

# Are You Happy with The Way Your Body Looks in Midlife?

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** *The years between 40 to the early 60's in the human life span is referred to as the Midlife period. It is also considered as an important period in one's life, referred to as the transition period. By this age it is generally assumed that a person would have more free time in their hands, as they get settled/established in their career and with the children hitting their teens and no longer demanding a lion's share of their spare time, one is free to socialise, introspect, explore new avenues etc. Traditionally it is believed that people are more fixated or obsessed with their outwardly appearance up until their 40, s and as they hit their midlife, they tend to become more relaxed on their outward appearance and physique. In the current scenario where people are locked up indoors due to the Covid19 pandemic. Working, Socialising, recreation is facilitated by some or the other social media platform. The issue here is that these platforms not only show us the other person, but you see yourself also on screen. Seeing themselves on screen is not something that the people in their midlife are used to. This over exposure of the unfiltered self, pitched against the others on screen make them conscious of their haves and have not's. The massive boom of the beauty /fitness industry along with the new age/gen Selfie revolution has put a massive pressure on the human psyche to look perfect and flawless in every frame. People have become very aware of their body, body type, flaws and assets.*

**Objective:** *This research was done to Understand the extent to which the people from a fitness group and who follow an exercise regime are conscious about the appearance of their specific body parts.*

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** *Quantitative analysis with pre-established tool of body comparison scale.*

**Findings/Results:** *Results showed that contrary to the general understanding that people become relaxed towards their appearance during their midlife, both, males and females were bothered about their physical features and appearance. Both the genders were equally concerned about size, weight, waist, physique and overall shape. Males were more bothered about the muscular attributes while females were shown to be more conscious about non muscular physical attributes. Hence the results clearly indicated that due to social media influence, people in midlife are really conscious, comparative and critical about their physical attributes and body, irrespective of their gender.*

**Originality/Value:** *The study points out at how comparative the social circles make us towards our own bodies.*

**Paper Type:** *Quantitative Analysis*

**Keywords:** Body image, Self-assessment, Body consciousness, Body comparison

### 1. INTRODUCTION :

As the world got locked up due to the Covid19 pandemic and people we advised to stay indoors and practice social distancing, most people turned to social and other visual media for information, work, recreation and everything in-between. The extended lockdowns have not only disrupted the eating

habits of people, but it has also limited their physical activity and mobility on one side and increased their exposure to themselves on the screen a lot more. Earlier a person would look at themselves in the mirror only five to six times a day. But now with all the Zoom meetings, other media calls, face timing and video chats one is seeing themselves pitched against the other almost the whole day. People are constantly confronted by their own reflections with much greater intensity and frequency leading to a side-by-side comparison of one's appearance against the others on the screen this has left a very little scope to hide or correct one's perceived flaws. The selfie culture has taken the obsession towards self-appearance to a whole new level.

Binge eating and Binge watching has become the most preferred form of recreation. This brought with it a complimentary issue of body conscious and comparison not only with your peer and contemporaries but also with the social media personalities and celebrities. The gap between how one wants to look, how one is expected to look and how one actually looks has increased. The media is also adding strain to the already stressed human psyche by projecting the image of the "perfect look" glorifying a certain type of body image as the most accepted and respected one no matter how unrealistic or unhuman it be, leading to negative Body perception.

'Body image' is how one sees themselves; this image is not created overnight. It evolves over a period of time influenced by a variety factors like peer group, family norm, media age and exposure in society. The aim of this research paper is to investigate the self-assessment of the respondents in the midlife age group and to understand how they view their bodies. Is it with the sense of pride, obsession, loathing or respect? Do they want to change themselves just because they are inspired by the desire to have a healthy body or are they influenced by the aspiration to look like someone else or better than someone else or are they pressurized to conform to the perfect body image being projected by the media? DO they compare themselves with others?

The aim of this study was to understand the acceptance one has towards one's body. Are the mid aged people, male and the female critically about their appearances. What are the factors contributing to this comparative criticism and what are the areas of concern?

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE :**

### **2.1 Body Image:**

Body image is a sensitive subject when it comes to how it has started affecting us individually. It is how one perceives themselves and it can greatly affect one's self-worth and self-confidence. A research published on the website of PubMed on 2020 May 6 showed 307 women stated that the Body image of women can have a significant effect on the occurrence of depression and anxiety [1]. A research published in the journal of social science and medicine studied 912 women who were 54yr old. BMI was computed and it was found that the women with higher education were dissatisfied with their weight and their looks, than those with much lesser social interaction or lesser education [2].

