The relationship between friendship factors, body-image concern and restrained eating.
A study on Greek female adolescents and young adults.

Marilena Tzafettas

London Metropolitan University

ABSTRACT: This study was designed to examine the relationship between friendship factors and Greek female adolescents’ and young adults’ body-image concern, body dissatisfaction, and restrained eating. While each of these issues has received much research attention in the past, very few studies have addressed whether perceived social support from friends or friendship intimacy influence young women’s body-image attitudes and eating behaviours, and whether heavier girls experience poorer friendship relations. The study was conducted in Greece and the total sample (N = 131) consisted of 67 high-school students and 64 university students, all of which were females. Data relied solely on self-report measures. Contrary to the hypothesis, lower perceived social support and friendship intimacy were not associated with increased levels of body-image concern, body dissatisfaction, or restrained eating, for either of the two age-groups. Additionally, higher levels of BMI were not associated with poorer levels of perceived social support or friendship intimacy. Finally, an additional finding—beyond the original hypotheses of this study—was that, even though levels of friendship intimacy were almost identical for the two age-groups, adolescents scored higher than young adults in body-image concern, body dissatisfaction, and restrained eating. The implications of these findings for future research are discussed.

Key Words: Body image concern, Friendship factors, Young females.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period characterized by rapid growth and development in all aspects of oneself including physical, emotional and psychological. Therefore, it has often been referred to by many theorists and researchers as a ‘period of trial and turmoil’1. Initially suggested by Erikson1, many studies have since supported the notion that adolescence is the most critical stage in the formation of adult personality and that it is throughout this period of development that individuals seek to define their role within society by clarifying their personal identity.

Within the construction of this identity, the literature suggests that body image is of fundamental importance. Body image can be defined as a multidimensional construction that represents the attitude towards one’s body, hence the individual’s feelings and behaviours with regards to their own physical attributes2,3. As the term ‘multidimensional’ suggests, body image is not limited to some conscious picture of a body figure we form in our mind, but rather consists of the following three aspects: a) the physiological, hence the brain’s ability to detect one’s weight and shape, b) the conceptual element, which is the mental picture of one’s body formed in his mind, and c) the emotional component, which involves feelings about one’s body weight and shape4-6.

The importance of body image in the construction of one’s personal identity can be explained by the fact that several researchers have stated that there is a
strong link between body image and the adolescent’s self-evaluation. More specifically, during puberty the body undergoes major transformations, developing from a child’s into an adult’s body, a reality that can be very challenging for the adolescent to adapt to. Moreover, at this point the individual is greatly influenced by societal stereotypes and there is a tendency in teenagers to imitate socially acceptable behaviours. This is in line with the social learning theory, on whichh the current study was based, and which relates behaviours to the models that individuals observe in their social environment and subsequently reproduce. To make this specific, the individual compares himself to what the society considers ideal and tries to comply with that, therefore measuring his self-worth according to the distance between the ideal self formed in his mind and the perceived actual self. When this distance is perceived to be substantial by the adolescent, a negative body image is formed which then leads to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, as the person feels let down by the fact that he does not measure up to his own ideals. A term most commonly used by researchers in order to describe this negative body image is ‘body dissatisfaction’. Even though body image concerns are an issue for both males and females, numerous studies have indicated that girls are more likely to develop body image disturbance than boys. For this very reason most of the literature has focused on females only. In fact, so huge is the percentage of the female population that experiences dissatisfaction with their body shape and size, that it has been classified as ‘normative discontent’. Hence, it is considered normal for women to feel that their physical appearance is not good enough.

Recently, a worrying increase in the frequency of the phenomenon of body dissatisfaction has been reported, with this applying not only to teenagers, but also to female college students, who similarly have high rates of body dissatisfaction. What is more, the transition from high school to college constitutes another major life change for the individual, ‘typically involving changes in social and role identities, a loss of proximal social support, and possibly geographical relocation’ as stated by Vohs et al. On the basis of these observations, adolescence and young adulthood are both considered high-risk developmental stages for experiencing a negative body-image and everything else this might entail.

