

**Leading to Life Long Exercise; what can group
fitness participants tell us about fitness leadership?**

by

Kathleen A. Cameron
B.A., University of Victoria, 1999

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. J. Wharf-Higgins, Supervisor
(School of Exercise Science, Physical & Health Education)

Dr. L. Lauzon, Committee Member
(School of Exercise Science, Physical & Health Education)

Dr. Darlene Clover, Committee Member
(Education Psychology and Leadership Studies)

Supervisory Committee

Dr. J. Wharf-Higgins, Supervisor
(School of Exercise Science, Physical & Health Education)

Dr. L. Lauzon, Committee Member
(School of Exercise Science, Physical & Health Education)

Dr. Darlene Clover, Committee Member
(Education Psychology and Leadership Studies)

Abstract

The importance of exercising within a group has been suggested to demonstrate a positive individual and group influence on exercise adherence. In addition, the important role the group fitness leader plays is integral in the development of group cohesion and individual exercise success (Turner, Rejeski, & Brawley, 1997). Bain, Wilson, and Chaikind (1989) revealed the importance of leadership style and approach on the exercising participant's enjoyment and adherence. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of novice, female group fitness participants and the feelings and attitudes they have about their group fitness experiences as they relate to the leadership of the class. Participants included six women, between the ages of 38-60 years currently participating in a novice, group fitness class. Participants were recruited through posters placed at the YM-YWCA of Greater Victoria and Oak Bay Recreation Centre. This ethnomethodological inquiry used interview and focus group as the data collection strategies. Analysis of the data revealed seven themes that were connected to four styles of leadership. Characteristics of the transformational style of group fitness leadership offer the participants the best support as they move from novice to advanced levels of experience. The results of this study provide a greater understanding of how to advance fitness leadership to maximize exercise adherence.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

It is widely recognized in the literature that regular physical activity (PA) enhances overall health (Biddle, 1995; Carron, Hausenblas, & Estabrooks, 2003; Maxwell, 2004; McElroy, 2002, Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006). McElroy suggests that physical inactivity is linked to increases in illnesses and mortality rates. In addition, physical inactivity may be related to an increased risk of heart disease and stroke, colon and breast cancer, obesity, type two diabetes, and mental stresses such as depression and anxiety (Colman & Walker, 2004). Warburton et al. (2006), has highlighted the benefits of physical activity in the prevention of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. The relationship of physical activity to overall health and well-being is not a new one. Warnings of the negative effects on health due to an inactive lifestyle were heard over 100 years ago by a handful of medical specialists. It is now widely recognized that a sedentary lifestyle may impede good health and take years off one's life (McElroy, 2002).

Because of the strong correlation between inactivity and illness, the interest in fitness and physical activity as it relates to disease prevention has grown. Unfortunately, despite an increase in participation over time, the rates of overweight and obese individuals are on the rise (Katzmarzyk, 2002). Keeler, Manning, Newhouse, Sloss, and Wasserman (1989) suggest that if the inactive public included daily physical activity into their lifestyle, it would reduce the costs associated with sedentary living. In BC, 38% of residents are inactive (Coleman & Walker, 2004), and this figure climbs to 53.5% across Canada (Klein-Geltink, Choi, & Fry, 2006). Katzmarzyk, Gladhill, and Shephard (2000)

estimated health care costs of \$2.1 billion dollars attributable to physical inactivity in Canada in 1999. In addition, the costs related to loss of productivity through illness, disability or death equals \$236 million dollars annually in BC (Coleman & Walker, 2004).

There have been a number of statements issued by various colleges and government agencies proclaiming the importance of regular physical activity. In 1996, the Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health stated that moderate physical activity had a significant positive benefit on health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). The American College of Sports Medicine has outlined suggestions relating to the prescription of a healthy aerobic program that include exercising 3-5 days per week; 20-30 minutes each session, based upon cardiovascular intensity (ACSM, 2007). The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada suggests 30 to 60 minutes or more of moderate physical activity per day. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, only 60 minutes of physical activity may reduce the risk of diseases related to sedentary lifestyle (Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC], 2003). Therefore, if a larger number of people are at risk for multiple illnesses due to inactivity than any other risk factor, physical activity promotion may be the most important factor in the prevention of illness.

The literature is replete with evidence of the physiological explanations for increased health and physical activity (Brown & Comeau, 2004; Heyward, 2002). Daily, moderate physical activity may increase heart size and volume, stroke volume,¹ cardiac output, and decrease resting heart rate and blood pressure. Musculoskeletal, exercise will strengthen the connective tissue and bones helping to reduce the risk of injury. In addition, elevated amounts of physical activity may reduce the amount of subcutaneous

¹ Stroke volume is the volume of blood pumped out of the heart in one beat (Rhoades & Pflanzner, 1992).

tissue and blood cholesterol. From the suggested “dose response relationship” to the appropriate exercise target heart rate, researchers have accumulated ample evidence to irrefutably proclaim the benefits of physical fitness (Warburton et al., 2006).

In addition to the physiological benefits, there is support for psychological benefits from being physically active. Physical activity has been linked to a reduction in stress, depression, and enhanced mood and well-being (Hassmen, Koivula, & Uutela, 2000; Jansen, Stevens, & Coast, 2001; Lee, Goldberg, Sallis, Hickmann, Castro, & Chen, 2001; Salmon, 2001; Sexton, Sogaard, & Olstad, 2001). Moreover, physical activity is becoming more prevalent in clinical settings as a strategy to treat and support individuals with mental health issues such as depression and schizophrenia (Biddle, 1999; Dimeo, Bauer, Varahram, Proest, & Halter, 2001; Penedo, & Dahn, 2005; Priest, 2007).

The educational approach to facilitating behaviour change assumes that greater amounts of information on the benefits of an active lifestyle will lead to increased rates of physical activity and lowered obesity. Alas, this seems not to be the case for the majority of people. As physical activity levels plummet, obesity rates in North America are on the rise. Katzmarzyk (2002) reported that over one half of the Canadian population in 1998 had a body mass index that exceeded recommendations for health. The British Columbia Nutrition Survey (2004) found more than 50% of the 1,823 adults who participated in the survey were overweight or obese. In addition, this percentage had increased by 10% from 1989 to 1999. 54% of Canadians are aware of some guidelines for physical activity, but only 37% say that they have heard of Canada’s Physical Activity Guide. Moreover, 45% say information they received facilitated their activity levels, yet for 54% the guidelines had no influence (CFLRI, 2005). Clearly, there are limitations to merely

providing information about the benefits of physical activity (Syme, 2002). In fact, the literature reveals the disappointment of health communication interventions in helping people to change their activity levels, arguably due to both the inappropriateness of the communication effort, and their irrelevance to people's lives (*Choosing Health*, 2004; Neuhauser & Kreps, 2003).

1.1 Determinants of Exercise

Rhodes and Courneya (2000) convey the importance of understanding the underlying factors that are associated with inactivity and the importance of using theoretically driven interventions for successful implementation of physical activity programs. Although the interest in the psychology of exercise emerged in the late 1800's, this interest was rekindled in the early 1970's. Since this time, there have been many theories and models to help understand the behaviour of the inactive individual (Dubbert, 2002).

For example, the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) postulates that perceived behavioural control, attitudes relating to physical activity behaviour and subjective norm are instrumental in the intent of the individual to exercise. This intent, over a short time period, will lead to the behaviour of exercise. DiClemente and Prochaska (1982) suggest that there are five stages an individual will experience when changing behaviour; precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination. This continuum of change assumes the individual will move through these stages at varying rates that may include steady progression or relapse. Albert Bandura's suggestion of self-efficacy, the beliefs in one's ability to succeed at a certain

task (in this case exercise), has been noted as the ‘foundation of human behavior’ (Bandura, 1989).

As much as attention has been given to the psychology of physical activity, it has now turned to understanding the social and environmental determinants underlying a sedentary lifestyle. Individual, social, environmental, and ecological factors all play a significant role in the decision to be physically active. Considerations such as socioeconomic status, educational level, cultural factors, and the influence of the built environment have an influence on the overall health and activity level of the individual (McElroy, 2002). For example, Giles-Corti and Donovan (2002) suggested the need for the acknowledgement of streetscapes in the promotion of walking. They also present the importance of social support in the maintenance of daily physical activity. In addition, it was reported that those individuals that participated in recreational activities did so at facilities within their communities. Earlier, Frankish, Milligan, and Reid (1998) acknowledged the importance of an individual’s physical activity history, education level, beliefs and attitudes, and the influence of social networks on the success of physical activity adherence. In addition, Frankish et al. suggest that social norms, as they relate to what is appropriate for males and females, may also influence lifestyle choice.

Moving beyond the individual experience of physical activity, the socio-ecological model has suggested that intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community factors have an influence on exercise behaviour (Matson-Koffman, Brownstein, Neiner, & Greaney, 2005). Intrapersonal factors, such as individual characteristics, coupled with interpersonal factors including social interactions with friends and family and social

support, and the integration of community participation in creating healthy environments, help to promote healthy behaviours (Baker, Brennan, Brownson & Houseman, 2000).

It has been argued that social support may positively influence physical activity behaviour (Trieber, Baranowski, Braden, Strong, Levy, & Knox, 1991). In addition, researchers suggest that the most influential factor in promoting physical activity is the support provided by friends, family, exercise specialists and other members of an individual's social network (Green, McAfee, Hendmarsh, Madsen, Caplow, & Buist, 2002). Thus the US government's Centers for Disease Control determined that the most influential support were that of non-family members (Task Force on Community Preventive Services, 2002). Wharf Higgins, Gaul, Gibbons, & Van Gyn (2003) found social support for exercise most important in females. Interestingly, however, the research findings on the importance of social support has been mixed, perhaps due to the data collection and analysis methods used in different investigations (Seefeldt et al., 2002).

The social dimension of physical activity behaviour as it relates to group exercise has been the focus of study for many researchers (Carron, Hausenblas, & Mack, 1996, Fox, Rejeski, & Gauvin, 2000, Frankish, Milligan, & Reid, 1998, Martin & Fox, 2001). Azjen and Fishbein (1980) highlighted the importance of social networks (or subjective norms) on the processes of behaviour change. This important variable was seen as a component of their theory of reasoned action and later Azjen's (1985) theory of planned behavior. It has been postulated that if perceived social influence is present and if the individual believes the behaviour is supported by their social circles, it will have a positive influence on the individual to participate in the chosen behaviour (such as

exercise). Carron et al. (1996), in their meta-analysis of social influence and exercise, suggest that important others influence the adherence to physical activity more than family. If this is the case, there is strong support for the benefits of group exercise on an individual's adherence of physical activity. In addition, based upon the findings of Carron et al. (1996), the leader of the group fitness program may play an integral role in the life long physical activity of the class participant.

1.2 Statement of Purpose

Clearly, the evidence that physical activity enhances multiple dimensions of health has been well established. We also know that despite this science, physical activity rates remain intractable. Further, there has been limited research in the area of fitness leadership. What research is available highlights popular themes on leadership styles (bland vs. socially enriched) and the fitness leader's influence on the exercise enjoyment and adherence of their participants. We have yet to explore the lived experiences, attitudes, and beliefs of the group fitness participant and how these experiences are influenced by the leadership styles of the fitness leader. Given the paucity of knowledge in this area, the purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of novice, female group fitness participants and the feelings and attitudes they have about their group fitness experiences as they relate to the leadership of the fitness class.

1.3 Research Questions

This study investigated the following research questions:

1. How do novice, group fitness participants experience fitness leadership in group fitness classes?

2. What are the characteristics of group fitness leadership that may positively influence the exercise experience and, therefore, adherence?

1.4 Operational Definitions

Group Fitness: Cardiovascular exercise performed in groups that may include activities such as step aerobics, hip-hop, water aerobics, group cycling, group resistance training or martial art-based classes such as boxing aerobics.

Group Fitness Leader (GFL): An aerobic instructor leading a beginner to moderate level group fitness classes.

Exercise: The appropriate dose of physical exertion (frequency, intensity, time and type of exercise) that will increase or help to maintain physical fitness (Peterson & Bryant, 1995).

Fitness: Incorporating optimum levels of muscular strength, flexibility, weight control, cardiovascular efficiency with the ability to carry out daily activities without fatigue (Peterson & Bryant, 1995).

Fitness Facility: A fitness facility may be defined as any facility (municipal, private, and not-for-profit or educational institute) that offers group fitness classes to the Greater Victoria Regional District.

Leadership: Leadership may be defined as goal achievement through the processes of communication exercised by a person or persons with interpersonal influence (Russel, 2001).

Autocratic Leadership: Autocratic leadership may be defined as leader-centred, closely supervised, leader-defined actions or decisions for others to follow (Russell, 2001).

Democratic Leadership: Democratic leadership may be defined as group-centered, decision-making that represents the needs of the group (Bass, 1990).

Transactional Leadership: Transactional leadership may be defined as an exchange between leader and follower. Leaders will appeal to the needs and desires of the follower while the follower will respond in a manner that will communicate continued leadership (Burns, 1978).

Transformational Leadership: Transformational leadership may be defined as a relationship approach to transform the values of the followers, motivating them to achieve more than what they had expected, seeks to inspire leadership in the follower. Transformational leadership is characterized by four leadership behaviours; inspirational motivation, idealized influence, individualized concern, and intellectual stimulation (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003; Burns, 1978).

Group Cohesion: Group cohesion may be defined as a dynamic influence that creates a tendency for members of a group to work together toward a common goal or social purpose (Carron et al., 2003).

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on the leadership of physical activity and related concepts, including definitions and theories of leadership, and how these concepts and models have been tested and used to understand group fitness and physical activity participation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of leadership in the fitness industry.

This study focused on the characteristics of leadership as defined by the novice, group fitness participant and based upon multiple leadership theories. In order to have a clear understanding of leadership theory and the link it may have on group cohesion, group fitness, and the fitness industry, the next section offers a review of literature as it relates to the above.

2.1 Leadership

The origin of the word “leadership” is rooted in the Old English language. The suffix “ship” descends from “schaepem” meaning “to create a thing of value” and is associated with the word “creativity”. The word “leader” originates from the old gothic word “laeden” which means “to go forward or upward”. This referred to any action that was constructive and leading to the benefit of the community (Karash, 1998). The Oxford English Dictionary defines a leader as “a person or thing that is the most successful or advanced in a particular area” (Soanes, 2002, p. 475). To lead is to “influence to do or believe something, to be in charge, or to be superior to” (p. 475). Leadership may be defined as “interpersonal influence exercised by a person or persons, through the process of communication, toward the attainment of an organization’s goals”

(Russel, 2001, pg.12). Although there are various definitions of leadership, the origins of this process stemmed from studying the realm of business. The study of leadership comes from the belief that successful leadership will transform a business or company into a profitable and high performing operation (Bernard, 2001).

Studies have shown that strong leaders possess certain personality characteristics that allow them to lead. Characteristics such as trustworthiness, abilities, positive general attitude, vision, and confidence have been found to enhance leadership ability in those that possess such traits (Russell, 2001). In addition, personal belief in the ability to lead within the individual may result in a greater effectiveness to lead (Hoyt, Murphy, Halverson, & Watson, 2003). Conversely, it has been suggested that perhaps focusing on leadership practices and strategies, instead of the characteristics of the individual, may prove to be more effective in defining successful leadership (Johnson, 1999).

2.2 Theories of Leadership

One of the earliest theories of leadership originated from the understanding that leadership was innate and the leader was predestined based upon birthing order, gender, and social status. As cited in Jordan (2007) the “Great Man” theory of leadership was influenced by European politics and made it difficult for a woman to become a great leader. Over time, an attempt was made to understand what influenced an individual to become a successful leader. Through this attempt, researchers outlined specific traits, behaviours and situational characteristics that were postulated as the key variables to leadership. These characteristics were inherent and included intelligence, strong communication skills, the ability to adapt to various situations and a pleasing physical appearance (Russell, 2001). Until the 1940’s it was believed that individuals became

leaders because of their individual traits and characteristics (Bass, 1990). After further research, it was noted that there might not be a set of qualities that could be observable in all leaders as emerging leaders did not always possess certain established personality traits (Kraus, Carpenter, & Bates, 1981; Riggio, Riggio, Salinas, & Cole, 2003)

Currently, theories frame strong leadership as emerging from individual behaviour rather than innate characteristics or traits (Jordan, 2007). The most widely recognized and researched styles of behavioural leadership are autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles (Russell, 2001). These leadership styles take the focus away from the innate characteristics of the leader and onto the processes and actions the leader chooses when directing, coaching and building teams and groups of people. When applying the following leadership styles to group fitness leaders, it may be observed that many leaders encompass a wide variety of behaviours.

