



## Impact of social media on body image of sports persons

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### Abstract

This study was undertaken to check the influence of social media on body image of sportspersons. 120 sportspersons of various colleges of Jiwaji University, Gwalior age 18-25 voluntarily participated in the study. The control subjects 60 (30 males and 30 females) participated by filling out the Body Shape questionnaire (BSQ). The experimental subjects 60 (30 males and 30 females) viewed 120-second power point presentation showing ideal media images and clippings of men and women followed by completion of the BSQ. The BSQ consisted of thirty four questions, rated on a Likert type scale that inquires about the subject's feelings regarding their physical appearance at a particular moment in time. Data analysis using independent sample tests was used in this study. Analysis suggested that sportspersons who viewed the media images felt less physically attractive and felt bad about their looks than the sportspersons who were not exposed to the media presentation.

**Keywords:** social media, sportspersons

### Introduction

#### Body Image

Body image refers to a person's feelings of the aesthetics and sexual attractiveness of their own body. The phrase body image was first coined by the Austrian neurologist and psychoanalyst Paul Schilder in his book 'The Image and Appearance of the Human Body' (1935). Cash & Pruzinsky (1990) [17, 20] defined body image as a person's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about their body overall, including appearance, age, race, functions, and sexuality. They discussed body image as being multidimensional, consisting of a cognitive and an emotional dimension. Cognitive body image includes beliefs and self-statements about the body. Emotional body image is comprised of experiences of appearance, whether the experiences are comfortable or uncomfortable and if there is satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the body. Body image is a subjective experience; it depends on how the individual interprets himself or herself. How a person perceives their body is how they perceive themselves.

Body image is not static; it can change over time or in a few moments. Cash and Pruzinsky (1990) [17, 20] found that watching television could change a person's body image by influencing them to think about their weight, attractiveness, or appearance. Body image is static in the sense that it changes over the life span. Grogan (1999) [21] concluded from several studies that body image is influenced by many factors (family, friends, teacher, peer and society) and as a person gets older the influences on body image change and may become stronger or weaker, thus creating flux in body image over the life-span. Person with a negative body image experience negative feelings about the mselves. Cash, Ancis, and Strachan (1997) [12] when a negative body image gets severe, it may contribute to several disorders, including body

dysmorphic disorder, anorexia nervosa, and bulimia nervosa. A negative body image could also lead to anxiety, depression, lowered self-esteem, sexual dissatisfaction and dysfunction.

Cash (1999) [10] concluded that investment in physical appearance comes at a high price - undermined self-worth as the body fails to meet societal standards.

Body image is learned and influenced by self-esteem. Light stone (2001) [27] stated that body image is psychological in nature, and is more about a person's self-esteem and less about their actual physical attractiveness as judged by others. Light stone (2001) [27] reported that body image is learned by what occurs in families and among peers and that the biggest influence on body image is the culture a person comes from. Cash (1999) [10] concurred with the idea that family, peers and society influence body image. Cash, Anis & Strachan (1997) [12] supported the finding that body image is related to self-esteem, however, they concluded that a negative body image leads to diminished self-esteem. Cash, Anis & Strachan (1997) [12] stated that a person's early socialization about physical appearance and their experience of their body during childhood and adolescence influences how they will view their body as they get older.

Although, even though women are suffering more from the pressure to look good, that does not mean men do not feel the pressure too. Although 10% of patients seeking treatment for eating disorders are male. 24 % of adult men are trying to lose weight and 41% of men are dissatisfied with their weight. A study conducted by nemeroff, stein Diehl and smolak suggested that men might be receiving more messages from media outlets encouraging dieting, developing muscle tone and plastic surgery.

There are differing messages for men and women as to what their bodies should look like based on our misconstrued ideas about what it means to be a "real" man or woman. If we took

all of that away and spread the message of body positively and body acceptance for men and women of all shapes and sizes, then we would not even have body image issues as a culture to begin with. We would be too busy loving ourselves and appreciating the body that in the human form of those of all shapes and sizes.

