

Body Image Perception and Self Esteem Among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the connection between young adults' self-esteem and body image in both males and females, ages 18 to 25. A convenience sample of 120 participants—60 men and 60 women—was chosen using a quantitative, cross-sectional, and correlational methodology. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and the 19-item Body Image Questionnaire (BIQ) were used to gather data. Self-esteem and body image did not significantly correlate for either gender, according to Pearson's correlation analysis ($r = 0.11$, $p > 0.05$ for men and $r = 0.09$, $p > 0.05$ for women). Additionally, independent sample t-tests showed no significant gender differences in self-esteem ($t = 0.46$, $p > 0.05$) or body image ($t = 0.14$, $p > 0.05$). The results indicate that gender has no apparent effect on body image and self-esteem, and that these variables are not highly associated within this group. These findings underscore the necessity of more study involving diverse communities and add to the larger conversation on psychological well-being.

Keywords: *Body image, Self-esteem, Young adults, Gender differences, Psychological well-being*

Self-esteem and body image perception are important psychological concepts that have a big impact on a person's general wellbeing. A person's mental depiction of their physical look, which may or may not be accurate, is referred to as their body image (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Conversely, self-esteem is a person's subjective assessment of their value, which includes their thoughts and feelings about themselves (Rosenberg, 1965). Body image issues have grown commonplace due to the growing emphasis on physical beauty in modern culture, particularly among young adults, and frequently have an adverse effect on psychological well-being and self-esteem (Grogan, 2017). Numerous factors, such as peer pressure, media exposure, cultural norms, and personal experiences, all influence how people view their bodies and contribute to their sense of confidence and self-worth.

Research over the last few decades has shown how important self-esteem and body image are becoming as indicators of mental health. Anxiety, sadness, and eating disorders are among the psychological diseases that have been connected to problems with body image. According to studies, people who have a negative body image frequently engage in higher levels of self-criticism, which can result in a poor opinion of themselves and a lower level of

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self-esteem in general (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Additionally, it has been found that one of the best indicators of emotional distress in both men and women is body image dissatisfaction (Swami et al., 2014).

Beyond a person's self-perception, body image and self-esteem are related because they influence how they interact with the outside world. More social confidence, better mental health, and an enhanced quality of life are frequently the outcomes of having a favourable body image. On the other hand, a negative opinion of one's physique is closely associated with psychological distress and can prevent people from participating fully in social and professional settings (National Eating Disorders Association [NEDA], 2023). How someone thinks about their physique affects how they engage with other people and how they participate in daily activities. For example, those who have a bad body image could have social anxiety, which could result in avoidance behaviors like social disengagement or a reluctance to exercise.

Furthermore, outside influences including media representations, cultural standards, and individual experiences frequently influence self-esteem, which is a more comprehensive assessment of one's own value. Due to the growth of digital platforms where physical appearance is closely examined, these influences have been stronger over time. People are exposed to unattainable beauty standards more frequently in today's image-centric society, mostly through social media and advertising.

Numerous studies have examined the connection between self-esteem and body image perception, and the results indicate a high association between the two variables (Menzel et al., 2010). While a favorable body image promotes greater psychological resilience and self-esteem, a negative body image is frequently linked to social disengagement, sadness, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Individuals who have a negative body image are more likely to think critically about themselves, which lowers their confidence and has an impact on both their personal and professional lives. Although both sexes face tremendous pressure to live up to social norms, gender differences also have an impact on this relationship, with women often expressing higher levels of body dissatisfaction than men (Jones & Crawford, 2006). Men are under social pressure to develop muscularity and steer clear of characteristics that are considered "unmasculine," whereas women are frequently expected to have a thin appearance. Both men and women may experience body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem as a result of these strict beauty standards, which may negatively impact their mental health and general quality of life.

Furthermore, people, especially young adults, frequently internalize these beauty standards as a gauge of their own value as a result of society's emphasis on looks. According to studies, people are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem the more they accept society's ideals of beauty (Grabe et al., 2008).

Perceptions of body image are also influenced by personal characteristics, upbringing, and prior experiences in addition to cultural influences. Individuals who suffer with perfectionism and self-criticism are more likely to feel dissatisfied with their looks, whereas those who have higher levels of self-acceptance and self-compassion tend to have a more positive body image. Furthermore, improving one's self-esteem and general well-being can be greatly aided by being exposed to encouraging surroundings that support body positivity and self-acceptance. The detrimental effects of cultural beauty standards can be lessened by

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practicing self-care, developing a positive relationship with food and exercise, and surrounding oneself with body-positive influences.

Self-compassion has been found to be protective against negative body image. Despite social pressures, research indicates that people who practice self-compassion are more likely to feel better accepted by their bodies and have higher self-esteem. On the other hand, those who are extremely critical of themselves are more likely to internalize unfavorable opinions of their bodies, which can result in a vicious cycle of psychological suffering and low self-esteem.

