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Abstract

Participant gender preferences for body image researchers, interventionists and focus group and intervention co-participants have been largely ignored, despite recognition that such characteristics can influence the nature and quality of data collected and intervention effects. To address this, Australian women (n = 505) and men (n = 220) completed a questionnaire about their preferences for interviewers and focus group facilitators, for teachers delivering school-based interventions, and for co-participants in these settings. Women predominantly preferred female interviewers and teachers, and mixed-sex co-participants, but most had no preference for focus group facilitators. Body dissatisfied women were more likely to prefer female researchers and single-sex co-participants. Most men did not have specific preferences, however, body dissatisfied men were more likely to report a gender preference for interviewers and teachers. Professional capabilities, personal qualities and appearance were regarded as important researcher characteristics. These findings have important implications for body image research, particularly among high-risk groups.

Keywords: Researcher characteristics, gender, body image, interviews, focus groups, interventions

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It is well recognized that researcher characteristics (e.g., gender, race, personal qualities and appearance) can impact on the nature and quality of data collection and intervention effects (Davis, Couper, Janz, Caldwell, & Resnicow, 2010). This is especially the case for research relating to personal and sensitive topics (Davis et al., 2010), such as body image. Therefore to enhance the rigor and quality of body image research, it is important to examine the influence of researcher characteristics and settings, and to determine which settings are likely to make participants most comfortable. Enhancing participant comfort in interviews, focus groups and interventions is likely to (a) increase their provision of accurate, honest and reliable data, and to (b) maximize intervention effects. Despite this, very few studies specific to body image have investigated or reported participant preferences for researchers and co-participants. To begin to address this gap, in the current paper we examine participant gender preferences for researchers and co-participants in body image interview, focus group and school-based intervention research settings.

In a paper encouraging researcher reflexivity, Finlay (2002, p. 531) suggests that "our behavior will always affect participants' responses, thereby influencing the direction of findings". Literature on the impact of researcher characteristics specific to body image studies is limited, however, such evidence does exist in the broader public health and social science literature. In their review of interviewer effects in public health surveys, Davis and colleagues (2010) summarize studies that have utilized multi-level modeling to determine whether there are differences in the self-reported, telephone assisted, or face-to-face reporting of public health attitudes and behaviors based on the characteristics of the researcher. These studies have generally found that men disclose more personal information to female

interviewers, while research with female participants is less clear (Aries, 1996; Dailey & Claus, 2001; Davis, et al., 2010; Pollner, 1998). Catania et al. (1996) also found that participants were less likely to drop out of the study if they were given a choice regarding the gender of their telephone interviewer for a questionnaire about sexuality. Additionally, while the vast majority of women elected to be interviewed by a woman, approximately half of the men sampled requested a man and half requested a woman to conduct the interview.

Many theories exist to explain why participants might be more likely to disclose more personal information to women. One suggestion is that women are perceived to be more sympathetic and to create conditions more conducive to disclosure (Pollner, 1998), while others suggest that female researchers may appear less critical of, and more interested in, what participants are saying (Derlega, Winstead, Wong, & Hunter, 1985). These explanations may be due to participants' perceptions being influenced by social norms and expectations regarding the behavior and manner of women more generally. In any case, although studies to date suggest that gender can influence levels of research participation and disclosure, and that women may be generally preferred, there is not enough evidence to provide a consensus on whether female interviewers should be recommended for all sensitive topics, including body image (Davis et al., 2010).

Shifting to body image research specifically, to date it appears that the role of researchers' and interventionists' gender has often been overlooked, or, at best, underreported. For example, we identified and reviewed all interview, focus group and intervention studies published in this journal from 2011-2012 (n = 12 out a total sample of 147 articles) and found that 25% did not report any demographic information about the interviewer, focus group facilitator or interventionist. Further, none of these studies reported whether or not participants were consulted in regards to their preferences for the gender of their interviewer, focus group facilitator or interventionist. Although there can be practical

restraints with regards to being able to accommodate participants' gender preferences for researchers, prior studies have shown that researcher gender can influence participants' levels of self-disclosure and may also influence the breadth and nature of data collected (e.g., Davis et al., 2010). Therefore, it appears important to consider participant preferences during the design of, and data collection in, body image research if it is feasible to do so.

To our knowledge, in the broader body image literature to date only two studies have reported a consideration of participant preferences for researcher characteristics in their study design, both of which considered boys and men's preferences. Grogan and Richards (2002) conducted pilot testing to determine their participants' preferences for the gender of the focus group facilitator to be used in their research into adolescent boys' and adult men's body image. Consistent with prior theorizing on why participants might be more likely to disclose more personal information to women (e.g., Pollner, 1998), the participants in this study reported a preference for female focus group facilitators as they considered them to be less threatening than men. In another study, Bottamini and Ste-Marie (2006) gave the adult men they were interviewing the choice of a male or female interviewer to discuss body image. None of the participants requested a man, and in follow-up interviews men reported that they perceived women to be less threatening, and that discussing body image concerns in front of a man could potentially be "de-masculinizing" (Bottamini & Ste-Marie, 2006). In addition, men reported that they felt the need to give more detailed descriptions of their body image issues to a female interviewer, as a man would have already understood their experiences and insecurities in relation to the male body. These findings suggest that, for men at least, gender should be an important consideration for qualitative body image research designs, and that it may affect participant comfort and their subsequent disclosure during data collection. However, it should be noted that the sample sizes in these studies were small (n = 12, n = 11, respectively), and that no studies to date have examined the preferences of women

participating in body image research.