Jessica Lovejoy (2014). “What ever your gender we are not safe from low self esteem and poor body image caused by much of our society and our media”

Body image issues are prevalent with in our perfection focused society. We are told to confirm to impossible beauty standards, to fit a certain body shape and that if we don't look a certain way, we are not beautiful. We have diets fads and crazes thrust upon us to try and encourage us to get that “perfect” figure that everybody seems to want and we are picked apart by the media and told to rebuild ourselves in their perfect ideal. But women are not only ones to suffer.

Men are also given the ‘perfection’ blueprint. They should be strong, muscular show no emotion. They are told constantly to “man up” and to “Be a man”. You will, however, see taut, toned, oiled and well-endowed men gracing the glossy pages of almost every magazine your reach for, every chain clothing store and everywhere else. It is an unrealistic expectation for men. And lot women, love the way these male models look, so that add fuel to the fire in male mind. Like women they feel they have to fit this extreme standard in order to be found attractive by the opposite sex.

So undue pressure is put on men by women, their friends other men and their parents, especially their fathers. “Be a man” is something that is easily sad, but carries a lot of weight. Slamming a man with this phrase is telling him that he has to bury his emotions and his feelings to take life to a chin and to never show weakness. If he cries, he is weak, if he is kind, he's a wimp. This simple phrase has the ability to be crippling. Now days, hitting the gym are in. Bulking and gaining is next big thing. Being big and muscular is where it's at. The truth is women are not the only who can suffer from poor self – image and to assume that man do not is absurd.

We have to realize that until we accept that these messages around body image that men and women are receiving are not okay and not productive and the only way that we well stop seeing a culture of self hate is through learning how to love ourselves and our bodies for what they are; beautiful Patricia van den Berg *et al.* (2007) examined the role of media body comparison as a mediator of the relationships between psychological factors and socio-cultural pressures to be thin and body dissatisfaction in both females and males. Body dissatisfaction was more common and felt more strongly in women, yet men were also clearly affected by body dissatisfaction. Brennan. M, *et al.* (2010) several gender differences were found; body dissatisfaction was more common and felt more strongly in women, yet men were also clearly affected by body dissatisfaction.

Athletes heavily focus on their bodies and the food which they eat. In order, to perform to their best, they need to be mentally and physically fit. Gaining or loosing excess weight can seriously jeopardize athletes' performances and chances of winning. Thus, most athletes religiously strive to maintain and regulate their weight. Commonly, athletes embrace unhealthy weight loss methods to realize this weight regulation.

McDonald and Thompson (1992) <sup>[28]</sup> assessed samples of physically active males (n = 700) and females (n = 91) for eating disturbance, body dissatisfaction, self-esteem, and reasons for engaging in exercise. The results indicated that women's motivation for exercise was more often related to weight and tone reasons than men. In addition, for both genders, exercising for weight, tone, and attractiveness reasons was highly correlated with other measures of disturbance. However, exercising because of health was positively associated with self-esteem for both sexes. For men only, exercising for fitness was related to lower levels of eating disturbance and higher self-esteem. Overall activity level was related to greater eating disturbance for women, but less body dissatisfaction for men.

Pas man and Thompson (1988) <sup>[31]</sup> evaluated body image and eating disturbance in obligatory runners, obligatory weightlifters, and sedentary controls. 30 subjects comprised each group, evenly proportioned by gender. The results indicated that weightlifters were significantly more accurate in estimating body size than runners and controls, although the latter two groups did not differ from one another. All subjects overestimated waist and hips to a greater degree than thighs; this finding was also true for their estimates of the size of a department store mannequin. Females were more dissatisfied with their body than males, with the exception that male and female weightlifters were equivalent on body dissatisfaction indices. Runners and weightlifters had greater eating disturbance than controls; females evidenced greater eating psychopathology than males. These findings indicate that type of physical activity or sport may be related to size estimation accuracy and body satisfaction.

