

Relationship among Self-Objectification, Emotional Regulation and Perceived Stress in University Students

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The aim of the study was to examine the relationship among Self-Objectification, Emotional Regulation and Perceived Stress in University students. The sample of University Students ($N=200$) with the age range of 19-24 years was recruited. Assessment measure included demographic form, Self -Objectification Scale (SOQ; Fredrickson et al.,1998), Emotional Regulation Scale (ERQ: Gross & John, 2003) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS: Cohen, 1983). The results showed that emotional regulation is significantly positively related with perceived stress. However, the relationship of self objectification and perceived stress is not significant. Moreover, Regression analysis revealed that the emotional regulation and type of institute are significant predictors of perceived stress. Furthermore, emotional regulation significantly mediated the relationship between self objectification and perceived stress.

Keywords: Self-Objectification; Emotional Regulation; Perceived Stress; University Students

Prevalence of perceived stress is alarmingly increasing in university students. The researchers reported that prevalence of stress in university students was 84.4% (Asif et al.,2020). Self-objectification causes stress and effects mental health (Tiggemann & Slater, 2015). Self-objectification refers to valuing oneself on the basis of appearance. It is linked to negative emotions such as anxiety and body shame (Winn & Cornelius, 2020). Emotion regulation is the ability to regulate emotions. It is influenced by self-objectification. Emotional dysregulation causes stress (Arias & Vera Martínez, 2020). Perceived stress is related with self-objectification and emotional dysregulation (Dimas et al.,2021). Therefore, it is important to study the relationship of self-objectification, emotional regulation and perceived stress in university students.

Self Objectification can be defined as viewing one self as an object instead of human being. It effects wellbeing of an individual (Arroyo et al.,2014). Concept of self objectification is based on objectification theory. According to this theory three types of self objectification exposures are: direct comments from others, indirect communication from others and content of media that objectifies body of women (Fredrickson & Roberts,1997). In self objectification individuals judge themselves on the basis of appearance which effect emotional regulation (Monachesi et al.,2023).

Emotional regulation can be defined as the ability to manage and control emotions. Two major types of emotional regulation are: cognitive reappraisal and emotive suppression. Cognitive reappraisal refers to reinterpreting the stressful situation. It is healthy and adaptive emotional regulation strategy. Emotive suppression is defined as suppressing ones emotions to deal with stressful situation. It is unhealthy and maladaptive strategy of emotional regulation (Gross & John, 2003). Emotional dysregulation causes stress. Katana and colleagues (2019) reported that emotional regulation was negatively related with perceived stress.

Perceived stress can be defined the degree to which situations are appraised as stressful. It measures individual's thoughts and feelings about unpredictability, uncontrollability of stress and coping ability (Phillips, 2016). Perceived stress affect mental health of students (Alwhaibi et al.,

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2023). Therefore, it is important to study the relationship of Self Objectification, Emotional Regulation and perceived stress in university students.

Research Objectives

- 1) To investigate the relationship among Self Objectification, Emotional Regulation and perceived stress in university students.
- 2) To find the mediating role of emotional regulation in the relationship of self objectification and perceived stress in university students.

Method

Research Design

Correlational research design was used to investigate the relationship of self objectification, emotional regulation and perceived stress in university students.

Participants

Sample comprised of 200 (male and female) university students. Hundred male and hundred female were recruited. Age range of sample was 18 to 24 year. Sample was recruited from different universities of Lahore, Pakistan. Regular university students were recruited. Students suffering from any physical disability or psychological illness were excluded from the study.

Measures

For current study following measures were used in the study:

Demographic Sheet

Demographic information sheet was used to gather personal information. It included age, gender, education level, semester, institute, number of siblings, family members, birth order, relationship with father, relationship with mother, social economic status and daily Social media Usage.

Self-Objectification Questionnaire (SOQ)

This scale was developed by Fredrickson and colleagues (1998). This scale comprised of two subscales: self-objectification trait and self-objectification state. The trait form (SOS-T) measure how much a person in general self objectifies. The state form (SOS-S) measure how a person is objectifying right now. It consists of 15 items. All the items are being rated on 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (5). Cronbach's alpha reliability is 0.88. (Fredrickson, et al., 1998).

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (EQR)

It was used to measure emotional regulation. It consists of 10-items. It has two subscales: cognitive reappraisal, emotional suppression. All items are rated on 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). The Cronbach's Alpha was 0.83 (Gross & John, 2003).

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

It was used to measure perceived stress. It consists of 14 items. It uses 5-point Likert scale ranging from *never* (0) to *very often* (4). Seven items are reverse scored: 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 13. Total score is sum of all items. Cronbach's α was .79. (Cohen et al., 1983).

