



UNDERSTANDING BODY IMAGE AND ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

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ABSTRACT

The focus of present research is on understanding body image and its psychological consequences. We formulated four objectives in our study a) to examine the body image dissatisfaction in different age groups b) to examine the relationship between body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression c) to see the difference between dysmorphic and non-dysmorphic on body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression d) to examine whether the body dissatisfaction is more in males or females. Data has been collected from total 60 participants which included 20 participants of people of age group 20 to 35, 20 participants of people of age group 45 to 60 and 20 participants of people of age group 65 above. The total 60 participants also involve 30 males and 30 females because we also want to know the gender difference in relation to body image. The results showed more body dissatisfaction is more in early adulthood as compared to middle and late adulthood. The result also showed that no significant difference exists between body image dissatisfaction and aggression. The result showed that there is significant difference between dysmorphic and non-dysmorphic on body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression. The result also showed on the basis of mean difference that body dissatisfaction is more in males as compared to females but there is no significant difference.

KEYWORDS: *Body image, Body image dissatisfaction, negative body image, self-esteem, aggression.*

INTRODUCTION

The society in which we live tend to give a lot of emphasis on beauty of the human body. But many time how a person perceive his or her body do not correspond to the standards set by the society. For the past few decades, the term body image has been the centre of attention of many researchers. Paul Schilder who was a famous Austrian neurologist and psychoanalyst in his book *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (1935) coined the term body image. Body image is considered as a important phenomenon worldwide because it has been found that 74.4% of women and 46% of men with normal body weight tend spend a lot of time contemplating about their physical appearance which causes a high risk of forming a negative body image. When there is discrepancy between current and ideal body, it leads to formation of negative body image. The body image not only include weight or shape of body but also includes facial features, skin colour, muscles tone and height. Body image is considered as a amalgamation of individuals personal experiences, personality, and various social and cultural forces. So, we can define body image as a psychological construct, which includes persons perceptions, thoughts and feelings about his or her body (Grogan, 1998). When the person has negative perceptions, thoughts and feelings about his or her body, it leads to body dissatisfaction. Media play a very important role in determining how people perceive their body because the kind of images related to body portrayed in media really impact people feelings, perceptions and thoughts about his or her body.

There are four major dimensions of body image-

- **Perceptual Body Image-** How you look at your body is your perceptual body image and this not always accurate description of how you actually look.
- **Affective Body Image-** This dimension is related to the feeling part, which generally means how you feel about your body.
- **Cognitive Body Image-** This third dimension is related to the thinking part, which generally means how you think about your body.
- **Behavioral Body Image-** All the kind of behavior in which you engage related to your body image is describe as your behavioral body image.

So, on the basis of these four dimensions we can operationally define body image as persons perceptual, emotional (affective), cognitive and behavioral interpretation of his/her physical appearance or body appearance.

Most intriguing thing is that many researches indicated that females are more dissatisfied with their bodies and their male's counterpart are found to be happier with their body weight (Leon, Carroll, Chernyk, & Finn, 1985), shape (Fallon & Rozin, 1985) and overall appearance (Pliner, Chaiken, & Flett, 1990; Rozin & Fallon, 1988). Because of this reason it is important to study the body image disturbance and eating disorders and their relationship to mental health, especially in females.

IDEAL BODY SIZE

Gruber, and Borowiecki (1999) in their study looked out for the toys of males and found that toys physiques have become more muscular over the last 20 to 35 years. In another