With regards to the underlying factors contributing to the formation of body dissatisfaction, the media are considered to play a significant role, since according to several researchers, over the last three decades the ideal shape presented to the society through magazines, television, etc has become progressively thinner, while the average person has become larger. Subsequently, the desirability for thinness that is emphasized by the current standards of beauty, has led many women to feel satisfied with their appearance.

In an attempt to resolve these negative feelings women will go to any extent in order to conform to their -unrealistic- ideal body image, a task which is difficult and in many cases impossible to achieve. While various unhealthy behaviours such as alcohol or substance abuse and smoking, have been associated with weight concerns, restrictive eating-or else extreme dieting- is thought to be the most prevalent behaviour in which adults engage, as a means to control their weight. This behaviour is potentially very harmful and constitutes a major health concern since it may lead to chronic eating disorders. Consequently, body image dissatisfaction, as a precursor of problematic eating behaviours, has been associated with clinical eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Therefore, the increased levels of body dissatisfaction observed in recent years, which are largely due to the increased emphasis that society has placed on the value of physical attractiveness, would also account for the rise in the incidence of eating disorders in both teenagers and young adults. It must be noted that eating disorders predominantly affect females, with only 10% of sufferers being males. However, this does not come as a surprise, since as previously mentioned- the ‘thin ideal’ presented to society through the media is much more directed towards girls than boys.

Due to their severity, the wider socio-cultural variables contributing to this ever-increasing health concern have received a high level of research attention. While much of this attention has been focused towards the media which is considered to have a significant impact on impressionable teenage girls and young women who aspire to look like the extreme-
ly thin images with which they are being constantly bombarded, family and especially peers have also been the focus of many studies recently.\textsuperscript{2,4,9,18,22} This can be accounted for, by the fact that as individuals become independent from their parents, they spend more time with their peers from whom they also seek social support. This shift towards friends and away from parents, is largely due to the different nature of these relationships; while the parental relationship is one of ‘unilateral authority’, where the parents try to instil certain behaviours and attitudes upon their children, friendship is a mutually reciprocal relationship, in which the adolescent can more freely express a different opinion and in which new ideas are discussed and debated.\textsuperscript{1} Hence, for most teenage girls and young women, friends seem to be a vital part of their social world. Some of the numerous vital functions fulfilled by peers involve information exchange, enhancement of one another’s self-esteem, emotional support and advice. Furthermore, friendship quality features, such as peer acceptance, trust, and communication are highly associated with the individual’s self-esteem and are consequently related to a Positive body image. Therefore, peer relations seem to be a critical factor associated with young women’s conceptualisation of their appearance and also significant contributors to an evolving sense of identity.\textsuperscript{9,11-13}

According to numerous studies there are several ways in which friendship variables may influence young women’s body-image attitudes and possibly lead to eating disturbances. One form of peer experience which is thought to have such an impact on young girls revolves around appearance conversations, which usually consist of verbalised concern about appearance.\textsuperscript{13,20,22,24} This directs attention to appearance-related issues and reinforces the importance of appearance to close friends. As a result, appearance ideals are constructed within the group and the individuals feel pressured to adhere to them.\textsuperscript{13,20} In support of this, previous research has suggested that those individuals with high levels of body dissatisfaction, eating disturbances and a belief that if they were thinner they would be better liked by their peers, are more likely to engage in such interactions with their group of friends.\textsuperscript{11-13} To sum it up, appearance conversations constitute an indicator of the importance placed by friendship cliques on weight and eating behaviours,\textsuperscript{9,12,26}, which in turn, leads to the development within individuals of an increased drive for thinness in order to be accepted by their peer group and gain popularity. Other predictors of body dissatisfaction less documented in the wider literature surround friendship qualities such as perceived social support and friendship intimacy.\textsuperscript{10,26} According to past studies women with eating problems reported low perceived social support as well as a failure to seek support from their peers. In addition to this, this group of women reported difficulties in intimacy and a lack of confidence in forming close relationships.

Finally, another form of peer experience closely associated with body image dissatisfaction is peer criticism,\textsuperscript{13,20,25} which highlights the absence of specific desirable appearance attributes. This direct negative evaluation of one’s body by a significant other reinforces body image concerns and potentially leads to the internalization of the thin-ideal by the recipient of the criticism.

