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Occupation as Transactional Experience: A Critique of Individualism in Occupational Science

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Abstract

Occupational science uses various concepts to denote occupation as residing within the individual. That is, despite recognizing the role of a context for the individual and her or his occupation, occupational scientists have continued to implicitly or explicitly create a dualistic view of person and context (environment). The dualism creates a problem for understanding occupation as well as the relationship of person and context. In this paper we present occupationally-focused case studies of two individuals and assert that existing concepts of occupation in the discipline cannot encompass the situations represented by these cases. We propose the Deweyan concept of transaction as an alternative perspective for understanding occupation. The relational perspective of transactionalism means that occupation is no longer seen as a thing or as a type of self-action or inter-action arising from within individuals. In this view, occupation is an important mode through which human beings, as organisms-in-environment-as-a-whole, function in their complex totality. As such, occupations become more central to the scientific understanding of person-context relations.

Key Words

Occupation
Dewey
Individualism

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The relationship of the individual to society, or to other forms of context such as environment and culture, is a difficult and hoary issue in philosophy and social science. Views of the individual-context relationship vary along a continuum from individualism to what might be called collectivism. The position taken on this relationship is of the utmost importance in any human science, because it molds any and every

interpretation of human experience by shaping the theories that may be used as a basis for those interpretations. Moreover, any position on individual-context relationships has implications for understanding action and its consequences, and similarly, for understanding occupation and its consequences. While there is arguably no consensus in occupational science about how to view the individual in relation to larger social and physical entities, we suggest that occupational scientists have tended, even if unintentionally, to take positions of individualism in their theoretical statements about occupation.

In this paper, we argue that occupational science is not served well by definitions of occupation that focus investigation and interpretation almost entirely on individual experience, and indeed, that occupation rarely, if ever, is individual in nature. An understanding of individual experience is a necessary but *insufficient* condition for understanding occupation that occurs through complex contexts. We acknowledge that occupational science has always recognized a role for context and/or environment. Our argument is that the manner in which both occupation and context are often defined in writings within the discipline is problematic because of the implied duality of person and context. The dualism is false and draws attention to and emphasizes one or the other rather than the relationship itself. We see a distinct need for the development of theoretical foundations that can overcome this duality and the concomitant individualism in occupational science. While it is challenging to arrive at a representation of occupation that avoids the duality of person and context, we suggest a basis for theory in occupational science that eschews such dualisms and places occupation more centrally within the human experience.

We begin the argument by laying out the case of an occupational science bound too much to an individualistic view of occupation. We follow that discussion with two case studies, each selected from different research projects. The case studies offer a view into occupation that provides the basis for our subsequent proposal for thinking about occupation as transactional. Our concept of occupational transaction is based on the concepts of transaction and situation articulated in the philosophy of John Dewey. We discuss this view in some depth and conclude the argument for a transactional understanding of occupation by considering the benefits of the perspective as well as issues still to be resolved.

The Focus on the Individual in Occupational Science

Definitions of occupation and occupational science

Two problems face us when we attempt to use current definitions in occupational science and occupational therapy literature, as we set out to study occupation. The first has to do with definitions that locate occupation within the individual and give primary value to the individual's experience as independent from a larger experiential whole. The second problem is the separation of context from the individual and occupation—either through use of a container metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) that places the individual *within* a context (Cutchin, 2004b), or location of occupation as the mediator *between* individual and context. We present several examples of current definitions of occupation and/or occupational science as a counterpoint to our position that occupation and context should not be separated, and because of this, occupation is larger than what an individual experiences. We acknowledge that these examples are taken out of context, and reflect the thinking of their time, but nonetheless, we maintain that they represent a pervasive conceptualization of occupation as residing within individuals or providing a link between the individual and his or her *separate* context. We believe that current definitions served occupational science well during its early years but are not sufficient for its developing understanding of the basic nature of occupation and how relationships among people, occupation, and context come about and develop.

The following definition of occupational science comes from the 1989 introduction to occupational science by Yerxa, et al.: "*Occupational science* is the study of the human as an occupational being including the need for and capacity to engage in and orchestrate daily occupations in the environment over the lifespan" (p. 6). This definition positioned occupation as a characteristic of the individual, who has both the need and potential to enact it within his or her environment. The authors stated that occupation "occurs in the stream of time" (p. 6) and "occurs as an action on the environment or as a response to its challenges" (p. 7). Occupation takes place in the intersection of the individual and his or her context, but is determined by the individual: "The study of occupation requires the study of the person as the author of his or her work, rest, play, leisure, and self-maintenance" (p. 10). In specifying the qualities of a science of occupation, these founders and early students of the discipline proposed that "occupational science will study individuals in interaction with their environments, not as decontextualized beings" (p. 11). Thus, the new science presented in the 1989 paper embraced the complexity of occupation and recognized the significance of context, but positioned the individual as the fundamental unit of study, albeit *in* context. The centrality of the individual and the duality of individual and context found in this definition of occupation is similar in other major definitions in the literature of both occupational therapy and occupational science (e.g., American Occupational Therapy Association, 2002; Christiansen, 1994; Clark, et al., 1991; Nelson, 1988; Wilcock,

1993; Yerxa, 1993).

