

## *Body and health in women's everyday lives: an ethnographic fieldwork in Southern Denmark*

**Lisbeth Rostgård**

University of Southern Denmark

In western societies today we see a widespread health culture, and I am going to start my article by outlining the background, as I see it, for this health culture, in which women not least are participating. After that I will provide an insight into an ethnographic fieldwork that I have carried out among female health users in Denmark as an element of a PhD project (ROSTGÅRD L. 2005), and finally I will present two theses, the first one concerning scientification of everyday life & mainstreaming of complementary and alternative medicine, the second one concerning the aches and pains experienced by women in their everyday lives & relevant means meeting these.

### *A health culture*

Several phenomena can be seen as interacting and contributing to the current health culture. First the established and professional health sector has expanded its field of interest. Prevention of so-called 'life style' diseases is in focus now, which means that people's everyday lives are in focus. National public health projects are displayed urging individuals to take responsibility for their own health (KJOLLER M. - RASMUSSEN N. 2002: 338-39, LARSEN K. 2003: 23). The Danish National Board of Health has launched various health campaigns in which two major areas are seen. One is the encouragement to physical activity, displayed in campaign slogans such as "30 minutes a day." Another is seen in food recommendations with slogans such as "6 pieces a day" meaning 600 grams of vegetables and fruit.

The second phenomenon affecting the current health culture is the increase in business activities of the complementary/alternative and commercial health sector. There is a growing market for everything that is regarded as healthy – or conversely, for everything that is considered to

reduce the risks of modern life – from fruit and ecological milk products, to various vitamin complexes with herbal extracts, and other complementary medical products. There is a market for alternative therapists offering treatment and prevention, a market of fitness centres and fitness machines intended for exercise at home, a market of Pilates and Yoga classes, providing instruction in various movement regimes intended to help relax, strengthen and firm up the body, and so on (LANGER J. 2002: 8, 2003: 15, LARSEN K. 2003: 21-22, 49, 55).

When I presented the picture of the health culture given here to some colleagues from the Institute of Sports Science at my university, they were offended that I, as they saw it, “confused” exercise with complementary medicine. And in a study such as mine, where to draw the line analytically is, of course, open to debate. Nevertheless I find it reasonable to define complementary/alternative medicine broadly as everything that is in addition to conventional medicine, and my point is that, if we look at things from the perspective of the user, these categories really are “confused”. In fact, many strange mixtures can be seen in the market and in the health prescriptions from official health authorities: Fitness and wellbeing, called wellness, gardening and therapy, called gardening therapy or exercise and medicine, called exercise on prescription, where exercise and even gardening are seen as a form of complementary/alternative medicine.

This brings us to a third element contributing to the health culture, and that is the health users, or health consumers. Their health strategies are influenced by new public health campaigns as well as by the offerings of the market. People in their everyday lives demand services and products from the professional as well as from the complementary/alternative sector. They pick and mix information and ideas from both sectors, constructing their own individual health strategies and body images. And the media play an important role in circulating and popularizing the raw materials that are used by individuals. For instance a woman that I have interviewed says:

«I read it in a magazine; I read about “the Five Tibetans” that it was a clever thing to do them every day; they’re said to be the source of eternal youth, so that when you’re seventy you look like forty years old. I don’t actually believe that, but I do believe that yoga does something for the body, something good». (Yoga exerciser, 46 years old)

### *Three arenas for body and health*

For my research project I have been interviewing 25 women, aged 30 to 76 years, and practising together with them in different types of health are-

nas: gymnastics classes at fitness centres, yoga classes, and a society of allotment gardens. The idea behind a research design such as this is that these leisure time activities open up to a broader area of everyday practices and thoughts concerning body and health. Starting an interview in the context of one of the three activities I have asked questions about other activities and products that the women make use of in their daily lives and which they themselves regard as healthy or beneficial for the body. The purpose of building the design not around one, but around three types of health arenas is to obtain variation in the material as to the women's age, their socioeconomic background, and their health strategies.

