

The influence of body image and self esteem psychology essay



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The topic of body image has attracted a great deal of attention around the world especially in terms of art, psychological sciences and philosophy. Body image refers to one's attitudinal placed on the physical self (Pruzinsky & Cash, 1990). It is also a picture of an individual formed in their mind through perception about his or her own body (Grogan, 2008). The way a person perceives his or her body is influenced by a variety of factors including the degree of importance their physical appearance to their overall sense of self (Spurgas, 2005).

In western countries, body image is very important as they emphasis more on body beautiful. Nowadays, the media always portrayed the standards of ideal body figure through programs such as American Next Top Model where it is not suitable to most people. However, physical appearance do differs in meaning and importance for males and females. It has been noted that many women experience a discrepancy between their actual and perceived body shape (Markham, Thompson & Bowling, 2005). Females tend to strive for thinness while males tend to strive for muscularity. Many females want to be slim. This is because in an individual perception, slim is a way to consider as beautiful while overweight has always been viewed negatively such as fat or ugly.

Rapid changes in physical growth and psychosocial development among adolescents (World Health Organization, 1995) caused many body image related problems such as eating disorders (extreme dieting and binge eating), obesity, depression and low self-esteem where effects of body image have been proven by other researchers as well. According to Newman, Sontag and Salvato (2006), poor body image is associated with self-reported
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low self-esteem, elevated anxiety, and depression. Besides that, body image dissatisfaction has also been found to correlate with eating disorders (Furnham, Badmin & Sneade 2002) where these problems always tend to increase with age, and reached the highest during adolescent stage especially in females.

Since ages ago, western countries have been influenced on non-western countries through globalization and industrialization such as increasing economic interaction and technological changes. Thus, these caused an increased on obesity and dissatisfaction issues with own body image among Malaysian adolescents. According to Pon, Mirnalini and Mohd Nasir (2004), many normal and healthy adolescents like to compare themselves with very thin males and females portrayed in media. In the end, they viewed themselves as being very fat and will come out with a variety of ideas just to slim down and look like the images portrayed in media.

Most people are dissatisfied with the way they look and this caused an impact on their self-esteem as well. Self-esteem is a way a person feels about him or herself when it is closely connected to body image (Goward, 1992). According to Williamson, Serdula, Anda, Levy and Byers (1992), males tend to obtain their self-esteem through achievements, power status and control while females tend to obtain self-esteem through attractiveness. Therefore, females tend to have higher pressure than males in losing weight. This is because a negative body image can lead to a feeling of worthlessness and as a result, it can trigger unhealthy eating disorders which can affect the individual dramatically.

Statement of Problem

In this new era, the ideal body image is affecting almost everybody such as males and females, people from different cultures background and many more. It is unhealthy to have a body image dissatisfaction as it always lead to eating disorders, psychological distress and most importantly, low self-esteem. This is because they tend to use unhealthy weight-control behaviors such as skipping meals as to slim down and wish to have the same body image as the model portrayed in media. Therefore, it is important to take action on prevention and intervention in order to prevent and treat body image dissatisfaction as this issue can cause impact on both individuals and society. Lastly, identification of the research problems also allowed us to pay more attention in investigating this issue especially among undergraduate students.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether there is a relationship between body image and self-esteem. Besides that, present study also investigates whether there is gender difference in both body image and self-esteem among undergraduate students in Utar. Lastly, investigating these differences could provide insight on improving the prevention and intervention on body image dissatisfaction and it can also become an essential tool for future research in Malaysia.

Significance of Study

Body image is a very important issue to most of the adolescents especially when they grow into adulthood. Many studies that focused on the influence

of body image and self-esteem has been conducted over the decade.

However, while body image has been the focus of study in many countries such as United States and Korea, it is not extensively being studied in Malaysia as studies that focus on body image are limited in Malaysia.

Although there are studies about body image, most of the studies only focus on females' body image, but not males' body image.

