

Older Women, Exercise to Music, and Yoga: Senses of Pleasure?

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This paper examines the lived experience of older women participants in (a) a low-impact exercise to music (ETM) class and (b) a yoga class to uncover what is important for them in taking part in these classes. Researcher S is the instructor of the ETM group and draws upon individual and focus group interviews and participant observation. Researcher B is a member of the yoga class where she interviewed the women and undertook participant observations. Both authors are a similar age to the older women interviewees. Through a phenomenological interpretative approach, the paper examines the women's perceptions of their exercise class and yoga experiences, highlighting pleasurable experiences and features that contribute to this enjoyment. The paper considers relationships between pleasure, wellbeing, the senses, physical activity, and aging, drawing upon a variety of analyses. It pays attention to the contextual features of the ETM and yoga classes in making available and accessible pleasurable physical activity experiences for the women and draws, in part, on 'typologies' of pleasure to frame the debate around older women, physical activity, and senses of pleasure. Our research highlights the considerable wellbeing affects for women when physical activity provision takes account of context (the spatial, cultural, social, and sentient).

Keywords: older women, exercise, promoting engagement, wellbeing, pleasure

As noted by Phoenix and Orr, "[p]leasure is an under researched and under theorized concept within health and health related areas" (2014, p. 94). Aging healthily is a major public issue in the 21st century, with statistics highlighting greater longevity and a significant increase in people over the age of 65 in Europe (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2012) and in the United States (Ortman, Velkoff, & Hogan, 2014). Consequently, remaining healthy as one ages is in the interest of both individuals and societies.

Many quantitative studies concerned with aging have demonstrated the complexity of health and the ability of physical activity to impact upon multifarious conditions associated with improving quality of life or 'wellbeing' and to produce measurable health benefits by targeting specific preexisting conditions, e.g., improvements in strength (Dean et al., 2007), functional capacity (Fahlman et al., 2007), aerobic fitness (Kallinen, 2005), bone density (Augestad, Schei, Forsmo, Langhammer, & Flanders, 2006), and cholesterol levels (Knight, Bermingham, & Mahajan, 1999). The practice of referring cardiac and stroke patients to exercise classes for rehabilitation also recognizes the benefits of exercise in improving functionality and quality of life (Cutler-Riddick, 2010; King, Taylor, Haskell, & Debusk, 1989). Improved cognitive and emotional benefits have also been demonstrated. According to O'Brien Cousins and Edwards (2002), active living is a worthy alternative to hormone replacement therapy in menopausal women. Further, popular and 'medical' discourse around aging can discourage some women from involvement in physical activity and may also not acknowledge the involvement that many older women and men have in physical activity and sport (Dionigi, 2006; Tulle, 2008). Older women may offer 'weak bones' through menopause as a reason for not taking part in physical activity (Vertinsky, 2002).

There is much evidence in support of physical activity benefiting the health of older people. However, much health-related

research 'medicalizes' older people and, as highlighted above, tends not to take an holistic approach, rather largely isolating specific physical and occasionally emotional benefits out of context. This 'medicalized' knowledge is helpful, yet it pathologizes aging and the benefits of physical activity, focusing more on outcomes rather than the experiences of older people. Critical of outcome approaches in understanding physical activity participation in adults and young people, Wellard (2012) points to the use of the term wellbeing by various academics and practitioners, including health and sport educators. The concept of wellbeing provides for a more inclusive and contextualized approach to aging and physical activity which takes account of the subjective experiences of the older person. Wellbeing is a social construct and, as such, according to Ereaut and Whitting, (2008, p. 9) has "no uncontested biological, spiritual, social, economic and any other kind of markers" and its meaning, although related to (good) health is complex and variable." Wellbeing, then, provides for a more complex understanding and acknowledgment of embodied experiences and a sense of pleasure from older people's perspectives. Arguably, a sense of wellbeing is connected to how we 'feel' and feeling good is largely associated with pleasurable experiences. Nevertheless, the effects of pleasure seeking are often treated as injurious as they are largely conceptualized as associated with habits such as smoking, addiction, or immoderate eating or drinking alcohol (Coveney & Bunton, 2003). In this respect, pleasure is seen in a deductive sense, linked firmly to a prior source or habit. Hagberg, Lindahl, Nyberg, and Hellénus (2009, p.746), arguably writing from an outcome-orientated position, nevertheless highlight the importance of pleasurable experiences of physical activity, concluding that, "Knowledge of what makes exercise enjoyable is scarce".

