

The Influence of Motivation and Attentional Style on Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Outcomes of an Exercise Class

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8 The Influence of Motivation and Attentional Style on Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral

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Outcomes of an Exercise Class

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Abstract

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2 Exercise classes are a popular form of physical activity. A greater understanding of the
3 individual difference factors that might influence the outcomes of such classes could help to
4 minimize the high dropout rates associated with exercise. The study explored the effects of
5 dominant attentional style and degree of self-determination on affective, cognitive, and
6 behavioral outcomes following structured exercise classes. Data from 417 female participants
7 revealed that those with a dominant attentional style for association (*Associators*) reported
8 significantly ($P < .05$) more positive affective, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes than did
9 *Dissociators*, and were more self-determined. Highly self-determined individuals reported the
10 most positive outcomes. Almost 29% of the variance in participants' affective valence could
11 be explained by Dissociators' behavioral regulations. Results lend support to the notion that
12 attentional style is associated with motivation. The combination of attentional style and
13 degree of self-determination appear to be noteworthy individual difference factors that
14 influence responses to exercise classes and could thus have a bearing on long-term exercise
15 adherence.

16

17 **Keywords:** Adherence; attentional focus; group exercise; SDT; structural equation modeling

1 The benefits of exercise are manifold and include improvements in cardiovascular and
2 respiratory function, reduced risk of coronary artery disease, decreased morbidity and
3 mortality, decreased anxiety and depression, and enhanced feelings of wellbeing (American
4 College of Sports Medicine [ACSM], 2013). The levels of physical inactivity are rising in the
5 Western world (e.g., Trost et al., 2014), and so exercise and health researchers must address
6 the multitudinous reasons for why this is the case. The cost of physical inactivity cannot be
7 assessed purely in financial terms; however, the financial cost is substantial given that
8 physical inactivity is estimated to cost in excess of €80 billion per annum across Europe (Lee
9 et al., 2012). The human cost is arguably far greater (Hallal et al., 2012).

10 Evidence has shown a clear decline in the physical activity levels of females, which
11 has a tendency to begin in early adolescence (Biddle et al., 2014; Kohlstedt et al., 2013).
12 Moreover, women continue to be less active than men throughout adulthood (Hallal et al.,
13 2012). A physically active lifestyle entails much more than simply attending gymnasias,
14 nonetheless, this remains a popular way by which people attempt to achieve the
15 recommended levels of physical activity (e.g., at least 150 min each week; ACSM, 2013).
16 Gymnasias and fitness centers offer multiple ways for people to engage in exercise and one of
17 the most popular modalities, particularly among females, is exercise classes (Hawley-Hague
18 et al., 2013). The high proportion of female attendees at such classes has been reflected in
19 studies exploring the psychological outcomes of engagement in exercise classes (e.g.,
20 Akpinar et al., 2011; Karageorghis et al., 2000).

21 **Individual Differences**

22 Individual difference factors have long been mooted as important determinants of
23 physical activity (Bauman et al., 2012). The idiosyncratic patterning of affect, behavior,
24 cognition, and goals over time serves to form our personality (Ortony et al., 2005). Ergo,
25 personality is pivotal in the appraisal of our responses to physical activity, and can determine

1 whether we enjoy the activity and choose to continue to be active. It is unsurprising then that
2 there is emerging evidence to support the contribution of individual differences to the
3 maintenance of regular physical activity (Rhodes & Smith, 2006; Wilson & Dishman,
4 2015). Specifically, *extraversion*, *conscientiousness*, and *openness* are positively correlated
5 with engagement in physical activity, while neuroticism is negatively correlated. Motivation
6 to exercise that is driven by external factors (e.g., rewards) has been shown to positively
7 correlate with neuroticism whereas participating in exercise for intrinsic reasons appears to be
8 negatively correlated with this trait (Ingledeu et al., 2004). A greater understanding of the
9 ways in which personality traits contribute to physical activity behaviors may help us to
10 predict an individual's future physical activity levels and, in turn, to develop strategies to
11 counter those characteristics that do not foster positive physical activity behaviors.

12 The constructs of attentional style and self-determination are two individual
13 difference factors that have been extensively researched in the sport and exercise psychology
14 literature (see Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2007; Moran, 2009). However, little is known about
15 how these factors interact in an exercise context or how they might influence important
16 consequences of exercise participation such as affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes.
17 These particular individual differences are likely to have a strong bearing on people's
18 attraction and adherence to exercise classes.

19 **Attention as an Individual Difference Factor**

20 Attentional focus has been conceptualized using two distinct styles: dissociation and
21 association (e.g., Brewer et al., 1996; Connolly & Janelle, 2003; Hutchinson & Karageorghis,
22 2013). Dissociation is characterized by a cognitive process of *blocking out* bodily sensations
23 related to physical effort (Lind et al., 2009) and association is a cognitive strategy by which
24 an individual attends to internal bodily cues such as respiration rate or muscle tension
25 (Hutchinson & Karageorghis, 2013). Individuals with a predisposition to dissociate are

1 identified as *Dissociators*, and those with a tendency to associate as *Associators* (Masters &
2 Ogles, 1998). However, there has been little investigation of people's tendency to adopt a
3 particular attentional style in exercise settings; this has been cited as an area that warrants
4 further investigation (Lind et al., 2009).

5 Of particular relevance to the present study is the influence that attentional style might
6 have on psychological outcomes (e.g., affect) rather than performance outcomes (e.g.,
7 amount of repetitions completed; cf. Brewer et al., 1996). Several studies have reported that a
8 dissociative attentional focus results in fewer reports of fatigue and boredom (e.g., Connolly
9 & Janelle, 2003; Schomer, 1987). However, Hutchinson and Karageorghis (2013) found that
10 *Associators* reported lower levels of perceived exertion compared to *Dissociators* during
11 high-intensity exercise. Research into the effects of attentional style on psychological
12 outcomes has primarily examined perceptions of fatigue (e.g., Koivula, & Hassmen, 1998),
13 whereas other important psychological outcomes (such as affect) have been largely neglected
14 (Lind et al., 2009). There is growing evidence to suggest that affective responses are a
15 significant contributing factor to longer term adherence to exercise (Williams et al., 2008;
16 Williams et al., 2012).

