Chapter 8

Self-Concept, Self-Esteem, and Exercise
"Before you try on any bathing suit, you're required to sign this waiver releasing us from liability should you incur permanent damage to your self-esteem."
Self-Concept Defined

• The way in which we see or define ourselves
• “Who I am.”
Self-Concept Model

• One’s general (overall) self-concept is an aggregate construct determined by judgments of self-concept in a number of domains

• General self-concept consists of two primary categories:
  – Academic self-concept (primary learning domains)
  – Nonacademic self-concept
Diagram of the Self-Concept Model

General self-concept

Academic self-concept
- English
- History
- Math
- Science
- Peers
- Significant others

Nonacademic self-concept
- Social self-concept
- Emotional self-concept
- Physical self-concept
- Emotional states
- Physical ability
- Physical appearance

Evaluation of behavior in specific situations

Source: Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton (1976).
Nonacademic Self-Concept

• Physical self-concept
  – Individual’s judgments of both general physical abilities and physical appearance

• Social self-concept
  – Enhanced by positive interaction with others

• Emotional self-concept
  – Cognitive or emotional states
More on the Self-Concept Model

• The base level of the hierarchy is defined by one’s behavior in specific situations
• Judgments of physical ability are based on our perceptions of successful and unsuccessful performance in a number of activities engaged in over a period of time
Self-Esteem Defined

- The evaluative or affective consequence of one’s self-concept
- The extent to which one feels positive or negative about one’s self-concept
- “How I feel about who I am.”
Other Terms and Definitions

- Other terms focus primarily on judgments of ability and potential success in specific situations, activities/skills, or domains
  - Perceived competence: “Do I consider myself an athlete?”
  - Self-confidence: “While I feel capable of doing this activity, am I as capable doing another activity?”
  - Self-efficacy: “While I feel capable of doing this activity in this situation, am I as capable doing it in a different situation?”
Significance of Self-Esteem

- Self-esteem tops the list of needs that make people happy
- Individuals who are popular, rich, and powerful are not necessarily happy
Does Physical activity improve my self-esteem?
Measurement

• Two physical self-concept/self-esteem inventories in 1980s/1990s:
  – Physical Self-Perception Profile (PSPP)
  – Physical Self-Description Questionnaire (PSDQ)
PSPP and PSDQ Scales

• **PSPP:**
  – Valid and reliable across a variety of measures
  – Substantial amount of reading with complex response format, making it less user-friendly
  – Shorter

• **PSDQ:**
  – A comprehensive assessment of physical self-concept
  – Global measures of both physical self-concept and self-esteem
  – Single-statement items
  – Longer
# Sample Items from the Physical Self-Perception Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Sample Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sports Competence</td>
<td>“Some people feel that they are not very good when it comes to playing sports BUT others feel that they are really good at just about every sport.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Condition</td>
<td>“Some people do not usually have a high level of stamina and fitness BUT others always maintain a high level of stamina and fitness.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Attractiveness</td>
<td>“Some people are extremely confident about the appearance of their bodies BUT others are a little self-conscious about the appearance of their bodies.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Strength</td>
<td>“Some people feel that they are physically stronger than most people of their sex BUT others feel that they lack physical strength compared to most others of their sex.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Self-Worth</td>
<td>“Some people feel extremely satisfied with the kind of persons they are physically BUT others sometimes feel a little dissatisfied with their physical selves.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Fox and Corbin (1989).*
Significance of Self-Esteem

- Promoting the self-esteem–enhancing properties of physical activity might be a viable strategy for improving activity levels in those individuals who view self-esteem as a primary psychological need.
Self-Esteem and Physical Activity

The impact of activity on global self-esteem

- Physical activity has a moderate effect on self-esteem

- Largest benefit on basis of activity is associated with weight training and aerobic activities (Fox, 2000)

- Physical activity does not automatically enhance self-esteem and body image; exercise programs should last for at least 12 weeks or more (Fox 2000)
Physical Activity and Self-esteem

![Bar graph showing effect sizes for different age groups.]

