



Body Esteem and Couple Satisfaction among Male and Female Young Adults

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Abstract: The present study examined the relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction among male and female young adults. A sample of 130 participants (65 males and 65 females), aged 18 to 30 years and currently involved in romantic relationships, completed the Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA) and the Couple Satisfaction Index–32 (CSI-32). Correlational analyses revealed no significant relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction among either males or females. Furthermore, independent samples t-tests indicated no significant gender differences in body esteem or couple satisfaction. These findings suggest that body esteem may not directly influence romantic relationship satisfaction among young adults, contrary to previous research. Limitations of the study include the use of convenience sampling, the relatively small sample size, and reliance on self-report measures. Future research should incorporate larger, more diverse samples, explore potential mediators and moderators, and utilize longitudinal designs to better understand the complex dynamics between self-perception and relational well-being.

Keywords: *Body Esteem, Couple Satisfaction, Young Adults, Romantic Relationships, Gender Differences*

1. Introduction

Romantic relationships are fundamental to adult psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Finkel et al., 2017). Within these partnerships, individual self-perceptions, particularly concerning physical appearance, significantly shape relational experiences. This study aims to investigate the association between body esteem—an individual's self-perceived value of their physical attributes—and overall couple satisfaction in romantic partnerships. By focusing on this positive self-evaluation, we seek to provide a nuanced understanding of its contribution to relational health. This research will offer valuable insights for clinicians, counselors, and individuals seeking to enhance relational dynamics through improved self-perception.

Body esteem is conceptualized as the subjective evaluation of one's body and appearance, encompassing cognitive and affective attitudes toward the physical self (Franzoi & Shields, 1984). It includes satisfaction with physical attributes, feelings of attractiveness, and overall physical self-worth. Unlike the broader concept of body image, body esteem directly concerns the self-perceived value linked to bodily attributes. Positive body esteem is associated with confidence, self-acceptance, and psychological resilience (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015), while negative body esteem is linked to shame, anxiety, and dissatisfaction, contributing to adverse psychological outcomes and interpersonal difficulties (Linardon et al., 2022). Couple satisfaction is defined as the subjective evaluation of a romantic partnership's quality and fulfillment (Spanier, 1976), encompassing emotional intimacy, communication quality, conflict resolution, and shared values. Satisfied couples typically report greater stability and commitment (Fincham & Beach, 2010), and this dynamic construct is influenced by both relational and individual characteristics, including body-related perceptions.

This investigation is informed by Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Objectification Theory suggests that societal beauty standards can lead to body surveillance and dissatisfaction, potentially hindering emotional expression and vulnerability in relationships. Conversely, the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy proposes that intimacy thrives on self-disclosure and partner responsiveness. Positive self-perception, including body esteem, can facilitate this openness and receptivity, thereby fostering relationship satisfaction. These theoretical lenses collectively posit a reciprocal relationship where individual body-related self-regard impacts relational well-being, while a fulfilling partnership can reciprocally reinforce positive self-perceptions. For this study, body esteem will be measured using the Body Esteem Scale for Adults (BES) (Franzoi & Shields, 1984), and couple satisfaction will be operationalized using the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI) (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

The significance of this inquiry extends beyond theoretical elucidation. Understanding the precise mechanisms through which positive body esteem influences couple satisfaction can inform targeted interventions designed to foster healthier self-perceptions and, by extension, strengthen relational bonds. Such insights could be invaluable for therapeutic practices aimed at enhancing intimacy, communication, and overall well-being within romantic partnerships. This study therefore holds considerable promise for both advancing scholarly understanding and contributing to practical applications in relationship counseling and psychoeducation. Despite emerging research linking self-perception and relationship quality, the direct relationship between body esteem and overall couple satisfaction remains underexplored, especially in non-clinical and non-Western populations, and often focuses on negative body image rather than the potentially protective construct of body esteem.

