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Psychology of Sport and Exercise 8 (2007) 685–703

Psychology

OF SPORT AND EXERCISE

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Self-determination of contextual motivation, inter-context dynamics and adolescents' patterns of sport participation over time

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Received 20 April 2006; received in revised form 14 September 2006; accepted 13 October 2006

Available online 28 November 2006

Abstract

Objectives: Previous studies have shown the heuristic qualities of self-determination theory constructs to predict sport persistence. The purpose of this study was to extend these researches by focusing on the conflicting or instrumental relationship between sport and other life contexts (i.e., school and friendship) to enhance the understanding of this phenomenon.

Design: A correlational longitudinal field design was used, including two data collections over 1 year.

Method: Participants were 446 French high school students (mean age = 13.85). Self-determined motivation toward sport, school and friendship, perceived conflicts versus instrumental relationships between sport and the other contexts, and sport participation during leisure time were assessed at wave 1. One year later, participants completed the same self-report measure of sport practise.

Results: Structural equation modelling revealed that (a) self-determined motivation toward sport, education and friendship was significantly related to the levels of conflict and instrumentality between those contexts and (b) a competing relationship between sport and education was negatively linked to sport participation at Time 2, whereas the other inter context relationships were not.

Conclusion: Findings suggest that other contexts like education can undermine sport investment among adolescents.

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Keywords: Self-determination theory; Motivation; Conflict; Instrumentality; Sport participation

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Introduction

The contribution of regular physical activity to well-being is now well documented. As numerous studies have shown, physical activity has been linked to a plethora of physical, social and psychological outcomes. More particularly, research has shown the existence of a positive link between physical activity and physical self-perception, self-esteem and social acceptance among youth (see [Martinsen & Stephens, 1994](#), for a review). In order to guarantee these benefits, health professionals recommend that teenagers have a level of physical activity equivalent to 30 min per day, most days of the week (e.g., [American College of Sports Medicine, 1990](#)). Sport participation during leisure time therefore represents an essential source of physical activity. However, as large national surveys generally show, a large proportion of young athletes diminish their physical activity participation during adolescence ([Russel, Allen, & Wilson, 1996](#); [Sallis & Patrick, 1996](#); [Wankel & Mummery, 1996](#)). In France, for example, sport participation decreases constantly as age increases, in particular between 11 and 17 years old of age ([French Minister for Youth and Sport, 2001](#)). This rate of decrease slows down during adulthood, but several studies show that sport participation during the adult years is related to the individual's sport experience during childhood or adolescence (e.g., [Perkins, Jacobs, Barber, & Eccles, 2004](#)). There is thus great interest in deepening our knowledge of the causes and contributors to sport dropout among teenagers. Self-determination theory (SDT; e.g., [Deci & Ryan, 2002](#)) represents a heuristic framework to investigate the dropout phenomenon in school ([Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997](#)) or in sport (See [Sarrazin, Boiché, & Pelletier, in press](#), for a review) that can enable us to better understand this phenomenon.

The self-determination continuum of motivation

SDT is a theory which focuses on the nature of motivation as well as its antecedents and outcomes. In opposition with previous quantitative approaches, SDT proposes that individuals can develop different types of motives toward a given behaviour. These motives are assumed to vary in their degree of self-determination, in other words they are more or less personally assumed and fully integrated in the individual's self ([Ryan & Deci, 2002](#)). Ryan and Deci used a theoretical continuum of self-determination to represent the range of motives. From the more self-determined to the more controlled form, this continuum includes intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation is present when a behaviour is done for the pleasure and satisfaction that derives from it, the sources of satisfaction being pleasant sensations, personal achievement or increased knowledge. SDT also posits the existence of four kinds of extrinsic motivation, when the behaviour is no longer adopted for itself, but seen as a means to an end. Among these four kinds of extrinsic motivation, external regulation (i.e., doing a behaviour because of environmental constraints), and introjected regulation (i.e., internal pressure to perform the behaviour because of a link with perceived self worth) are non-self-determined, whereas identified regulation (i.e., the behaviour is chosen because it is perceived as personally important and useful) and integrated regulation (i.e., the behaviour is perceived as important and coherent with other aspects of the self) are self-determined. Finally, amotivation reflects an absence of regulation toward the behaviour, among individuals who see no relationship between their behaviour and outcomes.

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