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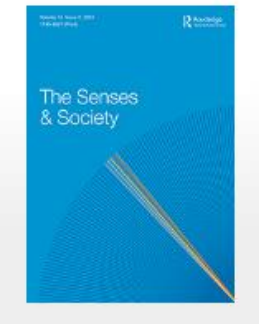

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Sensory pleasures and displeasures of the outdoors: Somatic learning and the senses

Globally, there are calls to increase physical activity levels in relatively sedentary populations, including via physical activity programmes, often targeted at those body-selves deemed at risk of 'sedentariness'. Despite the salience of sensory pleasures and displeasures in engagement with (and abandonment of) these programmes, the sensory, embodied experiences of participation remain under-researched. Here, we draw on findings from a two-year ethnographic study of a national programme in Wales, which used the aesthetic attractions of 'natural' outdoor environments to encourage and sustain physical activity. Employing insights from phenomenological sociology, we explore the programme participants' (*n*=146) lived experiences, analysed via a phenomenological lens, cohering around a panoply of sensory pleasures and displeasures, and somatic learning that is shaped and reshaped by weather encounters.

Keywords: senses; pleasure and displeasure; phenomenology; somatic and sensory learning; weather work

Introduction

Like many governments worldwide, the United Kingdom (UK) government has been vocal in exhorting its population to increase physical activity levels, through engaging in regular, frequent exercise to improve health and wellbeing (Department of Health and Social Care, 2019). Despite considerable efforts to promote active lifestyles, both via community-level programmes (e.g. Henderson et al., 2018) and Primary Care (e.g. Crone and James, 2016), developing effective programmes that achieve sustained engagement with physical activity remains an ongoing

challenge, however. Exercise Referral Schemes (ERS), and Physical Activity Referral Schemes (PARS) have been used since the 1990s to 'prescribe' exercise and/or physical activity for those with health problems, and to prevent health problems developing, but sustaining engagement has proved difficult, and drop-out rates **are** high (Henderson et al., 2018). We sought to investigate why this might be, by examining in-depth participants' experiences of actually taking part in such a programme and exploring ethnographically some of the sensory 'intersections of embodiment and environment' (Loland and Bäckström, 2023) in a large-scale national physical activity programme: the Welsh *Venture Out* (*Mentro Allan* in Welsh) Programme, funded by Sport Wales as part of a Big Lottery-funded initiative. The five-year *Venture Out* programme sought to increase physical activity levels in a range of 'target groups', deemed at high risk of sedentariness (see Table 1). A primary aim of *Venture Out* was to use a wide range of the 'natural'[1] outdoor environments across Wales to inspire and encourage participants' interest in physical activity as well as engaging in a wide range of movement forms. These included walking, cycling, hiking, horse-riding, canoeing and climbing, and thus generated a panoply of embodied and emplaced sensory experiences.

As has been noted, the rich, complex, multi-sensorial, embodied pleasures of sport, exercise, and physical activity in general, to date remain under-researched (Allen-Collinson, 2010; Allen-Collinson and Jackman, 2022; Day et al., 2021; Jackman et al., 2022; Phoenix and Orr, 2014; Pringle et al., 2015). This seems a surprising lacuna in the research, given that pleasurable experiences and interpretations of physical activity are so crucial in people's sustained involvement (Allen-Collinson, 2018; Day et al., 2021; Jackman et al., 2022). In contrast, key reasons for people's lack of engagement with physical activity are perceptions of its being hard work, unenjoyable, and concerned only

[1] Whilst cognisant of ongoing debates regarding social constructions of the 'natural', for current purposes, we employ the Programme's designation, and here we focus on the *outdoor* aspects of the environments.

with physical fitness (e.g. Nesti, 2016; Wellard, 2012) rather than enjoyment. As Day and colleagues (2021) argue, the ambiguity of pleasure and pain (and, we would add, displeasure) is inherent to physical activity. To explore such fluctuating corporeal sensations, and the 'somatic learning' (Allen-Collinson et al., 2019b; Gendlin, 1992) involved in interpreting sensory experiences of what can be corporeally challenging physical activity, the theoretical perspective of phenomenological sociology provides a powerful framework, as we portray below. For Gendlin (1992) somatic learning describes a process through which the body facilitates the flow of information to consciousness, which can then be expressed through language. We are generally in accord with this conceptualisation of an embodied approach to learning and would further add that such learning is socio-culturally structured (Underman, 2022), and also physically-culturally structured (Allen-Collinson et al., 2019b). Here, we are particularly interested in the sensory dimension of somatic learning. As we discuss below, there are also strong resonances with Shilling's (2016) work on 'body pedagogics'.

