"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
Co-Researchers: Katie Kisor, Kathleen Smith, Sarit Barley, 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-Williams, 1990; Troiden, 1988)
  - acceptance of one’s gayness as a positive aspect of self (Kus, 1985)
- Strategic Outness (Williamson, 2000)
“Coming Out” and it’s 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: It’s 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
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).


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