Introduction

- There is a growing emphasis on understanding the context of a behavior as previous research has demonstrated that different contexts have different predictors (Spink et al., 2011; Wilcox et al., 2000)
- One context that has received less attention is exercising indoors versus outdoors
  - Given that people often exercise both indoors and outdoors, examination of these settings appear warranted (Hug et al., 2009)
- Differences in affective responses have been shown between indoor and outdoor physical activity with more positive affective responses experienced outdoors (Coon et al., 2011; Focht, 2009)
- When compared to indoor physical activity, outdoor physical activity has been associated with less distress, more enjoyment and greater restorative affect (Hug et al., 2009)
- Such positive affect predicted physical activity frequency in the outdoor setting (Hug et al., 2009)
- However, few studies have examined why people choose to participate indoors or outdoors (i.e., their preferences)

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore adults’ preferences for participation in indoor and outdoor PA

Methods

Participants:
- Physically active kinesiology students (N=38)
  - Males: n=25, M=23.9yrs
  - Female: n=13, M=23.1yr

Design:
- Basic qualitative inquiry

Procedures:
- 11 Focus Groups
  - Separated by gender and preference
  - Average size of each focus group was 3.5 participants
  - Lasted between 31-72 minutes
- Semi-structured interview guide was used
- Reasons for preference of setting, expected outcomes, social influences, barriers for participating in each setting

Thematic Analysis:
- Transcribed digital recording of focus groups
- Grouped into common themes within and between settings (Krueger & Casey, 2009)

Results

Enjoyment of the Experience
Pleasant distractions, a connectedness with nature, a sense of “being away” or freedom

- “It’s always the same, your going to the weightlifting area, it’s always the same set-up, the same people where outdoor is more unpredictable and you see something different every time […] [Indoors] it’s always the same four walls” (Male, No Preference)
- “I just really like nature, that’s pretty much the main thing, being able to hear like birds, the wind, seeing grass and flowers, the surroundings. It’s a lot nice to look at flowers and green grass than steel and brown carpet or something” (Female, No Preference)
- “I feel kind of like a repressive feeling, just like a peace of calmness. I feel like at times I’m in my own little world when I am [outside …]. I usually don’t get that feeling as much when I am indoors” (Female, Outdoor)
- “Outdoor settings are a lot more fun, by a lot, there’s no comparison. When you’re inside it’s like you’re on the hamster wheel, right? So when your outdoors it’s just, the hamster wheel opened up and we’re just going wherever the hell we want to go” (Male, Outdoor)

Completing a Task
Participants favored indoor PA as it let them accomplish a specific task or workout

- “Um, I mean it’s like easier for me indoors to just focus on the task at hand. There’s no interruptions, no distractions whatsoever. It’s kind of like routine. It’s a place I go and just forget about the rest of the day and just not focus on that” (Male, Indoor)
- “I feel like, if I go with somebody to the gym, I have to have, I have my one gym buddy and I have that one person. We push each other. And so we actually get a good workout in. Because like, I know I can’t take some of my friends because they will just talk the entire time. And they usually don’t go to the gym, and then they’re like ‘oh what’s this machine?’ So you have to show them and then they take out your workout and they follow you everywhere you go around the gym” (Female, No Preference)
- “I guess ease of access […] I’ll want to go weightlifting […] I could buy the smell and have it at my house and do it outdoors, but indoors is so much more convenient. I can drive like 30 minutes and have the gym” (Male, No Preference)
- “Like all your resources are available to you. If you need to grab a sip of water you have a fountain. If you need to use the restroom […] The weather outside is unpredictable or really hot […] I’d say resources are number one” (Male, Indoor)
- “If I go outside and you want to go run in the street there is so much going on […] cars, traffic, other people working. If you go to a gym […] it’s not like you have to worry about getting hit by some car or something or a bike […] You feel comfortable and work harder in that aspect because you know what’s around you” (Male, Indoor)

Cardiovascular PA
Aerobic activities were reportedly more desirable in the outdoor setting than the indoor setting

- “If I’m running I defiantly like being outside cause I don’t like a treadmill. It’s so boring to me. I like seeing different things, like if I ran on a street course, I’m gonna see different things. It’s just better mentally for me running outdoors” (Male, Indoor)
- “If you’re inside it’s just, the hamster wheel opened up and we’re just going wherever the hell we want to go” (Male, Outdoor)

Resistance PA
Participants reported preferring to practice resistive exercise in this setting as opposed to the outdoors given access to equipment

- “I think, the only benefit that I enjoy from indoors is weight training […] I’m not going to sit in the sun and weight train. [Indoors] you get air conditioning […] I’ve tried working out in the sun, it sucks. [Having the added benefit of working inside with air conditioning, water fountain readily available; that’s the only reason I have a gym membership]” (Female, Outdoors)

Type of Activity Desired

- Outdoor setting was preferred for cardiovascular activity while indoor activity was preferred for resistance activity
- Previous research has shown differences in correlates between cardiovascular and resistance exercise (Bryan et al., 2002)
- Qualitative research provided rich description for why people prefer to exercise in each setting
- Multiple focus groups for each preference which were separated by gender
- No gender differences were evident

Limitations

- Generalizability is limited to kinesiology students who are physically active and may not transfer to other populations
- Only examined preferences why they exercise in each setting and not what factors into their actual participation

Future Directions

- Examine how perceptions of different settings translate to actual physical activity behavior in that setting
- Explore whether it is indoor versus outdoor or type of activity (cardiovascular versus resistance) that vary across context

Discussion

Why choose one setting over another?

Task Versus Affective Reasons

- This distinction is not surprising considering it has been utilized to explain why individuals are attracted to group settings (Caron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1998)
- Indoor setting appeared to be a better environment to “get the job done”
- This task focus may not be surprising given that a common barrier of university students is a high school workload (Gyruskic et al., 2004)
- Exercising indoors may be a way to cope with this barrier
- Another theme that emerged for indoor PA was predictability
- This also seems to be associated with it being easier to accomplish the task (i.e., easy to access, plenty of resources)

Outdoor setting appeared to be associated with the enjoyable experience or satisfying affective needs
- Not surprising given more positive affective responses associated with outdoor environments over indoor environments (Coon et al., 2011)
- Further, other research has shown this setting is associated with greater enjoyment (Focht, 2009) and greater restorative feelings (Hug et al., 2009)

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“When you’re indoor it’s like you’re on the hamster wheel” Preferences for Indoor vs. Outdoors Physical Activity

Design:

- Thematic Analysis: (Krueger & Casey, 2009)

Thematic Analysis:
- Transcribed digital recording of focus groups
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