Our ethnographic research sought to elicit participants' accounts of their general lived, embodied experiences. Whilst we did not set out to chart specifically the sensorial dimension, the pleasures, displeasures, and 'ambiguous' states (Day et al., 2021) of these elements were subsequently identified as highly salient in the data. Before delineating the study itself, we first consider our overarching methodology and theoretical perspective of phenomenological sociology, as these two aspects are closely braided and interwoven within phenomenology in general.

Phenomenology and phenomenological sociology

Originally developed in the 19th century by the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, modern phenomenology constitutes a complex, multi-stranded philosophical tradition,

incorporating both theory and methodology. In developing phenomenology, Husserl (1970) sought to unsettle both traditional common-sense and scientific habits of thought that failed to problematise extant assumptions about phenomena. Methodologically, Husserl (2002) posited the phenomenological reduction as a means to slice through layers of taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions enveloping a phenomenon, using the phenomenological *epochē* (a form of bracketing). In later work, he developed his interest in the relationality of existence, with his focus on the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), the world of everyday experience, intersubjectively constructed and shared between members. Subsequently, more social and cultural forms of phenomenology have been developed and applied within the humanities and social sciences (Allen-Collinson, 2010, 2023; Csordas, 1993, 1994), including a form of phenomenological sociology, primarily derived from Alfred Schütz's (1967) work. It is this 'sociologised' variant of phenomenology on which we draw.

In recent decades, phenomenological and phenomenologically-inspired research into embodiment issues and experiences in physical-activity contexts has burgeoned. To give but a light flavour of this corpus, researchers have investigated walking, including long-distance walks (Crust et al., 2011; Darker et al., 2007), running (Allen-Collinson and Jackman, 2022; Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2015; Ronkainen et al., 2014), mountaineering (Allen-Collinson et al., 2019b), swimming – both recreational and competitive (Evans et al., 2017; McNarry et al., 2021), dance (Purser, 2019; Ravn, 2023), and physical activity more generally, including organised exercise programmes (Allen-Collinson and Leledaki, 2015; Nesti, 2016). Phenomenological sociology was the principal theoretical and methodological framework that guided our ethnographic research into participants' shifting sensory experiences of physical activity.

In the (sensuous) field

The research was commissioned by Sport Wales, as part of a mixed-methods study, the ethnographic component of which involved two years' participant observation with specific projects, each offering a range of outdoor physical activities. Ethical approval was granted for the study by the first author's (then) University of Exeter departmental ethics committee (no approval number). All participants provided written informed consent. In addition to participant observation, and drafting field notes, interviews were undertaken with 68 participants, including on-the-move interviews. As Pink (2009; 2023) and Sparkes (2009) observe, a sensory ethnographic perspective means researchers using their own sensory, emplaced experiences better to understand those of others, and this involves self-consciously and reflexively attending to the sensory dimension (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2023). This we sought to do via participating in the activities to 'feel with' our participants, experiencing the sensory pleasures and displeasures of the outdoors. Seated, semi-structured interviews were also undertaken, were **voice**-recorded, and of around an hour's duration. The mobile, more conversational interviews were also **voice**-recorded but tended to be of shorter duration and had to fit around the demands of the activity, which sometimes left participants and researchers short of breath. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 44 members of project staff (e.g., project coordinators, activity leaders) and 34 other people involved in the Programme (e.g., carers, volunteer workers, support workers). The overall breakdown was as follows:

Programme participants ('beneficiaries')	68
Project staff	44
Others involved with projects	34
Total	146

