

EXPLAINING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN FITNESS BOOT CAMP

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Abstract

This study seeks to advance the understanding of how women become psychologically connected to intense physically active leisure in order to develop strategies that promote engagement in physical activity. In this study 62 women were surveyed to determine their psychological connection to fitness boot camp. When women participate in fitness boot camp, they participate for the enjoyment and interesting program elements. Also participants enjoy discussing fitness boot camp, but their life is not organized around participation. Participants do not use fitness boot camp as a means of self-identification; however, they are committed to participation. Nearly one half of participants participate with a friend. This indicates the importance of a shared experience.

Keywords: Physically active leisure, fitness boot camp, psychological connection model.

Resumen

Este estudio pretende avanzar en el entendimiento de cómo las mujeres se conectan a nivel psicológico a una actividad física de ocio intensa, para así desarrollar estrategias que promuevan la participación en actividades físicas. En este estudio se encuestaron a 62 mujeres para determinar su conexión psicológica con la actividad «fitness boot camp». Cuando las mujeres participan en el «fitness boot camp», participan para el disfrute e interés de los elementos del programa. También los participantes disfrutaron

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debatendo sobre el «fitness boot camp», pero su vida no se organiza alrededor de la participación en esta actividad. Los participantes no usan «fitness boot camp» como medio para sentirse identificadas, sin embargo, se han comprometido a la participación en el programa. Casi la mitad de los participantes acuden con un amigo o amiga. Ésto indica la importancia de compartir la experiencia.

Palabras clave: actividad física de ocio, fitness boot camp, modelo de conexión psicológica.

1. Introduction

The effects of physical inactivity among adults have contributed to the increase of chronic illnesses such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes. The majority of adults in the United States do not participate in enough physical activity to yield health benefits². Globally, physical inactivity has become a significant social concern³. Overcoming low rates of participation in physical activity constitutes a major challenge to programmers in the health, fitness and recreation industries. Strategies must be developed to promote active engagement in physical activity, through effective program delivery that can facilitate the development of healthier lifestyles.

Results from laboratory studies, clinical trials, and epidemic disease investigators provides evidence that increasing one's level of physical activity produces important health and social benefits⁴. It is important to understand the complexity of factors surrounding the participation in physically active leisure in the population⁵. Sport and recreation participation has the capacity to produce health and social benefits⁶. Gender scholars have suggested that females are more constrained than males in their leisure behavior⁷. Women often site leisure constraints such as lack of time, lack of resources, and

2. SAPKOTA, S., BOWLES, H. R., & HAM, S. A. «Adult participation in recommended levels of physical activity: United States, 2001 and 2003.» *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 295 (2006), pp. 27-29.

3. World Health Organization. (2010). <http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/en/> Retrieved 3-May, 2013.

4. HARRISON, R. A., MCELDUFF, P., & EDWARDS, R. «Planning to win: Health and lifestyles associated with physical activity amongst 15,423 adults.» *Public Health* 120 (2006), pp. 206-212.

5. KRAUSHAAR, L., & KRÄMER, A. «Are we losing the battle against cardiometabolic disease? The case for a paradigm shift in primary prevention.» *BMCPublic Health*, 9 (2009), pp. 64-73.

6. JACKSON, E. L, CRAWFORD, D., & GODBEY, G. «Negotiation of leisure constraints.» *LeisureSciences*, 15 (1993), pp. 1-11.

7. ALEXANDRIS, K., & CARROLL, B. «Motives for recreational sport participation in Greece: Implications for planning and provision of sport services.» *European Physical Education Review*, 3(1997), pp. 129-143.

child care, and household maintenance responsibilities⁸. By understanding the mechanism that promotes stable attitudes and behaviors strategies can be developed that help fitness and recreational facility managers provide programs to help women achieve physical, social and psychological benefits of physical activity. Therefore, this study seeks to advance the understanding of how women become psychologically connected to intense physically active leisure.

