



# Ideas about the image of one's own body in women with physical activity

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## Abstract

**Objective of the study** was to broadening of perspectives on women's self-perception, with a focus on physical movement in daily life.

**Methods and structure of the study.** The research encompassed 30 women between the ages of 20 and 30. The research employed the psychodiagnostic technique, the "ASI-R" questionnaire on body image perceptions, the «MAIA-R» multidimensional assessment of interoceptive body awareness, and the «5PFQ» five-factor personality questionnaire.

**Results and conclusions.** For a period of two and a half months, a group of women aged between 20 and 30 ( $M = 24$ ) underwent psychodiagnostics and kept a diary to explore their thoughts about their body image, taking into account their daily physical activity.

The study revealed five key factors that influence women's perception of their body image: physical activity, a positive attitude towards physical contact, a lack of self-care, a busy social life, and a heightened awareness of their body.

Young women who engage in physical activity, are conscious of their appearance, and enjoy physical contact tend to have a more positive body image.

**Keywords:** *body image, corporeality, body contact, body satisfaction, physical activity, self-monitoring of activity.*

**Introduction.** Men are more likely to engage in sports activities in their free time [1-4, 8]. Women have sufficient motivation to engage in physical exercise, but it is not sufficiently realized as a regular activity ( $p < 0,01$ ) [5-7, 12-15]. Among high school girls, absences from physical education classes were found not due to illness, but due to shyness and lack of interest in classes [1]. Women's use of physical activity is associated with their subjective ideas about their own bodies. Body image is a complex psychological construct with components characteristic of each person - evaluative, emotional, cognitive and behavioral. Self-assessment of body parts, shapes, weight and general appearance is associated with indicators of self-satisfaction. The emotional component manifests itself against the

background of interaction with others, who, in the process of communication, indicate their attitude to the woman's physical characteristics. The cognitive emphasis in self-perception includes beliefs about the body, as well as anxiety when it does not match internalized ideals. The behavioral component often includes motor practices, including turning to various types of physical activity [3, 8, 10]. In modern everyday life, under the influence of information technology and social networks, the image of the female body becomes a dominant theme in experiences about oneself. Studies show that by adolescence, more than 70% of girls can report a desire to change their weight or figure [7, 9, 13]. The development of negative ideas about their physical indicators contributes to a general deterioration in

physical and mental health [6, 14]. Passive experiences do not help to predict the prospects for improvement based on existing bodily experience [5, 7]. An active personal position regarding the embodiment of one's dreams of a beautiful body provides a person with the opportunity to get used to constant movement in everyday life [5, 11]. Women who engage in physical activity are more likely to be able to sense their body and consciously experience it as the most important resource of their capabilities [7].

**Objective of the study** was to broadening of perspectives on women's self-perception, with a focus on physical movement in daily life.

**Methods and structure of the study.** Thirty women aged 20 to 30 ( $M=24$ ) years took part in the study of their ideas about their body image. Observation using two-week diary entries was chosen as the main empirical method. Such data recording allowed for a qualitative analysis of ideas and experiences about their own body, as well as a more accurate determination of the daily physical activity of the study participant. In addition, a psychodiagnostic method was used, which included the questionnaire of ideas about appearance «ASI-R» (adapted by N.I. Khramtsova), a multidimensional assessment of interoceptive awareness of one's body «MAIA-R» (adapted by R.R. Popova and O.G. Lopukhova) and a five-factor personality questionnaire «5PFQ» (adapted by A.B. Khromov). Data were collected through Google forms, in which the respondents had to fill in all the points of the methods and keep a daily diary for two weeks. Data collection was carried out over two and a half months. During the survey, more than 100 people did not complete self-observation and answers to the questions of the methods, stopping at the first week of filling out the diary. Mathematical and statistical analysis of the obtained indicators was carried out in the SPSS Statistics 23 program using multivariate methods - regression and one-factor variance analysis (ANOVA).

**Results of the study and discussion.** The hypothesis of the study was that women with sufficient physical activity are better aware of their body features, are focused on self-care of their physical appearance and consider physical contact with loved ones to be significant.

The hypothesis of the study was that women who regularly engage in physical activity in their everyday lives are better aware of their body features, are

focused on self-care of their physical appearance and consider physical contact with loved ones to be significant. For a convenient explanation of the context of the study, a simple formulation was proposed regarding interest in the image of one's own body – «listening to my body».

Based on the content analysis of the diaries, the entire female sample was divided into three groups taking into account the severity of the main studied indicator «Physical activity».

