

UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATIONS, MEANINGS AND BENEFITS
OF PARTICIPATION IN THE RECREATIONAL SPORT OF GOLF:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF MEN AGED 60 YEARS
AND ABOVE

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A Thesis Submitted to Asia e University in
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Social Science

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ABSTRACT

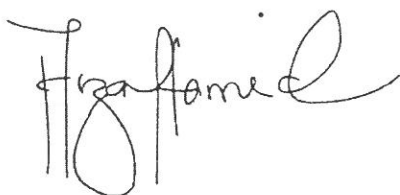
The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of older adults, specifically men 60 years and older, who play golf. This study focusses on (1) their motivations to consistently and actively engage in golf, (2) what playing golf means to them and (3) the benefits they derive from playing golf. This qualitative research adopted the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. In-depth interviews were conducted with 5 men between the ages of 60 and 73 years of age who met the inclusion criteria. Interviews were conducted in the premises of the clubhouse where the participants felt comfortable and lasted between 40 – 60 minutes.* The interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim for data analysis.

The emerging themes for motivations to regularly play golf were (1) the exercise, (2) the friends and (3) the enjoyment and fun. Similarly, three themes emerged on the meanings for participation being (1) a routine, (2) look forward to playing and (3) good friends. Three themes also emerged on the benefits derived, them being the (1) physical benefits, (2) social benefits and (3) mental benefits.

All the participants expressed that their physical and mental health was of great importance to them and that playing golf regularly and walking on the golf course provided them with the exercise to remain and maintain their physical health. This sport stimulated and engaged their mind, keeping them mentally alert and active. Additionally, the social aspects of the game, is also an important element and a major factor that contribute to having good mental health. The results from this study illuminates the importance to participate in sports and physical activities regularly into old age, for better quality of life and successful aging and also as a strategy for self-care.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised /read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, as a thesis for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Sciences.



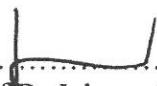
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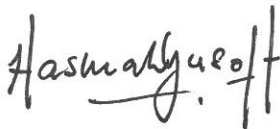


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Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the MSc degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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Acknowledgements

To my research supervisor for her guidance and patience,

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACSM	American College of Sports Medicine
AHA	American Heart Association
DOSM	Department of Statistics Malaysia
HRQL	Health Related Quality of Life
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
KGNS	Kelab Golf Negara Subang
R & A	Royal & Ancient
SDT	Standard Determination Theory

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

The population in Malaysia is rapidly aging. It has been noted that since year 2000, there has been a gradual increase in the percentage of the population of those 60 years and older. In 2005, the older adult population of those 60 years and over was 6.9%. However, it is projected that the older adult population aged 60 and over would reach 22% by the year 2050 (Hamid *et al.*, 2012). This alarming increase in percentage would categorize Malaysia as an aging country. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM, 2008) noted that the life expectancy in 2006 for male and female was 71.9 years and 76.4 years respectively. Nonetheless, in 2013, the DOSM estimated the life expectancy had risen to 72.6 for male and 77.2 for female respectively. With better education, nutrition, healthcare and advances in the field of medicine, Malaysians are living longer and these numbers are expected to increase further in the coming years.

With the retirement age set at 60 years for the majority of those working in the public as well as the private sectors in Malaysia, it would mean having older adults make future plans to manage their additional years of life fruitfully. Therefore, it would be very important to understand how these older adults use their time to stay healthy. Participation in recreational and leisure activities would fulfill the time use and can promote a healthy life style.

Participant in golf is an alternative for older adults to stay active and benefit from the game. Understanding how older adults stay healthy by participating in golf is important. Being involved in physical activities and golf in particular, would greatly help to ensure that older adults remain healthy and active. This would indirectly mean depending less on the younger adult population and thus ensure that older adults have a healthier lifestyle as they age. According to the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM, 2012), engaging in regular exercise and reducing sedentary behaviour is vital for the health of adults especially in older adults. However, thus far, behavioural studies on golf and older adults have been mainly focused on the physiological and biomechanical aspects. As such, the aim of this study is to understand the motivations, meanings and benefits of participation in the recreational sport of golf amongst older men.

