

Let's Get Physical: Investigative Research on Women's motivation for Physical Activity

Cristina Trejo Morales, Jane Littlefair, Rayla Porras, Rui Lu, Serina Spain Greene

University of British Columbia

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Let's Get Physical: Investigative Research on Women's motivation for Physical Activity

By: Cristina Trejo, Jane Littlefair, Rayla Porras, Serina Spain Greene, Rui Lu

Abstract

The basis of the research was founded upon with relevance to this main question: What are the main features, besides time and cost that would encourage more participation from UBC female students in physical activity programmes or events at UBC? To guide the research, three specific hypotheses were assessed in regards to this research question by looking at differences between two conditions: those who currently participate in UBC recreation activities and those who are not. Firstly, analysis of differences in perception towards UBC Recreation was done. Secondly, factors that motivate students to get involved and to stay involved were assessed. Thirdly, possible changes that UBC recreation could make in order to enhance appeal were more specifically derived. According to the results, there was significance pertaining to the difference between the boring/fun measures of perception. In regards to initial involvement, health was a determining factor and in regards to continuity of involvement, body goal achievement and the creation of a socially conducive environment were determining factors of this measure. As for areas in need of enhancement, the change that was most requested was increasing activities offered followed by improvements of facilities. Finally, the study's limitations along with recommendations for future studies are discussed.

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It is largely known that engaging in physical activity reduces stress levels, contributes to an increase in physical strength, and increases the release of endorphins, which triggers positive feelings in the body. With benefits such as these in mind, it should be clear that regular physical activity should be the norm within the lives of most people. However, in reality, work, social relations and simple lack of time among other factors inhibit the engagement in such activities. In the case of university students, a study has found only a 38% rate of participation in regular vigorous activity, 20% in regular moderate activity and only a fraction of those represent female students (Kilpatrick et. al, 2005). Fortunately, the participation trends at UBC Recreation are higher with 54% of male students and 46% female students currently involved in physical activities (UBC Recreation, 2015). Given the lower participation rates of women in physical activity, investigating the motivational factors and barriers to physical activity is indeed a contribution towards UBC Recreation.

In order to understand the motivational factors in regards to female participation in UBC Recreation activities, a main research question was investigated: What are the main features, besides time and cost that would encourage more participation from UBC female students in physical activity programmes or events at UBC? To aid in narrowing the prospects of the research, three more specific questions were devised in order to determine distinct factors that can help to identify motivational factors and resolve the existence of barriers: (1) What are the differences in perception of UBC recreation activities between women who are or are not currently involved? (2) What factors encourage women to initiate involvement and which factors promote continuity of involvement? (3) What specific changes would women like to see in regards to UBC Recreation and activities provided?

Three hypotheses were constructed in association with three more specific research questions. Firstly, it was hypothesized that participants who are currently involved in UBC recreation activities would perceive such activities as more fun than boring, more pleasant than unpleasant, less competitive than more competitive, and more worthwhile than more of a waste of time. It was also hypothesized that both conditions would perceive UBC Recreation as being more beneficial than harmful and more useful than not useful. The second hypothesis pertained largely towards female students who are currently involved with UBC Recreation. Based on previous research by Kilpatrick et. al, (2005), it was predicted that the main factors that encourage people to participate in physical activity are whether they are having fun and whether they have the opportunity to socially engage with others. It was also predicted that health, the feeling of being part of a community, and stress relief would be factors that would encourage women to continue participating in these activities. Also, with reference to both initial participation and continued participation, it was hypothesized that body goals would be a factor that would greatly influence both. Thirdly, it was of interest to pinpoint more specific changes that female students who are currently involved in UBC Recreation activities would like to see. Finally, it was predicted that the changes that would be selected most frequently would be to increase activities offered, increase female only classes, and reduce the amount of open spaces in classes. Changes that would be selected less frequently would be to increase instructor interactions with students, improve and update facilities, and to make class content less repetitive.

Methods

Participants

For this study, it was specified that the population sample consisted of female students attending the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Data was collected from 70 English-speaking female students who were available during daytime hours in one of the three chosen locations namely the AMS Student Nest, Irving K. Barber Learning Center and the UBC recreation center. The age range of 18 - 25 years is thought to represent the majority of students attending University. As an attempt to increase sample size, surveys were also distributed online. This was completed by 20 of the 70 participants in the study. Of those approached, 7 refused to participate mainly due to a commercial conflict of interest. Finally, The purpose of the study was described and verbal consent was received before handing out the surveys.

