



PSYCHOSOCIAL MOTIVATORS FOR OBSTACLE COURSE RACING:
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Psychosocial Motivators for Obstacle Course Racing: a Qualitative Case Study

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This study explored the psychological and sociological motivations of adult female and male obstacle course racers. A qualitative case study approach was used to explore the views, experiences, and motivations of obstacle course racing (OCR) participants. Descriptive statistics and cross tabulation was used to interpret responses to the 297 online questionnaires. A content analysis approach was used to analyze the qualitative data gathered from three focus groups with a total of 20 obstacle course racers. Three theories formed the basis of the study: Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Achievement Goal Theory (AGT), and Social Learning Theory (SLT). Overall, findings supported previous research regarding motivations to participate in adventure racing and extreme sports. Individuals were guided more by intrinsic motives than extrinsic motives. Important motivations for obstacle course racers included the camaraderie among participants, connecting and socializing with other like-minded people, having fun, and having a physical challenge that allowed them to progress and keep on track with their health goals. Obstacle course racing was perceived as positively impacting participants' health, mental wellness and their confidence in their physical abilities as well as in other areas of their lives. Findings from this study may inform future interventions to increase participation in OCR or to increase overall physical activity among adults by building on camaraderie, social connection, enjoyment, and self-efficacy.

Keywords: obstacle course racing, obstacle course race, motivation, self-determination theory, achievement goal theory, social learning theory, extreme sports

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This study used a qualitative case study approach to explore the views, experiences, and motivations of obstacle course racers. Descriptive statistics and cross tabulation were used to summarize and interpret quantitative data from online questionnaires, and a content analysis approach was used to analyze qualitative data gathered from focus group interviews. The purpose of this study was to explore psychosocial factors that motivate adults to begin and continue participating in obstacle course racing (OCR). This chapter presents the background, the significance of the study and it introduces the special terms used throughout the thesis.

Background of the Study

In recent years, participation rates of extreme sports have greatly increased while involvement in traditional sporting activities has declined (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2013; Dean, 2012). Extreme sports that have been extensively researched include BASE jumping (jumping from fixed structures such as cliffs, buildings or bridges), big wave surfing, extreme skiing, waterfall kayaking, off-road motorcycling, among other high-risk activities. However, one nascent sport that has captured the attention of millions of people worldwide, obstacle course racing (OCR), lacks scholarly exploration. Extreme sports are perceived to have a high level of inherent danger; they offer peril and thrill to participants (Dean, 2012). Although some may not consider OCR to be as extreme as other dangerous sports, the term “extreme sports” has become a “universal descriptor for a multitude of non-traditional independent and organized adventure sports” (Brymer &

Schweitzer, 2012 p. 477). Therefore, for the purpose of this study OCR was referred to as an extreme sport.

Obstacle course races are unlike any other traditional competitions. OCRs range in distance from 3 to 26+ miles and vary in the number and difficulty of obstacles (Mullins, 2012). One of the global leaders of OCR, Tough Mudder, describe the event as a “hardcore 10-12 mile obstacle course challenges designed to test your all-around strength, stamina, mental grit and camaraderie” (<http://www.toughmuder.com>). These challenges consist of rugged natural terrain and natural and artificial obstacles including being submerged into iced water, jumping over fire, carrying heavy objects (rocks, sandbags etc.), climbing over walls, crawling under barbed wire, plunging into deep water, traversing bodies of mud, and in some cases, getting electrically shocked (Mullins, 2012; <http://www.toughmuder.com>). OCR is a new breed of race that is designed to push people physically, mentally and emotionally.

OCR has been described as the fastest growing sport in American history (Greenberg, et al., 2013; Helliker & Terlep, 2013; Schlachter, 2014). It was introduced recently in 2010 with only 40,000 participants but quickly grew to an estimated 3.5 million participants in 2013 (Widdicombe, 2014). The cost to register for these events typically ranges from \$60 to almost \$200 (Williams, 2014). Although there are many magazines, newspaper articles, and blogs strictly dedicated to topics related to OCR, to the author’s knowledge there is no published scholarly research on what motivates people to participate in OCR. Given these large participation numbers and its fast-growing popularity, a question that was examined was why individuals choose to participate in this type of grueling event. With the intent of stimulating research on OCR, this study

explored the psychosocial factors that motivated adults to begin and continue participating in obstacle course racing.

Significance of the Study

The widespread popularity of these races would suggest that participants' experiences have been positive, as its growing popularity show no signs of slowing down (Mullins, 2012). Despite the popularity of OCR, we know very little about the psychosocial factors that motivate adults to begin and continue participating in OCR. This study was the first to examine the motivations of obstacle course racers. Scholars have researched motivations of adventure and extreme sport participants but none have focused specifically on OCR (see for example Brymer & Schweitzer, 2012; Brymer & Schweitzer, 2013; Dean, 2012; Kerr & Mackenzie, 2012; Powell, 2007). It is important to analyze and understand the subculture of such popular trends as OCR and its influence on those who choose to partake in it. Results of the study provided foundational research for those seeking to better understand motivational factors associated with participation in extreme sports such as OCR. Findings of the study can potentially help inform future interventions to increase physical activity among adults. Moreover, this study provided awareness of the growing popularity of this fitness trend that appears to have provided a new and unique way to positively alter healthy habits among those willing to try something new.

Research Questions

With the intent to learn about the psychosocial factors that motivate obstacle course racers, this study set out to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Who are OCR participants?
 - a) How often do they participate in OCR?
 - b) What are their social demographic variables (i.e., gender, ethnicity, marital status, education etc.)?
 - c) How physically active are they and has OCR altered their physical activity?
 - d) What psychological and sociological factors motivated individuals to participate in obstacle course racing?
 - e) What does it mean to them to participate/compete in these events?
 - f) Why do some participants choose to compete in OCR events multiple times?
 - g) How has participating in OCR impacted participants' lives (i.e., psychologically, physically, or socially)?

Delimitations

The following factors served as delimitations to the study.

- Men and women over the age of 18 who had participated in at least one OCR and who were current members of “The Weeple Army” Facebook group page were eligible to participate in the questionnaire study.
- Men and women over the age of 18 who had participated in at least one OCR were eligible to participate in the focus group.
- The researcher conducted focus groups at locations in Los Angeles County.

Limitations

The following factors served as limitations to the study.

- Only adults (18 years and older) were eligible to participate.

- Due to the qualitative nature of the study, there were only three focus groups with 5, 6 and 9 people respectively for a total of 20.
- Focus groups were conducted only in Los Angeles County, making it difficult to generalize to all of the OCR community.
- The online survey participant criteria excluded those that were not members of The Weeple Army Facebook group page.
- Participation bias was likely to have happened because survey and focus groups likely attracted individuals who were enthusiastic about OCR.
- A validated research tool was not used for the online survey.
- This study used self-report data, which may be underreported or overreported
- This study was a retrospective study, which may be subject to recall bias.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of specialized terminology that was used throughout the document.

Adventure racing (AR)

AR is a type of alternative sport where individuals or teams navigate from the starting line through various checkpoints until reaching the finish line. AR events can take from hours to several days to complete (Simpson, Post, & Tashman, 2013). AR often involves trail running, mountain biking, kayaking and orienteering.

Extreme sports

Extreme sports are leisure activities that place participants at a high probability for injury and death (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2012; Florenthal & Shoham, 2000 as cited in Dean, 2012). However, recently the term has been recognized as a general descriptor of a multitude of non-traditional sports (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2012).

Non-traditional sports

Non-traditional sports are also referred to as “alternative sports” (Ko, Park & Claussen, 2008). They are individual or team sports that are unique from the more “traditional” and team sports such as running, swimming, bicycling, basketball, baseball, and soccer among other mainstream sports. Non-traditional sports can be described as “activities that either ideologically or practically provide alternatives to mainstream sports and mainstream sport values” (Rinehart, 2000).

Obstacle course racing (OCR)

OCR is a challenge in which participants run on rugged natural terrain and overcome various physical challenges that are in the form of obstacles. Such obstacles may include crawling under barbed wire, jumping over fire, climbing over walls and traversing bodies of mud and/or water (Mullins, 2012).

Note: For convenience purposes the acronym “OCR” was used to refer to “Obstacle course racing” and “Obstacle course race(s).”

Traditional sports

Traditional sports are also referred to as “mainstream sports” (Ko et al., 2008) and are the common and well known types of individual or team sports such as running, swimming, bicycling, basketball, baseball, and soccer among other mainstream sports.

Spartan Race

Spartan Race is one of the most popular obstacle course racing companies. There are three types of Spartan Races that vary in distance, number of obstacles and difficulty. It includes the Spartan Sprint (3+ miles/15+ obstacles), Spartan Super (8+ miles/20+ obstacles), Spartan Beast (12+ miles/25+ obstacles) and the Ultra Beast (26+miles/ 50+ obstacles) (<http://www.spartanrace.com>).

Trifecta

Trifecta is Spartan Race’s title for “Spartans” who successfully complete a Spartan Sprint, Spartan Super and a Spartan Beast in one calendar year. Each participant can earn multiple trifectas (i.e., Double Trifecta, Triple Trifecta etc.) (<http://www.spartanrace.com>).

Elite wave/elite runners

The elite waves are the first few waves in an obstacle course race that are made up of competitive participants who often compete for monetary rewards.

Warrior Dash

Warrior Dash is a 5K mud run and also one of the most popular obstacle course racing companies (<https://warriordash.com>).

Tough Mudder

Tough Mudder is a 10-12 mile obstacle course race and also one of the most popular obstacle course racing companies. They are best known for their obstacle called “electroshock therapy,” in which participants must run through a field of live electrical wires (<https://toughmudder.com>).

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to explore psychosocial factors that motivate adults to begin and continue participating in obstacle course racing (OCR). As mentioned in the previous chapter, research on the motivating factors for OCR participation is nonexistent. For this reason, the literature review presents other relevant published research that helped frame this study. This chapter presents an overview of OCR, including a description and its history. Also included in this chapter is the literature related to psychological and sociological factors of participation and motivation within the context of physical activity and sport, primarily in non-traditional sports. A review of relevant research studies in sport motivation that used the theories that form the basis to this study are also presented: Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Achievement-Goal Theory (AGT) and Social Learning Theory (SLT).

History of Obstacle Course Racing

Obstacle course racing made its debut in England in 1997 but it was not until 2010 that it became increasingly popular especially in the United States (Desena & Weinberg, 2013; Schlachter, 2014). It is estimated that in 2013, 3.5 million people in the U.S. participated in an obstacle course race (Widdicombe, 2014) compared to the 40,000 who participated in 2010 (“Races from Hell,” 2013). Unlike marathons, triathlons and other fitness equivalents, OCR has lured in a more diverse population (Mullins, 2012). These races attract both serious athletes as well as individuals who simply seek a novel challenge (Mullins, 2012). The three most popular and successful OCR corporations include: Spartan Race (started in 2010), Tough Mudder (started in 2010), and Warrior

Dash (started in 1999; Desena & Weinberg, 2013). Together, these multimillion-dollar companies have attracted over three million registrants in 2013 alone (Widdicombe, 2014) and continue to increase in popularity with each race (Desena & Weinberg, 2013). Adding to its popularity, many OCR enthusiasts from other countries have “demanded” or “voted” to bring races to their town (<http://www.spartanrace.com>; <http://www.toughmuder.com>) and the OCR industry responded. These events are now held all over the world. Tough Mudder, for example, has extended to the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Ireland. Their 2015 schedule includes over 50 races (<http://www.toughmuder.com>). Spartan Race has extended to countries such as Mexico, South Africa, Germany, and Italy as well as 30 other counties (<http://www.spartanrace.com>; Widdicombe, 2014).

Of course these popular and high-risk events have not been without incident. At the 2013 Tough Mudder in West Virginia, a young man drowned after plunging into a 15-foot deep pool of muddy water. At that same event, 20 people were treated at a local hospital, including two people with heart attacks and several others with hypothermia, head injuries or orthopedic injuries (National Geographic News, 2013). At the 2011 Warrior Dash in Kansas, one man died of heat stroke and at a Michigan event, a young man suffered a spine fracture and became paralyzed after diving into a shallow mud pit (<http://www.minbcnews.com>). Less serious injuries such as fractures, sprains, dislocations and cuts and bruises (Greenberg et al., 2013) are commonplace at these events. But even then, the attraction of these events has not subsided.

OCR is a multi-sport event, as it usually involves running, jumping, swimming, and climbing among other obstacles. This type of multi-sport training is not new. The

earliest dates back to the eighth century BCE when ancient Greeks used obstacle courses to train soldiers for combat (Desena & Weinberg, 2013). More contemporary obstacle courses continue to be important in physical training especially for military personnel (Greenberg, et al., 2013; Mullins, 2012). This is in large part due to the benefits that come with this type of training as it combines endurance, strength, agility, coordination, balance, and strategy (Mullins, 2012).

Research involving obstacle courses or obstacle course races has focused on the physical benefits of obstacle course military training and its history (Bishop et al., 1999; Hofstetter & Hofstetter, 2012; Mullins, 2012) or has explored the various injuries that incur at these events (Greenberg et al., 2013). Previous research on similar “high-risk” sports has investigated motives of participation of adventure sports (Kerr, 2012) and extreme sports (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2012; Dean, 2012). However, OCR is a recent phenomenon that needs further exploration.

Tangible rewards for OCR finishers generally include a finishers medal (or Tough Mudder headband) and a race t-shirt. Additionally, participants may receive one free beer (for those 21 years of age and older). Personal motivations can span into many different aspects of a person’s life that have yet to be explored therefore, this study further examined what motivates individuals to participate in OCR. The paragraphs below review research on the motivational factors of other comparable sports.

Motivation in Extreme/Adventure Sports

Researchers have investigated risk factors, fear, anxiety and motivations of adventure races/extreme sports. For example, Brymer and Schweitzer (2012) explored the fear experienced among 15 participants in extreme sport. Some of the sports explored in

Brymer and Schweitzer's study were BASE-jumping, extreme skiing, and big wave surfing. Even though OCR is arguably a less extreme sport than those mentioned above, participants of each sport may experience similar emotions. One-on-one interviews with participants from the study revealed that during their extreme sport activity, fear became a "friend," as they were able to acknowledge its presence and interpret it as a positive contribution to personal growth. Another study by the same authors (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2013), explored one aspect of motivation in extreme sports, the search for freedom. Their research explored different ways that humans find value in extreme sport. Findings revealed that participants did not engage in these activities simply for the adrenaline rush or the risk-taking experience, instead the authors concluded, "the extreme sport experience might be a function of many factors that have been overlooked because of the focus on risk" (p. 234). The majority of research in alternative sports has explored participation through the lens of a risk-taking element associated with these activities (Kerr & Mackenzie, 2012; Simpson, Post & Tashman, 2013). As a result, Simpson, Post and Tashman (2013) suggested that a negative perspective of these activities has been constructed. Kerr and Mackenzie (2012) suggest that the narrow scope in the research has resulted in failure to examine other possible motives for participation and therefore may be missing pertinent information. This study contributed to the existing body of literature in motivation in extreme sports. In addition, it filled a literature gap by exploring motives through a sociological and psychological lens specifically among adult OCR participants.

Motivation

Motivation is fundamentally defined as having the drive to engage in activity (Walker, Foster, Daubert, & Nathan, 2005). Pargman (1998) adds to the definition as he

defines it as the “direction, energy, and intensity of behavior, or the ‘why’ of the behavior” (p. 62). Motivation is what drives human activity and as a result has shown to be prevalent in sport and exercise research as it is a vital ingredient in the participation of sport. In the world of sport especially at the elite level, motivation is essential in order to continually have the desire and the drive to complete intense training sessions (Walker et. al., 2005). At the non-elite level, having motivation can guide one’s choice of either continuing watching television or going out for a walk. Motivation is on a linear spectrum, some individuals possess more than others. The type of motivation an individual possesses is another factor that varies for each person. Motivation is divided into three types in the literature: intrinsic (internal), extrinsic (external) and amotivation (no motivation) (Edmunds, Ntoumanis & Duda, 2006).

Intrinsic motivation refers to having the inner desire to do something. A person is said to be intrinsically motivated when he/she is voluntarily engaged in an activity in the absence of material rewards (Pelletier et al., 1995). For example, athletes feel a sense of enjoyment from attending practice because it is pleasurable and rewarding to them. Non-athletes may feel the same satisfaction when engaging in another type of activity such as building a puzzle.

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation refers to any external forces directing one’s behavior. That is to say, external interests are of more value and play a more profound role to the individual rather than the activity itself (Deci & Ryan, 1985). One is said to be extrinsically motivated when engaging in a behavior that will earn a reward or avoid a punishment (Pelletier, Rocchi, Vallerand, Deci, & Ryan, 2013). For example, children may experience this type of motivation when parents ask them to clean their

room. They engage in the action to avoid being reprimanded by their parents. An example of an extrinsically motivated athlete is someone who participates in a sport in order to win a reward (e.g., trophy or monetary incentives). The primary difference between the two is that intrinsic motivation arises from within the individual while extrinsic motivation results from an outside entity (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

The third concept used to explain a type of motivation is amotivation, in essence the term is used for people who are not motivated. Here, individuals are neither intrinsically or extrinsically motivated because they lack a connection between their behavior and its outcome. For example, children often fall victim to this type of motivation when parents pressure them to participate in a sport. Due to the lack of personal motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic), children may cease activity and become amotivated because they lack the pleasure and satisfaction of the experience (Sanchez-Miguel, Leo, Sanchez-Oliva, Amando, & Garcia-Calvo, 2013). Amotivation is characterized by individuals' feelings of incompetence and lack of control to produce any desired results from their behavior (Walker et al., 2005). This study however, focused on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Motivation in Sport

Scholars have identified several motivational factors that influence the decision to participate in sport. Allender, Cowburn and Foster (2006) reviewed qualitative studies that focused on motives of children and adults in the United Kingdom choosing to participate or not participate in sport and other physical activity. Researchers found that teenagers and young women's motivation to engage in sport and other physical activity were largely due to their concerns about body shape and weight management. Having

positive influences at home and at school also affected their motivation to begin or continue being physically active. However, for adults the most common reasons to exercise were having a sense of achievement, developing a skill, reducing the risk of diseases, having a support networks and enjoyment. Generally, adults showed to have more intrinsic motivations to participate in sport and exercise than teenagers and young women (Allender, Cowburn and Foster, 2006). Multiple studies (see for example Kerr & Mackenzie, 2012; Kilpatrick, Hebert, Bartholomew, 2005; Pelletier, et al., 2013) have used both interview and motivation scales to understand what are the factors that drive individuals to engage in sport or exercise. One sport-specific definition of motivation is “the inclination to pursue and persist in activities related to one’s sport” (Walker et al., 2005, p. 5). Motivation in a sport context refers to the commitment and dedication that is embedded within individuals to engage in physical activity. Sport psychologists agree that motivation is an important ingredient in sport success. Each individual develops their own view of motivation and it is for this reason that researchers have created psychology-based theories to help explain this individualized phenomenon (Walker et al., 2005). In addition, sociological theories have also been developed to better understand motivation. In the paragraphs that follow, both types of theories are presented as the framework for this study.

Psychological Theories

Two of the most commonly used psychological theories of motivation in sport are Self-Determination Theory and Achievement Goal Theory.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposes that individuals are innately motivated to participate in activities (Standage, Duda & Ntoumanis, 2003). SDT suggests that humans have three basic psychological needs to be satisfied: autonomy (acting accordingly to one's own free will), competence (feeling capable of completing tasks effectively), and relatedness (feeling a sense of belongingness; Ng et al., 2012).

Edmunds et al. (2006), put SDT to the test in an exercise domain with 16-64 year old individuals who engaged in organized fitness classes to investigate if there was a connection between autonomy support, psychological needs satisfaction, motivational regulations and exercise behavior. Researchers found that if all three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) were met, individuals were self-determined. These findings supported SDT in an exercise domain. Another study related to SDT conducted by Mallet and Hanrahan (2004) explored the motivational processes of elite track and field athletes. They found that athletes possessed a wide variety of motivations to participate and were highly intrinsically motivated. Recurrent themes for major psychological needs of the elite athletes included: having a sense of achievement, social recognition, and increased perception of competence. Findings were consistent with SDT and AGT (Achievement Goal Theory).

Achievement Goal Theory (AGT)

The other widely used theory of motivation is Nicholl's Achievement Goal Theory (AGT). This theory explains that achievement behaviors are dependent upon the personal meaning to which an individual defines intrapersonal success or failure and judges his or her capabilities within a given performance context (Anshel, 2012). In an achievement context, individuals generally try to show high ability and avoid demonstrating low ability (Mallett & Hanrahan, 2004). In sport, AGT recognizes two goal orientations in which athletes perceive their sport performance; these are task orientation and ego orientation. Task orientation is focused on one's own effort and improvement while ego orientation is focused on comparing oneself to others and reaching better results than the rest (Moreno, Cervello, & Gonzalez-Cutre, 2010; Treasure & Roberts, 1995).

