

ACOTUP Researcher Profile

Name of researcher: Debbie Laliberte Rudman, UWO

Degrees and professional qualifications (including fellowships):

PhD (Public Health Sciences); MSc.; BSc (OT)

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Area of research:

My research focuses on advancing understanding and raising awareness of how occupational injustices and inequities in occupational possibilities are socio-politically shaped and perpetuated. In turn, I aim to inform the development and enactment of transformative occupation-based scholarship and practice that optimizes occupational possibilities for collectives experiencing marginalization. Within various projects, I draw upon critical social theory and critical qualitative methodologies to attend to the socio-political and discursive shaping of social issues and occupational inequities. A core aspect of my program of research has addressed the contemporary socio-political reconfiguration and individual negotiation of aging, in relation to retirement, later life work, and disabilities. Currently, I am conducting a multi-year study addressing the socio-political and discursive shaping of long-term unemployment, and the implications of contemporary long-term unemployment for everyday occupation. In addition, I have had opportunities to be involved in research addressing occupational possibilities of First Nations youth, and barriers to successful integration through occupation for immigrants.

Research related awards and honors:

- Hogeschool van Amderstam (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences), The Netherlands, Professional in the lead (lezing ergotherapie) lectureship, (February, 2014)
- Society for the Study of Occupation: USA, Ruth Zemke Lectureship; (October, 2013).
- Canadian Society of Occupational Scientists, Townsend and Polatajko Lecture; (May, 2012).
- Canadian Occupational Therapy Foundation, Lunch with a Scholar Award; (June, 2011).
- Faculty Scholar Award, University of Western Ontario, (2010-12).

Grants/funding history:

In the last 7 years, I have received 15 grants as primary investigator or co-investigator. Examples of grants include:

- D. Laliberte Rudman (PI), R. Aldrich, S. Huot, L. Magalhaes & J. Griffiths (Goodwill Industries). Possibilities and boundaries in the socio-political shaping of unemployment: How service providers and service seekers negotiate long-term unemployment in everyday life. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Insight grant, 2014-17 (\$243,577).

- C. Hand (PI), D. Laliberte Rudman, S. Huot & J. Gilliland. Exploring the person-place transactions underpinning social connectedness and inclusion among older adults. SSHRC Insight Development grant, 2015-17 (\$68,700).
- M. Egan (PI), D. Laliberte Rudman, P. Gardner, R. Malhotra, D. Kessler, C. McGrath & J. King. Seniors, risk and successful aging: Towards a broader understanding for rehabilitation. Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2013-14 (\$24,500).
- D. Laliberte Rudman (PI), D. Gold (CNIB), M. Spafford, R. Renwick, S. Dale Stone & W. Hodge. Older adults' lived experience of age-related vision loss and the vision rehabilitation process: Service and environmental influences on participation and social inclusion. The Drummond Foundation, 2011-12 (\$50,000).
- D. Laliberte Rudman (Co-PI), C. Richmond (Co-PI) et al. (in partnership with Indigenous Services at Western, N' Amerind Friendship Centre, Southwestern Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre). Learning with First Nations youth: A Photovoice study addressing visions of education and work success. SSHRC Aboriginal Research Program, 2010-11 (\$25,000).

Research collaboration:

As can be seen in my research funding examples, most of my research is collaborative in nature, often conducted with a team of inter-disciplinary researchers and, increasingly, in collaboration with community organizations. Building and maintaining research collaborations across disciplines, as well as national contexts, has strengthened the theoretical complexity, depth, reach, methodological diversity, innovativeness and quality of research I have had the opportunity to be involved in, and has challenged me to be explicit and persuasive about the contributions of an occupational perspective. Working with various community organizations has enhanced the research in many ways as well, particularly in terms of its relevance to contemporary issues and its mobilization into policies and practices. As I move forward in conducting critical and transformative scholarship, I hope to further engage in participatory approaches that involving working with collectives and individuals experiencing occupational injustices so as to optimize the relevance and transformative capacity of the research. Recently, I have had the opportunity to contribute to development of the Centre for Research on Health Equity and Social Inclusion (CRHESI) in London, Ontario, a collaborative community and academic initiative that provides a space for developing such participatory work.

What is the most important thing in mentoring graduate students?

Working with graduate students is one of the most rewarding aspects of being an academic. I aim to foster critically reflexive scholars who are able to situate their own work, and the work of others, and are open to a diversity of knowledges and research approaches. Thus, I believe that it is most important to nurture critical literacy; that is, the capacity to go beyond surface meanings and familiar habits of reading and thinking towards understanding deep meanings, sociopolitical contexts, dominant and alternative ways of knowing, ethical issues, and concerns related to justice.

Most significant publications:

- Laliberte Rudman, D. (2014). Embracing and enacting an occupational imagination: Occupational science as transformative. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 21(4), 373-388. This paper resulted from the Ruth Zemke Lectureship. It builds on, and crystallizes, my efforts over the past decade to develop critically-oriented scholarship addressing occupation,

particularly attending to the politics of occupation, through proposing key principles to guide the development of transformative scholarship addressing occupational injustices and expanding occupational possibilities for groups experiencing marginalization.

- Laliberte Rudman, D. (2010). Occupational possibilities. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 17(1), 55-59. This occupational terminology article articulates the theoretical foundations of the concept of occupational possibilities, a concept I began to write about in 2006. This concept provides a way to examine how political, economic, gendered, and other social forces map out particular types of occupations as possible, and not possible, for specific collectives, and to question how power is taken up in ways that differentially shape possibilities for occupation.
- Laliberte Rudman, D. (2006). Shaping the active, autonomous and responsible modern retiree: An analysis of discursive technologies and their connections with neoliberal political rationality. *Ageing and Society*, 26, 181-201. This article laid the foundation for my contributions to critical gerontology and helped to build interdisciplinary linkages that have enabled me to inter-link occupational science, occupational therapy and critical gerontology in the study of the contemporary socio-political shaping and individual negotiation of aging.

Tips would you give for new investigators:

Focus your work on topics and issues that you are passionate about, as passion is needed to persevere as you search for funding, partners and publication venues. Become part of research collaborations that span senior to junior researchers, enabling you to learn with and from people at various stages of their careers. Reach out to researchers (within and outside your disciplinary area), students, community organizations and others whose research interests overlap with yours – work at building relationships that will challenge your thinking and enhance the quality of your research. Know what you are committed to and what you value and stick with your commitments and values - making sure that your decisions about grants, topics, publications and collaborations are commensurate with your commitments and values. Make research a priority in your work life – set aside committed time to write, think, network and plan, as other demands of academic life can take over. When hiring and working with research coordinators, post-doctoral fellows, and research assistants, advertise widely, interview carefully, and invest in mentoring – research staff and students can be key contributors to your work, can become future graduate students and collaborators, and can push your own learning if you cultivate respectful, trusting and supportive relationships.

Resources/supports/training programs for new investigators:

Build support for yourself by seeking out one or more mentors from people you respect as researchers – having one or more mentors to consult with as you build your research program, set priorities and receive feedback on grants and article submissions can help you move forward in desired directions. Seek out feedback on your writing – get input on your grant and article writing in progress from colleagues and mentors so as to further refine your skills and optimize the success of our efforts. Another way to refine your research grant writing skills is to become involved in opportunities to be a grant reviewer, at local to broader scales. Attending workshops for new investigators, disciplinary/professional conferences and conferences in your substantive areas of interest are also ways to continue to learn, as well as build networks for advancing your research.