The empirical material of the study is analysed within a framework where the key word is 'conceptualizations.' Within this analytical framework conceptualizations of body and health are understood as processes as well as products. As I see it, meanings and ideas are circulated and produced by health consumers who construct their own situational and syncretistic understandings and images on the basis of available raw materials that already circulate in the health culture. Consequently the health strategies and the body images are articulated and practiced by human actors, but they are also circulated and reproduced through artefacts and cultural products that can be found in the media and on the market; such artefacts could, drawing on Latour, also be named non-human actors (LATOUR B. 1993: 63, LUPTON D. 2003: 18).

The empirical material therefore comprises interviews, observations, textual material and other things, generated and collected as part of the ethnographic fieldwork, and the purpose of the analysis is to look for recurrent patterns and scripts across the empirical material. Consequently the theoretical approach of the study is two-sided. A social constructionist perspective is balanced with a phenomenological perspective. The former is concerned with 'the outside in,' whereas the latter is concerned with 'the inside out' (GROSZ E. 1994: xii). The two sides are combined in the theoretical term 'embodiment', which signifies that individuals are embodied social agents, and that the lived body therefore both constructs its lifeworld and is being constructed by and in the social and cultural context (NETTLETON S. - WATSON J. 1998: 11).

### *The unfinished body & the health-beauty-wellbeing triplex*

A common topic in the interviews is the continued changes of the body throughout life and the women's ways of meeting the changes. An appro-

priate heading for the topic is 'the unfinished body' (SHILLING C. 2002: 12). The body is unfinished because it changes over the years. But it is also unfinished because biological changes can always be turned into projects of bodily reconfiguration (WINGERDEN I. 1996: 200, FOUCAULT M. 2004: 102-106). As a matter of fact incentives can be found in the media and on the market for an infinite number of reconfigurational body projects. In one of Jane Fonda's books from the 1980'ies, with workout instructions and other recipes for self-care for women of mature years, she writes that a healthy diet and frequent exercise are the best remedies for skin care in the long run. So the tradition of juxtaposing beauty and health is not a new one, but it could be said that when the health authorities currently urge individuals to take responsibility for their own health, the same authorities are indirectly sanctioning individuals taking action to improve their looks.

When I have interviewed the women about their activities and about what they find good about an activity it is characteristic that health matters, beauty matters, and the pursuit of wellbeing are not separated out in the answers. Other distinctive features in the answers are that the aging process of the body and the weight of the body in particular are made subjects for surveillance and control. Some examples:

«I believe it is important to maintain the suppleness of the body the older you get. If you just let matters take their course and you don't do anything, maybe just for a few months or so ...» (Yoga exerciser, 53 years old).

«My wellbeing could very quickly turn into a bad condition, I think, if I didn't ride my bicycle the way I do now. I'm trying to maintain what I've got ...» (Gardener, 64 years old).

«My weight is important for me too; I keep an eye on it so that it doesn't run away with me ...» (Exerciser in fitness centre, 62 years old).

«I know that it is good for my body and for my bones, and at the same time it helps me keep my weight so that I am where I'm supposed to be ...» (Gymnastics exerciser, 57 years old).

The youngest and the oldest among the interviewees have the least to say about age and good looks, but even so the interest in maintaining wellbeing, health, and good looks is widely distributed crisscross the interviews. In other words the women are very much alike as regards these matters.

### *The aches and pains of everyday life*

The aches and pains of everyday life is another topic that is just as widespread in the interviews. I have been told stories about illness and bodily

decay although my questions were about health strategies. The women's health strategies are therefore not solely aimed at body care and health promotion in general. They are also means meeting specific illnesses and health problems of a more indeterminable kind. About one third of the interviewees tell about muscular-skeleton illnesses such as low back pain or myalgia for which they have taken medical advice from their general practitioner and/or have consulted a physiotherapist or a chiropractor. And a common advice from these health professionals, from the professional health sector, is precisely to engage in some kind of exercise.

