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Exploring the Impact of Body Shaming and Emotional Reactivity on the Self-Esteem of Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The current study aimed to examine how emotional reactivity and body shaming effect young adults' self-esteem in the northern area "Malakand" of Pakistan. A convenience sampling method was used to gather data from N=300 respondents, aged 19 to 28, from various postgraduate colleges and universities. Of these, 147 men and 153 women, in equal numbers, were males (n=147) and females (n=153). Self-reported questionnaires were used to assess emotional reactivity, self-esteem, and body shaming. The regression and Pearson correlation analyses supported the findings by demonstrating that body shaming significantly lowers young adults' self-esteem. Additionally, a link between body shaming and emotional reactivity was discovered. Males and females scored significantly differently on emotional reactivity, with females scoring higher, according to the t-test analysis. These findings have significant implications for mental health interventions and support programs in the Malakand region because they highlight the damaging effects of body shaming on young adults' self-esteem and emotional well-being.

1. INTRODUCTION

Dissatisfaction with one's body image is a common experience for many individuals. During socialization, ideal body schemas frequently develop, with parents occasionally expressing direct approval or disapproval of others' appearances in the media and their surroundings. In the modern era, outward appearance is given a lot of importance. In a study of young adults, it was discovered that those who feel self-conscious about their appearance display mood-related symptomatology, which is frequently connected to self-critical behavior and unhealthy eating habits as a coping mechanism (Prabhu & Cunha, 2018).

In this context, the literature describes the Tripartite Influence Model as a commonly used framework for describing the emergence of body image dissatisfaction (Thompson & Stice, 2001; Gois, Ferreira, & Mendes, 2018). This model proposes two mediating processes that influence an individual's self-perception and problematic eating patterns in relation to various influences, such as friends, family, and social media: intrinsic social standards of beauty and extreme appearance comparisons. The theory claims that people adhere to unrealistic standards of beauty because of social pressures, including peer and familial pressure and stress from social media platforms (Grabe et al., 2008).

Numerous studies have revealed that socialization in the family, peer pressure, and the media are culturally influenced factors that affect how people feel about their bodies (Buitenhus, 2014). As a result, literature increasingly highlights the rising trend of appearance-related dissatisfaction among people of all ages and genders (Riklin, Andover, & Annunziato, 2019). Studies have shown that despite some differences in how men and women perceive their bodies, both sexes experience comparable levels of

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negative body image when around their partners. Both men and women are exposed to body size and shape shaming in a variety of ways (Jackson & Chen, 2010).

According to Han (2003), not having the ideal appearance can lead to psychological problems, as well as the stigmatization and social exclusion that may follow them, and can lower the quality of life (Prabhu & Cunha, 2018). Additionally, there is evidence connecting body dissatisfaction with low self-esteem, insecurity, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, low self-esteem in young people is directly linked to poor self-image and unhealthy eating habits or lifestyles (Green & Pritchard, 2003; Marta-Simões, & Ferreira, 2016).

Men, in particular, are under pressure to live up to cultural norms. Males' body image dissatisfaction is now acknowledged, and many adult men run the risk of developing psychological disorders and engaging in unhealthy appearance-correcting behaviors (El Ansari & Berg-Beckhoff, 2019). Male dissatisfaction with appearance, in contrast to female trends, is a complex phenomenon that includes both extremes of weight (Edwards, Tod, & Molnar, 2014). Mood disorders, distress, low self-esteem, and negative self-perceptions of attractiveness have all been linked to body image issues, as have increased social anxiety, emotional reactivity, and a propensity for pointless corrective procedures (Hayaki et al., 2002; Jung & Lee, 2006; Mousavi Asl et al., 2022).

