

The Relationship Between Physical Appearance Comparison, Body Dissatisfaction, and Aggression among University Students

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Original Article

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Abstract

University life represents a pivotal period of transition and growth for young adults, marked by academic demands, social pressures, and personal development. Objective: To determine the relationship between physical appearance comparison, body dissatisfaction, and aggression among university students. Methods: A total of 100 participants (male=40, female=60) were taken from the different universities of Lahore. The participant's age ranges were between 18-26 years. A convenient sampling technique was used for collection of data and following measures were used to assess the findings i.e., Demographic Form, Physical Appearance Comparison Scale, Body Dissatisfaction Scale, and Buss & Perry Aggression Questionnaire. Results: The analyses reveal that body dissatisfaction has a moderate positive correlation with physical appearance comparison ($R = .219, p < 0.01$) whereas, physical appearance comparison and aggression have a weak positive correlation ($R = .098, p < 0.01$) and body dissatisfaction and aggression show strongest positive significant correlation between them ($R = .256, p < 0.01$). Conclusions: It was concluded that body dissatisfaction and comparison with others bring numerous psychological issues such as aggression.

Keywords: Physical Appearance Comparison, body dissatisfaction, Aggression, psychological issues.

Introduction

"Physical appearance" means the external appearance of any individual, disregarding sex, with the count of hairstyle facial hairs, dressing sense, weight, height, facial features, or other characteristics of appearance (Ashher et al., 2023). It shall not relate to the requirement of cleanliness, uniform, or prescribed attire. Physical appearance comprises your height, size, weight, shape, etc, and also includes body piercings, tattoos, or other body modifications (Cavusoglu & Atik, 2023). Physical appearance comparison can be mostly seen in women but men also compare their bodies and appearance with their peer group and other men. Another research suggested that when people compare their looks to the appearance of their peers' groups or significant others, their body image suffers (Cavusoglu & Atik, 2023).

Appearance comparison is the method of comparing one's looks to that of others. Although physical appearance comparison processes might cause people to feel more or less satisfied with their bodies, they almost always hurt body dissatisfaction (Krozer & Gómez, 2023). Body comparison may come up with the development of eating disorders like bulimia or diet limitations. Social comparison theory is based on the body comparison concept. According to this hypothesis, people acquire opinions about themselves by comparing themselves to others. Social comparison is the evaluating procedure that includes both the improvement of knowledge and the creation of judgments about one's self and others (Alleva et al., 2023).

Usually, physical appearance remains important in every individual's life either in positive or negative ways, if a person is comparing his or her physical appearance or body image to an individual who has lower appearance characteristics compared to his or her then that person's self-esteem, self-confidence, body satisfaction will be higher than others. It can boost their abilities, performances, and qualities (Wagensveld et al., 2023). Also, if a person compares an individual whose physical appearance is higher than him or her then they will lose their self-confidence and self-esteem and can experience different types of disorders like depression, anxiety, and stress to become dissatisfied with their body (Festa, 2005).

Body dissatisfaction is a sub-type of bad body representation and this usually mentions possessing negative thoughts or sensations regarding one's own body. People who are dissatisfied with their bodies often interpose a gap between their personal body experiences and their idealized self-image (Davis & Evans, 2018). The dissatisfaction of body and poor body image are frequent among young people and can refer to disappointment not only with one's form or weight, but in addition to one's height, general appearance, or individual parts of the body. Being dissatisfied with your weight or appearance can put you at risk of disordered eating or having a therapeutic eating disorder. Yet, being dissatisfied with one's body is not sufficient to be labeled with such an eating disorder (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2014). Similarly, body dissatisfaction can be a result of many different factors including low self-esteem, physique and attractiveness, weight or size, and individual is constantly trying to compare your body and attractiveness to those of others, and, adjustments of meal and exercising with effort to gain muscles and reduce body fat (Rudiger & Winstead, 2013).

Some studies have found that women and girls are more likely than men and youngsters to be unsatisfied with their bodies. Broader research, however, suggests that men and those who perceive are equally sensitive to body dissatisfaction as females and individuals who consider them as females (Bergstrom & Neighbors, 2006). The dissatisfaction of body is also known as a negative thought pattern towards one's body caused by a presumed difference connecting the real self-image (i.e., insight, feelings, or thoughts regarding someone's real external appearance also the idealized image of the body (i.e., personal values regarding someone's physical) (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2004).

