Body Image Dissatisfaction in the Contemporary Society: A Case Study of Nepali Youths

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Abstract

People in recent times have become more focused on their body. They find a clear connection of their personality with their physical looks. Also, they attach their appearance or body-image with popular celebrities. In case people find their body image as good, they become satisfied, but if they find it below the 'ideal' type, they become upset. This practice of comparison indicates that people make negative remarks to their own body. Positive body image includes self-satisfaction with the appearance in terms of a given shape, size and weight of a body while negative body image means the dissatisfaction with shape, size and weight of body, and a perceived feeling of loss of sexuality. Notwithstanding the historical trend of women being more conscious of their preserved beauty, modern men have also been anxious of their body image and tried to be manly. This paper tries to explore what do people think about their bodies, how do they perceive their below-average body, what efforts they do make to change their average- or below-average body into a good-looking body, and how do they convert negative body image into a positive one. It finally argues that the labeling of own body is important for both men and women not only to learn types of bodies but also to adapt to them.

Keywords: Body, Beauty, Femininity, Masculinity, Sexuality.

Introduction

Body image means people's perception about their own body. It is inherently subjective evaluation made by individuals because they sketch their body-picture in their mind and define their outlook and character. If they sketch their body as perfect, they become satisfied, but if they find their body ugly, the become upset. However, people make some criteria or take some references of measuring their body. The defining of an 'ideal-type' or a beautiful body is also subjective, but it has some social contexts. Thus, the gap between 'ideal' and real body image brings, among people in general and among women in particular, the body image dissatisfaction, because beauty has historically been attached more to women than men. When people desire an ideal body and see themselves as different to the ideal, they cannot see their body as real and beautiful.

The defining of body is influenced by personal, social and cultural factors with feelings of positive, negative, or a combination of both (Borzekowski & Bayer, 2005). A body image has multifaceted dynamic construct, which involves biological and psychological factors as well as external 'cultural and social determinants' (Sachdeva et al., 2012) Body image dissatisfaction is caused by negative attribute, dieting behavior, and an eating disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Female's desire for a thin body is also the cause of body dissatisfaction (Heider et al., 2018). But body image satisfaction has a substantial association with image perception, health status, and self-weight assessment (Sachdeva et al., 2012). When an individual makes a positive body image, he feels self-esteem and self-worth. On the contrary, when he or she has a negative body image, a dissatisfied body image can develop.

Several factors influence people's dissatisfaction with their body image. A major role to dissatisfy people with their physical appearance in the contemporary world is played by television and other communication networks, which have mediatized people about what a perfect body is. Besides, natural environment and the peer group circle is also affecting individuals to feel about what beauty and ugly mean. It is widely that the 'body image dissatisfaction is one of the main reasons for dieting behavior, negative affect, and causation and maintenance of eating disorder' (Heider, 2018). Different studies show that body dissatisfaction is higher in women than in men and is unaffected by age in women. Also, women have given higher importance to their appearance than men. It is widely that the women invest more hours of their life to decorate their body and expose their 'ideal' type of beauty. Despite the fact that both the men and women engage in beautifying themselves, their body image is dissimilar and vary across different ages (Quittkat et al., 2019).

Body image, as a concept, was used firstly in 1935 by Paul Ferdin, an Austrian Psychiatrist, who defined it as a mental image that individuals have made, which truly represented their bodies. It is all about person's experience to embodiment, especially the physical appearance. This experience consists of perceptions about physical appearance and attitudes to handle or deal with that appearance. The idea of body image makes a person to accurately judge his or her appearance from the physical dimension and present the self among others. And, it is predominantly the women, who have been the major target of socially constructed criteria of beauty. The fame and shame that they have received from the public based on their body has also obliged them to engage more in thinking and doing for how to become beautiful.

