

High-School Female Students' Understanding of Female Athleticism and Body Image



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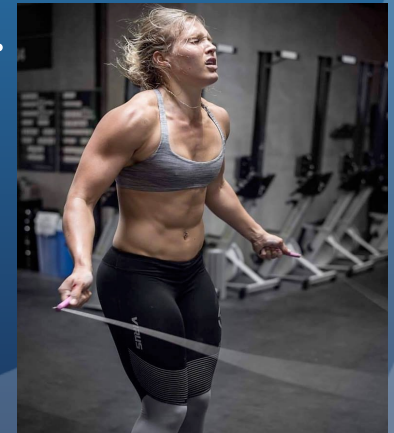
M.Ed., University of British Columbia, 2019

B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 2014

B.Rec., Acadia University, 2012

INTRODUCTION - About Me

- High-school Physical and Health Education teacher and Athletic Director at Notre Dame Regional Secondary School in East Vancouver.
- Received a University volleyball scholarship but growing up also played basketball, lacrosse and soccer. Competed in track and field as well as wrestling. Always had a passion for sports and fitness.
- Continuing my passion throughout coaching and still competing - beach volleyball and CrossFit.
- My presentation is based on my Master's Capstone project. I graduated with a Master's in Health Education in August 2019. My project was obviously centered around High-School Female Students' Understanding of Female Athleticism and Body Image.



The research I've done...

- The Canadian Women's Health Network states that in western culture, young women value slimness and hold the ultra-thin bodies of models and actresses as ideals, no matter how unrealistic and unhealthy they might be.
- It seems the message getting to young women is about being and looking slim, which perpetuates ideas of “perfection” that are largely unattainable.
- These societal expectations placed on young women in contexts where they consider themselves unattractive leaving them feeling incompetent, undesirable and unconfident (www.cwhn.ca, 2012).
- In addition, when ideas of perfection become blurred with notions of health, young women can enter into dangerous terrain as they attempt to achieve healthy ideas (Bordo, 1993).

HOW THIS AFFECTED ME.

- As an extremely competitive athlete, I have never been considered slim.
- When I wrestled for a year in high-school, I was in the heaviest weight class. I weighed about 180 pounds in high-school and I've weighed as heavy as 215 - but I've always considered myself to be in shape.
- When I began playing University volleyball, this is when I really started to deal with some body image issues.
- I never looked like the typical volleyball player. Most people thought I was a rugby player or a swimmer because of my broad shoulders.

Some alarming facts.

- Body image is a significant issue for the many adolescents and anxieties relating to body image can be very harmful (Ricciardelli & Yager, 2015).
- It is estimated that during preadolescence, 10-14 years of age, about 40 to 50% of girls report a preference to be thinner, and this increases to over 70% during adolescence, 14-17 years of age (Wertheim & Paxton, 2011).
- This preference to be thinner can lead to body dissatisfaction among female adolescents. Body dissatisfaction can occur when an individual's perception skills are inaccurate if the individual's body does not correspond to their own ideal (Schneider et al., 2012).



Research Background

- What are high school female students' understanding of female athleticism and body image?
- For my research, I chose to use participants who have an interest in fitness and who might be striving to develop strength throughout their training rather than the western culture 'ideal' of thinness.
- I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of why these female students choose and desire to exercise and compete in sport. What body image type do they feel is "ideal?"
- The seven participants in my research were female high-school students who attended Notre Dame Regional Secondary School and all participated in a voluntary morning work-out club.

Research Questions for Participants

1. Can you describe for me what comes to mind when you hear the words body image?
2. How does body image connect with physical activity or does it?
3. What aspects of fitness and working out are linked with body image?
4. Does your participation in the morning workout club support or take away from your own ideas about your body image? Can you share some examples?
5. What does the 'ideal' athletic female body look like for young women in the morning workout club?
6. How do young women conceptualize “strength” and what does this look like for the participants in the morning workout club?

Results

Organized results into four broad themes:

- Theme One - Constructing Body Image
- Theme Two - Exercise, Sports and Body Image
- Theme Three - Family, Peer and School Pressures
- Theme Four - Ideas about Strength

Theme One - Constructing Body Image

highlights the participants' construction of body image and the social pressures influencing the construction of body image.

