



RESEARCH PAPER**Appearance Related Commentary, Self-Objectification and Psychological Well-being in Young Adults**

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ABSTRACT

Appearance related comments and self-objectification seem very dominant in media and real life. Appearance related comments and self-objectification definitely influence psychological wellbeing of individuals especially adolescents and Young adults. The present study was designed to study the relationship between appearance-related comments, self-objectification and psychological well-being in young adults. Purposive sampling strategy was used to select a sample of students (N=120) from different colleges and universities of Lahore. A correlational research design with purposive sampling has been used. Physical Appearance Scale i.e., Verbal commentary on physical appearance scale (Herbozo & Thompson, 2006), Self -Objectification Questionnaire (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998), and Psychological Well-being Scale (Ryff, 2007) are used as assessment measures. Results of the research indicated that verbal commentary on physical appearance, self-objectification and psychological well-being are significantly related to each other. Self-objectification is a significant predictor of psychological wellbeing in young adults. There are no significant gender differences in verbal commentary on physical appearance, self-objectification and psychological well-being in young adults.

KEYWORDS Appearance Related Comments, Psychological Well-Being, Self-Objectification

Introduction

Appearance related commentary and self-objectification has become an important point of discussion in context of psychological well-being. In this age of social media, everyone is very active on various social media platforms. Mostly young adults are active on many social media platforms and frequently post their pictures and videos on social media. Appearance related comments regarding physical appearance are seen commonly in the comments section of those posts containing videos and pictures of that individual. There are positive and negative comments, and both can influence psychological wellbeing of young adults. Self-Objectification means how much people value their bodies in terms of observable appearance against non-observable competence without considering their level of satisfaction with their physical appearance (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998). Self-objectification also affects psychological wellbeing of individuals. Appearance related comments are also linked to beauty standards set by indigenous culture, and it has an impact on psychological wellbeing of individuals differently.

The presence of self-objectification in youth is explained by various theories. According to objectification theory, repeated experiences of sexual objectification educate girls and women to take an evaluative third-person view of their bodies (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). Sexual objectification, according to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), occurs

when a woman's body, body parts, or sexual activities are detached from her person, reduced to the status of simple tools, or treated as if they might represent her. According to theorists, sexual objectification affects girls and women in three ways i.e., direct interpersonal experiences of objectification, vicarious experiences of other women's objectification e.g., overhearing men's appearance commentary about other women, and objectified media representations of women e.g., fragmented images of women's bodies (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). In addition to traditional media and face-to-face interactions, women now commonly experience all three forms of objectification on social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, which have evolved since Fredrickson and Roberts' early work (Bell et al., 2018). Appearance-related communication is a behavioural manifestation of self-objectification (Arroyo & Harwood, 2012). And have also connected it to self-objectification (Becker et al., 2013). Both self-objectification and appearance related commentary is related to psychological wellbeing.

Appearance related comments refer to making bad or good comments to other's appearance. It contains negative comments regarding one's physical appearance (Negative Appearance factor), positive comments related to one's body shape (Positive Body factor), positive comments related to overall physical appearance or non-body related parts (Positive General Appearance factor), and comments related to exercise and weight loss (Exercise and Weight Loss factor (Herbozo & Thompson, 2006). Positive or negative comments about one's appearance are possible. Negative and positive appearance commentary are two types of appearance commentary that have gotten a lot of attention in the research. Positive appearance commentary refers to comments that are regarded positive e.g., compliments about weight or shape based on the content, whereas negative appearance commentary refers to comments that are considered negative e.g., complaints about shape or weight (Fabian and Thompson, 1989).

Self-objectification occurs when individuals treat themselves as objects to be viewed and evaluated based upon appearance (Rollero & Picolli, 2017). Self-objectifying refers to those who regard themselves as objects for use rather than human beings. Self-objectification follows objectification, a topic that is commonly discussed in the context of sex and gender. Men and women are both affected by self-objectification, although women are more affected. According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) self-objectification is the psychological consequence of living in a cultural setting among girls and women.

Inter- and intraindividual degrees of positive functioning, similar to, self-referent attitudes like personal growth and self-control, and one's connections with others, are referred to as psychological well-being. Psychological well-being refers to the quality of one's life. It is a combination of feeling well and being able to operate efficiently. (Huppert, 2009). Hedonic well-being, is commonly used to describe subjective feelings of felicity. It is made up of two constituents i.e., emotional (with a high positive effect and a low negative effect) and cognitive (with a low positive effect and a high negative effect). (Carruthers & Hood, 2004).

Eudaimonic well-being, the lesser known term, refers to the goal-oriented part of psychological well-being. A psychologist, Carol Ryff, has devised a detailed model that classifies eudaimonic well-being into six different forms of psychological well-being. (Ryff, 2005). These forms are comprised of Positive interpersonal relationships, individual abilities, a feeling of purpose and value in life, personal growth and development, and autonomy, these are all components of psychological well-being.

