Eating Attitudes, Body Dissatisfaction, and Perfectionism in Female College Athletes.


This study focuses on the differences in eating attitudes, body dissatisfaction, and perfectionism among athletes in a variety of sports. Previous research has linked eating disorders to involvement in athletics (Kirk, Singh & Getz, 2001). This could be due to the belief that lower body fat will improve athletic performance. Many athletes display perfectionist qualities, which are also related to the development of eating disorders. The type of sport an athlete participates in may have an effect on whether or not she develops an eating disorder or struggles with body dissatisfaction. Athletes in judged sports, such as gymnastics, dance, and figure skating, are more likely to develop eating disorders than are athletes in refereed sports such as basketball, soccer, and volleyball.

The method used in this study was a survey of 103 female, undergraduate students from a community college and a private women’s college in Missouri. The girls range in age from 18-22 years, and just over half (53%) participate in athletics. The Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26; Garner, Olmsted, Bohr, & Garfinkel, 1982), which measures eating attitudes through three subscales: Dieting, Bulimia, and Oral Control, was submitted. To measure body dissatisfaction a body dissatisfaction score was calculated by finding the absolute value of the difference between the actual weight and the ideal weight of each girl. The Perfectionism Subscale of the Eating Disorders Inventory (EDI; Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983) was used to measure perfectionism in the girls. Although the authors of this study hypothesized that athletes would be more dissatisfied with their bodies, the results actually show that body dissatisfaction is more prevalent in non-athletes. The t-tests of the EAT-26 show no significant differences between athletes and non-athletes in the areas of dieting, bulimia, or oral control. However, athletes in judged sports were found to be more likely to diet than athletes in refereed sports. As the authors predicted, perfectionism was found to be more common in athletes than in non-athletes. Positive correlations were found between perfectionism and dieting, bulimia, and an overall EAT-26 score. Overall, the only difference found between athletes and non-athletes is that non-athletes are more concerned with body image than are athletes.

Data Sources:

