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Wellbeing and personality through sports: A qualitative study of older badminton players in two cultures

The study explores older adults' lived experiences and meaning making around sports participation, wellbeing, and personality in later life. Semi-structured interviews with six badminton players (three British, three [Hong Kong Chinese](#); age range 56 to 75) were conducted, and the transcripts analysed according to the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009). The interviews with the Hong Kong participants were conducted bilingually enabling code-switching between Cantonese and English. Three overarching themes were derived: 1) British and Hong Kong players saw badminton as a conduit for self expression and mood regulation; 2) the British players claimed badminton helped them develop as a person; and 3) the Hong Kong players claimed that badminton was a mirror of their culture. [The findings disclose, in addition to physical health, sports participation supports wellbeing and continuing personal development in later life through being a crucible for change. We discuss implications for understanding sports through the phenomenological lens, to illuminate the lifeworld generally, and societal processes beyond.](#)

Keywords: ageing; British; [health psychology](#); Hong Kong; [phenomenology](#)

Introduction

Global population demographics are rapidly transforming. Owing to improved health services and declining fertility rates, a rapidly increasing older age section of the world population are living much longer and looking to enjoy life well into old age (Geard et al. 2017). As of February 5, 2018, the World Health Organisation listed on its website that between 2015 to 2050, the proportion of the world's population aged 60 years and older is expected to rise from 12% to 22%. Psychology and related fields are, as a result, increasingly addressing the factors which promote healthy and successful ageing (Cosco and Kuh 2016). Personality and wellbeing, owing to their established contributions to successful ageing, are significant topics in psychological research on older adults (Chiao and Hsiao 2017; Diener and Chan 2011; Klaming, Veltman, and Comijs 2017). Quantitative research commonly addresses causal links between physical activity and aspects of personality or wellbeing (Allen et al. 2017; Potocnik and Sonnentag 2013; Stephan, Sutin, and Terracciano 2014; Taylor et al. 2004; Whitehead and Blaxton 2017), often conceptualised artificially as separate constructs. Qualitative research to disclose the often intricate and subtle interplay between physical activity, feeling well, and personality in older adults' individual lived experience, may help to mitigate this limitation. Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued that the phenomena of consciousness are equiprimordial rather than causal. He argued for a conceptualisation of interpermeating parts within a systemic whole, rather than linear, causal mechanisms (Merleau-Ponty 1962). The present study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009) to explore the personal lifeworlds of older badminton players, focusing on how they make sense of the interpermeation of sports participation, personality expression and their experienced wellbeing. IPA is a qualitative methodology frequently used in health

