

# THE ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY OF SPORT

Key issues and practical applications

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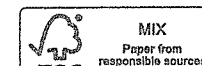
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## COMMITMENT IN SPORT AND EXERCISE

Implications for individual, group, and organizational functioning

*Ben Jackson, Daniel F. Gucciardi, Ken Hodge, and James A. Dimmock*

Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.

Vince Lombardi, American Football coach, NFL Hall of Fame Member  
(Lombardi, 2003, p. 105)

### Introduction

Whether listening to athletes explaining their achievements, employees describing their reasons for staying with an organization, or people discussing the longevity of their romantic relationship, we commonly hear individuals talk of their “commitment” to the activity, entity, or person in question. Due in part to the frequency with which we encounter this concept in daily life, sustained empirical attention has been directed toward understanding the nature, origins, and implications of “commitment”. Indeed, within social (see Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Johnson, 1991; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998), organizational (see Meyer, 2009; Meyer & Maltin, 2010), educational (see Jenkins, 1995), and athletic (see Weiss & Amorose, 2008) contexts, individuals’ persistence, well-being, and performance have all been examined through a “commitment” lens. In this chapter, we review the way in which commitment has traditionally been operationalized in sport and exercise, before outlining how our knowledge of commitment might be informed and advanced by drawing from established frameworks within organizational and social psychology.

Prior to examining the commitment literature in sport and exercise, though, it is important to provide a working definition of the construct, which we use as

a scaffold throughout the material that follows. This task is not a straightforward one, given that scholars are yet to arrive at any single and universally-endorsed definition of the construct (for different perspectives, see Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Solinger, van Olffen, & Roe, 2008). Most conceptualizations of commitment, however, emphasize that it represents a "force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets" (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p. 301). That is, commitment refers to a *psychological* desire, or drive, that helps direct individuals' behavior. Importantly, central to most definitions is the notion that individuals direct their "commitment" toward one or more entities or foci (for a detailed discussion, see Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). In sport, for instance, the entity or focus might take the form of (an athlete's commitment to) a playing partner, a coach, a team, a subgroup within one's team, an organization, and/or a sport itself. Similarly, in relation to exercise, a relevant entity or focus might include one's exercise partner or group, a delivery organization (e.g., a fitness company), an instructor, and/or an exercise modality. In the following section, we chart the development of commitment research in sport and exercise; our aim is to provide a broad overview of the way in which commitment has been (and is) typically studied within sport and exercise contexts.

### Commitment in sport and exercise: an overview

Guided by the extensive literature that had developed outside of sport and exercise (e.g., Becker, 1960; Kelley, 1983; Rusbult, 1980), a focus on commitment in athletic settings emerged during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Initially, commitment was considered largely as an explanatory mechanism for understanding athletic burnout and attrition (see Gould & Petlichkoff, 1988; Smith, 1986). Schmidt and Stein (1991), however, provided the impetus for concentrated research in this area by presenting a framework in which they positioned commitment as the focal construct. In particular, having articulated a range of antecedent factors (e.g., enjoyment, perceived benefits, perceived costs, available alternatives), these authors posited that individuals might experience different forms of commitment based on the relative profile of those antecedents. Schmidt and Stein contended that athletes may experience a relatively adaptive form of "enjoyment-based" commitment under a given set of antecedent conditions (e.g., high enjoyment and perceived benefits, allied with low perceived costs regarding one's sport involvement), but alternatively, might experience a less desirable form of commitment when antecedent conditions encouraged feelings of entrapment (e.g., low enjoyment and benefits alongside high perceived costs and few alternatives). Although Schmidt and Stein did not test these proposals, Scanlan and her colleagues built on their work, and, in 1993, presented a series of studies in the *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology* (Carpenter, Scanlan, Simons, & Lobel, 1993; Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993; Scanlan, Simons, Carpenter, Schmidt, & Keeler, 1993), in which they articulated, operationalized, and demonstrated empirical

support for a formalized model of sport commitment. In doing so, Scanlan and colleagues outlined that commitment represented a psychological desire that may determine one's persistence in an activity, and forwarded a model of sport commitment that would become the platform for much of the research that was to emerge in this area over the ensuing 20 years.

Scanlan and colleagues (Scanlan, Carpenter, et al., 1993) defined sport commitment as "the desire and resolve to continue participation in a sport over time" (p. 18). Guided by the assertion that strong feelings of sport commitment would contribute to behavioral perseverance (i.e., retention to one's sport), these authors drew from theory (e.g., Rusbult, 1980) and articulated that commitment was likely to be strengthened in response to a number of antecedent factors, namely when:

- *Enjoyment* levels were high (i.e., athletes enjoy playing their sport).
- *Involvement opportunities* were high (i.e., athletes anticipate or accrue benefits from their sport involvement, including friendships, skill, mastery, fitness, etc.). Note: this antecedent has also latterly been referred to as "valuable opportunities".
- *Personal investments* (such as time, effort, and money) in one's sport were high.
- *Social constraints* were high (i.e., expectations or norms regarding significant others that engender feelings of obligation to continue one's involvement).
- *Involvement alternatives* were low (i.e., attractive alternatives that compete with one's sport participation). Note: this antecedent has also latterly been referred to as "other priorities".
- *Social support* was high (i.e., feeling supported and encouraged to continue one's sport participation by significant others), and athletes' *desire to excel* – defined using personal, task, or normative criteria – was high. Note: these antecedent themes were added to the sport commitment model following subsequent work conducted after the original model was presented (see Scanlan, Russell, Beals, & Scanlan, 2003; Scanlan, Russell, Magyar, & Scanlan, 2009; Scanlan, Russell, Scanlan, Klunchoo, & Chow, 2013; Scanlan, Russell, Wilson, & Scanlan, 2003).