Conditions

The current study comprised of two conditions. The first condition consisted of 19 participants who were currently involved in UBC Recreation activities while the second condition consisted of 51 participants who were currently not involved in any UBC Recreation activity. Each participant was tested individually at one of the three locations. Participants in the first condition completed a survey on the motivational factors that encourage them to participate (see Appendix A) whereas participants in the second condition completed a survey on the possible barriers preventing their participation in physical activity (see Appendix B). In order to get a direct comparison for hypothesis 1, the question on subjective perceptions were mentioned in both surveys.

Measures

To analyze the differences in perceptions on UBC Recreation activities, participants from both conditions were asked to rate their perceptions based on six factors. The six factors used to describe participants' perceptions in relation to sports were noted from a previous study (Kilpatrick, Herbert & Bartholomew, 2005). Using the 7-point likert scale, participants rated the degree they perceived UBC recreation activities as boring/ fun, unpleasant/ pleasant, uncompetitive/ competitive, waste of time/ worthwhile, harmful/ beneficial and useless/ useful (see Appendix A & B). The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was then used to statistically analyze the responses obtained. As this was a between subjects design, an independent t-test was computed to compare participants' perceptions on UBC Recreation activities.

In the next section, women in the "currently involved in UBC recreation activities" condition were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed each motivational factors contributed to their initial participation and prolonged participation. The ratings were completed on a 5-point likert scale with 1 being "strongly agree" and 5 being "strongly disagree" (see Appendix A). It must be mentioned that the study examined motivational factors that affect physical involvement on two dimensions – get involved and stay involved. The study identified six motivational factors namely health, stress relief, social engagement, enjoyment, to be come part of the UBC community and body achievement. As this part of the study was a within subjects design, a sign test was conducted to highlight the differences in the importance of each motivational factor on the two dimensions of physical involvement.

The last section of the study examined changes and improvements women who are currently involved in UBC Recreation activities desired the most. To assess this, a

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multiple-choice question was developed outlining 7 potential changes (see Appendix A). An open-ended question was also considered appropriate for this part of the question to offer increased flexibility and consequently provide greater opportunities for probing. A frequency table was created to record the occurrence of responses from the multiple-choice question before converting the data to a pie chart for a more numeric interpretation to identify trends. Upon completion of the analysis, a coding scheme was developed to decode open-ended responses. Data that cannot be coded was analyzed later to determine if they represented a new category or a subcategory of an existing code.

Procedures

Participants were contacted directly at one of the three chosen locations by one of the researchers and were given a survey to complete. The survey was developed through the UBC Survey Tool mainly for its advanced features on real-time results sharing and to be easily accessed for online submissions. Prior to completing the survey, participants were asked if they were currently involved in any UBC recreation activity and were assigned to one of the two conditions accordingly. Participants were informed that the survey would take approximately 3 minutes to complete and were instructed to answer all the questions in the survey. The survey consisted of a series of multiple-choice, open-ended and likert scaled questions (see Appendix A & B)

Results

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare participants' perceptions of sports in the two independent groups. The analyses revealed that there was a significant difference in the perception scores for fun/boring (see Appendix C). Specifically, perception scores for of women in the "currently not involved in UBC recreation activity" condition ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 2.96$) was significantly lower than perception scores of women who are in the "currently involved in UBC recreation activities" condition ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 1.98$), $t(68) = 3.71$, $p = .00$, $d = 3.04$, 95% CI [1.27, 4.22]. These results suggest that participation in sports is a strong predictor for women's perceptions in sports as fun. No significant differences emerged between the two independent groups on the other 5 factors on perceptions. As a result, the hypothesis for perceptions of sports was largely unsupported, though the findings suggested that there was a significant difference for perceptions of sports as fun/boring, no significant differences were found for perceptions of pleasant/ unpleasant, competitive/ uncompetitive and worthwhile/ waste of time as was predicted.

