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To cite this article: Monika Stodolska , Kimberly J. Shinew , Juan Carlos Acevedo & Caterina G. Roman (2013) “I Was Born in the Hood”: Fear of Crime, Outdoor Recreation and Physical Activity Among Mexican-American Urban Adolescents, *Leisure Sciences*, 35:1, 1-15, DOI: [10.1080/01490400.2013.739867](https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2013.739867)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2013.739867>



Published online: 26 Dec 2013.



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“I Was Born in the Hood”: Fear of Crime, Outdoor Recreation and Physical Activity Among Mexican-American Urban Adolescents

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The study examines how perceptions of crime affect outdoor recreation and physical activity among Mexican-American youth of different ages and how Mexican-American youth negotiate constraints related to fear of crime. Theories of environmental stress and human territorial functioning theory are used to frame the findings of the study. In-depth interviews were conducted with 25 Mexican-American adolescents ages 11–18 residing in Chicago, Illinois. The findings show that crime prevents youth from visiting parks or places that require crossing gang boundaries, and that fear restricts participation in outdoor recreation. Activities that take place in the vicinity of homes and on school property during school hours, as well as activities that are organized and supervised by adults, are considered safer than unorganized and unsupervised activities. Adolescents use negotiation strategies to foster their participation in outdoor recreation and physical activity.

Keywords adolescents, crime, Mexican-Americans, outdoor recreation, physical activity, safety

Introduction

Existing studies have shown that recreation behavior of ethnic and racial minorities is significantly constrained by their economic and social environments, which are often related to poverty and disadvantaged social status (e.g., Floyd, 1998; Floyd, Bocarro, & Thomson, 2008; Sanders-Phillips, 2000; Stodolska, Shinew, Acevedo, & Izenstark, 2011). In particular, participation in outdoor physical activity may be negatively affected, which may

Received 1 December 2011; accepted 9 July 2012.

This study has been funded by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Salud America! Program.

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lead to many negative outcomes, including high obesity rates among some minority populations (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC]). Many factors constrain physical activity and outdoor recreation among minority youth including their socio-cultural environment (e.g., lack of role modeling and support from peers and parents) and characteristics of neighborhoods in which they live (Lareau, 2002; Stodolska et al., 2011). In particular, some studies have found that high levels of crime are associated with lower physical activity among many teens. For instance, Gordon-Larsen, McMurray, and Popkin (2000) found an association between high levels of crime and the decreased likelihood of being frequently involved in vigorous physical activity among middle and high school students. Molnar, Gortmaker, Bull, and Buka (2004) argued that crime may constrain physical activity among youth because of the lack of safety while playing sports or games and because of children's exposure to crime when traveling to or from recreational activities.

Our study was designed to contribute to this literature by providing an in-depth examination of how fear of crime affects participation in outdoor recreation and physical activity among Mexican-American adolescents ages 11–14 (grades 6–8) and 15–18 (grades 9–12). Outdoor recreation and physical activity in three environments were evaluated: school yards/school grounds; parks, neighborhood streets, sidewalks, and alleys; and front/backyards. The specific objectives of this study were to: 1) examine how perceptions of crime affected outdoor recreation and physical activity among Mexican-American youth; 2) determine youth's perceptions as to which activities and locations were safer than others; and 3) identify negotiation strategies adopted by Mexican-American youth to increase their safety while participating in outdoor recreation and physical activity. We paid particular attention to possible differences in age in these three constructs. The theory of environmental stress (Sanders-Phillips, 2000) and human territorial functioning theory (Taylor, 1988) were used to frame the findings of the study. The aim of this research was to help devise strategies to increase physical activity participation and outdoor recreation among members of this group.

Theoretical Background and Relevant Literature

According to the theory of environmental stress, "chronic exposure to environmental stressors can lead to feelings of fatigue, diminished sense of control over one's daily routines, and reduced social support within residential and work settings" (King, Stokols, Talen, Brassington, & Killingsworth, 2002, p. 19). Persistent exposure to violence (both occurring in families and communities) may be one of these stressors. It decreases people's motivation to adopt and sustain health promotion behaviors, such as participation in recreation and physical activity, and may increase involvement in risk behaviors, such as the use of illegal drugs, tobacco, and alcohol consumption (King et al., 2002; Sanders-Phillips, 2000). Sanders-Phillips argued that the pervasive and random nature of violence in urban minority communities diminishes quality of life, disrupts day-to-day activities, and affects people's interpersonal, cognitive, psychological, and behavioral functioning. It may increase rates of depression and emotional withdrawal and lead to diminished interest in significant life activities.