The aim of the present study was to further investigate the relationship between friendship factors and body-image disturbances and eating behaviours, in females of late adolescence and early adulthood, which are two life-stages marked by the importance of one’s peer group.\textsuperscript{27} Firstly, it was hypothesized that lower perceived social support and friendship intimacy would predict an increased level of body image concern, body dissatisfaction, and restrained eating. Secondly, the relationship between Body Mass Index (BMI) and friendship factors was tested in order to examine whether heavier girls were more likely to experience poorer friendship relations. A third aim of this study was to compare the two age-groups in order to determine whether friendship factors influence young women’s body image attitudes and eating behaviours to the same extent during adolescence and young adulthood.

Finally, according to a recent survey by the European Women’s Lobby, women in Greece reported the highest level of body dissatisfaction - 42% - compared to all other European countries.\textsuperscript{28} Therefore, it was decided that the research would be conducted on a Greek population, using a sample of female adolescents attending high-school and a sample of young female adults at university.
METHOD

Participants

Participants were recruited from a private high-school and the technological institute of education (university level) - department of mid-wifery, in a large town in Northern Greece, so that two samples of different age-groups could be studied. All participants were females. The one sample consisted of adolescents aged 15-18 years old, for which informed consent was obtained from parents before data collection. The second sample consisted of young adults aged 18-23 years old. The final sample \((N = 131)\), comprised 67 high-school students (mean age = 16.34, SD = .913) and 64 university students (mean age = 20.38, SD = 1.363).

Special permission from the Greek Ministry of Education was required.

Measures

Participants completed a self-report paper-and-pencil questionnaire, which consisted of four standard measuring scales assessing friendship quality (perceived social support and friendship intimacy) and body image related issues (body image concern, body dissatisfaction, and restrained eating). A translated version in the Greek language was used for all questionnaires.

Demographic Data. The first part of the questionnaire provided demographic information, such as age, weight, and height. Participants’ body mass index (BMI) was calculated as weight in kilograms divided by the squared height in metres\(^2\). In the present study, self-report data were used to calculate each participant’s BMI. The validity of adolescents’ self-reported weight and height has been well-established by previous studies\(^1\). Additional questions were included in this section, regarding issues such as weight fluctuations in the past and ideal weight.

Social Support. The Perceived Social Support from Friends scale (PSS-F)\(^2\) which consists of 20 items, was used to measure perceived social support. An illustrative item is ‘My friends give me the moral support I need’. The response format for each statement is a ‘yes, no, or I don’t know’ answer, and scores can range from 0 to 20, with higher scores reflecting greater social support. Previous studies have established the reliability and validity of this scale, with internal consistencies as assessed by Cronbach’s \(\alpha\), ranging from .76 to .92\(^2\).

Friendship Intimacy. The Intimate Friendship scale\(^3\), was used to measure level of intimacy. The IFS is a 32-item scale, comprised of 8 subscales (4 items each). The dimensions measured by the eight subscales are as follows: a) frankness and spontaneity (e.g. I feel free to talk to her about everything); b) sensitivity and knowing (e.g. I know how she feels without her telling me); c) attachment to the friend (e.g. I feel close to her); d) exclusiveness in the relationship (e.g. I do things with her that are quite different from what others do); e) giving and sharing (e.g. If she wants something I let her have it even if I want it too); f) imposition (e.g. I can count on her help whenever I ask for it); g) common activities and time spent together (e.g. whenever you see me you can be sure that she is also around); h) trust and loyalty (e.g. I speak up to defend her when others say bad things about her).

Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which the items correctly described their relationship with their best friend. The response format was a 7-point Likert scale, which comprised of three points of agreement (5-7), three points of disagreement (1-3), and a middle point for lack of decision (4). For each subscale, a mean score of the four items was calculated, providing an intimacy score ranging from 1 (low intimacy) to 7 (high intimacy). These eight mean scores were then averaged yielding a total intimacy score per participant.

The reliability of this scale has been established across many studies and across cultures with internal consistency as assessed by cronbach’s \(\alpha\) ranging from .67 to 98\(^31\-36\).

