

Motivations of San Luis Obispo Adolescents to Participate in Recreation Programs

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ABSTRACT

MOTIVATIONS OF SAN LUIS OBISPO ADOLESCENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN RECREATION PROGRAMS

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Teen programs in community recreation have seen a decline in participation in recent years. Adolescents present recreation professionals with the challenge of designing programs that are enjoyable and developmentally stimulating. The purpose of this study was to assess the motivations of San Luis Obispo adolescents to participate in community recreation programs. This study was conducted at Laguna Middle School in San Luis Obispo by conducting two focus groups, one with seventh grade students and the other with eighth grade students. It was found that students are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated by factors such as competition, an established history with the activity, social aspects, and performing. Adolescents have a negative view of the local recreation department but enjoy participating in extracurricular activities.

Recommendations regarding future research include using a multifaceted approach to data collection and obtaining a larger sample size. The recreation department should involve adolescents in the planning of teen activities.

Keywords: adolescents, community recreation, teen programs

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of the Study

Adolescents believe that there is “nowhere to go, nothing to do” (McMeeking & Purkayastha, 1995, p.336). Because of this common attitude, recreation departments develop programs especially for teens to combat this belief. Teen programs are offered for reasons beyond providing adolescents with enjoyment, such as to encourage personal, social, and intellectual development (Lawhorn, 2008). Recreation professionals try endlessly to draw young adults to their programs by highlighting the primary interest of the program and the benefits of participating; however, rates of enrollment in such programs are continually lower than youth and adult programs (S. Bohlken, personal communication, February 18, 2010). In many cases, teen programs end up being cancelled due to lack of enrollment. Low participation in such programs creates not only a challenge, but also a discouraging task for those who plan these activities.

The City of San Luis Obispo Parks and Recreation Department offers a variety of programs for teens, yet enrollment rarely reaches capacity. To find a solution to this dilemma it is crucial to understand adolescents and what drives them to become involved in activities within the community. The purpose of this study was to determine the motivations of San Luis Obispo adolescents to participate in community recreation programs. This study will aid the City of San Luis Obispo Parks and Recreation Department in determining what factors local teens seek in a recreational activity program and how to better serve this population.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Elite, SPORTDiscus, Hospitality and Tourism Complete, psycINFO, and Proquest. This review of literature is organized into the following topic areas: best practices in teen community recreation programs and youth culture.

Best practices in teen community recreation programs. In order to serve the adolescent population, understanding their wants and needs allows community recreation departments to offer the best possible programs. When discussing participation in out-of-school recreation programs, young adults often state that having fun and being with friends makes them more likely to be involved (Quinn, 1999). This section covers literature and completed research that focuses on best practices and successful enrollment in adolescent programs offered by community recreation departments.

Participants, including teenagers, know what they want and seek programs that cater to these desires. Successful programs cater their services to what teens want, since teens attend community recreation programs on a voluntary basis. The primary want of adolescents is to “hang out” when partaking in a leisure experience. Hanging out can be classified as relaxed leisure and often requires little organization; however, relaxed leisure needs to be balanced within a structured environment. Relaxed leisure, which can be related to activities such as watching television and surfing the Internet, provides young adults with enjoyment. Yet, this type of leisure is often frowned upon by parents and administrators of structured programs. It may not seem to be important, but passive

leisure is essential to teens when choosing recreational activities (Henderson & King, 1999).

Young adults also want programs that foster creativity (Horton, Meier, & Mineo, 2008). When creativity is brought forth, participants are allowed to freely express themselves. In early adolescence, self-expression is a crucial part of development. The ability to use the imagination results in a desire to participate in activities. ThinkQuest New York City allows for students participating in an afterschool program to creatively express themselves through healthy, educational competition (Horton et al.). This experience-based program has students eager to attend. The wants of teens need to be recognized in order to provide successful activities, so it is important to treat the participant as an active resource in the planning and implementation stages (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992).

Recreation programs that create a sense of community within the space being utilized have done well with registration. In this context, a place is the space where young adults gather to participate in an activity or program. This type of environment provides teens with an effective, comfortable environment in which to engage in the planned activity (Quinn, 1999). A sense of community also relates to the importance of place. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, (CCAD, 1992) found that adolescents looked for a safe place where they were respected by both their peers and adult staff members that also provided them with the ability to maintain their social identity. In creating an ideal place for teens, it is less important what is in the area and more important how the area represents the peer group (Henderson & King, 1999). Having such a place allows for the development of a group identity, which relates back to the

sense of community adolescents desire. Having a place with consistent hours that fit an adolescent's schedule is just as important to the program's success as the place itself. Meeting on a regular basis not only provides a sense of consistency and security, but it also plays a role in the increasing independence and autonomy of teenagers (McMeeking & Purkayastha, 1995). Having a program that fosters a sense of community and provides a safe environment, both inside and outside the walls of the program, are necessary for success.

