Occupational Possibilities in Unemployment Situations: The Feasibility of Volunteering for Discouraged Workers

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Presentation Overview

• Why relevant?
• Key definitions
• Description of study
• Findings
• Volunteering during routines of crisis
• Discussion and Implications: Linking possibility and reality
Why Relevant?

• Global unemployment
• Societal expectations about work
  – Cultural variations
• Purpose of occupational therapy and work
  – Historical focus, current scope of practice
• Volunteering and occupational possibilities
Key Definitions

• Occupational possibilities
  – “[What] occupations are supported and promoted by…the broader systems and structures in which [people’s] lives are lived” (Rudman, 2010)

• Discouraged workers
  – Wants/is available to work
  – Has looked in past year but not past month
  – Believes no job is available
Description of Study

- July 2009-April 2010
- “Horizon Mills,” North Carolina
- Collaborative ethnography (Lassiter, 2005)
  - Transactional perspective (Bailliard, Aldrich, & Dickie, in press)
- Funding: AOTF and ΦκΦ
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Community Role</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cindy (discouraged worker)</td>
<td>09/09-04/10</td>
<td>Par. obs., Interviews, OQs</td>
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<td>Rose (discouraged worker)</td>
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<td>Allen (discouraged worker)</td>
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<td>Margie (discouraged worker)</td>
<td>01/10-04/10</td>
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<td>Jeanette (discouraged worker)</td>
<td>09/09-04/10</td>
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<td>Ministry director</td>
<td>07/09-04/10</td>
<td>Par. obs., Interviews</td>
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<td>Ministry staff (N=10)</td>
<td>07/09-04/10</td>
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<td>Cham. of Comm. member</td>
<td>10/09</td>
<td>Single interview</td>
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<td>Media person</td>
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<td>Comm. college president</td>
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<td>Probation managers (N=2)</td>
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<td>Local politician</td>
<td>03/10</td>
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<td>Factory H.R. director</td>
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<td>Sheriff’s representative</td>
<td>09/09</td>
<td>Single interview</td>
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<td>Volunteer coordinator</td>
<td>02/10</td>
<td>Single interview</td>
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Findings

- Defining ‘discouraged’
- Reconceptualizing ‘routine’
- Daily occupational categories and possibilities
Margie and Jeanette
Volunteering

• Different situational relations lead to different occupational possibilities
  – Margie: “Not your ‘typical’ unemployed person”
  – Jeanette: “Nothing is under my control”

• Nexus of routine and resources creates spaces for occupational possibilities, but those spaces must still align with social norms
Discussion

- Crisis vs. ‘everyday’ experience of time (Shevchenko, 2009)

- Occupation as response to tension of situation (Dewey, 1957; Kestenbaum, 1977)
Discussion: Linking ‘Possibility’ and Reality

• Advocating ‘possibilities’ requires understanding relations of reality
  • Transactional perspective emphasizes relations
• Reconciling ‘crisis’ and ‘everyday’ possibilities
  • Occupational justice opportunity
Implications and Future Directions

• Must match occupational possibilities to situation
  – **Educators**: introduce students to perspectives that emphasize relationships
  – **Scholars**: continue dialogues and apply to real-world situations
  – **Practitioners**: expand scope of practice
Selected References


