
Influence of Body Image and Social Comparison on Assertiveness Level among Young Adults

Body Image is most commonly used term all over the media. Body image can be influenced by a number of social factors, such as culture, the media and, comparison of oneself with family, friends and others etc. It is also believed that people with negative body image and high social comparison tend to have poor assertive skills. This created an interest for the researchers to study the Influence of Body Image and Social Comparison on Assertiveness Level among Young Adults. For this purpose data has been collected from 33 Young Adults using the convenience sampling method. The tools used in the study are Body Image Concern Inventory (Littleton et al., 2005), Social Comparison Scale (Allan & Gilbert, 1995) and The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (Rathus, 1973). Correlation and Regression were used for analyzing the data. Results of the study reveal that there is significant relationship between Social Comparison and Body Image, and also between Assertiveness and Social Comparison. The regression analysis also showed that variables namely Body Image and Social Comparison were not significantly predicting Assertiveness of young adults. The prominent limitation of this study was that the sample size was small. Also, the research did not focus on the gender difference. The results of the study can be helpful in designing training programs for increasing assertive skills and designing better counseling techniques to address issues related to negative body image and high social comparison.

Key words: Body Image, Social Comparison, Assertiveness, Young Adults

Introduction

The emotional attitudes, perception and beliefs of their own body which a person has is known as body image. It has been defined as 'the multifaceted psychological experience of embodiment.' Body image refers to the way you feel about your body, the way how you look when you look at the mirror. The body image can both positive and negative. It can affect the mental and emotional health of a person. A person who has a good perception about their body shape and acceptance of their body is considered to have a positive body image. The don't feel inferior about their body image, they are happy with the way they look even if others doesn't say it as a desirable body image. A negative body image rises when a person feels inferior about their own self, they try to compare themselves with others and starts to hate themselves for the way they look. They also start to feel insecure about themselves, they feel ashamed to go out, they lack self confidence and they always hold on to fear what if the other person embarrass you in public. A negative body image is frequently linked to disorders such as body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), body integrity identity disorder, and eating disorders. Many research studies have shown that negative body image is strongly linked to eating disorders, eating disorder behaviours, depression, and low self-esteem. The body image of a person can be influenced by many factors, including one's parents, peers, culture/media, or one's past experiences.

A person gets shaped by the society more than we could realize, from our interactions to our personal development through to others' perception of our bodies as a reflection of self-worth.

Humans are considered as social beings, we depend upon one another for our survival. From this we can know that how the perception of our society affects us in many ways. Body Social comparison is considered as the central contributor to body image. It refers to the cognitive judgements which a person makes about their own attributes comparing others. The comparisons are pivotal to self-evaluations and depend less on objective circumstances than on how one judges the self in relation to others on a particular attribute (Wood, 1989). People often tend to compare themselves to others as a way of fostering self-improvement, self-motivation, and a positive self-image. As a result, humans tend to constantly evaluate themselves with others, across various domains such as attractiveness, wealth, intelligence, and success. These evaluations can promote judgmental, biased, and overly competitive or superior attitudes. Most people would have the social skills and impulse control to keep their standards for social comparison to themselves, and not to act on any envy or resentment spurred by comparison-making. People most often compare themselves to others whom they know personally (i.e same traits, same attributes). These comparisons can sometimes be healthy and sometimes be unhealthy. Some people try to compare themselves with others who have reached unusual high levels in life because of which they develop great deal of anxiety to progress in their life.

Assertiveness is a most important skill one must possess. It relies on effective communication while simultaneously respecting the thoughts and wishes of others. A person who is able to stand up for one's own right and for others in a calm and positive way, without being aggressive or passive is known as assertive. People who are assertive communicate to others very clearly about their needs, wants without compromising and hurting the other person. They accept both the compliments and criticism from the other person without over reacting to it. Assertiveness is the midpoint of two extremes such as aggressive and passive behaviour. People mostly tend to respond in a passive way, they remain silent and accept the things said by the other person without giving a second thought. People often tend to remain passive as they want to be liked by the other person. People who are aggressive are often kept aside, they don't consider the feelings of the other person, they speak what they have to and what they want without considering the opinion and feelings of other persons. Those who are behaving aggressively will rarely show praise or appreciate others and an aggressive response tends to put others down and making themselves look high through words. Being assertive helps people to be more honest about their rights, feelings and wishes which a person has without remaining passive or aggressive.

Generally, it is thought that people who have a negative body image tend to have low self-esteem and their assertiveness level tends to be low, which may make them remain passive most of the time. Therefore, this study intends to find out about the influence of body image and social comparison on assertiveness levels among young adults.

Aim:

To find the influence of body image, social comparison on assertiveness.

Objectives

1. To find out the relationship of Body Image with assertiveness among young adults.
2. To find out the relationship of Social Comparison with assertiveness among young adults.

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3. To find out the relationship of Body Image with Social comparison among young adults.
 4. To find out the influence of Body Image and Social Comparison on assertiveness among young adults.

