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Participation Motives for a Holistic Dance-Movement Practice**Abstract**

Recent decades have seen the appearance of forms of physical activity where the emphasis goes beyond traditional exercise to include a striving towards holistic well-being. However, not much is known about what attracts people to these holistically-orientated practices compared to typical sport and exercise participation motives. The purpose of this study was to explore the participation motives for a holistic dance-movement practice called 5Rhythms, comprising free movement within the structure of five distinct “rhythms”. Ninety eight dancers responded to an e-mail survey consisting of two open-ended questions querying them about what attracted them to 5Rhythms and what kept them dancing. A thematic analysis led to ten motive themes, with freedom, safety, emotions, personal growth, spirituality, and social motives emerging particularly strongly. It was noteworthy that health and appearance-related motives were virtually absent in the participants’ accounts, while fitness was important for some but not others and tended to be marginal compared to other motives. It was concluded that the inherent holistic features of the practice are reflected in participants’ motives and that 5Rhythms may serve a sub-population with particular values and needs. This underscores the notion that the varied characteristics of different physical activity contexts self-select different subsets of people according to matching values and beliefs.

Keywords: well-being; mind-body; leisure; spirituality; 5Rhythms

Introduction

Societal opportunities for structured physical activity come in many forms. A wide range of sport, dance, martial arts, and exercise formats exist, each with their own cultural origins and dynamic history (e.g., Hast, 1993; Nieminen, 1998). Furthermore, new practices regularly appear (e.g., Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003; Thorpe, 2009). Sociologists have argued that in recent decades, societal changes like detraditionalization, individuation, and a “loosening” of cultural meaning have created both psychological needs and cultural spaces for the occurrence of new physical practices – particularly practices that do not reflect typical preoccupations with competition or performance but instead endorse values like cooperation, self-reflection, and holistic well-being (Atkinson, 2010; Brown & Leledaki, 2010; Sointu & Woodhead, 2008). While some of these are of non-western origin (e.g., yoga and t'ai chi), “western-born” holistic movement practices also exist. The study presented here focuses on one such practice, 5Rhythms[®], and aims to explore participants’ reasons for participation.

According to Ingledeew and Markland (2008), participation motives reflect “the contents of individuals’ goals for participating in a particular domain of behaviour” (p.808), comprising the types of outcomes or experiences individuals aim to gain or avoid. The documentation of participation motives in physical activity has typically been described as descriptive and a-theoretical but as a valuable and essential starting point for understanding people’s engagement in different physical practices (Biddle & Mutrie, 2008; Weiss & Amorose, 2008). Patterns of participation motives show a number of recurring themes across physical activity contexts, such as physical competence or challenge, health and fitness, enjoyment, and social connectedness (e.g., Biddle & Mutrie, 2008; Nieminen, 1998; Weiss & Amorose, 2008). However, many variations and additional motives have also been noted, with differences noticeable between

subpopulations and across activities (e.g., Ebbeck, Gibbons & Loken-Dahle, 1995). Motives can also be very specific to activity type. For example, competition motives tend to be stronger for sports, while appearance-related motives are stronger for exercise (Frederick & Ryan, 1993); interests in self-defense skills and martial art philosophy are relevant reasons for martial arts participation (Ko, Kim, & Valacich, 2010), while self-expression, aesthetics, and creativity are common motives in dance (Alter, 1997; Nieminen, 1998). It is thus plausible that different forms of physical activity attract different subsets of people (Lewis, 2008) with participation motives that reflect each form's specific combination of characteristics. It can therefore be expected that the participation motives of 5Rhythms¹ participants will reflect the features of this practice.

5Rhythms

The 5Rhythms movement practice represents the life work of Gabrielle Roth (1941-2012), an American dancer and movement teacher who channelled her extensive engagement in holistic self-development practices, Native American spirituality, shamanism and trance dancing into the structure and philosophy of 5Rhythms. Roth (1998) believed that lack of movement and alienation from the body lie at the heart of western society's mental and social problems, and that "putting the body into motion" is key to healing some of these problems.

5Rhythms is structured around five basic "rhythms", each representing distinct musical, movement, and metaphorical qualities. The rhythms are labelled *Flowing* (associated with slow music; fluid, circular, soft, continuous movements; and metaphorically with grounding), *Staccato* (associated with more energetic and percussive music; defined, angular movements; and

¹ For ease of reading, 5Rhythms[®] will be referred to as 5Rhythms in the remainder of the paper.

boundaries, action), *Chaos* (associated with highly rhythmic, often fast, percussive music; unconfined, uncontrolled, “rag doll” movements; and letting go, surrender), *Lyrical* (associated with light, upbeat music; light, playful movements; and effortlessness, freedom), and *Stillness* (associated with slow, quiet music; slow, still or no movements; and completion, integration, just “being”). When danced in sequence, these rhythms form a “Wave”.

There are no prescribed steps or movements in 5Rhythms. Participants are invited to be in the moment, follow the music, and surrender to their internal impulses for movement (Juhan, 2003). Despite this freedom to move in whichever way one chooses, over time, participants are encouraged to expand their movement repertoire by experimenting with the different movement qualities that each rhythm inherently offers. Sessions often also include varied invitations to connect with others in the dance, though always with the proviso of staying true to one’s own movement impulses.

