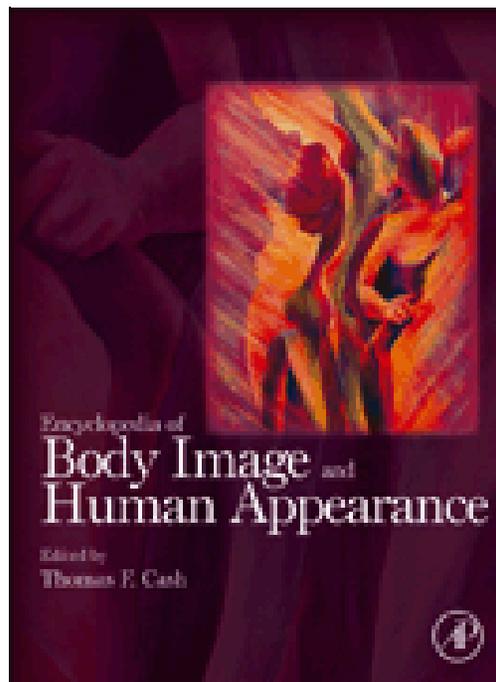


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Anthropological Perspectives on Physical Appearance and Body Image

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Glossary

culture Shared patterns of thoughts, beliefs, behaviors, and habits in both material and symbolic realms.

embodiment How culture “gets under the skin,” or the relationship of how sociocultural dynamics become translated into biological realities in the body.

emic The insider’s perspective, often related to subjectivity.

ethnography The hallmark method of anthropological research involving sustained participant observation.

ethnopsychology Local understandings of “how people work,” or local psychological processes.

etic The outsider’s perspective, often related to objectivity.

face validity Assessing that a measure, usually a survey measure, makes sense on the surface to those being administered the survey.

globalization Increased movement of ideas, ideals, money, technologies, and people across national boundaries.

Introduction

The discipline of anthropology takes as its task the holistic study of humans and is often considered the broadest of the social sciences. The discipline has been interested in the study of human appearance since its earliest days. Early European anthropologists, working during the ‘age of exploration’ and the ‘age of enlightenment’, were fascinated by the variable appearance of peoples they encountered. Questions about diversity of appearance in terms of body size and shape, skin color, body modification, and body ornamentation were part of the earliest set of questions of anthropology (at that time based in Western Europe) that wondered, “How are they similar to or different from us?” Physical appearance, in conjunction with other markers of difference such as language, was used to classify groups and ask philosophical questions about the evolution and nature of the species. Questions about physical appearance, and later body image, continued to flourish in anthropological studies up to the present day.

Anthropology is the social science most engaged with the concept of ‘culture’, that is, shared patterns of thoughts, beliefs, behaviors, and habits in both material and symbolic realms. In addition to cataloging the wide variety of human cultures, anthropologists have asked questions about what human appearance and body image indicate about culture as well as what effects culture has on human appearance and body image. Early anthropologists engaged these relationships in their pursuit of understanding human origins and human nature. More recently, anthropologists have engaged them regarding questions of power relationships and structural inequality. Anthropologists have historically worked cross-culturally both because of interest in human diversity and because of the difficulty in analyzing ‘culture’ in one’s own context. Culture is so deeply ingrained as to be taken for granted. Experiencing another cultural context in a disciplined manner has not only been educative for the world record, but also has made more visible many assumptions of Western culture. The comparative method highlights what is culture-specific and what is universal with respect to human appearance and body image.

A hallmark characteristic of a cultural anthropological approach to the study of a topic is the investigation of the

insider or ‘emic’ point of view in addition to the outsider or ‘etic’ one. That is, anthropologists want to understand what is important to particular people studied, what meaning is attached to objects of study such as physical appearance or aspects thereof, and how these understandings relate to larger sociocultural dynamics and institutions. For anthropologists, the object of study requires contextualization within time and place. This sort of approach is different in emphasis from fields like psychology or biomedicine that are more interested in uncovering universal mechanisms and principles according to models derived from cultures with strong academic underpinnings. A multidisciplinary approach engaging anthropology and psychology in the study of human appearance and body image is promising for combining emic and etic perspectives, a direction that has been shown to be fruitful in global health and in multicultural contexts. This article provides an overview of the types of data and theory that anthropology has contributed to the study of human appearance and body image as well as an examination of methodological innovations relevant for contemporary studies.

