

EFFECTS OF SELF-CONCEPT, BODY DISSATISFACTION AND GENDER ON STUDENT'S FEAR OF NEGATIVE EVALUATION IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the effect of self-concept, body dissatisfaction and gender on students' fear of negative evaluation. A sample of 420 university students, including males (n = 200,) and females (n = 220), from Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University were used for the study. The samples were collected through purposive sampling technique. The students were randomly drawn from three departments out of 6 from the Faculty of Social Sciences namely psychology, mass communication and political science. 120 students were selected from psychology department, 140 from political science while 140 students were selected from mass communication department. Their age ranged from 17 years to 25 years with a mean age of 21.0. Index of self Esteem developed by Hudson (1982), Body Dissatisfaction Assessment Questionnaire and Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation were the three instruments used in this study. The study was a cross- sectional survey with six groups (self-concept: high and low, gender: male and female, body dissatisfaction: high and low. Analysis of variance ANOVA with unequal sample size was used for data analysis. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, IBM SPSS version 26 and significance was accepted at $P < .05$. The result indicated a significant mean difference between

undergraduates that had high self-concept and those that had low concept. The second hypothesis was also accepted indicating that those that had high body dissatisfaction experienced fear of negative evaluation than those with low body dissatisfaction. Finally, gender did not have any effect on fear of negative evaluation. The findings were discussed and it was recommended that every university should establish a psychological service center to offer psychotherapy and psychoeducation to the university community.

Keywords: self-concept, body dissatisfaction, gender, students' fear, negative evaluation.

Introduction

The fear of evaluation encompasses social anxiety stemming from the assessment by others, and can be classified into fear of positive evaluation (FPE) and fear of negative evaluation (FNE) (Birk et al., 2019). Carleton et al. (2016) defined fear of negative evaluation as the apprehension and distress arising from concern about being judged despairingly or hostilely by others. Basically people with a high degree of fear of negative evaluation are overly concerned with how they are judged or perceived by other people. They tend to imagine that they are being perceived in negative ways and they are often inhibited in their behaviour as a result. This people are also more responsive to situational factors, conformity, and pre-social behavior etc. Additionally, it can be observed in all social evaluation scenarios, such as testing, being on a date, conversations with superiors, job interviews, and speeches (Watson et al., 2018). Certain aspects of personality, including social avoidance, anxiety, and submissiveness, are correlated with fear of receiving an

unfavorable assessment. The idea that dread of perceived unfavorable judgment is a contributing factor in social anxiety is supported by a number of cognitive theories and prior studies (Clark & Wells 2015; Rapee & Heimbeig, 2017; Achebe, & Onyemaechi, 2023).

Social anxiety is a perceived negative evaluation by others whereas fear of negative evaluation is related to dread of being evaluated despairingly when participating in a social situation. Social anxiety is purely an emotional reaction to this type of social phobia. Fear of being negatively evaluated is thought to be a latent construct that fosters the emergence and manifestation of more widespread anxieties, psychopathologies, and fears (Reiss & McNally, 2018). There is some heritability to this hidden dread (Stein, Jang, & Livesley, 2020). Considering the importance of constructive, fruitful social interaction, especially for those who are afraid of therapy (Alden & Taylor, 2021; Segrin, 2021) increased understanding of effect of fear of negative evaluation and its correlates becomes imperative.

Self-concept is another important variable of interest as it contributes a lot in determining whether a person would develop the fear of being negatively evaluated by people. The self-concept is a general term used to refer to how someone thinks about or perceives himself. The self-concept can be defined as an organized knowledge structure or cognitive schema that contains all known information about the self, including past experiences, current knowledge, feelings, beliefs and self-evaluations (Markus, 2019). While the self-concept was once conceptualized as a stable, generalised view of the self, it is now viewed as a dynamic and multifaceted structure, which influences areas as diverse as self-regulation, goal setting, information processing, affect

regulation, motivation, social perception, situation and partner choice, interaction strategies, and reactions to feedback (Markus & Wurf, 2019). This dynamic conceptualization allowed for the observation that an individual's self-concept could alter based on their currently accessible thoughts, attitudes and beliefs, which may be influenced by factors such as their current motivational state or social surroundings (Markus, & Wurf, 2019). However, social cognitive researchers have found out that people vary in the stability of their self-concept (Campbell et al, 2016), and propose that an unstable self-concept results in sensitivity and susceptibility to self-relevant feedback (Campbell, 2016). Psychologist, Carl Rogers (2019), was the first to establish the notion of self-concept. Everyone aspires to become their "ideal self," according to Rogers, and the closer one is to this self, the happier they will be.

