

A Case Study of Physical Activity Among Older Adults in Rural Newfoundland, Canada

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The purpose of this study was to assess rural older adults' perceptions of leisure-time physical activity and examine these perceptions from a historical perspective. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 10 inhabitants (mean age 82 years) of Fogo Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to inductive analysis. Member-checking interviews were conducted with 5 participants. Findings indicated that beginning in childhood, participants were socialized into a subculture of work activity. As a result of these historical and social forces, leisure-time physical activity did not form part of the participants' lives after retirement. Strategies for successful aging involved keeping busy, but this "busyness" did not include leisure-time physical activity. Results demonstrated the importance of developing a broader understanding of how past and present-day contexts can influence participation in leisure-time physical activity.

Key Words: perceptions, historical context, qualitative methods, aging, leisure

Despite the numerous health benefits of regular physical activity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996), it is estimated that over 60% of the world's population fails to achieve the minimum recommendation of 30 min of moderate-intensity daily physical activity (World Health Organization, 2003). In the United States, two thirds of older adults do not exercise regularly (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002). In fact, fewer than 25% of U.S. adults age 65 and over participate in 30 min of light or moderate leisure-time physical activity five or more days per week (National Center for Health Statistics, 2005). Similarly, in Australia, 54% of those age 65 and older fail to meet physical activity recommendations (Bauman, Bellew, Vita, Brown, & Owen, 2002). Comparable participation rates have recently been reported in Canada, with over 60% of those age 65 years and older found to be physically inactive (Craig, Russell, Cameron, & Bauman, 2004).

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Initiatives to promote regular physical activity in Canada have met with limited success. One such initiative was Canada's *Physical Activity Guide for Older Adults* (Health Canada, 1999), which recommended that older adults "accumulate 30 to 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days" (p. 2). Fewer than 40% of Canadians age 65 and older are aware of how much physical activity is necessary to acquire health benefits (Craig, Cameron, Russell, & Beaulieu, 2001). Among older adults, there is also confusion as to whether cumulative physical activity throughout the day is beneficial to one's health (as advocated by the older adult physical activity guide). According to Craig et al., half of Canadians reported that it would be necessary to perform a single 30-min bout of physical activity in order to experience health benefits. Clearly, from a population health perspective, the promotion of physical activity participation has been a challenging undertaking in Canada.

There are regional and geographical differences in Canadian physical activity participation rates. Overall, physical activity participation rates are highest in the west and steadily decline across the central and eastern Provinces (Craig & Cameron, 2004). People living in the Atlantic Provinces (i.e., New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador) are the most physically inactive. The percentage of Atlantic Canadians residing in rural areas (42.3%) is more than double the Canadian average of 20.3% (Statistics Canada, 2002). People living in rural areas participate in less leisure-time physical activity than those living in urban areas (Cook et al., 1998; Parks, Housemann, & Brownson, 2003; Wilcox, Castro, King, Housemann, & Brownson, 2000).

Among older adult Canadians, residents of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador are the least physically active. Nearly 70% of Newfoundlanders age 65 and over report being physically inactive (Statistics Canada, 2003a). In light of these relatively high rates of physical inactivity, it is not surprising that compared with the other nine provinces of Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador also has the highest rates of diabetes (Statistics Canada, 2001a), obesity (Craig & Cameron, 2004), acute myocardial infarction, and cardiovascular disease (Reeder & Taylor, 1999). Although the mechanisms responsible for regional differences in physical activity are not well understood, it is likely that the current health status of older rural Newfoundlanders is a result of leading physically inactive lives. Therefore, it is important, timely, and relevant to examine rural older adults' perceptions of their leisure-time physical activity. We were unable, however, to locate any published studies that have examined the nature and perceptions of physical activity participation among older adults in Atlantic Canada. The present study was designed to help address this gap in the literature.

O'Brien Cousins (2003) argued that understanding physical activity motivation was vital to develop strategies aimed at increasing physical activity participation. She reported that older people talked themselves out of effortful activity that was not valued. Physically active participants valued leading a physically active lifestyle, whereas physically inactive older adults did not value engaging in leisure-time physical activity. Inactive participants indicated that they were "too busy" to engage in leisure-time physical activity. Although the valuing or devaluing of leisure-time physical activity appeared to affect physical activity motivation, little is known about how historical, social, and contextual factors might shape the physical activity motivation of older adults in general and of rural older adults in particular.

Rural older adults, who have limited access to health-promotion resources, should garner special attention given current trends of large out-migration of younger people and the “aging in place” of older adults in particular rural areas (Statistics Canada, 2001b). Exploring the perceptions and beliefs related to physical activity participation of older adults in rural Newfoundland and developing a better understanding of the contextual factors that might influence current leisure-time physical activity participation might enhance current understanding of factors that contribute to this region’s low levels of physical activity. Developing a better understanding of older adults’ physical activity experiences over the life course is a fundamental step toward developing future health-promotion campaigns or intervention studies in rural Newfoundland. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to assess rural older adults’ perceptions of leisure-time physical activity and examine these perceptions from a historical perspective.

