

BODY SHAMING, EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIVITY, AND LIFE ORIENTATION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

***Ms. Shreya Saxena, *Ms. Avya Mathur, **Ms. Samiksha Jain**

Affiliations:

*BA (H) Applied Psychology student, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Amity University, Noida, India,

**Visiting Faculty, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Amity University, Noida, India.

ABSTRACT

Mockery of someone's body type leads to degradation in mental well being and lack of confidence. To understand the consequences of body shaming, we must evaluate the three aspects- body image, emotional expression, and life orientation. The aim of this study is to understand the relationship between body shaming and body image, life orientation and emotional expression. The interplay between these aspects determines one's personality and how we see the world around us. This study incorporated 150 participants including 75 males and 75 females. Snowball sampling was used to collect responses from the participants. Three scales were used to form a survey questionnaire that assessed respective aspects. The results revealed an insignificant relationship between the body image of males and females, and a significant relationship between body image and emotional expressivity which was found to be positive. However, there exists a significant and negative relationship between body image and optimism. Hence, this proves our hypothesis that people with positive body image can express their emotions well, but disproves the fact that positive body image can lead to a good level of optimism.

Keywords: Body Shaming, Emotional Expression, Optimism.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st Century, where social media is easily accessible to all kinds of age and people, great emphasis on idealized body, skin, and type can be observed. With various beauty blogs and pages come consequences that can lead to degraded mental health, as one of the major problems pertaining to our society is Body Shaming. Body Shaming is a form of bullying that mainly targets the physical parts of someone's body. Physical aspects include Weight, Shape, Hairstyle, Clothing Choices, Makeup, or Size. Humiliating and making negative statements about someone's body, or criticizing your own body for its appearance. In a study conducted on young adults, it was seen that individuals who experience feelings of shame towards their own body exhibit depressive symptoms associated with self-criticizing behavior, which can also lead to binge eating, acting as a social comforter to the person (Duarte, Gouveia, and Ferreira, 2014)

Body Shaming can now be found in young adults widely as with the growing trends of diets, exercise, and fashion portrayed by celebrities, people who drift apart from these trends are criticized or humiliated for the same. We can see people shaming both men and women nowadays for their body type. In the case of women, they are mostly criticized or humiliated for their weight by either being called 'Fat' or 'Too thin'. Men view their body in terms of muscularity, lean structure, hair and torso rather than looking at it from a holistic perspective and this desirability of a muscular structure can be seen in many men. Men's self esteem is also found to be correlated with their features comprehending to face, hair and muscularity (McFarland and Petrie,

2012). Hence men also experience body shaming if they aren't Muscular enough like the idealized examples of Men with 'Perfect Bodies'. Due to the growing trends, only men with abs and built muscles are considered handsome and fit. It has also been noted that the media poses as a negative moderator between the muscular ideals that men have, which in turn leads to a negative image and evaluation of their own bodies in regard to the societal comparisons (Barlette, Vowels and Saucier, 2008). It appears that even though both the genders experience body shaming in various ways, however certain differences in the perception and body image of men and women still exist. Women tend to have more negative images about their bodies in comparison to men in situations differing from each other. However, evaluations are on a similar level in both the genders when they are in presence of their partners. It was observed that lower body self esteem leads to negative body evaluations including weight, appearance etc. during sexual activities for both men and women (Brennan, Lalonde and Bain , 2010).

Even though the comments are made on the physical aspects of an individual's body, the impacts are often psychological. For example, when we are exposed to Magazines and Instagram pages that portray the desired body shape, we tend to question ourselves by comparing our bodies to the digitally altered ones. This practice of doubting ourselves can lead to losing self-confidence and lacking self-esteem. Some mental health aspects that can be affected are the way we express our emotions, called Emotional Expressivity and our idea of Life Orientation.

Emotional Expression can be defined in terms of how individuals portray their feelings or emotions. Emotions can be expressed by facial movements, verbally, or with gestures. Crying, laughing, smiling, or screaming are some ways in which emotions are expressed. It has been observed many times that women who tend to identify their body as being deviant from the 'standards' tend to indulge in disordered eating patterns. This idea of discrepancy leads to women being cognitively inclined to react to internal negative and unwanted experiences, for instance, eating less in order to become thin (Bento, Ferreira, Mendes and Marta Simões, 2017). Similarly, men who experience unwanted emotions regarding their body shape, size and features of it, often indulge in negative evaluations and experience dissatisfaction with their bodies; and engage in dysfunctional behaviours to cope with it. Regulating one's emotions thus becomes very important as if not done correctly, it also leads to maladaptive and harmful eating patterns (Lavender and Anderson, 2009).

