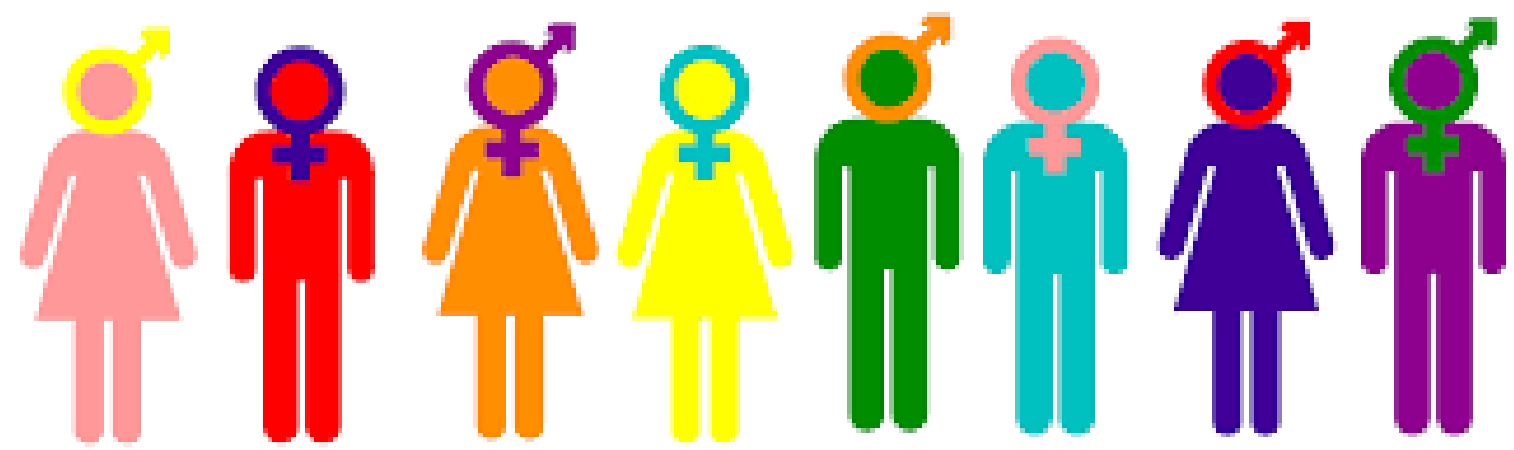


# Physical Therapy Student Reflections on Sex and Gender Issues in Clinical Practice Placements



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## INTRODUCTION

- The gender distribution of Physical Therapists is about 60/40 F/M. Gender awareness, expectations and relations with patients/health care providers may affect PT practice. Sex/gender competencies in physical therapy curriculum are not articulated.

## PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this study was to describe student reflections about experiences from their clinical placement that relate to sex/gender.

## THE REFLECTION INSTRUCTIONS

### Individual Reflective Summary Assignment

Reflect on a case from your clinical experiences. Select a case where there were sex/gender issues that were important, and reflect on what you learned from that experience and your subsequent education (including our module on sex/gender, if appropriate). Include a description of the experience(s) of the patient encounter. Discuss one sex and/or one gender factor that should have affected your clinical decision-making. Reflect on the experience—some dynamics to consider:

- Your awareness of the sex/gender issue before PT school or the incident; and whether it has changed since being in the PT program. Changes in your thinking may have come (or not) from the incident, our sex/gender module or other aspects of the PT program.
- Have your assumptions about sex/gender been challenged or validated? Did you gain any insights about yourself? How might your experience(s) and knowledge of sex/gender affect your future practice?

## METHODS

1. PT Students (in the final month of their program) attended a 4-hour module on sex/gender that addressed:
  - definitions of dimensions of sex/gender,
  - gender differences in health using pain and musculoskeletal disorders as exemplars,
  - examples/impact of gender bias on health care.
2. Students completed a reflective exercise and submitted it in written format.
3. The reflections were analyzed using an interpretive description approach.

## SUBJECT DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic	N = 50
Mean age (standard deviation)	25 (5)
Gender Male : Female (%)	19/31

## RESULTS - Prior awareness of sex/gender

1. Limited prior exposure to concepts from PT program
2. The primary influence was family and cultural norms with some cultural norms being limiting, and contact with gender diversity being enlightening.

## RESULTS - Challenges

1. Dealing with sexual harassment
  - Patients: women wanting male “attention”: and men who made demeaning or sexually inappropriate comments to women.
  - Other health professionals: boundary offenses.
2. Interactions with transgender patients: Uncertainty about impact on assessment and treatment, e.g., hormone therapy.
3. Insufficient knowledge on sex-differences.
4. Dealing with personal and other gender-bias is challenging; family and cultural gender role expectations.
5. Lack of preparedness was a concern, and completing the sex/gender module was helpful.
6. Recognition that there is wide variation in humans.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. PT students have broad needs to understand sex/gender issues to be prepared for the complexity of clinical practice.
2. Both professionalism and practice skills are impacted by lack of knowledge.
3. A sex/gender module helped PT trainees reflect on how sex/gender issues might be better managed in the future.
4. There is a need for both generic and PT-specific resources, and layered training within curriculum.

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