# 1999 Eleanor Clarke Slagle Lecture

# Defining Lives: Occupation as Identity: An Essay on Competence, Coherence, and the Creation of Meaning

Charles H. Christiansen, EdD, OTR, OT(C), FAOTA

The anthropologist Bateson (1996) has written that

The capacity to do something useful for yourself or others is key to personhood, whether it involves the ability to earn a living, cook a meal, put on shoes in the morning, or whatever other skill needs to be mastered at the moment. (1986, p. 11)

In this article, I assert that occupations are key not just to being a person, but to being a particular person, and thus creating and maintaining an identity. Occupations come together within the contexts of our relationships with others to provide us with a sense of purpose and structure in our day-to-day activities, as well as over time. When we build our identities through occupations, we provide ourselves with the contexts necessary for creating meaningful lives, and life meaning helps us to be well.

In this article, an important distinction is made between being well and being healthy. The ultimate goal of occupational therapy services is well-being, not health. Health enables people to pursue the tasks of everyday living that provide them with the life meaning necessary for their well-being. As Englehardt said in describing the virtues of occupational therapy, "people are healthy or diseased in terms of the activities open to them or denied them." (1977, p. 672)

#### Overview

In addressing the complex topic of personal identity, I begin by reviewing key concepts from the literature, noting particularly how our use of language gives us important insights into how we think about ourselves. I then discuss how identity is thought to be formed during the crucial developmental stages of our lives, and how it seems to be of immense importance to us as we make our way through the stages of life. After this, I consider how daily occupations serve the important purpose of enabling us to experience or realize our personal identities. I then address the implications of incomplete or blemished identities on personal well-being, and conclude with observations on the implications of identity-making for the practice of occupational therapy in the new millennium.

Originally published 1999 in American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 53, 547–558.

#### **Propositions**

My presentation is based on four propositions, all centered on the assertion that one of the most compelling needs that every human being has is to be able to express his or her unique identity in a manner that gives meaning to life. This assertion was influenced greatly by an ethnographic study of adaptive strategies reported in *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy* (McCuaig & Frank, 1991). That study described a middle-aged woman [Meghan] with severe athetoid cerebral palsy who had great difficulty with voluntary movement that profoundly affected her mobility and speech. Somehow, without much professional assistance, the woman was able to devise adaptive strategies so that she could use her limited voluntary movement and assistive technology to get along in daily life. Despite rather considerable postural deformities and difficulty with hearing, she was able to live in an apartment, requiring only modest assistance of friends and neighbors to live independently.

In considering the study, I found Meghan's motivations for choosing strategies, rather than the nature of her adaptations, of greatest interest. It seemed that one very important consideration underlying her choices—especially when they were to be viewed by others—was whether or not they would show her to be an intelligent, competent woman. In short, they were issues of identity.

I remember being surprised by this observation, thinking that someone as disabled as she was would be driven by the functional necessities of life, with little reserve time or energy to be consumed by thoughts of how she might be viewed in the eyes of others. But as I thought about it more deeply, I realized that life around me was teeming with indications<sup>1</sup> that people (with disabilities or without) are universally concerned about their social identity and acceptance by others. The ethnographic study also pointed squarely to the reality that daily occupation was the primary means through which the woman was able to communicate her identity as a competent person.

My further thinking and study about the relationships between daily occupations and selfhood led to four premises that may be useful to the process of considering identity issues in occupational therapy. Because there is yet much work to be done in establishing the validity of theories of how identity is constructed and maintained, each proposition must be viewed as tentative.

# Proposition 1: Identity is an overarching concept that shapes and is shaped by our relationships with others.

Personal identity can be defined as the person we think we are. It is the self we know. Note that this is not the same as self-concept nor is it the same as self-esteem, although these important concepts are related to identity. Baumeister (1986, 1997), an often-cited authority on the study of identity, has noted that the most obvious things in daily life are sometimes the most difficult to define. We use the word *self* in our everyday language several times a day.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Consider the prevalence (and popularity) of monograms, tattoos, vanity license plates, titles, degrees, pierced body parts, autobiographies, and unique names (changed or not).

When we say *self*, we include the direct feeling we have about our thoughts and feelings and sensations. This begins with the awareness of our body and is augmented by our sense of being able to make choices and initiate action. It also encompasses the abstract and complex ideas that embellish the self.

The term *self-concept* refers to the *inferences* we make about ourselves. It encompasses our understanding of personality traits and characteristics, our social roles, and our relationships. We are motivated as adults to achieve some consistency in terms of how we view ourselves, and we want this view to be favorable. In general, we strive to maintain favorable views and to dispute or avoid feedback that is discrepant from our view of self (Swann, 1987; Swann & Hill, 1982). To the extent that we perceive discrepancies between our perceived and ideal selves, we are motivated to change.

A third concept is self-esteem. This refers to the evaluative aspect of the self-concept. Self-

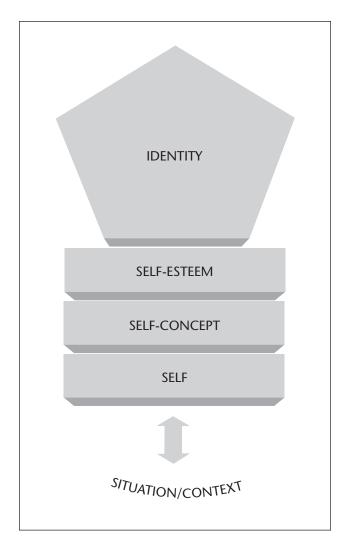


Figure 46.1. Hierarchy of identity concepts.

esteem is related to identity in the sense that our esteem is related to our ability to demonstrate efficacious action, which gains social approval and thus influences our overall concept of self (Baumeister, 1982; Franks & Marolla, 1976).

Finally, identity refers to the definitions that are created for and superimposed on the self. Identity is a composite definition of the self, and includes an interpersonal aspect (e.g., our roles and relationships, such as mothers, wives, occupational therapists), an aspect of possibility or potential (that is, who we might become), and a values aspect (that suggests importance and provides a stable basis for choices and decisions). Self-concept is entirely created in one's mind, whereas identity is often created by the larger society, even though it is often negotiated with others and refined by the individual as a result of those social negotiations (see Figure 46.1).

