

Spring 2012

The psychological benefits of participation in leisure pursuits for adolescents

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The psychological benefits of participation in leisure pursuits for adolescents

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Introduction

Today, adolescents have the highest level of depression per age group (Motl, Birnbaum, Kubik, & Dishman, 2004). This is relevant to leisure research since approximately “40% of adolescents’ waking hours are discretionary” (Bartko, W.T. & Eccles, J.S., 2003, p 233). Research has shown that participation in extracurricular leisure activities has substantial benefits to adolescents, in areas including psychologically well-being, physical health, academic performance, social well-being, and reduced risk taking. It is important to understand the outcomes of participation in extracurricular activities since they can be both positive and negative. For most adolescents, participation in different leisure and recreation activity types (e.g. active versus passive, structured versus unstructured, and individual versus team oriented) affect them in different ways. This study will focus on the outcomes for adolescents who participate in structured versus unstructured leisure activities and individual versus team oriented leisure activities. These different types of leisure activities have been shown to have a greater overall effect on adolescents compared to passive leisure.

In the past, as well as today, leisure has been associated with the field of psychology based on an individual’s overall psychological well-being. Many psychology theorists have work related to leisure rights including Albert Bandura, John Finnis, and Abraham Maslow (Compton, 1994, p. 9). Albert Bandura’s research states, “leisure experiences are essential to growth and development throughout the lifespan” (Compton, 1994, p. 9). Another theorist, John Finnis, stated that leisure is key to achieving well-being (Compton, 1994, p. 9). Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which dates back to 1943, also states that leisure is required to achieve a state of self-actualization (Compton, 1994, p. 9). These theorists played an important role in advancing the

study of leisure and the psychological well-being of an individual. Today, the link between participation in leisure activities and the psychological benefits is a common topic for research.

The relationship between mental health and psychological well-being is often hard to describe since most people have different suggestions about the definition. According to the Australian Health Ministers, a department that works for the government that is responsible for the national health policy, mental health

“...is a positive concept which embraces the inner individual experience and interpersonal group experience...To the individual, good mental health means happiness, competence, sense of power over one’s life, positive feelings of self esteem and capacities to love, work, and play...Mental health is the product of biological, psychological and social environments, health, care and lifestyle” (Compton, 1994, p. 18).

This definition helps people understand the effects lifestyle choices, including leisure participation, have on an individual. For the purpose of this study, psychological well-being is an individual’s overall feelings based on his or her own life satisfaction, happiness, fulfillment, contentment, achievement, stress, and coping mechanisms. It is important to understand that mental well-being means different things to different people but regardless of the definition, leisure participation affects an individual’s overall well-being.

This paper looks to better understand the effects leisure has on adolescents. Leisure is an important past time for adolescents since they have so much free time to pursue activities. The adolescents, their parents, recreation programmers, and school officials should be aware of the benefits and risks associated with different leisure pursuits so they can better help the adolescents’ transition into an adult who has a high level of psychologically well-being. After the

different effects are analyzed, this paper offers recommendations to recreation programmers. These recommendations account for the different factors of leisure. Overall, this paper is an analysis of leisure pursuits for adolescents and specifically focuses on psychologically well-being, while offering recommendations for anyone who has an interest in adolescents and leisure.

Hypothesis

For adolescents, participation in active and structured leisure pursuits will have a greater effect on positive self-esteem, psychological well-being, and psychosocial health compared to participation in passive and unstructured leisure pursuits or no participation at all.

Literature Review

Leisure:

According to Voss (1967, p 99-100), the basis of the definition of leisure is time, including work, leisure, and nondiscretionary time. Work is any time where an individual is being paid in goods and services (Voss, 2001). Outside of work time, there are two sections of nonwork, leisure and nondiscretionary time (Voss, 2001). Leisure is discretionary time, which is the time left over from work and other life maintenance activities with the individual freely choosing a leisure activity (Voss, 2001). The other category, nondiscretionary, is when the “individual is faced with a sense of legal, moral, social, or physiological compulsion or obligation when deciding how to allocate his time. He is not however faced with a sense of economic obligation” (Voss, 2001, pg 101). The terms leisure and recreation are often interchangeable. Recreation can be an activity that is under the umbrella of leisure, but it often focuses on the social aspect. As with leisure, recreational activities have intrinsic motivation and

are chosen freely by the individual. The distinction between time and activity is a common way to consider leisure experiences.

To go further into the definition of leisure, it is important to look at active and passive leisure. Active leisure, like exercise or playing a sport, typically relates to more positive outcomes on well-being than passive leisure, which includes reading, watching television, and computer use (Holder, Coleman, & Sehn 2009). Although passive leisure can relate to negative outcomes, such as an increase in substance abuse, the benefits from participation in active leisure pursuits have a greater positive effect overall for adolescents (Holder et al, 2009). At the basis of leisure, are the activities that individuals pursue with freedom during his or her discretionary time. However, it is important to look at the differences between active and passive leisure, since they do not have the same benefits to the individual.