Our data analysis was inspired by Giorgi's (1997) phenomenological method, as we sought to facilitate phenomenological reflection and insights, and apply these to our empirical data. Data analysis thus comprised: i) the adoption of a (sociological) phenomenological attitude via our best efforts to engage in *epochē* or the bracketing (as far as possible) of our own assumptions and pre-suppositions regarding the phenomema participants described; ii) initial impressionistic readings of the transcripts to gain a feel for the whole data set; iii) followed by in-depth re-reading of descriptions as part of our data-immersion process, to identify key themes and sub-themes; iv) the production of general statements of the patterns of participants' experiences. As sociological researchers we were highly cognisant of the impossibility of complete *epochē,* but nevertheless we made sustained efforts to bracket (by identifying, thematising, and acknowledging) as far as possible our assumptions and presuppositions about outdoor exercise generally and the various physical activities involved. In agreement with Katz and Csordas (2003) and Ravn (2023), we consider that phenomenological insights can be usefully deployed in the elucidation, analysis, and discussion of phenomena, including in relation to those data assembled by more traditional, qualitative approaches. Although we did not ask participants specifically about their experiences of sensory pleasures and displeasures, these dimensions were identified via data analysis as highly salient elements in their experiences.

The sensorium at work - and play

From data analysis we identified strong themes relating to the sensory embodiment and learning of participants, who recounted in vivid detail the varied pleasures and displeasures of physical activity in the outdoors. Noticeably, sensory experiences were intertwined as a synaesthetic or 'intersensorial' (Hammer, 2015) experience of the senses

as intermingled (Allen-Collinson and Jackman, 2022; Lauwrens, 2019), commensurate with phenomenological perspectives on the chiasmic multimodality of the senses, such as in haptic visuality (Merleau-Ponty, 2014; Paterson, 2006) and visual hearing (Pentimalli and Gobo, 2023). Actively learning to perceive and appreciate sensory pleasures, and handle sensory challenges, involved participants' becoming more of an 'outdoor person', as they described this shift in being-in-the-world. We consider the embodied pleasures this afforded, together with some of the less pleasurable aspects, arising primarily from 'bad' weather entanglements. We were interested in how participants engaged in weather work and weather learning (Allen-Collinson et al., 2019b) to face the challenges engendered by the 'displeasures' of inclement weather in the weather-worlds (Ingold, 2010) they encountered. We first consider how participants themselves described becoming an 'outdoor person', before examining somatic, sensory learning processes in the outdoor environment, particularly the role of weather.

Becoming an 'outdoor person'

For many, particularly urban-dwellers previously unfamiliar with undertaking outdoor physical activities, becoming more of an 'outdoor person' was a necessary first step, and required learning to interpret and appreciate the rich sensory spectrum of the outdoors. New sensory pleasures helped motivate people to engage and sustain engagement with outdoor physical activity, and to seek to 'do more outdoor things':

> *Interviewer*: You mentioned that you've never been an outdoor person. Has this changed with your involvement with the project?
>
> *Participant*: Yes, I think it has.
>
> *Interviewer*: How?

> *Participant*: Just as a desire to do more outdoor things I think, to do more difficult walks, I don't think I will ever become a camper, I don't think I would want to go that far, but the walking… and even graduating from easy walks into what the Ramblers call moderate, which are 8 and a half mile walks, which can be quite strenuous, I think. A normal person would probably say that's not moderate, it's probably harder than that... But the exercise being outdoors on a beautiful day, taking in the views that you get from the mountains and so on, is all good. (Participant with mental health issues)

The process of learning to feel *heimlich* (Heidegger, 1978), or at home and familiar with the outdoors, involved graduated exposure to both the elements and to more demanding forms of activity. Some of the key motivators for venturing into more challenging domains were the aesthetic pleasures of being in the 'natural' world, such as greenspaces (see also, Grant and Pollard, 2022; Maas et al., 2006). Multi-sensorial pleasures included: 'seeing colours', 'seeing plants grow', 'touching the soil', 'breathing fresh air'; for example:

> Outdoors is good because you get the fresh air, you can see the scenery as well, and the good thing about when you're on that hill, you can see across and when you're going at a speed, the wind and everything, so outdoor is very important to me, it's very important to me. When I came down on Friday morning, I just felt like, this is a fantastic tonic, mental health, I haven't got a mental health problem there because you've got, it just blows it all away. (Participant with mental health issues)