### **2.2 Mid-Life Crisis and Body Image:**

Mostly the middle age is accompanied by middle-age crises. It is seen that it's important to take care of how the body looks externally and is perceived in society to enhance a healthy body image in society. A study was done on eating habits, body dissatisfaction, and body image among 125 middle aged (50-65yrs) women and 125 elderly (66yrs and above) women showed the perceived differences in eating attitudes, drive for thinness & body image, in middle-aged and elderly women. Results highlighted the fact that, the middle age women had more apprehension towards eating and more ambition for thinness with an underlying interceptive confusion. Fascinatingly the women in their 60's also had body size aspirations and the body image discontentment was same as that of the younger women. It was found that the fear of aging was directly proportional to disordered eating. It was concluded that the pressure to conform to the social and cultural standards of beauty and the perceived body image affects women irrespective of age.[3].

### **2.3 Men and Women Disparity in Body Image:**

A study-found that only 12.2 percent of the surveyed women aged 50 and above were happy with their body size. The researcher concluded that it was really difficult to find people who have positive feelings towards their body and look it at with respect and love [4].

Another study took gender and various factors that influence-the body image satisfaction. The findings indicated that both women and men have different ways and standards by which they evaluate themselves and the dissatisfaction that they have towards their bodies was largely influenced by the cultural ideologies. Further the findings also suggested that the way women viewed themselves is more likely to be influenced by their self-worth. Body image dissatisfaction being the result of their need for body image gratification. Samples were interviewed to know their individual beliefs and to find out about apparent control towards achieving the so-called 'ideal' body shape. The findings suggested that the self-perceived factors are significant influencers of one's own body shape satisfaction or disappointment [5].

#### **2.4 Influence of Media with Body Image:**

Research done on 139 adults on body image dissatisfaction and possible relating factors showed the presence of body image dissatisfaction in both adult women and men. Media influence along with a few factors like a few general factors like age, family pressure, and self-worth played a major role in body dissatisfaction in among both men and women, and a few general factors like family pressure, age, and self-esteem caused body image dissatisfaction in both men and women. Researchers suggested that since children are highly influenced by the actions and believes of the adults it is important that we research-on the body image, dissatisfaction and associated factors in the adult populations as well [6].

A Mega research with the sample size of 11017 was conducted in New Zealand in 2012 where a national sample survey of a sample size of 11,017 was studied to learn the impact of social media like Facebook, peer-based media, and transitional media forms. The study hypothesized that middle-aged woman, because of the increasing pressure of the society to conform to youthful beauty standards were a vulnerable population. They studied the cross-sectional correlation-between a Facebook user and body satisfaction for across age and gender cohorts. The curvilinear effects of age, was tested using the Bayesian regression model and the results depicted that irrespective of age and gender having and using a Facebook profile is associated with poorer body satisfaction level. For the women face book users, a U-shaped curvilinear association was found between age and body satisfaction level. There was a clear gap between Facebook users and non-users in perceived body satisfaction. Overall, this study highlighted the need for conducting more research among older populations on factors related to body satisfaction [7].

#### **2.5 Body Comparison Scale**

The Body Comparison scale, bought about by Thompson et al., 1999 is a very popular tool among researchers researching on body image issues worldwide. It consists of 20 body areas-e.g., hair, arms, forehead, and 5 questions about general body features such as overall body tone, shape, etc.

A meta-analysis done in 2006 established the way in which the body is compared contributes to body image anxieties and this is in congruence with the sociocultural theory. It was proposed that other issues could be addressed as well, for e.g. image comparison, i.e. women comparing their body to other women with leaner bodies, this is also known as upwards comparisons and would show the connection in body dissatisfaction [8].

The Physical Appearance Comparison Scale PACS given by Thompson, Heinberg, & Tantleff, in 1991 put to test in France on students aging between 18 and 30 from two different French universities, The scores of this study were significantly correlated with self-weighing, body size satisfaction, body size valuation, self-respect, social appearance nervousness, and misery. This study helps us to further understand body discontent processes and the effect of this dissatisfaction on mental health [9].

1,760i males and females were studied for mental behavioural social evaluation process regarding physical appearance. In the appearance comparison representations were between the two dimensions of weight/non-weight and muscle/non-muscle. Significant difference was found between both the genders. While Females were more concerned about body parts along with the weight/non-weight parameter: males, were obsessed about the muscle/non-muscle dimension [10].