The correlation between body image and self-esteem has been heavily studied. However, there are some research studies which showed that females who reported having dissatisfaction with their own body image tend to have lower self-esteem compared to those who having a positive view with their own body image while some research studies found that there is an inverse relationship between body image and self-esteem. Previous studies stated that body image is correlated with self-esteem among Malaysian female adolescents where some females used various types of weight reduction approaches such as self-induced vomiting which can cause eating behavior in order to increase their self-esteem. Therefore, this study is to increase knowledge on the influence of body image and self-esteem among undergraduate students in Malaysia.

Research Questions

There are a total of four research questions in this study.

What is the level between body image and self-esteem among undergraduate students?

Is there a positive correlation relationship between body image and self-esteem?

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Is there gender difference in the influence of body image?

Is there gender difference in the influence of self-esteem?

Operational Definitions

Body image. Body image is an individual perception about his or her own body. This includes psychological notions such as how one perceives and acts towards one's body, and experience of personification (Grogan, 2008). Negative body image causes a person to be unable to feel good about his or her own body (Moe, 1999). In this present study, I will be using Body Image-Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (BI-AAQ) by Sandoz, E. K. and Wilson (2006) as the measurement of body image. This measurement refers to how an individual feels and thoughts about his or her body shape and body image.

Self-esteem. According to Rosenberg (1965), self-esteem is a positive or negative attitude toward a particular object, namely, the self. Self-esteem also defined as how well a person prizes, values, approves, feels or likes him or herself (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). High self-esteem has a reduction in depressive symptoms (Roberts & Munroe, 1992) and able to act independently, assume responsibility as well as tolerate frustration and attempt new tasks with confidence (Butler & Gasson, 2005) and linked with higher levels of self-satisfaction (Diener, 1984). Low self-esteem has been found to be predictive of increased vulnerability to body image dissatisfaction (Markham, Thompson & Bowling, 2005).

Gender. Gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes which can connect with being male or female at a specific time. Besides that, it <https://assignbuster.com/the-influence-of-body-image-and-self-esteem-psychology-essay/>

also can be classified human to be masculinity or feminity (WHO, 2011) and one emotional and psychological identity as male and female. Masculine is a term to describe male, this is because male are always have the image of strong and muscular. While feminine is to describe female, this is because the image of female are always need the protection from others and effeminacy.

Undergraduate students. According to Analytic Quality Glossary (2012), undergraduates are student or member of university who are taking or not yet complete a first-level degree programme of study. When undergraduates complete the programme, they may take further study which known as postgraduate study. Therefore, undergraduate students in UTAR are taken as samples for this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE RIVIEW

Various researches have been conducted and proposed theories which focus on the topic of body image and self esteem among different groups. In this literature review, various theories and factors were presented based on previous findings by other researchers.

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural influences. Sociocultural influences are one of the major factors which caused differences in body image among population. There are evidences showed that body image is subjective and it can change through social influences (Groetz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). For example, social influences can cause individuals to have body dissatisfaction, weigh concern

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and discrepancy between actual and ideal body shape (Bordo, 1993; Grogan, 1999; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). Other than that, individuals will also alter their bodies through diet, exercise and many more. This is because individuals used to evaluate their bodies through the lens of culture.

Media. The media is one of the sociocultural influences which has been well investigated and became the focus of effects of media images on body image. There are studies found that females who has watched more television's programme and read more about fashion magazines are more influenced by media to change their body compared to males (D. C. Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Y. Lee, 2004; Ricciardelli and McCabe, 2001). However, there are studies also showed that media has been blamed for their unrealistic appearance ideals in influencing females to feel dissatisfied with their own bodies and start to starve themselves (Wykes & Gunter, 2005). Media portrayed females' appearances as thin and larger breast while for males as tall and muscular and these pictures are everywhere included magazines, advertisements, television and Internet. Use of technology and special effects in editing pictures allows images to be more perfect than real life. However, these images have a major impact on individual's perception as they will compare themselves with the ideal images. There are studies showed that females who always expose themselves to thin-ideal images portrayed in media will increase their body image dissatisfaction and lower their self-esteem than those were exposed to non-appearance related commercials (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006). However, there are findings stated that males are less influenced by media compared with females. This

incident happen may be due to men are less focus on their body image towards the images portrayed in media.