In our review of the 2011-2012 articles published in this journal, we also noted that none of the focus group or intervention studies reported whether they had considered participant preferences for taking part in research with same- or mixed-sex co-participants, or their perceptions of how the gender dynamic of their co-participants may have influenced their participation and/or responses to the research. This may be an important oversight, as a meta-analysis by Stice, Shaw and Marti (2007) found that conducting single-sex interventions with girls and women was more effective for eating disorder prevention than mixed-sex settings. A recent systematic review of school-based body image interventions, a common setting for interventions targeting young people, also found that whenever mixed-sex programs were implemented, positive outcomes on body image were observed only among boys (Yager, Diedrichs, Ricciardelli, & Halliwell, 2013). Collectively this research suggests that the gender dynamic of focus group and intervention samples warrants consideration, and that gender preferences for co-participants should be explored as they may impact on intervention success.

To begin to address these identified gaps in the literature and strengthen the methodology of future body image research, the aim of this study was to examine participant gender preferences in body image research settings for interviewers, focus group facilitators, interventionists, and for focus group and intervention co-participants. We also aimed to examine participants' reasons for these preferences and whether or not their preferences varied by level of body dissatisfaction. This study specifically investigated the preferences of young adult undergraduate women and men as they demographically represent a commonly recruited sample in body image research. In regards to intervention settings, we have focused this initial investigation on school-based interventions specifically, as this is a frequently-used setting for body image interventions that target young people (Yager, et al., 2013).

Based upon previous research which suggests that participants prefer discussing sensitive topics with women (Davis, et al., 2010), we hypothesized that both women and men would indicate a preference for female interviewers, focus group facilitators, and interventionists delivering school-based body image programs. It was also predicted that women and men would prefer focus groups and body image interventions to be conducted in single-sex settings. This is because body image is a sensitive topic for many, and the social norms and rules for discussing body image are often different for women and men as evidenced in previous qualitative research and studies examining the content and frequency of their conversations about appearance (e.g., Engeln, Sladek & Waldron, 2013; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006). We further hypothesized that women and men with higher levels of body dissatisfaction would be more likely to prefer a female researcher than those with lower levels of body dissatisfaction. This prediction was based on previous research specific to body image which has indicated participant preferences for female researchers (Bottamini & Ste-Marie, 2006; Grogan & Richards, 2002), and because those with higher levels of body dissatisfaction are arguably more likely to feel that body image is sensitive discussion topic.

Method

Participants

Three successive cohorts of Australian undergraduate students were recruited to take part in this study during lecture (2009) and tutorial (2010, 2011) time. The students were enrolled in a first year subject, '*Concepts of Wellbeing'*, as part their course requirements for either a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed; 69.30%), Bachelor of Health and Physical Education (B.HPE; 13.05%), or a Bachelor of Physical and Outdoor Education (B.POE; 13.19%). Students were invited to complete the survey one week after receiving a lecture about body image. In total, 791 students agreed to complete the questionnaire and one women declined to participate. In order to create a comparable sample more representative of traditional

undergraduate cohorts, students aged over 30 years (women *n* = 45, men *n* = 21) were excluded from the analyses. As a result, the final sample consisted of 725 students aged 18-30 years (women *n* = 505, *M* age = 20.50, *SD* = 0.30; men *n* = 220, *M* age = 20.86, *SD* = 2.41). Ethics approval to conduct this study was granted by the university's Human Ethics Committee.

Measures

Demographics. Participants were asked to record their gender, age and the degree that they were enrolled in.

Preferences for interviews and focus groups on body image. To assess gender preferences for interviewers and focus group facilitators conducting body image research, participants were asked *'If you were going to be interviewed about your body image (*or *take part in a focus group about body image), would you be more comfortable with a male or female interviewer (*or *focus group facilitator)?'* Response options included '*male/female/either'.* Participants were then prompted to explain their choice with the question '*why?*', and an open-ended, free text response section was provided.

To assess if participants would prefer to take part in mixed- or single-sex focus group discussions on body image, participants were asked '*If you were going to be in a focus group to talk about body image issues, would you prefer that the participants were separated by gender? Or a mixed male/female group of participants?*'. The response options included '*mixed'* or *'separate'*. Participants were asked to explain their choice, with the question '*why?*', and an open-ended, free text response section was provided.

Preferences for school-based body image interventions. To assess participants' retrospective preferences for the gender of teachers delivering body image interventions in the school setting, participants were asked *'When you were in high school, would you have preferred a male or female teacher to present information about body image and conduct*

activities in class?'. Response options included '*male/female/either'.* To gain an explanation of their reasoning behind this choice, participants were then asked '*why?*', and an open-ended, free text response section was provided.

To assess if participants would have preferred same-gender or mixed-gender classroom groups when learning about body image at high school, participants were asked '*When you were in high school, would you have preferred to have learnt information about body image and completed activities to improve body image in class separated by gender? Or a mixed, co-educational class?'.* Response options included '*mixed/separate*'. Participants were then asked '*why?*' and an open-ended, free text response section was provided.

Body dissatisfaction. An abbreviated version of the Body Dissatisfaction subscale of the Eating Disorder Inventory-2 (EDI-2; Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983) was used to assess body dissatisfaction among the female participants (e.g., "*I feel satisfied with the shape of my body*"; 0 = *Never*, 5 = *Always*). Four of the negatively worded items from the original nine-item subscale were removed to reduce the length of the questionnaire (e.g. '*I think my stomach (hips, thighs, behind) is too big'*). Scores were reverse coded, such that higher scores indicating greater levels of body dissatisfaction, and summed to calculate an overall score of body dissatisfaction (scale range 0-35). The modified scale had good internal consistency with the current sample of women (Cronbach's α = .89).