On the other hand, life Orientation is how individuals see themselves in respect to the situations and people around them. It is concerned with the values and beliefs people have, the environment, and how they are responsible around it, how can someone lead a healthy and wise life, physical activities, and mental health. According to studies done to examine the concept behind a positive body image, it has been very significantly seen that a secure attachment can be considered to lead to higher self-esteem and optimism, and also a great predictor of positive body image (Sandoval, 2008). Another view in understanding how an individual's life and people in its domain along with the attitude one has towards it has an effect on the body image of that person is that people who hold a negative body image seek more social approval and acceptance. In the case of women, their body image is strongly impacted by their romantic relationships and anxiety in intimacy in that relationship can lead to a negative body image and dissatisfaction in women (Cash, Thériault, and Milkewicz Annis, 2004).

The interplay between these two variables and the way we perceive our bodies has a great deal of influence on our personality. The level of acceptance for his/her own body along with many other facets determine how positively we view our bodies (Tylka and Wood-Barcalow, 2015). It has been observed that a support from the people with whom the individual is close to can definitely lead to a positive body perception and love for oneself (Wood-Barcalow, Tylka and Augustus-Horvath, 2010). Thus, considering all the above discussion we can conclude that for an individual to lead a happy and contented life, everything around and within the person needs to be in harmony, including the nurturance and support from others and love for ourselves.

Hence the objectives of this study are,

1. To understand the differences in the perception of body image among males and females
2. To understand the relationship between body image, emotional expressivity, and life orientation among young adults.

Based on the understandings and the research work done previously, we have hypothesized that;

1. There would be a significant difference in the perception of body image among males and females
2. There would be a significant relationship between emotional expression, life orientation, and body image.

2. METHODS

Participants: The study included 150 participants, 75 males, and 75 females ranging within 18-28 years of age (Mean age= 22.6). 71.3 % of the population are students and 28.7% are nonstudents.

Measures: The survey questionnaire consisted of three subscales:

- *Body Image Questionnaire: Extension (BIQ; Koleck, Bruchon-Schweitzer, Cousson-Gélie, and Quintard; 2002);* This questionnaire aims at accessing the perceptions and attitudes they hold for their body. The questionnaire contains 19 items, each presenting the participant with a continuum (5-pointer) on which they have two rates between two opposite traits; for instance good health-bad health. The participant is asked to choose the most favorable response which is later scored from 1-5 for each value. For some items, reverse scoring is done, i.e. from 5-1. The total score can vary from 19 being the lowest and 95 being the highest. Higher the score, the higher is the body satisfaction.
- *Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R; Scheier, Carver, and Bridges; 1994);* This questionnaire aims at understanding the levels of optimism and pessimism of an individual in various aspects of their life. The LOT-R is a shorter version of the original questionnaire and has 10 items, each with 5-point Likert options ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly disagree. A higher score indicates that the participant has a positive outlook on life and its aspects. The LOT-R is a shorter version of the original questionnaire and has 10 items, each with 5-point Likert options ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly disagree. A higher score indicates that the participant has a positive outlook on life and its aspects.
- *The Emotional Expressivity Scale (EES, Kring, Smith, and Neale; 1994);* This questionnaire provides the participant with a set of questions that access how an individual expresses his/her emotions in different situations. There are 17 questions, each of them having a six-point option scale, ranging from 'never true' to 'always true'. The scores are attributed to each option from 1-6, where a higher score means that the person is able to adequately express their emotions outwardly.

Procedure:

To measure the variables, questionnaires that fulfilled the requirements were chosen. (BIQ, EES, LOT-R). The reliability and validity of the same were kept in mind. Further, a survey was framed using Google Forms which comprised three sections for the respective questionnaires. The participants were asked for their consent before they filled the questionnaire. The survey was shared with the subjects. Data was collected using the Snowball Sampling Technique. After data collection, the scoring was done with the help of scoring keys mentioned in the questionnaires.

3. ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed using SPSS statistics 23.0. The mean and standard deviation were calculated, along with which the correlation between each of the three variables was computed using the scores collected from

the Body Image Questionnaire (BIQ), The Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) and The Emotional Expressivity Scale (EES), and the correlation coefficients were analyzed to understand how body image, life orientation in terms of optimism and pessimism towards various aspects of life and the participant’s level of emotional expressivity in different scenarios are interrelated with each other. The significance was analyzed on both two-tailed (.01 and .05) and 0.2 levels.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 represents the standard deviation scores, mean along with error of mean for both male and female participants using the scores of the Body Image Questionnaire. The table 2 represents the t-values for both sexes for the Body Image Questionnaire whereas the table 3 depicts the correlation values between BIQ, LOT and EES.

