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EXAMINING PHYSIQUE CONCERNS AMONG MALE ADOLESCENTS USING FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY

C.M. Sabiston, W.A. Sedgwick, P.R.E. Crocker (School of Human Kinetics, University of British Columbia), & K.C. Kowalski (College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan)

Body-related concerns perpetuate health-risk behaviours among adolescent females, yet little is known about the relationship between physique anxiety and subsequent behaviours in adolescent male populations. Accordingly, male's physical self-perceptions have been a recent focus in sport and exercise psychology. Researchers have indicated that males express desires to lose weight, gain muscle mass, and employ an array of body change strategies (Grogan & Richards, 2002; Lysne et al., 2002; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003; McCreary & Sasse, 2000). This study examined strategies used to deal with, and the prevalence and consequence of, body-related concern amongst adolescent males. Social physique anxiety (SPA) was investigated because it is a well-defined affective dimension of body image (Bane & McAuley, 1998), accounts for the influence of others on physique concern grounded in theory (Hart et al., 1989), and its investigation from a health perspective has been restricted. Trained male facilitators conducted semi-structured focus groups using an interview guide grounded in self-presentation/social anxiety and coping perspectives (Hart et al., 1989; Kowalski & Leary, 1995; Lazarus, 1993; Leary, 1992). Adolescent males between the ages of 13 to 18 years ($M=13.86$, $SD = .95$) were recruited to participate. The reported prevalence of SPA was inconsistent since the younger males did not mention body-related concerns and there was little discussion pertaining to SPA; whereas other adolescent males reported that SPA was prevalent. All participants stated that body image was a heightened issue for females rather than males. Situations in which comparisons to, and scrutiny by, other male and female adolescents were possible (i.e., school dances, workout facilities, sporting events, and sexual intercourse) were indicated as promoters of SPA. Parents and peers were agents associated with the experience of SPA, primarily in athletic contexts. Among males, physical appearance was not as important as physical effectiveness. Competence and performance in physical activity was coveted over physical appearance. This finding supports previous research (Stanford & McCabe, 2002). A few coping strategies were reported and were either problem-focused or avoidance in nature. Several coping strategies were potential health-compromising behaviours, and the foundational coping strategies hinged on the goal of being accepted by others. Overall, male adolescents reported body-related concerns in an impersonal and general context whereby individual accounts were rarely mentioned. The participants focused on group trends and the global nature of body image. Gender-specific distinctions pertaining to the prevalence and consequences of body concerns will be presented.

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