

Relationship Between Body Image and Self Esteem

of Ninth and Twelfth Graders

by

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ABSTRACT

Body image and self-esteem are areas of importance when looking at high school-aged students. Several research questions were addressed relating to the relationship between body image and self-esteem among ninth and twelfth grade males and females. Males and females in ninth and twelfth grade from a high school in west-central Wisconsin were given a five-question body image survey and a five-question self-esteem survey. Thirty-six ninth grade and 38 twelfth grade students participated in the study.

Mean scores were tabulated for each of the item on the body image survey, for each item on the self-esteem survey, and for each survey as a whole. Pearson Correlation Coefficients were conducted to find possible significant correlations between body image scores and the self-esteem scores for the total group of participants, ninth grade males and females, twelfth grade males and females, and all males and all females of the participants. An independent groups *t* test found several significant differences between

groups based on gender for both the body image survey and self-esteem survey. These findings are consistent with past research, which has suggested that females have a lower body image and self-esteem than their male counterparts. Future research has been suggested for a greater population. The results could be further generalized to promote understanding of the correlation between body image and self-esteem. Suggestions for school counselors are examined.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

For many, adolescence is a time of vulnerability when relating to body image and self-esteem. Adolescence is a time of change in relation to puberty, thus forcing adolescents' body image to adjust to the physiological changes that occur (Daley & Hunter, 2001). Some adolescents struggle with the fact of reaching puberty and having a great deal of physiological changes at an early adolescence age, as well as others struggle to go through these changes later in adolescence. Both may have positive and negative effects on one's self-esteem. Throughout adolescence, children feel the pressures to have and portray a certain body image from a great deal of sources, such as the media, family, and their peers.

Within the American culture, physical appearance is stressed and can have an impact on how adolescents feel both inside and out. "The cultural ideal for female thinness and male masculinity appears to be well incorporated into adolescent mores" (Phelps et al., 1993, p. 297). The pressure to have a particular body image can have a harmful effect on the well-being and self-esteem of a child. The way one perceives his/her body and how one's body actually is can be referred to and known as body image (Frost & McKelvie, 2004).

According to *Lexicon Webster's Encyclopedia Dictionary* (1991) self-esteem is described as one's opinion of one's own worth. During adolescence, building of one's body image can greatly shape one's self-esteem as one reaches adulthood. The development of a positive body image may lead to a greater self-esteem and higher self-confidence (Duncan, Woodfield, O'Neill, & Al-Nakeeb, 2002). Research has established an association between body image and self-esteem. According to Hayes, Crocker, and

Kowalski (1999), an individual's physical self-perception in terms of body image will correlate to his/her sense of self-esteem. In other words, if an individual perceives him or herself to have a positive body image, it is likely for him/her to have a more positive self-esteem. A change in physical appearance and/or body image may result in a change of lifestyle through physical activity, thus possibly reducing the chances of increased body weight and a drop in self-esteem.

Research has displayed that males have a stronger perception of the physical aspects in relation to their bodies (Frost & McKelvie, 2004). In addition, during adolescence, males have a higher self-esteem than females. Body dissatisfaction typically has been a concern for females, but according to Green and Pritchard (2003), men are also concerned with body image. Males are found to be more and more self-conscious in terms of their own bodies and how they can stay thinner or more muscular. Males particularly look at themselves as striving to obtain a more slender muscular physique (Phelps et al., 1993).

In today's society, adolescents are shown the high importance placed on their own physical appearance. Research indicates that social standards recognize a heightened pressure to be thin from childhood through adolescence (Vernon-Guidry & Williamson, 1996). Society's overall stressed importance on physical appearance may result in a downward spiral for adolescents. By stressing physical appearance, it directs pressure on adolescents to fit or conform to a certain body type, which may result in negative self-esteem. Educational and societal influences and awareness of nutritional standards may send a message to youth to restrict their intake of food whether the food is nutritious or not (Kostanski & Gullone, 1999).

Family, along with the media and peers, may be at the top of the list in accordance to influence of body image and self-esteem. Research indicates if a member of a family stresses an individual within the family to conduct a diet, he or she may develop low self-esteem or body image (Green & Pritchard, 2003). Within the family realm, children may feel the direct pressure to meet the demanding standards in their education, sports, and peer relationships, which may result in poor body image and self-esteem.

The media has played a tremendous role for today's youth in relation to having a perfect physique and eating right. All sorts of media such as television, radio, movies, newspapers, magazines, and even computers have played a significant role in portraying the ideal body type, which may result in male and female youth developing a poor body image and lower self-esteem. For females, the media encourages the unrealistic model thin body figure. For males, the body image is portrayed in the media as a "toned," and "athletic" look (Stout & Frame, 2004, p. 176) diets and other weight loss tools are spread throughout the media for children and adolescents to try and obtain that perfect model figure.

