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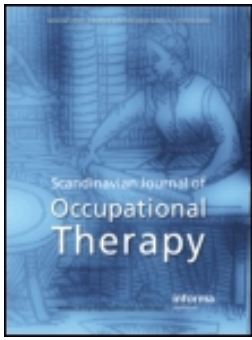
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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Occupational therapy and culture: a literature review

DANIELA CASTRO¹, SYNNEVE DAHLIN-IVANOFF^{1,2} & LENA MÅRTENSSON¹

¹Department of Clinical Neuroscience and Rehabilitation, Institute of Neuroscience and Physiology, The Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, and ²Center of Aging and Health-AGECAP, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Abstract

Background: Occupational therapy has culture as a relevant phenomenon of interest. Culture appears increasingly often in occupational therapy research, from diverse approaches and foci. As culture is difficult to define, and has political and ethical implications, an investigation into its usage is warranted. **Aim:** To identify and describe how culture as a broad phenomenon is expressed in OT research published between 2006 and 2011, regarding knowledge development in the discipline and its impact on practice. **Methods:** A qualitative study was carried out, using an integrative literature review. Thirty-nine studies in English were included. **Results:** From the analysis, two dimensions concerning expressions of culture emerged: “culture is alive” and “occupational therapy as a culture”. Aside from these dimensions, a group of forces that have an impact on these dimensions is described. **Conclusions:** In its understanding of expressions of culture, occupational therapy stands at a crossroads between traditional and critical approaches. A lack of critical insight into professional knowledge increases the risk that occupational therapy will remain satisfied with the current understanding of culture, based on the dominant knowledge. The discipline could fail to address the political, ethical, and theoretical issues required to reach the targeted diversity in its practice.

Key words: qualitative research, power, ethnic groups, cultural diversity, cultural characteristics

Introduction

Issues related to culture have been seen as relevant for the discipline of occupational therapy (OT), as presented in the “Guiding Principles on Diversity and Culture”, published by the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) (1). In this document, British anthropologist Helman’s definition of culture is used, referring to it as the ideational and complex system of values, meanings, knowledge, and beliefs that social groups share (2). This definition is rooted in the social sciences, as well as other concepts used in OT (1). The discipline also acknowledges strong influences from other fields of science, including biology and physiology. With such diverse influences, OT needs to adapt this kind of related knowledge to make it relevant for the discipline. Occupational therapy scholars then

develop a process of application of certain common terms (such as “activity”) or related sciences’ concepts into the professional knowledge (3). When they do so, they usually present their own understanding of these concepts (3). This process occurs in a chaotic way at different levels of the discipline’s domain, considering OT’s inherent holism, as presented by Royeen (4). This whole process can be described as the use of an occupational spin (1). But the use of such a spin may have ambivalent values, for example, a low degree of understanding of the ideas developed from an occupational spin outside the discipline versus the possibility to construct OT’s own theories. The deliberate act of avoiding an occupational spin, in order to keep the original definitions provided by other bodies of knowledge, seems to be in line with some criticism concerning the discipline’s

Correspondence: Daniela Castro, Arvid Wallgrens Backe, House 2, 2nd Floor – Box 455, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden. Tel: +46 317 865788.
E-mail: daniela.castro@neuro.gu.se

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tentative and insecure attitude with regard to its own knowledge construction (5).

In OT, several theories have been constructed to explain some of the discipline's complex phenomena, including occupation, disability, independence, and culture (6-9). According to the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT), occupations in OT are those activities developed on a daily basis, as individuals or in a collective way, in order to occupy time, and to gain meaning and purpose (10). Occupations are those needed, wanted and expected activities by people (10). Occupation is then understood as expressing the meanings and characteristics that are created by culture and shared by social groups (1). Thus, both phenomena – occupation and culture – are interconnected in several and complex ways (1). A basic understanding of these phenomena is allocated as a relevant topic in the discipline's common discourses, and it has been assumed with little questioning, as well as on the grounds of values and beliefs that OT has largely regarded as universal (11,12). According to available research, this aspiration for universality is rooted in certain common social characteristics of Western thinking (6,11,13-15). Despite this, the ideas have been used worldwide in the discipline (6,8,11,12,14-20). These ideas serve as a basis for understanding what is considered as right for occupational therapists (OTs) and clients in their experience of OT services (1,15). A further question emerges here: that of how other groups in the discipline – those that do not share the mainstream Western culture – conceptualize and experience common Western-centred ideas about OT, culture, and occupation (15,17).