Heffner *et al.* (2003) <sup>[23]</sup> revealed that a large percentage of coaches were involved in weight management of athletes. 44% of coaches reported weighing athletes, another 44% assessed body fat compositions of athletes, 30% coaches asked athlete to loose weight by restricting their diet and another 29% asked them to do so bypractice and extra workouts. Thompson and Sherman (1999) have stated that a society's; beliefs regarding how athletes should look also contribute in helping an athlete to set far him/herself “unrealistic and unhealthy shape and size expectations”. We as part of the larger society have developed certain stereotypical beliefs (e.g.) figure skaters and gymnasts should be ‘delicate and tiny’ runners and swimmers ‘lean’ and footballers ‘heavy and big’.

### **The Media and body image**

For years, the media has been influencing society in many ways. The media decides what the public sees and how it is portrayed. Women are predominately portrayed in the media as thin, waif-like women, without imperfections You will, however, see taut, toned, oiled and well endowed men gracing the glossy pages of almost every magazine your reach for, every chain clothing store and everywhere else.. They shows the thin women and muscular males as happy and successful. Some people are affected negatively by constantly being bombarded with this ideal images. Plastic surgery, drastic dieting, low self-esteem, negative body image and disordered eating are all part of what may happen who are constantly in contact with the these ideal images.

The thin ideal is widespread. It seems that thin women are everywhere in society from TV to magazines to billboards. However, those thin women are not our next-door neighbors, they are not our friends and family, they are images of women that most of society cannot attain. They are the models who have stylists do their make-up and their hair, they are airbrushed to rid themselves of imperfections, they are posed to look sexy; they are the images of the media. Most women cannot live up to these images because not everyone has make-up artists and stylists living with them, they cannot always hide their imperfections, and they do not normally pose themselves in the ways that the media poses their models.

The media portrays women and men in an unrealistic manner. According to Paff and Buckley-Lakner (1997)<sup>[30]</sup>, advertising has historically included stereotypical and unrealistic images of women and men. These ideals encourage women and men to focus on appearance and body shape. The cultural message that was found to be suggested in some magazines was that women and men should spend time and engage in behaviors that will make them more physically attractive.

The media constructs reality for its audience. Media presents ideologies and value messages. The media makes it socially acceptable to have a negative opinion about heavier people. According to Pollack-Seid (1989)<sup>[32]</sup> the popular media does not show heavy people leading normal, multifaceted, social lives. They are often seen as objects not fit for love, let alone sexual desire. To be thin and toned is to be loved, and to be heavy is to be unlovable. Cash & Pruzinsky (1990)<sup>[17, 20]</sup> found that slim women and muscular men are seen as glamorous people leading glamorous lives and heavy people are seen as lazy, unhappy people not worthy or able to lead a glamorous lifestyle. Pollack - Seid (1989)<sup>[32]</sup> also stated that most women think that they are never thin enough or taught enough to believe that they are not fat. They can never diet or exercise enough to feel good about themselves. This “new religion” to attain the ideal body is painful and a long road to travel.

According to a study done by Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, and Kelly (1986)<sup>[37]</sup> (cited in Unger and Crawford, 1996)<sup>[39, 45]</sup> women are exposed to more media messages about their bodies than are men. They found that in forty-eight issues of magazines there were sixty-three ads for diet foods in women’s magazines and only one in men’s magazines. They also found that women’s magazines had many more ads for sweets and snack foods. They concluded from their study that women receive more messages about food and how they should stay thin while at the same time thinking about food. Our society values beauty, and the thin ideal that the media shows us is what is considered to be beautiful, to be the ideal that every woman should strive for if she want to be happy.

