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## Perceived Body Image and Reasons for Exercise Among College Students

Ileana Flores Delgado

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**Abstract:** Perceptions of an ideal body image constructed by Western culture has led body dissatisfaction levels to increase significantly in the past 30 years. Researchers have found that individuals tend to have inaccurate perceptions of their body shapes that leads to body dissatisfaction. Minimal research however, has been done focusing on the relationship between body image and specific exercise behaviors. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how someone's own body perception affects their exercise behavior, type and frequency. A total of 30 participants were observed for 20 minutes focusing on behaviors like concentration, body surveillance, and confidence while exercising. Participants also answered a questionnaire about current workout routine, motivational reasons to exercise, and body size. Using the observations and questionnaires, relationships between body image and exercise behaviors were established. Results showed that participants who were less satisfied with their body shape engaged in higher levels of body surveillance behaviors and performed less efficient workouts. These results can help fitness and wellness professionals understand potential behaviors of individuals with a distorted body image and better help them achieve desired health outcomes.

**Keywords:** *body image, exercise, body dissatisfaction, body surveillance*

In the past 30 years' body dissatisfaction in the United States has increased by approximately 25%, thus, body image has become a prevalent topic (Fallon, Harris, & Johnson, 2013). This increasing body dissatisfaction trend has been led by the media portrayals of "ideal body" images that appear daily across the nation. Body image is defined as attitudes and behaviors that reflect a healthy acceptance of and appreciation for the body (Homan & Tylka, 2014). In the body image realm, viewing oneself as an object to be appreciated by others is referred to as self-objectification. Self-objectification may result from body surveillance which is an individual's vigilance about monitoring their appearance (Aubrey, 2006). Self-objectification and body surveillance can be seen as having low body image.

Many researchers have concluded that individuals often have an inaccurate perception of their body, causing body surveillance to be prevalent (Aubrey, 2006). To this point researchers have not looked at the effects of this perception on the behavior of the individual while working out. Most have looked at the effect of inaccurate body perception on self-objectification (Aubrey, 2006). There has also been minimal research focusing on specific exercise behaviors;

for example, Johnson, Fallon, Harris, & Burton, (2013) focused on non-specific exercise behaviors like "do you exercise" instead of specific forms of exercise like running.

Individuals at physical activity facilities have the freedom to do any type of exercise, any way they can or want to. It appears even with the abundance of research linking body image and physical activity, there has been no explanation for these behaviors. The current research study is designed to fill in this gap and contribute to scholars' understandings of the impacts of body image on exercise behaviors. Exercise behaviors included decisions for specific types of exercises or their body language meanwhile exercising. It may also help physical activity facilities better attend to their clients; allowing them to understand the clients' reasons for visiting the facility. The facilities can now be aware of common behaviors of individuals who need more guidance and help when exercising in order to achieve better results.

This research looked at the perception that college students have of their bodies and what exercises they do when they workout based on these perceptions. It also considered how focused they are on their own exercise and on other people exercising. The purpose of this research was to

understand the relationships between someone's body perception and how much they exercise, the type of exercises they do and their behaviors during exercise. The purpose of this study is to provide evidence of common behaviors like body surveillance that are seen in individuals based on their body image.

Specifically, the current study looked to answer the following research questions: What type of perceived body image do individuals have when working out in a physical activity facility? What is the relationship between perceived body image and exercise behaviors in college students that exercise in a campus physical activity facility?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Why do certain students choose to visit a physical fitness facility? When these students do visit a gym, what personal feelings arise and how do these feelings affect their behavior? The following literature covers what these personal feelings might be.

### Body Image

Body image is known as the attitudes and behaviors that reflect a healthy acceptance of and appreciation for the body (Homan & Tylka, 2014). The perceived ideal body weight has become a goal of many individuals, leading to increased body surveillance defined as an individual's vigilance about monitoring their appearance (Aubrey, 2006). Body surveillance could lead an individual to perceive a discrepancy between what their bodies actually look like and what their ideal body looks like. This often results in body dissatisfaction over time (Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2015). Another aspect of body surveillance is social comparisons in which individuals see others being objectified and therefore view themselves as objects to be looked at by others (Aubrey, 2006). A way to help avoid negative consequences of social comparisons is through the participation in exercise. Exercise encourages individuals to focus on a task rather than on the surroundings, though there is still potential for being distracted and even making social comparisons. In the current study, this

exercise focus was examined to see if body surveillance is a common behavior in individuals whom have either high or low body image.