Staffing procedures and requirements for teen programs are crucial to offering the most beneficial experience to the participant. The CCAD (1992) stated that receptive community recreation programs should reinforce the quality and diversity of their adult leadership by recruiting and investing in staff who will contribute to the program. The staff members of recreation programs serve as role models and mentors, and they must show commitment to the program and foster appropriate behavior in participants (Horton et al., 2008). Young adults are old enough to be appropriate authority figures and respected by adolescents; however, they are also young enough to be considered hip and cool. Teens are more likely to want to be seen within the community with leaders closer to their own age, rather than be embarrassed by hanging out with people significantly older than them (Payne & Barnett, 2006). Staff members who are good role models, as well as being considered "cool" by the teen population understand what this demographic enjoy and can relate to the culture in which they live.

Youth culture. Adolescents are one of life's unsolved mysteries. The activities teens choose to engage in and why these activities are of interest to them remains a burning question that has yet to be answered. This section covers completed research and

literature that tries to capture and qualify youth culture by examining how adolescents use their time and the activities they choose to take part in during their free time.

There is a concern that adolescents who have too much idle time and a lack of adult supervision will be more likely to engage in risky behaviors (Wight, Price, Bianchi, & Hunt, 2009). Activities classified as risky behaviors are those with detrimental consequences such as reckless driving, partying, physical violence, and sexual activity. Involvement in the aforementioned activities, as well as others that were not mentioned, may stem from “gender norms and neighborhood characteristics” (Cohen, Taylor, Zonta, Vestal, Schuster, 2007, p. 84). Risk-taking is a part of becoming an adult and experiencing the world, but these activities may undermine development and the consequences must be considered.

Speeding, running stop signs, and failing to yield to pedestrians may seem like small risks, but car accidents are the leading cause of death among teens in the United States (Zemanski, 2001). The most common risks teen drivers take are: driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol, driving late at night, and not using seatbelts (Williams, Leaf, Simons-Morton, & Hartos, 2006). Driving is one of the many privileges awarded to teens; however, it is important to remember this is a privilege, not a right, and privileges can be lost.

Partying is considered a gathering of friends or peer interaction and is another high-risk environment. Lefkowitz (1998) describes a teen party as a gathering that takes place in an adolescent’s home where music, alcohol, and a mixed gender group are present. Partying provides teens with a way to: relieve stress, have an enjoyable time, be accepted by peers, and engage in self-expression (Larson & Seepersad, 2003). Yet, the

presence of alcohol and a lack of adult supervision can have deadly consequences. About 17% of Los Angeles teens reported that they had driven under the influence of alcohol, and 15% had driven under the influence of narcotics (Carlos, Borba, Heck, Nathaniel, & Sousa, 2009). The word “party” has now become synonymous with fatal elements, which lead to irrational behavior, numbed brains, and ultimately bad decisions.

Teens, especially boys, struggle with using violence, as a way to express their emotions. This behavior proves to be risky when taken too far. Violence never solves a problem and can result in death. Yet, threats and physical abuse are acknowledged by middle school boys as acceptable ways to deal with a person who makes them angry. Even more concerning is the fact that the opportunity to get a gun is prevalent among this demographic (Zemanski, 2001).

Sexual activity is an extremely risky behavior during adolescence because it exposes teens to unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. According to a study by Markham, Peskin, Addy, Baumler, & Tortolero (2009), it was found that 14.2% of seventh grade students had engaged in some sort of sexual intercourse. Engaging in such behavior when one is younger than 14 years old, subjects an adolescent to having sex more often, having more sexual partners, and ultimately exposing these youth to more opportunities of sex-related consequences (Markham et al., 2009). The statistics are so astounding that the Office of the United States Surgeon General (2001) made understanding youth sexuality one of the nation’s top public health concerns.

With American adolescents having more free time than most young adults in other industrialized nations, it is interesting to explore what they choose to do with their leisure time (Larson & Seepersad, 2003). There is substantial time-diary data of adults in

the United States; however, very little research has been done regarding the time use of teenagers. Teenagers participate in productive activities such as: paid work, studying, and housework; they also enjoy leisure activities such as: watching television, using technology, sleeping, and extracurricular activities.

Paid work may provide adolescents with applicable skills and responsibilities to excel in the workforce post academia. Research shows that 40-60% of high school students have a part time job; students with a part time job work approximately seven hours per week during the school year, which is more than youth in other industrialized nations (Larson & Seepersad, 2003). It is unknown if this has a harmful or helpful effect related to academic achievement (Larson & Seepersad, 2003). It may establish a sense of direction for the adolescent, but it may also interfere with the teen's ability to complete homework.