### **3. OBJECTIVE :**

This pilot study aimed to identify the body image concerns of middle-aged people. The primary objective of this study is how conscious the respondents are about his or her body. The second objective is to understand how body image differs between the genders. Finally, the study aims to find if the there

is a percentile difference between both the gender when it comes to comparing their body while in public and is it the result of the public influence.

**4. THEORY :**

**Kelman's Social Influence Theory**

The Social influence theory' states that a person's beliefs, temperaments, and successive behaviour is influenced by others in three ways: compliance, identification, and internalization.

*"Compliance* happens when individuals admit and adopts the influence and the persuaded behaviour to increase rewards or support and avoid reprimands or condemnation. Therefore, "the satisfaction resulting from compliance is due to the social effect of accepting influence." (p. 53)

*Identification* happens when people accept the encouraged behaviour to generate or continue a chosen and advantageous relation with another person or a group. Hence, the gratification takes place due to "the act of conforming" (p. 53).

*Internalization* arises when individuals receive the influence after observing the content of the induced behaviour as satisfying in which the content specifies the views and actions of others mostly consistent with their said value systems. Thus, in this case, the satisfaction transpires due to "the content of the new behaviour." (p. 53).

It was stated that the consequence of agreement-based social influence may lessen over time, wherein the effects of identification and internalization would stay for longer periods. Therefore, the researches indicate that social influence exists and vary considerably across all societies (Wang et al. 2013) [11].

**5. METHOD :**

The study is a quantitative analysis using a pre-established tool on the Body comparison scale. Five males and five females were selected randomly from the online fitness groups who were in their middle age from 35-50yrs of age. SPSS 20 was used for statistical analysis.

**INCLUSION CRITERIA:** - Random sampling method was used from the researchers contact list. Married individuals above 35 were selected five being men and five being women all who have underwent biological child birth.

**EXCLUSION CRITERIA:** - Unmarried individuals were excluded from the study.

**6. RESULT :**

**6.1. Section I: Description of Demographic characteristics**

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Age in years		
a. Below 40 Years	1	10.0
b. 40-43 years	3	30.0
44-46 years	6	60.0
2. Gender		
a. Male	5	50.0
Female	5	50.0

**6.2 Analysis of various aspects of Body comparison with Gender**

N=10

	No of items	Max Score	Male			Female		
			Mean	Mean %	SD	Mean	Mean %	SD
General appearance, non-muscular, non-weight	9	45	14	31.1	3.873	18.20	45.5	4.55
Muscular Scale	6	30	15.0	50.0	7.382	11.80	39.33	7.382
Weight Scale	5	25	10.6	42.4	5.595	11.2	44.8	4.712
Overall Shape	5	25	14	56.0	7.036	11.8	47.2	8.198

Total	25	125	53.6	42.88	21.067	53.0	42.4	19.131
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### 6.3 Association of Body comparison with Gender

Variables	Male	Female	Chi square	D <sub>f</sub>	P value (0.05)	Inference
Ear						
Never	3	4	1.143	2	0.565	NS
Rarely	1	1				
Often	1	0				
2. Nose						
Never	2	3	2.200	2	0.333	NS
Rarely	3	1				
Often	0	1				
3. Lips						
Never	4	1	3.800	2	0.150	NS
Rarely	0	1				
Sometimes	1	3				
4. Hair						
Never	2	0	3.200	3	0.362	NS
Sometimes	2	3				
Often	1	1				
Always	0	1				
5. Teeth						
Never	2	2	3.000	3	0.392	NS
Rarely	0	1				
Sometimes	3	1				
Often	0	1				
6. Chin						
Never	5	3	2.500	2	0.287	NS
Rarely	0	1				
Sometimes	0	1				
7. Shape of Face						
Never	4	2	2.000	2	0.368	NS
Rarely	1	2				
3;4	0	1				
8. Cheeks						
Never	5	1	6.667	2	0.036	NS
Rarely	0	2				
Sometimes	0	2				
9. Fore Head						
Never	3	3	0.000	1	1.000	NS
Rarely	2	2				