In addition almost all of the interviewees tell about worries about their health, for instance occasionally aching knees, hot flushes, or fatigue, and more than half of them have seen therapists from the complementary/alternative sector, for example reflexologists which are the most commonly seen alternative therapists in Denmark, or they have on their own hand tried to ease or prevent the experienced ailments through herbal medicine, special diets, and the like. Among the yoga exercisers relatively more have seen complementary/alternative therapists than among the gardeners. On the other hand it could be said about the allotment holders that they in the garden and in nature have found their own effective ingredients against the aches and pains of everyday life. I shall return to that subject later on.

### *Three arenas – two socioeconomic groups*

In my empirical material I have been looking for similarities as well as differences because one of the purposes of the study is to draw attention to different health strategies connected with different conditions of life.

The 25 women in the study can roughly be divided into two groups as regards their socioeconomic background. The first group consists of the gymnastics and yoga exercisers who all have affiliation to the same fitness centre where I have made contacts with them. They come to the centre from an extensive geographical area, and consequently some of them arrive there by car. Most of them live in houses of their own and they are all in all better off than the women in the gardener group.

The second group consists of the gardeners. Each of them has a garden in an allotment society that abuts on several public council housing complexes. The allotment holders with whom I have made contacts in the gardens come from a more limited geographical area and consequently they can easily use a bike for transportation between their flat and their garden.

Besides, most of them do not have other means of private transportation; four of the eight women live alone, and all in all the women in this group are not as well off as those in the first group.

### *Health as selfcontrol – health as release*

In an ethnographic study carried out in Chicago in 1981 Robert Crawford brings out two different health strategies that relates to different conditions of life. “Health as selfcontrol” is a strategy typically articulated by people coming from the middle classes; they confirm their class affiliation and identity through health projects such as daily jogging, and they refrain from actions and products defined as unhealthy. Another strategy that is more characteristic of people coming from the lower classes is “health as release.” As a contrary to the working life where the body and the person are being strained, stressed, and controlled by others the off duty hours must be spend relaxing, unwinding, and living the good life (CRAWFORD R. 1985: 80-83).

Previously I have mentioned a number of body projects of surveillance that are distributed across the three arenas as well as across the two socioeconomic groups. With reference to Crawford the body projects can be characterized as a middle class strategy. However, they may as well be a typical female strategy since two thirds of the interviewees in Crawfords material are white women from the middle class (*ibid*: 63), and I can see in his article that the interviews from which he extracts the release strategy mostly are interviews with men (*ibid*: 82-87). In other words Crawford’s analysis is based on a class perspective and not so much on a gender perspective. Nevertheless I find his work interesting in relation to my own study.

The following statement is representative of the gardeners:

«It is good for me to relax in my garden, but it is also good for me to mess about with earth, to make something grow, to get earth under my nails, to use my body, to get some fresh air. I’m sure that it is healthy; it is good for my body and my mind. It has never been my intention to get a garden in order to be healthy, but in fact it makes me healthy». (Gardener, 40 years old).

The statement is an answer to my question as to whether it has something to do with health to be in the garden. And the answer is representative for the gardeners in that they point out that I am the one talking about health. Nevertheless they promptly accept the discourse and state that gardening must be healthy because it feels good. Crawford extracts from his interviews that «enjoyment, wellbeing, contentment, and “not worrying”» are

important ingredients in the health as release strategy (CRAWFORD R. 1985: 80-81). In my interviews with the gardeners I can see something similar:

«Now, I live on the first floor, and simply to get out and lie on the grass and mess about with earth, and the silence ...» (Gardener, 45 years old).

«I believe that there is something about growing your own things and mess about with earth; I can feel that; it gives me relaxation and a chance to unwind ...» (Gardener, 35 years old).

The healing powers of nature and the garden as a refuge

The qualities that the gardeners find in the allotment gardens can be summed up in two topics. The first one is about the garden being a refuge, not only from working life but also from family obligations and everyday life. That the garden is a kind of refuge is stated in various ways:

«It is meant to be my refuge, most of all my refuge ...» (Gardener, 40 years old).

«Besides, it is a kind of island, away from everything ...» (Gardener, 30 years old).

«It is important to me to have the time to recharge; it is important to have such a breathing hole...» (Gardener, 44 years old).