Subdisciplinary Approaches within Anthropology

Anthropology contains four subdisciplines: cultural, physical or biological, linguistic, and archaeological. Each one of these subdisciplines has engaged with physical appearance and body image, though the vast majority of research has been conducted in cultural anthropology.

Cultural anthropology examines how culture affects both group- and individual-level ideas, ideals, and practices as well as institutions. In short, cultural anthropology applies a multi-level analysis that focuses on studying the topic of interest as it interacts with its sociocultural context. Cultural anthropology also provides a rich and varied ethnographic record of how various peoples value and make meaning of particular appearances and appearance-related practices. Thus, for example, cultural anthropologists are interested not only in the question of how widespread globally pursuit of a thin body among women is, but also in the local iterations of why, how this is pursued, and how it is represented. In many Western nations, a thin body may be considered ‘beautiful’; in rural Fiji, it may be

considered a means to a successful end; and in urban South Africa, it may be considered 'sick'. Cultural anthropologists believe that these local meanings matter significantly in understanding appearance and body image, particularly when pathology is involved. In contemporary practice, cultural anthropological and psychological studies are increasingly coming to shared ground.

Physical or biological anthropology approaches the study of human appearance and body image in two primary ways. First, physical anthropologists engage in the classification of global human diversity of the body. These classifications can be related to the size, shape, composition, and appearance of the body such as cataloging differences in stature, hip-to-waist ratio, genetic composition, or biological adaptations to extreme climates. They can also relate to the function and performance of the body such as perception, metabolism, and various aspects of brain function, among many others. Biological anthropologists may investigate how dietary differences around the world affect variables such as body mass index (BMI), heart disease prevalence, or the age of onset of puberty in the population. Second, biological anthropology, sometimes in conjunction with cultural anthropology, engages in studies of embodiment. Embodiment is often defined as "how culture gets under the skin." Examples of recent embodiment studies look at how structural inequalities such as racism and poverty affect obesity or chronic disease rates, or how gender inequality affects the development of eating and body image disorders. Many physical anthropologists employ an evolutionary perspective in their work.

Linguistic anthropology is engaged less than the aforementioned subfields in the study of human appearance and body image; however, some key studies have been conducted, particularly in body image development. Linguistic anthropologists may investigate how appearance is discussed or valued in a society or in a particular language. For example, linguistic anthropologists in the United States have documented how young girls in particular are socialized into valuing thin bodies in both home and school contexts through looking at their engagement with speech surrounding 'fat' and 'thin'. In a seminal study contesting some common wisdom on adolescent US girls' speech regarding body size, the anthropologist Mimi Nichter looked at how adolescent girls in the United States use what she calls 'fat talk' to bond with each other, rather than to police actual body size. She convincingly argues that girls' bantering of phrases such as "I'm so fat" among groups of friends, which then demand the response "No, you're not," serves a social bonding purpose more than actual commentary on body size. Linguistic anthropology has been particularly fruitful in the realm of examining socialization of groups of people (e.g., groups based on age, gender, athletics) into particular body ideals.

Archaeologists are the least engaged in the study of human appearance and body image compared with the other subdisciplines. However, archaeologists too have added to the understanding of human diversity, particularly across human history. Archaeologists have been able to catalog variations both in the body itself (especially as related to size) through examination of human remains and in grooming and adornment practices through examination of artifacts. Of particular interest to the study of human appearance are studies that have cataloged social group differences throughout time in how

bodies were modified and adorned. For example, among colonial burial sites in the United States, slaves were more likely to be buried with beaded jewelry than nonslaves, and blue beads in particular signaled African American heritage. Women were buried with considerably more jewelry than men, and young women with more jewelry than older women. Archaeologists speculate about the role of jewelry in adornment to mark important ethnic and gender identities even under highly constrained conditions.

Taken together, the subfields of anthropology have produced a diverse body of knowledge in both contemporary and historical societies of human appearance and body image. The remainder of this article examines some of the empirical and theoretical contributions in these areas and suggests areas of collaboration between anthropology and psychology, particularly as related to methods.

