



SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF WOMEN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD FITNESS PRACTICES: A REVIEW OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC RESEARCH

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Abstract

This article examines socio-psychological approaches to the study of women's attitudes toward fitness practices through a comparative review of foreign and domestic research. The paper analyzes the main theoretical perspectives explaining women's involvement in fitness activities, including motivation theory, self-determination theory, body image concepts, social identity, gender-role expectations, and the influence of social environment. Special attention is given to the socio-cultural, emotional, and interpersonal determinants that shape women's perceptions of fitness as a means of health promotion, self-presentation, psychological well-being, and social integration. The review shows that women's attitudes toward fitness are formed under the influence of a complex interaction of internal motives and external social pressures, including family support, peer influence, media standards of attractiveness, and the accessibility of fitness infrastructure. The article also identifies similarities and differences between foreign and domestic studies, demonstrating that international research is more focused on body image, self-esteem, and empowerment, while domestic studies more often emphasize health improvement, lifestyle regulation, and social adaptation. It is argued that the socio-psychological analysis of women's engagement in fitness practices has important pedagogical and psychological implications for the development of inclusive, motivating, and culturally sensitive health-related programs. The findings may be useful for researchers, psychologists, and educators interested in physical culture, gender studies, and the psychology of health behavior.

Keywords: Women, fitness practices, socio-psychological approach, motivation, body image, health behavior, social environment, self-esteem, gender attitudes, psychological well-being.



Introduction

СОЦИАЛЬНО-ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ПОДХОДЫ К ИЗУЧЕНИЮ ОТНОШЕНИЯ ЖЕНЩИН К ФИТНЕС-ПРАКТИКАМ: ОБЗОР ЗАРУБЕЖНЫХ И ОТЕЧЕСТВЕННЫХ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ

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Аннотация:

В статье рассматриваются социально-психологические подходы к изучению отношения женщин к фитнес-практикам на основе анализа зарубежных и отечественных исследований. Особое внимание уделяется теоретическим концепциям, объясняющим мотивацию женщин к занятиям фитнесом, включая теории мотивации, самодетерминации, представления о телесности, гендерные установки и влияние социальной среды. Показано, что отношение женщин к фитнес-активности формируется под воздействием комплекса психологических и социальных факторов, среди которых важную роль играют самооценка, стремление к поддержанию здоровья, социальные ожидания, а также влияние медиа и культурных норм привлекательности. В работе анализируются особенности интерпретации фитнес-практик в зарубежной и отечественной научной литературе. Зарубежные исследования чаще акцентируют внимание на вопросах телесной идентичности, психологического благополучия и самореализации женщин, тогда как отечественные исследования уделяют больше внимания вопросам укрепления здоровья, формирования здорового образа жизни и социальной адаптации. Результаты обзора свидетельствуют о том, что социально-психологическое изучение отношения женщин к фитнес-практикам позволяет глубже понять механизмы формирования здорового поведения и разработать эффективные педагогические и психологические стратегии популяризации физической активности среди женщин.

Ключевые слова: женщины, фитнес-практики, социально-психологический подход, мотивация, образ тела, поведение в сфере здоровья, социальная среда, самооценка, гендерные установки, психологическое благополучие



Introduction

In recent decades, the role of physical activity in maintaining both physical and psychological health has attracted increasing attention from researchers across various fields, including psychology, pedagogy, sociology, and public health. Among different forms of physical activity, fitness practices have become one of the most popular and accessible ways for women to maintain a healthy lifestyle, improve physical well-being, and strengthen psychological resilience. Fitness activities are no longer perceived solely as a form of physical exercise; they represent a complex socio-cultural phenomenon that reflects broader social values, gender norms, and individual identity construction. As a result, the study of women's attitudes toward fitness practices requires a comprehensive socio-psychological perspective that considers both individual motivations and the influence of the surrounding social environment.

The growing participation of women in fitness activities has stimulated numerous academic discussions about the factors that motivate or hinder their involvement. Researchers emphasize that women's engagement in fitness is influenced by a variety of psychological determinants, including self-esteem, body image perception, emotional well-being, and personal motivation for self-improvement. At the same time, social factors such as cultural standards of beauty, peer influence, media representation of the ideal body, and family support play a significant role in shaping women's attitudes toward physical activity. From a socio-psychological perspective, fitness practices can be viewed as a space where individual aspirations intersect with social expectations.