The first topic is connected with the second one in that the mental release comes out by means of "messaging about with earth." On the one hand it is very down-to-earth to cultivate the ground, to grub the soil, and to get earth under one's nails; it has to do with the senses of the body and the materiality of nature. On the other hand there are in the statements ideas of nature being a magical non-human agent; the statements also hold conceptions of being connected to nature and in that way to be given back the peace and vitality that toil and trouble has drained out of body and mind. The conceptions seem to be based on an analogy between human beings and plants, and the idea is that if plants get nourishment from earth and nature, humans do too. To several of the gardeners it is not solely the cultivated nature in the garden but also the larger surrounding nature that gives nourishment, peace and new energy:

«To go for a walk in the open gives me peace too; it gives me exercise and it gives me a beautiful scenery at the same time. And I have a way of gathering herbs, stinging nettles among other things; I eat a lot of herbs, but also just to go walking in the woods, it gives me something» (Gardener, 35 years old).

### *Differences and similarities*

The health strategies of the female allotment holders are different from those of the women with affiliation to the fitness centre. The women in

each of the two socioeconomic groups do not find attractiveness in the places that the women from the other group attend. Indeed some of the women in the allotment gardens are yoga exercisers, but they seldom attend a fitness centre to exercise yoga. And indeed some of the women from the fitness centre grow a garden, but not in an allotment society. Therefore it is not so much the activities as such that the women feel differently about as it is the locations where the activities take place. Most of the women in all of the three arenas appreciate activities such as going for a ride or a walk in the open.

Therefore, when the interviewees in their statements emphasise the “health as selfcontrol” and “health as release” strategies a bit differently it may be a result of the different locations where the interviews are produced. The fitness centre and the allotment site each have different meanings that are embedded in the buildings, the artefacts, and the settings on the whole. And since the majority of the interviews are produced in each of the two settings it is a small wonder that the embedded values of these are articulated in the interviews. So my point is that the articulated differences result from the differences of the locations more than of the women. An allotment garden is traditionally a place of relaxation and of having a time off whereas a fitness centre traditionally is a place where you are supposed to “do something” in order to get healthier and prettier. And the two locations can be seen as another example of non-human actors producing social signification.

### *Wellbeing, energy, peace, and balance*

Wellbeing, energy, peace, and balance are formulas that first caught my eye in the interviews with the gardeners, but the formulas can be seen everywhere in my material. Women in all of the three arenas express the idea that due to the wear and tear of everyday life the body and the mind must be given nourishment, must build up new energy, and must establish peace and a renewed balance in order to reach a state of wellbeing. To the allotment holders it is the gardening, the earth, and nature that restore them to balance; to the yoga exercisers it is the yoga exercises, to the gymnastics exercisers it is the gymnastics, to the users of reflexology it is the therapy, and to all of the interviewees wellbeing is promoted by a walk in the open. Some examples:

«At the beginning of the week when leaving the fitness centre I just walk ordinarily, but later in the week, after two or three lessons, it is as if I'm floating and flying because I feel so much lighter...» (Gymnastics exerciser, 61 years old).



«Now, I gain energy, I really do. I'm not even tired. That's what I find so fantastic...»  
(Gymnastics exerciser, 76 years old).

«For several years I had a horse of my own and I was almost addicted to riding; to use my body and to be out in the open it was truly meditation and healing to me...» (Gardener, 44 years old).

«I have always walked a lot. And especially when I was working and I came home tired and stressed, then I knew that the best medicine was to go for a walk in the woods...» (Exerciser in fitness centre, 64 years old)

«You find a kind of peace and balance...» (Gardener, 35 years old)

It is not easy to say where for instance the concept "balance" or "wellbeing" first was articulated. On the one hand the scripts found in the health culture are matrixes available for the women, when they describe their bodily experiences. On the other hand I imagine that the commercial actors know just how to play on something that can actually be experienced and not just empty phrases. In this way the bodily experiences are socially constructed, but also actually experienced. And in this way the formulas and scripts of the women are mirrored by – or are mirrors of – material found in magazines and advertisements for various products on the market. Examples of such scripts are displayed below.