The definition of occupations as "chunks of activity that are culturally and personally meaningful" (Jackson, Carlson, Mandel, Zemke, & Clark, 1998, p. 327) made meaning the defining characteristic of the concept of occupation. This seems to open the doors to looking at occupational meaning from a broader perspective than solely within the person. In general, however, the notion of meaning is usually addressed at the level of the individual. This perspective is reflected in Spitzer's (2003) statement: "It is the individual's subjective experience that is believed to be critical in understanding occupations and coming to know that person as an occupational being" (p. 66). Pierce, in crafting her case for the difference between occupation and activity took a strong position that occupation is fundamentally individual:

An occupation is a specific individual's personally constructed, non-repeatable experience. That is, an occupation is a subjective event in perceived temporal, spatial, and sociocultural conditions that are unique to that one-time occurrence. An occupation has a shape, a pace, a beginning and an ending, a shared or solitary aspect, a cultural meaning to the person, and an infinite number of other perceived contextual qualities. A person interprets his or her occupations before, during, and after they happen. Although an occupation can be observed, interpretation of the meaning or emotional content of an occupation by anyone other than the person experiencing it is necessarily inexact. (2001, p. 139)

In this excerpt, the author restricted occupation to the *individual's* experience within a sea of cultural and "other perceived contextual qualities" whether the experience is shared or solitary.

Research and theory development in occupational science confirms our assessment of the manner in which occupation is defined as essentially individual. In 2000, Hocking reviewed the occupational science literature and noted that the "central focus was on humans as occupational beings" (p. 58). She noted that in the *Journal of Occupational Science* and other occupational therapy sources, the "view of occupation is characterized as being quite individualistic and largely health focused" (p. 58).

Influences on occupational science's focus on individualized experience

It is neither surprising, nor unreasonable that occupational science would describe occupation as individualistic and health focused, given the emergence of occupational science from occupational therapy. Since much of occupational therapy takes place in health care or educational settings where the individual is the focus of concern, a therapeutic perspective on occupation would necessarily be concerned with the individual. Wilcock (1998) alludes to this in her discussion of some reasons why occupational therapists have only sparingly moved into community-oriented prevention programs. As long

as occupational therapy takes place within health care and educational settings, the designation of occupation as something a singular person does seems to be sufficient. Outside of the medical model and in designing basic research on occupation, this designation is more problematic.

In occupational science in the United States, the centrality of individuals in concepts of occupation is certainly in line with dominant social values. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swider, and Tipton (1985) spoke of this in their study of American society:

Individualism lies at the very core of American culture.... We believe in the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the individual. Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious. Our highest and noblest aspirations, not only for ourselves, but for those we care about, for our society and for the world, are closely linked to our individualism. (p. 142)

As a discipline drawing from the work of many disciplines, occupational science has been shaped by those perspectives. Psychology may be the field that has most influenced the occupational science perspective. In the mid-20th century, the humanist movement and theories of self, where adaptive behavior was considered to be determined by conscious choice, were developed in psychology in reaction to Freudian and behaviorist perspectives that gave little control to the individual (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). Notions of self determination and free will that are embedded in occupational science literature are very much in line with this movement in psychology. Contemporary psychology, however, takes a less doctrinaire position, seating locus of control jointly within the individual and in his or her environment (Bargh & Chartrand).

An individualistic approach as problematic

Definitions of occupation as essentially individual experience (although always in a context) present a challenge for the science of occupation. Such definitions imply that the individual is the authority with respect to how occupations occur and are carried out. In contrast, a view of occupation as extending beyond a single person's experience to *encompass* others and the social, physical, and cultural context offers rich opportunities for study to extend the field's understanding of occupation. Our argument is not about research methods for studying occupation, nor even about the perspective a particular scientist might select in his or her studies; rather we take issue with language in broadly accepted definitions that directs the discipline to the individual as the focus for study, situating that individual in opposition to—in a dualism with—context.

Indeed, the few studies in the occupational science literature of something that might be called occupation (rather than studies of the effects of occupation), demonstrate that this "thing" is deeply social and contextual. For example, Humphry (2005) used participant observation in a childcare program to study infants as they developed occupation. She found that very

young children learn and engage in occupations together, frequently in the absence of direct adult involvement. Furthermore, the children in her study were always aware of and influenced by what was going on in their classroom. In another study, Hocking, Wright-St. Clair, and Bunrayong (2002) found that the meanings older women found in their holiday cooking encompassed family, traditions, and history. In the focus groups these authors used for data collection, an occupation they named "recipe work" was a social activity that required interaction with others while still encompassing traditions, family, and history. Cases such as Beth and Sam (to follow), drawn from our research projects, further illustrate the extension of occupation beyond the boundaries of the single person.

Studies such as those of Hocking, Wright-St. Clair, and Bunrayong (2002) and Humphry (2005) illustrate the contextualized nature of occupation, and it is this kind of research that implies the problem of an individually-focused definition of occupation. Dickie (2003), in her ethnographic study of quilt making, identified this problem and chose to use the term "occupational domain" to define her focus, side-stepping the issue of whether or not quilt making could be considered an occupation except as it was experienced by each individual who participated in the activity. She defined the occupational domain of quilt making as encompassing "the activities, past and present, of the people engaging in all processes related to the making of quilts, as well as shared knowledge and values" (p. 121). The concept of occupational domain provides a view of occupation as inclusive of social groups, processes, and history, but skirts the dilemma presented by the dominant definitions of occupation in the North American occupational science and occupational therapy literature. In contrast to Dickie's work, Graham (2002) took an individualistic approach to studying the transformative effects of dance, however she introduced the concept of a dance "field," which bears some similarity to Dickie's notion of domain. Graham compared one popular notion of the dance field as encompassing performers, school teachers, and community teachers to what she termed the "real dance field" (p. 130), which she represented by a fern frond that encompassed bodily movement and the reasons for participating in the various subfields of dance. Bodily movement and reasons for participation are both individual and social. Terms such as domain and field may allow us to circumvent the view of occupation as individual, but we believe it would be more useful to researchers and more productive of knowledge to have definitions and concepts that extend the purview of occupation beyond the limits of the singular person.

