More is Better? The Moderating Role of Behavioral Involvement in Promoting Well-being

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With the growing popularity of mass participant sport events (MPSEs), more scholars and practitioners are concerned about how MPSEs could contribute to participants’ behaviors and attitudes toward physical activity and lead to healthy outcomes (Funk et al., 2011; Henderson, 2009). MPSEs such as running or cycling events represent a community-based intervention that has the capacity to promote physically active leisure (Bauman et al., 2009). Given that physically active leisure can play an integral role in promoting people’s well-being (Maher et al., 2013), MPSEs may serve as a catalyst to improve event participants’ well-being. Despite this assertion, an empirical investigation into whether participation in MPSEs contributes to individuals' well-being has received little attention. More importantly, whereas accumulated evidence suggests that physically active leisure provides various benefits to an individual’s life, there has been much debate about the direct impact of physically active leisure on well-being (Rodríguez et al., 2008). This indicates a need to examine the role of physically active leisure in promoting well-being in MPSEs.

The purpose of this study is to examine how physically active leisure may promote individuals' well-being. This study uses broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001) as a framework. The basic premise of broaden-and-build theory is that people’s daily experiences of positive emotions build consequential personal resources (cognitive, psychological, social, and physical resources) over time, which would later increase well-being. In this study, we propose that psychological involvement, a measure of personal resources through physically active leisure, would promote life domain satisfaction, a common subjective indicator of well-being. Psychological involvement refers to the degree to which participation in an activity becomes a central component of individuals’ lives and provides hedonic and symbolic value (Beaton et al., 2011). In contrast, life domain satisfaction represents satisfaction with key areas in life. Based on broaden-and-build theory, we develop the following hypothesis:

H1. Psychological involvement will be positively related to life domain satisfaction.

In this study, we also argue that the positive relationship between psychological involvement and life domain satisfaction can vary by behavioral involvement, which represents structured (e.g., event participation) and unstructured (e.g., frequency of physical activity) leisure-time activities. MPSEs have the potential to serve as an environment determinant to assist goal-directed behavior that increases psychological involvement in an activity (Funk et al., 2011). In particular, intrinsically motivated goals provide a sense of meaning to daily life and maintain an individual’s affect system, which both are likely to enhance well-being (Cantor & Sanderson, 1999). Similarly, individuals maintaining higher frequency of physically active leisure are more likely to interact with various environmental factors (e.g., training partners, training facilities) that may influence psychological involvement and life domains through the activity. Hence, participation in an MPSE and higher frequency of physically active leisure are more likely to contribute to life domain satisfaction by enhancing psychological involvement.

Although behavioral involvement has been shown to have a positive influence on well-being, excessive behavioral involvement as reflected by long duration and high frequency can have an undesirable effect on attitude toward physical activity and their lives (Berger & Tobar, 2011). In the current study, a compulsion to participate in an MPSE or physically active leisure may lower hedonic or symbolic value of the activity, leading to negative feelings of various life domains. That is, participation in an MPSE and physically active leisure can strengthen the relationship between psychological involvement and life domain satisfaction in either a positive way (higher life domain satisfaction under conditions of higher psychological involvement) or a negative way (lower life domain satisfaction under conditions of lower psychological involvement). Collectively, we hypothesize the following:
H2(a). Participation in an MPSE will moderate the relationship between psychological involvement and life domain satisfaction such that the relationship between psychological involvement and life domain satisfaction will be stronger for individuals who participate in an MPSE.

H2(b). Frequency of physical activity will moderate the relationship between psychological involvement and life domain satisfaction such that the relationship between psychological involvement and life domain satisfaction will be stronger for individuals who engage in higher frequency of physical activity.

Participants were recruited through a survey panel from a 10-mile running event held in the U.S. A total of 1,162 respondents completed the survey for a response rate of 28%. Demographic analysis revealed that the participants were, for the most part, affluent, well-educated, White, and female. The questionnaire included eight items of life domain satisfaction (Sirgy et al., 2011) and three items of psychological involvement in running as a leisure activity (Beaton et al., 2011). Behavioral involvement was assessed by event participation and the average miles for running per week. To test the hypotheses, the moderation analysis by Hayes’ (2012) PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 2) was conducted by obtaining composite scores of psychological involvement and life domain satisfaction.

After controlling for demographic variables, adjusted R-square values of life domain satisfaction were .37. The results from the moderation analysis indicate that psychological involvement had the significant direct effect on life domain satisfaction ($\beta = .74; t = 20.58; p < .001; 95\%$ Confidence Interval = [.67,.81], supporting H1. The interaction term between psychological involvement and event participation was not significant ($\beta = -.13; t = -1.88; p = .06; 95\%$ Confidence Interval = [-.27,.06]), suggesting that H2 (a) was not supported. In contrast, the interaction term between psychological involvement and the average miles for running was significant ($\beta = .10; t = 2.67; p = .008; 95\%$ Confidence Interval = [.03,.16]), which supports H2 (b). Regression lines plotted for low (10th percentile = 5 miles), mid-low (25th percentile = 10 miles), middle (50th percentile = 15 miles), mid-high (75th percentile = 24 miles), and high (90th percentile = 30 miles) running activities revealed that individuals with higher miles for running were likely to show lower life domain satisfaction until their psychological involvement reached a mid-high level (75th percentile = 6.2 in a 7-point scale). Once individuals achieved high psychological involvement (90th percentile = 6.7 in a 7-point scale), they were likely to exhibit higher life domain satisfaction as the average miles for running increased.

The results have several implications. First, based on broaden-and-build theory, our findings provide a theoretical explanation about how psychological involvement in the activity could promote people’s life domain satisfaction. Also, our study represents initial empirical evidence about the moderating role of behavioral involvement in the relationship between psychological involvement and life domain satisfaction. Although single event participation may have limited influence on the relationship between psychological involvement and life domain satisfaction, our results indicate that the benefits of behavioral involvement in life domain satisfaction may be gained if individuals increase or maintain high psychological involvement in the activity. Event organizations and host communities should consider how they can leverage MPSEs to promote participants’ well-being by stimulating their psychological involvement through event preparation and subsequent activity.