Women and Physical Activity

According to Henderson, most women believe physical activity is good for them, but many are not physically active on a regular basis⁹. Exercise and structure activities were most commonly associated with physical activity. Henderson and Ainsworth found that the values expressed by women associated being physically active with feeling good, being with others, being and feeling healthy, and experiencing spiritual and psychological benefits¹⁰. They enjoyed physical activity most when it was not associated with «exercise»¹¹. Constraints reported by women include job demands, physical tiredness family obligations economic constraints and safety concerns. Physical activity was not a priority for the women. Many women have a social support system that both enhanced and constrained physical activity¹².

Enjoyment is a key component of leisure. Previous research by Wankel similarly concluded that enjoyment likely facilitated continued involvement and subsequent health benefits¹³. Coleman and Iso-Ahola's found elements of self-determination related to choice and enjoyment as both a cause and an effect of the health value of physical activity as leisure¹⁴. The essence of physical activity and health seemed to relate to a sense of enjoyment of an activity because of the way it made an individual feel physically and mentally.

8. DIXON, M. A. «From their perspective: A qualitative examination of physical activity and sport programming for working mothers.», 12 (2009), pp. 34-48.

9. HENDERSON, K. «Women, Physical Activity and Leisure.» *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal* 12(2003), pp. 113-137.

10. HENDERSON, K.A., & AINSWORTH, B.E. «Sociocultural perspectives on physical activity in the lives of older African American and American Indian women: A Cross Cultural Activity Participation Study.» *Women & Health* 30(2000), pp. 1-20.

11. HENDERSON, K.A., & AINSWORTH, B.E. «Researching leisure and physical activity with women of color: Issues and emerging questions». *Leisure Sciences* 23(2001), pp. 21-34.

12. HENDERSON, K.A., & Ainsworth. *Ibidem*.

13. WANKEL, L.M. «The importance of enjoyment to adherence and psychological benefits from physical activity.» *International Journal of Sport Psychology* 24(1993), 151-169.

14. COLEMAN, D., & ISO-AHOLA, S.E. «LEISURE AND HEALTH: The role of social support and self-determination.» *Journal of Leisure Research* 25(1995), pp. 111-128.

The enjoyable engagement in a physical activity enabled many women to feel physically healthier and this also influenced how they felt emotionally¹⁵.

1.1. Fitness Boot Camp

This study seeks to determine why women choose fitness boot camp over other types of exercise in order to develop strategies to increase commitment to physical activity for women.

The term boot camp produces an image of young men or soldiers being yelled by a drill sergeant while doing jumping jacks or pushups. Boot camp is perceived to be an extremely intense workout. With fitness boot camps becoming an increasingly popular trend, more fitness and recreational facilities are adding this training model to their list of program offerings. According to Lankford this trend is «...sparked in part by the popularity reality television competition shows that have made it cool to be tough.¹⁶» Based on military styled training regiments, these programs offer cardiovascular, strength, and flexibility training. Often taught in the outdoors, participants use their body weight such as push-ups, sit-ups and lunges. Natural elements such as stairs, hilly trails and parking garages provide the participants a challenging workout. Fitness boot camps are typically smaller in size than group exercise classes¹⁷. Depending on the instructor, the style of motivation varies. Most instructors rely on the competitiveness of human nature to push personal physical limits. Even though many instructors do not have military backgrounds, some still use drill sergeant tactics to encourage participants¹⁸. Regardless of instructor style discipline is a key element of fitness boot camp. Three unique motivation components of fitness boot camp have increased participant longevity in the program. First, fitness boot camp provides camaraderie and personal attention in a small group setting. Wood and Danylchuk¹⁹ report that friendship and camaraderie is one of the main reasons women continue to participate in a leisure activity. Second, another unique component is the loyalty of participants to fitness boot camp due to the progressive and creative nature. The third motivational component is the participant assessment (pre

15. HENDERSON, K.A., & Ainsworth. *Ibidem*.

16. LANKFORD K. «Military muscle.» *Kiplinger's* (2002), pp. 120-124.

17. CARRERA, M. «Work your but off.» *Fitness* (2009) pp. 60-61.

18. SARNATARO B. «Fitness boot camps: should you enlist?» <http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/features/fitness-boot-camps-should-you-enlist?print=true>. Accessed August 3, 2009.

