

# Relationship of Body Image and Emotion Regulation Strategies among Male University Students

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## ABSTRACT

This study attempted to determine the relationship between body image and emotion regulation strategies. Employing the descriptive (survey) method by random technique sampling with the aid of body image questionnaire (BESA) and emotion regulation strategies questionnaire (CERQ), the current study collected data from 305 male undergrad students enrolled for the diploma and degree of the year 2021 to 2024 at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Samarahan Campus, Sarawak (UiTM). The questionnaire culled background information, then requested respondents to rate their body image and emotion regulation strategies, and rate all on a five-point scale. To test consistency, Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was used, while Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson  $r$ ) was used to measure the correlation among the variables. The reliability of the body image and emotion regulation strategies that were tested using Cronbach alpha obtained a coefficient of 0.742 and 0.841 respectively, indicating a good level of reliability. The results revealed that body image and emotion regulation strategies have a significant positive correlation with  $r=0.406$ ,  $n=305$ , and  $p<0.001$  with moderate strength. The relationship between body image and emotion regulation strategies depicted not harmful to mental and physical health. This finding shows that adolescent male tends to have high body appreciation, and this body compassion is associated with mental activities and self-care behaviors that foster rational self-talk and acceptance of one's experiences. Future research can focus on different age (male adult) and economical status as these factors might have an impact on their wellbeing.

**Keywords:** Body image, emotion regulation strategies

## INTRODUCTION

Body image is a multifaceted construct that significantly influences an individual's self-esteem and emotional well-being (Cash & Smolak, 2011). It is evident that there are abundance of images that promote near-perfect bodies (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020) especially in commercial exposing both male and female the likely to experience threats to their body image (Cash, 2012). Indeed, several common situations or events might also trigger body-related thoughts and feeling that are experienced as unwanted and oppressing (Cash, 2012). As societal standards of beauty continue to evolve, the pressure to conform can lead individuals to develop negative perceptions of their bodies, often resulting in emotional distress. This distress can manifest in various forms, including anxiety, depression, and low self-worth, ultimately impacting one's overall quality of life (Stice, 2002).

In the face of these challenges, emotion regulation strategies become crucial tools for individuals seeking to navigate their feelings surrounding body image (Cash et al., 2005). Body image and coping strategies are key elements for one's wellbeing. Emotion regulation refers to the processes by which individuals influence their emotional experiences and expressions (Gross, 2002). Strategies such as cognitive reframing, mindfulness, and self-compassion have shown promise in mitigating the adverse effects of negative body image. For instance, individuals practicing mindfulness may cultivate a non-judgmental awareness of their thoughts and feelings,

which can reduce the intensity of negative emotions tied to body dissatisfaction (Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). Other research has shown that adopting certain strategies might be related to specific mental health outcomes, such as eating disorders symptoms (Cash et al., 2005), body shame (Choma et al., 2009), bulimic, depressive and anxiety symptoms, drive for thinness (Hughes & Gullone, 2011), greater body image inflexibility (Mancuso, 2016), lower life satisfaction and self-esteem, higher negative affect, and body surveillance (Rollero et al., 2017).

There are many studies about between body image that compare Western and Asian countries. One limitation of these past studies was assuming that all Asian countries are a homogenous group. There was a study examined the relationship between body image and weight status between participant from Taiwan and South Korea, showing different strength of the relationship (Noh et al., 2018). The report showed the weight over-perception was more evident in South Korea than in Taiwan. Although many studies have been carried out in this field, cultural and upbringing in different countries might have an impact on how male adolescent accept themselves, particularly in other Southern Asian country such as Malaysia. Based in these consideration, the present study aimed to examine the relationship between body image and emotional coping strategies among male university students in Malaysia. The question is, what is the relationship of body image and emotion regulation strategies among male university students in Malaysia? Thus, the aim of the present study was to examine the relationship of body image perception and the emotion regulation strategies among male university student in Universiti Teknologi MARA Samarahan Kampus in Sarawak, Malaysia.

The null hypothesis is that there is no significant relationship between body image and emotion regulation strategies among male UiTM students. The alternate hypothesis is that there is a significant relationship between body image and emotion regulation strategies among male UiTM students.