Procedure

First of all, permission were taken from authors of the scales. Permission was taken for data collection from respective authorities. A general overview of the purpose of the research was briefly described to the participants. Consent was taken from the participants. Instructions regarding the questionnaire were also provided to the participants. They were assured of confidentiality. Participants were also informed about right to withdraw if they want at any point. After the data collection, the data was entered in SPSS and analyzed.

Results**Table 1**

Inter-correlation among Self-objectification, Emotional Regulation and Perceived Stress in University Students (N=200)

| Variables | Institute | SOS | ERQ | PSS |
|-----------|-----------|--------|-------|--------|
| Institute | - | .237** | .129 | .190** |
| SOS | | - | .170* | .097 |
| ERQ | | | - | .201** |
| PSS | | | | - |

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; SOS= Self-Objectification, ERQ= Emotional Regulation, PSS= Perceived Stress Scale

Table 1 shows that the emotional regulation and perceived stress are significantly positively related. Additionally, the type of institute also has significant positive correlation with perceived stress.

Table 2

Regression analyses showing Self-objectification and Emotional regulation as a predictors of Perceived Stress in University Students (N=200).

| Predictors | Perceived Stress | |
|-------------------|------------------|---------|
| | ΔR^2 | β |
| | .07** | |
| SO | | .03 |
| ER | | .18* |
| Type of Institute | | .16* |

Note: SO=Self-Objectification, ER=Emotional Regulation, ΔR^2 = change in R square, $p < .05$

This table shows that emotional regulation and type of institute are significant positive predictors of perceived stress. Likewise, it was postulated that emotional regulation significantly mediate the relationship between self objectification and perceived stress.

Table 3

Mediation Analysis Showing Emotional Regulation as a Mediator between Self-Objectification and Perceived Stress (N=200).

| Paths | Estimates | SE | 95 CI | | t | p |
|-----------------|-----------|-----|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| | | | LL | UL | | |
| Indirect Effect | .02 | .01 | .001 | .05 | | |
| SO →ER | .26 | .10 | .04 | .47 | 2.4 | .01 |
| ER →PS | .08 | .03 | .02 | .15 | 2.6 | .01 |
| Direct Effect | .05 | .05 | -.05 | .14 | .92 | .35 |
| Total Effect | .07 | .05 | -.02 | .16 | 1.3 | .17 |

Note: SO= Self-objectification, ER =Emotional Regulation, PS = Perceived Stress, SE=Standard Error, CI = Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL =Upper Limit.

This table shows that indirect effect is significant which indicates that emotional regulation significantly mediate the relationship between self-objectification and perceived stress. Furthermore, it was assumed that there is likely to be significant gender differences on perceived stress in university students.

Table 4

Independent sample T-Test of showing mean differences in Perceived Stress in University Students (N=200)

| Variable | Male | Female | 95% CI | | | |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|--------|-----|-------|------|
| | (N=100) | (N=100) | t(198) | p | LL | UL |
| | M(SD) | M(SD) | | | | |
| Perceived Stress | 19.95(5.89) | 21.43(5.16) | -1.88 | .06 | -3.02 | .066 |

Note: p=significance level, LL=Lower Limit, UL= Upper Limit.

Table 3 indicates no significant gender differences on perceived stress in university students.

Discussion

The purpose of our research was to identify the relationship among self objectification, emotional regulation and perceived stress in university students. It was hypothesized that there is likely to be significant positive correlation of self objectification and emotional regulation with perceived stress in university students. The results indicated that emotional regulation has significant positive correlation with perceived stress. Similarly, the researchers reported that emotional regulation and stress are positively related in university students (Peixoto et al., 2022).

Moreover, It was postulated self objectification and emotional regulation are significant predictors of perceived stress in university students. The results revealed that emotional regulation is the significant predictor of perceived stress. Likewise, the researchers reported that ability to regulate emotions predict stress significantly (Kadović, et al.,2022).

Furthermore, it was assumed that emotional regulation significantly mediate the relationship between self objectification and perceived stress in university students. Mediation analysis was run via process The results indicated that emotional regulation significantly mediate the relationship between self objectification and perceived stress. Specifically, mediating role of emotional regulation in the above mentioned relationship is not studied yet. However, self objectification causes stress and emotional regulation helps in responding to stressful situation in an adaptive way

(Kadovic et al.,2022). Consequently, it is possible that emotional regulation may mediate the relationship between self-objectification and perceived stress significantly.

Additionally, it was hypothesized that there is likely to be significant gender differences on perceived stress in university students. The results show non significant gender differences on perceived stress. Likewise, Graves and colleagues (2021) reported non significant gender differences on perceived stress in university students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that emotional regulation is significantly related with perceived stress. Moreover, emotional regulation significantly mediate the relationship between self objectification and perceived stress.

Implications

Awareness programs should be planned to reduce self objectification in university students as it effect emotional regulation and leads to perceived stress. University students who are vulnerable to self objectification should be identified and interventions should be planned for their emotional wellbeing and stress management

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