

I Have My Own Standards: Positive Body Image Among Early Adult K-Pop Fans

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, K-Pop has become a global sensation, especially in Indonesia, where it has a massive fan base on social media. While K-Pop brings joy to many, it has also raised concerns about its impact on body image, especially among young fans known as K-Popers. This study explores how young women who are fans of K-Pop feel about their bodies. Through interviews and observations, three participants—Yerin, Joy, and Rose—shared their thoughts. Despite K-Pop's influence on beauty standards, these women have a positive body image. They feel good about themselves and focus on self-confidence rather than what others think. Their stories show how they navigate societal pressures and find acceptance for their bodies. By prioritizing self-esteem and support from friends, they maintain a positive outlook despite external beauty ideals. This research sheds light on how K-Pop fans view their bodies and offers insights into promoting body positivity. It's important for researchers and others to continue exploring these issues to create a more accepting environment for everyone to feel good about themselves.

Keywords: positive body image, k-pop fans, self-esteem, body satisfaction, social support



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, peaking during the pandemic, the phenomenon of Korean Pop, or K-Pop, has emerged prominently (Niswah & Zahro, 2021). According to Yulius in "K-Pop: A New Force in Pop Music," the term K-Pop originates from "Korean Pop." The usage of K-Pop began as Korean music gained international recognition, marked by the formation of idol groups, including boy bands and girl bands. Following its success in the music industry, Korea expanded its influence into the film and drama industries (Niswah & Zahro, 2021). An official report released by Twitter, as highlighted in a CNN Indonesia article from January 26, 2022, records Indonesia as having the largest number of K-Pop fans on social media in 2021. Additionally, according to a report by Kompas.com, Indonesia ranked first for the highest number of K-Pop related tweets in 2020 (Raditya, 2021). Mahmudah (as cited in Aristantya & Helmi, 2019) mentions that K-Pop fans are commonly referred to as K-Popers, who are individuals or groups fond of popular music from South Korea.

In Indonesia, K-Pop is beloved for its unique music and engaging dance routines, making K-Popers enthusiastic followers of the dance moves of their favorite boy bands or girl bands (Praundrianagari & Cahyono, 2021). Furthermore, K-Pop is admired for the visual appeal of its group members, which K-Popers find attractive. However, the K-Pop culture also has its negative impacts, particularly concerning physical appearance. It is well-known that Korean girl bands and boy bands possess appealing and seemingly perfect appearances from a fan's perspective, characterized by slender bodies, fair skin, tall stature, and modern hairstyles, aligning with the unique features of these bands (Idris, 2020).

An ideal body is coveted by all ages. K-Popers, predominantly teenagers to young adults, consider the body an essential aspect (Idris, 2020). Thus, young adults strive to present themselves as attractively as possible to others (Santoso et al., 2019). How one appears significantly supports social life. Currently, physical beauty is highly desired, especially among

adult women, leading to a focus solely on external appearance, thereby neglecting the body's primary functions (Sumanty et al., 2018). According to Hurlock (1999), early adulthood developmental tasks include starting a career, choosing a partner, beginning a family, raising children, managing a household, fulfilling civic duties, and finding a satisfying social group (Muslimah & Rahmawati, 2018). Attractive physical appearance typically brings personal satisfaction. This satisfaction is closely related to one's perception of their body image (Santoso et al., 2019).

Body image, as defined by Holigman and Castle, is an individual's mental representation of their body size and shape and how they believe others perceive them (Alidia, 2018). If an individual has a positive or healthy body image, they will likely have a favorable view of their body size and shape, feeling comfortable with their body, which translates into self-confidence and a healthy self-concept (Alidia, 2018). Conversely, someone with a negative body image will have a poor assessment of their body condition, viewing it as unattractive to others (Ramonda et al., 2019). Cash & Pruzinsky (2002) outlined five aspects of body image: (a) Appearance evaluation involves judging whether one's appearance is attractive or not; (b) Appearance orientation refers to the attention and effort one puts into enhancing their appearance; (c) Body areas satisfaction indicates how satisfied individuals are with certain body parts; (d) Overweight preoccupation involves fear of gaining weight and behaviors undertaken to achieve an ideal body; (e) Self-classified weight is an individual's perception of their weight category. Cash and Pruzinsky (in Anggraheni & Rahmandani, 2019) describe several factors influencing body image development: (a) Cultural socialization impacts body image as cultures have expectations and standards for appearance; (b) Interpersonal experiences shape individual body image through expectations, opinions, and verbal and non-verbal communications within families, friends, and others, prompting people to adopt and compare themselves to societal appearance standards; (c) Individual physical characteristics also play a crucial role in body image development. Continuous physical changes affect self and others' perceptions of one's physical appearance; (d) Personality, particularly self-esteem, is a significant factor in body image. High self-esteem can foster positive body evaluation and support resilience against negative body image influences, while low self-esteem may increase the likelihood of negative body image.