In summary, identity can be viewed as the superordinate view of ourselves that includes both selfesteem and the self-concept, but also importantly reflects, and is influenced by, the larger social world in which we find ourselves. This definition of identity leads logically to a second proposition:

# Proposition 2: Identities are closely tied to what we do and our interpretations of those actions in the context of our relationships with others.

It is interesting to note that in North America, after an exchange of names between strangers, the next part of a conversation often turns on the expression, "What do you do?" The resulting dialogue provides for shared meaning by situating each person in a context the other understands or attempts to understand through further dialogue.

This everyday exchange illustrates the close connection between doing and identity, and also points out the important role that language has in creating understanding and meaning. Were it not for our social existence, there would be no need for language and communication, and it is generally believed that thought itself is a product of language. That is, when we think, we carry on an internal dialogue with ourselves. Vygotsky (1981) maintained that language provides children with the tools to gain self-awareness and, consequently, voluntary control of their actions. Thus, our understanding of the world around us is shaped as much by language, a system of spoken and written symbols, as it is by direct experience.

For example, when we learn the word *stove* as toddlers, we are also apt to learn the words *hot* and *danger*. We may also discover that if we ignore our parents' admonitions and touch a hot stove, we may burn our fingers. At the same time, we may experience disapproval for not having behaved as our parents expected.

Piaget (1954) and others (Kagan, 1981) have shown that as infants and as toddlers, the experience of coming to know the world very much involves *doing*. As children, we learn that we can intentionally act on our environment and change it. It is this acting on the environment with observable consequence that gives us our sense of selfhood, that teaches us that we are active agents, separate from our environment.

As children explore cause-and-effect events, they learn that they can have an effect on inanimate objects, such as toys, and that they can also elicit reactions from animate objects, such as pets and other people. Mostly, a child's early experiences in this regard are positive because doting parents and grandparents tend to regard any behavior as cute and, as a consequence, are very forgiving of transgressions. Later, this tolerance becomes more selective, and parents can then also communicate disapproval when a child disobeys. Yet, already, children have become active agents in the world, exerting an effect on objects and on people. Using dolls or toy figures, they can even pretend that objects *are* people.

Thus, children learn that they can get the attention of others through their actions and that their actions can be approved or not. Studies have shown that *good* and *bad* are among the words most frequently spoken to young children (Kagan, 1981). Thus, very early on, a connection is made between behavior and social approval in a manner that influences our sense of self. The point to be made here is that already, at an early age, children know themselves as individuals capable of acting on the world, and they understand that their actions have a social meaning. They also begin to appreciate that their approval as individuals is often contingent on what they do (Keller, Ford, & Meacham, 1978).

This is to be the beginning of a lifetime of understanding the interdependence of self and the social groups to which we are connected. It is also the beginning of understanding ourselves as having an identity that is related to group membership. For example, as children we learn that we are members of a family, that we are male or female, and that we have other characteristics in common or in contrast with others.

Identity development continues to be influenced by social relationships as children mature. Beginning at preschool age, self-concept and identity are shaped by a person's competencies and capabilities in comparison to others and in relationship to social standards or expectations (Ruble, 1983). During adolescence, identity is shaped by more abstract concepts, such as interpersonal traits, values, and preferences (Erikson, 1968). For adults, identity is oriented toward goals; often related to becoming a certain kind of person and not becoming another kind of person (Baumeister, 1986). Adolescent and adult identity development, although based more on abstractions, is nonetheless largely influenced by social phenomena.

Because symbolic communication involves behaviors as well as language, children learn also that a raised eyebrow or an awkward silence can be among many forms of communicating disapproval. As maturity develops, the task of understanding what constitutes social approval takes on even greater importance, and becomes even more challenging, because the feedback adults receive in social settings is much more ambiguous and indirect. At this point, it should be obvious that identity has no existence outside of interpersonal relationships. Our views of our goals, our behaviors, and ourselves are inextricably tied to our relationships with others.

#### Proposition 3: Identities provide an important central figure in a selfnarrative or life story that provides coherence and meaning for everyday events and life itself.

When we interpret events, we evaluate them for personal meaning. If they are meaningful, they have significance to us, we respond emotionally to them, and they shape our behavior and perceptions of life. When people believe that they have no identity or that their identity has been spoiled, life becomes less meaningful and can become meaningless (Debats, Drost, & Hansen, 1995; Moore, 1997; van Selm & Dittmann-Kohli, 1998).

Our interpretation of life events and situations takes place within the framework of life stories or narratives. Other people are part of our life stories, and we are part of the life stories of others. Our lives are interwoven within the lives of others and, therefore, if our identities change, this influences our life as well as the lives of others. In this sense, identities are socially interconnected and distributed, yet understood in the context of ongoing life stories.

# Proposition 4: Because life meaning is derived in the context of identity, it is an essential element in promoting well-being and life-satisfaction.

Each of us hopes for a satisfactory outcome for the particular goals we are pursuing at the moment as well as for the life we are leading, which we are aware will end at some point. To the extent that we can successfully weave together the various and multiple short stories that comprise our lives into a meaningful whole, we can derive a sense of coherence and

meaning and purpose from our lives. I am proposing that our identities provide us with the context through which we interpret and derive meaning from the events we experience. Our identities also provide us with a view for future possibilities.

#### **Theoretical Contexts**

Having elaborated four propositions regarding identity, it is useful to create a context from which to view them and evaluate their implications for occupational therapy practice. There are three roots of selfhood that will serve as a framework for understanding. The first is the experience of reflexive consciousness, derived from the traditions of symbolic interactionism. This allows us to think about ourselves and the influence of our actions on others. The second is the interpersonal aspect of selfhood, the reality that identities are shaped within a social setting, where we receive acceptance, approval, and validation as worthwhile persons. The third is the agential aspect of identity, that aspect of demonstrating influence on the world around us that allows us to make meaning in our lives. When we create, when we control, when we exercise choice, we are expressing our selfhood and unique identities.

#### Reflexive Consciousness

The ability to think about ourselves and to have these thoughts modify our behavior is a distinctly human characteristic, and it depends on symbolic communication. Using symbols or language, we not only are able to categorize, think about, and act in socially influenced ways, but we also are able to reflect on ourselves from the perspective of others.

