

# The perceived belonging in sport scale: Examining validity

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** The purpose of this research was to examine the construct validity, specifically factorial validity, convergent, and discriminant validity of the perceived belonging in sport scale (PBS) (Allen, J.B. (2003). Social motivation in youth sport. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 25(4), 551–567.).

**Design:** Opportunities to develop and maintain connections with others are common in sport and frequently sought out by participants. However, little is known about the role of perceptions of these social connections (belonging) in sport. This is, in part, due to the lack of adequate measurement tools. Therefore, this research used confirmatory factor analysis to examine the psychometric properties of the PBS.

**Methods:** The participants were tertiary-level students ( $N=259$ ) who completed a questionnaire which included the perceived belonging in sport scale (PBS) and measures of satisfaction with social outcomes, social cohesion, intrinsic, extrinsic and amotivation. Confirmatory factor analysis, Pearson's correlations, and Cronbach's alphas were employed to examine scale validity and reliability.

**Results:** Confirmatory factor analyses provided evidence to support the construct validity, including gender invariance, of a modified version of the PBS. Evidence of convergent and discriminant validity was demonstrated through correlations with variables that were consistent with theoretical predictions.

**Conclusions:** The PBS adequately reflects the central features of belonging in sport. The implications of the findings and the measure for future research are discussed.

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**Keywords:** Social motivation; Perceived belonging; Relatedness; Measurement

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Sport abounds with opportunities for social interaction with teammates, fellow competitors, coaches, officials and spectators. For many participants this provides social meaning to their sport involvement. Central to understanding this social meaning is the fundamental psychological need for social connections (Allen, 2003). That is, individuals have a need for belongingness and seek out social

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contexts, such as sport, in which to satisfy this need (Allen, 2003; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In fact, Chelladurai & Riemer (1997) suggested that because of the demands of the athletic environment athletes may forego other opportunities for social interaction to focus on their pursuit of excellence and sport 'may be the only means of meeting an individual's social needs' (p. 144). However, relatively little is known about belonging in sport. This is in part due to the lack of adequate measurement tools. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to examine the validity of a new measure of perceived belonging in sport.

The desire for social bonds and connections with others has a long history in psychological research. It has been referred to as the need for affection between people (Murray, 1938), the need for positive regard from others (Rogers, 1951), belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Goodenow, 1993a; Maslow, 1954), affiliation motivation (McClelland, 1987), and the need for relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 1993; Vallerand, 1997). It has also been defined in a number of ways. For example, Baumeister & Leary (1995) suggested that the need to belong is characterised by a need for regular contact and the perception that the interpersonal relationship has stability, affective concern, and is ongoing. Deci & Ryan (1991) suggested that the need for relatedness 'encompasses a person's striving to relate to and care for others, to feel that those others are relating authentically to one's self, and to feel a satisfying and coherent involvement with the social world more generally' (p. 243). Vallerand (1997) suggested that the need for relatedness 'involves feeling connected (or feeling that one belongs in a social milieu)' (p. 300). Goodenow (1993a) proposed that a sense of belonging at school reflects 'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment' (p. 80). Central to each of these definitions of belonging are a sense of connection and security. Therefore, belonging was viewed as a sense of psychological connection with others in the sport setting and characterized by a sense of caring and security where individuals feel that they are included and respected for who they are.

The concept of belonging has potential to contribute to our understanding of participants' thoughts, feelings, and actions in the sport context. In research in sport and education perceived belonging has been viewed as a psychological mediator between situation variables and consequences such as affect, motivation, and behaviour (e.g. Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996; Sarrazin, Vallerand, Guillet, Pelletier, & Cury, 2002). Because belonging is viewed as a mediator it would be expected to be an antecedent to outcomes of sport participation such as satisfaction with social outcomes and motivation. However, it would also be expected to be a consequence of contextual factors such as cohesion. For example, Vallerand (1997) proposed that environmental factors that 'facilitate feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness [emphasis added] will lead individuals to freely engage in the activities in which these perceptions were experienced because such activities allow individuals to satisfy their needs' (p. 300). That is, individuals who feel that an activity is satisfying these basic psychological needs are more likely to participate for self-determined reasons. In support of the mediating role of perceived belonging Sarrazin et al. (2002) found that the influence of the coaching climate on handballers' self-determined motivation was mediated by athletes' perception of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Recently, Hollembeak & Amorose (2005) also demonstrated support for the mediational role of perceived belonging. In this study, coaching behaviours predicted perceptions of belonging which in turn predicted intrinsic motivation. Further in education, Roeser et al. (1996) found that the relationship between the nature

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