Occupational consciousness refers to ongoing awareness of the dynamics of hegemony and recognition that dominant practices are sustained through what people do every day, with implications for personal and collective health. The emergence of the construct in post-apartheid South Africa signifies the country’s ongoing struggle with negotiating long-standing dynamics of power that were laid down during colonialism, and maintained under black majority rule. Consciousness, a key component of the new terminology, is framed from post-colonial perspectives – notably work by Biko and Fanon – and grounded in the philosophy of liberation, in order to draw attention to continuing unequal intersubjective relations that play out through human occupation. The paper also draws important links between occupational consciousness and other related constructs, namely occupational possibilities, occupational choice, occupational apartheid, and collective occupation. The use of the term ‘consciousness’ in sociology, with related or different meanings, is also explored. Occupational consciousness is then advanced as a critical notion that frames everyday doing as a potentially liberating response to oppressive social structures. This paper advances theorizing as a scholarly practice in occupational science, and could potentially expand inter or transdisciplinary work for critical conceptualizations of human occupation.

Keywords: Post-colonial theory, Coloniality, Oppression, Philosophy of liberation, Politics of human occupation

Occupational consciousness emerged as a construct from my doctoral work on intergenerational play within families in post-apartheid South Africa. It refers to ongoing awareness about the dynamics of hegemony and recognition that dominant practices are sustained through what people do every day, with implications for personal and collective health (Ramugondo, 2012). The emergence of the construct in this context signifies an ongoing struggle with negotiating long-standing dynamics of power that were laid down during colonialism, and maintained under black majority rule. Occupational consciousness provides a language through which people can describe how their individual and collective everyday doing can resist and challenge hegemonic practices that sustain all forms of unequal power relations. In providing a theoretical foundation to occupational consciousness as a construct in occupational science, this discussion advances the
Theorizing practice of the discipline in promoting understandings of human occupation.

The first three sections of the paper introduce theorizing as a distinct scholarly practice, outline the genesis of occupational consciousness as a construct and provide both theoretical and philosophical foundations to the construct. This is followed by an analysis of synergies between occupational consciousness and other related constructs. Occupational consciousness is then advanced as a critical notion that frames everyday doing as a potentially liberating response to oppressive social structures. The paper concludes by proposing potential avenues for further theorizing and research.

**Theorizing as Scientific Practice and Interrogating the Epistemological Gaze**

Occupational science, a discipline concerned with human occupation and its situatedness in context (Whiteford, Townsend, & Hocking, 2000) and role and function in society (Clark et al., 1991; Yerxa, 1990), cannot underplay its central role in theorizing about occupation (Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2015). The term occupation has different meanings in professional and general public discourses, with various configurations of occupation illuminating the complex nature of the construct and emphasizing different aspects of what it refers to. Additionally, a number of constructs or concepts emerging from occupational science have different meanings in the everyday English language. Outlining, unpacking and critiquing these constructs has great potential for a generative scholarship or theorizing, which is required to build and sustain occupational science as a discipline.

Theorizing has only recently come to be regarded as a recognizable scientific practice and a critical aspect of growing and deepening scholarship in the social sciences (Swedberg, 2012). Theorizing refers to the process of developing a system of interconnected ideas that condense and organize knowledge about the social world, “explaining how some aspect of the social world works and why” (Neuman, 2011, p. 57). The process of developing a system of interconnected ideas about how human occupation “is shaped, embedded and negotiated within, as well as how it contributes to the shaping of, social systems and structures” (Laliberte Rudman, 2010, p. 55) is an important exercise for occupational scientists. How else could we advance occupational science as a recognizable body of knowledge, or develop, deepen and extend understandings of human occupation in order to communicate effectively with one another, and develop or critique empirical evidence?

Central to theory are constructs or concepts. While these abstractions are often used interchangeably some authors draw a clear distinction, suggesting that concepts are phenomena with specific definitions that are broadly agreed upon while constructs are more complex phenomena, with multiple dimensions and thus possibly contested. Others, however, do not make this distinction. For instance, Neuman (2011) suggested that concepts differ in terms of level of abstraction and whether they operate singularly or in clusters, are simple or complex, and narrow or broad in scope. Thus Neuman’s definition of abstract concepts corresponds with the definition of a construct, referring to aspects of the world that are not directly observable but can help people organize their thoughts and expand understandings. In this paper, I approach both concepts and constructs as synonymous, using the terms interchangeably.

