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The Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Susan Haiman, MPS, OT/L, FAOTA

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The Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of

Susan Haiman, MPS, OT/L, FAOTA

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Abstract

Objective: This life history is one of 30 life history interviews, which are part of a larger project, *Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) at the National Level and Beyond*. The purpose of this qualitative study is to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of the history of occupational therapy and how the practice has evolved from the beginning to its current practice through the life history stories of accomplished occupational therapists.

Method: An in-depth, semi-structured, 120-minute interview was conducted with Susan Haiman via telephone from the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences. Questions were created using the Kawa model as a guide to gather the information that added to the understanding of different aspects of the participant's life that shaped them in the practice of OT. The interview was audio-recorded and later transcribed and coded for emergent themes.

Results: The predominant themes representing the major elements of Susan's success as a leader was her passion for education, personal experiences, policy, and occupational therapy as a profession. The findings indicate that she has made a large impact on the profession by serving the needs of her clients and being a strong advocate for mental health.

Conclusion: Susan's interview provided a profound understanding and insight into her values and motivations that carried her through her OT career and allowed her to partake in her various leadership and educational positions successfully. Through Susan's curriculum vitae, interview, and other outside research, the researchers were able to develop an understanding of the major challenges and accomplishments that impacted her career. Susan's passion for the

profession and the ability to take the initiative allowed her to make many significant changes in the field of occupational therapy.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of the history of occupational therapy and how the practice has evolved from the beginning to its current practice through the life history stories of accomplished occupational therapists.

In this study, information was received from Susan Haiman through a 120-minute, semi-structured phone call interview, which was held at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences. Researchers were located in a quiet study space to ensure privacy and Susan was in her car, located in her driveway in Philadelphia, PA. The interview was guided by an interview schedule prepared by the project directors; the questions on the interview schedule were designed to be used with all the individuals interviewed as part of the larger project. The student researchers modified and added questions as needed throughout the interview.

This life history is one of 30 life history interviews, which are part of a larger project, *Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) at the National Level and Beyond*.

Susan is currently residing in her beloved city of Philadelphia, PA, as a caregiver for her husband. When she is not caring for her spouse, she is attending her synagogue services, knitting, needle pointing, going to lunch with friends, and staying up to date with current events in politics.

During Susan's time in practice, she was able to utilize her strengths, such as her ability to be assertive, take the initiative, and connect and engage with others. These personality traits allowed her to create great change and advocate for mental health throughout her various leadership positions in the profession of occupational therapy. Over the years, Susan touched the lives of many students and clients by always aiming to be a person they can count on.

Timeline Literature Review

There have been many changes in the field since Susan began her journey as an occupational therapist. The profession was founded in the 19th and 20th centuries and was originally guided by the arts and crafts movement. During this time, patients produced and designed projects such as hand towels, cement pots, and ceramic vases as a form of treatment (Reed, 2006). Susan stated in her interview that she was required to take art and craft courses while in OT school, as these concepts were much more emphasized and embedded into the curriculum during that time. Susan expressed her desire for the profession to return to its origins and begin integrating arts and crafts into the OT curriculum again, as she found it to be beneficial throughout her experience.

There were many significant milestones in occupational therapy during the time that Susan was beginning her occupational therapy journey. In 1970, the AOTA Board of Management developed a 12-week curriculum to train Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants (COTAs) for general practice (AOTA, 2017). Later, The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 included major civil rights protections for individuals with disabilities. During this same time in 1973, the first PhD program was approved at New York University (AOTA, 2017). In 1977, AOTA adopted the first stand-alone Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics, which therapists were required to abide by, rather than the 1926 Pledge and Creed that was only aspirational and

voluntary (AOTA, 2017). The purpose of establishing these principles was to guide ethical action and commit to serving clients. While many concepts have been everchanging in occupational therapy, the profession remains grounded in the seven principles (AOTA, 2015).

Throughout Susan's journey of becoming an occupational therapist, there were many positive changes and advancements in the field that aimed to provide equal and quality care to all people.

Theory

The Kawa Model was foundational to this study. This theory is based on a metaphor of a river that represents the flow of life. The items within and surrounding the river, represent supports, barriers, and contexts that affect a person's occupational performance. The water flowing throughout the river represents an individual's "life energy," the floor and walls of the river stand for the various contexts in which a person engages in, the rocks represent problematic life circumstances and barriers that obstruct the flow of the river, and the driftwood represents resources available in the individual's life (Teoh & Iwama).

Utilizing this theory helped in producing and guiding the interview questions, and allowed the researchers to develop a deeper understanding of Susan and the various aspects of her life that impacted her throughout her occupational therapy career.

