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ABSTRACT ACCEPTED FOR ORAL PRESENTATION

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Title and abstract of the Presentation/Workshop:

Occupational Possibilities in Unemployment Situations: The Feasibility of Volunteering for Discouraged Workers

A primary aim of occupational scientists and occupational therapists is to promote positive occupational possibilities for all human beings. It is imperative to attend to situational factors when analyzing *what* occupational possibilities are available to people. Using two examples from a collaborative ethnographic study of discouraged workers, this presentation discusses the ways in which volunteering is or is not an occupational possibility in situations of long-term unemployment. Long-term unemployment is becoming increasingly common as economies shift away from industrial orientations. Recognized as a productive activity, volunteering is often viewed as a replacement for formal employment, but little attention is paid to the situational factors that enable people to volunteer. The lives of two discouraged workers demonstrate that, despite having common labor force classifications, relative socioeconomic backgrounds, and places of residence, different situational relations yield different possibilities for volunteering. A transactional perspective, which increasingly informs scholarship on occupation, frames the discussion of these examples. This perspective is useful for occupational scientists, occupational therapists, and educators who seek to characterize the comprehensive relations that facilitate occupational engagement. The presentation aims to advocate the use of such a perspective to better understand and effect occupational possibilities in a variety of situations.