To address the second prediction, a sign test was carried out for each motivational factor to assess whether there was a significant difference in the motivational scores on encouraging women to get involved or to stay involved. In this test, the negative differences represent motivation that get participants involved whereas positive differences represent motivation that keep them encouraged to stay involved. As indicated in *Graph 2*, health is the most crucial factor in initially getting women involved in physical activity at UBC Recreation (see Appendix C. In other words, the test revealed that 4 participants of the 19 participants indicated that health was more important in motivating them to get involved whereas 0 participants indicated that it was an important factor to stay involved. On the other hand, the sign test showed that body goals and social engagement were the highest motivators to continue participation. Being part of UBC community was slightly a stronger motivation to stay involved than to get involved.

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Equal among both was stress relief and not body goals as previously predicted. More generally, these results highlight that each motivational factor varies in their importance in affecting women's motivation to get involved and to stay involved. Together, these findings do not support hypothesis 2 because it was predicted that the fun factor and social engagement factor would be important motivators to get involved in physical activity when in fact it was the health factor. Although, being part of the UBC community was more important in encouraging people to continue participating as was predicted, the stress relief factor was equally important in getting people involved and getting people to stay involved in physical activity, which is contrary to what was predicted.

Lastly, a frequency table was conducted to display a summary of responses to the variables for the third prediction. From this a pie chart was constructed to display the distribution of each variable out of 100 percent. As predicted, the increase in activities being offered was selected most frequently (33%) and only 5% of the sample wanted to make the classes less boring (see Appendix C, *Graph 3*). Further examination revealed that 27% wanted to see improvements and updates in facilities in the UBC recreation center, 20% wanted the increase in instructor and students interaction. Contrary to what was predicted, only 2% wanted the decrease in the amount of open spaces in classes. It is suspected that this may be due to the fact that university students derive substantial psychological benefits, including "feelings of open space", change of scenery", and a "place to escape". Data from the open-ended question revealed that 4 participants desired more fitness classes as a lot of these classes fill up too quickly, 3 participants wanted to have a separate studio that is available and free of charge for stretching and practicing and 2 participants wanted UBC Recreation to organize more one day tournaments to get people involved.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to elicit and understand motivational factors and barriers to physical activity participation in women as previous studies had only made limited attempts to measure these aspects. However, the emergence of relationships and findings from this study certainly warrants further investigation.

To begin with, hypothesis 1 did not support the findings from the independent t-test on women perceptions about UBC Recreation activities. Based on the significance of classes and activities being perceived as 'more fun' by female students who are currently involved in UBC Recreation activities, it is advisable to UBC Recreation to conduct a marketing campaign that would sell their activities as 'fun' rather than concentrating on 'skills' or 'competition' to appeal to those who are currently not involved and hopefully promote the perceptions of UBC Recreation activities as 'fun'. Given the findings, UBC Recreation should find opportunities to discuss issues with students around ways to make classes more fun and enjoyable while increasing body confidence.

Results garnered from the sign test contradicted the proposed predictions on the motivational factors that encourage involvement and prolonged involvement. It is recommended that UBC Recreation should continue their focus on being health oriented to motivate students to get involved. This could be seen in the use of apps to monitor progress, creation of nutrition classes, and awards for body goal achievement to name a few. As social engagement was among the highest in encouraging students to continue participating, UBC Recreation should maintain an environment conducive for social

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engagement. This could include lounge spaces, introduction times in classes to create friendships, and class activities to encourage socialization.

Lastly, only part of the hypothesis 3 was found in the results. It is highly advised that UBC Recreation introduce new activities into their schedules, as 33% of participants called for this. Accounting for 27% of all responses, it is suggested that UBC Recreation consider updating and improving their facilities particularly in the fitness center. UBC Recreation should also ensure that all staffs and instructors are welcoming and supportive of all students, irrespective of ability, and open-minded and creative in their approach to delivery to enhance the quality of instructor-student interaction.

