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Eastern Kentucky University

A Female's Profession: Gender Disparity in Occupational Therapy

Honors Thesis  
Submitted  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of The  
Requirements of HON 420  
Fall 2019

By  
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Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy

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## A Female's Profession: Gender Disparity in Occupational Therapy

Jodi Collins

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Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy

### **Abstract**

Occupational therapy celebrated its one hundredth anniversary in becoming an established therapy in 2017. The history between 1917 and 2017 is rich with stories of origin, adaptation, and assimilation. The initial need of occupational therapy was to assist in rehabilitation efforts of soldiers assigned to combat in World War I, yet as history has unraveled, the need for the therapy has manifested and is now used on individuals of all ages and all walks of life. Upon the initial creation of the therapy, females made up the entire field of then termed "reconstruction aides" due to the high number of males already at war. However, after the end of World War I and the availability of male candidates increased, the field of occupational therapy continued to be predominantly female. This gender disparity remains in the field today and serves as the basis of my honors thesis research. Within my thesis, I have created a quantitative study seeking to examine the potential effects the lack of males has on the profession, as well as the attitudes and satisfaction levels of male versus female occupational therapists. Chapter two of my project focuses on the researched history of occupational therapy and how the disparity emerged, while the third and final chapter examines my own Likert-style survey and the results of such. The findings within this chapter conclude that there is no statistical significance signifying there is a lesser satisfaction rate among male occupational therapists, nor is the lack of male therapists negatively affecting the profession.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### Background and Need

In 2017, the American Occupational Therapy Association celebrated its one hundred year anniversary as an established field, coming a long way from rehabilitating injured soldiers in the First World War. (AOTA, 2017) Since its origin in 1917, occupational therapy has transformed the lives of children, elderly, and all in-between. While occupational therapy is essential to complete daily activities, the duties and treatments of an occupational therapist often go misinformed or even unheard of. Additionally, such therapy is sometimes confused or indistinguishable from physical therapy and generally less respected than such. While several variables contribute to the lack of respect in the occupation therapy field, a strong concept worth investigating includes the abnormally high female ratio in the field. Females are currently dominating the field at 91%, while men make up a measly 9% of the field. (AOTA 2012) Comparatively, physical therapy possesses a noticeably more equal 64% women and 36% male ratio in the workplace, suggesting the female dominance in the field could be a potential cause of the struggles that the occupation therapy field is currently facing. (APTA 2012) Occupational Therapy revolutionized the workplace for women in 1917, but because of gender disparities in the workplace, occupational therapy lacks the respect, prestige, and equality that it has so rightly deserves.

While there is extensive research based upon the history of Occupational Therapy itself, there is significantly less in regard to the gender disparity within the field. When researching the history of occupational therapy there are endless articles recalling the history of the field, yet

there is a significant gap in research between the beginning of occupational therapy and the modernized field. In the research about the history, there is sufficient information about the lack of males in the field and in modernized research there are a number of articles acknowledging the gender disparity within the field, but articles regarding the satisfaction levels of male occupational therapists are minimal. In addition, while there are articles acknowledge the gender gap in the field, few articles are examining whether the work environment occupational therapists are in prohibit or discourage males from entering the field.

### **Problem Statement**

When researching literature pertaining to the field of occupational therapy it quickly became apparent there is a lack of information regarding the reason behind the gender disparity within the field and whether the current gender ratio is having a negative effect of the prestige and overall health of the field. Instead, an overwhelming majority of the existing literature primarily focuses on the history of occupational therapy and the acknowledgement of the disparity in the field. As a result of lack of works discussing the attitudes and effects of the current gender ratio, there is no current discussion on whether this ratio is a danger to the field as a whole and whether there should be steps to resolve the potential issue. This study sought to discover the overall outlook of male and female occupational therapists alike and analyze whether the two genders feel the gender disparity is affecting their own satisfaction in the field and the stature of the field as a whole.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this quantitative study is to better understand the tendencies in the field of occupational therapy and why the gender disparity within the field has remained prevalent since

the origin of the profession. This student seeks to obtain an authentic and honest perspective from experienced occupational therapist on their experience, attitudes, and satisfaction levels in the occupational therapy field. Further, the goal of this research is to provide a prospective that answers why the disparity is present and whether actions should be taken to lessen the gender gap in the field, a point of view that is absent in the current literature.

### **Research Question**

Is the current gender ratio in the field of occupational therapy negatively affecting the practice as a whole? Also, is there a difference in satisfaction levels between male and female occupational therapists?

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

#### History of Occupational Therapy

Judith Pettigrew, Katie Robinson, and Stephanie Moloney's scholarly article, *The Bluebirds: World War I Soldiers' Experiences of Occupational Therapy* provides an in-depth analysis of a World War I soldier's poem about his Occupational Therapy experience. By implementing historical documentary research, Pettigrew, Robinson, and Moloney are able to educate audiences about the earliest Occupational Therapists working conditions, methodology, values, and the notorious Lena Hitchcock, deemed the first reconstruction aide. (Pettigrew, Robinson, & Moloney, 2017) Without Lena Hitchcock's contribution and ample collection of her experiences, early Occupational Science studies could not exist. While the title of the article establishes Occupational Therapy was present in World War I, researchers assert that the rehabilitation efforts in 1918 were executed much differently than contemporary efforts. This, however, is to be expected given the considerable evolution of medicine and technology in the one-hundred years that Occupational Therapy has been utilized. However, the article deepens its credibility and academic soundness with its employment of Frank Wren's poem, *The Bluebirds*. (Pettigrew, Robinson, & Maloney, 2017)

By utilizing thematic analysis, the researchers used the poem, alongside the memoir of Lena Hitchcock, to gain mindset of how the world of an early Occupational Therapist looked. To ensure quality of the data, Pettigrew, Robinson, and Moloney adhered to four phases including, repeated reading, code identification, theme searching, and finally a review to ensure soundness. (2017) While these precautions are essential for quantitative data, biases are also factors that are



bound to arise in all studies, as the researcher acknowledge this and declare that the accounts within the study are partial and situated. With precautions acknowledged, the authors begin their work up of the poem. First establishing the purpose of Occupational Therapy, the researchers provides a brief description of the duty of the original Occupational Therapist, that being to reconstruct human life and restore movement to injured patients. This summation of the goal of a then reconstruction aide, summates to the goal of a contemporary Occupational Therapist, giving the impression that Occupational Therapy has always had a goal of improving quality of life despite hardship. Following the purpose, a brief description of the methods that were used in therapy, some of those being the construction of toys, sewing, and wood working. (Pettigrew, Robinson, & Maloney, 2017) Such methods, foreign to those used today, were not only for therapy, but a way to provide clothing and toys, as materials were much harder to come by. Lack of respect leads into the conclusion of the results because it complies with mental health. A significant portion of the analyzed poem includes lifted spirits that stemmed from Occupational Therapy, yet researchers attest that often times reconstruction aides were forced to act as nurse aides due to lack of respect for field. While physical injuries are nothing less than serious, mental health is an essential aspect of health care and fully deserving of equal respect. Overall, this article does an exemplary job in explaining the usage of Occupational therapy in its earliest form, but it has also served as a reminder that mental health is such a key factor in occupational therapy.