19. WOOD, L, & DANYLCHUK, K. «Constraints and Negotiation Processes in a Women's Recreational Sport Group.» 44 (2012), pp 463-485.

and post) from which the program is developed. Until fitness boot camp, many participants attending group aerobic classes or training on their own for years without achieving expected results. Fitness boot camp has been shown to burn 600 calories per hour by combining periods of high intensity aerobic exercise with lower intensity muscle conditioning²⁰.

1.2. Psychological Connection Model

To explain why women participate in fitness boot camp, the researcher used the Psychological Connection Model (PCM). Funk and James introduced the Psychological Continuum Model²¹ (PCM) later renamed Psychological Connection Model in Beaton, Funk, and Alexandris²². The PCM is a way to organize the lines of research that address the psychological connection between an individual and various activities. Sociological and psychological processes create an individual's relationship with a recreational activity and occur as a developmental progression divided into four stages labeled Awareness, Attraction, Attachment, and Allegiance. Each stage has different characteristics and influences which ultimately could allow practitioners to apply differential management strategies to help people move through these stages to become committed and loyal participants. Beaton, Funk, and Alexandris developed a framework suitable for placing participants into their respective stages²³. To reach the Allegiance stage developmental progression through each stage is required. There is no time component for any stage and participants can move in either direction.

Awareness

The first stage is categorized when participants are aware of the opportunity but have not yet begun to participate. As described by Funk, Beaton and Pritchard «The awareness stage describes the initial development of a

20. PORCARI, J, HENDIRCKSON, K, FOSTER, C, & ANDERS, M.» Drop and give me 20.» ACE: American Council on Exercise. Available at: <http://www.acefitness.org/getfit/study-boot-camp/default.aspx>. Accessed May 26, 2010.

21. FUNK, D. & JAMES, J. «The Psychological continuum Model: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding an Individual's Psychological Connection to Sport.» *Sport Management Review* 4 (2001), pp. 119-150.

FUNK, D., BEATON, A.C. & PRITCHARD, M. The Stage-Based Development of Physically Active Leisure: A Recreational Golf Context. *Journal of Leisure Research* 43(2011), pp. 268-289.

22. FUNK, D., & JAMES J., Ibidem.

FUNK, D., BEATON, A., & ALEXANDRIS, K., Ibidem.

23. FUNK, D., BEATON, A., and PRITCHARD, M., Ibidem.

psychological connection. The attitude is derived primarily through initial exposure and socialization, and produces a general knowledge and recognition²⁴» Awareness is shaped through a socialization process of a wide range of environmental factors such as peers, family members, mass media, cultural beliefs, and advertising. The awareness stage suggests that attitude formation is limited and that behavior can range from non-existent to unplanned or random. Participation in this stage is characterized by limited knowledge and minimal prior experiences. Simple behavior can occur through search and trial behavior as the individual first becomes aware and explores an activity²⁵. Individuals may be aware of boot camp but not engage, or if participation does occur it may be coerced. Once they begin to participate in the activity, they have left the awareness stage.

Attraction

This stage occurs when a participant is motivated to seek a benefit from actual participation. Motives such as hedonic needs, dispositional needs and social factors create a drive for participation. The attraction stage describes the next step in the development of the psychological connection. «I like boot camp» is the expected response of those in the attraction stage. Personal determinants represent a number of factors including gender, race, cultural orientation, socio-economic status, personality and perceived and actual constraints to perform the activity that can stimulate attraction to boot camp²⁶ Psychological determinants include needs and internal motives such as health related physical and mental benefits of exercise that can be realized through participation in boot camp²⁷. The interaction between individual processes and sociological forces activates positive perceptions of whether the individual perceives boot camp as satisfying needs and offering attractive benefits²⁸. Behavioral engagement increases in complexity through learning and feedback. The individual begins to understand and appreciate the act of participating, rules and structures, making judgments regarding a variety of elements related to the activity and interacting with fellow participants via mutual experience.

