Chapter 9: Physical Activity Groups

The Psychology of Physical Activity
Group Dynamics And Physical Activity

The important group dynamics in physical activity promotion are:

- Group Cohesion
- Leadership (i.e., the qualities of the exercise leader)
- Group structure (i.e., size of exercise class)
Exercise Class Cohesion

A dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in pursuit of its instrumental objectives (e.g., weight loss, reduction of CV risk) and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs.
INDIVIDUAL

Attractions to the group - Task

Attractions to the group - Social

TASK

Group Integration - Task

SOCIAL

Group Integration - Social

GROUP

Group Cohesion
The Measurement of Cohesion

The Measurement of Cohesion in Physical Activity Classes

- The Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ)
- Physical Activity Group Environment Questionnaire (PAGEQ)
Cohesion and Adherence Behavior

Carron, Widmeyer, and Brawley (1988)

- First to show that physical activity program adherers and dropouts differed in their perceptions of cohesion
- Adherers had higher perceptions of Attraction to the group-Task (e.g., I like the amount of physical activity in this class) and Attraction to the Group-Social (e.g., I enjoy my social interaction with other class members)
Cohesion and Adherence Behavior

Spink and Carron (1992)

- Females participating in exercise classes
- 4 weeks of attendance and punctuality data were collected during Weeks 8 to 12 of a 13-week program
- GEQ at Week 13
- Attraction to the group-task and Attraction to the Group-Socially (e.g., less the exercise was attractive and less the group got along), were negatively associated with absenteeism
- Attractive to the group-task accounted for the greatest difference between those participants who were never late and those who were late four or more times.
Spink and Carron conducted two prospective studies to examine the predictive ability of group cohesion for exercise adherence

- Study 1 -- GEQ in Week 3 of a 13-week program
  - University fitness class
- Attendance during the final 4 weeks
- Dropouts from the 13-week program had possessed lower perceptions of attraction to the group-task (e.g., they did not like the exercise mode, intensity, or duration) than the adherers
Cohesion and Adherence Behavior

Spink and Carron Study 2—a private fitness facility rather than in a university setting

- GEQ --3rd week of a 13-week program
- Attendance again was monitored for the final four weeks of the program
- Dropouts had lower perceptions Attraction of the group-social (e.g., none of my friends are in the class) and Group integration-social (e.g., we do not spend time socializing together).
Aging has a deleterious effect

PA is positively associated with physical and psychological maintenance and improvements for older adults

If a group and/or the presence of high cohesion are found to be beneficial for older adults, important implications are present for program planning.
Cohesion and Adherence Behavior

Estabrooks and Carron (1999) examined the relationship between class cohesion and exercise adherence in older adults.

- Study 1, 14 exercise classes for older adults completed the GEQ during the first month of a new exercise term.
- Attendance at the program was then documented for 1, 6, and 12 months.
- Attraction of the group-socially, group integration-socially, and group integration-task at one-month interval.
- Group integration of the task (e.g., members are satisfied with how much activity we are getting in the class) was significantly related to class attendance following a 6- and 12-month interval.
Given the consistent findings of these studies and others it has been concluded that the relationship between group cohesion and exercise adherence exist.
Group Cohesion And Group Processes

Hill and Estabrooks (2000) studied the relationship between group cohesion and group interaction:

- Competitiveness was positively associated with the attractiveness of group-task and group integration-task.
- Communication had the strongest positive relationship attraction to the group-social.
- Competition, cooperation, and communication were positively related to group integration-social.
Why in Cohesion Important?

Perceptions of control positively related to task (Estabrooks & Carron, 1999).

Self-efficacy to schedule physical activity classes into one’s regular routine positively related to task & group task (Estabrooks & Carron, 2000).

Task and social characteristics were positively related to attitude (Estabrooks & Carron, 1999).
True or False

Q19: The higher the cohesiveness of the exercise class, the higher the perceived effects of exercising (e.g. they perceived that they are getting a better workout) are in the class members.
Class Cohesion

- High group cohesion less dropout
- Team building is effective in adults exercisers as mean to improve attendance.
- Friendly competition is key for adults participation.
- More cohesive the exercise class, the higher the perceived effects of exercising are in the class members.
Leadership And Physical Activity

Researchers and program planners also have been interested in the role that exercise leaders play in participants' attitudes toward and adherence in PA programs.