2.3 Behavioral Theories of Leadership

Autocratic leadership may be defined as leader-centred, closely supervised, leader-defined actions or decisions for others to follow (Russell, 2001). According to Jordan (2007) the autocratic leader provides direction based upon orders without accepting or encouraging the contributions or feedback from the followers. Bass (1990) suggests autocratic leadership is based upon meeting the needs and goals of the leader without considering those of the follower. Van Vugt, Jepson, Hart, and Cremer (2004) found that when comparing autocratic leadership with democratic and laissez-faire leadership styles, the members of the autocratic groups demonstrated more unhappiness with the lack of participation in the process of decision-making. In addition, those participants in the autocratic leadership group were more likely to leave the group than were those from the

democratic and laissez-faire groups. Turman (2003) studied the impact of leadership styles on team cohesion and found that coaches using a more autocratic style of leadership were less effective in building the team cohesion of the players than those coaches using a more democratic style of leadership. It has been noted that this latter style of leadership may be effective within group fitness classes when the leader is directing the group in the execution of exercises (YMCA, 1985). However, it remains to be determined if this style has a positive influence on adherence, group cohesion and activity enjoyment of the group.

Democratic leaders, in contrast, value the feedback of the group members before making decisions for the group. This style of leadership encourages input and assistance from the members, perceiving the leader/follower relationship more equally than does the autocratic leader (Bass, 1990; Jordan, 2007; Russell, 2001). A democratic leader is present to guide the follower in making decisions, but promotes self-directed behaviour within the follower. This approach may enhance the morale of the group and in the long-term increase group productivity or achievement of set goals (Niepoth, 1983). When applying this style of leadership to the group fitness class setting, it may be acknowledged that this style would have a more positive effect on the building of group cohesiveness coupled with a sense of belonging and satisfaction.

It is important to acknowledge that one style of leadership may not necessarily be better than the other. For example, if time is an issue or if the safety of the group is at risk, autocratic leadership is most effective. Conversely, democratic leadership demands more time and produces positive results including greater team cohesion, productivity, and overall achievement by including all group members in the decision making process.

In addition, those included in the group report greater satisfaction and enjoyment (Jordan, 1996; Niepoth, 1983).

Finally, the third behavioural approach to leadership is referred to as “Laissez-Faire”. Translated from French, means “let it be”. It has been suggested that this “hands-off” approach to leadership occurs when the leader steps back from the group and allows the group to make the decisions. The laissez-faire leader withdraws or abstains from providing direction without attention to task or relationship (Bass, 1990). Niepoth (1983) suggested that laissez-faire leadership is the “non-leader” approach to leadership due to the lack of interest in changing the behaviour of the group. The leader acts as a resource for information and will participate in the decision making process when asked. This style of leadership may be seen as weak, however, it is useful when the purpose is to strengthen group dynamics (Jordan, 2007). It may also serve as an approach to enhancing group responsibility and ownership of decision making. For example, in an educational setting the teacher may stand back and allow for the students to participate in a learning exercise without the encouragement or supervision of the teacher. Conversely, when Corrigan, Garman, Canar and Chow (1999) studied the relationship between leader characteristics and the satisfaction of the followers, they found that those leaders that demonstrated a non-leader (i.e. laissez-faire) approach had higher reports of group dissatisfaction than those that assumed more responsibility. Team members reported the need for a higher understanding of what they were to do, they required a vision or goal and felt the need for their leader to make the necessary decisions.

2.4 Relationship Approaches to Leadership

As behavioural theories of leadership define leadership through the behaviours of the individual, both transactional and transformational models are described through the relationship between leader and follower. This approach to leadership has piqued the interest of researchers over the past decade and continues to receive growing attention (Vandenberghe, Stordeur, & D'hoore, 2002). In addition, there has been much interest in the research of transactional and transformational models of leadership as it relates to the health care field (Gellis & Zvi, 2001; Vandenberghe et al., 2002).

Burns (1978) defines transactional leadership as an act of connecting with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued services or objects. Whether this exchange is goods or services for money, goods for goods, or a trade for enhanced health, transactional leadership is based upon the equal recognition that both leader and follower have a purpose. As cited in Jordan (2007) transactional leadership may be defined as an exchange between people. This exchange is based upon the agreement of the roles of follower and leader. In addition, transactional leaders motivate groups to reach a pre-defined goal by providing assistance in goal definition and suggestions related to reaching those goals (Russel, 2001). For Vandenberghe et al. (2002), transactional leadership is based upon the identification of the goals and objectives of the group and the exchange of the leadership of performance for the achievement of the objectives. This is particularly observable when applying it to the group fitness class. The fitness class participant is accepting of the leadership provided and the group fitness leader provides the anticipated leadership. In addition, based upon the assumed purpose of any fitness class (i.e., to enhance physical fitness) one could consider this the pre-determined

goal of the fitness class. Thus, transactional leadership influences the behaviour of the group to attain the specified objectives.

Transformational leadership is the ability to transform the values of the followers, motivating them to achieve more than what they had expected (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003). Burns (1978) defines transformational leadership as not only an engagement between leader and follower, but a connection that elevates both to a higher level of conduct and aspiration. This latter type of leader has the ability of transforming individuals from thinking “I” into thinking “we”. This type of leadership may shift the emphasis off the individual and place it upon the group (Jordan, 2007). In addition, according to Kark et al. (2003), the transformational leader possesses four leadership behaviours related to this style of leadership. First, inspirational motivation is integral and refers to the charisma of the leader. Defined by Barbuto (1997) charisma is a “magical gift” possessed by leaders. The charismatic leader has the ability to influence others to follow, to attract those that mirror their beliefs and strongly identify with them and to gain the compliance of the follower through “symbolic power”. Russell (2001) defined charisma as the “leader’s ability to convey a sense of vision that inspires followers...to inspire pride, respect, and faith in a group” (pg. 22).

The second transformational leadership behaviour is idealized influence. Behaviours such as singling an individual from the group as a good example and demonstrating high standards may define such a behaviour. Third, individualized concern as characterized by providing support for the individual in addition to coaching and encouragement. Finally, the fourth behaviour is intellectual stimulation. This includes the education and awareness promoted by the leader in a way to enhance the

critical thinking of the followers ultimately leading to a new way of thinking or viewing problems (Kark et al., 2003).

When researching the differences of transactional and transformational leadership styles on physical and virtual environments, Hoyt (2003) found that in both environments transformational leadership style was associated with a decrease in the amount of productivity but an increase in the quality of productivity. In addition, Vandenberghe et al. (2002) explored the relationship between transactional and transformational leadership as it related to the nursing profession and job satisfaction. Through this community-based study, they found that the transformational leadership was related to increased job effort and leader satisfaction, a decreased intent to quit the position and was also related to staff retention rates. When Gellis and Zvi (2001) applied these leadership theories to the field of social work, they found that the transformational leadership style had a significant influence on the reported effectiveness and job satisfaction of social workers. In addition, it was self-reported that the social worker went above and beyond what was expected of them as defined by their job description. Transformational leaders were reported to meet the job-related needs of the staff more effectively and were more efficient at organizational effectiveness. Moreover, the researchers concluded that based upon the changes in the health care system (i.e. decreased staffing and funding) the understanding and implementation of creative leadership strategies, such as transformational leadership may help to create a positive working environment in lieu of perceived negative changes. Although the literature supports the overall effectiveness of transformational leadership within the health care profession, its application to fitness leadership is not well understood.

Since the days of Jane Fonda and Richard Simmons, the fitness industry has offered many charismatic fitness celebrities promoting the benefits of exercise. The leader's ability to approach individual members of a group fitness class offering praise on performance or achievement has been observed as creating an enjoyable exercise environment for many participants. It may be suggested that fitness leaders that make themselves available before and after classes may enhance the feeling of support by those that attend the class. This final suggestion outlined by Kark et al. (2003) may pose a challenge for some leaders but as argued by researchers, an important factor in transformational leadership: providing education and awareness to fitness class participants by presenting fitness tips, personal stories, issues related to the fitness profession may be the key to transforming the individual class participant into an active member of the group. Moreover, the importance in challenging the way fitness is achieved and marketed may help to instill critical thinking skills in the exercise consumer.

2.5 Group Cohesion and Fitness Leadership

It has been widely recognized that social connection or subjective norm² may play an important role in the adoption of and adherence to physical activity. Moreover, the importance of exercising within a group has been suggested to demonstrate a positive individual and group influence on exercise adherence (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Carron et al. (2003) define group cohesion as a “dynamic property of groups that is manifested by the tendency for members to stick together and remain united as they work toward collective goals and/or for social purposes” (pg. 97).

² Subjective norm refers to the individual's perception of the support or disapproval of significant others as it relates to the individual's behaviour (Ajzen, 1985).

Prior to 1995, there was little inquiry into the effects on exercise enjoyment, attrition and group cohesion within a fitness class (Carron et al., 2003). Since this time, there has been an interest in the effects of the group fitness class on exercise enjoyment, adherence, anxiety, and other factors relating to the exercise experience with the recognition that the group fitness leader plays an integral role in the development of group cohesion and individual exercise success (Turner, Rejeski, & Brawley, 1997).

Research has found that group cohesiveness across various physical activity settings, such as fitness classes, enhances the adherence rates of the group (Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1988; Spink et al., 1992). In addition to these results, it has been suggested that group cohesion influences an individual's reports of anxiety and enhanced self-esteem, trust, and a willingness to change. Carron and Spink (1993) suggest that those group fitness leaders that implement strategies within their fitness classes to enhance the group cohesion may lower rates of exercise attrition and raise overall satisfaction among the members of the group. In fact, acknowledging the effects of group cohesion on individual exercise behaviour can be an important way for instructors to enhance the experience of and adherence to physical activity (Spink & Carron, 1994). Surprisingly however, very little research has focused on the influences of group cohesion on the adherence of exercise (Spink & Carron, 1992).

In their study, Martin and Fox (2001) found that the leadership style of the group fitness leader influenced the levels of social anxiety among participants. In addition, Bain, Wilson, and Chaikind (1989) revealed the importance of leadership style and approach on the exercising participants' enjoyment and adherence. Carron, Hausenblas,

and Mack (1996) in their research into social influence and exercise, suggested that the influence of “important others” was twice as great as the influence of the family member.

2.6 Leadership and Group Fitness

After reviewing the behavioural and relationship approaches to leadership, how does the fitness practitioner apply this knowledge to enhance and promote physical activity enjoyment and adherence? When focused on the application of various leadership strategies to group fitness settings, what does the literature support?

Based upon the literature, interest in leadership behaviours and strategies within the group fitness class environment has increased (Bray, Millen, Eidsness, & Leuzinger, 2005; Carron et al., 2003; Fox, Rejeski, & Gauvin, 2000; Martin et al., 2001; Turner et al., 1997). This growing interest may have originated from the academic acknowledgment of the positive influences group cohesion has on the adherence of exercise behaviour (Carron et al., 2003). Although there has been little to no mention of autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, transactional or transformational styles of leadership within the literature, there has been a focus on the relationship between a “socially enriched” and “bland” style of leadership demonstrated by the group fitness leader as it influences the physical activity enjoyment and dynamics of the group (Bray, et al., 2005; Carron et al., 2003; Fox, Rejeski, & Gauvin, 2000; Martin et al., 2001; Turner et al., 1997).

As defined by Fox et al. (2000) the *socially enriched* leader takes the time to learn and use the names of each participant, engages in conversation before, during and after the group fitness class, reinforces positive behaviours, provides specific instructions and encouragement, ignores mistakes made by the participant and offers rewards for

participant's efforts immediately after the class. The opposite definition may be applied to the *bland style* of leadership. The bland leader will not acknowledge their participants by name, they will not engage in conversation before, during or after the fitness class, they will only comment to the group and not directly to the individual, they will not encourage or praise and will focus on negative behaviours while verbally acknowledging mistakes. The socially enriched style of leadership may be comparable to democratic and transformational leadership styles. Both lean towards inclusion of the participant and the attempt to enhance or transform fitness performance.

While there is a dearth of research in this area what does exist investigates the influences of leadership styles on the group fitness experience. Fox et al. (2000) compared the effects of socially enriched and bland leadership on the physical activity enjoyment and future intention to participate in a group fitness class. Based upon quantitative measures, their results suggested that the socially enriched leader promotes higher reported levels of exercise enjoyment and future participation among participants. It is important to note that this study was manipulated in a laboratory setting and measured over one exercise session only.

Martin and Fox (2001) studied the effects of leadership on the social anxiety felt by group fitness participants. Using the definitions of leadership provided by Fox et al. (2000) these researchers found that those participants in the socially enriched group reported experiencing less social anxiety than those led by a bland leader. The findings also suggested that the difference in verbal instruction provided by both leaders might have led to the results. The socially enriched leader provided positive feedback, whereas the bland group received only negative instruction. Again, this quantitative study was

laboratory based and measurements taken over only one session. One group fitness practitioner lead the class by following either the bland or socially enriched scripts very closely. In addition, research assistants were strategically placed among the study participants to either encourage a socially enriched atmosphere or a bland exercise environment. Researchers emphasized the importance of conducting a similar study within a community context, and outlined the importance of such a study to developing of leadership strategies to minimize the negative impact on the exercising participant.

Finally Bray et al. (2005), focusing on novice group fitness participants, compared the socially bland and socially enriched style of leadership, as defined by Fox et al. (2000), as it related to the participants' exercise enjoyment and intention. Using quantitative methodology, their results concluded that those exposed to the socially enriched leadership style reported a great level of exercise enjoyment. These researchers concluded that future research should look at the influence leadership style may have on class group dynamics and adherence to exercise.

One of the few qualitative studies focusing on the experiences of the group fitness participant in relation to the leadership of the class comes from Bain et al. (1989). The researchers were interested in the exercise experience of overweight women between the ages of 25 – 61 (mean age was 41.6). The valued qualities of the fitness leader as reported by the participants included leader expertise, awareness of the special needs of the overweight female, and a non-judgmental attitude. In addition, the sensitivity of the fitness leader was also important to the exercise experience and comfort of the overweight participant. One participant in this study commented, "There is a difference with a group of the same people who know each other rather than an anonymous class.

I've never found that supportive – quite the opposite” (Bain et al., 1989, pg.40).

Interestingly, their findings support the socially enriched and transformational styles of leadership due to the acknowledgement of individual participants and encouragement of individual and group participation.

In concluding their research, Bain et al. (1989) highlighted the importance of an awareness of the origins of many social beliefs and practices integrated within a group fitness program. For example, if the group fitness leader holds certain beliefs relating to obesity, the fitness program may demonstrate these beliefs through leadership and program design. This is what Vertinsky (1985) refers to as fitness and health promotion programs “imposing values packaged in scientific wrapping” (Vertinsky, 1985, pg. 73). Bain et al. (1989) found participants experienced feelings of social disapproval based upon their size. Although this may not be defined in any leadership theory or style covered in this paper, it is an attitude that may be perceived by the overweight and/or novice exercise participant and one that should be acknowledged through the leadership education of group fitness instructors.

Based upon the above suggestions perhaps the initial promotion of physical activity through the leadership of the group fitness instructor should focus on the enjoyment of exercise and not the physiological benefits, particularly for the female participant. Eyler, Vest, Sanderson, et al. (2002) found that the social environment had a strong influence on the physical activity behaviour of women. Their recommendations included the importance of creating a socially enhanced environment as part of any PA promotion for women. In addition, Eyler and Vest (2002) found similar results in that the primary

finding of the study, based upon focus group data, was the importance of a social environment in the promotion of PA behaviour among their female participants.

There is still a widely accepted belief that to become fit one must work at high intensities and experience pain and/or discomfort (Carron et al., 2003). One might suggest there is a battle going on between the disciplines of exercise physiology and exercise psychology. As one states the physiological benefits of fitness based upon prescribed target heart rates and muscular fatigue, the other promotes exercise enjoyment and social support (to name a few influences) as a way to create a life long exercise habit.

The “Active Living” approach to physical fitness relates to the more psychological approach to physical activity promotion by suggesting that active living is a way of life in which physical activity is integrated into one’s daily lifestyle. This approach suggests the importance of choosing fun, comfortable activities that one enjoys instead of focusing on how many calories are burned during the exercise. It is also suggested that the scientific approach to exercise, including the prescription of high intensity exercise, may turn people off and lead to non-compliance (PHAC, 2003).

