Human Kinetics
THE DIGEST

## Mobile Applications for Motivation but Not Counting Calories: What Do People Want?

There has been a rise in web-based and mobile applications centered on changing eating and physical activity habits. These applications have a variety of features, including self-monitoring capabilities to track daily steps and calories, and offer a way to set goals and provide motivation. One strategy for maintaining motivation within mobile applications is framed in functional imagery training, a process used to generate and practice mental imagery regarding how and why an individual achieves a goal. This study explored people's experiences of maintaining motivation during weight loss, with a focus on using mobile applications. Participants ($N = 24$) included people trying to lose weight, thinking about losing weight, or maintaining weight loss on their own. Six focus groups were conducted. Discussion centered on the hardest parts of trying to lose weight or maintaining weight loss. The conversation was directed toward support methods for weight loss and, eventually, the mobile applications that may be helpful in a weight loss journey. Toward the end of the focus groups, the facilitator briefly explained functional imagery training and showed three examples of the functional imagery training application under development. Main themes that emerged under the category of motivation were initial motivation (health and appearance), staying motivated (social support, good weather, attention to appearance, and goal setting), and barriers to weight loss (time and tiredness, slow results, no control over cravings, and others). Advantages and limitations themes were included under the category of previous experiences with weight loss programs and self-help. An application support wish list and motivational features were Included under the category of desired changes for support. Comments on the functional imagery training application under development highlighted its acceptability and potential for motivation during weight loss. Participants also mentioned that they felt applications were too complex and not personalized. The authors highlight the possible incongruence between public health information campaigns and commercially available weight loss self-help programs, and the help people actually desire. There may be opportunities to develop more effective mobile applications to foster motivational self-help during weight loss.

Solbrig, L., Jones, R., Kavanagh, D., May, J., Parkin, T., & Andrade, J. (2017). People trying to lose weight dislike calorie counting apps and want motivational support to help them achieve their goals. *Internet Interventions, 7,* 23–31. doi:10.1016/j.invent.2016.12.003

## Group Interactions: A Better Way to Understanding?

A fundamental assumption of groups is that they are made up of various interaction processes that are essential in influencing their survival, success, and failure. Further, groups interact in numerous ways (e.g., decision making, communication, performance) and engage in ongoing events and changes over time. Because these interactions and events occur over time, there is a challenge to the methods used to assess group phenomena. The authors argue that using variance theory to study groups may not truly capture how a series of interdependent interactions leads to specific outcomes. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to describe a newly developed method that can help reduce the measurement and methodological challenges of studying group interaction processes: relational event modeling (REM). REM blends social sequence and network analysis to produce a set of statistics that capture patterned and interdependent interaction over time (addressing measurement issues) by using continual and longitudinal inference to model a history of group interactions (overcoming methodological issues). This paper first provides a general REM framework for analyzing group interactions processes. Then, the authors describe a dataset that is used to demonstrate best practices for using, reporting, and interpreting REM. The authors suggest that REM enables researchers to identify patterns in the group interactions, which cannot be done using qualitative observation. Thus, REM allows researchers to test theoretical frameworks that were previously difficult to investigate. This article provides a tutorial that will allow the investigation of interactions in groups such as sport teams and physical activity groups. REM may provide greater insight into the functioning of groups and teams in the sport and physical activity context.

Pilny, A., Schecter, A., Poole, M.S., & Contractor, N. (2016). An illustration of the relational event model to analyze group interaction processes. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 20,* 181–195. doi:10.1037/gdn0000042

