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BODY IMAGE, GENERALIZED CONTENTMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between body image, generalized contentment and psychological well-being in university students. Data was collected using Body Image Questionnaire (BIQ): An Extension, Generalized Contentment Scale (GCS) and Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being. Research sample consisted of N= 200 individuals (100 males and 100 females) who were within the age range of 18-25 years. All research participants were either undergraduate or graduate students from 8 different educational institutions of Lahore. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 18 was used to compute the data, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to find the relationship of body image with generalized contentment and psychological well-being, and Independent Sample *t*-test was used to find out the gender difference in body image, generalized contentment and psychological well-being among university students. Results indicated that body image was positively correlated with both generalized contentment and psychological well-being in university students. Also, males had a better body image, higher generalized contentment and greater psychological well-being as compared to females. Future implications of the present study were discussed.

Keywords

body image, generalized contentment, psychological well-being, university students

1. Introduction

The purpose of this research was to investigate the relationship of body image with generalized contentment and psychological well-being in University students.

Body Image

The idea of "body image" as a psychological concept was initially introduced based on the belief that the image people have of their bodies in their minds helps explain how their bodies are presented to themselves. Expanding on this notion, body image was further defined as the mental picture people have of their body shape, size and contour, and also of their feelings associated with these features and the parts that make up their bodies (Pietro & Silveira, 2008).

While dissatisfaction with body appearance or shape is more frequently reported or seen among women,

researches show that men are overly concerned with their body images as well (Cafri, Strauss, & Thompson, 2002; Davison & McCabe, 2005; Tager, Good, & Morrison, 2006). According to Statistics Canada Survey (1993), 35% of men and 70% of women are dieting at any given time. The body image dissatisfaction that women experience has been referred to as "normative discontent" by some researchers. Normative discontent suggests that the principle of dissatisfaction with body image is so common among women that it should be thought of as a normal component of their lives (Hansen, 2008). Although societal standards of attractiveness and appearance can have a powerful influence on body image, self-evaluation and self-esteem have an even greater effect on formation of body image (Croll, 2005). When it comes to body esteem, which is self-

evaluation by individuals of their bodily appearance, the way that other people perceive a person's attractiveness seems to be less meaningful than the way the person identifies him or herself. According to a research, thin subjects evaluated their body shape in a more accurate manner as compared to obese subjects. However, they were not more satisfied with the way they looked. This insinuates a cognitive-evaluative dysfunction, where, even though people can estimate their size and/or shape accurately, they are still not satisfied with their bodies (Brennan et al., 2010).

Generalized Contentment

Actually, contentment is a state of satisfaction and happiness. It is not about achieving what one wants, but being satisfied with and appreciating what one already has. There are four attributes of generalized contentment, including satisfaction, hatred for greed, shunning envy and humility. Contentment, especially related to body image, is not an easy notion to live out. This is because everything in our surroundings is developed to generate discontentment (rather than contentment), prolong it and encourage it as well as make it a lifestyle. Almost every element of our media, our culture and our private chats revolves around discontentment in our day to day lives, in a way to either plan out changes or regretfully complaining about things one simply has to live with. In this way, contentment appears to be something that is only attainable when one has achieved perfection or has arrived at the ideal (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999).

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological wisdom, over the years, has emphasized that maintaining a close contact with reality is what ensures the psychological well-being of people, while, illusionary concepts of people make them vulnerable to mental illnesses. This is evident in a number of past theories, including Maslow's Theory of Self-Actualization, in which Abraham Maslow, regarding self-actualized people, said that they are able to accept themselves with all their weaknesses, evils and sins and are able to distinguish between their real and ideal selves (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

Just like generalized contentment, psychological well-being is another variable which is adversely affected by one's body image (Cafri, Strauss, & Thompson, 2002; Tager, Good, & Morrison, 2006; Dotse & Asumeng, 2015). The way that individuals assess themselves and their lives greatly contributes to their psychological well-being. These assessments can be in the form of affect or cognition (Smolak, 2011). Ryff (1989) identified six main dimensions of psychological well-being, namely autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in

life, self-acceptance and positive relations with others.

