BODY IMAGE
IN AUSTRALIAN ADOLESCENTS

Exploring Functional and Aesthetic Body Image across the Sporting Context

by

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This thesis is presented for the degree of
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at Murdoch University.

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis take a multidimensional view on body image, suggesting that perceptions of the body are not restricted to the way the body “looks”; they may also extend to the way the body “functions”. A new measure of body image; the Embodied Image Scale (EIS), was developed specifically to measure the cognitive, behavioural and affective components of body image across both the aesthetic and functional dimensions of the body. This thesis also explored contexts with the potential to foster a positive body image among adolescent girls, who are considered to be at high risk of developing a poor body image.

Study 1 introduced the EIS, and explored its psychometric properties with a sample of Western Australian adolescents. The EIS was found to demonstrate adequate reliability and the functional and aesthetic dimensions of the body were found to be separate dimensions. Overall, both males and females reported significantly higher value towards investment in, and satisfaction with the functional dimension of the body, compared to the aesthetic dimension. Girls reported lower overall body satisfaction than
boys. The functional dimension of the body was valued and invested in more by boys than girls who placed higher focus on the aesthetic dimension.

Study 2 explored changes in functional and aesthetic body satisfaction among Western Australian adolescents over a year. Girls reported lower overall body satisfaction than boys. Although both boys and girls reported a significant decrease in body satisfaction over the 12-month period, this decrease was stronger for female participants. Cohort differences were also found, with older adolescents reporting higher functional body satisfaction. This study highlights the poor condition of adolescent girls’ body image and confirms a need to explore contexts with the potential to improve body image among these young women.

Study 3 explored the association between sports and physical activity participation and body image among Australian adolescent girls. Sports participants reported higher value, investment in, and satisfaction with their functionality than non-participants and physically active girls. Although they reported higher functional behavioral-investment, girls who participated in general physical activity did not differ significantly from non-participants on functional satisfaction. Body image was also found to differ significantly among girls participating in different sport types. The results indicated that, although girls in different sport types differ in their body image, any involvement was associated with more functional body image than being sedentary.

Study 4 explored the link between sports participation and body image by measuring experiences of body objectification and physical competence during girls’ non-sporting and sporting activities, distinguishing between aesthetic and non-aesthetic sport types. Both experiences were more prevalent during sporting than non-sporting
activities. Overall, girls reported more experiences of physical competence and body objectification during sports compared to activities. Bodily experiences differed between aesthetic and non-aesthetic sport types; however, this difference varied when between-person and within-person analyses were conducted. Experiences of body objectification were positively related to aesthetic body values. Satisfaction in both the functional and aesthetic body was positively predicted by girls’ experiences of physical competence.

In summary, all four studies highlight that focusing solely on the aesthetic dimension of body image gives an incomplete understanding of adolescent body perceptions. This thesis also highlights that contexts where body functionality is highly salient may encourage a more functionally focused body image than those where appearance is also highly salient. The results of this thesis may benefit those with an interest in improving body image among adolescent girls.
LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This thesis comprises the following publications:


The following empirical study has been submitted to a peer reviewed journal and is currently being reviewed and considered for publication.

4. Abbott, B. D., Barber, B. L. & Dziurawiec, S. Experiences of body objectification and physical competence during adolescent leisure participation: The relation to aesthetic and functional body image. *Sex Roles*
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Several chapters within this thesis have been published, and thus, I must also thank the reviewers who took the time to read and critique each manuscript. The comments and suggestions made by these reviewers have improved the research within this thesis and has been a valuable contribution.

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