17 **Motivation as an Individual Difference Factor**

18 Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) posits that behavior is
19 determined by three psychological forces: amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic
20 motivation. Amotivation represents a complete lack of self-determination and intention to
21 participate in an activity such as exercise (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Extrinsically motivated
22 behavior can be differentiated into four specific motives—external regulation, introjected
23 regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation—that represent a progression from
24 less self-determined to more self-determined forms of behavioral regulation (Deci & Ryan,
25 1985). Intrinsic motivation concerns behaviors that are performed for sheer interest and

1 enjoyment; moreover, three types of intrinsic motivation have been identified: intrinsic
2 motivation to know, intrinsic motivation to accomplish, and intrinsic motivation to
3 experience stimulation (Vallerand et al., 1997). Self-determination theory posits that
4 competence, autonomy, and relatedness are three basic human needs, and the extent to which
5 these three needs are satisfied, strongly determines an individual's intrinsic motivation. Using
6 the theory as a lodestar, researchers have developed a number of context-specific measures
7 that tap the *behavioral regulations*, or drivers of behavior, associated with each psychological
8 force (e.g., Li, 1999; Pelletier et al., 2013).

9 As suggested by Vallerand (1997), motivation is associated with three principal
10 consequences: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. Although the relationship between self-
11 determined motives and outcomes is complex (McDonough & Crocker, 2007), there is a
12 wealth of evidence to suggest that individuals who exhibit high levels of self-determination
13 report more positive cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes in an exercise context
14 (e.g., Kohlstedt et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2004). In accordance with Vallerand's theoretical
15 propositions, the present study included assessments of affective (Affect Grid; Russell et al.,
16 1989), cognitive (concentration on the task at hand subscale of the Flow State Scale-2;
17 Jackson & Eklund, 2002), and behavioral (behavioral intent items; Vlachopoulos et al., 2000)
18 outcomes from participation in a structured exercise class.

19 **Interaction of Attention and Motivation**

20 Engelmann et al. (2009) presented findings that support an emerging body of
21 evidence which they suggest indicates that attention and motivation are “intimately tied” (p.
22 1). Stimuli with motivational significance—in other words, those that fulfill a particular need
23 for the perceiver—appear to preferentially engage attention and this extends to stimuli with
24 positive emotional valence whereby attention is drawn toward seemingly more pleasing
25 stimuli, such as images of food presented to hungry participants (e.g., LaBar et al., 2001) or

1 images of female nudity presented to male participants (Most et al., 2007). Oliveira et al.
2 (2013) proposed that the degree to which distractors are processed is dependent upon the
3 primary task (Erthal et al., 2005), but that the capacity to process distractors can be
4 modulated by the relevance of the distractor and the motivation for the primary task.

5 **Behavioral regulations in exercise.** People are said to be extrinsically motivated
6 when they engage in a behavior (e.g., an exercise program) for contingent rewards.
7 Therefore, exercisers' attention may be drawn toward stimuli that fulfill the need for reward
8 (e.g., an image on the wall of the exercise studio that depicts a desired body shape).
9 Conversely, intrinsically motivated individuals engage in exercise because they enjoy doing
10 so. Accordingly, an individual who is intrinsically motivated may attend to cues that promote
11 the inherent pleasure of exercise (e.g., the pleasure associated with movement itself). It is
12 logical to suggest that Associators would be more self-determined toward exercise than
13 Dissociators, owing to the abundance of stimuli that fulfill the needs of intrinsically
14 motivated individuals (i.e., movement is a necessary element of exercise classes and therefore
15 it fulfills the needs of an Associator). Conversely, Dissociators would be less self-determined
16 toward exercise as their needs would be fulfilled by external stimuli, but such stimuli may not
17 be readily available within an indoor exercise class and consequently their needs are not met.

18 **Purpose and Hypotheses**

19 The purpose of the present study was to explore two psychological characteristics
20 that are potential predictors of people's responses to exercise classes: Preferred attentional
21 style and contextual motivation. A fuller understanding of the influence of these factors in
22 exercise classes may afford us greater insight into how the experience of such classes may be
23 maximized for all participants.

24 It was hypothesized that those who reported a predominantly associative style during
25 the class (hereafter *Associators*) would experience more positive outcomes (H_1) than would

1 those who reported a dissociative one (*Dissociators*), owing to the fact that the class would
2 serve their needs (e.g., the inherent pleasure of exercise/movement) more fully. The
3 examination of the interaction of attentional style and behavioral regulations was expected to
4 reveal that Associators would be more self-determined than Dissociators (H_2). The
5 relationships between behavioral regulations and four outcome measures (affective valence
6 and arousal, concentration, and behavioral intent) were explored and it was expected that
7 correlations would be increasingly positive as the level of self-determination increased (H_3).
8 The predictive strength of behavioral regulations in relation to the four outcome measures
9 was explored using a multiple-group structural equation model (SEM) that examined
10 Associators and Dissociators. It was hypothesized that the relationships between the
11 behavioral regulations and the four outcome measures would differ according to attentional
12 style; specifically, that the intrinsic behavioral regulations of Associators would be more
13 positively related to the four outcome measures than extrinsic behavioral regulations, and that
14 extrinsic behavioral regulations of Dissociators would be more positively related to the
15 outcome measures than intrinsic behavioral regulations (H_4).

16 **Methodology**

17 The study was conducted in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as
18 revised in 2000, and by approval of the ____ Research Ethics Committee. All participants
19 provided written informed consent and data were collected at six health and leisure centers.
20 Participants were required to complete a questionnaire before and after attending their
21 exercise class. The questionnaires were administered at classes wherein the goal was to
22 promote activity at a moderate-to-high intensity with a focus on large muscle groups (e.g.,
23 Body Pump™, step aerobics, spinning, and Zumba®). Classes without a significant aerobic
24 demand (e.g., yoga and Pilates) were not included in order to maintain some homogeneity in
25 terms of the cardiorespiratory demands of the exercise sessions. Moreover, the exercise

1 classes all employed music throughout the session and the type of music used in moderate-to-
2 high intensity exercise classes is stimulative, rather than sedative, in nature.

3 **Participants**

4 A total of 434 female participants ($M_{age} = 37.2$ years, $SD = 13.8$; 89.6% British
5 nationality) completed pre- and post-class questionnaires.

6 **Measures**

7 **Attentional Focus Questionnaire.** Participants' dominant attentional style was
8 assessed using a modified Attentional Focus Questionnaire (AFQ; Brewer et al., 1996). The
9 original AFQ required participants to respond as if they were completing a maximal-effort
10 run. However, participants in the present study were asked to respond to the items (e.g.,
11 "monitoring specific body sensations" and "reflecting on past experience") with reference to
12 an exercise class. The AFQ (Brewer et al., 1996) has been used in a number of studies as a
13 method by which to establish individual preference for attentional style (e.g., Connolly &
14 Janelle, 2003; Hutchinson & Karageorghis, 2013; Masters & Ogles, 1998). The AFQ has
15 three subscales (association, dissociation, and distress) with responses attached to a 7-point
16 Likert scale anchored by 1 (*Would not do at all*) and 7 (*Would do a lot*). Brewer et al. (1996)
17 provided evidence of the internal consistency for the subscales in the AFQ: association (.79),
18 dissociation (.77), and distress (.85).

