

A Study on the Effect of Body Shape Preoccupations, Verbal Commentary, Perfectionism, and Negative Appearance Evaluations Among Exercisers and Non-Exercisers

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ABSTRACT

Perfectionism as a term has garnered widespread use in social media. Many believe that having a perfect body is the only way to get successful and gain admiration and approval. With the popularity of unrealistic appearance standards, people who don't "fit in" are scrutinized and mocked. Excessive teasing mostly leads to being constantly preoccupied with body shape and image concerns and also evaluating one's self-worth with physical appearance. Negative self-talk, excessive concerns about body shape leads to the constant fear of getting negatively evaluated by other people. The aim of the current research is to study the effects of body shape preoccupations, perfections, verbal commentary on physical appearance, and negative appearance evaluation among exercisers and non-exercisers. For this purpose, a sample of 80 women in the age range 19-30 is taken, out of which 40 are exercisers and 40 are non-exercisers. Standardized measures of Body Shape Preoccupation, Perfectionism, Verbal Commentary, and Negative Appearance Evaluation were administered to the participants. The findings of the study revealed a significant positive correlation of Body Shape Preoccupation with Negative Appearance Evaluation, Self-Critical Perfectionism, and Negative Weight and Shape. The results also found a significant positive correlation between Negative Appearance Evaluation and Rigid Perfectionism. Positive Weight and Shape and Positive General Appearance were also found to have a significant negative correlation with Body Shape Preoccupation. Non-exercisers were found to be higher on Body Shape Preoccupations, Narcissistic Perfectionism, and Positive Weight and Shape than Exercisers. One needs to know their body, be comfortable in it to actually practice self-love. The most important ingredient of self-love is a self-care activity that makes your soul feel alive. And self-love is what most women need to accept their body and its uniqueness.

Keywords: *Physical Appearance, Verbal Commentary, Body Shape, Perfectionism, Exercisers, Negative Appearance*

"Outward appearance is nothing to Him if it is not an expression of the inner" --- Mahatma Gandhi

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Increasingly women nowadays are displaying alarming levels of body shape preoccupations and symptoms of disordered eating. The stereotype regarding physical appearance has led to believe that others could make judgments of people's personality by their physical features like weight, height, shape, etc. The association of beauty with a good personality has become so widespread that now it is commonly believed that the person who fits in the societal standards of having a "perfect body" also possesses other highly valued personality characteristics and virtues. The people who don't conform to the societal standards or are different from them experience teasing and negative comments about their bodies. It's very common to hear comments like "you should lose some weight" or "you look thin like a matchstick" or even "you don't look like a woman", which eventually makes a person avoid any type of situation where their physical appearance could be evaluated. The preoccupation to achieve a perfect body has led many women to engage in unhealthy exercising habits. Exercise could be taken as having both positive and negative influences on these preoccupations. In today's world failure is seen as a weakness and perfectionism has become the most important goal. A common layman might highlight it as being flawless in every aspect of life, whether it is physical appearance, work, or relationships. Especially the idea of "looking perfect" has been conditioned into our minds. Humankind has made its excessive standards of having a perfect body and people who don't "fit in" are deemed as having flaws. One of the features of perfectionism is setting demanding standards and overly evaluating oneself. Most perfectionists relate their inability to achieve the standards set by them with their self-worth. Therefore, they constantly fear that their physical appearance will be negatively evaluated by others and try to avoid such situations. People who strive to achieve the perfect body constantly experience nervousness, anguish, and worries about being bitterly judged by others. In the area of interpersonal influences, verbal commentary is one of the major factors. Verbal Commentary, especially in the form of teasing may vary from good-natured verbal bantering to obnoxious and rude remarks. Such comments affect mental health whether they are coming from significant others or unknown people. In the long run, such comments influence body evaluation. These negative comments added to the perfect body image that is portrayed and exaggerated in media and even in real life also leads to thinking about one's body image and shape. Body shape concerns are the core of eating disorders. As compared to dissatisfaction with one's weight, overvaluation of one's body shape is more dangerous for mental health. Many people are constantly preoccupied with the thoughts of weight, body, attractiveness, etc. This unhealthy preoccupation with body shape leads to believing in the idea of a "perfect body" and striving to achieve that unrealistic standard.

