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## **Gender Differences in Body Image Perception Among College Sports Students**

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### **ABSTRACTS**

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Sports students are commonly associated with a healthy body condition and an ideal body shape. The purpose of this study is to examine the differences in body image perceptions between male and female students enrolled in sports studies programs. This study employs a quantitative methodology and a cross-sectional design. The chi-square test was used to analyze the data, with a p-value less than 0.05. Gender affects pupils' self-perceptions of their physical parts, as demonstrated in this study. The results indicate that all body indicators had significant p-values. In this study, most of the students feel satisfied with their body parts, although the number of female students who worried about their appearance was slightly higher compared to male students. Our findings suggest that sports students had a good body image.

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## 1. Introduction

Body image is a broad terminology that refers to an individual's perceptions, emotions, and feelings about his or her physical appearance<sup>1</sup>. A person's perception of body image can be positive or negative. Furthermore, it is generally influenced by the surrounding environment or racial and ethnic background<sup>2</sup>. Numerous characteristics have been shown to influence body image, including sex/gender, age, marital status, weight, height, ethnicity, and education<sup>3-5</sup>.

Individuals' negative perceptions have developed into a source of concern, particularly when experienced by children or teenagers<sup>6</sup>. Body image dissatisfaction (BID) refers to a person's negative perceptions of his or her own body<sup>7</sup>. Individuals with a negative body image will have a distorted perception of their physical appearance, causing them to feel ashamed of their own bodies<sup>8</sup>. A study in Indonesian college students revealed that the more negative the body image, the lower the level of self-acceptance<sup>9</sup>. The negative effect of body image can lead to dissatisfaction about body shape, eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression, and the use of unhealthy weight control behaviors<sup>10</sup>.

Students are a vulnerable group that frequently experiences a concern about their appearance in their social lives. The results of a study in 2021, involving 392 students in western Indonesia showed that 82.9% of students had a positive body image and 17.1% of students had a negative body image<sup>11</sup>. Negative self-acceptance of body condition and appearance can lead to low self-esteem, depression, and difficulties with interpersonal relationships<sup>12</sup>. Sports students are often associated with individuals who are healthy, fit and have an ideal body shape. Sports students have higher demands from their social environment to always look fit and have an ideal body shape. A good self-perception is needed for sports students so that they can remain confident in their social life, regardless of their physical appearance.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study uses a quantitative method with a cross-sectional approach. Respondent's inclusion criteria are students aged 18-23 years that are registered as students of the Department of Sports Education, Faculty of Sports and Health Education Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, and voluntarily participate in this study. This study involved 435 students who came from the sports education department.

The instrument used in this study was adopted from the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire-Appearance Scale (MBSRQ-AS). There are 34 question items based on the MBSRQ-AS, but in this study, we only examined aspects of self-perception of the body consisting of the face, hair, lower, middle, and upper body, muscle tone, weight, height, and overall appearance. Data on self-perceptions were compared based on student gender, namely male and female groups. Data analysis was performed using chi-square. The indicator is said to be significant if the p-value  $< \alpha$  ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

## 3. Results and Discussion

Respondents in this study were 435 students from the Faculty of Sports and Health Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. Students involved in this study are aged 18-21 years and are still actively enrolled as students from semesters 1 to 8 at the Faculty of Sports and Health Education. There are 267 male respondents and the remaining 168 female students. Self-perception of areas or aspects of the body was presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Self-Perception of Body Parts