Much like this article, the following study begins with the Blue Birds, the trailblazers of a blossoming field. Pettigrew, Robinson, and Moloney's investigation of soldier's experiences of therapy assist in raising awareness to the importance of the field, as the field still lacks the

respect it deserves. It is vital to fully grasp the primary reason Occupational Sciences was needed in 1917 and why it is still necessary today.

In *War, what is it Good For? Yakobina, Yakobina, and Harrison-Weaver* shed light on the association of Occupational Therapy and war in America. (2008) War is generally attached to negative outcomes. However, the authors wish to expand on war and one of the positive aspects that has derived from it, Occupational Therapy. Occupational Therapy originated in 1917 during the First World War assisting in the rehabilitation of injured American soldiers. For many, this is the only common grounds that OT and war share, but there is much more to be examined in history. A specialized branch of Occupational Therapy is Hand Therapy, which arose in World War II, furthering the relation of OT and war. (Yakobina, Yakobina, and Harrison, 2008) While comparable articles as this one has touched on this subject, this article, a true rarity, delves into the relation with much detail and progression.

This article is purely informational, subheadings are included with each focused topic, making the article overall an easy and intriguing read. The first portion of the begins quite standardly, with the origin of Occupational Therapy. However, something worth noting in the first three section is the inclusions of the six founders of Occupational therapy, two of which being men. This, in general, is nothing to turn a head, but considering the minuscular portion of men in the field today, it is interesting to know that one third of the founders of the therapy were male. Another interesting insertion made within the article is who were supposed to become Occupational Therapists during this time. Originally, the founders intended for soldiers themselves to be Reconstruction aides rather than women, considering no women were eligible to be soldiers at this time. (Yakobina, Yakobina, and Harrison, 2008) Had male soldiers

successfully become the first reconstruction aides history, it would be interesting to study the gender ratios compared to them in present day.

The second half the article also brings forth interesting points that I have yet to come across in related articles. The first principal factor the authors announce is the pay of an Occupational Therapist in the 1940s. Prior to the Second World War OT's were not given military benefits, but after realizing the necessity of Occupational Therapy services, therapists were paid with similar wages and benefits as soldiers themselves. (Yakobina, Yakobina, and Harrison, 2008) Considering the minimal number of rights women had during this time in history, this is a groundbreaking achievement for women. Other valuable information presented in the article is the specialization of Hand Therapy. While Hand Therapy is commonly used today, it was not until WWII that the therapy arose. After over 89,000 soldiers received some sort of hand trauma, Sterling Bunnell decided hand therapy was necessary to treat such many soldiers successfully. (Yakobina, Yakobina, and Harrison, 2008) From this specialization, there were numerous advancements in medical treatments for hands and motor sensory neurons. If it had not been for so many World War II soldiers desperate for hand treatments, the knowledge we know of hands many do not exist.

This article has been excellent in providing with new knowledge of the origination of Occupational Therapy. This article follows the profession throughout several more wars that America fought in, and how the wounded soldiers assisted in advancing the field of Occupational Therapy. Within the following study, researchers plan to utilize the inclusion of the aspects of pay for Occupational Therapy and further research on that topic.

### **Gendered Professions**

Cathie Wright and her book chapter titled *Sexuality, Feminism and Work with Men* provides a health diversity by incorporating her own personal experience working as a social worker and her relationships with men. (2004) There are several useful elements within Wright's article, but what is incredibly accommodating within the chapter is the inclusion of a bias in the initial paragraph. Before getting into any evidence, Wright reveals there is a heterosexual bias in her writing, simply because she has not encountered enough individuals to feel comfortable expressing her thoughts on the LGBTQ+ community. (Wright, Cavanagh, & Cree, 2004) Someone who earnestly wants to understand and explore the true meaning of feminism, gender, and related studies, can appreciate an author that puts her biases in the forefront and wants to educate, not deceive her audience. Overall, this chapter particularizes on what feminism is and insight of how feminism intertwines with men in the workplace.

One of the admirable features of this book chapter is the definition Wright uses to express feminism. Today, there are countless stigmas that portray feminism in a negative light, which is why slang terms such as "feminazi" are thrown around so frequently today. A common stigma is feminists want nothing more than to be superior to men, but nothing could be further from the truth. True feminists do not want to be superior, only equal. Women want equal opportunities for men and women in relationship, the workplace, home, and society. Wright does an excellent in arguing the correct definition of feminism with an article by stating though men and women "may be equal partners in humanity we live in an unequal society where men continue to exert power and control over women in all spheres of their lives" (Wright, Cavanagh, & Cree, 2004). What Wright is arguing is men and women were created equally. The only aspect of men and women that are different is the Y chromosome in our genetics determining our sex. Other than this small aspect, men and women are identical and should be given the same amount of

opportunity. This, however, is not the case. As a social worker, Wright gives firsthand examples of how men negatively dominate women in both their relationships and workplace. For this study's purposes, a primary focus is men in the workplace, beginning with the definitions the author gives of feminine and masculine. Masculinity is defined in terms of activity and power, whereas femininity is defined as involving passivity and submission and this translates into the workplace. (Wright, Cavanagh, & Cree, 2004) Men use their power in the workplace, which is why such a small percentage of men working in Occupational Therapy hold such a high percentage of positions of management or their own private practice. In contrast, women often lack the appetite for power and authority, allowing them to feel more satisfied in the Occupational Therapy field in a less powerful position. The unfortunate issue that is profound in this situation is that until society learns to recognize this trend in professions, there will not be an opportunity to change the stigmas.

This chapter gives great insight as to what feminism is and the effects men have on it in the workplace. This chapter, drastically unique from my other sources, provides a refreshing outlook on feminism that can easily be understood and conceptualized. In addition, Wright's piece, while not about Occupational Therapy, still had viable information about the workplace that I can easily incorporate with Occupational Therapy. Also, this book chapter also sheds light on the LGBTQ+ community and how it is also at a great disadvantage in the workplace, an issue that should be considered while researching the attitudes, perceptions, and comfortability the community has when in the workplace.

