

**The Experience of Regular Exercise Participation for
Women Moving into their Middle Years:
Its Nature, Meaning and its Benefits**

by

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I begin the ... journey with something that has called to me from within my life experience, something to which I have associations and fleeting awarenesses but whose nature is largely unknown. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13)

Abstract

This study added to the limited research on positive aspects of the human condition. It highlighted the perspective that women in western society recognise that there are wider health benefits to be taken from exercise than science suggests. Whilst this study acknowledged the customary fragmentary view, it took a holistic approach to exploring the nature and meaning of regular participation in exercise from the perspective of 41 women aged 30 to 50 years. This qualitative study included the views of regular participants in facility based and non-facility based exercise, along with the views of exercise instructors and the researcher.

The study was contextualised within the traditional theories of related disciplines, namely health, women's studies, and exercise science. Also it was founded on the fitness industry's perspective on its service provision and its instructor training. Theory was compared with the experiences of a sector of the female population who, despite all the accepted calls on their time and energy, consistently maintained regular involvement in exercise. The study provided a holistic perspective on the nature, meaning and benefits of regular participation in exercise.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were utilised in the data gathering process. In each case, the process consisted of a series of questions designed to explore a subjective perception of experience in accordance with the Neuro-Logical Levels process, a model from within the field of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (Dilts, 1990; Dilts, Hallborn and Smith, 1990; O'Connor and Seymour, 1995). This model acknowledges that behaviours and actions, witnessed on a surface level, are driven by internal systems, including personal beliefs and identity structures. It was utilised as an exploratory technique to identify unconscious triggers for behaviour. The use of this process in the interviews facilitated individual exploration of the research topic at increasingly deep levels of awareness. Focus groups demonstrated a consensus on, as well as

further individual differences in, the beliefs, attitudes, experiences and feelings of the participants as they arose from the interactive context.

The heuristic methodology utilised in the analysis and presentation of the data offered a holistic, person-centred and reflective perspective on the nature, meaning and benefits of exercise (Moustakas, 1990). Individual and exemplary portraits depicted the experience and personal meaning of exercise as it emerged from the data. Composite depictions conveyed the nature of exercise participation from the perspectives of participants and instructors. The researcher's involvement in the complete study facilitated the emergence of a creative synthesis of the essence of exercise.

Exercise provided emotional and spiritual gains that extended beyond the traditional lifestyle benefits. Individuals indicated a range of 'special' qualities in exercise, along with benefits to the mind. They noted unique personal benefits and enhanced interpersonal relationships in all spheres of life. Regular participation in exercise greatly enhanced the lives of those involved and contributed to an individual and collective evolutionary process. Effective exercise delivery consisted of interactional and motivational elements beyond the scientific and mechanistic topics traditionally recognised in instructor training programmes and was founded on empathy, facilitation, passion, love and positive energy.

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Chapter One: Introduction

An unshakable connection exists between what is out there, in its appearance and reality, and what is within me in reflective thought, feeling and awareness. It is I the person living in a world with others, alone yet inseparable from the community of others; I who see and understand something, freshly, as if for the first time; I who come to know essential meanings inherent in my experience. I stand out with my experiences and in the entire domain of my interest and concern. (Moustakas, 1990, p.12)

1.1 The background to the study

This study presents an interpretative approach to understanding the nature and meaning of exercise for women aged 30 to 50 years who maintain regular participation. It arose from earlier research that investigated the lifestyle of women in this same age group who were actively involved in exercise (Adams and Walton, 2003; Walton and Adams, 2003). These earlier studies established that a variety of social, political and economic factors impacted on women's involvement in exercise. It was demonstrated that time can be earmarked for activity if it is prioritised amongst other demands on resources (Adams and Walton, 2003). Also, Walton and Adams (2003) considered the importance exercise had for these women and their motivation to include it in their busy lifestyles. This earlier research was extended in this study in order to investigate more fully the meaning women who regularly exercise attach to their participation. This study focused on women who exercised three or more times per week and for at least 30 minutes on each occasion. It included participation in a range of facility and non-facility based activities. It incorporated the experiences of exercise instructors and considered factors relating to participation in activity and delivery of facility based group exercise. The study focused on women born between 1950 and 1970. These women were subject to the social influences of that era 'which cast women as appendages and

helpmates of men' (Borysenko, 1998, p.212-213). The study examined the circumstances within which this group maintained an exercise habit. Also, it considered the benefits they perceived as arising from their regular participation.

The study included the personal experiences of the researcher. The researcher's age placed her within the identified age bracket and she had the traditional multi-faceted lifestyle, involving home, family, social and work commitments (Bepko and Krestan, 1991; Borysenko, 1998). Also she was a regular participant in exercise and a practitioner within the fitness industry. She was involved in the design and delivery of both exercise sessions and instructor training.

The subject group was identified from the total female membership and staff of Preston City Council's Fulwood and West View Leisure Centres and the commercially owned Virgin Active Life Centre in Preston, Lancashire, United Kingdom. These facilities were selected to be local to the researcher and to give representation of both public and private fitness provision, the two major types in the United Kingdom. Preston is a city in the north west of England with a population of just over 130,000 people (Lancashire County Council, 2006). Incidences of poor quality housing, violent crime and binge drinking in Preston have been identified as being higher than the national average. Instances of diabetes and of death from smoking, heart disease and stroke were also higher than the national average (Department of Health, 2006b). Life expectancy for women in Preston was 78.9 years, which was below the national average of 80.8 years (Department of Health, 2004a). Preston Primary Care Trust (2004) also reported instances of chronic sickness, disability and poor health in the area as being higher than the national average. The subjects identified for the study were considered to be a group worthy of investigation in the light of the traditional academic view of this sector of the population as not having access to freely chosen leisure activities. Also, they represented a sector of the local population who indicated taking a pro-active stance against ill-health. The women had different individual histories and were in the process of creating

their own futures. Collectively they shared the common features as defined by the study.

1.2 The research problems

The problems addressed in this study were ‘what are the nature, meaning and benefits of regular exercise participation for women moving into their middle years?’ The motivation to carry out this study arose from the researcher’s own perceptions and intuitions that much of the relevant literature told only a partial and fragmented story in relation to these questions and to her own experiences as a woman who considered exercise as a valuable component in a busy lifestyle. Specifically, the study explored the experience of exercise participation and delivery, and critically analysed it from the perspective of those women who were regularly involved. The study acknowledged and honoured the voices of women and their expression of their personal experiences. It expressed their perceptions, their truths and their realities in relation to their involvement in exercise. It investigated the meaning of repeated immersion in the exercise experience and examined the factors that motivated women moving into their middle years to maintain regular participation. The study acknowledged the factors in exercise delivery that contributed to the creation of a positive experience for participants. The emergent process enabled illumination of concepts and themes to arise over time, with subsequent clarification taking place as the research process continued.

The study uncovered deep meaning in personal experience and presented a holistic and interconnected view of health, womanhood and exercise. It asserted that regular participation in exercise is a unique and holistic concept with a wide range of positive and interconnected implications for the whole of the life of those involved. It claimed that exercise enabled people to facilitate a personal and a collective evolutionary process. It described how exercisers take personal meaning from their participation and how they transferred the positive gains to their unique life situations. The study expanded the notion of involvement in exercise beyond the confines of the activity itself. As such, it

contributed to the body of knowledge in each of the fields in which it was grounded.

1.3 Justification for the research

A qualitative investigation into the nature and meaning of exercise was important as it focussed on personal experience, rather than scientific or theoretical assumption, and provided an opportunity for personal expression of sensory perceptions. There was relative neglect in research into a range of aspects of this study. Research into health and well-being in western culture had been bounded in mechanistic and reductionist traditions and lacked positive, preventative and holistic approaches (Blaxter, 1990, 2004). Research into the nature of womanhood acknowledged inadequate findings to satisfactorily describe this concept in a holistic sense (Dreher, 1998; Tong, 1998). The predominance of scientific research into the benefits of exercise also omitted to include a holistic, personal or interconnected perspective (Hardman, 1999; Sport England, 2005). It dehumanised exercise participation as a lifestyle experience. The fitness industry neglected to include the wider and interpersonal life benefits of its service in its promotion of exercise (Sport England, 2005). Furthermore, the training provision for exercise instructors provided by the fitness industry neglected to include the interpersonal elements involved in delivery (Fitness and Aerobic Certifications for Instructors, 2002). The use, in this study, of a qualitative methodology, as described in Chapter Three, expanded the extant literature beyond traditional limits. The study had practical and theoretical applications for each of the areas in which it was founded.

It was a fundamental presupposition of this study that those best placed to provide the answers to the emergent research questions were those with significant experience of exercise and its delivery. The topic was explored from the personal perspective of the individual and its meaning was considered in relation to personal applications in the individual's life situation. Exercise was considered as an example of a life experience. Regular participation in exercise was denoted as repeated immersion in the experience. The accumulative effects

on the whole person of repeated immersion were explored. Also, the influences on other people with whom the individual interacted were investigated. Instructors' views on the provision of the exercise experience added a further dimension to the study. A theoretical understanding of the meaning of regular exercise participation and its delivery was developed arising from conceptual realisations identified throughout the study.

1.4 The methodology

Assurances of confidentiality and sole use of all of the data for the purposes of the research study were provided to all participants. Qualitative processes facilitated the gathering of rich and meaningful data. The researcher's familiarity with the principles of Neuro-Linguistic Programming facilitated the use of the Neuro-Logical Levels process (Dilts, 1990; Dilts, Hallbom and Smith, 1990; O'Connor and Seymour, 1995). This was the tool utilised to explore the subjective experience of exercise. Individual interviews provided narrative accounts that expressed subjects' perceptions of the meaning of regular participation in exercise. The researcher, as a member of the subject group, also conducted a recorded interview of herself and was a respondent within the study. Additionally, focus groups provided indication of consensus on the topic investigated.

In accordance with the principles of organic research, the concept for the study arose from the researcher's own perceptions and reflections (Clements, Ettling, Jenett and Shields, 1998). According to Clements et al., (1998, p.117) organic research 'requires honouring ourselves, our collaborators, our readers, and the context in which we work'. This approach to investigating 'how life is lived' offered a 'feminine' influence to interpreting an aspect of daily life in a study involving women (Clements et al., 1998, p.123).

A heuristic process was utilised as the predominant methodology in the analysis of the qualitative data (Moustakas, 1990). This enabled the findings to be expressed in individual and exemplary depictions, utilising verbatim material; and composite depictions, providing group representations of the exercise

experience. A creative synthesis, arising from the researcher's perceptions on the topic as a whole, was also developed. The holistic consideration of the benefits of exercise participation differentiated this study from those that had focused purely on the fragmentary. It also differentiated it from those that had considered the benefits of exercise in terms of prevention of or rehabilitation from a range of medical and psychosocial conditions. It shifted the emphasis away from an investigation of the physiological changes resulting from regular participation in exercise, to a person-centred perspective.

The circumstances in which the study was undertaken had implications for the methodology and outcomes. The research project was self-funded and self-directed, with time-scales and workable deadlines identified by the researcher alongside other commitments and responsibilities. The researcher was, therefore, able to allow connections and realisations to emerge in their own time. Also, it was possible to allow the study to find its own direction, without constraints and limitations on content enforced by external funding bodies. The researcher's position, as a member of the identified subject group, and as a practitioner in the fitness industry, enabled her to continually reflect on personal experience alongside the emergence of ideas and thoughts in relation to the study.

1.5 Definitions

The study is presented in a largely reflective style, with understanding of concepts and areas of interest and significance emerging through discursive techniques. Within the context of the study, the term exercise is utilised to represent physical activity involving maintenance or development of health-related fitness. The term 'regular participation in exercise' is utilised to represent participation on three or more occasions per week and for at least 30 minutes on each occasion. Within the study, the participants' primary involvement in exercise involves both facility based and non-facility based physical activities with a health and fitness bias. The study includes exercise undertaken alone and within a group context. The study does not include the

experiences of those whose primary involvement involves competitive, extreme or team sports.

Emotion, spirituality, and a sense of wellness that included both concepts were explored in the literature review. A definition of well-being that incorporates emotional and spiritual aspects arose from this emergent process for use within this study. This was stated as a unique and individual construct that provides a dynamic, living and joyful connection with life itself and that has nurturing and healing influences on a personal and collective evolutionary level. A definition of the concept of the self for reference in this study also arose from the extant literature on the topic and was stated as a unique, holistic and individual emerging process with organic and constantly functioning interpersonal influences.

1.6 Conclusion

A broad view of the issues and themes that were considered at depth within the study has been presented in this chapter. The research problems have been identified and justification for the research was stated. The methodology has been briefly outlined and the key terms utilised within the study have been defined. The study proceeds in detail on this basis.

Chapter Two: From the Parts to the Whole

I know little of the territory through which I must travel. But one thing is certain, the mystery summons me and lures me 'to let go of the known and swim in an unknown current'. (Moustakas, 1990, p.13)

The review of literature was constructed in two phases. It was, firstly, undertaken to build a theoretical foundation and a context for the study. This initial review of literature, presented in Section 2.1, involved the development of an understanding of the traditional standpoints as they appeared in fields related to this study. This foundational phase focused on the traditional perspectives on health and well-being, and on women's position in western society. Also it concentrated on the accepted benefits of regular exercise participation, the views of the fitness industry on exercise provision, and the fitness industry's approach to providing exercise instructor training.

The second phase of the review of literature, presented in Sections 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4, was undertaken to bring to the study a perception of human experience that acknowledged holism and subjectivity. Section 2.2 expanded the traditional view of positive health and focused on the experience of well-being in an emotional and a spiritual sense. Section 2.3 concentrated on the concept of the self, the development of an awareness of the self, and a sense of well-being in relation to self, to daily experiences and to life circumstances. Section 2.4 synthesised the holistic views of well-being and of the self with literature focusing on related aspects of participation in physical activity. This second phase of the literature established an alternative standpoint from which to gain understanding of the experience of regular exercise participation.

2.1 The context from traditional perspectives

2.1.1 The traditional perspective on health and well-being

This study focused on women's experience of health and well-being, and asked whether western society's model of health traditionally reflected their perception. The basic paradigm of health in western society is the biomedical model (Blaxter, 1990, 2004). This model fundamentally assumes a mechanistic

view of health and is reductionist in its approach to diagnosis. It is a model of illness, rather than of health and aims to restore normal functioning rather than prevent ill-health or promote positive health. It focuses on the physical and mental aspects of human existence. In relation to the promotion of positive health, the World Health Organisation (1986) considered health as a resource for everyday life, not just the objective of living. Herzlich (1973) identified health as having three dimensions: the simple absence of disease, a 'reserve' of health determined by temperament and constitution, and a positive state of well-being or equilibrium. Also, research has distinguished between people's perceptions of health. It has either been defined negatively, as the absence of illness; functionally, as the ability to cope with everyday activities; or positively, as fitness and well-being (Pill and Stott, 1982; Blaxter and Paterson, 1982; Williams, 1983; Bunton and Macdonald, 1995; Blaxter, 2004).

The biomedical model does not encompass all of what health means to an individual (Blaxter, 2004). More appropriate for this study is the concept of social or holistic health, which locates biological processes within their social contexts and considers the person as a whole, rather than as a series of distinct bodily systems (Blaxter, 2004). Pre-empting this view, Dossey (2001) took a person-centred stance and considered health as having unique meaning for the individual and as mirroring, representing and symbolising what is taking place in the life of each person. Kimiecik (2002, p.46) described wellness in a holistic sense. He said it was 'all about the whole being greater than the sum of its parts'. He perceived wellness to be about bringing together, connecting, integrating and synergising a range of personal needs in order to achieve optimal functioning.

The natural aging process and lifestyle choices have been specifically investigated for their potential to contribute to ill health in women (Costello, Griffith, Redfearn and Wilbon 1998). Kimiecik (2002) described the need for balance and integration to achieve optimal functioning and good health. Gahagan, Loppie, MacLellan, Rehman, and Side (2004) reiterated the importance of equilibrium or a balanced lifestyle and related it specifically to women. Multiple responsibilities and commitments make equilibrium and a

sense of well-being potentially difficult to achieve for women in particular, so that life can appear to be a constant 'juggling act' (Bepko and Krestan, 1991; Friedan, 1992; Scraton, 1994; Stein, 1997; Borysenko, 1998; Walton, 1999; Walton and Adams, 2003). Recognition of the importance of a balance between multiple factors and consideration of the whole person are features of a holistic approach to health (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987; Northrup, 1997; Stein, 1997). This kind of biopsychosocial model of health considers a number of interrelated systems operating on different levels. It more readily incorporates a positive stance, and also recognises aspects of well-being beyond the physical and mental. A biopsychosocial model of health takes a pro-active, preventative approach to health enhancement (Engel, 1977). There remains a need to investigate ways to promote an enduring disposition to experience well-being as a resource for everyday living, and to encourage a pro-active stance against the incidence of health disorders and dysfunctional living.

2.1.2 The traditional perspective on women

The research problem included consideration of what it is like to be a contemporary woman, and whether the literature accurately reflected that perspective. A review of the literature on traditional feminist perspectives revealed a complex and contradictory scenario (Evans, 1997; Tong, 1998). Nevertheless, it revealed a strong implication that women are oppressed. Each disparate standpoint, such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist and socialist feminism, and existentialist feminism aimed to explain the causes and consequences of an aspect of that oppression and to prescribe strategies for women's liberation (Tong, 1998). Postmodern feminism offered an alternative focus on womanhood and offered a way of embracing openness, diversity and difference. Tong (1998), however, expressed concern about a risk of losing sight of the common traits of womanhood within a theoretical perspective that embraced change and freedom.

The different theoretical standpoints offered unique perspectives and methodological strengths and weaknesses. Also, each appeared to offer merely a partial and provisional answer to the question about what it is like to be a woman (Tong, 1998). It was not the view of the researcher that any of the

theories comprehensively related to her personal experience as a woman. Life is more complex than a neatly bounded fragmentary theory suggests. Thus she concurred with the theorists' own conclusions that a fragmented approach leads to the loss of any coherent standpoint, making it increasingly difficult to identify clear observations about the position of women. Tong (1998) described it as a major challenge to contemporary feminism to reconcile the demands for diversity and variety with equally strong calls for integration and commonality.

Borysenko (1998) recognised some of the difficulties associated with the female role and its depiction in the literature. She described the lack of an accepted theoretical framework for understanding women's social, emotional or spiritual development. In large part, she considered this to be due to the tendency for research to be carried out by males and on male populations. It is, therefore, common in research to take the more dominant male persona as a benchmark for all of human development. She described how factors that relate to women directly have been seen traditionally as deviations from the norm, rather than as essentially different and worthwhile in their own right. Borysenko (1998, p.102) recognised the difficulties of acknowledging uniqueness in people and pointed out the problem of 'cutting all women out of the same cloth'. She described the variety of needs and wants that individual women express and strive to achieve within the larger picture of the common trends. The difficulty for many women appears to be one of being able to feel comfortable in making a personal and unique choice of lifestyle, regardless of wider cultural influences and general changes in social trends.

Major changes have been taking place in the lives of western women since the middle of the twentieth century. The women involved in this study were born between 1950 and 1970 and were socialised by the influences of their formative years. Their mothers and other adult women would have been amongst their role models. The contemporary social trends that these adult women experienced, influenced by post-war mentalities, will have affected the thinking of the generation to which attention is turned in this study. Many women were expected to not continue working in the post-war era. In the 1950's the socially defined norm for women was that they would consider getting married, having

children and living a comfortable suburban life as a housewife as being their ultimate lifestyle (Friedan, 1992). Social policy mitigated against women working and having a family, and working women were considered a 'deviant' group (Borysenko 1998, p.102). By the 1960's women were more commonly expressing discontent and a lack of fulfilment and were beginning to seek employment opportunities. By the 1970's educational and career opportunities for women were expanding.

Social trends can evolve and grow and become the norm by virtue of the social structure in which they are positioned. The process suggests that people living within a social framework acquire an ability to think creatively about a current situation, and an ability to envisage alternatives in order for change to evolve. It must surely also require courage and determination from the people involved, in order for them to instigate an initial impetus for change. Eventually, a critical mass offers an influence to the wider society. However, such things do not occur in isolation. Changes in one sector of the population will inevitably have implications for others. It must be borne in mind with this study that each sector of the population studied in isolation fails to include a perception of the larger inclusive picture. The 'holistic' perspective reported within this study remains a partial truth.

Societal influences have continued to impact on women's position. Domestic and childcare duties remain amongst the traditionally recognised barriers for women committing to responsibilities outside the home (Friedan, 1992). Despite this, the employment rates for women have increased from 47% in 1959 to 70% in 2000 (Office for National Statistics, 2002). Many women now work full or part-time, many have secured work in retail, care and secretarial positions (Mullins, 1994). Others have opted for further education and training. In more recent years, it has become common for women to hold supervisory, professional and executive positions (Friedan, 1992; Office for National Statistics, 2002).

In their attempt to be 'more than just a housewife', many women, particularly those now in their middle years, have been identified as experiencing multiple

life roles and consequent value conflict (Walton, 1999). More and more social and professional opportunities have become available to women in recent years. Open access in these areas requires that a level of comfort be reached with a more androgynous place in society. It often requires that women overcome a deep-rooted sense of guilt that arises in connection with self-development issues. Traditional societal expectations of women remain as strong influences for many. The identity dilemma for modern women once again arises. Traditionally expected to meet the needs of those around them before their own, many women also are aware of their own basic need to grow and to develop their potential in their own right (Friedan, 1992; Borysenko, 1998; Linn, 2002).

The literature describing the social perspective particularly for women approaching midlife and older adulthood has traditionally suggested that women have been portrayed as lamenting their maturation into this life stage (Borysenko, 1998). However, Borysenko (1998, p.2) acknowledged the existence of a limited number of studies that demonstrated that some women do continue to develop their strengths in later years and actually 'bloom' in midlife. Nevertheless, the importance of higher level needs such as knowledge, achievement, mastery, confidence and independence is still commonly perceived as not having been given prominence amongst women and has not been widely encouraged (Friedan, 1992). Those women who have sought self-realisation through personal development and growth have frequently taken on additional commitments without the opportunity to reduce those they already had. Personal growth for many women, therefore, has required significant courage and strength. Also, it has generally required permission and encouragement from the woman's immediate environment (Friedan, 1992). The resultant conflict between multiple demands on women's time and energy has become a common source of discord for many (Friedan, 1992; Borysenko, 1998).

Bepko and Krestan (1991, p.3) considered that women are frequently 'too good for [their] own good' and wanting to meet all demands successfully find themselves torn. They described how women worry continually about attempting to live up to unattainable standards, never feeling good enough

about who they are and what they do. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) described women's notions of responsibility and care. According to Belenky et al. (1986) a responsibility orientation is central to those whose conceptions of self are rooted in a sense of connection and relatedness to others, a trait traditionally considered to be feminine. An orientation based on one's personal rights is more common amongst those who define themselves in terms of separation and autonomy, considered by many theorists to be a more masculine tendency (Tong, 1998). A more balanced and mutually beneficial approach may be to take an androgynous standpoint that places equal weighting on one's own needs and those of other people.

Research has further portrayed women as passive participants in the socialisation process. Northrup (1997) expressed concern at the degree to which women are socialised into putting others before themselves as the appropriate way to act. This concurred with the view that many women feel an obligation to care for the family, to be a companion for their friends and to achieve at work, to create, design, organise and straighten (Bepko and Krestan, 1991). Bepko and Krestan (1991) described an inner struggle faced by many women who perceive a need to appear competent, emotionally responsible, hard-working and successful in every facet of a multi-tasking lifestyle. Research has shown that this outward focus on the perceptions and needs of other people can produce self-doubt, guilt and even a sense of exhaustion.

Research has also shown that many women feel that there are culturally recognised ethical standards of behaviour to which they are obliged to adhere (Bepko and Krestan, 1991; Borysenko, 1998). Historically, women were expected to be physically and emotionally strong, and to take responsibility for the emotional and physical needs of their families (Stein, 1997). At the same time, they were expected to remain dependent on the family, particularly the male members (Turner, 1999). They rarely had access to the economic means to be solely responsible for themselves. Women, traditionally have had large amounts of responsibility, but little power. Over time, this may have developed women's innate capacity to be sensitive, intuitive, generous and nurturing, and to be able to focus on the emotional and physical comfort of others. Also, it

may have led women to deny themselves the need to nurture their own well-being (Bepko and Krestan, 1991; Friedan, 1992; Borysenko, 1998).

Many women now work (Mullins, 1994; Office for National Statistics, 2002). This is accompanied by women now maintaining their careers for longer and choosing to have children later in life (Borysenko, 1998). This fact and the expectation of many men that women will take care of relationship issues have implications for women between the ages of 30 and 50 years. They may commonly find themselves not only with dependent children to care for, but also with the needs of two sets of aging parents to consider. Other women who find themselves as a single parent are frequently expected to competently fulfil all the family responsibilities.

According to Bepko and Krestan (1991, p.9) 'being competent without complaint' is the standard expected of a woman as she is seen to be taking care of everything and doing so without appearing to be overwhelmed by the multiplicity of the task. Many women aim to combine a demanding career with an equally demanding home life. For men, the home is often regarded as a refuge from occupational stress. For women, home may be a source of further work. Many men still expect their female partners to take the lead with domestic duties, even when both parties spend an equal amount of time at work or out of the house. There has, more recently, been some change in male attitudes with a more androgynous approach to the sharing of household chores. However, in addition to what they do, women are still frequently the ones who are thinking about 'what needs to be done' (Bepko and Krestan, 1991, p.35). Professionally successful women with families often sustain their own and the family's environment themselves.

The literature depicted the concept of being a woman in current times as being complex, multi-faceted and busy. It suggested that many women may feel torn and fragmented due to the various demands on their time and energy that modern life presents. It suggested too that many women may feel that their life is often directed by external influences that leave them feeling restricted and with the perception that they are unable to fulfil their personal potential.

2.1.3 The traditional perspective on women as regular participants in exercise

The research problem included consideration of what it is like to be a woman who regularly takes part in exercise. The literature stated that, traditionally, women have little free time for participation in leisure activities of any kind (Kane, 1990; Bepko and Krestan, 1991; Stein, 1997; Taunton, Martin, Rhodes, Wolski, Donnelly and Elliot, 1997; Borysenko, 1998; Tong, 1998; Walton, 1999; Partenheimer, 2000) and that men exercise more than women (Bird, Smith and James, 1998). Clearly, however, the conviction with which such statements were made discounted atypical cases. Nevertheless, participation rates in physical activity and exercise amongst women were generally considered to be at about 25% (Allied Dunbar National Fitness Survey, 1992; Sport England, 2005). They have been low for centuries due to false assumptions concerning biology, aptitude and ability, and the suitability of exercise for the female form (Birley, 1993). Activity was considered to be inappropriate for women due to factors such as the menstrual cycle, plus a perceived lack of strength, propensity and skill in physical pursuits. These assumptions have led to physical activity being traditionally recognised as more appropriate for men in British society and regarded as a male preserve. However, the statistics remain unclear, as an increase of 4% (to 38%) in female participation rates had been recorded between 1987 and 1996 (Office for National Statistics, 1998). The Department of Health (2004a) indicated a rise of 3% from 21 % in 1997 to 24% in 2004. In any case, participation in exercise still remains, statistically, a minority activity for women. Furthermore, where women have been reported as regular participants in exercise, the benefits have been identified as relating to women's preoccupation with diet and weight loss (Chernin, 1981), a 'culturally induced body insecurity' (Orbach, 1993, p.23) and the subsequent decision to be active to attain and maintain a slender body image (Lloyd, 1996).

It is becoming more widely recognised that these assumptions about the appropriateness and the appeal of exercise for women are incorrect. However, women are still frequently considered to be held back by limits placed upon opportunity and provision through a variety of cultural, social, personal and institutional factors (Greendorfer, 1978; Scraton, 1994). Deem (1986, p.8), in a

Borysenko (1998, p.3) suggested, however, that the nature of womanhood, having developed historically, is continuing to change. She suggested it is slowly moving towards an understanding that being a woman transcends obligations, differences and individualities:

our major life task is much larger than making money, finding a mate, having a career, raising children, looking beautiful, achieving psychological health, or defying aging, illness and death. It is a recognition of the sacred in daily life – a deep gratitude for the wonders of the world and the delicate web of interconnectedness between people, nature and things – a recognition that true intimacy based on respect and love is the measure of a life well lived. This innate female spirituality underlies an often unspoken commitment to protect our world from the ravages of greed and violence.

Borysenko (1998, p.139) particularly offered some solace for women moving into their middle years, describing this period as the time when women demonstrate a shift away from fear and guilt and they 'learn to spin gold from straw'. She described how, in this stage of life, some women find a way of recognising that their life experiences have value in providing them with learning, understanding and compassion that pervade all their relationships. She expressed this as being a process of connecting with 'the core essence of womanhood, the development of self-in-relation that describes our natural spirituality'. Also, Bolen (2003, p.4) advocated the practice of 'inner development' for women moving into their middle years and described this phase of life as a time 'in which to grow psychologically and spiritually'. Henes (2005, p.3) reiterated the potential for positive gain for women approaching midlife and described the resultant 'mythic model' as:

a regal Queen standing in Her proper place ... Still active and sexy, vital with the enthusiasm and energy of youth, the Queen is tempered with the hard-earned experience and leavening attitudes of age ... She is the Queen of her Self, the mature monarch, the sole sovereign of Her own life and destiny.

Bolen (2003) and Henes (2005) stressed that the process is not an automatic one and that adversity and constraints make the journey both challenging and exhilarating.

study of women's leisure participation in Milton Keynes, found that 'women's leisure is much more constrained' than men's. The factors noted as perceived constraints, mainly rooted in the identified patriarchal and capitalist structures, included dependent children, a lack of disposable income, time and confidence to take part, restricted mobility, and poor health.

Research conducted in the United Kingdom suggested that family responsibilities were the most significant constraint on married women's leisure (Scraton, 1994). This was supported by Kenwell's (2000) finding that 68% of women with children felt that family responsibilities restricted their leisure time even though only 50% had children under 16 years of age. In the United States of America, Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw and Freysinger (1989, p.152) suggested that women with partners and dependent children were also limited in their leisure opportunities because 'leisure is not readily recognised as a legitimate component of women's lives as it is of men's'.

The basic tenet that women desire to find ways of balancing various life roles and fundamental self-concepts remains a source of many dilemmas for modern women (Borysenko, 1998). Women moving into their middle years, in particular, have many calls on their time and energy (Kane, 1990; Bepko and Krestan, 1991; Stein, 1997; Borysenko, 1998; Walton, 1999; Kay, 2000). A fundamental desire to nurture others and to develop positive relationships can require women to give careful thought to balancing commitments involving the close and extended family and friends, along with personal career and social considerations.

In line with the principles of organic research (Clements et al., 1998), the initial concept for this study arose from the researcher's own reflections on her personal experience. She brought to the study an intuitive sense that the traditional literature on women's position in the social structure told only a partial story. The researcher empathised with Stewart's (2000, p.5) view that the literature depicting women's experiences offered 'a slightly skewed vision that reveals underlying mindsets and motives'. The researcher also agreed with Eitling (1998, p.179) that there was '[a] need for women's stories to be told'.

As such, this study was an attempt to reveal a deeper truth, and to unravel the subtle hints of other stories and meanings. All of the women in the study have chosen to exercise regularly. They, therefore, do not comply with stereotypical social expectations of women. They have overcome the traditional barriers in order to maintain involvement in a pursuit that has deep positive meaning for them. This study investigated their lifestyle, values, beliefs and the meaning that they attached to their experience of regular participation in exercise.

2.1.4 The traditional perspective on the benefits of regular exercise participation

The research problem included consideration of the holistic benefits of regular participation in exercise for women moving into their middle years. The literature providing evidence of the benefits of physical activity traditionally originated from a scientific perspective. It identified links with a range of factors associated with improved physical and mental health and well-being. Also it was generally not gender-specific (Pollack, 1979; Joesting, 1981; Hughes, 1984; Hayes and Ross, 1986; Morgan and O'Connor, 1988; American College of Sports Medicine, 1990; Gleser and Mendelberg, 1990; Turner-Warwick, Petecost and Jones, 1991; Allied Dunbar National Fitness Survey, 1992; Singer, 1992; Blair, 1995; Pate, Pratt and Blair, 1995; Daley and Parfitt, 1996; Department of Health, 1996; Smith, Gould, See Tai and Illiffe, 1996; Yeung and Hemsley, 1996; Van Baak, 1998; Hardman, 1999; Faulkner and Biddle, 2001; Bauman, Bendiksen, Brubaker, Bruno, Chodzko-Zajko, Coakley, Kane, Krayzelburg, Matheson, Rundell, Sallis, Segar, Thompson and Woo, 2002; Lane, Crone-Grant, Lane, 2002; Department of Health, 2003; World Health Organisation, 2003; Health Development Agency, 2004b; Crone, Smith and Gough, 2005; Sport England, 2005). However, some research has focused specifically on the physical and mental benefits for women (Cramer, Nieman and Lee, 1991; Maroulakis and Zervas, 1993; Gill, Williams, Williams, Butki and Kim, 1997; Brustman, 2000; Shaw and Henderson, 2000; Hardcastle and Taylor, 2001).

Studies designed to explore the benefits of specific activities took a scientific approach and have investigated, for example, the benefits of swimming (Berger

and Owen, 1983, 1987) aerobic exercise (Hughes, 1984; Ransford and Palisi, 1996), physical fitness training (Folkins and Sime, 1981) and running (Greist, Klein, Eischens, Faris, Gurman and Morgan, 1979; Schnohr, 2000). Similarly, the benefits of participation in physical activity in terms of isolated aspects of health have been carried out from a fragmentary perspective. They have revealed connections between exercise participation and stress reduction (Long, 1983; Brown and Siegel, 1988; Brown, 1991; Long and Flood, 1993; Rostad and Long, 1996; Manning and Fusilier, 1999; Ruffin, 1999), reduced depression and anxiety (Bahrke and Morgan, 1978; Hayden and Allen, 1984; Petruzzello, Landers, Hatfield, Kubitz and Salazar, 1991; Partenheimer, 1999; Merritt, 2000), mood enhancement (Steptoe and Bolton, 1988; Cramer, et al., 1991; Muoulakis and Zervas, 1993; Berger and Motl, 2000), increased self-esteem (McAuley, 2000) and transcendence of negative life events (Kleiber, Hutchinson and Williams, 2002). As a result, physical activity has been included in public health policies (Department of Health, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2004b, 2006a; World Health Organisation, 2003; Health Development Agency, 2004a) and physical activity promotion programmes (Taylor, Doust and Webborn, 1998). However, this may have remained a partial depiction of the whole truth and failed to illustrate the benefits to quality of life and to enhanced involvement in wider life experiences.

2.1.5 The traditional perspective of the fitness industry.

The research problem included consideration of factors relating to adherence to regular exercise. The fitness industry promotes exercise as a route to wellness (Alessandri, 1999; Slocock, 1999) and as a factor in the prevention of chronic illnesses and conditions such as coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity and some cancers (Calman, Waring and Warburton, 1999; Sport England, 2005). However, despite widespread promotion and acceptance of the benefits on a macro level, figures show that, in practical terms, participation in exercise remains below guidelines. Figures recorded in surveys showed that approximately only 25% of the British population regularly engage in physical activity (Allied Dunbar National Fitness Survey, 1992; Clarke, 1997; Riddoch, Puig-Ribera, and Cooper, 1998; Harland, White, Drinkwater, Chinn, Farr, and Howel, 1999; Department of Health, 2004a; Sport England, 2005). Research by

the Health Education Authority (1998) has shown that many people have the intention of becoming more active. However, research to investigate behaviour change programmes and exercise adherence patterns demonstrated that commencement does not guarantee sustained participation (Marcus and Simkin, 1994; Marcus, Forsyth, Stone, Dubbert, McKenzie, Dunn and Blair, 2000). Regular participation in physical activity, therefore, remains low and attrition rates on exercise programmes remain high (Dishman and Buckworth, 1996; Chen, Sallis, Castro, Lee, Hickman, Williams and Martin, 1998; Marcus et al., 2000). These facts illustrated the on-going difficulties involved in promoting behaviour change and adherence to change (Dishman, Ickes and Morgan, 1980; Desharnais, Bouillon and Godin, 1986; Rollnick, Kinnersley and Stott, 1993; Buxton, Wyse and Mercer, 1996; Miilunpalo, 2001). They pointed to an abiding need to further investigate and identify the factors that motivate people who demonstrate a long-term commitment to regularly exercising. Also there was a need to investigate the thought processes of those who embark on behaviour change, and who commence and then maintain the exercise habit (Marx, 1982; Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983; Laffrey and Isenberg, 1983; Marcus and Simkin, 1994; Bouton, 2000; Chambers, Chambers and Campbell, 2000; Marcus et al., 2000; Orleans, 2000). This study focused on women with a history of exercise participation. It explored the mentality of women who gave exercise importance in their lives. It considered the value that women who are regular exercisers place on their participation and the factors that motivated them to retain the exercise habit. This had the potential to influence policy on service provision aimed at increasing participation and retention of exercise amongst the wider, and generally sedentary, population.

2.1.6 The traditional perspective of training providers for the fitness industry

The research problem included consideration of how the fitness industry trained its instructors and whether that provision equipped them adequately for the job. Exercise instructor training programmes concentrated on the scientific aspects of exercise and physical activity. Perusal of the content of training courses for instructors in aerobics, step, circuit, gym, body pump, body combat, studio cycling and for personal trainers showed a commonality of topics to be covered

prior to qualification. These included basic anatomy and physiology, exercise physiology, exercise psychology, fitness principles, health and safety issues, teaching/coaching techniques and programme design. Modules on aspects of the person-centred and subjective elements of exercise participation were rarely found in basic training courses. Continuing education or advanced modules for fitness and exercise instructors generally focused on specific areas of fitness such as strength, cross training, fitness testing and heart rate training zones. Person-centred topics were rare at all levels of training (YMCA, 2002; RSA, 2002; SPRITO, 2002; Fitness Professionals, 2002; Fitness and Aerobic Certifications for Instructors, 2002; FutureFit, 2002; Fitness Industry Education, 2002; Schwinn Fitness Academy, 2002; National Studio Cycling Centre, 2002; Peloton Fitness, 2002).

Training and development programmes for fitness and exercise instructors tended to be created and delivered by those who were already involved in the fitness and exercise industry. Their own education in sport and exercise matters was likely to have been based in the natural, rather than social, sciences and lacking a subjective focus. The development of new training programmes that are radically different from the norm requires significant changes in mindset and thinking. It requires recognition from the industry that there is value in focussing on additional or alternative issues. Training programmes require accreditation. Currently, this is partly acquired with the inclusion of referenced, accepted and science based information. The inclusion of, or focus on, a more subjective perspective may be perceived as 'risky', 'deviant' or 'unsound' by both training providers and the accrediting authorities. This may explain the continued focus on scientific information in training programmes.

Also, it must be considered that many of the people working within the fitness industry already demonstrate a predisposition to exercise. They value physical activity and already have a positive perception of exercise and of themselves in an exercise environment. Their personal values, beliefs and self-concept in relation to exercise are likely to be positive. They are likely to take for granted that exercise is to be experienced on a regular basis. Their own focus and subjective viewpoint about exercise is inherently natural, built very firmly into

their whole life view, and therefore largely unconscious. This may lead them to take a 'victim-blaming' stance towards those who do not exercise, or who relapse. People, whose early experiences of physical activity in school for example may have been less positive, may hold very different views. Exercise instructors and their training providers, who already function from a positivistic perspective in an exercise environment, appear not to perceive of a need to investigate the factors that underpin their perspective and enable them to maintain their own involvement. The answers to the behaviour change debate could be within, rather than without. This missed opportunity results in a lack of coverage in training programmes for instructors of topics that focus on the subjective aspects of exercise participation, and the factors that contribute to the retention of the habit.

The literature indicated an opportunity to give attention to the wider outcomes and benefits of exercising. It also pointed to the opportunity to focus conscious attention on the factors that contribute to the creation of a positive experience for participants in exercise. Greater understanding of the factors comprising a positive perception of exercise may facilitate greater empathy with newcomers to an activity environment and with those who resist physical activity. It may enable exercise instructors to make conscious use of techniques and approaches in their work to open people up to the full extent of the benefits of involvement in exercise.

The analysis of personal subjective experience is not easy. Also, it is difficult to appreciate a personal perspective that is different from one's own and to appreciate where the differences might lie. Member retention and the encouragement of physical activity amongst the wider population remain prominent issues on political agendas and within the fitness industry itself (Sport England, 2005). Furthermore, the true meaning of exercise participation may lie beyond the traditional standpoint of the scientific literature, and it remains unspoken in the realm of the fitness industry. In accordance with the work of Stewart (2000), it was the researcher's wish to investigate the deep meaning of regular exercise participation and the process of facilitating access

to knowing it. The words of Halprin (see Stewart, 2000, p.11-12) resonated reassuringly, as they intimated that this would not be a futile search:

the larger theme, as I see it, is once again renewing our faith in what our bodies have to teach us. I feel that in this culture and over all too long a period in our history, we have been totally alienated from the true wisdom of our bodies ... My interest in [movement] is to reconnect with the innate intelligence within our bodies and with what our bodies have to say to us. Our bodies contain all the wisdom of the ages, wisdom that goes back before we were even born. That wisdom is in our cellular system, in our nervous system, in our circulatory system, in each breath that we breathe. We are not an event; we are a long evolutionary process.

The research may evidence the process of 'becoming the exercise', of giving oneself up to the rhythm and the movement of activity and fully acknowledging the experience of the emotional and spiritual depth it invokes (Stewart, 2000, p.12).

2.2 An expanded view of health and well-being: emotional and spiritual well-being

2.2.1 The challenges involved in considering the emotional and spiritual as aspects of well-being

The traditional literature on the identified issues relating to health, women's position in modern society, the benefits of exercise and its provision and delivery, may offer only a partial truth. Further review of the literature was carried out with the aim of focussing on aspects of personal experience beyond those covered by traditional studies, and to include an emotional and a spiritual dimension. A holistic perspective states that positive health and well-being relate to aspects of the self beyond the physical and the mental, and embrace the individual as 'a social whole' (Blaxter, 2004, p.147). It was felt that this expanded view of health was not only accessible to the general population, but was also a current reality for many people.

In addition to physical and mental well-being, Calhoun and Solomon (1984), Goleman (1996), Myss (1997), Fredrickson, (1998), Tolle (1999), Levin (2000)

and Zohar and Marshall (2000) identified the inclusion of emotional and spiritual well-being as being important considerations of positive health and of a holistic perspective on the individual. The growing trend for well-being in an emotional and spiritual sense had not, however, generally been explicitly considered in the mainstream provision of health-related activities or in health promotion in western culture. The predominant mentality remained bound within physical and mental constructs (Bunton and Macdonald, 1995; Cooper, 1998a). This study considered whether women's experiences of health and well-being reflected the traditional view or included more expanded perceptions.

A review of literature on emotional health and well-being, and on spiritual well-being and a spiritual approach to life was carried out, utilising these terms in the search for relevant works. This revealed that the researchers producing such material appeared to distinguish between emotional and spiritual experience. In practical terms, however, the distinction between what constituted one or the other of these aspects of personal experience became less easy to define. Discussion on meaning, value and developing awareness, although identified as components of spiritual well-being, were also included in the texts concerning themselves specifically with emotion (Calhoun and Solomon, 1984; Fredrickson, 1998; Silvia, 2002). Proponents of spiritual well-being also discussed promotion of positive emotional states alongside issues of meaning and value and the individual's place in the wider social context (Myss, 1997; Tolle, 1999; Levin, 2000; Zohar and Marshall, 2000). A concept such as 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 2002) was referred to in literature on emotion (Fredrickson, 1998). 'Flow' was also referred to in relation to spiritual experiences (Spino, 1976; Stevens, 1988). This suggested a significant area of overlap. Also, it suggested subjective interpretation of what constituted emotional and spiritual well-being. Similar experiences have been interpreted, expressed and understood in different ways. This suggested that the event itself was not the source of emotional or spiritual experience. A crucial factor was the appreciation of quality and depth in the experiencing and the subsequent internal interpretation of the experience by the individual. Another crucial

factor was a level of comfort with the choice of words with which to give expression in linguistic terms to personal experience.

Research is defined and limited by its academic and social setting (Davies, 1999). It discounts, or fails to recognise, other aspects of human experience beyond its current defining boundaries. The resultant research is similarly bounded and indicates the connections made by its author within the definitions of the study. Different authors make different connections. There is the potential that further existent, and as yet unrecognised, unexpressed and unexplored connections are also possible. In the following sub-sections, the literature is reviewed as it was identified in its relation to emotional, and to spiritual issues. This includes consideration of some of the factors involved in the generation of emotional and spiritual well-being, specifically in relation to the context of the fitness industry. A definition of well-being that acknowledged emotional and spiritual components emerged from the review of literature and provided a new perspective on understanding women's experience of wellness.

