

**The Placebo Effect and Exercise:
Testing the Mind-Set Matters Hypothesis in an Everyday Context.**

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the Honours Degree of Bachelor of Psychology

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The University of Adelaide

February 2017

Word Count: 10,840

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Abstract

This study aimed to replicate and extend earlier findings relating to potential placebo effects in exercise. Prior research found that when workers were encouraged to view their job as physically demanding they perceived themselves to be getting greater levels of exercise than before, and experienced positive physical health changes despite actual activity levels not changing (Crum & Langer, 2007). These results suggest that expectations play a critical role in the outcomes associated with physical activities, and therefore that health benefits derived from exercise may be due, at least partially, to a placebo effect.

In the current study participants ($N = 68$) were randomised to either the 'informed' group ($n = 34$), who received information on how their current level of housework and gardening qualified as exercise; or the control group ($n = 34$), who received an equal amount of information on a neutral topic. Perceptions of current exercise participation, and measures of physiological and psychological wellbeing, were taken at baseline and four weeks' post-intervention. Contrary to hypotheses, both the informed and control groups perceived themselves to be getting more exercise at follow-up. The informed group did not experience significantly greater reductions in weight, body fat percentage or blood pressure than the control at follow-up, nor an increase in positive affect. The current study therefore found no compelling evidence to support earlier research suggesting that changing people's mind-sets surrounding their current activities will result in meaningful health changes, and therefore no compelling evidence suggesting a placebo effect in exercise.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University, and, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no materials previously published except where due reference is made. I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the School to restrict access for a period of time.

Jessica Brown

February, 2017

Acknowledgements

There are many people whose contributions were critical to the success of this project, and for that I am grateful. Sincere thanks must go to my supervisors, Dr Janine Chapman and Professor Carlene Wilson, for their professional guidance, help, patience, and encouragement. Thank you also to Donna Hughes for her assistance with phone calls and advice regarding recruitment, to Samantha Pearson for her exceptional acting skills (next step Hollywood!), and Trisha Franceschilli for the filming and editing. Thanks must go to the School of Psychology, especially Carolyn Semmler and Deidre and Angela in the office, for your assistance with various aspects of the project. A very, very big thank you must also go to all the wonderful individuals who participated in this study – thank you for your commitment, and for always making my days interesting.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my fiancé Nick (aka Vincent), who has been my sole support throughout my university journey, and who has sacrificed a lot to enable me to chase my goals. You alone know how hard this has been for me, and I never would have finished either of my degrees without you. Thank you for all the hugs, cups of tea, cooking, cleaning, laughter, motivational computer backgrounds, love notes, funny distractions, and just being there whenever I need you. Most of all, thank you for loving me at my best and my worst, for always believing in me even when I (frequently) don't believe in myself, and for always knowing how to make me smile. Happy reading!