Concepts in social science emerge in a variety of ways. Some originate from classical theory, while others come out of deep contemplation and reflection, or after examining and synthesizing research findings (Neuman, 2011; Swedberg, 2012). Constructs in occupational science have tended to originate from the latter. The power available to the theorist in shaping knowledge by proposing new constructs, however, needs careful examination and interrogation. Theorizing in occupational science, as in many social science disciplines or humanities, involves reconstructing people’s stories and languaging their lived
experience. Many authors have pointed to the skewed ontological positions of theorists in occupational therapy and occupational science in terms of gender, socio-cultural and socio-economic factors, whereby Western, Caucasian, female, middle-class, heterosexual and ableist constructions of meaningful occupation are favoured (Hammell, 2009; Hocking, 2012; Iwama, 2003; Kantartzis & Molineux, 2011; Kronenberg, Algado, & Pollard, 2005). For this reason, Hammell (2011) warned of the potential danger of universalism and theoretical imperialism, arguing that theories from a diversity of cultural perspectives are likely to promote inclusivity and a richer understanding of occupation.

**Genesis of the Construct and Definition**

In writing about a construct emerging from research on people who may be viewed as vulnerable, by virtue of their relative distance from the intellectual exercise of theorizing that does not involve them directly yet pertains to their everyday lives, it is imperative that I disclose some aspects of my socio-cultural positioning in relation to them. Occupational consciousness is a construct with potential and particular relevance in occupational science that emerged from my doctoral work. The study explored intergenerational shifts and continuities in children's play within family, and investigated associated factors (Ramugondo, 2012). The family I researched is black South African, representing a statistically dominant group in the country in terms of race and political affiliation to the ruling elite, but largely marginalized in terms of economic participation and growth (Van der Westhuizen, 2007). I share both racial and ethnic identities with this family, to whom I will refer as the Gudani family.

Having grown up during apartheid South Africa, I am a first generation university graduate in my family, only coming into contact with occupational therapy as a profession during my undergraduate studies. Although both parents within the Gudani family held post-matric qualifications, the family had never been exposed to occupational therapy. My presence within their community as a researcher of play sparked considerable interest, prompting a request for inclusion in the study from one family. The other two families that participated were approached in accordance with inclusion criteria for purposive sampling. Recruitment followed ethical processes as approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Cape Town. Data were collected from all three families, although my doctoral thesis was based on analysis and synthesis of the extensive data gathered from the Gudani family, who were given a copy of the thesis and audio recordings of narratives from the grandmother that captured previously unknown details about her childhood.

The study was partly prompted by anxieties about the apparent decline of play in relation to what adults knew of their own childhood play, that were noted in the post-apartheid era. These anxieties were shared with me by various community leaders during my visits across South Africa covering six provinces (Limpopo, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape, Free State and Gauteng). Observations in my personal and professional life as an occupational therapist echoed these sentiments. Similar anxieties are reflected in literature about British childhood play at the turn of the 20th century (Barnes & Kehily, 2003; Bishop & Curtis, 2001). The study sought to explore whether such anxieties in post-apartheid South Africa could be settled in the same manner as they were in Britain, where researchers concluded that rather than total decline, contemporary British childhood play was in many respects embedded in historical practices (Barnes & Kehily, 2003; Boyes, 1995). Given South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past, as well as large-scale, on-going, and rapid politico-ideological and macro-economic changes, and an accelerated pace of modernization (Boehnke & Bergs-Winkels, 2002; Haste, 2001), a study of change in children’s play within family during early 20th to 21st centuries promised to yield interesting lessons about how play evolves as an occupation, and how individuals across generations within family assert agency in constructing a shared play narrative.
The Gudani family was studied as a case (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Stake, 2008), situated in post-apartheid South Africa and reflective of its historical make-up as well as ongoing transitions. The three generations (grandmother, parents and children) were approached as embedded cases, allowing for historically situated play portraits to emerge for each generation. A focus on play as cultural practice necessitated an ethnographic lens to inform how I interrogated events and narratives about play, especially with regards to third generation. Participant observation became the main data collection method during the 24 days that I visited the family, arriving in the morning and departing after the last child had gone to bed. During this time, audio footage was collected mainly via a listening device which I wore around my neck, capturing all conversations, including television audio output whenever I was in the lounge area. Consistent with a critical paradigm that purports power to be discursive, circulated through dominant ideologies and practices (Frisby, 1972; Habermas, 1984; Marcuse, 1968), I held on very lightly to notions of play as presented in academic text, opting to fore-front what emerged as the family’s own constructions of what counts as play. Useful in this approach was Sutton-Smith’s view of play as elusive, and often framed in literature through theoretical lenses that are already contaminated by what professions and disciplines wish to see in it and use to assert power within the academy (Sutton-Smith, 1997).

