## The Importance of Subjective Experiences in Physical Activity

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Subjective Experiences

• Derived from physical activity
  – Emotions
  – Cognitions
  – Dispositions
  – Knowledge
  – Meanings

• Basically, subjective experiences are how we feel, think, and react to physical activity rather than the actual performance itself.
Four Truths About Sport and Exercise

1. Always accompanied by subjective experiences
2. Subjective experiences are unique
3. Might do physical activities without ever asking why or understanding the purpose
4. Will not be meaningful unless enjoyable
Why Subjective Experiences Are Important

One of the primary reasons we participate in exercise and sport is that they supply us with unique forms of subjective experience that are not available in other daily activities.
Why Subjective Experiences Are Important (continued)

• Subjective experiences can help clarify the bases of our career choices.
• Subjective experiences can help develop our skills as physical activity professionals.
• Most important, how we feel and what we think before, during, and after a physical activity largely determines whether we will make that activity part of our lives.

The focus is on internal dynamics rather than external performance.
The Nature of Subjective Experiences

• **Immediate subjective experiences**
  – “Instant” emotional and cognitive impressions
    • Your best game
    • Hole in one!
    • A “bad” day
  – Awareness and ease of recognition of these impressions improves with experience.

• **Replayed subjective experiences (self-reflection)**
  – Do you remember the feeling?
  – Replay the experience in your mind including visual, kinesthetic, auditory, and other impressions.
  – The potential for putting experiences into context makes subjective experiences meaningful.
Components of Subjective Experience

• Sensations and perceptions
• Emotions and emotional responses
• Knowledge and subjective experience
  – Psychoanalytic self-knowledge (deep-seated desires)
  – Mystical knowledge (rare and special; peak experience – the most cited type)
  – Socratic self-knowledge (what we know and what we don’t know)
Figure 4.1

Sources of knowledge from physical activity

Psychoanalytic self-knowledge

Socratic self-knowledge

Mystical knowledge

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Talking About Subjective Experiences

It can be difficult to find the right words to communicate our subjective experiences of sport and exercise to others. It is important that we try, however, because this helps us better understand the personal meanings we find in physical activity. Talking about our experiences may help us understand why we engage in activity and what it means to us.
Intrinsic and Extrinsic Approaches to Physical Activity

- **Extrinsic approaches**
  Valuing physical activity because of the benefits that come from participating (e.g., running a race to win a trophy that shows you were the fastest)

- **Intrinsic approaches (autotelic)**
  - Valuing physical activity because of the subjective experiences embedded within the activity itself (e.g., drifting into a runner’s high or running because it makes you feel good)
  - Helps to keep us engaged in activities for the long term

- **In most cases we approach physical activity from both perspectives.**
Internalization of Physical Activity

- Internalization involves a progression from merely enjoying an activity to becoming engrossed in it. As the activity develops a deep meaning for us, we incorporate it into our beliefs, attitudes, and personal identities, and it becomes *internalized*.
- The intrinsic value of the activity guides and controls our behavior.
Figure 4.2

You unenthusiastically attend a college badminton class because it is a requirement. A friend offers to tutor you on the fundamentals, and you accept her offer.

When your friend forgets to meet for your weekly lesson, you call her as a reminder. You decide to participate in a local tournament for novices. You begin to look forward to playing.

You join a local badminton club and attend matches, even though you must drive several miles to attend. You actively seek out others to compete with.

You discontinue your weekly game of racquetball in order to have more time for badminton. You discriminate between competitors, preferring to play more skilled players. You evaluate strategic approaches to the game, begin a training program, and buy instructional books.

Playing badminton is now an important part of your life; you participate in tournaments regularly, buy equipment, and other badminton players become part of your circle of friends. You can’t imagine life without badminton.

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Even though sport and exercise may provide many benefits, most people likely engage in them because of the unique subjective experiences they offer.
Factors Affecting the Enjoyment of Physical Activity

• **Factors related to the activity**
  – Evenly matched challenges
  – Clear goals and feedback
  – Competition
Factors Related to the Activity

We are more likely to enjoy physical activities when the challenges of the activity match our abilities, when the activity has clear goals, when feedback is sufficient, and when the activity is arranged in a competitive framework.
Factors Affecting the Enjoyment of Physical Activity

• Factors related to the performer
  – Dispositions
  – Attitudes (see Kenyon 1968; ATPA)
Factors Related to the Performer (continued)

Attitudes toward physical activity (ATPA)

• Social experience
• Health and fitness
• Pursuit of vertigo
• Aesthetic experience
• Cathartic experience
• Ascetic experience
Factors Affecting the Enjoyment of Physical Activity

• Factors related to the social context
  - Alone vs. with others
  - Environment
  - Sense of perceived freedom
Sport Participation Is About YOU

Physical activities are never performed in a vacuum; the social context and immediate environment can affect our sense of enjoyment. An example of this is when we find an activity less than enjoyable because we feel forced to engage in it rather than freely choosing to do it.
Watching Sports as a Subjective Experience

• **Vicarious participation**
  – Feeling as though we are engaged in a sport contest we are watching
  – Illustrated by comments such as “Our team is winning” or “Last night we lost,” even though we are not actually on the team

• **Disinterested sport spectating**
  A form of watching sport contests in which we are nonpartisan in our feelings about the outcome (does not always result in less enjoyment)
Factors Affecting Enjoyment of Sports Watching

• Knowledge of the game: Helps us appreciate the quality and significance of the performance
• Feelings toward the competing teams and players: Our team vs. your team
• Human drama of sport competition: Bitter rivalry vs. friendly competition
Importance of Subjective Experiences

• Physical activity involves emotions, thoughts, and reactions.
• Physical activity professionals help people appreciate physical activity.
• Subjective experiences are gained by participating or watching.
• Our enjoyment of an activity is one of the greatest determinants as to whether we continue to engage in that physical activity. (This is significant if maintaining or increasing participation is key.)