Health and Physical Activity: A Context for Exploring Indigenous Youths’ Views of Their Bodies

The bodies of indigenous peoples are continually compared to the slim ideal and the “norm” of white people (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Furthermore, the bodies of indigenous peoples are often of interest to government organizations, and Nelson (2012) argued that “Aboriginal” or “Torres Strait Islander” have become common, unproblematized markers of health risk. In light of the manner in which indigenous people’s bodies are scrutinized, the purpose of Nelson’s study was to explore urban indigenous youths’ perceptions of their bodies in the context of health and physical activity. This qualitative study was part of a longitudinal Australian Research Council funded study called the Life Activity Project (LAP). Within this narrative, 14 Australian indigenous males (n = 6) and females (n = 8) between the ages of 11 and 15 years were interviewed seven times over two and a half years. Most interviews were individual interviews, but upon the requests of participants, some were completed in pairs or small groups. Various forms of media (e.g., magazine images) were used as stimuli during interviews, and each interview lasted between 20 and 60 min. Data were analyzed using thematic and discourse analysis. Findings suggest that youth engaged in and resisted discourses around (1) bodily appearance, (2) worked on and working bodies, (3) the ideal (white) body, (4) authentic (black) bodies, (5) marked (black) bodies, and (6) achieving/performing bodies. This research highlights the complexities surrounding indigenous youths’ perceptions of their bodies, and the findings contribute to the modest physical activity and health literature that has highlighted the experiences of indigenous youth.

Nelson, A. (2012). ‘You don’t have to be black skinned to be black’: Indigenous young people’s bodily practices. Sport, Education and Society, 17, 57–75.

Journal website: www.tandfonline.com/loi/cses20
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The “Couple Effect”: Are Significant Others’ Health Behaviors and Attitudes Associated with the Health Behavior of Young Adults?

Research from diabetes, depression, and gambling fields suggests that including a significant other in a behavioral intervention or treatment process can have a positive effect on the behaviors or issues at hand. However, having a romantic partner has been positively associated with obesity. Little is known about how the health behaviors and attitudes of young people’s significant others (boy/girlfriend,
spouse, partner) is associated with their weight and weight-related health behaviors. Berge et al. (2012) sought to investigate this question using data from Project EAT-III (Eating and Activity in Teens and Young Adults). Young adults from Minnesota self-reported whether they had a significant other; their significant other’s health behaviors and attitudes; and their own BMI, fruit and vegetable intake, and physical activity. Data from 1212 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 24$ years) were analyzed using logistic regressions, controlling for health behaviors measured five years earlier, age, ethnicity, and education level. The results showed that women were more likely to eat ≥5 servings of fruit/vegetables per day if they reported that their significant other “cared about” healthy eating or found physical activity important. Having a significant other who values physical activity and who is active was associated with decreased likelihood of being overweight or obese among women. Men’s fruit and vegetable consumption and BMI were not associated with the health attitudes or behaviors of their significant other. For physical activity, however, both men and women were at increased likelihood of doing ≥3.5 hr of physical activity per week if they reported that they were active with their significant other, if their significant other placed importance on physical activity, and if their significant other was active. The findings suggest that having a significant other during young adulthood may benefit health-related habits such as being active, eating healthy, and maintaining a healthy weight. This influence may be particularly important among young women. Further research could consider the role that relationship type and length may have on the associations observed. If further support for a “couple effect” is found, health interventions that target couples could be a useful area of investigation.


Journal website: www.ijbnpa.org
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Reconceptualizing Appearance: How Focusing on the Controllable Influences Body Image as Women Age

The vast majority of the body image literature has focused on younger women and girls. Whereas older women may express dissatisfaction with their appearance, the effects of that dissatisfaction are likely different from those experienced by younger women. The purpose of this study was to explore how older women feel about their body and the importance they place on appearance. A total of 13 retirement-age women (ages 60–70) participated in individual interviews and follow-up focus groups. Thematic analysis resulted in four themes: (a) definitions of body image, (b) attitudes about appearance, (c) current body image, and (d) explaining the contradiction. Overall, participants viewed body image as a complex concept that included feelings about appearance, health, and awareness of the perceptions of others. Participants simultaneously experienced overall contentment as well as
desire for change, which included feeling good about aspects of their body and accepting themselves for who they are, including the flaws they cannot control. Women who placed high importance on appearance and defined appearance as being thin and looking young also expressed dissatisfaction with aging. Women who placed high importance on appearance and defined appearance as related to public presentation (e.g., clothing and style) felt more positive and confident about their body. Prioritizing functionality and physical health over appearance was reported as beneficial to participants’ body image. Overall, results suggest that defining appearance in terms of controllable and functional elements such as public presentation, functionality, and health was associated with more positive body image experiences among older women. The authors discuss the need to explore body image among older women of diverse cultures and suggest developing an instrument to understand body image with older women.


