

The When, How, and What of Becoming Disembodied

Implications for Health Behaviors
and the Journey Back to
Ourselves

Anne E. Cox, Ph.D.
Kinesiology Program

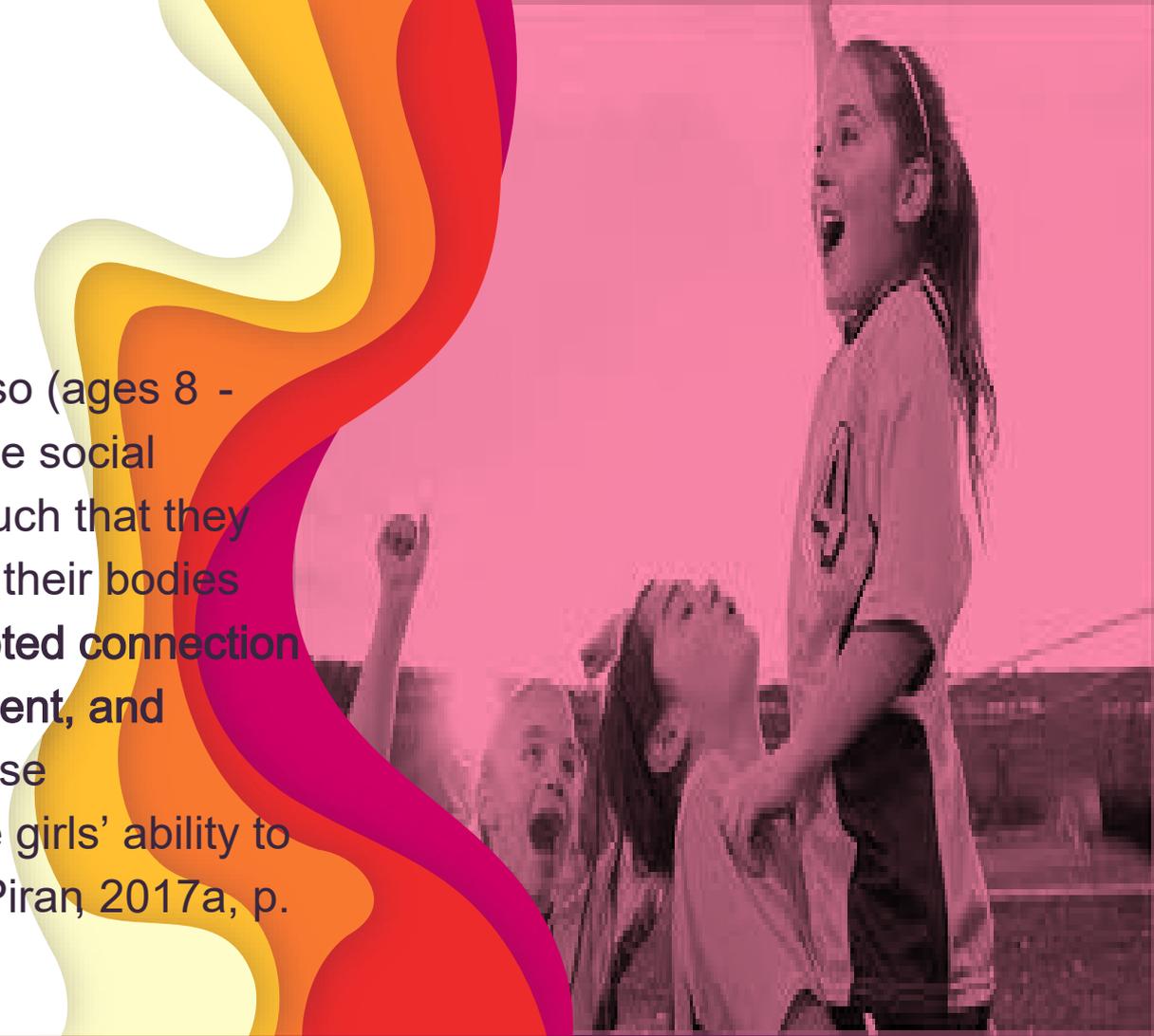


1. The When, How, and What of Becoming Disembodied



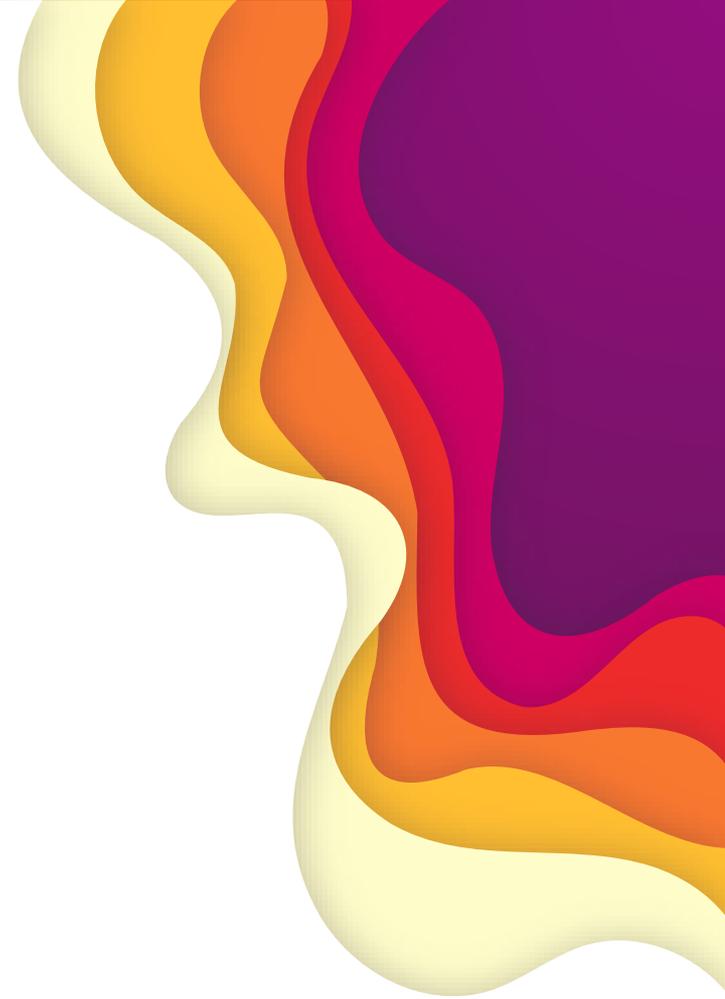
Developmental Theory of Embodiment

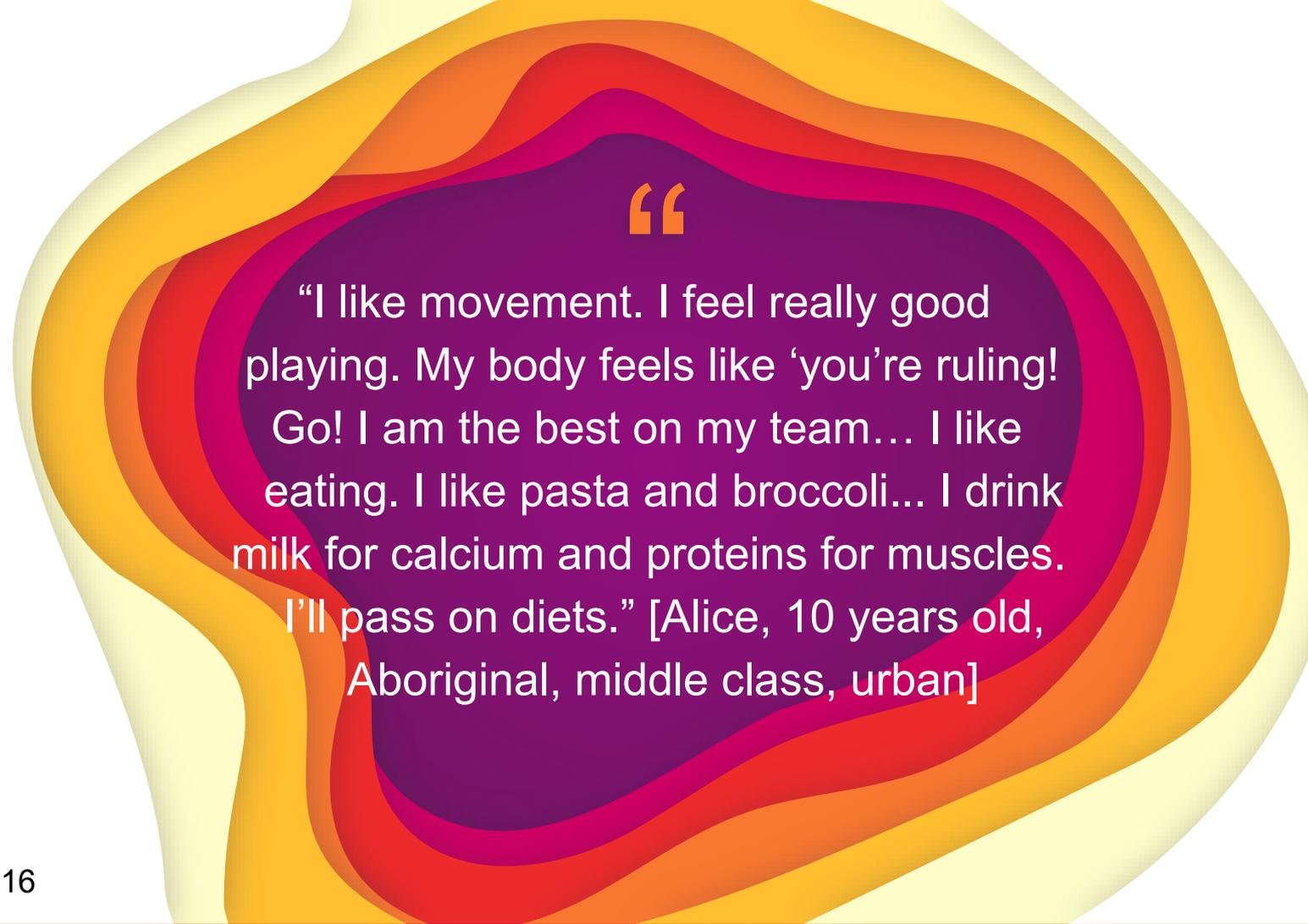
[W]ithin a period of 5 years or so (ages 8 - 13), associated with puberty, the social environment of girls changes such that they become acculturated to inhabit their bodies with **diminished agency, disrupted connection to desire, reduced self-attunement, and greater self-objectification**. These compounded losses undermine girls' ability to act in the world with power (Piran, 2017a, p. 261)



What is embodiment?

- Defined by Merleau-Ponty (1962) as the “perceptual experience of engagement of the body in the world” (Allan, 2005, p. 175)
- The “lived in” experiences of the body
- The body is a center of subjectivity and, concurrently, a site that performs and shapes culturally-informed practices (Piran, 2016)





