



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Department of Psychology
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
601 East Daniel Street
Champaign, IL 61820



Ed Diener, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychology at University of Virginia and University of Utah
Distinguished Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois
Senior Scientist, The Gallup Organization
ediener@illinois.edu

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Evaluation of the Habilitation Thesis of Steriani Elavsky, Ph.D.

I have read the Habilitation Thesis of Dr. Steriani Elavsky and it is absolutely excellent. It is a model of good science, and I highly recommend it for approval.

Over the decades I have been a journal editor for 20 years, the president of three scientific societies, and have served on numerous award committees. I have published over 350 papers myself, and have given talks around the world. Thus, I have seen the work and records of a very large number of rising young scientists. Elavsky's work stands out in this group because it is rigorous, programmatic, multi-method, and conceptually strong. With this Habilitation Dr. Elavsky has made herself a world expert and leader on the topic of exercise and menopause. The brevity of my letter should not be taken as a lack of enthusiasm, but is due to the fact that I am traveling and so it is difficult to author a long and detailed letter, and because this case is so very clear that it does not require a lengthy letter to explain why the thesis definitely deserves approval.

The thesis includes seven studies that vary in terms of the methods used and the samples. Thus, Elavsky does not run the risk of overgeneralizing her findings from a narrow population. She includes multi-method measures, such as experience-sampling, and she includes rigorous physical measures to capture exercise. The studies build on one another to yield deeper understanding. Dr. Elavsky does an excellent job in explaining how her findings reveal that the exercise and menopausal symptoms relationship is not a simple one-to-one pathway where exercise helps all women. Instead, she finds that exercise helps some women more than others, for example based on their physical fitness to begin with. She also finds that the outcomes depend on factors such as personality and BMI, and the intensity of the exercise. Thus, instead of the typically overly simple conclusions that often occur in the behavioral sciences, Elavsky's report and findings present an intricate picture of when exercise is more and less likely to help women. This subtle approach is refreshing in a world where people often want to market simple findings. Elavsky's findings and theoretical approach help understand when exercise is most likely to be of benefit and therefore does not presume that any exercise will help all women in all circumstances.

I should say that although I served on Elavsky's dissertation committee many years ago, I have not seen or talked to her since that time. Thus, my letter is not biased by personal friendship. I highly recommend approval of Steriani Elavsky's Habilitation Thesis.

Sincerely,

Ed Diener, Ph.D.