The Western culture has implanted the idea of an ideal body causing many individuals to have a negative body image perception. This is because the ideal body is not physically attainable for the majority of individuals. The ideal western body is extremely thin, and encourages the loss of excessive weight in order to attract the opposite sex and have a better sex life (Aubrey, 2006). The ideal female has an excessively thin waist with large breasts and a large buttock while the ideal male is tall, bigger built, with chiseled abdominal muscles also known as a six pack and strong (Aubrey, 2006). If an individual does have a negative perceived body image as a result of this ideal body, exercise could reverse this and help them gain a more positive body image (Homan & Tylka, 2014). This is because exercise has the ability to divert attention away from how the body looks, and redirects it to how the body actually functions (Martin Ginis, Strong, Arent, Bray, & Bassett-Gunter, 2014).

Gender seems to have an effect on body image. Females perceive themselves as fat twice as frequently as males (Zach et al., 2013). Results from a study that looked to determine the relationship between exercise and body satisfaction showed that 75% of male and female participants were satisfied with their body but less than 5% of females were sufficiently physically active (Zach et al., 2013).

Individuals who visit physical activity facilities, exercise for different reasons. A common reason for participation in physical activity among novice individuals (someone who is in the beginning stages of exercising) is self-objectification (Aubrey, 2006). Individuals who continuously see others' bodies being objectified may view themselves as objects to be looked at by others (Aubrey, 2006). This is for a variety of reasons including societal norms and exposure to sexual objectification in the everyday world. Sexual objectification has been described as often focusing on bodies and appearance as the most

important components of sexual desirability (Aubrey, 2006). This everyday exposure to sexual objectification causes individuals to believe that they have to conform to those “norms.” Exposure to sexual objectification activates self-objectification (Aubrey, 2006). Individuals who self-objectify define themselves based on perceived body appearance instead of what their body can do or how their body feels (Aubrey, 2006). It is a deeply internalized definition of the self which measures implicitly appearance and body competence (Aubrey, 2006).

### **Body Satisfaction & Body Dissatisfaction**

According to Abbott and Barber (2010), body satisfaction is the approval of and satisfaction with the body’s physical capabilities (as cited in Homan & Tylka, 2014). Garner (2002) defined body dissatisfaction as the negative evaluation of one’s physical body (as cited in Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2015). Body satisfaction is experienced differently by every individual and moves on a continuum from negative body satisfaction to positive body satisfaction. In the Western culture of the United States, women are found to have lower body satisfaction than men, meaning body dissatisfaction is more prevalent (Fallon, Harris, & Johnson, 2013). Most of the research conducted on body satisfaction has been done with females. One study about body satisfaction that included both men and women used masculinity to rate a man’s body satisfaction. It was found that body satisfaction in women which was rated by physical attributes, is based on a lower weight ideal and body satisfaction in men is based on a higher weight ideal representative of greater masculinity (Fallon et al., 2013).

Body surveillance and social comparisons have also been linked to an individual’s level of body satisfaction. The higher the levels of an individual’s body surveillance, the higher the levels of their body dissatisfaction (Aubrey, 2006). The more social comparisons individuals make between themselves and others, the more body dissatisfaction they feel (Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2015).

Researchers have found a relationship between exercise and body satisfaction. In order for amount of exercise to increase, then body satisfaction also needs to; conversely, body satisfaction increases as the amount of exercise increases (Homan & Tylka, 2014). Another case that measured this idea was a study that used an exercise intervention called “Coach-Approach” (Annesi, Howton, Johnson, & Porter, 2015) in a pre-existing fitness class. The Coach-Approach consists of goal setting, progress feedback, positive self-talk, and relapse prevention training in order to increase regular exercise, self-efficacy and mood (Annesi et al., 2015). This approach and enhanced the participation of regular exercise, and participating individuals' body satisfaction increased significantly (Annesi et al., 2015). Based on this intervention, it could be said that physical activity facilities could benefit from an approach similar to the Coach-Approach when beginning to help an individual with increasing exercise as this could increase their body satisfaction levels.

Prochaska and DiClemente (1982) describe the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) as a behavior change model with six stages. These stages explain that physical activity behaviors change over time. Johnson, Fallon, Harris, & Burton (2013) proposed that body satisfaction changes depending on which stage of exercise the individual is in. At each stage, an individual experiences either higher levels of body satisfaction or higher levels of body dissatisfaction. The individual will experience lower satisfaction in the action and in the maintenance stages. There will be higher levels of body satisfaction in the termination stage (Johnson et al., 2013). It can be concluded that exercise may help increase body satisfaction while decreasing body dissatisfaction.