During the teen years, adolescents strive to belong, to have a connection with someone, and to be with others who may have the same general interests. Peer relationships may be one of the more important aspects during childhood and adolescence in terms of building positive self-esteem and body image. According to Davison & McCabe (2006), social concerns relating to the body can be prevalent during adolescence. Furthermore, there is argument that during the adolescent stage, individuals can be preoccupied with their own appearance and assume that others are very aware of

evaluating their appearance as well. In addition, adolescents possibly having a preoccupied mindset can influence feelings about their body image and self-esteem.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The topic of body image is important because perceiving one's body image as distorted can be linked to the development of dysfunctional eating behaviors and possibly disorders such as body dysmorphic disorder (BDD). According to Olivardia (2002), studies suggest that both men and women want their bodies to fit a mesomorphic ideal portrayed by the media. The topic of self-esteem is important because it directly relates to one's self-regard or worth. Furthermore, self-esteem corresponds with one's emotional and psychological development, and in turn can be positively or negatively affected.

There is an important aspect that relates to males and females with regards to self-esteem and body image. When males and females pass through the pubertal stage may have a direct link to their self-esteem and body image. Also, research has found a correlation between body image and self-esteem among early adolescent age groups (Davison & McCabe, 2006). However, researchers have not adequately investigated the significance of body image and self-esteem among later adolescent males and females ranging from fourteen to eighteen.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether a relationship exists between body image and self-esteem among male and female ninth and twelfth graders. Male and female students in grades ninth and twelfth were given a survey during English class in the fall semester of 2006 at a high school in west-central Wisconsin.

### *Research Questions*

There are several questions this study attempted to answer. They include:

1. Is there a relationship between body image and self-esteem scores among high school-aged males?
2. Is there a relationship between body image and self-esteem scores among high school-aged females?
3. Is there a relationship between body image and self-esteem among ninth graders?
4. Is there a relationship between body image and self-esteem among twelfth graders?
5. How does the relationship between body image and self-esteem change for students between ninth and twelfth grade?
6. How did males and females differ in body image and self-esteem?

### *Definition of Terms*

There are two terms that need to be defined for clarity of understanding in this study. These are:

*Body image* – Evaluating one’s own body subjectively through linked feelings and attitudes (Duncan, Woodfield, O’Neill, & Al-Nakeeb, 2002).

*Self-esteem* – An evaluative element of how a person values, supports, approves or disapproves him or herself (Frost & McKelvie, 2004).

### *Assumptions of the Study*

The researcher assumed that all students who participate in the survey will understand all questions being asked. The researcher also assumed that all questions

answered on the survey would be answered with honesty and integrity. It was assumed the surveys for both body image and self-esteem assessed what was intended to be assessed, body image and self-esteem.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

There are several limitations recognized by the researcher. A limitation to this study was that only ninth and twelfth grade students were studied. Therefore, the results cannot be linked or broadened to other age groups. Due to conducting the research in an urban high school in west-central Wisconsin, conclusions of this study should not be generalized to age groups, geographic populations, and diversity used within the study. Furthermore, one of the instruments used in the survey of the study was not piloted. Lastly, sampling bias can be linked to the study due to volunteers not reflecting the general population.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

Body image and self-esteem are very significant in relation to males and females in their teen years, better known as adolescence. This chapter will discuss five areas relating to body image and self-esteem. First, the literature review will discuss adolescence and the difficulties adolescents confront. Second, statistical data will be discussed regarding body image satisfaction and self-esteem. The chapter will conclude with discussion on the influence of family, media, and peers relating to body image and self-esteem.

### *Adolescence*

For many, adolescence is a time of change both physically and socially. It is clear that many adolescents pass through the stage of puberty at different ages, which are predominant through the teen years and for females possibly younger. According to Davison and McCabe (2006) physique change during puberty for females can be more of a struggle than for boys. Due to females physiologically developing more adipose tissue and wanting to keep up with the cultural ideal of a thinner physique, females tend to be more dissatisfied. On the other hand, the stage of puberty for males is more positive because they reach closer to the cultural ideal of a muscular physique (Davison & McCabe, 2006). Along with the physical changes adolescents' experience, they also undergo changes in relationships. Adolescence can be a confusing time, due to the fact that peer and family relationships can help shape how one perceives him or herself. During adolescence, there is a possibility of heightened self-awareness and concerns of how one's peers portray him or her (Davison & McCabe, 2006).

Emotional change can be a stressor for adolescents. Some adolescents may struggle emotionally by not passing through the stages of puberty with their peers. According to Savin-Williams (1995), boys that go through maturity at a later time and physically develop at a slower rate score low on body image and self-concept. Feelings of low self-esteem may develop because one does not look like his or her peers. In addition, if one develops at an earlier rate or faster, he or she can develop low self-esteem due to the overwhelming changes his or her body is going through. Furthermore, a study “found that body image and self-esteem are positively related in younger populations, showing that a decrease in self-esteem contributes to a poorer body image” (Green & Pritchard, 2003, p. 217).

