

A Look at Leisure

Recreational Changes Among Age Cohorts, 1988–2004

Introduction

The Baby Boom generation is now reaching its senior years. Almost twenty years ago, however, they were in their mid-30s and early 40s, a time when prominence is given to family responsibilities, career development and the overall foundations for building a sound economic and social life. Now that this cohort is older, has built their lives and seen their families grow and move on, how has this new stage of life influenced their recreational interests and participation?

This bulletin explores the fundamentals of the changing relationships between recreational preference in young adulthood and the senior years. The intent is to determine the nature and extent of any changes that resulted as respondents have become older¹.

The approach that was used employed the 1988 *General Recreation Survey* and the 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey* data for the age cohorts of interest. Ideally, a comparison of 1984 data to 2004 was preferred to provide a 20 year comparison. However, the collection of participation data in these two years was different, limiting the capability for direct comparisons. The 1988 data is directly comparable and so was used to provide a 16-year comparison and give a reasonable indication of potential changes between the cohorts of interest.

The discussion compares data collected from the 1988 *General Recreation Survey* to corresponding data from the 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey* for:

- participation rates and activity preferences reported by the 35 to 44 age cohort in 1988 who in 2004 made up the 51 to 60 cohort.
- participation rates and activity preferences reported by the 45 to 64 age cohort in 1988 who in 2004 made up the over 60 cohort.
- reasons for participation in 1988 for the age cohorts of interest and corresponding reasons from the 2004 survey.

While there are some limitations that underlie the analysis, the intent of this bulletin is to identify any trends that are evident, such that this information might be used as a guide for recreational programmers who provide services to mature adults.

¹ Note that respondents to each survey are different individuals and not necessarily the same people who have taken part in the *Alberta Recreation Survey* since 1988.

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Participation Preferences

The Aging of 1988's 35-44 Cohort

In 1988, walking, bicycling, swimming in a pool and gardening were activities that involved over three-quarters of survey respondents from the 35-44 age cohort. Table 1 compares the rank order of the 15 leading activities for this group in the 1988 survey to their respective ranks in 2004, when the 35-44 cohort had moved to the 51 to 60 cohort.

Table 1 shows that walking maintains its first place ranking while other activities have increased in importance since 1988 as respondents have aged, while others are less important. The biggest increase has affected participation in video and computer games. In part this is likely reflected by the growing availability and adoption of computer technology by the 35 to 44 cohort in the late 1980s, and their continued use of it as they got older to reach the 51 to 60 cohort by 2004.

Also increasing noticeably is attendance at educational courses. This change reflects an interest in learning as we age both to assist with employment but also to broaden more general interests as we get older. There is also an increase by three ranking places for attending a sports event as a spectator,

Table 1
Rank Order of Activities, 1988 and 2004
(35-44 Cohort Becoming 51-60 Cohort)

<u>Activity</u>	<u>35 - 44 Cohort Rank in 1988</u>	<u>51 to 60 Cohort Rank in 2004</u>	<u>Change</u>
Walking for pleasure	1	1	0
Bicycling	2	5	-3
Swimming (in pools)	3	10	-7
Gardening	4	2	+2
Visiting a museum/art gallery	5	6	-1
Doing a craft/hobby	6	3	+3
Attending a sports event as a spectator	7	4	+3
Ice skating	8	22	-14
Picnicking (in the countryside)	9	12	-3
Overnight camping	10	13	-3
Fishing	11	21	-10
Attending educational courses	12	8	+4
Swimming (e.g., in lakes, rivers, ponds)	13	20	-7
Video/computer/electronic games	14	7	+7
Dancing	15	17	-2

perhaps an indication that as we age we might become less active in certain activities but maintain an interest by finding opportunities to watch.

While some activities have moved up the rank order, others have moved down. From Table 1 we see that ice skating has dropped from 8th rank in 1988 to 22nd in 2004. Here is an activity that is generally easy to access during the winter months and yet it has become less important in 2004 as respondents pass the age of 50. Since walking remains popular as we age, perhaps skating and access to opportunities to participate might be similarly encouraged as a means of keeping older people active both inside and out.

Also falling in rank is fishing that decreases from 11th to 21st. This may be reflective of the general decline in participation in this activity and yet, like ice skating, is an activity that is reasonably accessible and is also a good example of an activity that can be undertaken for its social benefits, its outdoor experience and even its competitive dimension.

Overall, from Table 1 we find that the more energetic pursuits, such as the 2nd and 3rd ranked activities in 1988 (bicycling and swimming in pools) have fallen out of the top five by the time respondents have passed the age of 50 to be replaced by the somewhat more passive activities of gardening and crafts/hobbies.