Research conducted by Noky (2015) found that body image among K-Pop community members in Solo was predominantly positive, at 53.5%. Consistent with Noky's findings, a study by Hakim (2018) on eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Bojongsoang also reported positive body image outcomes. Additionally, research by Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) on positive body image among young adult women identified several positive body image traits, including appreciating their body's unique beauty and functionality, filtering appearance-related comments and media standards, defining beauty broadly, and focusing on body assets while minimizing perceived flaws. Given the issues outlined above and the scarcity of research on positive body image, this study aims to further investigate positive body image, particularly among early adult K-Pop fans (K-Popers).

METHODS

This research employs a phenomenological approach to deeply understand the process through which positive body image is formed among early adult K-Pop fans (K-Popers). The phenomenological method was chosen to provide an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences and perceptions. The participant selection technique used in this study is purposive sampling, a method where participants are chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2023). Such criteria might include the individuals' ability to provide

pertinent information or their accessibility to the social contexts under examination (Sugiyono, 2023). The participant criteria for this study are early adult female K-Pop fans aged 18–25 years who exhibit a positive body image. To ascertain the presence of a positive body image, the researchers initially distributed a questionnaire. The measurement tool employed was the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) short version by Cooper et al., which has been translated into Indonesian. A body image is considered positive if the score is less than 38 and negative if greater than 38. From the questionnaire results, five participants scored below 38. These participants were Yerin with a score of 31, Joy with 32, Rose with 27, Lisa with 25, and Jiso with 33. The researcher contacted all five, but only three—Yerin, Joy, and Rose—responded and agreed to participate in the study.

Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews and observation. Interviews aimed to delve deeper into the subjects' body image development and how they maintain a positive body image amidst the influence of K-Pop culture. Each interview lasted approximately 20-40 minutes, though this duration could extend depending on the interview's content. Observations focused on participants' appearances, such as their clothing choices, gestures, and expressions during the interview process. Data credibility was ensured through technique triangulation, checking consistency across interviews, observations, and questionnaires (Denzin, 2017; Flick, 2018). The data analysis process involved organizing the interview transcripts, thoroughly analyzing and repeatedly reviewing the data to identify patterns, categorizing, and numerically ordering the interview excerpts. The final step was interpretation, deeply understanding the categorized data to uncover the underlying meanings within the text.



Figure 1. Research Flowchart

This methodological framework, supported by an array of references, underscores the comprehensive approach taken to explore the nuanced experiences of K-Popers and their body image perceptions, offering a well-rounded understanding of the phenomenon under study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Broadly, this study categorizes its findings based on the research questions concerning appearance evaluation, appearance orientation, body areas satisfaction, overweight preoccupation, and self-classified weight. Additionally, the research questions address factors influencing the development of an individual's positive body image.

Appearance Evaluation Expanded

Appearance evaluation critically underscores an individual's self-perception of their physical attractiveness, playing a pivotal role in shaping their overall body image (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). In this study, participants Yerin, Joy, and Rose provided invaluable insights into their self-assessment, revealing a notable level of satisfaction with their appearance. Their self-ratings, with Yerin and Joy marking an 8/10 and Rose a higher 9/10, demonstrate a strong positive correlation with their sense of self-worth and body image. These self-assessment scores are corroborated by the results from the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ), a reliable and validated tool used to measure body image perceptions (Cooper et al., 1987). The BSQ

scores obtained—31 for Yerin, 32 for Joy, and an even lower 27 for Rose—underscore a significant positive body image, particularly pronounced in Rose's case. The threshold score of less than 38 as an indicator of positive body image situates all three participants well within the range of having a healthy perception of their bodies. The importance of appearance evaluation is further emphasized by research indicating that a positive self-view in terms of physical appearance can significantly contribute to overall psychological well-being (Tiggemann, 2004). The positive ratings and BSQ scores reflect a broader narrative consistent with literature suggesting that individuals with a positive appearance evaluation tend to exhibit higher self-esteem and reduced anxiety related to body image (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). Moreover, the context of this evaluation within the K-Pop fandom adds an interesting dimension to the findings. Given that K-Pop culture places a considerable emphasis on aesthetics and visual appeal (Jung, 2011), the participants' positive self-assessment gains additional significance. It suggests that despite the high aesthetic standards often portrayed in K-Pop, fans like Yerin, Joy, and Rose can maintain a positive body image, which could be attributed to their internalization of positive self-worth transcending external beauty ideals.

