

2017

## **Resource Seeking as Occupation: A Critical and Empirical Exploration.**

Rebecca M Aldrich

Debbie Rudman  
*Western University*, [drudman@uwo.ca](mailto:drudman@uwo.ca)

Virginia A Dickie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/otpub>



Part of the [Occupational Therapy Commons](#)

---

### **Citation of this paper:**

Aldrich, Rebecca M; Rudman, Debbie; and Dickie, Virginia A, "Resource Seeking as Occupation: A Critical and Empirical Exploration." (2017). *Occupational Therapy Publications*. 66.  
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/otpub/66>

1 Resource seeking as occupation: A critical and empirical exploration

2

3 Rebecca M. Aldrich, PhD, OTR/L, Assistant Professor, Saint Louis University. 3437 Caroline  
4 Street, AHP Room 2020, Saint Louis, MO, 63104. 314-977-8577 (phone), 314-977-5414 (fax),  
5 [raldrich@slu.edu](mailto:raldrich@slu.edu)

6

7 Debbie Laliberte Rudman, PhD, OT Reg. Ont., Associate Professor, University of Western  
8 Ontario

9

10 Virginia A. Dickie, PhD, OTR, Professor Emeritus, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

## 11 Abstract

12 Occupational therapists and occupational scientists are committed to generating and  
13 utilizing knowledge about occupation, but Western middle-class social norms regarding  
14 particular ways of doing have limited explorations of survival occupations. This article provides  
15 empirical evidence of the ways in which resource seeking constitutes an occupational response to  
16 situations of uncertain survival. Resource seeking includes a range of activities outside formal  
17 employment that aim to meet basic needs. Based on findings from two ethnographic studies, we  
18 critique the presumption of survival in guiding occupational therapy documents and the  
19 accompanying failure to recognize occupations that seem at odds with self-sufficiency. We argue  
20 that failing to name resource seeking in occupational therapy documents risks aligning with  
21 social, political, and economic trends that foster occupational injustices. If occupational  
22 therapists truly aim to meet society's occupational needs, then they must ensure that professional  
23 documents and discourses reflect the experiences of *all* people in society.

24

25 Key words: activities of daily living; occupational science; occupational therapy; practice  
26 guidelines; qualitative research; social justice; social values; socioeconomic support; work

27

28 Introduction

29 Not all occupations have identifiable or universal names (Hocking, 2009) despite early  
30 occupational science assertions that occupations “can be named in the lexicon of our culture”  
31 (Clark et al., 1991, p. 301) according to “the purposes they serve in enabling people to meet  
32 environmental challenges” (Yerxa, 1993, p. 5). As practitioners and scholars who aim to promote  
33 occupational engagement and occupational justice, we have a responsibility to question why  
34 certain occupations are *not* named in our discourses. Schön and Rein (1994) suggested that  
35 “naming and framing” phenomena helps make sense of problematic situations because names  
36 afford visibility, value, and expectations. Failing to name an occupation may thus signify a lack  
37 of awareness of an occupation, a perceived lack of importance attributed to an occupation, or a  
38 decision to not address social or political issues related to an occupation.

39 In recent years, occupational therapy and occupational science scholars have critiqued  
40 how occupations are categorized (Aldrich et al., 2014; Hammell, 2009a/b; Jonsson, 2008) and  
41 made visible in research and published literature (Hocking, 2012; Kiepek, Phelan & Magalhaes,  
42 2014). In this article, we continue these trends by discussing an occupation that remains  
43 unnamed and unaddressed in occupational therapy: resource seeking. We appraise the social and  
44 political circumstances that have made resource seeking an increasingly common yet unnamed  
45 North American occupation. Our goal is to raise awareness and articulate how practitioners and  
46 scholars might address the necessity of resource seeking as an indicator of occupational injustice.

47 Background

48 North American societies are structured around work and most adults are expected to  
49 spend much of their time working (Stone, 2003). As a result, work becomes a primary source of  
50 many adults’ identities (Unruh, 2004) and people without paid employment are positioned as

51 undeserving of the merit attributed to people who work (Cottle, 2001). These social conditions  
52 have shaped the notion of work in occupational therapy (Harvey-Krefting, 1985), and the  
53 profession has had difficulty straying from normative ideas surrounding employment (Hammell,  
54 2009a). Thus, although work can be broadly conceived as any “activity that supports the survival  
55 of oneself and one’s family” (Dickie, 2003, p. 251), occupational therapy practice views paid  
56 employment as the archetypal work occupation (American Occupational Therapy Association  
57 [AOTA], 2014, pp. S20-S21). Yet survival – a primary function of work income – can be  
58 achieved through a variety of activities. People may garden, barter, hunt, fish, manufacture, sell,  
59 invest, steal, work for wages, and/or turn to governmental and non-governmental social services  
60 to support their lives. Multiple income strategies across formal and informal economies are  
61 common in most households (Dickie, 1998; Halperin, 1990; Leonard, 2000).