In the years since the development of the model, there has been a consistent focus in the literature on testing these proposed antecedents (for an overview, see Weiss & Amorose, 2008). With the exception of somewhat equivocal findings regarding the role of the social constraints construct (for coverage, see Scanlan et al., 2013), there appears to be (at least some) empirical support for each of the variables proposed to predict sport commitment (see Weiss & Amorose, 2008). The evidence that enjoyment acts as a support for commitment is particularly compelling (e.g., Carpenter & Coleman, 1998). Indeed, some authors have even demonstrated that the effects of the other predictor variables on commitment might occur through (i.e., be mediated by) enjoyment (e.g., Weiss, Kimmel, & Smith, 2001; Weiss & Weiss, 2006), although it is important to note that this

perspective is not unanimously endorsed (see Scanlan et al., 2009). Despite most attention being directed toward the determinants of commitment, the implications of this construct with respect to behavioral persistence (e.g., continued involvement, training frequency) have also been documented using both qualitative (e.g., Scanlan, Russell, et al., 2003b) and quantitative (e.g., Casper, Gray, & Stellino, 2007; Santi, Bruton, Pietrantonio, & Mellalieu, 2014; Vallerand & Young, 2014; Weiss & Weiss, 2006) approaches. Researchers in this area have also made conceptual advancements by considering how age and competitive level might moderate the effects of theorized determinants (e.g., Casper & Andrew, 2008; Weiss, 2014; Weiss & Weiss, 2007), as well as offering contextual diversity by focusing on athletic populations with varied geographical (e.g., Choosakul, Vongjaturapat, Li, & Harmer, 2009), developmental (e.g., Young & Medic, 2011), and skill-level (e.g., Scanlan et al., 2009) backgrounds.

Although the literature reviewed above is not exhaustive, it nonetheless demonstrates the continued effort that investigators have exerted in studying commitment over the last three decades. Nevertheless, there are important ways in which we might build upon our understanding of how commitment operates in sport and exercise settings. First, although Scanlan and colleagues (Scanlan, Carpenter, et al., 1993) asserted that commitment might be examined at different "levels of analysis" (i.e., in relation to different focal entities or actions), researchers in sport and exercise have yet to fully explore this notion. That is not to say that no attention has been directed toward varied entities or targets. For instance, limited work has been conducted with the aim of examining coach commitment and burnout (Raedeke, 2004; Raedeke, Granzyk, & Warren, 2000), exploring athletes' commitment to their sport team (e.g., Scanlan et al., 2009), and investigating relations between exercise commitment and exercise participation (Wilson et al., 2004). However, the majority of published commitment research has considered *athletes' commitment to their sport*, at the expense of the many other potential "targets" toward which athletes might direct their commitment. One way in which we might begin to understand more about the development and implications of commitment, therefore, is to study athlete commitment as it applies to a broader array of targets/foci (e.g., commitment to one's playing partner, coach, team, organization). Moreover, although the focus on athlete commitment is understandable given the importance of retention and persistence, there remains much to discover regarding the role of commitment among the various non-athlete cohorts that exist in sport and exercise (e.g., coaches/managers, administrators, exercise class attendees, performance directors). Later in this chapter, we provide a range of suggestions for future research that are rooted in these considerations.

Second, despite sport and exercise psychologists acknowledging for some time that commitment may take different forms (see Scanlan, Carpenter, et al., 1993; Schmidt & Stein, 1991), a multidimensional approach to the study of commitment is yet to become fully established in sport and exercise research. Raedeke (1997) demonstrated that individuals might be committed to their

sport for different reasons, and a number of other sport- (e.g., Santi et al., 2014; Scanlan, Chow, Sousa, Scanlan, & Knifsend, 2016; Scanlan et al., 2013; Weiss & Weiss, 2006; Young & Medic, 2011) and exercise-based (Wilson et al., 2004) investigations have provided support for the notion that individuals might experience qualitatively different types of commitment. Despite these findings, much of the commitment work that exists in the sport and exercise literature has treated commitment as a *unidimensional* construct. In the material that follows, we: (a) describe multidimensional commitment frameworks that exist in organizational and social contexts; (b) identify the limited number of sport- and exercise-related studies that have utilized these (and other multidimensional) frameworks; and (c) consider the ways in which these frameworks might be used to advance our understanding of commitment and associated outcomes (e.g., retention, participation) in sport and exercise.

