

## BODY IMAGE INSATISFACTION: A GENDER APPROACH AMONG BRAZILIAN ADOLESCENTS

**Graziele Souza Lira Ferrari<sup>1</sup>, Carlos Kusano Bucalen Ferrari<sup>1,2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Physical Education Course, and <sup>2</sup> Biomedical Science Course, Institute of Biological and Health Sciences (ICBS), "Campus Universitário do Araguaia", "Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso" (UFMT), Pontal do Araguaia e Barra do Garças, MT, Brazil

**ABSTRACT** — The aim of this study was to determine the prevalence of body image satisfaction or dissatisfaction among adolescent students of 14 to 19 years old. 855 adolescents of public schools (466 female and 389 male) from three municipalities of "Medio Araguaia Region" were evaluated (adesion rate was 94.8%, since only one school did not engage the study). Body image satisfaction or dissatisfaction was measured by using the Loland's Body Satisfaction Scale. One third of the adolescents was neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their body images. The dissatisfaction with body weight was higher among female (45.73%) compared to the males (39.84%), a gender difference which was statistically significant ( $p=0.02$ ). Female adolescents had also higher dissatisfaction with gluteus, thighs and legs, breasts, and muscle tone when compared to male gender. Female gender was not satisfied with legs, whereas among boys there were a higher satisfaction with legs. Regarding waist, there was more satisfaction among girls compared to the boys. These results reinforce the necessity to break body beauty models imposed to the girls and female adolescents since body stereotypes cause great societal pressures linked to negative mood and mental health problems amongst adolescents.

### INTRODUCTION

Body image can be defined as the body representation in our mind, that is, the way in which the body presents to us [1].

Adolescence which is marked by intensive biopsychosocial changes is an important and crucial transition to adult life [2]. Although both gender show concerns regarding body image, there are different body perceptions among girls and boys [3,4]. In general, girls are less physically active, but present more body image depreciation [5].

Modern economy and society explore female body image, imposing beauty patterns which are reproduced as massive forms of controlling body appearance, weight and height [6,7].

Remembering the historical evolution of the female figure, we see that obesity was value and represented in arts, contrary to what is currently advocated. There is a growing demand for lean appearance and



**Grazielle S. L. Ferrari**, Lic. in Physical Education by Federal University of Mato Grosso



**Carlos K. B. Ferrari**, Biomedical Scientist, MPhil and PhD in Public Health

forms of weight loss, often in detriment of the subject's health [8].

Brazil has a growing number of plastic surgeries and has been listed in the world's ranking of cosmetic plastic surgeries [9]. From 2009 to 2012, the number of cosmetic plastic surgeries in adolescents raised from 37,740 procedures to 91,100 (141%) according to the Brazilian Society of Plastic Surgery [10].

The actual economic and societal model has imposed a pattern of body silhouette as a synonym of "beauty" which in fact is totally outside normal nutritional and health standards. This model of "beauty" and "slim" body has caused diverse mood and affective disorders as well as health problems among young and adults, especially between female adolescents and women [11]. Body image dissatisfaction increased at 3.7-fold the risk of depressive symptoms among adolescents, according to a recent study [12].

Then, the aim of the current work was to investigate the body image satisfaction and dissatisfaction among school adolescents and verify possible gender differences in body image dissatisfaction/satisfaction.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to perform a prevalence study regarding body dissatisfaction/satisfaction, we developed an observational, quali-quantitative study [13], covering a representative population of adolescents from public schools of Aragarças (Goiás state), as well as Barra do Garças and Pontal do Araguaia (Mato Grosso state) with ages between 14 and 19 years old ( $n=855$ , female = 466; male = 389).

Inclusion criteria were interest in engage the study, being student of public school, and present the preconized age (14 to 18 years old). No interest to engage the study was the unique exclusion criteria.

Body dissatisfaction/satisfaction and its parts was evaluated by the use of the validated Portuguese version of the body satisfaction scale of Loland [14], a measurement scale with 15 items. For each 14 body parts and the hole body, the subject give a concept according to a Likert type scale, ranging from 1 to 5 (1 – very unsatisfied, 2 – unsatisfied, 3 – neither satisfied, nor unsatisfied, 4 – satisfied and 5 – very satisfied).

The mean and standard deviation between the variables (age and gender) were compared using z test calculated by Epidemiologic Tools software\* (Australia). Statistical differences were considered significant when  $p < 0.05$ .

