

# GENDER DIFFERENCES IN BODY IMAGE PERCEPTION AMONG 8<sup>th</sup> GRADE PUPILS

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## ABSTRACT

*Research background and hypothesis.* Previous studies have shown that dissatisfaction with the body image among girls often reflects a desire to be thinner, among boys – a desire to be bigger, taller, become more muscular and have a nice body shape. It is known that adolescents have a very precise body image which is related to their own perception. However, there is a gap in research, analyzing body image aspect, i. e. evaluation of specific body image components. *Hypothesis* – there is a difference in the satisfaction level with specific body image components among 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils; body image assessment of 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils is different in the aspect of gender.

*Research aim* was to establish gender differences in body image perception among 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils.

*Research methods.* The research has been conducted during the months of March-April-May of 2012. A random probability sampling method was used with 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils from 24 general education schools located in various cities and towns around Lithuania. The research sample was comprised of 1347 (boys n = 674, girls n = 673) 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils. To perform the diagnostic analysis, the author designed a body image perception questionnaire, composed on the basis of V. Rittner (1986), A. Zaborskis et al. (1996), R. Jankauskienė (2001), A. Zaborskis, J. Makari (2001), W. D. Brettschneider, T. Kleine, G. Klimek (2003), D. M. Garner (2004), R. Russell (2004), A. Miškinytė (2011), questionnaires.

*Research results.* Results of the present research allows concluding that respondents are more dissatisfied with their body image components which are influenced by adolescents' phenotype. i.e. stomach, shoulders, legs, thighs, hips, buttocks, waist, shin, breast ( $p < 0.001$ ). Gender differences in body image perception revealed that girls tended to be more dissatisfied with their facial features ( $p < 0.001$ ), nose ( $p < 0.001$ ), cheeks ( $p = 0.003$ ), facial skin ( $p < 0.001$ ), hair ( $p = 0.001$ ), breasts ( $p = 0.004$ ), waist ( $p = 0.001$ ), stomach ( $p < 0.001$ ), legs ( $p = 0.001$ ), hips ( $p < 0.001$ ), thighs ( $p < 0.001$ ), shin ( $p < 0.001$ ), buttocks ( $p < 0.001$ ), feet ( $p < 0.001$ ), naked body ( $p < 0.001$ ), body shape ( $p < 0.001$ ), and body weight ( $p < 0.001$ ).

*Discussion and conclusions.* Differences in body image perception among 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils depend on gender, i. e. girls compared to boys ( $p < 0.001$ ), tend to be more dissatisfied with their body image.

**Keywords:** body image, adolescence, body weight, body type, body shape.

## INTRODUCTION

Lately, scientists theorists (Brettschneider, Kleine, 2002; Vaičiulienė, 2004), as well as practitioners (Jankauskienė, 2003; Evans et al., 2008; Pelegrini, Petroski, 2010) especially focus on issues related with the body image. Everyday life placed a significant pressure on physical appearance as beauty ideals shifted in the social environment together with the requirements to pursue and maintain them. Beauty ideals which are promoted by the mass media increase

dissatisfaction with the body image and motivate to pursue such ideals (Blond, 2008). Body shape and size is a form of self-expression. Therefore, it is not surprising that contemporary culture uses body as an indicator to judge oneself as well as others (Polivy, Herman, 2007; Miškinytė, 2011, p. 6). Considering dissatisfaction with the body image, gender differences are of the utmost importance (Miškinytė, 2011, p. 37).

Body image is a schematic own body representation, comprised on the basis of space, time and movement experience (*Sporto terminų žodynas*, 2002). A lot of attention is paid to a negative body image component, which is body dissatisfaction, looking for ties to depression (Kardelis, Stakytė, 2003; Markevičiūtė et al., 2003; Didžiokienė, Žemaitienė, 2005) and eating disorders (Barker, 2003; Vizbaraitė et al., 2007; Jankauskienė, 2008; Pelegrini, Petroski, 2010). Conducted studies revealed that the majority of adolescents (especially girls) believed that appearance and other people's opinion formed basis for self perception (Blond, 2008). Scientists who performed body image studies emphasized the importance of positive body image development (Cash, 2002; Pelegrini, Petroski, 2010). Positive body image is a significant factor for adolescents' well-being (Brettschneider, Kleine, 2002; Avalos, Tylka, 2005, 2006; Swami et al., 2008). Adolescents have a very specific body image which is related with their own perception (Evans et al., 2008). Body image issues become very complex during the adolescence period, as during it an adolescent might feel confused due to changes occurring in his/her body, which might invoke dissatisfaction with the body image. Nobody is born with a negative body image. If the adolescent wanted to feel satisfied, be able to adjust and overcome difficulties, the body image should be positive (Vaičiulienė, 2004). When developing a positive body image, it is very important to acknowledge and respect a natural body shape, appearance, form, learn to manage negative thoughts and feelings. Adolescents can receive acknowledgement through their bodies (Baur, Burmann, 2000).