- **Children**: 0.41
- **Young Adults**: 0.55
- **Middle Adults**: 0.57
- **Elderly**: 0.61

Gruber, 1986; Hodges & McDonald, 1991
Physical Activity Prescription

- Does-response relationship of exercise and self-esteem have not been found about exercise frequency, intensity, and duration.
- There is a trend in the data by Spence et al, 2005 that indicates more frequent participation leads to increase in self-esteem.
Physical Self-Esteem

The body appearance, attributes, and abilities provides substantive interface between the individual and the outside world.

– Major vehicle for social communication
– Used to express status and sexuality
– Physical self strongly correlated to across one’s lifespan to global self-esteem
The Exercise and Self-Esteem Model

• Hierarchically organized constructs that lead to predictions of global self-esteem

• The process of altering self-esteem is initiated with physical measures located at the base of the model
More on the Exercise and Self-Esteem Model

• Also relevant to self-esteem:
  – Physical acceptance: The extent to which an individual accepts who he/she is physically
  – Subjective perception of success: Although objective indicators of improved fitness may not be present, self-concept/self-esteem might improve if one feels that physical competence has improved
Diagram of the Exercise and Self-Esteem Model

Your Viewpoint

• In your opinion, which is more important to self-esteem: objective or subjective changes to fitness?
Mechanisms of Change

- Mastery/self-efficacy theory
- Body image/body esteem
- Self-schemata
- Self-determination
Mastery/Self-Efficacy

• Physical self-efficacy exerts an influence on physical self-concept.

• Physical self-concept influences global self-esteem both independently and via physical acceptance.

• Based on the degree to which a person feels he or she has mastered necessary skills, he/she will report improvements in physical self-efficacy.
Body Image/Body Esteem

- **Body image**
  - Mental picture we form of our bodies ("what I look like")

- **Body esteem**
  - Emotional consequence of body image ("how I feel about the way I look")

- One’s perception of one’s body elicits either pleasing/satisfying or displeasing/dissatisfying feelings.
Diagram of Possible Linkage Between Body Image and Self-Esteem Following Chronic Exercise

- Chronic exercise
  - Perceived bodily change (e.g., body composition, muscle tone)
  - Body image
  - Body esteem
  - Global self-esteem
Self-Schemata—Three Categories of Exercise-Specific Identities

• Exerciser schematics
  – Describe themselves as exercisers and rate this self-identification as crucial to self-image

• Nonexerciser schematics
  – Describe themselves as nonexercisers who consider this (deficient) descriptor to be a significant influence on self-image

• Aschematics
  – Describe themselves as nonexercisers but don’t consider this perception to be important to self-image
Your Viewpoint

• Which category of exercise-specific identities do you most identify with? Your friends?

• Would you prefer to identify with a different category?
Diagram of Possible Linkage Between Exercise Schema and Self-Esteem Following Chronic Exercise

- Chronic exercise
- Exercise self-schema
- Physical self-concept
- Global self-esteem
Self-Determination

• An individual’s drive to autonomously and successfully perform behaviors important to him/her
• Vast potential to influence self-esteem
• Completion of an event/goal could lead to enhanced feelings of self-determination because of considerable internal capabilities:
  – Self-motivation
  – Discipline
  – Effort
Diagram of Possible Linkage Between Exercise Schema and Self-Esteem Following Chronic Exercise

Exercise outcome → Autonomy (self-determination) → Physical self-concept → Global self-esteem
Practical Recommendations

• Certain steps can be taken to ensure that the activity engaged in will lead to improvements in self-concept/self-esteem:
  – Determine why individual is interested in exercise regime; determine what his/her goals are
  – Conduct baseline health and fitness assessments, to provide feedback about progress
  – Ensure that exerciser feels a sense of accomplishment and personal control regarding exercise routine
  – Focus on effort and personal improvement
Focus on Aging

• Tai Chi is an ideal activity for older individuals because it can be performed in any location at any time

• Individuals in a study involving Tai Chi reported numerous improvements in their physical condition, body attractiveness, physical strength, overall physical self-worth, and global self-esteem
Focus on Aging—Activity

• Imagine that you are designing an exercise program for the local senior center:
  – Describe the psychological and social benefits of exercise for this population.
  – What unique features of the program will enhance self-concept and/or self-esteem?