As previously presented, research has indicated the importance of group cohesion within a group fitness class as a way to enhance the adherence of the individual members. Spink and Carron (1994) found that the individual perceptions of high group cohesion led to a higher rate of exercise adherence. In addition, those that reported lower levels of group cohesion dropped out at the end of the third week. Finally, Spink and Carron concluded by suggesting that through the promotion of group exercise and team building within fitness programs, health and fitness practitioners may increase the retention rates. The impact of this may lead to a more effective way of promoting life-long fitness

activity. In this particular study, however, the investigators failed to offer information on how one would promote team building and group cohesiveness.

2.7 Stages of Change

Also referred to as the transtheoretical model, the Stages of Change postulates that behaviour change does not occur immediately nor all at once. The change process takes time and may occur in a series of stages (Carron, et al., 2003; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). Additionally, this model emphasizes there may be periods of progression to the new stage or a relapse into old behaviours or stages (Carron et al., 2003; Prochaska et al., 1997). From the initial research relating to smoking cessation, the Stages of Change has been applied to a broader range of issues relating to health, including physical activity, sun tanning, and eating practices (Neiger, Thackeray, Merrill, Miner, Larsen, & Chalkey, 2001; Prochaska, Redding, & Evers, 1997).

The theory suggests that there are six stages of behaviour change, and the needs to support behaviour change differ within each stage. Precontemplation is defined as the stage in which the individual has no intention to change behaviour over the next six months. The individual may be aware of a need to change (e.g., advice from a physician or partner), but do not plan to initiate change. At this point, information that persuades change helps to move a person through to contemplation. The stage of contemplation occurs when the individual is aware of the positive and negative consequences of changing their behaviour, and will attempt a change within the next six months. During this time, dialogue and additional information can help propel an individual to begin to initiate a change. The preparation stage is defined as the time when an individual will be taking action within approximately one month. This person usually has a plan of action,

and will look to experiment with behaviour change without committing fully to it. Decreasing the barriers to affecting change is critical to helping them advance to action. When an individual is in the action stage of change, they have made the change within the past six months, and rely on different strategies to support their change (e.g., social support, positive reinforcement, stimulus control). In maintenance, the person is working toward sustaining their behaviour change and avoiding a relapse, relying on the strategies in the action stage that they found most rewarding. The move through these stages is accompanied by an increase in self-efficacy, serving to reinforce an individual's perception of success. Finally, the termination stage is defined as the point at which the individual, no matter what life stressors occur, will not go back to the unhealthy behaviour (Prochaska et al., 1997; Carron et al., 2003).

When applying this model to physical activity, Fallon, Hausenblas, and Nigg (2005) noted the importance of considering gender and specific stage of change when programming physical activity opportunities, and recognizing that one stage 'doesn't fit all'. Additionally, Prochaska and Marcus (1994) underline the importance of matching the individual's stage of change with the appropriate intervention strategy. They suggest that sedentary individuals may be given a disservice when offered action-based physical activity programs due to their precontemplative, contemplative, or preparation stage of change. Interestingly, Ingledeu, Markland, & Medley (1998) suggested the variation in personal motives for becoming active throughout the stages. It was reported that extrinsic motives, such as physical esthetic, dominated individuals in the early stages of change whereas intrinsic motives including enjoyment were noted in action and maintenance.

Converseley, Adams and White (2005) challenged the effectiveness of the stages of change model by suggesting that it fails to acknowledge the complexities and multiple layers of change. That, in fact, the model offers only a simplistic approach to change. As a result, Brug, Conner, Harre, Kremers, McKellar, and White (2005) argued that despite the issues raised by Adams and White, the stages of change has had positive influences on behaviour change, although question its long term effectiveness. As with social learning theory, the stages of change theory remains a conceptually sound and pragmatic model for facilitating and understanding behaviour change. In fact, the model underpins the personal training certification currently offered through the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiologists (www.csep.ca).

The research strongly suggests the benefits to stage appropriate physical activity intervention programs for both continued physical activity participation and getting the inactive active (Ingledeew et al., 1998; Marcus, Banspach, Lefebvre, Rossi, Carleton, & Abrams, 1992; Prochaska, & Velicer, 1997; Prochaska & Marcus, 1994). Based upon this suggested relationship, could there be an effective leadership strategy a group fitness leader could employ that speaks to various stages of change represented in her fitness class?

2.8 Fitness Leadership in the Fitness Industry

One of the most challenging tasks for researchers and practitioners may be bridging the gap between academic conclusions and practical application. It has been widely acknowledged through the literature that leadership is important to health and physical activity. The question remains, has this information been applied to community-based

physical activity programming? What are group fitness leaders presently doing in their fitness classes to promote group cohesion, team building and exercise adherence?

After reviewing the literature provided by various associations and councils currently involved in the promotion and education of fitness leadership and coaching, there is no mention or acknowledgement of one particular leadership style (Bryant & Green, 2003; Griffin, 1982; Hagan & Hutton, 2000; Martens, 1987; Potvin, 1993). In fact, there is scant attention provided to leadership as it applies to the group fitness class and participant experience and adherence.

The Canadian Association of Fitness Professionals (Can-Fit-Pro), established in 1993, serves fitness facility managers, personal trainers and group fitness leaders in the quest for continuing education and training. The definition of leadership offered through the Fitness Instructor Specialist certification manual includes a little of everything. Can-Fit-Pro defines leadership as...“a person who has commanding authority or influence. A Leader provides direction and guidance. Leadership is the ability to develop positive relationships with others and the ability to communicate effectively with a variety of personalities” (Hagan & Hutton, 2000, p.144). Although this definition does allow for various leadership styles, it fails to define or offer specifics of a particular style that is conducive to the leadership of groups that may help to promote group cohesion and exercise adherence.

The YMCA has played an integral role in the development of leadership among fitness professionals since the early 1970's (YMCA, 1985). However, the manual developed for group fitness leaders in training has dedicated one page to the topic of leadership in groups. It was suggested that based upon the group size, the fitness leader

had the choice of a “traditional” or “group-centered” style of leadership. The YMCA defined “traditional” leadership as directing and controlling the class. A traditional leader would focus on the task and deter the group from wandering. This leader would set limits, establish rules and believe that the emotions of the group are disruptive to the objective goal of the fitness class. The needs of the group fitness leader would be more important than those of the group. This leadership style may be determined to relate to the more authoritarian or autocratic form of group leadership and has been suggested a leadership style used by those novice group fitness leaders based upon the lack of practical experience leading groups (YMCA, 1985).

Conversely, the “group-centered” fitness leader feels the class is owned by all members, the group is responsible for the class experience, the leader is present as a guide, and emotions are recognized as valuable. The “group-centered” leader believes that any issues faced by the group should be solved by the group and that the group must understand the needs of all members to be able to grow as a team. The resemblance to transformational leadership is obvious. The more experienced group fitness leader may adopt this style of these group focused leadership behaviors over time (YMCA, 1985).

Interestingly, the Canadian history of fitness leadership development paints a more attentive picture. In fact, Tomlinson and Strachan (1982) and Strachan (1983) suggested communication tools, physical leader placement in class, and specific needs assessments that would enhance overall class enjoyment. Wankel (1984) suggested that the group fitness leader must play three roles to satisfy the needs of the fitness class participant. The instructional role includes dissemination of information relating to what to know and what to do, as a participant, in a group fitness class. The role of social director includes

the provision of social activities, encouragement of participant contribution, learning names, and creating a culture of inclusion. Finally, the counselor role is one that is based upon one on one communication with the individual and group.

By the mid 1980's there was a national call-out to fitness and health professionals across Canada to meet the growing demands of the fitness leadership profession in response to an increasingly active nation (National Fitness Leadership Advisory Committee [NFLAC], 1990; Government of Canada Fitness and Amateur Sport, 1984; Fitness Canada, 1986; The National Leadership Development Committee [NLDC], 1989; Fitness Canada and the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council, 1984). The National Fitness Leadership Advisory Committee (NFLAC) was working towards the development of guidelines for the enhanced training of fitness leaders. The Government of Canada Fitness and Amateur Sport and the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council also recognized the importance of leadership development. They identified twelve areas of knowledge of which an introduction to the theory and practice of leadership was highlighted (Government of Canada Fitness and Amateur Sport, 1984). The National Leadership Development Committee (1989) defined leadership as the "process of moving organization and agencies in a direction that is generally in their best interests" (pg. 4). Moreover, the definition of leader referred to people "who have a role and responsibility for making this happen. They are generally associated with an organization or agency which has a more specific mandate within this larger context" (pg. 5).

By 1986, it was suggested that changes to the group fitness leadership field had to include the addition of "generic leadership skills and principles". At this time, attention

was paid to the increased growth of the business of fitness and an ever-growing urgency to meet the demands of this expanding profession (Government of Canada Fitness and Amateur Sport, 1986, pg. 13).

Presently, however, the attention given to group fitness leadership is significantly less than was once offered. The British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) governs the fitness profession throughout the province of British Columbia. This agency outlines the course curriculum for all modules of fitness instruction including group fitness, strength training, personal training, aqua-fitness, and older adult leadership. In review of their current group exercise curriculum, there is no presentation of various leadership styles other than the mention of ‘demonstrating effective leadership qualities’. In addition, although performance standards include the ability to ‘create a supportive environment’, the BCRPA standards for group fitness performance does not include suggestions for enhanced group cohesion and adherence (National Fitness Leadership Alliance [NFLA], 2005).

Based upon the acknowledgement of the importance of group cohesion and team building on exercise enjoyment and adherence, it may not be a mystery as to why fitness and health professionals are challenged with the promotion of life-long physical activity behaviour. In fact, Brown and Vega (1996) question what positive influence academic research has had on the health care, education and service of the community.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This qualitative study applied ethnomethodology to the examination of group fitness leadership and exercise adherence. Six participants were purposefully sampled to represent a sub-group of female, novice group exercise participants between the ages of 38 – 60 years. The theoretical framework of behavioural and relationship leadership theories were applied to the data. The data were initially coded by hand. Using NVivo data analysis software, the data were coded again and organized by reoccurring themes. The following chapter provides a detailed review of the process.

3.1 Research Design

In the past, leadership theory research has primarily relied on quantitative research methods (Parry, 1998). Qualitative research methods allow for inquiry into the social and structural processes associated with the individual's experience of group fitness (Wuest, Merritt-Gray, Berman, & Gord-Gilboe, 2002).

This study followed ethnomethodology as the approach to inquiry. Garfinkel (1967) defines the term ethnomethodology as a way “to refer to the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life” (pg. 11). Sociologists have made the distinction between “product” and “process”. A product may be defined as a shared agreement between two people and a process may be defined as the actions an individual may carry out in accordance with a rule (Garfinkel, 1967). By applying ethnomethodology to the study of exercise behaviour, we may be able to highlight the products and processes associated with the culture of fitness.

To date, two modes of theoretical understanding have been applied to the study of exercise behaviour and adherence. They include taking a subjectivist approach to explore the individual's beliefs, attitudes, goal setting strategies, feedback and incentives. The second, objectivist approach, involves studying the social determinants of physical activity adoption. These may include socioeconomic status, demographic characteristics, and the like. Although these perspectives have offered researchers various ways of further understanding the issue, they do not take into account the cultures and social norms in which our daily lives unfold. According to McGannon and Mauws (2002), there is a need to explore the questions related to exercise adherence through the application of other theoretical perspectives.

McGannon et al. (2002) suggested that there is a need to focus on the structures of everyday practice and beliefs that may influence our decisions and ultimately our exercise behaviour. Ethnomethodology offers an opportunity to do just this. Factors such as social roles, recurrent patterns of interaction, discourse, and the distribution of power are all areas of interest and may add to what we know about exercise behaviour.

The implications of taking an ethnomethodological approach to studying exercise behaviour include the enhanced awareness of how our daily conversations with others and ourselves effect our decisions, thoughts, and feelings towards a particular behaviour, in this case, exercise. It would shed some light on how our everyday beliefs and definitions of what a fit female or male form should look like relate to the exercise prescriptions we attempt to carry out. Sassatelli (1999) employed ethnomethodology when examining the culture of the body within two fitness facilities in Italy. She divided the experience of exercise into two groupings; gymnastic exercise including aerobics and

other group fitness activities, and machine training including resistance and other individualized training methods. She defined the role of the fitness leader as one whose physical demonstration requires immediate attention and imitation by the participant. Interestingly enough, one novice participant described her first experience in a group fitness class as "...feeling useless, couldn't really follow and kept losing concentration while everyone looked so good, she felt out of place" (Sassatelli, 1999, pg. 236). In addition, Sassatelli described the leadership behaviour of one of the most popular group fitness leaders in one of the fitness facilities to include the promotion of studying one's form in the mirror. She went on to suggest that although some participants felt at ease, others were not comfortable looking at themselves in the mirror.

Collins (2002) in her paper "Working out the Contradictions; Feminism and Aerobics", used an ethnographic approach to inquiry offering the reader insight into how novice group fitness participants experience the culture within the group fitness class. She suggested the importance of the group fitness leader as a role model for empowerment instead of oppression, so that leadership strategies emphasized the comfort of the participant, the creation of an interaction with the class and welcoming personal expression among participants. Conversely, if a group fitness leader emphasized exercise for weight loss, thinner legs, or perhaps punishment for eating high fat foods, they may be creating a more oppressive exercise experience. One participant defined the fitness clothing that everyone wears as "oppressive"; another mentioned comments from the leader such as "Girls, it's bikini season" (Collins, 2002, pg. 93) that left her feeling physically scrutinized.

Bain, Wilson, and Chaikind (1989) led a study focused on the experiences and feelings of overweight women of their group fitness program. Thematic analyses from interviews and focus groups contributed to the understanding of group fitness through the lived experiences of the overweight female within the fitness class. Participants in this study described their experiences taking part in group fitness exercise as “too fast paced”, “unsafe”, “embarrassing”. The implications noted by the researchers included the education of fitness and health professionals in the development of group fitness programs that were more inclusive to overweight women and novice exercisers. By examining how an individual perceives her environment, and how this environment or culture influences her exercise behaviour, may help to stimulate change or awareness of various behaviours among fitness leaders that may create a more positive exercise environment.

3.2 The Sample

The goal of the study was to further our understanding of the experiences of a novice group fitness participant in exercise class. Because of this, participants were purposefully selected. Patton (1980) has defined purposeful sampling as a strategy employed when the research goal involves additional understanding versus generalization of research findings over a larger population. In addition, Patton (1987) defines the power of purposeful sampling is derived from the selection of “information-rich” cases (pg. 52). Based upon the following criteria, a homogeneous sample was necessary for this inquiry with the novice exerciser.

Participants were females between the ages of 38 – 60 years based upon the current trends and statistics of age groups attending fitness classes. The IDEA Fitness Programs

& Equipment Survey (2003) suggests that more than 53% of group exercise participants are between the ages of 35 – 54 years. Moreover, as our population ages, it is predicted people aged 55 and older are the fastest growing population to enter the fitness facility and the group fitness class (Health & Fitness Centre's Industry Report, 2003).

According to the Television Bureau of Canada's Health & Fitness Centre's Industry Report (2003), health club members are primarily female comprising 57% of membership. The National Sporting Goods Association has determined that 75% of attendance within group fitness classes is female (NSGA, 2003). Finally, the Women's Sports Foundation (2003) has suggested that in 2001, women made up 91.1% of all STEP exercisers and 73.2% of all group fitness exercise. Yet women are less active than their male counterparts (Eyler & Vest, 2002, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion [NCCDPH], 1999). To best capture the perspectives of the majority of participants in hopes of increasing their adherence rates, participants were female.

In addition to age and gender, the criteria of participation included: current participation in one or more group fitness classes per week; and attending classes that cater to those individuals with a novice level of fitness and/or group exercise experience. Bray et al. (2005) sampled from a novice population based upon the suggestion that novice exercisers may respond differently to leadership styles than would the experienced exerciser. In addition, those experienced at maintaining a regime of physical activity would have a stronger intention to exercise than those relatively new to fitness classes.

