

BODY APPRECIATION AS ANTECEDENTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG FEMALE UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract

The suggestion that the only strategy to prevent the onset of eating disorder is to foster body appreciation attitude remains the central point of this research article. This, however, entails that positive' rational acceptance of the body seems to be a cognitive attribute of body appreciation that may increase the level of psychological well-being of every individual against body image-related threat and eating disorders. Researching on this will serve as a source of safe immunity against campus stress. This study therefore investigated body appreciation as antecedents of psychological well-being among female undergraduates. Three hundred female undergraduates aged 15 to 33 years ($M = 23.34$ years, $SD = 2.67$) participated in the study. The Body Appreciation Scale and Psychological Well-being Scale (PWB) were the instruments used to measure body appreciation and psychological well-being respectively. Purposive sampling technique was used for data collection and a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used for data analysis. The result of the analysis showed that body appreciation positively predicted psychological well-being, indicating that those with positive body appreciation reported more psychological well-being. It was concluded that body appreciation should be considered as an important factor in psychosocial interventions to enhance the psychological well-being of female undergraduates.

Keywords: Body appreciation; psychological well-being, undergraduates.

Introduction

Often, the issue of campus health may not be fully defined without duly assessing the level of psychological well-being of those found within the campus. This study precisely sought to investigate this in female undergraduate students on the campus. Psychological well-being of female students is often disrupted by stressful situation originated from the campus environment, which may include the need to meet up with test and examination requirement, and social relationship. Psychological well-being is a positive construct that serves as safe immunity against stress, and it can seriously minimize the need for negative coping strategies (Ukeh & Hassan, 2018). Psychological well-being consists of positive emotions and moods such as contentment, and happiness; the absence of negative emotions such as depression, and anxiety; satisfaction with life, fulfillment and positive functioning (Oniyangi, Jamiu, Igben, Alaro, Babangida, & Danlami, 2019).

Psychological well-being is a positive psychological construct that comprises individual's experience of deep happiness, resilience, wisdom, physical and social well-being (Oniyangi, 2019). These capacities allow female students to develop the strengths that will help them against stress and help them to prevent both mental and physical illness (Parkinson, 2006). Almost every human person longs for fullness of health. Psychological well-being is a positive construct that is necessary for effective human functioning. It is characterized by three central

components. First, satisfactions with life (Forgas, 2002); Second, the relative presence of positive affect (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002); and finally, relative absence of negative affect (Deci & Ryan, 2001). Female students with high degree of psychological well-being could excel in all fields of study and attain higher levels of academic satisfaction, and can reason well about themselves and others. Diener, Wirtz, Tov, Kim-Prieto, Choi, Oishi, and Biswas-Diener (2009) defined psychological well-being to represent optimal human functioning. It includes positive characteristics of psychological growth and development. It also means total positive evaluation of one's own life, one's positive evaluation regarding their own social life, relationships, and life satisfaction. These evaluations of life, according to Diener and Suh, (1997), can be from two perspectives' that is, cognitive and affective. The cognitive evaluation includes information based appraisal. This involves the evaluation mostly based on the fact about the amount of satisfaction that one has with one's current life status. The affective evaluation is the indulgent kind. It is mostly a feeling based evaluation. This kind of evaluation includes how often one experiences the feelings of happiness and sadness. The assumption behind this is that some female students attach a lot of importance to good and bad, and hence, they evaluate their lives in the same way (that is, good or bad). This study takes a positive psychology perspective to study the variable that may seem suspicious to predict female students' psychological well-being. Researching on this variables may predict the core variable that may contribute to female student's high degree of psychological well-being; and may be useful in understanding the level of psychological well-being found among these students which comprises the degree to which female students are self-accepting and pursuing meaningful goals with a sense of purpose in life, have established quality ties with others, are autonomous in thought and action, have the ability to manage complex environments to suit personal needs and values, and continue to grow and develop with fullness of health.