study by Howard Lavine et al., (1999), they examined the showing of women on TV ads as sex objects and how it leads to body dissatisfaction in females. Results found that women experienced great body dissatisfaction when they show ads portraying women as sex objects and also discrepancy between their current body size and ideal body size was very large. Schwartz and colleagues found that parenting also play a very important role in determining whether individual experience body satisfaction or dissatisfaction. According to them negative parental feedback regarding the physical appearance during childhood resulted in body image dissatisfaction and poor psychological functioning among undergraduate students, which is measured by the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI). In a meta-analysis of 25 studies done by Groesz et al. (2002) indicated that negative body image was experienced by the women who viewed the images of thin women and on contrary no such negative body image experience was experienced by women who viewed images of average size models, plus size models, or inanimate objects. Duane A. Hargreaves & Marika Tiggemann (2004), studied the portrayal of idealized body images in media and its effect on adolescent males and females body image. It was found that when both boys and girls were exposed to idealized body image of beauty in the media, it led to greater body dissatisfaction among girls as compared to boys. Therefore, the results suggest that impact of media related to idealized body images is stronger and more normative for girls than for boys, but still some boys also suffer from perception of negative body image which also tend to impact their psychological functioning. But some studies indicated that body dissatisfaction which quite a common phenomenon among women has also become quite common among men (Tiggemann, M & Duane, A. 2009). When men experience body dissatisfaction it leads to various consequences such as low self-esteem, eating disorder, obsessive exercising, eating disorder and depressive moods.

OLDER MALES AND FEMALES

Researches conducted on older males and older females indicated that men differ from their female counterpart in intriguing ways. Many studies have revealed that older men show less concern about their physical appearances and age-related changes in their bodies as compared to older women. It was also found that older men have higher self-esteem in later life as compared to women who show high concern for physical appearances and age-related changes in their body and therefore, they tend to have low self-esteem in their later life (Demarest & Allen, 2000; Ferraro et al., 2008; McMullin & Cairney, 2004; Oberg & Tornstam, 1999; Pliner, Chaiken & Flett, 1990; Tiggemann, 1992). In another study by Paxton and Phythian (1999) found that males who are in old age give less emphasis to their appearance. Kaminski and Hayslip (2006) stated that instead of physical appearance decline in functioning may have greater negative impact on men because decline in functioning results in lower strength, independence, and able-bodiedness as well as lower self-esteem.

RATES OF BODY DISSATISFACTION AMONG MALES

Researches on male body dissatisfaction has been very less. But in the last few years researches have started giving

importance to male body image also. Drewnowski and Yee (1987) found that 85% of females showed desired to lose weight, but on the other hand men gave conflicting responses as around 40% wanted to lose weight and 45% wanted to gain weight and both these responses indicated dissatisfaction with their body image. In fact the most intriguing thing is that one study indicated more body dissatisfaction in males as compared to females in terms weight concerns (Abell & Richards, 1996). Other researchers such as Raudenbush and Zeller (1997) found in their study that around 50% of participants were undergoing body image dissatisfaction and among them 71 % of participants had normal body weight. A strong motivation to become muscular was found among middle and high school boys who wanted to make their body more athletic and perfect. Furnham and Calnan (1998) found an equal number of high school boys who had negative body image because of being underweight and overweight. They found that excessive exercising, great focus on attractiveness and fitness was related to eating disorder as measured by the Eating Disorders Inventory (EDI; Garner et al., 1983). The EDI was developed primarily to measure body image dissatisfaction in females but later researches also added some items to EDI to measure body images dissatisfaction in males, the items included were related to men desire to become bulkier which resulted in negative body image.

SOCIETY STRAINS INFLUENCING BODY IMAGE

The individual's perception of body image is also influenced by the norms and values of the society and these norms and values related that body image are constructed through social interaction. There individual body image is greatly influenced by what the society things and molds his/her body image according to society expectations.

MEDIA

The media has great influence on body image and play an important role in body image dissatisfaction in both males and females. Media includes several means such as radio, television, movies, newspapers, magazines, websites and billboards. Mass media portray such an unrealistic body image and motivate girls to form unrealistic thing body, which is not attainable in realistic way (Field et al., 2001, p.54). Many models who appear in the media platforms portray fake bodies and their bodies are nowhere close to the ideal body. Models who are shown in the magazines their bodies are airbrushed or otherwise enhanced by computer-generated means (Field et al., 2001). Also, "it has been observed that there is a clear association between exposure to beauty and fashion magazines and higher levels of weight concerns or eating disorder symptoms in adolescent girls" (Field et al., 2001, p. 54). It was also found that 69% of women in a study responded that models portray in the magazines tend to influence their perception of perfect body shape and acceptance of this unrealistic body shapes tend to create negative perception of their body among females and to reduce this negative body image they drive hard to achieve unrealistic body shape demands (Field et al., 2001). For example, models who participate in catwalk tend to form only a small percentage of population (Women's Health 2007). But when adolescent girls are exposed to these thin



models, it leads adolescent feeling inferiority complex withing adolescent girls and this leads to low self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction among adolescent girls.

BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER

Body Dysmorphic disorder is described by distressing or impairing experience which is caused by imagined defect in appearance that causes clinically significant distress or functional impairment. Body dysmorphic disorder is quite common and it has also high rates of morbidity (Philips, 2005). The most important component of Body dysmorphic disorder is body image dissatisfaction. (Cororve & Gleaves, 2001; Rosen & Rameriz, 1998). However still this component has received less attention in individuals with body dysmorphic disorder.

By using Body Dysmorphic Disorder Examination (BDDE) (Rosen & Rameriz, 1998) compared 51 individuals with body dysmorphic disorder to 45 individuals with eating disorder and found same level of body image dissatisfaction among both suffering from body dysmorphic disorder and eating disorder.

THEORIES

Social Comparison Theory: According to social comparison theory, people tend to compare themselves with individuals who are better than them and this comparison with others will increase the motivation level within the individuals to improve themselves.

Objectification Theory (Friedrickson & Roberts, 1997): Objectification theory states that girls generally internalize the perspective of others regarding their physical selves. According to objectification theory, female body undergoes constant monitoring which automatically leads to body image dissatisfaction in females. This body objectification of males and females can make them put more effort to change their physical appearance.

Social Cognitive Theory: This theory states that people learn by observing the behavior of other attractive people. The main reason for negative body image is that women imitate the behaviour of thin models and try to become like them and which led to the development of eating disorder.

Cultivation Theory: According to cultivation theory, through repetitive and continuous exposure to media images can cause portrayal of those images in the mind. Those people who spent more time on media such as television tend to view the world according to what they saw in the media.

RATIONAL OF THE STUDY

The above-mentioned literature review suggests that appearance related concerns are inevitable part of life of many women as well as men in our contemporary society. The discussion reveals that much of the literature to date has focused on body dissatisfaction and pathology associated with negative body related attitudes. Body researches have studied the perceptual, cognitive, behavioral and affective components of body image and have developed extensive knowledge about individual's perceptions, thoughts and feelings related to body dissatisfaction (Grogan, 2006). However, the review also brings into light certain gaps in the appearance literature.

First, most of the information on body image is based on clinical populations, women (and some men) with serious psychological disorders such as anorexia and bulimia nervosa or people with physical deformities. However, the concept body image belongs to everyone and it has strong emotional based experiences. How we look at our body determines various areas of our life such as our feeling, life partner we choose as well as our psychological wellbeing (Garner and Kearney-Cookey, 1997).

Secondly, as it is quite evident from the review presented earlier, major work in this area has been done in the western society because studies discussed earlier largely focused on western population. However, it cannot be said that in eastern society this concept is not being researched at all. But the number of researches being carried out is relatively less. Moreover, to an extent they are a replica of the work done in the west.

Since culture plays an important role in constructing the forms and meanings of human behavior and experience (Gergen, Gulerce, Lock & Misra, 1998), understanding the appearance related experiences of the women and men in the Indian context has not been well researched.

Thirdly, as has already been stated, coping has not been well researched in relation to appearance and body image. Specifically need is to understand the ways of coping that people use in response to the challenges to image functioning that occur in everyday lives (Cash, 2004).

Fourthly, the researches have largely been experimental in nature but recent trends do reveal a slow but gradual shift towards studying the concept quantitatively, coming out of the mould of a typical experimental and controlled condition.

Owing to the growing importance to body image concern and related dissatisfaction, the researcher feels it worthwhile to have an understanding of these appearance related issues. The present research makes an attempt in this direction to understand the construct in the Indian context as it has a universal appeal. The research will deepen our understanding of how people experience their appearances in our culture, even when they do not have eating or body image disorders as such, the consequence of self and others evaluations and how do they manage their appearance related concerns in their everyday lives.

Major research questions?

- Does body image dissatisfaction lead to low self-esteem?
- Does body image dissatisfaction lead to aggression?
- Do girls have more body image dissatisfaction as compared to boys?
- Are people in middle adulthood period more satisfied with body image?
- Are body image concerns more prevalent in early adulthood?
- Do high body dissatisfaction, high aggression and low self esteem lead to body dysmorphic concerns?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the body image dissatisfaction in different age groups
2. To examine the relationship between body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression.