The Body Satisfaction subscale (or Muscularity Oriented Body Image Attitudes Subscale) of the Drive for Muscularity Scale (DMS; McCreary & Sasse, 2000) was used to assess levels of body dissatisfaction among men (e.g., '*I wish that I were more muscular'* 1 = *Never*, 6 = *Always*). Total scores were calculated in line with the author's original instructions of summing the seven items related to body satisfaction, with higher scores indicating greater body dissatisfaction (scale range = 7-42). This scale had good internal consistency with the current sample of men (Cronbach's α = .81).

Procedure

The first author, who was the course lecturer and a young female academic with a BMI in the healthy weight range, administered the pen and paper questionnaire during class time. Students were given general ethical information about the study, but were not informed of the aims of the research, and were asked to complete the questionnaire if they consented to participate. Participants completed the questionnaire at the table they were seated at during class and were instructed to refrain from speaking and keep their work private while completing the questionnaire. Students were asked to read the instructions and questions carefully and to ask any questions that they might have.

Data Analysis

Frequencies and descriptive analyses were used to describe the proportion of participants who had chosen each preference. Chi-square was used to determine the potential for retrospective bias among participants responding to items about preferences for interventionists and co-participants during high school. For men and women, we conducted a series of ANCOVAs (with age as covariate to further control for retrospective bias) to determine whether the body dissatisfaction of those who chose 'male', 'female' or 'either', and for those who chose or 'single-sex' or 'mixed-sex' co-participants and settings, were significantly different. For men specifically, we also followed this up with further ANCOVAs to investigate differences in body dissatisfaction according to whether they had a specific gender preference (i.e., chose male or female) as opposed to choosing 'either' for interviewers and focus group facilitators. For women specifically, we then conducted ANCOVAs to determine whether levels of body dissatisfaction differed between participants who choose 'female' or 'either' for interviewers and focus group facilitators. Women who reported a preference for a male interviewer (2.40%, $n = 12$), focus group facilitator (0.80%, $n = 4$) or teacher (.60%, $n = 3$) had to be excluded from these analyses due to low cell

numbers. Partial eta-squared was used to estimate effect sizes throughout the analyses.

Qualitative analysis of the open-ended comments was conducted by the first author, in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for conducting inductive thematic analysis. The first author engaged in a process of data familiarization by transcribing the comments in to a Microsoft Word document. Data were then manually coded on a case-by-case basis according to a set of initial themes, which were identified during transcription and recorded in self-reflective memos. Extracts and examples of each theme were also highlighted and recorded during this process. After initial coding, the first author further refined the themes into a proposed final set that adequately captured the patterns within the data. This final set of themes were clearly distinct and mapped explicitly and semantically on to the data, as most participants only wrote short comments that fell neatly into distinct categories, for example, "*More comfortable talking about sensitive issues with women*", or "*Would feel uncomfortable regardless of the gender of the interviewer*". These themes, along with representative sample extracts for each theme, were then discussed with the second author to ensure consensus on the final themes reported. Frequencies for each theme were then calculated within each preference response category (e.g., for those who selected female for focus group facilitator, the frequency was calculated to represent the proportion of people in the sample who selected female for that particular question and who mentioned "X" theme in their reason). Invalid responses were not included in the analyses; these were comments that were illegible, did not make sense, or consisted of a single dash to indicate that participants were not providing a comment.

Results

Interviewer Characteristics

Gender preferences for interviewers are reported as frequencies in Table 1. Table 2 presents a summary of the thematic analysis of, and frequencies for, reasons given by

participants for their gender preferences for interviewers. The majority of men (63.55%, *n* = 136) indicated that they would be content with either a male or female inteviewer. The majority explained this choice by saying that the interviewer's gender was irrelevant because it would not influence the professionalism or nature of the interview (35.29%; *n* = 48). The majority of women (59.12%; *n* = 295) indicated that they would prefer a female interviewer for body image-related research. The most common reason provided for this preference was that women felt that a female interviewer would be more able to understand, or relate to, their body image concerns than a male interviewer (48.14%; *n* = 142).

Focus Group Characteristics

Gender preferences for focus group facilitators and co-participants are reported as frequencies in Table 1. Tables 3 and 4 present a summary of the reasons given by participants for their preference for facilitators and co-participants, respectively.

For focus group facilitators, the majority of both men (79.44%; *n* = 170) and women (67.94%, *n* = 339) indicated that they had no gender preference and that 'either' a woman or man would be acceptable. The most common reason given by men for this preference was that they did not consider gender to be an issue in this context; the level of professionalism held by the facilitator was more important (15.88%, *n* = 27). The most common reason for this preference provided by women was that they perceived the gender of the facilitator to be less important in focus groups than interviews, because focus groups are a less personal, and less intense environments than interview settings (20.06%; *n* = 68).

Most men (76.55%; *n* = 160) and women (64.70%; *n* = 319) also indicated a preference for taking part in mixed-sex focus groups. The most common reason reported by men and women for this preference was the same, they both reported that mixed-gender focus groups were beneficial as they allowed participants to hear '*from both sides'* or to '*get both points of view*' (men 64.38%, *n* = 101; women 70.85%, *n* = 220).

Table 1:

Participant Preferences for Body Image Researchers, Interventionists and Co-participants, and Associated Mean Body Dissatisfaction Scores.

