

## College Volleyball Players: Body Image and the Influence of Uniforms

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## Body Image



- Perceptions and attitudes about one's body (physical appearance) (Cash, Thériault, & Annix, 2004)
- Social body and athletic body often conflict (Greenleaf, 2002; Krane, Choi, Baird, Almar, & Kauer, 2004)
- Athletic environments emphasize the physical body (Greenleaf, 2002)
- Sport uniforms may provide a unique source of stress and influence body satisfaction (Feather, Ford, & Herr, 1996; Greenleaf, 2002; Krane et al., 2004; Krane Stiles-Shipley, Waldron, & Michalek, 2001)



## Uniforms



- What are your perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about uniforms in sport?
  - Personal athletic experiences?
  - Experiences as a coach?
- How might coach interactions maximize or minimize student-athletes perceptions of body image?

## Purpose



- Explore NCAA DI female volleyball players thoughts and feelings about their bodies – both as athletes and as women outside of sport
- Examine whether perceptions about their revealing spandex uniforms were related to their body image

## Sample



- 9 female NCAA DI volleyball players
- Years participating in volleyball ( $M = 7.33; SD = 1.80$ )
- 6 (White); 2 (Black); 1 (Biracial)
- Average Height = 5'10"
- Age:  $M = 19.78; SD = .083$
- Average Weight = 161 pounds
- Year in school:
  - 3 Freshman
  - 3 Sophomores
  - 3 Juniors
- Average BMI = 23.13

## CQR Methodology

(Hill et al., 1997)



- Discuss values, assumptions, biases prior to CQR process (Fassinger, 2005; Hill et al., 1997)
- Independent coding of transcribed interviews
- Consensus on emergent categories, domains, & core ideas
- External auditor review and feedback
- Incorporation of feedback & consensus on final categories
- Cross analysis procedure

## Perceptions about Body Image & Spandex Uniforms



Domains/Categories	Frequency
Domain 1: Expectations of volleyball body/uniform	
a) Purposeful body	Typical
b) Athletic, fit, self-assured	General
c) Desire to be comfortable	General
d) Transition to spandex	General

Note: General = applicable to all of the cases;  
 Typical = applicable to more than half of the cases;  
 Variant = applicable to half of the cases or less

### Purposeful body:

"If a coach or someone looks at me, they're like, 'Good, this girl is going to be powerful and stuff,' because you would think she's got all this power in her legs, she is strongly built."

### Athletic, fit, self-assured:

"When you think of a volleyball player, you think of someone skinny, you think of like someone who just had , muscular legs, um, and I feel like throughout the years I've had that."

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**Desire to be comfortable:**

"I think it is a little too tight, just because not all, I don't know how to say that, not all girls have the right body for it, or they feel so self-conscious about it. And I feel like, 'Why do you have to feel like that?' You shouldn't have to worry about how you look in the uniform. You should only have to worry about how you are going to play and focus on the game."

**Transition to spandex:**

"It just took a while to get used to because when you go from basketball shorts to spandex, that's opposite ends of the spectrum. I kind of feel like, 'Should I even be out in public in this?' But then once I saw everyone else was wearing them, it was a lot better...But at first I couldn't just wear spandex in public. I had to wear shorts over them, just like as a cover-up."

**Everything is hanging out:**

"Our shorts are just really short and really tight, and you know. Your butt hangs out, your legs are flopping around when you are diving on the floor. I just feel like that's a lot to be seeing. And you know a lot of people are watching the games, and you just get self-conscious, like your butt is hanging out."

**Shows all imperfections:**

"There is no room to hide anything. If you have one imperfection, everybody is going to see it, so you'd have to be really okay with yourself to not have to worry about that."

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## How Uniform Specifically Affects Body Image & Athletic Performance



Domains/Categories	Frequency
Domain 2: Uniform distraction/affirmation	
a) Everything is hanging out	Typical
b) Shows all imperfections	General
c) Pregame performance	Variant
d) In-game performance	General
e) Functionality of uniform	Typical

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**Pregame performance:**

"Definitely when we first get out there and we're starting to warm up and we're seeing people come into the gym, everyone is looking around, just trying to look at who's on the court and who's doing what and stuff. I'm definitely a little more self-conscious about what I'm doing to keep myself looking nice and what my uniform is doing and how I'm looking in my uniform."

