



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOWARDS WELLBEING: SYMBOLISMS THAT BIND

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**ABSTRACT** – Values of fitness and social interactions may differ from people individually or collectively as a group. The meanings one may place on a given task can be valued differently through the interpretive process by which individuals apply meaning depending on the worth the individual has placed on the task. Individuals and groups taking the aerobics program as a community engagement offer us the opportunity to study how fitness programs enhance the quality of life of the participant, how participants define “being fit”, and the values the participants place on being fit. The program that was launched back in 2009 by the Dean’s Office of the College of Arts and Sciences, has surpassed the expectation of its entity and its meanings to the public. More than five years after, participants are still coming back and continuously patronizing the Saturday engagement. There are also who left and maybe found other sources of meanings elsewhere. However, newcomers took their place. This paper intends to explore the constructs of fitness to diligent participants. Specifically, it would like to determine the different meanings of knowledge towards fitness, determine the engagement of some of the participants in relation to the weekly workout, and characterize the contribution of the university towards wellness as perceived by the participants. A qualitative paradigm is followed in the study. In-depth interviews were conducted to three males and seven females who are currently involved in the program and who have been in the program since its inception. Learning the narratives from these participants can easily predict the dynamics each of them have during the weekly workout. Using the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as the approach during the in-depth interview help eliminate the tension between the participants and the researchers. Results show the meanings participants attribute to benefits gained from the social interaction encountered at the weekly program. While most of the participants might have joined the program as way to distress themselves, they have improved their fitness level and have developed a value that being fit is necessary for higher quality of life. As a result they have put a priority on being fit. The connection between the university and the community has been greatly improved through the program. It has contributed towards increased wellbeing for the academic staff and surrounding communities as well.

*Keywords: constructs, fitness, reality, symbolic interactionism, workout*

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## INTRODUCTION

Fitness may have several shades of meaning to everyone. To some it means function, to some beauty perhaps or to some fitness means both function and beauty as well. Today, more and more people have showed more interest in fitness maybe because of the so many reported diseases and death by persons whom we know and also persons we do not know. Fitness becomes a goal for everyone especially because of the symbolism it signifies. Interaction to the different symbols by the actors highlights the significance of the interpersonal communication transmitting the meanings of these symbols (Forte 2008).

Colton (1987) has previously emphasized the utility of Symbolic Interactionism (SI) to be used as the lens in looking at a social action. Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer 1969) is the process of interaction in the formation of meanings for individuals which believed that human beings are best understood in a practical, interactive relation to their environment. The participants in the aerobic workout must have joined this social engagement because of the expected result they thought they might achieve with this activity.

The program that was launched back in 2009 by the College of Arts and Sciences or CAS Dean's Office, has surpassed the expectation of its original intent and its meanings to the public. Originally, the program of the college was for its immediate constituents but its effect has spread to the nearby communities. More than five years after the program's inception, participants are still coming back and have continuously patronized the Saturday engagement. Each participant has their own symbols regarding fitness in which some of the meanings could have been enhanced depending on their interactions and expectations. Not all participants stay in the program for a variety of reasons. Some leave and find other sources of meaning elsewhere, yet newcomers take their place. The theory of self-determination (Ryan and Deci 2000) can best explain how people are motivated either to stay or to look elsewhere for better alternatives

The study was guided by these research questions: 1) What is quality of life? 2) What symbolizes fitness? 3) What keeps the participants coming? 4) How helpful is the program to the communities? 5) How is the role of the university as an agent of change being accomplished?

The paper intended to explore the constructs of fitness to diligent participants. Specifically, it would like to determine the different meanings of knowledge towards wellbeing; determine the engagement of some of the participants in relation to the weekly workout, and identify the role of the university towards wellness as perceived by the participants.

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative paradigm was followed in the study. In-depth interviews were done to three males and seven females who are currently involved in the weekly aerobic workout. Consent was asked before the scheduled interviews. In-depth interview was used to elicit the stories from individuals. To initiate their own story, six (6) guide questions were asked to all key informants. Guide questions were patterned from the research questions of the study. All interviews were tape recorded for ease in getting back to the narratives. In order to protect the identities of the informants, pseudonyms were used in the report.