		Men (*n*= 220)		**Women (*n*= 505)**	
		% (*n*)	Mean [SD] DMS-BD	% (*n*)	Mean [SD] EDI-BD
Gender of Interviewer [a]	Male	24.77% (53)	26.57 [6.47]	2.40% (12)	17.00 [7.36]
	Female	11.68% (25)	27.48 [7.18]	59.12% (295)	20.16 [7.11]
	Either	63.55% (136)	24.99 [6.10]	38.68% (192)	16.05 [8.15]
Gender of Focus Group Facilitator [a]	Male	11.21% (24)	25.38 [5.84]	0.80% (4)	19.00 [9.93]
	Female	9.35% (20)	27.20 [7.20]	31.26% (156)	20.39 [7.22]
	Either	79.44% (170)	25.53 [6.35]	67.94% (339)	17.59 [7.90]
Gender composition of Focus Group [b]	Mixed	76.55% (160)	25.40 [6.45]	64.70% (319)	17.74 [7.69]
	Single sex	23.44% (49)	26.59 [6.12]	35.29% (174)	19.98 [7.81]
Teacher [c]	Male	19.10% (42)	27.17 [5.12]	0.60% (3)	15.00 [13.23]
	Female	14.10% (31)	27.26 [6.94]	52.90% (266)	19.58 [7.72]
	Either	66.80% (147)	24.89 [6.46]	46.50% (234)	17.24 [7.65]
Gender composition of Class [b]	Mixed	74.90% (161)	25.40 [6.33]	57.80% (292)	17.45 [7.80]
	Single sex	25.10% (54)	26.57 [6.42]	38.40% (194)	19.80 [7.80]

Notes: Higher scores on the EDI-BD and DMS-BD indicate higher levels of body dissatisfaction
[a] 214 valid responses for men and 499 for women
[b] 209 valid responses for men, 493 for women
[c] 220 valid responses for men, 503 for women
[d]215 valid responses for men, 486 for women

School–based Body Image Intervention Characteristics

We asked participants to retrospectively report their preferences for teacher and classroom co-participant characteristics. To examine the potential for retrospective bias, we compared the school-related preferences for recent school leavers (i.e., participants aged 18-20 years who had left secondary school no more than two years prior to the time at which

their data were collected) and older participants (i.e., participants aged 21-30 years). There were no significant differences in the gender preferences between these groups for teachers, women $\chi^2(1) = 1.87$, $p = .18$; men $\chi^2(2) = 0.60$, $p = .74$, or classmates, women $\chi^2(1) = .47$, $p = .49$; men $\chi^2(1) = 3.45$, $p = .06$. This suggests that it is unlikely that the results for the final sample reported below were influenced by retrospective bias. However, as a further precaution we controlled for age in subsequent analyses.

Gender preferences for teachers and classroom composition are presented in Table 1. Table 4 summarizes the reasons for classroom preferences, while Table 5 summarizes reasons for teacher preferences. The majority of men (66.82%, $n = 147$) indicated that they would be satisfied with either a male or a female teacher. The most common reason for this preference was that they perceived the content and nature of the lesson to be more important than the teacher's gender (22.45%, $n = 33$). For women, the majority indicated that they would have preferred a female teacher (52.90%, $n = 266$). The most common reason for this preference was that they thought female teachers would be more able relate to them as they might have experienced similar issues (47.37%, $n = 126$).

The majority of both men (74.9%, $n = 161$) and women (57.80%, $n = 292$) indicated that they would have preferred to have received body image lessons in a mixed-sex classroom setting. Similar to the finding regarding focus group composition, the most common reason for this preference reported by both men (62.73%, $n = 101$) and women (75.34%, $n = 220$) was that this setting would provide students with the opportunity to hear from both female and male perspectives.

Table 2: *Themes of Men's and Women's Reasons for Preferences for Interviewers*

Men's Preferences (*N* = 220)		**Women's Preferences (*N* = 505)**	
Pref	**Reasons for preference**	**Pref**	**Reasons for preference**
Male 24.77% (*n* = 53)	• Less embarrassing and more comfortable to talk same-sex interviewer about sensitive issues: 41.51% (22). Eg, "*May not tell the truth to the female because you don't feel comfortable"* • Same-sex interviewer could better relate to, and understand, body image issues: 35.85% (19). Eg, "*Because they would understand more about what body image problems I may have"* • Avoids pressure to impress the opposite sex: 11.32% (6). Eg, "*Wouldn't want a female to know which parts of my body I was self-conscious about*" • No reason given: 11.32% (6)	Male 2.40% (*n* = 12)	• Men are less judgmental in general than women: 50.00% (6). Eg: *"They can't relate as much as a female therefore can't judge as much"* • Avoids potential for appearance comparisons with a female interviewer: 25.00% (3). Eg: *"If the female interviewer was skinny and pretty- which she most likely would be in this field of work- then you may think she is judging you"* • No reason given 25.00% (3)
Female 11.68% (*n* = 25)	• More comfortable talking about sensitive issues with women: 44.00% (11) Eg,*"Females, for me at least, are easier to discuss personal issues such as body image with"* • Women perceived as more caring and less judgmental than men: 24.00% (6). Eg, "*Females are more caring and less intimidating than men"* • Avoids potential for appearance comparisons with a male interviewer 12.00% (3). Eg, "*In case the male had a better body"* • No reason given: 20.00% (5)	Female 59.12% (*n* = 295)	• Same-sex interviewer could better relate to, and understand, body image issues: 48.14% (142). Eg, *"they have a greater understanding because of experience"* • Less embarrassing and more comfortable to talk same-sex interviewer about sensitive issues: 32.54% (96). Eg, *"will make me feel more comfortable and open up a lot more about body image if I were talking to someone of the same sex"* • Women perceived as more caring and less judgmental than men: 12.54% (37). Eg, *"females understand females better, they don't judge or ask why"* • Avoids pressure to impress the opposite sex: 5.42% (16). Eg: *"I would feel judged by a male because they are the people I try to look good for"* • No reason given: 1.36% (4)
Either 63.55% (*n* = 136)	• Gender would not influence professionalism and the nature of the interview: 35.29% (48). Eg, "*They are just the interviewer the questions are the same"* • Not concerned about gender, as don't have body image issues: 17.65% (24). Eg, "*Because I am comfortable enough with my body image to talk to either gender about it"* • Would feel uncomfortable regardless of the gender of the interviewer: 2.94% (4). Eg, "*I wouldn't be comfortable at all, I would feel anxiety whether it was a male or female interviewer"* • No reason given: 44.12% (60).	Either 38.68% (*n* = 192)	• Gender would not influence professionalism and the nature of the interview: 26.56% (51). Eg, *"If they had the same qualifications it does not bother me who I talk to"* • Not concerned about gender, as don't have body image issues: 21.35% (41). Eg, *"I am happy with the way I am so it wouldn't matter as either wouldn't make me feel any different"* • Comfortable speaking with either men or women: 13.02% (25). Eg, *"body image is relevant to both sexes, so as long as the teacher was knowledgeable, I wouldn't have minded"* • Would feel uncomfortable regardless of the gender of the interviewer: 4.69% (9). Eg. *"I think that either way I would feel judged and uncomfortable talking about this to anyone"* • No reason given 34.38% (66)