Prevailing scholarly discourse underscores the profound influence of body image on psychological well-being, manifesting in various forms such as body dissatisfaction, appearance anxiety, and self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Linardon et al., 2022). A substantial body of research consistently demonstrates a negative correlation between these adverse body image constructs and numerous facets of relational functioning. For instance, longitudinal studies by Martin-Storey and August (2023) and Sánchez-Carracedo et al. (2018) provide compelling evidence that initial body dissatisfaction predicts lower long-term relationship satisfaction, underscoring the enduring impact of negative self-perceptions on interpersonal dynamics. This aligns with findings that link body dissatisfaction to increased relational conflict (Stern et al., 2021) and reduced emotional intimacy and perceived partner responsiveness (Tantleff-Dunn et al., 2014). The pervasive influence of sociocultural and media pressures on body image, as highlighted by Yalcin and Ceylan (2020), Dakanalis et al. (2014), and Ferguson et al. (2014), further illustrates how external factors can erode positive self-perceptions, consequently harming relationship quality. Moreover, several studies elucidate specific mechanisms through which body image impacts relationships, such as negative body image increasing attachment insecurity (Peterson and Warren, 2023) and perceived lower partner responsiveness (Morgan and Thompson, 2019), both of which mediate the link to reduced relationship satisfaction. The critical role of sexual intimacy is also underscored, with body dissatisfaction consistently predicting lower sexual satisfaction, which in turn impacts overall relationship satisfaction (Sánchez and Kiefer, 2016; Gillen and Lefkowitz, 2014). These findings resonate with the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988), suggesting that body-related insecurities can impede the vulnerability and self-disclosure essential for profound connection, and with Objectification Theory

(Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), which is supported by research showing how internalized objectification (Holland and Tiggemann, 2019) can lead to body shame and subsequently reduce relational satisfaction.

Crucially, a growing body of research points to the protective and enhancing role of positive body-related self-perceptions, directly informing the current study's emphasis on body esteem. Kim and Lee (2024) and García et al. (2024) both found significant positive correlations between positive body image (often operationalized as body appreciation or acceptance) and higher relationship satisfaction, noting enhanced emotional intimacy and communication quality. Homan and Tylka (2015) similarly demonstrated that body appreciation—defined as accepting, holding favorable attitudes toward, and respecting the body—was linked to greater relational intimacy and satisfaction, buffering against external pressures. Furthermore, Alleva et al. (2018) provided experimental evidence that body compassion interventions directly improve both body esteem and relationship satisfaction, offering causal support for the benefits of fostering positive body self-regard. The dyadic nature of these effects is evident in Meltzer and McNulty (2015)'s longitudinal study, which revealed that wives' body dissatisfaction negatively predicted both their own and their husbands' marital satisfaction over time, and in Markey and Markey (2016)'s finding that perceived partner satisfaction with one's body was a stronger predictor of relationship quality than one's own body satisfaction. While the literature extensively covers the negative impacts of body dissatisfaction on relationships, a systematic and comprehensive exploration of body esteem as a standalone, positive construct, and its direct association with broad measures of couple satisfaction in diverse contexts, remains underexplored.

2. Methodology

2.1 Aim

To study the relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction among male and female young adults.

2.2 Objectives

- To find out the relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction among male and female young adults.
- To measure the difference on the level of body esteem and couple satisfaction among male and female young adults.

2.3 Hypotheses

- There will be significant relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction among male young adults.
- There will be significant relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction among female young adults.
- There will be significant difference on the level of body esteem among male young adults.
- There will be significant difference on the level of couple satisfaction among male young adults.

2.4 Sample

This study enrolled 130 participants (65 males, 65 females) between 18 and 30 years old, all of whom were in a romantic relationship. Recruitment was conducted through a non-probability convenience sampling strategy, leveraging social media platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram, and university online communities) to disseminate a Google Form for data collection. Participants voluntarily self-selected to engage in the study, without any incentive or obligation. Inclusion criteria mandated participants be aged 18-30, currently in a romantic relationship, and possess sufficient English proficiency for the assessment tools. Incomplete submissions and those not meeting eligibility criteria were excluded from the final dataset.

2.5 Research Design

This study employed a correlational research design to examine the relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction among young adult males and females. Additionally, it utilized a comparative design to assess potential differences in the levels of body esteem and couple satisfaction between genders.

2.6 Procedure

The data for this study were collected using an online survey created and distributed via Google Forms. Before beginning the questionnaire, all participants were presented with a digital informed consent form that explained the purpose of the research, assured confidentiality, and outlined their right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. Only participants who agreed to the terms were allowed to proceed to the questionnaire.

The survey included two well-established self-report measures: the Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA) and the Couple Satisfaction Index–32 (CSI-32). These tools were chosen due to their strong psychometric validity and relevance to the constructs

being studied. Participants were also asked to provide basic demographic information to ensure that they met the eligibility criteria.

