

Physical Appearance Comparison and Self-Esteem among Late Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to compare the physical appearance comparison and self-esteem among late adolescents and emerging adulthood. This study examined the relationship between these two variables. This also measures the difference among socio-demographic variables such as gender, domicile status. The tools that were used was Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (PCAS-R) and Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. The participants enrolled for the study was 221, of which 200 sample data was used after data cleaning. The sample was selected through a convenience sampling method and an offline survey was used for data collection. The data obtained were analyzed using Spearman-correlation test, Mann-Whitney U test. The results were found such that physical appearance comparison is negatively correlated with self-esteem and there exists a significant difference in these variables among age group, gender and domicile status. Self-esteem is seem to be higher in males compared to females. Self-esteem is also higher in emerging adulthood compared to late adolescents. People hailing from rural area had lower level of self-esteem compared to people hailing from urban area.

Keywords: *Cross-sectional Study, Physical Appearance Comparison, Self-Esteem, Emerging Adults*

The psychological and social transitional stage between childhood and maturity is known as adolescence in humans. Early adulthood has traditionally been defined as the period between the ages of 18 (when puberty ends) and 40 or 45 (when middle age begins). Developmental scientists have lately divided this 25-year era for him into two distinct periods. Physical, cognitive, and social development varies throughout these ages, but the general age range of 18 to 40 is when people reach their physical peak, have more developed minds, become financially independent, and start to form close connections. The age range between late adolescence and early adulthood, or emerging adulthood, is 18 to 25. Adolescence and adulthood are two different stages of life.

This is a time of little future uncertainty and a time when, for the majority of people, the scope for independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater than at any other stage of

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the life course (Arnett, 2000). However, people at this age have not yet assumed responsibility for adulthood.

Your subjective perception of your overall value or worth is known as self-esteem. It describes your level of self-confidence in your skills and qualities, just as self-respect does. A strong sense of self-worth can affect your motivation, mental health, and general quality of life. However, a self-esteem that is either excessively high or too low might cause issues. You can find the perfect balance for you by having an improved understanding of your individual level of self-esteem.

Teenagers go through and face a variety of problems and difficulties during the adolescent stage. They frequently turn to materialistic pleasures and external possessions to help them deal with such difficulties. In addition, the media's portrayal of slender females and bulky guys may have an impact on a teen's body image. They typically start to form opinions about celebrities, sports figures, and other figures at this time and strive to imitate their hobbies and lifestyles. Teenagers frequently acquire competing, unresolved issues within themselves when they are unable to meet their goals, which can lead to problems with their self-esteem. Self-esteem can occasionally be influenced by family circumstances. Some parents criticize their children more than they compliment them, which might prevent children from growing up with healthy self-esteem. Teenagers may also endure unpleasant taunts and insults about the way they view their peers and classmates. Sometimes these remarks are motivated by racial and ethnic prejudice. Even though they are frequently disregarded, they can occasionally have an impact on someone's perception of their physique and self-worth.

Sometimes people make comparisons between their appearance and that of others. This comparison could be based on their body weight, size, shape, body fat, or overall appearance. According to sociocultural theories of disordered eating and body image (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999), frequently making appearance-based comparisons with people who exhibit dominant appearance ideals causes people to feel less satisfied with their bodies. As people try to alter their bodies through intense dieting, exercise, and other compensatory behaviors, disordered eating is thought to follow. We live in a society that values looks, therefore feelings about our physical appearance and self-esteem are frequently linked. Whether you were born with a noticeable disability or disfigurement, acquired it early in life, or underwent an aesthetic alteration later in life, your feelings of self-esteem may vary. People may compare themselves to others to learn about or admire their appearance, talents, or accomplishments. In our very image-focused world, it is simple to allow physical appearance and self-esteem to become inextricably linked. Everyone, in actuality, varies in look, capabilities, and abilities. We all compare ourselves to others, but part of developing confidence is realizing our own strengths, skills, and abilities. According to (Schaefer et al., 2015), the lower frequency and impact of appearance comparisons may contribute to more positive appearance evaluation and lower levels of disordered eating in Black women. Comparisons to models resulted in decreased confidence as well as increased appearance and weight dissatisfaction. Low confidence and increased weight dissatisfaction and appearance dissatisfaction were predicted by high trait physical appearance perfectionism, and these connections were mediated by rumination and catastrophizing (McComb & Mills, 2021).