Women are not only suffering for socially constructed parameter of beauty but also because of getting comments on their body which affect pathological conditions like low self-esteem and anorexia. Whereas in men, different visible physical problems such as muscle dysmorphic disorder or bigorexia are overlooked. Due to the portrayal of 'ideal' male bodies in media and television including films by showing men as heroes, Nepali people are have started thinking seriously about body image. There still lacks a profound concern about male body image. A boy wants to look like the "perfect man" by making muscular bodies just like the models they admire. In modern times, business areas use skimpily clad men in advertisements, movies, music videos, magazine covers, billboards, etc., and expose their appearance. While women are supposed to look slim and men are desired to look muscular, the practice of women going to beauty parlor and men going to gym is increasing day by day. Plus-size people are unlikely defined as perfect, and even if they are shown by media and film industry, it is designed for comic purposes (Tamang, 2018).

Making any type of a body image is a highly complex process. It is multifaceted, which includes rounds of thinking, feeling and exposure to others about one's physical appearance. Two key issues come during the making of body image; firstly, people's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with and beliefs about their body, and secondly, body image investment i.e. the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional importance given to the body by the self for evaluation (Cash, 2012). If a person makes a negative evaluation of own body, he or she becomes fully negative of it, and after a long time of being worried of this evaluation, witnesses a kind of disorder. This disorder is regarded as Body Dysmorphic Disorder in which a person invests a lot of time worrying about the defects of body. A person having always a preoccupation with one or more perceived defects or flaws in physical appearance are not that simply observable to others.

People have behaviors like frequent dressing, skin-picking, reassurance seeking, and above all, mirror-checking not only while going outside home but also living inside. Besides, they seek assurance from others that they look attractive, and they will be positively remarked even if they are compared with some renowned good-looking people. Each individual wants to be sure either standing in front of mirror or receiving positive comments from other people that he or she is wow. However, these people may have body dysmorphic disorder. Any individual can have this body dysmorphic disorder, but it is mostly teenagers and young adults, who suffer from this mental condition. This condition is often considered as disorder in which people have perceived defects in their physical outlook. These defects are finding own body as ugly, unattractive, and abnormal. These self-supposed defects underlie in one or many body parts like skin, hair, bone, muscle, etc. Besides, color of eye, teeth and skin, and size of eye, nose, chin, belly, breast, lips, eyebrow or genital organs can be the focus of body image.

Some common attitudes of people living with BDD include frequently observing the perceived defects in a mirror by excessive combing, shaving or plucking, frequent make-up, camouflaging the detested areas, doing heavy exercise like weight lifting, and seeking cosmetic procedures to claim beauty. We have seen muscle dysmorphia in many men, who feel unnecessarily weak for having small or a less than average body. It may result in overeating, excessive exercising, and taking alcoholic and other toxic substances to become more muscular. We lack a clear data, but many youths and young adults in general and girls and young women in particular have the body dysmorphic disorder. Men and women have more similar ideas about what a man's or a woman's body should look like, but men have genital preoccupations, and women have eating disorder.

A fair amount of research focusing on gender-based eating disorders is unavailable. But men seem to be interested in shape and size of a body or body-part than weight, and women are interested in weight-loss and dieting. The ideal male body is supposed to have large biceps and chest with six-pack stomach, whereas a female body is ideally expected as a small waist, fuller bust, wider hip, and a deer-eye shape. It is widely that men take being underweight as wicked, while women see it as good (Furnham et al., 2002). Men are also worried of their actual body such as height, weight, hair, etc., but their concern for body image is less emphasized. As a result, women are seen more worried than men regarding their body image. Also, showing women as more sensitive to their body image or projecting their higher rate of living with body dysmorphic disorder has political intention of patriarchal subjugation against them.

It is very common in Nepal that someone, meeting after a long time, speaks to other, like 'you look thin' or 'you look pretty fat'. Being fat has been the indicator of economic affluence. Thin people are

often stigmatized as 'kicked out of family during food', and it still exists in rural parts of the country. Now the trend is drastically changed, especially in the cities, where obsessed people are teased or offended owing to their fatty body, and are given a tagline like 'hippo' or 'elephant' or 'rhino', and repeatedly reminded how overweight they are. Those mindsets and intentions are inherited from generation to generation in one way or another, and have become part of Nepali culture. In Nepal, as in all societies of the world, women are claimed beautiful in terms of the thin body or slimness they have. People have high chance of making a positive body image if feedbacks are received positively. It is possible firstly by appreciating people for their maintaining of body or for keeping an appropriate body size, and secondly by reminding them to change the food and habit so that they can be optimistic of bring their beautiful body back. However, self-care and self-respect are the major requisites for any individual to make a positive body image or to convert a negative body image to positive.

