Why Do They Sweat? Body (Dis)Satisfaction and Evaluation of Health and Body Attractiveness among Young Men Taking Regular Gym Exercises

DOI: 10.15804/tner.2015.42.4.22

Abstract

Studies on men's body image are becoming increasingly popular. They show that body dissatisfaction may lead to certain health disorders (depressive mood, bigorexia, anxiety). This study focuses on the differences in body dissatisfaction among young men who work out to reach different aims (to increase, strengthen or to shape muscle mass). Body dissatisfaction was measured using the Bodybuilder Image Grid Scale. The results of this study show that there are no significant differences between men who exercise in gyms using different types of work-out. However, there is a significant difference between men who exercise to gain muscle mass and those who do not work out at all; the first group is less satisfied with their bodies as far as fat mass is concerned. Moreover, the evaluation of health and body attractiveness was measured using the questionnaire 'Your values' and asking men about the hypothetical possibility of giving up their longevity for a perfect body. The results indicate that men who exercise tend to treat health more instrumentally than those who do not train. Finally, those who train regularly find attractiveness of the body much more important than those who do not exercise at all.

Keywords: *body image, body dissatisfaction, gym, working out*

Introduction

For many years body image studies were focused on women. However, since the early nineties of the twentieth century it is more and more popular to concentrate on men's body image (Brytek – Matera, 2008). As the studies show (e.g. Zarek,

2007) women are usually less satisfied with their bodies than men. However, the attitude towards one's body is different for each sex. Men are less concerned about their body weight and focus more on their silhouettes (Zarek, 2007). It leads toward ambivalent attitudes – men exercise to increase their body weight (muscle mass) and at the same time to reduce their body weight (fat mass) in order to reach their goal, i.e. a 'perfect' body shape and satisfaction with their bodies (Tantleff – Dunn, Thompson, 2000).

Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki, Cohane (2004) show that men's body dissatisfaction has a vital influence on their self – esteem, lowers their mood and may lead to eating disorders. However, the topic of body (dis)satisfaction as an important issue in the context of well-being and physical and psychological health still needs to be verified empirically.

One of the most popular activities aimed at obtaining a 'perfect' silhouette among men is exercising at gyms (Grogan, 2008). So far, however, researchers have not paid attention to the variety of popular gym exercise. Rychlik (2008) mentions three types of exercise which differ in their aim: to increase muscle mass, to increase the strength of muscle mass, and to shape muscle mass. While examining the relationship between training at gyms and body (dis)satisfaction, it seems to be vital to remember the purpose for which workouts are done.

Exercising at a gym might be connected with some dangerous behaviors that might harm one's health (e.g. Ricciardelli, McCabe, 2003; Sas-Nowosielski, 2004, e.g. Czuma, Orłowska, 2005). Therefore, actions taken by young men (using steroids, undertaking debilitating training, etc.) might be understood as considering the attractiveness of one's body as more important than health. No scientific studies focused particularly on this phenomenon were found. Nonetheless, the problem is vital, especially from the practical point of view.

Research Methodology

General Background of Research

In the presented study attention was paid to the variety of types of workout done (or not) by men in connection with their body (dis)satisfaction. It seems to be an important issue that might explain the fact that previous studies on relations between workouts and body dissatisfaction are contradictory. Schier and Rakfal-ska (2008) showed that there are significant differences in body dissatisfaction between men who do regular workouts and those who do not. However, Ayensa,

Martinez, Rancel (2011) revealed no significant differences. None of these studies has included the variety of possible types of workout that might be done. It seems to be an important issue to check the differences in body (dis)satisfaction between men who do different types of workout.

Thompson (as cited in: Cash, Pruzinsky, 1999) showed that many researchers often use the term 'body image' as a synonym of other terms (e.g. body schema, body satisfaction). It seems to be significant to specify precisely which aspect of body image is the subject of investigation. Since the purpose of starting gym workouts is usually a desire to obtain a "perfect" silhouette, it was decided that the object of this particular study would be dissatisfaction with one's body. Grogan (2008, p. 4) explains it as 'a person's negative thoughts and feelings about his or her body'. It might also be understood as a difference between the perception of desired, ideal silhouette and the perception of one's actual body. The latter was applied in the presented study.

