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Perception of Self-Image by Pre-Teens - The Balance Between Real and Ideal

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Abstract

Self-esteem image in pre-teens development is still intensively studied in the speciality literature. The objective of this study is to investigate the physical self-image of pre-teens in the context of adequacy and inadequacy to the ideal self-one. The hypothesis to be tested is that unfavourable self-assessment of physic attractiveness or the inadequacy of the desired pattern can be the sources of devaluation for pre-teens with a low self-esteem. Girls are more dissatisfied than boys with the height they have. Weight is a source of dissatisfaction for both, boys and girls. The work is the product of research conducted within the project PERFORMER - POSDRU/86/1.2/S/62508.

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1. Introduction

The self-esteem image (etymology: lat. image) is related to the self-consciousness (Doron & Parot, 1999) and at the same time being part of the Ego model, as a vision of our own being and of our relations with others (Allport, 1981), it develops along with the knowledge capacity of human beings (Zlate, 2004). Jung (1921, 1997) sees the self-image not only as a “conglomerate, but a unitary product, which has its own autonomy” (p. 481). Hamachek (1987) follows the same line arguing that self-image is “an organized cognitive structure, about us humans, all derived from our experiences” (p. 29). The same author, quoted by Băban (2001), Miclea and Lemeni (2004), Golu (2005) includes in the self-esteem image tree major elements: current Ego with its compounds (physical Ego, cognitive Ego, emotional Ego, social Ego and spiritual Ego), ideal Ego and future Ego. Physical Ego (body image) represents an “anchor of self-consciousness” (Pavelcu, 1981) which refers how a person sees in self and how he/she thinks that others see him. Society and culture provide criteria, for individuals to assess their experiences and to restructure the self-esteem. The direct impact of media over the body image is stronger in girls than in boys (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004). An inappropriate self-image is a

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high risk factor, which can lead to problems regarding eating habits (e.g. bulimia) (Vos, 1999; Tiggemann, 2005). Resweber (quoted by de Peretti, 2001) founds 133 extends the corporal image concept with the following elements: “group, whether it’s class or the social group is a visible expression and an extension of a body images, and such susceptibility is higher for girls with high levels of internalizing” (Yamamiya et al., 2005). The influence of how adolescents perceive their own body over the global self-esteem is often a researched subject (Duncan, Al-Nakeeb, & Nevill, 2004; Phillips, Pinto, & Jain, 2004; Tiggermann, 2005; Izgic & Akyuz, 2006). Researches in this field show that girls want to be slimmer while boys strive for a higher weight (Sands, 1997; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004; Fallon & Hausenblas, 2005; Yamamiya, Cash, Melnyk, H. D. Posavac, & S. S. Posavac, 2005; Burgess, Grogan, & Burwitz, 2006; Cachelin, Monreal, & Juarez, 2006; Radford, 2007). The height and the weight are two important aspects on which the body image is based. Beside these aspects in shaping the self-image it also counts the ways in which we see: our head, body, legs and certain particular body aspects (Jourard & Secord, 1955) which introduce the concept of “body-cathexis” - how satisfied are we with specific body features.

2. Purpose of study

The research objective was the investigation of body image of preadolescents with a low self-esteem in the context of its adequacy or inadequacy to the ideal body image. The hypothesis to be tested in this study is that unfavourable perception physical attractiveness and/or the inadequacy to the desired model can become sources of devaluation, both in boys and girls preadolescents with low self-esteem.

3. Methods

The research lot consists of 126 preteens (aged 12 -13 years old), of which 68 subjects (54%) were females and 58 subjects (46%) were male. There were selected pupils with medium low and low self-esteem (scores below 29, Rosenberg Scale). The research methods used were interview based survey and questionnaire based survey. The instruments used were interview guide and self-esteem questionnaire (Rosenberg Scale and Corporal Perception Self Esteem Questionnaire - P.S.C., Clinciu version).

