

Putting the Hurt to Use: Integration of Life Experiences and the Development of Therapeutic Use of Self for Mental Health Occupational Therapists

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Introduction and Literature Review

Purpose: To discover how mental health occupational therapists integrate life experiences into their development of their therapeutic use of self.

Theory: Vivaio Model (MOVI)

Design: Qualitative phenomenology

Research questions:

1. How do mental health occupational therapists integrate life experiences into their development of therapeutic use of self?
2. What types of positive or negative life experiences do mental health occupational therapists describe as influential to their development of therapeutic use of self?
3. How important do mental health occupational therapists believe life experiences are for the development of their therapeutic use of self?

Methods

Data collection:

- Recruitment via email (criterion sample)
- Online informed consent & demographic survey
- 60-90 minute recorded & transcribed semi-structured interview
- Completion of creative reflection

Data analysis:

- Transcriptions → Immersion → Categories → Open coding → Development of initial code book → Axial Coding → Revision of Code Book → Emergent Themes

Steps to ensure validity:

- Bracketing
- Peer Debriefing
- Triangulation
- Member Checks
- Rich, Thick description
- Audit trails

Themes

1. It Takes the "Ick" to Become Polished
2. Life Experiences Foster Capacity for Pause
3. Metamorphosis of Therapeutic Use of Self

Participants

Inclusion Criteria: n=6 (2 Males, 4 Females) Practicing and non practicing mental health OTRs/COTAs; ≥ 1 year of experience in mental health practice setting

Limitations

- Creative reflection pieces were not obtained from all 6 participants
- Virtual interviews differed from intimacy of face-to-face interviews
- COVID-19 - limited the ability of researchers and participants to collaborate on an intimate face-to-face level

Conclusion

Data Revealed: Therapists shared a multitude of influential life experiences that impacted TUS including:

- Trauma
- Parenthood
- Other personal, relational, and/or professional adversities & crises

Implications: Life experiences, especially challenging experiences, seemed to influence development of TUS for these participants

Future Research:

- Build to future mixed methods study
- Aim to increase breadth of descriptive data through survey use