According to the literature, women who believe their bodies don't conform to beauty standards may develop unhealthful and problematic eating habits (Becerra & Campitelli, 2013). This sense of discord can result in negative and unfavourable internal experiences, such as the notion that starvation can make a person thin. Body dissatisfaction was once thought to be primarily a Western issue (Grabe & Hyde, 2006), but in the 21st century, it has become significantly more prevalent in a number of non-Western countries (Nasser et al., 2003). According to studies, non-white women who compare themselves to Western beauty standards may be more prone to eating disorders and body image problems (James et al., 2001; Oney et al., 2011). On the other hand, Asian cultures might be more likely to struggle with and be unhappy with their bodies (Jones, Little, Boothroyd, DeBruine, Feinberg & Smith, et al., 2005). Women in these countries are adopting more contemporary ideals of beauty that significantly depart from their cultural ideals, favouring extremely slender bodies and other characteristics (Han, 2003; Rongmuang et al., 2011).

The demand for large, dramatic eyes and straight noses, which significantly deviate from their naturally occurring characteristics, has been a major factor in the remarkable expansion of the cosmetic industry in some Asian countries (Jung & Lee, 2006; Mousavi Asl et al., 2022). The rise in body image dissatisfaction in Asia and the former socialist states of Europe have an intriguing correlation, according to research (Jung & Forbes, 2007). According to feminist theories, societies with strong male dominance, rigid gender norms, and quick social change, such as a quick increase in opportunities for women, are more likely to internalise unattainable beauty standards and report relatively high levels of body image dissatisfaction (Paludi, 2010).

Therefore, the current study aims to discuss how body shaming can affect young males and females' self-esteem and emotional reactivity. Focusing on body shaming, emotional reactivity, and self-esteem in the Malakand and surrounding areas is what makes this study novel. According to the literature that is currently available, we are aware of only a small number of studies that have been done on these variables in Pakistan, more specifically in Khyber Pohutukawa. This study primarily focuses on Pukhtoon young adults and explores whether or not emotional reactivity and negative body image can affect self-esteem. Young men and women can benefit from the current research's insights into the psychological effects of socially constructed factors like body shame, self-esteem, and emotional reactivity and their effects on various life domains. This study will also educate psychologists who work in various institutions and organizations in the aforementioned region about the significance of fostering body positivity, lowering emotional reactivity, and fostering higher self-esteem to support both genders' equal access to mental and physical health.

2. METHOD

Research Questions

- How does the frequency and severity of body shaming experiences in different social contexts affect the self-esteem of youth, and are there variations based on cultural factors?"
- "What coping mechanisms do youth employ in response to body shaming incidents, and how do these coping strategies mediate the relationship between emotional reactivity and self-esteem?"

Hypotheses

- Body shaming is significantly correlated with self-esteem and emotional reactivity.
- Body shaming has significant impact on self-esteem.
- Emotional Reactivity has significant impact on self-esteem.
- There would be gender difference on body shaming, emotional reactivity, and self-esteem.

Research Design

A correlational research design was used in this study to look at the relationships between the variables. This methodology was chosen because it enables the researchers to ascertain the strength of the relationship between variables without modifying them.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A method of convenience sampling was used to collect data from the respondents. This non-probability sampling method was selected due to its usability and availability. The study included a sample of 300 young adults ranging in age from 19 to 28 years, including 147 males and 153 females. Selecting a sample of 300 young respondents for our research on body shaming, emotional reactivity, and self-esteem is justified for several key reasons. This sample size provides ample statistical power, increasing the reliability of our findings. It allows for diversity and representativeness, enabling us to explore variations among different demographic groups. The larger sample accommodates

potential attrition and supports complex analyses, aligning with established research practices.

Inclusion Criteria

Respondents included in the study were Pashtun community members and Malakand region residents. This criterion ensured that the study focused on a distinct population with shared cultural characteristics.

Exclusion Criteria

To maintain a consistent age range for analysis, respondents younger than 19 or older than 28 years were excluded from the study. Those who refused to participate or were not Malakand residents were also excluded to eliminate potential confounding variables.

Instruments

Objectified Body Consciousness Scale

Designed by McKinley and Hyde in 1996, this 24-item questionnaire uses a 7-point Likert scale with the extremes of strongly disagree and strongly agree as the extremes. It has three subscales: beliefs about appearance control, body shame, and body surveillance. Only the body shame subscale was used in the current study, with the scale author's permission. Eight items make up this subscale, which has an internal consistency of = 0.78. (Schaefer & Thompson, 2018).

