

Research Paper

## It's All About Being Kind to Oneself: A Quantitative Research on Positive Body Image, Self-Compassion and Self-Worth in College Students

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### ABSTRACT

Positive body image is how we accept, acknowledge and appreciate our bodies and its functionality. The concept of positive body image revolves around the fact the people accept and even admire their body, including those aspects that are inconsistent with idealized images. It is not simply an absence of negative body image. It is imperative to understand the existence of positive body image in both men and women and find out ways and strategies in such way that it can be increased. Self-compassion training seems to be one of the ways that might increase positive body image and further may have impact on self-worth. The study examines the gender differences on positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth between men and women and the relationship between positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth. T-test, correlation and regression were used as statistical tools for data analysis using SPSS version 27. The results reveal that there are no significant gender differences on positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth between men and women and there is a positive relationship among positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth. The results further reveal that positive body image, and self-compassion predicted/influenced self-worth. The study is significant because it provides scope for the development and establishment of self-compassion interventions in schools and colleges for the promotion and enhancement of positive body image, such that there is an increase in self-worth also. It could be concluded that men and women do not differ in the way they perceive positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth, and positive body image and self-compassion influence our self-worth. It makes us believe that we are more than just looks and must be kind and warm to ourselves.

**Keywords:** *Body Image, Positive Body Image, Self-Compassion, Self-Worth*

It has been closely examined that much of the research on body image in history has been dominated and guided by a focus on pathology that intended to understand negative body image in the absence of considering positive body image in people of all ages.

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Body image is a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses how people think, feel, and act in relation to their own physical characteristics (Muth & Cash, 1997).

Given that most of the people are unhappy and displeased with the image of their body at some point of time, the main concern here is not how dissatisfied people are with their bodies but how their view of their body is affecting their idea of self and mental health. Even during the current times, when body positivity is on rise i.e., how having a pandemic body is absolutely fine, there are chances that that such positivity is coming from the media ideals and not because they are kind, warm and accepting towards their bodies, in the first place. Acknowledging and accepting their body for the way it is just for the sake of being part of a group does more harm than good – it leads to down spiralling of self-worth.

Keeping in mind the given point, the current research focuses on positive body image in students pursuing post-graduation.

In the most basic sense, positive body image can be considered as low negative body image and/or high body satisfaction. Positive body image, as such a construct, is related to people's heightened qualities and potential for having healthy mental and emotional well-being. When individuals love and respect their physical selves, they may develop a respect for their mental and emotional well-being as well.

Positive body image is needed, not only to reduce the level of body dissatisfaction (negative body image) in people, but also to cater to the specific needs of males and females w.r.t body image concerns. Emphasis is needed to be put on positive body image to help people embrace their bodies and accept it for what it is and not trying to change it to meet the needs and wants of the society but to meet the needs of their overall wellbeing.

Positive body image is a distinct construct and/or concept from negative body image. Negative body image is an issue threatening our society – to all the genders. Negative body image is considered as an unrealistic view of how someone sees their body. Body image dissatisfaction has been associated with incidences of heightened anxiety, and lowered self-esteem, as well as the development of maladaptive eating behaviors and dieting.

The main difference between positive body image and negative body image is how a person perceives herself/himself. Individuals with negative self-perception see themselves in a contorted picture of who they truly are. They feel disappointed, awkward, and far off from others, humiliated, embarrassed, distant from others and unsure. They are bound to build up a dietary issue, nervousness, depression and low confidence. People with positive body image see themselves as they truly are. They appreciate their natural body and value its uniqueness. People with positive body image also feel confident and comfortable and have high self-esteem and worth. A negative body image occurs when people see, think and perceive us in a negative way and they end up feeling uncomfortable, unjust and unsatisfied with their physical appearance.

One of the main aims of body positivity is to explore how body perception affects mental and emotional health and well-being of people. People's feelings about their appearance and even how they judge their self-worth are influenced by their body image. According to research, having a poor body image is linked to an increased risk of mental illnesses such as depression and eating disorders.

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Moreover, much of the research done in the area of body image has been done on women, ignoring the experiences and perspectives of 'men', to a certain extent. It stands imperative to take men into consideration, when studying about body image, and especially positive body image. The reason being, even though most research has been conducted surrounding female body image; male body image research, while becoming more popular, still lacks the depth and breadth of its counterpart and this serves as a robust rationale for the present study. There is no, as such, distinction about what body image is to men and women, either in positive or negative connotation in the Indian context.

