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The occupational experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals during the coming out process: An analysis of self-acceptance, disclosure, and occupational change

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Abstract:

Human occupation is an intensely individual process that is colored by the cultural and life experiences of the individual who is engaged in an activity. The experiences of gender and sexual minorities typically defined as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals are different in many ways from the rest of the population. One occupation unique to this community is the process of "coming out" in which the individual discloses their minority sexual orientation or gender identity to others. The coming out process is complex and multi-faceted, involving both the internal reflective process of first self-accepting one's orientation and identity and then the process of sharing it with others. Because of the stigmatized nature of LGBT orientations and identities this occupation often precipitates a great deal of occupational change involving occupational deprivation, marginalization, adaptation and gain.

Key Words: Self-Acceptance, Disclosure, Occupational Changes, LGBT

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Occupational science as a discipline seeks to identify the ways humans experience their lives as occupational beings (Christensen, & Townsend, 2010). In doing this it is important to recognize different lived experiences and identities individuals have and how those factors shape their occupational choices and experiences. One area of particular relevance is the experiences of gender and sexual minorities, most commonly referred to as member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. Traditionally, literature within occupational science and occupational therapy has been dismissive of the multi-faceted ways that sexual orientation affects occupational experience by only focusing on the occupations of sexual expression and relationships (Jackson, 1995). Jackson (1995) argued that the experiences of being a sexual minority influence a wide variety of beliefs and convictions as a result of life experiences that in turn influence which occupations are accessible and chosen. When it comes to literature within occupational science on sexual minorities the focus is only on the experiences of gay and lesbian individuals or lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) individuals as one entity without exploring the specific occupational experiences of bisexuals. Literature outside of occupational science that focuses on unique experiences of bisexuals is still limited but suggests unique experiences that are very different from that of lesbian and gay individuals (Balsam, & Moore, 2007; Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). Occupational science literature has only just begun to explore the occupational experiences of transgender individuals which is very different compared to LGB individuals due to their identification with a gender outside the one assigned to them at birth (Beagan, et al., 2012). For all LGBT minorities the occupation of 'coming out' where individuals disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity is a common experience that warrants study both as an occupation within itself and as an experience that predates a great deal of occupational change in the lives of gender and sexual minorities. In this paper the occupational experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals with regards to the "coming out" process and the occupational changes brought on as a result of this process will be explored. These include self-acceptance, self-disclosure and occupational changes. Consideration of the way these experiences differ for people of different orientations will also be examined.

Methodology

For this literature review articles were found using the Google Scholar database as well as looking through the archives of the American Journal of Occupational Therapy, Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, Journal of Occupational Science, and British Journal of Occupational Therapy. Search terms used included: "coming out LGBT", "coming out bisexual", "coming out transgender", "transgender", "homosexuality", "bisexuality", and "occupation coming out". Potential articles for review were identified based on title and abstract. Articles were analyzed according to which aspects of the coming out process they reviewed and what sexual and gender identities they focused on.

LGBT Identity and Relation to Occupation

Individual factors such as one's sexual orientation can contribute to themes of meaning that affect ones actions and occupational choices (Jackson, 1995). Occupational scientists should seek to understand the ways that sexual orientation affects one's experience as an occupational being such as

coping with stigma, societal perceptions, disclosing their orientation and the effects that has on occupational experiences (Jackson, 1995). Occupations may be used by LGBT individuals as a way to portray and affirm their identities to others (Beagan, et al., 2012). Because gender and sexual minorities often face marginalization their experiences with stigma tend to affect occupational choice because they may be barred from certain activities or afraid to engage in certain activities that identify them as a member of the LGBT community (Zimmerman, 2009). For this reason the occupation of "coming out" provides a rich area of study for the unique ways that an LGBT identity can affect occupational choices and experiences.

