
EVOLUTION OF THE ADULT SPORT PARTICIPANT: AN EXPLORATION OF SPORT INDUCED OUTCOMES

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Synopsis:

An exploration of how historical participation in sport influences one's enduring involvement and sport attitudes and behaviors.

Abstract:

INTRODUCTION

Cross-culturally, most adults do not meet the governmental health standards for a physically active lifestyle, a statistic that worsens with age. Despite the evidence that sport, physical activity, and exercise provide benefits of increased health, sport participation and physical activity continues to decline with age. The life course has distinct stages with elements that have the potential to hinder physical activity and participation in sport (see Cerin, Leslie, Sugiyama, & Owen, 2010). For example, many do not adhere to more conventional exercise and fitness programming for a wide variety of reasons including but not limited to boredom, intimidation, lack of social interaction, and cost. Sport may offer a better alternative as it provides adults an opportunity to interact and socialize with like-minded athletes, compete, and master new skills in a challenging environment (Berg, Warner, & Das, 2014).

Despite life's barriers, many individuals' involvement in sport endures through every life stage. Levinson's (1978, 1996) model provides a clear distinction of developmental sequences based on four categories that can be used as a framework to examine sport at various moments in an individual's life: childhood and adolescence (up to 22), early adulthood (17-45), middle adulthood (40-65) and adulthood (60+). This research is limited as it simply outlines participation levels and the impact of life cycle on participation. Rather, research is needed to develop a stronger understanding of how historical participation in sport influences one's enduring involvement and sport attitudes and behaviors.

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

Therefore, this study explores sport induced outcomes that include: enduring

involvement, motives to participate, meaning of sport, centrality of sport, and attachment to sport in the lives of adults sport participant to develop a better understanding of the lifelong athlete's career progression. Three research questions drive this investigation: (1) How does the life course impact sport induced outcomes? (2) How does the athlete type impact sport induced outcomes? (3) How does the skill and level the athlete reached at the peak of his/her sport career impact sport induced outcomes?

METHOD

Over 2,500 active sport participants competing in a wide variety of sports were asked to complete a 15-minute survey about their sport participation. The web-based questionnaire was distributed in partnership with several sport organizations to enhance participation rates. Using previous research, we developed questions pertaining to sport behavior including the meaning attached to sport, enduring involvement in sport, attachment to sport, motivating factors to participate in, and centrality of sport. In addition, we collected demographic information, sport participation data (hours trained, competitive level, skill level, sport type) for comparative purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data collection has begun and will continue through early summer. Because the study is still in progress, the results are forthcoming. There are a number of expected outcomes. Based on earlier research (Jacobs, Newland & Green, 2012), we do expect to see three types of adult athletes emerge from the sport history data: continuing (athletes who continue to participate in the same primary sport through the lifespan, switcher (athletes who have not stopped participation, but have switched to a different sport in adulthood), and adult onset (athletes who picked up sport in adulthood after a long hiatus). It is expected that the three types of athletes will report different levels of sport induced outcomes. While it is difficult at this point to predict the findings, the implications for theory and practice are important to note. Ultimately, the findings may allow practitioners to better develop programs that support their participants and can perhaps mitigate barriers. If we are able to deduce the impact of sport induced outcomes for participants within each of these three groups, there is potential for this information to serve as a persuasive marketing and retention tool. This research can also shed light on the way in which adult participants consume sport over their lifetime. A full discussion of the results will be provided in the presentation.

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