



STUDENT CASE STUDY #1

Based on Experiences Shared During the AOTA 2020 Be Heard, We're Listening Sessions

BACKGROUND

Demographic information: OT student candidate, entry-level Doctorate of Occupational Therapy; preparing for the National Board for Certification in OT exam

Themes: Filter self as Black woman for OT school interview; assimilation, changed appearance; Fitting in to make White OTs feel comfortable; Dual personality

PRIMARY SCENARIO

Karizma desired to enter the OT profession. When she started her research for OT schools, she did not see any faculty member or students who looked like her. As a Black woman, Karizma often wears her hair in its natural curly state and enjoys changing her hair color to convey her personal style. She takes pride in adorning her nails and expressing herself through unique hair styles. Karizma saw this as a huge part of her identity and would paint her nails in various designs and bright colors. She felt she had to filter herself as a Black woman to prepare for the OT school interview process and code-switch to be more acceptable with the images she saw on OT school websites.

During her OT school interview process, Karizma very intentionally toned down her nails and made sure her hair was done in a way that was more widely socially acceptable. She also made certain her outfit was not too flashy. Karizma wanted to avoid attaching any "Black women" stereotypes to her aesthetic.

As a "brown skinned women" interviewing for OT school, this was the first time she could recall having to assimilate and feel the need to make others comfortable with her presence.

CONNECTIONS

Themes Presented in Case Study

- Lack of diversity and representation
- Experience of racialized trauma, stress, and fatigue

AT A GLANCE

Recommended Actions

Academic Recommendations:

- Re-evaluate the admissions process to implement holistic admissions.
- Evaluate bias during the admissions process (e.g., socioeconomic status bias in volunteer hour requirement).
- Develop outreach programs for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged groups/locations
- Identify allies as part of the admissions team.
- Create an inclusive environment where code-switching is not necessary for admittance and continued success.
- Consider compensating an internal staff subject matter expert (SME) or student for DEI issues and training.

Student Suggestions:

- Familiarize yourself with the [Crown Act](#) which bans race-based hair discrimination and denies employment and educational opportunities based on hair texture.
- Stay true to yourself for your mental well-being.
- Assess the culture of the institution, reflect on your values, and make the best decisions that align with your principles and career objectives.

Analysis and Strategies

Now that you have reviewed the case, review the AOTA DEI Toolkit evidence-based resources and address the following questions:

- How was the person impacted?
- How does this case impact the field of occupational therapy?
- What are the implications for clients and stakeholders as a result of these experiences?
- What strategies would you employ?



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