These ten (10) respondents were chosen because they have been involved for years and most of them took part in the formative years of the program. SI Theory was used in the analysis of the narratives of each participant. Learning the narratives from these participants can easily predict the dynamics each of them has during the weekly workout. Thematic analysis was applied to the narratives. Interpretations of emergent themes were derived directly from interview transcripts, interviewer notes and the literature. Sometimes interpretations overlapped due to the numerous "story" the data tell.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was used as the approach during the semi-structured interview thereby helped eliminate the tension. AI has the attribute of fostering community and university partnerships as well. The consultative and collaborative elements of AI enhances the benefits of the different stakeholders in the inclusion of the communities of knowledge in the discovering, exchanging, and sharing of relevant knowledge to the greater public.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

When a person hears a rhythm, one could not stop but start tapping one's foot. And when the music persists and the beat becomes contagious, not only is there foot tapping but also head nodding to the beat, arms swinging, and so on. Every Saturday morning, the ancient but very dependable Baker Hall at University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) campus has continuously housed the weekly workout of these aerobics enthusiast for more than five years. Once you enter the hall, you could immediately feel the energy of every one swaying to the upbeat music, following the instructors on stage.

To most of the participants, this Saturday workout has become part of their weekly routine. The motivation to keep fitness as part of their psyche is very evident in the participants of the program (Abueg et al. 2014). Some of these participants have to travel 20 km to join the UPLB community aerobics program (Cardenas et al. 2014) but the distance never stop them from coming.

Requesting the key informants to be part of the study was never a problem for according to Deci and Ryan (2000), when one is highly motivated to remain fit, one becomes more accommodating.

### **The Social Constructions of Well-Being**

In the past, and in most fitness programs that we offer, we never had the baseline data set whether the participants have certain perspectives regarding health concepts. Haigh et al. (2012) proposed that an assessment should be done in order to give attention to paradigm positioning. Furthermore, the mentioned authors strongly believed that the tools to be used were governed by a direct connection between methods, methodology, epistemology, and ontology.

In the present paper, we used the qualitative texts to explore the different meanings of wellbeing concepts with our participants. Quality of life entailed several meanings because each one has different values attached to the concept. Visualization of their preferred lifestyle can affect their attitude towards the program. Therefore the more they put importance on wellbeing, the greater their drive to gain it. Wellbeing to the respondents dealt more on the positive emotion that enhanced the awareness of the community towards total human development (Lee et al., 2015). Three themes came out of the texts: comfortable life, peace of mind, and a functional individual.

**Comfortable life.** The purpose of each individual interviewed was consistent and it was to provide for their own family. Being a good provider to the family was always coming out in the narratives.

One mother said: *'Simple lang...di ako nag aim for madaming pera basta ma-meet ko needs ng family, konting luxury lang.'*

[Simple, I'm not aiming for plenty of money. I'm contented when I can meet my family's needs, just little luxury is enough.]

While a professor mentioned: “It means living the life that you really want and ah maybe that having all the things that you want but ah it's more than that, not the material things but it's more of those intangibles like happiness, good health, love, and you have your family. *Yun po 'yong sakin.*”

[That's it, for me].

“I can buy something for myself,” shared by a part-time dance instructor.

One happy grandmother, Luz said: “Masaya, masagana, walang problema..pero mahirap naman ata 'yong walang problema.”

[Happy, successful, problem-free but it's impossible maybe to have a problem-free life.].

Social roles demand that parents have to provide. We always have this expectation within us to be a provider (Zein-Elabdin 1996). Gender roles and expectations through the process of socialization depend on cultural context (Zelezny et al. 2000). It is in our culture that the father has to provide for the family just like the older siblings are expected to shell out economically for the family. The Philippine society is still the best example of an extended system. The family can be extended to grandparents, aunts and uncles and not excluded to only the immediate family.

