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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATIONS IN SPORT: A STUDY OF COLLEGE ATHLETES IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Participation in sports and games dates to antiquity and not a single theory or explanation can account for why humans continue to engage in sports. It is particularly important to understand why youths participate in sport as this may influence the formation of future lifestyle and inform the design of appropriate sport and recreation programmes to meet their interests and needs. This study undertaken to evaluate the factors, which influence college athletes' intention to participate in sports. It was hypothesized that college athletes participate in sport because of the need to excel in competition. Data were collected with questionnaires from 61 students randomly selected from a teacher training college in Kenya. Data were analysed through Kruskal-Wallis test of independent samples and hypothesis tested at  $p \leq 0.01$  level of significance. Findings revealed significant differences in the motivational orientations of men and women engaged in different sports. It is recommended that educational institutions should diversify their sports development strategies and promote greater participation in recreational sports.

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INTRODUCTION

Participation in games and sports dates back to antiquity. Several theories have been propounded to explain why humans engage in physical activities and sport and the benefits derived from such participation. Some of these theories overlap and have been given different interpretations. In fact, the reversal theory postulated by Kerr (1991) indicates that human behaviour is basically inconsistent. In other words the same behaviour or activity may be undertaken for very different reasons at different times. Similarly, the human organism is highly complex and no single theory or explanation will apply to different people or even the same person at different times. Indeed many of the reasons listed in the theories of play are working together often subconsciously to motivate and induce sports participation (Henry, 1978). Practitioners in sport settings desire to structure sports and exercise in ways that maximize motivation in participants (Weiss and Chaumeton, 1992). Understanding motivated behaviour is one of the key issues pursued by sport psychologists and educators for purposes of theoretical development and successful programming and applications in educational institutions (Weiss and Chaumeton, 1992). Three general theoretical models have been tested and modified in relation to describing and explaining the participation behaviour process. These theories include competence motivation (Harter, 1981), achievement goals (Maehr and Nicholas 1980) and social exchange/cost-benefit analysis

(Thibaut and Kelly, 1959, Smith, 1986). According to Harter (1981), individuals are motivated to demonstrate competence in an achievement area and do so by engaging in mastery attempts (i.e learn and demonstrate sport skills). If successful these mastery experiences results in feelings of efficacy and positive effect which in return results in continued motivation to participate. Achievement goal orientation posited that individuals are primarily motivated by one of three goal orientations of, ability, task and social approval orientations. Ability oriented individuals strive to demonstrate skills in relation to the others, so social comparison is a primary source of information for those individuals. Task-oriented persons adopt mastery oriented goals and evaluate their sport ability in relation to their own past performance rather than performance of others. The individuals primarily oriented by social approval goals is directed towards obtaining feedback from significant others for the effort put forth during participation regardless of performance outcome.

The social exchange theory as propounded by Thibaut and Kelly, (1959) and Smith (1986), postulates that social behaviour is motivated by the desire to maximize positive experiences and minimize negative experiences, i.e. individuals will remain in activities as long as the outcome is favourable. Thus, an individual weighs the costs, benefits and satisfaction of a current situation with those of alternative situations and makes a decision accordingly (Thibaut and Kelly, 1959). The viewpoint that sport and play need not fulfil an end is argued by Huizinga (1955) who stated that play ought to be considered for its own sake. However, the social

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context surrounding different cultures is likely to have an impact on sport participation motives (Mazrui 1987; Strand and Scanting, 1997). A comprehensive review of participation in games and sports in educational institutions in Kenya reveal that games and sports are competition – oriented and high levels of performance is emphasized (Wamukoya, 1993; Wasonga, 1996, Muindi 1998). Indeed Muindi (1998) emphasized that competition begins at school level with such events as interclass, inter-year and inter- house competitions whose main purpose is to provide an opportunity for the most able pupils to be identified and recruited into school teams in various games and sports. However, Muindi (1998) asserted that boys and girls in primary schools participate in games and sport out of self-initiated motives, forced by teachers, classmates or encouraged by the teachers or parents. However, studies from the west reveal contrasting findings on why pupils participate in sports and games. Hendry (1978) reported that enjoyment and satisfaction were strongly held motives of participation in recreational sports, while other highly regarded motives often cited in the literature include release of tension, physical development, self-confidence and skill acquisition. Similarly, Coakley (1995) identified skill development, affiliation, achievement and fun as the reasons cited by young people for participating in sports and games. In Israel, Weignartene *et al* (1984) found that motives such as achievement, affiliation competence, future success orientation and family/social expectations were rated as significantly more important by children living in cities than by Kibbutz children. The authors concluded that Israeli youth are motivated to compete in sport based on the opportunities it provides for actualizing independence, taking on responsibility and making decisions. These results suggest that motives for participation may vary as a function of socio-cultural factors. Siegel (1999) assessed patterns of participation motivation for sports and level and types of physical activities in urban Mexican school youth. He found that female preferred individual life time activities whereas males seemed to prefer sport activities. With the above background it was apt to investigate the participation motives of college athletes in Kenya. This was prompted by the fact that teams preparing for inter-collegiate games withdrew from the playing fields after they were made aware that they will not participate in the competitions due to financial constraints. Thus, the researcher hypothesised that college athletes participate in games and sports in order to excel in competition. It was further hypothesized that participation motives will vary across gender and different sports.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Sample