Recent studies have explored multiple motives for participation in adventure sports and physical activity (Allender et al., 2006; Kerr & Mackenzie, 2012; Scheerder et al., 2006). Kerr and Mackenzie (2012) qualitatively explored motives for participation in a range of adventure sports such as river surfing, mountain biking, kayaking, mountain climbing and hang gliding. Researchers found that motives for participation were multifaceted. Even though there were common motives among participants, their level of importance was ranked differently. The researchers identified multiple motives for participating in adventure sports, which included: risk taking, social motivation, escape from boredom, goal achievement, testing personal abilities and overcoming fear, and connecting with the natural environment.

The previously mentioned study by Mallet and Hanrahan (2004) qualitatively examined motivational processes of elite track and field athletes from an achievement goal perspective. Researchers revealed that participants were driven by personal goals of achievement. All of the athletes in the study possessed both types of oriented goals: task and ego. That is to say, elite track and field athletes were motivated by enhancing their skills and also by surpassing their opponents. However, athletes varied on the type of motivation in which they were primarily focused. Overall, their findings were consistent with AGT as well as SDT.

Sociological Theories

Researchers in the field of sociology are generally interested in how individuals become members of society and learn the culture in which they belong. This process is known as socialization, which Coakley (2007) defines as “a process of learning and social development, which occurs as we interact with one another and become acquainted with the social world in which we live in” (p. 90). Socialization is essential for development and for participation and function of an individual within a society (“Socialization,” 2012). The outcomes of the socialization process involve individuals acquiring attitudes, values, knowledge, and behaviors that are related to the group. There are various agents of socialization that play a role in this process. Agents of socialization refer to bodies or institutions that perform socialization function at a micro or macro level. At the micro level groups include, family, peers, and coaches while the macro level includes larger institutions such as religious and educational systems, and the mass media (“Socialization,” 2012). These factors play a role in socializing an individual in order to

acquire a personal identity and learn the norms, values, behaviors and social skills appropriate to their group.

Research on socialization has primarily involved children and adolescent experiences in acquiring certain behaviors. One study that explored the onset of teenage drinking, socialization factors and participation in organized sports found that family socialization styles were important in terms of onset drinking (Hellandsjo Bu, Watten, Foxcroft and Ingebrigtsen, & Relling, 2002). Results showed that more frequent peer and parental drinking was correlated with early alcohol debut. In terms of the socialization domain of sports, they found that participation in organized sports delayed alcohol consumption. At the macro level of socialization, one study by Hardin and Greer (2009) used Bandura's social learning theory to examine the relationship between media use, sport participation, and gender role socialization with classifying sports as masculine or feminine. The survey that was administered to 340 college students revealed that there was a great social pressure to conform into "appropriate" gender-roles and therefore most individuals only participated in "gender-appropriate" sports and thought of most sports as being masculine. The authors concluded that for the majority, mediated images of mostly men participating in sports is what keeps women from being socialized into other sports. The authors suggest that women's participation rates will increase only until media images are more inclusive of women in a variety of sports.

Socialization and Sport

The social process of getting involved into physical activity and sport is called sport socialization (Eitzen & Sage, 2003). Sport socialization is typically studied through two different conceptual frameworks. The first approach, socialization via sport, explains

the consequences of participating in sport. This is referring to the attitudes, values and beliefs, and behaviors that are learned through the participation of a sport (Eitzen & Sage, 2003). The second approach, socialization into sport examines the reasons associated in choosing to participate in sport. This approach deals with who gets involved in sport, which social agents are responsible for guiding that choice, and what are the social processes for becoming involved (Eitzen & Sage, 2003). This thesis focused on the latter approach, socialization into sport, in the hope of better understanding the factors that attracted individuals to begin and continue participating in OCR. One common theoretical framework used to explain the socialization phenomena associated with sport is social learning theory.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory (SLT) can be described as having two different views, the sociological and the health behavior lens (Anshel, 2012). Even though they are similar in some respects they also have differences worth noting. SLT through the sociological lens is an ongoing process whereby an individual acquires a personal identity through the interaction of a social group (Anshel, 2012). Individuals learn behavior, values, norms, and social skills that are acceptable for that particular group. The theory of social learning was first derived from the work of Bandura (1977) to explain the learned behaviors of aggression. But since then it has become perhaps the most influential theory of learning and development (Anshel, 2012). SLT through the health behavior lens focuses on the social support of health behavior change. Some core concepts of SLT (also referred to as social cognitive theory) that are most relevant to this study include social modeling (showing the person that others like themselves can do it) and self-efficacy (beliefs about

personal ability to complete tasks and reach goals). According to McAlister, Perry and Parcel (2008), “[SLT] posits that human behavior is the product of the dynamic interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences” (p. 170). Therefore, the act of choosing to partake in an activity for example, basketball, is a reflection of influences that surround individuals.

Only to a limited degree have the theoretical notions of the social learning model been used to study adult participation in sport. Previous research has focused mainly on the participation of sport during childhood. For example, one longitudinal study explored socialization of physical activities within families of fifth and sixth graders. Researchers found that both boys and girls’ main predictor for physical activities were the enjoyment aspect. Social learning variables had little influence (DiLorenzo, Stucky-Ropp, Vander Wal, & Gotham, 1998). However, they found that factors for physical activity changed substantially by the 8th and 9th grade. The results agreed with Kenyon and McPherson’s (1970) explanation of a child’s transition from childhood to adolescence, as their relevant social systems change. This social learning process is complex especially when dealing with physical activity and sport because of the engagement of it throughout an individual’s life and in an array of interrelated forms (Kenyon & McPherson, 1970).

Research shows that social influences play a role when deciding whether to participate in an activity (Coleman, Cox & Roker, 2008). For example, a United Kingdom study explored the leading influences of 15-19 year old women’s psychological and social influences in physical activity. The researchers found that family and friends were both significant influences but the influence of friends were particularly stronger (Coleman et al., 2008). One young woman mentioned that being involved in sports

became more of a social activity rather than a sporting activity when her friends were involved. Other young women mentioned that they felt left out when they did not participate in sporting activities when their friends participated. Family also played a large role in their socialization, as most women reported living in an active household where parents and siblings frequently participated in sport and physical activity. Most of the participants who lived in an inactive household felt that if their parents were more active, it would have led to an increase of their own physical activity. These results showed the shift of social influences that occur as children age and the influence of parents' physical activity on a child's physical activity.

Although prior research offered insight into factors associated with socialization of sports with children and adolescence, there is a lack of research on this topic pertaining to adults. Thus, this thesis provided additional knowledge on this topic.

Summary

There is a lack of scholarly research on the popular phenomenon of OCR therefore further exploration of this topic is suggested. Past research on other high-risk sports however, included concepts such as risk factors, fear, anxiety and motivations of adventure races that provide an understanding of what may be the motivation of obstacle course racers. Existing research however, has its own limitations as it fails to take into account other factors (beyond those mentioned above) that may be motivating participants of obstacle course racing. This thesis uncovered themes associated with sport motivation specifically, motivation to begin and continue participating in OCR. The theories utilized to frame this study were Self-Determination Theory, Achievement Goal Theory and Social Learning Theory.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore psychosocial factors that motivate adults to begin and continue participating in obstacle course racing (OCR). A phenomenological case study approach was used to explore the views, experiences and motivations of obstacle course racers. This chapter provides an overview of the research design, sampling methods and procedures, as well as the information involving data collection and analysis.

Research Design

In order to acquire a deeper understanding of participant motives for participating in OCR, a qualitative case study approach was utilized for this investigation. A case study refers to a detailed examination of a person, a social group, one single event, or a single depository of documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This method is meant to gather thorough information from qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and observations and present it from the perspective of the research participants. This research strategy allowed in-depth exploration of individuals within a social group and their choice to participate in OCR. Using this research design via online questionnaire and focus groups provided consistent descriptions of this particular phenomenon by identifying common patterns within individuals' experience (Morgan, 2011). California Polytechnic University's Human Subject's Committee approved this study.

A purposive sampling technique was used for both the online questionnaire and the focus groups. Purposive sampling is "designed to enhance understanding of selected individuals or groups' experience(s)" (Devers & Frankel, 2000 p. 264). To accomplish

this goal, participants were chosen as “information rich” cases in order to provide the greatest insight into the research questions (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Questionnaire respondents were chosen from an accessible population of male and female OCR participants through a Facebook group page and consequently, respondents who reported living in Los Angeles area were asked if they would be interested in participating in a focus group. The only incentives provided for focus group participants were light snacks and beverages.

Data Collection

Online questionnaire. The invitation to participate in the online questionnaire was distributed via Facebook, a popular online social networking site. Facebook has the capability of creating group pages where administrators are appointed and people can electronically request to be in a group. Facebook members can create online groups to have a community of like-minded individuals and use the group page to share for example, their passion of a particular hobby, ask for nutrition and fitness advice, motivate each other, and/or share their personal stories. One Facebook group in particular that is comprised of many OCR enthusiasts is “The Weeple Army” which served as this study’s subpopulation. The Weeple Army, a well-known group in the racing world throughout the United States describe themselves as a “Mud/Obstacle running group for people of all abilities and levels” (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/WeepleArmy/>). The Weeple Army currently has 1,964 members (as of May 19, 2014) most of which reside in California, more specifically southern California.

With permission from The Weeple Army Facebook group page administrator, an announcement about the study (Appendix A) along with a link to the Google Doc- made

(<https://www.docs.google.com>) questionnaire (Appendix B) was posted on the Weeple Army Facebook group page. The group's setting was set to "closed group" meaning that people who are interested in joining the Weeple Army Facebook group page were required to send an electronic request to join. Having a "closed group" setting was a benefit to the research as it helped control the amount of people who were added to the page, it also helped avoid spammers.

Before beginning the online questionnaire, participants were required to meet all inclusion criteria and accept the terms and conditions described on the embedded consent form (Appendix C). After completing the survey, participants were asked if 1) they live in Los Angeles County and 2) they are interested in participating in a focus group. Those who selected "Yes" to both questions were asked to provide their name and contact information. It was anticipated that a 30% response rate would be reached in two weeks. However, that goal was not reached so the link was made available for an additional two weeks. A total of 316 survey responses were collected but not all met the required criteria. Fourteen respondents were not members of The Weeple Army Facebook group page, one respondent was under 18 years of age, one respondent did not accept the consent form, and three respondents had not participated in an OCR. Consequently, 297 of the questionnaires were reviewed. Questionnaire data were summarized using descriptive statistics, specifically frequency of responses and cross tabulation.

Additional resource. The researcher's sister provided help and guidance throughout the research process. She is the Community Liaison for the Community Engagement program at the Clinical Translational Science Institute at the University of Southern California. She is experienced in qualitative research and has sound familiarity

with conducting focus group interviews. She served as the focus group facilitator and provided guidance with the analysis of qualitative data. She also helped in the process of peer debriefing which enhanced this study's trustworthiness.

Focus group. After collecting contact information voluntarily provided by those who completed the online questionnaire, the researcher contacted individuals to ensure that the inclusion criteria were met. If inclusion criteria were met, participants were asked to provide their zip code. An online pin map was created using Google Map Maker (<https://www.google.com/mapmaker>) in order to identify clusters of living proximities to find convenient locations for participants. Locations included three areas in Los Angeles County: San Fernando Valley, West Los Angeles, and East Los Angeles. After locations in the three sites were confirmed an email was sent with Doodle Poll links. Doodle Poll (<https://www.doodle.com>) is an online scheduling assistance tool. Participants were instructed to respond with their availability on the dates and times provided and the location(s) of convenience to them. The date and time convenient to the majority of the participants for each location was selected and an email was sent with the final dates, times and exact location of each focus group:

- Delano Recreation Center, Van Nuys, CA
- Julian Dixon Library, Culver City, CA
- University of Southern CA, Health Sciences Campus, Los Angeles, CA

Participants were asked to reply with the location they would be able to attend (if any).

Two e-mail reminders were sent approximately one week and two days prior to the focus group date.

Three focus group interviews were conducted each consisting of 5-9 people, as recommended in the literature (Greenbaum, 1998). A group that is too big (larger than ten) or too small (fewer than eight) may cause unfavorable challenges such as lack of group dynamics, difficulty in stimulating an effective interaction and it can be difficult to control if the group is too big (Greenbaum, 1998). Focus group sessions were approximately two hours in duration. With the permission of participants, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. An experienced facilitator (the researcher's sister) led the focus groups. Additionally, not having the principal investigator facilitate the focus groups reduced research bias given her involvement in OCR activities. The researcher familiarized the facilitator with the topic area, study design, study tools and other materials. The primary researcher served as the facilitator assistant. Her responsibilities included managing all focus group logistics and consenting participants at the start of the focus group as well as taking notes during the focus groups.

Reflexive journal. The researcher used a reflexive journal during the focus group sessions. Reflexive journals are commonly used in qualitative research because they provide the opportunity for researchers to have a space where they can reflect on their experiences and presuppositions (Ortlipp, 2008). Reflexive journals serve as a valuable source of data and as a means of enhancing participants' lived experiences by recording contextual information that is unavailable through audio recording (Ortlipp, 2008).

Instrument Design

Online questionnaire. The questionnaire (Appendix B) shared through Facebook contained 36 items and took approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. With help from a thesis committee member, the researcher developed questions specifically for this study

based on the research questions and core concepts of the three theories used for this study. The questionnaire contained five sections: 1) Questions related to general social demographics information, 2) Questions about participation in OCR events and other physical activity, 3) Questions related to OCR and key constructs of Self-Determination Theory, 4) Questions related to OCR and key constructs of Achievement Goal Theory, and 5) Questions related to OCR and key constructs of Social Learning Theory. The questionnaire was designed using a 5-Point Likert scale, “strongly agree”, “agree”, “undecided”, “disagree” and “strongly disagree”. A sixth choice, “I would rather not answer” was also given as an option for all questions.

Focus group guide. Focus groups were guided with a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix D) that was designed to elicit narratives about participants’ experiences. The development of the focus group guide and codebook (Appendix E) was informed by the results obtained from the questionnaire and three theoretical constructs of Self-Determination Theory, Achievement Goal Theory and Social Learning Theory. Additionally, data from the demographic questionnaire were used to further refine the focus group semi-structured interview script. The questions were intentionally designed to be open ended in order to elicit in-depth responses. Prompts were used when needed to ensure that all topics of interest were covered.

Data Analysis

Online questionnaire. Survey data were reviewed using statistical software, Minitab. Descriptive statistics, specifically frequency of answers was used to summarize the data. Cross tabulations were used to examine differences between gender and motivation.

Focus groups. All focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was reviewed and coded to protect the identity of participants. The researcher recorded handwritten notes during focus group sessions in a reflexive journal so that the responses could be interpreted in the context in which they were made therefore these notes were also considered when analyzing data. Data were analyzed using content analysis through online software called “Dedoose” (<http://www.dedoose>). Dedoose is an online tool that supports cross-sectional and longitudinal qualitative and mixed methods projects. The focus group transcripts were analyzed to identify patterns of words, phrases or statements (Patton, 2002) that were important in describing the essence of OCR and participants’ experiences. Themes were identified from consistent patterns found in the data that described or interpreted aspects related to experiences of OCR participants. Reoccurring concepts were identified and those that occurred most often became themes, otherwise stayed as sub themes. A codebook (Appendix E) was developed to help with the analysis of data using the most salient themes that emerged from the transcriptions. Differences in coding were discussed and resolved by the researcher and her sister. The codebook was modified as needed and conclusions were developed based on patterns found in the data. The researcher organized the results of the data analysis in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework that served as the foundation for the study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an essential component to qualitative research as it helps produce sound data. The three components of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability and dependability. Credibility refers to the findings of a study being

convincing or believable. Transferability refers to having the ability to apply the results of the study to a similar environment. Dependability refers to having the ability to understand what is really happening which means that the research would have to be descriptive and clear (Pitney & Parker, 2009). The following research strategies were used to maximize trustworthiness of data in this study.

To ensure credibility and dependability, member checks, data triangulation, theoretical triangulation and peer debriefing were conducted. Member checks were conducted by giving all participants the option to review the focus group transcription for accuracy. However, no participants provided feedback. This study used multiple tools for data collection that included online questionnaire data, focus group transcripts, and a research reflexive journal. The usage of multiple sources of data collection is termed “data triangulation” which in turn helped enhance the study’s credibility and dependability (Pitney & Parker, 2009). Multiple theoretical perspectives were utilized (Achievement Goal Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Social Learning Theory) also known as theoretical triangulation, which enhanced the study’s credibility and dependability. In addition, peer debriefing was accomplished by having the researcher’s sister review transcriptions and codes for plausibility. To ensure transferability, the researcher ensured that analytical techniques were methodological, thoughtful, and carefully analyzed by providing in-depth details about the study locations, participants, data collection and data analysis procedures. Moreover, the researcher also conducted multiple reads of the transcriptions.

Ethical and Procedural Safeguards

After agreeing to participate, participants were informed that the information they shared would remain confidential and that they may choose to decline to answer any question. Participants were asked for permission to audio record the focus group, after which they were asked to sign an informed consent (Appendix F). Although the names of the participants were captured in the audio recording, once transcribed the transcriptions referred to participants by their individual participant number (e.g., Focus Group #1, Participant “A”) in order to maintain confidentiality.

The Researcher as Participatory Observer

The researcher’s role as participant, assistant facilitator and observer was unique and somewhat difficult to manage throughout the focus group interviews and data analysis process due to her personal involvement in OCR. The researcher has been involved in OCR since 2011 and has participated in over twenty OCRs. She has also been a member of The Weeple Army since 2012 therefore, some participants knew her personally. However, the researcher was conscious of her role and made note of her observations and unique perspective. Her position as participatory researcher became more complex when she found herself confounded by the commonalities between the community she was studying and her personal experience. However, utilizing multiple data collection methods helped in reducing research bias and ultimately allowed for a holistic understanding of participants’ experiences. The researcher also recognized that her personal involvement in OCR was advantageous in some regards. First, she was well versed in the terms regularly used by obstacle course racers. This knowledge in turn helped in providing the focus group facilitator with background information about the

topic in preparation for the focus groups. Second, her previous experience with OCR helped facilitate the recruitment process, as it provided her with connections such as the founder of The Weeple Army and other OCR networks.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore psychosocial factors that motivate adults to begin and continue participating in obstacle course racing (OCR). This chapter includes survey and focus group results from adult male obstacle course racers.

The first section of this chapter contains results from data from the 36-item online questionnaire (Appendix B) that was administered to 297 respondents who met the following required criteria: 1.) Must be 18 years of age or older. 2.) Must be a member of the Weeple Army Facebook group page and 3.) Must have participated in at least one OCR. The second section of this chapter presents results from three focus group interviews conducted with a total of 20 adult OCR participants.

Online Questionnaire Results

Participants and Demographics

Figures 4.0 to 4.7 display the demographics of 297 online survey respondents. Participant male to female ratio was fairly even. Males made up 51% of the sample and 49% were females. Forty-three percent of participants were between the ages of 30-39. More than half (53%) of respondents were White, followed by 22% Hispanic or Latino. Less than half (41%) of participants were married followed by 27% single (never married) and 24% divorced. Most participants reported having 1-2 children (41%) followed by no children (40%). Sixty-seven percent of respondents reported being employed for wages with most (23%) having a household income of more than \$100,000.

However, 14% of respondents chose to not answer the question. Most participants (29%) reported having a college degree (e.g., BA, BS) followed by 28% having “Some college (no degree).”

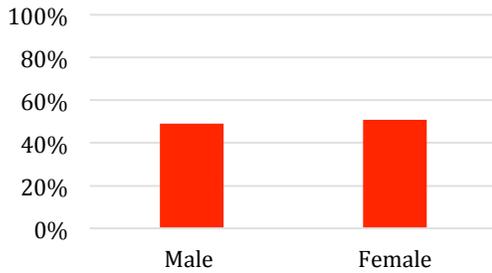


Figure 4.0. Gender of questionnaire respondents.

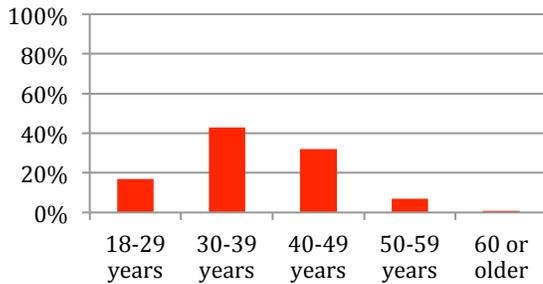


Figure 4.1. Age range of questionnaire respondents.