Adding on to the previous comment made, body image issues in boys and men are on the rise, given the emergence of norms and standards of ideal body image. Men prefer not to talk about their body image issues and suffer in silence. The idea of masculinity expects men to be tall, muscular etc. and when they fail to meet these standard and/or expectations set by the society, they feel inadequate and might as well criticise and judge themselves for not being like others, to some extent. Not talking about body image concerns and by not promoting positive body image, men not only experience dissatisfaction and negative emotions, but also low self-esteem, confidence, optimism and reduced sense of self-worth.

As a culture, we know very little about the prevalence of body image in men and boys since body image is traditionally considered a 'feminine problem'. The fact is, men can suffer just as much body dissatisfaction as women, but we may pay less attention to male body image because men are quieter and ignorant about these ideas and issues. If a man shows vulnerability, he risks being kicked out of the men's club of power. In the developmental period of adolescence, boys have a number of groups of which they become part of. Being in certain boys' groups comes with expectations and standards to look muscular and strong. Boys who are lean, thin and not muscular – how they are expected to be, are often bullied to an extent that it leads them to feel vulnerable. The negative experiences often lead boys to feel vulnerable and alone, to an extent that they develop body image issues, amongst other mental health issues like low self-esteem and depression. Therefore, it is necessary to promote positive body image in men so that they are able to accept their body for what it is, embrace it and enhance their overall wellbeing.

But, as our society gets better at dealing with mental health, we need to make sure that men's body image isn't left out of the conversation and should be dealt with sensitivity and compassion. Body image is a psychological issue that needs to be addressed, not avoided – especially in men. And for the very same reason, the perception of body positive image must be enhanced in both women and men.

Positive body image is said to be linked to self-perceived body acceptance by others. Others, here, means people around the person - family, friends, romantic partners, a higher power, and society. When people perceive that their bodies are acknowledged and accepted by others, they are less preoccupied with changing their appearance and attending to more how their bodies feel and function. Positive body image can be transmitted implicitly and indirectly via subtle acceptance-based messages from family members and friends about style or appearance (e.g., "The dress looks really good on you" or "That haircut really suits you"), infrequent or less appearance-related talk, and general messages about beauty and love for the body (e.g., "Everyone has a unique beauty." or "We all need to love and appreciate our bodies"). Wood-Barcalow et al., (2010) found in their study that U.S. College women perceive that unconditional acceptance provided by family, friends, peers and

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partners is central in the formation and maintenance of their positive body image and provided examples such as others reminding them that beauty is more than appearance. Researchers have been trying to gain an understanding of the relationship between self-compassion and positive body image, and ways to counteract the negative cultural messages. It is believed that Self-kindness appears to be the self-compassion dimension most linked to body confidence, possibly because it represents a non-critical, kind attitude toward oneself. When one compares his/her appearance to that of other people, they will almost always come with negative comparison.

The research consistently points to self-compassion as a psychological characteristic that can be honed to help women accept and support their bodies in even the most difficult situations and help them develop and maintain a healthy body image in the face of sociocultural threats (Tylka, 2019).

With self-compassion, we give ourselves the same kindness and care we would give to another person. Self-compassion, as a construct, can be considered as a healthy form of self-acceptance (Neff, 2003). This is to say that if you are being self-compassionate, you are healthily accepting yourself – with all the perfections, imperfections and flaws.

Self-compassion has been seen as having three interrelated components that are exhibited and portrayed during times of pain and failure, namely - self-kindness and self-judgment, common humanity and isolation, and mindfulness and over-identification.

Self-compassion seems to be related to positive body image. Researchers have been trying to gain understanding of the relationship between self-compassion and positive body image, and ways to lessen the negative cultural messages.

A subjective evaluation of one's physical appearance, plays a crucial role in adolescents' personality and social development, especially for women. According to objectification theory, adolescents in many cultures are pressured to maintain an ideal body image of being thin and attractive in order to be considered valuable females. This presupposition may become so strong that female adolescents are objectified. Their worth is determined by their outward and superficial appearance rather than their internal values and qualities.

Body image satisfaction has been shown to affect how female adolescents assess their self-worth and is regarded as a source of self-esteem. When one's happiness and satisfaction is spoiled and harmed, one's self-esteem is likely to suffer as well. Self-compassion can be seen moderating the association of body image satisfaction and self-esteem. Mindfulness, self-kindness, and the understanding of personal experience as normal human experience are three central elements of self-compassion that are likely to alleviate the connection between body image satisfaction and self-esteem. So, to say, female adolescents should learn to recognise their physical defects through self-kindness. In the same way, by reducing over-association of these flaws, mindfulness can help minimise the negative effects of these flaws. These traits, combined with the belief that physical imperfections and flaws are inherent and universal, can reduce the positive relationship between body image dissatisfaction and self-worth. It is to be believed that self-compassion likely reduces the degree to which a female adolescent is affected by her body image satisfaction, and then use this satisfaction to appraise and evaluate herself.