As with all research, there were many limitations in this study. Without a doubt, the biggest limitation of this study was the small sample size and unequal number of participants in each condition. It is worth mentioning that the study initially collected responses from 100 participants but only 70 of those could be used due to incomplete data. As a result, there is an increased likelihood that the study did not detect a true effect and overestimated the magnitude of associations. Although, the study ran multiple tests on the survey questions, it was noticed that some participants did not understand certain questions and therefore certain responses had to be discarded. The study also experienced issues with coding for open-ended answers primarily because there was no knowledgeable coder who could code all the transcripts once the coding scheme was established. Looking back at the study, some questions were biasedly posed by the researchers. For instance, the study limited the motivational factors that affect physical activity involvement to only the factors identified. Another issue with this study is the miscommunication with the client resulting in last minute adjustments (see Appendix D). The fact that the client wanted the study to cover all the possible motivational factors and barriers to physical activity was very overwhelming especially given the limited time. Perhaps, a more narrowed study with fewer variables to investigate would have yielded more meaningful results. Finally and unfortunately, the preceding findings make it difficult to arrive at any firm conclusions on the barriers to participation.

The following recommendations for future studies are based upon the findings from this study. Firstly, there remains a need to investigate the barriers to participation on female students who are currently not involved in physical activity. The knowledge gathered from this would help UBC Recreation address and resolve existing barriers. Another recommendation would be to use a chi-square to statistically compare the observed data with data the study expected to obtain. The study encourages future researchers to gather information from more location on campus and record any differences or trends found across the locations. As physical activity is a complex and multifactorial behavior, future research should consider how physical activity differ according to a student's age, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, and health or fitness status. Moreover, the study recommends future studies to conduct the research in a laboratory setting to prevent distractions from the external environment.

While there were flaws and incongruent results to the hypotheses, this research was still important to do. The data that was collected can guide the client, UBC Recreation into a positive direction for future research. In conclusion, the study offers a rare opportunity to hear the voices of female students and reveal their attitudes and perceptions to physical activity.

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References

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Appendix A

Survey for women who are currently participating in physical activities at UBC
Recreation

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Women in Physical Activites (REC)

0%

Section A: Background Information

Help us get to know you a little better!

What is your age?

Use numbers only e.g. 20 NOT twenty

Are you a Canadian or International student?

Canadian

International

Other, please specify...

Year of study at UBC?

Use numbers only e.g. 4 NOT four

What is your faculty?

e.g. Arts, Sauder, Science, etc

How do you identify yourself?

Female

Transgender

Other, please specify...

What is your ethnicity?

Please write your response

How long have you lived in Vancouver, BC?

Do you commute to campus?

Yes

No

[Next](#)

Women in Physical Activites (REC)

25%

Section B: UBC REC Involvement

The following questions will ask about your attendance of UBC REC activities and about your experience.

Are you currently involved in any UBC REC activities or programs?

Yes No

If 'Yes', what activity(s) do you do and how often do you go?

Type here

Have you ever tried any UBC REC activities?
Including free classes week and events

- Yes, and I liked it
- Yes, but I did not like it
- No, but I want to
- No, and I'm not interested

My participation in the UBC recreation activity(s) of my choice was:

Please rate your experience of UBC REC experiences with the scales below.

Boring	<input type="text"/>	Fun
Unpleasant	<input type="text"/>	Pleasant
Harmful	<input type="text"/>	Beneficial
Useless	<input type="text"/>	Useful
Competitive	<input type="text"/>	Not Competitive
Waste of Time	<input type="text"/>	Worthwhile

In general, do you think that there are advantages or benefits to participating in physical activity at UBC?

Yes No

If 'Yes', what are the advantages/benefits? If 'No', why?

Type here

Back

Next

Women in Physical Activities (REC)

50%

Section C: If you participate in UBC REC activities, please answer the following questions with reference to the activities you are currently involved in.

My main motivation to get INVOLVED in UBC recreation activity(s) is:

Using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "strongly agree" and 5 means "strongly disagree", how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements

To be healthy

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

For fun/enjoyment

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

Body goal(s) achievement

weight loss, strength, flexibility, etc

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

To be part of the UBC community

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

Stress relief

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

Social engagement

e.g. I made new friends in REC classes or I go to classes with my friend (s)

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

Chance to try something

e.g. new opportunities, or simply having the resource open to you

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

Please specify any other motivation(s) that encourage you to stay/get involved in UBC recreation activity(s)

Type here

The main factor that keeps me ENCOURAGED to continue participating in UBC recreation activity(s) is:

Using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "strongly agree" and 5 means "strongly disagree", how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements

To stay healthy

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

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It's fun

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

Body goal(s) achievement

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

To be part of the UBC community

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

Stress relief

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

Social engagement

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

Please specify any other factor(s) that keeps you encouraged to participate in UBC recreation activity(s):

Type here

If I could change anything about UBC recreation and the activities they offer it would be:

Please choose all that apply

- Decrease the presence of mirrors in studios and classrooms
- Decrease the amount of open space in classes
- Increase female only classes and spaces
- Increase instructor interaction with students
- Increase the variety/types of activities offered
- Improve/update the facilities
- Make the classes less boring
- I would not change anything
- None of the above

Please specify any other change(s) you would like to see happen:

You may also elaborate on the choices you chose above

Type here

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I think it's important to encourage UBC female students to participate in sports/join UBC recreation activity(s) because:

Check all that apply

- Reduction of stress
- It's enjoyable
- Get to meet new people
- Stay fit and healthy
- None of the above

Please specify any other reason(s) or why you don't think it is important to encourage other female students to join UBC recreation activity(s):

Type here

I would drop out of a class because:

Check all that apply

- That class is too repetitive/boring
- I don't know anyone in class
- The class is too difficult for my abilities
- I feel uncomfortable
- Not enough students in class
- Too many students in class
- The class is co-ed
- None of the above

Please specify any other reason(s) you would drop out of a class/activity:

Type here

If you were to recommend a UBC recreation activity to other women, what would it be and why?

Type here

What is a UBC recreation activity that you are interested in, but have not yet tried? Why are you interested in this activity?

Type here

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Women in Physical Activities (REC)

75%

Section D

Please answer these last few questions for us!!

In four words, how would you describe the UBC recreation culture?
e.g. the people who make the community, how you feel, etc

Type here

What is your opinion on campus wide UBC recreation events like 'Storm The Wall'?

Type here

WIN A \$50 VISA GIFT CARD!

As thanks for participating in our survey, there is a chance to win a \$50 visa gift card! If you would like to be entered, please fill out the information below!

We will NEVER share your information outside of the purpose for this survey and for the raffle.

Student Number

Type here

Email Address

Type here

Phone

OPTIONAL

Type here

Back

Submit

Appendix B

Women in Physical Activites (No REC)

0%

Year of study at UBC?

Use numbers only e.g. 4 NOT four

Type here

Section A: Background Information

Help us get to know you a little better!

What is your age?

Use numbers only e.g. 20 NOT twenty

Type here

What is your faculty?

e.g. Arts, Sauder, Science, etc

Type here

How do you identify yourself?

Female

Transgender

Other, please specify... Type here

Are you a Canadian or International student?

Canadian

International

Other, please specify... Type here

What is your ethnicity?

Please write your response

Type here

How long have you lived in Vancouver, BC?

Type here

Do you commute to campus?

Yes

No

Next

Investigative Research on Women's motivation for Physical Activity

Survey on women who are currently not involved in any UBC Recreation activities

Women in Physical Activites (No REC)

25%

Section B: UBC REC Involvement

The following questions will ask about your attendance of UBC REC activities and about your experience.

Are you currently involved in any UBC REC activities or programs?

Yes No

If 'Yes', what activity(s) do you do and how often do you go?

Type here

Have you ever tried any UBC REC activities?
Including free classes week and events

- Yes, and I liked it
- Yes, but I did not like it
- No, but I want to
- No, and I'm not interested

My participation in the UBC recreation activity(s) of my choice was:

Please rate your experience of UBC REC experiences with the scales below.

Boring	<input type="text"/>	Fun
Unpleasant	<input type="text"/>	Pleasant
Harmful	<input type="text"/>	Beneficial
Useless	<input type="text"/>	Useful
Competitive	<input type="text"/>	Not Competitive
Waste of Time	<input type="text"/>	Worthwhile

In general, do you think that there are advantages or benefits to participating in physical activity at UBC?

Yes No

If 'Yes', what are the advantages/benefits? If 'No', why?