### Multidimensional commitment perspectives

In anything we do, any endeavor, it's not what you do, it's why you do it.  
Howard Schultz, Starbucks Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
(Schultz & Yang, 1997, p. 18)

Social and organizational psychologists have long recognized that commitment is best understood (and measured) as a multidimensional construct (see Becker, 1960; Johnson, 1973). Although a number of different multidimensional models have been developed, there is some degree of commonality across prominent social (see Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999) and organizational (see Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002) frameworks in terms of the types of commitment that are theorized to exist. In particular, a three-component view of commitment is relatively well-entrenched within close relationship (Johnson, 1991) and workplace (Meyer & Allen, 1991) settings, and this conceptualization may be of value for the study of commitment to one's relationships, groups, teams, and organizations in sport and exercise. According to these frameworks, individuals may be committed to staying in/with a relationship, team, group, or organization due to their identification with, and emotional attachment to, that target. This dimension is often referred to as *affective* commitment in the organizational literature, and *personal* commitment in the relational literature (example measurement item, "this organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me"). A second commitment type reflects the notion that individuals may desire to remain in/with their relationship, team, group, or organization due to a sense of obligation, or moral attachment, to that target; this dimension has been termed *normative* (or *moral*) commitment (example measurement item, "I owe a great deal to my organization"). Finally, individuals might continue their involvement in/with their relationship, team, group, or organization as a result of feeling "locked in" due to the perceived costs associated with withdrawal and a lack of available alternatives; this

dimension has been termed *continuance* (or *structural*) commitment (example measurement item, "I feel that I have too few other options to consider leaving this organization"). Throughout the remainder of this chapter we refer to these dimensions according to the terms used in the organizational literature, as it is these terms that have been utilized in the multidimensional commitment research that has recently begun to emerge in sport.

Meyer and colleagues (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993) distinguished between the three factors by noting that individuals "with a strong affective commitment remain... because they *want* to, those with a strong continuance commitment remain because they *need* to, and those with a strong normative commitment remain because they feel they *ought* to" (p. 539, emphasis added). In outlining their three-component framework (see Figure 2.1), they also asserted that affective, normative, and continuance commitment are not mutually exclusive (Meyer & Allen, 1991), and that an individual can experience all three dimensions to varying degrees at any point in time. In sport, for instance, an athlete could report a strong affective (i.e., emotional attachment and identification) and normative (i.e., moral obligation) desire to remain with a coach, team, or organization, while simultaneously feeling "locked in" to that coach, team, or organization in light of investments made and limited available alternatives (i.e., strong continuance commitment).

In addition to accounting for the multidimensionality of commitment, the practical value of the three-component framework lies in the antecedents, correlates, and consequences that are theorized to align with the focal constructs, and how these processes might vary across commitment dimensions (Meyer et

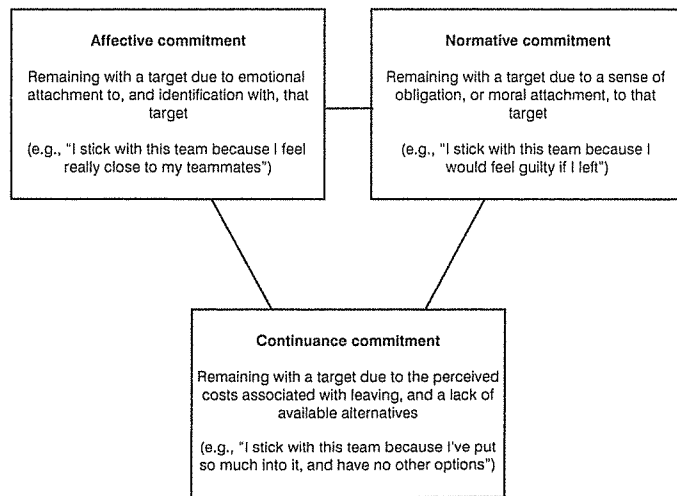


FIGURE 2.1 An illustration of the three-component model of commitment

al., 1993). Given the abundance of research attention that this framework has received in workplace settings, a comprehensive review of the three-component literature is beyond the scope of this chapter (for reviews, see Meyer, 2009; Meyer et al., 2002). It is important, however, that we briefly chart the determinants and consequences that are theorized (and have been shown) to align with the different commitment dimensions in non-sport and exercise organizational research, in order to demonstrate the potential relevance of these constructs for participation, performance, behavior, and well-being in sport and exercise.

### Correlates and outcomes of affective, normative, and continuance commitment

The three-component model was built on the premise that all three forms of commitment are likely to support retention, and meta-analytic evidence demonstrates that scores on each of the types of commitment correlate negatively with turnover and withdrawal cognitions (Meyer et al., 2002). Beyond turnover and retention, however, Meyer and colleagues (Meyer & Allen, 1991) contended that there was likely to be a somewhat divergent pattern of consequences for affective, normative, and continuance commitment. Affective commitment is considered to be the most adaptive of the three dimensions, and is theorized to align most strongly with favorable behavioral outcomes, in the form of attendance, performance, organizational citizenship behavior (i.e., voluntary, positive, constructive, and prosocial behavior at work), and reduced absenteeism. These behavioral consequences have often been considered in terms of their economic benefit at the organizational level (e.g., enhanced productivity, reduced loss-to-absenteeism); however, the three-component model may also hold relevance for understanding individual health and well-being. Affective commitment is proposed to alleviate stress and work-related conflict, and correlate positively with satisfaction, involvement, and commitment toward other related targets (e.g., toward one's occupation). Normative commitment – which typically correlates positively and strongly with affective commitment (see Bergman, 2006; Meyer et al., 2002) – is also proposed to align with these desirable organizational and individual outcomes, albeit at a weaker magnitude than the patterns observed for affective commitment. Finally, in light of the pressure and lack of alternatives reported by those who score highly on continuance commitment, it is posited that this dimension may be negatively related, or unrelated, to those adaptive outcomes discussed above (for a review, see Meyer & Maltin, 2010).

