

## Understanding internal and external forces in active sport participation

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Abstract 172**

Participation in recreational sport remains a significant aspect of leisure and recreation in the United States. In 2002, 62 million adults (30%) participated in sport and spent an estimated \$13.6 billion on sport consumption (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004-05). These numbers highlight the importance of participatory sport events. Despite this importance, most countries are experiencing a decline in active sport participation (Van Sluijs et al, 2005) while obesity rates, life expectancy and feelings of isolation increase. Taken together, these trends have grave implications for quality of life. Participant sport has the ability to directly and indirectly influence a number of aspects in a person's life including healthy lifestyles and building social cohesion within communities (Beaton & Funk, 2008). Organized sport events can also practice corporate social responsibility by linking with non-profits to raise awareness and revenue for charitable causes. Sport event managers are likely to find themselves on the forefront in the battle against physical inactivity and require a greater understanding for the internal and external forces that initiate and contribute to continued active participation.

This current study utilizes Funk and James' (2006) Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) as its theoretical basis. In their evaluation of theoretical frameworks for examining active recreation, Beaton and Funk (2008) found the PCM is a sound choice to guide research on physically active leisure. Funk, Toohey and Bruun (2007) utilized the PCM framework to examine reasons for participating in an international marathon by integrating prior motivation research (Crompton, 1979; Iso-Ahola, 1982). The PCM proposes that recreational sport participation is a product of psychological, personal, and environmental forces. Psychological forces include leisure motives. Personal forces represent person-specific characteristics such as demographics. Environmental forces include various socializing agents and experiential modes of participation. However, limited research has investigated the environmental factors.

The purpose of this research is to test the role of selected psychological, personal and environmental forces on active sport participation. The psychological measures used in this study included 12-items to measure four leisure motives: social, escape, intellectual and competency (Beard & Ragheb, 1983) plus one additional exploratory motive to support charities associated with this event. The personal measure used gender classification and the environmental measure was type of race participation (i.e., marathon, half marathon, or 8K).

Data were collected through an online survey sent to a census sample of 10,170 participants in the Yuengling Shamrock Sportsfest that took place March 17-18, 2007 in Virginia Beach, VA. The response rate was 37% with a sample size of 3804 runners. Forty-five percent of the respondents were male while 55% were female. As for type of race, 25% of the sample ran the marathon, 50% ran the half marathon, and 25% participated in the 8K race.

Analysis used multivariate analysis of variance (GLM) with LSD post-hoc multiple comparisons. Psychological measures acted as the dependent variables while gender and type of race were fixed factors. Results indicated significant gender differences for the intellectual, competency, and charity motives, but not for the social or escape motives  $p < .05$ . Females rated these three factors higher than males. Significant main effects were observed for social, competency, intellectual, and helping charity based on type of race  $p < .01$ . Post hoc analyses revealed 8K runners rated social motives higher than both Half and Marathon runners; 8K runners rated competency motives lower than Half and Marathon participants. For the charity motive, differences were observed for all three race types with 8K runners the highest followed by Half and then Marathon participants. There were no interaction effects between gender and type of race.

The findings of the present study support and extend the PCM proposition that the product of psychological, personal and environmental forces shape active sport participation. The results confirm how gender as a person-specific determinant moderates psychological benefits obtained through running events (Funk, Toohey, & Bruun, 2007). Female runners indicate the event provides opportunities for mental action, exploration, challenge, achievement and competency more than male runners. Results extend the PCM by revealing females perceive participation as a means to reinforce corporate social responsibility programs that include supporting local charities embedded in running events. The current study provides new evidence regarding environmental forces such as the experiential mode of race-type participation that appears to shape a desire for psychological benefits. 8K runners prefer socialization opportunities to reunite with past participants as well as meet new people but are less motivated by challenge and achievement than Half and Marathon runners.

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An interesting finding is that a desire to support charities decreased in relationship to the physical demand of preparing and completing a race. Future research is warranted to determine whether this stems from 8K runners being more altruistic and support the event because it is socially responsible or the that Half and Marathon runners are more interested in the physical challenge and achievement. These findings aid in developing marketing materials that appeal to targeted groups based on interaction of psychological, personal and environmental factors for participating in an active sporting event. Implications of these results will be discussed and suggestions for sport event managers will be provided.

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