

## Are Georgian adolescents satisfied with their body image?

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### Abstract

**Aim:** The purpose of this research is to learn more about how Georgian adolescents view their bodies and what factors play a role in shaping their body images.

**Method:** Eighty Georgian secondary school teenagers were questioned for the research. A questionnaire was used to gather the data for the study. Questions about the respondent's demographics, body image, sense of self-worth, etc., were included in the survey instrument. The information was examined utilizing SPSS 23.

**Findings:** The study's results confirmed that females place a premium on their physical appearance. Their thoughts appear to be in line with traditional gender roles. At 11, teenagers begin to critically examine their physical presentation. Internet users (78.8%) and television viewers (52.5%) gave similar answers regarding the greatest impact on their self-perception due to their appearance. Teens would welcome the chance to experiment with new styles. The majority of them would alter their weight, then their height, and finally, their body type. Teenagers with a healthy sense of self-worth are happier with their physical appearance than their less confident peers.

**Implications/Novel Contribution:** The questionnaire provides a broad sketch of the respondent's knowledge of physical form. It also discusses the importance of self-appreciation and the factors that play a role in helping adolescents' self-esteem. Findings should be used to encourage young people to develop personally and professionally and to increase their sense of self-worth.

*Keywords:* Body Image, Teenagers, Perception of Body

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### INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization, adolescents are between the ages of 10 and 19 (World Health Organization, 2013). One's self-perception is what is meant by the term "body image" (Hashem, 2016; Rerkklang, 2017; J. K. Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999; J. Thompson & Cafri, 2007). "Body image" is a highly personal concept. The concept of body image encompasses not only rational but also affective dimensions. Beliefs and attitudes toward one's physical self are part of the cognitive component of body image, while satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one's physical self is part of the emotional component.

There is no such thing as a fixed and unalterable body image. From infancy to senior years, it undergoes numerous transformations. Various social and cultural influences, such as those from one's family, friends, peers, media, etc., contribute to how a person perceives their body (Grogan, 2016). Some factors have a greater or lesser impact as one ages. Since an individual is most impressionable during their formative years, it's crucial to keep an eye on childhood and adolescence.

In the years between 8 and 10, kids begin to form opinions about their bodies and how they've changed, according to research published in Understanding Developmental Change (Pruzinsky, 2002). Teenagers aren't always prepared for the social, psychological, and biological shifts that come with entering adulthood. Having a poor perception of one's physical self is upsetting. Cash, Ancis, and Strachan (1997) as saying that the negative emotions caused by body image have adverse effects on the person's life, ranging from minor discomfort to serious illnesses like anorexia and bulimia.

Adolescents' perceptions of their bodies and the food they eat are strongly linked. The tendency for young

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adults to engage in extreme dieting, unhealthy eating habits, low self-esteem, and worry about being or becoming overweight may be influenced by inaccurate body image beliefs (Helfert & Warschburger, 2013).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescents' body image (i.e., feelings and thoughts about their body and appearance) is central to their health and wellbeing. Adolescents, who are at a stage in life in which their bodies, minds, and social lives are changing considerably, are particularly vulnerable to the messages conveyed by appearance culture (Wertheim & Paxton, 2011).

One of the essential characteristics of appearance culture is the idea of the body as something malleable that needs to be "worked on." The body is no longer seen as a functional tool to make things happen; instead, it is the body that is made. This view of the body and its concern is particularly emphasized among girls and women e.g., (Buchanan, Bluestein, Nappa, Woods, & Depatie, 2013; Sweeting & West, 2002). As a result, physical attractiveness and slenderness are seen as almost synonymous concepts in appearance culture. Slenderness assumed to be associated with discipline and control, while overweight, is seen as a sign of self-indulgence, laziness, lack of control, incompetence, and lack of will to engage in one's body (Puhl & Peterson, 2012).

The cultural factor has the most significant influence on the formation of the body image perception, so it is essential to understand the cultural background in which we carry out research (Davis & Katzman, 1997).