The inclusion criteria required participants to be between the ages of 18 and 30 and currently involved in a romantic relationship. A convenience sampling method was used, with participants recruited primarily through social media platforms and academic networks. The data collection process spanned approximately four weeks, during which a total of 130 complete and valid responses were obtained and retained for analysis.

The data collection process ensured anonymity and confidentiality, with no identifying information collected. Ethical considerations were strictly observed; all participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study through an informed consent section at the beginning of the form, which clearly stated that participation was voluntary and that participants could exit the form at any time prior to submission.

3. Analysis Of Results

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics*

Descriptive Statistics									
	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
CSI_32	130	25	161	122.45	34.163	-.879	.212	-.291	.422
BESAA	130	12	60	42.32	9.737	-.751	.212	.507	.422
Valid N (listwise)	130								

Descriptive analyses were conducted on both the Couple Satisfaction Inventory (CSI-32) and the Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA) for the full sample of 130 young adults (65 males, 65 females). On the CSI-32, scores ranged from 25 to 161 (possible range: 0–161), yielding a mean of 122.45 (SD = 34.16), which indicates generally high relationship satisfaction but with substantial variability across participants. The distribution of CSI-32 scores was moderately negatively skewed (skewness = -0.88 , SE = 0.21) and slightly platykurtic (kurtosis = -0.29 , SE = 0.42), suggesting a tail toward lower satisfaction values but an otherwise acceptably normal shape for parametric analyses. BESAA scores ranged from 12 to 60 (possible range: 0–60), with a mean of 42.32 (SD = 9.74), reflecting moderately high body esteem overall. Like the CSI-32, the BESAA distribution was also negatively skewed (skewness = -0.75 , SE = 0.21) and exhibited mild positive kurtosis (kurtosis = 0.51, SE = 0.42). Although both scales show slight departures from perfect normality—primarily due to a clustering of higher scores—these skewness and kurtosis values remain within acceptable bounds for Pearson correlations and independent-samples t-tests.

Consequently, the data meet the distributional assumptions required for subsequent inferential analyses.

Table 2: *Correlation between Body Esteem and Couple satisfaction among female young adults*

Variable	N	r	p
Body Esteem	65	-0.054	Insg.
Couple Satisfaction	65		

Females (Gender = 1). Among the 65 female participants, the Pearson correlation between couple satisfaction (CSI-32) and body esteem (BESAA) was $r = -0.054$ ($p = .671$). This coefficient is very close to zero and negative in direction, indicating virtually no linear relationship between women's satisfaction with their romantic partnership and their feelings about their body. Moreover, the p-value far exceeds the conventional threshold of .05, confirming that this slight inverse trend is not statistically significant. In practical terms, for this sample of young adult women, variation in body esteem does not appear to be meaningfully associated with variation in couple satisfaction.

Table 3: *Correlation between Body Esteem and Couple satisfaction among male young adults*

Variable	N	r	p
Body Esteem	65	0.190	Insg.
Couple Satisfaction	65		

Males (Gender = 2). In the male subsample ($N = 65$), the correlation between CSI-32 and BESAA was $r = 0.190$ ($p = .129$). Although this positive coefficient suggests a small tendency for men with higher body esteem to report greater couple satisfaction, the association did not reach statistical significance at the .05 level. The effect size ($|r| \approx .19$) would conventionally be considered “small,” and the p-value indicates that this pattern could easily arise by chance in samples of this size. Thus, among these young adult men, there is likewise no reliable evidence of a substantive link between how they feel about their bodies and how satisfied they are in their romantic relationships.

Table 4: *Group Statistics*

T-Test

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
CSI_32	1	65	122.66	35.555	4.410
	2	65	122.23	32.988	4.092
BESAA	1	65	41.23	9.957	1.235
	2	65	43.40	9.463	1.174

The “Group Statistics” table presents the sample size, means, standard deviations, and standard errors for both the Couple Satisfaction Inventory (CSI-32) and the Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA) separately for females (Gender 1) and males (Gender 2). Each gender group consisted of 65 young adults. For relationship satisfaction, females reported a mean CSI-32 score of 122.66 (SD = 35.56; SE = 4.41), while males reported essentially the same average at 122.23 (SD = 32.99; SE = 4.09). This near-identical mean and comparable spread indicate that, descriptively, men and women in this sample felt similarly satisfied in their relationships, with a moderate degree of variability around that central tendency. Turning to body esteem, females’ average BESAA score was 41.23 (SD = 9.96; SE = 1.24), whereas males scored slightly higher on average at 43.40 (SD = 9.46; SE = 1.17). Although men’s mean body-esteem score exceeds women’s by about 2.17 points, the overlapping standard deviations and modest standard errors suggest that this difference might be small relative to the individual variability within each group.