Societal standards of male and female body images have always been prevalent. People want to appear physically attractive or beautiful to other people in order to be positively evaluated by them, and because of the common perception that a person who appears to be beautiful indeed possesses other positive traits, such as intelligence. This stereotype is labeled as "what-is-beautiful-is-good" (Brennan et al., 2010). Even though various elements like society and media affect people's perception of their bodies, people are in control of forming their body images to a great extent. In light of the growing male and female body image concerns and discrepancies between real and ideal body image, there is a greater need to find out how body image affects generalized contentment and psychological well-being in both males and females.

The objectives of the current research were to investigate the relationship of body image with generalized contentment in university students, to investigate the relationship of body image with psychological well-being in university students, to explore the gender difference in body image in university students, to explore the gender difference in generalized contentment in university students, to explore the gender difference in psychological well-being in university students.

Hypotheses

1. There is a significant relationship between body image and generalized contentment in university students.
2. There is a significant relationship between body image and psychological well-being in university students.
3. There is a significant gender difference in body image in university students.

Method

Research Design and Sample

Correlational research design was used in this research.

Convenient sampling was used to select a total of N=200 participants, 100 males and 100 females. All participants were university students with ages varying between 18 to 25 years. The participants were selected from 8 different institutions (both government and private) in Lahore, namely Kinnaird College (n=25), Government College University (n=25), University of Engineering and Technology (n=25), Punjab University (n=25), Forman Christian College University (n=25), Lahore School of Economics (n=25), Lahore University of Management Sciences (n=25), and Beaconhouse National University (n=25).

Inclusion Criteria. Male and female university students between the ages of 18-25 years were included in this study. This included both undergraduate and graduate University students.

Exclusion Criteria. University students with any apparent disability were excluded from the study.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was sought from authors to use assessment measures and from respected institutes to collect data. Participants were briefed about the purpose of study and informed consent was obtained from them. Also, they were assured that all the data and information gathered from them will be kept confidential and will be used only for research purposes only. All participants had full independence to withdraw from the research at any given moment.

Measures

Demographic sheet: Participants were required to fill out a demographic sheet on which they stated their age, gender and institution name.

The Body Image Questionnaire (BIQ); An Extension: The Body Image Questionnaire (BIQ), developed by Koleck, Schweitzer, Gelie, Gilliard, and Quintard, was first published in a journal in 1987 by Schweitzer. BIQ was initially administered to a total of 1038 French participants, both male and female. A chief component assessment of their responses produced a first axis, construed as a general dimension known as Body Satisfaction. Body Satisfaction was linked with health, sex and present and future emotional stability. The mean test-retest reliability coefficient of BIQ's 19 items is 0.67, and it has an internal consistency of 0.82. BIQ, which is a 19-item scale, is Likert-type in nature, with values varying from 1 to 5, where 1 and 5 are two extreme values that depict 'never' and 'very much; often' respectively, 2 and 4 are moderate values that depict 'occasionally' and 'fairly; fairly often' respectively and 3 is the middle value that depicts 'in-between; neither one'. The scores on the BIQ range from 19 to 95, where a higher score depicts higher body contentment (Koleck, Schweitzer, Gelie, Gilliard, & Quintard, 2002).

Generalized Contentment Scale (GCS): In 1982, Walter Hudson introduced the Generalized Contentment Scale (GCS), which can be used to investigate the degree of discontentment among people. GCS has a test-retest reliability of 0.94. Obtaining a score above 30 on the GCS indicates that a person has a substantial problem, whereas, obtaining a score below 30 on the GCS indicates that a person has no substantial problem. GCS, which is a 25 item scale, is Likert-type in nature, with values

varying from 1 to 5, where 1 depicts 'rarely or none of the time', 2 depicts 'a little of the time', 3 depicts 'some of the time', 4 depicts 'good part of the time' and 5 depicts 'most or all of the time' (Hudson, 1982).

The Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being: In 1989, Carol Ryff devised and introduced the Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being. It is a 54-item, Likert-type scale with ratings from 1 to 6, where 1, 2 and 3 depict 'strong disagreement', 'disagreement' and 'slight disagreement' respectively, whereas, 4, 5 and 6 depict 'slight agreement', 'agreement' and 'strong agreement' respectively. Six main psychological well-being constituents, namely self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, autonomy, environment mastery and positive relations with others, are measured by the Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being. The scale's validity varied between .87 and .96 and the test-retest reliability was somewhere between .78 and .97. Ryff's psychological well-being scale has no definite cut-off value, but scores falling in the upper 25% depict a higher level of psychological well-being, whereas, scores falling in the lower 25% depict a lower level of psychological well-being (Akin, 2008).

Procedure

Permission to carry out the research was acquired from all the relevant institutions, and the participants were approached through convenient sampling. A questionnaire was put together, which comprised of an informed consent, a demographic sheet, Body Image Questionnaire (BIQ), Generalized Contentment Scale (GCS) and Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being, respectively. More than half of the data was collected by sending online questionnaires to the selected participants via mail. The rest of the data was collected by personally getting the research questionnaires filled out by the students of Kinnaird College, Punjab University and University of Engineering and Technology. Data was collected within four weeks. Afterwards, responses obtained from all three scales of the study were computed for results, and these results were used to study the relationships between variables under investigation.

Results

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 21.0) was used to compute the data and analyze the results. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was run to investigate the relationship of body image with generalized contentment and psychological well-being. Gender difference in body image was found using the Independent Sample *t*-test.

Table 1: shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient between body image and discontentment in university students ($N = 200$, $n = 100$ males and 100 females).

Variables	r	p
Body Image	-.48**	.00
Discontentment		

Note. ** $p < .01$

The results support the hypothesis because the calculated p value 0.00 is less than the alpha value, i.e. 0.01, and show that body image and generalized contentment share a significant weak and negative relationship in university students. This means that

students who score higher on body image are less discontent and have more generalized contentment, whereas, students who score lower on body image are more discontent and have less generalized contentment.

Table 2 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient between body image and psychological well-being in university students ($N = 200$, $n = 100$ males and 100 females).

Variables	r	p
Body Image	.37**	.00
Psychological Well-Being		

Note. ** $p < .01$

The results support the hypothesis because the calculated p value 0.00 is less than the alpha value, i.e. 0.01, and show that body image and psychological well-being share a significant weak and positive relationship in university students. This

means that students who score higher on body image have higher psychological well-being, and similarly, students who score lower on body image have lower psychological well-being.

Table 3 shows the mean (M), standard deviation (SD), degree of freedom (df), independent sample t -test score (t) and significance value (p) of the gender difference in body image among university students ($N = 200$, $n = 100$ males and 100 females).

Variable	Gender	M	SD	df	t	p
Body Image				198	8.54	.00
	Males	3.64	.48			
	Females	3.11	.38			

Note. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, df = Degree of Freedom, $p < 0.05$.