Similar to active versus passive leisure is the Pyramid for High-Yield Leisure. Both of these different structures for leisure focus on the outcomes related to different types of leisure pursuits. The Pyramid for High-Yield Leisure looks comparable to the food pyramid, with high-yield activities taking up more time at the bottom and low-yield activities at the top taking up less time. “High-yield activities that allow youth to manipulate or construct their own experiences, such as participating in sports, singing in a choir, playing a musical instrument in a band or creating an art project, should be the foundation of one’s leisure repertoire” (Witt & Caldwell, 2005). These high-yield activities typically include voluntary participation for the intrinsic rewards (Witt & Caldwell, 2005). High-yield activities are typically associated with more benefits than low-yield activities. Low-yield activities include watching television and hanging out with friends, which can be beneficial, but not as meaningful as high-yield activities (Witt & Caldwell, 2005). The Pyramid of High-Yield Leisure Activities is an expansion on

active and passive leisure. Both models have low beneficial outcomes for participating in passive or low-yield activities and these activities are often associated with boredom. On the other side, active and high-yield activities relate to outcomes that are more positive for the individual physically, emotionally, and socially. Even if an activity is high-yield, it is still important to consider it in different ways when comparing the benefits.

High-yield activities are often similar to structured activities, while low-yield activities are similar to unstructured activities. High-yield leisure pursuits, like playing on a sports team are often associated with a structured form of activity. Low-yield leisure pursuits, like watching television, are unstructured leisure pursuits, which often are not demanding of an individual. An important factor when considering leisure and the possible benefits is whether it is structured or unstructured. Unstructured, or relaxed leisure, are “activities that are enjoyable but not necessarily demanding or related to the development of specific skills or competencies” (Bartko & Eccles, 2003). Structured leisure pursuits are activities that “require effort and persistence” (Bartko & Eccles, 2003). Similar to active and passive leisure, the outcomes of structured and unstructured leisure are different. Structured leisure relates to high rates of skill development and overall well-being, while unstructured leisure relates to more negative outcomes as looked at in further detail later in the risks section (Bartko & Eccles, 2003). For adolescents, the outcomes and benefits associated with leisure pursuits vary greatly based on the different leisure types. When considering the research, it is important to factor in whether the adolescents participated in active versus passive leisure and structured versus unstructured leisure, since these different types may affect the results. Programmers should not advertise the benefits of leisure in general; rather they should fully understand the benefits associated with each activity and market accordingly.

Motivators:

Before considering the outcomes of leisure for adolescents, it is important to consider their motivators for participation. In 2006, Sirard, Pfeiffer, & Pate, conducted a study to understand the motivational factors for adolescents participating in sports programs. The research is from results gathered from 1,692 seventh and eighth grade students (Sirard et al, 2006). The students were from four public schools in Colorado, California, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, being predominately Caucasian and living in suburban areas (Sirard et al, 2006). These limitations cause the data to only pertain to similar populations. Another issue when considering generalizing the information to different populations and past research is the fact that the methods used had a broader definition of sports participation.

The researchers first used a questionnaire to determine recent participation in sports programs, then the students were given a modified version of the Participation Motivation Questionnaire, which identifies “factors associated with sports program participation and attrition” using a five-point Likert scale (Sirard et al, 2006). The research found that motivational factors for boys include competition, social benefits, fitness while the motivational factors for girls include social, skill benefits, competition, and fitness (Sirard et al, 2006). These findings are consistent with past research that found gender differences in reasons for participation in sports programs. Even though fun is the highest ranked reason for participation, it is important for recreation providers to understand the different types of motivators and tailor the programs accordingly.

While Sirard and his colleagues focused on quantitative data, research conducted by Ketteridge and Boshoff (2008) focused on qualitative data. For phase one, physically active adolescents were chosen while for phase two, a convenience sample was chosen and separated

based on active and less active adolescents (Ketteridge & Boshoff, 2008). The issue with a convenience sample is that although the results may find pertinent information, the data is not generalizable to different populations. Adolescents in both focus groups acknowledged that they participate in physical activity for the health, physical, psychological, social, emotional, and self-developmental benefits (Ketteridge & Boshoff, 2008). These findings are consistent with the perceived and actual benefits of participation in physical activities and sport programs. The main difference between the two focus groups, were the definitions of physical activity. The more active group labeled physical activity as participating in soccer, lacrosse, or working out, while the less active group included activities such as walking to school and non-sport activities in their definition of physical activity (Ketteridge & Boshoff, 2008). Adolescents, regardless of their definition of leisure, described the psychological benefits such as increased confidence and self-esteem as major reasons for participation (Ketteridge & Boshoff, 2008). Although the research was only exploratory and has limitations concerning generalizing to different populations, it is important to not only look at the motivators for participation in physical activity, but also the perceived constraints.

Constraints:

A constraint in relationship to participation in physical activity is anything that inhibits or decreases the enjoyment of an individual's participation or causes them to stop participating. In 1993, Hultsman's research looked at interpersonal constraints, which deals with relationships the individual has with others. There are two other widely recognized types of constraints including intrapersonal and structural. Some examples of constraints can include minor aches and pains, tiredness, and being too busy (Robbins, Sikorskii, Hamel, Wu, & Wilbur, 2009) or they can be broader in relation to adolescents' perceptions and relationships. Intrapersonal constraints exist