One of the most often-cited senses was the visual, with participants recounting the pleasures of seeing colours, plants and creatures never knowingly encountered before, and learning about these 'exotic' flora and fauna:

> I appreciate the colours on the tree, the flowers, different wildflowers have different colours, I love the violet blue, it is all nature, nothing man-made. (Older adult participant)

> Learning, seeing. I have seen so much stuff that I have never seen in my 38 years basically. And it's amazing what I've seen. I've never seen an adder before. I'd never seen a grass snake before. I'd never seen a lizard. I've seen frogs and toads but wouldn't have been able to distinguish the two. I can now. (Participant and volunteer helper)

The novelty, variety, and visual wonders of the outdoors induced sensory experiences and pleasures that helped generate and then sustain an interest in engaging in physical activity in these stimulating outdoor environments. Comments often resonated strongly with phenomenological exhortations to suspend or bracket our prior assumptions and knowledge about the world (Allen-Collinson, 2018) via the phenomenology *epochē*, to see (and feel) afresh with a child's perspective the wonders of the everyday world:

> One occasion we were out on a Nordic Walk… and we seen an orchid, a wild orchid, and we just all stopped, and we were all looking and then we were looking for others, and it's quite amazing, it's quite child-like really.

> And it was just so wonderful, and you see things and you think, ‘look at that’, ‘look at the leaves on that’, and 'oh look at that' - a dragonfly or some beetle or something, and as I say, it's quite child-like - you get that wonder. (Older adult participant)

In this vein, the sheer variety of settings and activities made possible by the outdoor environments was highlighted by participants as sensuously stimulating and motivating in their shift in embodiment toward becoming an active outdoors person. Contrastingly, for some participants suffering from sensory sensitivities and ‘overload’, the outdoor spaces of the Programme could offer a less sensorially challenging and compressed environment, providing an oasis of relative sensory calm:

> Physical, actual getting ***out*** and being physical, which a lot of children today don't have the experience of being in big open spaces, because a lot of their recreation is based around computer screens and television. And the therapeutic effects of actually being out in an open space: it is a very calming effect, it gives time to think… a lot of them are on sensory overload and even some of these learners are in sensory overload all the time, so again it's the benefit, just getting them out in an open space. (Support worker with young people with learning impairments)

The benefits of engaging with these ‘naturally occurring sensory signals’ have been highlighted by other sensory scholars (for example, Gottschalk, 2023), who also portray the sensory confusion that can arise from an excess of sensory stimulation from commercial and technological sources.

Whilst the benefits and aesthetic pleasures were signalled by participants as motivating a shift in their embodiment, to becoming more 'outdoorsy', inevitably there were also discomforts and displeasures in the outdoors, not least due to cognitive and corporeal unfamiliarity with the activity and/or environment. The role of somatic, sensory learning and 'body pedagogics' (Shilling, 2016; see also Cook and Hockey, 2023) emerged as key in developing familiarity with physical activity in the outdoors, learning to handle mind-body challenges, and disruptions in the mind-body-world relationship, engendered by weather and environmental conditions. Shilling (2016) uses the concept of 'body pedagogics' to describe an embodied approach to the acquisition and transmission of occupational, sporting, and other culturally structured practices. He identifies a need to analyse physical experiences, alongside acknowledging the role of cognition in embodied processes; the nexus of cognitive and corporeal learning was evident in our participants' accounts.

Somatic, sensory learning in the outdoors

As portrayed above, the feelings of being out in the 'fresh air' and open environments generated myriad sensory pleasures, but many participants identified one of the principal disadvantages and displeasures of the outdoors as exposure to the mercurial weather conditions (see also Allen-Collinson, 2018). The strongest influences on participants' sensory experiences appeared to be the conditions produced by weather-environment linkages, such as rain-ground generated mud, puddles, boggy ground, slippery rock, and so on. Conversely, in very dry conditions, some participants struggled with the friability and hardness of dirt paths (see also, Allen-Collinson and Jackman, 2022), and holes, dips and humps were similarly challenging when cycling (see also, Cook and Hockey, 2023).