Society defines what is desirable and what society desires is the thin waif-like figure portrayed on television, magazines, and books and on billboards. The media affects women in many different ways. In a body image and media study by Heinberg and Thompson (1995)<sup>[24]</sup>, it was concluded that media-presented images of the thin ideal, muscular bodies and attractiveness might negatively affect a person’s mood and body satisfaction. Furthermore, Garner (cited in Stice &

Shaw, 1994)<sup>[42]</sup> found that as the number of magazine articles on weight loss diets and exercise increased, the occurrence of eating disorders also increased. Grogan (1999)<sup>[21]</sup> agreed that youth masses are encouraged to undergo pain to change their bodies. Stice and Shaw (1994)<sup>[42]</sup> found that exposure to the ideal media images resulted in subjects feeling unhappy, shameful, guilty, depressed, and stressed, which in turn decreased their confidence. They also stated that the ideal body image portrayed in many popular magazines has negative effects on the affective state and body satisfaction of readers.

According to Alta be and Thompson (1996)<sup>[1]</sup>, Hein berg and Thompson (1995)<sup>[24]</sup>, and Fallon (1990)<sup>[20]</sup>, social endorsements found in the media portraying an ideal body have led to body image disturbance, as well as implicated the development of eating disorders.

Many popular magazines for females (and even male-oriented magazines) tell to focus on their physical, outside attributes (i.e. body shape, muscle tone, bone structure, hair, makeup, clothing, etc.) and rarely mention the importance of being smart, sophisticated, funny and/or possessing many other positive attributes that have nothing to do with physical attributes.

The purpose of this study was to determine if exposure to ideal media images of men and women negatively affects body image perception of sportspersons also. Stice and Shaw (1994)<sup>[42]</sup> stated that one of the strongest transmitters of the pressure to look like the ideal body may well be the mass media. It is hypothesized that the more images of the “thin ideal images for women and muscular body images for men” is exposed through the media, the more body image is affected negatively.

### Hypotheses

**Ho1:** There is no difference between the female sportspersons control and experimental group’s feelings regarding body image.

**Ho2:** There is no difference between the male sportspersons control and experimental group’s feelings regarding body image.

### Assumptions

The researcher assumes the following:

1. The media images used will be representative of the thin ideal for women and muscular ideal for men;
2. The subjects will answer the questionnaire honestly;
3. There are different levels of body image.

### Limitations

The findings of this study may be limited by the following:

1. All measures are self-report and pressure may have existed to respond in a certain way, thus, answering dishonestly;
2. The subjects may not be representative of the population as a whole;
3. The media images used may not be representative of the ideal media images;
4. We are exposed to the ideal media images everyday thus recapitulating that what they see throughout their lifetime.

**Methodology**

Subjects for this study were the sportspersons of various colleges of Jiwaji University, Gwalior age 18- 25 who participated in inter-college gymnastics, judo, swimming and athletic meet championships (2014-15). The subjects were randomly assigned to either the control group or the experimental group. The control subjects 60(30 males and 30 females) participated by filling out the Body Shape questionnaire (BSQ). The experimental subjects 60 (30 males and 30 females) viewed 120-second power point presentation showing ideal social media images and clippings of men and women followed by completion of the BSQ.

**Instrumentation**

Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) (Cooper, Taylor, Cooper & Fairburn 1987) The BSQ is a 34 item self-report questionnaire assessing dissatisfaction with weight or shape and preoccupation with weight and distress about body shape. Participants rate items on a scale from 1(never) to 6(always) and higher scores reflect greater dissatisfaction. This scale was developed on clinical populations including patients with anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa as well as women without an eating disorder from a community sample (cooper *et al.* 1987). The BSQ has been found to be a reliable and valid measure of body image as it has been shown to have good test retest reliability (.88), concurrent validity with other measures of body image, including the body dysmorphic disorder examination (Rosen, Reiter & orosan, 1995) and the multidimensional body self relations questionnaire (Brown, cash and mikulka, 1990) and criterion validity for clinical use. (Rosen, Jones, Ramirez & Waxman, 1996).