24. McDONOUGH, M. H., & CRACKER, P. R. E. «Sport participation motivation in young adolescent girls: The role of friendship quality and self-concept.» *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 76,(2005), pp. 456-467.

25. FUNK, D., BEATON, A.C. and PRITCHARD, M., Ibidem.

26. Ibidem.

27. Ibidem.

28. Ibidem.

Attachment

The psychological bond between the activity and the participant is strengthened and becomes more stable. This continued development reflects an individual assigning emotional, functional, and symbolic meaning to associations. The attachment stage describes a psychological connection to boot camp that has become meaningful²⁹. The connection to boot camp is now strong with collective associations generated by a differentiation of self from other participants and integration of self with other participants. The individual changes self from situation to situation. Boot camp now assumes a deeper meaning for the individual as ideas of self-concept are link to existing core values and represents a degree of complexity and strength in one's attitude toward boot camp³⁰ Behavior becomes more frequent, meaningful, and creates opportunities for self-expression and integration with others within the subculture³¹ Behaviors may still fluctuate due to the traits and values a person already possesses as part of their self-concept, but generally overall behavior will conform.

Allegiance

When participants reach the allegiance stage the activity is part of their life, represents their core values, and is resistant to change. Because of the psychological commitment and behavioral loyalty, the allegiance stage is the most stable. The allegiance stage describes the psychological connection to boot camp that is the strongest and most enduring. Psychological connections in this phase have become highly formed, complex, resistant to change, and capable of guiding behavior and information processing³² Allegiance is characterized by cognitive complexity, which allows individuals to resist negative information about the activity or suppress positive information about competing alternates. Robust connections enable long-term stability and a commitment to boot camp that is indicative of a well formed attitude that persists, resists, and influences related cognition and behavior. The complexity of behavioral engagement at this stage is also believed to increase in both the breadth and depth of participation.

29. FUNK, D. & JAMES, J., Ibidem.

30. FUNK, D., BEATON, A. C. & PRITCHARD, M., Ibidem.

31. SCHOUTEN, J. W., & MCALEXANDER, J. H. «Subcultures of consumption: An ethnography of the new bikers». 22(1995), pp. 43-61.

32. FUNK, D & JAMES, J. Ibidem.

The relationship between attitudes and behavior characteristics of engagement are generally linear and positive. A variety of processes operate within and between levels of awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance in PCM model. Stewart, Smith, and Nicholson³³ advocate the PCM as a theoretically sound framework for understanding active participation. Beaton and Funk³⁴ argue that the PCM is a sound choice to guide research on participation in physically active leisure. With regard to activerecreation, the framework has also been applied to an examination of motives for a variety of physically active leisure pastimes³⁵.

2. Measures

2.1. Involvement

Involvement measures were drawn from valid and reliable scales used previously in the leisure literature³⁶. The only revisions made were minor wording changes to denote the context of the activity. Each of the three facets of involvement were measured with three items scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Examples of items for each facet include «I participate in fitness boot camp because I like it» (pleasure), «A lot of my life is organized around fitness boot camp» (centrality), and «When I participate in fitness boot camp, I can really be myself» (self-expression). A complete list of the items used is presented in Table 1.

The Involvement Construct items were grouped into the facets of Pleasure (4 items) that represent enjoyment, interest and importance, Centrality (4 items) explains how central the activity is to lifestyle, and Sign (4 items) demonstrates that value of self expression and symbolism of the activity (6). The Involvement Construct items were labeled according to the averages of pleasure, sign and centrality. Mean facet scores were classified as low (< 3.5), medium (3.6-4.25), or high (> 4.26). The low, medium or high scores were used in the staging algorithm to classify involvement as attraction, attachment

33. STEWART, B., SMITH, A. C. T., & NICHOLSON, M. «Sport consumer typologies: A critical review» *Sport Marketing Quarterly* 4(2003), 206-216.

