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'Doing gender' through the performance of occupation

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Introduction/Rationale: Every person creates their own gender by acting individually, a process known as 'Doing Gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Social norms demand that individuals specify themselves as men or women and further reinforces this distinction in terms of people's performance of occupations. But what happens to people who experience their gender identity outside the predominating binary gender system, to those who identify themselves as gender-variant? How is their gender performance related to occupation?

The concept of gender seems to be largely absent from literature in the fields of occupational science and therapy. There appears to be a lack of discussion as to how gender and occupation influence each other.

Objectives: The presentation aims are: to increase understanding of gender and gender diversity both in general and in terms of occupation; to raise awareness of the mutual dependency of occupation and gender and thereby expand the professional knowledge base.

Method: A research project using a narrative approach explored the experiences of eight gender-variant people in Germany concerning the performance of meaningful occupations during their gender-transition process. Interviews were conducted and evaluated using narrative data analysis.

Results: The findings revealed initial insights into the occupational dimensions of gender. Concepts such as identity construction, embodiment and spirituality were identified with regard to gender diversity and occupation.

Conclusion: Research and theory inform us that gender is transacted through people's occupational performance. The knowledge gained has the potential to raise awareness of the influence of gender on occupation amongst occupational scientists and therapists.