#### *Preponderance of Body Dissatisfaction*

Body image dissatisfaction is of importance to more and more young people throughout the United States and even the world. Research has indicated concerns of appearance among adolescents, which may result in body image dissatisfaction. According to Ricciardelli, Thomas, and Williams (2000), body image concerns along with problematic eating behaviors are occurring among children as young as seven and eight years of age. These damaging feelings, which may result in body dissatisfaction, can spill over into adolescence and even adulthood, thus causing an eating disorder.

Insecurity of body satisfaction in adolescents or younger may encourage these children to aim toward strict dieting regimens to obtain the ideal body. Thelen and Vander Wal (2000) found that 6.9% of children in grades three through six self-reported in the anorexic range on an inventory for eating concerns. Furthermore, 13.3% of children in six through eighth grades were found to meet the criteria of having an eating

disorder. Adolescents who turn to the stronghold of dieting to develop the ultimate body have feelings of distorted self-esteem. There has been documentation of high correlation rates of body image dissatisfaction and dieting behaviors amongst adolescents (Schur, Sanders, & Steiner, 2000).

A study involving 318 children ages ranging from seven to thirteen investigated dieting behaviors and eating attitudes. Kostanski and Gullone (1999) found 45% wanted to have a thinner body and 37% had tried to lose body weight (53.1% were female in the study). The results from the research indicate that children of any range can resort to dieting to achieve the model figure body image.

#### *Gender Differences*

Generally, females tend to have lower body image satisfaction than males. “There are generally gender differences in body satisfaction, with weight concerns much more prevalent in adolescent females than males”(Phelps et al., 1993, p. 298). One possible explanation for females being directly more affected than males for the thin ideal may be directed toward the media. “Research strongly indicates that a thin ideal is promoted by the print media, particularly magazines aimed at teenage girls and adult women” (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999, p. 341).

Pubertal timing may also have an impact when it relates to body satisfaction among males and females. A study conducted by McCabe and Ricciardelli (2004) found that females were more affected by pubertal timing than males. The study involved male and female students ages ranging from 12 to 16. During puberty, females have an increase in body fat and the development of hip width, which may push them further away from society ideals of the thin body and increase the likelihood of body

dissatisfaction and lower self-image. In contrast, puberty can bring prowess to adolescent males due to the development of shoulder width and muscle mass, which can bring them closer to society's ideals of a man and positive self body image.

Typically, females will engage in dieting more than males. A study conducted by Zullig, Ubbes, Pyles, & Valois (2006) reported that females were more likely to engage in dieting behaviors to fit social acceptance while males reported trying to gain weight for possible muscle mass and to fit the social norm. The study involved male and female high school adolescents. The world of advertisement may also play a strong role in the dieting behavior of female adolescents. A majority of the advertisements in magazines and television depict the thin body ideal of females, while a smaller portion relate to males. In turn, this may promote the idea that young adolescent females should diet, which will further the quest for the thin body ideal – a perfect body.

However, male dissatisfaction with their bodies is steadily on the rise (Daley & Hunter, 2001). Females in general are expected to conform to the thin body ideal. On the other hand, males are looked upon to strive for the athletic, muscular physique (Daley & Hunter, 2001). As for females, so goes the advertisement of the athletic, muscular body ideal for males in magazines and on television. In addition to gender differences that exist when researching body image, age differences exist as well.

### *Age Differences*

Age can be an influencing factor on body image and self-esteem in adolescence. Age, along with gender, has shown to be more of an influential factor in females than in males (Phelps et al., 1993). Phelps et al. (1993) concluded that high school females had a notably higher level of body image dissatisfaction than middle school-aged females.

Also, males had no significant differences in body image dissatisfaction when compared by age ranges. The study involved 454 male and female students with a mean age of 15 years old. As females move further into the later part of adolescence as opposed to early adolescence, they may show more dissatisfaction due to puberty and body fat development. Other possible concerns may relate to peer pressure and media influences as age progresses for both males and females. Based on the little research that has been conducted on body image and self-esteem among youth in later adolescence, particularly ninth through twelfth grade, there seems to be the need for more adequate research conducted for further development within these age ranges.

#### *Body Image and Family Influence*

During adolescence one's family setting or environment may influence body image and self-esteem. Adolescent body dissatisfaction has been found to relate significantly with family criticisms of one's weight or physical appearance (Green & Pritchard, 2003). As children grow and develop, one of the most important role models in their lives is the family. Children learn their morals and values from their parent or guardian. Each family constructs what they feel is necessary and correct in terms of nutrition. Parents or guardians may be one of the more important people in a child's life to learn how to eat, what to eat, and finally how much to eat. During childhood and adolescence, nutrition and eating behaviors are learned and upheld throughout the lifespan (Monge-Rojas, Garita, Sanchez, & Munoz, 2005). The family in which he or she lives may influence the satisfaction with one's body.

