

**BODY IMAGE WITHIN ATHLETES, RECREATIONAL ATHLETES AND NONATHLETES  
BODY IMAGE ŠPORTOVCOV, REKREAČNÝCH ŠPORTOVCOV A NEŠPORTOVCOV**

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*Background:* The problem of the ideal body is very current and one of the ways to reach the ideal body is sporting.

*Objective:* The aim is to compare athletes, recreational athletes and nonathletes aged 18-30 years old in satisfaction with their own bodies, appearance, health, and fitness.

*Methods:* The research group consisted of 408 young adults aged 18 to 30, 117 males and 291 females. Athletes were 115, recreational athletes were in count 145 and nonathletes were in count 148. The MBSRQ was examined to identify health, appearance, and fitness. Nine silhouettes from the Thompson and Gray CDR were examined to identify satisfaction with the body.

*Results:* We found out that athletes are significantly more satisfied with their own bodies and they feel more attractive and healthier compared to nonathletes. Female athletes were less satisfied with their bodies than male athletes. There wasn't significant difference in the ideal body assessment between athletes and nonathletes.

*Conclusion:* Sport activity is needful for young adults because it can increase body satisfaction assessment and raise feelings about their health and physical attraction.

**Key words:** Body-image. Athletes. Nonathletes. Recreational athletes

**ABSTRAKT**

*Východiská:* Problematika ideálnej postavy je veľmi aktuálna a jednou z možností ako dosiahnuť ideálnu postavu je šport.

*Ciele:* Cieľom je porovnať športovcov, rekreačných športovcov a nešportovcov od 18 do 30 rokov v spokojnosti s vlastným telom, vzhľadom, zdravím a kondíciou.

*Štúdiu a metódy:* Výskumný súbor pozostával zo 408 mladých dospelých vo veku 18-30 rokov, 117 mužov a 291 žien. Športovcov bolo 115, rekreačných športovcov 145 a nešportovcov 148. MBSRQ bol použitý na zistenie zdravia, vzhľadu a kondície. Deväť siluet z CDR Thompsonovej a Graya bolo použitých na identifikovanie spokojnosti s vlastným telom.

*Výsledky:* Zistili sme, že športovci sú významne spokojnejší so svojím telom a cítia sa atraktívnejší a zdravší v porovnaní s nešportovcami. Nenašli sme významný rozdiel v posúdení ideálneho tela medzi športovcami a nešportovcami.

*Záver:* Športová aktivita je potrebná pre mladých ľudí pretože môže zvýšiť spokojnosť s vlastným telom a tiež pocity ohľadne zdravia a fyzickej atraktivity.

**Kľúčové slová:** Body-image. Športovci. Nešportovci. Rekreační športovci

**INTRODUCTION**

The problem of the ideal body is very current and one of the ways to reach the ideal body is sporting. Today is our world full of the ideal body glorification while the ideal measures promoted in fashion are often very unrealistic. Robinson et al. (2017) point to the fact that the average female mannequin body size is representative of a very underweight woman. Also, Campbell (2014) claims that female college students with high levels of exposure to fashion magazines seemed to be less satisfied with their personal physical appearance than those with low levels of exposure to fashion magazines.

We often meet women who are feeling thicker than they really are and the feeling about being fat is not related to exact measured values (Fialová, 2006). Šrámková et al. (2015) state that dissatisfaction with the own body is common in women and it is often related to weight. Bair et al. (2014) found out that undergraduate female students selected a thinner personal body ideal for their own body in the thin norm condition than in the heavy norm condition. Hricová et al. (2015) stated that body dissatisfaction is positively related to the Body Mass Index (BMI) mainly among women. Considering the research of Allan et al. (2019) female athletes seemed to be under pressure because of the assessment of their bodies. Authors draw attention to the fact that female athletes are often pushed to be strong and fit but also have a feminine look which is mostly quite hard to achieve. Although women are less satisfied with their bodies against men in general, there is an unrealistic expectation of the ideal body among men too. Based on the work of Sejčová (2008) among young adults aged 18 to 26 women tend to feel thicker than the ideal and men tend to feel thinner than the ideal.