Aggression is any action or act that is intended to injure an individual or an animal or to damage a physical item or object, some examples of aggressive behavior are acts of physical assault, yelling, cursing, and violent language, talking or spreading gossip about a classmate (Bojaruniec, 2023). Because destructive behavior is designed to hurt anyone who doesn't desire to get affected, its essentials include actions that solely consider hurting someone or thinking furious is insufficient, and unexpectedly harming an individual does not qualify. Aggressive conduct can occur (Hassim et al., 2023). Physical aggression includes kicking, punching, or stabbing another

individual. Physical hostility might also take the shape of property damage. Insulting, abusing, and screaming are all types of verbal assault. Relatively, with the intention of damaging other people's connections. Aggression is a visible behavior and not an internal response, like having aggressive thoughts or angry feelings (though such inner reactions may raise the possibility of real hostility) (Gabi et al., 2024). Secondly, aggression is intended relatively unintentional. Such as a dental surgeon may purposely proffer a sufferer a dose of Novocain that can hurt the patient, but the purpose is to aid rather than hurt the victim. Thirdly, the patient is required to keep away from the damage. Therefore, sadomasochistic sexual activity and suicide will not be termed as violence as the sufferer vigorously looks to be injured (Aljagoub et al., 2023).

Physical appearance comparison, body dissatisfaction, and aggression are three important psychological factors that can significantly impact the well-being and interpersonal relationships of university students. Understanding the relationship between these constructs among university students is crucial for addressing potential risk factors and developing interventions to promote a positive and supportive campus environment. University students are exposed to various sources of comparison, including peers, media, and societal standards of beauty (Grange & Kerr, 2010). Engaging in frequent physical appearance comparisons can lead to negative self-evaluations and increased body dissatisfaction. Psychological factors, such as body dissatisfaction, can contribute to the development of aggressive behaviors. Individuals experiencing body dissatisfaction may be more prone to feelings of low self-worth, frustration, and anger (Kandwal et al., 2023). These negative emotions can manifest as aggression towards others as a means of coping or asserting control. Understanding the relationship between physical appearance comparison, body dissatisfaction, and aggression is critical for the development of targeted intervention programs. By addressing body dissatisfaction and promoting positive body image, intervention programs can help reduce the risk of aggressive behaviors among university students.

Method

The correlation research method was used to explore the connection and relationship between physical appearance comparison, body dissatisfaction, and aggression. A population sample of 100 university students includes males (n=40) and young females (n=60) age range of 18-26 years from the university. A convenient sampling strategy was used in the research.

Table 1**Sample Characteristic Table**

| Variables | <i>M(SD)</i> | <i>f %</i> |
|---------------|--------------|------------|
| Age | 20.83 (1.83) | |
| Gender | | |
| Male | | 40 (40) |
| Female | | 60 (60) |
| Birth Order | | |
| Firstborn | | 40 (40) |
| Middleborn | | 37 (37) |
| Last born | | 21 (21) |
| Only child | | 2 (2) |
| Family System | | |
| Nuclear | | 65 (65) |
| Joint | | 35 (35) |

Note: *M*= Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, *f* = Frequency (total no. of items)

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

All the students who were studying in university were allowed to participate in this survey, the age range of 18-26 years. Gender, family system, and birth order were also asked those students who matched the demographic factors were included in the inclusion criteria. Also, students who do not have any physical or mental condition were added. Physically disabled students or mentally disabled students were excluded from this study. Individuals other than male and female were added to the exclusion criteria.

Measures**Demographic form**

Data were gathered on subdivided forms including all three variable scales which also include demographic features such as age, gender, education, birth order, number of siblings, and family

system. The demographic form was used to check if these features affect the results of scales used in research.

Physical Appearance Comparison Scale. The Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (PACS) was first developed by (Thompson et al., 1991). It is an eleven-item measure of general appearance-comparison frequency. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (never), 1 (seldom), 2 (sometimes), 3 (often) to 4 (always). Higher scores indicate higher levels of general appearance.

Body Dissatisfaction Scale. The Body Dissatisfaction Scale was first developed by Tazvin Ijaz and Mishal Tariq in 2015. This is a self-reported questionnaire concluding 26 items. It has 5-point Likert-type scale scoring from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). The cut-off score was starting from 26, if a person scores higher than 26 they will be dissatisfied with their bodies. The higher the scores they score on this questionnaire, there are higher the chances of body dissatisfaction among the individual.