Sanders-Phillips (2000) identified three mechanisms in her model whereby exposure to violence impacts health behaviors among residents of urban minority neighborhoods—powerlessness, anomie, and alienation. She defined *powerlessness* as a "subjective or perceived expectancy or belief that an individual cannot determine the occurrence of outcomes and is characterized by feelings that one has no effective control over one's destiny" (p. 302). She considered *anomie* to be a "broader concept that includes feelings of alienation, pessimism, distrust, and hopelessness" (p. 303). *Alienation* was defined

as “feelings of powerlessness and social isolation” that result from “rejection of cultural norms for evaluating success and rejection of societal means for achieving success” (p. 302). Sanders-Phillips claimed that powerlessness, anomie, and alienation cause feelings of psychological distress, which may be expressed as hopelessness, decreased self-efficacy, and decreased value ascribed to life and health.

The experience of distress has also been tied to people’s territorial behaviors. Human territorial functioning has been described in studies that go as far back as Jacobs (1961) and Newman (1972). As Taylor, Gottfredson, and Brower (1984) described,

Territorial functioning is an interrelated set of attitudes and behaviors concerned with a) who has access to particular delimited or bounded spaces, b) what activities are appropriate or permissible in those spaces, and c) who has control over and/or responsibility for the people, conditions, and activities in those spaces.” (p. 308)

According to Taylor (1988), human territorial functioning theory focuses on how people manage the locations they own, occupy, or use. Territorial functioning reduces stress and conflict, organizes and facilitates social life, develops better ties among group members, and allows settings to function more effectively. Taylor claimed that territorial functioning: a) is highly place specific, socially constructed, and conditioned; b) is largely linked with small, face-to-face groups (territorial functioning cannot operate unless there are some minimal personal bonds and interactions among people); 3) has an upper limit to the group sizes and spatial locations for which territorial functioning is relevant (territorial functioning may operate on the level of “corner gangs” or street blocks but not entire neighborhoods); and 4) is a product of evolutionary heritage.

According to Taylor (1988), territorial functioning may be related to crime in a number of ways. On one hand, people who use the space outside of their house often are more aware of their neighbors and outsiders. On the other hand, presence of people outdoors (i.e., the ones who are known to keep an eye on things and who are willing to intervene) increases the risk for possible street offenders. Further, markers that the territory is being cared for (e.g., signs of beautification or upkeep) signify that residents are more likely to intervene in case of crime and, thus, act as a deterrent to potential offenders. Residents who have neighbors displaying strong territorial behaviors are reassured that others would be willing to intervene and help in the event of danger, which reduces their feelings of fear in the immediate vicinity of their homes or on the block. Territorial signs are also symbols of commitment to the place and adherence to public norms of conduct. In this paper, we claim that through additional interlocked mechanisms, territorial functioning may work to reduce feelings of fear among Mexican American adolescent residents of urban communities and support their negotiation techniques that are employed to make participation in outdoor recreation and physical activity possible.

Limited research has effectively measured human territorial functioning in a manner that permits testing the effects of territorial functioning on different outcomes. Using a sample of 687 Baltimore households in 63 blocks, Taylor et al. (1984) measured territorial functioning as the extent to which residents felt responsible for what happened on the sidewalk in front of their house and in the alley behind their house, as well as the proportion of residents who could identify their neighborhood by name. Path models revealed that a sense of near home responsibility and neighborhood name identification were directly related to a reduction in violent crimes against persons and fear of crime. Similarly, Perkins, Wandersman, Rich, and Taylor (1993) studied territorial functioning in three working-class urban neighborhoods using a sample of 576 homes on 48 blocks. They found that several territorial symbols such as home crime prevention signs and stickers were actually

associated with an *increase* in serious crimes. These theories, to the best of our knowledge, however, have not been previously used in research on physical activity participation and outdoor recreation.

Experiences with crime, fear of crime, and disorder in the community have been identified as important determinants of physical activity participation among adults (e.g., Evenson, Sarmiento, Macon, Tawney, & Ammerman, 2002; Foster, Hillsdon, & Thorogood, 2004) and youth (Gordon-Larsen et al., 2000; Molnar et al., 2004; Zhu & Lee, 2008). Gates and Rohe (1987) defined fear of crime as “the affective experience associated with the perceived personal risk of victimization” (p. 427). Fear may cause people to avoid visiting certain recreational places, walking after dark, or walking alone. Some studies have documented that people who exhibit higher levels of fear walk less (e.g., Ross, 2000; Ross & Mirowski, 2001), and this relationship is particularly strong for women (Foster et al., 2004; Loukaitou-Sideris & Eck, 2007; Roman & Chalfin, 2008). Fear of crime among minority adults results in limited use of outdoor recreation areas such as parks, which may be controlled by gangs and are sites of illegal activity (Stodolska, Acevedo, & Shiness, 2009).