In a study done by Burger and Dolny (2002), it was found that regular exercisers had a higher engagement with disordered eating and weight-preoccupied attitudes. The female participants were not physically active, but showed dissatisfaction with their level of activity and also feared getting fat.

Davis, Claridge, and Fox (1999) found out that after controlling for body size and neurotic perfectionism, attractiveness was found to be positively related to weight preoccupation.

Cline, Lindsay, Gammage, and Kimberley (2016) conducted a study on young adult women and found through regression analysis that positive weight/shape appearance-related commentary significantly predicted higher physical activity.

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Verbal Commentary

Verbal commentary in the form of teasing or criticism is quite prevalent during childhood and adolescence and continues till adulthood too.

Bailey and Ricciardelli (2009) defined verbal commentary as the “form of feedback or messages made about an individual’s physical appearance.”

Appearance-related comments, such as weight teasing, are made to inform the individual of the current trending attractiveness standards and may even pressure him or her to adhere to those unrealistic popular standards (Sylvia, 2004).

Herbozo and Thompson (2006), found a significant correlation between body image disturbance and self-esteem measures, as well as the frequency and effect aspects of commentary. From the results, it was found that the greater occurrence of negative body-related comments had an association with being more negatively affected by them.

In a study done by Kvaem, Soest, Roald, and Skolleborg (2006), the results demonstrated that only emotional reaction to negative comments about appearance strongly predicted both appearance evaluation and orientation, but negative comment frequency did not. The findings highlight the need of distinguishing between the frequency and emotional impact of teasing when investigating body image, as well as personality factors.

The findings of the study done by Herbozo, Menzel, and Thompson (2013) suggested that a young women’s weight status affects the type of appearance-related feedback she receives, as well as how that feedback affects her body image and eating habits.

Body Shape Preoccupations

Women’s perceptions of their bodies are influenced by cultural ideals of beauty and attractiveness. The societal norm for thinness as the “ideal” for feminine appearance, in particular, may have a significant impact on how women regard their bodies and body shape. Shape and weight overvaluation refers to higher-order cognitive content that reflects core negative self-beliefs (e.g., low self-esteem) which might manifest as automatic negative thoughts or dysfunctional assumptions about shape and weight (Fairburn, 2008).

Overvaluation of weight and shape is assessing one’s worth mostly, if not entirely, on the basis of one’s shape and weight, as well as one’s ability to control them (Fairburn, Cooper, & Shafran, 2003).

In a study done by Rodgers, Paxton, and Chabrol (2009), it was found that irrelevant of gender, internalization, and physical appearance comparison only partially mediated the relationship between parental comments and the outcome variables. It was also found that there is a larger proportion of the variability in body shape and eating concerns in females than in males, with both positive and negative parental comments directly leading to body dissatisfaction and then affecting eating outcomes.

Imm and Pruitt (2010) concluded that high-frequency women exercisers have significantly more negative views of their body shape than moderate exercisers and non-exercisers.

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Perfectionism

Hollender (1965), defined perfectionism as “the practice of demanding of oneself or others a higher quality of performance than is required by the situation.”

Frost, Marten, Lahart, and Rosenbelt (1990), conceptualized perfectionism as “the setting of excessively high standards for performance which are accompanied by tendencies for overly critical evaluation of one’s behavior.”

In a 1956 American Psychological Association conference presentation, Ellis (2002), defined perfectionism as “the idea that one should be thoroughly competent, adequate, intelligent, and achieving in all possible respects.”