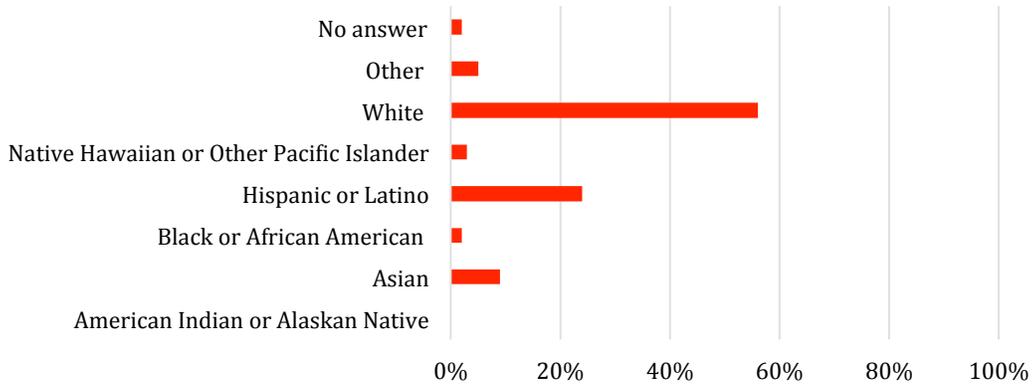


Figure 4.2. Ethnicity of questionnaire respondents.

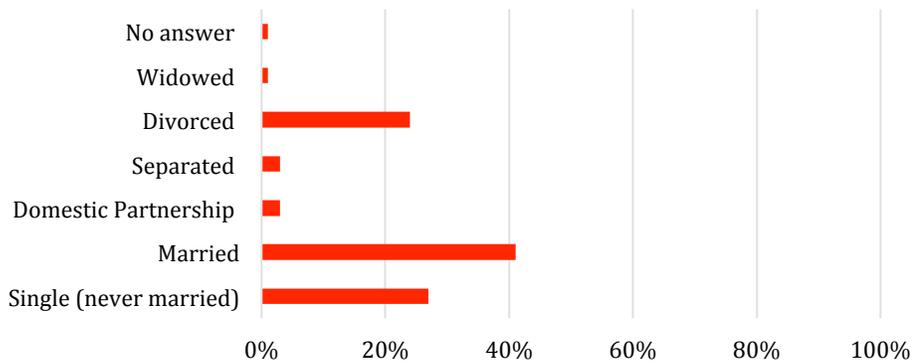


Figure 4.3. Marital status of questionnaire respondents.

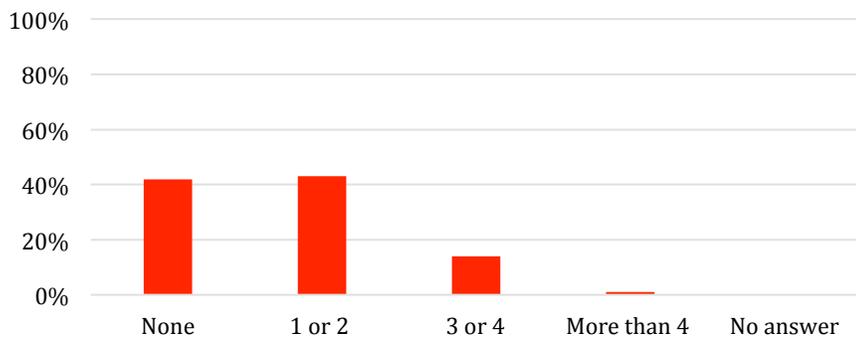


Figure 4.4. Number of children of questionnaire respondents.

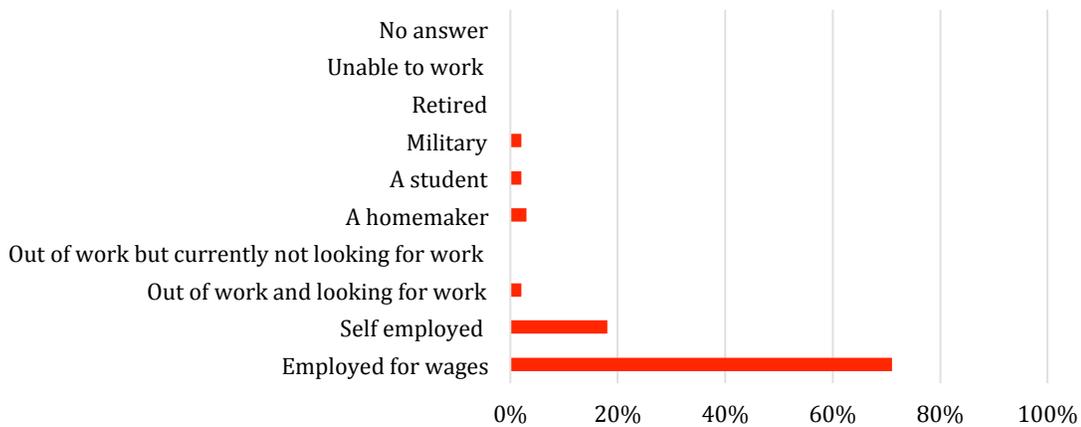


Figure 4.5. Employment status of questionnaire respondents.

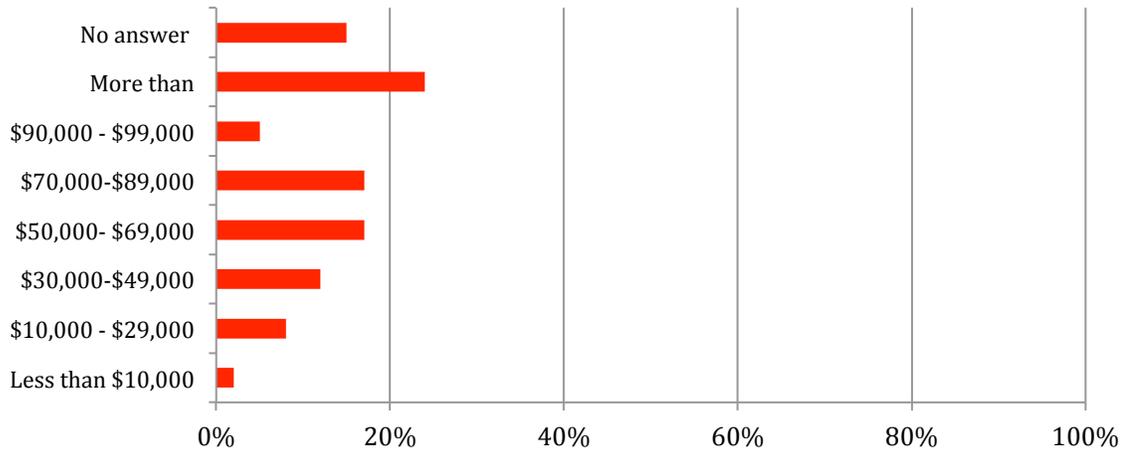


Figure 4.6. Household income of questionnaire respondents

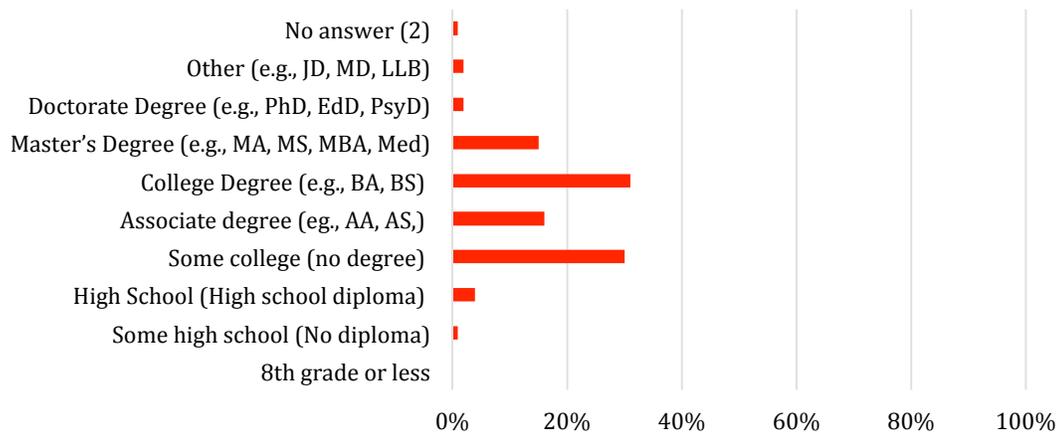


Figure 4.7. Highest education degree achieved by questionnaire respondents.

Experience with Obstacle Course Racing

Figures 4.8 to 4.11 present the online questionnaire results of 297 participants' experience with obstacle course racing. More than half (60%) of people reported having first heard about OCR through a friend. The next most popular response was Facebook (21%). Forty-one percent of participants had been participating in OCR for 1-2 years. Most (58%) participants had participated in an OCR less than a month ago from the time they completed the survey and 26% had participated in their last OCR 1-3 months ago.

When asked when participants intend on participating in another OCR, 84% percent of respondents chose the earliest answer choice, which was within the next 3 months. Only two respondents out of the 297 who completed the survey chose the option “I do not plan on participating in another OCR.” The reasons given was because it had become too expensive and because one person had suffered a serious injury and was longer able to participate in ‘dangerous’ activities. The vast majority of those who completed the survey were considered experienced obstacle course racers, that is to say that they had participating in these type of races for either 1-2 years (41%) or 3-4 years (30%) and demonstrated a high level of involvement in OCR.

Eighty-eight percent of respondents reported participating in both OCR and traditional physical activity events such as running, cycling, or swimming competitions. For example, 78% of respondents had participated in a 5k, 71% in a 10k, 53% in a half marathon, 25% in a marathon, and 37% in a trail competition.

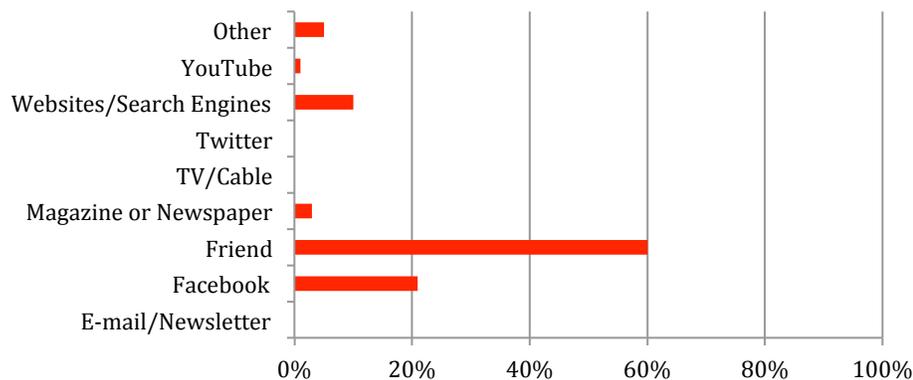


Figure 4.8. Manner in which questionnaire respondents first heard of OCR.

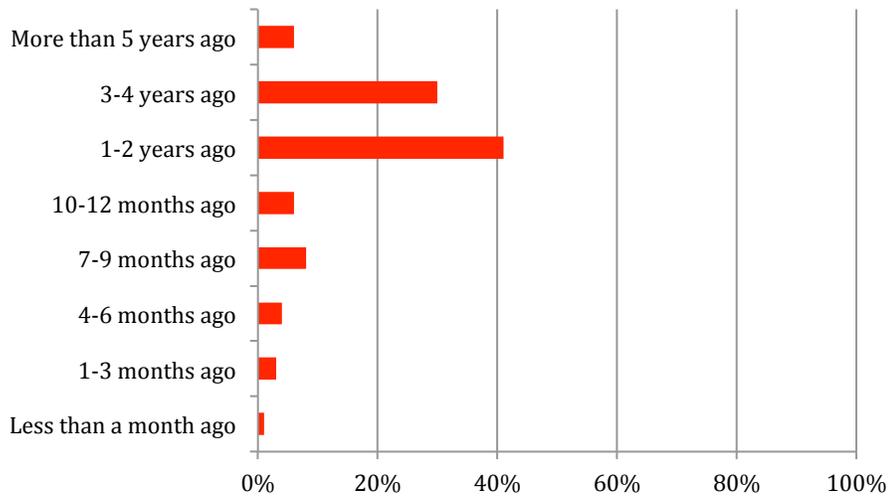


Figure 4.9. How long it had been since questionnaire respondents participated in their first OCR.

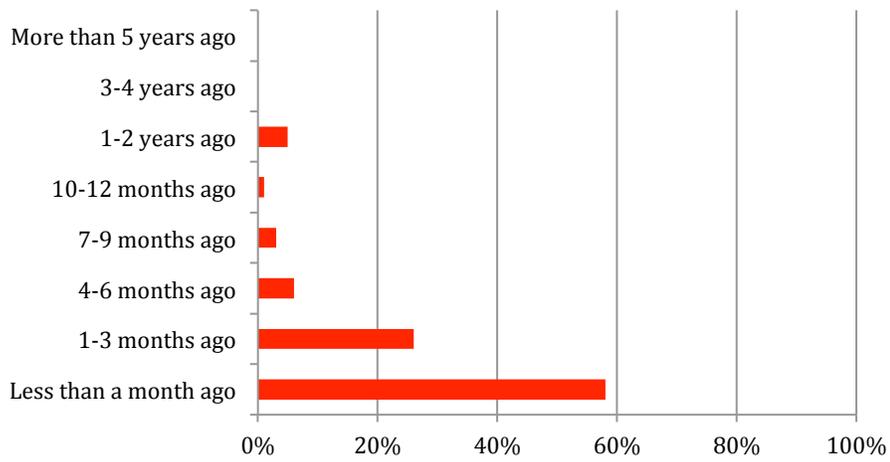


Figure 4.10. How long it had been since questionnaire respondents participated in their most recent OCR.

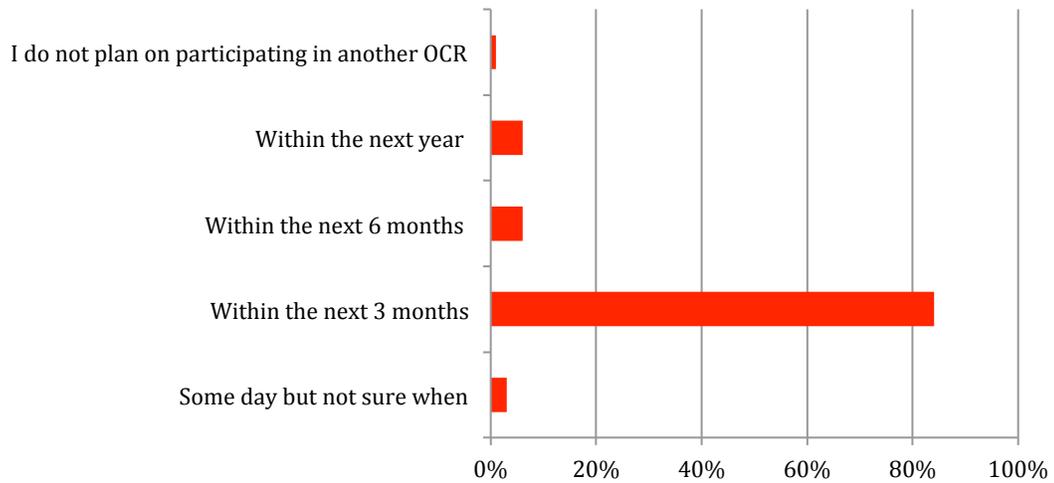


Figure 4.11. When do questionnaire respondents intend to participate in another OCR.

Motivation to Participate in OCR

Questions about motivation to participate in OCR were asked in the online questionnaire to better understand what motivates people to initially participate and continue to participate. In addition to obtaining a better understanding about their motivations, the data also provided information about how respondents felt when they participated in OCR and the impact that OCR has had on their health and personal life. The tables and figures in this next section present the survey questions related to motivation to participate in OCR (Tables 4.0 – 4.5) and their corresponding results (Figures 4.12 – 4.17 and Tables 4.6 -4.8). Note that the answers to “agree” and “strongly agree” were combined as well as the responses to “disagree” and “strongly disagree” in order to facilitate the reporting of the results.

Respondents were asked why they participate in OCR (Table 4.0) as it relates to feelings of independence (autonomy), competence or feeling close to others (relatedness) when participating in OCR.

Table 4.0

Participants' feelings of independence, competence, and relatedness

Item #	Survey Question
19.	I prefer to participate in OCR because it makes me feel independent (i.e., self-directed, autonomous)
20.	I prefer to participate in OCR because it makes me feel competent (i.e., knowledgeable, capable, and able)
21.	I prefer to participate in OCR because it makes me feel close to others

The majority (79%) of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they participated in OCR because it made them feel competent. On the other hand, when asked about feeling independent, 73% agreed or strongly agreed. Similarly, when asked about feeling close to others, 73% agreed or strongly agreed.

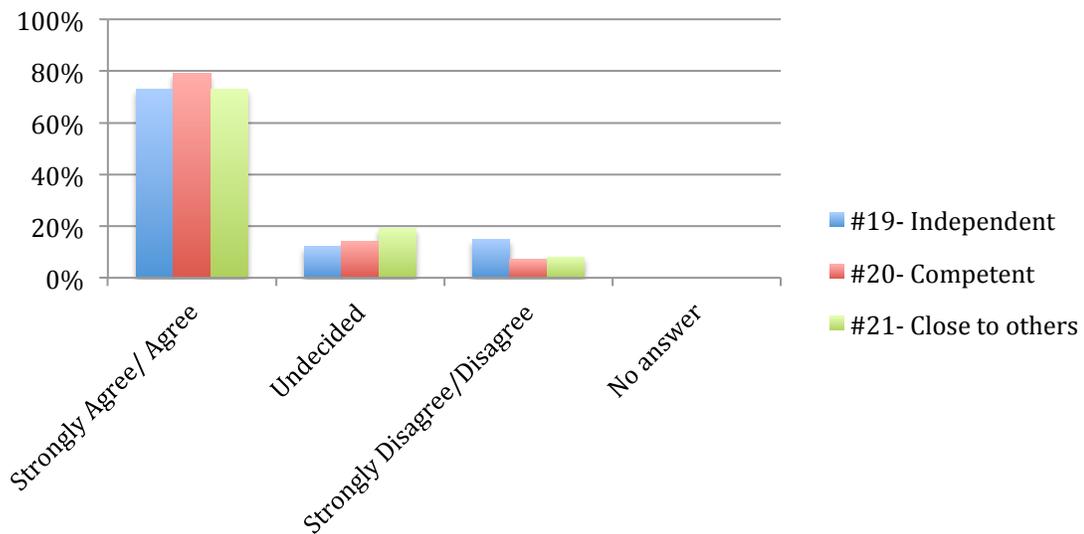


Figure 4.12. Motives for participation related to independence, competence and feeling close to others. Responses to survey items 19-21 shown in Table 4.0

The questionnaire also included two questions (Table 4.1) regarding participants' feelings of success when participating in an OCR. One question dealt with personal success while the other focused on performing better than others.

Table 4.1

Participant's feelings of success while participating in an OCR

Item #	Survey Question
22.	I feel successful when I work really hard to complete an obstacle course race
23.	I feel successful when others can't do as well as I can in an obstacle course race

Ninety-seven percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they felt successful when they work really hard. However, when asked about feeling successful when others can't do as well as they can only 37% agreed or strongly agreed.

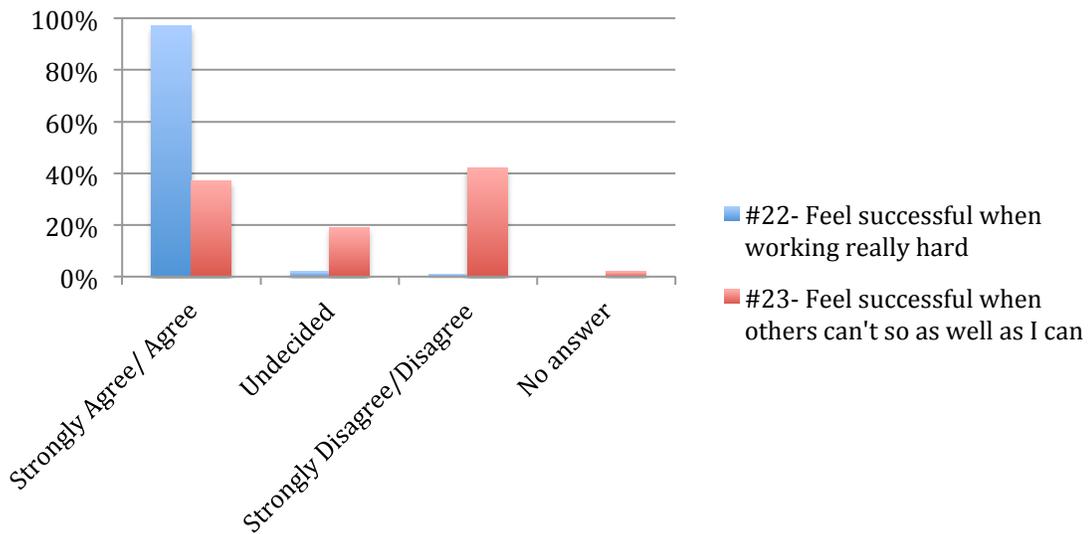


Figure 4.13. Motives related to feelings of success in OCR. Responses to survey items 22 and 23 shown in Table 4.1.