Gendered professions have been prevalent since the beginning of history. Domestic work was left for women, while hunting and physical labor was left for men. Although Americans now live in an age and country where men and women are free to apply and work in any profession

they wish, societal stereotypes have become ingrained within the minds of individuals, allowing gender inequality tendencies to exist, even when the profession is distributed equally among men and women. This happens to be the current issue with veterinary medicine. Leslie Irvine and Jenny Vermilya acknowledge this concept in their article and embark on an investigation to better understand why higher ratios of women in a profession does not equate higher pay or more leadership positions. (2010)

The authors begin their investigation by exploring the origination of veterinary medicine and its masculine decent. Originally, veterinarians were solely male due to the physical demands of the profession. Women were not only discouraged from becoming a vet, they also were not given a position in graduate programs unless there were more positions than males who had applied. However, since the Equal Opportunity Act in 1963, the number of female veterinarians has risen dramatically with women now making up fifty percent of vets in the United States and eighty percent of veterinarian students in the United States. (Irvine & Vermilya, 2010) While gender ratios are evolving, the profession is still considered sexist due to environmental factors and stigmas surrounding males and females. This article, though has nothing to do with Occupational Therapy, addresses the evolution of a gendered profession, which is the same issues that I plan to raise in future research. Within this study, Irvine and Vermilya interviewed twenty-two different veterinarians in order to further understand the environment of the profession. (2010) The study was completed by a conversational interview with the twenty-two vets. Questions that were asked in the consisted of the attraction of the profession and the distribution of men and women in the field. The results of this study were not surprising yet disheartening. Women were said to have chosen the profession because of the nurturing aspect of the field, yet, when questioned about this, they over exaggerated their passion for science to look

less emotion driven and more scientifically driven. (Irvine & Vermilya, 2010) In addition, when asked about the gendered aspect of the field, women provide stereotyped reasons as to why they are equally in the field, by not in more positions of power. Reasons that were given included women's passivity toward asking for higher wages, their lack of emotional management, and their commitment to familial duties. The issue that lies within these results is the responses came from females. Females were stereotyping themselves by giving reasoning as to why they are not equal in this practice. This poses a major problem because if women cannot depend on one another to help in efforts to make the workplace an even playing field, equality will never be reached.

As mentioned, the following study has a great deal to do with the gender disparity in the Occupational Therapy field, not with veterinary practices. However, the following research can benefit from this interview-based study because it gives possible reasoning as to why professions fail to become equal. Men are viewed in society as breadwinners and high achieving, which constitutes them into receiving what society believes they deserve. Likewise, women are seen as nurturers and passive individuals, which often allows them to be taken advantage of if they fail to stand up for themselves. This, however, becomes frustratingly difficult to change because there is not amount of empathy classes or assertion classes to change stigmas of gender of men and women continue to define themselves as such stigmas. For the purposes of this study, it is important to consider implementing an interview-based or a similar study to gauge the opinions of gender disparity in Occupational Therapy.

### **Gender Disparity in Occupational Therapy**

Amidst a fresh 2018 scholarly article, authors Angelo Maxim and Martin Rice develop a mixed methods survey to fully explore the issues, factors, and perceptions of men within the

Occupational Therapy field. Since the commencement of Occupational Therapy in World War I, women have fully dominated the field 9 to 1.(AOTA, 2017) While the precise reason behind this statistic is still not accounted for, Maxim and Martin devoted their research to find answers for the century long disparity within the profession. To carry out the research, 699 Occupational Therapists, both male and female, were asked questions regarding their satisfaction of their profession despite the gender ratio. (Maxim & Rice, 2018)

One of the most outstanding findings of the research was the gender-based benefits to the profession. Females felt they were beneficial from an emotional standpoint, while males felt their gender contributed from a financial and practical standpoint. Adding to this, a previous study mentioned in the article suggested that the higher empathy level found within women could contribute the higher female ratio in the profession. (Maxim & Rice, 2018) Because Occupational Therapy is strongly associated with psychology and holistic remedies, an empathic Occupational Therapist will better be equipped to treat particular groups of patients. Males, in contrast, because of their practicality in the field, are more equipped to assist in the more physical aspects of Occupational Therapy, such as moving patients during treatment. In addition to this finding, twelve further questions were inquired within the survey separated by gender. Despite the considerable gender disparity in the field, there was never a deviation more than one point in the answers from both genders. From these results, the research asserts that the gender ratio may be drastically lacking, but the mindset of Occupational Therapists are extremely similar. While Maxim and Rice ask interesting and useful questions within their study, it is important to note that the research is only in the state of Ohio, therefore the sample size is considerably smaller than that the overall population of practitioners in the United States. (2018)

With regards to my study, it is worth noting that the Occupational Therapy field is still



young, and the ratio of men continues to grow steadily as times goes on. In addition, this study emphasizes that regardless of gender, the practitioners are satisfied with their job, contribution and security in the field. In addition, as research continues, emotional and practical needs of the field need to further be investigated because these aspects prove that the Occupational Therapy field is not solely a male or female field, but a gender diverse one.

In their article discussing the dominance females have in Occupational Therapy, Brenda L. Beagan and Erin Fredericks use an archival approach to further dissect the gender parity in Occupational Therapy and whether this parity frames a concern for equity. *What About the Men? Gender Parity in Occupational Therapy* does more than acknowledge the measly eight percent of men that make up the field of Occupational Therapy, it uses a variety of sources from gender studies and sociology to give possible explanations as to why men continue to shy away from the professional. In their study, Beagan and Frederick combine popular research topics including gender balance in the profession, patterns of gender distribution broadly in employment, and why jobs tend to be gendered in an attempt to find answers that may not ever be completely understood.

Because this study is archival, there is no traditional methodology or data, making it a bit more trying to fully grasp the order of thinking that the researches go through in their study. Although, the article begins relatively broad, by providing the statistics of female to male Occupational Therapists and because I have now read through a fair number of articles and journal relating to this topic, this is quite standard. Following the statistics, Beagan and Frederick provide supported motives as to why men feel uncomfortable in the field. Such reasoning can be based upon the limited quantities of male changing rooms, female patients discomfort of being dressed or educated about hygiene by males, and the lack of inclusion due to a female dominated

workplace. Each of these factors are supported by multiple references, and each are rational reasoning. Because Occupational Science originated with females and remains female dominated, Occupational Therapy workplaces are created to cater toward females. Over the century that this profession has been active, males have rarely been associated, framing men to not go into or not remain in the field.

Getting to the core of the article, the question is posed of whether the gender parity in the profession equates to inequity. To prove or disprove this position, the researchers include several statistics claiming that men are more sought after in the Occupational Therapy programs, allowing them into graduate programs much more easily. An effect of the simplicity of getting into graduate programs, males are also more likely to receive higher positions or even own their own practice. Occupational Therapy, while known as a female's profession, is partial to men, feeding into the gender inequality that is present in all professions. This article reinforces that wage gaps are still present in Occupational Therapy, men earning sixteen percent more than women. Despite being sought after, the researchers express that men still shy away from the profession because of the stigma that Occupational Therapy is a female profession. Society has internalized hypermasculinity preventing men from choosing Occupational Therapy as a career. Therefore, despite the gender parity the researchers conclude they felt there was no inequity in the profession because of the advantage men have over women.