Type here

Back

Next

Women in Physical Activites (No REC)

50%

Section C

My main reason to not get involved in UBC recreation activity(s): Other than costs and time

Using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "strongly agree" and 5 means "strongly disagree", how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements

I think it will stress me out

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

I think I will feel uncomfortable in the facilities/classrooms

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

The programs/activities being offered are not interesting to me

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

I participate in other activities outside UBC recreation
sports team, gym membership, yoga studio, etc

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

I would prefer to participate with a friend, but none of them are interested/available to join me

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

I do not like the classroom design

too much open space, too many mirrors, by windows, etc

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

The class that I want to join is co-ed

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

Physical activities are not interesting to me

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

The classes are too repetitive

Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree

Please specify any other reason(s) why you are not involved in any UBC recreation activity(s)
You may also elaborate on the above selections

Type here

Are you participating in other activities or programs outside of UBC recreation?

- Yes
- No

Would you improve anything?

OPTIONAL

Type here

How often do you do this activity(s)?

- Once a week
- Twice a week
- 3 times a week
- 4-5 times a week
- More than 5 times a week

Please answer this question if you are not currently involved in any activity

I would be encouraged to join an activity if it:

Check all that apply

- Reduces stress
- Is enjoyable/fun
- Allow me to meet new people and friends
- Helps me get fit and healthy
- Is a female-only class
- None of the above

Please specify any other reasons what you'd encourage you to join an activity:

Type here

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Women in Physical Activities (No REC)

75%

Section D

Please answer these last few questions for us!!

What is your opinion on campus wide UBC recreation events like 'Storm The Wall'?

Type here

In four words, how would you describe the UBC recreation culture?
e.g. the people who make the community, how you feel, etc

Type here

WIN A \$50 VISA GIFT CARD!

As thanks for participating in our survey, there is a chance to win a \$50 visa gift card! If you would like to be entered, please fill out the information below!

Student Number

Type here

We will NEVER share your information outside of the purpose for this survey and for the raffle.

Email Address

Type here

Phone

OPTIONAL

Type here

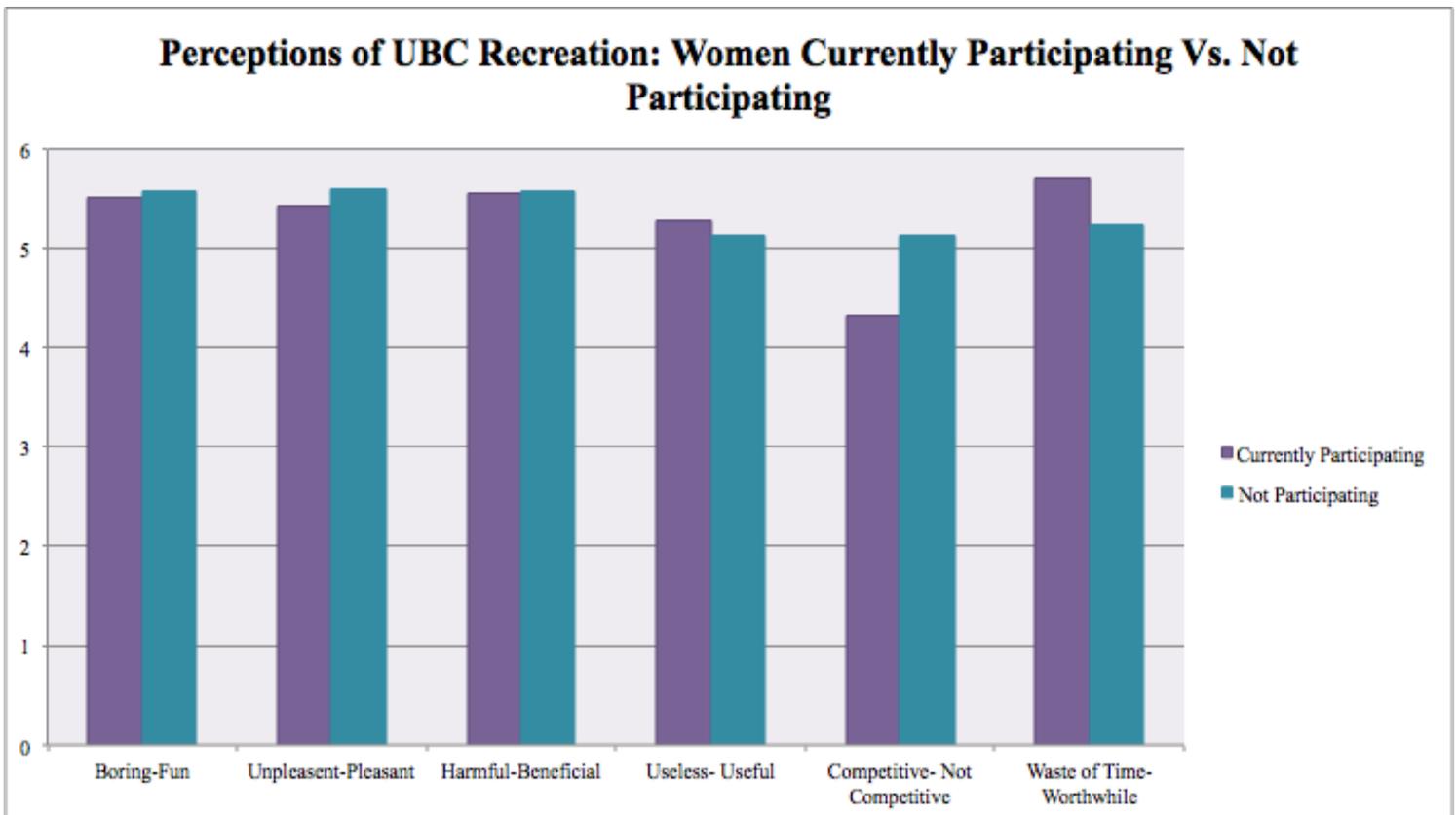
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Submit

