

# Exploring the Impact of Body Image Perception and Self-Esteem on Psychological Well Being

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## Abstract

The primary aim of this study was to examine the relationship between body image perception and psychological well-being, the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being, and interaction effect of body image perception and self-esteem on psychological well-being. A quantitative research design was employed, involving 250 participants. Body mass index (BMI) was calculated and categorized into four groups. Body image perception was assessed using a nine – silhouette scale, self-esteem was measured with Rosenberg's self-esteem scale, and psychological well-being was evaluated using Ryff's 18-item psychological well-being scale. Statistical analyses, including correlation and regression tests were conducted using SPSS to examine relationship between these variables. The findings of this study reinforce the understanding that body image perceptions significantly impact mental well-being. Individuals with a greater body image perception (BIP) discrepancy between their perceived and actual body image tend to experience lower psychological well-being. While self-esteem was hypothesized to be a significant predictor of psychological well-being, the results did not support this assumption. Although self-esteem had a positive association with psychological well-being, the lack of statistical significance suggests that additional factors may play a more dominant role in shaping psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** body image perception, self-esteem, psychological well-being, mental health, quantitative research

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In an era where social media, advertisements, and cultural norms shape our perceptions of beauty and self-worth, the way individuals perceive their bodies has become a critical determinant of their overall well-being. Body image perception the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings one has about their physical appearance can significantly influence self-esteem and mental health. While prior studies have explored these variables separately, there remains a need to examine their interconnected impact on psychological well-being holistically. This study seeks to bridge that gap by analyzing how body image perception and self-esteem interact to influence an individual's psychological well-being. Body image refers to how individuals perceive, think, feel about their physical appearance, which can be influenced by personal experiences, societal norms and cultural standards (Toselli et al., 2023a). self esteem, on the other hands is the measure of an individuals overall self-worth and confidence, shaped by various

internal and external factors (bailey, 2003) . Psychological well-being encompasses an individuals emotional , psychological and social functioning , contributing to life satisfaction , resilience and overall mental health (Ryff &keyes, n.d.). This paper explores the intricate connections between these three constructs , examining their psychological underpinnings , empirical findings and broader societal implications . Body image perception encompasses body size assessment ( view of an individual of their own body ) , estimation of body attractiveness ( what is the type of body that the person considers to be ideal and beautiful ) , opinions the individuals about their own body form and size (Toselli et al., 2023) . It has a significant impact on the concept of self . There is a growing attention to gorgon's definition to body image perception in developing and emerging cultures, he defines body image perception as a person's perception , thought , feelings about his or her body (Alipour et al., 2015) . Morris Rosenberg defined self – esteem as your overall sense of self-worth and an individual's positive or negative attitude toward themselves. The phrase self esteem is oversimplified to describe a variety of intricate mental processes related to one's self perception (Bailey, 2003). The term “psychological well- being “ describes the best possible psychological experience and functioning, Ryff and Keyes define psychological well being as a multifaceted method of gauging human actualization , they distinguish psychological well-being from subjective well being , This outlines what supports mental and physical well-being and includes autonomy , personal development , self-acceptance , life purpose , mastery and good relatedness (Hernandez et al., 2018a) .

### 1.1 Review of literature

Self-esteem , psychological well-being , and body image perception are interconnected concepts that significantly influence an individual's mental health and quality of life . numerous studies in psychology and social sciences have examined these factors , emphasizing their effects on emotional stability , personal identity , and overall well-being . Body image perception can have a considerable impact on self-esteem , which in turn influences psychological well-being . This literature review synthesizes the existing research to explore the relationships among body image perception , self-esteem , and psychological well-being .

The theory of social comparison processes ( Festinger,1954) examines how individuals evaluate their own abilities and opinions by comparing themselves to others . Festinger proposed that in the absence of objective benchmarks , people seek self-evaluation through social comparison , which can influence self-perception and motivation . Individuals tend to compare themselves with those who share similar characteristics , and both upward and downward comparisons can shape self-concept and body image perception .

