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# A theory of Occupational Agency: An international investigation of occupational therapists' negotiations

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Dr. Virginia Stoffel and Dr. Julie Taylor

**World Federation of Occupational Therapists**  
**31st August 2022**



**Queen Margaret University**  
EDINBURGH

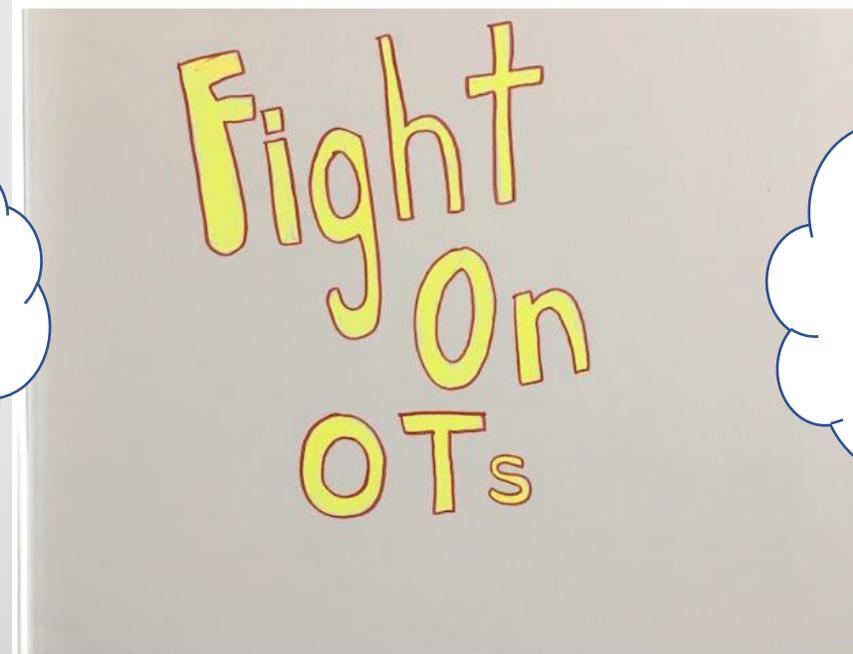
# Why do this research? The Consequences of Negotiation

