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The Power of Others to Shape Our Identity: Body Image, Physical Abilities, and Body Weight

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Other people can profoundly influence individuals' feelings about their own body and physical abilities—important dimensions of personal identity and key factors related to lifestyle and body weight. A total of 103 adults shared narratives related to physical activity and body image. In relation to the influence of other people, some participants felt strengthened (e.g., praised, supported), and many participants reported damaging experiences (e.g., embarrassment, ridicule). The constructs of self-esteem and sedimentation of experience helped guide interpretation of participants' stories. From a public health perspective, individuals need to feel competent to adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle, and they need to feel worthy of living it. Recommendations are offered to help people engender these feelings in other individuals.

Key Words: identity • other people • body image • physical abilities • body weight • self-worth • competence • self-esteem • habitus • sedimentation of experience

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