

## Participation in Team Sport: A Self-Expansion Perspective

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*The self-expansion perspective proposed by Aron and Aron (1986) suggests that people are motivated to include external features of the environment such as a close other and a group of people into their self. Previous studies showed that this type of integration leads to positive consequences for the individual. As such, the present investigation was designed to apply this perspective to athletes. We thus tested for the presence of three elements of inclusion in the self, that is, the inclusion of a close other (e.g., coach), a group (e.g., team), and an activity (e.g., basketball). We also tested the relationship between the three elements of inclusion and measures relevant to the sport domain (e.g., relationship with the coach, team cohesion, intentions to play). Male and female basketball players (N = 121) completed a questionnaire following a training session. Stepwise regression analyses were conducted wherein the three elements of inclusion served as independent variables and the sport-related constructs as dependent variables. As predicted, results revealed that each type of self-inclusions was uniquely related to specific sport variables. The present findings provide important support for the self-expansion model in the sport context.*

KEY WORDS: Coach, Self-Expansion, Sport, Team

Over the past two decades, much theorizing in social psychology has focused on the self. For instance, self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991) are among the social psychological theories which emerged during this period. One perspective that is growing in terms of interest for the understanding of the self and its surrounding is the self-expansion perspective proposed by Aron and Aron (1986, 1996). This

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new perspective has generated much research in the past years and appears promising for the sport domain. As we will see below, the self-expansion model provides a cogent explanation of how elements of one's environment are integrated into one's self. Further, it makes predictions with respect to consequences of such an integration for the individual. Finally, from a methodological perspective, the self-expansion model proposes the use of a single item pictorial measure that should prove useful and functional for sport research. Below, we present the self-expansion perspective and research pertaining to this theory.

### The Self-Expansion Perspective

The self-expansion perspective posits that through their interaction with their social environment, individuals are motivated to include elements of the environment in their self. Such internalization allows individuals to expand their self and thus to grow (Aron & Aron, 1986). According to this perspective, elements susceptible to be included in the self are numerous and could take the form of a close other, a group, or even an activity (Aron & Aron, 1986, 1996). The self-expansion model also predicts that incorporating elements of our social surroundings into our self leads to important consequences. Specifically, the model posits that because they create self-expansion, such inclusions should lead to a more proficient interaction with the environment.

Another interesting aspect of this perspective is the tool used to capture the relationship between elements of the environment and the individual. Based on an approach proposed by Pipp, Shaver, Jennings, Lamborn, & Fischer (1985), Aron and Aron (1986) suggested the use of a single pictorial item to measure the degree of inclusion between individuals and elements of their social context. For instance, Pipp, Shaver, Jennings, Lamborn, & Fischer (1985) asked young children to indicate how close they felt to their mother and father by drawing two circles. Much overlap between the circles indicated that children thought they were close. This research indicated that this tool is valid, reliable, and very effective especially when one is dealing with a young population and when testing conditions are difficult (Pipp, Shaver, Jennings, Lamborn, & Fischer, 1985). Aron and Aron have refined this methodology by asking individuals to select one of seven pictures depicting increasing degrees of overlap between two circles representing the self and an element to be included in the self (e.g., a friend), and thus creating a 7-point scale. Research has shown this simple methodological tool (Inclusion of Other into Self scale [IOS]) to have adequate psychometric properties (see Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) and to be extremely useful from a research standpoint.

The relevance of the self-expansion model has been tested in several studies. For instance, Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, (1991) assessed the link between the degree of inclusion in dyads and performance on a cognitive task. In an initial study, they measured the degree of self-inclusion between participants and either a significant other or a stranger using the IOS. Results indicated that when individuals are involved in a close relationship they score higher on the IOS scale, and in turn respond more rapidly and make less errors when responding to traits shared with their significant other than when referring to strangers.

