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Students' Perceptions of Body Image

Noor Fons¹

A primary problem with the current criminal justice system in the United States is that it almost solely relies on a jury to determine whether a defendant is guilty or not guilty of committing a crime. While this system has been in place for many years, it is flawed because it ignores the fact that people tend to make judgments based on extralegal factors, or variables that are not related to a case, which may lead them to have implicit biases toward or against an alleged offender. Previous findings indicate that extralegal factors that impact juries include gender, race and ethnicity, facial maturity, dress, perceived socioeconomic status, attractiveness, emotional engagement, and jurors' views of their own attractiveness. The present study evaluates whether the presence of visual information (i.e. what a juror can visually observe about a defendant) affects the verdict of a trial. Participants were divided into three groups who heard a fictional crime scenario about an armed robbery incident. Along with the scenario, participants in the first group saw a picture of an attractive offender, participants in the second group saw a picture of an unattractive offender, and participants in the third group did not see a picture of an offender at all. It was hypothesized that participants who saw the attractive offender would find him guilty less often and recommend less harsh sentences when convicted, but the findings were not significant for either of these hypotheses.

Body image is a concept that in Western societies, is influenced by the pressure of having an ideal body (Toselli & Spiga, 2017). Women with very thin figures and men with muscular bodies represent that ideal in Western societies. Throughout the years, media has been representing the ideal body for both men and women. A very recent study conducted by Dutta et al. (2018) looked at the social media platform called "Instagram," and the relationships between body image and posting selfies, testing university students. They found that posting more selfies is related to having a positive body image. Having a positive body image leads to many positive

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results such as having self-acceptance, self-determination, and efficacy. When specifically looking at the student population, females tend to have a negative body image more frequently than males (Toselli & Spiga, 2017). There are gender differences in how male and female individuals perceive their own body. For example, women perceive themselves as being overweight more often than men, whereas men can be more concerned about being underweight. For a long time, men in general, frequently had a more positive body image than women. However, more males are now experiencing body dissatisfaction as well (Toselli & Spiga, 2017).

Yoshie, Kato, Sadamatsu, and Watanabe (2017), defined body image as “an individual’s perception of his or her own body,” (p. 943). This study examined the relationship between depression, eating attitudes, and body-checking behavior among female university students in Japan. The researchers found that body-checking, depression, and obsessive behavior were positively correlated with eating disorders. It was also mentioned that body dissatisfaction has an association to a higher risk of a distorted body image (Yoshie et al., 2017). Additionally, individuals who developed healthier eating attitudes tended to have a higher body satisfaction. One of the limitations in Yoshie et al.’s (2017) study was their exclusive focus on female students.

Adolescents and teenagers (e.g. ages 11-24) are in a life phase that is more at risk and vulnerable to body dissatisfaction (Chaudhari, Kumar, Saldanha, Tewari, & Vanka, 2017). Factors such as, gender, age, Body Mass Index (BMI), and culture are considered to have a big impact on an individual’s body image. Chaudhari et al. (2017) measured the concerns that individuals have about their weight, body appearance, shape, and body dissatisfaction through a 16-item questionnaire. The questions focused on the individual’s opinion to his/her own body. The results showed that, 34.2% of the male and 66.7% of the female participants had no concern

about their body shape. Furthermore, a total of 53.9% of the participants reported having a positive body image, and 46.7% said they had mild, moderate, or marked concerns about their body image. In other words, a majority of the participants had a positive body image (Chaudhari et al., 2017).

Reeves, Boyd, Roul, McGowan, and Cameron (2017) conducted a study to find out how individuals who participate in the sport of rock climbing experience body image. It is known that athletes in general are at a higher risk to be dissatisfied with their bodies (Reeves et al., 2017). This risk is due to the pressure and emphasis that is put on athletes, their performance, and the expected body shape visualized by trainers, coaches, and teammates. Reeves et al. (2017), found that among many things, athletes' body image is influenced by the presentation of the other successful athletes on social media and magazines. Additionally, the study concluded that, female athletes participating in rock climbing experience more body dissatisfaction than the male athletes who participate in the same sport.