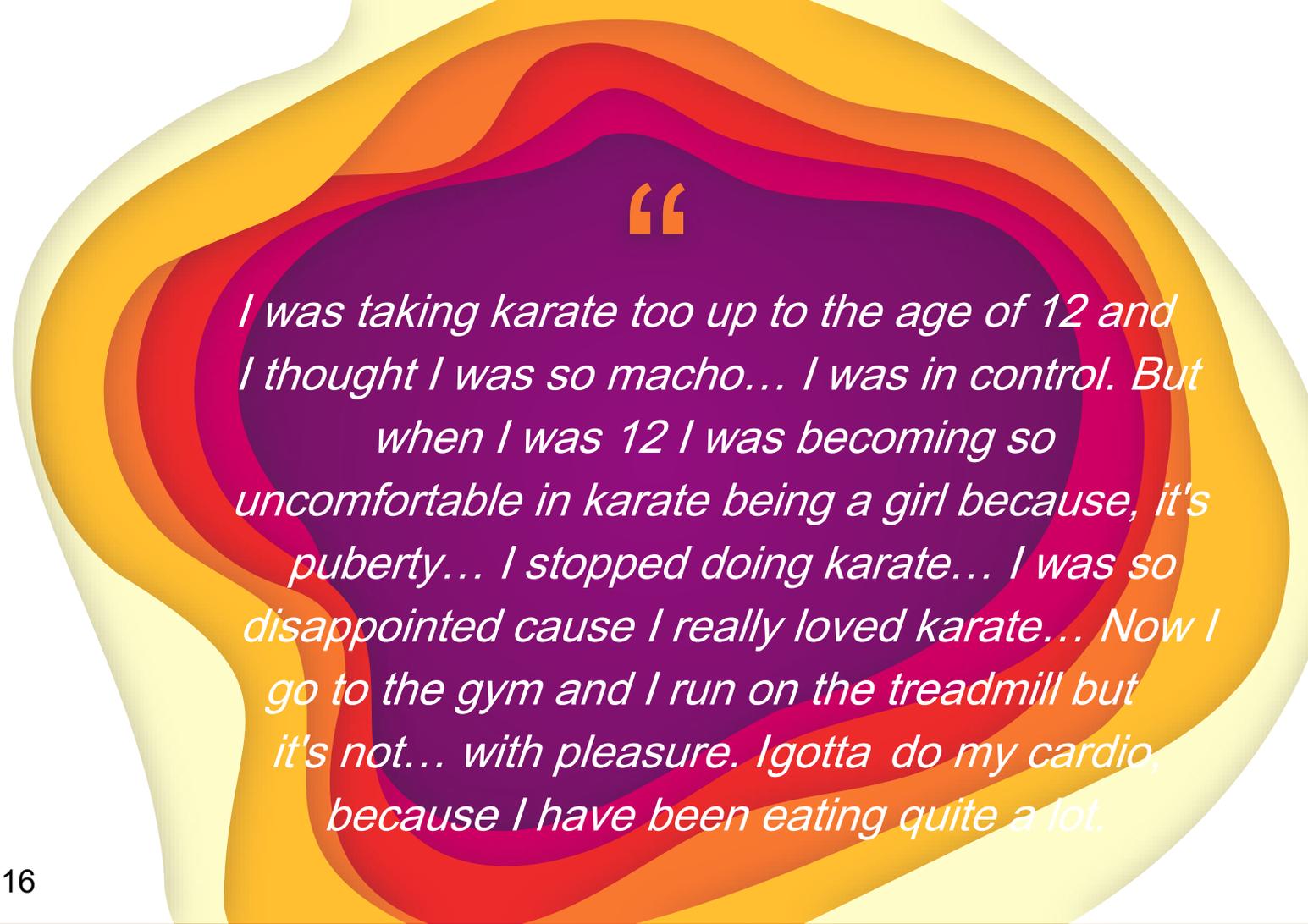
“

“I like movement. I feel really good playing. My body feels like ‘you’re ruling! Go! I am the best on my team... I like eating. I like pasta and broccoli... I drink milk for calcium and proteins for muscles. I’ll pass on diets.” [Alice, 10 years old, Aboriginal, middle class, urban]



“

I was the fastest girl in my class... playing active games and I really enjoyed that... When we turned about 12... I started hanging out more with the girls and just doing the walking, sitting, chatting and watching... I have been getting back into yoga now, which is great for body awareness. I exercise during the week, I have a pretty good cardio and I'm pretty good with weights .



“

I was taking karate too up to the age of 12 and I thought I was so macho... I was in control. But when I was 12 I was becoming so uncomfortable in karate being a girl because, it's puberty... I stopped doing karate... I was so disappointed cause I really loved karate... Now I go to the gym and I run on the treadmill but it's not... with pleasure. I gotta do my cardio, because I have been eating quite a lot.

Experiences of Embodiment as a Construct (Piran, 2016, 2017)

- Reflects the quality of embodied lives
- This construct ranges from positive embodiment, described as, “positive body connection and comfort, embodied agency and passion, and attuned self care,” to negative embodiment, defined as “disrupted body connection and discomfort, restricted agency and passion, and self neglect or harm”

