
THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GENDER IDENTITY, LONELINESS, AND BODY DISSATISFACTION AMONG ADOLESCENTS

Dr. Oksana Malinauskienė
Mykolas Romeris University
Faculty of Human and Social Studies
Institute of Psychology
Ateities str. 20, LT-08303 Vilnius, Lithuania
Email: oksana@mruni.eu

Submitted on 17 August 2023

Accepted on 1 December 2023

DOI: 10.13165/SD-23-21-2-02

Abstract

Identity formation is an important developmental process during adolescence. The interplay between adolescents' gender identity, loneliness, and body dissatisfaction is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Adolescent gender identity issues are thought to be related to loneliness, and body dissatisfaction is a risk factor for greater loneliness. It can be hypothesized that adolescents experiencing gender identity issues could feel lonelier when they have greater body dissatisfaction. The present study addresses the following two research questions: (1) Are adolescents' (both girls and boys) gender identities associated with loneliness, body dissatisfaction, and fear of negative appearance evaluation? (2) Does body dissatisfaction and fear of negative appearance evaluation mediate between adolescents' gender identity and loneliness, and does this differ for girls and boys? The sample consists of 211 adolescents (54.5% girls) aged 15–17 ($M_{age} = 16.20$) from five secondary schools in Vilnius. Adolescent gender identity was measured using the Gender Identity/Gender Dysphoria Questionnaire for Adolescents and Adults (GIDYQ-AA); body dissatisfaction was established using the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ); loneliness was established using the UCLA Loneliness Scale; and

apprehension regarding appearance evaluation was established using the Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Scale (FNAES). The results show that the gender identity of both girls and boys is negatively related to loneliness, body dissatisfaction, and fear of negative appearance evaluation. The results also revealed that the association between gender identity and loneliness was mediated by body dissatisfaction, and that the association between body dissatisfaction and loneliness was stronger for boys than for girls. However, fear of negative appearance evaluation does not mediate the association between gender identity and loneliness. These results illustrate the importance of examining adolescents' gender differences regarding body dissatisfaction, loneliness, and gender identity, especially the experiences of boys regarding body dissatisfaction.

Keywords: *adolescents, gender identity, loneliness, body dissatisfaction, fear of negative appearance evaluation.*

1. Introduction

During adolescence, identity development is a crucial developmental process. Before creating a distinct identity, a young person experiments by making choices in a variety of areas (Becker et al., 2017; Schwartz et al., 2012). Identity development is a trial-and-error process. Identity can be defined as a sense of continuity and self that emerges from the interaction of several contexts (such as an individual's surroundings, including their family, school, or social group). One element of identity is gender identity. In addition, at this age, there is a growing need for gender identification in preparation for the transition to emerging adulthood, and in preparation for future perspectives on the role of men and women and stereotypes in society (Egan & Perry, 2001). Thus, adolescents consider the issue of gender identity particularly intensely. Gender identity is defined as a person's psychological sense of their gender and the associated attribution or non-attribution of oneself to a particular gender (APA, 2015). Gender identity involves one's perspective of their body, which is mirrored in how they show themselves and behave, or how they express themselves sexually (via dress, speech, etc.). Gender identity is further complicated by increased social pressure to conform to culturally prescribed gender roles. Adolescents, who are undergoing a period of intense formation and notable physical and mental changes, are likely to have questions about gender identity. As a result, all adolescents inevitably try to figure out their gender identity, and some of them struggle with it at both the clinical and non-clinical levels (Becker et al., 2017; Diamond, 2020).

Adolescents exploring or embracing diverse gender identities may encounter unique challenges (e.g., stigma, prejudice, internalized homophobia) in addition to general stressors and stressors in their social environments that threaten their mental health and overall well-being (Meyer, 2013; Pereira, Silva, & Beatriz, 2022; Russell & Fish, 2016). Adolescents may face discrimination, victimization, social exclusion, bullying, and harassment, which

can increase stress and anxiety, depression levels, and loneliness (Eres et al., 2021; Marshal et al., 2011; Mustanski, Andrews, & Puckett, 2016; Russell et al., 2021). Adolescents with gender identity issues do not feel safe in Lithuania, because the country has a well-established heteronormativity and is regarded as one of the most homophobic countries in the European Union (ranked 36th out of 49 countries in the ILGA-Europe 2023 report). Examining the link between adolescent gender identity and psychosocial functioning (e.g., loneliness) is necessary in order to provide guidelines for preventive work (for example, counseling) with adolescents experiencing psychosocial issues in the formation of gender identity, to base intervention programs on ensuring better adjustment in late adolescence, and to help schools implement policy decisions such as those related to sexuality education.

1.1. Adolescents' gender identity and loneliness

Adolescence is an important time to study loneliness since it is a time of rapid biological, relational, and social network remodeling (Barreto et al., 2021; Laursen & Hartl, 2013). Adolescents who are unable to adapt to these changes might become lonely. According to the developmental neuroscience perspective, the changes occurring in adolescents' social brains make them vulnerable to developing loneliness (Wong, Yeung, & Lee, 2018). Therefore, feeling different and not fitting in is a common feeling during adolescence. Adolescents who struggle with gender identity or who identify as LGBTQ+ may find loneliness to be particularly distressing. According to numerous studies (Allen et al., 2021; McDanal et al., 2023), adolescents who struggle with gender identity may be more prone to loneliness than their heterosexual and cisgender peers. If the adolescent does not feel pleased with the gender role that is expected and desired of them in the culture in which they live, the experience of loneliness can be very distressing. When there is a discrepancy between one's internal gender identification and the outward expectations and standards set by society, it can cause feelings of isolation and exclusion, and can contribute to increased vulnerability to loneliness. Any deviation from the standard raises concern since the adolescent can analyze, reflect, and draw social comparisons because of their well-developed cognitive capabilities. Gender differences have been studied for a long time, and the relationship between gender and adolescent loneliness is controversial. Examples include girls experiencing more loneliness than boys and vice versa (e.g., Barreto et al., 2021), and some studies even suggest that there are no gender differences at all (Maes et al., 2019). However, loneliness and social isolation in adolescents have only recently started to be investigated alongside gender identity issues (Eres et al., 2021). According to some researchers (e.g., Mereish & Poteat, 2015), adolescents who struggle with gender identity may feel more loneliness as a result of stressors such as discrimination, stigma, marginalization, internalized homonegativity, concealment, and lack of acceptance. Thus, gender identity can have a significant impact on an adolescent's experience of loneliness.