Method

A case-study methodology was adopted to explore the nature of leisure-time physical activity among residents of Fogo Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. Stake (2000) suggested that qualitative case studies are appropriate when three conditions are fulfilled. First, the case should be a bounded system; because Fogo Island is a relatively tight-knit island community, it fulfills this condition on geographical and social grounds. Second, behavior in the case should be patterned; we knew that work behaviors on the island were repeated cyclically relative to the seasonal inshore cod fisheries. The third condition is that the previous two conditions be used to study a phenomenon. The phenomenon under investigation in the current study was leisure-time physical activity, and we examined this through analysis of the patterns of behavior in the case of Fogo Island.

Setting

Establishing historical and contextual information related to work and leisure on Fogo Island helps situate the present physical activity of the participants and further establish the context for this case study (Stake, 2000). Fogo Island is the largest of Newfoundland’s offshore islands (182 km²) and is 16 km off the northeast coast of the island portion of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. In 2001, its population was approximately 2,500 (Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, 2001) distributed over nine communities. The island was identified in 1529 on a Portuguese map as *y del fogo* and is thought to have derived its name from the Portuguese *fuego* (fire) for either the island’s characteristic thick, “smoky” fogs or for forest fires burning on the island at the time of European discovery (Smallwood, Horan, Pitt, & Riggs, 1981).

Europeans likely began using the island as a base to cure catches of fish as early as the 16th century. The first permanent settlement, Fogo, was established on Fogo Island in 1728. The fishing grounds off the coast of Fogo Island were one of the province’s first used by Europeans. Fogo Island has been a major player in the fishing history of Newfoundland and Labrador and was a major hub for the curing and distributing of cod well into the 20th century (Smallwood et al., 1981).

Participants

Inhabitants of Fogo Island were purposefully sampled (Patton, 2002). In order to provide information-rich data with regard to our research purpose, sampling criteria were that participants were born and raised on Fogo Island, had resided on Fogo Island for most of their lifetime, and were at least 65 years of age. Participants were recruited via chain referral sampling (Coleman, 1958). Initial potential participants were identified through the first author's personal and professional contacts. If they agreed to participate, participants were subsequently asked to identify other potential participants, and the sample grew in this manner.

The final sample included 10 White participants (5 men and 5 women) with a mean age of 82 years (range 70–94). All participants had received some level of schooling, but none were educated beyond the equivalent of high school. Nine participants were Protestant (either Anglican or United), and one was Roman Catholic. The sample was fairly representative of Fogo Island's population. According to recent census data, all inhabitants of Fogo Island are White, 42% have not advanced beyond a Grade-8 education, and the vast majority of Fogo Islanders (83.8%) are Protestant (Statistics Canada, 2003b). Research-ethics-board approval was obtained, and all participants provided written informed consent. Eleven people were approached about participating in the study, and 10 agreed to participate.

Data Collection

A semistructured-interview approach was used to obtain data. With this approach, the interviewer develops rapport, puts minimal emphasis on the ordering of questions, probes interesting areas that arise, and follows the respondents' interests or concerns (Smith, 1995). The aim here was to enter the psychological and social world of the respondents. Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 45 and 90 min. Data were collected by the first author in the participants' homes during two separate fieldwork trips. A short demographic questionnaire was completed before each interview.

To some extent, the quality of the data collected in qualitative research relies on the skills and sensitivities of the researcher (Patton, 2002). The interviewer was a 27-year-old man who was born and raised in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. This was advantageous in terms of developing rapport and understanding the subtleties of the regional dialect.¹ In order to develop his skills, the interviewer took a graduate course in qualitative research methods and had previously conducted research interviews with older women (O'Brien Cousins & Witcher, 2004). Before collecting the data for this study, he read articles on qualitative interviewing and completed two pilot interviews to hone his interviewing skills and establish the feasibility of the questions.

The interview guide consisted of three main sections of questions. Section 1 included questions about participants' current health (e.g., "Compared to others your age, how would you describe your present health?"), current leisure-activity participation (e.g., "What kinds of leisure activity do you do?"), and physical activity expectations (e.g., "Do you think that being regularly involved in physical activity may be a way to prevent physical frailty?"). Section 2 focused on activity over the life course (e.g., "In terms of your activity, how have things changed over the years?"). Section 3 probed further into participants' beliefs about physical

activity (e.g., “Do you think being more physically active would be of benefit to you?”), as well as participants’ perceptions about community members’ perception of older adult physical activity participation (e.g., “What would passersby from the community be likely to say/think about you playing a sport?”). Elaboration probes were used to obtain fuller descriptions when necessary (Patton, 2002).