Description of the Participant

Susan Haiman is an accomplished occupational therapist who currently lives in Philadelphia, PA, with her husband. Throughout her career, Susan primarily worked in mental health and education. She is incredibly passionate about being an advocate for mental health in the field of occupational therapy and used this passion for creating many changes in the Pennsylvania Occupational Therapy Association (POTA) while serving in her various leadership

positions. Some of these positions included: Legislative chair president, vice president, and mental health partnership committee chair.

Susan was able to impact many students over the years while working as an educator. She placed high value on being in the classroom and engaging with her students. Some of her most notable employment positions include Assistant professor, and then associate professor for the graduate program in occupational therapy at Philadelphia University, associate professor Emerita for the graduate program in occupational therapy for Jefferson University, laboratory instructor for the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, and laboratory instructor for the Temple University. Some of her additional accomplishments include writing articles, books, giving presentations on various mental health topics, and being awarded many honors such as Retired Educator Commendation (2015), American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Service Awards (1998-2012, 2012-2019), POTA Award of Outstanding Achievement (2003), and Certificate of Excellence in Leadership, Professionalism, Academic Performance and Contributions to the New School for Social Research.

Susan now spends the majority of her time prioritizing her family, caring for her husband, and being an active member of her synagogue. Her everyday life primarily revolves around being her husband's caregiver and ensuring that all of his needs are met. All information about Susan was obtained by a 120-minute, semi-structured interview, her CV, and a basic web search.

Methodology:

Study Design:

This was a qualitative study done using a life history approach. Using this approach gave the researchers an understanding of Susan's involvement in the evolution of occupational therapy practice. The researchers were able to explore Susan's life through an interview as well as additional outside research. There were no gatekeeper issues, as the project directors made initial contact with the participant. Informed consent was obtained before the interview.

Participant Selection:

The participant was selected from a participant list compiled through purposive sampling by the project directors. Informed consent was obtained before the interview and the project was reviewed by the UND Institutional Review Board (IRB) and because of the study design, the formal IRB process was waived.

Data Collection:

The two-hour, semi-structured phone interview was guided by an interview schedule created by the project directors. The researchers added and modified questions throughout the interview as necessary. The Kawa Model guided the questions to develop a deeper understanding of the various aspects of Susan's life that shaped her in the practice of OT (Turpin & Iwama, 2017). Before the interview, Susan provided the researchers with her curriculum vitae (CV), which they reviewed for an hour before meeting with her and developed questions based on the information in that document as well.

Trustworthiness:

The trustworthiness of this study was established through several methods. An advisor was assigned to the research group and examined the student researchers data while providing

advice for revisions. A 120-minute interview was conducted with the participant to ask questions and to verify information on Susan's CV and from reliable internet sources. Reflective notes were also made throughout the interview process and were reflected upon after reviewing the transcription of the interview. This helped to establish categories and recurring themes. Both researchers utilized reflexive journals to record the experiences and biases of the study, as well as an effective strategy to manage time and progress of the project throughout the semester. These different means were able to provide this study a strong validity and reliability.

Data Analysis:

The interview with Susan was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and initially coded; researchers identified 19 codes in the process. Next, the researchers found four categories that emerged from the data. These were chosen based on the amount of information provided by Susan. Multiple themes were found to fit within each category. A final assertion was created based on the discovered results (See Appendix A). There was other evidence that was uncovered throughout the interview; however, there was not enough supporting evidence to include it in the categories or themes. The researchers reviewed the material numerous times and memoed the transcription to gather an in-depth perspective of Susan's experiences and thoughts. The Kawa model guided data analysis, which identifies turning points in life as well as the strengths and barriers of the individual's unique experiences. This method was used to achieve an in-depth understanding of Susan's life, legacy, and career experiences within the field of occupational therapy.

Findings/Results:

Susan's numerous experiences and leadership roles heavily impacted the profession of occupational therapy, specifically in mental health practice. Through the data analysis and

coding, four major categories emerged: educational experiences, personal experiences, politics and leadership positions, and occupational therapy over time. The themes that emerged from these categories describe the various aspects that impacted Susan throughout her career and provide an understanding of the “flow” of her river in relation to the Kawa model (Teoh & Iwama).

Category one: Personal experiences

Theme one: Susan believes family is a priority in her life.

Although occupational therapy played a vital role in Susan’s life, she is now retired and prioritizes her many other roles as a family member, friend, volunteer, caregiver, as well as being an active member of her synagogue. Susan currently revolves her time around being a caregiver for her husband; “a lot of day to day life revolves around what's he going to do today as opposed to what I'm going to do today.” When Susan is not caring for her husband, she attends her synagogue regularly, knits and engages in needle pointing, goes to lunch with friends, and stays up to date with current events in politics as she explained that they both fascinate and terrify her. Susan will even write letters to members of Congress and donate money to candidates she believes in.

Theme two: As an OT, Susan was able to have an impact on both the students' and clients' lives.

