

Volunteering & Identity Formation

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Introduction

- Occupations, including those occupations in which you do things together (“enacted togetherness”), creates meaning and are linked to identity.^{1,2,3,4}
- Unpaid volunteerism is a valuable occupation in later life and brings positive feelings of one’s self-perception or identity.⁵

Study Aim

To explore how the social occupation of engaging in a volunteer organization supports identity formation



“And I’ve always felt like the more things you learn to do, the more things you do and the more people you meet-the bigger person you are. I just think that is how we grow.”

Methods

Design:

- Qualitative Study
- Phenomenological approach

Participants

- Extension Community Association (ECA) Volunteers, specifically 3 retired female volunteers from Randolph County
- ECA is an adult volunteer organization affiliated with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension whose mission is to strengthen families & communities through leadership development, education and volunteer work

Data Collection

- Semi-structured interviews

Analysis

- Thematic analysis approach



Results

Identity formation



Volunteerism

Altruism

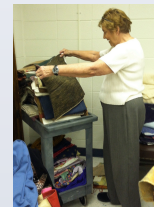
- Giving back to the community
- Helping people in need
- Doing good for others

Belonging

- Meeting new people
- Desire to be part of a close knit group
- Learning from other members

Purpose

- Gain joy from work
- Sharing time & talents
- Feelings of satisfaction with self and club roles



“I enjoy it- you get to meet a lot of different and nice people and be out there in the community. It gives you a sense that you are out there doing something good for someone else.”

Discussion

“Enacted togetherness” or doing things together in a volunteer organization promotes identity formation through increased feelings of altruism, belonging and purpose.

Implications for OS/OT

- Greater understanding of “enacted togetherness” specifically the method of volunteerism
- OT Practice and Volunteerism
 - Strategic mechanism for therapists to incorporate into practice
 - Promotes self-growth
 - Acts as motivator for clients
 - Improves client’s self-perception
 - May help to reform identity after injury or illness

References

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