Data suggest that 31% of the world's population is not meeting the recommended minimum levels for physical activity (Hallal et al., 2012). While Lee et al. (2012) argue that 6% and 10% of deaths from noncommunicable diseases worldwide can be attributed to sedentary behavior, judged by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2012) to be less than 30 min activity per day at a level sufficient to raise the heart rate.

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Using statistics from a sample of 561 adults aged between 60–64, who were respondents in the 2007 Health Survey for England, Chaudhury and Shelton (2010) report that very few people were aware of the recommended physical activity target, yet over three-quarters thought they were ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ active. Whereas multiple proven reasons exist for being physically active, especially as one gets older, current levels of inactivity and reported unawareness of recommended physical activity targets mentioned above indicate that despite the many initiatives aimed at promoting healthy behavior (e.g., National Blueprint: Increasing Physical Activity in Adults Age 50 and Over, see Chodzko-Zajko et al., 2005; Get Active for your Heart, see British Heart Foundation, 2007), they are having limited success in reaching people. Either the messages are not being effectively transmitted or they are not being heeded, or perhaps older people find them inappropriate or irrelevant. As Phoenix and Grant (2009) point out, “the older body is more than a stimulus-response machine” (p. 366), and warn that when it comes to understanding the older body in relation to fitness, multiple approaches should be adopted, as “one size fits all, fits nobody” (p. 373). While not recognizing the diversity of older people and what it is that older people find pleasurable about being physically active, Jallinoja, Pajari, and Absetz (2010) maintain that it is largely because these messages are based upon the assumption that it is cognitive forces alone that govern behavior.

Rizzuto, Orsini, Qui, Wang, and Fratiglioni (2012) argue that behavior change at any age can lead to improved quality of life and that including more physical activity in the lifestyle can have an even greater impact than stopping smoking or drinking immoderate amounts of alcohol. Thus improving quality of life or wellbeing for older people is possible for those who find physical activities enjoyable and pleasurable experiences. Consequently, understanding what is pleasurable for, and offers a sense of wellbeing to, older people through involvement in physical activity is crucial. This means developing a greater and more in-depth insight into what it means for older people to be physically active. Much qualitative research has explored the subjective experiences of older people participating in physical activity, but as Phoenix and Orr (2014) point out, the subject of pleasure has remained largely absent. While their research explores pleasure in some depth, it only partially considers the significance that the senses have in the process of pleasurable physical activity and tends to ignore the context in which the activities occur.

In research into physical cultures and physical activity, the sentient body and embodiment which draws upon phenomenological perspectives and the senses have become significant (see, for example, Allen-Collinson, 2011; Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2011; Hockey, 2006; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007; Straughan, 2012). Sparkes and Smith foresee “future shift(s) toward more sensuous forms of scholarship in sport and physical culture” (2012, p. 170). We would suggest that research into older people and pleasurable experiences, particularly in relation to physical activity and wellbeing, is only just beginning to see greater focus on the senses (Humberstone, 2011; Phoenix & Orr, 2014). Clearly then, physical activity is vitally important in maintaining health and wellbeing in an aging population and it is through the body and its senses that people experience physical activity. If it is not enjoyed and thought to be a pleasurable experience, then older people will choose not to participate or continue. Further developments in sensuous scholarship pay particular attention to the situatedness of the body. For physical activity and older people, the context within which the activity takes place is part of this sentient experience (see Sparkes, 2010). Howes (2005) argues that embodiment, or learning to be in the body, implies an integration of body-mind situating the body

in time and space and expresses the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment. Further, Pink proposes, “an emplacement ethnography that attends to the question of experience by accounting for the relationships between bodies, minds and materiality and sensoriality of the environment” (2009, p. 25). Consequently, we take seriously the context in which older people take part in physical activity as this embodied engagement in physical activity does not take place in spatial, sentient, cultural, or social isolation.