When we think about ourselves, we carry on the equivalent of an internal dialogue between two aspects of self, the experiencing self and the thought of self. These two aspects of the self can be labeled the I and the me. The I is the active creative agent doing the experiencing, thinking, and acting, and the me is the perspective or attitude toward oneself that one assumes when taking the roles of specific others or the generalized community. In this approach, the me's, or perspectives of the self, are the social selves—who we are in our own and others' eyes. Thought of in another way, when we consider the image of ourselves reflected in a mirror, the I is looking at and thinking about the me, all the while making grooming adjustments to improve it (see Figure 46.2).

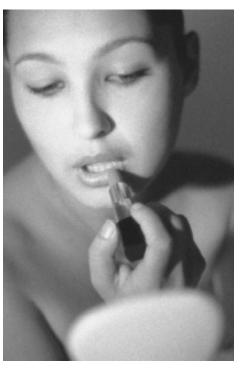


Figure 46.2. Reflexive self-consciousness— The dialogue between the *I* and the *me*. *Note*. Image © 1999 PhotoDisc, Inc. Used with permission.

The reflexive nature of the self is exemplified by everyday language that illustrates its duality. When we speak of self-discipline, we are talking about one aspect of the self keeping the other under control. Similarly, when we observe that Sue has "let herself go," we imply that she no longer has self-control or that she no longer cares about her public identity.

#### The Interpersonal Nature of Selfhood

The ideas of symbolic communication and the reflexive nature of the self are derived from a tradition of social psychology known as symbolic interactionism. This tradition goes back to the turn of the century and several prominent behavioral scientists of the time, beginning with William James (1892). Later, the famous sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1902) made the observation that our views of ourselves are very much influenced by the reactions of others to what we do. He formulated what is known as the "looking glass theory," which maintained that the reactions of others reflect their approval and disapproval and thus constitute a primary means of developing an awareness of ourselves.

The psychologist George Herbert Mead extended this thinking in the 1930s, advancing the theory even further. In *Mind, Self and Society,* Mead (1934) held that society is created, sustained, and changed through the process of symbolic communication. In other words, social reality is constructed and negotiated through interactions with others. In these interactions, people seek to present images of the self for others to see and evaluate. The primary purposes of these social selves are to gain approval from others and to be able to gain influence, which occurs through social status and power. Mead believed that by using the reflexive processes of communication, the dialogue between I and me, we are able to imagine how we appear to others or what reactions others will have to our behaviors.<sup>2</sup>

Because of the dependence on others for feedback about the self, Mead (1934) believed that there is a mutual interdependence of self and society. By seeking the approval of others, a person's behavior may be moderated, but this occurs only to the extent that people are capable of exercising the self-control necessary for them to gain social approval.

Many people are reluctant to accept a view of self that suggests that every action they take is calculated to gain the approval of others because it sounds manipulative or deceptive. However, in reality, people are not able to exercise conscious control over their behaviors in a manner that permits them to plan calculated actions at every moment in every social relationship. To a certain extent, however, the rules and conventions of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>It is worth noting that Mead's assertion that our identity is totally dependent on the feedback of others has been shown to be incomplete (Schrauger & Schoeneman, 1979), mainly because research has shown that people deceive themselves by perceiving that others evaluate them more favorably than is actually the case (Greenwald, 1980).

social interaction are such that we preserve and enhance our identity through conformity and careful reflection about the anticipated results of our behaviors on others.

As expressions of identity, people often exhibit spontaneity and creativity that test the boundaries of conformity or risk social disapproval. Unconventional behavior is often risky. This is one of the things that makes the world such an interesting place. Occasionally, acts of spontaneity and creativity are embraced and adopted by the larger group with the result that such innovations create change or progress in the culture. In this way, the reciprocal influence between self and society described by Mead (1934) is completed. That is, social expectations influence the individual, and the individual, through acts of creativity, sometimes influences the larger society. A proposal of symbolic interactionism views that the individual and society are interdependent. That is, they depend on each other for predictability and stability as well as for progress.

To summarize, the basic ideas underlying symbolic interactionism are that (a) we communicate symbolically much of the time and that the language of social life consists of both spoken and unspoken messages; (b) through our conversations with ourselves, we are able to modify our behaviors to gain social approval; and (c) the need for social approval encourages conformity, which promotes stability and predictability, but occasionally also yields individual creativity that, when adopted, serves to advance the social group.

#### Social Constructionism and Distributed Selves

In recent years, views of the social nature of self-identity have been extended with a school of thought called social constructionism. Theorists in this tradition propose that selves are distributed. That is, the person and their social context cannot be easily separated. Social constructionists argue that although we perceive a private and self-contained world inside our heads, it would be more accurate to describe this image as a snapshot from a constantly changing public panorama (Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988).

When we think of our multiple expressions of self, our children, our friendships, our marriages, our journals, and our daily interactions, we realize that our identities are indeed distributed throughout our social environments. These "pieces of self" are part of us. They define who we are, and yet they exist in other mediums, distributing identities well beyond the boundaries of a physical body. This distribution of the self only occurs through social interaction.

The social constructionist view suggests that people's identities not only are social, they also are multifaceted, yet they are perceived not so much as fragments, but as part of a comprehensive and understandable self (cf. Kondo, 1990). Ordinarily, we do not think of ourselves as fragmented, but as complex people with many dimensions of self. In short, we piece together our experiences to fashion an intelligible self, an identity that is comprehensible to both ourselves and others.

#### Life Stories

How is it that our identities can be complex and distributed while at the same time seem to be stable and predictable? The answer to this question lies in our understanding of our lives as evolving narratives or life stories. Through stories, we understand life events as systematically related. As Gergen and Gergen wrote: "One's present identity is thus not a sudden and mysterious event, but a sensible result of a life story" (1988, p. 55).

In a sense, our stories are unfolding and being rewritten as we live them. All narrative shares the similar characteristic of having a temporal order. That is, our life stories consist of events in progressive sequences. In order for our stories to have meaning, the events in our lives must be interpreted in ways that give them a relationship to each other. In this manner, they have coherence and unity. It helps that our everyday routines, our personality traits, and other factors, such as our genetic make-up, influence us in ways that provide a degree of consistency to our behavior. This makes it easier to interpret our life stories in an understandable way.