2.2.2 Emotional well-being

A review of the literature specifically on emotional well-being revealed that debate on the exact nature of this intangible, subjective and very personal phenomenon has been going on for centuries. Myers (1997) described how, in the past, Aristotle, for example, argued for the inclusion of beliefs, outwardly visible physical actions and internal physiological changes as inseparable elements of emotion. Calhoun and Solomon (1984) considered how, since then and over time that which has been considered to constitute emotion has varied, perpetuating a lack of clarity and understanding. Scientists, with their interest in objectivity, reason, measurement and regulation, have found emotion to be a difficult topic on which to agree (Williams and Bendelow, 1996; Gross, 1998).

Where an attempt at understanding has been made, theorists have generally argued that, in days gone by, emotional responses evolved because they promoted specific actions in life threatening circumstances and thereby increased the odds of survival. Negative emotions were said to have evolved to

narrow a person's thought-action repertoire and to increase a tendency for action. However, threats to life and limb are not usually an issue in situations that give rise to positive emotions. Therefore, quick and decisive action is not necessary. Contemporary usage of the term emotion is of two general kinds and tends to include the word 'emotion' to describe any number of subjectively experienced states, or as a label to describe the environmental, physiological and cognitive factors that underlie the subjective experiences (Reber, 1995).

In the scientific realm, Calhoun and Solomon (1984) described four theoretical approaches to the analysis of emotion: the physiological, the sensate, the behavioural and the cognitive-evaluative. Each emphasised a different component of emotion. Physiological and sensate theories focused on the acute nature of an emotional experience and stressed the feel of an emotion. James's (1950) physiological theory of emotion considered the internal disturbances underlying emotion. He argued that the awareness of emotion was the perception of these bodily changes. Sensate theorists, such as Hume (1957), focused on the characteristic feel of an emotion, as opposed to the physical disturbance, such as a churning stomach. The distinction between calm emotions, which generally have a mental feel, and violent ones, which may involve physiological disturbance was central to Hume's classification of emotions (Calhoun and Solomon, 1984).

Proponents of behavioural theories concentrated on externally observable behaviour, as opposed to internal subjective experiences (Calhoun and Solomon, 1984). Advocates of behavioural theories analysed not only the manifestation of emotional behaviour, but also a disposition to behave repeatedly in a particular way. Watson (1930) argued that behaviour, and also the disposition to behave, actually constituted the emotion itself. Ryle (1949) considered that all mental terms (for example, 'feels angry', 'believes', 'suspects') referred to behaviour and dispositions or tendencies to behave in a particular way. These exemplified the cognitive approach to understanding emotion at the level of mental processing, belief structure and the connection with expressed language (Calhoun and Solomon, 1984). Calhoun and Solomon (1984) also distinguished between short- and long-term emotions, referring to

the former as an 'episode' and to the latter as a 'disposition'. An episode was described as being distinctly bound in time, whereas a disposition is a tendency to be subject to certain kinds of episodes. Debate on the durability of emotion, however, was on-going. Strongman (1978) had included durability as a possible factor in his description of emotion. He had suggested emotions could be either transient or long-lasting. A lack of consensus was further evident, as Ekman (1992) later proposed that it is in the nature of emotions to be of rapid onset and of brief duration.

Cognitive-evaluative theorists linked emotions with an individual's values and beliefs and considered that what a person felt about other people, events and objects generally indicated how that person valued them (Calhoun and Solomon, 1984). They proposed that emotion and value were so strongly linked that, were it not for emotions it would not be possible to hold values. Values can be defined as 'core beliefs that guide behaviour ... and serve as standards to evaluate behaviour' (Crace and Hardy, 1997, p.43). The enduring, fundamental and essential nature of a person's values and the link with emotional responses added further support to the claim for pervading emotional dispositions. Sartre (1948) and Solomon (1977) considered that emotions were, or resembled, unspoken value judgments or beliefs. Brentano (1971) also supported the link between emotion and values. He considered that all emotions contained an evaluative pro- or con-attitude on which value beliefs were formulated and drew an analogy between emotion and judgment. Further he opined that the essential quality in knowing that an emotion was congruent with one's values was the internal and individual experience of correctness. Evaluative theories considered emotions to be important mental phenomena that complemented reason's insight by guiding a person in their values. This view appeared to pre-suppose a clear, conscious understanding of one's values, thought processes and emotional response to those processes.

Much of the theorising on emotion has arisen from individual perspectives that were grounded in varying aspects of scientific theory. These perspectives have attempted to rationalise emotion. Perhaps they have inadvertently dehumanised this subjective aspect of human experience. A perspective on emotion as

experiential, and that incorporated a developmental, organic and person-centred focus was more pertinent to this study. Emmons (1999) explored how emotion was involved in the processes through which people gave meaning, purpose and significance to life events. Emotions, according to Calhoun and Solomon (1984) endowed the world with meaning and were not simply momentary intrusions in an individual's life, but were the source of one's ideals. They concluded that emotions gave meaning to life and contributed significantly to quality of life. Frijda (1986) supported the view that the events that elicited emotion fulfilled a special role and were more than simple stimuli. He described how they have an effect commensurate with their significance to, or their meaning for, the individual. Central to these principles was the idea that emotions were a way of being conscious of or aware of the world.

Masson and McCarthy (1996) and Northrup (1997) added a dynamic dimension and further helped to reconnect emotion with human experience. Masson and McCarthy (1996) proposed that emotions gave not only meaning, but also depth to life. Northrup (1997, p.52) suggested that 'the purpose of emotions ... is to help us feel and participate fully in our own lives'. She felt that life could best be lived in a way that allowed the individual to move towards whatever provided the most fulfilment, personal growth and freedom. 'Depth' and 'movement towards' provoked a reconnection with the multi-dimensional nature of human existence. These terms suggested recognition of a life energy in emotional experience that implied development and growth. Cooper (1998a) also recognised the subjective nature of emotion. He recommended involvement in activities that focused the energies of mind and body, and that awakened the self to the deeper dimensions of human experience as a way of evoking emotion. This study investigated exercise as one such activity. In exploring the nature, meaning and benefits of regular exercise participation as perceived by women moving into their middle years, it acknowledged both depth and emotion in everyday experience.

Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p.xi) focussed attention on the generation of positive emotions and added a further dimension to the discussion. He suggested that a joyful approach to living did not have one definition or source. Rather it was

'an individual creation that cannot be copied from a recipe book'. Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p.5) further suggested that a deep sense of positive emotion came not from 'getting slim or rich', but from feeling good about life. The resultant enthusiasm, excitement, joy and contentment were indicated as the positive emotions that were likely to be the active ingredient that energised an upward spiral of optimal health and well-being (Fredrickson, 2000). This study considered exercise as a source for a joyful approach to living. It asked whether women seek more from exercise than the traditionally recognised 'acceptable body' (Chernin, 1981, p.36).

Significant for this study were the views of Masson and McCarthy (1996) and Northrup (1997) that emotion is an internal and an individual construct that provides a dynamic and living sense of a connection with life itself. Access to a deep sense of positive emotion is, within this viewpoint, considered to be an individual process acquired through involvement in activities perceived by the individual to have the potential to provide that outcome. Masson and McCarthy (1996) and Northrup (1997) also noted that such activities could not be prescribed; they have to be chosen by the individual. The ability to make this choice requires significant thought and self-knowledge on the part of the individual, and a sense that a particular option is not only appropriate, but also available. This requires a level of comfort with moving away from stereotypical and expected patterns of behaviour and expectations. The traditional view of women's position in society may not be conducive to such thinking. The issue, for women in particular, may be one of accessing a sense that this kind of activity can be a legitimate component of their lifestyle. They may require the personal strength and courage to feel comfortable in involving themselves in such activities. Furthermore, the fitness industry's traditional focus on its benefits, particularly for women, as being related to diet, weight loss and body image may be missing a crucial point.

The influence of the factors underlying subjective experience is significant in the appreciation of a dynamic dimension. Interaction with the environment and with other individuals has the potential to be challenging and to affect emotional well-being (Frankl, 1984; Wray, 1986; Myss, 1997; Pinker, 1997;

Levin 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). An environment perceived to be safe, supportive and inclusive has positive connotations and a positive influence on health. An environment perceived as hostile and unfriendly can have a negative impact on health. Similarly, a positive relationship with other people that includes respect, trust, compassion and empathy has the potential to enhance the well-being of those involved.

Emotions and thought processes have been found to have a profound effect on the health of the whole person, and were found to be physically linked to the individual (Goleman, 1996). Emotional factors have been found to influence physical health through the biochemical reactions that accompany them. If emotional distress is ignored it can result in physical illness due to the effect that suppressed emotions can have on the endocrine and immune systems. Links have been made between the physical manifestations of stress, cancer, heart disease and other ailments and emotional malaise arising as a result of a range of societal, environmental and individual factors (Stein, 1997). The implication is that there is a requirement for a degree of affinity with the environment and with one's fellow humans and an optimum level of emotion to produce best results from this process. The cultivation of a deep and intuitive self-awareness, and a wide perception of an empathic rapport with a broad diversity of people and of a sense of deep joy were considered amongst the key components of emotional well-being (Goleman, 1996; Tolle, 1999; Higgs and Dulewicz, 2000; Levin, 2000; Zohar and Marshall, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Emmons and McCullough, 2003).

The implications for the fitness industry must include recognition of the importance of creating a welcoming and empathic environment, both physical and social. The interaction between customers and staff members, including instructors and session leaders, is a crucial element in the creation of a wellness-inducing environment. Instructors enable participants to take positive benefit from attending their sessions when they interact positively and empathically with class participants. Those who welcome and support newcomers to their sessions, and who provide options to suit a range of capabilities are enabling people with a range of needs and goals to find an

appropriate level of challenge for themselves and to achieve. Where instructors are encouraging heightened levels of self-awareness and self-knowledge, they have greater potential to enhance health. Calhoun and Solomon (1984), Mayer and Geher (1996) and Brown and Ryan (2003) proposed that self-knowledge and awareness of one's emotional state was basic to a person's general well-being. The experience of positive emotion on a long-term basis, along with a pervading positive outlook and state of mind have been proposed as being indicative of good health and well-being (Stein, 1997; Fredrickson, 2000).

As a further issue, research into emotional well-being has acknowledged the difficulties inherent in understanding and expressing emotion. Mayer and Geher (1996) recognised that the personal identification of emotion is complex. Masson and McCarthy (1996) agreed and noted that complexity was partly due to emotions seldom arising in isolation from each other. Although research on emotion has increased in recent years, emotion theorists have frequently tended to explain emotions in general, without distinguishing the differences between the positive and the negative. Other studies have focussed specifically on experiences of negative emotion. Investigations specifically into the value of positive emotions remain scarce (Fredrickson, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Where distinctions between positive and negative emotions have been made, research has suggested that positive emotions account for only about one quarter of the total range of emotion (Fredrickson, 1998). This imbalance is also reflected in the numbers of words used to describe emotion in the English language. Approximately three-quarters of the English words used to express emotion are associated with negative emotion (Fredrickson, 1998). A lack of clarity remained, however, about the reason for the verbally expressed imbalance in the range of emotions. A possible explanation is a lack of appropriate language to verbalise positive emotion. Alternatively, the imbalance may be due to a deficiency in the amount of experienced positive emotion to be expressed verbally, or to western cultural influences that 'endorse the Protestant ethic, which casts hard work and self-discipline as virtues, and leisure and pleasure as sinful' (Fredrickson, 2000, p.2). Words have also been found to be inadequate at purveying the full depth of human subjective experience (Kovacs, 2000). Language itself has strong cultural and historical-

links that were connected to perception of experience and subsequent expression of emotion (Motluk, 2002). Berry and Pennebaker (1993) further noted that, along with the verbal expression of emotion, the nonverbal indications have high significance. There remained an ultimate need to acknowledge that the actual personal and unique experience of emotion remains distinct from both its verbal and nonverbal expression (Berry and Pennebaker, 1993). There was a need to bear in mind the considerations mentioned above in a study designed to investigate positive emotion, its components and implications.

Fredrickson (1998) and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) continued the discussion on emotion as a dynamic element of human experience. They identified one of the benefits of experiencing positive emotion as broadening a person's thought-action repertoire. Positive emotions were said to lead people to experiencing ease at discarding automatic everyday behavioural scripts and tendencies and to developing a relaxed approach to pursuing novel, creative and often unscripted paths of thought and action. Also, De Bono (1971) described the importance of an optimum emotional state in the facilitation of creative and open thinking. He described the significant role of emotion in facilitating optimum information processing. O'Connor and Seymour (1995) further described the importance of a positive approach to facilitating personal development and described how a positive environment can be influential in enabling growth. Diener (1984), Izard (1991), Pinker (1997) and Kovecses (2000) supported the view that emotion mobilises the mind and body to act. Myss (1997, p.198) described emotional energy as 'the true motivator of the human body and spirit'.

The research potential of positive emotions has been generally neglected, despite recognition of the aforementioned factors (Diener, 1984; Fredrickson, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). This further reiterates the general scientific and medical paradigms of concentrating on negative aspects of the human condition, rather than the preventative, well-being aspects. Fredrickson (1998) suggested that one reason for the lack of information on positive emotions was due to their dissimilarity with negative emotions. She supported Nesse's (1990) suggestion that researchers potentially found the negative emotions more

interesting due to a natural scientific gravitation towards problems and solutions, and due to the fact that there is a perception of more different kinds of threat than opportunities. Fredrickson (1998) recognized the need for further research into the salutogenic qualities of the positive emotions, acknowledging their potential to provide prevention of the problems that lead to negative states. She aimed to address the lack of research in this area and considered four basic positive emotions: joy, interest, contentment and love. These she selected due to her perception that they appear maximally distinct from each other, with the exception of love, which she perceived to be partially made up of the other three. Secondly she perceived these emotions to be recognisable across cultures. She supported Ekman's (1992) notion of emotional families and suggested that each of the four was made up of a number of related states.

Although Fredrickson (1998) distinguished between four positive emotions, the identified complexity and uniqueness with which one subjectively experiences emotion must also be borne in mind (Mayer and Geher, 1996; Masson and McCarthy, 1996). In practical terms, it is perhaps pertinent to acknowledge the aforementioned point that individuals are less likely to experience these emotions in isolation at any one time. It is possible to perceive, however, that an individual accessing a positive emotional state that may consist of more or less of the identified emotions will also be accessing a degree of the related benefits. Within the context of the fitness industry the onus is then on the instructor to provide an environment that facilitates the manifestation of positive emotion and the associated benefits.

Joy, Fredrickson (1998) proposed, is interchangeable with happiness, mirth, elation and gladness. Joy arises in contexts that are considered to be safe and familiar, that require achievable effort, and in circumstances where people are accomplishing or achieving and progressing towards their goals. She further suggested that joy and the related positive emotions broaden a person's thought-action repertoire into playful, creative, intellectual and physical activities. Through repeated play, joy has the potential to build a range of physical, intellectual and social skills.

According to Fredrickson (1998), interest includes curiosity, intrigue, excitement, wonder, challenge and intrinsic motivation. She linked interest to an aspect of Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) perception of flow which, in relation to interest, was described as the 'enjoyment that is experienced when a person's perceived skills match the perceived challenges of a particular activity' (Fredrickson, 1998, p.305). Fredrickson (1998) considered the optimum conditions for the arousal of interest to be a context that is safe and offers novelty, change and a sense of possibility or mystery. Interest generates a feeling of wanting to investigate or to become involved. It encourages expansion of the self by promoting a desire for new information and new experiences. Interest leads to a feeling of being animated and enlivened and creates an openness to new ideas, experiences and action. Interest leads people to explore further for intrinsic reasons and for a desire to satisfy their own curiosity. Studies in intrinsic motivation suggested that learning and development motivated by intrinsic interest are more efficient than when motivated by extrinsic rewards (Fredrickson, 1998; Kimiecik, 2002). Exploration increases the individual's knowledge base. Therefore, interest, as a basic ingredient of personal growth, broadens an individual's thought-action repertoire and builds the store of knowledge (Fredrickson, 1998).

Fredrickson (1998) linked contentment with tranquillity and serenity. Optimum circumstances for the generation of a feeling of contentment include safety, a high degree of certainty and an achievable degree of effort. She proposed that contentment could prompt people to savour current life circumstances and recent successes, to experience 'oneness' with the world and to integrate recent events and achievements into their overall self-concept and world-view (Fredrickson, 1998, p.306). Contentment promotes a mindful broadening of a person's self-view and their world-view. She further suggested that contentment follows from flow. That when an experience that led to the development of flow is over, that is when the individual feels more 'together' than before, not only internally, but also with respect to other people and to the world in general. These links to integration, receptiveness and increasing self-awareness showed contentment as broadening an individual's thought-action repertoire and building personal resources.

Fredrickson (1998) acknowledged love as being more than a single emotion and described it as being a combination of many positive emotions, including joy, interest and contentment. She noted that people experience different varieties of love toward specific individuals and circumstances. Love is, therefore, contextualised by its relationships and situation. Shared experiences of positive moments create mutual enjoyment in the moment as well as enduring alliances. An individual's experience of a range of relationships and positive experiences, and the subsequent variety and combination of positive emotions that they include, helps to build and solidify social resources. These, along with the intellectual and physical resources, can gradually accumulate and be drawn on at a later date.

The implications in relation to the provision of fitness activities would appear to be that a safe, supportive and inclusive environment, based on respect, trust, compassion and empathy, has the potential to give rise to a range of positive emotions. Such an environment also recognises individuals' needs for appropriate levels of challenge, based on personal skill and capability. Honouring these factors has the capability to have wide reaching benefit for the individual beyond the immediate context. It can help to develop self-awareness and self-knowledge, and focus attention on a pro-active choice to adopt a mentality that focuses on the positive aspects of daily events. This can help in the accumulation of an overall positive outlook on life. It has a healing influence and can thus help in the generation of positive health and well-being (Frederickson, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). The resultant positive state has the potential to strengthen the individual, enhance interpersonal relationships and thus spread the healing influence to others.

Like Strongman (1978), Izard (1991) and Stevens (1996), Fredrickson (2000) and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) perceived of emotion as forming a continuous backdrop to existence. They proposed that a pervading positive emotional state was most productive for the individual and most valuable when it had a central dynamic in consciousness. Acknowledgement was given to the ability of a prevailing emotional tone to impart a distinctive feel to lived experience. Izard

(1991), Fredrickson (2000) and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) considered emotion as being capable of motivating, organising and guiding perception, thought and action. Research has shown that the adoption of a mentality that focuses on the positive aspects of daily events helps in the accumulation of an overall positive outlook on life and can thus help in the generation of positive health and well-being (Fredrickson, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Emmons and McCullough, 2003). The identification of the positive emotions was a further step in the promotion of a salutogenic perspective on health. Links between the work of Fredrickson (2000) and health studies further suggested that control may be gained over health by the cultivation of positive emotion. However, the need for further investigation into specific ways in which positive emotions may be encouraged was highlighted, along with a need to further investigate how repeated experience of positive emotional states enhances the lives of those experiencing them.

Myss (1997, p.220) further advocated a need to develop greater self-knowledge and understanding, and to recognise the power of every thought and feeling to have 'biological, environmental, social, personal, and global consequences'. It was suggested that gaining self-knowledge and understanding can help to promote control over the emotions. Also she described a mutual and cyclical growth potential through which an individual might enhance self-knowledge and understanding related to greater awareness of emotions. However, Donaldson (1993) pointed out that, particularly in western cultures, there is a lack of explicit attention given to gaining control over one's repertoire of emotions. This reticence to be pro-active in relation to emotional well-being is also reflected in the literature on western society's approach to spiritual development.

2.2.3 Spiritual well-being

The review of literature on spiritual issues revealed a view that this is an important aspect of life. Myss (1997), Tolle (1999), Levin (2000) and Zohar and Marshall (2000) all considered the significance of spiritual well-being. This they defined in terms of a growing desire in western society for a greater sense of meaning and community to be acknowledged in everyday life. They

advocated the development of spiritual awareness. This, they described, not in any religious sense, but rather as a perspective that considers the individual's place in the global community and emphasises the individual's potential to influence the wider populace with the quality of their interactions. They advocated enhancing self-awareness and self-knowledge to promote personal growth and to facilitate recognition and acknowledgement of intuitions and hunches. Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p.86) advocated the development of control over consciousness to gain mastery of one's life, and to act as an antidote to the condition of 'alienation', described as a sense of 'constraint imposed by the social system'. Myss (1997), Tolle (1999), Levin (2000), Zohar and Marshall (2000) Csikszentmihalyi (2002) and Henes (2005) indicated the importance of recognising aspects of living that have a nurturing and healing effect on the individual. In the wider global context, the individual also has the opportunity to nurture, heal and facilitate personal growth in others. Spiritual awareness addresses issues of meaning and significance, and places personal situations in a wider, richer and meaning-giving context. Cooper (1998a, p.2) considered this to be an exploration of a 'secret life... a realm of inner experience beyond the constraints of the ego's habits of perception'.

Furthermore, Murphy (1992), Tolle (1999) and Teilhard de Chardin (2004, p.62) indicated a view that 'energetically ... the human group is still young' and humanity has still more progress to make in developing aspects of intelligence beyond current capability. They suggested that, presently, there is significant potential to grow the general level of spiritual capability within the societal context. They also expressed the opinion that, in time and with conscious effort to continue to progress, thinking and perception would further develop and include levels of intelligence that are currently generally unknown. Teilhard de Chardin (2004, p.23) offered grounds for optimism that progress is already evident and will be made further:

in the passage of time, a state of collective human consciousness has been progressively evolved, which is inherited by each succeeding generation of ... individuals, and to which each generation adds something.

However, as Tyler (1978), Graham (1986) and Cooper (1998a) intimated, western culture is currently still predominantly focused on the tangible, measurable and objectifiable realms and remains, largely, blind to the intricacies of experiences beyond that scope. It appears also to be the case, that western society remains shy of the concepts and language of emotional and spiritual paradigms. Where aspects of living could be interpreted within the context of emotionality and spirituality, they remain contextualised within the traditional mental health paradigm (Crone, Smith and Gough, 2005).

Likewise, in relation to fitness and exercise, the focus in developing understanding of how to create the benefits, tends, predominantly, to be on measurable, tangible and objectifiable data and outcomes. The study by Crone et al. (2005) appeared to be a rare example of an investigation into understanding the meaning that, in this case, exercise referral clients gave to exercise. There remains currently the opportunity to focus attention on understanding the factors that are perceived as enjoyable by the general participant in the exercise process itself, and to openly acknowledge the wider benefits that offer nurturing, healing and growth potential.

There may be benefit to the fitness industry in explicitly focusing attention on the creation of a safe, supportive and inclusive environment, acknowledging the importance of a compassionate and empathic style for instructors, and directing attention to developing awareness of wider benefits. Participants may then be encouraged to make decisions for themselves that enable them to take optimal levels of benefit from their exercise activity. This may involve encouraging recognition of the individually beneficial aspects of involving oneself in activities freely chosen for their enjoyment factor and which offer a level of challenge that is appropriate for the participant. A group exercise context that is designed by the instructor to be safe, supportive and inclusive of all participants has the potential to be appropriately challenging in intensity and complexity for each person in the group. In situations where individuals choose to exercise alone, they may require the capability to create that environment for themselves through recognition of its constituent factors. The literature suggested that the

resultant positive emotional states have the potential to facilitate expansion of individual physical, mental and social capability, along with heightened levels of self-awareness and self-knowledge (Frederickson, 2000). This process has the potential to facilitate a self-nurturing, self-healing process that enables individuals to make decisions that contribute to their personal evolutionary process. The wider benefits arise from the individual's participation in positive interactions with others that, on a broader scale, contribute to collective progression.

However, Zohar and Marshall (2000), Tart (2001), Csikszentmihalyi (2002) and Kimiecik (2002) considered the modern western rational society to be collectively low in deep level personal awareness and spiritual development. Cooper (1998a) had earlier expressed a similar view, and pointed out that within a culture that does not have the concepts that can hold and give adequate meaning to deep personal experience individual progression in these areas is limited. Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p.21) explained that taking control of consciousness is not simply a cognitive skill; rather 'it requires the commitment of emotions and will'. He distinguished between applying knowledge to a material context, where progress can be rapid, and applying it to the modification of personal habits and desires, where progress was described as often being slower. Knowing and understanding are socially constructed and reflect the virtues and shortcomings of their societal context. As with academic research, personal experience tends to be understood within the framework of the dominant cultural influences. Individuals generally lack the capability to give expression to the deep individual significances they may, at least subconsciously, sense to be inherent in their experiences within the predominantly rationalistic and objective western culture (Cooper, 1998a; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). This suggests a requirement, in the current cultural setting, for conscious and explicit effort in order to further the process.

Murphy (1972), Frick (1990), White (1999) and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) further recognised a need for conscious focus and the importance of conscious awareness. They described the potential for involvement in ordinary activities to reveal deep meaning, when otherwise it might have been perceived as no

more than frivolous occupation of free time. However, acknowledgement was also given to the point that an individual may be regularly involved in such activities without ever seriously considering the deep assumptions and values that shape and guide its practice (Cooper, 1998a). Braud (1994, p.294) also expressed a need to more fully understand the depth of human experience and implied a requirement for greater acknowledgement and ownership of both everyday occurrences, and also exceptional experiences. He recommended one 'commune with them, assimilate them. We must dance and play with these experiences in their own territories, speak with them using their own language'.

Frick (1990) and Bepko and Krestan (1991) reiterated the view that the societally induced lack of acknowledgement and ownership of experiences limits vision, diminishes capacity for exploration, and holds individuals within the bounds of the societally defined norms and standards and an implicit expectation of unquestioning compliance. Kimiecik (2002) noted how these same processes function to distract individuals from their own inner selves and their deepest emotions. Conformity and passive acquiescence reinforce the prevailing vision and contribute to the reluctance or inability to question. People adopt the habits and behaviours that are expected of them and they may then remain closed to alternative possibilities. Habits perpetuate thought patterns. These, when repeated often enough, form beliefs (Schunk, 1995; O'Connor and Seymour, 1995). Beliefs are heavily influenced by societal and cultural factors. Furthermore, beliefs held in common perpetuate the norms of society. This circular interaction, referenced to external factors, leads people to deny themselves a connection with their own inner guidance and their personal emotions (Northrup, 1997; Kimiecik, 2002).

There appears to be two conflicting influences. On the one hand, there is the significantly powerful societal influence that draws people away from their intuitions and self-awarenesses and is potentially detrimental to personal growth. On the other hand, there is the growing recognition amongst some individuals within the larger community that personal experience does have fundamental meaning, and that nurturing, healing and personal growth are not only important for the individual, but are also significant for the general

evolution of the human species (Braud, 1994; Ruumet, 1997; Cooper, 1998a; Tolle, 1999).

Zohar and Marshall (2000), Tart (2001), Csikszentmihalyi (2002) and Kimiecik (2002) further explored the departure from the general automatised acceptance of societal and cultural pressures that involves movement towards more profound and inwardly directed investigations. They acknowledged that this represents a significant leap in a change of perception. It requires significant personal strength of character, independence and assuredness to individually withstand the wider societal influences. They considered the process to be a continuum of personal growth and enlightenment. Blackstone (1991) and Leonard (2001) suggested that the evolution of an ever-widening and ever-deepening field of perception facilitates recognition of one's place in a process much bigger than the immediate social context and takes one closer to joining and aligning with that bigger process. Blackstone (1991), King (1992), Stone (1994), Leonard (2001) and Bishop (2006a,b,c) described the bigger process as the natural flow of energies that already exist globally and considered the ability to live life in alignment with them as the ultimate human achievement. They suggested that progress towards this goal involves joining body, mind, emotions, tendencies, actions, values, aspirations, intuitions and spirit in a holistic approach to living, achievable by means of an exploration of one's self, inwardly through reflection, and outwardly through the process of daily living. This appreciation raises personal awareness, leads people to question assumptions and increases curiosity about potentialities and possibilities. This reaching out to something beyond the conventional requires courage, imagination, trust and personal honesty. Those who develop these characteristics and who set out on their own evolutionary and transformative process, Leonard (2001) and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) suggested, are seldom disappointed. Zohar and Marshall (2000), Leonard (2001), Tart (2001) and Henes (2005) agreed with Murphy (1972) that these people may find themselves, not only realising exceptional potential themselves, but also taking pleasure in becoming the catalyst for others. In this sense they open up similar possibilities in those with whom they come into contact on a daily basis. The

gradual but ultimate benefit to the collective populace is greater personal satisfaction with life and an overall improvement in the human condition.

The links between issues of an emotional and a spiritual nature were reiterated in calls for further research into topics related to positive health and well-being. Fredrickson (1998) claimed a need for further studies on positive emotions to guide applications and interventions that might improve spiritual concepts, such as individual and collective functioning, in addition to mental well-being and physical health. Myss (1997), Tolle (1999), Levin (2000) and Zohar and Marshall (2000) advocated the development of spiritual awareness amongst a wider community of individuals to improve emotional well-being and to further progress the capabilities of humanity as a whole. It was, therefore, considered to be appropriate, in reference to this study, to consider wellness in a broad sense and to acknowledge its emotional and spiritual elements. Wellness in a holistic sense may be defined as a unique and individual construct that has nurturing and healing influences on a personal and collective evolutionary level.

Although exercise is currently promoted as giving rise to physical and mental health benefits, the full potential for health related exercise to offer a route to emotional and spiritual well-being, self-mastery and evolutionary self-knowledge has been under-exploited. This may, in part, be due to the traditional positivist and scientific methods of research that serve to reinforce a rational and fragmentary, rather than a unified, approach to the benefits of exercise participation (Faulkner and Biddle, 2001).

2.3 Developing greater awareness of the self

2.3.1 The need to develop greater awareness of the self

This section of the chapter reviews literature on the self, examining aspects of awareness of the self and the concept of self-development and growth. Self-awareness and self-knowledge have been identified as being fundamental to developing the ability to make positive decisions in all areas of life (Murphy, 1972; Frick, 1990; Cooper, 1998b; White, 1999; Zohar and Marshall, 2000;

Tart, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Kimiecik, 2002). The ability to be self-aware was said to primarily enable recognition of positive personal choices (Northrup, 1997; Stein, 1997; Myss, 1997; Tolle, 1999; Levin, 2000; Zohar and Marshall, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). The cultivation of a deep and intuitive self-awareness has earlier been indicated as a key component of emotional and spiritual well-being (Goleman, 1996; Mayer and Geher, 1996; Tolle, 1999; Higgs and Dulevycz, 2000; Levin, 2000; Zohar and Marshall, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Moustakas (1972) described the freedom and capability to make positive personal choices as being the factor that enhances the individuality, uniqueness and integrity of the self. It enables one to move towards being one's self. Moustakas (1972) further noted that conformity and submissive obedience to the expectations, standards and regulations of others is the most basic form of alienation from the self.

Within the context of the study, fitness instructors, for example, need self-awareness to recognise themselves in movement and to be able to share that with other exercisers. They need it to be able to make personal decisions, in order to maintain their own wellness, and not only in view of the physical demands that the work places on them. Also, it helps them to appreciate the gains they acquire from involvement in their chosen activities and how they apply these in other areas of their life. This in turn enables instructors to pass on the benefits to those in their sessions. Furthermore, self-knowledge for those who make personal decisions to exercise alone, rather than in a group context, enables them to make decisions about how to exercise effectively. The development of greater self-knowledge, or how to promote it in others, is not included in training programmes for exercise instructors. However, recognition of the importance of enhanced self-awareness can be found within some elite and performance sports coaching programmes. Concerns remained in this field that development of the specific reflective thinking skills to promote self-awareness are not actively taught or promoted (Knowles, Borrie and Telfer, 2005).

The development of certain aspects of self-knowledge is already an integral part of getting involved in physical activity. For example, the acquisition of the

skills involved in following an exercise to music class requires proprioceptive and motor skills. This is further developed in encouraging co-ordinated movement and a connection with changes in rhythm in music. The use of a heart rate monitor or a rate of perceived exertion measure facilitates a connection between physical effort and sensory awareness. The encouragement from an instructor to participants in a class to recognise how they feel in an exercise session can help participants make individual decisions in the class about how they exercise. These aspects of exercise delivery emphasise the importance of the use of coaching points by an instructor, as well as instructions about the exercise session. Also, it requires that the instructor is comfortable with working in a multi-faceted capacity with a range of possibilities, if individuals are to be encouraged to make personal choices within a class situation. Instructors need to be able to offer options and to encourage individuals to select from the range to suit themselves and their capability. Also, this choice enables participants to take the appropriate benefits from the session.

Recognition that exercise makes a positive difference in the broader context of individual and unique lives requires self-knowledge in order for the difference to be apparent. The traditional, prescriptive approach to indicating the benefits of specific activities fails to take into account personal choice, the individual perception of what is and what is not enjoyable and achievable, and the unique contexts into which the benefits of exercise can be applied. The fitness industry's approach to promoting exercise as a route to specific body image and lifestyle goals does not acknowledge the vast range of personal and uniquely interpretable benefits one may take. Furthermore, the recognition of personal positive gains, and acknowledgement of the application of those gains in the wider context of life, may be a significant factor in the decision to maintain regular participation.

The development of an open mentality and comfort with making personally directed decisions has been described as involving movement towards more profound and inwardly directed investigations and a continuum of personal growth and enlightenment (Zohar and Marshall, 2000; Tart, 2001). Moustakas

(1972, p.29) suggested that the desire to live according to one's own personal truths is always present. The challenge is to be open to reading the messages from the inner self that would enable a person's own 'dance' to come through. Personal development of this kind in a number of individuals is said to enhance the collective capability. This progression of individual and collective functioning begins with individuals developing greater personal awareness and self-knowledge in order to facilitate greater understanding of the self (Moustakas, 1972; Stevens, 1996; Myss, 1997; Tolle 1999; Levin 2000; Zohar and Marshall 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Silvia, 2002). It was considered pertinent here, therefore, to include a review of the literature on the concept of the self.

2.3.2 The traditional perspective on the study of the self

The study of the self and the concept of the self have been developed in different ways over time, with the main focus of attention varying with the theories proposed. An historical review of the study of the self revealed that the traditional foci of attention have tended to again be from a fragmentary, rationalistic, and scientific perspective. Studies tended to disregard rather than include previous areas of interest. Stevens (1996) pointed out distinctions between the approaches of those with biological, psychoanalytic, behavioural, social, humanistic or existential perspectives on the self. These distinct perspectives have reflected different assumptions about the nature of the self and how this should be studied. Anatomy and physiology formed the basis of the biological approach. Psychoanalysis involved interpretation of personal meaning and motive. Behaviourism focused on observable and measurable action. Social constructivism acknowledged influences from the societal context. The humanistic approach took the emphasis away from that which was neurotic and disturbed (psychoanalysis) and that which could be studied only through mechanistic theory (behaviourism). The focus in humanism moved to the study of higher human motives, to self-development, knowledge and aesthetics. Existentialism focused on subjectivity, free will and individuality (Reber, 1995; Stevens, 1996).

The literature revealed an additional inherently fragmentary perspective on the self. Freud (1946) distinguished between three aspects of the self. The rational and sane aspect, which he called the ego; the superego, or the voice of conscience and the impulsive, irrational id. In the Freudian sense, the ego operates to decide one's actions in line with realistic and appropriate principles. The superego provides one's sense of right and wrong and also a perception of the ideal. The id was described as an unconscious psychic energy that constantly strives to satisfy one's basic drives to survive, to reproduce and to aggress. However, Freud (1946) also acknowledged integration and wholeness as important concepts. He suggested that positive mental health was achievable when the three elements of the self became harmonised cohesively.

Integration was also evident in the work of Jung (1960), who supported the view that the self consisted of both conscious and unconscious elements. He proposed that the self had to incorporate both aspects of being in order to be complete. He focused on an inherited collective unconscious and used symbolism and imagery to develop a rich interpretation of experience.

Earlier, James (1890) had made a distinction between a subjective and an objective self. He conceived of a person's ability to observe himself and to change perceptual positions. He included recognition of the importance of feelings, evaluations and attitudes within his formulation of the self. Hume (1928) also elaborated on the existence of a sense-based identity and individual perceptions of the world. Locke (1960, p.188) referred to man as a 'thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection and can consider itself as itself'. Fromm (1964) also recognised the significance of attitudes to the self and described man as transcending all other forms of life as being the only life to be aware of itself. Baumeister (1987, 1991) described the historical quest for greater understanding of the self and concluded that there were four major areas for consideration: knowing and conceptualising the self; defining or creating the self; understanding one's potential and fulfilling it; and relating the single self to society. The range of opinions and foci for attention in studying the self were varied. They presented a complex and multi-faceted image of the subjective self. Dossey (2001) admitted that a scientific approach to gaining an

understanding of the origin, function, depth and destiny of the self was inconclusive.

2.3.3 An alternative, holistic view of the self

All aspects of the self are significant in gaining an understanding of the whole. The inclusion of a biological perspective allows for acknowledgement of physiological and genetic factors. Acknowledgement of cognitive considerations gives recognition to the different ways in which the self processes information and includes consideration of the processes involved in perceiving, remembering, reasoning, deciding and problem solving (Heider, 1958; Bruner, 1990). An experiential perspective recognises the significance of individual interpretations and perceptions of a situation (Frankl, 1984; Fordham, 1985; O'Connor and Seymour, 1995). The societal context is also significant in gaining an understanding of the development of a person's ways of thinking and being (Schachter and Singer, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). Reference to the influence of unconscious thought processes, of which the individual remains largely unaware, contributes added depth to an understanding of the ways in which a person interprets the world (Reber, 1995; Levin, 2000; Zohar and Marshall, 2000).

Focus on disparate aspects, however, still detracts from the whole. The self is a complex phenomenon (Raimy, 1948; Burns, 1979; Stevens, 1996). Shaffer (1978), Reason and Rowan (1981) and Wertheimer (1997) reiterated the view that being a person involves more than being a set of physiological functions or a set of behavioural reflexes. They referred to each individual person as inhabiting a unique social world of lived experience, with a particular past and with distinctive expectations of the future. An understanding of the person requires an appreciation of the bigger picture.

Wertheimer (1912) and Kimiecik (2002) supported the need for a holistic approach and maintained that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Cooper (1998a, p.3) recognised that a holistic approach is not without problems, however:

[it] tend[s] toward superficial eclectism, blandness, and distortion, as important distinctions are blurred and symbols, ideas, and practices are removed from the organic context in which they are rooted.

He recognised a need to create profundity in holism and advocated searching for the universal qualities that exist within a context. He recommended that the context itself be perceived as a source of meaning, rather than being limited by any single meaning.

Despite recognition of the existence of a holistic self, study in this area from a western, scientific perspective has generally been scarce (Ravizza, 1984; DiCarlo, 1999). Burns (1979) and Graham (1986) pointed to the requirement of scientific study for observable and measurable evidence as an explanation for the lack of inclusion of subjectivity. Traditional science tends to focus on detail. An understanding of the self from a subjective perspective requires a broader viewpoint. Science has traditionally considered introspection and subjectivity as unscientific and impossible to validate. Ray (1986) agreed that the scientific approach to understanding the self was insufficient. She proposed that western culture is mistakenly focused on scientific, intellectual, logical, reductionist and rational processes. She called for a broadening of the consciousness to include a wider and more holistic perspective that moves beyond reason. Tolle (1999) suggested that greater understanding of the self arises from a willingness to perceive of the whole self, and not from focusing attention on intellectualising about isolated details of the self. However, the detail must be part of the whole. The key may be to be able to recognise that the whole self arises from being able to reflect on the complex detail and being able to contextualise it in the totality of the whole. Contextualisation must involve temporal and temporary dimensions that acknowledge an individual's unique collection of past experiences and their present situation, along with their perception of future possibility. True contextualisation can only be achieved by the individual themselves, and, importantly, only in relation to the meaning that they personally attach to the accumulation of experience that is within their personal history.

2.3.4 The self as an individual

Burns (1979, p.3) considered the person as a complete and individual entity. He referred to an individual developing the ability to conceive of himself. This he described as an accumulation of perceptions and beliefs a person holds about himself. He promoted his self-concept theory as:

the most important and focal object within the experience of each individual because of its primacy, centrality, continuity and ubiquity in all aspects of behaviour.

Erikson (1968) referred to a developing concept of self, or identity formation as being a continuing process of progressive differentiations and crystallisations that expand self-awareness and exploration of the self. He claimed that an optimal sense of identity is a sense of knowing where one is going and an inner assuredness. O'Connor and Seymour (1995) referred to identity as one's basic sense of self, including one's core values and mission in life, the totality of one's being. Reber (1995) considered identity to be a person's essential, continuous self, the internal, subjective concept of oneself as an individual.

Stevens (1996) reiterated the significance of individuality and uniqueness. People function within the physical world. They also inhabit their own unique inner world of thoughts, feelings and reflections. Csikszentmihalyi, (2002, p. 34) described the self as 'contain[ing] everything else that has passed through consciousness'. Stevens (1996) referred to an organically developing fusion of personal identity over time. This identity develops from experiences specific to the individual. Also he referred to a social identity that includes those characteristics and roles attributed to the individual by others. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) concluded that the self is shaped by how one focuses the attention or consciousness, and where consciousness is directed. Furthermore, he noted the process as being two-way, with the self directing the focus of one's attention. He noted that any appreciation of the self that might approach wholeness or fullness only exists in one's own consciousness. No more than partial and distorted versions of one's own self will ever exist in the minds of other people. Furthermore, the equally unique consciousness of each individual person

constantly adjusts and recreates its own version of a perception of other selves. Raimy (1948) had also earlier noted that what a person believes about himself is a factor in his social comprehension of others in relation to himself. He had again developed the concept of the self as being built up through the accumulation and integration of an infinite number of perceptual impressions. Moustakas (1972) further acknowledged the enormity of the task of knowing one's self fully and holistically. He referred to the degree of difficulty involved in knowing one's self, compared, for example, with the alacrity with which others may define us, within their own perception of us in limited roles or contexts.

It is perhaps also important to remember here the aforementioned socially imposed limits on self and identity that shift through time and between cultural settings. As previously noted, these are also limited by influences from significant others whose own formative influences were from a different social and cultural setting. An understanding of the whole requires consideration to be given from a broad and an interactive perspective. It needs to consider influences and changes that are apparent over time. The greatest understanding arises from an integration of all perspectives. Also, it must be recognised that personal experience is always going to be unique, and understanding of it is only ever going to be achievable by the individual concerned. This understanding is developed within the uniquely personal reality and meaningfulness of the individual perceiver.

In relation to participation in exercise, each individual comes to an exercise session from their own unique personal position with their own personal history prior to that point. They each take part in an exercise session from a unique position within their personal experience. They each take something personal and unique from the session that is then integrated with their previous experience and learning. Movement through personal experience and the subsequent development of the self through those experiences is a uniquely organic and dynamic process. The aforementioned implications for the fitness instructor, that directions to class participants need to be appropriate to the whole range of individuals taking part, are again pertinent. Directions and

suggestions for participation need to be such that they can be interpreted appropriately by each individual and can be identified as being applicable to each individual's personal needs and goals. The instructor has the potential to enable each individual to connect positively with exercise participation. This is possible, not only in relation to specific involvement in the activity, but also to its connection with the broader context of personal and interpersonal experience.

2.3.5 The self and personal meaning

Bruner (1990) also focussed on the theme of individuality and uniqueness. He discussed the development of the self through cognitive capabilities such as perception, memory and information processing. It is in this way, Bruner (1990) argued, that individuals develop a personal perspective on events and consequently behave in a particular way. Tyler (1978) described how the individual makes an interpretation of personal situations. She raised the question as to whether the external, observable aspects of a situation or one's internal perceptions of that situation were important in developing meaning for an individual. She pre-empted Burns, (1979), Frankl (1984), Cooper (1998a), Dossey (2001) and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) and earlier concluded that experiences are not limited by a single meaning, rather they are a source of meaning for each individual. Each person reads meaning into an experience based on personal perception, as opposed to a single meaning being something that can be read out of an event or situation. Furthermore, Burns (1979) pointed out that an individual tends to perceive only those elements that support his current version of reality. In this way, perceptions are selective and can be distorted by one's motives, goals, attitudes and internal defence mechanisms. One's views and attitudes translate the raw sensory data into idiosyncratic perceptions, thus generating a unique interpretation of experience.

Exercise participation is an aspect of personal experience. This suggests that each individual reads meaning into participation in exercise. Within the fitness industry, where retention and participation are constant issues of concern, the creation of an environment that offers personally interpretable positive meaning

must be beneficial. It has the potential to enable more people to appreciate benefit in being active.