A spa resort advertises itself under the heading «Peace and deep sighs in the name of health», and at the foot the ad has a textbox saying «Relaxation, enjoyment, and new energy». Between head and foot various products such as mud wrapping, «pure natural products from the Dead Sea» and the «extensive rainforest treatment» are displayed.

One fitness centre advertises itself under the heading «Exercise is medicine too», and another fitness centre advertises itself as a «Health, wellbeing, and fitness centre!». In an advertisement for a third fitness centre the following sentence can be read: «Exercise is the ultimate place to workout, unwind, and achieve wellbeing, bodily as well as mental».

In a catalogue from The Body Shop and under the heading "Wellbeing" various bath oils and creams for aromatic therapy are described; you can buy relaxing Lavender, stimulating Peppermint, sensual Ylang-Ylang or energising Bergamot; or you can get a moisturizing and nourishing oil made from Brazil nuts from the Amazon region.

According to the scripts 'wellbeing, energy, peace, and balance' are qualities that are established either in a health and fitness centre or by supplying the body with nourishing substances that come from, not only nature, but moreover a distant, exotic, and therefore magical nature.

*Scientification of everyday life & Reenchantment of the world*

“Scientification of everyday life” and “reenchantment of the world” are my designations comprising two parallel leads that run through the scripts from the women as well as from the commercial actors. The term “reenchantment” is tied to the term “deenchantment”, attributed the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to the sociologist Max Weber modern science has expelled the magic of nature from the modern view of the world, and in that way the world has become a deenchanted world. Concurrently with the marginalisation of religion and superstition science has been able to explain, in a more and more detailed way, how the world is constructed.

But to the unlearned it becomes more and more difficult to understand and relate to the scientific approach that divides the world in smaller and smaller pieces. Therefore the experiences of everyday life concerning the body, health, and illness may be difficult to relate to the scientific explanations that it takes highly specialised knowledge to understand. Complementary/alternative therapies and philosophies, on the contrary, usually offer a complete, reenchanting view of the world, and they work with explanations and models of the body and the world that are relatively simple, and which can directly be related to the experiences of everyday life (WACKERHAUSEN S. 1994: 267-69).

Michel Foucault, among others, has made use of the term ‘scientification’ (FOUCAULT M. 2002, OTTO L. 1998: 70). Scientification of everyday life takes place when a field is described by dividing it up into smaller pieces by means of scientific concepts and in that way is explained as being ‘healthy,’ for instance. Such fields are, among others, the food, the body, and the everyday life by and large (LUPTON D. 1996).

An example of scientification from my material are leaflets from The National Board of Health drawing up tables indicating the number of kilojoules you burn if you walk the dog instead of just letting it out, or the joules you burn if you play with your children instead of watching television. An interesting new term has come up too. ‘Health Enhancing Physical Activities’ covers everyday activities such as mowing the lawn, cleaning the house, digging the garden, shopping by bike etc. (LARSEN K. 2003: 23). You might say that the new term helps people to comply with the prescription to take 30 minutes exercise a day, but it also colonizes people’s everyday lives and turns them into health projects.

Another example of scientification is the television programme or the article in a magazine telling you that sex is not just pleasurable but also in many

ways beneficial for your health and your looks, because immune and hormone systems as well as other complex mechanisms are involved in sex.

### *Effectual agents working from without and from within*

Scientification as well as exoticization can impart significance to actions in everyday life, and the two paradigms, the scientific and the reenchanting, may not be as disparate as it seems at first. Bits of popularized scientific knowledge can fit into a predominantly exotic-magical view of the world and vice versa, and when the interviewees talk about effectual, nourishing agents – not only those that work from without, but also those that they impart to the body so that they can work from within – there are trails of both paradigms, often in one and the same interview. In the following I present some examples of yet another common topic in all of three arenas, namely that the body must be supplied with nutrients, according to the official recommendations, and also other beneficial foodstuffs, from spices and herb teas, through specific complementing and preventive diets, to food defined as medicine.