Similar to the study conducted by Chaudhari et al. (2017), I will create a survey/questionnaire that will focus on student's opinion about their own body. I would like to include both female and male students. The majority of my participants will be in the phase of life development called emerging adulthood. The purpose of this study will be to see if students generally have a negative or positive body image. I also hope to see if there is a difference between male and female students, and between student-athletes and non-student-athletes. Based on previous research, I hypothesize that the majority of students have a positive body image, and that the majority of female students have a negative body image compared to male students. Focusing on the student-athlete population, I hypothesize that male student athletes are more satisfied with their body than female student athletes.

Method

Participants

A total of 78 college students participated in my study. I recruited a small amount of the participants from the Psi Chi website and the vast majority from the Lindenwood Participation Pool (LPP). The participants who were recruited through the LPP received one extra credit point towards participating classes, which include GE- and introductory level courses in sociology, anthropology, psychology, criminal justice, exercise science, and athletic training. The participants who took part in the study through the Psi Chi website, received no compensation. Out of the 78 individuals who took part in the study, 12 were male participants and 64 were female participants. The participants reported the following ages, 11 were 18 years old, 21 were 19 years old, 11 were 20 years old, 13 were 21 years old, 12 were 22 years old, and 10 participants selected the option "other." There was a large variety in what the participants reported to be their class status in college. A total of 23 of those who participated reported their class rank as freshman, 17 said sophomore, 19 said junior, 17 said senior, and 2 said other. When the participants were asked if they were a student athlete or not, 28 were athletes, and 50 were not athletes.

Materials and Procedure

I constructed the online survey using Qualtrics, before it was posted on the Psi Chi website and Sona Systems. The informed consent statement was the first to appear on the survey, followed by the demographic questionnaire. The demographic survey asked the participants about their gender, age, class status in college, and if they were a student-athlete or not. After the demographic questions, the body image survey, consisting of 16 items, was presented to the participants. Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction on the 16 parts of their own body. The ratings/possible answers were, "not at all satisfied," "not quite satisfied,"

“somewhat satisfied,” or “satisfied. At the end of the survey, participants received the feedback statement (see Appendix A, to see a copy of my survey). The computer program Excel was used to summarize and analyze the final results of the study.

The first step in this study was creating the demographic survey, along with the feedback letter, informed consent statement, and the body image survey on Qualtrics. The questions asked in the demographic survey were mainly created in relation to the purpose and hypothesis of this study. The body image survey questions were partly based off a previously conducted study by Chaudhari et al. (2017), where the researchers used a 16-item questionnaire to measure the concerns about body shape and dissatisfaction. A link was provided on the Psi Chi website and Sona Systems through which participants could take the survey on Qualtrics (URL).

To make sure only students would participate, the recruitment description on Psi Chi explained that the study focused on students (see Appendix B). Only students can be part of the LPP, which automatically excluded non-students from taking the study through Qualtrics. There was no time limit to complete the survey. After the participants completed the survey the feedback letter popped up on their screen. When 78 participants successfully completed the survey, I transferred the demographic and body image survey results into a table in Microsoft Excel that I used to see if students generally had a negative or positive body image. I used Excel to analyze my findings to test my hypotheses.

Results

After gathering all the data, I scored all the participant's responses by adding up the number of point they received for each item on the questionnaire (e.g. dissatisfied = 1, not quite satisfied = 2, somewhat satisfied = 3, satisfied = 4). As following, I did a frequency count on how many students had a final score equal or above 40, and how many had a score below 40 to examine if students generally have a positive or negative body image. The number 40 was

chosen because it represents exact middle score out of all the possible scores a participant could have. The frequency count indicated that 2 students had a negative body image, and 76 students had a positive body image. This result supports my research hypothesis that the majority of students have a positive body image.