5Rhythms has grown over the years and expanded internationally. Roth started offering formal teacher training by the late 1980s, and at the time of writing several hundred teachers have been accredited, spreading 5Rhythms to some 40 countries across every continent, although the majority is based in Western Europe and North America (5Rhythms, 2015). This spread has made 5Rhythms increasingly accessible as a possible leisure activity in western society. It has developed into a multi-formatted practice, with teachers offering regular (often weekly) facilitated sessions (“classes”), limitedly guided sessions where the structure is mainly provided by the music (“sweats”), and themed workshops where the work is taken more deeply; many of the latter follow the “maps” outlined by Roth, taking the participants into the landscapes of their emotions, life cycles, or shadow sides (Juhan, 2003; Roth, 1998).

With its holistic philosophy and integrative structure, 5Rhythms may well cater to the growing interest in holistic well-being flagged by sociologists (e.g. Sointu & Woodhead, 2008). By exploring participants' reasons for participation through an open-ended and inductive approach, the aim of this study was to contribute to a more detailed understanding of what people seek and find in a holistic movement practice like 5Rhythms. Comparing the results to participation motives for other physical activities may additionally help position 5Rhythms among the physical practices on offer in today's society.

Method

Epistemology

This study adopts a critical realist epistemology (Bryman, 2012), which assumes the existence of an independent reality while acknowledging the active role researchers play in constructing knowledge of this reality. It is thus relevant to note that the “realist tale” (a researcher-guided detailed account of participants' perspectives; Sparkes, 2002) presented in this paper was constructed by a 55-year-old female researcher with an extensive background in both 5Rhythms and sport and exercise psychology.

Participants and Procedures

Influenced by practicalities around distance, a qualitative, e-mail-based survey was employed. Participants of four workshops and two regular classes in the UK were invited to respond to two open-ended questions: “What was it that attracted you to 5Rhythms when you first started dancing?” and “What is/are the reasons that you keep dancing?”. Ninety eight dancers replied, 68 (69.4%) females and 30 (30.6%) males. The respondents represented a wide range of ages (26-66 years; $M = 43.9$, $SD = 9.7$) and a wide range of 5Rhythms experiences, including some who had

just had their first taste of 5Rhythms and others who had danced for 14 or 15 years. Fifty eight of the respondents were British; the remainder were mainly from Western Europe. Non-British respondents either resided in the UK or had travelled there to attend one of the workshops.

In a second phase of the study, participants' feedback on the findings was sought. As this was logistically somewhat challenging, with a relatively large sample and a very rich data base, a solution was found in converting the themes into questionnaire items and presenting these as an internet-based survey. All participants from the first phase of the study were sent an e-mail with information about the progress of the study, an invitation to complete the on-line survey, and the web-link to the survey. After several reminders, the eventual response rate was 48% (n = 47). In both phases, informed consent was sought in accordance with institutional ethics policy.

Participants were informed of the study purpose and assured of confidentiality and anonymity in the invitation email, and confirmed their consent by replying to the questions.

Data and Data Analysis

Open-ended questions.

The responses to the open-ended questions formed the main analytical focus of this study. They consisted of varied and often rich accounts of respondents' reasons for participation, varying in length from several sentences to several pages. Data were analysed using a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was chosen because it can accommodate an inductive analysis, grounding themes in the data without aiming for a fully-fledged grounded theory study (Weed, 2009). In accordance with Braun and Clarke, the analysis involved the following phases: 1) familiarisation with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, 6) report writing. After thorough reading of the data, codes were generated inductively (i.e., without a pre-determined coding

frame). Coding, retrieval, and organizing were facilitated with help of NVIVO 7 software. The coded extracts were then searched for repeated patterns, and collated into potential themes. A theme was defined as any content domain that reflects similar motives for participation (in the sense that participants used the same or similar words or expressions, or alluded to an equivalent reason). Themes were checked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, and were gradually defined and refined in an ongoing process of comparing, interpreting, and contrasting. A final reviewing and refining took place after collection of the on-line survey data. Memo writing was employed to support and record the analytical and interpretative process.

On-line Survey.

The on-line survey was created using the Bristol Online Survey program. It consisted of 114 items, representing statements capturing the essence and nuances expressed within each of the identified themes. For each item, participants were asked to indicate to what extent the statement was true for them, and to what extent it served as a reason for their participation. Ratings were provided on 5-point Likert-type scales, with 5 representing “highly true for me” or “one of the most important reasons”, and 1 representing “not at all true for me” or “not at all a reason”. There was also space to add comments after each item.

The survey was intended, on the one hand, to provide the respondents with an overview of the themes found in the qualitative data, while on the other, to explore the prevalence of the themes across the whole group. It also acted as a way to tease apart the extent to which a statement was experienced as true and the extent to which it served as a motive for participation, in an effort to discern whether what was experienced was actually motivational. Analysis of the survey data predominantly entailed the calculation of descriptive statistics. Because this information was used mainly to verify, deepen or expand the insights gained in the thematic

analysis, the survey results are not presented separately but only in association with the identified themes where they provide additional insights. An overview of the numerical results for the most relevant items is presented in Table 1.

Validity

Validity in this study was supported through the researcher's background, which enabled an inside understanding of the terminology and context of the dancers' accounts, and an appreciation of the literature on physical activity participation motives. Specific strategies to strengthen validity included 1) aiming to maintain an attitude of openness and curiosity during the analysis, supported by peer debriefings with two colleagues unfamiliar with 5Rhythms; 2) use of the survey to feed back the full range of responses, including negative ones, to the participants and to check and clarify some issues that were unclear, thus serving as a form of both respondent validation and triangulation (Bryman, 2012); 3) thick description of the data, allowing readers to form their own impressions and judge transferability.

