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Developing the transactional perspective of occupation for communities: “How well are we doing together?”

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ABSTRACT

Researchers in occupational science have begun to study occupation from a perspective beyond the individual. Previous occupation-based theory and literature, principally developed from the perspective of individual experience, has not offered sufficient theoretical foundation for this new scope of study. A need for theory and language that support further investigation in emerging scholarly and practice areas such as structural injustices, immigration, and community development is clear. The objective of this paper is to utilize philosophical perspectives of John Dewey to further develop the transactional perspective of occupation to address this need. A potential way forward for occupational scientists in studying these complex phenomena is uncovered by using Dewey's understanding of associated living. A ground map for characterizing communal occupation is suggested. Concepts of *private* and *public* acts proposed by Dewey exemplify the manner in which occupational scientists can use real, identifiable consequences to understand occupation on an associated level. This development will complement theoretical and methodological work currently being undertaken by occupational scientists and benefit the development of new and often overlooked areas of study for the discipline. Ultimately, it will facilitate scholarship that can contribute to resolution of challenges faced by contemporary communities, allowing occupational scientists to study phenomena such as unifying occupation, stigmatizing occupation, or occupation that contributes to structural justice.

KEYWORDS

Theory; Collective occupation; Transaction; Community; Justice

In the past several years, researchers have begun to grapple with a new theoretical challenge: if and how occupation can be studied and categorized at the community or population level. The need for such initiatives is made clear in Hocking and Whiteford's (2012) assertion that “most occupational science research continues to overlook the social processes and mechanisms through which occupational injustices are created and become entrenched as taken for granted practices” (p. 6). Similarly, Rudman (2013) highlighted how an individualistic orientation “stifles the capacity to address issues of equity and justice” and politicizing

individualism “can promote critical reflexivity regarding the ways in which this broader socio-political process has constrained the conditions of possibility for conceptualizing, studying and addressing occupation” (p. 304). Attending to these concerns may allow researchers to analyze the structural and communal factors that occupation has a role in perpetuating, including both injustice, such as discrimination and cycles of poverty (Angell, 2014) or progress, such as greater inclusivity or improved educational systems.

In pursuit of this endeavor, Ramugondo and Kronenberg (2015) suggested the African ethic

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of *Ubuntu*, which asserts the individual and community are integrally connected and co-constitutive, as a starting point for this conceptualization. Ubuntu stresses that “the community is not something ‘outside,’ some static entity that stands against individuals,” but that “in a dynamic process the individual and community are always in the process of coming into being” (Cornell & Marle, as cited by Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2015, p. 10). The community and individual unceasingly influence one another, which led Ramugondo and Kronenberg to highlight “the moral obligation for individuals and collectives to regularly ask of themselves, ‘How well are we doing together?’” (p. 10).

The question “How well are we doing together?” fundamentally asks us to evaluate and categorize the occupation of a group as a whole, undissected unit. It asks us to take note of the phenomena that emerge beyond the sum of individual experiences, to understand relationships and networks among and through which a community experiences occupation. It requires the expansion of the study of occupation to include relational processes situated around and through individual experience that form social norms, patterns, and structures. Occupational scientists will need to understand the processes through which humans, acting together, come into being as living communities. This question principally drives the theoretical development and exploration offered in this paper.

Social versus Communal: Different Questions

From early on, researchers in occupational therapy and occupational science have recognized and wrestled with social aspects of occupation, working to understand social influence and participation historically from the perspective of the individual. As early as 1997, Townsend acknowledged how “the ruling apparatus in institutions, such as health services, govern possibilities in the everyday world” (p. 22). Everyday experiences of parents were similarly situated within “the norms and expectations of the society and culture in which they are embedded” (Primeau, 2000, p. 20). Other authors have also recognized societal influence

on human occupation from various angles, such as the aging experience (Hugman, 1999), the shaping of routines and patterns in everyday life (Larson & Zemke, 2003), and many others (e.g. Hemmingsson & Jonsson, 2005; Hocking, 2009; Yerxa, 2000). Kantartzis and Molineux (2011) recognized that “people engage with a range of social systems” that ultimately lead to emergence of occupation through a social milieu (p. 63). Such research has instilled awareness of power structures and societal influences within study of occupation, as seen in the emergence and development of occupational justice theory (Stadnyk, Townsend, & Wilcock, 2010). This theoretical development has recognized how the everyday occupation of individuals is limited or facilitated by its socially embedded nature.

