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Exploring the Link between Body Image Perception and Self-Esteem: A Quantitative Study Shahana Nadeem

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ABSTRACT

The present study was aimed to investigate the perception of body image and its relationship to self-esteem among female students (N=200) of universities including Fazaia College of Education for Women, Peshawar, University of Peshawar and University of Engineering and Technology. The sample was selected by using Simple random technique which is a type of probability sampling. Students were assessed by Body-shape questionnaire 16-B scale (Evans & Dolan, 1993) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem questionnaire (Rosenberg, 1965). Results indicated a profound negative correlation between perception of body image and its relation to self-esteem ($r = -.8, p > 0.01$). These findings highlight the importance of promoting positive body image and self-esteem among students, potentially through interventions focusing on self-acceptance, self-compassion, and critical thinking about societal beauty standards may help mitigate the negative effects of body dissatisfaction on self-esteem.

Keyword: Body Image, Perception, Self-Esteem, Quantitative Study

Introduction

One of the first things individuals notice about other people is how they look in person, which has a big impact on their social interactions. According to Tiggeman (2011), appearance particularly body image has become an important aspect of identity in modern Western culture. Beyond psychological processes, body image influences social interactions and attitudes. In the West and around the world, there is a strong cultural stereotype that connects physical appearance with desirable mental traits. The generalization of "ideal" bodies in advertising, the media, and social media feeds into the subconscious, encouraging the assumption that "beauty equals goodness," frequently linking success to physical appearance.

According to studies, many women and girls have a negative perception of their bodies (Furham, Badmin & Snead, 2002; Grogan, 2008). The dissatisfaction is a result of society's desire for thinness as the standard of beauty, especially among young women. Women are more likely than men to be underweight, even as adults (Ali & Lindstrom, 2006). Overweight people frequently experience social disengagement, low self-esteem, and physical symptoms of insecurity as a result of their knowledge of their body size. Furthermore, overweight people are criticized because of societal perceptions that link being overweight to being lazy. (Papadopoulos et al., 2015)

The term "body image" describes how people feel, think, and interpret their physical appearance. It includes our mental and emotional responses to how we view ourselves in relation to both personal and cultural beauty standards. Many people, particularly young adults, struggle with body image concerns in today's society, when media and social standards frequently portray particular body types as desirable. These worries might be anything from

minor displeasure with particular physical characteristics to more significant problems including severe body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, and low self-esteem. (Brechan & Kvaalem, 2015)

Self-esteem and body image are significantly related, because people who believe they have a good appearance usually develop a higher value, which is a positivity that lead to a higher self-esteem, it is therefore better for emotional and social contributing positively to our health and other who present a bad body image have a low self-esteem. Body-image perceptions are lensed through a variety of influences from media representations, peers and family, and cultural and personal experiences. (Rodgers & Chabrol, 2009)

From research we know that peer relationships, experiences of bullying, and parents' messages about appearance all contribute to the development of a person's body image. Physical beauty standards are often reinforced by popular media, causing individuals to feel the need to conform to certain ideals. In certain countries, thinness in women and muscularity in men are prominent, contributing to low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction. (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013)

Nevertheless, the positive experience of body image, caring for and liking one's body no matter what the social standards are is being increasingly emphasized. Having high self-esteem and a healthy mind are related to the development of a positive body image. In undermining harmful beauty standards, and stressing the function of the body over its appearance, initiatives that promote body acceptance and self-love can play a role in improving body image and self-esteem, and particularly in younger people.

Theoretical Framework

When a person feels that their body does not match society's ideals, body dissatisfaction frequently results, which lowers their sense of value. According to Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), body image is shaped by societal objectification, especially of women, which causes internalization of external standards and lowers self-esteem.

Objectives

To investigate the relationship between body image perception on students' self-esteem.

Hypotheses are as follows

- **H1:** A high level of self-esteem correlates positively with a positive body image impression.
- **H2:** Those with low self-esteem have a negative image of their body.

Method

Students were randomly selected from Fazaia college of education for women (FCOEW), University of engineering and technology (UET) & University of Peshawar (UOP) and UOP with age ranged between 20 to 28. The research design used for the study was cross sectional design as the data was collected from different age groups in a single point of time. Students were debriefed regarding the purpose of the study and was ensured regarding the confidentiality of the collected data. The instruments including Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ-16B), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), and a demographic information sheet were given to the students. Self-worth and self-acceptance were measured by the 10-item RSES, which was rated on a 4-point Likert scale, while body dissatisfaction was measured by the 16-item BSQ-16B, which was graded on a 6-point scale. Strong internal consistency was

shown by both instruments (RSES $\alpha = .815$; BSQ-16B $\alpha = .864$). Strict adherence to ethical protocols was maintained. The target population's body image and self-esteem was effectively and consistently revealed by these validated self-report measures.

