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Inge Derom

Marijke Taks
University of Windsor

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Participants' Experiences in Two Types of Sporting Events: A Quest for Evidence of the SL-CL Continuum

Inge Derom

University of British Columbia

Marijke Taks

University of Windsor

Abstract

The dichotomy of serious leisure (SL) and casual leisure (CL) has significant limitations, leaving some leisure experiences unexplained. The SL-CL continuum proposed by Shen and Yarnal (2010) aims at filling this gap by providing a description based on behavioral commitment. We present evidence supporting the SL-CL continuum obtained by comparing participants in two different types of sporting events: an international/major and a national/minor event. Quantitative data on leisure motives and identity, corresponding to four SL and two CL characteristics, were collected from self-administered questionnaires. Both samples reported moderate to high intensities across the characteristics. However, international/major participants were more serious and national/minor participants more casual in their leisure experience. Participants were not effectively described in terms of the SL-CL dichotomy.

KEYWORDS: Casual leisure, continuum, identity, motives, serious leisure

Inge Derom is a doctoral student in the School of Human Kinetics, University of British Columbia, British Columbia. Marijke Taks is a professor in the Department of Kinesiology, University of Windsor, Ontario.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Inge Derom, School of Human Kinetics, University of British Columbia, Room 156, 1924 West Mall, Vancouver, British Columbia, V6T 1Z2, Canada. E-mail: derom@interchange.ubc.ca

There is a large body of literature that studies serious leisure (SL) participants in a wide range of activities (e.g., Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Brown, 2007; Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002; Hastings, Kurth, Schloder, & Cyr, 1995; Mackellar, 2009; Shipway & Jones, 2007; 2008; Stalp, 2006). However, casual leisure (CL) participants have only received minimal research attention (Shinew & Parry, 2005). Although these studies further our understanding of both leisure fields, they also stress their separateness and assist in establishing and maintaining the SL-CL dichotomy (Stebbins, 1997). Consistent with the recreation specialization framework developed by Bryan (1977), who argued that participants in any given activity fall along a continuum demonstrating different styles of involvement, Shen and Yarnal (2010) recently expressed the need to re-evaluate the SL-CL dichotomy. The authors suggested to study leisure participants along a SL-CL continuum, as one activity may attract participants with different levels (or intensities) of behavioral commitment and thus displaying different levels of SL and CL characteristics.

Past research examining the SL-CL continuum included participants from one particular activity (e.g., Brown, 2007; Scott & Godbey, 1994; Shen & Yarnal, 2010). However, in the recreation specialization framework, Bryan (1979) emphasized that there are not only differences in specialization within but also between activities. Therefore, the current study will test and evaluate the SL-CL continuum approach in two different types of sporting events using a cross-activity design. Furthermore, although previous research has examined SL participants at different types of sporting events (e.g., Hastings et al., 1995; Heo & Lee, 2010; Shipway & Jones, 2007; 2008), no studies were found that examined CL participants in the same sporting context. In order to test the SL-CL continuum, CL characteristics of participants will be included in the current study. This will provide a more holistic understanding of the leisure experiences of sporting event participants.

Methodologically, most research on SL or CL has taken a qualitative approach (e.g., Brown, 2007; Gibson et al., 2002; Mackellar, 2009; Shen & Yarnal, 2010; Shipway & Jones, 2007; 2008). Several authors, however, advocated for the collection of quantitative data as an avenue for future research since it allows for testing variations among participants (Scott & Godbey, 1994; Scott & Shafer, 2001), or examining the intercorrelations among the SL and CL characteristics (Shen & Yarnal, 2010). The current study will therefore take a quantitative approach. Furthermore, previous studies focused on the experiences of adult respondents, which means that our understanding of adolescents' leisure experiences is minimal. The current study includes a sample ranging from adolescents to older adults (i.e., 14 to 77 years of age). Lastly, recreation/regeneration (i.e., the ability of recreation to feeling refreshed) was discussed as one of the benefits of CL (Stebbins, 2001a). However, this CL characteristic was notably absent from Shen and Yarnal's (2010) findings.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to develop our knowledge of the SL-CL continuum conception as opposed to the SL-CL dichotomy. The SL-CL continuum theory will be tested comparing leisure characteristics of participants in two different types of sporting events, namely the 2005 Pan American Junior Athletics Championships and the 2008 Canadian Transplant Games. Quantitative data were collected on different leisure characteristics such as leisure motives (i.e., mastery,

intellectual, social, and escape) and identity (i.e., athletic self-identity and athletic social identity) from self-administered questionnaires. These characteristics correspond to four SL and two CL characteristics, which will be elucidated in the next section. The primary question that guided our research was, Is there evidence that participants in two different types of sporting events score differently on the SL-CL continuum?

Review of Literature

Serious Leisure

SL is defined by Stebbins (1992) as “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience” (p. 3). Six defining qualities of SL were identified: perseverance, leisure career, personal effort, ethos/subculture, durable benefits, and identification. Several studies, written exclusively from a qualitative research perspective and including only a small sample, have confirmed the presence of these six SL qualities among SL participants in different sporting contexts, including football fans (Gibson et al., 2002), shag dancers (Brown, 2007), marathon and long distance runners (Shipway & Jones, 2007; 2008), festival participants (Mackellar, 2009), and Masters swimmers (Hastings et al., 1995). Participants were labeled “serious” based on the presence of a combination of these six SL qualities, which are discussed subsequently.