**Research aim** was to establish gender differences in body image perception among 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils.

**Research object** was body image perception of 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils.

## RESEARCH METHODS

**Research sample.** The questionnaires were handed out during the months of March-April-May of 2012. Adolescents of 8<sup>th</sup> grades were chosen as the research sample. A random sampling was performed of 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils from 24 general education schools located in various cities and towns in Lithuania (Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Kretinga, Gargždai, Tauragė, Telšiai). During the anonymous survey, a total of 1347 adolescents of

8<sup>th</sup> grade were surveyed. The research sample was comprised of  $n = 674$  boys and  $n = 673$  girls, i. e. in regards to gender, the sample was comprised of a similar number of boys (50%) and girls (49.9%). The chosen study sample represents population of Lithuania and is sufficient in respect to the size of the sample. The present study conducted a research using a probability random sampling.

**Research instrument.** The research uses a body image perception questionnaire designed by the author based on V. Rittner (1986), R. Jankauskienė (2001), A. Zaborskis et al. (1996), A. Zaborskis, J. Makari (2001), W. D. Brettschneider, T. Kleine, G. Klimek (2003), D. M. Garner (2004), R. Russell (2004), A. Miškinytė (2011) questionnaires. For assessment of the body image the author composed a Likert Scale. The questionnaire presents 52 questions regarding the perception of adolescent body image. The participants were asked to rank certain body parts and place their answers on a scale from *dislike* to *like* (on a 7-point rank scale). To assess reliability of questionnaire scale as well as scale internal consistency a Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. It is based on correlation of individual questions in a questionnaire and assesses whether all scale items reflect the sample and enable to specify the number of necessary questions in the scale. The more the value is closer to 1, the better the questionnaire is designed, i. e. all of the questions are significant and confirm data interpretation validity. The questionnaire was composed of closed and semi closed questions.

**Data analysis.** For a quantitative data analysis, a *Statistical Package for Social Sciences* SPSS 17 was used. Differences between body image elements were assessed using a *Friedman* criterion; response differences of boys and girls were assessed using *Mann-Whitney* criterion. Assessing body image scale reliability, a reliability analysis was employed; *Cronbach's alpha* coefficient  $> 0.912$ . Thus, the above described scale was a reliable means of assessment.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

Results of the present research show that respondents were more dissatisfied (Figure 1) with their stomach ( $p < 0.001$ ), arms ( $p < 0.001$ ), shoulders ( $p < 0.001$ ), legs ( $p < 0.001$ ), thighs ( $p < 0.001$ ), hips ( $p < 0.001$ ), buttocks ( $p < 0.001$ ), hips ( $p < 0.001$ ), waist ( $p < 0.001$ ), shins ( $p < 0.001$ ), breasts ( $p < 0.001$ ), face ( $p < 0.001$ ), nose ( $p < 0.001$ ). Respondents tended to be more satisfied with

