

A Tale of Two Counties:

Racially-constructed social relations and opportunities for youth physical activity in two rural counties in the Southern United States

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Study Background



- 11 million U.S. children live in rural areas
 - 47% in low-income families
 - Doublas-Hall, Chau & Koball (2006)
- Rural youth at greater risk for obesity and physical inactivity
 - Yousefian et al. (2009); Martin et al. (2005); Probst et al., 2004
- Research on obesity and active living
 - “Rural” understudied
 - Needed to frame appropriate strategies
 - Moore et al. (2010)



Study Background



- Foundational study
 - Edwards (2009), Edwards, Bocarro, & Kanters (2010: 2011)
- Found a lack of supportive environments for youth physical activity across rural middle schools:
 - High variability in rural sample indicated disparities concentrated in some rural communities
 - Strong negative association with racial/ethnic heterogeneity, rather than economics



Conceptual Framework



- Process of social interaction among individuals and organizations is the foundation for **collective action** and capacity building
 - Wilkinson (1991); Goodman et al. (1998)
- Social capital
 - Bourdieu (1984); Coleman (1988); Putnam (1995)
- **New perspectives** on social capital
 - Lin (1999); Morrow (1999); Woolcock (1998; 2001)
- **Socio-economically stratified communities** and social capital
 - Coffé & Geys (2006)

Study Purpose



- Objectives of this study were:
 - Describe the opportunities and barriers for youth physical activity in **two types** of Southern rural counties
 - Investigate the role of socio-cultural characteristics and the ways in which social capital facilitated or inhibited opportunities and environments for youth physical activity



“Ridge” County



“Plains” County

Methods



- Comparative case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003)
- Two counties purposefully selected:
 - Population, economic profiles, demographics
 - Different levels of resources from first study
- Data collection & analysis
 - Expert informant interviews with theoretical sampling (Patton, 2001)
 - 16 in “Ridge” County
 - 14 in “Plains County
 - Observation and document reviews
 - Constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)

County Profiles



		“Ridge” County	“Plains” County	State Average
Description ^a		“Appalachia”	“Black Belt”	
Population Characteristics ^b	Population Count	24,000	19,000	80,500
	Pct. White	97.0%	52.0%	72.1%
	Pct. Black	1.0%	41.0%	21.6%
	Pct. Hispanic	3.0%	8.0%	7.0%
	MHI	\$28,800	\$32,000	\$45,069
	Below poverty line	13.5%	20.2%	12.3%
	HS graduate	68.6%	65.4%	78.1%

^a Wimberley & Morris (1996; 1997)

^b U.S. Census

Both counties have a rural population of 100% according to the U.S. Census definition

Results: Opportunities/Barriers for Youth PA

- Organized sports and structured programs
 - Schools, Parks and Recreation Department, 4-H, Churches
 - Seen as popular and economically self-supporting
- Unstructured outdoor recreation activities
 - Popular with some segments, but perceived in decline
- Transportation, accessibility, social isolation as most significant barriers



Results: Social networks and resources

- Ridge County
 - Social capital helped mobilize monetary and non-monetary resources across the community
 - Networks of elected officials and informal community leaders could be mobilized around community-wide needs
 - Coalitions and organizational partnerships to obtain external funding and coordinate resources
 - Volunteers to fundraise, lobby for resources, and organize or support activities



Results: Social networks and resources

- Plains County
 - Social capital and social networks helped mobilize resources in different ways
 - “Inside connections” or “right people” shaped support and priorities of public resources
 - Minority communities perceived less access to this process
 - Relied on internal localized social networks and organizations that had less economic resources or power
 - Volunteer support seen as a key barrier to developing and sustaining opportunities





Results: Racialized social patterns

- In Plains County, historical racial divisions were described as especially salient in determining opportunities and access to resources
 - Community needs were seen as more divided along racial and ethnic lines
 - White parent groups possessed more highly organized social networks and were more entrenched in political system
 - Elected officials and organizations perceived as unaware of population needs or ignorant of how policy decisions affected majority and minority youth differently

Discussion



- Rural counties shared similar approaches and challenges to provide youth PA opportunities
- Social capital was an asset to overcoming challenges, but social capital is not universal or benign
 - Resources were prioritized and mobilized differently due to how social capital was deployed
 - Stratification led to differentiated levels of social capital and deficits in returns on social capital for marginalized groups
 - May be more problematic in highly-stratified rural communities with scarce economic resources



Recommendations for policy and practice

- Purposive efforts to develop stronger inclusive organizational and social networks
- Citizen advocacy education
- Ensure representation in community needs assessments and accessibility
- Use community strengths and unique opportunities to challenge status quo and develop appropriate local resources

Questions & Comments



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