

THE EFFECT OF PEER INFLUENCE ON EXERCISE BEHAVIOR AND
ENJOYMENT IN RECREATIONAL RUNNERS (77 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Jacob E. Barkley, Ph.D.

Fitness professionals and popular media sources frequently recommend “exercising with a partner” to increase the motivation to exercise or improve the intensity or duration of an exercise session. However, experimental research examining the impact of social factors on exercise behavior is limited. A better understanding of how exercising with others may affect exercise behavior and/or the enjoyment of exercise could lead to better recommendations regarding the potential benefits of peer interaction during exercise. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation was to determine the effect of the presence of a same sex and fitness matched peer, versus an alone condition, on recreational runners’ behavior and liking during an acute bout of submaximal exercise.

Recreational runners (n = 12 male, n = 12 female) completed three experimental trials, each under a different social condition, in a randomized order. Each trial consisted of self-paced running for a duration voluntarily determined by the participant. The three social conditions were: alone, with a sex and fitness matched familiar peer, or with a sex and fitness matched unfamiliar peer. Running duration, distance travelled, average speed, liking, and RPE were assessed in each trial.

Mixed model regression analysis showed no significant main effect of social condition or interaction effects ($p \geq 0.40$) for any of the dependent variables. The presence of either a familiar or unfamiliar peer does not appear to affect recreational runners' enjoyment or voluntarily selected duration or intensity of a single submaximal exercise session.