Thus, in OT practice beliefs and ideas about culture are activated in any action developed by OTs on several levels, for example in the encounter with clients in therapy, where some prejudices and culture-based ideas are expressed (14). In this encounter, as well as in other therapy interventions, issues connected with culture may be forgotten, ignored and/or taken for granted. If these issues are not perceived or respected, potentially risky cultural situations could affect OT practice, at least in terms of ethical, therapeutic, or procedural concerns (21). An awareness of these potential risks is especially relevant for OT practice and its development in increasingly diverse societies, as well as in political involvement in OT as a globalized profession (6,11,18,22,23). This trend of bringing globalization into the discipline has been challenged by the need for local perspectives and other considerations of people's needs on a more complex level, adding diverse agents acting with and on the inherent complexity of the discipline (4,11,18,24). Cross-cultural categories should be considered to attain this

complex level of analysis, such as gender, independence, or ethnicity, and alternative versions of what is understood as valid knowledge (6,13). This has not always been critically and extensively reflected in the discipline (8,9,25).

The expression of culture in main OT knowledge developments, and consequently in its practice, should be constantly revisited, according to Dickie (20). However, only one review of the literature was found in this topic (14). That study reported in 2003 that there are some signals of an emergent paradigm shift in the discipline that is marked by an increased awareness of culture and related issues (14). Also, different papers have pointed out culture as an important topic for the discipline (6,11,15). Nevertheless, some concerns still remain. One question that must be solved is whether these concerns are actually new or just new expressions of some older ones (26,27). The answer might be closely correlated to a critical analysis of how political, ethical, and even culture-based conditions in OT have evolved in recent decades (8). Therefore, the aim of this literature review has been to identify and describe how culture as a broad phenomenon is expressed in OT research published in English between 2006 and 2011, as concerns knowledge development in the discipline and its impact on practice.

Material and methods

Design

As this was a qualitative study, a systematic integrative literature review was selected, allowing the researchers to include articles with different types of methodologies (28). The goal of an integrative literature review is to analyse and synthesize empirical or theoretical studies on a specific topic to achieve a comprehensive understanding of it, or to provide an understanding of the topic's state of the art (28). In terms of procedure, the method includes five steps (28). The first is identification of the research problem. The second is a literature search for studies in the field. The third step presents an evaluation of findings. The fourth step includes data analysis, considering data reduction and data comparison. The fifth step is the presentation of results.

Literature search

A systematic literature search was carried out in the PubMed, the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), and the SciVerse Scopus (Scopus) databases. Altogether, these electronic databases offer a broad coverage of articles in the medical, health, and social sciences.

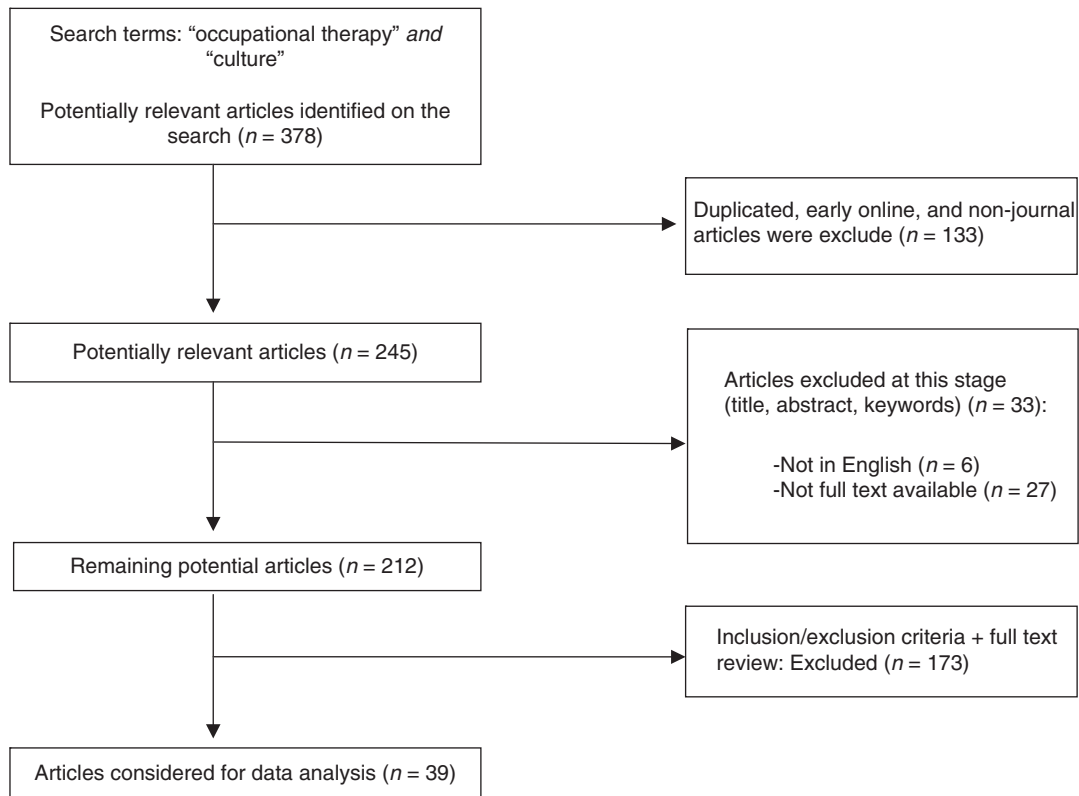


Figure 1. Flowchart of the articles selection for this literature review.

