my own challenges in OT school, I didn't have anyone to fight for me or advocate for me, and that cost greatly. So being able to be in that position for others, being able to be at the table where there are decisions being made that would open up doors of opportunities for others to enter the profession that may not otherwise have known, that is powerful. And that is what keeps me going.” (P. 13)



Pressure to Represent Across the Career Continuum

Black Tax vs Tokenism

Student

"I do believe in being the change that you wish to see and whatever I can do under my own power here and once I graduate, to make that change. I'll do it. It is a burden, but you know it's a burden I carry willingly." (P.1)

"They volunteer me because 'I am Diversity,' but [me being] a certain color does not mean that I want to be your point person for everything that revolves around race, equality, and inclusion"(P.6)

Practitioner

"There's so many Black and Brown kids that don't qualify for services, and it's at the hands of the evaluator. I'm just limited to how much I can do. The most I can do at times [as a COTA], is advocate sometimes." (P. 8-COTA)

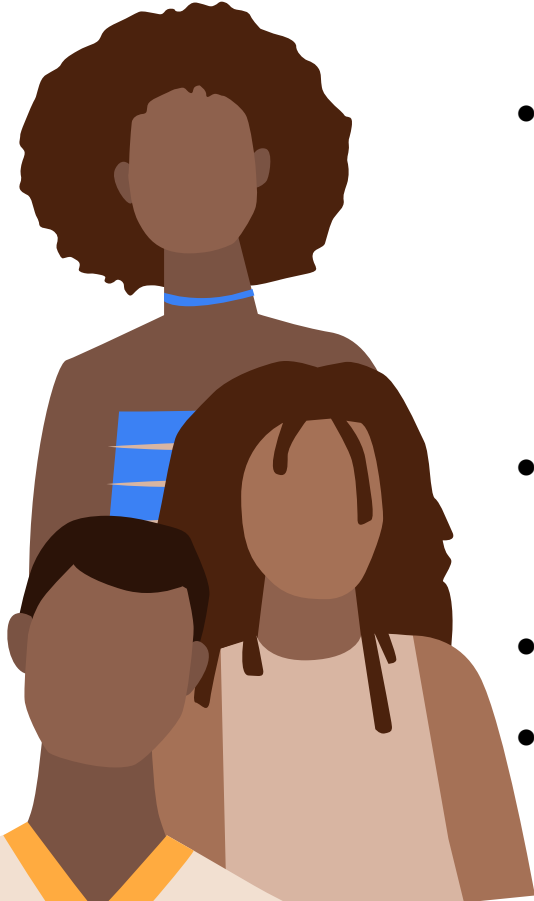
Educator/Leader

"But then the Dean went on to further say that he would only keep, if he had a choice about the faculty that would remain, he would keep myself another Black educator faculty member and the White male that was in the program because we would look best on a pamphlet." (P. 14)

"Every student from an underrepresented or marginalized group comes and talks to me because I'm accessible because I am open and share about my experiences, and they feel comfortable and safe talking to me where they may not feel that with other people and that's not an undesirable thing." (P. 23)



Differences Across the Career Continuum from Student to Educator



- Thickened skin over time ... students were less likely to speak against power imbalances but practitioners and educators often spoke of learned self-confidence, courage, and being true to self.
 - “Being a Black person in predominantly white spaces...I had to tell [individuals] that it was almost like I had to apologize for being Black because you know, we didn't want our pain to offend them. At least, that's how I felt as a student. In academia now, I'm pretty unapologetically Black so if it bothers people, oh well.”
- Students and practitioners more readily identified systemic racism where educators questioned other possible factors leading to mistreatment - age, sex, disability, etc.
- Credential imbalances in the workplace - OTR vs OTA.
- Students were sent to fieldwork in unsafe areas and had to endure. Practitioners and educators chose where to work and left unsafe spaces.



Nardia Aldridge
PhD., OTR/L, FAOTA, DTM



Chloe Hill
MOT, OTR/L



Lydia Armand
OTD, OTR/L



Kyrah Maduro
OTD, OTR/L



Dayeli Magaña
OTD

References



Publication