There is empirical support for these assertions; Gagné and colleagues (Gagné, Chemolli, Forest, & Koestner, 2008), for example, revealed positive relations between employees' affective commitment and autonomous motivation. Similarly, in their meta-analysis, Meyer et al. (2002) demonstrated that stronger affective commitment was associated with more favorable scores on absenteeism, performance, organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, job involvement, occupational commitment, stress, and work-family conflict

(see also Meyer, 2009; Park & Rainey, 2007). Normative commitment displayed relations with these variables that were relatively consistent in terms of direction, but tended to be weaker in magnitude than those observed for affective commitment (see also Gagné et al., 2008; Park & Rainey, 2007). Continuance commitment, meanwhile, displayed a pattern of associations that appeared to (at least in part) substantiate the contention that this form of commitment may be detrimental for individuals and organizations. Strong continuance commitment was associated with lower satisfaction, performance, and perceptions of support, as well as greater stress and work-family conflict (see also Park & Rainey, 2007). The evidence indicates, therefore, that the endorsement of affective and normative commitment might be desirable for both individual well-being and organizational productivity, but that continuance commitment might be accompanied in some cases by deleterious personal and group-level outcomes.

### Antecedents of affective, normative, and continuance commitment

Having discussed the implications of the three-component model, we now turn our attention to the factors that underpin the respective dimensions. Meyer and Allen (1991) outlined that affective commitment would be strengthened through the receipt of support from one's organization and supervisor, and meta-analytic results have substantiated these assertions. Meyer et al. (2002) concluded that employees reported greater emotional attachment and identification with their organization when they felt that they received strong organizational support (see also Aubé, Rousseau, & Morin, 2007; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001), and when they believed that their superior displayed transformational leadership characteristics. Affective commitment was also stronger when individuals reported lower levels of role ambiguity and role conflict, and when they held favorable perceptions of organizational justice in terms of fairness relating to work outcomes, processes, treatment, and information-provision (see also Park & Rainey, 2007). There is also evidence that individual difference variables are associated with the strength of one's affective commitment. For example, the big five personality traits (in particular agreeableness), self-efficacy, and autonomous (i.e., self-determined) motivation all appear to align positively with the affective dimension of commitment (see Choi, Oh, & Colbert, 2015; Gagné et al., 2008; Meyer et al., 2002).

Normative commitment reflects a strong moral obligation that one "ought to" persist with a given target. Meyer et al. (2002) reported correlations for this dimension that were consistent in terms of direction with those observed for affective commitment (i.e., self-efficacy, organizational support, transformational leadership, role ambiguity/conflict, organizational justice), but that were, for the most part, weaker in magnitude (see also Aubé et al., 2007; Park & Rainey, 2007). Interestingly, investigators have also demonstrated that normative commitment is associated with greater introjected motives for participation (i.e., participation due to internal pressures such as guilt; Gagné et al., 2008), who hold collectivist

(as opposed to individualist) values, who conform to high power distance values, and who adopt a long-term orientation (Meyer et al., 2012b). Finally, the evidence regarding theorized antecedents of continuance commitment is mixed. Meyer et al. (2002) concluded that continuance commitment – the feeling of being "locked in" to remaining with a target – was positively associated with tenure, and was associated with a number of organizational factors in the opposite direction to the relationships that were observed for affective and normative commitment. Specifically, strong continuance commitment – which is often unrelated or negatively related to a number of desirable workplace outcomes – was associated with low perceptions of organizational support, transformational leadership, organizational justice, and strong feelings of role ambiguity and role conflict.

In summarizing the nature of the three-component model, it may be worthwhile to contrast the multidimensionality of that approach with the unitary perspective that has often been adopted in sport-based work. Although recent advancements have been made in the measurement of sport commitment (see Scanlan et al., 2016, and coverage in the following section), much of the sport-focused work conducted to date has assessed commitment with items such as "How hard would it be for you to quit playing [on your team]?" It might be possible to infer the reason for a given rating on this item on the basis of responses provided on the antecedent constructs (e.g., enjoyment, personal investments, other priorities); however, when viewing this item (in isolation) through a multidimensional lens, we cannot detect with any certainty which type (or types) of commitment the respondent is experiencing. That is, it is difficult to determine whether the respondent might find it hard to quit their team because: (a) they love the team (i.e., affective commitment); (b) they feel obliged to continue with the team (i.e., normative commitment); (c) they feel that they have no other options available but to stay with that team (i.e., continuance commitment); or (d) some combination of all the above. Particularly in light of the distinct consequences with which these dimensions align in organizational contexts, it appears important that we account not only for the *quantity* of a person's commitment in sport and exercise, but also the *quality* (i.e., type) of that commitment.