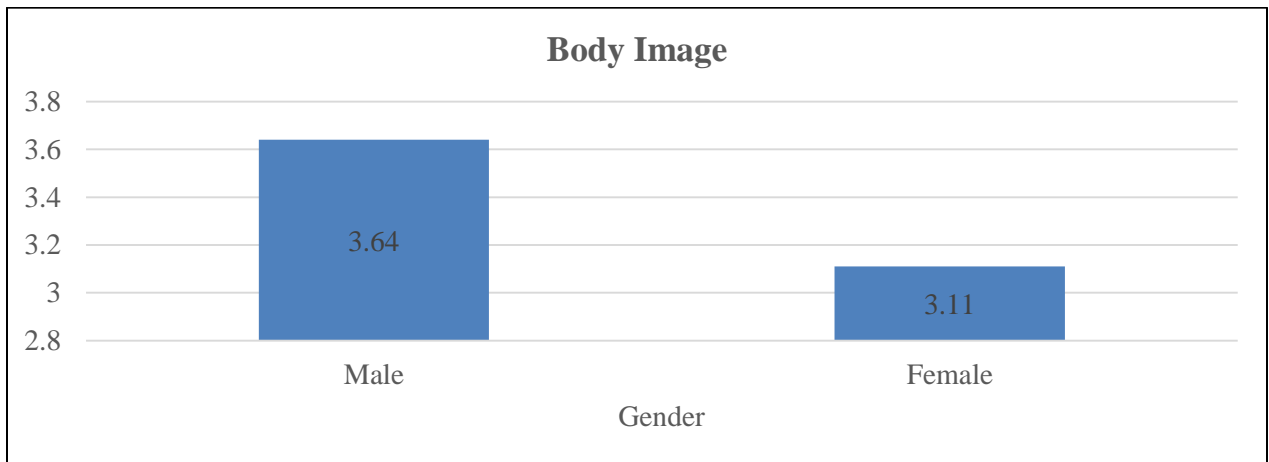
According to the independent sample t -test result, there is a significant gender difference in university

students' body image, as the calculated p value 0.00 is less than the alpha value. i.e. 0.05. Difference in

the mean value shows that males ($M = 3.64$) scored higher on body image as compared to females ($M =$

3.11). Thus, males have a better body image as compared to females.

Figure 1 shows the gender difference in body image among university students.



To sum it up, the results show that body image is positively correlated with both generalized contentment and psychological well-being in

university students. Also, male university students tend to have a better body image as compared to female university students.

Discussion

Present study aimed to investigate the relationship of body image with generalized contentment and psychological well-being in university students. It further explored gender difference in body image among university students.

Hypothesis I and II were supported by the results, which showed a significant positive correlation of body image with generalized contentment and psychological well-being, meaning that students who scored higher on body image also had higher generalized contentment and psychological well-being, and similarly, students who scored lower on body image had lower generalized contentment and psychological well-being. Hassan, Zubair, Riaz, and Tariq (2012) found a positive correlation between body image and generalized contentment in university students, and Mintem, Gigante, and Horta (2015) claimed that people showing augmented BMI z-scores between the ages of 4 and 23 years reported higher probability of discontentment at the age of 23 years. Frederick, Sandhu, Morse, and Swami (2016) carried out a research to examine the prevalence and correlation of body image with generalized contentment and concluded that individuals who held negative body images experienced greater neuroticism, spent more time watching television and had highly anxious and fearful attachment styles. On the other hand, individuals who held positive body images reported a higher level of conscientiousness, openness and extraversion, practiced safer and more reliable attachment styles, and experienced greater self-esteem and life contentment. Similar findings

have also been reported by Abbasi and Zubair (2015) and Dotse and Asumeng (2015), both studies that investigated more than just the general relationship between body image and psychological well-being. Abbasi and Zubair (2015) found that body image considerably predicted university students' psychological well-being, and that students whose parents had a higher level of education demonstrated better body image and a greater degree of psychological well-being as a result. Dotse and Asumeng (2015), expanded and redefined the aspect of body image to involve four different elements, which were complexion and body mass index, physical appearance, facial appearance and appendage appearance. Males were found to have greater satisfaction on all these aspects of body image as compared to females, which resulted in their higher psychological well-being. Most notably, as opposed to the sample of the current research, which was small in size and limited to just one city, this study consisted of people from nine different countries in Africa. In a somewhat similar research, Davison and McCabe (2005) found out that dissatisfaction with various elements of body image resulted in sexual and social problems among men, and lower self-esteem, anxiety and depression among both men and women. Cafri, Strauss and Thompson (2002) and Tager, Good, and Morrison (2006), both studies that used only male participants, are also in line with the result of the present research. The former found that dissatisfaction with fat and/or muscle was considerably linked to low self-esteem, poor self-concept, greater depression and less

contentment with life in male university students, and the latter found body image to be positively correlated with specifically two aspects of psychological well-being, including perceived mastery of environment and acceptance of self.

