

**Exploring a Possible Lucrative and Attractive Market Segment for Sport Managers:
Adulthood Sport Participation**

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Socio-cultural

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**20-minute oral presentation
(including questions)
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Relevance and Literature Review

Sport managers are increasingly being asked to design and manage sport programs that provide positive benefits to participants, benefits that go beyond the physical effects of participation. These programs are commonly labeled, sport-for-development, and are nearly always targeted towards youth participation. However, development doesn't stop at adulthood. Rather, one continues to develop and change throughout the life course. Successful aging is directly linked to continued development and, consequently, quality of life. Yet few sport programs, let alone sport-for-development programs have been designed for this purpose.

People are living longer than ever before, with the 65+ age population expected to double by 2030 (Rikli, 2005). Not surprisingly, research has shown that people are aging unsuccessfully with declining indicators in physical health, cognitive functioning, and psycho-social attributes framing this claim (cf., Hertzog et al., 2009, Tahmaseb-McConatha et al, 2011). Although people in adulthood are often aware of the positive benefits of sport participation and physical activity and may have been active sport participants at various points in their lives, they are unlikely to engage in these programs in order to reap positive outcomes (Baker, Fraser-Thomas, Dionigi, & Horton, 2010). Research suggests that developmental processes must be accounted for when explaining changes and reasons in sport participation (cf., Darshyn, 1999, Drahotka & Eitzen, 1998). Thus, understanding this phenomenon from a developmental perspective may greatly assist sport managers to effectively design, manage, and market sport programs that meet the needs of adults, particularly older adults. In turn, sport managers can capitalize on a viable market segment seeking to achieve a positive aging process that leads to a higher quality of life (Chodzko-Zajko, 2000).

Purpose

The impetus for this research is to understand the ways in which sport participation in adulthood may assist participants to navigate life transitions, and to identify characteristics to help sport managers design, manage, and market effective programs that adequately meet the needs of adults. Therefore, understanding the relationship between sport participation and successful (or unsuccessful) life transitions, and ultimately successful aging can provide meaningful insight for the design and management of sport-for-development programming for older adults. Life-event transitions have been investigated previously in relation to elite athletes using Schlossberg's (1981) model of transitions and human adaptation (cf., Debois, Ledon, Argiolas, Rosnet, 2012; Wooten, 1994).

Method

This is a qualitative study that employs a life-history narrative analysis (Hagemaster, 1992; Reissman, 2007). Interviews with up to 40 males and females in middle adulthood are in process, and examine adults' experiences with sport participation across the life course. Participants first complete a pre-interview demographic questionnaire along with a life-course transition and sport participation chart (Harrison, Angel, & Mann, 2008). These charts form the basis of semi-structured interviews to elicit interviewees' sport participation stories following a chronological, life-course trajectory. Probes throughout the interview inquire about life transitions during their sport participation story (Hagemaster, 1992; Reissman, 2007). The interviews are audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis (Hagemaster, 2007). In addition, the researcher takes field notes that describe the participant's affect and the interview's contextual details (Hagemaster, 2007). Data analysis will begin by categorizing the interview data through sorting and coding, then by grouping like categories to identify emerging themes and subthemes (Hagemaster, 2007). Mentor auditing throughout the study is used to ensure reliability (Hagemaster, 2007). Schlossberg's (1981) model and constructs (e.g., transition, adaptation) will be used to assist in

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interpreting the evolving themes (Hagemaster, 2007).

Discussion/Implications

A lengthy lifespan may be burdensome to both the individual and society if a positive aging process remains elusive (Alemayehu & Warner, 2004). Sport participation and physical activity programs have shown the capacity to impact life quality in this process (Chodzko-Zajko, 2000). Preliminary analysis of a subset of interviews suggests that sport participation can serve as a protective factor as one navigates some life transitions. This theme and others will continue to be examined. Understanding the components that influence sport and physical activity levels over the life course while also enhancing participants' quality of life enables sport managers to create meaningful and effective programming for this market segment. Implications for sport managers that take advantage of this opportunity will be discussed along with recommendations that continue to expand future research in adult sport participation.