I also hypothesized that the majority of female students would have a negative body image compared to the male students. Originally, I wanted to conduct an independent *t*-test, however, due to unequal sample sizes (12 men, 64 women), I decided to use a descriptive analysis. I did another frequency count which showed that 100% of the male students had a positive body image, and 96.875% of the female students had a positive body image. The findings do not support my hypothesis.

Lastly, I conducted an independent *t*-test to find out if there is a difference between male student-athletes' and female student-athletes' body image scores. An independent *t*-test revealed no significant difference between male student-athletes' body image scores ($M = 52.57$, $SD = 8.08$) and female student-athletes' body image scores ($M = 53.62$, $SD = 6.92$); $t(7, 21) = 0$, $p = 0.37$ (one-tailed), $d = 0$. These results do not support my hypothesis that a larger number of male student-athletes would have a positive body compared to female student-athletes.

Discussion

After conducting the frequency analysis that looked at students' body image perception, I found that the majority of students had a positive body image, which supported my hypothesis. Even though college students are in a life phase where they are more at risk and vulnerable to body dissatisfaction is experienced (Chaudhari, et al., 2017), there was only a very small amount of students who had a negative body image. Previous research done by Dutta et al. (2018) showed that posting more selfies is related to having a positive body image. This

finding could explain my results since that posting selfies is a common aspect of many college student's daily life which is related to a positive body image. Another explanation for such an extremely small amount of students with a negative body image score could be that, students who have a negative body image did not want to sign up for this particular study. A negative body image can make an individual insecure and therefore not preferring to participate in my research. A third explanation could be that due to the answer options lacking an option that indicated a neutral body image, led to participants answering towards a positive body image more often.

The finding that none of the male participants, and only a roughly 3% of the female participants reported a negative body image was not expected. This finding is very low in reliability since there were only 12 male participants who were being compared to 64 female participants, which could explain why there were no male participants whose results reported a negative body image. The research done by Toselli and Spiga (2017) explained that there are gender differences in "how" male and female individuals perceive their own body. When I specifically analyzed the scores below 3 (e.g. below "somewhat satisfied"), I found that except for the body part waist, both male and female participants scored below three on the exact same body parts (see Table 1). This shows that both male and female college students have a lower body satisfaction related to the body parts legs, hips, stomach, arms, and additionally for women, waist.

The third analysis showed that there was no significant difference between female student-athletes', and male student-athletes' body image, which is inconsistent with previous findings that showed results of female athletes experiencing more body dissatisfaction than male athletes (Reeves et al., 2017). When conducting the independent *t*-test, the male student-athletes' scores were more varied (65.29), and the female student-athletes' scores were more

clustered (47.95). This could also be due to the number of male student-athletes participants being 7, while there were 21 female student-athletes who participated.

One limitation to this study was the limited number of male participants. It was difficult to make a comparison between male and female participants since only 15% of the total participants were male. Another limitation was that the questions were modified so that they would not be too personal. Keeping the questions very neutral limited the data since I did not ask more specifically about participants' opinion about their own bodies. For example, I could not ask "mention one body part of yourself that you are not satisfied with and why."

Future modifications that could improve this study would be to give participants a fifth, neutral option to rate their body satisfaction. The current rating scale has four options that include dissatisfied, not quite satisfied, somewhat satisfied, and satisfied. I would create a fifth option called "neutral", and place it between not quite satisfied and somewhat satisfied. This could provide more accurate and reliable results. Also, changing the study's name might have a positive effect. The title of the study makes it very clear that the research focuses on body image. Not all student are attracted to participate in a study focusing on something that they might not be willing to share anything about. If the study would have a more neutral name such as "Body perceptions", some students who have a negative body image may be willing to participate.

The next step after this research is to study what students currently see as the idealistic body image. Over time the ideal body has changed (Toselli & Spiga, 2017). How has this influenced our student generation and how they perceive their own bodies? As a society we expect young people to be insecure about their appearance, yet is this really an accurate statement, or are we basing this on assumptions and inaccurate beliefs about how adolescents see themselves? I believe it is important to find suggestions and answers to these questions.