Results

The types of information that the participants provided in their e-mailed accounts included statements about what they valued in 5Rhythms, what motivated them, sometimes descriptions of how they came across 5Rhythms, what they experienced when dancing 5Rhythms, and occasionally statements about things they did not like about 5Rhythms. Ten main motive themes were distilled on the basis of this information, and are presented below.

Freedom

Freedom was the most commonly mentioned theme in the qualitative data. Its prevalence was

also supported in the survey, where statements about freedom were among the most strongly endorsed as true, and rated as the most important motivators (Table 1, section 1). The references to freedom involved a range of issues that participants felt free *from*, in particular the requirement to follow and live up to imposed criteria of movement, and the associated external and internalized judgments about “doing it right”. There was also freedom from judgments about how unorthodox or abnormal one might look when moving freely, leading to freedom from the internal states of self-consciousness and fear of embarrassment.

What I liked was the freedom of expression to do whatever I want no matter how crazy it may look - no-one cares, nor do I! (M, 39)²

Freedom *from* almost automatically translated into things one felt free *to* do or be, including the freedom to move according to one’s own desires, the freedom to “totally let go”, and the freedom to “allow things to happen”. Relatedly, it allowed people to be themselves, express themselves and feel like they were true to their authentic selves.

It gives you real freedom to explore your own boundaries (physical, of course, but also emotional and sometimes spiritual). (F, 48)

I love [it] because it's freedom. I feel the most like who I am when I'm dancing. (F, 47)

Safety

Closely linked to freedom, and also frequently mentioned, was the theme of safety. Safety was most commonly expressed in relation to the atmosphere of acceptance, non-judgment and open-mindedness that participants perceived. Other conditions that supported a sense of safety were

² Gender and age of the participant are indicated in brackets. To preserve authenticity, spelling and grammar of the original e-mailed text are maintained. If text is omitted this is indicated as [] .

the absence of drink and drugs, the integrity of the teacher, like-mindedness of others in the group, warmth and support, and the absence of performance rules. Safety was also felt with respect to closeness to others.

5 rhythms is a safe place to explore movement and my body. I do not have to worry about what others are thinking or what I am doing, [] everything is embraced and welcomed. (F, 28)

I became interested because it was drug and drink free, seemed to attract a mix of creative and unusual people who came together to celebrate their enjoyment of dance and support each other in a general way on many levels. - safe environment. (F, 35)

Both freedom and safety were strongly valued in participants' motivation. However, a few dancers noted that there were boundaries to freedom, and that safety was not always fully guaranteed. Survey responses indicated that safety could occasionally be compromised by other participants not respecting one's personal space or integrity, or a teacher lacking the experience to provide a safe space for the more profound emotional or energetic experiences. Some respondents noted that freedom to be oneself was tied to the responsibility to respect others, implying that this was a necessary condition to create a sense of safety for all participants (e.g., "I am ACCEPTED as long as I am sensitive to others i.e. respecting boundaries and not acting inappropriately." F, 34). These data suggest that there may be gradations in the extent to which 5Rhythms is experienced as a "safe space" (Table 1, section 2).

Love of Dance

Participants' descriptions often alluded to a "love of dance". For quite a few dancers, this love was long-standing (e.g., "I've always loved to dance!" F, 48), and generalized as a love of many dance forms. Others were very clear about *not* enjoying particular other dance forms, sometimes

having had very negative experiences in these forms.

I so hated ballet classes as a child - being forced to put my body in positions not of my choosing I really get into such a mess trying to do what people tell me I always think I'm doing it wrong, don't feel safe, feel criticised and threatened by whole thing w 5 R's v different able to love and respect my own movements which in turn are more in harmony with others because it's a true and authentic expression of who I am. (F, 57)

Dancing in night clubs was something that some participants never liked, and others used to like but had “grown out of” – not, or no longer, enjoying the atmosphere of drink, drugs, smoke, and the culture of being seen or “picking someone up”. Some felt restricted by their age or gender.

Clubs are so constraining. The atmosphere can be really aggressive, somehow. And the men, in particular, don't dance much! (M, 56)

Several people who had always loved dance indicated that they nevertheless had been looking for something deeper or had felt attracted by the depth of 5Rhythms when they did come across it. Involvement in various other holistic, spiritual, and/or therapeutic dance forms were also mentioned, such as Sacred Circle Dance, Biodanza, Trance Dance, and Authentic Movement.

Body and Mind

The physicality of dancing, the role of the body and its link with the mind were often commented upon by the participants. Many wrote about 5Rhythms being a place where they could get “out of their head”, letting go of analysing, judging and self-judging mental pre-occupations. This was variously linked to redirecting attention (often into the body, sometimes on to the music or other dancers), being able to be in-the-moment, and/or experiencing a sense of freedom or liberation. Switching off the thinking mind was especially valued in contrast to a daily life full of cognitive

deliberation.

A place to really drop out of my head (my work is currently all head-orientated, and I dislike the imbalance of this in my life and how it makes me feel) and into my heart and body, and really listen to my body and respond to whatever it wants to do to redress this imbalance. (M, 39)

Several comments indicated that dancers experienced their body as the carrier of unknown or hidden aspects of themselves, and as a part of themselves that had a “will” of its own, using expressions like “listen to it to see where it wants to move next” (F, 28) or “how it chose to move” (F, 47). Some referred to this as the “wisdom” of the body. Some dancers also emphasized how 5Rhythms offers a very physical, bodily way to connect with themselves, be it through discovering aspects of themselves while moving, or through expressing themselves in a physical way.