The strong gender parity in this career is one of the leading factors that lead the researchers to choose feminism in Occupational Therapy as my thesis topic, therefore this article is extremely relevant to the overall topic. An aspect of this article that I really found useful was that investigation of whether there was inequity toward men in the field. I will use angle in my thesis. However, while this article is agreeable, men and women both face advantages and

disadvantages in the profession, but the advantages and lack thereof, do not outweigh one another. This is definitely a topic that is worthy of further research and more updated sources than are used within this article.

Amidst a fresh 2018 scholarly article, authors Angelo Maxim and Martin Rice develop a mixed methods survey to fully explore the issues, factors, and perceptions of men within the Occupational Therapy field. Since the commencement of Occupational Therapy in World War I, women have fully dominated the field 9 to 1. While the precise reason behind this statistic is still not accounted for, Maxim and Martin devoted their research to find answers for the century long disparity within the profession. To carry out the research, 699 Occupational Therapists, both male and female, were asked questions regarding their satisfaction of their profession despite the gender ratio.

One of the most outstanding findings of the research was the gender-based benefits to the profession. Females felt they were beneficial from an emotional standpoint, while males felt their gender contributed from a financial and practical standpoint. Adding to this, a previous study mentioned in the article suggested that the higher empathy level found within women could contribute the higher female ratio in the profession. Because Occupational Therapy is strongly associated with psychology and holistic remedies, an empathic Occupational Therapist will better be equipped to treat particular groups of patients. Males, in contrast, because of their practicality in the field, are more equipped to assist in the more physical aspects of Occupational Therapy, such as moving patients during treatment. In addition to this finding, twelve further questions were inquired within the survey separated by gender. Despite the considerable gender disparity in the field, there was never a deviation more than one point in the answers from both genders. From these results, the research asserts that the gender ratio may be drastically lacking,

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With regards to the current study, it is worth noting that the Occupational Therapy field is still young, and the ratio of men continues to grow steadily as times goes on. In addition, this study emphasizes that regardless of gender, the practitioners are satisfied with their job, contribution and security in the field. In addition, as research continues, emotional and practical needs of the field will be included because these aspects prove that the Occupational Therapy field is not solely a male or female field, but a gender diverse one.

## Conclusion

In 2017, the Occupational Therapy Association celebrated its one hundred year as an established field, coming a long way from rehabilitating injured soldiers in the First World War. Since its origin in 1917, occupational therapy has transformed the lives of children, elderly, and all in-between. While occupational therapy is essential to complete daily activities, the duties and treatments of an occupational therapist often go misinformed or even unheard of. Additionally, such therapy is sometimes confused or indistinguishable from physical therapy and generally less respected than such. While several variables contribute to the lack of respect in the occupation therapy field, a strong concept worth investigating includes the abnormally high female ratio in the field. Females are currently dominating the field at 91%, while men make up a measly 9% of the field (AOTA 2012). Comparatively, physical therapy possesses a noticeably more equal 64% women and 36% male ratio in the workplace, suggesting the female dominance in the field could be a potential cause of the struggles that the occupation therapy field is currently facing (APTA

2012). Occupational Therapy revolutionized the workplace for women in 1917, but because of gender disparities in the workplace, occupational therapy lacks the respect, prestige, and equality that it has so rightly deserves.

While war is notorious for creating problems, in the case of occupational therapy, problems were solved by war. World War I marked the initial days of occupational practice and the field has only gained momentum since that day. According to 2008 article by Yakobina SC, Yakobina SR, & Harrison-Weaver S, the first vision of occupational therapy was far from its contents today. The first OT's, coined reconstruction aides, were initially going to be "enlisted men unfit to return to full duty" in the war (Yakobina SC, Yakobina SR, & Harrison-Weaver S., 2008). However, because of the high enlistment rate among men during this time, there was simply not enough bodies to fill the positions and the vision changed. Therefore, the first reconstruction aides were strictly female volunteers from American Red Cross and NSPOT. These reconstruction aides incorporated knitting, chair caning, woodworking, printing, rug making, and similar crafts into their therapy techniques with the hopes of assisting patients in finding full function of their body again (Pettigrew, Robinson, Moloney 2018). A particularly interesting young reconstruction aide, Lena Hitchcock, happened to leave behind journals, notes, and poetry regarding her work. Within *the Bluebirds: World War I Soldiers' Experiences of Occupational Therapy*, one of Lena's most influential poems entitled "Bluebirds", was discussed, as it provided excellent insight into the circumstances that the women faced as they treated the soldiers. Through data analysis, the authors of the article determined through Hitchcock's poem that the purpose of aides were "to assist nature in restoring movement to injured parts," very similar to the overall purpose of today's field. (Pettigrew, Robinson, Moloney 4). However, the methods of the earliest Occupational Therapists were dramatically

different, as Hitchcock utilizes onomatopoeias in her poem to describe the work. Repeatedly the words cut, cling, clang, flap, and zip are used descriptively in the poem. Again, using data analysis, it was these single syllable words that were a key into the world of one of the earliest occupational therapist's offices, full of hammers, knitting needles, hand saws and so much more. With these tools, patients were able to create toys, art, and useful tools for others. While the patients created toys and useful gadgets, the reconstruction aides restore working soldiers who could return to combat or even home to their families.

One major aspect that was established in Lena Hitchcock's days has slowly fallen away from the field, holistic practices. Such practices assist in bridging the gap between patients; mind and body. Unfortunately, this inclusion of treatment has faded in later decades because it is more difficult to gauge its effectiveness by an operational definition. However, the women in the early 20th century understood that in order for an individual to heal physically, they must also heal emotionally. Many times, the reconstruction aides were given soldiers who obtained injuries that could not be mended, however, the duty of an occupational therapist lies not in their ability to heal a patient, but to teach them to effectively live with their newfound injury. Sustaining a chronic injury wears not only the body, but the mind as well, therefore holism is necessary for such patients to truly graduate from treatment. This aspect was unbeknownst to me until I examined an article entitled *Men in Occupational Therapy: Issues, Factors, and Perceptions*. This literature examines the ratification levels between males and females in occupational therapy and a response by an occupational therapist stated "OT is more creative and holistic than PT" which sparked an interest in holism (Maxim, Rice 2017). From the single sentence within this mixed study, it became easy to find various other sources that specifically argued the importance of holistic practices in Occupational Therapy. Specifically, *Holism in Occupational*

*Therapy: Elusive Fiction and Ambivalent Struggle* takes the stance that holism is a dying treatment option because the increasingly standardized treatment protocols. The main focus of this article argues that our world is growing more profit oriented, and holistic treatments would be much costlier. The issue, the authors of the article argues, is society must decide whether cheaper ineffective treatments are worth the saved profits. This article is exceptional because it stresses the importance of personalized treatments and uniqueness to individuals. Holism is vital to occupational therapy because it will allow patients to connect with their minds and transform their ways of thinking.