1.2. The role of gender identity in adolescents' body dissatisfaction

Body image is a biopsychosocial and multidimensional construct that encompasses perceptions, cognitions, feelings, and behaviors regarding appearance, functions, and physical abilities (Finato et al., 2013). Adolescence is a period of development associated with rapid changes in body size and shape and the onset of puberty. These changes may lead to body dissatisfaction, as adolescents compare their altered bodies to the sociocultural ideal, standards of their gender, and idealized appearances (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2022; Finato et al., 2013). Body dissatisfaction constitutes an individual's negative feelings or thoughts about their body, including unfavorable assessments of size, form, and muscular tone (Cash, 2012). Since adolescence is a time of natural bodily changes, there may be natural body dissatisfaction for both girls and boys (Calzo et al., 2012). Many studies find gender differences in body image issues: body dissatisfaction is more frequent among adolescent girls than adolescent boys, but it is also present in boys (Bucchianeri & Neumark-Sztainer, 2014; Ferreiro, Seoane, & Senra, 2014; Flores, Cruz, & Gascón, 2017). It is commonly stated that body dissatisfaction tends to be normative, especially among females (Kusina & Exline, 2019). It is also well-known that body dissatisfaction can contribute to mental health issues, e.g., anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Forste, Potter, & Ericson, 2017; McLean et al., 2022; Vannucci & Ohannessian, 2018). For adolescents exploring or embracing gender identities beyond the traditional binary, body acceptance is significant and can become a central axis. For adolescents with gender identity issues, the struggle with body acceptance can be more difficult than for their peers, for several reasons. First, misalignment between gender identity and body: adolescents who struggle with their gender identification may notice a significant difference between how they feel about themselves on the inside and how they look on the outside. They may believe that their body does not correspond to their true identity, which can cause distress (Pulice-Farrow, Cusack, & Galupo, 2020). Second, adolescents are particularly sensitive to social pressures, societal expectations, and norms, especially related to gender roles (Rogers, Nielson, & Santos, 2021). So, adolescents with gender identity issues may feel pressured to conform to the gender expectations of the sex that they were assigned at birth (Spencer et al., 2021). Third, social comparison to peers: when their gender identity does not match their peers' expectations, adolescents may have difficulty accepting their bodies (Diamond, 2020). Therefore, adolescents' body dissatisfaction may be significantly influenced by their gender identification.

1.3. The link between adolescents' gender identity, loneliness, and body dissatisfaction

The interplay between adolescents' gender identity, loneliness, and body dissatisfaction is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. If their gender identity does not match what others see, adolescents may feel uncomfortable about the conflict between their physical body and how they feel and think about themselves. Thus, gender identity may have

implications for adolescents' relationships with their body and their physical appearance, which in turn may have implications for body image and body acceptance. Knowing that body image involves a degree of body perception and satisfaction or dissatisfaction with it (Loland, 2000), it can be assumed that adolescents with gender identity issues are already dissatisfied with their bodies – that is, that they will have negative thoughts and feelings about their bodies. Because adolescents internalize appearance ideals based on feedback about related body ideals provided by various social resources, such as their peers (Jarman et al., 2021), fear of negative appearance evaluation, feelings of inadequacy, or otherness may occur (Diamond, 2020). If an adolescent does not meet (by objectively or subjectively evaluating themselves) the standard of a man/woman (or masculinity/femininity) in a specific culture, this may affect their body image – i.e., increasing dissatisfaction with one's body can also lead to the fear that one's body will be judged negatively by others. This can lead to withdrawal from social interaction, isolation, and feelings of loneliness. Some results demonstrate the possibility of a complicated, vicious feedback loop between appearance concerns and loneliness in adolescents, especially for girls (Diamond, 2020; Forste, Potter, & Ericson, 2017; Papapanou et al., 2023). Loneliness can be subjective due to the fact that the adolescent themselves avoids social situations, which is caused by body dissatisfaction. It can be hypothesized that adolescents experiencing gender identity issues would experience more loneliness when they have greater body dissatisfaction and more fear of negative appearance evaluation.

1.4. The present study

A review of the relevant literature shows that gender identity is related to loneliness in adolescents. This relationship is mediated and moderated by other factors. Specifically, body dissatisfaction and gender have been separately associated with gender identity and loneliness. It can be assumed that body dissatisfaction can be a mediator of gender identity and loneliness – i.e., it can increase the feeling of loneliness – and that gender may moderate the relationships between gender identity and body dissatisfaction and fear of negative appearance evaluation and loneliness. This theorized relationship is presented in Figure 1. The research object of this study is adolescents' gender identity, loneliness, and body dissatisfaction. Due to inconsistent findings and a lack of data and knowledge, it can be considered that the notion of body dissatisfaction and fear of negative appearance evaluation as mediators between adolescents' gender identity and loneliness, and the differences between girls and boys in this regard, are open questions. The aims of the present study are: (1) to determine associations among adolescents' gender identity, loneliness, body dissatisfaction, and fear of negative appearance evaluation; (2) to examine the possible mediating role of body dissatisfaction and fear of negative appearance evaluation between adolescents' gender identity and loneliness, and how this differs for girls and boys. Thus, the following two research questions emerge: (1) Are adolescents' gender identities associated with loneliness, body dissatisfaction, and fear of negative appearance evaluation? (2) Does body

dissatisfaction and fear of negative appearance evaluation mediate between adolescents' gender identity and loneliness, and does this differ for girls and boys?

