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# "Coming Out": The Occupational Impact for Gay Men

Karen McCarthy

University College Cork, Ireland, karen.mccarthy@dominican.edu

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# "COMING OUT": THE OCCUPATIONAL IMPACT FOR GAY MEN

Dr. Karen McNulty, [k.mcnulty@ucc.ie](mailto:k.mcnulty@ucc.ie)

Co-Researchers: Katie Kisor, Kathleen Smith, Sarit Barlev, Miriam Ressler-Levy, Dr. Susan McNulty

# “Out”line



- Occupation and sexual identity
- Coming out process
- Research findings
- Role of OT

# Occupation and Identity

- Understanding Meaning (Williamson, 2000; Jackson, 1995)
- Identity (Taylor, 1999; Jackson, 1995)
- Transition (Birkholtz, 1999)



# Coming out process

- Historical background:
  - ▣ DSM, WHO
  - ▣ 8% LGB, 3% Unsure (My World Survey, 2012)
- Heterosexism and Homophobia (homonegativism)
- The Coming out process
  - ▣ not viewed as a single event but as a process that evolves over time (Savin-Willaims, 1990; Troiden, 1988)
  - ▣ acceptance of one's gayness as a positive aspect of self (Kus, 1985)
- Strategic Outness (Williamson, 2000)

# Research in OT

- “Coming Out” and its impact on women’s occupational behaviour- a discussion paper (Birkholtz & Blair, 1999)
- “My Secret Life”: The emergence of one gay man’s authentic identity (Walsh & Crepeau, 1998)
- Football and tin cans: A model of identity formation based on sexual orientation expressed through engagement in occupations (Williamson, 2000)
- Sexual orientation: Its relevance to Occupational Science and the practice of Occupational Therapy. (Jackson, 1995);
- Understanding the experience of noninclusive Occupational Therapy clinics: Lesbians’ perspectives (Jackson, 2000)
- Sexual identity and human occupation: A qualitative exploration. (Devine & Nolan, 2007)

# Research methods

- Qualitative study
  - ▣ Phenomenological approach
  - ▣ Semi-structured interviews, approx. 1 hour each
- Participants:
  - ▣ Seven men in their 20's who self-identified as gay
  - ▣ Experienced some of the process of coming out
  - ▣ Los Angeles and San Diego area
  - ▣ Purposive and snowball sampling

# Research findings

## □ **Theme 1: Hidden Identity**

- Motivations to hide identity:
  - External Pressures from Family, Religious and Societal Values
- The art of hiding their identity:
  - Using occupations and “impression management” (Goffman, 1959)
- Effects of hiding their identity:  
Mental health implications





# Research Findings

- **Theme 2: Social Support**
  - Friends
  - Family members
  - Media
  - Gay support Groups



# Research Findings

- Theme 3: Freedom to Explore Occupations
  - New occupations-
    - self care, leisure, sexual activity, substance use
  - Environment shift



# Summary of findings



## **In the Closet:**

Environment (heterosexism, homophobia)

Increased Fear

Hidden Identity and use of occupations to stay in the closet

Possible mental health concerns

## **Coming Out:**

finding support, freedom to explore new occupations, and a change of environment

# Perception of Healthcare providers

Mayock et al, 2009

- 76.9% felt healthcare providers need to have more knowledge and sensitivity to LGBT issues
- Healthcare providers typically presumed that their patients were heterosexual, leading to reluctance on the part of respondents to disclose their LGBT identity
- Healthcare providers were only aware of respondents LGB identity in 44% of cases
- Only 40% felt respected as an LGBT person by their healthcare provider
- 45% of respondents actively seek out LGBT-friendly healthcare professionals because of bad experiences they had with providers in the past

# Role of OT

- Communication with healthcare provider
  - ▣ Power of language
- OT Intervention:
  - ▣ Holistic Care
  - ▣ Worlds of meaning– (Jackson, 1995)
  - ▣ Clinical Reasoning
  - ▣ Coming out as a process, strategic outness (Orne, 2011)
- Advocacy:

“Occupational therapy is the art and science of enabling engagement in everyday living, through occupation; of enabling people to perform the occupations that foster health and well-being; and of **enabling a just and inclusive society so that all people may participate to their potential in the daily occupations of life**” (Townsend & Polatajko, 2007, p. 372).

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# Resources

- Glen.ie : Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (Resources- Mental Health and Well Being)
  - Supporting LBBT lives: Key Findings Report
  - Guide to practice for health care professionals
  - HSE report: Look After Yourself, Look After Your Mental Health
  - Older persons: Visible Lives
- Lgbt.ie; National LGBT Helpline: 1890 929 539
- Belongto.org

# Discussion Questions

- ❑ What is the role of OT when someone is coming out?
- ❑ How does coming out impact occupations social, leisure , school, work)?
- ❑ Can OT work specifically with LGBT population? Or how can knowledge of coming out influence traditional OT practice areas?
- ❑ Is there a need for a guide for OT in working with LGBT population?
- ❑ How can OT address heterosexism/ homophobia and advocate for LGBT population?

Thank you! Questions?  
k.mcnulty@ucc.ie