



Professor Petr Macek, Habilitation Thesis Chairperson
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Dear Professor Macek and Colleagues:

I am pleased to provide a review of Dr. Steriani Elavsky's Habilitation Thesis titled "Physical Activity and Menopausal Wellbeing". My understanding from the directives I was given and the habilitation procedure information posted on the website of Masaryk University is that I am serving as an external reviewer for the habilitation thesis (<https://www.muni.cz/en/research/academic-affairs/habilitacni-rizeni-na-mu>). To provide context for my evaluation, I am, by training, an exercise physiologist with expertise in women's health, aging and body composition with a clinical and translational focus to my research. It should be appreciated that I have enjoyed numerous collaborations with exercise psychologists throughout my career and my research program is highly interdisciplinary. I am familiar with the scholarship and character of Dr. Elavsky as I served on her thesis and dissertation committees while on faculty at the University of Illinois prior to relocating to the University of Georgia in 2010. Note that I have not collaborated with Dr. Elavsky in any capacity such as grant or manuscript authorship or trainee mentorship. I have carefully reviewed the thesis and provide the following evaluation of Dr. Elavsky's scholarly contributions. Prior to detailing the basis of my evaluation of her thesis, let me begin with my summary statement: *I believe that Dr. Steriani Elavsky has demonstrated a clear consistent line of original scholarship regarding the impact of physical activity on psychological wellbeing in women within or near the menopausal transition. Her synthesized summary of the literature is accurate, encompassing all main facets of the scholarly area, and informative for future scholarship in her area of expertise. Notably, early in her career, the impact of her scholarship was recognized with the New Investigator Award from the North American Menopause Society.*

Dr. Elavsky began her scientific trajectory into the specific area of physical activity, the menopausal transition and psychological wellbeing with an early interest in the general effects of physical activity on quality of life during the aging process. Under the mentorship of Professor Edward McAuley at the University of Illinois, for her dissertation project, Dr. Elavsky performed a large randomized clinical trial investigating the individual differences in menopausal symptoms and wellbeing in response to different modes of physical activity which was subsequently followed by an investigation into the long-term effects of physical activity on quality of life in the same cohort. Upon her transition to Pennsylvania State University for her tenure-track faculty position, she expanded this line of inquiry to include contemporary designs and ecological momentary assessment (EMA) methodology. In the past decade, she has had adequate productivity with an intentional informed focus within this area of women's health. Indeed, within the general discussion and future directions components of the habilitation thesis Dr. Elavsky demonstrates unique and insightful perspectives. Below I summarize the primary basis for my strong positive evaluation of Dr. Steriani Elavsky's original scholarship summarized in her habilitation thesis.

Demonstrated Independence from Mentor: In the past decade since completing her training at the University of Illinois, Dr. Elavsky has demonstrated independence from her mentor Professor Edward McAuley. Due to the nature of his lab and the number of ongoing externally funded clinical trials investigating the health benefits of exercise/physical activity in older adults during her time in his lab, it was not possible for her earlier publication record to demonstrate her scholarly independence, except for her dissertation work. However, her subsequent work completed at Pennsylvania State University, as summarized in this thesis, clearly shows her independence in multiple domains.

Contemporary Public Health Focus: The importance of habitual physical activity for menopausal wellbeing is highly contemporary. Indeed, with the worldwide societal aging demographics coupled with the known adverse health changes that often occur with the menopausal transition, and the ongoing controversial use of hormone replacement therapies for menopausal symptom management, alternative therapies will remain of public health interest for the foreseeable future.

Interdisciplinary Research Program: All successful research programs in contemporary science are interdisciplinary. Dr. Elavsky has positioned her research program at the intersection of the fields of health psychology, psychology of physical activity, women's health, and adult development and aging. This integration requires a) self-confidence in her own abilities to be both a leader and a team player on research teams and b) a deep appreciation for the complexity of the scientific areas of her investigations.

Contemporary Research Methods: Dr. Elavsky has demonstrated an insightful appreciation for the advancement of scientific methodology within the context of the intersection of her fields of interest. Going beyond the evaluation of mean/average differences in response to interventions to evaluate individual variability is highly contemporary. Moreover, in addition to the acknowledgement that the experience of menopausal symptoms is highly variable from woman to woman, she has embraced the notion that symptoms are also highly variable across a given time interval for an individual. Thus, the utilization of ecological moment assessment (EMA) methods using contemporary technologies is warranted and will undeniably move the field forward.

In summary, my collective evaluation of her habilitation thesis is that she has demonstrated mastery and impact on her quest towards her overarching long-term goal which is to "harness the power of physical activity to enhance health and wellbeing as [women] age". The thesis evidence, her reputation, and my professional interactions with Dr. Elavsky during her developmental days also suggests a creativity where she has designed her research program to span several important fields embracing contemporary perspectives and methodologies. All available evidence also suggests that Dr. Elavsky has a strong potential for sustained impactful future productivity. Indeed, there is only evidence to suggest a continued ascent in productivity, caliber, and reputation. Thus, in closing I will repeat my summary statement that the thesis indicates that she has demonstrated a clear consistent line of original scholarship regarding the impact of physical activity on psychological wellbeing in women within or near the menopausal transition offering conclusions whereupon to build future scholarly endeavors.

Conclusion: The habilitation thesis submitted by Steriani Elavsky entitled "*Physical Activity and Menopausal Wellbeing*" **meets** the requirements applicable to habilitation thesis in the field of Developmental Psychology.

Sincerely,

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