«And since I had my daughter I've had eczema on my skin. But it helps a lot when I eat brewers' yeast. I have been eating it for a long time, almost a year now, and I think that my skin has become more soft and supple and not so dry in the winter. They say that it has a lot of vitamin B. These are good vitamins, also because I've lost a lot of hair, because I have been stressed» (Yoga exerciser, 39 years old).

«I've found out that I need to get cod-liver oil and B and E, so I'll continue with that until I get convinced that something else is better» (Exerciser in fitness centre, 64 years old).

«Now, it was at the time when I was still bleeding, and I ate iron; our garden was full of parsley, and I ate and I just ate. At that stage I ate iron, but now I have a way of eating vitamin C, and calcium, and garlic pills» (Exerciser in fitness centre, 59 years old).

«In my opinion most spices are health food; for example chilli and curry, they increase metabolism» (Gardener, 42 years old).

«Well, someone I know has been eating it, and then I decided also to do so; Rosehip Vital, I haven't had a cold since I started eating it, I must say. And it has been advertised too, and I like natural products». (Gymnastics exerciser, 76 years old).

«I eat natural vitamins and some calcium, for my bones. I choose something based on nature over some chemical stuff» (Yoga exerciser, 50 years old).

«My husband is very helpful when it comes to shopping, and now that he has joined me listening to a dietician he looks at the labels too and we are aware of fibres, fat, carbohydrates, and proteins, we surely are» (Gymnastics exerciser, 65 years old).

In the interviews a popularised knowledge that originate from nutritional science is displayed. Especially knowledge about nutrients and vitamins and how they act on specific parts of and processes in the body is expressed. But although the food and also the body is conceptualized and described in a modern scientific way, that is, in separate parts, a reenchanting and benevolent nature is also seen in the interviews. Both paradigms impart significance to the actions of everyday life, and in this way the vitamins become exotic non-human actors that guarantee the health of the human actors. Vitamins are usually contained in small miraculous pills that can be put into the inside of the body; on the outside of the body their effect may be observable on the skin, the hair, and the nails, but their actual work, from within, through metabolism, is invisible and may therefore, to the unlearned, seem magical. In this way vitamins are magical and yet guaranteed by science.

### *Vitamins and water*

Vitamins play an important role in the women's health strategies, and so do water. For several of the interviewees water is included in their health strategies, and for example they drink water every morning, on an empty stomach, to assist digestion as well as detoxification. In scripts from the health authorities in recent years the health promoting qualities of water has been underlined too (SORENSEN M. D. 2000: 383), and the commercial actors apparently have lost no time bringing water of a new and exotic kind onto the market.

If you look at the scripts together it seems as if water is no longer just for drinking when you're thirsty. Water has become a complementary/alternative medicine of which you must consume at least two litres per day, because water is a panacea that helps the internal functions of the body as well as it helps the surface of the body, the skin, to stay youthful. As is the case with vitamins, water has been loaded with "health" and the guarantee for health is sanctioned by science, but also linked with nature's magic.

Water is vital, but in most western societies you need not *buy* water in order to get clean drinking water. Nevertheless, 80 million litres of bottled water is sold per year, alone in Denmark. The reason may be that water in a bottle with screw cap is a convenient and hygienic accessory in a modern everyday life, when you are on the move, riding in a train or on a bicycle, or you are attending a meeting. But the explanation may as well be that the water in the bottles is exotic and magic, sometimes even coming directly

from the inside of a benevolent Mother Earth (MERCHANT C. 1980: 3-4), where it has been cleansed and refined in a particularly natural way.

The water sold in Denmark often comes from underground wells in Belgium, France, or Italy, among others the brand SPA, an acronym for Sana Per Aqua. SPA is bottled from the Reine Spring in Belgium, and it is advertised on the label of the bottle as water coming "from the heart of Europe." On another label of these bottles of still water are printed the words: «Abbey Well Natural Mineral Water fell as rain or snow before the age of pollution. Every drop of Abbey Well Natural Mineral Water has been naturally filtered through water bearing white sandstone for at least 3000 years». And a third bottle of water, the Danish brand Carlsberg Kildevand, is advertised on television with the voice-over: "The more you have sinned the more you need cleansing".