within the individual and structural constraints deal with participation at an analytical level. As first described by Crawford and Godbey (1987), these constraints must be successfully negotiated, in a sequential order (intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural) to eventually end in participation (Godbey, Crawford & Shen, 2010). Intrapersonal constraints are thought to be the most important influencing factor since without overcoming them, there would be no desire to participate in the activity at all (Godbey et al, 2010). In relation, intrapersonal factors link to motivators more often than interpersonal and structural factors (Godbey et al, 2010). The hierarchical ordering is applicable to the majority of the population, but can vary depending on the individual (Godbey et al, 2010). As with most studies, there is an amount of personal variance, which holds true for hierarchical leisure constraints. The ordering is also cyclical and the starting point depends on where an individual is within the process (Godbey et al, 2010). For example, an individual may have worked through the constraints model, but then the program ended. Now the constraints cycle begins at the structural level since the individual has to find a new place that offers the desired program. The more rigid view of the hierarchical system gave light to a more interactive theory of constraints based on research analyzing the theory twenty years after its introduction. An analysis of the theory in relation to other research completed by one of the original contributors states that the level of interplay between the three constraints depends on the individual and the activity (Godbey et al, 2010). The Hierarchical Leisure Constraints model has been around for over twenty years and has been the basis for continuing research. The three categories are the basis for most other constraint models with further constraints being subcategories as shown by Hultsman's (1993) research on the influences of others on participation. The Hierarchical Leisure Constraints model, along with subsequent models, is important to the application of recreational activities. It is important to understand

why people do not participate to help remove those constraints. If an adolescents are not participating for intrapersonal reasons (e.g. they do not feel comfortable participating in activities with other people), programming to them is not as straightforward as programming to individuals facing structural constraints (e.g. there is not enough of a variety within times). The hierarchical leisure constraints theory is important to how participants and programmers perceive leisure activities.

Specific to adolescents, constraints are not solely individualistic; rather, the constraints change relative to close family members, friends, and adults. Research conducted by Hultsman (1993), looks at the influences of others as a barrier to participation in recreational activities among adolescents. The study, with information collected from over 900 adolescents, found that 76.1% of the participants stated parental influence as one of the top five reasons for not joining an activity (Hultsman, 1993). In regards to not joining an activity, the research found that the influences made by parents, peers, and activity leaders are higher for sporting activities than non-sport and community non-sport activities (Hultsman, 1993). The highest-ranking constraint for not joining an activity was the parents. To increase participation it is important to have both the adolescents and their parents understand the benefits.

Different from reasons for not pursuing a recreation program, activity leaders were the highest ranked reason for dropping out of a program (Hultsman, 1993). Activity leaders are often under trained and are unaware of the benefits they can have or the harm they can produce. Training programs to increase the effectiveness of activity leaders may help to reduce dropout rates. Constraints for participation are often considered internal, but for adolescents, the research provides insight into the influences of others on participation. Recreation programmers should try to reduce the constraints of others on an individual's participation since physical activity is an

important element in an adolescent's life. Although this research looked at the negative influences parents, adults, and peers can have on an adolescent's decision to participate, these individuals can also have a positive influence.

Gender Differences:

As already seen by the research conducted by Sirard, et al. (2006), Ketteridge and Boshoff (2008) there are gender differences concerning participation in physical activity. In general, girls want to participate to increase their skills (Sirard, et al., 2006) and psychological well-being (Ketteridge & Boshoff, 2008). In comparison, boys typically participate in physical activity for the competitive (Sirard et al 2006) and physical nature (Ketteridge & Boshoff, 2008). These gender differences are important to make sure each gender is receiving the outcomes they desire and to reduce attrition rates. Gender differences related to participation is also seen relative to influences by others. Research done by Hultsman (1993), found that parents and peers have a greater influence on males concerning not joining a sport and dropping out, while activity leaders have a greater influence on girls. Research and evaluations on gender differences mainly focus on the perceptions the adolescents have on participation. It is important to consider the user's perceptions concerning leisure since they are the ones participating in the activities, not the directors, programmers, or parents.

Perceived benefits of participation felt by male adolescents tend to focus on improving their skill and their athletic ability, while females tend to focus on proving to themselves that they are physically capable of excelling at an activity (Robbins, et al., 2009). The focus on their capabilities is consistent with previous findings that showed female adolescents tend to focus on the psychological benefits more than their male counterparts. Knowing and pushing one's own limits are an important part of development for an adolescent. Since male adolescents tend to

participate for the perceived health benefits, it is important to acknowledge that, although the overall time participating in physical activity is comparable, males tend to spend more time doing vigorous activities (Robbins et al, 2009). Focusing on the perceived benefits specific to each gender and attending to each separately may increase participation rates for adolescents.

Focusing on gender differences for physical activity is also important because of the changes happening during puberty. Females going through puberty earlier have lower psychological well-being resulting from increased rates of depression, weight-related maturity fears, and low self-worth (Davison, Werder, Trost, Baker, & Birch, 2007). These negative feelings result in a decrease in physical activity, which relates to lower levels of participation for girls who mature earlier (Davison et al, 2007). The differences within the female population should be considered when programming to help increase their self-worth and understanding of the processes of maturing. Physical activities should focus less on competition and revealing uniforms while shifting the focus onto team building and methods to help girls adjust to their changing body (Davison et al, 2007). The differences are important for programming within all female and co-ed activities. Activities that are gender segregated by choice, like those offered by the Lifestyle Education for Activity Project, show increases in physical activity levels, self-efficacy, and enjoyment of physical activity compared to co-ed activities (Davison et al, 2007). Most research tends to focus on the gender differences, but does not focus on the differences within the female gender. This area of research is important to look at in future studies to better the delivery model for adolescent girls.