It becomes difficult to appreciate objective reality, given that each person gives meaning to an experience by utilising a set of individual perceptual filters. Significance is then given to a person's perception of reality, not to reality itself (Burns, 1979). Perceived meaning in an experience has been noted as leading to an expectation that repeated involvement in a similar experience will give rise to the same or a similar meaning for the participant. For example, involvement in an experience perceived to be positive has been found to lead to positive expectations of subsequent similar experiences (O'Connor and Seymour, 1995; Dossey, 2001). Kimiciek (2002) related this specifically to the exercise context, describing how an expectation of enjoyment based on previous experience becomes an integral element of the intrinsic motivation to continue to be active. Fredrickson (1998), as has already been stated, suggested that enjoyment is a representation of positive meaning attached to an experience. She suggested that this was generated in situations that were perceived to be safe, supportive and inclusive of everyone. In an exercise context and based on Fredrickson's (1998) work, this reiterated the requirement to create a context in which people can create enjoyment for themselves. It suggested instructors would do well to incorporate some novelty and play into their delivery, bringing in change to add interest and variety. This may need to be balanced with enabling people to continue to feel safe by retaining a degree of certainty in the context.

Pinker (1997) further supported the need for a holistic perspective on the self and described how an individual makes sense of the world and creates meaning in life through the constant accumulation and integration of a mass of small and simple thoughts and experiences. He suggested that the individual's accumulative perception of the meaning of the whole is determined by the perceived meaning of the parts, and the perceived meaning of the relationship that connects the parts. Subjective experience results from this complex interaction. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p.104) referred to the everyday events of life that have an accumulative effect within the concept of perceived experience as 'the little scraps and nothingnesses of ... life'. The accumulative

effect can be predominantly positive or not. Greatest benefit would appear to be taken from a perception of predominantly positive experiences. Myss (1997) further discussed how the body energetically stores a memory of every experience and interaction. The quality of the meaning attached to those experiences is then recognised as being important to the health and well-being of the individual. Again the implication is that an accumulation of regular events that are experienced as positive has the potential to enhance health and engender a sense of well-being.

2.3.6 The aware self

Rogers (1983) considered a theoretical model of a person who has gained greater awareness of the self to include recognition of the freedom to function to full potential. He suggested that such a person was dependable, realistic, self-enhancing, socialised and appropriate in his behaviour. Earlier, he suggested that a self-aware person is creative, ever-changing and was constantly looking for opportunities to continue to develop and grow (Rogers, 1961). Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p.24) referred to this process as a development of consciousness and defined its function as:

represent[ing] information about what is happening outside and inside the organism in such a way that it can be evaluated and acted upon by the body ... it acts as a clearing house for sensations, feelings, and ideas, establishing priorities among all the diverse information.

Myss (1997), Tolle (1999) and Brown and Ryan (2003) recommended nurturing greater self-awareness. They suggested it facilitates a personal recognition of those experiences and life contexts that engendered a deep sense of well-being, positivity and further opportunity for development and personal growth. Each described the benefits in recognising contexts that were perceived as being positive, advocated future involvement in similar circumstances, and proposed avoidance or a reduction in involvement in contexts that produced a less than positive sense of being. They identified heightened energy levels as being amongst the significant factors that denote positive involvement. Conversely, a pervading sense of reduced energy was said to be amongst the

potential symptoms indicating less positive involvement in a context. Rogers (1961) indicated that the optimal climate in which to facilitate the evolution of a self-aware person was one in which empathy, understanding, caring, respect and stimulation are apparent. These characteristics were also found to be significant contributors to an individual's capability to promote personal growth in others.

However, Maslow (1967) and Hammond (1996) also felt that some people are afraid of and draw back from the opportunity to become fully aware and evolving selves. Moustakas (1972, p.30) described the anxiety, dissatisfaction and feelings of psychic starvation that denote a neglected desire for an authentic life and noted the level of difficulty involved in removing layers of dishonesty and 'phyness' when the self has been persistently ignored. Rowe (1988), Northrup (1997) and Myss (1997) described the negative health consequences to the self and to others of resistance to personal growth and evolution. De Bono (1971) had earlier stated similar views on the existence of a fear of self-development and referred to the ways in which people sabotage the opportunity for growth. He noted that people establish patterns of meaning with repeated behaviour in a present situation and that they maintain those patterns rigidly in subsequent present situations. People repeat actions and behaviours. He considered that the brain is effective in the formation and communication of ideas, but less effective in changing concepts as opposed to establishing them. In this way, people become set in their patterns of behaviour, unconscious processes repeating learnt actions in automatic mode. Opportunities for development and growth may then be perceived as a threat to that which is familiar and are, therefore, rejected. This static behaviour limits the definition of and realisation of one's potential for growth.

2.3.7 The developing self

Stevens (1996) considered that positive interpretations and a sense of positive choices provide opportunity for individual development. He discussed the evolving self and referred to part of the experience of being a person as including a sense of agency, or of being able to initiate actions and carry out personal projects. Tyler (1978) suggested that the awareness of the capacity for

autonomous choice involves the assignment of responsibility for those choices and an internal locus of control. Also, it implies assignment of responsibility for the consequences of those choices and for the continuing evolution of the self as a result of those choices. Choices, she proposed, determine what will be learnt, what effects will be integrated into one's personal history and, therefore, what the outcomes might be. They influence what situations will be included in one's personal world, the people with whom one's lot will be cast and the direction of one's development. Myss (2002) concurred with this view and described this process as being about how one works with one's own personal energy and how one shares it with others. She recommended the development of intuitive awareness to facilitate the processes involved in making positive decisions in choice situations.

Ray (1986), Blackstone (1991) and Harvey (2000) again described the personal evolutionary process. They considered the Buddhist claims that the full realisation of the self is a matter of on-going evolution to uncover a constantly present, but otherwise untapped, potential. Bannister and Fransella (1986) described the study of the individual as not only an inclusive process, but also as a holographically evolving one. They described the evolution as being determined by the person's unique and individual collection of decisions to act and choices made. Any perception of the present condition of an individual contains elements of the whole, based on an accumulation of previous history and ever more questions to be explored in the future. Individuals, in this sense, can be seen as 'work in progress'. Levin (2000) and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) concurred with this idea, stating that the process is constantly on-going. In this way, any conclusions about the self, and present understanding of the development of the self, can only be considered as temporarily valid. Beyond lie subsequent experiences bringing further potential for exploration and new opportunity for discovery and progress. Cooper (1998a) concurred with this view, stating that human experience cannot be reduced to a single purpose or principle. He described the Zen approach to appreciating the way experiences allow essential themes to be revisited and appreciated in increasing complexity as they are gradually illuminated with expanding understanding and from new perspectives.

Maslow (1954), Erikson (1968) and Rogers (1983) also conceived of people as being in a constant state of development and evolution. Stone (1994), Leonard and Murphy (1995), DiCarlo (1999) and Myss (2002) later reiterated this view and noted the progress that humanity in general still has to make, to continue to expand capabilities particularly in areas such as love, vitality, personhood, bodily awareness, intuition, perception, communication and volition. Progress in any individual's personal development indicates an example of the collective progression in humanity as a whole. Teilhard de Chardin (2004, p.77) focused specific attention on the involvement of time and interdependence in this process. He noted:

we have gradually come to understand that no mental thread in the Universe is wholly independent in its growth of its neighbouring threads. Each forms part of a sheaf; and the sheaf in turn represents a higher order of thread in a still larger sheaf – and so on indefinitely... This is the organic whole of which today we find ourselves to be a part, without being able to escape from it.

The fitness industry needs to become more aware of the potential it has to contribute to the collective progression. It can recognise the part it plays in developing individuals within the organic process as a whole. It can give explicit acknowledgement to exercise participation as an example of a life experience that is a part of the constantly evolving process of human existence. This will enable those involved in fitness provision to focus directed attention on recognising the potential to have positive individual and collective influence in this area.

Rogers (1983), Rowe (1988) and Levin (2000) also considered the individual as an emerging process, not as a static end product. They described how each new life experience develops the individual. Constant change in the self with each new life experience provides an opportunity for constant re-evaluation of one's potential. Personal fulfilment then becomes an integral and ever-present component in the concept of the ever-changing and ever-evolving process that is the self. Also, constant change in the self suggests constant change in

interpersonal relationships. Rogers (1983), Rowe (1988) and Levin (2000) considered that, ideally, the self would emerge from the accumulation of life experiences, rather than experiences being translated or twisted to fit a pre-conceived and socially defined self-structure. The implication here is that each new experience provides further potential for development and growth for the individual. Also, it has implications for one's interactions with other people. Each time people interact they do so as changed individuals. Any level of appreciation of the self must constantly be reviewed to maintain pace with this ever present, yet constantly changing, identity. A journey as opposed to a destination.

The theme of evolution and a sense of satisfaction and self-fulfilment as a goal of the self had been proposed by Goldstein (1939) and were taken up again by Maslow (1967). Baumeister (1987, 1991) and Stone (1994) considered the individual quest for personal fulfilment to have become increasingly accepted as a legitimate and important aspect of life. Optimal choice and selection of experiences are said to provide opportunities for movement towards personal growth and self-fulfilment. De Silva (1986) considered the gradual evolution of a state of adeptness as signifying a transformation of the person towards fulfilment. Adeptness, it was said, enables the individual to respond with calmness and equanimity to the incessant flux of stimuli that arises in everyday life. Stone (1994), Northrup (1997), Myss (1997), Levin (2000), Csikszentmihalyi (2002) and Bishop (2006a) considered the process to be one of developing self-understanding, self-mastery and a responsible involvement in self-healing. They appealed for the development of an inner awareness, a trust in one's intuitive judgement and the courage to follow it. Moustakas (1972) referred to becoming authentic and true to oneself as a significant factor in the process.

Csikszentmihalyi (2002) referred to the development of a complex self, said to evolve as the result of combining an appreciation of one's own uniqueness with the integration of that concept alongside people and entities beyond the self. Rowe (1988) similarly defined her successful self to be one who is aware of being individually unique and yet also part of the continuous web of life. She

suggested that an acknowledgement of this point enabled one to be comfortable with one's own place in the bigger picture. There is no longer a need to please others, to be locked into relationships of dominating others and being dominated by others. She suggested that an acceptance of simply being with other people as fellow human beings and as equals provided the self with security. She proposed that it facilitated a sense of the synthesis between being an individual and being a part of the whole human race. Goldstein (1939) and Frankl (1984) considered movement towards self-fulfilment as a coming to terms with the environment or a transcendence of it. This was said to be possible either through mastery over it, or an acceptance of the difficulties posed by it and a consequent adjustment to make the best of the situation. They regarded self-fulfilment as a creative trend. They saw it as a universal possibility for all people and yet taking different forms from person to person, as each gave individual meaning to personal circumstances.

2.3.8 The self and others

Social, cultural and historical contexts provide a wide range of attitudes and assumptions about appropriate and acceptable behaviour and ways of being. Cooley (1912), Adler (1927), Mead (1934), Horney (1945), Sullivan (1953) and Stevens (1996) all discussed the role of the self amongst other people and the significance of a social context. Recognition was given to the interaction between the individual and the social context in which that person operates. Burns (1979) utilised the term symbolic interactionism as an acknowledgement of a connection between the individual and the social environment. The social context was said to be significant in provoking a response from individuals, based on the meanings that elements of the environment have for those people. This offered further evidence that the fitness industry has the potential to consider ways to generate positive meaning within the social environment of an instructor led session. The meanings are considered to be a product of social interaction and are modified through individual interpretation within a shared interaction. The interaction between the instructor and the class participants in an exercise session is an example of this process in practice. The interactionist assumption is that whilst it is possible to separate the self and society (including the physical environment) analytically, a full understanding of one demands a

full understanding of the other. There exists between them a mutually interdependent relationship.

O'Connor and Seymour (1995) and Stevens (1996) suggested that individuality and a perception of the self are constituted through a mix of genetic inheritance, previous experience and the construction of the social context within which the person lives and around which the person creates meaning for herself. Stevens (1996) suggested that, in this way, social interaction becomes a mutual process where outcomes are not simply the product of each participant but of the negotiations between them. The pro-active approach to well-being requires recognition of this relationship and the self-awareness and self-assuredness to be able to make positive, personal decisions to facilitate a positive process and to subsequently promote good health. Within the social setting of an exercise class, the instructor has the potential to influence the interactive processes and is instrumental in nurturing the culture of the community for the duration of her sessions. Participants take meaning from that context. The responsibility must lie with the instructor to guide and nurture positive connections for all those taking part.

Tyler (1978), Cooper (1998b) and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) focused on difference between individuals and a need to appreciate the strength in integrating many uniquenesses. Tyler (1978) suggested that no one individual can ever be considered typical of the human race. It is the vast array of individual uniquenesses that makes full humanity possible. Tyler's (1978) argument for complementarity and relatedness included an appreciation of how difference functions in the interrelationships between individual selves. This extends the internal viewpoint of the self to an inclusion of other individuals. She noted how individual incompletenesses and uniquenesses complement each other and suggested that, in this way, there is a mutual and reciprocal interaction between individuals. Also, it indicates that the factors that make one person a fitness instructor and those that make a number of people participants are important in creating the experience of group fitness sessions. Further, it demonstrates how the health and well-being of any individual is important for the well-being of those people with whom the person interacts. Also, Myss

(1997), Levin (2000), Zohar and Marshall (2000) and Bishop (2006a) extended the development of the self to include a mutual interpersonal influence that has broad implications for society at large. Myss (1997, p.238) noted that the process has widespread implications:

each person is capable of making deeply significant contributions to the lives of others, not just through their profession, but more important, through the quality of person they become.

This suggested that the term self-concept is too limiting in describing personal perceptions of the self. A truer description needs to indicate an appreciation of the organic and constantly functioning interpersonal influences that are at work, with or without physical proximity to other people. Myss (1997) also recognised the interpersonal aspects of the self and discussed an energetic transfer that has a subtle and significant influence on communications with others. Tyler (1978), Stevens (1996), Myss (1997) and Levin (2000) further discussed how people, even if physically absent, may have an influence, through memory or perceived interpretation. That influence may be either positive or negative, depending on the personal interpretation, providing either a perception of liberation or of limitation. This suggests the potential for positive meaning taken from one context to have implications for the people involved as they operate in other wider contexts.

Recognition needs to be given to the developing capability of human beings to more deeply appreciate their experiences, to know more of themselves and each other and to gain greater understanding of the subtle influences that are at work (Tolle, 1999). Tyler (1978) concluded that the development of an individual involves the actualisation of only a small fraction of full human potential within the total richness of the global and universal process. The implication being that the full extent of the process itself lies outside and beyond any individual self and any current individual knowing. Each individual self represents a unique aspect of the bigger evolutionary picture, the full capability of which no one individual can know.

In addition, the connection with one's unique experiences and the subsequent construction of the self are affected by the passage of time. Memories of the past, both conscious and unconscious, and wishes for the future, can affect the present. Time provides an overall sense of personal biographical flow. The resultant continuity includes elements of both sameness and change. There is recognition that an individual person retains some aspects of the self as the same through the years, whilst also embodying and experiencing significant change and growth (Heidegger, 1962; O'Connor and Seymour, 1995; Stevens, 1996). Tyler (1978) and Myss (1997) acknowledged the interactional changes that occur over time and through a range of experiences.

The implication is that the personal concept needs not only to take an individually holistic approach, it needs also to be inclusive of the wider context. It is necessary to include a perspective that is broader than the individual self and includes the reciprocal influences of other individual selves. Also, it needs to incorporate an element of flow, growth, movement and on-going development. A process to understand and facilitate growth in an individual cannot be a static entity. It needs to be organic. It needs to be forward looking, whilst at the same time acknowledging the events of the past that have led to the individual arriving at their present situation. Recognition must also be given to the fact that the individual is constantly changing, through time. The influences of previous presents are constantly becoming part of the accumulation of significant past experiences. A definition of the concept of the self, based on this discussion and relevant to this study, may be stated as a unique, holistic and individually emerging process, with organic and constantly functioning interpersonal influences.

2.4 Integration: emotional and spiritual well-being, the self and exercise

This study moved away from the traditional scientific approach to research and focused on a holistic and integrated view. Braud (1994) offered reason to take an alternative perspective in developing understanding of human experience. He proposed that in order to understand depth in human experience, it was

necessary to employ a subjective and sensory perspective. He advocated greater acknowledgement and ownership of everyday occurrences and experiences. Dossey (2001) further stated a view that attempting to understand human experience from any other perspective than a subjective one was flawed. A synthesis of the literature on emotional and spiritual well-being as sensory experiences and the self as a holistic concept was made to provide a route to acknowledging depth in 'ordinary' everyday experiences and the accumulative positive value of such repeated experiences. This synthesis is assimilated in this section with literature focusing on related aspects of participation in physical activity.

The literature offering a person-centred view of the emotions, demonstrated that positive emotions have led people to experience greater ease at discarding automatic everyday behavioural scripts and tendencies. A perception of experiencing positive emotional states helps to instil a relaxed approach to developing a unique and aware self and to pursuing novel, creative and often unscripted paths of thought and action (De Bono, 1971; Fredrickson, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Also, Fredrickson (2000) suggested that control may be gained over health by the cultivation of positive emotion. Mayer and Geher (1996) and Bishop (2006c) proposed that self-knowledge and awareness of one's emotional state is basic to a person's general well-being. Emotional energy has further been described as a general motivator for the body and mind (Diener, 1984; Izard, 1991; Pinker, 1997; Myss, 1997; Kovecses, 2000). Myss (1997) and Cooper (1998b) suggested a circular or spiralling process that promoted greater self-knowledge, enabling one to further appreciate the power of every thought and feeling to have wide ranging consequences.

Involvement in experiences that are perceived as positive helps promote a pervading positive state of mind. Making a pro-active choice to adopt a mentality that focuses on the positive aspects of daily events has been demonstrated as facilitating an overall positive outlook on life. It has a healing influence and can thus help in the generation of positive health and well-being (Fredrickson, 2000). The resultant positive state has the potential to enhance interpersonal relationships and thus spread the healing influence to others.

The cultivation of a deep and intuitive self-awareness has been described as a key component of both emotional and spiritual well-being (Goleman, 1996; Mayer and Geher, 1996; Tolle, 1999; Higgs and Dulewicz, 2000; Levin, 2000; Zohar and Marshall, 2000; Bishop, 2006a). Movement towards a pro-active and preventative approach to personal well-being requires that one has the self-knowledge to be able to recognise positive health choices (Northrup, 1997; Stein, 1997; Myss, 1997; Tolle, 1999; Levin, 2000; Zohar and Marshall, 2000). This may require departure from the general automatised acceptance of societal pressures. This process has been described as involving movement towards more profound and inwardly directed investigations and a continuum of personal growth and enlightenment (Zohar and Marshall, 2000; Tart, 2001). This progression of individual and collective functioning involves individuals in developing greater personal awareness and self-knowledge in order to facilitate positive development and interactions for all (Stevens, 1996; Myss, 1997; Tolle, 1999; Levin, 2000; Zohar and Marshall, 2000; Silvia, 2002).

It was from the standpoint of an appreciation of the value of positive states and self-understanding that a review of the literature relating to physical activity in terms of it being a sensory experience was undertaken. No literature specifically on health related exercise as a sensory experience was found. The following references focused on a range of physical activity contexts, and on sports performance at elite level. The search revealed a focus on participation in activity when it is perceived as a positive experience. The literature identified a perception of resultant benefit. Cooper (1998a), for example, explored emotion in physical activity. He proposed participation in physical activity to be an example of a field of human endeavour that one could experience as being enjoyable and as involving sophisticated and loving appreciation. As such, he concluded, it brought extensive benefit. Physical activity and exercise, as particular fields of human endeavour, have been valued for a number of years for their positive impact on both physical and mental well-being (Ulrich, Dimberg and Driver, 1991). Reiss (2001) suggested that physical activity and movement of the body are important for all human beings, and are basic sources of happiness. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) identified physical activity as

being one of the expressive skills that enables people to externalise subjective experience and to get in touch with their real self.

Participation in activities undertaken in leisure time, for most people, brings the expectation of enjoyment (Shaw, 1985; Iso-Ahola, 1989). Involvement in enjoyable activities has been identified as providing benefit to the self by facilitating an internal integration of recent events and experiences. In this way it facilitates the creation of a new sense of self and a new worldview. The link between enjoyment and integration, receptiveness and increasing self-complexity is considered to indicate that activities providing such a response have the potential to develop personal resources. The resultant positive emotions are considered to be the active ingredient that has the potential to energise the upward spiral in well-being to optimise health and personal transformative growth (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 2002; Fredrickson, 1998). Enjoyment has already been found to have the effect of opening up the realms of possibilities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 2002; Kleiber et al., 2002). Also, Murphy (1972), Jackson (1995, 1996), Cooper (1998a), Dreher (1998), Levin (2000) and Zohar and Marshall (2000) advocated that, within the process of daily living, the participation in activities freely chosen for their perceived capacity to be enjoyable, was an appropriate route to facilitate access to positive states, and to deeper levels of self-knowledge and personal growth.

Csikszentmihalyi (1975), Scanlon and Simons (1992), Jackson (1995, 1996) and Kimiecik (2002) suggested that enjoyment is a key construct for understanding and explaining the experiences and motivation of people who participate in physical activity. Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 2002) and Kimiecik (2002) suggested that participation in an activity that is perceived to be enjoyable creates its own intrinsic reward. Involvement on a regular basis in such activities was said to be most beneficial as it repeatedly generates positive emotions that tend to spark change and it enables people to generate and be receptive to new ideas and actions. Positive emotions are said to broaden people's habitual modes of thinking and to promote relaxation. This in turn may facilitate inner calmness and feelings of oneness and connection (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 2002; Fredrickson, 1998, 2000).

Gray (1986, p.9) concluded that:

the ability to achieve a calm and tranquil state of mind while participating in ... leisure pursuits would appear to be related to both self-actualisation and relaxational satisfaction from leisure.

Stewart (2000, p.5) went some way to offering an understanding of the source of positive meaning in physical activity:

movement, our first language, touches centers of our being beyond the reach of vocabularies of reason or coercion. It communicates from the innermost soul that which cannot be expressed through words.... [Movement] molds feelings into physical form, inviting escape from the purely rational and from earthly tasks and mortal burdens, providing both a physical and an emotional form of release. It awakens us to a deeper awareness of both the sacred and the profane, bringing us into synchrony with one another and with the natural rhythms of our lives.

Furthermore, she expressed opinion on the value of group activity for those taking part. She suggested that it:

create[s] community, drawing people together both emotionally and physically in a special sense of intimacy and shared abandon. As the community participates, no one is a stranger any longer. We become companions on the same journey. (Stewart, 2000, p.5)

Gallwey (1974), Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 2002), Jackson (1995, 1996) Kimiecik and Harris (1996) and Cooper (1998a) considered positive emotional states, relaxation and enjoyment as being amongst the elements involved in accessing the zone, experiencing a flow state, and achieving peak performance in sports. Jackson (1995, p.138) described Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow as being 'a state of optimal experiencing involving total absorption in a task and creating a state of consciousness where optimal levels of functioning often occur'. Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p.74) described the outcomes of experiencing a flow activity as providing 'a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality. It ... led to previously undreamt-of states of consciousness'.

Fieger (2005, p.1) related accessing the zone and a flow state to meditation, which he described as 'the art of stilling the mind'. He said resultant benefits included improved physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health, enhanced creativity and an enhanced sense of purpose and well-being.

There is a need to focus attention on the subjective experience of exercise within the context of the fitness industry, as studies on the zone, flow and peak performance have tended to involve professional and elite athletes (Murphy, 1972, 1976; Garfield and Bennett, 1984; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Jackson, 1992, 1995, 1996; Heathcote, 1996; Cooper, 1998a; Clarkson, 1999; Young, 1999) and these states are considered to be relevant, primarily, to top class performance. Some reference has, however, been made to 'average people ... [who also] ... touch spiritual elements' during their involvement in, specifically, running (Spino, 1976, p.82).

Kimiecik (2002, p.133) further described the achievement of optimal states during participation in activity that need not involve competitive participation. He noted it as enabling a person to know the body and the world in ways that are natural, wonderful and joyful. He described it as a process of 'coming home'. Deshimaru (1982) described the Zen approach to understanding the benefits of participation in physical activity as involving not just technical mastery, but also self-mastery. Stevens (1988) referred to the Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei, members of Japan's Tendai School of Buddhism. The monks' training involves long distance running, interspersed with stops for meditation and prayer. The purpose of their training is not achievement of competitive excellence through sustained high intensity involvement in their activity, as time to complete their run is considered unimportant. They aim, during their run, to experience transformation of consciousness. This provides further evidence that competitive and high intensity performance is not a prerequisite for accessing altered states of consciousness during activity.

Experiences of the zone, flow and peak performance can perhaps be related to Frick's (1990, p.68) description of a Significant Growth Experience, defined as

an 'experience leading to heightened awareness, the creation of meaning, and personal growth' or White's (1999, p.1-2) explanation of an Exceptional Human Experience as 'an experience of transcendence... a new experience of the self'. Frick (1990) and White (1999) described the potential for experiences to include significant, and often profound, learning for the individual. Frick (1990) described how such experiences have the potential to clarify thinking in line with capability, to allow the individual to progress further. He further suggested that such experiences have a healing and corrective function and create a sense of wholeness for the individual. White (1999, p.2) described how such experiences have 'opening, connecting and transcending' capability. She explained how such events offer the experiencer a 'window with a new view'. The significance of the occurrence of such events for the experiencer, according to both authors, is in the individual's willingness to acknowledge, trust and honour the experience, rather than to doubt it, or to dismiss it. In choosing acknowledgement, honour and trust, the experiencer gives it existence. They can then allow themselves to be drawn into a realm of meaning and connection that lies beyond current rational and limiting explanation and that recognises therapeutic and growth-enhancing potential.

Interestingly, many of these authors noted concerns amongst their interviewees and study subjects that acknowledging and giving verbal expression to these experiences may lead to them personally being perceived by others as being 'strange' and their view of their experience as being 'unnatural' or 'weird'. This gives further support to the view that the societal context is not generally open to discussing or considering topics of an intangible, internal and highly subjective nature. One of the challenges in a research context is to overcome such concerns and to create a non-judgemental environment that enables people to feel comfortable in discussing such topics. This was a consideration in the development of the methodology for this study. Each individual person shares fundamental similarities in physical and mental composition. Yet at the level of subjective experience and in understanding the self, each is unique, with an individually constructed accumulation of experience, an individual perception of himself, of his world and of his relationship with other people (Stevens, 1996). Ultimately, the inevitable interaction of the whole of one's experience,

interpretation and understanding need to be acknowledged (Wertheimer, 1912; Stevens, 1996). Stevens (1996) noted that the various components, far from being separate, are closely interwoven with each other. Each is affected by the others. Each has an effect on the others creating a synergistic whole.

2.5 Conclusion

The review of academic and professional literature has been carried out amongst studies relating to health and well-being, women, exercise studies and the fitness industry. In addition, the literature pertaining to emotional and spiritual well-being, to the self and to a subjective perception of involvement in physical activity was reviewed as being significant in the study. The search has highlighted pertinent points in each area.

Firstly, the literature on the common model of health in western society revealed the biomedical model, which assumes a mechanistic view of health and is reductionist in its approach to diagnosis. A broader perception of health and wellness is required to appreciate a holistic view of the individual, connecting, integrating and synergising a range of personal needs in order to achieve optimal functioning.

Secondly, a review of the literature on traditional feminist perspectives depicted the concept of being a woman in current times as being multi-faceted and busy. It suggested that many women may feel torn and fragmented due to the various demands on their time and energy that modern life presents. It suggested too that many women may feel that their life is often directed by external influences that leave them feeling restricted and with the perception that they are unable to fulfil their personal potential. Women are traditionally perceived as not having access to leisure time, and those who do take part in exercise, are thought to do so primarily due to concerns about weight loss and body image.

Thirdly, the focus on the benefits of exercise participation has traditionally been from a scientific viewpoint. As such, it reveals only a partial truth and fails to illustrate the benefits to quality of life and to enhanced involvement in wider

life experiences. Likewise, the fitness industry fails to promote the wider benefits, and focuses attention on the scientific and measurable aspects of participation in its training for instructors.

Fourthly, emotional and spiritual wellness is a neglected area of health in western society. In relation to emotional and spiritual well-being, research into the emotions has generally focused on the negative and has been carried out with a fragmentary and partial approach. It has, however, indicated that having a perception of experiencing positive emotion on a long-term basis is indicative of good health and well-being. Despite this, in western culture, there is generally a lack of explicit attention given to gaining control over the emotions. There is a requirement for further studies on positive emotion, to guide applications and interventions that might improve mental and physical well-being, as well as enhancing individual and collective functioning. Furthermore, western society is considered to be collectively low in a deep level of personal awareness and spiritual development. There is the opportunity to further develop the wider community and to progress the capabilities of humanity as a whole.

Fifthly, studies on the self have also historically been conducted with a fragmentary approach. There is, nevertheless, an acknowledgement that all aspects of the self are significant in gaining understanding of the whole. Also, there is acknowledgement in the literature of a constant interaction between individual selves and the resultant mutual interpersonal influences. The development of an understanding of the self, therefore, requires a holistic approach that incorporates interpersonal connections and recognises that any progress in an individual's personal development can be considered an example of the collective progression in humanity as a whole. The organic nature of personal progression needs to incorporate an element of flow, growth, movement and on-going development. As 'work in progress', any present understanding of the development of the self can only be considered as temporary and incomplete.

Finally, there is evidence from a limited amount of research that alternative perspectives are possible. Research that takes a less traditional approach, and considers the sensory and subjective aspects of participation in activities freely chosen for their perceived capacity to be enjoyable has found them to be beneficial. They have been found to enhance emotional and spiritual health and to contribute to the development of an evolved self. Participation in such activities has been found to facilitate an internal integration of recent events and experiences for the individual, thus creating a new sense of self and a new worldview. The benefits to the self in terms of health and personal development are significant not only for the individual, but also for the person's immediate interpersonal relationships and for the evolution of humanity as a whole.

This study took a sensory and subjective approach to exploring regular participation in exercise. It investigated the effects created by regular immersion in exercise as an activity perceived to be enjoyable and that engenders positive emotional states. Exercise's contribution to a symbiotic process was explored as a way of cultivating positive emotion. Repeated positive experiences in an exercise context were investigated for their accumulative effect on participants. This study examined the potential for exercise to be an aspect of living that has a nurturing and healing effect on its participants. Also, it explored how exercise participants can have a nurturing and healing effect on a wider community of people. This study investigated the unspoken and generally unacknowledged aspects of regular exercise participation that are not always consciously recognised by its regular participants. It explored the potential for regular participation in exercise to establish itself as a generally accepted and practiced approach to the attainment of wholeness, positive emotional and spiritual well-being, self-mastery and evolutionary self-knowledge.

This study considered the nature, meaning and benefits of regular exercise participation from the perspective of women moving into their middle years. Traditionally, this sector of the population is considered not to be involved in freely chosen leisure activities. This study investigated the experiences of a sector of the female population who had found a way of managing and

transcending the recognised complexities of women's lifestyle and were connecting with something more profound. The study explored the values, self-concepts, beliefs and outlook on life of women moving into their middle years. It described their perceptions of their personal experiences. Also, it described how they reconciled their lifestyle with the wider social pressures.

This study considered the role exercise played in heightening self-knowledge and self-awareness. It explored exercise's role in increasing self-knowledge and self-awareness and also the part it played in facilitating self-development. It examined the part exercise played in initiating change and movement away from a perception of 'stuckness', and in promoting personal growth and development. It considered how exercise participants were developing their capability and promoting personal change and growth through choosing to involve themselves in new challenges and experiences. It examined the role of regular exercise in developing positive concepts of the self and of personal contexts and investigated the accumulative gains that regular participation in exercise offered for the wider context of life. It considered the potential for exercise to facilitate development of an understanding of the broader context of personal experience, beyond the exercise environment itself, in a way that promoted good health and a positive outlook on life generally.

This study considered the significance of the instructor's approach to exercise provision in creating an environment with positive connotations. It explored the role of the instructor in creating an environment conducive to positive participation for all, and in facilitating the development of greater personal awareness through participation in exercise. It examined the ways in which exercise instructors created a sense of enjoyment in their classes and the ways in which they influenced and nurtured the social setting of their classes.

The fitness industry needs to focus on the benefits to be derived from the exercise experience. This study set out to explore the nature, meaning and benefits of exercise. This was undertaken by recognising the experiences of current participants. The study included not only people who primarily recognised benefit taken from facility based programmed group exercise

sessions, but also those who chose more individual activities such as swimming. It also included subjects who identified activities undertaken outside a facility such as running or cycling as providing significant gains. In this way, a broader picture of the unique benefits as perceived by individual participants was gained. Given that each individual provided a unique focus for investigation, a broader range of exemplary subjects contributed more information from which conclusions were drawn.

This study examined the experiences of those involved in exercise, with a view to acknowledging the existence of aspects of health beyond the physical and mental, and to influencing perceptions of service provision in the fitness industry, and exercise instructor training. The holistic consideration of the benefits of exercise differentiated this study from those that have focused purely on the fragmentary. Also, it differentiated the study from those that have considered the benefits in terms of prevention of or rehabilitation from a range of medical and psychosocial conditions. It shifted the emphasis away from an investigation of the physiological changes resulting from regular participation in exercise to a more person-centred perspective. An additional challenge lies in encouraging both the health and the fitness industries, traditionally based on scientific, rational and objectifiable processes and data, that such considerations not only exist, but also that they have the potential to offer significant benefit. It may be pertinent to consider that a study of this nature does not alter the general culture of the health or fitness industries, where rationalisation and quantification abound. It may, therefore, be necessary to advocate an appreciation of the findings of a qualitative study as they stand, and to discourage both industries, on this occasion, from a traditional tendency to seek out ways of rationalising, quantifying and objectifying.

Chapter Three: A Way of Knowing, A Way of Being Informed

[The] ... inquiry begins with the internal search to discover, with an encompassing puzzlement, a passionate desire to know, a devotion and commitment to pursue a question that is strongly connected to one's own identity and selfhood. The awakening of such a question comes through an inward clearing, and an intentional readiness and determination to discover a fundamental truth regarding the meaning and essence of one's own experience and that of others. (Moustakas, 1990, p.40)

This study arose from earlier research that investigated the lifestyle of women aged 30 to 50 years who were actively involved in exercise (Adams and Walton, 2003; Walton and Adams, 2003). These earlier studies established that a variety of social, political and economic factors impacted on women's involvement in exercise. It was demonstrated that time can be earmarked for leisure if it is prioritised amongst other demands on resources (Adams and Walton, 2003). Also, Walton and Adams (2003) considered the importance exercise had for these women and their motivation to include it in their busy lifestyles. This earlier research was extended in this study, in order to investigate more fully the meaning women who exercise regularly attached to their participation. Forty women from the earlier research took part in the data gathering process in this study. These women had all indicated that they regularly took part in exercise, defined as exercising on three or more occasions per week and for at least 30 minutes on each occasion. Eleven were also exercise instructors. All the women had indicated a willingness to take further part in the research. The researcher was an additional respondent within this study. Data were gathered from a total of 41 women. Qualitative data on the nature, meaning and benefits of regular exercise participation were gathered in 23 individual interviews and six focus groups and were analysed for this study. The research process and the holistic approach to the study are discussed in Section 3.1, and the researcher's role considered in Section 3.2. The design of the study is outlined in Section 3.3 and the data gathering process detailed in Section 3.4. A heuristic process (Moustakas, 1990) was utilised as the predominant methodology in the handling of the qualitative data. This process is detailed in Section 3.5. The significance of the research environment is discussed in Section 3.6 and the significance of the reflective style is considered

in Section 3.7. The measures utilised in the study to uphold its validity and reliability are outlined in Section 3.8 and the chapter is concluded in Section 3.9.

3.1 The research process

Wertheimer (1997) discussed the traditional scientific approaches to researching the benefits of physical activity. One of the fundamental assumptions of science includes a need to break complexes into their component elements, to isolate the elements, to discover their laws, then to reassemble them. The true meaning of exercise participation may lie beyond the traditional standpoint of the scientific literature and remain unacknowledged in the realms of the fitness industry. Therefore, a holistic approach was utilised in this study, in order to investigate more fully the experience of exercise participation and to give voice to a different interpretation of its meaning. The acknowledged difficulties in demonstrating depth in a study designed to take a holistic perspective required careful reflection to develop a relevant approach to the data gathering and analysis process (Cooper, 1998b).

Further support for a holistic approach was found in the work of Reason and Rowan (1981). They discussed traditional research methods into human experience and rebuked researchers for alienating humanism from the research process by taking a fragmentary view of people. They concurred with Shaffer's (1978) view that an alternative, whole person approach to research liberates people from the dehumanising aspects of fragmentary and alienating investigations. Also, Newton (1998, p.203) noted value in honouring experience 'in [a] blend of mind, body and spirit, considered as facets of a whole, not split parts spliced together'. These authors suggested that a whole person approach to research provides an orientation that facilitates the inclusion of topics that have been neglected in the general field of research into human activity. The investigation of human subjective experience in a way that goes beyond logical positivism facilitates the inclusion of topics such as self, growth, creativity, higher values, self-actualisation, being, meaning, peak experience, courage, intuition and related concepts. It facilitates investigation into the

elements involved in experience, the relationships between elements and the meaning associated with the total complexity as perceived by the individual.

A narrative approach was used as the data gathering methodology in this study, enabling the participants to have a voice and for that voice to be heard in its natural form. Braud and Anderson (1998) supported the use of a narrative style in research and suggested that, in itself, the opportunity to tell one's own story and speak in one's own words is an empowering experience and may also be a transformative experience for the individual. Etherington (2006) noted that utilising a personal and subjective approach in research provides real and memorable data. It enables the gathering, integration and assimilation of information that might otherwise have been less apparent. In this way, it facilitates the process of exploring meaning assigned to experience. This in itself transforms the connection between personal experience and self. Furthermore, Braud and Anderson (1998) cited evidence that recognising, owning, honouring and sharing personal experiences, especially those considered to be more unusual or previously unvoiced, in a setting of trust and empathy, is beneficial to physical health and emotional well-being. The narrative act itself is said to facilitate new perspectives on past experiences and to enhance and deepen one's relationship with one's self and with others. These outcomes were noted as being applicable to participants and the researcher in the research setting, and also to the reader of the resultant texts. Furthermore, Ettling (1998, p.177) noted a personal perception that 'women often tell their truth through sharing personal experience in the context of a narrative'. She also postulated that 'the narrative itself holds the wisdom and contextualises it in a way that elicits a rich and unique tapestry, a virtual gold mine for research'.

3.2 Researcher involvement

The researcher wished to include herself and her own experiences in the study. It was, therefore, necessary to consider the part she was to play in the construction of the study. The purpose of research is discovery, making known something previously unknown (Elias and Dunning, 1986; Moustakas 1990). The traditional assumption in doing research is that the investigation is of

something 'outside' the researcher's own self and independent of the researcher; that the findings evolve as an entity remote from the researcher and that subjectivity is a contaminant (Etherington, 2006). There is an implication that the knowledge being sought does not involve introspection by the researcher, and cannot be gained solely or simply through this process. In the case of this study, and in line with the principles of organic research, the concept for the study arose from the researcher's own experience (Clements et al., 1998). As a regular participant in exercise herself, and a practitioner in the fitness industry, the researcher wished to have an acknowledged part in the study. The approach to the topic, therefore, expanded traditional methodologies in this field. In line with feminist methodologies, the researcher wished to conduct the research in a way that honoured and valued her own experiences, as well as those of other women:

[the] dailiness of women's lives structures a different way of knowing and a different way of thinking ... The point is to integrate ideas about love and healing, about balance and connection, about beauty and growing, into our everyday ways of being. We have to believe in the value of our own experiences and in the value of our ways of knowing, our ways of doing things. (Aptheker, 1989, p.253-254)

The researcher perceived particular value in studying the experiences of women from a female perspective. She empathised with the views of DeVault (1990) and Stewart (2000) who noted the historical predominance of male researchers, and the male preference for objective study. Stewart (2000, p.5) felt that this resulted not only in a scarcity of women's stories in research generally, she also felt that:

because women are less likely to speak freely to men about the world of which they are a part, the feminine voice is lost and their ways are subject to judgement and misapplication when filtered through the male view.

In this study, the researcher sought to explore the nature, meaning and benefits of regular exercise participation from the perspective of women moving into their middle years and to develop greater understanding of her own experience

of exercise, as a participant and as a fitness professional. In accordance with the work of Fisher (1997, 1998) on the experience of dance as a spiritual practice, the researcher used her own involvement in activity as an opportunity to reflect on the experience of exercising, and as time to allow integration of thoughts and ideas to naturally occur. Also, the researcher was able to relate emergent thinking to a practical setting during the course of her normal working practice as an exercise instructor. In this regard, the researcher felt a resonance with the work of Etherington (2006), in which she described the process of practitioners becoming researchers. Also, Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p.208) described the work of an original artist. The process he outlined reflected closely the researcher's perception of her involvement in the study:

an original artist ... commences with a deeply felt but undefined goal in mind, keeps modifying the picture in response to the unexpected colors and shapes emerging on the canvas, and ends up with a finished work that probably will not resemble anything she started out with.

Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p.208) placed the onus for a positive outcome on the 'artist' and described the need for self-awareness, along with reflective and intuitive capabilities in the creative process:

If the artist is responsive to her inner feelings, knows what she likes and does not like, and pays attention to what is happening on the canvas, a good painting is bound to emerge.

Any research project would not exist without the researcher. Research of any kind involves a link between the researcher and the focus of the study. It cannot be carried out with the researcher isolated from the topic. Researchers are, in varying degrees, connected to, or a part of, the object of their study. Realisation of this point was particularly pertinent in a study that involved furthering knowledge about people, as in the case of this study. The researcher was already inherently involved in this research project because of its nature. The design of the research project was influenced by recognition of a topic of personal interest to the researcher and acknowledgement of the multileveled and complex nature of human experience. Furthermore, the personal history of

the researcher and the sociocultural and academic contexts within which the researcher operated influenced the choice of research topic. The choice of research question and subject group for this particular study provided additional connections and opportunities for extensive involvement by the researcher.

Recognition of a requirement for interaction between researcher and subjects raised the question of the appropriateness of subjective involvement on the part of the researcher. Davies (1999) discussed difficulties encountered by researchers who attempt to achieve objectivity in socially oriented research. Acknowledgement was given to the fact that, even within the most objective studies, self-reference on behalf of the researcher is inevitable. The products of this research were affected by the researcher and by the process of doing the study. The way in which the researcher interacted with participants affected their response to the process. Data that formed the basis of subsequent results and conclusions were derived from these social interactions in which both the researcher and subjects participated. In this way, the researcher took some part in constructing the observations and events that became the data. Furthermore, one can never fully know the experiences of another and the research process cannot give full and complete expression of another's experience. The personal and intuitive perspective of the researcher inevitably influenced the analysis of the data. The outcomes of the study, the results and conclusions, were then drawn from this perspective. Acknowledgement and utilisation of the subjective experience of the researcher may, therefore, be considered to be an inherent and fundamentally formative part of any study. Research then becomes a personal journey, in which the researcher's involvement is essential to its creation, rather than contaminative.

Weisberg (1993) noted how the conscious and personal development of links between previously acquired knowledge and new information assists the process of developing understanding in a unique and individual way. Henry (2001) described how the brain is able to recall memories of past experiences differently over time. They are recalled in the light of more recent experiences. This cumulative process was evidenced in the researcher as each data gathering activity changed knowledge and understanding acquired from previous

interactions with subjects. Moustakas (1990) described the question of validity and trustworthiness in a heuristic study as being one of meaning. He advocated that the final depiction of the experience should comprehensively, vividly and accurately reflect its meanings and essences. Moustakas (1990, p.32) noted that 'this judgement is made by the primary researcher', as the only person to be involved in the whole of the study. Both the heuristic and organic methodologies advocated a profound and sophisticated approach to gaining an understanding of one's self and of other people, particularly for the researcher involved in such a study (Moustakas, 1990; Clements et al., 1998). This study, undertaken from such a perspective, became an emergent process of self knowing as well as knowing about others and about the topic that formed the context of the study.

Davies (1999) further recommended that the researcher's subjective involvement in a project be utilised constructively and enhance the quality of the final report, rather than reduce it. Moustakas (1990, p.12) recognised the significance of the involvement of the researcher, particularly within a study in which there is autobiographical connections with the topic under investigation. He supported the direct personal involvement of the researcher in the investigation. He recognised that to discover the constituents and qualities that make up an experience, one's own emerging self-discoveries, awarenesses, understandings and expressions of the experience are the initial steps in the process:

an unshakable connection exists between what is out there ... and what is within me in reflective thought, feeling, and awareness. It is I the person living in a world with others, alone yet inseparable from the community of others; I who see and understand something, freshly, as if for the first time; I who come to know essential meanings inherent in my experience. I stand out within my experiences and in the entire domain of my interest and concern.