62         Dickie (1998) commented that “the idea that people work *for money* [emphasis added]”  
63 (p. 117) was strangely absent in occupational therapy texts, and she called for more attention to  
64 broader economic activities in clients’ lives. Despite that call, contemporary occupational  
65 therapists are still unlikely to describe work as inclusive of the process of resource seeking,  
66 defined as a range of activities focused on securing income supplements, goods, and services to  
67 meet basic survival needs. Resource seeking may be perceived as antithetical to work because its  
68 necessity increases when people cannot primarily be self-sufficient through socially approved  
69 mechanisms of making money. People who engage in resource seeking are often marginalized  
70 because of their non-preferred ways of sustaining individual and family survival.

71         Perhaps due to the stigma surrounding government entitlement programs that guarantee  
72 income or resources to certain people, resource seeking has not received much attention in the  
73 occupational therapy and occupational science literatures. This lack of attention continues a

74 pattern in the profession and discipline of neglecting occupations that seem at odds with  
75 mainstream ways of doing and being (Kiepek, Phelan & Magalhaes, 2014). Other fields have  
76 investigated resource seeking activities (González de la Rocha, 2001; Dominguez & Watkins,  
77 2003; Edin & Lein, 1997) without explicit reference to occupation. Occupational therapy studies  
78 have begun to bridge this gap by focusing on how people with disabilities negotiate social  
79 service systems. Magasi's (2012) research illuminated the "unnoticed" complexity of the ways in  
80 which people with disabilities identify, obtain, and organize formal social services such as  
81 income and housing supports. According to Magasi, recognizing service system negotiation as a  
82 skilled occupation "can challenge stereotypes of people with disabilities as passive beneficiaries  
83 of support" (p. S30) and "help de-stigmatize service use" (p. S31). Although Magasi's work lays  
84 an important foundation for exploring contemporary resource seeking, a more expanded focus  
85 beyond people with disabilities and the acquisition of formal social services is necessary.

86 Economic trends have impacted wider needs for and availability of formal and informal  
87 resources for survival (Duck, 2012; González de la Rocha, 2001). Higher rates of unemployment  
88 and underemployment and longer durations of unemployment have plagued North America since  
89 the 2008 economic recession (Kosanovich & Sherman, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2013), fostering  
90 greater numbers of people engaging in resource seeking. Accordingly, it is essential to extend  
91 occupational therapy's budding focus to the vast numbers of people without disabilities who are  
92 unemployed, precariously employed, underemployed, or living on fixed incomes. Recognizing  
93 widespread needs for resources may help reduce associated stigma (Loewenberg, 1981) by  
94 situating this survival occupation as relevant for people beyond those with disabilities. Likewise,  
95 focusing on formal social service system negotiation is too limited to encompass contemporary  
96 survival efforts. In the United States (US), formal social programs such as unemployment

97 insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance  
98 Program work in concert with informal community-based resources such as food pantries, utility  
99 assistance, and medication programs to facilitate survival. People also create webs of support  
100 among family and friends to barter or trade for resources during difficult times (Dominguez &  
101 Watkins, 2003; Halperin 1990; Stack, 1974). More North Americans may be seeking non-  
102 governmental resources to offset the implications of income insecurity because fewer people  
103 have had access to formal social service benefits since the 2008 recession (McKenna, 2015;  
104 Mendelsohn & Medow, 2010). These circumstances reveal a need for an occupation-focused  
105 understanding of resource seeking that reflects the complexity of contemporary survival needs.

106 In this article, we use empirical evidence to show how resource seeking is a contingent,  
107 transactional, and occupational response to a lack of adequate income. Our illustration focuses  
108 on activities that support three of the World Health Organization's (WHO) prerequisites for  
109 health – income, food, and shelter (WHO, 1986) – as well as health maintenance. Although  
110 resource seeking extends beyond these domains, such delimitation allows a fuller discussion of  
111 the ways in which resource seeking contributes to everyday survival.

## 112 Methods

113 Two studies of unemployment utilized a transactional perspective (Dickie, Cutchin, &  
114 Humphry, 2006) and a collaborative ethnographic methodological approach (Lassiter, 2005) to  
115 provide empirical evidence of resource seeking. A transactional perspective illuminates the  
116 complex person-environment relationship (Aldrich, 2008) and is well-matched with ethnographic  
117 methodologies that “recognize and appreciate the entire situation of occupation(s)” (Bailliard,  
118 Aldrich, & Dickie, 2013, p. 157). Specifically, a transactional perspective helps scholars focus  
119 on how problematic situations are resolved through reconfiguring person-environment relations

120 (Aldrich, 2008). We chose a collaborative methodology based on our commitment to community  
121 engagement (Aldrich & Marterella, 2012) and social change (Lassiter & Campbell, 2010).  
122 Collaborative ethnography in particular helps redress power imbalances by recognizing research  
123 participants' integral role in knowledge generation (Lassiter, 2005). We asked participants to act  
124 as *consultants* who shaped the questions we asked, reviewed findings, and influenced knowledge  
125 dissemination. These theoretical and methodological approaches support a critical occupational  
126 science approach (Laliberte Rudman, 2015) which, among other things, illuminates assumptions  
127 about the social acceptability of particular occupations (Njelesani, Gibson, Nixon, Cameron, &  
128 Polatajko, 2013). Study 1's findings contributed to the explicitly critical orientation of Study 2.  
129 Study 2 also drew on governmentality theory (Laliberte Rudman, 2010) to reveal how  
130 sociopolitical discourses that define people and activities are taken up, resisted, and transformed.

