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AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES:

**What Do We Look Like?
How Do We Feel?**

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AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

from The Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press

What Do We Look Like? How Do We Feel?

Mirror, Mirror On The Wall: We Don't Like The View At All

In a nation bombarded by a steady stream of new diets, health conscious cookbooks, physical fitness, low-fat foods and cholesterol tests, many Americans still say they are overweight and only a small number rate their physical condition and health as excellent.

Fighting the battle of the bulge as well as the urge to exercise continues to be a constant challenge for American adults.

Only three in 10 adults (30 percent) are very happy with the way they look. Most would shed a few pounds, flatten their stomachs and trim a few inches off their waists. Not surprisingly, those people who keep their weight down and exercise at least five hours a week are the most satisfied with their overall physical fitness.

These are among the findings of a Times Mirror Body Image Survey of 1,220 adults conducted nationwide. The poll was conducted for the Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press in Washington which surveyed people about their feelings about their health, physical fitness and appearances. The poll, with an error margin of 3 percent, was conducted last month.

When it comes to rating one's health and physical fitness, the poll showed:

--Most American adults (53 percent) say their general health is good, but only a quarter (27 percent) rate their own health as excellent, while 15 percent say their health is only fair and five percent say it is poor.

--Nearly half (42 percent) of American adults consider themselves overweight, with middle-aged women and blacks most prone to excess weight. Women at all ages feel more overweight than men the same age, especially middle-aged women. Women aged 30-64 are twice as likely to feel overweight than men.

--When it comes to being physically fit, nearly one in four adults say their physical fitness is only fair, while another 6 percent rate it as poor. Only a small number (11 percent) say they are in excellent physical shape.

Individual ideas about personal health and physical fitness reflect the changes in American lifestyles and diets, but they also vary with a number of other factors, including age, sex, exercise and economics.

Those Americans who tend to be the happiest with the way they look and feel also tend to be young people, white and college graduates. They maintain their weight, exercise at least five hours a week and are more likely to live in more affluent households where the annual income is \$50,000 or more.

And those who exercise, especially younger men, devote considerable time to fitness. Tom Baran, 25, of East Hartford, Connecticut, spends at least seven hours a week exercising. As a chef, Baran says "I'm around food all day long and I don't have a lot of free time. I really work hard trying to stay in shape because I don't want to fall into what the typical chef looks like."

While statistics show that Americans are living longer, many older Americans are not happy with their state of health: 45 percent of the people 65 and older rate their physical condition as "only fair" or worse. And nearly half of adult American women (43 percent) and more than a quarter (26 percent) of adult men aged 50-64 give themselves negative fitness ratings.

While three-quarters of the nation's adults (73 percent) believe that exercise can improve their health and lengthen their lives, only six in 10 adults (59 percent) exercise regularly, virtually unchanged (57 percent) from a 1985 Associated Press poll.

Today, there seems to be a direct correlation between being fit and feeling attractive to others. People who feel good about themselves are more likely to view themselves as attractive to the opposite sex. Only a third of the public thinks they are above average when they compare their physical attractiveness to other men and women their age.

The most frequent excuse for not exercising, especially among men, is that their normal daily activities provide adequate exercise. Women, notably those with children, say they just don't have enough time in their daily schedules.

Those who do find time to exercise do it increasingly with their feet. Walking continues to grow as the most popular form of exercise, with almost half of the nation's adults (47 percent) saying they get their exercise by walking--a sizable increase from the 33 percent who reported walking as their fitness exercise in the 1985 AP poll.

After walking, the next most popular exercise activities are: aerobics (24 percent), running (19 percent), weight lifting (17 percent), bicycling (15 percent), exercise machines (14 percent) and swimming (13 percent).

The enthusiasm for walking seems to be strongest among people over 50. Nearly three quarters of older women (74 percent) and about half the men (47 percent) say they now walk for fitness.

Some people, like Mary Beard, 80, of Birmingham, Alabama, prove that it's never too late to start exercising. Beard recently started a physical fitness walking program. To beat the Southern heat, she has joined a growing number of indoor mall walkers. "I enjoy it, even though I get tired so quick. I can't make more than three trips around the mall."

Gentlemen Prefer Brunettes

In the movies, gentlemen may say they prefer blondes, but in real life American men have a different image of the ideal woman: she's average height, has long dark hair, blue eyes, a generous figure and even a few muscles.

All of which may come as somewhat of a surprise to many women who think that men really consider the ideal woman as thin, blond and not very muscular.

And what do today's American women like in men? They like them clean-shaven with short, dark hair, blue eyes and of average build and height.