Peers. Peer relation is a critical factor in everyone's view of the appearance especially among adolescents. Peer influence variables such as having friends who are preoccupied with dieting, and assigning importance to friends' beliefs about weight and appearance, may cause high body image dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, bulimia and lower self-esteem in adolescent especially females. Young adults in universities are also influenced by their peers in ways they perceive of their body image. There was study found that higher levels of peer interaction can cause higher level of internalization on body perception among adolescents. However, according to D. C. Jones and Crawford (2006), they found out that adolescents receive great influence from their peers in males besides females. This study stated that males who receive greater pressure from their peers about their physical appearance may impact their later onset pubertal changes. Besides that, interaction with peers about appearance may also influence individual's perception of their body image.

Puberty. The concept of puberty is important in explaining age and gender difference in the influence of body image and self-esteem. Males and females will experience changes in physical appearance and body shape during puberty and these can influence body image and self-esteem as well. Males will have higher body image satisfaction as they interpret them as masculinity. However, for girls, they will feel discomfort during this stage and therefore, they always strive for thinness (Dornbusch et al., 1984).

The awareness of physical changes and interpersonal introspection may cause adolescent who are concern with body image become more easily influenced by poor body image perception. In earlier studies, there was evidence showed that early maturing females tend to be less satisfied with their bodies compared with females who are on time or late matured (Petersen & Crockett, 1985). Therefore, when one focuses on creating close relationships, physical appearance and attractiveness are very important for them and as a result, too much attention on appearance may cause individuals to develop low self-esteem if their appearances do not meet their expectation.

Western acculturation. According to Negrin (2004), beautiful body and physical attractiveness such as thin, slender or even underweight have been given emphasis in western culture where rapid economic and technologies changes play a role in the development of body image dissatisfaction.

Modernization caused body image dissatisfaction become more international in nature (Nasser, 1997). This is supported by many studies. Malaysia is one of the countries which involve in an increasing Westernization and emergence of body image issue. For example, there is an increased of focusing on obesity and body dissatisfaction among males and females as there are more individuals expose themselves to western-oriented values of attractiveness and body size through media such as dressing styles (Pon et al., 2004; Miller M. N. & Pumariega A. J., 2001). People would like to compare themselves with images of very thin males and females portrayed in media. In the end, they will start to view themselves as very fat (Pon et al., 2004). However, studies that focus on body image still limited in Malaysia.

Cultural background and social class. People who live in different cultures or societies may face different pressures on body image. This is because body image can be affected by cultural aesthetic standards (Grogan, 1999) and females always evaluate themselves through their own culture. When individual's body perception matches cultural standards, this can increase an individual's self-esteem (Rudd & Lennon, 1994). In Western societies, slenderness has relation with happiness, and social acceptability while overweight has relation with laziness and out of control. Western cultures prescribe a narrow range of acceptable body image for males and females where individual who fail to fulfill the prescribe can experienced prejudice or stereotype from others.

Besides that, a study by Swami, Frederick and Aavik (2010) showed that in high socio-economic status setting, people can experienced higher level of body image dissatisfaction compared with individuals who are staying in lower socio-economic status setting where in low socio-economic status setting, individuals preferred heavier bodies. Since the cultural standard for females' appearance is unrealistic which is extremely thin, it may be impossible for females to view themselves more positively.

