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Queering Occupation: "Being" and "Doing" Gay in Occupational Therapy

Elvin Williams¹

¹*University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa,* ²*University of Stellenbosch, Cape Town, South Africa*

Introduction/Rationale: The growing occupational therapy (OT) scholarship on queer studies and queer theory in the dominant west is strongly juxtaposed by the unsettling lack of theoretical attention to queer experiences in the non-western world. This paper is a reflexive auto ethnographical narrative of my experience as a coloured gay occupational therapist from South Africa and my attempt to conduct research on homosexuality.

Objectives: The paper uses my "failed research" as a springboard to explore and challenge the notion of decolonisation of (queer) occupational therapy research and practise from a South African perspective and aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on queer studies in occupational therapy.

Approach: An auto ethnographical approach is used to give meaning to the deeply personal, painful and transformative experiences that unfolded during the research process. Personal reflections, literature and narratives provide a lens to describe the way conscious and subconscious experiences shaped the research process and unsettled embodied constructs about queerness, race, academic socialization and decolonisation of OT in South Africa.

Practice Implications: Without critical awareness of the dominant western epistemologies that pervade occupational therapy education, research and practice; and the evasion of our work that meaningfully queers the discipline of occupational therapy, we will effectively lose the transformative possibilities that enable authentic occupational therapy scholarship and practise.

Conclusion: To be silent is to be complicit.

