

Indian Journal of Positive Psychology

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Indian Journal of Positive Psychology

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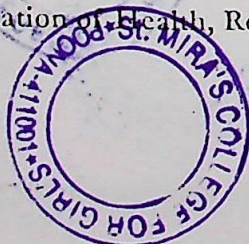
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	Indian	International
Single copy	Rs 750	\$ 30
Individual subscription price	Rs 4000 (4 issues)	\$ 150
Institutional subscription price (Postal and packaging charges included)	Rs 4000 (4 issues)	\$ 150 (Postal charges extra)

Mode of Payment: Kindly send the DD/Cheque in favor of Indian Association of Health, Research and Welfare, payable at Hisar, addressed at Dr. Sunil Saini, 1245/18, Mohalla Sainian, Hisar, Haryana, India
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Indian Journal of Positive Psychology

Volume 12

Issue-4

December, 2021

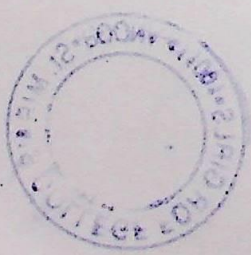
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Body Appreciation: Through the Lens of Positive Psychology

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Body image is a complex and multidimensional construct that includes self-perceptions and attitudes (thoughts, feelings, and behavior) related to the body. According to research, a person's positive or negative feelings regarding his or her physique might impact his or her well-being in the general population. The majority of body image research has focused on negative aspects such as dissatisfaction or distortion. There is a paucity of research on the protective factors that keep certain women from developing a negative body image. Despite the fact that research has shown that the characteristics linked with a good body image may be in contrast to those connected with a negative one, the predictors of a positive body image or the result of such a positive impression have received less attention. The present study attempted to look at the positive aspects of body image and to study whether resilience enhances appreciation of the body. The purpose of the study was to assess the relationship between body image appreciation and resilience. Data was collected from 100 female participants, age group 17-22 years. Materials used were a demographic sheet, Body Appreciation Scale, BMI ratings, and Resilience Scale. Results show that body image appreciation was significantly related to resilience. The outcome of the study has strengthened the need to understand the psycho social correlates of body appreciation. Results have been discussed in accordance to past research and possible implications.

Keywords: body image, resilience, positive psychology

Body image is a multifaceted construct that encompasses self-perceptions and attitudes (thoughts, feelings, & behavior) about the body (Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005; Cash, 2002). The way we relate to ourselves is heavily influenced by how we see and feel our body (Hutchinson, 1994; Mahler & McDevitt, 1982). A person's contentment (or discontent) with his or her physique is a critical component of personal self-evaluation and self-acceptance.

Dissatisfaction with one's appearance is common among girls and women. Negative body image affects girls as early as six years old, and there is evidence that women suffer with body issues throughout their lives (Lewis & Cachelin, 2001; Striegel-Moore & Franko, 2002). Negative body image has been linked to a variety of psychosocial issues, including maladaptive eating habits (Cooley & Toray, 2001); low self-esteem, anxiety about social evaluation, public self-consciousness, depression, and sexual inhibition (Ackard, Kearney-Cooke, & Peterson, 2000; Lavin & Cash, 2000); and the development of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia (Polivy & Herman, 2002). Adolescent females are subjected to cultural expectations surrounding their appearance and behavior. Body image becomes the most important component of adolescent females' overall self-esteem (Basow & Rubin, 1999).

Body image is a complex construct with both positive and negative aspects. Theory, study, and practice, on the other hand, have centered on understanding, preventing, and treating its negative

aspects. Despite the fact that research has shown that the characteristics linked with a positive body image may be in contrast to those connected with a negative one, the predictors of a positive body image or the result of such a positive impression have received less attention (Striegel-Moore & Cachelin, 1999). A positive body image, for example, has been linked to higher levels of optimism and self-esteem, as well as better coping methods for issues and emotions (Williams, Cash, & Santos, 2004).

In addition, there is a scarcity of research on the protective factors that keep certain women from developing negative body image (Cash, 2002; Striegel-Moore & Cachelin, 1999). Cash (2002) advocated a paradigm change away from studying body image as a disease, and instead focus on "the pathways by which people build meaningful experiences of embodiment" (p. 45). This shift should look at the function of protective factors and resilience by looking into the life experiences and personality qualities that help women resist severe cultural influences that cause them to be unhappy with their bodies (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Understanding positive body image is critical for preventive and therapy efforts, thus this research is critical. Current efforts to decrease negative body image may result in a neutral body image if these efforts are not made.

The study of positive body image can be guided by positive psychology, a perspective founded on hygiology (the promotion of health). Seligman, Lopez, and Fredrickson are among the proponents of this viewpoint, who argue that removing negative / maladaptive characteristics while not teaching positive / adaptive characteristics will likely result in intermediate mental health characterized by a lack of pathology but an absence of vitality (Fredrickson, 2001). Some aspects of positive body image, according to Striegel-Moore and Cachelin (2002) may be distinct and not merely the polar opposites of those linked with negative body image. Avalos and colleagues (2005) looked at the literature on body image and found four elements that imply positive body

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Acceptance of the body despite weight, shape, and flaws: respect for the body by listening to its needs and engaging in healthy activities; and protection of the body by rejecting unrealistic media representations. To reflect these concepts, the Body Appreciation Scale (BAS) (Avalos et al., 2005) was developed. Body appreciation was linked to a variety of well-being indicators in women (self-esteem, optimism, proactive coping).

