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A comparative analysis of the lifestyles of male and female gymgoers

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Abstract

Unhealthy nutrition habits as well as sedentary and stressful lifestyles increase psychosocial pressures on individuals in the modern world. When such habits and lifestyles come together, the sensitivity of the organism increases and the physical and spiritual endurance of individuals decrease. Gyms have become a part of many peoples' lives nowadays. This study was conducted in 28 gyms in Kyrenia, Nicosia & Famagusta. Participants were 211 males and 240 females. A 30-item questionnaire was administered to the participants and the data were analysed quantitatively. T-test results revealed that male gymgoers smoked more than their female counterparts and that females followed health and wellness Social Media accounts more. Male participants shared their personal problems with close friends more, males were more capable of coping with stress, males experienced anxiety concerning their jobs less and males paid more attention to using wearable fitness devices. This study poses a number of implications for physical education teachers.

Keywords: Health and wellness Social Media accounts; Nutrition; Wearable fitness devices; Physical fitness, Physical education.

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1. Introduction

It takes physical, emotional and psychological well-being in order to lead a healthy life. Regular physical activity reduces the risk of heart attack, improves mental health and mood, helps people build strong muscles and bones, manage weight and abstain from harmful habits. In order to have a healthy lifestyle individuals should not only stay away from health-damaging behaviours but also they must be in search of health promoting thoughts, feelings and efforts (Korp, 2008). Psychological resilience enables people to adapt to their stressed lives and cope with stress strongly (Luthar & Cichetti, 2000). Resilient people do not view stressful happenings as threats but opportunities to test their skills; they adapt themselves to their work, they believe that they are in control of the events they encounter and they have the ability to minimise stress in their lives (Sahin, 1994).

It is possible to maximise the health benefits of physical activity via a balanced diet, leading a less-stressed life and having a normal sleep pattern. Malnutrition, smoking, failure in coping with stress and alcohol, on the other hand, restrain gymgoers from reaping the benefit. Technology helps people to self-educate themselves in this respect. In our digital age, gymgoers do not need to see a dietitian in order to find out what should or should not be eaten before or after workout. Health and fitness accounts on Social Media offer valuable information on healthy eating including recipes so that gymgoers find full nutritional information and thus make an informed choice. There are many personal trainer accounts one can follow to improve his\her workout. Wearable fitness devices, on the other hand, have changed gymgoers' workout habits. With the help of technology, they can track their own efforts, such as the number of steps they take each day or how many calories they burn in doing a particular exercise. They can find out their heart rate through heart rate monitors and manage their weight by recording and reviewing their food each day.

Given that gyms have become a part of peoples' lives and that technology has dramatically changed the understanding of fitness and physical education, it is imperative to determine the lifestyles of gymgoers and the extent they make use of technology in their self-education and fitness regimes. In order to fulfil this purpose the following research questions are posed:

1. How do the lifestyles of female gymgoers differ from those of their male counterparts?
2. Is there a significant difference between male and female gymgoers' fitness regimes in terms of technology use?

2. Literature review

Fitness phenomenon has turned out to be a multibillion-dollar industry (Sassatelli, 2010) and the appeal of people to look fit and be healthy has been growing day by day. There is a high level of relationship between physical activity and health (Boutelle, Murray, Jeffery, Hennrikus & Lando, 2000). Research on fitness and gym culture shows that regular physical activity helps the individual to relax and calm himself during difficult times, to stay away from habits that harm health and to reduce the risk of psychopathologies such as depression and anxiety during stressful times (Alword & Grados, 2005). Hence, the individual adapts better to stressful life and can maintain daily activities effectively by minimising the negative effects of stress (Alword & Grados, 2005). Looking at earlier research on fitness research, it has been found that regular exercise has many health benefits by reducing depression, anxiety and stress (Strauss, Rodzilsky, Burack & Colin, 2001; Warburton, Nicol & Bredin, 2006). Owing to the association of lifestyle factors with symptoms of depression and anxiety (Lang, Beglinger, Schweinfurth, Walter & Borgwardt, 2015; Penedo & Dahn, 2005), it can be inferred that adopting a healthy lifestyle provides people with a depression free and less stressed life, and thus a better quality lifestyle. People with sedentary lifestyles, on the contrary, have relatively undesirable lifestyles (Schmitz, Kruse & Kugler, 2004). When considered the fourth leading risk factor of global mortality, physical inactivity can lead to more important problems, since it causes an estimated 5.3

million deaths each year (Lee et al., 2012). As reported by the World Health Organization (2009), 6% of premature mortality is related to physical inactivity.