Analysis of Independent-Samples Tests

Variable	N	M	SD	t	p
Male	65	122.23	32.988	0.072	Insg.
Female	65	122.66	35.555		

The “Independent Samples Test” table first reports Levene’s test for equality of variances and then the t-tests comparing means between genders under both equal-variances assumed and not assumed scenarios. For both CSI-32 and BESAA, Levene’s F values were very small (F = 0.004 for CSI-32; F = 0.207 for BESAA) and non-significant (p = .947 and p = .650, respectively), indicating no evidence of unequal variances and justifying use of the equal-variances rows.

Table 5: *Mean, SD and t-value of Couple satisfaction among male and female young adults*

CSI-32 (Couple Satisfaction): Under equal variances, the t-value was 0.072 (df = 128), yielding a two-tailed p = .943. The mean difference (females minus males) was just 0.431

points ($SE = 6.016$), with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -11.47 to $+12.33$. Because $p \gg .05$ and the confidence interval straddles zero, there is no statistically significant gender difference in couple satisfaction.

Table 6: Mean, SD and t-value of Body esteem among male and female young adults

Variable	N	M	SD	t	p
Male	65	43.40	9.463	-1.273	Insg.
Female	65	41.23	9.957		

BESAA (Body Esteem): For body esteem, the t-value was -1.273 ($df = 128$), two-tailed $p = .205$. The mean difference was -2.169 points ($SE = 1.704$), with a 95% confidence interval of -5.54 to $+1.20$. Again, the p-value exceeds .05 and the interval includes zero, indicating no reliable difference in body esteem between women and men in this sample.

4. Discussion

The present study sought to explore the relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction among young adult males and females. The results obtained through various statistical analyses are discussed below with reference to previous research findings.

Among female participants, the Pearson correlation analysis indicated a non-significant and very weak negative relationship ($r = -0.054$, $p = .671$) between body esteem and couple satisfaction. This suggests that variations in body esteem did not predict variations in romantic relationship satisfaction for women in the current sample. This finding contrasts with previous studies by Kim and Lee (2024) and García et al. (2024), who reported significant positive associations between body esteem and emotional intimacy. One possible explanation for this divergence could be cultural differences, or the influence of other unmeasured moderating variables such as self-esteem and attachment patterns, which were highlighted by Laurent and Leary (2022) as important buffers in relational satisfaction.

Similarly, among male participants, a small positive but non-significant correlation ($r = 0.190$, $p = .129$) was observed between body esteem and couple satisfaction. Although there was a slight tendency for men with higher body esteem to report greater couple satisfaction, the result was not statistically reliable. These findings partially align with Smith et al. (2021), who emphasized the role of partner affirmation in shaping body image and relationship satisfaction, though they contrast with more robust associations reported by Martin-Storey and August (2023).

Further, no significant gender differences were found either in couple satisfaction scores or in body esteem scores. Females and males reported almost identical average levels of couple satisfaction (mean difference = 0.431, $p = .943$), and only a small, non-significant difference in body esteem (mean difference = -2.169 , $p = .205$). These findings align with the work of Yalcin and Ceylan (2020), who observed minimal gender differences in relationship satisfaction related to body image concerns, and with Brunson and Wirth (2017), who suggested that traditional gender gaps in body image perceptions may be narrowing among younger populations. Considering these findings, it can be concluded that body esteem, while important for individual self-perception, may not directly influence relationship satisfaction in a simple linear manner for young adult males and females in this cultural context. Other psychological and relational factors might play a more prominent role in shaping couple satisfaction, such as communication patterns, emotional regulation, attachment security, or cultural expectations surrounding relationships.

Finally, based on the results, the hypotheses proposed at the outset were evaluated as follows:

- The hypothesis that body esteem would significantly correlate with couple satisfaction among male young adults was rejected.
- The hypothesis that body esteem would significantly correlate with couple satisfaction among female young adults was rejected.
- The hypothesis that there would be a significant difference in body esteem between male and female young adults was rejected.
- The hypothesis that there would be a significant difference in couple satisfaction between male and female young adults was rejected.

Overall, these findings suggest a more complex interplay between self-perception and relational well-being, warranting further investigation into additional variables and using more nuanced methodological approaches.