The first retrieval considered title, abstract, and keywords, using “occupational therapy” and “culture” as the search terms. The selected databases provided different results; PubMed gave 105 articles, CINAHL 129 articles, and Scopus 144 articles. The total number of articles retrieved was 378. The search limits were: articles written in English, published between January 2006 and December 2011, and available for free full-text download from the authors’ affiliated university’s electronic library system. All searches were made by the first author.

Evaluation of the findings

The initial evaluation of the 378 articles was made for title, abstract, and keywords (evaluation flow is shown in Figure 1). Of those 378 articles, 133 were discarded, because they were not peer-reviewed journal articles, were published “early online” or were duplicated in the results from the different databases. Another 33 were discarded because they presented the full text in a language other than English or because the full text article was not available for download. At this stage, an initial matrix of analysis was constructed with the remaining 212 potential articles employing the following data: authors, country of authors’ institutional affiliation, year, journal,

methodology, main topic, and potential relationship with the aim here.

Two stages of review were then conducted over the matrix, in order to select studies to be included in the data analysis. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied in the first stage (for title, keywords, and abstract). The main inclusion criterion was that the article presented culture as the main topic in relationship to OT development, expressed in terms of professional knowledge and subsequent practice. The exclusion criteria were: occupational science as the main theme, other types of culture (such as cell culture), and inter- or multi-professional studies. After this stage, the analysis was conducted in the remaining articles’ full text, looking for their relevance to the proposed aim of this study. At the end of this stage, 39 articles remained for data analysis because they were considered relevant to the aim.

Data analysis

Four stages were followed to achieve the emergence of the results: data reduction, data display, data comparison and drawing conclusions as recommended by Whittemore (28). Data reduction considered a first grouping of the information given some common characteristics among the articles (28). At this stage,

Table I. Descriptive characteristics of articles included in the literature review: Occupational therapy and culture (2006–2011).

Ref no.	Author	Year	Journal	Authors' institutional affiliation (country)	Methodology	Main topic	Scope
(40)	Watson	2006	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	South Africa	Qualitative	Cultural identity and cultural capital	***
(55)	Watson, Chapman, Adams et al.	2006	British Journal of Occupational Therapy	UK and Bangladesh	Qualitative	Impact of culture on learning	*****
(60)	Yang, Shek, Tsunaka et al.	2006	Occupational Therapy International	Singapore	Qualitative	Cultural influences in occupational therapy practice in Singapore	**
(43)	Kirsh, Trentham & Cole	2006	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	Canada	Qualitative	Cultural diversity	*
(45)	Hopton & Stoneley	2006	British Journal of Occupational Therapy	UK	Qualitative	Cultural awareness	**
(54)	Carmody, Nolan, Chonchuir et al.	2007	Occupational Therapy International	Ireland	Qualitative	Culturally sensitive/Kawa model	****
(39)	Muñoz	2007	Occupational Therapy International	USA	Qualitative	Culturally responsive caring	*****
(67)	Nayar, Hocking & Wilson	2007	British Journal of Occupational Therapy	New Zealand	Qualitative	New Zealand and Indian culture	*
(31)	Nelson	2007	Occupational Therapy International	Australia	Qualitative	Cultural safety	*
(64)	Nelson & Allison	2007	Occupational Therapy International	Australia	Qualitative	Culturally appropriated occupational therapy service	*
(53)	Iwama	2007	Occupational Therapy International	Canada	Qualitative	Culturally based occupational therapy	***
(65)	Nelson, Allison & Copley	2007	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	Australia	Qualitative	Culturally appropriated occupational therapy service	*
(35)	Trentham, Cockburn, Cameron et al.	2007	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	Canada	Qualitative	Cultural competence	*****
(61)	Tamaru, McColl & Yamasaki	2007	Disability and Rehabilitation	Canada and Japan	Qualitative	Intercultural concept of independence among Japanese and Canadian occupational therapists	***

Table I. (Continued).