At the time of this study, all six women were employed full-time and had a history of group fitness participation. Maggie was a warden at a correctional facility but was on

leave for approximately one year. She had participated in various group fitness classes in the 1980's and 1990's and was just starting to attend Pilates classes. Veronica was employed as a full time administrative assistant. She had participated in a few aerobics classes in the past and was starting to attend group cycling. Jane was an administrative assistant for a not-for-profit organization. Jane's group fitness experience started when her doctor insisted that she decrease her blood pressure and cholesterol levels through exercise. She began participating in Jazzercise classes and, today, she is a fitness leader with the organization. Natalie and Bobbi were employed with the provincial government and attended jazzercise classes together. Both had a history of sporadic attendance. Finally, Simone worked for the provincial government and had a history of group fitness participation. At the time of the interview, she had decided to participate in individual conditioning.

This homogenous sample was also based upon the personal experiences of the researcher. Through leading, and teaching others to lead group fitness classes, it has been observed that to lead the novice participant, one must focus on all aspects of leadership including exercise choice, education, individual attention and the ability to bring the group together. As it has been highlighted in the literature, if the exercising group has a certain level of cohesiveness, the greater the likelihood of adherence and exercise enjoyment (Carron & Spink, 1993; Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1988; Spink & Carron, 1994; 1992; Turman, 2003; Turner, Rejeski, & Brawley, 1997; Wankel, 1985). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to focus on those exercising participants who engage in group fitness classes that service the beginner participant. Those that participate in high levels of group fitness classes tend to have a high level of

understanding and comprehension of the choreography, have established a sense of community within the class and need little leadership relating to form and technique. This statement is derived from the experience of the researcher through 18 years of active fitness leadership and observation.

Participants for this study were to be recruited through the placement of informational posters in various fitness and exercise facilities within the Greater Victoria Regional District. Facilities included the YM-YWCA of Greater Victoria and the Oak Bay Recreation Center. These facilities represented two of the three variations of establishment; the not-for-profit agency and municipal recreation. Privately owned fitness facilities were omitted due to the challenge of gaining entrance into the facility without a valid membership. Based upon lack of recruitment over a three-week period, an amendment to the original Application for Ethics Approval for Human Participant Research was made to add the implementation of the “snowball” recruitment system. Based upon acceptance of this amendment, six participants were recruited. Two originated from the Oak Bay Recreation Center, one from the YM-YWCA of Greater Victoria, and the remaining three resulted from the recommendations of an existing participant recruited through the initial strategy.

3.3 Data Collection

With ethical approval (Appendix A) and the completion of individual letters of consent, the proposed study began in September 2005 with one-on-one interviews with each participant. After the completion of interviews, a focus group was conducted. Individual interviews were conducted first to help introduce the participant into the process of the study and helped to make the individual feel comfortable. The researcher

was able to establish a sense of trust and prepare the participant for the focus group in the future. Morgan (1997) notes that the individual interview may help to prepare a list of focus group questions or help guide the discussion during the focus group. The benefits of conducting individual interviews include the ability to give time and attention to each individual as they elaborate on their lived experiences, thoughts and feelings as they relate to the participation in group fitness classes (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

The individual interviews took approximately one to two hours and covered the span of three months. All interviews were semi-structured consisting of a list of formal questions, but leaving time for discussion or other issues the interviewee wished to discuss (refer to Appendix B for a list of interview questions). It was important that the interview be conducted where the participant felt most comfortable. Therefore, this included the participant's home, the researcher's office at the University of Victoria, Ian Stewart Complex, room 124a, and a local coffee shop. Each interview was recorded on audio tape and notes were taken during the interview process.

The interviews were transcribed within one or two days of taping the interview and the type-written transcriptions were electronically sent to each participant for review, revisions, and confirmation. To protect the identities of each participant throughout the written results and discussion, a pseudonym was provided for each. During the focus group audio recordings, participants were given a number and addressed each other by that number throughout the discussion.

It has been suggested by Morgan (1997) that the combination of individual and group interview may help to generate a greater and deeper understanding of the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the participants, and a greater interaction among the group

leading to further insights. Conversely, focus group processes may create conformity or influence the nature of the information provided (Morgan, 1997). Krueger and Casey (2000) have suggested that focus groups should be comprised of 6-8 participants. In addition, Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) have stated that focus groups with less than six participants makes for a dull and challenging data collection and groups with more than twelve people will create difficulties in management.

The focus group interview included five of the six participants and took place at the University of Victoria, Ian Stewart Complex, Room 220 and approximately one month following the completion of the interviews. Unfortunately, due to a prior commitment, Veronica was unable to attend. However, she was provided the opportunity to review and comment on the general themes that were produced from the interview process shortly after the focus group meeting.

The focus group discussion was audio-recorded and approximately two hours in duration. In addition, the researcher took notes throughout the focus group discussion. The purpose of the focus group was to provide participants an opportunity to confirm, elaborate upon and contribute to the emerging analysis of interview data. The questions asked during this session related to the amalgam of interpreted interview data. In addition, participants had the opportunity to offer further insights based upon the interview data analysis (refer to Appendix C for focus group questions). Finally, participants were given the opportunity to reflect on the summary of the interview data and offer suggestions that would enhance group fitness leadership and the adherence and enjoyment of novice participants.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

For this study, a conceptual framework of both behavioural and relationship leadership theory directed the analysis of data, a process known as orientational qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). Beginning with a theoretical perspective, orientational inquiry provided a framework through which the data was analyzed and coded. Patton (2002) suggested that ethnographic research may be defined as orientational because it focuses on a particular culture. The practices and beliefs of the culture in question provide the framework in which to analyze the data. In the case of this study, the culture is rooted within the fitness industry. In addition, the orientational approach to analysis is beneficial to the confirmation or elaboration of leadership theory and/or ideology as it relates to the participant's adherence and enjoyment of the group exercise class.

The theoretical framework applied to this study was that of the transformational and autocratic models of leadership. Transformational leadership was defined as a relationship approach to transform the values of the followers, motivating them to achieve more than what they had expected. Transformational leadership was characterized by four leadership behaviours; idealized influence, individualized concern, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003). An example of idealized influence included singling an exercising participant from the group through individual praise and encouragement. Individual concern was demonstrated by providing participants with support and encouragement before, during and after the group fitness class. A fitness leader could provide intellectual stimulation by offering fitness tips in the beginning of each class or providing handouts of information relating to fitness and health. Finally, inspirational motivation (also referred to as charisma) was

demonstrated through the individual's approach to the leadership of the fitness class. For example, the charismatic leader offered a common vision or goal for the class to achieve (i.e. doing a certain exercise with ease after a few months). She demonstrated a high standard of behaviour or vision that the participants wanted to emulate and offered challenges that are achievable for all. In addition, the inspirational motivator chose to lead among the class participants (instead of in the front of the class) and even encouraged participants to take a leadership role in the class.

Autocratic leadership behaviour was demonstrated through a leader-centred strategy. In this case, the group fitness leader was at the front of the class, supervising the participants. An autocratic leader presented the participant with the exercises and provided the necessary information to guide the class through each exercise. The leader defined the action and executed these actions through verbal and non-verbal commands.

Socially enriched leadership, by definition, incorporated the characteristics similar to the transformational leadership model (Bray et al., 2005; Carron et al., 2003; Fox et al., 2000; Martin et al., 2001; Turner et al., 1997). Conversely, bland or autocratic leadership may be defined as leader-centred, closely supervised, leader-defined actions for others to follow (Russell, 2001). Fox et al. (2000) defined bland leadership as group focused without addressing the individual participant by name or engage in conversation before or after class.

Through the analytical process, it became evident that there were other leadership styles represented in the experiences of the participants. Therefore, the conceptual framework of leadership theory was expanded to include the addition of democratic and transactional leadership theory. Democratic leadership was defined through the group

fitness leader's behavior through the invitation of participant feedback during the class. For example, participants may have chosen particular exercises or music. Transactional leadership was demonstrated through the participants' expectations of instruction and the group fitness leaders' expectation of participants mirroring the chosen exercise and choreography of the class.

In addition to examining the various approaches to fitness leadership, the fitness culture was considered and themes were pulled that related to uniform, leader discourse, non-verbal communication and behaviour including demonstrations, and promotion of specific exercises and health practices that may relate to the culture of fitness.

Finally, interpreting the data through the theoretical perspectives of leadership to the data, the stages of change were also taken into consideration. Each participant's narrative was reflected a particular stage of change according to DiClemente and Prochaska's theory (1982). In each case, the experiences related to a particular stage that included group fitness participation over time and number of attempts to adhere to a group fitness class.

Interpreting the data through the lenses of leadership styles and stages of change served to identify specific leadership behaviours of the group fitness leader that represent varied styles of leadership. The data facilitated an understanding the leadership needs of the novice, female group exercise participant in facilitating exercise enjoyment and retention. Moreover, by determining the participant's stage of change, we were able to relate the stage with a particular style of leadership conducive to the adherence and enjoyment of group fitness class.

In addition, the informal fitness culture was considered when the data were analysed. Data characterizing leadership behaviours such as uniform, discourse, non-verbal communication including demonstrations, and specific focus or promotion of certain exercises was integral to the analysis process.

3.5 Data Management and Analysis

The transcripts were initially organized and coded by hand as it provided the researcher an opportunity to familiarize herself with the data and identify potential themes under the theoretical framework of the analysis. The transcripts were then transferred to the data analysis software program N*Vivo for coding and organization. This program allowed for the categorization of themes through coding or “fracturing the data” (Charmaz, 2000, p.521), and also aided in the integrating coding with qualitative linking, shaping and modeling.

The transcripts were coded based upon “recurring regularities” (Patton, 1990, p. 403) across individual and group interviews as they related to the criteria of the framework. They were organized into categories based upon specific sentences and phrases. Patton (1990) suggested that two categories be created incorporating both internal homogeneity (how well the data relate to create meaning) and external heterogeneity (the obvious contrasts between data) to avoid the overlapping and duplication of information. Analytical strategies such as memoing, the use of metaphors and axial coding were employed. The process blended four cognitive strategies (Morse, 1994): (1) establishing an in-depth understanding of the issue; (2) synthesizing data sources and finding common themes; (3) theorizing the data by linking participants’ experiences to those existing in the literature (e.g., transformational and autocratic

models); and (4) recontextualizing the data with establishing theory and practice in the fitness leadership literature.

3.6 Considerations

When reviewing and interpreting the results of this study, the following was considered:

1. The researcher has an eighteen year history leading and supervising group fitness classes and programs. Through this experience, certain leadership styles and behaviours have been acknowledged and used to enhance the group fitness class experience for participants and help to create group cohesion. This has resulted in high levels of adherence to classes taught over the years. To help avoid this bias seeping into the data collection process, the researcher taped all interviews and discussions. In addition, the researcher did not disclose personal experiences, thoughts, feelings, or stories that may have effected participant feedback and kept a log of how the data may have influenced analysis decisions or development of focus group questions.
2. Because this study focused on a particular sub-group of the group fitness class, the sample was small and homogenous. The results of this research are not transferable over a larger population, but will help to guide further research into the area of leadership and group fitness participation. However, the transferability of the results may incorporate the addition of information and education among fitness leaders on various leadership strategies that may create a more welcoming environment for novice exercisers.

3. The confirmability of this study was attended to through the use of audiotapes, transcripts, and observation notes. Details of each participant, the location of data collection, and the effect the researcher may have on the process was provided. In addition, the participants were invited to reflect on a preliminary analysis of the data during the focus group where the researcher's classification or categorization of the leadership styles was offered for discussion.

CHAPTER 4

Results

This study investigated how novice participants experienced leadership in group fitness classes. Specifically, the study sought to identify characteristics involved with group fitness leadership that may positively influence the exercise experience and, therefore, adherence to the exercise class. This chapter presents the findings from the study and begins with an introduction of the participants. A discussion of the five themes related to leadership styles and the culture of fitness follows. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings as they relate to participants' stages of change and leadership styles.

As table 1 reveals, all six participants were between the ages of 39-58 with a mean age of 55. All were white, professional women currently engaged in group fitness classes with the exception of one participant, Simone. Simone had experienced group fitness but had recently chosen to move into individual conditioning. Based upon her experiences and characteristics, it was decided that she fit the participant criteria well and was accepted into the study. All six participants demonstrated a history of sporadic group fitness participation but confirmed their present participation in group fitness classes geared towards the novice exerciser. Table 1 overviews the participants' group fitness experience, and stage of change.

The group fitness experiences of the participants included traditional aerobics classes, step aerobics classes, group cycling classes, pilates and yoga classes, and walking clubs with a shared history of participating in Jazzercise classes. In fact, three participants consistently frequented Jazzercise classes at least once a week. Jazzercise was created by

Judi Sheppard Missett and introduced in 1969. This type of group fitness class offers the participant a combination of jazz dance and aerobic moves and has recently experienced an insurgence in popularity with participation rates as high as 100 people per class (www.jazzercise.com, 2006).

Table 1

Participant Profile, Group Fitness Experience, and Stage of Change

Participant	Age	Occupation	Group Fitness Experience	Stage of Change
Natalie	53	Provincial Government	Has a history of participating in group fitness (sporadically) and has begun participating in one Jazzercise class per week.	Preparation
Bobbi	52	Provincial Government Employee	Began her first group fitness class in 2000. She just re-joined the class after time away and currently participates one hour per week.	Preparation to Action
Maggie	51	Corrections Officer	Began group fitness in 1983 (off and on) until deciding to join a pilates class three months before the interview. She participates	Action

Table 1. Con't

Participant Profile, Group Fitness Experience, and Stage of Change

Participant	Age	Occupation	Group Fitness Experience	Stage of Change
Veronica	45	Administrative Assistant	two hours per week. Just began attending one group fitness class per week for less than six months.	Action
Simone	58	Provincial Government Employee	Past group fitness experience, but not currently participating in group exercise. She has participated in individual exercise for over six months exercising three times per week.	Maintenance
Jane	39	Administrative Assistant	She has participated in group fitness for over one year attending classes four times per week.	Maintenance

4.1 Theme – The Culture of Fitness Leadership

The culture of fitness leadership was identified as a salient theme when interpreting the data. This theme is comprised of three inter-related phenomenon: a leadership culture, a fitness culture and social support.

Leadership Culture

Embedded in the data was the importance of language as it related to verbal cues, sincerity of message, and exercise. When recalling her experience, one participant remarked, “She [the group fitness leader] talks to you as though you have some understanding. She doesn’t talk to you like you are a child” (Bobbi, interview). In addition to this comment, another participant added:

Do you go in there with big huge words that blow the person out of the water versus you go in there and you talk to them like they are your equal? Ya, it’s more the words and how the words are put together. So language is very important; it’s not only style of language but it’s the quality and quantity of the language. [Maggie, interview]

Finally, as it relates to instructor cues, one participant noted, “...she [the instructor] was like that little annoying person on TV saying ‘come on now...one, two...’ it was like someone was seducing the microphone too. It was actually quite ‘one, two, three, come on!’ That was annoying” (Veronica, interview).

The specific behaviours of the fitness leader in class, exemplifying leadership styles in the context of a fitness class, was one of the most significant patterns found in the data. Behaviours such as exercise choice and choreography, class pace, and other behaviours

were perceived as a barrier to participation among those research participants. Many participants remarked on the frustrations felt by attending a group fitness class advertised as “beginner” only to find the instructor leading an intermediate / advanced level of fitness class. One participant, describing her experience as “awful”, stated:

She’s [the fitness leader] looking at herself in the mirror going that way in tight spandex shorts, spandex bra, you know. I had Cotton Ginny size 20 shorts on, I’m sure and the stepping thing where you step up, I mean I kept missing the step, you know, and it was so embarrassing I could see my knees in the mirror. Oh my God, it was about six to eight years ago. It was awful, it was awful and everyone in that class knew what to do. So there was nobody else that, she didn’t stop, she didn’t stop, no stopping. She just kept going so I was just really like...wow.

