

Impact of Positive Affirmations on Body Image of Adolescents: A Theoretical Study

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid physical, emotional and psychological changes. During this period, body image becomes central to self-identity and self-worth. Seeing perfect-looking bodies again and again in media can make individuals feel like their own body is not good enough. The more someone is exposed to unrealistic beauty ideals in media, the more likely they are to feel dissatisfied with how they look. This paper explores the impact of positive affirmations as a psychological intervention to improve body image among adolescents. Using theoretical approach, it integrates cognitive psychology, self-affirmation theory and positive psychology frameworks. This study shows that affirmations can help people reduce negative self-talk, become emotionally stronger and feel more accepting of themselves. It also suggests that these practises can be included in schools and other developmental settings.

Keywords: *Positive Affirmations, Body Image, Adolescents, Theoretical Study*

Adolescence is a period where an individual goes through various changes in their body which could be physical, mental, and emotional because of puberty and hormonal changes. During this age period their looks become very important for them and body image becomes an important part of how they see themselves and their self-worth (Croll, 2005). Body image means how a person thinks and feels about their own body, and it develops strongly during these years (Wertheim & Paxton, 2012). At the same time during their adolescence period, seeing perfect bodies again and again in media of models and actors can affect how they feel about themselves. When adolescents are constantly exposed to unrealistic beauty standards, they may compare themselves and might think that their own body is not good enough. According to research, the more they see such images, the more likely they are to feel unhappy with how they look, especially girls who often feel that being thinner would make them happier (Ho et al., 2016).

With the rise of social media, this problem has become even much bigger. Adolescents are now continuously seeing edited and unrealistic images of people, which makes them compare themselves more which can lead to negative self-image, anxiety and depression. Seeing this again and again can make them feel like they need to look the same as they see in media

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(Merino et al., 2024). Many researches revealed that girls and boys face body dissatisfaction during their middle and high school (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2018).

There is a strong need for interventions to address body image issues during adolescence, as this is a stage where individuals go through many physical, emotional, and psychological changes. It is also a crucial period for shaping self-perception, as the foundation of self-image and confidence develops during this time (Markey, 2010).

Therefore, it is important to use interventions that are simple and personalized. Since every adolescent may have different insecurities, a one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective. Positive affirmations can be especially helpful in this regard, as individuals can create their own affirmations based on their personal concerns. This allows them to address their specific issues more deeply and helps in creating change at the root level. Positive affirmations are simple, positive thoughts that people repeat to themselves to reduce negative thinking. Based on self-affirmation theory, they help people feel better about themselves and maintain a healthy mental balance (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Therefore, this paper aims to examine how positive affirmations influences body image among adolescents using cognitive and emotional frameworks.

Conceptual Understanding of Body Image

Body image is a very complex concept which includes how a person sees, think and feel about their own body. It does not only include physical appearance but also includes aspects like health, abilities, and overall feelings about the body. Body image may also change due to factors like age, media exposure, or health conditions. It is influenced by personal factors such as self-esteem, as well as relationships with family, friends, and media, along with biological and cultural influences. Everything depends on how a person experiences and evaluates their body image, which could be positive or negative. According to Neago, body image has three main dimensions: the perceptual dimension (how a person sees their body), the attitudinal dimension (how they think and feel about it), and the behavioural dimension (actions like checking appearance, dieting, or avoiding social situations). During adolescence, body image becomes very important. Teenagers often start accepting social beauty standards, and if they feel they do not meet these ideals, it can make them feel dissatisfied with their bodies (Neagu, 2015). At the same time, puberty makes them more aware of their appearance, which can lead to self-doubt, self-criticism, discomfort in their own bodies, and lower confidence (Ginsberg & Gray, 2006). There are many negative consequences that adolescents may experience due to poor body image. Disturbance in body image is a key feature of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Also increase in demand of plastic surgery is an example of dissatisfaction of one's body image these days which tells us the lower self -esteem and emotional distress of an individual (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990). Additionally, disturbed body image has been associated with higher levels of anxiety (Ackard & Peterson, 2001). So, there's a need to develop intervention how young adults can develop positive body image (Markey, 2010).