I dance to connect with myself to run through my body and see how I am doing, to check out where the tension is, to see where my emotions aren't flowing and let them flow freely. (F, 36)

Enjoyment of the physical sensations of moving the body was also referred to in various ways. One dancer wrote of “luxuriating” (F, 32) in the physicality of the self and the sensuous experience of the body in movement. That this enjoyment was a powerful motivating factor was also supported by the survey findings (Table 1, section 4).

Emotions

Many dancers emphasized emotions as a crucial aspect of their 5Rhythms experience. It was particularly appreciated that 5Rhythms invited *any* of their emotions, whether these were

positive or negative, pleasant or unpleasant. This was clearly linked to the themes of freedom and safety. Not having to suppress or ignore negative feelings and instead giving them space – to be with them, feel them, explore them, and give them physical expression in the dance – was experienced as highly liberating. Furthermore, this could only happen in a psychologically safe environment where there is no fear of doing something socially inappropriate.

Our teacher says dance how you feel, whether, happy, sad, angry, shy, lonely, chaotic, I want to cry with happiness.... thank you so much for this permission to be exactly how I am, I do not have to be anything else or come back when I am feeling better etc . (M, 40)

Dancing one's emotions was associated with a wide range of effects. These included enhanced awareness, understanding, acceptance, and transformation of the emotions; discovery of emotional dimensions of an issue that one wasn't aware of; release of old patterns of negative emotions; senses of clarity, insight, lightness, catharsis, realness, and/or perspective; and feelings of body-mind (or body-mind-spirit) balance.

To put into a physical, visual, concrete shape what is going on in a secret and hidden place is liberating and extremely helpful! To let my all body express the emotion I am feeling gives me the impression that I can really reach the core of that emotion (whatever it is: joy, anger, sadness, tenderness, etc.). I can fully and safely live that emotion, acknowledge it, accept it, honour it and express it. So after a wave I am usually much more in contact with my emotions. And this, especially if after the wave I take time to rationalise the all process, (to understand it intellectually) also helps me in my personal growth, it helps me to understand my self better. (F, 32)

There was acknowledgement that deep emotional experiences and release do not necessarily occur at every 5Rhythms session, but the fact that there was the *potential* for these experiences was clearly motivating to continue dancing. The survey results supported the strong role this

opportunity for processing emotions plays in dancers' motivation (Table 1, section 5).

Personal Growth

Many of the participants alluded to the growth-enhancing and/or transformative experiences that 5Rhythms offered them in one way or another. This theme of personal growth included a cluster of tightly interwoven sub-themes.

Discovery.

Participants frequently wrote about discovering new or previously unknown aspects of themselves while dancing, and often about being surprised by what they found. Moreover, this journey of discovery felt like it was indefinite and limitless, putting 5Rhythms in the perspective of always holding the potential for new discoveries and excitement.

It keeps getting better. It feels like the Rythms are a world so deep and full that they may take a lifetime to understand. Every wave I have done has brought up new things for me, touched on new parts of myself and I continue to be amazed, intrigued and surprised by this practise. I feel I have found answers to questions I had. I have also found more and more questions I did not know existed. (F, 28)

Deeper Self.

In addition to discovering “hidden” parts of themselves, dancers wrote about getting to know themselves better through this process, particularly at deeper levels of their being (e.g., “Everytime I dance it is like discovering myself on a deeper and more profound level”, F, 28). There was a tendency to refer to these levels as representing a more profound, real, true or authentic part of oneself.

For me dancing in this "format" is a great opportunity to get to know myself more. Through movement and through the body I can get in contact with what's real in me in a way that I don't know of in any other part of my life. [] On the dance floor I can listen to whatever my soul has to tell me through my body, through my psyche. (F, 35)

Journey.

Several participants made reference to a “journey” of self-discovery, inner growth, or personal development that they were on. For some, this was a journey they had started already before they encountered 5Rhythms. For others, this was a journey that they suddenly or gradually found themselves on after they had started 5Rhythms.

But I got really hooked, when mysterious screams came out of me during chaos. “Wow! What’s this?” My body felt like a treasure box I had very little knowledge of. That was the starting point of a long journey into unearthing my unconscious, finding out what it means to be in my body, and to gradually learn who I am, how I am, and after wading through much self hate and that particular dance is not over yet to come to some kind of acceptance and compassion with myself. (F, 36)

That the concept of being on a path or journey of personal growth resonated strongly with the participants was also clear from the responses to the survey (Table 1, section 6).

Challenges.

Various dancers, referring to unpleasant emotions and difficult issues, mentioned being “challenged” in the dance but appreciating these challenges because they provided an opportunity for learning and growth.

I’ve found a practice in which I can express myself, where I can be creative, active and a place in which I can constantly find personal challenges. Sometimes I find myself in a scary

place, sometimes frustrating, sometimes exhilarating, sometimes sensuous and seductive. I have found the dark places in my soul that I wouldn't have reached had it not been for times I've given to myself in dance. (F, 48)

Transformation.

The sense of growth was also evident in comments about transformation and, sometimes profound, changes in oneself and/or one's life as a consequence of dancing 5Rhythms. Some people wrote about "a huge journey – a transformational process" (F, 41) or 5Rhythms having "changed my life" (M, 40). The survey results also endorsed the life-changing potential of 5Rhythms and its motivating effect (Table 1, section 6).

Therapy.

Participants regularly couched the benefits that 5Rhythms gave them in therapeutic terms, such as "wholeness", "healing" or "therapy", and frequently associated these directly with the physicality of the practice.