Although researchers have studied and theorized interpersonal interaction, they have generally maintained analysis and description of this experience from the individual’s perspective. For instance, Doble and Magill-Evans (1992) asserted that general systems theory was useful in conceptualizing social participation, depicting a model of a single individual engaging in social interaction (p. 143). Complex systems theory was reviewed for its viability as a foundation for social interaction as occupation, but does not go so far as to conceptualize the occupation of multiple people as a single unit of analysis (Eakman, 2007). Dickie, Cutchin, and Humphry (2006) described the embedded transactional nature of occupation, recognizing the inherent social quality of action, but only offered a description of this experience through the perspectives of individuals.

Many occupational scientists have begun to study the occupation of collective groups of people (Christiansen & Townsend, 2010; Farias & Asaba, 2013; Fogelberg & Frauwirth, 2010) as well as phenomena that cannot be understood through the traditionally individual lens of occupational science such as justice issues (Stadnyk et al., 2010), social movements (Frank & Muriithi, 2015), and immigration (Bailliard, 2016). They have elaborated on numerous ways individuals can come together to form social entities through occupation. However, none have gone so far as to theoretically characterize occupation that emerges from a functional system. Ramugondo and Kronenberg (2015)

opened this conversation with *collective occupation*, suggesting a lens through which the occupation of communities and social entities could be understood. Kantartzis and Molineux (2014) developed this theoretical perspective by describing family ideology and practice in a Greek town as occupation emerging at the collective level. Kantartzis (2017) later challenged occupational therapy to attend to the “meso level of family and collective occupation, beyond the traditional focus on the individual” (p. 26), and recognized that “academic occupation-based literature on the topic may be limited” (p. 20).

Some may contend that the social continuum of occupation, described by Zemke and Clark (1996), already provides a theoretical framework that describes the communal or collective process of occupation. This framework suggested “social-styles” of occupation such as solo-occupation, parallel occupation, co-occupation, and group occupation (Fanchiang, 1999). Co-occupations are “the most highly interactive types of occupation in which the occupational *experiences of the individuals* [emphasis added] involved simply could not occur without the interactive responses of the other person or persons” (Pierce, 2003, p. 199). This construct continues, providing a description of “the dyadic interplay between the occupations of” two individuals or more (p. 297). However, it lacks theoretical capacity to describe the communal process of the pair acting as a single occupational entity.

One attempt to distinguish the specific qualities of co-occupation specified physicality, emotionality, and intentionality of occupational experience as criteria for determining occupation’s location along the social continuum (Pickens & Pizur-Barnekow, 2009). The concept’s foundation in individual perspectives remains, however, in the proposal based in the Person-Environment-Occupation Model (Law et al., 1996), that “co-occupation is possible and may be more satisfying and meaningful *to each participant* [emphasis added] than engagement in a solitary or parallel occupation” (Mahoney & Roberts, 2009, p. 177). Thus the focus on occupational experience through the eyes of each individual continued through comparisons of the emotionality and intentionality

of separate persons, rather than description of the emergence of these qualities in a situational whole that is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

The concept of co-occupation may be an attempt to answer the social question “Are we doing together?” In other words, are each of the occupational experiences of individuals actively influencing each of the experience of others? However, this does not offer a solution to the communal question “How well are we doing together?” What are the situational characteristics and outcomes of the relationships among those individuals? Co-occupation describes experience of occupation from individual perspectives, whereas the proposed question requires a description of the situational relationship among those individuals as a single unit of analysis. That is, occupational scientists have instigated exploration of socially influenced individual experiences, however they do not provide a sturdy base for describing a whole functional system, including both individuals and the systems and structures through which they act, with properties of occupation of its own. To answer the question “How well are we doing together?” the scope must be broadened.