If this objective is not met, the person may show signs of fearing being negatively evaluated by others, and they will typically steer clear of socially judgmental circumstances. According to Rogers, receiving "Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) from others" is one element that contributes to a person's happiness. UPR includes giving the receiver the same amount of attention regardless of their feelings and frequently happens in close family relationships. Psychologically healthy people, in Rogers' opinion, actively seek out validation from within themselves rather than settling for roles that others have set for them. However, the self-concept of neurotic persons does not align with their experiences. They misrepresent their experiences because they are scared to acknowledge them as true, either for self-defense or to gain favor from others. Self-categorization theory (SCT), which holds that self-concept consists of at least two levels—a personal identity and a social identity—is one significant theory pertaining to self-concept. Put another way, one's

assessment of oneself is dependent on their own perception as well as that of others. On the other side, a positive self-evaluation fosters confidence in social circumstances. If someone believes they are inadequate, this negative self-evaluation will likely negatively affect their behavior or temperament.

Positive body image is important because it is one of the protection factors which can make a person more resilient to eating disorders, body dimorphic disorder, excessive exercise and other unfavorable behaviours. When someone is able to embrace, value, and respect their body, they have a positive body image. For all people, looks matters a great deal. It may have an impact on a person's self-perception, interactions with others, daily attention to appearance, and behaviours maintained to uphold one's reputation (Sloan, 2015). On the other hand, body dissatisfaction refers to unfavourable feelings regarding one's own appearance, form, colour, weight, height, etc, (Obi, 2016, Okonkwo, et al., 2022). Although it stems from inside, a number of external circumstances might have an impact on body dissatisfaction. For instance, how a person feels and perceives themselves and their looks is influenced by a variety of sources, including the media, teachers, friends, and acquaintances. People who work in appearance-focused environments or who hear unfavourable remarks about their looks are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction (Onyemaechi, et al., 2021).

Body dissatisfaction is a negative feeling about oneself, figure, color, weight and height among many other variables. Both male and female seemed to be bothered by their personal appearances and as a result gender is an essential factor in this study. Male and female young adults especially

those in the university are so conscious of their size, colour, weight and demands acceptance. Studies in body dissatisfaction suggests that males are less concern with their body image and as a result do not exhibit fears of negative evaluation while some said otherwise. This research work brings out the role of gender in self-evaluation especially in the south eastern part of Nigeria. Observations have revealed that ideal body image as established by mass media in this present-day are young, tall, slim, dark, fair with at least moderately large breasts and hips including eye lashes with long painted nails and hair especially for young ladies. On the other hand, Macho men with big chest, fine face, no pimples, tall and well-groomed as for men. This iconic image is construed by them that seemed to be socially acceptable norms such as women should invest in their beauty; slim fit is more adorable, normal, healthy and achievable through personal perseverance. This development has been accompanied by increased media attention to taking slimming teas and supplements, exercising and weightlifting's paths to sexual though not romantic prowess, and by adoration of dominating, hyper masculine action figures. Thus the social pressure to achieve this "ideal" body image according to (Ibida, & Agbu, 2014) could cause many people to develop a negative self-image and fear negative evaluation. Negative self-image typically stems from the belief that one is socially unacceptable, unattractive, or inferior to others, and can lead to emotional and interpersonal problems. However, dread of receiving an unfavorable review could lead to avoidance behaviors and social anxiety, which exacerbates low self-esteem. There is also an amplified value placed on peer acceptance and endorsement, and heightened awareness to external influences and social messages about cultural norms. Such beliefs in peer acceptance and endorsements including bodily changes associated with puberty, the quick physical growth and

subsequent sexual maturation that define adolescence and early adulthood, and these factors probably cause awkwardness and feelings of self-consciousness regarding one's perspective of one's body (Anazonwu, et al., 2019; Onyemaechi, et al., 2017). Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the impact of self-perception, body dissatisfaction, and gender on undergraduates' fear of negative evaluation as to cushion the negative consequences of fear and negative self evaluation which seems to be detrimental to the psychological well being of students. There is little or no research to fill the gap in knowledge with respect to the study variables in Africa and Nigeria in particular especially in south east. Such Nigerian based study especially in the South East region is crucial to verify the validity of some of the findings of studies on fear of negative evaluation across cultures.

