

EDUCATIONAL BEHAVIORS FOR BODY APPRECIATION INCREASE AND POSITIVE EATING ATTITUDES FOR CHILDREN

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Abstract. *Body appreciation and eating behavior among children has to receive a special attention in the psychological and health literature, so that the society together with the family can prevent body image impairment for children and obtain their positive body appreciation and to decrease their negative eating attitudes. . The purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between child's body appreciation, their eating attitude and the importance of their parents' educational behaviors in the context of parental marital status. In this respect, 265 children from different schools have completed psychological instruments that measure the level of body appreciation, children's eating attitudes and they give demographic data which contain their parent's marital status. For statistical purposes, r Pearson correlation and t Test were run. The results showed that a lower level of body appreciation correlates with a higher level of negative eating attitudes of Romanian children and no significant differences were found between children who have divorced parents and children who are in a united family in terms of attitude towards food and body appreciation.*

Keywords: body image; eating attitude; body appreciation; body appearance; marital status;

1.Introduction

The favorable family environment for each child is the key of developing a viable society. The family is the environment in which a child benefits from those sources to form and consolidate as an integral and complex personality. Children love predictability and stability. For them it is very important to know what is going to happen. When they live in an environment where things change from one day to another or parents have different reactions to the same behavior, the children's stress response system is constantly activated (they are guarded up, prepared to deal with unforeseen situations). This permanent state of alertness sensitizes certain areas of the brain that are responsible for preparing the body to

face the threat. This explains why living in environments where things change frequently, children get to experience intense emotional reactions, starting from small things as experiencing negative eating attitudes which can lead to a body modification and in this context to a decrease of body appreciation.

The evolution of Maslow's pyramid, however, does not attract relaxation, in our days other needs are amplified. In this context, we are talking about aesthetic needs or self-realization - needs that, once reached, are expanding and are increasingly present. These aesthetic needs can be manifested through different behaviors, for example, the desire to have a weak, thin body which is the result of the pressure of our society and refers to the ideas of opinion makers (Garner, Qlmsted, Poiivy & Garfinkel, 1984; Mazur, 1986). For many people weight loss cures or refraining from eating has become the normal eating pattern.

Frequent exposure to attractiveness standards based on different environments, often thin (female) or muscular (for men), leads to a more negative perception of one's body (Aglia and Tantleff-Dunn 2004).

Also, studies show that, from preschool, children begin to express their preference for thin, weak, filiform body types, and a girl as young as 5 years old, which makes some researchers worry about voicing their fears regarding the fact that these children face problems related to the physical stimulation of the body, a self-assessment of the body and physical appearance (Tremblay, Lovsin, Zecevic and Lariviere, 2011).

Although preschoolers still do not understand the sexual implications but many are aware that body fat is not beneficial and unwanted by women (Tremblay et al., 2011) and of course it is important for women to be beautiful (Smolak & Murnen, 2011).

Being skinny is highly appreciated in our society, especially among women, because a thin, thin, filiform body is often equated with being attractive. These social messages have become so universal that these values and views are already supported even by children under the age of 7.

There is evidence through various specialized studies that suggest that children actually learn from their families, teachers, friends and the media, society in general, that fat is "something bad" and thin is good "and learns these theories before to enter the vulnerable period of adolescence (Flannery-Schroeder & Chrisler, 1996).

Some studies show that girls and boys between the ages of 7 and 11 find that overweight young people have fewer friends, are less liked by parents, have poorer school results, are lazy, are less attentive to school and are less attractive than normal or weak-looking children (Hill & Silver, 1995; Tiggemann & Wilson-Barrett, 1998).

Improving body image among children, has received special attention in the literature, in the field of health, given the problematic behavior of nutrition during this period (Crow, Eisenberg, Story, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2006; Johnson & Wardle, Presnell, & Spangler, 2002), therefore, in recent decades, many researchers have emphasized through many articles, the importance of a positive perception of

body image as Smolak & Cash (2011) and Tylka (2012), concentrated on a complete description of the concept of body image. Trying to review the ways in which the body image is defined, we find that the following definition is unanimously accepted: "mental representation of information related to the physical aspect, information resulting from the perception of one's body" (Schilder, 1950 beside Grogan, 2008). One of its facets that has benefited from this attention is body appreciation, defined as "accepting, maintaining favorable opinions about the body and respecting the body, also rejecting the ideals promoted by the media as the only form of human beauty" (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

In a longitudinal study conducted with the help of mostly Caucasian American girls during adolescence, it was found that intense pressure to be thin from family members predicted the girls' body dissatisfaction a year later. More specific information on the content of comments related to physical appearance is needed to understand how family communication and educational behaviors shapes the body image of adolescent girls (Stice and Whitenton, 2002).

