



**Relationship of Body Image, Self Esteem and Social Anxiety: A Comparative Study among
Northeastern Indian and North Indian Students**

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Abstract

Aim: The study aims to investigate the correlation of Body Image, Self Esteem and Social Anxiety among Northeastern Indian and North Indian Students.

Methodology: For the study, a sample of 160 students was collected, of which about 50% were from Northeastern India, 50% from North India. Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg), Body Image Questionnaire (Bruchon) and Social Anxiety Scale (Liebowitz) was employed. By using SPSS, Pearson was used to analyze the correlation between the variables and Independent Sample T-test was also employed.

Results: The result clearly showed the correlation between the three variables. Specifically, the finding showed a significant positive correlation between Body Image and Self Esteem. The study

also shows a negative correlation between both Self Esteem and Social Anxiety, Social Anxiety and Body Image. Moreover, the study also shows a significant difference between the mean scores of Body Image, Self Esteem and Social Anxiety where Northeastern Indian Students exhibits lower body image and self-esteem and exhibits higher social anxiety as compared to North Indian Students. The study clearly indicates the positive correlation between Body Image and Self Esteem, a negative correlation between Self Esteem and Social Anxiety, Body Image, and Social Anxiety. Additionally, a significant difference between the two groups in the mean scores of variables is also a found. Therefore, the results of the research substantiate the formulated hypotheses.

Conclusion: The findings show the importance of implementing interventions that aims at promoting positive body image addressing social anxiety and enhancing their self-esteem for supporting overall well-being.

Keywords: *Body Image, Self Esteem, Social Anxiety, Students, Northeastern Indian, North Indian*

INTRODUCTION

Entering a new journey of college or university represents a transformative phase in life where an individual often find themselves in a new environment, meeting new people and new challenges. This transition can be a pivotal phase that can bring changes in various ways physically or mentally. Individuals may face a new feeling of independence, academic challenges, engaging in risky behavior, exploration as well as concerns about their body which can have an influence on self-esteem which is very important for their social dynamics. Body image fosters a sense of worth and confidence that encourages and empowers the students to fully engage in social interactions. College going students have the freedom to wear anything that is appropriate while undergrad students have uniforms which is mandatory for each and everyone. These can also have a contribution that college going students are self-conscious about their looks.

Body Image

A body image is defined as the perceptions individuals hold about their own bodies, also includes how a person imagines others perceive their body. If the body structure of an individual is different from their perceived ideal body structure which he/she usually dreams of and also not only body structure but also is different from his/her weight is different from their perceived ideal weight, discontentment with one's possessed body and the image of negative body may be seen (Wedden & Thomas 2002; Thomas et al., 2002; Presnell et al., 2004). Students, especially college going students are exposed and sensitive to social weight that as these constructive spans are basic for arrangement of one's personality and self-regard, self-esteem in various aspects that includes self-assessment physically. Surveys have found that body Image issues affect college going students in India has shown that 77% of the participants has dissatisfaction regarding their body image.

Self Esteem

Self-esteem is used to describe as an overall impression of self-worth or value that an individual holds for self. In other words, how much one has an appreciation and like self. Self-esteem involves "awareness of one's value system and emotional appraisal of one's own worth" (Schunk, 1985). High self-esteem indicates high levels of social adaptation (Martin et al., 2014). Specifically, an individual with low self-esteem tends to display negative reactions, while an individual with high self-esteem tends to be less affected as they tend to be dismissive or bigoted of negative input (Brown & Mankowski, 1993). Additionally, individuals that have low self-esteem remarks tend to develop a negative attitude towards various things generally involving other individual and personal circumstances (Mackinnon, 2015, p.15). Self-esteem is intrinsically related to body image as they reinforce each other one another. Perceived negative body image have a high tendency in leading to lower self-esteem as it can establish the feelings of disgrace, low self-esteem, and discontentment with oneself.

Social Anxiety

Social anxiety, on the other hand, is a common mental health condition characterized by an intense and persistent fear of being judged, criticized, or embarrassed in social situations. Individuals that are diagnosed with social anxiety often have the symptoms of overwhelming anxiety and self-consciousness in everyday social interactions which leads to an intense inclination to completely steer clear of social situations.

Common triggers for social anxiety may include public speaking, meeting new people, participating in group activities, or even simple everyday tasks like eating in public. Physical symptoms can manifest, such as blushing, trembling, sweating, or difficulty speaking. Social Anxiety have a profound impact on the students' experiences on the university, it can affect their skills in social interactions, academic performances, career development and mental health. Individuals with social anxiety may exhibit a feeling of hopelessness, sadness, inadequacy. Their experiences in the college may be limited by their social anxiety and may not be able to fully utilize their abilities and collaboration with others.