The objectification theory introduced by fredrickson and roberts (1997) which explores how societal objectification impacts women's experiences and mental health . According to this theory , repeated exposure to objectification leads to self-objectification , where individuals internalise an external observer's perspectives on their bodies . This internalization fosters habitual body surveillance and has been linked to negative psychological outcomes , including anxiety , body shame and decreased cognitive function . Furthermore , cultural and media influences reinforces objectification , exacerbating its detrimental psychological effects .

Empirical studies support these theories , a longitudinal study conducted by Stice and whitenton (2002) for identifying key predictors of body dissatisfaction in adolescent females , including higher body mass, perceived pressure to be thin , and thin-ideal internalization . similarly , swami and abbasnejad (2010) found that adherence to traditional femininity ideology correlated with lower body appreciation among

british female students . These findings indicate that gender norms play a crucial role in shaping body image perceptions .

The digital age has further amplified body image concerns . Tiggemann and slater (2013) examined the influence of social networking sites on adolescent girls body image concerns . Their study establishes a positive correlation between social media exposure and body dissatisfaction , reinforcing the argument that media consumption perpetuates thin-ideal internalization and body surveillance .

Gender disparities also exist in body image perception, a study conducted by Lobo et al. (2020) found that while women exhibited greater discrepancies between perceived and actual body image , both men and women reported high levels of dissatisfaction . This underscores the need to consider broader sociocultural influences affecting body perception across genders .

Self-esteem plays a central role in shaping psychological resilience and overall life satisfaction . Jain and Dixit (2014) examined self-esteem levels among indian youths and found that societal pressures , particularly academic expectations influence self-perception . While no significant gender differences emerged , the study emphasized the importance of external pressures in shaping self-esteem .

self-esteem in an academic writing setting was further explored by Cecily and jebaraj (2017a), finding a significant positive correlation between self-esteem and academic performance among first-year nursing students . This suggests that enhancing self-perception can lead to improved academic outcomes . This separate study cecily & jebaraj, ( 2017b) investigated self-esteem among individuals with substance addiction , revealing that 79% of participants exhibited low self-esteem , thereby highlighting the role of self-esteem in addiction vulnerability .

Linking low self esteem to negative mental health outcomes in vietnamese secondary school students a study was conducted by Nyguyen et al . (2019) including depression , anxiety and suicidal ideation . Their findings emphasize the necessity of early interventions to promote self-esteem and safeguard mental health .

Negative body image has been consistently linked to low self-esteem . prabhu and D’cunha(2018) found that body dissatisfaction increased with age among adolescents and was significantly correlated with lower self-esteem . Similarly , saranya et al . (2020) identified a strong negative correlation between body image perception and self-esteem , reinforcing the idea that negative self-perception can lead to diminished self-worth .

These studies collectively indicate that the interventions aimed at improving body image may have positive ripple effects on self-esteem , ultimately enhancing psychological well-being .

Proctor (2014) has conceptualized subjective well-being (SWB) as the cognitive and emotional evaluation of one’s life . SWB is influenced by personality traits , social relationships and environmental conditions , though its subjective nature presents challenges in measurement .

A multidimensional model of psychological well-being was proposed by Ryff (1989) that includes autonomy , environmental mastery , self-acceptance , positive relationships , purpose in life , and personal growth . Ryff’s (2014) follow up-study confirmed that higher PWB is associated with better health outcomes and longevity , reinforcing the importance of psychological resilience .

Gender differences in psychological well-being have also been noted . Roothman (2001) found that men scored higher in cognitive flexibility and autonomy , while women exhibited greater emotional expression and religious well-being . However self-report biases may have influences these findings .

The relationship between body image and psychological well-being among male college students was explored by Tager et al (2006) . Their findings suggested that men who perceived themselves as

overweight reported higher self - acceptance than those who saw themselves as underweight . This highlights how body image influences mental health outcomes in different ways depending on self-perception .

