

## Relationship Between Self Esteem and Body Esteem Among University Students

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### ABSTRACT

The present study examines the relationship between self-esteem and body esteem among university students, with a focus on gender differences across the domains of appearance, weight, and attribution. Self-esteem and body-related perceptions are widely recognized as significant contributors to psychological well-being during young adulthood, a period marked by heightened self-evaluation and identity formation. A sample of 100 university students participated in the study and completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale along with the Body-Esteem Scale. Descriptive statistics revealed that male students reported higher levels of self-esteem as well as more positive body esteem across all domains compared to female students. Correlation analysis demonstrated significant negative associations between self-esteem and each domain of body esteem. Specifically, dissatisfaction with appearance, weight, and body-related attributions was associated with lower self-esteem, with the strongest negative correlation observed between self-esteem and the attribution domain. These results highlight the critical role of body-related perceptions in shaping an individual's overall sense of self-worth. The findings carry important implications for mental health interventions within university settings. Enhancing body esteem through counseling, awareness programs, and positive body image initiatives may contribute to improved self-esteem and overall psychological well-being among students.

**Keywords:** *Self-esteem, Body-esteem, University Students*

University students experience a range of developmental, social, and psychological changes that influence their sense of identity, self-worth, and perception of their physical appearance. During this period, concerns related to body image often increase due to academic pressure, peer comparison, social expectations, and exposure to idealized body standards through media and social networking platforms. When students experience dissatisfaction with their bodies, it can negatively affect their global self-esteem, mental health, and overall functioning. Although research indicates a strong relationship between self-esteem and body esteem, the nature and strength of this association differ across populations, genders, cultural settings, and age groups. In the Indian context, limited

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systematic research has examined how body esteem influences self-esteem among university-level students. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the relationship between self-esteem and body esteem among university students to better understand the psychological factors contributing to their well-being.

The study focuses on two major psychological variables: self-esteem and body esteem. Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their worth and value as a person, and in this study, it will be measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Higher scores on this scale indicate a higher level of global self-esteem. Body esteem refers to a person's subjective evaluation of their own body, including appearance, weight, and physical attributes. In the present study, body esteem will be measured through the Body Esteem Scale (BES or BES-Revised), where higher scores represent more positive perceptions of one's body. The study population consists of university students aged 17 to 25 years enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programs.

Research over the past decade has consistently demonstrated a strong association between body esteem and self-esteem among young adults, particularly university students. Ata, Ludden, and Lally (2014) found that body dissatisfaction significantly predicted lower self-esteem in college students, with women reporting greater appearance-related concerns than men. Swami and colleagues (2015) reported that positive body image was strongly linked with high self-esteem and overall psychological well-being in university populations across different countries. Similarly, Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) observed that individuals who possessed higher levels of body appreciation tended to report higher global self-esteem and greater resilience toward societal beauty pressures.

Several studies highlight the role of sociocultural and media influences. Jackson and Chen (2016) revealed that body image dissatisfaction mediated the relationship between social media exposure and self-esteem, suggesting that students who frequently compare themselves with others online are more vulnerable to low self-worth. Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) also found that social networking site usage predicted lower body esteem and decreased self-esteem due to appearance-based comparisons. Andrew, Tiggemann, and Clark (2016) specifically noted that Instagram use increased appearance comparison and led to lower body and self-esteem among university students.

Gender differences have also been well documented. Rousseau et al. (2017) reported that female students showed stronger associations between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem compared to their male counterparts. Hwang and Kim (2019) similarly found that women exhibited higher levels of body dissatisfaction, which in turn strongly predicted lower self-esteem.

Recent research has explored the psychological mechanisms involved in this relationship. Betz, Sabik, and Ramsey (2019) reported that the internalization of societal appearance ideals predicted increased body dissatisfaction, which ultimately lowered self-esteem. Kim and Park (2020) found that self-esteem served as a mediator between body image dissatisfaction and stress, indicating that students with poor body esteem are more likely to experience psychological distress. Pila et al. (2020) discovered that appreciation of body functionality improved body esteem and contributed positively to global self-esteem.