19 A Cognitive Index (CI; Masters & Ogles, 1998) was determined for each participant.
20 The CI was calculated from the AFQ (Brewer et al., 1996) responses by subtracting each
21 individual's association score from their dissociation score and adding 100. A score over 100
22 indicates a preference for dissociation whereas a score equal to or below 100 indicates a
23 preference for association. This calculation yielded scores that ranged from 55 to 130 ($M =$
24 87.5 , $SD = 13.4$) and there were 335 participants with a preference for association
25 (Associators) and 82 with a preference for dissociation (Dissociators).

1 **Exercise Motivation Scale.** Participants' motivation to exercise was assessed using
2 the Exercise Motivation Scale (EMS; Li, 1999). The EMS categorizes responses into one of
3 eight types of motivation (Intrinsic Motivation [IM] to Know, IM to Accomplish, IM to
4 Experience Stimulation, Integrated Regulation, Identified Regulation, Introjected Regulation,
5 External Regulation, and Amotivation). Participants are asked the question "Why are you
6 currently participating in this activity?" with responses provided on a 6-point Likert scale
7 anchored by 1 (*Strongly disagree*) and 6 (*Strongly agree*). The Amotivation subscale is
8 comprised of three items whereas the remaining seven subscales each comprise four items. Li
9 (1999) reported alpha coefficients for each subscale that averaged .77 ranging from .71 (IM
10 to accomplish) to .85 (IM to learn).

11 **Outcome measures. Affect Grid.** The Affect Grid (Russell et al., 1989) is a self-
12 report measure in which respondents can indicate their perceived affective state according to
13 two orthogonal dimensions— affective valence and arousal— via a unitary response on a 9 x 9
14 grid. Participants were asked to mark an "X" in one cell of the grid.

15 **Flow State Scale-2.** The concentration on the task at hand subscale of the 36-item
16 Flow State Scale-2 (FSS-2; Jackson & Eklund, 2002) was used to assess participants'
17 cognitive responses to an exercise class. Participants responded to the four items of the scale
18 (e.g., "I was completely focused on the task at hand") on a 5-point Likert scale anchored by 1
19 (*Strongly disagree*) and 5 (*Strongly agree*).

20 **Behavioral intent.** Participants responded to three statements designed to represent
21 their future intentions toward attending exercise classes. The three items (e.g., "I am
22 determined to continue participating in exercise classes during this year") were initially used
23 by Vlachopoulos et al. (2000). Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale anchored
24 from 1 (*Extremely unlikely*) to 7 (*Extremely likely*).

25

1 **Procedure**

2 Each participant completed the AFQ (Brewer et al., 1996) and the EMS (Li, 1999)
3 immediately prior to their exercise class. Participants were instructed to complete the
4 questionnaire individually and to attend the session as normal. The initial questionnaire took
5 approximately 5min to complete. Immediately after the class, participants were asked to
6 complete the Affect Grid (Russell et al., 1989), behavioral intent items, and the FSS-2 items,
7 all of which took approximately 2 min to complete.

8 **Data Analysis**

9 Data were screened for univariate outliers using z scores ($> \pm 3.29$) and multivariate
10 outliers using the Mahalanobis distance method ($P < .001$). Following checks to ensure that
11 the data were suitable for parametric analysis, a series of MANOVAs and ANOVAs was
12 applied. A one-way independent-samples MANOVA was used to assess the effect of
13 attentional style on affective valence and arousal. One-way, independent-samples ANOVAs
14 (attentional style groups) were conducted for cognitive and behavioral outcome data. A one-
15 way independent-samples MANOVA was used to assess the effect of attentional style on
16 behavioral regulations. A correlational analysis was conducted to explore relationships
17 between behavioral regulations and the four outcome measures. A multiple group (Associator
18 or Dissociator) SEM was applied to examine the strength of relationships between behavioral
19 regulations and the four outcome measures. Structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses
20 were conducted using EQS 6.1 (Bentler, 2004). Each structural model had eight latent
21 predictor variables that represented the behavioral regulations, as identified by the EMS (Li,
22 1999), and the maximum likelihood estimation method was employed.

23 **Results**

24 Seventeen participants were removed following univariate and multivariate outlier
25 checks leaving 417 participants for the main analyses ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.5$ years, $SD = 13.7$ years).

1 **Analysis of Variance**

2 A one-way MANOVA of affective responses revealed a significant difference,
3 associated with a small effect size, between Associators and Dissociators (Hotelling's $T =$
4 $.02$, $F(2, 414) = 4.24$, $P = .015$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$). Associators reported significantly higher levels of
5 pleasure than did Dissociators ($P = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$). There were no significant differences for
6 arousal.

7 ANOVA for the cognitive outcome was significant and revealed a small-to-moderate
8 effect size, $F(13, 403) = 2.58$, $P < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, with Associators reporting higher levels of
9 concentration. ANOVA for the behavioral outcome was significant, albeit that the effect size
10 was small, $F(6, 410) = 2.39$, $P < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, with Associators reporting stronger behavioral
11 intent.

12 A one-way MANOVA revealed a significant difference with a moderate effect size
13 between Associators and Dissociators (Pillai's Trace = $.11$, $F(8, 408) = 6.04$, $P < .001$, $\eta_p^2 =$
14 $.11$) for behavioral regulations. Follow-up pairwise comparisons indicated that the
15 Associators reported significantly higher EMS scores for identified regulation ($P < .001$),
16 integrated regulation ($P < .001$), intrinsic motivation to learn ($P < .001$), intrinsic motivation
17 to accomplish ($P < .001$), and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation ($P < .001$) when
18 compared to Dissociators. Conversely, Dissociators reported significantly higher EMS scores
19 for amotivation ($P < .001$), and external regulation ($P < .001$) compared to Associators. There
20 were no significant differences between Associators and Dissociators for introjected
21 regulation (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

22 **Correlations**

23 Analysis revealed 27 significant correlations between behavioral regulations and
24 outcome measures regardless of attentional style (see Table 2). The relationships between
25 integrated regulation, IM to learn, IM to accomplish, and IM to experience stimulation and all

1 of the outcome measures were positive in nature with Pearson's r ranging .13–.37. The
 2 relationships between identified regulation and the cognitive, behavioral, and arousal scores
 3 were positive with Pearson's r ranging .15–.26. The relationships between amotivation and
 4 external motivation and all of the outcome measures were negative with Pearson's r ranging -
 5 .10–-.32. Correlations between behavioral regulations and outcome measures by attentional
 6 style identified some differences in the strength of the relationships between Associators and
 7 Dissociators. Specifically, Associators exhibited stronger negative *and* positive correlations
 8 than Dissociators for concentration and affective valence when moving from nonself-
 9 determined to increasingly self-determined forms of behavioral regulation (Table 2).