[Veronica, interview]

This experience was echoed by another participant who recalled:

Even though it was all levels, it was very advanced. Where you couldn’t keep up to them almost. And a few times, you know, I can remember the gal saying “come on, keep up to us” but you just felt out of place there. [Natalie, interview]

In addition to the above, participants referred to the behaviour and physical description of the group fitness leader as “cute” and “bouncy”. One participant commented:

Well...that’s part of that cutesy, exuberant, bouncy kind of thing that I think they could tone down. You can’t just go in there and bounce around like a Barbie doll and expect to be able to get people to follow along or even keep going. Like I said, every class I’ve ever had it has always been someone young and obviously

very fit and cute. It's the instructor or the teacher who's just too young and too fit and too perfect for you to have to deal with. [Simone, interview]

4.2 Theme - Fitness Culture

The culture of fitness has been described by some as “exclusive”, “intimidating”, and based upon the socialization of the belief that a thin, fit body is a healthy body. All participants made references to their expectations of physical changes to their body after group fitness participation. The focus group yielded the majority of comments related to outcome expectations associated with group fitness and body changes. As one participant noted:

. . . because we want to know that if we dance around for an hour we are going to lose [weight]. We are going to burn this many calories and we are going to lose this much weight and you know, that's why I go. I would bet that's why 90% of the people go. That's why I would go into exercise classes because I thought it would get rid of my stomach. [Natalie, focus group]

Finally, one participant disclosed her frustration by commenting:

I have been going to the gym for five years and I work out hard enough and I haven't lost a pound. I am strong and I am probably healthy and my heart is doing well, but I still want to lose 20 pounds. [Simone, interview]

As Crossley (2006) stated, a high number of novice exercise participants begin exercise with the primary motive of losing weight. Understandably, if one doesn't achieve this goal, it may lead to discouragement and ultimate exercise drop out.

Shifting focus from weight loss and fitness to one of health was also discussed. The understanding was evident from the data, that group fitness participation positively

influenced health, but the focus was still on fitness gains and weight loss. As one participant suggested, “I’d like to know how many of those people actually go to group fitness classes for the health of it. I think everybody that goes, like your weight or changing your body type has to be the motivator” (Natalie, focus group). Another participant offered the comment:

I am wondering if maybe what we are talking about is a subtle shift from fitness to, and this isn’t the word I would choose but, in this direction...wellness. So that instead of saying “okay if you do a number of sit ups or you go running around the gym you will lose weight” what you will say is that you will get your heart rate up. Here are the good things about getting your heart rate up for a while.

[Bobbi, focus group]

During the individual interviews, participants focused on the feelings of insecurity and exclusion as it related to the “people in spandex” and the “fitness people”. There is no shortage of literature to support the notion that the uniform and physique associated with the fitness culture is a barrier to novice exercisers (Bain, et al., 1989, Carron, et al., 1999; Treasure, Lox, & Lawton, 1998). This was represented well in the data as one participant suggested:

. . . because even when I go to these classes and I see little, thin, petite, beautiful, spandex people, I feel insecure even though I am able to keep up. I hated it because everyone was fit, everyone had those latex little spandex little bras on.

[Veronica, interview]

Interestingly, another participant offered her definition of a “fitness” person by saying;

I'm not really a 'fitness' person. I like to be healthy, I like to be active, but I'm not a fitness person. I don't have the clothes; I'm not going to be a hard body. It's not going to happen. I mean their [the fitness people] abs haven't been flabby since they were born you know? They could run 10k without breaking a sweat and they probably do weights and it shows. They drink carrot juice you know?
[Bobbi, interview]

In addition, another participant suggested:

They seemed to not need to be there. They were all in their skimpy little outfits and you would go in with baggy clothes on trying to hide. But I do recall just being very embarrassed to be there and everybody was very fit. [Natalie, interview]

There were many references made to feelings of exclusion when participating in group fitness classes. One participant described:

I know what it is like when I walk into the class for the first time and nobody talks to you and nobody looks at you and they are in their little groups and you're just kinda...waiting for it to start at the back, close to the door so you can make a quick exit. [Jane, focus group]

Another agreed, "She [the fitness leader] spoke to who she knew and that was it. It was almost like they had their own little group and they didn't want anyone else joining in and yet they were advertising for new people" (Natalie, interview).

Interestingly, feelings of discomfort, embarrassment and exclusion, when participating in group fitness classes, related to the placement of the mirrors in the class room:

I did do one aerobics class; it was a drop in at [one private facility]. I did a step class and I was totally embarrassed in front of the mirrors. Couldn't grapevine, step, or anything, was a klutz and I was so embarrassed that I never went back.

[Veronica, interview]

Finally, another participant offered, "I don't think we need to face the mirror. You are looking at this mirror watching yourself making a complete fool out of yourself (Simone, interview).

4.3 Theme - Social Support

The positive relationship between social support and exercise enjoyment and adherence has been well documented in the literature (Belton et al., 2000; Carron, et al., 1996; Green, et al., 2002; Trieber, et al., 1991). Not surprisingly, this theme emerged as one of the most important aspects to continual participation over time. However, there were a few conflicting comments relating to the positive and negative influences of leader uninitiated social support.

The themes that emerged from the data provided support for the above, but also suggested a negative effect. In addition to this, some participants presented the idea of the "right" amount of social support needed to feel welcomed and motivated to continue participating in group fitness. One woman commented:

Some people in the class were new and "hi, what's your name?" and, you know, that kind of thing. It was just the right mixture, for me, of welcoming without being over the top, inclusive and familiar. It worked for me. The people around you on the floor are generally, they acknowledge you, you know? "Oh hi. Is this your first time?" or "Oh hi, good to see you again." And then that's it. But it is a

class strategy I don't want to do a whole bunch of things in pairs and groups and, you know. I'm not there to make friends. I am not there to be touchy feely. I don't want to say hello to eight new neighbours...I just want to do it. [Bobbi, interview]

Based up this comment, it may be suggested that this participant, although enjoying the informal social connection with other class participants, was not attending class to advance her social network. The same participant added to this in the focus group by describing:

Based upon my recent experience and, in fact, Natalie's as well, was we went to Jazzercise classes two or three time, one of them was about getting a little group together and having a little sort of contest and we were out of there so fast, you couldn't see us for dust. Not just not interested, actively opposing it. Like, 'I'm outta there right now', you know? [Bobbi, focus group]

Conversely, many research participants felt the need for social support. One participant commented, "The class just flies, but if I didn't have somebody else to go with, I probably wouldn't go to it. I go because it's fun because I am going with somebody" (Natalie, interview). Another participant offered, "I would always go with a friend so there was a certain social aspect to it" (Simone, interview).

4.4 Theme - Leadership

The coded data were analyzed to identify predominant leadership styles of group fitness leaders and the effect these approaches had on the novice, exercising participant. These themes are presented in Table 2 (p 69). The themes that emerged from both the individual interview and focus group contextualize both behavioural and relationship theories of leadership, with the exception of laissez-faire leadership. The conceptual

frameworks included autocratic, democratic, transactional, and transformational leadership perspectives.

Laissez-faire leadership has been related to the hands-off approach. A laissez-faire leader is characterized as one that allows the group to make decisions and tends to shy away from responsibility and decision-making. Complete freedom is given to the group with input from the leader when requested (Jordan, 2007). Due to the nature of group fitness leadership and the necessity and expectation of group fitness instruction and direction, laissez-faire leadership was not noted or mentioned within this current study.

The Autocratic Leader

Autocratic leadership may be defined as leader-centred, closely supervised, and an integration of leader-defined actions or decision for others to follow (Bass, 1990; Russel, 2001). In this study, autocratic leadership was described in both negative and positive terms throughout the data. The metaphor of drill sergeant was used separately by three participants to define this type of leadership. For example, one participant described her experience of autocratic leadership as “somebody who is like a sergeant major coming out there and, you know, ‘okay guys...line up here!’ It’s not, to me, conducive to bringing fun into the exercise” (Maggie, interview). Another comment reflected the same experience “. . .drill sergeants, you know, like ‘come on!’ they are more yelling at you than encouraging you. And just saying, you know, more in a bossy tone than ‘come on, let’s have fun..whew hew!’” (Jane, interview). The perceptions of yelling at the class versus for or with the class were a predominating theme. And a third offered, “. . .and people can do exercises without having somebody yell at them ‘just one more, two more,

three more. . . ‘ just say you are going to do five of them, people can count’ (Simone, interview).

Conversely, autocratic leadership was defined as being useful to the participant. One participant noted “. . . she’s [the instructor] very good because she will say ‘don’t do it this way, do it this way’ and she’s up on the stage doing that. That’s good because you just don’t know” (Natalie, interview). Participants described on-going instruction to be useful in their adoption of the exercise program. As one participant suggested “. . . I like to have someone leading me and instructing me” (Maggie, interview).

The Democratic Leader

Bass (1990), Jordan (2007) and Russell (2001) define democratic leadership as one that values the feedback of the group. A democratic leader is one that pulls information from the group, promoting self-directed behaviour at the same time, making the decisions for the group. In this study, democratic leadership was represented in the data through comments relating to the provision of various alternatives during the fitness class.

Offering the participant choice during group exercise was described as positive. As one participant noted “[the leader] gives you options, you know if you really want to knock yourself out here’s how you do it and she will show you and if you don’t...here is an option” (Bobbi, interview). Another participant offered, “. . . like this gal that we go to now, she gives you alternate things to do if you can’t keep up with her. She’ll say, ‘well then, you know if you can’t do it, do it this way’” (Natalie, interview). One participant commented on the importance of leadership respect of personal agendas in fitness class. “I know I enjoy doing my own thing so, for me, it is learning how to let the instructor have their agenda and I have my agenda” (Maggie, interview). Agenda, as defined by

this participant, included their individual needs, goals, and expectations as they related to group fitness participation. Finally, one participant offered the following as a suggestion to fitness leaders “. . . present a situation [to the leader], a problem, a challenge, whatever you want to call it. Throw out some options on how you want to tackle it. Allow people to respond and make sure they find their way through it” (Bobbi, interview).

Both autocratic and democratic leadership fall under the behavioural theories explaining leadership behaviour. The relationship-based theories include transactional and transformational leadership. Burns (1978) defined transactional leadership as an exchange between two people based upon the agreement of the roles of follower and leader. Transactional leaders provide the framework of goal setting and motivate the followers to reach the goals through suggestions related to goal achievement. In relationship to the group fitness class, the leader and class have accepted and agreed upon their definitive roles of leader and follower. The pre-determined goal may be defined through physical achievement and the leader provides the suggested exercises and motivation to enhance follower goal achievement (Vandenberghe et al. 2002).

The Transactional Leader

The characteristics that define transactional leadership were noted in the data. It was evident that the leader served the participant through providing direction and leadership through the exercises. Such issues as instructional safety and technique cues were noted as an important and positive influence for the continuation of group fitness participation. One participant explained the importance of “. . . making sure [the leader] that they [the participant] are doing things properly so they aren't going to get injured and are not going to be extra sore the next day” (Jane, interview). As a suggestion for fitness leaders,

another participant offered “. . . if you are not doing something properly to come and show you how to do it” (Natalie, interview). Finally one participant explained the importance of instructional leadership by saying “. . .when that girl was here that used to teach with the curly hair and she came around in the middle of the class and she would straighten your back or tell you how you were doing, that really helped” (Veronica, Interview).

The Transformational Leader

Kark, Shamir, and Chen (2003) define transformational leadership as the ability to transform and motivate followers to achieve more than they had expected. In addition, Kark et al. (2003) suggest that there are four important characteristics a transformational leader must demonstrate to be effective in the group’s transformation. Acknowledged as the “Four I’s” of transformational leadership, they include; individualized concern, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence. From the data, it is evident that these characteristics are important and noted by the participants as determinants of group exercise enjoyment and class adherence. Table 2 outlines various participant quotations as they relate to the four characteristics of transformational leadership.

Individualized Concern.

Individualized concern, as defined by Kark et al. (2003) refers to behaviours such as coaching and encouragement of one or many individuals in a group. This leadership characteristic was demonstrated as an important aspect to group exercise enjoyment in five out of the six participants and acknowledged as a deterrent to group fitness

participation in the sixth. In addition, the findings suggest that there is a boundary between positive individualized consideration and negative attention, which may lead to leaving group fitness.

All research participants commented about the importance of individual attention. As one participant noted:

She [the instructor] cares about me. Not so much in my personal life, but while I am there. You know, just chatting with you before class and you know, remembering your name is nice, that kind of thing, you know? And checking in with you throughout the class if you are looking like you are getting really purple in the face. Checking out with you at the end of the class and you know, reminding you when your next class is or you know [saying] “Hope to see you on Thursday.” That kind of thing. [Jane, interview]

She is by far my favourite instructor that I have ever had. She’s great. She knows everybody’s name, she sends email reminders out once a month, little newsletters and you know, she remembers birthdays and stuff. Just really takes time to make everybody feel like they are important and she is really glad to see that one specific person. [Jane, interview]

It was evident that this participant felt it important to connect with her fitness leader through verbal communication before, during, and after class.

References to the leader’s individualized concern included comments relating to missed classes. If the participant missed a class, the leader would make inquiries relating to the whereabouts of the participant. Leaders that motivated participants to continue coming to class knew their names and other personal details including birthdays, noted

individual performance in class, and did this in a sincere and respectful manner: “She was very nice and kind and communicated with me before class and during class and after class” (Veronica, interview). In addition, one participant commented:

She just encouraged you. When you walked in and you have been down pounds or whatever, it was just...she made you feel good about it and made you want to try harder next time. That sort of thing. Just telling you how good you looked, and how she noticed the weight coming off or just made you feel like you were doing something. [Natalie, interview]

Surprisingly, this suggested positive leader characteristic was also noted as a hindrance and a motivator to avoid fitness class. As suggested by one participant, “I’m a person, who if anybody phoned me and said ‘don’t forget Jazzercise on Tuesday’ I would never go again” (Bobbi, interview). In addition, the fear of being singled out during class was considered negative, as noted by another participant:

. . . cause I can remember specifically a time when the same sort of thing, you know...when you aren’t doing something right and they come around and say “well you’re not doing it right” and they sort of make you feel like the centre of attention and people are looking to see who it is and I mean that just turns me right off. [Natalie, focus group]

It should also be noted that the results suggested a negative association with larger fitness classes. One participant mentioned, “...sometimes the group is too large and I think that’s why I didn’t really last long in the traditional aerobics because sometimes the group is so large that I find it overwhelming” (Maggie, interview). This participant

decided to leave the traditional group fitness class to participate in a smaller exercise group with a focus on muscular strength conditioning.

Inspirational Motivation.

Another characteristic of transformational leadership theory, inspirational motivation, may be defined as a “magical gift” possessed by leaders. Many experiences relating to inspirational motivation were evident in the data. Group fitness leader energy and enjoyment were most highly noted by all participants. As one participant suggested:

I just want somebody to bring as much energy as I am and maybe a little more to motivate me if I am not feeling all that energetic and be happy to be there. I really want to feel like they are happy to be there that they want to be there and it is not just a job, you know...like, I am here because I have to be and because I know you are all going to be here so, you know, I really appreciate feeling like they are glad to be there. [Jane, interview]

Another noted, “I think part of the overall enjoyment for me with this particular person [the leader] is that she so obviously enjoys it herself and, somehow, she transfers that” (Bobbi, interview). Finally, another participant notes how the energy of the fitness leader enhances her overall class enjoyment by commenting, “I think what, to me, is really important in a trainer or someone like an aerobics person, when I enjoy the class the most is their energy and their presentation” (Maggie, interview).

Interestingly enough, what did not motivate many participants was the typical instructional cueing and level of participation. One participant explained, “What I have a problem with is ‘don’t you feel good?’ That’s what I have a problem with. That’s the difference. Like there is something wrong with me if I am not feeling good” (Bobbi,

focus group). Another remarked, “It’s not about the ‘Okay...four, three, two, one...’ She’s [the instructor] talking about this and that, she sings to the music, she’s obviously just having a blast” (Bobbi, interview). In addition, when commenting about their experiences in aqua fitness classes, one participant added, “If they are going to make you work hard you want them to work hard with you. Their level of participation is really important, like just standing on the sidelines and just directing is not motivational” (Jane, interview).

Intellectual Stimulation.

