



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BODY WEIGHTS, SEXUAL
OBJECTIFICATION AND BODY APPRECIATION TO SELF-ESTEEM
AMONG UNDERGRADUATE FEMALE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY
MALAYSIA SARAWAK**

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Bachelor of Psychology (Honours)

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UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

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Final Year Project Report

Masters

PhD

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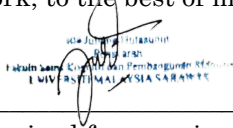
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**THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BODY WEIGHTS, SEXUAL
OBJECTIFICATION AND BODY APPRECIATION TO SELF-ESTEEM AMONG
UNDERGRADUATE FEMALE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA
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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
Bachelor of Psychology with Honours

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the relationship between body weights, sexual objectification, and body appreciation on self-esteem, simultaneously to identify the most significant factor to self-esteem among undergraduate female students in University Malaysia Sarawak. A total of 300 undergraduate female students participated in the online survey by answering instruments on weight stigmatization, interpersonal sexual objectification, body appreciation as well as self-esteem assessment. Findings have shown that samples experience weight stigmatization regardless of weight and size. Bivariate correlations have indicated that the variables have been significantly related to self-esteem among these female students. Multiple regression has shown that body appreciation is a significant factor on self-esteem among undergraduate female students at University Malaysia Sarawak. This finding convinced institutional educators and counselors to use body appreciation as a method to improve students' overall well-being. If further studies are to be implemented, this finding suggested that cultural differences may have important implications for their self-esteem and perspectives on sexual objectification.

Keywords: (body weights, sexual objectification, body appreciation, self-esteem, female students)

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji hubungan di antara berat badan, objektifikasi seksual dan penghargaan tubuh badan terhadap harga diri, serentak untuk mengenalpasti faktor signifikan terhadap harga diri dalam kalangan pelajar wanita sarjana muda di Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Seramai 300 pelajar wanita sarjana muda telah menyertai tinjauan atas talian dengan menjawab instrumen mengenai stigmatisasi berat badan, interpersonal objektif seksual, penghargaan tubuh badan serta penilaian harga diri. Kajian telah menunjukkan bahawa sampel mengalami stigmatisasi berat badan tanpa mengira berat dan saiz. Kolerasi bivariat telah menunjukkan bahawa pemboleh ubah telah berkait rapat terhadap harga diri dalam kalangan pelajar ini. Regresi berganda telah menunjukkan bahawa penghargaan tubuh badan merupakan faktor signifikan terhadap harga diri dalam kalangan pelajar wanita sarjana muda di Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Dapatan ini meyakinkan pendidik dan kaunselor institusi untuk menggunakan penghargaan tubuh badan sebagai kaedah untuk meningkatkan kesejahteraan keseluruhan individual. Jika kajian lanjut akan dilakukan, penemuan ini mencadangkan bahawa perbezaan budaya mungkin ada implikasi penting terhadap harga diri dan perspektif mereka terhadap objektifikasi seksual.

Kata kunci: (berat badan, objektifikasi seksual, penghargaan tubuh badan, harga diri, pelajar wanita)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

How do we evaluate ourselves? What values do we place on ourselves? Numerous studies have been focusing on these questions behind the theories of mentalism and behaviourism until these days. The evaluation of oneself can have a positive and negative impact on their psychological health and overall well-being. The modern psychological understanding of self-esteem consists of four ideas which are acceptance, evaluation, comparison, and efficacy (Hewitt, 2002). The view of oneself can be varied by culture and demographic variables that includes ages, socio-economic status, and urban-rural residence associations. This current study is focusing on Asian countries, specifically in Sarawak, Malaysia. Asian is characterised as a collectivistic culture, hence, the self cannot be separated from others and have to fit in with others (Triandis, 1994). The contemporary culture that we are in now is leaning towards wanting a sense of fitting in and belonging in society. In today's society, the significance placed on individual activity, membership in and acceptance by some group, the judgement of humans along multiple dimensions, the proclivity to draw invidious comparisons, and the proclivity to make invidious comparisons are all firmly established. This current study is interested to investigate the association of body weights, sexual objectification experiences and body appreciation to self-esteem in this collectivistic culture among undergraduate female students in University Malaysia Sarawak.