What emerged from the study was that while in this particular family play had retained elements found in its institutionalized forms, such as games – albeit less prominent in the third generation – unstructured play had become complicated, reflecting the complexification of the play narrative (Ramugondo, 2012). This complication came as a result of western-led social change characterized by modernization, global awareness and consumerism, and accelerated by technology in the form of television and cell-phones. Interestingly, even as adults in the family bemoaned the seemingly “lost” third generation, signaling the fading away of real play as a form of cultural loss, their role in this process was missing in the narratives. Even as the television set went on when the first person got up in the morning and got switched off only when the last person went to bed, no mention was made of how this could compete with formalized or structured games, or influenced unstructured play. Television, particularly local and American soap operas such as Days of our Lives and The Young and the Restless, not only determined time use and the patterning of occupations in and outside of family life, but also inserted itself into unstructured play and everyday conversation.

The apparent lack of awareness about the role of television in what became of play within the third generation, and the accompanying anxiety about the loss of collectively shared notions of “real” play, led to the emergence of occupational consciousness as a construct with potential relevance in occupational science. The construct requires further conceptualization and clarity about its theoretical underpinnings. This is especially so since it shares both converging and diverging points – in how it has been used, or with other related concepts – in other disciplines.

**Underpinning Theoretical and Philosophical Foundations**

Potential convergence exists between occupational consciousness and other sociological concepts associated with social inequity and systems of stratification, particularly those grounded on Marxian and Weberian thought, such as class and status consciousness; “the subjective awareness of class or status location and the implications of such awareness for social action” (Laumann & Senter, 1976, p. 1307). It is not so much in the notion of class or status location – the conception of which has been problematized in sociology (Marshall, 1997; Wright, 1979) – that potential synergy lies, but the formulation of consciousness as an emotional and psychic response to social stratification; always in interaction with the makings and consequences of such stratification (Reay, 2005). This sociological perspective on consciousness has permeated much of post-colonial theory, and provides a central theoretical grounding for
how I continue to conceptualize occupational consciousness.

Social scientists have long concerned themselves with how social stratification positions unequal groups in characteristic patterns of social relationships, but without much theoretical development to explain the link and the nature of such relationships (Laumann & Senter, 1976; Nash, 2008; Reay, 2005). In dealing with oppression and casting a critical theoretical lens to “intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic ‘normality’ to the uneven development and the differential” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 171), post-colonial theorists have provided important insights in the quest to understand these dynamics. Fanon and Biko in particular, emerging from a liberation thought on colonialism and black domination, have been able to illustrate how often times both the oppressed and the oppressors reinforce oppressive systems. This perspective echoes a view expressed by Paulo Freire with reference to the social and political landscape in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s where he observed that:

both the metropolitan society and the dependent society, totalities in themselves, are part of a greater whole, the economic, historical, cultural, and political context in which their mutual relationships evolve… the dependent society is by definition a silent society. Its voice is not an authentic voice, but merely an echo of the voice of the metropolis – in every way, the metropolis speaks, the dependent listens. (Freire, 1998, pp. 503-504)

Fanon (1952/1967), through his treatment of the notion of internalization, contended that the success of colonialism throughout the African continent could not depend solely on the might of colonial states, but also implicit consent of the oppressed. It is in this tacit but unwitting consent that I saw parallels between how oppression can be enacted and sustained, and how the Gudani family could be displaced from the central role of orchestrating its own play narrative across generations. Like colonialism, this shift in control for the occupational trajectory of children’s play for the family did not happen overnight. Occupational consciousness is thus concerned with how the things people do every day, individually and collectively, sustain systems and structures that support and promote certain occupations or certain ways of doing, to the exclusion of others. It is also about uncovering the trappings of human occupation that perpetuate these systems and structures. Occupational consciousness, however, is not about framing the oppressed as “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel, 1967) or as perpetually unaware and incapable of resisting dominance. To the contrary, the term unearths and gives language to acts of resistance that may already be in existence in certain communities that have and continue to face marginalisation and oppression, but have not yet been theoretically explored in occupational science.