Fear of crime may constrain outdoor recreation and physical activity not only among adults but also among children and adolescents. Lower neighborhood safety and social disorder led to decreased physical activity among youth, even after controlling for demographics (Molnar et al., 2004). Crime can lead to lower participation in physical activity among youth by hindering children’s ability to play games, to travel to the games, and to walk to school (Zhu & Lee, 2008). High levels of serious crime in the neighborhood can also lead to decreased likelihood of middle and high school students being frequently involved in vigorous physical activity (Gordon-Larsen et al., 2000). Children living in neighborhoods with high rates of larceny, burglary, and sexual assaults were found to be more likely to stay at home, watch TV, and play video games (Brown, Pérez, Mirchandani, Hoelscher, & Kelder, 2008).

Decreased levels of physical activity and outdoor recreation and increased levels of home-based passive activities have been attributed to youths’ feelings of fear as well as to their parents’ protective behaviors. For instance, adults living in neighborhoods with signs of high physical disorder (e.g., the presence of litter and graffiti) have been found to be significantly less likely to encourage children’s use of local playgrounds than adults living in neighborhoods with low or moderate disorder (Miles, 2008). Similarly, children who lived in neighborhoods that were perceived by their mothers as unsafe watched more TV than children whose mothers perceived their neighborhoods as safe (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005).

Although studies exist that show associations between high levels of disorder and fear of crime and participation in physical activity and outdoor recreation, the mechanisms behind this association have not been explored. Researchers have not examined which recreation locations and activities are perceived by youth as more dangerous than others, and what children do to increase their safety while participating in leisure. Our study is designed to contribute to this literature by examining how fear of crime affects physical activity participation and outdoor recreation among Mexican American adolescent residents of urban communities.

Methods

Methodological Approach

A qualitative interpretive approach was used in this study. Data were collected between May and November 2010 in two middle schools and two high schools in South Lawndale

(Little Village), Chicago, Illinois. Little Village is the largest Mexican neighborhood in the city of Chicago and serves as a gateway for Mexican-American migrants for much of the midwestern United States. In 2010, 79,228 people lived in Little Village, 83% of whom were Latino (U.S. Census, 2010). For a number of years, Little Village and the neighboring communities have struggled with the effects of crime. For instance, between January and October 2011, the Chicago Police Department recorded 1,237 violent crimes in District 10 (roughly corresponding to the South and North Lawndale neighborhoods) (Chicago Police Department, 2010). Most of these crimes have been attributed to gang violence and have taken place in the vicinity of schools and in public areas of the neighborhood such as streets and parks.

Four schools were included in this research study, and all were more than 96% Latino. More than 96% of students from all four schools were considered low income, and about half of middle school students were classified as Limited English Learners. English proficiency of high school students appeared to be much higher with only 7–12% of students classified as Limited English Learners. The study consisted of two phases. First, Latino adolescents ages 11–14 (grades 6–8) and 15–18 (grades 9–12) completed surveys aimed at addressing the research questions. When collecting the surveys, respondents were asked if they would like to participate in the second data collection phase (interviews). From the list of interested students, 25 adolescents were selected based on their gender and age. In the selection process, we wanted to ensure that a roughly equal number of boys and girls from each grade level were represented. Moreover, only students who had agreed to participate in the interviews and whose parents consented to the interview process were invited to participate. Only data from the interviews are included in this paper.

The Interview Process

Before students took part in the study, the researchers obtained active consent from their parents. In collaboration with the school administrators, all middle school and high school students in grades 6–12 were given parent consent forms to take home. A second attempt to reach parents was made during parent report card pick up day at all four schools. On these days, Spanish-speaking college students intercepted parents either before or after meeting with their child's teachers, explained the purpose of the study, and asked them to sign a consent form. As a result of both attempts, more than 90% of parents of all students in the targeted grades agreed for their child/children to participate in the study.

Prior to each interview, the purpose of the interview phase was explained to the students, they were given assent forms to sign, and their names were checked against the list of students whose parents consented to their participation. It was explained to the children that in the interview they would be asked questions about their participation in physical activity and outdoor recreation. Physical activity was defined as "any activity that increases your heart rate and makes you get out of breath some of the time. Physical activity can be done in sports, being active with friends, or walking to school. Examples of physical activity are running, walking fast, rollerblading, biking, dancing, skateboarding, swimming, soccer, basketball, and football." Outdoor recreation was defined as "any leisure activity that you participate in outside of home, school or recreation center. It can be done in the park, street, or any other outdoor setting." Children freely chose whether to be interviewed in English or in Spanish. All were fluent English speakers and chose to be interviewed in English. The interviews lasted between 20 and 35 minutes and were conducted on school grounds in quiet locations (e.g., empty classrooms, auditorium, and common areas of the school while the classes were in session). Interviews were conducted by the authors of the study and were tape recorded with the students' permission and later

transcribed verbatim. Students were given a \$30 Target gift card for participating in the interview.