Phoenix and Orr (2014) sought to develop more detailed insight into older adults’ subjective experiences of physical activity by studying what participants enjoyed about their activity. The authors delineate four categories, or typologies (ideal types) of pleasure: sensual, documented, pleasure of habitual action, and pleasure of immersion. They recommend that an exposition of these elements might be considered in health promotion messages (see Phoenix & Orr, 2014, p. 100). In this paper, we seek to acknowledge these typologies but will show that, emerging from our data, the senses permeate all of the pleasure experienced by our participants.

Methods

This study supports research that argues that there is much to be learnt about the way that older adults perceive the processes of aging and engagement with physical activity. To understand the richness of the life-worlds of the older women as they take part in physical activity, we as researchers drew upon research methodologies that provide for sensitivity to those life-worlds and enable insights into the women’s perspectives.

Humberstone argues that, “To ‘know’ and understand what it is to age, one arguably needs to experience this process of being and becoming reflexively and/or to engage empathically with the life-worlds of older people” (2011, p. 162). Both coauthors are of the Baby Boomer generation and each is engaged fully with the older women and the physical activities they participate in—coauthor B as a member of the yoga class and coauthor S as the instructor of the exercise to music (ETM) class. In researching the yoga group, coauthor B became interested in exploring the experiences of the older women who belonged to the same yoga classes as herself and later trained as a yoga teacher. Coauthor S is the ETM group’s instructor. She trained in later life to become a keep fit instructor because she wanted to stay fit and healthy into retirement and recognized that she needed to do this in the company of others. The methodological approach underpinning this research is informed by phenomenological perspectives (see Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007; Sparkes, 2009), with the coauthors adopting ethnographic methods to collect and interpret qualitative data. This approach acknowledges everyday understandings of participants in situated contexts and takes account of the experiences and ethical dilemmas of the researcher. The researchers as highlighted above are not removed from the research process and become part of the research process.

Data were collected from two case studies of (1) ETM classes researched by coauthor S and (2) yoga classes researched by coauthor B. The aim of both studies was to uncover the women’s lived experiences and the meanings that participation in physical activity has for them. Each ethnographically-orientated study drew upon qualitative methods, including informal or semistructured interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. Participant observation takes many forms from complete participant to ‘pure’ observer (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In both our cases, we were each “both a participant in the culture, but at the same time . . . an academic observer” (Atkinson, 2012, p.27), since each author was

involved fully in the classes they researched either as an instructor (S) or class member (B).

Data emerging from the yoga classes had been previously thematically analyzed and coded for an earlier larger study (see Humberstone & Cutler-Riddick, 2015), which had focused on reasons for taking part in yoga and the approaches of the teacher but indicated that participants found enjoyment in the yoga class and so continued. Data from one yoga class were later reexamined in light of the notion of forms of pleasure connected to the yoga practice.

Phoenix and Orr's (2014) paper on pleasure stimulated author B, who has a particular interest in embodiment to reexamine her research on older women and yoga (Humberstone & Cutler-Riddick, 2015). It also prompted coauthor S to examine her data in light of pleasure. We thus brought together both case studies on the experiences of older women taking part in ETM and yoga. We felt that our analyses might make further contributions to understanding women's engagement with physical activity in later life. The stimuli were the notion of pleasure in physical activity emphasized in the Phoenix and Orr (2014) paper in promoting wellbeing in older people, our own pleasurable experiences of physical activity, and an interest in embodiment.