As Vannini and colleagues (2012) highlight, the ways in which people experience and talk about weather are sociologically significant. How people sense, interpret, understand, and communicate about the weather, constitutes what we have termed 'weather work' (Allen-Collinson, 2018; Allen-Collinson et al., 2019a): a sensory engagement with weather that can be active, purposeful, reflexive, at times highly mindful, and often involving interactional exchanges, including in 'weather talk'. At other times, participants' weather-relatedness seemed more pre-reflexive, nebulous, shifting, intuitive, and difficult to 'pin down' in words. During interviews and observations, 'weather talk' constituted a frequent topic of conversation.

It was clear that weather was not simply 'received' by participants, however acute the sensation, but rather they actively engaged with, made sense of, interpreted and re-interpreted, learnt about, and communicated about, the weather. This coheres with constructions of the active 'production' of the sensory (e.g., Chau, 2008; Saerberg, 2010), in that social actors undertake considerable work in sensory-*production* as well as sensory-*interpretation*. Reverberating with existential phenomenological perspectives, participants' sense-making and communication were strongly shaped by their sensory socio-cultural frameworks, including the influence of fellow participants, and others such as project leaders and support workers. The notion of such shared weather-space resonates with the artist, Lisa Hirmer's insights that weather and atmosphere form a profoundly shared material plane (cited in Frappier, 2019: 368). It also echoes Mason's (2016: 1) sensory sociological observation that the weather 'gets right inside our lives, shaping what we do and feel, who we see, what we wear, what we eat, and just about everything', so that on a daily basis we 'live the weather'.

Many participants in our study had to undergo sensory familiarisation with highly variable weather conditions and engage in sustained 'weather learning' (Allen-Collinson,

2018; Allen-Collinson et al., 2019b), often in group contexts, to become more corporeally comfortable with the (often inclement) weather encountered in the Welsh outdoor environments. As the following support worker noted in relation to biking with a young person with learning disabilities:

> … when he first came to us last year, he wouldn't go out in the rain, even a drop, even a drizzle, we'd have major crises with him, but now… for him, he's experienced all this that he wouldn't normally experience. We're not making them do it, but because we're there and it rains, well it's raining, we're going to get wet… if you want to stay on the bikes, you can get wet, if you want to stay dry, you'll have to get off the bike. So, it's his choice… (Support worker)

Participants thus had to learn how to engage actively in 'weather work' and sensory learning, initially somewhat unwillingly for some, to familiarise themselves with weather conditions they often categorised as unpleasant, even hostile. Project staff, support workers and carers all acknowledged that in addition to weather learning via exposure to 'all weathers', there were also some safety concerns generated by sensory exposure to the elements. These were particularly acute for participants whom staff deemed vulnerable, in which case specialist clothing might be required to ameliorate potential deleterious sensory and corporeal consequences:

> He could go and do a bit of outdoor cycling, just like, you wouldn't be out for an hour, it would be 20 minutes, half an hour, and we can take blankets and stuff like that. And he's got one of these 'snuggies' [a warm all-over

> bodysuit] so we could put that on the little bicycle thing, wrap him up warm. Yes, we'd still go out for fresh air and stuff like that, so long as it's not bitter cold out there, and dependent on weather in the winter. (Carer of person with disabilities)

As identified here, sometimes it was considered necessary to shorten the duration of corporeal exposure to more challenging or unfamiliar weather conditions, particularly the cold, snow, ice, or heavy rain. The importance of *not* automatically abandoning outdoor activities due to inclement weather was, however, frequently reported by staff and participants. Establishing and adhering to routines, *despite* challenging weather conditions, was signalled as highly salient in sensory learning and steering people's previously sedentary mode of being-in-the-world towards a more physically-active form of embodiment:

> As well as a good routine as well, which is why we felt it was important to walk regardless of what the weather is doing. So, even if it is really bad, we go somewhere, we might change the path or shorten it, but we do go every week, so people know when they turn up they're going to be met by people and it's not going to get cancelled and stuff like that - give them a bit of consistency. (Support worker)