Results

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of study variables

Demographics	N	Percentage %
Gender		
Females	200	100%
Age		
20	53	26.5
21	29	14.5
22	62	31.0
23	23	11.5
24	11	5.5
25	13	6.5
26	8	4.0
28	1	.5
Education		
BS	200	100%

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the study participants, consisting entirely of female subjects. The age distribution was categorized into three groups: 20-22, 23-25, and 26-28 years. All participants were undergraduate students pursuing a bachelor's degree.

Table 2: Psychometric properties of Self-Esteem and Body shape questionnaire (N=200)

Scales	M	SD	Range	Cronbach α
SES	49.5	9.3	53.4	.8
BSQ	50.8	10.0	54.48	.8

Table 2 presents the reliability coefficients for the Self-Esteem Scale (SES) and the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ). The SES demonstrated good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.815, while the BSQ showed excellent reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.864, based on a sample of 200 participants. These results indicated that both scales are reliable and suitable for assessing self-esteem and body shape concerns.

Table 3: Correlation analysis between body shape perception and self esteem

Variables	1	2
Body shape perception	-	-.874**
Self esteem	-.874**	-

Note: Correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

Table 3 reveals a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.8$, $p < 0.01$) between self-esteem and body shape perception, indicating that individuals with more negative body image perceptions tend to have lower self-esteem. This statistically significant relationship highlights the profound impact of body shape concerns on overall self-worth.

Discussion

The demographic characteristics of the study sample highlight a young, educated population of female undergraduate students enrolled in Pakistani universities. All respondents were pursuing BS degrees, with most aged between 20 and 28 years. This group aligns with previous psychological research identifying young women as particularly susceptible to challenges related to body image and self-esteem (Bearman et al., 2006; Shaikh & Riaz, 2019). The decision to focus exclusively on female participants was deliberate, given the substantial evidence indicating that body image concerns are more prevalent among women, largely due to sociocultural expectations and gender-specific pressures (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Anderson-Fye, 2012). The measurement tools used in the research demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of .815 for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and .864 for the Body Shape Questionnaire. These reliability scores confirm the scales' appropriateness and consistency for assessing self-esteem and body image, consistent with their use in previous studies involving similar populations (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2018; Swami et al., 2018). The results provide strong support for the study's hypotheses. A significant negative correlation ($r = -.874$, $p < .01$) was found between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem, indicating that individuals with more negative body perceptions are likely to have lower self-esteem. This finding reinforces existing theories and research highlighting the inverse relationship between these two constructs (Cash, 2002; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008). While the strength of the observed correlation is notably high, even weaker correlations in similar research contexts have been considered meaningful in understanding psychological constructs such as identity and well-being (Tylka & Sabik, 2010; Zhang & Leung, 2002). These findings further underscore the importance of body image in shaping self-worth during emerging adulthood, a developmental stage where identity formation is particularly sensitive (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2015). The study's outcomes also align with sociocultural frameworks that highlight the influence of media exposure, peer comparison, and internalized beauty standards on body image perceptions (Tiggemann, 2011; Fardouly et al., 2015). Objectification theory suggests that women often internalize an external view of their bodies, resulting in constant self-monitoring and dissatisfaction, which in turn negatively affects their self-esteem (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Such influences are especially significant in university environments where social comparison is frequent and reinforced by digital media and peer interactions. In addition, regional research supports the study's conclusions. Studies conducted within the South Asian context, particularly in Pakistan, have also shown that cultural norms, media portrayals, and family expectations contribute significantly to body dissatisfaction and reduced self-esteem among young women (Shaikh & Riaz, 2019). These parallels further validate the cultural relevance and implications of the current findings.

Conclusion

This study confirms a significant negative correlation between body perception and self-esteem among female students. The findings suggest that societal beauty standards and media portrayal can adversely impact self-esteem. The results align with previous research, highlighting the need for interventions promoting positive body image. Enhancing self-acceptance and self-compassion may mitigate the negative effects of body dissatisfaction. The study's findings have implications for educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers. By promoting positive body image, we can foster healthier self-esteem among young women. Ultimately, this can contribute to their overall well-being. In the end, the study advances the science of psychology and motivates academic institutions to give students' psychological well-being first priority, particularly with regard to identity formation and self-perception.

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