Consequently, data from the ETM and yoga classes were compared and reexamined in light of scholarly concerns with the senses, embodiment, and pleasure, and included consideration of Phoenix and Orr's (2014) typologies of 'pleasure' in relation to older people's engagement with physical activities to frame the discussion.

We are not attempting to fit our data into these typologies, rather to explore 'pleasurable' experiences in physical activities in later life with respect to significant current research. The notion of enjoyment and pleasure emerged from reexamination of our data. This means that we engage with these typologies of 'pleasure' drawing out issues around embodiment and the senses. Phoenix and Orr's (2014) typologies were generated through interpretative interviews with 51 self-selecting older people taking part in a diverse variety of physical activities, including swimming, dance, keep-fit, walking, tennis, sea-based activities, cycling, bowls, rowing, and golf. Thus the activities participated in were selected randomly for the research based on the self-selected interviewees' physical activity and thus the approach is largely individualized. Significant differences in contexts exist between our studies and that of Phoenix and Orr (2014), and added to this is the specific engagement with the particular activities yoga and ETM by coauthors B and S. As a consequence, we were able to gain considerable insight into the experiences of physical activities due to our own positioning as participants and observers over significant periods of time within the ETM and yoga classes. Both researchers participated in the classes as either instructor (S) or participant (B) weekly over periods of two years and 18 months. Ethnographic interviews were undertaken by both authors; in addition, author S undertook focus group interviews.

Locating and Contextualizing the Case Studies

As we indicated, the ETM and yoga classes do not take place in a vacuum, rather we believe these classes should be contextualized. Consequently, it is pertinent to consider the spaces and relations to these spaces the women may have as well as the ways in which the classes are made enjoyable for them.

The women of the ETM group did not formally declare reasons for their participation but through informal conversation coauthor S surmised there was a desire to stay fit and healthy into retirement and beyond. A number of reasons were given for yoga participation by

members of this group. These were largely to do with helping their bodies keep healthy and for some it was to do with reducing stress.

Group 1: Exercise to Music (ETM)

The group observed by coauthor S meets in the local youth club hall at 9:30 a.m. Monday morning under the auspices of the county Adult Learning scheme. Termly membership fluctuates between nine and 12, with a core membership of nine women (age range 59–77) who have been attending Adult Learning keep-fit classes for many years. S, as the instructor for the group, was immersed in the group, and her participant observation spanned two years. Three focus group interviews were held with four to six women lasting 45 min, and two women were interviewed individually, lasting 45 min to an hour. The focus groups arose naturally from the social gatherings which participants choose to engage in after the exercise session.

Group 2: Yoga

The class observed by coauthor B and considered in this paper meets once a week in a small rural village hall, which holds no more than 12 participants comfortably. The class is not attached to any service or leisure center and participants pay £6 weekly to cover the cost of the hall. The yoga teacher is in her 60s and trained in the conventional hatha schools of yoga. She takes one class a week. The participating women ranged in age from 56–72 years old and had participated in yoga for more than five years. Eight women from this class were interviewed individually for between 45 min to one hour after the class and this along with participant observation over 18 months formed the main source of data from the yoga case study.

The participants of our two studies are largely White middle class women, living in semirural locations in the South of England. For the most part, the ETM women largely had or used to have professional jobs, while some of the yoga women also had held professional and technical jobs. We do not claim that these women's experiences and senses of pleasure are in any way representative of all women. Although we acknowledge that the women are all different, there were few women of Black or minority ethnicity and most appeared to be representative of middle-class culture. We recognize the increasing complexities that current meta-analysis of research on women and leisure has highlighted (see Henderson & Gibson, 2013). Nevertheless, our study contributes to an understanding of the ways that some older women are committed to their particular physical activities and the particular place pleasure has in this, thus filling some of the knowledge gaps concerned with pleasure, wellbeing, older women, and the senses.