The dance keeps making me whole in ways my mind cannot foresee [] The 5 Rhythms is a very straight forward 'therapy' because it is deeply experiential, the results stay in my body. (F, 36)

Some dancers actively compared 5Rhythms to forms of therapy that they had experienced in their lives, generally contrasting it to "talk" therapy, and pointing to the powerful effect 5Rhythms had on them.

Prior to this time I had had just about every form of psychotherapy you could mention. For years I had invested time, energy and money trying to make sense of my life. All good stuff, but none of it touched any part of me below the neck. I had never found a way to be present,

at any level of my being, but particularly in my body. My whole life, I had dragged my body around with me seriously my head poked forward like a turtle. (F, 50)

The survey results suggested that 83% of the respondents had experienced some form of counselling or psychotherapy. Among them, the majority agreed that 5Rhythms did not work in similar ways to counselling or psychotherapy but had a more complementary function (Table 1, section 6).

Spirituality

For many participants, 5Rhythms was associated with spirituality. Though the term “spiritual” can have many connotations (Cook, 2004), generally, the dancers referred to “otherworldly” or meta-physical dimensions, using various terms such as God, the sacred, the divine, the life force, the Great Spirit, the Otherworld. Sometimes they wrote about experiencing different “energies”. They also often seemed to place spirituality within a less conventional context, mentioning interest in or involvement with practices like Buddhism, Quakers, chanting, Sufi movement practices, Yoga, and “following a spiritual leader”; an interest in Shamanism in particular was cited by several participants.

The 5 Rhythms have become my spiritual practice and my remedy: I can connect with God most easily while dancing and it is the best way for me to get out of my head; I have had visions, guidance and insight while dancing. (F, 40)

The survey results confirmed that many participants saw 5Rhythms as fitting with their spiritual path and were motivated by the potential for having spiritual and/or “energy” experiences while dancing (Table 1, section 7).

Social

The social dimension of 5Rhythms also formed an important motivating factor. This theme had two sub-categories: interpersonal connections and community.

Interpersonal Connections.

Participants valued the sense of connection with others that they could (though not always necessarily would) experience during the dance. Some emphasized the feeling of authenticity present in such connections, connecting in a “very direct, raw” (M, 28) or “truly honest” (F, 57) way. Others wrote about the joy of sharing the dance experience with others, the possibility of physical contact and spontaneous interactions.

I love the energy that is exchanged when you dance with a 'good' partner who is willing to give and receive. Also the intimacy that sometimes happens when you are with a partner that is a good match (regardless of sex, age etc.) is fantastic, if you are really 'into' a person that makes you feel so good and intensifies the awareness of your body. (F, 44)

Connecting in the dance can happen in various ways, including degrees of physical contact that border on what is generally considered “intimate”. The possibility of experiencing such close physical connections was an important motivator for some participants, in particular in the relative safety of an environment that encouraged in-the-moment appreciation without attaching the conventional expectations that such connections might carry in everyday life.

I also very much liked the safe intimacy. usually in life one does not get to be so close to people in such a safe way, enjoying sharing the dance. [] Also contact without strings or it meaning anything apart from enjoying moving and expressing with another person. (M, 40)

This safety also allowed dancers to experiment with new ways of relating to others.

Dancing offered me a way to explore my relationships with men. I healed a lot related to being sexually abused as a child, and to my distant relationship with my father. I found both a lovely comforting masculine energy and a flirtatious tingle in my connection with some of my male dancing buddies. (F, 50)

The possibilities for connecting, at a deep, authentic, intimate, and/or asexual level made 5Rhythms stand out in comparison to other social realms, as several people indicated that 5Rhythms was unique in this respect. The survey findings supported this view, as well as the motivational value of these types of connections (Table 1, section 8)³.

Community and like-mindedness.

The second social aspect of 5Rhythms that dancers valued was a sense of belonging to a community, be it a local community or a more extended international community. Some spoke of the “dancing tribe”. This sense of community was associated with perceptions of having something in common with other 5Rhythms dancers, a commonality that was special – relatively unusual compared to other social contexts – and strongly valued. Several people referred to “like-mindedness”, and the survey results showed that for a majority, meeting like-minded people was an important reason for their participation.

³ Because in the qualitative data more of the comments about intimacy were made by males, in the survey, gender differences in the ratings of the physical intimacy items were explored via t-tests. The tests revealed differences in the motivating power of physical intimacy. While there were no significant differences in truth ratings of statements regarding physical intimacy, males rated these consistently higher as reasons than females (with averages between 3.75 and 4.13, while females scored between 2.83 and 3.36). The possibility of experiencing physical intimacy in a natural, relaxed, safe, and easy-going way was a particularly strong reason for males, receiving a mean rating of 4.13.

I really value the community and closeness that dancing seems to foster. 5R people seem to be the kind of people I can communicate with. People with whom I share values and attitudes. It is very rich to have such a wide network of beloved people. (F, 48)

What this like-mindedness consisted of was mostly indirectly alluded to in the qualitative data. Examining this further in the survey, it was found that an interest in exploring and expressing one's inner self and subscribing to a world view that goes beyond body and mind to include spirit, were qualities that the participants valued highly and that they sought and found within the 5Rhythms community (Table 1, section 8).

Experiential Effects

The dancers reported a range of relatively immediate experiential mood-related effects that dancing 5Rhythms brought them. These included feelings of total aliveness; liberation; tension release and relaxation; fun, joyfulness and playfulness; and a sense of wholeness and unity of mind-body-soul- and spirit.

