

2022-08-18

The meaning and process of becoming a martial artist: interpretative phenomenological analysis

Surtees, E

<https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/handle/10026.1/21639>

All content in PEARL is protected by copyright law. Author manuscripts are made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the details provided on the item record or document. In the absence of an open licence (e.g. Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher or author.

INTRODUCTION

Martial arts

- Martial arts are traditional forms of fighting that originate from East Asia, and typically have their own rich history and culture underpinned by philosophical beliefs connected to wellness (Fuller & Lloyd, 2020).
- Research has begun to examine the benefits of practising different types of martial arts for health and wellbeing, including areas such as confidence, posture, flexibility and stress (Fuller & Lloyd, 2020)
- Examining Eastern philosophies and occupations has the potential to uncover the meanings of a person's identity as an occupational being and their sense of connectedness with the world (Hitch et al., 2014).

An occupational science perspective

- As an aspect of occupation alongside *doing*, *being* and *belonging*, **becoming** is the process of change driven by evolving goals that inspire occupational engagement (Wilcock, 2006).
- It is important to consider all four elements for holistic practice in occupational therapy (Hitch et al., 2014).
- More research has explored *doing* and *being*, which has contributed to a lack of understanding of **becoming** (Hitch et al., 2014).
- A meta-synthesis revealed that engagement in meaningful occupations that promote restorative feelings can enhance happiness, health, and wellbeing; **Becoming** was linked to personal and social identity through a sense of uniqueness and continuity of self (Roberts & Bannigan, 2018).



Figure 1. Image of two martial artists in a training sequence (©Canva Free Stock Media).

PURPOSE

AIM: Advance an understanding of the meaning and process of becoming a martial artist.

RATIONALE – bridging the gap in the literature

- Development of knowledge and understanding of the occupational science concept of **becoming**.
- Contribute to the evidence-base for understanding the potential therapeutic benefits of martial arts.

METHODS

- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009) was used to acquire in-depth understandings of how individuals interpret their experience of martial arts.
- Purpose sampling ensured participants had sufficient breadth of experience.
- Inclusions criteria: Individuals aged over 18 living in the Southwest of England with experience practicing martial arts for over one year and who practises at a martial art club at least one per week.
- Three semi-structured individual interviews of 10 open-ended questions were undertaken using video conferencing software, before being transcribed verbatim and anonymised.
- The data analysis revealed super-ordinate themes and master themes using the five stages of analysis, considering the content of speech, language and underlying context (Smith et al., 2009).

Table 1. Participant demographics (pseudonym names).

Molly: 47-year-old female who has been practicing Karate for 36 years.	Daniel: 48-year-old male who has been practicing Tai Chi for 28 years.	Annabel: 62-year-old female who has been practicing Taekwondo for 15 years.
---	---	--

RESULTS

Theme 1: Unique practice

"... when it flows, and it just flows and you just feel into that flow of the moment of just moving, it's really enjoyable." [Daniel]

"I quite often described karate as being like a Rubik's Cube or Origami. You can twist it, you can fold it, you can turn it inside out ... and you can find in there all manner of magical things ... it can be whatever you want it to be." [Molly]

"got rid of the anxieties of work, and was able to punch out, get rid of any frustrations" [Annabel]

Theme 2: Martial arts as a continued occupation

"... there's always more to learn, there's always more to work on and improve" [Daniel]

"I feel as I get older, my balance is going to be reduced and if I stop, uh, then that won't help me." [Annabel]

"... as you get older, you're obviously not as able as you were. Um, but you try and maintain that in order to be able to demonstrate that to others, that you're worthy to be stood in front of them." [Molly]

"... it does change how you view yourself because, that confidence in being able to know how you can cope in situations." [Daniel]

Theme 3: Meaningful social environment

"Karate circle" [Molly]

"become very much a family" [Annabel]

"...it's difficult in many ways, because, you know, particularly the more martial aspects, is very difficult without the physical contact" [Daniel]

"... martial arts isn't a lonely, in our area, isn't a lonely thing to do ... it's not just doing things better than somebody else ... If without that person doing it better, you wouldn't have something to challenge you." [Annabel]

Figure 2. Selection of quotes within the three master themes.

DISCUSSION

Becoming a martial artist was associated with meaningful changes that allow one to adopt and express a unique identity and foster a collective sense of wellbeing.

- **Occupational roles, values & routines** – a sense of identity was influenced by changes in occupational roles e.g. becoming a martial arts teacher changed their focus to the development of others.
- **Self-efficacy & confidence** – positive development in self-efficacy over time e.g. success in competitions and reaching goals helped foster a collective sense of achievement.
- **Belonging** – sense of connectedness attributed to belonging to a martial arts community e.g. contributing to the success of others.
- **Creativity** – engaging in martial arts facilitated creative ways of self-expression unique to the person experiencing it.
- **Ownership of occupation** – developed sense of autonomy by creating a unique practice e.g. adapting training or the environment to be accessible to everyone regardless of age or health condition.

Health & wellbeing

- Improvements in flexibility, strength, balance and co-ordination
- Maintaining physical health and lessening ageing
- Providing an outlet for emotions and a sense of escapism
- Experiencing 'flow' over time as a meaningful outcome of training




CONCLUSION

- This research contributes to developing an understanding of **becoming** through the meanings of becoming engaged in martial arts as an occupation.
- Occupational therapists may use this information to support individuals and communities to become engaged in martial arts for health and wellbeing.

References

- Fuller, C., & Lloyd, V. (2020). *Martial arts and well-being: Connecting communities and promoting health*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Hitch, D., Pépin, G., & Stagnitti, K. (2014). In the footsteps of Wilcock, part two: The interdependent nature of doing, being, becoming, and belonging. *Occupational Therapy in Health Care*, 28(3), 247-263.
- Roberts, A. E., & Bannigan, K. (2018). Dimensions of personal meaning from engagement in occupations: A metasynthesis. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 85(5), 386-396.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, method and research*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Wilcock, A. A. (2006). *An occupational perspective of health*. Thorofare, NJ: SLACK Incorporated.

Contact Details

-  ellie.surtees@hotmail.co.uk
-  @EllieSurtees_OT
-  www.linkedin.com/in/eleanor-surtees

Acknowledgements

Permission was granted by each organisation for the inclusion of logos within this poster.

Affiliation: University of Plymouth

Funding: Livewell Southwest
Elizabeth Casson Trust