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Qualitative Study of Disabled Performance Art in Occupational Identity Formation and Empowerment

Lisa Mahaffey, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA; Midwestern University, Downers Grove, IL

Kristin Chrissos, OTD, OTR/L; Trilogy, Chicago, IL

Kate Wettergren, OTD, OTR/L; Community Consolidated School District 15, Palatine, IL

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What is performance art?

Performance art is a nontraditional way of creating art that uses time and space, the performer's body and sometimes art mediums that interact with or seek to influence its audience's perceptions (Goldberg, 2005).



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A performance art sound piece set in Chicago





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Research Design

- Methodology
 - Qualitative narrative approach
- Participants
 - Six self-identified disabled performance artists
- Data Collection & Analysis
 - Semi-structured interviews (60–90 minutes)
 - Data analyzed using thematic analysis

Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Type of Disability	Race	Education Level	Years As PA	Type of Performance Art
Liam	Male	37	Psychiatric	white	Advanced degree	5	Disability symptom experience
Eva	Female	23	Psychiatric	white	College degree	5	Disability symptom experience
David	Male	64	Acquired physical	white	College degree	30+	Humor to challenge audience ideas about disability
Ruby	Female	37	Acquired physical and sensorial	white	Advanced degree	30+	Storytelling through choreography and direction
Rex	Male	43	Sensorial and seizure disorder	white	College degree	19	Sound exploration and disability awareness
Josie	Female	36	Acquired physical	white	Advanced degree	10+	Satire to expose injustices of disability

Key Findings & Themes

1. Empowerment Through Community Belonging

Belonging to the disability community presented artists with art expansion opportunities, peer collaboration, happiness and empowerment leading to a greater internal locus of control which expanded beyond their performance art into their everyday lives.

Key Findings & Themes

2. Making the Invisible Visible

Disabled performance artists use their craft not only as a form of creative expression, often expressing inner experiences outwardly, but also view the interaction with the audience as a form of belonging where they hold some power, challenge audience perceptions of disability and confront stereotypes and visibility barriers.

Key Findings & Themes

3. Space & Transformative Engagement

Physical/social space choice, navigation and/or manipulation is integral to engagement with an audience. Using a safe public space allows for connection between the artist and audience resulting in an atmosphere for transformation of understanding disability.



"Taking my experience
to a space and turning it
into performance,
it's just awesome."

-Rex

Photo by Claire Cunningham, used with permission.

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Implications & Significance to OT

What's the takeaway?...

Belonging to a disability community creates shared spaces for connection, authenticity and collective meaning-making.

The act of performing occupations, especially while interacting with others, fuels empowerment and builds occupational identity.

Questions?

Lisa Mahaffey: lmahaf@midwestern.edu

Publication Link:

<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/ojot/vol13/iss3/2/>



References

Goldberg, R. (2005). Performance art: From futurism to the present. Thames & Hudson Inc.

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