As I mentioned previously, the article *Men in Occupational Therapy: Issues, Factors, and Perceptions* was the first article I had read that encompassed information regarding holism and occupational therapy. Interestingly, the statement about the importance of holism was made by a female, peaking curiosity about female practice and holistic treatment. In addition, the findings in this article displayed that females felt they were beneficial from an emotional standpoint, while males felt their gender contributed from a financial and practical standpoint. This too sparked an interest in me, because this article provides evidence from 699 occupational therapists stating that women are more equipped to deal with more emotion and be more hands on with patients, while men benefit more from a more logistical approach to the field. After taking this, along with the gender ratio in occupational therapy, it appears that holism could be the reason that men are shying away from the field. Furthering this, women and holistic treatments are related. Men, while making up only nine percent of the field, 60 percent of men in the field hold positions of management or have their own private practice (Beagan, Fredericks 2018). Going back to the previous findings that males feel they benefit the occupational from a logistical standpoint strengthens the idea that females are making less money and not free to use

holistic treatments are often because males are typically in superior positions. From this article I was able to build on personal ideas, and in future research to further the research, I will investigate the emotional aspects of occupational therapy and whether they are the reason women populate the field so heavily.

All the many sources I have been exposed to thus far have deeply enriched and cultivated my initial thoughts for my project. Thankfully, these sources widened the overall outlook, and allowed me to realize the gender disparity in the occupational therapy is much more intense and contains much more complexity than I first believed. With the assistance of the sources, I was able to connect the origin of occupational therapy with its necessity of holism, which then brought forth a discussion of male and female professions and why occupational therapy is considered a female profession. The utilization of scholarly articles ensure that occupational therapy began with solely female therapists, allowing women a hand in the military and workforce in general. Also, data supports the large female dominance of the field, as well as the large portion of male occupational therapists that hold management positions. In addition to making these essential connections in this following thesis project, the primary researcher is working to create a quantitative survey to gauge the satisfaction, environment, attitude, and desired position that male Occupational Therapy graduate students at Eastern Kentucky University have viewed in their personal and witnessed experiences. I have hypothesized that the men in the field can feel the noticeable gender disparity, have lower scarification levels compared to women, and wish to obtain a position of management in the field.

Occupational therapy is necessary for so many differing injuries and conditions, yet it is often pushed to the shadows because women are not taken seriously in the workforce. Men continuously dominate the workforce, making it difficult for different genders to live to their full



potential. This topic is an important one because with the ever-changing gender fluidity in the current world, gender should be set aside when individuals are competing for jobs. Careers should be based upon the ability of individual, instead of their demographics. Gender equality must be realized in the workplace not only for those who fill the positions, but also for the occupations themselves. I have stressed the importance of occupational therapy the gender disparity surrounding it turns potential patients away from receiving treatment that would allow them to enjoy liberation from their conditions.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methods

#### **Research Design**

A quantitative research design was utilized to gather information about the field of occupational therapy that was provided by practicing clinicians who graduated from Eastern Kentucky University. Information for this student was obtained by using a phenomenological approach. According to Depoy and Gitlin (2005), this approach is used to, “uncover the meaning of how humans experience phenomena through the description of those experiences as they are lived by individuals” (p. 322-323). This method of design is relative and necessary for this study because the researchers are examining the live experiences of current occupational therapists and

their attitudes toward their workplaces and profession as a whole to better grasp the climate of the field. To collect data for this research, a series of six Likert Scale style questions as well as four demographic type questions were presented to clinicians.

### **Sample**

The sample for this study was obtained through the Eastern Kentucky University Occupational Science and Therapy department. Within the department, there is a list of practicing clinicians who are included as a part of the department's research day. This is a day for all graduated therapists and clinicians to submit and showcase research and presentations that each of them have completed throughout the year, therefore while these occupational therapists are practicing elsewhere, they are still active within the university in some capacity, making them more likely to participate in this study's survey. This method of retaining participants is considered a convenience sample because this population was readily available and relatively easy to contact and receive responses from. After targeting a sample population, a mass email was distributed with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey and how it would serve as a step toward social justice within the field. Additionally, a statement of free speech and protection of information was stated. All participants were free to choose whatever option they felt most suitable and regardless of their choices all identifying information would be kept private and disposed of via electronic deletion after the conclusion of the research. In addition, the rights of human subjects were protected by the review and approval proves of the Institutional Review Board of the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Kentucky. Finally, a statement prior to the beginning of the survey stated that by completing an submitting the survey, all participants were giving consent to analyze their

responses to calculate results of the research and at any time the participants did not feel comfortable finishing the survey, they were free to end it in its entirety. All participants did so with no incentive. No compensation was provided to any of the participants.

As stated, the sample population was retrieved from the Eastern Kentucky University Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy Research Day contact list, with this being a total of slightly over four-hundred recipients. The survey attached within an email was distributed to all contacts on the list. The survey was open for submissions for a total of two full weeks, or fourteen days. After the conclusion of the two-week period, there was received total of sixty-three responses. Based on this turn out, this gave this research survey a 15.8% completion rate. The initial four questions on the survey were strictly demographic questions which consisted of age, years in the field, gender, and sexual orientation. It was also made clear that participants were free to skip questions if they did not feel comfortable providing said information. The first question asked about the age of the respondents. All participants chose to answer this question and the average age of the sample size was determined to be 46.06 years of age. Next, all participants chose to answer their amount of years within the field as an occupational therapist with an average of 18.41 years. The third demographic question asked about the gender of the participants and again, all participants chose to answer this question. Ninety-four percent of the respondents identified as female, was six percent identified as male. This means that fifty-eight of the respondents were female and five percent of the respondents were male. Lastly, the final question asked the sexual identity of the participants. This question too, was chosen to be answered by all respondents. Overall, eighty-nine percent of the respondents identified as heterosexual or straight, ten percent responded as identifying as bisexual and one percent identified as being asexual.

**Instrumentation**

A brief, Likert Scale style survey consisting of four demographic questions and six questions about the occupational therapy field were developed by the researcher with the assistance of the mentor. Below is a list of questions that were included within the survey.