Studying and doing homework is an expected activity of adolescents who attend school. Homework accounts for about five hours per week of an adolescent's time between the ages of 12 and 18, (Wight et al., 2009), this is surprisingly less than students in other countries (Larson & Seepersad, 2003).

As a child grows older, they are expected to contribute more around the house. These responsibilities, or chores, account for approximately 45 minutes per day for ninth graders (Wight et al., 2009). Household responsibilities such as washing dishes, taking out the trash, and cleaning one's room foster responsibility and maturity among teens, but some expectations such as taking care of younger siblings may force adolescents to grow up too quickly.

Watching television is also another common use of young adults' free time. Young adults watch an average of 15 hours of television per week (Wight et al., 2009). Televisions are prevalent in 70% of adolescents' bedrooms (Lewin, 2010). With television taking up so much time, and the results of watching TV having limited developmental benefits, television has been a constant concern for parents. The amount of time 8-18 year olds spend watching TV shows at the time they are broadcasted has decreased by 25 minute per day, but an additional 55 minutes per day are spent watching TV shows on other technologies such as the Internet and cell phones (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010).

In the age of technology, it isn't surprising how much time young adults spend using electronic devices such as computers, cell phones, and MP3 players. As stated by Lewin (2010), "Those ages 8 to 18 spend more than seven and a half hours a day with such devices" (p. A1). Technology devices cause distractions for teens while in school, studying, or even while driving. Not only that, but cell phones are used to cheat in school and to record, video tape, and take pictures of people and things without permission. Internet access provides students with the ability to simply copy and paste information to claim as their own and discourages students from seeking information from other sources. The Internet poses other threats with regards to chat rooms and social media sites such as cyberbullying, sexual predators, pornography, and damaged reputations (Gevirtzman, 2008). Video games have shown to be a technological concern as well, particularly for parents. The time spent playing video games displaces other interests and inhibits social interactions. Adolescents who spend a majority of their time playing video games spend less time reading and doing homework than those who do not play video

games (Wight et al., 2009). No matter the form, technology has the potential to make young adults less productive.

Extracurricular activities, or after school activities, encompass a wide variety of programs offered by schools, from sports and performing arts to service organizations and student government. Extracurricular activities offer participants benefits including making friends and developing skills (Lawhorn, 2008). Although these school-offered programs provide benefits for those who participate, the number of such activities can be overwhelming. Some students tend to over enroll themselves in extracurriculars in order to boost their resume and to get ahead rather than to have fun and learn new things. Throughout adolescence, 83% of youth participate in at least one extracurricular activity (Kennedy, 2008). In most cases, the amount of activities a teen participates in is related to how many activities are offered by the school. On average "...schools offer 14 sports programs, and the average participation rate was 39% for boys and 30% for girls" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 80). Extracurricular activities give adolescents something to do rather than sit at home on the couch after school.

Summary. Teens are a misunderstood population who provide recreation professionals with a constant challenge. Best practices in teen recreation programs highlight the importance of providing relaxed leisure as well as structured leisure. Teens enjoy hanging out, although this type of leisure has not been shown to have any developmental benefits. Fostering a sense of community within recreation programs allows adolescents a chance to maintain their social identity within a safe place. Youth need a place to display their creativity. One way to encourage creativity is to allow teens to be involved in the planning and implementation processes. In order to plan a

successful teen program, it is important to understand the culture in which youth immerse themselves. Today's adolescents have an abundance of free time and tend to do with it what they please. This idle time can be used in three different ways: to engage in risky behavior, to participate in productive activities, and to enjoy leisure activities. Risky behaviors have detrimental consequences while productive activities have developmental benefits but may take away from recreational activities. Adolescents choose to engage in leisure activities such as watching television, using technology, and participating in school-based extracurricular activities because teens fill their time with both positive and negative activities, finding a way to plan recreation programs which cater to their interests is difficult. For this reason, enrollment rates in teen programs suffer.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the motivations of San Luis Obispo adolescents to participate in community recreation programs.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What attitudes and perceptions do San Luis Obispo adolescents have about community recreation programs?
2. What are San Luis Obispo adolescents' motivations to participate in recreational activities?
3. Is there a relationship between gender/extracurricular activities/friends participating and motivation to participate in community recreation programs?

4. What types of community recreation programs are adolescents drawn to?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. Information on teen motivations and involvement in community recreation programs was gathered from students at Laguna Middle School in San Luis Obispo.
2. Demographics, interests, perceptions, and behaviors were analyzed.
3. The data were collected during spring of 2010.
4. Information for this study was gathered through focus group research.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following factors:

1. Laguna Middle School teachers were relied upon to select participants.
2. This study is based on the responses from one seventh grade male and seven eighth graders (three female/four male)
3. Due to a delay in Human Subjects approval, the timing of data collection was limited to a two-week period, which only allowed for one set of focus groups to be conducted.