Attachment theory. Family is the primary social institution and is the most important for young children because young children can be easily influence by family. Having a good relation in family is very important as it can influence body satisfaction and self-esteem unconsciously. However, without having a secure attachment or relation in a family, an individual may face psychosocial problem such as low self-esteem (Ward, Ramsey, & Treasure, 2000). There are studies reported that females are often pressured by <https://assignbuster.com/the-influence-of-body-image-and-self-esteem-psychology-essay/>

parents. According to Vincent and McCabe (2000), mothers often encourage their daughters to lose weight and pressured to be thinner. However, there is limited research showed that the role of family can have influence on body image.

Social comparison theory. Social comparison theory is a theory that could be applied tin understanding body image and self-esteem more deeply.

According to Fertinger (1954), individuals tend to evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparing with others' opinions or abilities. Individuals' perception and how others appraise them can influence an individual's self-esteem. There are two types of comparison which is upward comparison and downward comparison where making comparisons with perceived superior or inferior people can increase or decrease psychological well-being such as self-esteem.

In upward comparisons, individuals who have a high tendency to make physical appearance-related comparisons with societal ideals such as models may experience greater body image dissatisfaction (Heinberg and Thompson, 1992). On the other hand, downward comparison will be used when individuals who are having negative feeling about themselves will enhance their self-regard by comparing themselves with individual whom they perceive as less valued or worse than themselves (Duckitt, 1992).

According to Botta (1999), individuals always compare themselves to others automatically and without conscious thought. As images in media are very thin, automatic social comparisons with these images caused females to have negative feelings towards their own body image and increase their

body image dissatisfaction (Goethals, 1986). One argument is that healthy perspective should not depend on the comparisons of others.

Self-evaluation theory. Self-evaluation theory emphasizes the importance of environment context such as opinions for personal comparisons.

Dissatisfaction towards own body image can lead to negative self-evaluation and low self-esteem (Barker & Galambos, 2003) where body image dissatisfaction is normally happened between perceived and actual figure.

Relationship between body image and self-esteem. According to Thompson and Smolak (2001), the relationship between body image and self-esteem is strong and there are studies showed that focus on negative body image evaluation may cause low self-esteem. According to studies by Sheslow, Hassink, Wallance, and Delancey (1993), one consistent finding is that females who reported less satisfaction or having distorted perception with their body image and weight tend to have lower self-esteem and more psychosocial problem such as difficulties in interpersonal relationships than those who have more positive body image. This finding is supported by Rodin, Silberstein and Striegel-Moore (1985) studies which showed that physical self-concept is important for everyone, however, females who experienced greater importance on weight and appearance caused much greater impact on their global self-esteem than males.

Besides that, body image dissatisfaction has been found to be higher in late adolescence than in early adolescence (Clay, Vignoles & Dittmar, 2005), in females than in males (Grogan, 2006), and in overweight individuals than in average weight or underweight individuals (Neumark-Sztainer, Story,

Hannan, Perry & Irving, 2002). Besides that, self-esteem also found to be lower in females than in males and to decrease as adolescents progress from early to late adolescence. This has been proven in Schwartz & Brownell (2004) studies. The studies showed that females who are heavier tend to be less satisfied with their bodies and this caused them to have lower self-esteem compared with females who are having average weight and underweight weight. A study by Miller and Downey (1999) also showed that lower self-esteem has a moderate relationship with overweight than average weight and average weight, for females than in males and for college students than for children. On the other hand, individuals who have positive body image satisfaction tend to have higher self-esteem. Other than that, in western countries, overweight may also lead to lowered mood and self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction (Grogan, 1999). Unwanted physical changes on bodies such as accident, illness and ageing can also affect body image satisfaction and reduced quality of life and self-esteem (Anderson, 2000; Gannon, 2000).

According to previous study, it also stated that body image is correlated to self-esteem among females in Malaysia. Some females will try to involve themselves into eating behavior such as self-induced vomiting in order to increase their self-esteem and to have more acceptance towards their body image.

