

Brief Report

State Self-Esteem in Relation to Weight Locus of Control amongst Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The current society emphasizes physical appearance and physical fitness. Individual's self-esteem has been shown to be linked with physical appearance. **Methods:** A random sample comprising of 100 male and 100 female (N=200) adolescents was selected. The subjects were administered the Current Thoughts Scale and the Dieting Beliefs Scale for assessing their state self-esteem and their weight locus of control. **Results:** Boys had significantly higher appearance self-esteem than girls, while girls had significantly higher dieting belief in comparison to boys. Performance self-esteem was positively and significantly correlated with social self-esteem and appearance self-esteem in the total sample, and the sub-samples comprising of boys and girls

KEY WORDS: Adolescents; Self-esteem; Weight concerns.

INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem refers to an individual's sense of his or her value or worth, or the extent to which a person values, approves or, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself. Self-esteem is considered the evaluative component of self-concept, a broader representation of the self that includes cognitive and behavioral aspects as well as evaluative or affective ones.¹ While the construct is most often used to refer to a global sense of self-worth, narrow concepts such as appearance esteem or body esteem are used to imply a sense of self-esteem in more specific areas.

Personal, familial and cultural factors strongly influence how adolescents formulate and define their body image ideals and subsequent self comparisons. Objective physical weight is powerfully associated with social status and evaluation. The social desirability of particular body types, clearly related to weight, is learnt early, and personality attributes and social attractiveness ratings are reliably ascribed to children and adults as a function of their weight. It is no wonder then that body-image influences self-esteem in adolescence.² This may be particularly true for early adolescent girls. It has

been found that girls, especially heavier girls give less accurate reports than boys and tend in general to underreport their weight.³

Dieting is perhaps the most commonly employed method for addressing body size and weight concerns. Dieting has been defined differently but to most it suggests an intentional often temporary, change in eating to achieve weight loss. In reality, dieting is not a simple task and much of the time dieters do not eat less than do non-dieters. Research has shown that dieters significantly under report what they have eaten – they tend to believe that they have eaten much less than they actually have. In comparison, non-dieters tend to be very accurate at reporting the amount they have eaten.⁴ This and similar findings may represent a cognitive distortion, functioning to protect the dieter's *self-esteem* which is more heavily dependent on weight and shape than that of the non-dieter. Ackard and colleagues reported that dieting frequency was inversely associated with self-esteem, ideal body size, emotional regulation and impulse control.⁵

In the present study we aimed to assess performance self-esteem, social self-esteem, appearance self-esteem, and weight locus of control in adolescents; and to examine the correlation between these dimensions of self-esteem with weight locus of control.

METHODS

A sample of 200 unmarried adolescents (100 male and 100 female) within the age range of 18-21 years was selected from the local colleges of Chandigarh. All adolescents belonged to urban areas. They were administered the Current Thought Scale⁶ and the Dieting Belief Scale⁷. The Current Thought Scale (CTS) is a measure of state self-esteem and compares the same under Performance, Social, and Appearance self-esteem.⁶ It consists of 20 items, the response categories for each item are, not at all, a little bit, somewhat, very much and extremely on a 5 point scale. The items are scored as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively. Reverse scoring was done for the negatively worded items. Dieting Belief Scale measures weight locus of control and consists of 16 items from “not at all descriptive of my beliefs” to “very descriptive of my belief” on a 6 point Likert type scale.⁷ The response for each item is scored as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 respectively and are reversed for negatively worded items. Analysis of the data was done by computing t-ratio to examine significant differences among means and Pearson's coefficient of correlation.

RESULTS

There was no significant difference between boys and girls between boys and girls in the scores of performance self-esteem (Boys: 26.81±4.54, Girls: 26.16±3.57; t-ratio: 1.125, NS) and social self-esteem (Boys: 24.88±4.79, Girls: 24.26±3.44; t-ratio: 1.052, NS). However, girls had significantly lower scores on appearance self-esteem (Boys: 23.44±4.89, Girls: 21.98±3.62; t-ratio: 2.398, p<0.05) and higher scores on dieting belief (Boys: 62.41±8.91, Girls: 65.27±8.20; t-ratio: 2.363, p<0.05) in comparison to boys. Performance self-esteem, social self-esteem, and appearance self-esteem were not significantly correlated ($r < 0.15$) with dieting belief in either the total sample or in sub-samples comprising of boys and girls.

DISCUSSION

In the present study though boys and girls had significantly different scores on appearance self-esteem, they did not have significantly different scores on performance self-esteem and social self-esteem. Similar findings have been reported by other researchers.^{8,9} Gender stereotyped expectation of physical attractiveness have a detrimental effect on self-esteem of many girls. Issues like gaining the attention of boys, approval from girl friends and self-confidence are reported to be some of the main motivations for wanting to be slim.¹⁰ Wardle and Watters reported that greater exposure to older girls at school was associated with thinner ideals, increased concern about weight and more dieting and having lower self-esteem.¹¹

Boys had significant lower scores than girls on dieting beliefs. Similar findings were reported by other authors.^{8,12} McHale et al.¹³ and Kaltiala-Heino et al.¹⁴ found girls to be more concerned about being over weight, hence, indulging in greater dieting behavior. Further, Rhea observed that girls are involved in more extreme dieting behaviors.¹⁵

Evidence on correlation between various dimensions of self-esteem and dieting beliefs is contradictory. Some studies like the present one and those by Silberstein¹⁶ and Mendelson et al.¹⁷ have not found a correlation, however, others^{9,15,18} have reported that dieting belief is correlated with self-esteem and body image. In addition Abraham found these to be more important in the case of girls.¹⁹ The reasons for differences between reports are not immediately apparent.

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