The industrial revolution reduced the use of hand tools and human strength in manufacturing, and it led to improved systems of transportation and communication. However, there was an unexpected consequence: The advances in communication, transportation, and, more recently, informatics and the Internet made our world increasingly complex, pressured, and excessively sedentary. This extremely rapid evolution toward sedentariness, in conjunction with other factors such as highly caloric food, affected the mental health and psychological well-being of our society. According to the World Health Organization, a lack of physical activity is one of the top four leading causes of preventable death worldwide, ahead of high cholesterol, alcohol abuse, and drug abuse.

By the late 80s, kinesiologists, sport and exercise scientists, and psychologists started to address the consequences of physical (in)activity in health and well-being. Probably the first book exclusively focused on exercise psychology was written by Stuart Biddle (now at Victoria University, Melbourne) and Nannette Mutrie (now at University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom) in 1991, titled *Psychology of Physical Activity and Exercise: A Health-Related Perspective*. Since then, scientific knowledge has matured to the point where interventions can be principled and evidence-based. *Doing Exercise Psychology* is a book written by those who have been applying this knowledge and practicing these interventions for many years.

*Doing Exercise Psychology* provides numerous examples of applied practice in exercise psychology. The editors worked with more than two dozen experts on exercise, and they edited a book that documents real-world case studies of practitioner-client relationships and interventions, as well as narrative tales, autobiographical accounts, and interviews. This book will be an invaluable resource for exercise practitioners, academics and students in this field, as well as psychologists who wish to expand their services into the exercise and health psychology domain.

Each chapter’s author follows her or his own ideas about how best to apply the exercise psychology knowledge provided, and there is no overarching conceptual framework for the
book. For example, the order of the chapters is, with a few exceptions, arbitrary. However, all the authors coherently defend two core positions: Exercise is beneficial to human health, and physical (in)activity behavioral patterns can be changed. The foreword by Robert M. Kaplan clearly synthesizes the evidence supporting these assertions.

_Doing Exercise Psychology_ was shaped by one of Andersen’s previous books, _Doing Sport Psychology_ (Andersen, 2000); and, although it is not the first such book highlighting applications, it is the first that brings the dialogues between exercise professionals and their clients into public scrutiny. Readers have the opportunity to make their own interpretations or design their own action plans and compare them with those of the chapters’ authors. These lived examples of the processes involved in dealing with the psychological components of exercise-related interventions provide a superb pedagogical strategy that demonstrates how clinical methods can be taught using clinical stories.

**Contextual Influence in Exercise Psychology Interventions**

Abundant research documents that human behavior is determined more by social and physical environmental factors than individual characteristics (e.g., Sallis, Owen, & Fisher, 2008). As a result, interventions targeting individuals using one-on-one interactions are only a small part of the change necessary to help clients adopt an active lifestyle. The efficacy of such clinical practices will be undermined if clients return to social environments in which the circumstances attracting sedentary living remain in place. Clients’ real-world behavior settings (e.g., home, workplace, school, club) need at least as much attention as their mental states.

There are occasional references to an ecological stance, such as when authors address the often-neglected topic of cross-cultural motives and attitudes toward physical activity. For example, the first chapter on mindfulness, the only chapter that is not applied but presents a transtheoretical viewpoint, links with the environment through operationally defined concepts such as attunement or resonance.

The editors explicitly state that a key concept shaping the entire book is “relationships,” and the perspective is biased toward the individual side of the individual-environment system from which behavior (including mental states) emerges. This has a major consequence: Because the approach is centered on intraindividual mechanisms, it is not possible to test mechanisms at the level of the environment-individual system, and yet this is precisely where behavior occurs. The environment has to be considered if academics and professionals want to grasp the complexity of healthy behavior (Glass & McAtee, 2006). For example, chapter authors note the difficulty in determining the “active ingredient” that confers benefit in a physical activity behavior or intervention. In contrast, an ecological approach appreciates that both internal and external factors influence behavior.

The good news is that the adoption of an ecological approach within the sport and exercise literature has already been initiated (e.g., Dzewaltowski, 1997). For example, behavior change theorists, such as Susan Michie of University College London, consistently propose models that go beyond motivation and capabilities by considering their interaction with environmental “opportunities.” This ecological view implies a theoretical change from understanding an environment that interacts with a performer (i.e., two separate systems
that interact) to a more holistic view that understands performer and environment as a single coherent system to be studied (Araújo & Davids, 2009).

Several community-based physical activity approaches, for example, use participatory strategies in which individuals in the community are empowered to lead change. Consistent with the ecological approach, interventions are tailored to the settings where people live, and those who live in these settings are best equipped to understand these unique local variables. Since ecological psychology perspectives address the “big picture” that filters down to create local environmental variables, it presents substantial logistical challenges for study and practice. Therefore, there is a need for psychologists and other exercise professionals to study how the restructuring of environments can create opportunities to promote physical activity (Rietveld & Kiverstein, 2014).

**From the Psychological Room to the Real World**

*Doing Exercise Psychology* does not close the door to an ecological approach. In fact, it forces the reader to consider it. Otherwise, how could an exercise psychologist do exercise psychology without knowing the setting in which exercise occurs? Indeed, a change in behavior is more than a change in mental states.

I recommend *Doing Exercise Psychology*. It has abundant useful information, engaging case studies, and a style that captures the practitioners’ attention. Importantly, it stimulates the reader to go beyond what is written. It presents a tipping point for research and application, and it pushes the practitioner to consider getting out of the door of the consultation room, applying psychology in the actual exercise setting.

**References**


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