Discussion

Spatial and Social Contexts

We have argued that spatial aspects such as location are important in how physical activity is experienced. Sparkes (2010) draws attention to the significance of place and corporeal sensations in the (un)pleasant experience of his older body's sensory journey through a leisure center in going to exercise at a private gym. Senses such as sight and particularly smell become part of that sentient experience.

Phoenix and Orr (2014) also refer to the importance of space in which an activity occurs in relation to the pleasure experienced. For the women in the ETM class, the spot in the room which each woman chooses to stand is important. Marie, a member of the ETM class, remarked upon being able to avoid people whose movements

she finds off-putting through performing a routine in a circle. In a circle, she can no longer easily see and her vision is no longer drawn to other people's movements since there is no one directly in front to distract her:

I like the exercise in a ring because it makes you feel part of something bigger than yourself...a community thing like the coffee afterwards. There is no one in front of you that makes you go wrong if you are following them and you can keep out of the way of anyone who can't keep the beat because that's off-putting. —Marie

For preceding and succeeding routines that are performed under random, individually-isolated conditions, the women always go back to their chosen spot in the room where they habitually stand every week. When asked their reasons, they laugh or say that it just feels comfortable.

Arguably, movement in a circle gives a greater sense of belonging, regardless of differences in ability/performance, as everyone moves in to the center and back out at the same time. Marie appears to feel the group moving together in rhythm or harmony. Paradoxically after such a collective experience each woman moves back to their chosen original position, returning to individual movements.

We consider both environmental and social contexts of the ETM and yoga classes, which remained largely constant, in a room in a village hall in Buckinghamshire and New Forest, Hampshire, respectively, as significant in creating pleasurable experiences. For the participants of coauthor S' ETM class, the sentient experience of the space was a factor in their enjoyment of the activity. Coauthor S observed this embodied connection when teaching her ETM class. Participants would point out if the music was too loud for them or mention that the room was over or under ventilated. One student, Marie, had stopped going to another class because of a dirty floor. Further, she indicated she liked the sociable atmosphere in her current ETM class:

I mean I think the class we go to is very nice because people are so friendly. One of the other ladies said to me this morning 'Oh, we're like a sports' social club now' and I thought well, yes, it is like that as well especially when you're new to an area as I was when I first came to the club. It's another way of meeting people and doing your body a bit of good at the same time. —Marie

As Booth (2009) points out, the biological (physical) is intrinsically interlinked with the social-cultural in physical activity. For Marie, being in the company of friends has added benefits to her physical health and wellbeing.

Both coauthors had gained teaching qualifications in their respective research activities either before the research or shortly after. What therefore emerged significantly for us, in approaching our data, were the ways in which physical activities were perceived by the participants to be made available and accessible to them and had implications in terms of their enjoyment and consequential wellbeing.

Responses to a questionnaire given early on with the ETM group suggested that the women attached much importance to the quality of the atmosphere within the group, which we would argue is significantly influenced by the teacher's approach, and the sociability it may or may not foster. (Note: The questionnaire was mainly used to get background on the participants to inform the teaching program of ETM. However, it had data that was useful for the research.) As indicated by Marie above, sociability appeared to be as important as her desire to stay fit and healthy by engaging

with the exercise. This interpretation was supported by comments from members of the ETM focus groups and also in one-to-one interviews with members of the yoga group and from observations of the yoga teacher by coauthor B.

A participant spoke about "finding what's right for you" while another mentioned "a nice instructor". Marie (ETM) suggested that: "The age of the instructor is important. . . don't want to come home feeling you don't like yourself very much. . . feeling incapable because the instructor is very fit". For this woman, the experience was not pleasant if she felt inadequate in relation to the instructor and her/his approach. Most ETM women agreed with Marie's remark about the exercise experience being a whole "package" . . . "unless you're more sporty than the people I know it's a package all the time. You've got to go for something you enjoy as well as the exercise". Emerging from the focus groups was the idea that the women would only take part in an exercise class if it felt right for them holistically and made them feel good about themselves. For health promoters and people providing for older women's exercise and wellbeing, acknowledging diverse perspective about experiences of exercise and recognizing that it is not only the actual activity but all that goes with it is important.

