



Personality and self-determination of exercise behaviour

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Abstract

There is extensive evidence that personality traits are associated with health-related behaviours, but less evidence regarding the underlying mechanisms. In this study, we examined the relationships between personality and self-determination of exercise behaviour. Users of a sports centre completed personality scales (the NEO Five Factor Inventory supplemented with the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Psychoticism scale) and exercise self-determination scales (Behavioural Regulation in Exercise Questionnaire which measures extrinsic, introjected, identified and intrinsic forms of regulation). Analyses were restricted to 182 individuals in the maintenance stage of exercise participation. Partial correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships between each personality scale and the self-determination scales, controlling for other personality scales, gender and age. Neuroticism was associated with more introjected regulation, extraversion with more identified and intrinsic regulation, openness with less external regulation, conscientiousness with less external regulation and more intrinsic regulation, and psychoticism with more external regulation. Relating these findings to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), it is speculated that extraverted individuals are able to feel self-determined because exercise can satisfy the need for relatedness, conscientious individuals because exercise can satisfy the need for competence. Furthermore, conscientious individuals may have greater wherewithal to advance along the continuum of behavioural regulation.

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1. Introduction

There is extensive evidence that personality traits are associated with health-related behaviours (Wiebe & Smith, 1997) even if the findings are not always consistent (see Vollrath & Torgersen,

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2002). Courneya and colleagues have studied the relationship between the five-factor model of personality and exercise participation, finding participation to be associated with lower neuroticism, higher extraversion, and higher conscientiousness (Courneya, Bobick, & Schinke, 1999; Courneya & Hellsten, 1998; Rhodes, Courneya, & Bobick, 2001; see also Conner & Abraham, 2001; Marks & Lutgendorf, 1999). Various researchers employing an Eysenckian model of personality have found exercise participation to be associated with one or more of lower neuroticism, higher extraversion, and lower psychoticism (e.g., Arai & Hisamichi, 1998; Davis, Elliott, Dionne, & Mitchell, 1991; Davis & Fox, 1993; Kirkcaldy & Furnham, 1991; Potgieter & Venter, 1995; Szabo, 1992; Yeung & Hemsley, 1997b); although Yeung and Hemsley (1997a) found that, among participants referred to an aerobics programme, higher extraversion predicted lower attendance.

Less research has been devoted to the psychological mechanisms by which personality traits affect health-related behaviour (Bermúdez, 1999; Hoyle, 2000). One possible mechanism is motivational. Researchers have examined the associations between personality traits and exercise participation motives, but it is hard to discern a consistent pattern in the findings. Davis, Fox, Brewer, and Ratusny (1995) studied the associations of neuroticism, extraversion, and psychoticism with six exercise motives (weight control, sexual attractiveness, general appearance, fitness/health, mood improvement, and enjoyment). In multiple regression, neuroticism related positively to all motives except fitness/health; extraversion positively to weight control, general appearance, and enjoyment; and psychoticism inversely to fitness/health. Hsiao and Thayer (1998) studied the associations of neuroticism and extraversion with five motives (health-fitness, weight control, general appearance, mood improvement, and socialization). In ANOVAs, those high on neuroticism were higher on mood improvement and lower on health-fitness. Courneya and Hellsten (1998) studied the associations of a five-factor measure of personality with six motives (health, appearance, weight control, social, stress management, and enjoyment). In multiple regression, extraversion and conscientiousness related positively to health; openness to stress management; and extraversion and openness to enjoyment. However, the study of such surface (descriptive) motives does not in itself reveal much about the underlying motivational processes. For this we turn to Deci and Ryan's (1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) self-determination theory.

Self-determination theory is founded on the premise that there are innate psychological needs: for *autonomy* (to feel self-determining in one's actions rather than feeling controlled or obliged to act); for *competence* (to feel competent in dealing with one's environment); and for *relatedness* (to feel that one has satisfying and supportive social relationships). Self-determination theory also recognises a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. When intrinsically motivated, individuals engage in a behaviour for the inherent pleasure and satisfaction that they derive from taking part in the behaviour; individuals will be intrinsically motivated if they are meeting innate psychological needs. When extrinsically motivated, individuals engage in a behaviour in order to attain separable outcomes or external rewards. Participation motives of the kind studied by Davis et al. (1995), Hsiao and Thayer (1998), and Courneya and Hellsten (1998) may differ in their intrinsic versus extrinsic quality, but they cannot be decisively classified as either intrinsic or extrinsic. The extent to which a particular participation motive reflects intrinsic or extrinsic motivation will depend upon its meaning for the individual and could vary across persons, times or situations.

Furthermore, rather than simply contrasting intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, self-determination theory posits a more differentiated view of extrinsic motivation. It proposes that there are

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