

BODY IMAGE AND SENSATION SEEKING IN GYM-GOERS

Petr Schlegel, Ludmila Fialová

Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Charles University, Prague, Czech republic

Abstract. This research aimed to explore a relation between Body image (PSPP) and Sensation Seeking (SSS-V) and to determine gym-goers based on these entities. The research file (N = 182) consisted of gym-goers aged between 24 – 45. The comparison of the tests showed a weak relation (0.25) between PSPP and SST tests and also among the individual subscales. The comparison of men and women did not come up with any significant differences. In terms of Body image, the file showed above-average results, in the case of Sensation Seeking, its score was average. The outcome of our findings is that there is no marked relation between PSPP and SST and the same goes for men and women.

Key words: body image, physical self perception profile, sensation seeking, gym-goer

Introduction

When researching how people act, regardless of which particular area is being covered, it is hardly possible to separate one area from another. There is a sense of unity between people and their environment just as much as there is a certain level of integrity within themselves. In the field of psychology, various spheres trying to grasp and explain human behaviour are known. However, it is not always clear how these areas of human behaviour are linked. In a discourse on personality psychology, various ways of defining links across all kinds of spheres are offered: e.g. a relation between intelligence and motivation or self-esteem and personal characteristics (cf. Blatny 2010). Those who were researching into relations between self-esteem and temperament were, for instance, Heimpel and Eliot (2006) – behavioural systems in relation to neuroticism and self-esteem; Campell (2004) – sensation seeking and narcissism; Llewellyn et al. (2008) – self-efficacy and a propensity for risk behaviour.

In our case the research deals with a relation between sensation seeking and body image. Murtaza et al. (2011a, 2012) dealt with Sensation seeking and physical self-perception of weightlifters and bodybuilders. The research is, however, just a descriptive one and does not mention any deeper relations of the aspects observed. Apart from this one, we are not familiar with any other studies.

Body image in terms of mental representation of one's own body involves three parts: cognitive, emotional and behavioural (Fialová 2001). These parts influence one another and create a single entity, which is essential in the overall self-esteem. The importance of body and its presentation is crucial in today's society, as seen in media and the way body is treated. It is becoming a marketing device with an emphasis on its perfection and flawlessness. The following interiorisation of the performed ideals influences perception and the actual relation with one's body. This often results in dissatisfaction with body image and yearning for a change.

The survey research method Physical Self Reception Profile (PSPP) (Fox, Corbin 1989) was chosen for the evaluation. It contains 30 questions that are further divided into five subdomains: Sport competence, Physical condition, Attractive body, Physical strength, and Physical self-worth.

Seeking new, strong and extraordinary experiences or taking a certain risk which might lead to consequences in physical and social sphere is labelled by Zuckerman (1994) as Sensation Seeking. Research usually focuses on the spheres with a high objective degree of risk. Nevertheless, this is a complex personality trait that is related to further areas and beyond. The subscale Disinhibition is, for instance, related to addictions and/or Boredom Susceptibility influences decision-making and the ability to judge situations. (Breen, Zuckerman 1999; Roberti 2004).

The questionnaire (SST) (Zuckerman 1994) is used to define a degree for seeking sensations. 40 items are divided into 4 subscales: Thrill and adventure seeking (TAS), Experience seeking (ES), Disinhibition (Dis), Boredom susceptibility (BS).

Body image in the case gym-goers

One peculiarity of exercising in the gym is the focus on changing an outward look of one's own figure – fitness centre themselves stated this as the main reason (Rayn 1997; Stackeová 2009). Men care to tone up through muscle hypertrophy, while women care more to become slimmer and strengthen some of their weak areas. Boos et al. (1998) found out that men are particularly interested to build muscles and improve their appearance. Another

important motive is to become fitter – this has been only generally assessed but it is possible to interpret it as an urge to develop skills related to strength and stamina. What is, however, likely to be behind this motive is the first reason – i.e. optical appearance improvement, but quite a lot of people feel ashamed of this reason and do not admit it (Cash 2004).

The nature of exercise calls for high concentration on the actual technique and, at the same time, individual muscles. Stackeová (2006) states that a better differentiation of individual parts of body and feelings in them is achieved as a result. This is to lead to positive changes of body schema (Lowen 2002).

Thanks to exercising in the gym and following a nutrition plan, it is quite easy to achieve changes in some anthropometric measurements. Changes in body outline, weight loss etc. lead to changes in the way the body is perceived. This state is further strengthened by the fact that the body simultaneously becomes stronger and fitter. The hypothesis has it that the benefits mentioned above should reflect well on the creating of body image (Thompson 2011).