In Slovakia there was a research (Peráčková et al., 2016) which claims that sport active adolescents perceive their bodies better than sport inactive adolescents. The closest thoughts to the ideal own body were presented by sport active male adolescents and on the opposite side there were sport inactive female

adolescents. Besides sport active adolescents reached better scores in self-evaluation than sport inactive adolescents. This trend is observable in many other researches oriented also on young adults. For example, Campbell et al. (2009) found out through meta-analysis that exercise is improving body image or Hausenblas et al. (2001) claimed that athletes had more positive body image compared to nonathletes.

DiBartolo et al. (2002) claimed that female college athletes revealed more healthy psychological functioning and less eating disorder symptoms than female college nonathletes. Varnes et al. (2013) found out through a systematic review of studies from years 1997-2012 that female college athletes in endurance sports appear to have better body image and female college athletes in feminine sports (e.g., gymnastics) and more competitive athletes are in greater risk for body image concerns. Even though there are some discrepancies between men and women in the own body satisfaction we can tell, considering the research of Peráčková et al. (2020), that sport participation is more significant predictor of satisfaction with the own body than gender at least within adolescents.

## OBJECTIVE

The main aim of this study was to compare athletes, recreational athletes and nonathletes aged 18-30 years old in satisfaction with their own bodies, appearance evaluation, health evaluation and orientation, fitness evaluation and orientation.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Participants

Our research sample consisted of 408 young adults aged 18 to 30 ( $21.82 \pm 2.61$ ), 117 males and 291 females. The group of active athletes consisted of 115 participants ( $21.49 \pm 3.35$ ), the group of recreational athletes consisted of 145 ( $22.13 \pm 2.51$ ) participants and the group of nonathletes consisted of 148 participants ( $21.77 \pm 1.95$ ). The group of active athletes includes those participants who train at least three times per week and actively and regularly compete in sport disciplines. The group of recreational athletes consisted of participants who engage in sport two times per week and less. The group of nonathletes consisted of participants who presently don't engage in any continuous sports training. The group of active athletes was represented with individual sports (combat sports, athletics, cycling,

swimming, tennis and dancing) and team sports (ice hockey, football, floorball, handball and volleyball). The group of recreational athletes was represented with sports oriented at body forming (Pilates, fitness, CrossFit, aerobic, yoga and dancing) and other sports (skiing, swimming, running, hiking, cycling, racquet sports and team sports). A snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. All subjects voluntarily participated in this study and were given all the necessary information via the informed consent.

### Measurement and procedures

The multidimensional body-self relations questionnaire (MBSRQ) (Cash, 2000) was examined to identify health orientation and evaluation and nine silhouettes taken from the Thompson and Gray Contour Drawing Scale (Thompson, Gray, 1995) were examined to identify satisfaction with the own and the ideal body. The internal consistency  $\alpha$  for the subscales of the MBSRQ are adequate and ranged from 0.67 to 0.86 (Khodabandelou et al., 2019).

### The multidimensional body-self relations questionnaire MBSRQ

The multidimensional body-self relations questionnaire (MBSRQ) (Cash, 2000) is a self-report inventory which assesses self-attitude of the body-image. It contains 69 items and 7 factor subscales and 3 additional subscales. The factor subscales are appearance evaluation, appearance orientation, fitness evaluation, fitness orientation, health evaluation, health orientation and illness orientation. The additional subscales are body areas satisfaction scale, overweight preoccupation, and self-classified weight. First 57 items are answered using a 5-point scale format ranging from 1 (definitely disagree) to 5 (definitely agree). Next items are answered using 5-point scale format, but possible answers differ from question to question. The MBSRQ is intended for respondents who are 15 years old and older. The Slovak version of the questionnaire was translated from original English version using the reverse translation method. The translation was done by three independent psychologists.