1.1 Background of Study

Study on self-esteem has piqued my interest to investigate the uniqueness of human's behaviour in evaluating and comparing themselves in society. One of the pioneers in this domain, Rosenberg (1965) stated that self-esteem refers to individual overall positive evaluation to the self that includes respect and worthiness in oneself. Another definition of self-esteem is distinguished in three ways by Brown, Dutton and Cook (2001), which are (a) global or trait self-esteem refers to how people generally feel about themselves, i.e. feelings of love for oneself, (b) self-evaluation to refer to how people assess their varied abilities and characteristics, and (c) feelings of self-esteem are used to describe temporary emotional states such as a person might say their self-esteem is high after getting compliments on their work. Wang and Ollendick (2001) affirmed that self-esteem is the evaluation of oneself that is followed by emotional reaction of oneself. Overall, self-esteem is subjective as it depends on one's psychology and emotional status on their own worth.

Body weights exists along a spectrum between being obese to being underweight and how it affects one's self-esteem. A study by Jach and Kryston (2021) investigated those Polish women with a normal BMI and no weight-related stigmatisation experiences had greater self-esteem than women with high BMI values and those who admitted to having such experiences. Its study aligns with the previous studies on that there is a significant relationship between body weight and self-esteem in women (e.g., Miller & Downey, 1999; Kiviruusu et al., 2016). The concepts of fat talk and body comparisons have been commonly discussed among women regardless of age or races. Every woman has always been concerned about their body weights due to the judgmental society we live in and the media's influence. Humans with excess body weights are stereotyped with negative attitudes such as lazy, ugly, lonely and weak. This type of experience may impact one's self-esteem, putting their value at

the lowest. Women always perceive their body is heavier than their actual body weights (Chang & Christakis, 2003). Body weights play a significant role in forming attitudes that determine one's self-esteem to be low or high.

Other than body weight, sexual objectification has been affecting human's psychologically well-beings. Sexual objectification was linked to self-objectification in a substantial way, with more sexual objectification correlated with higher self-objectification (Winter, 2015). According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), women who are sexually objectified see their bodies as objects for other people's sexual enjoyment. Consequently, most women do not appreciate their bodies and have higher tendency on blaming themselves if they ever get sexual victimization. Today's mainstream such as television, print materials, video games and social networking sites has focussed on sexual attractiveness, physical beauty, and sexual attraction. This has impacted on how humans view themselves. On that account, women have experienced sexual objectification and gender stereotypes (Karsay, Knoll, & Matthes, 2017). Sexual objectifications occur mostly in two areas which are actual interpersonal encounters and media encounters. Based on samples of American youth, girls are more commonly targeted by sexual harassment and suffer more negative consequences as a result of it than boys (Calegari, 2012).

According to a model of objectification theory by Frederickson and Robert (1997), cultural practices of sexual objectification would lead to self-objectification which is set to predict self-surveillance that eventually give negative outcomes to the subject such as experience body shame, appearance anxiety, disrupted flow and interoceptive deficits. These negative experiences may lead to mental health risks such as eating disorders, depression and low self-esteem. A study done by Downs, James and Cowan (2006) in the United States which involved undergraduate students and exotic dancers investigated body objectification,

self-esteem and relationship satisfaction. The finding discussed that exotic dancers are familiar with being objectified and that the result showed there were no significant differences in self-esteem and body shame, despite that the trend was the dancer had more shame than college students. On that account, it showed that individuals could have different perceptions on how being objectified and how it impacts them.

Body appreciation is defined as accepting one's body, treating it with respect, and holding positive thoughts toward it. High body appreciation is associated with high self-esteem and research has shown that body appreciation impacts one's self-esteem. According to ÇELİK, & GÜNGÖR (2020), the level of body appreciation increases as the level of self-esteem increases. It indicated that there is a positive and significant relationship between body appreciation and self-esteem. This study was aligned with Khalaf, al Hashmi, and al Omari (2021) that conducted on undergraduate students as well and the result showed there is a significant relationship between body appreciation and self-esteem. Khalaf et. al. added that the contemporary function of mass and social media in promoting slender body attractiveness helps explain the positive relationship between body appreciation and self-esteem. Body positivity has changed according to time development. Back in the days, mass media used to promote thin bodies in becoming a model for advertisements, however, nowadays most media promote the diversity of bodies and skin colour.

In this current study, it will investigate on how undergraduate female students feel about themselves in term of their body weights, sexual objectification experiences and body appreciations. These variables may be a close connection to what women always evaluate in every day's functioning. This study wants to discover the correlation between these variables impacting self-esteem.

