



# THE EPIDEMIC OF BODY DYSPHORIA IN NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION STUDENT-ATHLETES

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## Abstract



The National Collegiate Athletic

Association is a world renowned organization that encompasses hundreds of thousands of student-athletes, 24 different sports, across three divisions (1). One of the most prevalent parts of this community is the student-athlete population. This population is made up of collegiate athletes that have signed a contract to play for their respective sports team, while also being a full time student enrolled in the university. Student athletes often receive tuition reimbursement in the form of scholarships. For an athlete, playing a collegiate sport on scholarship is the absolute dream. However, student-athletes from all over are facing a number of mental health struggles as a result of juggling collegiate athletics and academics. Perfectionism runs rampant in student-athletes, as they are held to the highest of standards. In recent years, this perfectionism has translated to poor body image perceptions among the population. The College Athlete Body Project is a program that can be established at any NCAA affiliated institution in order to help eliminate the problem of body dysmorphia in college athletes. The goal of CABP is to prevent body dysmorphic disorder long term, so as to decrease body dysmorphia in college athletes across the nation. The research question that is being investigated in this proposal is: does involving student-athletes in the College Athlete Body Project decrease their risk of body dysmorphia while competing in college athletics?



## Community Assessment and Analysis

### Who makes up the student-athlete population?

- As of 2021, there were a grand total of **493,297** student-athletes that participated in collegiate athletics through NCAA member institutions (1).
- Males make up 56 percent of the student-athlete population, while females make up 44 percent (1).
- There are 63 percent White student-athletes and 16 percent Black student-athletes. Other common races seen in this population include Hispanic or Latino, making up six percent of the population, those of two or more races, making up five percent of the population, and international student-athletes, making up four percent of the population (1).

### Who makes up the rest of this community?

- Directors of athletics
- Head coaches
- Administrators
- Athletic trainers

### What is the overall health of this community?

College students are often described as, "a healthy cohort among same-aged peers, and student-athletes an even healthier subpopulation, buttressed by a discipline, commitment and attention to exercise and nutrition required to meet the demands of their sport" (2). However, along with body dysmorphia, the NCAA is working to combat:

- Concussions
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Poor mental health
- Sport-related injuries

### Economics

- Many universities in the United States sponsor sports programs that generate over eight billion dollars annually (3).
- Scholarships attract the student-athletes, benefiting the school/team and increasing their revenue.
- Scholarship limits help keep schools economically sound.

## Problem in the Community



Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is a disorder of self-perception (4). It is the debilitating mental preoccupation with a nonexistent or minimal flaw in one's appearance. These "flaws" can cause patients to complain of supposed deformities which in turn make them feel hyper aware of their self-proclaimed deformed appearance. Being a student-athlete and having to focus on your physical attributes and abilities can be exhausting and rather unhealthy. It is known that sporting environments can create a negative space for athletes physically and mentally. The sports world expects athletes, especially female athletes, to focus on the aesthetic of their physical bodies. As a result, many athletes develop Body Dysmorphic Disorder.

### BDD in the NCAA

- 738 male intercollegiate athletes all throughout the United States, results of the study indicated that athletes who self-weighted seven times per week reported the most pressure to lose weight (5).
- Reports of bulimic symptomology and they felt "pressured to engage in muscle building activities and adhere to dietary restrictions" (5). This study illustrates that frequently being weighed as a collegiate athlete negatively affects their internalization of body ideals, social pressures about body weight and image, body satisfaction, and dietary intent.
- Victoria Garrick, the libero and co-captain of the University of Southern California's Women's indoor volleyball team, speaks on her struggles with body dysmorphic disorder: "Female athletes have pressure from society and Instagram to look one way and then we have pressure from our team and the sports world to look another way. As my body started to get bigger I could hear my mind saying don't eat carbs, don't eat this, or go run an extra two miles even after practice ended because I so badly wanted to look the way an athlete didn't look" (6).

### Impact

- Body dysmorphic disorder is one of the deadliest psychiatric conditions; 25% of individuals attempt suicide (4).
- Research has shown that suicidal thoughts are experienced by 80% of patients with BDD over their lifetime; indeed, in a prospective study of 185 patients, the completed suicide rate was 45 times higher than in the general population (4).
- Many individuals with BDD feel ashamed of their appearance and the fact that they are so focused on it. As a consequence, they may not report their BDD symptoms to clinicians.
- BDD is a global issue and by focusing on specific communities, such as the NCAA, we can attempt to identify the preventable risk factors of developing the disorder and apply them on a global scale.

## Proposed Solution



One proposed solution to the rise in body dysmorphia in college athletes across the world is the College Athlete Body Project (CABP). The CABP is designed by combining the FABP and the MABP, which are organizations that are already in place and have been studied before. FABP focus: targeting and decreasing eating disorders. MABP focus: muscle dysmorphia, body dissatisfaction (7). CABP will combine the two (FABP and MABP) and be a more broad group discussion while still personalizing everyone's own needs.

### College Athlete Body Project Steps:

- Steps: A pre-intervention assessment will be done for athletes prior to starting any practices for their season.
- Athletes will complete a 3 session course. Each session will be 90 minutes and occur weekly
- Three weeks after the third session athletes will be reassessed for post intervention progress, then again one month later to determine the effectiveness of the interventions
- Each session will have its own guide of what will be discussed, and homework for the next week

### CABP Funding Proposal

- Through each schools athletic department
- Fundraising through each athletic team
- SAAC events to raise awareness and money for mental health in student athletes

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