First, participants need to persevere through constraints such as embarrassment, danger, injury, fatigue, time, and so on (Stebbins, 1992). Second, participants develop a leisure career in terms of progressing through the activity (Scott & Shafer, 2001) and encountering “special contingencies, turning points and stages of achievement or involvement” (Stebbins, 2001b, p. 9); or regress from serious to casual (Brown, 2007). Third, significant personal effort is necessary to prepare for and participate in the activity, which may be based upon specially acquired skills or knowledge (Gibson et al., 2002; Green & Jones, 2005). Fourth, participants are part of a social world with its own unique ethos or subculture (Bryan, 1977; Green & Chalip, 1998; Green & Jones, 2005; Scott & Godbey, 1994). Fifth, participation in SL can lead to a range of durable benefits such as “the enhancement of the self-concept, self-actualisation, self-enrichment, self-expression, feelings of accomplishment, enhanced self-image and self-esteem, and social interaction” (Green & Jones, 2005, p. 168). SL activities can also offer rewards of “pleasure/enjoyment” and “recreation/regeneration” to its participants (Stebbins, 1997). Sixth, SL activities have the potential to provide participants with a strong identification, which can take place at the personal or social level (Brown, 2007; Green & Jones, 2005; Scott & Godbey, 1994; Scott & Shafer, 2001; Shipway & Jones, 2008).

Serious leisure and motives. Some of the aforementioned SL benefits correspond with leisure motives, such as intellectual, mastery, social, and escape motives (Beard & Ragheb, 1983). Self-actualization, for instance, can be described as “developing/learning new skills, abilities, and knowledge” (Shen & Yarnal, 2010, p. 170) and corresponds with intellectual motives. Competition may lead to feel-

ings of accomplishment, which can be described as “feelings accomplished or realized through participation” (Shen & Yarnal, 2010, p. 170) and correspond with mastery motives. Furthermore, social interaction is described as “interacting with others; developing meaningful relationships with others” (Shen & Yarnal, 2010, p. 170) and is consistent with social motives. A study by Hastings and colleagues (1995) encompasses all three aforementioned motives. Canadian and U.S. Masters swimmers reported that fitness, skill development, achievement, and sociability were important motives for participating in a SL career. Recreation/regeneration can be described as “feeling recreated or refreshed through participation” (Shen & Yarnal, 2010, p. 170) and corresponds with escape motives.

Serious leisure and identification. Since the current study focuses on sporting events, identification corresponds with athletic identity dimensions, namely athletic self-identity and athletic social identity. Athletic self-identity refers to the individual’s personal importance of being an athlete, whereas athletic social identity refers to the individual’s perception of the social importance of being an athlete (Green & Chalip, 1998; Shamir, 1992). The centrality of a leisure activity to an individual’s identity was likewise stressed by Bryan (1977) in the context of recreation specialization.

Thus, these motives and identity are indicators of SL characteristics, which create the leisure experience. While there is a large body of literature that studied SL participants in a wide range of activities, including sporting events, no studies were found that examined CL participants in the same sporting context.

Casual Leisure

Contrasted to SL, unserious or CL is defined as the “immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it” (Stebbins, 1997, p. 18). However, Stebbins (1997) also argued that it is possible that some participants might have had a significant level of skill and training, but these have weakened to the point that their participation is now more casual than serious. Brown (2007) reported how shag dancers progressed and regressed between being serious and casual participants. Former serious dancers explained that they became casual dancers because it was more fun and less time-consuming. These findings indicate that SL and CL pursuits may lead to different durable benefits or rewards.

According to Stebbins (1997), all CL activities are hedonic and produce a significant level of pleasure and enjoyment for their participants. Stebbins (2001a) also identified five other benefits of CL: (a) creativity and discovery, (b) edutainment, (c) recreation or regeneration, (d) development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships, and (e) well-being and quality of life. Overlap between activities exists as both SL and CL activities may offer benefits of recreation/regeneration and social interaction to its participants (Stebbins, 1997). Therefore, the benefits of recreation/regeneration and social interaction are identified as overlapping CL and SL characteristics (defined as CL/SL characteristics hereafter).

CL has received minimal research attention and no studies were found framed within CL theory examining the benefits of CL among leisure participants in different sporting contexts. However, two studies on cause-related sport event partici-

pation included the CL/SL characteristic of social interaction and revealed that social motives formed the strongest emergent theme for participating in the events (Cornwell & Smith, 2001; Filo, Funk & O'Brien, 2008).

SL – CL Continuum

Stebbins (1992) acknowledged continuity between the SL and CL fields as “individuals may be ranked by their degrees of involvement in a particular activity” (p. 6), which is supported by other leisure researchers. This idea is integral to the recreational specialization framework (Bryan, 1977; Scott & Godbey, 1994; Scott & Shafer, 2001). Participants along the continuum have different motivations, attitudes, values, preferences, and so on. Participants at the high end of the SL-CL and specialization continuum can be expected to evince a high level of identification, skill development, and knowledge. Shen and Yarnal (2010) recently conceptualized and examined the SL-CL continuum, whereas the exploratory findings of other studies (e.g., Brown, 2007; Green & Tanabe, 1998; Scott & Solomon, 2003) indirectly provided some evidence for continuity between the SL and CL fields. These studies described participants’ leisure experiences in terms of particular characteristics and are elucidated subsequently.