Ref no.	Author	Year	Journal	Authors' institutional affiliation (country)	Methodology	Main topic	Scope
(62)	Bowyer, Bélanger, Briand et al.	2007	Occupational Therapy in Health Care	USA, Canada, Chile, the Netherlands, Finland, Switzerland, France, Taiwan, Japan, and Israel	Qualitative	Model of Human Occupation dissemination worldwide	****
(41)	Kelly & McFarlane	2007	Occupational Therapy International	UK	Qualitative	Cultural identity	***
(63)	Liu & Ng	2008	Occupational Therapy in Health Care	Hong Kong	Qualitative	Chinese culture	**/*****
(50)	Murden, Norman, Ross et al.	2008	Occupational Therapy International	USA	Quantitative	Cultural awareness and competence	*****
(37)	Coster	2008	American Journal of Occupational Therapy	USA	Qualitative	Measurements and assessments in occupational therapy from a Western perspective	***
(47)	Rudman & Dennhardt	2008	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	Canada	Qualitative	Cultural underpinnings in occupational identity concept	***
(36)	Suarez-Balcázar, Rodawoski, Balcázar et al.	2009	American Journal of Occupational Therapy	USA	Quantitative	Cultural competence	*****
(33)	VanLeit & Crowe	2009	Occupational Therapy in Mental Health	USA	Qualitative	Cambodian culture	**
(48)	Hammel	2009	Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy	Canada	Qualitative	Sacred texts in occupational therapy	***
(49)	Iwama, Thomson & McDonald	2009	Disability and Rehabilitation	Canada	Qualitative	The Kawa model	****
(52)	Nelson	2009	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	Australia	Qualitative	Occupational therapists' role with Australian Aboriginal population	*
(46)	Scheidegger, Lovelock & Kinébanian	2010	Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy	China, the Netherlands and UK	Qualitative	Tibetan culture	**
(69)	Liedberg, Björk & Hensing	2010	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	Sweden	Qualitative	Culture and gender	***
(59)	Galheigo	2011	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	Brazil	Qualitative	Cultural sensitivity	***

Table I. (Continued).

Ref. no.	Author	Year	Journal	Authors' institutional affiliation (country)	Methodology	Main topic	Scope
(34)	Heigl, Kinébanian & Josephsson	2011	Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy	Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden	Qualitative	Relationship between culture and occupation (Albanian culture)	*
(68)	Humbert, Burket, Deveney et al.	2011	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	USA	Qualitative	Cultural awareness and sensitivity	****
(32)	Nelson, Gray, Jensen et al.	2011	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	Australia	Mixed	Aboriginal culture in Australia	*
(57)	Pooremamali, Östman, Persson et al.	2011	International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being	Sweden	Qualitative	Bicultural personal growth and mental health	*
(38)	Reid & Chiu	2011	Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy	Canada and Hong Kong	Mixed	Culturally diversity (Asian and Canadian mothers)	*
(66)	Simoneis, Njiesani, Novak et al.	2011	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	Canada	Qualitative	Cultural awareness	*****
(56)	Stedman & Thomas	2011	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	Australia	Qualitative	Cultural safety (Aboriginal population Australia)	*
(44)	Thomas, Gray & McGinty	2011	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	Australia	Qualitative	Cultural interface (Aboriginal population Australia)	*
(58)	Thorley & Lim	2011	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	Australia and Singapore	Qualitative	Culturally relevant assessments (Aboriginal population Australia)	*
(51)	Waugh & Mackenzie	2011	Australian Occupational Therapy Journal	Australia	Qualitative	Culturally sensitive health services (Aboriginal population Australia)	*
(42)	Wray & Mortenson	2011	Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy	Canada	Qualitative	Cultural competence	****

Note: Groups by scope: *Interventions or validation of assessments with/for minority groups. **Interventions in non-English-speaking countries. ***Analysis of main concepts for the discipline. ****Theoretical models development. *****Use of culture in daily practice. *****Use of culture and related topics in OT students' training.

the electronic versions of the 39 selected articles were kept in NVivo 10 (29). They were organized into six groups according to scope and research methodology (see Table I). After this stage, data display was conducted to present the reduced data in visual form in order to find the initial patterns and relationships (28). Preliminary themes and patterns were printed and organized manually to allow visual organization of the findings. Around 25 potential results emerged. The next stage, data comparison, allowed the identification and construction of relationships among the identified patterns and themes, in an iterative way (28). At this point, a continuous reflective process was followed among the co-authors in order to refine the nominalization of the results of the analysis. The last stage considered the drawing of conclusions, which implied the use of higher levels of abstraction in order to refine and construct the emerging results from the analysis (28). To support this development, verification with primary sources was conducted, as suggested by Whittemore (28). All the described stages supported rigour in the data-analysis process in this research.

After these stages were performed, the results of the study show the forces and the dimensions concerning expressions of culture in OT (28). A continuous reflective process was conducted in order to construct the forces and dimensions, as well as the sub-dimensions that sustain it. A notebook was kept during the whole process to register the progress in the analysis. Regular meetings were arranged among the co-authors to validate and discuss the dimensions and forces' construction. To ensure trustworthiness, Curtin & Fossey's recommendations were followed (reflexivity, transferability, collaboration, and rich description of the method) (30).

Results

In the selected period (2006–2011), the expression of culture in OT research shows different meanings in terms of extension and applicability, as they appear to be cross-related in theoretical, practical, geographical, and even political aspects. Below, a general framework is presented first, followed by a description of the results concerning content.

