Chapter 78

Body Image and Wellbeing in Religious Male and Female Youth in Israel:
An Educational Challenge

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ABSTRACT

In the current study described in this chapter, we examined the relationship between body image and well-being among religiously observant male and female youth from four age groups: 16, 17, 19, and 22. MANOVA analysis of age x gender produced a significant interaction regarding body image. Various trends were found among the two genders according to age group. Among the girls, there is a moderate rise in body image (BI) with age, whereas among the boys there is an obvious decline between 17 and 19, followed by an increase. The boys' BI scores were significantly higher than those of the girls aged 16, 17, and 19, but not for age 22. There were significant and positive correlations between BI and well-being for all age groups and both genders. There were high correlations among the girls relative to those among the boys.

INTRODUCTION

Body image is primarily dependent on age, culture (Safir, Flaisher-Kellner, & Rosenmann, 2005), ethnicity, and gender (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2006). Gillen and Lefkowitz (2006) claimed that "few studies, however, have tested sex and ethnic differences in body image together." Few studies have been carried out on body image among Israeli men (Safir et al., 2005). Despite the cultural context of body image, the author has not found even one comparative study on religious Israeli men and women. The connection between body image and emotional wellbeing has been proven in the past (Myers & Sweeney, 2005), but there is a lack of comparative research examining this connection among both genders, in the religious

population, and in three age groups. The current study seeks to compare religious adolescents of both genders and in three age groups (16, 17, and 19) regarding their body image, emotional wellbeing, and the connection between them.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Body Image

The complexity of body image is reflected in its large number of definitions, and the various psychological theories expressing different attitudes towards it. Schilder (1935), for example, defined body image as a person's general view of his or her body, including schema of awareness and unawareness. On the other hand Gal Or, Shoval, and Letzer (1983) defined the concept of body image as how we perceive the body, with the perception being the result of the conscious and unconscious reflection of the entirety of sensations, feelings, expectations, and values connected with the body when static or moving. Cash (1994) defined body image as the individual's self-evaluation and his or her emotional experiences connected with the body's physical characteristics.

In the current study, that examines the connection between body image and emotional wellbeing, we use the definition of Ravaldi et al. (2003), who defined body image as a subjective picture of the size and shape of a person's body and feelings relative to the characteristics of the various parts of his or her body, and the body as a whole. This "subjective picture" is what is most important to body image, rather than its objective dimensions. In Israel too, Bachar (2011), and Maor (2012) demonstrated that subjective self-esteem characterizes body image, rather than its objective dimensions.

The construct of body image may be divided into three central dimensions (Banfield & McCabe, 2002).

1. **The Perceptual Component:** How a person perceives his or her body size, parts, and how they are proportioned.
2. **The Attitudinal-Behavioral Component:** A person's feelings and cognitions concerning his or her body and external appearance (for example: satisfaction with one's body, its physical attractiveness) as well as body-related behaviors (looking after it, care, and touch).
3. **The Experiential-Sensory Component:** Basic and primary bodily sensations and experiences regarding a person's connection with his or her body (for example: level of confidence regarding limitations of one's body, sense of ownership of one's own body, level of integration of the body parts, and sense of control of the body).

Physical changes, sometimes extreme, occur during adolescence, that are bothersome for the adolescent. These transformations, just like changes on other planes (emotional, cognitive, and social) have a significant psychological effect (Erlich & Fisherman, 2012; Bachar, 2011) and influence the adolescent's identity, including body image.

Many researchers have examined the factors influencing body image. The main ones include social influence and familial, personal, spiritual, and other factors (Erlich & Fisherman 2012; Snapp, Hensley-Choate, & Ryu, 2012).

Social influence has a great effect on forming self-image regarding appearance and looks. Any deviation from what is considered a normative appearance leads to a lack of satisfaction with the person's

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