When examining the complex relationship between self-esteem and body image perception, it is important to recognize that personal characteristics are important in determining one's self-perception and how these perceptions impact psychological health. These elements differ from person to person and are frequently very personal. Personality traits, life experiences, emotional fortitude, and even early childhood effects are among them. When it comes to influencing how an individual internalizes their body image and controls their self-esteem, these traits have an equal or greater impact than external social and media influences.

Self-compassion, the capacity to treat oneself with love and understanding, particularly in times of failure or perceived inferiority, is a crucial individual component. According to research, those who are more self-compassionate have greater levels of self-esteem because they are better equipped to handle issues related to body image. Self-compassionate people accept their difficulties without passing judgment on them and work to better themselves, which eventually leads to increased emotional well-being, as opposed to being extremely critical of themselves or concentrating on their own shortcomings. Negative self-talk, on the other hand, can lead to a vicious cycle of low self-esteem and a negative body image.

Furthermore, a key component of psychological health is self-acceptance. Accepting oneself entails accepting one's flaws and strengths without passing judgment. In order to do this, people must embrace their bodies in all their individuality. A person who has a high degree of self-acceptance is less susceptible to internal or external criticism over their appearance. Greater inner peace and an improved capacity to handle life's ups and downs without becoming unduly distracted by validation based on appearance are made possible by this attitude of acceptance.

Self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction are significantly correlated, according to empirical research. For example, Vasudeva (2021) discovered that among Indian youth, lower self-esteem was linked to higher levels of body image dissatisfaction. In a similar vein, Pooja and Kakkar (2020) found a negative relationship between self-esteem and body image issues, suggesting that those who are more self-conscious about their appearance also typically have lower self-esteem.

Social media's introduction and growth have given body image problems new dimensions. Inflated body types are frequently displayed on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, which promote unattainable beauty ideals (Khatri & Sharma, 2024). Social comparison brought on by this ongoing exposure might exacerbate body dissatisfaction and have a detrimental effect on self-esteem (Vikram & Sutar, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A sample of 120 young adults, 60 of whom were male and 60 of whom were female, participated in the study. between the ages of 18 and 25 years.

Instruments

Two measures were used in this study,

- 1. 19-item Body Image Questionnaire (BIQ):** The Body Image Questionnaire used in the study is a 19-item scale designed to assess an individual's subjective perception and satisfaction with their body image. The scale includes both positively and negatively phrased items related to aspects such as appearance, weight, body shape, and overall self-evaluation of the body. Examples of positively worded items include statements like, "I feel satisfied with the shape of my body," while negatively worded items include statements such as, "I feel my body is unattractive." Participants are asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*. Higher scores indicate a more positive body image. The scale has been used widely in psychological research and shows good internal consistency and validity.
- 2. The RSES, or Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale:** The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) developed by Morris Rosenberg (1965) is a widely used instrument to measure global self-worth by assessing both positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale consists of 10 items. Five items are positively worded (e.g., "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself"), and five items are negatively worded (e.g., "At times I think I am no good at all"). Respondents rate their agreement with each statement on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 4 = *Strongly Agree*. Scores range from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. The RSES has demonstrated high reliability and validity across diverse populations and is considered a standard tool in self-esteem research.

Procedure

In order to collect data for this study, participants will be recruited via social media platforms using Google Forms and university networks using hardcopy questionnaires. This method keeps the sample diverse while still being accessible to those who wish to take part. Potential participants will receive comprehensive information about the goals, methods, and ethical considerations of the study as soon as they indicate interest. All participants' informed consent will be sought, with a focus on their rights to anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary involvement. They will be guaranteed the freedom to withdraw at any time without facing any repercussions and that their answers will only be used for research.

Participants will be required to fill out two standardized surveys after giving their consent: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and the 19-item Body Image Questionnaire (BIQ). Depending on participant accessibility and choices, these surveys will be distributed in-person or via the online Google Forms platform. Following data collection, answers will be methodically documented and arranged in a safe database for additional examination. A thorough statistical examination of the connection between self-esteem and body image perception is made easier by this methodical approach, which guarantees correctness in data management.

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Correlation value between Body Image and Self Esteem among Male Young Adults

Variable	N	r	p
Body Image	60	0.11	insig
Self Esteem	60		

Insignificant at both the levels

In Table 1, the correlation between body image and self-esteem was measured among male young adults. The obtained r-value was 0.11, which was found to be insignificant at both the 0.05 and 0.01 levels, thus indicating that there is no significant relationship between body image and self-esteem in males.

Table No. 2 Correlation value between Body Image and Self Esteem among Female Young Adults

Variable	N	r	p
Body Image	60	0.09	insig
Self Esteem	60		

Insignificant at both the levels

In Table 2, the correlation between body image and self-esteem was measured among female young adults. The obtained r-value was 0.09, which was found to be insignificant at both the 0.05 and 0.01 levels, thus indicating that there is no significant relationship between body image and self-esteem in females.

