



Particip-active Musical Performance: Quality of Life at a Seniors' Village in South Africa

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Abstract

With increasing life expectancy around the globe, both developed and developing countries face greater ageing populations. South Africa is no different as ageing impacts on quality of life. This paper situates itself within a wider study *Spirituality and Well-being: Music in the community*. It focuses on a mixed voice choir based in the Somerset West area (near Cape Town). The senior citizens in this choir are all ex-professional people bar one, almost all residing in this affluent retirement home. Using case study methodology and drawing on questionnaire data, we employ Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as an analytical tool to code the data and report on these overarching themes: Sense of Community and Social Relationships, The Desire to Learn and Try New Things, and Creating New Spiritual Selves. Our findings show that through ‘particip-action’ and performance, in both formal and informal settings, participants have the opportunity to actively learn, experience and question their sense of spirituality, and engage in a leisure activity like singing which significantly contributes to their life quality. This case study adds to the wider body of research that promotes active participation for all seniors. In a country like South Africa, where there is much disparity between the haves and have nots, we argue that singing is an effective medium that may contribute to the lives of all seniors despite their financial background. As this is a small-scale study, a limitation in itself, generalization to other countries or communities cannot be made.

Keywords Leisure · Quality of life · Retirement · Singing · Spirituality

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Introduction

This paper situates itself in South Africa, a country that continues to be in transition since the onset of democracy in 1994 (Noyoo 2017). Ageing in South Africa “impacts on the demographic, socio-economic and social welfare of the country in diverse ways, generating policy interest, as governments seek to set national priorities that cater for elderly persons as a vulnerable group” (Lehohla 2014, p. iv). With the growth of the population aged 60 years and over, there will be an increase from 3.7 to 4.6 million by 2050 (Makiwane 2011). This is no surprise as people are living longer across the globe and with an increase of population by 2% annually (Phaswana-Mafuya et al. 2011), by “2025 there will be a total of about 1.2 billion people over the age of 60” (WHO 2002, p. 6). With such increases amongst older people comes a range of opportunities, dilemmas and challenges for governments, families, and the individual person (Dobrianky et al. 2007). As each older person is different, it is therefore important to create age-friendly surroundings that promote active ageing where they can capitalise on their abilities, interests, and strengths (World Health Organisation 2017; Hughes and Heycox 2010). With the huge socio-economic disparity between black and white people in South Africa, Lehohla (2014, p. iv) states that numbers of “rich white elderly persons were ten times higher than that of black African elderly persons (80%, 7% and 8%, respectively)”. He further confirms that “the majority of English-speaking elderly persons (78%) have better socio-economic status compared with other languages” (2014, p. v). Additionally, men by at large are better placed economically than women once retired (Pillay and Maharaj 2013). It is beyond the scope of this paper to address these differences; rather, we agree that “the historical system of apartheid (which) ensured that white South Africans enjoyed a standard of living comparable to that of the developed nations of the world” (Makiwane and Kwizera 2006, p. 298). This leaves the government with challenges in relation to planning and shifting policies regarding “the care of older people, including the sustainability of social assistance and services” (Phaswana-Mafuya et al. 2011, p. 17).

Social support structures need to consider older people who can live independent and self-sufficient lives that are enabling, engaging, enduring and active (Neary et al. 2016; Bowling 2008). Studies have shown that older people joining practical, hands-on participatory activities (Elliott in his 2012 article uses the term “particip-action”) boosts their physical, mental, and social capacity; they create and maintain relationships as a community which offers them emotional support and improves their sense of well-being and spiritual connection (Pearce et al. 2015; Dobson and Gaunt 2015). Those privileged citizens who have the income, time and health to engage in leisure and recreation activities desire surroundings that promote active ageing. Many older people have the capacity to participate in several formal, relaxed or structured activities that are engaging, exciting, entertaining and fun (Thang 2006; Heo et al. 2010).