Framework of the articles

Regarding the articles' designs and authorship, Table I gives the year of publication of each, the country of the authors' institutional affiliation, the journal, the main topic, and the selected methodology. Additional relevant aspects that were observed in the articles were:

- The proportion of female authors or co-authors is six times larger than that of male authors or co-authors.
- Most of the authors or co-authors (at the time of publication) were affiliated with institutions/universities in English-speaking or European countries, followed by Asian ($n = 10$), South American ($n = 2$), and African ($n = 1$).
- Research was conducted mostly in English-speaking countries, followed by Asian and European non-English-speaking countries.
- To explain how culture is understood in OT, occupationally, psychologically, sociologically, anthropologically, and politically based perspectives are used (31–37).
- In the articles reviewed, culture appears both as an isolated construct, “the culture” or “a culture”, as well as in the plural, “cultures”, or through some expressions or combined forms of it, used occasionally as synonymous, for example, “cultural groups” (38,39), “cultural identity” (40,41), “cultural competence” (36,42), and “multicultural practices” (36,39), among many others.

Content of the articles

From the analysis two dimensions emerged, together with a group of forces that impact on them. The first dimension presents culture as an abstract and highly complex phenomenon of interest in OT, from the concrete to the abstract level. In this dimension, culture is understood as a dynamic phenomenon, and it is acknowledged that there are several alternatives for understanding it, all of them seeming to be relevant in some way. The second dimension introduces OT itself as a culture, where patterns of communication and behaviour, meanings, values, and relationships of power appear. Both dimensions are sustained by core and dynamically interconnected sub-dimensions. The following text presents the dimensions and their corresponding sub-dimensions. After this section, the forces that can impact on them are presented in relation to the expressions of culture in OT. This potential impact could be expressed as a trend to develop understanding of the expressions of culture in the discipline.

Culture is alive. According to the articles, culture can be considered to be a living entity, given its social nature and inherent dynamism (43). As a social process, it is sustained by a highly dynamic and complex network of interactions among persons and groups (39,40). This dynamism explains why culture can be perceived as a hard-to-capture phenomenon (34,35). Culture can be understood as

being sustained by five sub-dimensions, including time, degree of visibility, meanings in relation to membership, belongingness and power. The sub-dimensions share the quality of abstraction or lack of concrete expression. These sub-dimensions are important for occupational choices, as is widely described in the articles, because they highlight valued activities for persons who share a culture (31,34,35,40,44-50).

- *Culture is changing as a way to remain over time.* The articles express the presence of a link between culture and time, which indicates that culture changes in accordance with time. This link is described in three ways. The first shows how culture is constructed and re-constructed continuously and in this process both changes and remains. The passing of time allows culture to include new elements (such as technology), but also the realization that some core elements (such as values) remain (51). The second link appears in relationship to the orientation in time. As cultures are lived by cultural groups, they share a past, present, or future orientation, depending on the degree of control that they have over their own actions on the basis of time (47). The third link is related to past times and historical heritage, and is connected with ancient groups, such as the Romans or the Greeks (41,47).
- *Keeping the visible and invisible expressions of culture.* The articles show how culture is expressed in visible and invisible manifestations, and how this is meaningful for OT. Both spheres of manifestations are interdependent and coexist simultaneously. The invisible manifestations – which become natural and remain unquestioned – can be knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, morals, norms, and customs (31,48,50,52). These invisible manifestations underlie the visible ones, such as traditional celebrations, language, and crafts (50). As all of these manifestations construct the heritage of cultures, there are persons who have the task of preserving it (such as educators, authorities, or mentors) or mediating it among different groups as brokers or mediators (33,34,45,51). According to the articles, OT should be aware of both kinds of manifestations (50).
- *Sharing meanings as a basic element for membership to a culture.* The articles show that culture seems to be based on exchange and sharing. What is shared and how it is shared varies. However, in this exchange, the senses of identity and membership are constructed, through the shared meanings created and maintained by common experiences/ social processes developed by individuals and groups (34,35,37,40,42,43,46-49,53). Membership of a

culture can be seen in language, meaningful celebrations, or occupations shared by its members (35,51). What is seen allows others to recognize that a person or a group is part of a culture. To differentiate between groups, diversity in its several forms appears to be a key issue (34-36,39,43,47,49,50,53-56). Individuals can be introduced to, or be interested in becoming members of, a new culture (34). A negotiation process then starts, called acculturation (34). The process may promote or restrict social inclusion in the new culture (34,38,57).