Depression/Risks:

For the most part, the basis of participation in leisure focuses on the positive outcomes and the risks of not participating. It is also wise to consider the risks that often occur for

adolescents that participate in particular leisure activities. As mentioned before, participation in active (Holder et al, 2009), high-yield (Witt & Caldwell, 2005), and structured leisure (Bartko & Eccles, 2003) activities associates to more positive outcomes, although there are some exceptions to the research. Research on the relationships between sports participation and drug use has been controversial. Peretti-Watel, Beck & Legleye (2002), conducted research that focused on the U-curve relationship between sports and drug use (Figure 2). “As a whole, athletes drink less alcohol than those who perform no physical activity, but those who play sports intensively drink more than those who practice sports in moderation” (Peretti-Watel et al, 2002, pg 708). This curve is not present for all participants and sports; rather it varies greatly (Figure 4). The present study found that the U-shaped curve existed for heavy tobacco users (Peretti-Watel et al, 2002). Related to cannabis use, the curve is present for all males, but not females (Figure 3) (Peretti-Watel et al, 2002). The study also found that a false curve was present when age is unknown since older adolescents consumed more psychoactive substances (Peretti-Watel et al, 2002). Overall, the results are most significant when looking at males with frequent tobacco and cannabis use. While participation in sports is beneficial to adolescents, it is important to consider the amount of stress they feel to succeed. The drug use may result from trying to alleviate the stress associated with participation in sports programs (Peretti-Watel et al, 2002). Research should focus on both the positive and negative outcomes of recreation participation in adolescence since they both have major impacts on the adolescent’s life.

While Peretti-Watel and his colleagues (2002) looked at a U-curve for sports participation and drug use, Hoffmann (2006) looked at the overall increase of alcohol use for adolescents participating in after school sports programs. “Male athletic participation is often accompanied by a greater propensity to socialize and attend parties where alcohol may be

available...the results suggest, moreover, that this experience also operates for females who participate in athletics” (Hoffmann, 2006, pg 286). The different environments that adolescents experience throughout their high school years may help predict alcohol use. In team sports, adolescents gain new peer groups and increase their social network, which can lead to more opportunities to “party” on the weekend. The study also found that females who participate in sports programs at low socioeconomic status (SES) schools relate to higher amounts of alcohol use than those at high-SES schools (Hoffmann, 2006). The opposite holds true for males, those at high-SES schools show higher amounts of alcohol use than those at low-SES schools (Hoffmann, 2006). Although there may be an increase in social opportunities, often times there is no social cohesion, which can lead to other risky behaviors in adolescents.

Drug and alcohol use are not the only risks associated with participation in physical activity. For people ages 15 to 24 years, suicide is the third leading cause of death (Taliaferro, Rienzo, Miller, Pigg & Dodd, 2008). Research mostly focuses on the decrease in suicide among adolescents who participate in physical activity, but Taliaferro et al (2008), looks at the potential increase of suicide rates among adolescents related to physical activity. High-intensity physical activity when done for losing weight or in relation to eating disorders links to higher suicide rates among females (Taliaferro et al, 2008). This supports the complex relationship between body image and suicidal behavior (Taliaferro et al, 2008). It is important to understand that these results come from participation in only physical activity and not sports participation. Just being physical does not equate to all of the benefits seen with sports participation since it lacks the social involvement and confidence often found in sports participants. The social component to sports programs is evident since “females who were socially isolated from the adolescent community demonstrated significantly greater suicide risk and females embedded in cohesive

friendship groups” (Taliaferro et al, 2008, pg 551). Female adolescents should strive to not only be physically active, but also participate in sports programs to increase the sense of community they feel.

Developmental Benefits:

Although there are instances where participation in physical activity may increase associated risks such as drug and alcohol use and suicide rates, there are many positive outcomes. According to Mahoney, Larson, Eccles & Lord (2005), features of extracurricular activities that promote positive development include physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, supportive relationships, opportunities for belonging, positive social norms, support for self-efficacy and mattering, opportunities for skill building, and integration of family, school, and community efforts. If these factors are present, participation in organized activities can increase adolescents’ educational achievement, reduce problem behaviors, and heighten psychosocial competencies (Mahoney et al, 2005). The article shows how participation in any type of activity does not equate to developmental benefits in adolescents since the programs need certain factors present.

The decrease of risky behaviors in adolescents who participate in extracurricular activities may stem from the fact that time spent completing these activities leaves less time to engage in problematic behaviors (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). The study then looked at the differences between activities and the developmental benefits. According to the study, team sport participants associated with higher perceptions of school belonging, more favorable attitudes towards school, a higher percentage of prosocial peers, and lower rates of depression (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). These findings are consistent with benefits found in adolescents who participate in physical activity. The benefits associated with participation in team sports also relate to the

time spent participating. The adolescents who spent more time in team sports had outcomes that are more positive and lower rates of depression than adolescents who spent more time in clubs and other extracurricular activities (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). The developmental benefits associated with participation in team sports may be due to their social nature, which leaves adolescents feeling more connected to others. As previously mentioned, the social cohesiveness achieved by many adolescents in sports (Taliaferro et al, 2008) is an important factor in the achievement of the associated developmental benefits. The developmental benefits including higher educational achievements, lower rates of problematic behaviors (Mahoney et al, 2005), and increase in sense of belonging (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005) are important reasons for participation in extracurricular activities.