## **Making Sense of Experiences**

The problem of how people make sense of their life experiences has been central to the work of McAdams (1997). He has analyzed life stories to derive insights into the processes people use to construct their identities within a coherent structure. His work suggests that one of the central purposes of the life story is to create unity and purpose in daily life. In constructing and interpreting life stories, people seek to fashion identities that make sense to themselves and others. Importantly, because people are not passive participants in their life stories, they can enact or create the events that express their identities in the manner they would like others to view them. This brings us to the third requirement of identity, that of human agency, or expressing the self through acting on the world around us.

## Selfing: Shaping Identity Through Experience

It is the reflexive dialogue between the I and me that McAdams (1996, 1997) suggests ties human agency to identity. The I, he argues, is not a noun, but a process, which McAdams and others refer to as *selfing*. That is, by experiencing our actions and our lives as our own, we adopt them as part of ourselves, as belonging to the me. Selfing is responsible for human feelings of agency.

McAdams (1996) suggests that selfing is inherently a unifying, integrative, synthesizing process. Ego psychologists (e.g., Loevenger, 1976), building on Freud (as cited in Stachey, 1990), viewed the ego as the organizational medium of the mind that promotes healthy adaptation to life through learning, memory, perception, and synthesis (Kris, 1952). It permits the gaining of competence that White (1959) viewed as so important to successful adaptation. To quote McAdams: "The I puts experience together—synthesizes it, unifies it, makes it mine.

The fact that it is mine—even when I see the sunset, I am seeing it; that when you hurt my feelings those were my feelings, not yours that were hurt—provides a unity to selfhood without which human life in society as we know it would simply not exist" (1997, p. 57). To *self* is to maintain the stance of the self in the world, it is the being and becoming that Fidler (Fidler & Fidler, 1978) has written about. In other words, selfing is the shaping of identity through daily occupations.

Occupations are more than movements strung together, more than simply doing something. They are opportunities to express the self, to create an identity.

#### **Creating Life Meaning Through Selfing**

When we create our life stories through doing, or selfing, as McAdams would say, we are living for a purpose, and deriving a sense of meaning in our lives in the process. Sommer and Baumeister (1998) have observed that people seek meaning in ordinary events along the same lines that they seek meaning in life generally. That is, they try to fulfill four basic needs. These needs are *purpose*, *efficacy*, *value*, and *self-worth*. By definition, our daily occupations, whether they pertain to work, leisure, or maintenance of self, are goal directed and, therefore, provide purpose in the moment. When we achieve success in reaching our goals, we derive a sense of efficacy and believe that we have some measure of control over our environments (Langer & Rodin, 1976).

Meaning is also derived from believing that we have done the right thing, that our actions are justifiable under the circumstances. Finally, and not least importantly, we derive meaning from our feelings of self-worth. We meet this need through the approval of others and by viewing our own traits and abilities favorably. We want to feel good about ourselves, and we want to believe that we are worthy of other people's attention and affection.<sup>3</sup>

This discussion should emphasize the important relationships between identity, occupations, competence, and meaning. There is clearly an important interplay between these concepts. We cannot gain the recognition of others without competent action, nor can we meet our needs for meaning without engaging in occupation in a way that receives social validation. Moreover, the things we do, even when validated by others as competent, must be understandable to ourselves within a meaningful life context.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>The British psychologist and philosopher Rom Harré (1983) has used the term *identity projects* to refer to self-directed development and expression of self. Identity projects may take the form of pursuit of fame or status or recognition of some kind. Or they may be concerned with the more personal aspects of ourselves and the way we think about ourselves. This may involve developing our potentials to create and to relate to others, or enriching our experience and understanding. Harré (1998) has also written extensively about the importance of discourse in shaping agency. A complete treatment of his propositions is beyond the scope of this article, but highly recommended for readers interested in a more in-depth analysis of the psychology of selfhood.

## **Identity—Goals and Occupational Performance**

It may be helpful here to elaborate on the important relationship between occupations and identity. To speak of occupation is to describe goal-directed activity in the context of living. Goals work as motivators precisely because we imagine how we will be affected directly or indirectly when the goal is met. Thus, goals serve as motivators because we view them in the context of self, whether we are dressing for the day or seeking a promotion. We put on the blue blazer because we imagine what we will look like and anticipate that it will be satisfactory or appropriate for the day's activities.

Similarly, when we work late, or when we willingly take on an added responsibility in volunteer activities, we imagine ourselves as being viewed as virtuous, hardworking, and worthwhile people. We may imagine getting praised, getting a promotion, or receiving a raise or recognition as a result of those efforts. These views of our identity in the future are imagined selves, and they are powerful motivators of goal-directed action. Markus and colleagues (Markus, 1977; Markus & Nurius, 1986) have called these motivating images *possible selves*. They have suggested that a goal can have an influence on behavior to the extent that an individual can personalize it by building a bridge of self-representations between the current state and the hoped-for state.

Possible selves can consist of both positive as well as negative images. They not only may represent what we would like to become, they also may represent what we are afraid of becoming. Either type of possible self can be a motivator. Thus, we may strive to become the wealthy self, the shapely self, or the well-respected and loved self; while we dread, and thus, try to avoid becoming the lonely, depressed, or incompetent self (Ogilvie, 1987).

# **Possible Selves as Images of Action**

Markus and her colleagues have contended that possible selves give personal meaning and structure to a person's thoughts about the future. That is, when we think about actions we might take, we project images of ourselves into those thoughts, and we view ourselves taking the actions. In other words, possible selves provide a very useful and direct mechanism for translating thoughts into actions. Goals that individuals view as important, and to which they are committed, are effective because these goals are self-relevant and self-defining.

Goals differ between people because the nature of possible selves depends on the nature of one's core self or complex identity system. Goal-directed and motivated behavior and personal identity are thus reciprocally related. Studies (Pavot, Fujita, & Diener, 1997) have shown that as we perceive ourselves becoming more like the person we want to be, our life satisfaction increases. When we do not perceive ourselves as progressing toward our desired identities, we tend to exhibit signs of unhealthy adaptation (Heatherton & Baumeister, 1991).

#### **Social Approval and Competent Performance**

Social approval and competent performance are instrumental to our thoughts of actions that will help us avoid or realize possible selves. Research shows that people will go to great lengths to alter their behavior (and indeed, even their appearance) in order to gain social approval and avoid rejection (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964).