The Transactional Perspective: Toward Associated Occupation

Kantartzis (2017) described the potential of the transactional perspective to support “exploration of occupation as emerging from diverse elements at multiple levels” (p. 19). Informed by the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey and his concept of transaction, Dickie and colleagues (2006) conceived of occupation as always co-constituted through relationships among humans, environments, and communities that form a complex situation. The authors understood occupation to be socially situated and that societal structures and context existed with, along, and as an integral part of occupation. They challenged the “implied duality of person and context” present historically within occupational science literature (p. 83) and proposed a “deeply social and contextual” quality to occupation (p. 85). Yet, neither the original authors nor others elaborated on the transactional perspective’s potential to describe

occupation at the systematic or communal situational level, providing only examples of occupation from an individual's perspective albeit socially embedded.

Here, I argue, when founded in the transactional perspective of occupation and developed through Dewey's understanding of associated living, a theoretical ground map for communally understood occupation can be achieved. An important note is the transactional perspective does not abandon individual experience, as some have claimed (e.g. Barber, 2006). Rather, it specifically denies that those individuals are antithetical to or "autonomous" from their context (Cutchin, Dickie, & Humphry, 2006, p. 98). Dewey recognized "the distinctive manner in which someone participates in communal life" (Boisvert, 1997, p. 68), nullifying any concern of a missing individual experience within his theory. However, Dewey (1927/1984) critiqued individualism as a philosophy:

While [individualism] is false, it sets out from a fact. Wants, choices and purposes have their locus in single beings; behavior which manifests desire, intent and resolution proceeds from them in their singularity. But only intellectual laziness leads us to conclude that since the form of thought and decision is individual, their content, their subject-matter, is also something purely personal. (p. 22)

Here, Dewey recognized an *individuality* that allows for each organism to uniquely pass through the world, however he does not suggest any experience of complete autonomy (Boisvert, 1997).

Therefore, in this development of the transactional perspective I do not neglect singular individual experience, but instead expand the "location of emergence" (Kantartzis, 2017) of occupation to a *situation* that involves multiple individual experiences without holding any one particular as its crux. This will challenge the dichotomization of individual and community, allowing for occupation to emerge through both as a complex communal phenomenon. As mentioned above, occupational science has traditionally focused on the individual perspective of this phenomenon. In this paper, my objective

is to offer a manner in which to shift this focus toward the less explored communal realm of occupation. To do so, I develop and explore the viability of a transactional perspective, specifically through philosophical claims of John Dewey, to theoretically describe the situational and associated emergence of occupation. To achieve this, a brief examination of Dewey's philosophical claims regarding human action is necessary.

Trans-action and the Organism

In Deweyan philosophy, the previously separate factors of human action are unified together into a co-constitutive and continuous process. Dewey (1896/1998) described this process by contradicting the traditional "reflex arc" (action-reaction) exemplified by a child burning his finger. Seeing the candle, reaching for the flame, feeling pain, and subsequent withdrawal are intimately co-constitutive, coordinating multiple systems into a learning experience that dissuades the child from performing the same action in the future. When the child has ensuing contact with candle flames, "it is no longer mere seeing; it is seeing-of-a-light-that-means-pain-when-contact-occurs," constructing conscious and sub-conscious meaning for the candle flame (p. 4). Rather than understanding "sensory stimulus and motor response as distinct physical existences," Dewey suggested they are consistently in "co-ordination and have their significance purely from the part played in maintaining or reconstituting the co-ordination" (p. 5). This coordination is not suggested to be a rational process of thought, but rather a pragmatic and often subconscious incorporation of experience into future habits of action.