- “I think that culturally, it’s really interesting that our ideal body shape changes so much and that right now it’s everybody wants to look curvy, whereas, ok, early 2000’s everybody wants to look like so skinny and tiny. Versus like back then when you were trying to gain weight because people wanted to look more voluptuous. And, so people want to change the way they look just based on what’s culturally ‘IN’. It’s like a fashion trend but it’s your body shape which for a lot of people you don’t have a ton of control over sometimes.”



Theme Two - Exercise, Sports and Body Image

discusses the impacts of exercise on participants' sense of self.

experiences in sport reveals the challenges young women face as they take up physically active lifestyles.

- “I can keep up with the workout and I can do things. It doesn't mean that my body has to show that. And that's fine, and that's what makes me feel OK about my body because like I'm still a good athlete and I still play high-level volleyball and I still workout now four times a week.”
- “likes to have muscles that you can actually see because you're able to be functional and do stuff in your normal life. Not just like 'oh I can like curl this much,' but actually I can run and I can play this sport.”

Theme Two - Exercise, Sports and Body Image

- Physically active women face an interesting conflict - Western culture emphasizes a feminine ideal body that contrasts with an athletic body type and therefore sportswomen live in two cultures, the sport culture and their larger social culture (Krane et. Al, 2004). Female athletes who perform femininity acquire power and privilege while female athletes perceived as masculine are labeled as social deviants (Blinde & Taub, 1992). In a 2004 study by Krane et al., they researched female NCAA athletes and how they negotiated femininity and muscularity.



Theme Three - Family, Peer and School Pressures

external pressures are identified such as family pressure, peer pressure and pressures at school when it comes to body image and the impacts of school uniforms in relation to body image.

- “I have this grandma who is from Poland so she doesn’t speak very good English. I remember when I was little, she used to like grab my stomach fat and be like ‘you need to lose weight!’ when I was 6 years old. She would be picking me up from my elementary school and she would look at a girl and she’s be like ‘that girl needs to lose weight! Like why would she [my grandma] ever say that [about my weight]?’”
- “I think someone’s family influences their mindset a lot. I recently quit my soccer team because my coach treats me so bad. And then my sisters my sisters are always like ‘if you don’t work-out Angela, you’re gonna get fat!’ Or they say ‘ya, we work-out and we’re like 110 [pounds].’ They’re like ‘you have to work-out or you’re going to be the fattest in the family!’”

Theme Four - Ideas about Strength

illustrates how muscles and being strong are welcomed but understood in relation to dominant social forces. the young women talk about the bodily change's women undergo and how strength is part of their ability to adapt to lives changes but also to be able to protect themselves.

- “I’ve just always been like really scrawny, I want to like look like a woman and not a girl in my mind. Before I started working out, I couldn’t wear jeans cause I’m tall but too skinny to wear women’s jeans. So being able to fit women’s clothes makes me feel strong. I like it when you can tell that somebody works out and you can like see their arm muscles and see that they are strong.”



**HERE'S TO
STRONG
WOMEN**
MAY WE KNOW THEM
MAY WE BE THEM
MAY WE RAISE THEM

Suggestions and Recommendations

1. Suggestions should be made to schools to provide education sessions for parents and family members and invite them into having a conversation around the topic of body image and how they can positively impact their female children.
2. It is recommended that schools look at potential partnerships with children's health clinics or eating disorder clinics so that professionals can come into schools and educate teachers on how to have positive conversations with students surrounding the topic of body image.
3. I would suggest for high-school PHE teachers to incorporate small group discussions with female students surrounding important topics such as body image, strength and female athleticism.

Suggestions and Recommendations

4. Hopefully in the future, we see more Professional Development opportunities for coaches of female athletes. It is equally as important for coaches to engage in more conversations about how we can empower our female athletes and be more considerate of the language we use.



COACHING WOMEN IN SPORT

- Something I have recognized in my time coaching female athletes is that they are all different.
- Be hard on them, expect greatness out of them but also recognize that some don't respond well to yelling. I find pulling athletes to the side and talking to them is a much better strategy.
- Be patient and understanding with your female athletes when they are becoming frustrated or not acting themselves. It might be worth that extra conversation after practice to understand if something else is going on or if they are struggling internally.
- Competition is good, but try and avoid drills and situations where an athlete might constantly finish last. And if they do, have a conversation with them after practice about things they can do to improve.

QUESTIONS?





**THANK
YOU**

An illustration featuring two hands holding a bright orange banner with the words "THANK YOU" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The hands are wearing dark suit sleeves with white cuffs. The background is a light blue rectangle with a subtle gradient, set against a larger blue background with rounded corners and a layered effect.