### **Physical Activity & Exercise**

Regular exercise and physical activity leads to increased positive body image (Homan & Tylka, 2014). However, it has been reported that perceived body image increased the most with aerobic exercise and strength training, as

compared to other types of exercise such as flexibility training (Martin Ginis, Strong, Arent, Bray, & Bassett-Gunter, 2014). The researchers found that aerobic exercise and strength training led to the most significant increases in levels of body image (Martin Ginis et al., 2014). With regard to the relationship between amount or frequency of exercise and body image, researchers have reported mixed findings. For example, Martin Ginis et al. (2014) reported no change in body image as related to amount of exercise; however, Homan and Tylka (2014) reported positive body image as being positively associated with exercise frequency. Therefore, the current study is designed to further determine if exercise frequency is an important factor in body image perceptions.

Body image has also been shown to increase with exercise intensity (Campana, Swami, Onodera, da Silva, & Tavares, 2013).

Self-objectification can cause individuals to have appearance-based motivation for exercise. Appearance-based exercise is characterized by individuals who exercise primarily for appearance related reasons (Homan & Tylka, 2014). Appearance motivation is the idea that an individual only wants to exercise to change their physique as opposed to wanting to exercise for their health, external versus internal motivation (Homan & Tylka, 2014). The irony is that high appearance motivation leads to lower levels of exercise (Homan & Tylka, 2014). It is likely that a novice exerciser (someone who is in the beginning stages of exercising) with appearance motivation will lose interest and discontinue their exercise routine. However, for both novice and advanced exercisers, regular exercise decreases the likelihood of appearance motivation and self-objectification (Homan & Tylka, 2014). In order for physical activity facilities to effectively help novice individuals, change needs to happen. Effective interventions should focus on lowering appearance motivation to exercise, changing one's motivation for exercising from appearance-based motives to those of health and enjoyment, and increasing appreciation of the health benefits one

enjoys from physical activity (Homan & Tylka, 2014).

It is important for individuals to participate in physical activity for internal reasons in order to help maintain their health. Novice individuals utilizing physical activity facilities often times do not know how to ask for help. It is important for the staff of these facilities to know what to look for in individuals in order to know how to effectively help them in their exercise journey. Some characteristics and behaviors are ideal to recognize early on in the exercise journey. For example, guilt may foster maladaptive forms and customs of physical activity (Castonguay, Pila, Wrosch, & Sabiston, 2015). A maladaptive form would be anything ranging from excessive exercise, or excessive amounts of a specific type of exercise. Guilt could potentially be unhealthy when it comes to exercise behaviors, therefore if guilt seems to be an issue for the individual, then a conversation about their exercise goals needs to occur as soon as possible. As a result of guilt, shame can occur and could also be an unhealthy factor in exercise behaviors. Shame and guilt demonstrate extrinsic motivation (Castonguay, Pila, Wrosch, & Sabiston, 2015) and extrinsic motivation leads to unhealthy exercise habits. If a conversation is had early on in the exercise journey of a novice exerciser, then appropriate and healthy goals can be established, thus avoiding these unhealthy habits.

Some characteristics that have been found in most American men during exercise include, winning, power over women, violence, primacy of work and heterosexual self-presentation (Gattario, 2015). These are likely attributable to what society has depicted as the ideal lean masculine body. American men also have the highest drives for muscularity, leanness, and fitness (Gattario, 2015). Therefore, it is important to speak to the individual about what their exercise goals are and help them focus on their health rather than fitting into societal norms. This is important because efforts of achieving the ideal lean body can increase exaggerated commitment to physical exercise routine (Campana, Swami, Onodera, da Silva, & Tavares, 2013). Individuals who are new

to exercising, need to learn the difference between a healthy exercise routine based on their level of expertise and their body and refrain from an unhealthy rigorous exercise routine. A positive association between exercise intensity and exercise frequency has been shown (Campana et al., 2013), therefore, frequency of exercise needs to be established based on the goals of the individual and their current level of fitness ability. Once these goals are established and the individual is able to exercise regularly, then the danger of falling into unhealthy habits diminishes. Regular physical activity leads to authentic pride and intrinsic motivation (Castonguay, Pila, Wrosch, & Sabiston, 2015) and as stated previously, the more intrinsic motivation the individual has, the healthier their habits and behaviors will become. Healthy behaviors could include exercising regularly, not excessively, and completing exercise routines that are at their body capacity. For the purpose of this study, the words exercising and working out were used interchangeably.

## METHOD

The purpose of this research was to understand the relationships between body perception and exercise behaviors. Additionally, this research aimed to determine the perceived body images of college students and their reasons for exercise. For this study, regular exercise was defined as participating in exercise that works up a sweat five or more times a week (drawn from Homan & Tylka, 2014).

In order to address the research question, a qualitative approach was utilized. The data was collected through observations of students exercising in the recreation center and from a questionnaire that was completed by the participants. These methods were used to collect data on body image rating and satisfaction, as well as frequency and type of exercise.

