



What makes physical activity fun for urban adolescents? Listening to youth and opening Pandora's Box

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Background

- Increasing interest in understanding physical activity (PA) behavior in youth
- “Must be fun” – common recommendation for youth PA programs
 - Few studies explicitly define or examine fun
 - Taylor et al (1999) studied in African American & Latina middle school girls
 - Skill, winning, friends, family, activity preferences
- Need to understand what makes PA fun in our population to help develop interventions
 - But can we handle the truth...?



The Good Fit Project

- Mixed-methods formative evaluation for promoting after-school PA in multiethnic urban adolescents
- Community-based after-school programs as venue
 - Interviewed adolescents and program leaders in after-school programs with academic focus



Data Collection

- 51 participants interviewed
 - **41 Adolescents (ages 11-14)**
 - 10 one-on-one interviews
 - 6 focus groups – 3 boys & 3 girls
 - Primarily Latino and African American
 - 10 Key Informants
 - Adult afterschool program leaders
 - 9 females, 1 male, various racial/ethnic backgrounds
- All data were audiotaped, transcribed, reviewed & entered into ATLAS.ti for coding & analysis



Coding Process

- Team of 3 coders
- Codebook development through consensus
 - Guided by method of MacQueen et al (1998)
- 3 phases of coding for reliability & efficiency
 - Phase 1: Group coding
 - Phase 2: Consensus coding
 - Phase 3: “Funnel” approach
 - Multiple reviews of each coded transcript
 - Discussion directly entered into ATLAS
 - Disagreements addressed by full group



Questions

- What makes PA fun for our population?
 - When is PA fun? When is it not fun?
 - Does it differ by
 - gender?
 - skill level?



Analysis

- Open Coding/Memoing
 - “Fun” code
 - Enjoyment, entertaining, joy, pleasurable, laughter, "so funny"
- Reviewed instances of Fun code
 - Spontaneous mentions of “fun”
 - Responses to probes on what makes PA fun
- Identified emerging themes
 - Compare/contrast within and between transcripts
 - Compare/contrast within and between genders
 - Checked for salience within transcripts
 - Checked for negative examples
 - Reviewed by full team



Common themes across genders

- Friends make PA fun
- Trying new things and building skills is fun
- Making up your own PA is fun
- Comparable to what is reported in the literature



“It was like so funny...”

- The most vivid descriptions of fun occurred when recounting specific PA events
- Complex relationship among several factors:
 - Knowing what you’re doing... or not
 - Messing up... or not
 - Laughing at someone – self or others
 - Someone getting hurt
 - Competing and winning
- Concept of “bravado”
 - Different for males and females



“So Funny”: Boys’ Bravado

- Power and risk-taking
 - Glory, rush, “lights”
 - Verbal or physical aggression
 - Taking physical risks
 - Winning against man or machine
- But sometimes fun to simulate low-power role
 - Messing up and getting injured
 - Being laughed at by friends
 - Both sides of aggression - tackling AND being tackled
- Additional complexities

Power & Risk-Taking

Football ...I get that speed burst boppin' somebody up, crushing somebody up, you're blowing it, catching the ball, then when you win, your whole team, they're happy, and they jump around and stuff....

Sometimes the [soccer] goals, they take out the net and a couple kids will get on. Two kids will push it while the kids on it....without the net, like 3 kids will get in the middle, two get each side, like two of us will start pushing it...to the edge and stop it real quick to see who'll fall off.

...if I'm really stressed I can work off some stress ... and ... have ...fun with my family...my friends. Like make them cry. I'm a mean person in football...I pretty much don't stop till they cry. Yeah. Um, I get to laugh at their face when they lose, I get to ...send them packing in embarrassment, and it's really fun to play.

Like, the bus...you have to run extra fast just to catch up...you know you're exercising and, like, you're competing against a man-made thing...so it's like you're racing against time....to just run after that bus

Low-Power Role

He's always, like...making [name] be "it," because he is the biggest and he'll try to beat you up, but...it's fun to be chased by someone bigger who actually never gives up.