The design of this research project gave acknowledgement to the central and fundamentally formative involvement of the researcher. It acknowledged the personal involvement of the researcher as facilitator of a reflective stance on the

topic. The researcher's own desire to conduct a personal internal search to describe the nature and meaning of the exercise experience was acknowledged for its part in enriching interactions with the other participants involved in the study. In addition to the researcher's autobiographical connections with the topic under investigation, the study also incorporated the identified segment of the wider community, namely women aged between 30 and 50 years. As such, it had significance beyond the personal. For this reason, along with self-inquiry, dialogue with others assisted in the discovery of underlying meaning. In this way, the participants in the investigative process became co-researchers into the personal meaning of their own experience. Patton (1990, p.197) described the co-researcher as 'a fellow traveller in the exploration of mutually interesting issues.' However, for consistency and ease of reading, the terms subjects and participants have been maintained throughout the documentation of the study.

3.3 The design of the study

The time frame for this study began with the initial review of related literature in 2000. The data collection process took place between January and June 2002. A further review of literature and the analysis of the data began in July 2002. The explication of the findings and redrafting process took place between January 2004 and May 2006 leading to examination in September 2006. A further revision of the text was made, prior to re-submission in September 2007.

The subject group for this study was women for whom regular participation in exercise was the norm. The research was limited to women born between 1st January 1950 and 31st December 1970, who were aged 30 to 50 years at the time of the study and who took part in exercise three or more times per week and for at least 30 minutes on each occasion. Also, it included the experiences of women born between the same dates who were exercise participants and exercise instructors. The study included the experiences of the researcher, born in 1957, a regular participant in exercise and an exercise professional. The subjects were identified from the total female membership of the Fulwood and West View Leisure Centres and the Virgin Active Life Centre in Preston,

Lancashire, United Kingdom on 1 September 2001. Fulwood Leisure Centre is located in the north west of the city in a traditionally conservative ward. West View Leisure Centre is in a Preston East ward, recognised to be amongst the 10% most deprived wards in England (Preston City Council, 2005). Both are owned and managed by the local authority. The Virgin Active Life Centre is located in the mixed socio-economic southern area of the city and is commercially owned and managed. These facilities were chosen as attracting a diverse socio-economic membership from Preston's total population. Also, the facilities were local to the researcher and within a city identified as having the significant social and health problems outlined earlier. The co-operation of the facility management teams was obtained for the administration of the study. The identified criteria were considered significant in defining the subjects as a group worthy of investigation in the light of the traditional academic view of this sector of the population. Individually, the women each had a history and were in the process of creating their own futures. Collectively, they shared the common features as defined by the study. The data provided information about the subjects' experiences in an exercise context and also about their individual whole life contexts.

3.4 Data collection, interviews and focus groups

In accordance with Douglass and Moustakas (1985) a range of research methodologies were considered for the process of data collection. It was felt that the subjective nature of the study required a qualitative approach, to gain a critical understanding of the meaning of regular exercise participation (Silverman, 2000; Holliday, 2002). The data generated information on the impact exercise has on people's lives and the range of benefits that participants noted. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) suggested the possibility of gaining a deep understanding of a social issue from first-person accounts taken from individuals with relevant experience. It was felt that this approach provided a close correlation between the particular topic to be investigated in this study and an appropriate methodology. The decision to take a narrative approach to the study was based on the recognition that individual accounts of personal experience were an abundant and rich source of research material (Clandinin

and Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p.24) perceived people 'as living storied lives on storied landscapes'. An acknowledgement that people live their own organic existence within fluid and ever changing contexts facilitated recognition that narrative accounts of personal experience provide rich data about their movement through this process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p.104) noted that, if considered individually, small life events can appear insignificant. However, when considered collectively and over time, these 'little scraps and nothingnesses' of life create a definite pattern and exert an influence on one's life.

In this study, subjects expressed perceptions of specific examples of the exercise experience, and also perceptions of regular exercise participation in terms of its cumulative impact on their movement through their whole life process. The data gathering took place at a specific point in the life history of each participant involved in the study. The individuals continued, beyond that moment, to create their own personal histories. The research process created a recorded summary of those histories to the point of the data collection. There was a need to portray, in the subsequent report, a sense of the, at the time, unknown, now existent, and, still becoming, storied lives of the research subjects.

The data collection process consisted of a series of individual interviews and focus group discussions. The aim was to investigate the meaning attached to the experience by women who exercised regularly and by women who were also exercise instructors. The objective was to arrive at a critical consideration of exercise as a holistic concept. The study considered the unique and personal applications of the benefits of exercise and its potential to promote personal and collective growth, and well-being beyond the traditionally recognised physical and mental traits.

Subjects for this research project were identified from earlier research (Adams and Walton, 2003; Walton and Adams, 2003). Subjects in the earlier study indicated in responses to a postal survey their choice of taking no further part in

the research, or of participating in individual interviews or focus groups, all facilitated by the researcher. Forty six women had indicated a willingness to take part in interviews, 18 in focus groups. Fourteen women had indicated a willingness to take part in either. All the women indicating a willingness to take further part in the research were, initially, contacted by letter in relation to the option they had chosen (Appendix One). Those participants indicating a willingness to take part in either interviews or focus groups were given the option to select one or the other. The letters addressed to those participants indicating a preference to attend a focus group was an invitation to select a convenient option. Reply slips and a stamped addressed envelope were included to help optimise return rates (Veal, 1997). The letters relating to personal interviews were for information. The arrangements for individual interviews were, subsequently, made by telephone, the researcher alternately contacting participants from Fulwood and West View Leisure Centres and the Virgin Active Life Centre. Each individual retained the right to decline further involvement in the study. The researcher was also a respondent in the study and took part in an individual interview. The interview and focus groups provided data from a total of 41 women.

The data gathering process was utilised to explore issues around values, beliefs, self-concepts, personal development, interpersonal relationships and any other salient and emerging factors in relation to exercise and well-being. Twenty-three interviews were arranged to take place at mutually convenient times and locations between January and June 2002. Six focus groups were arranged in March 2002, two each at Fulwood and West View Leisure Centres and the Virgin Active Life Centre, by arrangement with the management. These group interviews were arranged to take place on different days in order to facilitate accessibility for subjects. Five focus groups actually took place, with a total of 18 women attending. No respondents opted to attend one of the focus groups at West View Leisure Centre. Members took part in a focus group at their local fitness facility. The interviews and focus groups were all treated as something separate from any usual social interaction there might have been between the researcher and the subjects (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall, 1999; Davies, 1999).

3.4.1 Interviews

Veal (1997), Davies (1999), Banister et al. (1999), Silverman (2000) and Holliday (2002) stated interview techniques as being probably the most widely used method of investigating the social world and of facilitating a narrative process. In this study, interviews enabled participants to describe their experiences of participation in exercise. The task of the interviewer was to select the appropriate style of interview for the situation and to direct the revelations without unduly influencing the narrative. This study utilised a semi-structured interview style, with specific questions being asked and participants being invited to provide personally relevant responses.

Semi-structured interviews fall between an unstructured and a structured style and are recognised as an equally important research tool (Davies, 1999). Unstructured interviews may be almost 'naturally occurring' conversations. In such instances, the researcher has in mind a range of topics to be explored with the interviewee and directs the conversation with the subjects. These forms of interviews usually occur between individuals who have a previously established on-going relationship. There is a shared history and an assumed future relationship. Some of the participants in this study were known to the researcher. However, not all were. Unstructured interviews were, therefore, not considered appropriate for the subject group.

Veal (1997) and Silverman (2000) considered structured interviews as consisting of a series of predetermined questions. Interviewees may be asked to select answers from a set of possible responses. Structured interviews take place with no presumption of an on-going relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. It was felt that a highly structured approach to data gathering might be unnecessarily limiting. Structured interviews were, therefore, also considered inappropriate.

Patton (1990) suggested that research carried out from a person-centred perspective provided the researcher with the opportunity to create an orientation that typically feels good to the people involved in the study. Individuals in this

study were not required to fit their experiences to predetermined categories. They were not required to rank, rate or categorise their feelings, opinions and experiences. The process of person-centred data collection utilised in this study communicated deep respect for the individual and intrinsically contained messages about valuing the individuality and specialness of each person being studied.

The researcher began each individual meeting by introducing herself and the study, thanking the participant for taking part and explaining the purpose and process of the interview. Permission to take notes was sought from the participant. Also, they were asked if they objected to the interview being recorded for later transcription. On each occasion permission to record and take notes was granted. Assurances of confidentiality and sole use of the notes and transcription for the purposes of the research study were reiterated. Any questions and concerns from the participant were answered before the data gathering process took place. Each individual interview took one hour to 90 minutes to complete. At the close of each session the researcher thanked the participant for their support of the study and for their contribution.

The interview process consisted of a series of questions designed to explore a subjective perception of experience in accordance with the Neuro-Logical Levels process (Dilts, 1990; Dilts et al., 1990; O'Connor and Seymour, 1995) (Figure One). In line with the principles of organic research, this process facilitated an exploration of deeply personal and meaningful aspects of experience (Clements et al., 1998). It was, therefore, utilised in this study as a tool fit for purpose. The use of this process in doctoral level research was an innovative aspect of this study. The Neuro-Logical Levels process acknowledged that behaviours and actions, witnessed on a surface level, were driven by internal systems, including personal beliefs and identity structures. It was utilised as an exploratory technique to identify unconscious triggers for behaviour. Also, it highlighted deep rooted meaning attached to the context explored. The process was designed to facilitate personal reflection by raising subconscious and implicit thinking processes into conscious awareness (O'Connor and Seymour, 1995). The researcher was familiar with this process

through her own training and experience as a Master Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (O'Connor and Seymour, 1995).

Robert Dilts' Neuro-Logical Levels	
1. Environment	What, for you, is the most positive form of exercise?
2. Behaviour	What are you doing there? What else are you doing?
3. Capability	What skills and capabilities do you have that enable you to do this?
4. Belief	What do you believe about yourself when you are doing this?
5. Identity	Who are you when you are doing this?
6. Meaning, Spirituality	What does this mean for you? What does it mean for you in the rest of your life?
5. Identity	With this in mind, who are you in the rest of your life?
4. Belief	What do you believe about yourself in the rest of your life?
3. Capability	What other capabilities do you have in the rest of your life?
2. Behaviour	What are you doing in the rest of your life?
1. Environment	Where are you doing this?

Figure One. The question format utilised for the interviews and focus groups. Questions adapted from the Neuro-Logical Levels Process (Dilts, 1990; Dilts et al., 1990; O'Connor and Seymour, 1995).

The use of the Neuro-Logical Levels process in the interviews facilitated exploration of the research topic at increasingly deep levels of awareness. The process consists of six areas of questioning, which explore subjective experience from the level of the specific context or environment, through to the meaning that the context has for the individual (Figure One). Subjects were encouraged to reflect on personal experience and perception. Each question is designed to enhance the individual's self-awareness and to facilitate the thought processes. For the purposes of this research study, the six areas of questioning in the Neuro-Logical Levels process (Environment, behaviour, capability, belief, identity, meaning / spirituality) were prepared and asked in relation to

the context of the subject's self-selected preferred exercise activity. Also, for the purposes of this study and to gain greater understanding of the meaning of exercise in relation to its benefits in a holistic sense, the questions were asked in reverse order in relation to the whole life context. Subjects were brought back through the process to an end point that related to a much larger context. The interview process required the establishment of a setting in which participants were able to comfortably and openly reflect on their experiences and in which greater awareness about the self could be promoted (Rogers, 1983).

The interview required the questions to be asked in the pre-determined format and for the subject to be allowed to respond to the questions in their own way. All individual responses were considered appropriate and relevant and topics raised by the participants were followed through as demonstrating personal relevance and significance. The researcher probed for further information or clarification during the natural course of the interview if it was felt to be appropriate or necessary. On occasion, interviewees' naturally occurring responses pre-empted a question in the process. The researcher then adjusted the structure of the interview to retain fluidity and to avoid duplicated responses. Also, interviewees were given the opportunity to add further information on the specific topic if they so wished. The researcher aimed to do this in a non-judgemental fashion. Davies (1999) suggested that this may be facilitated by the interviewer adopting a neutral position and refraining from expressing an opinion or assisting in interpretation.

The use of a recording facility assisted in amassing the wealth of information available in the interviews. This was considered less intrusive than extensive note taking and allowed greater awareness of other aspects of the interaction, such as body language and gestures, which cannot be captured on an audio recording. The researcher was able to utilise visual and sensory awareness in the interview process, in addition to auditory, and note non-verbal aspects of the interaction. Brief hand-written notes were made by the researcher during the course of the interview and included reference to non-verbal evidence. These were on pre-prepared paper in mind-map format (Buzan, 1988; DePorter, 1996), with the areas of questioning in the Neuro-Logical Levels model

indicated (Appendix Two). Notes were written in two different colours to indicate responses given to the questions in relation to exercise and in relation to the holistic life situation. The notes were used to support the recorded evidence during the analysis of the data. An example of a transcribed interview is presented in Appendix Three.

A number of difficulties, inherent to interviewing, were acknowledged (Davies, 1999). For example, on a practical level, the attainment of a natural free-flowing conversation is difficult if the participant is not expressing an opinion and is clearly not fully participating in the discussion. The researcher aimed to remain open to noticing any difficulties on the part of the participants and to be flexible in her approach to conducting the interview process. Oakley (1981) suggested that the researcher be prepared to share her own knowledge and experience about the topic. It was argued that this approach can help to develop empathy and rapport and can facilitate the interview process by opening up the participant to be more expressive. It was the researcher's preference to utilise probing questions to facilitate the participant's exploration of her own experience, as opposed to introducing a personal perspective that may influence the thinking of the individual.

Also, it was acknowledged that difficulties could arise due to the inability of individuals to provide uncontested information (Davies, 1999). The interview transcriptions contained apparent contradictions, deletions and distortions and were frequently punctuated by non-verbal interjections, incomplete sentences and false starts. It was considered important for the study to gather data in its original form, as a naturally occurring representation of experience. Transcriptions, therefore, reflected the actual verbal expression of the participants.

The interview provided information about each individual participant's perception of the topic under investigation. The researcher's own perception of the topic increased in scope and depth with each additional interaction with a range of interviewees. The involvement of the particular individual participants determined the extent of the consistency or variety of the responses obtained.

The researcher acknowledged that participants all related to the subject under discussion in their own way and from their own experience.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) acknowledged the potential for inconsistencies in an interview due to the interviewee adopting different social roles within the context of the discussion and responding from those varying perspectives. Data relating to a range of personally relevant life contexts were considered a strength, rather than a weakness, in a study designed to explore the holistic benefits of regular participation in exercise. Also, it was acknowledged that new interpretations and understandings emerged during the course of the interview process as the subject explored the topic more fully. The researcher needed to remain aware of the various perspectives on which developing understandings and explications were based, rather than considering them as a gradual move towards an ultimate truth.

3.4.2 Focus groups

Focus groups enabled data to be gathered in an interactive and discursive environment (Litosseliti, 2003). This arrangement added a further dimension to the data, and broadened its scope. The interactions became a naturally occurring formative element of the data gathering process in the focus groups. This process facilitated the collection of data that demonstrated a consensus on, as well as individual differences in, the beliefs, attitudes, experiences and feelings of the participants, as they arose from the interactive context. In this way, the focus groups were used as a supplementary source of data, to check validity in the findings from the interviews (Litosseliti, 2003). Also, it increased the number of exemplary instances reported in the study, further adding validity to the results (Silverman, 2000). Furthermore, this was possible, without significant increases in time required of the researcher (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997; Porcellato, Dugdill and Springett, 2002).

A location for the focus group meetings to take place was arranged with each of the fitness facilities. At Fulwood Leisure Centre an area of the bar was utilised, and was partitioned off from the general bar users. This provided a relaxed, quiet and private meeting space. At West View Leisure Centre an office was

allocated to the meetings, in which easy chairs and a coffee table were available and in which a private and social context could be created. At the Virgin Active Life Centre an area of the coffee bar was reserved for the purpose of conducting the meetings. This provided a private space, utilising the coffee bar furniture and forming a setting that was relaxed and social and was conducive to generating interaction and discussion. A time limit of approximately one hour had been suggested to the participants and to the venue staff for the duration of the group meetings. It was necessary to consider a number of logistical issues in assembling groups of people in a designated place at a prescribed time. Appropriate timings needed to include consideration of subjects' domestic, work and social commitments, as well as giving consideration to fitting in with, and avoiding disruption to, their regular exercise patterns. There was acknowledgement that potential participants may have appreciated incentives to attend. Refreshments were, therefore, arranged with the facilities involved.

The researcher opened each meeting by introducing herself and the study, welcoming the participants and thanking them for attending the meeting. She explained the aim and process for the meeting and gave assurances of confidentiality and sole use of the data for the purposes of the research. Any questions and concerns from the participants were answered before the data gathering process took place. In the focus groups the researcher took the role of facilitator, introduced the topic and initiated interaction amongst the group participants. During the focus groups there was a need to direct the discussion around topics relevant to the study without disrupting the social dynamics of the group and it was also necessary to report the range of thoughts and opinions expressed. Interaction amongst participants was a collaborative process and enabled personal thoughts and opinions to be reconsidered and re-evaluated. Development and shift was noted as a result of discussion in the groups. The researcher aimed to facilitate this process by establishing a context that was relaxed and enjoyable, in which participants did not feel pressurised to make decisions, and in which they were encouraged to express personal points of view (Litosseliti, 2003). At the close of each session the researcher thanked the participants for their support of the study and for their contributions.

Krueger (1994) and Morgan (1997) suggested that focus groups should ideally be composed of between four and twelve people for effective interaction between participants and to maintain a manageable group. Subjects in this study were invited to select convenient times and locations to attend focus groups, from a range of options. This, in practice, resulted in groups consisting of between two and six people. Groups of two and six attended the two focus groups at Fulwood Leisure Centre. Two attended the focus group at West View Leisure Centre. Four people attended both focus groups at the Virgin Active Life Centre. The numbers in the groups had effects on the dynamics of the interactions. Two people plus the researcher provided an intimate context in which each of the two participants had opportunity to respond at length. Interactive dialogue prompted further reflective thought. The groups of four and six provided greater social interaction, due to the larger numbers. In each case, the participants came to the meetings with their personal perceptions and experiences of exercise participation. Their unique, collective involvement in the telling, connecting and retelling of their experience provided data considered valid for this study (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Some participants were known to the researcher. Some were not. Some of the members of the focus groups knew each other, others did not. These factors added complexity to the observation of interactions between the participants as there were some historical relationships to consider. Some aspects of these historical relationships were known to the researcher, others were unknown.

Krueger (1994) suggested that focus groups offer several advantages. They are social encounters and allow people to interact, listen to the comments of others and form opinions in often relaxed and conducive settings. The format of the focus groups in this study enabled the researcher to probe and to explore unanticipated issues. Acknowledgement was given to the recognised limitations of focus groups. These included recognition of less control for the researcher than in an individual interview. Group participants interacted with each other and thus influenced the course of the discussion. Data were more difficult to collect and analyse, with comments to be recorded and acknowledged from a range of sources. The researcher, too, required a degree of skill to effectively facilitate a focus group. Her training as a teacher, her studies in Neuro-

Linguistic Programming, and her experience as a coach and group facilitator in a range of community and corporate contexts were useful in this instance.

The Neuro-Logical Levels process was utilised in the focus groups, to maintain consistency in the data gathering process (Dilts, 1990; Dilts et al., 1990; O'Connor and Seymour, 1995). The same questions were asked as in the interview process. The participants in the focus groups offered their own personal responses to each question. This prompted further discussion and reflection as a range of thoughts emerged from the interactive process. There was a need for the researcher to utilise open-ended and probing questions, and pauses to stimulate group discussion. The researcher also needed to be able to sense intuitively when and how to move to a new area of the discussion.

The difficulties inherent in creating transcriptions were compounded when working with groups of people. It was, at times, difficult to identify individual voices from a recording of a group discussion. An example of a transcription from a focus group meeting is presented in Appendix Three. The nature of a group discussion also meant that there were occasions when interruptions and multiple speakers made understanding and clear representation more difficult. In addition to the recorded data, the gist of the discussion within a group setting was documented, as opposed to verbatim comments, through the use of flipchart notes representing consensus opinion on the topic discussed. Each individual attending the focus groups was also invited, within the time frame of the focus groups, to provide their own hand written reflections on each question. Pre-prepared handouts were provided for participants. These were in the same mind-map format as used by the researcher in the interview process (Appendix Two). These personal reflective comments were included verbatim in the analysis.

The groups themselves varied, from one to another. This depended on the unique characteristics of the individual participants. Interactions amongst participants and between participants and the researcher varied in each group. This had a formative influence on the data gathering process. The researcher found benefit in arranging focus groups at each of the fitness facilities to enable

participants to attend their local facility and to feel relaxed and comfortable. Data from multiple groups was available for comparison at the analysis stage.

3.5 Heuristic methodology

The study retained a focus on developing an understanding of personal experience and the meaning attached to that experience. A search of the literature suggested that the focus of the study, and the data collection and analysis methods related closely to the theoretical explication of a heuristic process. This is defined by Moustakas (1990, p.10) as 'a way of being informed, a way of knowing'. Douglass and Moustakas (1985, p.39) described heuristics as:

a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self.

The heuristic paradigm involves a process of internal search to discover the nature and meaning of 'everyday human experience' (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985, p.39). It is a process in which self-dialogue and self-discovery are considered to be significant. Moustakas (1990, p.13) described the process, thus:

the initial 'data' is within me; the challenge is to discover and explicate its nature. In the process, I am not only lifting out the essential meanings of an experience, but I am actively awakening and transforming my own self. Self-understanding and self-growth occur simultaneously in heuristic discovery.

Rogers (1951, 1983) suggested that an effective environment for learning about the self is one in which people begin to move away from hiding behind pretences and facades and they move towards greater awareness of what they are inwardly experiencing. The use of the Neuro-Logical Levels process in the data collection stage helped in the raising of self-awareness (Dilts, 1990; Dilts et al., 1990; O'Connor and Seymour, 1995). The establishment by the researcher of a supportive, safe and respectful context for gathering data enabled the subjects to be relaxed and comfortable and facilitated deep

exploration of personal experience (Rogers, 1983). The facilitation of an exploratory process assisted people in finding and accepting their real and ever-changing self. It facilitated an acceptance and appreciation of the meaning of experience. Moustakas (1990, p.13) described personal exploration in this way as 'creating a story that portrays the qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences'.

The heuristic process comprises six phases (Moustakas, 1990). They are: the initial engagement with the research topic; immersion into the topic; incubation; illumination; explication, and the culmination of the research findings in the final report. Moustakas (1990, p.13) described the initial engagement with the topic as a time of discovery for the researcher. He stated:

I begin the heuristic journey with something that has called to me from within my life experience, something to which I have associations and fleeting awarenesses but whose nature is largely unknown.

The early stages of this study involved focusing on the specifics of the context from which the research questions took their form and significance. Conscious immersion in the topic occurred once the study was defined and clarified (Moustakas, 1990). Regular exercise participation and delivery were already integral parts of the life of the researcher. Observation and reflection on exercise participation and delivery for the purposes of the study also became integral parts of her life. This allowed the researcher to be alert to all possibilities for discovering meaning in connection with the topic. She became more aware of opportunities to maintain a sustained focus wherever the theme was being expressed. Also, she noted significant connections with the topic in everyday interactions outside the exercise context. The researcher was actively involved in regular exercise, in the delivery of exercise sessions for others, and in the design and delivery of training to fitness instructors. She interacted regularly with people who participated in exercise and with other exercise instructors. The opportunity existed for these interactions to provide reflective triggers relevant to the study, along with interactions outside the exercise environment with women in the identified subject group.

The heuristic process included periods of incubation. The researcher took time to retreat from concentrated focus on the topic. This process of incubation allowed the knowledge gained to become integrated with previous knowledge and experience and it began to facilitate a clarification and deeper understanding of the research topic. Periods of incubation allowed the occurrence of illumination, when new understandings, insights and modifications arose. Illumination allowed new awarenesses to arise and fragmented knowledge to become more synthesised. In illumination, misunderstood or distorted patterns of thinking became clearer, adding essential depth to the study (Moustakas, 1990). The researcher's continued involvement in a range of exercise contexts, her personal social interactions on a daily basis, programmed discussions with colleagues involved in the research process, and her on-going review of relevant literature aided an organic, dynamic and continuous process of illumination.

The illumination process progressed along with the periods of data gathering and incubation. It enabled fragmented knowledge to become synthesised over time. Also, the researcher entered into a process of explication to understand and explain the meanings revealed. The explication phases were gradual and developmental. They were an opportunity to fully examine the ideas raised into consciousness in order to promote understanding. Moustakas (1990) described the explication process as requiring the researcher to attend to her own awarenesses, feelings, thoughts, beliefs and judgements as a prelude to the understanding that is derived from interactions with others. At this stage, the researcher began to develop both a detailed and an overarching understanding of the major components of the topic in preparation for developing the final written report on the findings.

Moustakas (1990) and Frick (1990) suggested that the development of the report, the final stage of the heuristic research process, is only possible once the researcher has acquired a thorough familiarity with all the accumulated data. They suggested a need for the researcher to fully understand the major themes and components as revealed in the data and in the explication of meaning in connection with the experience as a whole. The researcher required a deep

knowledge of the data and a period of time to focus on the topic in preparation for the creation of the final report. There was a need at this stage for the researcher to move beyond any confined or restricted attention to the data and to allow a comprehensive expression of the essences of the topic investigated to be realised (Gendlin, 1962). This was achieved by the researcher withdrawing attention from a focus on the experiences of the individual participants in the study. Attention was then given to developing a holistic perspective on the data, to facilitate the creation and development of the report, depicting the common themes and elements as noted in the detailed data gathering process. Moustakas (1990, p.13) described this phase of the study as:

I am creating a story that portrays the qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences. Through an unwavering and steady inward gaze and inner freedom to explore and accept *what is*, I am reaching into deeper and deeper regions of a human problem or experience and coming to know and understand its underlying dynamics and constituents more and more fully.

Also, it is important to note, that although Moustakas (1990) described the heuristic process as six distinct and linear phases, in practical terms the researcher found the reality to be less clearly defined. In real terms, the phases of the research process were intermingled and there was also a realisation of movement back and forth between the identified phases. For example, each encounter in the data collection phase resulted in integration of previous experience and learning and so, in itself, involved a condensed process of immersion, incubation and illumination.

The extension of understanding and knowledge about the research topic began, in the heuristic paradigm, with the raising of self-awareness on the part of the researcher (Moustakas, 1990). There was a need for the researcher to raise her own awareness of her personal experience of exercise participation and her awareness of other aspects of the self as part of the exploratory process. A persistent and disciplined approach to challenging and confronting the personal perspective deepened knowledge of the issue. Emphasis on the investigator's internal frame of reference and intuition are at the heart of heuristic inquiry. It

was from this starting point that the qualities, meanings and essences of the unique experiences of others were investigated (Moustakas, 1990; Schon, 1991).

The heuristic research process constituted a personal challenge for the researcher. There was the identified acknowledgement within the literature on this methodology that whilst understanding the topic with increasing depth, the researcher experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge at the same time. Accordingly, the researcher maintained an active connection throughout with the topic of the study (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990). Goldstein (1940) and Moustakas (1990) suggested that the process of working with the self and with participants thus becomes one of a mutual search for a composite depiction of understanding that covers the worlds of the participants and of the researcher.

Research involving people is based in and depends on social interaction (Moustakas, 1990; Braud and Anderson, 1998; Davies, 1999; Rowan, 2001). Subjects are of central importance in such a study. In the course of this research process, the researcher interacted with individuals in a range of contexts. Some of these interactions were the formally arranged data gathering situations where researcher and participants were highly focused on the research question. Others were incidental interactions that arose in the course of the researcher's own involvement with exercise participation. Other interactions arose in the normal course of everyday activity and were outside an exercise context. These were more diffuse, covering a range of interests and situations. Each facilitated and influenced reflection in the researcher on the topic under investigation. These personal experiences of the researcher inevitably influenced the study and were formative elements in the research process. This gave further evidence of the researcher's personal involvement in the process of completing the study.

Douglass and Moustakas (1985, p.44) described learning that proceeds heuristically as having 'a path of its own. It is self-directed, self-motivated, and open to spontaneous shift without the restraining leash of formal

hypotheses.’ This open approach to discovery required a degree of flexibility in the design of an investigation that involved heuristic processes. Heuristic research methodologies retain the essence of the individual people involved in the investigated experience. Polkinghorne (1982, p.48) explained that it is not the commitment to methods that is of primary concern in a heuristic process, rather the understanding that ‘human beings exist within an experience of meaning.’ It was the focus on the person in experience and the individual’s search for awareness and discovery that constituted the essential core of this heuristic investigation (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985).

3.6 The research environment

Goldstein (1940), O’Hara (1986), Barrineau and Bozarth (1989) and Patton (1990) investigated the factors involved in the facilitation of effective personal development and growth. They examined a relationship between person-centred therapy and studies of human inquiry. These authors concluded that the conditions essential to the facilitation of effective therapy were applicable to qualitative research concepts and processes. The outlined approach to the current research project acknowledged the benefits of an adherence to these same core conditions of congruency, unconditional positive regard and empathy. These applied to the researcher both on a personal level and in her interactions with subjects (Rogers, 1951, 1983; Moustakas, 1990; Rowan, 2001).

The researcher required subjects to involve themselves in effective self-searching. This required the establishment of an appropriate environment. Also it required recognition of the necessary capabilities in the researcher (Rogers, 1983; Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999). Boud et al. (1999) suggested that those involved would perceive an appropriate environment as being safe, supportive, positive and non-threatening. The researcher aimed to promote individually oriented involvement in the developmental process by allowing participants to explore the personal significance of the exercise experience without fear of judgement or reprisal. The establishment of such a context involved the researcher in demonstrating a sense of genuineness; an unconditional, non-

possessive, caring approach to participants in the exploratory process, and an empathic listening ability that sought to understand the participants' viewpoint. Provision of such an environment developed a sense of mutual trust, acceptance and love that were important when assisting someone in getting to know themselves more fully (Rogers, 1983).

Rowan (2001) described congruency or genuineness as involving the researcher in the aforementioned personal process of acquiring a high level of self-awareness and experiencing a personal connectedness with the fundamentals of the research question. Additionally, there was a requirement for the researcher to facilitate the same process in those involved in the study. Comments from respondents such as 'Now I come to think of it' and 'I hadn't thought of it before' suggested that this was occurring. Rogers (1983) suggested that the facilitator in a developmental process demonstrates a realness that exemplifies an awareness of and an openness to one's own present state. This acknowledgement of a conscious effort to enhance her own self-awareness assisted the researcher in developing, amongst the research participants, an understanding of the significance of the topic under investigation and a connection to it for them.

The researcher found benefit in demonstrating a willingness to undergo the same discipline as that proposed to the participants. This required an open acknowledgement from the researcher of continually working to increase her own personal self-awareness. It required the researcher to be constantly involved in her own self-reflective process. This was necessary in order for the researcher to maintain an on-going evaluation of her personal experiences in connection with the research question and in connection with the reported experiences of the research participants.

Additionally, the researcher was required to remain open to the accounts of the participants and to take a non-judgmental stance during the data gathering process. The facilitation of such a person-centred environment required that the researcher be secure in herself and in her relationships with other people. Also,

she aimed to demonstrate, through the use of a supportive and empathic style, an essential trust in the capacity of others to develop and grow (Rogers, 1983).

The heuristic process involved an exploration and an acceptance of 'what is' (Moustakas, 1990, p.13). This process facilitated the development of an understanding of the dynamics and constituents that underpin an inner state. Rogers (1983) suggested that the role of the researcher requires an ability to appreciate and unconditionally accept the significance of experience from her own and from the participants' points of reference. Also, it required that the researcher be comfortable with uncertainties and difficulties that arose during her own and the participants' self-reflective processes.

The process to raise self-awareness enhanced participants' knowledge about their present state of personal growth. It was crucial for the researcher to facilitate an unconditional and positive acceptance of individual findings amongst the participants. It was anticipated that any reluctance on the part of the subjects to accept their emerging present state unconditionally may have reduced the potential for further personal growth. It was important for the researcher to be fully aware of the possibility of this occurring and to be able to recognise any supporting evidence in the data gathering process. The research participants' own storied lives were on-going beyond the point of contact with the researcher. It was acknowledged that involvement in the study inevitably had an effect on those involved. However, it was the researcher's intention that the effects should not be adverse or detrimental to the on-going creation of individual life stories.

The ability to recognise specific data that were significant to the study required that the researcher develop an empathic understanding of all of the individuals involved in the research process (Rowan, 2001). Rogers (1983) suggested that the development of empathic understanding comes from a desire to develop a sensitive understanding of the individuals' own perspective on an experience. In the case of this study, the researcher was an active participant within the identified subject group. The opportunity for a degree of empathy with other subjects was, therefore, potentially high. Personal experience of some of the

issues relevant to the subject group helped to develop a state of congruency with, and unconditional positive regard for the participants. In accordance with a heuristic approach to research, the researcher was immersed in the topic of the research project, living it and experiencing it first-hand. Therefore, she was in a position to recognise the validity of the content of any relevant self-reflective processes and intuitive responses and to include them in the collection of data for later analysis.

3.7 The reflective process

The generation of data pertinent to this study involved participants in a process of conscious reflection on their experiences. The reflective process was an act of searching deeply into a facet of human experience to gain understanding of its constituent qualities and its wholeness (Moustakas, 1990). Boud et al. (1999, p.19) referred to the importance of effective conscious reflection as a process 'in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it.' Douglass and Moustakas (1985, p.40) described reflection as 'a process of creating and clarifying the meaning of experience in terms of self in relation to self and self in relation to others'. Etherington (2006, p.31) described the reflective process as representing 'a means of constructing a bridge between research and practice'. This was a useful observation in relation to this study, and the researcher felt that working with her own experience and that of others in conscious awareness facilitated evaluation of the experience. Acknowledgement of reflection as a central feature in the research process required a willingness and an openness to be honestly and deeply reflective. Openness has been suggested by Mittelman (1991) as a key element in a process of personal growth or self-awareness.

Moustakas (1990) discussed the need in heuristic inquiry to reflect openly, to be receptive to all facets of experience and to recognise the unity of the experience. Heuristic inquiry is a way of determining patterns of meaning within experience and involves constant changes of focus from the whole, to the parts and back to the whole. The process of reflection in this study made

possible the collection of a body of knowledge that grew out of direct human experience.

Moustakas (1990) described reflection as involving an indwelling process. In this study, reflection allowed the individual to become attuned to the thoughts, emotions and awarenesses that made up experience. Indwelling is an essential part of the heuristic process and one that requires patience and understanding. Effective indwelling includes the act of focusing to enhance the reflective process and to enable concentration on the particular aspects of the self that are essential to clarifying and explicating the studied experience (Moustakas, 1990). In this study, focusing involved giving periods of attention to the exercise experience in order to better understand it. Also, the focusing process enabled the researcher to identify qualities within the reported experiences that may previously have remained out of conscious awareness, mainly because individuals had not taken the time to examine them (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985).

Knowledge derived through the reflective process related back to an internal frame of reference within each individual (Moustakas, 1990). Only the experiencing person could validly provide a description of their own experience. It was important for the researcher to recognise that, in the reporting of the findings, the most significant awarenesses were those that were developed from internal searches. The multileveled and complex nature of human experience meant that data gathered from each individual indicated a number of differences, even though all related to experiences of a similar nature, i.e. an involvement in exercise. The researcher had to remain aware of retaining the personal element of each individual report as a pertinent and salient aspect of the study as a whole.

Reflection on the exercise experience, or concentration of the mind on the topic, was a process of self-reference (Davies, 1999). Boud et al. (1999) described reflection as an active process of exploration and discovery that often leads to unexpected outcomes. Morin (1999) discussed the importance of inner speech in a reflective process to increase self-awareness and noted a positive

correlation between measures of inner speech and self-awareness. It was important in this study to encourage participants to not only reflect and self-talk, but also to report the essence of the reflective process.

The principle of adopting a reflective stance was important both for the researcher and the participants. The researcher needed to maintain awareness of the benefits of constant self-reflection throughout the research period. She was involved in her own reflection on her experiences of participation in exercise. Also, she was involved in reflection on the experiences of the subjects, on the research process itself, on interactions with participants and significant other people, and on related incidents. The subjective nature of the study required that the researcher encourage those involved as participants to reflect on their internal responses to their situation, before, during and after the investigated experience. The researcher needed to maintain the ability to reflect internally on the experiences of those participating in the study and the emerging links and common themes.

Polanyi (1983) discussed a holistic approach to research and the place played by tacit knowing in the development of understanding through reflection. He noted, for example, that a tacit knowing about a person's emotional state can be recognised by certain individual physiological clues that together represent the whole mood. According to Moustakas (1990, p.21-22):

this ability to sense the unity or wholeness of something from an understanding of the individual qualities or parts ... guides the researcher into untapped directions and sources of meaning.

Douglass and Moustakas (1985) had made a similar observation and suggested that curtailing the tacit in research limited possibilities for knowing and restricted the potential for new awarenesses and understandings.

The tacit dimension underpinned and preceded intuitive knowing about the exercise experience (Moustakas, 1990). Intuition provided the link between the implicit knowledge that was inherent in the tacit and the explicit knowledge that was observable and describable. The intuitive process involved drawing on

clues to develop a sense of patterning. As such, it guided the researcher in the process of perceiving and sensing clues in the data to arrive at the discovery of meanings to further deepen and extend knowledge.

The capability to reflect during and after an experience was discussed by Schon (1991). The research process required that the researcher acknowledge periods of uncertainty and instability. Schon (1991) suggested that the combination of reflection whilst in the experience, and also on the experience at a later time, had the potential to ease interim stages of uncertainty and confusion. The researcher's personal movement through this reflective process inevitably influenced the outcomes of the study. Reflection by the researcher was an essential part of the development of her own understanding of the data. Acknowledgement, however, still had to be made of the discomfort associated with interim periods prior to the emergence of her own expanded and clearer understanding. Etherington (2006) noted the difficulties in letting go of a need for certainty and in trusting in a developing sense of knowing that would ultimately arise. It was important in this study for the researcher to recognise the effects of interim stages in herself throughout the research process and to accept them as a natural part of the process, in the knowledge that they would pass in time and progress to a state of clarified understanding (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Weisberg (1993) concurred with the view that the reflective process was important in enabling creative thought processes to operate and new ideas to be generated. It was suggested that the thought processes underlying creative thinking are ordinary and unexceptional and, therefore, accessible to everyone. The significant factor was said to be the propensity to make effective use of the thinking process. Martin (2001) reiterated the need for comfort in the face of uncertainty to stimulate the generation of new ideas. Weisberg (1993) re-emphasised the benefits of a supportive environment, providing further confirmation of the need for the researcher to be patient, non-judgemental and comfortable with her own periods of confusion and uncertainty. Similarly, there was a need for the researcher to promote, amongst the participants, a non-judgmental acceptance of any discomfort evoked by the self-reflection process

and any emerging issues. The researcher aimed to facilitate this process by encouraging the participants to focus on emerging issues as part of the self-reporting process. It must be noted that the final explication of the results represented an artificially suspended moment in reflection on behalf of the researcher. This in itself was an interim point in reflection. In reality, reflection remained an on-going emergent process beyond the identified completion of the study.

Boud et al. (1999) admitted to reflection being a complex process in which emotion and cognition are interrelated and interactive. Reflection on the exercise experience included the thoughts, emotions, actions and conclusions that resulted from participation in that experience. The capacity to reflect was different for different people. Further acknowledgement was given to the need for a positive and supportive environment in which participants felt secure and their comments were valued. Boud et al. (1999) considered the factors involved in an effective reflective process and examined the significance of some of the characteristics of the individuals involved in determining their response to the investigated experience. As already noted, by definition, the experience to be processed was lived by the individual concerned. Therefore, the individual's previous experiences that were brought to the present event were an essential component to gaining an understanding of what occurred in the reflective process.

Subjects' reported thoughts often illustrated Boud et al.'s (1999) identification of three major elements in the reflective process. They noted that reflection firstly involved returning to the experience, secondly attending to the emotions that the experience generated and thirdly re-evaluating the experience. There was evidence that subjects were re-examining the experience in relation to a present state of development, at a point in time after the event, and integrating the experience into an existing framework of knowledge.

Rich and vivid data were acquired from the interviews and focus groups in which the link between experience and the reflective activity, as perceived by the participants, was promoted. This was achieved by encouraging participants

to firstly recollect the salient events by mentally replaying their experiences and recounting the detail. The researcher used probing questions where necessary in individual interviews. Member interaction within focus groups also helped to prompt the reflective process. Once the facts had been established, participants were encouraged to focus on the emotions and sensations they experienced in connection with the events and the meaning they attached to their experiences. Emotions evoked in recounting the event were also significant and were included in this process. Further examination of the event in the light of the new knowledge gained was found to reveal new understanding and a change of perspective.

3.8 Verification of the research

Yardley (2000) discussed potential difficulties associated with the reporting of qualitative research. Recommendations to ensure validity of research findings included a general acceptance of open-ended and flexible principles; sensitivity to the context and commitment and rigour on behalf of the researcher. In accordance with Davies (1999), a variety of methods were utilised in this study with cross-referencing employed to confirm emerging ideas. Validity was sought through the integration of data gathered from interviews and focus groups, from the researcher herself, and from subjects from three different facilities (Veal, 1997). Moustakas (1990) stated that validity in a heuristic process was confirmed if the ultimate depiction of the experience comprehensively and vividly presented the meanings and essences as perceived by the researcher and the subjects. Lincoln (1995), however, noted that qualitative texts are always partial and incomplete. It is, therefore, pertinent to state that the reporting of this research is merely a personal and an interim perception and cannot be considered as an ultimate or as a complete truth.

Within a heuristic study, validity is also enhanced through the researcher's participation in the study (Moustakas, 1990). The primary researcher is the only person in the study to have undergone the heuristic inquiry from the beginning to the end. In this event, the researcher was studying her own direct experience in relation to the research questions, and also in relation to the whole research

process. The ability of the researcher to do this determined the strength of the conclusions and interpretations reached (Moustakas 1990).

In this study the researcher was conscious of a need to check and recheck the data to determine whether the qualities or constituents derived from the data accurately represented original meaning. Moustakas (1990) emphasised the opinion of Polanyi (1969) that there are no rules to guide verification in a heuristic study and called on the individual researcher to make the ultimate judgement. Polanyi (1969) explained that the synthesis of essences and meanings inherent in any human experience is a reflection and outcome of the researcher's own search for knowledge. The choice of elements presented as truth and those discarded as insignificant to the study can be accredited only on the grounds of the personal knowledge and judgement of the researcher.

Davies (1999) discussed reliability in research involving people and acknowledged that no study of a group of people is directly repeatable. She also noted that, as with all knowledge, there is a need to accept the incompleteness and contingent characteristics of any individual report. However, she went on to suggest that an acceptable degree of reliability may be gained through the continual cross-checking of information and the interpretations developed as a result. The researcher also noted Davies's (1999) advice to remain aware of individual perspectives on a theme and the natural inconsistencies within people's explanations and interpretations.

In accordance with Moustakas's (1990) recommendation, the researcher returned to the participants to share with them the meanings and essences derived from reflection on and analysis of the transcribed interviews and other material. Their assessment for comprehensiveness and accuracy was considered to be important for the verifiability of the study. This was done informally, in this study, in naturally occurring interactions when the researcher later met with participants at exercise sessions. General conversation enabled the researcher to verify her understanding of their experiences in relation to their exercise participation.

Ingold (1989) and Davies (1999) argued for the need for generalisability in research. Bhaskar (1989) expanded on this, suggesting that generalisations within social research may be explanatory but not predictive. The difficulties with empirical generalisation lie in the need to specify boundaries within which the generalisations may be considered to be valid. Davies (1999) suggested that analysis of data gathered from studies of people proceeds by a gradual accumulation of cases in which the researcher seeks the differences that will refine and strengthen the explanations that naturally arise in each study. The opportunity existed, therefore, at the conclusion of this study, to seek contexts from which further comparable data might be collected. This would facilitate the development of understanding of the broader applications of the processes used in this study.

3.9 Conclusion

The mainly subjective focus of this study provided a rich description of the often complex ways in which events and experiences came together in the lives of the subjects. It was with this in mind that data were gathered from participants in ways that offered the opportunity for them to describe their experiences and life stories in their own voice. The heuristic approach enabled the researcher to include a reflective awareness of intuitive, emotional and non-verbal aspects of the interactions with participants, in addition to cognitions (Braud and Anderson, 1998). Reflective listening enabled the researcher to develop understanding of her own experiences and those of the participants in the research process.

The heuristic study was a demanding and lengthy process and placed immense responsibility on the researcher (Moustakas, 1990). The requirement that those involved fully experience the topic under consideration and reflect deeply on it had significant implications for all, and particularly for the researcher. This study required that the researcher develop a direct and deep personal understanding of the topic under investigation. Also, she had to draw others into that exploration and facilitate their own deep searching. The study involved moments of significant meaning, understanding and discovery. The exploration

of experiences, emotions, thoughts, beliefs and ideas by the participants and the researcher affected and changed all those involved. Interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships were altered.