Assumptions

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. It was assumed that respondents would respond honestly and to the best of their knowledge.
2. It was assumed that participants were those selected by the homeroom teacher.
3. It was assumed that the homeroom teacher used the provided selection criteria to choose a participant.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as used in this study:

Adolescent. A child in their middle school years, ages 11-14

Community recreation program. A program offered by the city parks and recreation department with the intent to prevent or reduce the frequency and/ or intensity of problems displayed by youth. Such programs include: summer camps, sports programs and afterschool programs (Witt, Crompton, & Baker, 1995).

Motivation. The psychological drive that affects an action, the reason for the action, both intrinsic and extrinsic

Chapter 2

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to determine the motivations of San Luis Obispo adolescents to participate in community recreation programs. This chapter is organized in the following order: description of subjects, description of instrument, description of procedures, method of data analysis.

Description of Subjects

San Luis Obispo (SLO) is located on the California Central Coast approximately halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles. The U.S. Census Bureau (2000) reported that the City of San Luis Obispo had a population of 42,963 with 14.2% of residents under the age of 18, equaling approximately 6,100 youth. Of these youth, 1,840 were between the ages of 10 and 14 years old. The gender split was roughly 50% male and 50% female, with the predominant reported ethnicity being Caucasian.

Students from Laguna Middle School in San Luis Obispo served as subjects for this study. Laguna Middle School serves 7th and 8th grade students from the entire City of San Luis Obispo, as well as small neighboring communities. The school hosts a variety of socioeconomic classes from the extremely affluent to the lowest income bracket. Students who attended Laguna Middle School in the 2007-2008 school year were required to take core classes in reading/language arts, mathematics, history/social science, and science. The 2007-2008 school year saw an enrollment of 753 students, 376 7th graders and 377 8th graders (San Luis Coastal Unified School District, 2007).

The sample was selected based on both voluntary and convenience sampling. Students were selected by their homeroom teachers and were asked if they were willing to participate. These students were selected because they fell within the 11-14 year old age range, which was previously decided in consultation with the recreation supervisor in charge of teen programs with the City of San Luis Obispo. Their homeroom teacher felt these students would be able to provide honest, insightful answers.

Description of Reviewers or Observers

This study was conducted solely by the primary researcher; however, a San Luis Obispo Parks and Recreation Department Teen Program Specialist served as a research assistant. This research assistant was used exclusively as an inter-rater when coding data. The primary researcher was the only person involved in gathering data due to the sensitive nature of responses. Data were gathered only by this person so that the research was conducted in a consistent manner and no bias was introduced by another researcher. Although the only person collecting data was the researcher, a school representative was in the room for liability reasons and to provide assistance with any problems that could arise during data collection.

Description of Instrument

For this study, a focus group guide was created to aid in data collection. This guide served as an outline for how each focus group would be conducted. Questions were designed in a sequence that began with a simple, fact-based question to allow the respondent to become comfortable speaking with the group. The order of questions then

moved to questions that established the respondents' relationship with the topic followed by questions specifically addressing the research purpose. The final question, which brought closure to the focus group, gave participants the opportunity to provide their insight for future program development. The questions were designed to measure the attitudes and motivations of San Luis Obispo adolescents regarding the city's recreation department. A copy of the focus group guide has been included in Appendix A.

A pilot test was conducted with students in Program X, an afterschool program offered to 7th and 8th grade students on the Laguna Middle School campus through the San Luis Obispo Parks and Recreation Department. Five students participated in a mock focus group to test questions for clarity, as well as to determine if questions were properly geared to receive appropriate answers. This pilot test also gave the primary researcher an opportunity to practice moderating a focus group with subjects in the given age group.

Due to the fact that the subjects of this study were under the age of 18, parental consent was needed. An informed consent letter was developed to notify parents of the study and to provide them with information about how their child's confidentiality was protected. A copy of the informed consent letter can be found in Appendix B. After final revisions were made to the focus group guide, the guide and the informed consent letter were submitted to Cal Poly's Human Subjects Committee. The Human Subjects Committee reviewed the instrument, as well as the procedure to conduct the focus group, to ensure that all potential risks were addressed.

Description of Procedures

To begin the study, contact was made with the recreation supervisor in charge of teen programs at the San Luis Obispo Parks and Recreation Department. This contact was made in order to receive support when proposing the initial study to the school officials. With the assistance of the recreation supervisor, contact was made with the principal of Laguna Middle School to begin the approval process to be able to conduct such a study on the school's campus.

