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Influence of Gender and Self-Esteem on Appearance Anxiety among Undergraduate College Students

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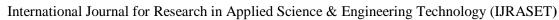[3]Assistant Professor, Dept. of Psychology, Christ College (Autonomous) Irinjalakuda

Abstract: One of the biggest issues faced by teens and young adults in their life is appearance anxiety. The purpose of the study was to understand the influence of gender and self-esteem with appearance anxiety among undergraduate college students and to understand the predictive nature of students' self-esteem and gender on appearance anxiety. Undergraduate college students of age ranging from 18 to 21 were considered randomly from educational institutions of Irinjalakuda municipality. Equal number of male and female students were considered. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and Appearance Anxiety Inventory was used to measure appearance anxiety and self-esteem of the sample population. The research concluded that there exists a moderately strong relation between appearance anxiety and self-esteem, and there lies a significant difference of appearance anxiety among male and female undergraduate college students. It is also revealed that gender is a much stronger predictor of appearance anxiety than self-esteem.
Keywords: Appearance anxiety, Self-esteem, Gender, Undergraduate college students

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of self-esteem has always been central to the psychologist for conducting their research. It has now successfully added itself into the list of household words. Coopersmith defined global self-esteem as "a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself" [7]. Our self-evaluations according to James are connected to the beliefs [16], which we hold regarding our abilities to accomplish our personal goals whereas Cooley claimed that our self-esteem totally relies upon the perceptions regarding what others think of us [6]. Hence, in valued "domains a global self-esteem encompasses perceptions of abilities and perceptions of social acceptance" [15]. Harter claims that self-esteem somewhat stays stable within major developmental, but is less stable during the transitional periods, for instance, the transition between middle childhood to adolescence [15]. Self-esteem concept might not be understood till an individual is an adolescent and starts to reflect on his/her personal values [8]. It has become a major part of the adolescent's self-understanding and is susceptible to external as well as internal influences during adolescence [2]. That's the reason parents, teachers, therapists, and others have started to put their efforts on working for boosting self-esteem because they assume that self-esteem will lead to positive outcomes. Many researchers have started to study about the role played by gender in influencing adolescents' self-esteem. The patriarchal societies claim self-confidence as solely male features whereas for girls having self-confidence has always been considered a breach of traditional gender roles. That's the reason recent studies have concluded that in the boy's self-esteem is relatively higher than girls. Boys are often seen more in situations which are linked to encouraging power, conflict, competition and excitement whereas girls are linked to situations of support, intimacy, co-rumination and self-disclosure. While boys developing emotions is more to externalising problems its vice versa in girls [2]. A very important source of self-esteem is an individual's body image [29]. As a child grows up, he/she tends to build an image of themselves which is developed by what people see in them and what they can or cannot do. Opinions related to our bodies if are really poor then it causes low self-confidence and self-esteem. The concept of body image is multidimensional, "behavioral component involves body-related behaviors, perceptual component involves the perception of body characteristics and the cognitive-affective component involves attitudes, cognitions and feelings toward one's body" [5], [32], [34], [36]. Szabo studied the relationship between self-esteem and body – image in young adults and found out that discrepancy in ideal and perceived body image is linked to low self-esteem [30]. Festinger in his social comparison theory said that the comparison done by an individual about himself/herself with others is either downwardly or upwardly [10]. "The Upward comparison leads to lower satisfaction whereas downward comparison leads to a feeling of superiority" [19]. Globally, a new cultural stereotype has appeared which is the linking of physical attractiveness with personal positive qualities. Not just European countries, but also the Asian countries are of the opinion "the marker of health and fertility a small waist has always been an invariant symbol of feminine beauty" [24].

During adolescence, low esteem can be seen in how the women are made to adapt to the societal stereotypical image to be a perfect woman. This leads to the destruction of their own self-beliefs and emotions and the end result of the sense of uncertainty makes them lose their self-esteem [13].

