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Relationship Between Socio Cultural Attitudes, Appearance and Body Dissatisfaction among Students of Islamic Azad University

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Abstract: This study examined the relation between socio cultural attitudes, appearance and body dissatisfaction in males and females students. In this study 331 student (156 boys and 155 girls) were selected via., stratified random sampling. Tools for measurement were body dissatisfaction and body mass index. As expected, girls showed higher body dissatisfaction and total SATAQ-3. The SATAQ-with four subscales (pressures, importance and internalization-general and internalization-athlete boys. In addition, for girls the strongest predictor of body dissatisfaction was importance, pressure, internalization general, whilst for boys the strongest predictor was pressure and importance.

Key words: Body dissatisfaction, pressure, importance, internalization, BMI

INTRODUCTION

The definition of disfigurement depends on an interaction between social norms and individual and values. Some cultural practices, such as foot binding, ear piercing and circumcision, clearly alter appearance and sometimes compromise normal functioning, but are not necessarily experienced or perceived as disfiguring (Fallon, 1999). Approximately 1% of the adult populations have a scar, blemish or deformity which severely affects (their) ability to lead a normal life but at least a quarter of men and a third of women report some degree of dissatisfaction with their overall appearance.

The natures of the difficulties experienced by disfigured people have been examined from two overlapping perspectives (Cash, 1990). The first perspective is largely social and cultural in nature and could be thought of as the view from the outside. Studies that have examined the impact of appearance from this perspective have been concerned with how appearance influences social perceptions and interactions. The second perspective has been concerned with the impact of appearance on individual perceptions of self-concept, emotional well-being and quality of life and so could be thought of as the view from the inside. There is a large amount of evidence that self-perceived appearance-the view from the inside-is only modestly related to the social reality of appearance and that this is equally true across the whole appearance spectrum (Ben-Tovim and Walker,

1995; Butters and Cash, 1987). It is therefore essential for researcher to consider both perspectives. In an attempt to bring these two standpoints together, the next section of this review will examine the literature pertaining to social and cultural aspects of appearance and disfigurement (outside views) and then examine psychological impacts (the view from the inside).

Body image has been long studied in the context of physically healthy individuals and persons with eating disorders. Recent interest has extended to medical populations (Benrud *et al.*, 2003) where appearance-related changes and disfigurements are readily visible and can interpersonally salient (e.g., facial scars) and can pose significant challenges to the preservation of positive self-esteem and body image (Rumsey, 2002). Research on upward comparisons suggests that people whit a high tendency to make physical appearance-related comparisons, typically with societal ideals (e.g., fashion models), experience greater body dissatisfaction and more disordered eating (Heinberg and Thompson, 1992) and that such comparisons mediate the relationship between socio-cultural influences and body dissatisfaction and eating disorders (Keery *et al.*, 2004). In contrast, research on downward comparisons (Wills, 1981) suggests that people experiencing negative feeling or cognitions about themselves (e.g., low self-esteem) can and often do, enhance their self-regard by comparing themselves to people they perceive to be less valued, or worse off than themselves (Duckitt, 1992;

Major *et al.*, 1991; Wills, 1981). However, there is no research examining the relationship between the tendency to make physical appearance-related comparisons and anti-fat attitudes, nor any research that examines whether physical appearance comparisons play a mediating role in the relationship between body image (physical self-esteem) and anti-fat attitudes. There is good evidence that prejudice toward others is related to feelings about the self (i.e., self-esteem; Duckitt, 1992, for a review) and it may be that the same will be true for feelings based on body image (i.e., physical self-esteem). In two recent studies where dimensions of body image were assessed alongside anti-fat attitudes (Lewis *et al.*, 1997) significant associations were found between the two. Although the relationship between anti-fat attitudes and body image was small in found moderate to large relationship between dimensions of body image and both implicit and explicit anti-fat attitudes. Clearly, a better understanding of the underlying reasons for this prejudice is needed in order to ameliorate or prevent it. Although, ideological/socio-cultural beliefs and associated have been found to play a role in anti-fat attitudes, with some societies clearly more prejudiced than others (Crandall *et al.*, 2001) individual differences such as body image and the tendency to compare oneself physically with others may also play an important role. The tendency to make comparisons with perceived superior and inferior others has been shown to decrease and increase psychological well being, respectively. And indeed, there is good evidence that the tendency to make physical appearance-related comparisons mediates the relationship between socio-cultural factors, body image and disordered eating (Thompson *et al.*, 1999).