Smolak (2011) claimed that what one believes and how one feels about his or her body has an effect on various features of his or her physical and psychological well-being. People who believe that they are not attractive tend to buy more products like make-up and diet drinks. These products have quite substantial costs, too. It was estimated that Americans spend \$40 billion only on weight-control programs and products every year. A few of these programs and products are even dangerous for health. Lack of satisfaction with one's body might lead a person to get a cosmetic surgery done, whereas, others may fall victim to depression, body dysmorphic disorders and/or eating disorders, all of which are also dangerous for health. A poor body image can quite possibly get in the way of getting necessary medical tests done, going along with suitable illness treatment and/or even healthy exercise. All these destructive behaviors, especially disordered eating, have led to increasing interest in the body image development, specifically negative development of body image. That is why, now, more attention is also being paid to the likelihood of a positive body image development contributing to contentment and psychological well-being. Along with avoidance and treatment strategies, this also holds the potential of enhancing body image and lowering risks associated with it.

The result of the Independent Sample *t*-test supported hypothesis III of the study, showing that males have a better body image as compared to females. This finding is in accordance with the findings of Smith et al. (2000), Muth and Cash (2004) and Dotse and Asumeng (2015). The research of Smith et al. (2000) extensively examined body image among White and Black men and women. The results showed that the Blacks, as compared to Whites, and that females, as compared to males, were more invested in their appearance. Also, females, as compared to males, were more dissatisfied with their general appearance, and White males, as compared to Black males, were more dissatisfied with their appearance. Among females, both White and Black women were equally dissatisfied with their appearance and size. Yet, after controlling for body mass index (BMI), age and education, Black females were more satisfied with their body appearance and size than White females. The results of present study could also be made more generalizable if body image was examined across different ethnic groups in Pakistan. Moreover, Muth and Cash (2004) claimed that in addition to having

more negative assessments regarding their body image, women, compared to men, engaged in more appearance grooming and had a greater frequency of cross-situational dissatisfaction with their body image.

Body image is greatly affected by adherence to conventional gender roles and professions, cultural beauty expectations and gender socialization. To a great extent, body image is a result of internalization of others' (friends, family, media, etc.) opinions concerning the behaviors and attributes suitable for males and females. Conventional gender roles associate femininity with beauty and the appeal of an attractive look, whereas, traditional masculinity with control, power and force. Such conscious or unconscious expectations regarding males' and females' bodies and bodily functions have different effects on how their body images are formed. A greater emphasis on aesthetic attributes of the females' bodies, as opposed to the functional ones, leads them to have greater body dissatisfaction, body shame and anxiety and low body esteem. This also results in more checking, fixing and avoidance behaviors in women (Zomer, 2016).

The extensive sexual objectification of women in the media (through movies, dramas, advertisements, video games, etc.) promotes sexism and has widely reduced women bodies to objects or commodities that are used to please and attract viewers, mainly men. Such sexual objectification has basically equated the worth of a woman to the physical appearance of her body and sexual purposes. When women make attributions about themselves in light of these objectified messages, they learn to be more involved with those body features that can be observed rather than those that cannot be observed, such as intellectual growth. Self-objectification by women and young girls increases their apprehension about their physical appearance, which then leads to insecurities, depression, low self-esteem, eating disorders and sexual disturbances in them (Ullah & Khan, 2014).

