

Body Image of Collegiate Athletes: Its Key Factors

KAITLIN SMITH & MARYCATHERINE HARMON

Kinesiology Department; Houston Baptist University; Houston, TX

Category: Undergraduate

Advisor / Mentor: Harmon, MaryCatherine (mharmon@hbu.edu)

ABSTRACT

The number of athletes developing eating disorders is on the rise. Participating in sports has many benefits, but not all stressors are positive. The intense drive to win combined with an emphasis on keeping a lean figure can be a dangerous combination. **PURPOSE:** to understand what factors influence an athlete's body image. This study looked the variables of each athlete, such as their relationships with their coach(es), relationships with their teammates, eating habits, and how they feel about their bodies concerning their sport or in daily life. It is thought in some sports body composition can give some competitive edge, this often puts pressure on athletes to maintain a lean figure to perform well, for example, swimming, volleyball, and track and field. This can lead to negative thoughts of one's own body image, and in extreme cases, lead to disordered eating. **METHODS:** this study used the Contextual Body Image Questionnaire for Athletes (CBIQA), the Student Athletes Relationship Instrument (SARI), and the ATHLETE Questionnaire in order to understand the factors that affect an athlete's body image and eating habits. The questionnaire was distributed to all athletes at a division one private university in south Texas through the athletic department. **RESULTS:** a significant difference ($p < .05$) was found between the athletes' gender; female athletes when concerning their sport, think more negatively of themselves, think they are not muscular enough, and have more negative feelings regarding their performance compared to male athletes. Regarding the leanness of their sport, lean athletes think more negatively of themselves, have a worse relationship with their teammates, and have a lower body positivity rating than non-lean sport athletes in their sport setting. **CONCLUSION:** The relationships that these results have shown have led the researcher to believe that female lean sport athletes are still the most at-risk population for athletic body-image issues. This in turn puts those athletes more at-risk for everything that a negative body image influences such as eating disorders, disordered eating habits, excessive exercise, and the excessive use of dietary/fat loss supplements. The overarching goal of all the current research should be to decrease the prevalence of negative body-image and the negative behaviors influenced by it.