Procedure

In the summer of 2004, 10 semistructured interviews were conducted over two periods of approximately 4 weeks each. Six in-depth interviews were completed during the initial 4-week period, and the other four in-depth interviews were completed during the second 4-week period. Five member-checking interviews were also conducted during the second 4-week period.

Data Analysis

Interview data were transcribed verbatim so as not to lose any contextualized meaning in the quotations (Patton, 2002). In this way, data transcription remained faithful to the participants’ use of the local dialect. Analysis was accomplished by first identifying specific meanings of extracts in the transcripts, which provided the basis for establishing a broader understanding of the nature and meaning of leisure-time physical activity for the participants. In order to identify the participants’ meanings and understandings, transcripts were content-analyzed following Maykut and Morehouse (1994) and Tesch (1990). This procedure involved reading all the transcripts thoroughly to get a sense of the whole. Then, one case document was selected and all the relevant topics listed. Relevant topics were identified by highlighting “meaning units”; a meaning unit could be a sentence, paragraph, or larger extract that conveyed relatively discrete “chunks” of information. Similar meaning units were grouped together as themes and assigned a label that reflected the nature of the meaning units contained therein.

To help clarify whether meaning units were similar enough to be included in the same theme, a rule of inclusion was written for each theme. These rules of inclusion reflected the essential nature and meaning of data contained in each theme (and each rule of inclusion was written starting with the sentence stem “Data in this theme refer to. . .”). We then created a coding scheme containing all the themes identified from the first transcript and coded meaning units in the remaining transcripts into these themes. The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and rules of inclusion were used to establish how the meaning units should be coded and to ensure that themes were not duplicated. Through the process of analyzing all the interview transcripts, some new themes were added to the coding scheme. Once all transcripts had been analyzed the list of themes was finalized and reviewed. Finally, the themes were grouped together under more general-level headings termed categories. These categories reflected the broader meanings of leisure-time physical activity that are reported in the results.

Trustworthiness

A member-checking interview was completed with 5 of the original participants during the second fieldwork trip. The purpose of each member-checking interview

was to determine whether particular interpretations made during analysis (based on prior statements made by the participants) were fair and accurate, as well as to obtain further elaboration on emerging meaning units or categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These interviews were fairly short (less than 25 min) and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim (data were subsequently included in the analysis). The member-checking procedure was particularly useful for saturating the findings in relation to the main themes identified. In addition to member checking, we achieved analyst triangulation (Patton, 2002) because the researchers worked on the analysis as a team; the interviewer completed the first round of analysis, which was subsequently scrutinized by the coauthors. This process allowed us to monitor our own personal subjectivities. The next stage, which qualitative researchers (e.g., Richardson, 2000) consider the final piece of data analysis, involved developing a written account of the larger categories of meaning, which is presented here. This was achieved through a process of discussion, writing, and rewriting, until the final analysis and results were agreed on by the authors.

Results

Analysis revealed three main themes that describe, and to some extent help explain, the nature of physical activity participation and perceptions of being physically active among older adults in rural Newfoundland. The themes related to the history and context of work on Fogo Island, the marginalization of leisure-time physical activity, and, subsequently, the participants' strategies for successful aging.

Work on Fogo Island

Our data indicated that all of the participants were involved in work activities during their childhood. These work tasks were perceived as being essential to the survival of the participants' families. Neil remembered, "Twas different when you got old enough. . . . [You] went to work." Men's childhood work generally related to the inshore cod fishery. The older men were responsible for preparing fishing tackle in the spring for the upcoming fishing season, and the boys became involved once the season began. Alex recalled,

We'd come out of school . . . about the last week in June. And that's when . . . everything was going wild. And when you came home you were into the fishin'. 'Cause if you could get down aboard the punt,² that's where you was to . . . with your father or your grandfather, or somebody . . . and you never stopped . . . you had to work . . . there's was a lot of work. . . . You'd start, and you'd be [working] up then until October, November.

At this time in the history of Fogo Island, schooling did not typically progress beyond adolescence. Once boys reached adolescence, they left school and indeed did work like men. Alex started fishing with his grandfather and actually co-owned his own fishing boat (with his cousin) by the time he was 18 years old. Work followed a seasonal pattern from the midteenage years until the men were no longer able to work in the fishing industry. This pattern was remarkably consistent throughout the adult lives of the participants. Although fishing took place in the summer, "winter

time you was getting ready for the [upcoming fishing season]. . . . There was always something to do. Build a punt, or build somethan" (Alex). Arnold recalled,

If you was fishin' . . . you're getting ready for the fish . . . mend your nets, trap . . . trawls, get your . . . put the hooks on the trawls, and carks [variant of corks] on the rope for the nets. And paintin' your boats . . . punts we used to call them small ones.

