

Body shape and gender



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Body Shape and Gender differences in ratings.

Introduction

Body image is the way people perceive themselves and equally important, the way they think others perceive them. Body image is constantly changing, and is always being modified by biological growth, trauma, or decline. It is also significantly influenced and moulded by life circumstances which bring about pain or pleasure. There are many factors that influence how people perceive their own body image and others. Factors such as culture have a significant influence on perceptions of body images. As people tend to compare their self to what is acceptable within their own culture, and see if they match the standard of others. Although, women's perception of the ideal body shape, is a thin one. Delameter 2004 stated that attraction is characterised as an attitude, which consists of feelings beliefs and behaviours, whether it is a positive or negative one is dependant on the person's perception of the individual.

Socio cultural theory

The sociocultural theory is a perspective that presents the idea that human behaviour is affected by cultural influences. It highlights the important of cultural values in understanding how individuals are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves. In relation to body image and attractiveness, the sociocultural perspective would offer the idea that if the culture deems attractiveness to be important and is admired within its members, then individuals within the society will value attractiveness in themselves as well as others, and the same idea would apply if the culture deems attractiveness

to be of less importance than the members of the society would then not look into the importance of attractiveness within themselves or others.

Within the socio cultural theory there are three approaches which help to explain the role of physical attractiveness in everyday life. The first theory being the social expectancy theory, this theory argues that cultural values influence perceptions of others and the behaviour, which in turn influences the behaviour of others which then has an impact on the self perception of others. The “ self fulfilling prophecy” is the sequence of events that happens in order for people to make judgments on others, which are based on the other persons’s and expectations, and then the individual is led to believe they are as the perceiver expected them to be. An example of this in relation to body image, if a shop assistant was helping a customer chose clothes and had to fetch the customer clothes without asking for their size, and kept bringing back larger sizes. The customer may then begin to think that as the shop assistant perceives them to be larger that they are actually much larger and if such events occurred over a number of times the customer would then believe it to be true over a period of time. There are many hypotheses that derive from the social expectancy theory such as:

- There is a consensual agreement within cultures about who is attractive and who is not attractive, but variability among cultures.
- There are consensual expectations within cultures about attractive and unattractive others, but variability among cultures.
- People behave differently toward attractive and unattractive others.

- People's differential behaviour toward attractive other results in differences in how they respond.

- These behavioural differences result in differences in the self-concepts of attractive and unattractive others.

There is very little research looking into the reasons why attractiveness is valued, or why some faces and body characteristics are considered attractive and others are not.

The next approach descending from the socio cultural theory is the implicit personality theory. This approach focuses on the knowledge structure that people use to make sense of their social world, which is to understand and predict the behaviour of others. Implicit theories are conceptualised as cognitive structures that consist of personal attributes and inferential relations that specify the degree to which attributes are related. An example of the attribute "intellectual" might be expected to go well with the attribute "studious" rather than the attribute "nervous".

Implicit personality theory provides a framework for understanding the physical attractiveness stereotype. The category label physically attractive is presumed to be linked to a variety of attributes; the number and nature depend on the culture. Cultural information is transmitted through direct observations of attractive others and by exposure to cultural representations of attractiveness. However, the theory does not explain why different cultures associate different attributes with attractiveness.

The final theory to stem from the social cultural theory is the status generalisation theory which has evolved from sociological theories. The theory suggests that external status characteristics are used to generate expectation states regarding performance, with or without prior association between these characteristics and performance and with or without conscious awareness.

Status generalisation theory views physical attractiveness as a “diffuse” status characteristic because it discriminates among individuals and establishes performance expectancies “without-limit” that is, without regard to the actual relevance of attractiveness to performance. From the status generalisation perspective, physical attractiveness should be associated with a wide range of desirable attributes in both perceptions of others and self perceptions.