No	Indicator	Male n (%) (n=267)	Female n (%) (n=168)	<i>p-value</i>
1	Face (facial features, complexion)			
	- Very dissatisfied	0	3 (1.8)	0.0001*
	- Dissatisfied	5 (1.9)	11 (6.5)	
	- Neutral	62 (23.2)	51 (30.4)	
	- Satisfied	101 (37.8)	67 (39.9)	
	- Very satisfied	99 (37.1)	36 (21.4)	
2	Hair (color, thickness, texture)			
	- Very dissatisfied	3 (1.1)	4 (2.4)	0.008*
	- Dissatisfied	10 (3.7)	5 (3)	
	- Neutral	54 (20.2)	58 (34.5)	
	- Satisfied	104 (39)	59 (35.1)	
	- Very satisfied	96 (36)	42 (25)	
5	Upper body (chest or breasts, shoulders, arms)			
	- Very dissatisfied	2 (0.7)	4 (2.4)	0.002*
	- Dissatisfied	12 (4.5)	13 (7.7)	
	- Neutral	60 (22.5)	58 (34.5)	
	- Satisfied	105 (39.3)	61 (36.3)	
	- Very satisfied	88 (33)	32 (19)	
4	Middle body (waist, stomach)			
	- Very dissatisfied	5 (1.9)	7 (4.2)	0.039*
	- Dissatisfied	18 (6.7)	14 (8.3)	
	- Neutral	77 (28.8)	65 (38.7)	
	- Satisfied	99 (37.1)	55 (32.7)	
	Very satisfied	68 (25.5)	27 (16.1)	
3	Lower body (buttocks, hips, thighs, legs)			
	- Very dissatisfied	4 (1.5)	5 (3)	0.002*
	- Dissatisfied	15 (5.6)	18 (10.7)	
	- Neutral	69 (25.8)	64 (38.1)	
	- Satisfied	100 (37.5)	50 (29.8)	
	- Very satisfied	79 (29.6)	31 (18.5)	
6	Muscle tone			
	- Very dissatisfied	5 (1.9)	6 (3.6)	0.031*
	- Dissatisfied	29 (10.9)	13 (7.7)	
	- Neutral	96 (36)	81 (48.2)	
	- Satisfied	80 (30)	47 (28)	
	- Very satisfied	57 (21.3)	21 (12.5)	
7	Weight			
	- Very dissatisfied	6 (2.2)	13 (7.7)	0.028*
	- Dissatisfied	34 (12.7)	30 (17.9)	
	- Neutral	102 (38.2)	61 (36.3)	
	- Satisfied	75 (28.1)	39 (23.2)	
	- Very satisfied	50 (18.7)	25 (14.9)	
8	Height			
	- Very dissatisfied	11 (4.1)	14 (8.3)	0.0001*
	- Dissatisfied	33 (12.4)	41 (24.4)	

No	Indicator	Male n (%) (n=267)	Female n (%) (n=168)	<i>p-value</i>
	- Neutral	69 (25.8)	50 (29.8)	
	- Satisfied	86 (32.2)	38 (22.6)	
	- Very satisfied	68 (25.5)	25 (14.9)	
9	Overall appearance			
	- Very dissatisfied	0	2 (1.2)	0.001*
	- Dissatisfied	6 (2.2)	4 (2.4)	
	- Neutral	50 (18.7)	58 (34.5)	
	- Satisfied	125 (46.8)	71 (42.3)	
	- Very satisfied	86 (32.2)	33 (19.6)	

The analytical results in Table 1 reveal that gender affects students' self-perceptions of their body parts. The results show that all indicators have been significant *p*-values. Body image perception was significantly affected by parts of the body, i.e., face ( $p=0.0001$ ), hair ( $p=0.08$ ), lower body ( $p=0.02$ ), middle ( $p=0.039$ ), and upper ( $p=0.02$ ), muscle ( $p=0.031$ ), body weight ( $p=0.028$ ), height ( $p=0.0001$ ), and overall appearance ( $p=0.001$ ).

Teenagers' perceptions of their bodies are often influenced by messages carried via social media. Young women desire a skinny body, with straight hair and white skin. Similarly, teenage boys have an ideal body image of being tall, strong, athletic, and well-built<sup>11</sup>. The results of this study indicate that women have a higher level of dissatisfaction with their body parts than men. Several studies reveal that women in Indonesia have a higher level of body image dissatisfaction<sup>9,13,14</sup>. A study of female adolescent students revealed that although most of them had a normal BMI (67.8%), still as much as 86% of them wanted to be slim<sup>12</sup>. Women are more concerned than males about being overweight or obese. Women produce higher estrogen physiologically, which results in more body-fat accumulation than men. Generally, men are more satisfied with their bodies than women, despite their physically larger size<sup>15</sup>. The opposite result was found in a study of university students in the United Arab Emirates, where men have higher levels of body image dissatisfaction<sup>7</sup>.

