Decreasing Obesity and Improving
Body Satisfaction in Adolescents

Michele Owens

Texas Woman’s University

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Currently in the United States, about 65% of the population 20 years or older is considered overweight, and almost half of this 65% is classified as obese. Unfortunately, American children seem to be following this trend. In 1984, the incidence of obesity in adolescents was 11%. By 1998, the incidence of obesity in adolescents rose to an alarming 25%, and now the adolescent obesity rate stands at 30%. Along with the health risks involved in obesity, there are also psychosocial consequences, such as poor body satisfaction (Perry, Rosenblatt, & Wang 2004).

Question

Would interventions aimed at increasing body satisfaction decrease the rates of obesity or would interventions aimed at treating obesity be more successful at increasing body satisfaction among adolescents?

Research Strategy

The following databases were searched: CINAHL Plus with full text, Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition, Academic Search Complete and MEDLINE. Major subjects searched were body image, exercise, obesity, and self-concept. MESH terms searched included obesity, adolescent, self-concept, attitude to health, body image, and personal satisfaction.

Findings

Dissatisfaction with one’s body is more prevalent among females than males—although, importantly, it manifests itself in both genders. For example, in a study of 4,746 adolescents, low body satisfaction was expressed by 46% of the girls and 26% of the boys, with even higher dissatisfaction among overweight girls (59%) and overweight boys (48%) (Neumark-Sztainer,
Goeden, & Story, 2004). This demonstrates that concerns about body satisfaction should not be limited to one gender.

Naturally, whenever there are weight and body satisfaction concerns with an individual, physical activity is a topic that needs to be addressed. Unfortunately, only half of Americans aged 12-21 engages in regular vigorous physical activity, and one fourth of this population does not participate in any physical activity at all. One particular study found that participation in physical activity can have an immediate positive effect on self-image during adolescence, especially if the activity is a team sport (Kirkcaldy, Shepard, & Sifen, 2002).

Although one would hope that low body satisfaction would be a motivating factor among youth to increase their physical activity, some studies have suggested that body satisfaction concerns prevent physical activity, particularly among adolescent girls. This trend is especially disconcerting given that low levels of physical activity are likely to put individuals at an increased risk for obesity, which may further decrease body satisfaction (Neumark-Sztainer, Goeden, & Story, 2004).
References


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