

Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation and Self- esteem among Middle Aged Women

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relation between Body consciousness, Fear of negative appearance evaluation and Self-esteem among Middle aged women. The study took place among between middle-aged women, ages 40 to 65. To learn more about how these variables interact and affect mental health, especially at important life stages like pregnancy and the physical changes that middle-aged women go through, a sample of 165 adults was examined. All three hypotheses were validated by the investigation. Body Consciousness and Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation showed a strong positive correlation. Second, a strong inverse relationship between self-esteem and body consciousness was discovered. Finally, there was a noteworthy inverse relationship between self-esteem and the fear of a negative appearance evaluation. These results offer insightful information on middle-aged women's psychological health and indicate that addressing issues related to body image and the fear of receiving a poor assessment may be crucial to boosting self-esteem and mental health in this demographic. Interventions targeted at enhancing middle-aged women's perceptions of their bodies and sense of self can be informed by an understanding of these relationships.

Keywords: *Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance evaluation, Self- Esteem, Middle Aged women*

From a philosophical perspective, being "body-conscious" is being aware of one's own needs, both physical and otherwise. Body-consciousness is the capacity to tune into emotional or cognitive experiences and understand how they can impact the physical world. Women refer to their "middle age" as a time when their bodies undergo changes from menopause, pregnancy, and other causes. It can also be a time of significant weight and body shape changes, which creates a window of opportunity for negative body images. The menopausal transition can be a challenging and drawn-out process, taking up to 5-7 years, according to (Voda et al,1991). around contrast to society's image of a young, slim woman, hormonal changes during this era, which occurs around middle age, are connected to increased weight gain and fat mass (Ho et al., 2010), as well as changes in skin tone and texture (Conboy et al., 2001).

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Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation and Self-esteem among Middle Aged Women

Building a positive body image involves understanding and evaluating one's physical attributes and considering how one believes others perceive them. This process is influenced by psychological, social, and cultural factors. One primary factor is social comparison, where individuals compare their bodies to others, either in person or through media portrayals. These comparisons can lead to body consciousness, especially when individuals feel they fall short of societal beauty standards. The media plays a significant role in shaping these standards, often idealizing and presenting false representations of beauty. Exposure to these images can contribute to negative body image perceptions in those who feel they do not measure up to these ideals (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Friends and relatives can significantly influence a person's body image perception through their remarks, expectations, and mocking, which can impact an individual's body image and cause self-consciousness. Body image consciousness can have both positive and negative effects, driving behaviors like extreme diets or cosmetic treatments, but also motivating healthy choices like exercise and self-care. Promoting a healthy body image requires acknowledging and challenging unreasonable norms, fostering self-acceptance, and seeking assistance when needed (Marney et al., 2023).

The concept of "objectified body consciousness," developed by (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) emphasizes how people learn to regard their bodies as objects, often from an observer's perspective. This theory highlights the negative psychological and physical consequences of this objectification, particularly in the context of body image and social pressures on appearance.

Objectified body consciousness refers to the tendency, particularly among women, to view themselves as objects to be observed, leading to snap judgments about their bodies based on appearance. This perspective can emphasize physical attributes like shape, weight, or specific body parts. Social and cultural factors, including media, advertisements, and societal norms, contribute to the development of self-objectification by promoting idealized body types. This self-objectification can have negative psychological and physiological effects, such as body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, hopelessness, and low self-worth. It can also lead to unhealthy habits like intense exercise or diets, and it may compromise an individual's sense of autonomy and self-determination as they feel pressured to meet beauty standards (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

The concept of objectified body awareness is closely linked to the broader framework of objectification theory, as developed by (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This theory explores how women, in particular, are often objectified in society, leading to various negative consequences. It suggests that societal objectification contributes to self-objectification among individuals.

The importance of promoting body acceptance and self-empowerment is emphasized within this framework. Encouraging individuals to view their bodies as tools for action, rather than objects to be evaluated solely based on appearance, can help counteract self-objectification and its adverse effects. In conclusion, objectified body awareness sheds light on how societal and cultural factors shape individuals' perceptions of their bodies. By acknowledging the detrimental impacts of self-objectification, particularly on body image, and advocating for approaches that foster a more holistic perspective of the body, such as

Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation and Self- esteem among Middle Aged Women

those outlined by Fredrickson and Roberts, there is potential for improved psychological well-being and self-acceptance.

Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation, also known as social appearance anxiety or appearance-related social anxiety, is a specific type of social anxiety disorder characterized by intense fear of negative evaluation based on one's appearance (Levinson et al., 2013). This anxiety may cause significant distress and avoidance behaviors, impacting social interactions and relationships. Individuals with social appearance anxiety often focus excessively on their physical appearance, including body type, size, facial features, clothing, and grooming. They may feel pressured to enhance their image to avoid criticism and fear being ridiculed, rejected, or judged negatively by others. This anxiety can result in avoiding social events and situations where they feel their appearance will be scrutinized, leading to loneliness and isolation.

