

THE PARADOX OF EXERCISE. LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT PROBLEMATIC EXERCISE

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Abstract: *Over five decades of scientific research have presented evidence that demystifies the idealization of unconditional physical commitment, revealing a paradox where healthy behavior such as exercise can become destructive to the individual. Through the concept of problematic exercise, this presentation will describe some lessons learned from research that help us understand why a pattern of activity that should promote well-being can lead to functional deterioration and profound maladjustment in the individual. A key issue is to understand that the core of this possible pathology does not lie in the volume and/or intensity of training, but in loss of control and degraded motivation, where the behavior acts as an emotional refuge or escape mechanism from psychological deficiencies and unresolved life conflicts. This phenomenon transcends the individual, being a manifestation of a culture of performativity that exalts metric achievements and visibility, allowing compulsive patterns to be socially validated as signs of self-control or discipline. Finally, it should be noted that self-report questionnaires are insufficient to capture the complexity of this possible disorder, defending the need for an in-depth clinical evaluation that analyzes the subjective meaning and actual damage in the individual's life. Therapeutic intervention, therefore, should not aim to suppress movement, but rather to restore autonomy and address unmet psychological needs, facilitating the return of exercise to its place as a harmonious and flexible activity in the individual's life.*

Key words: behavioral addiction, exercise addiction, dependence, commitment to exercise, mental disorder