Participants were asked about the level of support they receive from family, friends and acquaintances to participate in OCR (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Encouragement from family, friends, and acquaintances

Item #	Survey Question
24.	My family encourages me to participate in OCR
25.	My friends encourage me to participate in OCR
26.	Acquaintances (people you know, but not very well) encourage me to participate in OCR

The majority (81%) agreed that friends encourage them to participate, followed by encouragement by acquaintances (71%) and lastly, encouragement by family (53%).

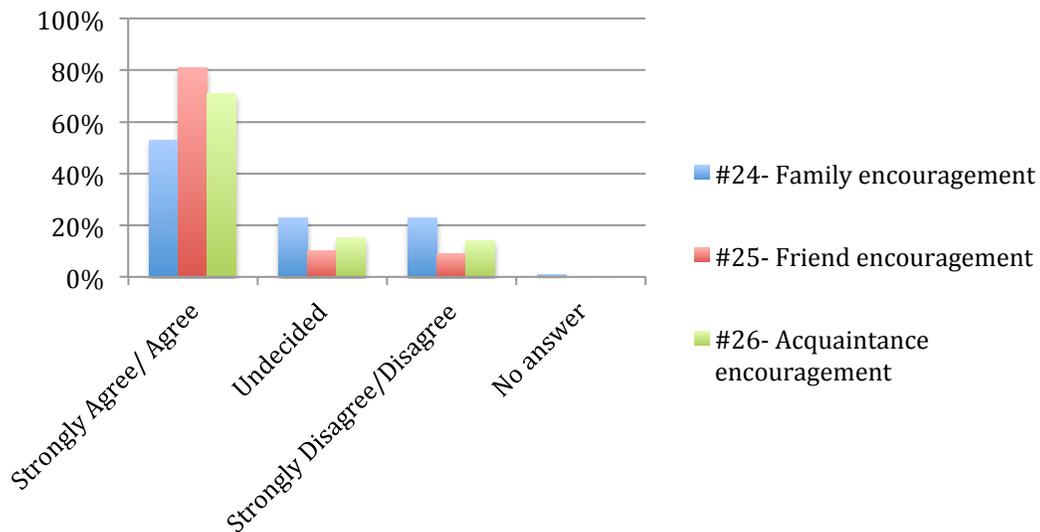


Figure 4.14. Encouragement from family, friends and acquaintances. Responses to survey items 24-26 shown in Table 4.2.

Participants were also asked about other external influences that may have influenced them to participate in OCR (Table 4.3); such as experience in past sport/physical activity, media, and observing others doing an OCR.

Table 4.3.

Influence of past sport/physical activity, the media and the observation of others in the decision to participate in OCR.

Item #	Survey Question
27.	My past sport or physical activity experience influenced me to participate in OCR
28.	The media (e.g., internet, TV, radio, magazines) influenced me to participate in OCR
29.	I was influenced to participate in OCR by observing others participate in OCR

Sixty-one percent agreed or strongly agreed that past sport or physical activity influenced their participation in an OCR. Only 29% agreed or strongly agreed that media had influenced them to participate in OCR. Fifty-five percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that observing others participate in OCR influenced them to participate.

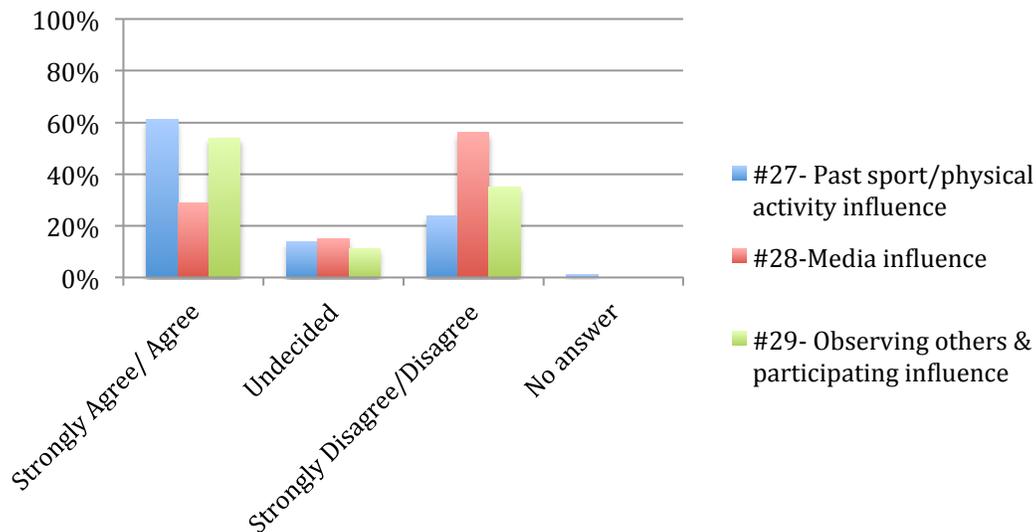


Figure 4.15. Influence of past sport/physical activity, media and observing others. Responses to survey items 27-29 shown in Table 4.3.

In order to better understand the potential influence of others, additional, specific questions involving motives for participation related to others were asked (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Modeled behavior (observing others participate) and verbal encouragement by friends

Item #	Survey Question
30.	By watching others participate in OCR, I knew I could be successful at OCR
31.	Verbal encouragement by friends got me to participate in OCR
32.	Verbal encouragement by friends boosted my confidence level in completing an OCR

More than half (53%) agreed or strongly agreed that watching others participate in OCR reassured them that they would be successful at OCR. When asked about verbal encouragement by friends, 64% agreed or strongly agreed that verbal encouragement by friends got them to participate in OCR and 77% agreed or strongly agreed that verbal encouragement by friends boosted their confidence to complete an OCR.

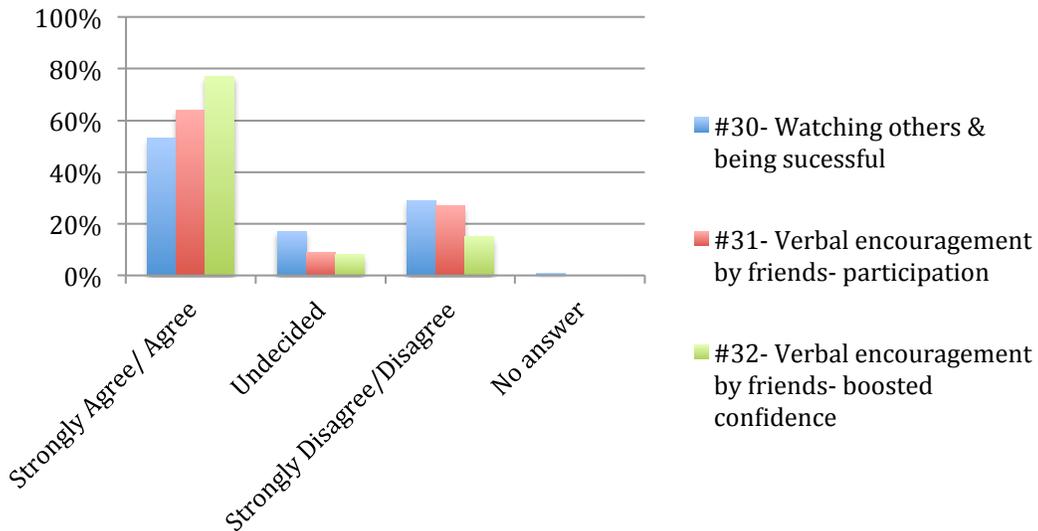


Figure 4.16. Modeled behavior and verbal encouragement. Responses to survey items 30-32 shown in Table 4.4.

Participants were also asked questions related to the impact of OCR on their physical and mental health as well as the importance that their mental/emotional wellness has on successful with completing an OCR and the value of social bonds through their participation (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

The relationship between OCR and psychological and physical health and the motivation to participate because of social bonds

Item #	Survey Question
33.	My mental and emotional wellbeing is positively related to completing an obstacle course race
34.	I participate in OCR because of the positive impact it has on my physical health
35.	I participate in OCR because of the positive impact it has on my emotional and mental health
36.	I participate in OCR because of the social bonds it creates

Eighty percent agreed or strongly agreed that their mental and emotional well being was positively related to completing an OCR. Ninety-five percent agreed or strongly agreed that they participated in OCR because of the positive impact it has had on their physical health. Ninety-two percent agreed or strongly agreed that they participate in OCR because of the positive impact it has had on their emotional and mental health. Eighty-eight percent of participants agreed that they participated in OCR because of the social bonds it creates.

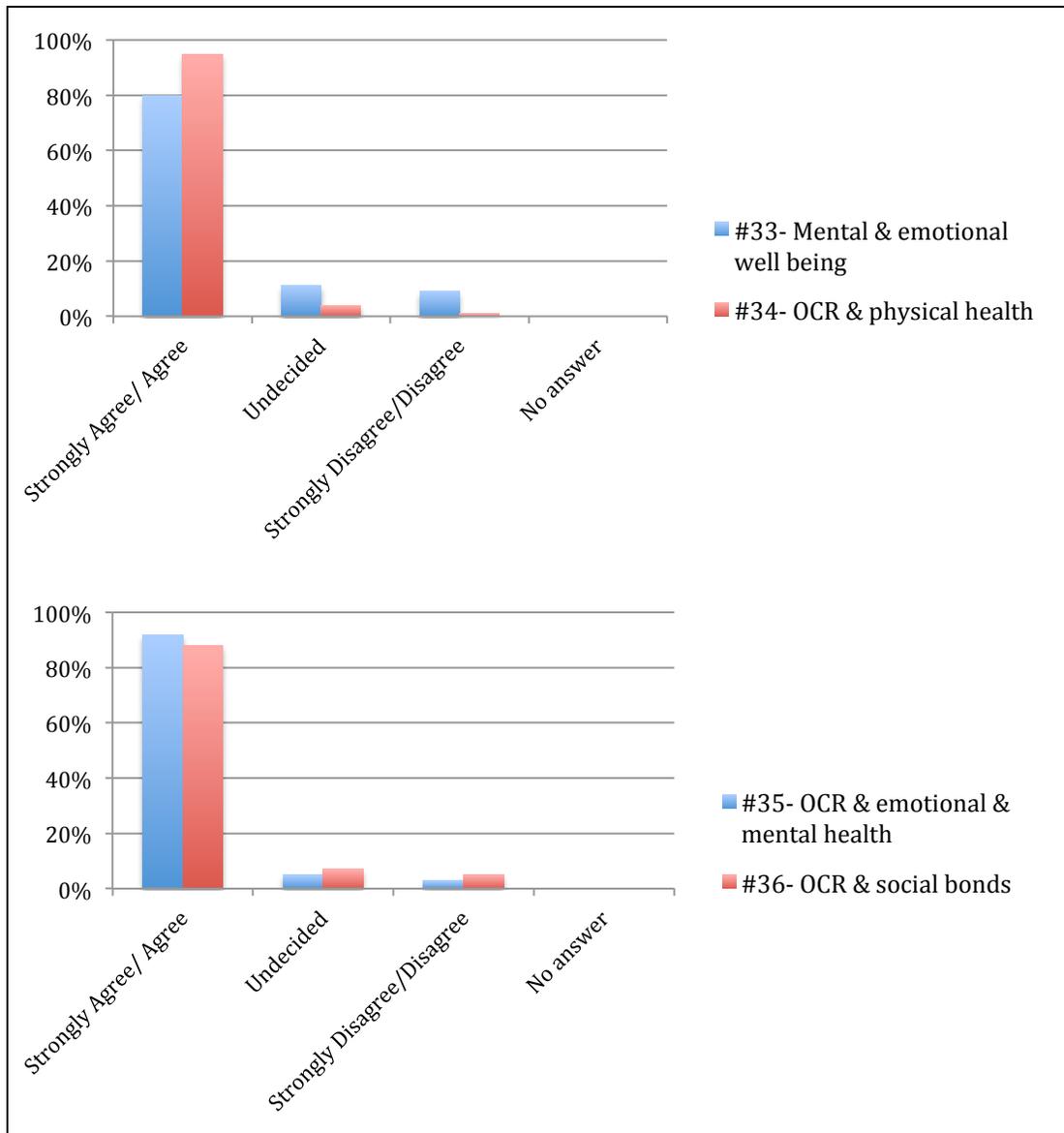


Figure 4.17. Psychological, physical and social meaning of participation. Responses to survey items 33-36 shown in Table 4.5.

The focus of this study was to explore the psychosocial factors that motivate adults to begin and continue participating in OCR. Therefore, participants were asked to select reasons for their initial and continued participation in OCR. The five most frequently (Table 4.6) and least frequently (Table 4.7) mentioned responses are presented in the tables below. Seventy-seven percent of participants were motivated to initially participate because of the physical challenge OCR provided them, followed by the fun

aspect of the sport (74%). The two least frequently mentioned responses were to please others (3%) and to win the race (6%).

When asked about their motivation to continue to participate, the top two responses were switched from their responses about their initial motivation. Eighty-three percent were motivated by fun while 78% did it for the physical challenge. The least frequently mentioned responses for motivating factors to continue to participate are same as their motivation to initially participate (3% to please others and 10% to win the race).

Table 4.6.
Five most popular responses to why respondents initiated and continue participation

Initial Motivation	%	Continued Motivation	%
Be physically challenged	77	Have Fun	83
Have Fun	74	Be physically challenged	78
Do something unique	58	Feel good	63
Feel adventurous	58	Feel adventurous	63
Go beyond my comfort zone	56	Improve my endurance	60

Table 4.7
Five least popular responses to why respondents initiated and continue participation (Excluding “I would rather not answer” [1%] and “Other” [5%])

Initial Motivation	%	Continued Motivation	%
Please others (want to be liked by others)	3	Please others (want to be liked by others)	3
Win the race	6	Win the race	10
Do better than my friends	7	Feel good	14
Feel independence/autonomy	11	Fulfill my curiosity	16
Get a better race time	11	Feel independence/autonomy	18

Table 4.8 below presents the five (out of more than 50 unique words received) most common words used by participants when asked to type one word that they felt best-described OCR.

Table 4.8
Top five words used to best describe OCR

Rank	OCR Word
1	Challenging
2	Adventurous
3	Awesome
4	Camaraderie
5	Fun

Note. Ranked from 1 (most popular) to 5 (least popular) out of more than 50 words that were received by questionnaire respondents.

Survey Cross Tabulation

Cross tabulation was used to better understand the relationship between variables. Please refer to Appendix B for online survey questions. Minitab was used to cross tabulate variables regarding how long participants had been involved in OCR and when they intend to participate in their next OCR. The answer choice “Within the next three months” (the earliest time option given) was the most popular response. Answer choices relating to OCR experience ranged from less than a month ago to more than five years ago. For example, those that had been involved in OCR for 1-2 years reported intending to participate in their next OCR within the next three months (34%) the same thing was true for those that had been participating in OCR for 3-4 years (26%). Cross tabulation of gender and motivation-related questions was also conducted. Findings showed that 75% of females and 71% of males agreed or strongly agreed that they participated in OCR

because it made them feel independent. Additionally, 82% of females and 76% of males agreed or strongly agreed that they participated in OCR because it made them feel competent. Seventy-two percent of females and 74% of males agreed or strongly agreed that they participated in OCR because it made them feel close to others. Participants were asked about their feelings of success when participating in OCR. Ninety-eight percent of females and 97% of males reported feeling successful when they work really hard to complete an OCR. Thirty percent of females agreed or strongly agreed and 43% of males agreed or strongly agreed that they felt successful when other cannot do as well as they can. When asked if friends encouraged them to participate in OCR, 86% of females agreed or strongly agreed and 76% of males agreed or strongly agreed.

Focus Group Results

Focus Group participants were asked to complete a shorter version of the online questionnaire. The modified questionnaire included demographic questions as well as general questions about their experience with OCR. The following section present the results from questionnaires completed by the focus group participants.

Participants and Demographics

Figures 4.18- 4.25 illustrate demographic information of the twenty focus group participants. There was a higher male attendance than females. More than half (65%) of the participants were males. Most (45%) participants were between the ages of 30-39 and 30% in the ages of 40-49. More than half (55%) of participants were White followed by 45% Hispanic or Latino. The marital status of participants was fairly split, 45% reported being married and 40% reported being single (never married). Most participants reported having no children (50%) followed by having 1 or 2 children (45%). The majority (95%)

of respondents reported being employed for wages or self-employed. Twenty-five percent of respondents reported an income of over \$100,000, 25% reporting having a household income of \$30-\$40K and 20% reported an income of \$70-\$89K. Most participants (40%) reported having a college degree (e.g., BA, BS), followed by 35% having “Some college (no degree)”.

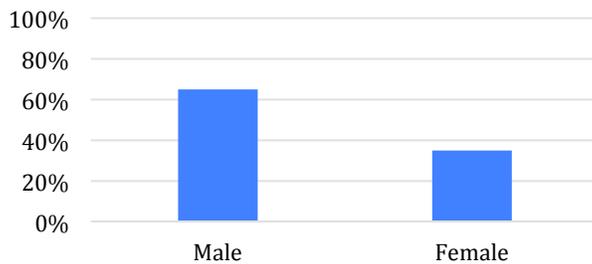


Figure 4.18. Gender of focus group participants.

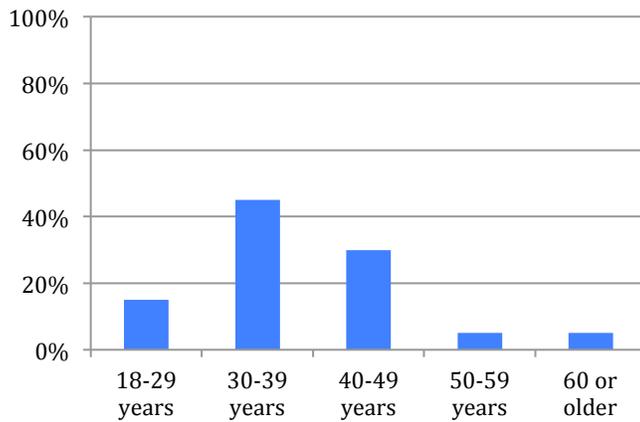


Figure 4.19. Age range of focus group participants.

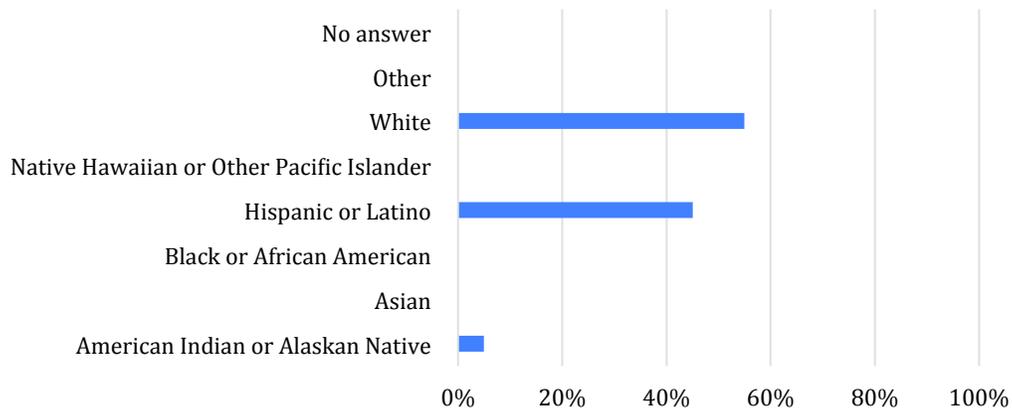


Figure 4.20. Ethnicity of focus group participants (check all that apply).