Shen and Yarnal (2010) argued that “neither the forms of activities nor the distinguishing SL/CL qualities appeared to be reliable criteria for determining the nature of a leisure pursuit as serious or casual” (p. 167). The SL-CL dichotomy represents two extreme or ideal types of leisure; however, most leisure experiences occur between the extremes along the SL-CL continuum. Shen and Yarnal proposed the Leisure Experience Characteristic framework, which locates individuals on a continuum of leisure experiences based on their SL and overlapping CL/SL characteristics. The authors examined the seemingly CL experiences of women involved in the Red Hat Society and found that they demonstrated both SL and CL characteristics. Socialization and fun/enjoyment (two CL/SL characteristics) were the leisure experiences most frequently identified by the participants, whereas sense of accomplishment and self-esteem (two SL characteristics) were the strongest leisure experiences reported at the highest levels of intensity. The authors argued that “the SL-CL dichotomy (a) ignores the connections between the two concepts and (b) captures the prototypical leisure pursuits but leaves a variety of in-between experiences unrepresented” (p. 177). The SL-CL continuum proposition, which exists on various dimensions of the leisure experience, attempts to bridge this gap.

Although Brown (2007) intended to look at shag dancing from a SL perspective, the study provided evidence for the SL-CL continuum as five types of shag dancers emerged from the findings ranging from casual to serious dancers, based on dancer traits such as identity and some leisure motives (e.g., tendency to improve skills, tendency to compete, experiential preference, orientation to dance, and interpersonal relationships with other dancers). Occasional and recreational shaggers were types of casual dancers, whereas wannabes, competitive and hard core shaggers were types of serious dancers. Findings indicated that casual dancers were as committed as serious dancers, but in different ways. For instance, casual dancers wanted to have fun and socialize, but they were not motivated to improve their skills or compete. Moreover, being a dancer was less important in their iden-

tity compared to serious dancers. In contrast, serious dancers showed continuous efforts to develop and showcase their skills, but they were less motivated to have fun and socialize. Evidence of continuity between the different types of leisure participants was also presented. Some dancers described how they progressed from casual to serious dancers, whereas some regressed. Former serious dancers explained that they discontinued their SL career as it was “no longer challenging or too time-consuming in terms of practice and travel time, too much work, and no fun” (Brown, 2007, p. 643), describing some of the differences in durable benefits obtained from SL and CL pursuits (Stebbins, 1997).

This is part-and-parcel to the specialization framework presented by Scott and Godbey (1994), who revealed that contract bridge players defined themselves as either serious or social players, with four types of bridge players emerging based on different styles of involvement. However, they argued the four types of players were not part of a continuum per se, but members of two different social worlds. Serious players wanted to develop their skills, whereas social players were more invested in developing close friendships. Significantly, both groups were committed to the leisure activity. Furthermore, contrary to Brown’s (2007) findings, many social bridge players were not interested in and actually resisted progression to serious bridge. Elsewhere, Scott and Shafer (2001) stated that “progression is not a typical career path pursued by leisure participants” (p. 337).

Green and Tanabe (1998) examined whether participants in four events of the Gold Coast Marathon (i.e., marathon, half marathon, 10 km run, and 10 km walk) differed in terms of their identification with and commitment to running and/or their leisure motives (Green, 2001). Although this study was not directly linked to SL or CL theory, the findings indicated that marathoners reported higher levels of identification—both self- and social identity—with and commitment to running, which are identified as characteristics of SL (Stebbins, 1992), compared to other runners and walkers. Furthermore, participants in the four races did not differ in terms of their leisure motives, suggesting that all participants shared similar levels of some SL (mastery and intellectual motives) and CL/SL (social and escape motives) characteristics. Lastly, Scott and Solomon (2003) found evidence of a continuum of participants at a cause-related sport event, a 5 km run or walk event aimed at raising funds to support breast cancer research. They observed a continuum of attendees ranging from “junkies” participating for the sport event and competition, to “social butterflies” participating for social interaction, to “activists” participating to support the cause. Thus, researchers have identified different ways to measure CL and SL, both empirically and a priori. However, there is no consensus as to which specific measures need to be used as indicators of these constructs. The recreational specialization framework uses behavior, skill, and commitment to explore variation among recreation participants (Scott & Shafer, 2001). The literature review on the SL-CL continuum revealed how leisure motives and identity represent SL and CL/SL characteristics and it has shown the relevance of investigating leisure motives and identity for both SL and CL participants. However, these concepts have never been the focus of past studies framed in SL or CL theory. In addition, Bryan (1979) stressed that differences in specialization not only occur *within* but also *between* activities. The current study therefore examines the concepts of

leisure motives and identity among two samples of sporting event participants in order to find evidence to support the SL-CL continuum. Although motives and identity are not experiences, they are “indicators” of CL and SL characteristics, which in turn create the leisure experience. In contrast to the studies described above, which were mostly qualitative in nature, our study will take a quantitative approach. The following section describes the leisure context of the current study.

Context and Setting

The two sporting events chosen for this study are the 2005 Pan American Junior Athletics Championships and the 2008 Canadian Transplant Games. Both events were organized in Windsor, a medium-sized city in Ontario, Canada. The availability and proximity of the events provided the researchers at the University of Windsor with an excellent opportunity to collect data from a sample of participants.

