

**BODY IMAGE AND DIETING BEHAVIOURS:  
A STUDY OF ATHLETES AND NON-ATHLETES**

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**This thesis is submitted in total fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

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All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

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As they say “As one door closes, another opens” – I think it's time/ I give myself

“Permission to Shine!”



## ABSTRACT

Research has shown that elite female athletes competing in competitive sports may experience weight consciousness and face demands to conform to unrealistic standards of body weight. The purpose of this research was to investigate body image and dieting behaviours in adolescent female athletes and non-athletes. A self-reporting questionnaire was administered to 60 athletes aged between 13-16 years derived from eight different sporting populations, and a control group consisting of 60 non-athletes or inactive individuals aged between 13-16 years. Two major areas relating to weight and eating behaviours were examined: disordered eating and distorted body image. Other variables under investigation included current attempts at weight loss, level of acceptance of thin female stereotypes promoted by the media, reasons for dieting, and perception of one's own body image.

Results indicated that the majority of the athletes displayed a positive body image and were generally happy with their overall body shape. This group was less likely to employ weight loss behaviours. However, the non-athletes were more likely to display distorted body image and distorted eating behaviours. Consistent with the cultural expectations of thinness, large proportions of the non-athletes wished to lose weight, even though their actual weight (i.e. Body Mass Index) was normal or underweight. Weight concerns in the non-athlete group related more to attaining a media driven "ideal" of femininity. The weight concerns recorded amongst a small number of athletes were related more to improving sporting performance. Although no clinically diagnosed cases of eating disorders were recorded, eating behaviours, weight reduction practices and body image beliefs indicated that the adolescent female non-athletes may be at risk of developing disordered eating and body image problems.