These are some of the results of Times Mirror Body Image Survey of 1,220 adults conducted nationwide. The poll was conducted for the Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press in Washington last month and asked people about their health, physical fitness, exercise routines and body images. The poll has an error margin of 3 percent.

Among the poll's findings is that there are significant differences between men and women in the way they perceive themselves and each other.

Ask yourself these questions:

True or False? Women are most attracted to a man's overall physique. The correct answer is FALSE. Men may think their bodies are what attracts women the most, but in reality, women (24 percent) say they are more attracted to a man's eyes than any other feature.

True or False? Men are only interested in women's bodies. FALSE is right again. While women are convinced that men only pay attention to their bodies, men say they are equally attracted by a woman's face and her figure.

One in five men (21 percent) says he is most attracted by a woman's face. Another 18 percent say they admire a woman's figure, and 13 percent admire a woman's legs followed by breasts (7 percent), rear (7 percent), and eyes (6 percent).

Age, however, brings mixed blessings for women. While men under 50 years of age are almost twice as likely to favor a woman's face over her figure, a quarter of the older men (25 percent) prefer a woman's figure to her face (13 percent).

In the enduring American battle to lose weight, women who try to stay as slender and taut as possible in order to be more attractive to men just might give some thought to changing their diets.

Many women, especially middle aged women, tend to think men like women who don't have muscles. Overall, a sizable number of women (32 percent) think men prefer women with soft body tone. They just might think again. Half of American men (51 percent) say they prefer a woman who has a firmly toned body and at least a little muscle. As might be expected, the preference for muscles is strongest among men under 30 years of age.

Women also differ among themselves as to how muscular they want to be.

A majority of young women under 30 (59 percent) have the highest interest in being muscular. And not surprisingly, women living on the West Coast, where physically fit bodies are encouraged, want muscles more than women living in other parts of the country.

The survey also showed that there are clear differences about how men and women view themselves and the opposite sex. Both men and women overestimate the emphasis that the opposite sex places on their bodies. Women tend to think that men prefer thin, blond, blue-eyed women. Actual preferences by men say otherwise:

--While nearly half the women (48 percent) think men prefer thin women, men say otherwise. The same number of men prefer women with generous figures (44 percent) as those who like women who are thin (42 percent).

--Men clearly (72 percent) prefer women who are average height. Only one in 10 men like women who are short or tall.

--Men, especially young men, like women with long hair (61 percent), and nearly half (49 percent) prefer dark or brunette hair. Only one quarter (24 percent) of the men actually prefer blondes.

--More men (40 percent) do prefer blue eyes to brown or dark eyes.

When it comes to what women like in men, about half the men think it is some aspect of their physique--their general build, rear or chest--that is most attractive to women. In actuality, almost a quarter (24 percent) of the nation's adult women say they are first attracted by a man's eyes, followed by his build (13 percent), his face (10 percent), his smile (8 percent), and his rear (5 percent).

--Most women (58 percent) like men to be average height. Only one third of all women (34 percent) like tall men, but at least half of the male college graduates and affluent men believe that women prefer tall men.

--A majority of women like men to have short, dark hair. Only a small number of women prefer men with blond (12 percent) or long hair (9 percent).

--More women prefer blue eyes (36 percent) to brown or dark eyes (30 percent).

And in what will surely come as a blow to those men who take great pride in growing their beards and meticulously trimming their mustaches, the poll found that American women clearly prefer clean shaven men (56 percent).

While about a quarter of the women (23 percent) say they like mustaches, the news is worse for those men who pride themselves in not shaving. Only one in 10 women likes a man with a beard.

Job Market Blues: Public Says Employers Think Beauty Beats Brains

Brains, a pleasant personality and hard work may be admirable job traits, but an overwhelming number of Americans still believe that physically attractive people are more likely to get hired and be promoted.

A majority of Americans say that good looks provide people with advantages in all phases of their lives, including work, school, marriage and even most friendships.

These are the among the findings of a Times Mirror Body Image survey of 1,220 adults conducted nationwide. The poll was conducted for the Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press in Washington and examined public views about health, physical fitness and body image.

The poll, with an error margin of 3 percent conducted in July, showed that being physically attractive is considered most beneficial when it comes to getting a job. A large majority (80 percent) of the public believes that good-looking men have a definite advantage in getting hired and promoted (69 percent).

When it comes to attractive women, the numbers are even higher. Most Americans say pretty women have a better chance to be hired (87 percent) and are far more likely to be promoted (74 percent).

Outside of the workplace, Americans also place a high premium on being attractive for other parts of their lives.

For example:

--Most people (seven out of ten) think that attractive men married to beautiful women will have happier marriages.