According to McCabe and Ricciardelli (2003), the family plays an important role in the influence of eating behaviors of adolescents. One of the most influential pieces

within the family in terms of dietary behavior may be the mother and daughter relationship. Mothers who promote dieting actually increase dieting behaviors of their adolescent daughters (Benedikt, Wertheim, & Love, 1998). Parents, particularly mothers, who give parental feedback in terms of dieting may have a tremendous impact on their daughters overall development of body satisfaction. If a male or female was pressured through family influence to diet, he or she is more likely to have a poor body image (Green & Pritchard, 2003).

### *Body Image and the Media*

Media-generated messages have an influential stronghold over adolescents and possibly are a contributor of body dissatisfaction in adolescents. Media such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and even in the technological age of computers depict images and messages of thin, attractive women and muscular men. Visual images and messages can have a direct impact on how people view their body and can be detrimental to their self-esteem. According to Wolf (as cited in Thompson & Heinberg, 1999), the mass media, predominant in women's magazines, are formidable advocates for portraying an unrealistic and damaging body ideal.

The mass media delivers a profound impact on how young women in the American culture perceive their bodies. According to Gonzalez-Lavin and Smolak (as cited in Thompson & Heinberg, 1999), girls who watch eight or more hours of television in a given week show far greater body dissatisfaction than girls who watch less television. Further studies have shown that other exposure to television programming may have an impact on eating disorders and body dissatisfaction. It seems the media portrays an image that if you fit the thin ideal or even the muscular physique in men that

you are more optimistic, outgoing, hardworking, and fun-loving, which is not attainable for those who do not comply to the ideal of being thin.

Believing in achieving the thin ideal can affect males and females of any age, especially in regards to adolescents. During the stages of adolescence and puberty, it may not be realistic for one's body to change the way the media stresses and to acquire the thin ideal body image. Because of this, one's self-esteem may be detrimentally affected. Moreover, adolescents live in an American culture that is significantly and powerfully influential in terms of media. Pressure from the media to have the ideal thin body type can set off negative feelings towards one's appearance (Green & Pritchard, 2003).

#### *Body Image and Peers*

During the developmental stage of adolescence, peer relationships play a significant role. Adolescents' feelings of self-esteem may be positively or negatively affected through the influence of their peers. According to Simmons, Rosenberg, and Rosenberg (as cited in Davison & McCabe, 2006), the authors stated that during the early stages of adolescence, adolescents may have a heightened self-awareness and apprehension of how their peers evaluate them.

A research study examining 304 seventh and tenth grade adolescents in relation to peer appearance relationship, internalized appearance ideals, and appearance social comparison factors to body satisfaction development was conducted in a major metropolitan district (Jones, 2004). The study examined peer relationships and peer evaluation of clothes, looks, and attractiveness. In the study, "internalized appearance ideal" referred to individuals and how they perceive their own appearance. In addition, the study looked at appearance social comparison factors which related to the biological

physical factors. The study found a strong correlation between adolescent females' body satisfaction and a connection to their social world. Adolescent females associated their body satisfaction with peer influences. For example, females in the study linked their body satisfaction to their female peer group conversations as to what was deemed acceptable among the peer group. For males, the findings were at the opposite end of the spectrum. Adolescent males were found to be less influenced than their female counterparts by their social world. However, boys within the study had some findings of body dissatisfaction and internalized role ideals. Males who idealized a perfect male body were more likely to have increased body dissatisfaction (Jones, 2004).

Weight control practices may also be associated with adolescents and their relationship with their peers. According to Levine (cited in Field, Camargo Jr., Taylor, Berkey, Roberts, & Colditz, 2001), adolescent girls accept the behaviors and beliefs which are constructed within their peer group. Therefore, girls who observed body weight management practices coincided with their peers.

It has been demonstrated that many variables come into play when considering body image and its relationship to self-esteem of adolescent males and females. Both body image and self-esteem are very important topics when looking at high school aged adolescents. While going through adolescence, high school aged students can experience difficulties, which can affect their self-esteem and overall body image. Research has been conducted looking at body image satisfaction with emphasis areas on gender, age, as well as the media, peers, and family having an influence on body image and self-esteem.

### Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter will discuss selection and description, along with instrumentation. In addition, data collection, analysis procedures, and limitations will be discussed in the chapter.

#### *Subject Selection and Description*

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between body image and self-esteem among high school male and females at different ages. Students in grades nine and twelve were surveyed during the spring of 2007.

