Examination of Reasons of Sport Participation and Physical Activity Enjoyment between High School Athletes across Specialization Status

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Abstract
Introduction: Athletes who participate in a single sport (“specializers”) are often thrust into highly structured and competitive environments which may foster burnout and negative feelings regarding that sport, and physical activity in general. Previous research has indicated that youth athletes who participate in a variety of sports report higher levels of physical activity enjoyment than specialized youth athletes. Purpose: The purpose of this study was to determine if high school athletes who specialize in a single sport differ in their physical activity (PA) enjoyment and reasons for participation compared to athletes who play multiple sports. Methods: Participants were 121 high school athletes (M age=15.7, SD=1.22) who participated in summer camps in the sport of volleyball (n=40), soccer (n=33), wrestling (n=11), or tennis (n=42). All participants completed a survey packet asking whether they specialized in a single sport, their reasons for sport participation, and their physical activity enjoyment (PAES, Kendzierski & DeCarlo, 1991). All participants completed the survey packet during registration for their respective sport camp. Results: Individual independent t-tests comparing “specializers” and “nonspecializers” on their reasons for sport participation were nonsignificant (p>0.05). In addition, no significant difference was found on physical activity enjoyment between specialists and nonspecialists (t(120)=1.30, p=0.20). Conclusion: These results suggest that specialists and nonspecialists were similar in their reasons for sport participation and general physical activity enjoyment. Primary reasons for sport participation may be more similar than different in these two groups of athletes among non-elite youth athletes. Future research should examine these variables in more elite youth sport settings.

Purpose
• The purpose of this study was to determine if high school athletes who specialize in a single sport differ in their physical activity (PA) enjoyment and reasons for participation compared to athletes who play multiple sports.

Methods
• Participants & Procedures
  – 121 high school athletes (24 males, 97 females) completed a survey packet during the registration period of their sports camp which was held at various Midwestern universities.
  – The sports represented from the various summer sports camps included: tennis (n=42), girls’ volleyball (n=40), wrestling (n=6), and girls’ soccer (n=33).
  – The survey included:
    9 questions, set to a five-point Likert scale, examining the athletes’ reason for participation in sport, structured upon previously reported reasons for youth sport participation and withdrawal (Hreicmovich, 2004; NASPE, 2005).
    Physical Activity Enjoyment Scale (PAES), composed of 18 bipolar questions (Kendzierski & DeCarlo, 1991).

Results
• As indicated in Table 1, individual independent t-tests comparing “specializers” and “nonspecializers” on their reason for sport participation were nonsignificant (p>0.05).
• Results from an independent t-test comparing specialists and nonspecialists on their general physical activity enjoyment were also nonsignificant (t(119)=1.49, p>0.05) indicating no group differences on their PA enjoyment.

Conclusions
• Specialization status does not appear to influence physical activity enjoyment levels and participation reasons in non-elite high school athletes.
• Future research should examine PA enjoyment and reasons for participation differences between elite and nonelite athletes.
• Researchers should examine PA enjoyment levels based on the length of the athlete’s career.

Limitations
• Small sport sample
• Small male population
• Confusion and comprehension on the PACES questions, may have created inaccurate data.
• Athletes may have been distracted due to camp atmosphere which may have caused them to rush through the survey

References

Background
• Parents and coaches pressure young athletes into specialization under the impression that it will increase their chance of receiving an athletic scholarship, which is not supported by data (Callender, 2010).
• The NCAA estimates the chance of a high school senior playing on a collegiate team varies by sport: 3 percent (men’s basketball) to 11 percent (men’s ice hockey).
• Athletes who specialize are likely to experience physical, psychological, and developmental issues including burnout (Baker, 2003; Gould, 2010; Gould, Tuffey, Udry, & Lober, 1996; Strachen et al., 2009), overuse injuries (Kaleth & Milkesky, 2010), and increased competitive stress.
• Past research states that specialization may cause more harm than good, however, athletes still specialize and many do so before adolescence (Rusell & Limle, 2013, 2014).

Hypothesis
• It was hypothesized that specialists would report lower levels of PA enjoyment due to the regimented and consistent practice/competition schedule.
• It was also hypothesized that specialists and nonspecialists would be different on their reasons for sport participation.

Research Question
• Do non-elite high school athletes report different reasons for participation and different levels of PA enjoyment based on specialization status?