--Six out of 10 people believe that attractive boys and girls will have a better chance of succeeding at school.

--More than half of all men and women say that it is generally easier for attractive people to have good friendships with members of their same sex.

If there is one exception to all of the advantages that people ascribe to beauty, it is the role that looks play in friendships among women. Good looks, it seems, hurt women -- especially younger women -- in building friendships with other women.

Almost a third of women aged 18 to 49 (31 percent), say that physical attractiveness is a disadvantage to a good friendship with other women.

As Glenda Anderson, 33, of Monticello, Arkansas, says, "Women are jealous of other women. You've heard the saying that women don't dress for men, they dress for other women. Well, it's true."

"It's part of the competition," Anderson said. "If a woman looks too beautiful or glamorous, men and women both are afraid of her. She's just unapproachable."

QUESTIONNAIRE

TABLES

"How would you rate your own health in general these days? Would you say your health is excellent, good, only fair, or poor?"

	<i>Men</i>				<i>Women</i>			
	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
<i>Excellent</i>	33%	27%	28%	15%	28%	31%	21%	22%
<i>Good</i>	57	58	54	51	61	55	44	37
<i>Only fair</i>	9	13	11	22	8	9	25	30
<i>Poor</i>	1	2	7	11	3	4	10	10
<i>Don't know</i>	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
# of interviews	175	261	97	73	130	239	110	120

"How physically fit are you now? Would you say you are in excellent physical condition, good condition, only fair condition, or poor condition?"

	<i>Men</i>				<i>Women</i>			
	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
<i>Excellent</i>	15%	12%	10%	4%	11%	9%	10%	13%
<i>Good</i>	69	62	64	51	64	60	47	40
<i>Only fair</i>	14	22	18	25	22	27	33	34
<i>Poor</i>	2	4	8	18	3	4	10	13
<i>Don't know</i>	0	*	0	2	0	0	0	0
# of interviews	175	261	97	73	130	239	110	120

* less than 0.5%

"How satisfied are you overall with your own appearance? Are you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?"

	Men				Women			
	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
<i>Very satisfied</i>	30%	27%	50%	32%	24%	30%	21%	33%
<i>Somewhat satisfied</i>	61	59	37	43	61	45	54	48
<i>Somewhat dissatisfied</i>	7	11	13	11	13	24	16	15
<i>Very dissatisfied</i>	1	2	0	8	2	1	5	1
<i>Don't know</i>	1	1	0	6	0	0	4	3
# of interviews	175	261	97	73	130	239	110	120

"How would you rate your own health in general these days? Would you say your health is excellent, good, only fair, or poor?"

	Exercise			Weight	
	<u>None</u>	<u>Less than 5 hours per week</u>	<u>5 hours or more per week</u>	<u>Not over</u>	<u>Over-weight</u>
<i>Excellent</i>	21%	24%	38%	33%	17%
<i>Good</i>	54	57	48	50	58
<i>Only fair</i>	16	16	11	12	19
<i>Poor</i>	9	3	2	5	6
<i>Don't know</i>	*	*	1	*	*
# of interviews	470	333	403	723	496

* Less than 0.5%

"How physically fit are you now? Would you say you are in excellent physical condition, good condition, only fair condition, or poor condition?"

	<i>Exercise</i>			<i>Weight</i>	
	<u>None</u>	<u>Less than 5 hours per week</u>	<u>5 hours or more per week</u>	<u>Not over</u>	<u>Over-weight</u>
<i>Excellent</i>	6%	7%	21%	14%	6%
<i>Good</i>	52	65	62	65	50
<i>Only fair</i>	33	22	14	16	36
<i>Poor</i>	9	6	3	5	8
<i>Don't know</i>	*	*	*	*	*
# of interviews	470	333	403	723	496

"How satisfied are you overall with your own appearance? Are you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?"

	<i>Exercise</i>			<i>Weight</i>	
	<u>None</u>	<u>Less than 5 hours per week</u>	<u>5 hours or more per week</u>	<u>Not over</u>	<u>Over-weight</u>
<i>Very satisfied</i>	29%	25%	36%	40%	16%
<i>Somewhat satisfied</i>	49	55	53	51	53
<i>Somewhat dissatisfied</i>	16	18	9	6	26
<i>Very dissatisfied</i>	4	1	1	1	4
<i>Don't know</i>	2	1	1	2	1
# of interviews	470	333	403	723	496

"What do you think is your most attractive physical feature?"