### Contour Drawing Rating Scale (CDRS)

CDRS (Thompson, Gray 1995) is a body-image assessment tool which consisting of 9 male and 9 female contour drawings (picture 1). The drawings' design is detailed. Using this tool includes choosing silhouette ranging from very thin (1) to obese (9)

based on their gender (women choose from female silhouettes, men from male silhouettes) which reflects their current body size and then participants choose from the same silhouettes their current ideal body size (Casebeer, 1997).

Statistical comparison was performed using SPSS software (Version 23 for Windows; IBM, Armonk, NY, USA). The Shapiro-Wilk test did not confirm the normality of the data. We used the Wilcoxon T-test to compare the own and the ideal body assessment within groups. The Spearman correlation coefficient was used to assess health orientation and evaluation, fitness orientation and evaluation, appearance evaluation and the own and the ideal body assessment among participants. We assessed the differences by  $z$  (Brace et al., 2003) and  $\rho$  coefficient (Pett, 1997). The magnitude of the  $\rho$  was evaluated in the following ranges:  $\rho \geq 0.5$  (large effect),  $\rho = 0.3 - 0.5$  (medium effect),  $\rho = 0.1 - 0.3$  (small effect).

## RESULTS

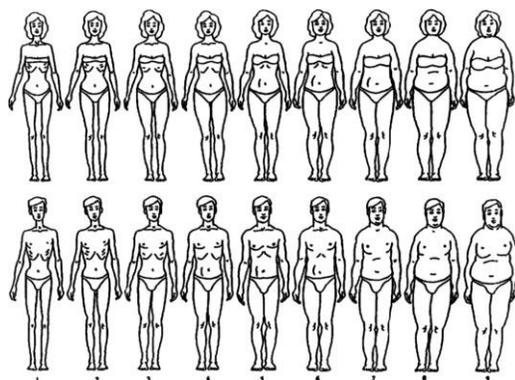
Table 1 presents results of correlations between sport activity and subscales of the MBSRQ and body assessments. Intergroup comparison revealed significant correlations between the level of sport activity and subscales of the MBSRQ appearance evaluation ( $\rho = 0.219, p < 0.001$ ), fitness evaluation

( $\rho = 0.660, p < 0.001$ ), fitness orientation ( $\rho = 0.799, p < 0.001$ ), health evaluation ( $\rho = 0.302, p < 0.001$ ) and health orientation ( $\rho = 0.329, p < 0.001$ ).

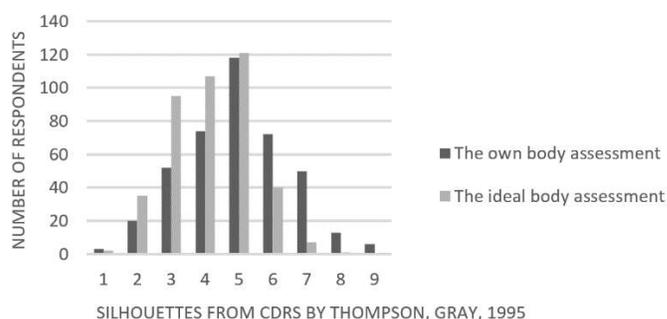
The comparison revealed a significant correlation between the level of sport activity and the own body assessment ( $\rho = 0.105, p = 0.034$ ). There was no significant correlation between the level of sport activity and the ideal body assessment ( $\rho = 0.080, p = 0.107$ ). Pairwise comparison showed that there is significant difference between the own body assessment and the ideal body assessment in the group of all participants ( $z = 11.033, p < 0.001$ ) and also in individual groups, athletes ( $z = 4.638, p < 0.001$ ), recreational athletes ( $z = 7.235, p < 0.001$ ) and non-athletes ( $z = 6.957, p < 0.001$ ). Graph 1 shows the number of respondents choosing specific silhouette for the own body assessment and the ideal body assessment.

