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## The relationship between the frequency of physical and sports activities and the body image

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### Abstract

This research aims at highlighting the level of body image perception in Babeș-Bolyai University students in Cluj-Napoca depending on the frequency of practicing physical activities. For this study, 465 questionnaires were applied to students from 13 faculties. The respondents' age was between 18 and 40 years old, most of them ages 19-21. For the statistical data processing, the statistical analysis program SPSS 20 was used and the graphical representations were made using the Microsoft EXCELL 2007 version. To quantify the body image, we used the modified Offer Scale [4]: I kept the first 4 items from the original 5-item scale. The value of the coefficient  $F = 3,292$  at a significance threshold  $p = 0.038$  shows that there is a significant difference between the average scores of body perception based on the frequent or rare of the practicing of physical and sports activities. Reported to the entire sample, it follows that more frequent sports activities determine a more positive body image.

**Key words:** body image; physical activity; students; the frequency of physical activity.

### Rezumat

Această cercetare are ca scop scoaterea în evidență a nivelului percepției imaginii corporale la studenții Universității Babeș-Bolyai din Cluj-Napoca în funcție de frecvența practicării activităților fizice. Pentru acest studiu s-au aplicat 465 de chestionare studenților din 13 facultăți. Vârsta respondenților a fost cuprinsă între 18 și 40 de ani, cei mai mulți având vârsta cuprinsă între 19–21 de ani. Pentru prelucrarea datelor statistice s-a apelat la programul de analize statistice SPSS 20, iar reprezentările grafice s-au făcut prin intermediul programului Microsoft EXCELL, versiunea 2007. Valoarea coeficientului  $F=3,292$  la un prag de semnificație  $p=0.038$  arată că există o diferență semnificativă între scorurile medii ale percepției corporale în funcție de practicarea frecventă sau mai rară a activităților fizice și sportive. Raportat la întregul eșantion rezultă că cu cât practicarea activităților sportive este mai frecventă cu atât imaginea asupra propriului corp este mai pozitivă.

**Cuvinte cheie:** imagine corporală; activități fizice; studenți; frecvența practicării activităților fizice.

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### **Introduction**

Body image can be conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, made up of two key components: perception and attitude, which are the way individuals feel, think, and manifest themselves about their own physical attributes [1].

Modern society pays special attention to the physical aspect. People who are considered attractive are often seen in a more favorable light than unattractive people. Their qualities are slightly exaggerated, being considered smarter and more honorable than people considered less attractive. The phenomenon by which people who are highly appreciated on a single dimension (attractiveness) and are supposed to have the same level in other dimensions (intelligence) is called the halo effect. This is also noted as a stereotype "what-is-beautiful-is-good"[2].

The formulation and defining of the ideal body image by the teens and their subsequent self-comparisons, are strongly influenced by family, human and cultural factors. Social influences, exerted by mass media and popular / mass culture, can promote specific images and standards of beauty and attractiveness that do not fit into a normal health-related behavior and affect the ability to build a type of body or corresponding image.

In the scientific research of the bodily image, the terms describing the image of a person's body in relation to its experiences relate to the level of bodily esteem (referring to self-esteem in relation to body and physical appearance) or bodily discontent, (referring to the feelings and negative thoughts about the body and physical appearance) [3].

### **The aim of the study**

The present study was mainly aimed at underlining that the frequency of physical activities determines a more positive appreciation of the body image by students. We hypothesized that there is an association between the frequency of practicing physical and sports activities and the body image of the students.

### **Materials and methods**

Our research refers to students in the first or second year of study at the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. The students were elected from the faculties of Biology-Geology, Law, Physical Education and Sports, Physics, Geography, Letters, Mathematics-Informatics, Psychology and Educational Sciences, Sociology and Social Assistance, European Studies, Political Science and Public Administration, Arts and Television and Orthodox Theology because the resources did not allow us to investigate representative statistical samples for all students from University. In the faculties where the questionnaires were applied, most of them were female students.

The studied sample was made up of 460 undergraduates from the faculties of "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, sample with a margin of error  $\pm 4.7\%$ . Were represented 13 faculties from the 21 faculties from University. The respondents' age was comprised between 18 and 40 years of age, most of them aged 19-21.