Similarly, like the social expectancy theory and implicit personality theory, the status generalisation theory predicts that people hold more positive expectations for attractive than unattractive others. All three theories predict that people behave more favourably towards attractive than unattractive others, and that more favourable treatment results in more favourable self-concepts for attractive people.

The socio cultural perspective, states that culture defines what an attractive body is and self perceptions of body attractiveness depend on these cultural definitions. The closer body self perceptions come to the ideal, the higher the self rating should be of body attractiveness. Therefore, body image should depend on cultural ideals and on how an individual perceives his or

her own body in relation to these ideals. This also, suggests that culture is an important issue which frames certain individual's perception on their body image, and perception of others.

Research following the socio cultural perspective has been found to suggest that body ideals vary among cultures as well as within cultures across groups and time. Present-day Western cultures idealise thinness for females and an average type for males. The thin ideal for women replaced the more full d one of the 1950s, and may soon be replaced by" fitness " ideal that began to emerge in the 1990s.)

Evolutionary theory

" The evolutionary theory argues that for the existence of universally shared criteria of attractiveness, which are cues to a persons potential reproductive success" Buss (1999) according to this theory, females are believed to select partners that will enhance their reproductive success, and the biological features are deemed to be found more attractive. It is stated that the biological features are " to honestly signal that one individual is more " desirable" then another" Buss 1999.

Culture

Within many different cultures there are different standards of what attractiveness is, and there are a wider range of acceptable weights and shapes. Within the " white" Western culture female attractiveness consists of a slender body shape. Slenderness is generally associated with happiness, success, youthfulness and social acceptability. Over weight for both men and women has been seen as physically unattractive and is also associated with other negative characteristics.

Research from Bordo (1993) found that excess flesh started to become linked with low morality, reflecting personal inadequacy or lack of willpower. Slenderness symbolises being in control, which in turn is seen as an attractive feature. The firm toned body is seen as representing success. Most people do not have slim, toned bodies, so they have to work towards fitting in with the norm of society. Bordo states that the current idealisation of slenderness is that the body is kept under control “ The ideal here is of a body that is absolutely tight, contained, bolted down, firm” (Bordo 1993: 190)

In a study by Tiggemann and Rothblum (1988) asked a large number of students about their stereotypes of fat and thin men and women. They were asked to rate the extents to which eight qualities were typical of thin men and women and fat men and women. Men and women in both cultures reported negative stereotypes of fat people. Although, fat people were seen as warmer and friendlier, confirming the traditional stereotype of the fat jolly person, they were also viewed as less happy, more self indulgent, less self confident, less self disciplined, lazier and less attractive than thin people. These judgements were marked of fat women than fat men. The results indicate negative stereotyping of fat people, especially fat women. Tiggemann et al stated that from the findings they found “ there were no differences in stereotyping between students who were fat and those who were thin. Even those who were overweight had negative stereotypes of fat people”

Dion researched the link between attractiveness and positive personal qualities. He stated that “ What is beautiful is good” Dion et al 1972: 285).

Dion stated that people tend to assign more favourable personality traits and life outcomes to those they perceive as attractive. More recent supporting evidence came from Eagley (1991) suggested that the effects of physical attractiveness stereotypes are strongest for perceptions of social competence. Negative stereotyping of overweight may be a specific aspect of the physical attractiveness stereotype that refers specifically to assignment of negative traits to those who have a body size and shape that is not considered attractive by dominant groups in western cultures.

It is often assumed that women's obsession with weight is linked with their desire to be attractive, to men, but research from Fallon and Rozin (1985) disagrees with this idea. They conducted an experiment which consisted of participants were shown line drawings of women ranging from extremely thin to extremely fat. It was found that women chose their ideal as thinner than what they believed men to prefer and this is more evident to be done in adolescence Cohn et al (1987) which may have an impact on how women rate and judge other women's bodies, and levels of attractiveness. The societal pressure hypothesis states that, the thin standard of beauty seen in the mass media encourages women to strive for unrealistically thin Silverstein et al (1986).

Whereas, in African cultures "black" females have described their standard of an ideal body on non body factors such as style of clothes, skin, ethnic pride and so on. The black community has a unique view of ideal weight and body size compared to white mainstream culture. Black women tend to support a larger and more moderate idea body size than the very thin ideal that is favoured by the white western societies. Also in contrast, to

overweight white women, overweight black women are more likely to view their bodies as attractive. There is also less prejudice against overweight people amongst the African cultures. Jackson and McGill (1996) found that when black men were asked to "relate several descriptors with the term "obese" they were more likely to associate positive characteristics such as "attractive" and "generous" and less likely to state negative attributes such as "lazy" or "uneducated" compared to the opinions of white men. Similarly, black women were more likely than white women to relate "sexiness" with "obese" in regard to same race men." This more tolerant and appreciative view of overweight and obese body sizes likely.

Langlois 2000 most research on physical attractiveness dominates research on attractiveness as it maybe most accessible trait when first meeting someone.

Whereas in Western societies Furnham 1983 found that there is an inverse relationship between high social class and low body weight, the inverse is true of less developed, non-Western societies. As it has also been shown that the longer immigrants have been in Western societies, the less obese they tend to be. This study examined how Kenyan Asian, British and Kenyan British females from similar backgrounds perceived female body shapes. As predicted, the Kenyans rated larger more favourably and smaller less favourably than the British. Also, as predicted, it was found that the Kenyan Asian British were more similar to the British group in their perceptions. The results support the view that social and cultural factors play dominant role in the perception of one's own and others' body shapes. In addition, the results

reveal that in Britain preferences for small body shapes to the point of being anorexic are not uncommon.

WHR ratio

It is difficult to state where fat is distributed and to comment on whether it is appropriate or inappropriate. Before puberty boys and girls have roughly the same pattern of fat distribution. However when puberty strikes, due to oestrogen, it causes fat to be placed around the hip area of the body. The affect on male bodies is that testosterone causes the body to distribute the fat around the abdominal region. The fat distribution is measured by the waist hip ratio (WHR). The WHR is obtained by taking an individual's waist at the narrowest point, and hip measurement, and then finding the ratio of the two measurements. The WHR is a reliable index of the distribution of fat between upper and lower body according to Leibel, Edens and Fried (1989) also they stated that the loss or gain of 10 pounds doesn't appear to affect fat distribution. Healthy men typically have a WHR in the range of 0.85- 0.95 and for women the WHR is in the region of 0.67-0.80.

In relation to attractiveness, it has become apparent that over the years the female has become more curvaceous over time. Later studies have looked mostly at select groups of women such as playboy centrefolds and Miss America contestants. Based on data from these populations, researchers have hypothesised that the female body shape is moving away from an hourglass shape and becoming curvier. This would indicate that women when rating bodies and their perception of them should favour the curvier shapes. However, when Singh (1993) re-examined the same data using the WHR, it was found that despite a reduction in total body weight, WHR has

remained fairly stable at the measurement of 0.68-0.72 over the years. These ratios are still very indicative of an hourglass form. If women had a very curvaceous body shape their WHR would approach 1.0.

Although, attractiveness does change over time, and these issues should be considered when men and women are rating body shapes for attractiveness as it may affect the scores they give. However, it does appear that the relation between a small waist and attractiveness has remained fairly similar. Mostly, western society's trends have been for women to exaggerate the smallness of this feature with a few exceptions, an example of this comes from periods such as the flapper period; where waist lines were eliminated. Research by Morris 1985 showed that in this "flapper" period women went to high levels of extremes to fit in with the small waist preference, and had their lower ribs removed. A narrow waist is often a preferred and....

Singh 1993 research found that both male and female subjects have the ability to use the WHR by itself to make judgements about women's attractiveness and other features which suggests that body shape is a very important variable, which should implicate that WHR is an important feature when body perceptions are made. Within Singh's study he allowed participants a 12 line drawing of female bodies, which four different WHR ratings. These images were also split into three body sizes of underweight, normal or overweight. , participants were then shown all images, and asked to rate the attractiveness of each in order. Participants were also asked other questions to group the images in certain groups. The results from this study found that participants can make discriminations about images, based on

weight and WHR. The results also found that participants preferred women with lower WHR and found them more attractive than the higher WHR. The normal weighted were rated higher whereas, the underweight and overweight images were perceived as being less attractive. Singh's study implies that female attractiveness is associated with low WHRs, and that fat distribution is more important than body weight when determining attractiveness. Singh also stated that a small WHR was gender specific, so a low WHR is more favoured when the image people are presented with to rate are females have a low WHR. Male images with low WHRs are judged as least attractive no matter what their weight category is.

Research by Palwowski and Grabarczyk 2003 conducted research into WHR, and investigated the difference within WHR and the different components that are a part of WHR dimensions. They looked into the hip size and the waist size. In order to state which asset is more important when males are rating female attractiveness they conducted an experiment whereby participants were presented with a series of photographs where the WHR had been altered with, in either the hip or waist area. It was found that attractiveness was correlated negatively with WHR especially when it was manipulated.

Although, some research by Tassinary and Hansen 1998 has suggested that hip size is more influential than waist size. In many traditional societies, living in relatively poor conditions, where fat reserves in hip and thigh regions may be important as an energy source during pregnancy and lactation, as it may be expected that there could also be a preference for wider hips. On the other hand, in modern societies; where there is no risk of

having not enough food and where there are resources for financially poor mothers, resources are given to support them. Therefore, men may be harsher judges about waist size. Although, Tovee et al 1999 found that weight was more important than WHR when participants were judging women's attractiveness.

Anorexics

Body perception may differ between anorexic people, research by Furnham et al 1994 studied three groups of anorexic females, teenagers and mature adults, all participants were shown male and female body images which ranged in body size; from thin to fat. The participants were then asked to rate them on four categories using a 10 point rating scale. It was found that both anorexic and teenage groups rated the thinner women as more attractive than the mature females. Both mature and teenage females rated the fat female body shape more positively than did the anorexics. This study design was altered in the experiment that was conducted.

Influential research

Swami and Tovee (2005) researched the cues that are perceived to influence rating female attractiveness, which were body mass index (BMI) and waist-to-hip-ratio (WHR). This study examined the relative contribution of both cues in two different cultures; British and Malaysian. Both cultures were asked to rate the females images where BMI and WHR was presented with the image, and asked to rate the attractiveness of the image. The results showed that BMI is an influential factor whereas, WHR doesn't emerge as a predictor, which suggest that the WHR doesn't have any major impact when rating images for levels for attractiveness. Thornhill and Grammer 1999 used real

images of women and this study also found that BMI is strongly correlated with attractiveness than is WHR.

Swami, Salem, Furnham & Tovée (2008) criticise standard research into ratings because they often use ratings of unrealistic drawings of women. They developed a scale using real photographs of women the photographic rating scale (PFRS), taken from the front view and wearing a neutral costume. The PFRS was designed to overcome many of the limitations associated with line-drawn that are currently in use, including a lack of realism and poor ecological validity. Based on a sample of 208 adult women, the results of the study showed that the PFRS had good validity in that all images were correctly rank-ordered by BMI.

Marlowe, Apicella & Reed (2005) criticised standard research on this topic from a different angle - they said that WHR has only been evaluated using front-on , where WHR involves waists and hips of varying comparative sizes. They created a scale of in profile and varied how large the ' s buttocks were. They concluded that women's actually vary regarding where the fat is deposited - in some cultures (e. g. USA) it tends to be deposited on the hips (and is favoured/disfavoured there) whilst in other cultures (e. g. Tanzania)it tends to be deposited on the buttocks (and is favoured/disfavoured there.

Smith, Cornelissen & Tovee (2007) also had something to say about where fat is distributed and how different this can be from person to person. This prompted them to conduct a study using real women's bodies, where participants were shown many angles around the 360 degree spectrum. it appears that cardiovascular fitness may be a weak cue, at least in bodies not

undergoing cardiovascular exercise. Instead, it seems that more salient cues, such as body mass and skin tanning, are the primary determinants of attractiveness judgements.

The current study has been inspired by a popular news article in the Mail Online, which presented a range of 12 body shapes, including “ Pear”, “ Skittle” and “ Goblet” (Trinny & Susannah, 2007). This news article acknowledged the varying places where body fat can be distributed on the female . The current study intends to vary the positioning of body fat deposits and the amount of body fat, to test whether it is only WHR that affects raters’ judgements or other elements of body fat distribution. This will be accomplished using artificial widening and narrowing of three photos, to produce three sizes for three shapes being tested.

It is anticipated that Differences in judgements between males and females and between body sizes are expected, as found in previous research. However, it is also anticipated that there may be some interesting differences in ratings depending on where body fat is distributed. It is expected that top heavy distribution of fat may be more unfavourably rated than bottom heavy or equally distributed body fat across all body sizes tested. However, there may also be interaction effects, for example, with only minor body shape differences for the narrower , yet greater body shape differences for the wider . There may also be an interaction between gender and these issues (e. g. males may be more discerning about body shape than females, or may be more discerning than females about body shape for some body sizes and not others).

The hypothesis that arises from the previous research that has been discussed is:

- To investigate if there is a relationship between the different types of body shapes and the perception of body image between different genders.
- If there is an effect within altered body shapes and between gender overall.

Method

Participants

A total of 180 participants were recruited at random from social networking website to take part in the online questionnaire. Most participants were selected from the university social network so the participants consisted of a range of individuals studying different courses. The participant's age ranged from 18-25 with a mean of 21.5. An equal gender split sample was selected to participate. The participants were randomly assigned to a questionnaire, each questionnaire required 20 participants to take part in the study. 10 males and 10 females were randomly chosen to complete each the questionnaire.

Materials

The materials used in this experiment were the questionnaire, which was created using an online service. A copy of the questionnaire can be seen in the appendix (see appendix?). The questionnaire results are then logged online. The results will then be analysed using the computer program SPSS. Each questionnaire contains 9 different images, consisting of 3 original images which were altered in size. The original 3 were pear, skittle and goblet body shapes which are the stimuli.

Design

The experiment will be analysed through a three-way ANOVA on the attractiveness ratings: a 2 (Gender: Male, Female) x 3 (Body Size: Narrowed, Original, Widened) x (Body Shape: Pear, Skittle, Goblet). The independent variable is the reaction to body image. This will be measured through a rating scale, whereby participants will be asked to rate the level of attractiveness of the picture they are presented with. The attractiveness ratings are the central concern of this study, with the other ratings appearing to help reduce demand characteristics. Although each participant will rate just one stimulus, between participants three body shapes and three body sizes will be rated. The dependant variable is the image that the participant will be faced with, and the gender of the participant.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to participant and complete one of the 9 questionnaires. There were 9 different images altogether; each of the 9 questionnaires had a different image. After this had been created, 9 separate online groups were created on the social networking website, which participants were then randomly allocated a website to click on and complete the questionnaire. Once the participant had been randomly selected, a link was sent the participant to complete the questionnaire. Once the participant clicked the link they were presented with the assigned questionnaire. The participant was given a brief description and outline of what the experiment asked them to do, and once the participant agreed they continued through with the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of questions regarding the participants age and gender. Participants will be faced with one, female stimulus to rate, followed by four questions, which <https://assignbuster.com/body-shape-and-gender/>

will ask them to rate the stimulus on: attractiveness, healthiness, success and popularity. The rating scale will consist of 1 being “ definitely not” attractive and so on and 10 being “ extremely” attractive and so on. After the participant had then completed the ratings they were then presented with a small debrief description, and once they had done so an option of whether their participation was still acceptable to go on and be analysed was offered and the results were logged on the online survey website.

Ethics

Ethical issues with this study were addressed sufficiently and followed the BPS ethical guidelines in line with the methods used. The biggest issue was of informed consent. The participants could not be allowed to know the end aim of the study to eliminate demand characteristics. This was addressed by a number of steps being followed: the subject matter will be made clear from the start and the task will be clearly explained. Also the responses will be entirely anonymous; and, in the debrief contact details will be provided for help and advice on any matters that may have distressed participants, and the participants will have the right to withdraw from the experiment at any time. Another issue that may occur is the issue of psychological harm to the participants, as the participant may feel inadequate when viewing the image and compare themselves against the image they are presented with too much. This issue will be addressed by a detailed debrief explaining that the images are a fictional image, to help lower the low self esteem that may arise. Also participants if given a questionnaire with the researcher present may feel pressured and may think that they themselves are being judged by the researcher about their body image, as the experiment is about this issue.

However, this issue will be minimised as the questionnaire is online, and the researcher will not be present and the participant may answer the questions alone and not feel pressured by the researcher. Another, issue that may have been if the researcher had to be faced with the participant, is physical risk of the participant's health which is deemed to be minimal; however this is primarily an online survey so that it will involve participants using their normal computing facilities. For the online recruitment, the participants and researcher will not meet face to face. However, Should additional face to face recruitment be required, it will take place in the public areas of the University in locations that both participants and researcher frequent in their normal daily lives. Other issues such as clinical interventions are not involved in the study and it is not expected to involve the University with any financial or legal risks. The Psychological risk to the researcher is considered to be minimal because the researcher understands the nature of the study and what is involved in both the subject matter and the data collection process.

Results

A three way ANOVA was used to analyse participant's ratings. There are 3 main effects that could affect each participant's results. However within these effects there maybe some interactions between these through a two way interaction: 1) Body size x Body Shape 2) Body size x Gender 3) Body shape x Gender. By comparing body size x body shape x gender this is looking at a three way interaction was made. The mean of all scores was 4.9944.

After a Post Hoc analysis was conducted and the results from this test are shown below. The main effects of the results are as follows. The results show that the ratings of images were not significantly affected by the factor Body Shape. Main effect of Body shape [F (2, 162) =

0. 523; p = 0. 594]. The main effect of Body size was significantly affected the rating the participant gave: [F (2, 162) = 10. 702; p= 0. 001]. Also, both genders were significantly different when rating all body shapes when they were widened (4. 08) compared with original (5. 28) and narrowed scores (5. 62). The type of body size the participant was faced with impacted on the attractiveness rating they gave. The main effect of gender was shown to be significant [F (2, 162) = 7. 254; p = 0. 008]. The main effect of gender overall, the means were significantly different the average rating given by males was 4. 61, whereas, the female rating was 5. 38, showing a significant difference between scores.

Below is a table showing the means for each body shape and gender. The table indicates that there is a significant difference between the average score of Goblet (low WHR) ratings, which show that males rate the Goblet (low WHR) lower 4. 20 than females 5. 60.

Below, are graphs showing the interaction between all three factors and there average, mean scores, and the differences between scores.

This graph shows the difference between the scores given of body size, between males and females. The means of all scores are shown. The graph indicates that overall, in all three body sizes, females rated the image higher than males. The mean for widened images shows that males significantly in

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particular rated this image lower 3. 53 than females 4. 63 this is a significant difference. (See table 1)

The graph shows the interaction between the mean scores of body shape and gender. Females rated the all body shapes higher than males. The biggest