Exploring Sensory Processing & Inclusivity within a Fitness Gym Environment

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Exploring Sensory Processing & Inclusivity within a Fitness Gym Environment

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BACKGROUND

An individual’s sensory processing involves the reception, modulation, integration, and organization of sensory stimuli, as well as behavioral responses to sensory input (Dunn, 2001). The STAR Institute for Sensory Processing Disorder (n.d.) affirms that at least 1 out of 20 children encounter symptoms of sensory processing disorder (SPD), while 1 in 6 face symptoms of sensory disruption (STAR Institute for SPD, n.d.). As adults, they may come across troubles with completing routines and tasks for work, social participation, and leisure (STAR Institute for SPD, n.d.). Since most individuals with these sensory processing challenges have struggled with symptoms continuously, they are likely to encounter secondary effects such as depression, underachievement, and social isolation (STAR Institute for SPD, n.d.). Adults with sensory processing deficits may experience difficulties with establishing their role in society, maintaining social support systems, and pursuing higher education (Clince et al., 2016). One area of sensory processing challenges that individuals may struggle with is sensory modulation, which is defined as the central and autonomic nervous system’s capability to sustain harmony by regulating and organizing sensory input and facilitate graded response (Atchinson & Morkut, 2017).

PROBLEM

Sensory processing challenges can potentially hinder an individual’s ability to participate in meaningful occupations, including gym participation. OTs are professionals who understand the dynamic interaction between individuals, environments, and the occupations in which they wish to partake and specialize in promoting greater accessibility (AOTA, 2020). However, OTs have yet to create programming or recommendations to enhance the experience and participation individuals in a fitness gym context. The current literature on sensory processing preferences within a gym environment is limited, creating leeway for exploration.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The participants for the surveys were recruited on-site and via email through the USAHS San Marcos institution. This institution previously offered students memberships to Crunch Fitness in San Marcos, CA. The criteria for recruiting participants included an active gym membership.

RESULTS

Gym-going Participant Survey:

- 54 total participants
- Gender: 19 male & 35 female
- Age range: 18 – 64
- Attendance: Daily – 1x/month or less

Staff Participant Survey:

- 8 total participants
- All male

Survey Question | Average Response
--- | ---
Pre-existing knowledge of sensory processing (1-5) | 3.59
Understanding own sensory processing preferences (1-5) | 3.67
Inclusion satisfaction within facility (1-5) | 3.8
Social inclusion satisfaction within facility (1-10) | 3.7

DISCUSSION

- Helped uncover current needs within facility
- Program is based on common themes found in needs assessment results regarding sensory preferences & inclusion
  - Optimize gym participation & feelings of inclusion
- OTs focus on supporting clients in maximizing abilities to engage in meaningful activities & promote overall health/wellness (AOTA, 2020)
- Further research to evaluate the efficacy of components & client satisfaction rates

DELIVERABLES

- Staff Training
- Handouts
- Programming/Handouts
- Staff Training

REFERENCES

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SCAN QR CODE FOR REFERENCES

**SCAN QR CODE FOR DELIVERABLES**