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Coming Out to Oneself

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While traditionally coming out is seen as a process in which an individual discloses their sexual orientation or gender identity to others it is actually a process with multiple stages that starts with process of self-identification and acceptance of one's identity internally (Bergan-Gander, & von Kurthy, 2006; Rhoads, 1995). This process relates to the occupational concept of "being" as described by Hitch, Pepin, and Stagnitti (2014) since "being" involves one's individual understanding of who they are. As an individual learns to accept their gender identity or sexual orientation their sense of being changes and they in turn become more aware of who they are and at peace with their identity (Rhoads, 1995). This section will examine this process with regards to experiences of the lesbian, gay and bisexual community, and the more unique experiences of bisexual and transgender individuals.

Accepting an LGB Identity

Because all people regardless of sexual orientation grow up in a society of assumed heterosexism or "heteronormativity", it is common for LGB individuals to develop negative attitudes about homosexuality which they then direct towards themselves when they begin to experience same sex attractions (Balsam, & Mohr, 2007; Bergan-Gander, von Kurthy, 2006; Cox, Dewaele, van Houtte, & Vincke, 2011). These negative views expressed towards themselves and other LGB individuals are commonly referred to as "internalized homophobia" (Bergan-Gander, von Kurthy, 2006). Internalized homophobia can have many emotional consequences such as internalized shame and self-doubt and denial of one's homosexual desires, or even severe consequences such as self-hatred and self-destructive behavior including suicide (Cox, Dewaele, van Houtte, & Vincke, 2011). Coming to terms with these feelings and learning to accept one's sexual orientation can be difficult due to the lack of LGB role models and peers for many individuals (Balsam, & Mohr, 2007).

The ways in which stigma and internalized homophobia affect the process of self-acceptance can be demonstrated in the way that the process of coming out to oneself has changed as homosexuality has become more accepted in American culture in recent decades. In one study of sexual orientation identity development, it was found that the process of LGB self-acceptance varied greatly between participants in an older cohort versus a younger cohort (Floyd, & Bakeman, 2006). LGB individuals in the older cohort tended to reach self-acceptance at later ages, have had more experience with heterosexual relationships before accepting an LGB identity, and tended to have same sex sexual experiences prior to publicly adopting an LGB identity (Floyd, & Bakeman, 2006). In contrast younger LGB individuals tended to adopt a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity prior to having any same sex experience and reach self-acceptance at younger ages. This study illustrates the role of cultural context in promoting self-acceptance.

Accepting a Bisexual Identity

Despite growing cultural acceptance of lesbian and gay individuals, bisexual individuals continue to face greater stigma and barriers to self-acceptance (Balsam, & Mohr, 2007; Ross,

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Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). While homosexuality continues to be stigmatized it is at least acknowledged whereas bisexuality is often treated as an illegitimate orientation (Balsam, & Mohr, 2007; Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). Pressure to conform not only to heterosexuality but the dichotomy of hetero and homosexuality makes self-acceptance much more confusing to bisexuals. A study by Balsam, and Mohr (2007) found significantly greater identity confusion in bisexual participants in comparison to lesbian and gay participants. In another study on the mental health of bisexual individuals, Ross, Dobinson, and Eady (2010), found that bisexuals were often unaware that bisexuality existed as an orientation while they were young and that these participants struggled not only with internalized homophobia but internalized monosexuality, the assumption that individuals can only be attracted to one gender. This identity confusion and the intersection of multiple forms of internalized shame leads to significant mental health challenges among bisexual individuals and makes the process of self-acceptance much more difficult (Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010).