## RESULTS

The dissatisfaction (the sum of the categories very unsatisfied, unsatisfied and not satisfied, nor unsatisfied) with body weight was higher among female (45.73%) compared to the males (39.84%), a gender difference which was statistically significant ( $p = 0.02$ ). A third of the adolescents of both gender was neither unsatisfied nor satisfied with their bodies.

A quintile of the adolescents from both gender was neither unsatisfied nor satisfied with their body weight, whereas the dissatisfaction with body weight was higher among female adolescents ( $p = 0.02$ ).

The dissatisfaction with legs and abdomen was also higher among female than male adolescents, with statistical significance ( $p = 0.01$  and  $p = 0.041$ , respectively). However, it should be noted that 60% of the adolescents were satisfied with their legs and abdomen.

Regarding dissatisfaction with gluteus, female adolescents were also more prone to be dissatisfied when compared to the male adolescents ( $p = 0.01$ ). Furthermore, a quarter of the adolescent students was neither unsatisfied nor satisfied with their gluteal regions, but 60% of the adolescents were satisfied or very satisfied with that body part.

The trend of satisfaction with waist was higher among female compared to male gender ( $p = 0.02$ ).

Considering the satisfaction with breast, an intimate body part and a simbol of femininity, or with the chest/thoracic region among male, about a fifth of the students was unsatisfied with that body part. In addition, there was more male adolescents neither satisfied nor unsatisfied with toracic region in relation to the female students ( $p = 0.02$ ).

In spite of the fact that 25% of the adolescents was neither unsatisfied nor satisfied with their arms,

male students were more satisfied with their arms compared with the female adolescents ( $p = 0.039$ ).

The great satisfaction with body shape and muscle tonus reached only 13.6% and 8.15% of the male and female students, respectively. 30% and 28% of male and female adolescents, respectively, were neither satisfied nor unsatisfied with body shape and muscle tonus and a fifth of the students was unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with body shape and muscle tonus.

At the age 14y, the highest body image unsatisfactions for female students were weight, muscle tone and the abdomen, whereas the highest body image dissatisfaction of male adolescents were muscle tone, height, weight, and abdomen. Those and other body image unsatisfactions were represented in fig. 1.

Among the 15y students, the highest body image unsatisfactions for female adolescents were weight, hair, muscle tone and the height, whereas the highest body image dissatisfaction of male adolescents were muscle tone, weight, and abdomen. Those and other body image unsatisfactions were represented in fig. 2.

Considering the 16y students, the highest body image unsatisfactions for female adolescents were weight, abdomen, and legs, whereas the highest body image dissatisfaction of male adolescents were weight, abdomen, muscle tone, and the chest. Those and other body image unsatisfactions were represented in fig. 3.

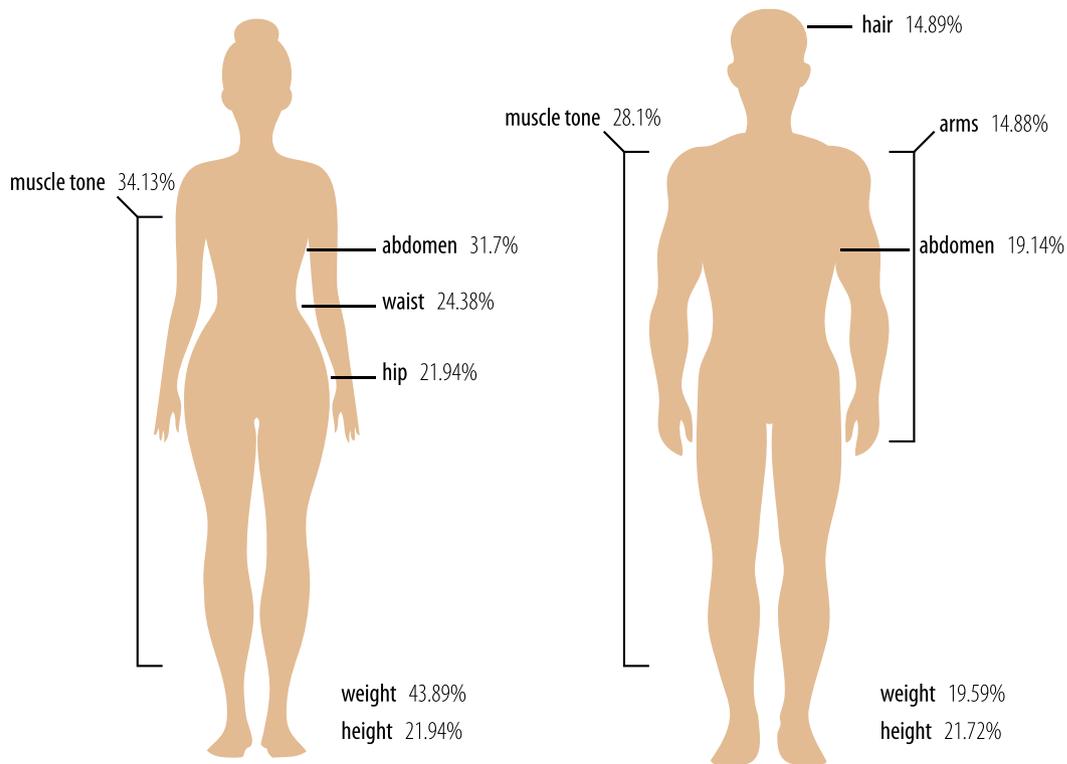
Regarding 17–18y students, the highest body image unsatisfactions for female adolescents were muscle tone, weight, and breast, whereas the highest body image dissatisfaction of male adolescents were weight, arms, and muscle tone. Those and other body image unsatisfactions were represented in fig. 4.

