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Moments of pleasure in the lives of older adults: why do they matter?

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Abstract

While research has recently focused on pleasure associated with deeply engaging pursuits such as hockey or dance, limited attention has been given to pleasurable *momentary* experiences in the lives of older adults. Examined through the lens of pleasure, the purpose of this secondary analysis was to explore the role of everyday moments of leisure in the lives of older adults. Four themes were developed that reflect the experiences and meanings of pleasure in the lives of older adult study participants (n = 5; aged 59–84): (1) Pleasure was experienced in small, but important ways, and (2) was often embedded in place. (3) The older adults were intentional about making pleasure happen in their lives and (4) pleasure matters (a lot) in the lives of older adults. This study highlights the role of momentary pleasures in motivating engagement and meaning-making juxtaposed against everyday life challenges and obligations experienced by older adults.

Keywords: emplaced, everyday, leisure, older adults, pleasure.

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Introduction

> [T]o truly enjoy life and take pleasure in the fact that we have today, those little bits of joy…are vital to having a really good day. You know, everybody has to clean the washroom. Everybody has to do laundry. Everybody has to do it. That's just part of our lives.…I think for me, I need to make that time in my day where I don't have the everything else….And I think if I didn't build on those moments of everyday leisure, I think my life would be less. I would be a lesser person because of it. (Francesca, older adult study participant)

What role does pleasure play in the lives of older adults? In many Western (e.g. North American and European) countries, pleasure-seeking is often associated with self-indulgent or hedonistic activities (e.g. drinking, eating, spa treatments) or juxtaposed with purposeful or useful activitiessuch as work (e.g. Koo 2023). This privileging of pursuits deemed purposeful or goal-oriented implicitly devalues the experience of pleasure for its own sake. Even within the field of leisure studies (where this work is rooted), the benefits of pleasurable, casual leisure activities are often seen as fleeting, short-lived and inconsequential, whereas other more "serious" forms of leisure are often more valued because of their sustained benefits (Stebbins 2015). At the same time, the experience of freedom and choice are foundational to the definition of leisure (e.g. Iwasaki 2017; Kleiber et al. 2011), and the desire to experience pleasure is a common driver of (free-choice) decisions to participate in leisure.

There is an expansive body of research that has demonstrated the myriad benefits of diverse forms of leisure pursuits for the overall health and well-being of older adults (e.g. Paggi et al. 2016), including for older adults living with ongoing health problems (e.g. An et al. 2023; Hutchinson & Nimrod 2012). These benefits are further evidenced across non-western cultural contexts (e.g. Ji et al. 2025; Lee & Heo 2021; Wora et al. 2025). Yet, in "health promoting" cultures, most attention is given to pursuits that require significant investments of time and other resources (e.g. "serious" leisure pursuits, such as volunteering or travel) with limited attention to the role and value of the smallest pleasurable moments in people's lives (Gallant et al. 2024, 2026). Even in later life, pursuits that are purposeful are often prioritized over those that may be pleasurable (e.g. Hill et al. 2023). Despite this, some studies have identified the value of smaller or

more "casual" forms of leisure for well-being (e.g. Standridge et al. 2020), including for coping with and adapting to challenging later life events, such as managing a chronic health condition (e.g. Chun et al. 2024; Hutchinson & Kleiber 2005). Yet, even within this research the concept of pleasure has received limited attention.

To demonstrate the value of pleasure in the lives of older adults, research has recently focused on pleasure in the context of deeply engaging pursuits such as hockey or dance (e.g. Allain 2020; Krekula 2022). These types of physical activities fall under the umbrella of "leisure." Yet, limited attention has been given to pleasurable *momentary* experiences in the lives of older adults and, within the leisure literature, there has been limited attention to the concept of pleasure, with more focus given to what are seen as more substantial or durable benefits (Stebbins 2015). Examined through the lens of pleasure, the purpose of this secondary analysis was to explore the role of everyday moments of leisure (EML) in the lives of older adults. This analysis provides a unique opportunity to bring the concept of pleasure to better understand why and how the pleasures associated with brief forms of leisure matter in the lives of older adults.

Later Life Living and "Aging Well"

Regardless of physical or cognitive abilities, "aging well" encompasses subjective indicators of well-being, and includes such factors as one's perceived abilities to manage challenges in life, to experience social connections and to maintain a sense of autonomy or control (e.g. Chapman 2005; Waddell et al. 2025; Wahl et al. 2012). Although there is not a unified definition of aging well, this perspective of aging asserts that people's experiences of themselves and their lives "should not be considered distinct from the environment in which they age" (Waddell et al. 2025, p. 5). This perspective suggests that how older adults invest their time, the spaces and places in which they find themselves, matter to later life living and aging well.

Yet, it is striking how adults are also facing other new, and often unexpected, sets of challenges as they age. Most frequently included in these challenges are changes in health, whether one's own health or that of close family members and friends (e.g. Nakamura et al. 2022). Furthermore,

limited financial security, loss of a partner (e.g. to death or divorce) or entering later life alone, and increasing responsibilities for caring for aging parents or other family members, all impact this sense of freedom that we associate with later life living (e.g. Jopp & Smith 2006).

Beyond these day-to-day immediacies are societal expectations about what older adults should or should not do, and even what aging should look like. Many Western societal norms, reinforced on a daily basis, reflect negative assumptions about aging (e.g. Ma et al. 2024). Ageism and ageist stereotypes are reflected in societal messages that can direct (and undermine) people's decisions about how (and with whom) to invest their time (e.g. Ludwig et al. 2024). The extent to which people adopt (intentionally or not) aging stereotypes about acceptable and good uses of time in older age can contribute to feelings of guilt ("I should be…"), feeling invisible, or feeling that one's value as a contributing society member is gone (e.g. Koo 2023).

What value, then, do adults in later life ascribe to their time spent in non-productive or leisure-like pursuits, and what value do these pursuits have in their lives?

Leisure in the Lives of Older Adults

As noted in the Introduction, the value of leisure for almost all aspects of well-being in later life has been well established. For example, there is abundant evidence of the benefits of not only physically active pursuits such as sports, walking, and biking for physical health (e.g. improved strength, coordination, energy) but also mental and emotional well-being (e.g. sense of satisfaction or mastery) (e.g. Chun et al. 2023; Paggi et al. 2016). Similar psychosocial benefits have been attributed to other arts- or culturally based pursuits such as music making, writing, or crafting (e.g. Fancourt & Steptoe 2018). Activities or experiences that connect people to others are also critical to increasing sense of belonging and reducing social isolation (e.g. Kadowaki & Wister 2023). In their review article, Fancourt and colleagues (2020) stated that: "Thousands of studies have shown a relationship between leisure engagement and both physical and mental health" (p. 329), including for the prevention and management of mental and physical health conditions (e.g. depression, heart disease),

as well as improved self-reported health and increased longevity (e.g. Menec et al. 2020).