Occurring in even the most minute of actions, this coordination of relationship between sensory stimuli, environment, and continuous redevelopment of historically cultivated meaning informs the efficient and functional action of organisms through their comprehensive situation (Dewey, 1922/1998). Therefore, Dewey claimed that structure of action is "found in the recurrent modes of interaction taking place between what we term organism, on one side, and environment, on the other," a process he named *trans-action* (Dewey, 1930/1998, p. 68).

He immediately clarified the apparent dualism within his statement by recognizing that “only by analysis and selective abstraction can we differentiate the actual occurrence into two factors, one called organism and the other, environment” (p. 68).

In Dewey’s action, environment and organism are co-constitutive, consistently and intimately emerging through situational transaction. He definitively stated, “singular things act, but they act together. Nothing has been discovered which acts in entire isolation. The action of everything is along with the action of other things” (Dewey, 1927/1984, p. 22). A completely autonomous individual did not exist for Dewey, however his conceptualization of individuality is “able to provide the freedom and practical rationality of a genuine conception of autonomy within a cultural framework of meanings and virtues” (Savage, 2002, p. 27).

Dewey’s conclusion of trans-action was clearly the foundation for the transactional perspective of occupation offered by Dickie and colleagues (2006). Occupation emerges through an associated existence that never deserts the presence and influence of other people, cultural norms, power structures, or the environment. Dewey (1927/1984) argued “there is no sense in asking how individuals come to be associated. They exist and operate in association” (p. 23).

Living Communities: A New Organism

Human action is consistently and continuously emerging among its situational factors (e.g. economics, politics, geography, built environment, social norms). Situational factors include processes of transaction among other humans as they generate actions. Dewey (1927/1984) referred to this as associated living, suggesting that “when A and B carry on a conversation together the action is a trans-action: both are concerned in it; its results pass, as it were, across from one to the other” (p. 13). When this meaning-making and communication occur, “cooperation in an activity in which there are partners” is established and this cooperation continuously adjusts and manages activity that occurs (Dewey, 1925/1998, p. 55). Dewey (1930/1998) claimed that influence on others is a “constant function of life” (p. 73).

The communication, meaning making, and systemic co-existence of humans acting in association with one another form living communities. I contend that just as the child burning his finger was understood as a coordinated whole of multiple systems (e.g. visual, sensory, psychological, environmental) coordinating to construct meaning and individuality, the construction of communities and their norms can be understood similarly. Historic power structures, cultural ideals, oppression, and privilege are the historic communication and meaning making of communities which continue to influence their members. Through expansion of the perspective originally presented by Dickie and colleagues (2006), theoretical support for a conceptualization of occupation that emerges among humans acting together through a situation is found. The scope of this community is determined “only by analysis and selective abstraction” (Dewey, 1930/1998, p. 68) and is not truly separate from its larger situation. Multiple communities exist throughout larger communities and continue to function across countless co-constitutive processes, only separated via analysis.

A county senior center serving a diverse population of elder adults can be used to exemplify these enfolded communities. The general functioning of the senior center as a whole, including policies, environmental influences, staff culture, and experiences of participants, could be examined. More narrowly, the social functioning and power dynamics of a group of Chinese immigrants participating in senior center programming could be a focus of study. A study of Spanish speaking immigrants in the same senior center may look significantly different. Expanding more broadly, the collaboration and inter-organizational functioning among entities serving the older adult participants, including but not limited to the senior center, could be explored and so on. Through an analytical lens of associated occupation, researchers can uncover unique ways in which various living communities form actions, policies, structures, cultures, and systems through associated occupation.

