"Coming Out": The Occupational Impact for Gay Men

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

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.dominican.edu/all-faculty

Part of the Occupational Therapy Commons

Survey: Let us know how this paper benefits you.

Recommended Citation
McCarthy, Karen, "'Coming Out': The Occupational Impact for Gay Men" (2013). Collected Faculty and Staff Scholarship. 251.
https://scholar.dominican.edu/all-faculty/251

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty and Staff Scholarship at Dominican Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Collected Faculty and Staff Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Dominican Scholar. For more information, please contact michael.pujals@dominican.edu.
"COMING OUT": THE OCCUPATIONAL IMPACT FOR GAY MEN

Dr. Karen McNulty, 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)
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).
References

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