

An Examination of Motivations and Constraints for Sport Participation Throughout a Lifespan: A Case Study in Surfing

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Aim

The purpose of this study was to examine how motivations and constraints for surfing participants change over time. The research questions were based around what motivations and constraints surfers encountered when they first commenced surfing, throughout their lives, and at the time of the interviews. Empirical evidence (e.g., Vella et al., 2016) suggests that participating regularly in sport and physical activity improves the likelihood of living a healthy life. However, throughout an individual's life, motivations to continue and constraints to participate may change over time. The changes could lead to physical inactivity and reduced levels of sport participation. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2015) stated that in order to perform optimal preventative lifestyle campaigns, it is crucial to identify the motivators and barriers for all individuals, particularly those of later aged people. Research on motivation and constraints can promote a greater understanding of individuals' decisions regarding their sport and physical behaviour (Tsorbatzoudis, Alexandris, Zahariadis, & Grouios, 2006). Therefore, this study sought to contribute to this knowledge gap and inform sport management decision making based on participant's changes on motivations and constraints over time.

Theoretical Background

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Hierarchical Model of Leisure Constraints were used as the theoretical frameworks to examine motivations and constraints in a sport domain. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002) defines intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation and offers a description of the respective roles of intrinsic and types of extrinsic motivation in cognitive and social development and in individual differences. Self-Determination Theory and its conceptual underpinnings have been used in a number of fields (including education, environment, healthcare, organisations and work, psychopathology, psychotherapy and counselling, sport, exercise, physical education and virtual environments) to investigate motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Alongside motivation theories, the Hierarchical Model of Leisure Constraints (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991) has assisted in expanding the research based on constraints surrounding the limitations to sport and physical exercise. It has allowed researchers to study closely how individuals face, experience and react to a variety of barriers that influence leisure behaviour (Jackson, 2000). The results of the studies from the sport and exercise domains using SDT or the Hierarchical Model of Leisure Constraints have direct relevance to understanding the optimal motivation and common constraints of physical activity from an early age to later-aged adults.

Methodology

A convenience sample of respondents was obtained from a board riders club on the Gold Coast, Queensland, in Australia. To obtain experiential descriptions of a specific phenomenon and examine how motivators and constraints of surfers change over time, a retrospective phenomenological approach was used in the study. Therefore, it was a requirement that respondents had started surfing when they were children and were continuing to participate at the time of data collection. It was essential for the methodological approach that later aged participants interviewed were currently involved in surfing in order to capture the phenomenological or 'lived experiences' nature of the study.

Findings

The findings confirmed that social reasons (e.g., friends and family) were the most influential construct for motivation at an early age. Further, the same social reasons were still in later adulthood. However, motivation shifted substantially towards mental wellbeing. With respect to participation constraints, the only significant construct at an early age was alternate activities, such as playing other sports. However, the most influential construct for later adulthood constraints was family responsibilities. Understanding these motives and constraints to develop appropriate activities and programs in sport may reduce withdrawal from participation and assist to increase the number of later aged people participating in sport.

Conclusions and Implications

From a theoretical standpoint, understanding the combined effects of what motivates individuals to participate and what constraints inhibit participation, as well as the changes throughout an individual's life, advances the identification of optimal motivation and its relationship to sport and exercise participation over time. Therefore, this study contributes to sport motivation theory and specifically the application of SDT and the Hierarchical Model of Leisure Constraints into a sport-specific context over the lifespan of individuals. The practical implications of the results of this study are important for all relevant entities/stakeholders who are involved in developing sport programs (e.g., sport development officers, national and state sporting organisations, local government, schools and universities), and that they are aware of the motivations and constraints of sport participation and how they change throughout a lifespan.

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