Belonging to a community and participating in leisure activities provide space for older people to feel connected as they have similar needs and requirements for mutual support (Chavis and Newbrough 1986). Participating in a serious leisure activity takes time, effort and commitment (Cheng et al. 2017) and joining in leisure activities, particularly serious as opposed to casual leisure activities, affords participants the chance to either gain new knowledge or skills or rekindle something that was learnt in their former days (playing an instrument, singing in a choir, playing sport,

participating in board games, sewing, doing crafts and so forth). Sharing in a group leisure activity gives people the opportunity to feel a sense of life satisfaction, gratification and personal fulfilment (Genoe 2010; Shen and Yarnal 2010). Through the engagement of committed participation, leisure activities offer “prime opportunity for personal fulfilment, self-identity enhancement, and self-expression—characteristics of successful aging” (Brown et al. 2008, p. 76). Keeping active contributes to quality of life for older people in relation to their overall well-being, happiness and life satisfaction, as well as the maintenance of their health which impacts on their state of being (Hilleras et al. 2001; Ory et al. 2003; Bowling 2009; Fernández-Ballesteros 2011; Huxhold et al. 2013). Whilst there is no shortage of research regarding quality of life, there is no conclusive definition regarding the meaning of quality of life (Netuveli and Blane 2008). It may be argued that quality of life lies in the perceived intersections relating to physical and material well-being, relations with other people, social, community, and civic activities, personal development and fulfilment and recreation (Flanagan 1982). This is similar to Netuveli and Blane (2008) who found in their studies that “the majority of the elderly people evaluate their quality of life positively on the basis of social contacts, dependency, health, material circumstances and social comparisons”. They point out that there are three approaches to measuring quality of life and suggest “normative—the norms being dictated by beliefs, principles and philosophies about a good life; preference satisfaction—quality of life depending on availability of goods to choose from and ability to acquire them; and subjective evaluation—a good life being one that is experienced as such” (Netuveli and Blane 2008, p. 113–114).

Quality of life as a global construct impacts on older adults’ personal lives through group activities like that of singing in a choir (Coffman and Adamek 1999; Coffman 2002; Bowling and Gabriel 2004; Galloway 2006). Whilst there is some overlap between active ageing and quality of life, keeping active contributes to quality of life as a state of being rather than a mere process (Fernández-Mayoralas et al. 2015).

Participating in activities such as music facilitates social connections, offers emotional support, combats feelings of seclusion and improves health benefits, increasing overall well-being (Lehmborg and Fung 2010; Creech et al. 2013; Mthembu et al. 2015; Leontyeva et al. 2015; The conversation 2016). Activities such as singing in choirs contribute to participants’ sense of well-being and help them maintain friendships, experiencing social and emotional connections to others which combats loneliness and feelings of sadness (Clift and Hancox 2010; Gridley et al. 2011; Skingley and Bungay 2010; Toepoel 2013). Singing as an aspect of music, in which it is notable that the performer is also simultaneously the instrument, may open a space for people to explore their sense of spirituality (Dabback 2008). Though there is some way to go before the real significance of singing and spirituality can be fully understood, it can be said that music (singing) has spiritual connotations that may relate to God or worship (Petty 2010; Tshabalala and Patel 2010; Miller and Strongman 2002). It is beyond the scope of this paper specifically to explore music and spirituality although investigation of the aspect of spirituality has been a part of the wider project under which this investigation was subsumed. We agree with Hays and Minichiello (2005, p. 95): “music can provide many people with ways of experiencing and expressing their spirituality in their life that otherwise they might find difficult to access in other tangible ways”.

In September 2016, approval was granted by the Human Ethics Advisory Group at X University to include case studies in South Africa as part of Author One's wider study *Spirituality and Well-being: Music in the community*. The wider project aims were to:

- Understand how music and spirituality fosters well-being in community settings
- Identify participants' understandings of spirituality within the community
- Identify how engagement with music affects well-being
- Investigate how people learn music within community settings
- Identify what are the benefits of community music making
- Understand why people come together to share music making and practice

In this article, we explore the benefits of community music making within a retirement home, we investigate why people come together to share music making and practice, strive to understand how music fosters well-being in a community setting like a retirement home and identify participants' understanding of spirituality within the community choir.