*Journal website:* www.tandf.co.uk/journals/wjwa

*Author website:* www.uregina.ca/kinesiology/faculty?id=28

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**How Do Adolescent Girls Become More Autonomous in Their Physical Activity Motivation?**

Research consistently demonstrates declines in physical activity during the adolescent years, particularly for females. Further, the role of declining autonomous motivation in explaining these physical activity changes is well documented. What is less well understood is how young girls become self-determined in their physical activity motivation. The purpose of this study was to use a mixed-methods design to identify the factors that help adolescent girls internalize their motivation for physical activity and thus feel more self-determined or autonomous. Participants (*N* = 107; *M* _age_ = 13.28) completed measures of exercise behavior (PAQ-A; Kowalski et al., 1997), exercise goals (GCEQ; Sebire et al., 2008) and motivation regulations (BREQ-2; Markland & Tobin, 2004) for exercise on two occasions, one year apart. Those participants who demonstrated increases in exercise behaviors and autonomous motivation for exercise over the 1-year period were selected to participate in semistructured interviews (*n* = 10). Interviews were focused on reasons for participation in current exercise, factors that increase participation in exercise, reasons for changing exercise behavior or motivation, and future exercise intentions. Although they did not differ at Time 1, at Time 2 the interview group reported higher intrinsic motivation and identified regulation, higher intrinsic exercise goals and more exercise behavior compared to the rest of the sample. The first theme from the interviews related to growing up and gaining a better understanding of how exercise relates to health outcomes. However, this still appeared to be a somewhat controlling source of motivation since they felt exercise is what they “should” do to stay healthy and to achieve a desired appearance. The second theme related to feeling a sense of accomplishment when they experienced improvement or
meeting their goals. Finally, the third theme related to the importance of fitting in socially and spending time with friends by engaging in exercise. The three themes reflected potential fulfillment of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, respectively, which are thought to be necessary ingredients for supporting autonomous motivation. These results may help inform school-based strategies specifically geared toward supporting autonomous motivation in girls during the adolescent years.


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Exercise Recognized as the Most Useful Self-Help Strategy for Sub-Threshold Depression

Sub-threshold depression affects the lives of large numbers of people. For many in this population, antidepressants have limited effects and psychological therapies are not readily available. As such, self-help approaches for dealing with the condition may have much to offer. This study reports on a survey of 1326 adults with sub-threshold depression recruited through the Internet. The study explored how helpful people perceive self-help strategies to be, and how frequently they use them. Twenty-six common strategies were identified through consultation with experts, and included strategies that evidence suggests are (a) likely to be helpful (e.g., exercise, eating a healthy diet, enlisting social support), (b) less likely to be helpful but are not unhelpful (e.g., using dietary supplements, having a nap, having a warm bath), and (c) likely to be unhelpful (e.g., spending time alone, drinking alcohol). Of all 26 strategies, engaging in exercise and physical activity was rated by respondents as the most likely to be helpful, yet it was used only moderately frequently. Indeed, there was no correlation between perceived usefulness of strategies and the frequency of their use. Respondents largely confirmed expert judgments as to which strategies are unhelpful; however, they still reported using these more frequently than strategies such as exercise despite their low efficacy ratings. The authors concluded that the results are encouraging in showing that people are able to recognize strategies that are helpful in dealing with sub-threshold depression; however, they suggest that more could be done to prompt people to use these strategies in place of easier but unhelpful alternatives at critical times.


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Promoting Physical Activity Through Exergaming: Success in Terms of Program Engagement and Weight Loss in Children

This pilot study aimed to investigate the potential for physically active video games to help children lose weight as part of a community-based intervention. Past work has shown that overweight children have significantly greater increases in energy expenditure when playing active video games than healthy weight children. Playing such games is enjoyable, and therefore seen as a mainstream activity that does not set them apart from what healthy weight friends are doing. As a result, exergaming may be a useful and acceptable means of encouraging physical activity at an intensity appropriate for weight loss. Forty-eight children (54% male) between the ages of 8 and 16 were recruited from primary care practices or through self-referral in response to advertisements. The 10-week weight loss intervention was run in local recreation centers. In addition to exergaming, sessions included nutritional education and behavior management discussions involving the children and their families. Engagement in the program was good, with 73% of children attending eight or more sessions. There was a significant decrease in BMI for the 83% of participants who did complete the course, with a mean decrease of .48 point ($SD = .93$). Self-reported screen time and fizzy drink consumption also significantly decreased, and average weekly exercise increased. The authors concluded that exergaming was important in supporting the program’s high retention rate, and that there is potential for this approach to be incorporated into larger scale interventions.