Although the informant believed on the socio-economic value of wealth but one did not stop at this point. She considered quality time for herself as a representation of comfortable life.

Ionne shared: “Spare time for exercises, *para ma-attain mo 'yon..importante yon sa iyo. Prevention of diseases...time to be healthy-conscious.*”

[Spare time for exercises so you can attain quality life, it's important for you. Prevention of diseases...time to be health-conscious.]

Comfortable life for the dance instructor does not revolve around financial capability alone. In fact, she considers the health aspect a more important factor in what she would call a “comfortable life”. Being a nurse may have influenced her to be very health-conscious. Having all the comforts of life, financially-able and having the luxury of time to follow the exercise schedules, is a sure way to a quality of life indeed for all the participants.

**Peace of mind.** What is an indicator of a happy community? Is it not peace of mind for all stakeholders? This concept was agreed by everyone as an important consideration when deciding where to live. This refers to the possibility of a sound sleep because of a mentality that the community they live in is safe. Nobody will hurt their families, nobody will destroy their property, and nobody will worry. Instead they will have peace of mind that when they wake up every morning, they are lively and healthy.

The informants related that having done the weekly routine gave them peace of mind that they stay healthy

Henry, a father, told us: “*Merong sakit pero makakaya...*” and another informant added: “*Kahit meron nang sakit...pero hindi na lumala.*”

[Though one has sickness, but one can make it through.]

Harry voluntarily disclosed to us his health condition of a ringing sound in his ear. But he was very positive that the weekly workout helped him a lot. Every time he went to any workout, he knew that the ringing sound slowly diminishes. He was very positive about it. And this helped him a lot to have peace of mind.

To most informants, the intangibles in this life led them to have peace of mind. An avid marathon runner, Lex expressed her desire for her two sons: “*Simple lang, makapagtapos sa pag-aaral, makapaghanap ng trabaho at si God ang center ng life nila. Kahit sa pag-aasawa nila, hindi ako choosy, pero sana God-fearing din.*”

[Simple, finish their studies, find jobs while making God the center of their life. Even when it comes to who they will marry, I’m not choosy, but I hope they are also God-fearing.]

Peace of mind for Lex came with her wishes for her sons to be God-fearing. She was confident though that it will come. As a professor conveyed earlier, happiness, love, good health and the family, made her think she had peace of mind.

**Functional individual.** As one grows older, the natural alertness of the body diminishes. Everybody in the program, especially the senior individuals knew about this fact therefore preparing for that time was necessary. A business woman and a retired public teacher voiced out that well-being to them was to function properly, with all the facet of a well-balanced person. In business, time was essential therefore Marivic wanted to maximize all.

She mentioned: “*yong may maayos na kalusugan para makapagtrabaho kasi ako ay negosyante, ayaw ko magkasakit . Ganon rin naman sa mga anak ko. Gusto ko magkaroon sila ng mgandang kalusugan at mabuting pangangatawan.*”

[One with good health so I can work, because I am a businesswoman, I don’t want to get sick. I want the same for my children. I want them to have good health and good physical condition.]

Looking at Marivic’s idea, she was a proactive individual. Before the health deteriorates, she had prepared herself well. To function optimally with her means doing her job well. For Mrs. Cosico, it was good memory that was important for her. Improving her mental capacity drove her to doing the weekly workout. She believed on the concept stating that: use it or lose it. All these functional movements can enhance the mental prowess of all. With the upbeat music and the quick succession of movements from the instructors, the easy change of pace, really, boosted the mind to be always alert.

She informed us: “*Ang gusto ko magkaroon ng magandang kalusugan at higit sa lahat mas gumaling pa ang utak ko, memorya ko... kasi ako nalang mag-isa, wala na ang asawa ko.*”

[I want to have good health and most of all, I want to have good memory...because I have no one, I am a widow.]

Another informant, a retired forester, believed that a very fit body was a meaning of a quality life that brought well-being closer. Perz expressed that to be fully functional, he needed to be fit.

