

Perception of Body Image and its Relationship to Self-Esteem

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ABSTRACT

Self-esteem is a crucial part of life and is closely linked to self-respect, self-worth and self-acceptance. Body image is an important element contributing to the development of self-concept and self-esteem. This study aims to explore the connection between the two. About 60 students, 30 male and 30 female ages ranging from 18-25 years were selected. Body Image Satisfaction Scale and Rosenberg's Self-esteem scale were used to collect data and Pearson correlation was done on the selected population. The finding revealed that as body image scores went up, self-esteem scores showed a slight decline ($r = -0.30$). The study sheds light on the changing relationship of body image and social media especially among the upcoming generations.

Keywords: *Body Image, Self-Esteem, Body Positivity, Psychological Well-being, Gender*

The self is the central idea in various psychological theories referring to either cognitive or affective representation of one's identity. The most basic definition of self-esteem is found in Webster's dictionary, which states that "Self-esteem is satisfaction with oneself". In another edition, self-esteem means an individual's good opinion of one's dignity or worth. In the domain of self-esteem, **Rosenberg (1965)**, one of the pioneers, defined it as an individual's overall positive evaluation to the self. In addition, he states that high self-esteem consists of an individual respecting him/herself and considering him/herself worthy.

Branden (1969) explained that self-esteem consists of two components: a) To consider oneself effective, to trust in one's ability to think, learn, choose and make correct decisions and to overcome challenges, b) To respect oneself, the confidence that people are worthy of the respect, love and self-fulfilment. The formation of self-esteem is a long process, in which adolescence and young adulthood age plays a crucial role. It is correlated with the formation of self-image and self-conscience. It is said that young female's perception towards their body tends to drive their thoughts, inner dialogue and self-perception, hence impacting their self-esteem. Body image—a person's thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes about their physical appearance has become a central issue in mental health discussions. Body image is a multi-layered concept that reflects a person's personal perception and feelings about their own appearance.

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Received: November 06, 2025; Revision Received: March 27, 2026; Accepted: March 31, 2026

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In our society great importance has been given to the beauty of the human body. This is because of personal opinion and what society teaches us. These ideas come from cultural, media and traditions. In the age of technological advancement and the world of social media the concept of body image has been defined differently. The readily available tools and apps which quickly get downloaded and easy to use to alter image can fix every flaw and blemish, allowing everyone to create a perfect body at least online so they can be proud of how they look. One's body image changes in response to the changing lifestyles. (**Women's Health, 2007**). Perhaps, the "looks" of the media stars, celebrities, models, etc. seems to set the time and the quest for the perfect body image.

Green & Pritchard (2003) stated that adolescent girls have low self-esteem through family and media influences. According to **Davison and McCabe (2006)**, a poor body image may hamper adolescent's development of interpersonal skills and positive relations with their friends, peer group and intimate relations.

This idea was later mentioned in a study by **Davison & McCabe (2006)** Lastly, they found a strong association between body image concerns and low self-esteem among adolescent girls, which has led to constructions of body image as an important aspect of self-esteem.

According to a Kenyon College Researcher, women with significant body images were most adversely affected by thin media stimuli than women without body dissatisfaction issues (**Groesz et al., 2002**).

Cash and Pruzinsky (2002) recognized this imbalance and gave emphasis on studying the experiences of positive body image. In researchers, positive body image was found to be associated with high confidence, self-esteem, body appreciation, acceptance, respect and safeguarding of one's body (Avalos et al., 2005).

Rationale of the study

The perception of body image plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's self-esteem. In today's society, where beauty standards are often influenced by media, culture and social expectations, many individuals experience body dissatisfaction, which can impact their overall self-worth. This research aims to explore the connection between body image perception and self-esteem, highlighting how positive or negative body image can impact an individual's mental and emotional health. Understanding this relationship is crucial because body dissatisfaction has been linked to low self-esteem, depression, anxiety and unhealthy behaviours such as extreme dieting or excessive exercise. The research aims to raise awareness about the impact of body image on mental well-being and encourage the development of interventions, such as body positivity movements, self-acceptance programs, and healthier media portrayal.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Keppel and Crowe (2000) explored the effects of a first stroke on body image and self-esteem in a population of previously neurologically intact young adults. 40 participants with a mean age of 36.7 years recorded retrospective and current ratings of self-concept. Body Cathexis Scale of Secord and Jourard and self-esteem was measured using Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale and the physical and personal self-esteem items on the Tennessee Self-concept Scale: 2. The study also found that self-esteem and body image were most strongly affected in people with damage in the left side of the brain. This indicated that the effect of body

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image on self-esteem has become generalised following the stroke contributing to feelings of poor self-worth and possibly culminating in depressive mentation.

