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## Body shape in relation to self concept and well being: A study among college students.

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### Abstract

As the common saying goes “beauty lies in the eyes of beholder”, one’s perception plays a crucial role in his or her mental health. Perceived body shape is how ones perceive his or her body/ figure. Self concept is all about how much people value themselves and how worthwhile they feel. Self concept perhaps is the broadest term it has been used in many ways, referring to many parts of a whole set of experiences and thoughts. Sometimes it is used to refer to the whole set. Some related terms are ego, identity, self concept and self schema. It is important because feeling good about oneself can affect how one acts. Wellbeing in the simplest term is understood as a state of health, happiness and/or prosperity. In a broad understanding, well being is living good life with which one is satisfied. Therefore keeping in view the importance of self-concept and well being in forming and maintaining perceived body shape especially in young college girls, the present study focuses on self concept and well being in relation to perceived body image as used by 80 female college students between the age ranges of 18 to 21 years. They completed a self report questionnaire of body shape (body shape questionnaire BSQ by Melanae Taylor 1987; self concept (6 factor self concept scale SFSCS by stake 1994) and well being (The Friedman well being scale 1994). Bivariate correlation demonstrates that there is a significant negative correlation between well being and perceived body image. Similarly, a significantly negative correlation was found between perceived body shape and self concept. The results indicate that less distorted perception of body shape leads to higher self concept and well being. Also distorted perception of body shape results in poor self concept and well being.

Keywords: perceived body shape, self concept , well being

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## **Introduction**

Body image is how someone feels about his/her own physical appearance. For many people especially those in their early adolescence, body shape perceived by them( girls) can be closely linked to self concept. That's because as adolescence develop into adulthood people care more about how others see them. Female body shape is the cumulative product of a woman's skeletal structure and the quantity and distribution of muscle and the fat on the body. As with most physical traits, there is a wide range of normality of female body shape. Human beings and cultures have perennially focused attention on the female body as a source of aesthetic pleasure, sexual attraction, fertility, and reproduction. There are, and have been, wide differences on what should be considered as an ideal or preferred body shape, both for attractiveness and for health reasons. Throughout history and to the present day, a core belief of our culture is that women should have a certain body type. Different body shapes have been "in" for women during different ears for example foot binding among ancient Chinese, lip stretching among African women, corsets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to lip fillers and botox during current times, all of this has created pressure towards thinness or a particular body types which again is attributed to male preferences. Media which portrays unrealistic beauty standards, like air brushed face thin and slender bodies in females plays an important role in deciding their mental health. Preferences for specific female body sizes are believed to be learned in social and cultural contexts. The search for the ideal body type is an area of focus for many women, and the inability to reach the ideal for some women is devastating

Self concept is closely related to how one sees them. Also self concept might incorporate many things that might not be true to one's identity therefore what and how one sees directly affect the self concept one carries. Carl roger's claimed that one factor in a person's happiness is unconditional positive regard, or UPR, from others. Evidence of UPR in self concept research is apparent in studies by Benner and Mistry (2007) and Tiedemann (2000). Research has indicated that adolescents whose mother and teacher's had high expectations for their future educational attainment experienced more academic success than those whose adult influences had lower expectations. There are many factors that affect one 's self concept namely life experiences, heredity and culture, stress and coping and health status.

Lastly well being in the broadest term is understood as happiness or prosperity. The relationship between perceived body image, well being and self concept has been studied numerous times

over the past few decades. There are multiple factors that affect well being like educational and intellectual development, health and nutrition ,infrastructure, interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships namely.