Not all occupational scientists limit their focus to the experience of the individual. Wilcock (1998) wrote of the centrality of individuals meeting their individual potential in her theory of humans as occupational beings, however she pointed out that individualistic values are "closely associated with materialism and fairly recent" (p. 107). Wilcock grounded occupation in biological and cultural evolution, certainly placing occupation in historical and social contexts.

Furthermore, the concept of occupational deprivation (Wilcock, 1998) as elaborated by Whiteford (2004) merged opportunity for occupation with contextual factors. Whiteford defined occupational deprivation as “a state of prolonged preclusion from engagement in occupations of necessity and/or meaning due to factors which stand outside the control of the individual” (Whiteford, 2004, p. 222). She identified factors of “social, economic, environmental, geographic, historic, cultural, or political” (p. 222) nature as sources that produce occupational deprivation. Similarly, the concept of *occupational justice* (Townsend & Wilcock, 2004) is based on beliefs that humans are occupational beings and autonomous agents, and that “occupational participation is interdependent and contextual” (p. 256). These references to the work of Wilcock, Whiteford, and Townsend present a concept of occupation that expands beyond the individual, immersing occupation in contextual factors. However, we are still uncomfortable with the remaining individualism in this work (e.g., humans as autonomous agents).

In the following section, we provide two case studies that offer more concrete evidence for this critique. More importantly, however, the case studies serve as a basis for our subsequent development of the idea of occupational transactions—a way to address the problem of an overly individual-oriented occupational science.

Two Case Studies

Case 1: Beth

Beth is a driving force in her quilting guild. She is one of its founders 13 years ago, a frequent officer, a teacher, its newsletter editor, and a constant presence. She is a consummate quilter, tackling challenging designs, learning new techniques, and producing piece after piece of exquisite work. When asked what quilting meant to her, she said “*it feeds my soul.*”

Beth’s engagement with quilting started while she was doing family history research. She noted that 19th century inheritance almost always went from father to son, but she discovered a great-great grandmother who did not follow this practice. This woman, a weaver, left numerous counterpanes to her married daughters and the house and loom to the unmarried daughter. In the context of that discovery, Beth decided to make something that she could leave to *her* daughter, who was then about 3, and determined that the something would be quilts.

When she began, there were no local quilting classes and she had access to few books to learn from. Beth taught herself to quilt, but she was also able to watch some older women at her church as they quilted to raise funds, learning as much as she could from observing. Within about 2 years, the county extension agent in her small town started a quilting group that grew into the current guild. The guild meets regularly in the county facility, and the county provides a van when members want to take educational trips to quilt shows around the state. Beth visits as many quilt shows as she can, is a regular student

at workshops in the area, and often chooses to take the most challenging classes. In her own community, an annual festival includes a quilt show where she displays her work. She views the newsletter she edits as a vehicle for teaching others.

Beth’s account of her quilt activities is full of personal meanings and connections to place, culture, and history. Every day she engages in some quilt related activity, from reading magazines to appliquéing while watching television with her family. A pleasant room at the back of the house serves as her studio, where two sewing machines, a cutting surface, tool storage, and lots and lots of fabric create a world dedicated to quilts. She and her friends encourage each other to buy fabric, aided by a huge independent fabric store about 20 miles away. Beth also buys from several smaller quilt stores, and teaches quilt-making classes in those venues and at guild meetings. She taught herself quilt history and collected many quilts. Beth said she used to think she had to personally save all of the old quilts in her county. She frames her ‘rescue’ of old quilts in terms of a sense of responsibility to the unknown women who made them. Because of her knowledge of quilt history, she works with the local historical museum and does a school presentation every year. Part of her history lesson links quilt making to the textile mills that used to dot the local landscape.

Beth’s quilt making and quilt related occupations cannot be understood unless they are viewed as a whole, as occupations not residing simply in the meaning Beth attributes to what she does. Her quilt making encompasses the whole of her personal history as well as local history, the place she lives, others who quilt, quilting organizations, fabric and places to buy it, government resources that support the quilt making efforts of citizens, for-profit enterprises from quilt shops to national shows, and manufacturing operations that produce the fabric, supplies, and tools she uses. Her access to so many quilt-related resources is possible because of the growth in popularity of quilting, which has fueled an industry that generated 2.27 billion dollars in sales in the United States in 2003 (Primedia Quilts, n.d.), making it easy for a contemporary American quilter to find needed supplies, tools, instruction, and social organizations, often locally and always through Internet sources.

Perhaps Beth’s story is unusual in terms of her level of involvement and expertise in the occupation of interest, but it is illustrative of the contextual nature of human occupation and the difficulty occupational scientists face if we try to situate the essence of occupation within the individual. We can talk about Beth’s quilt making as *her* occupation, but it cannot be divorced from the history and community and economy in which it takes place. Why would it make sense to try to tease apart what is Beth’s occupation alone, and what is shared with others, both past and present?

Case 2: Sam

Several years ago, Cutchin conducted qualitative research about the ways in which community based services mediate the aging-in-place process of frail older adults (Cutchin, 2003; Cutchin, Chang & Owen, 2005; Cutchin, Owen & Chang,

2003). The study included participants and staff in adult day care centers, and residents and staff in assisted living residences. The inquiry focused in particular on the experiential connection to place through those environments. Sam was a participant who lived in an assisted living residence in a suburb of a large city in the Northeastern United States. Just several months short of his 90th birthday when he was interviewed, Sam was not very physically frail (although he noted that he was declining physically somewhat), and he was cognitively sharp. Moreover, Sam was a thoughtful and articulate participant whose interesting life story and subtly profound statements proved useful for understanding occupation from a transactional perspective. Sam's story suggests in evocative ways how his occupations are part and parcel of an emergent transactional whole—his situation—and should not be located as individual actions apart from this whole.