5. Summary and Conclusion

The study aimed to examine the relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction among young adult males and females aged 18 to 30 years who were currently involved in romantic relationships. Guided by Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988), the research

explored whether individuals' self-perceptions related to their physical appearance were associated with their levels of satisfaction in romantic relationships.

The objectives of the study were:

- To find out the relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction among male and female young adults.
- To measure the difference on the level of body esteem and couple satisfaction among male and female young adults.

The following hypotheses were formulated to address the research objectives:

- There will be significant relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction among male young adults.
- There will be significant relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction among female young adults.
- There will be significant difference on the level of body esteem among male and female young adults.
- There will be significant difference on the level of couple satisfaction among male and female young adults.

A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed for the study. The sample consisted of 130 participants, evenly divided between males ($n = 65$) and females ($n = 65$), recruited through convenience sampling via online platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and university-related digital communities. Inclusion criteria required participants to be between 18 and 30 years of age, proficient in English, and currently engaged in a romantic relationship. Data were collected using a self-administered Google Form, which included an informed consent section, demographic information, and two standardized instruments:

- The Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA), which measures individuals' emotional and cognitive evaluations of their physical self.
- The Couple Satisfaction Index-32 (CSI-32), which evaluates various aspects of romantic relationship satisfaction, such as emotional closeness, communication, and conflict resolution.

Statistical analyses involved Pearson correlation to examine the relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction, and independent samples t-tests to assess gender-based differences.

Key Findings

The statistical analyses yielded the following findings:

- Among female participants, the correlation between body esteem and couple satisfaction was non-significant ($r = -0.054$, $p = .671$).
- Among male participants, a small positive but non-significant relationship was found ($r = 0.190$, $p = .129$).

These results indicate no significant relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction in either gender group.

Gender-based comparisons revealed:

- No significant difference in couple satisfaction between males ($M = 122.23$) and females ($M = 122.66$; $p = .943$).
- No significant difference in body esteem between males ($M = 43.40$) and females ($M = 41.23$; $p = .205$).

These results suggest that body esteem, as a singular construct, may not serve as a reliable predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction within this demographic. Instead, relational well-being may be shaped by a broader constellation of psychological and interpersonal factors, warranting further investigation through more nuanced and multifactorial research designs.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, the present study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings:

1. **Sampling Method:** The study employed a non-probability convenience sampling technique, which limits the generalizability of the results. Participants were self-selected and recruited primarily through online platforms, which may have introduced sampling bias and reduced representativeness.
2. **Self-Report Measures:** Both the Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA) and the Couple Satisfaction Index–32 (CSI-32) are self-report instruments. This reliance on self-reported data may have introduced social desirability bias, response bias, or inaccuracies in participants' self-assessments.
3. **Cross-Sectional Design:** As the study used a cross-sectional design, it only captured a snapshot of participants' experiences at a single point in time. This limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction.
4. **Lack of Control Variables:** The study did not examine or control for other variables that could potentially influence the results, such as self-esteem, attachment styles, communication quality, sexual satisfaction, or mental health status.

5. Cultural Context: The findings may be influenced by cultural attitudes specific to the population sampled and may not generalize to other sociocultural or age groups.

Future Recommendations

To enhance the validity and scope of future research in this area, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Adopt Longitudinal Designs: Future studies should consider longitudinal approaches to explore how the relationship between body esteem and couple satisfaction evolves over time and whether changes in one predict changes in the other.
2. Use Diverse and Representative Samples: Expanding the sample to include participants from different cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds would improve the generalizability of the findings and allow for comparative analysis.
3. Incorporate Dyadic or Partner Reports: Including data from both partners in a romantic relationship could provide a more holistic understanding of how body esteem influences—and is influenced by—couple dynamics.
4. Explore Mediating and Moderating Variables: Future research should investigate additional psychological or relational factors that may mediate or moderate the relationship, such as self-compassion, emotional regulation, relationship duration, or perceived partner support.
5. Integrate Mixed Methods: Employing qualitative or mixed-method approaches could enrich understanding by capturing deeper insights into individuals' lived experiences, perceptions, and the contextual nuances of romantic relationships.
6. Address Specific Relationship Contexts: Future studies may benefit from examining particular types of romantic relationships (e.g., long-distance, cohabiting, newly formed, or same-sex partnerships) to assess how body esteem may operate differently across relational contexts.

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