- *Belonging as a way to be equal and different among and between cultures.* According to the articles, culture may be understood as a broad spectrum in which every single individual is included in some way. This means that persons are equals in the sense that they belong to some culture. However, everyone is also different in the way that his/her belongingness is expressed. This happens because culture is shared by persons and groups who belong to it, and this is supported by a very dynamic and complex network of connections among them (34,35,40,49,50). People can feel that they are part of different cultures, as they can be a part of different groups (41). Inside and among the groups, heterogeneity is a common issue (55). Even if a culture is shared, some specific aspects such as geographical differences can add diversity or ambivalence in terms of occupations' performance and belongingness (34,58).
- *Sharing and using power.* The articles express culture as being a product of complex social interactions developed by social systems. This means that power appears as a main feature that sustains and stresses culture (40). Power distribution has different implications for daily living in different cultures, for example in terms of social status or access to privileges, and this varies over time (35,40). The fact that a culture has or does not have the possibility to have some power in social terms may depend on diversity issues, such as gender, ethnic origin, health conditions, migratory conditions, or poverty (59). As social systems are organized in larger and smaller groups, it is important to pay attention to the commonalities and differences between cultures (within the groups and among them). It is important to recognize diversity to prevent the perpetuation of stereotyping processes in respect of certain cultures, an expression of how power can be used against them (31,35,40,43,55). Traditionally, membership was exemplified as ethnicity, giving a set of characteristics that simply define

the individuals, and creating stereotypes of them (35,55,59).

Occupational therapy as a culture. This dimension presents the articles' expressions of culture as a way to explain the shared issues, meanings, and practice of OT. In understanding OT as a culture, the articles express the same ambivalence and complexity as for the previously presented dimension. Occupational therapy is described as a culture shared by groups of persons, for example faculties, practitioners, and students in training, which carry a common body of knowledge (35,48). This knowledge includes a large number of shared concepts and assumptions regarding occupation and its impact on health and well-being, among other constructs (48). To carry this knowledge, as in other cultures, specialized language, beliefs, values, and common patterns of expected professional behaviour coexist in OT (40). Knowledge in occupational therapy is supported by the Western way of thinking in the social and structural environment (49,53). This way of thinking has an impact on the surrounding environments of the discipline's involvement in diverse contexts (from the individual to the global level) (31,46-48). Contextual elements can show how power is executed within and by the discipline (40). Occupational therapy also includes culture as an external element of analysis for occupational performance (53). Occupational therapy has built its own culture with different degrees of critical review of its validity (41,48). Hence, four sub-dimensions that sustain this culture can be traced: OTs' identity, OT theoretical development, OT practice, and paradoxes/gaps in OT practice.

- *Having an occupational therapist identity.* According to the articles, OTs hold, value, and express OT culture in their own lives, in personal and professional terms. The OT culture is then expressed in diverse forms (35,40,41). Each OT as an individual has his/her own personal lenses for culture (that is, taken-for-granted assumptions) formed by gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic or professional status (35). The process of becoming an OT is an enculturating one, in which the student acquires the main aspects of the professional culture, including the discipline's ideas about culture (35,48). From a global perspective, the WFOT acts as a custodian of the profession's identity, believing that all cultures share some similarities (40).
- *Constructing occupational therapy knowledge.* The articles show that OT, like any culture, shares specific knowledge, values, and meanings. For OT, this has been supported by the Western thinking underlying the knowledge construction for the discipline since its beginning. This is presented as a fact, and also as an issue that requires deep and critical analysis (31,38,44,48,60). Culture is highly relevant for theory development in OT and in policy development because it determines perceptions of health, illness, and occupation (45). As most of the professional texts are written in English, knowledge translation is required in some cases (46,61-63). Simple language translation is useful, but not good enough, as an adaptation to local cultures should be also made (33,38,47). This process can be long and expensive, creating a barrier for access to the current knowledge among non English-speaking groups (59).
- *Performing practices with a base in culture in occupational therapy.* This sub-dimension is expressed in the articles in the different ways that OT culture is experienced in professional practice. Occupational therapists should be conscious of how their taken-for-granted assumptions affect their work, including their ideas about people's health beliefs (50,64,65). This could imply, on a basic level, being aware of tangible markers of culture, such as customs, language, dance, crafts, art, and a system of rules, including values and perceptions (43,52). On a more complex level, cultural awareness, respect for cultural heritage, cultural humility, cultural literacy, cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and cultural and transcultural competence are described as key issues for responsive interventions in terms of culture for OT (34,35,38,39,42,43,45-47,52,55,57,66). These interventions must be adjusted to the contexts of practice (40,46). According to the articles, the way in which power relationships are established between OTs and clients should be included in the analysis as well as in therapeutic strategies, especially when culture is involved (31,32,38,39,43,44,50,54,56,58,60). If not, clashes or dilemmas with regard to culture can appear in therapeutic relationships (39,55,57,67).
- *Realizing the gaps and paradoxes in culture in occupational therapy.* This sub-dimension demonstrates the expressions in the articles of how culture is globally understood and experienced by OT and OTs. Some concerns are presented and closely connected with some critical analyses of the discipline's culture (39). These analyses are rooted in a deeper review of some taken-for-granted main professional constructs and theoretical bases (41,48). Some of the main professional theories keep a Western-centred perspective, associated with specific ideas about independence, autonomy, equality, and self-determination, among

other concepts. These concepts are not meaningful in a universal way but have been used as if they were (49). Given the same influences on rehabilitation theory and OT development, there is an unaddressed need to cover rehabilitation requirements of very diverse clientele in terms of culture worldwide (31,33,34,37-45,47-50,52,54,55,57-61,68). These Western influences could determine a certain dominant culture within the discipline or show a class-specific character in the professional knowledge (48). Even more, these concepts could contribute to excluding persons in a situation of disability (48). Despite a declared commitment in OT to a client-centred approach, OTs do not always seem to focus on their clients' culture (69).