Sam was an intellectual whose occupations throughout his life-course emerged, changed, or waned as his situation changed. The story of Sam's situation and his occupations helps to illustrate the manner in which occupations exist as part of the situational whole. Indeed, the data collected from Sam assist in the construction of a view of occupations as *functions* in the transactional whole of the situation. Sam's case helps show how people's transactions with the world have a relatedness that belies the significance of individualism and independent occupation. We focus on a few of Sam's occupations to invoke the role of occupations in the functional transaction of person and situation.

Sam grew up in a southern state of the USA, where he was a very active athlete through his high school years and first two years of college. Sports continued to be an important occupation throughout most of his life. Engaging in sporting activities was a joy to him and seemingly brought Sam into greater harmony with wherever he happened to be living. Sports activities also created changes in his situations. He explained how a football injury in college led him to transfer to the state's best university. After graduation, he learned of a position that he later held for 10 years at the university from his tennis partner. Various sports, especially biking, played a central role in his situation in later years. Eventually, increasing age kept Sam from actively participating in sports although he enjoyed participating vicariously by watching the cyclists and skaters on Sunday afternoons near his residence. His interest in cycling led in part to his engagement in another type of occupation in his suburb: community activism.

Sam was invited to serve as an inaugural member of his city's bicycle committee when he moved to his community. His cycling shifted to community service which in turn "*made it interesting even though I was no longer biking myself*". Sam commented on how he got to know some of the younger people in his community through partaking in that social, shared occupation. Serving on committees and attending meetings had been a long-term occupation for Sam. As a younger man, through the help and encouragement of friends, Sam had won a scholarship through the Bureau of Intercultural Education. In the late 1940s, his activism and scholarly work

as part of this progressive organization imbued him with a life-long interest in reading, inquiry, and participation in community affairs. After he left the Bureau, he became active in organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League and the Association to Unite the Democracies. For Sam, the occupation of playing a role in progressive organizations was important in numerous ways. Among those significances for him as an older man, Sam met younger members of those organizations and was stimulated by what they were reading, thinking, and saying. His occupation developed and grew new linkages in his situations, across periods and places in his life.

The intellectual side of Sam in later life seemed to balance the athletic side of his identity, which was emphasized more in his early years. His engagement in the occupation of reading was a form of inquiry into affairs, and it was an engagement with ideas. As with playing sports and attending meetings, reading was a social occupation that was shaped by his situation and tied Sam to others who shared his context. Reading informed his thinking related to organizations in which he still had an interest, but it also stimulated his mind, which seemed to be concerned with many social and political issues. While his occupations of sport and associative membership had waned over the years, reading had not. At the time of interview, Sam was reading papers, magazines, and books of many different varieties. The activity of reading carried over into his correspondence and his conversation with other educated residents.

Sam's experience was somewhat unusual compared to other older adults interviewed because of his educational attainment and community involvement. Nonetheless, Sam's is a case that most clearly illustrates common dimensions of occupation for older adults. The ebb and flow of occupations and their shifting prominence in life is well understood. But perhaps what occupational science has understood and communicated less well is how occupations are functionally integrated with social relationships, cultural contexts, and community actions. These aspects of the transactional whole—the situations that we live—are the root of occupation and meaning to an extent underappreciated by occupational scientists. To understand how this view of occupation could be supported, we now turn to a discussion of Deweyan philosophy.

Transactionalism: A Significant Shift from Individualized Occupation

Near the end of his long and productive life, John Dewey worked with Arthur Bentley to produce his last book, *Knowing and the Known* (Dewey & Bentley, 1949). In that book, Dewey and Bentley strived to formalize a view of "trans-action". In an attempt to clarify the meaning of transaction, the authors placed their perspective in opposition to traditional perspectives of 'self-action' and 'inter-action'. By doing so, Dewey and Bentley argued for a break with existing theorizations of action as well as the basis for how we should think about individuals, their worlds, and the experience that weaves them together.

Dewey and Bentley (1949) defined the perspective of self-action as “where things are viewed as acting under their own powers” (p. 108). In other words, self-action is based on the notion of a single, unitary agent whose action originates solely from within. This view of action can be traced back to Greek thought, especially the doctrines of Aristotle. In contrast, interaction was defined as “where thing is balanced against thing in causal interconnection” (p. 108). As such, interaction implies separate entities that come together in some related action originating from one or the other or both. Dewey and Bentley suggested this view of action is best exemplified in Newtonian physics. The classic illustration of billiard balls moving and colliding to cause motion through the transference of energy is an example of interaction. For all intents and purposes, the discussions of interpersonal as well as person-environment relations are construed in the same way in occupational science and the social sciences. While there is influence of one thing upon the other in interaction, the entities are separate in every way.

Dewey and Bentley (1949) took great care to argue for a radical break from these two worldviews. They define the transactional position in the following way:

...where systems of description and naming are employed to deal with aspects and phases of action, without final attribution to ‘elements’ or other presumptively detachable or independent ‘entities,’ ‘essences,’ or ‘realities,’ and without isolation of presumptively detachable ‘relations’ from such detachable ‘elements.’ (p. 108)

Dewey and Bentley used two footnotes (several hundred words) within this definition to clarify it. Part of the clarification is to note that the concept of transaction was being developed by Dewey early in his career; indeed, other commentators have observed that the concept of transaction can be found throughout much of the Deweyan corpus (e.g., Thayer & Thayer, 1978). Another aspect of Dewey and Bentley’s footnotes was their effort to make the point that they were not referring to common usage of transaction, meaning a ‘deal’ between two or more actors. Dewey and Bentley were developing something more revolutionary about the way we can view the relationship between humans and their world, and have a better understanding about that relationship and its implications. We hope to clarify the idea somewhat here and apply it to the concept of occupation in general, and to the case studies of Beth and Sam in particular.