## **METHOD AND MATERIAL**

### **Sample and Procedures**

After obtaining approval from UiTM Sarawak Ethics Committee, a pilot study with a total of 30 participants was conducted to ensure the reliability of the instruments and the feasibility of the study. The reliability of the scales was tested using Cronbach's alpha. Then, a cross-sectional survey was conducted on a volunteer sample of 305 male university pre-selected students from undergrad students enrolled for the diploma and degree of the year 2021 to 2024 at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Samarahan Campus, Sarawak, Malaysia (UiTM). The students were randomly selected in campus. After explaining the purpose of the research, the students agreed to participate in the study. All participants were provided written informed consent. A self-administrated questionnaire was used to acquire socio-demographic information such as age, ethnicity, athlete status and faculty.

The sample size required was according to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula indicating a sample of 254 people from the current enrolled population of 1300 at the time. Another 20% was added to the sample size to account for potential non-response and dropouts, giving a target sample size of N=305.

### **Variables**

#### **Body Image Questionnaire**

Body image questionnaire (BESA) of trust and satisfaction from the body consist of 23 items (Mandelson et al, 2001) with a Likert scale of 5 degrees form "totally disagree" with a score of 0 to "fully agrees" with a score of 5. The questionnaire shows a general and responsive view of its appearance and body. The score ranges of the questionnaire from 0 to 115 with a higher score indicating greater satisfaction with the body.

#### **Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies Questionnaire**

The cognitive emotion regulation strategies questionnaire (CERQ) have 36 items. This questionnaire was developed by Garnefski, Kraaij and Spinhoven (2001). This scale consists of 9 sub-scales and each of which

assesses a specific strategy. The sub-categories are self-blame, blaming others, acceptance, refocusing on planning, positive refocusing, rumination, positive reappraisal, putting into perspective, and catastrophizing. Responses are given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “almost never” to “almost always”. The total score range is from 36 to 180. Higher subscale scores indicating greater frequency of use of the specific cognitive strategy.

**Statistical Analysis**

All analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 26.0. the results were expressed as mean values and standard deviations (SD). To test consistency, Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was used, while Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson  $r$ ) was used to measure the correlation among the variables. The level of  $p < 0.05$  was considered significant.

**RESULTS**

**Descriptive Statistics**

The descriptive statistics for the participants (N = 305) questionnaires are shown in Table 1. The mean scores of body image questionnaire were used to perceive and think about the body from male UiTM students. The results indicated that trust and satisfaction subscales had the mean score of  $M = 3.18$ . Subsequently, the emotions regulations strategies subscales were used to identify a person’s ability to effectively manage and respond to emotional experiences. It is a cognitive processes and approaches individuals use to analyse, understand, and solve problems or make decisions. The results indicated that emotion regulation strategies had a mean score of  $M = 3.43$ .

Table 1: Descriptive statistics results of respondents’ questionnaire (N = 305)

	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Body Image	3.18	0.46
Emotions Regulation	3.43	0.50

**Inferential Statistics**

This study attempted to investigate the relationship between body image and emotion regulation strategies. This research question was explored using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson  $r$ ). As for this study, it was using Cohen’s rule of thumb (1988) for guidelines of interpretation of the strength of relationship. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumption of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted to examine correlation between male students’ body image and emotion regulation variables at the 0.05 level of significant. From the significant relationships identified in Table 2, it can be seen that there was significant correlation observed and the results indicated a medium correlation ( $r = .406$ ,  $n = 305$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between body images and emotion regulation strategies. Thus, the study rejected the null hypothesis that has been set earlier.

Table 2: Correlations between male student’s Body Images and Emotion Regulations Strategies in UiTM Sarawak (N=305)

<b>Subscales</b>	<b>Body Images</b>	<b>Emotions Regulation</b>
Body Images	1	0.406*
Emotions Regulation	0.406*	1

\* $p < 0.05$  level (2-tailed)

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## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The relationship between body image and emotion regulation strategies among male university students is a nuanced topic that involves understanding how perceptions of one's physical appearance influence the ways in which individuals manage their emotions.

This study observed to distinguish the differences of body image perception on emotion regulation strategies among male UiTM students. The expected differences among UiTM male students did arise modestly from the fact that there was a significant and positive correlation observed in emotion regulation strategies regarding students' body image.

Body images perception was associated with emotions regulations strategies. The mean score in body image questionnaire showed that the scale of 'sometimes' indicating students' satisfaction and trust with one's body, means how content or dissatisfied individuals feel about their physical appearance. Equivalent to the mean score of cognitive emotion regulations questionnaire, it revealed that 'occasionally' individuals used these methods like self-blaming, blaming others, accepting events, revising planning, positive re-focusing, rumination, positive re-evaluation, and reaching an outline to manage and respond to their emotional experiences and to feel confident and secure of their body image.