Moustakas (1990, p.14) described the demands of this kind of research process, particularly for the researcher:

[it]... is not one that can be hurried or timed... It demands the total presence, honesty, maturity and integrity of a researcher who not only strongly desires to know and understand but is willing to commit endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on one central question, to risk the opening of wounds and passionate concerns, and to undergo the personal transformation that exists as a possibility in every heuristic journey.

Polanyi (1962, p.143) described thus his own experience of conducting a research project involving the methodologies used here:

having made a discovery, I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently. I have crossed a gap, the heuristic gap, which lies between problem and discovery.

Moustakas (1961) described his own research work into loneliness. He expressed an appreciation of the benefits of a process that included being open to the significance of particular experiences and that facilitated self-inquiry, immersion in the topic to be studied, along with observation and dialogue with the people who were experiencing loneliness. He pointed to the potential for qualitative human inquiry research to offer opportunities for understanding the development of identity and selfhood. These methods facilitate studies into understanding the deepest aspects of human experience.

Moustakas (1990) suggested that the search for understanding of the meaning of experience facilitates the development of a new view of self and life and makes possible movement towards well-being, authenticity and growth. The process for the researcher in this study involved her becoming absorbed, curious, alert and open to each expression of lived experience. It required that

she come to understand the topic from the participants' frame of reference and also from the vantage point of her own experience. The process was one of mutual discovery with important connections evolving to reveal pathways to new ways of being. The meaning that evolved from the study is intersubjective. The final reporting of the investigation represented an understanding of the participants' worlds within the context of the researcher's own experience.

Chapter Four: The Nature, Meaning and Benefits of Regular Exercise Participation and Delivery

I am creating a story that portrays the qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences. Through an unwavering and steady inward gaze and inner freedom to explore and accept *what is*, I am reaching into deeper and deeper regions of a human problem or experience and coming to know and understand its underlying dynamics and constituents more and more fully. (Moustakas, 1990, p.13)

Qualitative data were gathered from a total of 41 women (40, plus the researcher). Twenty three women took part in individual interviews, and 18 attended focus groups. All the women regularly took part in exercise (three or more times per week, for at least 30 minutes on each occasion). Eleven were also exercise instructors. The study explored the nature, meaning and benefits of regular participation in exercise and its delivery.

The narrative data provided a way to investigate the accumulative effects on its participants of repeated positive experiences in an exercise context. Also, the study illustrated the effect exercise participants can have on a wider community of people. It investigated the unspoken and generally unacknowledged aspects of regular exercise participation that are not always consciously recognised. This study considered the significance of the approach used by exercise instructors in creating an environment with positive connotations. It examined the ways in which exercise instructors created a sense of enjoyment in their classes and the ways in which they influenced and nurtured the social setting of their classes. The process employed in the analysis of the data is explained in Section 4.1. Section 4.2 describes the treatment of the verbal and non-verbal data. The results of the study are presented in a range of formats, prepared according to the principles of the heuristic paradigm (Moustakas, 1990). Individual depictions of the exercise experience illustrated a relationship with the identified themes and are presented in Section 4.3. Data representing interaction between members of the focus groups was utilised to support that

from the individual interviews, to demonstrate consensus on a connection with the identified themes. Exemplary individual portraits illustrated the application of the themes to subjects' unique personal situations. These are presented in Section 4.4. Composite depictions illustrated the core themes, qualities and essences that permeated the experiences of the research participants. Two composite depictions are presented in Section 4.5, one to illustrate the experiences of exercise participants, and one of instructors. A creative synthesis, presented in Section 4.6, demonstrated the researcher's perception of exercise in light of her own experiences of the topic and of the study.

4.1 Data analysis

As expected, the narrative style generated large amounts of data (Moustakas, 1990; Braud and Anderson, 1998; Rowan, 2001). Analysis of this qualitative data required the researcher to become immersed in gaining a full understanding of the individual participants' experiences. This involved the researcher in periods of reflection and 'incubation' away from the data, to allow new understandings to develop, and syntheses and awarenesses to emerge. Furthermore, it required that the researcher adopt a particular perspective that enabled an understanding to develop, not just of isolated events, i.e. separate exercise experiences, but also of the impact of those experiences on other aspects of each individual's unique life. It called for an acknowledgement of integration of more recent experiences with those from the past, providing an understanding of an accumulated effect over time (Boud et al., 1999). Awareness of an integrative process helped to clarify the growth, change and development that took place over time, with an accumulation of experiences (Moustakas, 1990).

Analysis of the qualitative data from the interviews and focus groups involved acquiring a high level of familiarity with the content and linguistic meaning of the transcriptions (Martin, 2001). The researcher's familiarity with the principles of Neuro-Linguistic Programming facilitated the emergence of insights into subjects' own perceptions of reality and their personal truths and beliefs (O'Connor and Seymour, 1995). A series of mind maps was collated on

A3 paper for each participant in the study (Buzan, 1988; DePorter, 1996) (Appendix Four). The mind maps illustrated themes within the narrative gathered from each individual, and gave an overall view of the data collected. Large spaces were acquired to spread out all the notes and mind maps due to the volume of data produced. The places used for this purpose were acquired through the researcher's connections within the fitness industry. A squash court and an activity studio were used for this purpose. Also, it was found to be valuable to be contemplating the content of the research material in settings that were familiar to the researcher, and that had strong connections with exercise provision. In accordance with the findings of Fisher (1997) it was felt that this aided the thought processes utilised in the analysis of the volume of data.

The 'overview' process took place on three separate occasions. This enabled the researcher to view all the data simultaneously. Further notes and thoughts were gathered on flipchart paper. A time gap of two to three weeks between each viewing allowed awarenesses to arise and links to form. This enabled the researcher to gain a detailed impression of all the data and allowed a personal perception of the common themes to emerge. This emergent process led to data related to the research questions being categorised into sets and subsets. Substantive data from the interviews and focus groups were extracted verbatim and collated on 1169 index cards. The cards were categorised to represent major themes. This process provided physical evidence of five main themes labelled as lifestyle, specialness, thinking, personal and interpersonal. The cards pertaining to each theme were spread out to give an overview. They were then further categorised into subsets, formed by linking related comments. The analysis was conducted manually. This enabled the researcher to physically view all of the data simultaneously, to note common themes and to identify the significant nature of the verbatim linguistic and metaphoric content of the transcriptions. The process was verified by a reflective practice consultant, who was trained in the processes of Neuro-Linguistic Programming. Also, he was familiar with the study and with the research methodologies utilised.

The resultant categorisation provided a way of mapping out an interpretive pathway linking regular participation in exercise and what that meant for the

participants. It provided a way of establishing meaning in terms of the exercise experience and also in terms of repeated experiences of exercise in individuals' lives generally. This approach to the research project facilitated a holistic exploration of the value and meaning of exercise for the subject group in terms of their personal and unique whole life narrative histories. The reporting of the study involved the inclusion of verbatim examples to illustrate the collection of data and its analysis and synthesis. Emerging thematic structures were discussed and illustrated.

Recognition was given to the need to demonstrate respect for and understanding of the perspective of all those involved in the research process. In order for the research process to take place effectively, data analysis involved the researcher in a cyclical process of self-reflection, and a move towards disassociation from her own personal life and association with the personal experiences of the participants. A return to self-reflection enabled the researcher to integrate new learnings from reflection on the experiences of others with learnings taken from personal experience (Miller and Glassner, 1997).

The difficulties inherent in attempting to create a convergence of varying perspectives on a topic were discussed by Southgate (1981). The overriding hindrance to convergence was identified as being the imposition of one dominant view over the others, thus producing an unequal relationship between the varying perspectives. The opposite process of developing a relationship that denoted equal validity was described as being based on a perspective that operated from a position of mutual respect and understanding for the experiences of all those involved in the process. It was important that mutual respect for all those involved in the study was acknowledged and equal validity was given to all reported data.

The explication of the research data illustrated aspects of the accumulative effects of repeated immersion in the exercise experience as perceived by the researcher and the subjects, and also perceptions of the individual and collective influence and significance of exercise in life generally. This included comments on development in terms of the traditional fitness criteria. Also,

benefit was noted in relation to the development of emotional and spiritual well-being, personal development and growth, altered self perceptions and world views, and enhanced interpersonal relationships. Exercise was found to promote physical, intellectual and social capabilities. Conclusions arising from the research findings were outlined, and further related studies identified. The implications of the findings of the study were expressed, along with their significance both for the researcher and for others.

4.2 The verbal and non-verbal content of the qualitative data

Language is central to the narrative process (Boud et al., 1999). The movement towards a shared understanding of the personal meaning of the specific words used to express experience was important within this study. Analysis of data with linguistic significance involved the interpretation of language, metaphor, symbolism and semiotics (Vygotsky, 1978; Grove, 1978; Davies, 1999; Lawley and Tompkins, 2000; Robbins, 2003). There were inherent difficulties in establishing shared understanding of the significance of a personal experience. The established limitations of language involved in the expression of emotional experience have already been noted (Kovecses, 2000) and were acknowledged within this study. The establishment of a clear and mutual understanding of subjective experiences was crucial for the current study. This involved further questioning and some 'translation' and clarification of meaning expressed by individual participants to avoid misinterpretation and misrepresentation (Grove, 1978; Lawley and Tompkins, 2000).

Belenky et al. (1986) and DeVault (1990) discussed the need to be alert to styles of communication. It was suggested that hesitations, restarts and other incidental features of speech were significant indicators of deep meaning. Apparently meaningless phrases, repetitions, sublinguistic verbalisations, pauses and silences were all significant in adding to or contradicting the purely semantic detail of what was said. These were retained in the transcriptions from interviews and focus groups in this study.

Lawley and Tompkins (2000) described the symbolic modelling process as a way to develop understanding of an individual's experience that neither contaminates nor distorts that experience. The symbolic modelling process was utilised in the analysis of data for this study by taking the individual's own language and metaphoric expression as an accurate description of their personal experience. Expressions such as 'I could take on the world', 'I'm 'clunk' there', 'Exercise gives me a 'spark' in my life', 'You feel like you're, like a hamster in a wheel' were recorded verbatim as representing personal symbolic perceptions of experience. Any explication remained within the logic of the information given. Lawley and Tompkins (2000) developed the Grovian process (Grove, 1978) into one that enabled the construction of a model of an individual's perception of experience. This process was further extended in this study to facilitate the development of composite depictions of the individual models and also a creative synthesis representing the collective individual models symbolically. The composite models meant that the study moved beyond the idiosyncrasies of personal experiences and illustrated a range of pervading factors that had been evidenced in individual circumstances. The creative synthesis represented the researcher's perception of the symbolic meaning of regular exercise participation. It is developed from her own experience, and from her developing understanding as a result of participation in the whole research project.

Body language and voice tone were also noted within the data gathering process. These were generally found to suggest an enthusiasm in respondents to express something of themselves and a willingness to respond to the request for information (O'Connor and Seymour, 1995; Laborde, 1998; Stewart, 2000). Respondents sometimes initially sat back in their seats to reflect on a question as it was asked, before replying. Subjects generally sat forward, once responses had been internally formulated. They made frequent eye contact with the researcher as they spoke and often spoke at length about their experiences. The voice tone, pace and pitch suggested genuineness, and congruence with the spoken message. The researcher felt intuitively, in these circumstances, that respondents were comfortable discussing their experiences and desirous of imparting an honest message. They appeared keen to give expression to their

personal stories (Stewart, 2000). They indicated taking pains to select the appropriate words that would enable them to provide an accurate verbal account of their experiences. They appeared to want to express their experiences in a way that truly represented their personal reality. They often took thinking time to carefully select the words to say, and frequently sought confirmation from the researcher of a shared understanding. Indications of body language and voice tone have been included within the exemplary portraits to support the overall depiction of the exercise experience.

4.3 Individual depictions: the experience of exercise

The following sections provided individual depictions of the experience of regular participation in exercise as noted by women moving into their middle years. The depictions illustrated the five core themes of lifestyle benefits through exercise, the 'special' qualities of exercise, the effects of exercise on the mind, the personal benefits from regular exercise, and the interpersonal effects of exercise on relationships with others. Individual perceptions arising from the interviews were supported by consensus viewpoints emerging from discussions in the focus groups.

4.3.1 Lifestyle benefits through exercise

Subjects concurred with the traditional view that exercise provides a range of lifestyle benefits and indicated a belief that exercise provided general positive gains. They commonly depicted a perception or belief that involvement in exercise would be a positive experience, and that it would result in them recognising positive gains for themselves. Comments on benefits related to health were included in this section. Health was found to be a personal experience with individuals describing their perception of well-being in unique terms. They recognised benefits to their overall health, and indicated exercise played a part both in keeping them well, and in helping them avoid ill-health and negative states. Exercise provided access to an emotional backdrop that was predominantly positive with salutogenic potential. Subjects identified specific physical and mental health gains. Fitness gains were noted, as were benefits in relation to postural concerns. Subjects recognised that regular

exercise helped them to lose weight or maintain weight and they commented on issues relating to body image. They noted that exercise impacted on their eating habits. A perception of lifestyle gains through exercise, focussed subjects' attention on their diet as a wider health issue. Subjects recognised exercise as evoking positive emotional responses and connected their involvement with positive emotional states and positive benefits. Unprompted, they indicated a perception that emotional health is an integral component of overall well-being.

Cynthia was 48 years old, married with two children and worked full time. She liked to swim, played badminton, cycled and enjoyed hiking and long distance walking. She indicated a perception that exercise provided positive lifestyle gains and particularly noted fitness benefits for herself. Also, she felt that she maintained good health and her current weight through regular exercise. Cynthia explained how she overcame one of the traditional barriers to participation in exercise, young children, to be able to maintain her involvement. This suggested that she valued her participation in regular exercise and was determined to create possibilities to continue to take part.

With swimming, I don't know. I suppose I'm competitive. I tend to push myself when I'm swimming. I'll go and I tend to sometimes do 30 minutes fast and see how many lengths I can do. Sometimes on a Sunday I'll go and I'll perhaps do 100 lengths. Nice and slowly.... Nice and steady. But usually with an aim in mind. Either build up stamina or build up speed. ... I don't get ill very often. I am rarely off work. I don't get colds. The first cold I ever got was when I was pregnant. So I think I'm pretty healthy ... It takes up a bit of my time. So it's time consuming. But when the boys were small, ... I started going out on my bike. As soon as I'd had my second one I started going out on my bike to get fit. I'd say 'right' to my husband 'right, here you are, you feed them, I'm going out.' Just to get myself back in shape again. And then I started jogging. They used to be on bikes and I'd jog with them to the leisure centre and then I'd jog back again. In my own personal life it just keeps me fit.

Rachel was 33 years old, divorced and worked full time. She liked to run. She found running helped her feel well, physically and emotionally, and she believed that it had been significant in helping her avoid mental and emotional health problems. She noted awareness of a changed world-view and felt she had

a more positive outlook. Also, she noted enhanced interpersonal relationships as a result of regularly exercising.

The reason I started exercising in the first place was when I separated from my ex-husband. I'd never done anything in my life. I, I thought I was on the verge of depression and I read an article about the benefits of exercise and I've never looked back. So I never actually got depressed. I always feel a lot more energised.... I'm not ... it's more down to the stress relief ... I'm not as anxious as I was. I sleep better. I feel a better person to other people. I feel that my mood is more enhanced when I look back to before I started running and exercising. I felt there was a lot more wrong in the world. I felt a bit of a 'whinger' at work ... but things like that, I don't feel that things bother me as much.

Anne was 47 years old, divorced and worked full time. She exercised in the gym. She commented on the fitness gains she got from exercising, and also on a range of lifestyle and health benefits. She felt that exercise had relieved stress for her and had enhanced her emotional state by helping her become more relaxed, calm and comfortable in herself. She recognised changes in herself and in her metaphoric representation of her situation. Exercise had helped her move away from a 'traumatic' situation, being 'low' and being 'on a knife edge' to being more 'laid back' and to 'taking the stress out of [her] body'. Also, she found that exercising helped her maintain her performance at work. It was helping her with weight management and she was facing new life challenges on her own as a divorcee.

I'd gone through a very traumatic divorce and I wasn't getting out much. I was quite low. I was low... I can honestly say that at the worst time I was on a knife edge. ... It's also stress relief. At times I get very irritated. I'm more laid back. It's helping me take the stress out of my body... I'm on my feet all day at work. I'm fit to do that. I'm on my own now and getting on with it. I never thought I'd manage on my own. It helps me keep my weight down too. Even if I get down to my weight I'd still continue with it. It has made me get out of the yo-yo dieting. I'm more accepting of myself.

Pauline was 42 years old, married with two children and worked part time. She enjoyed a range of exercise classes. She indicated that she was subject to many

of the traditional calls on her time and energy and felt that exercising provided her with the necessary fitness to meet the demands of her lifestyle. Exercise symbolised health gains for Pauline, indicated in her comment 'it's keeping everything down'. She exemplified many of the subjects who also noted a perception that giving time and energy to exercising aided, rather than hindering, the process of daily living. She appreciated the fitness and health benefits and believed that she enhanced her emotional state with exercise. She found exercise was a good stress reliever, and felt more relaxed after exercising. She indicated a belief that the deep breathing required in exercise was a significant factor in the acquisition of positive gains.

You are burning the calories that you want to burn... It's a good energy burner... It's wanting and needing to do it. I need to get fit. If you've got some stress you feel a lot better... I feel that I'm burning off the stress. I'm more relaxed... It generally makes me feel better about myself. As soon as you do it you feel better. Even if you feel shattered after work. I do it and I feel better. I make the time and I take an hour out to make myself feel better. I'm fitter for everything. At work I'm on my feet all day. I've more energy. I think it's good. I think, I'll be fitter and healthier in the long run. It's keeping everything down like my blood pressure and that. What a huge difference I feel now from when I first started. You make yourself breathe deeper and everything becomes easier. Work, home, kids, my mother. There's so much. It goes on and on. I'd never be able to do it all if it wasn't for me being fit. That's what it comes down to. I never, ever stop. If I didn't have the energy...

Barbara was 49 years old, married and worked part time; **Helen W** was 45 years old, married with two children and worked full time; **Jackie R** was 40 years old, married with four children and three dependent relatives and worked part time, and **Suzanne** was 42 years old, married with two children and worked part time. They collectively agreed that exercise relieved stress and tension, and provided positive emotional benefits.

Barbara

It's the feel good factor. I tend to feel easily stressed, not able to say 'no' to people. Exercise means I'm better able to cope.

Helen W

Yes, the feel good factor. I work off any frustrations. It's definitely a de-stressor.

Jackie

Oh yes. I'm releasing tension when I exercise. It releases tension.

Suzanne

Exercise helps you to cope with life, really. I have a monotonous work load to deal with. I have to cope with that.

Barbara

It just makes you stay fitter and you feel better, doesn't it really.

4.3.2 The 'special' qualities of exercise

Subjects indicated a wide range of positive connotations in relation to exercise. They frequently indicated recognition that their involvement in exercise had 'special' qualities, which were indicated as being inherent in the act of being involved in exercise. These were described as sensory experiences that were generally only achieved during exercise and that were valued for their positive qualities. They evoked positive emotions in subjects. Also, they provided recognition of exercise as an activity that provided experiences of a spiritual nature, focused the energies of the mind and body and awakened the self to the deeper dimensions of human experience. This suggested recognition of intrinsic value in exercise participation. It demonstrated that the meaning of regular exercise participation involved more than was suggested in traditional theory. Furthermore, the individual constructs illustrated uniqueness in the experience and provided a dynamic and living sense of a personal connection, not only with exercise, but with its meaning in the context of the whole of life itself.

The recognised difficulties inherent to giving a full and complete verbal expression to aspects of subjective experience were noted by subjects themselves, who sometimes indicated a degree of awkwardness in putting their thoughts into words. They used a range of language with positive connotations. The choice of language was an interpretation of their experience of exercise, and related to participants' self-selected choice of 'enjoyable' forms of exercise. Comments demonstrated the significance of involvement in an

activity perceived by the individual to be enjoyable, as opposed to the traditional prescriptive approach to describing the benefits of specific forms of exercise.

Subjects perceived exercise as an integral part of their life, suggesting the high value they placed upon it. Exercise promoted positive emotions, including those related to joy, interest, contentment and love. They described 'loving' their involvement in exercise, or being 'passionate' about what they did. The value they placed on exercise was directly related to the benefits they perceived exercise provided for them. Accessing positive emotion implied access to the related benefits. They found various qualities and states in exercise that they found difficult to access in the multi-faceted busyness of daily living, and that they felt helped them to effectively get on with the rest of their lives. They noted exercise enabled them to access such concepts as 'happiness', 'peace', 'freedom', 'escape', 'solitude', 'your own space' and 'balance'.

They again indicated a perception that exercise provided, rather than reduced, the time, energy and impetus for involvement in other activities. They explicitly stated a preference for maintaining their participation in exercise in addition to meeting other commitments and other demands on their time and energy. They noted the development in themselves, through exercise, of qualities such as 'confidence', 'determination', 'perseverance' and 'resilience'. Such qualities enabled them to be more effective in their daily lives and to face new challenges. Exercise helped women discard automatic everyday behavioural scripts and tendencies and facilitated a relaxed approach to pursuing novel and creative paths of thought and action. It provided wider growth opportunities in life generally, and led to involvement in a range of activities and challenges, aside from the exercise context itself. This was again despite the time commitment required to exercise regularly, in addition to women's other commitments.

Elizabeth was 43 years old, married with two children and worked part time. She enjoyed running. For her, running symbolised 'space'. She appreciated being on her own, away from other people when she exercised. She expressed a

perception that running symbolised for her a space in which 'nobody can get at you'. She believed exercise provided her with access to the qualities of 'determination' and 'perseverance', both of which enabled her to feel that she could meet other challenges in her life. Also, she experienced confidence, security, energy and resilience through her participation in exercise. She recognised the transferability of these qualities and their capability to enhance life generally.

You are on your own. You have your own space and nobody can get at you. It gives me determination. I'm determined I'm going to do this. And perseverance. I might aim to cut my time down and I keep trying. Perseverance to go out when it's chucking it down. You feel ready for anything. I could take on the world. I'm more confident and more ready to take on things that you might shy away from. I think, I can do it. I feel more secure and it gives me more energy and commitment and resilience. It makes your whole life better. It gives you more confidence and it makes you better able to deal with things. I think if I can do this, I can do anything.

Lynn was 39 years old, married with elderly dependents and worked full time. She enjoyed exercising in the gym. She found that exercise helped her regain an 'inner calm' that she felt she had lost due to other life challenges in recent times. The 'inner calm', for Lynn, appeared to be the basis of her ability to deal with life's challenges. She noted other gains from exercising, such as feeling more dynamic, focussed, healthy, confident and determined. Also, she found she had added stamina and a sense of being grounded and balanced. Lynn indicated that the opportunity to reflect on the impact of exercise on her life enabled her to appreciate the extent of its influence.

The inner calm comes as a result of the exercise. This is the feeling I'm striving towards. I feel really pleased with myself. I like being calm. I am essentially a calm person, but I feel I've lost that somewhere along the way recently. In the past few years I've lost my inner calm and I'm trying to get it back again. Yes. It makes me feel stronger and more able to cope with whatever I'm faced with. It's the inner calm again. I think it makes me dynamic, focussed, healthy, determined. There's this determination and ... errrm confidence that I'm going to get the results that I'm looking for. That's from the exercise and obviously from having built my company. That's been very

good. But I probably wouldn't have managed to do that without the exercise. I feel sort of duty bound to exercise so I can carry on with the company and everything else and enjoy my life. It's remarkable really, now just talking about it, just how big a role it plays.

Exercise has an impact. I do public speaking. I have to do a lot of that, so I feel very centred. I'm not sort of hopping from one leg to the other. I'm 'clunk' there. I feel my feet are definitely on the ground, you know, I don't feel uncomfortable. And I think that is definitely exercise related. Balance. The physical strength in my legs keeps me grounded. I have to talk at events. There's a lot of business things I have to do. Like it's just a non-stop thing really, you know, everything is timed to the minute. Especially in the evening. You've done a full day's work and the stamina has to keep going. That's the other thing really, the stamina, mental and physical.

Michelle was 35 years old, married with two children and expecting a third, worked part time and was a part time student. Also, she was an exercise instructor. She liked swimming and running. The quote illustrated her internal processes to understand the meaning of exercise for herself and then to express it in response to the interview questions. Exercise, for her, was 'dream time' and 'an escape'. She appreciated the time for herself when she was exercising. Also she found that having the freedom to go and exercise and the control over what she did during her session gave her a sense of empowerment. She indicated a perception that the demands of her life generally did not allow her the same level of freedom and control. She felt strong, competent, confident, capable, patient and tolerant as a result of exercising. She found exercising re-energised her, 'like putting your batteries on charge'. She perceived the demands of her life as taking her energy from her, exercise as putting it back.

My first thought is, it makes me feel in tune with my body. But really I don't think it is that. I don't know really. I can just get on with it physically, without even thinking about it. It's dream time for me. It's an escape really I suppose. Escape time for me really. I can do it any time. I don't have to wait. It's having the freedom and the control really. I find it such a mental release and a physical release. I think life is so stressed mentally that it's never balanced out physically.... I feel empowered. I feel more confident. It kind of re-energises you really. You're trying to keep everybody else going and nothing is re-energising you. It's

all taking from you all the time and the exercise isn't just a window of an hour, you're re-energising aren't you. Like putting your batteries on charge.... I'm really confident when I'm exercising and I can challenge the world. Achieve anything I want to do. I'm strong and I'm competent really. And I'm not stressed. I'm very patient. I think that's what I am, what I would like to think I am. No, I think that's what I am. I think that's what I was before I started to give myself to everybody else. And it's a chance to be that again, I suppose.... Because you're not in control of your environment absolutely ever, are you really. Whereas in exercise I feel like I am in control. It's your choice to do it or your choice not to do it. Your choice how fast to do it, and your choice how much to do it. And that's taken away from you in everything else in your life really, isn't it. It makes me feel more in control and keeps my feet on the tracks, so I'm not having to be meeting what everybody else thinks I should do. It empowers me and I suppose it kind of releases me from all the compromising. So it takes me out my normal everyday environment and the routine of expectations that everybody else has. I feel like I've got time for me. And I'm stronger and I'm more confident It makes you more competent, more capable, more patient and tolerant to deal with things.

Louise was 35 years old, married with three children and worked part time. She was also an exercise instructor. She was involved in running and swimming. She appreciated the solitude she experienced whilst exercising, away from the demands of everyday life. She described exercise as giving her a sense of 'freedom' and 'escape' from the ordinariness of life. She could make her own decisions about her exercising.

I think it's the solitude that I quite like about it, or the, you know, certainly, certain aspects of training, that's just me against me. You know, no phones ringing. Nobody clambering for tea. And I can go for as long as I want to go and it's not dictated by anybody else, where I don't want to be and it just gives you that sense of freedom and escape.

Julie was 40 years old, married with one child and worked part time. **Helen W** was 45 years old, married with two children and worked full time. **Julie** and **Helen W** were both also exercise instructors. **Suzanne** was 42 years old, married with two children and worked part time. They collectively agreed that exercise had special qualities and that it was an integral part of their life.

Julie

It's the music for me. You get a buzz from it. And I love the dramatics of it too.

Helen W

It's the peace for me. I can give more because I've escaped.

Suzanne

I like the space. It's escapism for me too.

Helen W

It just changes everything, I think. It's just part of everything you do.

4.3.3 The effects of exercise on the mind

Subjects referred to exercise as being important in relation to a range of mental activities. They perceived exercise to be mentally beneficial, in that it gave them time to focus and think. There was a common perception that thinking time was not generally available in life. Exercise was noted as providing time to think about a wide range of personally relevant topics. Also, it provided the opportunity to clear, or rest, the mind, and to not think. Furthermore, it expanded thinking beyond personally identified 'normal' boundaries. This was specifically linked, for some, to recognition of facing new challenges, and a resultant sense of achievement when these were met.

Avril was 44 years old, married with 2 children and worked full time. She was aware of exercise providing her with thinking time and giving her the opportunity to expand her thinking. She believed that the process of running meant she had 'nothing else to do mentally' and was herself 'amazed' at the extent of her own thinking during this time. Also, she was aware of exercise providing her with the opportunity to face and achieve a number of challenges. Each exercise session was an achievement and helped her build self-respect as a result. This enabled her to have a positive approach to challenges in other areas of her life.

I'm thinking. It gives me plenty of time to think. I'm thinking about lots of things. You're supposed to empty your mind when

you do yoga, but I find that quite difficult. I run too and when you've given yourself nothing else to do mentally it's amazing what else you can think about. You don't have to think about anybody except yourself and you don't have to impress anybody. It's just you and your mind, I suppose. I never thought about that before. I think it's more mental than physical. I've often wondered – if I didn't exercise I don't know It just I think it gives me a bit ... more self-respect.... Because I know that let me think I feel pleased with myself if I've done it. I've achieved something if I've done it. If I didn't go at all, I wouldn't have that sense of well, I've done that. It's like having that satisfaction of knowing that you've done something to help yourself, whatever it is. I suppose, because if, you know, you can achieve something physical because, I think if I've achieved something physical it's also a mental achievement as well. You know, it takes a bit of persuading yourself. I feel stronger mentally, because especially when I'm running. When I first set out we did two miles and then we did four, and then 10k and 10 miles and we ended up at 13 miles. Well, I know that if you'd have asked me to do 10 miles I'd have said 'Oh no, I can't do that!' But it's amazing what you can do when you set your mind to it. Running 10 or 13 miles, apart from the time, it's not really any more difficult than running six miles. Because you get into a rhythm. So in a way, I feel if I set my mind to something, I know I can do it. Because I know I've done it in exercise then I'm going to be able to do it, aren't I. It's just a matter of setting your mind to it.

Susan was 47 years old, married and worked full time. She enjoyed swimming. She noted exercise gave her time, either not to have to think about day-to-day concerns, or to think about things that normally she would not be thinking about. The opportunity to do that provided her with energy and vitality for the normal daily chores and activities. She noted having decided to give herself a new challenge, to take part in the Race for Life, a women's five kilometre run in aid of breast cancer research.

Yes – I think. About nothing in particular. I suppose I'm thinking about things you don't normally have time to think about. Half the time it's just a load of nothingness. Or if I've got a problem I can think about that. It's just relaxing. All the rest of the time you are thinking about everybody else. Is this alright for them, have we done enough, have we got enough, have we gone far enough? You come home ready to get on with things. It gets you going. It gives you more You can come home and think 'Right, I'm going to do this now.' It gives you that buzz. Rather than make me tired it makes me go the other way. I just do it. Me

and a friend are thinking of doing the Race for Life this year too. We might walk it, but we fancied having a go.

Judith was 35 years old, divorced with two children and worked full time. She attended exercise classes. She found that exercise had mental benefits. It helped her come to terms with difficult personal circumstances, and enabled her to divert her attention away from thinking about some of the pressures of her work. She noted finding challenges generally less daunting, as a result of her involvement in exercise. Also, she noted that exercising benefited her thinking in other areas of life and helped her concentrate on study.

Probably just it helps me forget some of the things I've had to deal with at work, just because of the line of work I'm in (*nursing*). It's probably the only time in my day that I don't think of somebody else. Probably, mentally it's got me where I am today. Because I started exercise through Exercising seriously after the death of one of my children. It just refreshes me. It gives me a bit of fight I think. It helps me. I study better after exercise too and I do a lot of study. If I go home and cook the evening meal and sit down to study it doesn't go in as well as if I've come out to train and then gone back for a bath before I study. I'm not really afraid any more of a challenge either. A challenge would have frightened me to death once over, but it doesn't bother me any more.

Lesley was 38 years old, married with one child and worked full time. She enjoyed aerobics and swimming. She described her involvement in both activities as providing different benefits. She perceived her busy lifestyle as providing her with little time to think. Swimming was 'thinking time' for Lesley. The repetitive action provided time to allow her thoughts to run their course. Lesley found that aerobics required greater concentration on the movements, and that process, for her, 'clears your mind' of other thoughts. Involvement in these mental processes led Lesley to describe exercise as 'chill out time'. The personal benefit appeared to be related directly to the opportunity to be involved in the identified thinking processes, and, as a result of that involvement, to feel more relaxed. Also, exercising had prompted her to expand her knowledge of related health topics and led to her attending a college course.

I do an aerobics class and I swim five mornings a week. When I swim I think about everything. I sort out lots of problems when I'm swimming. It's thinking time. When I do aerobics it's different. You are concentrating more on what you are doing. The aerobics, no, it clears your mind. If you've had a bit of a stressful day. By the time you've finished work, you are so exhausted. That's good to clear your mind. I suppose a lot of the time now, there's very little time to think otherwise. I work full time and I have the house to run. You are doing two things at once half the time anyway. At least swimming, you have the time to think. It's chill out time really. Something for me. I'm doing it for me. I'm thinking this is doing you good. I have the home and family. I work in a bank. I'm doing a course at college on aromatherapy, which is all part of the thing, you know. Exercise was the start of all that.

Dawn was 34 years old, married and worked full time; **Jennifer** was 50 years old, divorced with one child and worked full time; **Penelope** was 36 years old, married with two children and worked part time and **Ailsa** was 30 years old and married with two children. They collectively noted the impact that exercise had on their thinking and their perception of their capability in challenges.

Dawn

It clears your mind, really, doesn't it. Gets rid of all the other stuff from the day.

Jennifer

Yes, when I'm exercising I'm in my own little world and just thinking my own thoughts. There's nothing else going on really.

Penelope

I know what you mean. And I think it makes you more ready to do other things too. I know I have.

Ailsa

Yes, you think ahead more and plan to do more. It's made me do more things. I push myself more now with other things.

4.3.4 The personal benefits from regular exercise

Subjects made specific reference to personal benefits they perceived from their participation in exercise. They noted that exercise was an opportunity to do something for themselves as opposed to the perceived dominance in their lives of the need to often be providing for other people. They noted that exercise

helped them to increase their self-knowledge and their awareness of themselves. It was overwhelmingly indicated as allowing them to spend time experiencing a strong connection with a 'real' or fundamental aspect of themselves that they perceived was not possible in the execution of their everyday activities. Also, there was recognition of change and growth from an 'old' to a 'new' self. Subjects recognised that exercise was beneficial to them personally, and noted feeling justified in taking the time to exercise.

Jacqui was 42 years old, married with 2 children and worked part time. She enjoyed line dancing. She noted that exercising enabled her to connect with herself in a way that did not involve the fulfilment of the social roles of mother, wife, daughter etc. She recognised that her connection with exercise had changed over time. Initially, she wanted to be involved in an activity that gave her an interest outside her routine commitments. She found that exercise was 'a release from other things', and helped her 'believe that I am capable of other things'. She recognised facing new challenges as a result of her involvement in exercise and referred to areas of change and growth in herself. She felt more confident, alert and awake.

I mix well with people now. I didn't before I went. I used to find it really difficult to talk to people before. I believe that I can do it. I can do it, to a fairly good standard as well. When I'm there I'm me. Just me. I'm not somebody's mum, wife. It's like an escape as well. I think over the years the meaning changes. When I first started, the reason was to get out. I never went out. I'd spent years and years and years with the kids. Always being here. I got the chance to go. It's still to get out. You get hooked on it and you don't want to miss anything. You miss a class and you miss a new dance. It's a way of relaxing. If I wasn't doing it I'd probably be very down. I used to get depressed a lot. It stops that happening. It stops it ever getting too bad. It's a release from other things. It's helped me believe that I am capable of doing things. Actually I never thought I could do some of the things. I would never have gone out on my own, without my husband four or five years ago. I would never have dreamt of doing that. He went to work in Germany for a while. So I did all this while he was away and I've just carried on. He didn't recognise me when he came back. I'll have a go at things now. It all happened just before my fortieth birthday. This fortieth birthday was looming and I hadn't a clue where I was going, what I was doing. I just decided I had to do something. It all just turned around.

It's given me a lot of confidence in everything I do. I'm much more confident. I can talk to people far better than I used to be able to. I'm more alert. More awake. You are more responsive to things. I seem to be able to cope better with doing more things. Even though I do get very tired. I think though, without the exercise I do, I wouldn't cope with it all. I'll have a go at things now. I had a go at Spinning and the Body Combat. I even went to circuits. I would never have joined in with a group before. Especially a mixed group with a lot of men. I definitely wouldn't have done all these things. I wouldn't have been able to. I do a lot of voluntary work too. I work part time. I have home and the family. My husband is away so I have to do everything. I'm secretary of the water polo club. I've just given up teaching at Sunday School. Having children makes it difficult to do things. You can't get out. You're tied to the house and what they're doing. I run Daniel around a lot. He plays competitive water polo. And Jenna. She does synchro. I'm taxi driver for them.

Sharon was 35 years old, married with 2 children and worked full time. She attended exercise classes and felt they enabled her to connect with 'the real me'. She implied that exercising changed her emotional state and, metaphorically, referred to it as giving her a 'spark' in her life and enabling her to feel 'alive'.

I love following the music and listening to the instructions, It's the coordination and the rhythm. I am the real me when I'm exercising. Not all the other parts of me. Exercise gives me a 'spark' in my life. I feel ALIVE after exercising.

Glenda was 44 years old, married with two children and worked full time. She enjoyed running and exercise classes. She felt that exercise helped her deal more effectively with daily challenges. Also, she appreciated the opportunity to be herself and to disconnect from other socially defined roles.

I function better at home, work and play for exercising. I am just me – not a partner, daughter, mother, housekeeper, cook, washer upper, gardener, taxi driver, dog walker, health visitor Just me.

Helen A was 35 years old, married with two children and worked part time. In addition, she was an exercise instructor. She appreciated exercise as being an opportunity to free herself from the demands of daily life and to find time for herself. Metaphorically, she perceived the demands of her life as requiring that she give pieces of herself away to other people. Exercise, for Helen, was an opportunity to revive herself and to pull herself back together.

Well, I think the exercise part of it is, like, freedom of movement isn't it. Because, nowadays we are all You know you're not conscious are you, it's not all that because if you're not careful you feel like you're, like a hamster in a wheel or on a train and it's never ending. It's nice to know that you can stop that train and get off for a bit. And that's time for you, time out and it's very, very important. You know what I could do? I could spend the whole of Sunday probably washing, doing my ironing, catching up with cleaning, you know, but in the end, you've got to find time. Like I say to my husband, no, because you could spend your whole life, your whole weekend working.

Err I'm splitting myself up in bits. I divide my time between, really, my job and my family. Well, I think I'm, I'm conscious really, conscious of a, a balance, you know, of myself. There's a balance of my needs, you know. I'm conscious of trying to keep a balance in what I'm doing in my life, to benefit me, you know. So I think I try to be as fair as I can, you know, generally, about giving everybody a piece of the cake, if you know what I mean. And, as you are doing it, you are, I suppose, as you are doing it, you are, it's about life as well. You're aware of what life is, as well. Well, it, for me, it ... errr ... clears my mind really. Because some times, I'll be in here and I've done my class, been for a swim, gone in the Jacuzzi, relaxed a bit, had a shower, done my hair, come down. I will say I'll get myself something to eat now. So by the time I'm coming out it'll be one o'clock. I don't do that every week, but I will take that time out to do that, for me. It does me good. Because, sometimes, you think, well, I've got to do it for myself, because nobody else is going to do it for you. They're not particularly, you know, I mean, my husband has a very busy job with shifts and that, you know. He's not really one of these people who'll say 'You do what you want today'. I don't really get that. No. I think, no, to hell with it. Today I am going to do what I need to do, because I think it's ... I think you have to do that. Otherwise, like I say, you're on a treadmill aren't you. You've got to be aware of that and you're a better person for doing it. Because you've taken that time out. You've come away from ... you know ... and I'm sure I come home in a much happier frame of mind than if I'd not done it.

And then just another day goes by, doesn't it. And before you know it, it's weekend and the week's gone. And I work on Saturday, you know. I mean, that is the only thing, you know. You feel, sometimes, it's like, just a minute here. You've got a piece here, a piece here, a piece here. You know, everybody wants a piece of you. So, you know, sometimes, you think enough's enough. You put your foot down. And you need to take that time out to pull yourself together again. You do need that time to pull yourself back together again.

Karen was 34 years old, married with two children and worked full time; **Val** was 36 years old, married with one child and worked part time; **Pam** was 37 years old, married with one child and worked full time, and **Sue** was 48 years old, married with 3 children and worked part time. They all commented on the perceived personal benefits of their participation in exercise. They agreed that exercise provided an opportunity for them to do something for themselves. Also, they recognised the connection with the 'real' or fundamental aspect of themselves, and they agreed that exercise was a route to that.

Karen

It's a chance to do something for yourself, isn't it. I mean, we don't ever do that normally, do we. It's all go, all the time.

Val

Well, I only have one child, but he's enough. I mean, it's just so good to do something for me.

Pam

Oh I know. I can just be me when I'm running. It makes such a difference, doesn't it.

Sue

Well with three kids, I find it really hard to do anything for me. But I really appreciate it when I do. Just that bit of time out from all the normal hassles ...

4.3.5 The interpersonal effects of exercise on relationships with others

Subjects indicated being aware of being 'different' from many other people, due to their regular exercising, and that others often perceived them to be 'strange'. Also, they noted a deep sense of camaraderie and kinship when they were with other like-minded people. For some, exercising with others gave them the motivation to 'keep going'. It meant they had role models from whom

they could take inspiration to develop their own capability in their chosen activity. Some noted that they had themselves become models for others to emulate.

Beyond the context of exercise, subjects noted enhanced relationships with family, friends and colleagues as a result of them 'feeling better' in themselves from their regular exercise. Some noted experiencing a sense of guilt at taking time away from other commitments in order to exercise. This was, however, generally outweighed by recognition of positive gains for all concerned.

Margaret D was 40 years old, married with two children and worked full time. She enjoyed attending exercise classes and she found it benefited her family relationships. She described a sense of guilt at taking the time away from family commitments. However, she felt that the benefits of attending exercise classes outweighed the advantages of not going. She was aware that regularly exercising set her apart from some other people.

I believe in myself. The fact that ... you know ... I can do it. I'm always striving to push myself ... The exercise helps me at home. I do feel an extreme sense of guilt sometimes though, when because we're so ... because I'm so devoted to exercise. There are times when I think I should be at home with Rachel, my daughter, doing homework. Although I do sometimes cram things in, I sometimes wonder if I should be doing some of the things, or if I should change my priorities sometimes. I probably wouldn't be so nice to her when I got home, if I didn't exercise. And there's always time for other things when we get home. And I think we sometimes beat ourselves up about feeling guilty. But I don't think anything else suffers, and I don't think it would be good for the girls if I didn't do it. And there's always time. You make time to do the other things. And if I didn't go you've got all the things to deal with about not going out and feeling a grudge. And it could all be a lot worse. I'm a better person. I'm in a better frame of mind. I'm definitely more energetic and more enthusiastic than I would be. You hear them all when you come into work, talking about what they watched on TV and they think you are really bizarre. Really strange.

Denise was 35 years old, married and worked full time. She was also an exercise instructor. She particularly enjoyed running. She enjoyed the

social aspects of running with other people. She was able to model her performance on that of other people. Also, she was aware that, often, other people had a perception of her exercising that is different to her own.

Most of the time I run with groups of people. It's not just the exercise. I'm socialising as well. It motivates you and keeps you going. It gives me an all-round fitness. Running is a basis for everything.. If you can run, you have the stamina for most other things. It builds motivation. I find running hard. Aerobics, circuits, spinning, I don't find any of those hard. With running it's a challenge. I try to push myself in different ways. Short speed runs or long steady ones. It can be totally different. When I'm running with a group I try to pick on a good runner. I try to learn from someone else. I don't copy their style. I'm trying to achieve what I think the best people have achieved. I try to learn from them. You never stop learning. If I didn't exercise I'd be a nightmare. I've always liked it. Exercise is part of my every day life. I socialise with a lot of my friends through exercise. I like learning new things like yoga and relaxation. It's the connection of one thing into another. I just love it. It gives you a lot more energy. You get a buzz from it. It's like a fix really isn't it. Connecting with people at work in my full time job, they are a bit lethargic. I think you are stronger. It's another spectrum to your life really. I'm at peace with myself as well, I think. People think I'm daft. I run 40 to 50 miles a week. But I don't tell everybody. People either think you are making it up or you are mad, don't they.

Lynn was 39 years old, married with elderly dependents and worked full time. She noticed that exercise had helped her find strength to deal with some difficult times herself and had helped her come to a place where she is now 'poised for a new life... The life that I'd like'. Also, it had helped her enhance her relationships with other people.