1.2 Problem Statement

Self-esteem is characterised as the value one sets on oneself (Rosenberg, 1965). A lot of research has been done to investigate self-esteem (Ching, Wu, & Chen, 2021; Kamody et al., 2018; Murakami & Latner, 2015). According to Swami, von Nordheim, & Barron (2016), higher self-esteem in women gives them the capabilities they need to cope better from the emotional, attentional, and physiological effects of stress to reduce stress and improve cognitive and emotional functions. As a result, a healthy body image is promoted. Women that appreciate their bodies tend to have higher self-esteem. Other than that, women with excessive weights experienced weight-related stigmatisation that led to lower self-esteem (Jach & Kryston, 2021). The consequences of today's mainstream are women with excess BMI perceive themselves ampler than their actual body (Jach & Kryston, 2021). The relationship between body weights and self-esteem have been heavily studied among Western researchers. In addition, these days people are leaning towards accepting themselves and learning to treat everyone equally. This present study would fill the gap in Malaysia research of body weights in relation to self-esteem while contributing to promote body positivity among women.

Aside from body weights, the impact of today's mainstream towards women is they experienced sexual objectification in society. Viewers' conceptions of their physical identities in terms of outwardly perceivable features (i.e., how the body appears) rather than interior traits increased after exposure to sexually objectifying television shows (i.e., what it can do) (Aubrey, 2006). Nevertheless, the study was done among undergraduate students in the Midwestern U.S., and it is believed that those women live in an objectifying culture. Therefore, mainstream objectification fosters a certain self-perception, one that stresses the value of physical appearance. Sexual objectification experiences have impact on women's

body surveillance (Aubrey, 2006), beauty conceptualization and body appreciation (Luo, Niu, Kong, & Chen, 2019) and self-esteem (Adams, Tyler, Calogero, & Lee, 2017). This present study will fill the gap in Malaysia research on how sexual objectification experiences in relation to self-esteem among women here. Other than that, it will contribute to finding out whether Malaysia is a country which applies an objectifying culture or otherwise.

While most self-esteem research has been conducted in Western countries, study on self-esteem in Malaysia is widely studied as well. However, studies in Malaysia on self-esteem are associated with emotional intelligence in the workplace (Johar, Shah, & Bakar, 2012), work/family conflict among nurses (Rashid, Nordin, Omar, & Ismail, 2012) and academic performance (Rosli et al., 2012). There are limited studies on self-esteem that includes body weights, sexual objectification experiences and body appreciation among undergraduate female students in Malaysia specifically in Sarawak. Consequently, the lack of research on this relationship in the country calls for the present study. Given the influences of areas previously mentioned on self-esteem and awareness, it is crucial to investigate the link between body weights, sexual objectification experiences and body appreciation to self-esteem among undergraduate female students.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

To investigate the relationships between body weights, sexual objectification, and body appreciation to self-esteem among undergraduate female students in University Malaysia Sarawak.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To investigate the relationship between body weights and self-esteem among undergraduate female students University Malaysia Sarawak.
2. To examine the relationship between sexual objectification and self-esteem among undergraduate female students University Malaysia Sarawak.
3. To investigate the relationship between body appreciation and self-esteem among undergraduate female students University Malaysia Sarawak.
4. To identify the most significant factor influencing self-esteem among undergraduate female students University Malaysia Sarawak.

1.4 Research Hypotheses

1. There is a significant relationship between body weights and self-esteem. (Jach & Kryston, 2021)
2. There is a significant relationship between sexual objectification and self-esteem. (Winter, 2015; Adams, Tyler, Calogero, & Lee, 2017)
3. There is a significant relationship between body appreciation and self-esteem (ÇELik, & Güngör, 2020).
4. There is the most significant factor to self-esteem among undergraduate female students.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

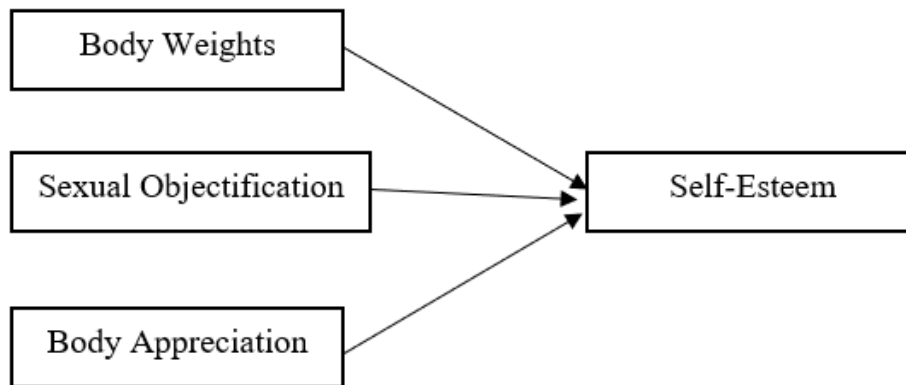


Figure 1.5. Conceptual framework of the study

1.6 Significance of the study

This current study performed an investigation of the relationship between self-perception and self-esteem among undergraduate female students in University Malaysia Sarawak. This study helped me as a practitioner to understand undergraduate female's students' perception on their body weights, sexual objectification experiences and body appreciation to their self-esteem.