Social appearance anxiety is closely related to Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), a mental health condition characterized by an intense preoccupation with perceived flaws in physical appearance (Phillips et al., 2005). People with BDD may engage in obsessive behaviors to hide or alter these perceived defects.

Treatment for social appearance anxiety often includes cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which helps individuals challenge and change negative thought patterns about their appearance. Medications such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) may also be prescribed to manage symptoms, particularly when social appearance anxiety coexists with other mental health conditions. An empathetic and supportive environment, including support from friends and family, can also be beneficial for individuals experiencing social anxiety related to appearance.

Self-esteem, defined as the degree to which an individual values and respects themselves, plays a crucial role in body image perception. It influences how individuals perceive and care for their bodies, as well as how they interact with others socially. Positive body image and high self-esteem are closely linked, as they contribute to a sense of self-worth and emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002).

Negative body image and low self-esteem can lead to avoidance behaviors, such as skipping social events or neglecting self-care. Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), characterized by an obsessive focus on perceived physical flaws, is often associated with social appearance anxiety (Phillips et al., 2005). Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is a commonly used treatment for social anxiety, helping individuals challenge negative thoughts and develop coping strategies.

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development identifies middle adulthood, typically between the ages of 40 and 65, as a stage focused on generativity versus stagnation. This stage emphasizes the importance of passing on knowledge and mentoring the next generation. Women in this stage may experience heightened body consciousness, fearing negative evaluation of their appearance and leading to a decline in self-esteem (Erikson, 1950).

In Indian society, where cultural and societal ideals often dictate women's body standards, understanding body consciousness, fear of negative appearance evaluation, and self-esteem

Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation and Self- esteem among Middle Aged Women

among middle-aged women who have given birth is crucial. Pregnancy and childbirth experiences vary widely in India based on cultural beliefs and access to healthcare. Studying these variables can help develop culturally sensitive interventions and support networks for Indian women, improving their overall well-being (Cash & Smolak, 2011).

(Mckinley & Nita Mary ,1995) Developed objectified body consciousness (OBC) scales for women, which include dimensions like internalization/body shame, surveillance, and surveillance/internalization/body shame. They found negative correlations between surveillance and body shame across all groups, and these were negatively correlated with psychological well-being and self-esteem. Control beliefs were positively linked to physical and mental health. (Mckinley & Nita Mary, 1999) studied age-related changes in OBC among mothers and daughters. Found that mothers displayed lower levels of body shame and surveillance than daughters. OBC was linked to psychological well-being in both groups, with body esteem more strongly correlated with well-being in daughters. (Sinclair et al., 2004) explored the effects of appearance control attitudes, body shame, and body surveillance on college women's wellness. Found that appearance control attitudes were positively correlated with wellness, while body surveillance and body shame were negatively correlated. (Joann Montepare ,2007) investigated adult physical consciousness in relation to age-related patterns. Found that older adults reported being more concerned with their outward physical appearance, more aware of their internal body sensations, and more positive in their self-evaluations of their bodies. (Swati Dixit et al., 2011) examined teenage girls' awareness of their body image. Found that a significant percentage of girls were unhappy with their body image, especially in urban and slum areas. Also, found that some girls who believed their bodies were too thin were motivated to reduce weight. (Viren Swami & Verity Knowles, 2013) investigated mental health literacy of negative body image. Found that few participants correctly identified negative body image in vignettes, indicating low mental health literacy in this area, especially among males. (Socorro Maria et al., 2017) explored the relationship between middle-aged Brazilian women's body views and their overall quality of life. Found that body image was significantly associated with overall quality of life, emotional and sexual quality of life, and health. (Hannah L. Quittkat & Andrea S. Hartmann, 2019) explored different aspects of body image in the general German-speaking population. Found that women expressed greater body dissatisfaction than men and placed a greater value on beauty. (Valentina Boursier et al. ,2020) examined the predictive impact of appearance control beliefs on problematic social networking use. Found that appearance control beliefs negatively predicted body image control in photos and that this effect was mitigated by problematic social networking use. (Tarika & Sargun Sandhu ,2021) investigated the effects of self-objectification on objectified body consciousness in adolescent females. Found that media representations negatively impact teenage mental health. (Ashleigh Bellar et al., 2022) examined age-related changes in self-body recognition in women. Found that older women showed a decline in implicit self-recognition abilities and were more prone to negative body image. (Ashley Gerada ,2022) explored the relationship between body image, anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation in teenagers. Found reciprocal positive correlations between body image dissatisfaction and social anxiety, as well as between social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. (Z. Tehseem Fathima et al. , 2001) studied the relationship between students' body perceptions and anxiety about receiving negative comments about their appearance. Found that both male and female students reported fear of being negatively judged for their appearance.

Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation and Self-esteem among Middle Aged Women

(Levinson & Rodebaugh, 2015) identified shared vulnerabilities in social appearance anxiety and fear of criticism linking negative social-evaluative fears to social anxiety, food intake, and body dissatisfaction. These vulnerabilities may lead to unique actions in eating and social anxiety disorders. (Goswami, 2013) studied the impact of aging on middle-aged and older women's body-self image, mood, and self-esteem. Middle-aged women perceived their bodies less favorably, reported more depressive moods, and had lower self-esteem compared to older women. (Olchowska-Kotala, 2017) found that body mass index (BMI), optimism, self-worth, and menopausal symptoms predicted body esteem in middle-aged women, with opinions on physical appearance and health having a stronger correlation with total self-esteem than body size sentiments. (Almenara et al., 2017) examined the relationship between weight stigmatization, disordered eating, self-esteem, and fear of negative evaluation in obese women. The study found that weight stigmatization was associated with disordered eating behaviors, partially mediated by fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem. (Ahadzadeh et al., 2018) investigated the moderating impact of self-esteem in the relationship between body mass index, body image, and fear of negative evaluation, finding that body image and BMI were negatively correlated, but there was no association with fear of negative evaluation. (Dąbrowska-Galas & Dąbrowska, 2021) explored how middle-aged women's physical activity levels impacted their self-esteem, finding that higher physical activity levels were associated with higher self-esteem. Finally, (Shahid et al., 2022) assessed the relationship between body image consciousness, fear of negative appearance, and self-esteem in university students, finding an inverse relationship between self-esteem and body image consciousness, with women more likely to experience body surveillance, body shame, and low self-esteem related to it compared to men.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relation between Body consciousness, Fear of negative appearance evaluation and Self-esteem.

- To determine if middle aged women have fear of negative appearance evaluation regarding body consciousness.
- To study if there is a relationship between self-esteem and body consciousness
- To assess if fear to experience negative appearance evaluation is significantly related with self-esteem.

Hypotheses

- **H₁:** There is a significant relationship between fear of negative appearance evaluation and body consciousness in middle aged women.
- **H₂:** There is a significant relationship between self-esteem and body consciousness
- **H₃:** There is a significant relationship in fear of negative appearance evaluation and self-esteem

METHOD

Sample

This study will focus on middle-aged women aged 40-65 who have undergone pregnancy. The sample size will be 165 women, selected using convenience sampling. Participants must have a basic level of education to understand the questionnaire and must currently reside in India. Women with any mental disturbances will be excluded, as will those who have not undergone pregnancy. The study aims to investigate the relationship between body consciousness, fear of negative appearance evaluation, and self-esteem in this population.

Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation and Self-esteem among Middle Aged Women

Tools

- **Objectified body consciousness scale:** - Self objectification was measured using McKinley and Hydes (1996). Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBSC). The OBSC is composed of three subscales (surveillance, body shame and control beliefs) to which participants respond on scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The total score is calculated by finding the sum of the 24 items, after reverse coding as described for a set of questions. The total score ranges from 24-168, with a higher score indicating a higher body consciousness. The reliability for the OBSC (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.75$). The OBSC can be used for the age range 13-60.
- **Fear of Negative appearance evaluation scale:** The FNAES was used to assess women's apprehension toward appearance evaluations. The scale was developed by Lundgren, Anderson and Thompson. The FNAES contained six items, which were scored on a five-point Likert scale, from definitely disagree to definitely agree. Higher scores indicated greater FNAE. Cronbach's alpha for the FNAES in the present study was 0.93. The FNAES can be used for the age range 18-72.
- **Rosenberg self esteem scale:** This scale was developed by Morris Rosenberg. It 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 1= strongly agree to 4=strongly disagree. Few items are reverse scored. Sum scores for all ten items. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. The scale has good predictive validity, as well as internal consistency and test-retest reliability. Cronbach coefficient has been shown to be high ($M = 0.81$) supporting. The age range is 13-65.

Ethical Consideration

The study ensured ethical considerations by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring they were aware of the nature of the study and their rights. Anonymity was maintained by not collecting any identifying information that could link responses to individual participants. Confidentiality was also upheld by storing all data securely and only accessible to authorized personnel involved in the study. These measures were implemented to protect the privacy and rights of the participants throughout the research process.

Statistical Analysis

The results were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. IBM SPSS- 25 was used for data analysis. Among descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation were used; among the inferential statistics inferential statistics Pearson's correlation method was used to test the hypothesis.

Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation and Self- esteem among Middle Aged Women

RESULTS

The results of the study, in line with the objectives and hypothesis, are presented in the following section:

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance evaluation and Self-Esteem.