Oldridge (1977) concluded that the exercise leader is "the pivot on which the success or failure of a program will depend."
Leadership And Physical Activity

Franklin (1988) compiled a list of over 30 variables that influence dropout behaviour from physical activity programs, he identified the exercise leader as "the single most important variable affecting exercise compliance".

Carron, Hausenblas, and Mack (1996) Meta-analysis

- A small effect for the influence that class leaders have on adherence behavior.
Leadership And Physical Activity

Susan Peterson (1993) identified 24 qualities that can be reduced to three general categories—behavioral, communicative and motivational.

- **Behavioral**—the ability to instruct with the proper technical execution, stay focused, and be energetic.
- **Communicative**—Class leaders should possess the ability to express themselves clearly and listen to class members.
- **Motivational**—leaders should have the ability to motivate both the participants and themselves, be decisive, and use group processes.
Leadership And Physical Activity

McAuley and Jacobson (1991)
- Following an 8-week program, participants were asked how they felt their instructor had influenced their adherence to the program.
- Participant perceptions of leader influence did have a small positive association with in-class adherence.

Nancy Gyurcsik and her associates (1998)
- Assessed participants’ confidence in their activity leader’s abilities.
- Monitored attendance for 12 weeks.
- A small, but significant, relationship was found with attendance.
Fox and her collaborators (2000) investigated the impact of leadership style and group dynamics on intention to return to a structured fitness class.

- Manipulated leadership style (i.e., an enriched versus a bland leadership style)
- Manipulated the group environment (i.e., an enriched versus a bland class environment) were systematically varied.
Leadership And Physical Activity

 música The enriched group environment was manipulated with the use of trained confederates.

 música Intention to return to a similar class and enjoyment of the session was assessed.

 música Enriched leadership & group environment = Increased enjoyment.

 música Those in the enriched group environments intended to return to a similar exercise session, regardless of the style of the leader.
Leadership And Physical Activity

Earlier in this section, it was noted that the physical activity class leader has been identified as possibly the most important factor in participant adherence.

However, research has not supported this contention.

Only a small to moderate effect (ES = .31) is present for class leaders and adherence (Carron et al., 1996).
True or False

Q20: Larger the class size, the higher members of the class reported that they expended more effort in working out.
In a study focusing on adherence behavior (Carron et al., 1990, Study 1),

Examined archival data from 47 university physical activity classes

Size ranged from 5-46 members

Classes were classified as:
- small classes (5 to 17 members)
- medium classes (18-26)
- moderately large classes (37-31)
- large classes (32-46)
Small and large classes had the highest retention rates (i.e., fewest dropouts) and superior attendance (i.e., percentage of classes attended by adherers)
Group Size And Individual Perceptions

Research outside of the physical activity sciences shows that increasing group size generally has negative effects on group member perceptions (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998).

Increasing group size:
- more resources
- chances of meeting attractive and interesting others increases

However, across most types of groups generally see little positive benefit in increases in group size.
Group Size And Individual Perceptions

What about physical activity classes? Is the issue of group size relevant?

Carron and his associates (1990) assessed the relationship between group size and...
- Member perceptions their leader
- Crowding
- Opportunities for interaction
- Satisfaction with the group
As physical activity classes became larger:

- participant perceptions of the instructor decreased in a linear fashion
- participants in small and moderate sized classes perceived that more opportunities were available for social interaction than did those in large classes
- Participants’ satisfaction decreased in a linear fashion as class size increased from small to large
Leadership

• Leaders need to:
  – Have the ability to instruct technical information, stay focused, and be energetic.
  – Express themselves clearly & listen to client
  – Motivate the client
  – Provide team building activities

• Clients enjoy & have positive exercise effects where the leader is enriching
Class Size

- Small (5-17) and large (32-46) classes have the highest retention rate and superior attendance.
- Larger the class the higher reported RPE in clients.
- As groups size increases, leadership perception of instructor decreases.
- As group size increases, clients satisfaction increases.
END