The apparent trend of relatively passive activities becoming more popular as we get older, does not completely characterize the recreational preferences of older adults. Aerobics/fitness, for example is ranked 8th by the 51-60 cohort in 2004, up from 24th in 1988. To some extent the availability of opportunities for this activity may be the reason for this change but it might also be argued that the provision of this activity combined with messages about health and wellness have had an effect and encouraged greater participation among older adults.

Other activities that have increased in rank in 2004 over 1988 to become part of the top 20 are:

- weight training
- day hiking
- jogging
- picnicking (within a city)

These activities have replaced those listed below and clearly demonstrates that the more energetic activities have not become any less important as we age:

- fishing
- ice skating
- downhill skiing
- tobogganing/sledding
- softball/baseball

The Aging of 1988's 45-64 Cohort

The second cohort of interest from 1988 is that of people aged 45 and 64 years. This group is represented by those over the age of 60 in the 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey*. As with the younger cohorts described earlier, there are some notable changes evident in activity preferences (Table 2).

The first point of interest is that the three highest ranked activities by the 45-64 cohort in 1988 remain the three highest ranking activities when this cohort has turned 61 in 2004. Similarly, visiting a museum/art gallery ranked fourth in 1988 dropped one rank to 5th in 2004, switching positions with attending a sports event as a spectator. Overall the top 5 activities are the same, indicating that once we reach our late 40's we have become established in our preferences.

Attending a sports event as a spectator is one of just three activities in the top 15 that has a higher rank in 2004 than in 1988. The other two are golf and attending educational courses. Golf ranked 12th among those in the 45-64 cohort in 1988 but increases to 8th as this cohort passes the age of 60 in 2004. This may reflect the greater availability of time to play golf, the increase in the number of courses in Alberta during the 1990's, and potentially the greater availability of discretionary funds available to those over 60 whose family has grown and moved on.

Attending educational courses has increased by six places to rank as 7th in 2004. This may be for the same reasons noted earlier - the desire to continue learning about new things and greater availability of opportunities to fulfill this preference. For the older cohort, they may have more time available for attending courses and now that they have passed 60 have a desire to remain mentally active.

Three activities have experienced notable decreases in rank since 1988. Fishing drops from 8th in 1988 to 17th in 2004, perhaps reflecting the general decline in participation in this activity despite the benefits it can offer. Swimming in lakes and ice skating both experienced drops of seven places, possibly a reflection of the level of physical effort associated with these activities relative to the abilities of those over 60 in 2004. Swimming in lakes was ranked 14th in 1988 but by 2004 it was 21st, and ice-skating falls to 22nd from 15th.

Table 2
Rank Order of Activities, 1988 and 2004
(45-64 Becoming 61-80 Cohort)

<u>Activity</u>	<u>45 – 64 Cohort Rank in 1998</u>	<u>61 to 80 Cohort Rank in 2004</u>	<u>Change</u>
Walking for pleasure	1	1	0
Gardening	2	2	0
Doing a craft/hobby	3	3	0
Visiting a museum/art gallery	4	5	-1
Attend a sports event as a spectator	5	4	+1
Bicycling	6	11	-5
Picnicking (in the countryside)	7	9	-2
Fishing	8	17	-9
Swimming (in pools)	9	10	-1
Dancing	10	12	-2
Overnight camping	11	14	-3
Golf	12	8	+4
Attending educational courses	13	7	+6
Swimming (e.g., in lake, rivers, ponds)	14	21	-7
Ice skating	15	22	-7

Changes in Reasons For Participation

With there being evidence that activity preferences change as we get older, is there also a corresponding change in the reasons that we take part? Table 3 compares the 1988 survey results for motivations to those reported in 2004 for all survey respondents². These data show that the percentages reported in 2004 are lower than those observed in 1988 but that the rank orders are generally very similar.

The most noticeable change is that the 2004 data shows a greater emphasis on taking part with family which rises to seventh rank from 11th in 1988.