Anthropological Findings in the Study of Human Appearance

Anthropology's interest in the study of human appearance is both descriptive and interpretive. That is, anthropologists are interested in cataloging the diversity of human appearance, modifications to appearance, and adornments of appearance. Anthropology values capturing human diversity both in and of itself and for what systematic analysis of the diversity within physical and social environments can tell us about human nature, evolution, and health. In addition, with its frequent focus on personal and local meaning, cultural anthropology can shed light on why particular appearances are valued and how appearance relates to social structures and power across societies. Anthropology has especially engaged four areas of inquiry regarding human appearance with respect to these issues: (1) descriptive diversity of human appearance; (2) cultural elaboration of particular appearances through body adornment and body modification; (3) description and interpretation of beauty ideals; and (4) human appearance as indicative of group membership – voluntary or involuntary.

Diversity of Global Human Appearance

In terms of descriptive work, the vast ethnographic record speaks to the diversity of human body size, shape, and other characteristics. For example, average human height can vary by about 2 feet between different groups. Pygmy groups in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere average around 4½ feet tall, whereas the Masai of Kenya average over 6 feet tall. These two examples are interesting especially because they co-occur under conditions of low sustenance, thwarting a simple linear hypothesis between nutritional status and height. Evolutionary-oriented anthropologists and biologists posit how these cases might be related to particular environmental challenges and affordances as well as cultural responses to them.

Physical anthropologists have described population-level differences in BMI, a measurement very important to contemporary understandings of health and risk for chronic disease. Often commented upon in biomedical and global health literature is the adiposity of Pacific Islanders who have some of the highest average BMI calculations in the world. This issue has also come to the fore in the context of globalization with

large numbers of Pacific Islanders migrating to multicultural nations such as the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. In studies of European-descended peoples, BMI is strongly positively correlated with increased cardiovascular risks. This relationship has been harder to document among various groups of Pacific Islanders, and indicates that 'obesity' may function differently for Pacific Islanders than for Europeans. Such investigations that call into question static biomedical 'truths' are critically important to the study of global health and to the health of multicultural populations, in addition to the specific group being studied.

Cultural Elaboration of Appearance

Cultural anthropologists have also described how differences in physical appearance are culturally elaborated or minimized, and how social structures interact with physical appearance. For example, gender differences have been a fruitful area of study. Most societies have gendered practices of grooming and dressing to mark local constructions of femininity and masculinity. Such practices may be particularly vivid through socialization processes. In countries without pronounced initiation rituals, observing the socialization of babies and young children may be particularly educative. In the United States, babies are often dressed in apparel that is color-coded (e.g., pink for girls, blue for boys), themed (e.g., princesses for girls, trucks for boys), and constructed differently (e.g., frills for girls, simple shapes for boys). Thus, a quick glance indicates the gender of the child, something considered societally important. Similarly, in parts of the Caribbean and Latin America, infant girls' ears are often pierced signaling gender. In Sweden, a nation self-consciously dedicated to gender equality, clothing for babies and young children is designed to be more unisex. One high-end children's clothing retailer boasts, "Not for boys. Not for girls. We make clothes for children," in consort with national identity. In societies with pronounced initiation rituals, such as the Sambia of Papua New Guinea, gendered demarcation of appearance may only begin at the time of initiation and may include grooming practices (e.g., shaving of hair), scarification, or adornment that signals both gender and maturity.

Another fascinating study investigating the interplay of technology and modernity with gender and appearance was conducted by Alex Edmonds regarding plastic surgery in Brazil. Plastic surgery in Brazil is widespread, with almost anyone having access to it as a basic health-care right. Edmonds makes a sophisticated argument that the beauty desired through plastic surgery is intertwined with sexual desirability for women of different backgrounds in varied ways that intersect with, but are not isomorphic to, the role of capitalism in this nation with bifurcated social status. In this case, Edmonds argues that beauty *per se* is a unique realm of modern experience that is not simply an amalgam of other inequalities. This elaborated case of the unique role of beauty for women dovetails with meta-analyses that have shown upward mobility to be a strong risk factor in the development of problematic body image and eating around the world. One of the reasons for risk is the shift in attitudes about how malleable appearances are in the first place. With modernization tends to come the belief that bodies can be changed and worked upon, whether with diet and exercise or with plastic surgery. In contrast, many

traditional peoples believe that the body is a divinely bestowed entity that cannot (or should not) be significantly changed through works of human will.