The forces that shape and impact on culture in occupational therapy. This result involves four continuum principles, expressed as forces that have been creating a major impact on the OT's understanding of expressions of culture, both as a living entity and in professional terms. The poles in the respective forces can therefore stress the dimensions, adding ambivalence and complexity to it, as they can pull its understanding in different directions. The forces are dynamic agents and have different degrees of impact on culture, depending on the surrounding context and the moment of appearance. The forces also undergo continuous movement and change, and this fact can create unstable conditions for the expressions of culture. This could be an issue of major concern for OTs. Hence, four forces can be traced, regarding dynamism, complexity, innovation, and connection with a certain cosmivision.

- *From static to dynamic.* The first force expresses how the concept of culture has changed in the past decades, from being static and centred on ethnicity to a dynamic, complex, and multidimensional entity (34,35,39,40,42,49,53,57,69). Despite this, the static or reductionist conceptualization remains in use in the discipline, although with some criticism of this (40).
- *From simple to complex.* Closely connected with the first force, the second force is about how culture is understood as a common term, but also as a deeply complex and ambivalent one. This quality could affect the understanding of what culture is in a broad view, and specifically in OT (49). This complexity arises from the interaction of a number of features that express culture, such as knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, morals, norms, customs, ethnicity, religion, age, and other circumstances that people share and experience (35,42,48). For OT the central focus in relation to culture seems to be the meanings given and attached to occupations, more than other aspects described in the literature (35,40,48,49,53).
- *From tradition to innovation.* A third force emerges from the tension between tradition and modernity, for example in terms of values. This implies the understanding of how and which aspects of culture (s) can be preserved in an increasingly globalized, technological, and diverse world (35,36,39-41,45,50,60). Thus adaptability concerning knowledge and practice becomes a main issue of consideration.
- *From Western to Eastern.* A fourth force appears from the concern of how culture(s) can be questioned by globalization when main cosmivisions or

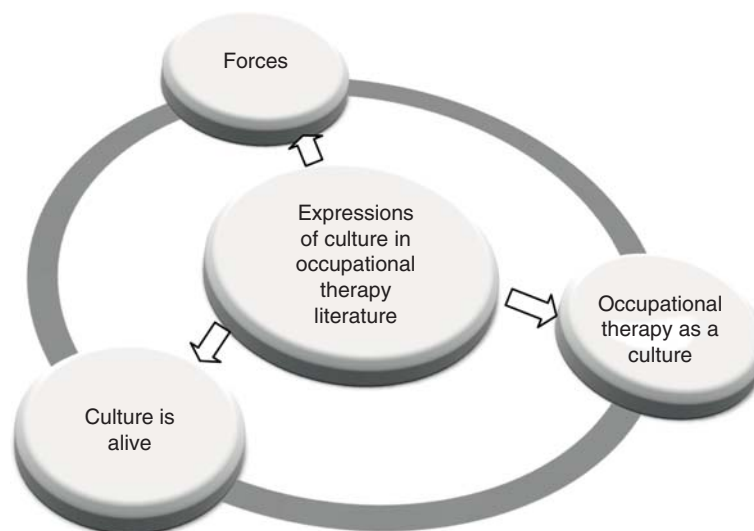


Figure 2. Main results of the analysis in the literature review: Interconnected and dynamic dimensions and forces showing expressions of culture in occupational therapy literature.

worldviews are used to understand it (49). The main worldviews described in the articles are the collectivistically oriented (the Eastern world) and the individualistically oriented (the Western world) (37,40,47,49). Each one includes a set of shared and pervasive values and beliefs that people take for granted and accept as unquestioned (40,49). These values and beliefs are then expressed in occupations, and correspondingly in OT (49,53).

Dimensions and forces are shown in Figure 2. The dimensions as well as the forces are interconnected in a dynamic way, which creates special conditions for the expressions of culture in OT. The ideas of movement and mutual feedback are key elements among all the expressions of culture for the discipline.

Discussion

Three main results emerged from the articles analysed. Two main dimensions and a group of forces present the diverse expressions of culture in OT in these articles. The first dimension explains culture as a phenomenon of interest in OT, given its abstract quality and inherent complexity. The second dimension expresses OT itself as a culture, where relationships based on power, patterns of behaviour, expectations, knowledge, and codes of communication are shared. The group of forces can stress and impact on the understanding of culture in the discipline. Across the dimensions and forces, culture is presented from different perspectives, which do not always agree. Nevertheless these very diverse ideas add richness to the understanding of the phenomenon.

