



2015-04-09

# Adolescent Body Dissatisfaction and Emotional Distress

Marina Potter

Brigham Young University - Provo, [marina@haddockfamily.org](mailto:marina@haddockfamily.org)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference\\_studentpub](https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub)



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

The Annual Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference showcases some of the best student research from the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences. The mentored learning program encourages undergraduate students to participate in hands-on and practical research under the direction of a faculty member. Students create these posters as an aide in presenting the results of their research to the public, faculty, and their peers.

## BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Potter, Marina, "Adolescent Body Dissatisfaction and Emotional Distress" (2015). *FHSS Mentored Research Conference*. 274.  
[https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference\\_studentpub/274](https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub/274)

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Family, Home, and Social Sciences at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in FHSS Mentored Research Conference by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu).



# Adolescent Body Dissatisfaction and Emotional Distress

Marina Haddock Potter

Faculty Advisor: Renata Forste

Department of Sociology

## ABSTRACT

Based on data from a nationally representative survey of adolescents in the U.S., this study examines the association between body dissatisfaction and emotional distress, mediated by family, peer, and school relationships. In a sample of 5,110 adolescent girls, I use least squares regression to estimate the models. I find satisfaction with family relationships, self-esteem, time with friends, peer victimization, and feelings about school to be associated with emotional distress. In addition, body dissatisfaction remains the strongest predictor of emotional distress, even when all other variables are held constant.

## METHODS

### Sample

•Health Behavior in School-Aged Children Survey, 2009-2010; sample of 5,110 girls aged 11 to 16 in the U.S.

### Methods

- Dependent variable- composite index measuring emotional distress
  - Independent variables (see Table 1) –
  - Self-Image Variables: body dissatisfaction, self-esteem
  - Peer and School Variables: close friends, time with friends, relationships with fellow students, peer victimization, school performance, school enjoyment
  - Family Variables: monitoring by father and by mother, satisfaction with family relationships
  - Control Variables: race, age, family structure, socioeconomic status
- Estimation**
- Model estimated using least squares regression



Table 2. Standardized Regression Coefficients of Self-Image, Peer and School Relationships, and Family Relationships on Emotional Distress in Adolescent Girls

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Self-Image</b>				
Body Dissatisfaction	0.382***			0.271***
Self-Esteem	-0.371***			-0.148***
<b>Peer and School Relationships</b>				
Close Friends		-0.053**		-0.046***
Time with Friends		-0.140***		-0.105***
Relationships with Fellow Students		-0.192***		-0.073***
Bullied		0.175***		0.103***
School Performance		-0.184***		-0.074***
School Enjoyment		-0.207***		-0.101***
<b>Family Relationships</b>				
Father's Knowledge			-0.107***	-0.078***
Mother's Knowledge			-0.138***	-0.080***
Satisfaction with Family Relationships			-0.469***	-0.237***
<b>Controls</b>				
Socio-Economic Status	-0.024	-0.059***	-0.042**	0.006
Race:				
White (Reference)	-	-	-	-
Black	0.009	-0.346*	-0.044**	0.001
Hispanic	0.009	0.027	0.004	0.007
Other	0.013	0.025	-0.003	0.001
Age	0.129***	0.153***	0.088***	0.079***
Number of Observations	5110	5110	5110	5110
R <sup>2</sup>	0.439	0.333	0.394	0.575

Source: Health Behavior in School-Aged Children (HBSC), 2009-2010; \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001  
Note: Variables are weighted to represent population parameters.

Table 2

- The self-image variables accounted for the highest percentage of variation in emotional distress, apart from the full model.
- Body dissatisfaction was the strongest predictor of emotional distress across models.
- Satisfaction with family relationships and self-esteem followed, and were negatively associated with emotional distress.
- Time spent with friends and school enjoyment were also negatively related to distress.
- Peer victimization contributed positively to emotional distress.
- All other variables were significant, with the exceptions of socioeconomic status and race.
- The full model predicted 57.5% of the variation in emotional distress.