4. Findings and results

In order to test the hypothesis the results immediate obtained on the research instruments were transform in standard results. The new standard scores were place in a five intervals: very good, good, average, poor and very poor (see Table 1) enabling their comparison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rosenberg Scale</th>
<th>Results appreciation scale</th>
<th>Corporal Perception Self Esteem Questionnaire – P.S.C. (Clinciu, A. - version)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Score head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 - 4</td>
<td>Very week</td>
<td>-45 - 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – 12</td>
<td>Week</td>
<td>1 - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 – 29</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>11 - 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 - 40</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>41 - 45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding the scores for height and weight dimensions, of the body image self-perception (P.S.C. – a version Clinciu, A.), the data interpretation was made on many intervals because tests results demand it (Table 2): for girls the height average is 157 centimetres, and the desired one is of 164 centimetres \((r = -.652, p<0.01)\). The maximum height desired by girls is 187 centimetres. Boys also desire a higher height: the average of known height is 160 centimetres while the average for the desire one is 175 centimetres. The maximum value of height for boys goes to 200 centimetres. The height was codified in eight categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Height (centimetres)</th>
<th>Scale of appreciation scores</th>
<th>Weight (kilograms)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 130</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>under 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131 – 140</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>141 – 150</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>41 – 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151 – 160</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>51 – 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161 – 170</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>61 – 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>171 – 180</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>71 – 80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181 – 190</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>81 – 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>191 – 200</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>91 – 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 200</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>over 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both girls and boys are unsatisfied with their height. Still their discontent differs. While lower classes (class 0 for girls and 1st class for boys) do not exist anymore the upper ones appeared (6th class for girls and 7th for boys). The results for the rest of the classes move from lower ranks to the upper ones. The height desired by girls has constant high scores on the 3rd and 4th rank, but has a low number of cases, because of their distribution on the higher ranks: 5th and 6th ones. More boys than girls wish to be taller. We can clearly see the boys scores regarding the height moving from lower classes/ranks (1st, 2nd, 3rd) to the higher one (5th, 6th, 7th). We can say there is no class 0 (less than 130 centimetres) for the boys’ real height while for the 6th class (181-190 centimetres) there is only one case. The girls’ results are opposite to boys’ ones: they miss class 6th but have class 0. For both boys and girls we have low (second class and class 3rd) and medium scores (class 4th), higher values are less presented in the researched group. Both the researched preadolescents and in generally girls only wish to be taller while boys strive for it.

In order to confer more clearly upon this concept – preteen’s height issue another item of the P.S.C. – Clinciu, A. version Questionnaire measured the degree in which they appreciate their own height. The preadolescents’ results are between -3 points (very unsatisfied) to +3 points (very satisfied) with their height. A higher number of boys (31 boys compared with only 14 girls) are unsatisfied with their height. Their score is between -3 to 0. Results fall within the 12-13 years age specific frame. At the beginning of preadolescence, the teen’s body is relatively proportional and has a good motility dominated by willed. At the end of preadolescence, the physical balance will be affected by certain discordant aspects, caused by the height and weight growing.

In preadolescence another important aspect of physical image is body weight. If girls wish for a lower weight, in boys case things are entirely different, they wish for a bigger weight. In the next figure we can see the difference between the real weight and the desired one \((r = -.605, p<0.01)\). An important observation must be made in boys case: by bigger weight we understand they want to became “more muscular”, to have “more muscles”, with “muscles well worked” (quoted from teens answers) not fat. Some of them said: “I want to go to gym to work my muscles”, “To have muscles, as culturists”.

Body weight of preadolescents was also measured by another item of P.S.C. (Clinciu, A. version). Similar to the request to body height assess was made: the students were asked to judge their weight on a scale starting from -3 (very dissatisfied) to +3 (very satisfied) showing how (un)happy are with their body weight. Girls in a slightly higher position (29 girls and 25 boys) are dissatisfied with their actual weight. Pupil’s results are place on a scale starting from -3 to 0 (dissatisfaction with their actual weight). For girl the real weight average is 47, 22 kilograms.
and the desired one is 44, 79 kilograms. The maximum value of real weight of girls is 70 kilograms. Desired weight for girls decreases with 15 kilograms. A difference between the real weight and the desired one exists also in boys’ case only that they wish for a greater weight. The actual weight average for boys is 48, 80 kilograms while they wish to have around 52, 75 kilograms. Their maximum weight scores also around 70 kilograms. The weight was coded into 8 classes. It can be seen for the actual weight boys don’t have class 0 (a weight under 30 kilograms) while in the classes 5th, 6th and 7th (over 70 kilograms) we meet 5 cases. Most of boys’ results are found in 1st to 4th class (between 31 kilograms and 70 kilograms). Girls’ results are distributed on all 5 classes (between 0 to 5th class), even if there are few cases (only in case for class 0 and 4th cases for forth one). Both girls and boys have low values (classes 1st, 2nd and 3rd) (a weight under 60 kilograms).