According to the results, complexity and ambivalence appear as common issues in the current dimensions of how culture is expressed in OT research. This is in line with other research which states that culture's usage in OT is usually connected in a complex way to occupation, as an elusive and hard-to-reach phenomenon like many others used in professional knowledge (5,15,19,70). This supports earlier ideas concerning the diverse expressions of culture in connection to occupation, which adds additional ambivalence to the global professional discourse. This ambivalence and some frailty in professional identity are not new concerns in OT, but have been expressed in different ways over time (8,23,71,72).

In the first dimension, the sub-dimensions of time, degree of visibility, meanings in relation to membership belongingness, and power indicate a wide spectrum of possibilities to understand how culture is expressed in the discipline. These sub-dimensions seem to have an impact on occupational performance, and indicate that culture should not be perceived in a static manner. Concerning the second dimension,

considering OT as a culture, this can be seen as double-faceted. On one side, the importance of shared professional identity is highly emphasized, as also presented in other studies (4,9,70). However, a concern emerges here that has been pointed out by some critical thinkers; the door is now open for seeing how some dominant discourses concerning culture and other main constructs have been disseminated globally without questioning their relevance to local practices (6,11,15).

Another issue of concern is the idea presented by Creek, about how OT scholars tend to define professional concepts in their own ways (3). These definitions consider the addition of professional meanings to commonly used terms to form an occupational spin (1,3). The result of these author-based definitions is that the readers, even within the discipline, can be confused in their understanding of the main professional ideas and constructs (3). Culture is not an exception. Based on the results of this literature review, where both dimensions meet, the profession could be standing at a crossroads, marked by the use or avoidance of an occupational spin (1,5). The group of forces could move the decision regarding the chosen way at the crossroads in different directions. One possible way may be to keep the understanding and expression of culture closer to the reductionist approach, which seems "easier" to reach. The other way may offer the possibility to install a diverse understanding of OT at the core of the profession's ideas (more complex and closer to some critical approaches), as is suggested in earlier studies (6,70). It may be possible to follow both ways in a profession that is continuously expanding. Regardless of which way is chosen, political, social, economic, and ethical issues should be addressed (16,18,23,73). At this point, awareness of the forces concerning the understanding of culture for OT should be prioritized for consideration.

The relationship between culture and OT has been explored in previous studies (6,14,22,74-76). Different perspectives on and approaches to culture are presented in these studies, given in the results here, with a broad scope and understanding of the phenomenon. This broadness can be seen as a lack of agreement among the authors, as well as a lower or higher degree of use of occupational spin (1). This broad scope is presented in terms of the understanding of culture (from a more reductionist to a more complex approach) and of how OT deals with the diverse expressions of culture in practice. This research and other OT literature show culture in several ways, for example, as another element in the context/environment in some theoretical models of practice (77,78). Culture has also become a topic of

increasing interest among OT researchers and the profession's developers, although several gaps still remain in the relationship between culture and OT (1,24,79).

The results of this study present certain limitations concerning the format of the articles that should be acknowledged. The use of articles published in English, available for download at a specific Nordic university, is a paradoxical aspect of the research and likely affects the results of the study. The results are based only on texts in English, and are presented in that language. In this way, the dominant Western discourse somehow prevails, although serious concerns about the urgent need to show and respect diversity in culture are presented. The results should then be understood with these considerations. When the analysis was completed, and given the fact that the first author's native language is Spanish, a check was made to get an idea of the research conducted in this language. No matches were found. This could be an expression of the hidden voices in OT research worldwide saying that what is considered as *valid* knowledge is only what is published in or translated from English.

The findings of this study thus support the need for a broader and more amplified understanding of the expressions of culture in OT. Further research is recommended to open global and local discussions about how the diverse expressions of culture are or are not connected to current and emerging practices, as well as with the profession's foundations (11). These foundations, usually claimed to be universal, should be reviewed from a critical approach, in order to – in a very delicate balance – maintain OT spirit and identity, and, on the other hand, be sensitive to local needs. These reviews can have a controversial potential that must be acknowledged, as mainstream discourses could be questioned.

To summarize, culture is expressed as a key phenomenon in OT, considering its close relationship to occupation. Both phenomena share the fact that they are very complex, with a lack of agreement regarding definitions, extension, and applicability. Keeping reductionist approaches in terms of culture in OT may then become a major risk. Occupational therapy works directly with sensitive issues such as purpose, meaning, and what people actually do. Ignoring how culture is connected to these aspects may lead to unethical or even iatrogenic practices from individual to global levels. The effect of this is a denial of the diversity and richness in local practices, trying to impose a standardized set of rules, ideas, and ways of life. Paradoxically, this could undermine the desired global identity of OT. In dealing with it, a critical approach could help to solve uncertainty and

potential dilemmas. If the actual status quo is maintained, social, economic, political, ethical, and theoretical issues that are not addressed will preserve an unequal power distribution in the discipline. The current status quo could then restrict the profession's potential as a committed political, social, and technical actor worldwide.

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