131 Both studies aimed to understand what occupations people are and are not able to do  
132 during prolonged joblessness. The first author (Aldrich) completed Study 1 under the third  
133 author's (Dickie's) supervision from 2009-2010. Study 1 explored the daily occupations of five  
134 people who were or were at-risk of becoming "discouraged workers" who want to work but are  
135 not looking for work because they believe they cannot find a job (Bureau of Labor Statistics,  
136 2015). Study 1 aimed to answer the following questions: What occupations do discouraged  
137 workers engage in during unemployment? What value do they assign to those occupations, and  
138 what function do those occupations serve? How do their occupations fit with formal/informal  
139 economic and social activities in the region? The four women and one man who participated in  
140 Study 1 ranged from 21-50 years old and came from diverse family and career backgrounds.  
141 Aldrich generated data via multiple participant observations, two to three semi-structured 25 to  
142 90-minute interviews, and the Occupational Questionnaire time diary (Smith, Kielhofner, &



143 Watts, 1986). To develop a broader understanding of participants' situations, Aldrich also  
144 volunteered in a community food pantry for participant observations and interviewed community  
145 leaders and staff members from various support organizations. All study activities took place in  
146 rural North Carolina and were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

147 Aldrich and the second author (Laliberte Rudman) completed Study 2 from 2012 to 2013.  
148 Study 2 focused on people who were unemployed long-term in mid-size US and Canadian cities  
149 as well as front-line service providers who worked with clients facing joblessness. Study 2 was  
150 concerned with how unemployment services manifest sociopolitical values and aimed to answer  
151 the following question: What is the relation of social services, sociopolitical policies and  
152 discourses, and occupations during long-term unemployment? Four people in each site (2  
153 women, 2 men) completed one to three 30 to 90-minute semi-structured interviews, and seven  
154 front-line service providers and program managers completed one to two informal interviews and  
155 facilitated observations of service provision processes for the study. Study 2's participants  
156 ranged from 30-65 years old and came from diverse educational, ethnic, and employment  
157 backgrounds. Two universities' Institutional Review Boards approved Study 2's methods.

158 We utilized open and focused coding of interview transcripts, iterative readings of field  
159 notes, memoing, and, in Study 2, discursive (Cheek, 2004; Laliberte Rudman, 2013) and  
160 situational analyses (Clarke, 2005; Clarke, Friese, & Washburn, 2015). The discursive analysis  
161 used guiding questions to illuminate subject positions, negotiations, and tensions in participants'  
162 lives as well as participants' situatedness relative to sociopolitical discourses. Situational maps  
163 helped illustrate the human, nonhuman, social, political, cultural, spatial, and temporal elements  
164 that constituted situations of long-term unemployment (Aldrich & Laliberte Rudman, 2015).  
165 Together, these analytic approaches helped us articulate resource seeking as an occupation.

## 166 Findings

167 The following examples illustrate how people enact resource seeking as an occupational  
168 response to particular survival needs. Embedded descriptions of participants demonstrate that  
169 resource seeking is not restricted to one kind of person or set of circumstances. These findings  
170 illuminate resource seeking as an occupational response to the situation of unemployment rather  
171 than generating thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of any person's actions. As noted earlier, these  
172 findings explore resource seeking in relation to the prerequisites of health as well as health itself.

173 *Ensuring financial survival: Making ends meet via resource seeking*

174 The necessity and difficulty of financial survival is underscored by its relation to the  
175 WHO prerequisites for health: financial survival requires securing some form of income which  
176 in turn supports needs for shelter and food. Across studies, participants described how financial  
177 survival entailed a complex process of determining what resources existed, where resources were  
178 geographically located, and what eligibility requirements controlled access to available  
179 resources. The large amount of time participants invested in resource seeking speaks to the  
180 learning that is central to the skillful performance of this occupation (Dickie, 2003).

181 Jeanette was not accustomed to financial struggles prior to her extended joblessness in  
182 her early 40s. While employed as an insurance assistant, her middle class lifestyle allowed her to  
183 support two children as a single parent; after two years of unsuccessful job applications, Jeanette  
184 became unable to make ends meet in rural North Carolina and had to learn how to find resources:

185 I called places, Salvation Army, and it was, "You'll have to get in line with the rest of  
186 them." I went to Child Support Enforcement [and they said], "We'll get you a court date  
187 whenever we can, you're just like a million other people"... And I called a church, and  
188 they have a huge fund, and they said, "Well I'm sorry, you live in [your] county and we

189           only help people in [our] county”...[and at the Department of Social Services] trying to  
190           get my kids on Medicaid and maybe a little food stamps, [they said] “No, I’m sorry.”  
191 Jeanette thus learned the limitations on accessing seemingly available financial resources, noting  
192 that her “unemployment [insurance] is \$32 a month too much for food stamps, but if you qualify  
193 for food stamps, you can’t buy shampoo, cleaning supplies, none of the paper products.” Jeanette  
194 eventually learned that she could collect groceries from two different food pantries and seek  
195 utility or rent assistance from state and community organizations. No guidebook existed to aid  
196 Jeanette’s resource seeking: it was only through trial, error, and a great deal of time that she  
197 learned where to get help and when she was or was not eligible for services and supports.

