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GENDER-BASED BODY IMAGE PERCEPTIONS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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GENDER-BASED BODY IMAGE PERCEPTION AMONG COLLEGE
STUDENTS

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Public Health

by
Aleka Arredondo

June 2019

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study sought to examining the gender-based expectations of an ideal body, for self and opposite gender, among college students.

Methods: The study used a qualitative approach using thematic analysis.

Common words and phrases were first identified and later grouped into category, through open and axial coding respectively. Next, central theme was identified using selective coding.

Results: This study examined a total of 145 student participants responses of which 94 were self-identified women and 51 were self-identified men. The results reveal that men's ideal body perception for a woman is different than women's expectations for women. For example, women's perceptions of ideal body for women were focused on *features* such as lips, nose, eyebrows; whereas the men's perception of ideal body for women was considered to be a *small body type*. Similarly, there was also variation of ideal body expectations for men. Although both men and women considered *fit* body types to be the most ideal body for men, women also reported *personal hygiene* as being an important factor. Furthermore, the men's perception focused more on body types rather than other factors such as *hygiene*.

Conclusion: Our results show unique differences in *body image* perception based on self-identified gender. These results can aid public health professionals in creating targeted body positivity initiatives.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Defining the construct of *body image* is still widely debated amongst researchers due to its multidimensional social importance and understanding among different social groups. Nonetheless, the general consensus is that the term *body image* can be understood as a combination of cognitions, expectations, media influences, and awareness in relation to our own bodies (scheffers, et al. 2017). Furthermore, aspects of *body image* have a developmental impact on social interactions and can result in poor psychosocial adjustments (scheffers et al., 2017). Within the adolescence and transitional youth population the behavioral “norms” associated with an acceptable or satisfactory body type in certain social groups become accepted. For example, the current empirical evidence has shown that negative social behavior in youth can lead to poor eating habits during transitional adolescence. Eating behaviors such as excessive fasting periods, extremely low caloric intake and extended periods of exercise (liberska & boniecka, 2016).

Furthermore, the literature highlights that several physical and mental morbidities are associated with poor *body image*, such as malnutrition, bulimia, intermittent starvation, excessive exercise, obesity, social anxiety, and

depression (Kamody et al., 2018). Studies primarily conducted among females demonstrate that there is a strong relationship found between being overweight or obese and body dissatisfaction and/or the increasing desires to be thin (Webb, Butler-Ajibade, & Robinson, 2014). Studies including male participants have further shown that thin- ideal figures for women and muscular – ideal figures for men, often promoted by commercials, results in higher levels of body dissatisfaction (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004). This suggests that males are also susceptible to the same behavioral and emotional outcomes associated with negative *body image*. A particular population that is often impacted with negative *body image* perception is that of college students, often due to the need for social networking and acceptance (Bucchianeri, Arikian, Hannan, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2013).

Undoubtedly, the underpinnings of how *body image* can influence both the psychological and social status of individuals are critical in the treatment of the resulting associated morbidities. One putative factor contributing to negative *body image* maybe societal expectations. For example, in a study assessing cultural ideas of a male body, Leit et al. found that since 1973, the expectations of a male body has changed to be more muscular (Leit et al, 2001). It is also plausible that notions of what the opposite sex wants, thus, not meeting them for oneself, can negatively impact one's own *body image* perception. In fact, a similar trend related to alcohol consumption has been noted in the literature. In their study among college females (LaBrie, Cail, Hummer, Lac, & Neighbors,

2009), noted that female participants often overestimated males' perception of drinking expectations and thus often resulted in negative alcohol consumption behavior. Likewise, Eggermont studied whether media (television), particular watching romantic drama for the youth, as well as expectations of what the opposite sex wants, influences adolescent females' body satisfaction. Among 411 adolescent girls, the authors found that girls who watched romantic drama for the youth had lower levels of body satisfaction, which in turn impacted how such participants felt were the expectations of the opposite sex. This in turn indirectly impacted self-body satisfaction (Eggermont, Beullens, & Bulck, 2005). Whether a similar trend exists among college students remains to be evaluated.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to evaluate ideal *body image* perceptions of self and the opposite gender. A particularly focus is on gender because our questions are related to the ideal body for men and the ideal body for women in order to encompass putative perception of gender-based body expectations, such as feminine, masculine, etc. and whether any gender-norms and expectations play a factor in such expectations.

Research Questions

- 1) What is the ideal *body image* of a man, according to self-identified men?

- 2) What is the ideal *body image* of a man, according to self-identified women?
- 3) What is the ideal *body image* of a women, according to self-identified men?
- 4) What is the ideal *body image* of a women, according to self-identified women?
- 5) Are there any gender differences in self and opposite-gender *ideal body image*?

Significance to Public Health

This study would be the first of its kind to assess gender-based ideal body expectations, such that evidence-based interventions can be implemented, especially among college students, to aid the rising burden of health issues associated with poor *body image*. In addition, results of this study can aid health educators or healthcare professionals in providing various psychological help to combat the adverse results of poor *body image* by addressing the gender-specific social expectations and role of such negative perceptions. This topic is relevant when considering the dramatic rates of chronic obesity and mental illness among college students, especially those stemming from eating disorders associated with body perceptions and expectations.

In addition, several public health competencies will be addressed in this thesis. These include:

- 1) *Interpret results of data analysis for public health research, policy or practice.* This will be accomplished by evaluating the results of qualitative analysis to identify common emergent themes from open ended questions in the survey and make recommendations for health education practice.
- 2) *Communicate audience-appropriate public health content, both in writing and through oral presentation.* This will be accomplished by defending the thesis for an audience and writing the thesis document, in addition to peer-reviewed publication.
- 3) *Synthesize existing literature on health education programs to make evidence-based recommendations.* This will be accomplished throughout the thesis in order to evaluate the current empirical literature and make recommendations for practice based on the results of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Body image perceptions or expectations is a public health issue because it has been associated with shaping internal view of self-esteem and determining the sociocultural acceptable body types. In a study done to assess self-esteem 19% of the college students were found to have lower self-esteem related to body weight outcomes (Kamody et al, 2018). *Body image* among college students has been linked to detrimental nutritional, health behaviors one study found that 35% of female and 10% of male college athletes were at risk for anorexia nervosa and 58% of female and 38% of male college athletes were at risk for bulimia nervosa (“Statistics & Research on Eating Disorders,” 2018). Furthermore in general young adults are 10 times more likely to die due to eating related disorder (“Statistics & Research on Eating Disorders,” 2018). The purpose of this literature review is to provide a summary of the current literature on body image perception.

What is *Body Image*?

Body image is part of a multifaceted psychological experience that is inclusive to an individual’s physical appearance, as well as self- attitudes,

including: thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors (Cash et al., 1990). In a more recent article Cash (Cash et. al, 2004) expands on his pervious *body image* definition to include an ever-widening context on human experiences, as further supported by new literature from different disciplines. Cash and colleagues note that *body image* literature, although considered to be predominate within the disciple of psychiatrics, also has significant impact on practices of other fields. For instance an additional factor that is now considered an important aspect of *body image* is an acquired physical diseases such as human immunodeficiency virus or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), skin diseases or injuries such as burns, and even cancer (Cash et. Al, 2004) This indicates a much broader range of medical professionals is needed to maintain health *body image* such as medical doctors, health educators and psychiatrics. Furthermore, a diverse cultural-context, and systemic body positivity process are now included in the scope of body image (Cash et. al 2004) continues to mention the aim of scope for *body image* has yet to be theoretically saturated due to the bias nature that body image data encompasses women's experiences but vastly under represents the impacts on men. This study aims to fill such a gap in the existing imperial data.

