
October 16, 2026



Affirming Bodies, Affirming Occupations

Occupational Therapy's Role in Body
Image Intervention for LGBTQIA+ Adults

October 16, 2026





BRIDGET FARRELL, OTD/OTR/L

she/her

Current Role

Occupational Therapist, Inpatient Psychiatry, UC Health

Fellowship

OT LGBTQIA2S+ Health Fellow (2025-2026), UC Health

Education

UT Health San Antonio

Other Experience

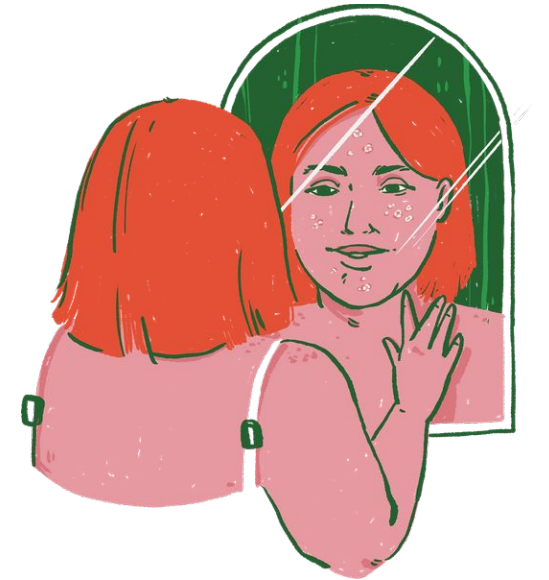
Community-based trauma-informed mental health care for transition-age youth with foster care backgrounds

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Examine the unique role of occupational therapy in addressing body image concerns through occupation-based and affirming interventions.
- Describe body image concerns commonly experienced within LGBTQIA+ populations and their impact on occupational participation.
- Discuss the implementation, outcomes, and recommendations of an occupational therapy group program for body image and LGBTQIA+ health.

What is body image?

Beliefs, perceptions and feelings about one's body



DEFINITIONS

Body dissatisfaction

Discontent with whole or parts of body

Body image disturbance

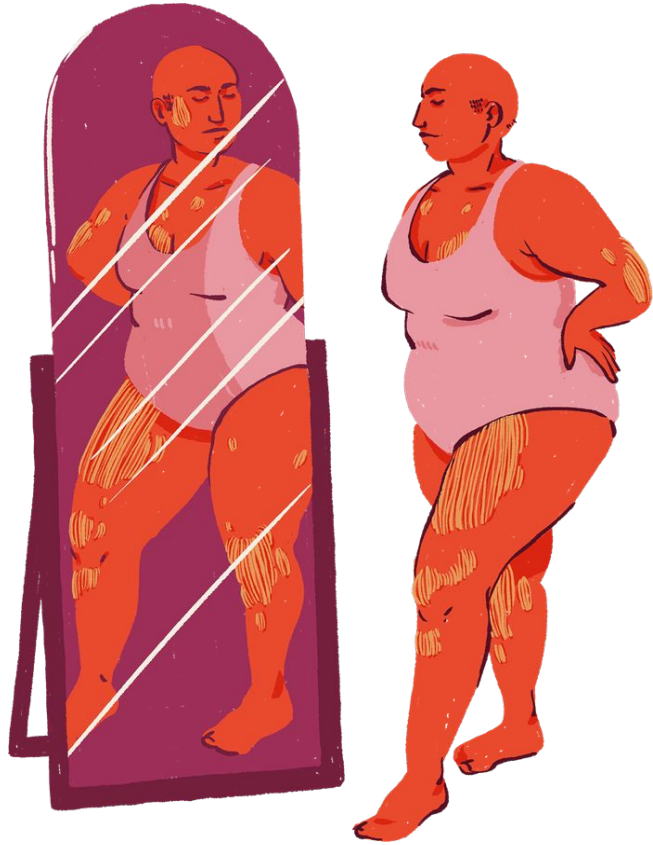
Persistent negative body-related thoughts/feelings that disrupt daily life

Body dysmorphia

Distress over a perceived physical flaw

Gender dysphoria

Distress from difference between gender identity and sex assigned at birth



Think of an experience you
felt affirmed or comfortable
in your body.