From participant observations of the yoga classes, it was clear that the teacher's approach was also important for the women. The teacher adapted the practices to the needs of individuals in the classes. Alternative postures or modifications were offered with comments such as. "if it's not right for you, I can give you an alternative". Further, this was never expressed as a fixed 'problem' but as something variable with the understanding that the women's capabilities could change daily. For Linda, who has joint problems, her yoga practice is favorably perceived compared with her former physical activity experiences:

. . . whereas in yoga there is a way around your infirmities... so bad knees, bad feet...um a problem neck occasionally, um I could (get) around those and still feel I get a good workout, a good stretch. —Linda

Likewise, members of the ETM group expressed appreciation for being given optional alternatives for actions that they could choose to adopt or not depending upon the way that they were feeling on a particular occasion.

Some days I just feel I want to go for it. Others not...I feel tired...got too much to do...and (the teacher, coauthor S) doesn't mind if I don't jog...just take it easy...keep going till I feel better. —Anna

Clearly, how the activity is made available and accessible is significant in creating a pleasurable experience and depends partly on the instructor/ teacher's experience and knowledge of the factors that will foster feelings of safety and confidence. The practice of presenting the group, whether ETM or yoga, with optional movement alternatives allows women to accept levels of challenge that they feel comfortable with depending upon how they feel on a specific occasion without feeling that anyone will judge them. The teachers regularly remind the women to "Listen to your body".

Supported by evidence from our participants, we would argue that feeling good about ourselves or 'learning to be in the body' in physical activity is shaped by a complexity of features which includes social and environmental contexts and the way in which activities are made available and accessible to older women. Educational research has long been concerned with exploring the processes of teaching and learning within the classroom through opening up the so-called 'black box' (Black & Wiliam, 1998), although not to

any great extent in relation to pleasure or the senses (in respect of pleasurable learning in higher education, see Clayton, Beard, Humberstone, & Wolstenholme, 2009). Opening up the 'black box' of movement classes for older people so that providers and health promoters can understand what makes physical activity experience pleasurable or creates unpleasant sensations that can put older women off engaging with physical activity is important considering the wellbeing of women in later life.

We now turn to the women's perceptions of their activities in relation to the pleasures they gained from participating. We draw upon Phoenix and Orr's (2014) four typologies of pleasures to structure this discussion. In our analysis of data from our case studies, we found little evidence of what Phoenix and Orr refer to as documented pleasures, that is pleasure stemming from "the process and outcome of documenting one's activity" (2014, p. 97). However, habitual and sensual pleasures and pleasure through immersion were featured variously in our analysis and these are the categories of pleasure which we will now consider.

Habitual Pleasure

Phoenix and Orr propose habitual pleasure as, "[I]mplementation of and adherence to habitual behavior" (2014, p. 98). In the ETM and yoga studies, based upon the above notion, there is much evidence of the existence of the pleasure of habitual action, particularly for members of the ETM group. For the women in the ETM class, the first-thing Monday morning exercise class starts their week well, as discussed in a focus group:

I love Monday morning (yes, yes) because it.....

Gets you off to a good start.

It does.

Yes, gets you going.

These women are committed to regular attendance, rarely miss a session, and express regret to their tutor if they are going to be or have been absent. They dislike the breaks between the terms, especially the long summer holiday. The habit of regular attendance to a physical activity provides "a sense of structure and purpose to everyday life" (Phoenix & Orr, 2014, p. 98), which is particularly appropriate for older women who may have retired from paid work or have fewer or changed family commitments.