Many studies have shown that body dissatisfaction is highly prevalent during adolescence (Kostanski *et al.*, 2004; Ricciardelli and McCabe, 2001). Moreover, there has been substantial empirical evidence indicating that girls show greater body dissatisfaction than boys (Barker and Galambos, 2003; Eisenberg *et al.*, 2006; Kostanski *et al.*, 2004; Muth and Cash, 1997). Muth and Cash (1997) found in their study focusing on gender differences in body image that 40% of females and 22% of males were not satisfied with their body. Results from a representative sample of 7420 adolescents in the Swiss Multicenter Adolescent Survey on health (Narring *et al.*, 2004) showed that nearly 50% of girls and 18% of boys were not satisfied with their body. Wardle and Marsland (1990) found similar results with 47% of girls and 72% of boys being satisfied with their body.

Whilst body dissatisfaction in girls is mostly related to a desire to be thinner (Kostanski *et al.*, 2004; Ricciardelli and McCabe, 2001; Wardle and Marsland, 1990) in boys body dissatisfaction is related either to a desire to lose or gain weight or to be more muscular (Cohane and Popem, 2001; Ricciardelli and McCabe, 2001; Smolak *et al.*, 2001; Smolak and Stein, 2006). Although gender differences in frequency and intensity of body-image concerns are widely recognized, few studies have examined attitudes and beliefs that might contribute to these differences or the manner in which they operate. To address these issues, the present study aimed to compare the extent of internalization of media body ideals and the pressure to conform to these ideals, in adolescent girls and boys.

One explanation for gender differences in body dissatisfaction is that there is greater socio cultural emphasis placed on physical attractiveness for girls and women in western society (Mckinley, 1999) and Switzerland is no exception in this respect. Media images create a beauty standard for girls in which a perfect, thin, body is central. However, the thin ideal propagated in media is generally unattainable (Wiseman *et al.*, 1992). It has been suggested that the discrepancy between actual and ideal body can result in body dissatisfaction (Durkin and Paxton, 2002).

Not surprisingly, under these circumstances, larger body size has consistently been observed to predict greater body dissatisfaction in girls (Barkett and Galambos, 2003).

The purpose of the present study was to determine the relationship between socio cultural attitudes towards appearance and body dissatisfaction in girls and boys students. We hypothesized that girls would have higher body dissatisfaction than boys and we hypothesized that internalization of body ideals, perceived pressure and BMI would be significant predictors of body dissatisfaction in adolescents, but to a lesser extent in boys than in girls.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: Participants were 311 students girls (n = 155) and boys (n = 156) aged 18 to 28 years (mean total age 22.84 years, SD = 4.36, Mean age and SD for girls, 21.66 and 2.98 and for boys, 23.93 and 5.1). Respondents were from 8 Faculty of Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz Branch that a wide range of socioeconomic status areas.

Measures: The Socio cultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-III (SATAQ-3; Thompson *et al.*, 1991) consists of 30 items comprising four dimensions of media influence; pressures (seven items), importance (nine items), internalization-general (nine items) and internalization-athlete (5 items). Respondents rated statements from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). The pressures subscale assesses perceived pressures from the media to achieve the cultural beauty ideal and attempts to enhance one's appearance. Cronbach's alpha for this subscale was 0.92 in the current sample. The Importance subscale score reflects to what extent media is used as an informational source on attractiveness. In present sample, this subscale had an alpha of 0.93. The internalization subscales reflect internalization of socio cultural ideals related to television, magazines and movies (internalization-general), or athletic and sports figures (internalization-athlete). Cronbach's alphas were, respectively 0.94 and 0.85 for the internalization subscales. In the present study all scales together represented a general score for thin ideal media susceptibility for each respondent. Cronbachs alpha coefficient of the total scale was 0.95 in this sample. TheSATAQ-3 has been shown to have good convergent validity in a non-clinical sample (Thompson *et al.*, 1991) and excellent internal consistency in a clinical sample (Jones, 2004).