Beauty Ideals

Cultural anthropologists have documented varying standards of ideal appearances and social dynamics that support beauty ideals. A particularly interesting set of studies was edited by Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Richard Wilk, and Beverly Stoeltje in a collection investigating the near-ubiquitous phenomenon of beauty pageants around the world. Such pageants put idealized gendered appearances literally on stage, but also those appearances can signal deeper political or cultural dynamics as participants battle it out for the crown. Race, ethnicity, nationality, and social class may come into play in terms of who will succeed. A particularly interesting and contemporary theme of this work was the role of globalization in shaping pageant beauty, and the ability to investigate underlying sociocultural and political tensions through beauty ideals. For example, Wilk showed how, in Belize, global standards of beauty were trickling down into small local pageants since the goal for the pageants (and the country) was to have a competitive candidate for international pageantry. Even if a particular girl was not considered the most beautiful by local standards, she could win if she might be more competitive on the global stage. Such shifts in pageant winners corresponded with Belize's nation-making goals of becoming more of an international presence and especially with respect to its relatively young but dominant industry, tourism. Thus, this group of scholars argued that by looking at the process and outcomes of beauty pageants, we can also learn about societal organization and change.

Appearance as Indicative of Group Membership

Cultural anthropologists have extensively studied how appearance may signal group membership or identity. Group membership may be voluntary or involuntary. In multiple groups in West Africa such as the Mende of Sierra Leone, youth experience scarification to mark their full adult belonging to certain tribes. This change in appearance is highly valued and desirable as it commands a different set of social relations and status. In a related example of youth-driven rather than adult-sanctioned body modification, youth identifying with particular subcultures in industrialized nations as diverse as England and Korea have been found to initiate piercings or tattoos to index membership. Body adornment and grooming are also strong signals of group membership around the world in addition to body modification.

Some signs of identity signaled by appearance are involuntary. This may be due to structural inequalities, disease, or other issues. One of the most obvious examples of this is racial categorization by skin color and bodily features. Historically, in the United States, the 'one-drop' rule was used. That is, one drop of 'Black' blood categorized someone as 'Black' regardless of a multicultural heritage or how they might categorize themselves. Even among historically African American fraternities, the 'brown paper bag test' was used to categorize people. If a partygoer had skin lighter than the paper bag, he could attend the party; if it was darker, he would be excluded.

Anthropologists and other social scientists have studied how people who are part of minority groups have used appearance modification – through skin bleaching, plastic surgery, hair straightening, and other technologies – to cope with discrimination and attempt appearance modification around the world. Many of these practices are dangerous, and all speak to how appearance is related to cultural norms, practices, and institutions.

Historically and cross-culturally, appearance has also signaled disease status, particularly in the face of pandemics. A vivid example is in urban South Africa where rates of HIV and AIDS remain extremely high – up to one-third of young women are infected in some communities. Here, a thin body may signal illness as opposed to an aesthetic ideal, but also a particular body fat distribution with reduced fat in the limbs and face and increased central adiposity is a common effect of antiretroviral therapies and therefore also signals disease status. New body ideals are emerging for women in this context that are slim but muscular in the hope of distancing oneself from disease stigma. Historians have identified similar powerful patterns of appearance signaling disease in the case of TB and other pandemics.

Whether pursued from physical or cultural perspectives, anthropologists are interested in understanding the empirical variation of human appearance worldwide, the meanings of appearance, and the varied relationships among appearance, individual experience and behavior, and group- and institutional-level practices and meanings. Anthropologists tend to combine emic and etic approaches to get at this sort of multi-level analysis.

Anthropological Study of Body Image

Due to the focus on diversity and meaning of appearance, anthropology has had a long-standing interest in body image. Psychological and medical anthropology have been the areas most engaged with this topic of study. Both areas include cultural and biological anthropology (and indeed, 'biocultural anthropology' that includes elements of both subfields is a major paradigm in both); however, cultural anthropological studies are dominant. Psychological anthropology is interested in local understandings of "how people work" and the applicability of psychological theory that originated largely in Western contexts to non-Western peoples. 'Ethnopsychology' is the term for locally relevant psychological theories. A cross-cultural psychologist might take body image measures (and concomitant theories) from a Western nation, translate the language, and administer them in a non-Western context for comparison purposes. In contrast, a psychological anthropologist is more likely to begin with local participant observation to attempt to articulate the emic conceptions of body image and what is valued in the culture being studied without assuming that the concepts and related measures would be accurate in a context in which they were not created or normed. These etic and emic ways of working can provide a fuller picture of body image around the world than either can alone as discussed below.