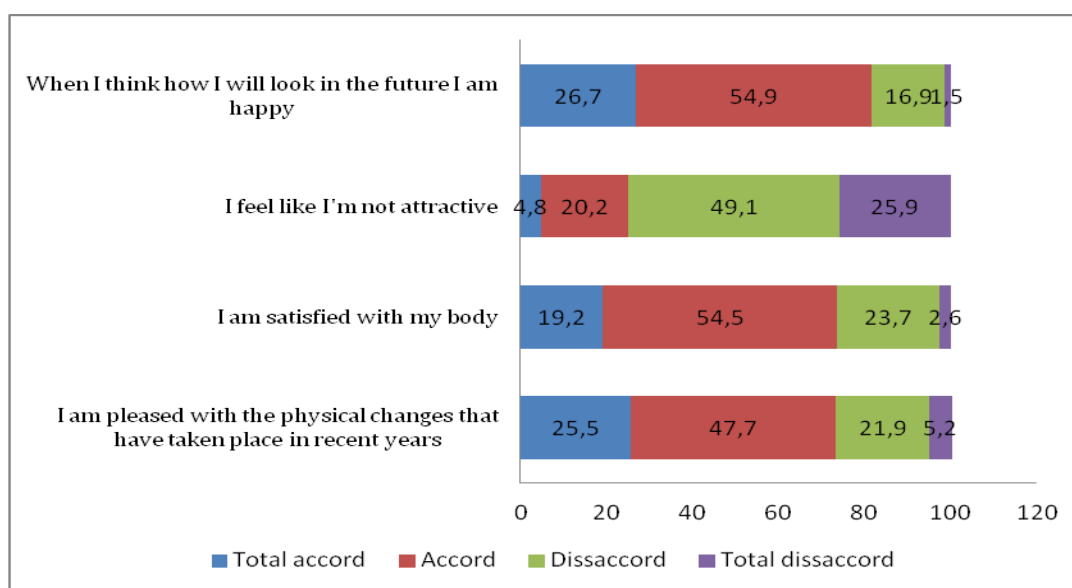
Because the sample is not representative of the population of students of Babeș-Bolyai University, the results cannot be generalized at this population level. But the sample has a theoretical representativeness in the sense that the student selection criteria allow testing the specified hypothesis. Thus the sample includes a sub-sample of girls and one of boys, sub-samples for exact sciences, humanities and sport profile, respectively it is heterogeneous from the point of view of the social origin of the students

In order to quantify the body image, we used the modified Offer Scale [4]: we kept the first 4 items from the original 5 item item, excluding the health item because this variable was treated separately as a distinct dimension of the respondent's well-being. The value of the Chronbach Alpha for the 4-item scale was 0.711 (Sig. = 0.000), therefore reliability is appropriate for reliable use of the resulting additive scale.

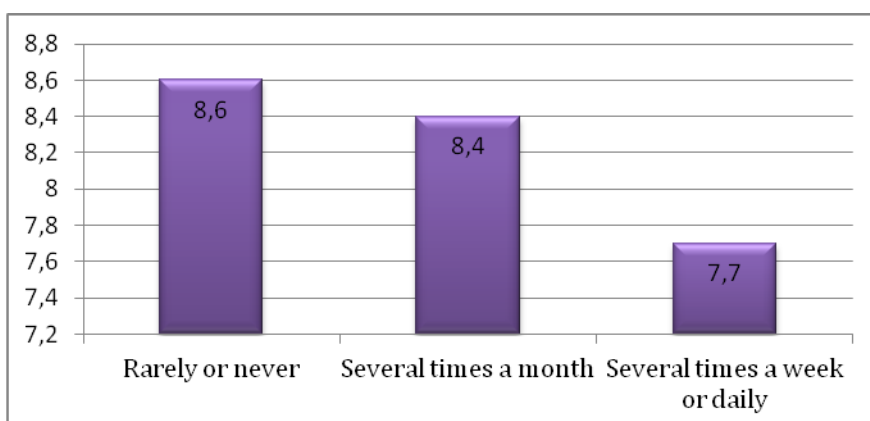
**Results**

The descriptive analysis of the bodily image item in the questionnaire that underpins a broader study, shows that body image is one of the most valued aspects in today's capitalist society. This image is often able to induce a state of well-being, or vice versa, in terms of self-esteem of individuals, especially when the media constantly bombs us with more or less realistic images of the ideal image of a body. Practically, we are witnessing an ideology of the body transformed into a propaganda tool. In

these circumstances, answers given by students related to their own body can be interpreted in this key of social desideratum. More specifically, 72.9% of them say that they are pleased with the physical changes by which they have gone through in recent years (total agreement and agreement), 73.7% are satisfied with their body, 75% disagree with the statement that they are not attractive persons and 80.6% project in the future a picture of their own body that makes them happy and satisfied (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Own body image appreciation