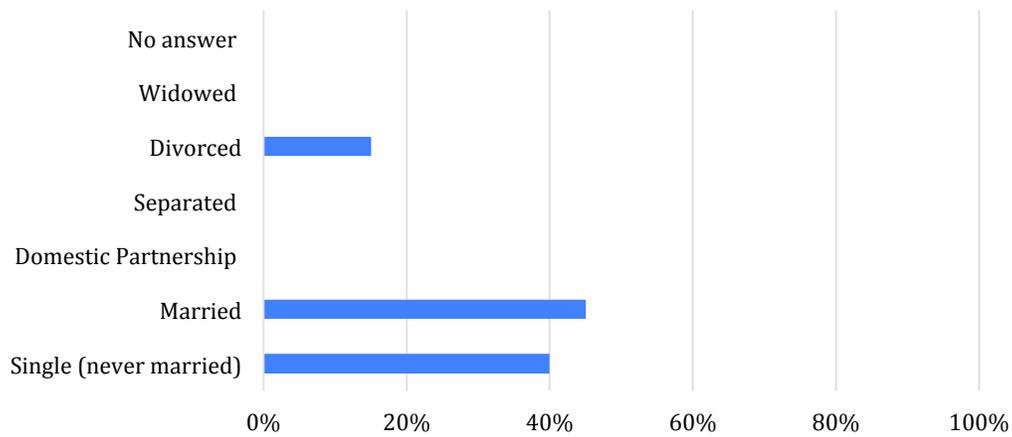


Figure 4.21. Marital status of focus group participants.

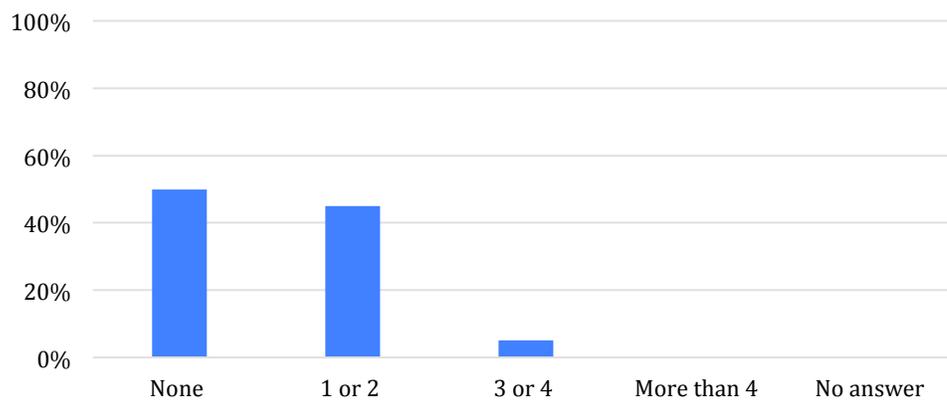


Figure 4.22. Number of children of focus group participants.

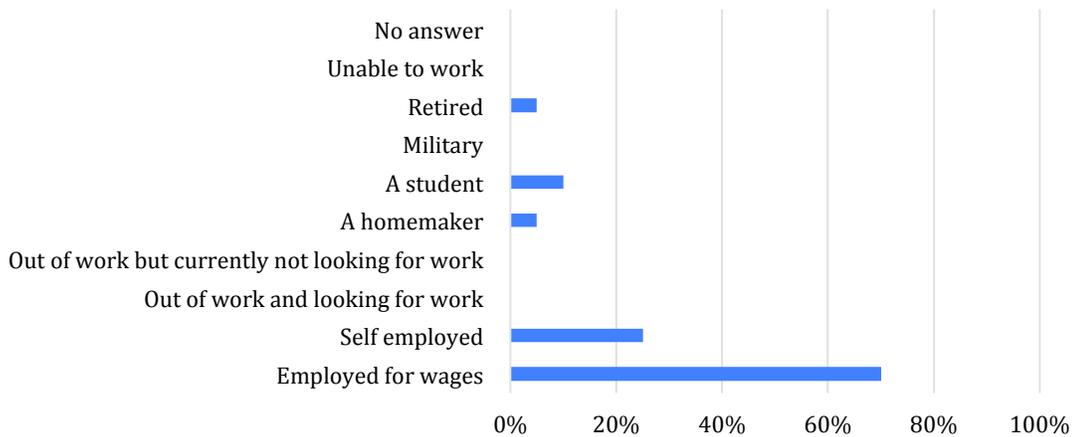


Figure 4.23. Employment status of focus group participants (check all that apply).

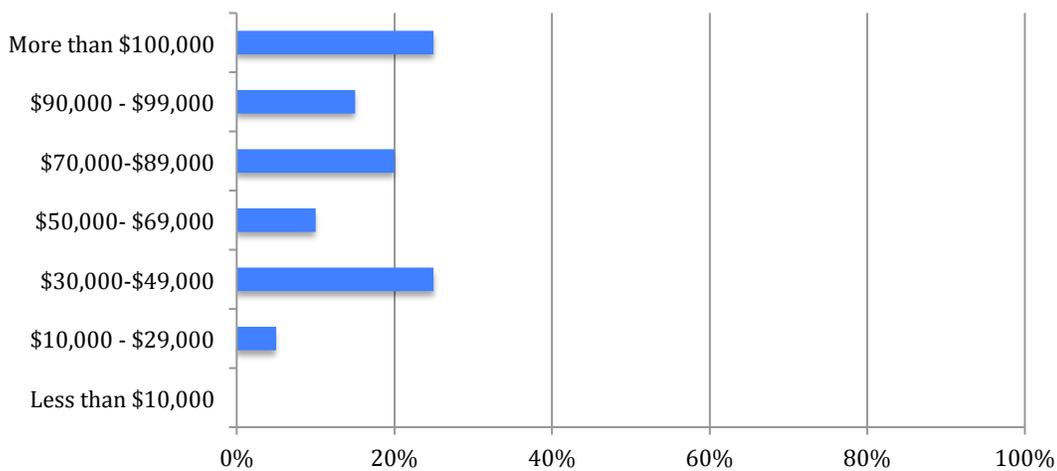


Figure 4.24. Household income of focus group participants.

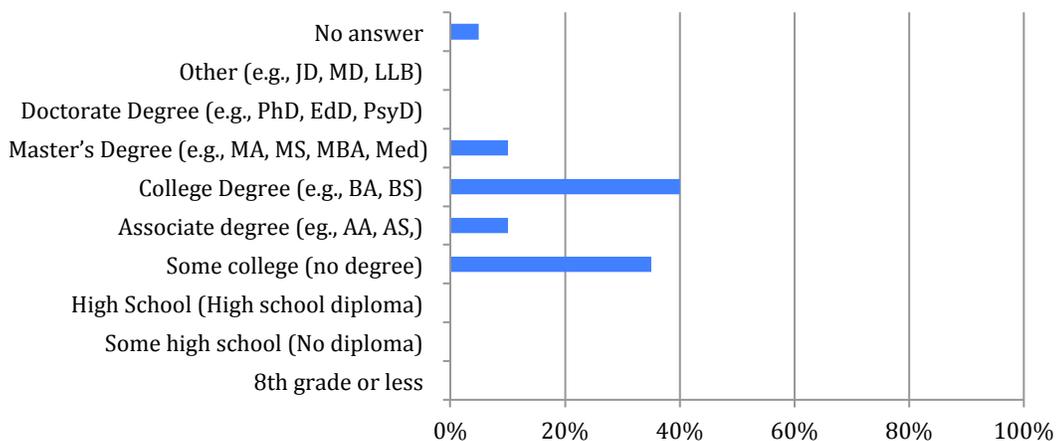


Figure 4.25. Highest education degree achieved by focus group participants.

Experience with Obstacle Course Racing

Figure 4.26 presents results on the manner in which respondents first heard of OCR. More than half (55%) of participants reported having first heard about OCR through a friend. The next most popular response (21%) was through websites and search engines. In order to learn more about their experience with OCR respondents were also asked how long ago they participated in their first OCR, how long had it been since their last OCR and when they intend to participate in another OCR (Figures 4.27 to 4.29).

More than half (55%) of participants reported having completed their first OCR 1-2 years ago while 30% reported having participated in their first OCR 3-4 years ago. When asked about the last time they participated in an OCR most (60%) had participated in an OCR less than a month ago from the time they completed the survey. Twenty-five percent had participated in their last OCR 1-3 months ago. When asked about their intentions to participate in another OCR, ninety percent of respondents chose the earliest answer choice, which was within the next three months. Most participants reported that they have been OCR participants for as long as 1-2 years (55%) or 3-4 years (30%).

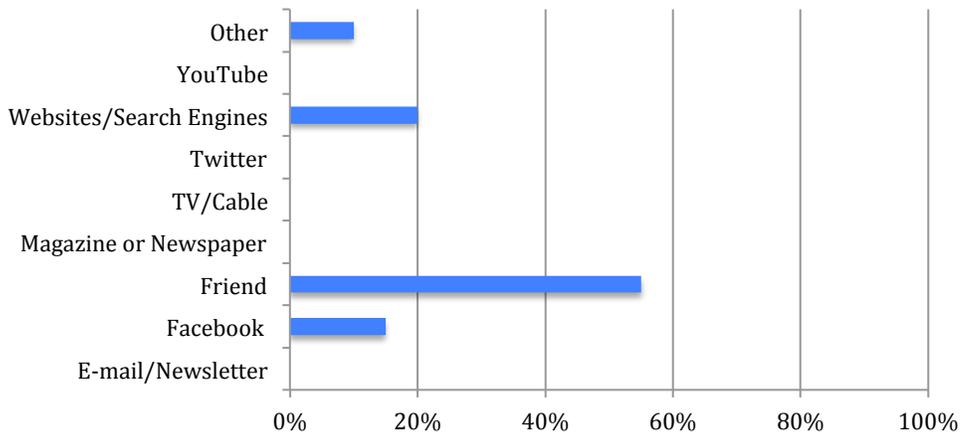


Figure 4.26. Manner in which focus group participants first heard of OCR.

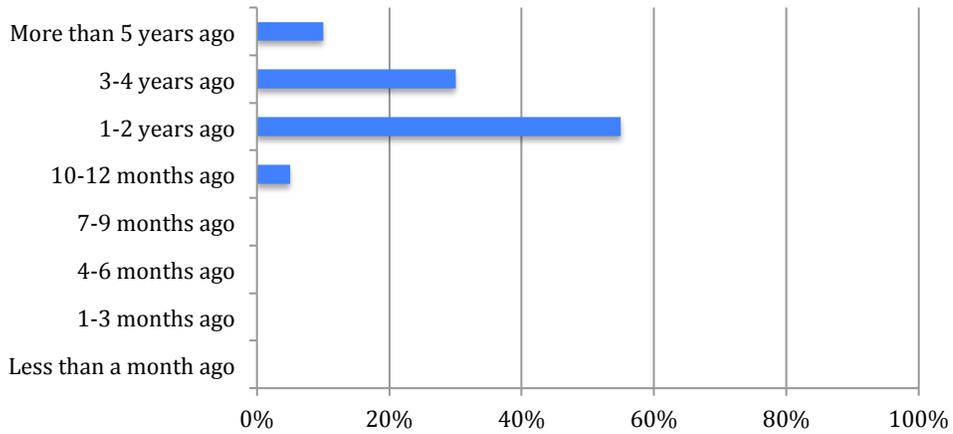


Figure 4.27. How long had it been since focus group participants participated in their first OCR.

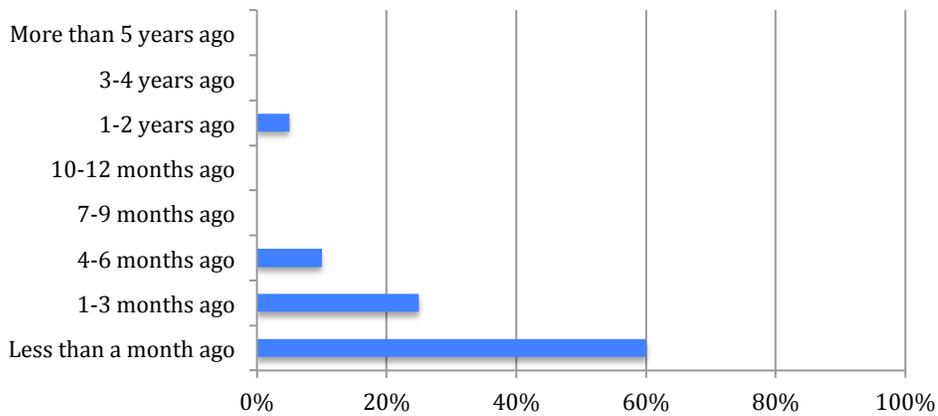


Figure 4.28. How long it had been since focus group participants participated in their most recent OCR.

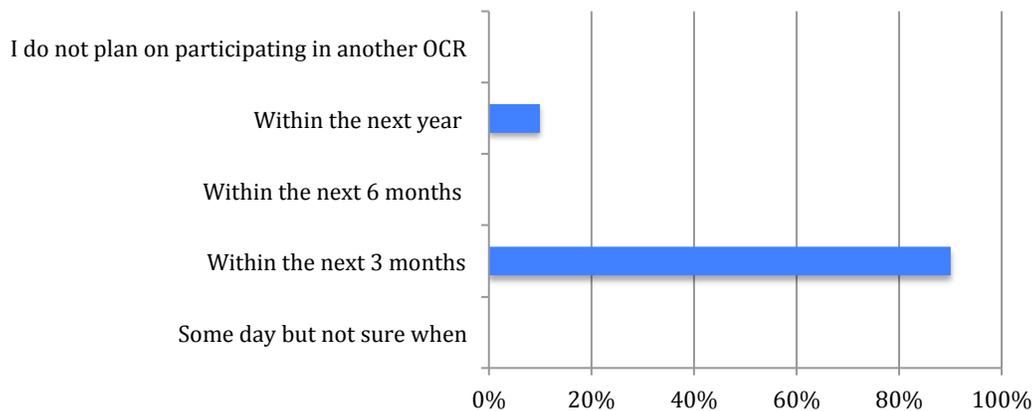


Figure 4.29. When do focus group participants intend to participate in another OCR.

The focus group participants were also asked about their involvement in other types of races. The majority (85%) of respondents reported participating in both OCR and traditional physical activity events such as running, cycling, or swimming competitions. For example, 85% of respondents had participated in a 5k, 80% in a 10k, 40% in a half marathon, 35% in a trail competition, 20% in a triathlon, and 10% in a marathon.

Focus Group Qualitative Data

Purposive sampling techniques were used to recruit participants for the online questionnaire and focus group interviews (Patton, 2002). Three focus groups were conducted with a total of 20 participants to explore individuals' experience with OCR. This section will discuss results from the 64 pages of transcriptions that were utilized in the data analysis process. Reoccurring concepts were identified and those that occurred most often became themes, otherwise stayed as sub themes. Eight overarching themes and seventeen sub themes were identified. The following section will discuss and describe the themes that emerged from the focus group, including quotes from participants. The codebook found in Appendix E provides a definition for each prominent theme and sub theme that emerged from the data that are listed on Figure 4.30.

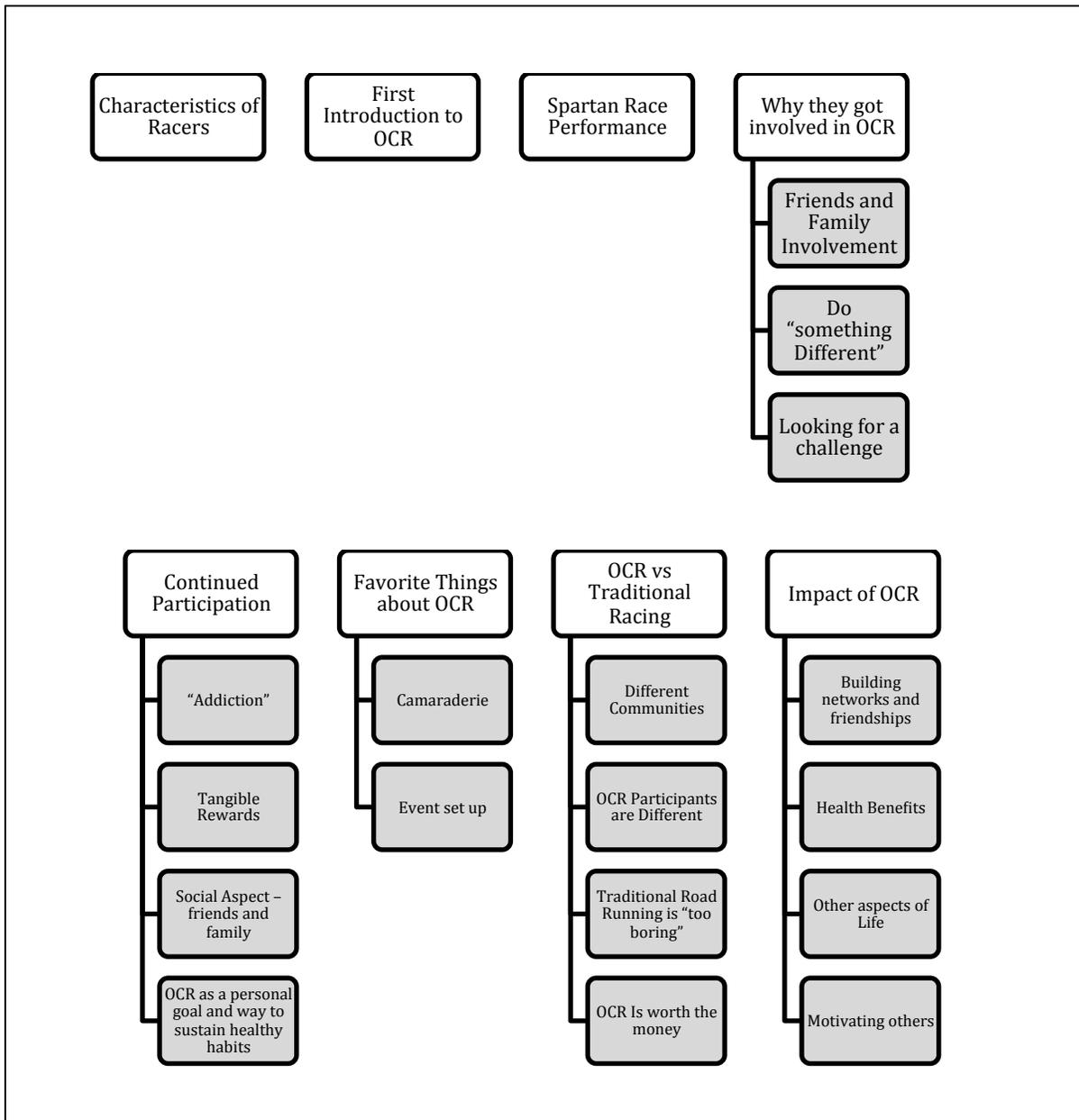


Figure 4.30. Focus groups' most prominent themes and sub themes. *Note.* White rectangles represent themes and grey rectangles represent its attached sub theme.

The first theme discussed has to do with the characteristics of racers, the similarities and differences among them.

Characteristics of Racers

All focus group participants were very involved in OCR. The number of OCRs completed individually varied from 4 to over 75; the average number of OCRs completed was 23. Obstacle course racers are not a homogenous group; the similarities and differences among them became noticeable from the start. For example, one big difference was the difference in their racing objective. Some participants were more competitive than others therefore some chose to run individually mostly in the “elite wave.” These participants’ main objective was getting a good time and outperforming others. On the other hand, and this was the majority, enjoy running as a group and enjoy helping others on the course. These type of racers found reward in simply finishing the race, doing well in time is secondary to them. For example, one participant that now participates to compete said, *“In the beginning I did it them for fun, now I just compete. So none of them are fun [laughs].”* One participant disagreed with the majority of the group when she said:

I am the opposite though I don't really like running with other people because the people that I know that I'm bound to run with ...they can be slower....

On the other hand another participant who enjoys racing alongside others summarized what “winning” means to her:

For you [looks towards one participant] it's placing and winning money. For you [looks at another participant] it's placing as well and all you guys, for me it's just finishing. Finishing is my win.

The level of competitiveness among participants varied. Some compete against anyone they see on the course for example one participant said, *“I’m competitive so even when I’m out there passing people up it’s always fun because you know it’s like ‘I’m doing better than you.’”* Some participants compete in the elite wave, some compete against their friends and one participant mentioned having a *“rivalry”* with his brothers and therefore competes against them.

There was a range in the type of emotions felt by participants while they were on the course. There was a difference between those who race competitively and those who participate for fun. Those who race competitively said that they zone out and focus on the course as much as they can. These individuals described that they focus on little things during the race such as their moving mechanics, racing pace, and breathing. Those that do it for fun compared their feelings as an *“emotional rollercoaster.”* They started off the race excited, then after a couple of miles they thought to themselves *“I’m never doing this again”* and later their feeling changed to, *“Oh, this is cool”* then again they felt low and worn-out. Crossing the finish line however, was described as a remarkable and satisfying feeling that was summed up by one participant, as *“That was pretty fun let’s do it again.”*

First Introduction to OCR

In order to “break the ice”, the focus group facilitator began the focus group with “warm-up” type questions with the purpose of building rapport and making participants feel comfortable. Some of the questions included how they first became involved in OCR, what initially attracted them to OCR, and the number of OCRs they have completed. Most participants mentioned the use of social media, particularly Facebook.