## DISCUSSION

In these days there is a lot of focus on body-assessment and a concept of the ideal body. Despite of the fact that the ideal measures promoted in fashion are often very unrealistic and there is an effort to reverse these ideals, there remains a desire of the people to achieve the perfect body. We found out that participants of our study are critical of their bodies and that they are not satisfied with bodies



**Picture 1** Contour Drawing Rating Scale (Thompson, Gray, 1995)



**Graph 1** Number of respondents choosing specific silhouettes for the own body assessment and the ideal body assessment

**Table 1** Results of correlations ( $\rho$ ) between sport activity and subscales of the MBSRQ and body assessments

Parameter	MBSRQ					CDRS	
	Appearance evaluation	Fitness evaluation	Fitness orientation	Health evaluation	Health orientation	Own body assessment	Ideal body assessment
Sport activity	0.219**	0.660**	0.799**	0.302**	0.329**	-0.105*	0.080

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.001$

they have and want to have different, mostly thinner, ideal body. This fact is present in all three groups of participants (athletes, recreational athletes and nonathletes). The highest effect is in the group of recreational athletes and it differs only a little from nonathletes. In the group of athletes there is a smaller effect, but it is still significant. It means that even though athletes are not satisfied with their bodies they are still more satisfied in comparison with recreational athletes or nonathletes and recreational athletes seem to be most unsatisfied with their bodies. It can be explained by the possibility that people who are not satisfied with their bodies tend to do something to feel better in this way, so they are doing sports for example. Campbell et al. (2009) found out through meta-analysis that exercise is improving body image but with small effect. Varnes et al. (2013) found differences between levels of sport and it seems that higher-level athletes have more body image concerns than other female athletes.

Apart from the fact that women are often feeling thicker than they really are (Gardner et al., 2009; Fialová, 2006), many researchers found out that young women tend to feel thicker than the ideal (Bair et al., 2014; Al-Otaibi et al., 2013; El Ansari et al., 2010) and young men tend to feel thinner than the ideal (Sand et al., 2017; Sejščová, 2008) but there are also young men who tend to feel thicker than the ideal (McCabe et al., 2004).

Athletes and nonathletes didn't differ in assessing the ideal body so it means that it doesn't matter if sporting, the ideals are the same for all groups of participants but considering the previous results shown, athletes seem to feel closer to their ideals than other groups of participants.

Our next finding is that there is significant correlation between the level of sport activity and subscales of the MBSRQ, specifically appearance evaluation, fitness evaluation, and orientation, health evaluation and orientation. It means that with increasing sport activity our participants felt more physically attractive, more physically fit and they invest more in being physically fit. They also felt healthier and invest more in a physically healthy lifestyle. The largest effect was found in fitness evaluation and fitness orientation and it means that young adults who engage more in sport activities felt more physically fit and invest more in being physically fit. A medium effect was found in health evaluation and health orientation and only a small effect has been found in appearance evaluation

which means that sport activity seems to impact feeling healthy and investing more in physically healthy lifestyle more than feeling physically attractive. Similar results were shown in other research, for example Hausenblas et al. (2001) report that athletes had more positive body image compared to nonathletes or Sabiston et al. (2018) claim that negative body image is linked to lower physical activity so with greater physical activity is associated positive body image. Positive body image is very important for the mental and physical health (Griffiths et al., 2016) and it plays essential role in the quality of life in college students (Baceviciene et al., 2020).

According to DiBartolo et al. (2002) female college athletes revealed more healthy psychological functioning than female college nonathletes. Considering Proctor et al. (2010), male intercollegiate student athletes showed significantly fewer depressive symptoms than nonathletes.

Limitations of the study are a big variousness of sports in the group of athletes considering diversity of different sports. Also, there was an imbalance of males and females in the research sample.

## CONCLUSION

Based on these findings we state that sport activity improves satisfaction with the own body in young adults and that athletes feel more attractive, healthier and invest more in a physically healthy lifestyle in comparison with nonathletes. We believe sport activity is needful for young adults to feel more comfortable with their bodies and to be overall satisfied with their physical appearance.

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