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EXAMINING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ASSERTIVENESS IN RELATIONSHIP AMONG NEUROTICISM, CONSCIENTIOUSNESS AND BODY IMAGE AMONG CLIENTS OF SPORTS CLUBS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the mediating role of assertiveness in relationship among neuroticism, conscientiousness and body image among clients of sports clubs. Having used the multistage sampling method, it was attempted to select a sample group of 308 women and men who had commuted to sports clubs in districts 2, 5 and 10 in Tehran, Iran. It should be mentioned that this was a descriptive-correlational study. Then, the necessary data were collected through the NEO-FFI Personality Inventory, Fisher's Body Image Questionnaire and Gambill-Richey Assertiveness Scale. The data were analyzed through the multivariate analysis (the path analysis approach). The results revealed that the conceptual model was fitted to the collected data. Besides, it was indicated that there was a statistical significant relationship between path coefficient for body image and assertiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Taking a glance at hierarchies of social values in different societies at different periods shows that elegance and ideal body image is one of the important social values embedded with diverse manifestations and implications. Accordingly, there is too much emphasis on this phenomenon in such a way that its absence can sociologically deprive individuals of many social benefits and it may lead to frustration and subsequent negative consequences (Zokai, 2006). Sclafani believes that a person's concept of his/her body is considered as one of the most important part of his/her self-concept. Besides, physical traits are among the stable concepts that have always been acknowledged in parallel to the concept of personality during human history. Given the very distant past till now, people believe that fat individuals are sociable and happy and, conversely, skinny individuals are shy, anxious, anxious and nervous. Besides, it is believed that athletes possess healthy spirit. The idea that there is a relationship between individuals' skeletal structure and his/her psychological and behavioral characteristics has existed for centuries before the emergence of scientific psychology (Motahari, 2010, as quoted by Raqibi & Mina Khani, 2011). On the other hand, psychologists are now well aware that the psychological dimensions of human beings are directly affected by their physical and corporeal conditions. Interestingly, the human body and the functions of organs are affected by psychological and mental exercise (Khibanchi, 1997, as quoted by Islamian, 2011).

KEY WORDS

Neuroticism, body image, assertiveness

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Every person has a mental image of his/her own body which constitutes the main ingredient of his/her own personality. Regarding the studies conducted on personality traits, it can be asserted that the notion of conscientiousness essentially comprises goal-oriented behavioral traits and comprehensive management of impulses. Given the notion of neuroticism, it may be argued that emotional stability is placed against a range of negative emotions such as sadness, irritability, nervous tension and so on. Considering the range of social relations, it seems that interpersonal skills play a key role in successful performance in the society. As such, the physical skills are not considered the sole sufficient condition for attaining a desirable life. The assertiveness skill is one of the aforementioned interpersonal skills that play a key role in social and behavioral health as well as a successful performance in life (Shahni Yeylaqi & Rezai, 2001; Qara Quzoqlu et al., 2008, as quoted by Jalali & Pour Ahmadi, 2010). It should be noted that self-worth and life satisfaction may not be achieved in the absence of these skills. Accordingly, Alberti and Emmons (1970) found that assertive individuals attained far more success in social situations compared to less-assertive individuals. As a result, they feel more confident about themselves. Conversely, those who had low self-esteem experienced more inhibition in expressing their beliefs, rights, desires and views and, thus, they were less-assertive individuals (Alberti and Emmons, 1970, as quoted by Kirst, 2011). The body image of any given individual is composed of feeling of body satisfaction, self-esteem and beliefs about appearance (Spangler & Stice, 2001, as quoted by Assar Kashani et al., 2012). Alberti and Emmons (1970) found that assertive individuals attained far more success in social situations compared to less-assertive individuals. Nicol and Suzanne (2003) examined the relationship between personality and dietary behavior in adolescents and found that there was a significant negative relationship between neuroticism and healthy eating and obesity and that the latter factor led to an inappropriate body image. Noor Molla (2007) investigated the relationship between self-esteem, personality traits and body image and concluded that there was a negative relationship between body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem. Besides, it was indicated that there was a positive correlation between neuroticism and body image dissatisfaction. Cruick Shank (2006) asserted that some of the personality traits were negatively associated with negative body image and concerns about appearance. Having studied the personality traits, it was concluded that the body image and eating behaviors of individuals afflicted with personality