To a large extent, our ability to gain this approval depends on our ability to portray ourselves as competent people. Through implicit expectations associated with social standing and the performance of roles, social groups help define the levels of competence necessary for acceptance, approval, and recognition.

In other words, self-appraisal is highly dependent on the extent to which we believe that we will be accepted by others. Research has also shown that it is related to efficacious action or competent performance, meaning that we must demonstrate to others that we are competent people as part of the acceptance process (Franks & Marolla, 1976).

#### **Competent Performance**

To be competent suggests that we are effective in dealing with the challenges that come our way (White, 1971). If we experience success in the challenges we undertake, we enhance our view of ourselves as competent beings (Bandura, 1977; Gage & Polatajko, 1994). This encourages us to explore and to engage the world in ways that give us our sense of autonomy and selfhood.

As we experience successes, our views of ourselves as efficacious or competent become strengthened. Thus, completing a task successfully adds to our sense of being competent human beings and, in a sense, prepares us for new challenges by bolstering our self-confidence. The term *self-confidence* is an interesting expression because it establishes a clear link between our identity and our belief in the things that we can do. Rogers (1982) asserted that developing a sense of the self as a competent agent in the world requires the expression of choice and control. Through choice, we express autonomy and, through control, we express efficacy. Brewster Smith summed it up nicely in: "The crucial attitude toward the self is self-respect as a significant and efficacious person" (1974, p. 14).

#### **Performance Deficits**

If our identities are crafted by what we do and how we do it, then it follows that any threat to our ability to engage in occupations and present ourselves as competent people becomes a threat to our identity. On a daily basis, occupational therapists come into contact with persons whose identities are threatened by virtue of performance limitations. These identity crises may occur as the result of normal aging, which often deprives us of the sense of competence we once had, or result from congenital disorders, injuries, and diseases that leave lasting or progressive disability.

To the extent that disabilities interfere with the competent execution of tasks and roles, they threaten the establishment of an identity based on competence. In some cases, injury, disease and disability also result in bodily disfigurement, which further assaults the person's identity and increases the challenges associated with establishing an identity that receives social approval (Goffman, 1963). Facial scars or anomalies, involuntary movements related to motor planning deficits, balance disorders, and unwanted tics are among the many observable signs of disorders that gain unwanted public attention and increase the challenge of fashioning a social identity that is acceptable to self and others.

#### **Stigma**

Goffman (1959) suggested that a socially competent performance involves more than simply getting the job done. There are certain stylistic and procedural expectations that must be fulfilled in order for the person to be considered by others to have performed competently and credibly. When we convince others that we have performed credibly, we are engaging in what Goffman called *impression management*.<sup>4</sup>

It is widely acknowledged within the cultures of people with activity limitations that impression management is an important strategy to undertake. It is a practiced skill to develop such social proficiency that one's impairment is hardly noticed. Indeed, there is a word for this, *passing*, which means that one has hidden one's devalued characteristics from others successfully, so that one has been able to pass as "normal" or able-bodied.

The ability to manage the impressions of others is often so compelling that actual performance may be secondary to preserving identity by leaving a good impression. Studies of prosthetic and assistive technology devices show that their acceptance and use may be as dependent on appearance and perceived social acceptability as their functional benefits (Batavia & Hammer, 1990; Pippin & Fernie, 1997; Stein & Walley, 1983).

Of course, the easiest way to avoid rejection is to increase control and the possibility of rejection by avoiding social interaction altogether. In confronting the risk of social rejection, it is not unusual to find people with observable disability to retreat to the safety and emotional security of interactions limited to close friends and associates. These people, it is reasoned, know the person beyond the disfigurement. Avoidance strategies are more understandable when one considers that social disapproval is not simply an uncomfortable situation that evokes feelings of embarrassment or shame. It is, quite directly, an assault on one's identity.

Researchers have shown that while passing is a useful strategy for avoiding stigma, it can result in an unhealthy adaptation to disability if it results in denial. Successful adaptation to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>It is worth mentioning that stigma affects those with whom one shares identity. Consistent with the idea of distributed selves, spouses and family members may also endure the social cost of disfigurement, poor role performance, or deviance. For example, stigma accrues to families whose members have HIV or mental illness, or who have committed suicide.

one's individual differences requires the ability to acknowledge one's differences and to integrate them into an identity that permits a confident expression of self (Weinberg & Sterritt, 1986). One of the challenges of acquired disability is reintegration into social patterns that promote acceptance of self and a more comfortable relationship with able-bodied persons. This comfort leads to more positive acceptance by those persons.

#### **Disability and Identity Adaptations**

A surprising number of studies have directly or indirectly studied the identity consequences of children and adults with chronic illnesses and disabling conditions. These have often shown that preserving and developing one's identity are often at the heart of adaptational strategies (Charmaz, 1994; Estroff, 1989; Monks, 1995; Ville, Ravaud, Marchal, Paicheler, & Fardeau, 1992; Weinberg & Sterrit, 1986).

For example, a study by Charmaz (1994) of men with chronic illnesses is relevant here. She found that when men did awaken to the changes in their bodies and accept the uncertainties of their futures, they engaged in reflection and reappraisals that often improved their awareness of self and personal priorities. It is noteworthy that reappraisals of productivity, achievement, and relationships were central to this process. As a result of these reappraisals, some men changed jobs, others retired or renegotiated their work assignments, and many followed health regimens, such as exercising, more devotedly.

One recurring theme in these and other studies of adaptation to illness and disability is the role of identity in creating a sense of coherence or continuity over time. When people experience loss and change, the continuity of their lives is disrupted. Identity is the great integrator of life experience. We interpret events that happen to us in terms of their meaning for our life stories. This gives life a sense of coherence.

## Identity, Sense of Coherence, and Well-Being

People with a sense of coherence view their lives as understandable, meaningful, and manageable. The concept emanates from Aaron Antonovsky (1979), who proposed a model that would explain how some people are able to cope with stressors without experiencing the negative consequences to health experienced by others. Antonovsky proposed that a sense of coherence was central to this ability to cope with stress, suggesting that people who interpret their experiences within a meaningful and understandable framework, and who perceive that their challenges are manageable, are better equipped to deal with life's unexpected turns.

Research on the sense of coherence during the past 20 years has shown that people with this attribute, or way of viewing the world, are healthier and better adjusted than people without a strong sense of coherence. For example, significant relationships have been found between sense of coherence and blood pressure, emotional stability, global health, subjective well-being, and coping skills (Antonovsky, 1993). Sense of coherence is different from, but related to, another factor found in coping studies called hardiness (Kobasa, 1979).