Foreign research literature has widely explored the relationship between women's body image and their participation in fitness activities. Studies conducted within the framework of self-determination theory highlight the importance of intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and personal satisfaction in sustaining long-term engagement in physical exercise. Many scholars argue that women who perceive fitness as a means of personal development and psychological balance are more likely to maintain consistent participation compared to those who are primarily motivated by external pressures related to appearance. Furthermore, international research often examines the empowering potential of fitness, emphasizing how regular physical activity can enhance women's self-confidence, social interaction, and sense of personal agency.



Domestic studies, while sharing similar concerns, often focus more strongly on the role of fitness in promoting health culture and preventing lifestyle-related diseases. In these studies, fitness practices are frequently interpreted as an important component of a healthy lifestyle and as a pedagogical tool for strengthening physical and mental health. Researchers emphasize that the formation of positive attitudes toward fitness among women requires the development of supportive educational environments, accessible sports infrastructure, and effective health education programs.

Another important dimension of the socio-psychological analysis of women's attitudes toward fitness practices is the role of social identity and gender norms. Cultural expectations related to femininity, attractiveness, and physical appearance significantly influence women's motivation to engage in fitness activities. In many societies, the female body is subject to strong normative pressures that shape perceptions of beauty and physical competence. Consequently, fitness participation can function both as a form of conformity to social expectations and as a means of self-expression and personal empowerment.

Despite the growing body of research in this field, there remains a need for comprehensive analytical reviews that integrate the findings of foreign and domestic studies within a unified socio-psychological framework. Such an approach makes it possible to identify key theoretical perspectives, methodological tendencies, and conceptual differences in the interpretation of women's attitudes toward fitness practices. The present study aims to analyze the main socio-psychological approaches used in contemporary research and to determine the major factors that influence women's perceptions and engagement in fitness activities. Through this analysis, the article seeks to contribute to the development of a deeper understanding of the psychological and social mechanisms that shape women's involvement in fitness culture and health-related physical activity.

Methods

The methodological basis of this article is built on the principles of theoretical analysis, comparative review, and socio-psychological interpretation of scholarly literature devoted to women's attitudes toward fitness practices. Since the purpose of the study is not to test a narrowly defined empirical hypothesis but to systematize and critically interpret the existing body of knowledge, the article uses a review-based research design that combines elements of descriptive, analytical, and comparative



approaches. Such a design makes it possible to identify dominant conceptual trends, explain the logic of different research traditions, and reveal the main psychological and social factors that shape women's involvement in fitness activity.

The review includes foreign and domestic academic publications in the fields of psychology, pedagogy, sociology, gender studies, and physical culture. The selection of sources was based on their thematic relevance to the study of women's motivation for physical activity, body image, health behavior, social environment, fitness culture, self-esteem, and social identity. Special attention was paid to works that interpret fitness not only as a health-related practice but also as a socially mediated form of behavior influenced by cultural norms, interpersonal relations, and gender expectations. Both conceptual papers and empirical studies were considered in order to provide a fuller picture of the research landscape.

The analytical procedure was organized in several interrelated stages. At the first stage, a thematic search and classification of publications were conducted according to the key directions of socio-psychological inquiry. These directions included motivational approaches, studies of body image and self-perception, social influence theories, gender-role analysis, health psychology frameworks, and works devoted to the socio-cultural determinants of women's physical activity. At the second stage, the selected studies were grouped according to their geographical and academic contexts, which allowed the distinction between foreign and domestic research traditions. At the third stage, the findings of the reviewed works were compared in order to identify convergences, divergences, and gaps in interpretation.

The socio-psychological approach used in this article assumes that women's attitudes toward fitness practices are not formed in isolation and cannot be reduced to purely individual choice. Therefore, the analysis was guided by the principle of interaction between internal and external determinants. Internal determinants included motives for self-development, emotional regulation, health maintenance, self-esteem enhancement, and body satisfaction. External determinants included family influence, peer approval, media representations of the ideal female body, accessibility of sports facilities, public discourse on health, and the prestige associated with active lifestyles. This interpretive framework made it possible to examine fitness practices as a multidimensional phenomenon situated at the intersection of personal agency and social regulation.