Body image concern. Body image concern was measured using the sum of four subscales from the Body Attitudes Questionnaire\(^37\). These subscales measure: a) feelings of fatness, b) lower body fatness, c) body disparagement, and d) salience of weight and shape. The 33 items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), to strongly agree (5), with higher scores indicating less body image concern. Previous studies have established the reliability of the sum of these subscales, with internal consistency as assessed by Cronbach’s \(\alpha\) ranging from .92 to .94\(^26\,37\).

Restrained Eating. The Restrained Eating subscale from the Dutch Eating Behaviour Questionnaire\(^38\) was

---

\(^1\) Aristotle University Medical Journal, Vol. 36, Issue 2, June 2009
used to assess participants’ dieting behaviour. The DEBQ-R is a 10-item subscale that assesses frequency of deliberate, planned weight control behaviours. An indicative question is ‘Do you try to eat less at meal-times than you would like to eat?’. The items were rated from never (1), to very often (5), with higher scores indicating that a behaviour or attitude is more frequent. The DEBQ-R has been shown to have high internal consistency\textsuperscript{10,12,16,26}.

*Body-Dissatisfaction.* The ‘feeling fat’ subscale of the Body Attitudes Questionnaire\textsuperscript{37}, was used to assess body dissatisfaction. This is a 13-item scale containing statements which reflect feelings of overall fatness such as ‘I get so worried about my shape that I feel I ought to diet’. These are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), to strongly agree (5), with higher scores indicating greater body dissatisfaction. This instrument was selected as it has been shown to be a valid measure of body dissatisfaction\textsuperscript{12,37}.

**Procedure**

For the adolescents’ sample, all questionnaires and ethical considerations had to be assessed by the research committee of the Greek Ministry of Education, which then allowed for the specific private school to be included in the research. Then, the students were informed during assembly about the study and those who volunteered to take part were handed out information sheets, which they had to pass on to their parents notifying them about the study. At the last page, consent forms were attached, which the parents had to sign, allowing for their child to take part. Once these were collected, students were allocated to specific classrooms where they were asked to sign consent forms agreeing to take part, and were handed out the questionnaires to complete.

The young adults on the other hand, were briefly informed about the study at the end of a lecture and were handed out information sheets (with attached consent forms) to read in their own time. Those who were willing to participate in the study had to bring back the consent forms signed the next day, and were then handed out the questionnaires to complete.

**Design and statistical analysis**

To explore the relationship between body image concern, body dissatisfaction, restrained eating, BMI, and friendship factors within the two age-groups separately, correlations between these variables were examined, using the Pearson r correlation coefficient.

**RESULTS**

**Descriptive Information**

Descriptive information is shown in Table 2. Overall, mean BMI was 21.17 (SD = 2.514) for the high-school students (15-18 years old), and 22.24 (SD = 3.412) for the university students, which places both age groups within the normal range according to the Standards from the National Health and Nutritional Examination Survey\textsuperscript{15,39}. More detailed classification of the participants of each age-group separately—in the categories: underweight, normal, overweight, and obese—is illustrated in Table 1.

With regards to the friendship variables, both age groups reported almost identical levels of friendship intimacy, with the university students however scoring relatively higher on perceived social support from friends, compared to high-school students.

Body image concern, body dissatisfaction, and restrained eating were all higher for high-school students than university students.

---

**Table 1. Body Mass Index classification (in percentages) of participants, based on the Standards from the National Health and Nutritional Examination Survey\textsuperscript{39}**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>High-school students (N = 67)</th>
<th>University students (N = 64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underweight (&lt; 18.5)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal (18.5-24.9)</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>65.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overweight (25.0-29.9)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obese (&gt; 30.0)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As illustrated in Tables 3a (for high-school students) and 3b (for university students), contrary to our hypotheses, no significant correlation was found between friendship factors (namely perceived social support and friendship intimacy) and body-image related issues (namely body image concern, body dissatisfaction, and restrained eating) within either of the two age groups. In addition to that, no significant correlation was found between friendship factors and BMI, for either of the two groups.

