

Body satisfaction and the process of aging

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Today we can see the valorization of a strong, productive and beautiful body seen by society as “ideal”. However, the search for this body may cause many problems. In a capitalist world such as the one we live in, it is clear that the body incorporates the features of this system. Youth, aesthetics and health become, more than ever, a source of desire for the human being. Ferreira (2005) claims that culture is a determining factor when it comes to the aspects incorporated in the body. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the subjectivities of each society, taking into consideration the role of images on our perception of body. That is, society may determine and favor the adhesion to one type of body.

Today, we can see how the beauty pattern is linked to the image of youth. Young and perfect bodies are exposed by the media daily, gaining an enormous importance, which ends up contrasting with the image of the elderly. Aging or senescence corresponds to biological events which occur from the first morphological and psychosocial events of adult age until total decline and death. It starts in the second half of life, but its speed and intensity of progression vary among people, being influenced mainly by genetic constitution, lifestyle and environmental factors (Néri, Cachioni, & Resende, 2002). Nevertheless, in this context of the valorization of the young body, aging may be seen as a fatality or a loss, which may happen in many cases, and result in the appearance of body image disorders.

Body image is understood as the mental representation we make of our body (Schilder, 1999). In this way, it may be understood as a multidimensional construct in which its creation and development depends on biological, psychological and social factors (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). In general, it would correspond to the representation and experimentation of this body, becoming, therefore, an important and integrated psychological and social phenomenon.

This study aimed to investigate the possible differences existing in the body satisfaction of women who are physically active, in different phases of their

lives, in order to analyze the possible interferences that the process of aging may have on body satisfaction.

This study is part of a preliminary study and was approved by the Ethics Committee of Research of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, No. 1928.272.2009.

The Body Image Satisfaction Scale (BISS) adapted and validated by Ferreira e Leite (2002) was used. In order to adapt the tool, the authors used two international scales, the Body Esteem Scale (BES) (Mendelson, White, & Mendelson, 1997; 1998) and the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) (Cash, 1994). The tool was translated and back-translated, and later submitted for exploratory factorial analysis. During this process, some items were excluded and the final version of the tool presented two factors: degree of satisfaction with one's own appearance (factor 1) and the preoccupation with weight (factor 2). The internal consistency analysis of these factors, calculated through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient presented results equal to 0.90 and 0.79, respectively. According to Saur and Pasion (2008), this scale proved an adequate technique for the investigation of body image of people in the Brazilian social and cultural context, representing a promising alternative to assess the theme by means of fast self-report resources.

The sample of this study was composed of women over 40 years old, divided into two groups: women between 40 and 54 years of age and women 55 years of age or older. This division is in accordance with the aim of the study, which is to assess the possible differences in body satisfaction of women in different phases of life.

Women over 40 who went to gyms in downtown Juiz de Fora – MG, Brazil, at least three times a week for a minimum of six months in a row, as well as those who volunteered to participate in the study, were included in it. Women who did not meet all inclusion criteria were excluded from the sample.

The participants were approached at the time classes started and those who agreed to participate were invited to come back at a scheduled time for data collection. On the day of the data collection, those interviewed were given the Free and Clarified Consent Term and, after signing it, their heights and BMI were measured and the BISS was filled in.

For the characterization of the sample, we opted for the descriptive analysis; and for the satisfaction analysis among groups and differences between groups for factor 1 and factor 2, Student's Test t was used, with a significance level of $p < 0.05$. For the correlation between BMI and BISS, Pearson's correlation was used, with $p < 0.05$. All data were analyzed with SPSS software, version 16.0.

The total sample was composed of 33 women, 21 of whom (63.6%) were between 40 and 54 years of age (Group 1), and 12 (36.4%) were 55 years of age or older (Group 2). The BISS average was 90.86 ± 12.204 for Group 1 and 85.00 ± 12.570 for Group 2, with no statistically significant difference between the age groups. The analyses of the two BISS factors for groups 1 and 2 demonstrated scores of 68.19 ± 9.147 and 63.67 ± 9.528 respectively for factor 1 (satisfaction with appearance), and 22.67 ± 5.902 and 21.33 ± 6.372 respectively for factor 2 (preoccupation with weight), with no significant statistical difference between the groups.

These data show that there was not, in the sample investigated, influence of age on body satisfaction and preoccupation with weight. According to Ålgars, Santtila, Varjonen, Witting, Johansson, Jern and Sandnabba (2009), the interference of age is still not conclusive when it comes to adults' body image, for they can become more satisfied with some aspects of their bodies and less satisfied with others. Our data suggest that there is no significance statistical difference in the body satisfaction of physically active women of different ages, a difference which was also not found in the groups for each one of the factors analyzed.

That being said, a negative and direct correlation between BISS and BMI was found ($r = -0.547$), demonstrating that the women with a higher BMI had lower scores on the scale of satisfaction with body image. Other studies found similar results, pointing to the fact that BMI may influence the relationship established with the body and, consequently, body satisfaction (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Paxton, 2006; Van der Berg, Paxton, Keery, Wall, Guo, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007).

In summary, our study points to the existence of a relationship between the BMI and body satisfaction. That is, people with a high BMI tend to feel more dissatisfied with their own bodies. However, according to other studies, due to the complexity of the construct of body image, a simple and direct relationship

between age and satisfaction with body image cannot be confirmed. We suggest that further studies be carried out, taking into account that other factors might interfere with body image, so as to verify other relations of satisfaction with the body.

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