



# CRITICAL OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE: IMPLICATIONS FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PRACTICE

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## KEY TAKE HOME POINTS

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What are the common elements that characterize critical occupational science?

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What are the potential contributions of a critical perspective to practice?  
the understanding of occupation and OT





# SCANNING THE FIELD

Who has already have a class or a course on occupational science?

Who has already have a class or a course on 'critical' perspectives and/or 'critical' occupational science?

# AGENDA



Background – 5 min



Critical Occupational Science – 10 min



Examples of implications – 10 min



Discussion – breakout rooms – 20 min

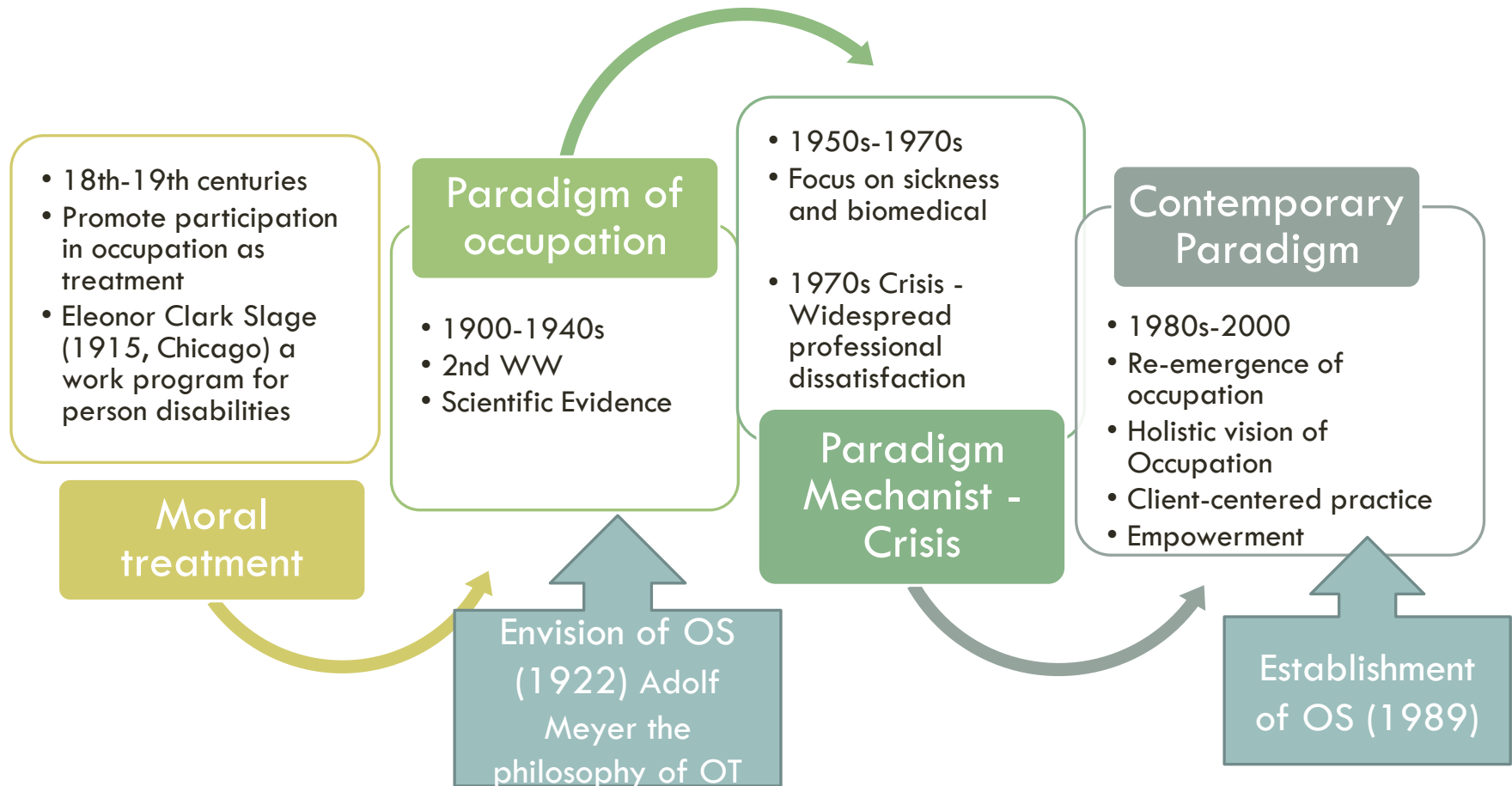


Brief Report from groups – 15-20 min



Reflections – 5 min

# BACKGROUND: DEVELOPMENT OF OT/OS



# DEVELOPMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE



Models



Theories



Understandings of  
occupation

Contemporary  
Paradigm

- 1980s-2000
- Re-emergence of occupation
- Holistic vision of Occupation
- Client-centered practice
- Empowerment

Establishment  
of OS (1989)



