

Relationship between body image, gender difference and self-esteem among adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Does any of this sound familiar? "I'm too tall." "I'm too short." "I'm too skinny." "If only I were shorter/taller/had curly hair/straight hair/a smaller nose/longer legs, I'd be happy." At some point or the other we all put ourselves down in terms of our own image of self. As teenagers, we go through a lot of turbulence due to the surging up of hormones which lead to many changes in our body. And, as our body changes, our image of our body also changes. We often tend to stick to these negative thoughts of our own body image which has a critical remark on our self-esteem, which also plays a central role in our mental health. During this phase, both girls and boys have their own and different perception of their own body image which makes them behave in certain ways. However, not enough is known how youth evaluate themselves as they move across adolescence. **Objective:** To study the relationship between body image, gender differences and self-esteem among adolescents. **Method:** The method adopted for this study was a survey. Adolescents between the age group 18-19 were randomly chosen with equal number of men and women and were given a Body Satisfaction Questionnaire 16A and self-esteem questionnaire by Rosenberg. **Result:** (1) No correlation was found between body image and self-esteem in males and females (2) Gender difference was seen in Body image among adolescents. (3) No gender difference was seen in self-esteem between the two genders. **Implications:** (1) Psychological links between body image and self-worth, could serve as key components for promotion of positive and healthy body satisfaction in adolescents. (2) Parenting education- Parents need to be aware of the role they play in their child's body satisfaction.

Keywords: *Body Image, Self-Esteem, Gender Difference, Adolescents'*

The transition from childhood to Adolescence is a very bumpy ride. It is the period between the age group 12-18. There is not only a transition from one phase to another, but also in their physical, social and psychological states. Along with the body changes, self-image of both males and females also change. It's not always easy to like every look of the body part, but when you get stuck on the negatives it can really bring down your self-esteem. Physical and psychological changes can influence perceptions of and satisfaction with body image, both of

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which are key elements in the development of self-esteem and social adjustment among adolescents.

Body image is the perception that a person has, of their physical self, the thoughts and feelings that result from that perception. These feelings can be positive, negative or both and are influenced by individual and environmental factors.

Self-esteem reflects a person's overall subjective emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. It is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude toward the self. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs about oneself, (for example, "I am competent", "I am worthy"), as well as emotional states, such as triumph, despair, pride, and shame.

People with high self-esteem know themselves well. They're realistic and find friends that like and appreciate them for who they are. People with high self-esteem usually feel more in control of their lives and know their own strengths and weaknesses. But however, for many people, especially people in their early teens, body image can be closely linked to self-esteem.

Factors influencing Self-Esteem

1. Puberty and Development

Some people struggle with their self-esteem and body image when they begin puberty because it's a time when the body goes through many changes. These changes, combined with wanting to feel accepted by our friends, means it can be tempting to compare ourselves with others. The trouble with that is, not everyone grows or develops at the same time or in the same way.

2. Media Images and Other Outside Influences

Our tweens and early teens are a time when we become more aware of celebrities and media images — as well as how other kids look and how we fit in. We might start to compare ourselves with other people or media images ("ideals" that are frequently airbrushed). All of this can affect how we feel about ourselves and our bodies even as we grow into our teens.

3. Families and School

Family life can sometimes influence our body image. Some parents or coaches might be too focused on looking a certain way or "making weight" for a sports team. Family members might struggle with their own body image or criticize their kids' looks ("why do you wear your hair so long?" or "how come you can't wear pants that fit you?"). This can all influence a person's self-esteem, especially if they're sensitive to others' comments. People also may experience negative comments and hurtful teasing about the way they look from classmates and peers. Although these often come from ignorance, sometimes they can affect body image and self-esteem.

Many studies have focused on the relationship between body image and self-esteem during adolescence (Arim, Shapka, & Dahinten, 2006; Bell & Dittmar, 2011; Grieve, 2007; Hutchinson, Rapee, & Taylor, 2010). Most of these studies suggest that girls are more vulnerable than boys to physical changes. This vulnerability tends to turn into a greater level of body and weight dissatisfaction, which reflects low self-esteem (Brunet, Sabiston, Dorsch, & McCreary, 2010; Rajchert, 2010; Shaw, Stice, & Springer, 2004). This dissatisfaction seems less overwhelming (Europe's Journal of Psychology ejop.psychopen.eu | 1841-0413) in male samples (Davison & McCabe, 2006; Ramos, Rivera, Moreno, & Jimenez-Iglesias, 2010).