10 **Multiple-Groups Structural Equation Model**

11 SEM results for Associators (IFI = .98; RMSEA = .12; CFI = .98; NFI = .97; SRMR
 12 = .03, $\chi^2(6) = 32.35$, $P = 0.001$) and Dissociators (IFI = .96; RMSEA = .17; CFI = .96; NFI =
 13 .95; SRMR = .04, $\chi^2(6) = 21.16$, $P = 0.002$) indicated good fit for IFI (> .95), marginal fit for
 14 RMSEA (> .08), acceptable fit for the CFI (> .95), good fit for NFI (> .94), good fit for
 15 SRMR (< .08), and poor fit for χ^2 ($P < .05$). The two SEMs including the two attentional
 16 styles (association and dissociation) are presented in Figures 2 and 3 respectively.

17 The structural model for Associators shows that 25% of the variance in behavioral
 18 intent scores was accounted for by behavioral regulations (see Figure 2). Path coefficients
 19 showed that high scores for IM to experience stimulation were associated with stronger
 20 behavioral intent ($P < .05$). High scores for amotivation and external regulation were
 21 associated with the weakest behavioral intent ($P < .05$). Data indicated that 14% of variance
 22 in the cognitive outcome was accounted for by the behavioral regulations. Path coefficients
 23 showed that high scores for IM to learn were associated with the highest levels of
 24 concentration during the exercise class ($P < .05$). Further, high scores for external regulation
 25 were associated with the lowest levels of concentration.

1 The structural model for Dissociators indicates that 29% of variance in affective
2 valence was accounted for by the behavioral regulations (see Figure 3). Path coefficients
3 showed that high scores for IM to Accomplish were associated with the most positive
4 affective valence scores ($P < .05$); conversely, high Amotivation scores were associated with
5 the lowest affective valence scores ($P < .05$). Findings also show that 19% of concentration
6 variance was accounted for by behavioral regulations. Path coefficients indicated that high
7 scores for IM to learn and identified regulation were associated with high levels of
8 concentration, whereas high scores for IM to accomplish were associated with low
9 concentration levels ($P < .05$). The analysis indicates that 18% of behavioral intent variance
10 was accounted for by behavioral regulations. Path coefficients showed that high scores for
11 integrated regulation and IM to accomplish were associated with stronger behavioral intent (P
12 $< .05$).

13 Discussion

14 The purpose of the present study was to explore the relationships between attentional
15 style, motivation, and a range of outcome measures that followed a structured exercise class.
16 The hypothesis that Associators would experience the most positive psychological outcomes
17 is accepted (H_1) as Associators exhibited significantly ($p < .05$) more positive affective,
18 cognitive, and behavioral outcomes. The small-to-moderate effect sizes associated with these
19 findings would suggest that caution should be taken in interpreting these preliminary data.
20 There is equivocal evidence as to whether a tendency toward an Associative or a Dissociative
21 focus during exercise should lead to more positive outcomes (see e.g., Hutchinson &
22 Karageorghis, 2013), but the results of the present study suggest that a tendency toward
23 association during the exercise classes promoted the most positive affective and cognitive
24 outcomes. Moreover, the results indicate that Associators reported a stronger intention to
25 continue attending exercise classes over the next year. Nonetheless, caution regarding the

1 behavioral outcome is warranted, as the responses indicate *intention* to continue attending,
2 rather than providing objective evidence showing that attendance *did* continue. Nonetheless,
3 when coupled with participants' affective responses, the results could suggest that this
4 intention will lead to exercise adherence; for example, Parschau et al. (2013) found that
5 intentions to continue with physical activity were more likely to be translated into action
6 when the physical activity was perceived to be a positive experience.

7 **The Link between Attention and Motivation**

8 The data support our hypothesis that Associators would have greater self-
9 determination than Dissociators (H_2): Dissociators recorded significantly higher scores for the
10 EMS subscales of amotivation and extrinsic regulation than did Associators (see Figure 1).
11 Therefore, Dissociators may stand to benefit most from interventions that serve to enhance
12 autonomy, competence, and relatedness in an exercise context. Associators reported higher
13 levels of integrated regulation, identified regulation, and all aspects of intrinsic motivation
14 which indicates that they are focusing on stimuli that fulfill their needs during exercise (e.g.,
15 the inherent joy of movement).

16 The present results lend support to the notion that attention is associated with
17 motivation (Engelmann et al., 2009). The notion that attention can also be *driven* by
18 motivation (LaBar et al., 2001; Most et al., 2007) provides a plausible explanation for the
19 observed links between attentional style and motivation reported herein. Specifically, the
20 results of the present study suggest that participants who were more externally regulated
21 tended to favor a dissociative attentional style (see Figure 1). External regulation is
22 characterized by behavior driven by forms of external reinforcement, such as gaining rewards
23 or avoiding punishment (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

24 In light of the findings of LaBar et al. (2001) and Most et al. (2007), it is tenable that
25 individuals who are externally regulated with regard to exercise, may use the music as a

1 means by which to avoid punishment – the “punishment” in this context being the negative
2 affect and physical discomfort often experienced during exercise (Rhodes et al., 2009).
3 Individuals who describe themselves as externally regulated are not likely to participate in
4 exercise for inherent enjoyment, and the present data indicate that these individuals may seek
5 distraction as a means by which to enable themselves to tolerate the exercise class. Hence,
6 they may attend classes because the external stimuli (e.g., music, the instructor, and fellow
7 exercisers) are a salient distraction from the activity itself. Oliveira et al. (2013) proposed that
8 distractors are most effective when they are perceived as being relevant, in particular
9 *emotionally relevant*, to the individual. Music such as that used in Spinning, Body PumpTM,
10 and other group-exercise formats can help to reduce the negative emotional states associated
11 with exercise (e.g., Elliott et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2014) and this may offer some
12 explanation as to why those with low self-determination seek such an external stimulus: The
13 music is used to avoid or minimize the negative emotional consequences of exercise.