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When people who have negative feelings about their bodies take a more supportive approach they can turn those feelings into positive emotions like gratitude and appreciation for their height, shape and weight. That is to say, take a more compassionate stance. Wasykiw et al. (2012) reported that women in college who have a high a degree of self-compassion often have a higher level of body appreciation.

When it comes to body image, self-compassion can help women recognise that we all have flaws and empower them to treat their bodies with kindness and acceptance, resulting in a new respect for their bodies (Albertson, Neff, & Dill-Shackleford, 2015). Numerous correlational studies demonstrate that women with high levels of self-compassion body have higher levels of body appreciation (Homan& Tylka, 2015; Marta-Simões, Ferreira, & Mendes, 2016; Tylka, Russell, & Neal, 2015; Wasykiw, MacKinnon, & MacLellan, 2012).

Body image and self-worth have a profound impact on a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Body image is one of the most important aspects of a person's self-concept, since it allows them to achieve a more stable and mental state. In this way, our view of our bodies and the emotions associated with them have a major impact on our self-concept and our self-worth. Self-worth is more about valuing our inherent worth as a person and not measuring our self on external actions, wins and achievements.

Self-worth being a component of self-esteem hasn't been much researched on. Across all the countries, results depict those men have higher levels of self-esteem than women have and both genders show age-graded increments from late adolescence to middle adulthood.

Exposure to a culture that promotes unrealistic body image can force an individual to look a certain way, and when they fail, they lose their self-worth. On the other hand, individuals who appreciate and love their bodies regardless of the imperfections are more likely to accept themselves and have a higher sense of self-worth and are comfortable in their bodies. There is very less research on the relationship between positive body image and self-worth. Moreover, based on prior research that has established the fact that negative body image affects self-worth, it is imperative to check if the same affect is provided by positive body image on self-worth of a person.

For certain women, their physical appearance is an important part of their overall sense of self-worth. (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003). Self-objectification, appearance anxiety, low self-esteem, low body appreciation, and disordered eating have all been related to having a sense of self-worth that is based on appearance (i.e., appearance-contingent self-worth) making it an important construct for evaluation and objective for intervention for all the genders.

Taking these points in consideration, the present study attempts to account for a gap in the literature pertaining to positive body image by utilizing a diverse community sample of male and female college students in India and its relation to self-compassion and self-worth.

### ***Objectives***

- To examine the gender differences on the three variables, namely positive body, self-compassion and self-worth in college students.
- To examine the relationship between positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth in college students at Indian Universities.

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- To examine the predictive effect of positive body image and self-compassion on self-worth.

### *Hypotheses*

Ho – There is statistically no significant difference on positive body image, self-compassion, and self-worth between men and women.

Ho – There is no significant relationship between positive body image, self-compassion, and self-worth in college students.

Ho – There is no predictive effect of positive body image and self-compassion on self-worth.

### *Research Design*

The design for the study was based on a cross-sectional sampling using a computerized survey. In the present study, the survey was distributed by availability to a sample of college students.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Sampling*

Purposive or judgment sampling has been used in the current research to collect data from the participants.

### *Sample*

In this research study, participants consisted of post-graduate women and men from different universities in India. A total of 137 participants took part. The age group selected for this research was 21-24 years, of which 10% participants were 21 years old, 25.4% participants were 22 years old, 39.2% participants were 23 years old and 25.4% participants were 24 years old with the mean age of 22.8 years (Standard Deviation – 0.93). The research included an equal percentage of both the genders i.e., 50% females and 50% males.

### *Instruments*

- **Self-Compassion Scale:** The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003) measures participants' overall capacity to be kind and non-judgmental toward their own suffering. The self-compassion scale includes 6 sub-components with a total of 26 items such as a) self-kindness, b) self-judgment, c) common humanity, d) isolation, e) mindfulness, and f) over-identification. These items are scored on a 5-point scale (1= almost never; 5=almost always) and averaged, with higher scores representing higher levels of self-compassion. Participants are asked to rate the extent to which each statement applies to them the Likert scale. The SCS has a total score range of 26 to 130. The Cronbach alpha for the sample in this study is .786.
- **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale:** Rosenberg self-esteem scale was constructed and published by Morris Rosenberg in 1965 in the paper '*Society and the adolescent self-image*'. Rosenberg self-esteem scale is a 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. All items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-esteem. The Cronbach alpha for the sample in this study is .804.
- **Indian Positive Body Scale:** The Indian Positive Body Scale was constructed by Pankaj Jain and Gyanesh Kumar Tiwari in May 2020. The Indian Positive Body Scale is used to measure the idea of body appreciation and body effectiveness

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together as a concept in people. The scale has two components, namely - a.) Body Appreciation - The body appreciation referred to the respect, satisfaction, acceptance, positive feelings, attractiveness, self-enhancing effects and God-giftedness of body and its attributes; b) Body Effectiveness - This body effectiveness dimension consists of the items that consisted of the effectiveness of body in achieving various life success and outcomes and helpful in achieving social praise, opportunities, positive feedback, identity as well as positive efforts. The Cronbach alpha for the sample in this study is .917.