²in the 1988 *General Recreation Survey* and the 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey*, respondents were asked about their motivations to take part in their favourite activity

Table 3
Reasons for Taking Part in Recreation, 1988 and 2004
(All respondents)

REASON	% Important or Very Important*			
	% 1988	Rank	% 2004	Rank
For pleasure	98.9	1	87.2	1
For physical health or exercise	91.6	3	82.3	2
To relax	95.4	2	77.8	3
To enjoy nature	88.3	6	76.9	4
To do things with friends	88.7	5	62.7	5
To do something different from work	90.1	4	62.4	6
To be with family	81.6	11	60.2	7
To improve skills or knowledge	86.0	7	58.5	8
For a challenge	82.9	10	56.9	9
To learn new skills and abilities	85.0	8	56.4	10
For excitement	83.7	9	56.2	11
To keep busy	73.1	13	49.7	12
To meet new people	77.0	12	37.7	13
To be creative	63.0	14	33.6	14
Being good at it	60.4	15	29.6	15
To be alone	50.7	17	25.0	16
To help the community	53.0	16	22.8	17
To compete with others	25.9	19	21.5	18
To show others can do it	29.7	18	12.4	19
To be away from family	22.7	20	6.8	20

* on the questionnaire the response categories 'Important' and 'Very Important'

Other minor changes include:

- doing something different from work drops from fourth place in 1988 to sixth in 2004,
- learning new skills and abilities drops to tenth rank from eighth,
- doing something for excitement drops to eleventh in 2004 from ninth.

An examination of the results specific to the 1988 age cohorts of 35 to 44 and 45 to 64 and the

Table 4
Changes in Reasons for Taking Part in Recreation, Between the
35 to 44 Cohort (1988) and the 51 to 64 Cohort (2004)

REASON	% Important or Very Important			
	% 35 to 44 Cohort 1988	Rank	% 51 to 64 Cohort 2004	Rank
For pleasure	99.1	1	94.1	1
To relax	96.2	2	87.0	2
For physical health or exercise	90.9	3	84.7	3
To do something different from work	90.8	4	73.4	5
To enjoy nature	88.1	5	80.8	4
To improve skills or knowledge	86.5	6	64.2	8
To learn new skills and abilities	86.0	7	62.6	9
To do things with friends	85.4	8	65.5	7
To be with family	84.5	9	67.4	6
For a challenge	84.3	10	60.0	10
For excitement	83.6	11	55.3	11
To meet new people	70.4	12	40.8	13
To keep busy	64.1	13	49.6	12
To be creative	61.7	14	38.2	14
Being good at it	60.6	15	28.4	15
To be alone	51.5	16	26.2	16
To help the community	51.4	17	24.6	17
To compete with others	31.4	18	9.5	19
To show others can do it	23.6	19	11.5	18
To be away from family	20.4	20	5.1	20

* on the questionnaire the response categories 'Important' and 'Very Important'.

comparison to corresponding age cohorts for 2004, shows that some changes in the importance of motivational factors are evident. Changes are most evident for the older cohorts.

For the 1988's 35 to 44 cohort, the main change concerns the shift of emphasis affecting to be with family (Table 4). This reason was ranked ninth in 1988 but increased to sixth in 2004 when this cohort had turned 51, reflecting, perhaps, that children have left home by this stage of the life cycle and family-time takes on more meaning. Small changes are also apparent for the desire to improve skills which

Table 5
Changes in Reasons for Taking Part in Recreation, Between the
45 to 64 Cohort (1988) and the 61 to 80 Cohort (2004)

REASON	% Important or Very Important			
	% 45 to 64 Cohort 1988	Rank	% 61 to 80 Cohort 2004	Rank
For pleasure	98.4	1	92.4	1
To relax	96.3	2	81.7	3
To do something different from work	91.6	3	50.8	11
For physical health or exercise	90.4	4	87.0	2
To enjoy nature	90.2	5	74.7	4
To do things with friends	88.7	6	67.4	5
To be with family	84.7	7	64.4	6
To improve skills or knowledge	80.9	8	56.9	8
To learn new skills and abilities	79.4	9	51.9	10
To meet new people	77.5	10	45.5	13
For a challenge	75.3	11	53.8	9
For excitement	74.6	12	46.3	12
To keep busy	73.6	13	57.0	7
To be creative	60.1	14	37.3	14
To help the community	56.1	15	28.3	15
Being good at it	49.9	16	27.9	16
To be alone	45.5	17	18.5	17
To compete with others	30.7	18	13.9	19
To show others can do it	24.9	19	14.0	18
To be away from family	15.7	20	6.4	20

* on the questionnaire the response categories 'Important' and 'Very Important'.

dropped from sixth to eighth, and to learn new skills and abilities which also dropped two ranking places from seventh to ninth.

