An Analysis of Motivation of Sport Participation among College Students: A Cross-National Comparison

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College students have invaluable opportunities to participate in sport activities during college years. Most colleges provide appropriate leisure circumstances to their students on campus (Kim, Sung, Park, & Dittmore, 2015). In particular, college recreation programs provide a variety of leisure activities including intramural sports, club sports, group fitness, personal training, and outdoor recreation programs (Kim et al., 2015; Lindsey & Sessoms, 2006). College students participate in those activities for competence (e.g., learning or improving skills), affiliation (e.g., making friends), fitness (e.g., having a good body shape), and fun (Kondric, Sindik, Furjan-Mandic, & Schiefler, 2013). Keating, Guan, Pinero, and Bridges (2005) reported that regularly participating in physical activities is one of the critical factors to maintain good health. The result is consistent with research from Kilpatrick, Heber, and Bartholomew (2005) which indicated that college students who regularly participate in college recreational programs could improve physical and psychological health. In addition, Taliaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller, and Dodd (2009) demonstrated that college students who participate in physical activities experienced lower rates of hopelessness, depression, and suicidal behaviors than those who do not participate in physical activities. Despite the physical and psychological benefits of physical activities, many college students worldwide do not participate. Approximately 40% to 50% of college students in the USA do not participate in any physical activities (Keating et al., 2005), while only 27.6% of male and 16.8% of female college students participate in sport and club activities in Korea (Cheng & Hashem, 2011). In China, more than 50.2% of college students do not participate in any exercises (Xinhua, 2011).

In order to improve physical and psychological health among college students through sport activities, it is important to understand the motivations of sport participation (Kilpatrick et al., 2005). Motivation, in general, refers to “the intensity and direction of behavior” (Kondric et al., 2013, p.10). Stokowski, Huffman, and Aicher (2013) also indicated that motivation is directly related to human behavior. Motivation is the best predictor of exercise behavior (Ebben & Brudzynski, 2008). A substantial amount of research in sport management and leisure studies has examined participating motivation in terms of physical activities. Particularly, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were examined in physical activities and sports (Egli, Bland, Melton, & Czech, 2011; Kondric et al., 2013; Moreno, Gonzalez-Cutre, Martin-Albo, & Cervello, 2010). For instance, Egli et al. (2011) investigated exercise motivation among college students by demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, and race). Results indicated that males were more motivated by intrinsic factors such as competition, enjoyment and strength, while females were more motivated by extrinsic factors such as weight management and appearance. More recently, Kondric et al. (2013) examined the differences of motivation to participate in sport activities among students from three different countries (e.g., Slovenia, Croatia, and Germany) and found significant gender differences in motivation among college students.

Despite an abundance of research on motivation in sport consumer behaviors, there is limited research on motivation of sport participation among college students. In particular, there is dearth of research examining a cross-national difference of psychological aspects among college students. Motivation of sport participation varies based on social contexts and cultures (Fung, 1992; Izzo, 2014). In addition, Yi and Park (2003) revealed that an individual who has a different cultural background tends to have different attitudes as well as different behavioral patterns.

Given this commentary, the purpose of this study was to examine the differences in the motivation of sport participation among college students in three different countries (e.g., China, Korea, and USA) because an individual from each country could have different motivation to participate in sport activities in terms of cultural value orientation such as individualism and collectivism.
The participants in this study were 143 college students from China, 140 college student from Korea, and 132 college students from the USA. Of the 415 total participants from three countries, more than half (N = 242, 58.3%) were males and the remaining were females (N = 173, 41.7%). The majority (N = 353, 85.1%) of students’ ages ranged from 18 to 24 and the largest ethnicity group was Asian (N = 279, 67.2%) followed by Caucasian (N = 69, 16.6%) and African American (N = 53, 12.8%). The Participation Motivation Questionnaire (PMQ) developed by Gill, Gross, and Huddleston (1983) was used to assess the motivation of sport participation. This scale includes 30 items under eight motivational constructs including achievement/status, team, fitness, energy release, others, skill, friends, and fun. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all important to 5 = extremely important). The analysis of data from three countries was performed using SPSS 20.0. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify the number of factors on the 30 items of the PMQ. In addition, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to examine the differences of the motivation among college students in three different countries.

The results of the EFA supported a three-factor model including social development, achievement, and fitness with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 concerning a reasonable compromise between model parsimony and adequacy of fit (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 1998). The extracted three-factor model accounted for 59.93% of the total variance of the variables. Reliability coefficients of motivation factors exceeded the recommended benchmark of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), supporting that the items for each motivation factor were considered to have an acceptable level of internal consistency: social development $\alpha = .899$, achievement $\alpha = .891$, and fitness $\alpha = .770$.

Descriptive statistics indicated that students from USA (M = 3.75, SD = .72) had the highest level of motivation in social development followed by students from Korea (M = 3.38, SD = .77) and students from China (M = 2.96, SD = 1.09). Students from Korea (M = 3.99, SD = .69) had the highest level of motivation in achievement followed by students from USA (M = 3.68, SD = .72) and students from China (M = 3.09, SD = 1.10). Lastly, students from Korea (M = 4.10, SD = .64) had the highest level of motivation in fitness followed by students from USA (M = 4.00, SD = .72) and students from China (M = 3.84, SD = .87). MANOVA results indicated that there were significant differences, $V = .334$, $F (6, 822) = 27.44$, $p < .001$, in motivation factors among the three countries. Univariate tests indicated that there were significant differences in each motivation factor between three countries. As the result of post hoc test, there were significant differences in social development and achievement among the three countries. It was interesting note that there was no difference in fitness motivation between China and USA as well as Korea and USA while there was a significant difference in fitness motivation between China and Korea.

The finding of this study clearly demonstrated that students from three countries have different motivation to participate in sport activities, possibly explained from cultural diversity. For example, Korean and American students exhibited mean score higher than Chinese students in all three motivational factors, suggesting the cultural environment in China does not place a great importance on physical activity among college students. By understanding motivation of sport participation, administrators in college recreation centers not only increase rates of student participation but also satisfy students’ need for exercise.