Previous studies indicates, those without body shape concerns were higher on psychological well being. Also women most at risk of body dissatisfaction are those who have low self concept, those who perceive a lack of control over their bodies and those who have internalized the thin ideal. (Srivastava, Ramakrishna,2013; Alipoor, Goodarzi, Nehzad , Zaheri 2009). In a study, it was found that those who suffers from anorexia nervosa, reported lower levels of Positive body image (body appreciation, functionality appreciation, and body responsiveness) and psychological well-being, along with greater difficulties in regulating emotions, compared to the healthy control group (Torres, Vieira, Vieira et al. (2024). The prevalence of disordered eating behaviors is rising quickly, particularly among young women in their twenties. These abnormal actions are the outcome of multiple elements interacting, one of which is ideals of beauty. Social media plays a big role in popularizing unrealistic beauty standards, which can encourage these behaviors. (Apraicio-Martinez et al., 2019), In a study, young women (18–30 years old) were randomized to read Instagram photos that were either appearance-neutral, body-positive, or thin-ideal. The findings demonstrated that, in comparison to thin-ideal and appearance-neutral postings, a brief exposure to body-positive posts was linked to improvements in young women's positive mood, body satisfaction, and body appreciation. Furthermore, compared to appearance-neutral posts, thin-ideal and body-positive posts were linked to higher levels of self-objectification. (Cohen,Newton-John,Slater 2021). Body image construction is a two-edged blade that can either encourage good personal growth or result in self-deprecation. When it comes to college students' mental health, fostering a favorable environment for physical activity is more beneficial than engaging in physical activity itself.( Wang, Lu, Niu,2023). Age and gender affect self-perceptions of body size in Taiwan. Overall, women are more likely than men to misperceive themselves as being too big, and men are more likely than women to misperceive themselves as too thin. Older women, however, were more likely to misperceive themselves as being too thin. Clinicians and health educators should know that people's perceptions and concerns regarding their body size vary by age and gender(Weng, Chang, Hsu, et al. (2023).

Therefore it is pertinent to examine the relationship between perceived body shape, self concept and well being.

## **Objective**

The present study explores correlation between Perceived body shape, self concept and well being among female college students.

## **Hypotheses**

1. There would be no significant relationship between Perceived body shape and self concept among female students
2. There would be no significant relationship between perceived body shape and well being.
3. There would be no significant relationship between well being and self concept

## **Measures**

1. Body shape questionnaire (BSQ) by Melanae Taylor (1987) – The BSQ is a self report measure of the body shape preoccupations typical of bulimia nervosa and anorexia nervosa. Body shape questionnaire has three versions i.e. BSQ – 34; BSQ – 16a and b; and BSQ – 8a, b,c d. BSQ -34 was used. It has 34 items. The type of are “ has feeling made you brood about your shape?, have you been so worried about your shape that you have been feeling you ought to diet , these sort of questions are scored on the scale of 1-6, where 1 signifies never such activity/ behavior has been done in past 4 weeks and signifies such activity/ behavior has been done on regular basis in past 4 weeks. The range of score is 34- 204.

2. 6 Factor self concept scale (SFSCS) by stake (1994) - The six factor self concept scale is a multi dimensional measure of adult self concept that was designed to have broad applicability across life settings, roles, and activities. The test aims to identify a set of subscales that would represent categories of self evaluation that (a) have universal relevance for all adults, regardless of gender, age or other person variables and (b) have meaning for a broad range of life settings and activities. There are six factors: Likeability , morality , task accomplishment, giftedness, power and vulnerability. These 6 factors are measured in the questionnaire on the basis of 35 items, which are divided into 6 sub groups. These items are scored on the scale of 1-5. In which 1 signifies “never true for me” i.e. there is a less likeability and 5 signify “always true for me” i.e. there is a greater likeability. Scores are measured separately for 6 factors as well as composite

scores of these 6 factors are used to measure the self concept. The range is 35-175.

3. Well being scale by Friedman – The Friedman well being scale (1994) consists of twenty bipolar adjectives. it has five subscales: emotional stability, self confidence, joviality, sociability and happiness. The questionnaire consist of 20 items which are equally divided into 5 subscales. Each subscale has 4 bipolar questions which are rated on the scale of 0-10, where 0 and 10 signifies extreme bipolar traits and 5 stands for average the range of scores is 0-100.

### **Result and discussion**

Table I, Correlation coefficient between perceived body shape, self concept and well being.