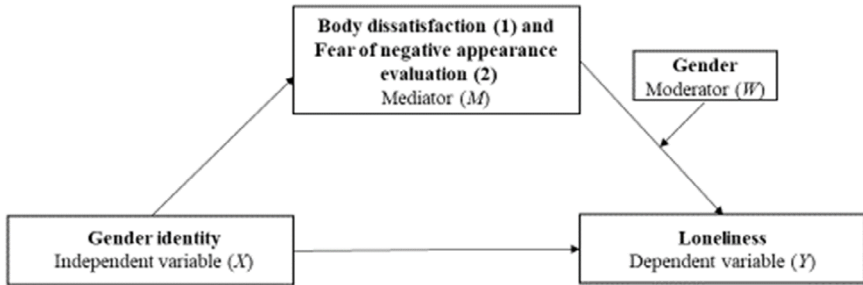


Fig. 1. The mediating role of body dissatisfaction and fear of negative appearance evaluation on the relationship between gender identity and loneliness, and the moderating effect of gender

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 211 adolescents in the 10th grade from five secondary public schools (gymnasiums) in Vilnius, Lithuania, 54.5% of whom were girls and 45.5% boys. Participants were between the ages of 15 and 17 ($M_{\text{age}} = 16.20$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 0.43$). Adolescent age was selected because most studies on gender identity involve samples of adolescents with a mean age of 16 years (e.g., Pace et al., 2020; Shiffman et al., 2016), and because most older adolescents are just starting to comprehend their potentially non-binary gender identity. The responses to the inquiry “With which gender do you identify?” were dispersed as follows: 49.8% of respondents were female, 40.3% were male, 3.3% responded “other,” and 6.6% said “I don’t want to answer.”

Analyzing the distribution of the study participants by family composition, the majority, or 62.1%, indicated that they live with both parents, 18.5% that they live only with their mother, 0.9% that they live only with their father, 14.7% that they live with their mother and her partner, 0.5% that they live with their father and his partner, 2.8% that they live with other relatives or guardians, and 0.5% that they live alone.

2.2. Instruments

During the study, adolescents were asked to fill out questionnaires assessing:

Gender identity. The Gender Identity/Gender Dysphoria Questionnaire for

Adolescents and Adults (GIDYQ-AA; Deogracias et al., 2007), which consists of 27 items (separate versions for boys and girls based on assigned sex), was used to measure adolescent gender identity. Four indicators of gender identity are included in the questionnaire: Subjective (13 items), Social (9 items), Somatic (3 items), and Sociolegal (2 items). Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, marking the most appropriate answer between 1 – *Always* and 5 – *Never* in the last 12 months, with high scores indicating greater gender identity. Sample items (for the questionnaire distributed to girls) include: “In the past 12 months, have you felt more like a boy than like a girl?”; “In the past 12 months, have you felt that you were not a real girl?” (Subjective indicator); “In the past 12 months, have you felt that you did not have anything in common with either boys or girls?”; “In the past 12 months, have strangers treated you as a boy?” (Social indicator); “In the past 12 months, have you disliked your body because it is female (e.g., having breasts or having a vagina)?” (Somatic indicator); “In the past 12 months, have you made an effort to change your legal sex (e.g., on a driver’s license or credit card)?” (Sociolegal indicator). A total gender identity score was calculated by adding together the answers to the questions. The GIDYQ-AA had excellent internal consistency in the sample of girls, with Cronbach’s $\alpha = .931$. In the sample of boys, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .836$, indicating good internal consistency. Thus, the internal consistency was good for this study, and was similar to that of the original scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .97$; Deogracias et al., 2007).

Loneliness. Adolescents’ subjective feelings of loneliness were measured using the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978). There are 20 items on the scale. Using a 4-point Likert-type scale, each item is rated, and the most appropriate answer is selected: greater loneliness is indicated by higher ratings, which range from 1 – *Never* to 4 – *Often*. Example items include: “How often do you feel that no one really knows you well?” and “How often do you feel that there are people who really understand you?” In the sample of girls, the Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .946, while in the sample of boys it was .968. As a result, this study’s internal consistency was excellent and was similar to that of the original scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .96$; Russell et al., 1978).

Body dissatisfaction. Negative feelings about one’s body size and shape were measured using the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ; Dowson & Henderson, 2001). This questionnaire is used to measure body dissatisfaction (Marzola et al., 2022). The questionnaire consists of a total of 14 items. Each item is evaluated on a 6-point Likert-type scale, choosing the most suitable answer option from 1 – *Never* to 6 – *Always*, with higher total scores indicating greater body dissatisfaction. Sample items include: “Have you felt ashamed of your body?”; “Have you been particularly self-conscious about your shape when in the company of other people?” The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale in the sample of girls was .958, and in the sample of boys was .920. Thus, the internal consistency was excellent for this study and was similar to that of the original scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$; Dowson & Henderson, 2001).

Fear of negative appearance evaluation. The Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Scale (FNAES; Thomas et al., 1998; cited by Lundgren, Anderson, & Thompson, 2004), which assesses apprehension about appearance, was used to measure this factor. This scale

consists of a total of 6 items, each of which is evaluated on a 5-point Likert-type scale by choosing the most suitable answer from 1 – *Not at all* to 6 – *Extremely*, with higher total scores indicating greater fear of negative appearance evaluation. Sample items include: “I worry that people will find fault with the way I look”; “It bothers me if I know someone is judging my physical shape.” The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale in the sample of girls was .921, and in the sample of boys was .874. Thus, the internal consistency was excellent (for the girls’ sample) and good (for the boys’ sample) for this study, and was similar to that of the original scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$; Lundgren et al., 2004).

2.3. Procedure

This research was approved by the Mykolas Romeris University Ethics Committee (Decision No. 1/2022 dated February 21, 2022). A convenience sampling method was used.

According to the information provided by the Vilnius Municipality and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport, there are around 30 state secondary schools in Vilnius where research can be done, excluding gymnasiums where Lithuanian is not the primary language of instruction and some secondary state schools (such as adult or training centers). Only 5 of the 29 secondary state schools that were contacted, or 17% of all secondary state schools, consented to the inquiry. After this, dialogue with the administration of the schools took place for almost 3 months. Collaboration was requested from a large number of schools via email (sending an official letter from the university) and telephone. The parents/guardians of adolescents ($N = 393$) were informed about the ongoing study after school leaders had given their permission for it to be carried out. As mediated by the school administration, parents/guardians were given informed consent forms (electronically or in writing) with all necessary information regarding the study. A paper informed consent form was used because the response rate for the electronic consent form was poor. In total, 54.2% of parents/guardians gave their child active permission to take the survey, 32.57% did not give permission, and 13.23% did not respond. Only adolescents whose parents/guardians allowed them to participate in the study (by clearly completing the consent form) were eligible to participate. Adolescents could decide for themselves before the study whether they agreed (or not) to participate in the study: 100% of students with active parental/guardian consent agreed to participate in the study. The research questionnaire was placed on the SurveyMonkey electronic platform. The survey was carried out online, and students filled out the form on tablets while in class. The average time taken to complete the questionnaire was around 25 minutes, i.e., within the duration of the lesson. Data was collected in March–May 2022.