Pope, Phillips, Olivardia (2000) show that doing regular exercise at gyms is becoming more and more popular. The main motivation to begin workouts at gyms is aesthetic – the desire to get a 'perfect' silhouette. That prompts the reflection that the beauty of the body and an attractive appearance might be values of particular importance. As Grogan and Richards (2002) show, aesthetic values are the main factors that lead men to start workouts at gyms (even though a muscular body is identified with health and fitness). It seems to be a logical conclusion that the beauty of the body will be much more important for those who exercise regularly at gyms than for those who do not.

The adduced studies prompt also the reflection on how health is valued among young men. Puchalski (1997) focused on perceiving health as a value – autotelic or instrumental. The data shown by CBOS (2004) suggest that people generally tend to treat health as a value of the greatest importance. However, in everyday life it loses its dominant position and practical importance when confronted with other values. Consequently, it is necessary to analyze its position in relation to other values (Puchalski, 1997; Górník-Durose, Jach, 2013).

It is worth mentioning in this context a study by Garner (1997). In his survey he asked men how many years of their lives they would 'give up' to get their ideal body weight. More than 11% of the respondents would 'exchange' more than five years while 17% – more than three. The survey had some limitations. First of all, the highest possible answer in the survey was 'more than five'. Furthermore, the respondents were asked about body weight, while it is, as mentioned before, considered to be less important to men than a perfect silhouette (Zarek, 2007). Gaining muscle mass is one of the most common reasons for working out (Giess-

ing, 2011). Nevertheless, the results of Garner's survey show the quantifiable and instrumental value of life and possibly also health. Almost 1/3 of the subjects declared that body weight was more important than longer life.

In the presented study the differences in body dissatisfaction among young men who exercise at gyms and those who do not was examined. The relative value of health and body appearance was also taken into consideration. The following hypotheses were formulated:

- a) There will be differences between young men who exercise at gyms and take different types of training and these who do not exercise in relation to body dissatisfaction.
- b) The men will value a perfect silhouette more highly than perfect weight.
- c) The men who exercise regularly will value the appearance of their bodies more highly than the men who do not exercise at all.
- d) The men who exercise regularly will value the appearance of their bodies more highly than their health.

Methods

Men answered questions about their age, education, whether they exercise in gyms and what kind of training they do (to gain muscle mass, to "sculpture" muscle mass, to increase muscle strength, others). The participants answered the question about how long they had attended the gym (in months). Then their body dissatisfaction and health valuation were measured.

Body dissatisfaction

The body dissatisfaction was measured by The Bodybuilder Image Grid (Hildebrandt, Langenbucher, Schlundt, 2004). BIG is a tool aimed at checking the perception of one's body image and desired body image. BIG consists of thirty images representing men's silhouettes. There are two dimensions that measure body image – fat mass and muscle mass. The respondent's task is to select four images related to: 1. his present body image; 2. ideal body image; 3. the one that is most attractive to the respondent; 4. the one that is the most attractive to the opposite sex (for homosexual men – for the same sex). For the purpose of this study, the respondents were asked to select images related to the first two criteria. The difference between the present and ideal body image was considered as an indicator of dissatisfaction – the greater the discrepancy the more dissatisfied the men were considered to be with their body.

Health evaluation

Health evaluation was measured in two ways. The first was inspired by Garner's (1997) popular survey. The respondents were asked: 'How many years of your life would you »give« to get desired body weight?' and 'How many years of your life would you »give« to get a desired body silhouette?' Some doubts may be raised here in relation to the identification of life with health. Such a solution was applied because the worth of life was possible to objectify in years of life given up, whereas it would be difficult in relation to health.