Theorizing Body Image

Body image is analyzed with the help of social comparison theory, modernization theory and ageing theory. Social comparison theory argues that people have a comparing nature, and people compare themselves with other people. Comparison may take place about physical attributes, individual characters, social status, and sometimes personal capacity and skills. People value their personal talents and social worth with reference to others, particularly the people around them. Social comparison is important for making a better understanding of personal ability by comparing with other people. It is beneficial if the comparison is made realistic and achievable, but it becomes harmful if we compare our behavior in an unrealistic way (Nortje, 2020). While making comparison, people take reference of three types; upward comparison, downward comparison, and lateral comparison. In upward social comparison, one compares the self with someone, who is better in terms of wealth and material goods, high social standing, and greater physical attractiveness. In downward social comparison, one compares oneself with someone, who is not as good as oneself in physical, social and financial measures. And lateral social comparison enables someone to compare oneself with another, who is considered to be more or less equal to oneself. (APA, 2018).

Moreover, individuals pass through different new modes during adolescence stage, where their body grows, and their basic personal characteristics develop. In this stage, people witness crucial changes in their body such as gaining of height and weight, pimples coming on their face, growth of sexual and reproductive organs, etc. This particular change in physical appearance may make them confused or provide enormous amount of ecstasy. In other words, the transitional period becomes difficult to adapt for some while it may be enjoyable for others. Likewise, young adulthood is an age just ahead of adolescence. It is an impressive life stage as young adults develop new skills toward their independence yet remain vulnerable due to a lack of life experience. Therefore, body image concerns remain highly memorable for people of this age. After looking the roles played by their models or successful actors in television, boys pay serious concern about their height and being muscular, girls try to look like the beauty-queen, meaning both men and women maintain their imaginary bodies and change their physical and psychological selves according to changing trends (Damon & Eisenberg, 2006).

Modernization has brought tremendous change in people perception and practice. People have become busier and started consuming food, including fast-food, mostly in restaurant, which has caused damage

in their body parts. It means that many contradictions are taking place in a modern society. People have a busy life but they also expect a healthy body. They want to stay fit like model bodies or impressive bodies, and use different steroids aiming to balance their expected body image. Change in living styles, eating habits, and self-care are also crucial for making a body shape. Health issues such as thyroid, POCS, etc., directly affect to gain weight and fall prey to obesity, chronic illness and disability. Mental stress may damage the ideal body. Accidents and disasters are also responsible for damaging human body. Most of the research has been done only on adolescents and females but young adults are also suffering more from body image problems. Both Males and females are equally suffering from body image dissatisfaction. Media has also influenced a lot for body image dissatisfaction.

The COVID-19 pandemic situation forced people to be stuck at home and experience a highly stressful life. Their daily routine is disturbed. Not only the adult but also children could not go outside and do their regular work, they were locked inside home and kept on eating without a minimum exercise, sleeping for a long time, etc., which resulted in the fatty body. Nowadays, everyone is involved in social media like TikTok and reels on different platforms where everybody notices a photograph of siblings, family, peers, and celebrities and gives feedback according to their perceptual image of body structure. Because of modernization, everybody wants to be perfect in physical and facial structure and be fashionable to catch everyone's attention on social media. Everyone does something to look better and get good feedback, while few people have issues and cannot find body image satisfaction. The gap between actual body image and ideal body image makes suffer and self-harm. Most of the existing research is only focused on adolescent and women's body dissatisfaction but males and females both want their body structure to be perfect. Developing countries like ours easily suffer from modernization or follow new trends very quickly without thinking about bad consequences. We are easily influenced by others means we forget our authentic social norms and values and make irrelevant ideas about genuine issues. Ideas about body image are also subjective dispositions, which are not absolutely true as modernization theory assumes.