Method

In qualitative research, Brannen (2016) points out that, ahead of the data collection, researchers may have some ideas about what they will find in their search. We employ qualitative case study methodology as a way to understand and illuminate phenomena under study (Creswell and Poth 2017; Tai and Ajjawi 2016; Starman 2013; Flyvbjerg 2006). Although case study methodologies encapsulate "naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological and biographic research methods" (Stake 1995, p. xi–xii), it is not always possible to have scientific rigour and reliability when undertaking a single case study (Noor 2008). We use a phenomenological approach as it afforded us the opportunity to explore the perceptions and lived experience of our participants, seen from their point of view (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008), whilst remaining aware of the importance of our positionality and relationship to our chosen research methods, participants and contexts (Nicholls 2019). Case study methodology allows participants to voice their stories (Crabtree and Miller 1999) and provides an in-depth understanding offered by one or more individuals (Creswell and Creswell 2018).

As Author Two lives in South Africa, in the Cape Town vicinity, she initially made contact through telephone, email and personal visiting with the accompanist/choir director (ACD) of the Helderberg Village Choir (HVC). She explained the project and invited the HVC to participate in the study. In addition, the Plain Language Statement and Consent Form and questionnaire were emailed to the ACD for approval to be sought from the HVC organising committee. Once consent was granted, hard copies of the questionnaire were hand-delivered to the ACD by Author Two to distribute to the members of the HVC. We chose questionnaires as our instrument as a quick, easy and cost-effective method to collect data (Strange et al. 2003). Findings from questionnaires can generate generalizable data that can be insightful (Rowley 2014). The questionnaire included closed questions—for example respondents were asked to tick boxes for age group and gender. It also included open-ended questions

such as: What is/was your occupation? What made you join the HVC? Why have you continued to participate? What benefits do you derive from participating in the HVC? What are some of the challenges in singing in a choir? It is interesting that these questions were later found to be very similar to those asked by Brown et al. (2008, p. 79) in their investigation of shag dancing as a form of serious leisure for older adults, supporting successful ageing: “Why did you become involved with the dance? When you first began to shag, was it difficult to learn the steps? Did you feel any sense of accomplishment after mastering the steps? Do you think there are any rewards or benefits from shagging?”

Once the questionnaire data had been collected by Author Two, we used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as an analytical tool for coding and analysing the data (Smith et al. 2009). As “IPA is anchored in phenomenology” (Noon 2017, p. 46), we read and re-read the questionnaire responses of the lived experience of our participants and the interview notes with the ACD undertaken by Author Two and the club manager undertaken by Author One (Alase 2017; Larkin and Thompson 2012). We communicated through skype, telephone and email to discuss our preliminary findings before finalising our emergent themes. This article builds on our previous paper (Joseph and Van Niekerk 2018) where we explored two emergent themes: the notions of quality of life and artistic senior citizenship. Although quality of life is recognized as a term to the extent that the acronym QoL is already used in literature on the topic, this condition is also widely described in this way in a general sense. Artistic senior citizenship, in contrast, is a new term, coined by the authors (Joseph and Van Niekerk 2018). It is, however, an expansion of the existing concept of artistic citizenship, articulated by well-known authors such as Elliott (2012). In this article, we discuss three themes that emerged from our data (Sense of Community and Social Relationships, The Desire to Learn and Try New Things, and Creating New Spiritual Selves). We use direct quotations from our participants (McCarrick et al. 2016).

The Research Site: Helderberg Village Choir

To contextualise the data for our case study, we provide a brief overview of the setting and the choir. The Helderberg retirement village was established in 1987, set on the slopes of the Helderberg mountains in Somers West (Cape Town area, South Africa). It offers premium living on 84 acres of land offering a variety of accommodation (cottages, apartments, freehold homes and care levels) and a wide range of facilities for retirees, including an onsite healthcare facility of 70 beds (Helderberg Retirement Village 2018). There are on average 1200 residents from all walks of life. Between 2012 and 2013 this prestigious village was recognized as the ‘world’s best international retirement village’ offering luxury living, and a range of clubs, societies and cultural activities including the ‘village choir’ (Helderberg Village 2017a).