Conceptual understanding of positive affirmation

Affirmations are those statements which we repeat again and again so that we can reprogram our subconscious mind. When we keep repeating those statements then our mind thinks that those statements are actually true. This gives us the chance to replace negative or unwanted thoughts with positive or encouraging thoughts that serve us to do better (Kadian, 2023). The use of positive affirmations helps in increasing self-esteem and confidence in one's life. There are various types of affirmations like personal, general and positive affirmations (Kadian,

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2023). These affirmations help individuals develop a more optimistic mindset (Rana, 2018). During adolescence, it is important to develop a positive mindset about one's own body, as this is the time when self-esteem, confidence, and healthy habits are formed, which shape individuals for the future. For this, we need simple and effective ways to build and encourage a positive attitude toward life. Positive affirmations can be a great way to address the different challenges adolescents face during this period, especially those related to body image.

Cognitive theory suggests that an individual's thoughts, beliefs, and interpretations play a central role in shaping how their emotions and behaviours will be. During adolescence, individuals often develop negative automatic thoughts and core beliefs about their bodies, which are influenced by socially comparing themselves and by internalized beauty standards. These thoughts are often unrealistic, such as focusing only on the flaws or believing that only appearance determines their self-worth, which can lead to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and unhealthy behaviours. According to cognitive theory, modifying these negative thought patterns can improve emotional well-being and self-perception (Dozois & Beck, 2011). Researches have shown that when people change their thinking along with their behaviour, the results on an individual are better and long lasting. This supports the idea that positive self-talk, like affirmation can help improve how adolescents feel about their body (Meichenbaum, 1977).

The broaden-and-build theory further explains that positive emotions help broaden an individual's thinking, making it more flexible, open, and constructive, whereas negative emotions make the thinking narrow and increase focus on flaws and insecurities (Fredrickson, 2001). In this context, positive affirmations can generate positive emotions, helping adolescents move away from narrow, negative thinking patterns towards a more balanced and accepting view of their bodies. Additionally, positive emotions can reduce the effects of negative emotions such as anxiety and self-doubt, and over time, help build an individual's personal resources like self-confidence, resilience, and overall psychological well-being.

Self-compassion, defined as treating oneself with kindness and understanding, has been identified as an important protective factor in relation to body image. Research shows that individuals with higher self-compassion tend to experience lower levels of body dissatisfaction and are seen less likely to engage in disordered eating behaviours. Self-compassion reduces self-criticism, prevents the development of negative beliefs, weakens the impact of external pressures such as media and social comparison, and interrupts negative thinking patterns that contribute to poor body image (Braun et al., 2016). In research it was found that increased self-compassion is associated with higher life satisfaction and lower level of anxiety, depression and stress. It also tells us that self-compassion is a learnable skill which can effectively improve psychological health of an individual. Here in this situation, positive affirmation can be seen as a simple way to cultivate self-compassion by encouraging individuals to treat themselves with kindness and reduce self-critical thoughts, which in turn can lead to more positive body image (Neff & Germer, 2013).