Table 1: Group statistics

	GENDER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
BIQ	Male	75	67.32	7.717	0.891
	Female	75	65.33	8.106	0.936

Table 2: Independent Sample tests; t test values, insignificant at 2-tailed level, significant at 0.2 level; t= t-test for Equality of Means and F= Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
BIQ	Equal variances assumed	0.478	0.49	1.537	148	0.126	1.987	1.292	-0.567	4.54
	Equal variances not assumed			1.537	147.642	0.126	1.987	1.292	-0.567	4.54

Table 3: Correlations table; **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

	BIQ	EE	LOT
BIQ	1	.213**	-.377**
EE	.213**	1	-0.125
LOT	-.377**	-0.125	1

4. DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 2, there exists no significant difference between the t-value for both the genders with respect to the body image (1.537 for Male and Female). This rejects the first hypothesis as it is found that there exists no gender difference in the body image for young adults. This finding can be explained by the fact that men and women both then to evaluate their bodies when it comes to their physical appearance, and we can see this similarity of perception in the case where both the sexes are in presence of their partners or significant others (Brennan, Lalonde, and Bain; 2010)

The correlations between the three variables have been shown in table 3, where we can see a positive correlation between the emotional expressivity and body image of both the sexes. It has been found that scores for BIQ and EE are significant at a 2-tailed level, where the correlation comes out to be 0.213. This result supports the second hypothesis, where a significant positive correlation between the BIQ and EE has been found (.213). However, there exists a correlation of -.377 between BIQ and LOT, which suggests that hypothesis two has been proved, but there exists a negative correlation between the two. Thus if the Body Image of a person increases, their expressions of emotions will be enhanced, however, it will not certainly affect the optimism level, in a positive direction.

It is observed that men and women both tend to experience negative emotions and inadequate expressions when they have a negative image and perception of their bodies. This research finding can be supported by the fact that the emotions people experience (in terms of emotional intelligence) tends to moderate their self-esteem and body image perceptions, which can be either positive or negative (Swami, Begum and Petrides; 2010). This can also be explained by the fact that there are five facets to emotional expressivity, in which the core of emotional expressivity is better explained by the situation that the person is experiencing. Body shaming can lead to negative experiences in people where they tend to regulate their emotions and may adapt to limiting their expression of emotions by masking the negative and strongly felt ones (Gross J.J. and John O.P.; 1998).

In terms of life orientation, it can be explained by the finding that some people tend to have a certain 'overly' optimistic attitude towards their life and their perception about their body. This phenomenon, which is called the 'optimistic bias' or 'unrealistic optimism' is explained by a mechanism where people tend to indulge in defensive behaviors and attitudes to secure their self-esteem (Conversano, et.al., 2010).

To explain this in terms of body shaming, people who have developed a certain negative image about their bodies may tend to be overly protective and avoid negative repercussions by adapting/coping to the situation and altering negative image which can also be explained by the term 'dispositional optimism' (Scheier and Carver, 1992).

5. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since young adults are exposed to almost every platform of social media, it is important to spread knowledge of what is negative in their lives and how they can change their thoughts and perceptions.

With the increasing beauty models and treatments for improvised skin tone, weight loss techniques, or acne removal creams, it should be made sure that people are not heading towards negative body image. Therefore, to promote healthy and positive body image, we should focus on how our body is bringing us closer to our goals instead of focusing on what our body isn't doing, we should have a list of what we like about our body so that we are aware of our importance and beauty, we should make sure we are not surrounded by people who try to bring us down by making negative statements for our body or, every time we have negative thoughts about our body, we can replace them with positive ones, hence affirming ourselves.

Moving forward, few ways in which we can boost our Life Orientation or Optimism are, remembering ‘this isn’t the end’, that is, we must never stay hung up on just one situation that may have not turned out positively, instead we must remember that there are more challenges in the future that we will achieve positively. Another important thing is to surround ourselves with people who are optimistic. It is important to eliminate people who may add negativity in our life through their actions or thoughts.

It is also important to be aware that no one is perfect, hence, it’s okay to have some ups and downs in life. We should learn how to accept things that don’t go the way we expected them to, and still be positive about the future. We need to learn how to get up every time despite falling several times.