BODY IMAGE AND OCCUPATION

Domain	Examples
Context	Environment: Public restrooms, transportation Attitudes: Cultural beliefs with body size and wealth
Occupations	Activities of daily living: Dressing, eating, sexual activity Health management: Medication management, physical activity Social participation: Community, friend
Performance patterns	Roles: Student or worker, partner Routines: Morning self-care, mealtime
Client factors	Values and beliefs: Beliefs about body size, shape, and ability Body functions and structures: Menstruation

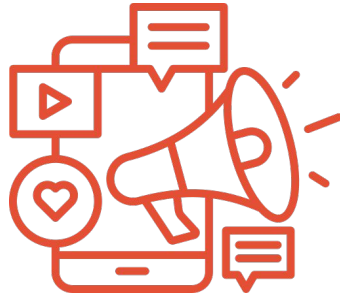
What patient populations may experience body image concerns that impact their participation in meaningful occupations?



BODY IMAGE AND LGBTQIA+ POPULATION

CONTEXT

- Community attitudes
- Media representation
- Political rhetoric
- Legal changes



CONCERNS

- Safety
- Weight
- Shape
- Gender expression
- Sexual activity
- Coping with minority stress

Identified needs include dismantling unrealistic body ideals, supporting daily living activities (skills and routines), navigating social connections and resources, and performing safe body-affirming behaviors.

BODY IMAGE AND LGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH

- 87% of LGBTQ+ youth are dissatisfied with their bodies (Trevor Project, 2023)
- 2x higher rates of depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation compared to body satisfied peers (Trevor Project, 2023)
- 60% of LGBTQ+ college students reported disordered eating behaviors (Gordon, 2019)
- SGM adults experience anorexia at rates 2-5x higher and bulimia at rates 6-16x higher than their straight cisgender peers (Goldhammer, 2023)

ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS



- Critical reflection
 - [Implicit Association Test \(IAT\)](#)
- Use affirming and de-stigmatizing language
- Screening and assessment
- Intervention
 - Routine building
 - Body-affirming care
 - Gender-affirming care
 - Self-compassion
 - CBT
 - Sensory processing
 - Political and system-level advocacy



Case Presentation: Occupational Therapy LGBTQIA+ Body Image Group

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- **Kawa Model:** Emphasizes interconnectedness between individuals and their environment
 - Riverbanks, rocks, driftwood
 - Life flow
- **Minority Stress Model:** Experience of chronic stress related to marginalized identity
 - Distal and proximal stressors
 - Protective and resilience factors
- **Self-Compassion Framework:** How humans relate to themselves during experiences of perceived inadequacy
 - Self-kindness
 - Mindfulness
 - Shared human experiences

OT GROUP INTERVENTION

- **Program goals:**

- Increase performance and/or satisfaction with daily activities
- Increase knowledge of coping strategies for body-related distress

- **Format:**

- Virtual intake and discharge sessions
- Weekly, in-person group sessions after hours at Faith Center in LCOH for 6 weeks

- **Data collection:**

- Canadian Occupational Performance Measure
- 3-2-1 Reflection forms
- Post-group survey

- **Recruitment** of 5 participants through community-based and medical networks



SESSION FORMAT: COLE'S SEVEN STEPS

01

Introduction

Review previous session and homework. Warm-up activity, education, and purpose.

02

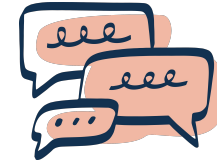
Activity



Engage in a written reflection and practice tied to the session content.

03

Sharing



Group members discuss their work or experience with the activity.

04

Processing

Discuss how participants felt about the activity.

05

Generalizing

Summarize group responses and highlight positive observations.