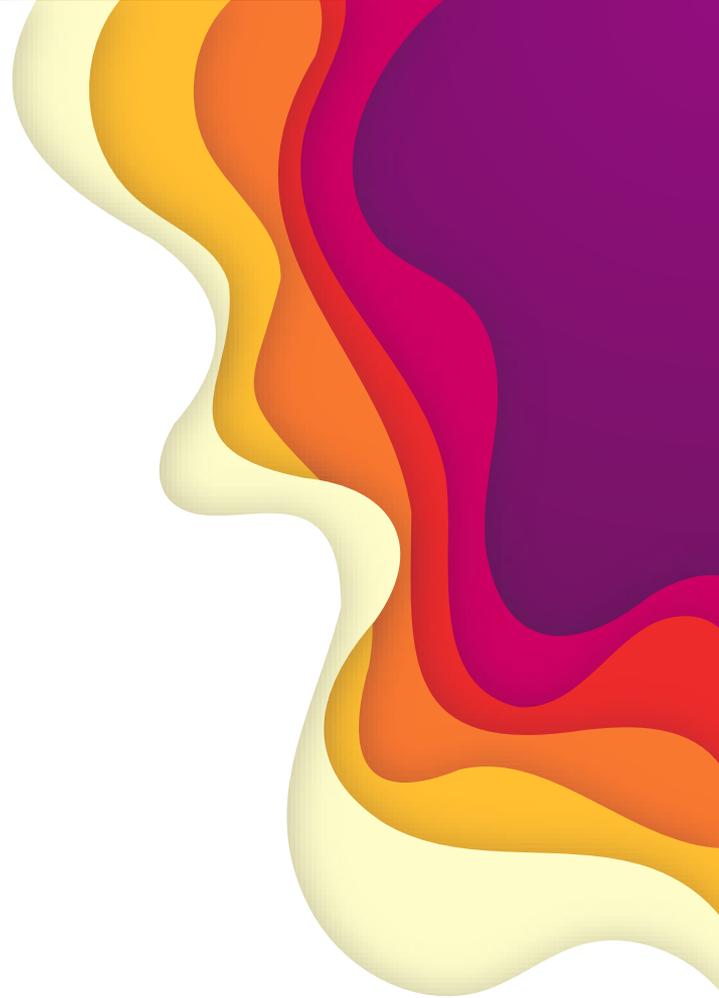


2. Implications for Health Behaviors



Consequences of negative embodiment...

- Lower awareness of bodily sensations
- Higher body surveillance
- Reduced ability respond to physical needs (e.g., nourishment, hydration, rest, relaxation)
- Disordered eating patterns
- Lower physical activity behaviors
- Extrinsic motivation for physical activity behavior



Physical Pathway to Positive Embodiment

- Engaging in immersed and joyful physical activities (nonobjectifying, non-appearance focus)
- Moving freely and taking up space





There is no 'supposed to be' in bodies. The question is not size or shape or age, or even having two of everything, for some do not. The wild issue is, does this body feel, does it have a connection to pleasure, to heart, to soul, to the wild? Does it have happiness, joy? Can it, in its own way, move, dance, jiggle, sway and thrust? Nothing else matters.

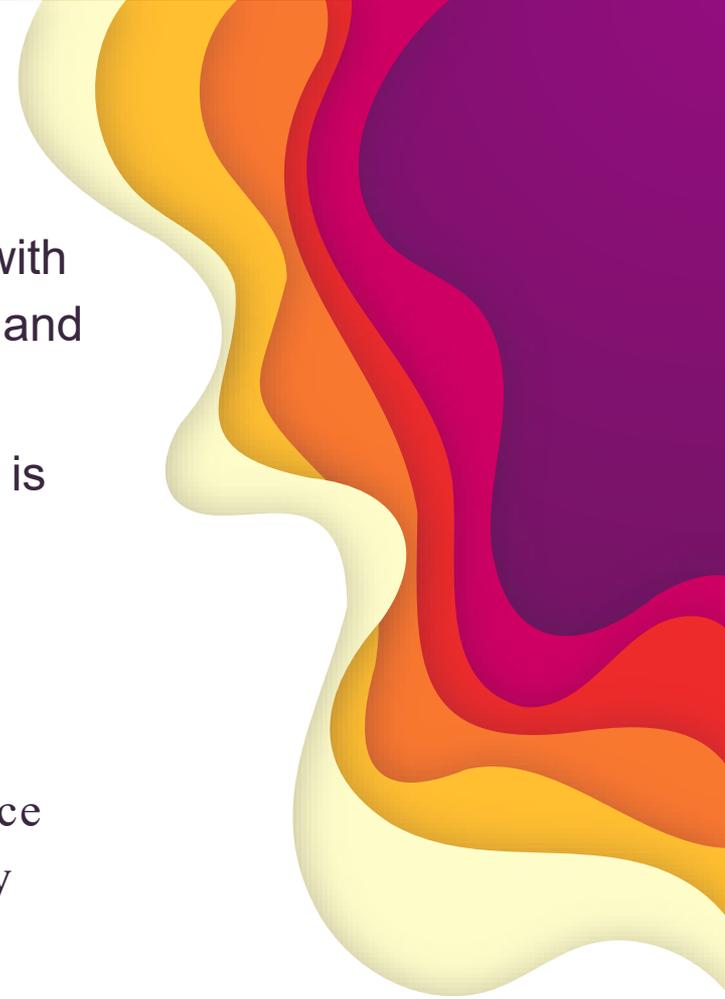
Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Ph.D.

