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## Psychology of Sport and Exercise

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### Introduction :

Self - esteem and physical self-worth contribute significantly to overall Psychological Well-being and quality of Life and research indicates that Physical activity can positively influence these self-Perceptions.

Drawing from current Multi-dimensional hieranchical theories of Self-esteem, Sonstroem and colleagues proposed the Exercise and Self-Esteem model and suggested that a positive experience of exercise could enhance exercise self-efficacy, which in turn may benefit one's physical self-perceptions and ultimately lead to changes in self-esteem.

Fox reported that out of 36 randomized controlled studies examined. 78% indicated that exercise led to positive changes in some aspect of physical self - esteem or concept, and argued that this was a robust and significant Finding. More recent experimental Studies have, to an extent, supported this.

For example Taylor and Fox reported that participants in a 10-week primary care exercise referral Intervention had greater improvements in self-perceptions at 16 and 37 weeks than a control group. Asli also found that compared with non-active control groups. Participants in 10- week step and aenobie dance programs significantly improved on aspects of physical concept. Further, Alfermann and stoll conducted two field experiments with middle-aged adults to examine the effects of exercise of self concept and well being.

The results of the fist study indicated that a 6 month exercise Program lead to significant changes in Physical Self-concept compared with a waiting list control group. However, Alfermann and stoll noted that these changes could be due to expectancy or attentional effects and therefore conducted a second study that compared changes in Self-concept over 6 months between two exercising groups and two placebo attention group.

The results of the second study demonstrated that all groups significantly improved indicating that exercise is one but not the only strategy to improve self-perceptions, finally. Some studies have failed to report an improvement in self-perceptions following exercise.

In line with Sonstroom et al.'s hierarchical model. The relationship between exercise and self-perceptions appears to be stronger and more consistent for the lower level physical self-perceptions than the more stable construct of global self-esteem, which is at the apex of the hierarchy. However, there has been limited experimental research using multi-dimensional measures to examine the effects of exercise on the hierarchy of self-perceptions.

The reasons why a positive relationship exists between exercise and self-perceptions are not fully understood. As indicated above, some researchers have suggested that this improvement may be due merely to an expectancy effect that participating in exercise will improve well being. Further, it may be that it is not exercise per se that leads to improvements in self-perception, as other interventions appear to be equally effective. Fox suggested that there are likely to be several mechanisms operating such as increased personal autonomy, increased sense of belongingness, and increased perceptions of competence from exercise leading to enhanced self-perceptions. A further possible explanation, which is the focus of this investigation, is that exercise leads to weight loss and improved muscle tone and body size that, in turn, enhances self-perceptions such as body image.

Body image incorporates our thoughts about the body and includes body dissatisfaction. In women, body dissatisfaction is positively related to body mass, body fat content, and specific anatomical features such as size of hips, buttocks, and stomach. Therefore, exercise-induced improvements to the body may result in enhanced body image. Fox indicated that situation-specific self-perceptions such as feeling fat in certain clothes could be changed through exercise. Consistent with Sonstroom et al.'s EXSEM model, Fox suggested that this situation-specific change could then influence general feelings of fatness that could subsequently lead to enhanced perceptions of body image and body attractiveness, general physical self-worth, and potentially overall self-esteem.

Few studies have investigated the relationship between exercise-induced changes to the body and changes in self-perceptions, and the findings have been inconsistent suggesting that further research is required. Taylor and Fox reported that participants' changes in

anthropometric measures were related to changes in physical self-perception in a primary care exercise referral program. However, Ransdell, Detling, Taylor, reel, and Shultz, did not find a relationship between changes in body mass and changes in physical self-perceptions in a mother and daughter sample following a 3-month fitness building exercise program. Ransdell et al. suggested that this finding might be due to the limited changes in the body mass of the participants. Use of additional anthropometric and body composition measures, which are more sensitive indexes of physical changes than body mass, may have provided greater insight into the relationship between physical changes and changes in self-perceptions. Alternatively Fox suggested that actual physical may be unnecessary, but instead the subjective *feeling* that one's body is improving through exercise may be sufficient to improve self-perceptions.

If the relationship between exercise and self-perceptions is mediated, at least partially, by changes in anthropometric measures and body composition then it may be expected that physical activity that targets specific body changes would lead to greater self-perception changes than alternative exercise, and no exercise. For example, there is some evidence to suggest that resistance exercise may be more effective than endurance exercise in improving body image, perhaps because it focuses on developing the muscle tone and strength of the body. By comparing the effects on self-perceptions of exercise that focuses on body changes with exercise that does not focus on body changes to the same extent, it may be possible to identify whether these body size, body mass and body composition changes are important in enhancing self-perceptions.

Brisk walking is a recommended more of moderate intensity physical activity to achieve health and fitness benefits consistent with reduced cardiovascular risk. Previous research has demonstrated that a program of moderate intensity walking anthropometric measures and self-perceptions than no exercise. Following an 8-week exercise program changes in self-perception are more evident at the lower end of the self-perception hierarchy, and less so at the more stable global, domain and sub-domain levels. Walking + EMS is more beneficial in reducing anthropometric measures, and improving self-perceptions than walking alone. This finding could indicate that exercise-induced changes in body size and body mass are influential in facilitating exercise-induced changes in some self-perception constructs.

However, additional reaserch is required to examine this mediating effect further. Furture research should also aim to address the limitations of this tudy by including a placebo attention control group, ensuring equal groups following randomization, developing a more comprehensive measure of perceptions of clothes fit, and increasing sample size.

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