Leisure that is focused on relaxing or sensory stimulation has been associated with hedonistic pleasures; these have been attributed to "activities that require little effort (casual leisure) and provide immediate, though short-lived, pleasure and gratification" (Rodrigues & Marquest 2026, p. 670). These are often contrasted with more serious leisure pursuits that require greater personal investment "but have more lasting and transformative consequences for personal fulfilment, well-being and happiness" (Rodrigues & Marquest 2026, p. 670).

Taken together, there is compelling evidence that pursuits that are enjoyable, personally meaningful, and self-determined (e.g. for which people are able to exercise some autonomy and control) contribute to greater levels of well-being (e.g. Chun et al. 2024). Despite this breadth of knowledge about the benefits of most forms of leisure for older adults, there has been limited attention to the role or meanings of small, EML in the lives of older adults, or to how they reflect conceptualizations of pleasure outside the leisure literature (e.g. Pheonix & Orr 2014).

Conceptualizing Everyday Moments of Leisure

Countering the common focus on structured and commodified leisure experiences (i.e. activities, programs or events that people pay to attend and are often organized or planned by recreation professionals), the concept of EML draws attention to the smallest units of leisure that people experience in the context of their everyday lives – perhaps taking a break to brew a cup of coffee, to watch a sunset, or to chat with a friend as they pass by on the street (Gallant et al. 2024).

Building on recent attention to short-duration experiences in several disciplines, such as the interest in nearby nature within urban geography (Cox et al. 2017), a concept synthesis (Walker & Avant 2005) was undertaken, aimed at understanding such experiences as forms of leisure, by seeking out descriptions of adults' momentary leisure experiences within diverse academic literature. Fifteen cross-disciplinary articles and book chapters were identified and systematically reviewed for key concepts and examples. Based on this analysis, we came to define EML as *subjectively*

defined and noticed enjoyable, personally resonant momentary experiences that occur within ordinary places and activities and that involve a juncture and are facilitated by a sense of safety, receptiveness and ease (Gallant et al. 2024, p. 232).

We subsequently collected primary data (Gallant et al. 2026, and described further in the Methods section that follows) through a series of phenomenological interviews, aiming to understand how EML come to occur in people's lives, the characteristics of such experiences and the meanings attributed to them. Analysis of these data further define EML as enjoyable brief experiences within or between daily activities and characterized by sensory and embodied experience. These moments occurred in the context of external circumstances, providing respite and contrast to experiences of oppression or worry about the state of the world, and fit within the crevices of one's life (e.g. within the breaks afforded to a full-time worker) or the hecticness of everyday life, and their surroundings.

Notably, the original study neither explicitly focused on the meanings of EML for the older study participants nor on how these moments were associated with the concept of pleasure.

Conceptualizing Pleasure in the Lives of Older Adults

Much of the research about pleasure in the lives of older adults seems to have been built on the work of Phoenix and Orr (2014). They drew on Smith (1980) to define pleasure as "the diverse emotions that make a person "feel good," including "happiness, joy, fun, sensuality, amusement, mirth, tranquility" (Smith 1980, p. 75, cited in Phoenix & Orr 2014, p. 96). Based on their research, which examined pleasure associated with physical activities, Pheonix and Orr developed a typology of pleasure, including: sensual pleasure, documented pleasure, the pleasure of habitual action, and the pleasure of immersion.

Sensual pleasure is associated with sensory experiences (e.g. seeing, smelling, tasting), including the experience of feeling connected to the environment associated with the activity (e.g. nature or material objects). *Documented pleasures* come from the process of documenting an activity (e.g. writing, photography, or tracking), as well as helping others through sharing knowledge and experience. The *pleasure of habitual action* comes

from implementing and adhering to routines related to the activity. Finally, the *pleasure of immersion* comes from a sense of focus, which enables people to either escape from, consider more, or gain different perspectives on daily life demands and issues.

Studies have built on Pheonix and Orr's (2014) seminal work to examine pleasure in the lives of older adults in relation to different forms of sport, such older men's participation in hockey (Allain 2020) and biking (Minello & Nixon 2017); physical activities such as walking/engaging in nature (Humberstone et al. 2025; Jackman et al. 2023) and dance (Krekula 2022); or other leisure pursuits, including community singing (Lee et al. 2016) and crafting (Liddle et al. 2013).

Of all the forms of pleasure within Pheonix and Orr's (2014) typology, sensual pleasures were evidenced across all the above studies. Sensory pleasures often led older adults to feel at one with their surroundings, the activities they engaged in, and the material objects involved in the activity, which were often viewed as a welcomed contrast to daily life (e.g. Humberstone et al. 2025; Minello & Nixon 2017). Within the studies, documented pleasures were seen in examples from the studies of hockey (Allain 2020) and dance (Krekula 2022) where the activity they were involved in connected them to feelings associated with their youth (e.g. freedom and fun). The most common experience of documented pleasure was the pleasure of sharing knowledge and experience gained throughout their lifetime (e.g. Allain 2020; Humberstone et al. 2025). The pleasure of habitual action provided feelings and experiences lost as they aged, such as a sense of purpose or structure (e.g. Jackman et al. 2023) and a perceived sense of control over their aging and health (Krekula 2022). As an example, participants in Jackman et al.'s health promotion initiative appreciated the structure the program provided them, especially in contrast to feeling a loss of structure in retirement. Finally, for the older adults who participated in the included studies, immersive pleasures provided escape and contrast to or a deeper understanding of experiences and difficulties in their daily lives. Feeling immersive pleasure gave some older adults a break from external worries or concerns (e.g. Humberstone et al. 2025; Lee et al. 2016; Liddle et al. 2013).

There is merit in examining whether these various forms of pleasure are part of older adults' experiences of less structured leisure experiences.

Summary and Statement of the Problem

Later life is somewhat paradoxical; the time that older adults have provides opportunities to experience freedom and pleasure, while challenges associated with aging sometimes limit these same opportunities. Leisure pursuits have multiple benefits for all aspects of later life living, but limited attention has been given to the role of small or "everyday" moments of leisure (EML) in the lives of older adults. Although there has been research that has looked at pleasure in relation to more deeply involving serious activities, such as hockey (Allain 2020), or specific forms of casual leisure, such as TV watching (Chun et al. 2024), none of the previous research on pleasure has examined brief or momentary activity pursuits and the forms of pleasure associated with them for older adults.