1.1 Problem Statement

The sport of golf is quite popular in South East Asia, in particular Malaysia, that is seeing an increase in the number of golfers and golf courses developed. There is an estimated over two hundred golf courses (Cheah, 1992) in Malaysia. Nonetheless, despite this increase, it can be said that there is a significant decrease in the number of middle-aged and senior players judging by the number of rounds played monthly (Juneja, 2004). Therefore it is important to find out what are the factors that motivates and keeps older golfers to continue indulging and participating in golf.

The benefits of regular physical activity is extensive (Nelson *et al.*, 2007) and older adults can be motivated to participate in physical activity as it can prevent certain aspects of mental illness and evidence is accumulating that being physically active late in life may be protective for cognitive decline and risk of dementia (Taaffe *et al.*, 2008). Regular physical activity has been known to reduce risk of cardiovascular disease, thromboembolic stroke, hypertension, type 2 diabetes mellitus, osteoporosis, obesity, colon cancer, breast cancer, anxiety, and depression. (Haskell *et al.*, 2007) and regular exercise has also been attributed to a lower risk in developing heart diseases and recent studies suggests that people who exercise cope better with stress and are less likely to suffer from depression and anxiety (ACSM, 2003). Therefore, the motivation in leading a physically active lifestyle carries greater meaning to older adults as participation would mean offering one of the greatest opportunities for older adults to extend years of active independent life and reduce functional limitations (Cress *et al.*, 2005) and especially self-care. Nonetheless, despite the known benefits, many older adults in Malaysia remain underactive or sedentary (Hamid *et al.*, 2012) and continue leading a life lacking in physical activity.

Several studies have been undertaken in connection with the sport of golf but few of these studies have focused on golf and older adults. Vandervoort *et al.*, (2012) investigated the sport as an option for motivating the older adult population to maintain their physical capacities and their studies focused on the biomechanics of the golf swing and the physiological aspects of the aging

body. Other studies on golf and older adults have been focused on topics related to physiology (Tsang & Hui-Chan, 2004; Gao *et al.*, 2011) and physical fitness (Morris & Hardman, 1997; Sell *et al.*, 2008). Stodel (2004), studied the important role enjoyment plays in golf participation and enhancing quality of life on older adults. The nature of the relationship between golf and older adults needs further investigation. In Malaysia, numerous studies have been carried out in connection with older adults and physical activity participation. Research in the areas of promoting physical activity and exercise in maintaining quality of life of older adults has regularly been studied. Minhat & Amin (2012), explored the socio-demographic determinants of leisure participation among the Malaysian elderly and reported that older adults who participated more in cognitive and social activities were found to have better health related quality of life. However, despite this understanding, there is very limited scientific evidence and Malaysian research in particular, that has explicitly explored to understand the motivation, meanings and benefits in participation of golf in older adults.

In response to this phenomenon, to bridge this gap, this study proposes to explore the motivation of older adults to consistently and actively engage in playing golf regularly. The study will also attempt to investigate what playing golf means to the older adults and the benefits gained as a source in increasing their quality of life and an outlet for active aging. Moreover, the phenomenon in question deserves further exploration and detailed description so that deeper meaning and knowledge can be generated and shared.

1.2 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of 5 older adults who regularly participate in the sport of golf.

The specific objectives are:

1. To explore the motivation of older adults in golf participation.
2. To investigate the meanings attached to why older adults continue to regularly participate in playing golf.
3. To understand the benefits derived from regular participation in golf in older adults.

1.3 Research Questions

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, this research will endeavor to find the answers to the following questions:

1. What is the motivation of older adults to play golf?
2. What does playing golf mean to the older adults?
3. What benefits do older adults gain from playing golf?