Both Fanon and Biko centered their philosophy of liberation on the notion of consciousness. Freire (1998) also wrote extensively about the necessity for conscientization in order to break the ‘culture of silence’ in the dependent society. He noted, however, that even as there may be similarities in how the path to liberation may be advanced in both Latin America and other areas of the Third World, each context will present particular nuances. Consistent with sociological formulations that view it as a response to social stratification (Reay, 2005), consciousness is also referred to as a mental attitude in continuous interaction with oppressive systems (Biko, 1978; Fanon, 1961/1963) and a commitment to fight all forces that seek to use identity as a stamp that marks out subservience (Biko, 1978). It is a response that requires that one acknowledges that one is indeed oppressed “because it is from the ‘Other’ and her Exteriority that the new truth-claims spring forth and demand explanation” (Dussel, 2011, p. 21).

Freire (1998) also stressed the need for the oppressed to acknowledge this reality, as a first critical step to self-liberation. This stance begins to deal with what social scientists had long evaded – a theoretical analysis of the patterns of
social relationships between unequal groups – albeit from the position of those that admit to suffer the consequences of such social stratification. While Biko and Fanon’s analyses came from liberation thought regarding colonialism and black domination, there are interesting parallels between what can be understood of this analysis and relational patterns between groups with unequal access to meaningful and dignified occupation, and the manner in which systems and structures that sustain such stratification are maintained.

Biko and Fanon consistently argued that the instrumental mode of division is central to the colonial project, with regions within colonies differently marked for privilege across history (Fanon, 1961/1963). Biko (1978) observed how in Apartheid South Africa, racial difference was used to stratify people with regards to privilege and resources. Lighter skinned black people could climb the social strata and earn more privileges by successfully proving to the authorities that they were of a different race. Biko (1978) saw this as a deliberate design by the system to not only stratify people socially, but also in terms of their aspirations. Stratified this way, it becomes not only logical but legitimate for people in different social strata to view their positions as deserved. Those with sustained privileges and accumulated resources would then fight hard to retain access, while those with less may resign themselves to the limits prescribed for them. The consequences of division within a colonial project – for those at the lower end of privilege – is that they not only end with feeling separate from the privileged other, but also reduced. For those that benefit from oppressive systems, the oppressed other and his or her ways would need to change substantially, in order to enjoy the same entitlements.

Consciousness, for Biko, therefore begins with a realization that regardless of our positions across social strata, we are all oppressed, and the fact that people are oppressed to varying degrees is a deliberate design of the system. This deliberate-ness renders individuals and groups within an unequal system able to participate in their own and each other’s oppression. It was for this reason that Biko saw a strong interrelationship between a consciousness of the self and the emancipatory project. This realization led to one of the famous quotes Biko is known by: “The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed” (Biko, 1978, pp. 101-102). Although it begins with the individual, consciousness cannot end there. It serves to disrupt the cycle through which subjectivities developed through oppressive systems and othering are sustained.

While Biko wrote about oppression with a focus on race, blackness and whiteness, Fanon signaled very clearly that a central issue of liberation philosophy is not so much the color of one’s skin, but how power is used by those with means within an unequal society and the reasons that underlie their continuous hold on power. Fanon’s analysis of these issues, however, aligns very closely with Biko’s central arguments about what sustains oppressive systems; the legitimization of ongoing access to privilege for those with relative power, and the reduction of the other to a lesser being who can graduate to a place of significance only through the denial of self and concomitant emulation of the elite.