Students' perception of faces shows that most of them are satisfied. The level of student dissatisfaction with facial appearance is also known to be very low. There were only 1.8% of female students who stated that they were very dissatisfied, while none of the male students felt very dissatisfied. Male and female students' dissatisfaction with the face is also low. Male students expressed dissatisfaction at a rate of 1.9 percent, while female students expressed dissatisfaction at a rate of 6.5 percent. The same trend is also seen in students' perception of their hair appearance. Most students feel satisfied with the color, thickness, and texture of their hair. The satisfaction level of male students is higher than female students. There are 36% male students who are very satisfied with their hair compared to female students, which are only 25%.

The results of the data analysis also revealed that body parts were known to have a significant influence on students' self-perceptions. The human body was divided into three parts, namely the lower body (buttocks, hips, thighs, legs), the middle part (waist and stomach), and the upper part (chest or breasts, shoulders, arms).

Most of the respondents, both male and female students, stated that they were satisfied with the upper limbs. The percentage of male students (33%) who are satisfied is higher than that of female students (19%). The number of male students who feel dissatisfied with the lower body is also known to be lower (0.7%) compared to female students (2.4%). Self-perception of the

middle body focuses on the waist and stomach section. The results of the analysis showed that the number of satisfied male students (37.1%) was higher than that of female students (32.7%). In this study, male students exhibited a more positive self-perception than female students. This is shown by men's lower level of dissatisfaction with their midsection (1.9 %) than women's (4.2 %). A similar perception was also found in the lower body parts which included buttocks, hips, thighs, legs. In general, students have a good perception of the lower limbs. Most of the female students (38.1%) felt that there was no problem in that section, while 37.5% of the male students said they were satisfied. Most of the students, whether male or female, stated that their muscle appearance was normal. In this statement, it is unknown whether female students want a better muscle appearance or not. More male students feel satisfied and very satisfied with the appearance of their muscles (51.3%).

Sports students' learning activities incorporate a variety of theories on health and sports practice. Students frequently engage in learning by participating in a sport or physical activity. They have a clear understanding of the concept of health and the benefits of exercise. Thus, regardless of their body image, they place a higher priority on the health advantages associated with the many forms of exercise and physical activity they engage in on a daily routine. Regular physical activity and exercise provide numerous beneficial health outcomes for young people, including a lower risk of coronary heart disease, hypertension, depression, and obesity<sup>16,17</sup>.

Based on students' perceptions against the weight indicator, most of the students stated that there was no problem with their body weight. However, some more female students feel very dissatisfied with their weight (7.7%) when compared to male students (2.2%). The findings of this investigation supported those of a 2014 study which revealed that females demonstrated greater dissatisfaction and a more consistent assessment of their weight status than males among Italian university students<sup>18</sup>.

According to student perceptions of body height, most male students (32.2 %) were satisfied with their height. However, most of the female students thought there was no problem with their height (29.8%). When it comes to the level of satisfaction, female students are more dissatisfied (8.3 %) with their height compared to male students (4.1 %). The final indicator in self-perception assessment is overall appearance. According to the findings of the study, only 1.2 % of students were extremely dissatisfied with their appearance. Meanwhile, only 2.2 % of students were concerned about their overall appearance. However, most of the respondents, both male, and female said they were satisfied with their appearance.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that women are more likely than men to experience body dissatisfaction and have an eating disorder<sup>19-21</sup>. Nevertheless, students' participation in physical activity and sport were associated with a less negative and a more positive body image<sup>22</sup>. In this study, sports students are individuals who are routinely involved in physical activity and sports training. Thus, they can maintain a normal body mass index and have a good perception of their body appearance.

#### 4. Conclusions

Gender differences influence body image in sports students based on the perception of body parts. Overall, male students are more satisfied with their physical features. Despite some concerns regarding the appearance of certain body parts, this study shows that, in general, sports students have a positive body image perception.

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