The transmission of such stereotypical ideal body representation and perception is generally transmitted by various socialising agents, importantly mass media. It has been seen that there is a discrepancy in the psychological and physical changes attained by the male and the female adolescents. Where females are more concerned about their weight and body shape, men are seen to be more concerned about their physique in terms of strength [14]. The body image of a female is judged more on its appearance and the male is judged by his performance [31].

One interesting finding is the direction of dissatisfaction of body image between male and females. Where females are working on losing their weight the males are working on gaining or losing it (Furnham et al., 2002). Self-esteem is one of the important predictors related to dissatisfaction of perceived body image [18]. Previous research has concluded that women are inclined to have low self-esteem and greater body image dissatisfaction which makes them dieting and they often describe them as fatter than the males [11].

Males are more focused on muscular build and shape when it comes to body dissatisfaction. Agliata and Tantleff– Dunn said that the difference between the real and ideal image in men causes depression and low self-esteem [3]. The childhood marks as the beginning of the struggle regarding self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction and remain continued during the adolescence period. This struggle sometimes leads to harmful consequences like eating disorders, depression and social appearance anxiety. Social appearance anxiety is basically "the fear that one will be negatively evaluated because of one's appearance" [21]. Parent's education level has been linked to the development of social appearance anxiety where high education leads to low social appearance anxiety and vice – versa [26].

The relation of neuroticism with high social appearance anxiety was further studied by Kang [17]. Study conducted by Triggerman and Lynch on the age group of 20 to 84 years females concluded that the appearance importance was higher for young females than the older [33]. Similar study done on men found out that the importance of appearance varies significantly within various age groups [22]. Since the importance of appearance is higher during the younger ages, it becomes really important to study the appearance anxiety in relation to gender and self-esteem in them. The amount of research in India considering these variables is also inadequate which further acts as a driving force for conducting such studies.

II.   SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is of highly significance for developing school-based programs which includes strong interaction, participation and incorporating self-esteem components. The curriculum can further be made in accordance with the differences in the gender. The counsellors, teachers and parents can easily have an overlook on the activities they can build for enhancing self-esteem and building a positive body image so that there would be less appearance anxiety.

III.   AIM

The aim of the study is to understand the influence of gender and self-esteem with appearance anxiety among undergraduate college students and to understand the predictive nature of students' self-esteem and gender on appearance anxiety.

IV.   HYPOTHESES

A. There exists no statistically significant correlation between appearance anxiety and self-esteem.
B. There exists no statistically significant difference among appearance anxiety of male and female undergraduate college students.
C. There exists no predictability between appearance anxiety and self-esteem.
D. There exists no predictability between appearance anxiety and gender.

V.   PROCEDURE

Random sampling was used to collect the data from undergraduate college students of age ranging from 18 to 21 years from educational institutions of Irinjalakuda municipality. Equal number of male and female students were considered. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and Appearance Anxiety Inventory was used to measure appearance anxiety and self-esteem of the sample population. Data was collected and analysed using independent sample t-test, Pearson correlation and simple linear regression to test the hypotheses.

VI. METHOD

A sample size of 120 undergraduate college students were considered for the study. Equal number of male and female students were considered. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was developed by Rosenberg M (1965). It's a 10-item scale that measures self-worth by measuring constructive and destructive emotions about self. It has a good reliability with test-retest varying between 0.82-0.88 and Cronbach's alpha 0.77 to 0.88. The 10-item appearance anxiety inventory (AAI) (Vcale et al. 2013) was developed to evaluate the cognitive and behavioural traits of body dysmorphic disorder (BDD). It refers to social anxiousness surrounding general appearance, together with physique form and worry of unfavourable perception of others. The AAI was discovered to have good convergent validity, with a correlation of 0.55. Internal consistency was excessive with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86. Two sub-scales had been found utilising factor evaluation. Avoidant and risk monitoring. The AAI was discovered to have good test-retest reliability too.