A total of 61 students randomly selected from Kilimambogo teacher training college in Kenya took part in the study. These comprised (37) (60.67%) men with a mean age of  $23.56 \pm 4.77$  years, and 24 (39.34) women aged  $23.19 \pm 3.77$  years. They comprised of athletes in the following sports who were preparing for the annual Kenyan intercollegiate ball games championships: basketball (n=9), volleyball (n=9), hockey (n=11), handball (n=9), soccer (n=17) and netball (n=6).

### Questionnaire

In order to obtain data for the purpose of this study, a 40-item questionnaire was designed after a comprehensive review of

the literature on motivational orientation in sports. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Items in section A covered demographic information while section B focused on motives/reasons for participating in sports. Each item in section B was rated on a 4-point scale ranging from “Very important” to “Very unimportant”. The response scales were scored such that the more important the motive was, the higher the score. A pilot study was done to establish the reliability of the questionnaire. It was tested with 30 participants (athletes) in a neighbouring secondary school. The results after a split-half analysis yielded a reliability (r) coefficient of 0.82. The standardized questionnaire was then administered to 90 athletes in the college one week after the intercollegiate games had been held. However, only the data of 61 athletes are presented in subsequent sections due to faulty responses obtained in some questionnaires, which were subsequently discarded.

### Data analysis

The reasons were grouped together to form nine major motives for participation in sport. For descriptive purposes, percentages and ranks were calculated. Kruskal-Wallis test for independent samples was used to reject or uphold the hypothesis at 0.01 level of significance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 show that the first five motivational orientations among male athletes included skill development, cognitive benefits, health and physical fitness, competition and psychological benefits. For the female athletes the top five motives were aesthetic qualities, cognitive benefits skill development, health and physical fitness, and tension/stress management. However, the calculated chi-square value of 21.95 is greater than the table value of 6.64. Therefore, there is a significant difference in motivational orientations of the male and female athletes ( $p \leq 0.01$ ). Consequently, the hypothesis that sports participation motives will not differ between male and female athletes is rejected. In Table 2 the motivational orientations of different categories of college athletes are presented. The calculated  $X^2$  value of 59.48 is greater than the table value of 15.09, thus there is a significant difference ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) in motivational orientations of college athletes in different sports. Thus, the hypothesis that their motives will not differ according to the type of sport is rejected. This is because the motive of skill development was highly ranked in netball, basketball and football while health and physical fitness were the most cited reason for participating in volleyball and handball.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that there are significant differences in motivational orientations of males and females athletes at collegiate level. This finding is supported by Coakley's (1995) assertion that participation motives in sports will differ across different groups and gender. For the male athletes, participatory motives range from skill development to enjoyment, while female athletes' motives range from aesthetic benefits to enjoyment. Indeed, Scully and Clarke, (1997) found that males prefer team sports and masculine sports while females prefer individual and aesthetic sports and

**Table 1: Motivational orientations of college athletes by gender**

GENDER	MALES (N=37)		FEMALES (n=24)		
	Motives/Reasons	Rating (%)	Rank	Rating (%)	Rank
	Skill development	88	1	73	3
	Health and physical fitness	81	3	13	4.5
	Psychological benefits	79	5	71	7
	Cognitive benefits	83	2	80	2
	Friendship	77	6	70	8
	Competition	80	4	72	6
	Aesthetic qualities	75	8	84	1
	Enjoyment	74	9	66	9
	Tension/stress management	76	7	73	4.5