### ***Procedure***

To accomplish the objectives, an online survey encompassing the chosen scales of the three constructs was constructed. The online constructed form was distributed to friends and family and were asked to forward it so as to get more responses and was also shared on social media sites by the researcher and her few friends.

### ***Data analysis***

SPSS (Version 27) was used for data analysis. The analysis procedure started with the descriptive analysis, during which the distribution, mean, standard deviation of scores, minimum and maximum scores for the variables – positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth studied were examined. T-test analysis was performed to check the differences between male and females on the variables - positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth. Correlation analysis was performed to check the level of association between the variables - positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth. Lastly, regression analysis was then conducted to check whether or not positive body image and self-compassion predicted self-worth; wherein self-worth was the outcome variable and Positive body image and self-compassion were the predicting variables.

## **RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

The overarching aim of the current research was to understand and explore the association between positive body image, self-compassion, and self-worth among students pursuing post-graduation in Indian Universities. The present study findings mainly suggest that a relationship exists between positive body image, self-compassion, and self-worth. Also, there exists no difference between men and women on positive body image, self-compassion, and self-worth. This means that there is no difference in the way both men and women perceive positive body image, are self-compassionate and have self-worth.

In this research study, a total of 130 participants took part in the study. The age group selected for this research was 21-24 years, of which 10% participants were 21 years old (13/130), 25.4% participants were 22 years old (33/130), 39.2% participants were 23 years old (51/130) and 25.4% participants were 24 years old (33/130) with the mean age of 22.8 years (Standard Deviation – 0.93). The research included an equal percentage of both the genders i.e., 50% females (65/130) and 50% males (65/130). However, their level of education was divided into categories of 2 years of post-graduation i.e., 43.8% participants belonged to master's 1<sup>st</sup> year (73/130) and 56.2% participants belonged to master's 2<sup>nd</sup> year (57/130). Given the total number of participants (N) as 130, the mean of Self-compassion is 80.04 (SD = 11.95) with minimum and maximum score as 52.00 and 115.00 respectively. The mean of Positive body image is 115.44 (SD = 22.09) with minimum and maximum score as 56.00 and 160.00 respectively. The mean of Self-worth is 17.40 (SD = 4.73) with minimum and maximum score as 2.00 and 30.00 respectively.

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**Table 1 Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-Compassion	130	52.00	115.00	80.0462	11.95850
Positive Body Image	130	56.00	160.00	115.4462	22.09987
Self-Worth	130	2.00	30.00	17.4000	4.73417

To accomplish the first objective of checking the gender differences on each variable, null hypothesis was formed for each variable, and an independent t-test was used. An independent t-test was used to examine the difference between men and women postgraduates with regard to positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth. The null hypothesis stated that there is no statistically significant difference on positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth between men and women.

**Table 2 Group Statistics**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. error Mean
Positive Body Image	Female	65	116.1077	18.08411	2.24306
	Male	65	114.7846	25.62256	3.17809
Self-Compassion	Female	65	79.9538	12.86277	1.59543
	Male	65	80.1385	11.08050	1.37437
Self-Worth	Female	65	18.1692	5.17074	0.64135
	Male	65	16.6308	4.15169	.51495

**Table 3 Independent Samples Test**

			Levine's Test for Equality of variances		Test for Equality of Means	
			F	Sig.	t	df
Positive Body Image	Equal variance assumed		5.636	.059	.340	128
Self-Compassion	Equal variance assumed		.535	.466	-.088	128
Self-Worth	Equal variance assumed		1.468	.228	1.870	128

As shown in Table 3, homogeneity of variance was assessed with Levine's test, which revealed equality of error variance for positive body image,  $F(5.636) = 0.059$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , self-compassion,  $F(0.535) = 0.466$ ,  $p > 0.05$  and, self-worth,  $F(1.468) = 0.228$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . This means that the two variances are approximately equal because the result is not significant. Because homogeneity of error variance was satisfied and the second assumption was met, t-statistics based on 'equal variance assumed' were used. The test showed that the difference between group means was not significant at the 5% level of significance ( $t(128) = 0.340$ ,  $p = 0.734$ , two-tailed test) for positive body image, ( $t(128) = -0.088$ ,  $p = 0.930$ , two-tailed



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test) for self-compassion, and  $t(128) = 1.870, p = 0.064$ , two-tailed test) for self-worth. It can be concluded that the null hypothesis for positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth was retained that there is no statistically significant difference on positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth between men and women. This indicates that females display approximately the same degree of positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth as males ( $H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$ ).

