

“Am I what I physically am?”: relationship between body esteem and social anxiety

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ABSTRACT

The author has investigated the relationship between two variables namely, Body Esteem and Social Anxiety. The research paper focuses on the correlation between the variables mentioned as well as studies the difference between the body esteem scores of various age groups and genders. It was hypothesized that there will be a significant correlation between the body esteem and social anxiety. The sample size is 80 (Males-40, Females-40). The age group of the sample taken is 20-40 years which is divided into four sub groups. Each sub group consists of 20 subjects (Males-10, Females 10). The average age of the sample is 30.4125. Body Esteem Scale by Franzoi and Shields (1991) and Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS-SR) by Michael Liebowitz (1987) were used to measure body esteem and social anxiety among the participants. Pearson’s correlation method has been employed to study the correlation between Body esteem and Social Anxiety which showed a correlation moderate negative correlation implying that lower is the body esteem, higher is the social anxiety and vice versa also holds true. To study the differences between the body esteem scores among various age groups, One Way ANOVA has been used. The test shows a significant difference between the body esteem scores among the various age groups ranging from 20-40. On the other hand, the difference between the body esteem scores of males and females were analysed by t-test and were found to be insignificant. The limitations and recommendations for future research have also been discussed later in the paper.

Keywords: *Body Esteem, Social Anxiety, One-Way ANOVA, Pearson’s Correlation, t-test*

Body esteem is the evaluation of one’s body or physical attributes of one’s body or physical appearance. It is a facet of self-concept and has been associated with a number of physical attributes like weight, BMI, hip-waist ratio, etc. There have been many studies conducted to study body esteem across various age groups, gender, ethnicities and cultures.

Social Anxiety is a mental condition where a person feels himself or herself being evaluated or judged negatively by the other people in social contexts. In extreme cases, social anxiety may lead to “Social Phobia”. People who suffer from social anxiety may feel afraid of being rejected in social or performance situations.

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Received: October 20, 2019; Revision Received: December 12, 2019; Accepted: December 25, 2019

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A plethora of studies have been conducted in this area and most of them have shown a negative correlation between body esteem and social anxiety.

In a study conducted by Waghachavare, Quraishi, Dhumale, and Gore, body image anxiety was significantly associated with depression and social phobia. In another study, conducted by **Abdollahi** on 520 high school students from eight high schools in Tehran city, it was concluded that there exists a relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety with body esteem playing a mediating role. Weight and gender also moderated between body esteem and self-esteem with social anxiety. The results threw light on the fact that both, body esteem and self-esteem control social anxiety among the adolescent students. Another study by **M. Tarkhan, M. Esmailpour, T. Tizdast** investigated the relationship between the social anxiety, social self-efficacy and body image in the female students. A sample of 240 female students was taken from a university and the results were analyzed by Pearson correlation and multivariable regression. The results showed that a significant negative relationship was observed between social anxiety and body image among the female students. A significant positive relationship was observed between social self- efficacy and body image among the female students. Another study by **Y. Pawijit, W. Likhitsuwan, J. Ludington, K. Pisitsungkagarn** has examined the how negative self-evaluation affects relationship between body image dissatisfaction and social anxiety. Adolescents and adults are more prone to body image dissatisfaction and social anxiety due to which there are problems faced by adolescents and adults in social adjustment and well-being. **Frost** conducted a study on 227 male and female elementary school, high school, and university students. It was found that females had lower self-esteem as compared to their male counterparts.

McKarty studied 327 undergraduate women and men who were surveyed to study the gender differences in body esteem. The study concluded that the relationships between body surveillance, body shame, and body esteem were more strongly present among women than in men. Women showed higher body shame, and actual/ideal weight discrepancy, and also lower body esteem as compared to their male counterparts. **Mellor et al.** studied the relationship between body image and self-esteem for men and women. It was found that a significant positive relationship exists between self-esteem and body dissatisfaction. Women were found to have higher body dissatisfaction than men.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

The study was conducted on 80 participants, from Hisar (Haryana) region. The age group of the participants was 20-40. Forty males and forty females participated in the study voluntarily. The participants were divided into four age groups, i.e. 20-25, 25-30, 30-35 and 35-40. Each age group comprised of equal number of male and female participants.

Table 1: The characteristics of the sample taken

Age Group ↓ Gender →	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	Total
Male	10	10	10	10	40
Female	10	10	10	10	40
Total	20	20	20	20	80

Materials

The participants were briefed about the purpose of the research study and assured about the confidentiality of the information that they will be providing. After the participants had given their consent, they were requested to fill the questionnaires (Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale and Body Esteem Scale by Franzoi and Shields).

