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Exercise causality orientations, behavioural regulation for exercise and stage of change for exercise: exploring their relationships

Elaine A. Rose^{a,*}, Gaynor Parfitt^{b,1}, Sian Williams^b

^aSchool of Physical Education, University of Otago, P.O. Box 56, Dunedin, New Zealand ^bSchool of Sport, Health and Exercise Sciences, University of Wales, Bangor, Gwynedd, UK

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Abstract

Objectives: The objectives are to (a) explore the relationship between exercise causality orientations and stages of change and in doing so highlight any motivational changes that accompany movement through the stages, and (b) investigate the relative importance of exercise causality orientations and behavioural regulations in discriminating stage of change.

Methods: One hundred and one female $(M_{\rm age} = 28.85 \pm 11.21)$ and 83 male $(M_{\rm age} = 33.99 \pm 13.86)$ volunteers completed the Stage of Change for Exercise Ladder, the Exercise Causality Orientations Scale (ECOS) and the Behavioural Regulation in Exercise Questionnaire (BREQ).

Results: For both males and females, levels of the autonomy orientation increased across the stages of change while levels of the control orientation remained stable. Taking the ECOS and BREQ in combination, only identified and introjected regulation distinguished stage of change. Less self-determined regulations decreased as exercise participation increased but intrinsic regulation was not increased by longer participation in exercise.

Conclusions: The autonomy orientation and more self-determined extrinsic motivation were related to later stages of change for exercise but the nature of this study precludes the ability to make causal inferences. The BREQ subscales seem to be more important for discriminating stage of change than the ECOS subscales, however, the causal relationship between the development of causality orientations and behavioural regulations is not yet

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^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +64-3-479-8941; fax: +64-3-479-8309.

E-mail address: erose@pooka.otago.ac.nz (E.A. Rose).

¹ Present address: School of Sport and Health Sciences, University of Exeter, UK.

1. Introduction

The topic of motivation provides an avenue to understand behavioural choices and decision-making (Biddle & Mutrie, 2001) and to make judgements about the direction, intensity and persistence of behaviour (Kanfer, 1994). In the current climate, numbers participating in exercise are low and individuals seem to find it difficult to adhere to exercise beyond 6 months. As a consequence, research that expands our knowledge of the motivational processes that are used by individuals at different stages of behaviour change may be paramount to help us understand how the trends of inactivity and drop-out can be reversed. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985a) is regarded as an important theoretical perspective for the study of motivation within exercise psychology and by uniting it with the Transtheoretical model of behaviour change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984) the forces behind behaviour change can be further understood (Mullan & Markland, 1997).

Self-determination theory distinguishes between intrinsic motivation (participation in an activity because of its inherent rewards of interest and enjoyment) and extrinsic motivation (participation in order to gain external rewards or to satisfy an external pressure) and is comprised of three mini-theories: cognitive evaluation theory, organismic integration theory and causality orientations theory. Cognitive evaluation theory details the social factors that promote and undermine the development of intrinsic motivation through their effects on self-determination, perceived competence and relatedness (the three innate needs). Organismic integration theory defines the self-determination continuum and the process by which non-self-determined extrinsic motives can be internalised to become more self-determined. Causality orientations theory describes the individual differences that are present in the interpretation of the characteristics of a specific situation. Using self-determination theory as the theoretical perspective, research has suggested that more extrinsic motives, such as losing weight and increasing fitness, drive the decision to adopt exercise (Ingledew, Markland, & Medley, 1997). However, it is believed that to gain any long-term consistency in exercise behaviour the development of intrinsic motivation and more self-determined motives are necessary (Biddle, 1999; Dishman, 1987; Frederick & Ryan, 1993; Mullan & Markland, 1997; Wankel, 1993).

According to cognitive evaluation theory, every situation or event can be interpreted as being informational, controlling or amotivational and the salience of these aspects (also known as the functional significance) will influence the motivational consequences for the individual. The informational aspect provides the individual with competence information and within a context of self-determination will promote intrinsic motivation. The controlling aspect will undermine self-determination and intrinsic motivation by imparting pressure to behave in a certain manner and to achieve extrinsic rewards. The amotivation aspect will also undermine intrinsic motivation by inducing feelings of incompetence. Importantly, it is not the objective characteristics of the situation that will influence self-determination, perceived competence and ultimately intrinsic motivation it is the individuals' perception of the direction and strength of each of the three aspects that is important.

Causality orientations theory suggests that the way a situation is interpreted will differ from person to person. A specific situation can be interpreted as informational by one person and controlling or amotivational by another. It argues that there are personality-based orientations that predispose individuals to seek out an informational, controlling or impersonal aspect within each situation in order to regulate their behaviour. This interpretation will interact with the actual context and characteristics of the situation leading to the final interpretation. Deci and Ryan (1985b) describe three causality orientations: autonomy, control and impersonal. Underlying the autonomy orientation is the experience

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