Polce-Lynch, Myers, et al. (2001) used cross-sectional design to examine age and gender patterns in self-esteem and to explore how contemporary social influences relate to adolescent self-esteem for their study. Self-reported influence on self-esteem involving the media, sexual harassment, body image, family and peer relationships and emotional expressions were evaluated with 93 boys and 116 girls in grade 5,8 and 12. Girls reported lower self-esteem than boys in early adolescence, and late adolescent boys reported lower self-esteem than younger boys. Large gender differences were present for emotional expression, with boys becoming more restrictive across adolescence.

Kim, and Lennon (2007) examined whether the level of exposure to mass media is related to self-esteem, body image, and eating disorders tendencies in a non-experimental setting based on Festinger's social comparison theory. A convenience sample of 114 female college students participated in this study. Significant positive relationships between exposure to fashion or beauty magazines and a) Overall Appearance dissatisfaction and b) eating disorders tendencies were found. No relationship resulted from television exposure. In addition, risk of eating disorders tendencies was associated with a) low self-esteem, b) body dissatisfaction and c) overall dissatisfaction.

Mellor, Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, et al. (2010) examined the relationship between body image and self-esteem across time and age for men and women. There were 150 men and 239 women aged between 20 and 86 years, recruited from the general population in Australia. They completed a questionnaire assessing self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, body importance and a range of other domains of life satisfaction at a baseline and 2 years later. Cross-Sectionally, we found that higher self-esteem was associated with lower body dissatisfaction, but there was no consistent relationship between variables across time for age and gender. Women were more dissatisfied with their bodies than men.

Cohen, Fardouly et. al (2019) study reveals that exposure to body-positive content can have significant effects on an individual's body satisfaction and self-esteem. One notable study by **Cohen et al. (2019)** investigates the impact of viewing body-positive content on Instagram on young women's mood and body image. This study involved 195 women aged 18-30, randomly assigned to view body-positive, thin-ideal, or appearance-neutral posts. The results indicated that viewing body-positive content improved body satisfaction, mood and body appreciation compared to the other two conditions. However, both thin-ideal and body-positive content also increased self-objectification relative to appearance-neutral content, highlighting a complex interaction between different types of media exposure and body image outcomes.

Audrey, Satyadarma, et. al (2020) attempted to identify whether self-esteem is linked to body image in female teenager Instagram users. The research involved 150 female teenagers who use Instagram recently by using snowball technique. The method that was used in this research is a non-experimental quantitative method. There were two instruments used in the research. Self-Esteem was measured by State Self-Esteem Scale and Body image was measured by Multidimensional Body-Self Relationship Questionnaire-Appearance Scale. The results showed that there is a correlation between self-esteem and body image in female teenager instagram users, hence the research hypothesis is accepted

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Hasballah, R. M., & Hussain, H. A. (2022). The study aims at assessing the level of body image and self-esteem among nursing female collegians. In addition, identify the relationship between the body image and self-esteem among nursing female collegians. In addition, find-out the relationship between the body image, self-esteem and their socio-demographic. The study was conducted on a non-probability sample of 110 female students in the College of Nursing. Using Body Image Scale and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a purposive sampling method involving 60 college students, 30 males and 30 females aged between 18 to 25 years. Participants were selected from various undergraduate programs. All participants were proficient in English, which was essential for comprehending and responding to the standardised self-report measures used in this study. Informed consent was obtained to ensure they fully understood the study's purpose and procedures. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants were required to meet the following eligibility to be included in the research:

- They must be actively enrolled as students in college or university at the time of participation.
- Their age must fall within the range of 18 to 25 years.
- They must be proficient in English to fully comprehend the questionnaire.
- They must voluntarily agree to participate and provide informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria

Individuals were excluded from the study if they met following conditions:

- They were not currently enrolled in a college or university.
- They were either younger than 18 years or older than 25 years.
- They had limited English proficiency or were non- English speakers, which might affect their understanding of the questionnaire.
- They were not willing to provide informed consent for the participation.
- They had any condition or circumstance that could interfere with their ability to complete the survey.

Hypothesis of the study

- **Null Hypothesis (H0):** There is no statistical significant relationship between body image and self-esteem of the sample population.
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H1):** There is a statistical significant relationship between body image and self-esteem in the sample population.

Research Design

The study is designed to understand the concepts of self-esteem and body image and their relation. The sample was collected using a convenience sampling method. Data was collected from a sample of 60 students, 30 male and 30 female undergraduate students, and age group of 18-25. This study employs quantitative correlational research design. Two standardised scales were used to collect the data on self-esteem and body image.