These processes should be the target of occupational scientists wishing to study complex

social phenomena. If the “organism” is no longer conceptualized as only the single human but rather a group or even situation, the scope of analysis of meaning and individuality is understood from a broader perspective. This provides theoretical direction for characterization of occupation of a comprehensive situation. Dewey (1927/1984) purported:

The problem of the relation of individuals to associations – sometimes posed as the relation of the individual to society – is a meaningless one. We might as well make a problem out of the relation of the letters of an alphabet to the alphabet. An alphabet is letters, and ‘society’ is individuals and their connections with one another. The mode of combination of letters with one another is obviously a matter of importance; letters form words and sentences when combined, and have no point nor sense except in some combination. (p. 69)

Therefore, studying and describing experience of occupation at the associated situational level will require occupational scientists to theoretically expand from only individuals to the *modes* of combinations of people, communities, and societies; that is to study modes in which people and their situations combine, relate, and engage.

Shifting to Consequences

The pragmatist perspective asserted by Dewey (1922/1998) called for constant reflection on consequences of past action to understand situations. Because of the complex nature of human occupation, it is beyond the reach of science to isolate and analyze each factor or relationship. Observation and documentation of individual perspectives and experiences are currently used to validate researchers’ description and characterization of individual occupation. Dewey’s shift toward observation of consequences offers a parallel solution for studying associated occupation. Dewey (1927/1984) stressed:

We must in any case start from acts which are performed, not from hypothetical

causes for those acts, and consider their consequences. We must also introduce intelligence, or the observation of consequences as consequences, that is, in connection with the acts from which they proceed. (p. 12)

Human action is informed by meaning consciously and subconsciously constructed through consequences of past actions. These meanings are then factors affecting reflection in preparation for future action in order to “secure some consequences and avoid others” (Dewey, 1927/1984, p. 12). It is with examination of consequential changes in networks of people doing together that occupational scientists can describe the significance and experience of collective occupation. In this, a shift occurs away from traditional occupation (e.g., activity of daily living, social participation, education, play) toward, instead, changes in patterns, systems, and structures that emerge from occupation of living communities. This requires further research to name and understand.

Drawing attention of occupational scientists to the study of consequences of occupation honors the complex and dynamic emergence of associated human action while allowing for the singular description of a process that occurs among people. This approach does not attempt to describe complete processes of associated occupation. Rather, it seeks to identify real and concrete changes that have occurred within modes, or relationships, of doing among living communities in order to understand those processes. It attempts to point at the traces left by an ever-evolving process. To truly contend with obstacles facing contemporary communities such as injustices, inequality, or deprivation, the study of occupation must identify moments when traditions, policies, environments, and relationships change among people and their situation. In addition to describing what each individual does, occupational scientists must describe real systemic consequences, beneficial or detrimental, that proceed from humans doing together through different modes of communal action. In this, the discipline can contribute further to the beneficial development of communities.

A Ground Map for Describing Communal Occupation

Dewey suggested a conceptual ground map for how action occurs among people, conceived using consequential changes as his key. With this, identifiable changes in societal structures, organizational policies, human relationships, and even the physical environment can be used to illuminate, analyze, and categorize various processes of humans doing together. Dewey's concepts of public and private actions¹ exemplify his utilization of consequences to characterize associated living. The difference between a private and public act is established through experienced and recognized consequences of the act, not the preemptive motivation for action or assumed truths about action (i.e. two people acting alone does not characterize an act as private). Understanding the process and evidence Dewey used to come to these characterizations of associated living will provide occupational scientists with a framework for characterizing other types of associated living such as structural violence, economic inequality, community development, or others yet to be identified.

Private Acts

Private acts are understood as those acts in which only direct consequences are experienced or identified by people involved with the acts (Dewey, 1927/1984). Dewey (1927/1984) exemplified the experience of a private act in the "intimate and subtle sense of the fruits of intercourse" present within friendship (p. 26). Empirical consequences are observed and noted between the people involved in a private action. When friends build trust, make agreements, accommodate differences, or strengthen their relationship, they perform private acts. Dewey names these acts private because the individuals participating do not recognize or observe consequences outside their immediate relationship, even though they may exist.