14 **Self-determination and Positive Outcomes**

15 An examination of the results that pertain to the relationships among behavioral
16 regulation and outcome measures led to the acceptance of H_3 . It was hypothesized that
17 correlations between behavioral regulations and outcome measures would become stronger
18 and more positive with higher levels of self-determined motivation. Table 2 shows a clear
19 pattern of small-to-medium negative correlations between amotivation and the outcome
20 measures, and small-to-medium positive correlations between intrinsic motivation and the
21 outcome measures. The expected trend emerged, with the strongest positive correlations
22 found between IM to experience stimulation and the outcome measures. These results support
23 previous work of a similar nature (e.g., Vlachopoulos et al., 2000; Wilson et al., 2004), and
24 can be added to the wealth of data regarding the self-determination of an individual and
25 positive outcomes in a wide range of contexts.

1 **Findings from the Structural Equation Models**

2 The hypothesis pertaining to the multiple-group SEMs (H_4) is only partially accepted.
3 Results indicate that both models (Associators and Dissociators) demonstrated acceptable fit
4 and that attentional style did not moderate the strength of relationships between behavioral
5 regulations and the outcome measures. However, almost 29% of the variance in affective
6 valence could be explained by behavioral regulations for Dissociators (Figure 3), whereas
7 this figure was only 4% for Associators (Figure 2); this indicates that attentional style may
8 exert a considerable influence on affective responses to exercise classes. There was
9 significant variation in the affective responses of Dissociators, which was largely due to their
10 perceived level of self-determination. We hypothesized that the extrinsic behavioral
11 regulations would relate more strongly than intrinsic behavioral regulations to positive
12 outcomes for Dissociators; however, the affective valence findings do not support H_4 , given
13 that IM to accomplish accounted for the greatest percentage of variance in affective valence –
14 notably, higher IM scores were associated with higher affect scores.

15 Enhancing the enjoyment that Dissociators experience during exercise appears crucial
16 in terms of enhancing levels of self-determination; the challenge is how we, as researchers
17 and practitioners, might go about increasing enjoyment for Dissociators. Exercisers with a
18 preference for dissociation are more likely to be amenable to in-task interventions. Thus if the
19 quality of such interventions can be improved for this group—particularly through offering a
20 pleasant stimulus that captures attention (addressing their greater need for extrinsic reward)
21 —a marked improvement in the outcomes of exercise classes will likely follow.

22 For Associators, 25% of the variance for behavioral intent could be explained by
23 behavioral regulations whereas this figure was 18% for Dissociators. Significant path
24 predictors for Associators between IM to experience stimulation and positive behavioral
25 intent, as well as between external regulation and negative behavioral intent, offer support for

1 *H₄*. Further support for *H₄* can be found in the significant path predictors for Dissociators
2 between integrated regulation and positive behavioral intent. This could indicate that exercise
3 classes are appropriate for those with an associative attentional style in terms of engendering
4 future exercise participation. Structured exercise classes may be of particular benefit to
5 Associators owing to the fact that the primary task (i.e., movement) appeals to their intrinsic
6 motives (e.g., pleasure derived from exercise) and no discernible extrinsic reward. The higher
7 behavioral intent score for Associators may be a result of the higher self-reported self-
8 determination for this group compared to Dissociators.

9 Williams et al. (2008) provided evidence of the link between acute affective responses
10 to bouts of exercise and adherence to exercise programs after 6 and 12 months. The present
11 results offer tentative support for the link between affective responses to exercise and
12 exercise adherence inasmuch as individuals who reported more positive affect also reported
13 stronger behavioral intentions (see Table 1). In line with the notion that acute affective
14 responses predict physical activity behavior, the present results suggest that Associators may
15 be more likely to continue attending exercise classes in the long term.

16 Behavioral regulations for Associators and Dissociators accounted for similar levels
17 of variance for the cognitive outcome (14% and 19% respectively). The path predictors
18 relating to the cognitive outcome measure revealed four significant relationships (see Figure
19 2 and Figure 3). Associators and Dissociators with intrinsic motivation to learn reported
20 higher levels of concentration in the exercise class ($P < .05$) suggesting that a desire to learn
21 the skills required to take part in exercise (e.g., the dance moves that are integral to a Zumba
22 class) is a strong driver to mentally engage with exercise. This finding represents the only
23 similarity across path predictors and might indicate that learning the skills to be able to
24 participate successfully in an exercise class is a central component of intrinsically-motivated
25 behavior, regardless of one's attentional style.

1 **Practical Implications**

2 The present results support previous research suggesting that high self-determination
3 is associated with the most positive consequences from engaging in exercise behavior (e.g.,
4 Vlachopoulos et al., 2000). Therefore, practitioners in a structured exercise context should
5 aim to bolster the level of self-determination that is perceived by participants in their charge.
6 With regards to the three building blocks of self-determination (autonomy, competence, and
7 relatedness), allowing participants to select the music that is played during an exercise class
8 (such as Spinning or Body Pump™) can enhance autonomy by giving them a sense of choice
9 about their exercise experience. The use of regular social events that engage class members
10 or exercise-related activities that are conducted in pairs or small groups (e.g., passive
11 stretching techniques) will contribute toward satisfaction of the need for relatedness (Deci &
12 Ryan, 2000). To satisfy the need for competence, instructors might use verbal
13 encouragement, assist exercisers in setting and monitoring challenging but attainable goals,
14 and employ token reward systems (e.g., exerciser of the week).

15 Practitioners should seek to explore a variety of external stimuli that Dissociators may
16 focus upon, which can lead to more positive outcomes. As an initial step, this might
17 necessitate that instructors talk to their class members to gain an insight into the stimuli that
18 may be of emotional significance to them (e.g., motivational quotes, pop videos, etc.).
19 Nonetheless, practitioners should be mindful of strategies that entail forms of social pressure
20 and an emphasis on physical attractiveness, as despite the fact that these are significant
21 factors for females to initiate exercise, they can have a deleterious effect when it comes to
22 maintaining exercise behaviors (Kohlstedt et al., 2013).

23 **Limitations of the Present Study**

24 Baseline measures for the affective, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes were not
25 recorded. Although the results indicate that Associators experience the most positive

1 psychological outcomes, it may be that Dissociators experience the greatest *change* in
2 outcomes between the pre and post phases of an exercise session. The practicalities of a study
3 of this nature would be extremely challenging, as it would demand additional time from the
4 participants prior to the session, something that proved a significant challenge even within the
5 current participant-friendly protocol. Further, the instructors of an exercise class, and the
6 music they play, are significant factors (Elliott et al., 2005). It was not possible to control for
7 the actions (verbal or nonverbal) of the instructors in this study or the music played.

