

The Relationship between Body Image Expectations and Exercise, Eating, and Social Behavior

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INTRODUCTION

Body image ideals and expectations have been a prevalent topic for many young adults and still are, if not more, prevalent today. Today females' body ideals shifted to a skinny but curvy enough, toned, and tall body. Males should have muscles, but not too many muscles. They should have a lean body and aim for a V-shaped and well-toned body. These often unrealistic ideals may lead to body dissatisfaction. Body dissatisfaction can have psychopathological consequences, including depressive symptoms, reduced food intake, increase of exercise, and low self-esteem (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006). Body dissatisfaction is a critical predictor for developing an eating disorder in the future (Stice, Marti, & Durant, 2011).

Body Image Ideals in Females

Women are often portrayed as sexual objects in social media, movies, and TV (Lindner et al., 2019). They are expected to eat small amounts of food, to care about the way they look, and to only act in appropriate and stereotypically expected ways. Through the constant exposure to thin ideals, including social media, TV, and magazines, women begin to develop unrealistic and unhealthy expectations for themselves.

Body Image Ideals in Males

The lack of research of males with eating disorders is primarily due to the differences in etiology and pathology of eating disorders in females and males. The DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for eating disorders emphasizes symptoms that are more often associated with female experiences of eating disorders. Men are more likely to show concerns about their muscularity.

Body Ideal Expectations

The expectations and pressures for the ideal body, for women and men, often comes from the opposite sex or from peers' expectations. Unfavorable comparisons may lead to the development of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. This indicates a need for clarification for understanding female and male expectations to reduce body dissatisfaction for men and women.

Body Dissatisfaction's Influences and Attitudes

Dissatisfaction with one's body image can have many negative consequences. Certain behaviors often change due to the effort of changing one's weight and body. Specific actions, including eating, exercise, and social behaviors, can also be precursors toward body dissatisfaction and a negative body ideal (Furnham et al., 2002). Women and men frequently use exercise and dieting as a weight-loss strategies.

Research Objectives

As eating disorders and body dissatisfaction are shared across the globe, body ideals, expectations, and the impact on exercise, eating, and social behavior are incredibly relevant today. Body ideals and expectations are often an essential aspect of the development of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Even though researchers have investigated these ideas thoroughly, there is still more to be discovered. The current study aims to investigate Trinity students' perceptions of their own and others' body image and how those affect their eating, exercise, and social behavior.



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HYPOTHESES

- 1 It is hypothesized that the smaller male and female participants' assessment of what figure others find attractive is, the smaller their own selected ideal body image will be for body figure rating and muscle mass.
- 2 It is hypothesized that according to their sexual interest male and female participants' assessment of others' ideal body image correlates positively with participants own ideal body image for body figure rating and muscle mass.
- 3 It is hypothesized that male and female participants ideal body images on average are smaller than participants' self-assessed actual bodies. Looking at muscularity, it is hypothesized that male and female participants ideal body images on average are bigger than participant' s self-assessed actual bodies.
- 4 It is hypothesized that male and female participants assessment of what figure others' find attractive on average is smaller than participants assessment according to their sexual interest of the other genders' ideal body images for body figure rating and muscle mass
- 5 It is hypothesized that male and female participants select a bigger figure to look most like themselves than for what they believe others/ the opposite gender find/s most attractive for body figure rating and muscle mass. Looking at muscularity, it is hypothesized that male participants select a smaller figure to look most like themselves than what they believe others/ the opposite gender find/s most attractive
- 6 It is hypothesized that the selected typical male/ female body chosen by participants according to their sexual interest correlates positively with the figure mostly selected by participants when choosing their self-assessed actual body for body figure and muscle mass.
- 7 It is hypothesized that the figure that male and female participants believe looks most like themselves on average is close to/ similar to the figure chosen by the other participants according to their sexual interest to be most attractive.
- 8 It is hypothesized that male and female participants importance of exercise and eating positively correlates with the importance of having an ideal body.
- 9 It is hypothesized that male and female participants engagement in social behavior (Greek life) correlates positively with the participants' importance of an ideal body.
- 10 It is hypothesized that for male and female participants being a member of an athletic team correlates positively with the importance of an ideal body.
- 11 It is hypothesized that male and female participants assessment of importance of having an ideal body correlates positively with changes in eating and exercise habits on days participants do not feel as confident in their body.
- 12 It is hypothesized that male and female participants who find having an ideal body significantly important also find it important that their romantic or sexual partner has an ideal body.

