



Sensation seeking and involvement in chess

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Abstract

The present study examined the relationship between scores on the Sensation Seeking Scale [SSS; Zuckerman, M. (1979). *Sensation seeking; beyond the optimal level of arousal*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.] and involvement in chess within a sample of 112 college students. Students who reported having played chess, and those with more chess experience, evidenced higher scores on both the Total SSS and the Thrill and Adventure Seeking (TAS) subscale, effects which were independent of gender. Higher scores on Disinhibition were also associated with greater chess experience. The present results provide further support for the validity of the TAS scale with regard to involvement in sports, and suggest that more attention be directed to the link between sensation seeking and involvement in low-risk, but theoretically relevant, sporting activities. © 2002 Published by Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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Chess is, as every one knows, a mimic battle fought upon a field of sixty-four squares with pieces moved according to an elaborate system having powers suggestive of a variety of fighting units. Cleveland (1907, p. 270).

A number of studies have demonstrated that individuals engaged in high-risk sports score higher on various subscales of Zuckerman's (1979) Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS; for reviews, see Jack & Ronan, 1998; Zuckerman, 1983, 1994). The list of sports associated with sensation seeking (e.g. skydiving, hang-gliding, scuba diving, kayaking, skiing, and mountaineering) suggests that physically taxing, exciting, and risky sporting activities are the ones that appeal to the high sensation seeker. While consistent with Zuckerman's (1994) definition of sensation seeking, this

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collection of findings does not seem to fully capture the richness of the sensation seeking construct.

Zuckerman (1994) defines sensation seeking as "...a trait defined by the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experiences." (p. 27). Because risky behavior is more likely to result in significant personal and/or social harm, it is understandable that much of the research on sensation seeking has focused on such risky activities. At the same time, it seems important to recognize that Zuckerman's definition does not imply that sensation seekers *must* take physical risks to meet their needs, only that they are *willing* to take such risks to meet their needs. Indeed, as Zuckerman (1994) notes, sensation seekers appear to be attracted to high-risk sports due to the sensations they provide, rather than their inherent risk. The primary importance of exciting sensations, rather than risk per se, suggests that sensation seeking might also be related to involvement in challenging and stimulating, yet less physically risky sports.

The present study tests this general hypothesis by examining the relationship between sensation seeking and involvement in chess. As Zuckerman (1983) has noted, any attempt to predict a link between sensation seeking and involvement in a particular sport must involve an analysis of the sport in question, in order to determine whether the sport possesses characteristics which would likely attract or repel sensation seekers. To that end, we briefly review the sensation seeking construct, and subsequently consider whether chess might have any appeal to the high sensation seeker.

Originally developed as an individual difference measure which might predict differential response to sensory deprivation (Zuckerman, 1979), the SSS evolved into a multi-dimensional measure, consisting of four interrelated subscales. The subscales, each comprised of 10 forced-choice items, include *boredom susceptibility* (BS; an aversion to repetitive and/or boring tasks and/or people), *disinhibition* (DIS; seeking release and/or disinhibited social behavior via alcohol, partying, sex etc.), *experience seeking* (ES; pursuit of an unconventional lifestyle via unplanned activities and/or hallucinatory drugs), and *thrill and adventure seeking* (TAS; seeking unusual sensations via exciting and risky sporting activities). A Total SSS score is also frequently employed in studies of sensation seeking. Of these scales, the DIS, TAS, and Total scales tend to show the highest internal reliability, factor replicability, and test–retest reliability, with ES to some degree, and BS to a greater degree, demonstrating somewhat lower replicabilities and reliabilities (Zuckerman, 1979).

While much research exists on the relationship between sensation seeking and involvement in risky sports, little is known about its relation with less risky sports. To our knowledge, no study has examined its relationship with involvement in chess. How might sensation seeking be related to involvement in chess?

On the surface, chess may not appear to be a sensation seekers' sport. The game requires a tremendous amount of concentration, frequently over extended periods of time. Moreover, during the course of a game, chess players are likely to remain relatively inactive as they consider their next move, or wait for their opponent to move, and neither player is likely to sustain any major injuries. Thus, the long and relatively inactive game of chess may potentially be aversive to those who (1) get bored easily, (2) would prefer to act in a disinhibited manner, and/or (3) enjoy thrilling activities like skydiving.

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