There are no, however, definite conclusions when comparing bodybuilders\gym goers to the general population. In some cases, we are able to observe positive changes in body image, while in the others, we observe pathological tendencies (Hallsworth et al. 2005; Pickett et al. 2005; Goldfield 2006; Braun, Graham 2008; Schlegel, Fialová 2013).

Sensation seeking in the case of gym-goers

According to the division of movement activities in relation to sensation seeking (Kuban 2006) exercising in a fitness centre is found at the very end of the proposed spectrum; in contrast to mountaineering, snowboarding, parachuting and so on. As a result, we report a lower degree of objective risk and, at the same time, we predict a low score in SST test.

The nature of exercise is, however, more complicated. What occurs is a lot of strain, increased blood circulation, pain in muscles and exhaustion. All this is a source of strong emotions that influence the way a certain activity is experienced (Lowen 2002; Stackeová 2008).

We can see gym-goers pay more attention to their own bodies and concentrate on it so much that it can sometimes lead even to narcissism. Narcissism, an exaggerated esteem of one's own body and impulsive behaviour correlates with the results from the subscales Disinhibition and Boredom susceptibility (Emmons 1987; Breen, Zuckermann 1999). On the other hand, it is also possible to find a positive relation between sensation seeking and positive self-view (Campell et al. 2004).

Design of the study

Objective - Determining the relationship between body image and sensation seeking in gym-goers.

Aims

- comparison of tests Physical self perception profile (PSPP) and Sensation seeking tendency (SST),
- comparison of selected subscales of tests PSPP and SST,
- determination of the research group in terms of body image,
- determination of the research group in terms of sensation seeking,
- gender determination in PSPP and SST.

Czech gym-goers aged between 24 and 45 (average = 30.8; SD = 6.9) participated in the survey (N = 182) and these were represented by 93 men (average 30.8; SD = 7.1) and 89 women (average 30.7; SD = 6.8). The basic condition was that they had to exercise at least twice a week and for at least one year. The choice of the fitness centre (N = 7) was limited to large cities (more than 80 000 inhabitants), it had to meet specific requirements to obtain the homogeneity of the sample: area covering at least 400 m², a gym hall, whole body exercise machines, dumbbells and weights, cardio zone with training machines.

Methods

Physical self perception profile (PSPP) (Fox, Corbin 1989) is a questionnaire focused on perception, presentation and evaluating abilities and body appearance. It was validated for the Czech population by Tomešová (2005). The questionnaire consists of 30 items – sentences, which a participant completes by choosing one of four options based on the one that fits them best.

Sensation seeking tendency (SSS-V) (Zuckermann 1994) is a questionnaire serving to find out a degree of tendency of seeking sensations in various spheres of life. Kuban (2006) validated it through the Czech sample. A participant chooses between two options in forty items, based on the one that fits them best.

Procedure

The questionnaires were given out right in the gyms and always on one randomly chosen day. The data collection was taking place from August to October in 2013. The content and the procedure were both in accordance with ethic and scientific norms.

Data management and analysis

To process the data the programme NCSS 2007 was used, including descriptive statistics and graphs. Out of statistics methods Spearman's correlation coefficient was applied to find out a correlation of two signs. T-test used to compare arithmetic average of two independent variants. Kruskal-Wallis test used to verify homogeneity of dividing the sign in question in several populations with independently random choices.

Results

What can be inferred from the final figures is that in both tests the participants achieved a score above average. When correlating the tests just a weak link was uncovered ($PC = 0.25$). In the graph 1 the linear correlation is shown. The results in the table 1 show the comparison between men and women. The correlation was higher in the case of women ($PC = 0.21$), but, overall, there is a weak relation in both sexes.

Table1

The results of the correlation tests PSPP and SST

	count	mPSPP	mSST	PCS	CronA
All	182	78.3	62.1	0.253	0.4
Man	93	82.5	63	0.15	0.26
Women	89	73.9	61.1	0.21	0.35

Note: mPSPP: the average of results in the test PSPP, mSST: the average of results in the test SST,

PC – Pearson's correlation coefficient, CronA – Cronbach's alpha

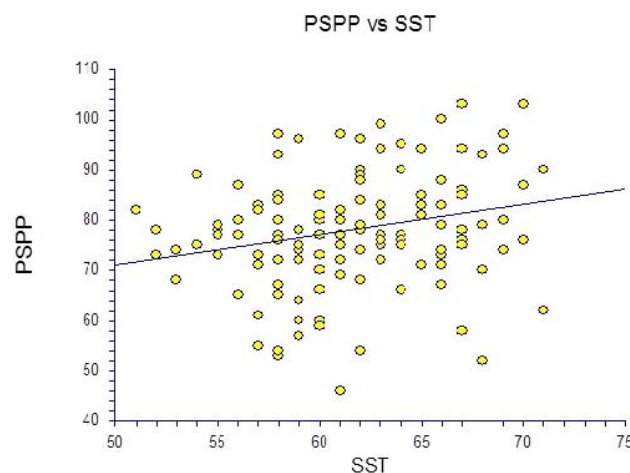


Figure 1

The correlation of tests PSPP and SST

Certain subscales were selected from the tests and they were further compared to one another (see table 2). The values PC run from 0.1 up to 0.19. Going by the results of the correlation, there is a weak relation among them all.