Self-Image/Self-Esteem:

Participation in physical activity also relates to increases in self-esteem. The more time adolescents spend participating in a sport relates to their perception about their sports ability, which in turn is positively associated with self-esteem (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2008). The positive relationship is not only based on time participating, like the research conducted by Fredricks & Eccles (2005), rather the current study states that there has to be other positive aspects of the activity to relate to higher levels of self-esteem (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2008). More research completed by Kirkcaldy, Shephard, and Siefen (2002) show the relationship between participation in physical activity and positive self-esteem. The research “shows substantial associations between the regular practice of endurance sport and attitudes, personality, scores for physical and psychological well-being and the adoption of a healthy lifestyle” (Kirkcaldy et al, 2002, pg 548). The increase in self-esteem and self-image felt by adolescents may be associated with their sense of belonging (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005) and because of their increased feelings

of mastering and self-efficacy (Kirkcaldy et al, 2002). Although the relationships between activity participation and increased self-image found are not causal, they are still relevant. Since females participate in physical activity for the challenging nature (Sirard et al, 2006) and the sense of mastery is an important in relation to a positive self-image (Kirkcaldy et al, 2002) programs should focus on mastering skills. Participating in leisure activities helps adolescents understand themselves and increase their own bodily awareness, which are important concepts for the creation of positive self-esteem.

Overall Well-Being:

While participation has positive outcomes to specific facets of an adolescent's life, there is also a more holistic benefit associated with participation in physical activity. Although there are many definitions of psychological well-being, it can be considered as an individual's overall feelings based on their own life satisfaction, happiness, fulfillment, contentment, achievement, stress, and coping mechanisms. According to Trainor, Delfabbro, Anderson & Winefield (2010), psychological well-being is "indicated by higher scores on measure of self-esteem and life satisfaction, positive mood states, and non-clinical levels of general psychological health... i.e., the absence of significant levels of depression, anxiety, or stress" (pg 174). Similarly, the research done by Vilhjalmsson & Thorlindsson (1992) measured psychological well-being with four dimensions including life satisfaction, psycho-physiological symptoms, anxiety, and depression. The research conducted by Ussher, Owen, Cook & Whincup (2007) measured psychological well-being with the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire that looks at hyperactivity, emotional symptoms, conduct problems and peer problems. These few studies show the ambiguity felt when trying to measure psychological well-being, especially when compared to leisure activities, which can be just as ambiguous. Overall, psychologically well-

being focuses on life satisfaction (Trainor et al, 2010 and Vilhjalmsson & Thorlindsson, 1992 and Ussher et al, 2007) and the absence of depression and other negative emotions (Trainor et al, 2010 and Vilhjalmsson & Thorlindsson, 1992 and Ussher et al, 2007).

Much research has focused on the benefits of physical activity on psychological well-being. Motl, Birnbaum, Kubik & Dishman (2004) have shown that changes in physical activity inversely relate to changes in depressive symptoms in adolescents. This relationship works both ways, stating that increases in physical activity decreases depressive symptoms, while a decrease in physical activity may increase depressive symptoms. The effect on time spent participating in physical activity is also in the research conducted by Fredricks & Eccles (2005). They found that time in organized sports negatively correlated with depression and levels of risk behavior. Trainor et al (2010) found similar results showing that spare-time use relates to substance use. Overall, the time spent participating in physical activities is important in decreasing the levels of depression and risky behavior in adolescents.

Participation in physical activity does not only relate to a decrease in negative outcomes, but it also relates to increases in positive outcomes such as psychological well-being. As mentioned before, these positive outcomes depend on the type of activity an adolescent participates. Compared to individual recreation activities, team-oriented activities are often associated with lower levels of depression and higher levels of social well-being. Participants in physical team sports reported lower levels of anxiety and depression than participants in individual physical activities (Kirkcady et al, 2002). Kirkcady et al (2002) relates these lower levels of anxiety and depression to the social cohesion experienced in team sports. In team sports, an “emphasis on peer interactions” (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2008, pg 385) relates back to an individual’s self-esteem and psychological well-being. Taliaferro et al (2008) expands on this

notion in the research by stating, “The team sport environment represents a fertile ground for adolescent self-esteem development because teams provide opportunities for youth to engage with adults and peers to achieve collective goals. Through its capacity to foster feelings of social support and integration, sport participation may create a distinct form of protection against risk factors associated with adolescent suicide” (pg.551). Taliaferro et al (2008) also found that participation in team sports could significantly decrease suicide risk among females dependent on their reasons for participation and for both males and females that risk decreases even more when they participate in multiple team sports. Although the effectiveness of leisure participation on psychological well-being varies among different factors, overall there are benefits.

Team sports have a more beneficial impact on psychological well-being compared to individual sports. The effects on well-being relative to active and passive leisure are similar. Active leisure pursuits tend to have outcomes that are more positive than passive leisure. “Strong and graded associations were observed between adolescents’ reports of lower psychological well-being and lower physical activity levels and increased use of TV/videos/computers” (Ussher et al, 2007, pg 855). Holder et al (2009) also found similar results linking active leisure pursuits with psychological well-being and linking passive leisure to negative effects on well-being. The differences of leisure pursuits and their effects on psychological well-being are important to consider when looking at the outcomes of participation.

Analysis/Recommendations

The information from these studies is important for many reasons to both the participant and the programmers. Participants should be able to recognize the associated benefits of participation in recreation activities to make decisions that are more informed. The programmers and departments who work together to provide recreation opportunities should understand the

benefits of participation, the motivators, the constraints, and the differences in participation to increase enjoyment and participation. It is important for programs to focus on the relative factors influencing the development of adolescents including safety, appropriate structure, supportive relationships, opportunities for belonging, positive social norms, support for efficacy and mattering, opportunities for skill building, and integration of family, school, and community efforts (Mahoney et al, 2005). An analysis of the data, within the context of the important factors for development, will provide suggestions to individuals to help make leisure opportunities more worthwhile.