Accepting a Transgender Identity

Because transgender individuals make up only a small proportion of the population and research about the trans community is fairly new, the majority of the available research on transgender individuals and their occupations involves a small sample size and qualitative research processes (Beagan et al., 2010) . For the sake of this literature review the term "transgender" will be used to refer to trans individuals who identify within the binary as either male or female and have an identity that is opposite of the sex they were assigned at birth. While there are many transgender individuals who identify somewhere outside of the gender binary there is currently very little published research on individuals who do not identify with a discrete gender of either male or female. In a qualitative study of the occupational experiences of transgender individuals Beagen, et al. (2012) found that the participants generally knew from very young that their gender identities did not match the sex of their bodies. Despite early realization that something was different about them many transgender individuals experienced denial about their identity or tried to suppress it because they did not see role models of transgender people that depicted transition as a viable option (Zimmerman, 2009). One common occupation associated with the process of self-acceptance of gender identity was cross dressing. Cross dressing was often done in private while individuals engaged in gender-normative occupations publically as a way to explore and come to grips with their gender identity (Beagan, et al., 2010). For many individuals cross dressing was a difficult experience because it was an incomplete version of the acceptance they needed leading to further questioning of gender identity. The process of "becoming" as described by Hitch, Pepin, and Stagnitti (2014) involves a transition between occupations as one grows and develops. For transgender people, cross dressing is an occupation of becoming that is used as part of the process of developing acceptance of the necessity of physical and social transition.

Coming Out to Others

Coming out as LGB

The occupation of coming out is an interesting lens through which to study the occupations of sexual minorities because it intersects with experiences of both discrimination and stigma but also has the potential to open up more authentic communication with others. There are many positive and negative responses to coming out and the burdens and benefits of coming out will vary for each individual depending on the cultural context they live in. Coming out has many benefits one of the biggest being that it enables an LGB person access to a the LGB community and social support from others who identify similarly which has a strongly positive affect on mental health (Cox, Dewaele, van Houtte, & Vincke, 2011). In studies of the experiences of LGB individuals, coming out to others was an important way to let go of some of the internalized homophobia, and the negative emotions associated with the stressful process of emotional suppression (Cox, Dewaele,

van Houtte, & Vincke, 2011; Rhoads, 1995). Coming out can also be a way for someone to gain control over how others perceive them by preventing the consequences of being accidently "outed" by others (Corrigan, & Matthews, 2003). Politically having more "out" and visible LGB individuals helps to reduce assumptions of heterosexuality and stigma for the LGB community as a whole (Bergan-Gander, & von Kurthy; Corrigan, & Matthews, 2003).

Negative responses to coming out where also noted in the literature typically connected to experiences of discrimination and marginalization. In one study by Corrigan and Matthews (2003) some reasons identified for nondisclosure included: the threat of violence, the feeling that disclosure was not appropriate to the situation, the desire not to upset a significant other, a lack of social support to shield against negative responses, and a fear of a person in power using the information against them. Many individuals feared harassment and exclusion (Rhoads, 1995). Individuals in highly controlling environments at home, work or socially were very unlikely to come out for fear of facing occupational loss including loss of social support from friends or family, or employment discrimination (Legate, & Molineux, 2012). This has especially strong consequences for younger LGB individuals who are reliant on their families for support. Research has shown that LGB individuals living with families who have strong religious beliefs, strong adherence to traditional gender roles and conservative political beliefs are less likely to disclose sexual orientation (Walder & Magruder, 2008). LGB individuals who have strong relationships with their families also tend to avoid coming out for fear of losing or harming their relationships with their families even if their families had not demonstrated negative views regarding homosexuality (Waldner, & Magruder, 2008).

Coming out as bisexual

Coming out as bisexual is much more complicated than coming out as gay or lesbian, so bisexuals tend to be far less "out" to others compared to lesbian and gay individuals (Balsam, & Mohr, 2007). Bisexuality tends to be dismissed and discouraged on a societal level which often means that the individual has to first explain and convince the other person that bisexuality exists (Balsam, & Mohr, 2007; Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). Coming out as bisexual is also more complicated because it cannot be revealed by stating the gender of one's romantic partner since bisexuals in differently-sexed relationships are assumed straight and bisexuals in same-sexed relationships are assumed to be gay (Balsam, & Mohr, 2007; Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). For bisexuals this makes the process of coming out far more awkward and less likely to be taken seriously. For bisexuals who are monogamous, this is complicated since bisexuality is often not taken seriously unless the individual is sexually active with both genders (Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). Bisexuality is often accompanied by different stigmas which are hard to navigate such as being "slutty" or "hypersexual" which are not often present for people who identify as lesbian or gay (Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). Because bisexuality is often accepted by neither the straight or gay community, bisexuals may not feel safe coming out to lesbian and gay individuals because their identity is not taken seriously (Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). Being bisexual is a lot like having two closets because they have to come out both to gay and straight populations and are not often accepted by either community.