The findings of the survey were analyzed after the interviews had taken place and, thus, did not inform the development of interview questions. The interview questions were designed based on the previous research conducted by the authors (Stodolska et al., 2009) and informed by the theoretical frameworks employed in the study. The interviewees were asked about the crime levels in their neighborhood and how crime affected their recreation participation. Of particular interest was how students reacted to violence and whether it led to feelings of powerlessness, anomie, and alienation and was related to abandoning participation in physical activity (as the environmental stress theory would suggest) or engaging in active negotiation of constraints. If the active negotiation did occur, was it related in any way to the youth adopting territorial behaviors? Some of the interview questions included: "Tell me how your life is affected by crime in this neighborhood?" "What do you do to feel safer? Do you do anything special to have fun and play sports while making sure you are safe?" "Are there any places in this neighborhood where you hang out and feel completely safe? Are there any places in your neighborhood that you try to avoid?" "Do you know which gangs control your part of the neighborhood? How about where the school and the park are located? High school students were additionally asked whether there were any differences based on age in how fear of crime affected their outdoor recreation. They were also asked "How do you feel about what is going on in the community? Do you think anything can be done to make recreation areas in your community safe and, if so, what is it?" and "What do you think can be done to make Latino teenagers and kids participate in more physical activity?"

The Participants

Of the 13 middle school students who participated in the study (seven male and six female), four were from sixth grade, five from seventh grade, and four from eighth grade. Twelve high school students (seven male and five female) included three freshmen, one sophomore, two juniors, and six seniors. However, the age of each grade level varied among students from two high schools. One of the schools had a three-year graduation program where students attend classes from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, with shorter vacation days during the summer. Except for one student who was born in Mexico, all students were second-generation immigrants from Mexico. Students were not asked about the socio-economic status of their families. All students were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Analysis of the interview data was performed by employing the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Analysis began after the first interview had been completed and lasted for the duration of the study. First, interview transcripts were read by all researchers to develop a broad understanding of the topic. The main categories were developed by grouping the data or, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) described it, by "bringing together into temporary categories those data bits that apparently relate to the same content" (p. 347). Identified categories were color coded and major themes were isolated. For example, in the first phase, main themes such as "experiences of children with crime" and "the effect of crime on outdoor recreation and physical activity of children" were identified. Subsequently, each transcript was re-read by all researchers to identify subthemes and to ascertain that they accurately represented the information gathered during the interviews. In that phase, subthemes such as "differences in the experience of crime among children

of different ages” were isolated. As the research process progressed, the initially identified subthemes were revised and other subthemes were added to the findings. New observations, emerging themes, and issues were explored in subsequent coding. After the completion of all interviews, the transcripts were re-read and relevant information that confirmed and contradicted emergent themes was identified. To obtain information useful in assessing reliability of the data, researchers conducted general informal conversations with school personnel (e.g., counselors, school principals, teachers) and individuals actively involved in the local Latino ethnic community. These conversations helped to provide additional information on what is being done to increase safety in the community in general and for outdoor recreation areas in particular. Moreover, they elucidated more information on the existing collaborations between schools, park district, and the police to decrease the effects of crime on local youth. This information was subsequently used by the research team to design recommendations for reducing the effects of crime on outdoor recreation and physical activity among youth in this area.

Findings

The findings were divided into three main sections corresponding to the objectives of the study. First, we discuss how fear of crime affected outdoor recreation and physical activity among Mexican-American youth. Second, we explore their perceptions of which leisure activities and locations were safer than others. Third, we examine negotiation strategies adopted by Mexican-American youth to foster their participation in outdoor recreation and physical activity.

Effect of Perceptions of Crime on Outdoor Recreation and Physical Activity Among Mexican-American Youth

The majority of interviewed adolescents said that crime was a serious problem in their community and recalled instances of being exposed to or having witnessed crime. They had been shot at, beaten, and had their property stolen. They had witnessed people being assaulted and killed, gang shootings, fights, carjackings, drug use, and gang activity in the area. Their family members and friends had also been victims of violent crime. One of the female middle school student’s father was killed by a gang-related drive-by shooting. When asked why he was killed, Angelica replied, “Ah, it was random. It was a drive-by-shooting. He went to pick up my mom from work. He was waiting for her outside and there was a drive-by-shooting and they got him.” High school youth recounted being shot at while playing soccer in front of their school and being beaten by gang members while walking to school. A 15-year-old high school student, Christian, recalled a shooting that happened when he was playing soccer outside his school:

When I was playing soccer all of a sudden they started shooting. I actually know these two gang members. They were just standing there smoking and they suddenly popped out their guns and just started shooting everywhere and gladly I’m behind this brick concrete where I’m just staying down. One of my friends got shot in the leg and those other two gang members were dead by the end of the day.