The transactional view

At its core, Dewey’s transactional view is based on a holism, a continuity of persons and world (Cutchin, 2004b). In *Knowing and the Known*, Dewey and Bentley (1949) tried to work through the restrictions of language to express this continuity as “organism-in-environment-as-a-whole” (p. 109). By using this term, Dewey and Bentley suggested that people’s greatest concern should be for persons and the contexts *through* which they live. Some readers may be familiar with the concept of transaction because it has been utilized in environmental psychology, with the work of Altman and Rogoff (1987) perhaps being the most explicit about the concept’s connection

to Dewey and Bentley’s work. While the concept of transaction still lives on in environmental psychology, we do not see that discipline adhering enough to the full Deweyan position on transaction. This is an important point because environmental/ecological psychology that is supposedly transactional has been incorporated into the influential person-environment-occupation model in occupational therapy (Law, Cooper, Strong, Stewart, Rigby, & Letts, 1996; Rigby & Letts, 2003). Yet a careful reading of the so-called transactional environmental psychology that underpins that model (e.g., Lawton, 1982) reveals that it shies away from a truly transactional approach as Dewey and Bentley meant it. Authors such as Lawton failed to take the deepest relational basis of experience and action as the fundamental premise on which transaction rests; Lawton was agnostic on the issue of holism in person-environment relations, preferring to focus on the separate empirical entities in inquiry (see Lawton, 1982, pp. 42-43). As a result of building upon Lawton, among others, and being distanced from the philosophical underpinnings of transactionalism, the person-environment-occupation model, for all the value it offers, is not capable of being a truly transactional account of experience—including occupation—from a Deweyan perspective.

Unlike transaction, both self-action and interaction are based in dualistic thinking about the nature of things. For decades, Dewey criticized the binary opposition of such entities as subject and object, internal and external, upon which the older views of action are based. The placing of elements, entities, etc. in quotation marks in their definition means that Dewey and Bentley were telling us to be suspicious of such language that would trap us into the self-action and interaction views. They also suggested, however, that while transaction is a holistic view of relations, it has the ability, and often necessity, to accept the temporary abstraction of entities as separate things. The transactional view means that what we would typically see as separate from each other are really *part of each other*. When Dewey (1989/1929) wrote that “experience is *of* as well as *in* nature” (p. 4, emphasis in the original), he was suggesting an ever-present and always changing interpenetration of humans and their world. More than being part of one another, things, such as person and environment, should be considered co-defining (Palmer, 2004) and co-constitutive (Sullivan, 2001). This brings the idea of action more clearly into the transactional relationship of organism-in-environment-as-a-whole.

We think it important to add several more layers of the transactional view before turning to an analysis of our case studies. The environment/place/world with which persons transact is not limited to physical forms; it includes, for instance, social, cultural, and political aspects as well. A transactional view is inclusive of the full range of experience, and transactional relations may be, for instance, those of a person and a discourse or other cultural form. A transactional view also includes the durational-extensional set of relations that make up our evolving contexts of action. Said another way, a view of transactional relations should include their temporal and spatial dimensions—how those relations extend through

