

## Motivation in practicing Yoga & Pilates and satisfying the need for self-knowledge

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the type of motivation of Yoga and Pilates practitioners. These are believed to be two branches of fitness. To test the type of motivation that animate the practitioners, we used the Self Motivation Scale 28 (SMS 28), designed by Pelletier & al. and applied it to a group of 29 female practitioners of Yoga and 29 female practitioners of Pilates, along with a demographic survey. The results indicate that the objectives of the practitioners are muscle tone and correct posture and the main motivation is intrinsic knowledge.

**Key words:** *fitness, yoga, Pilates, needs, satisfaction, knowledge;*

### Rezumat

Scopul acestei cercetări este de a analiza tipul de motivație al practicantelor de Yoga și Pilates, două ramuri ale fitnessului. Pentru a testa tipul de motivație al practicantelor, am utilizat Self Motivațiã Scale(SMS 28) conceput de Pelletier și colaboratorii și l-am aplicat unui grup de 29 de practicante de Yoga și altui grup de 29 de practicante de Pilates, împreună cu un chestionar demographic. Rezultatele ne indică faptul că pe lângă obiectivele ce țin de tonifierea musculară și postura corectă, participantele la studiu sunt motivate în primul rând de cunoașterea instrinsecă.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *fitness, yoga, Pilates, nevoi, satisfacție, cunoaștere*

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## Introduction

In recent years, physical activities different from the usual branches of aerobics (step, dance, tae-bo etc.) such as Yoga and Pilates have spread among the fitness centers in Romania. If in The United States, Yoga had an unexpected increase in popularity in the past decade (Saper & al, 2004) whether in health and fitness centers or private studios and thus allowed the development of various styles of yoga (Bikram, Ashtanga, etc.), in Romania this activity has a hard time developing in the fitness industry. Pilates however developed in the '20s as a method and even if it has a decades of history, only in recent years did it develop a lot and is known as a form of fitness but also as a holistic form of maintaining health. Pilates is described by practitioners as “a unique method of physical fitness that uses a combination of muscle strengthening, lengthening and breathing to develop trunk muscles and restore muscle balance” (1, 3, 11, 12, 16). Some studies (2, 10) emphasizes that Pilates exercises are suitable for all ages, all body types and fitness abilities due to the modifiable nature of the movements (11, 14, 15).

Generally speaking, aerobic activities mainly have a female audience and a smaller number of participants based on the fact that these activities do not have a direct effect on weight loss or rapid physical sculpting, which are the main objectives of the fitness practitioners (9). However, the practitioners who are turning to Yoga and Pilates pursue other objectives such as body posture, joint mobility, muscle flexibility, mental relaxation.

The motivation for this kind of practices can be defined as the process by which a practitioner uses the available resources of time, talent and energy to practice and perform activities in order to achieve an anticipated positive effect associated with success and avoidance of failure (8). Motivation also varies. If at aerobics one can observe that people are motivated by visible results related to improved physical appearance (17) at Yoga and Pilates the motivation is regarding a state of wellbeing.

The practitioners will be influenced in their choices by their dominant behavior, which can be divided in three categories representing the sphere of motivation: extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation and amotivation (5, 6, 7). Compared to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic is a lower form of motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the solid basis on which one

can build performance, while extrinsic motivation will overlap with this later on in the process to complete successful outcome. Generally speaking, intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity because that specific activity gives you satisfaction and pleasure through its content (5). When a person is intrinsically motivated, he/she will act on his/her own initiative, without expecting material rewards (7).

Practitioners of various branches and disciplines of fitness can also be fitted in this category based on the fact that they find it interesting and want to learn and know more about the discipline or branch practiced. Intrinsic motivation can be divided into three distinct types (18): intrinsic motivation of knowledge, of development and of stimulation.