Antonio, a high school student, commented on the dangers related to gang boundaries in the neighborhood.

Where I live it's like a border line [boundary between rival gangs]. I've seen guys get shot, I've seen gangs yell, I've seen cops push them. One day I was about to fall asleep and my window was open, it was in the summer and this gang bangers were fighting and I heard gun shots and this guy was just screaming, "Oh help, I got shot, I got shot" and then I saw the lights of the ambulance.

Fear of crime prevented youth from visiting parks and locations that would make them cross gang boundaries (e.g., parks, pools, clubs) and restricted their participation in activities that took place after dark (e.g., sport practice and after school activities). Moreover, the need to be vigilant all the time diminished the fun they had while participating in leisure. For instance, Christian, commented, "It [crime] affects my life with not being able to go out as much as I can or want to. It's harder to go to a friend's house without worrying if I'm going to get shot or not." Antonio could not play sports this year on a school team because practice was in the evening and it would require him to cross the gang boundary. He commented,

Sometimes, yeah, it does affect me. Like this year I didn't do any sports because it was at night and I would have to come to school at 6 to practice and I would leave school at 8. And I mean, I would have to walk back home at the night time, so I was like . . . "No. I am not going to do it."

Fear of crime seemed to constrain outdoor recreation and physical activity among older youth more than younger children. Older youth were more aware of the extent of the crime problem in the community and were more likely to be victims of serious crime. Although younger (10–12 years old) children were more likely to be recruited to gangs, older teens believed they were more likely to be victims of serious crime because they posed a threat to gang members. Gangs, on the other hand, did not treat younger children "seriously." Several high school interviewees also remarked that in high school "the stakes were higher." They needed to focus on school, on getting to college and were concerned that any involvement in crime might seriously jeopardize their chances for the future. For instance, Sylvia, a high school student, noted, "Because I'm at a stage where I'm about to go to college. So what if something happens to me and then I won't be able to reach my goal of going to college?" Similarly, Laura added, "High school is very important. It's college. I don't need any distractions." However, it needs to be noted that although high school teens admitted being more afraid of crime now than when they were younger, youth from *both* age groups displayed strong concerns about neighborhood safety.

Older male teenagers were primarily concerned about random crime (e.g., drive-by-shootings), while fear of sexual assault was prevalent among high school girls. For instance, Sylvia commented, "Cuz I mean guys only want one thing, which is sex. So they will just go up to girls and just rape them." Lupe, another female high school student, mentioned that girls were less likely to defend themselves than boys and, as a result, "There's some little girls in middle school sometimes like 13, 14 years old, they had their babies already 'cuz some people rape them or something."

Leisure Activities and Locations that Youth Perceived to be Safer

When evaluating whether activities were safe, youth considered where and when they took place, whether they were supervised or not, the ease with which they could be relocated, the equipment that was used, and people with whom they participated. The consensus among the students was that homes, immediate areas around homes, relative's homes, and schools

were the safest places in the community. Jose, a middle school student, explained that he felt safe close to home “Because I have our phone just in case we are attacked, I can run into my house and get the phone and call someone to tell.” Asked why she felt safe at school, Lilia replied, “Because there are a lot of adults around and they take care of things.” Two other middle school boys (Pedro and Jose) added, “Because they have cameras, and they are always watching over us” and “because usually cops come passing by and security from the school are usually outside.” Older teens also listed local recreation centers such as Boys & Girls Club as the safest places in the community. Antonio, a high school student, described the importance of Boys & Girls Club and commented why he thought it was a safe location: “Because it’s a building. I’ve been going there since I was little. I know the staff. Sometimes the police officer stops there.”

School grounds were considered safe during the day, but not after school hours. In particular, children talked about gang members being present outside of the school and people doing drugs. High school students also considered schools unsafe after school hours if they were located near the gang boundary or if they required youth to cross gang boundary to get to school. Antonio drew a map in the air indicating where he lived in relation to his school. “My house is right here and the school is right there, so I have to cross the borderline. I won’t go at night on that street.” Streets, alleys, and parks were also considered unsafe. Alleys were particularly dangerous “Because there’s no one watching, so if you get attacked no one is going to know” (Jose, middle school). Maria, a middle school student, recalled how her mom encouraged her to go to parks, “. . . but I say ‘no’ because I am afraid. Because over there, there’s shooting. Last time, when I went there, I heard some shootings so I don’t feel safe. Because I always see them [gang members]. I feel so scared.” Pedro, also a middle school student, when asked what was the worst thing that could happen to him in the park, replied, “Getting killed.” Christian, a high school student described his neighborhood park in these words: “Our park is Douglass Park, so in there it isn’t so safe because it’s just entirely made up of gangs. It’s hard to play without them trying to do something.” Several adolescents commented that they would only visit parks in the morning when there were many people there. Others would go to parks only if accompanied by their parents or other family members.

