



Parasocial Bonding, Body Image, And Self-Esteem: A Systematic Review

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Abstract: In light of growing exposure to digital media, this review paper investigates the connection between parasocial bonding, body image, and self-esteem. The emergence of social networking sites has increased the prevalence of parasocial relationships, which are characterized as one-sided psychological attachments to media personalities. Such interactions may affect people's perceptions of themselves and their appearance, especially among young adults, according to prior research. With an emphasis on self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction, this paper summarizes the body of research on parasocial bonding and its psychological effects. The review emphasizes the benefits and drawbacks of parasocial engagement, such as internalization of idealized standards, social comparison, and emotional fulfilment. Research findings are inconsistent, with some studies reporting strong correlations and others showing weak or non-significant ones. The necessity of more research examining moderating factors like social comparison, media literacy, and cultural context is emphasized in the paper's conclusion.

Index terms: Parasocial Bonding, Body Image, Self-esteem, Social media, psychological Well-being

I INTRODUCTION

Social interaction patterns have changed dramatically as a result of the quick development of digital technology and the extensive use of social media platforms. People are no longer restricted to interpersonal relationships in real life; instead, they are increasingly forming one-sided psychological bonds with media personalities, which are referred to as parasocial relationships. The term "parasocial interactions" was first used by Horton and Wohl (1956) to describe the appearance of in-person relationships that viewers form with media figures in spite of the lack of reciprocal communication.

Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have enhanced parasocial experiences in the modern digital world by facilitating ongoing exposure, perceived intimacy, and interactive engagement. Celebrities and influencers frequently display carefully chosen and idealized versions of themselves, which can affect viewers' attitudes, perceptions, and assessments of themselves. Young adults, particularly female college students, are particularly affected by this phenomenon because they are going through a crucial developmental stage marked by identity exploration and increased social comparison sensitivity.

A person's perceptions, ideas, and emotions regarding their physical appearance are known as their body image, and they are crucial to psychological health. Body dissatisfaction has been repeatedly linked to media exposure to idealized body standards. According to social comparison theory, people assess themselves by comparing themselves to others, and positive comparisons with attractive media personalities may have a detrimental effect on body image.

Similar to this, both internal and external factors, such as social validation and assessments based on appearance, have an impact on self-esteem, which represents a person's overall assessment of their own value. Repeated exposure to idealized representations on social media can cause people to internalize unattainable standards, which can lower their self-esteem.

While a great deal of research has been done on body image, self-esteem, and parasocial relationships separately, few studies have looked at how these factors interact within a single framework. Knowing how parasocial bonding interacts with body image and self-esteem is essential for understanding modern psychological experiences, especially in light of the increasing impact of digital media. Thus, the purpose of this review is to summarize previous research and investigate the connections between these three factors.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

Parasocial Bonding

Horton and Wohl (1956) first proposed the idea of parasocial interaction, characterizing it as a one-sided psychological relationship in which viewers become intimate with media figures even in the absence of direct interaction. Parasocial relationships have grown more prevalent and interactive with the development of digital media, especially through social networking sites.

According to research, people who are lonely or socially dissatisfied are more likely to develop parasocial relationships because these connections may make up for unfulfilled social needs (Rubin et al., 1985). Tukachinsky (2011) emphasized that repeated exposure to media figures can result in long-term emotional attachment and further distinguished between parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships.

According to Cohen (2004), who emphasized the importance of identification in parasocial bonding, people who strongly identify with media characters are more likely to form emotional bonds. In a similar vein, Stever and Lawson (2013) discovered that, especially among young adults going through identity formation, parasocial relationships can resemble real-life interpersonal bonds.

Parasocial bonding, though, might also have drawbacks. Excessive celebrity worship has been linked to maladaptive outcomes, such as psychological distress and obsessive tendencies, according to Maltby et al. (2005). Therefore, even though parasocial relationships might offer emotional solace, their effects on psychological health are still complicated.

Bodyimage

Perceptions, ideas, and emotions regarding one's physical appearance are all part of the multifaceted concept of body image (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). It is essential for psychological health, especially for young women who are more vulnerable to the standards of beauty set by society.

Media exposure and body dissatisfaction were found to be significantly correlated in a meta-analysis by Grabe et al. (2008), indicating that internalizing idealized body standards leads to a negative self-perception. In a similar vein, Tiggemann and Slater (2013) found a connection between increased body dissatisfaction and a desire for thinness and frequent use of social networking sites.