198           Margie, who was also in her early 40s, had a markedly different experience despite living  
199 in the same area of rural North Carolina as Jeanette. When Margie lost her job as a high-finance  
200 banker, she took a paid AmeriCorps volunteer position instead of seeking re-employment, noting  
201           I’m still below the poverty line, even with my unemployment and the stipend. I’m  
202           eligible for food stamps, housing assistance, pretty much anything that the federal, state,  
203           and local government allows for poverty-stricken individuals. So I went from a 6-figure  
204           income to being below the poverty line. And I still have the same bills.

205 She commented that “as a Vista volunteer, I have to maintain living in poverty so that I can  
206 relate to the programs that I’m supporting and helping out,” and she discovered that the process  
207 of seeking resources was “an eye-opening experience...I thought financial aid for college was a  
208 humbling experience, an experience that was somewhat degrading...This was probably 25 times  
209 worse.” Margie estimated that she spent at least 15 hours per month submitting paperwork or  
210 attending meetings to maintain her eligibility for unemployment insurance, childcare assistance,  
211 and utility assistance. Although the Vista program provided volunteers with information on

212 supports and subsidies, Margie still had to learn how to structure her flexible volunteer schedule  
213 and earn her supervisor's support so she could maintain her receipt of financial resources.

214 In Ontario, Canada, Eileen wove together a similar tapestry of financial resources to  
215 make ends meet while actively resisting the stigmatized option to "end up on welfare." After  
216 losing a full-time "career job" in her mid-40s, Eileen described herself as "caught in a vicious  
217 cycle" of alternating between employment and drawing employment insurance benefits. As an  
218 older worker in her 60s, Eileen described being aware of how many weeks of employment  
219 insurance she had accrued and using a variety of job search strategies to work long enough to  
220 renew her future employment insurance. As she aged, Eileen feared that her ability to survive in  
221 this way was increasingly uncertain because her time between contract jobs steadily increased.  
222 Accordingly, Eileen drew her publicly-funded Canadian Pension Plan early, which carried a  
223 long-term financial penalty but helped her make ends meet in the present. Eileen's daily needs  
224 and lingering debt always exceeded her financial means and she lived with the persistent fear  
225 that "I'm not going to have enough to live on" and "I could be 70 and still out there working."

226 *Addressing health: Caring for the self via resource seeking*

227 To ensure financial survival, the women described above had to learn which elements of  
228 their situations matched eligibility requirements of state and community resources. As the  
229 following findings illustrate, knowledge of resource eligibility also facilitated one of the primary  
230 functions of occupation: achieving and maintaining health (Wilcock & Hocking, 2015).

231 As a single mother in her late 30s, Cindy found it difficult to maintain employment in  
232 administrative work due to North Carolina's weak economy and her battles with addiction and  
233 depression. While she was jobless, Cindy suffered from chronic bronchitis, kidney and urinary

234 tract infections, headaches, and pain from a work-related back injury. Resource seeking became  
235 Cindy's primary means of restoring and maintaining her health. She stated,

236 I did realize recently that I could possibly go to the Health Department and I haven't done  
237 that since I was a baby. That's another thing if I were to get sick, instead of going to the  
238 hospital. [Hospitals are] not like they used to be: they expect payment.

239 Knowing where to get an illness diagnosed for free was only one part of Cindy's resource  
240 seeking; she also needed to obtain medications to remedy diagnosed problems. During one  
241 kidney infection, Cindy could not afford two prescriptions because "no one can give me \$8." As  
242 a result, Cindy spent an hour waiting at a local charity to get a voucher from their medication  
243 assistance program. For less emergent health needs, Cindy said she relied on stable resources:

244 I know I've got to go to [the clinic] and get my assessment and get my refill because  
245 there are no more refills on that. That's not something I planned ahead, I just kept saying,  
246 "Ok, I'm getting lower, I'm getting lower, I'm going to have to do it." And one morning I  
247 woke up and said, "I need to make that phone call today."

248 Cindy's attempts to achieve and maintain health involved discerning which resources were  
249 available for one-time versus regular use and understanding how resource availability met or  
250 failed to meet her particular needs at any given moment.

251 Also recovering from a work-related back injury, Kevin had spent most of his 30s  
252 navigating resources in the Ontario area after going "two years trying to get an MRI to find  
253 out...that I had a crushed spine." Although Kevin had lost his worker's compensation benefits,  
254 he perceived an advantage to being on a different form of social welfare called Ontario Works:

255 for the five years I was on worker's comp, rarely would you see me leave my house.

256 [Investigators] literally – they will follow you around. They'll go knock on your

257 neighbor's doors and they'll start asking questions. And the next thing you know, if  
258 you're out carrying a loaf of bread from the grocery store, they say, oh, well, you must be  
259 okay. So I never went out, I never did anything.