Middle school children considered games that could be played close to home and easily moved to safer locations (e.g., tag) as safer than those that were more difficult to relocate. For instance, Lilia from middle school commented, “The tag one [is safe] because you can always move it to somewhere else. Softball is kind of hard because we can only play in that space we can’t play in a yard.” Swimming was considered unsafe, as pools were located often far away from the child’s home and forced children to cross gang boundaries. Jose, a middle school student, considered soccer to be the safest sport because he played with his uncles or cousins.

Older youth from high school believed that indoor activities, the ones that were supervised (e.g., by coaches, parents, teachers, or security guards), and the ones that were played during the day were safer. Many teens were concerned about playing outdoor sports as on occasion local gang members wanted to join their games. For instance, Sebastian, a high school student, considered playing football unsafe because

[You play it] outside and sometimes, gang bangers, they want to come join, but we don’t let them play because it is our game. But then, you know, they want to try to take over the park so then we just end up going home. We don’t play no more.

When asked about the safety of activities, Sebastian made a distinction among sports based on the equipment used by the players. He considered soccer as the safest sport and baseball as most dangerous because “there is bats that you, that guys could come

and take. You could use them to hit people.” Christian and several other high school interviewees also made a distinction based on whether sports were organized and supervised by adults. Team sports were considered safe “because they have a coach, and they make sure you go to the game and they make sure that they drop you off at your house.”

Negotiation Strategies Employed by Mexican-American Youth

The findings of this study showed little evidence of youth developing feelings of powerlessness, anomie, and alienation (Sanders-Phillips, 2000) as a result of experiences with crime in the community. Only one of the interviewed adolescents admitted that he did not participate in any outdoor leisure activities because of his concerns for safety. A few others, however, commented that crime was a part of their community and that they just “got used to” living in a dangerous neighborhood. As Susan, a high school student, described: “It [violence] is pretty normal. Mainly because of the gangs and everything. So you always hear sirens every now and then, but people are used to it around here.” Only two out of 25 interviewed adolescents admitted that fear of crime made them stay at home and engage in primarily passive activities such as watching TV and playing games on their computers. Thus, there was little evidence that fear of crime made youth completely abandon participation in health promoting behaviors.

To the contrary, interviewed adolescents seemed to actively engage in negotiating fear of crime and maintained some level of participation in physically active, outdoor pursuits. Both younger and older adolescents preferred to stay in groups, were vigilant at all times, and aware of their surroundings. For instance, Claudia, a middle school student, commented:

Usually, if I see a big group of gangsters I would stand next to my house or go inside a fence so they don’t bother me. Or like there’s a big group of people who are having a cookout I would stand next to them, so they wouldn’t bother me either. It’s one of my techniques to get away from them.

Angelica, another middle school student, talked about “watching out” for gang members while playing: “Well, I watch out what type of people are coming close to where you’re playing. So if you see two rival gangs getting pretty close to where you’re playing then you leave before anything starts.” Christian, a high school student, also made sure to be aware of his surroundings and usually walked with a group of people to increase safety: “I’m just very aware of my surroundings to make sure that nothing is happening. If I’m not aware and I hear gun shots then I know I have to go home.” Carlos and his friends also checked the location first before participating in an activity: “We actually go first to check if anybody is outside and, if not, then we just go outside and start playing soccer. And if we see a couple of gang bangers come out we just go back inside.”

Both younger and older youth played games and participated in sports during the day but not in the evening or at night. Josue from the middle school said, “Because at night you can’t see. Gang bangers are out. They post it up, they’re smoking marijuana.” Both younger and older interviewees were also keenly aware of the spatial divisions in the community and tried to avoid crossing gang territories or being close to borderlines between two rivaling gangs. Lilia, a middle school student commented, “Sometimes they [gangs] mark their streets so we try to avoid them at all costs. We’ll see the tagging in the wall and we’ll know whose street is this.” Josue from middle school talked about staying on his side of the “hood.” “I don’t like going pass two blocks over here because I wasn’t born over there;

I wasn't raised over there so I stay over here. Because I was born in the hood. I stay in one area." Similarly, Susan, a high school student observed:

Because you can't go past certain places and there are just places that you want to go but you just can't. Like you don't feel safe. So you just stick to your own neighborhood, the things you know, [where] you feel safe, your comfort zone.