I roughoused with my friends, that was fun...they started attacking me

...I was playing football in the rain, and...when I tried to curve in the rain, I slipped, and I busted my butt, but I still caught the ball... [and what made that so great was] because it was, like, my friends were laughing at me, plus I still made the touchdown...

Like, [physical activity] means, like, time to go out, have fun, knock somebody out, they tackle, you tackle



“So Funny”: Girls’ Bravado

- Declaring and embracing low skill combined with occasional triumph as underdogs
 - Only safe & comfortable to do so with friends - usually other girls
 - Pre-emptive (self) teasing?
 - Claiming girls’ entitlement to PA?
- Girls who were skilled athletes emphasized weaknesses and things they “couldn’t do” more than boys did
- Physical risk and injury fun in some cases, NOT fun in others
- Additional complexities

Embracing low skill...

Today...we were doing tennis...which I was really bad at it ... And I thought it was fun because first of all, we got to play outside, and second of all because, even though I was really bad at it, I was really bad at it I couldn't play...

I couldn't get off the floor, I jumped and fell back down. But that was the fun part about it because I didn't know how to do it...And it was just so fun fallin' on the ground, knowing that you can't do it...that was the best part

...with a chance to be the “underdog”

Today in gym we had to play volleyball. The thing that made it fun was because we're all really bad...But the thing that made it fun was that the other team was good so it was kind of competitive and the best part about it was that we won.

Low skill can also make it NOT fun

Like, we had this team one time...and it was a whole bunch of boys, and we were playing baseball. And I was so mad. We were like, that's not fair because we had 2 boys and they had like, 22. So we were like, this is a boys' game. They're going to win. That wasn't fun.

When I had to play basketball for the first time, I didn't know how to play, like I didn't know how to get the ball in, so, I was mad, so everyone was making fun of me...so, they were right. I didn't know how to play basketball.

There was one time that I participated in a track race. I didn't like it cuz I'm not a good runner, so I felt intimidated by the other girls who were running really quick...I just wanted to participate and I wasn't very good....I felt like I was always behind through the whole thing. And also I got very tired, I don't know, I didn't like it.



Validation/Triangulation Plans

- Survey including original “Fun” items to be given to target population
 - “Physical activity is most fun when...”
 - “...I feel a rush”
 - “...I get to tackle someone”
 - “... my friends and I are goofing around”
 - “...my friends and I are all really bad at it”
 - “...we make up games”
 - 44 items to be tested



Can we handle the truth?

- Intervention planning models would suggest emphasizing and promoting the processes of PA enjoyment valued by our population
 - Boys' bravado – aggressive elements, “mean person,” risk-taking, injury
 - Girls' bravado – self-effacement, embracing low skill
 - Other findings – environmental adaption – inventing PAs for any space with elements of danger



Opening Pandora's Box

- How do the processes of fun valued by our population conflict with public health and social values?
 - Safety & injury prevention
 - Non-violence
 - Gender equity
 - Positive self-image
- Now that we've asked, what do we do?



Dealing with Pandora's Box

- How do we resolve the conflict?
 - Promote more palatable messages?
 - Can that be effective? Does that convey or confirm disconnect from target audience?
 - Promote the processes anyway?
 - Compromise values? Unintended consequences?
- No easy answers – the field needs to struggle with this issue
 - What do you think?



See our other Good Fit presentations

○ **MONDAY**

- Refining a physical activity promotion model through formative evaluation: The Good Fit Project for multiethnic urban adolescents **2:30 pm – 3320.0**
- Applying Durkheim's theory of solidarity to health promotion for multiethnic urban youth **4:30 pm – 3389.0 Board 4**
- Representations of adolescent eating in commercial image banks **4:30 pm – 3388.0 Board 6**

○ **TUESDAY**

- Motivating adolescents to be physically active: After-school program providers' perceptions of gender and class constraints **9:15 am – 4063.0**