Are Georgian adolescents satisfied with their body image?

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Abstract

Research of a perception of a body image among adolescents has become important during the recent years. Body image refers to how people feel, think and perceives about their appearance and body. This perception may be positive or negative. Body image is influenced by various factors such as culture, family, social environment, media, self-esteem and etc. The aim of this study is to examine the perception of the body image of Georgian teenagers and what factors have an influence on the formation of their body image. The survey was conducted with 80 Georgian teenagers aged 13-19 (40 girls and 40 boys). The study showed that appearance is important, especially to women. Their perceptions seem to be relevant to gender stereotypes. Teenagers start to evaluate their appearance at the age of 11. 78.8% of the respondents reported internet to be the most influential factor in the perception of their appearance, followed by television (52.5%). Adolescents would be happy to have the opportunity to make some changes in their appearance. Most of them would change their weight, followed by height, and body. Teenagers who have high self-esteem are more satisfied with their appearance than those with relatively low self-esteem. In the future, it is important to conduct a larger-scale research with adolescents; It is also important to use research findings in practice and to support teenagers to develop positive attitudes toward their own body and as well as improve their self-esteem.

Keywords: Body Image, Teenagers, Perception of Body

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescents, as defined by the World Health Organization are beings in 10-19y age range (World Health Organization, 2013). The term "body image" refers to the perception of one’s own body (Hashem, 2016; Rerkklang, 2017; J. K. Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999; J. Thompson & Cafri, 2007). "Body image" is a subjective, not an objective experience. The body image is a multidimensional phenomenon and consists of cognitive and emotional aspects. The cognitive aspects of the body image contain beliefs and attitudes to own body, and the emotional aspects refer to satisfaction/not satisfied with own body based on experience.

The body image is not a static and unchangeable phenomenon. It develops and changes throughout life, from childhood to old age. According to Grogan (2016), many factors affect the body image, such as family, friends, peers, society, etc. With age, the influence of various factors increases or decreases. It is essential to pay attention to the period of childhood and adolescence because the culture most easily influences the individual in this period.

Children start the evaluation of their own body at the age of 8 to 10 years and changes over time (Pruzinsky, 2002). The switch from childhood to adulthood embraces changes such as social, psychological and biological; for which teenagers are often not well-versed. Negative body image is a negative experience for a person. According to Ancis and Strachan (Cash, Ancis, & Strachan, 1997), negative emotions caused by body image have adverse effects on the person’s life, starting with minor discomfort, to severe illnesses, such as anorexia, bulimia, etc.

The perception of the body affects perceived weight status of adolescents, as well as on the food they eat. Faulty perceptions about body image may have an influence on an instinct for young adults to engross in strict dieting, unhealthy eating behaviors, having low self-esteem and worrying of being or becoming overweight (Helfert & Warschburger, 2013).

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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 ones 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 King and Thiantas (Tsiantas & 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 (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, & Breidablik, 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.

**RESEARCH 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)](image)

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Very Important for Women%</th>
<th>Very Important for Men%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Family creation</td>
<td>85.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Relationship with the opposite sex</td>
<td>83.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Popularity in school/higher education institutions</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Choice of profession</td>
<td>66.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Success in Work</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Relationship with friends and community</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Academic progress</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Important for Women%</th>
<th>Important for Men%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Being Thin</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Height</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Beautiful face</td>
<td>93.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Body structure</td>
<td>97.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strong Influence%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Magazines and newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Famous people in the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Show business representatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 Mc-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](image)

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](image)

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, $F = 9.29, p < 0.05$). The higher is the self-esteem of a teenager, the higher is the satisfaction of his/her appearance ($F = 3.37, p < 0.05$). 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

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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