The first group of physically inactive women included those surveyed who practically did not report any types of activity that involved physical activity. In the second group, women mention it only a few times, while in the third group, they point out the importance of a lifestyle with physical activity and sports, associating these ideas with the motivation to maintain good physical shape. The results of the variance analysis allow us to detect certain significant differences in the groups under consideration. The participants of the third group, who mentioned the importance of physical activity in their diary entries more often than others, are characterized by regular monitoring of their own physical characteristics and the possibilities for improving them ( $p=0,037$ ) (Figure 1). Women from the second group who periodically mentioned physical activity, compared to those surveyed in the first group, note greater dissatisfaction with their own body ( $0,017$ ), as well as an increased desire to examine it, compared to women demonstrating high physical activity ( $p=0,022$ ). Perhaps dissatisfaction with one's body, its study can cause emotional reactions that lead to periodic, but not systematic physical exercise.

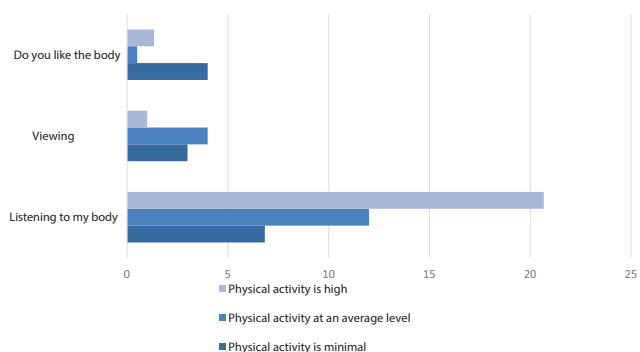


Figure 1. Comparative analysis of attitudes towards one's body in women with different levels of physical activity

Frequent observation of their bodily features was reported in the diaries by women who, for two weeks, did not mention the presence of physical activity in their usual work schedule and free time activities. They led a measured, sedentary lifestyle. The bodily aspect in their reflection on themselves was significant, but was not associated with the experience of an active position for change. In self-reports, they indicated that they looked at their bodies without demonstrating any emotions. When interpreting the obtained results of the study, five integral indicators were identified that are associated with women's ideas about their bodies: physical activity, a positive attitude towards physical contact, insufficient care of their bodies, active interaction with other people in everyday life, and attentiveness to their bodies (Figure 2).

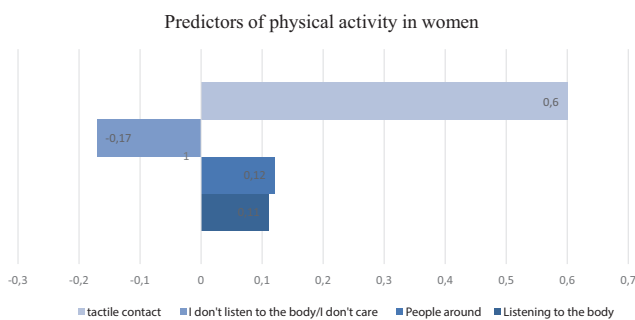


Figure 2. The influence of a number of indicators on women's physical activity

For women, the most important among the identified indicators is definitely «tactile contact». Apparently, the emphasis on pleasant interaction with loved ones, the importance of tactile contact with them can increase the importance of physical activity to achieve results in improving the parameters of one's own body.

Among all five indicators, «attentiveness to one's body» is of lesser importance for women, which may indicate a certain weakness of the volitional component in determining the necessary physical activity to achieve the desired changes in one's body image and the absence in their value-semantic sphere of orientation on the importance of attention to one's own corporality, the perception of one's body as a «value».

Based on the obtained results of the study, it can be assumed that young women who pay attention to their body, think about its parameters in the context of their own appearance, show an

intention to improve their physical appearance. They reflect on ways to implement self-care. In bodily self-knowledge, the reactions of people around them during tactile interaction with them are important. Against the background of subjective ideas about one's body, motivation for changes arises, which, in turn, will contribute to an increase in physical activity.

**Conclusions.** The study confirms the hypothesis that attention to one's own body, understanding of one's own physical needs and emphasis on corporality when interacting with close significant people become internal intentions for increasing the physical activity of young women. One of the important internal experiences with increasing attention to one's own body and care for it may be an increase in negative assessments both in relation to the individual characteristics of one's body and in the actions taken to maintain oneself in good physical shape, which may determine a positive revision of personal orientation toward an active lifestyle.

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