Concepts of "sufficiency" in women's physical activity for health: lay perspectives and the national guidelines

Belinda Gay Giles

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses

Recommended Citation

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
NOTE

This online version of the thesis may have different page formatting and pagination from the paper copy held in the University of Wollongong Library.

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
CONCEPTS OF “SUFFICIENCY” IN WOMEN’S PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR HEALTH: LAY PERSPECTIVES AND THE NATIONAL GUIDELINES

A thesis presented as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE - RESEARCH

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

BELINDA GAY GILES B.A.

School of Health Sciences

2008
ABSTRACT

The relationship of physical activity to population health is currently an area of intense interest because of the economic and social cost of inactivity related morbidity and mortality (Stephenson et al. 2000). Efforts to address the perceived increase in insufficient physical activity are largely unsuccessful (Bauman et al. 2001). National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care 1999) were published in 1999 within the social and historical context of the Active Australia policy. Evidence suggests older people have a concept of sufficient physical activity that does not comply with the current health promotion definition (Crombie et al. 2004; O'Neill and Reid 1991). Women are most likely to be judged insufficiently physically active (Armstrong et al. 2000).

This was a qualitative investigation of concepts of sufficiency in physical activity for health voiced by Australian women in their fifties. Their concepts are contrasted to a professional concept of sufficient physical activity identified in published definitions, and portrayed in the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care 1999). Semi-structured interviews with thematic analysis were used to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the concepts of sufficiency in physical activity for health from the lay perspective of women in their fifties?

2. How do their perceptions compare to the recommendations expressed in the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians?

Eleven women in their fifties who spoke English as a first language volunteered as participants. They were contacted through local civic and adult leisure learning institutions.
This study established that lay women’s concepts of sufficiency are not expressed in a manner comparable with the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians. They do not use the language of ‘physical activity’. The study identified eight indicators of sufficiency used by the women. These are:

1. Intrinsic Value Indicators
2. Individual Expression Indicators
3. Moral or Values Indicators
4. Alignment with Family Responsibilities
5. Physical Sense Indicators
   a. General Sense
   b. Embodied Sense
6. Body Weight Indicators
7. Ability Indicators
8. Therapeutic or Professional Advice Indicators

From this study, three outcomes emerge to inform understanding about gendered relationships around the commendation of physical activity for health:

1) Women comprehend calculative rationalities but do not employ them exclusively to assess the sufficiency of their physical activity.

2) The meaning of a physical activity is significant in lay women’s determination of an actions relationship to health and therefore its contribution to sufficient physical activity for health.

3) The work/leisure boundary impacts on women’s physical activity and presents an area of theoretical exploration in future investigation of sufficiency of physical activity for health.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my precious family.

To Mitchell, for joining me on this long journey lending your strength and discipline.
To Ryan, for helping me show myself how learning stops our star from fading.
To Chelsea, for listening to all of my good advice and giving it back to me unedited.

To Lindsey and Nancy, thank you for being my safety rails, source of support and all the other things a student needs but does not realise until after they have been the recipient of such care.

To the faceless, nameless, persons who developed the postgraduate research infrastructure at the University of Wollongong, congratulations for building something very useful of which you should be proud.

"Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted." - Albert Einstein

“‘I reject your reality and substitute my own.” – Adam Savage (Mythbusters, Beyond Productions)
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................ I  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...................................................................................................... III  
TABLE OF CONTENTS ........................................................................................................ IV  
LIST OF FIGURES .............................................................................................................. VII  
LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................. VIII  
1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 1  
1.1 Research Questions ................................................................................................. 1  
1.2 No Pre-Established Theoretical Framework ......................................................... 4  
1.3 Choice of Methodology ......................................................................................... 5  
1.4 Scope and Limitations ......................................................................................... 6  
1.5 Description of the Chapters ................................................................................ 7  
1.6 Chapter Summary ............................................................................................... 8  
2 LITERATURE ........................................................................................................... 9  
2.1 Support for the Promotion of Physical Activity for Health ......................... 9  
2.2 Patterns of Participation ..................................................................................... 11  
2.3 Barriers Identified by the Profession............................................................... 15  
2.4 Intervention Trials ............................................................................................ 18  
2.5 Investigating the Perspective of Older Women ......................................... 19  
2.6 Social Capital and Health ............................................................................... 23  
2.7 Chapter Summary ............................................................................................. 25  
3 IDENTIFYING A PROFESSIONAL CONCEPT OF SUFFICIENCY .............. 27  
3.1 Definitions ....................................................................................................... 27  
3.1.1 Physical Activity ............................................................................................ 27  
3.1.2 Physical Activity for Health ........................................................................ 29  
3.1.3 Sufficient and Insufficient Physical Activity .............................................. 31  
3.2 Public Health Recommendations ....................................................................... 33  
3.2.1 National Guidelines: What do they say? .................................................... 33  
3.2.2 CDC and ACSM Statement ......................................................................... 35  
3.2.3 National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians ............................ 37  
3.3 Surveillance Surveys ............................................................................................. 40  
3.3.1 Active Australia Surveys ............................................................................. 41  
3.3.2 National Health Surveys ............................................................................. 49
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 Active Australia Survey Questions........................................................... 43
LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Summary of results from the Active Australia and National Physical Activity Surveys of 1997, 1999, 2000 ............................................................... 13

Table 4.2 Summary of gardening results from the Active Australia and National Physical Activity Surveys of 1997, 1999, 2000......................................................... 14