It gives me more confidence to interact with people. I believe we're getting there. I've gone through a lot in the past few years and the fact that I've coped with all that I attribute largely to actually the physical things I do. I'm definitely involved in a lot of people contact now. Which I haven't found easy but recently, as I say, you know, ... in fact I've just recently finished bereavement counselling, today in fact. So that was something else I had to get through. And I feel a lot better for that. But recently I've not been able to talk to my friends. I wasn't feeling

confident enough to really. But the exercise has given me back the confidence. I like talking to people and I like supporting them you know. But I've not been able to do that. I wanted to hide myself away. It's amazing, for a good three years, I would say, I've sort of had things to deal with, and so now I feel poised for a new life really. The life that I'd like. Exercise has aided that process. In fact, I joined Virgin just before my father died and I kept going. This was something, a set pattern, that I sort of hung on to really. So that's been the thing with all these bereavements. We had three in sort of quick succession and I'm the only one. There's only me. I have no brothers and sisters so I've had to sort of, err.... That's partly the problem. I've had to shelve any grief I've had to help everybody else deal with their's. But the gym has helped with that, you know. Because I've been able to keep focussed and, you know, absolutely, we are going to get through this. So the strength has come out of me and helped everybody else. I'm convinced that's what's happened.

Brenda was 35 years old, married with two children and worked part time. She was also an exercise instructor. She found that exercise benefited her in her home life. She felt more 'comfortable' in herself and that she was a 'better' person for exercising. It had enhanced her interactions with other family members.

You feel more comfortable. I think it's made me a better person. I do feel like I'm not as confrontational. Not that I ever really was very confrontational. But not rising to a situation. But also being able to handle a situation when it does arise. I used to back away from things and be afraid of things and always want to take the easy option. The other side of the coin is that I feel more That I'm more confident. I'm able to address a situation. Yes, I'm definitely doing different things. I played basketball with my son and all his friends yesterday. And I definitely wouldn't have been doing that a few years ago. Or maybe I would but I'd be collapsing in a heap on the floor. I was running around the pitch for an hour, I couldn't believe it. I was exhausted, but it felt really good. And being able to breeze through that hour and not get out of breath. The kids were like, you know, paggered. And my husband was He gave up after half an hour. He said 'I'm having a rest' and he went for a sit down. But it was great, yes. Just general things like that, you know, being able to ... err ... to carry on with your day when ordinarily you'd just give up and think 'oh that's it now, I can't do any more.' You've got that extra burst of energy to do it.

Sue was 48 years old, married with 3 children and worked part time; **Val** was 36 years old, married with one child and worked part time, and **Karen** was 34 years old, married with two children and worked full time. They recognised that their participation in exercise led to enhancements in their relationships with other people.

Sue

I get on better with everybody afterwards. I'm better with the kids. My husband even says sometimes 'Oh go on, go to the gym, will you'.

Val

I know what you mean. You are better. It makes a difference to how you get on with people.

Karen

I'm better at work too. I get on better with people and don't get worked up the same. You feel more like being there and being with people don't you.

4.4 Exemplary portraits: the personal meaning of exercise

Individual portraits were developed of each participant's experience of exercise and its meaning in their life. These included the individual depictions of the themes identified in the study. Also, they included supplementary demographic and autobiographical material collected during the data gathering process. Two exemplary portraits are presented here, with three more included in Appendix Five. They illustrated how individual people uniquely perceived the meaning of exercise, and how they personally and holistically applied the benefits into their lives. Also, they provided evidence of the collective influences that reached beyond the self. They exemplified a diverse range of lifestyles and sets of personal circumstances. They demonstrated how the benefits of exercise were transferable to many different situations, and reached far beyond the traditional prescriptive view. They exemplified uniqueness, holism and interconnectivity in personal experience. Notes were included within the body of the text in the exemplary portraits to provide indications of changes in the subject's posture and voice tonality during the interview. These were utilised to illustrate the contribution of non verbal data to expressing personal experience.

Lynn was 39 years of age, married to a man whom she described as her 'soul mate'. She also cared for her and her husband's elderly relatives. She credited exercise with helping her deal with a number of personal challenges in her life. She worked full-time managing her own business, which she started 12 years ago. She loved language, culture, history, good books, good food and good wine. She enjoyed gardening and had recently designed her back garden as a wildlife oasis. She described her spare time as 'elusive', enjoyed good health with few ailments, and enjoyed going to the gym and walking. The benefits she experienced in regularly exercising are described in this summary of her interview.

[Sitting back in her chair]. I really like walking and we have joined a ramblers club recently. Saying that, I find it very strenuous, which is interesting seeing as everyone else is older than me. I hate swimming with a passion. But I enjoy testing myself on all the equipment at the gym.

[Pauses to consider her response. The voice slows and softens]. Whilst I'm in the gym and exercising, I am also thinking. It gives me time to think. About work mainly, or family issues. And I'm thinking about how I want the exercise to make me feel. I like to know where I am going with it. I want to physically feel stronger and self-accomplished. [Sits forward. Voice quickens and the volume increases slightly] I am very into progress. I have to feel I'm making progress in whatever I am doing. Possibly weight loss is in there somewhere too.

[Sits back again. Sighs deeply, looking down. Then raises her head when ready to respond]. Maybe it is a very female thing, to be able to do multi-tasking. I quite enjoy doing the thinking and exercising together. It gives me a feeling of inner calm. [Pauses]. I am actually making myself better physically, but also mentally having a good clear out. The inner calm comes as a result of the exercise. There is definitely no inner calm during it! [Laughs]. This is the feeling I am striving towards. I feel really pleased with myself afterwards.

[Sits forward. Voice quickens and volume increases]. My husband and I go to the gym early in the morning on the way to work. We have what we call a 'smug attack' when we drive past later when we have done the exercises. [Smiles. Appears to internally recreate the 'smug attack']. We sit in the car and we smile smugly to each other! We are really pleased with

ourselves. God knows what the people in the cars around us think! [Laughs]. We can laugh about it though! I really enjoy going and I look forward to it.

[Sits back. Pauses. Looks. Voice slows and softens. Raises her head when ready to respond]. I like the calm sensation I get from exercising. I like being calm. I am essentially a calm person, but I feel I have lost that somewhere along the way recently. In the past few years I've lost my inner calm and I am trying to get it back again.

[Sits forward. Shrugs her shoulders and raises her hands, fingers spread apart. Voice quickens and volume increases]. I find the exercise environment in the gym completely alien to me and I really do not always find it obvious what I am meant to be doing with the equipment. Whereas some people, my husband for example, finds it all perfectly obvious. I just look at it and think 'What the hell is that' So, I always go and ask for help if I need it. I have a programme that I follow. I am pleased that I do it, when it seems so alien. I have been able to master a lot of the machines. I know I will get there if I ask and if I am patient with myself.

[Sits back. Pauses, looking down. Then sits forward, raising her head. Speaks slowly at first]. When I am exercising, it allows me to be who I want to be, I think. I am someone dynamic, focussed, achieving goals, healthy, determined. [Voice quickens]. Exercise means progress and self-development for me. I can sense myself progressing and developing. It's a growth process. It is also about my back. I used to have a really bad back and that has been resolved because of the exercises that I do. So that is marvellous. I just had such a real problem and nearly had to have it operated on. To be free of that is just wonderful.

[Pauses]. It makes me feel stronger and more able to cope with whatever I am faced with. It is the inner calm again. It gives me more confidence to interact with people. And it is the smug attacks. Especially if we go to the gym in the mornings. We get up at 5.30am, and we are in the office for 9am. You can feel really ahead of everyone. Absolutely primed and ready to go.

[Sits back, nodding her head, looking down]. I have gone through a lot in the past few years and the fact that I have coped with all that, I actually attribute largely to the physical things I do. I believe I am getting there. If you look at something as small as standing on the treadmill and thinking 'I'm gonna do this' and 'I ran for all these minutes' and you had thought at the beginning 'Well, it's an impossible task,' but you did it. [Sits forward].

You feel like you have achieved something and you can apply that to other problems then. It gives me this determination and the confidence that I am going to get the results that I am looking for.

That is results from the exercise and obviously from having built the company too. That has been very good. And I probably would not have managed to do all that without the exercise. I feel sort of duty bound to exercise so I can carry on with the company and everything else and enjoy my life. [Pauses. Sits back]. It is remarkable really, now just talking about it, just how big a role it plays.

I am in contact with a lot of people through the business. So it gives me confidence there. I have not always found that easy. I have had a number of bereavements to deal with too. That was something else I had to get through. And I feel a lot better now. Until recently I was not ready to talk to my friends. I was not feeling confident enough to really. The exercise has given me back the confidence. I like talking to people and I like supporting them and I have not been able to do that. I wanted to hide myself away. [Sits forward]. It is amazing, for a good three years, I would say, I have had things to deal with, and now I feel poised for a new life really. The life that I would like for myself. Exercise has definitely aided that process. In fact, I joined the club just before my father died and I kept going. This was something, a set pattern that I hung on to really.

Exercise definitely has an impact on your life. I do some public speaking. I have to do a lot of that with the business. I like to feel very centred when I am speaking, so that I am not hopping from one leg to the other. I am right there, grounded. I feel my feet are definitely on the ground, you know, I do not feel uncomfortable. And I think this is definitely related to the exercise. It is balance. The physical strength in my legs keeps me grounded. I have to talk at events. There are a lot of business things I have to do. Socially, just the sheer amount of family related occasions. It is just a non-stop thing really, you know, everything is timed to the minute. Especially in the evening. You have done a full day's work and the stamina has to keep going. That is another thing, exercise gives you mental and physical stamina.

That has been the thing with all these bereavements. We had three in quick succession and I am an only child. [Pauses]. There is only me. I have no brothers and sisters, so I have had to do everything. [Sits back. Looks down]. That is partly the problem. I have had to shelve any grief I have had, so that I could help everybody else deal with theirs. But the gym has helped me with

that. I have been able to keep focused and keep telling myself we are going to get through this. [Sits forward]. So the strength has come out of me and helped everybody else. I am convinced that is what has happened.

Lynn's reflections on exercise in her life illustrated the benefits to her in her work, in her home life and in her relationships. She recognised that exercise had enabled her to face and overcome a number of challenges, and felt that she had also grown in the process.

Michelle was 35 years old, married with two children and expecting her third child. She worked part time and was also an aerobics instructor. She led 10 classes per week. She enjoyed swimming and running. Her husband was self-employed and she helped him with the business. Also, she was just completing a part-time masters degree at the local university.

[Sits back, looking up at the ceiling. Begins speaking slowly and deliberately]. I really like swimming and I really like running. I can just get on with it physically, without even thinking about it. It is dream time for me. Escape time for me really. [Sits forward, looks forward, voice quickening]. I can do it any time. I do not have to wait. I've done a lot of travelling in my life and I can run anywhere. I always pack my trainers. [Sits back, voice slowing]. It is having the freedom to just do it and the control to be able to do it really.

[Pauses. Looks up. Looks forward when she is ready to speak]. I don't get much spare time in my day to get myself organised, so running and swimming help me organise in my head. Organise my day. What has been going on over the week. [Pauses]. It is the only time I get to think about me really. I never even realised until just now. [Sits forward]. And it definitely gets rid of stress.

[Sits back. Pauses]. I am not particularly competitive. I have never pushed myself for times and distances. I have done a couple of half marathons and I have really enjoyed them. But it has been about participation really, not competition. I have always been physically quite active, although I am not a competitive athlete, I have never found it a problem. So, I think, that is why I find it such a mental release and a physical release. [Pauses. Looks up. Looks forward when she is ready to speak]. I think life, for a lot of people, is so stressed mentally, and they never balance that out with physical activity. I think you need that balance.

[Sitting back, pauses, looks down at the floor, then raises her head and speaks slowly]. I feel like I owe it to myself. [Pauses]. I feel like I cannot really afford to be without exercise. I can do without it, but I am not happy [Sits forward, shaking her head, emphatically, voice quickening]. I am a much nicer person when I am exercising regularly. It is like getting up and getting a shower for me. Like when I had had my babies and, you know, the midwife said [Sits forward, placing her hands on her hips, suggesting an authoritarian stance]. 'Oh no, after six weeks we will do your checks' and 'we can't have you running after two weeks'. [Wagging her index finger] I thought, you don't know who you are dealing with here. My brother brought me a jogging pram from the states and it was a lifesaver [Throws her arms outwards and upwards]. I sacrificed my life to this really little person, which I was really ready to do, and the only thing I needed in my life was an hour of my own time to exercise. It was not that I needed it to change myself physically at all. That was the last thing I intended. [Pauses]. What I needed to feel was that I was in control really and that I could choose to exercise. [Emphasises each word] I wanted the freedom.

[Sits back, looking down at the floor and pauses. Sighs, then speaks slowly]. My first thought is, exercise makes me feel in tune with my body. But really I do not think it is that. [Pauses, then sits forward, looking forward, speech gathers pace]. I feel empowered. I feel more confident. And I have done something for me really. I feel clear in my head and I feel like I have achieved something as well. And it is not just a physical achievement. I have achieved that space of being on my own. I think you need that control in your life. [Pauses. Sits back]. I think it is space in my head really. It kind of re-energises you really. [Sits forward, voice quickens]. Everything is going on around you. Especially being a female, especially being a mother, I think. You are trying to keep everybody else going and nothing is re-energising you. It is all taking from you all the time and the exercise is not just a window of an hour, you are re-energising for the rest of the day and for later. Like putting your batteries on charge.

[Sits back, looking up at the ceiling. Sits forward, looking forward when ready to speak]. I feel that exercise enables me to feel really confident and I can challenge the world. I can achieve anything I want to do. I am strong and I am competent really. And I am not stressed. I am very patient. I think that is what I am, what I would like to think I am. [Pauses, sits back, looking down]. No, I think that is what I am. What I am with exercise. I think that is what I was before I started to give myself to

everybody else. Before marriage and babies! And now it is a chance to be that again.

[Sits forward]. Travelling makes me feel good too. Travelling makes me feel like that. I love to be on a train station with my rucksack on my back not knowing where I am going. I love it. But obviously with two children and another one on the way I have stopped doing that. And exercise is not a substitute for that. I always exercised. You are not in control of your environment absolutely ever, are you really. Whereas in exercise I feel like I am in control. It is your choice to do it, or your choice not to do it. Your choice how fast to do it, and your choice how much to do it. And that is taken away from you in everything else in your life really.

[Sits back, looking up and pauses. Looks forwards when ready to speak]. Exercise means that I am an individual. Having my own ideas and my own thoughts in my head and being able to run with them there really, without anybody judging them and without anybody telling me. That is why I prefer to take my own exercise alone and not in a group. [Sits forward]. You know, I had my own business for a while and again it is nice to set your own standards. But now I am working in different places those standards are set for me and probably my own exercise is the only time I can set my own parameters and work to my own standards. And I do that, and if I want to push myself one day I do. And the next day if I do not want to, I do not need to. It is the freedom and the control, the choice. [Sits back]. Exercise makes me feel more in control and keeps my feet on the tracks, so I am not having to be meeting what everybody else thinks I should do.

[Sits forward]. In my life as a wife and mother I am somebody who everybody wants me to be. You are always compromising. And compromising is fine and I do not mind doing that, as long as I can still do my exercise and have that bit of freedom for me. It empowers me and I suppose it kind of releases me from all the compromising. So it takes me out my normal everyday environment and the routine and expectations that everybody else has.

I believe I have that control and that I have got time for me. And I am stronger for exercising. And I am more confident. I do not mind giving up 23 hours a day if I can have that one hour. Wanting that one hour to exercise, is it selfish to want to have that one hour? I think that it probably is, but I think it is probably important. Fortunately, I have a partner who exercises as much as I do, so he understands. It would be so hard if he did not.

[Sits back, looking up and pauses. Sits forward when ready to speak. Speaks slowly]. Exercise gives you that sense that you have got that control. But also it gives you more confidence really. It makes you more competent, more capable, more patient and tolerant to deal with things. Because I know that if things do get to me mentally in my head I can just go and shake it out on a run or a swim. It is an escape really I suppose. [Sits back].

[Sits forward]. Life is busy. I am expecting a baby in ten weeks, I am in the last few months of my MSc, my husband has just gone self-employed and with two kids already And we have renovated our own house. That has been a time in my life when I have felt disempowered if that is the right word. It was really hard. It was when the kids were only three and five or three and four and it was really hard. And to not have a window to exercise, it was really hard.

[Sits back and pauses]. You do not get the same personal energising for yourself when you are teaching exercise classes, do you. [Pauses, looks down. Raises her eyes when ready to speak]. You cannot escape into your own space the same, can you. You are having to give the people that energy. So I do not get the same benefits myself when I am teaching. I do to a certain extent, physically re-energise in my own class, but I cannot mentally re-energise. It is not my training session. [Sits forward]. Which actually makes you realise the mental gains that you take from your own training. That is probably what connects with me more. Physically I am going through the motions of it obviously when I am teaching, but I do not have that place to go on my own. [Sits back]. It is not training for me. You are conscious of the group all the time. Your focus is on them. It is not what I would consider training for me anyway.

[Sits forward]. Yes I have a really busy life. So that is why I exercise. When I was doing my degree at college and when I was self-employed I was really busy. And then I really need exercise. You really need that space to go to. And I find that doing it on my own is a really important part of it. Because, although I love teaching group exercise, as far as my own exercise goes, [Emphasises each word] I have got to be on my own.

Now my life is the children and running after them, which I love, but I would feel really as though I was doing three quarters of a job, sort of, if I was not active with the children. Children are so active, you have got to be active with them. It is an important part of my life and it is an important part of their life. And yes, [shaking her head] if I was not exercising, I think it would be very different really.

Michelle appreciated the opportunity that exercise gave her to regain some control of her own life. She appreciated the freedom that she experienced whilst running and swimming. Her busy lifestyle as a wife, mother, employee and an aerobics instructor left her little time to herself. Her own exercise routine enabled her to organise her thoughts in her head, and to be better prepared to deal with her multiple commitments.

4.5 Composite depictions: the nature of exercise

Two composite depictions were developed to represent the common qualities and themes that embraced the experiences of the subjects. One was a composite of the experiences of those who regularly took part in exercise. The other was a composite of the experiences of those subjects who took part in exercise themselves and were also exercise instructors. Both were group depictions reflecting the experiences of individuals in each of those groups. They were written as if describing one single person, a composite of the research subjects. The aim here was to provide a vivid, accurate, alive and clear representation of the nature of exercise and to encompass the core qualities and themes inherent in the experience. The composite depictions included the core meanings as experienced by the individuals in the study (Moustakas, 1990).

4.5.1 The nature of exercise as noted by women moving into their middle years

The woman moving into her middle years who exercises regularly finds it difficult to express in words her experience of exercise. She stumbles occasionally and searches frequently for the right words to express what exercise means to her. One can sense that giving expression to this experience is a task not taken lightly. One senses that exercise is a valued and important part of the life of this woman, and that it deserves significant time, respect and attention, and the right words to describe it. She even apologises for her hesitations and uncertainties. It is not that the experience is unfamiliar to her. Its explication seems strange; normal everyday language proving inadequate to express the depth of the sensations and emotions she knows from exercise. She frequently seeks confirmation that I, as the listener, am following her explanation despite her linguistic difficulties, and

that I am understanding the meaning she is attempting to put across.

The active woman's busy lifestyle involves a partner, children of school age, a job, the home, and the increasing responsibilities of aging parents. She fully recognises the demands of her lifestyle, and recognises that as a woman there are certain, largely unspoken, unwritten expectations placed on her. She speaks of sometimes feeling guilty for 'breaking the rules', for stepping outside the mould and taking the decision to exercise on a regular basis, to do something for herself, and not directly for others. She recognises in herself almost an audaciousness at 'daring' to regularly step out of the giving and providing roles that she personifies, and do something for herself. She justifies to herself her repeated participation, by noting the benefits that she takes from exercising, not only for herself, but also for others. She feels she is a 'better' person for having exercised. She feels better in herself for exercising, and is certain that she deals more effectively with life generally, and her relationships with other people are also enhanced. It is this train of thought that enables her to continue to take herself away from her commitments and responsibilities and to take part regularly in exercise.

She generally feels fitter and healthier for exercising. She rarely gets ill, and even if she does, she is usually only mildly affected, and recovers quickly. She feels she is physically stronger, is more supple, and has more energy and stamina, than if she did not exercise. Exercise helps her control her weight, even with the advancing years, when, she believes, weight gain can be a problem. She is careful about what she eats and considers diet, along with exercise, to be an important factor in maintaining good overall health. Also, she is careful to encourage others to lead healthy lifestyles, providing healthy meals for the family, and encouraging them to also be active on a regular basis. She generally has a positive outlook on life, faces everyday tasks, problems and challenges energetically, and with the self-belief that she can accomplish them. She exudes an energy that exemplifies a pro-active approach to living, and assertively makes personal decisions that help her and her family maintain good health.

Exercise is a passion! Also, she recognises that she specifically chooses to involve herself in activities that she enjoys. She looks forward to exercising, enjoys it whilst she is doing it, and feels great afterwards. The enjoyment factor and the resultant sense of well-being are huge motivations to retain the habit. She could not imagine being without exercise, and would not like to be without the positive benefits it provides. Exercise is such an integral part of her life that it would be impossible to imagine

one without the other. She does not perceive them as separate entities. Exercising is 'just something that [she] does', a normal part of her daily life. The benefits she takes from regular exercise manifest themselves in the whole of her life.

Relaxation is a significant and valued gain from exercising. She feels she can relax in exercise. Also exercising enables her to feel relaxed about life generally. Life appears less stressful, and she is able to comfortably deal with everyday occurrences and annoyances. Also, she feels she gains patience, confidence and self-esteem. Exercising enables her feel happy in herself and she feels alive! The fitness and energy she gains give her a sense of lightness, and doing something for herself helps build her self-respect. Her mind is alert, and she feels she can be better organised, and can be more effectively responsive in everyday situations. She is out-going, self-assured and self-reliant. Exercising gives the woman moving into her middle years energy for other activities. It does not drain her energy.

She credits exercise too with providing her with qualities such as resilience, determination, perseverance, motivation and self-discipline. Her gains from exercising enable her to feel confident about approaching new challenges and experiences, and she actively seeks new opportunities to continue to develop herself, within and besides the context of her exercise. She approaches all her challenges with a belief that she will achieve them, and can readily recount a number of instances to exemplify the conviction.

The actual process of exercising is particularly difficult to describe. The active woman is very aware of accessing deep, very personal and profoundly meaningful emotions and sensations during exercise. Also, she is aware that she is in a 'different place' when she is exercising, and much of what she experiences is not within her normal conscious state. She feels she is in more of a meditative state of mind. When she runs or swims, for example, she connects very strongly with the repetitive, rhythmical action of the activity. The repetitiveness, the constancy of the rhythm, the continuous flowing action take her to her special place. It enables her to experience herself to a depth that is not normally possible within the busyness of everyday life. She hesitates to attach mere words to this specialness. When the words come they are words like inner calmness, peace, quiet, and peace of mind. Also she feels that exercise enables her to access a sense of freedom, an escape and a release from everyday concerns and this allows her to 'switch off' to some of the stresses of daily life. Solitude, aloneness and access to personal space are also important gains, and, again, are not considered easily accessible within the daily process of

living. Exercise gives her time to herself, time to 'pull herself together' and the opportunity to take 'time out' from everyday activities. The 'escape' and the 'space' mean she feels she can later return to routine activities in an enhanced state, and better able to deal with everyday demands.

The process of exercising provides the active woman with the time to think. She perceives this not to be widely available in life generally. She can think about herself and the benefits she is taking from her exercise session. Also, she can use the time in exercise as a diversion from everyday topics that otherwise tend to occupy her mind. She can think about things that she normally would not have time to think about; and finds herself making plans, considering options, and coming up with new ideas.

Sometimes her exercise requires that she use her mind in order to learn and ultimately master the activity itself. It is so with activities which involve routines, such as step, aerobics, tai chi and dance. She is aware, in these activities, of focussing her attention on learning and mastering routines and choreography. This process, in itself, she finds beneficial, as it too provides a distraction from everyday thoughts and concerns. She feels it helps her to develop alertness keeping her mind and her memory active, and enabling her to think more widely about other things in life generally. Reflection leads to the realisation that exercise is not only enjoyable, it is also engaging and challenging.

The woman who regularly exercises, instinctively and intuitively applies the benefits she gets to her own individual life contexts. She finds herself internally integrating her recent events and experiences, thinking creatively and broadening her thinking beyond previously perceived limits.

Sometimes exercise is an opportunity to clear, empty or rest her mind. Once again, she finds this difficult to achieve in the normal busyness of her daily life. When she is completely focussed on the activity, her mind is still, empty, and she is no longer thinking. Involvement, focus and total immersion in the activity means that her mind is quieted. Even simply thinking about this state enables her to recall the sense of peace, calmness and inner quiet that it engenders. She is 'amazed' at the enormity, the richness, the beauty and the powerfulness of it all.

Repeated involvement in exercise means that the active woman is regularly immersing herself in such deep and profoundly significant experiences. She holds the accumulative and pervading positive effects of such influences in the highest regard. She finds that they enable her to take a positive stance to

sorting, organising and ordering her thoughts, integrating recent events into her self-concept and world-view, and creating revised views of both. The sense of well-being she gets after exercise gives her an altered perception not only of herself, but also of her recent experiences, and of herself in relation to her experiences, and to other people. Her involvement in exercise enables her to experience creative and expanded thinking processes. She is often 'amazed' by what she has been able to do and how much her perception of her potential has expanded, not only in the exercise context, but also in other areas of her life. She instinctively senses a deep belief that she has the capability to continue to grow.

She gives herself new challenges, with the belief that she will achieve them. Challenges include those directly related to exercise and to other areas of her life. She feels a 'drive' or motivation to continue to take new challenges, often increasingly difficult ones, and revels in the gradual progression towards achievement. This, in itself, she finds exciting and enjoyable. The active woman sees herself to be in a state of development and moving forward. She is open to the possibility of change and new ideas. She is involved in activities, within and outside the exercise context, that are new to her. She believes that the motivation, energy, desire and confidence to develop in these ways arise from her exercising.

The active woman particularly appreciates her participation in exercise as something that she can do for herself. She is aware of social pressures to put other people before herself, and yet she makes autonomous and nonconforming decisions in order to continue to exercise. The drive to continue to make those decisions is wrapped up in the perception that exercise provides her with the ability to overcome personal difficulties and to increase her potential in all areas of life. She is mastering herself, as well as the intricacies of her chosen activities.

The woman who exercises gains self-knowledge and self-awareness. She becomes aware of herself in physical movement, of her coordination and posture, and her connection with activity. Also, she is more aware of how she functions generally in all aspects of her life. She recognises that exercise enables her to reconnect with a fundamental self-concept that is devoid of any of the social roles that much of life demands of her. She described this as a connection with a 'simplified' self, 'just me', and a 'true' self. Making this connection reflects her process of letting go of her social identities. She is connecting with a fundamental and 'pure' self-concept. She is able to focus her attention on herself, devoid of other thoughts and diversions.

This connection with a deep sense of self is like 'coming home'. Exercise allows her to 'come home'.

Time to be alone and to focus attention inwardly is highly valued by the active woman. Being able to focus on herself, she can give her energy to being creative, to developing herself, to enhancing the quality of her life and to enriching herself. She can focus her energy within, to enable her true self to develop, shaping itself over time. She can become more of who she truly is, and allow her own uniqueness and individuality to shine through. She recognises constructive change in herself as a result of taking up regular exercise and distinguishes between an 'old' self and a 'new' self. She wholeheartedly views movement into the new self as positive. The active woman strongly desires progression in that direction to continue, and demonstrates an eager disinclination to return to the old self. Also, she can identify specific aspects of herself that she would still wish to develop further. This connection with on-going development and regeneration of the self as 'new' brings with it a sense of youthfulness and freshness. The active woman moving into her middle years feels and believes she looks young for her years.

Exercise enables the woman moving into her middle years to feel more secure in herself, to feel better about herself, more relaxed and more 'together'. It moves her towards becoming more comfortable with her own individuality or uniqueness. She values the gains from exercise so highly, that she feels a sense of letting herself down if she does not maintain the participation. Even on the occasions when motivation to take part is lacking, she knows she will feel better afterwards and this provides the impetus for her to continue.

The motivational context of a group exercise session led by an instructor sometimes appeals to the active woman. She values the social aspects of exercising in a group session. She takes strength in regularly being with like-minded people and finds she develops new friendships through exercise as well as renewing old ones. She values the convivial atmosphere, camaraderie and kinship she finds in exercising with other people. She knows she will find social contact at her regular activity sessions, so she feels comfortable about attending sessions alone. Sometimes she focuses her attention on other people within the group who she perceives to be appropriate role models for her own advancement. Sometimes she finds other people following her, and she becomes a role model for their progression and learning. She likes to look out for new attendees to the class, and to help them feel comfortable and to acquaint themselves with the routines or the intricacies of the activity.

It is the view of the active woman that exercise enhances her interpersonal interactions generally. It gives her a talking point with other people. Also, she recognises that her involvement in exercise identifies her as 'different' to the majority of the general population who are less active. She selects carefully with whom she may discuss her involvement in exercise. She prefers conversation about exercise that acknowledges and honours her own experience, and is positive and constructive. There are situations where she deliberately under-states the level or degree to which she involves herself in exercise, as opposed to being truthful, as she fears the truth may appear boastful. Also, she intuitively senses that in the company of some people an honest and accurate description of her involvement in exercise would be considered to be excessive, unnatural and impossible to sustain. However, regardless of the views of many of her friends and family members who think she is 'strange' or 'bizarre', she continues to exercise on a regular basis. Exercise is enabling her to transfer positivity to her interpersonal relationships. She describes this as a healing influence, for herself and for other people in her life. It means that she passes on a nurturing and healing influence in her relationships with other people. She believes that exercising enhances her relationships with everyone, and in particular with family, friends and work colleagues.

4.5.2 The nature of exercise delivery as noted by female fitness instructors

The woman moving into her middle years who is also an exercise instructor values her own exercise time as well as the opportunity to deliver exercise to others. She readily reflects on both and makes clear distinctions between them. Exercising herself enables her to maintain her health and fitness, and she recognises the benefits in the wider context of her life. She reiterates the views of non-instructors in identifying exercise as including many special qualities for her. Also, it influences her thinking, her self-awareness and her connections with other people.

In discussing her work as an instructor, the active woman indicates a conscious awareness of adhering to the principles of her education programmes. She is aware of the issues involved in providing safe, effective and appropriate exercise options, and considers these elements of a class as being the underpinning considerations in her planning, preparation and delivery. These elements are integral to a session. They are automatic, natural and fundamental considerations for her in preparing her classes. Most of her reflective attention and focus, however, is directed elsewhere.

The active woman who delivers exercise sessions focuses attention on the reasons why she involves herself in this work. She is highly intrinsically motivated. She is passionate about her own exercise and also about her work. Her main enjoyment in instructing comes from providing something 'special' for the people attending her classes, and from sharing her own passion for exercise. She loves helping other people to achieve their own goals, and facilitating development in others. It gives her great pleasure to be able to recognise, over time, change and growth in other people. She frequently discusses with her regular participants their own development in their fitness capability, and also generally in their whole life situations.

Empathy, understanding, and a caring and respectful approach characterise the style of this instructor as she interacts with her clients. She aims to be particularly aware of people new to her sessions who might be apprehensive. She wants them to feel safe and supported, and recognises this as being significant in encouraging them to retain the exercise habit. She wants them to 'get hooked' on exercise, just as she is, so that they too can experience what she knows. She takes particular care to welcome and guide new-comers, who often have little or no previous experience of exercise, and for whom the activity may be unfamiliar. Intuitively, she 'feels' all the people in her classes, in order to understand and appreciate their personal situations, to recognise their level of fitness capability, and to be able to offer appropriate options and directions to them during her sessions.

Exercise is so special, and this instructor perceives her role to involve facilitating for others a route to that 'specialness'. She knows what exercise can mean, what it provides, and how she feels about it herself. She wants to share that with others by enabling them to know it for themselves, by experiencing it for themselves. The active woman instructor knows and accepts that whilst she is providing exercise for others she will not personally attain the same heightened level of experience as when she exercises herself. Her focus of attention, as an instructor, is on providing that heightened level of experience for her class participants. She uses multi-faceted thought processes during a class, in order to be aware of herself, her movements, her presence before the class, and her connection with the session she is delivering. She is aware of when to speak, when to stay silent. What to say, how to say it. She is facilitating movement in others, focussing on the music, its rhythms and changes, and on the environment. She is aware of the individual needs of the people in the class. Yes, the experience has to be safe and effective in terms of its fitness content. More than that, it has to be good, it has to be right, it has to make people 'feel better'.

Beyond the 'normal' duty of care issues, the active woman instructor wants to create an enjoyable and supportive environment that is meaningful and beneficial to her class participants. She wants to motivate, encourage, inspire and enthuse her attendees. She recognises that people attend exercise sessions for a variety of reasons, and with a range of personal circumstances. She knows that exercise can provide participants with 'time out', 'escape' and 'freedom' from those everyday routines and pressures.

This instructor's knowing about the pervasiveness of the benefits of exercise for others is mainly intuitive and non-specific. She knows there are benefits beyond the physiological and the mental. She knows because she experiences them herself. She has only scant knowledge of the personal circumstances of many of her regular attendees. Yet she 'knows' that all of these people can take into their life scenarios a range of benefits from exercising. There is no need for her to delve into the histories of each individual in the class – only to know any points pertinent to their safety in the class. It is enough to appreciate that her role is to provide the 'experience'. Beyond this, she trusts that participants will apply the benefits themselves. She believes that, over time people benefit, and she frequently recognises growth and development in regular attendees. Sometimes they tell her about changes and achievements they note in themselves. On other occasions, her recognition is based more on a tacit and an intuitive knowing, and the unspoken indications, such as perceived changes in demeanour, posture and attitude in other people. Most important, is that participants themselves appreciate benefit from attending.

Creating the 'right' experience requires personal preparation. The active woman instructor knows she needs to be in the 'right' frame of mind and emotional state for her classes. Preparation to 'perform' involves a ritualistic approach to taking on the identity of an instructor, coach, leader or teacher. Sometimes environmental factors, such as problems with equipment in a class for example, interfere with personal preparation. Such distractions can detract from the quality of the session. This instructor draws on her personal strengths to minimise and overcome such inconveniences, for the benefit of the participants attending the class.

The active woman instructor values highly her own exercising. She also has a passion for her work and considers it to be 'good' for those who attend her sessions. She believes the way exercise is provided for others is important in producing a positive influence and in engendering retention to regular exercise.

4.6 Creative synthesis: the essence of exercise

Participation in an activity perceived to be enjoyable and that involves loving and sophisticated appreciation has been shown to provide extensive benefit (Cooper, 1998a). This study focused on the experiences of women whose perception of exercise was that it was an enjoyable activity, and that it provided a wide range of positive gains. The researcher wished to honour the heuristic paradigm and present a personal perception of the experience of exercise participation, as an example of a life enhancing activity (Moustakas, 1990). The following creative synthesis was developed from personal reflections and intuitions by the researcher. It provided a personal interpretation of the universal experience of regular exercise participation, its nature, meaning, and essence, as it emerged from personal experience, along with immersion in, and reflection on the accumulated research experience.

I have sought a synthesis to express something of the experience of taking part in exercise. Also, I wanted it to convey the continuity of regular exercise participation, the pervasiveness of the impacts of exercise on the wider aspects of life, and the organic, dynamic and uniquely personal change and growth it stimulates and enables. I wanted something timeless and constant, yet flexible and changing. I wanted something strong, denoting energy and endurance, steadfastness and resolve, yet possessing a softness and gentleness that spoke of harmony, cooperation and connectivity. I wanted something clean, something rhythmical and steady. Something that expressed exercise as a part of the dance of life itself.

A strong image came to mind. It was the beating of a drum. A rhythmical sound that is constant and regular, always there, underpinning everything else. Drums have a unique role in music. They are there, essentially, to keep the rhythm. Consistent, constant and enduring. Like a bass drum, a deep and powerful sound. Or the drum that was used to keep slaves rowing in unison below the decks of the trading ships. Or even the huge Japanese drum that holds a commanding position in traditional compositions. Or the softer percussion drums that actively play with rhythm and trip nimbly between the other instruments. They each represent different aspects of exercise and the dance of life itself.

The drum itself symbolises life in its human form. Alone it is there, it simply exists, it is not ALIVE. The drum truly comes to

life when it emits a beat, when its rhythm is heard. The rhythm of its own life. Sometimes complex, sometimes simple. Sometimes alone, sometimes in the company of other instruments. Sometimes leading the way, sometimes hidden beneath a myriad of other sounds. The beat of the drum invites the other instruments in a musical composition to join it, to play along with it, and to come alive with it. Whatever the other instruments do, they come into the piece, they leave, the drum remains there, beating out its own steady rhythm. Sometimes the rhythm changes. Sometimes variations in drum stroke, or additional drums of varying sizes and shapes, enhance the rhythm and create melody. The underpinning rhythm is always there, the basis for everything else. Sometimes you have to really listen carefully to hear it, search to find it amongst the other sounds that have been placed on top of it. But it is still there. It is the rhythm that underpins everything. It is the basis on which everything else is built, from which everything else grows. The rhythm that becomes the dance of life itself.

It is the drum that holds the rhythm with which we exercise, the rhythm with which we move. The continuous beating of the drum symbolising the flow of the movement, smooth and easy, melodic and harmonious, in tune with who we are. The rhythm underpinning the structure of the movement, and of the whole exercise experience. The drum denotes the rhythm with which we run, swim, cycle, dance. A single exercise experience has a rhythmical beat, the rhythm of the movement and the activity. Repeated participation has rhythm, the rhythm of doing, and doing again. The rhythm of exercise that is the dance of life itself.

Exercise is part of life. Life itself has rhythm, the rhythm of a heartbeat. The rhythm that underpins everything, always there. We have our own rhythm, we dance to our own beat. The rhythm that denotes who we truly are, that tells us we are doing what is truly right for us. The rhythm of our own dance of life. There is the rhythm with which we move through our lives and our daily activities. We use the beat, the rhythms, in our own dance of life to harmonise with that of others, to create a symphony together. We dance together to our own and each other's rhythms. Difference and complementarity enhancing the composite symphony. Rhythm in relationships. Each creating a unique tempo, a distinctive beat and rhythm. Synchronised, we create beautiful connections and seemingly effortless harmonies. The rhythm that symbolises the choreography of the dance of life itself.

The results were here presented in individual and exemplary portraits, composite depictions and a creative synthesis, in accordance with the heuristic paradigm. This format honoured the significance of self-searching and the value of personal knowledge in gaining understanding of human experience. The process involved periods of immersion and incubation, interspersed with emergent illumination and understanding. The distinctiveness of the exercise experience was gradually explicated into its unique qualities and themes and finally depicted in narrative format. This provided a method of constructing the universal nature, meaning and essence of the exercise experience from the perspective of women moving into their middle years.

Chapter Five: Uniqueness, Interconnectivity and Accumulated Effects: The Holistic Experience of Exercise

Once one enters into the quest for knowledge and understanding, once one begins the passionate search for the illumination of a puzzlement, the intensity, wonder, intrigue, and engagement carry one along through ever growing levels of meaning and excitement. A unique, temporal rhythm has awakened in one's absorption and sustaining gaze, a rhythm that must take its own course and that will not be satisfied until a natural closing occurs and a sense of wonder has fulfilled its intent and purpose. (Moustakas, 1990, p.55)

The aim of this study was to explore the nature, meaning and benefits of regular exercise participation from the perspective of women moving into their middle years. Within this, the final chapter, the contents of previous chapters are reviewed and the core themes are restated. The conclusions about the nature and meaning of regular participation in exercise are discussed in Section 5.1 and are compared with the traditional literature in the fields of health, womanhood, exercise science and the fitness industry. The findings in relation to the nature and meaning of the exercise experience are discussed in Section 5.2. In Section 5.3 the conclusions relating to the nature and meaning of exercise delivery are presented. The implications of the study for future research and policy development are described in Section 5.4.

Chapter One outlined the context in which the study was located. It established that there were potential discrepancies between personal experience and theoretical assumptions in the fields of health, womanhood, the benefits of exercise, and in the policies and practices of the fitness industry. In accordance with the principles of organic research, the concept for the study arose from vague and initially indistinct perceptions on the part of the researcher that these related research fields neglected to include pertinent observations. She felt that the literature in these areas was telling only a partial and fragmented story. She sensed that there were wider implications and an, as yet, unspoken relationship

between these fields that may have provided a more holistic depiction of interconnectivity. The study's problems were, therefore, grounded in the theoretical assumptions of these fields of traditional literature, as outlined in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two went on to explore the literature on emotional and spiritual well-being. Emotion and spirituality were found to be inextricably linked and the concept of wellness that incorporated both was defined as a unique and individual construct that has nurturing and healing influences on a personal and a collective evolutionary level. The chapter offered this individual, interconnected, expanded and holistic view of health as an enhancement of the traditional. Chapter Two included a review of literature on aspects of the self, and considered how the development of self-awareness and personal growth further contribute to individual perceptions of well-being. The concept of the self was defined as a unique and individually emerging process with organic and constantly functioning interpersonal influences. Also, the chapter provided an integration of the holistic view of health and the concept of the self with literature focusing on a subjective perception of physical activity.

Holism and interconnectivity remained pertinent themes in Chapter Three, in which the style of enquiry used for data collection and analysis was described. The researcher felt that traditional scientific methods of investigating the benefits of exercise participation did not fully honour and acknowledge the deep significances of personal experience. The use of the Neuro-Logical Levels process in this study provided an original approach to exploring the experience of exercise participation. This technique facilitates thoughtful reflection on the deep structure systems that underpin human behaviour (Dilts, 1990; Dilts et al., 1990; O'Connor and Seymour, 1995). It was, therefore, an effective tool with which to study profundity in the exercise experience. The utilisation of this technique differentiated this study from traditional research into the benefits of regular exercise participation.

A fundamental presupposition of the study was that those best placed to provide the answers to the emergent research questions on the value of exercise were

those who participate in it and who deliver it. The heuristic methodology developed by Moustakas (1990) provided a framework for the analysis of the data and the in-depth exploration of the nature and meaning of the experience of exercise. The heuristic process provided a way of being informed, a way of knowing. It facilitated the discovery process in an area of human experience, from the unique perspectives of those involved. It gave rise to an acknowledgement and honouring of the voices of women and provided a depiction of their perceptions, truths and realities. It gave access to an experiential focus to studying an aspect of human experience that incorporated a developmental, organic and person-centred approach. The study thus provided the opportunity for involvement in 'ordinary' activities to be honoured and appreciated for their nurturing and healing influences. The principles of a heuristic investigation openly permitted and offered methods of verification for this personally directed exploration into an area of subjective experience.

In line with the heuristic framework, the researcher was involved in the study throughout and was an active participant in the research process (Moustakas, 1990). It involved her reflecting on her own experiences, and integrating her thoughts with those of additional research subjects. Her immersion in the narrative data enabled an integrated and holistic depiction to emerge of what it meant to be a woman moving into her middle years who was regularly involved in exercise. The emergent process enabled themes and concepts about the experience of exercise to arise from the data. The narrative approach to the research raised into conscious awareness many of the perceptions, senses and intuitions that depicted the true nature and deep meaning of exercise participation. The utilisation of this methodology differentiated this study from traditional research into the benefits of regular exercise participation.

Also, the heuristic methodology informed the nature of the presentation of the findings. The outcomes of the data collection and analysis process were presented in Chapter Four. The study identified the impacts exercise has on personal and collective well-being. In accordance with the heuristic paradigm, the presentation of the results portrayed the qualities, meanings and essences of the unique experiences of the individuals involved in the study (Moustakas,

1990). The emergent themes and concepts were presented in the form of individual and exemplary portraits, illustrating unique examples of the findings. Composite depictions presented integrated illustrations derived from the perspective of participants and instructors. A creative synthesis provided the researcher's own holistic perspective on the topic and on the study itself. The following sections present the conclusions from the study in greater detail.

5.1 Conclusions about the nature and meaning of regular participation in exercise

5.1.1 Conclusions in relation to health and well-being

This study explored a positive perception of health and compared that with the physical and mental components traditionally identified in the biomedical model (Blaxter, 1990, 2004). It asked whether the traditional mechanistic and reductionist model gave sufficient recognition to the benefits of a preventative and pro-active approach to maintaining positive health. This study concluded that the traditional literature depicting western society's perceptions of health and well-being told only a partial story. It concurred with the views of Dossey (2001) that health has unique meaning for the individual. Also, it supported Kimiecik's (2002) perceptions of wellness as a connecting, integrating and synergising concept. It recognised wellness as a unique and individual construct that has nurturing and healing influences on a personal and collective evolutionary level. This study expanded the traditional health paradigm in western society to acknowledge concepts of emotional and spiritual wellness that supported the work of Myss (1997), Fredrickson (1998), Tolle (1999), Levin (2000), Zohar and Marshall (2000) and Csikszentmihalyi (2002). As such, it responded to Fredrickson's (1998) appeal for further study on positive emotions to guide applications and interventions that might improve spiritual concepts, such as individual and collective functioning, in addition to physical and mental well-being.