8 The pool of participants comprised a considerably greater number of Associators ($n =$
9 335) than Dissociators ($n = 82$). While this disparity appears consistent with that observed in
10 other studies exploring the influence of attentional style (e.g., Connolly & Janelle, 2003;
11 Couture et al., 2003), it is a noteworthy limitation that has implications for future research. A
12 larger initial pool of participants would be necessary from which to extract equal numbers of
13 Associators and Dissociators.

14 Questionnaires offer a practical means by which to assess psychological phenomena
15 in large cohorts of participants but invariably present a number of limitations. For example,
16 within the physical activity literature there is an acknowledgement that self-report
17 questionnaires often result in the over-reporting of positive behaviors and the under-reporting
18 of negative behaviors (Sallis & Saelens, 2000; Shephard, 2003). We also acknowledge
19 that responses to certain items, particularly those for behavioral intent, could have been
20 negatively skewed by social desirability bias – not least because the questionnaires were
21 administered within a group environment.

22 **Future Directions**

23 The present results indicate that Associators tend to report higher levels of self-
24 determination and the implications of this warrant further examination. To manipulate class
25 attendees' attentional focus and then subsequently assess changes in motivation may shed

1 greater light on the nature of the relationship between attentional style and behavioral
2 regulations. A simple intervention could be implemented that instructs exercisers to either
3 associate (e.g., “focus on maintaining perfect form in your movement patterns”) or dissociate
4 (“try to sing along to the music as you exercise”), and the effects of this change in attentional
5 focus could be measured on a range of outcomes including perceptions of self-determination.

6 Future studies could explore how and why individuals who are externally regulated
7 with regard to exercise have a tendency to favor environmental distractors (e.g., music,
8 fellow exercisers) during classes. Further, owing to the shift toward an associative focus as
9 exercise intensity increases (Lind et al., 2009), individuals who are externally regulated
10 toward exercise will not readily be able to focus on external stimuli (which they have a
11 tendency to do) during high-intensity exercise, and so a reason for attending the exercise
12 class will all but disappear as the intensity of exercise increases. A greater understanding of
13 what may constitute meaningful external stimuli for Dissociators may help to develop
14 interventions that can promote a more positive exercise experience for that group and help
15 maintain a dissociative focus during exercise (Jones et al., 2014).

16 The marked difference in the number of participants who report a preference for an
17 associative attentional style compared to a dissociative style warrants additional exploration.
18 This consistent finding could serve as the basis for exploring whether exercise per se, or
19 whether exercise environments, appeal to a greater degree to individuals with an associative
20 attentional style, and therefore account for the dominance of participants reporting a
21 preference for an associative style in exercise contexts. Further, the present study focused
22 solely on female participants; hence a similar study exploring male responses is likely to
23 provide additional detail on the nature of the relationship between attention and motivation in
24 an exercise context. Such an approach would also facilitate generalization of the present
25 findings; we cannot assume that the same pattern of results would be replicated with a male

1 sample.

2 **Perspectives**

3 The present findings offer some insight into the role of attentional style during
4 exercise; an area that has been highlighted as warranting further research attention (Lind et
5 al., 2009). Associators reported the most positive affective and cognitive outcomes, as well as
6 stronger behavioral intent to continue exercise when compared to Dissociators. Moreover, the
7 results support the notion that attention and motivation are intertwined with a trend emerging
8 between Associators and the more self-determined forms of motivation. Consistent with
9 extant literature, individuals reporting high levels of self-determination toward exercise
10 experienced the most positive psychological outcomes following a structured exercise class.
11 The findings may help to address the issue of female physical inactivity by providing further
12 understanding of key individual difference factors in the relationship between *attendance* at
13 exercise classes and *maintained* attendance at exercise classes over time. Additionally, the
14 nature of the relationship between attention and motivation in exercise contexts warrants
15 greater research focus. Specifically, investigators should seek to further understand the
16 influence that these two individual difference factors may exert on each other when
17 considering initiation of, and adherence to, an exercise regimen.

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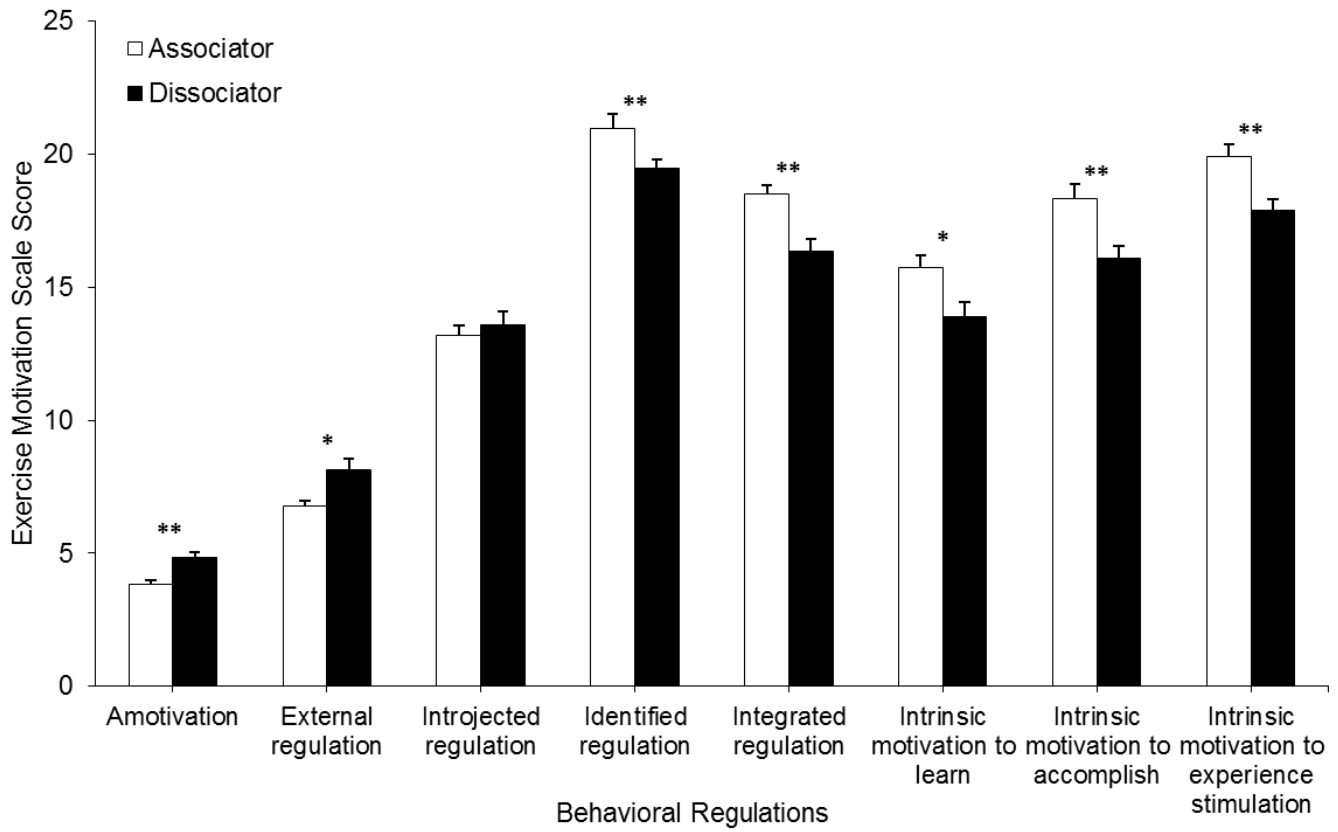