Following initial meetings with both the recreation supervisor, whose primary role was to provide information on current teen programs, and the principal, it was decided that focus groups would offer the most beneficial information. A focus group guide was created to help the facilitator properly lead the discussion. Before focus groups could be conducted, students needed to be selected, and parental consent was needed from the guardians of those who were chosen. To ensure that at least eight students were able to participate, 14 students were chosen from each grade, one from each homeroom class. Two weeks prior to the focus group meeting, informed consent letters were sent home with each selected student, to be returned to their teacher within one week. These were then given to the researcher for documentation.

Two focus groups were conducted. One group of seventh graders and one group of eighth graders engaged in a discussion led by the primary researcher during their respective lunch periods. The lunch period was chosen as the best time to conduct a discussion because all selected students had an equal opportunity to be on campus during this time. Students arrived to a designated classroom after getting their lunch and were

greeted by the researcher. They were asked to sit in a group of designated chairs placed in a circle for the duration of the discussion. Participants were welcomed and ground rules were explained. It was also noted that the conversation would be audio recorded to allow for review by the researcher following the focus group.

Before any discussion regarding recreational activities took place, students were provided a piece of paper and asked to write their name, age, and extracurricular activities they are currently involved in. These were then returned to the researcher for use in data analysis. The focus group followed the focus group guide, and answers from participants were probed for further information. The discussion lasted 30 minutes and was concluded by the participants being thanked for their time.

Method of Data Analysis

Due to the fact this study was based on qualitative data, findings were organized into groupings of common themes and trends. These themes were supported by direct quotes from focus group participants. Each theme or trend that emerged was arranged to answer the predetermined research questions. All trends aligned with the adolescents' interests and motivations for participating in provided activities.

Inter-rater reliability was used to ensure that the quotations used to support common themes were consistent and interpreted in similar ways. This procedure also brought in an outsider's opinion, which mitigated any bias introduced by the researcher. For the purpose of this study, the researcher, as well as a teen program specialist from the City of San Luis Parks and Recreation Department both coded the transcripts and compared results. An inter-rater reliability percentage of 80% or greater was achieved

before any further data analysis was completed. Quantitative data was used solely for demographic purposes. These responses included information regarding age, grade level, and extracurricular activities.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to assess the motivations of San Luis Obispo adolescents to participate in community recreation programs. This study was conducted during the seventh and eighth grade lunch periods on June 2, 2010 at Laguna Middle School. The researcher conducted separate focus groups for seventh and eighth grade students; however, due to the small sample size and consistency in emerging themes, the subjects from each focus group have been combined into a group of eight middle school students for the purpose of presenting the data. This chapter is divided into the following sections: demographic information, perceptions of the San Luis Obispo Recreation Department, types of activities adolescents enjoy, motivation to participate in activities, and summary.

Demographic Information

Of the eight students who participated in this study, one was in seventh grade, and the other seven were in eighth grade. There were five male subjects and three female subjects. All participants were 14 years old and participated in at least one extracurricular activity. The range of extracurricular activities included: swimming to cheerleading to band.

Perceptions of the San Luis Obispo Recreation Department

To determine the subject's attitudes and opinions of the San Luis Obispo (SLO) Recreation Department, participants were asked if they have ever participated in any programs offered and what first comes to their mind when the recreation department is mentioned. Of the eight participants, three (37.5%) had participated in a program offered by the SLO Recreation Department. These subjects' opinions of the recreation department did not differ from those who had never been involved in a program offered by the SLO Recreation Department. When first asked what comes to mind when the recreation department is mentioned, multiple students described the logo. When probed further, responses varied. These responses were coded and then developed into themes. The three themes that arose were: organizational issues, targeting to younger age groups, and lack of variety.

These themes were developed through the repetition of responses from subjects. The responses that fell under the category *organizational issues* used words such as "chaos, uninformed, and no structure." Subject D said, "When I played basketball and soccer, the leagues weren't always the best put together, so there was some confusion." Subject G followed up by saying, "Sometimes the staff doesn't seem like they know what they are doing...They get frustrated easily."

Those who associated the recreation department as being *targeted to younger age groups* seemed to draw associations from younger siblings. This is best shown by Subject E who stated, "The programs are for little kids, and well, I'm a big kid. My little brother does all their little sports." Subject E continued by saying "I don't want to be like the little kids."

The *lack of variety* theme related to the abundance of sports the recreation department offers with few other activities in which to choose. This theme evolved from students seeking alternatives to sports such as creative outlets. Subject H said, “They offer the basics, you know, basketball, soccer, football, the major sports. But for people like me, who don’t like sports, there’s nothing for us to do.” Subject G added, “Only the kids who like sports get to join. I wish they had art, or something with animals.”