Because it makes me so happy! Life becomes so full of life. I experience myself in a hundred times more ways than otherwise. I become much more alive and expand. (M, 35)

These experiential effects were also strongly endorsed in the survey, with all above-mentioned effects receiving mean truth and reason ratings between 4 and 5 (Table 1, section 9).

Exercise / Fitness

Although a number of people mentioned exercise or fitness as a motive, this was often done almost as an aside, tagged onto a section that addressed the psychological benefits in much more detail, for example: "It's also my favourite exercise" (M, 45); "apart from that it keeps me

active” (F, 26). Some participants noted that dance was an enjoyable form of physical exercise compared to other forms of exercise that they either did not like, could not do because of physical limitations, or were not good at. Some others, on the other hand, mentioned that their enjoyment of the physical workout they achieved while dancing was similar to that experienced in sport or exercise during earlier times of their lives. The diversity in fitness appreciation was reflected in the survey, where 46% rated fitness as an important reason for participation, while for 30% it had little importance (Table 1, section 10).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to contribute to a more detailed understanding of what people seek and find in a relatively novel and thus-far under-researched holistically-orientated physical practice, 5Rhythms. The results revealed a range of interconnected characteristics and experiences that attracted participants to 5Rhythms and motivated them to stay involved. A number of these, such as processing emotions, safety, non-judgment, personal growth, spirituality, and mind-body-spirit wholeness, were clearly connected with 5Rhythms as a practice with a holistic intent. As such, they have not, or only to a limited extent, been found in other physical activity contexts. Others show overlap with motives identified for dance, sport, exercise, and/or martial arts (e.g., Frederick & Ryan, 1993; Ko et al., 2010; McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002), in particular motives related to belonging, enjoyment, and relief from daily responsibilities. Some overlap is also evident with other holistic movement practices, for example, non-judgmental being-in-the-moment, and a sensed, aware, conscious experience of the moving body (e.g., Adams, Caldwell, Atkins, & Quin, 2012; DiGiacomo et al., 2010; Leseho & Maxwell, 2010). Most overlap is found with studies in dance, especially with forms that also

include free movement – where motives related to freedom, embodiment, emotions, connectedness, self-discovery, and spirituality have been reported (Alter, 1997; Bond & Stinson, 2000/01; Kraus, 2009; Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003). The nature of the overlap is not always clear, however. Emotions, for example, have been described simply as “emotional release” (Alter, 1997) or “expression of emotions” (Nieminen, 1998); this may not be quite the same as the processing of positive and negative emotions that the 5Rhythms dancers describe in this study.

At the same time, it is not surprising that there was an absence of motives associated with structural qualities not part of 5Rhythms’ make-up, such as performing, achievement, aesthetics, or competition. Common exercise motives such as appearance and health (e.g., Crossley, 2006; Frederick & Ryan, 1993) were also conspicuously absent or marginal in the dancers’ accounts. This is in contrast, too, to holistic movement practices like yoga or t’ai chi, where managing a health condition is a recurring motive (Hasselle-Newcombe, 2005; Rabinowitz, 2008). Overall, there was a strikingly low emergence of extrinsic motives. Although fitness did have a place among the motives, it was clear that the psychological benefits were among the most important factors motivating participants to keep dancing 5Rhythms.

Some of the most wide-spread motives for all types of physical activity involve taking a break from daily demands and stress relief (e.g., Hast, 1993; Laverie, 1998; Lewis, 2008; McDonald et al., 2002). Generally, this switching off happens through total absorption in the physical and mental demands of the activity. 5Rhythms dancers clearly appreciated the possibility of immersing themselves in the music and movement. At the same time, they also used 5Rhythms as an opportunity to “stay in touch” with the stresses of everyday life by using the space to explore, express, digest, and transform emotions stemming from their daily

responsibilities. Paradoxically, 5Rhythms thus appears to offer the possibility of “losing oneself” (in the music), while at the same time providing the possibility of “finding oneself” (a deeper, authentic self).

Although it is probably implicitly present in many social motives for continued participation (e.g., Allen, 2003), emotional safety is not explicitly mentioned in other physical activity contexts. That 5Rhythms participants do mention safety explicitly is interesting and may reflect the vulnerabilities involved in emotional processing, opening oneself to self-discoveries, and moving freely in ways that would meet with disapproval in other social contexts. In offering a safe container, emphasizing non-judgment and inviting the expression and exploration of emotions through movement, 5Rhythms shows some similarities with Dance-Movement Therapy (DMT), where physical movement is used therapeutically as a vehicle to, among other things, gain access to and integrate subconscious material (Payne, 2006). Participants appear to appreciate this therapy-like dimension of 5Rhythms without it officially being therapy. At the same time, as a leisure activity that supports personal growth through physical embodiment, 5Rhythms can have a supportive, complementary function to conventional “talk” therapy, as a number of dancers indicated. The possibility of fulfilling such a function within a physical practice may be relatively unique to holistic movement practices like 5Rhythms, and may therefore attract people interested in such a function.

Spirituality was clearly important for many 5Rhythms dancers in this study. While spirituality was interpreted here as connecting with an otherworldly higher power, and having transcendental or “energy” experiences, there are wider interpretations of spirituality. Other authors have included experiencing deep connections with both others and self, personal growth, self-discovery, and transformation as components of spirituality (Heintzman, 2002; Kraus, 2009;

Takahashi & Olaveson, 2003), suggesting that spirituality could act as an overarching concept for several of the themes distinguished in this study.