Table 2
The correlation of the chosen subscales

	PCS	CronA
PWS - Dis	0.19	0.34
Strength - Dis	0.1	0.18
PSW - TAS	0.17	0.23
Strength - ES	0.09	0.19
Strength - BS	0.18	0.28

*Note: PSW – Physical Self Worth, Dis – Disinhibition, TAS – Thrill and Adventure Seeking, ES – Experience Seeking, BS – Boredom Susceptibility
PCS - correlation coefficient, CronA - Cronbach's Alpha*

Discussion

The aim of the research was to determine gym-goers by means of PSPP and SST tests and find out a relation between these tests. The results of PSPP test show an above-average satisfaction with body, which concerns all the components of body image. This is in accordance with the conclusions of the surveys carried out among sport population (Cash, Pruzinsky 2002; Grogan 2008; Schlegel, Fialová 2013). Once again it has been proven that all those worries about negative effects of exercise in a gym mainly concern professional bodybuilders. In the case of common exercise, they have a positive effect on body image and self-esteem (Pope et al. 2006; Mosley 2009). The research file did not reveal any high values in any of the subscales. Although the nature of exercise and social environment might predict higher values in subscales Strength and Attractivity, such a thing did not occur. The propensity to narcissism and exaggerated self-objectivity is likely to be true for certain individuals and professional bodybuilders (Pickett et al. 2005; Brown, Graham 2008).

Exercising in a gym belongs to the sports with a low physical risk and those working out this way should be marked with lower values in the test SST (Goma-i-Freixanet 2012; Kuban 2006). Our findings, however, do not entirely confirm this assumption. The results were only average and it is, therefore, impossible to state firmly that gyms are visited by people with a low tendency to sensation seeking. No particular deviation in the subscales was detected, which means that gym-goers cannot be ruled out based on SST.

Only a weak relation results from the outcomes of the comparison between PSPP and SST tests. The correlation coefficient reached the value 0.25. This means that we cannot presume a positive dependence of these signs in the case of the research sample. Although an assumption of a possible dependence emerged in some other researches (Zuckerman 1984; Emmons 1987; Crozier 1995; Miller 2003; Cambell 2004; Heimpel et al. 2006; Llewellyn 2008), we were not able to prove this in ours.

Individual subscales are also tested independently in SST (see Breen, Zuckerman 1999) and, therefore, the chosen subscales of both tests were compared. The table 2 shows the pairs where such a correlation occurred. None of them pointed to a strong dependence. The highest value was scored by the correlation *Physical Self Worth – Disinhibition* (0.19), but still this is just a too low value for a significant relation.

Comparing groups of men and women in PSPP test yielded significantly better results in the case of men ($p = 0.05$). The outcomes of the test bear out the earlier assumption that women are less satisfied with body image. Sociocultural conditions and media pressure play a central role (Grogan 2008; Hobza, Rochlen 2009; Sirra, Ballard 2011 ad.). The Gender comparison of SST produced results without a significant deviation. The values were comparable to one another, which differs from the conclusions of other studies in which men scored higher than women. (Twenge 1997; Wood Eagly 2012).

Conclusions

The findings of this study have been proven both right and wrong by some other researches. Czech gym-goers are marked with above-average satisfaction with body and, at the same time, there is no marked difference of values among the subscales. In terms of Sensation Seeking all the participants achieved an average score without any marked difference among the subscales.

The correlation of PSPP and SST tests showed a weak dependence. The significant relation cannot be stated in the chosen subscales either (*Physical Self Worth – Disinhibition*, *Strength – Disinhibition*, *Physical Self Worth – Thrill and Adventure Seeking*, *Strength – Experience Seeking*, *Strength – Boredom Susceptibility*). The results of men and women differed as revealed in the earlier findings. Men achieved significantly better results in PSPP, the values in SST were comparable to one another.

With regard to the size of the file and its specific character, it is impossible to generalize the findings and apply them to general population. It would be necessary to carry out further research to conclude this.

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