Another study conducted by Du et al(2014) examined relational self-esteem and psychological well-being among children with HIV-positive parents in china . Their study demonstrated that social support fosters self-esteem , which in turn contributes to improved psychological well-being , This reinforces the idea that self-esteem serves as a mediating factor between external stressors and mental health outcomes

## Conclusion

The reviewed literature collectively highlights the intricate relationships among body image perception , self-esteem , and psychological well-being , While body dissatisfaction can contribute to lower self-esteem and negative mental health outcomes , self-esteem also mediated the effects of social influences on psychological resilience . Given these findings , further research should focus on studies to establish casual links and explore intervention strategies that enhance self-esteem and body image perception , ultimately improving overall psychological well-being . The relationships between psychological well-being and self-esteem, body image perception and self-esteem, and body image perception and psychological well-being have all been extensively studied, but there is still a dearth of research that looks at how self-esteem and body image perception work together to affect psychological well-being. Although the literature now in publication offers insightful information on these distinct relationships, a more thorough comprehension of their combined influence is still missing .

## 1.2 Aim and objectives of the study

The study aims to explore and understand the relationship between body image perception , self-esteem and psychological well-being among young adults .

The objectives of the study are :

1. To examine the relationship between body image perception and psychological well-being .
2. To assess the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being .
3. To investigate any interaction effect of body image perception and self esteem on psychological well-being .

## 1.3 Research hypothesis

**H1** : Higher body dissatisfaction is association with lower psychological well- being .

**H2** : Higher self-esteem is associated with better psychological well-being.

**H3** : Body image perception and self-esteem together significantly predict psychological well-being .

## 1.4 Significance of the study :

The findings can help therapists design targeted interventions to improve body image and self-esteem , thereby enhancing overall well-being . Schools and universities can use the insights to develop programs that promote body positivity and self-acceptance among students .Understanding these relationships can empower individuals to build a healthier self- concept and resist societal pressures regarding appearance . This study lays the groundwork for further exploration into the psychological and social factors affecting self-perception and well-being . By shedding light on the intricate links between body image ,

self-esteem , psychological well-being , this research aims to contribute to the growing conversation on mental health and self-acceptance in today's society .

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Research Design**

A quantitative approach is employed , utilizing standardized psychometric scales to measure body image perception , self-esteem , and psychological well-being . And a correlational research design was employed . The study does not involve any experimental intervention , ensuring that all data are collected under natural conditions .

### **2.2 Participants**

The study sample consists of 250 college students ages 18-25 years representing a diverse population of young adults enrolled in various academic programs . Participants were to ensure demographic representation across gender , socioeconomic status and academic backgrounds , The rationale for choosing college students as the sample population stems from existing research suggesting that body image concerns and self-esteem issues are highly prevalent in this age group due to social and cultural influences .

### **2.3 Sampling**

#### **2.3.1 Technique used**

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure equal representation of relevant subgroups within the population .

#### **2.3.2 Inclusion Criteria**

- College students ages 18-25 years .
- Individuals currently enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programs .

#### **2.3.3 Exclusion criteria**

- a) Individuals diagnosed with physical health conditions that may influence body image perception and self-esteem .
- b) Pregnant individuals, as pregnancy may significantly alter body image perception .
- c) Individuals with physical disabilities as their body image concerns may differ significantly from the general population .