1
2
3 psychology, which incorporates understandings from both researcher and participant,
4 acknowledging the co-creation of psychological knowledge (Smith et al. 2009). There
5
6 is currently no published IPA study of how older badminton players experience
7
8 themselves and their wellbeing through their sport.
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11
12 Existential phenomenology, the stance adopted in this study, rejects the
13
14 Cartesian division of objective world 'out there' distinct from consciousness within
15
16 the body (Moran, 2000). Rather, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) put it, the world is already
17
18 interpreted, and world, body, and consciousness are intertwined, inter-relating and
19
20 inextricable from each other. From this standpoint, phenomena are not abstract
21
22 information, but are a part of incarnate subjectivity (Allen-Collinson 2009). Merleau-
23
24 Ponty's (1963) concept of existential unity posited the body and world as forming a
25
26 system, which he called the *flesh* of the world. His concept of *chiasm* expressed the
27
28 crossover of the body–world, such that experiencing my body is experiencing the
29
30 world, and vice versa. He asserted a deeply corporeal, pre-reflective experiencing,
31
32 where our mode of being is fundamentally a manner of treating a specific world made
33
34 only available by the kind of body that we are. Merleau-Ponty's (1969) concept of
35
36 *intercorporeality* further demonstrated that our experience of embodiment is always
37
38 already mediated by interactions with other bodies. This inter-embodiment recasts our
39
40 understanding of the sporting body as inseparable from intersubjectivity and mood,
41
42 two other ontological dimensions of Heidegger's (1962) Dasein. The analysis recasts
43
44 the *being-in-the-world* as *flesh-of-the-world*, which conveys, alongside the body's
45
46 fundamental embeddedness within a world, their interpermeation.
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54 Previous qualitative research has addressed older adults' lived experiences of
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56 their bodies through sports and exercise. A content analytic study of 27 active older
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58 adults in the United Kingdom (UK) by Phoenix and Orr (2014), identified four
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3 cardinal types of pleasure from physical exercise: *sensual pleasure* (e.g., feeling the
4 wind on the body); *documented pleasure* (e.g., written accounts recalling experiences);
5
6
7 *pleasure of habitual action* (e.g., going ahead despite bad weather); and *pleasure of*
8
9
10 *immersion* (e.g., losing oneself in Tai Chi sequences). Humberstone and Stuart's
11
12 (2016) phenomenological study of older women from two exercise classes in England
13
14 drew on this typology of pleasure. They reported the *auditory* and *kinaesthetic* senses
15
16 as especially important (e.g., pleasure through moving to the rhythm of the music).
17
18 Heo et al. (2013) used a constant comparison qualitative method to analyse in-depth
19
20 interviews with 10 older participants of the United States (US) Senior Games. Of
21
22 particular note are their themes *perseverance* and *unique ethos*: the former symbolise
23
24 continuing despite fatigue and injury; the latter reflected the older athletes' inclusion
25
26 within a special social world defined by distinctive ideals, values, sentiments, and
27
28 guiding beliefs. The authors' concluded that sport – understood as *serious leisure* –
29
30 provided the older adults with an athletic identity, which could sustain wellbeing and a
31
32 healthy lifestyle (Heo et al. 2013). A study by Dionigi, Horton and Baker (2013)
33
34 addressed ways that sport helps negotiate the ageing process. Their narrative
35
36 methodology analysed personal stories from 44 older sports participants from four
37
38 western nations in the World Masters Games. Four themes reflected participants'
39
40 stories of: avoiding old age; *fighting the ageing process*; *redefining self and 'old age'*;
41
42 and *adaptation and acceptance*. These stories enhanced participants' wellbeing by
43
44 providing alternatives to the dominant 'declining body' narrative of ageing (Dionigi et
45
46 al. 2013). Despite the well documented benefits of sports and exercise for older adults,
47
48 two issues are noteworthy: 1) many older people still consider physical activity
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50 unnecessary and risky (Franco et al. 2015), and 2) most studies to date have been
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52 based on English-speaking nations of West. The later issue is reflected by two recent
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3 systematic reviews. Gayman et al.'s (2017) review of ten studies of the psychosocial
4 outcomes of sports participation, included no studies of Eastern societies. In Franco et
5 al.'s (2015) review of qualitative research on older adults' perspectives on physical
6 activity, 70% of the 132 studies included were based in the US, UK, or Canada.
7
8 Hence, the experiences and perspectives of non-Western older participants are under-
9 represented.
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17 This study forms part of a larger multi-method research project to explore
18 interrelationships between leisure-time physical activity, personality, and wellbeing in
19 Hong Kong (HK) and the UK. HK, a British colony for over 150 years, was returned
20 to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. The historical tie has shaped the psychology of HK
21 people, and they have been described as genuinely bicultural (Chan and Lee 1995). In
22 addition to west-facing values (e.g., The Umbrella Movement, see Hall 2017), many
23 older adults in HK continue to sustain traditional Chinese values through ancient arts
24 such as T'ai Chi (Yau and Packer 2002), which is a cultural export to the West
25 (Campbell 2015). Therefore, HK's Chinese cultural value-base and longstanding
26 association with the UK provides an interesting psychological counterpoint. Older,
27 native inhabitants of HK have lived through both British (pre-1997) and Chinese
28 (post-1997) systems. Their experiences of sports may be able to offer meaningful
29 insights that may be culturally interpreted.
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47 This paper reports results of an IPA study of the interpermeation of wellbeing,
48 personality and sport, using a sample of older badminton players drawn from both HK
49 and the UK. Badminton was selected because of its high level of popularity. As of
50 November 23, 2018, the BBC Sport Academy listed badminton as the second most
51 popular participation sport in the world. A culturally varied sample was employed to
52 enhance opportunities for interpretation. We employed Todres and Galvin's (2010)
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3 existential-phenomenological theory of wellbeing as an initial interrogative
4 framework. This theory was recently used to enquire into the wellbeing of older
5 adults' as they moved into extra care housing (Shaw et al. 2016). The theory
6 conceptualises wellbeing in its deepest possibility as a dialectic between *dwelling*
7 (rootedness) and *mobility* (flow), as manifest in the six dimensions of the lifeworld:
8 spatiality, temporality, intersubjectivity, mood, identity, and embodiment (Todres and
9 Galvin 2010). These are based on Heidegger's concept of *Gegnet* (abiding expanse) in
10 his later works on existential homelessness – the uniquely human situation that
11 energises us towards greater authenticity (Mugerauer 2008; Todres and Galvin 2010;).
12 Through this approach, we aim to understand our participants as people actively
13 making sense of their situations, and trying to find their own unique ways towards
14 healthy ageing.
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33 **Methodology**