### **The Social Construction of Fitness: its symbols**

Symbol refers to any social object that stands in place of, or represents, something else. Symbols are created by humans (Colton 1987, Forte 2008). And oftentimes, symbols depend on the society’s practices. How the meanings of symbols are communicated to the other persons is affected by the interaction from the other persons or the other groups (Blumer 1969). In relaying the meanings of an object, the meanings might change, the meanings may take another direction. This interpretive process is always at work. Wallace and Wolf (1998, p 191) also considered the occurrence of subjected meanings due to several interactions to an interpretive understanding.

How one attributes importance to an object depends on how he sees the object. Take for instance, fitness. One may think fitness refers to sweating and moving around the field, or may think of it as a time to unwind, or to some, maybe the object does not present an issue. To most people, they believe they are healthy and physically okay thus they do not worry about fitness. Norms, values, and status affect the acceptance or rejection of meanings to an object. All of these factors affect the attitude towards fitness.

The narratives of our informants divulged two themes: longevity and challenge to be accomplished.

**Longevity.** The looking-glass self concept (Cooley 1902) expounded three elements how one look at oneself: 1) imagination of the appearance to the other person, 2) imagination of his judgment to that appearance and 3) some sort of self-feeling (pride or mortification). The narratives of the informants showed the elements together.

Mrs. Cosico, the retired elementary teacher mentioned that: *“Ako naman , para sa ‘kin ang, fitness sa ‘kin ay pagkakaroon pa ng mahabang buhay, kasi feeling ko ako ay bumabata..kita mo nga, lalo pa ako gumaganda at yung mga braso ko ay hindi pa laglag.”*

[For me, fitness is about having longer life, because I feel like I am getting younger, you see, I am much prettier now and the muscle in my arms are still not saggy.]

She knew that sooner or later she will face her final judgement, nevertheless, she longed for long life. It was also very clear that the presence of ‘significant others’ pushed her to be persistent in weekly workout. She added in relation to her good body, *“ako satisfied na pero hindi parin ako titigil kasi pag nakikita ako ng mga friends ko nagugulat sila at maganda parin ako , kita mo nga, mukha ko blooming pa.”*

[Me, I’m satisfied already with how I look but I don’t want to stop because when my friends see me, they are surprised to see me still pretty, you see, I’m blooming.]

Sir Perz continued his story: *“It keeps my life longer,that’s number one, even my blood circulation has normalized and the effects of stress and everything else levels off.”*

Cha, a professor, enthusiastically spoke to us: *“sa akin, I’m into dancing, kasi medyo nakisawsaw ako sa dance sports, tapos po, hindi for competition. it’s more for fitness and fun.”*

[As for me, I’m into dancing, I was joining dance sport, then, it was not for competition, it’s more for fitness and fun.]

She revealed her desire to dance since at a young age. Dancing for her was fun. As of now, dancing is still for fun but with an added need for good health . She added, *“ ehh wala naman akong time kasi, I worked agad after college and then nag family na ‘ko so there’s really no time, it’s only when introduced dito sa university noong time ni Chancellor Velasco yung one hour per week, kasi I’m not into sports really,”*

[I really don’t have time, I worked immediately after college and then built a family so there’s really no time, it’s only when I was introduced here in the university, Chancellor Velasco’s time, that time I only can afford an hour a week because I’m not into sports, reall.]

and she explained, *“ walang rhythm,if walang music, I’m more of like stimulated to move when there is music, when there’s a beat, nafe-feel mo na yung ‘pag gumanon ung paa mo feel mo na ‘yon sa body mo.”*

[There’s no rhythm without music. I’m stimulated to move when there is music, when there’s a beat, you feel when your feet move, your body follows.]

Doing zumba, a workout dance fusion, and aero dancing actualized the youth's desire of Cha which was to dance. Fitness workout became a vehicle to do what she had wanted to do and loved to do. Cooley (1902) talked about self, seeking things that would bring pride to the individual.

A challenge to be Accomplished. Fitness is a need to be attained. All of the informants shared the same beliefs. Some even used the analogy of going to church. If the weekly workout was missed, somehow they felt something was lacking in their life just like missing a church service.