As in many other physical activity contexts (e.g., Allen, 2003; Columbus & Rice, 1998; Crossley, 2006; Hast, 1993; Lewis, 2008), social motives were also strong in this study. Participants particularly emphasized the importance of *like-mindedness* as an attraction. This like-mindedness not only involved a love of dancing freely, but also an openness to exploring inner processes, a sense of being on a journey of personal growth, and an interest in other holistic and/or non-religious spiritual activities. This suggests that 5Rhythms may indeed attract people with particular interests and values.

In socio-demographic terms, the sample represented both genders but with a predominance of females, and a wide range of ages but with the strongest representation in the 40-50 year age group. Furthermore, there were indications that quite a high percentage had had experience with counselling or therapy. The precise distribution of participant characteristics, in terms of both socio-demographic markers and psychological attributes, warrants further investigation via a more extensive survey.

Like many studies on participation motivation, this study was a-theoretical. To enhance our understanding of people's motivation to engage in holistic movement practices like 5Rhythms, future studies need to incorporate theoretical perspectives on why people would seek the types of experiences documented here (or not). These could be drawn from humanistic, existential, and/or transpersonal psychology but could also benefit from taking into account socio-cultural perspectives (e.g., Brown & Leledaki, 2010; Sointu & Woodhead, 2008).

Another limitation of the study includes the fact that motives were sought via open-ended questions in e-mailed format. On the one hand, this means there is no way of checking whether

possible motives not spontaneously mentioned by the participants, such as health or competence, were actually absent or just not salient enough to be included in participants' accounts. On the other hand, it means the data are not as in-depth as might be possible if gathered through other qualitative methodologies (e.g., in-depth interviews; ethnography). Future studies need to address these limitations.

Asking people for their motives for becoming and staying involved in an activity will, by nature, elicit mostly positively-oriented responses. How these motives affect participation patterns, actual experiences, and outcomes deserves attention in future studies. Considering the potential psychological benefits mentioned by the participants, future studies may also investigate the feasibility of offering 5Rhythms as an intervention within the mental health field.

Conclusion

This study showed that the participation motives of 5Rhythms dancers reflect the holistic orientation of the practice and vary in several respects from those typically found for other forms of physical activity. It appears that 5Rhythms attracts people with particular interests and values, for whom the practice offers a range of holistic benefits that they cannot easily find in other contexts. 5Rhythms thus may fill a void in providing a valuable arena to grapple with some of the challenges of contemporary society highlighted by sociologists (e.g., Atkinson, 2010; Brown & Leledaki, 2010; Sointu & Woodhead, 2008), albeit currently for a specific group of people. This supports Lewis' (2008) notion that the unique psycho-social and physical characteristics of different physical activity cultures self-select different subsets of people according to matching values and beliefs.

[Table 1 here]

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Table 1. An overview of the most relevant items from the survey.

| | T | R | T % | T% | R% | R% |
|---|--------------|--------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| | Mean | Mean | low | high | low | high |
| | (S.D) | (S.D) | | | | |
| Section 1: Freedom | | | | | | |
| Dancing 5R gives me a sense of liberation | 4.57 (0.7) | 4.43 (0.7) | 2.1 | 93.7 | 0 | 87.2 |
| I love the freedom of expression to do whatever I want, no matter how crazy it may look | 4.53 (0.6) | 4.21 (0.8) | 0 | 93.6 | 2.1 | 78.7 |
| I love that in 5R I can dance without having to learn steps | 4.38 (1.0) | 3.94 (1.3) | 4.2 | 82 | 12.7 | 70.2 |
| Section 2: Safety | | | | | | |
| 5R provides a safe space where I do not have to worry about doing things wrong or being criticized or judged | 4.30 (0.9) | 3.96 (1.1) | 2.1 | 80.9 | 8.6 | 70.2 |
| I love the emotional safety of 5R | 3.87 (1.1) | 3.70 (1.1) | 8.5 | 61.7 | 14.9 | 59.6 |
| I have felt violated or threatened by other participants not respecting my personal space or integrity | 2.17 (1.3) | n/a | 66 | 21.3 | n/a | n/a |
| I have experienced 5R teachers whom I did not feel safe with | 1.70 (1.0) | n/a | 80.4 | 6.5 | n/a | n/a |
| Section 3: Love of Dance | | | | | | |
| I love any form of dance | 3.19 (1.3) | 2.91 (1.2) | 27.7 | 40.4 | 33.4 | 28.9 |
| 5R gives me the opportunity to dance - an opportunity that is not readily available in society for people of my age, gender, or abilities | 3.53 (1.4) | 3.40 (1.5) | 23.4 | 51.1 | 25.5 | 53.2 |
| I love being inspired to move by the music that I hear | 4.48 (0.8) | 4.09 (1.0) | 2.2 | 84.8 | 6.4 | 76.6 |
| Section 4: Body and Mind | | | | | | |
| I love that 5R gives me the opportunity to really be in my body, connect with it, listen to it | 4.47 (0.7) | 4.43 (0.9) | 2.1 | 93.6 | 4.2 | 89.4 |
| 5R is a place where I can get out of my head, let go of my thinking mind | 4.40 (0.7) | 4.34 (0.8) | 2.1 | 89.4 | 2.1 | 83 |