260 For Kevin, seeking health resources entailed figuring out how to adjust his occupational routines  
261 to demonstrate his worthiness of support. He noted that “[people are] looking at you...well, then  
262 of course I lift up my shirt and show them my lower spine and they just kind of, ‘Oh, okay.’” As  
263 a result of needing to be believed, Kevin’s “focus wasn’t on where I was going to be. At that  
264 time, I was trying to deal with the present issues at hand and dealing with doctors.”

265 *Procuring and preparing food: Providing sustenance for self and others via resource seeking*

266 Participants’ diverse strategies for procuring and preparing food offer other examples of  
267 needing to understand eligibility requirements while refining and enacting resource seeking  
268 skills. In both studies, securing sustenance entailed negotiating a lack of choice given the  
269 “spontaneous and contextually embedded nature” (Galvaan, 2015, p. 40) of resource seeking.

270 As a 50 year-old former factory worker in rural North Carolina, Rose shared Jeanette and  
271 Margie’s uncertainty about having enough money for rent, groceries, and household items. Since  
272 her most recent layoff, Rose had developed a complex system to ensure her family had enough  
273 food to eat. Based on her household income, Rose qualified for food stamps as well as twice-a-  
274 month allocations from two food pantries. Food pantry workers determined what grocery items  
275 she received, but Rose said that decreased choice inspired creativity, noting that “[we] have  
276 come up with some creative meals that you wouldn’t think about fixing but they turn out to be  
277 really good... We take macaroni and cheese and put tomatoes in it, brown some hamburger and  
278 put it in there.” Although her food pantry allocations were balanced across food groups, Rose  
279 occasionally received food that she did not want or need and she donated those items to an

280 informal food pantry at her apartment complex. Rose also shared purchased groceries with  
281 neighbors, noting that “meat products are wrapped individually, but then they are wrapped  
282 together...I had one bag I didn’t need, so I gave them to a neighbor and she cooked what she  
283 wanted and gave the rest to another neighbor.” Rose’s community context affected the ways in  
284 which she sought and used food resources: the amount of food available at food pantries and the  
285 willingness of neighbors to trade and barter prompted spontaneity and creativity in her efforts.

286 Denise engaged in a similar process of seeking food resources but did not have the luxury  
287 of food stamps. Denise and her husband were both in their late 40s and struggling to survive  
288 since facing a brief period of homelessness in Ontario. Denise identified free church meals and  
289 used the local library’s internet to “order a lot of coupons online.” She supplemented with  
290 allocations from a local food bank and carefully budgeted any food purchase. She explained that

291 I cannot justify making a pot of spaghetti sauce...it’s just too expensive. I ended up  
292 buying four skinless chicken breasts for like \$5.00 and 10 drumsticks for like \$3.00-  
293 something. I’m thinking, well, there’s two meals with the chicken breasts and like 2 more  
294 with the drumsticks.

295 Although Denise successfully procured food, it was not necessarily fresh or healthful. She  
296 observed that “if you go to the food bank you’re getting packaged pastas and stuff, and you’re  
297 getting canned foods...it’s not necessarily giving you the things that you need to be healthy.”  
298 Denise also recognized the stigma that accompanied seeking and using food resources, stating,  
299 “I’m almost to the point now that I don’t care. If [other people] see me, they see me, I don’t give  
300 a shit. I know that it was hard on the kids...they’re like, ‘You don’t need to go there.’” Her adult  
301 children perpetuated a view of community food resources that Denise herself had once held.  
302 Denise emphasized that “before I had experienced that, that’s what I always thought community

303 meals were: serving [the] homeless...But being there, I do see a lot of people that are just more  
304 the working poor or the people that have low income.” Denise’s revelation illustrates that  
305 resource seeking can be important whether people are with or without work.

## 306 Discussion

307 The above examples show the diverse ways in which resource seeking operates as an  
308 occupational response to survival needs. Participants’ resource seeking was purposeful, goal-  
309 directed, contextually shaped, temporal in nature, and connected to health, thus constituting an  
310 occupation (AOTA, 2014). Unfortunately, the lack of recognition of resource seeking in current  
311 occupational therapy terminology limits practitioners’ abilities to address this occupation. As  
312 noted in the introduction, resource seeking does not fit within accepted definitions of work  
313 despite the fact that it helps people survive in ways similar to employment income. Resource  
314 seeking also fails to fit within other occupational categories in the Occupational Therapy Practice  
315 Framework (OTPF), which “describes the central concepts that ground occupational therapy  
316 practice and builds a common understanding of the basic tenets and vision of the profession”  
317 (AOTA, 2014, p. S3). For instance, in defining financial management as “using fiscal resources,  
318 including alternate methods of financial transaction, and planning and using finances...”  
319 (AOTA, 2014, p. S19), the OTPF does not explain how people like Jeanette, Margie, and Eileen  
320 *acquire* financial resources. Instead, it falsely assumes the presence of financial resources as well  
321 as people’s abilities to plan the use of those resources. Similarly, the OTPF fails to reflect that  
322 “developing, managing, and maintaining routines for health and wellness promotion” (AOTA,  
323 2014, p. S19) can be unaffordable luxuries (Tirado, 2014) when daily survival or the need to  
324 appear “authentically” ill or injured are considerations. Finally, OTPF definitions do not  
325 encompass common food acquisition strategies such as utilizing food pantries and trading



326 groceries with neighbors; instead, existing definitions presume stability beyond what Rose and  
327 Denise faced. By starting from an assumption of survival, OTPF definitions reveal strikingly  
328 little about how occupations provide a means for subsisting across a range of situations.

