



# Attitudes Towards Weight in Junior Women's Tennis Players

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## INTRODUCTION

- As standards of beauty have increasingly emphasized thin bodies and low body weight, concerns about appearance, weight, and eating have become widespread in the United States and other Western countries.
- Recently, researchers and therapists have focused attention on disturbances in eating and body image in particular groups of women, including female athletes. While tennis is not among the "lean" sports in which success is obviously linked to appearance and/or weight (e.g., gymnastics, figure skating, and wrestling), almost no research has focused on or even discussed female tennis players as a group at risk for eating disorders and abnormal concern with body image.
- However, an increase in media attention on the weight and appearance of female tennis players suggests that these players may also be at risk of focusing excessively upon the appearance of their bodies. This project aimed to fill this void in the literature by investigating the weight-related concerns of competitive junior women tennis players, their parents and their coaches.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this project was to investigate the following questions:

- Do female players and their mothers both believe that weight is important to them?
- What is the relationship between players' body composition, their self-esteem, and their perceptions about their bodies?
- Is there a relationship between female players' and their mothers' body composition, eating behaviors, and self-concept (the way one views oneself)?
- What is the status of tennis coaches' knowledge about obesity and eating disorders in sport?



## SAMPLE

- Participants for this study were 72 junior women tennis players (ages 8 to 23 years), who on average began playing tennis at 7 years of age and began receiving professional coaching at age 9.
- In addition to the players, other participants for the study were parents of these players (47 mothers and 24 fathers) and the players' coaches (25 males and 7 females)



## METHOD

- While attending one of two tennis tournaments, the participants responded to questionnaires concerning their attitudes toward weight, eating and tennis.

## RESULTS

- Most of the players and parents appeared to have reasonable eating patterns, normal self-concepts, and healthy attitudes about tennis.
  - This group of participants was most likely somewhat healthier and more fit than a random sample of Americans of those ages.
- However, players and parents were concerned about their weight; and players, mothers and coaches all wished to be thinner than they were.
- Coaches considered weight-related issues important but were not highly knowledgeable about them.
- Several results implied that weight concerns were more important for females than males.
- Overall, the findings suggest that, rather than applying the results to all female players, issues of weight concern and eating behaviors in women tennis players should be considered on an individual basis.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The results of this study suggest that the issues of weight concerns, body image, and eating disorders in athletes should be approached with care.
  - Some adolescent female players seem to have reasonably healthy attitudes and behaviors with respect to weight, whereas others may display behaviors that indicate an excessive concern with weight and body image.
  - Issues of weight concerns and eating disorders needs to be addressed individually with each of your players.
- Players, parents, and coaches should be aware of the possibility that a normal concern with appearance could develop into an abnormal focus on weight.
  - You should not assume, however, that eating disorders are common to everyone.
- In many ways, most of the players, parents and coaches in the present study held appropriate views of tennis as a part of life rather than its focus and of weight as only moderate in importance.
  - The coaches, in particular, were aware that not all players share these views and that female players may be at an increased risk for the development of eating disorders.

## CONCLUSION

- It is important for you to be aware of the signs and symptoms of excessive body weight concerns and eating disorders and to establish relationships with your players so that conversations about the issues can comfortably take place if needed.
- Also, be aware of professions in your community to whom you can refer your players if it is discovered that an individual has a case that requires expert and specialized attention.



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