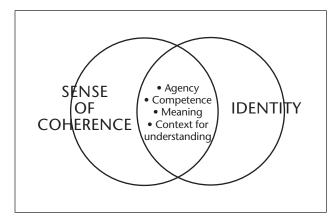


Figure 46.3. Concepts that link sense of coherence to identity.

Of importance to this discussion is the finding that sense of coherence seems to measure a human dimension that intersects with identity. Because it reflects one's efficacy or sense of agency, because it reflects meaning, and because it reflects a person's sense of how the events in their lives fit together, sense of coherence is related in important ways to the issue of identity (Baumeister & Tice, 1990; Korotkov, 1998). In fact, this relationship is borne out in

studies of personal projects done by Little and others (Little, 1989; Christiansen, Backman, Little, & Nguyen, 1999). This research, using personal projects analysis (cf. Christiansen, Little, & Backman, 1998), seeks to connect occupations of everyday life with personality traits. Findings have shown a relationship between identity dimensions of personal projects and sense of coherence. This provides a small but important piece of evidence supporting the hypothesis that identity and sense of coherence are related, and possibly overlapping, concepts (see Figure 46.3).

Issues of coherence, personal identity, meaning, and well-being have been nicely tied together in research reported by Wong (1998). He has used an implicit theories approach to study how people define their lives as personally meaningful. Through analysis of the responses of subjects in different age groups, he has identified nine factors that collectively provide a profile of an ideal meaningful life.<sup>5</sup> Four of these factors focus directly on the self. In these studies, Wong has found that when people have higher profiles on these factors, their subjective well-being increases.

We can summarize by noting that research has shown that people shape their identities through their daily occupations, which are performed in a social context that gives them symbolic meaning. Over time, our evolving identities and our actions are woven together to provide a coherent life story. The central place of occupations in shaping identity and creating life meaning is so powerful that one cannot help but marvel at their implications for occupational therapy practice.

# **Implications for Occupational Therapy Practice**

Nearly 20 years ago, Bing (1981) provided a historical review of the people and ideas that have influenced occupational therapy since its inception. In his identification of themes that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>The nine factors are achievement striving, religion, relationship, fulfillment, fairness–respect, self-confidence, self-integration, self-transcendence, and self-acceptance.

have provided particular relevance for the field, he included this principle: "The patient is the product of his or her own efforts, not the article made nor the activity accomplished" (p. 501). This principle suggests that the work of therapy involves identity building.

Therapy becomes identity building when therapists provide environments that help persons explore possible selves and achieve success in tasks that are instrumental to identities they strive to achieve, and when it enables them to validate the identities that they have worked hard to achieve in the past.

#### **Occupational Therapy as Identity Building**

There is much opportunity for occupational therapy as a special and unique service that provides opportunities for people to establish, maintain, or reclaim their identities. Particularly in North America, the demographics of aging will bring the declines in function that are a threat to identity (Kunkel & Applebaum, 1992; Statistics Canada, 1993). It is no accident that late life depression is one of the most common mental health problems in adults 60 years of age and older. Although there are many causes of depression, late life depression can arise from a loss of self-esteem, a loss of meaningful roles, declining social contacts, and reduced functional status (Karp, 1994; Reker, 1997). Research on psychosocial theories of depression has shown that depression can be averted when people are given an opportunity to gain personal meaning from everyday activities, when their sense of optimism is renewed, and where they believe that there is choice and control in their lives (Baumeister, 1990; Brewer, 1993; Kapci, 1998; Rodin, 1986).

This was shown by investigators (Jackson, Carlson, Mandel, Zemke, & Clark, 1998) at the University of Southern California in their recent study of a program for well elderly persons. That successful program used lifestyle redesign to engage participants in occupations that provided both structure and meaning to the participants. The participants in the program showed less morbidity and higher morale than a control group, demonstrating clearly that occupations, through the mechanism of identity, provide the purpose, structure, and global meaning that is an essential need for all human beings. I suggest that the key link here is identity building.

Because issues of health and well-being are at stake, society needs services concerned with helping people establish and maintain their identities. The decline of abilities that comes with normal aging need not be interpreted or experienced as a decline in competence. The key to successful aging may very well be related to the acceptance of a changed body along with opportunities for demonstrating competence and control in mastering late life challenges that create the beginnings so necessary for satisfactory endings. Coming to terms with the end of life may be facilitated through occupations that lead to an enduring presence of self and the sense that one can derive meaning from all that has happened during one's life.

Beyond the demographics of aging, there are other developments that call out for a profession that can help people find meaning in their lives. The recently released global burden of disease study contains some astonishing statistics. This study, completed at Harvard

University but sponsored by the World Health Organization and the World Bank, is a careful epidemiological projection of the kinds of health-related problems the world will be dealing with in the year 2020 (Murray & Lopez, 1996).

The most interesting finding from the study is that unipolar major depression will become the second leading threat to life quality in the world. It is projected to increase significantly from 1990 levels in the developed countries. Besides dementia and osteoarthritis, other conditions showing major increases will be alcohol use and self-inflicted injuries. Although the projected pattern for the world in the year 2020 will show a general increase in overall health owing to the control of infectious diseases in the developing countries, many other health challenges will be of a nature that traditional medicine is currently unequipped to handle. Depression, self-inflicted injuries, and alcohol abuse have one thing in common—they are diseases of meaning; therefore, they can be linked to social conditions that permit people to lose their identity and sense of purpose and meaning in life.

#### **Summary**

In this article, I have made the claim that occupations constitute the mechanism that enables persons to develop and express their identities. I have asserted that identities are central features of understanding the world in an evolving self-narrative, and that the continuity provided by identity enables life to be comprehended in a manner that helps minimize the uncertainties and stresses of daily life. I have maintained that it is the imagined self that provides the context for motivation and purpose and that competence is interpreted as the capable expression of identity within a social world. And finally, and most importantly, I have argued that that identity is the pathway by which people, through daily occupations and relationships with others, are able to derive meaning from their lives.