10. Upper Arm						
Never	3	2	0.533	2	0.766	NS
Rarely	1	1				
Often	1	2				
11. Fore Arm						
Never	3	4	1.143	2	0.565	NS
Sometimes	1	1				
Often	1	0				
12. Shoulder						
Never	1	3	4.333	3	0.228	NS
Rarely	1	2				
Sometimes	1	0				
Often	2	0				
13. Chest						
Never	1	2	5.333	4	0.255	NS
Rarely	1	1				
Sometimes	0	1				
Often	3	0				
Always	0	1				
14. Back						
Never	2	3	5.200	3	0.158	NS
Rarely	0	2				
Sometimes	2	0				
Often	1	0				
15. Waist						
Never	1	1	6.000	4	0.199	NS
Rarely	1	1				
Sometimes	0	2				
Often	3	0				
Always	0	1				
16. Stomach						
Never	1	0	7.000	4	0.136	NS
Rarely	1	0				
Sometimes	0	3				
Often	3	1				
Always	0	1				
17. Buttock						
Never	3	3	1.333	2	0.513	NS
Sometimes	2	1				
Always	0	1				
18. Thighs						
Never	3	2	2.533	3	0.469	NS
Rarely	1	2				

Sometimes	0	1				
Often	1	0				
19. Hips						
Never	3	2	2.533	3	0.469	NS
Rarely	0	1				
Sometimes	2	1				
Always	0	1				
20. Calves						
Never	2	4	2.667	3	0.446	NS
Rarely	1	1				
Sometimes	1	0				
Often	1	0				
21. Muscle Tone of the Upper Body						
Never	1	2	4.667	3	0.198	NS
Rarely	1	2				
Often	3	0				
Always	0	1				
22. Shape of the Upper Body						
Never	1	2	3.333	4	0.504	NS
Rarely	1	1				
Sometimes	1	1				
Often	2	0				
Always	0	1				
23. Muscle tone of the Lower Body						
Never	2	2	6.000	4	0.199	NS
Rarely	0	2				
Sometimes	1	0				
Often	2	0				
Always	0	1				
24. Shape of the Lower Body						
Never	2	2	4.667	3	0.198	NS
Rarely	0	1				
Sometimes	1	1				
Often	2	0				
Always	0	1				
25. Overall Body						
Never	1	2	7.333	4	0.119	NS
Rarely	1	0				
Sometimes	0	2				
Often	3	0				
Always	0	1				