To accomplish the second objective, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the direction and strength of the relationship between the study variables – positive body image, self-compassion, and self-worth. Correlation analysis provided information that helped in determining which variables were meaningfully associated with the variables of interest. The null hypotheses stated for Pearson correlation was that there is no significant relationship among the variables – positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth.

**Table 4 Correlation**

Measures		Self-Compassion	Positive Body Image	Self-Worth
Self-Compassion	Pearson Correlation	1	.291**	.563**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-	.001	.000
	N	130	130	130
Positive Body Image	Pearson Correlation	.291**	1	.478**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	-	.000
	N	130	130	130
Self-Worth	Pearson Correlation	.563**	.478**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	-
	N	130	130	130

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test)*

As shown in Table 4, there is a low correlation of .291 between self-compassion and positive body image. Moreover, it is also depicted that self-compassion and positive body image are positively correlated,  $r(128) = .29, p < .01$ . Since, it is significant at 0.01 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis, that there is a significant relationship between self-compassion and positive body image, is accepted. The second null hypothesis stated for Pearson correlation was that there is no significant relationship between positive body image and self-worth. As shown in Table 4, there is a moderate correlation of .478 between positive body image and self-worth. Moreover, it is also depicted that positive body image and self-worth are positively correlated,  $r(128) = .47, p < .01$ . Since, it is significant at 0.01 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis, that there is a significant relationship between positive body image and self-worth, is accepted. The third null hypothesis stated for Pearson

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correlation was that there is no significant relationship between self-compassion and self-worth. As shown in Table 4, there is a high correlation of .563 between self-compassion and self-worth. Moreover, it is also depicted that between self-compassion and self-worth are positively correlated,  $r(128) = .56, p < .01$ . Since, it is significant at 0.01 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis, that there is a significant relationship between self-compassion and self-worth, is accepted.

To accomplish the third objective, multiple (stepwise) regression analysis was used to test if positive body image and self-compassion can influence participants' self-worth. Assumptions of the multiple regression model were met (VIF < 10 (1.09), Tolerance > 0.1 (0.9), Durbin-Watson value = 2.010 (Table 5 and Table 8) The predictor variables chosen for multiple regression were positive body image and self-compassion, whereas the outcome variable chosen for multiple regression was self-worth. Self-worth was chosen as an outcome variable because there was a low correlation between positive body image and self-compassion, and self-worth correlated moderately with positive body image and highly with self-compassion. So, taking either positive body image or self-compassion as an outcome variable would have been redundant.

It was hypothesized that there is no predictive effect of positive body image and self-compassion on self-worth. Results shows that 42.5% of the variance in self-worth can be accounted for by the two predictors (Table 5), collectively,  $F(2,127) = 46.89, p < .005$  (Table 6). The model was significant to predict self-worth. Elaboratively, the  $R^2$  for the overall model was 42.5% with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 41.6%, a medium size effect is reported by the model of variations in self-worth which is accounted by the linear combination of the predictor variables (positive body image and self-compassion)

Since the p value is less than 0.05 (Table 6) the null hypothesis was rejected that stated that there is no predictive effect of positive body image and self-compassion on self-worth. In this case, the alternate hypothesis, stating that there is a predictive effect of positive body image and self-compassion on self-worth, was accepted. To test which predictor (positive body image and self-compassion) predicts self-worth (it could be either positive body image or self-compassion or both), an individual t-test was used. Looking at the unique individual contributions of the predictors, the result shows that positive body image ( $\beta = .343, t = 4.872, p = .000$ ) and self-compassion ( $\beta = .463, t = 6.588, p = .000$ ) positively predict self-worth (Table 7). Also, the positive slope for self-compassion (.183) as predictor of self-worth indicated there was about a .183 increase in self-worth for each 1-point increase in self-compassion. In other words, self-worth tends to increase as self-compassion increases. The positive slope for positive body image (.073) as predictor of self-worth indicated there was about .073 increase in self-worth for each 1-point increase in positive body image. In other words, self-worth tends to increase as positive body increases. This suggests that individuals who have a positive body image and are compassionate to themselves have a sense of self-worth in them.

