

BFS Builds Self-Esteem

A psychologist finds that BFS does more than just build muscle

BY DR. DAVID SCHLENOFF



Dulaney High School has implemented a strength and conditioning program that develops young women who are strong and confident.

As a licensed psychologist and certified school psychologist in the Baltimore County Public School system, I often work with students who are dealing with learning difficulties or emotional problems. As a certified BFS coach, I enjoy interacting with students who voluntarily participate in a vigorous scripted program of physical exercise. Having been a bodybuilder for approximately 20 years until I prudently scaled back on the weights over the past 10 years, I enjoy coaching youngsters who are highly motivated to devote themselves to physical improvement. And last year for the first time I was provided the chance to work with a BFS group comprised exclusively of female high school students.

I went into this experience with an understanding of the safety issues and body mechanics specific to female athletes (such as how the structure of the pelvis impacts knee alignment). However, I also had a naïve expectation that the girls BFS group might not share the enthusiasm and “esprit de corps” I had witnessed with the guys.

To my surprise, what I found was a group of girls who were ebullient and eager to learn and improve. They also were unafraid of becoming “bulked-up,” which can be a fear of girls who are less well-informed about BFS and about the hormonal differences between the genders that impact this phenomenon. To the contrary, these girls were eager to help each other improve and interestingly, appeared to interact more readily with each other than the boys seemed to be doing. This level of spontaneity also seemed to foster a very strong sense of group cohesiveness. Also, the girls appeared less reluctant than the boys to ask for help with form and procedures. Macho attitudes were nowhere to be found!

What was even more noticeable was a palpable air of happiness that seemed to permeate the weightroom as these girls eagerly awaited their opportunity to work out. They each seemed very proud of their progress. Perhaps this seeming happiness derives from learning how to set realistic, attainable goals and from reaching those goals. Perhaps it

derives from being part of a group with a shared interest (we know that girls are typically more socially oriented than boys). Perhaps it derives from the endorphin release that has proven to be attributable to physical exercise – or maybe it's just plain fun!

Along these lines, the BFS staff at Dulaney High

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School and I wondered if there was any research documenting the obvious improvement in self-esteem these girls were seeing from working out. Just as research demonstrates that academic achievement correlates with academic self-concept and educational expectations of adolescents, it stands to reason that if a child feels good about herself in the school setting, this may have a positive impact. And, while the positive effects of weightlifting have been well explored, the science of training female adolescents is relatively more nascent. Having previously generated and published a federally funded research project related to jogging/running as a therapeutic treatment modality for psychiatric inpatients, I decided to conduct a study.

A group of 21 female high school students at Dulaney volunteered to participate in the study. In terms of racial composition, 19 girls identified themselves as Caucasian, one as African American, and one as "Other," in grades 9 through 12. After securing written parental permission, we decided to administer a self-esteem inventory to the 21 girls prior to the start of BFS as well as upon completion. The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, Second Edition, is a well-known, highly respected and frequently used 60-question inventory; the psychological literature notes the scale as being both valid (it measures what it purports to measure) and reliable (it can be counted on to measure the same factors time and time again). The Piers-Harris2 was normed on a group of 1,387 school students, with the racial distribution of the sample representing that of the country, according to census data.

The Piers-Harris2 has seven clinical subscales that assess elements of self-esteem, and it has two validity scales. One validity scale measures whether or not the individual is just responding "yes" to all of the items; the other measures inconsistent responding. This means that some of the questions are rephrased and repeated in the test, so the results will reveal if someone is merely going down the answer sheet

checking answers off at random.

After formal analysis of the data, a dramatic (statistically significant) increase in scores in the domain measuring "happiness" was observed among the sample of girls who completed BFS. The Piers-Harris2 describes such marked elevations on this domain as indicative of an overall increase

in sense of well-being, endorsing that students described themselves as cheerful, lucky, able to get along well with others and generally satisfied. An overall positive evaluation of life circumstances is indicated. This is in direct contrast to scores on the test prior to BFS participation, which reflected more negative self-evaluations and more dissatisfaction with life circumstances. Before BFS, the students' scores indicated more self-criticism and less satisfaction with their ability to relate to others.

This represents quite a striking change and serves to help bring into focus the multiple benefits that BFS provides. While it is well known that the BFS Total Program delivers a proven roadmap for success on the playing field along with "Be an Eleven" benefits, it appears that positive psychological changes can now be added to the list of desirable effects.

We already knew that exercise has a positive impact upon mood and self-esteem. Now BFS clinicians have hard evidence of what we have long suspected: the positive effects of the BFS program upon overall happiness of a specific population of high-school-age female BFS athletes.

Get strong, get fast, get flexible, and now, get HAPPY! Join BFS!

(Dr. David Schlenoff is a licensed psychologist and certified school psychologist, and is BFS certified. He has served as psychological consultant to Runner's World Magazine, has published material on the role of a therapeutic running program in rehabilitation, on jogging therapy for psychiatric inpatients, and on numerous other topics. Dr. Schlenoff is employed by the Office of Psychological Services of the Baltimore County Public Schools.)





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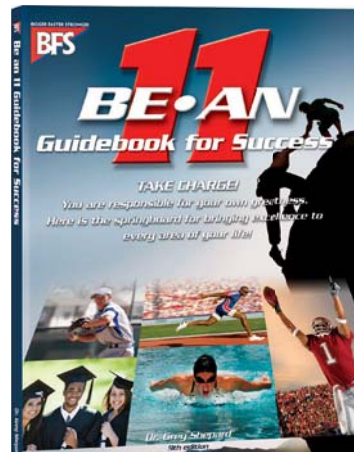
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