Unable to hear the client's voice

Therapists leaving the profession

Therapists questioning their belonging

Reduced Client and therapeutic outcomes



*AOTA2019 Welcome to conference wall  
Artist- Unknown*

Therapist lack of identity in professional role

Conflicted professional philosophies. time, transitions and reflection

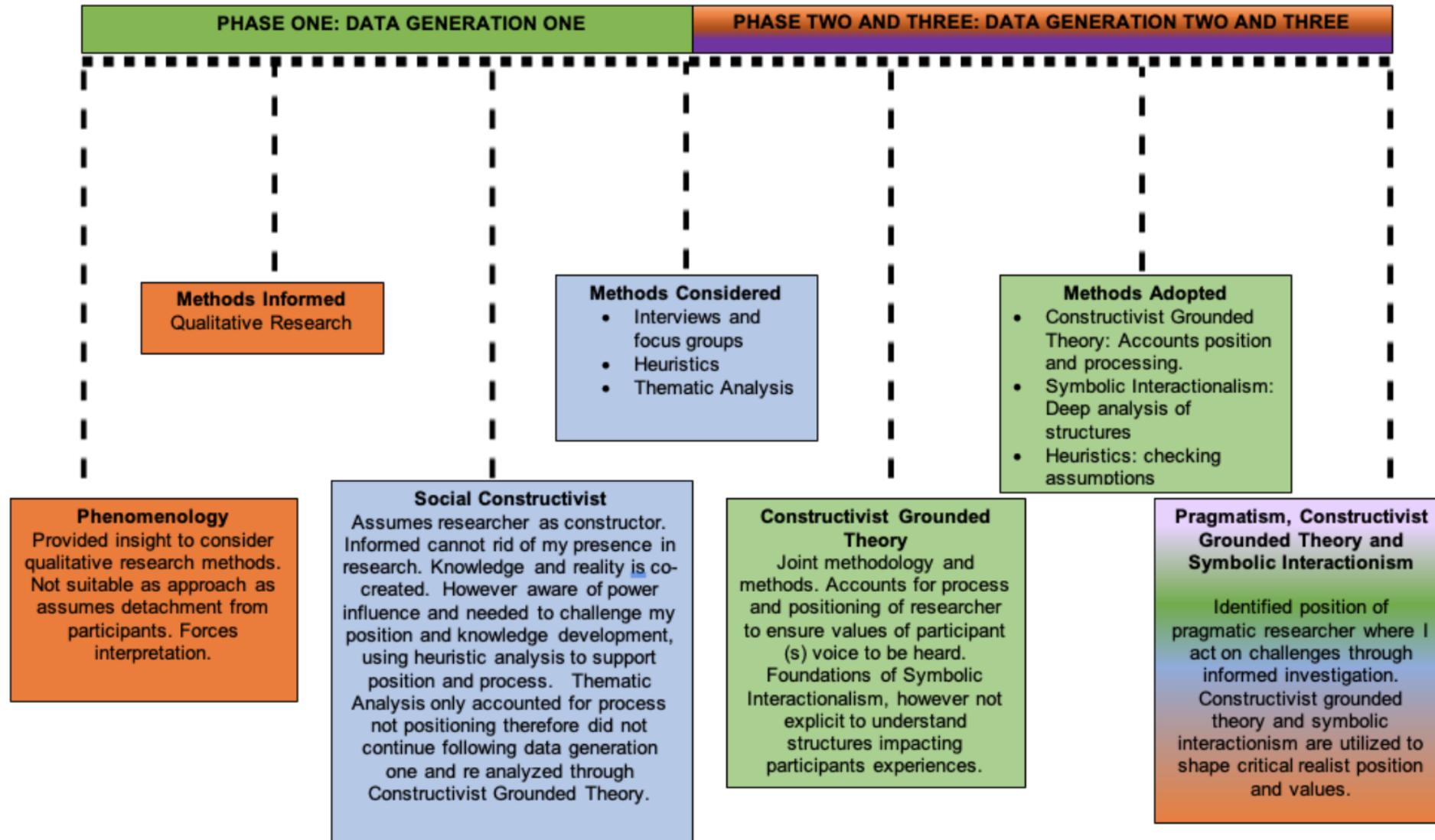
Therapists feeling unwelcome in the profession

Reduced Therapist wellbeing feeling burnt out and "disingenuous"

Profession divided continuously by our inner world, external reality and the need to engage within imaginative processes



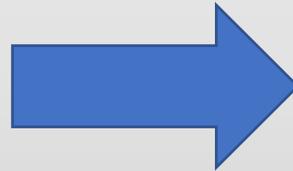
# Methodology & Methods



# Findings

## Please Profession See Me

- **When:** January 2020
- **What:** A creative memo of research analysis concerning the experiences of occupational therapists' agency, negotiations of engagement and practice
- **Who:** 14 participants from three countries, United Kingdom, United States of America and Australia



### YET.... Here's what we know..

- Occupational therapists hope to live coherently (HTLC) through their professional values and philosophy.
- There are two structures or systems of the therapist that transact to stimulate negotiation of engagement in occupation.
- The negotiations impact the health and wellbeing of the therapist and subsequently, the client.



# What is Occupational Agency?

**Occupation is:** The meaningful things we do everyday.

**Agency is:** The capacity of “individuals” to act independently and make their own free choices (Giddens, 1984).

**Occupational Agency is:** The negotiation, which accounts for the human engagement in occupation and the performance outcomes of it.