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Girls' self-esteem drops significantly during middle adolescence in Western societies, with changes in body image cited as a possible explanation. Self-esteem was similarly lower in older girls than in younger girls. According to structural equation modelling, this age trend was partially explained by a corresponding downward trend in body satisfaction, which was then fully explained by upward age trends in awareness and internalization of sociocultural attitudes towards appearance, as well as social comparison with media models. Early educational programmes to assist females analyze advertising and media representations are supported by the findings (Clay et al., 2005). (Oktan,2017) discovered a substantial link between teenage body image and self-esteem, and that body image and self-esteem were major predictors of self-harm behaviors. This study fill the research gap of finding the difference in self-esteem and physical appearance comparison among adolescents and late-adulthood.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample for the study was collected through a convenience sampling method consisting of 250 participants who belong to age group 15-25 years from various places in kerala. A total population adopted for the present study was individuals from age 15 to 25. A total of 120 adolescents and 130 emerging adults participated in the study. Among them 121 were males and 129 were females. The inclusion criteria adopted for the present study were individuals of 15-25 age range who are male or female. Individuals with any kind of biological or genetic abnormalities are avoided.

Instruments

Two measures were used in this study,

- 1. Physical Appearance Comparison Scale-Revised (PACS-R):** An 11-item revised version of the PACS (Schaefer & Thompson, 2014) was used in this study. The questions were scored based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “never” to “always”. This one-dimensional scale measures the frequency of an individual’s comparison of his/her physical appearance with others in different places.
- 2. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale:** A ten-item scale that assesses overall self-worth by assessing both positive and negative thoughts about oneself. The scale is thought to be one-dimensional. All items are graded on a 4-point Likert scale, with answers ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Procedure

After deciding on the study topic, the questionnaires appropriate for the study purpose were searched and the respective tools of Physical appearance comparison scale and Rosenberg self-esteem scale were selected. The permission to use the scale from respective authors were taken. Then the questionnaires along with the informed consent form were given to the participants. The aspects of objective, duration, confidentiality, and right to withdrawal from the study were mentioned in the informed consent form. No other personal information other than the socio- demographic data relevant to the study like domicile, age group and gender. The number of participants participated in the study was 210. 10 responses were eliminated because of patterned responses. The remaining 200 responses were used for data analysis.

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RESULTS

Table No. 1 Correlation between Physical Appearance Comparison Scale and Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale

	Self Esteem	Physical Appearance Comparison
Self Esteem	—	—
Physical Appearance Comparison	-0.649***	—

The results reveal that there exists a negative relationship between the scores of self-esteem and physical appearance comparison. This means that as self-esteem increases, tendency to compare physical appearance with others decreases similarly when self-esteem decreases, tendency to compare the physical appearance with others increases. The correlation coefficient of physical appearance comparison was $r = -0.649$ which is also moderate but significant ($p < .001$) correlation.

Table No.2 Comparison of physical appearance comparison and self-esteem in respect to age group

	Group	N	Mean Rank	p
Self -Esteem	Late Adolescence	130	17.725	<0.001
	Emerging Adulthood	120	24.938	
Physical Appearance Comparison	Late Adolescence	130	30.658	<0.001
	Emerging Adulthood	120	10.454	

From the table 2, it is understood that there exists a significant difference between self-esteem and physical appearance comparison among late adolescents and emerging adulthood. The mean value of self esteem for emerging adulthood is 24.938 which suggests that they have more self esteem compared to late adolescents whereas in case of physical appearance comparison, the mean value of late adolescents is 30.658 which means they have more physical appearance comparison.