The sample for this study was comprised of college students who utilized a college campus recreation center. The data was collected through observations of individuals exercising in the recreation center as well as through a

questionnaire that was completed by the participants. My mentor was involved with the data collection of both the observations and the questionnaires. We were at the Recreation Center twice a week, once in the morning and once in the early evening for two hours at a time, beginning January 18, 2016 and ending March 14, 2016. The participants were selected at random when they entered the Recreation Center. Every third person that walked into the door was selected as a potential participant (any potential participant who said they were a non-traditional college student and/ or faculty and staff member when asked to participate, were eliminated from the study and the next third person that walked through the door was selected). The number of participants needed for these findings were a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 30. The participant was observed for a maximum of 20 minutes. Then the participant was approached by one researcher and told that we were conducting research about students who visit the Recreation Center and were asked if they would be willing to participate. If the potential participant answered yes, then they were given a consent form with the information about the study and asked to sign it, followed by a questionnaire they filled out. If the potential participant answered no, then the observation notes were put in a manila envelope labeled "shred" and were shredded after the two-hour session of data collection. Participants completed the questionnaire in the recreation center where they were approached by a researcher. They were not taken to a specific, more private location to complete this part of the study. No other follow-up questions were asked to the participants so once they completed the 6 item questionnaire they were done with the study and free to continue their workout.

For this research, a six question questionnaire (see Appendix A) was given to the participants to answer and put into a manila envelope labeled "data" after it was completed during data collection. This provided anonymity for the participant. The development of our own questionnaire was done because we decided that our participants needed to be asked questions

appropriate for their age. Ideally this allowed for questions to be clearly understood. Observations were included in this study to help understand the behaviors that the participants engage in while exercising.

The questionnaire items addressed participants' gender, where they rate themselves on the body image spectrum, how satisfied they were with this placement on the spectrum, how frequently they visited the Recreation Center, what does their normal workout routine look like, number of times they visited the Recreation Center, and their motivations for visiting the Recreation Center.

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained prior to the start of data collection. The participants remained anonymous as they were never asked for their names or any identifying information at any time during the entire study. The participants were assigned a number to ensure their information would remain confidential and organized. The analysis procedure included typing up all the observations of each participant side by side with their responses for the questionnaire. From there, information was coded simultaneously by both researchers until recurring themes were found. The themes were recorded and compared to the expectation. All the data collected throughout this experiment was stored in [my mentor's] office at UNC and only she and I have access to this data. The data will be kept there for three years, then the hard copies will be shredded.

The validity and credibility of this research and data collection was ensured because not only did I observe and give a questionnaire to the participants, but my mentor also observed and gave out the same questionnaire. We both observed the same participant at the same time and then one researcher approached the participant to ask if they would complete the questionnaire. Both researchers analyzed the data collected to ensure that similar data was collected and proper themes were developed. The strengths of this approach was that someone else was there in case there was a difficult participant or if

observations were difficult to understand. Therefore, we worked hand in hand when making conclusions regarding the data. We compared and contrasted our understandings of the observation and come to a consensus. Some limitations of this approach were that there may have been disagreements on what each observed or on the theme of the observations. Some participants may have felt overwhelmed or forced into the questionnaire, which was not our intention and procedures were in place to limit these reactions.

There were minimal risks involved in the participation of this study. There could have been discomfort in answering questions about body image and workout routines. If these discomforts did arise, the consent form included references to on campus resources for them to utilize. Direct benefits resulting from the participation in this study included knowledge of their exercise routines as well as how satisfied they were with themselves. The study may also have served as motivation in case they want to change something within themselves. An indirect benefit from participation was adding to the body of knowledge in the field of body image.

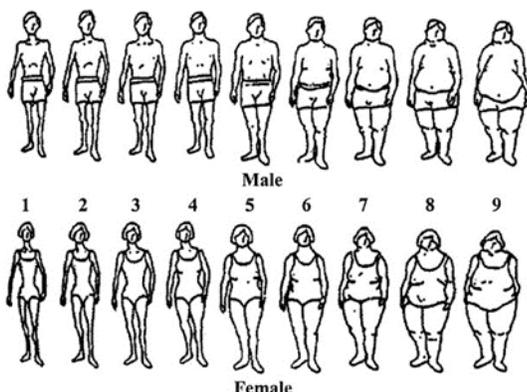
There was no compensation provided for participation in this study, though there was a cost. The cost was the missed exercise time that resulted while participating in this study. The missed exercise time was a maximum of five minutes.

## **FINDINGS**

This study looked to answer what individuals at a physical activity facility think of their own body and if this perception had a relationship to exercise behaviors. A descriptive analysis was completed for the data collected. There was a total of 30 participants from which 73% of them were females and 27% were males.