Coming out as transgender

The process of coming out as transgender is very different from coming out as LGB. While lesbian, gay and bisexual refers to sexual orientations, transgender refers to a gender orientation which is a far more overt and public than one's sexual orientation. Because transgender people emphasize their identity as the gender of "man" or "woman", rather than "transgender", coming out is a very different process (Zimmerman, 2009). Zimmerman (2009) defines two parts to discussing a

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transgender identity; one of "declaration" where one first announces to themselves and others as identifying with a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth, and "disclosure" where one reveals a transgender history after having completed transition and having adopted the social role of one's declared gender. "Declaration" for transgender individuals is more similar to the process of "coming out" for LGB individuals in that the person declaring their gender identity is revealing a fundamental truth about themselves (Zimmerman, 2009). On the other hand disclosure is not treated this way because a transwoman, for example, doesn't see herself as a "trans" woman but rather just a woman and being forced to reveal one's transgender status after transition may lead to others not taking that individual's gender identity seriously (Zimmerman, 2009). For this reason, many transgender individuals choose to remain "stealth" and not reveal their transgender status after transition but just live openly as their identified gender. From a political standpoint this is somewhat complicated because disclosing transgender status helps to fight the stigma faced by transgender individuals still in the process of self-acceptance and declaration, but it may come at a cost to the people revealing their transgender status (Zimmerman, 2009). In interviews of transgender individuals regarding this issue many of them indicated that they felt disclosure was a personal choice that every person should be free to make for themselves (Zimmerman, 2009).

Another complication that makes both declaration and disclosure of transgender identity difficult for transgender people is the fear of facing violence and harassment (Beagan, et al., 2012; Zimmerman, 2009). While this fear is present for all individuals in the LGBT community it is especially prevalent for transgender individuals who have a very visible identity if they appear androgynous. In this past year alone in the United States 20 transgender women have been murdered (Kellaway, & Brydum, 2015). Additionally, transgender people have a lot less control in managing disclosure because their identity can be revealed by their legal name, people in past relationships, or their legal identifiers. When dealing with any form of bureaucracy there is potential to be "outed" if those legal identifiers have not been changed which requires a large amount of energy and planning (Beagan, et al., 2012). Due to the public nature of gender expression, transgender individuals spend a very large amount of time engaged in occupations related to social presentation such as dressing, grooming, and self-care (Beagan, et al., 2012). For transgender individuals who have not yet begun the process of physical transition their gender identity is often not accepted by others because they still appear to look like the gender they were assigned at birth (Zimmerman, 2009). Physical traits related to their birth gender such as pitch of voice, hairlines, body hair, height, and other physical traits can make it harder for someone to be accepted as their identified gender and may complicate the process of coming out (Zimmerman, 2009).

Coping with Stigma/Discrimination

The two main forms of discrimination noted in the literature facing LGB individuals are homophobia and heterosexism (Beagan, Carswell, Merritt, & Trentham, 2000). Homophobia is a fear or intense dislike of LGB individuals and tends to be expressed as outright intolerance and discrimination of LGB individuals. A more pervasive and less explicit form of stigma involves heterosexism which is ignoring the existence of non-heterosexual orientations or same-sex relationships and their experiences (Beagan, Carswell, Merritt, & Trentham, 2000). Heterosexism, unlike homophobia is often unconscious and unintended (2000). For transgender people transphobia is usually used to describe the same kind of outright intolerance towards transgender people that the term homophobia applies towards LGB identified individuals.