34 ***Sample***

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36 According to Smith et al. (2009), IPA studies typically use small samples to focus on
37 the quality of the lifeworld in depth and detail. Smith et al. (2009) suggested that a
38 sample size between three to six participants is suitable for IPA's idiographic approach
39 of disclosing participants' lived experiences and making sense of essential phenomena
40 from a relatively homogeneous group.
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49 Participants were recruited through personal networks and snowball sampling.
50 The inclusion criteria were: 1) aged 50 years or above, 2) British living in the UK or
51 Hongkonger living in HK, 3) member of a badminton club who plays the sport at least
52 once a week, and 4) able to read English and speak fluently in either Cantonese or
53 English. Altogether six participants (age range 56 to 75 years) participated in this
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3 study. Three of them were from the UK, and the other three were from HK. Table 1
4
5 provides their demographic information. The average length of the interviews was 55
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7 minutes.
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10 [Insert Table 1]
11
12
13

14 *Procedure*

15
16 A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared. After receiving ethical approval
17
18 from XXX, a pilot interview was conducted to fine tune the schedule and interview
19
20 questions. Prior to the interviews, participants were given an information sheet and
21
22 they all signed a consent form. In the interviews, they were first asked a series of
23
24 background questions.
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26

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28 Funnelling was used beginning with relatively straightforward questions (e.g.,
29
30 What makes you like badminton?). Participants were then asked about the role of
31
32 badminton in their wellbeing (e.g., What do you gain from your participation in
33
34 badminton?), followed by questions about their personality on and off the badminton
35
36 court (e.g., How does your personality shine through?). Finally, they were asked about
37
38 possible influences of culture on their experience. Probes such as “Can you elaborate
39
40 on that?” were used when a response was unclear.
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45 All interviews were transcribed within 72 hours after completion. Although the
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47 HK participants were proficient in English, they were given a choice to do the
48
49 interviews in either Cantonese or English. This was so they could express themselves
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51 in their mother tongue, especially when discussing HK’s local culture. All of the HK
52
53 participants all opted for Cantonese, although often code-switched between Cantonese
54
55 and English during their interviews. To ensure that they were not misinterpreted, an
56
57 English transcript of the interview was sent to each participant. They were invited to
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3 correct for originally intended meanings in the translation. No participants opted to
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5 correct their translated transcripts.
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10 *Data analysis*

11
12 IPA was used to analyse the interviews. This qualitative approach is
13
14 phenomenological in that it explores in detail how individuals give meaning to their
15
16 personal experiences (Smith 1996). It also emphasises the researcher's active role in
17
18 making sense of the participants' personal and social world through a process of
19
20 interpretative activity based on his or her own personal experiences and understanding
21
22 of the relevant literature (Smith 1996).
23
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25

26 Analysis was conducted based on guidelines from Smith et al. (2009) and a
27
28 published cross-cultural study using IPA (Tan et al. 2010). First, the transcripts were
29
30 read and re-read to gain a rich familiarity with the participant's meanings. Second,
31
32 intra-case themes were identified and theme labels were developed. Within this stage,
33
34 each of the transcripts was analysed individually using the empathic hermeneutic
35
36 (Ricoeur, 1974). Dialogues between the two authors enhanced development of
37
38 emergent themes. Third, inter-case themes were identified. This included looking for
39
40 connections between the intra-case emergent themes from each of the participants and
41
42 grouping them according to conceptual similarities. At this stage, some of the themes
43
44 that had weaker evidential bases, or did not fit well with the emerging structure were
45
46 dropped. Fourth, the remaining themes were finally reconfigured. They are presented
47
48 in Table 2 and Table 3 (in Appendix) for the UK and the HK participants respectively.
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50 Themes across the two groups were noted, and their commonalities and differences
51
52 were identified.
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Credibility checks

A number of strategies were adopted to enhance the credibility of the analyses. First, open coding was used to ensure that our analysis was organised around themes that emerged from the transcripts, instead of pre-determined constructs (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Second, we followed Smith and McGannon's (2018) recommendation of using critical friends to assess the quality of the data presented. The second author acted as a critical friend to review whether the themes captured participants lived experiences, and how the selected extracts might be interpreted differently. Third, researcher reflexivity was systematically employed. In particular, we drew on Ahern's (1999) guidelines for reflexive bracketing. For example, the first author kept a reflexive journal to continuously language how his own bicultural background (Chinese enculturation through growing up in HK, British acculturation through a first degree in the UK), and taken-for-granted assumptions (e.g. understandings of wellbeing informed by both Western and Eastern cultures), could influence the research process. The possible impact of these was monitored through in-depth analytic discussions with the second author. Some reflections and their impact are discussed later in the Conclusion.

Results and discussion

The findings are presented in three sections. The first section focuses on the similarities between British and HK participants. The second and third sections present more unique themes from the British and the HK participants respectively.