In the survey the participants were asked to select what figure on a scale best represented their current body type. The Body Image Scale (Bhuiyan, Gustat, Srinivasan, & Berenson, 2003) (Figure 1) ranged from 1-9 with 1 being a lower weight individual and 9 being a higher weight individual.

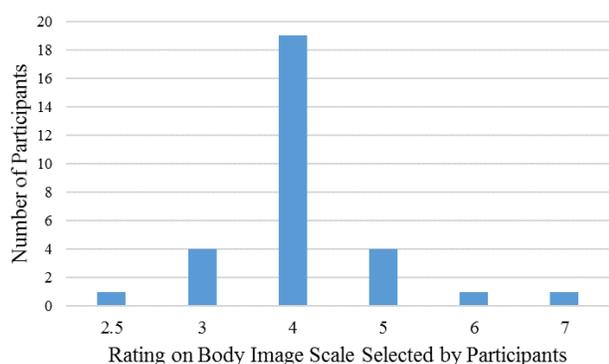
Figure 1. Body Image Scale (Bhuiyan, A. R., Gustat, J., Srinivasan, S. R., & Berenson, G. S. 2003)



### Body Image

We established that ratings from 3-5 on the scale (whether the participants are male or female) represented the average body based on the Western ideal body type. Figure 2 shows the ratings the 30 participants selected on the scale. The majority of participants (19) rated themselves at a 4; there were 3 outliers, one participant rated themselves a 2.5, another participant rated themselves a 7 and the other participant rated themselves a 6. Based on the rest of the participants' data, it was determined that 90% of participants (27) perceive themselves to have an average body type.

Figure 2. Body Image Scale ratings



### Body Satisfaction

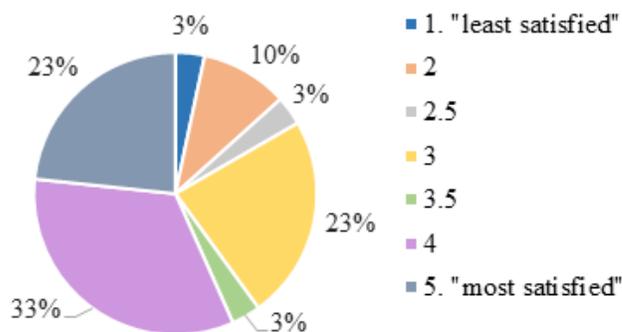
How satisfied the participants were on their identified ratings on the Body Image Scale (Bhuiyan, Gustat, Srinivasan, & Berenson, 2003), was also recorded. Their satisfaction level was determined using a scale that ranged from 1-5

with 1 being least satisfied and 5 being most satisfied. Figure 3 shows the satisfaction rating from these 30 participants. It was determined that 56% of participants (17) were satisfied (4 and 5 rating) with where they rated themselves on the Body Image Scale (Bhuiyan et al., 2003). It was also determined that 23% of participants (7) were mildly satisfied (3 rating) with their current body size and 21% of participants (6) were least satisfied (1 and 2 rating). From this data, it was determined that the participants that rated themselves from a 1 to a 3 could potentially have a negative body image.

### Frequency of Exercise

The frequency of exercise of the participants was determined by a question that asked them to provide the number of times they visited the University of Northern Colorado Recreation Center per week. Figure 4 shows the visit numbers that were recorded. The majority of the participants (43%) stated that they visit the facility 5 to 6 days per week. One person stated that they visit the facility all 7 days of the week and (36%) of the participants stated that they visit the facility 3 to 4 days per week. Lastly, 16% of participants stated that they visit the facility 1 to 2 times per week.

Figure 3. Body satisfaction percentages by scale

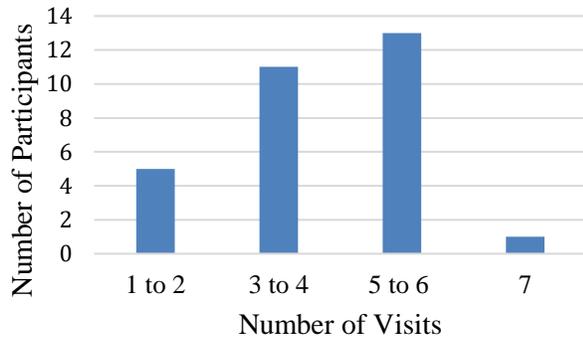


### Types of Exercises During Workouts

When participants were asked about their workout routine, two main types of workout were mentioned. Cardio was the most listed type of workout with 90% of participants mentioning it as part of their workout routine. Weight lifting was

the second highest recorded workout type with 83% of participants identifying it on the questionnaire. A total of 17% of participants participate in intramural sports and 13% in fitness classes. Other workout types that were mentioned by single participants were basketball, racquetball, rock climbing, club sports, core workouts and self-taught dance and Pilates workouts.