Literature Review

Young adults experience appearance related comments and self-objectification at multiple stages of their life. Some young adults are more sensitive to appearance related comments and experience more detrimental effects on their psychological well-being. The literature exploring the relationship between appearance related comments, self-objectification and psychological wellbeing revealed that body-image was positively related with psychological well-being. Body-image significantly predicted the psychological well-being among students (Abbasi & Zubair, 2015). Self-objectification is also significantly related to psychological health (Hanna et al., 2017). The combination of these three variables i.e., appearance related commentary, self-objectification and psychological wellbeing in young adults is studied least indigenously.

In a research study by Arroyo et al. (2014) it was highlighted appearance-related communication is a behavioural manifestation of self-objectification (Arroyo & Harwood, 2012) and have also connected it to self-objectification (Becker et al., 2013). In doing so, this research predicted that higher levels of self-objectification are associated with verbalizing negative evaluations of oneself because interpersonal conversations about one's appearance often feature self-objectification e.g., self-criticism (Arroyo et al., 2014). Feltmann (2018) explored how and when the use of Instagram, an image-based social networking site, relates to self-objectification and body surveillance among young adult women. Internalization of cultural standards of beauty and engaging in upward appearance comparison mediated the relationship between Instagram usage and both body surveillance and self objectification. That is, increased Instagram usage was shown to be associated with greater internalization of cultural standards of beauty and higher rates of upward appearance comparison, which in turn were related to increased levels of both self-objectification and body surveillance. So, self-objectification is related to body appearance and comparison based on beauty standards.

Maqbool et al. (2020) explored social media usage and self-sexualization behavior by taking into account the mediating roles of Internalization of reward beauty and self-objectification. The relationship of appearance conversation on Facebook and Instagram has also been explored with these variables. The results found that self-objectification is positively related to self-sexualization behavior. Tyszkiewicz et al. (2012) conducted research and found that appearance-related commentary is most likely to trigger an instance of appearance self-consciousness and self-perceived level of attractiveness is most likely to prompt self-consciousness. The findings suggested that the negative effects of appearance comments and/or perceived unattractiveness may affect appearance self-consciousness.

Appearance related commentary and self-objectification is directly and positively related to psychological well-being.

Hypotheses

Following hypotheses laid the foundation for this study:

- There is likely to be a significant relationship between appearance related commentary, self-objectification and psychological well-being in young adults.
- Appearance related commentary and self-objectification are likely to predict psychological well-being in young adults.
- There are likely to be the significant gender differences in appearance related commentary, self-objectification and psychological wellbeing in young adults.

There is research gap exploring the relationship between appearance related commentary, self-objectification and psychological wellbeing in Pakistan. Appearance related commentary is different here as people judge you both for being overweight and underweight, beauty standards are different from other cultures, and it does have bad impact on psychological wellbeing of young adults as they are more sensitive to such comments. The goal of this research is to assess the relationship between appearance related commentary, self-objectification and psychological wellbeing in young adults indigenously. The interventions can also be used to boost self-esteem and reduce the bad impact of appearance related commentary and self-objectification on psychological wellbeing in young generation.

Material and Methods

This section outlines the procedures that were employed to conduct this research. It includes research design, sampling strategy, and assessment measures used in the research.

Research Design

A correlational research design was used in the present study to assess the relationship between appearance related comments, self-objectification and psychological wellbeing in young adults.

Sample and Sample Strategy

A sample of 120 young adults was taken from different colleges and universities. Non-probability purposive sampling was utilized to recruit the sample with the following inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Inclusion Criteria

- Young adults with age range of 18-25 were taken.
- Students from colleges and universities were taken.
- Both girls and boys were taken.

Exclusion Criteria

- Adolescents were not taken.
- Students with special needs and any physical disability were excluded.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables (N=200)

Variables	M	SD	f	%
Age (in years)	10.71	1.06	-	-
Gender				
Male			16	86.8
Female			105	13.2
Family System	-	-		
Nuclear			79	65.3
Joint			42	34.7
Family Income				
10000-50000			69	57
50000-1 lac			50	41.3
1 lac- 1.5 lac			1	.8
Above			1	.8
Education	-	-		

Bachelors	11	9.1
Masters	30	24.8
MPHIL	78	64.5

Note. f = frequency, %age= percentage

Operational Definitions

Appearance Related Commentary

To making bad or good comments to others appearance. It contains negative comments regarding one's physical appearance (Negative Appearance factor), positive comments related to one's body shape (Positive Body factor), positive comments related to overall physical appearance or non-body related parts (Positive General Appearance factor), and comments related to exercise and weight loss (Exercise and Weight Loss factor). (Herbozo & Thompson, 2006)

Self-Objectification

Self objectification has also been described as the act of viewing one's body in terms of observable, appearance-based characteristics rather than non-observable, competence-based characteristics, or as viewing and treating oneself as a sexual object (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998).