The overall aim of this secondary analysis was to bring the concept of pleasure more fully to understanding how and why brief moments of leisure matter for older adults to experience well-being in later life. Enhancing individual well-being in later life has been a core focus of researchers and practitioners interested in preserving and enhancing health and well-being as people age. While both hedonic and eudemonic well-being can be cultivated through different forms of leisure, within leisure research and practice the majority of emphasis has been on those pursuits that are more active, purposeful and deeply involving (i.e. requiring significant physical or cognitive investment). This is potentially limiting our understanding of the ways pleasurable moments of leisure can contribute to older adults' well-being, especially when other more "substantial" forms of leisure are less accessible.

As observed, despite interest in enhancing well-being in later life within the leisure literature there has been limited attention to the concept and experience of pleasure. Yet, pleasure is clearly an essential aspect of diverse forms of activity engagement for older adults. While our original study (Gallant et al. 2026) affirmed the value of diverse forms of momentary leisure experiences, it neither explicitly focused on the meanings of EML for the older study participants nor focused on how these moments were associated with the concept of pleasure. Examined through the lens of pleasure, the purpose of this secondary analysis was to explore the ways in which pleasure was experienced within EML and why and how pleasure mattered in the lives of the older adult study participants.

Methods

Description of the Methodology and Methods used in the Original Study

The original research (Gallant et al. 2026) was guided by interpretive phenomenology, an approach that recognizes human experience as embedded within situational circumstances, and shaped by the social, cultural, and political contexts in which they occur (Flood 2010; Smith et al. 2022; Tuohy et al. 2013). The hermeneutic and idiographic nature of interpretive phenomenology encourages focus on the interpretive meaning that participants and researchers attribute to the particular contexts in which a phenomenon occurs (Matua & Van Der Wal 2015; Smith et al. 2022). For this reason, interpretive phenomenology was selected to examine participants' lived experiences of EML, their interpretations of experience, and the contextual conditions in which they occur.

Following approval by the institutional research ethics boards at the universities of the original study's authors 20 participants engaged in the original study (15 women, 3 men, 2 non-binary; 13 identified as white, 7 identified as either south-Asian, east-Asian, multiracial, or Black) ranging in age from 20 to 84. The study recruitment was limited to people living in a coastal Canadian city. Notably recruitment for the study did not include mention of "leisure"; instead, they were invited to participate in a study of "short moments where people take breaks during the day to experience something fun, relaxing, joyful, or meaningful" (from information letter). Participants were invited to take part in a series of three interviews and one of two knowledge mobilization workshops. Data were collected between December 2022 and January 2025.

The first semi-structured interview (n = 20) focused on familiarizing participants with the concept of EML and explored the meaning of these moments within their lives. Participants were then invited to document EML experiences through photos or journaling and shared their documented examples with researchers during the second interview (n = 15). Finally, some participants took part in a "go-along" interview (n = 7) (Alexander et al. 2020) in which a researcher and participant met at a public location that was significant to the participant. After analyzing the data,

participants and a guest of their choice (i.e. a friend or family member) were invited to attend either an in-person (n = 9) or virtual (n = 8) knowledge mobilization workshop, during which researchers shared preliminary findings with participants and gathered feedback from participants on initial findings.

All interviews and knowledge mobilization workshops were audio-recorded, professionally transcribed, and then de-identified by research assistants. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyze data (Smith et al. 2022). In keeping with the ideographic foundations of IPA, each participant's data were analyzed independently with the development of a summary for each participant providing an overview of their personal experiential themes (PETs) across all interviews in which they engaged (Smith et al. 2022). Researchers then collaboratively reviewed the PETs to create group experiential themes (GETs) which provided the basis of the creation of the overall themes for the larger study.

Secondary Data Analysis

The secondary analysis aimed to answer the question: *what are the experiences and meanings of pleasure-based EML in the lives of older adults who participated in our original study?* Transcripts from five of the original 20 study participants were selected for this analysis, based on age (over 55). Participants ranged in ages from 59 to 84, with four identifying as women and one as a man. Three lived with a partner, one with an adult son, and one person lived alone. Two identified as white, with the remaining identifying as south-Asian, multiracial or Black. Four indicated they were retired and one was working. Within this subset of participants, two participants took part in two phases of interviews, with three participants engaging in all three phases of interviews. The phase three go-along interviews took place in urban parks (n = 2), and a senior's centre (n = 1). All of the participants in the secondary analysis attended an in-person (n = 3) or virtual (n = 2) knowledge mobilization workshop.

Adapted thematic analysis methods were used to conduct this secondary analysis (e.g. Braun & Clarke 2022). Braun and Clarke's proposed method typically begins with familiarization with the data; we had already spent considerable time with the data as part of the IPA process

for the original study. However, before moving to generate initial codes an annotated bibliography of key citations related to pleasure and older adults provided sensitizing concepts (e.g. Allain 2020; Pheonix & Orr 2014). Thus, the secondary analysis process was informed more by the literature than is typically seen with traditional thematic analysis methods. All team members reviewed the annotated bibliography and transcripts for two of the older adult study participants. Because of the ubiquitous referencing of the pleasure typology developed by Phoenix and Orr (2014) we looked to see to what extent the categorizations within this typology were evident in these transcripts, as well as inductively considering other concepts and ideas that were apparent in the data. Following collaborative discussion, these initial ideas (codes and descriptions) formed the preliminary coding framework (Braun & Clarke's proposed second phase).

We used the preliminary coding framework to code three of the transcripts. Transcripts were coded by one team member, and then reviewed by a second researcher, with discrepancies in coding resolved through discussion. A full team meeting followed this initial coding process, focused on refining the coding framework. This revised framework was then used to code all transcripts, following the same processes described above. Once this coding process was complete, a preliminary thematic framework, grounded in the concept of pleasure, was developed by the first author and refined through discussion with all authors. The process of refinement involved shifting from specific codes to a broader, more conceptual level of analysis (phases 4 and 5 of Braun & Clarke's method 2022). Braun and Clarke's final phase involves producing a report; Pseudonyms selected by participants in the original study were retained to present the findings that follow.