The motivators for participation in recreation activities are important to help guide the program in the desired direction. According to Sirard et al (2006), adolescents participate in sports programs for the main reasons of having fun, the social aspect, the competitive nature, and skill development. These motivators differ based on many aspects, including gender, which is discussed later. In addition, the motivational factors such as the social aspect and the competitive nature are seen with activities that are active, while motivators, such as having fun, can be obtained through both active and passive leisure pursuits. When departments offering recreation opportunities are able to tailor their programs according to the motivators, the programs will typically have more success.

All recreation programs should promote the fun that participants have since that is a major motivator for adolescents. Recreation Departments should offer special events alongside their programs as a way to increase social cohesion and fun. Special events typically celebrate something and allow participants to do something out of the ordinary. By allowing adolescents a break from the norm with a special event, it may foster a fun environment. Although adolescents are looking for fun and competitive programs, they also want to develop their skills. Since skill

building is an important developmental factor, all programs should have some aspect of it. Programmers should recognize this and focus not only on winning as a desired outcome, but also the development of individual and team skills. Recreation programs may be able to focus on the development of the participant by having sportsmanship programs that reward participants more for their development and sportsmanship efforts than the outcome of the game. By focusing on sportsmanship, the program is able to promote positive norms, which is an important factor in development. Since directors are not able to determine the motivators for each individual participant, when possible, there should be different delivery methods based on competition levels and program design.

Along with motivators, constraints often dictate an individual's participation and enjoyment of a leisure activity. Research conducted by Godbey et al (2010) analyzed the model of hierarchical leisure constraints, which focuses on the process of working through intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints. This theory model is important to the application of recreational activities. It is important to understand why people do not participate to help remove those constraints. If an individual is not participating for intrapersonal reasons, such as they feel as though they are not skilled enough, programming to them is not as applicable as programming to individuals facing structural constraints, like not enough of a variety within times. The hierarchical leisure constraints theory is important to how participants and programmers perceive leisure activities.

There are different ways for an individual to work through constraints dependant on the constraint felt and the type of program. To negate the intrapersonal constraints felt by participants and nonparticipants, with the example of lack of confidence in skills, recreation activities should have different levels of participation. If there is a need, there should be at least a

beginner and competitive league. This problem can also be negotiated through having camps or events that focus on skill development to increase the participant's confidence. Since parents, peers, and coaches influence adolescents, relating to their leisure pursuits, it is important to consider all aspects of interpersonal constraints. Recreation programs can target this problem by having discounts for individuals who sign up with a friend or family member. This will help some adolescents work through interpersonal constraints such as not having a friend to participate with or too many family obligations. Some solutions to reducing structural constraints are to have more times, levels, or different recreation programs offered. Transportation is also a common structural constraint for adolescents, so schools might offer transportation afterschool to the recreation site to increase participation. This cooperative agreement shows the integration of school and community, which is an important developmental factor.

Compared to the constraints proposed by Godbey et al (2010), the research conducted by Hultsman (1993) found that parental influences were the highest-ranking reason for adolescents to not join an activity. This information is important since it shows how influential parents are to their adolescent's decision to participate. Programmers should focus on explaining the benefits to the potential participants and their parents. Similar parent programs should be created so they can understand the positive outcomes associated with the program. The cooperation between the department, the adolescent, and the parent is important to consider when looking at the developmental benefits. Hultsman (1993) also found that the highest-ranking influence on dropout was the activity leader. Since the majority of activity leaders are untrained, departments should focus on proper training of the leaders, which might reduce the dropout rate. Recreation programmers should try to reduce the constraints imposed by others on an individual's participation since physical activity is an important element in an adolescent's life.

Once adolescents no longer feel any constraints, they are able to participate in a recreation activity. During participation, there are gender differences that are important to acknowledge. Robbins et al (2009) found that males tend to participate in activities for the competitiveness and the skill development, while females participate for the overall psychological benefits including individual capabilities separate from sports skill. Organizations that offer recreation opportunities can help increase participation by tending to the different populations' perceived benefits. Since males perceive improvement as a top benefit, programmers could offer more skills-based programs to increase participation. Programmers could cater to females by offering activities that challenge each person individually, since females perceive challenging oneself as a top benefit. Focusing on the perceived benefits for each gender and attending to each separately may increase participation rates for adolescents.

Another difference within the female gender has to do with puberty. According to Davison et al (2007), females going through puberty earlier have lower psychological well-being and decreased rates of physical activity resulting from increased rates of depression, weight-related maturity fears, and low self-worth. Puberty is an important process for all adolescents to go through, but the differences for younger girls compared to older girls and boys are important to consider. Physical activities should switch from co-ed to segregated options at this age and they should focus on improving body image. This information is mostly pertinent to school recreation programs since most activities outside of the school are segregated at this point. School athletic programs offer different activities each day, either segregated or not, to allow the girls to feel more comfortable with their bodies. For both activities inside and outside of school, directors should inform the participants about the changes they are experiencing at the beginning of the program and start an open door policy that allows the adolescents to come to them with

any questions, especially concerning the changes they are going through, to help ease the participants through the transition. The programmers and directors should try to meet with each participant individually to try to ease embarrassment to increase the comfort they feel discussing such topics. These changes can relate to benefits for females going through puberty and should be taken into account when planning activities for both genders.