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**Table 5 Model Summary**

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of the estimate	Change Statistic						
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change	F	Durbin-Watson
1	.563 <sup>a</sup>	.317	.312	3.92699	.317	59.481	1	128	.000		
2	.652 <sup>b</sup>	.425	.416	3.61874	.108	23.735	1	127	.000	2.010	

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Compassion  
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Compassion, Positive Body Image  
 c. Dependent Variable: Self-Worth

**Table 6 ANOVA**

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	917.279	1	917.279	59.481	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	1973.921	128	15.421		
	Total	2891.200	129			
2	Regression	1228.100	2	614.050	46.891	.000 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	1663.100	127	13.095		
	Total	2891.200	129			

- a. Dependent Variable: Self-Worth  
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Compassion  
 c. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Compassion, Positive Body Image

**Table 7 Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		95.0% Confidence Interval for B		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	-.449	2.340		-.192	.848	-5.079	4.181
	Self-Compassion	.223	.209	.563	7.712	.000	.166	.280
2	(Constant)	-5.763	2.416		-2.385	.019	-10.545	-.982
	Self-Compassion	.183	.028	.463	6.588	.000	.128	.239
	Positive Body Image	.073	.015	.343	4.872	.000	.044	.103

- a. Dependent Variable: Self Worth

**Table 8 Excluded variables**

	Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Tolerance	Statistics VIF
Positive Body Image	.343 <sup>b</sup>	4.872	.000	.397	.915	1.09

- a. Dependent Variable: Self-Worth  
 b. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), Self-Compassion

## **DISCUSSION**

The overarching aim of the current research was to understand and explore the association between positive body image, self-compassion, and self-worth among students pursuing post-graduation in Indian Universities. Theoretically, positive body image means to accept, appreciate and, acknowledge the whole of one's body – the way it looks, understanding the concept of beauty, and having inner positivity – for not trying to engage in acts that would change any aspect of their body. Self-compassion means to have a healthy and stable stance toward oneself that does not involve critical evaluation of oneself. Self-worth means to value and have high regards for yourself. Despite of failures and what others say, a person is a part of his/her team and gives the required respect and dignity.

Taking in consideration the first objective of the study 'to examine the gender differences on the three variables, namely positive body, self-compassion and self-worth in college students', an independent t-test was used to examine the difference between men and women postgraduates with regard to positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth. The research clearly indicates that females display approximately the same degree of positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth as males.

One reason to think of such results is that higher education and well-paying jobs may afford individuals greater financial and occupational opportunity, as well as personal means to improve their psychological, emotional and physical health, including attaining more self-esteem and positive body image. Paxton et al. (2005) suggested that men and women with higher self-esteem tend to evaluate their bodies in a positive manner and are satisfied and content with their bodies at all ages. Women and men opposing conventional beauty standards are less susceptible to slim or muscular ideal media signals and, as a result, are less triggered to disappointment and dissatisfaction by self-ideal differences. Men and women have been appreciating and acknowledging the functionality, features, and health and wellness of the body and praising their body for what it is able to do, what it represents, and its unique features, and not solely appreciating their appearance or the extent and level to which their body aligns with the ideals and norms of cultural appearance – what is and what is not culturally appropriate way to look for them.

Women and men having been showing the same degree of self-compassion ideally because of the changing roles and necessities in today's world. Gilligan et al. (1990) explained how females, by the time they reach adolescence stage, begin to realize that there are certain values that are expected of them, such as nurturing and relational care. This makes them more self-conscious and less self-compassionate, comparing to men. However, with changing time where both the genders are fighting the good fight for equality and equity, both men and women are taking up roles that were only expected of from either of the gender at earlier times. Both men and women are now being taught to be more kind and forgiving to themselves. Self – compassion levels may increase later in life, after the developmental phase of adolescence in both women and men – at the time when they have matured and have gained a sense of agency and identity.

Much of the research has focussed on self-esteem as construct. Self-worth and self-esteem, though with different meanings, are used interchangeably. Past research findings on gender differences in self-worth have been inconsistent. However, the present research indicates that females display approximately the same degree of self-worth as males. A number of researchers have found that males score higher than females on standard measures of self-

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esteem (Allgood-Merten & Stockard, 1991; Feather 1991) whereas other researchers found that females report higher levels of self-esteem (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994). According to studies published by the American Psychological Association, self-esteem rises during puberty and then declines in young adulthood, but there is no substantial difference between men's and women's self-esteem during any of those life stages, contrary to popular opinion. Because of the prevalent belief that men have higher self-esteem than women, the converging evidence on gender similarity in self-esteem is significant because false assumptions in gender differences in self-esteem can bring considerable costs. For instance, because of the widespread belief that men have higher self-esteem than women, parents, teachers, and counsellors may ignore self-esteem issues in male adolescents and young men. Moreover, focus on self-esteem issues of women in ways that is not required or in areas where much attention isn't needed, would only do more harm than good. Children are usually discouraged from bragging about themselves and their accomplishments, mainly, at the expense of others. Such expressions may lead to unexpressed self-esteem. As a part, their self-worth will also fluctuate.