Mothers are key socio-cultural agents who can influence their daughters to accept or reject body forms and dimensions. Studies in recent years, which reveal how negative feedback is related to poor body image of girls, are a major contribution to the literature. However, the benefits of positive family communication on body image are far less understood. (Romo, Mireles-Rios, 2016). Also, families and parents should be a resource to prevent obesity, as counseling by parents is an intervention method that should be more intensely used (Goian, 2019).

Although it is well known that the pressure of the family and of the modern media on the body aspect can have negative consequences for both adults and children, in Romania the articles that study this aspect are very few. Recently, two instruments have been translated and validated that measure body appreciation and adult muscularity preferences (Swami, Tudorel, Goian, Barron and Vintila, 2017; Swami, Vintila, Tudorel, Goian and Barron, 2018).

However, more studies are needed to investigate the risk factors that lead to negative consequences on body image for adults, children and adolescents. Children should be educated to be aware that they have the right to live a healthy life, from both mental and physical aspects, to help manage their problems to create and develop a healthy environment, becoming responsible for their well-being. (Vintilă, Marklinder, Nydahl, Istrat and Kuglis, 2009).

During adolescence there seems to be a time when dissatisfaction and maladaptive eating patterns are common (Cooke, 2004), and many specialists have argued that concerns about body image and disordered eating patterns develop much earlier than adolescence.

Supporting this assertion, there is evidence that even young children may show signs of body dissatisfaction and exhibit a certain attitude toward unhealthy eating (Robinson, 2001). Researchers have identified a number of factors related to improper food consumption. These include a thin body shape as a preferred type in our society (Garner, et al. , 1984).

Girls and boys between the ages of 7 and 11 consider overweight young people as having fewer friends, being less liked by parents, having poorer school results, being lazy, less attentive to school and less attractive than normal or skinny-looking children (Hill & Silver, 1995).

In a similar study conducted with children between the ages of 7 and 10, Shapiro, Newcomb, and Leob (1997) found that 45% of girls and 38% of boys in their study considered it important for women to be thin, and 35% of girls and 33% of boys felt that it was also important for men to be thin.

Since it is so important to be thin, there should be many children who report dissatisfaction with body size and appearance, worry about being overweight and engaging in weight loss behaviors. Such concern with the size and shape of the body among children is reflected in the large number of studies that in recent years have examined concerns about body image and eating attitudes and behaviors among children.

Due to the fact that families are an integral part of eating behavior, childhood obesity refers in particular to children who are experiencing changes that occur in the family especially as they navigate puberty (Rhee, 2008).

Unfortunately, at present almost one in two marriages ends with a divorce, with approximately one million children being involved in these separations (Amoto, 2000). There are a number of known risk factors for children who have experienced obesity. Currently, there is an abundance of data on children's anthropometric characteristics (physical measurements of body weight and height) and physical activity. However, previous research has found that even after controlling for physical activity for children, divorce remains a significant predictor of BMI in older children (Yannakoulia, 2007).

Parental divorce is a period of "family revolution", but it is known for a number of processes that link the family structure to obesity.

The results of the studies showed that pre-adolescents from divorced families consumed more sweetened carbonated drinks than pre-adolescents from married families and there was a reduced tendency of breakfast among pre-adolescents in divorced families (Yannakoulia, 2007).

Parental influence and family functioning play an essential role in the development of children in healthy eating behaviors specifically, the pattern of healthy eating behaviors and control of children's food intake, diet quality, portion size and exposure of children to different foods existing in the home (Rhee, 2008).

2. Methods

Therefore, the purpose of our study is to analyze the relationship between body appreciation, and eating attitudes of children. We would also like to find out if there are differences in eating attitudes and body appreciation for children who have different parental education in terms of mono-parental context. Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1. A low level of body appreciation correlates with a high level of negative attitude towards eating in children

H2. There are differences between children with divorced parents (separated, remarried, deceased) and those with married parents regarding the eating attitudes

H3. There are differences between children with divorced parents (separated, remarried, deceased) and those with married parents regarding the level of body appreciation

2.1 Participants

In this study 265 students ($n = 265$) were involved, of which 57% were boys and came from 3 different schools in Timisoara and its peripheral area. The students ranged in age from 9 to 13 years ($M = 10.25$; $SD = 1.08$) and attended different classes, from the third to the sixth grade. All students were Romanian citizens and came from different socio-economic backgrounds.

2.2. Instruments

In order to highlight the results, we used two instruments that were given to the children to fill to measure the level of body appreciation among children, as well as to measure their eating attitudes. Also demographic data's were provided containing the children's parental status.