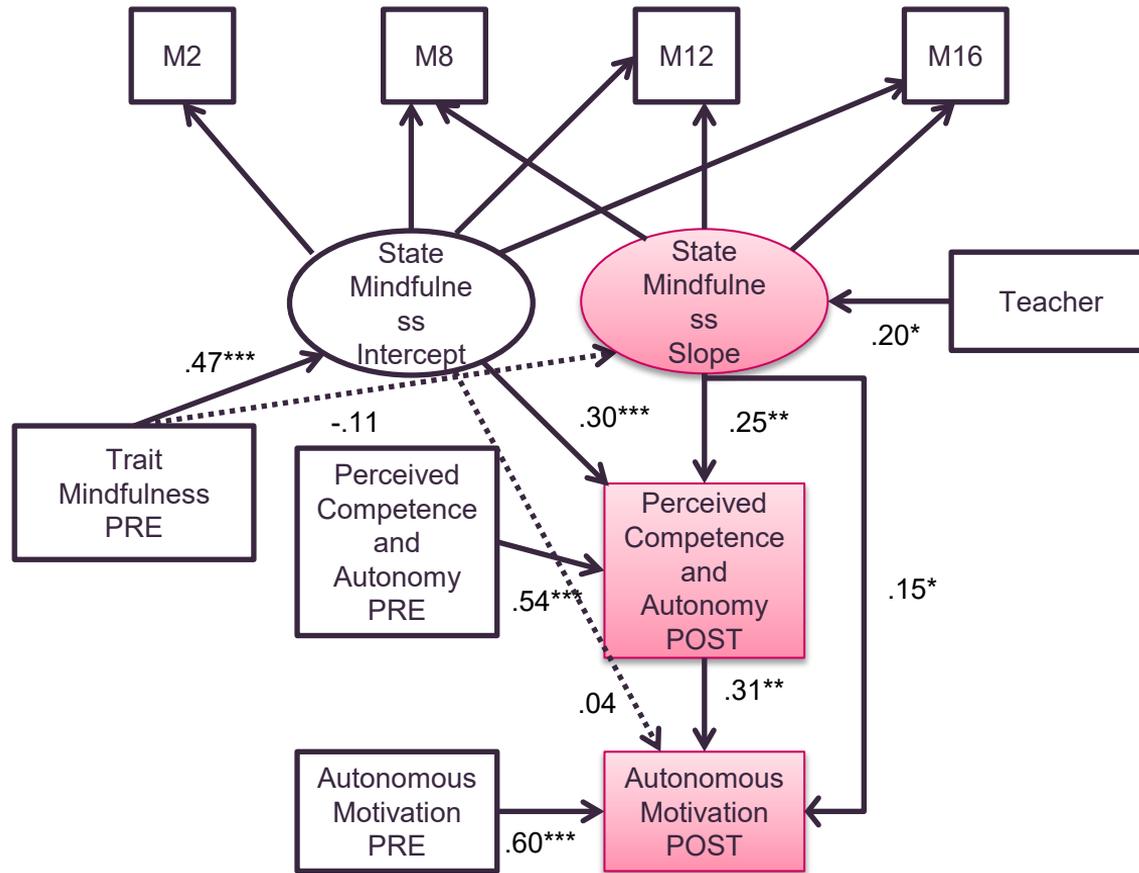
3. The journey back to ourselves



Mindfulness

- Awareness and attention to the present moment with elements of non-judgment, curiosity, acceptance and openness (e.g., Bishop et al., 2004)
- Greater state mindfulness during physical activity is associated with...
 - More positive affect (i.e., more pleasure 😊)
 - Lower body surveillance
 - Higher body appreciation
 - Greater feelings of autonomy and competence
 - Higher intrinsic motivation for physical activity





* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Model fit: DIC = 2526.382, PPP = .344.