Figure 1. Beth's Quilting as Transactional

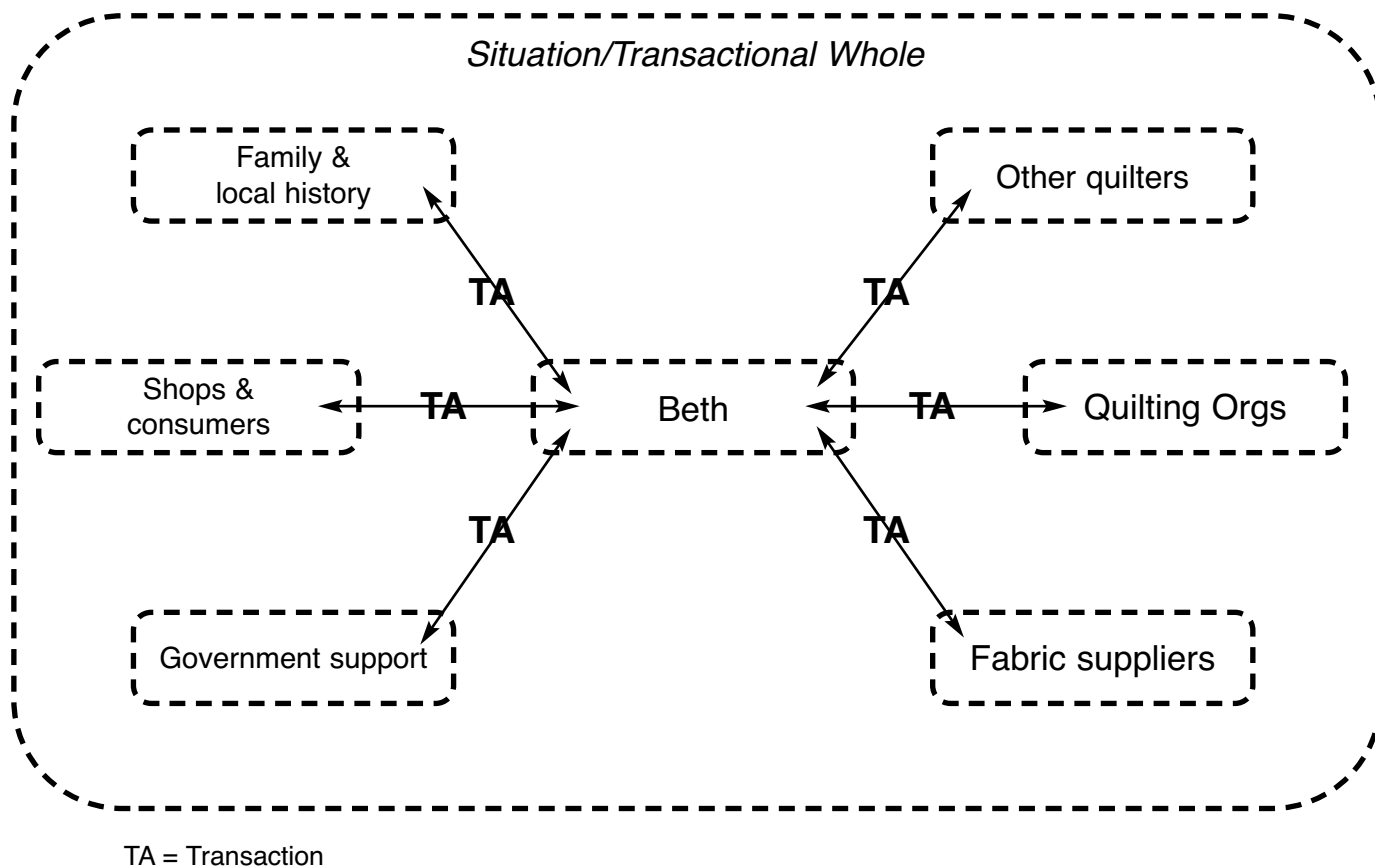
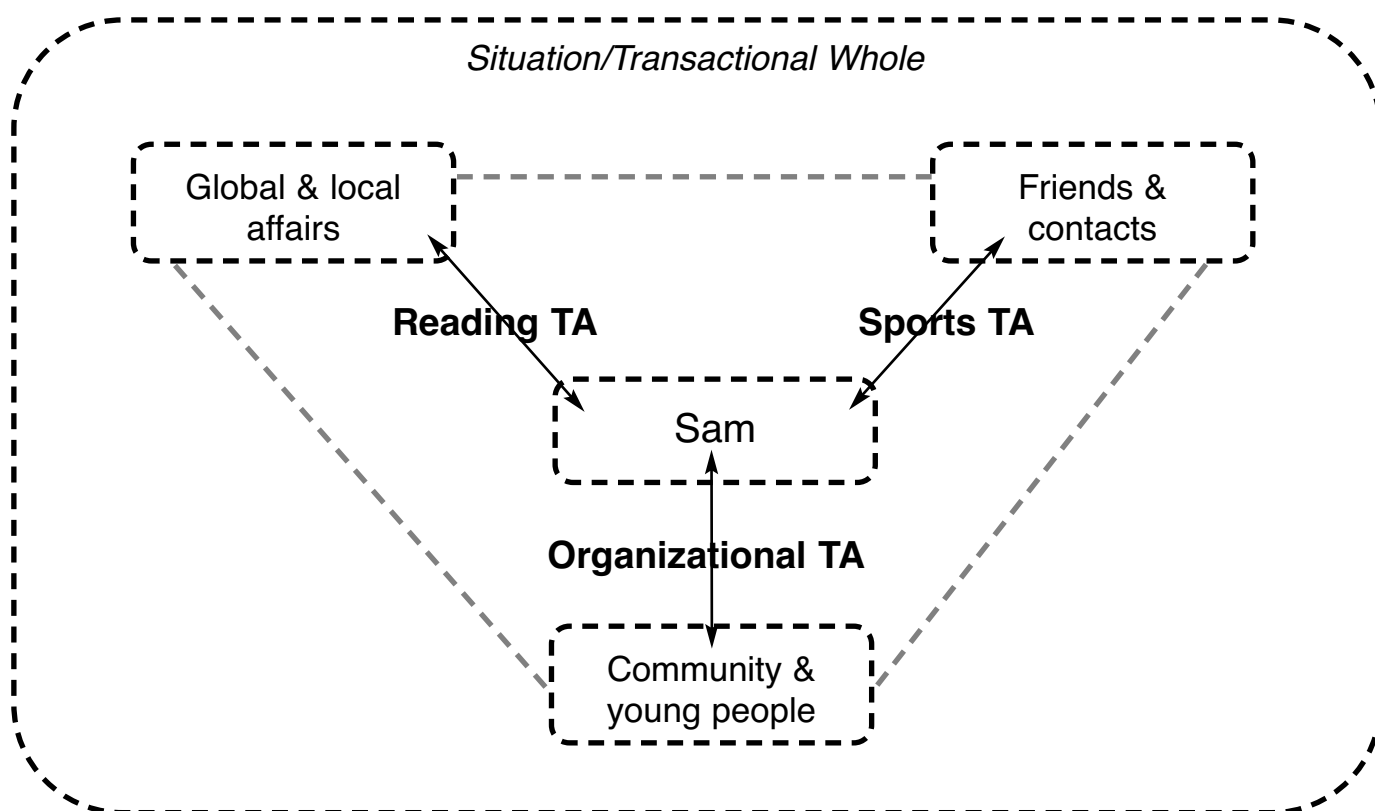


Figure 2. Sam's Occupational Transactions through the Life Course



time and space. Moreover, and very importantly, the transactional view is based on the *functional* relationship between person and world (Garrison, 2001). Garrison carefully explained that Dewey's transactionalism is explicit about human life existing only because of functional relations among us and our environments. These relations continually emerge (change subtly or more significantly) through the ongoing transactions that occur or because of other uncertainties and instabilities inherent in a world in flux (Cutchin, 2004a).