When they spoke about how they first were exposed to OCR, most of them shared a story about a Facebook friend posting pictures of him/her participating in an OCR and later either took the initiative to search the web for more information or asked their friend about it. One participant said, *“It’s the same thing as everyone else that has been said so far. My friend posted something on Facebook- I forgot which race she did I think it was Warrior Dash- and I immediately Googled ‘mud races.’”* Another popular way that they first heard about OCR was through word of mouth such as their friend, children, or significant other. Others found OCR simply by surfing the web for something to do and came across a specific OCR event. One participant was first introduced to OCR by an advertisement that he saw online.

Spartan Race Preference

OCR has grown to the extent that now there are hundreds of companies that organize OCR events. The most popular companies include Spartan Race, Tough Mudder and Warrior Dash. The participants in this study favored Spartan Race. For instance, the word “Spartan” or “Spartan Race” was recorded a total of 77 times in the transcripts while the words “Tough Mudder” was mentioned 15 times and “Warrior Dash” only 4 times. The five most common reasons why they prefer Spartan Race were because: 1) it is more challenging than other OCRs, 2) it provides finisher medals as opposed to Tough Mudder who provides finisher headbands, 3) it offers a variety of race distances, 4) it provides participants an opportunity to earn a “Trifecta” and the more trifecta’s earned, the bigger the medal, and finally 5) Spartan Race hosts many events year-round at various venues across the nation and internationally as opposed to smaller companies that may only host few events a year at limited locations.

Why They Got Involved in OCR

When asked why they chose to initially participate in OCR the answers varied, but the most popular responses included getting involved because they were being asked by their friends or family, they were looking to do “*something different*,” or because they were looking for a challenge.

Friends and Family Involvement

One of the most common reasons for participants’ initial motivation to get involved in OCR was family and friends pushing them to try it. Almost all participants reported having done their first race with at least one other person whether it was with their friend, son or daughter, gym instructor, workout group, sibling, or a significant other. For example, one participant said that his friend was the first to introduce him to OCR “*My buddy who does Cross Fit training he basically got me off the couch, got me to do an OCR.*” Another participant got his brothers involved, “*I told my brothers about it, we said, ‘Oh that looks like fun, let's sign up!’ So one of my other brothers signed up and then the other two wanted to sign up because we were doing it.*”

Do “Something Different”

Another popular motive to first participate in an OCR was to do “*something different*.” OCR was described as something unique and something they had not done before. That was reason enough for many of them to register and experience an OCR for the first time. One female participant said she signed up for her first OCR because it was “*something different, something to push [her] limits.*” A male participant described his initial reaction to OCR, as “*It was something different from pretty much everything else,*

something that was going to challenge you in a different way.” Another participant simply stated, *“It just looked cool.”*

Looking for a Challenge

Many participants explained that they were tired of doing the same exercise routine and therefore wanted to do something else that would provide them with a challenge. One female participant described the reason why she first participated in OCR: *“I think for me it was a good way to test my strength like how fit do I think I really am- to see what my weaknesses are.”* One male participant described a similar reason:

I had fallen greatly out of shape throughout my twenties and most of my thirties and started to get back into it and each year I would step it up a little bit and a little bit and finally I wanted to do something to test myself.

Continued Participation of OCR

Besides understanding the reasons for initially participating in an OCR, this study explored why people continue to participate. All of the participants had participated in an OCR multiple times. For example, one participant in particular said that he had completed more than 75 OCRs. Although, some of the reasons for continued participation remained the same as their initial participation, there were new themes that emerged. Participants often described their continued racing as an addiction. Addiction or being *“addicted”* was not used in a bad connotation but rather as a motivation. Additional reasons for their continual racing included receiving tangible rewards such as a medal or a T-shirt, being with their family and friends, and sustaining healthy habits.

“Addiction”

Almost all participants expressed a compulsive desire to partake in OCR. They expressed feeling deeply committed to OCR whether it was the sport itself, the feelings they get from participating such as the feeling of accomplishment, putting a race on the calendar, or earning tangible rewards. The word “addiction” was used various times and referred to in a positive way. They used words or phrases such as *“I got hooked”*, *“I think I got addicted”*, *“I drank the Kool-Aid and I can’t get over it”* and *“I need to keep doing this.”* One shared feeling between many of the participants was the need to earn Spartan Race’s Trifecta. Trifecta is a title and a finisher’s medal comprised of three individual pieces. In addition to a regular finisher’s medal, Spartan Race participants receive a third of a trifecta medal. In order to complete the medal, participants must complete each of the three distance races (Spartan Sprint, Spartan Super, and Spartan Beast) in one calendar year. One male participant described his dedication to the sport:

and then they throw the Trifecta at you and you’re like ‘Yes, I have to run all of those and now I have to find another race! Now I have to get two [laughs] [Everyone agrees].’ Right? And now I have to run multiple ones in one day and now I just booked a flight to London to go run Tough Guy in February so it’s a complete obsession now.

Tangible Rewards

Tangible rewards were mentioned when participants shared their reasons for their continued participation. It was often mentioned in the context of being addicted to the sport. One elite Spartan Race athlete described his financial motivation to place top three saying, *“I need that money. I need to get paid.”* The majority of participants however,

were not motivated by monetary incentives but instead, expressed their love for collecting finisher medals, as one woman described herself, being a “*medal junkie.*” Another participant described his medals as a “*shield.*” Participants placed great value in a medal, as one participant shared: “*I care for my medals. If there is a race without a medal I’ll think weather I’m doing that race or not. I want my medal.*” Participants understood that the medals, in particular the Spartan Race trifecta, are strategic approaches by the coordinating event companies to provide incentives to participants. A woman comments, “*The smartest thing Spartan did was make their medals into thirds because once you get that one piece you want all of them.*”

Participants referred to their medals as more than just material objects. There is a symbolism behind each finisher medal that makes them special, as they represent an “*accumulation of accomplishments.*” For example, one participant explained “*It’s not about the medals it’s about the journey or the experience, which is definitely it for me because if there was no experience to it, no joy, no fun, I wouldn’t care about the medal.*” One woman shared that after finishing each race she does not take off her medal until she showers because she is very proud of her medals. Others admitted to doing this as well.

Social Aspect- Family and Friends

Another recurring theme dealing with motivations to continue participating in OCR dealt with the interactions that people have with other race participants. This included friends whom they have “met” only via Facebook, complete strangers, and people they see at recurring races. The OCR community was mentioned often when asked why they choose to participate multiple times. One participant stated, “*The only reason I still do OCRs is because I like the community.*” This particular community

seems to attract people who share a genuine love for the sport. OCR has a unique social aspect that is not, according to participants, present in other more traditional type of sports. Participants enjoy being around like-minded people. The majority expressed a positive experience with the people they encounter; they feel that camaraderie is what makes participating multiple times worth it for them. One participant said that after a while he noticed that he kept seeing the same people at the races and said to himself *“these are cool people.”* Some participants described it as *“being a part of a family”*.

Another participant shared the following:

I tell people that every time we have a race it’s like a family reunion. Especially now with the holidays coming up when you get everybody together and you haven’t seen them in a while and you know you’re going to have fun.

The same participant shared that his wife, his three brothers and his three and a half year-old son now participate. He expressed that *“It’s nice because it turns into a family thing and it helps you keep motivated.”* It was clear that sharing the race experience with family, friends and other like-minded people served as motivation for some to continue participating in OCR.

OCR as a Personal Goal and a Way to Sustain Healthy Habits

Some participants use OCR as a goal to keep them motivated to sustain healthy habits. Many reported having unhealthy health habits prior to participating in OCR such as smoking, excessive drinking, being involved with the *“wrong crowd,”* and lack of exercise and/or poor eating habits. All of the participants who mentioned their previous poor health habits described themselves as being in a negative place before OCR and attributed OCR to their now healthy behaviors. The sustainability of healthy habits was

another common reason why some choose to continue participating in OCR. One female participant explained:

I find it easier for me to workout if I have a race in a couple of months, then I know it's time for me to be serious, otherwise I can slack off. So it helped to have a goal or race in the horizon to work towards otherwise I'm going to suffer when I'm out there on the course.

Other participants mentioned that because of their OCR training they now put into practice techniques that have helped them become overall better athletes such as proper hydration, carbohydrate loading, proper diet, and getting sufficient sleep. Another participant explained that when he has a race on the calendar he becomes more conscious about what he eats, for example he stops eating at fast food restaurants. Many participants mentioned that they enjoy improving on the different obstacles; one woman explained that recently she was able to conquer getting to the second bar of the monkey bar obstacle and said *“one day I'm going to get across the freaking monkey bars. Anything having to do with relying on upper body strength I'm going to conquer it one day.”* As another participant shared in agreement, *“It makes it a little more rewarding and more fun for the next race.”* Improving their performance in OCR and sustaining healthy habits was a strong motivator for continued participation in OCR.

Favorite Thing About OCR

Participants had many positive things to say about OCR throughout the focus group discussions. However, in order to better understand their leading motivation for participating they were asked about their one, most favorite aspect of OCR. Many reiterated some of the things already mentioned. The most frequently mentioned

responses dealt with 1) the camaraderie among fellow racers, 2) the format of the events in particular the multisport aspect, which provides a variety of challenges and 3) that OCR often takes place in beautiful outdoor locations.

“Camaraderie”

Camaraderie became a very apparent theme early on in the focus groups and in the analysis of the data. It was often mentioned in the context of brotherhood/sisterhood and helping each other. Participants frequently used the term “camaraderie” to describe their relationship to other racers. For example, one woman said:

I really like that camaraderie, the family, and it's weird because there are thousands of people and you have this one thing in common that you love and it brings everybody together; where if you were on the street and I had seen any of these guys in passing I would have never thought to say anything.

It seemed that those who go through the course almost immediately form a bond that encourages this type of no man/woman left behind type of attitude. Participants shared about their experiences being on the course and either offering to help someone or help was offered to them. Some participants described needing guidance with a particular obstacle such as climbing to the other side of a cargo net or needing an extra push to get up and over a wall. Others spoke about offering water, bars, or other types of aid to those they saw struggling on the course.

Event Set-Up

Another popular response to participants' favorite aspect of OCR had to do with the way OCR events are organized. Some examples provided were the obstacle course nature of the event, opposed to just a running race. Whether it is the variety in distance,

venues, or obstacles, it is a sport that is ever changing, and that dynamic aspect is one that participants enjoyed and appreciated. As one participant put it, *“The variety of the courses change, the obstacles change, they’re adding different obstacles now so that’s kind of exciting.”* Another participant added, *“What other sport has that? I mean it can go from a small 15 obstacles to a large 25 obstacles.”* Yet another participant explained that one of her favorite things about Spartan Race is that she has the opportunity to register for progressively more challenging races such as the Sprint, Super, Beast and the Ultra Beast. This challenge gave her something to work towards. A unique aspect of OCR is the varying degree of difficulty in each obstacle that plays to the strengths and weaknesses of many. As one participant articulated:

Obstacle course racing really levels the playing field athletically for people because some of us are a little stronger, it helps to be tall for those big walls, but then you have to crawl under things and it helps to be smaller to squiggle underneath.

Participants described that in running for example, if you’re not good at it you may just quit but since OCR has many other physical tasks involved, you are more likely to find at least one task that you feel comfortable doing. Another favorite aspect of these types of events is that they take place in beautiful outdoor locations. One participant said that his favorite OCR up to date (out of 75) is a Tough Mudder he did in Lake Tahoe because of the beautiful scenery. Another participant added:

That's one of the main things for me it's that, and the fact that most of these obstacle races, at least with Spartan, they take place in a natural setting. These

are all trails that we're hitting so there's something therapeutic about the fact that you're running in these beautiful locations.

OCR Preference Over Traditional Racing

OCR is considered a non-traditional sport due to its unique obstacle format. Traditional type of races includes road-running races, cycling races, or swimming competitions. When participants were asked about their experience with traditional racing they responded by explaining the differences between the two and said which they prefer and why. With the exception of one participant who had participated only in OCRs (75 of them), all participants had participated in at least a 5k or 10k and a few others had participated in half marathons, marathons, and a couple had done triathlons. Many of those who had participated in traditional racing, now mostly participate in OCR and once in a while do a traditional type of race in which most view as a training run for their next OCR event. The top reasons they preferred OCR over traditional racing included 1) being part of the unique OCR community, 2) they were bored of traditional races, and 3) they felt that OCR events are worth the money.

OCR Has a Different Community than Traditional Races

It was interesting to note that almost all participants felt similarly about the difference in communities that exist between traditional racers and obstacle course racers. They explained that there is more interaction and enthusiasm among OCR racers than among traditional racers. For example, one participant described the starting line at a traditional road race compared to that of an OCR:

There are two different types of crowds. The traditional road race runners-- totally different atmosphere vs. OCR community. I've done plenty of both and I do

plenty of both and regular road racing you show up, a smile, maybe a good morning that's pretty much as far as it gets.

He later compared it to OCR:

But in OCR like we said in the beginning, you give that person a high- five because you know you both go through hell, both of you are going to hurt out there and then when you're down you're just like, yeah we did this, good job out there! Fist pump, high- five- Two different types of atmospheres and the OCR one is definitely more rewarding.

Some words that were used to describe the traditional road racing community included “weird”, “serious”, “semi-social”, “introverted”, and “snobby.” Words used to describe the OCR community were “intense”, “fun”, and “camaraderie.” These descriptors were used when discussing the lack of interaction in traditional racing.

OCR Participants are Different

When asked what sets them apart from traditional racers, participants responded, “we are masochistic”, “we look forward to getting dirty”, “we’re a little bit tougher”, and “we are not prissy.” Others suggested that there is no OCR “type.” As a couple of participants put it, OCR participants come from “all walks of life” meaning that everyone is different from body types to personalities. As one participant explained:

I think the one thing that we all have in common is that we are different and that's the thing that strikes me it's the diversity. If you were to put us all in street clothes I don't think you would be able to tell who is an OCR racer and who isn't.

Another unique characteristic of an obstacle course racer identified by participants was that many of them are proud of what they referred to as their “battle wounds.” It is

common to complete a race with cuts and bruises; some participants mentioned that they enjoy showing off these wounds. For example, one woman said that she herself finds it strange that she's proud of looking like an "abused woman" after a race:

'Why do I do this to myself? Why do I torture myself? Why am I badly bruised and beaten looking like an abused woman and I'm proud?' Like 'look at my bruises look at my arms look at my legs.'"

Traditional Road Running Got "Too Boring"

Another common theme across all focus groups was that traditional running had become too boring which was one reason that attracted them to OCR or it was the reason why they no longer do traditional road racing. One participant described that traditional road racing makes her feel *"like a zombie."* Another participant expressed that *"running on the street for half an hour is freaking torture."* OCR was preferred over traditional road runs because of the excitement involved in completing obstacles. The only other type of activity that some participants mentioned as also enjoyable was trail running because it keeps them on their toes, due to the unpredictable running surface.

OCR is Worth the Money

Another frequently mentioned comment was that they get their money's worth in OCR, more so than in traditional races. One participant said, *"It's the same cost [to register for the race] so they're [event coordinators] just taking all the money and not putting any lumber up anywhere."* One participant shared her experience of doing her one and only 5k road race: *"It's like I'm running and 'Okay, I paid 50-60 bucks to run three miles? I could've done this for free.'" The same participant continued to say, "I'd rather pay my \$60 or so for an obstacle course race because there is more stuff on the*

field.” Participants felt that OCR is something they cannot replicate on their own. For example, one participant described OCR as a “*thing that you can never pay anywhere else to get that recreated.*” Others have discovered ways to decrease the expense of these races in order to satisfy this “addiction.” For example, some companies offer a “season pass” which allows participants to pay a one-time fee (about \$550) to register for an unlimited amount of races for one year (special restrictions apply). Also, some OCR companies reward race-day volunteers with a free race.

Impact of OCR

It is apparent that OCR represents more than just another sport or hobby to those who participate. Many participants spoke about OCR as an important aspect in their lives and it having an impact in other areas of their lives. The themes that emerged to reflect the impacts that OCR has had on participants included 1) the building of a network and friendships, 2) a healthier lifestyle, and 3) OCR influencing other areas of their life.

Building Network and Friendships

OCR has provided long time participants with a new social circle. *Network* referred to people participants have met at events, on social media or even strangers on the street due to their involvement in OCR. *Friendships* referred to a bond built among those who have helped each other during a race. Comments used to describe this bond included, “*once you get out there on the course you are instantly all a community ...very holistic thing that just happens.*” Another participant said, “*You don't know each other, you may not ever see each other ever again, but you just have this bond.*” Many participants felt that meeting OCR strangers is very different from meeting strangers who are not involved in the sport. For example, one participant explained how meeting

strangers at the events is not like meeting a complete stranger due to their affiliation with groups like The Weeple Army or simply through their common interest with OCR, *“you build credibility I guess and trust because you know them from somewhere it’s not like you’re a complete stranger.”* The same participant also told the story of how she and her boyfriend met a couple at an OCR event and became really good friends. Now the four of them travel back and forth from Idaho to California to spend time together. Beyond networking with strangers, other participants have had the opportunity to establish long lasting and meaningful friendships. For example, one participant mentioned one relationship that was established through his participation in OCR:

I met my best friend in this sport. We got introduced as the only two people crazy enough to do certain things so he's been my best friend for two years, just over two years now, I mean we're pretty much inseparable.

Due to the friendships and connections made through OCR, some participants have obtained unexpected benefits. For example, one participant said that he once received a free \$80 race registration from another OCR participant. The same participant shared that he went to Washington D.C, for an endurance event but did not know anybody there. Fortunately for him he is well known in the OCR community, *“the person who drove me, picked me up, let me sleep on their couch, and fed me had never met me before.”* Another participant told the story about him hosting someone from out of state at his house whom he had briefly met at a race. As participants described, *“The community is strangely strong for people that you've never met before. A lot of it is pretty awesome, that’s one of the best things”* and *“It’s crazy that people are so generous with people they’ve never even met before. It almost doesn't even make sense.”* Due to the OCR team mentality,

participants feel a shared bond. For example, one participant explained it as, *“I think the fact that you know there is so much of this element of camaraderie but more so of a shared struggle, that you got no other choice but to open up to people.”*

Health Benefits

As could probably be expected, OCR has influenced participants’ health habits. As was previously mentioned, having a race scheduled and on the calendar prompted participants to be more attentive to their diet and exercise. Participants mentioned that they are stronger, are making better food choices, and some are losing weight. One participant said that she was not physically active before getting involved in OCR and attributes her 40-pound loss to her OCR involvement.

Not for me. I wasn't really [physically active]-- I actually since I started working out and started in the races I think I probably lost about 40lbs. So that was great because it literally did get me up off the couch and then when we started working out we had such a great group of people that got together... and it wasn't just about sweating and being miserable and doing burpees [type of exercise involving a push-up to a jump].

One participant who was over the age of 60 described his motivation for continuing to participate in these types of races. He said:

One motivation for continuing to do these events is it keeps me in shape and it gives me incentive to stay in shape by doing like beach runs and going to the gym and doing pull-ups and chin-ups to develop upper body strength which helps to get up over obstacles.

Finding a fun physical activity has allowed this older participant to stay in shape. It has also helped with the arthritis in one of his knees. Other participants mentioned making changes in their social life in order to do well in the races. For example, one participant said, *“Friends that I used to have, we used to party and drink and do all that stuff, I don’t do that anymore.”* Another participant shared a similar experience:

Like it’s weird I don’t drink anymore – That much anymore, I don’t really spend time at bars, I don’t go out to clubs. I spend most of my money doing events at this point. So you kind of fall out – Or I’ve fallen out with a lot of my other friends because they’re just busy doing that. It’s definitely a different lifestyle. It’s a more fitness-focused lifestyle.

Others echoed similar experiences; one other participant described her shift in social circle, *“because in order for me to actually participate in these races I had to delete or take out some people from my life and these were people who were just toxic substance abusers.”* The lifestyles of some participants were completely changed with help from OCR, particularly in the area of health and wellness. As one participant said, *“You can’t just do these races and not want to be more active in your life.”*

A few participants shared about how OCR has improved their health after suffering from serious health problems. For example, one participant said, *“at one point I was 300 pounds, I was on blood pressure medication, like ‘I have to do something’ and this [OCR] kind of turns me back into being healthier.”* Another participant mentioned her changes in alcohol consumption due to OCR:

I can’t be drinking the night before or even wine the night before because I’m going to wake up at four in the morning and I’m going to be dehydrated. It’s

going to affect my workout, it's going to affect my race so I've been on a pretty decent roll so and just like the mention of foods--same thing with the diet.

