

## **How Males and Females Feel About Body Image**

**Hannah Briscoe and Cadey Kuehnel**

**Lindenwood University**

*We wanted to see if the participants have a low or high body image. The participants were asked questions determining how they feel about their body image and others around them. Our hypothesis is that the younger participants will have a lower body image than those older, males will have a higher body image than females and seniors will have a higher body image than freshmen. The subjects were from the Human Subjects Pool at Lindenwood University consisting of general psychology, Anthropology, and Sociology classes. Our findings were significant with our hypothesis.*

How do males and females differ with their attitudes on body image? That is what we are trying to figure out. Many studies have investigated this question. Most studies combined proved one thing in common; body image has been defined as being multidimensional, including components such as physiological, psychological and sociological (Cash, 1994; Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990; Parks & Read, 1997, cited in Hoyt, 2001). "In general, body image is one's body, particularly its size, shape, and aesthetics; it refers to individuals' evaluations and affective experiences regarding their physical attributes" (Cash, 1994; Cash, Ancis, & Strachan, 1997 as cited in Hoyt, 2001).

Hoyt (2001) wrote in an introduction about how relationship satisfaction and body image relate in male and female college students. The implications for studying attitudes about body image and how it reacts to relationships is enormous. It is human nature to base first impressions on physical appearance. The article goes on to tell how women are

more dissatisfied with their body images, while men are more dissatisfied with their relationships and sex lives. Hoyt (2001) created a 24-item questionnaire to assess participants' satisfactions with 15 specific body parts. The participants were asked to rate each item on a six-point scale (1-extremely satisfied to 6-extremely dissatisfied). The main point is to show that both men and women are dissatisfied consistently with the "ideal" body parts that are emphasized in society. What American society views as "ideal" is to be tall, skinny yet lean.

McCabe (2001) studied the influences on body image strategies to increase/decrease body size among adolescent boys and girls. There has been recognition of behavioral problems among males in ways of increasing muscle tone and weight gain. In the past, society has always been more concerned about females and their eating habits. McCabe (2001) had the participants complete the Body Image and Body Change Inventory (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 1999) and the Sociocultural Influences on Body Image and Body Change Questionnaire (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001). These tests assess the following: body image satisfaction, body image importance, body change strategies to decrease weight, body change strategies to increase weight, body change strategies to increase muscle tone, binge eating, food supplements, the influence of father, the influence of mother, best male friend, best female friend, and the media. This study supported her hypothesis and other studies regarding sociocultural influences.

Men and women have different strategies to achieve the "ideal" body image. Men try to increase weight and muscle tone whereas most women try to do the opposite. It seems from the findings in this study that girls are more at risk to be influenced by sociocultural influences than boys are. Girls are more influenced by media, parents and

peers than are boys. Another interesting finding from this study is both boys' and girls' dissatisfaction with their body, and the use of supplements and/or strategies, increase with age.

Turner (1997) did a study involving 49 undergraduate women on body image. The women were divided into two groups: one half to a fashion magazine group and the other half to a news magazine group. Fashion magazines included Vogue, Allure, Elle and Bazaar; the news magazines included Time, Newsweek, Business Week and U.S. News and World Report. After looking at these magazines while sitting in a waiting room (the kind of magazines left in the room depended on what group the female was in) the girls were given a questionnaire to fill out. The findings were consistent with the hypothesis: body image satisfaction is influenced by exposure to the "ideal" body presented in the media. Those girls who read the fashion magazine desired to weigh less and held more negative beliefs about themselves than those who read the news magazines. The women in the study did not differ significantly in height or weight. Women became much more conscious about their own body; their self-esteem, self-perception and their own identity development were affected negatively after viewing fashion magazines. It could be conclude that anything that portrays the "ideal" body image will have the same negative affect.

The goal is to find out how the undergraduates at Lindenwood University feel about their own body image and those around them. The reason we choose this topic is because we are personally curious because both of us are highly concerned about our own body image. In this experiment, we are trying to see the differences between men and women's body image, and if they are concerned with others' body images. We believe

that people who are concerned work on their own body will also be concerned and focus on others' appearances than those dissatisfied.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were recruited from the Human Subject Pool (HSP) at Lindenwood University. The HSP consists of all students enrolled in Introduction Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology. A sign up sheet was put up on the HSP bulletin board so the participants could sign up for a time that works best for them. They had an incentive of extra credit points toward their respective introduction class. There were 30 participants for this experiment 15 females and 15 males.

### *Materials*

Our experiment requires an informed consent form, and a questionnaire (see Appendix A) that includes questions about how an individual feels about their body. A desk is needed in a room in the psychology lab at Lindenwood University. A pen or pencil was required to write with. An informed consent form was given prior to the questionnaire and the feedback letter was also provided after the questionnaire was completed, along with the extra credit slips provided by the Human Subject Pool.