Find What Moves You...

1. Girls practice strategies that support *body appreciation* targeting physical abilities, functioning, and appearance.

2. Girls engage in *mindfulness* practices.

3. Girls engage in physical activities in which they get to choose their level of participation in order to support bodily *autonomy* and *competence*.

4. Girls experience a sense of *community* through meaningful interactions with peers and instructors.

This program is designed to empower girls to discover, embrace, and express their true self through movement, reflection, and social connection. Throughout the program, girls will learn skills that support physical, mental, and social well-being.



Core Structural Elements

Movement

Self-
Reflection

Social
Connection

Continuing
Practice

Example lessons...

Mindfulness of the Body

- Yoga and pilates
- Cueing to internal experiences
- Noticing how poses make them feel

Self-Kindness

- Dance sequences
- Noticing how you respond when things are difficult
- Practice different ways of offering kindness to self

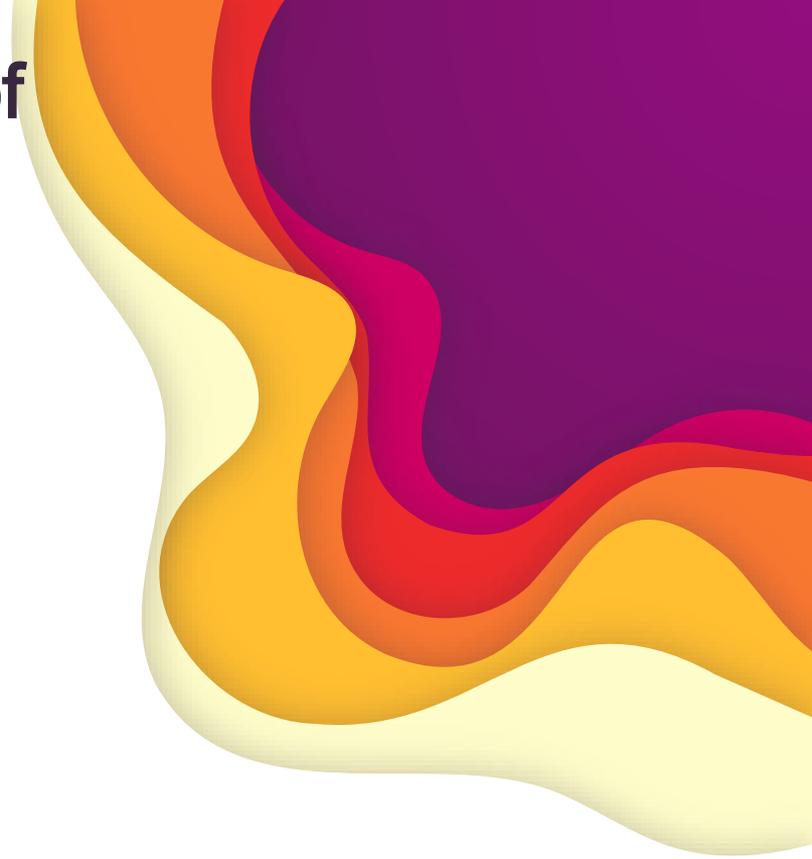
Self-Care and Responding to Internal Cues

- Practice interpreting body sensations
- Experience different types of self-care movement practices



Thank you to the Psychology of Physical Activity Lab!!

- *Sarah UllrichFrench*
- Amanda McMahon
- Susan Williams
- Corlyn Estelle
- Ashley Schumacher
- Haley Balestreri
- Emilie Ellifritz
- Diana Voros Molina
- Sam Schmidt
- Abby Ulofoshio





Let's Discuss...