Susan believes that one of her most prominent personality traits is her ability to engage and connect with others, specifically with young children. This is an ironic statement as she never worked in pediatrics, although, she expressed that this is one area she wanted to explore in her career, but never had the opportunity to. Susan also stated that she is a loyal companion; “I think I'm good company, and I'm predictable for the most part, which is what a patient once

described me as.” Susan’s ability to connect with others allowed her to influence many of the students and clients she worked with.

Theme three: Susan’s ability to remain humble throughout her career is commendable

Susan is also humble as she stated that she is not the best judge of what she has contributed to the field; “I have a hard time blowing my own horn.” When Susan is at the forefront of a stressful situation, she explained that she cries in order to cope with the overwhelming emotions. Although many people in helping professions feel that stress should be hidden, Susan believed that in a safe environment, it is healthy to express one’s emotions openly. Susan’s personality has allowed her to be successful in her various life roles as well as in her professional life when connecting and engaging with students and clients. Susan’s ability to remain humble throughout her career is commendable as she has positively impacted so many individuals.

Category two: Educational experiences

Theme one: Education has played an important role in Susan’s life.

Education has always been a significant part of Susan’s life as she has achieved a degree in Masters of Public Services from New School University, New York, and a Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy from the University of Pennsylvania. She also went back to school to receive a degree in social work as she stated, “my major interest in life was in mental health and I thought that learning some of the social work skills and would be a great combination with OT.” Susan, however, decided not to finish her social work schooling due to a job offer she could not resist. She still found her experiences in social work meaningful as it provided her with new theories and different ways of looking at people. Susan’s passion for education began with her pursuit of many degrees and later resulted in her desire to hold various

teaching positions. When Susan began the process of becoming an OT, theory was unheard of in the profession; Ironically, Susan later became a teacher for this specific subject. She was also fortunate enough to be hired at various teaching hospitals.

Theme two: Susan placed a high value on being in the classroom with her students.

Susan's most valued times in the classroom consisted of open discussions with her students. She appreciated moments when students would take off on a subject and build a teaching moment around it. Susan preferred treating her students as if they were her peers; she valued all of their suggestions and opinions. She is incredibly grateful for all of her students' support regarding her husband's chronic illness. She stated, When my husband was so sick, the students were wonderful. They would ask me every week how he was, how I was, and if I was taking care of myself. She truly appreciated their concern during that time. However, Susan admits sometimes her students did not know what to make of her because of her tendency to want to weave stories in and out of a lecture, this trait made her come across less straightforward, but more personable. Overall, education has played a significant role in Susan's life and she highly valued the time she spent in the classroom as both a student and a professor.

Category three: Politics and leadership positions

Theme one: Susan's assertiveness and willingness to take initiative allowed her to create change through hiring a lobbyist to advocate for the profession in AOTA.

Susan found politics to be an incredibly important aspect of the profession, as evidenced by her numerous leadership positions and titles. Susan was not only able to connect with many people in the profession through her roles and attending conferences but also had the opportunity to hire a lobbyist through POTA to advocate for the importance of occupational therapy. Susan believed this decision was one of her most valuable contributions throughout her time as a leader

as she stated, “One of my biggest accomplishments was getting the boards to take the 20,000 and hire a lobbyist because it is a big state with a lot of OTs.”

Theme two: As an educator, Susan encourages students to take advantage of opportunities to help bolster their careers.

Susan was vocal about her thoughts revolving AOTA membership. Susan stated that she does not believe that students enrolled in occupational therapy programs should be required to hold membership through national or state organizations. She does, however, believe that information obtained from these associations is not “public radio,” and if people want to utilize the data, they need to pay for it. Additionally, Susan was passionate about individuals in the profession stepping up and contributing whenever possible; “Raise your hand, say I would like to help you with that...” Susan emphasized that individuals do not need to run for president, but need to stay involved and support the profession whenever possible. She believes that on an organizational level, 20 percent of members do 80 percent of the work and she expressed major concern about this issue in the profession.

Theme three: Advocating for OT’s role in mental health was important to Susan.

In Susan’s political career, she learned to be “a little bit more politically savvy.” Specifically, learning how to motivate individuals within the committee to achieve a common goal. Susan stated that many people in the profession were incredibly dedicated; however, they often needed a leader and someone to instill a vision. She was proud that she was able to be this person. She capitalized on her skills such as being able to engage others to advocate for mental health within her leadership positions. Susan said the following about her leadership positions in POTA: “They allowed me to remind others that there is a mental health perspective. And I spent hours raising my hand going “and mental health, and mental health.”

Susan's passion for the field allowed her to make many changes through her leadership positions, such as hiring a lobbyist and creating visions that helped to engage professionals and guide everyone through working towards a common goal.

Category four: Occupational therapy

Theme one: Susan is passionate about the role of occupational therapy in mental health.