Post-hoc tests

Even though no correlations were found within either of the two age groups, a closer look at the mean scores (presented in Table 1), suggested that there might be some differences between the groups. More specifically, both high-school and university students reported almost identical levels of friendship intimacy, with the mean scores being 5.52 and 5.53 respectively. However, high-school students reported a) higher levels of body image concerns than university students, with mean scores of 88.57 and 77.55, and b) greater body dissatisfaction than university students, with mean scores of 38.43 and 33.63 respectively.

Based on this observation it was considered plausible to run additional between independent samples t-tests in order to examine whether the differences suggested by the mean scores of high-school and university students in body image concerns and body dissatisfaction were significant, despite the almost identical levels of friendship intimacy.

As expected, the results of the t-tests—presented in Table 4—indicated that: a) there was no significant difference in levels of friendship intimacy between...
the two groups $t(129) = .070$, $p > .05$ (two-tailed); b) there was a significant difference in levels of body image concerns between groups $t(129) = 2.902$, $p < .05$ (two-tailed); and c) there was a significant difference in levels of body dissatisfaction between groups $t(129) = 2.369$, $p < .05$ (two-tailed). Adolescents had more body image concerns and were more dissatisfied with their bodies than young adults.

**DISCUSSION**

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the associations between Greek female adolescents’ and young adults’ perceptions regarding their friendships, and their weight concerns and dietary restraint. Even though each of these issues has received a considerable amount of research interest in the past, as observed in the wider literature, very few studies have actually studied how friendship qualities, such as intimacy and perceived social support, might be associated with body image concern, body dissatisfaction, and restrained eating. Contrary to the first hypothesis, lower perceived social support and friendship intimacy were not associated with higher levels of body image concern, body dissatisfaction, and restrained eating in either of the two age-groups studied. Only one previously published study has also produced null results\(^4\), whereas Gerner and Wilson\(^2\) found that lower perceived social support and friendship intimacy predicted body image concern but not body dissatisfaction or restrained eating. However, the non-significant results of the current study contradict the findings of the majority of previous relevant studies, which found that deficits in social support from friends as well as a lack of friendship intimacy may promote body image disturbances, and affect eating behaviours\(^4\). Based on those studies, the widely held view within the literature is that feeling supported by one’s immediate social environment might serve as a protective factor from social pressures that are linked to the development of body dissatisfaction and disturbed eating patterns; consequently, adolescents and young adults lacking such a supportive network are more likely to pursue the ideal body type in an attempt to gain social acceptance—a rationale however, that is not supported by the current study.

One possible explanation for the conflicting results between the current and previous studies involves cultural factors and stems from the fact that all past research was carried out in Australia and the USA.

Table 3b. Correlations between friendship factors and body-image related issues and BMI, for university students ($N = 64$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PSS-F</th>
<th>FI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body Image Concern</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Dissatisfaction</td>
<td>-.051</td>
<td>.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrained Eating</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>-.050</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. PSS-F = Perceived Social Support from Friends; FI = Friendship Intimacy; BMI = Body Mass Index.*

Table 4. Differences between high-school and university students in friendship intimacy, body-image concerns, and body dissatisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$T$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendship Intimacy</td>
<td>.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body-image concerns</td>
<td>2.902*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body dissatisfaction</td>
<td>2.369*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *difference is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed).*
whereas the current study was conducted on a Greek population. For example, friendships might be more valued in some cultures than in others and thus have a greater impact on the individual. Even though all three, Australia, USA, and Europe, adopt a Western type of lifestyle, they do not necessarily share the same values; therefore, further research in other European countries is required in order to determine whether culture may influence the relationship between friendship factors and body image disturbances. However, the one study of which the results were consistent with this one, was conducted in China - an Eastern culture, possibly with even more distinct values than European - indicating that culture alone cannot be held responsible for the conflicting results between the different studies. Nevertheless, without further evidence, it is not possible to either accept or reject this explanation of cultural effect.

Another possible interpretation of these non-significant results - which might indirectly be linked to cultural factors - is that young women in adolescence and young adulthood might in fact be more influenced by their family than their friends on issues related to their appearance. This might be especially the case in countries such as Greece where family bonds are very strong. Therefore, even though during both these developmental stages, on the whole peers are considered to have a greater influence on the individual than his or her family, it would be interesting for future research to examine this possibility by investigating whether perceived social support from family is associated with body image concern, body dissatisfaction, and restrained eating.