For all individuals in the LGBT community involvement whether online/virtual or in person in the LGBT community has been found to provide a significant buffer against stigma (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Beagan, et al., 2012). Cow, Dewaele, van Houtte, and Vincke (2011) found that community involvement is significantly correlated with a reduction in internalized homonegativity among LGB individuals. For the bisexual community in particular access to other bisexual people

is essential because they are more likely to face alienation from both the straight and gay communities (Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010).

Occupational Loss/Deprivation as a Result of Coming Out

Occupational Loss as a Result of Coming out LGB

Coming out can often be a difficult occupation simply because it can present so much risk for occupational loss. Corrigan and Matthews (2003) identified four main categories of risks individuals faced when coming out including: physical harm, social avoidance, social disapproval, and self-consciousness. These various reactions affect occupation participation in a variety of ways.

Social participation is one of the biggest areas of occupational loss for LGB individuals who come out. Individuals who come out identified that it had a major effect on relationships with friends and family including the loss of these relationships (Bergan-Gander, & von Kurthy, 2006). In a study of the experiences of gay college students several of them expressed losing friendships and roommates who did not want to face discrimination for being associated with an out gay man (Rhoads, 1995). Participation in social and leisure occupations was significantly affected by sexual orientation because LGB individuals tended to avoid people and places in which their sexual orientation would not be accepted (Bergan-Gander, & von Kurthy, 2006). Fear of harassment and violence also prevented LGB individuals from engaging in various social and leisure occupations (Began-Gander, & von Kurthy, 2006; Rhoads, 1995).

Aside from social occupations the occupations most affected including school and work. In a study of gay college students many of the students expressed feeling excluded and marginalized in class discussion by negative comments from classmates (Rhoads, 1995). In the work situation this marginalization is often present in the form of heterosexism among work policies where language is often gendered and excludes same-sex partners (Twinley, 2014). In many workplace situations individuals are encouraged to avoid talking about their partners or weekend experiences if they imply a non-heterosexual sexuality (Ward, & Winstanley, 2005). Oftentimes individuals justify this silence about LGB experiences by claiming that "bedroom identities" should not be discussed at work. Beagan et al. (2000) argue that this kind of silence does not simply render sexual lives invisible but entire lives invisible because one's sexual identity plays a role in many formative life experiences outside of one's romantic and sexual relationships. Asking LGB individuals to maintain this "double life" in which they are not allowed to express themselves at work affects their occupational participation in work activities because they spend a disproportionate among of time engaged in developing and maintaining coping strategies for dealing with this marginalization (Ward, & Winstanley, 2005).

Workplace marginalization does not simply have social and relational consequences but plays an impact on career advancement and ultimately on financial stability. In one study by Bergan-Gander and von Kurthy (2006) one of the participants stated that after coming out to his manager his manager warned him that his orientation would limit his ability to receive promotions. In some workplaces coworkers may explicitly refuse to work with "out" LGB individuals and may ask to be accommodated for their prejudices. This kind of atmosphere creates a hostile working environment for someone who is LGB and was found to influence LGB people to actually leave their desired career (Twinley, 2014). Hostile attitudes are not the only form of discrimination related to employment that LGB individuals may face; in the U.S. in 29 states there are no legal protections to prevent employers from firing LGB individuals based on their sexual orientation (American Civil Liberties Union, 2015). Overall, the above forms of occupational deprivation and loss experienced by LGB individuals who are out in social, leisure, educational and work situations illustrate a form of occupational injustice (Bergan-Gander, & von Kurthy, 2006).

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Occupational Loss as a Result of Being Bisexual

While the above forms of discrimination are often experienced by bisexuals, particularly individuals who are in same sex relationships and are therefore perceived as gay, there are some forms of occupational loss and deprivation that are unique to individuals who identify as bisexual. Most of these occupational losses and deprivations are related to the relative lack of community support for the bisexual community (Balsam, & Mohr, 2007). Because bisexuals often face stigma from both the straight and lesbian and gay community they often do not have access to a supportive community to mitigate the effects of stigma in the straight community (Balsam, & Mohr, 2007; Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). Bisexuals also tended to face more conflicts within their romantic relationships because their partners often misunderstood their sexual orientation (Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). Overall, bisexuals face similar forms of stigmas to lesbian and gay individuals with additional difficulties in social occupations related to having less emotional support and their orientations being less understood.