1. Age:

Age is another factor that influences body satisfaction and self-esteem. On average, those in their early adolescence are more satisfied with both their physical appearance and their weight, as is shown by their achievement of higher self-esteem scores than those in the middle of their adolescence (Ciuluvica, Mitrofan, & Fulcheri, 2010; Gatti, Confalonieri, Ionio, & Traficante, 2007; Holmqvist & Frisé, 2012). Even though age and gender are two widely studied factors in adolescents' perceptions of their own bodies, other individual variables, such as the level of pubertal development and the Body Mass Index (BMI), could also influence one's perception and representation of one's body and one's self-esteem (Carlson Jones & Crawford, 2005; Fenton, Brooks, Spencer, & Morgan, 2010; Meshkova, Nikolaeva, & Koprina, 2010)

Delayed or advanced pubertal development is commonly agreed to be a somewhat risky factor for adaptation and psychological wellbeing (Graber, Brooks-Gunn, & Warren, 2006; van Jaarsveld, Fidler, Simon, & Wardle, 2007). The theory called the "off-time hypothesis" considers the deviation from the normative pubertal timing (being "off time"), whether early or late, to be a source of difficulties in adolescents' adaptations (Alsaker & Flammer, 2006; Canals, Vigil-Colet, Chico, & Martí-Henneberg, 2005; Graber, Brooks-Gunn, & Warren, 2006; Susman & Rogol, 2004). According to the off-time hypothesis, girls who mature early are less satisfied with their own bodies and more concerned about physical appearance. Moreover, they show low body esteem and high stress levels. Therefore, these girls tend to engage in more physical activities that are often associated with weight-loss diets (van Jaarsveld et al., 2007). Body dissatisfaction among early maturing girls is often accompanied by teasing from peers, especially at the beginning of their pubertal development.

In contrast, the effects of early pubertal maturation in boys are associated more with alcohol abuse, aggressive behavior, or deviance (Arim, Shapka, & Dahinten, 2006; Rose, 2002; van Jaarsveld et al., 2007; Weichold, Yao, & Silbereisen, 2010). Other studies emphasize that boys who mature early are more problematic in terms of peer reported school adjustment, self-reported bullying, overt delinquency, and conflicts with authority (Scholte, 2010). These effects tend to persist in adulthood (Smith, 2010).

Therefore, the main consequence of early pubertal development in girls is less satisfaction with their own body images. In boys, this consequence is shown in their behaviours, which leading to more difficulty in social adjustments. Late-maturing girls seem to be at less risk than early maturing girl even though they show lower self-esteem. Also, young adults report more internalized problems, while late-maturing boys seem to be teased by peers and are perceived as emotionally nervous, feeling victimized and isolated (Biehl, Natsuaki, & Ge, 2007; Fasche, Weichold, & Silbereisen, 2010; Graber, Brooks-Gunn, & Warren, 2006; Scholte, 2010).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Huebscher, Brenda C. conducted a study (2010) among adolescent girls to study the Relationship between Body Image and Self-Esteem. The results suggested that "self-esteem was the most important predictor of body dissatisfaction, with females with low self-esteem experiencing more body dissatisfaction than those with high self-esteem". It was also noted that the impact of society, parents, girlfriends, and boyfriends, improved the prediction of body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and importance of appearance.

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Marion Kostanski and Eleonora Gullone (1998) conducted a study Adolescent Body Image Dissatisfaction: Relationships with Self-esteem, Anxiety, and Depression Controlling for Body Mass in a nonclinical population of 516 adolescents, aged 12 to 18. The prevalence of Perceived Body Image Dissatisfaction (PBID) was comparative with previous findings. Interestingly, actual body mass and psychological well-being variables were found to be significantly related with PBID, whilst being independent of each other. Findings support proposals that PBID arises from a complex interplay of factors, including gender, self-esteem, and actual body mass.