Social comparison theory states that human beings have an innate drive to compare themselves to others when evaluating themselves. This theory offers more explanation as to why women have lower body images than men. The comparison tendencies of women are linked to their poor body image and low body esteem. This is because women tend to make more upward social comparisons, i.e. they compare themselves to others who are better than them in some physical attribute(s). On the other hand, rigid norms of physical appearance and attributes do not affect men so much, who, therefore, tend to make more downward social comparisons, i.e. they compare themselves to others who are inferior to

them in some physical attribute(s), a strategy which is more promising and increases self-esteem (Zomer, 2016).

The effects of societal norms and elements (such as family, friends, relatives, media, etc.) on an individual's body image should be explored in order to gain in-depth information regarding how these elements may be related to body image. In addition, a qualitative research can be conducted in order to gain a better and elaborate understanding of the nature of body image, and its relationship with psychological well-being in university students.

Conclusion

The findings of the present research indicate a significant, positive and weak relationship of body image with both generalized contentment and psychological well-being in university students. The results further conclude that there is a significant gender difference in body image among university students, with males generally having a better body image than females.

Implications

The present study contributes to the vast and increasingly multi-faceted literature on body image, especially in relation to Pakistani culture. The findings have significant implications for studies on self-esteem, self-objectification, disordered eating behaviors, etc.

On the basis of present research findings, university students (both males and females) should be made aware of the importance of maintaining a positive body image through various university health and wellness societies or groups by arranging various workshops, seminars, presentations, group meetings, health fairs, etc. Education psychologists and university counselors can use these research findings in interventions with university students to improve their body image in order to boost their generalized contentment and psychological well-being.

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Tables

Table 1 shows the demographic features of the sample.

Variables	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Age		21.55(2.02)
Gender		
Males	100 (50%)	
Females	100 (50%)	
Institution		
Kinnaird College (KC)	25 (12.5%)	
Punjab University (PU)	25 (12.5%)	
UET	25 (12.5%)	
Government College (GC)	25 (12.5%)	
LUMS	25 (12.5%)	
BNU	25 (12.5%)	
FCCU	25 (12.5%)	
LSE	25 (12.5%)	

Note. N = 200; UET = University of Engineering and Technology; LUMS = Lahore University of Management Sciences; BNU = Beaconhouse National University; FCCU = Forman Christian College University; LSE = Lahore School of Economics.

Table 2 shows the psychometric properties of major study variables.

Variables	Range				
	<i>K</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>Skewness</i>
Body Image	19	64.14	9.69	.800	-.322
Generalized Contentment	25	64.74	17.61	.878	.168
Psychological Well-Being	54	214.57	28.53	.889	.446
Autonomy	9	35.27	5.90	.590	-.090
Environmental Mastery	9	34.08	5.55	.552	.336
Personal Growth	9	37.02	6.71	.683	.403
Positive Relations With Others	9	35.80	7.04	.684	-.002
Purpose In Life	9	36.60	6.50	.671	.119
Self-Acceptance	9	35.78	6.93	.702	-.075

Subscales of PWBS

Note. K = Total no of items, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, α = Cronbach's alpha, PWBS = Psychological Well-Being Scale.

Table 3 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient between body image and discontentment in university students (N = 200, n= 100 males and 100 females).

Variables	r	p
Body Image	-.48**	.00
Discontentment		

Note. ** $p < .01$

Table 4 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient between body image and psychological well-being in university students (N = 200, n= 100 males and 100 females).

Variables	r	p
Body Image	.37**	.00
Psychological Well-Being		

Note. ** $p < .01$

Table 5 shows the mean (M), standard deviation (SD), degree of freedom (df), independent sample t-test score (t) and significance value (p) of the gender difference in body image among university students (N = 200, n = 100 males and 100 females).

Variable	Gender	M	SD	df	t	p
Body Image						
	Males	3.64	.48	198	8.54	.00
	Females	3.11	.38			

Note. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, df = Degree of Freedom, $p < 0.05$.

Figure 1 shows the gender difference in body image among university students.