06

Application

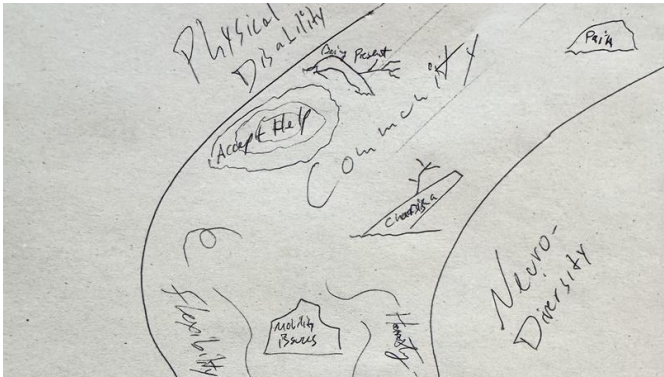
Discuss how to apply learnings to daily life. Assign homework.

07

Summary

Review purpose of session and complete 3-2-1 reflection form.

OT GROUP CONTENT



• Identity and Pride

Self-Compassion Meditations

Meditations to try out for mindfulness and self-compassion, especially for times when you're feeling overwhelmed or are experiencing a moment of suffering. All meditations are 10 minutes or less.

General Self-Compassion



Tender Self-Compassion



Providing Self-Compassion



• Self-Compassion



Cat-Cow

Feet flat on the ground. Sit with a tall spine. Round your back and tuck your chin into your chest. Then look up slightly, arch your back, and open your chest. Continue this flow from Cat Pose to Cow Pose a few times to stretch your spine. Try inhaling as you round your back in Cat Pose and exhaling as you arch your back in Cow Pose.



Side Bend

Feet flat on the ground, place your palms on your knees. Take a moment to come to stillness and take a deep breath. Then take your left arm straight up to the sky. Tilt your upper body to the right and place your right hand on the chair. Open your chest, look up, and feel the gentle stretch on the left side of your torso. Come back to center. Switch sides and repeat the stretch on the right side of your torso.



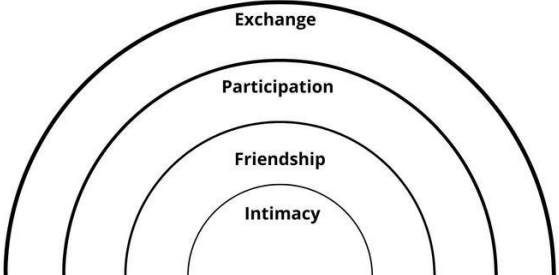
Seated Twist

Sit upright in your chair. Check that your spine is straight and your feet are flat on the ground. Twist your torso.



• Body Affirmation

Circles of Support



• Relationships

Session 5: Sex and Intimacy

"Sex, at its core, is a sensory experience." - Dana Solomon

Sensory System	Definition	My Sensory Supports
Vision	What we see Lighting, mirrors	
Auditory	What we hear Language, music, body sounds	
Tactile	What we touch/feel Temperature, blankets, clothing, liquids	
Gustatory	What we taste	

