A study on the difference in the Body Image Acceptance among teenagers in Mumbai

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ABSTRACT

Background: It is well acknowledged that mass media has played a pivotal role in fostering a sense of body image dissatisfaction. Studies have suggested that body image concerns are more prominent among females, although males are increasingly experiencing the impact. The current research aims to investigate sex differences with respect to body image acceptance in the Indian context.

Methodology: Through convenient sampling, 30 male and 30 female participants between the age group of 16-21 years were included in the study and completed the Body Image Acceptance and Action Questionnaire. The number of people participated in the study were 60.

Results: Descriptive statistics (Mean and SD) for both male and female respondents were conducted. The average score for males (Mean=150; SD=29.547) was higher than that of females (Mean=145.8, SD=25.498). As part of the inferential statistical procedure carried out, the obtained t-value was not found to be statistically significant (t= 0.589, p not significant).

Conclusions: The body image acceptance differences were not found to be significant across the two groups, males showed relatively higher levels of body image acceptance compared to females.

Key Words: Body Image Acceptance, Sex Difference, Indian Context, teenagers.

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INTRODUCTION

Interest in the idea of body image (also called 'body-esteem) [1]; can be traced back to the first half of 20th Century when Austrian psychoanalyst Paul Schilder [2] defined it as "the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say the way in which the body appears to ourselves". Since then, researchers have developed an acute interest in the examination of this construct. Later, researchers [3] viewed it as a 'multidimensional construct', which involves appraisal of one's physical appearance. Cash outlined two primary constituents of body image, namely, evaluation/affect and investment. The former concerns thoughts and feelings associated with one's appearance, whereas the latter entails "importance of, attention paid to, and behavioural management of appearance" [4]. Body image satisfaction [5] or body image acceptance [6] can be seen as the converse of body image dissatisfaction.

Thompson [7] has proposed four perspectives to illustrate the phenomenon of body image dissatisfaction: socio-cultural, social comparison, negative verbal commentary, and maturational status. The socio-cultural perspective highlights how the mass media, by conveying strong messages about what constitutes an (un)acceptable physical appearance, influences one's body image attitudes. It is well acknowledged that

mass media has played a pivotal role in fostering a sense of body image dissatisfaction [8-9]. The salience of the socio-cultural tradition is visible in the objectification theory [10]. The social comparison framework states that individuals who examine themselves by using the attractive person as a reference point stand a greater chance of being dissatisfied with their bodies. The negative verbal commentary explanation pinpoints the role of scornful remarks related to one's physique in influencing body image attitudes, eating disorders, and well-being. Finally, the maturational status hypothesis attributes body dissatisfaction to early occurrence of physical maturation.

Body image dissatisfaction has been found to be associated with dimensions of psychological distress such as depressive symptomatology and low self-esteem [11-13]. For instance, it has been reported that body image to be a significant predictor of depressed mood longitudinally, and the magnitude of this association was found to be similar across both the sexes [13]. Furthermore, they found body image to demonstrate a robust association with depressed mood during early adolescence (13-15 years), but not during later period (15-18 years), and the reverse was true in case of boys. Similar findings were obtained by researchers [14] who found body image dissatisfaction to significantly predict prospective depression and self-esteem, but only among girls and boys in their early adolescence and mid-adolescence, respectively.

This brings us to an important issue of gender differences in body image dissatisfaction. Studies have reported females to experience higher levels of body image dissatisfaction compared to men [15]. In other words, males are relatively more satisfied with their bodies compared to females. Cash and others [3], in their 19-year longitudinal research, found an interesting pattern with respect to sex differences in body image dissatisfaction. Specifically, they found that body image attitudes for females deteriorated and then ameliorated over time, whereas those for males remained fairly consistent over time.

Much research is carried out in Western populations. Very limited research in the area of body image dissatisfaction has been carried out in the Indian context [16]. Goswami and colleagues [16] found body image dissatisfaction to be much lower (13.54%) among college-going Indian females compared to those from developed economies. In other words, it is possible that gender differences in body image dissatisfaction are not likely to be as pronounced in the Indian context as those in developed economies. The current study seeks to investigate gender differences in body image dissatisfaction in the Indian context. It is thus hypothesized that men and women will not significantly differ with respect to their scores on body image dissatisfaction/ body image acceptance.

METHODOLOGY

Sample Description and Procedure

The number of people participated in the study were 60. Out of which 30 were males and 30 were females, specifications in terms of age range was kept to be 16-21 years of age. The participants were college students. To choose the sample, convenience sampling method was used. The participants were informed that the information is collected for research purposes. Then the survey forms were distributed among the students 60 participants. After collecting the questionnaire, obtained data was subjected to statistical analysis.

Measures

The Body Image-Acceptance and Action Questionnaire: (BI-AAQ) a 29-item instrument was used to measure body image flexibility for the study. Respondents are expected to respond to each of the items on a 7-point Likert scale (1= 'Never True' to 7= 'Always True'). Higher scores on this scale are indicative of higher levels of acceptance, and vice versa. Sandoz and Wilson have found to the scale to demonstrate a very good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha=0.93) and construct validity [17].

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

Data was analyzed by calculating mean, standard deviation, range, percentage and sample variance and percentages. Inferential analysis included an independent samples t-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current study sought to examine gender differences with respect to body image acceptance, which is the converse of body image dissatisfaction. In accordance with the literature reviewed, it was hypothesized that males would score higher on body image acceptance than females. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for both male and female respondents in our study.

Table 1 shows the total score of each participant in both the groups (males and females) on BI-AAQ. From the table, it can be seen that the average score for males (Mean=150; SD=29.547) was higher than that of females (Mean=145.8, SD=25.498).

Table 1 – Descriptive Statistics of both the genders with regards to Body Image Acceptance and Action

	Males	Females
Total	4500	4374
Mean	150	145.8
Percentage	50.70%	49.29%
Standard Deviation	29.54715693	25.49834342
Range	109	86
Maximum	192	196
Minimum	83	110
Sample Variance	873.0344828	650.1655172

An independent samples t-test was used to examine whether the differences on body image acceptance across the two groups are statistically significant or not. However, the obtained t-value was not found to be statistically significant (t= 0.589, p not significant). The findings support the null hypothesis that was proposed for the current study. Nevertheless, relatively higher level of body image acceptance among males compared to females is in line with prior research findings [5] or those demonstrating relatively higher levels of body image dissatisfaction among females compared to males [11-13]. The study relied on a small sample, thus making generalizability a major concern. Additionally, self-report surveys are susceptible to 'social desirability bias' [18], which might probably have distorted the responses. Future studies need to be carried out on a large sample and its association with other psychological variables (e.g., depression, self-esteem) needs to be examined as well. Nevertheless, the study lays down crucial implications for mental health professionals to devise psychosocial interventions aimed at ameliorating self-perceptions of college-going students by fostering a sense of acceptance.

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