1.4 Significance of Study

Understanding the reasons on what motivates older adults to play golf is crucial, as it will provide a basis to promote active aging among older Malaysians. Knowledge gained regarding the importance of participation in golf, as a health factor, will greatly contribute to active aging and play a central role in lifestyle choices for older adults in Malaysia. This study is conducted to help older adults identify ways to remain healthy and continue achieving good health while aging. In this way, they will put less strain and depend less

on the younger generation for their welfare and be able to face the future more confident knowing that they are able to take care of themselves through participation in golf. This study may affirm the importance of playing golf as a suitable form of physical activity for older adults and the prominent benefits derived from engaging in golf in particular the physical, mental and social aspects. The stories narrated and told by the participants of their continued adherence in golf will give insight as to why they regularly engage in physical activities. In-depth knowledge of these factors from this study could be applied to help older adults attain a better understanding of the motivation, meaning and benefits from regular participation in golf.

There is a pressing need to study the lived experiences of older adults engaging in golf, as the results from this study may be useful in assisting individuals and organizations that are researching for better ways to get older adults involved in physical activities and sports, to better understand why older adults play golf. The extended knowledge gained from this research will be helpful for public policy makers and developers to focus on ways to build more public golf courses and incorporating facilities and amenities to include lifestyle activities for older adults, increase the accessibility and availability of opportunity to encourage older adults to participate, introduce educational sessions and have tailor-made community programs to facilitate and promote physical activity and recreational sports among older adults. Sports club managers could use the information to further enhance programs in the clubs. Hirvensalo *et al.*, (2003) concluded that initiating new physical activities in old

age is strongly connected to encouragement to exercise by health care professionals and should be supported to promote exercise among older adults.

As such, this study would help establish the importance of golf participation to the older adult. Their motivations and meanings attached to consistently and regularly participate in golf would help relevant authorities understand their concerns and thus develop programs and facilities suitable for the needs of older adults. Amenities and opportunities to indulge in sporting activities should suit the requirements and cater for older adults and priority to older adults to engage in physical and sporting activities be considered.

It is the hope of the researcher that knowledge obtained from this research would serve as motivation and help inspire inactive older adults to take up a sport and become physically active. It is never too late to start. The adherence to having an active lifestyle would contribute greatly to older adults being mobile and independent and enjoying life to the fullest extent possible even into old age. This study could also help future researchers interested in promoting sports in older adults to use as a stepping stone to study similar objectives.

1.5 Definition of Terms

The following section contains definitions of major terms which is intended to provide readers with an understanding of the terminology used.

- (a) *Motivation* is defined as “the process that initiates, guides and maintains goal-orientated behaviors”. Both intrinsic and extrinsic factors are the main drivers of motivation (Phillips *et al.*, 2004).

- (b) *Meaning* in essence is connection and can be regarded as one of humanity's tools for imposing stability in life (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002).
- (c) *Benefit* is defined as something that is advantageous, a good or helpful result or effect (*Merriam-Webster dictionary*)

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The continuity theory combined with the self-determination theory and the self-efficacy theory, are the 3 theories that grounds this qualitative phenomenological research. The continuity theory is a theory of continued adult development and adaptation (Atchley, 1999). He goes on to say that this theory holds that in making adaptive choices, older adults will attempt to preserve and maintain internal and external structures by using past experiences of themselves and their social world. Thus, with regards to this study, as age catches up with them, older adults discover that are unable to participate in vigorous and demanding sports anymore. Sports like rugby, hockey and squash are found to be too taxing on their joints and body. Therefore, in the pursuit to continue participating in sports and physical activities, in order to remain active, older adults will resort to taking up sports more suitable for their age and social standing based from past experiences. The self-determination theory focuses on how intrinsic motivation influences individuals to develop, persist and even compete in sports and other activities (Ryan & Patrick, 2009) and employs three basic components them being autonomy, competence and relatedness. Bandura (1995), states that self-efficacy is "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage

prospective situations". The more the older adult believes he can play golf and achieves success in doing so, he will have high self-efficacy. Past experiences and knowledge on the benefits of participation in sports and physical activities beneficial for their overall health motivates them and strengthens their self-determination to succeed and their self-efficacy is increased as they learn to master the skill and become better golfers. When self-efficacy in the participation of the sport is high, it will bring greater meaning to participation and promote continuous involvement in the sport.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This section describes the literature of relevant previous research done as background for the study on the lived experiences, meanings and benefits of participation in the recreational sports of golf. It starts with a brief introduction of the general history of golf and how it came to Malaysia. This will be followed by the motivation of participation, the meaning of participation and the benefits of participation in sport and physical activities. This chapter will be concluded with the theoretical frame of the study and samples of qualitative research in golf in relation to this study and a brief summary.

2.1 The Story of Golf

Although there have been numerous debates regarding the origins of the game of golf, Scotland has always been considered the birthplace of golf with the rudimentary beginnings of the sport back in the 15th century (Hudson & Hudson, 2010). The game became popular with the Scottish and English royalty, soon spreading to the commoners resulting in the springing up of golf courses all over the United Kingdom. St. Andrews established in 1552 was the most famous of golf courses and The Royal and Ancient (R & A) which was based at St. Andrews formulated the Rules of Golf in 1897.

In 1820 and 1829, the first golf clubs outside of Britain were established in Bangalore and Calcutta, both in India respectively with the spread of the British

Empire in the 19th century (Hudson & Hudson, 2010). By 1885, golf was well established around the world. Between 1885 and 1890, golf came to the shores of Asia with golf courses built in Taiping, Perak, in the then Malaya and Bangkok in Thailand. Perak, also known as the “Silver State”, was once home to Malaysia’s oldest club – The Taiping Golf Club (Cheah, 1998). Established in 1885, The Taiping Golf Club is also known as the oldest golf club in South East Asia. The nine holes club was located in the lush and scenic Lake Gardens of Taiping but sadly enough, The Taiping Golf Club is now no more and the former golf course has been absorbed into the Lake Gardens Park (Cheah, 1998). Although golf is a popular among elderly Westerners, there is an increasing interest among the Asian population (Tsang & Hui-Chan, 2004).

From a recreational sport played exclusively by foreign dignitaries and diplomats, this sport has bloomed and mushroomed. Today, Malaysia plays host for many local and international competitions participated by both local and international professional golfers. There are also many golf tournaments designed specifically for the amateur and novice golfers to show off their skills. With the existence of numerous affiliations to golf clubs in Malaysia and abroad, club members can have access to play on other golf courses other than the ones available at their own club. Club committees also arrange interclub friendly competitions, thus making social interactions and networking possible.

Golf, which was once considered a lazy pastime of the rich has now become very much a pursuit enjoyed by thousands of enthusiasts in this part of Asia (Cheah, 1992). Whilst decades ago, it was the common assumption that golf is

a recreational sport played by only the rich, famous or/and wealthy, today in Malaysia, this recreational sport is played by people from all walks of life, from the higher income, middle income as well as the lower income wage bracket of society. Many private clubs are available for membership as well as public venues for people to indulge in their favourite activity of choice. There are driving ranges located in many housing estates and for a mere 10 ringgit, a hundred golf balls will be made available for anyone and anybody to hit and swing away to your heart's content. More and more people from a myriad of backgrounds and across ages are taking up golf (Juneja, 2004). Golf is a popular pastime activity and is played by people of all ages (Brusseau & Scheer, 2013). From the young to the old, golf is a suitable recreational sport for people of all ages. There is a steady rise of golf in Malaysia among family members (Nih, 2004). In fact, more often than not, this game is normally introduced from family member to family member, from fathers to their children, husbands to wives, brothers to sisters, uncles and aunts and the list goes on. Adults and youths play this recreational sport in Malaysia. There are many golf competitions catering for the junior golfers in the country aspiring to become the future professionals of golf and perhaps the next Tiger Woods. Also available are golf academies and professional golf coaches in many of the golf clubs ready to assist participants to perfect their skills or perhaps learn a new one for a fee.