Much of the purpose of transaction, then, is to *functionally coordinate* relations to keep the transactional unit whole and operational, for the benefit of the dimensions that constitute it. For example, functional coordination is apparent in the way a person and society may share a positive relationship (survival, adjustments, development) through processes of education, work, and leisure. Through those processes (relations) person and society are co-constitutive. It should be apparent by this juncture that transactionalism is difficult to grasp because it attempts to address experience in its full complexity and asks people to think fundamentally differently about the world and their experience of it. Perhaps these are reasons transactionalism has not been incorporated in scientific thinking to a larger degree.¹

A simplistic example may be of use at this juncture. Breathing air is a transaction. One cannot say that air is separate from a person because a person must have air—in the sense of making it a part of oneself—to exist. One (air) becomes part of the other (person). Air is taken into the body in the transaction and both are changed. The relationship is functional in that it is necessary for existence of the person. Most often, the function is habitually coordinated. Sometimes, however, a person must functionally coordinate the transaction by breathing at a different rate or by augmenting breathing with some form of technology. While this is a very simple example, it serves to indicate the intimate relationship between person and environment. Person and air can only fully understood by understanding the transaction that fully implicates each—breathing. Air and person only make complete sense through their transactional relationship (Palmer, 2004). As alluded to in the preceding paragraph, the transactional analogy can and should be extended to the relations between persons and societies as well.

Occupational transactions

From the transactional standpoint, occupation viewed as self-action or interaction is problematic because it becomes conceptually muddled in dualisms (e.g., individual and environment). In contrast, occupation can be viewed as a transaction joining person and situation.² In this sense, occupation becomes a way to functionally coordinate the intimate person–situation relationship. The goals (or “ends-in-view” as Dewey called them) of that functional coordination depend on the particular person and the situation. This means that individuality and context are important, but they must be seen as transactionally a part of the other. We note that habits are often used in occupational transactions as a means of coordinating relatively stable relations in a situation.

Eventually, a reformation of those habits will be needed to re-coordinate the occupational transaction as the situation demands it (Garrison, 2002).

As so far stated, occupational transactions may seem devoid of flesh and blood, and particularly passion and fury. This is not the case, however, because occupational transactions are typically full of meaning. Occupational meaning derives from the values and aesthetics of the transaction and situation (Garrison, 1996). Also, meanings stemming from the outcome of transactions allow us to understand and use means-consequence connections and thus to see the importance of occupation for both the person and larger whole (Garrison, 2002). Yet meanings are not based simply in the function of a transaction and its outcomes. Meaning should be understood as flowing from the aesthetic, imaginative, creative and emotional modes of the transaction as well (Alexander, 1990; Garrison, 2002). At the heart of Dewey's philosophy is the necessity and ability to transact with the world, a type of action that provides an “emergentism” and generates meanings through imagination as well as aesthetic judgments and outcomes (Alexander, 1992). Occupation is an important type of transaction that helps achieve aesthetic judgments and outcomes for various types of persons and across all parts of the life course.

The examples of Beth and Sam help to illustrate occupational transactions. In Beth's case (Figure 1)³, her occupation of quilt making is composed by a multifaceted set of transactions with her situation. Beth's situation has shifted (emerged) through time and place, and the transactions that make up the occupation of quilting have been functionally oriented to maintain and extend her relationship with various aspects of the situation. For example, Beth has maintained and deepened ties to her family and its history, which was the original motive for engaging in her occupation. She has also extended her ties to the present and historical quilting community by transacting more fully with quilting organizations, suppliers, other quilters, and consumers. We stress that meaning is generated for Beth through both the ongoing and shifting transactions of quilting. When Beth commented that quilting feeds her soul, she indicated that meaning arises through the transactions of quilting. The meaning is not intrinsic to Beth. The aesthetic accomplishment of creating a work of beauty, as well as the shared value of doing intricate, high quality work that arises from her situation (the judgment of other quilters, for example), are the bases of meaning. The fact that the transaction provides other rewards, such as compensation from teaching and recognition from organizations, must also be seen by Beth as a valuable consequence of the occupational transactions. The view of Beth's case that we have presented emphasizes one type of occupation within which many types of transactions are embedded.

Sam's case (Figure 2) is different because the ebb and flow of multiple occupations (each less elaborated) is viewed over a life time, revealing a much longer time scale over which occupational transactions might be understood. Whereas our discussion of Beth contains only information about her emerging transactions since she began quilting, Sam's sports,

reading and organizational transactions wax and wane with the changes in his life course. Moreover, Sam's occupational transactions are more generalized than Beth's.⁴ But this does not minimize the possibility of seeing how and to what effect his occupations are transactional. Sam's sports transactions gave him a sense of self-worth, but more importantly in the transactional sense, forged friendships. It was through those friendly relationships that Sam and his situation emerged and he was able to develop as a person and professional. The meanings of that emergence were still important for Sam many years later as revealed in his narrative.

Similarly, his engagement in reading transactions brought various affairs into Sam's consciousness, so that he became a concerned and involved citizen. Such reading transactions affected him profoundly because they helped him shift his situation to academia. Reading transactions also led Sam to functionally coordinate his relationship with the world by becoming actively involved in organizations that worked for social change. Sam generated meaning through his organizational transactions because they helped him become more integrated with his community, especially with younger people. By going to meetings and talking with others who shared similar interests, Sam developed his understanding of his situation and was better able to modify it through action. His occupational transactions therefore enabled him to integrate with his place in a fuller sense than he might have otherwise (Cutchin, 2004b). Another insight that Sam's case provides is the way in which his occupational transactions were interwoven across his life course. Sports, reading, and organizational participation transactions had effects on each other so that the whole of Sam's life becomes more discernable through understanding the constellation of occupational transactions through his life course.

