



General self-concept and life satisfaction for boys with differing levels of physical coordination: The role of goal orientations and leisure participation

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Abstract

Participation in leisure-time activities, self-concept perceptions and individual dispositional goal orientations were examined as mediators of relationships between physical coordination and self-evaluations of life satisfaction and general self-concept for 173 boys aged 10–13 years. Participants completed seven-day activity diaries and 12-month retrospective recall questionnaires recording participation in leisure-time activities. Self-report measures of self-concept, global life satisfaction and dispositional goal orientations were also completed. Results showed that boys with moderate to severe physical coordination difficulties had significantly lower self-concept perceptions of physical ability and appearance, peer and parent relations and general self-concept, as well as lower life satisfaction than boys with medium to high levels of physical coordination. The relationships between boys' physical coordination and their self-perceptions of life satisfaction and general self-concept were significantly influenced by individual self-concept appraisals of physical ability and appearance, peer and parent relations. Adopting task-oriented goals was found to positively change the relationship between physical coordination and both general self-concept and life satisfaction. Team sport participation positively mediated the relationship between physical coordination and life satisfaction. The potential for team sport participation and adoption of task-oriented goals to influence life satisfaction for boys with differing levels of physical coordination was discussed.

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1. Introduction

Life satisfaction, maintaining positive self-concepts and encouraging healthy participation in a wide range of physically active and mentally stimulating pursuits are important goals for all who work with children. These are subjective and objective indicators of quality of life and are increasingly recognised as contributing to long-term mental and physical health outcomes (Huebner, Suldo, Smith, & McKnight, 2004). The interrelationships between these variables, however, are complex.

Children with physical coordination difficulties are particularly vulnerable to physical activity participation restrictions, either through elective withdrawal or exclusion (George & Feltz, 1995; Mandich, Polatajko, & Rodger, 2003). While the cumulative impact of long term participation deficits on global life satisfaction and general self-concept is unknown, the relationship between physical coordination and physical ability self-concept, as well as participation in organised and recreational physical activities, has been demonstrated (Cairney, Hay, Faught, Mandigo, & Flouris, 2005). Ecological systems models such as the Synthesis of Child, Occupational Performance and Environment – In Time (SCOPE-IT) (Poulsen & Ziviani, 2004) are particularly useful frameworks for conceptualising the way in which individual (including intra-psychic variables) and environmental constraints can potentially influence participation behaviour and psychosocial outcomes for children with physical coordination difficulties. In this study the SCOPE-IT model framework will be used to explore pathways between intra-psychic variables, leisure-time participation behaviour and both subjective well-being and general self-concept, for boys with varying levels of physical coordination ability.

Boys with DCD may well be disadvantaged and perceive themselves to have lower life satisfaction relative to their well coordinated peers, because of low participation in sports and free play physical activities both in school (Boulton, 1995; Smyth & Anderson, 2000) and during leisure-time (Cairney et al., 2005). Low levels of participation in social-physical activities, such as team sports, may be particularly pertinent for boys, many of whom consider physical prowess and skill development, particularly in the company of their peers, an important aspect of identity development (Lee, Fredenberg, Belcher, & Cleveland, 1999). Team sports have been found to represent significant contexts for socialisation experiences, leadership opportunities, and friendship development (Roberts & Ommundsen, 1996), and participation in these activities has been positively linked to general self-concept (Marsh & Kleitman, 2003). Reduced participation in large-group physical activities is common for boys with severe physical coordination difficulties, and this has been significantly associated with social dissatisfaction and loneliness (Poulsen, Ziviani, Cuskelly, & Smith, submitted for publication).

Children with physical coordination difficulties that are incommensurate with their intellectual ability and who have significant problems with performance of everyday motor activities are described as having DCD (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). The prevalence of DCD in children is five to six per cent of the general population with more

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