With reference to the pitfalls of national consciousness amongst the middle-class and political elite at the end of colonial regimes across African and Latin-American States, Fanon (1961/1963) found that the newly developed “native bourgeoisie” often failed to govern with attention to new social relations that needed to be understood and developed in the interest of the whole nation. In their haste to replace “the foreigner” and to fit the cosmopolitan mold, they paid little attention to the problems faced by peoples of the new nation from the perspectives of all who make up that nation. This, Fanon termed intellectual laziness, which serves to engrat social relations between unequal groups along the lines already laid down by colonialism. Nationalization, in this narrow sense, “has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which
today puts on the masque of neo-colonialism” (Fanon, 1961/1963, p. 122). This, for those who have suggested that post-colonial Africa is a myth (Aidoo, 1991; Grosfoguel, 2011), is referred to as coloniality, and defined by Maldonado-Torres (2007) thus:

Long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day. (p. 243)

Consciousness, as understood by Biko (1978) and Fanon (1961/1963), can thus be seen as a mental attitude and commitment to resist coloniality; patterns of power that define and sustain dominant cultural practices and patterns and in so doing reproduce unequal intersubjective relations. It requires particular attention to mechanisms that serve to divide people, denying those in the periphery their voice, or the ability to tell stories that matter to them. It is recognition that to accede to these mechanisms is to deny humanity a chance at collective self-understanding.

Intersections between consciousness and occupation hold potential for theorizing about human occupation within occupational science as a discipline, perhaps even introducing the philosophy of liberation (Dussel, 1995, 2000, 2011; Fanon, 1961/1963) into the discipline. The philosophy of liberation has been best articulated by Dussel — renowned as its co-founder amongst a group of Argentinean philosophers who emerged in the 1960s during military dictatorship (Burton & Osorio, 2011; Dussel, 2011; Mahvish, 2013) — to refer to an explanation of oppression and a critique of dominant accepted truths about the status quo, from the viewpoint of alterity; the perspective of the oppressed other (Dussel, 2011). Human occupation may very well be central to oppression and coloniality, in that doing is the most visible enactment of unequal intersubjective relations. Consistent with a transactional view of occupation (Dickie, Cutchin, & Humphry, 2006), what people do every day sustains discourses that produce and maintain “truths” about self or selves and others. Similarly, Ramugondo and Kronenberg (2015) have argued that human beings in fact are occupied, not only in terms of using their time, energy and personal resources, but also in that they are jointly culpable for what becomes of themselves and others, through their action in and on the world. In drawing links between human occupation and consciousness as understood from Fanon and Biko, and grounded within the philosophy of liberation, I highlight the need for a wakefulness or alertness about how the things that human beings do every day intersect with inequality and oppression.

Synergies with Other Related Constructs

The generation of constructs within occupational science in recent years has been celebrated by many, viewed as critical to advancing theory related to occupation and its situatedness. Some of these constructs can form interconnected groups, which I refer to here as construct clusters, borrowing from Neuman’s (2011) description of concept clusters; a collection of “associated concepts that are consistent and mutually reinforcing” (p. 65). Occupational consciousness, as a construct, enjoys synergy with a number of constructs introduced to occupational science during the past decade, as well as occupational therapy discourse. This paper serves to highlight some of the conceptual links between occupational consciousness and these other constructs as an introduction to what I hope will be an “ongoing occupational terminology interactive dialogue” (Laliberte Rudman, 2010, p. 55).

There may also be other constructs or concepts I have not identified, that fall within the same cluster of construct for theorizing purposes. In
outlining some of the conceptual links between occupational consciousness and the four constructs I identify here, I am hoping to illuminate some potential for occupational science terminology to interact in ways that advance theorizing about human occupation. The four constructs I begin to draw from in this occupational terminology interactive dialogue are occupational possibilities, occupational choice, occupational apartheid, and collective occupation.

Laliberte Rudman (2010), having analyzed discourses pertaining to aging and occupations that become constructed as ideal or non-ideal, introduced occupational possibilities as a construct in occupational science. Drawing from a Foucauldian concept, governmentality, she was able to demonstrate how transactions between socially contextualized structure and agency shape occupation at individual and collective levels, arguing that this is the mechanism through which occupational possibilities are differently shaped for different categories of persons or social groups. Laliberte Rudman (2010) further proposed that a generative way to advance understanding of the interplay between structure and agency in the negotiation and enactment of occupation was not only understanding how occupational possibilities come about within context, but also how they are taken up and at times resisted by individuals and collectives. Occupational consciousness links very strongly with the latter part of this proposition, highlighting that it is through everyday doing at individual and collective levels that systems and structures that support and promote certain occupations to the exclusion of others, are sustained. This point was also made by Angell (2014), who argued that human occupation could “be a site of both resistance to and reproduction of the social order” (p. 104).

