

1532

Occupational identity - Outline of a theory based on contemporary thinking and object relations theory

Jesper Larsen Maersk

The Department of Occupational Therapy, University College Sealand, Naestved, Sealand, Denmark

Introduction

The concept of occupational identity could be one of the key instruments for OT and researchers to understand the essence of occupation as a therapeutic tool. Not only as an isolated incident in a therapeutic setting but to understand it as an important and meaningful entity that has a thematic relation to a much more complex and unique personal history.

Objectives

The aim of this presentation is to outline a theoretical understanding of Occupational Identity.

Description

In contemporary definitions Occupational Identity is either described as a social construction or an internal psychological process. This outline bridges that gap by drawing on object relations theory and post modernistic thinking. The new terminology underpinning this new understanding of Occupational Identity is as follows:

Imagoes are the basic building blocks of identity. Imagoes constitute the internal representation the person has of his capacities to interact with other people and physical objects. They serve as a reservoir for the composure of a personal narratives and Occupational Identity. They come from the unique Occupational trajectory. Occupational trajectory is the footprint made of a unique line of performed occupational forms the individual has engaged in through different contexts. Occupational Identity is a subjective composure of a personal narrative negotiated between internalized imagoes and collective imagines and narratives of a shared social world. Creating a coherent narrative is vital to psychic stability. Experiences of everyday life can be contradictive and provoke anxiety. Splitting, idealization and other forms of psychic defense are vital in order to maintain a meaningful personal narrative that also fosters social recognition. Also, narrative composure allows a space for imagination future possibilities as an occupational being.

Conclusion

A new understanding of Occupational Identity was presented. The theoretical outline can guide occupational therapy praxis related to identity issues. By placing meaning in occupation as the pivotal condition for identity development in a juncture between emotions, occupational history, social and physical world, it captures all important aspects when working from holistic perspective. Also, the theoretical foundation underpinning this outline can serve as a stepping stone for future research focused on Occupational Identity.