Furthermore, The National eating disorders organization defined *body image* as how an individual sees themselves both in person and in thought ("Body Image," 2018). This includes how one feels about their body including body weight, height and physical appearance or shape. *Body image* also

encompasses beliefs such as memories, and generalized cognitions. Additionally, this includes self-control or the sense of one's own body in movement. This can otherwise be known as self-esteem. The National eating disorder organization continues to discuss the significance of internalization of either positive or negative body image being extremely influential on the overall mental and physical health of an adolescent or adult.

Scheffers et al. (2017) set out to provide a reliable tool of measuring *body image* apart from just physical appearances as *body image* can have implications for psychosocial behaviors or psychiatric disorder and quality of life. The Dersden Body Image Questionnaire (DBIQ-NL), which incorporated body acceptance, sexual fulfillment, physical contact, vitality and self-esteem, was developed in order to evaluate a non-clinical sample to establish validity. Overall the analysis confirmed accordance of these variables to be accurate measures with the exception of sexual fulfillment being inconsistent. Moreover, in a separate study Scheffers and group applied the DBIQ-NL survey to assess a sample group of 167 females and 91 men that had regularly receiving psychiatric treatment. Results showed that there is a significant relationship between *body image* and psychosocial functions (Scheffers et al., 2017). For instance, those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) had scored noticeably lower in *body image* satisfaction and self-esteem. This supports the inclination that *body image* is a cognition by social factors as well as body weight and health behaviors.

Health Outcomes of Negative *Body Image*.

A study done by King and associates (Kling, Rodgers, & Frisén, 2016) took a longitudinal approach to study young men's personal investment in appearance (defined as the degree to which they place psychological importance in appearance) and the impact it may have on *body image* outcome in relation to prospective leanness orientation, internalization of media-ideals (in general or athletic) and drive for muscularity (dissatisfaction behaviors). The initial survey included 276 participants with a follow up survey conducted with 186 of the original participants by means of collecting longitudinal data. Overall the study revealed that the role of appearance investment was predictor of an increased pursuit of a muscular ideal body. Further the results supported that appearance investment plays a significant role in the development and maintenance of behaviors that endorse body ideals. Increased appearance investment was found to increase vulnerability to sociocultural perceived body expectations, resulting in men being less satisfied as with their body and felt less physically attractive.

These results are consistent with other studies. For example, Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2004), In their study Idealized media images and adolescent body image: "comparing" boy and girls Hargreaves and Tiggemann sought to address whether or not sociocultural theories of body dissatisfaction results from unrealistic societal beauty ideals via social media. Sample population included 595 adolescent students (310 girls and 285 boys) recruited from public high

schools with an average age of 15 years old. Body dissatisfaction was recorded before and after the participants where subject to view various television commercials. The results indicate a strong correlation between appearance investment and internalized media-ideals. Moreover, the results did not show a relationship between appearance investment and muscularity dissatisfaction. Although this study focuses on males body image perceptions it does not address the if opposite sex expectations may also have an impact on males body image orientation.

Liberska and team (2016) focused on teenage girls range of 17-18 years of age and how health-oriented behaviors determined their body esteem; 112 high school students participated in the study. Results were gathered in two stages with the first phase highlighting health-orient behaviors, which were categorized as eating habits, preventive behavior, positive mental attitude, and health practice, as well as body esteem defined by the authors as.. and categorized into sexual attractiveness, weight control, and physical condition. The results showed a positive association between health behavior and body evaluation among all subscales. Additionally, during phase two, body mass index (BMI) was assessed in relation to body esteem. There was no significant relation between BMI and body esteem. This supports that overall health behavior indicator correlates with body evaluation more often than BMI. This is significant because health educators and nutritionist repeatedly reporting negative health behaviors adopted by young adults such as fad-diets in efforts to reduce body

fat. Furthermore, these results support a vital need to properly educate young adults in proper nutrition habits in order to sustain a healthy body image and esteem. Moreover, internalization of opposite sex expectations is not discussed in this article.

College Students and *Body Image*.

Lowery et. Al (2016) evaluated 423 first year college students of which 267 were female and 156 were male to understand the relationship between self-esteem, body image, and that of health behaviors, including exercise. When evaluating body image, the authors looked at body surveillance, body shame, body control, physical dissatisfaction, and self-ideal discrepancy. Results showed that, sex differences exist in four of the five body image measures, such as: body surveillance, body shame, self-ideal discrepancy, and physical dissatisfaction. Particularly, females were more likely to report more body surveillance, body shame, and discrepancy between ideal and real body figure, as well as higher dissatisfaction with their weight and physical appearance. Similarly, among males, a significant correlation existed for low self-esteem and high body shame. For women, a similar trend was noted between low self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction, body surveillance, body shame, self-ideal discrepancy, and physical dissatisfaction. Furthermore, exercising had no relation to body image to women. Finally, among males and females, positive self-esteem was related to positive health related behaviors and some measure of body image. Cumulatively, the results of this study showed that there are substantial sex-

differences in self-perception of body image and its relation to self-esteem.

However, the study does not address the body image perception of the opposite sex and whether that has any influence on behavioral outcomes.

In the study by Kamody and group (2018), 424 young adults attending the University of Memphis were examined to determine if there was a relationship between shape/weight profiles and self-esteem, depression, and anxiety. The team also sought to determine whether or not there was a pattern between the self-esteem, depression and anxiety weight-related outcomes (in other words to determine with there is a positive association between anxiety symptomology and weight status) . The results concluded: first the low shape/weight, depression and anxiety influence group that comprised of the majority of participants 66% and was characterized by low shape /weight have little influence on self-esteem, depression and anxiety and had the lowest BMI and highest rates of perceived physical health. Second, the high depression and anxiety influence profile, 19% of participants were characterized by having the highest rates of depression and anxiety along with low self-esteem, however there was no significant change in BMI in comparison to the first profile. Thirdly, high shape/weight influence profiles which characterized to be moderately affecting depression and anxiety yet have the highest influence rates for self-esteem representing the remaining 15%. Further those characterized as highest influence on shape/weight on their self-esteem also had the highest BMI and lowest perceived physical health. This study did well to expand on current research of the mental health factors such as

depression, anxiety and self-esteem by examining them in relation to perceived physical health and BMI. In conclusion the article suggests that psychological conditions may play a lesser role than the weight- stigma on weight and health outcomes. The team also mentioned there was no significant patterns found in relation to gender and characterized profiles. While the authors did not find a relationship between gender and characterized profiles, it remains to be evaluated if opposite sex differences exist in such profile expectations.

Cumulatively, the literature demonstrates both male and females are impacted by idealized *body image* expectations whether imposed by external societal influences or internalize interpersonal factors due to the manifestation of body dissatisfaction. Although body weight distribution has been shown to correlation with overall body image satisfaction the data represents more significant factors related to sociocultural interpretations of *body image*. This study evaluates sociocultural perceptions of *body image* by addressed the gender-based *body image* expectations.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

STUDY DESIGN

This study was a qualitative assessment based on open ended questions obtained from an existing database (APPENDIX A SURVEY QUESTIONS). The original cross-sectional study collected data on various health variables among college students, parts of which have been published and explained elsewhere (Becerra, Bol, Granados, & Hassija, 2018). Due to the fact that *body image* is a multifactorial concept to define, an exploratory means of data collection was appropriate and thus qualitative method was utilized. Any spelling or grammatical errors in the qualitative responses have been corrected and bracketed to ensure clear interpretation, when needed.

Data Source and Collection

The data was collected from general education courses offered at a public school, where all students were given the right to participate and extra credit option was provided as incentive. The demographics represented by the sample population is largely diverse representing both minorities and majority populations, such as Hispanic, White, non-resident foreign students, African American, Asian.