As the contributions to the institute, the findings could persuade educators and institution counsellors to use body appreciation as a method to increase overall well-being. Strategies for managing body weights stigmatization may include the implementation of health promotion to handle body weight issues as well as to promote body positivity. The finding would help the institute to make it a safer place for students to study as undergraduate female students encounter the sexual objectification experiences.

As for the community, especially women, it will help them to be aware and understand themselves better of their well-being. The finding will add to the body of

knowledge on a study of self-perception and self-esteem among undergraduate female students in Sarawak. The data gathered from undergraduate female students with cultural differences in background will encourage future study to discover more on the effect of cultural differences to self-esteem.

1.7 Definition of Terms

1.7.1 Body Weights

Conceptual Definition: In the current study, the body weight is assessed by Body Mass Index (BMI) to observe participants with categories such as underweight, ideal, overweight, or obese. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), underweight BMI is below 18.50, ideal BMI ranges from 18.50 to 24.99, BMI between 25.00 and 29.99 indicates overweight, and the values of 30.00 and more indicate obesity.

Operational Definition: The sample of participants chosen were undergraduate UNIMAS female students. In Google Form, participants were needed to put their heights, weights as well as calculate their BMI. Besides that, the participants were tested if they had experienced weight-related stigmatisation, by asking two questions based on the concept of spoiled identity and concepts related to obesity stigma. Following the Jach and Kryston (2021) study, the questions used are: “Do you think you are fat now?”; and “Are you currently ashamed of how much you weigh?”. The choice of answers is “yes” or “no”.

1.7.2 Sexual Objectification

Conceptual Definition: Sexual objectification is defined as individual is treated as an object that is simply to look at, touched or make fun of it. Proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), women that live in practically objectified culture tend to look at their bodies as an object.

Operational Definition: Sexual objectification is assessed by Interpersonal Sexual Objectification Scale (ISOS; Kozee, Tylka, Augustus-Horvath, & Denchik, 2007). The ISOS is a 15-item scale was developed by focusing on two forms of interpersonal sexual objectifications identified by Objectification theory (OT) framework: Body Evaluation subscale and Unwanted Explicit Sexual Advances scale. Higher scores indicate higher levels of interpersonal sexual objectification. The internal consistency reliability for ISOS scores ($\alpha = .926$). The 15-items were kept in its original style without any additional modification.

1.7.3 Body Appreciation

Conceptual Definition: Body appreciation is defined as accepting, holding favourable thoughts, respecting and protecting one's body (Avalos, Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2005).

Operational Definition: Body appreciation is assessed by Body Appreciation Scale (BAS; Avalos, et al., 2005). The BAS is a 13-item scale designed to assess individuals' favourable opinions, acceptance, respect, and protection of their bodies. Higher scores reflect greater body appreciation. These items' scores were internally consistent ($\alpha = .943$). As a result, each item was kept in its original form without any changes.

1.7.4 Self-Esteem

Conceptual Definition: Self-esteem was conceptualised as the value one places on themselves, in negative or positive ways (Rosenberg, 1965). Self-esteem is an evaluative component of self-concept that incorporates self-evaluation based on feedback from others and data obtained during social interactions (Martín-Albo, Núñez, Navarro, & Grijalvo, 2007). On that account, this present study mainly focusing on women's self-esteem and on how body weights, sexual objectification and body appreciation would have relation to self-esteem.

Operational Definition: The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1979) is one of the commonly used instruments used to assess self-esteem. RSES is a 10-item scale design to understand individuals' global positive or negative attitude towards themselves. Due to its extensive use and reliability to body weights (Jach and Kryston, 2021; Ching et al., 2021, Kamody et al., 2018), sexual objectification (Winter, 2015; Choma et al., 2010) and body appreciation (Çelik & Güngör, 2020; Swami et al., 2016), RSES is chosen to assess self-esteem for this present study. The internal consistency reliability for RSES scores ($\alpha = .872$). The 10-items were kept in its original style without any additional modification.

1.8 Summary

To summarise, this chapter has given an overview of the introduction of what the present study will do including hypotheses, objectives, and the purpose of studying it. Next, chapter 2 would provide supported literature review on the initial idea of this research followed by the methodology in chapter 3.