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Seeing Things Differently: Perceived Stress Mediates the Relationship Between Optimism and Burnout

Athlete burnout is related to perceptions of stress and is characterized by emotional/physical exhaustion, a reduced sense of athletic accomplishment, and sport devaluation. Optimists perceive less stress in their lives, do not dwell on problems or stressors, have an expectation that good things will happen, and are less likely to experience symptoms of burnout. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between optimism and burnout among adolescent athletes, and also to investigate perceived stress as a mediator in this relationship. Two hundred and seventeen athletes (139 males, 78 females, $M_{age} = 17.21$ years, $SD = .95$) participating in team and individual sports (average training volume = 9.97 hr/week, $SD = 4.14$) completed measures of optimism (Life Orientation Test; LOT-R, Scheirer, Carver, & Bridges, 1994), burnout (Athlete Burnout Questionnaire; ABQ, Radeke & Smith, 2001, 2009), and global perceptions of stress (Perceived Stress Scale; PSS, Cohen, Kamarch, & Mermelstein, 1983). Results showed a significant negative relationship between optimism and all three dimensions of burnout. Thus, the more optimistic the athletes were, the less they reported emotional/physical
exhaustion, reduced sense of accomplishment, and sport devaluation. Optimism also had a significant negative relationship with perceived stress. Stress was significantly related to all three dimensions of burnout, suggesting that perceiving one’s life situation as stressful is associated with a higher risk of burnout among adolescent athletes. Using hierarchical regression analyses, the authors found that perceived stress fully mediated the relationship between optimism and emotional/physical exhaustion, as well as the relationship between optimism and sport devaluation. Perceived stress partially mediated the relationship between optimism and athletes’ reduced sense of accomplishment. These findings suggest that optimism is associated with lower levels of burnout. Promoting optimistic attitudes among young athletes may prevent perceptions of high stress and burnout. Programs to change pessimistic or distorted thinking may be useful for reducing perceptions of stress and burnout and for increasing well-being among young athletes.


Journal website: www.tandfonline.com/toc/gasc20/current
Author website: www.kau.se/en/research/research-database?to_do=show_researcher&id=3162

Perceptions of Coach and Peer Motivational Climates Predict Moral Attitudes, Well-Being, and Behavioral Investment in Youth Sport

Research examining motivational climates in youth sport have identified that coach-created task-involving climates are linked to more adaptive behavioral patterns and positive cognitive and emotional responses among young athletes compared to ego-involving climates. However, researchers have largely overlooked the influence of peers in contributing to the motivational climate within team sports, despite the increasing influence of peers across adolescence. The purpose of this study was to examine how perceptions of coach and peer motivational climates predicted moral attitudes, emotional well-being, and behavioral investment among British adolescent athletes. Soccer, basketball, and rugby union athletes ages 12–16 years completed questionnaires at three time points: mid-season (n = 267; 45 females), end of season (n = 233; 53 females), and at the beginning of the following season (n = 149; 20 females). Athletes’ perceptions of motivational climates were measured using the Peer Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire (Ntoumanis & Vazou, 2005) and the Motivational Climate for Youth Sports Questionnaire (Smith, Cumming, & Smoll, 2008). Prosocial and antisocial moral attitudes were measured using subscales of the Multidimensional Sportspersonship Orientation Scale (Vallerand, Briere, Blanchard, & Provencher, 1997) and the Attitudes to Moral Decision-Making in Youth Sport Questionnaire (Lee, Whitehead, & Ntoumanis, 2007). Emotional well-being was measured using the Subjective Vitality Scale (Ryan & Frederick, 1997) and the Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (Radeke & Smith, 2001). Behavioral investment was measured using coach ratings of athlete effort
and athletes’ intentions to return to the sport the following season. Results showed that athletes’ perceptions of peer-created ego climate, coach-created task climate, burnout, and measures of coach-rated effort decreased over time. Conversely, perceptions of coach-created ego climate increased over time. With regard to motivational climates and moral attitudes, findings suggested that athletes with higher average perceptions of peer and coach ego climate reported greater levels of antisocial moral attitudes. The authors reported that perceptions of coach and peer ego-involving motivational climates were conducive to fostering antisocial attitudes in sport. Conversely, athletes who reported higher average perceptions of peer task-involving climates reported higher levels of prosocial moral attitudes. Perceptions of peer task-involving climate also negatively predicted burnout, suggesting that peer groups who promote mastery and effort may protect against symptoms of burnout, such as feelings of exhaustion and a reduced sense of accomplishment. Coach-created ego climate was not related to burnout at the first measurement; however, it was positively related to burnout at the middle and at the end of the study, and the relationship became stronger over time. Perceptions of peer and coach task-involving climate were also related to high levels of vitality, and perceptions of a coach task-involving climate positively predicted future intention to engage in sport. These findings support the need to examine the influence of coaches and peers as contributors to perceptions of motivational climates in youth sport.