One variable considered here is 'body appreciation'. This is because the manner in which many female students develop a sense of body appreciation is a healthy process that has received scanty previous attention. For instance, the view that the body image of an individual has implications for their psychological functioning and well-being and low self-esteem' according to Tiwari (2014) are some of the most studied consequences of low body image belief. Sukkyung, and Kyulee (2019) assert that the physical changes that occur within the period of adolescent with secondary sexual characteristics allow the female students to develop a deep view about their body, and thus, are more likely to base on social pressure with regard to their body image than other age groups.

Body appreciation' according to Wood - Barcalow, Tylka, and Augustus - Horvath (2010) refers to an overarching love and respect for the body that allows individuals to appreciate the unique beauty of their body and the functions that it performs for them. It is the capability of an individual to accept and even admire their body, including those aspects that are inconsistent with idealized images; feelings of self-beauty, comfortable, confident, and happy with the body, which is often reflected as an outer radiance, or a "glow"; emphasizing on their body assets rather than dwell on their imperfections. It also includes interpreting incoming information in a body - protective manner whereby most positive information is internalized and most negative information is rejected or reframed.

Body appreciation is a unique characteristic of positive body image. It is a healthy balance between accepting and appreciating certain things about the shape, substance and functions of one's body without relative presence of preoccupation on them. It is often conceptualized as solely the absence of negative features. It portrays positive body image and absence of pathology. Body appreciation' according to Wood-Barcolow et al. (2010), however is not merely the absence of negative body image perception, nor is it merely the presence of body satisfaction, rather it is the absence of negative body image perception and the presence of high level of psychological well-being about the body. Wood-Barcolow suggested that body appreciation is an important prevention and treatment goal of body image-related threat. Little is known on how to achieve body appreciation attitude, though Striegel-Moore and Cochelin (1999, p. 85) stated that "understanding the combination of factors that lead to body appreciation and healthy eating is important for developing prevention efforts in the area of eating disorders". Williams, Cash, and Santos, (2004) tried to point out how to achieve body appreciation attitude by uncovering three distinct groups using cluster analysis with college women; women with positive body image (51%), women with normative body image discontent (23%), and women with negative body image (24%).

Furthermore, Cash, Santos, and Williams (2005) coined the concept of body appreciation as positive rational acceptance, which entails engaging in adaptive mental and behavioural activities such as positive self-care and rational self-talk that reflect the acceptance of the body against body image-related threats. Examples of threats to body image include being teased about weight, seeing advertisements and/or models who conform to media appearance ideals, being told to go on a doctor's office, and realizing an article of clothing has become tighter in the waistband. Conversely, female students who had undergone rapid physical changes depend more easily on peoples' evaluation of their body and appearance than on their own evaluation and, therefore, they are highly sensitive to the body image obtainable in the society (Sukkyung, et. al, 2019).

During body image-related threats, female undergraduate students who are positive in appreciation of the body may remind themselves of their good qualities and tell themselves that the situation will pass or may not be that important and permanent. Indeed, body appreciation according to Wood-Barcolow et al. (2010)' is a positive rational acceptance of the individual's body image and it seems to be related to psychological functioning and well-being of female individual. Thus, psychological well-being is thought to be associated with mindful, accepting, and satisfying relationship with bodies (Cash et. al., 2005). However, one strategy that could help to promote psychological well-being of female undergraduate students is to foster positive body image such as self-worth and appreciation for the functionality and diverse appearances of the body (Menzel & Levine, 2011).

One of the researchers of eating disorders and prevention has suggested that the only strategy to prevent the onset of eating disorder is to foster body appreciation attitude (Carey & Preston, 2019; Smolak, 1999). This, however, entails that positive rational acceptance of the body seems to be a cognitive attribute of body appreciation that may increase the level of psychological well-being of every individual against body image-related threat and eating disorders. Observations have shown that more inclination in photo-based enjoyment in Facebook such as viewing photos posted by others, sharing one's own photos, engaging on appearance-focused accounts on Instagram, and spending time in selecting and editing one's picture before

posting or sharing them online, are all associated to body image concerns and appreciation among female (Cohen, Newton-John & Slater 2017; 2018).

Therefore, it may seem possible that a female undergraduate student who appreciates the attributes of their bodies might attain high degree of psychological well-being. Studying the adaptive facets of body image would be consistent with the positive psychology movement by underscoring character strengths and virtues that may increase and maintain individual's psychological well-being.