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

This widely used 10-item scale was created by Rosenberg (1965, retrieved 2017) and assesses one's positive and negative feelings towards themselves to determine overall self-worth. Items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 are scored differently for the 4-point Likert scale, which ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Perth Emotional Reactivity Scale

Designed by Nock et al. (2008), this 30-item self-report tool gauges emotional reactivity on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very unlike me to very like me (Preece, Becerra & Campitelli, 2018; Becerra, Preece, Campitelli, & Scott-Pillow, 2017).

Demographic Sheet

Using the respondents' ages and genders on this sheet, the researchers can examine demographic factors that could have an impact on the findings.

Procedure

Procedure: At first, approval was sought from the Universities of Malakand and Swat, as well as the postgraduate institutions in Malakand's Timergara and Swat. The researchers approached potential respondents after receiving permission, using the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Informed consent was obtained from each participant after thorough explanation of the study's nature and objectives was given to them. Following the distribution of the questionnaires, detailed instructions emphasizing the value of accuracy and honesty were provided regarding their completion. None of the respondents reported experiencing any physical or psychological discomfort while completing the questionnaires. When finished, the questionnaires were gathered by the researchers for data analysis.

Ethical Consideration

Informed consent was obtained from both the respondents and the heads of the institutions to ensure that everyone was aware of and consented to their participation in the study. Respondents in this study were treated with respect and confidentiality and no harm was ever intended. Respondents were made aware that they could leave the study at any time without penalty, and the study's purpose was explained to them honestly and without any exaggeration. The researchers also made sure that the information obtained during the study was securely stored and only used for that purpose. Efforts were made to disseminate the findings in a way that added to the body of knowledge on body shaming, self-esteem, and emotional reactivity among young adults in the Malakand region after the study's completion was shared with the participating institutions. The study sought to advance openness,

3. RESULT & FINDINGS

The findings of this study use a variety of statistical analyses to look at how body shame, self-esteem, and emotional reactivity among young adults in Pakistan are related. Initially, the study sample's demographic details were presented using descriptive statistics. In addition, the psychometric characteristics of the instruments used were investigated along with the relationship between the study variables using correlations. Furthermore, the effect of emotional reactivity and body shaming on self-esteem was examined using linear regression analysis. The means and standard deviations of the study variables for males and females were then compared using t-tests. These statistical analyses shed important light on the connections between emotional reactivity, self-esteem, and body shame in Pakistani young adults. The findings indicated the following demographic characteristics of the study sample (N = 300): There were 49% male respondents (n = 147) and 51% female respondents (n = 153) in the study. The age distribution was divided into two groups: those aged 19 to 23 and those aged 24 to 28. 63% (n = 189) of the respondents were between the ages of 19 and 23, while 37% (n = 111) were between the ages of 24 and 28 (see Table 1).

Table 1
Frequency and Percentage of respondents (N=300)

Demographics	f	%
Gender		
Male	147	49%
Female	153	51%
Age		
19 – 23 Years	189	63%
24 – 28 Years	111	37%

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Variables	M	SD	Actual	Potential	Skew	Kurt
Body Shaming	31.79	7.72	9-49	8-56	-.085	-.327
Self Esteem	18.47	4.42	2-30	0-30	-.336	.924
Emotional Reactivity	107.7	15.37	56-141	30-150	-.207	-.124

The table 2 provides descriptive statistics for three variables: Body Shaming (M = 31.79, SD = 7.72), Self Esteem (M = 18.47, SD = 4.42), and Emotional Reactivity (M = 107.7, SD = 15.37). Each variable's actual and potential score ranges, skewness, and kurtosis are also reported. Body Shaming has a slightly negatively skewed distribution, Self Esteem is negatively skewed with some peakedness, and Emotional Reactivity has a slightly negatively skewed and relatively normal distribution.