Occupational consciousness, as an occupational science construct, underscores this resistance, suggesting that some level of alertness to how everyday doing intersects with oppression is necessary at individual and collective levels in order to disrupt the cycle through which subjectivities developed through governmentality are sustained. Where occupational possibilities frame occupation “as an essential object and target of contemporary technologies of government” (Laliberte Rudman, 2010, p. 58), occupational consciousness frames human occupation as a possible response. This response is essential for dignified living, especially for those who are oppressed by circulating dominant discourses. As Laliberte Rudman (2010) argued, the circulation of discourses appears “to be based on a ‘true’ understanding of what is to be governed… with some authorities and agents having more power to influence how discourses are shaped and what discourses come to be most pervasive” (p. 56). Occupational consciousness is concerned with how human occupation sustains discourses that produce and sustain these truths in relation to self as the oppressed other.

Advancing the notion that dominant discourses may be sustained by individual and collective action in the world, Galvaan (2012, 2015) introduced the construct of occupational choice. She argued that rather than just a conscious act to assert individual agency onto the world, making choices about what to do or not to do was a transactional act between person and context; a mechanism through which “agents and structures define and reproduce each other” (2012, p. 160). Drawing from Bourdieu’s critique of rational choice theory and insight about the relationship between structure and agency in shaping social action, Galvaan (2012) noted that the occupational choices of adolescents in a Western Cape community of South Africa “were contingent upon, and consistent with, those historic socio-economic and politically asserted patterns of occupational engagement that have developed and been perpetuated in Lavender Hill since apartheid” (p. 154).

This patterning occurred even as both the adolescents and adults at times explicitly disapproved of some of these occupations that were historically predicated and a form of occupational injustice, for example dropping out of school or abusing alcohol (Galvaan, 2012). This restricted mindset in relation to making occupational
choices intersects well with the notion of occupational consciousness. Both constructs point to a form of individual and collective culpability to the circulation of dominant discourses, borne by those who are oppressed but cultivated and maintained by oppressive systems that privilege certain subjectivities over others.

However, culpability for ongoing oppression and dominance is not only reserved for those that are forced to bear it by virtue of having limited access to structural power. Drawing from Aristotellian and Orwellian perspectives, Kronenbeg and Pollard (2005) introduced the notion of occupational apartheid, arguing that unequal power relations and consequent access or lack thereof to meaningful and dignified occupation results from a reluctance on the part of privileged sectors of society to confront injustice, because “the world's economies have been benefitting from it [emphasis added] materially and in terms of local political and social stability” (p. 66). The authors’ use of a contentious term “apartheid” is deliberate, aiming to excavate the “systematic segregation of occupational opportunity” (Kronenberg & Pollard, 2005, p. 59), which advances access to power for some but not all people.

Unlike occupational choice and occupational consciousness, which are constructs that illuminate individual and collective culpability for perpetuating dominant practices and discourses on the part of the oppressed, occupational apartheid exposes individual and collective culpability and complacency on the side of those who benefit from oppressive systems. While both occupational apartheid and occupational consciousness focus on the fact that some agents have more power than others to influence which discourses become pervasive through human occupation, both constructs also bring to light the relational mechanisms and dynamics between unequal agents. Occupational apartheid exposes the illusion held by those privileged by dominant structures that the oppressed other has no capacity to realize power, while occupational consciousness points to the response always available to the oppressed to disrupt occupational apartheid, through everyday doing.

