

## PRESERVATION OF BODY IMAGE AND FEMINITY

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### **Abstract**

This paper focus on the preservation of body image and femininity. It has been observed that our female folks spent unending hours taking care of their facial and other physical body parts. To some it has become an obsession and reasons for this are not far - fetched. The modern day would applause and give credence to women who are cute. Cute women entails slims and average-weight ladies. To become cute therefore, obesity and over-weight are forbidden variables and this paper seek to address this in numerous ways, ranging from regular exercise, good diet and avoidance of shabby life style. In addressing this, the following factors were enumerated; body somatotype, body composition, body fat, origin of fatness, factors responsible for fatness and health risk associated with over-fatness. Others are health risk associated with excessively low body fatness, relationship between body image and femininity as well as the relationship among diet, physical activity, fatness and body preservation.

The preservation of the human body is the preservation of life, even at death according to some beliefs. It has even been observed that in some places of the world, men had been preserving even their dead. The entombments of pharaohs underneath the pyramids of ancient Egypt are well known cases and the preservation of our body while alive is contingent on

many factors for obvious reasons (Smith, 2010).

The preservation of body image viewed from the shape and size of the human body from feminine angle is worth considering, judging from the modern trend where slimness is in vogue. According to Mayo (2003) and Manore (2003), body image can be traced scientifically to body composition, as it is

the relative percentage of muscle, fat, bone and other tissues of the body. Body composition is considered as a component of health-related fitness, but can also be considered a component of metabolic fitness.

There is the natural tendency for women to be more obsessed with their body than men. Women want to look beautiful, slim, and attractive at all times, which makes them spend time fussing obsessively about their body image. The appropriate sizes, shape, build and composition of female body is of major importance to them to succeed in most life's endeavours. Body build refers to the morphology of the form and structure of the body. Somatotyping is a procedure used in science to describe the morphology of the body in quantitative manner (Wilmore, 2003). In order to present the full picture of this paper, the following sub-headings will be looked at; body somatotype, body composition, body fat, the origin of fatness, health risks associated with over-fatness, health risks associated with excessively low body fatness, relationship among diet, physical activity and fitness as well as body image preservation.

### **Body Somatotype**

According to Wilmore and Costill (2004), body build is usually assessed by one of the standard systems of somatotyping. This dates back to the time of Hippocrates, who used two basic body types; Phthisic habitus or a long, thin body and apoplectic habitus, or a short, thick body. In the 1800's and early 1900's,

several somatotype systems were developed. In the 1930's Sheldon revolutionized the science of somatotype by assigning ratings to each of the three categories, endomorphy, mesomorphy and ectomorphy (Oboh & Oriabure, 2009).

In Sheldon's system, endomorphy is characterized by roundness and softness as typified by the grossly obese individual, mesomorphy is characterized by a square body with prominent musculature, as illustrated by the middle-weight, weight lifter. The ectomorphy is linear and fragile with small muscles and prominent bones, as illustrated by the long distance runner (Wilmore 2004). O'shea (2000) observed that with age women appear to possess "pear shape" with fat accumulating in the buttocks and legs.

### **Body composition**

Like the other parts of health-related physical fitness, body composition is related to good health, and body composition requires no movement or performance. Metabolic fitness includes other non performance measures associated with increase risk for health problems, such as high blood fat, high blood pressure, and high blood sugar levels (Lohman, Houtkooper & Going, 2002). Body composition comprises of body fat, body weight, bone density and lean body fat, and these are measured anthropometrically as percent body fat, percent body weight, body density and lean body fat (Corbin, Welk, Corbin & Welk, 2004). Body fat and body weight is the nightmare of average woman as far as they are concern, especially among the

enlighten ones. The less educated ones sees them as living well. In some customs amassing fats is referred to as a sign of living large.

### **Body fat**

Body fat is dangerous because of its association with various health problems and issues, and being over-fat or under-fat can result in health concerns (Corbin et al, 2004). Despite general public awareness and concerns about weight control, the prevalence of obesity has continued to rise. According to WHO (2010) current estimates suggest that more than 70 percent of Americans are overweight, and about 35 to 30 percent of these individuals also meet the criterion for obesity. The prevalence of obesity has increased by over 60 percent in the past decade, indicating that this is a relatively recent trend.