The subjects surveyed in the study were male and female students in grades nine and twelve. The population from which the study sample was drawn consisted of 115 students. The school used in the survey had an ethnic population of 79.0 % Caucasian, 16.0 % Asian-Pacific, 2.0 % African American, 2.0 % Hispanic, and 1.0 % American Indian. Ninth and twelfth grade students in English class were asked to complete the surveys with parental consent. In all, 74 students participated in the study.

#### *Instrumentation*

Two surveys were used in this study to assess body image and self-esteem. The body image survey (See Appendix A) is an abbreviated version of the Children's Eating Attitudes Test (ChEAT). The purpose of this instrument was to obtain information regarding body image in relation to students' thoughts and feelings about how they perceive their bodies. The survey was modified to five questions. Subjects chose between responses: never, rarely, sometimes, and always. Permission to use this amended survey was given via email by Rebecca Russell, a high school guidance counselor in Edgerton,

Wisconsin, and by Dr. Lina Angela Ricciardelli, an associate professor at Deakin university in Burwood, Australia.

The self-esteem survey was created by Dr. Morris Rosenberg, a former professor at the University of Maryland (See Appendix A). The Rosenberg Self Esteem Inventory was available in the public domain (Rosenberg, 1965). The self-esteem survey was used for the purpose of analyzing how individuals relate to their self-esteem through feelings and thoughts. The researcher modified the survey to five questions for this study. The subjects chose between four responses: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The subjects were asked to circle the answer that was most applicable to their thoughts and feelings. Since the instruments were modified specifically for this study, no measures of validity or reliability have been documented on either instrument used.

#### *Data Collection*

Prior to the data collection, permission was obtained from the high school administration and superintendent of the school district. Permission was also obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. The survey was offered to students on a voluntary basis in freshmen and senior English classes. This occurred during the month of March 2007. Students were invited to obtain parental permission in order to participate in the survey. After parental permission was obtained, the survey was conducted in the classrooms in a ten-minute time frame. After the surveys were completed, the students were asked to place the surveys in a drop box that was provided. Surveys were gathered from the drop box at the end of the day (several classes participated).

### *Data Analysis*

Mean scores, percentages, and standard deviations were calculated for total responses for each of the five questions on both the body image and self-esteem surveys. The researcher explored variables based on the results, which included grade, gender, and the scores of both the body image and self-esteem surveys. Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to see if a relationship existed between a student's score on the body image survey and the self-esteem survey. Furthermore, a *t* test was used to see if group differences in mean scores existed based on grade and gender.

### *Limitations*

A limitation of the methodology was that the students may have misunderstood the terminology used within the survey. Possible misunderstanding may have hindered their ability to answer the survey questions precisely. Another possible limitation of the methodology relates to the researcher using only five questions of the full twenty-five questions that make up the Children's Eating Attitudes Test (ChEAT). Furthermore, five out of ten questions were represented for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Doing so may have hindered the survey's ability to be an accurate representation of high or low body image and self-esteem and may have limited the reliability and validity of the instruments. Finally, there may have been participant sample bias within the study. The volunteers within the study may not represent the population as a whole. The study was not therefore generalizable.

## Chapter IV: Results

The study presented looked at body image and self-esteem of ninth and twelfth grade males and females at a high school in west-central Wisconsin. The following results will discuss demographics, followed by the item analysis on the body image survey and the self-esteem survey. Last, previous research questions are reexamined through current research findings.

### *Demographics*

Seventy-four ninth and twelfth grade students participated in the study. Of the total ninth graders, 9 were male (12.2%) and 27 were female (36.5%). Of the total twelfth graders, there were 20 male (27.0%) and 18 female (24.3%). Seventy-four total participants were given the body image and self-esteem surveys.

### *Item Analysis: Body Image Survey*

In order to measure the responses for the body image survey, each response (never, rarely, sometimes, always) was assigned a number (4,3,2, or 1, with a score of 1 being associated with higher levels of body image). The mean for the body image survey was then derived by averaging the total number of points each student obtained from the individual questions.

For the body image survey item one (I am scared about being overweight), the group total had a mean score of 2.46, which resulted in an attitude of sometimes feeling scared about being overweight. For the body image survey item two (I think a lot about wanting to be thinner), the group total had a mean score of 2.36, which displayed an end result of sometimes thinking about wanting to be thinner. For the body image item three (I have been dieting), the group total had a mean score of 2.93, which resulted in the total

group rarely dieting. For the body image item four (I think a lot about being fat), the group total had a mean score of 2.53, which displayed an end result of sometimes thinking about being fat. Lastly, the body image item five (I give too much time and thought to food), the group total had a mean score of 2.85, which resulted significantly toward rarely thinking about food. Overall, the total group had a mean score of 2.62 for the body image survey.

*Item Analysis: Self-esteem Survey*

In order to measure the responses for the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, each response (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree) was assigned a number (1,2,3, or 4, with a score of 4 being associated with higher levels of self-esteem). Two of the five questions were scored in reverse order (4,3,2,1) to account for the reverse wording of the item (See Appendix A). The mean for the self-esteem scale was then tabulated by averaging the total number of points each student obtained for the individual questions.