Humans’ individual-collective culpability and complacency regarding occupations that perpetuate oppressive systems or disrupt dominant practices that marginalize, is articulated in Ramugondo and Kronenberg’s (2015) definition of collective occupations, a construct introduced to occupational science by Fogelberg and Frauwirth (2010). In their definition, Ramugondo and Kronenberg suggested collective occupations to be those “that are engaged in by individuals, groups, communities and/or societies in everyday contexts” that “may reflect an intention towards social cohesion or dysfunction, and/or advancement of or aversion to a common good” (p. 10). The authors further asserted that “these collective occupations may have consequences that benefit some populations and not others” (p. 10). They grounded this teleological or explanatory approach to collective occupation on the notion of ubuntu; an African interactive ethic defined by Cornell and Van Marle (2005) as referring to human interconnectedness, or how peoples’ humanity is constantly shaped in interaction with each other, assigning responsibility to both the individual and the community for the other’s existence.

Through this perspective, Ramugondo and Kronenberg (2015) argued that peoples’ shared humanity is “constantly being shaped by what we are able or unable to do within groups, communities, and society” (p. 12). In a similar vein, Laliberte Rudman (2010) suggested that occupational possibilities could provide a lens to critically appraise the ways and ends to which occupation is being promoted. Ramugondo and Kronenberg proposed that in paying attention to the “intentional stance” of individual and collective occupation, humans as agents within society “may be persuaded to ask of themselves: Whom do my or our occupations serve?” (p. 6).

It is the intentionality within collective occupation (Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2015) that intersects with occupational consciousness. In raising consciousness about collective occupations, individuals,
families, groups and whole communities begin to elevate the work required to build just societies from mere rhetoric, to paying attention to the ways in which human occupation contributes to or detracts from building such societies. Occupational consciousness, however, focuses on those who exist on the margins of unjust societies and calls attention to how, in their respective spaces of occupational influence, individuals can disrupt societal dynamics that perpetuate unjust worlds.

In paying attention to only four constructs that share conceptual synergies with occupational consciousness, my intention is not to exclude other constructs or concepts that may also share links with these constructs individually, or as another separate construct cluster. The four constructs, along with occupational consciousness, are outlined here because they begin to illuminate the politics of human occupation (Frank, 1996; Kronenberg & Pollard, 2005; Laliberte Rudman, 2013).

**Occupational Consciousness: A Critical Notion about Everyday Doing and Living**

Attention to the politics of human occupation cannot be separate from the philosophy of liberation, and without regard to how coloniality (Aidoo, 1991; Grosfoguel, 2011; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) impacts those on the margins of the globalized world. As Dussel (2013) argued, it is on the basis of a philosophy of liberation as logic, politics, ethics and interrogating the status quo, that those on the periphery of the dominant world can have a dialogue with modernity and begin to rethink their problems. Rather than grand ideals for a global revolution, a simple attempt by those on the periphery towards dignified living is central to this undertaking; the possibility of authoring the production, reproduction and development of lives in the material, social and cultural sense (Burton & Osorio, 2011; Dussel, 2011). In occupational science terms, this refers to those excluded from driving global occupational possibilities (Laliberte Rudman, 2010), being able, at times, to resist dominant discourses in order to orchestrate their own occupational narratives (Goldstein, Kielhofner, & Paul-Ward, 2004) in accordance with what informs meaningful and dignified living. This resistance requires alertness to how human occupation intersects with dominance and perpetuates inequality and oppression, what I refer to as occupational consciousness. In this sense, occupational consciousness illuminates the critical perspective of the oppressed other.

Occupational consciousness is thus about adopting transgressive acts to disrupt the cycle of oppression through human occupation. In introducing this construct in occupational science as part of a philosophy of liberation, I contend that everyday doing – while the most difficult thing to change at individual or collective levels – is probably the most powerful mechanism through which to resist dominant discourses and practices. This point was made explicit at the two most recent congresses hosted by the Occupational Therapy Africa Regional Group (OTARG) in Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Having introduced occupational consciousness as an emerging occupational science construct at the Zambian OTARG Congress in 2011, I was approached by one of the Zambian delegates. She remarked that what I presented appeared as if I had “peeped into” Zambian homes. I asked her to explain, and she replied that it is because she knew many families in Zambia, including her own, where the television set was on during all hours of the day, without much interrogation about why this is so, and with little reflection about what unrestricted television viewing might lead to in the future with regards to local cultural practices, as well as health and well-being.