Lastly, to have insightful communications, one must know how to convey their thoughts and emotions to the other person or themselves in the right manner. Few ways in which people express themselves are writing down their feelings, gestures, verbally communicating. It is important to let our emotions out as the more we repress our emotions, the more stress we experience. Sharing our feelings can also help in receiving new perspectives from other people that may help us in seeing our future more clearly. Some ways that can help us to be more expressive are, talking to other people about how we feel as this helps in letting out our emotions instead of repressing them. Once we communicate our emotions, it helps us see clearly our feelings and we can also hear someone else’s view. Secondly, we must be exposed to books, movies, and series that teach us the importance of being expressive. Sometimes when we see a character of a movie having any problems that may be the same as ours, it helps us in acknowledging our own emotions when we see or read the character’s emotions. Also, it is important to write down our feelings and emotions so that we can see how our thoughts are changing and if they are positive or negative.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to understand the relationship between body image, emotional expressivity, and life orientation among young adults. It was discovered that there is no significant gender difference in perceptions of Body Image for males and females. A positive correlation was found between Body Image and Emotional Expressivity. Whereas a negative correlation was found between Body Image and Life Orientation.

7. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study focuses on some major mental health aspects that need more consideration in society.

This study can be beneficial for mental health professionals to understand the emotional and behavioral patterns better with respect to particular problems. It may also help in providing a better understanding of the trauma and emotions that a person goes through in their life.

Further, Psychologists, research scholars, and psychiatrists can study these emotions to sketch mental health interventions and treatment plans for the clients that may be facing some problems.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank all the participants for providing their information and donating some of their precious time to help us with our research. We assure the participants that their information would be kept highly confidential. We would also like to thank the Jetir Journal for providing us the opportunity to publish our paper for further educational purposes. Lastly, we would like to thank all the people who helped us throughout the span of this research with their support.

Conflict of interest- None.

REFERENCES

[1] Duarte, C., Pinto-Gouveia, J., & Ferreira, C. (2014). Escaping from body image shame and harsh

- self-criticism: Exploration of underlying mechanisms of binge eating. *Eating behaviors*, 15(4), 638-643.
- [2] McFarland, M. B., & Petrie, T. A. (2012). Male body satisfaction: Factorial and construct validity of the Body Parts Satisfaction Scale for men. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 59(2), 329.
- [3] Barlett, C. P., Vowels, C. L., & Saucier, D. A. (2008). Meta-analyses of the effects of media images on men's body-image concerns. *Journal of social and clinical psychology*, 27(3), 279-310.
- [4] Brennan, M. A., Lalonde, C. E., & Bain, J. L. (2010). Body image perceptions: Do gender differences exist. *Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 15(3), 130-138.
- [5] Bento, S., Ferreira, C., Mendes, A. L., & Marta-Simões, J. (2017). Emotion regulation and disordered eating: The distinct effects of body image-related cognitive fusion and body appreciation.
- [6] Lavender, J. M., & Anderson, D. A. (2010). Contribution of emotion regulation difficulties to disordered eating and body dissatisfaction in college men. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 43(4), 352-357.
- [7] Sandoval, E. L. (2008). *Secure attachment, self-esteem, and optimism as predictors of positive body image in women*. Texas A&M University.
- [8] Cash, T. F., Theriault, J., & Annis, N. M. (2004). Body image in an interpersonal context: Adult attachment, fear of intimacy and social anxiety. *Journal of social and clinical psychology*, 23(1), 89-103.
- [9] Tylka, T. L., & Wood-Barcalow, N. L. (2015). What is and what is not positive body image? Conceptual foundations and construct definition. *Body image*, 14, 118-129
- [10] Wood-Barcalow, N. L., Tylka, T. L., & Augustus-Horvath, C. L. (2010). "But I like my body": Positive body image characteristics and a holistic model for young-adult women. *Body image*, 7(2), 106-116.
- [11] Swami, V., Begum, S., & Petrides, K. V. (2010). Associations between trait emotional intelligence, actual-ideal weight discrepancy, and positive body image. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 49(5), 485-489.
- [12] Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (1994). Distinguishing optimism from neuroticism (and trait anxiety, self-mastery, and self-esteem): A re-evaluation of the Life Orientation Test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67, 1063-1078.
- [13] Body shaming and its effect on society , PDBY. (2019, April 09). Retrieved July 16, 2020, from <https://pdbby.co.za/body-shaming-and-its-effect-on-society/>
- [14] Handel, S. (2019, June 07). 7 Ways to Connect More With Your Emotional Self. Retrieved July 16, 2020, from <https://www.theemotionmachine.com/7-ways-to-connect-more-with-your-emotional-self/>
- [15] Tschinkel, A. (2018, July 23). 12 things you don't think are forms of body shaming, but actually are. Retrieved July 16, 2020, from <https://www.insider.com/things-that-are-actually-body-shaming-2018-7>
- [16] 10 Steps to Positive Body Image. (2018, February 22). Retrieved July 16, 2020, from <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/learn/general-information/ten-steps>