Body Image, Self Esteem and Social Anxiety

Research suggests a complex interconnectedness between social anxiety, body image, and self-esteem. Individuals with social anxiety may experience negative self-perceptions and augmentation of self-reflection in social engagements, pitching in lower self-esteem. This, in turn, can be altered by body image conceptions as the fear of criticism may stretch to how one perceives their physical appearance.

Several studies highlight the reciprocal relationship between these factors. Social anxiety has been proved to linked positively with body image discontentment, lower self-esteem and negatively associated with being engaged physically activities. Individuals may feel agitated and anxious due to social criticism, which is related to their physical features, considering their body as not as attractive as others.

A study published in the "Journal of Abnormal Psychology" (2017) found that individuals with SAD often display lower self-esteem, and this was associated to negative body image perceptions. Similarly, research in the "Journal of Anxiety Disorders" (2015) suggested that body dissatisfaction and self-esteem concerns were pervasive among individuals with SAD.

Cultural Context

It has been proved that cultural backgrounds can have an enormous impact on the way an individual perceives their bodies, the importance level that one hold for physical appearance, and the level of contentment on oneself. For instance, in western cultures, thinness and slim bodies are often linked and associated with having perceived success, beauty, and self-discipline. In discrepancy, in many African cultures, a larger body size is often considered beautiful, healthy and have high potential in fertility (Cachelin & Regan, 2016).

Research has suggested that cultural influences have an effective impact on perception of body image and self-esteem in various ways. For example, cultural values and norms can have a huge impact on an individual's beliefs about the ideal type of body, which in turn can lead to body discontentment and negative self-esteem when an individual does not meet those standards (Cash et al., 2012). Cultural factors can have an influence the way an individual perceives their body and the level of importance an individual holds for physical appearance (Liang et al., 2019). Additionally, cultural values associated to gender roles and anticipations can have an impact on body image perception differently for men and women (Murray et al., 2015).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Amrit et al. (2020) research aimed at exploring the relationship between Body Image satisfaction and Self-Esteem and the percentage of students that feel discontent with their body image and their associations with various factors as well as with self-esteem. The sample of 125 students

was collected. The findings of the study stated that there was a significant positive correlation between body image and self-esteem.

Manar et al. (2019) in their research aimed to study the body image perception and satisfaction among university students in Cairo. It also aimed to identify the various factors that are affecting body image perception and to determine the interrelationship of body image, self-esteem, and perception. 400 university students were collected, and Cross-Sectional Design was used. Body weight and height were also measured to calculate BMI. Results indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between self-esteem score and body image concerns.

Shah et al. (2020) did research in which the article aimed to identify the correlation between Social Anxiety and Effect of social anxiety on self-esteem of special need university students in the war-affected region to analyze the association between the two variables among the special need university students located in Pakistan. A sample of 100 disable university students aged between 18-30 years was collected and a correlational method was utilized for analyzing the correlation. For measurements, Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS, Liebowitz, 1987) Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) were utilized. The findings show a significantly negative relationship between social anxiety and self-esteem indicating that the students with high social anxiety have low levels of self-esteem.

Morteza et al. (2013) in their research assessed the correlation of social anxiety, social self-efficacy, and body image in the girl students at the Islamic Azad University at Tonekabon Branch. In this study, a sample of 240 female students were collected via stratified random sampling. For further analysis, the Social Anxiety Scale, Self-Efficacy Scale for Social Situations, and Body Image Test were employed. Pearson correlation and multivariate regression analysis was also done. The results indicated negative correlation between Social Anxiety and Body Image on females' students. Also, positive correlation between social efficacy and body image.

METHODOLOGY

PURPOSE

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the correlation of Body Image, Self Esteem and Social Anxiety among Northeastern Indian and North Indian Students.

HYPOTHESES

- H1: There will be a significant positive correlation between Body Image and Self Esteem.
- H2: There will be a significant negative correlation between Self Esteem and Social Anxiety.
- H3: There will be a significant negative correlation between Body Image and Social Anxiety.
- H4: There will be a significant difference in Body Image scores between Northeastern Indian and North Indian Students, with Northeastern Indian Students potentially exhibiting Lower levels of Body Image satisfaction.
- H5: There will be a significant difference in Self Esteem scores between Northeastern Indian and North Indian Students, with Northeastern Indian Students potentially exhibiting lower Self Esteem.
- H6: There will be a significant difference in Social Anxiety scores between Northeastern Indian and North Indian Students, with Northeastern Indian Students potentially exhibiting higher Social Anxiety.