Dewey (1927/1984) recognized that "many private acts are social; their consequences contribute to the welfare of the community or affect its status and prospects" (p. 13). Functioning on the concept of transaction, the process of doing "friendship" remains associated and socially

embedded; therefore, this private act will influence a larger social situation. He noted that "consequences, in a word, affect large numbers beyond those immediately concerned in the transaction" (p. 52). When these private acts instigate consequences that "are intellectually and emotionally appreciated, a shared interest is generated and the nature of the interconnected behavior is thereby transformed" (Dewey, 1927/1984, p. 27). These shared interests, or effects on the status and prospects of the community, are indirect consequences influencing larger social situations. It follows that indirect consequences must be managed to prevent harm; this realization instigates the conception of laws, rituals, traditions, and social norms.

Public Acts

Public acts emerge when indirect consequences within a group or community need to be regulated and supervised in order to prevent adverse effects on the well-being of those outside private acts (Dewey, 1927/1984). In Dewey's (1927/1984) view, only "when the tie has extended to a union of families in a clan and of clans in a tribe do consequences become so indirect that special measures are called for" (p. 40). A *public* is called into being when "special agencies and measures must be formed" (Dewey, 1927/1984, p. 27) to manage consequences stemming from specific social associations. Public acts, often through public officials, then contribute to "vast currents" that bring people together in different modes of social action (Dewey, 1927/1984, p. 107). A public may serve as a unit of study for occupational scientists interested in occupation at the communal level. For example, the public activities of a neighborhood and its homeowners' association, which seeks to regulate and supervise modes in which people live in their neighborhood together, could be examined (Stone, 2016). While Dewey offered some categories of modes of associated action, researchers must uncover and understand further relationships that influence how communities function together.

With public and private acts as examples, a process for describing the qualities of functional systems of human action can be reached. Characterization of action is determined by

experienced and appreciated consequences that emerge in particular patterns, relationships, and formal policies among communal situations. Using this mechanism for characterizing associated living, occupational scientists can conduct research that uncovers and names occurrences of divisive occupation, dysfunctional occupation, occupation that forms supportive communities, occupation that liberates, and others that emerge from complex situations.

Utilizing the Ground Map to Characterize Associated Occupation

Studying occupational experiences at the communal level, such as family occupations (Priemeau, 2000; Segal, 1999), communities of practice (Bratun & Asaba, 2008), or social clubs (White, Owen-Smith, Moody, & Powell, 2004) has been restricted to theoretical approaches and methods tailored to describing individual occupation. A methodological approach derived from this theoretical perspective may look starkly different and allow for more effective description of these phenomena. The following is part of a collaborative ethnographic project the author conducted with a family of drag queens as part of a course during his doctoral studies. This account, primarily written by the author, was iteratively reviewed and critiqued by the drag queen principally featured as part of an educational exercise in collaborative ethnographic methods. Additionally, it was informed by multiple observations of drag shows and interviews with other drag queens and spectators of drag shows which included the particular drag queen featured. It was shortened for the purposes of this paper and reviewed again by the drag queen featured, who gave permission for it to be published. The university institutional review board approved the secondary discussion of this data for publication.

This particular example was chosen because it highlights the consequences, or changes in modes over time, in the relationships among the participants, atmosphere, and situation. It was informed by various conversations, participatory observations, and engagement with spectators of drag performances as part of the larger collaborative ethnographic project. The

researcher often discussed observations and patterns with spectators and performers, comparing and integrating their feedback. This multifaceted and collaborative approach to data collection revealed dynamic relationships among drag queens and patrons, offering insight into the communal atmospheres often emerging and developing during performances. Emerging shifts in social systems such as the associated atmosphere of the space, roles of participants in relation to one another, and clear defiance of conventional norms were especially noticeable and important to both the researcher and the performer in describing the experience.

