

Get Girls Back in the Game: Gender Influences on Participation in Collegiate Recreational Sports

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Many collegiate recreational programs across the country are vying for increased participation in their sport programs. The popular press has discussed the issue of gender equity in leisure and recreation opportunities, leading some to construe that means the sexes have reached equality in their leisure and recreation opportunities (Henderson & Hickerson, 2007). A common problem for many programs is decreasing female participation in recreational sports. Research continues to unfold that helps understand more about what females want and need in their leisure (Henderson & Hickerson), but this research lacks information on what influences the choices to participate. Washington State University is an example of a program struggling with female participation in all female intramural sport leagues where just in the past four years numbers have dwindled for all sports. (Washington State University UREC, 2012) Take for example volleyball where in 2008 there were 22 all female teams to 2012 where there are only 10 all female teams or basketball where there were 14 teams which is now down to 6. (WSU UREC) Why is it that male participation in intramural sports is consistent or increasing and female participation is dwindling? This study aimed to examine the constraints and motivations felt by intramural participants and non participants of the female gender to answer the question of how gender influences the decision to participate in recreational sports. The purpose of the study is twofold: 1) to determine the constraints females feel when choosing not to participate in recreational sports; and 2) to examine the motivational factors of active leisure participation. Understanding which factors influence intramural participation at the collegiate level may highlight possible solutions to increasing participation in these populations. This study is built around the thought that if coordinators of recreational sports at the collegiate level understand constraints and motivations of females, they can construct their leagues or market their services to better meet the needs of the consumer. The lack of research at American collegiate institutions in recent years provides a need for this study to fill the gap in leisure constraints research for female participation in recreational sports.

The theoretical framework for this study is based around leisure constraints. Women's experience of leisure constraints constitutes the core of this study. Crawford and Godbey (1987) defined leisure constraints as factors that limit or prohibit participation in desired leisure activities. For the purposes of this study, intramural sports will be looked at as a leisure activity based on the lack of skill, involvement, and time required to participate in an intramural sport. Crawford and Godbey (1987) described three domains of constraints; intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Intrapersonal constraints were thought to exist within the individual, interpersonal constraints dealt more with social interactions and considerations, and structural constraints were defined as features of the environment. Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey (1991) then developed a hierarchical model of leisure constraints that examined constraint negotiation, where people utilize strategies to overcome constraints, and a hierarchy of importance for constraints from proximal (intrapersonal) to distal (structural). Motivation was then added into the model and included the influence on leisure preferences and level of leisure activity participation which has helped clarify relationships between constraint, negotiation, motivation, and leisure participation (Carroll & Alexandris, 1997; Alexandris et al., 2002). One example of this is the study done by Carroll and Alexandris (1997) which found that recreational sport participation motivation was positively associated with participation and constraint was negatively associated with participation. The research done on women's experience of leisure constraints is more limited and inconclusive. Shaw et al. (1991) suggested that gender may or may not be a constraint to leisure; rather the way in one's gender is defined and experienced in society creates circumstances that in turn may be perceived or experienced as constraining. Jackson and Henderson (1995) found differences between men and women in terms of the intensity and nature of constraints, leading to a conclusion that women are overall more constrained in their leisure than men. However, Son, Kerstetter, & Mowen (2008) found no evidence of gender differences in constraint among adults aged 50 and older but called for more gender difference studies in leisure constraints for different age groups. The research in this study would provide a perspective towards a younger demographic for analyzing gender constraints, filling the gap from previous research, as well as examine

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constraints at a collegiate level related to recreational sports.

For this study, a qualitative approach was selected. Hudson et al. (2010) explain that the benefits of this approach in the context of leisure constraints is that qualitative research frequently uncovers constraints that are difficult or impossible to identify in the predetermined list of items used in qualitative surveys. Three focus groups will be utilized to uncover themes related to the leisure constraints framework. The study will take place at a Division 1A University in the Northwest with all participants being students at the college. Eight female participants will make up the first focus group with none of the participants having played an intramural sport before. This group will be asked questions about why they don't participate in intramural sports, how they spend their "leisure" time and will be analyzed to uncover constraints of participation. The second focus group will consist of eight female participants randomly selected from all female and coed intramural teams. This group will be asked questions related to why they participate in intramural sports and be analyzed on what motivates them to participate as well as how they may negotiate constraints that were determined in the first focus group. The third focus group will be a mixed group of female intramural non-participants and participants where questions will be asked similar to the first two focus groups but will help understand constraint negotiation. The focus groups will be conducted by a female moderator to help with anxiety about talking around a male. All of the focus groups will range from 20 to 40 minutes in length will be taped and transcribed for analysis purposes. Data from the focus groups will be analyzed using template analysis which requires than an a priori coding key be developed, with data then sorted into categories and themes using the key. This method allows for data to be analyzed for content and broad themes to be identified and then explored in relation to leisure constraints.

Anticipated results for this study are hypothesized to contain all three types of constraints. Intrapersonal constraints are hypothesized to be related to perceptions of females playing sport and situational social physique anxiety (Kruisselbrink, Dodge, Swanburg, and MacLeod, 2004) related to mixed sex exercise settings. Interpersonal constraints are hypothesized to be related to a lack of friends participating and structural constraints related to finding alternative methods of recreation and exercise. Motivational factors are hypothesized to deal with an opportunity to continue playing sports at a competitive level, a chance to socialize while playing sport, and the opportunity to compete against the male gender in co-ed leagues. Results are aimed at providing sport manager's the insight into what constricts and motivates females to participate in collegiate recreational sports for the purpose of providing a better offering and to get higher participation rates out of the female gender.