

Unfolding Occupation Over Time: A Longitudinal Phenomenology of Exercise in Retirement

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Rationale for study and design

Retirement as
existential
transition

Loss of identity,
routine and
belonging

Exercise commonly
framed as
behaviour rather
than occupation

Need for
phenomenological
occupation-
centred evidence

***“It made a huge
difference, it’s like a
bereavement, because
you lose your friends.”
(1PM1J)***

Philosophical Foundations

Interpretivist paradigm

Heideggerian hermeneutics

(Heidegger, 1927/1962)

Occupational Science: Doing, being, becoming,
belonging (Wilcock, 1998; Wilcock & Hocking, 2015)

Integrated lens reveals *how* meaning is
lived, not just *what* people do

**Being-in-the-world as
an Occupational
Question**

Methodological Design

Following Lives in Motion: A Longitudinal Hermeneutic Approach

Four interviews
per participant

26-to-29-months
of engagement

Vignettes to
preserve
existential
nuance

Temporal
unfolding of
meaning

Longitudinal
design reveals
trajectories, not
snapshots

***“Looking back, I don’t
know how I had time to do
everything... I’ve never
missed working.” (5PF3M)***

Analytic Innovation

Integrating Heidegger, Occupational Science, and Thematic Analysis for interpretive depth

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Thematic analysis adapted hermeneutically

Interpretive movement, not descriptive coding

Hermeneutic circle operationalised

Occupational Science Lens

Occupational Science lens: sensitising concepts

Attention to existential and occupational structures of experience

“I was very good at giving advice to others about activity... but not doing it myself.” (7PF19E)

Theme 1

‘Retirement as an Existential Threshold’