Body dissatisfaction: Body dissatisfaction and was assessed with two measures. The negative body evaluation subscale of the body image questionnaire (Clement and Lowe, 1996) assessed dissatisfaction with one's own appearance and body, but also feelings of discomfort with ones own body. It contains 10 items such as sometimes, I wish I looked completely different, there is something wrong with my appearance or i don't like myself on photos. Items are rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale has been shown to yield valid and reliable scores (Clement and Lowe,

1996). In addition, body dissatisfaction was also assessed with 10 items from the Frankfurter Body Concept Scales (FBCS) (Dusinger, 1998), with items such as I am satisfied with my appearance, I look quite good or I would like to change some parts of my body. These items also measure dissatisfaction with the own body and appearance and were also rated from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The FBCS has been shown to be a reliable and valid questionnaire (Dusinger, 1998). Exploratory factor analysis on the combined 20 items from the two body dissatisfaction measures showed that they loaded on one factor. Therefore, they were used as one body dissatisfaction scale. Body dissatisfaction measure was identical for body and girl's. Items were appropriate for both genders due to the assessment of a general dissatisfaction independent of a specific body ideal. In this study the internal consistency of the resulting body dissatisfaction scale was 0.91 in girls and 0.86 in boys. Body mass index (kg m^{-2}) was calculated using self-reported weight and height.

RESULTS

As hypothesized (Table 1) girls showed significantly higher body dissatisfaction than boys. Girls had significantly higher pressure, importance, internalization-general, internalization-athlete and total SATQ-3 than boys. However, there was no significant difference between boys and girls on BMI.

The six independent variables explained 29 and 43% of variance and body dissatisfaction in boys and girls, respectively (Table 2, 3).

In both, boys and girls each of the independent variables predicted a significant unique proportion of the variance in body dissatisfaction for girls the strongest predictor of body dissatisfaction was importance, pressure, internalization general, whilst for boys the strongest predictor was pressure and importance.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviation for variables in girls (n = 155) and boys (n = 156)

Variables	Scale range	Girls		Boys		t-values
		M	SD	M	SD	
Body dissatisfaction	20-100	49.71	13.84	40.15	9.23	7.159*
Pressure	7-35	15.57	7.10	13.54	6.25	2.672*
Importance	9-45	10.18	4.62	7.85	3.12	5.206*
Internalization-general	9-45	28.32	8.17	22.71	6.23	6.800*
Internalization-athlete	5-30	13.41	4.07	11.14	3.95	4.983*
Total SATQ-3	30-150	67.48	23.96	55.24	19.55	4.929*
BMI		22.50	3.29	22.75	2.84	0.716

*p<0.01

Table 2: Multiple regression analysis predicting body dissatisfaction from socio cultural attitudes towards appearance variable and BMI in boys

Criterion variable	Predictors variables	MR	SR	FP	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Body dissatisfaction	BMI	0.20	0.04	9.58	B = 0.25 T = 3.09 P = 0.002						
	Pressure	0.32	0.10	12.26	B = 0.001 T = 0.01 P = 0.98	B = 0.62 T = 4.74 P = 0.000					
	Importance	0.468	0.22	19.58	B = 0.10 T = 1.29 P = 0.19	B = 0.12 T = 1.05 P = 0.29	B = 0.38 T = 5.35 P = 0.000				
	Internalization-general	0.479	0.23	15.49	B = 0.09 T = 1.23 P = 0.21	B = 0.07 T = 0.57 P = 0.56	B = 0.35 T = 4.82 P = 0.000	B = 0.18 T = 1.65 P = 0.09			
	Internalization-athlete	0.50	0.25	14.03	B = 0.10 T = 1.42 P = 0.15	B = 0.03 T = 0.25 P = 0.80	B = 0.29 T = 3.79 P = 0.0002	B = 0.07 T = 0.58 P = 0.56	B = 0.24 T = 2.55 P = 0.011		
	Total SATAQ-3	0.54	0.29	14.32	B = 0.10 T = 1.39 P = 0.16	B = 0.006 T = 0.05 P = 0.95	B = 0.22 T = 2.89 P = 0.004	B = 0.02 T = 0.22 P = 0.83	B = 0.17 T = 1.80 P = 0.07	B = 0.39 T = 3.46 P = 0.0006	

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis predicting body dissatisfaction from socio cultural attitudes towards appearance variable and BMI in girls

