

**Views of Disability in Occupational Therapy: Past, present, future**

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**Introduction:** What is *disability*? Critical disability theory challenges the ways that disability is viewed. Disability scholars have challenged rehabilitation professionals to reconsider how they conceptualize disability; however, few occupational therapists have engaged with this critique in practice, research and education. The examination of how disability has been given meaning in occupational therapy is necessary as it influences the way that occupational therapists interact with clients, develop treatment plans, teach students, conduct research, and structure services and policy.

**Objectives:** The purpose of this paper is to investigate the meaning of disability in occupational therapy, considering historical context and predicting future possibilities. The implications for occupational therapy practice and research will be outlined.

**Methods:** A critical historical review of the occupational therapy literature will examine how disability has been conceptualized in occupational therapy. Dominant ideologies that underlie occupational therapy theory and frameworks will be exposed including normality/normalcy, independence, expertise, and disability as undesirable. A critical examination of how disability has been conceptualized in occupational therapy allows for consideration of alternative views of disability that are likely to influence the development of occupational therapy theory, practice and knowledge.

**Results:** Occupational therapy has evolved in historical context allowing for strategic alliances that have helped to shape the ways that disability is given meaning. The critical examination of occupational therapy's past and present views of disability and the underlying assumptions associated with these views will be exposed, allowing for alternative ways of thinking about disability in occupational therapy.

**Conclusion:** The knowledge generated in this review will challenge occupational therapists to reflect on their views of disability. By developing a greater self-awareness of otherwise unconscious values, occupational therapists will be able to provide more inclusive and relevant services in global contexts.

**Contribution to practice:** The examination of how disability has been, and continues to be conceptualized in occupational therapy theory, practice and research is vital to advancing the profession of occupational therapy. Determining the ways that occupational therapists understand and conceptualize disability will provide insight into how treatment is organized and how new knowledge is generated, and how this is likely to change in the future.