When the fishing season began, men were responsible for any maintenance required on fishing tackle and spent their days hauling traps and nets by hand and loading their boats with fish. Once their boats had been filled, they would return to shore, where they would unload their catch and prepare to split and gut the fish. Once the fishing season had ended, many teenage boys would go into the lumberwoods³ in the fall to earn some extra money for their families. Andy remembered going away to the lumberwoods when he was around 16 years of age, and James also spent time there in the fall, remarking, "Yeah, as soon as you got up old enough, we had to go . . . try and do a bit of work." These data show that the men of Fogo Island were integrated into a regular work routine relatively early in life. The work involved physical labor, and the routine endured throughout their working lives.

Although the female residents of Fogo Island did not regularly go out in the fishing boats, female participants engaged in work patterns similar to those of their male counterparts. Darlene remembered her childhood, reporting,

We come up [from helping with the fish] . . . we'd ah, get something on for dinner. 'Cause we always cooked dinner then. . . . And ah, next thing then we had bread to bake. Or . . . you know washin' to do, or something like that. . . . It would be always something all day long. And, that's like it 'twas after I got married. The same thing, well, every day.

As the last sentence from Darlene reveals, this pattern of work activity was a consistent feature of her adult life. Whereas the culture of work activity for men was based on the fishing and lumber industries, the parallel culture of work activity for women revolved around supporting the men's fishing and lumber activities primarily through performing domestic duties. Women also did the chores around the house. Madge remembered doing chores at an early age, remarking, "Well, I wasn't very old before I worked, you know . . . did housework." Darlene speculated, "I s'pose that's why now, I'm, you know, so interested in doing housework. . . . I always did it. From my 8 years up." Similarly, Olive said, "We used to do a lot of work then, you know, that the children don't do now, in house, to help them out, you know, this that. Bring water and stuff like that, eh?" She recalled performing such duties at age "8 or 10 probably." When asked about typical activities performed in her youth, Pamela relayed this brief story:

Well I can tell you one thing. . . . There was three homes there. Three families. We were very happy. And ah . . . what we did was ah . . . we had our chores to do. . . . There was, ah, firewood to bring in maybe . . . you'd help maybe with sawin' it off, if your brother wasn't too mad with ya, because you weren't doin' it right. And . . . you could help to bring the water, which was in buckets, eh? With two . . . or, look after the chickens . . . or feed the dogs, or feed the

pig . . . and ah . . . boys . . . and girls were at that, like, eh? Then help with the fish, help to spread it, or help to take it out, and . . . and then it was the grass. . . . We had to help to make the grass . . . help ah, to take the fertilizer, which was fish then, eh? Fish heads, and fish . . . parts of . . . fish parts to the garden, and ah . . . and that was fun for us too . . . not only work . . . it was fun too. We enjoyed it. And when our . . . like . . . like the girls . . . like . . . Mom was in the stage⁴ at the fish, well, ah, we're expected to do some of the housework, or . . . you know.

As Pamela alluded to, the activities performed during adolescence became part of one's routine after marriage and through adulthood. Like the men, the women were involved in physical labor, but the woman's role seemed to be one of assisting the men. Perhaps as a result of this supportive role, Darlene wondered if a woman's work was ever done, and she suggested that even after men had finished their work, "women be'd still at it. They still doin' their housework or doin' something . . . out weedin,' or something. Because we had our veg growin' our vegetables and everything then. Everybody had to grow their vegetables." Laura had a similar point of view:

Well we all used to, we all used to say that the women worked harder than the men, because they had all the housework to do, and all the children to take care of, and all the fish to make, and the gardens to do. See, the men would be out in the boat, and they'd get a rest when they're goin' and comin' in their boat, ah, after they had their engines anyway, you know. Although they worked hard haulin' traps and all this kinda stuff, but they didn't work as hard as [the women]. And then, even, when they'd go in stage and do the fish, the women had to be there also in the stage. And then the women had to wash out the fish. 'Cause the men wouldn't be at it. Ah, as far as I'm concerned, in my day . . . the women worked harder than the men. Yeah . . . and now of course it's got the other way . . . equal . . . could be women's lib I s'pose, changed some [laughter].

In summary, men and women were socialized into a culture of physical labor during their childhood. By adolescence they appeared to have the responsibilities of adults and engaged in cyclical patterns of work that were consistent throughout their adult lives. They worked hard to survive, and as Alex recalled,

I guarantee you we knew what work was. . . . You wouldn't supposed to be sick . . . [otherwise, people would think] you were too lazy to work. . . . I'm a firm believer in work, you know. . . . That's the attitude I take . . . and course I was always used to plenty of work . . . a lifetime.