To this point, we have presented some broad (and differing) perspectives regarding the conceptualization and measurement of commitment, and have demonstrated that a three-component approach to the study of commitment – which is not fully established in sport and exercise – might have merit in understanding individual and group functioning. We have yet to consider in detail, however, the range of potential implications associated with the three-component model in sport and exercise contexts, and it is this issue on which we focus our attention for the remainder of the chapter.

### Applications in sport and exercise

The sport commitment model has generated sustained research attention since its inception, and continues to help shape our understanding of commitment in

sport and exercise. In discussing the merits of the three-component framework, therefore, we are not advocating that researchers abandon what has been done in sport; rather, that they attempt to integrate a multidimensional perspective within studies exploring the determinants and outcomes of sport commitment (see, for example, Santi et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2004; Young & Medic, 2011). In line with this suggestion, Scanlan and colleagues (Scanlan et al., 2016) very recently presented a novel two-component measurement approach, which accompanied a revised sport commitment model and accounted for different commitment dimensions (as well as theorized predictors of those dimensions in line with the antecedents described previously). In their article, Scanlan et al. (2016) provided an operational definition of “*enthusiastic commitment*” (e.g., “I am dedicated to keep playing this sport”), representing individuals’ resolve and desire to persist in their sport, as well as “*constrained commitment*” (e.g., “staying in this sport is more of a necessity than a desire”), relating to individuals’ feelings of obligation to continue their sport involvement (for more information on initial validity evidence for these measures, see Scanlan et al., 2016).

Consistent with Scanlan et al.’s (2016) proposals, the use of a multidimensional assessment approach – whether defined using a two- or three-factor perspective – may allow researchers to capture a more nuanced view of the development of commitment, and the role that this construct plays with respect to persistence, well-being, and functional outcomes. The three-component model, for example, holds relevance for investigating commitment-based differences across a range of personal (e.g., stress), relational (e.g., relationship longevity), team-level (e.g., cohesion), and organizational (e.g., turnover) outcomes. Meanwhile, devising how to foster adaptive forms of commitment (e.g., affective or enthusiastic commitment) might be valuable within recreational sport and exercise settings that are characterized by high levels of dropout, and an understanding of the development of continuance (or constrained) commitment could enable researchers and practitioners to detect elite performers at risk of burnout, reduced performance, and withdrawal.

Many of the proposals such as those relating to the three-component model above are yet to be tested in an empirical sense in sport or exercise. That is not to say, however, that there is no evidence to support Meyer and colleagues’ (see Meyer, 2009; Meyer et al., 2002) multidimensional perspective in these contexts. For example, investigators have explored affective and normative commitment perceptions among volunteers in sport clubs and organizations. Volunteering plays a crucial role in the administration of recreational sport (Engelberg, Zakus, & Skinner, 2007), and commitment among this cohort has received scrutiny in light of diminishing volunteer numbers (see Engelberg, Zakus, Skinner, & Campbell, 2012). Using a sample of volunteers from athletics centers, Engelberg et al. (2012) presented an instrument development study in which they assessed affective and normative commitment to three different “targets”, namely one’s athletic center, one’s volunteer team, and the volunteering role itself. The authors demonstrated evidence for the distinguishability of commitment perceptions relating to different

targets, and provided some initial validity evidence pertaining to their measures (particularly for affective commitment measures). Other work that has focused on sport volunteers has considered only the affective dimension of the three-component model; for instance, Bang, Ross, and Reio (2013) demonstrated positive associations between affective commitment and job satisfaction among volunteers at non-profit sport organizations. There is also evidence that strong affective commitment toward one’s sport organization is associated with greater affective commitment to one’s volunteering role, more effective role performance, and adaptive turnover outcomes (e.g., Cuskelly & Boag, 2001; Engelberg, Skinner, & Zakus, 2011). Although these investigators did not examine the three-component model in its entirety (i.e., did not account for all possible dimensions), the literature on volunteers in sport is a useful illustration of how different commitment dimensions have previously been considered in athletic contexts.

The majority of sport-related studies that have drawn from Meyer and colleagues’ three-component model have been directed toward volunteering; however, formative work on coach commitment has also taken place. In one such study, Engelberg-Moston and colleagues (Engelberg-Moston, Stipis, Kippin, Spillman, & Burbidge, 2009) measured coaches’ affective, normative, and continuance commitment to their club, with participants drawn from various sports including field hockey, rugby, basketball, soccer, and athletics. Analyses revealed positive associations between affective and normative dimensions, and that these commitment perceptions were negatively associated with coach burnout indices (continuance commitment was dropped from analyses in this investigation due to poor internal consistency estimates). In another investigation, Turner and Chelladurai (2005) assessed coaches’ affective, normative, and continuance commitment in relation to their sport organization and (separately) their occupation. Correlation analyses showed that affective and normative commitment to the organization and occupation were negatively related to coaches’ intentions to leave their organization and occupation, respectively. Moreover, the authors also reported that strong affective commitment to the organization on the part of coaches (i.e., coaches who were emotionally attached to, and identified strongly with, their organization) was associated with desirable team performance outcomes, as measured by the team’s finishing position in its athletic conference.