Note: 214 valid responses for men and 499 for women

Table 3: *Themes of Men's and Women's Reasons for Preferences for Focus Group Facilitators*

Men's Preferences (*N* = 220)		**Women's Preferences (*N* = 505)**	
Pref	**Reasons for preference**	**Pref**	**Reasons for preference**
Male 11.21% (*n* = 24)	• Same-sex facilitator could better relate, and understand, body image issues: 37.50% (9). Eg. *"Can ask more specific questions on 'how to' for men. They should know, being able to relate."* • Less embarrassing and more comfortable to talk same-sex facilitator about sensitive issues: 29.17% (7). Eg, *"Feel more comfortable talking to male interviewer because I would feel I'm not being judged by the opposite sex"* • No reason given: 33.33% (8).	Male 0.80% (*n* = 4)	• No reason given: 100.00% (4)
Female 9.35% (*n* = 20)	• Women perceived to be more knowledgeable and professionally capable in this area: 35.00% (7). Eg, *"I think females <u>appear</u> to have more knowledge about the subject and are more comfortable discussing it."* • Women perceived as more caring and less judgmental than men: 35.00% (7). Eg, *"They have a sense of understanding which is more neutral"* • No reason given: 30.00% (6).	Female 31.26% (*n* = 156)	• Less embarrassing and more comfortable to talk same-sex facilitator about sensitive issues: 39.10% (61). Eg, *"the discussion would be more open and less awkward if you were speaking to someone of the same sex"* • Same-sex interviewer could better relate, and understand, body image issues: 30.77% (48). Eg, *"she can relate more to you and understand where you are coming from, she could give you more information, and know more than a male, just on instinct"* • Women perceived as more caring and less judgmental than men: 10.26% (16). Eg, *"Women are generally more open and understanding"* • Women perceived to be more knowledgeable and professionally capable in this area: 5.13% (8). Eg, *"They would know what questions to ask and when to stop pressuring for answers"* • No reason given: 14.74% (23).
Either 79.44% (*n* = 170)	• Professionalism is more important than gender: 15.88% (27). Eg,*"as long as the leader knows about the topic i don't think it matters in general discussion"* • Can see the potential contribution of both genders: 10.00% (17). Eg, *"Both would be able to offer insights into the issues"* • Not bothered: 10.00% (17) Eg, "*Doesn't bother me what-so-ever"* • Gender of facilitator would not affect the focus group or participant responses: 8.24% (14). Eg, *"would answer questions regardless of the person"* • Focus group context is less personal and means that gender of facilitator is not important: 4.71% (8). Eg, *"A focus group as an open forum would be less individual and therefore it would not matter as much."* • Not concerned about gender, as don't have body image issues: 5.29 % (9). Eg, *"I am confident in enough in myself and my body to talk about my body"* • No reason given: 45.88% (78).	Either 67.94% (*n* = 339)	• Focus group context is less personal and means that gender of facilitator is not important: 20.06% (68). Eg, *"Being a group discussion, I'd feel the questions wouldn't be too personal, I would fee comfortable in front of either sex"* • Professionalism is more important than gender: 12.39% (42). Eg, "*if the person knows how to ask the right questions and respects the answers, either gender will do"* • Not bothered: 11.80% (40). Eg,*"it just wouldn't worry me either way"* • Can see the potential contribution of both genders: 10.32% (35). Eg, "*I think it would be best to get a range of opinions and to see what the other sex really thinks."* • Generally comfortable with both genders: 9.73% (33). Eg, *"I am comfortable speaking to both"* • Maturity now means that gender is not an issue: 5.01% (17). Eg, "*Being a bit older it's something I am more comfortable talking about"* • Not concerned about gender, as don't have body image issues: 3.53% (12). Eg, *"It wouldn't matter- I am comfortable with my body"* • No reason given: 27.14% (92).