Marginalization of Leisure-Time Physical Activity

Within the culture of work activity, leisure-time physical activities were marginalized to the periphery of acceptable societal norms. As a result, leisure-time physical activities were something that the participants engaged in only after all necessary work tasks had been completed. For example, Alex remembered his father would say

"Alex, come on in b'y [variant of boy], let's get this done." That attitude, eh? If he . . . if there was . . . the water barrel wants to be filled up, and 'twas gettin' late, and if I was kickin' football he'd probably . . . sing out, "Come on in b'y, and get that barrel filled up." And I'd come on. . . . They [parents] always had time for a little bit of sport in between . . . [but] you had family chores to do . . . things had to be done before darkness set in . . . in the winter months.

This extract illustrated the value placed on completing useful work tasks before engaging in leisure activity. In Andy's words, "They'd be liable to check up on ya, and think you should be doing something useful . . . to help . . . the parents get along."

Performing work activity was a matter of survival and consequently was highly valued and held priority over engaging in other types of activity. Arnold also indicated that he thought completing work activities would be the first priority, and felt "they'd [parents] want you to be . . . doin' something for the fishery, or the gardens, or something to eat . . . rhinin'⁵ rails, or pickets, [for] the fence" but also conceded that he thought participating in some physical activity would be fine, as long as "it was after . . . in the evenings or something like that." Similarly, Neil indicated that "they'd think it was better if you were doing work."

Women also appeared to have little time available for leisure-time physical activity. Madge remembered, "Well, in the summer we wouldn't be doing a big lot, because we'd be workin' . . . in the stage and on the flakes."⁶ During the same interview she later added, "It's not like it is now today . . . 'tis really changed . . . everything. . . . Oh, I'd say they [people today] do less work . . . but they have more sport . . . what they call h'activity I s'pose hey? But we had to work." Darlene's mother had reinforced the idea that rather than spend time engaged in leisure-time physical activity, she should be "in the house . . . doing something, knitting or sewing."

One implication of the marginalization of leisure-time physical activities for this study is that we had few data describing participants' leisure-time physical activities throughout their adulthood. As children, participants played sports and games once the work had been completed, but as adults work activities were the focus of their daily routines. It seemed that the objective of each day was to complete all the tasks viewed as necessary to assist with the survival of the family. As already mentioned, time spent in leisure-time physical activity was generally viewed as time not well spent. It appeared that being raised in an environment that was not supportive of leisure-time physical activity resulted in the devaluing and marginalization of such activities.

The marginalization of leisure-time physical activity was further revealed when participants were directly asked about becoming more physically active. Alex said, "I don't think I would be interested. No . . . I, I don't think. If it was . . . I mean, I s'pose I'm past that . . . say it that way." Arnold also felt he was "past that," as he commented, "Not really . . . no, not my age now, I wouldn't." When asked what people in the community might think about her engaging in physical activity, Pamela said that they would ask, "'Haven't she got anything else to do?' . . . The older people that's not doing it, well they'd say, 'Well she haven't got anything else to do today?'" Trying to make sense of physical activity participation in older adults, Laura commented:

'Cause I mean what do they need . . . to do, for older people anyway? 'Cause you ain't gonna live that many more years. . . . You're going to die, you know, that's for sure, when the time comes. . . . As long as you can, you know, keep active enough to be able to, ah, you know . . . keep about and walk about and you know.

During member-checking interviews, James echoed similar views, and commenting on riding a bike, he said, "too late . . . now for to try that."

In addition to feeling as though they were too old to consider physical activity, participants also were skeptical about physical activity's contribution to health in later life. For example, Pamela said, "And we know no matter what we do we're going to get frail," and Laura commented, "I don't think. I don't think that would help. . . . That wouldn't bring it back." Madge agreed that it was too late for her, as well, "I don't think it [physical activity] would [help] . . . not now. . . . Probably I would if I was younger." Olive saw frailty as something that "comes with age, I s'pose," while Andy said, "I don't think there'd be, you can do anything about time. Time takes care of it all . . . gotta come." James, however, was a little less sure and said, "You'll have to come back in 15 years time and size that up. . . . I don't know, I wouldn't know."

During member-checking interviews a number of individuals were particularly cogent in expressing their concerns about taking up physical activity. James felt as though he'd have "to get the nurse to help [him]" perform a push-up and feared that "people [would] hurt themselves, doin' a lot of walkin'." Olive suggested that her activity in the house might be an adequate substitute for other forms of activity:

I don't do no exercises, none a'tall. Only in the house, eh? I used to walk the other year, I gave that up 'cause I had gout in me feet then . . . but I mean, I'm always on the go in the house.

Thus, it appeared that as a result of the marginalization of leisure-time physical activity throughout their lives, most participants felt as though leisure-time physical activity was not appropriate for them at their current life stage. Clearly, participating in physical activity was not part of participants' aging experience.

