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Exercise Preferences Among Young Adults: Do Men and Women Want Different Things?

VCU School of Medicine

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Background

Young adults are at high risk for overweight and obesity

- Overweight and obesity in early adulthood is linked to increased cardiometabolic risk
- Sharp declines in physical activity during early adulthood

Young adults, specifically young men, are difficult to recruit and retain in behavioral weight loss programs

- Men have lower concerns about weight gain
- Young men are motivated to lose weight to improve physical fitness and appearance
- Framing programs around physical activity may enhance engagement and appeal

Understanding young men's specific preference surrounding physical activity and whether or not these differ from young women can help adapt recruitment messages and weight loss programs

Objective

The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of gender differences in young adults' exercise preferences in order to inform future weight loss interventions for this population

Methods

Procedure

- Adults aged 18-25 completed an online survey about a variety of health behaviors and preferences for programming
- Participants were recruited from internet advertisements, e-mail blasts, and university advertisements
- Participants received $10 for participation and entered in a raffle to win an iPod

Measures

- Participants were asked to select their preference for the type of exercise to be included in a weight loss program and their delivery preference of the program

Preference for type of exercise

•Moderate intensity cardio (walking, jogging)

•Strength based training (toning, light weights)

•Intense strength training (muscle building)

•Combination of strength training and moderate intensity cardio

Preference for delivery of exercise program

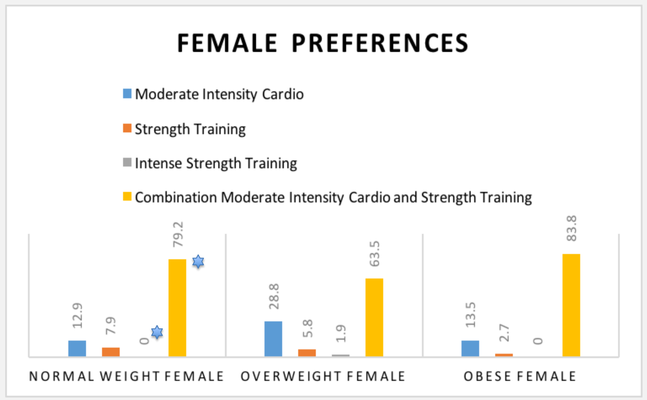
•Clinic-based facility with supervision

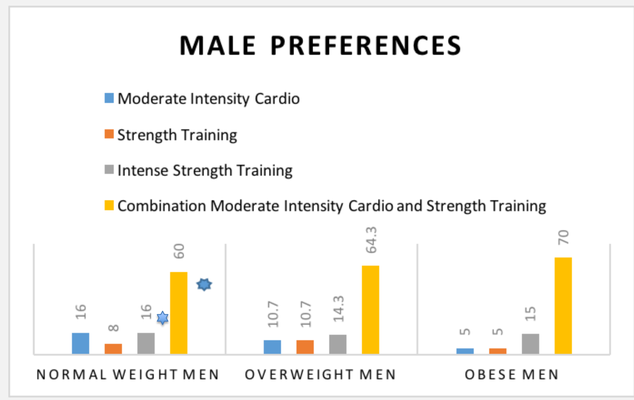
•Self-directed with guidance from a program

Data Analysis

Chi-square tests were conducted to examine differences in exercise preferences and mode of delivery, accounting for BMI status (normal weight, overweight, obesity)

Results





*Significant difference between men and women (p=.000)

Demographics (N=288)	
Mean Age	21.85 (2.18)
Female	66%
White non-Hispanic	83%
Single	83%
Mean BMI	25.91 (5.29)
Normal weight	52%
Overweight/obesity	48%



Type of Exercise

- Over 2/3 of young adults prefer a combination of moderate intensity cardio and strength training
- Women and men differed significantly in exercise preference (p<.001)
- Less than 1% of women preferred intense strength training compared to 15.3% of men
- Normal weight women and men differed significantly in exercise preferences by weight status (p =.000)
- Normal weight women preferred a combination of cardio and strength training at higher rates than men
- Normal weight men preferred intense strength training at higher rates

Delivery Mode of Program

- Over 2/3 preferred exercising on own with guidance from a program compared to a clinic-based supervision

Discussion

- YA prefer a combination of cardio and strength training, with men preferring intense strength training at higher rates than women
- Majority prefer minimal guidance in exercise from a program
- Findings are consistent with past literature suggesting YA are more likely than older adults to lose weight on their own through exercise
- Gender differences in exercise preferences could be related to preferences for different ideal body type
- Future weight loss interventions should frame recruitment advertisements and program content around physical activity preferences to enhance interest and engagement with young men

Limitations: Self-report height and weight; modest sample size

***Strengths*:** Gender balanced sample; not a treatment seeking sample and conducted online so may be more representative of young adults

Findings suggest that future efforts to recruit young men for weight management should emphasize self-guided physical activity, specifically strength based training