The remaining group of studies that have drawn from the three-component commitment framework within the sport literature have explored athletes’ affective, normative, and/or continuance commitment. Research with collegiate athletes, for instance, has shown support for a multifaceted approach to the study of commitment to one’s university, team, and head coach (Turner & Pack, 2007), and demonstrated that commitment perceptions may align with important personal (i.e., intentions to leave) and group-related (i.e., team cohesion) outcomes (Ha & Ha, 2015; Turner & Pack, 2007). Finally, Jackson, Gucciardi, and Dimmock (2014) were guided by the three-component model in seeking to explore the validity of instruments designed to measure: (a) individual-sport

athletes' commitment to their relationship with their coach; and (b) team-sport athletes' commitment to their team. Jackson and colleagues adapted Meyer et al.'s (1993) workplace instrument to assess affective (example item, "My relationship with this coach/being part of this team has a great deal of personal meaning for me"), normative (example item, "I would feel guilty if I left this coach/team now"), and continuance (example item, "Right now, staying with this coach/team is a matter of necessity as much as desire") commitment in these two contexts.

In addition to providing support for structural aspects of validity for the measures (i.e., dimensionality, internal consistency), Jackson and colleagues (2014) reported a series of correlations that were consistent with theoretical assertions. That is, athletes who reported strong affective and normative commitment to their coach also reported stronger satisfaction with the coach, greater confidence in their coach's ability, and more positive intentions to remain with their coach and in their sport. Similarly, those who scored highly on affective and normative commitment to their team responded more positively in terms of their satisfaction with the team, perceptions of task and social cohesion, and intentions to continue with the team and the sport. Interestingly, consistent with the findings that have emerged for continuance commitment in the organizational literature, athletes who felt "locked into" their relationship or team actually reported weaker intentions to remain with that coach/team (if given the choice about whether to remain or not). To this point, therefore, there appears to be preliminary evidence for the utility of multidimensional commitment models in sport (including Scanlan and colleagues' (2016) recent two-component conceptualization); however, there is a very limited number of studies that have examined the development and implications of different commitment dimensions. In the following section, we present a range of theory-derived suggestions for research on sport commitment, as well as considering potential applications for the study of multidimensional commitment in exercise contexts.

### Future directions

Prior to offering suggestions for future research, it is worth cautioning that the three-component model is not the *only* framework that may be fit-for-purpose in terms of examining the multidimensionality of commitment in sport and exercise. There are clear parallels between aspects of the three-component model and Scanlan and colleagues' (2016) two-dimensional approach, for example, and research that considers the merits and applicability of both frameworks in diverse sport settings is encouraged. There are also a number of other alternative perspectives to the study of commitment that warrant consideration (see Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001), and there is some conjecture in the organizational literature regarding a number of aspects of the three-component model (interested readers should see Bergman, 2006; Solinger et al., 2008). Accordingly, below we outline a number of broad conceptual issues relating to the three-component model about which sport and exercise psychologists should be cognizant when pursuing

research in this area. Following our coverage of those issues, we consider some sport- and/or exercise-specific recommendations for future work.

### Relations with motivation

An important issue that has received attention in the organizational sphere is the matter of redundancy/overlap between commitment (as defined and operationalized in the three-component model) and motivational processes (see Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004). As defined within self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), individuals may pursue a course of action according to one or more motives, ranging from those that are more autonomous (i.e., pursued for reasons such as enjoyment, interest, and due to consistency with one's identity and values) to those that are more controlled (i.e., pursued due to internal or external pressures) in nature. There are clear parallels between some of the motivational regulations outlined within SDT and the components within the three-component commitment model. Affective (or enthusiastic) commitment, for example, is closely related to the SDT principle that individuals might participate in an activity due to the value it holds and the inherent pleasure they derive from it (i.e., autonomous motivation), whereas normative (or constrained) commitment, in part, resembles the feelings of obligation and guilt that accompany introjected regulation. Finally, continuance commitment, which is associated with external pressures and contingencies, aligns to a degree with the concept of external regulation outlined in SDT.

Researchers have recognized the commonality that exists between SDT regulations and the three-component model (see Gagné et al., 2008; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Meyer et al., 2004); however, Gagné et al. (2008, p. 223) delineated between motivation and commitment by noting that "the target of commitment is an entity (e.g., organization, person or event), whereas the target of motivation is a course of action (for which movement is necessary)". We acknowledge that this may be somewhat at odds with some of the existing sport commitment research, in which individuals' commitment *to a sport* (i.e., which could be considered a "course of action") has been assessed. Nonetheless, by applying Gagné et al.'s principle to sport (2008), motivation might be measured in relation to participation in one's sport, with commitment assessed in relation to remaining with the relationship, team, and/or organization within which one's sport participation is couched. On the basis of this distinction, Gagné et al. (2008) contended that different motivational orientations might precede the development of different commitment responses in the work domain. Using cross-lagged analyses, they subsequently presented evidence that motivational variables (i.e., reflecting motivation for one's job) were, on the whole, a better predictor of commitment (i.e., reflecting commitment to one's organization) than organizational commitment variables were of job motivation.

