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Exercise as Empowerment: Insights into Trans and Gender Diverse Experiences

Spotlight on Exercise

Regular exercise has long been championed for its physical and mental health benefits. However, for trans and gender diverse (TGD) people the relationship with exercise is nuanced and deeply influenced by socio-environmental and personal factors, as explored in the recent study by [Schweizer + colleagues \(2025\)](#).



The Role of Gender Affirmation

The study highlights how exercise can serve as a crucial tool for gender affirmation. TGD people often use exercise to reshape their bodies in ways that align with their gender identity, alleviating gender dysphoria, fostering a sense of control and self-confidence. For example, building muscle can help trans men achieve a more stereotypically masculine appearance, while fitness activities that enhance flexibility or toning may support other gender expressions. Such practices underscore the psychosocial importance of physical activity in this population.

Barriers to Participation

Socio-environmental factors, such as unsafe gym environments and lack of inclusive spaces, often discourage TGD people from regular physical activity. Experiences of discrimination or misgendering in fitness settings create a significant barrier. Additionally, limited access to gender-affirming healthcare and professionals knowledgeable about TGD needs compounds these challenges.

Pathways to Positive Change

Despite these barriers, fostering supportive and inclusive fitness communities can make a significant difference. Group-based activities, such as yoga or team sports, promote not only physical health but also a sense of belonging. Empowering TGD people with resources and access to gender-affirming exercise professionals is essential to overcoming barriers.

However, exercise can also manifest in harmful ways. Compulsive or disordered exercise behaviours, driven by gender dysphoria or societal pressures to conform to binary standards of appearance, were commonly reported in the study. This aligns with broader findings that minority stress and systemic barriers can significantly influence health behaviours in TGD people.

Schweizer + colleagues emphasise the need for gender-affirming exercise environments. Inclusive fitness spaces and programs that acknowledge the unique needs of TGD people can mitigate stigma and promote healthful behaviours.

By addressing systemic challenges, such as lack of access to gender-neutral facilities and healthcare disparities, we can support exercise as a pathway to both physical health and gender affirmation.



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