3.To see the differences between dysmorphic and non-dysmorphic on body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression.
 4.To examine whether the body dissatisfaction is more in males or females.

METHOD

Sample

The sample included people of three different age groups of males and females. Data has been collected from total 60 participants which included 20 participants of people of age group 20 to 35, 20 participants of people of age group 45 to 60 and 20 participants of people of age group 65 above. The total 60 participants also involve 30 males and 30 females because we also want to know the gender difference in relation to body image.

RESULTS

This section presents the descriptive statistics, t-test, one way ANOVA and correlation

Table 1: Showing descriptive statistics of Body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression.

	Age range	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Body Image dissatisfaction	20-35	20	41.25	12.17
	45-60	20	33.60	9.46
	65-80	20	39.25	14.17
Self-esteem	20-35	20	19.75	5.45
	45-60	20	20.85	3.60
	65-80	20	23.50	3.01
Aggression	20-35	20	98.00	14.98
	45-60	20	99.65	13.86
	65-80	20	100.80	15.38

The above table showed mean and standard deviation among different age groups. The mean value of body dissatisfaction among age group 20-35 is 41.25, for 45-60 is 33.60 and for 65-80 is 39.25 and their standard deviation score is 12.17, 9.46 and 14.17 respectively. This means that on the basis of mean body dissatisfaction is more in early adulthood as compared to middle and late adulthood. The mean value of self-esteem among age group 20-35 is 19.75, 45-60 is 20.85, 65-80 is 23.50

Measure

- Body image satisfaction by using Body shape questionnaire
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES; Rosenberg, 1965)
- Aggression Scale
- Body dysmorphic disorder screening questionnaire

Procedure

Participants were approached and their consent was sought. Once they agreed to participate in then their responses would be anonymous and would not be seen by any person. This was done to eliminate the response bias. The participants were also encouraged to complete the questionnaire individually and avoid help from another person. If the participant was found to skip out or skip sections, they were encouraged to complete them but no additional help was given to them. Once the data was collected the given information was then entered in the Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and further analysis was done using it.

and their standard deviation score is 5.45, 3.60, 3.01. This means that due to body dissatisfaction self-esteem is much lower in early adulthood as compared to middle and late adulthood. The means value of aggression among age group 20-35 is 98.00, 45-60 is 99.65 and 65-80 is 100.80 and their standard deviation score is 14.98, 13.86 and 15.38 respectively. On the basis of mean value, the result showed more aggression among late adulthood people.

Table 2: Showing one-way ANOVA of different age groups on body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression.

		Sum of Squares	D	F	Sig.
Body Image Dissatisfaction	Between group	629.63	2	2.15	.125
	Within group	8334.30			
Self-esteem	Between group	148.63	2	4.29	.018**
	Within group	985.30			
Aggression	Between group	79.23	2	.182	.834
	Within group	12415.75			

The above table shows that there is a significant difference on self-esteem. Further table showed that no significant difference exists between body image dissatisfaction and aggression.



Table 3: Showing correlation between body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression.

	Body image dissatisfaction	Self-esteem
Self-esteem	-.188	1
Aggression	.503	-.245

The above table showed correlations between Body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and Aggression. Result showed that

the aggression is high, body image dissatisfaction is found to be higher that is .503, self-esteem is found to be lower that is -.245.

Table 4: Showing mean differences of dysmorphic and non-dysmorphic on body image satisfaction, self-esteem and aggression.

	Body dysmorphic Disorder	Mean	Standard Deviation	T	df	Sig.
Body Image dissatisfaction	Dysmorphic	49.52	10.87	7.257	58	.000**
	Non- Dysmorphic	31.84	7.83			
Self-esteem	Dysmorphic	19.61	5.17	2.351	58	.022**
	Non-Dysmorphic	22.30	3.62			
Aggression	Dysmorphic	112.71	9.67	6.926	58	.000**
	Non-Dysmorphic	92.35	11.43			

In the above table, out of 60 samples 21 are Dysmorphic and 39 are Non-dysmorphic. The result showed that there is significant

difference between dysmorphic and non-dysmorphic on body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression.