Aggression Questionnaire. The Aggression Questionnaire was published by Buss and Perry in 1992 (Buss & Perry, 1992) and has 29 items present in it. This scale was also a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-5 as such 1 (extremely uncharacteristic of me), 2 (somewhat uncharacteristic of me), 3 (neither uncharacteristic nor characteristic), 4 (somewhat characteristic of me), 5 (extremely characteristic of me). The BPAQ concludes with four subscales named physical Aggression which includes items (1-9), Verbal Aggression items (10-14), Anger items (15-21), and Hostility items (21-29).

Procedure. Prior to the collection of data, formal permission and approval was granted by the university relevant bodies for conduction of the study. After this, permission was also taken from all the concerned authorities including respective authors of the scales of Physical Appearance Comparison (PACS-R), Body Dissatisfaction Scale (BDS), and Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) for their use in the present research. After all, permissions were done, pilot testing was conducted.

In this regard, approval from the Department of Psychology, Lahore Leads University collected while the participants were also informed about the purpose and objectives of the research. Informed consent was also attached to the questionnaires, and requested to fill it out, where they were providing freedom to participate in the survey and were told about the right to withdraw at any point from the study.

After the data collection was done, the data were entered in SPSS (IBM SPSS, version 2021), to check significant results and test statistics of the data. Different analyses were done on the SPSS to determine all results, Correlation, ANOVA, T-test, Regression analysis, and other descriptive analyses.

Results

The below table shows the descriptive statistics and reliability analysis that was carried out for all the measures. Descriptive statistics and reliability analysis of physical appearance comparison, body dissatisfaction, and aggression ($N=100$).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis of Physical Appearance Comparison, Body Dissatisfaction, and Aggression

| Variables | K | M | SD | α | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|-----------|----|-------|--------|----------|----------|----------|
| PACS | 11 | 11.28 | 7.537 | .799 | .454 | -.647 |
| BDS | 26 | 65.33 | 12.484 | .795 | .094 | .623 |
| BPAQ | 29 | 85.49 | 18.500 | .871 | -.329 | .344 |

Note: M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; k= no. of items; α = Cronbach alpha.

Table 2. shows the mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach alpha with skewness and kurtosis values. The Buss and Perry Aggression Questionnaire has the highest reliability $\alpha = .871$. Physical Appearance Comparison Scale has also good reliability $\alpha = .799$ and Body Dissatisfaction also has good reliability $\alpha = .795$.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Physical Appearance Comparison, Body Dissatisfaction, and Aggression University Students (N=100).

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-----------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. PACS | - | - | - |
| 2. BDS | .219* | - | - |
| 3. BPAQ | .098 | .256* | - |

Note; PACS= Physical appearance comparison scale, BDS= Body dissatisfaction scale, BPAQ= Buss and Perry aggression questionnaire. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 3 shows the results of the Pearson product-moment correlation which indicates that body dissatisfaction has a moderate positive correlation with physical appearance comparison ($R = .219$, $p < 0.01$) whereas, physical appearance comparison and aggression have a weak positive correlation ($R = .098$, $p < 0.01$) but body dissatisfaction and aggression shows strongest positive significant correlation between them ($R = .256$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 4: Linear Regression Analysis of Physical Appearance Comparison, Body Dissatisfaction, and Aggression University Students (N=100).

| Variable | B | β | SE |
|----------------|--------|---------|-------|
| Constant | 60.380 | | 9.684 |
| PACS | .108 | .044 | .247 |
| BDS | .366 | .247 | .149 |
| R ² | .068 | | |

Note B= coefficient of X; β = standardized coefficient Beta; SE= standard error; R²= R square.

According to this, the results are significant as the results are greater than 0.05 which show that the variables are effective enough to determine the relationship. The relation of variables is positive.

Table 5 Gender Differences in Physical Appearance Comparison, Body Dissatisfaction, and Aggression among University Students (N=100).

| Variable | Women (n=60) | | Men (n=40) | | t (98) | p | Cohen's d |
|----------|-----------------|-------|---------------|-------|--------|-------|-----------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| PACS | 11.06 | 7.71 | 11.60 | 7.34 | .345 | 0.071 | 0.071 |
| BDS | 63.11 | 11.45 | 68.65 | 13.35 | 2.214 | 0.445 | 0.445 |
| BPAQ | 86.65 | 18.67 | 83.75 | 18.32 | -.766 | 0.156 | 0.156 |

Note M= mean; SD= standard deviation; t= standard errors of coefficient, p= standard significance value, Cohen's d= comparison of 2 groups.