Typically, there are no structural differences between programming for males and females. Research has shown that males and females have different reasons for participating, different perceived outcomes (Robbins et al, 2009), and differences concerning puberty (Sirard et al, 2006) and physical activity (Davison et al, 2007). Programmers should understand these differences to give adolescents more information concerning the areas they deem important. The programs should also focus on achieving the perceived benefits that the adolescents seek. In addition, during adolescence, gender separate activities should increase the female participants' enjoyment and psychological well-being. Overall, these changes should help increase participation in physical activity regardless of gender and track with adults that are more physically active.

Although most of the research has focused on the positive outcomes, there are also some negative outcomes. The stress associated with competitive sports can relate to increases in substance abuse (Peretti-Watel et al, 2002). Although competition can be good since it demands focus and skill development from the participant as well as achievement for some, too much focus on the competitive nature can be harmful. The emphasis on winning should not be the only focus of sports programs, especially during adolescence. A shift in focus to skill development and self-awareness could cater to the desired benefits and help reduce the stress felt by adolescents resulting in a decrease in risky behaviors such as substance abuse. Peretti-Watel et al

(2002) suggests that the increase in alcohol consumption by adolescents relates to the increase in social opportunities that promote consumption. These findings are important for the athletic departments and college admission offices. High school athletic departments should consider these findings when running programs to find the most at risk groups for alcohol use. Being aware of these groups may help schools to combat the problem and eventually decrease the use of alcohol among high school athletes. If schools are aware of which sports groups have a higher risk of substance abuse they can enforce a player's code that does not allow students to use illegal substances during the sports season or they could make sure each team goes to an informational session about the harmful effects of illegal substances specific to their sport. The findings are also important for college admission offices since the information shows that males who participate in nonathletic extracurricular activities have lower levels of alcohol use. Understanding the relationship between the type of school, the type of extracurricular activity, and the gender differences may help college admission offices better identify potential students.

Even though the increase in social opportunities for participants is associated with higher rates of alcohol consumption, there are also some benefits. According to Taliaferro et al (2008), the social component of sports programs can reduce the risk of suicidal tendencies in females when there is group cohesiveness. The social network that accompanies team sports is important in increasing the self-esteem of adolescents, especially females. Parents should be interested in these findings, especially because of their influence in participation, to help decrease the suicide rates among adolescents. Program directors can improve upon the social cohesion felt by adolescent females by having bonding opportunities outside of the activity. In addition, the directors can allow opportunities for the participants to make new friends by pairing them up with different people during practices. The opportunities that promote social belonging are

needed since belonging is an important factor in development. Although physical activity is important to adolescents, it is imperative for programmers, parents, and school officials to understand the increased risk of suicide if a social network is not present. Therefore, female adolescents should strive to not only be physically active, but also participate in sports programs.

If these suggestions are used to modify a program, there are greater chances of developmental benefits to exist. If a program is targeted to benefiting the adolescent, greater strides can be made towards positive development, while decreasing the rates of risky behavior. Fredricks and Eccles (2005) research looks at how team sports expand upon the developmental benefits associated with physical activity. The developmental benefits associated with participation in team sports may be due to their social nature, which leaves adolescents feeling more connected to others. Programs for adolescents should focus on positive social interactions by having structured gathering times for participants to decrease the availability of illegal substances and thoughts of suicide.

The social aspects of recreation programs can help adolescents with a sense of belonging, which may help with their self-esteem. The increase in self-esteem felt by adolescents may be associated with their sense of belonging (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005) and because of their increased feelings of mastering and self-efficacy (Kirkcaldy et al, 2002). Participating in leisure activities helps adolescents understand themselves and increase their own bodily awareness. These are important factors in having positive self-esteem. Programmers should focus on motivating adolescents to participate and increasing their sense of accomplishment. An adolescent's sense of accomplishment can be increased by their sense of belonging or by meeting goals set by the programmer. With different modes of participation, the skill level can be better tailored to each individual so they are not over or under-challenged. If possible, programmers

should also make time to have one-on-one opportunities with each participant and challenge them based on their abilities. Allowing the adolescents to focus on themselves and challenge themselves might allow them to understand their strengths and weaknesses, eventually resulting in increased self-esteem.

The benefits associated with participation in leisure activities happen only when the adolescent is involved for some time. One of the benefits for participation is an increase in overall psychological well-being. Psychological well-being relates to the adolescent's sense of life satisfaction, happiness, contentment, achievement, and coping mechanisms. For adolescents, the time spent participating in recreation activities can decrease suicide rates and risky behaviors (Taliaferro et al, 2008). As mentioned previously, it is important for program directors to understand the motivators, constraints, and differences of the adolescents to increase participation. This is important since it shows that the amount of time spent participating is linked to the benefits. Recreation programs should take place over a long enough period to help adolescents achieve the full benefits and reduce the time available for partaking in risky behavior, but not too long to increase an adolescent's stress level.

The different types of leisure pursuits affect the outcomes with active, structured, and team sports having more positive outcomes than passive, unstructured, and individual sports. Generalizing the benefits of participation in different leisure activities should not occur. The differences based on activity type are important for giving correct information to participants. In addition, activities related to negative outcomes should not be associated with other activities that are associated with positive outcomes since it would be false information. When creating a program and choosing one to participate in, the differences in activities types, such as active

versus passive and high-yield versus low-yield, should be highlighted to improve the program and to help individuals make better informed decisions.