A second aim of this study - which was of a more exploratory nature - was to examine whether increased levels of BMI were associated with decreased levels in friendship intimacy and perceived social support. The results of this analysis were in line with a previous study and revealed that heavier girls did not experience poorer levels of friendship qualities. This is an encouraging finding, since it suggests that despite the existence of stereotypes that equate thinness with social appeal and popularity, it is not a prerequisite for the formation of intimate, supportive friendships.

Finally, although not included in the initial aims of this study, an additional interesting finding came up during the analysis, distinguishing the two age-groups from one another. It was observed that even though both adolescents and young adults, reported almost identical levels of friendship intimacy, the younger group scored higher than the older one in body image concern, body dissatisfaction, and restrained eating. This reinforces the main finding of this study - that friendship factors are not associated with body image disturbances and disordered eating behaviours. If that were the case, since adolescents and young adults had similar scores in friendship intimacy we would expect them to also score similarly in body image concern, body dissatisfaction, and restrained eating.

The differences noted between the two groups in the latter three issues imply that other age-related factors rather than friendship are more likely to be associated with body image and weight concerns. For example, even though the human body continues to develop during the first years of early adulthood, the major developmental changes take place during adolescence. This, in association with the development of cognitive abilities which allow for greater self-awareness might cause teenage girls to become highly self-conscious of their bodies, thereon, combined with the “thin-ideal” projected to them by the society, and their own willingness to ‘fit in’ with their peers and gain popularity, might lead to the development of increased body dissatisfaction and consequently restrained eating as a means of achieving an image closer to the ‘ideal’. On the other hand, young adults will have had enough time to adapt to and accept the major changes in their bodies; as a result of this acceptance, they are less dissatisfied with their body image and are therefore more relaxed in their eating behaviours. Moreover, another possible contributor to the reduced levels of body dissatisfaction and weight concerns in young adults compared to adolescents might be associated with self-esteem. Being a university student provides individuals with a sense of self-accomplishment and as a result, they are more likely to measure their self-worth in terms of their academic achievements rather than their figure alone.

It is important to consider the limitations of this study when interpreting the findings. First of all, the questionnaires used in order to collect data are all standard measuring scales that have been previously
used in relevant studies and have been proven to have high internal consistency which establishes their reliability. However, in order to distribute them to the sample of the present study, they were translated into Greek without adjusting them to the local population, and therefore their reliability might have been affected. Ideally, after translating the original questionnaires, a pilot study should have been carried out in order to evaluate their reliability, thus allowing for appropriate adjustments to be made if there was a need to do so. However, due to time restraint, this step was overridden.

Second, null results can be due to a lack of statistical power. However, with data from 131 participants we consider this not to be an issue for the current study, since at least one other previous study that used the same questionnaires and came up with significant results26, was also conducted on a sample of 131 participants. Nevertheless, taking into account that the internal consistency of the translated questionnaires was not established before commencement, a larger sample would have ensured a more reliable outcome for the present study.

A third limitation of this study is its reliance on self-report measures of body-image, eating and friend environment, as well as participants’ weight and height for which no objective measures were taken. Even though, self-report studies are the most common method of examining sensitive topics such as body image and disturbed eating behaviours, and adolescents’ accuracy in reporting their own weight and height has been established in previous studies8,19, they have none-the-less been criticized on several levels, such as the influence of extraneous factors15. For example, in the present study the participants were seated near their peers while completing the questionnaires, which might have affected their answers. Therefore, it might be beneficial for future research to aim to gather information from a range of sources, such as the participants’ peers, parents and teachers, using a range of different methods, such as observations and interviews. This would not only provide more realistic data, but would also potentially broaden our understanding of the interaction between social environment and body image.

Finally, another limitation is the homogeneity of the sample - consisting of adolescents from one private high-school, and young adults from one university, in Greece - which limits the generalizability of the results. Future studies could contribute to expanding our knowledge base to a broader range of the population, by including a wider variety of socioeconomic and ethnic groups.