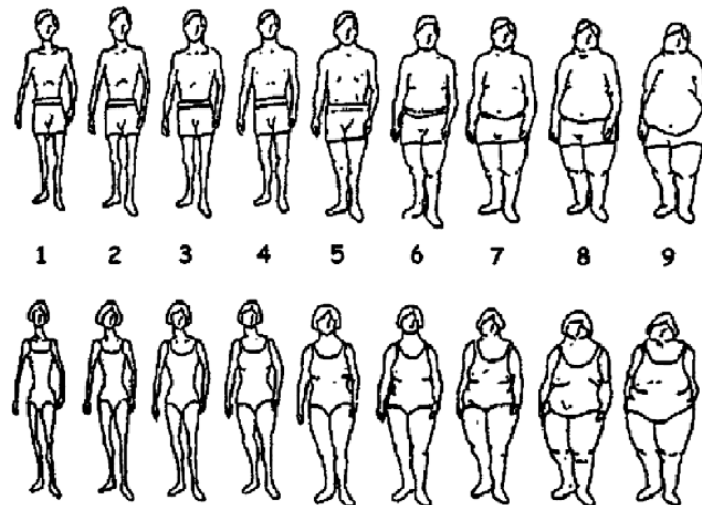
### **2.4 Tools**

#### **2.4.1 The nine - silhouette scale (Stunkard, 2000)**

Nine silhouettes are displayed in this tool, which is particular to gender and race. The thinnest shape is ranked as 1, while the heaviest is rated as 9. The silhouette that the participants thought best represented their desired body size was asked to be chosen. Researchers can investigate differences between people's perceived and ideal , which offers information into body image perception . To ensure that participant replies are clear, the silhouettes are arranged in a sequential manner from thinnest to heaviest. In order to investigate weight perception, body dissatisfaction, and cultural impacts on body ideals, this tool has been widely utilized in body image research.



**Figure 1 showing options presented to select their current silhouettes**



#### **2.4.2 Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES) ( Morris Rosenberg , 1965)**

Morris Rosenberg created the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) in 1965, and it is a well-known indicator of global self-esteem, or a person's overall assessment of their value. From "Strongly Agree" (1) to "Strongly Disagree" (4), each of the scale's ten items is assessed on a 4-point Likert scale. Both positively and negatively worded statements are included in the RSES, including: “ On the whole , I am satisfied with myself “ ( positive item ) .

“ I feel i do not have much to be proud of “ ( negative item ) .

Higher scores indicate better self-esteem. Responses are tallied to create a single composite score. The RSES's high reliability and validity in evaluating self-worth, confidence, and self-acceptance have led to its widespread use in psychological research and clinical contexts.

#### **2.4.3 Ryff Psychological Well-Being scale (PWB) ( Ryff, 1988)**

Carol Ryff created the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) in 1988. It uses a multidimensional framework to evaluate several aspects of psychological well-being. The 18-item PWB scale was used for this study in order to minimize response load and guarantee a thorough evaluation. Each item is rated on a likert scale from 1= strongly disagree to 6= strongly agree , with higher scores indicating higher psychological well-being and lower scores indicating lower psychological well-being .

### **2.5 Procedure**

Participants were sent a Google Forms link with standardized psychological questionnaires as part of the study's online survey approach. These surveys will evaluate psychological health, self-esteem, and participants body mass index was also calculate to measure their actual body image and were asked to choose a picture from silhouettes which they think resembles their current body image , and then while scoring the BMI score and the image chosen was compared with the silhouettes scale picture and assess perceptions of one's body. For Rosenberg’s self esteem scale and psychological well being scales scoring was done using the scoring norms .

To guarantee accuracy, clarity, and ethical compliance, the data gathering procedure will be meticulously planned. Participants will receive a thorough explanation of the study, including its goals, importance, and the nature of their involvement, prior to starting the survey. By reading and signing a permission document, they will have to give their informed consent , Participants will electronically

submit their answers after finishing the survey. Only the principal investigator will have secure access to the password-protected database containing the collected data.

## 2.6 Data Analysis

The obtained raw responses for each scale were coded in the excel sheet for the scales of Rosenberg's self-esteem scale . The scale consists of five positively worded items and five negatively worded items for positively worded items the scoring is done as follows strongly agree=3 , agree=2 , Disagree =1 , Strongly disagree=0 . For the negatively worded items reverse scoring is done strongly agree=0 , agree=1, disagree=2 , strongly disagree=3 The final total score for each individual was calculated that ranges from 0-30 , with higher score indicating higher self – esteem levels .

For Ryff's psychological well-being scale each item is rated on a 6 point likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 6 strongly agree , Items 1,2,3,8,9,11,12,13,17,and 18 are reverse scored . The formula for reverse scoring  $((\text{Number of scale points}) + 1) - (\text{Respondent's answer})$  . And the final obtained total score for psychological well – being the total score ranges from 18 to 108 , higher scores indicate higher well-being while lower scores indicate lower well-being .