Josue talked about dressing in a way that did not signify gang membership: "I just dress normally, no colors, nothing like that. I don't dress flashy colors. I dress black and white usually." Some youth also said that they prayed and that belief in God was helping them cope with their fear of crime. For example, Laura, a high school student, commented, "You can try to do many strategies to keep from getting hurt but I don't think it's really going to work. I just . . . not to sound too religious, but I have faith in God that He will protect me."

Discussion and Conclusions

The objectives of this study were to examine the effects of the perceptions of crime on outdoor recreation and physical activity among Mexican-American youth, to determine which activities and locations they believed were safer and to identify negotiation strategies adopted to increase safety while participating in outdoor recreation and physical activity. While research on the effects of crime on physical activity among children is beginning to appear (e.g., Gordon-Larsen et al., 2000; Molnar et al., 2004), to the best of our knowledge, no studies in the fields of leisure studies or criminal justice have explored the differences in fear experienced by boys and girls of various ages who participate in recreation, the ways in which crime affects recreation participation, or the activities and locations that are more likely to be associated with crime. Thus, the findings of the study provide findings that can help researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to understand how youth's perceptions of crime affect their recreation behavior.

Our findings showed that although adolescents from all age groups were affected by the fear of crime, fear was particularly pronounced among older teens (14–18 years old). Moreover, while boys were particularly concerned about being physically attacked, sexual assault was generating the most fear among the girls. Fear of sexual assault and unwanted pregnancy as factors constraining physical activity and outdoor recreation have been documented in previous studies on adult women (Coble, Selin, & Erikson, 2003; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993; Mehta & Bondi, 1999; Valentine, 1989). Such fears might be exacerbated among Mexican-American girls who face strong cultural pressures to refrain from sexual activity until marriage and who are expected to move upwards in the socio-economic ladder. In particular, many of the interviewed girls commented that their parents strongly encouraged them to "do better in life" and about the sacrifices made by their immigrant families so that they could be successful. Mexican-American female interviewees were fully aware of the expectations placed on them and feared that unwanted pregnancy could stand in a way of them going to college and fulfilling theirs and their families' dreams.

The findings of the study showed that activities that took place in the vicinity of homes and on school property during school hours, as well as the ones that were organized and supervised by adults, were considered safer than unorganized and unsupervised activities. Similar results were obtained by Mahoney and Stattin (2000) who showed that highly structured activities (e.g., competitive sports, school and community sponsored athletics) that are overseen by adults, coaches and/or supervisors were associated with lower delinquency rates than unstructured activities. Such activities were considered by our interviewees as

safe because adult supervision and indoor locations offered protection from the violence on neighborhood streets. The preference of youth to participate in indoor activities is troublesome considering the well-known benefits of spending time outdoors (Bedimorung, Mowen, & Cohen, 2005; Hua, Payne, Orsega-Smith, & Godbey, 2003).

The theory of environmental stress (Sanders-Phillips, 2000) and human territorial functioning theory (Taylor, 1988) were employed to help frame some of the findings of the study. Overall, as predicted by the theory of environmental stress (Sanders-Phillips, 2000), chronic exposure to crime in the neighborhood decreased but did not eliminate youth's health-promoting behaviors. However, and interestingly, while some of the adolescents commented that crime was a part of the community and that many residents were used to crime, none of the interviewed teens seemed to exhibit feelings of alienation, pessimism, distrust, and hopelessness (components of anomie). Moreover, they did not reject the cultural norms of society for evaluating success (components of alienation). To the contrary, belief in and desire for socio-economic mobility were quite common in the narratives. Although none of the teens commented that they could change the status-quo in the community, the active negotiation techniques that they had adopted seemed to signify that feelings of powerlessness were *not* typical to the interviewed group.

Teen's involvement in outdoor recreation and physical activity was apparently diminished by their fear of crime because concerns for safety affected how long they could stay outdoors (only during daylight), places and facilities they could use for physical activity, and activities (both individual and group) they selected for participation. These restrictions, however, were more structural in nature and did not seem to be related to the cognitive effects of violence. Three reasons can be identified for the apparent dissonance between the findings of the study and some of the propositions of Sanders-Phillips (2000). First, the age of the participants might have played a role, as many of the adult Latino members of the same community previously studied by Stodolska et al. (2009, 2011) exhibited strong traits of anomie, alienation, and powerlessness, as proposed by Sanders-Phillips. Second, selection bias might have affected the results of the study, as perhaps only more socio-economically mobile teens with more positive outlooks on their future volunteered to participate in the research project. Perhaps adolescents who exhibited stronger traits of anomie, alienation, and powerlessness were not represented in the group of interviewed teens. Lastly, no in-depth psychological assessment of youth was conducted in the study, and our suggestions are based on the comments made by teens as they relate to their outdoor recreation and physical activity.