Table No. 3 Mean, SD, and t-value of Body Image among Male and Female Young Adults

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-vale	p
Male	60	57.08	4.36	0.14	insig
Female	60	57.18	3.70		

Insignificant at both the levels

Table 3 presents the comparison of body image scores between male and female young adults. The calculated t-value was 0.14, which was found to be statistically insignificant at both the 0.05 and 0.01 levels. This indicates that there is no significant difference in body image perception based on gender.

Table No. 4 Mean, SD, and t-value of Self Esteem among Male and Female Young Adults

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-vale	p
Male	60	21.76	5.96	0.46	insig
Female	60	22.21	5.48		

Insignificant at both the levels

Table 4 displays the comparison of self-esteem scores between male and female young adults. The obtained t-value was 0.46, which was not statistically significant at either the 0.05 or 0.01 level. This suggests that there is no significant gender-based difference in self-esteem among the participants.

DISCUSSION

The present study's main goal was to investigate the connection between young adults' self-esteem and body image, with an emphasis on gender disparities and predictive relationships. Responses from 120 young individuals, both male and female, between the ages of 18 and 25 years, who took the 19-item Body Image Questionnaire (BIQ) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), two standardized psychological tests, were used for the analysis. To assess the hypotheses, the study used both correlational and inferential statistical techniques, such as Pearson's correlation coefficients and t-tests.

The relationship between male young adults' self-esteem and body image was examined in Table 1. At the 0.05 and 0.01 levels, the correlation (r) was 0.11, indicating statistical insignificance. This suggests that among male participants, there is no substantial correlation between self-esteem and body image. Studies like Ali et al. (2022), who discovered a positive correlation between body image and self-esteem among adolescents and young adults, and Victor et al. (2024), who discovered that low self-esteem was significantly associated with poor body image among female medical students, contrast with this finding. The current study's lack of significance could be attributed to sample-specific contextual or cultural factors, or it could be the result of individual variances in how men internalize body image. Therefore, the initial hypothesis, which suggested a substantial link among males, was not supported by the current investigation.

Table 2 looked at the relationship between female young adults' self-esteem and body image. Additionally statistically insignificant was the r -value of 0.09. This implies that among the female study participants, there is not an obvious connection between self-esteem and body image. Given that numerous other research have consistently shown a substantial correlation between these two variables in females, this is a surprising outcome. For example, Paria et al. (2023) and Mallaram et al. (2023) discovered that among female adolescents and young adults, body image dissatisfaction significantly affected self-esteem. These findings contradict the current findings, which implies that either the association is changing as a result of contemporary influences (such as growing awareness of body acceptance) or that it varies according on sample characteristics. As a result, the second theory was likewise unsupported.

In Table 3, the mean body image ratings of young people who were male and female were compared. 57.08 (SD = 4.36) was the average score for males, and 57.18 (SD = 3.70) for females. There was no obvious gender disparity in body image, as indicated by the computed t -value of 0.14. It would appear from this that participants' impressions of their bodies are identical for men and women. According to Rai and Sharma (2021), there were no substantial gender differences in young adults' body image, which is consistent with these findings. This might be an indication of a change in society toward more equitable standards and exposure to inclusive body portrayals, particularly among young people. Consequently, the third hypothesis, which anticipated a gender difference, was not validated.

Lastly, the self-esteem scores of male and female individuals are compared in Table 4. The average score was 22.21 (SD = 5.48) for females and 21.76 (SD = 5.96) for males. Once more, the t -value was 0.46, which indicates statistical insignificance. our suggests that among the young adults in our sample, there is no noticeable disparity in the self-esteem of males and females. This is consistent with research by Keshk et al. (2019), which found that both genders had high and similar levels of self-esteem. It is in contrast to certain studies, such as Javaid and Ajmal (2019), which found that teenage girls had lower self-esteem and

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were more body-conscious than boys. The current study's absence of gender differences may point to a slow cultural shift in young adults' self-perceptions toward greater equality. Consequently, the fourth hypothesis is likewise unsupported.

The study's key conclusions are supported by a number of significant ramifications and areas for consideration. The lack of a significant correlation between self-esteem and body image among young adults' male and female counterparts may indicate a rise in youth resilience or a wider acceptance of different body standards, which may be influenced by media representations of inclusivity and body positivity. Instead of concentrating only on physical attractiveness, mental health professionals and educators may need to approach self-esteem from a more holistic perspective, taking into account elements like social belonging, career pressure, and academic stress. Additionally, these dynamics may be shaped by cultural context; in collectivist societies like India, academic or familial accomplishments may provide more external validation than physical attractiveness, which could account for the weak link shown. The use of self-reported online data, which might have introduced social desirability bias, is one issue to be aware of. To develop a more thorough understanding of self-esteem and body image in modern youth, future research may take a qualitative approach to examine individual experiences in greater detail or investigate associated factors like media consumption, peer impact, or mental health status.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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