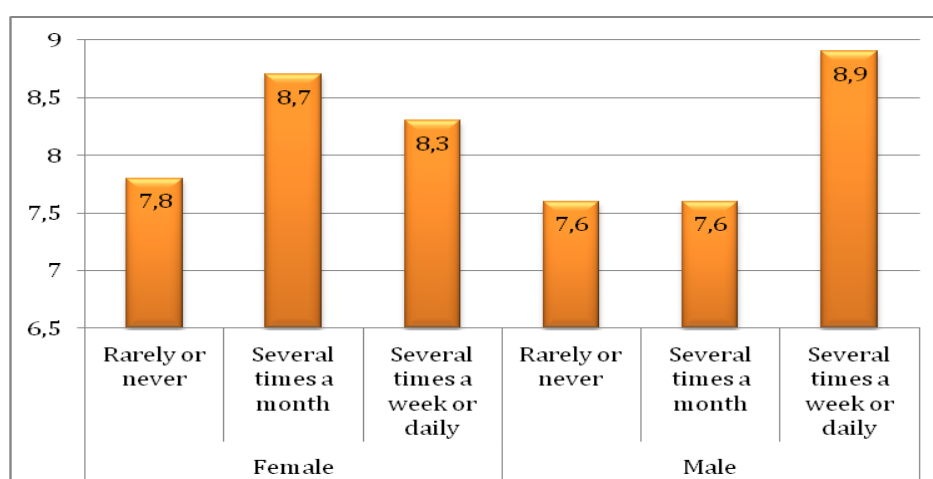
**Figure 2.** The average value of the body image according to the frequency of participation in physical and sports activities

**Table I.** Body perception score

ANOVA Table							
			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Body perception score	Between Groups	(Combined)	32,766	2	16,383	3,292	,038
	Within Groups		2264,109	455	4,976		
	Total		2296,876	457			

The value of the coefficient  $F = 3,292$  at a significance threshold  $p = 0.038$  shows that there is a significant difference between the average scores of body perception based on the frequent or rare

practice of physical and sports activities. Reported to the whole sample, it results that the more is frequent practicing of sports activities, the more the image of the own body is more positive.



**Figure 3.** Average value of body image by sex and frequency of physical and sports activities

In the case of the separate sample on girls and boys, the data graphically represented above suggests that girls practicing physical activities several times a month have a better own body image than those who perform physical activities with a higher frequency. Instead, the chart shows a reverse situation in boys, showing that those who do sports a few times a week or daily have a much better body image than those who do physical exercise a few times a month, rarely or never. Difference between genres can be attributed to attractiveness that is associated with a thin body for women, while for

men it is considered attractive a muscular body [1]. The hypothesis that there is an association between the frequency of practicing physical and sports activities and the body image of students is supported by statistical data.

**Discussions and conclusions**

Modern society places a special emphasis on physical appearance. People who are considered attractive are often appreciated more favorably than unattractive people. They are considered to be smarter, and more honorable than the least

attractive. This assumption is called the halo effect [1]; people who are highly appreciated on one dimension (attractiveness) are supposed that they excel in just the same way and in the other dimensions (intelligence). The attractiveness of a person is associated with a thin body from the point of view of women, while for men it is considered attractive, a muscular body. The ideal body is often impossible to reach for a normal person, and it can be increasingly difficult to fulfill as the population gets heavier [1]. The discrepancy between the "real" dimension and the "ideal" dimension is increasing.

The statistical data from this study show that a large part of UBB Cluj's students' population are interested in physical appearance. This is noted in Table 1, the body perceptions score table, where the value of the coefficient  $F = 3.292$  at a significance threshold  $p = 0.038$  shows that there is a significant difference between the average scores of body perception depending on the frequency of the practicing of physical activities and sports.

Figure 2 presents the appreciation of the importance of practicing physical activities separate on gender. An explanation of these results could be that a greater frequency of physical activity reflects the desire to obtain a body as close to the ideal as possible, and not necessarily a harmonious and powerful body. Their own body shapes, in the view of girls more interested in this aspect, may not even correspond with the submission of more sustained

physical effort. The category of girls students that practicing sport a few times a month, and who have reported a positive body image, can be said to appreciate doing regular exercise as a way to show their care for the own body and for general well-being. They see in physical exercise a way of avoiding stress, the possibility of enjoying their own person, and improving their health, rather than a way to lose weight [5].

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