According to Tsiantas and King (2001) women in Western culture suffer from the influence of their parents, peers and the media about their body image. Culture and social environment make sense being slim means to be happy. According to Berg and Rosencrans (2000), this problem is not new. Historically, women were faced with strict social standards. The social environment establishes not only the appearance but also the rules of behavior.

It should be noted that most of the population is not satisfied with their own body. Moreover, according to comparisons of studies conducted from 1972 to 1985, people are becoming more and more dissatisfied with their own body. In 1972, only 15% of women said that they did not like their body, and in 1985 it increased to 23% (Psychology Today, 1996). More recent research has shown that as many as 70% of adolescent girls and 50% of adolescent boys are dissatisfied with their bodies and want to change the way they look (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001; Wertheim & Paxton, 2011). A recent longitudinal study of Swedish girls between the ages of 7 and 18 years showed that the wish to be thinner increased with age (Westerberg-Jacobson, Ghaderi, & Edlund, 2012).

Culture forces to evaluate the appearance, but the media creates standards of beauty. A person who is not satisfied with his/her appearance believes that those better physical characteristics would have a better life.

The assumption that "beauty is good" and, "unattractiveness is bad," permeates appearance culture and is conveyed even to young children through the media, peers, and family (Bazzini, Curtin, Joslin, Regan, & Martz, 2010; Clark & Tiggemann, 2006; J. Thompson & Cafri, 2007; Stice, Hayward, Cameron, Killen, & Taylor, 2000). Research has shown that children as young as 36 years old tend to view attractive children as sociable, smart, and likable, whereas unattractive children are assumed to be antisocial and aggressive (Dion, 1976).

Throughout their lives, people attractive people are treated more favorably, have better chances of employment, and are perceived as healthier, smarter, happier, more successful while people considered unattractive may be stigmatized and discriminated against (Rennels, 2012).

Psychologists pay attention to self-esteem when discussing the body image. According to Lightstone (1999), the body image is a psychological phenomenon and is associated with psychological aspects, such as self-esteem, rather than real physical characteristics. People with low self-esteem are less happy with their appearance than people with high self-esteem. It should be mentioned that a negative body image is not only connected to low self-esteem (O'Dea, 2012) and decreased overall well-being (Meland, Haugland, & Bredablik, 2007), it is also related to severe long-term psychological consequences, such as depression and eating disorders (Stice et al., 2000; Westerberg-Jacobson et al., 2012).

Body image research has had a long history in the social and psychological sciences with mostly adults and clinical samples, such as people with Eating Disorders (EDs) (Leone & Mullin, 2014). Such kind of research is less common among teenagers without any eating disorders. Most body image research has been restricted to adolescents in the postindustrial English-speaking world (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001; Wertheim & Paxton, 2011). Available research is mainly carried out mostly in European and American culture. Similar studies in Georgia are

less common.

As a body image is especially important for adolescents' health and well-being, it is important to analyze it, especially in populations where research is less well defined, like in Georgia.

## METHODOLOGY

This study aims to examine the perception of the body image of Georgian teenagers and what factors influence the formation of their body image.

Research sample - During the study 80 Georgian teenagers aged 13-19 were interviewed: 40 girls and 40 boys. The average age is 16 years ( $S.D = 15.97$ ).

Research design, and techniques - The survey was conducted using a questionnaire. The survey tool consisted of 40 questions. The questionnaire included information on demographic data, attitudes toward body, self-esteem, etc. The questionnaire required about 25 minutes to be filled in. The SPSS 23 program analyzed the data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The average weight of respondents is 55 kilograms ( $S.D = 10$ , min-40 kg, 85 kg), and the average height is 165 centimeters. ( $S.D = 10$ , min -145 cm, 187 cm).

The average weight of boys is 60 kg ( $S.D = 11$ ) and girls 50 ( $S.D = 10$ ) and height is 170 cm ( $S.D = 9.66$ ) while for girls -160 cm; ( $S.D = 6.5$ ). The weight and height indicator of boys is higher than the same indicators of girls.

According to the mass index formula (to divide weight by square of height), 8.1% of respondents have a shortage of weight; 83,9% is in norm, and 4,8% are overweight.