Shared themes: Badminton as i) Self expression and ii) Mood regulation

i) Self expression

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2
3 British and HK older adults experienced badminton as a platform to express
4 themselves. Darren begins by explaining how he expresses himself through a recent
5 attempt to play with someone much younger than him:
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9
10 “I’ll say, I’m open to experiences [...] If I see players in their 20s or 30s, I
11 tend to avoid them (laughs). Having said that, I recently played with a Hong
12 Kong team member last week. Why? Because he needed an extra player to
13 be his partner. He was like, ‘Hey, come and have a go!’ So, when I played
14 with him, it’s a different game. I tried to avoid playing at the back, I stayed
15 up front so I could run less, that Hong Kong team guy stayed at the back and
16 played like a beast, you could literally hear the sound of him smashing the
17 shuttlecock tirelessly, and there was no chance I could play like him, so what
18 I could only do was to focus on my own part - staying up front, trying to play
19 a few shots there and taking those chances.” – Darren
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31 Darren’s sense of self is expressed in two notable ways. First, despite his
32 tendency to avoid younger players, he is up for the challenge of filling in when
33 younger players need him for a game. Second, he is also open to using different tactics
34 to cooperate with his younger partner. Stories of acceptance and adaptation in Dionigi
35 et al.’s (2013) study showed that sports offered older participants an alternative to the
36 declining body narrative of ageing. Similar to Dionigi et al.’s (2013) participants,
37 Darren’s experiences highlight the role of badminton in helping him to accept and
38 adapt to his ageing body - he appreciates that his body no longer allows him to play
39 “tirelessly” like his younger partner, so he adopts a tactical position in which he is
40 positioned to “take those chances”. Adopting Todres and Galvin’s (2010) concept of
41 dwelling-mobility, Darren may be said to experience dwelling in the dimension of
42 embodiment – a quality of rootedness, through acceptance of his body’s limitations.
43 His tactical adaptations during the game, on the other hand, may offer mobility, an
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3 experience of flow in playing “up front” and seeking after chances. Dwelling-mobility
4
5 experienced together offers wellbeing in its deepest possibility according to
6
7 Heidegger: adventure from existential possibility as well as at-homeness with what has
8
9 been given (Todres and Galvin 2010).
10

11
12 David recalls how badminton allows his “competitive” self:

13
14 “[Badminton] gives me everything that I want. I want challenge, and I’ve
15
16 always been competitive [...] If you want to succeed in any sports, you’ve
17
18 got to be competitive, I believe. Without the competitiveness, you haven’t
19
20 got the challenge that it brings, and the, um, the drive to get better, and drive
21
22 to improve yourself, um, which is all part of it.” – David
23
24

25
26 David “wants challenge” and playing sports and being competitiveness are
27
28 entwined together in his life. Badminton “gives him everything” and, in particular,
29
30 expression to his need for competitiveness. These drive him to “challenge” and
31
32 “improve” himself. References to identity, being retired, and a widower recur through
33
34 his interview. Applying Todres and Galvin’s (2010) theory, competitiveness in
35
36 badminton may offer David mobility in the identity and embodiment elements of his
37
38 lifeworld. In terms of the identity element, he experiences a sense of *I can* (seeking to
39
40 win). In the embodiment element, he gets a sense of *vitality*, of “getting better” and a
41
42 “drive to improve”.
43
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45
46 Finally, Gloria is able to express her interest in new people in the context of
47
48 badminton:
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50
51 “[A] good thing about the club is that during every badminton session,
52
53 there will always be a few spaces open to the public, so almost every time
54
55 you get to play with or against someone new, and I’m usually quite
56
57 excited about that part.” – Gloria
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3 The prospect of playing with strangers is “quite exciting” for Gloria. This
4 offers mobility in various elements in her lifeworld. In terms of temporality, she is
5 energised by the recurring future possibilities of “someone new”; in terms of
6 intersubjectivity, the uncertainty of what kind of people will fill up the “few spaces
7 open to the public” offers her a sense of *mysterious interpersonal attraction* (Todres
8 and Galvin 2010, 5-6).
9

10
11
12 The participants’ experiences in badminton illuminate how sport, personality,
13 and wellbeing interpermeate in their lives. For Darren, badminton brings to the fore
14 his openness toward himself and toward others, and appears to be a significant element
15 of his ageing process. For David, there is vitality and a sense of ‘I can’ from
16 embodying competitiveness on court. For Gloria, the desire and recurring opportunity
17 to experience badminton with new members of the public affords wellbeing socially
18 and temporally in the anticipation of the future.
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35 *ii) Mood regulation*

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37 Badminton was also an opportunity for our participants to experience hopeful mood.