In a related study, the degree of inclusion was further associated with emotional and behavioral consequences. Specifically, Aron, Aron, & Smollan (1992) demonstrated that individuals who reported being close to a significant other (e.g., a romantic partner), as assessed with the IOS reported more positive affect with respect to their relationship. It was also found that the degree of inclusion was highly correlated with longevity of the relationship.

Likewise, a recent study conducted by Smith and Henry (1996) yielded evidence indicating that people are also motivated to include a group into their self. Drawing on Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), Smith and Henry (1996) hypothesized that people who report greater identification to their group of reference (i.e., in-group) would also show a high degree of inclusion of that group. As expected, identification to their group was associated with higher levels of inclusion, and consequently, better performance on the cognitive task. More specifically, participants responded more rapidly and made less errors when responding to traits associated with their in-group as opposed to traits associated with the out-group. Results from another study (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997) showed that participants who reported a high degree of inclusion with respect to a person belonging to the out-group engaged in less prejudice and had a more positive general evaluation of the other group.

Aron and Aron (1986) theorized that self-expansion may also be attained by including in the self various external sources such as a career, educational experiences, and hobbies. Thus, just as people are motivated to include a significant other or a group in the self, they may also include an activity. This notion is similar to the one advocated by Anderson and Cychosz (1995) who suggested that people will choose to engage in activities which are prototypic of their self (see also Haggard & Williams, 1992; Schenker, 1984; Shamir, 1992). This type of inclusion has not yet been tested, however.

In sum, past research has shown that people are motivated to include a significant other and a group in the self. Such mechanisms have been found to lead to positive consequences for the individual. However, there appears to be no direct evidence with respect to the inclusion of an activity. Furthermore, no study has verified the independence of these different elements of inclusion in the self. Finally, no research to date has tested the self-expansion model in a sport context.

## THE PRESENT STUDY

The present investigation was designed to test for the presence of three elements of inclusion in the self. Specifically, we tested for the inclusion of three important elements with respect to a team-sport setting, that is, a close other (e.g., a coach), a group (e.g., a team), and an activity (e.g., basketball). We thus expected that athletes would report a certain degree of inclusion with respect to each element. In this study, we were also interested in testing the relationship between the three elements of inclusion and measures relevant to the sport domain. As such, it was hypothesized that the inclusion of the coach would be related to measures assessing the relationship with the coach and satisfaction with basketball (Losier & Valleraud, 1995). The higher the degree of inclusion of the coach in the athlete's self, the more positive the athlete's perceptions of a positive and supportive relationship with their coach (Pipp, Shaver, Jennings, Lamborn, & Fischer, 1985; see also Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996). As well, since playing conditions, training schedule, and playing time affect players and these decisions are most often controlled by the coach, inclusion of the coach in the athlete's self was also expected to correlate with satisfaction with the sport in general (see Horne & Carron, 1985; Weiss & Friedrichs, 1986; see also Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980). With respect to the team, we expected that the more athletes report inclusion of the team in the self, the more they should report team identity and perceptions of team cohesiveness (Luthanen & Crocker, 1992; Smith & Henry, 1996; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Finally, we reasoned that the degree of inclusion of basketball in the self would be positively related to measures such as the importance of the activity and intentions to pursue the activity in the near future (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). In sum, we predicted that each type of self-inclusion would be uniquely related to specific variables. Such a pattern of results would then provide support for the application of the self-expansion model in sport and empirical evidence of the independent existence of each type of self-inclusion.

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## Method

### PARTICIPANTS

Participants were athletes ( $N = 121$ : 57 females and 64 males) from the Montreal metropolitan area. They were selected from basketball teams ( $n = 16$ ) competing at the intercollegiate level (i.e., junior college). The mean age of the sample was 18 years old, ranging from 16 to 21.

### PROCEDURE

At the end of the basketball season (April), following a training session, participants completed a questionnaire package in their respective locker room. The questionnaire package included an adapted version of the «Inclusion of Other into Self (IOS) scale» (described below) and scales assessing perceptions of the coach's interpersonal style, overall satisfaction with the sport, team identity, perceptions of team cohesiveness, importance of basketball, and intentions to keep playing in a near future. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. They were cautioned that participation was voluntary and that they could decide to stop at any time.