When respondents were asked "How important is the appearance in life of 13-19 olds (woman/man) ", half of the adolescents indicated that appearance played a significant role (50%); 44% - is essential; Only 3% -3% think that the appearance in a woman's life is quite unimportant or entirely unimportant.

Less than a half of the adolescents mentioned appearance in man's life as significant (40%) and 25% - very important; 20% think that it is entirely unimportant and 15% is unimportant (Figure 1).

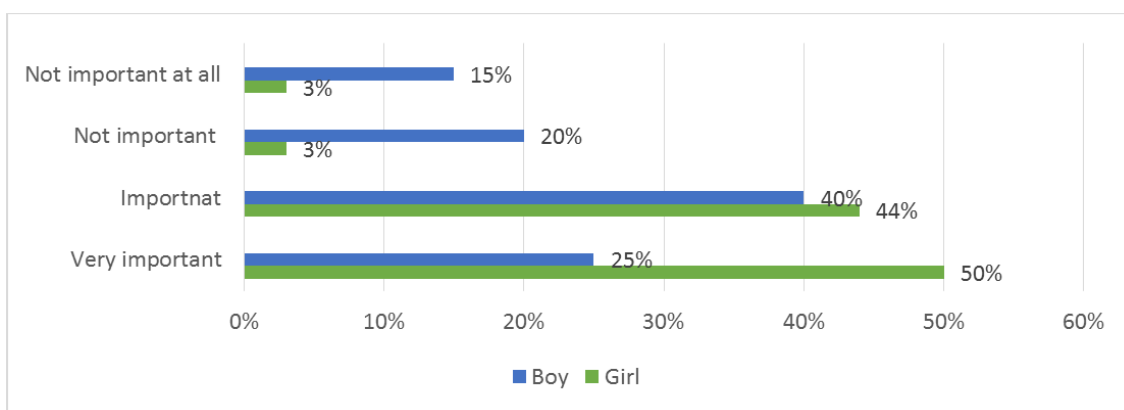


Figure 1. How important is the appearance in the life of 13-20 old people (women/men)

Adolescents appreciate effects of appearance on such aspects as the choice of profession, academic progress, success in work, relationship with opposite sex, family creation, popularity in school/higher education institutions, relationship with friends and community.

The appearance is more important for a woman than for man; The appearance of a woman was the most critical factor in creating a family, relationships with the opposite sex and popularity in school/higher education institutions. Whereas for men the appearance is crucial in having a relationship with the representatives of the opposite sex, family creation and in a choice of profession (Table 1).

Table 1: Influence of appearance on different spheres for women/men

No		Very Important for Women%	Very Important for Men%
1	Family creation	85.0	78.8
2	Relationship with the opposite sex	83.8	81.2
3	Popularity in school/higher education institutions	75.0	52.5
4	Choice of profession	66.3	62.5
5	Success in Work	65.0	60.0
6	Relationship with friends and community	60.0	56.3
7	Academic progress	55.0	43.8

87.5% of adolescents believe that being thin is important for 13-19-year-old women, and for men, this result is equal to 57.5%. 47.5% of respondents believe that height is important for women, for men this figure is higher (85.0%).

93.7% of respondents believe that having a beautiful face is essential for women. For men, this indicator is much lower (61.3%). 97.5% of respondents note that body structure is essential for women when this indicator among men is 75.0%. (See Table 2).

Overall, 89.2% of boys and 98.57% of girls believe that the appearance of a woman aged 13-20 year plays an important role ( $M = 94.0\%$ ,  $X^2(2) = 5.89$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 2: How important are the following characteristics for men and women

No		Important for Women%	Important for Men%
1	Being Thin	87.5	57.5
2	Height	47.5	85.0
3	Beautiful face	93.7	61.3
4	Body structure	97.5	75.0

We asked respondents to rate the importance of the following sources for establishing body image standards. Research shows that the Internet has the most substantial influence (71.4%), followed by representatives of show business (56.1%) and the famous people of the city (45.9%). Answers are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Factors which have an influence on body image perception

		Strong Influence%
1	TV	52.5
2	Magazines and newspapers	52.5
3	Internet	78.8
4	Famous people in the city	53.8
5	Show business representatives	56.3

Most of the respondents (66.3%) have seen a person with an ideal appearance on the internet and followed by TV (43.8%) and magazines (37.5%).