Other studies have highlighted the impact on mental health. Griffiths et al. (2018) found that negative body image was associated with depressive symptoms and low self-esteem among

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both male and female university students. Schaefer and colleagues (2018) observed that individuals with high body appreciation tended to report higher life satisfaction, better well-being, and greater self-esteem.

Collectively, these studies indicate that body esteem plays a crucial role in shaping students' self-esteem and overall psychological adjustment. They emphasize that positive body perception is associated with higher self-worth, while body dissatisfaction significantly contributes to low self-esteem and mental distress. Despite numerous international studies, research among Indian university students remains limited, highlighting the need for further investigation in this cultural setting.

The university years represent a crucial developmental stage during which students undergo major psychological, social, and physical transitions. These changes often shape how young adults perceive themselves and their bodies. With increasing exposure to social media, peer comparison, and societal beauty standards, issues related to body esteem have become more prominent. Poor body esteem has been linked with lower self-esteem, emotional difficulties, academic stress, and impaired social functioning. Although several international studies have found a significant relationship between body esteem and self-esteem, the extent to which these findings apply to Indian university students is not yet fully understood. Given the cultural differences in beauty ideals, social expectations, and academic pressures, it is essential to examine the relationship between self-esteem and body esteem within the Indian context. This study is therefore justified, as it attempts to fill the existing gap in literature by exploring how university students perceive their bodies and how these perceptions influence their overall sense of self-worth.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the relationship between self-esteem and body esteem among university students. A secondary objective is to determine whether higher levels of body esteem contribute to higher levels of global self-esteem in this population. The study also aims to explore whether variations in body perception are associated with differences in self-worth among young adults.

The following hypotheses will be formulated for the present study:

1. There will be a significant relationship between self-esteem and body esteem among university students.
2. Higher levels of body esteem will be associated with higher levels of self-esteem among university students.

## **METHOD**

### *Research Design*

The present study was employed a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationship between self-esteem and body esteem among university students. A cross-sectional survey method will be used to collect data from the participants at a single point in time.

### *Sample*

The sample consisted of 100 university students (male and Female) aged between 18 and 25 years who are enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programs. A convenience sampling technique will be used to select participants from different departments within the university. Students who provide voluntary consent and are able to comprehend the survey will be included in the study. Students with diagnosed psychological disorders or medical

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conditions that may influence body image perception were excluded to ensure the accuracy of results. Inclusive criteria of the participants were 1) the age range of 18-25 years of literate young adults, 2) no medical and psychological illness history, 3) without psychiatric symptoms, 4) willing to be a part of the research.

### *Tools*

- **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale:** This scale is developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965. It is one of the most widely used psychological instruments for assessing global self-esteem, which refers to an individual's overall sense of personal worth and value. The scale was originally created for adolescents, but it has been extensively validated and used across all age groups, including university students and adults. It assesses general feelings of self-worth rather than specific competency-based self-evaluations. This is a unidimensional scale, but it includes two types of items: Positive self-esteem items (e.g., "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.") and Negative self-esteem items (reverse-scored, e.g., "At times, I think I am no good at all.") However, the scale is typically treated as measuring one overall dimension of global self-esteem. The scale consists of 10 items. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Strongly Disagree. Negative items, are reverse-scored, and higher total scores indicate higher self-esteem. The RSES demonstrates strong reliability across multiple populations. Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) is ranges between 0.77 and 0.88 in most studies. And test-retest reliability is found 0.82 to 0.85 over 1–2 weeks.
- **The Body-Esteem Scale (BES):** It is developed by Mendelson, White, and Mendelson in 1996, This scale contained a 23-item assesses body esteem across three domains: Appearance, Weight, and Attribution. Rated on a 5-point Likert scale from "Never" to "Always." The BES measures satisfaction with body features, weight-related concerns, and perceived social acceptance. The scale demonstrates strong reliability ( $\alpha = 0.85$  to  $0.94$ ) and strong construct, concurrent, and discriminant validity, making it one of the most reliable and widely used tools for assessing body esteem in adolescents and adults, including university students.

### *Procedure:*

Before initiating data collection, formal approval obtained from the competent authority of the university. Participants will be briefed about the purpose, objectives, and significance of the research in a clear and understandable manner. They will also be informed about the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality of responses, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. After providing this information, written informed consent took from each participant prior to administering the questionnaires.