Occupational Loss as a Result of Being Transgender

Because gender identity is something that is often displayed publicly and plays a big role in how one is treated it affects occupation much differently than sexual orientation. In a study by Beagan et al. (2012), many of the transgender women interviewed stated that they felt deprived of the ability to engage in gendered activities that were not considered socially appropriate when growing up. Social norms were enforced strictly and if any of these individuals broke the norms they faced bullying and teasing in school which reinforced the occupational deprivation by discouraging them from participating in desired occupations (Beagan et al., 2012). Over time many of these individuals were forced to take up gender-normative occupations and roles that they did not desire such as the roles of husband and father in order to hide their true identities (Beagan, et al., 2012). In many ways this loss of desired roles and occupations is a strong example of occupational deprivation. Additionally, many transgender individuals experience significant loss when coming out and beginning transition. It is common for transgender individuals to lose relationships with friends, family, religious community and even professional relationships and jobs (Beagan et al., 2012). Because of the loss of social relationships, transgender individuals experience significant difficulty with occupational marginalization.

Occupational Gain/Adaptation

Occupational Adaptation for LGB Individuals

While coming out can be a cause for occupational loss and deprivation, it can also be a cause for the gain of new occupations and roles for LGB individuals. In a study by Corrigan and Matthews (2003), it was found that individuals who came out experienced reduced stress, were less likely to participate in risky behaviors, and experienced closer interpersonal connections in their remaining relationships. While 'belonging' is often a challenge since being openly LGB may lead to loss of some relationships, there is evidence that this honesty strengthens the relationships that survive the coming out process because it allows both people involved to know one another better (Rhoads, 1995). Individuals who came out expressed feeling an immense sense of relief, and greater confidence after coming out and some people say the process helped them to become more courageous in general (Rhoads, 1995). While the narrative of the unaccepting family is a common one, it is evident that many families are able to move past heteronormative social values and respond to their LGB family member in an accepting and nurturing way. In a study of families that are accepting of a family member coming out there were many narratives of families being untroubled

by the announcement (Gorman-Murray, 2008). This was particularly common among the siblings of LGB individuals and as society is becoming more accepting in general (2008). Many parents in the Gorman-Murray (2008) study saw the coming out process as a positive thing and a chance to connect better with their child. One parent in the study had seen the pain that a sexuality related-suicide had brought to another family and used that as motivation behind his own acceptance of his daughter because he did not want her to experience that kind of pain (Gorman-Murray, 2008). This study showed that coming out can lead to occupational gain in the form of stronger familial relationships and bonds (2008). In another study of LGB college students it was found that after coming out many individuals found that they took up brand new occupations (Rhoads, 1995). After coming out many college students got involved in LGB community events, frequented LGB-owned bars and restaurants, and became much more involved in political activism (Rhoads, 1995). In work relationships coming out also seemed to foster more authentic relationships between coworkers (Ward, & Winstanley, 2005). Because so many closeted LGB people edit their descriptions of their lives in discussions at work in order to manage their identity being open about one's identity can allow for more honest communication and social connection (Ward, & Winstanley, 2005).

Occupational Adaptation for Bisexuals

Because coming out is much more complicated for bisexuals due to lack of social awareness and acceptance, many bisexuals will adapt how they come out and how they identify themselves based on the gender of their romantic partner at the time (Balsam, & Mohr, 2007). It is very common for bisexuals in same-sex relationships to call themselves gay or lesbian as a way of avoiding discrimination faced within the LGB community. Because bisexuals are less likely to have community support they were more likely to foster a wide range of self-care occupations such as exercise, meditation, and art to use as a source of pride and self-esteem and to provide an escape from the stress associated with dealing with stigma (Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). Much like out LGB individuals in general, many bisexuals are likely to take up occupations related to political and social activism as a way of challenging the social stigmas bisexuals face and making it easier for other bisexual individuals to reach the state of self-acceptance (Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010). In this sense, the state of *becoming*, related to attaining self-acceptance of a stigmatized identity, is also related to helping others become comfortable with their own stigmatized sexual orientations.