Various scholars have offered different typologies of sporting events (e.g., Getz, 2007; Gratton & Taylor, 2000). For the purpose of this study, we have adapted Solomon's (2002) framework for defining sporting events which is based on the participant's perspective and geographic reach. The participant's perspective distinguishes between amateur or professional events and whether events are of major or minor sporting importance. The geographic reach indicates the event's impact on the local, regional, national, or international level. One other component Solomon brings in is “sanction,” indicating that the event is recognized by a sport governing body. Generally, sanctioned events are more important and more recognized by the sporting public than are non-sanctioned events. We have limited the focus of this study to two amateur sporting events: one international event of major sporting importance and one national event of minor sporting importance. Events of major importance emphasize sporting performance and excellence, while events of minor importance embrace participation for the sake of recreational participation and/or as a means to other ends (e.g., socializing, raising funds, or creating awareness). Generally, participants in events of minor sporting importance are linked with a reference group which is meaningful to them (Misener & Taks, 2009).

The Pan American Junior Athletics Championships is an international event of major sporting importance, organized bi-annually in various Pan American countries under the auspices of the International Association of Athletics Federations and the Pan American Athletics Commission. The event is a world-class track and field meet that features some of the western hemisphere's best up-and-coming junior athletes, who are selected by their national federations. Excellent participation at this event may lead to a successful track and field career. The 2005 event was hosted by the University of Windsor, in partnership with the local Track and Field Club, the community, corporate, and regional partners. Thirty five countries were represented at the event. Since it was a “junior” championship, all 443 athletes were 19 years of age or younger. The event attracted mainly local but also international spectators (Local Organizing Committee, 2005).

The Canadian Transplant Games is a national event of minor sporting importance, organized bi-annually in Canada by the Canadian Transplant Association

and a local host organization to create awareness about organ and tissue donation and to encourage transplant recipients to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The Canadian Transplant Association invites all transplant recipients, young and old, recreational and competitive athletes, to participate. The event brings together transplant recipients (athletes), donor families and supporters (spectators), and volunteers to celebrate the second chance at life and to pay tribute to organ donors and their families. A total of 124 athletes from Canada and the United States were represented at the 2008 event, with ages ranging from 7 to 77 years (Canadian Transplant Association, 2010).

Based on the SL and CL literature and Solomon's (2002) typology of sporting events, there is a seemingly clear distinction between the two types of events. The international event of major sporting importance emphasizes sporting performance and excellence, which relates to some SL qualities such as a leisure career (Stebbins, 2001b), durable benefits of self-actualization and feelings of accomplishment (Green & Jones, 2005), and strong identification (Stebbins, 1982). In contrast, the national event of minor sporting importance emphasizes recreational participation as a means to raise awareness and socialize, which relates to some CL qualities. The hedonic nature of the sporting activity offers benefits to the participants: it contributes to their well-being and quality of life, assists in developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Canadian Transplant Association, 2010), and offers recreation/regeneration (Stebbins, 2001a).

Under the SL-CL continuum proposition (Shen & Yarnal, 2010), and consistent with the recreation specialization (Bryan, 1979), participants at two different types of sporting events can display various SL and CL characteristics with various levels of intensities. It was hypothesized that within the seemingly more serious leisure context of the international event of major sporting importance, both SL and CL characteristics would be observed with various levels of intensities, with the SL characteristics being more dominant. Similarly, it was hypothesized that within the seemingly more casual leisure context of the national event of minor sporting importance, both CL and SL characteristics would be observed with various levels of intensities, with the CL characteristics being more dominant. In addition, Bryan (1979) stressed that there are differences in specialization within and between activities. In this context it can be argued that participants in the Pan American Junior Athletics Championships show a higher level of specialization, since these athletes are selected to participate in this event based on performance criteria in athletics. Thus, it can be assumed that not only the level of specialization of the participants in this type of event will be higher, but also, that the range of specialization will be narrower compared to the participants in the Canadian Transplant Games. For participants in the latter event, the level of specialization is expected to be lower, although some participants may be highly specialized. Thus, we expect larger standard deviations for participants in the Canadian Transplant Games compared to the Pan American Junior Athletics Championships.

Methods

Research Design

The purpose of the initial study was to identify differences in leisure motives and athletic identity among participants at two different types of sporting events. The study was not designed to test the SL-CL continuum theory, but the collected data allow for analysis of some of the SL and CL/SL characteristics described in Shen and Yarnal's (2010) Leisure Experience Characteristic framework. By examining leisure variables among two samples of sporting event participants, the SL-CL continuum theory could be tested with a cross-activity design. We collected quantitative data using a self-administered questionnaire, which allowed us to examine intercorrelations among the characteristics. The economy of the design and the rapid turnaround in data collection were the two main advantages of using a questionnaire method. Furthermore, the data consisted of respondents' scores on each leisure characteristic, including the concept of recreation/regeneration which was missing in previous studies, providing a more holistic view of their leisure experiences.

Participants and Procedures

Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires completed by participants at two sporting events: the 2005 Pan American Junior Athletics Championships, considered an international event of major sporting importance and the 2008 Canadian Transplant Games, considered a national event of minor sporting importance. The researchers contacted the organizers and requested to collect data during the events. The request was approved and the researchers attended the events while clearly identifying themselves as researchers (e.g., wearing university T-shirts, setting up a research booth). Due to biases associated with event participation, which includes significant travel costs for the majority of participants, our study sample may not represent the general population.