Based upon Kark et al. (2003), intellectual stimulation may be defined as the promotion of education and awareness provided by the leader in a way to enhance the critical thinking of the followers ultimately leading to a new way of thinking or viewing problems. Although, the individual interviews and focus group did not yield much data suggesting previous participants’ experiences with this leadership characteristic, there were many suggestions provided that would enhance their group fitness enjoyment and future class participation. However, one participant had commented on her group fitness class experience as it related to the provision of intellectual stimulation:

I think what kind of kept me going was that relationship, that engaging relationship you get, to get my curiosity going. And just their topics like some aerobics instructors brought information when they slowed down or did the mat work. Where they presented information on nutrition or they allowed questions to ask, you know people asked questions and it was great. [Maggie, interview]

As previously noted, the remainder of comments were reserved for suggestions for future leadership strategies. One participant offered, “It’s doing something like

intellectual stimulation through educational handouts. Helping the participants become aware of. . . that image is not as important as health” (Maggie, focus group). Another noted intellectual stimulation as a motivation to return to class by suggesting:

There could have been just, you know, weekly or monthly newsletters or handouts with some more fitness tips. Something to do when you are away from aqua fit, you know, between classes. Nutrition information and that kind of stuff, something you could take away with you and think about. You know, that was really great at least I can go back and get another one of those so I guess I should go to another class. [Jane, interview]

Finally, another participant commented:

Maybe after the first class send home an instruction book on how many and which steps you do when and how. Like, you know, if you are going to do the steps you are going to go up three times, left once, forward once...whatever. So that you could, at least when you get home you could say “oh that’s what I was supposed to be doing”. I think that would help. [Simone, interview]

In addition to the above, there was one comment in particular that focused on the negative aspect of intellectual stimulation. This related to a series of comments made by the fitness leader as they related to nutritional information and body size. It was noted by the research participant:

Well, we all know sugar is not good for us, but it was [quoting the fitness leader], “if you keep eating sugaryou want to look like this? [referring to herself]..you don’t want to look like this [referring to a larger body type]” Oh ya, I was surprised. It was like just sort of talking down. [Natalie, focus group]

Idealized Influence.

Behaviours such as singling an individual from the group as a good example and demonstrating high standards may define idealized influence according to Kark, et al. (2003). Additionally, role modeling such as the demonstration of correct technique and form may also play a role in influencing class participation.

Based upon the research findings, role modeling related to the leaders' physical characteristics were well documented. Physical characteristics such as age, body size, and clothing were represented in the research data. In addition to the leader's physicality, dress was also elemental to idealized influence among research participants.

She does look the part; she's been doing it for years, so she is fit and you know and you watch her and you see her muscles moving and you think I want muscles like that. That's inspiring. [Jane, interview]

Someone that is my age, I'm more likely to go to a spin class if I am going to an over 40 spin class that someone that is my age is teaching. My characteristics of a fitness leader that would add to my enjoyment would be someone that is a heavy set person that has the ability to keep a good pace and to keep people motivated and going.

The lady that I took it [pilates class] with was a heavy set. So I went in and thought, 'oh, cool, she can do this' and then when I saw her doing it I thought 'oh my God, look at her go. She can do this, wow! That's awesome! I can do this.' [Veronica, interview]

When asked what would inspire her to continue to go to group fitness class, another participant said, "The instructor in her tight fitting clothing and somebody who is leaner

would be more of a motivator” (Donna, interview). Conversely, when asked the same question, another participant was quoted:

I am not intimidated by a bunch of other women that can't do it. It's the instructor or teacher who is just too young and too fit and too perfect for you to have to deal with. I don't know, is there such a thing as a fifty year old, overweight instructor? [Simone, interview]

In this case, idealized influence was evident when the fitness leader represented the participant in age and body size and negatively influenced the participant when someone younger and leaner was leading. However, this was not the case in the latter quotation.

Table 2

Participant quotes relating to the four “I’s” of Transformational Leadership

Inspirational	Intellectual	Idealized	Individual
Motivation	Stimulation	Influence	Attention
<p>There was more of a connection and more of an engagement. I keep coming back. I guess if I go with aerobics there has to be an enthusiasm from the leader.</p> <p>[Maggie]</p>	<p>She [the fitness leader] sends email reminders out once a month, little newsletters, and you know, she remembers birthdays and Stuff.”</p> <p>[Jane]</p>	<p>I think there should be a fitness leader for people over 40 and uncoordinated. Because it is just like, you’re kind of overweight, you don’t want to go into one of those class and you feel insecure going in them.</p> <p>[Veronica]</p>	<p>They [the fitness leader] always greeted you. They were so glad you were there and to welcome you. She always made us feel like we were doing her a favour by being there.</p> <p>[Natalie]</p>

4.5 Theme - Stages of Change and Leadership Style

DiClemente and Prochaska (1982) have postulated there are five stages an individual must go through to successfully change behaviour. This continuum of change assumes the individual will move through these stages at varying rates that may include steady progression or relapse.

Based upon participant feedback, it was possible to determine what stage of change each was exhibiting through present exercise participation and related comments. Due to the nature of the study, the stage of pre-contemplation and contemplation were not represented as the participant recruitment criteria requested that participants be presently active. After reviewing the individual interviews, it was determined that two participants were in the action stage, two were in maintenance, and two participants recently began participating in group fitness after a struggle with adherence and, therefore, in the preparation stage. Once the stages were determined, the predominant themes of leadership, defined by each participant, were identified. Table 3 outlines the various stages of change as it relates to preferred leadership approach.

Preparation and Leadership

According to DiClemente and Prochaska (1982), when one is in the preparation stage of change, the individual is planning for change within the next month, has been unsuccessful with behaviour change over the last year, or have begun the new behaviour for under three months. Two participants within this study reported beginning another group fitness class after struggling with attendance over the past year.

Interestingly, both participants reported the benefits of blending autocratic leadership with transformational leadership. As one participant reported, "...and she's [the leader]

very good because she will say ‘don’t do it this way, do it this way’ and she’s up on the stage doing that. That is good because, you know, you just don’t know” (Natalie, interview). In addition, this participant suggested the benefits of transformational leadership through her definition of her ideal group fitness leader:

. . . somebody who can motivate and encourage you. Just somebody who encourages you along to meet your own goals, you know? Somebody who cares that you think they care about what you are doing. They want you to succeed. You know? They are pushing you towards that. [Natalie, interview]

It is evident, based upon participant feedback that, not only is it important to have instruction on what to do and how to do it, but stresses the importance of individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence.

Action and Leadership

For one to be in the stage of action, one must be currently involved in the new behaviour for three to six months (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982). Based upon this criterion, two participants demonstrated they were in this stage of change.

Like those participants in the preparation stage of change, participants in the action stage commented on the benefits related to transformational leadership. In addition, the need for instruction was evident. As one participant noted:

What I enjoy most from the class is their energy and their presentation. I think if they push me or push the class too hard we don’t...I like to have someone leading me and instructing me and that’s what is neat about pilates. They instruct first and then if you are doing something wrong, they then come and show you how to do it. [Maggie, interview]

Evident in this comment are aspects of a transactional approach to leadership as well as autocratic. There is a certain expectation of roles by the participant as she explains the importance of instruction first and foremost. In addition, the negative connotation of “pushing her too hard” suggests that the autocratic approach may not be motivating or enjoyable.

In addition to the above comment, the same participant defined her ideal fitness leader by suggesting:

To me, there has to be; it's like engaging my intellect, even though it's on a physical level. That's such an interesting comment...engaging intellect. It's almost like I have to be curious and the curiosity has to be there or I will get bored. To me, it is connection. Like connecting with the instructor. In aerobics, I think what kept me going was that relationship, that engaging relationship you get; to get my curiosity going. And just their topics like some aerobics instructors brought information when they slowed down or did the mat work. Where they presented information on nutrition or they allowed questions to ask, you know?
[Maggie, interview]

These comments highlight both intellectual stimulation and individual consideration as important for this participant. Interestingly, these characteristics are what kept her attending group fitness class.

Maintenance and Leadership

According to Prochaska and DiClemente (1982) the stage of maintenance may be considered attained when one achieves to continue the behaviour regularly and over a

six-month period. Based upon the data collected, two participants were regularly participating in group fitness classes over a six month period.

What stood out from the data was the reference to transformational leadership alone. It was evident that the importance of the “Four I’s” of this leadership theory superseded other behavioural leadership approaches such as autocratic or democratic. As one participant noted:

I feel that she cares about me. [She is] chatting with you before class and remembering your name is nice. Checking in with you throughout the class if you are looking like you are getting really purple in the face. Checking out with you at the end of the class and reminding you when your next class is. She’s go to have great energy, really good energy. She has been doing it for years, so she is fit and, you know, and you watch her and you see her muscles moving and you think “I want muscles like that”. That’s inspiring. There could have been weekly or monthly newsletters or handouts with some more fitness tips. Something to do when you are away from aqua fit, you know, between classes and nutrition information and that kind of stuff. Something you could take away with you and think about and, you know, that was really great at least I can go back and get another one of those so I guess I should go to another class. [Jane, interview]

Table 3.

Preferred Leadership Approach as it Relates to Stage of Change

Stage of Change	Autocratic Leadership	Transactional Leadership	Transformational Leadership
Preparation	<p>“...and she’s [the instructor] very good because she will say ‘don’t do it this way, do it this way,’ And she’s up on stage doing that. That is good. Because, you know, you just don’t know [what to do]” (Natalie).</p>		<p>[A leader is] “somebody who can motivate and encourage. Just somebody who encourages you along to meet your own goals. And, they want you to succeed. They are pushing you towards that” (Natalie).</p>
Action		<p>“I like to have someone leading me and instructing me, and that’s what’s neat about pilates. They instruct first and then if you are</p>	<p>“To me, there has to be; it’s like engaging my intellect. Even though it’s on a physical</p>

Table 3. Con't

Stage of Change	Autocratic Leadership	Transactional Leadership	Transformational Leadership
Maintenance		doing something wrong, they come and show you how to do it" (Maggie).	level" (Maggie). "I feel that she [the fitness fitness leader] cares about me...just chatting with you before class and remembering your name is nice. Checking in with you throughout the class...and reminding you when your next class is" (Jane).

From the data, it appeared that transformational leadership crossed all stages of change with the focus on more autocratic and transactional approaches when participants were in the preparation and action stages. Interestingly, the participants in the stage of maintenance focused on only the characteristics defining transformational leadership and made no mention of autocratic or transactional approaches to fitness leadership. Figure 1 demonstrates the variation in leadership style, as it related to the stage of change participants were experiencing.

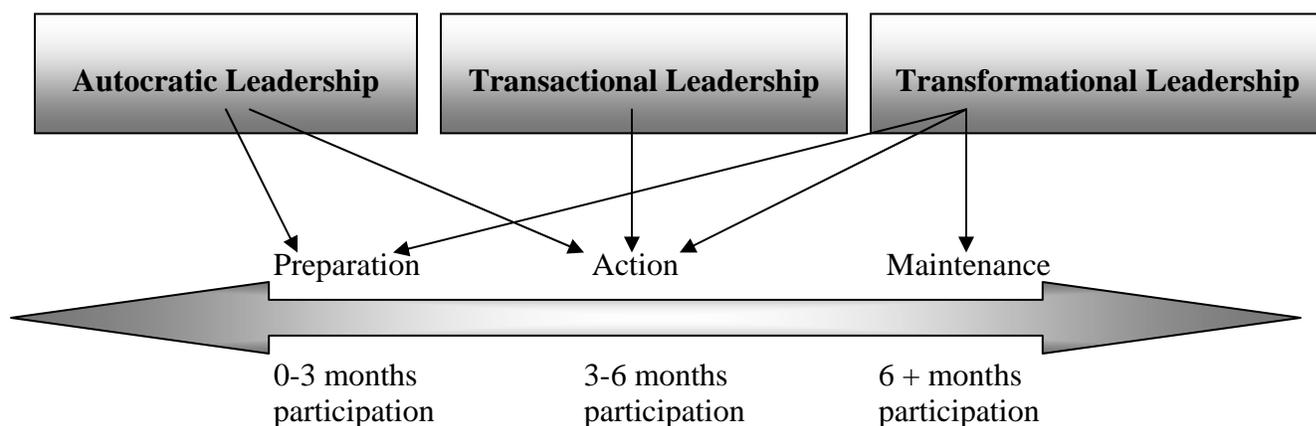


Figure 1. Leadership strategies as they relate to stage of change

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of novice, female, group fitness participants and the feelings and attitudes they have about their group fitness experiences as they relate to its leadership. Results suggest positive experiences and enhanced overall participation are conducive to a transformational leadership approach. In addition, this study suggests there may be adverse effects on fitness class enjoyment and future continuation when the fitness leader employs a more

autocratic approach. Moreover, it appears that leadership culture, fitness culture, and social support are influential in the fitness class experience. By providing sincere education and instruction without the use of jargon, offering alternatives in exercise, and providing choreography suited for the novice participant, the culture of group fitness leadership may be altered for enhanced adherence and enjoyment. In addition, this study suggests a shift in message from fitness and fat loss to health and function may also help to increase adherence. Moreover, it appears not all participants enjoyed team building opportunities within the fitness class, but agreed on the importance of attending classes with someone else.

Earlier research supports the above by suggesting that socially enriched leadership styles may enhance participant enjoyment and adherence to group fitness classes (Bray et al., 2005; Fox et al., 2000; Martin & Fox, 2001). In addition, Bain et al. (1989) suggest the importance of a leader's expertise, awareness of individual differences, and a welcoming and inclusive attitude to the overall experience of the novice exerciser. The results are framed in terms of the literature in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The importance of physical activity to overall health is well represented in the literature (Biddle, 1995; Carron, Hausenblas, & Estabrooks, 2003; McElroy, 2002). In addition, the literature suggests a growing interest in the area of exercise behaviour as it relates to the adherence to physical activity (Bain et al., 1989; Carron et al., 1996; Fox et al., 2000; Hausenblas, et al., 1997; Spink & Carron, 1993). Until recently, however, little attention has been placed upon the potential influences of leadership on the adherence to exercise. Fox et al. (2000) have defined two distinct group fitness leadership approaches that include bland and socially enriched leadership. From this point, the literature has examined the relationship between bland and socially enriched leadership and exercise adherence through a quantitative perspective (Bray et al., 2005; Carron et al., 2003; Fox, Rejeski, & Gauvin, 2000; Martin et al., 2001).

From the qualitative data in this study, representing the perspectives of novice exercisers, the results suggest that there may be an important relationship between transformational leadership strategies and nurturing group fitness adherence and enjoyment. In particular, the culture of fitness as exemplified in different leadership styles may influence future participation of group fitness and the attitudes and beliefs of the novice participant as they relate to exercise outcomes and expectations. This chapter discusses these findings in the context of the current literature in the areas of leadership, fitness culture, social support, and stages of change theory.

5.1 Leadership

Autocratic

In this study, the predominant style of group fitness leadership experienced by the group was the autocratic approach. This was negatively defined as more of a “drill sergeant” and led to the cessation of exercise participation for one participant. It has been widely acknowledged in the literature that a more bland style of leadership that offers only instruction may lead to decreased participation and ultimate exercise enjoyment (Fox et al., 2000). Conversely, as one participant noted, it was perceived as vital for the novice participant due to lack of experience and knowledge of proper form and technique.

Democratic

Democratic leadership within group fitness classes included the provision of exercise alternatives. These leaders offered the participant a choice between various levels of intensity based upon the diverse needs of the group. This was an important factor for two participants as they described their frustrations and feelings of intimidation in fitness classes that were beyond their level of intensity. This is congruent with the findings of Carron and Spink (1993) as they describe the benefits of a group approach within the fitness leadership realm. When looking at the importance of group cohesion and exercise adherence and enjoyment, the authors suggested group approaches such as coming up with a name for the fitness class or creating a group design for a T-shirt. Such practices are representative of democratic leadership and enhance the overall experience for the group exerciser. In addition, it has been noted that those athletic coaches providing a

more democratic approach to leadership coupled with positive feedback, training, and social support, benefit from a more satisfied group of athletes (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995).

Transactional

Although, to date, the more common approaches to group fitness leadership incorporate the behavioural theories of autocratic and democratic leadership, the findings of this study suggest that the relationship approaches to group fitness leadership are more conducive to enjoyment and adherence among novice participants. Relationship-based theories of leadership include transactional and transformational leadership. Burns (1978) defined transactional leadership as an exchange between two people based upon the agreement of the roles of follower and leader. Transactional leaders provide the framework of goal setting and motivate the followers to reach the goals through suggestions related to goal achievement. In relationship to the group fitness class, the leader and class have accepted and agreed upon their definitive roles of leader and follower. The pre-determined goal may be defined as physical achievement or performance in the class as the leader provides the suggested exercises and motivation to enhance the follower's goal achievement (Vandenberghe et al., 2002). Moreover, the novice participant may also place a higher level of responsibility on the fitness leader to motivate them to adhere to the exercise program. It has been noted in the literature that when applying relationship theories to group fitness, the transactional approach has had a greater influence on the novice participant in terms of making time for, and decreasing barriers to, group fitness participation. It has also been suggested that novice or "initiate" participants, when compared with experienced exercisers demonstrate a greater response

due to their lack of experience. Those experienced exercisers place more of the responsibility to adhere and enjoy on themselves rather than on the fitness leader (Beauchamp et al., 2007).