Once we turn 61 it is clear that certain health and socially-based reasons begin to have a greater influence on motivations (Table 5). In 1988, the 45 to 64 cohort placed more emphasis on doing something different from work (ranked third) but in 2004 when this cohort had turned 60 and reached retirement, this reason had fallen to eleventh. More important were the need for physical health or

exercise and which rose from fourth to second rank, keeping busy (13th to seventh), and taking part for a challenge (11th to ninth). By age 61, then, lifestyles have changed such that time is no longer devoted to work and there is a desire to remain physically and mentally healthy while keeping active.

Conclusions

Comparing respondents from the 1988 *General Recreation Survey* and their corresponding age cohort in the 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey*, reveals that changes to recreation participation do exist. Those who make up the older cohort in 2004 (61 to 80) show few differences in their recreational preferences from their corresponding cohort in 1988. The five highest ranked activities are unchanged while activities requiring physical effort have decreased participation rates.

By contrast, those who are entering their senior years in 2004 and who made up the 35 to 44 cohort in 1988 are maintaining an interest in health and physical fitness. There is evidence from the data to suggest that this group has abandoned activities such as downhill skiing, ice skating or softball, in favour of hiking, jogging and weight training. This group is changing the nature of demand away from relatively passive activities that occupy time and keep older adults busy, to activities that support a healthy lifestyle, something that can be expected to continue as the “baby-boom” generation reaches its senior years.

The reasons for participation remain generally consistent for the younger cohort. They have continued to emphasize the values of pleasure, physical health or exercise and relaxation as they have become older, with the main shift being to keep time available for family activities. For the older cohort, however, the shift in motivations reflects a desire to fill time while maintaining a challenge and keeping physically active, all reasons that are consistent with a lifestyle that no longer includes work.

As we age, we change our interests in recreation. The nature of change reflects the stage of life cycle we have reached. More importantly, however, is the attitudinal changes that are evident in the analysis discussed in this report. The younger cohort appears to have embraced the messages centred on the value of physical exercise and are adopting activities that reflect this goal. As this group continues to age and as they are joined by the generation that follows, greater interest, demand and participation in physically-based activities can be expected to replace the more passive-oriented activities associated with the older generations.

The results presented in this report provide a benchmark against which future research into the recreational preferences and changes among age cohorts can be measured. Further analysis will enable practitioners to identify and meet future needs in their program planning.

Appendix

Top 20 Activities By Cohort

	45 to 64		61 to 80	
	1988		2004	
	%	Rank	%	Rank
Walking for pleasure	85.9	1	89.9	1
Gardening	80.2	2	79.1	2
Doing a craft/hobby	67.0	3	68.7	3
Visiting a museum/art gallery	64.4	4	48.3	5
Attending a sports event as a spectator	60.8	5	61.2	4
Bicycling	53.8	6	31.4	11
Picnicking (in the countryside)	53.3	7	35.6	9
Fishing	49.7	8	25.2	17
Swimming (in pools)	48.0	9	33.4	10
Dancing	45.7	10	30.8	12
Overnight camping	45.5	11	27.5	14
Golf	39.8	12	36.8	8
Attending educational courses	39.6	13	45.6	7
Swimming (e.g., in lakes, rivers, ponds)	29.2	14	13.3	21
Ice skating	28.9	15	12.3	22
Downhill skiing	27.1	16	8.5	28
Motor boating	25.9	17	11.1	25
Day hiking	25.6	18	20.5	19
Playing bingo/casino	25.6	18	21.7	18
Video/computer/electronic games	25.3	20	47.7	6

	35 to 44		51 to 60	
	1988		2004	
	%	Rank	%	Rank
Walking for pleasure	90.2	1	94.5	1
Bicycling	80.9	2	53.1	5
Swimming (in pools)	76.1	3	44.7	10
Gardening	75.8	4	79.1	2
Visiting a museum/art gallery	74.8	5	51.2	6
Doing a craft/hobby	70.4	6	68.7	3
Attending a sports event as a spectator	69.7	7	61.2	4
Ice skating	64.9	8	22.3	22
Picnicking (in the countryside)	60.2	9	43.9	12
Overnight camping	59.2	10	41.9	13
Fishing	53.4	11	26.6	21
Attending educational courses	53.3	12	45.6	8
Swimming (e.g., in lakes, river, ponds)	51.5	13	27.6	20
Video/computer/electronic games	51.3	14	47.7	7
Dancing	49.1	15	30.8	17
Downhill skiing	47.1	16	21.7	23
Taking part in the arts (e.g., drama)	46.9	17	28.0	19
Tobogganing/sledding	43.8	18	15.3	27
Softball/baseball	43.2	19	11.7	32
Golf	42.1	20	44.7	10

**Further
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