

## Effect of Body Image Avoidance on Self Esteem

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to investigate the effect of Body Image Avoidance on Self-Esteem. Body image encompasses an individual's perception of their physical appearance and their corresponding emotions and thoughts, which can range from positive to negative. Sample Consists of 300 participants, 199 females, 101 males, divided into 3 age groups, 123 adolescents (13-20), 128 young adults (21-39), and 49 middle-aged adults (40-65). The selection of these age groups was based on established developmental periods. "Body Image Avoidance Questionnaire (BIAQ)" developed by James C Rosen et. al. 1991, and "Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale" developed by Morris Rosenberg, 1965, were administered on the participants. The data collected were later subjected to statistical analysis. After conducting statistical analyses of correlation and regression on the collected data, it was found that there was a significant relation between various factors of body image avoidance (such as clothing choices and social activities) and overall levels of self-esteem. However, the factor of eating restraints and grooming and weighing did not show a significant relation with self-esteem in this study. The regression analysis revealed that Body Image Avoidance contributes approximately 20% to an individual's overall self-esteem, while the remaining 80% can be attributed to other external factors. This finding highlights the complex nature of self-esteem and its influence on factors of body image avoidance. This study highlights the strategy to overcome body image avoidance. Further studies can explore external factors that may impact an individual's self-esteem.

**Keywords:** *Body Image Avoidance, Self-Esteem, Avoidance Behaviours*

**B**ody image is a multidisciplinary and complex concept that involves a person's beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, and perceptions about their own physical self (Cash et al., 2002). Avoidance involves the act of escapism, where the individual averts from situations in which their body is negatively evaluated. (Cash et al., 2005). It may include changes in their clothing behaviour, avoidance of social activities, development of restrained eating behaviours, alterations in their grooming behaviour or constantly weighing oneself.

The term "Body Image Avoidance" was first used by an Austrian neurologist and psychologist, Paul Schilder (1935), in his book, "The Image and Appearance of Human Body". His work analyses the social and psychological factors that contribute to influence an individual's perception towards their body image.

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Sarah Grogan in her book “Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women and Children” exclaimed that the psychological research on the body image until 1980’s, were primarily conducted on women due to its association with eating disorders, as it encompassed body weight and shape. But later studies revealed that body image includes more than these factors and currently many studies are been undertaken on this subject including men women and children.

Self-esteem refers to a person's overall positive opinion about themselves (Rosenberg, 1965). The study conducted by O'Dea (2012), concluded that self-esteem can be affected by various factors such as body weight, academic success, and ability to participate in sports.

The present study bridges the gap in the literature as there has been very few research on the correlation between body image avoidance, its factors and self-esteem.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study body image avoidance and self-esteem among adolescents, early adults and middle aged adults is a correlation and regression study. It is a quantitative study that establishes the relationship between body image avoidance and self-esteem.

#### **Aim**

The study aims to examine the relationship between body image avoidance and self-esteem among adolescent, early adults and middle aged adults.

#### **Sample**

In this study, a total of 300 individuals participated, comprising of 199 female subjects and 101 male subjects. The participants was categorized into three groups: 123 adolescents (age range of 13–20), 128 young adults (age range of 21–39), and 49 middle-aged adults (age range of 40–65).

#### **Tools for Study**

##### **Body Image Avoidance Scale**

The Body Image Avoidance Questionnaire (BIAQ) is a self-report questionnaire developed by James C. Rosen, Debra Srebnik, Elayne Saltzberg, and Sally Wendt, to measure body image avoidance behavior. It consists of 19 items that assess the frequency of behaviors individuals engage in to avoid experiencing negative thoughts and feelings related to their body image. Factors that can contribute to body image avoidance behaviour include:

- ***Clothing:***
- ***Social Activities:***
- ***Eating Restraints:***
- ***Grooming and Weighting:***

Participants are asked to rate the frequency of each behavior on a 6-point scale, ranging from 0 (never), 1 (Rarely), 2 (Sometimes), 3 (Often), 4 (Usually) and 5 (always). The BIAQ has been used in research studies to investigate the relationship between body image avoidance behavior and psychological distress, as well as the effectiveness of interventions designed to reduce these behaviors. It has demonstrated good reliability and validity and is widely used in both clinical and research settings. The questionnaire has reliability coefficient of .87 and has fair to good concurrent validity, with low but significant correlation of .22 with body size

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estimation, correlation of .78 with the body shape questionnaire, and correlations of .68 and .63 with the shape concern and weight concern scales respectively.

### ROSENBERG SELF-ESTEEM SCALE (RERS)

The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES) is a psychological assessment tool used to measure self-esteem. It was developed by sociologist Morris Rosenberg in 1965 and has since become one of the most widely used self-esteem measures in social science research. The RSES consists of 10 statements about one's self-worth and feelings of personal value, with responses on a four-point scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree to strongly disagree. The scoring for the RSES is straightforward, with reverse scoring used for some items. After scoring all items, the responses are summed to obtain a total score ranging from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-esteem. It is important to note that the RSES is not a diagnostic tool, and scores should be interpreted in the context of other factors and clinical assessments. The scale generally has high reliability, Cronbach's alpha for various sample are in the range of .77 and .88 (Blascovich and Tomaka 1993 and Rosenberg 1986) studies have demonstrated both unidimensional and two factor structure to the scale.