Fig. 1. Mean Exercise Motivation Scale subscale scores for Associators and Dissociators (T-bars represent standard error). * $P < .01$, ** $P < .001$.

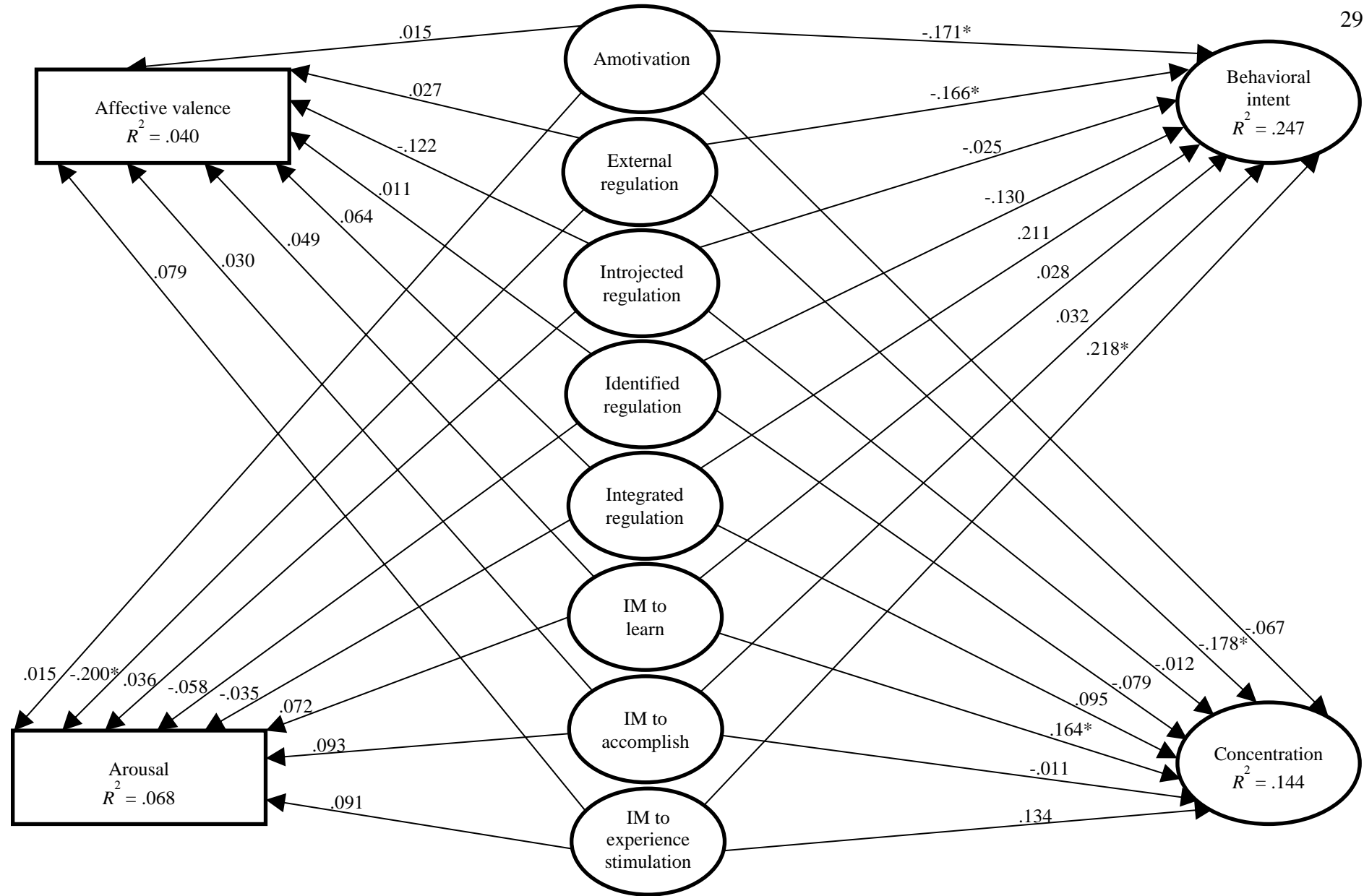


Fig. 2. Structural model showing the associations between motivational orientation at a contextual level and affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcome measures for Associators.