Trustworthiness was addressed through the use of an established research design, along with an iterative and collaborative approach to data analysis, including involvement of study participants in refining findings (Nowell et al. 2017). All authors were involved in the original study data analysis, which contributed to a strong familiarity with the data at the time of secondary analysis. The collaborative process of developing the coding framework, along with having all coded transcripts reviewed by a second researcher also contributed to trustworthiness. As all of the participants in the secondary analysis engaged in either an in-person or

virtual knowledge mobilization workshop, they had the opportunity to review and provide feedback on initial themes for the original study. Discussions and feedback from the workshop informed the development of themes for both the original study and this secondary analysis.

Findings

Four themes were developed that reflect the experiences and meanings of pleasure in these older adults' lives: (1) Pleasure was experienced in small but important ways; (2) Pleasure is embedded in place; (3) Older adults make pleasure happen in their lives; and (4) Pleasure matters (a lot) in the lives of older adults. The themes and representative quotes follow (note: although most themes/subthemes are supported by data from all older adult study participants, due to space constraints, only a few select quotes have been included).

Theme #1: Pleasure was Experienced in Small but Important Ways

We have constructed four subthemes to reflect older adult study participants' pleasurable moments: pleasurable sensory experiences, pleasurable connections (to self and others), pleasurable escapes, and the pleasure of doing everyday life.

Subtheme #1: Pleasurable Sensory Experiences. Of all the different forms of pleasure experienced, sensory pleasures were described most frequently. These experiences were described to be *primarily sensory in nature*, including seeing, tasting, smelling, touching, and hearing sounds. Examples included enjoying nature views, savoring the smell of coffee or newly mown grass, tasting chocolate, listening to music, and enjoying the physical sensations of swinging, laying in a hammock, or dancing. Francesca noted:

> I love to go on the swings….Well, I love first of all getting the sensation of just being sort of free flowing. And then, when you're sort of lying back, you can see the trees and the sky. And you have again, a very different perspective. It's almost like you're airborne, right, because you know, you can see houses and ground, but most of your vision is the sky and the trees, and the canopy.… So, I just love the sensation of swinging.

Similarly, Kay liked to watch for a beautiful view while taking the bus:

> There is a space where you can actually see the water and the boats. And there are days when I look forward to getting around that corner. [I]t's like a…it's not even a minute, the bus goes by there really fast. But it's…sometimes the sun is right on the ocean and the boats are out there.

Subtheme #2: Pleasurable Connections. There were two key ways that pleasurable connections were experienced by the older adult study participants. Firstly, pleasurable experiences enabled them to experience feeling *connected to themselves*, either by connecting to their personal history or past, or through savoring or contemplation (more of an inward focus of attention than outward), especially experiences that enabled them to pause in the moment, to reflect and "reset." For example, Chloe's deep connection to different types of flowers was inspired by her equally deep attunement to her racial history: "I always notice magnolias because of the Billie Holiday song, A Strange Fruit, about the Black people being hung from magnolia trees in the South.… But it's a beautiful, beautiful tree, when it's budded." Kay also likened her pleasurable moments to an opportunity to focus inward: "For me, it's the time of meditation. I kind of walk and talk to myself, which I'm doing a lot of lately."

Pleasurable moments that connected them to other *people or things*, including to other living creatures (e.g. wildlife or pets), their home or outdoor environment were important. Francesca described how the small games she played connected her to her partner:

> [W]e use that time of the day, not only for our everyday life…but also as a way to, to connect because there are enough things that can take us apart during the day. So, by making a point of it, it's a recognition of each other, our relationship as well.

For Frank Jarvis, pleasurable moments provided "just a connection with the real world, which is for me, very enjoyable." He provided the following example: "It's like you have a brief conversation with somebody on the bus or whatever, and you go, oh, that was nice. And then it's gone. You don't dwell on it. So, they're little snippets of pleasure, enjoyment or whatever." Perhaps because he lives alone, putting himself in places that connected him with others was important:

> Well, I like little kids. I don't drive anymore, so I use the bus. And sometimes kids will get on the bus with their mothers, and sometimes the kids are a lot of fun. They'll sit next to you or across from you, and you're making faces at them. And that for me, is pleasurable.

Renae's pleasurable connections were primarily in relation to her work context: "I work at a seniors' centre, so hearing some people talk about stupid stuff, and then sort of finding that – so, there's enjoyment in it, or yeah, enjoyment in being human and being on this Earth."

Subtheme #3: Pleasurable Escapes. For some older adult study participants, pleasurable experiences provided an *escape or break* from life challenges, demands or obligations. Speaking about her appreciation of a local public gardens Chloe commented "It takes you out of the misery of the daily day, and there's so much misery these days. It doesn't take much, but sunlight and water." For Francesca (and her partner), short games provide a welcomed break from everyday life:

> I think it sort of takes us out of our day and gives us a break from whatever we're doing. We're both involved in volunteer activities as well, so they could be that or they could be family issues going on. But it gives us a break in our day that we don't have to think about the outside world.

Kay noted that traveling on the bus provides her with some momentary escape: "the bus, because I use that as a real time lapse" and added that having a pleasurable moment "stops you from that chatter, for a minute." Renae similarly commented on the pause or escape that pleasurable moments provided: "I'd be down on the waterfront and watching other people, and there's sort of that sort of bounty of time where you're really disconnected from obligation or chores, or shoulds."

Subtheme #4: The Pleasure of "Doing Everyday Life." This subtheme reflects descriptions of pleasurable experiences that were associated with engaging in everyday or ordinary life activities. This form of pleasure seemed visible in three ways. Firstly, pleasure was important in the context of experiencing everyday life challenges, such as health or mobility restrictions, caregiving/family responsibilities, or aging more generally. Chloe, for example, observed:

> [What I have is] gratefulness that I can walk….And I remember when I was going through the healing recovery process for both my surgeries, I would say to myself, the minute I am able to walk again, I'm going to walk everywhere. And so, I don't own a car and either walk or the bus as my main mode of transportation.

Frank Jarvis described the many pleasures he experiences by successfully managing everyday life:

> I sit down and write a cheque, stick it in an envelope, put a stamp on it, and then afterwards I think…yeah, that's a random act of contentment. Because I can write the cheque and pay my bill without saying, oh, I can't afford it, I've got to put my money here, because I can do it. Plus the fact at my age, I can still physically do it. So, all of those little things do create a certain amount of contentment…. [t]here's the other side of the coin. So, just having things work properly is a sense of achievement, or contentment, or pleasure even. You say, oh my god, it worked!