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traits (low levels of neuroticism) were less correlated with body dissatisfaction and negative self-image (Behnava et al., 2009). Kalogiannis (2006) investigated the role of sport and physical education in the development of self-concept and found that teaching physical education in a proper manner could help children and adolescents to form an objective body image and gain a positive physical self-esteem. As a result, they felt more confident about themselves. Conversely, those who had low self-esteem experienced more inhibition in expressing their beliefs, rights, desires and views and, thus, they were less-assertive individuals (Alberti & Emmons, 1970, as quoted by Kirst, 2011). A research conducted by Damhari and Hamdavi (2014) aimed to examine the simple and multiple relationship between students' personality traits and their concerns about body image. The results of correlation and regression analysis showed that personality traits (conscientiousness and agreeableness) were negatively correlated with concerns about body dysmorphic disorder. These findings suggested that there was a significant relationship between assertiveness and self-esteem. Besides, it was noted that there was a direct relationship between self-esteem and body image. It also confirmed the probable relationship between assertiveness and personality traits. According to the research conducted in relation to personal traits and body image and given the probable impact of assertiveness as a powerful mediator, it seems that the following questions should be raised: A) Is there a goodness of fit between conceptual model and the collected data? B) Is there any significant positive relationship between neuroticism and body image? C) Can assertiveness explain significant part of the variance in body image? D) Can assertiveness mediate the relationship between neuroticism, conscientiousness and body image?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Given the purpose of study, it was indicated that this was a basic research. Regarding the methodology, it was indicated that this was a descriptive-correlational research. It should be noted that path analysis was used to examine the particular model of relationship among variables (Sarmad, Bazargan & Hejazi, 2012). The population of this study was composed of male and female clients of sports clubs in Tehran city in the summer of 2015. Since the multistage sampling method was used in this study to collect the desirable data, it was attempted to randomly select 3 districts (out of total 22 districts) of Tehran. Thus, the districts 2, 5 and 18 were selected thereof. Then, the researchers visited the Physical Education Department of these three districts. The list of clubs in this districts as well as their addresses was provided to the researchers. Given the aforementioned clubs, it was attempted to randomly select and visit 3 sports clubs in each district. Having coordinated with the directors of selected clubs, it was tried to distribute questionnaires among all members and clients of sport clubs. Since the sample size is a key element of any given research and given this issue that this has a decisive influence on the research results, it seems essential to determine the sample size in accordance with data analysis. All experts in the field of SEM agree that, compared to smaller sample size, a larger sample size can help researchers to estimate and interpret the results of SEM because the latter leads to less sampling error (Schumacher & Lumks, 2004, as quoted by Meyers, Gamst & Guarino, 2006). However, there is no absolute method for determining the sample size. Some researchers consider a minimum sample size of 100 and believe that a sample size of 200 or higher is favorable. Guadagnoli (1998) proposes that modeling and path analysis approach requires a sample size of 300 or more participants/items (Meyers, Gamst & Guarino, 2006). The sample group consisted of 308 individuals (150 women and 156 men) and 2 persons who did not respond to the gender question. It should be noted that the latter individuals were selected among those clients of sport clubs in Tehran.