Researchers are encouraged to address the potential for similar relationships within sport and exercise. For example, it would be interesting to explore how



motivational regulations relating to one's exercise participation (e.g., "I participate in circuit training exercise because it is fun and enjoyable...") might orient individuals toward certain types of commitment to the gymnasium they attend (e.g., "...and I want to keep exercising here because I feel really attached to this gym"). Alternatively, it would be enlightening to examine whether dissonance and maladaptive outcomes result in cases where there is conflict between one's motivation for sport (e.g., "I play soccer because I love it...") and one's commitment toward a team or relationship (e.g., "...but I'm only with this coach/team because I'm stuck here"); that is, if such perceptions can co-exist. Irrespective of the shared/unique conceptual "space" that exists between motivation and commitment constructs, though, it is also necessary from a practical standpoint to test whether SDT and commitment constructs, when assessed together, have independent meaning in terms of shaping behavior in sport and exercise. Moreover, we encourage that, in cases where the referent of respective motivational and multidimensional commitment assessments may overlap (e.g., studying relations between motivation for one's sport and commitment to one's sport), investigators provide a clear conceptual rationale for the inclusion of both measures.

#### *Dimensionality and relevance of continuance commitment*

There has been persistent debate within the organizational literature as to whether continuance commitment is best defined and measured as a single-factor or bi-dimensional construct (for a review, see Jaros & Culpepper, 2014). Proponents of the bifurcated approach contend that continuance commitment comprises two distinct components, one reflecting a perception that an individual has too few alternatives to consider leaving an organization (often termed "LoAlt"), and another reflecting the sacrifice of personal investments (e.g., social, economic investments) that would occur were one to leave the organization (often termed "HiSac"). Although the potential for sub-dimensions within continuance commitment has been acknowledged for some 20 years (Meyer & Allen, 1997), evidence for this approach is somewhat equivocal, and researchers often still rely on a unidimensional definition when assessing commitment. Indeed, in the limited work that has taken place in sport to date, both the unidimensional (Jackson et al., 2014) and bi-dimensional (Turner & Chelladurai, 2005) approaches to measuring continuance perceptions have been employed.

Recent work outside sport has demonstrated that continuance commitment may in fact be unidimensional, and is best represented by the "HiSac" component only (Jaros & Culpepper, 2014). Although individuals make significant investments into their sport and exercise endeavors (e.g., time, financial, social), they may also develop the feeling that there are limited alternatives to their current position. In sport, for example, coaches may feel that there are limited alternative roles for them in comparable organizations, whereas athletes may feel that there are a lack of other teams or partners with which they could feasibly compete. Similarly, in terms of exercise participation, individuals may come to

believe that there are no other suitable facilities or trainers that could adequately satisfy their needs. With this in mind, prior to examining correlates and outcomes, it may be worthwhile to conduct exploratory work that seeks to understand the nature of continuance commitment in sport and exercise contexts. Given the voluntary nature of recreational sport and exercise, it might also be beneficial for researchers to chart the extent to which continuance commitment (i.e., the feeling of being "locked in") is actually manifest in these contexts, as well as the conditions under which, and the persons for whom, it may (or may not) develop.

#### *Relations between affective and normative commitment*

Meta-analytic evidence indicates that affective and normative commitment are strongly and positively correlated, and that these two dimensions often align in the same direction with behavioral and perceptual outcomes (Meyer et al., 2002). That being the case, at least at an empirical level, the distinction (or lack thereof) between these two concepts has received attention in the literature (see Bergman, 2006). Considering the links discussed previously between commitment dimensions and SDT motivational regulations (see Gagné et al., 2008; Meyer & Maltin, 2010), those with a background in SDT might be somewhat surprised by the close relations that are observed between affective and normative commitment, and the consistency in terms of the nomological net associated with these two dimensions. Affective commitment closely resembles the notion of autonomous motivation outlined in SDT, which is self-determined in nature and aligns positively and consistently with well-being and persistence-related outcomes (see Deci & Ryan, 2000). Normative commitment, meanwhile, is characterized by moral obligation, and most closely relates to the introjected regulation concept within SDT, which is considered a less adaptive (and more controlled) form of motivation and does not typically display the same relationships with correlates as autonomous motivation. With this issue in mind, we encourage researchers in sport and exercise to draw from Bergman's (2006) recommendations for distinguishing between affective and normative commitment, and encouraging unique associations with related concepts. These recommendations include methodological (e.g., assessing the cross-lagged relations between affective and normative perceptions), analytical (e.g., computing partial correlations between affective and normative perceptions that account for potential shared antecedents) and conceptual (e.g., reexamining the meaning of "obligation") strategies, and implementing one or more of these approaches may be worthwhile as researchers consider the unique contribution of normative commitment among athletic populations.