Especially, when it is taken into account that obesity is one of the global problems, fitness and regular exercise are an area of timely importance (Flegal, Carroll, Ogden & Curtin, 2010). Physical activity enhances body appearance (Lyons, Kaufman & Rima, 2015). Exercise causes weight loss, in his respect. The 'thin ideal' prevalent in Western cultures (Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002) increases the demands of individuals to look fit and thin. Females more than men are governed by this 'thin ideal' (Chambliss, Finley & Blair, 2004; Klaczynski, Goold & Mudry, 2004). Research shows that sustained weight loss is promoted by physical activity (Brownell, 1998; Burnette & Finkel, 2012; Donnelly et al., 2004). Healthy eating (Ehrlinger, Burnette, Park, Harrold & Orvidas, 2017) is also essential for gymgoers in their fitness regimens. However, some research has found accounts of balancing between unhealthy and healthy habits (Backett, 1992; Pajari, Jallinoja & Absetz, 2006; Pierret, 1993). In addition, consuming light to moderate amounts of alcohol (O'Keefe, Bhatti, Bajwa, DiNicolantonio & Lavie, 2014) and not smoking contribute to increased longevity.

2.1. Wearable fitness devices

Wearable fitness technology has taken its place in fitness and wellness centres and been favoured by many gymgoers (Consumer Technology Association, 2013). These devices are useful in tracking both physical and physiological performance. They can track one's steps taken, calories burnt and the kilometres covered. They can also monitor heart rates (Mackinlay, 2013). There are controversial research results concerning wearable fitness technology. While some research results indicate a lack of trust of users in this technology (Ehmen et al., 2012; Lazar, Koehler, Tanenbaum & Nguyen, 2015; Mancuso, Thompson, Tietze, Kelk & Roux, 2014; Shih, Han, Poole, Rosson & Carroll, 2015), others have positive results with regard to the enjoyable and thus motivational aspects of these devices (Patel, Asch & Volpp, 2015). Levine, Savarimuthu, Squires, Nicholson and Jay (2015) have found technology is effective in weight loss efforts.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants consisted of 451 adult gymgoers. The age range of the participants was 20–65. Fifty-three per cent of them were male and 57% of them were female. Sixty-eight per cent of the participants were single and 32% of them were married. A great majority of them (60%) were university graduates. The participants were sampled from 28 fitness centres out of a total 61 in north Cyprus.

3.2. Data collection procedures

The data were collected quantitatively through a 30-item questionnaire developed by the first researcher (Atamturk, Ahmedov & Tokmak, 2007). The alpha coefficient for the questionnaire is 0.84, suggesting that the items on the questionnaire have relatively high internal consistency.

3.3. Data analysis

SPSS 20 was utilised to analyse the data elicited through the questionnaires. T-test was performed to reveal the differences between groups.

3.4. Findings

The quantitative analysis of the survey data revealed that 42% of the participants smoked heavily and 22% of them were frequent smokers. It was found that a great majority of males (90%) did not believe smoking affected their performance in the gym. A great majority of all participants shared their problems with friends and half of them did not drink alcohol. 160 female participants and 11 males reported that they abstained from secondhand smoke. It was found that 52% of the respondents avoided excessive salt intake and 42% excessive saturated fat intake. In a similar vein, 84% avoided white sugar. Forty-two per cent of the participants regularly consumed various foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole wheat legumes everyday. The results also revealed that more than half of the male participants went to the gym to get rid of stress and more than half of the females to lose weight.

T-test results revealed significant differences between males and females with regard to smoking, sharing problems with friends, job-related anxiety, following health and wellness Social Media accounts and use of wearable technology devices. Table 1 displayed the t-test results concerning smoking.

Table 1. Mean (X) and standard deviation (Sd) values for smoking

Gender	n	X	S	Sd	t	p
Male	211	4.56	0.583	48	9.374	0.000
Female	240	2.08	1.187			

As illustrated in Table 1, there was a significant difference between male and female gymgoers' smoking habits ($t(48) = 9.374$, $p < 0.01$). The male gymgoers responded to this construct more positively ($X = 4.56$) than their female counterparts ($X = 2.08$). Another significant difference was found between male and female gymgoers concerning sharing problems with friends (see Table 2).