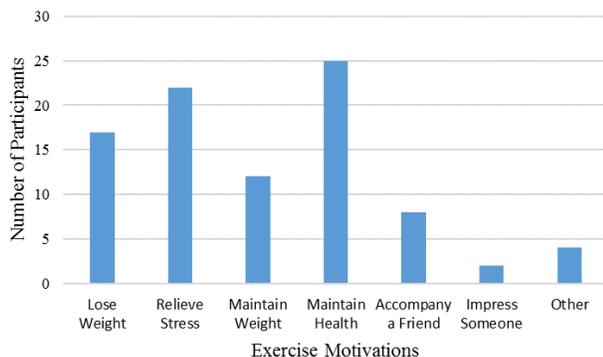
Figure 4. Number of visits to exercise facility per week



### Motivation to Exercise

The main motivation for visiting the gym and working out was also recorded from each participant. The top motivators that participants listed were to maintain health (85%), to relieve stress (73%), to lose weight (57%), to maintain weight (40%), and to accompany a friend (26%). Some other motivators that were mentioned by single participants were to impress someone, to train for a marathon, to have more energy, to tone-up, and to be in shape for firefighting. Figure 5 below represents these findings.

Figure 5. Recorded workout motivators



### Participant Observations

Observations were also completed in this research study. During the 20 minute observations, notes of the exercise behaviors of each participant during their workout routine were recorded. From the notes, there were five main themes that developed: exercise type, having a workout partner or being alone, concentrated or distracted from workout, positive or negative demeanor, and the use of headphones.

Exercise type appeared as a major theme because participants didn't only participate in one type of exercise during their time they were observed. Many participants would do cardio for 5 to 10 minutes and then switch to weight lifting for the remainder of the time. Also, the type of exercise the participant was engaged in impacted other behaviors such as mirror checking and being distracted by external factors.

Having a workout partner or not also became a major theme when analyzing the data. Those participants who came with a partner socialized more and would rely on what behavior or exercise their friend was doing to decide what behavior they would do as well. They compared themselves to their workout partner and at times were less focused on their own workout routine. The participants that were alone appeared to have a workout plan or routine and stuck with it throughout the whole time they were being observed.

Concentrated or distracted was also identified as a theme. It was very clear through observing the participants that some were very focused on their workout and accomplishing the tasks they had prepared, while others were consistently distracted by a variety of external sources. Some participants would workout at a steady pace, paying great attention to their intensity level and adjusting as desired while others varied their intensity due to being distracted by things around them. Participants were observed to be frequently distracted by their phones, checking themselves in the mirror, and watching other individuals working out.

Another major theme was positive and negative demeanor. Participants were observed

either having very upright, confident postures or they would be slouching with their head down during their workout. Attention seeking behaviors like fixing hair, grabbing their body parts, and wearing colorful, tight fitting, revealing clothes was also observed and considered a part of the positive or negative demeanor theme.

The last major theme identified during the analysis of the observation data was the use of headphones. Participants usually had headphones in during their workout while they were being observed. It could not be determined if the headphones were a concentration or distraction since every individual is different with how they use music when working out. It was noted that the participants that continuously had headphones in were the ones that were alone and not with a workout partner or friend.

### **Body Image and Satisfaction related to Exercise Frequency**

We wanted to look at the relationship of someone's body image perception and their frequency of exercise. Based on the results of both the surveys and the notes from the observation, the relationship we found was that participants that perceive themselves to have the average body type based on the Western ideal body and are very satisfied with this perception visit the facility regularly. Regular exercise visits was defined to be 5 days a week or more for the purposes of this study. The few participants that did not perceive their body to be average and or were not satisfied with their perception, listed that they visit the facility 1 to 4 times a week.

### **Body Image and Exercise Frequency related to Types of Exercises**

We looked at the relationship of someone's body image perception and frequency of exercise and the type of exercises they engaged in during their workout. Based on this study, we found that participants that perceive themselves to have an average body type and had regular frequency of visits to the physical fitness facility also participated in a variety of types of exercises. A common variety of exercises that appeared was beginning with cardio then moving to weight

lifting and then moving to stretching. The participants that had non average body perception and or were not satisfied with this perception and visited the facility 1 to 4 times a week were found that they tended to stick to one type of exercise during the workout time they were observed.