Prnjak, Jukic, and Tufano (2019) observed no differences between gender or sport types and dieting behavior. It was also found that body satisfaction was the only significant predictor of dieting in female athletes. Body satisfaction was found to be a mediator between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism and dieting.

Taranis and Meyer (2010), conducted a study on young women who exercise and indicated that self-criticism accounted for a relationship between compulsive exercise and high personal standards.

Miller (2014), found that narcissism, self-oriented perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism has a positive relationship with exercise dependence.

Negative Appearance Evaluation

Thompson and Stice (2001) defined fear of negative appearance evaluation as the “(a) apprehension about receiving negative appearance evaluations, (b) avoidance of being physically evaluated, and (c) the expectation of being negatively evaluated physically.”

Fear of Negative Evaluation is the “fear that one will be negatively evaluated because of one’s appearance” (Levinson and Rodebaugh, 2012).

In a study done by Shafique, Gul, and Raseed (2017), maladaptive perfectionism was found to be significantly related to perceived stress and fear of negative evaluation.

Bautista and Hope (2015), found that participants with high social anxiety experienced self-focused thoughts, negative thoughts, and state anxiety in response to increases in negative feedback, and participants with low social anxiety experienced fewer self-focused thoughts in response to increased negative feedback.

Purpose

The purpose is to study the effect of body shape preoccupations, verbal commentary, perfectionism, and negative appearance evaluations among Exercisers and Non-exercisers.

Hypothesis

- There will be no relationship between body shape preoccupation and verbal commentary on physical appearance.
- There will be no relationship between body shape preoccupation and perfectionism.

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- There will be no relationship between body shape preoccupation and fear of negative evaluation.
- There will no difference among exercisers and non-exercisers in body shape preoccupation, verbal commentary on physical appearance, perfectionism and fear of negative evaluation.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total of 80 females participated in the study out of which 40 were exercisers and 40 were non-exercisers. The age of the subjects ranges from 19 to 30 years. Sample was collected from Delhi.

Measures

The following standardized tests were used

- **Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ):** BSQ is an 8-item (short version) self-report measure designed to assess people's body shape preoccupations typical of bulimia nervosa and anorexia nervosa. It was developed by Cooper et al; (1986). Responses were made with a six-point scale with anchors Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Very Often, and Always.
- **Verbal Commentary on Physical Appearance Scale (VCOPAS):** VCOPAS is a 21-item scale designed to assess the frequency and effect of physical appearance-related commentary, developed by Herbozo and Thompson (2006). It has three subscales: Negative Weight and Shape, Positive Weight and Shape, and Positive General Appearance. Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5(always). Unless the participants responded never to a specific comment, they were also asked to rate how positively or adversely they perceived each listed statement on a 5-point scale ranging from very positive to very negative.
- **Big Three Perfectionism Scale (BTPS):** The Big Three Perfectionism Scale is a 16-item (short version) scale designed to assess perfectionism in people. It was developed by Smith, Saklofske, et al., (2016). It has three subscales: Rigid Perfectionism, Self-critical Perfectionism, and Narcissistic Perfectionism.
- **Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Scale (FNAES):** The Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Scale is a 6-item (short version) scale designed to assess the apprehension associated with negative appearance evaluation experience. It was developed by Thomas, Keery, Williams, and Thompson (1998). Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1(not at all) to 5(extremely).

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaire was filled out through google forms. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information to elicit their honest responses without any fear or inhibitions. Standardized psychological tests were administered to participants. Each participant was thanked for their cooperation.