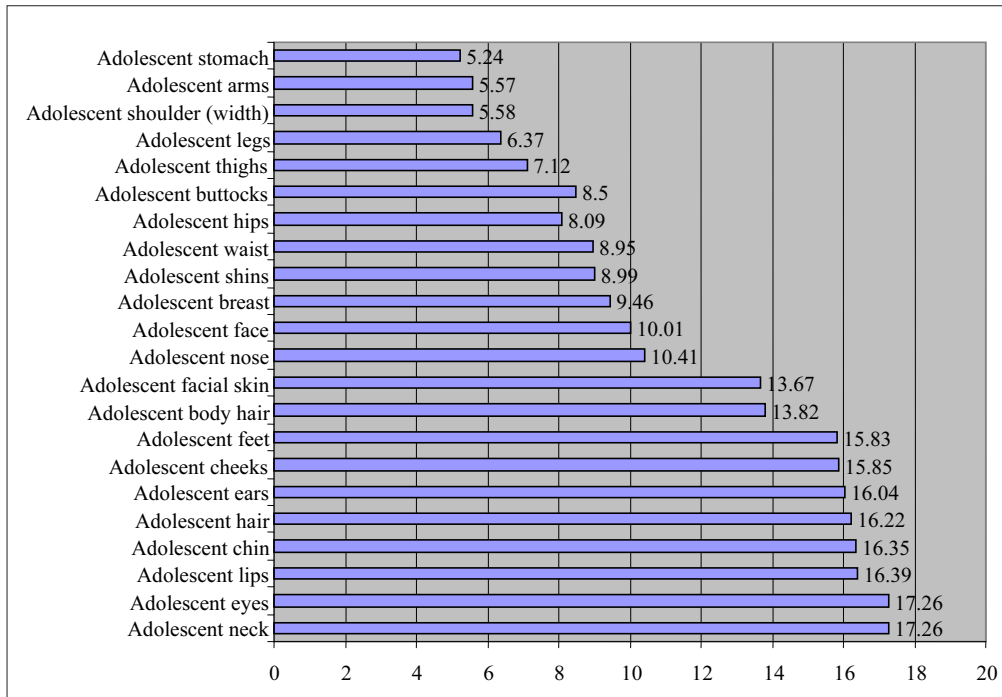


Figure 1. Adolescents' body image assessment results (mean rank is based on Friedman's criterion)

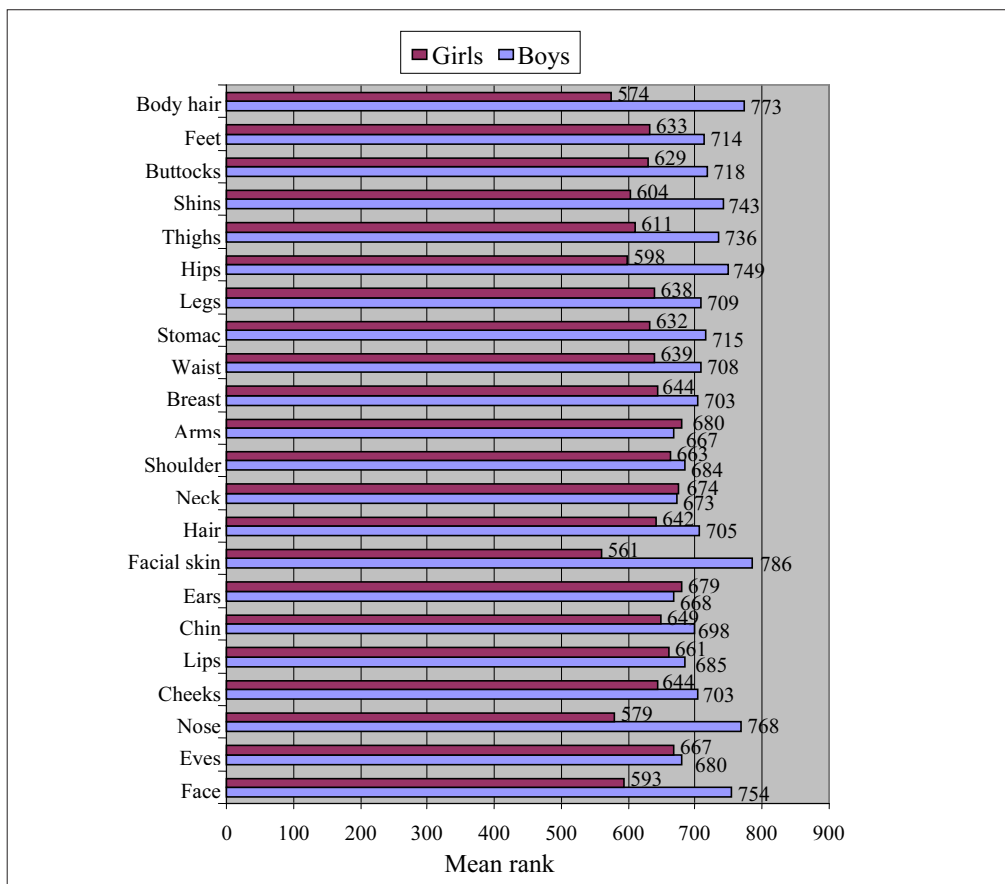


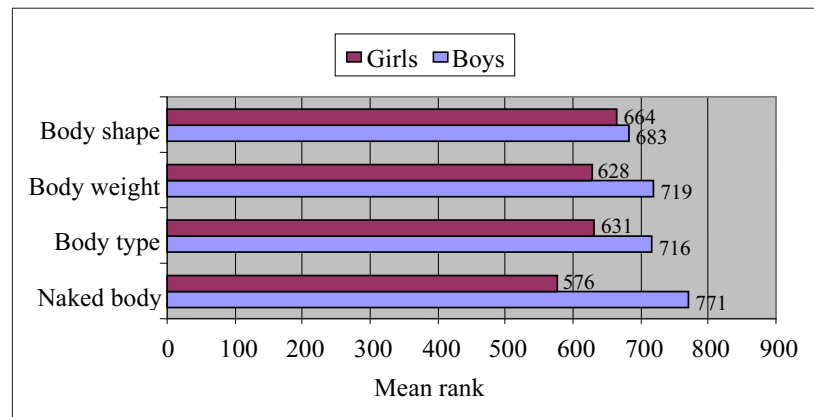
Figure 2. Adolescents' body image assessment results (mean rank is presented in accordance with MannWhitney (U) test criterion)