Body Appreciation Scale-2 for Children (BAS-2C; Halliwella, Jarmana, Tylka, Slater, 2017). This instrument is an Adult Body Appreciation Scale that was adapted in the form of BAS-2C by Tylka and Wood-Barcalow in 2015, which has been translated and validated on the Romanian population by Swami, Tudorel, Goian, Barron and Vintilă in 2017. This scale at its turn was adapted for its use in children, BAS-2C having a one-dimensional factor structure and evidence of good internal consistency, test-retest fidelity and construct validity, related to criteria and incremental validity. In addition, the results suggest adaptive properties of body appreciation for emotional and body well-being among children. The tool contains 10 items with responses on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = never; 5 = always.

This instrument has a good internal consistency and in the case of the present study Alfa Cronbach was .87.

Children Eating Attitude Test (Linda Smolak and Michael P. Levine in 1993 developed an Eating Attitude Test which has a child friendly form developed by Maloney, McCuire and Daniels in 1988)

This test was proposed because it has been found that as the interest in eating disorders is increasing, there is also an increased need for psychometric measurements regarding attitudes and behaviors towards eating in children. The answers were given using the Likert scale, where 1 = never, and 6 = very often. ChEAT has a questionable internal consistency; Cronbach's Alpha was .69 for our study.

Demographic data. All the participants provided demographic data with reference to the age, environment of origin and family status of the parents.

2.3 Procedure

The aforementioned tools were given to the children to be filled out by the pencil-paper method. At the beginning of the completion, all the children were informed about the process and specific words found in these tools that they didn't understand it was explained and received information about the time required to complete the questionnaires. While completing these scales, they were monitored if they needed for help and explanations. The effective completion of the instruments took place in their own classrooms to make them comfortable and to be familiar with the place.

3. Results

The datas were collected and subsequently analyzed and interpreted using SPSS for Windows, v. 20.0. This study is a correlational and comparative non-experimental one. To investigate the correlations between the variables we used the r Pearson correlation coefficient, and we also used t Tests for independent groups to investigate the differences between children who have divorced parents and children who are in a united family in terms of eating attitudes and body appreciation.

H1. A low level of body appreciation correlates with a high level of negative attitude towards eating in children

The results show that eating attitudes is negatively correlated with body appreciation. Thus, a lower level of body appreciation correlates with a higher level of negative eating attitudes $r = -.207$, $p < .01$; effect size $r^2 = .04$, which represents a medium effect.

(Tabel 1).

Tabel 1. Correlations between the variables included in the study

Variabile	1	2
ChEA	-.207**	-
BA	-	-.207**

$p < .01$; ChEAT = eating attitudes; BA –body appreciation

H2. There are differences between children with divorced parents (separated, remarried, deceased) and those with married parents regarding the eating attitudes

In order to highlight the differences that exist regarding the children's eating attitudes with divorced parents and those with married parents, we used t tests for independent groups. The results in our study did not support the hypothesis, there are no statistically significant differences between the children's eating attitudes with divorced parents and those with married parents ($t = .114$, $p = .910$, $p > .05$).

Tabel 2. Differences between the parents marital status and children's eating attitudes

Variabile	1	2
ChEA	-.207**	-
BA	-	-.207**

ChEAT = eating attitudes

H3. There are differences between children with divorced parents (separated, remarried, deceased) and those with married parents regarding the level of body appreciation

To highlight the differences that exist in terms of body appreciation in children with divorced parents and those with married parents, we used t-tests for independent groups. Nor did these results support the hypothesis, there are no statistically significant differences between the body appreciation in children with divorced parents and those with married parents ($t = -.959$, $p = .342$, $p > .05$).

Tabel 3. Differences between the parents marital status and children's body appreciation

Variable	t	p
BAS	-.959	.342

BAS = body appreciation

4. Discussion

The present study was conducted to emphasize that thru a good, healthy parental educational behavior can obtain the satisfaction and appreciation of an increased body image and a decrease of negative eating attitudes for children It is also emphasized in other researches that during this period of childhood (9-12 years

- the beginning of puberty) a child can gain about 10 kg and 20 cm in height. (Munteanu, 2007). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable, because body image is particularly important while they undergo significant physical and psychological changes in puberty (Ricciardelli and Yager, 2015). These changes can be difficult to manage in terms of body appreciation. A person may be dissatisfied with a particular part of the body or its general form, or may be dissatisfied with his body as a whole.

In order for these children to understand, it is recommended that a parent inoculate a correct scale of values, especially nowadays, when physical appearance can cause an anxiety crisis (Munteanu, 2007). The dissatisfaction of the body image can be defined as the inconsistency between how a person perceives the body and how they would like to be from the ideal point of view of their body (Maxwell & Cole, 2012). It is very important to pay special attention to sports and healthy eating for all family members and to avoid family members' comments about body weight or body shape during this vulnerable period (Gavrila-Ardelean, Gavrila-Ardelean, 2016).