All of these factors are important for recreation programmers to consider since physical activity tracks with age. There is a common trend of individuals having decreased rates of physical activity once they enter adolescence. Adolescents who participate in club sports and organized activities have higher rates of participation later in life compared to other adolescents (Evans, Shelia, Kirk, & Crombie, 2009). The study also states that there are high levels of tracking for adolescents who participate in recreation activities with their parents (Evans et al, 2009). These facts are relevant to departments that offer recreation programs. Departments should focus their efforts on offering programs that are associated with higher rates of tracking into adulthood. As noted before, programs should also be offered to increase parental involvement. The parental involvement will decrease the constraints the adolescent feels, but it may also relate to higher levels of participation in physical activity into adulthood. According to Richards, Williams, Poulton and Reeder (2007), the levels of tracking are higher when participation happens earlier in childhood or adolescence. A higher level of tracking of participation in physical activities also relates to adolescents' attitudes about physical education class (Kjonniksen, Fjortoft, & Wold, 2009). Positive attitudes towards physical education classes significantly predicted physical activity into adulthood (Kjonniksen et al, 2009). The importance of physical activity, especially across a lifetime is evident by all the positive outcomes. Recreation programmers should focus on having adolescents participate in activities that track better with age. Participation in physical activities are beneficial to one's health and their psychologically well-being.

Conclusion

Since participation in leisure pursuits is relevant to an adolescent's development, sense of belonging, health, and psychological well-being, it is important to understand all factors affecting these outcomes. Programs should strive to have as many factors related to the developmental benefits as possible, but at a minimum, all programs should have an appropriate structure and a safe environment for the adolescents to participate in. Program directors should have as many different modes of participation as possible to allow for maximum participation and enjoyment for all individuals. These programs should also focus on increasing the social cohesion felt by all participants, while trying to reduce the negative outcomes from social opportunities, such as substance use. Programmers should also be aware of the differences associated with the participants and the activities and tailor the programs accordingly. Since leisure is an important aspect for all individuals, it is important for participation to be enjoyable and start as soon as possible to better ensure lifelong participation.

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Figures

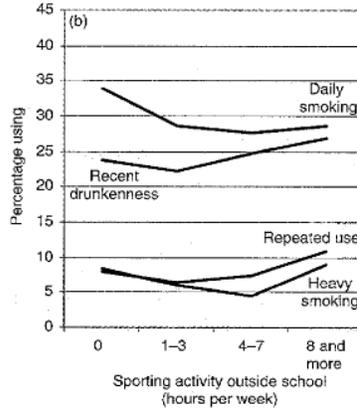
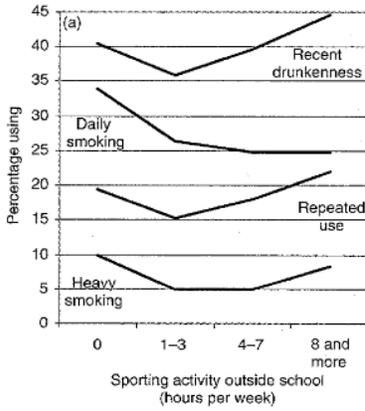


Figure 2 Proportion of (a) boys and (b) girls with different levels of sporting activity outside school according to cigarette and alcohol use. Cigarettes: heavy smoking; daily smoking. Alcohol: repeated use; recent drunkenness.

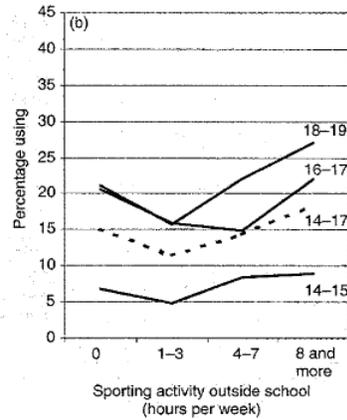
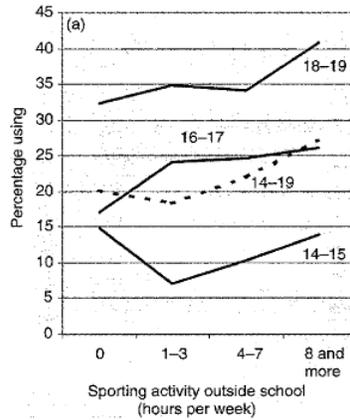


Figure 4 Proportion of adolescents with different levels of sporting activity outside school: (a) team sports; (b) athletic sports, reporting recent drunkenness.

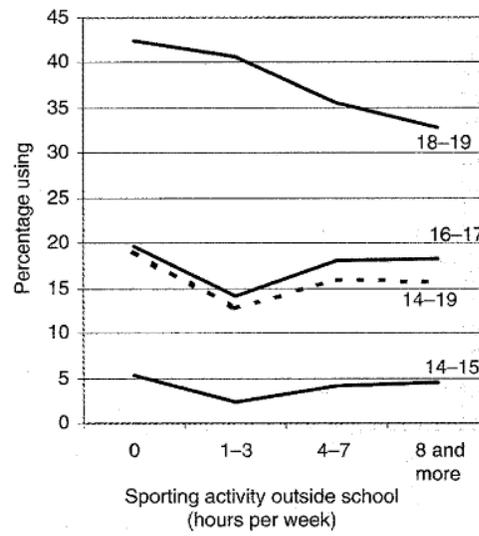


Figure 3 Proportion of boys with different levels of sporting activity outside school reporting repeated use of cannabis.