There is existing research highlight how variations in body image satisfaction and trust affect different emotion regulation strategies. For instance on the satisfaction, lower body image satisfaction may increase tendencies to self-blame when facing challenges. Individuals might perceive their physical appearance as a source of personal shortcomings, leading to negative self-judgment (Schaefer & Kinnally, 2020). Individuals with lower satisfaction might externalize blame to protect their self-esteem, as attributing issues to external factors can alleviate the discomfort of self-blame. Higher body image satisfaction is generally associated with better acceptance of events. Individuals with a positive body image are often more resilient and can more readily accept and adapt to various situations (Tiggemann & Slater, 2021). Those with higher body image satisfaction may be more flexible in adjusting plans and strategies due to increased confidence and less preoccupation with body-related concerns.

Regardless, on the body image trust, this component interact on how higher trust in body image often correlates with a greater ability to re-focus on positive and pleasurable aspects of life. This trust provides a stable emotional foundation that makes positive re-focusing easier (Kearney-Cooke & Tieger, 2022). Individuals with lower body image trust may be more prone to rumination, as insecurity about their appearance can lead to repetitive and negative thought patterns. In addition, high trust in body image can facilitate positive re-evaluation of events and experiences. Individuals who trust their body image are likely to view challenges and setbacks in a more optimistic light. Those with high body image trust may be better at creating structured plans and strategies to handle future events, as they have a more stable self-view and are less affected by body image concerns (Pope et al., 2021; Vogel & Wester, 2020).

Among these male university students, the results supported a significant moderate and positive correlation, it implies that while body image significantly impacts emotion regulation strategies, the strength and nature of this impact may vary such as an individual with high body image satisfaction and low body image trust may exhibit different emotion regulation patterns compared to someone with low satisfaction but high trust. It may indicate that body image dissatisfaction moderately affects self-blaming and rumination but has a weaker impact on positive re-focusing and acceptance. Consistent with Paddock & Bell (2021) studies, interactions with peers regarding appearance can be both positive and negative. Positive feedback about appearance, especially if one is popular and attractive, tends to be well received. Conversely, negative comments about appearance can be problematic, though they are not always intended to be harmful.

Moreover, as indicated by Gilbert & Meyer (2005) correlation between body image and positive thoughts suggests that differentiating these aspects in some studies can be challenging as it also can be influenced by other factors such as individual differences in personal traits, cultural background, and social influences. Individuals who experience higher levels of anxiety are more likely to feel dissatisfied with their appearance.

During adolescence, the concerns about how one is evaluated by others, particularly regarding their appearance, are notably significant.

Ultimately, fostering a healthy relationship between body image and emotion regulations involve understanding or accepting oneself, acknowledging the influence of emotions on body perception, working towards a balanced and positive self-image. Bottamini & Ste-Marie (2006) posits that the discussion surrounds the male voice on level of body image and emotion perceived motivations and behaviors employed to maintain their desired body type.

Understanding these relationships helps in identifying areas where interventions can be targeted. Interventions such as counselling and support, where the university providing counselling that addresses body image issues can improve emotion regulation strategies. This might include cognitive-behavioural approaches that focus on altering negative body image perceptions. Apart from that, workshops and programs. Implementing workshops that enhance body image positivity and teach effective emotion regulation techniques can benefit male university students.

In summary, the exploration of body image satisfaction and trust reveals a significant yet nuanced relationship with emotion regulation strategies among male UiTM students. Body image satisfaction and trust fundamentally shape how individuals manage their emotions, influencing their approaches to self-blaming, acceptance, positive re-focusing, and other key strategies. The influence of body image on emotion regulation is not absolute but moderate, suggesting that while body image plays a crucial role. Hence, in enhancing body image satisfaction and trust, it can lead to more effective emotion regulation, reducing the likelihood of maladaptive strategies like excessive rumination or self-blaming. This, in turn, supports better emotional stability and overall well-being. Other than that, fostering a positive body image, male students can develop healthier coping mechanisms, improving their ability to manage stress and navigate challenges both academically and personally.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The current study was approved by the Ethic Committee of UiTM Sarawak.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The author declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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