The second form of pleasure associated with doing everyday life came from experiences that aligned with people's core values and priorities, such as learning or contributing. For Francesca learning was a primary motive, and one of her pleasurable habits enabled this on a daily basis: "[R]eading is very, very much a part of my day… and it happens several times during the day." These experiences were often tied to the pleasurable habits study participants had intentionally created in their lives (see Theme 3 for more).

Thirdly, the pleasures of doing everyday life were also often associated with everyday activities, like eating and drinking. As Renae said, "Often I'll stop to take a snack, again, it's very hurried in some ways, but it is a moment where I stop, I get a tea. It probably takes three, four minutes in total to have something small to eat and a tea." Francesca also talked about the pleasure of taking time to enjoy a cup of tea with her partner: "I think it just gives us a little bit of just time together with everything else around us that we don't have to worry about at that particular time."

In summary, there were a diversity of ways in which the older adult study participants experienced small moments of pleasure that involved engaging with their senses. These pleasurable moments enabled them to feel more connected to themselves or others or to escape momentarily the obligations and challenges of everyday life.

Theme #2: Pleasure is Embedded in Place

This theme describes participants' experiences of pleasure as intertwined with or embedded within the places where they were experienced. For the older adult study participants it was important to put themselves in (often familiar-to-them) places, such as the bus or in nature, that would enable them to encounter things or people that induced pleasure or, conversely, that enabled them to step outside disruptive thoughts and reconnect with their body. Renae, for example, observed:

> [Y]ou're walking along to the park, and you realize you're chewing on something from work, or you're chewing on something that just happened with your daughter that was upsetting. So, that coming back is like, oh, here you are, look at the sun. Here's the sidewalk beneath your feet. You're back where you really are. Not in the future, not in the past….And appreciating what is here right now.

Renae recognized that part of putting herself fully in an environment was about pausing or paying attention: "[I]t's like, I'm walking in this beautiful graveyard that I love walking in. Well, open your eyes and look. Don't just keep stomping on…. Because those things can still happen, but I have to be a little bit more relaxed maybe to catch them." It was attention to the characteristics of a place that mattered to experiencing moments of pleasure.

Francesca described a park she routinely visits as a "a very welcoming place" and noted that being outdoors opened people up to making brief social connections: "when you're outdoors, you are less on a mission…" She also believed this even happened in public spaces, such as streets: "[I]f you see somebody on the street, it's amazing how people will… just strike up a conversation with you… there's something about the environment that changes social norms almost."

For the older adult study participants, it was the *accessibility* of nature and other spaces that inspired appreciation of and efforts to seek pleasure. As Chloe said:

> I'm mindful that there are things, meaning nature, meaning walking, that are free for the taking. I don't have to wait for someone to give me permission to go outside. I don't have to pay anybody. I don't have fear of being outside. So, they shape my life…So, it's always available to me.

Familiar places close to home were also valued spaces for Chloe's momentary experiences of pleasure: "[F]or me, the moments are connected with ease and familiarity, and not traveling far. I hang the flags in the backyard. The tulips in the Public Gardens. The [chocolate bars] over at the [name] Shopping Centre."

In summary, the significance attributed to many of the pleasurable moments were connected to easily accessible places to which the older adult study participants derived meaning.

Theme #3: Older Adults Make Pleasure Happen in Their Lives

Across all these older adult study participants it was striking how deliberate they were in making pleasure happen in their lives and in their orientation to pleasure (i.e. recognizing and appreciating its significance in their lives). These ideas are reflected in two subthemes discussed next:

Subtheme #1: Being Intentional Makes Pleasurable Experiences Happen. Intentionality was reflected in the older adults' efforts to seek out or create conditions (e.g. planning, gathering supplies, having objects in one's environment) for having pleasurable EML experiences. All described different ways they were intentional or deliberate about creating opportunities to experience pleasure. For example, Francesca spoke about having games, magazines, books and other supplies in a convenient spot in her home. As she said: "[T]his is where we eat on a daily basis, so the Yahtzee is always handy to that." Renae, who was still working, described how objects she surrounded herself with created opportunities to experience moments of pleasure in the midst of a busy work life: "So, I have lots of little objects around my office that give me joy" and added "I have those things in my office deliberately, so I can have moments of enjoyment. So, that's deliberate."

As noted previously, most of the older adult study participants had created *habits or routines* that enabled them to experience pleasure, and they described being able to count on having a pleasurable experience because of these routines, Frank Jarvis, for example, described how he frequently rewatched old shows or interviews because he knew they would be pleasurable: "I'm perfectly content to go back and re-listen to the same thing because it gave me pleasure before, and a lot of them will continue to do

so because I just enjoyed it once, and I'll keep on enjoying it." A deeply pleasurable routine for Chloe was to buy a particular chocolate bar and then having them available to gift. "I got into the habit of buying that candy bar, and giving it as a gift to people. If I was meeting a person, just a small token…."

Although not evidenced across all the older adult study participants, some did practice intentionality by documenting a pleasurable moment so they could share with others or reminisce. Renae, for example, noted she regularly tries to take pictures of something funny or beautiful to share with family members. "I'll see something that's really beautiful or interesting, and I'll send it to my daughter or husband again usually." Francesca described how she and her partner keep previous scorecards from their games to extend the pleasure associated with them: "Sometimes it's fun to go back and see when we played it, and what was happening that day in terms of weather or that sort of stuff."

The final aspect of intentionality was how some participants intentionally created opportunities for *spontaneous* pleasurable experiences. This was reflected in Kay's choice to walk downtown, creating opportunity for unexpected pleasures on her walk: "If I'm walking, I plan to walk downtown because I want the walk. But then, things happen within that that I wasn't expecting." Frank Jarvis described going to a particular park that is known to have a lot of wildlife so he might have a spontaneous interaction with a squirrel: "Planned in as much as I put peanuts in my pocket when I'm going there, because I know what I'm going to do with them. But certainly not planned on the squirrels' side. So, that is spontaneous."

Subtheme #2: Overall Approach to Living Makes a Difference to Experiencing Pleasure. The older adults who participated in this study all had ways of thinking about the value of pleasurable experiences in their lives that contributed to the possibility of experiencing pleasure. In part, it was overall feelings of gratitude or appreciation that created the conditions for having a pleasurable EML experience. Included in this overall approach to living was their awareness of and orientation to the importance of taking time to have a pleasurable moment.

Francesca and her partner viewed pleasurable moments as good for them: "We know that it's good also for our minds, to keep our minds active. And most of the things, we like to solve word puzzles. So, it just

gets us thinking, you know." For Chloe it was a sense of gratitude that motivated her to continually seek pleasure in simple activities and nature:

> I have a great sense of gratitude….I feel very grateful that I have the time and the space in my life to have these moments. I am very much aware of the fact that I am a descendant of people who didn't have freedom….they didn't have the chance to enjoy it, and revel in it the way that I do.