Table 3
Reliability analysis of instruments and Pearson correlation among study variables (N=300)

Variables	Items	α	1	2	3
Body shaming	08	.54	-	-.291**	.164**
Self-esteem	10	.68		-	-.149**
Emotional reactivity	30	.82			-

p < .01**

Further the results indicated the correlations between the three studied variables: body shaming, self-esteem, and emotional reactivity along with the variables psychometric properties. The body shaming variable contains eight items with an alpha of 0.54. Self-esteem is measured with 10 items and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.68, whereas emotional reactivity is assessed with 30 items and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82. There is a significant negative correlation between body shaming and self-esteem (r = -.291, p <.01) and a significant positive correlation between body shaming and emotional reactivity (r =.164, p <.01). Moreover, a significant negative relationship exists between self-esteem and emotional reactivity (r = -.149, p <.01). Table 2 shows detail.

Table 4
Linear Regression analysis indicating the impact of Body Shaming, and Emotional Reactivity on Self-esteem of Young Adults (N=300)

Variable	B	Self esteem			
		SE	β	95% CI	
				LL	UL
(Constant)	25.77***	1.89		22.06	29.49
Body shaming	-.152***	.035	-.27	-.22	-.09
Emotional Reactivity	-.024	.016	-.08	-.06	.01
R2			.085		

*** *p<.001*

The linear regression analysis investigated the influence of body shaming and emotional reactivity on the self-esteem of 300 young adults. Both body shaming (B = -.152, SE =.035, β = -.27, 95% CI [-.22, -.09], p <.001) and emotional reactivity (B = -.024, SE =.016, β = -.08, 95% CI [-.06,.01], p >.05) have a negative impact on self-esteem. However, only body shaming was the significant predictor. The constant term has a value of 25.77 (SE = 1.89, 95% CI [22.06, 29.49]). The overall R2 for the model is .085, indicating that body shaming and emotional reactivity explain 8.5% of the variance in young adults' self-esteem (see Table 3).

Table 5
Mean, standard deviation, and t-values for males and females on study variables (N=300)

Variables	Females (n=153)		Males (n=147)		t (298)	p	CI 95%		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Body shaming	31.2	7.8	32.3	7.5	1.30	.19	-.59	2.91	--
Self-esteem	18.2	4.3	18.7	4.7	1.01	.31	-.501	1.56	--
Emotional reactivity	111.7	16.3	103.5	13.1	-4.78	.00	-11.5	-4.82	0.56

The means and standard deviations for body shaming, self-esteem, and emotional reactivity are compared for females (n = 153) and males (n = 147) in the table 4. In terms of body shaming, there was no statistically significant difference between males (M = 32.3, SD = 7.5) and females (M = 31.2, SD = 7.8). Further, the difference in self-esteem between males and females (M = 18.7, SD = 4.7) was not statistically significant t (298) = 1.01, p =.31. However, there was a statistically significant difference in emotional reactivity between males and females (M = 103.5, SD = 13.1); Cohen's d = 0.50; t(298) = -4.78; p<.001. This suggests that women were more emotionally reactive than men.

Discussion

The importance of the body image issue has traditionally been downplayed in Eastern cultures, such as Pakistan, and elevated in Western societies. However, the recent media boom in Pakistan has significantly contributed to the transformation of conventional norms and values. A moderately heavier physique (without being obese) was once stigmatized as unhealthy in Pakistani society, while a thin body was seen as a sign of success. The obsession with the ideal physical appearance is currently more pervasive in Pakistani culture, causing the locals to deal with body image issues like those that Western societies faced a few decades ago (Compas, Jaser, Bettis, Watson, & Gruhn, et al., 2017).

Therefore, it was thought necessary to create a conceptual framework to comprehend how males and females in the Malakand region feel about body shaming. In regions where cultural or religious norms strongly encourage body covering, particularly for women wearing burkas, full body-covering dresses, and veils, individuals who deviate from these expectations may experience body shaming. The pressure to conform to these dress codes can lead to stigmatization, criticism, and negative judgments, which can have a detrimental impact on individuals' self-esteem and body image. This highlights how societal expectations related to body coverage can contribute to body shaming, especially in the context of cultural and religious practices. According to the first hypothesis of the current study, which was supported by statistical analysis, there is a negative relationship between self-esteem and body shaming; as body shaming increases, self-esteem declines. These results are in line with earlier studies. For instance, Geller et al. (2002) found a clear connection between a person's self-esteem and their perception of their body. Additionally, studies have shown that having a strong sense of self can guard against eating disorders and body dissatisfaction (Mensinger, Tylka & Calamari, 2018). In addition, Neighbors and Sobal (2007) found a link between low self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction in children, adolescents, and adults.

