

Phenomenology and Human Occupation: Situating Occupation and Advancing Understanding

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Introduction: Occupational therapists strive to illuminate the importance of human occupation in everyday life. However, despite years of scholarly progress, a question continues to haunt its members and threaten the future vitality of the profession: Why is it so difficult to effectively communicate clear understandings of the profession's core construct, human occupation? Wilcock (2006) suggests that human occupation is such a mundane part of our everyday lives that its significance is often overlooked. Likewise, Hasselkus (2006) contends that everyday occupation is frequently "seen but unnoticed" (p. 627). This raises the question of whether we might transform our gaze on occupation, so that we may "look at what we normally look through" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 50). In this regard, Hasselkus proposes that a phenomenological approach to understanding occupation may hold promise. **Objectives:** This paper takes up this challenge by examining what a phenomenological perspective may offer to the study and conceptualization of human occupation. **Description:** Phenomenology highlights the lived experience of phenomena and may inform new ways of understanding human occupation, through what Husserl has called the "life world." This paper draws on the phenomenological perspectives of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty to make explicit the central assumptions within their distinct phenomenological stances, and to critically consider the implications for the study of human occupation. **Discussion:** Rooted in the interpretive tradition, the purpose of phenomenology is to examine the lived experience of human phenomena in their most basic and unfettered form. The battle cry of phenomenology, 'Back to the things themselves!', calls for researchers and practitioners to put aside culturally inscribed assumptions and to consider phenomena from a stance of what some phenomenologists have called 'first critique' (Crotty, 1998). **Conclusion:** The authors contend that phenomenology offers a fruitful, though underutilized, theoretical lens through which to engage in the study of human occupation. **Contribution to the Practice of Occupational Therapy:** Phenomenological perspectives have the potential to contribute to current conceptualizations of human occupation by drawing attention back to the lived experience of day-to-day human phenomena. This has implications for advancing understandings of human occupation in theory and practice.