In what fitness disciplines are concerned, intrinsic motivation of knowledge can be associated with certain aspects such as exploration (what the body can do, physical limitations as well as self and senses limitation), the curiosity towards a new discipline and new approaches and achieving goals (fighting stress, finding new coping methods, mental relaxation). We can also include in this category the motivation to learn, to know or to understand what you practice. It can be defined as an activity done for the pleasure and satisfaction you have while you learn, know or try to understand something new (5) like these disciplines or the way in which the body perceives and feels the physical exercise.

The intrinsic motivation of development can be defined as engaging in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction felt when you are trying to accomplish or create something (7). If in aerobics and aerobic effort we count on releasing endorphins after an intense exercise sessions, in Yoga and Pilates we rely on a state of flow (4).

The intrinsic motivation of stimulation may occur in fitness activities where sensory pleasures are felt during the isometric contraction or while performing gestures and movements with a particular aesthetic. Extrinsic motivation corresponds to a behavior that is not self-determined, a behavior that must be determined externally through rewards. There are several types of external determination that may be on either a lower or higher scale of self-determination (14). These are: external control, introjected and regulation by identifying the behavior. External regulation refers to a behavior that is influenced by external factors (i.e. material) or

by rules/constraints. Introjected controls refers to those individuals who feel an internal pressure such as guilt or anxiety, the pressure to be in shape; they feel ashamed and they blame themselves when they are not in shape and do not have good result or miss classes. Regulation by identifying behavior can be seen the individuals who consider that practicing this disciplines contributes to their personal development and it also helps them in other branch of their lives. In general it fights stress and it develops self-regulation which has effects on everyday life and on the job.

Amotivation can be defined as the lack of correspondence between an individual's actions and the results of his/her actions and generally leads to stop practicing these disciplines.

**The research purpose** is to analyze the way in which the Yoga and Pilates practitioners (female) are motivated. Because Yoga and Pilates have established themselves in the past couple of years as branches of fitness in Romania as well and because they are competing in fitness and wellness centers with other aerobics classes we want to analyze the type of motivation which determines the practitioners' choices. The benefits of practicing Yoga and Pilates are related to a state of wellbeing rather than to fast body sculpting and idea body shape in Yoga and Pilates is the lean, tone and flexible woman with an optimal physical condition.

**The hypothesis of the research:**

Yoga and Pilates offer a new dimension to the practice of physical exercises and satisfy various needs and pleasures. Learning new techniques that lead to body perfection and experienced sensations satisfy the need for knowledge of practitioners.

**Methodology**

**Material used**

The study is conducted on a total of 58 female practitioners, 29 practitioners of Yoga and 29 practitioners of Pilates of two different fitness centers from Timisoara. The practitioners are aged between 16 and 58 years with an average of 33,17 (for Yoga) and 32.17 (for Pilates). The average weight of the practitioners is 55.67 kg (for Pilates) and 56.71 (for Yoga) and the average height is 165 cm for Yoga and 164 cm for Plates.

Of the 58 practitioners, 24 are married with children and 34 are not married. In both cases the majority of the practitioners are employed with a higher education diploma (83% Yoga and 76% Pilates).

After calculating the body mass index (BMI) one can see that of all the Yoga practitioners not one was overweight and most of them fell within a normal BMI (18,5-24,9 kg/m<sup>2</sup>) only two with an index lower than normal. The same situation can be seen at Pilates, the majority of practitioners falling in the normal BMI and only four with an index lower than normal.