Body image dissatisfaction is defined as a false perception of physical appearance. It is believed that once feels dissatisfied, a person may think looks ugly, or unattractive. Checking oneself in a mirror, editing posts on social media, being more conscious about food, and fear of getting negative impressions and remarks, all indicate one is suffering from body image dissatisfaction. Body image affects old age people. After crossing 50 years of age, our body starts to lose its smartness and glow in different ways. For example, a physical body or a biological body cannot do a similar level of work as it had done during adolescence or adulthood. To elaborate, human organs exhaust, level of energy in a body decrease, enzyme and its quality falls, skin gets wrinkled, the body gets stooped, it means that the 'ideal' body is damaged. Neurotransmitters and the spinal cord or any fluid-related substances in our body, which start to dry, make them, suffer from different health issues similar to arthritis Parkinson's, and other memory-related problems. Even emotionally and socially, old age people start to suffer. Old people start to lose people from their lives and fear of losing themselves or close one also makes them dissatisfied emotionally. When aging starts, their body slows down with their habitual task, they want to move and talk with people and share their experiences, but it become more impossible due to drastic change taking place in all societies. If the real body is accepted, people would no longer have dissatisfaction of it and distress to live, but if the real body is rejected and the 'ideal' body is expected, it again may damage the real body sooner.

Body image dissatisfaction can be seen in a person of any age or sex. Man is the most dissatisfied being, who has dissatisfied of oneself. However, the level of satisfaction varies, but the body image satisfaction depends on how one person sees oneself, imagines an ideal type of body image within oneself, expects an attractive physique and personality within oneself, and compares oneself with others' or celebrity's body structure. Therefore, any idea about body image is social, which is constructed by network of relationships, and is promoted by social media such as posting of photo or video in different social media apps and the comments the post has received. It further depends on how peers, family, and other members react towards our body. Despite the fact that ways of social and cultural evaluation are crucial for making a positive or negative body image, the body image dissatisfaction is caused mainly by self-perceived image of an ideal body, which is far different from the actual body. Moreover, body image is also affected by individual's physiological health, physical structure, physical strength as well as one's capability of making an impression to the wider public.

Methodology

The topic that I have chosen in this piece of writing seems difficult to carry on in general, but it was relatively easier for me because of my familiarity to it and the respondents that I have chosen were as per my convenience in Kathmandu valley. I thought in the initial that I should find many people, both men and women, to collect necessary ideas about their body image, but once I found a woman, who responded me more comfortably than I thought about her body image, I changed my mind to limit the size of the respondent and collect data being more focused. Therefore, I talked only with four people, two men and two women, ranging from 25 to 35 years of age, this age group I think is a supposedly beautiful age, who shared with me their views on their body image. Also, purely qualitative research expects issues than numbers, so the size of sample, even if it looks tiny, is thought to be enough. And, the only tool that was used for gathering information for this research paper was case study, which was conducted by taking an informal cum unstructured interview with the purposively selected samples.

Discussion

A 26-years unmarried girl, who worked in dental hygiene in Maitidevi area, shared her experience related to her negative body image. She shared many things about her body image dissatisfaction. Her hands and legs were bigger than the average, and was taller than the average boys' height. Thus, she was teased by her friends and ridiculed from her teenager as if she was a male. Her relatives and neighbors passed comments and suggested for a balanced body structure. Few people always say that she has a male body structure, as strong as a male, and a male will be fearful of her and she will not be able to have marriage. Mostly, Mongolian people have flat faces, small eyes and a short nose, but she had a big bone in her nose as well. She visited the doctor a number of times to get a purge of her big nose. She even tried to self-harm by clipping her nose overnight to make the small nose. She was not that fat, but getting comments from others as if she was fat was unbearable for her. She tried a lot to maintain her body by jogging every day, joining the gym and do regular physical exercises, playing boxing, and fasting or has one meal a day for a month. But there was no significant progress in her masculine body, or no remarkable change about her negative body image.

Bitter experience of a young girl, who had deep in mind that having a big body and being tall was more to be a male than female, was the result of gendered socialization, which instilled ideas in her that the

female should have a small physique. In case the existence of any type of body is taken as diversity, there would not be dissatisfaction or negative body image among individuals. In my view, diversity is to celebrate than resist, which helps to convert negative body image into positive one.