## DISCUSSION

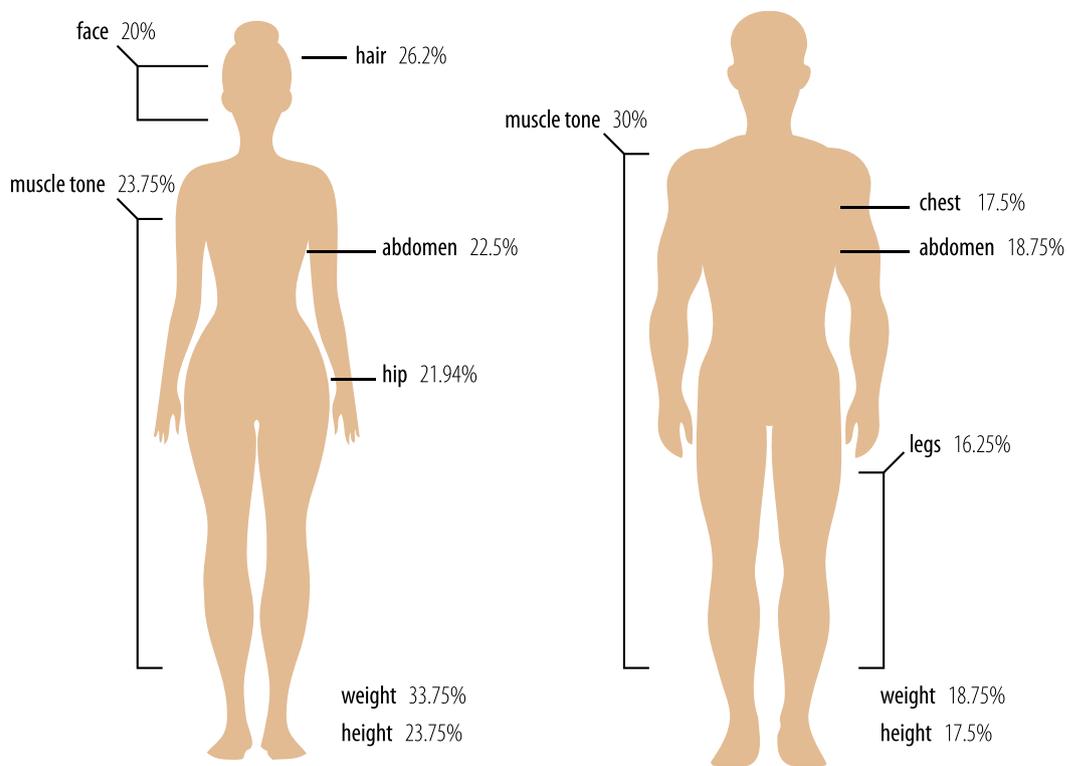
The social media impacts the body culture and has strengthened the foundations of a thinness body image among female adolescents and women or the imposition of a muscle/virile body silhouette among boys and men [15]. While female adolescents obsessively strived to maintain or lose weight, male adolescents try at all cost to acquire weight and body mass according to an Australian study [16]. Similar patterns of body image was also verified among adults in Brazil [17].

Although 60% of the adolescents have been satisfied with their body images, one third of this population, without gender differences, was not unsatsifeid neither satisfied with their bodies. This hesitation with body image could be a reflex of the adolescence life stage, a transition of childhood to adult life [2].