Psychological Wellbeing

Psychological well-being is a factor supporting someone's future happiness, which is stimulated by individual's learning in dealing with problem or environment (Mock et al., 2019), and affected by their experience and education (Ryff, 2014). It had been measured on scale by ryff that measured six components of wellbeing.

Results and Discussion

The results of the current research are presented for relationship of academic burnout, mindfulness, and psychological wellbeing in young adults.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficients of Study Variables

Scales	A	k	M	SD	Range	
					Potential	Actual
Appearance-related Commentary	.70	21	56.01	9.96	1-105	29-80
Self-Objectification	.81	24	67.80	13.70	1-168	34-104
Psychological Well-being	.79	42	111.32	20.76	1-252	55-172

Note: α = reliability coefficient, K= no. of items in scale and subscale

SPSS version 23 has been used to assess the reliability of the scales for appearance related commentary, self-objectification and psychological wellbeing. Cronbach's alpha reliability for verbal commentary on physical scale containing 21 items was $\alpha = .70$ which is quite good. Self-objectification scale consisted of 24 items and had a reliability value of $\alpha = .81$. The psychological wellbeing scale had a reliability value of .79 and its good.

Table 3
Independent Samples T-test comparing males and females in Appearance related commentary, self-objectification and psychological wellbeing in young adults (N=120)

Variables	Females (n=106)		Males (n= 16)		t (120)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Appearance-related Commentary	55.74	9.95	57.81	10.14	-.773	.441	.20
Self-Objectification	67.50	13.60	69.75	14.62	-.607	.545	.15
Psychological Well-being	110.55	20.61	116.37	21.73	-1.04	.298	.27

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; CI= Confidence Interval; LL: Lower Limit; UL= Upper Limit; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the gender difference between appearance related commentary, self-objectification and psychological well-being. There is non-significant gender difference in appearance related commentary $t(120) = -.773$, $p = .441$ (two-tailed), in score for males ($M = 57.81$, $SD = 10.14$) and females ($M = 55.74$, $SD = 9.95$). Results also indicated that there is non-significant difference in self-objectification, $t(120) = -.607$, $p = .545$ (two-tailed), in score for males ($M = 69.75$, $SD = 14.62$) and females ($M = 67.50$, $SD = 13.60$). Also, there is non-significant gender difference in psychological well-being, $t(120) = -1.04$, $p = .298$ (two-tailed). The effect size of appearance related commentary, self-objectification and psychological well-being was .20, .15 and .27 respectively.

Table 4
Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Study Constructs (N=200)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.Appearance related commentary	-	.527***	.288**	.510***	.413***	.404***	.317***	.267**	.190*	.122	.254**	.241**
2.Self-objectification	-	-	.543***	.806***	.850***	.850***	.476***	.359***	.493***	.423***	.428***	.454***
3.Psychological Well-being	-	-	-	.514***	.393***	.451***	.856***	.786***	.779***	.796***	.821***	.804***
4.Surveillance Scale	-	-	-	-	.519***	.522***	.467***	.376***	.384***	.413***	.452***	.400***
5.Body Shame Scale	-	-	-	-	-	.595***	.331***	.252**	.420***	.266**	.286**	.345***
6.Control Belief Scale	-	-	-	-	-	-	.399***	.279**	.415***	.363***	.338***	.392***
7. Autonomy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.606***	.605***	.642***	.671***	.627***
8.Environmental Mastery	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.511***	.536***	.563***	.573***
9.Personal Growth	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.485***	.609***	.538***
10.Positive Relations with others	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.594***	.627***
11.Purpose in Life	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.535***
12.Self-Acceptance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The table 4 showed the results of Pearson product moment correlation analysis that had been used to investigate the connection among demographics and study variables.

The result showed that there was significant positive correlation between total appearance related commentary and total psychological well-being. There is positive and highly significant relationship between self-objectification and total psychological well-being as well as its subscales personal burnout, studies related burnout, class related burnout, instructor related burnout, environment mastery and self-acceptance. And there is significant positive correlation between psychological wellbeing and subscales autonomy, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life. There is non-significant relationship between appearance related commentary and positive relations with others subscale.