### *Procedure*

Our data was taken from the subjects that signed up through the Human Subject Pool. The subjects made an appointment on the sign up sheet that we created and the subjects then proceeded at their designated time to the experimentation room.

Once the participant arrived s/he received an informed consent form and was asked to read and sign it. The experimenters then asked the participant to fill out the

questionnaire as honestly as s/he could. All of the data were kept anonymous. After the questionnaire is completed they are given a feedback letter and asked if there were any questions about the experiment. The experimenters gave the participant an extra credit receipt and then will dismiss the participant.

### Results

A total of 30 participants completed this questionnaire; 15 males and 15 females participated. The participants were divided into five groups based on their perception of their body. Those with a total points of 0-20 were classified as extremely low, 21-40 low, 41-60 moderate, 61-80 high, and 81-100 extremely high.

Overall there were 13 males with a score of high and two males with extremely high ratings of body image. Four females had scored in the moderate range, ten scored high, and one with the rating of extreme.

We found that there was a moderate positive, yet significant correlation,  $r = .242$ , between ages and total body image scores. The mean age was 20.23. We did an independent one-tailed t-test for gender and the total body image score was our dependent variable and gender was the independent variable. We found a significant sex difference,  $t(28) = 2.177, p=.038$ . We found a mild, significant correlation between year of school and total body image score,  $r = .194$ . The mean year in school was 1.67, which would make it mostly freshmen.

## Discussion

The results of the experiment show our hypotheses are correct with males' and females' attitudes on body image and age also plays a role in the differing attitudes. Consistent with our hypothesis that males will have a higher body image than females, it was found that female's attitudes on body image is, indeed, lower than males. The results also supported our hypothesis that the younger participants will have a lower body image than those older and our hypothesis that seniors will have a higher body image than freshmen was still significant but not as strongly correlated as the age difference. One reason for that may be because age is sensitive and it is possible that a freshman may be 25 years of age.

The limitations for this experiment were few but we felt the results were still accurate. First, we did not have very many females that signed up for our experiment. With 15 subjects there was not a strong correlation where as if it was 25 to 30 females. Also our experiments were ran in the psychology lab using the HSP subjects, so maybe if it was handed out in a classroom setting we would of had more subjects.

For future experiments it would be interesting to explore this same topic but with a broader group of people and ages. Some of the participants did not understand a few of the questions and if we were to do it again we would go back and re-look the questions that we choose. We would also like to use a more standard test that enables better scores.

### References

- Hoyt, W. D. (2001). Satisfaction with body image and peer relationships for males and females in a college environment. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 1-3.
- McCabe, M. P. (2001). Parent, peer and media influences on body image and strategies to both increase and decrease body size among adolescent boys and girls. *Adolescence*, 1-7.
- Turner, S. L. (1997). The influence of fashion magazines on the body image satisfaction of college women: an exploratory analysis. *Adolescence*, 1-6.

## Appendix A

### Questionnaire

#### DIRECTIONS

Fill out this questionnaire as honestly as you can, it will remain anonymous so no one will be aware of whom filled this out. On the questionnaire section, the rating scale goes from 1-5. 1 being never, 3 being your neutral, and 5 being always, 2 and 4 are in between, just circle which one you feel best fits how you think.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS:

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your gender? M / F

What year are you? \_\_\_\_\_

#### QUESTIONNAIRE:

**1-never, 3-neutral, 5-always, 2 and 4 in between thoughts.**

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| 1. I am comfortable with my body.   | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 2. I am aware of my surroundings while shopping.                          | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 3. I am happy with my weight.   | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 4. I take chemical measures to control my weight.                         | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 5. I exercise as a way to control my weight.                              | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 6. I think about what I am going to eat.                                  | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 7. I worry about my weight daily.   | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 8. The sizes of clothes I wear make a difference to me.                   | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 9. I feel self-conscious with my body.                                    | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 10. I worry about becoming overweight.                                    | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 11. I think that if I am overweight people will be prejudiced against me. | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 12. I think that thinness equate with success.                            | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 13. Either one or both of my parents was concerned with my weight.        | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 14. I work out to control my weight.                                      | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 15. I skip meals if I feel like I already ate too much.                   | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 16. My initial impression is based on looks.                              | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 17. I feel most people I encounter look better than me.                   | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 18. I compare myself to others of the same sex.                           | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 19. I try to make myself look like others.                                | 1---2---3---4---5 |
| 20. I try to please others with my looks.                                 | 1---2---3---4---5 |