

The Role of Relatedness in Physical Activity Motivation, Behaviour, and Affective Experiences:  
A Self-Determination Theory Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991) suggests that when participants' three psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met in the physical activity context, they will experience more self-determined types of motivation and more positive cognitive, affective, and behavioural outcomes. Limited research has examined the mediational role of self-determined motivation in this process among adult physical activity participants, and very few studies have included assessments of relatedness in this work (Frederick-Recascino, 2002). This project tested the hypotheses that relatedness would be a significant predictor of self-determined motivation and that self-determined motivation would mediate the relationship between psychological need fulfillment and affective and behavioural outcomes among adult dragon boat paddlers. Participants included 558 adult dragon boaters between the ages of 19-83 who volunteered to complete a questionnaire on motivational aspects of dragon boating. Consistent with the first hypothesis, autonomy, competence, and relatedness all significantly predicted self-determined motivation. Contrary to the second hypothesis, self-determined motivation only partially mediated the relationship between psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and positive and negative affect. These findings demonstrate the importance of relatedness in adult activity motivation, and support further research efforts that include assessments of relatedness and further knowledge on the relatedness construct. This work also questions the mediational role of self-determined motivation in the relationship between need fulfillment and outcomes. Future research should fully test mediation using the three-step process advocated in the literature (Holmbeck, 1997) to replicate these findings in other samples and further understanding of this motivational process.

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