#### *Broadening the scope of commitment research in sport and exercise*

Earlier in this chapter, we noted that athlete commitment might be directed toward an array of targets, and that a more complete understanding of

commitment may result if researchers were to diversify the focus of their work. The multidimensional framework might be used to examine varied targets among athlete cohorts, including their commitment toward a playing partner or coach, their subgroup within a team (e.g., their offensive teammates), their team as a whole, and/or their broader organization. Indeed, a comprehensive assessment that incorporated multiple targets might provide fascinating insight into the potential for target-dependent discrepancies within one's commitment perceptions. Similarly, an investigation into exercisers' commitment regarding their trainer, classmates/training partner, and facility might provide novel information regarding the way in which exercise experiences shape distinct commitment responses, and how commitment to different targets may contribute in different ways to maintenance/dropout.

In addition to diversifying the targets of individuals' perceptions, commitment researchers in sport and exercise might draw from the two- or three-component models to explore outcomes of commitment beyond retention/turnover. In the organizational literature, implications for a host of personal and group-level outcomes have been demonstrated, and in sport, it would be worthwhile to consider how athlete commitment relates to well-being (e.g., coping, stress), behavior (e.g., performance, effort, attendance at training), and interpersonal processes (e.g., cohesion, prosocial behavior, conflict). Aside from the implications of commitment, there is also significant scope to explore the role of environmental influences (i.e., antecedents) on the formation of different commitment perceptions in sport and exercise (see Scanlan et al., 2016); examining the role of need-supportive (versus need-thwarting) instructional practices represents one such avenue.

Finally, there is already evidence to support the utility of the three-component model among the important non-athlete cohorts that exist in sport (e.g., coaches, volunteers; Engelberg et al., 2012; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005). That being the case, there is a strong rationale to extend the study of commitment to other populations. Interesting focal populations might include the support, executive, and administration staff at professional sport organizations, given their role in facilitating the day-to-day activities of athletic personnel. Similarly, there may be value in exploring the commitment perceptions of parents in relation to the sporting organizations in which their children participate, with an emphasis on the implications for parent behavior and support for their child's involvement. From an exercise and physical activity perspective, one can also readily envisage how trainers or physical education teachers might instruct in markedly different ways as a function of their different commitment profiles. In such scenarios, it might be important to explore whether strong continuance commitment (i.e., feeling locked into one's role) among trainers/teachers might lead to a degree of apathy and suboptimal instructional methods, causing those under their instruction to experience detrimental outcomes. Support staff, parents, teachers, and trainers are just a selection of the populations to which a multidimensional commitment lens may be applied, and there appears to be a range of interesting cohorts that are ripe for investigation outside of athlete-based samples.

### *Consider synergistic approaches*

Although there is merit in investigating commitment perceptions using variable-centered methods, researchers in organizational settings have also applied person-centered approaches to attempt to understand the naturally-occurring patterns that may exist across commitment dimensions. Using analytic techniques such as cluster analysis and latent profile analysis, it is possible to not only determine the prominent patterns of affective, normative, and continuance (or enthusiastic and constrained) commitment that individuals display, but also to examine the correlates of those patterns (see, for example, Meyer, Stanley, & Parfyonova, 2012; Somers, 2009; Wasti, 2005). In sport, these exploratory techniques would allow researchers to consider the prevalence of different commitment profiles, and how environmental (e.g., need support, transformational leadership) and personal (e.g., stress, engagement, performance) factors might coincide with a particular pattern of commitment. In addition, one interesting line of enquiry in this area would be to consider the potential for contagion or consensus effects among group members' commitment profiles. Within teams, exercise classes, or organizations, it would be intriguing to test whether particular types of commitment might generalize or spread across group members, and whether common profiles might emerge through communication and interaction styles. Such a study would also allow for investigation of the way in which differences in individuals' commitment profiles might have implications for interpersonal relations. In sum, there are a range of possibilities for future multidimensional commitment research that include, but are not limited to:

- studying relations between commitment dimensions and motivational regulations;
- exploring the dimensionality and relevance of continuance commitment;
- delineating the relations between affective and normative commitment;
- broadening the scope of commitment research in terms of foci, populations, and outcomes;
- considering synergistic (e.g., cluster, profile analysis) commitment issues, as well as potential contagion effects within team contexts.

### **Conclusion**

For over 20 years, researchers have studied the development of athlete, coach, and exerciser commitment, and have explored how this concept might support behavioral persistence. In this chapter, we presented an overview of the framework that has most commonly been used in these investigations (i.e., the sport commitment model), before considering how commitment research in sport and exercise might be informed by drawing from perspectives that are widely used by organizational and social psychologists. In particular, we focused our attention primarily on the three-component framework, which specifies

that individuals might experience qualitatively different types of commitment, and that these commitment dimensions may develop in distinct ways and have unique implications for individual and group-related outcomes. Formative work has been conducted using this model (and using a related two-component model) in sport; to date, however, there has been no sustained attempt to test the main tenets of the (two- or) three-component model among sport or exercise cohorts. Accordingly, we presented a selection of interesting opportunities for researchers studying sport and exercise commitment, and called for a research agenda that examines a new generation of targets, populations, and processes. A number of important conceptual issues require attention in order to provide a working model for researchers in this area; however, embracing a multidimensional commitment perspective may help researchers, practitioners, and participants better understand the forces that drive behavior in sport and exercise.

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