facial skin ( $p < 0.001$ ), body hair ( $p < 0.001$ ), feet ( $p < 0.001$ ), cheeks ( $p < 0.001$ ), ears ( $p < 0.001$ ), hair ( $p < 0.001$ ), chin ( $p < 0.001$ ), lips ( $p < 0.001$ ), eyes ( $p < 0.001$ ), neck ( $p < 0.001$ ). Having assessed the questionnaire items using *Friedman's* criterion it was determined that the differences

were statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 16329$ ;  $df = 25$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ).

Gender differences in body image perception among 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils (Figure 2) revealed that girls tended to be more dissatisfied with their face ( $U = 172289,500$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), nose ( $U = 163292,000$ ;

Figure 3. Adolescents' body image assessment results (mean rank is presented in accordance with MannWhitney (U) test criterion)



$p < 0.001$ ), cheeks ( $U = 206748,000$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ), facial skin ( $U = 150840,500$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), hair ( $U = 205523,000$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ), body hair ( $U = 160012,500$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), which depend on adolescents' genotype, as well as breasts ( $U = 206717,000$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ), waist ( $U = 203616,000$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ), stomach ( $U = 199037,000$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), legs ( $U = 202790,000$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ), hips ( $U = 176005,500$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), thighs ( $U = 184430,500$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), shins ( $U = 179827,000$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), buttocks ( $U = 196810,500$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), feet ( $U = 199549,000$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), which depended on adolescents' phenotype.

Data in Figure 3 showed that girls more than boys were more dissatisfied with their naked body ( $U = 161082,500$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), body type ( $U = 198292,000$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), and body weight ( $U = 196259,000$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

Body type, body weight and body shape depended on adolescents' phenotype, which could be altered by physical exercises, physical activities and healthy eating.

## DISCUSSION

In terms of body image dissatisfaction, gender differences play a significant role. By the present research we aimed to analyze whether body image perception among 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils is different in the aspect of gender. The present diagnostic research as well as other studies conducted by foreign scientists shed some light on the presumption that adolescent girls tend to be more dissatisfied with their body image. It has been estimated that seven out of ten girls express their dissatisfaction with their body image by pursuing an idea of a thinner body. Boys tend to be dissatisfied with their body image, as they seek

to be bigger, taller and more muscular (Evans et al., 2008). The study reveals that starting from 20 to 95 percent of adolescent boys and adult men feel a great dissatisfaction with their body image, especially due to body shape and type (Watkins et al., 2008). If boys and men want to achieve a body image of ideal type and weight, they use unhealthy compensatory behavior (such as malnutrition, excessively high loads during physical activities) very often (Blond, 2008). Our research results revealed that adolescents placed a great focus on their body weight and body shape. Research results revealed that issues related with the body image and weight were very important to acknowledge and understand because difficulties that emerge during early adolescence might remain during adult years (Swami et al., 2008). Body image is the most significant factor for self-definition, especially for girls (Pelegri, Petroski, 2010). Adolescents (especially girls) believe that physical appearance and perception (evaluation) of other people are important factors for self-judgment. It has been established that body image development and body changes have an effect on movement (McCabe et al., 2006). Sports (movement) have influence on body image (Avalos, Tylka, 2005, 2006; Swami et al., 2008). Research revealed that in many cases adolescents' psychosocial development and body image correlated with their pursuance of a stereotypical slim body image (Hargreaves, Tiggemann, 2006). Studies also determined a relation between body image and a negative association, especially for the adolescent girls (Pelegri, Petroski, 2010). In the studies of body image Scientists emphasized that the formation of a positive body image was essential (Evans et al., 2008). There are studies which analyzed a positive body image aspect – body perception (Avalos, Tylka, 2005, 2006;

Swami et al., 2008). Results of conducted studies have revealed that development of a positive body image during early adolescence is very important and relevant as an ability to take care of your body image is one of the most significant tasks allowing to ensure adolescents' positive cognitive, social and physical changes. For this ability to become a life standard, it is necessary to develop it from the moment adolescent start taking a better care and are more concerned about their body image, which is during the early adolescence (Hargreaves et al., 2006; McCabe, Tiggemann, 2006; Blond, 2008; Evans et al., 2008; Pelegrini, Petroski, 2010).

## CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

1. Having assessed the body image of 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils, it was established that adolescents tended to be more dissatisfied with their stomach ( $p < 0.001$ ), arms ( $p < 0.001$ ), shoulders ( $p < 0.001$ ), legs ( $p < 0.001$ ), thighs ( $p < 0.001$ ), hips ( $p < 0.001$ ) and buttocks ( $p < 0.001$ ).

2. Differences in body image perception among 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils depended on their gender, i. e. girls compared to boys ( $p < 0.001$ ), tended to be more dissatisfied with their body image.

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## VIII KLASĖS MOKINIŲ KŪNO SAVIVAIZDŽIO VERTINIMO SKIRTUMAI LYTIES POŽIŪRIU

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### SANTRAUKA

*Tyrimo pagrindimas ir hipotezė.* Tyrimais įrodyta, kad mergaičių nepasitenkinimas kūno savivaizdžiu dažnai rodo norą būti plonesnėmis, berniukų – norą būti stambesniais, aukštesniais, turėti daugiau raumenų ir gražias kūno formas. Teigiama, kad paaugliai turi labai konkretų kūno savivaizdį, kuris siejamas su jų pačių išivaizdavimais. Visgi tyrimų, nagrinėjančių kūno savivaizdžio ypatumus, t. y. konkrečių kūno savivaizdžio dalių vertinimo, vis dar trūksta. *Hipotezė* – VIII klasės mokinių pasitenkinimo lygis konkrečiomis kūno savivaizdžio dalimis skiriasi; jų kūno savivaizdžio vertinimas skiriasi lyties požiūriu.

*Tikslas* – atskleisti VIII klasės mokinių kūno savivaizdžio vertinimo skirtumus lyties požiūriu.

*Metodai.* Tyrimas atliktas 2012 metų kovo–balandžio–gegužės mėnesiais. Paimta tikimybinė atsitiktinė VIII klasės mokinių imtis iš 24 bendrojo ugdymo mokyklų, esančių įvairiuose Lietuvos miestuose. Tiriamąją imtį sudarė 1347 (berniukai –  $n = 674$ , mergaitės –  $n = 673$ ) VIII klasės mokiniai. Diagnostiniam tyrimui atlikti buvo naudota autorės sudaryta kūno savivaizdžio vertinimo anketa, remiantis V. Rittner (1986), R. Jankauskienės (2001), A. Zaborskio ir kt. (1996), A. Zaborskio, J. Makari (2001), R. Russell (2004), W. D. Brettschneider, T. Kleine, G. Klimek (2003), D. M. Garner (2004), A. Miškinytės (2011) anketomis.

*Rezultatai.* Tyrimo rezultatai leidžia teigti, kad respondentai labiau nepatenkinti kūno savivaizdžio dalimis, kurios priklauso nuo paauglių fenotipo, t. y. pilvu, rankomis, pečiais, kojomis, šlaunimis, klubais, sėdmenimis, liemeniu, blauzdomis, krūtine ( $p < 0,001$ ). Kūno savivaizdžio vertinimo skirtumai lyties požiūriu atskleidė, kad mergaitės yra labiau nepatenkintos savo veidu ( $p < 0,001$ ), nosimi ( $p < 0,001$ ), skruostais ( $p = 0,003$ ), veido oda ( $p < 0,001$ ), plaukais ( $p = 0,001$ ), krūtine ( $p = 0,004$ ), liemeniu ( $p = 0,001$ ), pilvu ( $p < 0,001$ ), kojomis ( $p = 0,001$ ), klubais ( $p < 0,001$ ), šlaunimis ( $p < 0,001$ ), blauzdomis ( $p < 0,001$ ), sėdmenimis ( $p < 0,001$ ), pėdomis ( $p < 0,001$ ), nuogu kūnu ( $p < 0,001$ ), kūno sudėjimu ( $p < 0,001$ ), kūno svoriu ( $p < 0,001$ ).

*Aptarimas ir išvados.* VIII klasės mokinių kūno savivaizdžio vertinimo skirtumai priklauso nuo lyties, t. y. mergaitės, lyginant su berniukais ( $p < 0,001$ ), labiau nepatenkintos savo kūno savivaizdžiu.

**Raktažodžiai:** kūno savivaizdis, paauglystė, kūno svoris, kūno sudėjimas, kūno forma.

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