Table No. 3 Comparison of physical appearance comparison and self-esteem in respect to gender

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	p
Self -Esteem	Male	129	24.930	<0.001
	Female	121	17.793	
Physical Appearance Comparison	Male	129	10.504	<0.001
	Female	121	30.438	

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From the table 3, it is understood that there exists a significant difference between self-esteem and physical appearance comparison among male and female. The mean value of self-esteem for male is 24.930 which suggests that they have more self-esteem compared to females whereas in case of physical appearance comparison, the mean value of females is 30.438 which means they have more physical appearance comparison.

Table No.4 Comparison of physical appearance comparison and self-esteem in respect to domicile status.

	Group	N	Mean Rank	p
Self -Esteem	Rural	121	17.793	<0.001
	Urban	129	24.930	
Physical Appearance Comparison	Rural	121	30.458	<0.001
	Urban	129	10.504	

From the table 4, it is understood that there exists a significant difference between self-esteem and physical appearance comparison among rural and urban area. The mean value of self-esteem for urban area is 24.930 which suggests that they have more self-esteem compared to rural people whereas in case of physical appearance comparison, the mean value of rural people is 30.458 which means they have more physical appearance comparison.

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis set up for the study was that there will not be a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and physical appearance comparison. Based on the results we reject the null hypothesis and found that there exists a negative correlation between the two variables. This means that as self-esteem increases, the tendency to compare the physical appearance decreases. This may be because we will be having a positive sense of worth upon ourselves and is not intimidated by mere comparisons. The impact of comparison is severe and multi-faceted. If we compare ourselves with other persons and found out that our performance is lower or not up to mark, we may begin to sense a feeling of inferiority complex. Body Image or physical appearance is regarded as an important thing in this social constructivist world. If a person is not confident about his looks, he or she may start to feel a lower self-confidence.

The next hypothesis set up was that there is no significant difference in self-esteem and physical comparison scale in terms of late adolescents and emerging adulthood. Based on the results, we reject the null hypothesis that there exists no difference and it was found that emerging adulthood had more self-esteem compared to late adolescents. This may be because adolescence is a period of stress and storm. Adolescents may undergo several changes and they will be lacking self-esteem and may start to compare themselves with others. This is a period where one gives prime importance to external outlook and they will try their maximum to fit in to the beauty standards defined by the society. Adolescents may engage in physical appearance comparison than emerging adults. This result is in congruence with (Clay et al., 2005) study which reveals that adolescent girls had poor self-esteem and negative body image. Another hypothesis set up was that there is no significant

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difference in self-esteem and physical comparison scale in terms of gender. Based on the results, we reject the null hypothesis that there exists no difference and it was found that males had more self-esteem compared to females. It was also found that females have engaged more in physical appearance comparison. This may be because of situational and social factors that male encounters and also even the genetic or biological changes of man compared to a female. This result is in congruence with (Bleidorn et al., 2016) study which suggests that men had higher self-esteem compared to women.

The next hypothesis set up was that there exists no difference in these variables in terms of domicile status. Based on the results, it is found that people hailing from urban area has more self-esteem compared to people hailing from rural area. Similarly, people from rural area engages more in physical appearance comparison. This may be due to the lack of availability of resources in rural area and lack of modernization. People from rural areas might not have the required knowledge, and they may not have received as much exposure to the media and this feeling of inferiority complex may turn them to compare their physical appearance with others.

The study has some limitations which included the sampling method and instrument. Since participants were chosen through convenience sampling from Kerala, proper representation cannot be guaranteed. Lack of sub-domains of the tool is another limitation of the study. In Future, the research can be conducted in an increased sample size which would be helpful in generalizing the results. More sociodemographic variables relating to the variables of the study can also be used for future research. Further studies can be conducted to identify the mediator and moderator variables in the relationship between self-esteem and physical appearance comparison.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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