Note: 214 valid responses for men and 499 for women

Table 4: *Themes of Men's and Women's Reasons for Preferences of Teachers Delivering Body Image Interventions in Schools*

Men's Preferences (*N* = 220)		**Women's Preferences (*N* = 505)**	
Pref	**Reasons for preference**	**Pref**	**Reasons for preference**
Male 19.10% (*n* = 42)	• Same-sex teacher could better relate, and understand body image issues: 73.80% (31). Eg, *"A male teacher would know the feelings that the male teenager is going through"* • Prefer same-sex teacher regardless of lesson topic: 11.90% (5). Eg, *"They have different style. More direct and to the point without repetition all the time."* • No Reason Given (6).	Male 0.60% (*n* = 3)	• Men are less judgmental in general than women: 66.66% (2). Eg, *"I felt that females are more judgmental when it comes to body image"* • No reason given: 33.33% (1).
Female 14.10% (*n* = 31)	• Women perceived to be more knowledgeable and professionally capable in this area: 29.03% (9) Eg. *"Because they seem to know a lot more about body image and females experience the pressure of that more often"* • Women perceived as more caring and less judgmental than men 29.03% (9). Eg, *"Because females are more sensitive and understanding then men, they also are able to explain it better."* • Concern about awkwardness or insensitivity of male teachers – particularly as they might make the young girls feel awkward 25.80% (8) Eg, *"A female knows both – more serious not making that many crude jokes."* • No Reason Given 16.13% (5)	Female 52.90% (*n* = 266)	• Same-sex facilitator could better relate, and understand body image issues: 47.37% (126). Eg, *"they know what they are talking about because of experience"* • Less embarrassing and more comfortable to talk same-sex teacher about sensitive issues: 38.72% (103). Eg, *"I would have felt uncomfortable if a male had been teaching me, I probably wouldn't have listened"* • Women perceived to be more knowledgeable and professionally capable in this area: 12.41% (33). Eg, *"Because they are often more able to convey info in an emotionally appropriate way. Whereas male teachers can be a little more cold or factual."* • No reason given: 1.50% (4).
Either 66.82% (*n* = 147)	• The content and nature of the lesson is more important than the gender of the teacher 22.45% (33). Eg: *"As long as the information gets across it does not matter where it comes from"* • Can see the potential contribution of both genders, and the importance of discussing issues among both males and females 11.56% (17). Eg *"I believe that although it may be an issue directed at girls, boys also have these kind of problems associated with body image so it would be valuable for both genders to project the issues of body image."* • Professionalism (lack of judgment and criticism) considered to be more important than gender 10.88% (16). Eg *"Doesn't really matter as long as they are comfortable talking about body issues and are approachable and don't seem to judge or make it awkward."* • Not concerned about gender as don't have body image issues: 6.80% (10) Eg, *"It wouldn't have worried me as body image wasn't a big issue for me.".* • No reason given: 48.30% (71).	Either 46.50% (*n* = 234)	• Can see the potential contribution of both genders, and the importance of discussing issues among both males and females: 22.65% (53). Eg, *"…Sometimes it's good to hear from a male that girls don't need to worry about how they look and I assume the guys would feel the same about hearing it from a female."* • Not bothered: 21.37% (50). • Professionalism (lack of judgment and criticism) considered to be more important than gender: 20.08% (47). Eg, *"Because it wouldn't have worried me where the information was coming from as long as the teacher was confident, sensitive and informative"* • The content and nature of the lesson is more important than the gender of the teacher:15.81% (37). Eg, *"It didn't really matter, as long as the content was engaging, relevant and educational"* • Not concerned about gender as don't have body image issues: 3.42% (8). • No reason given: 16.66% (39).

Note: 220 Valid responses for men, and 503 for women

Table 5: *Men's and Women's Reasons for Preferences for the Gender Dynamics of Body Image Focus Groups and Body Image Lessons*

	Men's Preferences (*N* = 220)		Women's Preferences (*N* = 505)	
	Pref	**Reasons for preference**	**Pref**	**Reasons for preference**
Focus Group Co-Participants [a]	Mixed 76.55% (*n* = 160)	• Benefits of hearing from both male and female perspectives: 64.38% (103). Eg, *"So that both genders can see that everyone, even guys, have body image or even body image problems"* • Comfortable with opposite sex so no need to separate, or it would make no difference to separate: 11.88% (19). Eg, *"I'd prefer to have some females present"* • No reason given, 23.75% (38).	Mixed 64.70% (*n* = 319)	• Benefits of hearing from both male and female perspectives: 70.85% (226). Eg, "*Would be good to get a male perspective"* • Feeling that they are now mature enough to engage in mixed gender focus groups: 6.58% (21). Eg, *"Because now I am an adult it doesn't matter who is in the group".* • No reason given: 22.57% (72).
	Separate 23.44% (*n* = 49)	• Difference in issues between males and females means more focused discussion in separate groups: 40.81% (20). Eg, *"More specific topics wouldn't have to listen to female problems."* • Reduced awkwardness and embarrassment in separate groups: 36.73% (18). Eg, "*Makes everyone more relaxed and generally more open about how they feel."* • No reason given: 22.45% (11).	Separate 35.29% (*n* = 174)	• Difference in issues between males and females means more focused discussion in separate groups: 36.21% (63). Eg. *"So that you could focus more on specific issues related to that gender".* • Reduced awkwardness and embarrassment in separate groups: 31.03% (54). Eg, *"relate more, less embarrassed, more honest".* • More likely to be open in same sex groups: 20.69% (36). Eg, *"Girls won't open up around boys that are the same age".* • No reason given: 12.07% (21).
Lesson Co-Participants [b]	Mixed 74.90% (*n* = 161)	• Benefits of hearing from both male and female perspectives: 62.73% (101). Eg, *"You found out that some of the things you may have stressed about didn't really matter to them. It is good to understand how different people handle issues and what is an issue for them"* • Generally felt comfortable in mixed classes: 8.69% (14). Eg, *"It would have made it awkward changing the normal class format. I think separating the males and females would taboo talking about body image which is bad"* • Diluted intensity of mixed groups: 5.59% (9). Eg, "*Because of the topic I would be comparing myself more to the other guys"* • No reason given: 22.98% (37)	Mixed 57.80% (*n* = 292)	• Benefits of hearing from both male and female perspectives: 75.34% (220). Eg, *"I liked knowing that guys had similar body issues as girls. I gained a better understanding of their feelings, as they did with females."* • Diluted intensity of mixed settings: 10.61% (31). Eg, *"That way the other girls wouldn't judge or single me out"* • It didn't matter: 8.56% (25). Eg, "*wouldn't have mattered- if I want my thoughts about my own body image to be private I will keep them private"* • No reason given: 5.49% (16)
	Separate 25.10% (*n* = 54)	• Reduced awkwardness and embarrassment in separate groups, not have to 'act differently' because the girls were there or 'try to impress' them: 48.15% (26). Eg. "*girls being around would inhibit boys from being completely honest."* • More opportunity for more in-depth, gender specific information: 27.77% (15). Eg, *"So you can focus on your gender rather than going through the other gender (wastes time)"* • No reason given: 24.08% (13).	Separate 38.40% (*n* = 194)	• Reduced awkwardness and embarrassment in separate groups, feel more comfortable and open: 41.24% (80). Eg, *"You can talk about personal information without trying to 'impress' the other sex or feeling uncomfortable."* • More opportunity for more in-depth, gender specific information: 31.96% (62). Eg, *"Issues raised could have been talked about in a more detailed sex-specific way."* • Boys were mean and insensitive at this age: 22.16% (43). Eg, "*May be a bit too juvenile and confronting to have mixed classes"* • No reason given: 4.64% (9).