Drinking water from one of these bottles, the body is cleansed by means of pure water that earth itself has cleansed by means of its ingenious circulatory eco system. Nature and the body is conceptualised as analogous to each other – as self-regulating and self-healing organisms – even though they may sometimes be in need of assistance to their ingenious mechanisms. With regard to the body the yoga exercises can be such an assistant.

About water it could be said that with the new status it has been given as a complementary/alternative medicine, it contributes to the mainstreaming – and maybe diluting – of 'the alternative,' and something similar could be said about yoga.

### *Detoxification and the body as circulatory system*

Anthropologist Helle Johannessen has described the use of reflexology in Denmark and the body image inherent in the therapy, called the plumbing model as the body is conceptualised as a circulatory system, analogous to that of a house. In reflexology the body is described as consisting of piping systems in which there must be a good circulation and passage. However, some of these systems, whether it is the digestive apparatus or other circulatory systems, may from time to time become blocked, for which reason the therapy works on the blocks and assist the free flow and the detoxification and elimination of waste matters (JOHANNESSEN H. 1994: 52-57, 147).

Among some of the interviewees a similar body image is seen; along with the idea of a body in need of nurture goes an idea of a body in need of

detoxification. The body must be nourished but also cleansed, and the cleansing that can be assisted either by water that washes away the waste matters – just like waste can be washed out of a kitchen sink – or by exercises that get matters move faster through the system. The women talking about detoxification and waste matters are either yoga exercisers or in another way users of complementary/alternative therapies or products. That is, the concept of cleansing is not as widespread as the concept of nurture. Some examples:

«And I drink water; I don't drink two litres per day, but I try. Sometimes you forget to do so».

Question: Do you do it for health, for good looks, or?

«Well, I guess it is both, because if you have got a healthy skin, you also look better, and you don't look so aged. And it also helps remove the waste matters from the body if you drink some water, so it's a good thing» (Yoga exerciser, 39 years old).

«At the beginning of the week when leaving the fitness centre I just walk ordinarily, but later in the week, after two or three lessons, it is as if I'm floating and flying because I feel so much lighter. And it's evident that maybe you have some waste matters or something that has come out of your body» (Gymnastics exerciser, 61 years old).

«I have become aware of such things as accumulation of waste matters and such things as keeping the body clean. It's too much bother to fast, but I believe in doing yoga» (Yoga exerciser, 46 years old)

### *Yoga as another example of mainstreaming the alternative*

The eight yoga exercisers interviewed expressed varying notions of what yoga is. Some see it as a form of cautious gymnastics suited for people with disabilities; some see it as a parallel to physiotherapy in that it is a system for stretching out your muscles and relaxing your body after the working day; some see it as kind of medicine for reducing stress, and others as a means of general prevention of disease in that it also works on the internal organs and assists the circulatory systems of the body. Yoga instructors used anatomical concepts in explaining elaborately about nerves and muscles, but they also told us about the strange smell emanating from the body as it sweated especially during the first lessons, ascribing it to the detoxification process.

Is yoga then a complementary/alternative therapy? Is it exercise? Or is it both? Yoga is sometimes seen included in studies about the use of complementary and alternative medicine (TINDLE H. *et al.* 2005), but on the other hand yoga classes often take place at fitness centres.

I have also been engaged in two classes of gymnastics which I thought would be just gymnastics. But they appeared to have some elements in common with the yoga classes. The instructors combined the expected fitness and muscle training with yoga positions. They instructed us in drinking water and in breathing the right way in order to assist oxidation in the body and excretion from the body. In addition they taught us various tricks to get rid of tensions and blocks in the body, and it wasn't always clear whether they were referring to a strictly physiological or to a complementary paradigm.

As mentioned earlier, my thesis is, that what characterizes at least part of the exercise culture and therefore also part of the health culture is that treatment regimes and instructions seem to be based on science and knowledge about anatomy and physiology. But these cultures also hold some kind of exotic spice, whether it be that their techniques originate from far-away Himalayan Mountains, or that Madonna practises the same regime – as is the case with the Five Tibetans. Such a two-sided concept seems to appeal to many female users and to be selling on the market. The phenomenon can be characterized as scientification going hand in hand with an exoticization, or a mainstreaming of the alternative.