Tools

Body image

The Fisher's Body Image Questionnaire was used to measure body image in this study. The questionnaire was developed by Fisher in 1970 and had 46 items. Each item had a value between 1 and 5 (very dissatisfied=1, dissatisfied = 2, average=3, satisfied= 4 and very satisfied = 5). A score of 46 indicated a disorder and a score higher than 46 (maximum 230) showed no disorder. The areas measured in this test included the head and face (questions 1 to 12), upper limbs (questions 13 to 22) and lower limbs (questions 23 to 28). The other 18 items gauged the attitudes of participants towards the general characteristics of body (questions 29 to 46) (Fisher, 1970, as quoted by Asgari et al., 2008). The validity of the test was confirmed by Yazdan Jou in Iran. The Pearsn's correlation coefficient for the test in the first and second runs were determined 0.81, 0.84, 0.87 and 0.84 for first-year students, second year students, third-year students and total students, respectively. Given the significant level of the aforementioned coefficients, it could be argued that there was a significant relationship among different administrations of body image test (Asgari et al., 2008). The short-form version of NEO- FFI Personality Inventory, which was embedded with 60 questions, was used to measure extraversion and openness to experience. It should be noted that the NEO- FFI Personality Inventory was developed by Costa and McCrae (1985). They made use of factor analysis and concluded that the following five dimensions could affect individual differences in terms of personality traits: (N) neuroticism, (E) extroversion, (O) openness to experience, (A) agreeableness and (C) conscientiousness. Actually, its name was derived from the titles of the first factors. Costa and McCrae tested the questionnaire on 208 U.S. students within a three-month interval and obtained validity coefficients between 0.75 and 0.83. Given the validity of the NEO Test, Garusi Farshi (2001) attempted to run the test on a sample of 2000 students studying in University of Tabriz, Shiraz University, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences and Tabriz University of Medical Sciences. Finally, they reported a

correlation coefficient between 0.56 and 0.87 for the main five dimensions. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each of the main dimensions of neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness were determined 0.86, 0.73, 0.56, 0.68 and 0.87, respectively. The content validity of this test was investigated via determining the correlation between Self-Report Form (S) and Observer Evaluation Form (R). Consequently, the maximum and minimum correlations (0.66 and 0.45) belonged to extraversion and agreeableness (Garusi Farshi, 2001). Atash Rouz (2007) made use of internal consistency method and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each of the main dimensions of neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness were determined 0.74, 0.55, 0.27, 0.38 and 0.77, respectively. In this study, the Gambill-Richey Assertiveness Scale was used to measure the notion of assertiveness. The questionnaire was developed in 1975 and had 40 main items. However, it was attempted to modify some items because they failed to comply with Iranian culture. Finally, the questionnaire consisted of 22 questions. The test items required assertiveness behaviors. The participants would be asked to respond to questions based on a five-point scale. Regarding the reliability, there was a high correlation among the test items. Besides, the load factor of different test items was determined between 39% and 70%. Gambill-Richey reported a reliability coefficient for 0.81. Shohreh Amoli (as quoted by Mahmoudian et al., 2004) removed the aforementioned 18 items, adjusted the items with Iranian culture and attempted to determine the reliability coefficient for the aforementioned element among 40 female junior school students within a 25-day interval in Tehran Psychiatric Institute. Finally, she reported a reliability coefficient for 0.82. In addition, professors of Allameh Tabatabai University in Tehran confirmed the validity of the test. Actually, the factorial reliability of test items was determined between 0.39 and 0.75 (Bahrami, 1996).

Table 1: The mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of neuroticism, conscientiousness, assertiveness and body image

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Neuroticism	20.59	7.22	0.625	0.139
Conscientiousness	34.40	7.05	-0.337	-0.428
Assertiveness	84.73	11.59	0.424	0.136
Body image	170.10	21.94	0.424	0.294

[Table 1] shows the mean and standard deviation of research variables. The abovementioned table shows that the skewness and kurtosis indices of factors have not exceeded the ± 2 limit. This shows that the distribution of data has been normal across all the research variables.

Table 2: The relationship among neuroticism, assertiveness and body image

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Cronbach's alpha
1) Neuroticism								0.773
2) Conscientiousness	-0.419**	0.220**	0.041	0.349**	--			0.817
3) Assertiveness	-0.312**	0.266**	0.133**	0.149**	0.195**	--		0.946
Body image	-0.318**	0.298**	0.171**	0.183**	0.395**	0.479**	---	0.831

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

Given the results presented in [Table 2], neuroticism and conscientiousness dimensions were significantly related to assertiveness and body image variables at 0.01 level. This relationship was positive in terms of neuroticism but it was negative in terms of other dimensions. It should be noted that the internal consistency of the research tool was determined through the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Accordingly, the concerned questionnaires were embedded with acceptable reliability coefficients.