Kay described the approach to being open to pleasure as a "mindset" and likened it to mindfulness practices that she has trained herself to engage in: "it was a deliberate kind of action. So it's more mental. I trained myself to and I continue to train myself to look for those moments." Kay also reframed obligatory activities (e.g. taking the bus) to be a source of potential pleasure: "So it's kind of like I have to make it a nice time, otherwise it's just going to be like, I'll be bitching all the way."

In summary, the older adults who participated in this study were remarkably deliberate in making pleasure happen in their lives; recognizing and appreciating its significance was a core aspect of a self-reinforcing cycle of seeking moments of pleasure.

Theme #4: Pleasure Matters (A Lot) in the Lives of Older Adults

As noted earlier, study participants often made meaning of pleasurable moments in relation to their life circumstances or context. Two subthemes reflect the overall meanings or benefits the older adult study participants ascribed to their pleasurable experiences.

Subtheme #1: Overall Benefits for Well-Being. Participants were able to clearly describe the ways brief pleasurable experiences contributed to their overall well-being (e.g. helping them to feel more capable, accomplished or in control). Overall, pleasurable moments contributed to emotional or mental well-being by either reducing negative feelings such as stress, and by generating positive emotions/appraisals, such as feeling uplifted or joyful. Kay used the following words to describe why pleasurable moments were important to her: "sense of peace and comfort," "soothes me," "helping to ground me and help me to not get submerged in the negativity around me all the time," "inspiring," "very calming." Renae also talked about how she feels "soothed" when she takes a moment to experience

pleasure in the midst of her stressful work life: "soothed, collected, and very much it helps me, a moment possibly to help me step out of the bubble a bit." "Uplifted" was the word Frank Jarvis used to describe valued pleasurable moments: "It's just a good feeling that these are creatures, and they are reacting with you, and you're reacting with them. Yeah, it's very uplifting to be that close to wild creatures." Nature-based experiences were particularly meaningful. As Francesca said "I find that nature sort of gives me strength, it rejuvenates me, so when I'm going through a very stressful period, I really need to be outdoors…"

Participants also described how pleasurable moments also helped them shift their perspective, or see their lives or current situation in more positive ways. Renae described returning to work after taking a pleasurable break:

> I'll have corrected my posture, and noticed what's happening in my body, or noticed that my shoulders are creep up to my ears, or whatever. So, I've relaxed that a bit, and when I go back to my work, I guess it's with a better perspective. And as I said, if I felt a moment of joy, or relaxation, or relief, or whatever we want to call it, that carries through to the beginning of the work. And I think changing perspective is a big part of it too.

Francesca also experienced a shift in perspective from some of her pleasurable activities, such as reading: "[it] just gives me a different perspective on the world. Because sometimes I think I can get caught up with myself in my world."

Subtheme #2: Affirming One's Self. Pleasure-based experiences contributed to the older adult study participants' feelings that they were valuing or affirming themselves, signifying that they were "worthy" or deserving of these experiences, including pleasurable experiences that aligned with or reinforced core values. For example, as someone who identifies closely with her heritage as a person of African descent, Chloe noted that experiencing moments of pleasure were important because they signified "That we don't have to always be in battle, even though the battle continues. But we can take a moment and say, I don't have to be a warrior this second. I can stop and read a poem on a chalkboard."

In addition, some participants talked about how these experiences helped them to combat or resist stereotypes. Francesca would regularly

go to a local playground and swing on one of the swings, aware this wasn't "typical" behavior of other older adults: "I'm the only adult on the swings. I very rarely see other adults come and swing." Resisting stereotypes included descriptions of feeling "seen." Explaining what it means to him to be "seen" by others, Frank Jarvis described someone stopping to pick up something for him as they were passing by:

> [I]t's not really necessary because I'm perfectly capable to do it myself. But…it's a nice thought. So, just little things like that. As I say, when you reach 84, little, tiny things like that make a big difference to your day. But being 84… you reach a certain age and you become invisible.

In summary, as noted above, pleasurable moments contributed to overall physical or emotional well-being as well as appraisals of "aging well." By engaging in these pleasurable moments they perceived themselves to be more effectively managing stressors and feeling that they were valuing or affirming themselves, signifying that they were "worthy" or deserving of these experiences, including pleasurable experiences that aligned with or reinforced core values.

Discussion

In the title of this article we asked the question *"why do moments of pleasure matter in the lives of older adults?"* From this secondary analysis we believe they *are* fundamentally important to the older adults in this study feeling they were living a good life and believing they were doing what they could to take care of themselves. Next we discuss the findings in relation to the existing literature on pleasure, place, leisure and "aging well."

Experiences of Pleasurable Moments

As noted in the literature reviewed, pleasure in the lives of older adults has received recent attention, with most of the research building on Pheonix and Orr's (2014) typology of pleasure, and examined in the context of more intense or serious forms of physical activity (e.g. Allain 2020; Minello & Nixon 2017) or leisure (e.g. Krekula 2022; Lee et al. 2016; Liddle et al. 2013). This study was one of the first to examine the experiences of

short or momentary forms of leisure and the forms of pleasures associated with them in older adults' lives.

Consistent with Pheonix and Orr (2014), experiences of sensory pleasures were the most common form of pleasurable moments described by this study participants. Whether indoors or outdoors, participants described a deep appreciation for small moments that allowed them to see, hear, smell, feel or taste something that caused them to briefly pause and notice and, in so doing, induced a sense of appreciation and pleasure. Experiencing sensory pleasures helped study participants to remove themselves psychologically from stressful situations and to be more "in the moment."

Perhaps because short moments were so fleeting or stopping to document experiences would distract/detract from the experience itself, but *documented pleasures* were not as prevalent in this study compared with others (e.g. Humberstone et al. 2025; Minello & Nixon 2017) where it was important to help others through sharing knowledge and experience. Future research is needed to examine forms and meanings of documented pleasures.