Table 5
Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Psychological Wellbeing from Appearance related commentary and self-objectification in Young Adults (N= 200)

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
Constant	54.75	9.95	5.50	.000	[35.04, 74.46]
Appearance-related commentary	.01	.19	.09	.92	[-.35, .39]
Self-objectification	.81	.14	5.89	.000	[.54, 1.09]
F	24.24***				
R2	.29				

Note. B= Unstandardized B, SE= Std. Error, R²= R square; CI = confidence Interval; *** $p < .001$

Result shows that self-objectification is a significant predictor of psychological wellbeing. The R^2 value of .29 indicates that predictors explained 29% variance in the outcome variable with $F = 24.44$, $p < .001$. So, the overall model was highly significant. The findings revealed that self-objectification is a significant predictor of psychological wellbeing ($\beta = .538$, $p = .000$). Appearance related commentary was found as non-significant predictor of psychological wellbeing.

Following are the major findings of the study:

- Appearance related commentary, self-objectification and psychological wellbeing have significant positive relationship with each other.
- Self-objectification is significantly predicting psychological wellbeing in young adults.
- No significant gender differences were found in appearance related commentary, self-objectification and psychological wellbeing.

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the association between appearance related commentary, self-objectification and psychological well-being in young adults. Previously, it was hypothesized that appearance related commentary, self-objectification are likely to predict psychological well-being in young adults. Also, appearance related commentary, self-objectification are likely to be correlated with psychological well-being in young adults. This is consistence with the research conducted by Rasalingman et al. (2017) which highlighted appearance related commentary and it's association with mental health (Psychological wellbeing) and its effects on daily life. This study revealed when young adults experience appearance commentary, they also face mental problems as a result. So, this study highlighted relationships between appearance related commentary and psychological wellbeing (Rasalingam et al., 2017).

Another study also highlighted positive relationship between body shame and psychological wellbeing in young adults conducted by Priya et al. (2015). The results of this research suggests the positive relationship between body shame and depression, anxiety and loneliness. This study shows that when adolescents experience body shame, they are also having issues in form of psychological wellbeing in depression, anxiety and loneliness. (Priya et al., 2015).

It was hypothesized that there is likely to be significant gender difference in terms of appearance related commentary, self objectification and psychological wellbeing in young adults. Findings of the study showed that there were nonsignificant difference between male and female in appearance related commentary, self objectification and psychological wellbeing. Male non-significantly showed more difference in appearance

related commentary, self objectification and psychological wellbeing. Females non-significantly showed more difference in appearance related commentary, self objectification and psychological wellbeing. This is inconsistent with the research conducted by Rueger and Jenkins (2014). This research revealed that boys showed high levels of direct and physical commentary and girls showed higher levels of indirect self objectification and psychological wellbeing. Another study was done by Nazia (2018). The findings of this study showed that boys were at higher risk to be appearance related commentary and have more chances to face psychological distress and females have lower risks for psychological distress. Another study by Sadiq et al. (2020), showed that both internalizing and externalizing symptoms were highly presented in males than females. The difference of our results might be due the culture differences.

It was hypothesized that appearance related commentary and self objectification is likely to predict psychological wellbeing in young adults. Results of the study showed that self objectification significantly predicted psychological wellbeing in young adults. This is consistence with the research conducted by Salman et al. (2021), appearance related commentary positively predicted psychological wellbeing in young adults and victims of appearance related commentary were more vulnerable to be affected by psychological wellbeing. Another study done by Ruqia et al. (2018). The findings of this study showed that appearance related commentary predicted psychological wellbeing in young adults.

Another research conducted by Lanna et al. (2021). The findings of this research that experiencing commentary at school level significantly predicted psychological wellbeing in young adults. Another study conducted by Schwartz et al. (2014). The results of this study showed that appearance related commentary leads toward psychological wellbeing in young adults. A study was conducted by Wolke at al. (2013). The findings of this study showed that appearance related commentary significantly predicted both internalizing and externalizing problems (psychological wellbeing) in young adults. Another study was conducted by Bowes et al. (2014). The results of this study showed that appearance related commentary was a risk factor for anxiety and depressive symptoms and appearance related commentary predicted psychological wellbeing in young adult

Conclusion

Considering all the results, it can be concluded that appearance related commentary and self-objectification have significant relationship with psychological well-being and self-objectification is also a predictor of psychological wellbeing. Thus, most of the research of these variables in Pakistan is in the favour of current findings. Even appearance related commentary and self-objectification play a vital role in an individual's well-being, not only in foreign countries but in Pakistan also. So our research hypothesis are supporting the literature to some extent.

Future studies should focus on

- The result of the study would be more generalized if sample would be taken from colleges as well.
- Sample can also be taken from other age groups like adolescents or school students.

The result of the present study can be taken into consideration for the future research as appearance related commentary and self-objectification are statistically significant, and self-objectification is also predicting psychological well-being in young

adults. It is important to make public aware that although appearance related commentary and self-objectification negatively affects the psychological well-being of young adults.

- Most of the participants belonged to university so it can become a hindrance for generalization of the results.
- The participants were taken from specific areas only as sample from all over the country was not possible.

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