Taking in consideration the second objective of the study 'to examine the relationship between positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth in college students at Indian Universities', Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the direction and strength of the relationship. The research clearly indicates a positive relationship between the study variables – positive body image, self-compassion, and self-worth.

A large body of research has been trying to acquire an understanding of the relationship between self-compassion and positive body image, and ways to counteract the negative cultural messages. It is believed that self-kindness appears to be the self-compassion dimension most linked to body appreciation and confidence, possibly because it represents a non-critical, kind attitude toward oneself. When one compares his/her appearance to that of other people, they will almost always come with negative comparison. Similarly, when one abstains from comparing oneself to another and accept, acknowledge, and appreciate their bodily features and honour the functionality of the body, they will almost always come with positive body image. When people having negative feelings about their bodies take a more supportive approach, they can turn those feelings into positive emotions like gratitude and appreciation for their features of the body. This is to say, take a more compassionate stance. Consistent with the current research, Wasykiw et al. (2012) reported that women in college who have a high a degree of self-compassion often have a higher level of body appreciation. When it comes to body image, self-compassion can help women and men recognize that we all have flaws and empower them to treat their bodies with kindness and acceptance, resulting in a new respect for their bodies (Albertson, Neff, & Dill-Shackleford, 2015).

Body image is closely linked to self-worth – which is how you feel about yourself truly, your potential and abilities. It might as well be considered as the inner voice. People who have low self-worth may also have negative body image, because of their low opinions of themselves, their potential, and their abilities. Self-worth would reflect in how one takes care of their bodies emotionally, physically, and spiritually. It is said that having positive feelings toward one's physical being may translate into positive feelings toward the self as a whole. For instance, in a sample of U.S. college students, body appreciation was significantly associated with self-esteem in both men and women (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2013). Thus, it seems that positive body image is associated with higher self-esteem in both men and women. Lastly, it is worth mentioning here is that people who don't like their bodies for

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what it actually is or how it actually looks may not feel good about themselves. This would affect their sense of self-worth. People like to think that if they have a perfect body, in such a way that others find them attractive, they will like their bodies, and this will, perhaps, increase their sense of self-worth. But it should begin the other way round. People must acknowledge their bodies and its functionality and appreciate the features of the body. When people accept their bodies for what it is and how it looks, a sense of self-worth automatically prevails. A healthy and positive body image can make a person recognise their qualities and strengths that make them feel good about themselves in all aspects. An environment where one is valued and supportive for who s/he is, regardless of his appearance, stands essential to self-esteem and body image.

Even in times of unforeseen situations, when sense of self-worth fluctuates, being self-compassionate would lead better understanding of the situation that you may not be the first person to be alone in this situation and you must not be hard on yourself. Having clarity of the situation by not being hard on yourself, you may restore the lost sense of self-worth. The degree to which people feel kind, connected, and centred when confronting personal inadequacies may be more important for a healthy sense of self than merely judging oneself positively. Previous research found that self-compassion is significantly associated with happiness, optimism, and positive affect which, further, heightens self-worth. Even in times of unforeseen situations, when sense of self-worth fluctuates, being self-compassionate would lead better understanding of the situation that you may not be the first person to be alone in this situation and you must not be hard on yourself. Having clarity of the situation by not being hard on yourself, you may restore the lost sense of self-worth. The degree to which people feel kind, connected, and centred when confronting personal inadequacies may be more important for a healthy sense of self than merely judging oneself positively.

Taking in consideration the third objective of the study ‘to examine the predictive effect of positive body image and self-compassion on self-worth.’, multiple (stepwise) regression analysis was used to test if positive body image and self-compassion can influence participants' self-worth. The research clearly indicates that an individual's views on positive body image and self-compassion can influence their self-worth.

