Factors That Impact Physical Activity Participation in African-American College Women: A Qualitative Study

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research has reported numerous barriers for African-American (AA) women when it comes to physical activity engagement. These barriers include lack of access/resources, cultural factors, hair maintenance and safety concerns (Eyler et al, 1998; Harley et al, 2009; Eyler et al, 2002; Wilbur et al, 2002). While the above mentioned discuss AA women as a whole, these barriers and other unknown factors have yet to be explored extensively with AA collegiate women. Given the facts on the prevalence of obesity in AA women and collegiate students, it is imperative to use the college setting to explore the factors influencing or impeding physical activity (PA) for this population. There is a deficiency in the amount of published literature specifically related to perceptions of PA and PA engagement in AA collegiate women. Eyler et al. (2002) recommended that, to better understand the cultural factors that may be antecedents or inhibit PA in certain ethnic groups, there must be proper representation in future studies. This study seeks provide valuable insight on a sample of AA female collegiate students and their attitudes, normative beliefs and perceptions of ability to be physically active. This will be done through the Black Feminist Thought (BFT) perspective and will be based on the three constructs (attitude, normative beliefs, perceived behavioral control) of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and environment factors.

Method

A total of 31 AA collegiate women were interviewed during ten separate qualitative focus groups. Participants were selected based on their demographic information and current physical activity level reported during a separate data collection phase. Recorded focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim and used for data analysis. Data analysis used open and closed coding techniques. Closed coding addressed the following topics: general PA behaviors, environmental factors that influence PA behavior, and cultural/gender influence on their perception of body image and PA.

Results

Using the (BFT) and the constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior the follow data emerged based on the focus groups shared experiences. Attitude towards physical activity were based on the value of PA, health outcomes and body appearance. Normative beliefs were based on the influence of important people in participants lives and media influence and barriers were related to time, lack of resources and hair. The campus environment proved to be an important factor in PA engagement for this population.

Discussion

The findings that were revealed showed that this group of women carried their own values and viewpoints that ultimately impacted their decisions to be PA. The women who participated in the focus groups were from different social locations and had varying levels of PA over their lifetime. This is what enriched the data, while they were all AA women they all had their own perceptions that were influenced by other things outside of just their gender and race. This shows that future studies should consider more than intersectionality of race and gender for this population.