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39 Darren recounts an experience of reconnection:

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42 “I thought they had already forgotten me. However, I recently crashed
43 into them again in this club, and they showed great respect to me, telling
44 me all about their life, including their university life and work life; and
45 that made me really happy, really happy!” – Darren
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51
52 Darren thought he was forgotten by the young men he had coached previously,
53 yet they re-connected with him and “showed great respect” to him. Being remembered
54 and still appreciated by these former relationships, and seeing his continuing relevance
55 in their lives, were sources of good mood, as can be seen by “really happy” in the
56 extract which he repeats twice in succession. It is relevant to add that Darren currently
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2
3 plays with a coach and shows a great respect for her (analysed later). Thus the
4 coaching relationship is an aspect of badminton that offers a significant source of
5 reward and enjoyment for himself through self-improvement and the benefitting of
6 others.
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11
12 By contrast, David claims “pleasure” from [appreciating the aesthetic aspects of](#)
13 [sports](#):
14

15
16 “People get so much lift in terms of beauty, seeing people participating in
17 sports (pause) and I realise that (pause) I’m one of those, I get an awful lot
18 of pleasure from seeing people I’ve seen over the years in cricket, football,
19 badminton [...] I’ve seen good badminton players that I just enjoyed
20 watching from, might be the way they move, the way they perform their
21 shots, that’s what I get out of sports generally. [A fellow club member] has
22 certain amounts of beauty in the way he moves about in the court, and the
23 way he plays his shots, it’s almost artistic, almost like a bit of a balled
24 dance if you like, coming in and playing a shot, and then playing a
25 deceptive shot, you know, that’s beauty to me!” – David
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38 In David’s life, sports have provided a hedonic element of pleasure through the
39 lift in mood, and a eudaimonic element of self-understanding through indications to
40 his own identity – helping to situate himself, as when he says “I’m one of those!”. This
41 understanding becomes more significant when considered in the context of another
42 part of the interview where he highlights not feeling “isolated” as important to his
43 wellbeing, especially since becoming a widower. In our analysis, sports provide David
44 with wellbeing through the qualities of dwelling (*I am*) and mobility (*I can*) in the
45 identity element of his lifeworld. [His aesthetic responses recall Phoenix and Orr’s](#)
46 [\(2014\) sensory form of pleasure. Participants from their study and those from](#)
47 [Humberstone and Stuart \(2016\) reported sensory pleasure through touch, smell,](#)
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3 hearing, and proprioception. In contrast, the visual form of pleasure is focal in David's
4 account of being on court, witness to "beauty, artistry, and dance".
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8 Finally, Paul's good mood is manifest during the day in the anticipation of
9 playing:
10

11 "On the days I'm playing badminton, you know, I'm quite excited, quite
12 pleased. I wake up in the morning thinking, 'Yes, I'm going to play badminton
13 today', but the rest of the days when I don't play badminton, it's not a
14 negative effect because I'm not playing badminton, it's just normal." – Paul
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20
21 Badminton enables Paul to experience his day as "excited" and "pleased" and
22 himself in terms of the presence and absence of badminton. When present, he wakes
23 up motivated by the thought-feeling of "Yes, I'm going to play badminton today".
24 When absent, he does not experience particular "negative effects" as the days are "just
25 normal". Paul's relation with badminton highlights an experience of dwelling-mobility
26 in his mood, as described by Todres and Galvin (2010). The anticipation of playing in
27 the coming day appears as a felt sense of "Yes" propelling him forward. The days
28 without badminton lack this mobility, yet they are "not negative, [rather] just normal",
29 suggesting a peacefulness in dwelling in his mood during these days.
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41 Our participants' rich lived experiences help to flesh out the link between
42 physical activity and [wellbeing](#) reported in previous ageing research (e.g., Whitehead
43 and Blaxton 2017) through three notable ways: 1) physical interpersonal activity
44 through sport offers older adults a chance for meaningful reconnection, 2) sport offers
45 opportunities for aesthetic expression and self-actualisation, and 3) physical
46 interpersonal activity stimulates hopeful and open anticipation of the future. Based on
47 our analysis, [embodied cooperation and interconnectedness with others appears to be](#)
48 [particularly important in older adults' enjoyment of sports participation.](#)
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3 ***British participants: Badminton as a conduit for self-improvement***
4

5 British participants illuminated a further beneficial theme from their sport: becoming a
6 better person. All of them stated that badminton helped them to change in a positive
7 way. In the following extract, David acknowledges shortcomings and how he tries to
8 moderate them:
9