329         If occupational therapy and the study of occupation are to be relevant for all people, then  
330 it is vital to see how survival occupations are represented in documents like the OTPF. There is  
331 growing recognition that middle-class, Caucasian, Western perspectives have contributed to  
332 limited and partial conceptualizations of occupation (Hammell, 2009a/b; Hocking, 2012;  
333 Kantartzis & Molineux, 2012). Attending to occupations like resource seeking is essential to  
334 “meeting society’s occupational needs” (AOTA, 2006, p. 1) because the tasks that constitute  
335 resource seeking – such as using coupons, strategizing purchases, trading items with friends, and  
336 utilizing governmental incentives – are common survival strategies. Excluding resource seeking  
337 from occupational therapists’ consideration risks perpetuating the assumption that the nature of  
338 people’s economic activities determines their deservingness of occupation-focused services.

339         Neoliberal frameworks that prioritize self-reliance and individualize social problems  
340 shape the policies and systems within which occupational therapists operate (Laliberte Rudman,  
341 2013). Such frameworks exclude occupations like resource seeking because they appear to foster  
342 dependency and reinforce a lack of self-sufficiency (as defined by Hong et al., 2012). However,  
343 drawing on increased attention to the socio-political shaping of occupation (Angell, 2014;  
344 Galvaan, 2015; Laliberte Rudman, 2014), occupational therapists can reframe resource seeking  
345 as an occupation that results from policies and economic circumstances (Soss, Fording &  
346 Schram, 2011) rather than self-sufficiency failures. Occupational therapists can also address  
347 resource seeking as part of everyday occupational justice practices (Bailliard & Aldrich, in  
348 press). The need to seek resources accompanies an urgent focus on survival that prevents people

349 from engaging in other valued and meaningful occupations. It is imperative to critique the  
350 systems and structures that foster such situations, especially because they are disproportionately  
351 distributed along markers such as race, gender, citizenship status, and ability/disability (Vosko,  
352 2010). Occupational therapists can promote more equitable opportunities by framing certain  
353 collectives' heightened need for resource seeking as an occupational injustice.

### 354 Conclusion

355 Traditional notions of work are culturally determined and often predicated on middle-  
356 class experiences of secure employment relations. If such notions continue to provide a reference  
357 point for named occupations, there will remain a lack of attention to situations that are not  
358 funded by formal employment income. Work-centric definitions are not without merit, but  
359 uncritically propagating them when traditional full-time work is becoming less prevalent in  
360 society verges on professional irresponsibility. Failing to name and attend to the occupation of  
361 resource seeking may inadvertently or unintentionally make occupational therapists complicit  
362 with social and policy changes that shape and perpetuate occupational injustices. Recognizing  
363 resource seeking within the lexicon of occupational therapy can raise social awareness and  
364 support addressing resource seeking within practice and broader social policy.

### 365 Implications for occupational therapy practice

- 366 • It is important to question implicit understandings in documents that guide practice.
- 367 • Practice must account for the occupations that meet survival needs instead of relying on  
368 assumptions about what is “normal” in everyday life.
- 369 • Attending to occupational injustices can occur through critically addressing resource-seeking  
370 occupations at individual and societal levels.

### 371 Acknowledgements

372           We would like to thank the consultants and community partners who, through their  
373 experiences, helped us develop understandings about the occupation of resource seeking. We are  
374 also grateful for the funding we received to support these studies.

375

376

## References

- 377  
378  
379 Aldrich, R. (2008). From complexity theory to transactionalism: Moving occupational science  
380 forward in theorizing the complexities of behavior. *Journal of Occupational Science*,  
381 15(3), 147-156. doi: 10.1080/14427591.2008.9686624
- 382 Aldrich, R. & Laliberte Rudman, D. (2015). Situational analysis: A visual analytic approach to  
383 unpack the complexity of occupation. *Journal of Occupational Science*, doi:  
384 10.1080/14427591.2015.1045014.
- 385 Aldrich, R. & Marterella, A. (2012). Community-engaged research: A path for occupational  
386 science in the changing university landscape. *Journal of Occupational Science*.  
387 doi:10.1080/14427591.2012.714077
- 388 Aldrich, R., McCarty, C., Boyd, B., Bunch, C., & Balentine, C. (2014). Empirical lessons about  
389 occupational categorization from case studies of unemployment. *Canadian Journal of*  
390 *Occupational Therapy*, 81(5), 289-297. doi: 10.1177/0008417414540129
- 391 American Occupational Therapy Association. (2006). AOTA's centennial vision. Retrieved from  
392 <https://www.aota.org//media/Corporate/Files/AboutAOTA/Centennial/Background/Vision1.pdf>  
393
- 394 American Occupational Therapy Association. (2014). Occupational therapy practice framework:  
395 Domain and process (3rd ed.). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 68(Suppl.1),  
396 S1–S48. doi: 10.5014/ajot.2014.682006
- 397 Angell, A. (2014). Occupation-centered analysis of social difference: Contributions to a socially-  
398 responsive occupational science. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 21(2), 104-116. doi:  
399 10.1080/14427591.2012.711230