Participants at the international event of major sporting importance received a questionnaire, a letter of information and consent, as well as a pencil and a blank envelope in the athletes' welcome package. Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaires and return it in a sealed envelope to the research booth over the three-day course of the event. Upon returning the questionnaire, respondents received an invitation card to participate in a draw to win a token of appreciation (i.e., an iPod). The winner of the draw was announced at the farewell party. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. During the course of the event, researchers encouraged as many participants as possible to partake in the study. A total of 443 athletes participated in the international event of major sporting importance (labeled international/major participants hereafter) and 147 returned the questionnaire (response rate = 33%). Due to missing data, only 117 questionnaires were usable for further analyses. Slightly more than half of the respondents were female (55%). For the sample of international/major participants ($n = 117$), all participants were 19 years of age or younger as the age ranged from 15 to 19 years (M age = 18.18; $SD = 0.99$).

Data at the national event of minor sporting importance were collected during registration on the first day of the four-day event. Participants, who were all transplant recipients, were required to register in order to receive their name tags, room keys, food vouchers, etc. Immediately after registration, participants were invited by the researchers to partake in the study. The Research Ethics Boards required participants to be 14 years of age or older to be part of the study. Only participants who were 14 years of age or older and agreed to partake in the study, received a questionnaire, a letter of information and consent, and a blank envelope. They were asked to fill out the questionnaire at the research table and return it in a sealed envelope that ensured confidentiality and anonymity. Upon returning the questionnaire, respondents received an invitation card to participate in a draw to win a token of appreciation (i.e., an iPod). The winner of the draw was announced before the closing ceremony. A total of 124 athletes participated in the national event of minor sporting importance (labeled national/minor participants hereafter). Only 106 athletes were 14 years of age or older and therefore, eligible to partake in the study. Overall, 75 questionnaires were returned (response rate = 71%). One questionnaire was excluded due to missing data, thus 74 questionnaires were usable for further analyses. Slightly more than half of the respondents were male (57%). For the sample of national/minor participants ($n = 74$), the age ranged from 14 to 77 years (M age = 44.89; $SD = 14.95$).

The study did not involve stratification of the population before selecting the sample. Thus, for the total sample of sporting event participants ($N = 191$), the age ranged from 14 to 77 years (M age = 28.59; $SD = 16.00$). The sample of international/major participants can be considered homogeneous (15 to 19 years) and the sample of national/minor participants heterogeneous (14 to 77 years). An equal number of males and females were represented in the total sample.

The Survey Instrument

The questionnaire included measures of athletic identity and leisure motives. In order to collect some data on demographics, respondents were also asked to report their gender (measured as a dichotomous variable) and age (measured as a continuous variable).

Athletic identity. Shamir (1992) developed the Leisure Identity Scale to measure two aspects of athletic identity: (a) athletic self-identity which is measured with the Identity Salience Scale and includes seven items, and (b) athletic social identity which is measured with the Social Commitment Scale and includes eight items. Self-identity is defined as the importance of a leisure identity for the respondent's self-definition relative to other identities (e.g., being an athlete describes me). Social identity refers to the respondent's perception of other people's awareness of participation in the leisure activity, their definition of the respondent as a participant, and their expectations of continued involvement (e.g., people would be surprised if I just stopped being involved in sport). Shamir's (1992) scales were internally consistent with an alpha of .87 for self-identity and .89 for social identity. Snelgrove, Taks, Chalip, and Green (2008) modified Shamir's original scale towards a scale containing two subscales, measured with three items each, which made the questionnaire easier to answer and less time consuming for re-

spondents. Their modified scales, which were used in this study, were internally consistent with an alpha of .88 for self-identity and .93 for social identity. The response range was a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Item scores of each subscale were averaged to form an aggregated measure of the intended identity.

Leisure motives. Psychological and sociological reasons for leisure activity participation were measured with a modified version of Beard and Ragheb's (1983) Leisure Motivation Scale. The original scale contained four dimensions: competency-mastery (or mastery), intellectual, social, and stimulus-avoidance (or escape), measured with 12 items each. The mastery dimension encompasses motives to achieve, master, and compete (e.g., to gain experience at a high level). The intellectual dimension includes motives to learn, discover, and explore new ideas (e.g., to expand my knowledge about sports). The social dimension incorporates motives to build friendships and to receive esteem from others (e.g., to meet new and different people). Lastly, the escape dimension integrates motives to escape from daily life situations (e.g., to relax mentally). Beard and Ragheb's (1983) dimensions were internally consistent with alpha's ranging from .90 to .92. Snelgrove et al. (2008) modified Beard and Ragheb's original scale toward a scale containing the same four dimensions, measured with three items each, which again made the questionnaire easier to answer and less time consuming for respondents. Their modified scale, which was used in this study, was internally consistent with alpha's ranging from .75 to .94. The response range was a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Item scores of each dimension were averaged to form an aggregated measure of the intended motive. We acknowledge that the construct validity of the modified Leisure Motivation Scale (Snelgrove et al., 2008) has limitations as it only includes four dimensions and excludes dimensions such as fun/enjoyment, which are important within SL and CL theory.