[a] Note: 209 Valid responses for men and 493 for women; [b] Note: 215 valid responses for men and 486 for women.

Preferences and Levels of Body Dissatisfaction

Women. As hypothesized, women who reported a preference for a female interviewer, $F(1, 484) = 37.17$, $p = .00$, $\eta p^2 = .07$, focus group facilitator $F(1, 492) = 14.58$, $p=.00$, $\eta p^2 = .03$, and/or teacher $F(1, 493) = 11.20$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta p^2 = .02$ had significantly higher levels of body dissatisfaction than those who reported no gender preference (selected 'either'). Age impacted on the analyses significantly for interviewer $F(1, 484) = 4.79$, p = .02, but not focus group facilitator $F(1, 492) = 2.64$, $p = .10$, or teacher $F(1, 493) = 1.82$, $p = .18$. Similarly, women who indicated a preference for single-sex focus groups $F(1, 490) = 9.51$, $p = .002$, $\eta p^2 = .02$, and classrooms $F(1, 480) = 9.77$, p = .002, $\eta p^2 = .02$, had significantly higher levels of body dissatisfaction than women who selected a preference for mixed groups. The impact of age was not significant for these analyses for focus groups $F(1, 490) = 3.09$, $p = .08$, or classrooms, $F(1, 480) = 1.30$, $p = .25$.

Men. We predicted that men with increased levels of body dissatisfaction would be more likely to prefer researchers of the same gender. An ANCOVA, where age was used as the covariate, found that there were no significant differences on the satisfaction subscale of the Drive for Muscularity Scale [DMS] among the men according to their preferences for the gender of body image interviewers $F(2, 210) = 2.48$, $p = .16$, $\eta p^2 = .02$, or focus group facilitators $F(2, 210) = 0.67$, $p = .51$, $\eta p^2 = .006$. The effect of age was non-significant for interviewer $F(2, 210) = 2.54$, $p = .11$, or focus group facilitator F (1, 210 = 2.31, $p = .13$. However, an inspection of the mean body dissatisfaction scores indicated that the groups of men who selected 'male' or 'female' had higher mean body dissatisfaction scores than those who selected 'either'. Therefore, we created a category of men who indicated a gender preference (chose 'male' or 'female') and used further ANCOVAs to compare their mean

level of body dissatisfaction to those who indicated no gender preference (chose 'either'). In this analysis, men who had a preference for the gender of the interviewer had significantly higher levels of body dissatisfaction (M=26.86, SD= 6.67) in comparison to men who said they would be satisfied with either a male or female interviewer (M=24.99, SD= 6.10), F(1, 211) = 4.56, p = .04, ηp^2 = .02, and there was no significant effect of age F (1, 211) = 2.5, p= .11. There was still no significant difference between the men who had a preference (M=26.20, SD= 6.46) and those who chose 'either' (M=25.53, SD= 6.35) for the gender of the focus group facilitator F(1, 211) = 0.39, p = .53, ηp^2 = .002; and the effect of age was non-significant F(1, 211) = 2.25, p = .14. There was also no significant difference in mean levels of body dissatisfaction between men who indicated a preference for mixed- or single-sex focus groups F(1, 206) = 0.97, p = .33, ηp^2 = .005, and age did not have a significant impact on these results F(1, 206) = .87, p = .35.

An ANCOVA, controlling for age, found that there was a significant difference in mean levels of body dissatisfaction among men according to their preference for the gender of the teacher providing body image lessons, F(2, 210) = 3.42, p = .04, ηp^2 = .04. The effect of age was not significant in this analysis, F(1, 210) = 2.64, p = .11. Furthermore, men who indicated a gender preference (M= 27.21, SD= 5.92) were significantly more likely to have higher levels of body dissatisfaction than the men who reported no gender preference (M= 24.89, SD = 6.46), F(1, 211) = 6.75, p =.01, ηp^2 = .03. There was no significant difference in mean levels of body dissatisfaction between men who indicated a preference for mixed- or single-sex classes for school body image lessons, F(1, 206) = 0.91, p = .34, ηp^2 = .004, and age was also non-significant in this analysis, F(1, 206) = 1.12, p = .29.

In sum, the men who indicated a gender preference for the researcher conducting body image interviews or teaching of body image intervention lessons had significantly higher levels of body dissatisfaction than those men who selected 'either', but this was not

the case for focus group facilitators. There were no significant differences in men's levels of body dissatisfaction according to their preferences for mixed or separate gender focus groups and classroom settings.