The dissatisfaction with body weight was higher among female students compared to male gender. This is in accordance with studies which have been



*Fig. 1. Body dissatisfaction among 14 years old adolescents*



*Fig. 2. Body dissatisfaction among 15 years old adolescents*

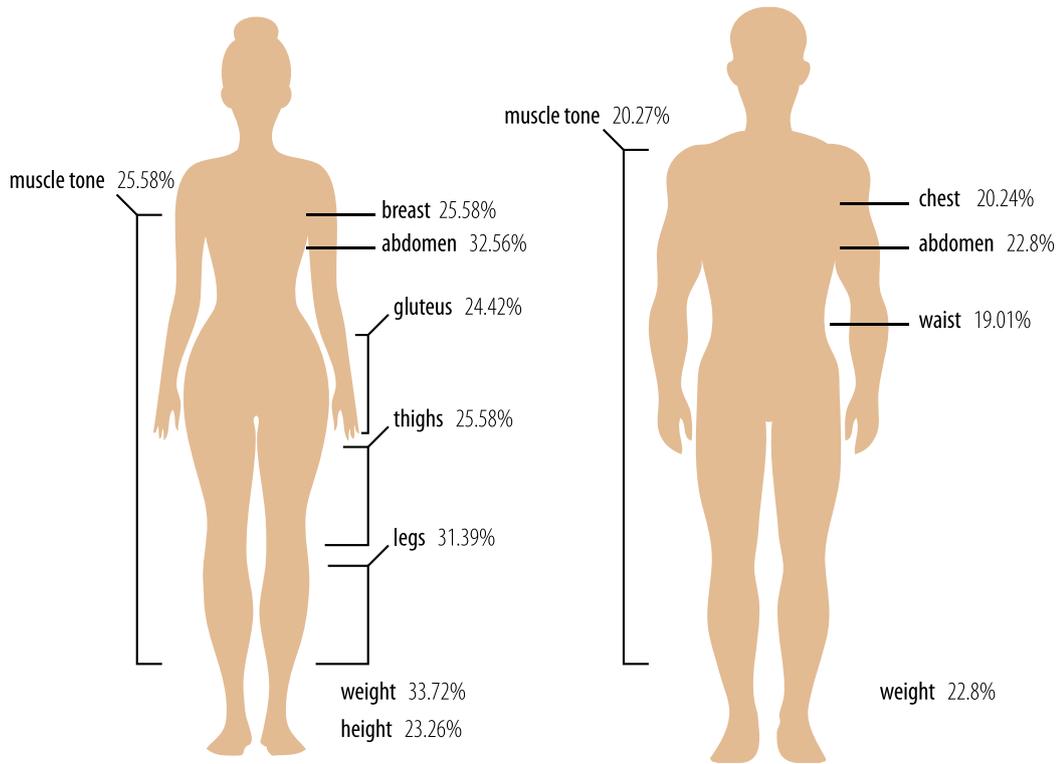


Fig. 3. Body dissatisfaction among 16 years old adolescents

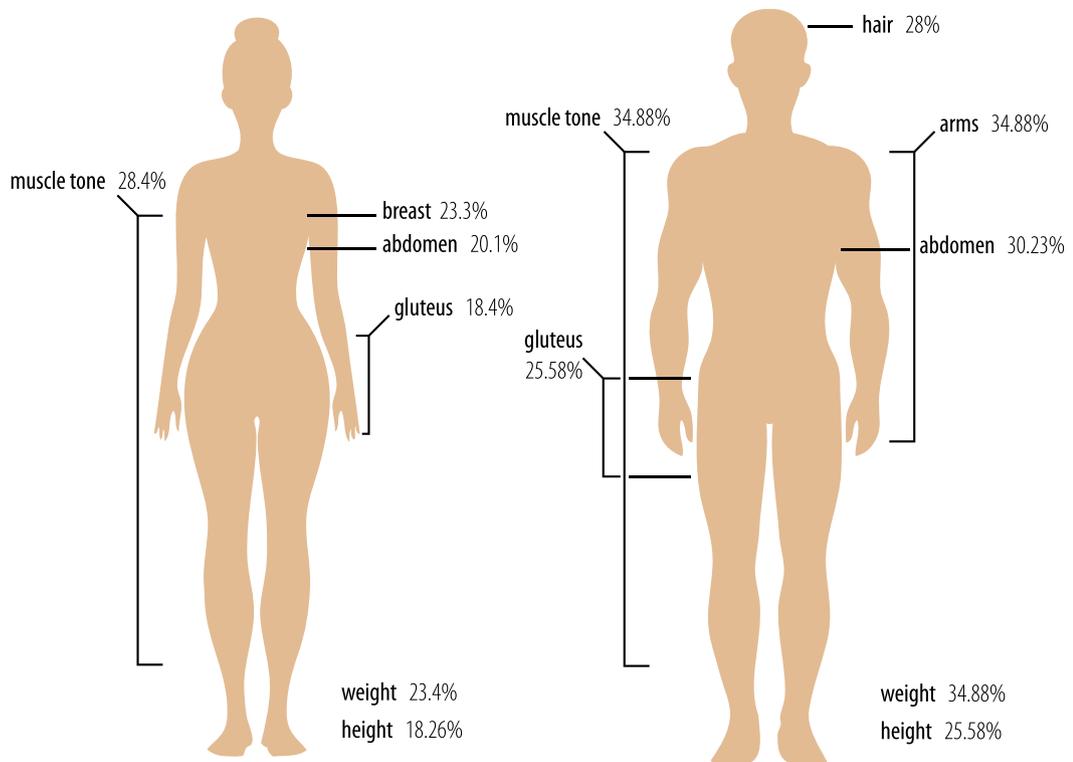


Fig. 4. Body dissatisfaction among 17-18 years old adolescents

demonstrated female gender suffer an intense and continuous social coercion by means of advertising and other kinds of social communication [18] to maintain or lose weight, whereas male adolescents are pressed to gain weight and body mass [16]. This coercion of women's body begins in infancy and adolescence [11] and generates a negative distortion of the self body image which enhances during adulthood and has been related to many adverse consequences to subject's health and physical integrity [17,19,20].

Considering yet the body weight, a fifth of the school adolescents was neither unsatisfied, nor satisfied with their body weights which also reinforce the concept of transition and body acceptance during adolescence. In this manner, Conti et al. [21] reported 31% of female adolescents were unsatisfied with their body weights. In the same study, the dissatisfaction with breasts (20%) and abdomen (18%) were also raised among female adolescents. The male adolescents from Conti's study [21] presented raised dissatisfaction with weight (35%), abdomen (25%) and thighs/legs (23%). A Brazilian study with 2,149 female students, from 14 to 18y, revealed that 93.6% of the female adolescents would like to change their bodies and 42.5% was unsatisfied with their body weights [22]. In the present study, 32.4% of the female school adolescents was unsatisfied (very unsatisfied and unsatisfied) with their body weights. A German study observed that female adolescents were much more affected and prone to give in to group pressures to change the body and develop negative body images than their male counterparts [23].

Considering gluteus region as well as legs the dissatisfaction was also increased among female school adolescents compared to male counterparts. This important dissatisfaction among female adolescents with gluteus corroborates the Sudo e Luz [24] study which demonstrated the increased desire and execution of breast plastic surgery to receive silicone implants in order to raise the volume of breasts and buttocks.