Resilience is a dynamic process including an interplay between internal and external risk and protective systems that can change the consequences of a traumatic life experience (Rutter, 1985). Researchers have been studying resilience as a construct for a long time. Despite being exposed to risk and hardship, children and teenagers were able to manage and adapt, according to the researchers. Resilience, according to empirical data, is dynamic, developmental, and interacting with one's environment (Ahern, 2008).

Rubin et al. (2004) conducted one of the first studies to link the concept of resilience to body image dissatisfaction. The authors looked at college women to see how the feminist perspective not only helps to ward off societal pressures, but also intervenes in the process of body dissatisfaction and allows women to maintain positive body images. Previous study has found a strong link between self-reliance, strong identity, and positive body image in girls, indicating that these traits contribute to a greater sense of competence and independence, making girls less prone to body image issues (Celio, Zabinski, & Wilfley, 2002). Resiliency as a measurable factor, however, was not specifically examined in these studies.

The term "resilience" has been defined in a variety of ways. We define the word here as the ability to successfully cope with change or adversity, as defined by Wagnild et al. (1993). Perseverance, or the act of persisting in the face of adversity or discouragement, is one of the five qualities of resilience that serve as the conceptual framework for the Resilience Scale (Wagnild et al., 1993). Equanimity is a balanced view of life and events, and it may be described as letting go and taking whatever comes your way, therefore tempering excessive reactions to hardship. The awareness that life has a purpose and that there is something for which to live is defined as meaningfulness. Finally, existential aloneness is the awareness that everyone is distinct, and that while certain experiences may be shared, others must be confronted alone. There is a sense of individuality and possibly freedom that comes with existential aloneness (Wagnild & Young, 1990, 1993).

While resilience has been studied in a variety of health-related domains, there have been few empirical research on the impact of resiliency on body acceptance in young women. Given that body image issues can establish the foundation for eating disorders, such study would be beneficial to health professionals working in adolescent preventative programs to assess the need for increased monitoring (Harrison, 2001; Devlin & Zhu, 2001).

Therefore, the objective of this study was to explore the relationship between body image appreciation and resilience among female adolescents from urban backgrounds in the city of Pune. Here, we hypothesize that resiliency may have a measurable enhancing effect on body image appreciation in young women. Specifically, we hypothesize that as a young woman's resilience increases, her body image appreciation will increase.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants in this study were girl students from colleges in Pune city, Maharashtra. Their age range was 17-21 yrs. Their mean age was 18.79 yrs. Female students voluntarily participated in the anonymous study. Participants were recruited through undergraduate classes.

The questionnaire consisted of 38 items including two scales, one which measured body image appreciation and the other resiliency. Demographic questions included age, height, weight.

Instruments

Resiliency: The 25 survey questions comprised the resiliency scale developed by Wagnild et al. (1993). Validity of the scale was determined through factor analysis with a reported coefficient of .91. Scale questions utilized a 7-point Likert scale with 1 representing "I strongly disagree" and 7 representing "I strongly agree". Examples of questions are: "When I make plans I follow through with them," "I feel proud that I have accomplished things in my life," "I have self-discipline," and "When I am in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way out of it." Resiliency scores were calculated by summing the responses across the 25 questions. Respondents could score between a minimum of 25 to a maximum of 175 on the scale. A higher score equated to a higher level of resiliency.

Body Appreciation (BAS; Avalos et al., 2005): This 13-item instrument, comprises a single dimension and shows adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's α coefficient = .94) and construct validity. BAS items are rated along a 5-point scale (i.e., 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always) and are averaged to obtain an overall body appreciation score.

BMI ratings were calculated on the basis of reported height and weight. In assigning participants to a weight category, those adolescents whose BMIs were at or below 18.5 to the underweight category, those between the 18.5 and 23 to the normal weight category, those between the 23 and 24.9 to the overweight category and those at or above 25 to the obese category.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive analyses were conducted for the variables of age, resiliency, Body appreciation and BMI.

The primary variables of resilience and body appreciation were then calculated. The Pearson Product moment correlation was used to assess the relationship between the scores on the Resilience scale and BAS.

Results

Demographics

Table 1

Distribution of Sample by Body Mass Index (N=100)

BMI cut-off points	Significance	Number of participants	%
<18.5	Underweight	30	30
18.5-22.9	Normal	50	50
23-24.9	Overweight	8	8
>25	Obese	12	12



Completed questionnaires were received from 100 students. Additionally, 30 % females had BMIs at or below the lower weight group (underweight), 50 % females had BMIs in the middle weight group (normal), and 20 % females had BMIs in the heavier weight group (overweight & obese).