Research hypotheses

- 1) The path coefficient for dimensions of neuroticism and conscientiousness and body image is statistically significant.
- 2) The path coefficient for assertiveness and body image is statistically significant.
- 3) The assertiveness variable can significantly mediate the relationship between personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness) and body image.

The path analysis was run through AMOS (Version 7.0) Software and Maximum Likelihood (ML) Estimation in order to analyze the aforementioned research hypotheses.

Table 3: Total, direct and indirect path coefficients for neuroticism, conscientiousness, assertiveness and body image

Paths	Total effect		Direct effect		Indirect effect	
	Standard parameter β	Standard error	Standard parameter β	Standard error	Standard parameter β	Standard error
Neuroticism-body image	-0.140*	0.064	-0.052	0.062	-0.089**	0.025
Conscientiousness-body image	0.290**	0.057	0.237**	0.052	0.017	0.022
Neuroticism-assertiveness	-0.240**	0.057				
Conscientiousness-assertiveness	0.047	0.059				
Assertiveness-body image	0.369**	0.049				

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Given the results presented in [Table 3], the total path coefficient (total of direct and indirect path coefficients) for neuroticism was negatively related to body image (β -0.140, $p < 0.05$) and the total path coefficient for conscientiousness was positively related to body image (β -0.290, $p < 0.01$). Generally speaking, the aforementioned coefficients were significant at 0.01 level.

Given the first hypothesis, entitled “the path coefficient for dimensions of neuroticism and conscientiousness and body image is statistically significant”, it may be argued that the path coefficient for neuroticism is negatively related to body image and the path coefficient for conscientiousness is significantly and positively related to body image.

Given the results presented in [Table 3], the path coefficient for assertiveness was positively related to body image and the latter relationship was significant at 0.01 level (β -0.369, $p < 0.01$). Thus, any given increase (1 standard deviation) in assertiveness led to an increase (0.369 standard deviation) increase in body image. Given the second hypothesis, entitled “the path coefficient for assertiveness and body image is statistically significant”, it may be argued that the path coefficient for neuroticism is positively related to body image and the latter relationship is significant at 0.01 level. Thus, one may assert that the assertiveness can positively predict the body image.

Regarding the results depicted in [Table 3], it may be argued that the indirect path coefficient for neuroticism is negatively related to the body image and the latter relationship is significant at 0.01 level (β -0.089, $p < 0.01$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

1. Similar to any other psychological aspect, the body image is considered an evolutionary part of any given human being. Given this, one might refer to a research conducted by Noor Molla (2007) who investigated the relationship among self-esteem, personality traits and body image and found that there was a negative correlation between body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem. Besides, he found that there was a positive correlation between neuroticism and body image dissatisfaction. Cruick Shank (2006) argued that there was a negative relationship between some personality traits and body image dissatisfaction and concerns about the appearance. Having studied the personality traits, it was concluded that the body image and eating behaviors of individuals afflicted with personality traits (low neuroticism) were less correlated with body dissatisfaction and negative self-image. A research conducted by Damhari and Hamdavi (2014) aimed to examine the simple and multiple relationship between students' personality traits and their concerns about body image. The results showed that the conscientiousness was a significantly and negatively correlated with concerns about body dysmorphic disorder (low body image). These findings suggested that there was a significant positive relationship between neuroticism and concerns about body dysmorphic disorder.

Nicol and Suzanne (2003) examined the relationship between personality and dietary behavior in adolescents and found that there was a significant negative relationship between neuroticism and healthy eating and obesity and that the latter factor led to an inappropriate body image. Eskandar Nejad (2014) examined the probable correlation between perception of body image and physical activity in women and men in terms of different levels of body mass index (BMI) and found that obese individuals and those with normal weight had the highest and lowest understanding of their body shape, respectively. Consequently, almost half of those people with normal weight perceived themselves more or less than their actual situation. As such, the latter finding can indirectly explain the negative relationship between neuroticism and body image. So, all the investigations conducted in line with this research hypothesis may confirm the aforementioned result.