Ionne, articulated that, "*buo na ang araw kapag naka exercise na, kung walang zumba...nagwa-walking ako. Para at least papawisan ka, o 'di ba. Kasi kulang 'yong araw ko eh...ang lambot ko sa hapon. Labanan ang pagod...pagnakapagpawis na...okay ka na.*"

[My day is complete when I get to work out, when there's no zumba session, I walk. So at least I'll get sweaty]

"*Hinahanap-hanap ng katawan ko,*" [It's what my body is looking for,] conveyed by another fitness enthusiast, Harry, and was seconded by Henry, "*masigla ako kapag nagawa ko...parang ganoon...may kulang kapag wala.*" [I feel energetic when I do it...there's something missing when I don't exercise.] Liberty considered fitness as, "*something na kailangan kong ma-achieve.*" [Something that I need to achieve.] She was still in her 30's when she focused in fitness. For Liberty she started early but for Aling Luz recalled, "*nitong nag 60 ako, sabi ng anak ko kasi, 'Inay kapag mag 60 ka na, mag-exercise ka na.' Diabetic kasi ako.*" [The time I turned 60, because my daughter told me, 'Mother, since you turn 60, you should start exercising.' It's because I am diabetic.]

She shared that it was not the focus of her life while she was young, "*noong bata pa ako, ako ay ano...sa trabaho. Kase para kumita ng pera, para makapagpaaral ng anak, para sa ikakabuhay.*" [When I was younger, I was working. So I can earn money, so I can pay for my child's education, to live.] Meanwhile, Lex took fitness very seriously. She joined several marathons and fun run and pushed herself to be always healthy. She revealed that, "*parang dalawang drawers na ang mga workout gamit.*" She mentioned, "*napapraning sa mga sakit.*"

[I think I have two drawers containing things for workout]. [paranoid of getting sick.]

There were numerous reasons why fitness became a challenge for all of them which surfaced in the narratives. They all arrived at a consensus that fitness should be achieved. A goal they needed to accomplish in order to lessen the possibilities of illnesses and somehow control the current diseases.

### **Workout Engagement**

The Saturday aerobic program has been functional for more than five years now. Around 100-130 participants were joining every weekend and more than fifty percent (50%) of these participants were habitual exercisers. They also followed their own ritual in joining the program. Some walked around the track oval or along the walk path before going inside the Baker Hall and start to swing their body following the dance instructor. While some would come strictly for the dance workout only and leave the area at the dismissal time and from there do errands. But there were also participants who regroup and to meet their friends use the time to renew friendship by dining together.

**Why Keep Coming.** Most learned about the program from a family member and friends. There were also some who knew about the program because they personally saw it. From there on, decision to attend was only affected by health and work assignments. One distinct theme emerged in the narratives, satisfaction.

Satisfaction. Gratification of the things that we do will always result to repeating the same experience. Cha shared , “*kasi nag eenjoy ako, for example sa routine kasi apat naman sila, so nagchange routine nila every now and then, we can go back to the old routine, and pwedeng something new, so ‘yun, dun ako nag eenjoy, I think ‘yung response ng body parang wala nang challenge sa muscles mo pag paulit-ulit lang unlike if there’s something new there’s a conscious effort for your body, you exert more energy to cope with the new routine.*”

[I am enjoying for example in a routine as there are four members, so the routine changes every now and then, we can go back to the old routine, and try something new, so there, that is why I am enjoying it. I think when the routine is constant, there is no challenge anymore to the muscles, if there is something new there’s a conscious effort for your body, you exert more energy to cope with the new routine.]

Ionne talked about the enjoyment of the client through the music and she said, “*client mo talaga naghahanap din ng magandang music, susunod din sila, kung pangit ang music nagwawalk out sila.*”

[Your client also looks for good music, they follow but if the music is dull, they walk out on us.]

There was the constant challenge on the part of the workout instructor to keep up to date when it comes to choices in music. Not only will she think of updating her moves but also the collection of music to be used.