The Present Study

This study attempts to provide an important complement to one of psychology's traditional goals: the understanding of unhappiness or ill-being in the form of depression, anxiety, and unpleasant emotions. Thus, the addition of a positive orientation towards female undergraduate's psychological well-being provides an additional perspective for researchers. In so doing, the current study tries to provide an answer to the following research question.

1. Will body appreciation significantly predict psychological well-being among female undergraduates?

Hypotheses

In view of the literature reviewed thus far, the following hypothesis was also postulated:

1. Body appreciation will significantly predict psychological well-being among female undergraduate students.

Method

A total number of 300 undergraduate female students participated in the study. They were drawn from Ebonyi State University, Abakiliki, Nigeria. From three departments (Political Science, Economics, and Sociology/Anthropology). The three departments were randomly selected out of nine departments in the Faculty of the Social Sciences. Their ages ranged from 15 to 33 years ($M = 23.34$; $SD = 2.67$). They consisted of both single (93.7%) and married (6.3%) female students. The highest education qualifications obtained were O'level certificate (56.7%), and Ordinary National Diploma (43.3%). By ethnic group, there were Igbos (78%), Yorubas (17.3%), and Hausas (4.7%), Based on religion involved there were Christians (93.3%), Muslims and (6%), adherents of African Traditional Religion (2%). The Body Appreciation Scale (BAS) developed by Laura, Tracy and Nichole (2005) was used to assess the extent to which women a) hold favourable opinions of their bodies, Higher scores reflect greater body appreciation. The Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) was developed by Diener, Wirtz, Tov, Kim-Prieto, Choi, Oishi, and Biswas-Diener (2010) was used to measure important aspects of human functioning ranging from positive relationships, to feelings of competence, to having meaning and purpose in life. The study adopted a cross-sectional design. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used for data analysis to test the hypotheses of the study.

Results

The results of this study are presented in this chapter. The correlations of the demographic variables and study variables are shown in Table 1, while findings of the regression analysis are in Table 2.

Table 1: Correlations of demographic variables, body appreciation and psychological well-being

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1 Age	-				
2 Education	-.05	-			
3 Body appreciation	-.16**	.09	-		
4 Psychological well-being	-.04	-.05	.12*	.14*	.13*

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

In Table 1, the correlations showed that age was negatively related to body appreciation ($r = -.16$, $p < .01$) and it was not significantly related to psychological well-being ($r = -.04$). Educational status was not significantly related to any of the variables in the study.

Table 2: Hierarchical multiple regression predicting psychological well-being by body appreciation

Predictors	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
	B	B	T	B	B	t	B	β	T
Body appreciation	.16	.12	2.09*	.14	.10	1.74	.09	.06	1.02
R^2	.01			.03			.04		
ΔR^2	.01			.02			.01		
F	4.37(1, 298)*			4.50 (2, 297)*			3.82(3, 296)*		
ΔF	4.37(1, 298)*			4.58(1, 297)*			2.43(1, 296)		

** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ΔR^2 = Change in R^2 ; ΔF = Change in F ; B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; β = Standardised regression coefficient.

Results of the hierarchical multiple regression for the test of the hypotheses were shown in Table 2. Body appreciation was added in the Step 1 of the regression analysis. It significantly and positively predicted psychological well-being, $\beta = .12$, $t(300) = 2.09$, $p < .05$. Thus, the hypothesis which stated that Body appreciation would be a significant positive predictor of psychological well-being among undergraduate female students was not rejected. The unstandardized regression coefficient (B) showed that for every one unit increase in body appreciation, psychological well-being increases by .16 units. The contribution of body appreciation in explaining the variance in psychological well-being was 1% ($R^2 = .01$), and the model was significant, $F(1, 298) = 4.37$, $p < .05$. Thus, the hypothesis which stated that Body appreciation would be a significant positive predictor of psychological well-being among undergraduate female students was accepted.