## INTRODUCTION

Mental health issues in adolescence are an increasingly prevalent problem. Approximately 1.4 million adolescent girls undergo a major depressive episode every year, and these episodes are three times as likely in girls as in boys (samhsa.gov). Research has established a link between body dissatisfaction and emotional distress (Almeida et al., 2012). Overweight and obese youth not only experience greater body stress, they also report more frequent depressive symptoms and more negative self-esteem (Goldfield et al., 2010). While many studies have examined this relationship, few have considered it in the context of peer and family relationships. This study identifies a number of variables contributing to emotional distress, thereby identifying potential interventions.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Self-Image, Peer and School Relationship, and Family Relationship Variables

Variables	Mean/Proportion	Standard Deviation	Range Low	Range High
Emotional Distress	2.29	0.75	1=No Distress	5=Very High Distress
<b>Self-Image</b>				
Body Dissatisfaction	2.33	0.95	1=Very Satisfied	5=Very Dissatisfied
Self-Esteem	7.39	1.96	0=Worst Possible Life	10=Best Possible Life
<b>Peer and School Relationships</b>				
Number of Close Friends	4.99	1.38	0=No Close Friends	6=6 or More Close Friends
Time with Friends	2.26	1.73	0=No Time	6.5=Every Day
Relationships with Fellow Students	3.63	0.84	1=Very Bad Relationships	5=Very Good Relationships
Bullied	1.47	0.95	1=Not in the Past Couple of Months	5=Several Times a Week
School Performance	3.01	0.85	1=Below Average	4=Very Good
School Enjoyment	3.02	0.86	1=Not at All	4=A Lot
<b>Family Relationships</b>				
Father's Monitoring	2.15	0.71	1=He Doesn't Know Anything	3=He Knows a Lot
Mother's Monitoring	2.65	0.46	1=She Doesn't Know Anything	3=She Knows a Lot
Satisfaction with Family Relationships	7.48	2.50	0=Very Bad Relationships	10=Very Good Relationships
<b>Controls</b>				
Socio-Economic Status	6.08	1.96	0=Low Affluence	9=High Affluence
Race:				
White	0.55			
Black	0.15			
Hispanic	0.13			
Other	0.18			
Age	13.37	1.52	11=11 Years Old	16=16 Years Old

Source: Health Behavior in School-Aged Children (HBSC), 2009-2010  
Note: Sample characteristics are weighted to represent population parameters.

### References

- Depression rates triple between the ages of 12 and 15 among adolescent girls. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012, July 24).
- Goldfield, G. S., Moore, C., Henderson, K., Buchholz, A., Obeid, N., & Flament, M. F. (2010). Body Dissatisfaction, Dietary Restraint, Depression, and Weight Status in Adolescents. *Journal Of School Health, 80*(4), 186-192. doi:10.1111/j.1746-1561.2009.00485.x
- Stice and Hayward. (2000). Body-Image and Eating Disturbances Predict Onset of Depression Among Female Adolescents. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 109*(3), 438.

## RESULTS

Table 1

- Participants reported fairly low average emotional distress.
- On average, respondents reported moderate body dissatisfaction.
- Respondents reported fairly high average self-esteem.
- Adolescents reported having about 5 close friends, and spending time with them an average of two or three days per week.
- Most participants reported that they hadn't been bullied in the past couple of months.
- On average, respondents reported good school performance and positive feelings about school.
- Mothers' monitoring of participants on average was moderately higher than fathers'.
- The greatest percentage of adolescents reported very good family relationships.
- About 55% of the sample was White, 15% Black, 13% Hispanic, and 18% Other.

## CONCLUSION

Body dissatisfaction is associated with emotional distress independent of peer, school, and family factors. Adolescent girls at greatest risk for mental health problems are dissatisfied with their bodies, have poor self-esteem, spent little time with friends, are bullied, don't enjoy school, and have poor family relationships. This data provides potential targets for interventions in troubled youth. By increasing positive self-image, particularly positive body image, as well as promoting supportive family and peer relationships, emotional distress risk factors can be significantly decreased