6.4 Diagrammatic Representation:

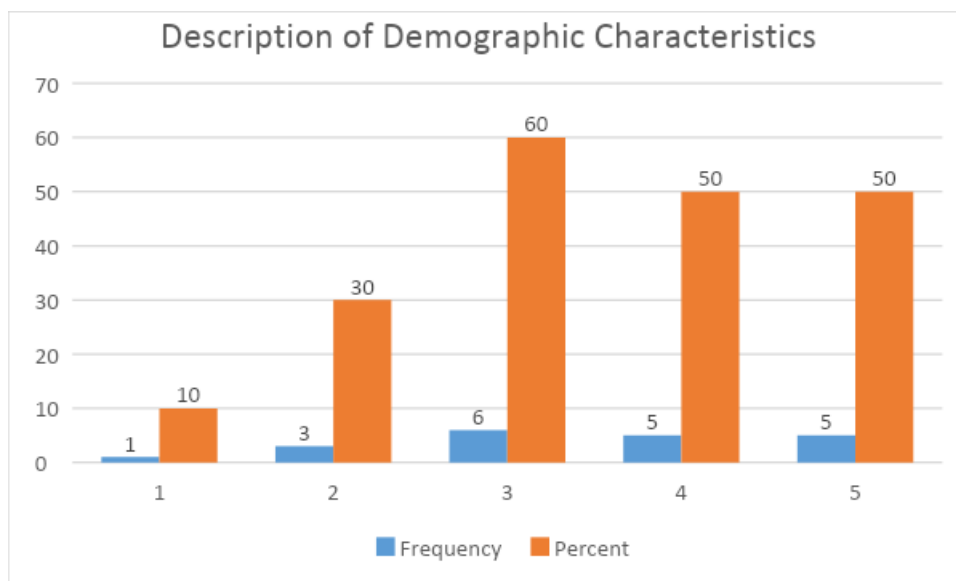


Fig. 1. Description Of Demographic Characteristics

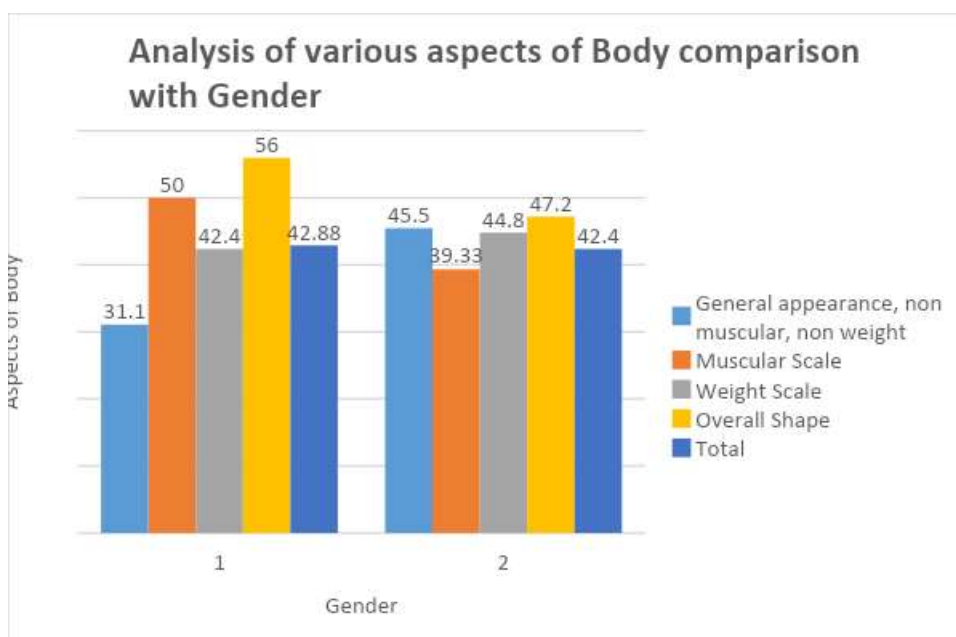


Fig. 2. Various Aspects of Body Comparison with Gender

7. DISCUSSION :

The study explored how conscious we become of our body image while we are with others. Obtained data, revealed that both males and females were equally bothered about their looks, the gender difference concerning body image was non-significant. But there was a remarkable difference with regards to the body part which either gender was more conscious about. This slow and steady shift happens in midlife to feel good with compliance, identification and internalisation to the beliefs, attitudes, and successive actions or behaviours of the referent others as Kelman’s social influence theory suggest.

This result shows how we are often in evaluative states when it comes to our physical features in general. The study found that most of the male respondents were more conscious about the muscular aspects 50 percent in comparison to females being 39.33 percent and the overall body shape being 56 percent in comparison to 47.2 percent as compared to females.

However, the significant majority of the female was more conscious towards weight scale 44.80 percent against 42.40 percent in men, that's a marginal difference though but overall general appearance and non-muscular aspects being 45.50 percent against only 31.10 percent in men being conscious about the same aspects.

One common observation was both the genders were equally bothered about their waist size both the genders showed 80 percent of each being conscious about the waist size, which if taken as Eustress might have a positive effect on people working over their fitness but the questionnaire strictly focused on the comparative mind-set which proves that people were more concerned about their looks in public.

## 8. CONCLUSION :

This study has found that most respondents were dissatisfied with what they really look like and have body image issues due to increased social media exposure and being comparative. They have experienced a state of insecurity about their physical attributes irrespective of gender. The study also shows how females were more concerned about their attributes related to weight while men were more concerned about muscular attributes, leading to negative body image and stress related to perceived body image. Having established that physical appearance is a matter of concern, the researcher further aims to find the impact of media on this body image discontentment. Various studies have also shown that body image issues are related to social influences. It is suggested to generate consciousness among parents and society to address an environment where we realize that the media's portrayal of a certain body image is far away from reality and more emphasis should be given on health than just the physical attribute.

## 9. SCALE USED :

### 9.1 Body comparison scale

The scale being used is the body comparison scale which focuses on how one compares his or her body part with others in terms of no muscular and non-weight aspects and also muscular and weight scale. It will help us to understand how the participant looks at his or her own body.

For the questions below, use the given scale to rate how frequently you compare these features of your body to those of other individuals of the same sex. NOTE: Please be sure that you read and answer to all of the questions as to how would you compare yourself to your same gender peers.

Note: general appearance, non-weight, non-muscular scale: items 1 to 9; muscular scale: items 10 to 15; weight scale items 16 to 20; Overall shape: 20 to 25

Along with it, baseline information was also collected from the samples.

### 9.2 Baseline data

Name

Age

Sex

**Consent form:** - voluntarily responding to the study which is a part of the research and this research will be kept confidential except for the scientific reason and publication and will be kept confidential.

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