It seems adrenaline is coursing even through our bones. As we all stiffly stand, shoulder to shoulder in the small dance floor in front of a smaller stage, the drag queen host gives a quick and sassy introduction of the first of her drag daughters to perform. Heads turned toward the back of the bar, the viciously electric guitar chords of Pink's "So What" pierced the atmosphere. A figure bursts from a tiny alcove near the all-gender bathroom, taking wide strides toward the stage as the crowd surges to make way for the queen. Her natural undercut blond hair, styled into an alternative almost Mohawk, bobbed high over the heads of the audience. As she approaches the stage, dark, thick, yet sharp eyebrows contrasting almost white eye makeup with a strongly contoured cheekbone appear. As the beginning of the song's chorus rings through the bar, the queen is surrounded by the crowd standing in front of the stage.

Both men and women encircle her as she begins to dance and lip sync, throwing her head forward and backward. She lifts her arms in the air, tosses them down. She gently spins, accentuating her metallic blue cover, a lingerie-esque low-cut robe with black fur along her collar and flowing hemline. With ostentatious red lips reaching around the words of the song, face to the industrial ceiling, and eyes closed, her presence embodies the brand-new attitude described in the lyrics. She lets inhibition seep through the shimmering dress and

evaporate. The crowd follows her energy, singing with her and throbbing rhythmically with the power of the song. Some begin to join her flagrant dancing. Her lips are wide and exaggerating the words. She is the answer to our anticipation, and we cannot wait to experience our journey together.

As she begins the first chorus, the crowd joins her in singing the popular song, some even mirroring her dramatic interpretation of the words. We reflect her petulant passion back, intensifying her energy. Drinks are lifted and nodding as the audience dances with new inspiration. She turns to the patrons around her, looking them directly in the eyes, ignited by and igniting them for what is to come.

The beginning of the second verse cues her to move toward the stage, drawing the patrons close in behind her, pulling us toward her experience. She chicly steps in front of the sparkling backdrop, dancing alone, moving with the music, illuminated by a burning spotlight. She drops her muscular arms to the front of her cover and in one continuous motion, rips it open, revealing an open black vest covering only a black bra on her unpadded chest, a bare stomach, and black panties tightly hugging every contour of her natural masculine pelvis. The hairs on the back of the audience's necks are as tall as this glamazon queen.

Feeling the reverberation of the crowd, she pumps her fist in the air as the song enters its third chorus, leading her subjects into battle. She seizes us with movement, attitude, and fearlessness as we offer our fervor as fuel. She boldly stands on stage, offering her bare body, subtly accented by exposed scars on her knees, as a raw beacon of truth. By somehow emitting a biting feminine sexuality with a fire of masculine power and assertion, she helps us break down walls of gender, body, and self-consciousness, revealing, both literally and metaphorically, her weird, stunning, and awkward essence, asking us to do the same. She beckons the audience to allow

the stress of our world to burst out in a relentless dissolution of boundary.

Suddenly, she rips off her vest, leaving only her black bra to cover the male torso. The masculine nakedness purposefully contradicts her feminine façade. It does not bind her; it heightens her essence. Her power, her explosion, her sensuality, and her beauty engulf us. She scratches at our discomfort with non-conformity and flicks it away with her earnest zeal for every ounce of life we can ring from this moment. She reaches into the bowels of our societal standards and twists our normative gut with a devious smile. We share her appetite for shattered expectations. As the song crescendos to the final line of the chorus, some of us are dancing lost in ourselves, some of us are lifting our drinks to her, but all of us are simply captured by the fierce spectacle that is a drag queen leading liberation.

We move with her, into her, dancing, loosening, and following into her world of liberated expression. Her defiant attitude and beautifully absurd movements call for a release of inhibition. The queen and her subjects are bound together in an improvised choreography of limitlessness. Even the bar tenders were glancing from their rushed service to taste a moment of her handsomely audacious persona. We are with her. The final line hits. We have found liberation together.

