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Gary Kielhofner's Model of Human Occupation: A Re-discovery of Will

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In memory of Professor Gary Kielhofner

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## **Gary Kielhofner's Model of Human Occupation: A Re-discovery of Will**

Yesterday, I received a beautifully-written memorial article focusing on my late spouse, Professor Gary Kielhofner (Miller, 2011). It contained several quotes from students and colleagues whose lives he had touched. The quotes captured many truths about Professor Kielhofner (or Gary, as he most often preferred) that transcended his professional and personal lives:



"rare individual"; "love for the profession"; "passion for education"; "understanding"; "down-to-earth"; "thoughtful"; "dedicated to the next generation"; "twinkle in his eye"; "love for life"; "reaching beyond"; "everything he did was done with love"; "always open"; "belief in the inherent goodness and value of humankind."

Laid to rest on September 2, 2010, Gary ceaselessly dedicated his life to enacting these truths. Having endured his own share of losses and hardships, he was deeply dedicated to empowering people with disabilities to improve their own circumstances through an empathetic, client-centered conceptual practice model referred to as the Model of Human Occupation (Kielhofner, 2008). This Special Issue is dedicated to the life work of Professor Kielhofner and to his legendary model (more casually referenced as "MOHO").

From a hardworking single mother to an adult with a severe mental illness or a child with an intellectual impairment, Gary Kielhofner strove to understand, access, and cultivate the will of each individual to act within his or her environment in ways that were gratifying, confidence-enhancing, and valued. He strove to reinforce people's pride in their own efforts and unique identities as their occupations took shape according to their capacities, interests, worldviews, and belief systems.

Ironically, these ambitious and complex ideals are captured by Kielhofner's model with remarkable simplicity. In essence, MOHO provides a wide range of assessments and empirically-validated intervention approaches that transform how people's occupations are motivated, patterned, and performed within given physical and social contexts (Kielhofner, 2008). Even though MOHO is the most widely-cited and most evidence-based occupation-focused model in the field (Lee, 2010), students, practitioners, and the clients themselves were always Gary's top priorities. Not only did he research, teach, and write about MOHO practices and concepts, but he lived them everyday with clients, friends, and family members, including me.

Now that Gary has passed, I have had to face a tremendous and multi-faceted chasm in my own life. As someone who has researched and practiced

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MOHO-based approaches under Gary's mentorship, I am fortunate, now, to be able to apply them to myself. Even in my early days of grief and despair, the first thing I turned to were the concepts and practices of MOHO. I knew I had to force myself into occupations that I felt were interesting and of personal value. I also knew that I had to stick to a daily schedule of performing those occupations and to create an entirely new habit pattern in my life (as previously, Gary and I had done virtually everything together). Finally, I knew that I had to surround myself with people and place myself in environments that would support a "new life" without my enduring companion and soul mate.

Although everything felt unfamiliar and awkward (and still does), the new habits and social environment continue to sustain me to function, even in the darkest days of grief. I never really "needed" MOHO until Gary was gone, because he provided it for me implicitly by taking time to re-orient me to and support my interests, by keeping me on a schedule, by establishing routines and rituals in our relationship, and by creating physical and social environments that were nurturing and sustaining.

Today and into the future, I must rely on a more deliberate practice of MOHO (among other supports and coping mechanisms). Whenever I am overwhelmed by external demands or internal pressures, I make time to place myself into a supportive social environment, to re-visit physical locations that bring me peace and comfort, and to stay with a routine that involves performing occupations that engender feelings of competence and pride. Grateful for the force of this model in my own life, I can only imagine the feelings of gratitude that clients must have, when they are introduced to MOHO concepts that support them to adapt and change within their lives as well. Gary will always be deeply missed by the entire occupational therapy community. Hopefully, students, practitioners, and clients will continue to derive strength from the timeless practices and ideas that he so carefully left behind.

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