Body image and self-worth begins in the mind, and not in the spoken words of others or in the mirror. They may change the way we understand our value. Internalized unrealistic body expectations can cause women to place their self-worth in their appearance. Self-worth is the conviction that you are loveable and important unrelatedly of how you judge your traits or how you look. When we have a positive body image, we, most probably, end up liking and accepting the way we are. As in, the way we look and the way our body functions, even when we don't follow the media ideal body image. The healthy attitude gained towards one's body allow us to explore other areas of growing in one's life, such as establishing good relationships with friends, family, and colleagues. This, perhaps, would challenge us mentally and physically. Developing and acknowledging these parts of oneself can increase our self-worth. It is important to recognize that our body is our own, no matter how it looks or what functions it performs – for it may change our self-worth. People with a positive body image are likely to have a sound mental and physical health. Having a positive body image means respecting your body for how it looks and what functions it performs. When one is able to realize this fact, their sense of self-worth would automatically increase because they are most likely to believe that this is how they look and this is how they body functions, which is acceptable and celebrated by them. Taking this point in consideration,

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Harter (1999) has mentioned that the perceptions of a person's physical appearance and self-worth are linked, in such a way that perceived appearance consistently emerges as the strongest single predictor of self-esteem. Perceived physical appearance is considered as building self-confidence in people (Coyl, 2009).

Self-compassion is one of the ways to enhance one's self-worth. It is the ability to be warm and kind to oneself and actually say and do kind things towards ourselves the same way we would do for a good friend rather than being self-critical. Self-compassion creates a sense of self-worth because it leads people to genuinely care about their own physical and emotional well-being and recover after a failure. People with high self-compassion know that they can treat themselves kindly – without being overly judgmental and critical – while also recognizing what is best for them in the long-term. So, even after few setbacks when they are hitting rock-bottom and their sense of self-esteem is spiralling down, their sense of self-worth would remain intact. Interestingly, when we talk about self-worth, body image or appearance is one of the many factors that affect our self-worth. Body image satisfaction has been shown to affect how women assess their self-worth and is regarded as a source of self-esteem. When one's happiness and satisfaction is harmed, one's self-worth is likely to suffer as well. Self-compassion is considered as an appropriate moderator than can enable effective intervention.

Positive body image is needed, not only to reduce the level of body dissatisfaction (negative body image) in people, but also to cater to the specific needs of men and women w.r.t body image concerns. Emphasis is needed to be put on positive body image to help people embrace their bodies and accept it for what it is and not trying to change it to meet the needs of the society but to meet the needs of their overall wellbeing and self-worth. Relating to the current findings, positive body image and self-compassion influence our self-worth. It makes us believe that we are more than just are looks and must be kind and warm to ourselves.

### **CONCLUSION**

The research study addressed the gap in current research by examining the relationship between positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth in students pursuing post-graduation in Indian universities and provides additional literature on the subject matter that could improve interventions among the population group being studied.

The study seems significant because it advances the understanding and knowledge of positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth within the field of behavioral health, by examining the possible relationship between positive body image, self-compassion and self-worth among students pursuing post-graduation aged 21-24 years. For example, the results obtained from this study could be used for informational purposes to assist in the development of interventions to combat negative body image or body dissatisfaction and promote and/or enhance positive body image. Promoting positive body image appears promising in a country like India where, more often than not, women are judged and criticised for the way they look or how their body functions. Since, it was apparent in the research that positive body image and self-worth were positively correlated, more focus can be put on enhancing body positivity in both men and women, such that their appearance contingent self-worth increases significantly and they do not feel dissatisfied with their bodies. Interventions aimed at increasing self-compassion may have potential for preventing body image distress and enhancing positive ways of relating to one's body for students on

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college campuses. Since the population of young adults is more concerned with following body image ideals to an extent that it leads to body image dissatisfaction and critical, harsh and judgemental stance, it stands imperative to develop intervention modules that addresses the concerns of body image in such a way that young adults become more accepting and compassionate towards their bodies. Given the unique contribution of self-compassion and positive body image to self-worth of college students in this study, programs aimed at increasing self-compassion may be particularly relevant in college counselling. Moreover, education courses related to positive body image could be developed and taught in schools from early on. This would inculcate a sense of body positivity in students that all bodies are beautiful and shouldn't be looked down by oneself and others. Since, both men and women perceive positive image from single lens, educating about such concepts could be done together, so that neither of the gender feels left out of the conversation and doesn't degrade or derogate the body image of the other gendered person. In addition to positive body image, cultivating a sense of self-compassion can also help people deal with adverse perceived flaws, imperfections, distress tolerance, avoidance and adjustment.

Lastly, based on the findings of the present study, the researcher highlights some areas for attention of future researchers. Future research could focus on working with different groups of people with wide age range. Future research can focus working with different group of people belonging to LGBTQ+ community, schoolchildren, working professionals, elderly people etc. Future research should triangulate findings with a qualitative component because this would enrich findings in term subjective experiences of self-compassion, positive body image and self-worth.

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***Conflict of Interest***

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