This drag performance was not simply a single queen acting; rather, the queen, patrons, bar tenders, and passersby outside who happen to glance in, together were doing drag. Utilizing the theoretical ground map proposed, analysis may turn to the communal consequences experienced among the relationships of the living community as drag occurs. While individual perspectives of occupation are essential to this process and influence its unfolding, the focus of analysis becomes how the group is doing together. This allows occupational scientists to transcend individual experiences of occupation and explore how these individual experiences contribute to changes in modes of doing within the community as a whole.

This group doing drag together challenged established social conventions, forming new and observable norms and expectations for the space. Analysis at this level highlights how doing occupation together redefined normative unidirectional relationships among observers and performer to be instead characterized by companionship and solidarity. The space was no longer a bar full of customers, but the birthplace of an ephemeral community of liberation. Clear and observable consequences in the relationships and shared understandings of the living community become the markers for describing associated occupation. The nuanced and infinite variables of how this process occurred are inaccessible, but real and appreciated consequences in how we passed through the world together steer us toward a way to answer, in this particular situation, the question “How well are we doing together?”: We were liberating.

This vignette functions as a preliminary narrative example of how this budding theoretical framework might be utilized within occupational science to analyze qualitative accounts, while also highlighting potential for collaborative qualitative methods to reveal communal experience of occupation. More narrow situations such as nuclear families or broader situations such as institutions might be explored with more developed and thorough methodological approaches. This communal emergence of occupation may challenge researchers in developing methodological approaches that effectively capture and articulate the complex nature of the phenomenon. Further exploration and development of practical methods for collecting data that represent this associated perspective of occupation are needed. Nevertheless, allowing this tentative theoretical perspective to inform these methodological decisions will enable occupational scientists to explore how certain experiences of doing together influence, for better or for worse, relationships and structures of living communities.

Conclusion

The study of occupation has largely been limited to “an experience” housed within physical bodies

and individual perspectives of humans. With current theoretical perspectives, we are limited in ways to describe the full and rich processes of humans acting together as living communities. The transactional perspective of occupation, as it was originally presented (Dickie et al., 2006), challenged occupational scientists to incorporate the multitude of relationships that contribute to the emergence of individual human action. It shifted the focus of occupational scientists from the individual performing the action to occupation as it emerges through a web of transactional relations. I assert, by returning to Deweyan philosophy, a theoretical ground map can be developed in the same vein to describe associated occupation.

Using Dewey’s framework for characterizing associated living, occupational scientists can identify potential phenomena such as unifying occupation, stigmatizing occupation, occupation that impassions communities into social movements, or occupation that contributes to the hegemonic structuring of communities. Processes that produce stigmatization of elder adults with dementia, consistent tension between minority populations and police, an easily accessible healthcare system for immigrants, or the liberation of an audience through drag can be understood and characterized. Utilizing situational consequences and experienced modes of action to understand and analyze communal occupation provides a framework for categorizing and describing how humans do together.

The ground map explored and offered within this paper provides a theoretical approach for describing and understanding identifiable consequences of humans doing together. Further theoretical exploration is needed and invited in order to identify potential limitations of this approach. Future development and research is needed to ascertain which methodologies may be most appropriate to study new locations of emergence of occupation. Studies and analyses informed by this framework can examine policies, structures, environments or individual occupation that contribute to the functional systems of living communities, providing both broad and specific terminology for describing these phenomena. Then, through intervention, occupational scientists and therapists might better identify and support growth in occupational

possibilities for the community as a whole. Previous theories of occupation did not offer space for such exploration, withholding the potential for theoretical development in areas such as occupational justice and the political role of occupational science. By using this theoretical approach, occupational scientists can appreciate individual human experience as embedded within a situational whole, while still identifying and studying the complex process and functional system of living communities doing together.

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Note

1. Private and public, in Dewey's intention, refer to traditional political philosophy, describing the difference for example between a private and public relationship (e.g. a love affair vs. the legislative debate) or institution (e.g. a family home vs. congress) (Dewey, 1927/1984).

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