Another respondent was a 32-years man from Khumaltar, who shared his dissatisfaction with his body image from several measures. He was a small child in his family, and everybody used to love him too much that all his wishes were immediately fulfilled. Also, he was a foodie, and he felt that even drinking more water makes fat in his body. He was healthy during childhood, so, all his friends call him *mote.* However, called by someone as *mote* caused uncomfortable in him, and from that day he stopped making more friends from school and other places as well. He also told me that he did not make any true friend while doing a master's degree in the Tribhuvan University. During the lockdown rendered by COVID-19 pandemic, he gained more weight than before and became worried. Stress often triggers hunger, and eating more food contributes to gain extra weight. He further felt uncomfortable to join any social gathering, or a fitness club. Every time he was fond of eating food and sleep. He was disinterested in watching movies and advertisements. He did not even like to watch himself in a mirror, which might show him fatty and contribute to increased dissatisfaction with his body.

It seems after looking at the experience of body image dissatisfaction of a young man that a simple negative image was proved harmful not only for the personality development of the particular respondent concerned but also for his possibility of broader social networking and yielding wider space in the society. Young man's feeling scared of going out and making friends, and staying inside home due to body image dissatisfaction caused more damage i.e. obesity to his body than recovery, which did not help bringing positive perception furthermore.

Next respondent was a 34-years aged bodybuilder from Sorhakhutte. He said that during his teen age, all his friends were slim and physically fit but only he was fat or had an unshaped body figure. He was betrayed by his beloved girlfriend citing his unusual body shape. He was felt low-level of self-esteem, and joined gym for body building. Then, watching himself regularly in the mirror raised his satisfaction level, and everyday work enhanced his self-esteem. It also helped him balance the stress. Later, he competed in national-level bodybuilding championships and became the national champion.

That was the success story of a man, who had a negative body image of himself during his early days, but when he realized the importance of bodybuilding and attempted to make a perfect masculine body, he became the champion. The story can be the reference for any individual, who think negative and make pessimist views about their body, which, if maintained, could be transformed into the truly 'ideal' body and the ultimately positive body image.

Here is another story of a 31-years girl from Bhaktapur. She had no close friends because of her negative perception about her overweight body. She was skipping from group gathering and other social events. She was scared of riding a motorcycle or a scooter. She was afraid of allegations from others, and unwilling to meet people. She had disinterest in joining a gym, but wanted to lose her weight. She never went out for shopping clothes. She however was fond of cooking, and ate foods very consciously. Frequently people asked questions about her height and weight, which she did not share with anyone.

Body has been the topic for many people to discuss, enjoy or condemn. Many people in their stages of life face critical questions about their body image. Men and women have different requirements about

body-shapes, while female is expected to be slim with a figure 36-24-36, a male is supposed to be tall and have a 6 or 8 pack muscular body. If any man or woman lacks that desired shape, they become dissatisfied with their given body image. Many people are struggling to maintain for an ideally perfect look and an impressive body figure. Some people have issues only with facial structure, while some make ideas about their eyes, nose, forehead, lip, and fingers. Whatever the case, the imagination of an ideal body-type makes people upset than happy. Besides, listening to others, accepting others' comments, comparing self-body with others, social media influence and comparing self with celebrities, triggers dissatisfaction.

Conclusion

This paper finds people's dissatisfaction over the type of body that they have had. Respondents had in common a trend of defining one type of body or physical appearance as perfect and of comparing their body with that particular type. They were found worried for finding their body below the ideal type. The criteria of measuring a human body were made by established social or cultural norms, but were promoted by modern media, medicine and technology. People have to live with the same body and the same body image if they keep only on making negative body image by not making significant attempts to change their body, but they could feel smarter or start thinking positively about themselves if they bring change in their body by adapting to modern technology or joining sports, gym or yoga. However, a major problem among a wide variety of people, particularly the youths, lie in making unnecessary remarks about their own body or being infatuated of the over-standardized ideal body, without making any significant attempt to convert their existing body to that ideal type. Equally important to mark is people's underestimation of the socially construction of an ideal body image, which also undergoes change. Therefore, any person, who can minimize or bridge the gap between actual and ideal body image is likely to minimize the harm caused by negative body image. Whether someone makes his or her body image negative or positive is less important, but more important is whether people realize the social construction of body image, and work for changing both their body and body image from negativity to positivity. Finally, regular exercise or yoga is recommended for making a perfect balance between body and beauty.

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