The eight students each gave their own opinions about the San Luis Obispo Recreation Department, and most responses could be related back to one of the themes. However, Subject B stated, “I honestly don’t really know anything about it. I think if we were more informed more people would participate.” Although Subject B’s statement does not fit into an aforementioned theme, it is important to note that the SLO Recreation Department may not be extremely visible among the middle school population. Many students agreed with each other, yet each original response identified with an appropriate theme. After discussing attitudes and perceptions of the SLO Recreation Department, the subjects were asked about what types of recreational activities they enjoy.

Types of Activities Adolescents Enjoy

To find out what types of activities the eight subjects enjoy participating in, they were asked questions such as what they would like to do if they could plan the afternoon and what they enjoy doing in their free time. Answers varied from riding bikes to cheerleading. Other activities included: baseball, swimming, soccer, golf, online gaming, and band. When asked what they enjoy doing during their free time, “hanging out with friends” was a unanimous answer. Hanging out was described by Subject B in saying:

Getting a big group of friends together and you watch a movie or go downtown. I don't really know how to describe hanging out because you do different things when you hang out, but like going to the beach. Just being with all your friends and doing different things.

Subject D had a similar definition by saying, "It's usually seeing a movie, or maybe seeing a baseball game, or going home and watching TV or playing soccer, you know, just hanging out." Hanging out with friends was a common response from all focus group participants, yet Subject H also added:

Even when I have free time and want to hang out with my friends, all I can think about is school. I think about school a lot. Most of my time is spent figuring out how I am going to catch up and get these projects done.

Each subject had their own definition of hanging out and liked to participate in different activities. Subjects were then asked questions regarding their motivations to participate in extracurricular activities.

Motivation to Participate in Activities

In order to determine subject's motivations to participate in activities, students were asked why those activities they had previously discussed were of interest to them. Each respondent was involved in a different activity with no two students participating in the same activity. Out of the eight students engaged in the discussion, five (62.5%) were involved most with sports. The other three students (37.5%) were involved more in fine arts. Subjects were motivated by competition, a history with the activity, social aspects,

and/or performing. Many of the responses were multidimensional; however, the raters determined which motivational factor to place the response in with 80% reliability.

Those subjects who were involved in competitive sports, such as baseball and swimming, described the importance of competition as a motivating factor through winning, being the best, and improving skill sets. Subject C said he was involved with baseball because “I like to win. And winning is fun. I like to brag and hit the ball really far and tag people out.” Subject E recalled an experience in a non-competitive league:

I was playing in a league with kids who didn't try. You can't have kids who don't do anything and expect others to work their hardest. Now, I'm playing for real, against people of my own level. I'm getting a lot more out of it.

Subjects who identified with the theme of an established history with the activity said that they have continued to participate throughout the years because they have been involved for many years of their life. They said that due to this, they don't know anything different and haven't had the opportunity to try other things. Subject B said:

I got into it when I was little, and I really enjoyed it. And since I've grown through the years, I've had a passion for it and wanted to go further with it. I have been involved for so long, and if I gave it up now, all the time I have put into it would be pointless.

Subject F grew up playing baseball, and it has significance in the family; “I started out really young playing t-ball, like probably 4 or 5. My dad played baseball in college and had the chance to go to the pros. Baseball has been in my family for a long time.”

The social aspect of activities was a common theme found among the responses. Seeing friends, meeting new people, and having a group outside of school friends were

some of the social reasons mentioned pertaining to participation in extracurricular activities. Subject D said, “It’s fun to get to play with your friends and meet people from other cities or schools. Being with a big group of friends makes whatever you are doing fun.” Subject G said that the most important aspect of any activity is “having people around you that make you laugh and make things fun. Getting to see my friends outside of school makes me want to do things afterschool.”

Common to those who participated in fine art activities, performing was an important motivator. Being in front of people, engaging and interacting with members of the group and audience were mentioned as part of the performing theme. Subject H said, “Theater is fun because you get to move around and it’s interactive. I like to be on stage and humor others, especially with improv stuff.” Subject A said that “the sense of accomplishment when you finish a performance is great, even if you know you messed up. You get an adrenaline rush when you’re up there. It’s even better when other people are there too.” These motivations expressed by subjects continued to arise throughout the discussion regardless of the question.

Summary

Results from this study show that subjects view the San Luis Obispo Recreation Department to have organizational issues, be targeted to a younger age group, and offer a lack of variety. The subjects participated in a wide range of extracurricular activities, which fell into the categories of sports and fine arts. The participants determined that they participated in activities based on competition, a history with the activity, social aspects, and performing. The results presented in this chapter indicate a need for a redesigned teen

program offered by the local recreation department. A detailed summary and a discussion of the findings will follow in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to assess the motivations of San Luis Obispo adolescents to participate in community recreation programs. This chapter is divided into the following sections: summary, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

Summary

Adolescents are a population rarely understood by adults, including those in the recreation field. Teen programs are offered through community recreation departments to provide the adolescent population with enjoyment and developmental benefits. These programs have seen a decline in enrollment in recent years for unknown reasons. Literature regarding best practices in teen community recreation programs and youth culture was reviewed to establish a basis for this study. Best practices in teen recreation show that adolescents seek programs where they can hang-out, use their creativity, be a part of a community, and have staff who are seen as both “cool” and role models. Youth culture shows that teens are becoming more involved in risky behaviors such as partying and reckless driving, and fill their time with both productive and leisure activities. The purpose of this study was to assess the motivations of San Luis Obispo adolescents to participate in community recreation programs.