For the self-esteem survey item one (On the whole, I am satisfied with myself), the group total had a mean score of 2.97, which resulted significantly toward the group agreeing with being satisfied. For the self-esteem survey item two (I feel that I have a number of good qualities), the group had a total mean score of 3.32, which displayed an end result of the total group feeling they have a number of good qualities. For the self-esteem survey item three (I feel I do not have much to be proud of), the group total had a mean score of 3.14, which resulted in the total group disagreeing with not having much to be proud of. For the self-esteem survey item four (I certainly feel useless at times), the group total had a mean score of 2.57, which indicated that the group was fairly neutral

about feeling useless at times. Lastly, for the self-esteem survey item five (I wish I could have more respect for myself), the group total had a mean score of 2.57, which had an end result of the group being fairly neutral on having more self respect. Overall, the total group had a mean score of 2.91 for the self-esteem survey.

*Data Analysis: Group Comparisons*

Data were further analyzed using an independent groups *t* test. Overall mean and standard deviation scores were tabulated by grade and gender for the body image survey and the self-esteem survey. Participants' results for the body image survey are found in Table 1, and results for the self-esteem survey are found in Table 2.

Table 1

*Body Image and Self-esteem Survey Mean Scores for Grade*

Survey	Grade	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Body Image	9 <sup>th</sup>	2.65	.78502
Body Image	12 <sup>th</sup>	2.59	.78216
Self-esteem	9 <sup>th</sup>	2.88	.55626
Self-esteem	12 <sup>th</sup>	2.94	.60611

A total score of 20 was possible on the body image and self-esteem surveys, which would indicate high body image and high self-esteem. The mean score and standard deviation for participants' responses are found above in Table 1. The *t* test showed there were no significant differences between ninth and twelfth graders on the body image survey.

Table 2

*Body Image and Self-esteem Survey Mean Scores for Gender*

Survey	Gender	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Body Image	Male	2.86	.86400
Body Image	Female	2.46	.68201
Self-esteem	Male	3.05	.53691
Self-esteem	Female	2.82	.59272

A total score of 20 was possible on the self-esteem survey, which would indicate high self-esteem. The mean score and standard deviation for participants' responses are found above in Table 2. The *t* test showed that there were several significant differences between males and females. For the body image survey item 1 (I am scared about being overweight), females were found to be significantly more scared about being overweight than males. This was significant at the  $p < .05$  level ( $p = .044$ ). For the body image survey item 2 (I think a lot about wanting to be thinner), females were found to have a strong significance about thinking about being thinner compared to males. This was significant at the  $p < .01$  level ( $p = .008$ ). For the body image survey item 4 (I think a lot about being fat), females were found to think significantly more about being fat than males. This was significant at the  $p < .05$  level ( $p = .044$ ). Lastly, on self-esteem survey item 2 (I feel I have a number of good qualities), females were found to be significantly more likely to feel they have fewer good qualities when compared to males. This was

significant at the  $p < .01$  level ( $p = .008$ ). Also, females were significantly lower on the overall body image score. This was significant at the  $p < .05$  level ( $p = .027$ ).

#### *Data Analysis: Body Image and Self-esteem*

Data were further analyzed using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. A significant correlation between body image and self-esteem was found for the total group of participants. This was significant at the  $p < .01$  level. This indicates that a strong correlation was found between a negative body image and negative self-esteem for the total group of participants.

A significant correlation between body image and self-esteem was also found for participants in the ninth grade when combining both males and females, participants in the twelfth grade when combining both males and females, females in the study, and total participant males in the study. All correlations were significant at the  $p < .01$  level. Thus, there was a strong correlation between negative body image and negative self-esteem for all groups in the study.

#### *Research Questions*

Six research questions were addressed and answered in this study. Research question number one was as follows: Is there a relationship between body image and self-esteem scores among high school-aged males? By using a Pearson Correlation Coefficient, the data revealed that there was a strong correlation with body image and self-esteem scores for males at the  $p < .01$  level ( $p = .00$ ). In other words, the males who participated in the study were found to have high body image with a high self-esteem or low body image with a low self-esteem.

The second question asked: Is there a relationship between body image and self-esteem scores among high school-aged males? The data revealed that there was a strong correlation with body image and self-esteem scores for females at the  $p < .01$  level ( $p = .001$ ). In other words, the females who participated in the study were found to have high body image with a high self-esteem or low body image with a low self-esteem.

The third and fourth questions asked: Is there a relationship between body image and self-esteem among ninth graders? Twelfth graders? The data revealed that there was a strong correlation with body image and self-esteem scores for ninth graders at the  $p < .01$  level ( $p = .006$ ). The data revealed that there was a strong correlation for body image and self-esteem for the twelfth grade at the  $p < .01$  level ( $p = .00$ ). In other words, the ninth and twelfth graders that participated in the study were found to have high body image with a high self-esteem or low body image with a low self-esteem. Overall, the study confirmed previous studies. These students were showing a typical pattern.