A further approach to mitigating 'bad' weather conditions, was to provide indoor facilities or some form of outdoor shelter that offered temporary weather respite. Many participants noted the need for some form of shelter from the elements, so that people were not exposed to 'too much weather', for example:

> The only thing I would say, if they had somewhere for the people to sit. They have somewhere outside to sit and drink, where they've got the 'Portacabins', but I think with people like in wheelchairs, you might need something inside because of the weather. And if you had something inside, at least they could stay there for an hour or two until the [bad] weather stopped, and then go out again later on. (Carer)

From participants' comments, it became clear that the role of experiential sensory learning was important in increasing their confidence in 'all weathers'. This learning was not only experiential and self-generated, but also actively developed as part of what Shilling (2016) has termed 'body pedagogics'. This he (2016) portrays as an embodied approach to the acquisition and transmission of occupational, sporting, and other culturally structured practices, including those of physical cultures (Allen-Collinson et al., 2019a, 2019b; Underman, 2022). For Shilling (2016), when people internalise body techniques associated with pedagogics, they can find their deliberative patterns and sensory reactions changed in fundamental ways that can cross over into other aspects of their lives. In our case, this might involve participants becoming 'weather-wise' more generally, not just vis-à-vis supervised, structured physical activity.

For us, 'body pedagogics' (Shilling, 2016) are distinguished from more general, experiential sensory learning by a greater degree of directedness by a teacher or someone in an educative or supervisory role. So, body-pedagogic sensory learning opportunities would be planned, directed, and managed by staff in the *Venture Out* Programme, so as deliberately to expose participants to a wide range of sensory experiences and environmental conditions. Activity leaders, for example, would seek to transmit their

knowledge, including their bodily ways of knowing about, and responding to, myriad changing conditions encountered in the outdoors. But across the board, project coordinators, activity leaders, carers, parents, and support workers were all involved in seeking to develop the sensory learning and competences of participants, in relation to the weather and wider environmental conditions, such as the terrain underfoot. The role of lived, sensory experience in such learning was deemed crucial and a *sine qua non*, as a project coordinator neatly summarised in discussing weather learning:

> My suggestion is that the perception of the impact of the weather is different from the reality of the experience… anyone who has had the opportunity to experience outdoor activity in the rain - perhaps because the weather's good at the start of the day but changed for the worse during the activity - is less likely to be put off by the weather in the future, as they often have a positive experience they can draw on. (Project coordinator)

Thus, participants learned experientially that they were able to endure, and even embrace, diverse sensory experiences spawned by myriad weather and environmental conditions. They were subsequently less likely to be deterred from venturing outdoors for physical activity by what had previously been construed as the displeasures of inclement 'bad' weather, for example, so long as they had protective clothing, as we discuss in the concluding section.

In conclusion

Drawing on ethnographic data from a two-year research project, in this article we have explored some of the sensory pleasures and displeasures recounted by participants in a

physical activity programme emplaced in the 'great outdoors' of Wales. Participants identified the necessary first steps of becoming something of an 'outdoor person', involving rich, complex and often nuanced sensory experiences and learning, which, for many, was a major step in becoming more physically active. Participants described vividly their shifting modes of being-in-the-outdoors, and the ways in which sensory pleasures motivated and helped sustain their engagement, despite (at times) considerable corporeal discomforts.

The salience of pleasurable experience in motivating and sustaining physically active embodiment reverberates with a small research corpus that also includes the sensory pleasures of involvement in sport and exercise (e.g., Allen-Collinson, 2010, 2023; Allen-Collinson and Jackman, 2022; Caudwell, 2015; Day et al., 2021; Jackman et al., 2022; Phoenix and Orr, 2014; Pringle et al., 2015). To date, however, sensory (sociological) explorations in this domain remain surprisingly limited. Our findings also cohere strongly with Wellard's (2012: 27) conceptualisation of pleasure as 'more than a one-off moment of individual gratification' but rather a 'process whereby the pleasurable experience contributes to contemplation before and after the moment in the form of anticipation and reflection'. Resonating with our phenomenological perspective, participants in *Venture Out* described how the pleasures of outdoor physical activity were encountered in the immediate present moment, but also formed part of their 'lived' experience in terms of their reflection on, and sense-making of, phenomenal experience, both retrospectively and in anticipation. Saliently, many participants also portrayed how they had to *learn* how to enjoy and derive pleasure from what had initially been perceived as unpleasant, unsettling, and disagreeable, such as being out in 'bad' weather, with its uncomfortable corporeal consequences such as being cold and soaked by rain. These somatic, sensory learning experiences were at times deliberately sought out by