**Method used**

As data collecting method, we used two surveys: a demographic survey with a total of 16 items (age, gender, weight, studies, occupation etc.) and the second one was "The Sport Motivation Scale" (SMS 28) developed by Pelletier et al. (13). The latter one has a total of 28 items and for variable responses, we used the Likert scale from 1 to 7, 1 being "does not correspond at all", 4 being "moderately corresponds", 5-6 being "corresponds a lot" and 7 being "corresponds precisely"

**Results**

**Top objectives of Yoga and Pilates practitioners**

The reasons for which people decide to practice fitness (in various forms) are generally pragmatic things such as health, physical condition, weight loss and body beauty. Even if Yoga and Pilates offer something completely different than the other branches of fitness, especially the dynamic ones (aerobic, step etc.) one can see that the main reason for the study group, for Yoga and Pilates is acquiring a toned body, that can provide a beautiful straight posture. The Yoga and Pilates woman type is different from the aerobic one, where the forms are full and round (predominantly white muscle fiber development), whereas In Pilates-Yoga the body is lean and dry (predominantly red muscle fiber development). However there are differences in the percentage level of importance allotted to toning between Pilates practitioners (72, 41%) and Yoga practitioners (44, 82%). The positions done in Pilates, especially the "power house" as well as the Yoga asana allow the involvement of small muscle groups that are hard to reach in Aerobics, where one generally works the main muscle groups.

In Yoga, on a tie with toning is relaxation (44, 82%), which for Pilates ranks no 2.) Slow execution of asana and maintaining the position for a certain period of time, along with the music help attain a state of relaxation. The type of isometric contraction correlated with exhalation allows a proper

oxygenation of the body establishing a state of relaxation at the end of the session. The final state of well-being is a complex combination between physical effort, breathing alternating with physical and mental relaxation.

**Table 1.** Top objectives of Yoga and Pilates practitioners

NO.	OBJECTIVES	YOGA	YOGA RANKING	PILATES	PILATES RANKING
1.	Weight loss	37.93%	3	37.93%	3
2.	Muscle tone	44.82%	1	72.41%	1
3.	Relaxation	44.82%	1	41.37%	2
4.	Breathing improvement	17.23%	5	10.34%	7
5.	Joint mobility development	34.48%	4	37.93%	3
6.	Muscle resistance development	34.48%	4	31.03%	5
7.	Muscle flexibility development	37.93%	3	20.68%	6
8.	Maintaining optimum physical condition	41.37%	2	34.48%	4
9.	Spending free time effectively/in a useful way	3.44%	6	6.89%	8
10.	Socializing	3.44%	6	6.89%	8

**Table 2.** Motivation of Yoga and Pilates practitioners (female)

No.	Types of motivation	Yoga	Pilates	t test	Pearson
		x	x	t	r
1.	Intrinsic motivation - to know	4.89	4.65	0.24, p>0.05	.76**
2.	Intrinsic motivation - to accomplish	4.78	4.12	0.53, p>0.05	.01
3.	Intrinsic motivation-to experience stimulation	4.54	4.31	0.28, p>0.05	.92***
4.	Extrinsic motivation - identified	3.04	3.21	0.85, p>0.05	.99***
5.	Extrinsic motivation - introjected	4.27	4.74	0.18, p>0.05	.14
6.	Extrinsic motivation - external regulation	2.45	2.7	0.18, p>0.05	.14
7.	Amotivation	1.77	2.02	0.06, p>0.05	.39

Maintaining an optimal physical condition through Yoga is the 2<sup>nd</sup> reason for which the practitioners choose this discipline (41.37%) whereas for Pilates practitioners it only ranks 4<sup>th</sup> (34.48%).

Weight loss ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> for both practices (37.93%). Even if the body mass index proves that no practitioner is overweight, every woman wants a leaner silhouette. Sometimes due to lack of knowledge and understanding of one's own body and its possibilities of development and shaping, the ideal woman remains linked to the thickness of the fat tissues.

Regarding mobility both Yoga and Pilates address joint mobility and muscle flexibility, physical qualities that are addressed less in aerobic. In addition to good posture, performing the positions and asana with a high degree of joint mobility and muscle flexibility gives a different body allure. Yoga practitioners rank flexibility development 3<sup>rd</sup> (37.93%) and joint mobility 4<sup>th</sup> (34.48%) while

Pilates practitioners rank joint mobility 3<sup>rd</sup> (37.93%) and muscle flexibility 6<sup>th</sup> (20.68%). The differences in muscle flexibility can be explained by the very essence of the two practices: regulation (through muscle contraction and positions) in Pilates and openness and fluidity (through asana) in Yoga.