The fifth question asked: How does the relationship between body image and self-esteem change for students between ninth and twelfth grade? The data revealed that there were no significant differences evident among body image and self-esteem between ninth and twelfth grade. This is contrary to what the researcher expected.

The sixth question asked: How did males and females differ in body image and self-esteem? The data revealed using an independent  $t$  test there were several differences between males and females when comparing body image and self-esteem. From the body image survey, items one (I am scared about being overweight), two (I think a lot about wanting to be thinner), and four (I think a lot about being fat), showed a significant lower body image for females than males. Furthermore, the self-esteem survey item two (I feel I

have a number of good qualities), revealed a significantly lower self-esteem for females than males.

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that over the span from ninth to twelfth grade there is no significant differences among body image and self-esteem. However, in relation to gender the data revealed showed there is a significant difference between males and females. According to the survey results, females have been found to have a lower body image and lower self-esteem than males.

## Chapter V: Discussion

In this chapter, the current study will be discussed in relation to similar research findings. First, a summary of the present study will be discussed. Next, conclusions will be discussed, followed by recommendations for future research on body image and self-esteem.

### *Summary*

For high school aged students, body image and self-esteem are important topics. Ninth and twelfth grade males and females at a high school in west-central Wisconsin were given a five-question body image survey and a five-question self-esteem survey. Volunteer students in three ninth grade English classrooms were surveyed, which totaled 36 students. Volunteer students in three twelfth grade English classrooms were surveyed, which totaled 38 students. Overall, a total of 74 students completed the body image and self-esteem surveys.

Mean scores were tabulated for each of the items on the body image survey and for each item on the self-esteem survey. Pearson Correlation Coefficients were conducted to find possible significant correlations between the body image scores and the self-esteem scores for the total group of participants, ninth grade males and females, twelfth grade males and females, and all males and all females of the participants. Lastly, an independent groups *t* test found several significant differences between groups based on gender for both the body image survey and self-esteem survey; however, no such differences were found based on grade for either survey.

### *Conclusions*

The present study found a correlation between negative body image and negative self-esteem for the total group of respondents, male and female students, and ninth and twelfth grade students. Green and Pritchard (2003) found that body image and self-esteem are positively correlated in younger populations, showing that a decrease in self-esteem contributes to a poorer body image. Furthermore, previous research has indicated and found a significant correlation between high body image and high self-esteem (Hayes et. al, 1999). Therefore, the findings within this study correlates with past research that there is a relationship between negative body image and negative self-esteem.

The present study did find significant differences in the body image and self-esteem scores among males and females. This is consistent with past research as well. Research has discovered that differences do in fact exist in relation to body image satisfaction between males and females (Green & Pritchard, 2003; Duncan et. al, 2002). Research has distinguished that the cultural ideal for male muscularity and female thinness is well established by adolescence (Phelps et al., 1993). In the present study, females were more likely to be dissatisfied with body image and self-esteem than males.

According to Phelps et al. (2003), dissatisfaction with one's body is prevalent during the adolescent years. The present study findings show some evidence of dissatisfaction with one's body during adolescence. Students attending high school, grades ninth and twelfth, are all in their adolescent years. This may explain the present study finding no differences between grades for body image and self-esteem.

Zullig, Ubbes, Pyles, & Valois (2006) reported that females were more likely to engage in dieting behaviors to fit the social acceptance, whereas males dieted strictly to

gain muscle mass to fit the social norm. However, Zullig et al.'s findings are not completely consistent with the results from this study. This study indicated that 3 males reported that they always diet (item three from body image survey). On the other hand, there were no female respondents in this study who reported that they always diet. According to Thompson & Heinberg, (1999) print media could be a strong factor in why adolescent females are more likely to diet. Based on the three responses from the males who reported that they always diet, the researcher hypothesized that the males may have been in a sport (wrestling) where the athletes have to continually diet to maintain a certain body weight.

According to Schur, Sanders, and Steiner (2000) there has been a high correlation between dieting behaviors and body image dissatisfaction among adolescents. The present study found that 13 females and 4 males indicated that they always think a lot about wanting to be thinner, thus supporting past research. Some adolescents have reported to engage in dieting behaviors based on their dissatisfaction (Kostanski & Gullone, 2000).