Susan stated that one of her biggest accomplishments throughout her career was being able to change the ways individuals view mental health. She stated that she was "probably among the few to start treating people in groups that were focused on a particular issue rather than everybody into the pool." One of the primary reasons Susan values occupational therapy is because of the emphasis on occupation. She stated that engaging in an activity with her client was a way of building a bridge to have a more in-depth and rich conversation.

Theme: Susan values being a person in the environment clients can count on.

One of Susan's most fond memories in the clinic was when a young man described her as the "good neighbor" next door. Susan explained that this is exactly who she aimed to be; A person in the environment who people know they can count on but will not overwhelm them. Additionally, one of Susan's most notable contributions to mental health in occupational therapy was working in the prisons. She stated that this was the most interesting experience she ever had. Although she did not love it, it was fascinating for her to enter a system that was a city within itself. This experience challenged her creativity as an occupational therapist as the prisoners were limited in the activities they could engage in. Susan also showed empathy for the women she worked with during this time, as she could see how they were terribly wounded. Susan emphasized how eye-opening this entire experience was and explained that her overall takeaway was this: "These are not bad people. These are people to whom bad things happen."

Theme two: Susan has faced many challenges in her career but grew to learn from them.

One of Susan's largest challenges in her career occurred when she was employed as a director at a day hospital. This was one of Susan's most valued jobs, but she faced many obstacles along the way. One was having to lay-off employees. During this time, the insurance company had stopped paying which resulted in administration advising Susan to cut her staff; "I think the biggest challenge I ever had was the shrinking of the hospital and needing to lay people off. And how to decide who to lay off." Susan expressed that none of the people she laid off were unqualified, but rather the hospital could not afford them. The aftermath of laying off certain individuals was an incredibly painful experience for Susan; however, she stated that this challenge allowed her to grow for the future.

Overall, Susan viewed occupational therapy as her opportunity to do some good in the world. She explained that there is nothing more valuable than simply listening to clients and empathizing with them. Throughout her career, Susan aimed to be a consistent advocate for occupational therapy's role in mental health as well as being the person in her client's environment that they can count on. The categories and themes led to this final assertion: By utilizing her personal strengths, such as her ability to be assertive, take initiative, and connect and engage with others, Susan was able to impact many students and clients throughout her career. These same personality traits allowed her to create great change and advocate for mental health throughout her leadership positions in the profession.

Discussion/Conclusions:

The interview with Susan Haiman provided an insightful understanding of the various aspects of Susan's life that impacted her during her occupational therapy career. Utilizing the Kawa Model allowed the researchers to gain valuable information regarding the supports,

barriers, and contexts in her life that impacted her throughout her various challenges and accomplishments (Teoh & Iwama, 2015). Susan consistently capitalized on her personal strengths, such as her ability to be assertive, take initiative, and connect and engage with others in order to create great change and advocate for mental health in the profession. Through both her leadership roles and educator positions, Susan was able to heavily impact clients, students, and others in the field. Many changes were occurring in occupational therapy throughout Susan's career such as The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the establishment of the Code of Ethics in 1977. These advancements heavily influenced Susan's occupational therapy journey and the way she operated within the profession.

Susan was able to make numerous contributions to the profession through writing various articles and books as well as presenting on numerous mental health topics. Susan's many accomplishments and large impact on the field is inspirational to both current and future occupational therapists. Her desire to advocate for the profession and connect with her clients makes her a role model to all individuals involved in occupational therapy.

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Appendix:
 The Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of
 Susan Haiman, MPS, OT/L, FAOTA
 Jacey Savage, MOTS and Meaghan Wolfgram, MOTS

Categories	Personal Experiences	Education	Politics	OT
Codes	Hobbies Church Everyday life Personality Husband Kids	Social work Various jobs College OTD Students Teaching	AOTA History Leadership	Work Mental health Occupational therapy Publications
Themes	<p>Personal Experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Susan’s ability to remain humble throughout her career is commendable ● Susan believes family is a priority in her life. ● As an OT, Susan was able to have an impact on both the students' and clients’ lives. <p>Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education has played an important role in Susan’s life. ● Susan placed a high value on being in the classroom with her students. <p>Politics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocating for OT’s role in mental health was important to Susan. ● Her assertiveness and willingness to take initiative allowed her to create change through hiring a lobbyist to advocate for the profession in AOTA. ● As an educator, Susan encourages students to take advantage of opportunities to help bolster their careers. <p>Occupational Therapy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Susan values being a person in the environment clients can count on. ● Susan has faced many challenges in her career but grew to learn from them. ● Susan is passionate about the role of occupational therapy in mental health. 			

Assertion: By utilizing her personal strengths, such as her ability to be assertive, take initiative, and connect and engage with others, Susan was able to impact many students and clients throughout her career. These same personality traits allowed her to create great change and advocate for mental health throughout her leadership positions in the profession.