The lines between conventional medicine, non-conventional medicine, and health promoting actions in everyday life seem to be blurred. It is not easy to categorise horticultural therapy, or gymnastics and yoga when they are conceptualised as “exercise therapies”, or the everyday food when it is conceptualised as health food or medicine. One view is that the non-conventional is incorporated into the mainstream, that is, the alternative is mainstreamed; another view is that the terms of what counts as medicine are expanded.

### *Relevant means meeting the aches and pains of everyday life*

Thesis number two concerns the female health users and the gender perspective of my study, and it takes its point of departure in the literature on sex/gender differentials in health. It is well known that women use the General Practitioner more often than men; they also use alternative/complementary therapies and products more often than men (KJOLLER M. - RASMUSSEN N. 2002: 191, 207, 239, 247, 251, 361, 395). They are more interested in matters concerning health and the body; they read about them and talk about them, and to a significant extent popular knowledge circulating about health matters also seems to have a female target group.

One explanation is the health-beauty-wellbeing triplex that the commercial actors of the market know how to play on. Consequently it can be hard to tell whether it is health matters or beauty matters that women are interested in.

It is, however, not the case that all women go to a yoga class or a physiotherapist or buy herbal products just for the sense of wellbeing or the improved looks. Almost all of the women that I interviewed spoke of bodily disorders, even though they were not questioned about them. «Just the aches and pains that everybody knows about», they said. Nevertheless these aches and pains take up a good part of the interviews.

Much discussion takes place in the literature on women's health as to whether women actually do suffer from illnesses to a greater extent than men, whether they experience more illnesses because they are more aware of their bodies, or whether it simply is more socially acceptable for women to be ill and to do something about it. Another debate concerns whether women's bodily functions are being medicalized and women are being treated too much, or whether on the contrary women's bodily experiences and worries are not taken seriously and women are being treated too little (VERBRUGGE L. 1982: 434, ANDERSEN A. N. 2000: 31-33, MALTERUD K. 2001: 16, ZACHARIAE B. 2002: 101-102, 107, KNUDSEN L. 2003: 267-68)

Like in the statements of the women interviewed here, women's complaints are described in the literature as being aches and pains to a great extent, i.e. pains in muscles and joints, headaches, pains in the back of the neck, the shoulders, chest, back and lower back, in the stomach and abdomen; constipation and other digestive troubles also figure, along with exhaustion, fatigue, sadness, worries about health as well as various menopausal symptoms. These are conditions that are mostly harmless although inhibiting (ANDERSEN A. N. 2000: 31, PEDERSEN A. T. 2000: 224-25, SORENSEN M. D. 2000: 384, KNUDSEN L. 2003: 267).

Many women, including those in my study, are critical of conventional medicine. They are afraid of side effects from, for example, hormone replacement therapy or from conventional analgesics (LEWIS J. T. - CHAN J. 2002, GOLLSCHESKI S. *et al.* 2004). Complementary/alternative medicine – broadly defined and including health enhancing physical activities – is often described as being less potent and therefore also having fewer side effects compared to conventional medicine, and is also described as suited for the promotion of health and prevention of diseases in general (VERTINSKY P. 1998, IM E. - MELEIS A. I. - LEE K. A. 1999). My thesis is therefore as follows: Could it be that exercise, yoga, gardening and other sorts of com-



plementary/alternative medicine are especially relevant means of countering the aches and pains of everyday life in that they are neither 'too much' nor 'too little'? And could it be seen as an empowerment of women that they have a whole range of opportunities for practising or acquiring alternative/complementary therapies that work slowly and that come in small doses that they themselves can control? That their empowerment is nourished by the inspiration they get from the media and from the many products on the market to do something on their own, something that works for them individually – for instance drinking two glasses of water every morning or doing 'the Five Tibetans' every evening.

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