The HVC has existed for about 20 years; it includes anyone who wants to sing and can sing, although being able to read music in any ensemble is always an advantage. The choir has a small committee (chair, vice-chairpersons, treasurer, elected voice representatives and co-opted members), with a professional accompanist/choir director (the ACD) who had been in her role for 4 years at the time of this study. She selects repertoire and then seeks the approval of the committee. The ACD does not live in the

village, and she sees herself as “an accompanist rather than the conductor of the choir”, although she is certainly viewed as the conductor by the HVC. This discrepancy in her view of her role is interesting in the light of a similar discrepancy found in the article “Conductorless singing group: a particular kind of self-managed team?” and suggested by the heading therein, The Administrator/Facilitator/ Leader/ Director (Page-Shipp et al. 2018).

The ACD has been involved with teaching and learning for most of her life in schools and teacher education colleges. She holds a BA Mus degree and higher education diploma. She only has one eye and, according to the wife of one choir member, “they are often amazed at how she copes with music scores, playing at the piano, jumping up and conducting”. A further lady who lives in the village is sometimes called on as the singing teacher help. Members meet throughout the year for rehearsals except during the southern hemisphere summer holiday season over the Christmas period. During rehearsals they do both sectional and whole choir work. Membership is free though a small fee is charged for printed music. The choir plays an important role for fellow residents especially as they perform to those in healthcare. The choir also serves as an excellent marketing image to prospective residents (Helderberg Village 2017b).

Results

At the time of the study, the choir consisted of 40 members. From these, 36 responded to the questionnaire and the gender distribution was 11 male and 25 female. The age range was between 60 and 90 plus (see Table 1 for demographics). Their former careers/occupations ranged from teaching, medical/science professionals, the corporate area of business and management to a minister of religion. Several choir members noted that they could no longer cope with standing and sitting, and for them there were seats available when rehearsing or performing. This meant that they might be positioned separately from their voice parts, but this disruption to the balance of voices within the choir was regarded as less important than the participation of these members.

The three emergent and interrelated themes are now discussed.

Sense of Community and Social Relationships

Singing in the choir as a group gave the members something to do; it offered them “a place to go to” as the club manager pointed out. For all participants, whether retired,

Table 1 Demographics of participants

Age group	Number	Male	Female
60–69	5	2	3
70–79	15	1	14
80–89	14	6	8
90+	2	2	0

single, married or widowed, the notion of wanting to belong was very evident in the HVC. Most of the participants had professional careers during their working lives and singing in the HVC felt special, making them feel “part of a community”. The choir singing meant “meeting new people” and sharing common interest with “like-minded people”. As residents, members appreciated the chance to attend rehearsals in a different space (venue) once a week, coming out of their rooms or individual homes at the residence. The experience offered participants a sense of social engagement which contributed to their QoL. They felt part of being in a group with others who enjoyed what they did and also had a commitment to wanting to sing with others. Some members were also part of the music society at the village, which organised concerts when high-level artists performed for them. Whereas singing in the choir meant performing and socially engaging (talking and laughing) with others, the club manager said that the choir “added value to the choir members being together and singing together”. The essence of the choir was forming close friends and relationships, sharing views, interests and activities, all of which resonates with the tenets of QoL. However, the membership was not very open to including new choristers and the club manager noted “the constitution of the choir says the majority of the choir cannot be non-residents; they have to live at the village”.

Having a weekly routine was a good thing, motivating people to attend and also means that they were committed to the membership and to singing. One member said they “did not want to let the group down” so attendance and trying to do well added to the personal and group dynamics. One member aptly summed it up by saying “good friends are part of a successful group”. Some members felt stressed due to their partner’s ill health; choir membership was good for their personal development and fulfilment. Singing in the choir was a “way to keep alive” as some had undergone emotional pain and stress, for example from losing a child, grandchild or life partner. Singing offered them solace and as one said “consolation”. It could be argued that singing offered members a sense of comfort and sharing personal stories and experiences had a “large influence on well-being”.

