

An Exploration of the Physical Activity Experiences of Northern Aboriginal Youth:

A Community-Based Participatory
Research Project

Beth Hudson

John C. Spence

Tara-Leigh McHugh



Introduction



Literature Review

- Physical activity can result in a number of holistic health benefits for Aboriginal peoples (Cargo, Peterson, Lévesque & Macaulay, 2007; McHugh, 2011; Tang & Jardine, 2016)
- Relatively little research has explored the physical activity experiences of Aboriginal peoples
 - Even less research has focused on the experiences of those from rural, remote, and Northern communities in Canada (POWER UP! Coalition Linking Action and Science Prevention, 2016)



Purpose

The purpose of this community-based participatory research project was to explore the physical activity experiences of Northern Aboriginal Youth



Methods

- Community-based participatory research approach (CBPR)
 - Mutually reinforcing partnership
 - Collaborative
 - Ideal approach for working with Aboriginal peoples (Fletcher, 2003)
- Drew upon Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the method of inquiry
 - Developed as a way to understand how individuals make sense of the world in which they live (Smith & Osborn, 2003)



Methods

- Research Partner: Christina Bonnetrouge
 - 19 years old
 - Born and raised in Fort Providence, NT
 - Attended U of A as an undergraduate and currently the Community Health Representative
- Theoretical framework
 - Integrated Indigenous-Ecological Model (Lavallée & Lévesque, 2013)
 - Supported the development of interview questions and interpretation of findings



Methods

- Participants
 - 14 Participants between the ages of 13-19
- Interviews
 - One-on-one & sharing circles
- Photovoice
- Data analysis
 - Adhered to Smith and Osborne's four steps for IPA



Results

- The physical activity experiences of participants are represented by five themes:
 - (a) encompassing meanings
 - (b) “makes me feel awesome”
 - (c) connected to the land
 - (d) better with friends and family
 - (e) needs spaces



Encompassing meanings

- “There’s lots of **physical stuff** we gotta do like **get wood, chop wood, make fire**, learn how to build a shelter...”
- The **encompassing nature of physical activity** can be seen by the **variety of structured and unstructured activities** in which the youth chose to participate (Appendix B: Physical Activity list).



Figure 1



“Makes me feel awesome”

- “Physical activity **makes me happy** because it helps me to get to **where I want to be** with my body”
- “Physical activity makes me happy, like I could be in the shittiest mood... ever and then I... **workout and I’ll feel great** after that and I just love that feeling”



Connected to the land

- Dene Laws; feel “like an Indian”
- “You’re feeling more energized... cause **you’re away from all of the cell phones** and stuff”
- “[People] try to make [cultural physical activity] **sound like it’s different** [from regular physical activity] **when it’s not**”



Better with friends and family

- “My friends encourage me. Like if my **friends are doing it then I’m going to want to do it** too, even if I still do it alone I’ll encourage them to do it with me”
- “My mom always pushes me, **she will always encourage me to go even if I do not want to.** My dad too.”
- “I think **if we got more parents** to put their kids [in sport], **kids would wanna be in [sport].**”



Needs spaces

- “My photo is about me... at **the fitness centre...**
That’s where I started. I started working out there a good 14-15 months ago. **And I’m here now, like 65 pounds later and like lots of muscles later.”**
- “**Our lake, our river**”; “When I go canoeing, **I love that... I feel good doing that**”



Figure 4



Discussion

- Addresses a gap in the literature
- Contributes to a deeper understanding of meaningful approaches for enhancing physical activity experiences including:
 1. On the land programming and consideration of “mother earth”
 2. Caution against a sole focus on “cultural” activities
 3. Importance of social support



Discussion

- Findings serve as a foundation for beginning to address:
 - Call to Action #89 identified by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*
 - The goals identified in *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport*



Limitations & Future Directions

- Small sample size does not reflect the diversity of Northern Aboriginal peoples
- Purposeful selection of participants based on their “lived experiences” of physical activity
- Limited time of data generation



Conclusion

- Listen to the voices of Aboriginal youth to enhance understanding
- Engage in partnerships with Aboriginal youth
 - Importance of optimizing on the excitement and motivation of youth to be involved in the research process
- Aboriginal youth are the experts of their own experiences (McHugh, 2011)



THANK YOU!

Especially to my committee members:

Dr. Tara-Leigh McHugh

Dr. John Spence

Dr. Lauren Sulz

And to the community of Fort Providence for supporting this research from the very beginning



Questions?

Beth Hudson

bethh@me.com