(N-80)

	Body shape	Well being	Self concept
Body shape	1		
Well being	0.44*	1	
Self concept	0.23**	0.45*	1

\*. Correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

\*\*.. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 1 shows that perceived body shape was negatively correlated to well being i.e. – 0.448, ( $p < 0.01$ ) indicates a negative correlation between perceived body shape and well being. It implies that when body shape concerns increases (poor perceived body image) well being decreases. It has been seen that a rather large percentage of adolescent girls of low socio economic status engage in dieting when trying to lose weight, which may seriously damage their development growth ( Peternel, sujoldzic 2009). Evidence from 50 studies in 17 countries indicates that social media usage leads to body image concerns, eating disorders/disordered eating and poor mental health via the mediating pathways of social comparison, thin / fit ideal internalisation, and self-objectification. (Dane, Bhatia 2023). This review has highlighted how social media use can contribute to poor mental health – through validation-seeking practices, fear of judgement, body comparison, addiction and cyberbullying. It also demonstrates social media’s positive impact on adolescent wellbeing - through connection, support and discussion forums for those with similar diagnoses.(Popat & Tarrant 2022). Well being is mostly thought of as the dynamic process that gives people a sense of how their lives are going through the interaction between their circumstances, activities and psychological resources or mental capital. In short

well being can be defined as “a unifying concept and a characteristics of both the objective and subjective factors which constitute health and quality of life.”

Similarly the body shape was negatively correlated to self concept i.e. a correlation of  $-0.23$  ( $p < 0.05$ ) which implies that when body shape concerns increases (poor perceived body shape) self concept deteriorates. Self concept is an individual's beliefs about himself or herself including the person's attributes and who and what is the self is. The self concept includes many things that might not be part of one's identity. For example a person's self concept might include many idea of being ugly or good looking. In past studies it was found that by 6 years of age, a large number of girls desired a thinner ideal figure. Both peer and media influences emerged as significant predictors of body image and dieting awareness ( Dohnt and tiggemann 2006). The factor of the greatest impact on subjective body shape perception is socio-cultural attitudes towards appearance. In order to positively change body shape perception, it is necessary to help them perceive their body shape as it is, accept the actual body shape, and have a specific way to be satisfied with their body shape( Gyeong –hye & Na –eon , 2020). Therefore it can be concluded that, body shape dissatisfaction is considered as a predicting and maintaining factor of a variety of prevalent health problems.

Although there is a positive correlation between well being and self concept i.e.  $+0.450$  ( $P < 0.01$ ) indicates a positive correlation between well being and self concept. Previous data obtained indicated that physical self concept is related in a positive manner to psychological unwellness, in such a way that the more one is happy with one's physique, the more psychological well being one has, with less levels of anxiety and depression and less risk of suffering from eating behavior disorder. In short, the results of the study revealed the importance of psychological factors in detail which could prove helpful to clinical psychologists for prevention and treatment of mental health related disorders.( Fernandez 2009). Results showed that SCC had positive correlations with hope and subjective well-being both at one time point and over time. Multilevel mediation analysis indicated that hope could serve as a mediator in the association between SCC and subjective well-being, at both the between-person and within-person levels. Moreover, the model of longitudinal multilevel mediation was found to be moderated by gender and age. Our results indicated that hope could be an underlying mechanism for the longitudinal relationship between SCC and subjective well-being among Chinese adolescents, which provides a potential intervention target for improving adolescents' well-being(Xiang, Teng, Du, Yang, & He. (2024).

### **Suggestions to further work**

- No research is the ultimate discovery. There is always a scope for further researches in the same area.
- The study can be concluded on both the genders
- The area of study can be increased by including different dimensions of self like self objectification, social physique anxiety or social media influence. In order to increase our understanding of different variables.

### **Implications**

- Findings of the study can be utilized in developing Training programs for adolescents to enhance their well being and self concept.
- Therapists could also develop specific body positivity programme by modifying traditional therapies to resolve the problems in adolescents especially females.

### **Delimitations**

- The fact that this study was conducted on the college girls limits the findings to this particular age group.
- Extended variable like quality of life, economic status, hope, social media influence were not included.

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