The average age of undergraduate population being 22 years old, and the majority of students are first generation college students. Also, this particular college sample was more representative of women than males.

In addition to *body image* perception questions (APPENDIX A SURVEY QUESTIONS), additional sociodemographic questions were assessed through quantitative means (APPENDIX B TABLES). The original questionnaire was a cross-sectional design during which surveys were distributed to general education courses through an online system. A total of 51 self-identified men and 94 self-identified women were included in the qualitative analysis.

Measures and Data Analysis

The qualitative variables were *body image* perceptions for men and women. The results were stratified by gender, measured using self-identified gender identity. First, qualitative data was analyzed for common words and phrases, once identified the word and phrases were then color coded for ease of finding. Qualitative data was first coded using open coding where common words and phrases were identified. Next, these common words and phrases were grouped based on commonality into larger categories, which were finally organized into central versus supporting themes. This was repeated until theoretical saturation was reached. A subsequent quantitative assessment was

conducted to evaluate the frequency of common phrases and thematic content in order to analyze gender-specific differences in *body image* perception.

Ethics

This study was done retrospectively. Secondary data was used from an existing data approved the Institutional Review Board (15021).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Ideal *Body Image* Perceptions for Men

Several common themes emerged when evaluating perceptions of ideal *body image* for men in the United States, especially when analyzed by gender. Table 1 shows the open coded words from a qualitative assessment of gender-specific perception of ideal man's body. As shown in Figure 1, the most common themes that men identified as an ideal man's body to be were: being *fit as a result of exercising* (referred to as *fit*), followed by various *other body types, skin tone*, and a category termed *other*.

Table 1. Variables of Ideal Body Image for Men

Ideal Body Image for Men			
Women's responses:		Men's responses:	
Open Codes	Count	Open Codes	Count
muscular	122	muscular	66
fit	28	6 pack	19
tall	83	buff	2
abs	25	tall	42
big shoulders	6	fit	10
groomed/nice hair	9	jawline	5
handsome	9	big	8

strong	18	dark/tan skin	4
built	5	light/fair skin	1
bulky	3	white skin	1
defined features	8	athletic	3
athletic	4	unrealistic	1
teeth	2	obese	2
thin	3	toned	4
lean	7	in shape	6
skinny	3	slim	5
buff	11	skinny	3
Black or dark skin	5	bulky	2
white skin	2	no ideal boy type	2
light/fair skin	1	v shaped	1
slim	3	hair cut/well groomed	6
model type	4	strong	7
toned	7	lean	7
overweight	2	built	1
smell nice	1		
arms	10		

The theme of *fit* was recorded by identifying key terms such as “muscular”, “strong”, the presence of “abs”, “being toned”, “buff” or “built” in addition to “athletic”. *Skin tone* was noted by participants as: “dark/black skin tone”, “fair/light skin tone”, and “white skin tone”. Remaining body types that participants noted were divided by key descriptive words into either *big* or *small body types*. For instances, if the response included “lean,” “skinny”, “thin”, or “slim” as a descriptive marker it would be categorized as a *small body type*. Similarly,

responses marked with “tall”, “bulky”, “big shoulders”, and “overweight” as descriptive were categorized in *big body type*.

“The ideal body shape for men is to be tall and muscular.”

“The ideal body shape for men is that all men should [b]e muscular in shape and have six-pack(abs)”

Descriptive words or phrases that did not fit the theme of fitness, skin tone, or either a body type, were grouped separately as *other*. Exceptions categorized as *other* included: “v-shaped” and “unrealistic”, and “no body type”.

“The ideal body shape would be a lean and cut [physique]. The media [portrays] a lot of [muscular] and fit idea, often man [’]s body having big muscles all around”

“Having huge [muscles], six-pack of abs, and being in a fit condition.”

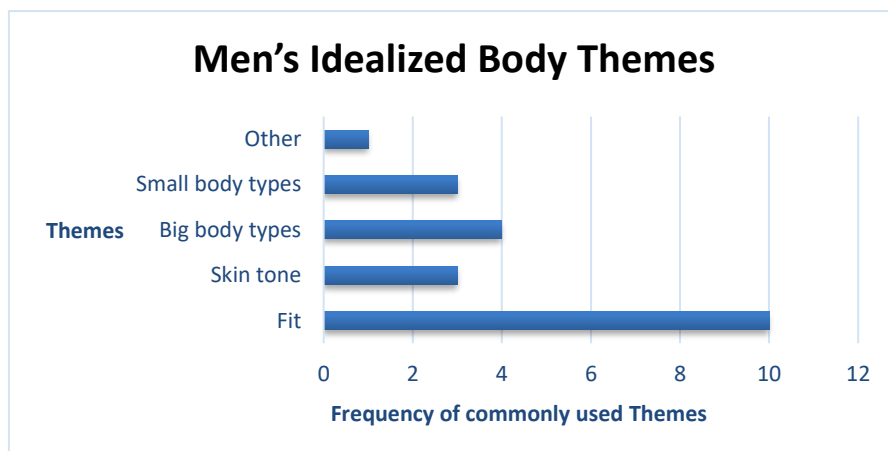


Figure 1: Men's Idealized Body Themes

Likewise, evaluating women's perception of an ideal *body image* of a man (Figure 2) also revealed the most common type as being *fit as a result of exercise*, though not as common as the men's perception. Additionally, themes noted were *small or big* body types, which consisted of more descriptive terms such as "big shoulders" or "big arms" in addition to "bulky", "tall", and "overweight" categorized in big body types and "being thin" categorized into the small body types along with "lean", "skinny", and "slim". *Skin tone* was described using the same terms as men's ideal body type for men and showed no difference.

"[Social] media and [advertisements] are also responsible for m[a]n's ideal body shape. Clothing stores use [muscular], lean and fit men as their models"

"I feel like the ideal body shape for a man In American Varies from being tall and skinny or tall and muscular"

A unique theme that emerged from evaluating women's perception of ideal *body image* for men is that of *hygiene*. For example, several women participants reported that having a pleasant odor or smell in addition to clean skin and teeth are preferred characteristics for an ideal man's body. Comments such as "having good skin", "smells nice", and "good smile or teeth" were commonly recorded.

"Tall [build], lean, muscular, white teeth, nice hair"

Other features were also discussed as being an important aspect of women's ideal body type for men are "having defined facial features", "being handsome" or even presenting like that of "model figures".

"Muscular with short hair, bright eyes, skin, jaw lines. Tall"

"Lean but buff, tall and sharp jawline"

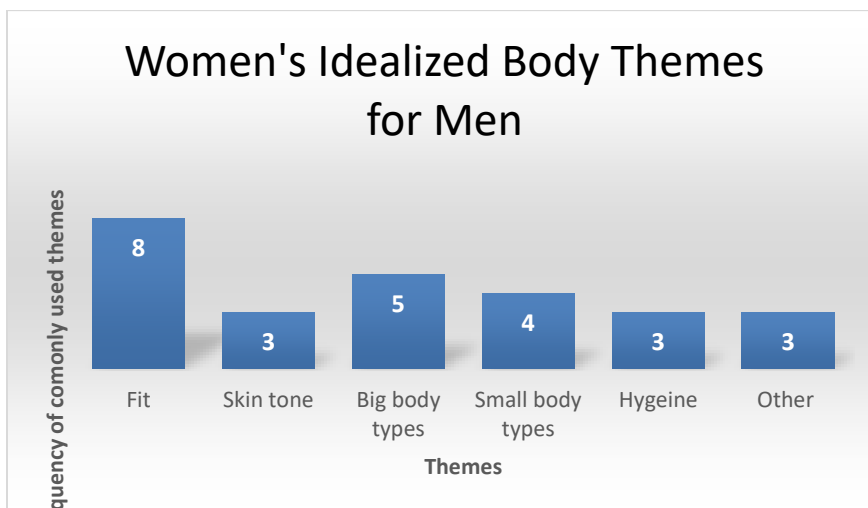


Figure 2: Women's Idealized Body Themes for Men

Ideal Body Image Perceptions for Women.