Medical anthropology relevant to body image is concerned with both local understandings of 'pathological' and 'normal' and the medical systems such as psychiatric treatment or

traditional healing that people encounter when pathology occurs. Thus, anthropological studies of body image have investigated the multiple cross-cultural conceptions of what a 'body' is in the first place, how various cultures might experience and conceptualize what psychology calls 'body image', how body image problems interact with local healing institutions, and how globalization impacts all of the above.

Cross-cultural Conceptions of the Body

Anthropologists have found that the assumptions about what a body is vary considerably around the world. Psychology and biomedicine (including psychiatry) generally assume a body to be a universal entity that functions approximately the same way around the world and across time. Moreover, they assume that there is one body per person; that is, each body is part of an individual who is bounded by his or her skin. In contrast, psychological and medical anthropologists have found a variety of commonly occurring conceptions and functions of the body as well as healing systems that depend on a particular set of assumptions about what a body is.

One simplistic but conceptually useful way these understandings have been categorized is as 'individualistic' societies versus 'sociocentric' societies. In individualistic societies such as most Western nations, bodies are seen to be individual entities with individual rights and responsibilities. Similarly, healing practices for adults are carried out individually. A vivid contrast to this example is the work of the anthropologist and psychiatrist Anne Becker. Becker has done considerable research in rural Fiji, particularly with girls and women. She found that the traditional ethnic Fijian understandings of body were sociocentric; that is, multiple people were responsible for the care and feeding of one body. Thus, a body was a shared entity consisting of the person bounded by the skin as well as close others in that person's life. A robust body size was traditionally valued and signified that that person was well cared for. There was a local illness translated to 'going thin'. When someone was thought to be 'going thin', it was not just an issue for that person, but rather all the close others became engaged in the diagnosis and treatment of the problem. The sickness – and the body – was everyone's responsibility, not just that of the individual. Other Pacific Islander, African, Caribbean, Asian, and Latin American cultures have been found to hold more sociocentric views of the body. In globalizing multicultural societies, such understandings are important for both psychological and medical theory and practice.

Globalization has brought various body conceptions into increasing contact with one another through cultural change and migration. In the Fijian case above, Becker investigated a 'natural experiment' opportunity that was part of globalization. After she had been working there investigating body image for several years, television with Western programming was introduced to the community. She was able to document pre- and posttesting of body conceptualization, body image, and disordered eating behaviors. In a stunning finding, Becker and colleagues found a significant rise in self-reported dieting and purging behaviors 18 months after the introduction of television. Moreover, in qualitative interviews, Becker documented that young women said they wanted their bodies to look like the characters in shows like *Beverly Hills, 90210* not because they thought thin bodies were beautiful, but rather

because they seemed to be a means to a successful and glamorous end, such as boyfriends, social engagements, and expensive cars and houses. Moreover, these young women and the generation after them are showing a willingness to 'work' on the individual body in ways not documented previously. This study was the first to document that television programming could impact body image and body conceptualization cross-culturally.

In the case of migration, conflicts between individualistic and sociocentric conceptions of the body are seen in a number of ways. A recurring situation in immigrant and refugee health care in the United States is when a group of family members appear for an individual's medical appointment. US health care sees the medical encounter as an individual and private event, whereas many non-Western migrants expect that the family is involved, since cure of the body is a distributed process. Similarly, one of the reasons immigrants and refugees are generally thought to be at higher risk for disordered eating and body image in nations like England is because they come into contact with Western individualized conceptions of the body and 'work' on the body as an important moral discipline. Interestingly, some East Asian immigrant groups such as Koreans are the exception to the rule on migration increasing the risk of disordered eating and body image. While this pattern of Korean immigrants exhibiting lower reported rates of disorder than their counterparts in Korea is still under investigation, preliminary hypotheses are that body ideals are actually less thin in Western nations than in Korea and that pressure for competition and self-discipline is lower than in the home society.