Every person should possess at least a minimum amount of fat (percent body fat) for good health. This fat is called essential fat and is necessary for temperature regulation, shock absorption and regulation of essential body nutrients, including vitamins A,D,E and K (Critser, 2003). The exact amount of fat considered essential to normal body functioning has been debated, but most experts agree that males should possess no less that 5 percent and females no less that 10 percent (Critser, 2003).

For females, an exceptionally low body fat percentage (underweight) is especially of concern. Amenorrhea may occur among women at fat levels as high as 16%. Some people feel that amenorrhea

when associated with low body fat, is a reversible condition that is merely the body's method of preventing pregnancy. However, low body fat levels, accompanied by amenorrhea, places a woman at risk for bone loss (osteoporosis) (Fairburn & Brownell, 2000). Nonessential fat is fat above essential fat level that accumulates when more calories are consumed than expended. When nonessential fat accumulates in excessive amounts, over-fatness or even obesity can occur. A desirable range of fatness is associated with good metabolic fitness, good health, and wellness (Wong & Dietz, 2002).

### **The Origin of Fatness**

Heredity plays a role in fatness. Science had suggested that every individual is born with predetermined weight (sometimes called set-point). This implies that an individual have little control over his or her weight or body fat levels. According to Corbin et al (2004), an individual has considerable control over his or her weight and level of fatness, as evidenced by the fact that calories taken in (diet) and calories expended (activity) are the two most important factors associated with fat control. Nevertheless, research suggests that people are born with a predisposition towards fatness or leanness (America College of Sports Medicine, 2010).

For years, some scholars have suggested that body type or somatotype, is inherited. Clearly, some people have more difficulty than others controlling fatness because of their body and because they

come from families with history of obesity. Recent research by a well-respected team of scholars indicates that the body has a “natural” fatness range, which is influenced by heredity (WHO 2010). Recently, the “ob-gene” (or gene responsible for obesity) was discovered and it is a very important scientific discovery, but it is unlikely that it will result in a cure for over-fatness in the near future (Sohn, 2012).

#### **Factors responsible for fatness**

The following factors are also responsible for fatness:

**Glandular disorders:** Glandular disorder are not a cause of over fatness for most people. For example, thyroid problems can cause a slow metabolic rate that result in fat gain. However, most experts suggest that only 1 to 2 percent of all over fatness is directly caused by problems of this type (America College of Sports medicine, (2010).

**Fatness early in life:** Fatness early in life leads to adult’s fatness for Research studies have documented that body composition levels tend to track through the life span. Although according to Corbin at al, (2004), there are exceptions, for individuals that are overweight or obese as children are more likely to be overweight or obese as adult. One explanation for this is that over-fatness in children causes the body to produce more fat cells. Although it was once thought that only children could add fat cells as a result of over fatness, evidence now suggest that obesity can results in new fat

cells production, even into adulthood (Sohn, 2012).

**Changes in basal metabolic rate:** The amount of energy one expends each day must be balanced with the energy intake for one to maintain body and fat and bodyweight over time. The energy intake is determined by calories consumed. The basal metabolic rate (BMR) is an indication of one’s energy expenditure, is highest during the growing years, for the amount of food eaten increases to support the increased energy expenditure (Sohn, 2012).

**Excess caloric intake:** This can results in an increase in number of fat cells among children. For adults, over-fatness is as a result of the increase in size of fat cells (hypertrophy). When fat cells near the skin become excessively large, they can cause dimples or lumps under the skin and some individuals refer to these large fat cells as cellulite (Sohn, 2012).

**Creeping obesity:** This is a problem as humans grow older with inactiveness their BMR gradually decrease with age. Caloric intake does seem to decrease somewhat with age, but the decrease does not adequately compensate for the decrease in BMR and activity levels. For this reason, body fat increases gradually for the typical person with age.

