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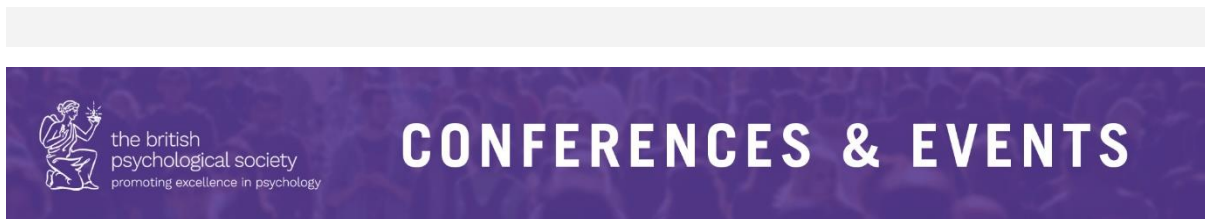
“A mental health game-changer”: Embodied experiences of the psychosocial, body image and wellbeing outcomes from strength and resistance training during perimenopause.

Objectives: Resistance exercise facilitates healthy aging in women but is ostensibly promoted to improve physiological health in later life and reduce weight gain. However, the psychosocial outcomes of resistance training in midlife are often overlooked. Given the pervasive messages that exist in fitness culture around exercise and appearance, this study explores experiences of strength training in perimenopause that embody wellbeing, functionality, vasomotor symptoms, and sociocultural ideals of ageing.

Design: An online, qualitative survey was distributed via University webpages and social media, informed by relevant health, physical activity, and body image literature. Participants self-identified as individuals experiencing menopausal symptoms (inclusive of non-binary or trans) and confirmed engagement in regular strength training.

Method: Participants’ ages ranged from 35 to 60 years ($n = 58$, $M = 48.03$, $SD = 5.61$) with 98.3% identifying as a (cis-)woman, 82.8% as White British, and 46.6% strength training for three years or more. Reflexive thematic analysis was employed to interpret patterns of shared meaning.

Results: Three themes were developed: 1) Empowerment in “feeling strong” and building muscle, 2) “A mental health game-changer”, and 3) Invisibility of the perimenopausal body. Strength training was understood as beneficial for improved mobility, yet many reported more subtle changes (e.g., improved mood) through the transition and welcomed a sense of focus and control. Evidence-based awareness of strength training in midlife was perceived to be lacking within medical guidance and physical activity spaces. Findings therefore offer nuanced insight into perimenopausal experiences that emphasise enhanced body image and wellbeing outcomes of strength training.



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The following submission has been received.

Submission Title: “A mental health game-changer”: Embodied experiences of the psychosocial, body image and wellbeing outcomes from strength and resistance training during perimenopause.

Submitting Author: Nova Deighton-Smith

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