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RESULTS

Table 1: N, Mean and Standard Deviation of Variables

	COMPARISON GROUP	BODY SHAPE PREOCCUPATION	NEGATIVE APPEARANCE EVALUATION	RIGID PERFECTIONISM	SELF-CRITICAL PERFECTIONISM	NARCISSISTIC PERFECTIONISM	NEGATIVE WEIGHT AND SHAPE	POSITIVE WEIGHT AND SHAPE	POSITIVE GENERAL APPEARANCE
N	Exerciser	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
	Non-Exerciser	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Mean	Exerciser	15.1	11.9	12.6	16.2	11.7	22.8	12.8	24.8
	Non-Exerciser	19.4	13.5	12.9	17.7	13.8	25.9	15.3	26.7
Standard deviation	Exerciser	6.50	4.83	3.91	5.52	4.71	8.15	4.21	4.67
	Non-Exerciser	9.92	4.90	4.30	5.66	5.13	8.51	4.52	5.69

Table 2: Correlation of Variables

	BODY SHAPE PREOCCUPATION	NEGATIVE APPEARANCE EVALUATION	RIGID PERFECTIONISM	SELF-CRITICAL PERFECTIONISM	NARCISSISTIC PERFECTIONISM	NEGATIVE WEIGHT AND SHAPE	POSITIVE WEIGHT AND SHAPE	POSITIVE GENERAL APPEARANCE
BODY SHAPE PREOCCUPATION	—							
NEGATIVE APPEARANCE EVALUATION	0.549 ***	—						
RIGID PERFECTIONISM	0.168	0.378 ***	—					
SELF-CRITICAL PERFECTIONISM	0.241 *	0.352 **	0.498 ***	—				
NARCISSISTIC PERFECTIONISM	0.095	0.155	0.434 ***	0.447 ***	—			
NEGATIVE WEIGHT AND SHAPE	0.341 **	-0.020	-0.179	-0.045	0.123	—		
POSITIVE WEIGHT AND SHAPE	-0.253 *	0.001	0.171	0.048	0.182	-0.033	—	
POSITIVE GENERAL APPEARANCE	-0.255 *	0.002	0.035	-0.083	-0.061	0.145	0.510 ***	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 3: T-statistics Table

	Group	N	Mean	Median	Statistic	P
BODY SHAPE PREOCCUPATION	Exerciser	40	15.1	13.0	-2.267	0.026
	Non-Exerciser	40	19.4	16.5		

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NEGATIVE APPEARANCE EVALUATION	Exerciser	40	11.9	10.0	-1.448	0.152
	Non-Exerciser	40	13.5	13.0		
RIGID PERFECTIONISM	Exerciser	40	12.6	13.5	-0.299	0.766
	Non-Exerciser	40	12.9	14.0		
SELF-CRITICAL PERFECTIONISM	Exerciser	40	16.2	16.0	-1.220	0.226
	Non-Exerciser	40	17.7	18.0		
NARCISSISTIC PERFECTIONISM	Exerciser	40	11.7	10.0	-1.951	0.055
	Non-Exerciser	40	13.8	14.0		
NEGATIVE WEIGHT AND SHAPE	Exerciser	40	22.8	22.5	-1.651	0.103
	Non-Exerciser	40	25.9	28.0		
POSITIVE WEIGHT AND SHAPE	Exerciser	40	12.8	13.0	-2.663	0.009
	Non-Exerciser	40	15.3	16.0		
POSITIVE GENERAL APPEARANCE	Exerciser	40	24.8	24.0	-1.676	0.098
	Non-Exerciser	40	26.7	27.0		

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results found out there is a significant positive correlation between Negative Appearance Evaluation and Body Shape Preoccupation ($r=0.549$, $p<.001$). A significant positive correlation was also found between Rigid Perfectionism and Negative Appearance Evaluation ($r=0.378$, $p<.001$) but there is no significant correlation between Rigid Perfectionism and Body Shape Preoccupation. It was also found that there was a significant positive correlation between Self-Critical Perfectionism and Body Shape Preoccupation ($r=0.241$, $p<.05$), a significant positive correlation between Self-Critical Perfectionism and Negative Appearance Evaluation ($r=0.352$, $p<.01$), and a significant positive correlation between Self-Critical Perfectionism and Rigid Perfectionism. The result table depicted a significant positive correlation between Narcissistic Perfectionism and Rigid Perfectionism ($r=0.434$, $p<.001$) and Narcissistic Perfectionism and Self-Critical Perfectionism ($r=0.447$, $p<.001$). But there is no significant correlation between Narcissistic Perfectionism and Body Shape Preoccupation and Narcissistic Perfectionism and Fear of Negative Appearance. It was also established that there is a significant positive correlation between Negative Weight

