Motivating People to Be Physically Active

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Motivating People to Be Physically Active addresses a topic of critical importance in modern society—assisting diverse segments of the population to increase their ongoing levels of physical activity to establish optimal levels of health. As emphasized by The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001), increasing physical activity is a topic of crucial importance in developed nations. An overall goal of the authors is to facilitate the reader’s work in helping people to be physically active. Exercise behavior is an integral part of health promotion and disease prevention.

This practical handbook is written for exercise and health professionals who direct physical activity programs. The book also is of value to researchers, especially for those who have little background in the stage theory of motivation. Researchers who are interested in exploring exercise factors related to stage theory will find practical introductory information.

Motivating People to Be Physically Active is a compact, easy-to-read book and is almost exclusively based on the stage model of exercise promotion. This focus is a simultaneous strength and a weakness. The single model is a strength because it enables the authors to provide a focused examination of the multiple roles of the stages model in exercise settings. It is a weakness, however, because uninformed readers will need to read additional books such as McElroy’s (2002) Resistance to Exercise: A Social Analysis of Inactivity and Kimiecik’s (2002) The Intrinsic Exerciser: Discovering the Joy of Exercise. Additional sources such as these are needed to provide insights into the complex exercise dilemma of so many benefits, so few participants.

The book easily fulfills its stated purpose of translating stage theory and concepts from behavioral science research into a handbook that is useful for personal trainers, employees at health clubs, and other health/exercise professionals. The 11 chapters range in length between 6 and 12 pages of text. The chapters are brief and yet are complete enough to introduce readers to basic concepts and principles and to provide useful questionnaires for promoting physical activity. The later chapters also provide guidelines for applying the stages model of motivational readiness in a multitude of exercise settings.

As emphasized throughout Motivating People, the stages model of motivational readiness for change includes five well-established stages through which participants in physical activity proceed. The nonsequential stages that the authors describe are the (a) “inactive and not thinking about becoming physically active”
stage, (b) “physically inactive and thinking about becoming active” stage, (c) “doing some physical activity” stage, (d) “doing enough physical activity” stage, and (e) “making physical activity a habit” stage. A major premise is that by matching specific types of physical activity interventions to the participant’s stage of exercise participation maximizes program success. The handbook is conveniently organized into the two parts: (I) theoretical background and tools for measuring motivational readiness and (II) applications.

Part I of the book includes five chapters that provide important theoretical background for measuring stages of motivational readiness for physical activity. It also includes a chapter that focuses on measuring physical activity mediators. All chapters conclude with a few references for readers who are interested in locating additional information about related studies highlighted in the chapters.

Of note is chapter 5, an outstanding compilation of exercise motivation questionnaires. In my opinion, this collection makes Marcus and Forsyth’s book worth its weight in gold! The copies of measures from diverse sources and associated scoring instructions presented in this chapter are useful for both exercise practitioners and for researchers. Questionnaires include Processes of Change, Confidence (Self-Efficacy), Decisional Balance, Social Support for Physical Activity Scale, Outcome Expectations for Exercise, and Physical Activity Enjoyment Scale.

In part II, Marcus and Forsyth provide practical tips and examples for employing the stages of motivational readiness for change model in diverse situations and populations. Subsequent chapters help readers explore the usefulness of the stages model in specific situations. Most chapters include exercises and worksheets that can be adapted for use in exercise programs.

Motivating People To Be Physically Active is a practical, how-to book. Marcus and Forsyth provide readers with a wealth of information as they share their research-based, applied approaches for developing and programming successful exercise programs. The exercise program suggestions are specifically targeted to broad and diverse segments of the population who are in specific stages of exercise motivation.

Busy exercise professionals can read the chapters in any sequence for immediate application of the material to a specific subpopulation. The advantage of reading the chapters in any sequence also is a disadvantage. When reading the book from cover to cover, the presentation of concepts and the stages model becomes repetitious. Perhaps to facilitate nonsequential reading of chapters, the chapters do not noticeably build on one another.

Motivating People will be a useful addition to your personal exercise psychology library — regardless of whether you are an exercise professional, a researcher unfamiliar with stage theory of exercise motivation, or in search of some basic measures of exercise motivation. I would be remiss if I did not mention that this applied handbook would be very useful as an auxiliary text in exercise psychology courses, especially if they employ one of the newly published comprehensive texts in exercise psychology.

In summary, if you are interested in encouraging more people to reap the health benefits of exercise, I think that you will enjoy and benefit from reading Motivating People to Be Physically Active. The combination of solid research-based information on stage theory and the authors’ applied experience separates this book from other exercise motivation texts.