According to the respondents' answers, they began thinking about their appearance at the age of 11.7 years ( $S.D = 1.8$ , Min-7 years and Max-17 years); And about one year later started taking care of their appearance ( $S.D = 2.4$ , min-6 and Max-12).

Girls and boys begin to think about their appearance at the same age (boys - 11.5,  $S.D = 1.7$ , girls - 11.9,  $S.D = 1.8$ ), but girls start taking care of their appearance later than boys (boys - 11, 4,  $S.D = 2.3$ , girls - 13,  $S.D = 2.3$ ).

The adolescents were asked to evaluate the satisfaction level with their appearance. 48.8% of respondents are quite satisfied with their appearance; 27.5% is not so much, And 13.8% are not satisfied. 9.9% do not have a position on this issue.

If they had an opportunity, the majority of the respondents would make some changes in their appearance;

In particular, the most of them would like to change weight (88%), about a one third would like to change height (38%) (Figure 2).

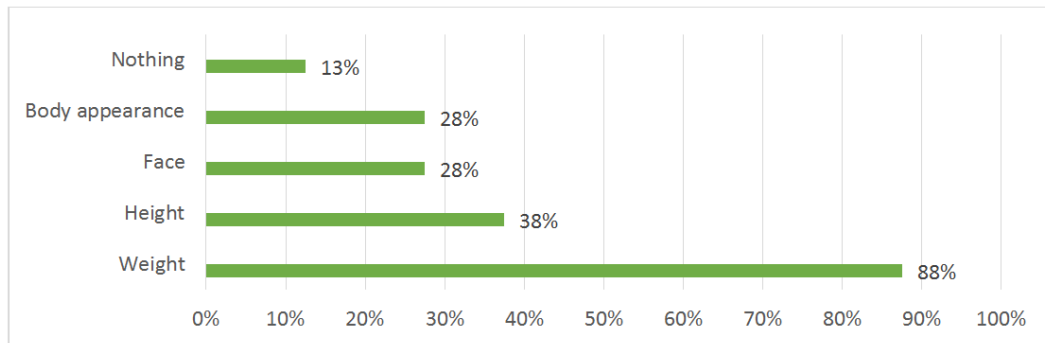


Figure 2. What would you like to change in appearance

The gender differences were observed about the desire to change the appearance; 93.7% of female respondents and 82.3% of male indicate that if they had an opportunity, they would change weight ( $X^2 (3) = 7.882 p < .05$ ).

Respondents think that regular exercise is an essential factor for weight loss. Even though they want some changes in weight, 51.3% of respondents exercise regularly, and 5% have access to body massage. If they had an opportunity, 5% would make plastic surgery; Among them 87.0% are girls.

43.8% of teenagers are satisfied with their own life; Partially satisfied are 37.5%; 13.8% are not satisfied, and for others, it is difficult to answer. Teens evaluate the most positive mental abilities, followed by hardworking skills and the last is appearance.