Successful Aging on Fogo Island: Keeping Busy

We found that a repeated, consistent, cyclical pattern of work dominated the participants' lives from childhood through adulthood, and leisure-time physical activity was marginalized. Consequently, we became interested in whether the participants attempted to age successfully. All people interviewed were retired from work activity, so discretionary leisure-time was available to them for perhaps the first time in their lives. But the participants were not engaged in regular physical activity. Rather, we discovered that the key strategy for aging successfully among the residents of Fogo Island involved "keeping busy." Keeping busy meant being involved in productive activities rather than leisure-time physical activities. Participants perceived themselves as being busy throughout the day and appeared to value being occupied, as was the norm in their youth and adulthood. The difference was that youth and adult "busyness" revolved around work activities, but after retirement, essential work activities were no longer present.

Idleness was not an option for participants. Alex spent most of his time “peddlin’ around [“fooling around”], that’s right yeah . . . what we would call peddling” and enjoyed “wood work. If I wants . . . if part of a fence is there I’ll fix it. Wants a bit of clapboard put on I’ll do it.” Arnold also said that men of retirement age would “go into their carpenter work for their own use . . . after they retire.” In the summer, James would still go “out fishin’ and stuff like that . . . when the fishery is open,” but fishing was no longer a means of survival. Several participants (James, Neil, and Arnold) would pick berries during the summer.

In terms of current activity participation among women, Pamela remarked, “I never stop. When I sit down I’ve got something in my hands . . . so I won’t rust out.” She sometimes speculated that people might wonder how she occupied herself, given that she lived alone. She was, however, “not a one that is sittin’ down all day long. . . . I never stop, from the time I get up, till I go to bed . . . around, from 7 o’clock in the morning, until around 11 in the night, I’m at something.” Olive saw her situation similarly, “Me? I never stops . . . only long enough to go to bed for a nap.” As for Darlene, she also said she was “always busy . . . all the time. . . . I gets up at 6 o’clock and 6:30. And I’m working from that time until 12, 1 o’clock in the night.”

During member checking both Olive and Pamela confirmed that they were constantly busy and “never stopped.” Olive said, “I’m always on the go in the house.” Juxtaposed with participants’ perceptions of being busy were the views of others who believed that some retired members of the community, in the words of Andy, “they don’t do a big lot now.” Pamela and Darlene both believed that “the people around here are not doin’ very much . . . they’re not doin’ very much,” which alluded to the fact that although occupied, residents are not necessarily engaged in pursuits that would place them in the gaze of the community at large (e.g., physically active pursuits).

Overall, participants were “keeping busy” and did not participate regularly in leisure-time physical activity, with one notable exception. Arnold reported being “on the go . . . from the time I gets up, [until the] time I goes to bed,” but in contrast to other participants, Arnold spoke about his own physical activity routine, as well as the benefits of being physically active. Arnold spoke about the importance of combining sound environmentalism with one’s activity regimen:

If anybody is going to do something active . . . do something for the public, you know . . . because there’s lots of things on Fogo Island . . . around Joe Batt’s now, and Barr’d Islands . . . there . . . you take the beaches . . . wood, kel-up [variant of kelp], plastic barrels, plastic tubs, buckets, and . . . you name it . . . Like John Cabot, the first day he was on the beaches. . . . Well I’d say now . . . instead of being goin’ up in the gym. . . . Well that’s . . . it’s alright for himself probably, to be . . . active . . . but, he can be active on the beach. Yeah . . . or on the road.

In stark contrast to his peers, Arnold valued remaining physically active in old age. Commenting on why he thought his health was better than most people his age, Arnold said, “Well, because I’m active . . . more active.” It made sense to Arnold that “when I lies down on the couch here . . . there so long . . . I, I can hardly get up. Get movin’, alright then.” Arnold didn’t seem to understand why people of similar age would not be more physically active and said they

should do it [physical activity]. Thousands in the grave, today, wouldn't be there. . . . I knows hundreds . . . on Fogo Island one time . . . is in the grave. . . . Way younger than I am. Now 'cause when they gets 65 . . . they thinks they got to go to bed and die . . . or go into a home somewhere.

Arnold's efforts to remain physically active did not appear to be met with much optimism in his community. In fact, Arnold speculated that he was likely viewed as an oddball: "Some people say, well I'm only foolish. . . . I dare say you've heard it. . . . Somebody said 'S'all Arnold does is pick up garbage'" and recalled one particular incident that illustrates this point vividly:

I've been on the road, and a woman said the other day . . . or not the other day. . . . That was there the spring? And by I s'pose it was the last snow dwy⁷ we had . . . snow storm. . . . I was coming from Stag Harbour pickin' up garbage. . . . She told me, she said, "Well who is that now, Arnold up there now . . . 85 year old . . . pickin' up garbage and it's snowin.'" So it 'twas . . . yeah. . . . Now what I says now . . . perhaps somebody else will say.