In the second step, the questionnaire 'Your Values' was used. The questionnaire was created by a research team from the Psychology of Health and Quality of Life Department at the Faculty of Education and Psychology at the University of Silesia in Katowice. The respondent's task was to decide to what extent each of the 30 values was important to him on the scale from 0 ("not at all") to 7 ("it dominates in my life"). For the purpose of the presented study, only the value of health in relation to the value of the "beauty of the body" was analyzed.

Respondents

The respondents were men aged 19–29. Oliver, León, Guerra-Hernandez (2011) say that it is the period of time when men are most likely to pay attention to the appearance of their bodies. There were two groups of respondents – those who worked out in gyms and those who did not. The first of those groups consisted of men who had exercised at a gym for at least a year. The assumption was that for men who have trained for at least for a year it becomes an important part of their lifestyle. Men who do not work out were considered as a control group. 151 respondents took part in the study – 77 who regularly worked out and 74 who did not at all. Questionnaires were distributed in two ways – sent by e-mail (83 questionnaires) or handed out directly to the respondents (68 questionnaires).

The men who exercised in gyms were mainly customers of one of the most popular fitness clubs in Silesia, Poland. Their managers did not agree to reveal the names of the gyms.

Research Results

Table 1 shows discrepancies between ideal and actual muscle mass and fat mass as perceived by the subjects. In relation to muscle mass, the most dissatisfied sub-

jects were those who worked on muscle mass and strength, the least – the subjects with non-specific muscle sculpting plans as well as those who did not exercise at all. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows statistically significant differences between the group with non – specific training plans and those who work out to gain muscle mass ($p < .025$) as well as the ones who work out to increase their strength ($p < .025$). However, there were no significant differences between any of the groups of those who trained at gyms and those who did not exercise at all (in all cases $p > .10$).

As far as differences in the actual and ideal level of fat mass were concerned, once again the most dissatisfied subjects were those who worked on muscle mass and strength, the least – the subjects with multiple plans and those who did not exercise at all. However, the differences were not statistically significant in most cases. Comparison between all the groups showed that the men who trained to gain muscle mass were less satisfied with their level of fat mass than those who did not train at all ($p = .04$).

Table 1. The differences between ideal and actual fat mass and muscle mass among men who train different types of workouts and those who do not (from Bodybuilder Image Grid)

	Muscle mass (n=25)	Sculpting muscle mass (n=16)	Increasing strength (n=16)	Non-specific (n=20)	Workouts – overall (n=77)	No workouts (n=74)
Difference: ideal and actual level of muscle mass						
M	23.33	13.13	22.50	12.00	18.03	16.89
SD	16.33	14.01	10.00	14.73	14.97	14.70
Difference: actual and ideal level of fat mass						
M	27.08	16.25	19.38	13.50	19.61	14.19
SD	19.67	16.68	21.44	15.31	18.86	15.70

The results shown above indicate that the hypothesis that there were significant differences in body dissatisfaction between the men who chose different types of gym workouts and those who did not exercise did not find sufficient support. However, some tendencies requiring further investigation were revealed.

Next, the claim that for the men who work out and those who do not a perfect silhouette is more important than perfect weight was verified. The respondents were to decide how many years of their lives they would 'give up' to obtain perfect weight and a perfect silhouette (if, of course, such a situation was possible). For

the men who trained regularly at gyms the mean result for 'giving up' their lives for perfect weight was 2.07 years and for a perfect silhouette – 3.01 years. The pair comparison (Wilcoxon test) showed that there were significant differences between both scores ($p < .01$). This result showed that for the men who worked out regularly a perfect silhouette was more important than perfect weight. The same procedure was applied to test the group of men who did not exercise at gyms. The mean result of 'years of life given up' for perfect weight was 0.75, and for a perfect silhouette – 1.17 ($p < .01$). The results obtained suggest that for both groups a perfect silhouette was more important than perfect body weight.

