

Self - concepts of swiss adolescents with different physical activity levels

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Keywords: Sport, Self-concept, Socialization

Introduction and hypotheses

Physical activity constitutes a basic principle of life. Therefore, we have reason to assume that sport participation might result in positive outcomes of socialization. The younger children are the more physical activity builds the essence of the developmental process. Therefore, this study examines whether or not physical experiences contribute to the development of the self-concept (Shavelson et al. 1976).

Method

A German version of the Self-Description Questionnaire II and a physical self-concept questionnaire was filled in by 247 (141 female, 106 male) high-school students (grade 8 and 9). The students' levels of sport participation were evaluated a) according to their sportclub and regional/national elite-sport team membership, b) with regard to the real time spent in physical activities and c) with respect to their engagement in special sport classes (maximum time for training). Differences between the groups were analyzed by multiple analyses of variance (MANOVA).

Results

Irrespective of the categorization, there were few differences between the groups. The most relevant differences showed up in the physical self-concept. However, they did not concern all subareas (but particularly the physical ability). Physically active students rate their physical ability higher. In the general and academic self-concept there were almost no differences. However, physically inactive students had the lowest social self-concept when the sport participation was operationalized by the real time spent in sport.

Conclusion

In spite of the promising tendencies in reviews (i.e. Pühse/Gerber 2003), the present study points out only few self-concept differences between Swiss adolescents with different physical activity levels. However, the results partly support the area-specific functioning of the self-concept as posited by Sonstroem (1997). The absence of differences in the general self-concept might be explained by the assumption that in Switzerland, physical activities and success in sport do have a rather small prestige compared to school and academic success.

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