Hypotheses

Due to paucity of studies in identifying the relationship and prediction of the variables such as body image, social comparison and assertiveness, the following null hypotheses were framed:

1. There will be no significant relationship between Assertiveness and Body Image (Hypothesis 1)
2. There will be no significant relationship between Assertiveness and Social Comparison (Hypothesis 2)
3. There will be no significant relationship between Body image and Social Comparison (Hypothesis 3)
4. There will be no significant prediction of Assertiveness by Body Image and Social Comparison (Hypothesis 4)

Operational Definition:

1. Social comparison is the idea that people learn about their own attitudes, beliefs and abilities by comparing themselves to the other people around them (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2010).
2. Body image is defined as positive or negative satisfaction with one's own body size (Eggermont, et al., 2005)
3. Assertiveness is standing up for oneself without denying the rights of others, expressing oneself honestly and firmly without hurting, manipulating or putting others down (Alberti and Emmons, 2008).

Method

Research design: Ex post facto research design is used in the study

Sample description: Sample consists of 33 young adults, among which 26 are female and 7 are male between the ages 18 to 35. The mean age of the sample was 22.33.

Sampling Technique: Convenient sampling technique was used in the study.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Participants between the ages 18 to 35 are included
- Participants who can read and write in English are included
- Only graduates are included

Exclusion Criteria:

- Participants above the age 35 are excluded

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- Participants who cannot read and write in English are excluded

Tools Used:

- **Body Image:** Body Image Concern Inventory (BICI) is used in the study and it was developed by Littleton HL, Axsom D and Pury CLS. It consists of 19-items and uses 5-point Likert rating scale bounded by 1 (never) and 5 (always). And Cronbach's alpha is .93. The measure is scored by summing all the items. Scores can range from 19 to 95 (higher scores represent higher levels of dysmorphic concern).
- **Social Comparison Scale:** This scale was developed by Allan and Gilbert (1995). This scale consists of 11 items. Participants are required to compare of themselves in relation to other people and to rate themselves along a ten-point rating scale. Low scores point to feelings of inferiority. The scale has been found to have good reliability, with Cronbach alphas of .88 and .96 with clinical populations and .91 and .90 with student populations.
- **Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS):** The RAS was developed in 1973 by Spencer Rathus. The scale contains 30 items. A total score is obtained by adding numerical responses for each item, after changing the signs of reversed items. Test-retest reliability was .78 and Split-half reliability was .77, Cronbach's alpha = .82.

Data analysis: Statistical analysis consisted of correlation analysis using Pearson's correlation coefficient for finding the relationship between Body Image, Social Comparison and Assertiveness. Multiple Linear Regression analysis was carried out to predict the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Results and discussion

Table 1.1 Relationship between Body Image, Social Comparison and Assertiveness

Variables

Body Image

Social Comparison

Assertiveness

Body Image

Pearson Correlation

1

-.546**

.156

Sig. (2-tailed)

.001

.385

N

33

33

33

Social Comparison

Pearson Correlation

-.546**

1

-.347*

Sig. (2-tailed)

.001

.048

N

33

33

33

Assertiveness

Pearson Correlation

.156

-.347*

1

Sig. (2-tailed)

.385

.048

N

33

33

33

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

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

Table 1.1 shows the Relationship between Body Image, Social Comparison and Assertiveness among young adults. The correlation values show assertiveness and body image aren't related, and Assertiveness and Social Comparison are negatively, and also Social Comparison and Body Image are negatively related. Hence, it can be understood that when Body image increases Social comparison decreases and when Social Comparison increases assertiveness decreases and vice versa. Therefore the hypothesis 1 (There will be no significant relationship between Assertiveness and Body Image) is accepted. Hypothesis 2 (There will be no significant relationship between Assertiveness and Social Comparison) and Hypothesis 3 (There will be no significant relationship between Social Comparison and Body image) was not accepted. The result of this study is not in coordination with the results of the study conducted by Diane Carlson Jones (2001) who reported that weight comparisons to both peer and model targets were primary correlates of body dissatisfaction.

Table 1.2 Multiple Linear Regression Coefficient, Beta Value and 't' Value

Variables

Beta

t

Sig.

R²

F

Body Image

-.047

-.229

.820

-.571

.122

2.079

Social Comparison

-.372

-1.823

.078

-.365

a. Dependent Variable: Assertiveness

Table 1.2 shows the multiple linear regression analysis, Body image and Social comparison were introduced as the independent variables with Assertiveness as the dependent variable. The results of the regression table indicate that variables namely Body image and Social comparison were not significantly predicting assertiveness of individuals. Therefore the hypothesis 3 (There will be no significant prediction of Assertiveness by Body Image and Social Comparison) was accepted. The result of this study is not in coordination with the results of the study conducted by Paul Gilbert and Steven Allan (1994) who reported that that social comparison may be an important variable in assertiveness.

Summary and conclusion

- The study reveals that there is a significant Moderate negative relationship between Social Comparison and Body Image, and also there is a low negative relationship between Assertiveness and Social Comparison.
- The regression analysis also shows that variables namely Body Image and Social Comparison were not significantly predicting Assertiveness of young adults

Limitations

- The prominent limitation of this study was that the sample size was small.
- Sample study was collected in limited place in Chennai.
- The research did not focus on the gender difference.

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- Usage of convenient sampling technique.

Implications

The results of the study can be helpful in designing training programs for increasing assertive skills and designing better counseling techniques to address issues related to negative body image and high social comparison.

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