Dislocation
and loss of
identity

Exercise as a
stabilising
occupation

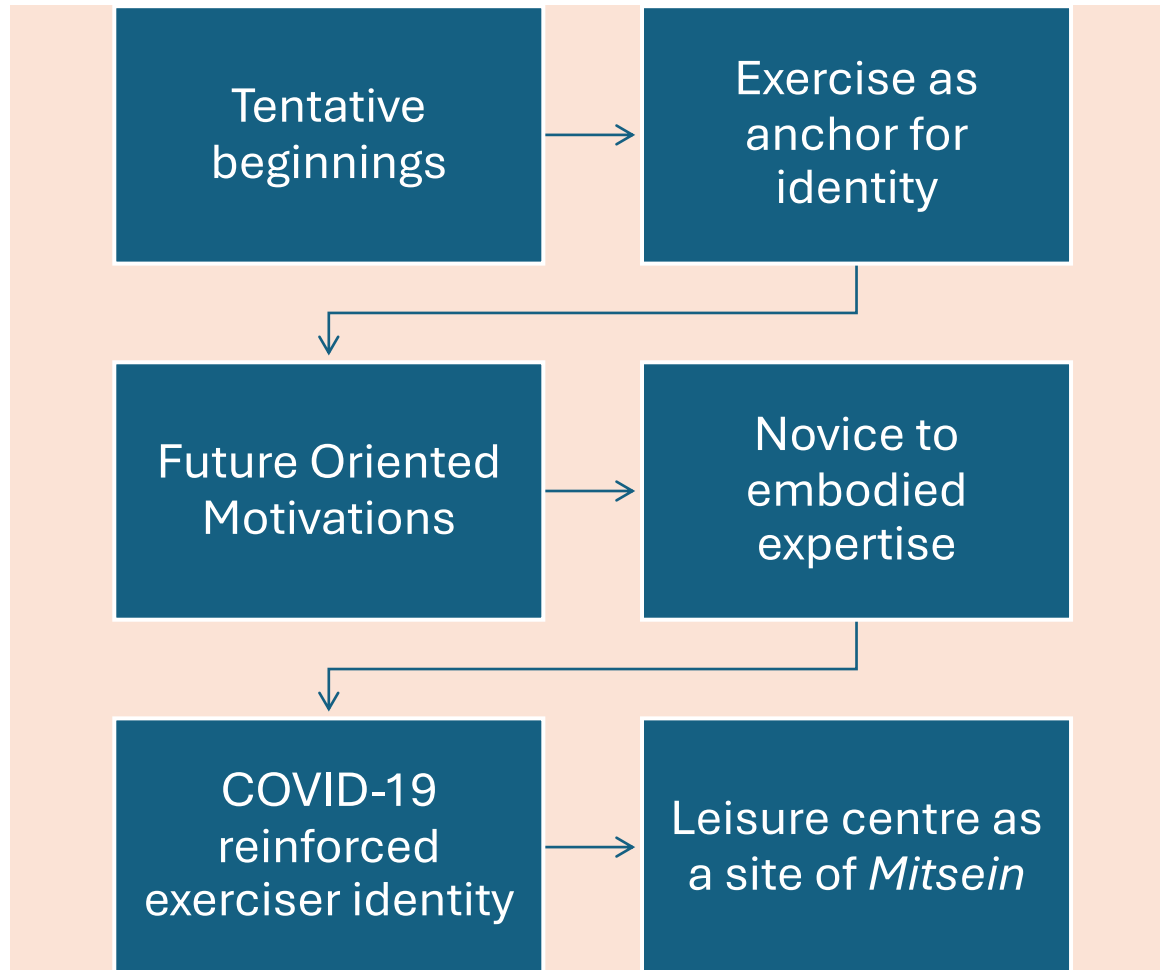
Autonomy
shapes the
emotional
tone

Threshold
that sets the
conditions
for
becoming

***“I retired at 65... which was my choice... I felt a loss, yes. I was dreading it in a sense even though I had decided to go.”
(14PF11J)***

Theme 2

‘Becoming a Retired Exerciser: Trajectories of Transformation’



“At first I felt awkward... a bit lost... but I kept going.” (PF11J)

“If I didn’t do exercise, I don’t know what I would do.” (PF10M)

“I wanted to retire while I was still young enough to enjoy life... you might not be fit enough later; you might just drop dead.” (PF10M)

“Pilates works on your balance... it’s important as you get older so that doesn’t happen.” (PF11J)

Theme 3

‘Meaning, Wellbeing, and Occupational Harmony’

Exercise as health-promoting occupation

Embodiment and emotional regulation

Inspiration from others and aspirational ageing

Intertwining doing-being-becoming

Curating occupational harmony

***“It feels good to go... it clears your head... it makes you feel better.”
(PF10M)***

***“Doing different things is good... sometimes you really ache the day after... but it makes you feel alive.”
(PF11J)***

“Seeing others older than me still going strong... it makes you think, I want to be like that.” (PF12S)

Theme 4

‘Belonging and Occupational Spaces’



Social Presence and
shared routines



Leisure centre as
infrastructure of belonging



Identity continuity and
social identity gain

**“We just really have a good laugh... I don’t remember the last time we had a good laugh at home.”
(10PF14S)**

“It’s taken over from my workplace.” (PF11J)

Implications

‘Occupation as a Public Health Strategy’

Retirement as occupational possibility

Leisure centres as infrastructures of belonging

OT leadership in lifespan health promotion

Occupation-centred, justice-oriented approaches

Longitudinal approach reveals *how* health-promoting occupations are lived

Conceptual contribution

‘Re-Authoring Identity through Occupation’

Integration of
Heidegger and
Occupational
Science

Themes as
existential-
occupational
transformations

Retirement as
generative
becoming

Identity
reconstructed
through
meaningful
occupation

“I knew I couldn’t just sit at home.” (14PF11J)

The Transformative Arc: From Loss to belonging

“It’s like a bereavement... because you lose your friends.”

Loss

“I enjoy the classes as they challenge your memory... the gym is more challenging as it requires more discipline... Pilates works on your balance which is important as you get older.”

Doing

“I go to the centre every weekday and do something... Routine is important for me. I make a day of it.”

Being

“At first I felt awkward... a bit lost... but I kept going.”

Becoming

“We just really have a good laugh... I don’t remember the last time we had a good laugh at home.”

Belonging

Conclusion

‘Retirement as Beginning: Occupation as Transformation’

Exercise became the occupation through which retirement turned from loss into possibility; restoring rhythm, meaning, and a place to belong.

Understanding *how* people engage in exercise as a health promoting occupation, not simply *whether* they do is key to facilitating infrastructures that support flourishing.

To build a healthier nation, public health must begin with the occupations that make life meaningful.



Thankyou
for Listening

Any Questions?

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