Girls and boys are unsatisfied with their actual weight. The measure of their dissatisfaction differs. Girls don’t have any more inferior class - class 0 nor class 4th (weight between 60 and 70 kilograms). They wish for a lower weight (to be slimmer. A great number of girls 41 from a total number of 68, wish for a weight placed in the second class (weight between 40 to 50 kilograms). Unlike with girls, who wish for a low weight, boys want a higher weight. There can be seen how the 3rd classes’ results (weight between 50 and 60 kilograms) are many compared with the 2nd class ones (weight between 40 and 50 kilograms) which is stable according, to the number of cases. There is a correlation between the desired height and the desired weight ($r = -.749$, $p < 0.01$), meaning that preadolescents wish for a certain height and weight.

The results registered for the appreciation of head, body and limbs elements and other body aspects were made as a comparison between genders. Boys are more dissatisfied then girls with their head features (20, 4% of them are place in the lower classes 1st and 2nd, while girls’ results are found in the superior classes). Boys also are more discontent with some of their body aspects (63% of boys and only 21% of girls). Some of the boys’ dissatisfaction sources are: their voice (“I have a rumbling voice, as if I’m speaking from a barrel!”) and their hairiness (D.M. says: “I’m hairy like a monkey!”). Girls are also unsatisfied with many aspects, but the most common are the fat deposits on their body (“I have cellulite!” or “I have fluffy hips!” or “I have belly fat!” with the meaning of fat found in the abdominal area), the face moles/freckles or pimples, and the body smell. For the body elements girls have results with lower values – they are more dissatisfied (class 1st and 2nd – very low and low scores) compared to boys 67,5% of them have results classified in the 3rd class (medium satisfaction) and only 10% in the 4th class (good appreciation). Abdominal area, waist, hips are elements sassed with negative scores when coming to the actual body image of girls. Also, the appearance of breasts and other sexual features are seen as negative by some girls (“they make me look more bent, not to be seen!” – said B.D.). In the same time limbs elements are seen as unfavourable (class 1 very low and class 2 low) by 76, 6% of girls compared to 31, 5% of boys. Girls refer more to legs length (student D.R.M. said: “If I had longer legs, maybe I would have look taller!”)

5. Conclusions and recommendations

According to the research results, we can draw the following conclusions:

- **Girls** are more dissatisfied than boys with their height, even though they are taller than boys. This can be the results of the ideal model of woman: 180 centimetres height, a model promoted by media.
- **The weight** is a source of dissatisfaction for both boys and girls, only that its direction differs. Girls wish for a lower weight than the one they have, while boys wish for a bigger weight compared with their actual one. It can be argued here, again, the ideal of models promoted by society.
- **Particular issues of body** (body skin, smell, freckles – scars – pimples, general hairiness, voice, fat deposits and walk) are rather a dissatisfaction source for boys than for girls.
- **Boys are more dissatisfied with the head features** (head shape, face shape, nose, eyes, mouth, eyebrows, forehead, ears, skin and hair).
- **Body elements** (neck, shoulders, abdomen, pectoral muscles/ breasts, waist, and hips) are a
dissatisfaction source for both boys and girls.

Self-appreciation of body image was investigated within an interview session held with each one of the research subjects. In one of the interview question students were asked rank a value between 1 to 10 for entire body aspect. We have seen that (self) perceived body image is deteriorated for both boys and girls. Though 31% of boys (18 students) give grades from 9 to 10, compared with 39.7% of girls (27 girls). Boys are slightly more critical than girls when comes to their physical image. Only 4 boys awarded themselves with the maxim grade, compared to girls, where 11 of them awarded themselves with the maximum grade. In boys case we have the same frequency regarding the 8th grade of the body image (16 boys compared with 24 girls. For the other classes there can be seen a similar frequency of the subjects’ answers: 77, 6% of boys have a medium low and low self-esteem and have negative scores at the attractiveness level perceived by others. This finding is very important since an unfavourable perception of body image of preteens with low and medium low self-esteem, for most of them is doubled by an unfavourable judgment from classmates. In this circumstance, the confidence of these preadolescent suffers a double blow.

References