Whereas the *pleasure of habitual action* was one form of pleasurable experience within Pheonix and Orr's (2014) typology, we came to view it as a part of intentionality; that is, what people did to create the conditions for having a pleasurable experience. We discuss in more detail next. Finally, within Pheonix and Orr's typology the *pleasure of immersion* comes from a sense of focus, which in turn enables people to gain different perspectives on daily life demands and issues. We did not see evidence of this immersive quality or experience from the older adults' descriptions of pleasure in their lives, again perhaps because of the momentary nature of participants' experiences. However, pleasurable moments did nonetheless provide meaningful forms of escape and distraction from everyday life challenges and stressors. This is consistent with other research that has looked at casual leisure as a resource for coping with stress when it serves as a positive distraction from immediate concerns and contributes to a sense of normalcy (in the face of ongoing stressors; e.g. Hutchinson & Kleiber 2005).

We argue that our findings extend the current research on pleasure in the lives of older adults in two important ways. Although opportunities

to build friendships and social connections (e.g. Lee et al. 2016) or to connect to the materiality of an activity (e.g. hockey equipment; Allain 2020) were observed in previous research, this study clearly highlights how important the smallest of connections – to one's self/personal history, other people, neighbours, community, animals, nature, etc. – were to these older adults. It seems as if it was the connections that helped participants to potently see how important these experiences were to their everyday lives. This reinforces other research on the importance of connections for well-being and aging well (e.g. Menec et al. 2020). A second unique finding was the extent to which participants identified how pleasurable it was to successfully engage in activities that were part of their everyday life, especially when faced with awareness of age-related constraints or limitations. We discuss this in more detail next.

Pleasure is Emplaced

"Place" describes a setting or location and the meaning it holds for someone, so encompasses its physical characteristics, as well as social relationships, cultural significance and history. Pink (2017) extended this understanding of place to suggest that it is instead "composed of entanglements of all components of an environment. This includes geological forms, the weather, human socialites, material objects, buildings, animals, and more" (p. 88, cited in Bailliard et al. 2023). To be emplaced is to be situated in a specific temporal or physical location and interconnected with its place-based elements. Through this study we came to believe that moments of pleasure matter so significantly in people's lives because they connect people to places and spaces that matter to them.

Moving beyond the idea of embodiment (i.e. mind-body connection) Bailliard and colleagues (2023) argue that emplacement recognizes "the significance of the environment in shaping everyday practices [actions]" (p. 120). In this study, reliable pleasures (e.g. Allain 2020) shaped this relationship; study participants had created, found and regularly returned to places or spaces that mattered to them. This included the creation of particular indoor or outdoor places, a certain seat on the bus, as well as regularly returning to nature or outdoor spaces that possessed personally important characteristics (e.g. light, flowers, animals). Even more

internal pleasures, such as contemplating or savoring the current moment or remembering one's past (including cultural history), were described by study participants as associated with places that provided connection and inspiration. Notably, it was the ease of access to certain places that enhanced people's comfort and routine connection to place.

According to Bailliard et al. (2023) conceptualizing work or leisure and other activities of everyday life (occupations) as emplaced "emphasizes the many different forces and energies that intersect and entangle in any given moment" (p. 120) to shape people's experiences. From our perspective, conceptualizing pleasure as emplaced is similar. Emplacement was clearly central to older adults' experiences of pleasure.

Older Adults Make Pleasure Happen in Their Everyday Lives

As we have noted, pleasure was actively sought and created by the older adults in this study. The findings highlighted diverse forms of intentionality, from having the materials, equipment, supplies or objects readily available to choosing places or pathways/streets in which there was a greater likelihood of experiencing pleasure. It was striking how study participants created, sought out or returned to places where they had previously experienced some sort of pleasurable moment, creating self-reinforcing pleasurable habits.

In our study, engaging in pleasurable experiences facilitated a change in perspective that, in turn, encouraged participants to slow down and derive greater benefit or meaning from them. Similar to other studies of pleasure (e.g. Humberstone et al. 2025; Jackman et al. 2023), it was this change in perspective that facilitated a deeper capacity to "be in the moment" and even experience former activities in new ways. As an example, in the walking-based health promotion initiative (Jackman et al. 2023), some older adults appreciated a noticed slowing down as they age, allowing them to experience pleasure (particularly sensory pleasure) in new and exciting ways.

Successfully accomplishing small pleasures – whether to escape or get a break from stressful life challenges or obligations – or to revel in the pleasure of ordinary life activities (like writing a cheque or having a cup of tea) – helped the older adults in this study feel more capable, competent

and self-determined. These are core psychosocial factors associated with aging well (e.g. Waddell et al. 2025) and are consistent with other studies of factors impacting older adults' engagement in leisure-related activities. For example, Dattilo and colleagues (2018) identified both general approaches (e.g. maintaining a healthy lifestyle) and specific adaptive strategies (e.g. using assistive devices, such as walking poles) to get or remain engaged in self-determined community leisure participation. While physical ailments could sometimes act as barriers to crafting, the women in Liddle et al.'s (2013) study used strategies (e.g. participating for shorter times, switching the hand they used, utilizing assistive devices, etc.) to help maintain their engagement in their activities. Again, in our studies and others, this engagement was self-reinforcing; when participants perceived themselves to be capable (i.e. self-determined) they utilized strategies or were willing to persevere in the face of challenges, which led to both successful participation and a greater sense of self-determination.

In our study it seemed as if an overall belief in or understanding of the importance and value of pleasurable moments compelled study participants to be intentional in creating and experiencing pleasure. This idea that people held strong beliefs about the importance of taking time to experience moments of pleasure is akin to the concept of *leisure beliefs*, wherein people's attitudes toward or beliefs in leisure predispose them to see leisure (or pleasurable moments) as a resource in their lives (e.g. Macchia & Whillians 2021). Beliefs that leisure can help deal with stress, for example, shape the choices people make about what they do and how they think (i.e. leisure coping strategies; Iwasaki & Mannell 1999) in specific stressful situations. A belief in the value of pleasurable moments can motivate people to look for, appreciate, or create beneficial experiences and to be attuned to the benefits associated with them (e.g. positive emotions, sense of relief or gratitude). This overall belief in the importance of pleasurable engagement was reflected in other studies of pleasure; anticipation/appreciation of the group/program or pleasure itself motivated participation (e.g. Allain 2020; Jackman et al. 2023; Lee et al. 2016), including anticipated social connections (Humberstone et al. 2025; Lee et al. 2016).