14 “I’m not a big admirer of myself, in terms of my personality, but I do try
15 to moderate all of my shortcomings, and be more considerate of others
16 [...] My hidden (2 seconds) shortcomings are largely caused by my own
17 dissatisfaction with my own performance, but I do that by showing a bit
18 of aggressiveness on court, and (pause) poor behaviour at times, which
19 I’m not happy about, and I’ve tried to be (pause) temperate many times
20 but not with a lot of success, I need to have some (pause) something that
21 really gets me (pause) going if you like. But it doesn’t excuse my
22 behaviour.” – David
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33 David can see the “shortcomings” of his personality through badminton, and
34 he tries to be more “considerate of others” and “temperate” although without a lot of
35 success. Through the manifestation of poor behaviour and the realisation on court with
36 others, he is able to come to a judgment that his self-dissatisfaction does not excuse his
37 behaviour. Badminton gives him the opportunity to see the disparity between the
38 person he is and the person he would rather be. In Heidegger’s (1962) discussion of
39 authenticity, he placed central importance in Dasein’s hearing (hearkening) the
40 conscience - this “voice” inside is not formulated in words but calls us if we are ready
41 to listen to our ownmost being. For David, incidents in badminton seem to trigger his
42 conscience, which calls him to account: by confronting him with the mismatch
43 between his ways of being in different parts of his lifeworld. Heidegger (1962)
44 believed that hearing one’s conscience was crucial to authenticity by temporalizing
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3 what he is, has been, and resolves to be in future. In another part of his interview,
4 David is kind towards his two grandchildren, yet here we see how he is unkind
5 towards the other players on court, through being upset with himself. Heidegger's
6 (1962) concept of the conscience offers a way to understand David's self-
7 improvement.
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11 Paul describes himself as "reserved" and "quiet" in public, but he also claims
12 that he can be "very extraverted" in badminton:
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15 "He was playing down there one time when I was playing with other
16 people, and I, erm, I just said to him, 'Do you want to have a game?',
17 and then we played a game together, and we exchanged emails and got
18 in touch to play whenever we could. The same with the other people I
19 play with now." – Paul
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30 Paul's badminton makes him extraverted, as he puts it. In order to find other
31 players, he is willing to approach strangers to enlist them for his group. According to
32 Adler (2013), personality serves people's particular purposes and goals within their
33 lifespan. The person is not extraverted, for no reason. Paul's extraversion is not an
34 isolated 'trait' of himself occurring in a cultural vacuum. It is valuable for Paul to
35 gather people together to play badminton and we can see in the transcript it is also a
36 vehicle for other purposes: to diffuse stress and engage with strangers. These purposes
37 amount to Paul's extraversion, as a particular way of being-in-the-world (Heidegger
38 1962). This lifeworld is one in which others are approachable, yet these others have, as
39 he puts it, "come and gone over the years". Phenomenology is a critique of the
40 essentialist view of personality, as somehow inside the person as a trait. Ron's
41 extraversion is not "inside" him; it is out there in-the-world: the world calls for Paul to
42 be socially outward and fulfil this role to sustain badminton within his and others'
43 lives. We may say the world of Paul calls for someone's extraversion and this
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3 someone happens to be him. Extraversion describes both Paul and the world: the
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5 being-in-the-world.
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7 Emma states explicitly “becoming a better person”:

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10 “If you think, oh, I can’t be bothered doing this today, you’re going to let
11
12 three people down, because there’s four to play, so it makes you motivated
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14 and committed, just the fact that you’re not going to let people down [...]
15
16 You’d probably become a better person through it because you, as I said,
17
18 you don’t want to let people down.” – Emma
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21 Emma is motivated by not letting other players down. This awareness of others
22
23 is what encourages commitment even on days when she cannot be bothered. The
24
25 commitment to not letting others down in badminton is in her understanding making
26
27 her “a better person”. This converges with the *perseverance* theme presented in Heo et
28
29 al. (2013), which reported how different challenges in the context of sport helped older
30
31 adults to develop a sense of perseverance. For Emma, the challenge is that her club
32
33 will always require four players (including herself) to be present, and this challenge
34
35 plays an important part in developing her [commitment to enabling others to play](#).
36
37 [Emma’s sense making recalls Phoenix and Orr \(2014\) that physical activity could](#)
38
39 [contribute to the development of a *disciplined body* in older age](#).
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44 According to Roberts and Mroczek’s (2008) review of ageing research,
45
46 personality development continues throughout later life and old age. The analysis of
47
48 our participants provides lived experiences to exemplify this process: David trying to
49
50 be more considerate; Paul being more extraverted; and Emma practising commitment.
51
52 It is noteworthy that in addition to developing a sense of perseverance (as discussed in
53
54 Heo et al. 2013), other aspects of self-improvement in later life may also be triggered
55
56 by the process of facing the challenges associated with sport: David’s challenge of
57
58 reacting to poor performance on the badminton court seems to help develop his self-
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3 awareness; and Paul's challenge of recruiting more players seems to help develop his
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5 extraversion.
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10 ***Hong Kong participants: Badminton is a cultural symbol***