In closing, Arnold speculated that his frank talk about this topic would be viewed by other older adults on the island as "a lot of foolishness, 'Arnold talking about this and that . . . like being active.' You think they wouldn't?" he asked.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess rural older adults' perceptions of leisure-time physical activity and examine these perceptions from a historical perspective. In completing this study we realized that leisure-time physical activity could not be assessed in isolation from the historical, cultural, and social processes in which the participants were embedded. We found that participants were socialized into a subculture of work activity, and leisure-time physical activity had been marginalized to the periphery of their lives. In fact, the residents of Fogo Island we studied grew up viewing leisure-time physical activity participation as acceptable only once all work activity had been completed. As a result of these historical, cultural, and social forces, leisure-time physical activity did not form part of the participants' lives once they had retired. Their strategies for successful aging involved keeping busy, but this "busyness" did not include participating in leisure-time physical activity.

The social context in which participants grew up and came of age was one that reflected cultural values of hard work, ruggedness, and determination (Sider, 2003). Our findings relating to the history and context of work on Fogo Island corroborated research conducted in other regions. For example, Black women in the United States were observed to have acquired work responsibilities during their childhood (Allen & Chin-Sang, 1990). In the Canadian context, Roadburg (1985) reported that older adults acquired work responsibilities relatively early in life and were oftentimes too busy to participate in any leisure activities.

In addition to corroborating findings based on leisure experiences in youth, this study's findings also extend beyond prior research on leisure-time involvement among older adults by exploring the influence of past work-time physical activity experiences on participants' current leisure-time physical activity participation. Participants' prioritization of work at the expense of leisure-time physical activity

in youth resembles the "Protestant work ethic" popularized by Weber (1958). In accordance with the Protestant work ethic, participation in continuous systemic labor is highly valued, whereas "wasting time" is considered one of the deadliest sins. Our participants were keen not to waste time during their youth by participating in leisure-time physical activity, activity that was viewed predominantly as time not well spent. Instead, participants focused on carrying out more "useful" productive tasks, those seen to benefit the family as a whole and often involving physical labor. Consequently, participation in leisure-time physical activity became marginalized and devalued. Similarities in the prioritization and value placed on physical labor have been observed among the Amish, a group whose members strongly uphold the Protestant work ethic, to the detriment of leisure-time physical activity participation (Bassett, Schneider, & Huntington, 2004).

The "roots" of the Protestant work ethic were evident in the present-day leisure-time activity patterns of participants. They valued keeping busy and engaged in activities perceived to be productive. Their busyness involved woodworking, fixing things around the home (men), and carrying out various domestic duties (women). Similar gendered activity patterns were reported by Bassett et al. (2004) and Verbrugge, Gruber-Baldini, and Fozard (1996). Staying busy was also reported to be a later life strategy among rural older adults in Alabama (Davis et al., 1991) and North Carolina (Arcury, Quandt, & Bell, 2001). Ekerdt (1986) has labeled this phenomenon the "busy ethic."

Our findings suggest that participants' present-day busy ethic might reflect the value placed on carrying out tasks seen as meaningful or productive in their earlier years. Given the scarcity of options available to participants (specifically, physically active ones), coupled with society's tendency to push older adults to one side (Marshall, Heinz, Kruger, & Verma, 2001; Schaie & Schooler, 1998), staying busy might be one of the few ways in which older adults feel as though they can continue to actively contribute to society in a meaningful way. In the case of this study, participants kept busy by engaging primarily in various sedentary activities perceived as productive.

The marginalization of leisure-time physical activity among participants could be attributed to self-stereotyping. Alexandris, Barkoukis, Tsorbatzoudis, and Grouios (2003) and O'Brien Cousins (2000) have discussed the tendency for older adults to perceive themselves as unable to perform physically active tasks because of their age; physical activities might be viewed as not age appropriate. Although O'Brien Cousins (2005) has written extensively about ageism and self-stereotyping, less empirical research has examined contextual influences (e.g., early work-time physical activity experiences) on leisure-time physical activity participation in later life. Strategies employed by participants in later life to remain productive might be a product of both earlier work and leisure activity experiences, as well as present-day contextual influences (e.g., perceptions of activity appropriateness). In this study, participants raised concerns about being too old for certain types of activities and did not want to appear foolish. The present findings add to the literature by revealing more information about the historical, social, and contextual factors that might contribute to self-stereotyping among older adults in rural areas.