#### **Health risks associated with fatness**

1. Obesity has been elevated from a secondary to a primary risk factor for heart disease (Corbin et at, 2004). Prior to 1998, obesity was considered to be a secondary risk factor for heart disease. The reason for this was that the effects of

obesity were thought to be mediated by other risk factors, such as high blood pressure and blood lipids. As a result of the mounting evidence of the relationship of obesity to health risk, especially risk for heart disease, the American Heart Association classifies obesity as a primary risk factor, along with high blood lipids, high blood pressure, tobacco use, and sedentary living (American College of Sports medicine, 2010).

2. Over-fatness and obesity can contribute to degenerative disease, health problems and shortens life, and some disease and health problems are associated with over-fatness and obesity. In addition to the higher incidence of certain diseases and health problems, evidence shows that people who are moderately over-fat have a 40 percent higher than normal death rate. This is evidenced by the very high life insurance premiums paid by obese individuals (Corbin et al, 2004).

3. Excessive abdominal fat and excessive fatness of the upper body can increase the risk of various diseases. The location of body fat can influence the health risks associated with obesity. A variety of terms are associated with location of body fat. Fat in the upper part of the body is sometimes referred to as "Northern Hemisphere" fat and a body type high in this type of fat is sometimes called the "apple" shape (Corbin et al, 2004). Upper body fat is also referred to as android fat because it is more characteristic of men than women. Postmenopausal women typically have a higher amount of upper body fat than premenopausal women. Lower body fat

such as in the hips and upper legs is sometimes referred to as "Southern hemisphere" fat. This body type is sometimes called the "Pear" shape. Lower body fat is also referred to as gynoid fat because it is more characteristic of women than men (Nash, 2002).

According to O'Shea (2000), abdominal obesity is much more damaging to health. It has a strong link to "Syndrome X." the deadly quartet of high insulin, high sugar, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Abdominal obesity is clearly associated with high levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol and low levels of HDL (good) cholesterol. In addition, abdominal obesity is strongly linked to an increase risk of heart disease and stroke and is far more hazardous to health than lower body obesity.

#### **Health risks associated with excessively low body fatness**

Low body fatness is when the average required fat is lacking in the body. Excessive desire to be thin or low on body weight can result in health problems. In Western society, the near obsession with thinness has been, at least in part responsible for eating disorders. The most common disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia and anorexia athletica. All of these disorders are most common among highly achievement oriented girls and young women, although they affect virtually all segments of the population (Mayo, 2000 & Nash, 2002).

**Anorexia nervosa:** This is the most severe eating disorder and if untreated can be life-threatening. Anorexics restrict

food intake so that their bodies becomes emaciated. Among the many characteristics of anorexia nervosa are fear of maturity and inaccurate body image. Anorexics starve themselves and may exercise compulsively or use laxatives to prevent the digestion of food in an attempt to attain excessive leanness. Among anorexic girls and women, developing adult figure is often feared. People with this disorder must obtain medical and psychological help immediately, as the consequences are severe (Mayo, 2003).

**Bulimia:** Bulimia is a common eating disorder characterized by bingeing and purging. Disordered eating patterns become habitual for many people with bulimia. They alternate between bingeing and purging. Bingeing means the periodic eating of large amounts of food at one time. After a binge, the bulimia purges the body of the food by forced regurgitation or the use of laxative. Another form of bulimia is bingeing on one day and starving on the next. The consequences of bulimia can result in serious mental, gastrointestinal, and dental problems (May, 2003 & Corbin et al, 2004).

**Fear of obesity:** The fear of obesity is a less severe condition, but it can still have negative health consequence. This condition is most common among achievement oriented teenagers who impose a safe restriction in caloric intake because they fear obesity. Consequences include stunting of growth, delayed puberty, delayed sexual development and decreased physical attractiveness (USA Today, 2003).