**In-game performance:**

"I wasn't thinking as much about the game as I should have been. I was thinking about what I looked like and what people were thinking about me instead of focusing on what I need to be doing for the game, or what I should be mentally preparing for the game. I would be worried, pulling my spandex down so I wasn't falling out of them. Or pulling my jersey down so people wouldn't see my stomach or my hips. It would take away from my concentration definitely."

**Functionality of uniform:**

"It helps because it [uniform] doesn't get in our way as much because we are doing quick, fast movements, changing directions constantly, jumping up and down close to the net. Like if we were to have a baggy uniform, it might get caught in the net and we'd get a net call and that's lost points to us."

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## Perceptions of Others' Comments



Domains/Categories	Frequency
Domain 3: Perceptions of others' comments	
a) Coach messages	General
b) Teammates/competitors	Typical
c) Significant others	General
d) Paradox of male spectators	Typical

**Coach messages:**

"Yes, our coach told us that, for a while, we heard that we had smaller uniforms so that everyone would want to lose weight or look better and that's part of the reason why people said that we had small uniforms because they'd heard from our coach that we all needed to look, she wanted us to be aware of our bodies and want to look a certain way."

**Teammates/competitors:**

"My teammates definitely make fun of my butt because it's big. But, I mean it's all in fun. I mean I know they don't mean any harm by it. But sometimes it's annoying because, I feel like even on the side other people [competitors] make comments too."

**Significant others:**

"I think my family is not really a huge fan of them [spandex uniforms]. Like, they know it's what everyone wears so they are okay with it, but my mom is always making sure, 'Do you have a big enough size?' because she doesn't like it when she sees other people have too small when it's already, like spandex, then it's extra small, so she wants to make sure I'm covering myself up as much as possible and stuff."

**Paradox of male spectator:**

"I know there's always certain schools that have student sections full of guys and girls, and they always will find anything to pick on and to just nail it into the ground. So I remember one game there was a student section and they had a white board and they were drawing our players, one by one, and our butts in the spandex. And I know everyone was completely distracted, not worrying about the game. They were all looking at, you know, what they were drawing."

"I know a lot of guy friends that would come to our games specifically because it was girls in spandex. So a lot of times girls would, to get people to come to our games, we would be like 'You know you can come. It's just a bunch of girls in spandex.' ...I know that's what a lot of guys come to our games for."

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## Social Comparison



Domains/Categories	Frequency
Domain 4: Social comparison	
a) Comparison with other athletes	Typical
b) Paradox of on-court/off-court	Typical
c) Gaining muscle	Typical
d) Localized awareness	Typical
e) Projection onto others	Typical

**Comparison with other athletes:**

"If I had a choice I would definitely change some of the tightness of the uniforms or the look of the uniforms, just so it would benefit everybody and not so much like, 'Oh I have to be skinny, and I have to be tones for these uniforms to look right,' because it does demote your confidence, and it does make you feel like, you compare yourself to other teammates and other athletes that look better in their uniforms, and you're like, 'Well, they look awesome and I look like I....[stopping]. You lose confidence points, really, if you don't look good in your uniform."

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**Paradox of on-court/off-court; Gaining muscle:**

"I definitely feel like we're a lot bigger because we're working out so much and because we're lifting weights all the time. I definitely feel like we have bigger bodies compared to women who don't, which can be a little, um, you know, make me a little self-conscious because I, comparing, I feel like a man sometimes because you're just building so much muscle and constantly working out and then you see little petite women who are a lot smaller. So I guess it could make me feel a little more on the manly side."

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**Localized awareness:**

"I feel like around my stomach area I might have more stuff there than I should but, I mean the uniform definitely shows that off so I tried and hide that as much as possible."

**Projection onto others:**

"I could see where there could be problems. I'm not saying I have a problem with it. I don't mind it at all. I don't think anybody on my team minds it. I think we, I'm pretty comfortable with it. I think the girls on my team are. But I can definitely see where, if somebody was very self-conscious about their body."

**Discussion**

- Female athletes "live the paradox"
- Revealing spandex uniforms may increase sexual objectification, feelings of discomfort, and decrease body esteem
- Perceptions about uniforms influence body image and performance

## Strategies



- How might we influence body esteem with female-student athletes?
  - Practical strategies for coaches?
  - Practical strategies for team leaders?
  - Practical strategies for sport psychology consultants?

## Implications



- Awareness of the role uniforms can play
- Educate coaches about their influence
- Empower athletes with skills to effectively communicate their preferences
- Explore if a relationship exists between uniform type and prevalence of disordered eating and mood disorders.

## Questions?



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