Table 5: Showing mean difference between males and females on body dissatisfaction

	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	T	df	Sig.
Body Dissatisfaction	Male	39.60	12.13	.984	58	.329
	Female	36.46	12.19			

The above table showed on the basis of mean difference that body dissatisfaction is more in males as compared to females but there is no significant difference.

DISCUSSION

The objective of the study is a) to examine the body image dissatisfaction in different age groups b) to examine the relationship between body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression c) to see the difference between dysmorphic and non-dysmorphic on body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression d) to examine whether the body dissatisfaction is more in males or females.

However previous studies have focused more on body image problems in old age among males and females but due to significant changes in life styles body image problems are found to be more in early adulthood (20-35) as compared to middle adulthood and late adulthood. The perception related to negative body image is more common especially among adults and young adolescents, who are at higher risk of suffering from body image dissatisfaction. To become a part of the peer group which you like is the primary goal during adolescence, but adolescence with negative body image and low self-esteem find it very difficult to become part of a group. Identity formation also takes place among older teens and young adults. The perception of negative body image tends to hamper their social interaction and therefore also cause hindrance in their identity development. Depressive symptoms because body image dissatisfaction have been found more in younger adults as compared to those who are over 65 years of age. Older adults show less vulnerability to disfigurement as compared to

younger adults and the main reason for experience of less vulnerability because of disfigurement among older adults is psychological maturity. Because of this psychological maturity older adults see changes in body as being normative part of aging process.

There is a gap in literature because there are few studies which talk about body image concerns in middle adulthood. Our result indicates that body image problems are going to be less in middle adulthood as compared to late adulthood. The reason could be that people of this age group have less leisure time to think about their bodies because they are generally involved in career planning and family growth. Therefore, they have less time to think about their bodies. On the other hand, people of late adulthood have more leisure time and more body related problems that's why body image concerns arise more in late adulthood.

There is another objective in our study which talks about the relationship between body dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression. One thing is quite clear on the basis of above literature that body image dissatisfaction will lead to low self-esteem. Researchers found a strong association between negative body image and low self-esteem and therefore, described body image construction as a important part of self-esteem (Davidson & McCabe, 2006).

Another objective in the study that body image dissatisfaction can lead to high aggression. Researchers have found that girls and women who are overweight tend to experience extreme societal pressures in the form of teasing, stereotype and disapproval, which led to aggressive tendencies within women because they contemplate that inorder to protect



themselves from all these negative experiences, they should act aggressively (Striegel-Moore & Smolak, 2000).

Another objective is that body image concern will be more in women as compared to men but finding is not supporting this and indicating higher body dissatisfaction among males as compared to females. Like women, men who are exposed to unrealistic and unattainable body image in media also experience body image dissatisfaction. Men body image is also determined by parental cues and body image construction starts in childhood. When children start attending schools, their perception related to body image becomes stronger.

It is very important to address body image concerns in males also in order to avoid conditions like depression, anorexia and bulimia.

The last objective that we formulated is about the differences between dysmorphic concern and non-dysmorphic concern on body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression. The results showed that there is significant difference between dysmorphic and non-dysmorphic on body image dissatisfaction, self-esteem and aggression.

CONCLUSION

Looking at the vast literature and our research findings we can clearly conclude that body image is not confined to some specific gender, males and females both experience disturbances related to their bodies, the only difference that lies amongst them is that of the way these insecurities are manifested, for females it is more likely through poor mental well being and for males through aggressive behaviors. These findings have implications for mental health professionals working towards the well being of individuals, it is essential that we as clinicians should not neglect this important domain of body image satisfaction and dissatisfaction which is pushing people towards various psychiatric disorders such as body dysmorphic disorder, eating disorders, depression, low self-esteem, and very sadly in worst cases suicide. We should create awareness amongst people, of this grave condition and collaboratively look for solution to this. We should also keep the impact created by positive body image on our mental health in mind and should use it as an option for better mental and physical health. Though the research was conducted on a small sample, we cannot generalize completely from these findings, but surely can learn something from it.

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