To ensure analytical consistency, the reviewed studies were examined through several socio-psychological categories. These categories included attitude structure, motivational orientation, self-concept, social identity, normative influence, and behavioral intention. The category of attitude structure was used to identify cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of women's perceptions of fitness. Motivational orientation made it possible to distinguish intrinsic motives, such as enjoyment and well-being, from extrinsic motives, such as pressure to meet appearance standards. The categories of self-concept and social identity helped to explain how fitness participation is connected with the construction of femininity, confidence, and personal competence. Normative influence and behavioral intention were used to understand the role of social pressure, approval, and expectations in shaping fitness-related decisions.

Comparative analysis occupied a central place in the method of this study. Foreign research was examined primarily for its focus on autonomy, empowerment, self-determination, body politics, and media influence. Domestic research was studied for its stronger orientation toward health preservation, educational influence, prevention of sedentary lifestyles, and the promotion of socially useful behavioral models. By comparing these two research trajectories, the article identifies not only differences in thematic emphasis but also distinctions in conceptual language and practical implications.

The method of interpretation also involved identifying recurrent explanatory patterns in the literature. For example, repeated reference to self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, social support, and health motivation across different studies was treated as evidence of the relative stability of these variables in the socio-psychological analysis of women's fitness behavior. At the same time, differences in the meaning attached to fitness participation in various cultural contexts were taken into account. This made it possible to avoid overly universal conclusions and to preserve sensitivity to contextual factors.

Thus, the methods used in this article combine literature review, thematic systematization, socio-psychological categorization, and comparative interpretation. This approach allows for a broad yet structured understanding of how women's attitudes toward fitness practices are conceptualized in contemporary foreign and domestic scholarship and provides a sound foundation for further analytical conclusions.



Results

The analytical review of foreign and domestic studies demonstrates that women's attitudes toward fitness practices are shaped by a multidimensional system of socio-psychological factors rather than by a single motive or situational influence. The examined literature makes it possible to identify several stable result patterns that recur across different academic traditions. First, the majority of studies confirm that women usually perceive fitness simultaneously as a health-preserving activity, a means of body management, a source of emotional regulation, and a socially meaningful practice associated with self-presentation and social belonging. This multidimensionality indicates that women's fitness behavior cannot be adequately explained only through physiological needs or aesthetic goals. Instead, it reflects the interaction of personal meanings, cultural expectations, and social conditions.

A major result emerging from the literature is the central role of motivation in determining women's attitudes toward fitness practices. Both foreign and domestic studies reveal that intrinsic motivation, including enjoyment, interest in movement, psychological relief, and a desire for self-development, is associated with more stable and positive engagement in fitness. Women who view fitness as part of personal growth and inner well-being tend to demonstrate greater continuity in participation and more positive emotional attitudes toward physical activity. By contrast, predominantly extrinsic motivation, such as pressure to lose weight, conform to idealized beauty standards, or gain social approval, often leads to unstable participation, emotional tension, and dissatisfaction with the process. This distinction appears consistently in the reviewed studies and suggests that the quality of motivation is more significant than its mere presence.

Another important result concerns body image and self-perception. A substantial proportion of foreign research emphasizes that women's attitudes toward fitness are strongly mediated by how they evaluate their own bodies. Positive body image is associated with a more autonomous and health-oriented approach to exercise, whereas body dissatisfaction often leads women to enter fitness spaces under conditions of anxiety, self-comparison, and heightened vulnerability to external judgment. At the same time, domestic studies show that body-related motives are present but are often discussed in closer connection with general health, functional readiness, and self-discipline. This difference in emphasis suggests that body image occupies a universal but culturally mediated place in the system of women's attitudes toward fitness.



The review also reveals the significance of social environment. Family support, peer interaction, and the communicative atmosphere of fitness groups are repeatedly identified as factors that strengthen women's readiness to participate in fitness practices. Women are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward exercise when they receive approval, practical support, and emotional encouragement from significant others. Group-based fitness activities are especially often described as psychologically favorable because they satisfy the need for belonging, reduce feelings of isolation, and provide a context for shared goals. Conversely, lack of support, fear of negative evaluation, and uncomfortable social comparison tend to weaken motivation and contribute to withdrawal from fitness participation.

One more result concerns the role of cultural norms and media influence. The reviewed literature shows that public representations of the ideal female body continue to exert strong pressure on women's perceptions of fitness. In foreign studies, this pressure is frequently analyzed through the lens of gender stereotypes, objectification, and body politics. In domestic research, it is more often reflected in discussions of social expectations, appearance culture, and the growing prestige of physically active lifestyles. In both cases, women's attitudes toward fitness are shown to develop in dialogue with broader symbolic standards of femininity, success, and attractiveness. However, the literature also demonstrates that fitness can function as a resource of empowerment when women reinterpret physical activity as a form of self-care rather than external compliance.

