Commentary to Kimiecik

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Kimiecik (1992), in his article "Predicting Vigorous Physical Activity of Corporate Employees: Comparing the Theories of Reasoned Action and Planned Behavior," cautioned against putting "too much blind faith into the results" (p. 203) of investigations that either compare theories or pit theories against each other. While "blind faith" is inappropriate in scientific study, Kimiecik’s recommendation is misleading, and he supports his recommendation with questionable interpretations of his own results as well as incorrect interpretations of the results and conclusions of past investigations. Because studies that test contrasting theoretical perspectives and hypotheses are needed to advance the sport and exercise psychology literature, this comment will respond to Kimiecik (1992) and demonstrate that (a) Kimiecik’s results do not dramatically differ from prior investigations, (b) Kimiecik’s results do not negate investigations that compared theoretical perspectives, and (c) Kimiecik’s recommendation for the integration of theoretical approaches can only occur through the comparison of contrasting theories and hypotheses.

Kimiecik (1992) contributed to the literature by documenting that behavioral intentions and behavioral control predicted the physical activity of corporate employees. Based on this finding, he concluded that "the theory of planned behavior may be useful for examining the motivational aspects of exercise behavior in future research" (p. 201). Kimiecik went beyond these conclusions and compared his study to past investigations:

Dzewaltowski (1989) and Dzewaltowski et al. (1990) concluded that intentions and perceived control are poor predictors of exercise behavior and that it may be "more advantageous and more parsimonious to adopt the social cognitive mechanisms for future study" (Dzewaltowski, 1989, p. 262).

The results of the present investigation relating to the predictive capabilities of planned behavior indicate that those conclusions, based on only two studies, may be premature. (p. 202)

But in the two cited studies, Dzewaltowski found similar results to Kimiecik (1992) in that behavioral intention predicted physical activity (Dzewaltowski, 1989; Dzewaltowski, et al., 1990). Dzewaltowski did not study the theory of

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planned behavior (more specifically, perceived behavioral control) in the 1989 study. Dzewaltowski and colleagues’ 1990 results differed from Kimiecik’s results only in that perceived behavioral control did not contribute to behavioral intention as a predictor of physical activity. Therefore, Dzewaltowski and colleagues’ results did not dramatically differ from those of Kimiecik (1992).

If Kimiecik’s findings and Dzewaltowski and colleagues’ findings were similar, what led these investigators to different conclusions? Kimiecik’s recommendations were based on a test of the theories of reasoned action and planned behavior. Dzewaltowski and colleagues’ recommendations were based on a comparison of the theories of reasoned action and planned behavior to social cognitive theory.

Kimiecik tested the predictive effectiveness of theories of reasoned action and planned behavior and found stronger relationships between behavioral intention, perceived control, and physical activity than did Dzewaltowski and colleagues’ studies (Dzewaltowski, 1989; Dzewaltowski et al., 1990). Kimiecik contended that the strong relations were due to methodological improvements including (a) a greater range and variability in the intention and behavioral control constructs than was found in past research, and (b) a greater correspondence between the construct and behavior measures than was found in past research. Kimiecik concluded that “the results of the present investigation suggest that in the exercise setting, more conceptual research needs to be conducted before theories are labeled ineffective and cast aside” (p. 202).

Kimiecik is correct in noting that Dzewaltowski and colleagues were concerned that the theories of reasoned action and planned behavior did not account for a large amount of variance. But Dzewaltowski and colleagues did not conclude that the theories of reasoned action and planned behavior could not predict physical activity, nor did they label the theories as ineffective. In 1989 Dzewaltowski stated, “The present study supported the predictions of the theory of reasoned action” (p. 263). Also, in 1990 Dzewaltowski and colleagues discussed why a nonsignificant relationship between perceived control and behavior could provide support for the theory of planned behavior.

Dzewaltowski and colleagues’ conclusion that social cognitive theory was a superior predictor was based on a comparison of the predictive effectiveness of the theory of reasoned action with social cognitive theory in 1989 and the theory of planned behavior with social cognitive theory in 1990. In both studies, they reported that self-efficacy was a better predictor of physical activity than was behavioral intention. In the 1990 study they reported that self-efficacy was also a better predictor of physical activity than was perceived behavioral control. Dzewaltowski and colleagues summarized these results in 1990, stating the following:

This study demonstrated that self-efficacy was clearly the best predictor of physical activity participation. Moreover, this study and past investigations that have investigated the intention construct have found it of limited predictive usefulness when compared to efficacy in a physical activity domain (e.g., Dzewaltowski, 1989). (p. 402)

Kimiecik contends that Dzewaltowski and colleagues’ recommendation was premature, but Kimiecik does not have evidence that self-efficacy would