Typically, findings derived from case-study research are limited in terms of their generalizability (Stake, 2000). Findings are only generalizable to contexts, settings, and populations that correspond with the original research. Nonetheless,

our findings are consistent with those of other studies of older adults (i.e., Allen & Chin-Sang, 1990; Arcury et al., 2001; Davis et al., 1991; Ekerdt, 1986; Marshall et al., 2001; Roadburg, 1985; Schaie & Schooler, 1998), which lends some external validity to our investigation. This study was, however, limited by a small sample size and our complete reliance on self-report data. We did not triangulate the case study by obtaining data through other means (e.g., observation) or interviewing multiple family members to authenticate self-reported accounts. Accordingly, further research is required to compare findings among different populations and contexts. Specifically, understanding more about how to overcome the marginalization of leisure-time physical activity and how to use established social norms (e.g., busyness) to promote physical activity requires further investigation.

Treating the findings of this study with due skepticism, we tentatively present implications for the design of community- and individual-level interventions aimed at promoting leisure-time physical activity among residents of Fogo Island. Miller (1965) claimed that for leisure activities to be appealing, they must be infused with aspects of work activity that are culturally esteemed. The findings of the present study suggest that participants will most likely demonstrate a willingness to participate in activity that is deemed relevant and suitably purposeful or productive. Thus, the object of physical activity promotion should be participation in behavior that is perceived to be purposeful and to have productive, tangible outcomes (e.g., walking to pick berries rather than walking for the sake of health). In addition, physical activity programs and campaigns that focus solely on leisure-time physical activity will likely fail because they would imply that older adults have discretionary time and are not already busy engaging in other activities. The promotion of physical activity among rural older adults should include more than recommending typical leisure-time physical activities (Health Canada, 1999).

Community-level interventions might involve creating projects that give older residents the opportunity to engage in physical activities perceived to be meaningful and useful (e.g., familiar work-time physical activities). As an example, residents might be more likely to accumulate bouts of physical activity when engaged in the cutting of timber if it could be collectively shared as a fuel source or, alternatively, if the timber was to be converted to lumber to construct boardwalks and recreational centers. Individually tailored interventions should also focus on engaging in meaningful or productive activities. This could involve promoting lifestyle activities that include elements of physical activity (e.g., walking to retrieve the mail) rather than the promotion of simply walking for your health. Although data were not collected directly to assess the gender appropriateness of present-day activity, gender differences in activity participation early on in life (Garcia et al., 1995) would likely have implications for the promotion of physical activity on Fogo Island. Appropriate physical activities for men might include activities such as cutting timber and fishing, and walking for leisure and gardening might be viewed as more appropriate for women.

From a broader based population health standpoint, health education is required before any health gains are likely to be made (Glanz, Lewis, & Rimer, 2002). An educational program aimed at teaching older adults living on Fogo Island that it is never too late to make health gains and that physical frailty is not an inevitable consequence of aging would likely be a precursor to behavior change. Older adults need to learn that they can improve their aging experience in a meaningful and

relevant manner. Introducing an educational program that helps dispel commonly held beliefs about aging, in association with carrying out a targeted intervention, might increase the efficacy of such a program (Kahn et al., 2002).

Lifestyle research often fails to pay adequate attention to notable contextual or ecological factors that might support or undermine participation in regular physical activity (Grzywacz & Marks, 2001; Spence & Lee, 2003). Participants' early physical activity experiences and present-day contextual influences in their communities have shaped their leisure-time physical activity behavior. The results of this study demonstrate the importance of developing a broader understanding of how contextual influences can affect older adult's participation in leisure-time physical activity. Understanding participants' physical activity experiences over the life course is an essential step toward the development of appropriate and effective physical-activity-promotion initiatives.

Notes

1. Dialect areas have been identified in Newfoundland in which the variant of English spoken differs from the Standard English spoken in other parts of Canada (Clarke, 1999; Paddock, 1984; Story, 1965). The interviewer's familiarity with the region's culture and dialect was advantageous during data analysis. We think that the analysis and subsequent interpretations were more reflective of the thoughts expressed by participants than if the interviews had been carried out by an "outsider." Furthermore, the fact that 10 of 11 people approached agreed to participate in the study was likely a result of the interviewer not being viewed as an outsider. On the other hand, the coauthors were "outsiders," which was useful for balancing each individual researcher's biases and maintaining analytic distance (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).
2. Flat-bottomed shallow boat, broad and square at both ends (Story, Kirwin, & Widdowson, 1990).
3. Forest area for the commercial cutting of timber (Story et al., 1990).
4. An elevated platform on the shore with working tables and sheds where fish are landed and processed for salting and drying and fishing gear and supplies are stored (Story et al., 1990).
5. The action of stripping the bark from standing spruce or fir trees in sheets for use in the fisheries and in building (Story et al., 1990).
6. Platforms built on poles and spread with boughs for drying codfish on the foreshore (Story et al., 1990).
7. Brief shower or storm (Story et al., 1990).

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