As a profession concerned with enabling people to engage in meaningful daily occupations, occupational therapy is positioned uniquely to meet the challenges confronting people whose identity is threatened by impairments, limitations to activity, and restrictions on their participation as social beings. We have seen that, in the years ahead, our friends and colleagues will be challenged with assaults on their identities brought by age, health problems, and social conditions.

Englehardt (1986) once described occupational therapists as technologists and *custodians* of meaning. As an outsider, he saw the same opportunity and unfulfilled promise that Adolph Meyer (1922) described in the founding years of occupational therapy. Yet, a full and genuine appreciation of the power of occupation to enable health and well-being has not yet made its way across the landscape of the profession.

Just as individual persons create their unique identities and life meaning through occupations, so too do professions, which represent groups of people with shared purposes, values, and interests, realize their identities through collective action. Biomedicine will experience many great advances in the years ahead. But no genetic code, no chemical intervention, and no microsurgical technology will be invented to repair broken identities and the

assault on meaning that accompanies them. Because of this, the new millennium will realize the health-enabling, restorative potential of occupation, and the promise of occupational therapy will be fulfilled.

#### **Acknowledgments**

This lecture is dedicated to my friend and mentor, Robert K. Bing, EdD, OTR, FAOTA; to my special colleague and friend, Carolyn Baum, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA; to my parents; and especially to my wife, Pamela, a pediatric occupational therapist; and, not least of all, to my children, Carrie, Erik, and Kalle.

I thank Cindy Hammecker, Charles Hayden, and Natalie Sims for their invaluable assistance in the preparation of this paper. I am indebted to my colleagues Kenneth Ottenbacher, PhD, OTR, FAOTA, and Beatriz Abreu, PhD, OTR, FAOTA, for their expressions of confidence and support.

#### References

- Antonovsky, A. (1979). *Health, stress and coping: New perspectives on mental health and physical well-being.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Antonovsky, A. (1993). The structure and properties of the Sense of Coherence Scale. *Social Science and Medicine*, *36*, 725–733.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84, 191–215.
- Batavia, A. I., & Hammer, G. S. (1990). Toward the development of consumer based criteria for the evaluation of assistive devices. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research*, *27*, 425–436.
- Bateson, M. C. (1996). Enfolded activity and the concept of occupation. In R. Zemke & F. Clark (Eds.), *Occupational science: The evolving discipline* (pp. 5–12). Philadelphia: F. A. Davis.
- Baumeister, R. F. (1982). Self-esteem, self-presentation and future interaction. A dilemma of reputation. *Journal of Personality*, *50*, 29–45.
- Baumeister, R. F. (1986). *Identity: Cultural change and the struggle for self*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Baumeister, R. F. (1990). Suicide as escape from self. Psychological Review, 97(1), 90–113.
- Baumeister, R. F. (1997). Identity, self-concept and self-esteem. In R. Hogan, J. Johnson, & S. Briggs (Eds.), *Handbook of personality psychology* (pp. 681–711). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Tice, D. M. (1990). Self-esteem and responses to success and failure. Subsequent performance and intrinsic motivation. *Journal of Personality*, *53*, 450–467.
- Bing, R. K. (1981). Occupational therapy revisited: A paraphrastic journey. 1981 Eleanor Clarke Slagle Lectures. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *35*, 499–518.
- Brewer, B. W. (1993). Self identity and specific vulnerability to depressed mood. *Journal of Personality*, 61(3), 343–364.
- Bruner, J. S. (1990). Acts of meaning. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Charmaz, K. (1994). Identity dilemmas of chronically ill men. Sociological Quarterly, 35(2), 269–288.
- Christiansen, C. H., Little, B. R., & Backman, C. (1998). Personal projects: A useful approach to the study of occupation. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *52*, 439–446.
- Christiansen, C. H., Backman, C., Little, B. R., & Nguyen, A. (1999). Occupations and well being: A study of personal projects. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 53,* 91–100.

- Cooley, C. H. (1902). Human nature and the social order. New York: Scribner.
- Crowne, D. P., & Marlowe, D. (1964). The approval motive. New York: Wiley.
- Debats, D. L., Drost, J., & Hansen P. (1995). Experiences of meaning in life: A combined qualitative and quantitative approach. *British Journal of Psychology*, 86(3), 359–375.
- Englehardt, T. (1977). Defining occupational therapy: The meaning of therapy and the virtues of occupation. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *31*, 666–672.
- Englehardt, T. (1986). Occupational therapists as technologists and custodians of meaning. In G. Kielhofner (Ed.), *Health through occupation* (pp. 139–144). Philadelphia: F. A. Davis.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity, youth and crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Estroff, S. E. (1989). Self, identity and subjective experiences of schizophrenia: In search of the subject. *Schizophrenia Bulletin, 15*(2), 189–196.
- Fidler, G. S., & Fidler, J. W. (1978). Doing and becoming: Purposeful action and self actualization. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *32*, 305–310.
- Franks, D. D., & Marolla, J. (1976). Efficacious action and social approval as interacting dimensions of self-esteem: A tentative formulation through construct validation. *Sociometry*, 39(4), 324–341.
- Gage, M., & Polatajko, H. (1994). Enhancing occupational performance through an understanding of perceived self-efficacy. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 48,* 452–461.
- Gergen, K. J. (1991). The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in modern life. New York: Basic.
- Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. M. (1988). Narrative and the self as relationship. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental and social psychology* (pp. 17–55). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Goffman, E. (1959). The presentation of self in everyday life. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of a spoiled identity.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Greenwald, A. G. (1980). The totalitarian ego: Fabrication and revision of personal history. *American Psychologist*, *35*, 603–613.
- Harré, R. (1983). Personal being. Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell.
- Harré, R. (1998). The singular self. London: Sage.
- Heatherton, T. F., & Baumeister, R. F. (1991). Binge eating as escape from self-awareness. *Psychological Bulletin*, *110*, 86–108.
- Jackson, J., Carlson, M., Mandel, D., Zemke, R., & Clark, F. (1998). Occupation in lifestyle redesign: The well elderly study occupational therapy program. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *52*, 326–336.
- James, W. (1892). Psychology: The briefer course. New York: Henry Holt & Co.
- Kagan, J. (1981). *The second year: The emergence of self-awareness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kapci, E. G. (1998). Test of the hopelessness theory of depression: Drawing negative inference from negative life events. *Psychological Reports*, *82*(2), 355–363.
- Karp, D. A. (1994). Living with depression: Illness and identity turning points. *Qualitative Health Research*, 4(1), 6–30.
- Keller, A., Ford, L. H., & Meacham, J. A. (1978). Dimensions of self-concept in preschool children. *Developmental Psychology, 14,* 483–489.
- Kobasa, S. C. (1979). Stressful life events, personality and health: An inquiry into hardiness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *37*, 1–11.