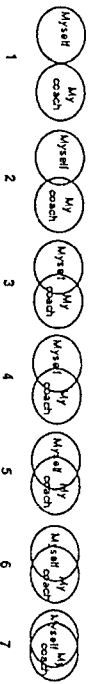
### INSTRUMENTS

The «Inclusion of Others into Self (IOS) scale» is a single item pictorial instrument intended to measure to what extent individuals have included various elements of the social context into their self (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992). In the present study, participants were asked to select the picture that best described their relationship with their coach, the team, and a meaningful activity (basketball) from a set of Venn-like diagrams each depicting increasing degrees of overlap between two circles. A specific series of circles were presented for each dimension (coach, team, and basketball), thus illustrating «myself and the coach», «myself and the team», and «myself and basketball». Figure 1 depicts the diagrams used to assess the degree of inclusion for the three sport dimensions. Results obtained from a study conducted by Aron, Aron & Smollan, (1992) showed that the IOS scale correlated strongly with a variety of more elaborate measures of closeness and predicted relationship stability. For instance, analyses indicated that the IOS measure positively correlated with subscales of the Relationship Closeness Inventory (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989). Further, the IOS scale led to several findings predicted by the self-expansion model, thereby providing content validity to the instrument. Finally, results obtained from an Aron, Aron & Smollan, (1992) study revealed high levels of test-retest reliability ( $r = .83$ ). These findings have been replicated in a previous study (Blanchard & Valleraud, 1998) using the IOS scale with respect to inclusion of the team and inclusion of basketball. Test-retest correlations of .76 and .78, respectively were obtained. In sum, much research support the validity and reliability of the IOS scale.

The questionnaire package also included measures related to the coach dimension. We included a subscale assessing athletes' perceptions of autonomy support from the coach (Autonomy Supportive Subscale from the Interpersonal Style Questionnaire; Pelletier & Valleraud, 1996). High levels of respect and autonomy as perceived by the athlete in his/her interactions with the coach is indicative of a positive and supportive relationship between the coach

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Circle the illustration that best describes the relationship between you and your coach



Circle the illustration that best describes the relationship between you and your basketball team



Circle the illustration that best describes the relationship between you and the game of basketball



Fig. 1. Measure of inclusion for the coach, the team, and basketball.

ch and the athlete (Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman, 1981; Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, & Ryan, 1981; Hodgins, Koestner, & Duncan, 1996; Weiss & Friedrichs, 1986). This version of the scale was composed of three items. A sample item is « My coach lets me take initiatives on the basketball court». Satisfaction with the sport was assessed using a scale comprised of four items (adapted from the Satisfaction with Life Scale; Diener, Emmons, Lausen, & Griffin, 1985). Adaptation of the scale consisted in substituting the word life for basketball. A sample item from this scale is « Up until now this season, the conditions in which I played basketball were excellent». In the present study, internal consistency for both instruments proved to be satisfactory (Autonomy Supportive subscale/ Cronbach alpha coefficient = .81; Satisfaction with the Sport/ Cronbach alpha coefficient = .76).

In addition, the questionnaire package included measures related to the team dimension, notably, team cohesion and team identity measures. For the purpose of this study and for sake of brevity, we used only one subscale of the Group Environment Questionnaire (Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985) to measure the perception of team cohesion. The «Group Integration-tasks» subscale was used because the goal was to assess team cohesion related specifically to the sport as opposed to team cohesion while doing social activities. It was composed of four items to measure the degree of perceived cohesiveness of the team. A sample item from this scale is «Our team is united in trying to reach its goal for performance». Team identity was assessed using an adapted version of the «Importance of Group to Identity» subscale (Collective Self-Esteem Scale; Luthanen & Crocker, 1992). This scale, adapted to assess team identity rather than group identity, was composed of four items. A sample item is «My team is an important reflection of who I am». In the present study, internal consistency for both subscales proved to be satisfactory (Group Integration-task/Cronbach alpha coefficient = .82; Importance of Group to Identity/Cronbach alpha coefficient = .82).