Koo (2023) contrasted this fundamental belief in leisure's value with the concept of leisure guilt, which is "an experience or state of feeling guilty

for spending time leisurely over productively" (p. xii). This is consistent with Western views of leisure and time use, where purposeful or instrumental uses of time, including free time, are prioritized over enjoyable moments or "doing nothing" (Mgonja 2020). Koo argued that leisure guilt both shapes everyday experiences (e.g. interferes with the possibility of experiencing pleasure) as well as decisions about time use. We did not see or hear evidence of this guilt in the older adult study participants and speculated as to why not. As noted previously, recruitment for the original study intentionally avoided the word "leisure" and instead asked research participants to share their moments of fun, relaxation, joy, etc. because we were not wanting people to focus on more traditional (i.e. longer duration, commodified) forms of leisure. The older adults who chose to participate in the original EML study clearly chose to create these moments in their lives and did not express guilt for doing so. Instead, they held beliefs about the value of these moments that enabled them to describe their intentions and actions as a way to resist societal norms related to both aging and productivity by carving out time for pleasure amid their everyday routines. More research is needed to explore this idea of leisure guilt as a barrier to experiencing pleasurable moments in later life, looking across older adults with diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, as well as current lived experiences (e.g. caregiving, living alone, etc.).

Pleasure Matters for Later Life Living

There has been recent attention to the concepts of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being within research, and the types of leisure-related pursuits that contribute to these (e.g. Chun et al. 2024). For example, Chun and colleagues (2024) found that specific leisure activities such as reading, walking and TV watching contributed to the subjective well-being of older adults living with cancer. But, the debate about eudaimonic versus hedonic well-being usually contrasts self-fulfillment with maximizing pleasure; value- and virtue-oriented living with seeking short-term gratification (Ryu et al. 2022). Yet, for many older adults, especially for those with health limitations, moments of hedonic pleasure can contribute to overall life satisfaction and subjective well-being (Chun et al. 2024; Ryu et al. 2022).

As noted earlier, there is compelling evidence of leisure's contributions to the overall health and well-being of older adults (e.g. Fancourt et al. 2020) and to aging well (e.g. Lee & Payne 2015), even when living with health problems (e.g. Hutchinson & Nimrod 2012). There were clearly lasting benefits (i.e. that extended beyond the specific experience) in our study and previous studies of pleasure. In Lee et al.'s (2016) study of community singing, for example, individuals were motivated to continue participating in their singing group because of the emotional and spiritual boost they associated with their involvement in the activity, particularly how these feelings stayed with them after leaving rehearsal. Liddle et al. (2013) found that the process of crafting allowed some women to experience feelings of control in new and positive ways, helping them view aging less as a transition defined by loss and instead as a time where having less control could mean having more freedom (such as the freedom to focus on activities they truly enjoy). These pursuits, not framed around the concept of leisure, are nonetheless examples of more "serious" leisure pursuits, often valued as being more worthwhile and fulfilling uses of time, especially when compared with those pursuits that are considered more casual in nature (Stebbins 2015). Although pleasure is clearly connected to the immediate meanings and experiences of these and other leisure pursuits, this is one of the first studies to demonstrate immediate *and* enduring well-being benefits associated with momentary pleasurable experiences.

In this study, the many ways study participants described their positive responses (thoughts and feelings) to momentary pleasures is consistent with other research on the essential role of psychological or emotional uplifts and positive emotions in aging well. Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden and Build theory of positive emotions captures this idea. She suggested that positive emotions can broaden thoughts and attention, can undo or reduce negative emotions, and can fuel psychological resilience and well-being. Like pleasure, emotions like joy and interest can enhance psychological, cognitive and social resources which, in turn, can contribute to increased well-being and life satisfaction (Fredrickson 2001). Although there is evidence that such positive experiences can counteract or aid in resisting aging stereotypes (e.g. Ma et al. 2024) this was not as visible in this study (except perhaps in Francesca's swinging example). Instead, it seemed that overall pleasurable moments contributed to people feeling

they were living their lives to the best of their abilities, and given their life circumstances. Future research is needed to specifically examine pleasure in relation to aging stereotypes.

Limitations and Implications for Research and Practice

This secondary analysis was limited by the number of people who were older who participated in the original study. While we were "opportunistic" in conducting a secondary analysis with the older adults who volunteered to participate in the larger EML study, clearly there was something about this concept that resonated with them. To what extent do other older adults (who may not hold these same core beliefs in the value of pleasure) seek out and experience moments of pleasure, and would they experience the same benefits as these study participants who appeared to believe so wholeheartedly in these moments? Furthermore, although we did not ask about socioeconomic status, the fact that all the older adults who participated in the study were able to create moments of pleasure in their lives suggests some economic and/or physical capacity to do so. In reality, as is reflected in proposed conceptualizations of aging well (e.g. Waddell et al. 2025), socioeconomic factors, structural inequalities, and the socio-political environment have much potential to limit the ability for (or ease with which) some older adults are able to experience momentary pleasures.In addition, our small sample was not able to capture this range of experiences and likely under-represented the challenges some groups may have in experiencing momentary pleasures. A larger study with a more diverse sample, especially one that involves daily experience sampling methods (e.g. Hektner et al. 2007), is warranted. Also, it would be of interest to conduct an intervention study, wherein older adults with limited prior knowledge about moments of pleasure – or who are living in highly stressful or challenging situations – are exposed to this concept and are supported to both create and reflect on these moments. We anticipate that this would have the potential to be a relatively low-cost health promotion initiative that could be implemented in a variety of community, health or congregate living (e.g. retirement homes) contexts.

To assist older adults to age well, in addition to advocating for participation in more traditional form of recreation or physical activity programs, health promotion and recreation practitioners are advised to

draw people's attention to these small moments of pleasure, encouraging "being in the moment" or savoring these experiences, and paying attention to the immediate "benefits" available from them (Lenneis & Pfister 2007). This advice would be especially relevant for practitioners working with older adults who are facing a myriad of challenging and stressful life circumstances, for whom more structured forms of recreation may be inaccessible. In addition to advocating for small moments of pleasure, it would be beneficial for practitioners to provide opportunities for clients/patients to have first-hand experiences of moments of pleasure, and to reflect on why they might be a resource for promoting coping, resilience and aging well. In this way, the more that older adults experience moments of pleasure, the more likely they will be to seek them out or make them happen in their everyday lives.

Conclusion

Interestingly, health promotion practices to support optimal aging often focus on the therapeutic benefits of leisure for health (e.g. "you need to stay active in order to improve or maintain memory or strength and flexibility"). Yet, aging researchers and health practitioners often forget about the importance of doing something just for the sheer pleasure or fun of doing it. However, this is really what is at the core of what it means to exert free choice and self-determination in leisure. Pleasure is part of what it means to be human; focusing on the pleasurable aspects of leisure rather than its therapeutic benefits reinforces the humanity of all persons as they age.

Ethics

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