The present study found no significant differences between age levels in body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem among high school adolescents. A study conducted by Phelps et al. (1993) found adolescent males had no significant differences in body image dissatisfaction when compared by age levels. However, females were found to be significantly higher in body image dissatisfaction moving further into adolescence from middle school to high school (Phelps et al., 1993). Thus, the findings show a contrast from the present study with past research.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the current research findings, the researcher suggests that further research should be conducted looking at body image and self-esteem. Studies involving all three levels of schooling (elementary, middle, and high school) could be conducted, compared, and evaluated to find the relationship among body image and self-esteem. The researcher also suggests further research to be examined on a greater population than the present study. By doing so, the results could be further generalized on a greater scale to promote understanding of the correlation among body image and self-esteem. Research could also be developed and studied among different ethnic backgrounds in relation to age and gender for body image and self-esteem. Furthermore, a longitudinal study could be conducted over the adolescent years from elementary through high school in relation to body image and self-esteem.

Parents, school counselors, and teachers alike who work with adolescents at some level on a daily basis can develop inferences from this study regarding body image and self-esteem. As the researcher found in the present study, a strong correlation between body image and self-esteem among adolescents exists. This gives the field of counseling strong support to educate adolescents and parents on the importance of a healthy body image and a positive self-esteem. Recommendations for school counselors of all levels should be to develop curriculum for the classroom to help educate students about the importance of a healthy body image and positive self-esteem. Other recommendations may include bringing the community into the schools through the use of guest speakers on the importance of living a life with a healthy body image and positive self-esteem.

Furthermore, collaboration with health teachers in schools for the development of clubs for extracurricular activities that involve living fit and feeling fit through the use of healthy eating, education, and exercise may improve students' body image and self-esteem. Also, the use of small group guidance for adolescents focusing on topics such as friendships, team building, and relationships can help further self-esteem. Lastly, guidance counselors can develop a "Body and Self-esteem" night for parents and adolescents to come to the school to listen and partake in different events to help develop and establish healthy body images and positive self-esteem.

In conclusion, the results from this study provide useful information for a variety of groups. Parents, teachers, school counselors, and individuals within the community can take further steps to instill the young with the importance of having a healthy body image and a positive self-esteem. By doing so, the youth of tomorrow can prosper, develop, and live healthier lives.

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## Appendix A: Body Image Survey and Self Esteem Survey

**This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.**

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey. Your responses to the following questions will be anonymous. The survey is completely voluntary. By submitting your answers, you agree to allow them to be used in the study. You may stop taking this survey at any time.

**Please circle your gender and grade in school:**

**Gender:**        Male                      Female

**Grade:** 9<sup>th</sup>                      12<sup>th</sup>

### Student Survey I

Please answer the following five questions by circling the answer that best describes you.

- |  |       |        |           |        |
|--|-------|--------|-----------|--------|
| 1. <b>I am scared about being overweight.</b>        | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Always |
| 2. <b>I think a lot about wanting to be thinner.</b> | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Always |
| 3. <b>I have been dieting.</b>                       | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Always |
| 4. <b>I think a lot about being fat.</b>             | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Always |
| 5. <b>I give too much time and thought to food.</b>  | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Always |

### Student Survey II

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you **strongly agree**, circle **SA**. If you **agree** with the statement, circle **A**. If you **disagree**, circle **D**. If you **strongly disagree**, circle **SD**.

- |  |    |   |   |    |
|--|----|---|---|----|
| 1. <b>On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.</b>      | SA | A | D | SD |
| 2. <b>I feel that I have a number of good qualities.</b> | SA | A | D | SD |
| 3. <b>I feel I do not have much to be proud of.</b>      | SA | A | D | SD |
| 4. <b>I certainly feel useless at times.</b>             | SA | A | D | SD |
| 5. <b>I wish I could have more respect for myself.</b>   | SA | A | D | SD |

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

### Parent/Guardian Permission Form

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am a graduate student at UW-Stout in the School Counseling program. I am currently working as a school counseling practicum student with Amy Bauman at Pederson Elementary in Altoona, Wisconsin.

I am currently working on my thesis for graduate school, which is on body image and self-esteem. The high school principal, David Valk, has given me permission to survey interested students at North High School. I am asking your permission for your child to be included in this study.

Students will complete one five-question survey on body image and one five-question survey on self-esteem. The surveys are expected to take the students about ten minutes to complete. Since students will not put their names on the survey, they will remain anonymous. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. The risks involving this survey are minimal. A possible risk is that students may experience emotional discomfort when thinking about their body image and self-esteem. However, students will be given the option to withdraw from this survey at anytime. Counseling services are available at North High School. The benefit of this study is to gain more insight about some of these issues facing adolescents. If you will allow your child's participation in the study, please complete the form on the next page and have your child return it to their English teacher by Friday, March 9<sup>th</sup>. Thank you for your time!

If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact David Hildebrandt or Dr. Barbara Flom. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your child's rights as a research participant, please contact Sue Foxwell.

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Sincerely,

David R. Hildebrandt

Please return this page to your English instructor.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, will allow my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in this study about body image and self-esteem.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of parent or guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the study about body image and self-esteem.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date