Eulalia Almeida (2015) conducted a study Gender Differences in Body Image among Adolescents among 100 adolescents, 50 males and 50 females in Goa. Results suggested that female adolescents have showed significantly high body dissatisfaction than adolescent males in the dimensions of Appearance Orientation, Fitness Evaluation, Fitness Orientation, Health Evaluation, Health Orientation and Illness. And, male and female adolescents did not differ significantly in the dimensions such as, Appearance Evaluation, Self-classified Weight and Overweight Preoccupation.

Prax Kinder (2002) conducted a study Sex differences in body image of adolescents and significance for self-esteem among 326 adolescents aged 13 to 16 using questionnaires in the context of a multi-dimensional perspective. The results indicate that there is primarily evidence for gender differences, whereas age related differences can hardly be found: Female adolescents differ from their male counterparts for example in the following aspects: they have a higher body awareness, a higher dissatisfaction with their shape, a lower perceived athletic competence and stronger feelings of depersonalization. Using regression analysis it was shown that altogether the body image has the same relevance for males and females in order to predict self-esteem. The results show that the body image of adolescents is gender-dependent but not gender specific.

Teri Quatman and Cary M Watson (2010) conducted a study Gender Differences in Adolescent Self-Esteem: An Exploration of Domains among a large number of sample of 545 drawn from Grades 8, 10 and 12. Gender differences as well as the relative contributions of the different domains to overall self-esteem scores were measured. Results showed that boys attained slightly higher global self-esteem scores than girls did, by a difference of .22 standard deviation units. There were no main or interaction effects for grade level.

Maggie A. Brennan et.al (2010) conducted a study on Body Image Perceptions: Do Gender Differences Exist: among undergraduate students attending a large metropolitan university in Canada who were enrolled in Psychology 100 courses. Data were collected from 210 students. The following results were obtained:

a) Men had higher scores than women on the three subscales of the Body-Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA) indicating that men feel better about their bodies than women. b) Women reported negative body image perceptions during significantly more situations than men on the short form of the Situational Inventory of Body-Image Dysphoria (SIBID-S). c) Body-Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA) and self-esteem scores were negatively correlated in both men and women. This indicates that participants with lower self-esteem also had lower body esteem. d) Body Mass Index (BMI) scores were not correlated with body esteem scores for men or women.

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Jennifer Ah-Kion (2006) conducted a study Body image and self-esteem: A study of gender differences among mid-adolescents. This study looked at the conceptualization of body image and its relationship with self-esteem and investigated for gender differences in these two aspects of the self. Two hundred and forty three randomly selected adolescents responded to a structured self-report schedule. Results revealed significant gender differences in both body image and self-esteem, with adolescent girls having lower body image and self-esteem than their male counterparts.

METHODOLOGY

Problem Statement

To study the relationship between body image, gender differences and self-esteem among adolescents.

Objectives

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To find a relationship between body image and self-esteem
2. To study gender difference in body image and self-esteem.

Hypothesis

1. There is a positive correlation between body image and self-esteem.
2. Gender difference is found in body image among adolescents.
3. There is gender difference in self-esteem among adolescents.

Sample

AGE	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
19	50	50	100

For this study, the present investigators of the paper surveyed a multitude of 150 adolescents from V.E.S. college of Arts, Science and Commerce located in Mumbai city. After discarding the incomplete and irrelevant questionnaires primary data from 100 participants was obtained. There were students from third year degree. Equal number of boys and girls were chosen at random. Method of sample selection was random incidental sampling. Students above and below the age of 19 were excluded.

Tools

Body Satisfaction Questionnaire 16A-

The internal reliability of the BSQ was assessed using the combined data from the 535 women in the community and the sample of 72 patients with bulimia nervosa:

1. Guttman's coefficient of split-half reliability was 0.94.
2. Cronbach's alpha was high and very similar for both halves; alpha=0.94 for part 1, and alpha=0.93 for part
3. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.97.

Thus, the BSQ showed a satisfactory degree of split-half reliability and internal consistency.

Validity: was based on clinical reports that patients with bulimia nervosa show disturbed eating attitudes and behaviour and an extreme level of concern with their shape.

