

Body Image Dimensions as Predictors of Fear of Negative Evaluation and People-Pleasing: The Moderating Role of Rejection Sensitivity Among College Students

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Abstract

This study examines the predictive effects of various body image dimensions on fear of negative evaluation and people-pleasing behaviors among college students, with a focus on the moderating role of rejection sensitivity. Utilizing a sample of 204 college students from Tamil Nadu, aged 17–25, the research employed validated questionnaires: the Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ), Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (FNE), the Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale, and the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire. Results indicated significant relationships between negative appearance evaluation and both fear of negative evaluation and people-pleasing. Appearance orientation and weight preoccupation also emerged as significant predictors of people-pleasing, while fitness evaluation and subjective weight showed weaker or non-significant associations. Moderation analysis highlighted that rejection sensitivity intensified the impact of negative body image on fear of negative evaluation and people-pleasing. This research underscores the importance of body image and rejection sensitivity as core factors influencing college students' social and emotional well-being.

Keywords: body image, fear of negative evaluation, people-pleasing, rejection sensitivity, sociotropy, college students, social anxiety, self-esteem

Introduction

Body image is a multidimensional and dynamic construct reflecting how individuals perceive, evaluate, and feel about their own bodies. Dissatisfaction with body image is common in adolescence and young adulthood and is linked to psychological distress, low self-esteem, unhealthy eating, and the development of symptoms related to anxiety and depression. Among college students, such dissatisfaction is often heightened by peer comparison, internalization of sociocultural standards, and heightened exposure to evaluation in social settings.

Self-concept is central to this process, comprising beliefs and perceptions organized through life experiences and social learning. As posited by self-discrepancy theory, a mismatch between actual and ideal self-views can trigger psychological strain and shape behaviors associated with social acceptance or avoidance (e.g., people-pleasing or fear of negative evaluation).

People-pleasing behavior, especially salient in individuals with sociotropic tendencies, manifests as prioritizing others' approval at the cost of personal needs. This may foster a sense of self-doubt, dependence on external validation, and increased risk for mental health difficulties. Similarly, **fear of negative evaluation**—the apprehension or distress linked to the possibility of unfavorable judgment by others—can produce social withdrawal, self-consciousness, and anxiety in academic and peer settings. Rejection sensitivity further complicates this dynamic by amplifying individuals' anticipation and perception of social rejection, producing heightened fear of negative evaluation and people-pleasing tendencies given the salience of peer acceptance and social feedback during the college years, understanding the interplay between body image, fear of negative evaluation, people-pleasing, and rejection sensitivity is critical. This research examines these associations in a college student sample, aiming to clarify the mechanisms underlying maladaptive social coping and support the development of more effective psychological interventions.

Methodology

Aim

The aim of this study is to examine how body image dimensions predict fear of negative evaluation and people-pleasing among college students, and to assess the moderating role of rejection sensitivity.

Hypotheses

- H1: There are significant relationships between body image dimensions and fear of negative evaluation.
- H2: There are significant relationships between body image dimensions and people-pleasing.
- H3: Body image dimensions significantly affect fear of negative evaluation.
- H4: Body image dimensions significantly affect people-pleasing.
- H5: Body image dimensions predict fear of negative evaluation in the presence of rejection sensitivity as a moderating variable.

Objectives

- To estimate the relationship between body image dimensions and fear of negative evaluation among college students.
- To estimate the relationship between body image dimensions and people-pleasing.
- To assess the effect of body image dimensions on both outcomes.
- To examine whether rejection sensitivity moderates the relationship between body image and fear of negative evaluation.

Research Design

A cross-sectional, quantitative design utilizing standardized self-report questionnaires.

Variables

Independent variables: Ten body image dimensions: appearance evaluation, appearance orientation, fitness evaluation, fitness orientation, health evaluation, health orientation, illness orientation, body area satisfaction, subjective weight, weight preoccupation.

Dependent variables: Fear of negative evaluation, People-pleasing

Moderating variable: Rejection sensitivity

Sample and Sampling

Population: College students from Tamil Nadu, India

Sample size: 204 students (80 males, 124 females)

Age range: 17–25 years

Sampling method: Purposive and snowball sampling (recruitment via Google Forms and social media)

Inclusion criteria:

- College students (undergraduate or postgraduate)
- Age 17–25 years
- Residing in Tamil Nadu

Exclusion criteria:

- Below 17 or above 25 years
- Not currently enrolled in college
- Residing outside Tamil Nadu

Sample Characteristics

Category	Frequency
Male	80
Female	124
Age 17–19	42
Age 20–23	156
Rural	19
Urban.	159
Semi-urban	26
Undergraduate	97
Postgraduate	107

Measures

- **Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ; Cash, 1990)**
Assesses ten dimensions of body image; responses on a 5-point Likert scale.
Internal consistency: $\alpha = 0.75–0.90$; test-retest reliability: 0.49–0.91.
- **Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (FNE; Watson & Friend, 1969)**
30 items, true/false. Internal reliability: $\alpha = 0.94–0.98$; test-retest: 0.78–0.94.
- **Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale (Beck et al., 1983)**
Used to score people-pleasing tendencies (sociotropy); 0–4 scale.
Internal reliability: $\alpha = 0.90$.
- **Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (Downey & Feldman, 2013)**
18 items (6-point scale); measures anxiety and expectancy of rejection.
Test-retest reliability: 0.83; internal consistency: 0.81.
- **Socio-demographic Data Sheet :**
Collected age, gender, residence, education, and living arrangement.

Procedure

- Participants were given information about the study and provided informed consent electronically.
- Questionnaires were administered online (Google Forms, social media).
- Participation was voluntary and anonymous.
- Data confidentiality and academic use were assured.

Statistical Analysis

Software: SPSS Version 20

Analysis plan

- Descriptive statistics: Means, SDs for all key variables.
- Pearson correlations: To analyze relationships between variables.
- Regression analyses: To assess predictive effects of body image dimensions on fear of negative evaluation and people-pleasing.
- Moderation analysis: To examine rejection sensitivity as a moderator.

Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent obtained
- Confidential, voluntary participation
- Withdrawal permitted at any time
- Data used solely for academic purposes, following ethical guidelines for human subjects research.

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