For the measuring the body image perception of the individual's Body mass index ( BMI) was calculated using their height and weight . The formula for body mass index is  $\text{weight (Kg)} / \text{height m}^2$  . Using the obtained BMI score BMI was grouped into four categories using the cut points established by WHO (1998) , while body images in the silhouettes was assigned into four categories using the classification recommended by the authors of nine silhouettes scale ( McElhone et al ., 1999)., Thus individuals were grouped based on the following criteria pictures 1,2,3 to underweight subjects ( $\text{BMI} = 19.99 \text{ kg (m)}^2$  ), pictures 4 and 5 to represent normal weighted subjects ( $\text{BMI} = 19.99 \text{ kg m}^{-2}$  ) , pictures 6 and 7 representing overweight subjects ( $\text{BMI} = 25\text{-}29.99 \text{ kg m}^{-2}$  ) and 8 and 9 represent obese subjects (  $\text{BMI} = 30 \text{ Kg m}^{-2}$  ) . To identify the discrepancy in body image perception in the individuals the individuals actual score obtained after arranging BMI into categories and the option they have chosen on the 9 silhouette scale was compared and based on the difference they were labeled as either 1 if the perceptual discrepancy was present and labeled as 0 for individuals who showed no perceptual discrepancy .

### 2.6.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to determine the characteristics such as age , gender mean and standard deviation of the sample

### 2.6.2 Inferential statistics

Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to assess the strength and direction of relationships between body image perception discrepancy , self-esteem and psychological well-being . A multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the predictive power of body image perception discrepancy and self-esteem on psychological well-being .

## 2.7 Research ethics

Ethical considerations were prioritized by ensuring informed consent , confidentiality and minimizing harm to participants . The participants were informed clear information about the study . participant privacy was protected by maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected . Cultural sensitivity was considered by adapting methods to be culturally appropriate .

### 3. Results and discussion

The data obtained from 250 young adults between ages 18-25 is analyzed using the SPSS .

**Table 1 :** showing demographic characteristics of participants

Sample characteristics	n	% / M,SD
Gender		
Female	142	55.9
Male	111	43.7
Age		21.18 (3.77)

Table 1 showing the demographic characteristics of the participants , The sample consists of female participants (55.9 %) , followed by male participants (43.7 %) , This gender distribution provides relatively balanced representation , though there is slight over representation of females . The mean age of the participants is of 21.18 years (SD= 3.77) . The most common age groups are 20 years (22.3%) , 19 years (18.7%) and 22 years (17.5 %) , indicating that the sample primarily consists of young adults .

**Table 2 :** Showing Pearson's correlation between study variables

	BIP Discrepancy	Self - esteem	Psychological well - being
1. BIP Discrepancy	1.00	.001	-.158
2. Self-esteem	.001	1.00	.112
3. Psychological Well-being	-.158	.112	1.00

**Note :** \* $p < .05$ .

Table 1 presents the correlation coefficients between these key variables . The correlation analysis indicates a significant negative relationship between Body image perception and psychological well-being (  $r = -0.158$  ,  $p < .05$  ). This means that individuals who experience a larger gap between their perceived and ideal body image tend to report lower psychological well-being . This aligns with the previous research studies suggesting that dissatisfaction can lead to negative emotional outcomes such as anxiety and depression . This results support the first hypothesis H1 : “There is a significant relationship between body image perception and psychological well-being , such that higher body image perception discrepancy is associated with lower psychological well-being” . As the Body image perception discrepancy was significantly negatively correlated with psychological well-being (  $r = -0.158$  ,  $p < .05$  ). This suggests that individuals with greater body dissatisfaction experience lower psychological well-being , confirming previous research findings . Interestingly , Body image perception discrepancy was not significantly correlated with the self-esteem (  $r = .001$  ,  $p > .05$  ) , suggesting that having a body image perception discrepancy does not necessarily impact self-esteem in a direct way . similarly self-esteem had a positive but non-significant relationship with psychological well-being (  $r = .112$  ,  $p > .05$  ). The results do not provide strong support for H2 that states that “ there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being , such that higher self esteem is associated with higher psychological well-being” , As the correlation between self-esteem and psychological well-being



was positive but not statistically significant ( $r = .112$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This indicates that while there may be a trend towards higher self esteem being linked to better well-being, the relationship is not strong enough to be considering significant. While higher self –esteem may be associated with better mental health, the lack of statistical significance suggests that other factors may also play a role. These findings suggest that further research is needed to understand how self-esteem and body image perceptions influence well-being.