**Body weight control:** A structural programme of exercise promotes weight control, the major principle behind it is to reduce the amount of fat intake in the body and increase the muscle tissues (Smith, 2010). There is no dispute that excess fat place an extra burden on the heart and muscle. According to Donogue (2000) in normal human forms, 65% of the total calories in the body is used to execute daily work and 15% is used to generate heat, while 30% of unused calories is stored in the muscles. The stored excess calories (in the form of fat) if unutilized for a prolong period may result in over weight and / or obesity. Exercise programme structured by experts, helps in cardio respiratory efficiency which manifest in effective transportation of blood and nutrients to all muscles. The muscular system requires proper maintenance to perform its characteristics function, one of which in the movement of about 45% of the body weight and the

status of the muscle is an important index of the body shape and motor performance. The underused of muscles could cause atrophy and quick accumulation of lactic acid during physical system (Edmundson, 2002).

### **Relationship between Body Image and Femininity**

Overtime and through ages, the body image of women had been of great concern to everybody. Men like their women to be feminine, that is; tall, lean; and supple and on part of the female folks,

they have always been too conscious of their body image (Liebman, 2000).

The modern trend of beautiful women is exemplified by pageant beauty contest. There they display their physical bodies, assorted clothes, bikini and panties with the greatest attention given to their facial appearance, for women spent hours unending in their mirrors, painting their faces, attending to their hair and hair wears. A lot of girls and ladies shy away from physical fitness activities and sports because they don't want to develop muscle, especially at the calf and arms. They complain about masculine shape with its attending disadvantages on girls, ranging from; shying away of boys, interested suitors and lovers because of masculine features.. The average feminine body image in this modern dispensation is quite different from what we see among the uneducated women, especially the market women. This is quite obvious with sedentary life styles and post-children bearing shape.

#### **The Relationship among Diet, Physical Activity, Fitness and Body Preservation**

- A combination of regular physical activity and dietary restriction is the most effective means of losing body fat and preserving body image. Wilmore and Costill (2004) observed that regular physical activity combined with dietary restriction is the most effective method of losing fat. One study of adult women according to Mayo (2003), indicate that diet alone resulted in loss of weight, but much of this loss was lean body tissue. Those who were dieting as well as

exercising experienced similar weight losses but this loss included more body fat. For optimal results, all weight loss programme should combine a lower caloric intake with a good physical fitness programme.

- Good physical activity and diets habits can be useful in maintaining desirable body composition, for people who wish to maintain their current body composition, a caloric balance between intake and output is effective (Mayo, 2003).

- Physical activity is one effective means of controlling body fat: Though physical activity or exercise will not result in immediate and large decrease in the body fat levels, there is increasing evidence that fat loss resulting from physical activity may be more lasting than fat loss from dieting (Liebman, 2000).

- Strength training can be effective in maintaining body composition and reducing body fat: According to O'shea (2000) and Wilmore (2010), weight training is very effective exercise for maintaining body composition and reducing body fat. When carried out for a period of six months the result will be more discerning. According to Oboh (2006), weight training reduced the body fats of three anaerobic training modes on the physical fitness profiles of jumpers. In a related study, Agwubike and Oboh (2005) reported a reduction in percent body fat of jumpers due to the impact of circuit weight training and bounding on jumpers' anthropometry.

### **Conclusion**

The physical constitution and facial appearance of women are most crucial to their well-being and existence. The feminine notion of beauty lies in their body image and this goes a long way to positioning them in all aspects in their ways of lives. It is not strange therefore, to see ladies spending most of their dressing time by their mirrors. Even before the advent of mirrors other means were device by women to see their faces and bodies in order to enhance their body image.

Preservation of body image is very compactable with femininity where both align to form appreciable beauty in women and when such is the case, very attractable women will the made. For women to arrive at great beauty, the body and weight should be proportional with accepted norms using body max index. The body composition and body build are both paramount in determining the body image in women. A lot of measures are taken by women and scientist to ensure that body fat is minimized or eliminated and the maintenance of desirable body composition. Amongst these measures are diet and physical activity. The contributions of both will help to eliminate body fats and weight, thereby preserving the body image of women.

### **Recommendations**

The following are the recommendations for this paper:

1. There are health risks associated with over-fatness.
2. There are health risks associated with excessively low body fatness.

3. Abdominal obesity is more damaging to health.

4. A combination of regular physical activity and dietary restriction is the most effective means of losing body fat.

5. Good physical activity and diets habits can be useful in maintaining desirable body composition.

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