**A Female's Profession: Gender Disparity in Occupational Therapy**

1. Age

2. Gender

3. Current Years of Experience

4. Sexual Orientation

5. I am currently satisfied in my profession.

- Not at all
- Somewhat
- Neutral
- Mostly
- Completely

6. I feel that Occupational Therapists are well respected as a health care profession.

- Not at all
- Somewhat
- Neutral
- Mostly
- Completely

7. I notice a gender bias in my workplace between oppositely gendered occupational therapists.

- Not at all
- Somewhat
- Neutral
- Mostly
- Completely

8. I view occupational therapy as a female's profession.

- Not at all
- Somewhat
- Neutral
- Mostly
- Completely

9. I feel my gender provides me with an advantage in the field of occupational therapy.

- Not at all
- Somewhat
- Neutral
- Mostly
- Completely

10. I anticipate being in the same profession in ten years.

- Not at all
- Somewhat
- Neutral
- Mostly
- Completely

### **Procedure**

To begin the research process, researchers heavily studied the history and attitudes of the field based upon published literature. After researching for an ample amount of time, a need for further research was found and the framework of this study was created. Many weeks went into framing the survey questions and how they would be presented to the sample population. This study was unique because it is the only study researchers have found thus far that examine the

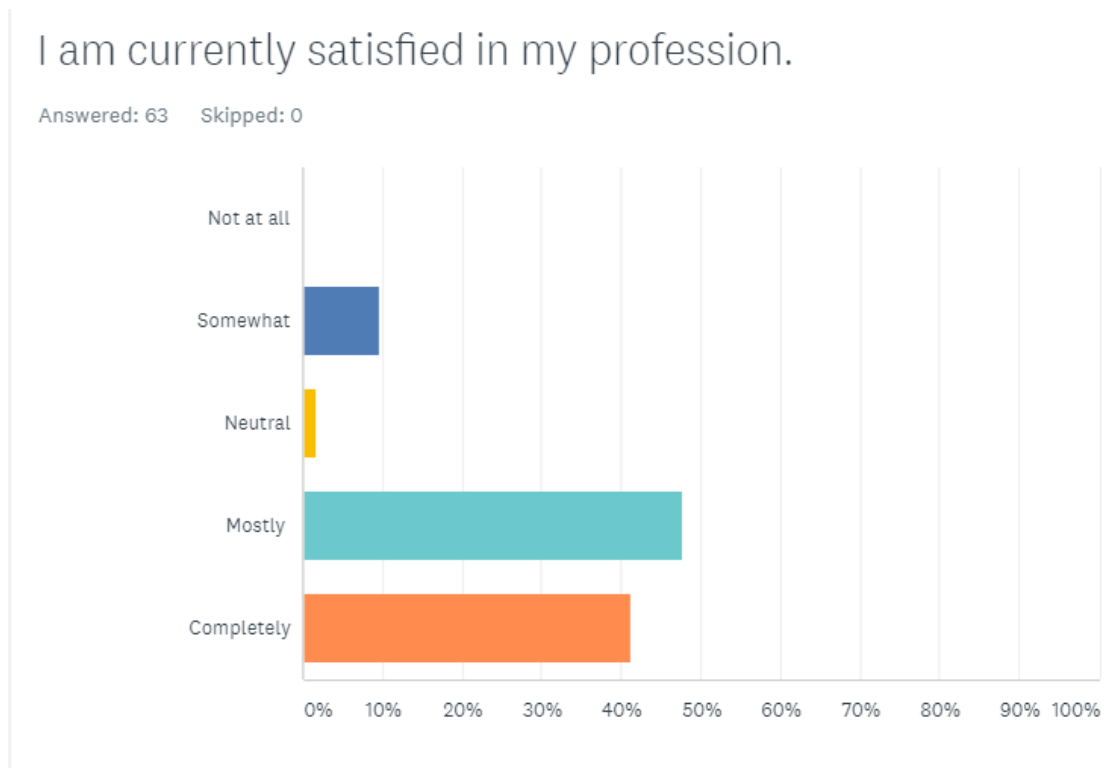
satisfaction levels of both male and female occupational therapists, while analyzing what the climate of the environment all practicing occupational therapists is like.

Before beginning the survey process, all active researchers were required to complete CITI training to prove they are capable and knowledgeable about working with human subjects in any capacity. This step in the process ensures that all portions of the process will be done ethnically and in a way that does not disrupt the lives of the participants. After each researcher completes this extensive training, a review and approval of the Institutional Review Board of the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Kentucky was completed, signifying researchers are now eligible to begin research. The survey, as depicted in Table 1, was then created via SurveyMonkey due to its user-friendly site and easy accessibility. Shortly thereafter, the survey was distributed to the sample of occupational therapist as mentioned above. The survey remained open for a total of two weeks to give each clinician ample time to complete the survey at a time most convenient for them.

## **Results**

Because the survey was administered through SurveyMonkey, graphs with results were easily obtained to better analyze the data. Below includes graphs of each individual question asked and the average and standard deviation of each of such.

Figure 1



This initial question asked about the overall satisfaction of practicing occupational therapists.

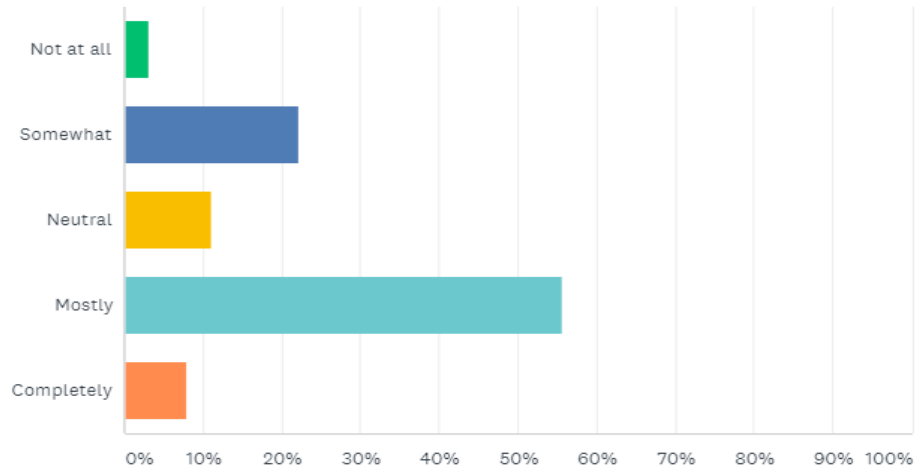
Based upon the results of this question, 88% percent of the sample population was either completely satisfied with their current profession. The overall average of the response equaled a 4.21 with a standard deviation of .88. Based on this average result, occupational therapists are “mostly” satisfied in their profession.

Figure 2



I feel that Occupational Therapists are well respected as a health care profession.