Table 1

Connection between Leisure Experience Characteristic (LEC) and Questionnaire Dimensions

LEC Dimension	Questionnaire Dimension
<i>Serious Leisure</i>	
Sense of accomplishment	Mastery motives
Self-actualization	Intellectual motives
Identity/sense of belonging	Athletic social identity
Self-expression	Athletic self-identity
<i>Casual Leisure/Serious Leisure</i>	
Socialization/social interaction	Social motives
Recreation/regeneration	Escape motives

Note. The LEC Dimensions are from "Blowing Open the Serious Leisure-Casual Leisure Dichotomy: What's In There?," by X.S. Shen, and C. Yarnal, 2010, *Leisure Sciences*, 32, p. 170.

Table 1 shows how the aforementioned questionnaire dimensions of athletic identity and leisure motives fit the Leisure Experience Characteristic framework (Shen & Yarnal, 2010). The characteristics were compared among the two samples of sporting event participants in order to examine whether they scored differently on the SL-CL continuum.

Data Analysis

Alpha coefficients for each dimension were calculated to examine internal consistencies of the measures, in accordance with Nunnally's (1978) recommendation of .70, and ranged from .68 to .86. Although the mastery dimension ($\alpha = .68$) had a lower than recommended internal consistency value, it was still included in the analyses. Correlations among the different dimensions were also calculated and Table 2 shows that there were no problems with multicollinearity as the correlations were not high ($r > .90$) nor perfect ($r = 1$). Based on the 6-point Likert scale measurement, each respondent had a score from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) on the four SL and two CL/SL dimensions. Descriptive analyses (means and standard deviations) were used to calculate the levels of intensity of the leisure experience dimensions (Table 3). In order to examine the differences between international/major and national/minor participants along the SL-CL continuum, we used the Welch *t* test for independent samples and the following assumptions were satisfied: first, the observations were independent from one another, and second, the samples followed a normal distribution (as outliers were deleted). The Welch *t* test does not assume equal population variances or equal sample sizes. The results are presented in Table 4.

Results

The mean scores and standard deviations for the SL and CL/SL characteristics, which were measured with a 6-point scale, are presented in Table 3. All the mean scores were distributed above the median of the scale and ranged from 3.26 to

Table 2

Intercorrelations among Questionnaire Dimensions

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Mastery motives	-	.72**	.39**	.55**	.11	.05
2. Intellectual motives		-	.32**	.46**	.25**	.20**
3. Athletic social identity			-	.60**	.06	-.19**
4. Athletic self-identity				-	.01	-.05
5. Social motives					-	.42**
6. Escape motives						-

Note. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Leisure Characteristics

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Serious Leisure</i>		
Mastery motives	5.10	0.95
Intellectual motives	4.33	1.25
Athletic social identity	5.25	0.96
Athletic self-identity	5.04	1.15
<i>Casual Leisure/Serious Leisure</i>		
Social motives	5.14	0.82
Escape motives	3.26	1.28

Note. Measured using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).
N = 191.

5.25. These scores represent the level of intensity of the respondents' leisure experiences. Sporting event participants, in general, reported strong experiences (i.e., greater than 3 on a 6-point scale), with some variation across the characteristics. Athletic social identity ($M = 5.25$) and social motives ($M = 5.14$) ranked highest. The other leisure experience characteristics, including mastery motives ($M = 5.10$), athletic self-identity ($M = 5.04$), and intellectual motives ($M = 4.33$) also received high ratings. Escape motives ($M = 3.26$) were ranked lowest.

The mean differences between national/minor and international/major participants are presented in Table 4. Both groups reported moderate to high levels of intensity across the characteristics. However, the results suggest that the leisure experiences of both groups differed significantly. Furthermore, the differences clearly correspond with the four SL and two CL/SL characteristics. International/major participants seemed more serious as they reported a higher athletic social identity ($M = 5.68$) and athletic self-identity ($M = 5.63$) and as they were more interested to master ($M = 5.56$) and learn ($M = 4.89$) while participating in the sporting event. International/major participants also reported moderate to high levels across the CL/SL characteristics, however, significantly lower than their national/minor counterparts. As a result, national/minor participants seemed more casual as they were more interested to socialize ($M = 5.46$) and escape ($M = 3.86$) while participating in the sporting event. National/minor participants also reported high levels across the SL characteristics, however, significantly lower than their international/major counterparts. As expected, the standard deviations for SL characteristics are larger for the national/minor participants as opposed to the international/major participants. Interestingly, the standard deviations of the CL/SL characteristics are larger for the international/major participants, compared to the national/minor participants.

Table 4

Comparing Mean Differences of Leisure Characteristics among Two Samples of Sporting Event Participants

	National/minor participants (n = 74)	International/major participants (n = 117)	Welch statistic ^a
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F (df1, df2)</i>
<i>Serious Leisure</i>			
Mastery motives	4.39 (1.05)	5.56 (0.51)	78.21 (1, 93.7) **
Intellectual motives	3.46 (1.24)	4.89 (0.88)	74.08 (1, 120.7) **
Athletic social identity	4.64 (1.12)	5.68 (0.49)	57.42 (1, 92.3) **
Athletic self-identity	4.21 (1.29)	5.63 (0.51)	80.46 (1, 89.5) **
<i>Casual Leisure/Serious Leisure</i>			
Social motives	5.46 (0.54)	4.94 (0.90)	24.71 (1, 185.4) **
Escape motives	3.86 (0.84)	2.89 (1.36)	36.18 (1, 185.9) **

