How do I look? The impact of body awareness and self-objectification on motor performance in women

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Drawing on tenets of self-objectification theory, women and girls internalize a focus on their body's appearance rather than its functional attributes. Although self-objectification promotes constrained and ineffective motor performance in girls, it is unknown how body awareness and self-objectification impact motor performance in women. The present study examined the impact of body awareness and self-objectification on performance in women. It was hypothesized that greater body awareness would predict reduced performance during a visual-motor aiming task, and this relation would be mediated by self-objectification. Women (N = 80, M_{age} = 20.6 ± 3.1 years) completed the state Self-Objectification Questionnaire. To prime awareness of the body, participants were assigned athletic clothing to wear for the duration of the study, had their picture taken, weight, height, and waist circumference measured, and completed a body size distortion task. Participants then completed a visual-motor aiming task while sitting beside a full-length mirror. Their behaviour was video recorded. For each participant, number of clothing adjustments and self-views in the mirror were coded and summed, and mean body distortion score was calculated. Z-scores were calculated and summed to create a composite body awareness measure (CBA). Mean and standard deviation (*SD*) of reaction time (RT) were calculated across aiming task trials. Based on the linear regression models, CBA was significantly related to *SD* of RT (β = 0.006, CI: 0.002, 0.010, p = 0.002), whereby increased CBA predicted increased *SD* of RT. The indirect effect of self-objectification was β = -0.001, CI: -0.002, 0.000, p = 0.054. These results suggest women's body awareness and perception of their body as an object rather than as an effective instrument may lead to inefficient motor performance. Over time, this relatively inefficient performance could deter participation in physical activity. More work is needed to explore this possible link between body awareness, motor performance and physical activity.