Table 2. Mean (X) and standard deviation (Sd) values for sharing problems with friends

Gender	n	X	S	Sd	t	p
Male	211	4.64	0.490	48	3.357	0.002
Female	240	4.12	0.600			

Table 2 illustrated the statistically significant difference ($t(48) = 3.357$, $p < 0.01$). The male participants shared their problems with their friends ($X = 4.64$) more than the females did ($X = 4.12$). There was a significant difference between the responses of the males and females ($t(48) = 3.476$, $p < 0.01$) concerning coping with stress (see Table 3).

Table 3. Mean (X) and standard deviation (Sd) values for coping with stress

Gender	n	X	S	Sd	t	p
Male	211	4.68	0.476	48	3.476	0.001
Female	240	4.20	0.500			

As can be seen in Table 3 the male gymgoers were better ($X = 4.68$) at coping with stress than the female gymgoers ($X = 4.20$). Another significant difference was found between the females and males concerning job loss-related anxiety ($t(48) = 2.448$, $p < 0.01$) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Mean (X) and standard deviation (Sd) values for job loss-related anxiety

Gender	n	X	S	Sd	t	p
Male	211	4.60	0.645	48	2.448	0.018
Female	240	4.20	0.500			

Male gymgoers were found to experience job loss-related anxiety less ($X = 4.60$) than the female gymgoers did ($X = 4.20$). T-test revealed another significant difference between males and females concerning their following health and wellness accounts on Social Media ($t(48) = 3.176, p < 0.01$) (see Table 5).

Table 5. Mean (X) and standard deviation (Sd) values for following health and wellness accounts on Social Media

Gender	n	X	S	Sd	t	p
Male	211	4.16	0.374	48	3.176	0.003
Female	240	4.56	0.507			

It was found that the female gymgoers followed health and wellness accounts on Social Media more ($X = 4.56$) than their male counterparts ($X = 4.16$). Table 6 illustrated how the use of wearable technology devices differed in terms of gender ($t(48) = 0.583, p < 0.01$) (see Table 6).

Table 6. Mean (X) and standard deviation (Sd) values for the use of wearable technology devices

Gender	n	X	S	Sd	t	p
Male	211	4.32	0.748	48	0.583	0.002
Female	240	4.20	0.707			

As illustrated in Table 6, the male gymgoers used wearable technology devices more ($X = 4.32$) than the female gymgoers ($X = 4.20$) did.

4. Discussion

The current study attempted to determine the lifestyles of female and male gymgoers in the northern Cyprus context and to evaluate the use of technology in the fitness regimes of male and female gymgoers in this context. The results indicated that most male gymgoers were heavy smokers. This was an unexpected finding since it was taken for granted that they went to the gym for the sake of a healthy lifestyle and that smoking was a harmful habit. This result corroborated Backett (1992), Pajari et al. (2006) and Pierret (1993) that there were accounts of balancing between unhealthy and healthy habits. Men were found more likely to cope with stress than women. This result affirmed those of Strauss, Rodzilsky, Burack and Colin (2001) and Warburton, Nicol and Bredin (2006) that regular exercise reduced stress. Men were found to have less job-related anxiety than women, which went in line with Lang et al. (2015) and Penedo and Dahn (2005). It was found that females went to the gym to lose weight, which affirmed Lyons, Kaufman and Rima (2015), Brownell (1998), Burnette and Finkel (2012) and Donnelly et al. (2004). The results that men shared their problems with friends more than their female counterparts and that females followed health and wellness accounts on Social Media more could not be endorsed due to the lack of research on the issues. Similarly, one of the major results of the study that males resorted to wearable technology devices in the gym more failed to support those of previous research owing to the lack of research examining gender differences on wearable technology use in fitness centres, which called a need for more research on the issue.

5. Conclusion

A depression free and less stressed life which is essential for a healthy lifestyle can be attained through physical activity. In general terms, it has been determined that most gymgoers are health conscious in terms of physical activity and nutrition. They pay special attention to nutrition; however, men are less conscious as far as harmful habits such as smoking and drinking are concerned. The reasons for gymgoing varied. While male participants go to the gym to get rid of stress, females commute to the gym to lose weight. Females internalise the 'thin ideal' more than males do. Physical activity helps gymgoers to cope with stress and hence has got a healing power in terms of psychological wellbeing. With regard to technology use, this study indicates that males use wearable technology more and females follow health and wellness accounts on Social Media more. Technology has been changing the fitness industry dramatically and in the near future this change will be more prominent. For this reason, the current study contributes to the growing body of research on the technology use in the gyms and provides a standpoint for further research to be conducted in the northern Cypriot context. This study has a few implications for physical education as well. In the light of the results of this study, sports and physical activity should be viewed as means through which healthy habits, a quality lifestyle and pleasure are attained.

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