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12 The HK participants made sense of some of their experiences in terms of their culture
13 and society. Playing badminton reflected some cultural features of HK. First,
14 appointing a coach is common among older players in HK. All three of the
15 participants spoke proactively about their positive experiences with a coach. Chris
16 mentions that his coach helps to "hone his skills". Gloria claims that playing with the
17 coach allows her to "learn something new" and to "feel more comfortable". Darren
18 seems to get the most from his coach:
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28 "If I play well, then I will feel very satisfied. I may text my coach
29 afterwards and tell her how happy I feel. I will thank my coach for a
30 good training session. On the other hand, if I don't play well enough, I
31 may text the coach to apologise. Why? Because the coach has spent
32 both the time and the effort to help me improve, yet I don't play well
33 enough, so I feel like I'm letting the coach down." – Darren
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41 The extract displays the following notable experiential claims: 1) he feels
42 gratitude towards his coach for playing well; 2) he feels apologetic for not playing
43 well; and 3) he feels he is "letting the coach down" when he does not play well. Thus,
44 when he plays well, it is due to the coach and the "good training session". However,
45 when he does not play well, he is culpable for letting the coach down and wasting her
46 time. The asymmetry in this attribution style is reminiscent of the traditional Chinese
47 master-disciple relationship. According to this relationship, the role of disciple is to
48 atone for any failings and to gratefully revere the master for any personal successes
49 (Wach, Kitagawa, and Alles 1988). For Darren, enacting this attributional style with
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3 his coach seems an important part of his enjoyment. It is also noteworthy that the way
4 he expresses his happiness and satisfaction gained from playing good badminton (i.e.,
5 via text messages after the session) is a good example to illuminate what Phoenix and
6 Orr (2014) described as documented pleasure.
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12 Chris feels that badminton reflects what he admires about HK's culture:

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14 "Badminton is a special sport, because it is a sport that you see people
15 playing from a very young age to a very old age. I think that's
16 something positive [...] In HK, there's an accommodating culture.
17 People tend to be inviting and encouraging, even if they don't share
18 the same interest as yours. I think this kind of culture can be found in
19 the sporting context here as well [...] It doesn't matter where I come
20 from, what my level of education is, or what I can afford; as long as I
21 have my badminton racket and my trainers, I can play, and all of us
22 who play the sport are equal." – Chris
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34 Chris claims that HK is "an accommodating culture" and he can feel this
35 inclusivity in badminton. Badminton is "special" because it can accommodate people
36 of different ages, interests, backgrounds, educational attainment, and socioeconomic
37 status. This high level of inclusivity in the badminton arena seems to allow Chris to
38 experience dwelling in the spatial element of his lifeworld – a sense of being at-home
39 and feeling of comfort and settlement in his physical environment, qualities associated
40 with dwelling in one's spatiality (Todres and Galvin 2010).
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50 By contrast, badminton could also disclose some of the political problems that
51 Hongkongers are facing. In the context of the current socio-political differences
52 between HK and China, relationships between some native Hongkongers and Chinese
53 from the Mainland are under strain (Chen, Hsu, and Li 2018; Hall 2017; Lowe and
54 Tsang 2017). Gloria's unpleasant experience in her club reflects this tension:
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3 “There’re quite a few people from Mainland China in my club. They
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5 tend to be a bit wild. They tend to get angry as soon as something
6
7 doesn’t go their way. If they don’t like something, they’ll grumble
8
9 immediately [...] I feel that their culture was really different. Their
10
11 focus was always on winning. In order to win, they might try to avoid
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13 playing with me, or yell at me.” – Gloria
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16 The extract captures Gloria’s understanding of the situation between HK and
17
18 China. She says the Mainlanders in her club “tend to be a bit wild”. They have bad
19
20 tempers and are obsessed with winning. It is relevant to draw from two other parts of
21
22 her interview for further interpretation. First, Gloria mentions that she tends to focus
23
24 on the “process” of playing badminton more than the “winning”. Hence, the process-
25
26 orientation versus goal-directedness is perhaps how she understands her experience of
27
28 badminton as “really different” from that of the Mainlanders in her club. Second,
29
30 Gloria describes herself as “emotionally stable”. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962),
31
32 our sense of self derives from involvement in an intersubjective world. For example,
33
34 we may gain a sense of self through interpersonal comparisons (Merleau-Ponty 1962).
35
36 Hence, Gloria’s sense of self as “emotionally stable” may reflect her immersion in a
37
38 world peopled by others from another culture who “get angry” and “grumble”.
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44 According to Williams (2011, 93), “Sports represent a window into the soul of
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46 the culture of its participants”. This quote summarises poetically his work on the
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48 relationship between sports and economics. The foregoing analysis bears this out in
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50 the participant extracts, which provide a snapshot of HK’s culture through the
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52 phenomenology of their lived experience of badminton.
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57 **Conclusion**

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3 Despite the growing attention given to the impact of physical activity on healthy
4 ageing in recent years, no qualitative study has examined how badminton, the second
5 most popular participation sport, is experienced by Eastern and Western older adults
6 and the meanings they assign to it. This study explored how experiences of the self,
7 sports, and wellbeing interpermeate in the lifeworlds of active older adults.
8 Participants from the UK and HK experienced badminton as a crucible enabling them
9 to express themselves. Badminton was also a conduit for a range of hopeful emotions
10 for all the participants. Among the British participants, badminton allowed them to
11 articulate becoming a better person, by acting as a mirror and catalyst of their
12 personality. Among the HK participants, badminton provided a connection back to
13 traditional roles, reflected HK's inclusive culture, and symbolised HK's current socio-
14 political situation.