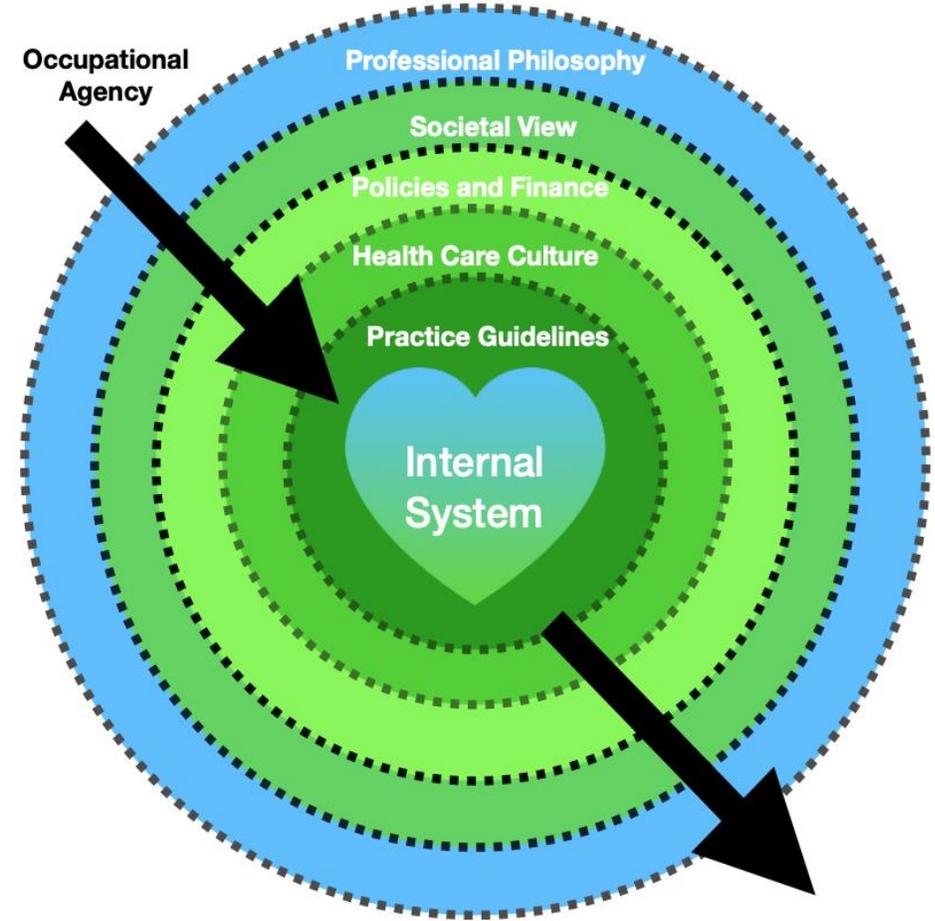
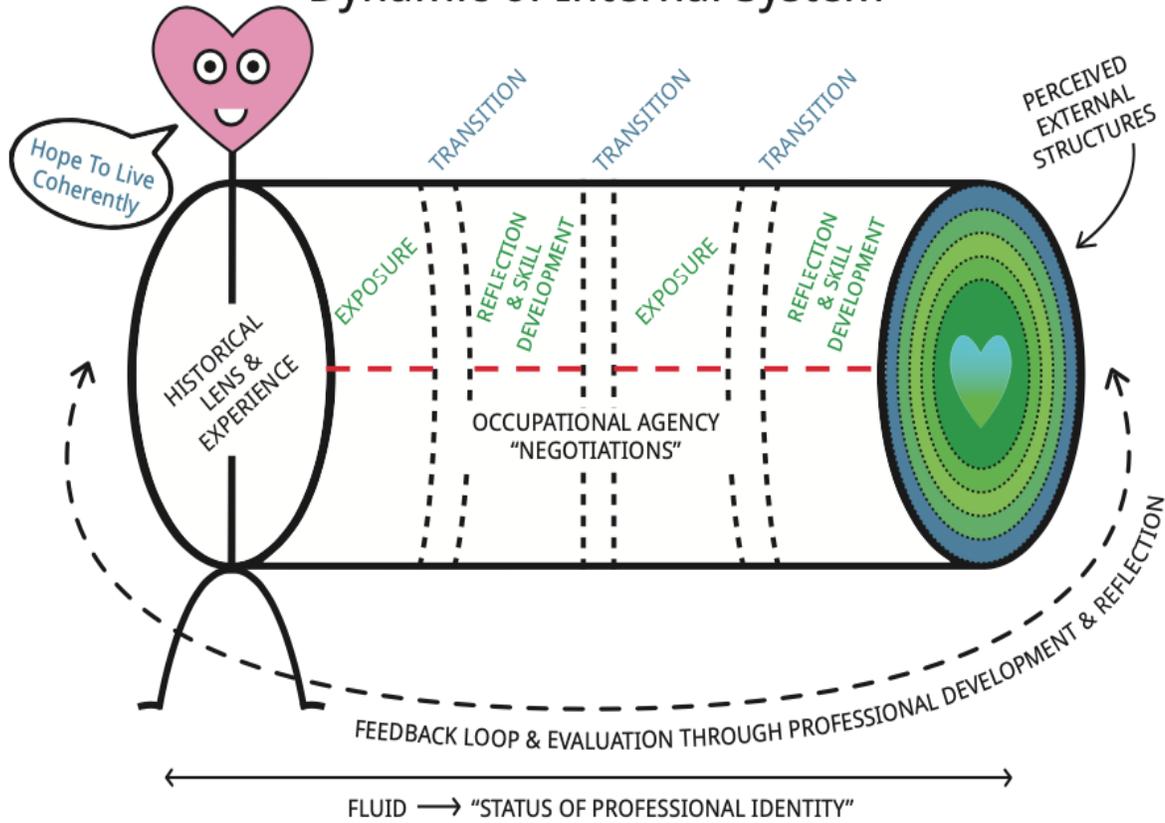
# Locating Occupational Agency in the Engagement Process