The principles of voluntariness, freedom of decision, confidentiality, and other ethical norms were followed during the conduct of the research. Privacy protection was ensured. The significance of honest responses to the questions was emphasized throughout the data collection process, along with the anonymity of the study and the confidential treatment of the data. Additionally, brochures were created and handed to students containing

information offering specialized assistance, including free, remote, face-to-face, weekday, and 24/7 psychological help options and alternatives.

2.4. Data analysis

The processing and analysis of results was conducted using the IBM SPSS v.26.0 statistical package. First, descriptive statistics were calculated for the main study variables (i.e., the fourth scale), which are presented as means and standard deviations. No missing data was observed in valid questionnaires, and comparative statistics are presented in Table 1. Second, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to test the associations between the main study variables. Correlation analyses are presented in Table 2. Finally, PROCESS v.4.1 for SPSS (Model 14) was used and moderated mediation analysis was performed, with gender identity as the independent variable, loneliness as the dependent variable, and body dissatisfaction and fear of negative appearance evaluation as the mediating variable to test its mediating effect. The moderator was gender. The moderated mediation model argues that the relationship between gender identity (independent variable) and loneliness (dependent variable) through body dissatisfaction and fear of negative appearance evaluation (mediating variable) differs depending on gender (moderating variable). The effect of gender identity on the evaluation of body dissatisfaction and fear of negative appearance and the effect of the evaluation of body dissatisfaction and fear of negative appearance on loneliness is affected by gender. The statistical significance of the moderated and mediated effects was calculated using the bootstrapping method. Statistical significance was determined when zero was not within the 95% confidence interval. The minimum level of statistical significance required in all tests was $p < .05$.

3. Results

Comparing gender identity indicators, loneliness, body dissatisfaction, and fear of negative appearance evaluation estimates according to adolescent gender, the Student's *t*-test for independent samples was applied. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), Student’s *t*-test results, and *p*-values from the analysis of differences in scores for gender identity, loneliness, body dissatisfaction, and fear of negative appearance evaluation between girls (*n* = 115) and boys (*n* = 96)

Variables			Girls		Boys		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Min value	Max value	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Gender identity	25	125	115.90	11.82	120.90	6.31	3.73	.000
Loneliness	20	80	43.15	13.60	34.19	14.60	-4.60	.000
Body dissatisfaction	14	84	46.40	18.34	27.33	11.65	-8.81	.000
Fear of negative appearance evaluation	6	30	18.47	6.97	13.14	5.68	-6.01	.000

Comparison by gender revealed that girls have significantly poorer gender identity than boys, and they feel lonelier, are more dissatisfied with their bodies and more afraid of the negative evaluation of their appearance than boys.

The correlations for the variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation between gender identity, loneliness, body dissatisfaction, and fear of negative appearance evaluation in the samples of boys and girls

	Gender identity	Loneliness	Body dissatisfaction	Fear of negative appearance evaluation
Gender identity	1	-.273**	-.219*	-.412**
Loneliness	-.407**	1	.482**	.386**
Body dissatisfaction	-.216*	.484**	1	.431**
Fear of negative appearance evaluation	-.249**	.525**	.666**	1

Note. Correlations below the diagonal represent correlations for girls, and correlations above the diagonal represent correlations for boys.

p* < .05; *p* < .01

Correlation analysis demonstrated that the gender identity of both girls and boys is negatively related to loneliness, body dissatisfaction, and fear of negative appearance evaluation. Thus, the better gender identity of both girls and boys, the lower their loneliness, body dissatisfaction, and fear of negative appearance evaluation. Based on the user’s guide to correlation coefficients (Akoglu, 2018), it can be argued that all correlations except girls’ fear of negative appearance evaluation and loneliness (*r* = .525, *p* < .01; moderate correlation strength) and body dissatisfaction (*r* = .666, *p* < .01; moderate correlation strength)

are weak (correlation coefficient between 0.2 and 0.5).

The analysis of body dissatisfaction and fear of negative appearance evaluation as a mediating variable and gender as a moderator was then performed in the total sample. Thus, moderated mediation analysis was performed. Two moderated mediation analyses were tested (the first model: gender identity → body dissatisfaction → loneliness; the second model: gender identity → fear of negative appearance evaluation → loneliness), but only one (the first model) indicated a significant effect.

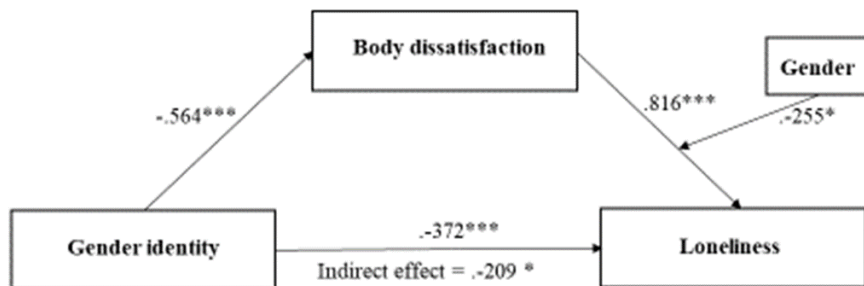


Fig. 2. The results of the mediation analysis of body dissatisfaction in the relationship between gender identity and loneliness; * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$

In the first model (Figure 2), statistically significant ($p < .001$) values of regression coefficients were observed between gender identity and body dissatisfaction ($\beta = -.564$), and between body dissatisfaction and loneliness ($\beta = .816$). After including body dissatisfaction as the mediator, the original value of the regression coefficient decreased from $\beta = -.372$ to $\beta = -.209$. The direct effect of gender identity on loneliness was $B(SE) = -.372 (.087)$ with a 95% CI $[-.543; -.201]$ and the indirect effect of gender identity on loneliness was $B(SE) = -.209 (.067)$ with a 95% CI $[-.370; -.106]$, confirming that the association between gender identity and loneliness was mediated by body dissatisfaction. The condition indirect effect of body dissatisfaction at the level of the gender group for girls was $.305$; $SE = .062$; with a 95% CI $[-.183; .427]$. For boys, the effect was $.561$; $SE = .105$; with a 95% CI $[-.353; .768]$. Specifically, the association between body dissatisfaction and loneliness was stronger for boys than for girls.