Criterion variable	Predictors variables	MR	SR	FP	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Body dissatisfaction	BMI	0.18	0.03	7.39	B = 0.31 T = 2.71 P = 0.007						
	Pressure	0.34	0.11	13.84	B = 0.15 T = 1.34 P = 0.18	B = 0.68 T = 4.43 P = 0.000					
	Importance	0.57	0.32	34.49	B = 0.04 T = 0.43 P = 0.66	B = 0.08 T = 0.54 P = 0.58	B = 0.73 T = 8.01 P = 0.000				
	Internalization-general	0.599	0.36	28.64	B = 0.02 T = 0.19 P = 0.84	B = 0.04 T = 0.26 P = 0.79	B = 0.67 T = 7.30 P = 0.000	B = 0.45 T = 3.12 P = 0.002			
	Internalization-athlete	0.629	0.39	26.62	B = 0.03 T = 0.38 P = 0.70	B = 0.11 T = 0.74 P = 0.45	B = 0.57 T = 6.14 P = 0.000	B = 0.24 T = 1.60 P = 0.10	B = 0.42 T = 3.46 P = 0.0006		
	Total SATAQ-3	0.66	0.43	26.02	B = 0.03 T = 0.32 P = 0.74	B = 0.14 T = 0.98 P = 0.95	B = 0.48 T = 5.11 P = 0.000	B = 0.11 T = 0.75 P = 0.45	B = 0.33 T = 2.78 P = 0.005	B = 0.53 T = 3.78 P = 0.0002	

DISCUSSION

The main goal of the present study was to examine the relationship and comparison between socio-cultural attitudes towards appearance and body dissatisfaction in girls and boys students. As expected, girls had higher body dissatisfaction than boys. Also for girls, the strongest predictor of boy dissatisfaction was importance, pressure internalization general, whilst for boys the strongest predictor was pressure and importance.

Gender differences in body dissatisfaction were observed, consistent with many other studies (Barker and Galambos, 2003; Eisenberg *et al.*, 2006; Kostanski *et al.*, 2004; Muth and Cash, 1997).

Furthermore, girls reported internalization of body ideals to a greater extent and perceived more pressure from media than boys, replicating a previous observation (Wilksch *et al.*, 2006). These differences were not due to

differences in BMI between girls and boys. Despite media presentations of idealized image of muscular men, boys being generally less likely to endorse this ideal, may well contribute to the significantly lower body dissatisfaction in boys than girls.

Gender differences in internalization and pressure could be due to girls being exposed to a greater extent to media body ideals than boys. Mass media plays a central role in conveying body ideals (Thompson *et al.*, 1999; Tiggemann and Pickering, 1996) and women are confronted with appearance norms in media in more frequent and explicit ways than men (Strahan *et al.*, 2006) for example, studies have shown that there are more diet and muscle development advertisement in women's than in men's magazines (Andersen and DiDomenico, 1992). An additional reason for gender differences in internalization and pressure may be that, in western society, beauty and the current female body

ideal is more central to a feminine than to a masculine gender role (Grogan, 1999; Halliwell and Dittmar, 2003; Thompson *et al.*, 1999).

Consistent with earlier studies, the present study found internalization of the body ideal, perceived pressure from media and BMI to contribute to the prediction of body dissatisfaction (Cafri *et al.*, 2005; Jones *et al.*, 2004; McCabe and Ricciardelli, 2003). In line with the hypothesis, internalization, pressure and BMI explained much more of the total variance in girls than boys body dissatisfaction. Although, these variables are clearly associated with body dissatisfaction, in boys particularly, other predictors of body dissatisfaction need to be considered. Personality or psychological variables, such as depressive symptomatology or negative mood, may be especially important in the prediction of body dissatisfaction in boys (McCabe and Ricciardelli, 2003; Paxton *et al.*, 2006; Presnell *et al.*, 2004).

Although internalization was the strongest unique predictor of body dissatisfaction for girls identified in the regression analysis, perceived pressure was the strongest unique predictor for boys. Interestingly, Stice and Whitenton (2002) found in their longitudinal study that perceived pressure to be thin, not internalization, was the strongest predictor of body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls.

The difference in the finding may relate to one study being longitudinal and the other being cross-sectional. Possibly, perceived pressure precedes internalization of the thin ideal, but once this ideal has become part of a girls' own value system, the difficulty of living up to this ideal may contribute more to body dissatisfaction than perceived external pressures

CONCLUSION

In relation to boys, correlations between body dissatisfaction and internalization and body dissatisfaction and pressure, were quite similar. However, the regression analysis suggests that pressure is a somewhat stronger unique predictor of body dissatisfaction than internalization. Future research is required to confirm these relationships. However, it is possible that boys of this age do not internalize a body ideal that is likely to be detrimental to their own view of themselves to the same extent as girls, but do still respond to external messages about the importance of a certain body ideal. It is also possible that the balance of factors associated with body dissatisfaction may change

over time and that as boys grow into young adults, perceived pressure may result in greater internalization of media body ideals.

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