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Tools of the study

Two questionnaires were used in this study

1. **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES):** It is a widely used self-report scale with 10 items. It measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about self.
2. **Body Image Satisfaction Scale (BIS):** It was designed to measure the body image accessibility/closeness, satisfaction/dissatisfaction by measuring the degree of discrepancy of self by both perceived and physical attributes. It is a 19 item questionnaire.

RESULT ANALYSIS

The study included 60 participants (30 male and 30 female) aged 18 to 25. Descriptive statistics were computed for self-esteem and body image scores. The **mean self-esteem score** was **12.80** (SD = **5.95**), and the **mean body image score** was **21.72** (SD = **3.38**). A Pearson correlation analysis indicated a negative relationship between body image and self-esteem ($r = -0.30$), suggesting that higher body image satisfaction was modestly associated with lower self-esteem in this sample. This could be due to a number of reasons including the increase in body positivity in social media trends due to which newer generations like generation z are decreasing their focus on negative body evaluations and focusing on other aspects of themselves to base their self-esteem.

Descriptive Analysis

- Male participants had an average **body image** score of **12.3** and an average **self-esteem** score of **22.3**. The variation in their **body image** score (SD) was **5.42**, while for **self-esteem** was **4.19**
- Female participants had an average **body image** score of **13.2** and an average self-esteem score of **21.2**. Their **body image** score varied by **6.48**, while **self-esteem** scores varied by **2.22**
- The correlation coefficient between the variables, **body image and self-esteem** was **-0.30**, indicating a weak negative relationship, which means that as body image scores increased, self-esteem scores tended to decrease slightly.

DISCUSSION

Perception of our body contributes a large share in conceptualizing self-image as it affects our overall feelings. The correlational analysis reveals a weak relationship between body image and self-esteem. Although the correlation is negative, the strength of the relationship matters. A weak negative correlation like -0.30 suggests that while body image and self-esteem are related, other factors also influence self-esteem. Factors such as societal beauty standards, social comparison, internalized negative beliefs etc. Body image is related to psychological health and a happy life. **Al-Daher (2004)** defines it as the attitude of the individual towards himself.

Finding of this study reveals a weak negative correlation between body image and self-esteem. Future studies considering the different pertaining psychological and social factors, self-esteem and body image can be studied while understanding adverse effects of eating disorders. Finding aligns with theories like Self-Discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) which suggest that individuals compare their actual self to their ideal self, impacting self-esteem. It also contributes to research in self-esteem development, showing how body image plays a role in shaping an individual's self-worth.

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Practical Implications

- Encourages the development of counselling and therapy programs that focus on improving body image to boost self-esteem.
- Schools and universities can incorporate body positive programs to promote healthy self-esteem.
- Social media literacy programs can help individuals critically assess unrealistic beauty standards.
- Encourage individuals to engage in self-acceptance and self-care practices.
- Promotes healthy lifestyle choices without unrealistic body expectations, improving both physical and mental health.

Limitations

Several limitations may affect the study's result and interpretation. Here are a few limitations to consider.

1. **Cross-Sectional Design:** If the study is cross-sectional, it cannot prove that one factor directly causes the other, it only shows that they are related. Longitudinal studies would be needed to track changes over time.
2. **Limited Consideration of External Factors:** Body image and self-esteem are influenced by multiple factors, such as media exposure, cultural background, peer pressure and mental health conditions, which may not all be accounted for in the study.
3. **Gender Differences:** The relationship between body image and self-esteem might differ between males or females, but if gender differences are not deeply analyzed, the results may not capture the full complexity of the issue.
4. **Lack of Experimental Control:** If the study is non-experimental, it may not control for external variables that could influence the relationship between body image and self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

The current study demonstrates a strong observation that an individual's level of self-esteem serves as a correlate to one's perception of body image or vice versa. The findings revealed a negative correlation, indicating that individuals with higher body image satisfaction reported slightly lower levels of self-esteem. Although unexpected, these results suggest that body image and self-esteem may not always be positively aligned and can vary based on individual perceptions and sociocultural factors. Future researchers need to consider it as a pertinent psychological aspect contributing to the development of personality and well-being. To prevent the growing issues of developing negative body image leading to low self-esteem and confidence; psychologists, policy makers, educationalists, parents and media say social media needs to give more emphasis to the positive inner aspects of the intellect and beauty. The need of the hour is to provide such a tool to people that they critically evaluate the images around them. They need to encourage people to recognize the emotional competencies and uniqueness as a beauty construct.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Baviskar, P., Shaikh, M. & Dalvi, E. (2026). Perception of Body Image and its Relationship to Self-Esteem. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(1), 3114-3121. DIP:18.01.309.20261401, DOI:10.25215/1401.309