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17 In terms of implications, this study shows how playing a leisure-time sport can
18 facilitate self-improvement and emotion regulation in later life. Researchers and
19 practitioners in the fields of healthy ageing and applied (e.g., clinical, health, sports
20 and exercise, etc.) psychology may beneficially investigate how to maximise such
21 valuable therapeutic effects. Cultural factors which contribute to sports experience
22 may be of interest to club organisers. In particular, since the presence of a coach seems
23 to be valued by people in HK, they can consider sponsoring the coaching fee and
24 offering more accredited coaching courses in HK. In addition, badminton may also be
25 considered part of team-building in organisations to increase morale since it is
26 accommodating of different ages, and it may promote good mood and social
27 interaction.

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30 A limitation and strength of the study is the small number of participants
31 analysed. The method of IPA is idiographic rather than nomothetic, in aiming to
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3 illuminate essentials of phenomena by disclosing actual lived experiences in a
4 particular participant sample. Our themes, therefore, make no claim to generalisability
5 to other people or cultures. Rather, their validity is to be judged on the plausibility of
6 the analyses presented, and whether and to what extent these illuminate for the reader
7 significant and universal features of human experience. IPA is also distinctive in its
8 attention to researcher reflexivity. The first author is bicultural with significant lived
9 experience of HK and the UK, and is bilingual in Cantonese and English. An example
10 of how this impacted the study was the researcher's ability to code-switch in response
11 to the HK participants, thus enabling nuances to be expressed in the interviews. In
12 turn, this enabled different preferred interaction styles among the British and HK
13 participants. For example, some British participants preferred to create their own
14 modus operandi in the interviews, whereas some Hong Kong participants preferred to
15 follow the researcher's lead and a clear working framework. This embodied awareness
16 of variations in Eastern and Western cultural values and styles afforded flexibility,
17 nuance and spontaneity in practice, and in the knowledge co-creation process.

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38 Recent findings suggest that numerous HK residents could potentially seek the
39 right to emigrate to the UK, amid mounting concerns regarding Chinese control
40 (Barnett 2015; Price and Pomfret 2017). A common theme from all participants was
41 self expression. Recent political events in HK may be understood as supporting this
42 theme. For example, the Umbrella Movement (Hall 2017) testifies to the high value
43 placed on self-determination and expression by Hongkongers, in common with their
44 UK counterparts and with other democratic nations of the West. Our qualitative
45 findings highlight how experiences of sports participation may serve as a microcosm
46 for elements of the lifeworld more generally. The phenomenological analysis of lived
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3 experiences provides a powerful lens for understanding psychological processes in the
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5 individual, and perhaps society more generally.
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10 **Disclosure statement**

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12 The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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26 Appendices

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28 See Tables 2 and 3.
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Table 1. Demographic data for participants

Participant* (Nationality/ Ethnicity)	Sex	Age	Working Status (Occupation/ Previous Occupation)	Marital Status	Frequency of Playing Badminton	Other Regular Exercise
David (UK/ White British)	Male	75	Retired (Government Official)	Widower	Once a Week	Walking
Emma (UK/White British)	Female	63	Full-time (Administrative Officer)	Married	Once a Week	Walking and Yoga
Paul (UK/White British)	Male	60	Part-time (Computer Programmer)	Married	Once a Week	Hillwalking, Stair Climbing, and Swimming
Chris (HK/Chinese)	Male	62	Retired (Insurance Consultant)	Married	Once a Week	Swimming
Gloria (HK/Chinese)	Female	56	Full-time (Piano Teacher)	Married	2 to 3 Times a Week	Dancing and Yoga
Darren (HK/Chinese)	Male	63	Full-time (Architect)	Married	4 Times a Week	Diving

*All participants were given pseudonyms to preserve anonymity and confidentiality.

Table 2. Inter-case themes for the British group

	David	Emma	Paul
Badminton as a platform for expressing myself	It allows my competitiveness	It brings out my bossiness and dependability	It shows my laid-back side
Badminton as a conduit for self-improvement	The game reflects how I try to cope	It makes me motivated and committed	It develops the desirable personality: extraversion
Badminton keeps me well	It keeps me healthy and gives me pleasure	It helps me shake off the stress	It leads to excitement and reduces stress

Table 3. Inter-case themes for the Hong Kong group

	Darren	Chris	Gloria
Openness enacted in the sporting context	I use different ways to approach the game	It's not just a sport, it's also an artistic activity to appreciate	I like to play with/against someone new
Badminton helps quality of life	Badminton enables better work-life balance; makes me happy	It gives me a sense of purpose	It keeps me young, happy, and hopeful
Badminton is a cultural symbol	Having a good coach is significant	Badminton symbolises the accommodating culture in HK	Ambivalence towards mainlanders

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