| | T | R | T % | T% | R% | R% |
|---|--------------|--------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| | Mean | Mean | low | high | low | high |
| | (S.D) | (S.D) | | | | |
| I love the physical sensations I get from freely moving my body | 4.23 (0.7) | 4.02 (0.9) | 0 | 82.8 | 6.4 | 72.4 |
| Dancing the 5R allows the wisdom of my body to come through | 4.09 (1.0) | 4.00 (1.1) | 6.4 | 74.5 | 8.6 | 72.3 |
| Section 5: Emotions | | | | | | |
| 5R offers a safe place to let myself feel and express any emotion that comes up, positive or negative | 4.32 (0.8) | 4.15 (1.1) | 2.1 | 83 | 8.5 | 74.5 |
| I feel that by dancing the 5R I can free up emotions that have become stuck in my body | 4.26 (1.0) | 4.13 (1.0) | 6.5 | 78.2 | 6.4 | 72.3 |
| Dancing my emotions in 5R helps me to shift or transform them | 4.23 (0.8) | 4.17 (0.9) | 0 | 76.6 | 6.4 | 76.6 |
| Section 6: Personal Growth | | | | | | |
| Dancing the 5R fits with my general journey of personal growth | 4.45 (1.0) | 4.30 (1.0) | 6.4 | 87.3 | 6.4 | 80.8 |
| 5R allows me to explore different parts of myself | 4.24 (0.9) | 3.96 (0.9) | 4.4 | 82.3 | 8.7 | 73.9 |
| 5R helps me to get to know myself at a deeper and more profound level | 4.02 (1.0) | 3.78 (1.0) | 8.7 | 74 | 13 | 63.1 |
| Dancing the 5R has changed me as a person | 3.89 (1.2) | 3.67 (1.3) | 14.9 | 70.2 | 21.7 | 58.7 |
| 5R forces me to face the shadow sides of myself that I might not otherwise get to know | 3.69 (1.1) | 3.58 (1.2) | 11.1 | 60 | 15.6 | 55.5 |
| I find dancing the 5R very therapeutic and healing | 4.36 (0.8) | 4.38 (0.8) | 2.1 | 83 | 2.1 | 82.9 |
| To me, 5R is complementary to counseling or therapy that I have experienced or am experiencing | 3.49 (1.4) | 3.26 (1.5) | 25.6 | 69.3 | 30.8 | 53.9 |
| Section 7: Spirituality | | | | | | |
| Dancing 5R fits with the general spiritual path that I am on | 4.46 (0.8) | 4.28 (0.9) | 2.2 | 84.7 | 4.3 | 80.9 |
| I have had spiritual experiences while dancing the 5R | 4.17 (1.0) | 4.02 (1.1) | 6.4 | 76.6 | 10.6 | 72.4 |

| | T | R | T % | T% | R% | R% |
|---|--------------|--------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| | Mean | Mean | low | high | low | high |
| | (S.D) | (S.D) | | | | |
| I have had unusual "energy" experiences while dancing | 4.17 (1.0) | 3.79 (1.2) | 8.5 | 78.7 | 14.9 | 61.7 |
| For me, dancing 5R is a way of connecting with "the sacred"/ spirit /God | 4.02 (1.0) | 3.91 (1.2) | 6.4 | 78.8 | 10.7 | 68.1 |
| Section 8: Social | | | | | | |
| Dancing 5R gives me the chance to connect with others on a deep and genuine level | 4.09 (0.9) | 3.98 (1.0) | 2.1 | 66 | 8.5 | 68.1 |
| 5R gives me the chance to connect with others in a way that is hard to find in other life domains | 3.77 (1.1) | 3.74 (1.2) | 10.7 | 59.6 | 13 | 54.4 |
| 5R is a place where I can experience physical intimacy in a natural, relaxed, safe and easy-going way | 3.70 (1.1) | 3.62 (1.3) | 12.8 | 59.6 | 21.3 | 55.3 |
| 5R is a place where I can be with people who are also open to exploring and expressing their inner selves | 4.41 (0.7) | 4.13 (0.8) | 0 | 86.9 | 0 | 71.7 |
| 5R gives me the chance to connect with other people who also have an interest in mind-body-spirit | 4.33 (0.8) | 4.09 (0.9) | 0 | 80.5 | 4.3 | 69.6 |
| 5R is a place where I can meet and be with like-minded people | 4.19 (1.0) | 4.09 (1.0) | 4.2 | 74.5 | 6.4 | 70.2 |
| Section 9: Experiential effects | | | | | | |
| Dancing 5R makes me feel free | 4.28 (0.9) | 4.11 (0.9) | 2.1 | 82.9 | 4.2 | 76.6 |
| Dancing 5R helps me to experience myself as a holistic unity - body, mind, soul & spirit | 4.28 (0.9) | 4.13 (1.0) | 2.2 | 80.5 | 4.2 | 70.2 |
| Dancing 5R lets me experience a sense of joyfulness | 4.28 (0.8) | 4.04 (1.1) | 4.3 | 85.1 | 8.5 | 70.2 |

| | T | | R | | T % | T% | R% | R% |
|--|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| | Mean | | Mean | | low | high | low | high |
| | (S.D) | | (S.D) | | | | | |
| Dancing 5R helps me to relax and release tension | 4.23 | (0.9) | 4.06 | (1.1) | 4.2 | 83 | 8.5 | 72.4 |
| Dancing 5R makes me feel totally alive | 4.15 | (0.8) | 4.09 | (0.9) | 0 | 78.3 | 4.3 | 76.6 |
| Section 10: Exercise/Fitness | | | | | | | | |
| Doing 5R helps me to keep fit | 3.70 | (1.0) | 3.26 | (1.2) | 12.7 | 61.7 | 30.4 | 45.7 |

Note. The first two columns represent the means and standard deviations for the truth (T) and reason (R) ratings. The last four columns represent the percentages that scored lowest (1 or 2) and highest (4 or 5) on the truth and reason ratings. The rating scale was 1-5.