Further, participants find pleasure in the habitual action of rehearsing the ETM routines and honing their ability to perform them faultlessly. Progress is represented by quality of performance. The routines are changed regularly every five or six weeks, introducing new challenges to the women in terms of balance and coordination, building a pleasurable habit of kinaesthetic learning.

For yoga, the asanas (postures) practiced in the yoga class and the lesson structure follow a very regular pattern. Hatha yoga takes a holistic approach to yoga practice; the focus of a class is on learning the specific postures, mindfulness, and relaxation (see Humberstone & Cutler-Riddick, 2015). The same postures or versions of them are practiced from week to week, taking up the main part of the class, and the lesson generally finishes with breathing practice, relaxation, and meditation. The women are developing physical literacy, learning to be in the body, through pleasurable corporeal habit in attending their ETM or yoga class regularly. Much research on habitual pleasures focuses on addiction and habits seen to be associated promoting poor health, such as excessive eating or alcohol intake, rather than wellbeing (Coveney & Bunton, 2003)

and, arguably, excessive risk-seeking through adventurous sporting activities (Booth, 2009). Developing pleasurable habitual sensations of bodily movement through regular corporeal experiences as in these case studies, according to health promoters, can benefit the wellbeing of women in later life.

Pleasure of Immersion

Phoenix and Orr characterize the pleasure of immersion as a "[S]ense of focus which facilitates escape from, consideration of and perspective to be gained upon everyday life demands" (2014, p. 100).

The ETM participants express pride on reaching a point where they are able to perform the ETM routines without much conscious thought and without making mistakes; they become immersed in the movements. The concentration that this requires often helps them to forget their worries and elevates their mood. Dorothy maintains that, "I always feel better after coming to class. . . .especially if I didn't feel like coming beforehand". As a participant-observer, coauthor S has heard many similar comments on numerous occasions. When this stage in the quality of performance is reached, mind and body are united in action almost below the level of consciousness. At the moment that such habituated action is performed, the pleasure that is experienced might be said to be that of immersion. This notion of immersion, particularly in relation to activities like yoga deemed to have their roots in non-Western cultures, is comparable with that of mindfulness (mind-body-consciousness), which arguably is rarely featured in scholarship on embodiment, the senses, and physical activity (see Boyce, 2011; Fox & Humberstone, 2014; Shusterman, 2008).

In both authors' classes, pleasure through immersion was identified, but particularly so for the yoga class. This might be expected given the philosophy underpinning yoga practice, and which most classically-trained yoga teachers would have absorbed. It is argued that unlike most physical activities, classical yoga is a unifying embodied practice since it involves the whole body through mind-body engagement in body practices (Desikachar & Cravens, 1998).

Phoenix and Orr (2014) include perspectives from the yoga and dance exercise participants as well as a hill walker's to illustrate pleasure of immersion. For their yoga participant, Deetria yoga is:

[a] mind body thing. I love it if I've gone into yoga having a hundred things [on my mind]...you just concentrate totally on what you're doing....it adds to my wellbeing, how I feel.... all those things I've been worrying about....well they're not so important anymore. -Deetria quoted in Phoenix and Orr, 2014, p. 99

Likewise, Jackie provides a similar example, explaining:

I started (yoga) originally for the exercise....After the yoga class I'm totally relaxed-chilled out-completely takes you away from everyday things and you can just concentrate on the postures and somehow (it) calms you right down.

For these women, the pleasure of immersion in their yoga class brings about a transformative effect, eliminating stress and increasing wellbeing. Immersion is the losing oneself to the harmony of the senses. The ETM women became immersed in a rhythm and sequence or routine they knew well, while the yoga women became fully immersed in their meditation and relaxation at the end of the session. Marie's comment on the pleasure of exercising in a circle offers further insight into reaching this sentient state and of feeling that she is "part of something larger than [her]self".

Others echo her view when they speak of the pleasure of “connecting with others”, “sharing movement”, or experiencing a “sense of belonging”.