Gender differences in body image. There are many studies showed that females are significantly more dissatisfied with their bodies than males where females' body image dissatisfaction is stable across the lifespan

compared to males (Tiggemann, 2004). Males tend to increase their self-
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esteem through achievements, power status and control while females tend to increase self-esteem through attractiveness (Goward P., 1992). Females tend to perceive themselves as overweight and paying more attention on physique and appearance. However, according to Pope, H. G., Phillips, and Olivardia (2000), in western societies, males are also getting more pressure in attaining and maintaining a slender but muscular body. This is because males may face problems such as low self-esteem and use of drugs such as human growth hormone (Pope et al., 2000) as well when they have body image dissatisfaction. However, there is still lack of research looking at body image dissatisfaction in males. Besides that, in western society, females also placed more emphasis on physical attractiveness when the sociocultural is greater (Mckinly, 1999)

Body image was concerned since aged of 8 in children. Studies showed that girls were less satisfied with their weight compared with boys where girls placed more attention on weight when they get older while boys are less satisfied with their muscles and placed more attention on their muscles. On the other hand, heavier children were also less satisfied with their weight compared to children with normal or average weight (Grogan & Richards, 2002; Grogan & Wainwright, 1996; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001).

According to Mellor, McCabe, Ricciardelli, Yeow, NurDaliza and Hapidzal (2009)'s studies in Malaysia, they found out that adolescent boys' acceptance towards their body image was high across ethnic groups. This can be explained due to Asian men's body shape does not conform to Western muscular body ideal. Besides that, it may also be explained by

males tend to underestimate their body weight while females tend to overestimate their body weight.

Gender differences in self-esteem. Self-esteem consists of feeling good, liking yourselves and treated well and it can achieved through social comparisons we made of ourselves or opinions by others. In present study, self-esteem is linked to how a person feels or accepts about their body image where body image dissatisfaction can lead to negative self-evaluation and lower self-esteem.

There was research suggested that females experienced more disruption of self-esteem compared with males and therefore, males' self-esteem is higher than females' self-esteem. Besides that, higher body image acceptance can increase one's self-esteem as well. According to previous studies, they found out that more females more prefer and frequently to relate their body image to self-esteem more than males. Females who are having low self-esteem may feel less worthy of themselves and caused body image dissatisfaction whenever they are in a society which put attention on ideal body. For example, overweight can lead to lower body image satisfaction and self-esteem. According to research by Gurari, Hetts, and Strube (2006), children's sense of self-worth is influenced by physical appearance where an individual's self-esteem is directly associated with perceived body image satisfaction to cultural standards.

According to Cash, Morrow, Hrabosky, and Perry (2004) studies, it showed that adults may divert their low self-esteem to another source of self-esteem by starting to evaluate their self-worth based on achievements besides body

image which they have been reported having less body image dissatisfaction. This is because thin images from media are the easiest source of self-esteem for females who focus more on body image. Lastly, there are many ways to increase self-esteem besides focusing on body image or physical appearance.

Based on literature review, I found that these researches do not discuss specifically on factors which may cause body image dissatisfaction. Besides that, not much studies has been conducted to show whether body image can influence one's self-esteem in Malaysia. Thus, in this present study, I chose to investigate the relationship between body image on self-esteem, and gender differences in both body image and self-esteem among undergraduate students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter focused on the aspect of research design, participants and location, instrument, research procedures, and data analysis. In this study, survey method which is cross-sectional design was being carried out for obtaining the data. Participants were undergraduate students from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) which located at Kampar, Perak. The Body Image-Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (BI-AAQ) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) served as the instrument to access the influence of body image and self-esteem among undergraduate students in UTAR.

Research Design

Survey. Research design is a basic structure of scientific study which consisted of various designs and to collect information from the research sample (Spector, 2008). Cross-sectional design is being used throughout this study. It is a design which can draw one or more samples from the population at one time.

This study was conducted by non-probability sampling and convenience sampling method. Non-probability is an approach where samples have the equal chance to be selected to participate in this study while convenience sampling method is respondents availability and willingness to respond to the questionnaires (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister, 2009). Therefore, in this study, samples were randomly selected to answer a predetermined set of questions where it allows us to summarize the views of all respondents precisely (Shaughnessy, B. Zechmeister, & S. Zechmeister, 2009). The reason for using this method is that this method is low cost, time-saving and self-reflection from the respondents.