Answered: 63 Skipped: 0

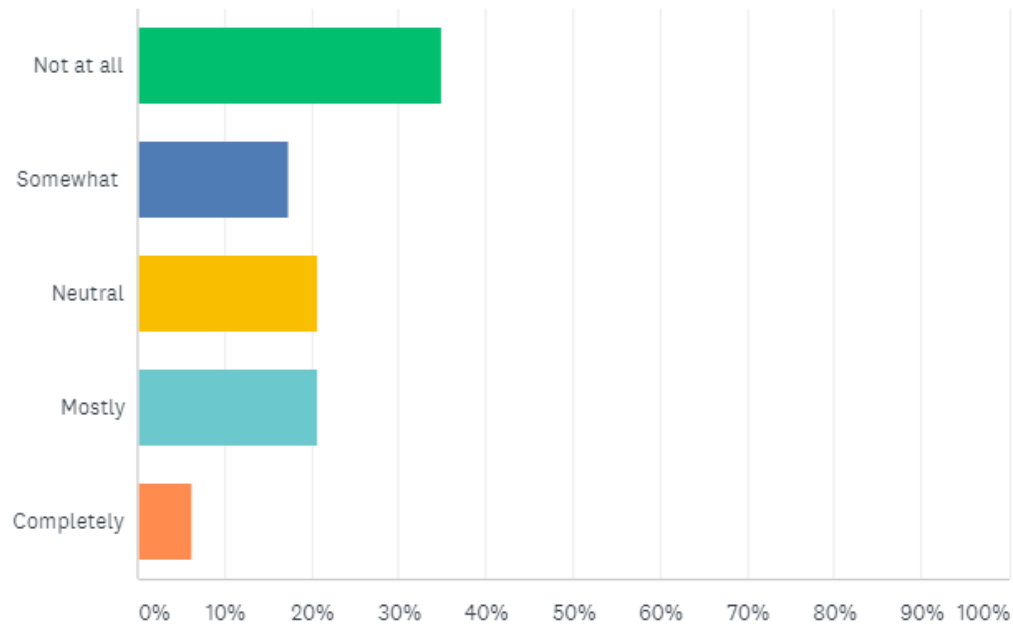


This question asked therapists their thoughts about the respect that occupational therapy receives in comparison of other professions. The results from this question are more distributed among the choice, with “completely” being chosen only 8% of the time. “Mostly” was chosen most frequently with a percentage of 57%. However, the average of the results for this question reported as 3.43 with standard deviation of 1.02. Based on the results, occupational therapists feel “neutral” toward witnessing respect in the field. While occupational therapy may be not as well respected, the therapists indicated from the average that there are no overwhelming feelings toward this in either direction.

Figure 3

I notice a gender bias in my workplace between oppositely gendered occupational therapists.

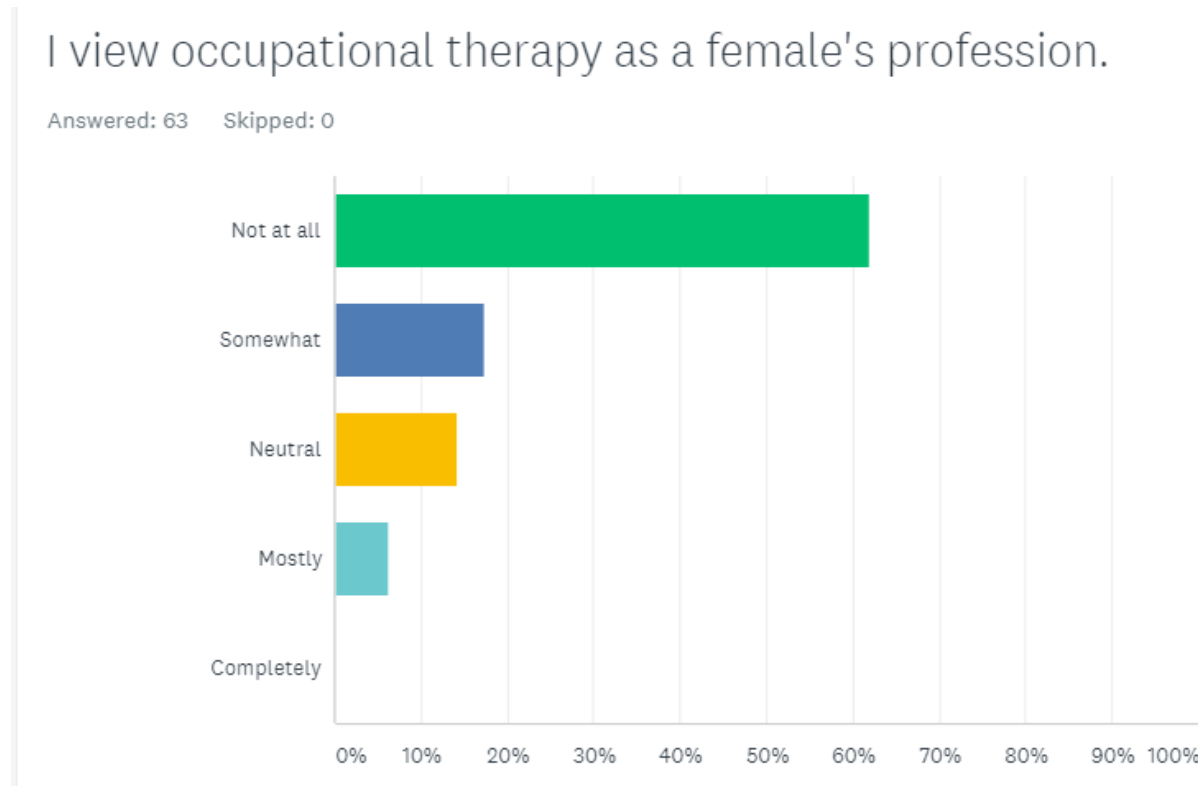
Answered: 63 Skipped: 0



The third question of the survey asked about the prevalence of a gender bias within the workplace. The results of this question, more than any of the other questions, it the most uniform in answering, with no clear majority. While 34% of the responses indicated there was no gender bias in the workplace, that left 66% to believe there is at least somewhat of a gender bias.

Overall, this question rendered an average of 2.46 and a standard deviation of 1.32, suggesting that occupational therapists see “somewhat” of a gender bias within their current workplace.

Figure 4



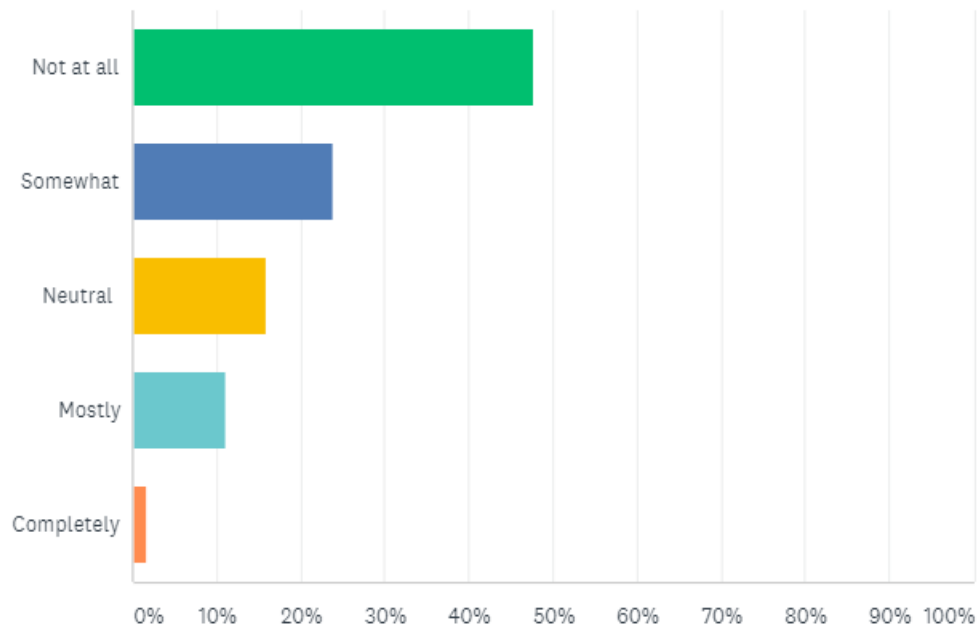
Question four of the survey asked whether the participants viewed occupational therapy as a female's profession due to the high number of females in the profession. To the surprise of the researchers, this question had an overwhelming majority answer of "not at all", meaning that a majority of the respondents did not see occupational therapy as a female profession at all.