VII. RESULT & DISCUSSION

The objective of the present investigation is to understand the influence of gender and self-esteem on appearance anxiety of undergraduate college students and to understand the predictive nature of student self-esteem on appearance anxiety. Pearson's correlation was used to determine the relation between appearance anxiety and self-esteem, independent sample t-test to understand the difference of appearance anxiety among male and female undergraduate college students and to understand the predictive nature of self-esteem and gender on the appearance anxiety, simple linear regression was performed.

TABLE I

Pearson's correlation between Appearance anxiety and self-esteem

	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2
1, Appearance anxiety	20.38	6.948	-	
2, Self-Esteem	23.38	3.996	-.594[**]	-

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

To determine the relation between appearance anxiety and self-esteem Pearson correlation was performed. Table 1 has concluded that there exists a negative relation between appearance anxiety and student self-esteem (r (120) =-.594[**], p =.001), such that higher self-esteem (Mean = 23.38, SD = 3.996) reported lower appearance anxiety (Mean = 20.38, SD = 6.948) and vice versa. The correlation result concludes that there is a moderately strong relation between appearance anxiety and self-esteem. As per the earlier works, an individual's appearance anxiety is inversely proportional to self-esteem, the increase in self-esteem of an individual will dramatically reduce the appearance anxiety [1], [26], [27], [9], [23].

TABLE II

Descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test of Appearance anxiety among Male and Female undergraduate college students

Gender	N	M	SD	F-value	Sig.
Male	60	14.87	5.084	-10.179	0.01
Female	60	25.90	3.067		

The table II shows the mean value of appearance anxiety among males (N= 40, M= 19.23, SD= 3.731) and females (N= 40, M= 24.1, SD= 4.845). To test the hypothesis that the gender brings up no significant change in the mean of the student's appearance anxiety, an independent sample t-test was used to test the hypothesis. "The assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene's F test" (Levene, 1960) (F (118) = 8.085, p = 0.01. The difference between the gender on students' appearance anxiety was tested for statistically significant, t (118) = -10.179, p= .01. It is clear from the data that gender plays a major role in appearance anxiety as females show a higher appearance anxiety than males. Previous studies found the same effect [28], [37].

TABLE III. Simple linear regression between appearance anxiety with Gender and self-esteem

Variables	R	R²	Change R²	β	F value	Sig.
X = Appearance anxiety Y = Gender	0.801	0.641	0.635	-0.801	103.612	0.01
X = Appearance anxiety Y = Self-Esteem	0.594	0.353	0.342	-0.594	31.698	0.01

To determine the ability to predict students' appearance anxiety based on their gender and self-esteem, simple linear regression was conducted. A significant regression equation was found (F (1,119) = 103.612, p=.01), with an R^2 of .64 between students' appearance anxiety and gender. Students predicted appearance anxiety is equal to 36.93 - 11.033 where gender is coded as 1 = Male, 2 = Female school. Female students' appearance anxiety is 11.033 units higher than male undergraduate college students. The analysis has concluded that gender can predict appearance anxiety up to 64% accurately.

Students, appearance anxiety and self-esteem found a significant regression equation (F (1,119) = 31.698, p=.01), with an R^2 of .35 between students' appearance anxiety and self-esteem. Students predicted appearance anxiety is equal to 44.552 - 1.034 when self-esteem is measured. Students' average appearance anxiety decreased by 1.034 units for each point of self-esteem. The analysis resulted in a 35% predictable accuracy between self-esteem and appearance anxiety. From the analysis it's clear that gender is a much stronger predictor of appearance anxiety than self-esteem.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The research concluded that there exists a moderately strong relation between appearance anxiety and self-esteem, and there lies a significant difference of appearance anxiety among male and female undergraduate college students. It is also revealed that gender is a much stronger predictor of appearance anxiety than self-esteem.

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