Purpose of the Study

This study's main goal was to investigate the effect of self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and gender on undergraduates' fear of negative evaluation. Therefore, the specific purposes were:

1. To determine if there will be a significant difference between undergraduate students who have low self-concept and those who have high self-concept in fear of negative evaluation.
2. To identify if there will be a significant difference between undergraduate students who have body dissatisfaction and those who do not have body dissatisfaction in fear of negative evaluation.

Research Questions

Given the stated problem of the study, the following pertinent questions guided the study.

1. Will there be a significant difference between undergraduate students who has low self-concept and those who have high self-concept in fear of negative evaluation?
2. Will there be a significant difference between undergraduate students who have body dissatisfaction and those who do not have body dissatisfaction in fear of negative evaluation?

Methods

Participants

A sample of 420 university students, including males ($n = 200$,) and females ($n = 220$,), from Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University were used for the study. The samples were collected through purposive sampling technique. The students were randomly drawn from three departments out of 6 from the faculty of social sciences namely psychology, mass communication and political science. 120 students were selected from psychology department, 140 from political science while 140 students were selected from mass communication department. Their age ranged from 17 years to 25 years with a mean age of 21.0.

Instruments

These set of instrument were used:

- Index of self Esteem
- Body Dissatisfaction Assessment Questionnaire

- Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation - Straightforward Scale (BFNE-S)

Index of self Esteem

The Index of Self - Esteem is a standardized psychological assessment instrument developed by Hudson (1982) and validated for use with Nigerian samples by Omoluabi (1997). The instrument contains 25 items designed to measure the self perceived and self evaluative component of self-concept which the sum total of the self perceived and the other is perceived views of the self held by a person. It is scored on a 4 point scale ranging from 1 to 4 as follows, 1- Rarely or none of the time, 2 - A little of the time, 3- Some of the time, 4- Most or all the time, For scoring, items 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 15, 18, 21, 22, 23, 25 were scored in a reverse direction to obtain consistency of scoring. Separate norms have been reported for male and female Nigerian samples as follows: males = 30.89, females = 32.04 (Omoluabi, .1997). In this study, the Nigerian norm was the basis for interpreting the scores of the participants. Scores lower than the norm indicates high self esteem while scores higher than the norm indicates inadequate or low self esteem. The instrument has been used in research with Nigerian samples (Onighaiye, 1996) and has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure. Hudson (1982) obtained a co-efficient alpha of .93 and a two hour test retest co-efficient of .92. Onighaiye (1996) reported a concurrent validity of .46. In this study, cronbach alpha of .70 was obtained. Anazonwu(2019) obtained a cronback alpha of 0.70.

Body Dissatisfaction Assessment Questionnaire

The items on body dissatisfaction question were adapted from the Eating and Body Image Quick Assessment Scale developed by Eating Disorder and Body Image concerns Task Force of George

Mason University, USA (2004). The guide was designed for use as a resource in understanding eating disorders, identifying problem behaviours, and if necessary, making a referral. The items for measuring body dissatisfaction in the present study were drawn from this source and rephrased to assess body dissatisfaction. An example of an item from the body dissatisfaction questionnaire is: "I am anxious about how people perceive and judge my appearance." The face and content validities of the items were ascertained with Cronbach alpha reliability of 0.73. (Amazue & Obi, 2016) The final instrument was a likert type questionnaire with four options: Strongly Agree = 4; Agree = 3; Disagree = 2; and Strongly Disagree = 1.

Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation - Straightforward Scale (BFNE-S).