Table 2 shows the open coded words from a qualitative assessment of gender-specific perception of the ideal woman's body. In general, multiple themes can be found as outlying when examining gender-specific ideal *body image* expectations for women. When evaluating men's perception of ideal *body*

image for women, the most significant themes that surfaced encompasses: specific features (Figure 3) followed by *small body* types, being *fit*, having an *hour-glass figure*, *skin tone*, *unrealistic*, and *other*. Identifying specific body features such as, various body parts as “lips”, “eyes”, “nose”, “eyebrows”, “blue eyes”, “colored eyes”, “thigh gap” having “a beautiful or pretty face”, “long legs”, “blond hair”, “clear skin”, and “nice completion” are reoccurring themes in females’ *body image* expectations for women.

_____“*[T]he body shap[e] for women would be very skinny. The figure would have to be a supermodel who is underweight. This result would affect women who see this in America.*”

“*I would de[s]cribe American cultures ideal body shape for women as nice body shape, one of their most important things for women is their appearance if not all*”

Again, *small body* types and *big* body types were categorized by grouping commonly themed responses. In this manner responses such as “skinny”, “lean”, “small”, “slender”, “no cellulite”, “flat stomach”, and “slim” were themed as *small body* types. Subsequently, responses such as “thick”, “tall”, and “big thighs” are grouped in the *big body* types theme. Furthermore, being “fit”, “being lean”, “fit”, “toned”, “athletic”, and “healthy shows to be more significant than *big body* types female *body image* expectation for women.

“*Hourglass figure, t[o]ned body. With no cellulite flat stomach, big boobs, big butt, big eyes, small nose, big lips*”

An interesting theme that emerged in the Americans' ideal body types for women is to have an Hourglass figure. This theme was recorded by the large amount responses including descriptive terms such as the following; "having big breasts or boobs" "big butt", "being curvy or having curves", "slim-thick", "big or wide hips", and "being an hourglass shape or figure"

" Hourglass shape, pretty face, no body fat"

" In today's American culture, the ideal b[o]dy shape is unrealistic. It can be [described] as an hour-glass shaped body, even then it has to be a skinny hour-glass"

"You need to have an 'hourglass' figure thin waist"

Skin tone was grouped by identification of "dark/black skin tone", "fair/light skin tone", "white skin tone" and "tan skin tone". Ideal body mage types for women also include "tan skin tone". The title Negative is given to a group of descriptive variables that have generally negative connotation when used colloquially for example, responses "unhealthy" or "unrealistic" were commonly found and included in this theme. The final category, Other, includes descriptive terms of ideal body types such as "being perfect" "looking like a model" and "being sexy".

"[T]he ideal women in America is said to be tall, thin with a "flawless" face and body. They are supposed to be in shape and not fat or obese."

"The ideal body is unachi[e]vable and unrealistic. The standard is placed in a way no one can actually get to it so beauty companies can succeed."

Table 2. Variables of Ideal Body Image for Women

Ideal Body Image for Women		Women's Responses	
Men's Responses		Women's Responses	
Open Codes	Count	Open Codes	Count
anorexic	1	anorexic	2
big/wide hips	4	athletic	1
curvy	19	beautiful/pretty face	16
defined eyebrows	1	big thighs	2
fat/obese	4	blond hair	4
fit	12	blue eyes	3
flat/no stomach	1	breasts/boobs	62
flawless/ perfect	1	butt	62
healthy	4	clear skin	9
hour glass	17	colored eyes	2
large butt	17	curvy/curves	32
large/big breasts	15	eyebrows	1
lean	1	flat stomach	13
lips	2	healthy	1
long hair	9	hourglass shape/figure	36
long legs	4	lean	1
massive thighs	1	lips	9
model type	9	long hair	2
muscular	1	long legs	3
not fat	3	model type	15
not too short/tall	3	nice complexion	11
pretty face	10	no cellulite	2
sexy	1	nose	3
short	2	perfect	4
skinny	31	sexy	1
skinny waist	8	skinny	53
slender	3	slender	4
slim	17	slim	17

slim-thick	6	slim-thick	2
small sized/ size 0	2	small	7
small thigh (gap)	1	tall	36
tall	12	teeth	2
teeth	1	thick	4
thin	21	thigh gap	5
toned	6	thin/small waist	34
unhealthy	1	big/wide hips	6
unrealistic	1	fit	8
youthful	1	thin	42
Black/Dark skin	1	toned	3
Fair/Light skin tone	4	unhealthy	3
Tan	2	unrealistic	8
White	1	Black/Dark skin	2
		Fair/Light skin tone	7
		Tan	4
		White	5

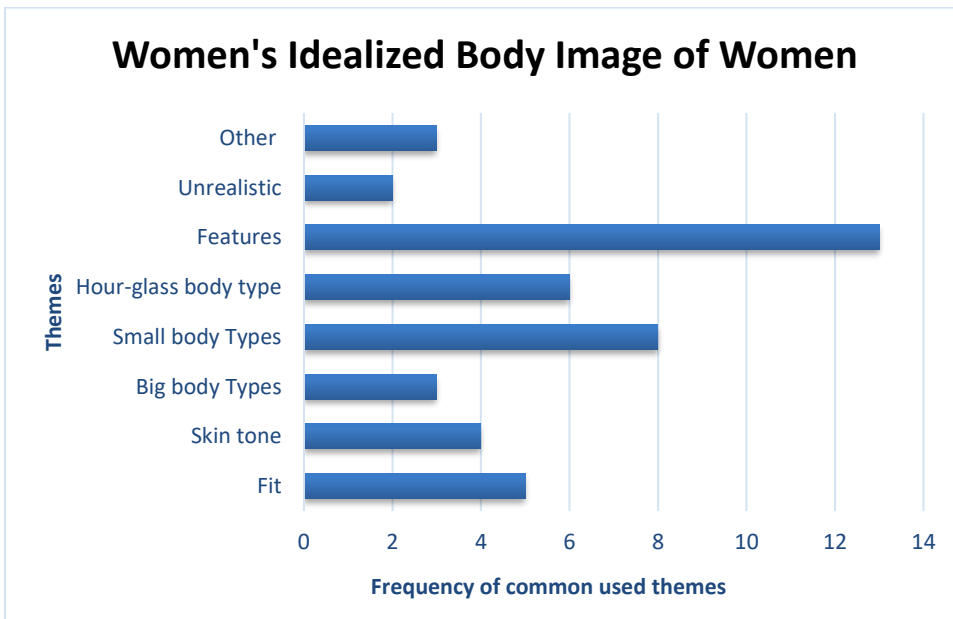


Figure 3: Women's Idealized Body Image of Women

When examining men *body image* expectation for women there is a rather variation as shown in the figure below. The most common ideal *body image* theme was found to be *small body types*, then followed by the identification of specific *features*, *hourglass body types*, *fitness* (resulting to be equally significant Hourglass body type) followed by *skin tone*, *big body types*, *unrealistic*, and *other*. Notably, the most ideal *body image* of women in their responses is themed *small body types*. This category consists of terms or phrases like “thin”, “skinny”, “small size or size 0”, “slim”, “not fat”, “slender”, “flat stomach ” or “ no stomach fat”, “small thighs”, having a “short” physical stature , “skinny waist”, are included under *small body types*. *Features* category of identified body features such as “youthful”, “perfect”, “model type”, “perfect face”, “defined eyebrows”, “lips”, and “long legs”

“The need to have a flat stomach, big butt, big boobs, and black or light skin”

“Slim but curvy. Dark complexion like defined eyebrows and relatively tall”

Descriptive phrases or terms such as “hourglass”, “ curvy”, “ slim-thick”, “large butt”, “large boob/ breasts”, “big or wide hips” are included in the Hourglass themed category of male idealized body image. Fitness as a theme is being by

variables such as “athletic”, “fit”, “muscular”, “toned”, “lean”, “healthy”. Big body types are also thematically grouped by such terms as “massive thighs”, “fat/obese”, “tall”.