5.1.2 Conclusions in relation to the nature of womanhood

There is an identified paucity in research about women (Borysenko, 1998). Female researchers are also in the minority (Aptheker, 1989; DeVault, 1990;

Stewart, 2000). Furthermore, there have been calls for a holistic approach to research on aspects of human experience (Shaffer, 1978; Reason and Rowan, 1981; Newton, 1998; Braud and Anderson, 1998). This study contributed to the existing literature by offering women's personal life stories, researched by a woman and depicted using holistic methodologies. It offered a holistic perspective on the experience of being a contemporary woman moving into her middle years, who is regularly involved in exercise.

This study's findings indicated that the individual theories on the experience of being a contemporary woman, particularly one moving into her middle years, did not comprehensively relate to personal experience (Tong, 1998). The study concurred with the theorists' own conclusions that a fragmented approach led to the loss of any coherent and holistic standpoint, and offered a partial truth about womanhood in contemporary society (Borysenko, 1998; Tong, 1998).

The study found that, in line with the traditional literature on women's issues, being a contemporary woman involved a life that is complex, multi-faceted and busy (Evans, 1997; Stein, 1997; Borysenko, 1998; Tong, 1998). Life was found to have the potential to leave one feeling torn and fragmented, due to various demands on time and energy. Life was also perceived to be directed by external influences that leave one feeling restricted. This study concluded that women found exercise to be a route back to, or a way of maintaining, a sense of a balanced and integrated lifestyle.

This study concurred with the views of Borysenko (1998), Bolen (2003) and Henes (2005) that the nature of womanhood was continuing to develop to include a perspective that transcended obligations, differences and individualities. The study demonstrated that contemporary women were not only aware of their own needs to grow and develop; they were actively seeking personal challenges. They were involving themselves in activities that they found to be beneficial to themselves and which they believed were instrumental in facilitating their on-going development of positive personal qualities. This study found that regular participation in exercise enabled women to feel that they could transcend the little irritations of daily living; that they could

challenge themselves in various areas of life, and that they could work towards fulfilling their personal potential. These findings conflicted with much of the traditional literature on women's position in modern society that suggested that women felt restricted, and unable, or not wishing, to challenge themselves (Friedan, 1992; Tong, 1998). It thus contributed to the developmental literature on the nature of contemporary womanhood.

5.1.3 Conclusions in relation to women as regular participants in exercise

Women have been traditionally perceived to have little time for participation in leisure activities (Kane, 1990; Bepko and Krestan, 1991; Stein, 1997; Taunton et al., 1997; Borysenko, 1998; Tong, 1998; Walton, 1999; Partenheimer, 2000). This study provided an alternative view of women's access to leisure time. It found that women who were regular exercisers were prioritising their continued involvement amongst traditional commitments and responsibilities. Exercise was not considered to be a drain on time and energy, rather to enhance it, and to provide 'more' of both. It facilitated the achievement of other daily commitments. Furthermore, the findings in this study indicated that women recognised enhancements to the whole of their life, as a result of regularly exercising. Also, they acknowledged they were providing positive influences in the lives of other people. This significantly expanded the traditional view that those women who did regularly exercise, did so to lose or to maintain weight and to attain a positive body image (Chernin, 1981; Orbach, 1993; Lloyd, 1996). The findings indicated that regular exercise participation was highly valued by women and that the benefits extended beyond those noted in the traditional fragmentary and scientific literature.

5.1.4 Conclusions in relation to the benefits of regular participation in exercise

This study focused on participation in exercise experiences that were perceived to intrinsically be enjoyable. This focus expanded the traditional literature on the benefits of regular exercise participation by highlighting benefits that arose from participation in activities with positive emotive connotations. As such, it added to the limited research into positive aspects of the human condition (Fredrickson, 1998). The study presented a holistic, uniquely personal and

interconnected whole-life perspective that indicated that exercise perceived to be enjoyable engendered an experience of wellness that has wide ranging implications.

Specific mention was made by respondents of exercise providing fitness benefits, such as physical strength and suppleness, and physical and mental health benefits, in accordance with the traditional literature (Pollack, 1979; Joesting, 1981; Hughes, 1984; Hayes and Ross, 1986; Morgan and O'Connor, 1988; Gleser and Mendelberg, 1990; Turner-Warwick et al., 1991; Department of Health, 1996; Manning and Fusilier, 1999; Ruffin, 1999; Merritt, 2000; Berger and Motl, 2000; Faulkner and Biddle, 2001; Sport England, 2005). A positive sense of general well-being, positive perceptions of body image, and a pro-active approach to other health issues, such as diet, were also noted by participants.

In addition, responses indicated benefit taken from regular participation in exercise that concurred with the literature on emotional and spiritual well-being (Myss, 1997; Fredrickson, 1998; Tolle, 1999; Levin, 2000; Zohar and Marshall, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). This study concluded that gains from regular exercise participation were unique and personal, extended beyond the specific and pervaded all life contexts. Exercise promoted a positive self-concept and a positive outlook on life in general. Respondents indicated that the positive meaning attached to their participation in exercise was significant in the achievement of a range of life enhancing effects. Exercise was found to be an activity with opening, connecting and transcending capabilities (White, 1999). It provided access to a flow state, focused the energies of mind and body, provided access to self-mastery and evolutionary self-knowledge, and awakened the self to the deeper dimensions of human experience. This reflected the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 2002), Myss (1997), Cooper (1998a), Fredrickson (1998), Tolle (1999), Levin (2000) and Zohar and Marshall (2000) on participation in activities with positive emotional and spiritual connotations. These findings significantly extended the traditional viewpoint on the meaning of participation in exercise. They indicated that exercise provided access to a

deep sense of positive emotion that promoted a dynamic and living sense of a connection with life itself (Masson and McCarthy, 1996; Northrup, 1997).

The findings in this study supported the work of Fredrickson (1998) on involvement in activities perceived to be enjoyable. Exercise was found to help women discard unconscious everyday behavioural scripts and tendencies, and offered a route to a more relaxed approach to pursuing novel, creative and unscripted paths of thought and action (De Bono, 1971; Fredrickson, 1998). Regular participation in exercise built physical, intellectual and social skills and promoted a desire for new experiences. Also, it had a nurturing and healing influence on a personal and a collective scale. It developed self-awareness and self-knowledge that enhanced individuality, uniqueness and the integrity of the self. It opened people up to possibilities, enabled them to connect with other people in positive ways, and facilitated transcendence of life's irritations and daily occurrences.

Exercise was found to have meaning interpreted personally and uniquely by each individual participant. However, positive connotations and intrinsic value were common to all. Exercise experienced from this perspective provided benefits that pervaded all of the individual's life and positively influenced the lives of the people with whom the individual interacted. This study thus added new knowledge to the traditional view of the benefits of regular participation in exercise.

5.1.5 Conclusions in relation to provision within the fitness industry

The study enabled women to speak out about the meaning that exercise had for them and about the value they placed on their participation. It honoured the depth of experience engendered by exercise. The findings indicated that important considerations have been omitted by those with responsibility for marketing in the fitness industry. They have traditionally focused on exercise as a route to wellness, as preventing chronic illnesses and conditions (Calman et al., 1999; Sport England, 2005), and as satisfying women's perceived desire for a slender body (Chernin, 1981; Orbach, 1993; Lloyd, 1996). Regular participation in a form of exercise that was perceived to be enjoyable was found

in this study to provide benefit on a personal and a collective level that extended beyond and deeper than the traditional wellness and body image perspectives. Recognition of the high level of importance that participants attached to their exercising was not currently acknowledged in marketing and promotional practices in the fitness industry. Neither do the industry or the health promotion programmes focus on assisting new or potential clients to discover a form of exercise that they personally perceive as enjoyable. The provision is generally presented from an operational perspective. The study thus added new knowledge to the fitness industry's traditional perspective on providing information and education about the benefits of exercise.

5.1.6 Conclusions in relation to training provision in the fitness industry

Training modules for instructors in the fitness industry dealt admirably with the scientific and mechanistic aspects of exercise delivery (YMCA, 2002; RSA, 2002; Fitness Professionals, 2002; Fitness and Aerobic Certifications for Instructors, 2002; FutureFit, 2002; Fitness Industry Education, 2002; Schwinn Fitness Academy, 2002; National Studio Cycling Centre, 2002; Peloton Fitness, 2002). However, this study has highlighted omissions relating to some fundamental aspects of the work of instructors. Training for exercise instructors did not generally include consideration of the interactional and motivational elements involved in the process of exercise delivery. This study demonstrated the significance of such elements and indicated an area for development in future training provision. There is a need for the providers of training for fitness instructors to recognise the value that participants attach to high quality exercise experiences that are perceived as enjoyable. This study demonstrated that the provision of an environment which is safe, supportive and inclusive created the context in which participants experienced emotion with personal and collective transformational potential. The crucial factor required to facilitate access to beneficial gain was the instructor's ability to create this positive environment. This study concluded that some instructors intuitively focused attention on their interaction with participants in their classes. It cannot be assumed that this is generally the case. This study highlighted the opportunity for training providers within the industry to acknowledge, honour and respect depth in the exercise experience and to recognise the instructors'

capability to engender exercise's therapeutic and growth enhancing potential. This study concluded that instructors who had an empathic and compassionate approach to the participants attending their classes, loved facilitating the exercise experience for others, and had a passion for exercise, demonstrated a positive energy. This was a crucial element in the creation of a positive experience for class participants. This study highlighted that the industry, generally, has the opportunity to place more value on 'empathy', 'facilitation', 'passion', 'love', and 'positive energy'.

5.2 Conclusions about the nature and meaning of the exercise experience

This study supported the work of Fredrickson (2000) and provided further evidence that repeated experience of positive emotional states enhances the lives of those experiencing them. Regular participation in exercise experiences that were perceived to be enjoyable provided a range of benefits. Such experiences were found to positively influence health and lifestyle, inherently possess a range of 'special' qualities and provided benefits to the mind. Individual and unique perceptions of the benefits enabled participants to apply them to their personal life context. These qualities were found to have significant impact on the individual and on the individual's interactions with other people. The findings concurred with the emergent holistic definition of wellness as a unique and individual construct that has nurturing and healing influences on a personal and collective evolutionary level. The full range of perceived benefits was found to influence the motivation to retain the exercise habit in a cyclical and developing process. The on-going involvement in activities perceived to be enjoyable and with positive connotations provided accumulative benefits that supported the definition of the self as a unique, holistic and individually emerging process, with organic and constantly functioning interpersonal influences. It is significant to note that reference to motivation to retain the exercise habit developed as the perception of the self changed. The original motivation, for example, to 'get out more' or to 'lose weight' changed as the new self emerged from achievement of these initial expectations and awareness of new challenges arose. The nature and meaning

of the exercise experience as they were ascertained in this study are conceptually represented in Figure Two. The conclusions about the identified elements of the experience are detailed in the following sections.

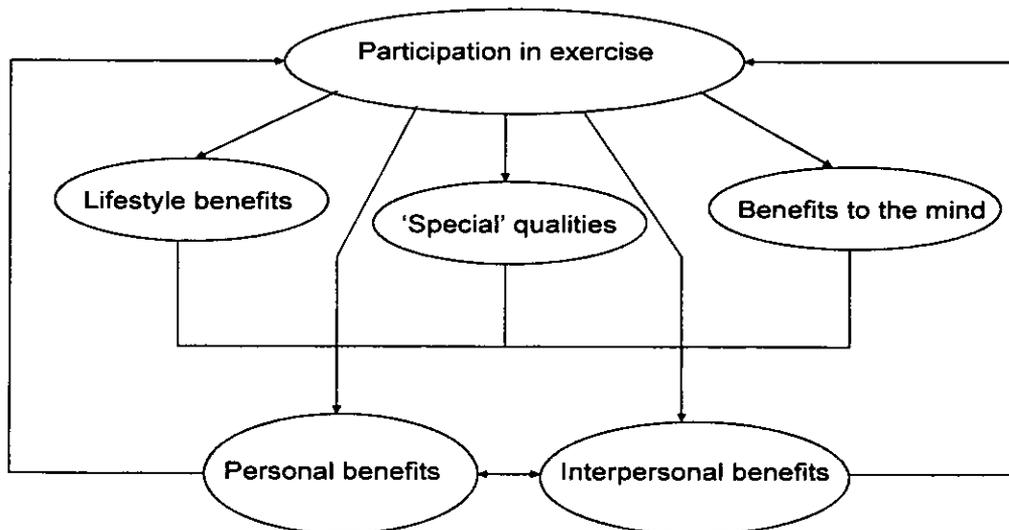


Figure Two. The nature and meaning of the exercise experience as noted by active women moving into their middle years.

5.2.1 Conclusions about lifestyle benefits through exercise

In accordance with much of the traditional literature on the benefits of exercise, respondents in this study indicated that it offered positive lifestyle gains. It engendered a positive outlook on life, a constructive approach to dealing with daily irritations and occurrences, and relief from, or avoidance of stress. These comments concurred with the work of Steptoe and Bolton (1988), Cramer et al. (1991), Muoulakis and Zervas (1993) and Berger and Motl (2000). Respondents in this study connected exercising with good health, the general avoidance of ailments, and rapid recovery from any unwellness, which was generally noted as being mild. These findings reiterated the work exemplified by the Department of Health (1996), the World Health Organisation (2003) and Sport England (2005). Wellness was, however, individually interpreted by each respondent and the positive gains were applied to all aspects of each person's unique life situation. This supported the emergent definition of wellness as a unique and individual construct that has nurturing and healing influences on a personal and collective evolutionary level.

Enjoyment of the process of exercising was a significant component. In accordance with the work of Fredrickson (1998) enjoyment was identified as consisting of a range of factors. However, the resultant enhanced emotional state was linked to a sense of 'feeling good', and had significant constructive impacts on a variety of life situations. There was an expectation that future exercise participation will be an enjoyable experience, and that it will result in an improved sense of well-being. Also, the anticipation enabled people to experience an improved emotional state prior to and beyond, and therefore, outside the exercise experience. Furthermore, non-participation had negative implications and engendered a dislike of the loss of the pervading positive gains.

Along with enjoyment, relaxation was a significant component of exercise, and a sustainable state beyond the exercise session. Relaxation contributed to a sense of fulfilment from taking part in exercise. Subjects noted being more responsive, better organised, more out-going and more secure, and indicated maintaining mental stability. Mental and emotional strength, resilience, perseverance, determination, motivation and self-discipline were noted as further gains. These specific gains supported comments about feeling able to get involved in new experiences outside exercise. They upheld subjects' comments on being a 'better' or enhanced person in a range of life contexts, and on being aware of a degree of development and self-progression. Exercise was noted as being instrumental in facilitating this continuing growth. The findings in this study supported the work of Gallwey (1974), Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 2002), Jackson (1995, 1996), Kimiecik and Harris (1996) and Cooper (1998a). They reiterated the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health benefits that arise from repeated involvement in activities which lead to a sense of enjoyment, relaxation and positivity and that pervade all aspects of life.

Exercise was found to enhance energy levels, rather than draining them. The emergence of a sense of heightened energy was particularly linked to experience in an enjoyable context. Also, this related to subjects' perception of sensing a 'buzz' or a 'high' during and after exercise. Heightened levels of

energy were noted to pervade other aspects of life. Enhanced energy was linked to a perception of greater self-belief that, not only were challenges presented in exercise achievable, other accomplishments in the wider life context were also possible. This supported Henes's (2005, p.6) description of the emergence of 'a strong, ... spirited, and successful ... woman'.

5.2.2 Conclusions about the 'special' qualities of exercise

Descriptions of the special qualities that subjects associated with their participation in exercise provided specific individual examples of the positive states experienced during the process of exercising. Subjects' identification of exercise as a vehicle to accessing a 'special place' corresponded closely to the recognised descriptions of elements of a flow state, transformed consciousness and a meditative state of mind (Murphy, 1972, 1976; Spino, 1976; Garfield and Bennett, 1984; Stevens, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Jackson, 1992, 1995, 1996; Heathcote, 1996; Cooper, 1998a; Clarkson, 1999; Young, 1999; Fieger, 2005). A repetitive rhythmical action in exercise, as, for example, in running or swimming, was an important factor for some women in achieving this state. Exercise engendered a sense of inner calmness, peace, quiet and peace of mind. It promoted patience, confidence, self-esteem, a sense of lightness, happiness, aliveness and self-respect. It also gave rise to a sense of freedom, escape and a release from everyday concerns, enabling women to 'switch off'. Solitude, aloneness and access to personal space were further important gains. This particular aspect was expanded upon in references to exercise providing time to one's self and 'time out' from everyday activities. Particular benefit was noted from 'escaping' and taking time away from routine responsibilities. The findings indicated a link between being involved in something perceived to be enjoyable and of benefit, and being able to return to routine activities in an enhanced state and better able to deal with everyday events.

5.2.3 Conclusions about the effects of exercise on the mind

Respondents indicated experiencing an optimum emotional state in connection with their exercise participation. This study concurred with the work of Fredrickson (1998) and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) and found that involvement in activity as a positive experience provided a range of benefits to thinking and to

the utilisation of the mind. Respondents indicated that participation in exercise was valuable in providing time to think. This was considered to be rarely available in the general busyness of daily life. It was an opportunity to think about oneself, and the benefits exercise was providing. Also, it was a diversion from everyday topics that tended to occupy the mind. It engaged the thought processes in mastery of the activity. This was apparent particularly with activities that involved routines, such as step, aerobics and dance and supported the work of Fredrickson (1998). This in itself was indicated as being beneficial and involved the integration, ordering and re-integration of thoughts. Involvement in enjoyable activities distracted the mind from everyday thoughts and facilitated the integration of recent events into the self-concept and world-view. Also, positive connections with exercise were related to the facilitation of creative and open thinking by respondents. This concurred with the work of De Bono (1971). The sense of well-being arising after exercise involved an altered perception not only of the self, but also of recent experiences and of the relationship between the self and experience.

Exercise was described as an opportunity to think creatively, and to broaden thinking beyond previous limits. Creative thinking whilst in a positive state facilitated constructive thinking about challenging and demanding life situations. Subjects indicated being 'amazed' by what they had been able to do, what they had overcome and dealt with, and how much their perception of their potential had expanded, not only in the exercise context, but also in other areas of life. The reference to an involvement in personal challenges and an awareness of personal growth and development supported the views of Maslow (1954), Erikson (1968), Rogers (1983), Leonard and Murphy (1995), DiCarlo (1999), Myss (2002) and Henes (2005) that the individual is an emerging process. Respondents indicated that exercise was significant in creating a positive context for personal development. Also, their connection with exercising changed as they personally developed. Over time, participants noted revising their motivations to retain the exercise habit. They indicated an on-going expectation and an achievement of positive outcomes when facing personal challenges. Exercise gave rise to the 'drive' or motivation to take new challenges and to experience the gradual progression towards new

achievements. The involvement in challenging experiences was itself described as being enjoyable and also demanding. This indicated a level of self-awareness that enabled challenges to be selected to engender development at an appropriate and achievable rate. It also suggested heightened self-esteem and self-belief. The achievement of challenges was further associated with positive emotions and was instrumental in enabling a positive self-perception. This, in turn, enabled further involvement in additional challenges. Successful outcomes added to the positive health gains and further enhanced the meaning associated with participation in exercise. The resultant positive spiralling effect concurred with the findings of Fredrickson (1998). However, it conflicted with traditional views of women in western society that state self-development as not being accessible to women, or as being unwanted by them (Borysenko, 1998).

Exercise provided an opportunity for clearing, emptying or resting the mind, in addition to thinking. Subjects described not thinking or thinking of nothing. Positive emotions, a relaxed state and a high degree of familiarity with an activity were frequently linked with exercise not requiring or involving conscious thought. Involvement, focus and total immersion in these experiences meant the mind was quieted. This process of non-thinking corresponded with Fieger's (2005, p.1) description of meditation as 'the art of stilling the mind.' Links have been established between a calm and tranquil state of mind, and accessing the zone or a flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Jackson, 1995, 1996; Kimiecik and Harris, 1996; Cooper, 1998a), and experiencing a transformation of consciousness (Stevens, 1988). Exercise participation facilitated access to a flow state. Repeated immersion in this positive state provided recurrent access to the benefits. Exercise exposed participants to a wide range of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual benefits. The accumulative and pervading affects of repeated and regular exposure to such positive influences compounded the gains.

5.2.4 Conclusions about the personal benefits from regular exercise

The benefits to lifestyle, the special aspects of exercise and its affects on the mind supported further gains for the individual. The findings of the study supported the view that the concept of the self is a unique and individual

emerging process (Maslow, 1954; Erikson, 1968; Rogers, 1983; Leonard and Murphy, 1995; DiCarlo, 1999; Myss, 2002). The study concluded that exercise had implications for the individual's perception of the self. Exercise was found to enable women to be involved in an experience specifically for themselves. Traditionally, women were socialised into putting others before themselves (Bepko and Krestan, 1991; Borysenko, 1998; Tong, 1998). This study found that women appreciated having something in their lives that was specifically for them, as opposed to them being the providers for other people. In this sense, the women in the subject group demonstrated an autonomous and nonconforming tendency to traditional views of their place in western society, and they avoided the societal influences that drew people away from internal awarenesses. This conflicted with the traditional views of women as oppressed and disempowered (Tong, 1998) and supported the work of Northrup (1997), Zohar and Marshall (2000), Tart (2001), Csikszentmihalyi (2002) and Henes (2005) that indicated an opening up to the potential for personal growth. This further substantiated the comments about gains in self-knowledge and self-awareness. Women particularly noted enhanced awareness of self in movement, coordination and connection with the exercise activity. They indicated enhanced general awareness about, for example, postural issues, and also greater awareness about emotional states, responses and attitudes in all aspects of life.

This study concluded that exercise promoted a progression towards unique, profound and inwardly directed investigations. This supported the literature on the process of taking a spiritual approach to living (Levin, 2000; Zohar and Marshall, 2000; Tart, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Kimiecik, 2002). The research highlighted overwhelming indications that participation in exercise facilitated a reconnection with a fundamental self-concept that was devoid of any of the social roles that much of life involves. This was described as a 'simplified' self, 'just me', and also a 'true' self, as noted in the comment 'I'm the real me'. This perception was also described in relation to the temporary 'letting go' of the social identities such as wife, mother, daughter, or employee. Subjects recognised this as providing them with a sense of 'coming home' and 'connecting with themselves'. This concurred with the work of Kimiecik (2002) on the benefits of participation in activities involving the experiencing of

optimal states. Furthermore, participants noted that in the general busyness of their daily lives such an opportunity was rare.

Csikszentmihalyi (2002) noted that optimal experience involved a loss of consciousness of the self, where the concept of self disappeared from conscious thinking. However, for the women in this study, the benefit arose from a stronger and a clearer connection with, and return to, a fundamental and 'pure' concept of the self, as opposed to a total sense of loss of self-concept. The study, therefore, extended the literature on optimal human experiences by offering an additional perception of benefit. For women, the general lack of connection with a strong concept of a unique self arose from the multi-faceted characteristics of life that left them feeling fragmented and torn. The benefits from exercising were in the opportunity to 'let go' of other wider identities and a pulling back together of the essence of the self. This narrowed the concentration to an awareness of the individuality, uniqueness and integrity of the self. Responses indicated that this led to a capability to make constructive positive personal choices and decisions that further enhanced the perception of individuality and uniqueness. Subjects recognised that this provided a sense of progression in their personal growth. This process corresponded closely with Csikszentmihalyi's (2002) description of focused attention that was not distracted by other thoughts and diversions. Exercise provided an opportunity to be one's self, to be alone with one's self, and to focus attention inwardly, as opposed to outwardly towards others. This provided significant positive gains for the individual and enabled the self to be shaped and developed from an internal focus. This process was instrumental in facilitating personal growth.

Exercise facilitated constructive personal change. Repeated immersion in positive experiences opened up women to the possibility of change, growth and to new ideas. Women who became regular exercisers distinguished between an 'old' self, prior to exercise participation, and a 'new' self. The movement, facilitated through the process of exercise participation, to the new self was overwhelmingly indicated as positive, and was accompanied by a strong desire for further progression. It was linked with a strong disinclination to return to the old self. Women were aware of further opportunities for development. The

motivation to retain the exercise habit was strongly linked to recognition of the emerging self. The connection with exercise developed as the personal changes emerged and motivation to retain the exercise habit also altered.

This study found that self-development initiated through exercise had intrinsic qualities. Exercise enabled women to feel more secure in themselves, better about themselves, more relaxed and more 'together'. It moved women towards becoming more comfortable with their own individual uniquenesses (Tyler, 1978, Cooper, 1998a). Much of the motivation to maintain exercise participation arose from a desire to perpetuate the personal growth that it engendered. Not maintaining regular exercise participation would lead to women experiencing a sense of letting themselves down, due to self-improvement not occurring. This led to women maintaining regular participation, even when initial motivation was lacking. This provided further evidence of the intrinsic value of regular participation in exercise.

Exercise nurtured recognition of the need to take personal responsibility for health and well-being. According to traditional literature on the position of women in western culture, thinking autonomously placed them within a minority sector of the general female population (Friedan, 1992; Borysenko, 1998; Tong, 1998). Within the subject group in this study, self-maintenance and self-improvement were intrinsic motivators to continue exercising. These findings had significance for health promoters and signified a movement away from the focus of the medical model of exercise as a preventative or rehabilitative tool (Taylor et al., 1998; Department of Health, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2004b; World Health Organisation, 2003; Health Development Agency, 2004a) and the western health model that has restoration of normal functioning as its focus (Blaxter, 1990, 2004). In accordance with the work of Fredrickson (1998), involvement in intrinsically rewarding activity generated positive emotions, facilitated personal growth, expanded thinking, and engendered inner calmness, oneness, integration and connection. Self-maintenance and self-improvement exemplified a pro-active approach to achieving positive health that included aspects beyond the traditionally considered normal functioning of

the physical and mental faculties. This significantly expanded the traditional views of the benefits of regular participation in exercise.

A desire for personal change was a motivator for the commencement of exercise. Significant life events, such as birthdays, children becoming more independent, and dissatisfaction with current lifestyle were amongst the circumstances that prompted a desire for change. Women interpreted life events and experiences as triggers and opportunities for change and growth. Regular participation in exercise nurtured a perception of being able to overcome barriers to growth and of being able to increase potential in all areas of life. Exercise involved and promoted self-awareness, self-knowledge and self-mastery, in addition to mastery of the intricacies of the activity itself.

The women in the study were aware of an underpinning social and cultural expectation of conformity to traditional norms (Bepko and Krestan, 1991; Stein, 1997; Borysenko, 1998). They recognised a sense of guilt when they took a non-conforming stance and took time for self-improvement. Involvement in exercise took women away from spending that time in the traditional female role of providing and caring for others (Bepko and Krestan, 1991). However, they were aware of the extent of the personal and collective benefits arising from their self-improvement through exercise, and this enabled them to justify continued participation. Involvement in exercise, as an activity that intrinsically gave rise to positive states, enabled women to transfer positivity to other aspects of their life. A positive outlook on life had a healing influence on the individual. The positivity was also transferred to the people with whom the individual interacted, thus contributing to a collective healing and developmental process.

5.2.5 Conclusions about the effects of exercise on relationships with others

The findings in this study upheld the emergent concept of the self as having organic and constantly functioning interpersonal influences. This study concluded that the constructive influences gained from exercise had positive impacts on participants' relationships with other people. This was evidenced within contexts involving exercise and others beyond activity sessions. The

social aspects of exercising in a group context were important for women. This supported the work of Stewart (2000). The participants indicated taking benefit from regularly being with like-minded people, and developing new friendships through exercise, as well as renewing old ones. Exercising provided mutually influential personal interactions that afforded benefits in addition to the physical. The resultant convivial atmosphere, camaraderie and perception of kinship were important elements of the activity. An expectation of social contact through a regular activity enabled women to feel comfortable about attending sessions alone. Group exercise sessions, led by an instructor, were particularly found to provide a motivational social context, as well as being an opportunity to develop current fitness potential within the activity. Women exercising in a group context, focused attention on other people whom they perceived to be appropriate role models for their own advancement within the activity. They recognised progression in their own capability in an activity when newer attendees began to follow their lead in order to acquaint themselves with routines in a class or the intricacies of an activity.

Additionally, exercise had positive influences on interpersonal interactions beyond the activity context. Participation in exercise provided conversational opportunities with other people. However, women chose carefully with whom they discussed their exercise activity. They preferred conversation about exercise that was positive and constructive for themselves and others, as opposed to it being derisory or condescending. When discussing exercise, they preferred to under-state the level or degree of their involvement, as opposed to being truthful, which they feared would appear boastful.

Positivity and wellness derived from taking part in exercise pervaded all social interactions. This study concluded that exercise involved spiritual aspects, as it engendered enhanced relationships with family, friends and work colleagues that had a healing and a nurturing influence (Myss, 1997; Tolle, 1999; Fredrickson, 2000; Levin, 2000; Zohar and Marshall, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi 2002; Henes, 2005). Participants indicated that positive personal connections with the exercise experience led to enhanced interactions with other people outside the exercise experience. This was a significant factor in the potential for

exercise to contribute to the collective evolutionary process as described by Myss (1997), Levin (2000), Zohar and Marshall (2000), Tart (2001), Csikszentmihalyi (2002) and Kimiecik (2002). These findings provide further evidence of a link between regular exercise participation and the emergent definitions of both wellness and the concept of the self.

5.3 Conclusions about the nature and meaning of exercise delivery

Exercise delivery was found to be underpinned by principles established in instructor education programmes. In addition, it consisted of factors not traditionally recognised in training provision for instructors. The nature and meaning of exercise delivery as they were ascertained in this study are conceptually represented in Figure Three. The related conclusions are detailed in this section.

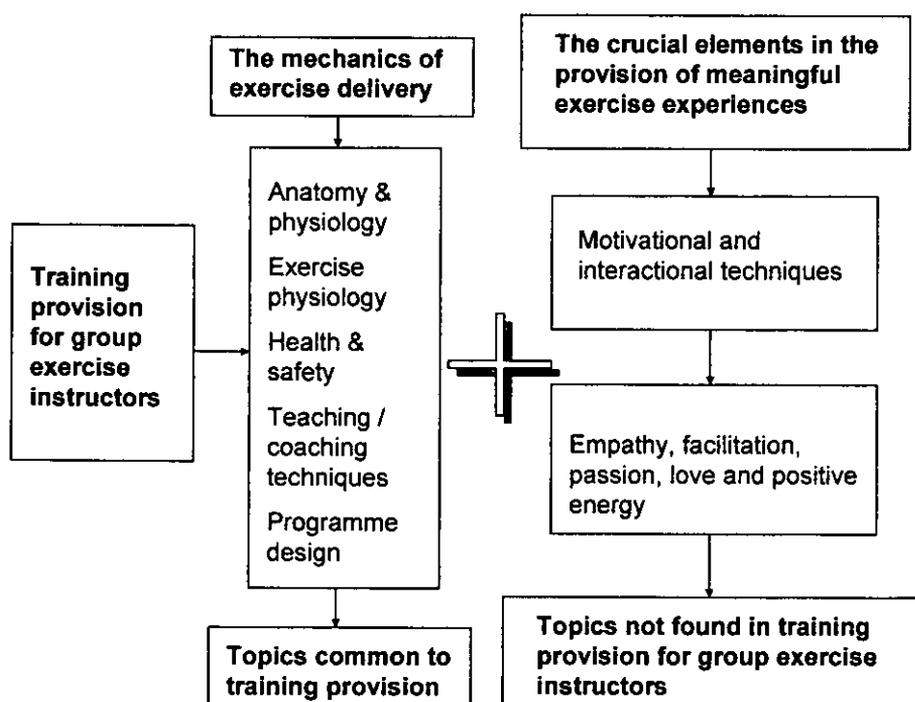


Figure Three. The nature and meaning of exercise delivery as perceived by active women moving into their middle years.

The study involved women who regularly exercise and are group exercise instructors. They described both their own experiences of exercise, and their experiences of providing exercise for other people. Both aspects of exercise were important to them. In accordance with the work of Moustakas (1990) and Schon (1991), active women who were group exercise instructors readily reflected on both. They distinguished clearly between exercising as a participant and delivering exercise sessions for others. Instructors took personal benefit from their own participation in exercise and indicated the same widespread impacts and influences on all areas of their lives as noted by other participants in exercise.

Active women who were instructors indicated an adherence to the principles of their education programme, as exemplified in the left hand side of Figure Three. They were aware of the issues involved in providing safe, effective and appropriate exercise options in accordance with traditional training provision (YMCA, 2002; RSA, 2002; Fitness Professionals, 2002; Fitness and Aerobic Certifications for Instructors, 2002; FutureFit, 2002; Fitness Industry Education, 2002; Schwinn Fitness Academy, 2002; National Studio Cycling Centre, 2002; Peloton Fitness, 2002). They indicated these elements to be the underpinning considerations in their planning, preparation and delivery of exercise. However, where these elements were mentioned, it was generally briefly. They were considered as integral to a session, and as automatic, basic, natural and fundamental considerations for instructors in preparing classes. Most of their reflective attention and focus was directed at the interactional and motivational elements of their delivery and facilitation and their sharing of their own love and passion for their activity. These crucial elements in the delivery of meaningful exercise experiences are indicated on the right hand side of Figure Three. These elements are not commonly found within the training provision for group exercise instructors.

Active women who were instructors indicated a high degree of intrinsic motivation for their work. Their enjoyment arose from facilitating the exercise experience for other people. They enjoyed sharing with others their passion for exercise and their activity. They exemplified the work of Myss (1997), Tolle

(1999), Levin (2000), Zohar and Marshall (2000), Csikszentmihalyi (2002) and Henes (2005) who recognised the principle that one's positive energy can have nurturing and healing effects on other people. Furthermore, instructors indicated taking personal enjoyment from helping other people to achieve their own goals, from facilitating growth in people, and from recognising personal development in others as it occurred over time. The instructors reflected at length on facilitating this process in others. They not only indicated a strong desire to facilitate development in terms of physical capability, but also generally in people's life situations. They displayed congruence and comfort with the principle of personal and evolutionary development.

The study highlighted aspects of exercise delivery that were not traditionally covered in training provision. Although instructors involved in the research focused attention on these issues, each respondent gave unique emphasis to different aspects of exercise delivery. No one individual respondent reflected on all aspects. The study concluded that training provision developed to include recognition of the value of these capabilities and that instilled and nurtured them, had the potential to greatly enhance the effectiveness of all exercise instructors. The instructors recognised a need to be empathic, compassionate, understanding, caring and respectful when facilitating exercise, and especially with people new to their sessions who might be apprehensive. This was noted as being important in enabling people to feel safe and supported in exercise sessions. This exemplified the work of Rogers (1951, 1983), Moustakas (1990) and Rowan (2001) who recognised the importance of congruency, unconditional positive regard and empathy in facilitating constructive interactions with others. Also, these interactional qualities were significant in encouraging people to retain the exercise habit, and in enabling them to access the benefits of regular exercise. Empathy and interaction with class participants involved a non-judgmental approach. This enabled instructors to provide an emotionally safe, supportive and inclusive environment for all participants. It enabled them to welcome and guide new-comers, who often attended with little or no previous experience of exercise, and for whom the activity was unfamiliar. Empathy, compassion and understanding involved an intuitive knowing about the people in the classes. Instructors placed themselves in the

position of their class members, in order to appreciate their participants' personal perspectives in the class, and on the class in relation to their individual life situations. They did this by 'feeling' the people in their classes in order to gain an understanding of them.

This study concluded that active women who were instructors made conscious attempts to influence the meaning that participants attributed to their sessions. They aimed to facilitate an experience that replicated their own personal awareness of participation in exercise. They acknowledged and accepted that whilst working as an instructor and providing exercise sessions for others, they were personally not able to attain the same heightened level of experience as when they were taking part in exercise themselves. Their focus of attention as instructors was on igniting that heightened level of experience for their class participants. Significantly for the industry, this opportunity to facilitate the exercise experience and share with others the positive benefits of exercise was a major motivation to be an instructor. The facilitation involved multi-faceted thought processes and an intuitive knowing in the instructors. These capabilities enabled them to enhance their awareness of themselves in the class situation, to facilitate movement, focus on the music and the environment, and to be aware of the individual needs of the people in the class. Instructors intuitively sensed that it was important to facilitate a positive experience for those attending their sessions. Beyond a duty to keep participants physically safe, they considered their personal goals for a session to include creating an emotionally enjoyable, safe, supportive and inclusive environment, motivating and encouraging participants, and inspiring and enthusing them. Training provision within the industry does not currently include the processes involved in multi-faceted thinking, perceptual positioning, or the development and use of intuitive capabilities. This study highlighted factors that are inherent to the provision of a positive experience for class participants and which are omitted from the training provision for exercise instructors.

Instructors prepared themselves for a class, in order to be in an appropriate frame of mind and emotional state. This was referred to as preparation to 'perform', or as involving a ritualistic approach to taking on the identity of an

instructor, coach, leader or teacher. This process enabled instructors to engender a positive atmosphere in the class. They recognised that environmental factors, such as problems with equipment in a class for example, occasionally interfered with their personal preparation or with delivery. It was their perception that such distractions were potentially disruptive and had the capacity to detract from the quality of the session. Instructors alluded to an intuitive recognition that the disruptive effects and reduction in quality were associated with emotional and energetic changes within themselves and within the exercise environment. They recognised that physiologically they were able to facilitate the same performance in such circumstances. They felt, however, that emotionally and experientially the effects were of a reduced quality. This study concluded that an environment devoid of distractions and disruptions had the potential to provide the greatest benefits. The benefits beyond the physical were those that could be adversely affected by disruptive influences in a class situation. Experienced instructors developed coping mechanisms to overcome such 'professional hazards'. Such 'tricks of the trade' could usefully be passed on to other less experienced instructors, to reduce the occurrence of disruptions and the subsequent non-occurrence of the positive influences of exercise participation.

Instructors recognised, from personal experience, that exercise had the potential to engender a sense of well-being in the holistic sense. They acknowledged that people attended sessions for a variety of reasons and with a range of personal circumstances. They recognised that exercise could be an enjoyable experience and could provide the 'time out', the 'escape' and the 'freedom' from everyday routines and pressures. They indicated a desire to create for participants the kind of experience that they knew themselves in exercise, and that they recognised as being a contributing factor in its enduring appeal.

Instructors indicated a vague, yet commonly reported intuitive knowing that exercise was beneficial to their participants and that the benefits extended beyond the physiological and the mental. In accordance with the work of Shaw (1985) and Iso-Ahola (1989), there was an expectation of enjoyment in the exercise activity. Furthermore, there was an expectation that enjoyment would

provide positive effects, exemplifying the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Myss (1997) and Fredrickson (1998). The instructors indicated often only having scant knowledge of the personal circumstances of many of their regular attendees. Yet they felt that these people took a range of benefits into their life scenarios. Instructors did not consider it necessary to know any more about the individuals in their classes. They were content to appreciate that their role was to provide the experience. Beyond this, they trusted that participants applied the benefit themselves. It was their belief that, over time, people were benefiting, and they recognised changes in regular attendees. Sometimes this was as a result of a personal conversation with individuals at the class. On other occasions, their recognition was based more on a tacit knowing and unspoken indications, such as perceived changes in demeanour, posture and attitude. They overwhelmingly considered it important that participants in their session appreciated benefit from attending.

The findings from this study indicated that active women who were exercise instructors considered their own participation in exercise to be of value and to be important to them. They also had a passion for their work as instructors and considered the provision of the exercise experience to be of value to those who attended their sessions. This study concluded that the environment and style of delivery had the potential to affect the benefits taken, and ultimately, retention to the exercise habit.

5.4 Implications of the study

This study highlighted limitations in the traditional mechanistic, reductionist, fragmentary and rationalistic theoretical approaches to research and called for an acknowledgement of holism, interconnectivity, uniqueness and growth as integral aspects of human experience. It also added to the limited research into positive aspects of the human condition. The study recognised exercise as an aspect of human experience into which each individual participant read unique meaning. The benefits of regular participation in exercise derived from an organic integration of each experience in a positive sense. This promoted individual and collective well-being that extended beyond the traditional

concept of wellness. Regular participation in exercise provided physical, mental, emotional and spiritual benefit, developed self-mastery and evolutionary self-knowledge, enhanced creative capabilities and provided a sense of purposeful living for women. Exercise was found to be an example of personal experience that was part of the individual and collective constantly evolving process of human existence. It thus extended theoretical understanding in the fields of health, womanhood and exercise science.

Also, the study had implications for policy and practice in the fitness industry. It indicated that greater emphasis can profitably be given to the creation of the exercise experience, both by service and training providers. Fitness industry facility management teams have the opportunity to acknowledge, value and nurture the passion and growth that exists within their facilities, and that contribute to the positive impacts of exercise. Training providers have the opportunity to be drawn into a realm of meaning and connection that lies beyond current rational and limited thinking, and to recognise the factors in exercise delivery that have therapeutic and growth enhancing potential.

The study offered opportunity to further recognise holism and interconnectivity in other human experience. Also, it implied an opportunity to recognise and acknowledge deep significance and unique personal meaning in other everyday experiences. This research project indicated that this process exists, and demonstrated how ordinary daily living was contributing to an individual and collective evolutionary process. It highlighted a need within western society for a more focused and open approach generally to recognising personal and collective significance in everyday experiences.

This study utilised a qualitative methodology to develop a holistic perspective. It expanded traditional theoretical assumptions in its related research fields by highlighting the gap between traditional fragmentary methodologies and the true holism and interconnectivity of human experience. By further implication, the study indicated a need to consider interconnectivity in and between other research disciplines, if greater understanding and true knowledge are to be acquired.

This study was carried out with the primary purpose of exploring the exercise experience. Exercise instructors, as facilitators of that experience, provided an additional dimension. There was the opportunity for further specific study, utilising a similar methodology, to investigate further the role of the instructor in providing an optimal experience. It was the researcher's view that additional research could be carried out with a change of emphasis, to focus greater attention on the experience and process of exercise delivery. This would give further indication of the specific factors involved in the facilitation of a positive experience.

This study established that involvement in experience perceived to be enjoyable had wide ranging benefits. The researcher chose to explore the experience of participation in exercise. It was her intuitive opinion that exercise did not stand alone in offering such possibilities. There was a need for further research, utilising a similar methodology, to honour and appreciate the benefits of involvement in other 'ordinary' activities, to explore their potential to focus the energies of mind and body and to awaken the self to the deeper dimensions of human experience.

There remained a need for further research to explore the benefits of exercise as perceived by other sectors of the population. The fitness industry traditionally recognised people aged over 50 years of age, disabled people, people from ethnic minority communities and young people as its target population groups, in addition to women. Additionally, the requirement remained for qualitative research into the experiences of men in an exercise context.

This study made no differentiation between intensities of exercise in their influence on perceived resultant enjoyment or benefit. Intensity of exercise needed to be explored as a variable factor in a relationship with enjoyment and positive benefit. Involvement in competitive, extreme and team sports offered alternative variations on the theme of this study. A further opportunity existed to research the nature, meaning and accumulative impacts (positive and negative) of involvement in changes to habitual behaviour. For example, when

regular participation in exercise is not possible due to injury or changes in life circumstances.

The methodology afforded opportunity to investigate motivation to regularly participate in a wide range of activities and experiences. It offered potential to develop understanding, from the perspective of the participant, of the nature, meaning and accumulative impacts of repeated involvement in these experiences. This provided scope to influence theory, policy and practice in a wide range of academic and profession fields.

The researcher acknowledged limitations in the study. The size of the subject group provided data illustrating a wide range of experiences, thoughts and opinions on the nature and meaning of exercise. It also provided data exemplifying a variety of contextual applications for exercise's benefits. Further study with fewer subjects may provide the opportunity to understand human experience to a depth greater than was here achieved, and to collect data of an even richer nature. Such a study may extend the present research.

Furthermore, this study was undertaken from the researcher's personal perspective and is therefore limited to such in its conclusions. However, any study requires interpretation by a researcher. It may never be possible to fully understand the experiences of another, nor to state with authority that the full depth of personal experience has been conclusively investigated. Any such study remains a distorted, incomplete and partial representation of truth. Also, it is recognised by the researcher that an attempt at holism is only ever a partial one, as true holism requires full and complete integration of every factor. The process of gaining understanding about aspects of human experience and of attaching meaning to it can only ever be temporary and incomplete, rather than conclusive and absolute. Nevertheless, the findings of the study offered an insight into some of the wonders of human experience, and indicated something of the depths to which it can be appreciated on a daily basis.