In the second model, statistically significant ($p < .001$) values of regression coefficients were observed between gender identity and fear of negative appearance evaluation ($\beta = -.244$), but statistically non-significant values were observed between fear of negative appearance evaluation and loneliness ($\beta = .798$). After including fear of negative appearance evaluation as the mediator, the original value of the regression coefficient decreased from $\beta = -.334$ ($p < .001$) to $\beta = -.042$ (p -value was not significant). The direct effect of gender identity on loneliness was $B(SE) = -.334 (.091)$ with a 95% CI $[-.512; -.155]$ and the total indirect effect of gender identity on loneliness was $B(SE) = -.010 (.068)$ with a 95%

CI [-.145; .127], thus failing to confirm that the association between gender identity and loneliness was mediated by fear of negative appearance evaluation. The condition indirect effect of negative appearance evaluation at the level of the gender group was not significant. This fails to confirm that the mediating effect of fear of negative appearance evaluation in the association between gender identity and loneliness is different for girls and boys.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Given that adolescence is a time of substantial personal and social growth, the interaction between loneliness, body dissatisfaction, and gender identity can be particularly complicated during this time. Adolescence is a time when people are developing their identities, starting relationships, and frequently dealing with pressure from the public regarding their appearance and gender. The results of this study reveal that the gender identities of both girls and boys are negatively related to loneliness, body dissatisfaction, and fear of negative appearance evaluation. Moreover, the association between gender identity and loneliness is mediated by body dissatisfaction, the association between body dissatisfaction and loneliness is stronger for boys than for girls, and fear of negative appearance evaluation does not mediate the association between gender identity and loneliness.

As expected, the association between gender identity and loneliness is mediated by body dissatisfaction and moderated by gender. These results could explain how the combination of societal pressure and body dissatisfaction can take a toll on emotional well-being (Lawler & Nixon, 2011). Persistent negative emotions and feelings of inadequacy can contribute to a heightened sense of loneliness, as individuals may feel misunderstood and unable to connect with others authentically. Adolescents with gender identity issues may experience particularly severe increased levels of stress and pressure to conform to societal norms and expectations (Spencer et al., 2021). Adolescents who identify as gender non-conforming frequently experience prejudice, stigmatization, and a lack of empathy from others under minority stress (Eres et al., 2021; Pereira, Silva, & Beatriz, 2022; Russell et al., 2021). When adolescents feel dissatisfaction with their bodies – which often arises when there is a disconnect between one's body and gender identity and when there is an inability to safely express one's true gender identity in various social situations – they may feel particularly misunderstood, and this can increase their experience of loneliness. Some adolescents may cope with the challenges associated with gender identity and body dissatisfaction by withdrawing from social interactions or avoiding situations that could trigger dysphoria, which can further strengthen feelings of loneliness (Meyer et al., 2021).

Most research results confirm that girls are more dissatisfied with their bodies than boys, and that this is treated as more normative in adolescence among females (Kusina & Exline, 2019). Only very few studies find the opposite result (Presnell, Bearman, & Stice, 2004). The results of our study show that the association between body dissatisfaction and loneliness was stronger for boys than for girls. These results are interesting and can be

interpreted in several ways. The first possible explanation may be the stigma associated with boys' body image issues. Body dissatisfaction, as already mentioned, is often seen as occurring more frequently among girls. Given the prevailing social and cultural norms related to gender roles, boys may be reluctant to reveal or talk about their body dissatisfaction for fear of being stigmatized or not being taken seriously (e.g., O'gorman et al., 2020). Often, cultural and societal norms discourage emotional expression in males. This lack of opportunities to express one's feelings can lead to greater loneliness. It is more atypical than typical for males to talk publicly about their body dissatisfaction, which can lead to a desire to withdraw and avoid talking about the topic. This, consequently, can leave them feeling misunderstood. Second, societal and gender norms have different expectations regarding the appearances of boys and girls (Ward & Grower, 2020). Boys who feel that they do not meet these standards may experience body dissatisfaction, which can lead to feelings of loneliness caused by a lack of social recognition. Third, the importance of peers, peer influence, and comparisons with peers who seem to meet standards (such as muscular and fit physiques, which are often dictated by the media) during adolescence can amplify body dissatisfaction (Lawler & Nixon, 2011). This dissatisfaction can contribute to loneliness, as boys may feel disconnected from their peers. Boys, if they feel that they do not meet these idealized male standards, might experience body dissatisfaction, which can contribute to feelings of loneliness due to a perceived lack of social acceptance. Fourth, different received or/and perceived social support networks and methods of coping with emotional discomfort may exist for boys and girls (Frison & Eggermont, 2016). Girls frequently place a greater emphasis on interpersonal interactions and emotional expression. While looking for intimate connections to express their emotions, they might be more likely to talk about body dissatisfaction with friends or family members, which can alleviate feelings of loneliness. Moreover, girls might be more prone to seeking out social support when dealing with body dissatisfaction, while boys might be more likely to internalize their feelings such as by avoiding or withdrawing from social interactions. Thus, the results of this study demonstrate the need to begin to pay more attention to the experiences of boys regarding body dissatisfaction.

An unexpected result indicates that the association between gender identity and loneliness is not mediated by fear of negative appearance evaluation, and is not moderated by gender. Due to changing societal norms in recent years, boys, just like girls, might feel social pressure to conform to certain appearance ideals, and may also fear negative appearance evaluation (Nielson et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2010). This could also indicate that fear of negative appearance evaluation is a normal experience in adolescence for both boys and girls.