Gathering together for rehearsals and performance offered participants a sense of validation, still feeling worthy to sing for themselves, amongst themselves and for others at concerts. The club manager talked about just how much the choir members “admired two trained operatic singers in the choir”. She added “whilst they are not given special treatment, their voices are strategically placed around the choir to carry the voices of others”. This type of vocal interaction was an important aspect to singing in the HVC as “it provides a sense of belonging and upliftment” to all members. Singing alongside excellent voices offered encouragement to less confident members. Participants might live in a high-end retirement village boasting a host of facilities, but they nevertheless felt the need to be part of a wider society. They wanted to interact with each other and with the audience. Living away from children and family in a retirement village can be lonely and singing in the choir “occupies their time” as well as “an empty space”. For some members who were forlorn, who had no children, or had lost their loved ones, music offered a “social interaction through singing ... brightens the spirit”, also contributing to their QoL in a recreational and social sense. Something that the choir did which the club manager remarked was very special for them was to perform to mixed race children from a primary school, brought on a bus from nearby Gordon’s Bay. The concert brought much joy and happiness for the members being

able to perform to a younger audience. The club manager explained “it is easier for the kids to come out than for the oldies to go to them”.

Having a weekly routine motivated people to attend, to sing, perform and undertake recordings (audio and video), adding to personal and group dynamics. One member aptly summed it by saying “good friends are part of a successful group”. Overall, singing as a regular activity in the village, led by a specialist music director and accompanist, provided “personal and group satisfaction” to the membership. They felt appreciated especially when performing at concerts and frail care centres. The choir experienced a special bonding with other village residents, and the club manager confirmed “they sing at three concerts (winter, summer and Christmas) during the year at the healthcare division at the village for very, very sick and frail”. Whilst singing within the village and beyond meant that the members felt appreciated, respected and valued by the audience, one member aptly summed it up by saying singing provided “double the pleasure” for them to perform to others as they felt special to be a part of a sonic world.

The Desire to Learn and Try New Things

Learning new and different repertoire took time and commitment, yet the learning environment offered members a sense of personal development and fulfilment. Participants commented on how singing improved their learning, keeping their minds active as they engaged in routine rehearsals, all of which contributed to QoL. Members learnt a wide range of repertoire, organised through the choir committee and the ACD and conductor. One member in his 60s stated that he was “temporarily unable to play the piano and got hooked into joining the choir”, noting the leadership of the ACD and conductor, saying “we are very fortunate to have two qualified ladies”. It was apparent that these women played a major role in fostering learning and performing opportunities for the participants. The club manager commented positively on the efforts of the ACD, undertaking all the paperwork for copyright clearance and ensuring that members had copies to sing from. Members also commented on the hard work and dedication required to run a choir. Whilst some confirmed that they enjoyed learning new songs, others enjoyed pieces they knew and were familiar with. The club manager found that trying out new things was an effort for older people: “they do not take it lightly if they have to sing modern songs they do not know and they don’t like”. Learning material from their era came with ease as when they recently performed at a concert where the themes were from the movies of their time. This aspect of learning members found fulfilling and rewarding.

Aside from the social aspects that came with learning (time to chat, have some fun), attendance also meant that members had to learn different parts which for some could be challenging. As one member in his 90s pointed out “hearing harmony sadly comes later”. Members felt that singing in the choir gave them a chance to “learn from others”, it “stimulates the mind” and “increased musical ability”. For many being able to “sing in parts” and “being with other musicians” was a “positive and creative” experience. The ACD said “the choir seems to accept my choice of the odd individual solo items at concerts, as they recognise the obvious solo voice talent”. Whilst members admired the ‘odd soloist’, they also understood their limitations and ability, which contributed to their personal development and fulfilment in relation to QoL. Singing as a soloist, the

club manager added “offers them a sense of validation in their senior years”. The ACD was “very strict” according to the club manager; she did not have any pets. The ACD said she did swap seating for example for concerts “when someone is seated next to a person other than the person they sit next to at rehearsals”. She added this might be due to a member being “hard of hearing in one ear or can’t cope with their part if placed next to a different voice group. I allow them to swap within the voice group as long as the person they’re swapping with agrees to move”. One member in her 70s summed it up by saying “receiving approval and encouragement” was one of the highs in the choir. Having an “excellent accompanist” played an important role in training the choir as they performed at many concerts and the participants all simply “loved the concerts”. Whilst this was a positive outcome of their engagement and learning the club manager mentioned “they do not like it if you suggest singing with another choir or artist ... they really do not warm up to sharing (the stage)”. This suggestion was a way of improving sales tickets for concerts and offering more variety to the program.