Variables	n	M	SD	1	2	3
Body Consciousness	165	99.72	11.031	-		
Fear of Negative appearance evaluation	165	11.97	5.350	.575**	-	
Self esteem	165	29.77	2.262	-.411**	-.380**	-

** $p < 0.01$. ** correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed).

In the Normality testing it was identified that the data was not normally distributed hence a Spearman correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship between the variables Body consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance evaluation and Self-Esteem, as shown in Table 1. There was a positive correlation between the variables Body Consciousness and Fear of Negative appearance evaluation $r(163) = .575^{**}$, $p = <0.01$. Therefore, the study accepts the alternative hypothesis. (H_1). There was a negative correlation with Self Esteem and Body Consciousness $r(163) = -.411^{**}$, $p = <0.01$. Therefore, the study accepts the alternative hypothesis. (H_2). There was a negative correlation with Fear of Negative appearance evaluation and Self Esteem $r(163) = -.380^{**}$, $p = <0.01$ Therefore, the study accepts the alternative hypothesis. (H_3). There is a significant relationship between Body consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance evaluation and Self-Esteem among Middle Aged women. Overall, the results show that the first hypothesis had a positive correlation and the second and the third hypothesis had a negative correlation.

DISCUSSION

The study examined the relation of Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance evaluation and Self- Esteem among Middle aged women who were aged from 40-65 years and the sample size consisted of 165 participants. As middle-aged women undergo pregnancy and experience various bodily changes, it becomes essential to study these changes alongside variables such as fear of negative appearance evaluation and self-esteem. This holistic approach can shed light on how these factors interrelate and impact one's mental health. Understanding the relationship between these variables can provide valuable insights into the psychological well-being of middle-aged women, especially during a significant life stage like pregnancy and the bodily changes they go through and how one can overcome it.

The study supported all three hypotheses, with H_1 demonstrating a significant positive correlation between the variables Body Consciousness and Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation. This finding aligns with prior research, specifically the study (Hannah L. Quittkat & Andrea S. Hartmann, 2019), which indicated that women exhibited higher levels of body dissatisfaction, which remained consistent across age groups. Furthermore, women placed greater importance on appearance than men. However, only in men did age predict a reduced significance of appearance. Women expressed a greater willingness to invest time and years to achieve their ideal appearance compared to men. For H_2 were the showed that there was a significant negative correlation among the variables Body Consciousness and Self- esteem and thus the alternative hypothesis was supported with a previous study on Ageing and Its Effect on Body-Self Image, Mood and Self Esteem of Middle Age Women

Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation and Self- esteem among Middle Aged Women

and Older Women. (Dr. Pinky Goswami, 2013). results suggest that as women age, they may experience improvements in self-esteem, mood, and body image. The study provides valuable insights into the psychological well-being of middle-aged and older women and highlights the importance of considering the impact of aging on mental health and self-perception.

For H₃ the alternative hypothesis was supported as there was a significant negative correlation among the variables Fear of negative appearance evaluation and Self-esteem, and the result supported a previous study (Almenara et al. 2017) focused on the relationship between weight stigmatization, disordered eating behaviors, self-esteem, and fear of negative appearance evaluation in obese women. They found that weight stigmatization was linked to higher levels of disordered eating behaviors. Additionally, self-esteem and fear of negative appearance evaluation partially mediated this relationship. This means that obese women who experienced more weight stigmatization were more likely to have lower self-esteem and higher fear of negative appearance evaluation, which in turn were associated with higher levels of disordered eating behaviors. These findings highlight the importance of addressing weight stigmatization in interventions aimed at reducing disordered eating behaviors in obese women. Improving self-esteem and reducing fear of negative appearance evaluation may also be helpful in this population.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the relationship between Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation, and Self-Esteem among middle-aged women (40-65 years) and included 165 participants. It aimed to understand how these factors impact mental health, particularly during significant life stages like pregnancy. The study supported all three hypotheses, indicating a positive correlation between Body Consciousness and Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation, a negative correlation between Body Consciousness and Self-Esteem, and a negative correlation between Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation and Self-Esteem. The study's limitations included a lack of prior research on these factors among middle-aged women in India and its exclusive focus on women who have undergone pregnancy, omitting other genders and targeting a specific subgroup. Addressing these gaps could provide valuable insights into the experiences of middle-aged women in India and contribute to a broader understanding of body image and self-esteem. The study suggests a need for interventions focused on holistic self-care and health for middle-aged women, with inclusive media representation to foster appreciation and value for women of all ages and sizes. Addressing these issues is crucial for mental health, as they can impact conditions like depression and anxiety. Early intervention strategies tailored to these challenges can improve mental health outcomes and overall well-being for middle-aged women.

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Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation and Self-esteem among Middle Aged Women

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Body Consciousness, Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation and Self- esteem among Middle Aged Women

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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