Finally, with respect to the activity dimension, we assessed the importance of basketball and intentions to persist playing basketball in the near future. Importance of basketball was

assessed using a scale adapted from Briere, Vallerand, Blais, and Pelletier (1995). Adaptation consisted in substituting the word sport for basketball. It was comprised of four items. A sample item is «Basketball is presently the most important thing in my life». We also included a measure of intentions to continue playing within the next few weeks. The scale was composed of five items. A sample item is «I intend to keep playing basketball in the weeks to come». In the present study, internal consistency for both scales proved to be satisfactory (Importance of Basketball/Cronbach alpha coefficient = .86; Intentions to Persist Cronbach alpha coefficient = .80). All scales were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all in agreement) to 7 (Complete agreement).

## Results

Preliminary analyses yielded kurtosis and skewness values ranging from -.2 and 2, thus indicating univariate normality for all variables. T-tests were used to examine differences between males and females on the inclusion measures. Analyses yielded no significant difference. Therefore both male and female participants were included in the regression analyses. Means and standard deviations for the measured variables are presented in Table I.

TABLE I  
Means and Standard Deviations for the Measured Constructs

Dimensions of Inclusion	M	SD
Coach/self	4.10	1.69
Team/self	4.72	1.41
Basketball/self	5.34	1.40
<i>Sport Related Constructs</i>		
Positive relationship with the coach	4.03	1.19
Satisfaction with the sport	4.07	1.19
Team cohesion	4.21	.99
Team identity	4.27	1.32
Importance of basketball	5.75	1.06
Playing intentions	5.85	.85

Correlation coefficients among the three measures of inclusion were all so computed. Degree of inclusion of the coach correlated positively with degree of inclusion of the team ( $r = .39, p < .001$ ). Degree of inclusion of basketball and degree of inclusion of the team were also positively correlated ( $r = .32, p < .001$ ). Finally, a low but positive correlation ( $r = .18, p < .05$ ) was obtained between inclusion of basketball and inclusion of the coach. These results suggest that although the three inclusion measures are somewhat related to each other and thus appear to coexist within the self, they remain nevertheless distinct of one another.

In all, six stepwise regression analyses were conducted to test the relationships between the three inclusion measures and the sport related measures. The three inclusion measures were used as predictors and the sport related measures were used as criterion. The first two regression analyses consisted of verifying the link between the three dimensions and the two measures related to the coach (i.e., positive relationship with the coach and satisfaction with basketball in general, respectively). As anticipated, the degree of inclusion of the coach was the best and only predictor of a positive relationship with the coach ( $\beta = .50, p < .001$ ; explained variance = 23%). A second regression analysis, using the measure of satisfaction with basketball as the criterion variable, indicated that the degree of inclusion of the coach was the most important predictor of overall satisfaction with basketball ( $\beta = .55, p < .001$ ; explained variance = 34%). Next, we examined the link between the three measures of inclusion and the measures relevant to the team (i.e., team cohesiveness and team identity). Results indicated that the degree of inclusion of the team predicted perceptions of team cohesiveness ( $\beta = .43, p < .001$ ; explained variance = 19%) and team identity ( $\beta = .35, p < .001$ ; explained variance = 21%). As well, results revealed a significant negative relationship between the degree of inclusion of basketball and perceptions of team cohesiveness ( $\beta = -.27, p < .01$ ). Lastly, we verified the link between the three measures of inclusion and measures relevant to the sport activity itself (i.e., importance of basketball and intentions to keep playing, respectively). Results indicated that degree of inclusion of the activity (basketball) was highly associated with the importance of basketball ( $\beta = .71, p < .001$ ; explained variance = 53%) and with intentions to play within the next few weeks ( $\beta = .45, p < .001$ ; explained variance = 23%). Regression coefficients for the three dimensions of inclusion and the sport related measures are presented in Table II.