SAMPLE

For the study, students between the age of 18 - 30 enrolled in Amity University, Noida from Northeastern India and North India was collected. The final data set contained 160 students of which 50% are from Northeastern part of India and other 50% from North India.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TOOLS

The following tools were used to measure body image, self-esteem, and social anxiety among students. The measurements used were reliable and valid.

- **Body Image Questionnaire:** The scale was developed by Marilou Bruchon-Schweitzer (1987) to explore attitudes, feelings, and perceptions towards one's body. This questionnaire contains 19 items that represents opposite meanings, this allows the participants to rate the frequency of their body feelings across listed dimensions. It takes around 5 minutes to complete the questionnaire.
- **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale:** The scale was developed by Rosenberg (1965) to examines the global self-worth by capturing both positive and negative feelings. This tool contains 10 items and used a 4-point Likert scale, that ranges from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."
- **Social Anxiety Scale:** The scale is developed in 1987 by Michael Liebowitz, to evaluate the variety of social engagement and performance scenarios that a patient fears to aid in the diagnosis of social anxiety disorder. The scale comprises of 24 items, divided into 2 subscales. The first 24 items are rated on a Likert Scale from 0 to 3 on fear experienced under the given circumstances, and then the same items are rated regarding avoidance of the situation.

PROCEDURE

For research design, a Cross Sectional study was used and Stratified Random Sampling Method.

Statistical methods were utilized to verify the significance of the findings. Furthermore, the formulated hypotheses were supported by the results and the existing literature given. The necessary information was collected via physical questionnaire and through online surveys using Google Forms. The goal and the significance of the study was briefed to the participants. Each questionnaire was distributed separately, and the respondents were notified about the confidentiality, that their responses will be solely utilized for research purposes only. The participants spent around 8-10

minutes to finished up responding to the questionnaires and respondents were encouraged to seek for further clarification and queries on any items via text/email. The data was stored and documented and finally downloaded for further analysis. For data entry, Excel Spreadsheets was used for data scoring. For each sample, raw scores, percentiles, and related categories were noted for each of the three factors. Appropriate statistical techniques were used to evaluate the information gathered.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1.1

Descriptive Statistics for the three variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Body Image	160	33	87	59.05	10.369
Self Esteem	160	9	20	14.92	2.071
Social Anxiety	160	0	140	60.85	30.104

The table given above has provided the descriptive statistics for the sample (N=160) of the study. As it is shown in the table, the mean score of Body Image is 59.05 with a Standard Deviation of 10.36 (**X = 59.05, SD = 10.36**) indicating a moderate level of Body Image Satisfaction level. Furtherly, the table also depicts the average scores of each variable. The mean scores of the sample on the Self- Esteem scale was to be 14.92 (**X = 14.92, SD = 2.07**) which depicts a high level of self-esteem. The Social Anxiety scales has obtained mean scores of 60.85 (**X = 60.85, SD = 30.104**) depicting moderate to high level of social anxiety.

Table 1.2*Pearson's Correlation coefficient scores of Body Image, Self Esteem and Social Anxiety*

Variables		Body Image	Self Esteem	Social Anxiety
Body Image	Pearson Correlation	1	.604	-.525
	Sig. (1-tailed)		<.001	<.001
Self Esteem	Pearson Correlation	.604	1	-.433
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001		<.001
Social Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.525	-.433	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	<.001	

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

The table above has shown the correlation coefficient between Body Image and Self Esteem is ($r=.604$), which is statistically significant at the 0.001 level (1-tailed) indicating a strong positive relationship between these variables. Therefore, the hypothesis “There will be a significant positive correlation between Body Image and Self Esteem” stands supported suggesting that individuals with more positive body image tends to have higher self-esteem and individuals with negative body image perceptions are more likely to experience lower levels of self-esteem.

A study done by Thomas (2023) emphasizes the relationship between body image and self-esteem among adolescents between the aged of 14 to 18 in Mysuru. There were 60 participants consisting of 30 males and 30 females and further findings of the study states that there is a considerable positive association between body image and self-esteem among the adolescents. These findings supported and helped in understanding the importance of positive mindset and enhancing self-esteem. Body image perceptions has a huge impact on self-esteem and social anxiety as it is the center of focus at this stage, students thrive to meet their standards and may set unrealistic goals which can be influenced by peers and the environment.