It is a 12 item self-report measure of fear and distress related to negative evaluation from others. Rodebaugh et al. (2004) and Weeks, Norton, and Heimberg (2009) have reported that the 8 straightforwardly worded items of the BFNE are more reliable and valid indicators of fear of negative evaluation than the reverse-scored items. Based on 8 items, it is a revised version of the BFNE (Carleton, Collimore, McCabe, & Antony, 2011). Each item on this self-report measure is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*). This scale includes item statements such as; "I am afraid that others will not approve of me"; and "I often worry that I will say or do wrong things". A total score on the scale corresponds to the degree of fear an individual holds for being negatively evaluated. The minimum score of the scale is 8 and the maximum score is 40. High score indicates high fear of negative evaluation.

Procedure

Approval for the study was obtained by the researcher from the heads of departments involved. Written informed consent was equally obtained from each participant after the researchers offered a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study. The researcher employed the help of a research assistant. The researcher assistants helped in administering the instruments to each participant who were willing to participate in the study. The patients were informed of their right to refuse participation. The participants were instructed on how to complete the questionnaires and were encouraged to do so honestly. The questionnaires were administered to the participants after recruitment into the study by signing the informed consent form. The participants were individually administered the questionnaires by the researcher and research assistant. The properly filled copies of the questionnaires were analyzed using the appropriate statistics.

Design and Statistics

The study was a cross- sectional survey with six groups (self-concept-high and low, gender-male and female, body dissatisfaction- high and low. Analysis of variance ANOVA with unequal sample size was used for data analysis. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, IBM SPSS version 26 and significance was accepted at $P < .05$.

Results

Table I: mean Scores and standard deviations of the Various Groups c

Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation

Variable		Mean	Standard Deviation
Gender:	Male	27.72	7.09
	Female	27.91	6.51
Self Esteem:	High	25,35	6.01
	Low	30.49	6.58
Body Dissatisfaction:	High	30.43	6.78
	Low	25.43	5.87

The results, as shown in Table 1 above, show that the mean scores male undergraduate students (27.72) did not differ much from that of the female counterparts (27.91). On the contrary, the result showed that student with high self-concept scored lower ($M = 25.35$, $SD = 6.01$) than those with low self-concept ($M = 30.49$, $SD = 6.58$). Similarly, the result showed the students with high body dissatisfaction scored higher ($M = 30.43$, $SD = 6.78$) than those with low body dissatisfaction ($M = 25.43$, $SD = 5.87$).

Table 2: ANOVA Summary Table of Gender x Self-concept x Body Dissatisfaction on Fear of Negative Evaluation

Source of variance	Sum of Square	DF	Ms	F-Ratio	Significance
Gender (A)	25.32	1	25.32	0.68	NS
Self-concept (B)	1217.12	1	1217.12	32.61	.001

Body Dissatisfaction	1085.01	1	1085.01	29.07	.001
(c)	40.49	1	40.49	1.09	
A x B	0.51	1	0.51	0.01	NS
A x C	0.76	1	0.76	0.02	NS
A x B x C	15377.41	1	37.32		NS
Error					

NS - not significant

Two out of the three main effects were statistically significant. The results in Table 2 showed that gender was not statistically significant. The results revealed a significant effect of high self-concept on university undergraduates scores on their fear of negative evaluation, $F(1, 413) = 32.61$, $p < .001$. In addition, Table 2 showed a statistically significant low body dissatisfaction of undergraduates scores on fear of negative evaluation, $F(1, 413) = 29.07$, $p < .001$. There were no interaction effects.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis which stated that there will be a significant difference between undergraduates with high self-concept and those with low self-concept was accepted. This means that the higher an individual's self-concept the lower the possibility of the person to have fear of negative evaluation which is a form of anxiety. This is line with certain previous studies (Nwankwo et al, 2020; Ummer, 2024). From the result, it is evident that fear of negative evaluation and self-esteem are negatively related, that is a high level of self-concept causes a decrease in fear of negative