“American culture's ideal body shape for women is curvy with a thin waist and a larger chest/rear end”

“Hourglass figure, toned body. With no cellulite flat stomach, big boobs, big butt, big eyes, small nose, big lips”

Similarly, to women’s *body image* expectations, men’s body image expectations also include an *unrealistic* theme,” *annorexic*”, “unrealistic”, “unhealthy” are all terms grouped under *unrealistic*. Descriptive terms or phrases that did not fit the scope of the mentioned themes are in a separate group labeled Other. This includes “not too short and not too tall” and “sexy”

“The American ideal body shape is slim, tall and skinny. Models are a great influence on [A]merican culture displaying the thin body to the world making the public think it is ideal to be like that.”

“[T]oo good to be true, way too ex[a]gerated as to what the ideal shape is. Skinny[']s the only to be”

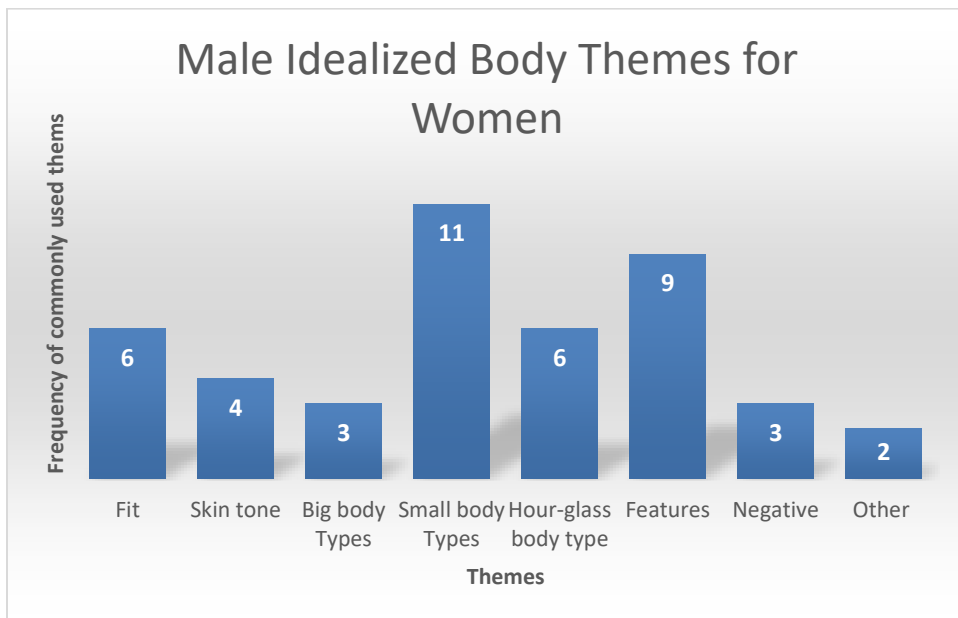


Figure 4: Male Idealized Body Themes for Women

Common Terms Used to Describe Ideal Body Types.

Illustrated below is a pie chart (Figure 5) that summarizes the highest occurrence frequencies were recorded. The most commonly used descriptive terms or phrases to describe Americans' ideal body type for men are “muscular”, “tall”, “buff”, “fit”, “strong”, “abs/6 pack”, “arms” and “big” in that order.

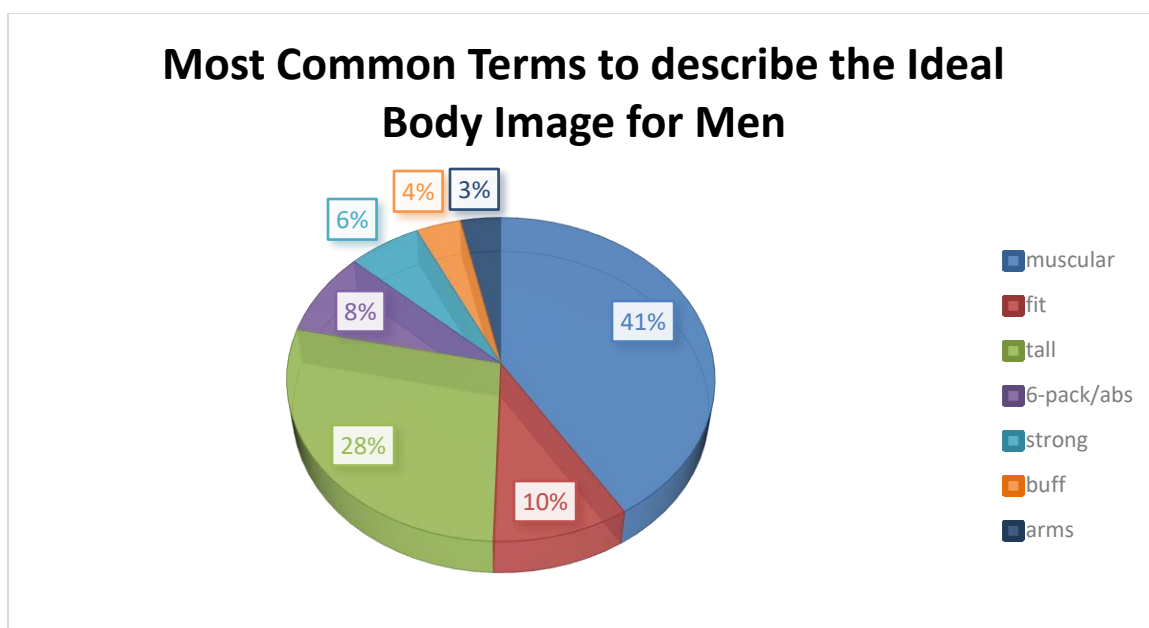


Figure 5: Most Common Terms to describe the Ideal Body Image for Men

The most common terms used to describe the Americas' ideal *body image* for women is listed below. The purpose of stratifying the data is to find commonalities in order to later find groupings within themes of similar thoughts. For this reason the most common descriptive variables used are recorded and listed as “skinny”, “large butt”, “large breasts or boobs”, “thin”, “curvy”, “hourglass”, “tall”, “pretty face or complexion”, “fit”, “slim” with each being more frequent than the last.