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Rosenberg's scale of self-esteem-

The Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES), developed by sociologist Dr. Morris Rosenberg which is a self-esteem measure widely used in social-science research. It uses a scale of 0-30 where, and a score less than 15 may indicate a problematic low self-esteem.

Reliability: high reliability with internal consistency being 0.77 and minimum Coefficient of Reproducibility was at least 0.90. Wide range of studies showed alpha coefficients within the range 0.72-0.87. Test-retest reliability for 2 weeks was found to be 0.85 (Rosenberg M, 1965).

Procedure

1. Adolescents between the age group 18-19 (late adolescents) were randomly chosen from different schools and colleges from different parts of Mumbai.
2. Equal number of boys and girls were chosen from each age group
3. The investigator of the study was present at the time of data collection.
4. Proper instructions were given to the participants regarding the filling of the questionnaire.
5. The demographic details were assured to remain confidential for research purpose.
6. Around 20-25 minutes were required by the participants for the completion of the questionnaires.
7. The participants were surveyed and assessed on the Body Satisfaction Questionnaire (BSQ) 16A for Body Image and on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale for self-esteem.
8. The scoresheet of every participant was scored and entered into Microsoft Excel for statistical analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following results were obtained from the study.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) of Self-esteem and Body Image

	Self-esteem	Body Image
MEAN (BOYS)	19.72	28.04
MEAN (GIRLS)	17.94	33.26
SD (BOYS)	4.050900631	10.17391623
SD (GIRLS)	3.935241092	15.15337909

As it can be seen in the above table, the mean scores of males in self-esteem and body image was 19.72 and 28.04 respectively and the mean scores of females in self-esteem and body image was 17.94 and 33.26 respectively.

Hence, it can be seen that females have a lower self-esteem than males maybe because of increased social pressure that emphasizes appearance and good looks more than intelligence or athletic ability than for males.

Table 2: Correlation Coefficient obtained between Body Image and Self-Esteem

	Body Image and Self-Esteem
Males	-0.463212328**
Females	-0.19412194**

*NOTE: ** states correlation coefficient insignificant at 0.01 level.*

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It can be seen that there is no correlation between Body Image and Self-esteem in males and females with respect to this research sample. Many other sociocultural factors, media, peers, race and ethnicity may be other variables other than self-esteem that may have a negative impact on body image. (Rheanna et.al, 2011)

Table 3: Chi-square obtained between males and females in Body Image and Self-Esteem

	Chi-square coefficient	p value	significance
Self Esteem	0.9821	0.611979	Not significant at $p < .05$
Body Image	8.7087	0.0334	Significant at $p < .05$

The chi-square coefficient (8.7087) for body image is significant indicating that there is gender difference in body image among boys and girls. The possible reason could be that it is more likely to see boys in situations that encourage competition, conflict, power, and excitement while girls in situations of intimacy, self-disclosure, support, and co-rumination. While girls tend to develop emotions related to internalizing problems, boys tend to develop emotions related to externalizing problems. Considering the body ideal for males (muscular and lean) vs. females (thin body), it can explain why adolescent girls reported more body dissatisfaction compared to boys. (Moria Golan, 2015)

The chi-square coefficient (0.9821) for self-esteem is insignificant indicating that there is no gender difference in self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

Concerning the hypothesis of the study we find that:

1. There is no correlation between body image and self-esteem in males and females. Hence, the hypothesis is rejected.
2. Gender difference is seen in Body image among adolescents. Hence the hypothesis is retained.
3. No gender difference in self-esteem between the two genders. Hence the hypothesis is rejected.

Limitations of The Study

1. Small sample size of the adolescent population makes it difficult to infer the derived results to the larger mass.
2. All participants of the present study belonged to the average or above average social and economic backgrounds. Therefore, the relation between Body image and self-esteem among adolescents under lower socio-economic background and among different cultures is yet to be explored.

Suggestions for Further Studies

1. Development and changes in Body image could be compared among adolescents of different age-groups; i.e from age 13 to 19.
2. Gender difference between body image and other factors affecting body image could also be studied. Even cross cultural studies could be done.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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