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The relationship between commitment and exercise behavior

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Abstract

Objectives: The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between commitment and exercise behavior using the Sport Commitment Model (SCM; *J Sport & Exercise Psychology, 15,* 1) as a guiding conceptual framework.

Design: Cross-sectional survey.

Methods: Participants at two universities (N_1 = 205; 83.4% female; N_2 = 223; 73.1% female) provided demographic information and completed measures of exercise commitment and frequency of exercise behavior.

Results: Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported the presence of 5 determinants (personal investments, social support, satisfaction, social constraints, and invovlement alternatives) and 2 dimensions ('want' and 'have') of commitment. Structural equation modeling analyses supported the predictive utility of the SCM accounting for 31% and 51% of the commitment dimension variance and 12% of the exercise behavior variance respectively. Satisfaction and personal investment predicted both commitment dimensions, whereas alternatives and social constraints predicted 'have to' commitment only, and the 'want to' commitment dimension was the only significant predictor of exercise behavior.

Conclusion: These results render some support for the psychometric properties of the measures used to assess commitment constructs in the exercise domain and provide partial support for the application of the SCM to the study of exercise motivation issues.

Keywords: Exercise adherence; Commitment; Motivation

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Despite the favorable health benefits associated with regular exercise (Blair & Connelly, 1996), the prevalence of sedentary behavior remains high in developed countries (Cameron, Craig, Stephens, & Ready, 2000; Katzmaryzyk, Gledhill, & Shephard, 2000; US Department of Health & Human Services, 1996). Given these participation trends, understanding "why" people exercise is a central focus of motivational research in both health and exercise psychology, and calls for more theoretically driven approaches to clarify the determinants of exercise behavior have been forthcoming (see Biddle, Fox, & Boutcher, 2000 for a review). One construct that holds some appeal for understanding the psychological determinants of exercise behavior is commitment (Corbin, Nielson, Borsdorf, & Laurie, 1987; Martin & Hausenblaus, 1998).

Previous research has defined commitment as a global psychological construct reflecting a person's pledge or obligation towards continued exercise involvement (Corbin, Nielson, Borsdorf & Laurie, 1987; Martin & Hausenblaus, 1998). In addition to being a "binding force" supporting continued exercise behavior, research by Martin and Hausenblaus indicates that commitment is associated with greater self-reported eating disorder symptoms. Collectively, these studies suggest some degree of ambiguity surrounding the functional influence of commitment in the exercise domain. One possible explanation for these divergent findings is the absence of a conceptual model clarifying the relationships between the determinants, dimensions (or faces) of commitment, and the consequences ensuing from exercise commitment. It is conceivable, for example, that the global approaches to understanding exercise commitment used in previous research fail to capture the complexity of exercise commitment, and as such, a more comprehensive and theoretical treatment of the structure and function of commitment to exercise appears justified.

Scanlan and her colleagues (Carpenter, Scanlan, Simons, & Lobel, 1993; Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993a; Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993b; Carpenter & Coleman, 1998; Carpenter & Scanlan, 1998) have described the development of the Sport Commitment Model (SCM), a conceptual framework designed to account for persistence behavior in youth sport settings. The SCM delineates the psychological processes underpinning commitment (defined as the desire and resolve to continue playing) that draws on both Rusbult's (1983) Investment Model and previous participant motivation research in youth sport (Scanlan et al., 1993a). The original version of the SCM proposed by Scanlan posited that overall commitment was determined by greater enjoyment, personal investments, involvement opportunities, social constraints, and lower involvement alternatives. Enjoyment refers to feelings of positive affect derived from the sport (Scanlan et al., 1993a) and replaced Rusbult's (1983) satisfaction construct in the SCM. Involvement opportunities reflect the perceived availability of important opportunities made possible only via continued participation. Conversely, involvement attractiveness is concerned with the array of possible alternatives to participation (Scanlan et al., 1993a). The personal investments component of the SCM represents the allocation of irretrievable resources associated with sport participation, while the social constraints construct refers to expectations or norms that create feelings of obligation to continue participating (Scanlan et al., 1993a).

Scanlan and colleagues (Carpenter et al., 1993; Scanlan et al., 1993a; Scanlan et al., 1993b; Carpenter & Scanlan, 1998) provided some preliminary support for the propositions put forth within the framework of their original SCM. Using structural equation modeling analyses in a large sample of youth sport participants, Carpenter et al. (1993) supported the positive contributions of enjoyment, personal investments, and involvement opportunities to the prediction of sport commitment. Following the original development and validation studies, Carpenter and