Results of Thematic Analysis: Explanations for Preferences

The explanations provided by participants for their gender preferences for body image researchers and interventionists can be summarized broadly into four main themes: *perceived comfort, personal experience and qualities*, *professional capabilities*, and *appearance*. Comfort was central to the explanation for many preferences, particularly those who opted for same gender researchers, as these participants generally indicated that they would feel more comfortable, and less embarrassed with someone of the same gender. Alternatively, a small group of men indicated that they felt more comfortable discussing sensitive topics with women. Professionalism was also important for many as most participants who did not report a specific gender preference indicated that, as long as the researcher was 'professional', their gender was not important. Generally, however, female researchers and teachers delivering intervention programs were perceived by many participants as having greater professional capacity in the area of body image, including greater knowledge about the topic and a skill set that was better suited for conducting body image research or interventions than men. In terms of personal qualities and experience, participants who preferred researchers or teachers of the same gender tended to do so because they thought that they would be more likely to understand 'what they were going through', and were better placed to relate to their problems or issues. There was an underlying assumption that a researcher of the same gender would have experienced the same body image concerns of the participant. Other important personality characteristics that participants specified as being important were being understanding and non-judgmental. The appearance of the researcher or teacher was also highlighted in some comments that mentioned the potential for

appearance-related comparisons to researchers of the same gender, or attraction to those of the opposite gender. Overall, these findings suggest that participant comfort and the personal experience and qualities, professional capabilities, and appearance of researchers and interventionists should be considered in the design and procedures of body image research.

Discussion

This study examined young adults' preferences for the gender of interviewers, focus group facilitators, teachers of school-based interventions, and focus group and intervention co-participants in body image research. Our hypotheses for women's preferences were partially supported in that the majority of women sampled indicated a preference for female interviewers and interventionists, and women with higher levels of body dissatisfaction were significantly more likely to prefer female researchers, interventionists and co-participants across all settings than those with lower levels of body dissatisfaction. Unexpectedly, however, most women had no gender preference for focus group facilitators and preferred mixed-sex co-participants for focus groups and school-based interventions. Similarly, contrary to our hypotheses and prior research (Bottamini & Ste-Marie, 2006; Grogan & Richards, 2002) most men in our sample indicated no specific gender preference for researchers and co-participants across all research settings. The qualitative explanations for those who did report a preference for female researchers (e.g., the perception that women are less threatening than men), however, were consistent with previous studies. Additionally, men with higher body dissatisfaction scores were significantly more likely to indicate a gender preference (as opposed to selecting 'either') for interviewers and interventionists than those who were satisfied.

The gender differences we observed in participant preferences for interviewers and interventionists, whereby women were more likely to prefer female researchers, are consistent with prior research examining sensitive public health topics (e.g., Catania et al.,

1996; Davis et al., 2010). Furthermore, these differences may be explained by prior qualitative research, which has found that the social rules and norms for discussing body image are gendered (e.g., Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006; Diedrichs, Lee & Kelly, 2011). In regards to the differences in participant preferences observed between research settings, it is likely that the lack of specific gender preferences observed for focus group facilitators, interventionists and co-participants is due to the less personal nature of these settings as compared to interviews. More explicitly, the reduced amount of personal attention directed towards individual participants in focus groups and school intervention settings was a common explanation provided by participants for why they would be happy with 'either' male or female researchers in these settings.

The findings of this study have practical implications for body image researchers and others working in sensitive research topic areas. Although there are often funding and practical constraints, our results suggest that researcher gender should be an important consideration in research design, rather than a barrier to the gathering and interpretation of reliable data. They also indicate that consulting with participants in regards to their gender preferences may be particularly important among female participants and those who experience body dissatisfaction. Our qualitative findings also point towards the need to consider the professional capabilities and personal qualities of those conducting interviews, focus groups and intervention programs about body image, as these researcher characteristics can potentially influence participant comfort levels and subsequent self-disclosure. Although reported relatively infrequently in comparison to professional and personal capabilities and experience, appearance considerations may be of particular interest in body image research due to the known impact of appearance-related social comparisons on body dissatisfaction (e.g., Cattarin, Thompson, Thomas, & Williams, 2000; Jones, 2001; Keery, van den Berg, & Thompson, 2004). Researchers who meet conventional standards of attractiveness should be

aware of the potential influence of their appearance and seek to emphasize the other qualities that are known to comfort participants such as professional qualifications and being understanding. At a minimum, our findings emphasize that it is important to report researcher and interventionist characteristics in body image studies and any pilot work conducted to determine participant preferences, as these factors could potentially influence findings and effects.

There were a number of limitations in the current study that could be improved in future research. Firstly, open-ended, text-based comments only offer a brief insight into participants' explanations for gender preferences, and more data collection in follow-up interviews with prompting might offer more in-depth findings. Secondly, although it is preferable to have at least two researchers code qualitative data, as this was an unfunded study with a large number of participants that resulted in over 4000 open-ended text responses, it was not feasible to have a second researcher code all of the comments. Finally, our study focused primarily on researchers' and co-participants' gender. Our qualitative findings indicate that future studies could also benefit from broadening the scope of researcher characteristics under examination, by also exploring age, appearance, qualifications, and personal qualities.

Conclusion

This study provides a preliminary investigation of participant preferences for the gender of body image researchers, interventionists and co-participants, and some insight in to how gender might impact on participant comfort and the success of body image research and interventions. The findings indicate that in some settings (e.g., interviews and school-based interventions), the gender of those conducting body image research is important, particularly among women and participants who report elevated levels of body dissatisfaction. They also suggest that to improve the rigor, validity and impact of body image research and

interventions in future, consideration of participant preferences for researcher and co-participant characteristics may be helpful.

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