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Appendices

Appendix One

Appendix 1a - invitation to interview

Appendix 1b – invitation to focus group

Appendix 1c – invitation to focus group or interview

Appendix Two

Appendix 2a – interview/focus group questions

Appendix 2b – interview/focus group questions in mindmap format

Appendix Three

Appendix 3a – example of interview transcript

Appendix 3b – example of focus group transcript

Appendix Four

Appendix 4 - example of mindmap denoting analysis of qualitative data

Appendix Five

Appendix 5 – additional exemplary portraits

Appendix One Interview and focus group invitations

Appendix One contains examples of the letters issued to participants, inviting them to take part in interviews or focus groups

Appendix 1a – letter to respondents indicating willingness to take part in an interview

Appendix 1b – letter to respondents indicating willingness to take part in a focus group

Appendix 1c – letter to respondents indicating a willingness to take part in either a focus group or an interview

Appendix 1a – letter to respondents indicating willingness to take part in an interview

Dear _____,

First of all, thank you for responding to the research questionnaire that was sent out to you recently. The information you provided has been very useful and has enabled me to make sound progress with my research into the benefits of exercise, particularly for women.

On the reply you indicated that you would also be happy to take part in an individual interview.

I will contact you shortly to arrange this.

Thank you for taking the time to take part in this research.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Walton

Appendix 1b – letter to respondents indicating a willingness to take part in a focus group.

Dear _____,

First of all, thank you for responding to the research questionnaire that was sent out to you recently. The information you provided has been very useful and has enabled me to make sound progress with my research into the benefits of exercise, particularly for women.

On the reply you indicated that you would also be happy to take part in an informal group meeting.

Group meetings have now been arranged. These are to take place during the first week of March. You are invited to attend one of the meetings, at your own convenience. It is anticipated that the meetings may last between one and two hours. In order to arrange adequate seating and refreshment facilities I would be grateful if you could please indicate on the slip below which meeting you would prefer to attend.

The details are as follows :

Focus Group 1. Friday 1 March 6.30pm Treetops Bar, Fulwood Leisure Centre.

Focus Group 2. Monday 4 March 6.30pm Treetops Bar, Fulwood Leisure Centre.

Focus Group 3. Tuesday 5 March 6.30pm, West View Leisure Centre.

Focus Group 4. Friday 8 March 6.30pm West View Leisure Centre.

When you have completed the slip please return it in the pre-paid envelope provided.

Thank you for taking the time to take part in this research.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Walton

Name _____

I would like to attend the following focus group. (Please tick to indicate the group):

Focus Group 1.

Friday 1 March 6.30pm Treetops Bar, Fulwood Leisure Centre. _____

Focus Group 2.

Monday 4 March 6.30pm Treetops Bar, Fulwood Leisure Centre. _____

Focus Group 3.

Tuesday 5 March 6.30pm, West View Leisure Centre. _____

Focus Group 4.

Friday 8 March 6.30pm West View Leisure Centre. _____

VirginActive details

Name _____

I would like to attend the following focus group. (Please tick to indicate the group):

Focus Group 1. Monday 17 March 7pm Crunch coffee bar, Virgin Active.

Focus Group 2. Saturday 22 March 9.30am Crunch coffee bar, Virgin Active.

Appendix 1c – letter to respondents indicating a willingness to take part in a focus group or an interview

Dear _____,

First of all, thank you for responding to the research questionnaire that was sent out to you recently. The information you provided has been very useful and has enabled me to make sound progress with my research into the benefits of exercise, particularly for women.

On the reply you indicated that you would also be happy to take part in either an informal group meeting or an individual interview.

Group meetings have now been arranged. These are to take place during the first week of March. You are invited to attend one of the meetings, at your own convenience. It is anticipated that the meetings may last between one and two hours. In order to arrange adequate seating and refreshment facilities I would be grateful if you could please indicate on the slip below which meeting you would prefer to attend.

The details are as follows :

Focus Group 1. Friday 1 March 6.30pm Treetops Bar, Fulwood Leisure Centre.

Focus Group 2. Monday 4 March 6.30pm Treetops Bar, Fulwood Leisure Centre.

Focus Group 3. Tuesday 5 March 6.30pm, West View Leisure Centre.

Focus Group 4. Friday 8 March 6.30pm West View Leisure Centre.

If you would prefer to take part in an individual interview rather than a group session, please indicate this on the form below and I will contact you shortly to arrange this. When you have completed the slip please return it in the pre-paid envelope provided.

Thank you for taking the time to take part in this research.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Walton

Name _____

I would like to attend the following focus group. (Please tick to indicate the group) :

Focus Group 1.

Friday 1 March 6.30pm Treetops Bar, Fulwood Leisure Centre. _____

Focus Group 2.

Monday 4 March 6.30pm Treetops Bar, Fulwood Leisure Centre. _____

Focus Group 3.

Tuesday 5 March 6.30pm, West View Leisure Centre. _____

Focus Group 4.

Friday 8 March 6.30pm West View Leisure Centre. _____

I would prefer to take part in an individual interview _____

VirginActive details

Name _____

I would like to attend the following focus group. (Please tick to indicate the group) :

Focus Group 1. Monday 17 March 7pm Crunch coffee bar, Virgin Active.

Focus Group 2. Saturday 22 March 9.30am Crunch coffee bar, Virgin Active.

Appendix Two Neuro-Logical Levels questions

Appendix Two shows the question format used for the interviews and focus groups

Appendix 2a – Neuro-Logical Levels questions for the interviews and focus groups in written format

Appendix 2b – Neuro-logical Levels questions for the interviews and focus groups in mindmap format

Questions adapted from the Neuro-Logical Levels Process (Dilts, 1990; Dilts, Hallbom and Smith, 1990)

**Appendix 2a – Neuro-Logical Levels questions for the interviews and focus groups
in written format**

Environment

What for you is the most positive form of exercise?

Behaviour

What are you doing there?

What else are you doing?

Capability

What skills and capabilities do you have that enable you to do this?

Belief

What do you believe about yourself when you are doing this?

Identity

Who are you when you are doing this?

Meaning / Spirituality

What does doing this mean for you?

What does it mean for you in the rest of your life?

Identity

With this in mind, who are you in the rest of your life?

Belief

What do you believe about yourself in the rest of your life?

Capability

What other capabilities do you bring to the rest of your life?

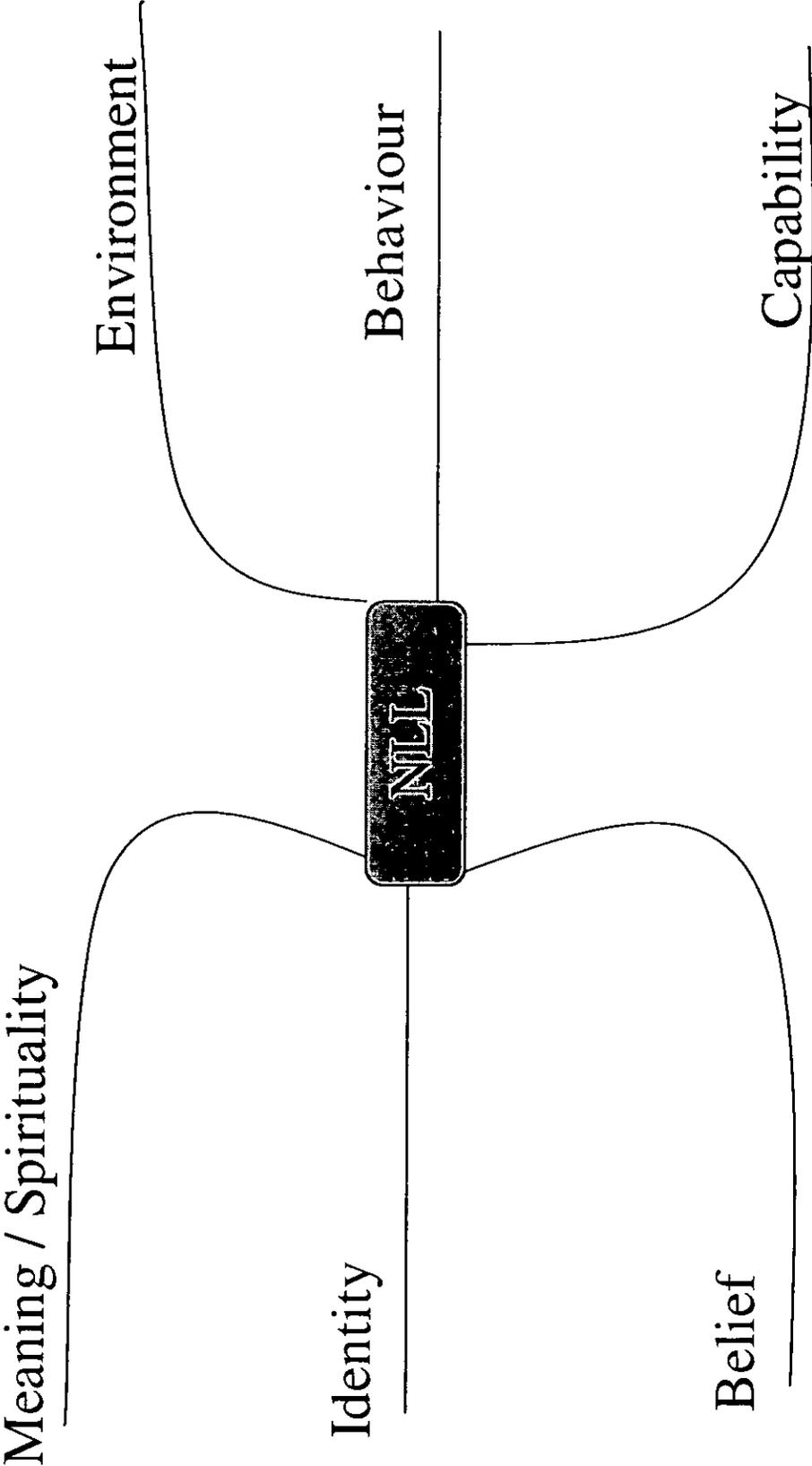
Behaviour

What are you doing in the rest of your life?

Environment

Where are you doing this?

Appendix 2b – Neuro-Logical Levels questions for the interviews and focus groups in mindmap format



Appendix Three Examples of interview and focus group transcripts

Appendix 3a Example of interview transcript

Cynthia

Environment

What for you is the most positive form of exercise?

I like fell walking and swimming. Well swimming, I just enjoy the challenge of doing it. The freedom of the swim. That's the thing with fell walking as well. The quiet. I'm usually with my husband, or else I'd get lost.

I like team stuff too. I play badminton once a week. That's with three work colleagues. I like the repartee and the fun. That's totally different. It's a bit of fun. We do play to win, but it's fun.

I've done a couple of long distance walks. They are challenges. I like challenges. The badminton is a bit of fun.

Behaviour

What are you doing there?

What else are you doing?

I'm thinking. I suppose, turning over things you'd like to do. Things you are attracted to. Sorting things out as well. When I'm fell walking we don't do a lot of chit chat. We do talk, but it's quite a solitary thing for a long time. Because I work in an office, you're not always on your own. And when I come home, you're not always on your own. So it's solitary.

Capabilities.

What strengths, capabilities do you have that enable you to do this?

With swimming, I don't know. I suppose I'm competitive. I tend to push myself when I'm swimming. I'll go and I tend to sometimes do 30 minutes fast and see how many lengths I can do. Sometimes on a Sunday I'll go and I'll perhaps do 100 lengths. Nice and slowly.... Nice and steady. But usually with an aim in mind. Either build up stamina or build up speed. I'm thinking of doing a triathlon, but I'm not so sure. That would be a challenge. For the last few years, certainly for the last two years, I've been setting myself quite heavy challenges, I think. In all areas of my life.

Beliefs

What do you believe about yourself when you are doing this?

I believe that I am capable. Positive thoughts. My sister would like to go swimming, but she's frightened of going into a pool. She thinks other people will look at her. Now my attitude is, I don't care. I don't care what other people think. If I want to do something I'll go and do it. So it's positive to me. I've had to acquire that. I still am, but I can be extremely shy and hold back. But then I decide, no I'm going to do that. I don't care, you know.

Identity

Who are you when you are doing this?

I'm me. Yes. Well, I suppose when you are at home you are a wife and mother. When you are at work. I am the senior member in the office. I am beholding to other people, I suppose. And depending on All the world's a stage, so every time you do anything you are a different person, if you will. So when you are on your own and doing something you just like doing you are just you. And you are not just somebody's wife, You are not just somebody's mother.

Meaning

What does this mean to you?

What does it mean for you in the rest of your life?

Exercise is important to me to keep fit, for the challenge, physical and mental. I think it gives me a positive outlook.

Identity

With this in mind, who are you in the rest of your life?

It doesn't particularly help me with my job because I sit down. I am I don't get ill very often. I am rarely off work. I don't get colds. The first cold I ever got was when I was pregnant. So I think I'm pretty healthy. Apart from a bit of arthritis in my knees and as I'm getting older I'm getting a few niggles.

It takes up a bit of my time. So it's time consuming. But when the boys were small, ... I was 28 and 29 when I had my children I started going out on my bike. As soon as I'd had my second one I started going out on my bike to get

fit. I'd say 'right' to my husband 'right, here you are, you feed them, I'm going out.' Just to get myself back in shape again. And then I started jogging. They used to be on bikes and I'd jog with them to the leisure centre and then I'd jog back again. In my own personal life it just keeps me fit.

Beliefs

What do you believe about yourself in the rest of your life?

I believe that I could possibly cope with ... I do things and I think that wasn't too bad. So I can cope with things probably a lot more than I think I can. I think, because of this confidence thing it gives you, I think go on I'll give it a go. It gives you a feeling of being confident.

Capabilities

What other capabilities do you bring to the rest of your life?

Determination. It perhaps makes me pushy, I don't know. I have to say – sometimes you hear 'girly girls' at work. You know, they say 'Oh I want to do ...' And I think 'Well, go out and do it then. I'm 50, I can do it, you do it.'

Behaviour

What are you doing in the rest of your life?

I do long distance walks and cycle rides. My son and I are doing John O'Groats to Land's End in bits. This is what we did last year and the week before last, and in the summer. It gives you something to think about. Something to aim towards. I just decided to do the Cumbrian Way. Me and my son, for something to do and I thoroughly enjoyed it. And then we did the West Highland Way last year. I was not confident about doing the Cumbrian Way when I started to do it. It's 75 miles. I thought, I was shattered on the first day. I only booked the first night's accommodation. Just in case! I was absolutely shattered on the first day. I laid in my bunk and I thought somebody had taken a Black and Decker to my knees and my back was killing me. In the morning I felt fantastic. I felt, this is great. So I certainly wasn't confident that I could do it. But when I finished it I felt great. I felt really I don't give up. I don't give up. But having said that I can be pragmatic. If my knees had been really sore I would have had to sort of test it out. I wouldn't have just gone blindly on. But once I

set my sights on something I tend to If at all possible ... I do it. I think it evolved, but I've always been sporty.

Environment

Where are you doing this?

I've got home and work. I do the long distance walks and cycling. I play badminton once a week and I swim 3 times a week. Most weekends I do something. We go out for a walk. I go on North End once every two weeks. I'm a season ticket holder. And we like going to the cinema.

Appendix 3b – example of focus group transcript

Environment

What for you is the most positive form of exercise?

Pam

For me it's definitely running. I really love it.

Sue

Well I like going to the gym. It works really well for me.

Val

Oh no. My favourite is swimming.

Karen

Yes, it's swimming for me too.

Behaviour

What are you doing there?

What else are you doing?

Karen

You are just keeping going, aren't you. Focusing on keeping going

Pam.

It's the rhythm, isn't it. You just keep going. Yes.

Capabilities

What strengths, capabilities do you have that enable you to do this?

Sue

Well, I had to get the hang of all the machines. That was a bit of a challenge for me.

But now I'm into it ...

Pam

You just decide. Well I do. I just decide, right, I'm going to do this. And you do it.

Val

Yes, swimming is like that for me. I just get on with it.

Beliefs

What do you believe about yourself when you are doing this?

Pam

I'm going to do it. There's no other idea in my head. I know I'll do it.

Val

I decide how many lengths I'm going to do and then I do it. I never think I'll not finish them. It's quite simple, really, I think.

Identity

Who are you when you are doing this?

Karen

It's a chance to do something for yourself, isn't it. I mean, we don't ever do that normally, do we. It's all go, all the time.

Val

Well, I only have one child, but he's enough. I mean, it's just so good to do something for me.

Pam

Oh I know. I can just be me when I'm running. It makes such a difference, doesn't it.

Sue

Well with three kids, I find it really hard to do anything for me. But I really appreciate it when I do. Just that bit of time out from all the normal hassles ...

Meaning

What does this mean for you?

What does it mean for you in the rest of your life?

Pam

It means a lot really.

Sue

I get on better with everybody afterwards. I'm better with the kids. My husband even says sometimes 'Oh go on, go to the gym, will you'.

Val

I know what you mean. You are better. It makes a difference to how you get on with people.

Karen

I'm better at work too. I get on better with people and don't get worked up the same. You feel more like being there and being with people don't you.

Identity

With this in mind, who are you in the rest of your life?

Karen

A much better person, definitely. Much nicer!

Val

Oh I know! I wouldn't like to be without it now.

Karen

I get on so much better with people

Sue

My husband says I'm better.

Pam

It makes a big difference. Everything's better, really.

Beliefs

What do you believe about yourself in the rest of your life?

Sue

I believe I can get on with everything. That I can do it all. Just all the normal stuff really.

Karen

Yes, you just want to be able to enjoy life, don't you really. I think it helps you do that. You get on with everyone better and you just do things.

It's not such a problem, is it.

Pam

Yes, you definitely have more energy to get on with everything.

Capabilities

What other capabilities do you bring to the rest of your life?

Val

I think it helps you cope. I only have one little boy. But it helps me cope with him.

Karen

It definitely makes everything better. You do enjoy things more. You are on the go such a lot. You have to be able to keep going. It helps that, doesn't it.

Sue

It helps me relax too. I think I can relax better when I've been.

Behaviour

What are you doing in the rest of your life?

Pam

Well it's everything really isn't it. You know, everything really. Home and work and all that.

Val.

It's my little boy really for me. He keeps me on the go. I have to be able to cope with him.

Karen

It's getting a balance, I think. With working as well, I mean. You don't want to be working all day and then feeling like you have to work outside as well. You want to be able to enjoy it, really. I think it helps you enjoy it more.

Environment

Where are you doing this?

Sue

Everywhere, really. With working and having three kids as well. I make sure I do something for me.

Pam

Yes, you have to get a balance, don't you. It's too easy to just keep working. It is, it's everything. You can't really say it benefits one thing. It's everything.

Karen

I wonder sometimes how I do it. But you just do. And swimming helps me with that. I know it does.

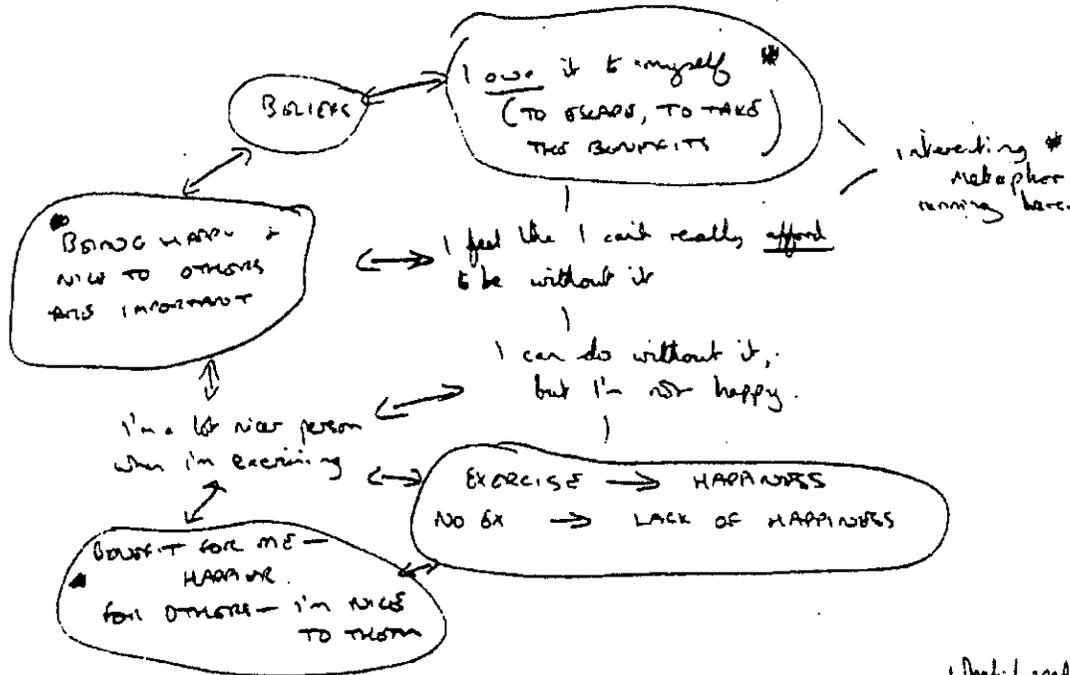
Pam

Yes, I know what you mean.

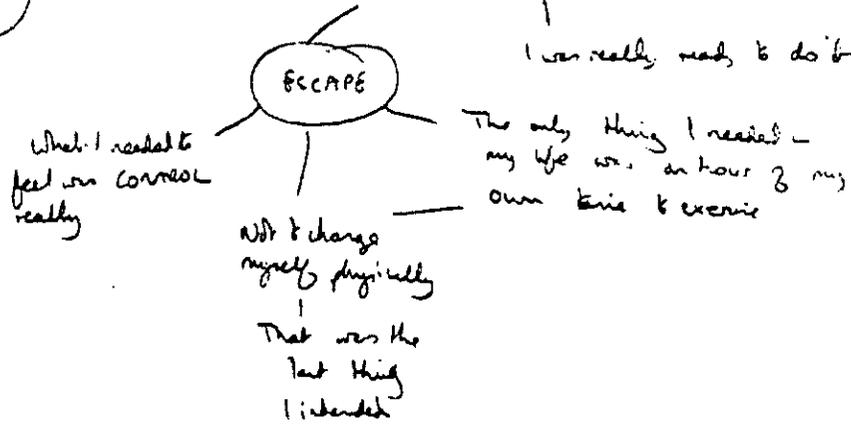


MICHELLE ARNOLD VI 4

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I sacrificed my life to this really little person.
I was really mad to do it



Michael Aronow VI4

I feel like I've achieved - achieved spaces of being on my own
not just physical. **Very K**

I feel clear in my head
I'm not stressed
I'm strong
I'm competent
I've done something for me really.
I'm very patient
I feel more confident

It makes me feel in tune with my body

Not really that I don't know really

feel empowered
I can challenge the world

It re-energizes you

Searching for benefits
The truth
has reflection

NOT KNOWING CONSCIOUSLY

SUB CONSCIOUS
BYPASS IT

SO: ROOMS

LIFE IS ABOUT
OTHERS
THE IRONIC

You are trying to keep everybody else going or nothing if re-energizing you

It's all taking from you all the time

The exercise is it just a window 3 and

You're re-energizing over you

* SELF IS SURVIVAL

Control?
or who I am
or being myself?

239

I'm really confident
It gives you more confidence
I feel like I've achieved something

ACHIEVEMENT

not just physical
I've achieved that space of being on my own.

I think you need that control = your life

space = control?
= freedom?

Reconnection with
to love that is lost - a 'real' self
IN THE COLDS OF
ADULTHOOD.

and that's taken away from you
everything else - your life really, isn't it

In exercise, I feel like I'm in control?
It's your choice to do it or not to do it
Your choice has lost a true need.

I think that's what I want
what I would like to think I am.
No I think that's what I want
I think that's what I want before I started
to give myself to everybody else. It's a
chance to be that again, I suppose

IDENTITY

Strong competent
not stressed
empowered

patient
confident

MICHELLE ASTON VILK

take me out of my normal everyday
routines & the routine of
expectation that everybody else
has

of Paulie Doherty
they differ

IT MEANS I'M
AN INDIVIDUAL

Having my own ideas
or my own thoughts
+ being able to do with them
without anybody, judging them
+ without anybody, telling me
It's nice to set your own standards.

I'm not having to
do what
everybody else
wishes I should do.

It makes me feel
more in control.

+ keeps my feet on the tracks. (WORKS ARE THE
TRACKS TO MOVE)

I don't have that place
to go on my own

MUSSELTOR

I can to a
certain extent
physically re-energise
in my own class,
but I can't mentally.

with teaching you don't get
the same energising

You can't escape
into your own
space. The can

You're having to give
the people that energy
so I can't do it myself
You're unconscious of
the group all the time.

IN LIFE

I'm somebody who everybody
wants me to be. - I'm really busy.

You're always compromising with you.

That's why I exercise - You really need that
space to go to.

And compromising is fine as long as I
can still do my exercise.

I compromise for others - to help them become more of who they are
- kids, husband, family, work.
Others compromise to let me be me
exercising.

exercise seems to
be more of my
possibilities

INDIVIDUAL
- ME -

it empowers me
Wishing that one
hour, it is selfish to want to
have that one hour

I suppose it kind of
releases me from all the
compromising

SOCIAL ZOO

I don't mind giving up 27 hours a day
if I can have that one hour

I think it, probably is - but I think it's, probably important

selfish to want to
take the opportunity
& connect with the self

Appendix Five Additional exemplary portraits

Jacqui was 43 years of age and married with 2 children. She worked part-time as a nursery nurse, and also described herself as the taxi driver for her children. She started exercising when she found herself spending a lot of time at the local leisure centres whilst the children took part in swimming club activities. Her husband frequently worked away from home, which, she said, meant she had to do 'everything'. She was the secretary of her son's water polo club and, until recently, also taught in a Sunday school.

[Sits forward] I love line dancing. I like everything about it. It gives you a buzz. It is a real challenge to learn the new dances. I meet new people there too. I go to lots of different places. Socially, it is very good. I have always enjoyed dancing since I was younger. And with line dancing, you do not need a partner, you just do it.

[Sits back and pauses, looking down at the floor] I sweat a lot when I am dancing. Your heart rate goes up a lot too. Some of the dances are like an aerobic workout. You do not have time to think of anything else. It blocks out everything else. Your mind is just empty.

[Sits forward] I pick things up quite quickly. I have danced since I was little. So I know I can dance. I know it is something I can do. In the class, it is about hearing the music. I am able to put the steps to the music. You hear the music and I can pick things up. [Pauses] It is the rhythm and the beat in the music that is important.

[Sits back and pauses] Going to the classes has helped me mix well with people. I did not mix well before I went. I used to find it really difficult to talk to people before. I meet lots of new people now in the classes. I find it much easier to mix. You have something in common with these other people.

[Sits forward] When I am dancing I believe that I can do it. I can do it to a fairly good standard as well. I know I can because I have been told by other people. I get people following me now in the classes. People say 'Oh you know this one. You can help us.' I get asked to stand at the front and sometimes I help out in beginners' classes. I have actually taught a couple of groups of children on a play scheme.

[Sits back and pauses] Dancing allows me to be completely me. I am me. Just me. [Sits forward]. I am not somebody's mum, wife. [Sits back and pauses]. It is like an escape as well. It is like an escape. [Pauses]. I think over the years the meaning changes. When I first started, the reason was to get out. I never went out. I had spent years and years and years with the kids. Always being there for them. I got the chance to go to a dance class. I still like to get out. You get hooked on it and you do not want to miss anything. If you miss a class, you miss a new dance.

[Sits back, voice softens]. It is also a way of relaxing. It can be a stress buster as well. It gets rid of stress. You do not realise the benefits until afterwards. If I was not doing it, I would probably be very down. I used to get depressed a lot. It stops that happening. It stops it ever getting too bad. It is a release from other things.

[Sits forward, voice quickens]. Getting back to dancing has helped me believe that, that I am capable of doing things. Actually I never thought I could do some of the things I am doing. [Pauses]. I would never have gone out on my own, without my husband four or five years ago. I would never have dreamt of doing that. I will have a go at things now. My husband went to work in Germany for a while. So I started dancing again while he was away and I have just carried on since. He did not recognise me when he came back.

[Pauses]. It all happened just before my fortieth birthday. This fortieth birthday was looming and I had not got a clue where I was going, what I was doing. I just decided I had to do something. It all just turned around. It all came from that. All in the last few years.

[Sits forward]. It has given me a lot of confidence in everything I do. I am much more confident. I can talk to people far better than I used to be able to. I am still not very good at saying no. I do a lot of voluntary things. [Sits back and pauses]. I am more alert. More awake. I get tired, but it is a nice tired and you are more responsive to things. I seem to be able to cope better with doing more things. Even though I do get very tired. I think though, without the exercise I do, I would not cope with it all.

[Sits forward]. I will have a go at things now. I had a go at indoor cycling and body combat. I even went to circuits. [Laughs]. I would never have joined in with a group before. Especially a mixed group with a lot of men. [Laughs]. I

definitely would not have done all these things. I would not have been able to. I go out running on my own too now. [Sits up straight]. That is also a major thing for me. I have just completed my second 10k run. My first mixed run. The first one I did was just for ladies.

[Sits back]. Having children makes it difficult to do things. You cannot get out. You are tied to the house and what the children are doing. [Sits forward]. You have to be determined if you are going to do it. Finding something I really enjoy has made me determined to keep doing it.

Jacqui's decision to exercise had led to significant changes in her lifestyle. She was now facing new challenges that she never thought possible. She had gained confidence in herself and greater independence in her life.

Linder was 37 years old and married with 3 children. She had been exercising for about 15 years and had been an instructor for 13. She was an aerobics instructor and led four classes per week. Also she worked part-time as a business consultant. She enjoyed running, as well as leading her classes. She was an only child and cared for her elderly parents. She was involved with the Parent Teachers Association at her children's school.

[Sits forward]. I really enjoy my teaching and leading a class. It's an enhanced hobby really. The main pleasure I get is sharing my enjoyment of exercise with the rest of the people. I love watching people progress. They come along at first and are very uncoordinated, perhaps nervous, apprehensive, not used to exercise. Their biggest concern is not looking foolish in front of everyone else. My aim is to make sure they enjoy themselves and have a laugh. Once they are enjoying themselves, they do not notice they are working.

[Pauses]. I give them lots of encouragement. I aim to make them laugh. [Laughs]. I instruct them, and I aim to do it in a way that means they do not realise they are being pushed. I want to help them keep going to the end of the class. Even if I am really, really tired, the minute I get in the class I seem to come alive! These people have paid to take themselves away from the home environment. They do not come to see me stressed out. They all come with their personal reason for being there. They want me to help them forget about their problems. If they can sense a change

in themselves then that is going to make them feel better about themselves.

[Sits back and pauses]. I need to stay focussed when I am leading a class. I am doing several things at once. I keep an eye on everyone and make sure everyone is safe. I also need to motivate them. [Pauses]. I hope I am inspiring them. If I see they are looking tired, I over exaggerate the movements. I think I get on well with people. [Pauses]. I believe I can sympathise and empathise with them. I am not some kind of threatening teacher who they are scared of. And I am not a supermodel either! [Laughs]. I think they like to see someone who is not a size 10. I think they like the fact that I am your average 30 odd year old woman whose body looks like I have had 3 children. I do this to help me to keep fit too. I enjoy it and they can see that.

[Sits forward]. I am the instructor and safety in the class is my responsibility. Those issues are always there. They are the backbone of the whole session. [Pauses]. I like to think that I am approachable in the class. I think of myself as an entertainer as well. [Pauses]. I become a larger than life person. Just slightly larger than life! [Laughs]. I have to act when I am leading a class. I even taught while I was in labour. You have to act. I suppose, as a teacher you are a bit of an exhibitionist. You have got to realise that. You get recognised when you are out. You have to watch what you do when you are out!

Exercise is a regular routine for me. Leading my classes and my running. It is like cleaning my teeth. It is just something I do. I think of it as time for myself. I work part-time and I enjoy my job. The rest of the time I am with the children. Exercise is different. [Sits back and pauses]. It is a different form of enjoyment. The times when I am exercising are my times. The time out is my time. [Pauses]. With running, I thoroughly enjoy the escapism. With the classes, I enjoy what I do and I enjoy mixing with other people. I like people. I also like the buzz exercise gives me. I do feel much better when I have exercised. I can carry on with everything else. [Pauses]. Whatever else has been going on, when I finish exercising, I feel lifted and energised. I can carry on then.

[Pauses]. Exercise is part of me. It is so much a part of me that I cannot imagine not doing it. [Sits forward]. I think I would be kicking my heels if I were not doing it. I got totally hooked on aerobics. I fell in love with the whole thing. I became an instructor purely by being encouraged by one of the instructors whose classes I used to attend. But I was really shy and I never thought I would have the confidence to lead a class. I said I

could not teach. The thought of standing up in front of people scared me. My knees were knocking in my first class. It was hell on earth. I just do it now. Exercise has made me more determined. I see things through. Sometimes people start things and give up after a few weeks. [Emphasising each word] I do not give up.

[Sits back] I am happier, more outgoing and more confident certainly. I am not shy now. When I started teaching, I realised you had to be this larger than life person and it becomes just you. You become more confident. If you can teach in front of 120 people, well, I think you can do anything really. [Pauses] Exercise and teaching have helped me at work. [Sits forward]. I train people now at work. I could not have done that. I am not fazed by groups of people. I think exercise makes you more determined. I think it makes you a stronger person.

[Pauses]. I had post-natal depression with my third child. [Sits back]. I had problems with my memory and I had to adapt my classes. I had to make the routines easier. [Sits forward]. It was scary and you think it is not going to come back. But it has. It was hard work getting out of the house even at first. Anything would set me off crying, but not in the class. And I think I had the strength to get through that due to exercise. Then people come to me in a class and say I have had a really bad day. I think, I can appreciate where they are, and if I can make them feel better in a class, I think I have done my job. It is just recognising where they are.

[Sits back and pauses]. I do not think I could fit as much into my life as I do, if I were not exercising. It is not about the time it takes to be active; it is about what you get from being active. I am very busy and people say I do not know how you do it. [Sits forward]. I think any woman works hard. I am not setting myself up as some kind of superwoman. I think because I do exercise, I pack much more in. You are busy and you just never stop and I do not think I could do that without exercise. Mentally it just makes you stay alert. I look at people who do not exercise and they do not seem to have as much energy.

Linder appreciated personal benefit from her own exercising. Also, she aimed to provide other people with the benefits. She recognised that empathy and a connection with the people in her classes was an important part of providing an exercise programme.

Margaret W was the researcher. She was 43 years old, married with two grown up children. She enjoyed running, cycling and swimming. She was a master instructor for a fitness company. She was involved in the development and delivery of education for exercise instructors and the delivery of exercise sessions. Also, she was a corporate, community and personal coach working with a holistic style.

[Pauses, then sits forward] When I think of exercise and the experience of exercising, I think of myself involved in a movement activity. I relate to the repetitive rhythm, the maintenance of an elevated rate of effort, the keeping going. It might be running, cycling or swimming. They are all the same, although they are different. I like having the choice of different activities. Accessibility is important. [Sits back]. Freedom is important. Freedom to choose, and freedom to exercise. With choice, I always have access to something. I can consider the weather and my other commitments and find ways of accessing one or more of my preferred activities on a daily basis. [Pauses, then sits forward]. Exercise is a big part of my life. It's an integral part of my life. I get up in a morning and I train! Then I get on with the rest of my day. It is as simple as that.

[Sits back and pauses]. I think also of my life history that brings me to each particular activity session and which gives each experience its unique qualities. [Pauses]. Each time I train, I am a different person, before, during and after. The route and the time of day, the duration or the number of lengths may be the same, but it is always a different experience. This appreciation enables me to reflect on the roots of some of the underlying, fundamental and integral specialness that I attribute to exercise.

[Pauses, then sits forward]. I think it was exercise, a new found joy in movement, breathing deeply, raising my heart rate and stretching my body to new limits, that allowed me to come alive, for the first time, in my late teen years. I began running after the death of my father at the beginning of my 'A' level years. It was the onset of a slow awakening to a brighter way of living, in which I began to enjoy activity and movement, and the freedom and 'space' that it gave me. I felt alive, probably for the first time, and whole. [Sits back]. Everything just flowed when I ran.

[Pauses]. Once I had found a way of expressing myself through movement in a way that was neither dictated by the whims of a physical education teacher, nor restricted by the rules of a single sport, I made rapid progress in developing my fitness

capabilities. I seemed to just 'know' what to do. [Pauses]. I followed my instincts about what felt good and I soon found I could hold my own amongst other more experienced male or female exercisers. [Sits forward]. I can remember being particularly proud at being invited to go along with a group of (male) friends on trips to the Lake District to take part in lengthy 'route marches' across the fells! I had 'arrived' if they considered me 'good enough' to join them and not a hindrance to their own progress! [Laughs, then pauses]. I had unlocked a level of energy I had never known before, and it spilled over into the rest of my life as I continued my studies, expanded my horizons and involved myself in a range of activities, achievements and commitments.

[Sits back]. Running, walking and cycling along the roads and over the moors around my hometown, interspersed with swimming, ensured activity remained an integral part of my daily life. That was, until a back injury in my mid twenties stopped me in my tracks. It was twelve months before excruciating pain, subsequent paralysis and the accompanying inactivity were finally relieved by an operation that got me back on my feet. My aims and goals changed dramatically. They had to. No longer was I challenging myself to shorten the times on my regular routes. First of all I had to learn to walk again. [Pauses]. My legs no longer felt like they belonged to me. [Pauses]. The wholeness and the flow had left me. I had, literally, lost touch with parts of myself and felt I had lost something of life itself.

[Pauses, then sits forward]. The local leisure centre had treadmills facing full-length mirrors on the wall. I could walk, steady myself with the handrails, increase the pace gradually and reconnect messages from my brain with the muscles in my right leg by being able to watch what I was doing and 'think' my leg into coming forwards cleanly, and in a controlled manner, as opposed to taking a wide and ungainly sweep and 'plonking' itself down in front of me with a thud.

[Sits back]. Progress was slow but steady. Patience has never been one of my strong points. Determination and perseverance have. My ability to walk improved with time, but I now perceived running as an activity with lots of impact on the joints, and as 'scary'. The thought of cycling, being hunched over a bike, in a position that strained the back, also made me nervous. I had lost confidence as well as fitness. [Pauses].

[Sits forward]. I started with swimming. I had developed a 'screw kick' in my weak leg! Nevertheless, I could move, begin

breathing deeply again, raise my heart rate, and regain a capability to [emphasising the words] 'keep going'. At first it was awkward, I felt uncoordinated, and the movement was hard on my body. [Sits back and pauses]. I knew what I had felt before, and I wanted to experience it again. [Pauses]. Slowly I found again a rhythm, gradually built up the distance, and reconnected with a sensation of flowing with activity. Over time, I got to a point where I was regularly doing 100 lengths. Energy, confidence and life began to return.

[Sits forward]. Despite the passing years, two children, several jobs, many experiences and encounters, I still exercise and have done so throughout. I still run, ride a bike and swim. I now also have an indoor bike. I am also a master instructor of indoor cycling. I am involved in developing and delivering education to instructors, as well as presenting the activity at events and shows in a wide range of locations. My background in teaching and the leisure industry, my involvement in exercise, and my fascination with people and my love of languages have all come together! I now travel nationally and internationally to do what I do, and to awaken other people to the beautiful art of moving.

I do not need to ask myself 'shall I train or exercise or not?' It is not a question that needs to be asked. I might ask what shall I do? [Pauses]. Generally the answer is readily apparent and often decides itself the evening before a morning session. Last thing at night and first thing in the morning, I check the weather outside. It helps me decide how I might train.

[Sits back]. For me, it is simply about doing it. Being involved in activity. [Pauses]. I have no need or great desire to do 'it' to any particular externally created standard or level of achievement. I do it myself, not to compete against others. If I am exercising with others it is to take part. I share rather than conquer. [Pauses]. Mostly, I prefer to exercise alone and will be very happily occupied with a long run or cycle ride very early in a morning, during which I see no one or very few people. I do not need other people in order to exercise. I simply need the opportunity and that I create on a daily basis.

[Sitting back, pauses and speaks slowly]. The process of exercising, for me, is about deepening the breathing, raising the heart rate and getting comfortable with the activity. [Pauses]. It is about finding a steady, consistent, stable place and a rhythm. [Pauses]. After that it is simply about keeping going. Just keeping going. It is about arriving at that point and keeping going. [Pauses]. Even though my body is working hard, I am relaxed and my breathing is deep. I am working hard, but it is

also easy. The energy is there and it feels easy. It seems like there is no extra effort required. It is consistent, steady, rhythmical and repetitive. It just flows.

[Sitting back, pauses]. With running it is a flow with the terrain, a steady repetitive leg and arm action. With swimming, it is flowing with the water and the other people in the pool. Easy repetitive motions, turn and do it again, up and down. With cycling it is the repetitive pedal action. It is rhythm, keeping going, steady, all the time. With indoor cycling I connect the rhythm with music. I just ride the music.

[Pauses]. I do not need to search to find the consistent, steady, rhythmical and repetitive place. I just let it happen. I am just in it, just doing it. [Pauses]. I let go of anything else, I let it happen and I just keep going. [Pauses]. It is a very simple and uncomplicated process and I believe in it completely. I believe I can do it, it will happen, and that it is a good and a positive place for me to be. I believe it is a very positive thing for me to be doing. I believe that it's good for me physically, and that it is good for me in lots of other ways. I believe I will feel better for having done it.

Exercise allows me to connect with a fundamental and internal aspect of myself. It is an aspect of myself that holds everything that has gone before, and more besides. It holds the future, and also the reason for all that, and the meaning of it all. [Pauses]. My spirit is bigger than I will ever be in a lifetime. I do not need to remember or know any of it. I simply need to let it happen, and know that it is happening! Movement, stillness, action, peace. Everything comes together. I am doing all of it, and yet I am doing nothing. I simply let it happen.

[Pauses]. Exercise means sorting lots of things, settling lots of things. [Pauses]. Lots of things are thrown up in the air, and they come back down during exercise, and they will be much more sorted, organised, settled. There is a lightness with all of that. [Pauses]. When I come out of exercise I can move on with a number of things. [Pauses]. It allows me to think without thinking, which means often I have got answers, I have got direction, I have got ideas that I did not have beforehand. They are usually fairly accessible, either immediately, or at some later stage, as and when they are needed.

[Sits forward]. It gives me energy for the work that I do. It gives me reference for the work that I do, and it gives me a connection to lots of things that I do. The training that I do on my own gives me something that I can offer to the people in my classes, at the

events and in the education I deliver. I can aim to raise awareness and facilitate the same experience for other people, and enable other instructors to do the same. [Pauses]. My delivery style reflects my experiences in my own training.

[Sits back]. I think I have a stronger connection with myself. I think exercise gives me a strong connection with myself. It allows me to recognise and observe changes in myself, and my responses to different circumstances. It allows me to acknowledge in myself how I feel, and to recognise positive states in myself. It also enables me to note times when I could benefit from changing something about how I feel. It gives me options to know what needs to change, it gives me the ability to know, and it gives me options in how to change it. I am stronger and fitter for exercising, and not just physically! I take that into everything that I do. [Pauses]. I am fairly 'together' I think, and exercise has a big part to play in maintaining that for me.

[Sits forward]. My experiences in exercise enable me to believe that I can keep going with other things too. If I can keep going in exercise I can keep going in other ways. Not just physical things. I can keep going with projects in which I am involved. I can keep going with whatever really. I do not tend to pick things up and just drop them, I tend to keep going and to keep moving forward too. There is definitely a sense of moving forwards. Changes and movement forward.

I believe that I am strong. That is not just a physical strength. It is strength in who I am. [Pauses]. I also feel it is a gentle strength, not aggressive. It is a solid strength, deeply grounded and it underpins everything. Exercise has given me that. Movement, activity, the space that I find in exercise gives me that. I think exercise gives me resilience, strength, energy, endurance, stamina. It gives me the potential to keep going, even when it feels tough. It gives me the self-awareness to be able to observe myself. To note how I am.

[Sits back]. I am involved in lots of things and that is important to me. And I need to keep tabs on all the different strands of what I do. That is important. My mind has to be alert and active. [Pauses]. I am not fazed by challenges either. I approach them with the assumption, the belief, that I will complete them and that they will not defeat me. I am facing challenges, and I am making decisions for myself that are based on a belief that I will achieve.

[Sits forward]. I have a passion for what I do. A big part of my work involves demonstrating that passion. [Pauses]. I can speak

to people with an honesty about myself. [Pauses]. In all of my work, I also have to recognise something about the person or people with whom I am working. I have to understand them and their perspective, their situation. I have to sense something about them in order to work with them. And the awareness that I have of myself from the exercise that I do, I think gives me the ability to do that, and it allows me to facilitate in other people a greater level of awareness in themselves. And that is important for a lot of the work that I do.

Margaret believed strongly in the benefits of regular movement and activity. She recognised that exercise provided her with a range of benefits throughout her life. Also, she made connections between her exercising and other aspects of her work. Exercise remained a constant for her, and underpinned other areas of development and growth.