METHOD

- 41 female and 15 male participants considered for data analysis.
- Essential task was to fill out a Qualtrics questionnaire about body image expectations and exercise, eating, and social behavior
- Stimuli varied for participants depending on their gender and sexual interest.
- Depending on each hypothesis we found the bivariate pearson correlation, independent sample t-test, or paired sample t-test.
- Types of stimuli that were presented in the questionnaire included the following two figures.

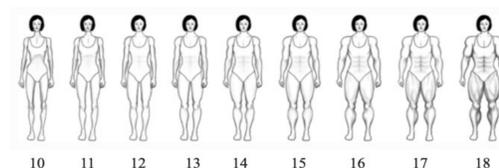
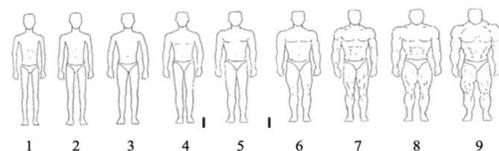


Figure 1. Figure Rating Scale by Stunkard et al. (1983)

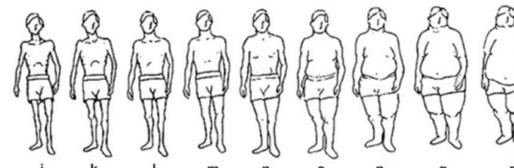
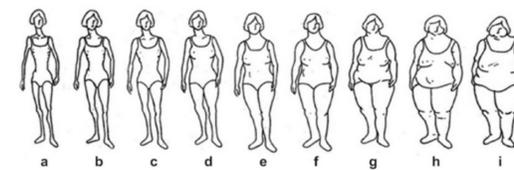


Figure 2. Male Muscle Mass Rating Scale and Female Muscle Mass Rating Scale by Ralph Neumann and Filik (2020)

RESULTS

Confirmed Hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 1** - The smaller participants' assessment of what figure others find attractive is the smaller their own selected ideal body image was for body figure rating and muscle mass.
- **Hypothesis 2** - Males only for muscle mass participants' assessment of others' ideal muscle mass image correlates positively with participants' own ideal muscle mass image. For females, the results confirm that participants' evaluation of others' ideal body image according to their sexual interest correlates positively with females' own ideal body image.
- **Hypothesis 4** - Females' assessment of what figure others find attractive on average is more petite than participants' assessment according to their sexual interest of the other genders' ideal body image for body figure rating and muscle mass.
- **Hypothesis 5** - Females considering body figure and muscle mass selected a bigger figure to look most like themselves than for what they believe others, or the opposite gender finds most attractive.
- **Hypothesis 6** - Selected typical male body chosen by participants according to their sexual interest correlates positively with the figure primarily selected by males when choosing their self-assessed actual body for body figure and muscle mass. For females, this hypothesis was not confirmed.
- **Hypothesis 7** - Females and males (only for body figure) chose a similar figure that looks most like themselves to the most attractive figure selected by participants according to their sexual interest.
- **Hypothesis 12** - Participants who find having an ideal body significant also find it essential that their romantic or sexual partner has an ideal body.

DISCUSSION

- Study shows how influential others' opinions are on body image ideals.
- Male and female participants' ideals are more similar than they think to be true.
- **Essential to educate adolescents and young adults about these findings and continue further research to better our understanding of body image ideals, body dissatisfaction, and overall, the development of eating disorders.**
- Pressure for an ideal body is especially relevant for women, shown by how vital an ideal body is to females and how critical they are with their own bodies. Men often struggle with their body image and tend to be more concerned about muscularity.
- Differences need to be considered in the DSM-5 Diagnostic criteria for eating disorders
- Young adults need to be better educated about these ideas. In college, young adults engage in many sexual and romantic relationships, which is why it is so important to recognize these misconceptions and understand the expectations to instigate change toward becoming more accepting.
- **It is essential to generate an understanding of the implications the pressure towards a particular ideal can have.**