

Characterizing College-Aged Women's Participation in Weightlifting

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Introduction

- Weight bearing activity has been found to increase the capacity for learning, physical and mental health, and skills such as teamwork, self-discipline and socialization¹
- Weightlifting improves and maintains muscular strength and bone mineral density: a trait most necessary for women who are at risk for bone demineralization^{2, 3}
- A number of factors may have an effect on the level of participation in weightlifting among women: peers and parents or through dominant discourses of gendering⁴
- Activity levels decline from high school to college and patterns of activity in college populations are insufficient for improving health and fitness levels⁵
- Identifying why college-aged women participate or withhold from weightlifting is important in understanding how to address

Purpose

- To determine if and why college aged women participate or withhold from weight training methods

Materials and Methods

- 249 college-aged (18-22 yrs.) were surveyed and 12 of those women participated in small focus group sessions
- Surveys took no longer than 10 minutes to complete. Demographic information was solicited as well as frequency, time and type of regular exercise. Subjects were asked about their perceptions of health, motivation to exercise and barriers to exercise in addition to their weightlifting habits
- Focus group subjects were separated into one of four groups of 2-5 subjects dependent on their response to the statement, *weightlifting is unnecessary when I am being physically active*. Whether the subject agreed, was neutral or disagreed with this statement indicated their basic understanding of weightlifting benefits or lack thereof.
- Focus group sessions were lead by a mediator, recorded and later transcribed by the researcher who then coded and identified various themes

Subject Profile:

Avg. Height:	166.37 ± 0.07 cm
Avg. Weight:	62.04 ± 10.84 kg
Avg. BMI:	22.99 ± 3.34 kg/m ²
Year (% of respondents):	Freshman: 24.1% Sophomore: 23.3% Junior: 23.7% Senior: 28.9%
Lifestyle:	88% (moderate-very active) * Options given were very sedentary, sedentary, moderately active, very active
Level of health:	82.4% (healthy-very healthy) * Options given were not healthy, healthy, somewhat healthy, very healthy. All survey results were self-reported

Survey Results:

Top 5 Motivators

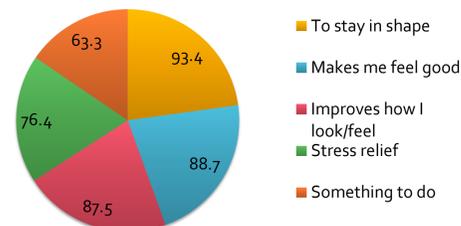


Figure 1: Responses to the question, "What motivates you to workout. Answer in terms of how important the factor is in motivating you to workout: 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important)"

Top 5 Obstacles

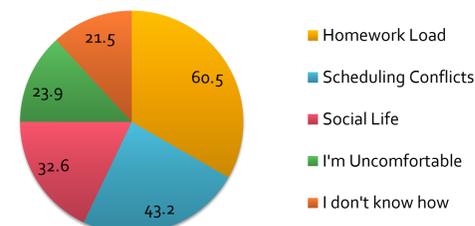


Figure 2: Responses to the question, "How often do each of the following potential obstacles keep you from including resistance training in your workouts? Never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often"

Focus Group Results:

Why women participate in weightlifting

History of weightlifting/knowledge

- "I played hockey in high school so we were forced to weightlift 2-3 times a week and now I've just continued"
- "I weightlift because my mom was a huge advocate and got me started"

Physical appearance

- "I want to look good in the mirror and feel good"
- "I do it more for looks"
- "I like looking in the mirror and seeing things I want to see"

Involved in a sports team

- "My team is counting on me to be there and lead"
- "It's pretty mandatory for us [through swimming] so I don't really have a choice"

Utilized as a tool of empowerment

- "I feel like I'm more powerful when I lift"
- "I have the sports motivation in wanting to be strong and powerful"

Why women withhold from weightlifting

Lack of knowledge

- "I don't weightlift because I don't know what to do"
- "[I would weightlift] If I had a friend to teach me, otherwise I wouldn't know what I was doing"

Misconceptions about weightlifting

- "It just seems like a 'guy thing'"
- "I don't want to get bulky"

Emphasis on cardio

- "I would just rather run"
- "I feel like it's more of a time commitment to lift than to run"
- "If I have time I might weightlift"

Other barriers

- "I feel like people are judging me when I'm figuring out what to do"
- "I definitely feel uncomfortable when I'm the only female and there are guys there"

Discussion

- Evidence from the present research supports previously reported motivations for women to participate in weightlifting such as exercising for oneself or body image³
- Additionally, inactivity among women may be due to scheduling conflicts and time-management⁵
- Subjects in this study also battle gender stereotypes that is prevalent in a society where weightlifting and resistance training are viewed as generally masculine activities⁶
- Subjects signified that they don't perceive weightlifting to be necessary or important. Education about the importance and benefits of weightlifting on college campuses is necessary.
- Friends, role models and teams that emphasize a 'fun factor' in participating, are more likely to enhance intrinsic motivation to weightlift and encourage long-term adherence^{6, 7}

Conclusions

Though the reported activity levels in this sample were encouraging, an effort should still be made to address misconceptions and a lack of education surrounding weightlifting, especially in college-aged women.

Campus-wide campaigns with high visibility tactics that deliver more than one component, such as educating and programming, have the potential for causing positive behavior change.

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