The interviewed teens adopted an array of negotiation strategies to protect themselves from crime such as being vigilant, staying home after dark, participating with others for protection, and planning activities in advance. Many of these strategies were similar to those identified in studies on adults (e.g., Coble et al., 2003; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993; Mehta & Bondi, 1999; Stodolska et al., 2009; Whyte & Shaw, 1994). However, our young interviewees also reported some unique approaches. They relied on both cognitive and behavioral strategies (Jackson & Rucks, 1995), praying for protection and trying to avoid dangers posed by gangs. Some of those behavioral strategies were designed to avoid encounters with and assaults by gang members and included dressing in neutral-colored clothing (i.e., those that did not signify gang affiliation), avoiding areas frequented by gangs (including parks), and staying within areas of the community controlled by the local gang.

The findings of our study have helped to identify additional mechanisms through which territorial functioning (Taylor, 1988) may be related to crime. The evidence of strong territorial functioning of youth as a result of fear of crime was visible in the narratives of the interviewed teens and could be found at both spatial and social levels. First, the adolescents knew which gang controlled their part of the neighborhood and were acutely aware that

venturing into another side of the community controlled by a rival gang posed danger to their safety. This knowledge restricted the number of leisure activities they could participate in as well as locations and facilities they could use for recreation and physical activity. For instance, almost every interviewee commented on an activity or a location (such as a pool in a park in a distant part of the neighborhood or a Boys & Girls Club) he/she would not visit because it was located in the “wrong” part of the community. Power relations vis-à-vis gangs that controlled a broader territory were visible, as children were not in the position to openly challenge their ownership of space. However, youth found refuge in the safety of their own territories—homes, backyards, areas immediately adjacent to homes, schools, or Boys & Girls Clubs. These locations were considered safe because they offered protection afforded by the control exercised by *others* (e.g., parents, school personnel, police). Consistent with Taylor (1988), territorial functioning of youth also manifested itself in youth ceding a territory altogether (e.g., not using a park after dark due to gang activity). The social networks of youth worked to increase their safety by recreating in the company of trusted others (e.g., small peer group, siblings, parents) and excluding others deemed as a threat (e.g., local gang members) from their leisure activities such as soccer or baseball games.

The recommendations for practice stemming from this study can be numerous. First, we recommend that working to address the gang problem in Latino communities and providing safe environments in which children can play and participate in outdoor recreation should be a top priority. While mindful of decreasing public budgets and competing priorities, increasing police presence in outdoor recreation environments such as parks and school grounds, especially in the evening hours, and working with local community organizations to tackle the gang problem could be the first and the most obvious steps in an effort to combat the crime problem. These efforts are occurring since local law enforcements are aware of the detrimental effects of crime on the quality of life of local residents and mindful of the negative image constant reports of crime bring to the city’s public administration.

What the findings of the study highlight is that providing more supervised indoor activities during daylight hours in locations considered safe such as schools and Boys & Girls Clubs, as well as providing safe transportation to and from activities, may decrease fears among children and, thus, foster physical activity involvement among the local youth. Other approaches may be undertaken to decrease feelings of fear among children. For instance, visible police presence in areas of the community where children recreate; better lighting on streets, alleys, parks, playgrounds, and school grounds; and more security cameras can make children feel safer while spending time outdoors. Moreover, even informal supervision from one of the parents (i.e., more “eyes on the street” [Taylor, 1998]) can lead to decreasing feelings of fear among youth. While we do not advocate underreporting of crime that occurs in the community, the role of the media in perpetuating sensational reports and thus contributing to feelings of fear also needs to be considered. Lastly, the need to recognize the geography of crime and territorial behaviors of residents of communities with high levels of crime is an important recommendation for practice that stem from this study.

This study offered interesting results, but also had some important limitations. It provided a qualitative examination of only one community in Chicago and focused on youth from one ethnic group. Thus, more research is needed to better understand how crime affects recreation behavior and physical activity of youth from different minority populations, residing in different areas across the United States, as well as in urban and rural locations. Longitudinal studies that would help to uncover individual-, family-, and community-level factors that shield youth from crime and contribute to their positive

health outcomes are also necessary. Lastly, we believe that increased collaborations among researchers in the fields of leisure studies, criminology, public health, and geography are needed if we want to understand and address the growing problem of crime in racially and ethnically diverse communities and its detrimental effects on children's health and well-being.

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