2. There was a statistically significant relationship between path coefficients for assertiveness and body image. It was concluded that the aforementioned path coefficient was positive and significant at 0.01 level ($=\beta$ 0.369, $p < 0.01$). Accordingly, the assertiveness could positively predict the body image. Thus, it can be stated that negative emotions and behaviors and poor cognitive processing about body image and appearance could led to distorted body image and negative self-concept. The perception and

understanding of any given individual about his/her own body constitutes one of the most important part of his/her self-concept. The body image of any individual is composed of feeling of body satisfaction, self-esteem and beliefs about appearance. Besides, the latter factor can affect the self-esteem coefficient in any given individual (Spangler & Stice, 2001, as quoted by Assar Kashani et al., 2012).

On the other hand, those individuals whose self-esteem is not dependent on external factors and are more likely to stress on the abilities and achievements gained in life and depend on their internal states, pay less attention to concerns about weight and body organs. In addition, they are less likely to experience eating disorders as a result of low self-esteem. If individuals hold an inconsistent notion about the physical form of their body compared to public opinion, they will adopt an inappropriate body image about themselves and their organs. Therefore, the latter factor leads to a feeling of low self-concept, an imperfective self and, subsequently, low self-esteem in them (Atashpour et al., 2005).

Rod and Lennon (1994) conducted a research, entitled "the relationship between attitudes to gender roles, body satisfaction, self-esteem and women's appearance management", to examine the aforementioned variables among university students. The findings showed that attitude to the role of gender and body satisfaction lasted a positive impact on self-esteem.

Alberti and Emmons (1970) found that assertive individuals attained far more success in social situations compared to less-assertive individuals. As a result, they feel more confident about themselves. Conversely, those who have low self-esteem experience more inhibition in expressing their beliefs, rights, desires and views and, thus, they are less-assertive individuals (Alberti & Emmons, 1970, as quoted by Kirst, 2011). Therefore, it can be asserted that there is a direct relationship between assertiveness and self-esteem and body image.

Qobari Bonab and Hejazi (2007) attempted to gauge the relationship between assertiveness and self-esteem and academic achievement in gifted and ordinary students and concluded that there was a significant positive correlation between assertiveness and self-esteem in both groups. The latter finding is indirectly in line with the results of this research hypothesis.

3) The assertiveness variable can significantly mediate the relationship between neuroticism and conscientiousness and body image.

Behnava et al. (2009) examined the relationship between body image and personality traits and found that there was a negative relationship between data distribution in body image and characteristics of neuroticism. Besides, it was indicated that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between body image and personality traits (extraversion, openness to experience and agreeableness). Besides, Sabeti et al. (2007) investigated the relationship between personality traits and sexual beliefs and indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between conscientiousness and openness to experience and emotional stability (low neuroticism) and beliefs about body image. In other words, the latter findings confirmed the existence of a significant negative relationship between neuroticism and body image. A research conducted by Damhari and Hamdavi (2014) aimed to examine the simple and multiple relationship between students' personality traits and their concerns about body image. The results showed that conscientiousness was negatively correlated with concerns about body dysmorphic disorder (low body image). These findings suggested that there was a significant relationship between neuroticism and concerns about body dysmorphic disorder. So, assertiveness may predict the relationship between neuroticism and body image through a desirable model.

Limitations of the study

Since the participants in this research were clients of sports clubs, the duration and numbers of their exercise were unclear. Therefore, their impact on the body image was unclear. Another limitation was that the research sample was consisted of limited number of participants. As such, the results may not be generalized thereof. Besides, the data were based on participants' self-reports and, consequently, the reports may be subject to bias. The assertiveness should be effectively and practically taught to those individuals afflicted with neuroticism to eliminate the negative impact of the personality traits, especially neuroticism. Besides, it is suggested that a larger sample should be subject to more comprehensive testing tools so that the results may be generalized to a higher level.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None

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