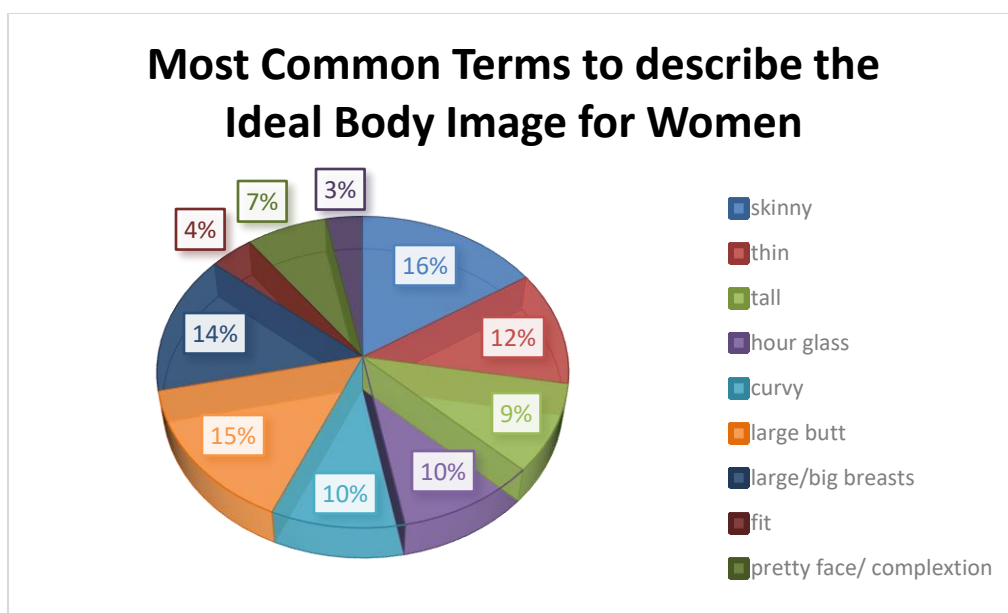


Figure 6: Most Common Terms to describe Ideal Body Image for Women

Body Image Expectations in General.

As a result of the data analysis, we sought to explore whether there are any gender-specific differences in how males and females perceive ideal body type for their own sex, and further if there are any gender-specific differences in how males and females perceive ideal body type for the opposite sex? The theme of being *fit* and is perceived as the most important body image type for a male. However, being *fit* is more significant when looking at male expectations versus female expectations (see Figure 7 below). There is not a clear distinction between which themes are the second most common for ideal male body types. Both *small body types* and *big body types* are equally termed using four variables and three variables among females and males in that order. There is also a

difference in *other* key themes thought to be significant to ideal *body image* types. Males expectations defined these exceptions as being “unrealistic” however, females consider attributes like “defined facial features” and “looking like a model” as being and an ideal body type for men. Hygiene has been a point of discussion, due to the fact that is noticeably more considerable when studying female ideal body image expectations. Following a reemerging pattern expectation of male *body image* also included more descriptive terms for specific features, this accounts to the alteration in females ranking Other themes as more significant than males.

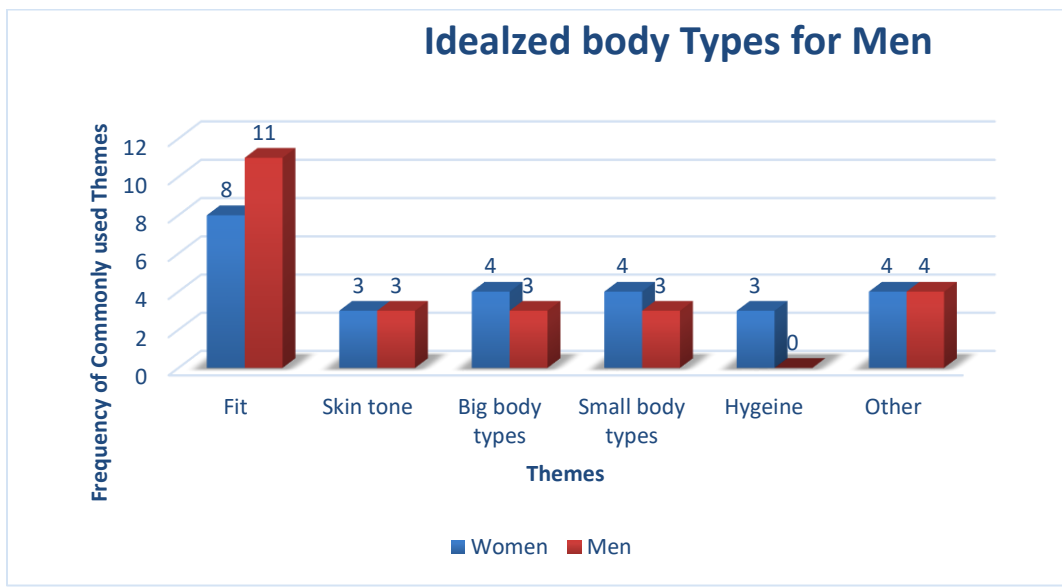


Figure 7: Idealized Body Types for Men

Interestingly the frequency of descriptive variables for ideal *body image* expectation of women was found to have been increased by at least one or two terms per theme. In other words, generally, there are more terms to describe Americans' ideal *body image* types for women than for men. For instance, when examining *small body types* theme category of *body image* expectations for women a total amount of 19 descriptive variables were used, whereas *small body types* for males only coined an average of three to four terms. In the *skin tones* of ideal body types for males were noted by both males and females' participants as "black/ dark skin", "fair/light skin "and "white skin tone;" however, *skin tone* type expectations of women included an additional descriptive term identified as a "tan skin tone" variable. Markedly, there was an increase in descriptive phrases and terms used to describe ideal *body image* for women creating a variation in themes. This variation shift focuses toward grouping different specifically identified bodily and facial features i.e. *features*, *unrealistic* theme categories (shown below in Figure 8). Moreover, these results can suggest that women have more external social pressures.

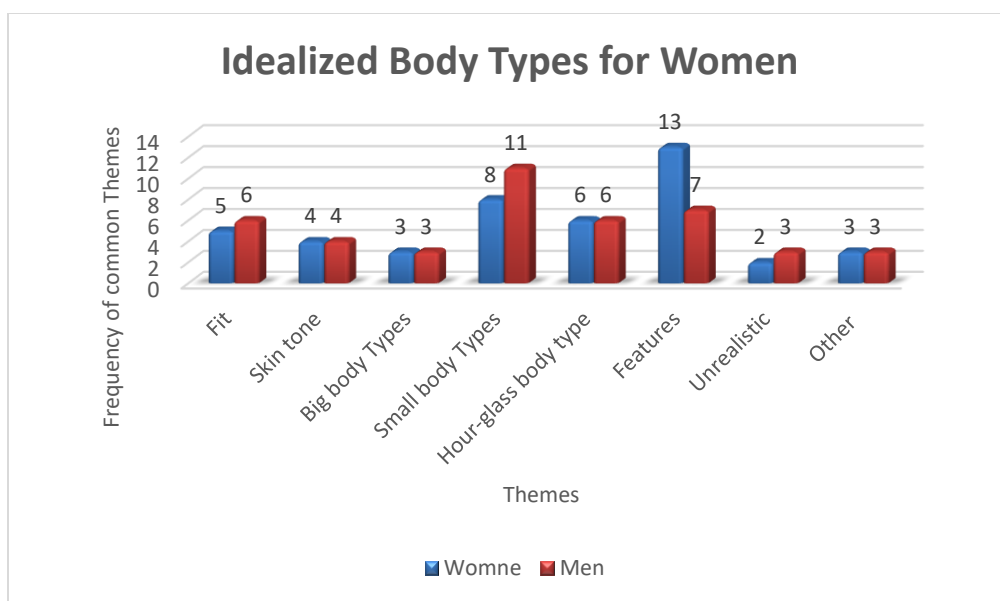


Figure 8. Idealized Body Types for Women

Figure 8 depicts the similarities and differences between the ideal *body image* for women expectations from the same sex (gender -specific) and opposite sex (male) perspective.

Non-common Ideal Body Image Themes

Some that unique themes emerged among some participants that highlighted that body image expectations were unrealistic

Male responses:

“I think some people they are fat but also look some people they exercise in the gym and t[r]y are v[e]ry slim”

“Also majority unrealistic because it[‘]s all bullying and standing bigger is better. Not all people are genetically capable of attaining that shape”

Female responses:

“Men[‘]s [A]merican ideal body shape is a ‘dad body’ [o]r 6 pack abs tall and skinny”

“Men in [A]merican cultures is suppose[d] to be with abs, muscles but can be ‘fat’ with beer bellies as ‘dad bods’ and is acceptable.”