Sensual Pleasure

Sensual pleasure is represented by Phoenix and Orr as “[S]ensory experience” (2014, p. 100). In recent years, there has been a significant turn to sensuous scholarship in physical culture research drawing upon works of anthropologists of the senses such as Stoller (1997) and Pink (2009). Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) refer to the five dominant senses—aural, visual, olfactory, haptic, and taste—in their embodied narratives of running selves. Sparkes (2009) points out that the visual has tended to dominate in Western research and argues for greater attention to be given to other senses such as balance. In relation to findings in this project, the visual does not emerge as a significant sense in participants’ pleasure, but rather a broader range of senses is in play.

Central to ETM are kinaesthetic and auditory senses. Participants learn through practice to move rhythmically to music, together with and in time with the rest of the group.

The music is important. I like to throw myself into it more.
—Marie

I like the social and the dancing...and I get a buzz from the music...(Yeh) and prancing about to the music. —Cathy

For Cathy, it is the movements to the rhythm of the music which she finds pleasurable and, as highlighted earlier, routines performed in circles are especially popular.

Coauthor S observed the significance for the women that the music should have a pronounced beat and be familiar. When a track has particular resonance for individuals they ask for details of the singer and song. There are also requests to repeat popular routines later in the year.

Phoenix and Orr (2014) refer to the sensuous pleasure accrued to one of their interviewees while ballroom dancing. But in that movement context, the sense that was emphasized is olfactory. The interviewee refers to the smell of her partner-husband’s aftershave while in close physical contact. All of the ETM participants gained pleasure, not from closeness to a partner but from feeling the music through their bodies and responding in harmony with it.

Annette, a yoga participant talked emotionally and sensuously to coauthor B about the effect of listening to chanting on her mind and body. At the end of the yoga session on ‘special occasions’ and during relaxation time, chanting by a Tibetan Buddhist group at the bedside of a sick Buddhist is played for 10–15 min.

Annette: It’s pleasantly powerful, more a release of emotions... like laying in bed and having melted chocolate poured over you ...wonderful...I had breast cancer 2 years ago and when I was recovering...just listening to that—so powerful...coping with breast cancer. I think it’s the tones and how they harmonize so closely and the repetition of the chants. It transports you.

B: But what do you feel?

Annette: Peace and calm, my whole body gives in just listening to the rhythm.

Annette speaks to a transformation through her senses where the patterns of sound evoke a sense of being touched in a healing peace and calm.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

In conclusion, we reflect upon senses of pleasure as they have been highlighted in our paper and upon relations between wellbeing, pleasure, corporeality, exercise, and older women.

Public discourse suggests and health promoters maintain that ‘messages’ about aging healthily and the significant importance of exercise to the quality of life are not being heard or acted upon. We challenge the medicalization of women in later life and maintain that drawing upon notions of wellbeing provides for a more complex understanding and acknowledgment of aging well, providing for the exploration of embodied experiences and a sense of pleasure from older people’s perspectives. We have shown that a sense of wellbeing is connected to how we ‘feel’ and feeling good is largely associated with pleasurable experiences which emerge through our senses. The paper has presented evidence from the perspectives of older women. Drawing upon three typologies of pleasure to frame the discussion—habitual and sensual pleasures and pleasure through immersion—we have shown that the senses are crucial in fostering pleasurable subjective physical activity experiences for older women. Further, the context and ways in which exercise/physical activity is made available and accessible in classes for older people is extremely important if the experience is to be pleasurable and thus foster pleasurable corporeal habits and maintain patterns of physical activity involvement. Finally, our paper shows that all older people are different and experience physical activity differently, and so we advise health promoters and providers of Phoenix and Grant’s comment, “one size fits all, fits nobody” (2009, p. 373), as well as Henderson and Gibson’s comment that “a one size fits all approach likely will not work” (2013, p.127).

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