The standardized psychological tools Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and the Body-Esteem Scale checked for completeness, clarity, and scoring instructions before distribution. Participants completed the questionnaires individually in a classroom or quiet setting, ensuring minimal distractions. The researcher remained present to address any doubts, without influencing the responses.

After data collection, all responses were screened for completeness. Any incomplete or unusable questionnaires excluded following predefined criteria. The data then coded and

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entered into SPSS for statistical analysis. Appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical methods—such as means, standard deviations, correlation analysis applied.

### RESULT

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation scores of self-esteem and the three domains of body esteem—appearance, weight, and attribution—among male and female university students. The results show that male participants ( $M = 22.06$ ,  $SD = 5.49$ ) reported slightly higher self-esteem compared to female participants ( $M = 20.76$ ,  $SD = 3.88$ ). In terms of the appearance domain of body esteem, males again scored higher ( $M = 20.86$ ,  $SD = 8.86$ ) than females ( $M = 19.00$ ,  $SD = 4.95$ ), indicating relatively more positive perceptions of physical appearance among males. Similarly, males obtained higher mean scores in the weight domain ( $M = 18.41$ ,  $SD = 7.08$ ) compared to females ( $M = 16.35$ ,  $SD = 4.98$ ), suggesting better satisfaction with weight-related aspects. For the attribution domain, males also scored slightly higher ( $M = 13.31$ ,  $SD = 5.28$ ) than females ( $M = 12.30$ ,  $SD = 4.69$ ). Overall, the descriptive statistics indicate that male students tend to have higher self-esteem and more positive body esteem across all domains when compared with female students.

*Table-1: Mean and SD of Self-esteem and domains of body esteem in male and female participants*

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-esteem	Male	49	22.06	5.494
	Female	50	20.76	3.889
Appearance	Male	49	20.86	8.869
	Female	50	19.00	4.957
Weight	Male	49	18.41	7.088
	Female	49	16.35	4.986
Attribution	Male	49	13.31	5.288
	Female	50	12.30	4.696

Table 2 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients between self-esteem and the domains of body esteem—appearance, weight, and attribution. The findings indicate a significant negative correlation between self-esteem and appearance ( $r = -.250$ ,  $p < .05$ ), suggesting that lower satisfaction with appearance is associated with lower self-esteem. Similarly, self-esteem is negatively correlated with the weight domain ( $r = -.255$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that dissatisfaction with body weight is linked to reduced self-esteem. A stronger negative correlation is observed between self-esteem and the attribution domain ( $r = -.396$ ,  $p < .01$ ), demonstrating that negative body-related judgments from others or self-perceptions are associated with substantially lower levels of self-esteem.

Additionally, the three body esteem domains show significant positive inter-correlations. Appearance is strongly correlated with weight ( $r = .819$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and moderately correlated with attribution ( $r = .560$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while weight is also strongly correlated with attribution ( $r = .681$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These results indicate that positive perceptions in one domain of body esteem tend to be associated with positive perceptions in other domains. Overall, the correlation analysis suggests that lower body esteem across appearance, weight, and attribution is associated with lower self-esteem among university students.

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**Table-2: Correlation Coefficient between self-esteem**

Correlations		Self-esteem	Appearance	Weight	Attribution
<b>Self-esteem</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	-.250*	-.255*	-.396**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.013	.011	.000
	N		99	98	99
<b>Appearance</b>	Pearson Correlation		1	.819**	.560**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000
	N			98	99
<b>Weight</b>	Pearson Correlation			1	.681**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000
	N				98
<b>Attribution</b>	Pearson Correlation				1
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N				

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### Major Findings

- Male students reported higher self-esteem ( $M = 22.06$ ) compared to female students ( $M = 20.76$ ).
- Across all domains of body esteem—appearance, weight, and attribution—male students scored higher than female students, indicating more positive body perceptions among males.
- A significant negative correlation was found between self-esteem and appearance ( $r = -.250$ ,  $p < .05$ ), suggesting that dissatisfaction with appearance is linked to lower self-esteem.
- Self-esteem also showed a significant negative correlation with the weight domain ( $r = -.255$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that weight concerns are associated with reduced self-esteem.
- The strongest negative relationship was observed between self-esteem and attribution ( $r = -.396$ ,  $p < .01$ ), showing that negative body-related evaluations strongly predict lower self-esteem.
- The appearance domain of body esteem showed a strong positive correlation with the weight domain ( $r = .819$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that individuals who feel positive about their appearance also tend to feel positive about their weight.
- Appearance also showed a moderate positive correlation with the attribution domain ( $r = .560$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting interrelatedness among body esteem components.
- The weight domain and attribution domain displayed a strong positive correlation ( $r = .681$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating consistency in body-related attitudes across domains.
- Overall, the findings reveal that body esteem plays a significant role in shaping self-esteem among university students.

## DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between self-esteem and various domains of body esteem appearance, weight, and attribution among university students. The findings revealed gender differences, with male students reporting higher levels of self-esteem and more positive body esteem compared to female students. These results align with earlier

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studies indicating that females typically experience higher body dissatisfaction due to sociocultural pressures, idealized beauty standards, and internalized body comparisons (Mellor et al., 2010; Tiggermann & Slater, 2014). The higher scores observed among male participants suggest that men may face comparatively less societal scrutiny regarding physical appearance, which may help maintain more stable self-esteem.

The correlation analysis demonstrated significant negative associations between self-esteem and each of the body esteem domains. Individuals who reported dissatisfaction with their appearance or weight, or who perceived negative body-related attributions, were more likely to have lower self-esteem. This supports previous research showing that body image concerns strongly predict reduced self-esteem, especially during young adulthood when identity and self-concept are still developing (Van den Berg et al., 2010; Holsen et al., 2012). The strongest negative correlation was observed between self-esteem and attribution, suggesting that how individuals believe others evaluate their bodies plays a particularly influential role in shaping self-worth.

Positive and significant inter-correlations among the body esteem domains indicate that satisfaction with one aspect of the body tends to be associated with satisfaction in others. This reinforces the multidimensional nature of body image proposed by Franzoi and Shields (1984), suggesting that cognitive, evaluative, and perceptual components of body esteem are interconnected. When students feel confident about their appearance and weight, they are more likely to experience favorable social and personal evaluations, contributing to better psychological well-being.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of body esteem as a key determinant of self-esteem among university students. Interventions aimed at improving body image—such as media literacy, self-compassion training, and positive body feedback—may therefore contribute to enhanced self-esteem and mental health.

### CONCLUSION

The study concludes that body esteem, including appearance, weight satisfaction, and attribution, plays a significant role in predicting self-esteem among university students. Male students demonstrated higher self-esteem and more positive body esteem across all domains compared to female students. Significant negative correlations between body esteem domains and self-esteem indicate that dissatisfaction with physical attributes is associated with diminished self-worth. These findings underscore the need for educational institutions to promote positive body image and provide psychological support programs to enhance self-esteem, particularly among female students.

### *Limitations and Implications*

However, the study employed a correlational design, which limits the ability to establish relationships between self-esteem and body esteem. The sample was restricted to students from a single university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Self-report questionnaires were used, which may be subject to social desirability bias or inaccurate self-perceptions. The study did not account for external variables such as media exposure, BMI, peer influence, or cultural factors, which may also affect body esteem and self-esteem. Gender was categorized only as male and female; future research may benefit from including gender-diverse participants.

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The findings of the study highlight that body esteem has a significant influence on self-esteem among university students, indicating the importance of addressing body image concerns within educational settings. The results suggest that universities should strengthen their mental health and counseling services by incorporating interventions focused on improving students' perceptions of their appearance, weight, and overall body image. Such initiatives may be particularly beneficial for female students, who showed comparatively lower levels of body esteem. The study further implies that awareness programs and workshops promoting realistic and inclusive beauty standards can contribute to healthier self-perceptions and enhanced psychological well-being. Creating a supportive campus environment that encourages acceptance of diverse body types can also help students develop greater confidence and resilience. These findings provide a useful foundation for policymakers to integrate body image education into broader student wellness policies. Moreover, the study highlights the need for future research to examine other influential factors, such as media exposure, peer influence, and cultural expectations, which may further shape body esteem and self-esteem. Overall, the study underscores the importance of promoting positive body image as a pathway to improving the mental health and well-being of university students.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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