**Table 3 Showing regression analysis of study variables**

	B	SE	95%CI		$\beta$	p	t
			LL	UL			
Constant	74.731	5.012	64.860	84.6	-	.000	14.911
BIP discrepancy	- 3.427	1.349	-6.085 0.77	-	-.159	.012	-2.540
Self esteem	0.586	0.326	-0.055 1.228		.112	.073	1.800

**Note : R square = .038; F(2, 247) = 4.842 ; p =.009 (\*p< .05).**

Table 2 .The regression analysis showed that the overall model was statistically significant  $F(2, 247) = 4.842$ ,  $p = .009$ , explaining 3.8 % of variance in psychological well-being(  $r$  square = .038) . While this percentage is small , it indicates that body image perception ( BIP) discrepancy and self-esteem contribute to differences in psychological well-being . Body image perception (BIP) discrepancy was found to be a significant negative predictor of psychological well-being ( $\beta = -0.159$ ,  $p = .012$ ) . This means that the greater the difference between one’s perceived and actual body image , the lower their psychological well-being . This finding aligns with previous research , which has shown that dissatisfaction with one’s body can have harmful psychological effects , reinforcing the need for interventions that promote body acceptance and self-compassion . On the other hand , self-esteem was not a statistically significant predictor of psychological well-being ( $\beta = 0.112$ ,  $p = .073$ ) though it showed a slight positive association . The results partially support the hypothesis H3 which states body image perception and self esteem will significantly predict psychological well-being . The regression model was significant overall ( $p = .009$ ) , meaning that body image perception ( BIP) discrepancy and self esteem together contribute to predicting psychological well-being . However , only Body image perception ( BIP) discrepancy was a significant predictor ( $\beta = -0.159$ ,  $p = .012$ ) , while self-esteem was not ( $\beta = .112$ ,  $p = .073$ ) . This suggests that while body dissatisfaction has a measurable negative impact on well-being , self-esteem may not play as strong a role in predicting psychological well-being as initially hypothesized . This suggests that while self-esteem may play a role in mental well- being , other factors , such a social support or coping strategies , may have a stronger influence . Further studies could explore additional psychological and environmental variables that contribute to well-being beyond self-esteem .

#### 4. Conclusion

The findings emphasize the profound impact of body image perception on psychological well-being. Individuals who experience a discrepancy between their real and perceived body image tend to report lower psychological well-being, reinforcing Hypothesis 1 and aligning with previous research linking body dissatisfaction to anxiety, depression and body shame. (Prabhu & D'cunha, 2018; Saranya et al., 2020) Conversely, the study found no significant correlation between self-esteem and psychological well-being, challenging Hypothesis 2 and suggesting that other factors such as social support, coping strategies and resilience may play more influential roles in determining psychological well-being. Furthermore, while the overall regression model was significant, only body image perception emerged as a strong predictor of psychological well-being, whereas self-esteem did not. This partially supports hypothesis 3 highlighting the need for future research to investigate the other psychological mechanisms that may mediate or moderate the relationship between self-esteem and well-being.

#### 5. Limitations

This study provides valuable insights but has several limitations affecting interpretation and generalizability. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases such as social desirability and recall bias, as participants might underreport or exaggerate their feelings, and lack of external validation limits accuracy. Additionally, the sample consists solely of college students, whose experiences with body image and self-esteem may not reflect those of older adults or individuals from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, restricting the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the study's cross-sectional design measures variables at a single point in time, making it difficult to assess causal relationships. A longitudinal approach would be more effective in capturing the evolving nature of body image, self-esteem and psychological well-being.

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