Attractiveness still key to dating activity. (survey of female college students shows that how others perceive looks determines activity)(Brief Article). *USA Today (Magazine)* 126.n2632 (Jan 1998): pp6(2). (435 words)

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When it comes to dating and sexuality, how coeds perceive their body image is less important than how others see it. A survey of about 200 18- and 19-year-old college females found that they all rated themselves as at least average in attractiveness. Yet, analysis found dating activity rose in correlation with increased physical attractiveness and lowered weight, notes Mike Wiederman, professor of Psychological science, Ball State University, Muncie, Ind.

"Going in, we thought that women who had poor images of their body would have fewer dating experiences because they didn't feel good about themselves. In fact, all these women rated themselves just about average or above average when it came to attractiveness.

"Instead, the results told us that how women look at themselves isn't as important as how others see them. If you are seen as unattractive and overweight, men may have little to do with you when it comes to dating."

The coeds rated their body image and dating and sexual experiences. Height and weight statistics were measured, using a standard international body mass index. The index for the coeds ranged from 19 to 52.4, with the average being 25.3. A body mass index of 27.3 and above is considered to be substantially overweight or obese. About 23% of the group fell into this category.

A pair of male and female research assistants rated the coeds for facial and body attractiveness on a scale of one to seven, with one the least attractive and seven the prettiest. The ratings ranged from two to 6.5, with the average at 4.1.

According to the study:

* Average body mass index for women in relationships was 24.1, while for those not dating it was 26.4. Those dating also were rated as facially more attractive.

* About 25% of the respondents said they never had engaged in sexual intercourse. The average body mass index for this group was 27.2.

* Eight of the 144 with sexual experience indicated they hadn't had a sexual relationship in 12 months. The average body mass index for these women was 31.6. The researchers rated these women as least facially attractive.

* Weight and rated attractiveness were unrelated to women's sexual esteem.

* Most of the women expressed at least some dissatisfaction with their bodies.
Wiederman says the results indicate that dating and sexual experience were related to attractiveness ratings by the researchers as well as the coeds' actual weight, but was unrelated to the women's body dissatisfaction. "We know that men stigmatize women with high body mass indexes as asexual, cold, and not wanting relationships when exactly the opposite is true."


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