Another participant described the learning curve in understanding the relationship between food consumption and success in a race. He mentioned that he learned that having a “*big Mexican meal or a big greasy burger the night before*” a race is not a good idea. After experiencing a “*bad race*” he began changing his diet and learned about carb loading and just improving his diet which in turn helped him with the races and “*overall with [his] attitude in life.*”

Other Aspects of Life

Besides the expected impact of OCR in people's health, participants also shared how OCR has bled into other aspects of their lives. For example, some participants reported feeling a boost of confidence in life in general or more specifically in their workplace after completing an OCR. For example, one participant said:

So after a race, like going into any other obstacle you reach in life, you always have this sense of confidence 'I've done harder, I've had to carry sandbags up and down the hill, the bucket, and pull a tractor tire, cement block and chain. I can do this' and you just approach life a little differently.

Another participant said something similar:

'Okay I'm going through these obstacles you have to adapt to the trail or to the environment' and I said 'Well you know if I can do that on the field I can do that financially and professionally on a daily basis.' And it's been an uphill battle but I tell myself all the time, 'If I can run uphill like Silver Lake or Temecula [race sites], then I can do this five or six days a week', and that's helped me progress.

The same participant described how he is constantly looking for ways to improve and looking for ways to have a positive impact on the lives of others. He said, *“I feel that racing allows us all to kind of learn that ability or that trait.”* A few participants shared how OCR has also helped them in the workplace. One participant shared she had recently given a PowerPoint presentation to her company titled “How a Spartan Race is similar to Agency Life.” She described how she was able to draw connections between the two and that in that sense it has helped her in her work.

Another participant who had been out of state for a couple of months training for OCRs described how that experience boosted his confidence and motivated him in his job search when he came back home.

It's [OCR] also offered me the ability to adapt in other situations. As soon as I got out here [California] there was no stopping or settling and I immediately went out and applied for other positions for other jobs.

Three participants mentioned that due to their new found love of OCR they have now found what they are truly passionate about and are now making small changes in their careers, all of which involve helping others be more physically active.

Motivating Others

Participants expressed a sense of obligation to serve as role models to those around them including their children (for those who are parents). For example one participant who has two children said, *“It's a big deal for us and our girls. I got a freshman and 6th grade daughter and it's just teaching them to make healthy choices and then trying to model for them.”*

Most participants mentioned having encouraged or motivated their friends or family to participate in their first OCR. Others mentioned having motivated their spouse or significant other or fellow co-workers. One participant described his experience, *“My brothers have done it, my wife got into it, she's done a couple of them. It's nice because it turns into a family thing and it helps keep you motivated.”*

One participant said that she exercises at home because she is a stay at home mom. She described how her two young daughters see her exercise so they too join her in doing squats and lunges. She continued to say that her children are her motivation. She wants to continue to be a great role model to her daughters because she does not want them to have body image issues in the future. A couple of participants mentioned that they simply get joy from motivating other people regardless of who they are, *“It was just motivating for me to keep other people motivated.”*

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore psychosocial factors that motivate adults to begin and continue participating in obstacle course racing (OCR). This chapter contains a summary of key findings as they relate to this study's research questions and the psychological and sociological theories that formed the framework for this study. The limitations of the study, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

One factor to take into account as the data are compared to the study's framework is the similarities that exist between SDT (Social Determination Theory) and AGT (Achievement Goal Theory), as they are both psychological theories of motivation therefore there is overlap between the two.

Overall, the demographic data of both the online questionnaire and focus groups were similar. The majority of participants were White males, between the ages of 30-34. Most reported being married, having either no children or 1-2 children and having a college degree (e.g., BA, BS). Participants reported having a positive experience. Most were experienced obstacle course racers, involved in the sport for at least 1-2 years. All had participated multiple times. The majority planned to participate in another OCR within the next 3 months.

The focus of this study was to explore the psychological and sociological factors that motivate adults to initially participate and continue participating in OCR. Previous research on sport motivation has shown that there is a wide range of motives to participate in sport (Kerr & Mackenzie, 2012; Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004). Similar to Kerr and Mackenzie's findings, OCR participants were motivated by social motivation, escape from boredom, goal achievement, and connecting with the natural environment.

Almost all focus group participants mentioned having participated in their first OCR with at least one other person. The survey data revealed that encouragement by friends played a large role in participating in OCR followed by family encouragement. These results support past literature (Coleman et al., 2008; DiLorenzo et al., 1998; Treiber, Baranowski, Braden, Strong, Levy, Knox; 1991) involving influence of physical activity among adults. For example, Treiber et al., (1991), found that physical activity was positively related to family and friend's support for exercise among young adults.

Focus group participants often described OCRs as "fun." Running, jumping over things, and getting dirty made them feel like they were a "kid again." Survey respondents also reported "fun" to be one of their top motivations to begin and continue participating in OCR. Research shows that making physical activity a social event and enjoyable increases participation in physical activity (Allender et al., 2006; Hsiao & Thayer, 1998). For example, Allender, et al. (2006) found that fun, enjoyment, and social support were predictors of participation in sport and physical activity. OCR seems to provide these factors for its thousands of participants. It has a blend of challenge and enjoyment that people appreciate from this unique physical activity.

After completing a race, participants often described an increase in their self-confidence. The survey included questions related to the three psychological needs proposed by SDT in order to become self-motivated (Ng et al., 2012). Each of those questions had an over 70% agree or strongly agree rate, which suggests that participating in OCR – at least for the participants in this study - provided feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness. The majority (79%) however felt that feelings of competence, in particular was the reason why they participate in OCR. These results were similar to Edmunds et al., (2006) research that also found competence to be the most highly satisfied need in predicting strenuous exercise behavior. The researchers found that if the three psychological needs were met, participants were more self-determined to engage in physical activity. This was also the case with participation in OCR. The focus groups also reflected this, as participants spoke of ideas that were in one way or another related to the three psychological needs. For example, feelings of autonomy were supported when participants explained that they were first motivated to participate in OCR because of their self-motivation to complete a challenging event. Other participants referred to their feelings of competence when they spoke about feeling capable of effectively completing a tough task in their personal life due to the challenges they endured on the OCR course. Feelings of relatedness were echoed throughout the focus groups. For example, many individuals explained that one of their favorite things about OCR is the supportive community that makes them feel welcomed.

A concept rooted in AGT, self-efficacy (beliefs about personal ability to complete tasks and reach goals) is similar to competence, as they both refer to feeling confident and capable to overcome challenges (Anshel, 2012; Standage et al., 2003). Focus groups

provided an in-depth look at the feelings experienced by obstacle course racers. Participants expressed feelings of accomplishment, excitement, satisfaction and empowerment when crossing the finish line. Participants expressed feeling like they could conquer any obstacle that comes their way, both on the course and in their personal life. Several participants spoke of how OCR has positively impacted their lives. For instance, one participant described a “sense of confidence” after completing a race and as a result she “approach[es] life a little differently.” Another participant described his tenacious job search and boost in confidence due to his training and involvement in OCRs. Survey responses and focus group anecdotes suggest that having completed a challenging course increased participants’ self-efficacy which in turn motivated participants to continue their involvement in OCR.

Another recurrent theme was that OCR participants showed to be more task oriented (focused on personal success and improvement through effort) as opposed to ego oriented (focused on outperforming others; Moreno et al., 2010; Treasure & Roberts, 1995). These two types of goal orientations are core concepts of AGT and are similar to the concept of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of SDT. Task orientation is similar to intrinsic motivation in that it is a motivation that comes from within the individual. Ego orientation is similar to extrinsic motivation as its motivation factors are external (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Moreno et al., 2010; Treasure & Roberts, 1995). Questionnaire results showed a difference between task and ego orientation. The majority reported feeling successful when they work hard in completing an OCR (task orientation) as opposed to feeling successful when others can’t do as well as they can (ego orientation). Therefore, participants of OCR appeared to be task oriented rather than ego oriented. That is to

say, they do these types of events because they are interested in personal success rather than competing against others. Focus group participants showed to possess both types of goal orientations. Most participants explained having an inner drive to participate in OCR therefore having more of a task orientation (or intrinsic motivation) such as improving their skills. A few did however, describe themselves as competitive and therefore would be considered goal oriented (or extrinsically motivated). These individuals focused on performing better than others, getting a better race time, or winning.

Mallet and Hanrahan (2004) explored task and ego orientation in elite track and field athletes and found that elite athletes possess both task and ego orientation. Even though the majority of OCR participants were not “elite,” there were several similarities between the current study and the findings of Mallet and Hanrahan. For example, the researchers found that elite track and field athletes continued participating in their sport to have a sense of achievement, have recognition and increase their perception of confidence. The aforementioned were all concepts that were also mentioned by the participants of this study. OCR participants often shared the enjoyment they felt when achieving something from which they had worked hard; this feeling in turn increased their confidence. Others mentioned enjoying the recognition they received from friends and family.

Survey data showed that the two least popular reasons why individuals first participated in OCR and continue participating were to please others (want to be liked by others) and winning the race (Table 4.7). Like the survey data, only a few focus group participants expressed extrinsic motives, as some spoke about wanting to perform better than others or getting a good race time. There was one frequently mentioned extrinsic

motive that many OCR participants shared; their love of race finisher medals. One participant said that he thinks twice about registering for a race if they do not provide finisher medals and many others in the group agreed. An interesting aspect about the finisher medals as extrinsic motives is that there was a deeper motive behind them. Finisher medals represent more than tangible rewards. As one participant put it, the finisher medals are an “accumulation of accomplishments”, as such they could also be viewed as an intrinsic motivation.

Another research question this study set out to answer was the reasons why participants choose to partake in OCR multiple times. The OCR community is one of the primary reasons individuals choose to continue their participation in OCR. The special bonds that many participants have made through OCR are something that has shown to be of great value. Some obstacles are designed to be completed with the assistance of others (<https://www.toughmudder.com>). This in turn has strengthened the spirit of teamwork that is rooted in many OCR events. Tough Mudder for example emphasizes the importance of camaraderie over finisher rankings, as it is not a timed event and describes itself as a “team challenge” (<https://www.toughmudder.com>). Several focus group participants used the word “camaraderie” to describe the attitude and spirit of the OCR community. Many, shared stories of helping others on the course or others helping them. They talked about an immediate connection with people whom they have never met from the moment they enter the starting line corral. These findings were similar to a study that explored experiences of adventure racers (Simpson et al., 2014). Camaraderie was also a strong aspect within the community. The stories shared among focus group participants along with survey data show that these individuals feel a strong sense of relatedness (one

of the three basic psychological needs) (Ng et al., 2012). The connections and friendships among participants continue to be an important aspect of these races.

Another primary reason participants continue to be involved in obstacle course racing is the varying degree of challenge these events provide. OCR is unique in that it provides different levels of difficulty. Spartan Race participants for example can start with a “Spartan Sprint” (3 mile OCR), then a “Spartan Super” (6-8 mile OCR), move up to a “Spartan Beast” (9-12 mile OCR) and if they choose, complete an Ultra Beast (26+ mile OCR). The questionnaire data also showed challenge to be an important aspect of OCR. Out of 45 choices listed, “Be physically challenged” was one of the top two reasons why OCR participants initially participated and continue to participate (Table 4.6). The questionnaire contained one open-ended question in which respondents were asked to provide one word they thought best described OCR (Table 4.8). There were over 50 words that were provided but the word “challenge” or “challenging” was the most often noted.

An important and commonly mentioned benefit to participating in OCR was a positive lifestyle change. Participants shared that since their involvement in OCR they have become more health conscious. For example, participants mentioned that they use OCR events as their motivation to exercise regularly in order to do well in the races. Others mentioned that waking up early to exercise became their priority, which for some involved decreasing or eliminating drinking or smoking, making healthier food choices, getting more sleep, or even changing their social circle. A woman shared that before discovering OCR, she did not exercise. However, since her involvement in OCR she had

lost 40 pounds. OCR has clearly provided a new and unique way for people to get physically active.

Another concept rooted in SLT is the influence that macro agents of socialization such as media have had on individuals' decision to participate in sport ("Socialization," 2012). When asked if media (e.g., Facebook, TV, radio, Internet, newspaper) influenced their participation in OCR, a surprising 56% of online survey respondents disagreed. However, it was different for focus group participants; they mentioned media various times, in particular when discussing how they first were introduced to OCR. They shared how they saw pictures on Facebook of their friends doing obstacles, jumping over fire and crawling under barbed wire. Unlike the questionnaire respondents, social media did seem to play a significant role in influencing individuals to participate in their first OCR. Perhaps this difference was due to participants' interpretation of the word "influence" as it was posed in the survey question.

The SLT concepts of modeled behavior and social modeling (Anshel, 2012) can be seen among OCR participants. After participating in an OCR, participants generally told their friends about the race and/or posted pictures on social media, such as Facebook. By doing so, it motivated and encouraged others to also participate in OCR. One concept of SLT is social modeling which refers to showing people that other like themselves can do it (Anshel, 2012). Phrases related to this concept were mentioned various times especially with participants who had children. They spoke of wanting to expose their children to physical activity and a healthier lifestyle. Research has shown that this can have a positive influence on children's lives (Coleman et al., 2007; DiLorenzo et al., 1998; Sanchez-Miguel et al., 2013). For example, Coleman, Cox and Roker (2007)

interviewed 15-19 year old women to explore their psychological and social influence on physical activity and found that families who participated in physical activity (also called active households) increased the chances of their children being involved in sports. Therefore, having active parents can have an effect on children's exercise behavior especially for younger children who are more influenced by family. Being involved in OCR has had a positive influence on the individuals who participate in the sport as well as the people around them.

Cross tabulation statistics were used to interpret categorical data. When cross tabulating variables for the amount of time participants have been involved in OCR and when they intend on participating in another OCR, the results were surprising. Findings showed that those who have been involved in the sport for a longer period of time (1-2 years or 3-4 years) also have the highest percentage of planning to participate in OCR again (as early as in 3 months) compared to those that have been participating in OCR for less than a year. The researcher postulated that those who had been involved in the sport longer would grow less interested in the sport but findings showed the opposite. This shows the longevity of the sport, as it continues to be of interest to participants even after years of involvement. Cross tabulation with gender and motivation-related questions were also conducted. The researcher postulated that the type of motivation for participation would vary by gender. However, responses to all questions involving motivation to participate in OCR were generally the same among males and females. These results did not support findings from past research (Allender et al., 2006; Hsiao & Thayer, 1998; Kilpatrick, et. al., 2005) that explored the differences in motivation of males and females to participate in sport or physical activity. For example, Hebert and

Bartholomew (2005) found that there were gender differences in motivations for physical activity. Men reported higher levels of motivation than women for competition while women's number one motive was weight management. OCR male and female participants shared similar motivations. The biggest gender difference found when cross tabulating for gender and motivation-related questions was when participants were asked a question related to ego orientation, "I feel successful when others can't do as well as I can in an OCR event." Males (43%) seemed to have more ego orientation than females (30%). This finding suggests that generally males were more competitive than females as they were more concerned about outperforming others and getting a better race time.

Limitations

There were some limitations to this study many of which apply to both the online survey and focus groups given that participants were recruited from those who completed the online survey. One limitation to this study is the lack of generalizability. For instance, the recruitment pool was not open to all OCR participants. The online survey participant criteria excluded those that were not members of The Weeple Army Facebook group page. The small sample size of focus groups also made it difficult to generalize results. The three focus groups were conducted only in Los Angeles County, the majority of participants were members of The Weeple Army and all members were 18 years of age or older. Therefore, results may not reflect the opinions of other obstacle course racers. This study used self-report data, which may be subject to overreporting or underreporting. Additionally this study was a retrospective study, which may be subject to recall bias. A limitation to the survey was that the survey tool was developed specifically for this study; a validated research tool was not used. Another limitation is

that survey respondents and focus groups likely attracted participants who were dedicated and enthusiastic about OCR. Therefore, the survey and focus groups may have included mostly participants who continue to have a positive experience with OCR. Additionally, the experiences of focus group participants may have been bias; there were no negative comments made about OCR. Some negative consequences that may occur from participating in OCR that were not mentioned in the data are the risk of injury, the high cost of registering for races, and risking unhealthy exercise habits such as overtraining or exercise addiction.

Implications of the Findings

The results of this study demonstrate the importance of motivation-related variables to understanding exercise behaviors of obstacle course racers. There has been limited research in motivations to participate in OCR, therefore this study adds to the growing literature in this area. This study provided insight into the key determinants of participation in obstacle course racing, which include camaraderie, enjoyment, and social interaction. Findings from this study may inform future interventions to increase participation in OCR or to increase overall physical activity among adults by building on camaraderie, social connection, enjoyment, and on encouraging self-efficacy. OCR coordinators may consider these findings to inform ways to increase participation rates and ultimately increase participant retention in OCR.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a lack of scholarly research on obstacle course racing therefore there are many opportunities for future research on this particular topic. Even though the questionnaire results did not show much of a difference between genders, one suggestion

is to explore this finding. Another recommendation for future research is to perform a randomized control trial (RCT). It could for example, compare traditional racers to OCR participants or OCR to other health programs. An RCT would provide the opportunity to evaluate if there is a cause and effect relationship between motivation and continued participation. Moreover, conducting an RCT would provide the opportunity to evaluate OCR as a health intervention for health outcomes such as weight loss or improvements in health. Another recommendation for future research includes sampling a larger number of participants in both questionnaire and focus group and other geographic regions in order to increase generalizability.

Summary and Conclusion

This study explored the psychological and sociological motivations of adult female and male obstacle course racers. Overall, findings supported previous research regarding motivations to participate in adventure racing and extreme sports. Individuals were guided more by intrinsic motives than extrinsic motives. Important motivations for obstacle course racers included the camaraderie among participants, connecting and socializing with other like-minded people, having fun, and having a physical challenge that allowed them to progress and keep on track with their health goals. Obstacle course racing appeared to have positively impacted participants' health, mental wellness and increased their confidence in their physical abilities as well as in other areas of their lives. It is the researcher's recommendation that OCR be considered as much more than just a "muddy, fun race" but rather as a means of increasing physical activity in a significant subset of the population, providing thousands of people an alternative and sustainable lifestyle change.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Obstacle Course Racing (OCR) Survey Announcement

Obstacle Course Racing (OCR) Survey

Here is an opportunity to share about your opinion and experience with OCR

- Have you completed at least one obstacle course race?
- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Are you a current member of the Weeple Army Facebook group page?
- Would you like to be part of one of the first OCR studies?
- Do you have 7-10 minutes to spare?

If you answered yes to ALL of the questions above, click on the link below to begin the online survey. The Weeple Army has been chosen as the subpopulation to a master's thesis project entitled "Psychosocial Motivators for Obstacle Course Racing: A Qualitative Case Study." Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Please answer each question thoughtfully.

Thank you!

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/11ACAqFS7IUIR6UzMpMMgoUYZHKSQioPmxSkyIAuMeY/viewform?usp=send_form

Appendix B: Online Questionnaire

Obstacle Course Racing (OCR) Survey

Thank you for your interest in completing this survey. Before beginning, please answer the following three questions.

* Required

1. **Have you participated in at least one obstacle course race? ***

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No *Skip to "End of Survey."*

2. **Are you 18 years of age or older?**

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No *Skip to "End of Survey."*

3. **Are you a current member of The Weeple Army Facebook group page?**

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No *Skip to "End of Survey."*

Consent to Participate in OCR Study

Please read the following and choose either Accept or Decline.

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT, A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF PSYCHO/SOCIAL FACTORS THAT MOTIVATE ADULTS TO PARTICIPATE IN OBSTACLE COURSE RACING (OCR)

Master's level student, Aracely Rodriguez in the Department of Kinesiology at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, is conducting a research project on Obstacle Course Racing (OCR). The purpose of the study is to explore what motivates adults to begin and continue participating in OCR with the goal of informing future exercise and nutrition interventions in the community.

You are being asked to take part in this study by completing the attached questionnaire. If you chose to participate in this study click on the link provided and give your best answer to the questions that follow. Your participation will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Please be aware that you are not required to participate in this research and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. You may also omit any items on the questionnaire(s) you prefer not to answer by choosing the "I would rather not answer" option.

The possible risks and discomforts associated with participation in this study include psychological harm by feeling uncomfortable or upset by some of the information participants choose to share about their

experiences with OCR. If you should experience emotional distress, please be aware that you may discontinue participation in the study.