Subjects of this study were seventh and eighth grade students at Laguna Middle School. Subjects were selected by their homeroom teacher and were between 11 and 14 years old. In order for selected subjects to participate, parental consent was needed. This

study used a focus group discussion to gather data with specific questions that addressed the research purpose. Two audio-recorded focus groups were conducted during the seventh and eighth grade lunch periods at Laguna Middle School. One seventh grader was involved in the seventh grade focus group, and seven eighth graders participated in the eighth grade focus group. The data were analyzed by organizing responses into themes relating to the research questions.

After the data were analyzed, it was found that subjects thought the San Luis Obispo Recreation Department had organizational issues, was targeted to a younger age group, and lacked variety. Subjects also expressed the importance of hanging out with friends when discussing how they like to spend their free time. Motivating factors for participation in recreational activities were identified to be competition, a history with the activity, social aspects, or performing. These results will be discussed further in this chapter.

Discussion

The major findings of this study have led to numerous conclusions related to the research questions. This section will discuss what the findings revealed, how they relate to previous research, the limitations which impacted the study, and the implications of the findings. The conclusions will be aligned with each research question.

The first research question addressed the attitudes and perceptions of adolescents toward the City of San Luis Obispo (SLO) Recreation Department. Subjects responded with a range of answers, but most had negative connotations. Adolescents thought that the recreation department offered programs geared toward younger youth, or that the

programs tended to be poorly managed and put together. Responses did not vary by grade level or gender, nor did any subject respond with a positive answer; however, one subject discussed the lack of effective marketing. Respondents did draw an association between the SLO Recreation Department and their logo. To address the respondents concerns regarding the recreation department, a marketing plan catered to the teen audience may increase interest in the programs, as well as increase enrollment.

The second research question addressed the motivations of adolescents to participate in recreational activities. As stated in Chapter 3, all responses were categorized into the four themes: competition, a history with the activity, social aspects, or performing. Although most subjects were involved in sporting activities, others participated in theater and band. The motivations that were mentioned the most were competition and a history with the activity. Competition being a primary motivator implies that those who enjoy competition may feel as though they have something to prove, or seek to be the best. Participants with an established history with an activity may be influenced greatly by their parents or other family members. Both of these motivations are extrinsic factors, which show that outside forces play a large role in the recreational activities adolescents choose to participate.

Those who were intrinsically motivated, or find their desire to participate from within, took part in activities due to the social aspects or performing aspects of their given extracurricular activities. Adolescents who participated in this study had a deep passion for establishing relationships with others and being the center of attention. Those who participated in extracurricular activities due to the social aspects show that adolescents desire to be with friends and to increase their social circle. Performing allows

adolescents to express themselves and engage with others, not necessarily on a one on one basis.

These motivating factors relate directly to the activities in which the subjects were currently involved with. This age group appears to be a very opinionated group that knows what drives their participation in extracurricular activities. Establishing a teen advisory board to involve adolescents in the program planning process may lead to an overall program that satisfies intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

The third research question tried to determine if there was any significant relationship between gender, extracurricular activities, friends participating and motivation when participating in community recreation programs. Although the data regarding these subjects remains relatively inconclusive due to a small sample size, it can be seen that of the respondents, males appear to be more extrinsically motivated than females. The chosen extracurricular activities varied among subjects, however those involved in both individual and team sports aligned more with the motivations of competition and a history with the activity compared to those involved in fine arts. Those who participated in the fine arts did so for the opportunity to perform. There was an overlap between the two types of activities with responses related to participation due to the social aspects.

The last question was attempting to find out what types of activities San Luis Obispo teenagers enjoy participating in. Subjects revealed that they were looking for the opportunity to spend time with their friends in their free time, but also enjoyed participating in organized sports. This finding aligns with literature from Henderson and King (1999) who reported that young adults enjoy relaxed leisure, which is most

commonly associated with “hanging out.” It was important to a number of students that the activity was interactive and innovative, as expressed by those involved in theater, which is similar to the statement made by Horton et al. (2008) who said that young adults want programs which foster creativity. Literature suggested that adolescents wanted a program that created a sense of community and that staff played a large role in the activities teens chose, however, this was not directly revealed in these focus groups.

