

Occupational science/therapy divide: Building a global community of praxis

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Is occupational science a “bullshit science”?

How dare we?

- Turcotte, P.-L., Simaan, J., Hammell, K.W., Farias, L., dos Santos, V. (2026; In Press). Bridging the Divide: Decentring Occupational Science and Fostering a Global Praxis Community. In R. Aldrich & Hocking, C. (Ed.). (2026). *Routledge International Handbook of Occupational Science*.
- *Who* has the legitimacy to write about occupational science?
- *Who* can legitimately call themselves occupational scientists?

Framing the divide

- Occupational science emerged as an epistemic strategy to legitimize occupational therapy as a scientific, evidence-based profession (Yerxa, 1993)
- Occupational scientists have reinforced a rigid science/therapy divide, distancing theory from practice (Morrison et al., 2021)
- In this paper, we challenge this false dualism, arguing that:

Defining the ‘center’

- Occupational science - a field of study and a way in which knowledge is organized through a regime of “truths” (Foucault, 1980)
- Knowledge development has “centered” Western, white, ableist, class-privileged, Anglo, heteronormative, cis-female perspectives (Hammell, 2015)
- Those wielding power in occupational science’s center determine what “counts” as occupations worthy of study (Kiepek et al., 2019)

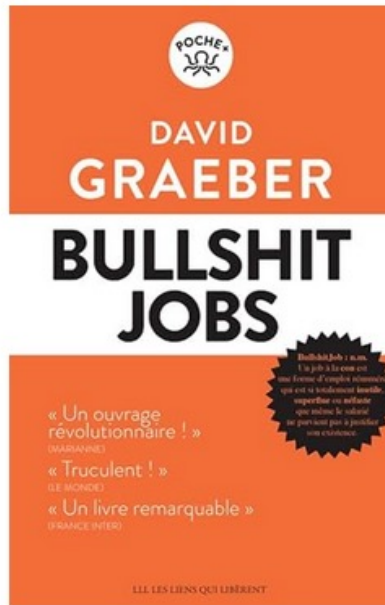
Occupational science's disciplinary power

- Specific ideologies, theories and discourses achieve dominance ...because of the *power* they were arbitrarily attributed (Hammell, 2015)
- The status quo perpetuated in occupational science results from a compulsory conformity to its disciplinary power (Turcotte & Holmes, 2021)
- The discipline's failure to resist these dominant ideologies “occupation” is compulsively attached to an extensive range of concepts, e.g. justice (Emery-Whittington, 2021)

Fostering the divide

- The science and the therapy have increasingly evolved on distinct trajectories
- Perversely, study of the occupational therapy profession has become a taboo subject of research within occupational science,
- This transforms the discipline into a process of abstract theorizing, depriving the profession of critical tools (Farias & Rudman, 2019)

A “bullshit science”, you said?

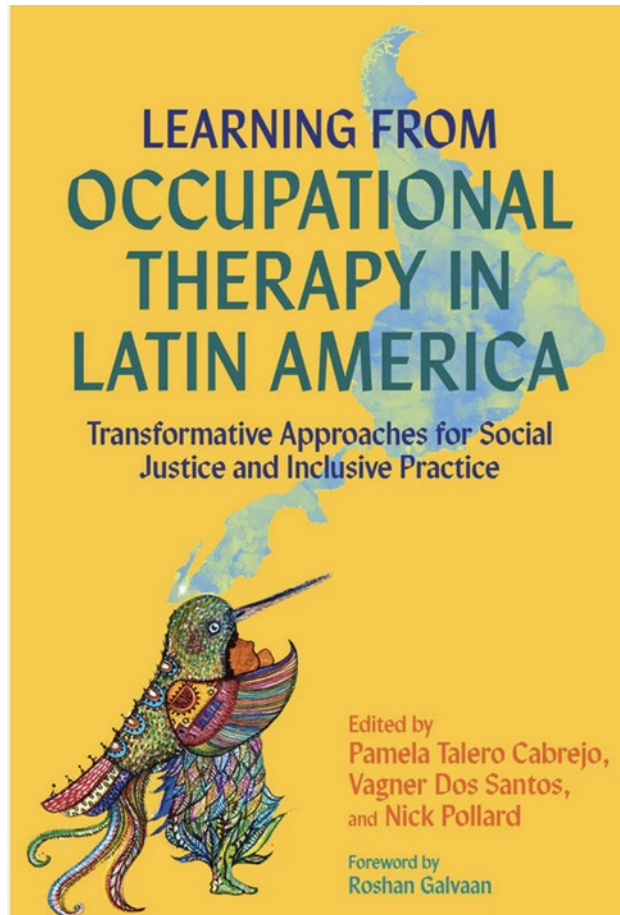


- The artificial therapy/science division risks making occupational science an irrelevant field of study with limited impact on real-life communities – jargon-filled, elitist with no concrete anchorage in the social field – an alienating form of occupation (Turcotte & Holmes, 2021)
- Anthropologist David Graeber (2019) would call this a “bullshit job” :“a form of paid employment that is so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence” (p.27)
- Over 50% of human jobs have so little impact on real life that if employees stopped doing these jobs, no one would notice

Delineating a bullshit science

- “Feudal retainers” (e.g. scientists) (Graeber, 2019)
- “Goons” – created because they exist elsewhere (e.g. to provide a “basic science” proving occupational therapy’s value to insurers)
- “Duct tapers” – address a problem that should not exist (e.g. to render occupational therapy as “scientific” enough to assimilate with other professions) (Graeber, 2019)
- Occupational science’s “stalled revolution” (Frank, 2022)

Bridging the divide through *praxis*



- Paulo Freire (1970) defined *praxis* as the movement from practice to theory to practice (Farias & Lopes, 2023)
- The effectiveness – and social accountability – of both occupational science and occupational therapy can only arise from a shared community of *praxis* (Dos Santos, 2025)

To conclude

Olive Growing in Palestine / *Stories of Everyday Forms of Resistance*

JUMAN SIMAAN



- Occupational science's evolution into a discipline that largely avoids the study of occupational therapy may well turn itself into a “bullshit science”
- Global challenges are experience in the everyday life, and the everyday *can* be the space in which they are resisted (Simaan,2026)
- Bridging the divide between the science and the therapy can generate new possibilities for socially relevant praxis, and perhaps also, for social transformation (Farias & Rudman, 2021)

Thank you!

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