evaluation while a low level of self-concept increases fear of negative evaluation. Fear of negative evaluation is considered to be a hallmark of social anxiety. In this study, the sample were young adults and they are observed to be possessing high fear of being negatively evaluated. So, it is obvious that they had low self-esteem. According to Kashdan et al. (2011), those classified as individuals with high social anxiety require more self-control than their counterparts in many social encounters, and the demands for self-control will be particularly elevated during stressful or challenging social interactions. In other words, those who were awkward and socially withdrawn ruminated over a lot about potential ostracism in society (Blackhart et al., 2015). They thus frequently participated in avoidance behaviours, such as excessive nodding, seeking for validation, speaking very little, or attempting to divert attention by asking others pointed questions (Clark & Wells, 1995). The result of this study can be linked to the social cognitive perspectives which support the notion that the apprehension of being evaluated negatively from others, which is found to rise steadily from childhood to adulthood, is the core feature of social anxiety. The family plays a major role in the development of one's self-concept. Any individuals that grow up from a disoriented family where the parents are not together without receiving enough love and care from family tends to have low self-concept and as a result may likely have fear of negative evaluation. Parent's socio economic status (SES) can be another variable of interest in explaining the outcome of this present study. This entails the parents level of income which determines who is who in the society. Any young person that perceives that he or she is from a poor background tend to have fear of negative evaluation by others he or she feels is well to do. These set of persons feel intimidated because maybe of dressings, housing and feeding of the other people and as a result

may lead the student to antisocial behaviours like stealing, prostitution, bullying, aggressive tendencies, yahoo business and other forms of cybercrimes.

Peer Pressure can be another variable in the explanation of the result of this present study. Since students or young person's spend a big portion of their time with peers, their behaviours tend to influence them. It has been observed that most young people has internalize the advertised body images of slim ,tall girls with firm breast as the acceptable normal and if not achieved the persons develops fear of negative evaluation.

The second hypothesis which stated that undergraduate students with high body dissatisfaction will have more fear of evaluation than those with low body dissatisfaction was also accepted. This is line with some previous empirical studies like Trompeter et al. (2018), Kaviraj et al.. (2016), Maggie, Christopher and judy, (2009), Kaviray, et al. (2016), Divya and Mayuri (2015) with many others as well. The outcome of the result indicated that the more an individual is dissatisfied with the body image the more the person will have fear of negative evaluation. On the other hand an individual who does not feel dissatisfied with his or her body image will not exhibit fear of negative evaluation. Acceptance with an individual's appearance is the key which inhibits fear of negative evaluation while non acceptance of body image increases fear of negative evaluation. This result of this study can be explained by the fact that fear of negative evaluation has a shared feature of both eating disorder symptoms and social anxiety which may be extended to ones shape and weight. Furthermore, the result is in line with socio-cultural theory by Vygotsky (1934, 1978). Vygotsky believed that cognitive development is influenced by cultural and social factors. He

emphasized the role of social interaction in the development of mental abilities e.g., speech and reasoning in children.

Since the individual started from a home then a community with divers cultural beliefs, it is quick to understand that the family and community plays a major role in an individual's perception of body image and bodily perception which can be linked to fear of negative evaluation. In support of the findings, socio- cultural theory suggests that adolescents who experience high levels of fear of negative evaluation may experience greater weight/shape concerns if their body shape is not aligned with sociocultural norms (Dunkleyetal.2001). Given that obsessed adolescents are at greater risk for weight/shape concerns compared to their healthy weight peers (Gall etal.2016). The results of the current study is suggestive that undergraduates with a higher body dissatisfaction may experience higher fear of negative evaluation and greater weight/shape concerns than their healthy weight peers who experience similar levels of low body dissatisfaction and fear of negative evaluation.

Conclusions

This study investigated the effect of self-concept, gender and body dissatisfaction on fear of negative evaluation among undergraduates. The results of the study indicated that there a significant difference between those with high self-concept and those with low self-concept on fear of negative evaluation among undergraduates. Increase in self-concept will lead to decrease in fear of negative evaluation while decrease in self-concept will lead to increase in fear of negative evaluation. Secondly, there was significant difference among students with high body

dissatisfaction and those with low body dissatisfaction on fear of negative evaluation among undergraduates. In conclusion, self esteem serves as a protective factor in fear of negative evaluation and should be encouraged.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that clinicians should conduct empirical research on a larger scale in this area and on the topic in regards to self-concept, gender, body dissatisfaction and fear of negative evaluation.
2. It is equally recommended that government should include psychological services center in every university to ensure that undergraduates are assessed during orientation and final year to equip them psychologically.

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