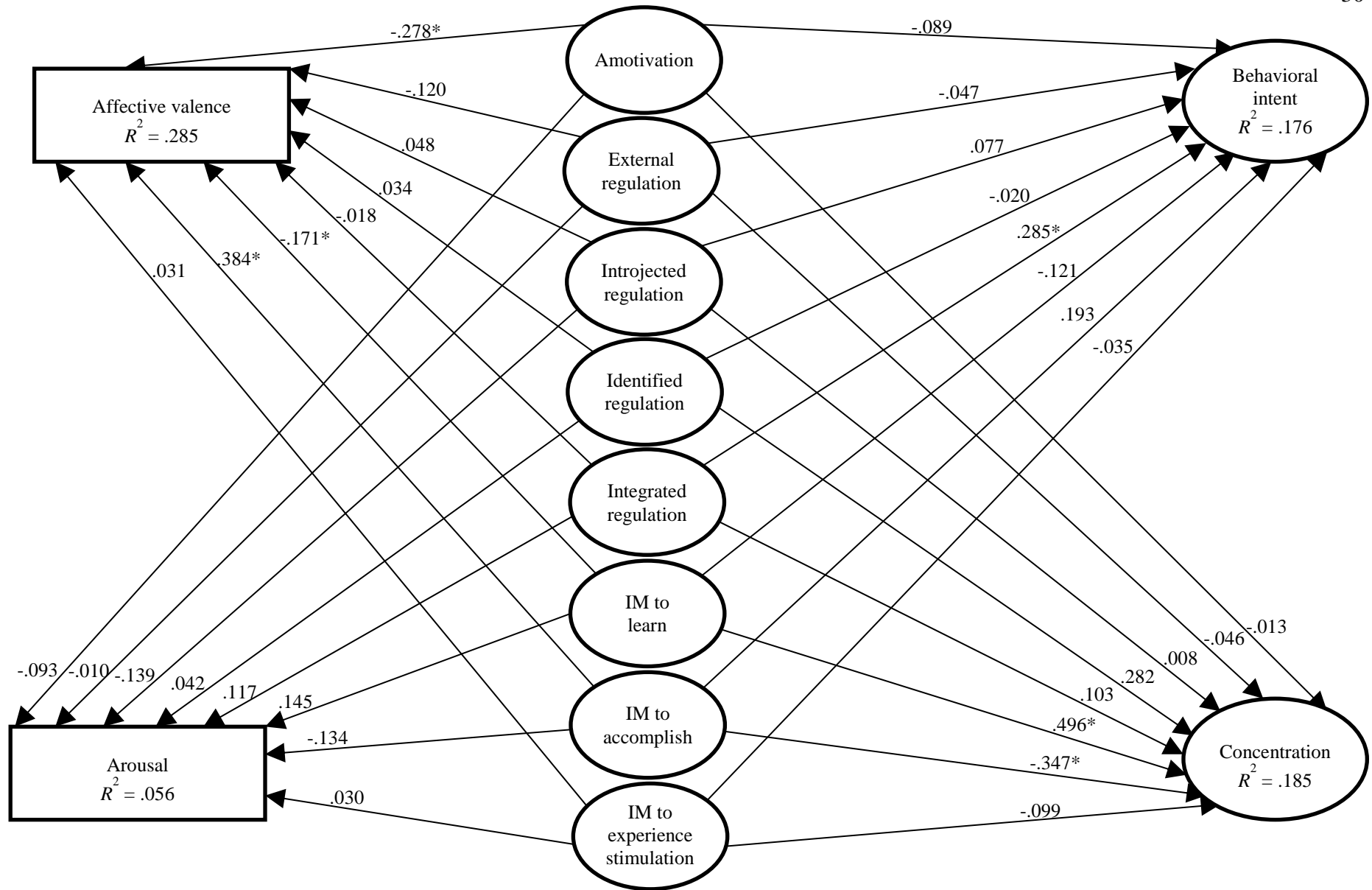


Fig. 3. Structural model showing the associations between motivational orientation at a contextual level and affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcome measures for Dissociators.

Table 1. Descriptive and inferential statistics for outcome measures and behavioral regulations by attentional style

	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	η_p^2
Affective valence					
Associators	7.78	.07	7.86	.005	.02
Dissociators	7.34	.14			
Arousal					
Associators	6.29	.11	.40	.529	.00
Dissociators	6.13	.23			
Behavioral intent					
Associators	6.72	.03	2.39	.028	.03
Dissociators	6.52	.07			
Concentration on the task					
Associators	4.11	.04	2.58	.002	.07
Dissociators	3.65	.09			
Amotivation					
Associators	3.82	.09	27.50	.000	.06
Dissociators	4.84	.18			
External regulation					
Associators	6.78	.18	11.77	.001	.03
Dissociators	8.15	.36			
Introjected regulation					
Associators	13.18	.24	.52	.472	.00
Dissociators	13.56	.48			
Identified regulation					
Associators	20.97	.14	22.01	.000	.05
Dissociators	19.46	.29			
Integrated regulation					
Associators	18.51	.21	21.13	.000	.05
Dissociators	16.35	.42			
IM to learn					
Associators	15.74	.25	11.00	.001	.03
Dissociators	13.88	.50			
IM to accomplish					
Associators	18.33	.20	24.13	.000	.06
Dissociators	16.10	.41			
IM to experience stimulation					
Associators	19.92	.19	22.79	.000	.05
Dissociators	17.89	.38			

Table 2. Pearson's Product moment correlations for behavioral regulations and cognitive, behavioral, and affective outcomes

All participants ($N = 417$)				
EMS subscales	Concentration	Behavioral intent	Affective valence	Arousal
Amotivation	-0.22***	-0.32***	-0.14**	-0.16**
External regulation	-0.19***	-0.23***	-0.18**	-0.10*
Introjected regulation	-0.03	0.03	-0.05	-0.05
Identified regulation	0.21***	0.26***	0.09	0.15**
Integrated regulation	0.27***	0.37***	0.13**	0.16**
IM to learn	0.30***	0.26***	0.16**	0.15**
IM to accomplish	0.26***	0.35***	0.16**	0.19***
IM to experience stimulation	0.30***	0.37***	0.19***	0.20***
Associators ($N = 335$)				
EMS subscales	Concentration	Behavioral intent	Affective valence	Arousal
Amotivation	-0.21***	-0.34***	-0.10	-0.05
External regulation	-0.23***	-0.27***	-0.19***	-0.03
Introjected regulation	-0.07	-0.01	-0.04	-0.07
Identified regulation	0.14**	0.22***	0.07	0.11*
Integrated regulation	0.22***	0.34***	0.10	0.13*
IM to learn	0.26***	0.26***	0.15**	0.15**
IM to accomplish	0.23***	0.33***	0.16***	0.15**
IM to experience stimulation	0.28***	0.39***	0.17***	0.16***
Dissociators ($N = 82$)				
EMS subscales	Concentration	Behavioral intent	Affective valence	Arousal
Amotivation	-0.08	-0.22*	-0.15	-0.44***
External regulation	0.06	-0.07	-0.09	-0.29**
Introjected regulation	-0.07	-0.01	-0.09	0.01
Identified regulation	0.14	0.20	0.07	0.27*
Integrated regulation	0.28**	0.27**	0.12	0.28**
IM to learn	0.26*	0.38***	0.12	0.12
IM to accomplish	0.17	0.33***	0.07	0.35***
IM to experience stimulation	0.19	0.25*	0.14	0.32***

* $P < .05$, ** $P < .01$, *** $P < .001$.