Participants and Location

The sample of the study consisted of 50 respondents (N = 50) whom are selected through non-probability sampling from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). Respondents would be ranging in age from 18 to 30 years who are still studying in UTAR either is from foundation, degree or master holder. A total of 50 undergraduate students which consist of 25 males and 25 females have been chosen to participate in this study as the representative of the population in UTAR. The questionnaires were

distributed at Block C cafeteria in UTAR as there are more undergraduate students gather at there.

Instrument

The Body Image-Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (BI-AAQ) which was developed by Sandoz, E. K. and Wilson (2006) were used as the instrument in this study. The BI-AAQ is a 29-item self-report scale which measures how an individual exhibits an accepting posture toward negative thoughts and feelings towards his or her body shape and/or weight (Sandoz et al., under review).

The measurement scale used in this questionnaire is an interval scale on a 7-point scale that ranges from (1= Never True, 2= Very Seldom True, 3= Seldom True, 4= Sometimes True, 5= Frequently True, 6= Almost Always True, to 7= Always True). Total scores for a body image acceptance ranging from 29 to 203 where higher scores indicate more acceptance. There are few reverse scored items within the questionnaire. There are question 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29 where initial psychometric data is promising.

Body Image-Acceptance and Action Questionnaire having a very high reliability where the internal reliability is $\hat{I}_{\pm} = .93$.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) which was developed by Morris Rosenberg (1965) was also used as the instrument in this study. The RSE is a 10-item scale which is used to measure global self-esteem of high school students. However, after its development, the scale has been used widely among a variety of groups including adults.

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RSE is a 10-item Likert scale with items answered on a four point scale which is from “ Strongly Disagree” to “ Strongly Agree”. For questions 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7, the score is in descending order which is from 3 – 0 based upon the response. It means that a response of “ Strongly Agree” received a score of 3, and a response of “ Agree” received a score of 2. A response of “ Disagree” received a score of 1, and a response of “ Strongly Disagree” received a score of 0. On the other hand, for questions 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10 were scored in ascending order which is from 0 – 3 based upon the response. For these questions, it means that a response of “ Strongly Agree” received a score of 0, and a response of “ Agree” received a score of 1. A response of “ Disagree” received a score of 2, and a response of “ Strongly Disagree” received a score of 3. Lastly, scores which is above 25 is consider as high self-esteem, scores which is between 15 and 25 are consider as within normal range of self-esteem while scores which is below 15 are consider as low self-esteem.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale having a high reliability as well. It showed that the test-retest correlation is in the range of . 82 to . 88 while Cronbach’s alpha is in the range of . 77 to . 88.

Research Procedure

Before questionnaire distribution, research proposal had been revised and approved by research supervisor. The research was conducted on 16 July, 2012 Monday, 1pm at Block C cafeteria in UTAR. Questionnaires were distributed to 50 University Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) undergraduate students which consist of 25 males and 25 females through non-probability sampling method. Every participant is given 5 to 10 minutes to fill up the <https://assignbuster.com/the-influence-of-body-image-and-self-esteem-psychology-essay/>

questionnaire. Lastly, every item of each questionnaire was checked to see whether there is a missing value. After that, data analysis follows.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data includes descriptive statistics which include mean and standard deviations for each item in the questionnaire. T-test was used to obtain the statistical result between two independent variables (body image and gender) and dependent variable (self-esteem). Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used during the analysis.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Findings and analysis in this present study focused on descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. For descriptive statistics, the statistical result of participants' body image and self-esteem were shown in minimum and maximum score, mean and standard deviation. For inferential statistics, the statistical result of two independent variables (body image and gender) and dependent variable (self-esteem) had been computed with relevant statistical methods such as t-test and Pearson