34. BEATON, A.A., & FUNK, D.C. An Evaluation of Theoretical Frameworks for Studying Physically Active Leisure. *Leisure Sciences* 30(2008), pp. 1-18.

35. FUNK, D.C., TOOHEY, T., & BRUUN, T. «International sport event participation: Prior sport involvement; destination image; and travel motives.» *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 7(2007), pp. 227-248.

36. BEATON, A. A. & FUNK, D. C., & ALEXANDRIS, K. «Operationalizing a theory of participation in physically active leisure.» *Journal of Leisure Research* 41(2009), pp. 177-203.

or alliance. The process used in Beaton, Funk and Alexdris is show in Table 2. Awareness was not used in this study as our participants are currently participating in fitness boot camp

2.2. Commitment Construct

The fitness boot camp commitment measure was adapted from prior research on psychological commitment and resistance to change «My preference for fitness boot camp would not willingly change» is an example of the items used to measure commitment to fitness boot camp. Similar to the other measures, the commitment scale utilized three items measured on 5-point Likert-type scales anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The commitment scale had previously been developed and validated in a variety of leisure contexts including marathon running, cycling, rugby league participation, recreational skiing and recreational fitness.

3. Participants and procedure

The data were collected at a private not for profit medical fitness facility and a municipal recreation department located in the Midwestern United States by a researcher who was familiar with the fitness boot camp program and the facilities. Data were collected in the last week of a 6 week program session. Participants in five different training groups were surveyed. The questionnaires were distributed at the end of workout, and were completed by adults (over 18 years of age). Participants were allowed to complete the survey in the presence of the researcher or take them home to complete and return them to the facility. All surveys were completed in the presence of the researcher. Surveys were anonymous.

4. Results

Sixty-eight surveys were collected with the majority of those being female (92%), and between the ages of 30-49 (57%) and 20-29 (21%). Six men were participants in the fitness boot camp programs; however, their surveys were collected separately and not reported for this article. Besides the Involvement Construct Items, participants were asked why they initially were attracted to the program. Weight loss was reported as important (90%) as was muscle gain (92%) and flexibility (100%). Thirty-three percent reported attending group exercise classes other than fitness boot camp such as yoga, cycling, or aerobics. Interestingly 49% reported participating in fitness boot camp with friend. This is consistent with research that suggests that friendship and

camaraderie is one of the main reasons women continue to participate in an activity³⁷.

Of all the Involvement Construct facets, Pleasure recorded the highest mean value ($M = 3.92$), Centrality $M=3.83$, and Sign $M=3.50$. The Pleasure item that states «compared to other exercise programs, boot camp is very interesting» was the highest mean score of all 12 items ($M = 4.41$).

Participants rated the Centrality item that states «I enjoy discussing my boot camp participation with friends» the next highest item ($M = 4.21$). Table 1 reports all Involvement Construct Items.

Table 1: Involvement

	Mean
Pleasure	3.92*
Participating in boot camp offers me relaxation when pressure builds up	3.74
Participating in boot camp is one of the most satisfying things I do	3.55
I really enjoy boot camp	4.14
Compared to other exercise programs, boot camp is very interesting	4.41
Centrality	3.83*
I find a lot of my life organized around boot camp	3.79
Boot camp has a central role in my life	3.58
I enjoy discussing my boot camp participation with friends	4.21
A lot of my time is organized around boot camp	3.74
Sign	3.50*
Participating in boot camp says a lot about who I am	3.53
You can tell a lot about a person by seeing them participate in boot camp	3.65
When I participate in boot camp I can really be myself	3.58
When I participate in boot camp, others see me the way they want to see me	3.24

*overall mean for each item

After using the staging algorithm (Table 2) as developed by Beaton, Funk, and Alexandris³⁸ twenty nine percent were in the attraction stage, 53% were in the attachment stage and 18% were in the allegiance stage. No participants were in the awareness stage since all surveyed persons were participants.