The abdominal region was also a matter of dissatisfaction among adolescents. Once more, female adolescents declared being more unsatisfied with this body part in relation to the male counterparts.

About a fifth of the adolescents, with no gender variation, was unsatisfied with breast or chest. However, there was more male adolescents that was unsatisfied or, in the opposite side, satisfied with their chest compared to the female gender. This undoubtedly reveals the importance and appreciation of men's muscular and muscular chest as a part of body culture. This dissatisfaction with chest appearance of male adolescents reinforces the relevance of a "male and virile body" in the formation of men's identity according to the classic discussion of Bourdieu [25].

Although they were not so satisfied with their chests, male adolescents were more satisfied with their arms than their female counterparts. But, once more time there was hesitation regarding satisfaction with this body part, since a quarter was not unsatisfied, neither satisfied.

In the current study, about 30% of female and 28% of male adolescents were not unsatisfied, nor satisfied with their body tone and muscle appearance and a fifth of them was very unsatisfied or unsatisfied with these body parts.

Beyond the discussion of Bourdieu [25], the results of the current work also need to be interpreted at the light of other psychosocial theories, such as the social representation theory. According to Moscovici [26] the subjects in their representative actions did not passively reproduce an object, idea, or concept, but they reconstruct them as active subjects who grasp and fit into their social and material universes. This means that imposed beauty patterns, especially to the young female and women, are introjected causing high self-collection for the control of the body and, in the difficulty in doing so, great psychosocial frustration which has support in the scientific literature [27, 28].

## CONCLUSION

A third of the adolescents was not either unsatisfied nor satisfied with their bodies. Furthermore, the dissatisfaction with weight, gluteus, legs/thighs, breasts (or chest), and muscle tone was higher among female school adolescents in comparison to male gender. The results reinforce the necessity to break up with the body beauty paradigms socially imposed to women and search for community strategies towards equity and sustainability in gender relations.

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