Young women's body dissatisfaction increases instantly when they are exposed to idealized social media images, according to experimental research by Fardouly et al. (2015). These results corroborate the idea that body image is shaped by social comparison processes.

According to Perloff (2014), social media is different from traditional media in that it encourages constant self-monitoring, comparison, and feedback, all of which can exacerbate body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, Dittmar (2009) emphasized that unrealistic beauty standards are a result of cultural and societal pressures, which further exacerbate body image issues.

Overall, research shows that media exposure and social comparison, especially in digital settings, have a significant impact on body image.

Self-esteem

A key component of psychological functioning is self-esteem, which is described as a person's overall assessment of their own value (Rosenberg, 1965). Both internal and external social experiences have an impact on it.

According to the sociometer theory put forth by Leary and Baumeister (2000), self-esteem serves as an internal gauge of social acceptance. People's self-esteem usually declines when they feel rejected or negatively assessed.

The idea of contingencies of self-worth was first proposed by Crocker and Park (2004), who contend that people who base their sense of self-worth on outside variables like appearance are more susceptible to changes in their self-esteem. According to Vogel et al. (2014), using social media is linked to upward social comparison, which has a detrimental effect on self-esteem.

According to Harter (1999), adolescents' and young adults' self-esteem is significantly influenced by their physical appearance. This implies that self-esteem and body image are closely related.

However, research also shows that a variety of factors, such as cultural context, social relationships, and personal accomplishments, have an impact on self-esteem, underscoring its complexity.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

In light of growing exposure to digital media, the current review sought to investigate the connection between parasocial bonding, body image, and self-esteem. These variables are linked, according to the review of the literature, although research findings are still inconsistent.

According to research on parasocial bonding, these connections can have both beneficial and detrimental effects. Parasocial interactions can, on the one hand, satisfy needs for belongingness, lessen loneliness, and offer emotional support (Gabriel et al., 2009). However, excessive participation in parasocial relationships has been linked to maladaptive behaviors and psychological distress, especially when it comes to celebrity worship (Maltby et al., 2005). The detrimental effects of media exposure are frequently highlighted in the body image literature. According to studies, exposure to carefully chosen and idealized depictions of beauty on social media platforms increases body dissatisfaction through upward social comparison processes (Fardouly et al., 2015; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). However, individual differences like media literacy and self-awareness may affect how much of an impact this has.

Similarly, research on self-esteem indicates that both internal and external factors have an impact on it. Self-esteem has been found to be adversely affected by social comparison processes, especially in digital environments (Vogel et al., 2014). However, some people might continue to be resilient because of things like stable self-concept and social support.

The literature indicates that parasocial bonding may indirectly affect body image and self-esteem through mechanisms like identification and comparison when taking into account the interrelationship among these variables. People who have a strong sense of identification with media personalities may compare themselves to others, which could result in negative self-evaluations. These associations are not universal, though, as some studies report weak or non-significant relationships.

Overall, the results show how complicated these relationships are and imply that other factors, like individual differences and cultural context, are important.

RESEARCH GAP

There are still a number of gaps in the growing corpus of research on parasocial bonding, body image, and self-esteem. Few studies have looked at these variables' combined relationship within a single framework; the majority have looked at them separately. Furthermore, comparatively few studies have been carried out in non-Western or culturally diverse contexts, with the majority of current research concentrating on Western populations.

Moreover, little research has been done on the function of moderating factors like media literacy, personality traits, and social support. Longitudinal research on the long-term effects of parasocial relationships on psychological well-being is also lacking.

IMPLICATIONS

The review's conclusions have theoretical and practical ramifications. The study theoretically advances knowledge of how media-related psychological processes affect wellbeing and self-perception. It emphasizes the necessity of taking parasocial bonding into account as a possible component in studies on body image and self-esteem.

Practically speaking, the results can help educators, legislators, and mental health specialists create interventions that encourage responsible media use and lessen detrimental psychological effects. Promoting media literacy and raising awareness of the negative impacts of social comparison may aid people in creating a more balanced view of themselves.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, parasocial bonding has become a prominent phenomenon in the digital age and may have an impact on self-esteem and body image. According to the reviewed literature, parasocial relationships can lead to negative self-perception through comparison processes, even though they may also offer emotional benefits. Nevertheless, inconsistent results across studies suggest the impact of other factors.

In order to better understand the intricate relationships between parasocial bonding, body image, and self-esteem, future research should concentrate on examining moderating variables, diverse populations, and long-term effects.

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