Note. ^a *Asymptotically F distributed.*

** *p < .001, two-tailed.*

N = 191.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to further develop our understanding of the SL-CL continuum by exploring leisure experiences of participants in two different types of sporting events. Based on the SL and CL literature and Solomon's (2002) typology of sporting events, it was hypothesized that there was a seemingly clear distinction between participants in the two types of sporting events. The original hypotheses of the study were confirmed as the SL and CL/SL characteristics of both groups of participants were compared and significant differences were found. International/major participants showed higher levels of SL characteristics when compared to national/minor participants, whereas the latter showed higher levels of CL/SL characteristics when compared to the former. Athletic social identification was the SL characteristic reported highest among international/major participants, whereas social motivation was the CL/SL characteristic reported highest among national/minor participants. Therefore, based on their differences in leisure motives and identity, international/major participants could be considered more serious and national/minor participants more casual in their leisure experiences. Moreover, the standard deviations of the SL characteristics were larger in the group national/minor participants, showing a wider range in levels of specialization among participants, which was expected based on Bryan's (1977) ideas about recreational specialization. However, the larger standard deviations and the wider range in CL/SL characteristics among the international/major participants is a new finding, confirming that for some international/major participants the casual component can also be of high importance.

However, the two groups of participants could not be described completely in terms of the SL-CL dichotomy as no extreme low versus extreme high values were observed. In order to be categorized as CL participants, national/minor participants should have scored low on the SL characteristics. The mean values, however, ranging from 3.46 to 4.64 on a 6-point scale confirmed the opposite. The national/minor participants' leisure experiences included both CL/SL and SL characteristics at high levels of intensity. Furthermore, there are no characteristics exclusively tied to the concept of CL. Nevertheless, international/major participants scored moderate to high on the CL/SL characteristics. The mean values ranged from 2.89 to 4.94 on a 6-point scale.

Overall, international/major participants showed both SL and CL/SL characteristics at moderate to high levels of intensities, but the SL characteristics were more dominant when compared to national/minor participants. Similarly, national/minor participants showed both CL/SL and SL characteristics at high levels of intensities, but the CL/SL characteristics were more dominant when compared to international/major participants. These findings support the idea that participation in complex leisure activities is better represented as a continuum of involvement rather than a dichotomy of serious versus casual (Shen & Yarnal, 2010).

By using a cross-activity design, we found that sporting event participation is a combination of SL and CL. Our findings are similar to shag dancing and contract bridge, as the more serious participants were more committed to compete, gain experience at a high level, improve their skills, and discover new things about sports and less interested to socialize and interact with others compared to the more casual participants (Brown, 2007; Scott & Godbey, 1994). Although the more casual national/minor participants were more interested in socializing compared to their more serious international/major counterparts, our findings support the use of the SL-CL continuum as these participants were also highly committed to compete, gain experience at a high level, improve their skills, and discover new things about sports while participating in the sporting event. These findings are similar to the CL participants at the Red Hat Society who also reported SL characteristics at high levels (Shen & Yarnal, 2010). Furthermore, international/major participants were found to be similar to marathoners as they reported the highest levels of athletic social identity and athletic self-identity compared to national/minor participants (Green & Tanabe, 1998). However, once more our findings support the use of the SL-CL continuum as the two samples of sporting event participants differed significantly in terms of their leisure motives.

Our findings also add to the knowledge of the CL/SL characteristic of recreation/regeneration, which was measured via escape motives. Past research did not clarify the recreation/regeneration dimension, as it did not find evidence for this characteristic (Shen & Yarnal, 2010), did not include this as a trait in the study (Brown, 2007; Scott & Solomon, 2003), nor did it find significant differences among participants (Green & Tanabe, 1998). The more casual national/minor participants were more motivated to get away from their everyday lives and relax while participating in the sporting event, compared to the more serious international/major participants. However, the latter group still reported moderate values for the escape characteristic (2.89 on a 6-point scale, slightly below the

median). This highlights the importance of leisure activities offering the benefits of recreation/regeneration to its participants, serious or casual, along the SL-CL continuum (Stebbins, 1997).

Furthermore, this quantitative study provided results on the intercorrelations among the SL and CL/SL characteristics. The correlations among the four SL characteristics were moderate to high (ranging from .32 to .72). Similarly, the correlation among the two CL/SL characteristics was moderate (.42). However, the correlations among the six characteristics together were low (ranging from .01 to .25). This indicates that although social and escape motives are defined as overlapping SL/CL characteristics (Stebbins, 1997), there is a clear disconnection between these two dimensions and the four SL dimensions. Therefore, based on the SL-CL continuum as opposed to the SL-CL dichotomy, social and escape motives could be conceptualized as CL characteristics and future research should continue to examine their prevalence among both SL and CL participants.

Lastly, by finding evidence to support the SL-CL continuum, our study confirms that CL may also offer psychological benefits that have been typically identified with SL (Shen & Yarnal, 2010). Durable benefits such as self-actualization and feelings of accomplishment were thought to be exclusively related to SL (Green & Jones, 2005; Stebbins, 1992). However, our study confirms that more casual national/minor participants were also committed to compete, gain experience at a high level, improve their skills, and discover new things about sports and thus, gain some of the durable SL benefits. From this, we can emphasize that CL should be taken out of its residual role when being compared to SL, as "casual leisure is an important form of leisure in itself" (Stebbins, 1997, p. 18). Thus, it is important to note that more casual participants might enhance their psychological well-being via participation in sporting events, which is relevant for both adolescents and older adults. This may become the subject of a future study.