According to a different study, college students who felt good about their bodies had higher self-esteem than those who felt bad about their bodies (Grammas & Schwartz, 2009). It's interesting that the current study discovered that body shaming has an equal impact on both genders' levels of self-esteem, which may not entirely line up with earlier studies. The majority of research points to women being more impacted by body shame and issues with body image (Furham, Badmin & Snead, 2002). Most people are unhappy with their body shape, size, and weight because thinness is frequently seen as the ideal and standard for attractiveness, especially in young women. Women are more likely than men to be underweight even as adults (Annis, Cash & Hrabosky, 2004).

The results of our study, which indicate that body shaming has an equal impact on male and female self-esteem, can be attributed to sociocultural factors. Women are advised to wear loose clothing and abayas in this area to reduce their exposure to peers, family, and other close relationships that may promote body shaming, which could harm their self-esteem. Similar to how women are affected by clothing restrictions, men can experience body shaming due to cultural expectations of the ideal male body, media exposure, and peer pressure (Tiggemann, 2011).

The findings also confirm the second hypothesis, which proposed a direct relationship between body shaming and emotional reactivity, indicating that as body shaming scores rise, emotional reactivity scores also do (Stevens, Herbozo, & Martinez, 2018). The finding that people's emotions can influence their perceptions of their body image, whether positive or negative, supports this study's conclusion (Turpyn, Chaplin, Cook, & Martelli, 2015).

The study also confirmed the third hypothesis, showing through t-test analysis that women performed better than men on the emotional reactivity scale. Males and females of all ages and cultural backgrounds believe that adult women are more emotionally engaged than men (Hazzard et al., 2019). Additionally, men who feel unsatisfied with their bodies frequently have negative body perceptions, engage in dysfunctional behaviours to deal with these feelings, and experience dissatisfaction with their bodies. As a result, controlling one's emotions is crucial; however, poor control can also lead to unhealthy eating habits (Gratz & Roemer, 2004).

The results of the current study also support earlier findings that women are typically more emotionally reactive than men, whether they are experiencing positive or negative emotions. This suggests that, when confronted with body shaming, females are more likely than males to feel emotions quickly and intensely. Women are therefore more likely than men to develop eating disorders. According to some theories, men tend to have fewer eating disorders, are less concerned with their weight, and go on fewer diets than women (McCreary, 2011).

4. CONCLUSION

The current study highlights how crucial body image issues are in Eastern cultures, particularly in Pakistan, where the media boom has had a significant impact on traditional norms and values. The results highlight the significance of sociocultural variables and media exposure in influencing people's perceptions of their bodies and suggest that body shaming negatively affects both male and female self-esteem. In addition, emotional reactivity was discovered to be linked to body shaming, with women typically scoring higher on this metric than men. Despite some limitations, the study serves as a starting point for further investigation into body image problems in Eastern cultures.

Limitations

It is important to recognise the limitations of the current study. The results may not be generalizable to other regions or cultures because the sample size was small and the research was only done in one area of Pakistan. The study also used self-report measures, which can be biased and may not accurately reflect actual behaviour or emotions. By incorporating objective measures of emotional reactivity and

body image issues and expanding the sample size in future studies, it should be possible to address these limitations.

Recommendations

Several suggestions for future research and interventions can be made in light of the study's findings. First, future research should aim to broaden the sample size and include subjects from various Pakistani regions and cultures. This will make it possible to comprehend sociocultural influences and media exposure's effects on body image issues more thoroughly. Second, it's important to develop and test interventions like cognitive-behavioural therapy and mindfulness-based interventions to lessen body shaming and boost people's self-esteem. In order to address the unique intersection of gender, culture, and body image issues in Eastern cultures, culturally specific interventions need to be developed.

Competing Interests

The authors did not declare any competing interest.

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