Subjects participated in a variety of activities, including: swimming, theater, cheerleading, band, golf, baseball, biking, and church related activities. Although these were organized activities, students also enjoyed visiting downtown San Luis Obispo, travelling, and going to the beach or pool.

This study was affected by multiple limitations. As stated in Chapter 1, subject selection was left to the homeroom teachers at Laguna Middle School. The selection criteria was not extremely descriptive, nor were teachers questioned or monitored to see if they followed outlined procedures. This process turned out to yield a total of only eight students. Although eight is an acceptable number for one focus group and qualitative research, the original plan called for two focus groups of approximately eight students each in order to increase the reliability of the results. The final limitation in this study was due to the timing of data collection. When working with minors in a non-academic setting, the Human Subjects Committee requires research to go through an expedited review. After a delay in approval, a two-week period remained to select participants and obtain parental consent. Only two focus groups were able to be conducted during this time period. This may have affected the turnout of selected subjects and contributed to the small sample size.

This study has created a stepping-stone into the mysterious lives of teenagers. It has been found that they are willing to talk, and enjoy talking about themselves and things they are passionate about. In future research, more time should be taken to talk to the subjects, and possibly speak with more students in the population. This will allow for more reliable data and allow for greater variety in demographics. This study has shown that teens are willing to participate in extracurricular activities, but the programs need to be tailored to their motivations and interests. Recreation professionals can benefit from the research provided in this study.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Adolescents of San Luis Obispo view the SLO Recreation Department in a negative light; however they have developed brand recognition with their logo.
2. The extrinsic motivational factors of competition and an established history with the activity, and intrinsic factors of social aspects and performing motivate San Luis Obispo adolescents to participate in extracurricular activities.
3. No conclusion regarding a relationship between gender, extracurricular activities, friends participating, and motivation to participate in community recreation programs can be drawn due to the limitations associated with data collection.

4. Adolescents are drawn to both structured and unstructured leisure programs, which include sports, fine arts, and hanging out with friends.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Gather more demographic data from San Luis Obispo adolescents to determine if demographics affect participation in recreational activities.
2. Conduct multiple focus groups with a larger total sample size to establish reliability.
3. In future research, consider using a multifaceted approach, utilizing survey data and focus group or interview data.
4. The City of San Luis Obispo Recreation Department should involve adolescents in the planning of teen programs.
5. SLO Recreation Department should develop and execute a marketing campaign which targets adolescents.
6. Either Laguna Middle School or the San Luis Obispo Recreation Department should offer more competitive sports leagues to the teen population.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Adolescent Recreation Focus Group Guide

Welcome

Good afternoon and thank you for helping me with my senior project. I would like to talk about your interests in afterschool activities and what you think about the City of San Luis Obispo Recreation Department.

Overview

My name is Jasmine and I am a senior at Cal Poly. I am majoring in Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration, and I am interested in why you choose to participate in activities and how the recreation department can better serve your needs. You were invited because one of your teachers thought you would like to share information about both you and your classmates.

Ground rules

There are no right or wrong answers. I expect that you will have different points of view and please feel free to share these ideas even if they differ from what others have said. We're here to express our opinions and ideas. I expect that we will all accept what everyone has to say and be respectful of others.

I will be recording the discussion because I don't want to miss any of your comments. So, please speak up, and let's have one speaker at a time. No names will be included in any final reports.

You do not have to answer any question which you do not feel comfortable asking, and you are more than welcome to leave at anytime. Please only share things that are school appropriate with the group, and let's try to keep what is shared in this discussion within this room. Ms. Anderson is here to support you both during and after the focus group should you have any concerns.

Opening question (easy, fact-based questions that get respondents comfortable)

Let's begin. I'd like to learn more about each of you by going around the table. [moderator introduces self].

As I said before, my name is Jasmine and I am a senior at Cal Poly. I love exercising and after graduation I would love to work for a professional sports team. Does anybody here have a favorite sports team?

Why don't we go around the table and everyone can share their name and one interesting fact about themselves.

Introductory question (open-ended questions that allow respondents to explain their relationship to the topic)

- Describe your perfect summer? What will you be doing?

Transition question (moves the conversation to the main purpose)

- How do you like to spend your free time?

Key question (questions that specifically address the research purpose)

- Do you participate in programs offered by San Luis Obispo Parks and Recreation Department?
 - If yes: What programs?
 - What did you like about them?
 - Why did you participate?

 - If no: Why don't you participate in these programs?
 - What activities could they offer that you would participate in?
- What is the first thing you think of when I say "recreation department"?
- What makes you want to participate in activities?

Ending question (brings closure to the interview)

- If you could spend a whole day with your friends, what would you want to do?
- Now, what if I told you that TV and video games were not an option?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter

