



# Body Image Perception in Athletes versus Non-Athletes

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## INTRODUCTION

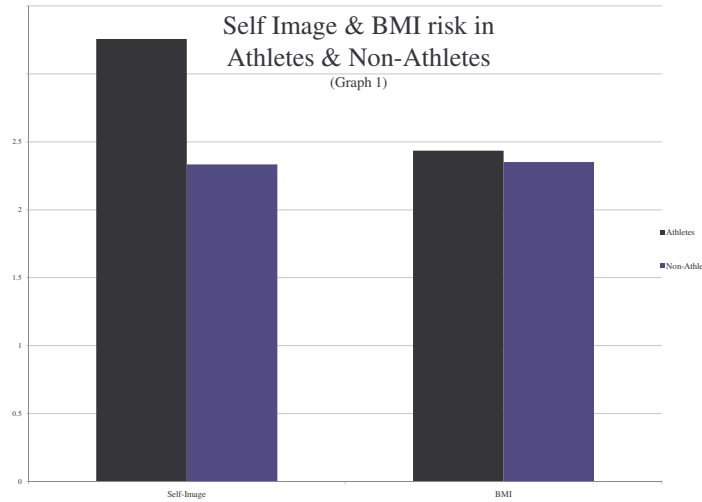
The purpose of this study was to find if there was a relationship when measuring body image perception between athletes vs. non-athletes. We chose to study students on the University of Wisconsin-River Falls campus because we were interested in seeing body image perception in college students. There are many problems in our society today regarding poor satisfaction of one's body type and appearance, and we were interested in seeing if there were any differences of a person's self-perception when involved in an athletic sport compared to someone who isn't involved in an athletic sport.

Our hypothesis simply stated that those who are involved in athletic sports would have a better body image perception than those who did not participate in athletic sports. The reason for this belief was because when a person is involved in an athletic sport, they are focused on the physical aspects of their body; the importance of being physically fit in order to succeed in sports such as basketball, hockey, soccer, etc. is critical.

## METHOD

The method of our data collection was a simple questionnaire we asked students to complete. We chose to distribute them in a variety of departments throughout campus to ensure we would be receiving data from a diverse selection of students. The general areas we included were whether the subject was male or female, if they were involved in an organized sport (e.g. UWRF Athletics, Club Sports, YMCA leagues, etc.), their height, and their weight (in ranges of 15lbs). The last two areas of our questionnaire included a question which inquired how satisfied they were with their current body image on a 5-point scale (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest), and a section which had the subjects observe a table of nine figures (the first being extremely underweight and the last being extremely overweight); we had them select the figure which they believed most represented what they looked like, and which figure would they pick to have as their ideal body image.

The method of our data interpretation included using the subject's height and weight to measure their Body Mass Index (BMI) to see if they were at a healthy BMI range; the BMI ranges were 1=underweight, 2=low-risk, 3=overweight, and 4=high-risk. In order to find the subject's body image dissatisfaction, used the 5-point scale of the subject's body image satisfaction, but it did not need to be converted; we kept the 1-5 scale to interpret our data.



## RESULTS

The perceived body image of athletes on average was 20% higher than that of non-athletes. On our 5- point scale of body image satisfaction, non-athletes averaged a 2.25/5; whereas athletes averaged a 3.25/5 (Graph 1).

When comparing male athletes to male non-athletes, their BMI risk factor and body-image perception were fairly close in numbers. No underweight men were recorded in this study. Male athletes who were at a low risk BMI had a 5% better body-image perception compared to low risk non-athletes. Male athletes who were overweight had a 10% better body-image perception compared to overweight non-athletes. Male athletes who were at a high risk BMI had a 5% lower body-image perception compared to high risk non-athletes (Graph 4).

When comparing female athletes to female non-athletes, their BMI risk factor and body image perception were moderately different. There were only two underweight females that were recorded in this study; both were participants in college volleyball. Female athletes who were at a low risk BMI had a 10% better body-image perception compared to low risk non-athletes. Female athletes who were overweight had a 20% better body-image perception compared to overweight non-athletes. Female athletes who were at a high risk BMI had a 25% better body-image perception compared to high risk non-athletes. Both groups of females at a high risk BMI had the lowest body image perception out of all the subjects in this study (Graph 7).

## CONCLUSIONS

Of particular interest to the current study was the difference between body image perception in athletes versus non-athletes. Our expected outcome for this study was that athletes would have a better body-image perception compared to non-athletes. After analyzing the data collected we can conclude that this hypothesis is accurate for this study. The overall body image perception of athletes was better than non-athletes, despite similar BMI ranges. When separating male and female subjects it was determined that male athletes and non-athletes had similar body image perceptions in relation to their BMI risk factors; whereas female athletes and non-athletes had very different body-image perceptions in relation to their BMI risk factors. Only at a high risk BMI did non-athletic males have a higher body-image perception than athletic males. In the female subjects of this study, all athletes had a better body-image perception regardless of BMI risk factors.

According to our study, we have ruled out a difference in actual body image between athletes and non-athletes as a factor of the difference in body image perception. We believe the reason for an increased body image perception in athletes is because of their knowledge and understanding of what it takes to be a healthy and fit individual due to the resources available to an athlete. Further research would need to be done in order to prove this hypothesis.

## REFERENCES

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