Body Image and Its Disorder in Anthropology

While anthropology has contributed to the expansion of the empirical world data on body image, perhaps its larger contribution is theoretical. Anthropological research has closely investigated questions mentioned above, such as the relationship of selves, bodies, and societal organization in body image construction. Such understandings become particularly poignant when systems of body image clash, and especially in the case of disorder. For example, cases of immigration have repeatedly shown that if a person who is obese believes that his or her body is beyond individual control but is placed into a medical system that assumes individual rational actors in its treatments, adherence is likely to be low and those treatments are ineffective. Patient belief about bodies and body image among other things is critical in clinical encounters.

Over the last couple of decades, the body image literature has convincingly proven the expansion of Western ideals of beauty, body image dissatisfaction, and body image and eating disorders. Initial work in this direction regarding females posited a fairly straightforward causal chain of (1) changed beauty ideals leading to (2) body image dissatisfaction through idealization of thinness and fear of fatness, which would then lead to (3) body image and eating disorders in pursuit of the thin ideal. One of the first findings to disrupt this simplistic explanation was that of the transcultural psychiatrist Sing Lee working with Chinese young women in Hong Kong. Lee found patients exhibiting all the symptoms of full-blown eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa but without the hallmark characteristic of 'fear of fatness'. Lee's early Chinese

patients did not exhibit the body image dissatisfaction found among Western patients. This finding was replicated in other parts of Asia. These findings called diagnostic criteria such as 'fear of fatness' into question. They also raised the question as to whether anorexia was a fixed universal problem, or whether it might be many anorexias with various local instantiations. Furthermore, Lee's more recent patients did present with 'fear of fatness' causing social commentators like Ethan Watters to question 'the Americanization of mental illness' more generally.

Becker's work mentioned above also showed the spread of the thin body ideal and pathological means of pursuing that ideal among young ethnic Fijian women. However, Becker demonstrated that contrary to the conventional wisdom, girls did not aspire to the thin body ideal because they thought it was attractive, because they thought their peer males found it attractive, or because they considered it as an end in itself. Rather, they associated the thin body ideal with a particular lifestyle that they found desirable. A thin body was a means to that end. Moreover, Becker found that the very conceptualization of the body and beliefs about 'work' on the body changed through girls' interactions with global media, changes that were essential to the emergence of Western-style pathology.

In contrast, Eileen Anderson-Fye found that even in the face of rapid cultural change and heavy interaction with Western economies, cultures, and people, young women in Belize were remarkably resistant to disordered eating behaviors. Anderson-Fye fully expected to find the mushrooming of disordered eating in rural Belize consistent with the extant literature on the developing world at that time. Instead, through mixed-method research, she found that while the young women in the community rapidly incorporated other aspects of global media and images, the thin body ideal was not one of them. She found that the Belizean girls had an ethnopsychology based around self-protection and self-care that they used to filter messages from globalization. In this process, behaviors such as restricting food, excessive exercise, or purging were filtered out as untenable and undesirable. Moreover, while female beauty was incredibly important in this community, body shape was more important than body size. An idealized curvy body, either naturally or adorned by clothing choice, was accessible to almost any girl. The few girls in the community who were showing eating pathology were tied economically to the global tourism industry and were directed to lose weight to be more attractive to Western tourists rather than reporting (by interviews or surveys) body dissatisfaction. This case was considered an 'ethnographic veto' to the world data on the spread of eating disorders to places with similar conditions of globalization and also added to the literature complexifying the relationships between body image and disordered eating.

Finally, anthropologists have also investigated the importance of the role of body conceptualization and societal organization in eating disorder treatment programs. Rebecca Lester conducted a fascinating ethnographic comparison between a major eating disorder treatment clinic in Mexico City, Mexico, and one in the Midwestern United States. She found that the psychiatric model for 'health' and the goals for recovery in each clinic were different and embedded within the local cultural and moral contexts. In the Mexican clinic program, based loosely on a 12-step model, families were a critical

component of the recovery process and young women were treated as part of a social web, consistent with a more familistic and sociocentric society. In the US case, individuals were treated as rational actors with goals of self-sufficiency, consistent with individualistic goals. Lester demonstrates how models of personhood, development, gender, and morality must 'fit' with the therapeutic model in order to be most effective. Thus, she also begs the questions in evidence-based treatment programs of whom the evidence comes from and whom it is used.