### Procedure

The present study consists a sample of 300 participants, consisting of 199 female subjects and 101 male subjects. The participants was categorised into three groups: 123 adolescents (age range of 13–20), 128 young adults (age range of 21–39), and 49 middle-aged adults (age range of 40–65). This age categorisation was based on established developmental periods known to have distinct cognitive, social, and emotional characteristics. The responses were collected through google forms in the online mode and were subjected to statistical analyses, including correlation and regression. Tables 1 and 2 present the results in terms and correlation and regression respectively.

### RESULT

#### Table 1

*Result of Pearson's product moment correlation between body Image avoidance factors and self-esteem.*

Factors of body Image Avoidance	Self-Esteem	Correlation	Significance
Clothing	Self-Esteem	-.390	.001
Social Activities	Self-Esteem	-.331	.001
Eating Restraints	Self-Esteem	-.033	.571
Grooming and weighing	Self-Esteem	.019	.745
Body Image Avoidance	Self-Esteem	-.322	.001

Table 1 shows that there is significant and negative relationship between Body Image Avoidance and its factors Clothing and Social Activities, with Self-Esteem. On the other hand, there is no significant correlation between factors such as eating restraints and grooming and weighing with Self-Esteem. The correlation coefficients between Self-Esteem and Body Image Avoidance ( $r=-.322$ ,  $p=.001$ ), Clothing ( $r=-.390$ ,  $p=.001$ ), and Social Activities ( $r=-.331$ ,  $p=.001$ ) are all negative and highly significant. In contrast, the correlation coefficients between Self-Esteem and Eating Restraints ( $r=-.033$ ,  $p=.571$ ) and Grooming and Weighing ( $r=.019$ ,  $p=.745$ ) are both positive but not significant. In other words, as Self-

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Esteem increases, Body Image Avoidance and its factors such as Clothing and Social Activities also increase.

**Table 2**

**Summary result of stepwise multiple regression or prediction of Self-Esteem from Body Image Avoidance Factors**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1. Clothing	.390	.152	.149	4.206
2. Social Activities	.419	.175	.170	4.154
3. Eating Restraints	.447	.200	.192	4.098
4. Grooming and Weighing	.459	.211	.200	4.077

The statistical analysis from regression indicated that overall, body image avoidance accounts for 20% of an individual's self-esteem. Additionally, the factors of body image avoidance, such as clothing, social activities, eating restraints, and grooming and weighing, accounted for varying degrees of self-esteem. Specifically, clothing accounted for 14.9% of an individual's self-esteem, social activities accounted for 2.1%, eating restraints accounted for 2.2%, and grooming and weighing accounted for 0.8%.

## DISCUSSION

Major findings of the study

- On the whole, Body Image Avoidance is found to have a significant negative correlation with Self-Esteem
- In case factors related to body image, such as clothing choices and participation in social activities, there is a significant negative correlation with Self-Esteem.
- Factors such as Eating Restraints and Grooming and Weighing, there is no significant correlation observed with Self-Esteem.
- The body image avoidance factors contributes 20% to an individual's self-esteem, in which clothing contributes 14.9% followed by social activities 2.1%, eating restraints 2.2% and grooming and weighing 0.8%.

The main objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and body image avoidance, and its various factors such as clothing, social activities, eating restraints, grooming, and weighing behaviors. The results revealed a negatively significant correlation between self-esteem and body image avoidance, and with its factors clothing and social activities. However, no significant correlation was found between self-esteem and the other factors of Body Image Avoidance such as eating restraints and grooming and weighing behaviors.

The present study revealed a significant negative correlation between body image and self-esteem. The findings indicated that individuals with high body image avoidance scores have low self-esteem. These results align with previous studies conducted by Mintz and Betz (1986) as well as Saranya et al. (2022), which also found a similar correlation between body image and self-esteem.

The study conducted by Kah Leng Soo et al. (2008) revealed that self-esteem was not significantly correlated with restrained eating. This finding is consistent with the present

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study, suggesting that there is a strong negative correlation between self-esteem and restrained eating behaviors. There has been no studies regarding the correlation between self-esteem and grooming, weighing, and social activities, there is currently a lack of specific findings in the existing literature.

Moreover, the study conducted by Ulrich Orth et al. (2010) emphasized that an individual's self-esteem can be influenced by various factors, such as traumatic experiences or major life events and also revealed a positive correlation between relationship satisfaction and self-esteem in both older and younger adults.

Overcoming body image avoidance involves cultivating self-compassion, recognizing that everyone has unique bodies and that worth, challenging negative thoughts is essential, replacing self-critical thinking with positive and realistic perspectives and surrounding oneself with positive influences. Engaging in mindfulness practices aids in developing non-judgmental body awareness and detachment from negative thoughts.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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