- 1. Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (Michael Liebowitz, 1987):** The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale assesses an individual's social anxiety in performance and social interaction situations as well as their avoidance in the performance and social interaction situations. There are 24 items in this scale and for each item, there are two answers that an individual has to give, one for anxiety or fear and the other for avoidance. The answers have to be based on past one week's experience of the individual. The answers for both have to be marked as 0, 1, 2 or 3. For anxiety questions (how anxious or fearful one feels), the 0, 1, 2 or 3 symbolises *None, Mild, Moderate and Severe* respectively. For avoidance questions (how often does one avoid the situation), the 0, 1, 2 or 3 symbolises *Never, Occasionally, Often and Usually* respectively.

If any statement describes a situation that one does not experience regularly, they are asked to imagine how would they have responded if such a situation would arise. The LSAS-SR is finally scored by summing the item ratings. Scores for LSAS-SR can be presented as: One Total Global Score for anxiety and avoidance, separate performance and social sub-scores and four separate score for Performance Anxiety, Performance Avoidance, Social Anxiety and Social Avoidance. The scores are interpreted based on the range they fall into. Score of 55-65 implies Moderate Social Phobia; 65-80 implies Marked Social Phobia; 80-95 implies Severe Social Phobia and Greater than 95 implies Very Severe Social Phobia. As seen in the existing literatures, the LSAS-SR has been reported as a reliable and valid measure of social phobia. Various researches have shown that LSAS-SR has a good test-retest reliability, adequate internal consistency, and adequate convergent and discriminant validity.

- 2. Body Esteem Scale (Franzoi and Shields, 1984):** The sample comprised of 40 males and 40 females. The average age of Males was 30.45 and the average age of females was 30.375. T-test was performed on the data of the two groups (Group 1: Males and Group 2: Females) to determine whether the difference between the means of body esteem scores between the two group is significant or it is due to chance factors. The mean of body esteem scores of Males is 69.35 and the mean for body esteem scores of Females is 74.05. The t-value calculated was 0.88285 which was NOT significant at 0.05 significance level.

The existing literature has more evidence that showed that there is a difference between the body esteem between males and females. But this study has given contradictory results where there was no significant difference between the body esteem between men and women. Any difference observed can be attributed to the chance factors.

- 3. Difference between the means of Body Esteem scores of Males and Females:** The sample comprised of 40 males and 40 females. The average age of Males was 30.45 and the average age of females was 30.375. T-test was performed on the data of the two groups (Group 1: Males and Group 2: Females) to determine whether the difference between the means of body esteem scores between the two group is significant or it is due to chance factors. The mean of body esteem scores of Males is 69.35 and the mean for body esteem scores of Females is 74.05. The t-value

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- 4. Difference between the means of Body Esteem scores among different age groups:**
The sample was divided into four age groups. The age groups and their respective means of body esteem scores are shown in the table below.

Table 2: Age Group and respective mean of Body Esteem scores

Age Group	Mean of Body Esteem Score
21-25	56.25
25-30	79.15
30-35	80.7
35-40	70.7

One-way ANOVA was performed to find out whether the difference between the means of body esteem scores existing among various age groups is significant or not. The f-value calculated was 5.1335 which was significant at significance level of 0.05. Thus, the difference existing between the age groups cannot be attributed to chance factors.

CONCLUSIONS

In light of the data collected and the results calculated, we can conclude that the Body Esteem and Social Anxiety are negatively and moderately correlated. Though the difference between body esteem was not found to be significant between men and women, but the difference between means was found to be significant among various age groups. A common sense explanation for the lowest body esteem scores for the age group of 21-25 years is that men and women in this age group are more likely to be conscious of their physical appearance and they are henceforth, more conscious about details of their physical attributes, i.e., they feel that they are being observed more than they actually are being observed, a phenomenon known as the “Spotlight Effect”. This overemphasis on the physical appearance can also be attributed to the exposure to media which focuses on the perfect look as the success “mantra” in life.

Limitations

1. The sample for the research is 80 and is limited to Hisar (Haryana). Thus, it might not be the true representative of the population.
2. The Social Anxiety can be caused by multiple factors and Body Esteem is one of the variables. The other variables have not been studied in this research.
3. Only correlation between body esteem and social anxiety has been focused upon in this research. There is no cause-effect relationship established between the variables in the study.

Recommendations

1. A study can be conducted where the sample size is larger and the research is not limited to a single geographical location so that the results can be generalised to the entire population.
2. Other variables that might contribute to social anxiety can be explored.

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Acknowledgements

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

How to cite this article: S Dalal (2019). “Am I what I physically am?”: relationship between body esteem and social anxiety. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 7(4), 385-390. DIP:18.01.045/20190704, DOI:10.25215/0704.045