37. WOOD, L, and DANYLCHUK, K., *Ibidem*.

38. BEATON, A. et. al., *Ibidem*.

Table 2: Staging algorithm

Using the involvement profile ratings, complete the actions below in order until a stage is determined.	
Action 1	If pleasure facet is rated low Stage = awareness (non participants), attachment (participants); If condition not satisfied then
Action 2	If both centrality and sign facets are rated low Stage=attraction If condition not satisfied then
Action 3	If either centrality and sign facets are rated low Stage= attachment If condition not satisfied then
Action 4	If any two facets are rated high Stage=allegiance If condition not satisfied then
Action 5	All remaining, Stage=attachment

5. Discussion

When women participate in fitness boot camp, they participate for the enjoyment and interesting program elements which is consistent with Carrera³⁹. Also participants enjoy discussing fitness boot camp, but their life is not organized around participation. Participants do not use fitness boot camp as a means of self-identification; however, they are committed to participation. Nearly one half of participants participate with a friend. This indicates the importance of a shared experience which is consistent with Wood and Danylchuk⁴⁰.

A trend emerged where participants in the attraction stage rated centrality and sign as low. Participants in the attraction phase may begin to have self-efficacy but still perceive themselves as having barriers (i.e. not being able to perform the activity). This type of behavior is unstable. To keep these participants, it is in the facility managers, person trainers and instructors best interest to move participants from the attraction to the attachment stage. The attachment stage represents more stable behaviors. Individual debriefings can be implemented to determine if participants perceive themselves as accomplishing workout tasks and meeting individual fitness goals.

39. CARRERA, M., Ibidem.

40. WOOD, L, and DANYLCHUK, K., Ibidem.

Participants in the attachment stage continue to strengthen their psychological bond with fitness boot camp and should begin to rate construct items as medium. However, we found that participants in this stage are still rating some construct items as low. In this stage participants are developing self-efficacy but may still need some individualized attention.

Participants in the Allegiance stage rated all construct items as high. These participants are fully engaged and committed to fitness boot camp. Facility managers, personal trainers and instructors would expect these people to continue to keep signing up for fitness boot camps in the future.

Managerial Implications

The results of the current research also introduce a variety of implications for fitness and recreational facility managers. First, managers can segment the participant base. By utilizing the involvement construct managers and programmers can facilitate the application of stage matching participants within the PCM framework to understand participant behavior, while attempting to promote increased participation (Beaton et al., 2009). Recreation and fitness industry professionals can employ divergent marketing strategies to facilitate participation in community events that can increase physical activity patterns.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explain the reasons why women participate in fitness boot camp with the broader application of developing strategies to help women adopt physically active lifestyles. PCM framework characterizes an individual's relationship with an activity as progressing upward through four distinct phases that correspond to different levels of attitude formation as well as increased frequency and type of behavior. Strategies that nurture the psychological connection and social aspects make fitness boot camp a central a symbol of self expression. Highlighting the bonding nature of shared experience, individual attention, and the opportunity for self expression through fitness boot camp is one way to attract women to such programs. Specific findings of the current research indicate marketing communication should highlight the benefits of excitement, performance, and esteem associated with participation in fitness boot camp. To increase program retention and recruitment a focus on individualized attention is necessary. The author suggests using social media such as Facebook and Twitter to enhance the centrality of fitness boot camp to participants. Incentives for completion of individual goals can overcome the perceived lack of ability in participants and move them from the attraction stage to the attachment.

Limitation and Implications

One limitation of this study was the homogeneity of the participants. There were no minorities among the participants. Participants were selected from a convenience sample. Both facilities are located within an upper middle class geographic area. A follow up study to determine if the participants had moved through the stages over time is warranted. It would be interesting to know the reasons for participant drop out of the program. Although some gains were made, more research into motivation and constraints is necessary to develop a more complete understanding of participation in physically activity leisure.

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