- 400 Bailliard, A. & Aldrich, R. (in press). Occupational justice in everyday occupational therapy  
401 practice. Forthcoming in N. Pollard & D. Sakellariou (Eds.), *Occupational therapies*  
402 *without borders: Integrating justice with practice*. Elsevier.
- 403 Bailliard, A., Aldrich, R., & Dickie, V. (2013). Ethnography and transactional research. In M.  
404 Cutchin & V. Dickie (Eds.), *Transactional Perspectives on Occupation*. Dordrecht:  
405 Springer.
- 406 Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2015). BLS Information: Glossary. Retrieved from  
407 <http://www.bls.gov/bls/glossary.htm#D>
- 408 Cheek, J. (2004). At the margins? Discourse analysis and qualitative research. *Qualitative Health*  
409 *Research*, 14(8), 1140-1150. doi: 10.1177/1049732304266820
- 410 Clark, F. A., Parham, D., Carlson, M. E., Frank, G., Jackson, J., Pierce, D., Wolfe, R. J., &  
411 Zemke, R. (1991). Occupational science: Academic innovation in the service of  
412 occupational therapy's future. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(4),  
413 300-310. doi: 10.5014/ajot.45.4.300
- 414 Clarke, A. E. (2005). *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn*. Thousand  
415 Oaks: Sage.
- 416 Clarke, A. E., Friese, C., & Washburn, R. (2015). *Situational analysis in practice: Mapping*  
417 *research with grounded theory*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.
- 418 Cottle, T.J. (2001). *Hardest times: The trauma of long-term unemployment*. Westport: Praeger.
- 419 Dickie, V. A. (1998). Households, multiple livelihoods, and the informal economy: A study of  
420 American crafters. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 5(3), 109-118.
- 421 Dickie, V. A. (2003). Establishing worker identity: A study of people in craft work. *The*  
422 *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 57(3), 250-261. doi: 10.5014/ajot.57.3.250

- 423 Dickie, V. A., Cutchin, M., & Humphry, R. (2006). Occupation as transactional experience: A  
424 critique of individualism in occupational science. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 13(1),  
425 83-93.
- 426 Dominguez, S., & Watkins, C. (2003). Creating networks for survival and mobility: Social  
427 capital among African-American and Latin-American low-income mothers. *Social*  
428 *Problems*, 50(1), 111-135.
- 429 Duck, W. O. (2012). An ethnographic portrait of a precarious life. *The ANNALS of the American*  
430 *Academy of Political and Social Science*, 642(1), 124-138. doi:  
431 10.1177/0002716212438202
- 432 Edin, K., & Lein, L. (1997). Work, welfare, and single mothers' economic survival  
433 strategies. *American Sociological Review*, 253-266.
- 434 Galvaan, R. (2015). The contextually situated nature of occupational choice: Marginalized young  
435 adolescents' experiences in South Africa. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 22(1), 39-53.  
436 doi: 10.1080/14427591.2014.912124
- 437 Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York: BasicBooks.
- 438 González de la Rocha, M. (2001). From the resources of poverty to the poverty of resources?  
439 The erosion of a survival model. *Latin American Perspectives*, 72-100.
- 440 Halperin, R. H. (1990). *The livelihood of kin*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- 441 Hammell, K. W. (2009a). Sacred texts: A skeptical exploration of the assumptions underpinning  
442 theories of occupation. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 76(1), 6-13.
- 443 Hammell, K. W. (2009b). Self-care, productivity, and leisure, or dimensions of occupational  
444 experience? *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 76(2), 107-114.

- 445 Harvey-Krefting, L. (1985). The concept of work in occupational therapy: A historical review.  
446 *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 39(5), 301-307. doi: 10.5014/ajot.39.5.301
- 447 Hocking, C. (2009). The challenge of occupation: Describing the things people do. *Journal of*  
448 *Occupational Science*, 16(3), 140-150. doi: 10.1080/14427591.2009.9686655
- 449 Hocking, C. (2012). Occupations through the looking glass: Reflecting on occupational  
450 scientists' ontological assumptions. In G. E. Whiteford & C. Hocking (Eds.),  
451 *Occupational science: Society, inclusion, participation* (pp. 54-66). Oxford: Wiley-  
452 Blackwell.
- 453 Jonsson, H. (2008). A new direction in the conceptualization and categorization of occupation.  
454 *Journal of Occupational Science*, 15(1), 3-8.
- 455 Kantartzis, S. & Molineux, M. (2012). Understanding the discursive development of occupation:  
456 Historico-political perspectives. In G. E. Whiteford & C. Hocking (Eds.), *Occupational*  
457 *science: Society, inclusion, participation* (pp. 38-53). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- 458 Kiepek, N., Phelan, S. K., & Magalhaes, L. (2014). Introducing a critical analysis of the figured  
459 world of occupation. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 21(4), 403-417. doi:  
460 10.1080/14427591.2013.816998
- 461 Kosanovich, K. & Sherman, E. T. (2015, March). Trends in long term unemployment. Retrieved  
462 from <http://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2015/long-term-unemployment/>
- 463 Laliberte Rudman, D. L. (2010). Occupational terminology: Occupational possibilities. *Journal*  
464 *of Occupational Science*, 17(1), 55-59. doi: 10.1080/14427591.2010.9686673
- 465 Laliberte Rudman, D. (2013). Critical discourse analysis: Adding a political dimension to  
466 inquiry. In M.P. Cutchin & V.A. Dickie (Eds.), *Transactional perspectives on*  
467 *occupation* (pp. 169-181). Dordrecht: Springer.