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Maturation at the Extremes: Do Early and Late Maturing Girls Differ Regarding Physical Activity Levels, Self-Perceptions, and Quality of Life?

Past research has shown that early maturation relative to peers is associated with several detrimental outcomes, including depression, substance use, alcohol abuse, and early sexual activity. This study examined the relationship between maturation status and health-related outcomes (i.e., physical activity levels, self-perceptions, and health-related quality of life) among adolescent girls. From an original sample of 222 female adolescents, those girls who were most mature (top 10% with regard to percentage of predicted adult stature) and least mature (bottom 10% of predicted adult stature) were selected and categorized in two ways: by chronological year (11-, 12-, 13-year-olds) and by grade in school (Year 7, Year 8, Year 9). Comparisons made within chronological year on perceptions and physical activity levels revealed many differences. Within 11-, 12-, and 13-year-olds, late maturing girls had higher perceived body attractiveness and physical self-worth than early maturing girls. Within 11- and 13-year-olds, late maturing girls had higher
perceived sport competence and perceived physical condition compared to early maturers. Within 13-year-olds, late maturing girls had higher levels of physical activity and high self-reports of health-related quality of life than early maturing girls. Comparisons made within academic year in school were not as robust, with more differences found between Year 7 students (late maturing students had higher perceived sport competence, body attractiveness, and physical self-worth compared to early maturing students) than between Years 8 (early maturing students had lower perceived body attractiveness) and 9 (no differences) students. Generally, those girls who were early maturing (whether measured in terms of chronological year or year in school) may be more likely to perceive themselves in a negative manner. These relative maturation effects may be largest in early adolescence when comparisons between early and late maturers may be most visible to others.


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**Bridging the Gap in Motor Imagery Research**

The study of motor imagery, defined as the mental representation of a motor task without overt motor output (such as a physical movement) is of interest to both cognitive neuroscientists and sport psychologists. Differences in terminology, conceptual understanding, and methodologies have produced barriers to the integration of research across these domains. The use of a variety of terms (e.g., motor imagery, kinesthetic imagery, movement imagery) between the two fields produces confusion. Cognitive neuroscientists have generally considered motor imagery to involve only the first-person, visual perspective. Evidence from sport psychology suggests that motor imagery can use both first- and third-person perspectives, and include visual and kinesthetic imagery. Furthermore, the third-person perspective may be superior to the first-person perspective for some activities. Conceptualizations of the theoretical mechanisms of imagery, in particular the functional equivalence hypothesis (that imagery results in similar, but not identical representations, neural pathways, and production of movements as actual movement), also differs between the two fields. The authors note that sport psychologists have been somewhat inconsistent with their interpretation of functional equivalence. Methodologically, sport psychologists are more likely to include manipulation checks in research studies and are more likely to provide precise instructions on what participants are to image (including, for example, what the exact task is and the perspective to be used). The authors conclude with several recommendations for bridging the gap between research on motor imagery in sport psychology and cognitive neuroscience. First, they recommend the use of the term *motor imagery*, as it is the most commonly used of all the terms, and best represents the construct of interest. Second, both fields should make greater use of chronometric measures—those that examine the temporal sequencing of imagery.
Third, researchers clarify issues of imagery perspective and improve methodologies. Finally, research should continue to investigate theoretical mechanisms of motor imagery in order to integrate the two fields. This greater integration could be accomplished through studying meta-imagery processes (people’s knowledge about their own use of imagery) or by combining both objective and subjective imagery measures into a composite measure. Ultimately, fewer barriers leading to increased collaborations may help us better understand consciousness and movement, and help improve the learning and execution of skills for groups such as athletes or surgeons.


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