Conclusion. Contrary to past research, the current study found no association between friendship factors and young females’ body image concern, body dissatisfaction, and restrained eating. However, despite both adolescents and young adults reporting almost identical levels of friendship intimacy, the younger girls were clearly more dissatisfied with their bodies, had greater body-image concerns, and engaged in more frequent restrained eating behaviours. Finally, a positive outcome of the present study was that BMI does not seem to influence the quality of girls’ friendships.

Undoubtedly, body dissatisfaction and related eating disturbances are a cause for worry, especially in young women, therefore it is important to identify the possible sources that contribute to their development, exacerbation, or maintenance. This will enable the development of more targeted and thus more effective methods of intervention as well as prevention. The conflicting results between the current and previous studies highlight the necessity for further research in this area before assumptions are made about the effect of friendships on individuals.
Αλληλεπίδραση σχέσεων φιλίας και προβληματισμού μεταξύ νεαρών Ελληνίδων αναφορικά με διαιτητικές διαταραχές και τις επιπτώσεις του στη φυσική τους εμφάνιση.

Μαριλένα Τζαφέτα
Μητροπολιτικό Πανεπιστήμιο Λονδίνου

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ: Η παρούσα έρευνα σχεδιάστηκε προκειμένου να μελετηθεί η σχέση αλληλεπίδρασης ανάμεσα σε διάφορους παράγοντες παράγοντες φιλίας και τις ανησυχίες που έχουν Ελληνίδες κοπέλες εφήβικής ηλικίας και νεαρής ενηλικίωσης, σχετικά με τη σωματική τους εμφάνιση, τη σω-ματική δυσαρέσκεια, και τον περιορισμό της τροφής που καταναλώνουν. Παράλληλα, κάθε ένα από αυτά τα θέματα χωρίστα έχει αποτελέσει επανειλημμένα αντικείμενο μελέτης στο παρελθόν, ελάχιστες είναι οι μελέτες εκείνες οι οποίες εξέτασαν εάν η εκλαμβάνουσα κοινωνική υποστήριξη από τους φίλους, ή το επίπεδο της οικιστικής μεταξύ φιλίων επηρεάζει τη στάση νεαρών κοριτσιών απέναντι στη σωματική τους εμφάνιση και τις διαιτητικές τους συμπεριφορές, καθώς επίσης και αν οι φιλίες κοριτσιών που ζυγίζουν περισσότερο υποστηρίζουν ποιοτικά. Η έρευνα διεξήχθη στην Ελλάδα και το συνολικό δείγμα (N = 131) απαρτίζεται από 67 μαθήτριες λυκείου και 64 φοιτήτριες. Η συλλογή των δεδομένων βασίστηκε αποκλειστικά σε καταθέσεις των ίδιων των κοριτσιών που συμμετείχαν στην έρευνα. Σε αντίθεση με τις αρχικές υποθέσεις, χαμηλότερα επίπεδα κοινωνικής υποστήριξης και χαμηλότερη υποστήριξη-ξής από φίλους καθώς και χαμηλότερο επίπεδο σωματικής εμφάνισης, μεγαλύτερη σωματική δυσαρέσκεια, ή πιο περιορισμένη κατανάλωση φαγητού, για καμία από τις δύο ηλικιακές ομάδες. Ακόμη, υψηλότεροι δείκτες σωματικής μάζας δεν σχετίζονταν με χαμηλότερα επίπεδα κοινωνικής υποστήριξης ή φιλικής οικιστικής. Τέλος, ως ένα σημαντικό αποτέλεσμα η συντελεστής φιλίας καθώς και το περιορισμένο επίπεδο κοινωνικής υποστήριξης, ή χαμηλότερη οικιστικής, ή πιο περιορισμένη κατανάλωση, αναφέρθηκαν σε σύγκριση με τις άλλες διαιτητικές. Λεπτομερείς αναφορές γίνεται στις επιπλοκές αυτών των σχέσεων και στις προοπτικές για μέλλοντες μελέτες.

Λέξεις Κλειδιά: Ανησυχίες σωματικής εμφάνισης, Συντελεστές φιλίας, Νεανίδες.

REFERENCES

8. De La Mater, J. L. A study to determine the effect of the media on the perception of adolescent female body-image and the resultant relationship to academic achievement. A research paper, The Graduate School University of Wisconsin 2002;