The comparative review further indicates that foreign and domestic research differ in theoretical focus but converge in practical conclusions. Foreign scholarship more actively explores self-determination, empowerment, emotional experience, and body identity, while domestic scholarship more often highlights health education, prevention, and social adaptation. Despite these differences, both traditions agree that positive attitudes toward fitness are reinforced when women experience competence, autonomy, social support, and meaningful personal outcomes. Overall, the results show that women's attitudes toward fitness practices are best understood as the outcome of interconnected motivational, emotional, social, and cultural processes.

Discussion

The results of the analytical review make it possible to argue that women's attitudes toward fitness practices should be interpreted as a socially mediated psychological



construct formed at the intersection of personal needs, cultural meanings, and interpersonal influences. This conclusion is important because it shifts the focus away from simplified explanations that reduce women's participation in fitness either to the pursuit of physical attractiveness or to a purely health-oriented behavioral choice. The reviewed studies show that such attitudes are embedded in broader systems of values and expectations and therefore require a multidimensional socio-psychological interpretation. In this sense, fitness practices appear not only as forms of motor activity but also as spaces of identity construction, emotional self-regulation, social comparison, and negotiation of gender norms.

A key point for discussion concerns the balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The reviewed literature convincingly demonstrates that sustainable and psychologically positive fitness participation is more often associated with intrinsic motives, such as enjoyment, vitality, self-development, stress reduction, and a sense of competence. This finding is theoretically consistent with self-determination perspectives and with broader socio-psychological models of internalized behavior. At the same time, it would be inaccurate to present intrinsic and extrinsic motives as completely separate or mutually exclusive. In real life, women's motivations are often mixed and dynamic. A woman may begin fitness activity because of dissatisfaction with appearance or social pressure, yet over time transform this externally initiated behavior into a more autonomous and meaningful practice. Therefore, discussion of women's attitudes toward fitness should include not only the source of motivation but also the process of motivational transformation.

Another important issue relates to the role of body image. Foreign studies often frame body image as one of the central predictors of women's engagement in fitness, emphasizing both its constructive and problematic dimensions. On the one hand, attention to the body may stimulate self-care, discipline, and physical awareness. On the other hand, excessive orientation toward appearance standards may intensify anxiety, self-objectification, and chronic dissatisfaction. Domestic studies tend to address this issue more cautiously, often integrating body-related themes into the discourse of health, self-improvement, and socially approved lifestyle. This difference may reflect not only academic traditions but also cultural distinctions in how women's bodily experiences are articulated. The discussion suggests that body image should not be understood merely as a private psychological factor. It is also a social product



shaped by media, family discourse, educational norms, and dominant models of femininity.

The social environment emerges as another decisive factor that deserves deeper interpretation. The studies reviewed indicate that women's fitness behavior becomes more stable and emotionally positive in contexts where support, recognition, and psychological safety are present. This observation confirms the broader socio-psychological thesis that behavior linked to self-presentation and bodily involvement is highly sensitive to interpersonal feedback. Fitness spaces may function either as environments of encouragement and empowerment or as contexts of surveillance and comparison. Much depends on how communication is organized, what norms dominate in the group, and whether participation is associated with inclusion or judgment. For pedagogical universities and psychology-oriented educational settings, this has practical significance. Programs that promote physical activity among women should not focus exclusively on exercise content; they should also cultivate supportive microenvironments that reduce fear of evaluation and strengthen subjective comfort. The discussion also highlights the dual nature of cultural norms. Fitness can serve as an instrument of conformity to socially imposed ideals of femininity, slimness, productivity, and bodily discipline. At the same time, it can become a means of resistance to passivity, psychological exhaustion, and socially restrictive roles. This duality explains why the same practice may have opposite meanings for different women. For some, fitness is associated with pressure and compulsory self-correction; for others, it represents autonomy, pleasure, and recovery of psychological balance. Thus, women's attitudes toward fitness practices cannot be interpreted outside the context of lived experience, age, social status, prior exercise history, and local cultural expectations. The review supports the position that fitness is a culturally coded practice whose psychological meaning changes depending on how women interpret their participation.