Given the unique challenges that adolescents with gender identity issues face regarding body acceptance, they must have access to supportive environments and mental health resources that can assist them in their self-discovery, self-acceptance, and overall well-being, e.g., by reducing loneliness given the special obstacles that adolescents encounter around body acceptance. Thus, it is especially important to create inclusive and affirming environments that recognize and validate diverse gender identities.

Limitations and directions for future research

It is important to discuss the main shortcomings and limitations of this research and possible directions for future studies. The first limitation of this work is the research sample. The sample of the study included senior high school students in the Lithuanian capital – Vilnius. As such, it did not represent the Lithuanian adolescent population. It is important to emphasize that the sample is not clinical and is very small, so the results reveal only possible tendencies. A greater sample size would enable more intricate calculations. Adolescents from towns and cities smaller than Vilnius may enrich the sample. The fact that the research participants were only in the 10th grade was another limitation, as data could also be collected from students in higher grades. The third limitation of the study is that all information was collected from the adolescents themselves – that is, self-reported measurement questionnaires were used. Adolescents are more likely to answer these questions in a socially desirable manner. The inability to inquire about adolescents' sexual orientation was a fourth limitation. Indications of a wider problem in this regard can be observed in the fact that it was highly challenging to get into schools initially (and school administrations frequently refused to accept the study out of concern for parents' reactions or because the study's topic was perceived as being improper for the school). In future research, based on other research findings (e.g., Hammack et al., 2022; Kiekens & Mereish, 2022; Mezzalana et al., 2022) it would also be interesting to examine gender expression, psychological resilience, and the effect of perceived or received social support on the relationship between gender identity and loneliness. It should also be considered that factors might interact differently in various cultural and social contexts. To better understand what impact body dissatisfaction has on the relationship between adolescent gender identity and loneliness, further longitudinal studies are also needed.

Funding

This research was part of the “Longitudinal Links between Gender Identity and Psychosocial Functioning across a One-Year Period in Adolescence” project. This activity is funded under Measure 09.3.3-LMT-K-712 “Development of Scientific Competences of Scientists, other Researchers, and Students through Practical Research Activities”.

References

-
- Akoglu, H. (2018). User's guide to correlation coefficients. *Turkish Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 18(3), 91–93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tjem.2018.08.001>
- Allen, B. J., Stratman, Z. E., Kerr, B. R., Zhao, Q., & Moreno, M. A. (2021). Associations between psychosocial measures and digital media use among transgender youth: Cross-sectional study. *JMIR Pediatrics and Parenting*, 4(3), e25801. <http://doi.org/10.19190/jmrip.4.3.e25801>

- org/10.2196/25801
- American Psychological Association [APA]. (2015). Guidelines for psychological practice with transgender and gender nonconforming people. *American Psychologist*, 70(9), 832–864. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039906>
- Barreto, M., Victor, C., Hammond, C., Eccles, A., Richins, M. T., & Qualter, P. (2021). Loneliness around the world: Age, gender, and cultural differences in loneliness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 169, 110066. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110066>
- Becker, I., Ravens-Sieberer, U., Ottová-Jordan, V., & Schulte-Markwort, M. (2017). Prevalence of adolescent gender experiences and gender expression in Germany. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 61(1), 83–90. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.02.001>
- Bucchianeri, M. M., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2014). Body dissatisfaction: An overlooked public health concern. *Journal of Public Mental Health*, 13(2), 64–69. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jpmh-11-2013-0071>
- Calzo, J. P., Sonnevile, K. R., Haines, J., Blood, E. A., Field, A. E., & Austin, S. B. (2012). The development of associations among body mass index, body dissatisfaction, and weight and shape concern in adolescent boys and girls. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 51(5), 517–523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.02.021>
- Cash, T. F. (2012). Cognitive-behavioral perspectives on body image. In T. F. Cash (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of body image and human appearance* (pp. 334–342). London, UK: Elsevier Science & Technology.
- Choukas-Bradley, S., Roberts, S. R., Maheux, A. J., & Nesi, J. (2022). The perfect storm: A developmental-sociocultural framework for the role of social media in adolescent girls' body image concerns and mental health. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 25(4), 681–701. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-022-00404-5>
- Deogracias, J. J., Johnson, L. L., Meyer-Bahlburg, H. F., Kessler, S. J., Schober, J. M., & Zucker, K. J. (2007). The gender identity/gender dysphoria questionnaire for adolescents and adults. *Journal of Sex Research*, 44(4), 370–379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490701586730>
- Diamond, L. M. (2020). Gender Fluidity and Nonbinary Gender Identities Among Children and Adolescents. *Child Development Perspectives*, 14(2), 110–115. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12366>
- Dowson, J., & Henderson, L. (2001). The validity of a short version of the Body Shape Questionnaire. *Psychiatry Research*, 102(3), 263–271. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0165-1781\(01\)00254-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0165-1781(01)00254-2)
- Egan, S. K., & Perry, D. G. (2001). Gender identity: A multidimensional analysis with implications for psychosocial adjustment. *Developmental Psychology*, 37(4), 451–463. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.37.4.451>
- Eres, R., Postolovski, N., Thielking, M., & Lim, M. H. (2021). Loneliness, mental health, and social health indicators in LGBTQIA+ Australians. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 91(3), 358–366. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000531>
- Ferreiro, F., Seoane, G., & Senra, C. (2014). Toward understanding the role of body