Creating New Spiritual Selves

Being retired or living in a retirement village opened new vistas for choir members, offering a range of opportunities to engage with others as it contributed to their sense of well-being. As older performers, music offered them a space to create ‘new selves’ where they were able to increase their music literacy, gain new friends and widen their spiritual vistas which ranged from “spirit is in everything, (and is) not exclusive to religious or secular music” to “music and singing is a way to express spirituality”, to “singing sacred pieces relates deeply to my faith”. The very act of singing together was a spiritual experience for some, impacting on their personal lives as it offered a space to freely connect with God and with others. The performance and social interaction with others offered some a new lease of life. One of the males found “it enjoyable and refreshing to see her (his wife) relating in a different context” when singing in the choir.

For members who had lost their partners, the choir was a special place to fit in with others where they could share a deep love of music. As some members experienced loss and/or a change in lifestyle, moving from full-time professional work to being a retiree, singing lifted their mood and filled a space in life. Overall, members remarked that singing “drives away despair”, “it gives the spirit or emotional side a lift”, bringing much “pleasure”. It also offered some members a sense of spirituality as they found it a way to praise or glorify God; for others, singing offered them a sense to connect with “the universe and sounds in nature”. Overall, singing produced uplifting moments that could be deemed spiritual for the individual.

As retirees, singing together offered a new and different sense of self, giving them a sense of purpose and self-worth. One member in her 80s pointed out that she “likes to help others” and she “enjoys the team support of the choir” so still being able to feel useful contributed to her sense of well-being. Another said, “I can’t survive without music and I love the challenge to sing in the choir”. For some members the opportunity to sing was a way to express their feelings of sadness, joy and happiness; for others, singing connected their walk with God, uplifting their spirit and contributing to their general well-being. Few members identified as either atheist/agnostic or as spiritual. One member felt “singing sacred pieces related deeply to my faith” but overall, the singing experience was for most members a way to communicate their “deep feelings”.

Those that found a connection to God through singing commented in particular about when singing or learning Christian songs, for example in preparation for the Christmas concert. They felt the songs were an inspiration and offered some a “closer walk with the Lord”; some said songs sung were a time to reflect on happy past memories. The club manager remarked that the 2018 Christmas concert was unique in that the choir shared the Christmas concert program with the housekeeping staff for a special morning coffee for the residents and invited guests which included school children. The program comprised a mixture of African songs sung by the staff and western songs (sung by the choir) to create a shared program which for some might have been a new musical and spiritual experience.

Discussion

The participants in this study (retired professional and business people, many of whom had careers in what could be described as non-artistic fields, e.g. scientific) were from an elite retirement community. We acknowledge that this research does not therefore represent the vast majority of South African retirees from disadvantaged communities who still endure post-apartheid inequalities and neglect (Webster 2017). However, we did find that despite our participants’ affluence which resonates with their objective dimension of QoL in relation to a high quality standard of living (Netuveli and Blane 2008), connecting with others as a basic human need was something neither money nor luxury living could always satisfy. Our participants’ subjective dimensions (feeling joyful and happy) all contributed to their individual and collective sense of well-being and QoL. It was evident that singing in the HVC as a regular recreational activity was priceless, fostering social relationships for all members but enhancing life satisfaction and overall happiness especially for residents in the Village (Batt-Rawden and Storlien 2019). For participants, the convenience of time, location, environment, and good teaching and learning seemed contributing factors that added positively to their QoL. In addition, they felt united as a group through common interests, beliefs and conduct, which contributed significantly to their QoL (Chavis and Newbrough 1986; Coffman 2002; Huxhold et al. 2013). As choir members, they were involved in social participation (Levasseur et al. 2010): the choir was a place for them to share music and have fun with others. Members in the main felt they gained “personal and group satisfaction” which was “rewarding” in particular when they sang at the healthcare division and more recently together with employees at the village.

The concept of ‘particip-action’ was reflected in all three emerging themes discussed above, and in all the responses given by HVC members. Members felt valued when singing at rehearsals and at concerts, and the choir provided an opportunity for them to socially connect with others and across generations (Lehmberg and Fung 2010). In so doing, singing offered members of the choir comfort, contentment and a sense of belonging which equally served as a good marketing tool for management (Helderberg Village 2017b). The notion of particip-action counteracted feelings of isolation, unhappiness and loneliness especially as some members were recently widowed and the choir offered them a safe and friendly space, one that positively contributed to their QoL (Flanagan 1982; Lehmberg and Fung 2010; Joseph and Southcott 2018). Active particip-action for older people is life-giving, enabling and transformational (Elliott

2012). The participants in this study sought solace from bereavement and other disappointments—thus making friends was very important to them.