Another study done found that there was a high contrast in self-esteem and body image between the genders. Even though gender differences are not considered in this study, there are some gender differences with female exhibits higher levels of negative body image and low level of self-esteem as compared to male. However, females are not the only that have distorted view of their body, males also have negative perceptions as they tend to compare themselves from their peer. Males that are shorter and lean tends to have inferiority complex and social anxiety, also low self-esteem. Effective intervention strategies, such as counseling, are necessary, health, and physical education should be practiced in schools, colleges, and society.

In the same table, the correlation between Self Esteem and Social Anxiety is $-.433$, which is also statistically significant at the level of 0.001 (1-tailed), indicating a moderate negative correlation between the two variables. Therefore, the hypothesis “There will be a significant negative correlation between Self Esteem and Social Anxiety” is supported and suggests that individuals with higher self-esteem tend to experience lower levels of social anxiety and vice versa. Xiahong (2002) did research among college students to investigate the relationship between self-esteem, interpersonal trust, and social anxiety. For this study, 673 college students were randomly sampled the results show that social anxiety has a significant negative correlation with Self-Esteem. Interpersonal trust partly mediates the relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety. This study has helped in understanding the importance of self-esteem in the context of social anxiety and interpersonal trust. Students that have higher self-esteem may find it easier to blend in with others and trust others leading to more positive social interactions and experiences. Conversely, students with low self-esteem may struggle and find it hard to trust others. Individuals who are supported and trust by others are more likely to have a lower social anxiety and performs well in their task, as well as academically. This finding supported the formulated hypothesis that self-esteem is significantly related to social anxiety.

Eventfully, the table has also shown the correlation between Body Image and Social Anxiety which is ($r=-.525$), which is also statistically significant at the 0.001 level (1- tailed) indicating a negative correlation between the variables. Therefore, the hypothesis “There will be a significant negative correlation between Body Image and Social Anxiety” stands supported. This indicates that

individuals with more positive body image tend to experience lower levels of social anxiety and vice versa. This finding have been supported by a study by Bell (2024) has concluded that Body Image and Social Anxiety has a significant connection to each other saying that individuals who does not feel good about their looks and physique are mostly reluctant to socialize and not seek relationships with others.

Hamraj et al. (2023) did a study to investigates the relationship between Self-Esteem, Body Image, and Anxiety among Adolescents. A sample of 192 was collected from college students. The result indicated that there is significantly a negative correlation between Self – Esteem and Anxiety as well as between Body Image and Anxiety. The study also shows a positive correlation between Body Image and Self-Esteem; hence this study has supported the current study that aims to investigate the correlation of body image, self-esteem, and social anxiety. The formulated hypotheses were supported by the findings which was statistically analyzed. Hence, this study stands the notion that body image, self-esteem and social anxiety are interlinked and unfold the complex interplay between these variables and how each variable has an impact on each other.

Table Number 1.3

Independent Sample T-test

Variables	Groups	F	Sig.	t - value	df	p - value	Mean difference
Body Image	NEI NI	1.903	0.170	- 8.205	158	<.001	-11.300
Self Esteem	NEI NI	7.694	0.006	-9.050	153	<.001	-2.412
Social Anxiety	NEI NI	0.001	0.970	10.327	158	<.001	38.100

Table given above has shown the independent sample t-test done on the variables, the results reveal a statistically significant difference in Body Image scores between Northeastern Indian and

North Indian students ($p < .001$). The mean difference in Body Image scores is -11.30, indicating that Northeastern Indian students have significantly lower levels of Body Image satisfaction as compared to North Indian students. Therefore, the hypothesis “*There will be a significant difference in Body Image scores between Northeastern Indian and North Indian Students, with Northeastern Indian Students potentially exhibiting Lower levels of Body Image*” stands supported.

Additionally, the table has also shown a statistically significant difference in Self Esteem scores between Northeastern Indian and North Indian students ($p < .001$). The mean difference in Self Esteem scores is -2.41, indicating that Northeastern Indian students have significantly lower levels of Self Esteem compared to North Indian students. Therefore, the hypothesis “*There will be a significant difference in Self Esteem scores between Northeastern Indian and North Indian Students, with Northeastern Indian Students potentially exhibiting lower Self Esteem*” stands supported.