The alternative hypothesis which was made on gender differences in the above-mentioned variables i.e. body dissatisfaction and aggression is not supported by the results of the independent sample *t*-test as the results are non-significant. Only physical appearance comparison results are significant as the *p*-value is 0.071.

Discussion

The above-mentioned study was conducted to research the relationship between Physical Appearance Comparison, Body Dissatisfaction, and Aggression among university students. Also, to examine the effects of these variables on each other, like body dissatisfaction and physical appearance comparison are interrelated and aggression can be the consequence of either body dissatisfaction or physical appearance comparison. Firstly, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (R) of .219 suggests a moderate positive correlation between these two variables. This finding implies that as individuals experience higher levels of body dissatisfaction, they are more likely to engage in comparing their physical appearance to others. Research has consistently demonstrated that exposure to idealized body images in the media, such as those depicted in advertising, television, and social media, contributes to feelings of body dissatisfaction among individuals (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2009). As individuals internalize these unrealistic beauty ideals, they may experience heightened dissatisfaction with their own bodies, leading them to engage in comparison with others as a means of evaluating their own appearance (Franchina & Coco, 2018).

In a study by Grabe, (Grabe et al., 2008) concluded that the exposure of an individual to thin-ideal media images led to increased body dissatisfaction among both women and men. This dissatisfaction, in turn, was associated with greater tendencies to engage in appearance comparison with peers. Similarly, (Pawela et al., 2008) conducted research showing that exposure to fitpiration

imagery on social media platforms was linked to heightened body dissatisfaction and increased appearance comparison among young women.

In addition, longitudinal studies have provided further support to the association between body dissatisfaction and appearance comparison over time. For example, in a longitudinal study by (Fardouly et al., 2015), researchers found that initial levels of body dissatisfaction predicted subsequent engagement in appearance comparison among adolescent girls. This suggests a reciprocal relationship whereby body dissatisfaction contributes to increased comparison with others, which, in turn, may perpetuate or exacerbate feelings of dissatisfaction. Aggression can be a consequence of appearance comparison or body dissatisfaction. According to various theoretical frameworks, including social comparison theory and self-discrepancy theory, individuals experiencing dissatisfaction with their bodies may be more prone to negative affect, such as frustration, anger, or low self-esteem. These negative emotions, in turn, can increase the likelihood of engaging in aggressive behaviors as a means of coping or expressing distress (Robertson et al., 2012). For example, a study by (Homan & Tylka, 2014) found that body dissatisfaction was positively associated with trait anger and aggressive behaviors among college women. Similarly, research demonstrated that body dissatisfaction predicted increases in both physical and relational aggression among adolescent girls over time (Borelli et al., 2021).

Additionally, it was hypothesized that body dissatisfaction, aggression, and physical appearance comparison show different results in gender difference, it was thought that females will be more comparative about their bodies with others and also body dissatisfaction. Therefore, males are thought to be more aggressive than females, not because of physical appearance comparison or body dissatisfaction but for other consequences (Ferguson et al., 2011). The results showed no significant differences in physical appearance comparison and aggression between women and men, there was a significant difference in body dissatisfaction scores (Gatti et al., 2014). For instance, research by (Tylka & Hill, 2004) found that both women and men experience pressure to adhere to idealized body standards perpetuated by the media, albeit in slightly different ways. While women are often subjected to thin-ideal standards, men may face pressure to attain muscularity. These gender-specific ideals may lead to comparable levels of appearance comparison across genders. Moreover, research has highlighted the detrimental effects of body dissatisfaction on psychological well-being and health behaviors, particularly among women (Wrench & Knapp, 2008). For example, (Cash, 2005) found that body dissatisfaction was associated with negative psychological outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and disordered eating behaviors, which may contribute to the observed gender differences in body dissatisfaction scores.

Conclusions

The relationship between body dissatisfaction, physical appearance comparison, and aggression among university students underscores the complex interplay of psychological factors influencing individual well-being and behavior. While the study revealed no significant gender differences in physical appearance comparison and aggression, the notable gender disparity in body dissatisfaction highlights the enduring impact of societal beauty standards on women's body image concerns. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing body dissatisfaction as a precursor to aggression and underscore the need for targeted interventions aimed at promoting positive body image and fostering healthier coping strategies among universities.

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