However, upon factoring responses of other participants, the response average was 1.65 with a standard .95. Therefore, while the majority felt the profession is not at all a female profession, the average response feels that the field is somewhat a female profession.

Figure 5

I feel my gender provides me with an advantage in the field of occupational therapy.

Answered: 63 Skipped: 0

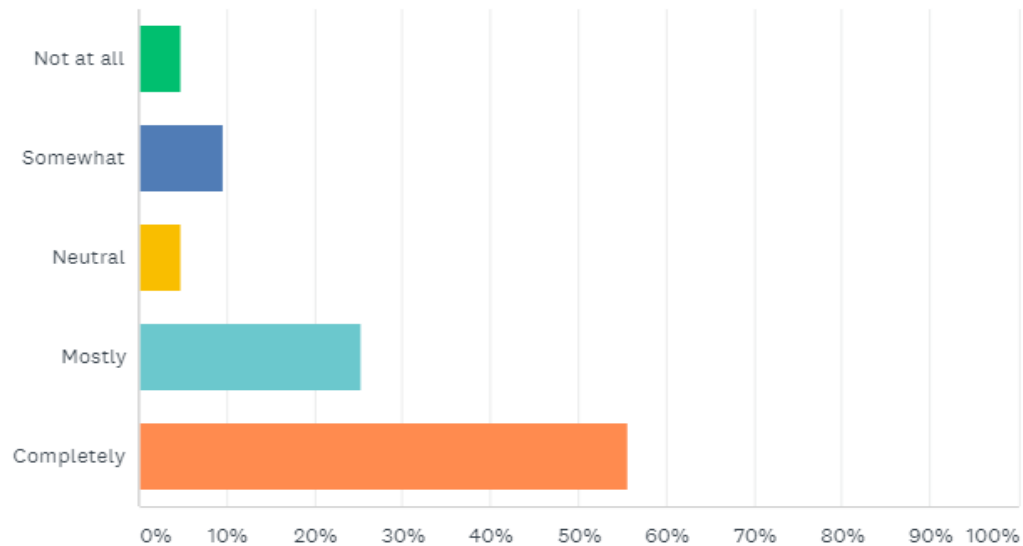


This question in the survey asked about advantages occupational therapists feel they may have while practicing due to their gender. Only one participant felt that their gender completely provided them with an advantage in the field and close to 50% of the respondents felt that their gender had no effect on their practice. Based on the entirety of the responses, there was an average of 1.95 with a standard deviation of 1.1, signifying that the respondents feel their gender provides them with somewhat of an advantage in the field of occupational therapy.

Figure 6

I anticipate being in the same profession in ten years.

Answered: 63 Skipped: 0



The sixth and final question of the survey regarded the projection of the field. The question asked whether the occupational therapists felt they will still be in the same profession in ten years. A majority of the respondents chose “completely” as their choice, signifying that they are currently enjoying their profession and are satisfied to an extent that they will continue the career for at least a decade into the future. A total of four participants claimed that they do not anticipate being in the same profession at all in the next ten year. However, two of the four participants who chose this answer were also over the age of 60, so an assumption can be made that they will not be in the same profession due to retirement. Overall, this question rendered an average of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 1.18. Therefore, most of the occupational therapists anticipate being in the same profession in the next ten years.

## Discussion

Before beginning the experiment, there was a total of three hypotheses that were to be tested after receiving the survey results. The first hypothesis stated that occupational therapists do not feel their field is well respected in comparison to other similar medical professions. The second stated that there is currently a gender bias within the profession that is potentially driving the gender disparity in the field. Finally, the third hypothesis stated that the gender disparity within the profession is negatively affecting the therapists' satisfaction in the field. After analyzing the results of the survey, each of these hypotheses can be rejected due because there is not a sufficient amount of statistical significance to signify either of the hypotheses are correct.

The initial hypothesis, hypothesis 1, was rejected after analyzing the results of question number two in the survey, which asked their opinion on the respect that occupational therapy receives. The average answer was 3.43 meaning the respondents felt neutral to this question. Therefore, while there were some therapists who felt the profession was not respected at all, the larger majority did not feel strongly in any case. The second hypothesis, hypothesis 2, was rejected with questions three and four asking explicitly about the gender bias in the workplace and whether the respondents feel occupational therapy is a female's profession. This question regarding gender bias in the workplace received an average response of 2.46, meaning the majority of the respondents saw somewhat of a gender bias in the field, but this number is still too low to be considered statistically significant. The proceeding question received an average of 1.65 meaning respondents also felt it was somewhat of a female's profession, but again the number was not great enough to be considered statistically significant. Finally, the third hypothesis, hypothesis 3, regarding the gender disparity's negative affect on satisfaction in the

field was rejected with the results from question 1 and 6 on the survey. Question 1 asked about the participants overall satisfaction in the field and rendered a 4.21 as an average. Therefore, the sixty-three participants are mostly satisfied with their profession. Question 6 asked about the participants plan to stay in the field in ten years. This question received an average of 4.17, also meaning that the participants mostly anticipate being in the same profession in a decade.

In order to examine whether male and female occupational therapists answered the questions differently, a separate analysis was conducted to examine only the male respondents. The results finding the average of the male responses was nearly identical to that of the females, besides the final question. As mentioned, the final question asked whether the respondents anticipated being in the profession in ten years. The overall average of the entire population was mostly. However, the male average was neutral. Although, one of the five male respondents was over the age of sixty and stated he planned to “not at all” be in the profession in ten years. A possible explanation for this selection is due to retirement and thus, skewing the results of the questions.

### **Limitations**

While precautions were set in place to assisting in keeping the integrity of this study, there was factors that could not be avoided while completing the investigation. To begin, the sample was considered a convenience sample. The participants were easily contacted and there was no compensation to them involved. While it was relatively simple to contact this respondents, they all graduated from the same university, therefore that could have created some type of bias within their responses. In addition, while some may have relocated to other places in the United States, many of them reside in Kentucky. Therefore, if the sample had been larger and more

diverse, the responses may have varied. Additionally, researchers could not achieve an exact number of occupational therapists that were contacted to take the survey. The number was approximately 400, however, it cannot be confirmed this number is exact. Finally, when designing the survey, the place of work was not considered. Pediatric occupational therapists may have had different responses when compared to geriatric occupational therapists and that should have been taken into account.



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