## A Proposed Shift From "Me" To "We" in Understanding and Promoting Physical Activity

In recognizing the health benefits of leading a physically active lifestyle, contrasted by the negative outcomes and global rates associated with physical inactivity, this article proposes a social identity approach to understanding and promoting physical activity. The authors briefly summarize the research efforts concerning the correlates and determinants of physical activity, and highlight the traditional tendency to investigate behavior with a focus on the individual, overlooking the salient influence of groups. Importantly, recent lines of research have extended their scope by taking an ecological approach to behavior change recognizing the environments, policies, and social determinants that invariably influence individual affect, cognition, and behavior. In line with this shift is the social identity approach, which considers the mental and physical benefits derived from developing social identities based on meaningful group memberships. Grounded in social identity and self-categorization theories, a social identity approach recognizes that individual psychology is invariably influenced by group life. Individuals' identities are shaped by the groups to which they belong, as there is a desire to align one's attitudes and values with those of other group members. Accordingly, the authors introduce exercise groups and sport teams as salient entities that can capitalize on member motivations to adopt normative expectations and exhibited behaviors of other group members. Furthermore, they provide three key examples of how a social identity approach could be particularly useful. First, social identity can be harnessed to promote participation and adherence to physical activity. People are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors that are congruent with their social identities, and environments can be structured in ways that can facilitate stronger identity perceptions (e.g., similar physical characteristics of group members). Second, social identity can reinforce group behavior. Extensive literature supports the benefits of creating "true groups" rich with cohesion, and the distinctiveness often sought during team-building efforts reinforces the fault lines of a group (e.g., "us" vs. "they"). Although not directly investigated, the overlap with social identity and previous group-based physical activity interventions is clear and represents an ideal avenue for continued investigation. Third, the authors summarize literature from organizational psychology that highlights how effective leadership can reinforce social identity and that leaders need to create, represent, and embed the prototypical behaviors expected of a group. They emphasize how exercise leaders should learn about their group (e.g., history, composition) and focus on its goals and values as a collective.

Stevens, M., Rees, T., Coffee, P., Steffens, N.K., Haslam, S.A., & Polman, R. (2017). A social identity approach to understanding and promoting physical activity. *Sports Medicine*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1007/s40279-017-0720-4

## Intergenerational Study Shares Strategies for Reviving Active Free Play

The decline in active free play (AFP) is a trend that has been associated with low overall physical activity levels of children in numerous countries. AFP includes spontaneous and voluntary activities that take place outdoors and with little to no adult influence. Parents' concerns about traffic safety and "stranger danger," as well as the structure of playgrounds, access to play areas, and neighborhood designs, have contributed to the decline in AFP in recent years. Researchers have explored factors that influence children's engagement in AFP over time using intergenerational studies that take into account the perspectives of children, parents, and grandparents. The current study explored the perceptions of intergenerational changes in AFP among families from understudied rural areas. Using an ecological framework of active play, the authors explored how AFP has changed across three generations and acquired participants' (i.e., grandparents, parents, children) suggestions for reviving AFP. Forty-nine individual interviews with members of 16 families (15 grandparents, 16 parents, and 18 children aged 7–12 years) residing in rural areas of Alberta, Canada, were conducted. Children perceived less use of imagination and increased use of technology as contributing to the change in the nature of AFP. Safety concerns and increased surveillance were also perceived at the parent level as contributing to the decline in AFP. At the community level, having other children to play with and engaging in purposeful physical activity and organized activities were perceived contributions to limited AFP. The social change in the notion of good parenting (e.g., parents need to be involved in or supervising play) is also perceived as contributing to the decline in AFP. The participants suggested enhanced facilities to keep kids entertained, more opportunities for supervised play, more community events, and decreased use of technology to increase AFP. This study provides evidence of the prevalence of reduced AFP in rural areas. Initiatives to promote AFP should align with the modern ideal of good parenting, involve the maintenance and/or renovation of play areas, provide supervised opportunities for spontaneous play, and create community events.

Holt, N.L., Neely, K.C., Spence, J.C., Carson, V., Pynn, S.R., Boyd, K.A., . . . Robinson, Z. (2016). An intergenerational study of perceptions of changes in active free play among families from rural areas of Western Canada. *BMC Public Health, 16*, 829. doi:10.1186/s12889-016-3490-2