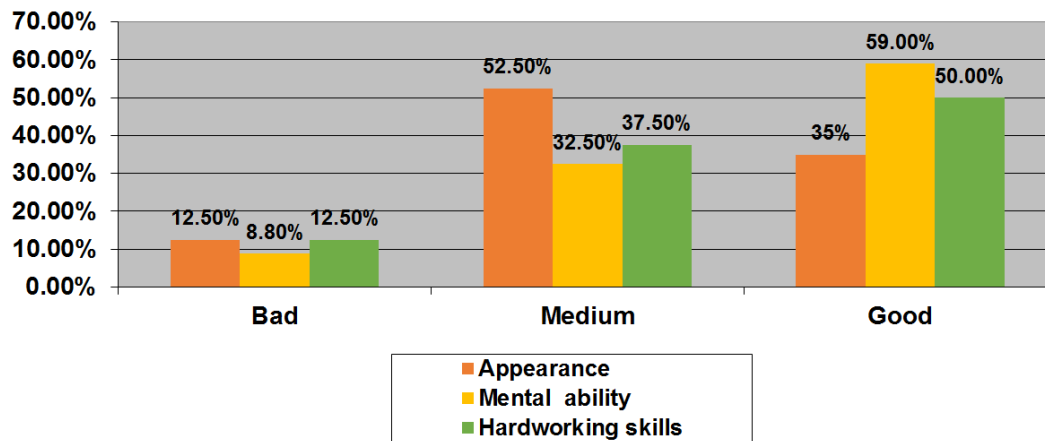


Figure 3. Graph

The greater part of the female negatively rates their appearance (18.8%) compared to men (6.2%). ( $X^2 (2) = 5.789 p < .05$ ).

Boys have higher self-esteem than girls (Rosenberg's self-assessment scale is 27.7 and 27.5,  $F = 9.29, p < .05$ ). The higher is the self-esteem of a teenager, the higher is the satisfaction of his/her appearance ( $F = 3.37, p < .05$ ). Among the adolescents who are very satisfied with their appearance, 28.3% have high self-esteem; among the teens who are satisfied with their appearance 27.3% have high self-esteem, among the teens who are unhappy 25.27% have high self-esteem and among the teens who are very unhappy with their appearance 22.3% have high self-esteem.

The research findings show that there are similarities between the findings of our research and western research: greatly the value of physical attractiveness, both value female thinness, and both have access to media. It should be mentioned that these similarities are more important in determining adolescents' body image than are the

differences in cultural norms and values. However, the research data do not provide evidence to discuss whether the factors are possibly predicting these levels are similar too. For instance, the influence of family, values, social norms.

The present findings suggest that body ideal internalization is as crucial to Georgian adolescents' body image as it is to many other adolescents in Western countries. Adolescents internalization of the body and appearance reflects societal focus on physical attractiveness in Georgia. Research should further examine the processes by which adolescents internalize appearance ideals.

## CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of the research showed that appearance is significant for Georgian teenagers. In their opinion, appearance plays an important role especially in the life of women.

Appearance has an impact on almost all aspects of human life, such as the choice of profession, success in education, work, relationships with representatives of the opposite sex, family creation, popularity in school/higher education, communication with friends and the community. International studies also confirm that women are more influenced by body image than men (Tsiantas & King, 2001).

For men and women, weight, body structure, and height are significant. However, being slim is much more important for women than for men; And height is much more important for men than for women. These findings are relevant to gender stereotypes.

The study showed a significant impact of the Internet on body image formation which is quite natural in the century of the modern technologies. Adolescents spend most of their time on the computer. They have seen a person with an ideal appearance on the Internet. Cultural influence on the establishment of beauty standards is on the second place. Television and show business also influence establishing beauty standards, but it is not as big as an internet.

Boys and girls start an evaluation of their appearance at the same age, at the age of 11, but girls start taking care of their appearance one year later than boys.

Most of the adolescents think that if they had an opportunity to change their appearance, they would change their height, face, and body structure. More women are not satisfied with their weight than men.

Self-esteem is positively related to the satisfaction of teenagers' appearance. The higher the self-esteem of a teenager, the higher is the satisfaction of his/her appearance. Similar to other studies (Harter, 1999), our research shows that the body image is a psychological phenomenon and is more associated with psychological aspects, such as self-esteem, rather than the real physical characteristics.

The limitation of the research is that it covered a limited number of participants and only quantitative research. Thus in the future, it is essential to conduct large-scale and long-term research on adolescents with qualitative methods too. It is also essential to use the results in practice in the relevant field in cooperation with professionals and spouses. Educational institutions can serve as a medium to convey the appropriate information on body image to adolescents. The results of this study suggest that it is important to educate adolescents about changes they experience during the phase of puberty, about weight ranges, having a proper diet, adequate exercise; and having a realistic and positive body image. It is essential that adolescents develop a positive attitude towards their body and high self-esteem.

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