• Sex and Intimacy

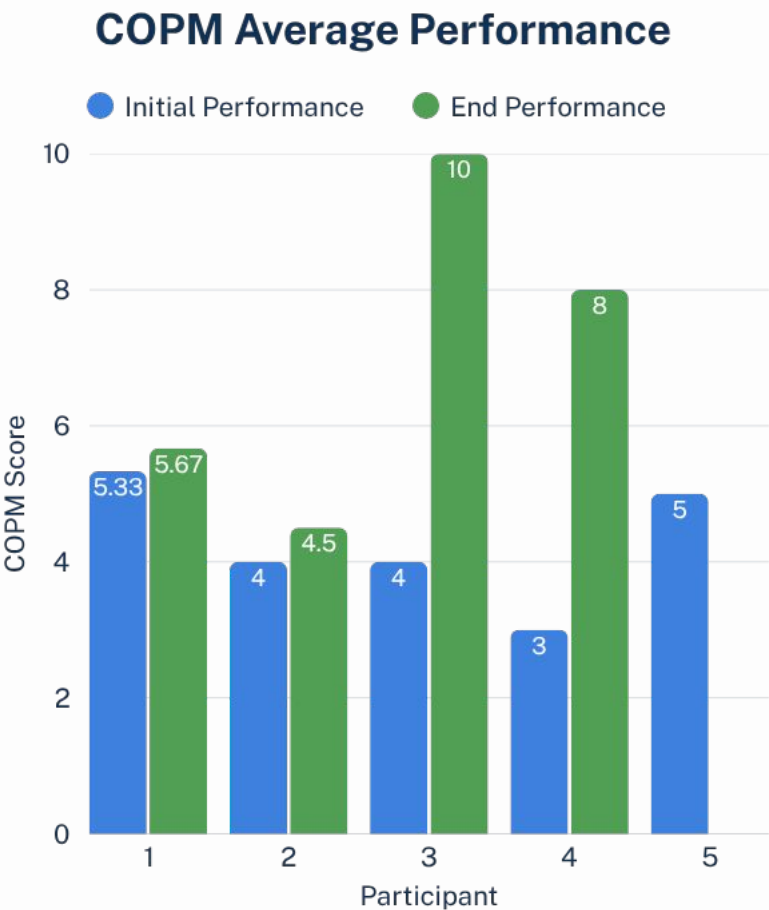


• Growing Forward

PROJECT IMPACT: 3-2-1 REFLECTION

Session	Learning	Interest	Questions
1	Importance of community	Remembering that we are part of nature	Would love to learn more specific techniques
2	Habit stacking	Giving myself time to take care of my needs is compassion	How to connect with body after sexual trauma?
3	Being grateful for what my body does for me is a game changer	Thinking about ways gender expression reflects the worth I feel in my body	I know the body holds trauma, but can the body hold joy? What does that look like?
4	New perspective from charting relationships	The idea that I deserve to ask for more respect from the people in my life is a lot	Do you have a place in cincy you feel safe as LGBTQ persons?
5	The ideas for staying grounded and focusing on one sensation at a time	Pre-sex checklist was really cohesive	Suggestions for taste solutions
6	Ongoing support is important	The plant project was awesome	More time talking about sustainable habits when you have ADHD/mental/physical stuff going on!

PROJECT IMPACT: COPM



Occupational Performance Problems
Community mobility: leaving the house, accessing public spaces
Social participation: interacting with community
Activities of daily living: dressing, grooming
Health management: physical exercise



PROJECT IMPACT: SURVEY

Survey Results (3 responses)

- **Group format**
 - **Worked well:** in person setting, fixed start/end time
 - **Recommended change:** more weeks/more time
- **Group content**
 - **Recommended change:** choose homework option in-session
 - **Topics to add:** conflict resolution esp. w/ negative views on personal identity, vocal training, more body-focused exercises
- **Group outcomes**
 - **Strengths:** had a positive impact on my wellbeing, would recommend this group to others, supported connection with others
 - **Areas for growth:** applying learning to daily life, balance between discussion and activities

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

“[This group makes] me feel like the livelihood of trans folks matters and that we are deserving of time and care dedicated to healing.”

“This experience made me feel more relaxed in my body, seeing how people also struggle in ways I don't, and my own unique struggles.”



SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES

LGBTQIA+ Body Image Group Protocol

Bridget Farrell, OTD, OTR/L
Occupational Therapy LGBTQIA2S+ Health Fellow
May 2026



- Group protocol accessible through a digital document - available upon request
- Presentations to key stakeholders
- Protocol expansion with interoception and gender expression
- Program implementation

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



- Lindner Center of Hope
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- Shanna Stryker, MD, MPH
- Kelly Farrell, MS, OTR/L
- Hailey Coulehan, OTS

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EVALUATION: Affirming Bodies, Affirming Occupations: Occupational Therapy's Role in Body Image Intervention for LGBTQIA+ Adults



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Discussion | Q&A

We amplify, adapt, and advance occupational therapy, together.



THANK YOU!

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