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Ideal *body image* expectations in general are polarized by expecting extreme versions of either side of the spectrum. For instance, when examining gender-specific ideal *body image* perceptions among college students this study found either, large muscles, large breasts, exaggerated hip-to-waist- ratios, being thin and skinny are all idealized body types. These results suggest that the expectations of ideal *body image* types are unrealistic when considering to average body types.

Furthermore, the results of this study are in support to those found in Lowery et. al that there are sex differences among ideal *body image* expectations (2016). In their study Lowery and others found out that there is a relation of females having increased body surveillance as well as self-ideal discrepancy (2016). Overall this study collected a greater amount of quantitative data of women's ideal body image perceptions of women resulting in increase of ideal body image themes of perception. Additionally, the increased volume of data resulted in a variation of women's expectations for ideal *body image* of women to incorporate specially defined bodily *features*. This empirical data is indicative to the relation that women have increased body surveillance and self-ideal discrepancy

Moreover, the results of this current study suggest that same- sex body image expectations supersede opposite-sex body image expectations due to the abundance of female ideal *body image* themes for women. Similarly, to the study by Kamody and colleagues stated that an ideal *body image* is more reliant on psychological factors compared to body-weight relation (2018). Also, the idealized *body image* expectations for men mirrors those expectations from the opposite-sex.

Strengths and Limitations

Like any other piece of literature, this study has some strengths and limitations such as: the sample population may be representative of any other college campus due to the diversity of the students enrolled. For example, there is a high representation of students from different disciplines of with majors such as: psychology, health sciences and business. Additionally, the sample population predominately commutes to campus the demographic is representative of various cities in the region. Also the sample population comprised on minorities race and ethnicities in to international students. With this being said the data found here may be used as an external tool to further analyze the communities ideal *body image* perceptions.

By design qualitative studies encounter human error in participant responses or non-response error creating a potential for interpretation biases.

This in part could have been a result of instrumentation bias, wherein some participants concluded the survey to be off putting and thus resulted in a non-response. Moreover, the use of secondary data on this study creates an implicit cross-sectional bias that cannot be expanded upon due to the confidentiality rights in place to protect participant identity

Conclusion

In summary, the ideal *body image* for men is majority expected to be *fit*, *big body types* followed by *small body types*. The ideal *body image* for females was widely expected to be *small body types* followed by specific features, such as big lips and hour-glass figures. Differences of ideal *body image* perceptions found in opposite sex did occur for instance female perceptions of ideal *body image* for men also included *hygiene* as well as *other* features such as defined jawlines and bodily muscles, additionally male perceptions for ideal *body image* of women were found to be negative in the context of being unrealistic.

APPENDIX A
SURVEY QUESTIONS

Describe American culture's ideal body type for men in a few sentences.

Describe American culture's ideal body type for women in a few sentences.

APPENDIX B

TABLES

Table 1. Variables of Ideal Body Image for Men

Ideal Body Image for Men			
Women's responses:		Men's responses:	
Open Codes	Count	Open Codes	Count
muscular	122	muscular	66
fit	28	6 pack	19
tall	83	buff	2
abs	25	tall	42
big shoulders	6	fit	10
groomed/nice hair	9	jawline	5
handsome	9	big	8
strong	18	dark/tan skin	4
built	5	light/fair skin	1
bulky	3	white skin	1
defined features	8	athletic	3
athletic	4	unrealistic	1
teeth	2	obese	2
thin	3	toned	4
lean	7	in shape	6
skinny	3	slim	5
buff	11	skinny	3
Black or dark skin	5	bulky	2
white skin	2	no ideal boy type	2
light/fair skin	1	v shaped	1
slim	3	hair cut/well groomed	6
model type	4	strong	7
toned	7	lean	7
overweight	2	built	1
smell nice	1		
arms	10		

Table 2. Variables of Ideal Body Image for Women

Ideal Body Image for Women			
Men's Responses		Women's Responses	
Open Codes	Count	Open Codes	Count
anorexic	1	anorexic	2
big/wide hips	4	athletic	1
curvy	19	beautiful/pretty face	16
defined eyebrows	1	big thighs	2
fat/obese	4	blond hair	4
fit	12	blue eyes	3
flat/no stomach	1	breasts/boobs	62
flawless/ perfect	1	butt	62
healthy	4	clear skin	9
hour glass	17	colored eyes	2
large butt	17	curvy/curves	32
large/big breasts	15	eyebrows	1
lean	1	flat stomach	13
lips	2	healthy	1
long hair	9	hourglass shape/figure	36
long legs	4	lean	1
massive thighs	1	lips	9
model type	9	long hair	2
muscular	1	long legs	3
not fat	3	model type	15
not too short/tall	3	nice complexion	11
pretty face	10	no cellulite	2
sexy	1	nose	3
short	2	perfect	4
skinny	31	sexy	1
skinny waist	8	skinny	53
slender	3	slender	4
slim	17	slim	17
slim-thick	6	slim-thick	2
small sized/ size 0	2	small	7
small thigh (gap)	1	tall	36
tall	12	teeth	2

teeth	1	thick	4
thin	21	thigh gap	5
toned	6	thin/small waist	34
unhealthy	1	big/wide hips	6
unrealistic	1	fit	8
youthful	1	thin	42
Black/Dark skin	1	toned	3
Fair/Light skin tone	4	unhealthy	3
Tan	2	unrealistic	8
White	1	Black/Dark skin	2
		Fair/Light skin tone	7
		Tan	4
		White	5