Resilience

The Resilience measure questions were answered by all 100 respondents. The minimum reported resilience score was 56 and the maximum 110. The mean resiliency score was 88.74 (SD 9.3).

Body Appreciation

The Body Image Appreciation measure questions were answered by all 100 respondents. The minimum reported body appreciation score was 20 and the maximum was 52. The mean BAS score was 31.86, SD was 4.7.

Comparative Analysis

Relation between Body Appreciation and Resilience: Bivariate analysis revealed significant relationship between primary variables.

Table II

Relationship between Body Appreciation and Resilience of College Women

	N	Mean	SD	r	p
Resilience	100	88.74	9.3	0.220*	0.05
Body appreciation	100	31.86	4.7		

When Pearson correlations examining the relation between body image satisfaction and resilience were computed, women were found to have a significant positive correlation between the two, $r = 0.220$, $p = .05$

Table III

Relationship between Body Image Appreciation and BMI of College Women

	N	Mean	SD	r	p
Body image appreciation	100	31.86	4.7	-0.47	0.05
BMI	100	20.61	4.02		

Similarly, the relation between the Body Mass Index and Body appreciation was computed, women were found to have a significant negative correlation between the two, $r = -0.47$, $p = 0.05$.

Discussion

Body image dissatisfaction is a normative discontent in Western culture, according to Thompson (1990). This is especially true among college women. The majority of body image research has been on the negative elements of dissatisfaction and disorders. There is a scarcity of research on the positive features of body appreciation and the associated variables that might prevent women from BID. In response to these concerns, this study looked into the positive aspects of body image in an Indian urban sample, as well as the links between body appreciation and college women's resilience.

As has been noted in previous research, participants in this study also indicated a general trend that as BMI increased, body satisfaction decreased. The findings of Hausenblas and Fallon (2001) and Kostanski and Gullone (1998) support these findings. Individuals with a greater BMI had poorer self-rated bodily

attractiveness, as expected. It appears to be a common observation that overweight teenagers are less likely to be happy with their bodies.

As hypothesized, results from this study indicate that there is a significant relationship between the level of a woman's resilience and holding a positive body image. This study backs up the findings, of Rubin et al. (2004) who found a link between positive body image and resilience in the form of feminist ideas. These findings are significant because they show that resilience has the ability to reduce body image dissatisfaction in young women.

Self-direction, defined as an individual's feeling of mindfulness and intentionality in attaining key life objectives, is an essential part of resilience (Myers et al., 2000). Sense of worth, control, realistic beliefs, emotional awareness and coping, problem solving and creativity, self-care, and stress management are all components of this dimension. Each of these subtasks adds to body image resilience because women who have mastered them feel empowered to take charge of their life in all aspects.

During adolescence, girls encounter several developmental transformations and concerns. They require internal resources in order to effectively deal with life's challenges. Unfortunately, many women focus on their weight and appearance to avoid dealing with these complex and challenging issues. Steiner-Adair and Vorenberg (1999) noted that "Clearly, dieting, eating, and spending are not suitable strategies for coping with life's ups and downs. yet it is not surprising that women turn to these self-limiting practices in times of need". It has been observed that to help girls foster a positive body image there is a need to include both specific areas of body resilience as also overall global resilience. As a result, life skills training (e.g., improving problem-solving abilities, interpersonal competence, assertive communication, stress management methods, & internal locus of control) has become an increasingly important programme component in the prevention of BID and eating disorders (McVey & Davis, 2002).

According to the resilience model, when girls place too much focus on their physical appearance, they may overlook the development of supportive connections and key life skills that are necessary for coping with the challenges of adolescence (Striegel-Moore & Cachelin, 1999). In order to build body image resilience, a sense of holistic wellness and balance indicates the need of boosting and balancing all life domains. Girls grow to see their identities as extending beyond their appearances when they are encouraged to develop and cherish their strengths in different life dimensions, such as spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional, and physical competence. Girls can cultivate the resilience needed to navigate the complex social and developmental obstacles of adolescence by reclaiming their capabilities. Women who have the coping skills to deal successfully with stressors and resolve developmental changes may be a potential protective factor in body image development. Traditionally, health-care interventions have followed a pathology-based model that stresses deficiencies and problem-solving. Redirecting health care to recognise strengths and establish plans to build on current capabilities by focusing on ideas like resilience is essential.

Enhancing reliance and a focus on successful prevention programs are key values of positive psychology. Positive psychology is a growing field that emphasises the development of strengths rather than the correction of flaws in order to improve



treatment efficacy. The findings of this study highlight the importance of developing prevention programmes that focus on building general resilience in young women and highlighting positive aspects of body image in order to foster love and respect for their bodies. The nature of resilience in college-aged women, as well as its sources and roles, will require more research in the future. While these findings imply that resilience can help those with negative body image, it's still unknown how resilience is built and maintained in this population.

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Received October 12, 2021

Revision received November 1, 2021

Accepted November 4, 2021