Having study personnel sign statements agreeing to protect security and confidentiality of study information will protect your confidentiality. Study information will have restricted access to authorized study personnel. Information will be stored in a secure cabinet and secure laptop. There are no direct benefits by participating in this focus group. However, potential benefits associated with the study include: (a) An opportunity to gain further knowledge and better understand psychosocial motivational factors associated with extreme sports such as OCR (b) An opportunity for participants to help researchers gain further knowledge of social influence and physical activity, specifically OCR (c) An opportunity for participants' contribution to help in the development of future health interventions targeted at adult community members who do not engage in physical activity.

If you have questions regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is completed, please feel free to contact Aracely Rodriguez via email at aracely.rodriguez.00@gmail.com. If you have questions or concerns regarding the manner in which the study is conducted, you may contact Dr. Steve Davis, Chair of the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee, at (805) 756-2754, sdavis@calpoly.edu, or Dr. Dean Wendt, Interim Dean of Research, at (805) 756-1508, dwendt@calpoly.edu.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research project as described, please indicate your agreement below.

4. Please choose one

Mark only one oval.

- Accept
 Decline *Skip to "End of Survey."*

Obstacle Course Racing (OCR) Survey

This survey will take approximately 7-10 minutes to complete. Thank you for your time.

Background Information

5. 1.) Gender *

Mark only one oval.

- Male
 Female
 I would rather not answer

6. **2.) Age ***

Mark only one oval.

- 18-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60 and over
- I would rather not answer

7. **3.) What state do you currently live in? ***

Mark only one oval.

- Arizona *Skip to question 9.*
- California *Skip to question 9.*
- Idaho *Skip to question 9.*
- Nevada *Skip to question 9.*
- New Mexico *Skip to question 9.*
- Oregon *Skip to question 9.*
- Other *Skip to question 8.*
- I would rather not answer *Skip to question 9.*

Skip to question 9.

Other

8. **3a.) What U.S state do you currently live in? ***

Please type in your answer below

.....

Background Information

9. **4.) What is your ethnicity? ***

Mark only one oval.

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other
- I would rather not answer

10. **5.) What is your current marital status? ***

Mark only one oval.

- Single (never married)
- Married
- Domestic Partnership
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed
- I would rather not answer

11. **6.) How many children do you have? ***

Mark only one oval.

- None
- 1-2
- 3-4
- More than 4
- I would rather not answer

12. **7.) Employment Status ***

Are you currently...

Mark only one oval.

- Employed for wages
- Self-employed
- Out of work and looking for work
- Out of work but currently not looking for work
- A homemaker
- A student
- Military
- Retired
- Unable to work
- I would rather not answer

13. **8.) What is your total household income? ***

Mark only one oval.

- Less than \$10,000
- \$10,000 - \$19,999
- \$20,000 - \$29,999
- \$30,000 - \$39,000
- \$40,000 - \$49,000
- \$50,000 - \$59,000
- \$60,000 - \$69,000
- \$70,000 - \$79,999
- \$80,000 - \$89,999
- \$90,000 - \$99, 999
- More than \$100,000
- I would rather not answer

14. **9.) What is your highest educational level completed? ***

Mark only one oval.

- 8th Grade or less
- Some High School (no diploma)
- High School (High School diploma)
- Some College (no degree)
- Associate Degree (e.g., AA, AS)
- College Degree (e.g., BA, BS)
- Master's Degree (e.g., MA, MS, MBA, MEd)
- Doctorate Degree (e.g., PhD, EdD, PsyD)
- Other (e.g., JD, MD, LLB)
- I would rather not answer

Obstacle Course Racing (OCR)

The following questions relate to obstacle course racing.

15. **10.) How did you first hear about OCR? ***

Mark only one oval.

- E-mail/ Newsletter
- Facebook
- Friend
- Magazine or Newspaper article
- TV/ Cable
- Twitter
- Websites/Search engines
- YouTube
- Other
- I would rather not answer

16. **11.) How long ago did you participate in your FIRST obstacle course race? ***

Mark only one oval.

- Less than a month ago
- 1-3 months ago
- 4-6 months ago
- 7-9 months ago
- 10-12 months ago
- 1-2 years ago
- 3-4 years ago
- More than 5 years ago
- I would rather not answer

17. **12.) How long has it been since you last participated in an obstacle course race? ***

Mark only one oval.

- Less than a month ago
- 1-3 months ago
- 4-6 months ago
- 7-9 months ago
- 10-12 months ago
- 1-2 years ago
- 3-4 years ago
- More than 5 years ago
- I would rather not answer

18. **13.) When do you intend on participating in another obstacle course race? ***

(choose one only)

Mark only one oval.

- Within the next 3 months *Skip to question 20.*
- Within the next 6 months *Skip to question 20.*
- Within the next year *Skip to question 20.*
- I am hoping to run another obstacle course race some day, but I am not sure when *Skip to question 20.*
- I do not plan on running another obstacle course race *Skip to question 19.*
- I would rather not answer *Skip to question 20.*

13a.) Other

Not participating in OCR

19. Why would you not participate in another OCR event? *

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

20. 14.) Do you participate in both OCR and traditional physical activity events such as running, cycling, or swimming competitions (5k, 10k, half marathon, marathon, triathlons etc.)? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 21.
 No Skip to question 22.
 I would rather not answer Skip to question 22.

Events

21. 14a.) Which of the following events have you participated in? *

(Check all that apply if any)

Check all that apply.

- 5k
 10k
 Half marathon
 Marathon
 Trail competition
 Cycling competition
 Swimming competition
 Triathlons
 Ironman
 Other
 I would rather not answer

Motivation to participate in Obstacle Course Racing (OCR)

The following two questions will provide you many options about your INITIAL motivation and your CONTINUED participation in OCR. Please check all that apply.

22. 15.) Think back to when you first participated in OCR, what was your INITIAL motivation to participate? To... *

(check all that apply if any)

Check all that apply.

- Have fun
- Feel good
- Fulfill my curiosity
- Feel empowered
- Feel invigorated
- Feel adventurous
- Feel excitement
- Do something unique
- Be mentally challenged
- Be physically challenged
- Improve my endurance
- Improve my skill(s) (e.g., run, climb, crawl, lift)
- Feel independence/Autonomy
- Feel satisfaction
- Feel accomplished
- Find inner peace
- Feel satisfaction
- Fulfill a passion
- Feel accomplishment
- Fulfill an obsession (e.g., habit or need to do it)
- Increase my confidence
- Perform acts of camaraderie (mutual trust and friendship)
- Feel younger
- Be close to nature
- Win rewards (e.g., money, medal, T-shirt etc.)
- Win the race
- Get a better race time
- Do better than my friends
- Improve my health
- Improve my body image
- Improve my appearance (to look good)
- Please others (want to be liked by others)
- Lose weight
- Feel fitter
- Keep me in shape
- Motivate me to exercise
- Conquer fears (e.g., heights, tight spaces, swimming)
- Go beyond my comfort zone

- Bond with others
- Interact with others
- Have a good time with friends
- Fulfill my compulsive desire for excitement (adrenaline junkie)
- Support a charitable cause (e.g., Wounded warrior project, Homes for our troops, St. Jude etc.)
- Be part of a new and popular sport
- I would rather not answer
- Other:

23. **16.) I CONTINUE to participate in OCR to... ***

(check all that apply if any)

Check all that apply.

- Have fun
- Feel good
- Fulfill my curiosity
- Feel empowered
- Feel invigorated
- Feel adventurous
- Feel excitement
- Do something unique
- Be mentally challenged
- Be physically challenged
- Improve my endurance
- Improve my skill(s) (e.g., run, climb, crawl, lift)
- Feel independence/Autonomy
- Feel satisfaction
- Feel accomplished
- Find inner peace
- Feel satisfaction
- Fulfill a passion
- Feel accomplishment
- Fulfill an obsession (e.g., habit or need to do it)
- Increase my confidence
- Perform acts of camaraderie (mutual trust and friendship)
- Feel younger
- Be close to nature
- Win rewards (e.g., money, medal, T-shirt etc.)
- Win the race
- Get a better race time

- Do better than my friends
- Improve my health
- Improve my body image
- Improve my appearance (to look good)
- Please others (want to be liked by others)
- Lose weight
- Feel fitter
- Keep me in shape
- Motivate me to exercise
- Conquer fears (e.g., heights, tight spaces, swimming)
- Go beyond my comfort zone
- Bond with others
- Interact with others
- Have a good time with friends
- Fulfill my compulsive desire for excitement (adrenaline junkie)
- Support a charitable cause (e.g., Wounded warrior project, Homes for our troops, St. Jude etc.)
- Be part of a new and popular sport
- I would rather not answer
- Other:

24. **17.) Type ONE word that you think best describes OCR ***

.....

25. **18.) How often do you participate in sport or physical activity (other than in competitions) ***

Mark only one oval per row.

	Less than 30 minutes	30-59 minutes	1-2 hours	3-4 hours	5-6 hours	7 hours or more	Not Applicable	I would rather not answer
Daily	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Weekly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

26. Indicate your degree of agreement by checking the option that most represents the way you feel *
 Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I would rather not answer
19.) I prefer to participate in OCR because it makes me feel independent (i.e., self-directed, autonomous)	<input type="radio"/>					
20.) I prefer to participate in OCR because it makes me feel competent (i.e., knowledgeable, capable, and able)	<input type="radio"/>					
21.) I prefer to participate in OCR because it makes me feel close to others	<input type="radio"/>					
22.) I feel successful when I work really hard to complete an OCR	<input type="radio"/>					
23.) I feel successful when others can't do as well as I can in an OCR event	<input type="radio"/>					
24.) My family encourages me to participate in OCR	<input type="radio"/>					
25.) My friends encourage me to participate in OCR	<input type="radio"/>					
26.) Acquaintances (people you know, but not very well) encourage me to participate in OCR	<input type="radio"/>					
27.) Past sport experience influenced me to participate in OCR	<input type="radio"/>					

27. Indicate your degree of agreement by checking the option that most represents the way you feel *
 Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I would rather not answer
28.) Media (e.g., Facebook, TV, radio, newspaper, internet) influenced me to participate in OCR	<input type="radio"/>					
29.) I was influenced to participate in OCR by observing others participate in OCR	<input type="radio"/>					
30.) By watching others participate in OCR, I knew I could be successful at OCR	<input type="radio"/>					
31.) Verbal encouragement by friends got me to participate in OCR	<input type="radio"/>					
32.) Verbal encouragement by friends boosted my confidence levels in completing an obstacle course race	<input type="radio"/>					
33.) My mental and emotional well being is positively related to completing an obstacle course race	<input type="radio"/>					
34.) I participate in OCR because of the positive impact it has on my physical health	<input type="radio"/>					
35.) I participate in OCR because of the positive impact it has on my emotional and mental health	<input type="radio"/>					
36.) I participate in OCR because of the social bonds it creates	<input type="radio"/>					

Thank you!

Before submitting your answers, please read the following.

OPTION TO BE INCLUDED IN AN OCR FOCUS GROUP STUDY IN THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Please read the following

The second part of this study involves recruiting participants to take part in a focus group-based study relating to adults' motivations to participate and continue participating in OCR.

A focus group is a small group brought together to talk about a particular topic. For the focus group, a person from the study team will meet with you and 8-10 other people and will talk about your opinions and experiences with OCR. The focus group will last about one to two hours. If you agree to participate in this study, you also agree to be audio-taped during the focus group session.

If you live in the Los Angeles County and would like to participate in an OCR group interview within the next couple of months, please include your contact information below.

Aracely will contact you and provide you with updated information. Food and beverages will be provided at the site.

28. Would you like to participate in a focus group based study in the Los Angeles County? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, sign me up! *Skip to question 29.*
- No, I'm not interested at this time *Skip to "Thank you for completing the survey!."*
- I do not live in the Los Angeles County *Skip to "Thank you for completing the survey!."*

Thank you for your interest in participating in an OCR group interview

29. Please include your name, email address, and phone number below. Please Note: If contact information is voluntarily submitted, responses will not be anonymous but will be kept in a confidential database. *

1. Name 2. E-mail address 3. Phone number (optional)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Skip to "Thank you for completing the survey!."

End of Survey

Thank you for your time and interest in taking this survey. However, for this research we are looking for people who meet the following criteria:

- Agree to the consent form
- Have participated in at least one obstacle course race
- Are 18 years of age or older
- Are current members of the Weeple Army Facebook group page.

If you have questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact Aracely Rodriguez via email at aracely.rodriguez.00@gmail.com.

Thank you

Thank you for completing the survey!

Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire. Your answers have been recorded in a confidential database.

If you have questions regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is completed (December, 2014), please feel free to contact Aracely Rodriguez via email at aracely.rodriguez.00@gmail.com.

Thank you again for your participation!

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Appendix C: Online Questionnaire Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT,
“PSYCHOSOCIAL MOTIVATORS FOR OBSTACLE COURSE RACING:
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY”

Master’s level student, Aracely Rodriguez in the Department of Kinesiology at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo under the supervision of Dr. Camille O’Bryant, is conducting a research project on Obstacle Course Racing (OCR). The purpose of the study is to explore what motivates adults to begin and continue participating in OCR with the goal of informing future exercise and nutrition interventions in the community.

You are being asked to take part in this study because you have participated in OCR, are 18 years of age or older and are a current member of the The Weeple Army Facebook group page. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire by clicking on the link provided. The questionnaire will take approximately 7-10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. You may also omit any items on the questionnaire by choosing the “I would rather not answer” option. There are no risks or discomforts associated with completing this questionnaire.

There are no risks anticipated with participation in this study; however, if you should experience any distress please contact the researchers (contact information is provided below). Study personnel have signed statements agreeing to protect security and confidentiality of study information in order to protect your confidentiality. Your name will not be used in any reports on this research. Information will be stored in a secure cabinet and secure laptop. Potential benefits include gaining a better understanding of the factors that motivate adults to participate in obstacle course racing.

If you have questions regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is complete, please feel free to contact Aracely Rodriguez via email at aracely.rodriguez.00@gmail.com. If you have concerns regarding the manner in which the study is conducted, you may contact Dr. Camille O’Bryant, Chair of thesis

committee, at (805) 756-1787, cobryant@calpoly.edu or may contact Dr. Steve Davis, Chair of the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee, at (805) 756-2754, sdavis@calpoly.edu, or Dr. Dean Wendt, Interim Dean of Research, at (805) 756-1508, dwendt@calpoly.edu.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research project as described, please indicate your agreement below. Please print a copy of this informed consent for your reference.

- Accept
- Decline

Appendix D: Focus Group Guide

Introductions

1.) Can you introduce yourself- your name, when you first participated in an OCR and the number of OCRs you've participated in.

OCR Experience

2. How did you first become involved in OCR?

- Tell me what first attracted you to OCR.

3. What feelings or emotions do you experience when you're participating in an event?

4. What do you enjoy the most about OCR?

Motivation

Think back to your first race...

5.) What was your primary reason for participating in that first race?

- Were there other reasons that motivated you to participate in your first race?

Some of you have participated in several races...

6.) What motivates you to continue to participate in these races?

Social Aspect

7.) To what extent do other people you know (Friends and/or family) participate in OCR?

8.) How has OCR provided opportunities for you to develop connections with people you just met, your community, your friends, your family and others?

OCR vs. Traditional Racing

9.) Tell me about your experience with traditional events/racing?

- Why do you participate in OCR as opposed to other non-traditional competitions?

Wrap Up

11.) Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with OCR?

Appendix E: Codebook: Most Prominent Codes

Theme 1. Characteristics of racers- Personality traits of racers, differences and similarities of racing objectives and emotions while racing.

Theme 2: First introduction to OCR- Manner in which participants first got involved in OCR (heard from a friend, Facebook post, online ad, etc.)

Theme 3. Spartan Race preference- Spartan Race seemed to be most participants' favorite OCR series. Reasons why include the varying distances offered, special registration offers, "Trifecta" status, and finisher medals)

Theme 4. Why they got involved in OCR- Reasons why they decided to participate in their first OCR (e.g., it looked fun, family or friends involvement/encouragement, get in better shape)

Subthemes:

- Friends and Family involvement- family or friends pushing them to try an OCR
- Do "something different"- Were curious about the sport so they wanted to do something unique.
- Looking for a challenge-Wanted to test their strength, test their weaknesses

Theme 5. Continued Participation- Reasons why they participate in OCR multiple times.

Subthemes:

- "Addiction"- A strong desire to participate in more races (e.g. feeling like they "got hooked", feels like an "obsession")
- Tangible rewards- Continue participation because of materialistic objects (e.g. Finishers medal, race T-shirt, free beer, money)
- Social aspect- Family and friends- Enjoy the social aspect of OCR, enjoy having friends to run the race with, enjoy socializing after the race.
- OCR as a personal goal and a way to sustain healthy habits- Registering for OCRs motivated them to continue or start making healthier life choices (e.g. eating healthier, exercising regularly, getting sufficient sleep, etc.).

Theme 6. Favorite thing about OCR- What participants enjoy the most about OCR.

Subthemes:

- Camaraderie- Enjoy the brotherhood/sisterhood spirit of OCR.
- Event set up- Enjoy the way OCR is organized (offer a variety of distances, obstacles change, different race locations, takes place in a natural setting etc.)

Theme 7. OCR preference over traditional racing- Reasons why they choose OCR over other types of more traditional races.

Subthemes:

- Different communities- OCR has a different atmosphere than other types of events, there is more interaction and enthusiasm between OCR participants.
- OCR participants are different- OCR racers see themselves as unique from others who participate in more traditional races. Spoke about looking forward to getting dirty and feeling proud of their “battle wounds.”
- Traditional road running got “too boring”- OCR is more exciting, there is more involved than just running, enjoy that OCR is a multi-sport event.
- OCR is worth the money- Participants feel that they get more for their money in OCR, there are less expensive options.

Theme 8. Impacts of OCR- As a result from participating in OCR, other life changes have occurred.

- Building network and friendships- Long-lasting friendships have been formed, OCR has help network with other OCR enthusiast, networking has been beneficial for some (have hosting family when traveling, free race registration etc.)
- Health benefits- OCR has served as a motivation to be healthier (have gotten in better shape, have lost weight, reduced or eliminated drinking or smoking etc.)
- Other aspects of life (OCR has bled into other aspects of life (feeling a boost of confidence, approaching life differently, doing better at work etc.)
- Motivating others- Their involvement in OCR has motivated others to also join. Feel an obligation to serve as role models to their children (for those who are parents).

Appendix F: Focus Group Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT,
“PSYCHOSOCIAL MOTIVATORS FOR OBSTACLE COURSE RACING:
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY”

Master’s level student, Aracely Rodriguez in the Department of Kinesiology at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo under the supervision of Dr. Camille O’Bryant, is conducting a research project on Obstacle Course Racing (OCR). The purpose of the study is to explore what motivates adults to begin and continue participating in OCR with the goal of informing future exercise and nutrition interventions in the community.

You are being asked to take part in this study because you have participated in at least one OCR event and are 18 years of age or older. You are being asked to take part in a focus group - a focus group is a small group brought together to talk about a particular topic. For the focus group, a person from the study team will meet with you and 8-10 other people and will talk about your opinions and experiences with OCR. The focus group will meet one time for two hours. If you agree to participate in this study, you also agree to be audiotaped during the focus group session. Please be aware that you are not required to participate in this research and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty.

A possible risk associated with participation in this study is a loss of confidentiality due to the group nature of the interviews. We ask the participants to refrain from discussing the focus group. Please be aware that you may discontinue participation in the study at any time or you may choose not to answer any question that make you feel uncomfortable.

All the information collected will be kept confidential; your name will not appear in any reports of the data. While the researchers will not reveal your identity, other members of the focus group may share information and cite you as a source. The focus group transcripts (without names) may be made available to you. No identifying information about you or provided by you during the research will be released to others without your written permission. If quotes from the audio-recordings of you are used for

educational purposes, your identity will not be revealed. Once we listen, type, review and verify the audio-recordings from the focus groups, the audio-recordings will be deleted. All names mentioned during the focus group session will be deleted from our records. Information will be stored in a secure cabinet and secure laptop.

There are no direct benefits by participating in this focus group. However, potential benefits associated with the study include a better understanding of the factors that motivate adults to participate in obstacle course racing.

If you have questions regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is completed, please feel free to contact Aracely Rodriguez via email at **aracely.rodriquez.00@gmail.com**. If you have questions or concerns regarding the manner in which the study is conducted, you may contact Dr. Camille O’Bryant, Chair of thesis committee, at (805) 756-1787, cobryant@calpoly.edu or Dr. Steve Davis, Chair of the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee, at (805) 756-2754, sdavis@calpoly.edu, or Dr. Dean Wendt, Interim Dean of Research, at (805) 756-1508, dwendt@calpoly.edu.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research project as described, please indicate your agreement by signing your name below.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date