APPENDIX C
CHARTS AND GRAPHS

Figure 1: Men's Idealized Body Themes

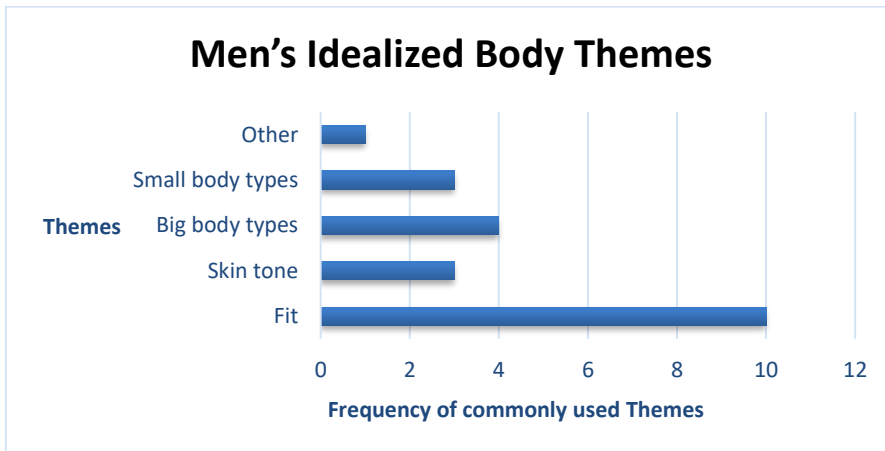


Figure 2: Women's Idealized Body Themes for Men

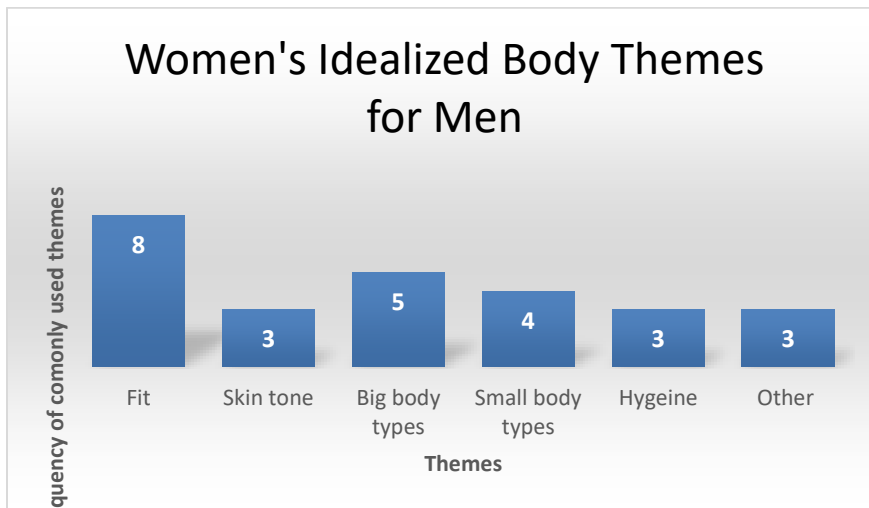


Figure 3: Women's Idealized Body Image of Women

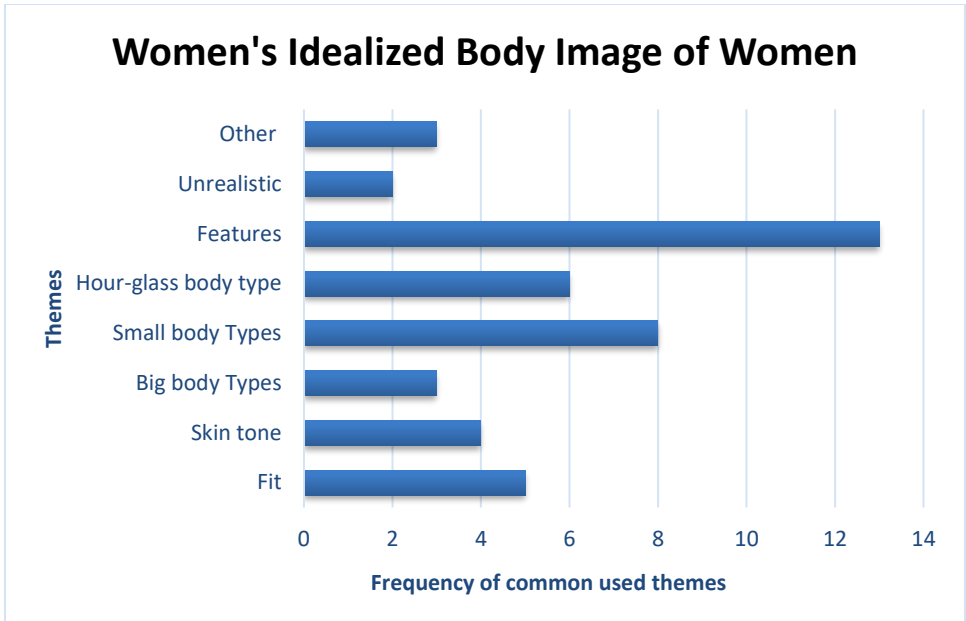


Figure 4: Male Idealized Body Themes for women

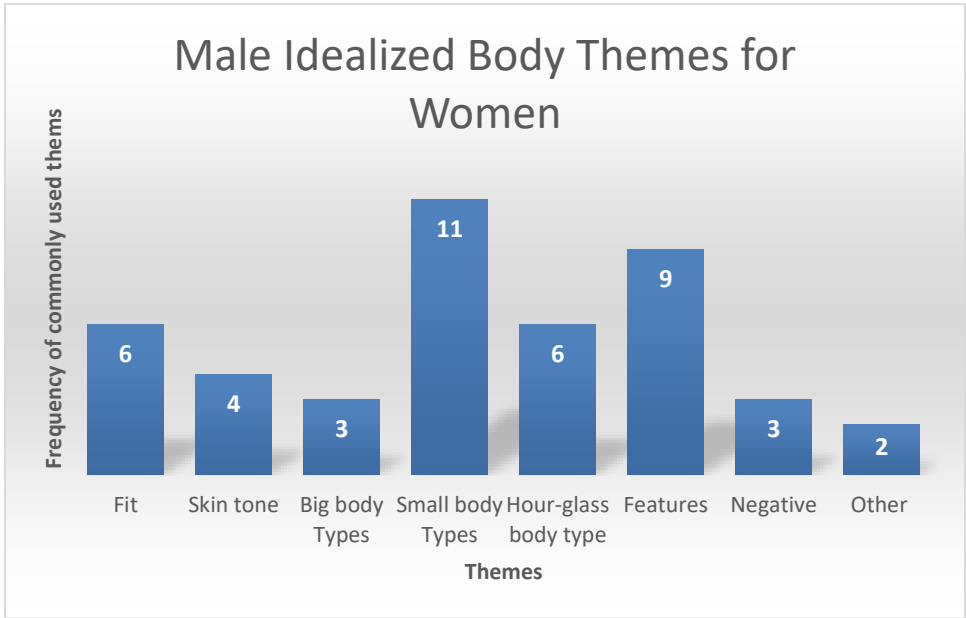


Figure 5: Most Common Terms to describe the Ideal Body Image for Men

Most Common Terms to describe the Ideal Body Image for Men

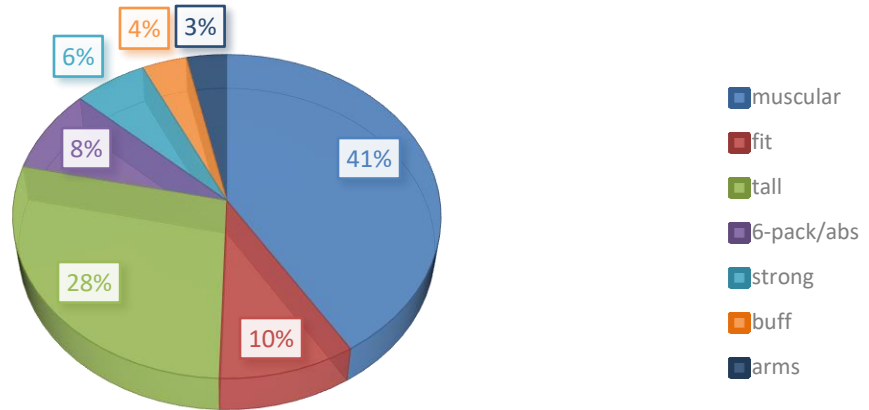
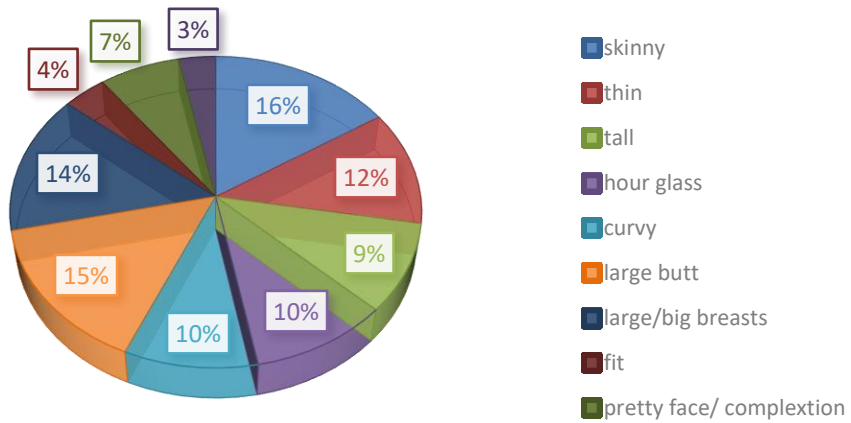


Figure 6: Most Common Terms to describe Ideal Body Image for Women

Most Common Terms to describe the Ideal Body Image for Women



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