# Theories

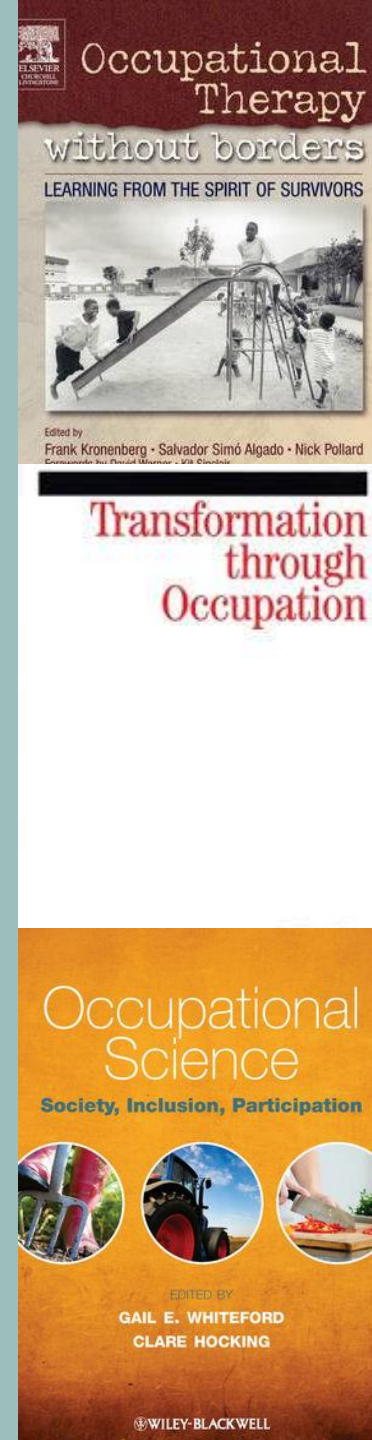




# BACKGROUND

- International movement seeking to respond to situations of oppression and exclusion through occupation
- Social role and ethical responsibility to social justice
- Occupation use as a means for social transformation

e.g. Farias, & Rudman, 2019; Kronenberg, & Ramugondo, 2015; Laliberte Rudman, 2015; Pollard, Sakellariou, & Kronenberg, 2008; Sakellariou & Pollard, 2017; Townsend, 1997; Watson & Swartz, 2004



# CRITICAL OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE

- Focus on occupations
- Critical social theory – critical perspectives (e.g. Critical Race, Governmentality, Radical Feminism, etc.)
  - Reality and knowledge
  - Power relations
  - Critique of ‘common sense’, ‘taken-for-granted’
  - (Re)formulate practices –transformation

Canella & Lincoln, 2011; Sayer, 2009



# CRITICAL OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE

- Critical occupational approach (Njelesani et al., 2013) explores e.g. who controls knowledge production, the mechanisms of how occupations are taken up, and who stands to gain or lose.
- The central focus of critical occupation studies has been the meso-societal influences that affect occupations (Laliberte-Rudman, 2012)

What does this means?





# CRITICAL OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE

- Dominant focus on occupations that can restore or maintain good health, seen as something positive and productive (Twinley, & Addidle, 2012).
- Tendency to privileging those people that engage in occupations seen as “productive” or healthy – while marginalizing others (Kiepek et al., 2013).









# CRITICAL OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE

- Critical occupational approach locates occupation as “a site of knowledge production, that is, active political sites where meanings are generated and contested” (Njelesani et al., 2013, p.12)
- Occupation as “always a product of history, society and agency, and as continually shaped in relations of power.” (Laliberte Rudman, 2014, p.381)





## EXAMPLES OF IMPLICATIONS: USE OF CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES WITHIN OT/OS

- Expanding the conceptualization of occupation, e.g. occupation as situated, occupation as residing within the individual, occupational choice
- Examining occupations as resistance

e.g. Farias & Laliberte Rudman, 2016; Galvaan, 2012, Hocking & Whiteford, 2012

A stylized illustration of a person with dark hair and a sad expression, wearing a light-colored shirt. They are surrounded by several hands of different colors (orange, green, yellow, pink) pointing towards them. The background is a dark teal color with some faint, light-colored patterns.

## EXAMPLES OF IMPLICATIONS: USE OF CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES WITHIN OT/OS

- Challenging the categorization of occupations that perpetuates dominant ideal ways of living
- Avoiding blaming individual and groups for what is framed as irresponsibility for not doing the “right” occupations

e.g. Farias & Rudman, 2019; Hammell, 2009; Kiepek, Phelan, & Magalhães, 2014





## EXAMPLES OF IMPLICATIONS: USE OF CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES WITHIN OT/OS

- Judging indigenous parent–infant play against Western normative standards can increase the likelihood of blaming parents as neglectful and labelling children as ‘at risk’

e.g. Gerlach, Browne, and Suto, 2014

# DISCUSSION

Can you come up with 1 example of occupation that is labelled as dark, unhealthy or marginalized within your culture/society?

Individual thinking, write it down...



# DISCUSSION

- Who is marginalized in your example of an occupation that is labelled as 'unhealthy' occupations?
- Who does this view of 'dark or unhealthy' occupations affect OT practice?








# BRIEF REPORT FROM THE GROUPS



# KEY TAKE HOME POINTS

What are the common elements that characterize critical occupational science?



What are the potential contributions of a critical perspective to practice? the understanding of occupation and OT



**Thank You**  
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