Event organizers and sport managers should use the findings of our study to improve their marketing communications and event activities in order to attract a wide range of participants along the SL-CL continuum. Green (2001) argued that event promotions should market the core aspects of the sporting event as this positively influences consumption and participation. The mission statement of the international/major sporting event emphasized sporting performance and excellence. The more serious participants indicated that athletic social identity and athletic self-identity were the most important characteristics when taking part in the sporting event. As a result, in addition to highlighting the opportunities to strengthen their self-identity, the opportunities to celebrate, parade, and share their social identity as athletes should also be emphasized in the marketing communications. Green and Chalip (1998) reported how event organizers attempted to give a women's football tournament a more serious image by focusing on the football competition and by limiting the subcultural festivities, which had been a marketing mistake as event regulars started to reconsider the tournament's value. On the contrary, the mission statement of the national/minor sporting event emphasized recreational participation as a means to socialize. The more casual participants indicated that social motivation and athletic social identity were the most important characteristics when taking part in the sporting event. As a result,

in addition to highlighting the opportunities to socialize, marketing communications should also emphasize the opportunities to celebrate, parade, and share their social identity as athletes. Overall, athletic social identity can be promoted and fostered via formal social activities, for instance opening and closing ceremonies, and informal social activities, for instance social interactions with other participants, spectators, visitors, and residents (Green & Chalip, 1998). Thus, both events should not only be marketed as sport performance/excellence events or recreational participation events, but also as events that celebrate the participants' athletic identities on a social level.

Furthermore, event activities should be tailored to satisfy participants' leisure motives as this maximizes performance and ensures continuation (Fung, 1992). For the more serious international/major participants, high quality and challenging competitions with experienced referees will satisfy their mastery motives, whereas additional workshops (e.g., about new equipment) or guest speakers (e.g., professional athletes) will satisfy their intellectual motives (Green & Tanabe, 1998). Lastly, formal and informal social activities (e.g., opening and closing ceremonies and social interactions) will relate to their social motives, while presenting an opportunity to relax and unwind during the event, although escape motives were only moderately important among these participants. Although the more casual national/minor participants reported high levels of the same leisure motives, different types of event activities must be selected based on the recreational participatory nature of the event. Social activities, not necessarily linked to athletics, will satisfy participants' social motives (Green & Tanabe, 1998). Furthermore, competitions must be an essential aspect of the national/minor sporting event in order to satisfy their mastery motives. However, different levels of activities, ranging from high to low intensity, must be jointly organized, for instance 5 km runs and 5 km walks, so that participants can select their level of competition. Nevertheless, all accomplishments must be celebrated with medals and tokens of appreciation. Furthermore, if multiple activities are organized, participants can try out new and different events as a way of satisfying their intellectual motives. Also, the difference in activity intensities will provide opportunities to relax and unwind and thus satisfy their escape motives. The participants at the national/minor sporting event were very heterogeneous, with ages ranging from 7 to 77 years, and therefore, offering choices between activities is very important.

There are several limitations associated with the study. There is no consensus as to which specific measures need to be used as indicators of SL and CL characteristics to test the SL-CL continuum proposition. The variables used in the current study were framed based on availability in both data sets. Furthermore, there are limitations in the chosen sample. First, based on the nature of sporting event participation, which may include travel costs, our findings cannot be generalized to the wider population. Second, the two sporting events were selected based on their convenience and proximity to the researchers' university. Third, the sample was relatively small although the researchers encouraged all event participants to partake in the study. And fourth, a sample bias with regards to age was acknowledged. However, the selected statistic for comparing the two samples did not assume equal population variances or equal sample sizes. Another limitation was that the

survey instrument does only include a small number of SL and CL characteristics and other questionnaire measurements might be better suited for the purpose of examining the SL-CL continuum (e.g., Driver, Tinsley, & Manfredi, 1991).

Based on the continuity between SL and CL (Brown, 2007; Scott & Godbey, 1994; Scott & Solomon, 2003; Shen & Yarnal, 2010; Stebbins, 1992), future research may further explore the leisure experiences of participants who partake in different types of sporting events on a yearly basis in order to examine whether their leisure experiences shift along the SL-CL continuum (regress or progress). In addition, future research may examine and compare sporting event participants with different age groups in order to more fully understand the relationships between age and the SL-CL continuum. Furthermore, traveling to participate in sporting events has been exclusively associated with SL (e.g., Mackellar, 2009; Shipway & Jones, 2008; 2009). Lastly, future research may build on the SL-CL continuum by examining SL traits among more casual participants and CL traits among more serious participants.

Although the areas of SL and CL have received a lot of research attention, most research continues to contribute to the SL-CL dichotomy which has serious limitations when describing participants' holistic leisure experiences. Furthermore, past research has not examined CL in the area of sporting event participation. Overall, this study supports Shen and Yarnal's (2010) SL-CL continuum proposition based on evidence of participants' leisure experiences at two types of sporting events. By comparing participants' leisure motives and identity, corresponding to four SL and two CL/SL characteristics, international/major participants could be considered more serious and national/minor participants more casual, although both groups of participants showed moderate to high levels of intensity across the characteristics. The SL-CL continuum offers a useful tool to describe leisure experiences that would be left unexplained by the SL-CL dichotomy.

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