$p \leq 0.01, X^2 \geq 6.64$

**Table 2: Participation motives of college athletes by sport type**

SPORT	VB (N=9)		HO(N=11)		NB(N=6)		BB(N=9)		HB(N=9)		FB(N=17)	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
Motives/Reasons												
Skill development	80	2	82	2	92	1	92	1	82	2	89	1
Health and Physical Fitness	81	1	70	4	80	4.5	56	9	83	1	83	3
Psychological benefits	74	6.5	66	7	80	4.5	83	2.5	76	5	79	5.5
Cognitive benefits	79	3	77	3	88	2	75	7.5	79	3	84	2
Friendship	74	6.5	66	8	77	7	78	6	69	7	82	4
Competition	76	5	69	5	79	6	83	2.5	78	4	79	5.5
Aesthetic qualities	77	4	88	1	86	3	81	4.5	68	8	75	9
Enjoyment	67	9	68	6	75	8	75	7.5	61	9	77	8
Tension/stress management	63	8	63	9	74	9	81	4.5	71	6	78	7

$p \leq 0.01, X^2 \geq 15.09$

physical activities. Several authors suggest that males are more competitive than females who achieve less identity through competition and more through cooperation (Siegel 1999., Koivula, 1999). White (1995) observed that males more than females value the competitive aspects of sports and females perceive sports as a source of material reward and personal recognition. Equally, Tappe *et al* (1990) found that boys participated to experience competition while females participated to be out with friends. The women's participation motives found in the present study are consistent with Hendry's (1978) assertion that "such differentiation in participatory motives gives credence to the stereotype that all girls are "naturally" suited to performing activities involving grace, balance and aesthetic involvement". The most feminine sports are those with a strong aesthetic component such as swimming and gymnastic which do not compromise the stereotypes' of feminine behaviour and appearance (Colley *etal* ,2005) No wonder why the women in this study most favourably ranked 'athletic qualities' as the motive accounting for their intention to participate in sports. These different approaches relate directly to traditional gender-role differences in the form of females communal, person focused orientation and males instrumental competitive orientation (Eagly, 1987)

On the other hand, the findings of this study reveal significant differences in participation motives of the college athletes in different sports. However, there is no sufficient evidence to account for these differences. Descriptive researches on participation in sport can be classified as sport-general or sport-specific. A review of previous studies on participation motivation reveals that athletes participate in sports due to competence (learn and improve skills, achieve goals), fitness (get in shape or get stronger), affiliation (be with friends or make new ones), team aspects (be part of a group or team) competition (win, be successful) and fun (excitement, challenge action). Siegel (1999) found that primary reason for sports participation for the youth was fun and physical fitness. He reported that males were more ego oriented than females and there were no differences in task orientation. Most males

were in the active category while most female were in the inactive category. However, Muindi (1998) asserted that the foundation of recreation competency is laid in the individual early in life and thus it can be postulated that the foundation of interest in sport is also laid in the early stages of socialisation into sport. Kerr (1991) also conceded that no single theory can account for the differences in participatory motives in different people. However, recent works have revealed that people get involved in sports due to several rather than only a few of the motives of participation (Ryan *et al*, 1997)

Previous research by Coakley (1995) indicates that participation in college sports is almost wholly a foundation of earlier success in high school sport. Thus, it is agreeable that participation motives were also defined in high school. However, the reversal theory postulates that human organism is complex and human behaviour is basically inconsistent (Kerr, 1991), and thus, the participation motives for the athletes could have changed and largely influenced by their exposure to competitive sport at the teacher training college. Weiss and Chaumeton (1992) were equivocal that the social context surrounding the athletes is likely to have an impact on participation motives. In this study, inconsistent pattern was noted in the motivational orientations of the various categories of Kenyan athletes. Further research is necessary to establish the extent to which exposure to external competitions could influence the motives of college athletes to engage in sports. Indeed, Owolabi (1996) asserted that when teams are not exposed to outside competitions, they eventually lose morale and this would have a detrimental impact on their motivational orientation.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to establish the participatory motives of athletes engaged in collegiate sports. The findings of this study reveal that no single motive is paramount and the assertion by Kerr (1991) that the human organism is highly complex and that no single explanation will apply to different

people or even the same person holds true. Within the limitations of this study, it is recommended that: Coaches and games teachers need to structure their training programmes based on the motives of their athletes to participate in sports. This will possibly ensure continued participation in sports of the college athletes. There is a compelling urgency to comprehensively restructure sports at collegiate level in Kenya. Specifically, restructuring is needed in both planning and organising intramural and extramural sports in the colleges. Intramural sports should be emphasised in order to facilitate wider participation in recreational sports. It is imperative for the Kenyan ministry of education to agitate for diversification of sporting activities from team sports to individual sports, alongside provision of facilities and equipment for all games, aerobics, dance, weight training, e.t.c. Further studies should incorporate larger samples while focusing on the participation motives of children in primary and secondary schools as this forms the basis for future sport development.

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