All of the informants talked about coming to the workout in order to see their friends. Like Cha mentioned, “*ay talaga kasi nga kahit kaming malayo nagpupunta pa rito para makapag exercise lang, at masaya talaga.*” [Even when we live far away, we still come just to exercise.]

Les also recognized her friends as her other reasons of joining the workout even if the venue was out of her way. Perz agreed that, “*senior citizens are looking forward to the workout, nagkikita sila with friends, bonding ng Saturday.*”

[Senior citizens are looking forward to the workout, meeting with friends and bond every Saturday.]

Aside from friends, Marivic voiced out “*gusto kong mag-exercise pa at dito pumunta kasi maganda yung settings ng place at mababait mga tao.*”

[I’d like to exercise more here because of the ambience of the place.]

The setting of the venue helped in the overall satisfaction. For one to destress oneself, the right venue and right people around are factors that will lead to higher satisfaction.

The other byproduct of enjoyment is habit formation. Because the experience proved beneficial and positive to the client, they do it habitually until it becomes part of them. Once they missed a weekend, they knew they missed something for themselves. Liberty, Henry and Harry considered the workout as “*hanap hanap ng katawan.*” [it is what the body yearns for.] As fitness becomes their goal in life, doing the weekly workout is a target they want to hit.

Discipline is also an active part in this habit formation. As Liberty disclosed, “*dagdag discipline biruin mo, nagtrabaho ka buong week, tapos sa Saturday maaga pa rin gumising.*”

[It is a discipline boost, you work for one whole week but you still get up early on Saturday to work out.]



## Community Engagement

The third function of the university is extension. At the University of the Philippines, the tripartite functions are strongly visible, instruction, research and extension. The third function is usually done through activities that would benefit both, the university and the community. Although the concept of university-community engagement has met some critiques by different scholars and organizations (Ramachandrar et al. 2014) but Hart and Northmore (2011) gave a very concrete idea what is a university-community engagement. To these authors it refers “to activities which are conducted in the community by a university expanding its role as passive provider of knowledge to an active participant.”

More and more community practices are being developed by universities throughout the world thereby expanding their significance by responding to and engaging with local and regional societal challenges in multiple ways (Boyle et al. 2011; Butterfield & Soska 2005). The case of the UPLB community aerobic program has showcased the response of our university to societal challenges at this point: fitness awareness. Spearheaded by the College of Arts and Sciences, the university program tried to reach out to surrounding local communities.

Community of knowledge and community belongingness came out as the final themes in the narratives of the informants.

a) Community of Knowledge. The university as the community of knowledge has to live up to its name’s symbolism through engagement in the community. The informants considered the program as an act of the university to reach out not only to its constituents but more so to the local communities. Aling Luz’s summary of the program showed it all: “Malaking tulong sa komunidad ang programa lalo na sa may mga edad. May pagmalasakit sa program...hindi ako nakakapunta minsan ‘yong iba ang nagyayakag...walang bayad ‘yun, magaling doon ang nagtuturo.”

[The program is a big help to the community members especially to the older ones. People feel passionate about the program, when I can’t go, others will invite, The program is free, the teacher is good.]

Henry, being a father showed concerned for the youth and said, “*may magandang epekto para sa kabataan, focus sa pagpaganda ng katawan rather than vices.*”

[there is a positive effect to the youth, focus on improving the body rather than taking up vices.]

The weekly workout did not exclude the young members of the community. In fact, aged 15-21 represented an 8% of the participants (Cardenas et al. 2014).

Fitness awareness within the other offices at UPLB was enhanced too. Lex articulated this by saying, “*yes, awareness for the people, small offices have come up with their own, offshot of the big,*” while this was happening with UPLB, the neighboring barangays came up with their own workout clinic, “*ginagaya nila...naging bangko ang UP, nag- act as a leader.*”

[They follow what was started, UP became a model , it acted as a leader].”

Perz strongly believed that, “one thing is sure, they are trying to look for sort of a dance move, so they come around and copy the move, those people who are teaching come around and also to learn and to check whether they are right.”