Furthermore, the men who regularly worked out at gyms were more likely to devote their health and lives to gaining an ideal silhouette than those who did not exercise. Comparison between both groups with the use of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test showed that there were significant differences ($p < .05$). In relation to 'perfect body weight', the statistics did not show significant differences ($p > 0.1$). However, when it comes to evaluating health in a more direct way (Questionnaire 'Your Values'), the men who regularly trained at the gym did not differ from those who did not exercise at all ($p > .01$). In both cases health was indicated as the most important value.

It seemed to be logical to assume that the men who worked out at gyms considered the value of 'beauty of the body' as more important than the men who did not exercise. The mean result of the men who worked out at gyms for the 'beauty of the body' was 5.28 while for the men who did not exercise – 4.04. The comparison between both groups shows that the difference was statistically significant ($p < .01$). Thus, this assumption was confirmed.

Conclusions

The level of dissatisfaction with men's body was investigated by Ayensa, Martinez and Rancel (2011). It showed no differences in body dissatisfaction between men who regularly work out at gyms and those who do not. On the other hand, the study conducted by Schier and Rakfalska (2008) revealed opposite results – men who work out tended to be more satisfied with their bodies. The presented study seems to confirm the results obtained by Ayensa, Martinez and Rancel (2011) – no statistically significant differences were found between the groups. However, when the types of training were included, the groups differed: those who did not work out were more satisfied with their fat mass than those who trained to gain greater muscle mass. Also, the subjects who were more relaxed

about their training (non-specific training) were less dissatisfied with their muscle mass than the subjects aiming at muscle mass and strength. It might be explained by the time spent in gyms by those men – they were the least experienced groups among all the men who worked out ($M = 30$ months). They had just begun their training to gain muscle mass (Rychlik, 2008). In comparison, those who worked out to ‘sculpture’ their muscle mass were more experienced in training ($M = 46$ months) and less dissatisfied with their bodies. The same applied to the group with non-specific training ($M = 60$ months for training plans other than described, and $M = 40$ months for multiple plans). Such a result seems to be understandable. The reasons for taking up exercise are usually connected with aesthetic issues – to sweat in the gym men must have been dissatisfied with their bodies in some way. However, it could happen that despite exercising some men are still dissatisfied, thinking that they do not achieve their goals. This group is at risk of developing bigorexia and other body image disorders (Czuma, Orłowska, 2005). Thus, it is important to pay attention to the relationship between exercising, dissatisfaction and the actual results of exercising which were not monitored in the presented study. The results obtained in this study show also that while examining men who work out at gyms it is necessary to focus on different types of training.

The presented study has shown that gaining a ‘perfect’ silhouette is much more important than achieving ‘perfect’ weight – for both men who work out and those who do not. It corresponds with Zarek’s (2007) claims that men’s dissatisfaction with their bodies is different from women’s. For women dissatisfaction is related to their body weight, whereas for men – to the silhouette. This is why – as Phillips, de Man (2010), Drewnowski, Yee (1987) and Maisey, Vale, Cornelissen and Tovee (1999) argue – using BMI (body mass index) in studies on body image among men is unjustified.

In the presented study the subjects were asked how many years of their lives they would ‘give up’ for a ‘perfect’ silhouette and ‘perfect’ body weight. The results showed that the men were more likely to ‘exchange’ their lives for the ‘perfect’ silhouettes than the ‘perfect’ body weight. The same tendency was shown among the men who worked out and those who did not. However, the first group would ‘give up’ much more of their lives than the second one. It may mean that they treat their lives and health more instrumentally. However, health was considered to be one of the most important values in both groups, much higher than body attractiveness. It might be explained by Górník-Durose and Jach’s (2013) considerations – health is often treated as a ‘ceremonial value’ when people are asked directly about its importance. In practice it often loses its ‘ceremonial value’ and is used as an instrument to achieve other goals.

Due to the fact that this is the first study which takes into account the purpose of training, more studies on this issue are needed. It is important in the context of the prevention of mental disorders (such as bigorexia) to draw attention to the appropriate education of young men, especially those who are starting their adventure with exercising at the gym. A crucial role might be played here by personal trainers.

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