Appendix C

Graph 1

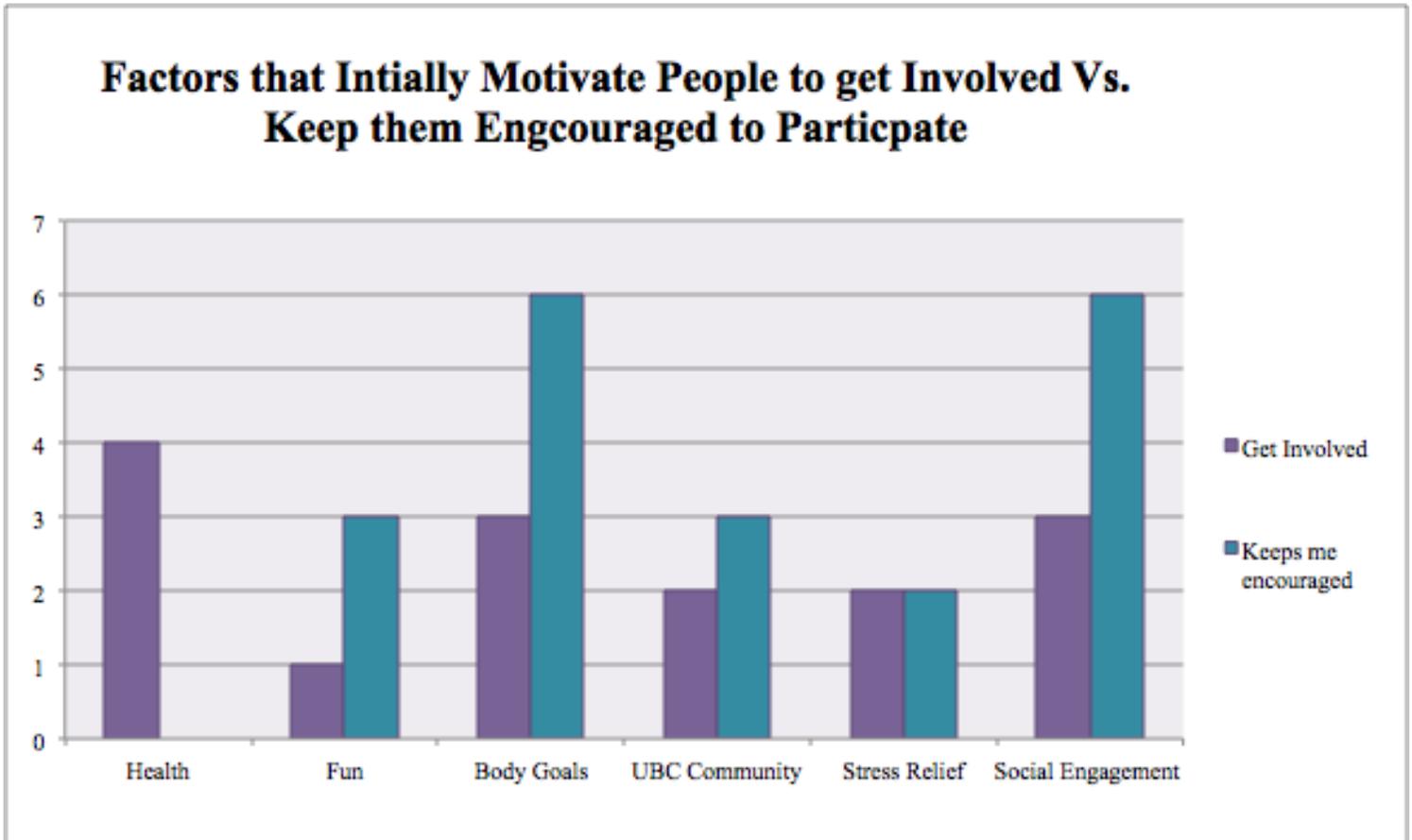
Perceptions of UBC Recreation: Women Currently Participating versus Not Participating in UBC Recreation activities.