TABLE II  
Stepwise Regression Analysis: Beta Weights for Dimensions of Inclusion and the Sport Related Constructs

Inclusion	Sport Related Constructs				
	Positive relationship with the coach	Satisfaction with the sport	Team cohesion	Team identity	Importance of basketball
Coach/self	.50***	.55***	.08	.08	.02
Team/self	-.05	.11	.43***	.35***	.04
Basketball/self	-.02	-.07	-.27**	.13	.71***
	R <sup>2</sup> = .23	R <sup>2</sup> = .34	R <sup>2</sup> = .19	R <sup>2</sup> = .21	R <sup>2</sup> = .53
					R <sup>2</sup> = .23

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## Discussion

A first purpose of the present study consisted in testing the relevance of the self-expansion perspective (Aron & Aron, 1986, 1996; Aron, Aron, Tudor & Nelson, 1991; Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992) for the sport domain. As such, the degree of inclusion in the self of three sport dimensions was tested, specifically, the coach, the team, and the activity. The means obtained for each measure of inclusion showed that a moderately high level of inclusion was endorsed by athletes for all three dimensions. Moreover, correlation coefficients among the three dimensions provided some evidence with respect to the relevance of the three dimensions and the coexistence of the three dimensions within athletes. Accordingly, it appears that all three dimensions are included in the athletes' selves to some degree, but remain nevertheless relatively distinct of one another. These findings are in line with past research on the self-expansion model (Aron, Aron, Tudor & Nelson, 1991; Smith & Henry, 1996). In addition, these results provide some support for the multidimensional perspective of the self (e.g., Harter, 1985; Vallerand, 1997, in press) which posits that several elements relevant for the self can coexist within athletes' selves.

A second purpose of this investigation was to study the relationship between the degree of inclusion and measures relevant to team-sport. Specific patterns of relationships were predicted between the inclusion and sport measures. Thus, it was anticipated that the degree of inclusion of the coach in the athlete's self would be related to measures relevant to the coach, that the degree of inclusion of the team would be correlated with measures relevant to the team, and that the degree of inclusion of the activity would be correlated with measures relevant to the sport itself. Results from regression analyses provided strong support for the postulated relationships. Specifically, it was demonstrated that the degree of inclusion of the coach was strongly related to a positive relationship with the coach and also to satisfaction with the sport in general. In addition, findings revealed that the degree of inclusion of the team was the most prominent predictor of perceptions of team cohesiveness and team identity. Finally, it was found that the degree of inclusion of the activity was the most important predictor of importance of basketball and intentions to keep playing basketball in the near future. Of interest is that the percentage of explained variance was substantial (ranging from 19% to 53%). It thus appears that elements of the sport environment are included in the self in a specific fashion as predicted by the self-expansion model.

These findings would appear to represent an important extension to previous work on several counts. First, the present study is the first to show that the self-expansion model is relevant for sport. Thus, just as individuals

in any other social context studied so far (see Aron & Aron, 1996; Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone & Bator, 1997), it appears that athletes do include elements of the sport context into their self. These findings open up a myriad of possibilities for studying the self in the sport arena.

A second point deals with the results obtained with respect to the new dimension of inclusion (i.e., the activity). These are the first empirical findings supporting the claims of the self-expansion perspective to this effect. Future research should replicate these findings with other sports in order to provide additional evidence for this type of inclusion. Further, in line with the work of Aron, Aron, Tudor & Nelson, (1991) and Smith and Henry (1996), we suggest that the cognitive processes associated with the degree of inclusion of the activity (or sport) should also be explored. Based on previous research, we speculate that the more there is inclusion of the activity, the more one should possess knowledge on the activity and the more one should possess the cognitive abilities typically associated with expert sport performance (Anderson & Cychoz, 1995; Aron, Aron, Tudor & Nelson, 1991; Haggard & Williams, 1992; Kendzierski, 1988; Kendzierski & Whittaker, 1997). Future research on this hypothesis appears warranted as it may have implications for sport expertise and sport performance.