- Kondo, D. (1990). *Crafting selves: Power, gender and discourses of identity in a Japanese workplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Korotkov, D. L. (1998). The sense of coherence: Making sense out of chaos. In P.T.P. Wong & P. S. Fry (Eds.), *The human quest for meaning: A handbook of psychological research and clinical applications* (pp. 51–70). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Kris, E. (1952). Psychoanalytic explorations in art. New York: International Universities Press.
- Kunkel, S. R., & Applebaum, R. A. (1992). Estimating the prevalence of long-term disability for an aging society. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 475, S253–S260.
- Langer, E. J., & Rodin, J. (1976). The effects of choice and enhanced personal responsibility for the aged: A field experiment in an institutional setting. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34(2), 192–198.
- Little, B. R. (1989). Personal projects analysis: Trivial pursuits, magnificent obsessions, and the search for coherence. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), *Personality psychology: Recent trends and emerging directions* (pp. 15–31). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Loevenger, J. (1976). Ego development. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Markus, H. (1977). Self-schemata and processing information about the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35, 63–78.
- Markus, H., & Nurius, P. S. (1986). Possible selves. American Psychologist, 41, 954–969.
- McAdams, D. P. (1996). Personality, modernity, and the storied self: A contemporary framework for studying persons. *Psychological Inquiry*, *7*, 295–321.
- McAdams, D. P. (1997). Multiplicity of self versus unity of identity. In R. D. Ashmore & L. Jussim (Eds.), *Self and identity: Fundamental issues* (pp. 46–78). New York: Oxford University Press.
- McCuaig, M., & Frank, G. (1991). The able self: Adaptive patterns and choices in independent living for a person with cerebral palsy. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45, 224–234.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). Mind, self and society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Meyer, A. (1922). The philosophy of occupation therapy. *Archives of Occupational Therapy, 1,* 1–10. Monks, J. (1995). Life stories and sickness experience: A performance perspective. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry, 19*(4), 453–478.
- Moore, S. L. (1997). A phenomenological study of meaning in life in suicidal older adults. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 11(1), 29–36.
- Murray, C.J.L., & Lopez, A. D. (1996). Alternative visions of the future: Projecting mortality and disability 1990–2020. In C.J.L. Murray & A. D. Lopez (Eds.), *The global burden of disease* (pp. 325–396). Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.
- Ogilvie, D. M. (1987). The undesired self: A neglected variable in personality research. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *52*, 379–385.
- Pavot, W., Fujita, F., & Diener, E. (1997). The relation between self-aspect congruence, personality and subjective well-being. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 22(2), 183–191.
- Piaget, J. (1954). The construction of reality in the child. New York: Basic.
- Pippin, K., & Fernie, G. R. (1997). Designing devices that are acceptable to the frail elderly: A new understanding based upon how older people perceive a walker. *Technology and Disability*, 7(1/2), 93–102.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Reker, G. T. (1997). Personal meaning, optimism, and choice. Existential predictors of depression in community and institutional elderly. *Gerontologist*, *37*(6), 709–716.

- Rodin, J. C. (1986). Aging and health: Effects of the sense of control. *Science, 233*(4770), 1271–1276. Rogers, J. (1982). Order and disorder in medicine and occupational therapy. *American Journal of*
- Occupational Therapy, 31, 29–35.
- Ruble, D. (1983). The development of social comparison processes and their role in achievement-related self-socialization. In E. T. Higgins, D. Ruble, & W. Hartup (Eds.), *Social cognition and social behavior: Developmental perspectives* (pp. 134–157). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schrauger, J. S., & Schoeneman, T. J. (1979). Symbolic interactionist view of self-concept: Through the looking glass darkly. *Psychological Bulletin, 86,* 549–573.
- Smith, M. B. (1974). Competence and adaptation: A perspective on therapeutic ends and means. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 28,* 11–15.
- Sommer, K. L., & Baumeister, R. F. (1998). The construction of meaning from life events: Empirical studies of personal narratives. In P.T.P. Wong & P. S. Fry (Eds.), *The human quest for meaning: A handbook of psychological research and clinical applications* (pp. 143–161). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Stachey, J. (Ed.). (1990). *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud.* New York: W. W. Norton.
- Statistics Canada. (1993). *Population ageing and the elderly: Current demographic analysis*. Cat. No. 9I-533E. Ottawa, Canada: Government of Canada.
- Stein, R. B., & Walley, M. (1983). Functional comparison of upper extremity amputees using myoelectric and conventional prostheses. *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, 73, 1169–1173.
- Swann, W. B. (1987). Identity negotiation: Where two roads meet. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *53*, 1038–1051.
- Swann, W. B., & Hill, C. A. (1982). When our identities are mistaken: Reaffirming self-conceptions through social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 43, 59–66.
- van selm, M., & Dittmann-Kohli, F. (1998). Meaninglessness in the second half of life: The development of a construct. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 47(2), 81–104.
- Ville, I., Ravaud, J. F., Marchal, F., Paicheler, H., & Fardeau, M. (1992). Social identity and the international classification of handicaps: An evaluation of the consequences of facioscapulo-humeral muscular dystrophy. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, *14*(4), 168–175.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1981). The instrumental method in psychology. In J. V. Wertsch (Ed.), *The concept of activity in Soviet psychology* (pp. 134–143). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharp.
- Weinberg, N., & Sterritt, M. (1986). Disability and identity: A study of identity patterns in adolescents with hearing impairments. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, *31*(2), 95–103.
- White, R. W. (1959). Motivation reconsidered: The concept of competence. *Psychological Review*, 66, 297–333.
- White, R. W. (1971). The urge toward competence. American *Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 25, 271–274.
- Wong, P.T.P. (1998). Implicit theories of meaningful life and the development of the personal meaning profile. In P.T.P. Wong & P. S. Fry (Eds.), *The human quest for meaning: A handbook of psychological research and clinical applications* (pp. 111–140). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.