In this case, the study clearly suggests the importance of having a group fitness leader providing instruction on proper technique and form. However, when instruction went beyond the physical capabilities of the participant and combined with a more autocratic leadership approach, enjoyment decreased. Bray et al. (2005), report the importance of providing the novice group fitness participant with social and structural factors that include the type of leadership (bland vs. socially enriched) with the appropriate choreography. In fact, their results showed the combination of socially enriched leadership with varied choreography enhanced participants' reported exercise enjoyment and intentions for future participation. This is evident in the data collected from each participant in this study. When the choreography became too challenging, or when they felt they were no longer able to keep up to the class, they dropped out of their group fitness class.

Transformational

Kark, Shamir, and Chen (2003) define transformational leadership as the ability to transform and motivate followers to achieve more than they had expected. In addition, Kark et al. suggest that there are four important characteristics a transformational leader must demonstrate to be effective in the group's transformation. Acknowledged as the "Four Is" of transformational leadership, they include; individualized concern, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence. From the data,

it is evident that these characteristics are important and noted by the participants as determinants of group exercise enjoyment and class adherence.

The transformational leadership approach to group fitness class leadership enhanced the enjoyment of the class experience and increased the motivation to continue with the class. Leadership style, when applied to group fitness classes, has been acknowledged in the literature as an important precursor to class adherence and enjoyment. However, these styles have limited their definitions to two types; bland and socially enriched. As defined by Fox et al. (2000), bland leadership includes behaviours such as the provision of general instruction and technical feedback but is without encouragement, feedback, and other such supports. Socially enriched leadership, however, includes such interaction and delivers encouragement, one-on-one feedback, energetic leadership, and is interactive in addition to general instruction on technique and form.

The theoretical framework on the transformational leadership approach extends the definition of socially enriched to include idealized influence or role modeling and intellectual stimulation or the provision of informational tips and handouts related to exercise and/or health in general. Interestingly, the examination of transformational leadership as it relates to health promotion and exercise is increasing. Barrett, Plotnikoff, Raine, and Anderson (2005) suggest a shift from the “leader-follower” approach to an inclusive, goal-oriented approach within an organization or group. This approach would utilize multiple strategies that would influence actions. Beauchamp et al. (2007) have supported the notion of limited academic consideration of the relationship models and physical activity. Their research suggested the utilization of both transactional and transformational leadership on the effectiveness of exercise related self-efficacy among

novice group fitness participants. The findings from Beauchamp and colleagues' study suggest the usefulness of these leadership approaches among "initiates" of exercise, but less so for those experienced with group fitness. They are cautious of the potential limitations transformational leadership may have within group fitness because of the limited contact the fitness leader has with the group. That said, it was evident in this study that the all novice participants benefited from or wished to experience fitness leadership that exemplified the transformational approach.

With the focus on novice participation, this study revealed the importance of all four characteristics of transformational leadership. However, in support of the findings of Beauchamp et al. (2007) those participants with the least amount of exercise experience and the greatest challenge with adherence to exercise also suggested that a combination of transactional leadership with transformational was most influential for maximizing enjoyment and minimizing class attrition. Conversely, as the experience increased among participants, so did the appreciation of the transformational approach to group fitness class leadership. This may be due to the experience and knowledge accumulated over time by the experienced fitness participant. Experienced participants have an increased sense of self-efficacy as they master choreography, technique, proper form and pacing and, therefore, transactional leadership may not be a benefit. However, by offering detailed information on fitness and health, social connection with other participants, and role modeling the experienced participant may continue to attend.

In this study, each characteristic of transformational leadership was revealed as a positive influence to the participants. Individualized concern was a predominant characteristic that included leadership practices such as personal contact before, during,

and after the class. Longhead and Carron (2003) support the importance of individual interaction as one of the four dimensions related to class cohesion, thereby, increasing the potential for group fitness class enjoyment and adherence. Spink and Carron (1993), when measuring adherence to group fitness leadership and cohesiveness of the group, suggested the relationship between individual attention through feedback and praise by the leader is paramount to overall class cohesion and adherence.

In relationship to this study, leader acknowledgement of special days, weight loss, personal reminders and the like were defined by the majority of participants as positive and created a sense of inclusion leading to adherence. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) found that those leaders exhibiting transformational leadership had a higher quality leader-follower relationship than transactional or behaviour-focused leaders. Interestingly, however, one participant defined transformational practices as the factors leading to their decision to cease their group fitness participation. In addition, personal attention when participating in a large group of exercisers was also noted as a deterrent for continued fitness class involvement. This may suggest there is a fine line between supportive and destructive individual attention. Bain et al. (1989) postulated the potential negative influence of personal attention or being singled out in front of a class. Participants reported a fear of visibility and embarrassment of being acknowledged during class. This finding is significant as it challenges the accepted notion of the “one size fits all” practice of group fitness motivation.

Inspirational motivation was also found to be a positive influence to exercise enjoyment and adherence. Another characteristic of transformational leadership style, inspirational motivation, may be defined as a “magical gift” possessed by leaders.

Barbuto (1997) suggested the charismatic leader has the ability of influencing others, to attract those that mirror their beliefs and strongly identify with them and to gain the compliance of the follower through “symbolic power”. Russell (2001) defined charisma as the ability of a leader to communicate a vision that may inspire the follower and create a sense of pride, respect, and faith in a group.

In this study, fitness leaders offered inspirational motivation by demonstrating their energy, personal enjoyment, and a genuine interest to be present in the class. Whether through verbal or non-verbal behaviour, the participants picked up on the leader’s enthusiasm and energy, which positively influenced their overall experience in the class. According to the literature, socially enriched leadership creates an inclusive, relaxed, social interactive environment that offers the participant feedback and encouragement (Bray et al. 2005; Martin & Fox, 2001). What the current socially enriched leadership definition fails to include or acknowledge is the importance of leadership charisma to the enjoyment of the group fitness class. If charisma has been suggested as important to the overall enjoyment and continuation of the fitness class, how may the fitness leader enhance their charismatic leadership? It has been the experience of this researcher that, in many cases, charisma cannot be taught but is innate to the personality characteristics of the individual. However, Barbuto (1997) suggested that, although similar, inspirational leadership may help to define transformational leadership more than charisma. A leader may be inspirational by influencing follower objectives, goals, and overall motivation that may lead to the empowerment of the individual and group. Conversely, he suggests that the charismatic leader may strengthen the dependence of the follower on the leader

causing an increase in follower loyalty and obedience that may not positively influence the individual or group.

Rubin, Munz, and Bommer (2005) argued that the characteristic of agreeableness is the main predictor of a transformational leader and the key leadership variable that stimulates the engagement of others. These researchers used the example of providing intellectual stimulation and presentation of a vision that allow the leader to communicate values and ideas to the group. In addition, Rubin et al. suggested that “positive affectivity”, possessing an overall elevated sense of well-being and engaging in a positive relationship with the world, is an important attribute for the charismatic transformational leader. Fox and Spector (2000) found that positive affectivity was related to effective translation of vision through emotional expression and non-verbal communication. If this is the case, how does the group fitness leader learn to convey vision, values, and goals to her group fitness class? Perhaps this “positive affectivity” starts with a passion for fitness and fitness leadership as well as with care and concern for her participants as individuals.

The third characteristic demonstrated in this study was intellectual stimulation within the group fitness class. Based upon Kark et al. (2003) intellectual stimulation may be defined as the promotion of education and awareness provided by the leader in a way to enhance the critical thinking of the followers ultimately leading to a new way of thinking or viewing problems. In one case, the fitness leader provided intellectually stimulating situations by offering information relating to overall health (i.e. nutrition) during the stretch segment of the class. Interestingly, there was minimal mention of behaviours that represented this leadership characteristic, however, all participants offered examples of

intellectual stimulation as suggestions for keeping their exercise interest and participation consistent.

In a meta-ethnographic analysis of transformational leadership, Peilstick (1998) noted the importance of lifelong learning for personal well-being through the practice of creative, critical, and reflexive consideration, conceptually similar to intellectual stimulation. What does this mean for the fitness instructor? As suggested by the research participants, information on various health and fitness topics would be helpful. In addition, the provision of informational, take-home supplements that may guide the novice participant through some of the more challenging choreography was offered as suggestion. It has been the experience of this researcher that promoting critical thinking through challenging various claims, ideas, and beliefs within the industry of fitness has been helpful to transform a class focus on aesthetic and body changes to overall health benefits of exercise.

Finally, idealized influence was defined by all participants as critical to their enjoyment of the exercise class. Behaviours such as singling an individual from the group for demonstrating positive health behaviours may define idealized influence according to Kark et al. (2003). Additionally, role modeling correct technique and form may also play a role in influencing class participation.

In this study, idealized influence was defined through the physical attributes of the fitness leader. The commonalities in participant feedback related to the importance of the fitness leader as a role model. In addition, the physical look of the fitness leader was the predominant focus of influence for each participant. Where participants differed was the physical qualities of the fitness leader that influenced future class participation. Four of

the six participants suggested a female fitness leader that represented their age group and body type would lessen their intimidation and enhance enjoyment and adherence. These participants described an older, more overweight fitness leader as their “ideal” influence. Someone they could relate to and compare themselves with as a way of motivating them to continue their fitness program. As one participant put it “if she can do it, so can I”. Conversely, a “fit” looking, non-age specific leader with noticeable musculature and tight fitted clothes was a defining influence for one participant. Interestingly, this participant was younger and more represented the more “ideal” look that predominates in today’s fitness culture.

Kark et al. (2003) support this finding through their study of the influence of transformational leadership and the empowerment and dependency of the follower. In their study, the researchers found that personal identification with the leader was the greatest influence on empowerment. Kouzes and Posner (2002) support the importance of role modeling within leadership by stating that people will follow and emulate the behaviour of those they admire and respect. In the industry of weight loss and enhanced fitness, those that are admired and respected are frequently the group fitness leaders and other fitness trainers who exemplify the fit ideal (Dishman & Sallis, 1994; Hausenblas and Martin, 2000; Martin et al., 1998; McAuley & Jacobson, 1991). Interestingly, there was no mention of other role modeling or influential behaviours that related to other health practices such as nutrition or a demonstrated balanced approach to exercise. According to the literature, many group fitness leaders participate in excessive exercise and health behaviours that include over exercising and eating disorders (Martin et al., 1998). On the opposite end of the spectrum, Ouellette, Hessling, Gibbons, Reis-Bergan,

and Gerrard (2005) suggested that fitness leaders possessing a high level of fitness may serve as a role model for health and as an influence on the exercise behaviour of others. If this is the case, the exercising observer may equate health to a certain aesthetic and, therefore, find inspiration in following a “fit looking” group fitness leader rather than one that challenges this accepted aesthetic.

On the other hand, the literature suggests that those novice participants in group fitness classes report feelings of intimidation and self-consciousness when the leadership is “fit looking” and wearing tight fitness clothing (Bain et al., 1989; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Sassatelli, 1999). This was supported in the present study as four out of six participants noted their feelings of discomfort and intimidation due to the presentation of the group fitness leader. They described such a leader as thin, exuberant, and young wearing tight fitted clothing. In fact, the memory of one participant was so disturbing that she never tried group fitness again until the arrival of group cycling.

Markula (1995) has argued that female group fitness participants would appreciate a “normal” or “real” looking fitness leader with more fat on her body. This, as reported by participants in the current study, would allow for a greater connection and relatability than the thin, fit, “perfect” looking leader. Moreover, Fleming and Ginis (2004) found that after regular and sporadic female exercisers viewed exercise videos lead by “perfect-looking” leaders, they reported a lower level of confidence in their own abilities. While the literature points to the significance of physical appearance and age to leadership effectiveness, it remains silent on issues of race or ethnicity and presumably gender. Perhaps the look of a leader’s body and assumed fitness matters less than if she is Asian, African or male.

5.2 Fitness Leadership Culture

In the present study, the attributes relating to transformational leadership (inspirational motivation, idealized influence) also served to define a culture of fitness leadership. These included choice of language, verbal instruction and cues, delivery of messages, choices of exercises or choreography, and overall appearance. It is widely recognized that beliefs and attitudes may influence an individual's physical activity practice and adherence (Collins, 2002; Loland, 2000; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Markula, 1995; Sassatelli, 1999). As Maguire and Mansfield (1998) suggested, aerobics is a specific culture that embodies a particular code of conduct, dress, language, and practice. These cultural beliefs and practices influence the group fitness leader and permeate into group fitness classes. For example, there is a certain expectation of a fitness leader to be thin, muscular, energetic, exuding overall fitness while wearing tight fitted clothing (Martin & Fox, 2001). In addition, fitness leadership certification courses instruct the novice leader to cue and motivate accordingly through verbal instruction. Interestingly, this study uncovered many frustrations around this type of cueing and behaviour. In fact, two participants commented on the irritation felt by counting down and screaming into the microphone. One participant went as far as describing this behaviour as "seducing the microphone".

Leaders who failed to demonstrate transformational characteristics of individualized concern and intellectual stimulation fared less well in the eyes of novice participants. Behaviours such as exercise choice and others that were perceived as exclusive for intermediate or advanced class participants made it less enjoyable and decreased the chance of future participation among novice participants. Maguire and Mansfield (1998)

report that many novice group fitness participants, not having the experience or knowledge to keep up with the class choreography, will keep to the back of the class and out of sight until they are able to master the exercise. They go on to suggest that once “empowered by exercise knowledge and appropriate appearance, established bodies claim privileged positions at the front of the dance studio” (pg. 128). Participants within this study reported situations similar to the above, but did not mention their mastery of the choreography as empowering, only flashbacks of feelings of intimidation, exclusion and extreme self-consciousness. One participant, in particular, never returned to her group fitness class due to her feelings of overweight embarrassment and the inability to keep up to the class.

In addition to the above, all six participants made mention of their frustrations around the advertisement of beginner group fitness classes only to find the choreography suited to the intermediate and advance participants within the class. They felt a lack of opportunities given to the novice participant to learn each step in a comfortable and non-threatening atmosphere. Although the literature is not available to support this, it is the experience of the researcher that this is a growing issue and has prevented many novice participants from future participation. Are fitness leaders influenced by the pressures of the long-term participants to increase the level of intensity or is this due to the inability of the fitness leader to truly recognize and understand the needs of the novice participant? Perhaps a closer examination of group fitness certification programs will reveal a lack of consideration for the novice participant. If this is the case, offering information relating to the appropriate exercise, leadership, and other strategies for leaders to draw on, may positively influence the exercise adherence of beginner exercisers.

5.3 Fitness Culture

The culture of the fitness industry is heavily influenced by the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of both the fitness leader and the exercising participant (Andrews, Sudwell, & Sparkes, 2005; Collins, 2002; Crossley, 2006; Hausenblas & Martin, 2000; Lloyd, 1996; Loland, 2000; Markula, 1995; Markula, 2001; Mutrie and Choi, 2000; Sassatelli, 1999). The fitness culture has been described by some as “inclusive”, “intimidating”, and based upon the socialization of the belief that a thin, fit body is a healthy body. Bain et al. (1989) reported that, on average, overweight and obese women participating in group fitness classes felt they were judged by exercising participants and the fitness leader leading to a negative experience. In the current study, it was evident that all six participants were influenced by the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of the fitness culture.

Participants commented on their motivations for initial and present exercise behaviour. Exercising to lose weight or altering their physical aesthetic of the body was the most prevalent. The expectation of physical changes, as reported by two of the participants, only lead to future disappointment when those changes were not realized. The cultural influences on body regulation have increased the pressure to combat the effects of aging through healthful practice such as exercise and diet. This results in a constant ‘battle of the bulge’ influenced by the fashionable body aesthetic (Poole, 2001). For Mutrie and Choi (2000), some women pursue beauty through exercise and associate beauty and thinness with health. They go on to suggest:

Instead of being promoted to both women and men as a way of improving physical and psychological health, physical exercise (and aerobics in particular) is promoted to women as a way of losing weight and

improving muscle tone. This constructs physical exercise as a beauty product instead of a health product (pg. 545).