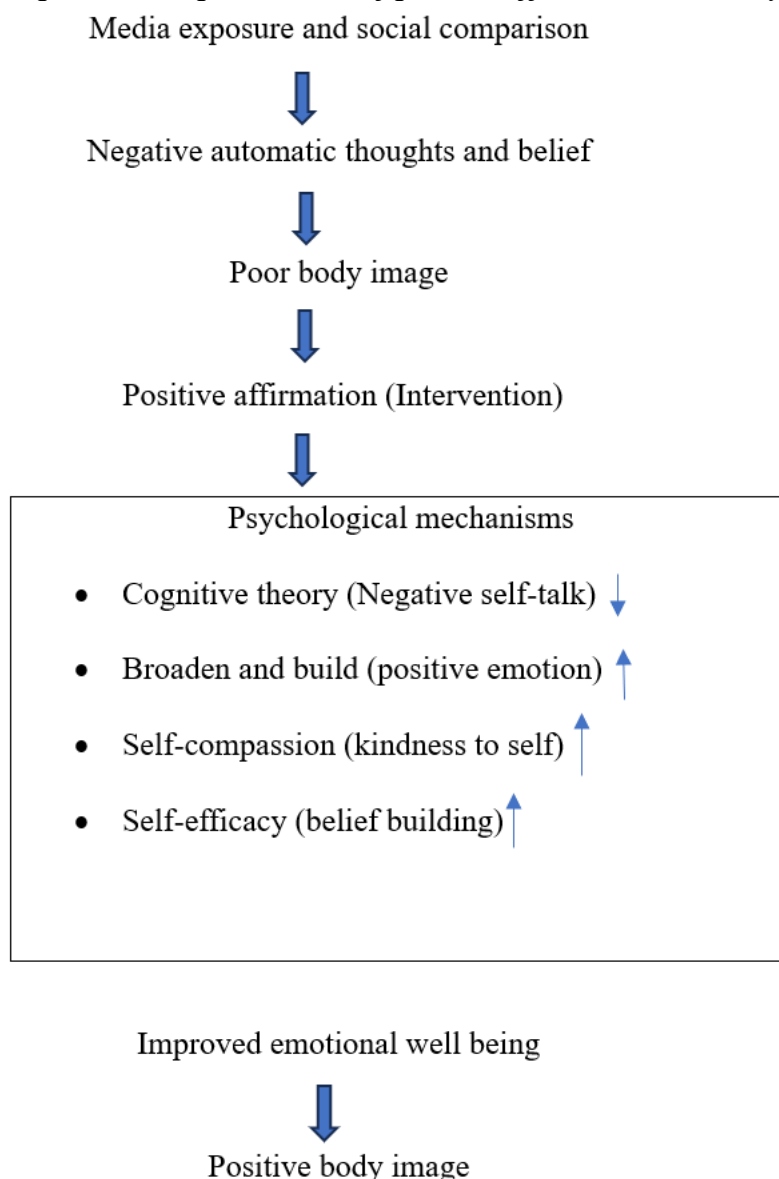
In this situation, positive affirmations can be understood as a practical cognitive strategy that promotes both self-compassion and positive thinking (Bryan et al., 2016). This process not only reduces self-criticism but also fosters a kinder and more accepting relationship with one's body.

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Furthermore, according to self-efficacy theory, an individual's belief in their own abilities influences their actions and outcomes; positive affirmations can strengthen this belief, thereby enhancing confidence and adaptive behaviours.

Overall, the integration of cognitive theory, broaden-and-build theory, self-compassion, and self-efficacy provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how positive affirmations can improve body image, self-confidence, and psychological well-being among adolescents. These mechanisms do not work independently rather they work together to create positive thoughts, emotions and behaviours which ultimately leads to improved body image.

Proposed conceptual model of positive affirmation and body image in adolescents



CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that positive affirmations play a significant role in improving body image among adolescents. They help reduce negative thinking, improve body

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satisfaction, enhance emotional well-being, promote self-acceptance, and reduce social comparison.

Overall, positive affirmations are a simple yet effective strategy that can help adolescents develop a healthier and more positive relationship with their bodies.

By gradually transforming negative self-talk into supportive and encouraging thoughts, affirmations contribute to greater emotional stability and self-confidence. With regular practice, they can enhance overall mental well-being. Due to their simplicity and accessibility, positive affirmations can be easily incorporated into daily routines as well as educational settings, making them a practical tool for promoting long-term psychological benefits.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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