Singing as a recreational activity promotes social participation in a happy and friendly environment which positively impacts on well-being and quality of life (Netuveli and Blane 2008; Levasseur et al. 2010; Clift and Hancox 2010; Gridley et al. 2011; Skingley and Bungay 2010; Toepoel 2013). Whilst members gained interpersonal connections through rehearsals and performances, singing in a group kept them mentally engaged, contributing to QoL in an optimistic way (Silverstein and Parker 2002; Fung and Lehmborg 2016; Wlodkowski and Ginsberg 2017). Meeting weekly for rehearsals and performing annually at three public concerts, despite some members not being able to stand for a concert, required commitment and perseverance, resonating with the tenets of serious leisure (Heo et al. 2010; Cheng et al. 2017). The word 'leisure' was not used by a single respondent: members thought of themselves as being busy, and they might not have realised that they were engaged in serious leisure as their choir involvement entailed "special knowledge, training, experience or skills" (Shen and Yarnal 2010: 164).

The teaching experience and inspiration of the ACD contributed significantly to the success of the group as the HVC committee and ACD selected repertoire that "brightens the spirit" and fosters "active learning". As a regular weekly recreational activity, singing in the choir as serious leisure could be argued to be "fulfilling in nature" (Stebbins 2017: xii), affording members opportunities for "self-enrichment, self-expression, feelings of accomplishment ... renewal of self, self-gratification or fun and a sense of social interaction and belongingness" (Brown et al. 2008, p. 85). In his book *The barbershop singer*, Stebbins (1996, p. 64) makes the point that "personal enrichment is the most powerful reward to be found in singing". He notes that the 'thrills' of singing in his study with barbershop singers "may be seen as situated manifestations of the more abstract rewards" (p.66).

The Helderberg Village Choir offers members the opportunity to particip-actively perform for self and others. The ACD's rigour and commitment to the choir impacted members' personal development, positively contributing to the longevity and viability of the choir (Flanagan 1982; Davidson et al. 2014). Whilst being strict, the ACD created a positive learning environment, making members feel good about the singing activity, and helping them face obstacles (Durrant 2017). Should the ACD fall ill or leave, the club manager pointed out that there were "very capable people that could fill in the gap and stand in to lead the choir". It would not seem plausible for the choir to disintegrate, given their commitment and also high standing. The ACD confirmed that appointing someone younger if the need should arise would mean paying them "professional fees as younger people would expect". Members gained "a sense of achievement, inherent aesthetic fulfilment and positive socialisation" as artistic senior citizens (Joseph and van Niekerk 2018: 81). 'Spirituality and Well-being' were the two key words in the title of the wider project of which this research formed a part. Well-being is a very general concept, as is quality of life; these perceptions were widely reflected in members' responses. However, despite the fact that retirees typically facing the impending ends of their lives, very little emerged from their responses on the specific aspect of spirituality.

The smallness of this study was a limitation in itself, adding, however, to the wider study as an exemplar (Flyvbjerg 2006). It provided insights into the choir's music

learning and performance and contributed to perceptions of singing in regard to sharing music as retired people (Stake 2000; Creswell and Creswell 2018). The findings add to the body of research on active participation for older people undertaking a leisure activity.

Future Research

Participants in this study were not asked to describe successful ageing and serious leisure; a future study drawing on these components should consolidate and improve the efficacy of music and specifically singing activities for older people, especially given the rich choral tradition South Africa boasts.

Research with a cross section of the wider South African population living in less affluent retirement circumstances warrants further investigation, to explore how and why music activities across different groups and races contribute to quality of life. Future research may also explore intergenerational singing at retirement centres. This study showed the myriad benefits and opportunities particip-active quality of life may offer seniors. In the light of the most recent elections in South Africa (8 May, 2019), we hope that this study may inform government policy about the need and urgency regarding equitable provision of residential environments that support particip-active quality of life for all seniors.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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