**Data Analysis**

The data for this study was analyzed using independent samples test. The t-tests were used to find out if there were any statistically significant differences between the control and the experimental groups BSQ scores as well as the total scores. A t-test was performed among males and female of both controls and experimental groups. The means and standard deviations were also determined.

**Ho1:** There is no difference between controlled and experimental female Group regarding their body image.

**Table 1:** t-test between controlled and experimental female Groups regarding body image perception.

| Group        | Sub | M     | SD   | df | t     |
|--------------|-----|-------|------|----|-------|
| Control      | 30  | 34.40 | .508 | 58 | 2.872 |
| Experimental | 30  | 36.00 | .567 |    |       |

\* Significant at .05

The t-test analysis found a significant difference between the control and experimental female sportspersons group regarding their body image perception. As a result the null hypothesis was rejected. The control group's average response to their feelings about their body image (M= 34.40) was that they felt about the same as they usually do. The experimental group felt just slightly worse (M= 36.00) than they usually do about their looks. Of the experimental group 26.2% of them

responded that they felt just slightly worse about their body image while 9.5% of the control group responded in the same manner.

**Ho2:** There is no difference between controlled and experimental male group regarding their body image.

**Table 2:** t-test between controlled and experimental male groups regarding body image perception.

| Group        | Sub | M     | SD    | df | t     |
|--------------|-----|-------|-------|----|-------|
| Control      | 32  | 36.00 | 1.016 | 58 | 3.577 |
| Experimental | 32  | 37.90 | 1.076 |    |       |

\* Significant at .05

A t-test was performed on the male control and experimental group's feelings about their body image perception. A significant difference between the two was found. The control group rated their feelings regarding their body as slightly/moderately attractive. The experimental group's average response was that they felt neither attractive nor unattractive. Fifteen out of the 30 experimental group subtexts felt that they were very, moderately or slightly unattractive (M=36.00). In the control group six out of 30 felt they were moderately or slightly unattractive (M=37.90). Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected.

**Summary**

Media images of the ideal body have been displayed to us for centuries. Although the ideal body shape and size have changed over the years, but men and women have always tried to attain that ideal for themselves. This paper examined previous research regarding the ever changing body ideal and how it has impacted over the years (Striegel-Moore, and Smolak, 2000 [43]; Altabe and Thompson, 1996 [1]; Heinberg and Thompson, 1995 [24]; Fallon, 1990 [20]; Stice and Shaw, 1994 [42]; and Anderson and DiDomenico, 1992) [3]. The concept of body image and how it can change over time was addressed (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990 [17, 20]; Banfield and McCabe, 2002 [6]; Grogan, 1999 [21]; Cash, Ancis, and Strachan, 1997 [12]; Lightstone, 2001) [27]. The media's way of portraying men and women to the public was discussed (Paff and Buckley- Lakner, 1997 [30]; Pollack-Seid, 1989 [32]; Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, and Kelly, 1986) [37]. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between body image and the social media's portrayal of women and men ideal image among sportspersons. Data analysis found that there were significant differences between the control and experimental group. The results suggest that individuals who viewed the media slides felt slightly unattractive at that particular time while the control group felt neither attractive nor unattractive. This particular study found a significant difference between the two groups pertaining to how physically attractive they felt.

**Recommendations**

This study found significant differences between the two groups in regards to how the media may affect body image perception among sportspersons. This shows that sports persons are also equally affected through social media ideal



images. Given the results of the study one suggestion could be to implement a body image and media course into the educational institutes to educate young men & women to be critical viewers of the media.

Teaching society to view the media more critically and informing society that the thin ideal is virtually unattainable for almost 95% of the population is the first step to help realize that the models are not real; they are airbrushed, trimmed to size by a computer, and posed to look the way that they do. Another suggestion could be to encourage self-esteem development to be incorporated into educational curriculums. Society should be informed about the way that overweight people are being discriminated against and begin to develop ways to rid society of unjust discrimination. Society will need to redefine what is desirable and what is beautiful before men and women can begin looking into a mirror and actually liking their reflection.

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