## **DISCUSSION**

Overall, UNC recreation center students tend to perceive that they have the average body type, they tend to be very satisfied with their body and tend to participate in regular exercise. From the 30 participants, 73% were females and 26% were males. UNC as a whole is 65% females and 35% males (UNC IRAS, 2016). It is believed that the reason there were so many more females than males even though the selection process was at random, is because our observation times during the day were 6:30am to 8:30 am and 6:30pm to 8:30pm. It was observed that in the morning more females attended the recreation center and in the evening more males attended. This could be due to the fact that intramural sports occur in the evening which more males participated in. Intramurals were not included in this study because the blindness of the observations would be affected. Out of the 30 participants, only 1 was non-Caucasian. UNC undergraduates are 54% Caucasian (UNC IRAS, 2016). Therefore, the UNC recreation center population during the times that we were there does not portray the diversity of the university.

From our study, 56% of participants were satisfied with their body but in a previous study 75% of participants were satisfied with their body (Zach et al., 2013). Based on previous research (Homan & Tylka, 2014), it was determined that there was a direct relationship between body satisfaction and exercise, our research study further supports this relationship. When relating the amount of satisfaction of these participants to the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982), it can be assumed that these participants are mostly in the action and maintenance stages (as cited in Johnson, Fallon, Harris, & Burton, 2013). Participants appeared to have a set workout routine and for the most part

stuck to their routine. Their frequency of exercise per week also helps in supporting the assumption that these participants are more than likely in the action and maintenance stages. Our participants reported being regular exercisers (61%) and exercise has the ability to divert attention away from how the body looks and redirects it to how the body actually functions (Martin Ginis et al., 2014). Such focus could have played a role in the fact that majority of the participants (90%) reported believing that they have the average body type; this could have been because since exercising regularly has allowed them to see how their body actually functions and they see that their body functions well, it could have led the participants to believe that they do have the average body type since they feel their body does the average exercise functions such as running and lifting heavy weights.

On the survey, participants were also asked for their main types of exercises. Our results confirm that at least 83% of participants include both cardio and weight lifting during their workout routines. These results serve to demonstrate a relationship between body image with satisfaction levels and variety in exercise types. It can be concluded that because majority of participants believed they have the average body type, they are very satisfied with their body and participate in regular exercise, then the likelihood of the participants including a variety of exercises in their workout routine was very high. The participants appeared to have set workout routine and followed it throughout the observations. They seemed to be very confident in their exercises routines. Both males and females showed their ability to have a well-rounded exercise routine. These results are contrary of previous literature in which they state that sex differences in sport exist because people believe they exist (Chalabaev et al., 2013). In the current study, it gives the impression that even if people believe stereotypes exist, stereotype did not affect the variability of exercises the participants did. This fact argues the situation perspective that states that it is not necessary to believe a stereotype is true in order to be affected by it, that

the sole presence of the stereotype in the surroundings may be enough to influence behaviors (Chalabaev et al., 2013).

Because most of the participants perceived themselves as having an average body type and reported being satisfied with their body type as well as participating in regular exercise, it makes sense that their motivations for exercising would be more neutral and intrinsic as far as maintaining health and relieving stress rather than extrinsic like accompanying a friend. Their main motivation selection was used as a predictor for their body surveillance levels. Body surveillance is the vigilance about monitoring their appearance (Aubrey, 2006). If the participant's main motivation would have been accompanying a friend or impressing someone, then their levels of surveillance would have been much higher, but because their motivations were to maintain health and relieve stress, then their body surveillance levels were found to be low. These low levels of body surveillance appear to support the idea from previous research, in which it had been said that self-objectification could result from body surveillance (Aubrey, 2006). This idea is supported because our participants did not have high levels of surveillance and their self-objectification levels were also low based on the observations. Both male and female participants were for the most part concentrated on their work out and did not try changing their behavior based on the people exercising around them; Therefore, the participants did not self-objectify themselves.

Exercise type was a prevalent theme that emerged in the current study. Most participants started their workout with a cardio activity, then participated in weight lifting, and ending in active stretching. These observations relate to the questionnaire where participants were asked about the type of exercises they participated in on a weekly basis. These observations serve to further conclude that individuals with high body image levels include a variety of exercises when they workout. They appear to be more experienced and know what they are doing. This theme of exercise type also supports as well as neglects previous research that has stated that body image could be

changed with types of exercises but not necessarily with amount of exercise (Martin Ginis, Strong, Arent, Bray, & Bassett-Gunter, 2014). This theme supports that body image can be changed with types of exercises because the participants demonstrated participation in a variety of exercises and all appear to have high body image levels. Participating in a variety of exercises does not mean that the amount of exercise (known as frequency of exercise for the purpose of this study) does not affect body image levels. The results of this study suggest otherwise; being a regular exerciser increases body image levels.