Similarly, the table also depicts that there are the t-test results indicate a statistically significant difference in Social Anxiety scores between Northeastern Indian and North Indian students ($p < .001$). The mean difference in Social Anxiety scores is 38.10, suggesting that Northeastern Indian students exhibit significantly higher levels of Social Anxiety compared to North Indian students. Hence, the hypothesis “*There will be a significant difference in Social Anxiety scores between Northeastern Indian and North Indian Students, with Northeastern Indian Students potentially exhibiting higher Social Anxiety*” stands supported.

Studies done by Sethuram et al. in 2022 has focused on studying eating attitudes and Body Image Dissatisfaction among Naga girls to assess the prevalence of these behaviors. Here, the article emphasis on the cultural differences among individuals and the impact on perceived body image. Cultural ideals of beauty and perceived body image can be varied across different society and norms. Culture plays a vital role in shaping our beliefs, values, and attitudes towards body image and self-esteem. It has been proved that cultural backgrounds can have an enormous impact on the way an

individual perceives their bodies, the importance level that one hold for physical appearance, and the level of contentment on oneself. For example, Western cultures, thinness, and slim bodies are often linked and associated with having perceived success, beauty, and self-discipline. In discrepancy, in many African cultures, a larger body size is often considered beautiful, healthy and have high potential in fertility (Cachelin & Regan, 2016).

Cultural settings and differences can have a huge impact on an individual's sense of worth and belonging. An individual can have their own view and perception of themselves based on their cultural and societal standards or beauty and attractiveness.

Northeast Indian people often belongs to indigenous ethnic groups, they tend to have a different views and norms with different beauty standards as compared to North Indian people. Individuals may be facing a societal pressure due to their cultural background and maybe experiencing discrimination and stereotypes and marginalization. Mostly, students from Northeast India stays in hostels or PG and there is a high chance of facing having difficulties in facing challenges and adapting to the new environment. They may encounter with language barrier and other difficulties that may have contribution to lower self-esteem and high levels of self-esteem. The higher mean scores of body image and self-esteem scored by Northeastern Indian may indicated that individuals may have a greater dissatisfaction with their physical appearances and lower self-worth, also they may feel discomfort in social situations as compared to North Indian students.

LIMITATIONS

- The tools used such as Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, Body Image Questionnaire and Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scales, despite being traditionally validated, may not be fully accurate considering the complexities of the contemporary settings and cultural dynamics.
- This study is conducted only within one university, and it may not be fully representative of the diverse populations of Northeastern Indian and North Indian students. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized.

- The study only focuses on the differences between the groups and overlook the potential factors that may have an influence such as acculturation, cultural identities.
- The research design used i.e. Cross-Sectional Design has limited the ability to draw the causal conclusions about the observed three variables.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research paper aimed to explore the association of Body Image, Self Esteem and Social Anxiety among enrolled Amity University Students from Northeastern part of India and North India. The findings of the study has highlighted the importance of understanding the complexities of the relationship between these three variables among college going students. Going into college is a new phase which can have a huge impact on identity shaping.

This is a crucial period of growth mentally and physically it is important to promote mental well-being as well as physical well-being. Difficulties that stem from a mix element can hamper their performance academically, socially, culturally and their personal worlds.

In the new setting, college students from anywhere are often pressured by peers and often compared themselves with others in various areas such as success, physical appearance, physique, social standing which leads to negative feelings about self-such as low self-esteem, negative body image and social anxiety.

The empirical study found out that there is a significant relationship of Body Image, Self Esteem and Social Anxiety. This finding supports the hypothesis given and emphasized the importance of mental well-being in the development of college going student.

The findings also indicated the differences between Northeastern Indian and North Indian in the scores of Body Image and Self Esteem, where North Eastern Indian exhibits lower Body Image and Self Esteem. Differences between the scores of Social Anxiety between the two groups is also found where Northeastern Indian students exhibited higher levels of Social Anxiety as predicted.

Therefore, interventions that aimed at promoting positive body image, self-esteem and reducing social anxiety should be given for the students.

The findings of this study suggest the promotion of positive mental well-being, positive body image and self-esteem that can have an impact on high levels of Anxiety among the students. Therefore, it is important to support students who are struggling in these areas.

IMPLICATIONS

In conclusion, this research paper has highlighted the importance of understanding the relationship between self-esteem, body image, and social anxiety among the university students. The findings of this study suggest that promoting positive body image, enhancing self-esteem may have a positive impact on reducing social anxiety levels. This will not only improve the mental health, but it will also improve overall health of the students. Therefore, a creative and supportive surroundings empowering environment that fosters positive body image, enhances self-esteem, and reduces social anxiety for the students to promote overall well-being as well as academically.

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