At the OTARG Congress in Zimbabwe in 2013, I had the privilege of co-facilitating a workshop with my colleague, Roshan Galvaan, titled “Occupational Choice and Occupational Consciousness: An African Dialogue”. During discussions, one of the participants remarked that she was not too sure whether she liked the construct occupational consciousness or not, indicating that it is somewhat burdensome. She added however, that she could see how once communities have had their consciousness raised about their everyday
occupations, they would conduct their own advocacy on any issue of injustice.

I found that these insights, from delegates at two separate congresses on the African continent, illuminated occupational consciousness as a critical notion and a potentially liberating response to oppressive social structures. Just like the dominant discourses within which they are socio-culturally embedded, patterned occupational engagements are difficult to break owing to their normalizing effect. Unrestricted television watching, for example, regardless of its adverse long-term consequences within families and potentially whole communities, becomes pervasive within particular contexts because this is what everyone does. It also fits in very well within an ongoing colonial project posing as modernity, where the oppressed other, having been sufficiently reduced, must change himself or herself substantially by emulating the dominant other in order to rise to a place of significance. Occupational consciousness, as a critical tool for self-advocacy, calls for individuals within families and communities on the margins of dominant worlds to pay attention to their occupational influence; how their everyday doing can begin to disrupt societal dynamics of dominance. The term also alerts occupational scientists to pay attention to acts of resistance in everyday occupations as lived by communities on the margins of society.

Conclusions and Future Possibilities

In this paper, building on a previous article which introduced the construct (Ramugondo, 2012), I have argued that occupational consciousness is a response that is always available to individuals and collectives on the periphery of dominant worlds to disrupt the cycle of oppression and inequality through everyday doing; a form of resistance, and thus a potentially liberating transgressive act. I have made my argument by bringing together human occupation and consciousness, as understood by Fanon (1961/1963) and Biko (1978) to mean a mental attitude and commitment to resist coloniality. In doing this, I have introduced the philosophy of liberation (Dussel, 1995, 2000, 2011) into theorizing about human occupation, illuminating the critical perspective of the oppressed. The philosophy of liberation may enable the political and economic analysis Frank (1996) called for as part of defining occupations, and understanding “meaningful everyday activity (as) political” (p. 56).

Unwitting consent on the part of the oppressed is central to the ways global dominant cultural practices assert and embed themselves within local contexts, evident in how intergenerational play within a South African context was marked by one family assuming a marginal role in orchestrating its own play narrative. Such mechanisms, which rely on continuing unequal intersubjective relations and thus perpetuate coloniality, could be at play across various forms of human occupation. I hope this paper will serve as an invitation to scholars to take up post-colonial theory, coloniality and liberation philosophy to further explore ways in which human occupation is implicated. This could expand inter or transdisciplinary work within occupational science for critical conceptualizations of human occupation.

By beginning to draw conceptual links between occupational consciousness and other related constructs that also focus on the politics of human occupation, this paper promotes an ongoing occupational terminology interactive dialogue, and advances theorizing as a scholarly practice within occupational science. It is hoped that further work will outline the complex nature of relationships between the cluster of concepts identified in this paper and relevant others, to offer possible fuller explanations of why people engage in occupations that promote oppression and inequality across contexts.

In addition, further reflection on occupational consciousness may be advanced by addressing research questions such as: (a) are there specific indicators for or expressions of occupational consciousness within individuals and collectives? (b) in what ways do individuals and communities articulate acts of resistance in everyday
occupation as expressed in different languages and lived within local contexts? (c) is occupational consciousness a transferrable disposition across occupations and contexts, and how does it relate to different subjectivities? (d) how does occupational consciousness intersect with an occupational justice approach? (e) what mechanisms and practices are available and effective in raising occupational consciousness? (f) what intersections lie between social justice and occupational consciousness in individuals within communities, and across institutional levels within corporates and the state? These questions, especially when those on the margins are involved as co-researchers, would further illuminate everyday doing as a powerful liberating and transgressive act, to resist dominant discourses and practices that deny dignified living for all. The last question, in particular, underscores the fact that raising consciousness in the oppressed is not enough in and of itself and may in fact bear the neo-liberal danger of “responsibilizing” the oppressed to overcome their oppression. The question highlights instead intersections between occupational consciousness and institutional power as worthy of further exploration.

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