Breathing still remains a rather complex to perform and understand element; as proof of that it only ranks 5<sup>th</sup> for Yoga (17.23%) and 7<sup>th</sup> for Pilates (10.34%). This difference can be explained by the different structure the lessons have; in Yoga we have the last part which focuses on mental relaxation that is done through pranayama and here the practitioners understand that the amount of oxygen dosage has a significant contribution to becoming relaxed and achieving the state of flow, which exists in Pilates but is acquired by execution rather than by mental relaxation.

Linking inspiration and exhalation with muscle contraction and relaxation but also the extensive

apnea phases will be understood and perfected only in years of practice. Often in Yoga, practicing Pranayama without knowledge leads to poor oxygenation of the brain and hence forth appears different states far beyond relaxation, which is the general objective. However fitness centers tend to avoid this, which is not the case of Yoga schools.

As you can see, both socializing and spending time in a useful way rank lowest for Pilates practitioners and 6<sup>th</sup> for Yoga practitioners. The practitioners have various goals and track their fulfillment.

#### **Motivation of Yoga and Pilates practitioners (female)**

One can see that in terms of intrinsic motivation of knowledge it ranks highest for both Yoga and Pilates. Wanting to know better the different things that these activities offer is the main motivation for which the practitioners are attracted to practicing these disciplines. Sport practices are not meant to only offer health, wellbeing and beauty advantages, things that can be visibly perceived, but in the case of Pilates and Yoga to offer a way for insight and knowledge. Aside from the fact that both have a particular short or long-term history, that proves that they withstood time, unlike Aerobic which has a recent past, they have allowed the development of deeper needs, such as knowledge.

The intrinsic motivation of achieving is well represented in yoga as well as in Pilates. Both have numerous asana and positions combinations and link elements that allow evolution from beginner to advanced along with the evolution of the feeling of competence and movement accomplishment.

The intrinsic motivation of stimulation as well the other two types of intrinsic motivation is very well represented in Yoga and Pilates without any significant differences. Both allow new experiences, experience pleasures and sensations. The isometric contraction produces different sensations that produce sweat, pain and incite resistance.

As far as extrinsic motivation of identification is concerned, there are no significant differences between the motivation of Yoga practitioners and Pilates practitioners. With an average response of 3.04, the practitioners identify themselves with Yoga in a moderate way. The same can be observed for the Pilates practitioners (3, 21) and this could be explained by the fact that both disciplines were included in fitness centers where the offer is very

diverse and most of the time the practitioners alternate these practices to achieve different goals.

The extrinsic motivation of introjection is moderately correlated to the women's motivation for practicing Yoga and Pilates. Generally the practitioners have a strict schedule that must be kept to otherwise not participating might bring remorse. In order to feel good and to stay in shape one must practice Yoga and Pilates.

The extrinsic motivation of regulation is very little correlated. Women that practice Yoga and Pilates do not do this to obey general practices; these are not considered a trend in Romania and they don't really do it to comply with the rest of the world. On the contrary, most of the times it arouses suspicion, especially in the case of Yoga – which may be associated with esoteric or spiritual practices or sectarianism. In Pilates things are not that complicated but they still show originality.

As for amotivation, it is not encountered among practitioners of either Yoga or Pilates

#### **Conclusions**

As one can see, the answers given by Yoga and Pilates practitioners are generally moderate, which proves that these disciplines are still practiced with reluctance and that these newly emerged branches of fitness in Romania mark the transition from the "object" woman that sculpts her body to the "subject" woman for which it is more important to feel good about her body, to know her body's limits and to know her body and to try to be in harmony with herself.

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