- dissatisfaction in the gender differences in depressive symptoms and disordered eating: A longitudinal study during adolescence. *Journal of Adolescence*, 37(1), 73–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2013.10.013>
- Finato, S., Rech, R. R., Migon, P., Gavineski, I. C., Toni, V. D., & Halpern, R. (2013). Insatisfação com a imagem corporal em escolares do sexto ano da rede municipal de Caxias do Sul, no Rio Grande do Sul [Body image dissatisfaction in students from the sixth grade of public schools in Caxias do Sul, Southern Brazil]. *Revista Paulista de pediatria*, 31(1), 65–70. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0103-05822013000100011>
- Flores, P. J., Cruz, A. J., & Gascón, M. B. (2017). Body-image dissatisfaction in children and adolescents: a systematic review. *Nutrición hospitalaria*, 34(2), 479–489. <https://doi.org/10.20960/nh.455>
- Forste, R., Potter, M., & Erickson, L. (2017). Sad and lonely: body dissatisfaction among adolescent girls. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*, 31(2), 20160157. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijamh-2016-0157>
- Frison, E., & Eggermont, S. (2016). Exploring the relationships between different types of Facebook use, perceived online social support, and adolescents' depressed mood. *Social Science Computer Review*, 34(2), 153–171. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439314567449>
- Hammack, P. L., Hughes, S. D., Atwood, J. M., Cohen, E. M., & Clark, R. C. (2022). Gender and sexual identity in adolescence: A mixed-methods study of labeling in diverse community settings. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 37(2), 167–220. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584211000315>
- ILGA-Europe. (n.d.). *Country Ranking*. Rainbow Europe. Retrieved on August 1, 2023. <https://www.rainbow-europe.org/country-ranking>
- Jarman, H. K., Marques, M. D., McLean, S. A., Slater, A., & Paxton, S. J. (2021). Social media, body satisfaction and well-being among adolescents: A mediation model of appearance-ideal internalization and comparison. *Body Image*, 36, 139–148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.11.005>
- Kiekens, W. J., & Mearish, E. H. (2022). The association between daily concealment and affect among sexual and gender minority adolescents: The moderating role of family and peer support. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 70(4), 650–657. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.11.019>
- Kusina, J. R., & Exline, J. J. (2019). Beyond body image: A systematic review of classroom-based interventions targeting body image of adolescents. *Adolescent Research Review*, 4, 293–311. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-019-00121-1>
- Laursen, B., & Hartl, A. C. (2013). Understanding loneliness during adolescence: Developmental changes that increase the risk of perceived social isolation. *Journal of Adolescence*, 36(6), 1261–1268. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2013.06.003>
- Lawler, M., & Nixon, E. (2011). Body dissatisfaction among adolescent boys and girls: the effects of body mass, peer appearance culture and internalization of appearance ideals. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 40, 59–71. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-009-9500-2>

- Loland, N. W. (2000). The aging body: Attitudes toward bodily appearance among physically active and inactive women and men of different ages. *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*, 8(3), 197–213. <https://doi.org/10.1123/japa.8.3.197>
- Lundgren, J. D., Anderson, D. A., & Thompson, J. K. (2004). Fear of negative appearance evaluation: Development and evaluation of a new construct for risk factor work in the field of eating disorders. *Eating Behaviors*, 5(1), 75–84. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1471-0153\(03\)00055-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1471-0153(03)00055-2)
- Maes, M., Qualter, P., Vanhalst, J., Van den Noortgate, W., & Goossens, L. (2019). Gender differences in loneliness across the lifespan: A meta-analysis. *European Journal of Personality*, 33(6), 642–654. <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.222>
- Marshal, M. P., Dietz, L. J., Friedman, M. S., Stall, R., Smith, H. A., McGinley, J., ... & Brent, D. A. (2011). Suicidality and depression disparities between sexual minority and heterosexual youth: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 49(2), 115–123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2011.02.005>
- Marzola, E., Martini, M., Longo, P., Toppino, F., Bevione, F., Delsedime, N., ... & Preti, A. (2022). Psychometric properties of the Italian body shape questionnaire: an investigation of its reliability, factorial, concurrent, and criterion validity. *Eating and Weight Disorders-Studies on Anorexia, Bulimia and Obesity*, 27(8), 3637–3648. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40519-022-01503-6>
- McDanal, R., Schleider, J. L., Fox, K. R., & Eaton, N. R. (2023). Loneliness in gender-diverse and sexual orientation-diverse adolescents: Measurement invariance analyses and between-group comparisons. *Assessment*, 30(3), 706–727. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10731911211065167>
- McLean, S. A., Rodgers, R. F., Slater, A., Jarman, H. K., Gordon, C. S., & Paxton, S. J. (2022). Clinically significant body dissatisfaction: Prevalence and association with depressive symptoms in adolescent boys and girls. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 31(12), 1921–1932. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-021-01824-4>
- Meyer, D., Sledge, R., Cameron, E., & Manning, D. (2021). Gender Dysphoria and Transgender Concerns in School Counseling: Advocating for Students. *Journal of LGBTQ Issues in Counseling*, 15(4), 406–425. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2021.1938334>
- Meyer, I. H. (2013). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 1(S), 3–26. <https://doi.org/10.1037/2329-0382.1.S.3>
- Mereish, E. H., & Poteat, V. (2015). A relational model of sexual minority mental and physical health: The negative effects of shame on relationships, loneliness, and health. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 62(3), 425–437. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000088>
- Mezzalana, S., Scandurra, C., Mezza, F., Miscioscia, M., Innamorati, M., & Bochicchio, V. (2022). Gender felt pressure, affective domains, and mental health outcomes among transgender and gender diverse (TGD) children and adolescents: a systematic review with developmental and clinical implications. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(1), 785. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20010785>

- Mustanski, B., Andrews, R., & Puckett, J. A. (2016). The effects of cumulative victimization on mental health among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adolescents and young adults. *American Journal of Public Health, 106*(3), 527–533. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302976>
- Nielson, M. G., Tolman, D., Martin, C. L., & Fraser, A. M. (2023). Boys' Internalized Appearance-Related Norms from Different Socializers Uniquely, Negatively Relate to Wellbeing and Gender Beliefs. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 02724316231176961*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02724316231176961>
- O'gorman, B., Sheffield, J., Clarke, R., & Griffiths, S. (2020). "Guys don't talk about their bodies": A qualitative investigation of male body dissatisfaction and sociocultural influences in a sample of 40 Australian males. *Clinical Psychologist, 24*(2), 123–132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cp.12198>
- Pace, U., D'Urso, G., & Fontanesi, L. (2020). The vicissitudes of homophobic victimization in adolescence: an explorative study. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00043>
- Papapanou, T. K., Darviri, C., Kanaka-Gantenbein, C., Tigani, X., Michou, M., Vlachakis, D., ... & Bacopoulou, F. (2023). Strong correlations between social appearance anxiety, use of social media, and feelings of loneliness in adolescents and young adults. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 20*(5), 4296. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20054296>
- Pereira, H., Silva, P., & Beatriz, C. (2022, April). The impact of psychological distress on the occupational well-being of sexual and gender minorities. *Healthcare, 10*(4), 699. MDPI. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare10040699>
- Presnell, K., Bearman, S. K., & Stice, E. (2004). Risk factors for body dissatisfaction in adolescent boys and girls: A prospective study. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 36*(4), 389–401. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.20045>
- Pulice-Farrow, L., Cusack, C. E., & Galupo, M. P. (2020). "Certain parts of my body don't belong to me": Trans individuals' descriptions of body-specific gender dysphoria. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy, 17*, 654–667. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-019-00423-y>
- Rogers, A. A., Nielson, M. G., & Santos, C. E. (2021). Manning up while growing up: A developmental-contextual perspective on masculine gender-role socialization in adolescence. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities, 22*(2), 354–364. <https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000296>
- Russell, D., Peplau, L. A., & Ferguson, M. L. (1978). Developing a measure of loneliness. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 42*(3), 290–294. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa4203_11
- Russell, S. T., & Fish, J. N. (2016). Mental health in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 12*, 465–487. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-021815-093153>
- Russell, S. T., Bishop, M. D., Saba, V. C., James, I., & Ioverno, S. (2021). Promoting school