Discussion

This study investigated the predictive roles of body appreciation on psychological well-being among female undergraduate students. The findings showed that body appreciation was positively and significantly predicted psychological well-being. This, therefore, implies that the higher the body appreciation score, the higher the degree of psychological well-being attained by female undergraduates. It also implies that body appreciation is a major predictor of psychological well-being of female undergraduate students. The finding supports the previous research of Cohen, et. al, (2019) which showed that exposure to body positive posts was associated with improvements in young women's positive mood. The finding also is in consistent with that of Neff & Pommier, (2012); John & Maxwell, (2015); Abassi & Zubair, (2015) which

reported that 95% of female students who are preoccupied with appreciation of the unique beauty of their bodies and the functions it performs for them is positively linked with happiness and elevated level of psychological well-being.

This finding brings to mind the importance of body appreciation in the elevation of psychological well-being of an individual. Wood-Barcalow et al (2010) had already asserted that, body appreciation is a healthy balance between accepting and appreciating certain things about the shape, substance, and functions of one's body. Body appreciation however has been assumed to be a total absence of negative body image perception and the presence of elevated psychological well-being. Wood-Barcalow suggested that body appreciation is an important prevention and treatment goal of body image related threat and major instrument in the elevation to psychological well-being. Oniyangi, (2019), and Smolak, (1999), have suggested that the only strategy to prevent the onset of eating disorder is to foster body appreciation attitude. Menzel et al (2011) also opined that the only strategy that could help to promote psychological well-being of female students is to foster positive body image such as self-worth and appreciation of the functionality and diverse appearance of the body. Some correlational studies have also supported this finding by showing that more inclination in photo-based enjoyment on Facebook such as viewing photos posted by others, sharing one's own photos, engaging on appearance-focused accounts on Instagram, and spending time in selecting and editing one's picture before posting or sharing them online are all associated with body image concerns and appreciation among female (Cohen, et. al,2017; 2018), which dramatically elevate one's psychological well-being.

Implications the study

The study has both theoretical and practical implications. In theoretical implication, however, it is to be noted that the development of body appreciation attitude could be traced using objectification theory by Fredrickson et al (1997), and Behavioural theory by Wolpe, (1958, 1973). Objectification theory proposed by Frederickson et al (1997) attempts to explain the extreme and overarching tendency to judge females with their bodies and why this can have such positive consequences for female's positive body image and psychological well-being. By viewing and treating themselves with care and as loving objects, female students tend to accentuate the body image as a means to promote their level of psychological well-being. The sexual objectification theory takes a starting point that cultural practices of sexually objectifying women are pervasive in westernized societies and create multiple opportunities for the female body to be on public display. Sexual objectification refers to a means of fragmenting a woman into a collection of sexual parts or functions, essentially stripping her of a unique personality and subjectivity so that she exists as merely a body. It is important to note that this experience of sexual objectification is suspected to contribute to the rationale behind accepting and appreciating the body for its sexual functionality among female students in the universities.

Limitations of the study

Although the study has several implications, the generalizability of the results should be done with caution. The research was conducted using only female undergraduate students. This was because Neff et al (2012) found that preoccupation with appreciation of the body is high among female college students than male/men. And again, Walid et al.(2014) reported that more females (35%) than males (8%) reported being markedly concerned with their body image. Secondly, the research was carried out only in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, thus

generalization of the findings to the entire female students population in Nigeria may be limited. Future researchers should attempt to use more than two or more universities from different states to enable a wider generalization to the entire female population. Secondly, psychological well-being is not restricted to only female students' population. Future researchers should endeavour to extend this area of research to the general population.

Conclusion

The study established that body appreciation was significantly a predictor of psychological well-being. Thus, the nature of optimal human functioning associated with psychological well-being requires consideration for affective, behavioural and cognitive consequence to female undergraduate students. Considering the cognitive component, it is assumed that female students who develop rational acceptance of their body image tend to view and treat themselves with care and as a loving object, and thereby, tend to accentuate the body image as a means to promote their level of psychological well-being.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendation that developing a programme that could foster body image appreciation attitude among female students should be encouraged in both psychological therapeutic center and campus health services department. This will definitely lead to reduction in accepting body image related threat, and in turn foster positive body image such as appreciation of the functionality of the body, and increase the level of psychological well-being of female students.

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