Programme staff, commensurate with Shilling's (2016) concept of 'body pedagogics', explored above. At other times, such learning seemed to be self-generated, occurring more spontaneously via participants' ongoing sensory engagement with activities in the outdoor environments.

In relation to opportunities for such somatic, sensory learning, one of the key limitations of the Programme, and consequently of the commissioned research we undertook, was that sociological categories, such as gender, age, social class, and so on, together with intersectionality of disadvantage, were not seen as key factors across *all* projects in the Programme. The research team was therefore limited in its cognisance of the social-structural location of many participants, who interpreted (and re-interpreted), made sense of, and communicated their experiences, in ways strongly contoured by their social-structural and socio-cultural situatedness. For example, some projects provided participants on low incomes with specialist weather-proof clothing, either free of charge or at heavily subsidised prices, acknowledging that many people would be unable to afford such clothing. The free or subsidised clothing then permitted those on low incomes to participate in physical activity even in highly inclement and demanding meteorological conditions. This afforded opportunities to engage in sensory learning, so that corporeal challenges generated by intense cold or rain, for example, were no longer perceived as grounds for not going outdoors, but as surmountable challenges or even positive 'intense embodiment' experiences (Allen-Collinson, 2023) to be accepted and even embraced. Without the benefit of such (relatively expensive) protective clothing, however, it is questionable whether even those highly motivated to venture out in challenging conditions would perceive it as practicable, despite their sensory experiential learning. This might then impact deleteriously upon motivation and commitment, denying people

the opportunity for pleasurable experiences of physical activity to contribute to a 'memory bank' of positive sensory experiences of physicality (Wellard, 2012).

In employing a phenomenologically sensitive form of ethnography, we contribute to a relatively small corpus in sociology and in anthropology (see introductions to special editions of *Ethnography*, and the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* by Katz and Csordas (2003) and by vom Lehn and Hitzler (2015), respectively). As Pfadenhauer and Grenz (2015) argue, the hallmark of phenomenology-based ethnography is participation in the everyday life of the field forming the subject of the ethnographer's interest, and this we sought to do in sharing the *Venture Out* activities and experiences of participants in the outdoor activities. We would also emphasize that, methodologically speaking, we do not purport to employ 'full', philosophical phenomenology, but rather we have drawn on a phenomenological form of sociology as a theoretical framework for analysing the ethnographic data. The nexus of sociology and phenomenology provides researchers with a powerful conceptual and analytic framework, for situating individuals' lived-body sensory experiences (however deeply, corporeally intense and 'felt' these might be), within wider social-structural and socio-cultural contexts (Allen-Collinson, 2010).

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Table 1: The Venture Out / Mentro Allen Projects in Wales

Name of Project	*Primary target group(s)*
Greater Bargoed and Gilfach	People on low incomes
Bridgend	Older people
Caerphilly and Torfaen	Hard to reach groups, including over 50s, disadvantaged young people, and residents with low-level mental health concerns
City of Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan	Black and Minority Ethnic groups, particularly women (aged 18 - 64)
City of Cardiff	Children and adults with disabilities
Powys - Dyfi Valley	People experiencing rural isolation
Flintshire and Wrexham	People with physical & learning difficulties
Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent	People with mental health problems
Newport	Black and Minority Ethnic groups
Neath Port Talbot	Young people (11-25) at risk of disengagement
Pembroke Dock	Young people (11-25) living in Pembroke Dock
Rhondda Cynon Taf	People on low incomes
Swansea - City & County	Young Carers; Parent Carers; BME Carers; Carers of people with mental health problems; Carers of older people
Anglesey	Young women aged 16-30 years