Interestingly, a desire to shift the focus from weight loss to health in group fitness was articulated by all participants during the focus group discussion. Nonetheless, four out of the six participants cited expectations of weight loss as a motivation to participating in exercise. In addition, these participants verbalized their distaste for their present figure and held the belief that specific exercises would positively alter their body shape. It has been suggested in the literature that a focus on body weight and attractiveness through exercise results in a lower sense of self-esteem and body dissatisfaction (McDonald & Thompson, 1992; Strelan, Mehaffeyh, & Tiggemann, 2003; Tiggemann & Williamson, 2000). According to Maltby and Day (2001) intrinsic motivations to exercise is critical for psychological well-being. Indeed, a negative body image has been associated with appearance-related reasons for exercise behaviour (Strelan et al., 2003). In addition it has been suggested that women are more likely to participate in exercise for weight loss and related aesthetic motives versus men (Davis & Cowles, 1991; Tiggemann & Williamson, 2000).

The majority of participants in this study, despite articulating their belief in the health benefits of exercise, verbalized their frustrations over their appearance in fitness class and their continued fight against aging through exercise participation. Interestingly, Markula (2006) postulates the “constant contradiction” women demonstrate when involved with exercise. On one hand, they understand the health benefits of physical activity, but on the other, they have the goal of achieving a more toned, fit, and slender form. This contradiction or battle between health and beauty was evident in the findings of this

study. In support of this, Poole (2001) drawing on her observations and experiences of group fitness classes, noted that although women participate in group fitness classes because of the health benefits, when told that a particular exercise will reduce flab, ask 'how many should they do' to see results. In this study, Simone repeatedly verbalized her frustrations over not knowing how much exercise she needs to do to achieve results.

The culture of fitness not only supports a particular behaviour, belief, and attitude, but also dictates a specific uniform of dress. Loland (2000) described the focus on the 'look' of fitness through the fitness leaders and participants' uniforms. Uniforms such as leotards, tight fitting tank tops and bra tops that bare the mid section help to define the culture of fitness. Collins (2002) reported one female group fitness participant referring to fitness clothing as oppressive. The participant described her feelings of intimidation by "the little blonde, leotard, and perfect body type" (pg 93). In addition another group fitness participant added the feelings of pressure to "adopt this costume that everybody else is wearing" (pg. 93). In the current study, one participant painted a detailed picture of "fitness people" by suggesting "they haven't been flabby since they were born" and "could run 10k without breaking a sweat and they probably do weights and it shows. They drink carrot juice..." (Bobbi, interview). Another referred to feelings of intimidation and described "spandex people" as "little, thin, petite, and beautiful...[with] those latex little spandex little bras on" (Veronica, interview). These data have implications for revising leadership training to heighten leaders' awareness of the influence of their dress and appearance on the adherence of participants. This is discussed further in section 5.6.

5.4 Social Support

Throughout the literature, social support remains one of the most influential variables for exercise adherence (Belton, et al., 2000; Carron, et al., 1996; Green, et al., 2002; Trieber, et al., 1991). Moreover, research suggests that it may be the social connection that is the key factor in the adoption of and adherence to physical activity (Belton, et al. 2000; Brownson, et al., 1991; Carron, et al., 1996; Green, et al., 2002; Trieber, et al., 1991). In addition, Azjen (1985) has suggested subjective norm plays a role in behavioural intention. It was no surprise that themes relating to social support, connection, and exercise enjoyment emerged from this study. All six participants emphasized the importance of participating in group fitness with a friend. Moreover, support through other group fitness participants was also noteworthy. Mention of initial greetings and goodbyes by those already integrated into the class were important to the participant and influential in making the decision to return.

Not surprisingly, the group fitness leader played an important role in the social support of the novice group fitness participant. Martin et al. (1984) suggested the influence group fitness leaders have on exercise participants' adherence to exercise. In this study, the fitness leader that provided initial greetings and goodbyes had a positive effect on the class enjoyment and adherence of the participant. In addition, social support during the class was also appreciated. Interestingly, as noted by three of the six study participants, there was a fine line between comfortable and uncomfortable leader support. For instance, Bobbi and Natalie recalled an event where the group fitness leader suggested a social support exercise that included each participant finding three other partners to participate in a class adherence challenge. If each group were to participate in

all fitness class without missing one, they were awarded a water bottle. Both participants reported feeling additional pressure to continue otherwise letting the group down. As a result of this, they left the class immediately. Veronica noted that she did not want to talk to others when she exercised, but appreciated the greetings and goodbyes, which connected her to the group. She defined her ideal social support as being “welcoming without being over the top”. All participants felt included and motivated to continue their group fitness class when the group fitness leader and other participants noted their absence at times. Conversely, Bobbi reported her distaste for a fitness leader or fellow participant calling her up and reminding her of fitness class.

The stories of participants in this study reveal varying degrees of social support that may be a positive influence in exercise enjoyment and adherence but may also pose as a hindrance to future participation. Spink and Carron (1993) found that those group fitness participants that experienced classes with high level team building also experienced lower rates of exercise drop out. However, Belton, Fernandez, Henriquez-Roldan, and DeVellis (2000) suggest that social support for health behaviour change may be determined based upon individual needs. Moreover, Loughead and Carron (2004) found that the personal preferences relating to social interaction vary between individuals. The individual attractiveness of potential friendships, social interactions and other opportunities available in a socially cohesive class may differ from participant to participant. Carron, Widmeyer, and Brawley (1988) suggested that those participants with higher levels of adherence also had a higher level of attractiveness to “group-task” than nonadherers. The above research supports the findings of the current study as they highlight the individual differences and interests of group fitness participants.

How, then, is the group fitness leader able to provide the appropriate amount of support to all who enter her class? Perhaps offering a participant questionnaire before the individual participates in group fitness may benefit the leader by asking questions relating to personal motivation. Perhaps a pre class interview may serve as a way to help the leader understand what will socially support the class participant. The challenge lies in the nature of group fitness classes. The average fitness class is based on a drop-in format. Therefore, the group fitness leader is unaware of the needs of many of her participants. Ultimately, by providing an array of social support strategies and by gathering information through individual and group discussion, the group fitness leader may enhance her positive influence on the exercise enjoyment and adherence of her novice participants.

5.5 Stages of Change and Leadership

The integration of change and leadership literature remains focused within the study of business. Reardon, Reardon and Rowe (1998) propose a five-stage change model that includes; planning, enabling, launching, catalyzing, and maintaining. The application of transformational leadership and other styles varies based upon the organizational and individual stage of change. At present, there appears to be no research relating the various leadership approaches to the stages of change for exercise behaviour.

Reardon et al.(1998) relate the combination of the “logical” or task oriented leadership approach and the “inspirational” approach with the planning stage of change. The “logical”, “inspirational”, and “supportive” leadership style was conducive for the enabling stage. “Logical” and “commanding” leadership was appropriate for the launching stage of change due to the increased focus on employees’ resistance to change.

For the catalyzing stage of change, a combination of “inspirational and supportive” leadership was determined effective. Finally, the last stage of “maintaining”, similar to DiClemente & Prochaska’s (1982) Stage of Change model, suggested that “logical”, “inspirational”, and “supportive” styles of leadership would help to create positive change.

Based upon the participants’ discussion in the individual interviews, it was determined that each participant represented a stage of change characterized by their present exercise participation. It was possible to match their stage to their desired leadership approach. Interestingly, the themes that emerged from the data demonstrated similar patterns as reported in Reardon et al. (1998). Those participants that were in the preparation stage, or “planning” stage of change reported the benefits of a combination of autocratic and transformational styles of leadership. Based upon this, the novice group fitness participant may require a fitness leader that is able to provide characteristics of transformational leadership such as; inspirational motivation, individual consideration, idealized influence through role modeling, and intellectual stimulation through fitness tips and other forms of media, coupled with verbal and non verbal instruction on what and how to perform.

Again, similar to the findings of Reardon et al. (1998) those participants in the action (launching) stage of change reported their preference of transactional (task oriented) and transformational leadership strategy. Participants in this stage may require similar instruction as those in the preparation stage. However, they are less apt to be motivated by a leader “telling” them what to do or push too hard. Instead, there is an expectation of professional instruction relating to proper technique and form as well as the

implementation of various transformational strategies. Conversely, the business literature suggests that the leadership focus be on logical and commanding styles due to the increased concern of employee resistance to change during the “launching” stage of change (Reardon et al. 1998).

The final stage of change noted in this study was the stage of maintenance. Interestingly, participants in this stage noted that only transformational leadership would influence their class enjoyment and adherence. This supports the notion of progression through the fitness class over time. As the novice group exerciser progresses and gains more experience and knowledge of the class she will need less guidance on proper form and technique. However, the importance of motivation, role modeling, intellectual challenge, and individualized attention still remains if the participant is going to maintain their group fitness participation. Reardon et al. (1998) refers to the last stage of organizational change as “maintaining”. There is a noted importance of a combination approach to leadership that includes the logical, inspirational, and supportive styles. Evidence suggests that during this stage the focus is on “overseeing and guiding” employees. Echoing the business literature, group fitness leaders may also act as guides for those more experienced participants.

Findings from the current study suggest there may be a particular leadership approach that may meet the needs of exercisers in various stages of change. It is interesting that across all stages of change represented in this study transformational leadership remained the constant. That transformational leadership is strongly influential in exercise behaviour does not come as a surprise; the literature clearly supports the notion of “socially enriched” leadership as a positive influence on group fitness enjoyment and attrition

(Bray, et al. 2005; Fox, et al. 2000; Martin & Fox, 2001). Based upon the absence of academic exercise literature relating the two leadership styles, further research is warranted to advance our understanding of fitness leadership and the retention of novice exercisers.

5.6 Implications for Research and Practice

This study has contributed to the existing literature on exercise adherence and enjoyment within a group fitness environment by suggesting there may be other characteristics of leadership, not represented in the present definition of “socially enriched” leadership provided by Fox et al. (2000) that may promote adherence to a group fitness class. Moreover, this examination has been qualitative in nature and has explored the lived experiences of the novice, group fitness participant. Through this exploration, we have been able to uncover commonalities that point in the direction of transformational leadership as a strategy for enhanced enjoyment and adherence to exercise. It may also be suggested that the findings of this study have opened the door to further examination and application of leadership theory as it relates to the promotion and leadership of fitness and health programming and to redefine a culture of fitness that is more inclusive, responsive and holistic.

So what does this mean to the fitness leader? Because leadership is not a subject currently dwelled upon in group fitness certification programs, is it too much to expect from group fitness leaders to be everything to everyone? Reardon et al. (1998) wondered whether any one leader can meet all needs of individuals through the various stages of change. Moreover, although it may be a lot to ask of one leader, those who are able to rise to the task and are able to vary their leadership approach may be considered

“strategic” in their leadership. At present, there are no known educational programs for fitness leaders that teach leadership strategies as they relate to participants’ needs. It seems plausible and reasonable, however, to integrate this knowledge into existing curricula to groom fitness leaders that will not only perform the requisite exercises correctly, but may transform the novice group fitness participant into a lifelong exerciser. This may be as simple as the addition of course reading materials and presentations pertaining to the various leadership strategies and their effects on the beginner, intermediate, and advanced participant. Course facilitators could offer leadership scenarios to assist in the understanding and future practice of special leadership strategies through hands-on practice. Evaluations of novice and experienced group fitness leaders could include the examination of chosen leadership strategies as they relate to the level and needs of the class. In addition, the enhanced understanding and implementation of stage-based leadership strategies could be included in the fitness leader toolbox as a way to enhance novice participation and enjoyment of group fitness.

It would be advantageous to expand this examination of leadership and fitness to the realm of health promotion. When reporting on the influences of various organizational leadership approaches on health promotion, Barrett et al. (2005) emphasized the extreme lack of academic literature examining the relationship. In addition, they noted the challenge to enhanced understanding from a purely quantitative perspective and offered the suggestion of a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study and note that these are due to a small sample size, findings are not transferable to a larger population. The participants were purposefully selected to represent a particular demographic and group

fitness clientele, therefore, these findings are restricted to the sample of six participants. In addition, based upon the application of the “snowball” method of participant recruitment, three out of the six participants originated from the same Jazzercise group fitness class. Although this may have an influence on present experiences, this does not negate past experiences in group fitness. Although this study is exploratory, the results suggest implications for further research.

Beauchamp et al. (2007) suggest attention be given to causality, and not correlation, between relationship theories of leadership and exercise behaviour. Moreover, a longitudinal examination of the relationship between leadership theory and physical activity behaviour may produce a greater understanding of this dynamic. This may include the application of mixed methodology with a larger sample size including a more diverse representation of participants with the addition of males, diverse ethnicity, and an age range to include the youth and senior demographic. Mixed method designs collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data, either concurrently or sequentially, in a single study (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003,). Greene and Caracelli (2003) express that one of the benefits of using multiple methods within a single research study is that it capitalizes on the objective strengths of quantitative findings as well as the richness and depth of qualitative findings. Furthermore, it may be advantageous to revisit the socially enriched style of leadership as defined by Fox et al. (2000) to include a greater range of leadership strategies as characterized by the theory of transformational leadership. Finally, it will be important to understand the perspectives of curriculum/policy makers and group fitness leaders themselves in order to complete the portrait of leadership in the fitness industry.

On a grander scale, future research must examine the application of transformational leadership and its influence on the global fitness culture that may challenge the belief that thinness is health. How can we change the social climate of health and fitness to represent the true meaning of health? If health and fitness professionals want to increase the level of physical activity on a national and international level, perhaps they should remember that front line leaders possess power in this regard; power that is both overt and reflected in their choice of dress, appearance and presentation. For some participants in this study, leaders' literal physical and fashion styles created a cultural norm for the class that was more dispiriting than inspirational, despite acknowledging their pursuit of the body ideal.

The certification and professional development of our leaders deserve considerable attention if we expect them to nurture a new culture and norm around health, fitness, and overall well-being. Very recently, the provincial governing body of fitness leaders in BC has renewed its attention to the importance of leadership in attracting and maintaining participants in physical activity classes. Partly a result of the well documented epidemiological evidence linking physical activity to health, the political agenda concerning the 2010 Olympic Winter Games³ (www.actnowbc.ca), and the sedentary patterns of British Columbians, there exists an opportunity to redefine leadership training in this province. The findings from this study speak directly to the need for less concern in the curriculum on choreography and costumes, and enhancing leaders' capacity to transform novice participants into life long exercisers.

³ The BC Premier has set a goal for BC to be the healthiest and most active population to host an Olympic Games.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Individual Interview Questions

1. How many group fitness classes do you attend per week? What days of the week do you attend and what time of the day?
2. What types of group fitness do you participate in. Examples of group fitness classes may include boxing classes, step aerobics, hi/low impact class or other group focused exercise classes.
3. Is this your first time attending aerobics classes? If not, over the course of your adulthood, how many times have you started aerobics class? (*history of adherence*)
4. Based upon your experiences in aerobic classes, what are some of the characteristics, behaviors, perceived attitudes, leadership strategies (including the physical presentation) of an aerobics instructor that would add to your fitness class enjoyment and keep you coming? For example, did the instructor talk with the class before, during and/or after the class? Did she appear to care for the participant's comfort during the class? What did the instructor wear to class?
5. Thinking back to aerobics classes you have attended in the past, what were some of the characteristics, behaviors, perceived attitudes, leadership strategies (including the physical presentation) of an aerobics instructor that hindered your fitness class enjoyment and made it challenging to come back? For example, did the instructor only talk to a few people in the class? Did the instructor focus on thinness or a certain physical appearance during any part of the class?
6. In your opinion, what were the barriers or challenges you faced over this time and why did you stop attending fitness classes?
7. Why do you choose to exercise in a fitness facility? (*establishing personal needs or objectives*)
8. How do/did you feel walking into a fitness facility and your fitness class for the first time? (*fitness culture*)
9. What have aerobics instructors done in the past (or present) to make you feel welcome and enjoy your fitness class? (*fitness leadership strategies and behaviors*)
10. What have aerobics instructors done in the past (or present) that made it an unpleasant experience for you? (*fitness leadership strategies and behaviors*)
11. What are some of the important considerations an aerobic instructor should keep in mind when leading a class of novice participants?
12. What role could the fitness leader take in motivating you to adhere to the aerobics class?
13. Define fitness leadership.

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

1. Given the summary/review of how the data have been interpreted thus far, does this accurately capture/reflect your experiences, feelings and perspectives of being a novice fitness participant?
2. Is there something missing from the interpretation? Does it stimulate other experiences/thoughts about fitness class that you may not have expressed in the interview?
3. What recommendations/suggestions, based on the summary of the interview data and my preliminary interpretation, do you have for fitness leaders or trainers of fitness leaders?