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Table 1		
Average Body Image Scores		
Scores < 3 were reported		
Body part	Average score men	Average score women
Legs	2.92308	2.922
Waist	2.71795	2.688
Hips	> 3	2.906
Stomach	2.4487	2.3906
Arms	2.89744	2.891

Appendix A

Informed Consent/Demographic Survey/Body Image Survey/Feedback Letter

Q35 Survey Research Information Sheet

You are being asked to participate in a survey conducted by Noor Fons and faculty supervisor Michiko Nohara-LeClair at Lindenwood University. I am doing this study to measure if students generally have a negative or positive body image. I also hope to see if there is a difference between male and female students, and between student-athletes and non-student-athletes. Participants will complete a short survey, focusing on their own body image. It will take about 7 minutes to complete this survey.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time by simply not completing the survey or closing the browser window.

There are no risks from participating in this project. We will not collect any information that may identify you. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.

If you are in the LPP you will receive one extra credit point in the course for which you signed up for the LPP. You will receive extra credit simply for completing this information sheet. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. Participants who are not part of the LPP will receive no compensation beyond the possible benefits listed above. However, your participation is an opportunity to contribute to psychological science.

WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

Noor Fons: noorfons@upcmail.nl

Michiko Nohara-LeClair: mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Michael Leary (Director – Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu.

By clicking the link below, I confirm that I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be required to do, and the risks involved. I understand that I can discontinue participation at any time by simply not completing the survey. My consent also indicates that I am at least 18 years of age, or that I have parental consent on file with the Lindenwood Participant Pool.

You can withdraw from this study at any time by simply closing the browser window.

Please feel free to print a copy of this information sheet.

- Agree (1)
- Disagree (2)

End of Block: consent

Start of Block: Block 4

Q37 How would you identify yourself?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3)

Q41 What is your age?

- 18 (1)
- 19 (2)
- 20 (3)
- 21 (4)
- 22 (5)
- Other (6) _____

Q38 Which of the following best describes you?

- Freshman (1)
- Sophomore (2)
- Junior (3)
- Senior (4)
- Other (5)

Q39 Are you a Student-Athlete?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

End of Block: Block 4

Start of Block: Rate your satisfaction of the following parts of your own body

Q1 Rate your satisfaction with the following parts of your own body.
(Click on the arrow after each question)

Q40 Feet

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q2 Legs

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q3 Hips

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q4 Waist

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q5 Stomach

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q6 Chest

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q7 Shoulders

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q8 Arms

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q9 Neck

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q10 Lips

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q11 Nose

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q12 Eyes

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q13 Ears

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q14 Head

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q15 Hair

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

Q16 Hands

- Not at all satisfied (1)
- Not quite satisfied (2)
- Somewhat satisfied (3)
- Satisfied (4)

End of Block: Rate your satisfaction of the following parts of your own body

Start of Block: feedback

Q36 Feedback Letter

Thank you for participating in my study. The present study was conducted in order to determine whether students generally have a negative or positive body image. I also hope to see if there is a difference between male and female students, and between student-athletes and non-student-athletes. Based on previous research, I hypothesize that the majority of students have a positive body image and that male student athletes are more satisfied with their body than female student athletes.

Please note that I am not interested in your individual results; rather, I am only interested in the overall findings based on aggregate data. No identifying information about you will be associated with any of the findings, nor will it be possible for me to trace your responses on an individual basis.

If you are interested in obtaining the final results of this study based on aggregate data, or if you have any questions or concerns regarding any portion of this study, please do not hesitate to let me know now or in the future. My contact information is found at the bottom of this letter.

Thank you again for your valuable contribution to this study.

Sincerely,

Principal Investigator:
Noor Fons (noorfons@upcmail.nl)

Supervisor:
Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair 636-949-4371 (mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu)

IRB Director:
Michael Leary 636-949-4730 Mleary@lindenwood.edu

Appendix B

Recruitment Description

This study focuses on the body image of students. You will be asked to complete a short survey about body image. The entire procedure should take no more than 15 minutes of your time.