It was just right, coming to the university to observe whether the knowledge they already have was correct. The local communities look up to the university being a robust agency (Boyle et al. 2011).

**b. Community Belongingness.** The narratives voiced the need to bridge the university and the community. Cha rightfully revealed the old understanding of the university status: “*Yeah it's form of community service/relations kasi diba they always say na UP is a place of its own parang ganun, detached sa community, pero I think thru this it's one way of reaching out to the surrounding community.*”

[Yeah it's form of community service/relations and they always say: UP is a place of its own, as if detached from the community, but I think through this. it's one way of reaching out to the surrounding communities].”

The university has to infect change in the society and the only way to do this is to be a partner for social change. Good relationship has to be achieved in order to hasten communication and understanding. The informants strongly believed that the university has started to mend the relationship with its neighbours. Cha was happy to observe the change and said: “*kahit anong age pwedeng umatend d'yan. bata, matanda, jobless, students, employed, karamihan ng attendees ay from outside communities. Maganda siya, maganda... napaka positive on our part: heto kami, tutulongan namin kayo concern namin di lang para sa amin 'yong mga senior citizen din. Hindi pwede na detached ang UP. Kahit sino pwedeng mag attend. We cater to anyone, guests, walk in...*”

[It's open to all. Young or old, jobless, students, employed. Most of the attendees are from neighboring communities. It's good. Very positive on our part: We are here, we will help you, we will address your concerns and not just for us but for the senior citizens also. It's not good that UP is detached. Everyone can attend. We cater to anyone, guests, walk in...]

The informants' narratives always showed the positive effect of the program to the community. There was a strong community belongingness that the different stakeholders to the program felt. Ionne expressed, “*gusto nila 'yong activity sa UP kasi feeling nila na tama at kasama sila. Mag-alok ka nga ng t-shirt na may tatak UP... gusto nila yon. Kasi andyan 'yong feeling kasali sila.*”

[They like the activities of UP because they feel that they are in the right. Just try and give them a shirt with a UP mark, they would like it. Because there is a feeling of belongingness.]

Recognizing the identity of the program within the participants would surely assure success. Giving ownership to the different stakeholders would assure of constant attendees. Participatory evaluation can also help the stories of those unheard yet be heard. It should not always be a top-down process of decision making (Eliot 2008, Mahoney et al. 2007). The current practice at the program revealed participatory decision making among the participants and the staff and this greatly helps in the sustenance.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

While each informant had different stories in joining the weekly aerobics program but they were in consensus that being fit could be equated with an improved quality of life. The narratives of the 10 informants collected through semi-structured interviews revealed significant themes. The construction of wellbeing and the different symbols of fitness to them have differences and similarities at the same time.

The construction of wellbeing involved several meanings and three themes persisted like comfortable life, peace of mind and as a functional individual. Social roles demand that parents provide not only for the immediate family but the extended family as well. Comfortable life did not revolve around finances alone but could also include ease in time management. Peace of mind matters a lot to the informants and becoming a functional individual in preparation to maximize life.

Symbolisms of fitness depend on social interaction. The narratives displayed longevity and challenges to be accomplished as themes. Everyone prepared for a quality longer life. The informants believed that through fitness which they considered fun would help them attained the desired long life. There were longings while they were young and at current times, opportunities were present. Fitness became a challenge. The informants strongly believed it to be the target. Missing the weekly workout means missing a lot for fitness.

The workout engagement had rituals in the process. Some participants would come for the dance workout alone while others added a walk before or after the workout. Some used this as a venue to bond with friends.

The aerobic workout every Saturday became the medium of the university to visibly show its community engagement. The informants were very positive in praising the program and the narratives showed distinct themes like being a community of knowledge and the community belongingness. Community participants showed more trust in the university activity due to its being a robust agency. They had also recognized an identity with the program therefore the concept of belonging to the university was present.

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## **STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP**

The first author spearheaded the idea of doing a study. All the rest of the authors agreed and cooperated from the conduct of the interviews until the paper was written for eventual publication.

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