- 468 Laliberte Rudman, D. (2014). Embracing and enacting an ‘occupational imagination’:  
469 Occupational science as transformative. *Journal of Occupational Science*, doi:  
470 10.1080/14427591.2014.888970
- 471 Laliberte Rudman, D. (2015). Situating occupation in social relations of power: Occupational  
472 possibilities, ageism and the retirement choice. *South African Journal of Occupational  
473 Therapy*, 45(1), 27-33.
- 474 Lassiter, L. E. (2005). *The Chicago guide to collaborative ethnography*. Chicago: The University  
475 of Chicago Press.
- 476 Lassiter, L. E., & Campbell, E. (2010). What will we have ethnography do? *Qualitative Inquiry*,  
477 16(9), 757-767. doi: 10.1177/1077800410374444
- 478 Leonard, M. (2000). Coping strategies in developed and developing societies: The workings of  
479 the informal economy. *Journal of International Development*, 12(8), 1069-1085.
- 480 Loewenberg, F. M. (1981). The destigmatization of public dependency. *Social Service Review*,  
481 55(3), 434-452. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30011499>
- 482 Magasi, S. (2012). Negotiating the social service systems: A vital yet frequently invisible  
483 occupation. *Occupational Therapy Journal of Research: Occupation, Participation,  
484 Health*, 32(1), S25-S33. doi: 10.3928/15394492-20110906-03
- 485 Mendelsohn, M. & Medow, J. (2010). Help wanted: How well did the EI program respond  
486 during recent recessions? Retrieved from [www.mowatcentre.ca/wp-  
487 content/uploads/publications/10\\_help\\_wanted.pdf](http://www.mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/10_help_wanted.pdf)
- 488 McKenna, C. (2015, February). The job ahead: Advancing opportunity for unemployed workers.  
489 Retrieved from [http://www.nelp.org/content/uploads/2015/03/Report-The-Job-Ahead-  
490 Advancing-Opportunity-Unemployed-Workers.pdf](http://www.nelp.org/content/uploads/2015/03/Report-The-Job-Ahead-Advancing-Opportunity-Unemployed-Workers.pdf)



- 491 Njelesani, J., Gibson, B. E., Nixon, S., Cameron, D., & Polatajko, H. J. (2013). Towards a  
492 critical occupational approach to research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*,  
493 *12*, 207-220.
- 494 Schön, D. A. & Rein, M. (1994). *Frame reflection: Toward the resolution of intractable policy*  
495 *controversies*. New York: BasicBooks.
- 496 Smith, N. R., Kielhofner, G., & Watts, J. H. (1986). The relationships between volition, activity  
497 pattern, and life satisfaction in the elderly. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*,  
498 *40*(4), 278-283. doi: 10.5014/ajot.40.4.278
- 499 Soss, J., Fording, R. C., & Schram, S. (2011). *Disciplining the poor: Neoliberal paternalism and*  
500 *the persistent power of race*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 501 Stack, C. B. (1974). *All our kin: Strategies for survival in a black community*. New York: Harper  
502 & Row.
- 503 Statistics Canada. (2013). Table282-0048. Labour Force Survey estimates (LFS), duration of  
504 unemployment by sex and age group, annual. CANSIM (database). Retrieved from  
505 <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/pickchoisir?lang=eng&p2=33&id=2820048>
- 506 Stone, S. D. (2003). Workers without work: Injured workers and well-being. *Journal of*  
507 *Occupational Science*, *10*(1), 7-13. doi: 10.1080/14427591.2003.9686505
- 508 Tirado, L. (2014). *Hand to mouth: Living in bootstrap America*. New York: G.P Putnam's Sons.
- 509 Unruh, A. M. (2004). Reflections on: "So...what do you do?" Occupation and the construction  
510 of identity. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *71*(5), 290-295. doi:  
511 10.1177/000841740407100508
- 512 Vosko, L.F. (2010), *Managing the Margins: Gender, Citizenship, and the International*  
513 *Regulation of Precarious Employment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- 514 Wilcock, A. A. & Hocking, C. (2015). *An occupational perspective of health* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thorofare:  
515 Slack.
- 516 World Health Organization. (1986). The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. Retrieved from  
517 <http://www.who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/previous/ottawa/en/>.
- 518 Yerxa, E. J. (1993). Occupational science: A new source of power for participants in  
519 occupational therapy. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 1(1), 3-9. doi:  
520 10.1080/14427591.1993.9686373
- 521