Anthropological research has provided us with additional models of global body image as well as pushed our understandings of theoretical models of how globalization impacts body image, pathology, as well as responses to and treatments of pathology.

Methodological Innovations

The methods of anthropology are different in important ways from those of disciplines such as psychology and psychiatry that dominate the study of human appearance and body image. These differences are explained by the epistemological differences in the fields. Most academic psychology, for example, is oriented toward the pursuit of universal mechanisms of human behavior. The experimental method, presumed to be widely generalizable, is still the gold standard in the behavioral sciences. Recently, social scientists in Canada published a groundbreaking paper discussing the scientific problems with basing broad universal claims on samples drawn entirely from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) societies, and usually college students. Such samples are not representative of the diversity of the societies from which they come, let alone other societies. Anthropologists have also pointed out the problems with assuming that how someone behaves in a lab is similar to how that person may behave in a plethora of real-life situations. Psychologists have pointed out that theories tested on one age-group may or may not be relevant for those at other developmental life stages.

In more biologically oriented research, the human body is assumed to function more or less the same way everywhere. This assumption has been repeatedly proven problematic but still stands. For example, the metabolism of many drugs has been proven to vary not only by gender but also by other group-level genetically linked factors. In the example regarding the relationship between obesity and risk for heart disease mentioned above, differences have been found between Pacific Islanders and people of European heritage, though the exact reasons for these differences are unknown. Neuroscientists using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies relevant to body image have pointed out that it is an empirical unknown whether all brains around the world function the same way as for the subjects who tend to enroll in neuroimaging studies at major Western universities. Nascent immigrant data suggest that there might be important cultural differences, even though biomedicine would posit a universal human brain. Such differences matter, and biomedicine is increasingly aware of this fact. Anthropologist-physicians have been at the forefront of work examining what is often referred to as 'local biology' that recognizes significant variations relevant to global health.

Robust quantitative survey measures play a critically important role in the study of body image. Studies based on this method are the backbone of our cross-cultural comparative data on body image and provide reliable data. Examples of these measures include the Stunkard body weight/shape figural stimuli and various body image and eating attitudes inventories. However, typical cross-cultural psychology studies do not investigate the validity of such measures. A classic example of the problems born from this privileging of reliability over validity comes from the work of Daniel Le Grange published in a collection of work showing a range of psychological and anthropological measures. Le Grange had been one of a number of psychiatrists to conduct research on body image and eating in South Africa. The surveys collected there consistently showed high levels of disordered eating among Black South Africans, a group that theoretically should not be at risk for disordered eating, given what was known in the literature. Moreover, the males reported rates as high as the females did, another unusual pattern. Le Grange decided to investigate further by conducting short qualitative interviews. After only a handful of interviews, he realized that the thousands of previously collected and reliable surveys were invalid. Among other reasons, he discovered that the South African students were endorsing problems such as food preoccupation and binge eating due to poverty and hunger, not self-starvation. This restudy shows the importance of including validity, even in comparative quantitative measures.

In contrast to survey-based comparative studies, ethnography is the hallmark technique of anthropology. Ethnography usually involves sustained interactions with members of a community for a period of at least a year or through all the local seasons (winter/spring/summer/fall, rainy/dry, etc.). Ethnography is aimed at understanding the insider's perspective, though external measures such as anthropomorphic measurements or standardized surveys are common. Ethnographers engage in participant observation as well as in various types of qualitative interviewing. Participant observation is a method of semidetached observing and recording aspects of everyday life while being involved with the activities and community. Ethnographers are trained to become aware of and attempt to minimize their own biases in the research as they become a sort of naive participant in a local cultural setting. With this close, daily attention, ethnography attempts to grasp an experience-near understanding of a phenomenon such as body image in local context. Usually, results are written up as detailed case studies on their own terms. Ethnographic research tends to maximize validity. While there may be generalizable findings in ethnography, replicability can be difficult since so much relies on the individual ethnographer and his or her particular experiences and relationships. Additionally, it is a labor-intensive type of work that requires the ability of a researcher to remove himself or herself from his or her own daily life for a year or more.