The creative reflective and reflexive process of negotiation of occupational therapist's agency

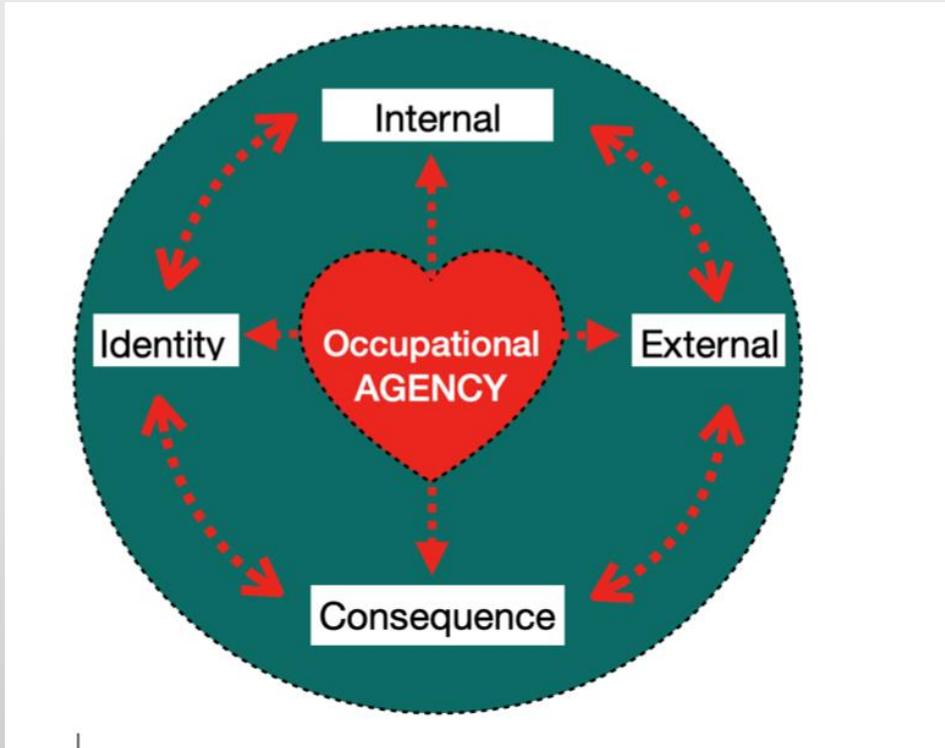


# The Dynamic of the Internal and Perceived External Structures

## Dynamic of Internal System



# Implications For Practice



- **Occupational Agency** enables us to understand **negotiations** which accounts for human engagement in occupation and the performance outcomes of it.
- Occupational therapists negotiate their professional “occupations” too. These negotiations are identified as either as a barrier or facilitator to our philosophical intentions as a profession.
- The essential need is to **reflect and be reflexive** in our practice to ensure we act with **humility** when doing occupational therapy and being therapeutic within our interactions with our teams and the people with whom we work.
- The aim is to act meaningfully and purposefully to enable health and wellbeing globally through **MEANINGFUL OCCUPATION**.



# Acknowledgements

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with support from..



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Professor Diane Cox  
Dr. Karen Morris  
Dr. Julie Taylor  
Dr. Virginia Stoffel  
Dr. Duncan Pentland

and Finally...

“ To all those who have contributed to my thought  
processes over the years, to open my eyes and develop my  
lens to enable me to interpret the world as I see it”

\*\*\*References available on request