Today, there exist hundreds of golf courses and resorts all over East and West Malaysia. Malaysia currently has 206 golf courses and over 308,000

golfers (Juneja, 2004). It is estimated that there are over sixty million golfers and over thirty thousand golf courses worldwide (Readman, 2003) and an estimated 17-18 million golfers in the Asian region (Hudson & Hudson, 2010; Alzoubi, 2013). Golf tourism has become a big industry in the country catering not only for the locals but also attracting foreign tourists from all over the world especially from Japan and Korea, thus generating revenue for the country. This is a fast growing industry catering for the sport from golf sport shops to tour agencies specially offering golf packages and holidays. There are also shops catering specifically for golf enthusiasts, serving as one-stop centers offering anything and everything golf from golf clubs, balls, shoes, bags, trolleys, gloves, clothes and accessories and because of their spending power, equipment and travel packages are often geared to the senior player (Stover & Stoltz, 1996).

Golf is a sport that is commonly embraced by retirees because once they retire there is more time for leisure activities and a need for active socialization and belonging (Alzoubi, 2013). This sport offers older adults the opportunity to interact, form social relationships and promotes friendships. This sport is suitable for older adults and has the potential to contribute to successful aging because it requires a moderate degree of physical activity and cognitive effort (Siegenthaler & Dell, 2003). Golf is not overly vigorous and older adults do not have to be in perfect physical condition to play and thus is a sport that can be enjoyed for a lifetime no matter the age of the player (Alzoubi, 2013).

2.2 Motivation For Participation

Motivation is defined as “the process that initiates, guides and maintains goal-orientated behaviors”. Both intrinsic and extrinsic factors are the main drivers of motivation (Phillips *et al.*, 2004). For many older adults, the reasons to play golf could be viewed as reflecting both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Golfers with intrinsic motivation find the experience itself rewarding (Dacey & Newcomer, 2005). Golfers experiencing intrinsic motivation, will have the tendency to engage in golf for self-satisfaction and personal gratification and this can be achieved through feelings of competence. White (1959) defines the new motivational concept of ‘competence’ as being a biological behavior and goes on further to say that it furthers the learning process of effective interaction with the environment. The more competent older adults get, the higher the motivation to continue playing golf. In contrast, extrinsic motivation entails being motivated by some external benefit or outcome (Dacey & Newcomer, 2005). This will more often than not, apply to the reward system where possibilities of getting trophies, prizes, money, travel, sponsors, social recognition and praises and so forth are expected. Extrinsically motivated golfers are motivated to play golf perhaps more for the social standing and recognition they receive. Nevertheless, what would be the reasons older adults in Malaysia continue to partake in golf.

2.3 Meaning of Participation

Meaning can be regarded as one of humanity's tools for imposing stability in life and the concept of meaning refers to making connections and finding themes in unrelated or changing phenomena, in order to make sense of them (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Therefore, meaning-making is an activity that is distinctly human, a function of how the human brain is organized (Emmons, 2003). How older adults view what participating in golf means to them are the reasons that motivates them to come back every week to play the game.

According to Baumeister & Vohs (2002), there are four needs for meaning which constitutes to four patterns of motivation that will guide people make sense of their lives. Firstly, purpose which is goal and fulfilment orientated. Secondly, values which enables people to distinguish right from wrong. Meaning is experienced as what people are trying to do to enact their values (Steger, 2009). Thirdly, the sense of self-efficacy to belief that his presence can make a difference and lastly, self-worth in believing that he is a good worthy person. For older adults, doing things to bring meaning into their life would mean having a balanced lifestyle. Balance is finding beauty, passion and meaning in the different loves of our lives (Orlick, 1998). Orlick adds that this maybe in relationships, nature, sports or just simple daily experiences. He continues by saying that life is supposed to be lived in the present. By temporarily integrating life's past and future goals to enhance the present, purpose in life can provide human life with an enduring sense of continuity (Morgan, 2010). Older adults who play golf will discover that participating in