Each method of research such as experiments, surveys, ethnography, and interviews has costs and benefits. Contemporary research in both anthropology and psychology is coming closer to realizing the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration that attends to both validity and reliability, local meaning, and cross-cultural comparison. In fact, given the increasing role of body image and eating problems around the world, the World

Health Organization has flagged these problems as high priority, especially for adolescents. Psychological and medical anthropologists often include standardized measures in their multimethod repertoires and can contextualize them with ethnographic data. Increasingly, psychologists are looking for feasible ways to increase validity especially in the case of minority cultural groups on whom the measures were not normed. Similarly, psychologists are concerned about these measures in the case of younger children, since most child-related work in this field has been done with older adolescents.

An example of a simple method from anthropological research that may aid psychological survey-based research is 'face validity'. Face validity, as it sounds, is making sure that the questions in a survey are asking what one intends them to in a sample different from the population where the test originated. While anthropologists who use surveys often have detailed ethnographic data to apply to their knowledge of survey questions, psychologists understandably may not have this information. However, several studies have shown that even a small sample of qualitative feedback on survey questions and concepts prior to survey administration can make a significant difference in the validity of the findings. A cost-effective way to gather these data is to 'talk through' the survey findings with a small number of participants representative of the target sample. Asking each participant what they think the question means, what possible answers might mean, and to speak aloud other thoughts about the survey can point to translational problems, conceptual problems, and specific directions that would be helpful to participants. Thematic saturation, the repetition of themes from individual participants, is often a sign that potential problems have been discovered and can be obtained with a small number of interviewees. With this kind of relatively simple method, presumably some of the cultural problems Le Grange and others have encountered could be prevented. Anderson-Fye used this method to uncover problems with body shape questionnaires that are based on only size, not shape, with adolescent girls in Belize. Further research showed shape to be a more important body image dimension than size. Such a method may also be helpful in investigating how valid survey measures might be for children younger than those for whom a survey was designed.

Other anthropologists have collaborated with psychologists and psychiatrists in collecting data, interpreting results, or both. These cross-disciplinary teams, such as that of clinical psychologist Kathleen Pike and the anthropologist Amy Borovoy working on body image in Japan, can provide a level of both depth and comparability urgently needed. Some of the innovative work on male muscularity and body image by David Frederick and others also accesses these cross-disciplinary teams.

In the context of globalization, the anthropologist Eileen Anderson-Fye and the statistician Jieliu Lin found that the Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26) was robust enough to pick up behavioral issues separate from attitudinal issues in a rapidly developing community in Belize. Analyzing the data by these categories rather than by the total score or previously found components was predictive of body image satisfaction. In this society, analyzing the relationship between behavior and attitudes was a more robust and sensitive way to use the measure. They suggest that looking at

attitudes and behavior separately, as well as their relationship, may be a more useful direction than traditional analyses with this measure in contexts of cultural change such as migration and globalization.

Conclusions

In the contemporary world, with increasing globalization and migration that cause cultures to come into contact with each other and change with more frequency and intensity, culturally valid yet comparable data on human appearance and body image are needed. Anthropological approaches, with their emphasis on emic perspectives, subjective experience, meaning, context, and validity, can bring valuable insight into psychological and biomedical or psychiatric approaches to the study of these issues. Cultural, physical, and biocultural anthropology work descriptively to catalog human diversity in terms of appearance, adornment, and body modification as well as conceptualization of the body, the relationship of body to person, and body image. Furthermore, in addition to descriptive differences, anthropologists from all the subfields contribute interpretive and theoretical insights to help us better understand relationships among biology, personhood, body image, and social organization in any society. While anthropological approaches are a minority perspective in the larger studies of human appearance and body image, they are increasingly necessary and relevant, and have provided a set of innovative studies from which the fields can build.

See also: Anthropometry; Body Art: Tattooing and Piercing; Body Image among African Americans; Body Image among Asian Americans; Body Image among Hispanics/Latinos; Body Image and Gender Roles; Body Image and Social Class; Body Image in Non-Western Societies; Body Image in Social Contexts; Evolutionary Perspectives on Physical Appearance; Feminist Perspectives on Body Image and Physical Appearance; Media Influences on Female Body Image; Media Influences on Male Body Image; Muscularity and Body Image; Race, Ethnicity, and Human Appearance; Self-Mutilation and Excoriation; Skin Color; Sociocultural Perspectives on Body Image.

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