Having a workout partner or not became a prevalent theme during observations because the presence of a workout partner increased the levels of body surveillance the participant demonstrated. When the participant was accompanied by a workout partner, they tended to keep an eye on their partner in order to match up with their behavior. They would socialize more than when the participant was alone. Previous literature disagrees with this observation by stating that greater levels of social support lead to a stronger sense of exercise (McAuley, Jerome, Marquez, Elavsky, & Blissmer, 2003). Future research should focus on the effects of socialization during exercise and the differences between socialization and social support. The observations from the current study can relate back to the question about motivation in the questionnaire. When a participant was alone, their motivation was more intrinsic meaning they were there more to maintain health and relieve stress; their body surveillance levels were lower. When a participant was accompanied by a friend, their motivation was more extrinsic meaning they cared more about accompanying their friend and/or impressing someone; their body surveillance levels were higher. These high levels of body surveillance were demonstrated by amount of socialization and mirror checking for example. We had concluded before this study based on previous research that a way to help avoid negative consequences of social comparisons would be through participation in exercise. This

was because exercise encourages individuals to focus on a task rather than on the surroundings. After observing our participants, we can now say that this conclusion is not always true. Though there does seem to be a relationship between exercise and concentration, it is not always a positive relationship when there is a workout partner involved.

Concentration and distraction levels were also a prevalent theme throughout the observations. When a participant was concentrated, they would physically show it by maintaining a steady pace if they were exercising in cardio and paying close attention to their intensity level. They would rarely look over at others. They appeared to be focused on what the exercise they were doing. On the other hand, participants that were distracted varied their intensity levels if participating in cardio, and would easily and frequently look over at others walking by or at individuals exercising next to them. The participants that were distracted tended to take out their phone often and either text or take selfies as well as would participate in mirror checking if a mirror was around. These participants would also easily stop and socialize with someone walking by that they knew and would seem out of context when trying to return to their workout.

In the same realm of concentration and distraction, another prevalent theme that arose from the observations was positive and negative demeanor. Positive demeanor included but was not limited to very upright and confident postures as well as head facing forward appearing confident. Negative demeanor included but was not limited to a very slouchy posture many times with a head down. Negative demeanor also included attention seeking behaviors. Positive and negative demeanor serves to demonstrate body surveillance. The participants with negative demeanor showed high levels of body surveillance given the fact that many of these behaviors were attention seeking and purposeful to others. Therefore, because this negative demeanor was attention seeking, it supports that potentially an individual with lower body image demonstrates negative demeanor showing that

body surveillance in prevalent in lower body image individuals.

Finally, the use of headphones was the last prevalent theme that arose from the observations. The use of headphones could not be determined if it was concentration or distraction factor of interest or even a positive or negative demeanor given the fact that this varies by individual. Some individuals would suggest that use of headphones helps them concentrate when working out and some would suggest that the use of headphones actually distracts them from their exercise routine. One observation that was made was that the participants that were accompanied by a workout friend or partner did not use headphones and appears to be more distracted. Participants that were working out alone, used headphones and appears to be more focused in their workout routine, and would maintain high intensity levels. This can relate back to the motivational reasons of working out for the individuals. If a participant was exercising to relieve stress or maintain health, it could be assumed that headphones would be used in order to fully destress fully. If someone is exercising to impress someone, then it could be assumed that no headphones would be used in case if that someone ended up approaching the individual. Future studies should be done on how the use of headphones with music affect the exercising behavior of individuals.

### Limitations

Throughout the study, there were a few limitations that could have affected the results of this study. One limitation that could have affected the results was that many potential participants participated in intramural sports and therefore could not be included in the study as participants. This could have affected the randomization of the participants. Ideally every third person that walked through the door was a potential participant, but once it was seen that they were going to participate in intramurals, they were discarded and the next third person was selected as a potential participant.

Another limitation that arose throughout the study was that there were a few times when after

the observation, the participant would be running out the door and we would have to catch up to them to get them to answer the questionnaire. This could have affected the accuracy of their responses to the questionnaire because they could have potentially felt pressured to participate. Also, at times the researcher stood next to the participant while they were filling out the questionnaire. This could have affected the accuracy because the presence of the researcher could have made the participant feel like they needed to answer a “right or correct” answer.

Lastly, prior literature indicated that gender played a role in perceived body image and exercise behavior. Due to the method of random participant selection, we were unable to address this topic in our study as the majority of participants studied were female.

### CONCLUSION

Increased body dissatisfaction in the United States has been blamed on the media’s portrayals of an “ideal body” that has shown to increase self-objectification and body surveillance in those pursuing this body type. Based on the current study, there was a relationship between body image and frequency of exercise as well as types of exercises an individual performed. It is important for professionals who work in gym settings to know what the main motivations are of the individuals working out in their facilities to effectively help them in their exercise journey. Understanding these motivations and helping to guide the individual to focus on their health rather than fitting into societal norms is vital in long term exercise maintenance and success in achieving a positive body image.

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