A further point for discussion concerns the difference between foreign and domestic research traditions. Foreign scholarship appears more conceptually diverse and more attentive to themes such as empowerment, embodiment, self-objectification, identity, and emotional experience. Domestic research, by contrast, often demonstrates stronger orientation toward health promotion, prevention, and educational influence. This difference should not be interpreted as a contradiction. Rather, it reflects distinct academic priorities and practical contexts. For the development of contemporary



psychological and pedagogical knowledge, the most productive strategy would be to integrate these traditions. Health-centered approaches may benefit from deeper analysis of subjective experience, while identity- and body-focused approaches may benefit from stronger connection to preventive education and public well-being.

Finally, the discussion indicates several перспективные directions for further inquiry. More attention should be paid to age differences among women, the role of socioeconomic accessibility of fitness infrastructure, digital fitness environments, and the psychological effects of social media representations of exercise culture. In addition, there is a need for context-sensitive studies that examine not only why women participate in fitness but how they interpret this participation in everyday life. Such research would strengthen the socio-psychological understanding of fitness practices and help educational institutions, psychologists, and health specialists design more humane, motivating, and culturally responsive programs for women's physical activity.

Conclusion

The review of foreign and domestic research confirms that women's attitudes toward fitness practices are formed through the interaction of psychological, social, and cultural determinants. Fitness in contemporary society is not limited to the sphere of physical exercise. It has become a meaningful socio-psychological phenomenon connected with health behavior, self-perception, emotional regulation, social communication, and the construction of gender identity. For this reason, the study of women's fitness participation requires an approach that unites health psychology, social psychology, gender studies, and pedagogical analysis. The examined literature shows that women's engagement in fitness cannot be fully understood through one-dimensional explanations based only on weight control, appearance improvement, or medical necessity. In reality, women's attitudes toward fitness emerge from a combination of motives related to well-being, self-esteem, social belonging, cultural expectations, and personal life experience.

One of the central conclusions of the review is that the stability and positivity of women's attitudes toward fitness are strongly associated with intrinsic motivational factors. When fitness is perceived as a source of energy, emotional balance, self-development, and personal competence, participation becomes more sustainable and psychologically constructive. In contrast, when women enter fitness practices



primarily because of external pressure, fear of social judgment, or dissatisfaction caused by unrealistic appearance norms, their involvement is more vulnerable to frustration, discontinuity, and emotional discomfort. This conclusion has both theoretical and practical value because it shows that the promotion of women's physical activity should be based not on pressure or narrow aesthetic standards, but on the development of supportive conditions for autonomous and meaningful participation.

The review also makes clear that body image occupies an important but ambivalent position in the system of women's attitudes toward fitness. On the one hand, concern for physical appearance may stimulate activity, discipline, and interest in self-care. On the other hand, excessive dependence on social beauty standards may generate anxiety, self-criticism, and chronic dissatisfaction. Therefore, body-related aspects of fitness should be approached with psychological sensitivity. A positive attitude toward fitness develops more successfully in contexts where the female body is treated not as an object of constant social evaluation, but as a source of strength, health, and personal experience. This shift from external control to internal acceptance is especially significant in educational and psychological work with women.

Another important conclusion is that the social environment plays a decisive role in shaping women's perceptions of fitness practices. Family support, peer approval, access to safe and encouraging fitness spaces, and positive communication within exercise groups all contribute to stronger motivation and greater emotional comfort. At the same time, negative evaluation, social comparison, exclusion, and lack of infrastructure may weaken women's willingness to participate. This means that the formation of positive attitudes toward fitness is not only an individual task but also a social and pedagogical one. Institutions interested in promoting healthy lifestyles should create environments that support inclusion, respect, and psychological safety. The comparison of foreign and domestic studies has shown that, despite differences in emphasis, both research traditions converge on the recognition of fitness as a complex socio-psychological practice. Foreign scholarship more often focuses on empowerment, self-determination, and body identity, whereas domestic scholarship tends to emphasize health improvement, prevention, and the educational value of physical activity. Their integration creates a more complete framework for understanding women's fitness behavior. Such synthesis is especially important for



psychology and pedagogy, where practical interventions should be scientifically grounded and culturally responsive.

Thus, the study concludes that women's attitudes toward fitness practices are best understood as dynamic, socially conditioned, and psychologically meaningful formations. Further research should continue to explore the diversity of women's experiences, the influence of digital environments, and the ways in which educational and community institutions can support sustainable and positive engagement in fitness culture.

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