Inheriting the idea of dissatisfaction with the body aspect can be a maladaptive, transgenerational thought because research shows that mothers especially seem to have an effect on how their daughters perceived their body appearance. Their mother's comments, which sent negative comments about their body, caused them to reflect on their body appearance (Curtis & Loomans, 2014).

Adolescents whose colleagues or family members have negative attitudes about overweight have been found to be more dissatisfied with their bodies than girls whose family members have no negative attitudes about weight (Paxton et al., 1999) and girls who - they felt more accepted by their parents, especially the father, were less dissatisfied with their body appearance (Barker & Galambos, 2003).

It was included in the present study the interest regarding the attitude towards eating of the children because I considered that there is a predisposition of the children to have maladaptive eating tendencies during this period. As Schultz showed in a study conducted in 2016, dietary behaviors are associated with food consumption and are often identified as one of the many factors contributing to the development of childhood obesity. Behavior, to some extent, is supported and motivated by what an individual tacitly believes and knows to be true. What children and adolescents know about food consumption is critical, as eating behaviors are set at the age of 4-6, being obese at this age is predictive of being obese as an adult (Brisbois, Farmer & McCargar, 2012). What children and adolescents know about food consumption may explain why nearly 17% of children between the ages of 2 and 19 are obese (Ogden, Carroll, Kit & Flegal, 2014). In the case of our study it was shown that a low level of body appreciation correlates with a high level of negative children eating attitudes, which indicates that in the case of children dissatisfaction with their body aspects are correlated with a maladaptive attitude in those who looks at nutrition and eating behaviors.

Through this study we expect to obtain differences regarding the attitude towards food and body appreciation in children with divorced parents and those

who have married parents because the review of the specialized literature has shown that the preadolescents from divorced families consumed more sweetened carbon dioxide drinks than pre-adolescents from families with married parents and there was a tendency for reduced consumption of breakfast among pre-adolescents in divorced families (Yannakoulia, 2007). It was also found that, in fact, even after controlling for physical activity for children, divorce remained a significant predictor of adolescent body mass index level. (Yannakoulia, 2007).

Body image research has been largely biased towards focusing on negative body image, but over the past decade there has been an increased interest in understanding a range of positive body image constructs, including body appreciation, body acceptance, and broad conceptualization of beauty (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

These new developments have allowed a more complete and comprehensive understanding of body image, including the development of additional scales to measure the positive aspects of body image.

Advocates of positive body image tend to consider that positive body image is not just the reverse of negative body image, but has unique elements that require understanding (Tylka, 2011). These elements are: the favorable opinion of the body aspect, regardless of its real appearance; acceptance of the body despite the weight, imperfections and body shape; respect for the body by engaging in healthy behaviors and responding to its needs and rejecting media images that help protect the body. These items were incorporated into a Body Appreciation Scale, which was found to be valid (Avalos, Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2005) and used for our study.

A process of counseling by professionals like psychologists, social workers could also help improve this situation (Gavrila-Ardelean, Gavrila-Ardelean, 2017). Social support can be view as a protective factor that could reduce the effect of stressful, overwhelming life events (Tudorel & Vintilă, 2018). In order for this to happen professionals should be equipped with adequate skills and communication abilities (Goian, 2004, Goian, 2010). Future studies could investigate the effect of exposure to the natural environment on improving children's body image, as studies already provide evidence of the beneficial effect of nature on body appreciation (Swami et al., 2019).

In the case of our study, the differences regarding the children whose parents have different marital status were not highlighted. There were no differences regarding the corporal appreciation and the attitude towards food of the children who had divorced parents and those who had a united family.

5. Limitation

Like other studies also the current study contains limitation that must be recognized. First, although the participating schools, from which the participants were chosen, belong as classified in different socio-economic environments, the sample mainly comprised individuals from the surrounding areas of the city. Also the age range was 9-13 years and this limits our ability to generalize the findings

for older children and adolescents, as well as for children who come and attend well-rated schools in Timisoara. The recommendation for future research is to include in studies a more diverse range of age, ethnicity and geographical location.

6. Conclusion

In our study we tried to highlight the fact that a low level of body appreciation correlates with a high level of negative attitude towards eating in children, as shown by the results of this study. Following the review of the literature, it was pointed out that pre-adolescents from families with divorced parents have a more disorganized eating behavior than pre-adolescents from families whose parents are still married. These differences we tried to highlight also through the present work, but our results in this respect did not support the hypotheses. We did not obtain results showing differences between children with divorced parents (separated, remarried, deceased) and those with married parents regarding eating attitudes and body appreciation.

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