Third, prior research on self-expansion had focused on only one element of inclusion at a time. For instance, Aron, Aron, & Smollan (1992) studied the consequences associated with the inclusion of a close other, while Smith and Henry (1996) and Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp (1997) focused on the consequences associated with the inclusion of a group and an out-group, respectively. The present study went a step further and examined the degree of inclusion of three different elements namely, the coach, the team, and the sport activity. The present findings lead to the conclusion that those three sport dimensions coexist within the self and are relatively independent. Further, each type of self-inclusions led to specific types of consequences as posited by Aron, Aron and their colleagues (sport satisfaction, behavioral intentions, etc...)(Aron, Aron, Tudor & Nelson, 1991; Smith & Henry, 1996). Future research should further investigate those self-elements. For instance, one could study whether the self-inclusion of the coach, team, and sport is relatively independent of the inclusion of other elements such as friends and school. One could even assess the potential conflict between certain elements included in the self (e.g., sport versus school). Findings emerging from such a line of research could shed some light on how the self is implicated in sport behavior and performance.

A fourth important aspect of the present study is that the instrument used in self-expansion research (the IOS scale) was applied to the realm of

sport for the first time. Although additional research is necessary in order to further validate the instrument, results of this study nevertheless revealed that the IOS scale represents a valuable instrument to study the multidimensional nature of sport. Moreover, the application of the IOS scale to the sport domain may represent a valuable instrument for professionals intervening with athletes. The instrument which presents encouraging reliability and validity (see Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992 for more information) could capture athletes' perspective with respect to the coach, the team, and their sport in a concise and non-intruding manner. For example, such a measure could be administered with ease before the training camp, at the beginning of the season, and at different times during the season in order to get an evolving picture of athletes' sense of self with respect to these three elements of interest. Under ideal conditions one could predict higher levels of self-inclusion of the three elements as the season progresses.

Finally, a last finding warrants discussion. Although the measure of inclusion of the activity (i.e., basketball) did reveal strong links with the expected constructs (i.e., importance of basketball and intentions to persist), it also yielded a negative relationship with the measure of team cohesiveness. This negative relationship suggests that the more there is inclusion of the activity in the self, the less athletes perceive the team as being cohesive. A possible explanation of these results is that athletes who report an important degree of activity inclusion in the self may display a more individualistic attitude which could lead them to perceive the team as being less cohesive. Further research is needed to test this hypothesis.

Lastly, certain limitations need to be underscored. First, the relationships between inclusion measures and the sport-related constructs were studied using a cross-sectional design. Future research based on a prospective or longitudinal design would certainly provide stronger support for the self-expansion perspective in the sport domain. Second, because of the correlational design employed in this study, it is rather difficult to make statements regarding causality. Thus, future research should use experimental designs in order to tease out the direction of causality between the sport dimensions and other variables of interest for the sport context. Work along the lines of that of Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator (1997) who showed that it is possible to experimentally create self-inclusions, would prove useful for the sport domain. Third, the present investigation only dealt with one type of sport, namely basketball. Future studies should further test this perspective (Aron & Aron, 1986) in other sport settings.

In sum, the present investigation represents the first empirical test of the self-expansion perspective (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Aron & Smollan,

1992) in Aron, Aron, & Smollan (1992) the sport domain. Further, the IOS scale proved to be a useful measure to study the relationship between the different sport dimensions and other measures relevant to the sport. Thus, based on the present findings it would appear that the self-expansion perspective and its single-item pictorial instrument provide the field with a valuable paradigm to better understand the individual within the sport context.

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