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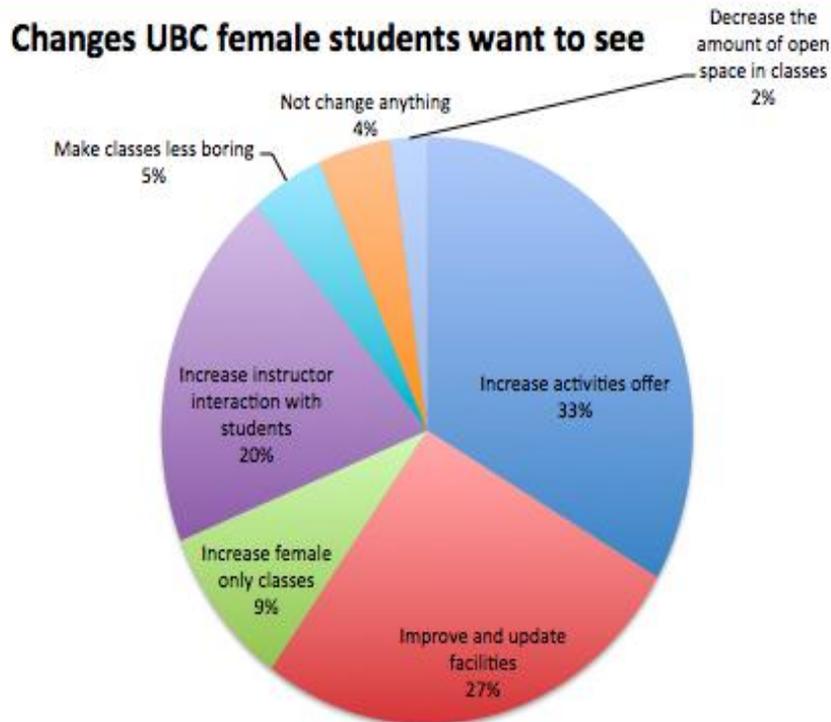
Graph 2.

Factors that Initially Motivate People to Get involved versus Keeping them Engaged to Participate.



Graph 3

Changes UBC Females Students want to see in UBC Recreation Activities



Appendix D

Clientele Interaction

Our clients from UBC Recreation were kind, but hard to get a hold of. After our initial meeting with them, they never replied to our numerous emails or reached out to us independently. We were originally supposed to receive two fitbits, courtesy of UBC Recreation, as raffle prizes for our survey. However, since we did not ever hear from them after a few email inquiries about the fitbits, our group decided to use our own money to buy a \$50 Visa gift card to use instead. Our clients also wanted to know many things and had many variables they wanted tested. Due to being undergraduates and the nature of the research/class (time allowance, resources), we felt very overwhelmed and were thus forced to stretch our research as much as possible in order to accommodate for as many of these variables as we could. We originally proposed the idea of testing belongingness and self-esteem, but our clients were not supportive of this idea and wanted us to change our research question the very last minute. This was very inefficient and time consuming because we had to discard all the data we previously collected and start a new survey to test the new research question.