- safety for LGBTQ and all students. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 8(2), 160–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23727322211031938>
- Schwartz, S. J., Klimstra, T. A., Luyckx, K., Hale, W. W., III, & Meeus, W. H. J. (2012). Characterizing the self-system over time in adolescence: Internal structure and associations with internalizing symptoms. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 41, 1208–1225. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-012-9751-1>
- Shiffman, M., VanderLaan, D. P., Wood, H., Hughes, S. K., Owen-Anderson, A., Lumley, M. M., Lollis, S. P., & Zucker, K. J. (2016). Behavioral and emotional problems as a function of peer relationships in adolescents with gender dysphoria: A comparison with clinical and nonclinical controls. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 3(1), 27–36. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000152>
- Spencer, K. G., Berg, D. R., Bradford, N. J., Vencill, J. A., Tellawi, G., & Rider, G. N. (2021). The gender-affirmative life span approach: A developmental model for clinical work with transgender and gender-diverse children, adolescents, and adults. *Psychotherapy*, 58(1), 37–49. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pst0000363>
- Vannucci, A., & Ohannessian, C. M. (2018). Body image dissatisfaction and anxiety trajectories during adolescence. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 47(5), 785–795. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2017.1390755>
- Ward, L. M., & Grower, P. (2020). Media and the development of gender role stereotypes. *Annual Review of Developmental Psychology*, 2, 177–199. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-devpsych-051120-010630>
- Wong, N. M., Yeung, P. P., & Lee, T. M. (2018). A developmental social neuroscience model for understanding loneliness in adolescence. *Social Neuroscience*, 13(1), 94–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17470919.2016.1256832>
- Xu, X., Mellor, D., Kiehne, M., Ricciardelli, L. A., McCabe, M. P., & Xu, Y. (2010). Body dissatisfaction, engagement in body change behaviors and sociocultural influences on body image among Chinese adolescents. *Body Image*, 7(2), 156–164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2009.11.003>

THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GENDER IDENTITY, LONELINESS, AND BODY DISSATISFACTION AMONG ADOLESCENTS

Dr. Oksana Malinauskienė
Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania

Summary

Identity formation is an important developmental process during adolescence. The interaction between adolescents' gender identity, loneliness, and body dissatisfaction is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Adolescent gender identity issues are thought to be related to loneliness, and body dissatisfaction is a risk factor for greater loneliness. It can be hypothesized that adolescents experiencing gender identity issues could feel lonelier when experiencing greater body dissatisfaction. The present study aims to determine associations among adolescents' (girls and boys) gender identity, loneliness, body dissatisfaction, and fear of negative appearance evaluation, as well as to examine the possible mediating roles of body dissatisfaction and fear of negative appearance evaluation between adolescents' gender identity and loneliness, and how these phenomena differ for girls and boys.

The sample consists of 211 adolescents in the 10th grade from five secondary public schools (gymnasiums) in Vilnius, Lithuania, 54.5% of whom were girls and 45.5% boys. Participants were between the ages of 15 and 17 ($M_{age} = 16.20$, $SD_{age} = 0.43$). During the study, adolescents were asked to fill out self-reported questionnaires: gender identity was measured using the Gender Identity/Gender Dysphoria Questionnaire for Adolescents and Adults (GIDYQ-AA; Deogracias et al., 2007); subjective feelings of loneliness were measured using the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978); body dissatisfaction was measured using the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ; Dowson & Henderson, 2001); and the Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Scale (FNAES; Thomas et al., 1998; cited by Lundgren, Anderson, & Thompson, 2004) was used to measure apprehension regarding appearance evaluation.

The processing and analysis of results was achieved using the IBM SPSS v.26.0 statistical package. First, comparative and correlation analysis was performed; second, the PROCESS v.4.1 for SPSS (Model 14) was used, and moderated mediation analysis was performed.

The results of this study reveal that the gender identity of both girls and boys is negatively related to loneliness, body dissatisfaction, and fear of negative appearance evaluation. The results also show that the association between gender identity and loneliness is mediated by body dissatisfaction, and that the association between body dissatisfaction and loneliness is stronger for boys than for girls, but fear of negative appearance evaluation does not mediate the association between gender identity and loneliness. This study outlines

the need to begin to pay more attention to the experiences of boys regarding body dissatisfaction and illustrates the importance of examining adolescents' gender differences in body dissatisfaction, loneliness, and gender identity.

Given the unique challenges that adolescents with gender identity issues face regarding body acceptance, they must have access to supportive environments and mental health resources that can assist them in their self-discovery, self-acceptance, and overall well-being, e.g., by reducing loneliness given the special obstacles that adolescents encounter around body acceptance. Thus, it is especially important to create inclusive and affirming environments that recognize and validate diverse gender identities.

Keywords: *adolescents, gender identity, loneliness, body dissatisfaction, fear of negative appearance evaluation.*

Oksana Malinauskienė, PhD in Social Sciences (Psychology), postdoctoral researcher at the Applied Psychology Research Laboratory at Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania). Research areas: adolescence, gender identity, emotional and behavioral problems, parenting.