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and Shape and Body Shape Preoccupation ($r=0.341$, $p<0.341$) A significant negative correlation was found between Positive Weight and Shape and Body Shape Preoccupation ($r= -0.253$, $p<.05$). The result table depicted a significant negative correlation between Positive General Appearance and Body Shape Preoccupation ($r= -0.255$, $p<.05$) and a significant positive correlation between Positive General Appearance and Positive Weight and Shape ($r=0.510$, $p<0.001$).

Table 2 depicts that non-exerciser are higher on body shape preoccupations than Exercisers ($t= -2.267$). The results also found that non-exercisers are higher on Narcissistic Perfectionism than Exercisers ($t= -1.951$). It was also found out that non-exercisers are higher on the Positive Weight and Shape subscale ($t= -2.663$). However, there is no significant difference in both groups in regards to the other variables.

In a study done by Davis (1990), a strong relationship between emotional reactivity and weight preoccupation was found. It was found that among non-exercisers BMI predicted weight preoccupation and for exercisers, subject body shape influenced weight preoccupation. A relation was also found between greater body dissatisfaction and poorer emotional well-being in the exercise group. This group also attributed the importance of their physical appearance to their self-esteem.

Brudzynski and Ebben (2010), found body image to be a significant factor in determining how much a person exercises. It was found that non-exercisers were satisfied with their physical appearance and did not find body image to be a barrier to exercise.

CONCLUSION

The research study comprehends the effects of body shape preoccupations, perfections, verbal commentary on physical appearance, and negative appearance evaluation among exercisers and non-exercisers. For this purpose, a sample of 80 women in the age range 19-30 were collected, out of which 40 are exercisers and 40 are non-exercisers. Standardized measures of Body Shape Preoccupation, Perfectionism, Verbal Commentary, and Negative Appearance Evaluation were administered to the participants. The findings of the study revealed a significant positive correlation of Body Shape Preoccupation with Negative Appearance Evaluation, Self-Critical Perfectionism, and Negative Weight and Shape. The results also found a significant positive correlation between Negative Appearance Evaluation and Rigid Perfectionism. Positive Weight and Shape and Positive General Appearance were also found to have a significant negative correlation with Body Shape Preoccupation. Non-exercisers were found to be higher on Body Shape Preoccupations, Narcissistic Perfectionism, and Positive Weight and Shape than Exercisers. For centuries women have been pressured, stopped, forced to even think for themselves. It's not new how women are forced to follow all the rules and regulations in terms of appearance to look like "an ideal woman". These unrealistic standards have made them foolishly believe that they have to attain a perfect body shape to get accepted in society. This standard of perfectionism is just an illusion. There's nothing wrong with exercising but the thought behind that should be that "I am doing this for myself". It's high time, women start doing things just for themselves because society can wait. But their dreams and desires should not. Everybody is in itself is unique because it represents how far one has come, how hard one has worked, and how now it's their time to enjoy. Focusing on the self is not selfish. It's an act of self-love. Appreciating how special you are is one of the important acts of self-love. Positive affirmations are the way to go. One needs to actually know their body and become

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comfortable in it. Self-care routines that fulfil your needs are crucial to focusing on yourself. The most important ingredient of self-care activity is that it makes your soul feel alive. Say nice things about your body, dress yourself up, and explore the world. Don't hold on to the bad feelings, let go and forgive yourself. A life lived solely in the pursuit of the happiness of others may not bring one personal joy and fulfillment.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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