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
<i>Build/figure</i>	18%	10%
<i>Face in general</i>	11	15
<i>Eyes</i>	11	22
<i>Hair</i>	6	13
<i>Smile</i>	2	6
<i>Legs</i>	4	6
<i>Chest/breasts</i>	4	1
<i>Other</i>	22	13
<i>Nothing/Don't know</i>	22	14
# of interviews	608	612

"Now, imagine how you would like to look. If you could change only one thing about your body or your physical appearance, what would it be?"

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
<i>Lose weight</i>	14%	27%
<i>Stomach or waist</i>	12	12
<i>Legs or hips</i>	3	10
<i>Taller</i>	8	4
<i>Hair</i>	8	5
<i>More muscular</i>	6	2
<i>Chest/breasts</i>	2	4
<i>Gain weight</i>	4	1
<i>Nose</i>	3	3
<i>Other</i>	20	17
<i>Nothing/Don't know</i>	20	15
# of interviews	608	612

"Right now, do you feel that you are overweight, underweight, or just about the right weight for you? (IF OVER) Do you feel you are very overweight, somewhat overweight, or only a little overweight?"

	Men				Women			
	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
<i>Very overweight</i>	2%	4%	2%	3%	3%	9%	13%	7%
<i>Somewhat overweight</i>	5	14	10	3	10	22	16	11
<i>A little overweight</i>	14	26	31	32	15	22	29	24
<i>Underweight</i>	18	7	4	1	6	*	2	3
<i>About right</i>	61	49	53	60	66	47	40	55
<i>Don't know</i>	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
# of interviews	175	261	97	73	130	239	110	120

"Aside from your normal daily activities, do you do any type of exercise program that helps keep you physically fit, or not? (IF YES) What special activities do you do for physical fitness?"

	Men				Women			
	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
<i>None</i>	38%	41%	47%	41%	48%	36%	38%	42%
Among exercisers:								
<i>Walking</i>	5%	32%	43%	51%	37%	64%	73%	76%
<i>Running or jogging</i>	38	33	16	8	20	14	4	0
<i>Exercise classes</i>	15	13	12	19	51	35	19	20
<i>Weight lifting</i>	50	19	21	2	22	11	3	1
<i>Exercise machines</i>	8	10	16	5	12	18	33	10
<i>Bicycling</i>	16	18	18	20	14	14	13	6
<i>Swimming</i>	11	13	9	6	12	19	12	9
<i>Games</i>	38	48	29	22	22	15	5	13
<i>Other</i>	12	15	21	33	11	12	21	25
# of interviews	175	261	97	73	130	239	110	120

Totals for exercisers add to more than 100% because of multiple responses

"In having good friendships with other women, do you think it is an advantage or a disadvantage for a woman to be physically attractive?"

	<i>Men</i>				<i>Women</i>			
	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
<i>Advantage</i>	62%	55%	63%	57%	45%	37%	53%	59%
<i>Disadvantage</i>	15	18	7	13	32	31	19	10
<i>Doesn't matter</i>	20	24	22	18	21	27	23	21
<i>It depends/Don't know</i>	3	3	8	12	2	5	5	10
# of interviews	175	261	97	73	130	239	110	120

"What kind of muscle tone, firm or soft, do you (think men) prefer a woman to have? (IF FIRM) On women, do you (think men) like a look that's muscular, a little muscular, or not muscular? (WOMEN ONLY) What kind of muscle tone would you, yourself, like to have? Would you like to have firm or soft muscle tone? (IF FIRM) Would you like to look muscular, a little muscular, or not muscular?"

	<u>Men like</u>	<u>Women think men like</u>	<u>Women want</u>
Age 18-29:			
<i>Soft body tone</i>	22%	33%	11%
<i>Firm, not muscular (or DK)</i>	11	14	30
<i>At least a little muscular</i>	64	52	59
<i>No preference/Don't know</i>	3	1	0
# of interviews	175	130	130

Age 30-49:

<i>Soft body tone</i>	29%	29%	13
<i>Firm, not muscular (or DK)</i>	18	31	49
<i>At least a little muscular</i>	51	39	36
<i>No preference/Don't know</i>	2	1	2
# of interviews	261	239	239

Age 50-64:

<i>Soft body tone</i>	15%	32%	16%
<i>Firm, not muscular (or DK)</i>	19	37	50
<i>At least a little muscular</i>	52	29	30
<i>No preference/Don't know</i>	14	2	4
# of interviews	97	110	110

Age 65 and older:

<i>Soft body tone</i>	32%	36%	18%
<i>Firm, not muscular (or DK)</i>	26	36	51
<i>At least a little muscular</i>	27	24	27
<i>No preference/Don't know</i>	15	4	4
# of interviews	73	120	120

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Survey Methodology: The survey results are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among 1,220 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period of July 12-16, 1990. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points.