Occupational Adaptation for Transgender Individuals

For transgender individuals, occupations associated with transitioning after declaring a transgender identity were numerous and accompanied a far greater range of occupations than those that were gained for LGB individuals. Of all the occupations related to transition the most common one was that of seeking information (Beagan, et al., 2012). The virtual context was especially important because it was the easiest way to access information and communities of other transgender people to learn about their experiences. The actual process of medical and social transition included a variety of occupations related to grooming, voice training, and securing access to medical interventions such as hormone therapy and surgical intervention (Beagan, et al., 2012). Because of the monetary expenses associated with medical transition, transgender individuals spend a lot of time engaged in occupations related to securing the money necessary for surgery or hormones. In many cases individuals would stay in jobs they did not necessarily enjoy or would change jobs in order to ensure they had medical coverage (Beagan et al., 2012). In general, it was found that securing health care services was exhausting. Because most medical professionals did not have much knowledge about transgender individuals, many transgender people end up engaging in the occupation of educating their doctors and other health care workers (Beagan et al., 2012). As part of the process of transition, individuals spent a lot of time navigating through bureaucracy while

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they looked into changing their identification cards, birth certificates, and dealt with navigating the legal system while their identifiers did not match their gender identity (Beagan, et al., 2012). The process of transition as a whole can be seen as an aspect of "becoming" in that it is a goal-oriented approach to changing appearance, legal identification, and social perceptions to gain widespread recognition of their gender identity (Hitch, Pepin, & Stagnitti, 2014).

In everyday occupations the occupations of dressing and grooming were hugely important for transgender individuals because it gave them the opportunity to "play" with gender expression through dress. Grooming activities such as finding a wig, styling hair and undergoing facial electrolysis were very important to transgender women hoping to be recognized as female in public (Beagan et al., 2012). Getting to finally participate in occupations associated with their gender identity, such as makeup for example, was an exciting experience for many transgender people who felt they were unable to engage in these occupations when they were still in the closet (Beagan, et al., 2012).

One new occupation that was adopted by many transgender individuals was that of educating others about the needs, challenges, and language of the transgender community (Beagan, et al., 2012). Many transgender individuals interviewed discussed participating in online communities and even going to national and international conferences for transgender people. Many transgender individuals expressed a strong need to give back to the transgender community and help others through the process of transition and associated occupations related to transition including disclosing at work, getting medical treatment, and dealing with bureaucracy (Beagan, et al., 2012). In this way many transgender individuals use their own process of becoming as part of transition to help others in their own process of becoming and belonging (Hitch, Pepin, & Stagnitti, 2014).

Conclusion

While this is not an exhaustive review of the literature it may be concluded that overall, the occupation of "coming out" is complex and holds a variety of meanings and struggles including the nuances of self-acceptance, social relationships and occupational changes. "Coming out" affects participation in a variety of occupations and community engagement. The process is very different depending on the social and cultural environment that surrounds the individual involved and the orientation of that individual. The occupation of "coming out" shows many facets of the processes of doing, being, becoming, and belonging since it involves action, reflection, change and adaption, and ultimately greatly affects social relationships with others in both positive and negative ways (Hitch, Pepin, & Stagnitti, 2014). Understanding the meaning behind these occupations can offer occupational therapists insight into this occupational process and offer greater help for working with LGBT clients (Jackson, 1995). The unique experiences of LGBT individuals related to learning self-acceptance, coming out to others, and adapting to occupational loss as well as the gain of new occupations color their experiences of all occupations (Jackson, 1995).

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