Conclusions: Occupational Science as a Transactional Science

We began this analysis by arguing that occupational science has been limited by its focus on occupation as a type of individualistic experience. The two case studies presented different types of occupations and different levels of resolution on those occupations. The common ground between the two distinct cases was the fact that occupation was a process located not at the level of the individual but rather at the level of the situation of which the individual is an integral part. Not content to let these empirical examples suffice, we presented a theoretical argument for interpreting them—indeed for interpreting the nature of occupation more generally—as transactions. Such an interpretation allowed us to consider Beth's and Sam's occupations without focusing entirely on the individual, and without separating the person and the context. Neither a type of self-action (individualistic) or interaction (also a way to leave individuals atomized and independent), the transactional view of occupation makes a break with dominant perspectives in occupational science.

Whither the individual in a transactional occupational science? We have implied the fact that individual differences are

important, because the transactions that persons are a part of will vary with these differences. Moreover, the situation for each person varies, leaving a range of possible transactions and experience. We are not, therefore, arguing that individuals do not exist in the transactional view. What we are suggesting is that individuals are brought into balance with their situations in the transactional perspective; but the primary focus is placed on the transaction—the active relation—that integrates person and situation. The focus on the transaction has important implications for the study of occupation. First and foremost is the placing of occupation, as a type of transactional relation, in center stage. The relational perspective of transactionalism means that occupation is no longer seen as a thing or as a type of self-action. It is an important mode through which human beings, as organisms-in-environment-as-a-whole, function in their complex totality. This holistic view also means that occupation transforms the situation as well as the person in an ongoing and emergent way.

Not unlike Emirbayer's (1997) call for a relational sociology based on John Dewey and his pragmatist contemporaries' philosophy, we are making a call for a transactional occupational science based on Dewey and his allies. We assert that the transactional view is a solid foundation on which to place the concept of occupation. It provides a philosophical basis for the importance of occupation in everyday life. A transactional perspective of occupational science also enables occupation to be directly related to a wider range of experience and inquiry, from ethics to cultural analysis to political issues such as occupational justice.⁵ This means that occupational science can more easily branch into other academic domains as well as draw upon them. We cannot see how this could do anything but good for occupational scientists. In addition, even though it is not a new idea, transactionalism has not been well-incorporated into science of any sort. It is an important theoretical innovation whose time has come. Occupational science can be a leader in the broader academic community in the implementation of the transactional view.

In his "manifesto" for a relational sociology, Emirbayer (1997) rightfully admitted challenges for a transactional approach. We would like to suggest some challenges that occupational science also would face if it is to incorporate the transactional view. We must be relatively brief in this discussion, but we offer three issues understanding that there are others that must be addressed. First, what Emirbayer (1997, p. 303) called the problem "boundary specification" is relevant to occupational science, and we believe, any science that would use transactionalism as a foundation. As our figures depict, the situation through which transactions occur is permeable and flexible. This means that the boundary of the situation is difficult to determine and articulate. There is almost no way to escape this problem that we know of. One might be tempted to suggest that the situational dimensions, such as quilting organizations in Beth's case, create the space, time, and "entity" boundaries for consideration in an analysis. But to do so would ignore the fact that such organizations are often diffuse and situationally difficult to pinpoint. Is the situational scale more local, or does it extend with the organization to a regional or country-wide

level? We believe that this difficulty should not prevent a transactional view from being implemented and that such ambiguity can be accepted for the time being.

A second issue of difficulty is to understand how a transactional view might affect important concepts that at this moment give occupational science currency. We don't think that the development of a transactional view of occupation means the death of concepts such as participation, occupational deprivation, or others. An occupational scientist using transactionalism would have to query the meaning of such important ideas and suggest how they might be expanded or re-articulated from the transactional point of view. Incommensurabilities are sure to arise, and tension in the discipline could follow. Nonetheless, we believe that reflection and discussion on this level would only help build a more rigorous and intellectual discipline.

Finally, our discussion leads us to acknowledge that the relationship between the terms occupation and transaction needs to be more fully worked out and articulated. If occupations are "chunks of activity that can be named in the lexicon of the culture" (Zemke & Clark, 1996, p. viii), then what transactions do not fit this definition? In other words, what is the exact fit of a transaction and an occupation? For transactions that do not fit within the conception of occupation, how do those transactions differ from transactions that are occupational? While we believe that the whole of occupational science can be supported by a transactional view, a sorting out of the relative scope of transactions and occupation is needed. This problem implies a more general problem of language that has been implicated since Dewey (and Bentley) had the courage to challenge the established worldviews of Western civilization. The problems should not stop occupational scientists from following in their footsteps, but we should be aware that progress is not always an easy process to transact.

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Endnotes

1. Another aspect of this situation is the decline of pragmatism's influence, vis-à-vis analytic philosophy, in the academy until the last decade or so of the 20th century (Boisvert, 1998).
2. Cutchin (2004a) discusses the Deweyan concept of situation as the transactional whole or context of thought/action.
3. The figures contain lines and arrows that signify types of relations within the situational whole. The arrows illustrate the interpenetrating effect of transactional relations in the occupation. The dashed lines connecting situational dimensions suggest the manner in which those

are related even though the transaction with each is distinct. The situation boundary and dimensional (e.g., "Other quilters") boundaries are dashed to connote their flexible nature in terms of scope and scale.

4. A primary reason for this is limited data generated in a study that was not focused explicitly on the question of occupational transactions.
5. Dewey wrote extensively on these issues and never considered them apart from his more general philosophical position of transactionalism. We believe that these themes, some of which are emergent in occupational science (e.g., Townsend & Wilcock, 2004), would be well-served by transactional views and analysis.

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