Expanded Discussion on Appearance Orientation

Appearance orientation, as conceptualized by Cash & Pruzinsky (2002), revolves around the degree of an individual's engagement and investment in cultivating their appearance. This concept not only involves aesthetic choices but also reflects deeper psychological underpinnings related to self-identity and societal interactions. Yerin's and Joy's prioritization of comfort and self-confidence over societal judgments exemplifies a mature approach to appearance orientation, suggesting a strong internal locus of control regarding their self-image. Yerin's stance, emphasizing autonomy over external validation, aligns with findings from Richins (1991), who discusses the minimal influence of societal expectations on individuals with a high internal locus of control regarding appearance. Conversely, Rose's acknowledgment of public perception underscores the nuanced interplay between individual identity and societal feedback. Her perspective resonates with the concept of beauty privilege, which acknowledges the societal advantages conferred upon individuals perceived as attractive (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009). This acknowledgment does not necessarily imply a dependency on external validation but rather an awareness of the social dynamics related to appearance. The participants' clothing choices further illustrate their appearance orientation. Their selection of attire that complements their skin tone and Joy's specific avoidance of tight clothing due to her medical condition (scoliosis) point to a deliberate and thoughtful approach to personal appearance management. Such choices reflect a balance between personal comfort and aesthetic expression, indicating a sophisticated engagement with appearance orientation that transcends mere conformity to fashion trends. This nuanced approach to appearance orientation among the participants is indicative of a broader trend where individual choices in appearance are increasingly seen as acts of personal expression rather than mere compliance with external standards (Tiggemann & Andrew, 2012). The participants' strategies align with the recommendations from researchers like Tiggemann (2005), who advocate for a balanced approach to appearance orientation, emphasizing personal satisfaction and comfort over rigid adherence to societal beauty norms. Furthermore, the care taken in personal appearance choices, particularly in the context of mitigating physical discomfort or enhancing body compatibility (as seen with Joy's clothing preferences), aligns with the principles of body positivity, which emphasize acceptance and adaptation rather than alteration (Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010). This approach reflects a healthy engagement with appearance orientation, where the emphasis is on personal well-being and self-expression.

Body Areas Satisfaction

Body areas satisfaction, as a component of body image, encompasses individuals' perceptions and feelings regarding specific aspects of their physical appearance (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). This facet of body image is intricately linked to self-esteem, psychological well-being, and social interactions, reflecting the multifaceted nature of human perception and self-concept. The interviews conducted with Yerin, Joy, and Rose shed light on their experiences with body areas satisfaction, revealing a nuanced understanding of self-perception and acceptance. Despite their overall positive body image, all three participants expressed dissatisfaction with certain aspects of their bodies, echoing findings from previous research on body image complexity (Long, 2023). This discrepancy between global body image satisfaction and specific body areas dissatisfaction underscores the nuanced nature of body image perceptions and the coexistence of positive and negative evaluations within individuals. Yerin, Joy, and Rose's efforts to accept their perceived flaws align with broader psychological theories emphasizing self-acceptance and self-compassion (Neff, 2003). Their willingness to acknowledge and navigate areas of dissatisfaction reflects a healthy approach to body image, characterized by self-awareness and resilience. Such attitudes are in line with the principles of body positivity, which advocate for embracing diverse body types and challenging unrealistic beauty standards (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Furthermore, the participants' experiences highlight the role of social comparison processes in shaping body areas satisfaction. Research suggests that individuals often evaluate their bodies in comparison to others, leading to discrepancies between perceived and ideal body images (Festinger, 1954). Yerin, Joy, and Rose's dissatisfaction with certain body areas may stem, in part, from societal ideals perpetuated through media representations and interpersonal comparisons (Grabe et al., 2008). Moreover, their continuous striving for acceptance underscores the dynamic nature of body image and the ongoing negotiation between internalized standards and external influences (Grogan, 2008). This process of reconciliation between perceived flaws and societal expectations is central to the development of a healthy body image and self-concept (Cash & Smolak, 2011).

Overweight Preoccupation

Overweight preoccupation, a significant aspect of body image, encompasses individuals' concerns about weight gain and their subsequent behaviors aimed at achieving an idealized body shape (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). This phenomenon reflects the pervasive influence of societal beauty standards and the pressure to conform to unrealistic body ideals, often perpetuated through media representations and cultural norms. The narratives shared by Yerin, Joy, and Rose offer valuable insights into their experiences with overweight preoccupation and the strategies they employ to navigate these concerns. Initially surprised by weight gains, the participants' reactions highlight the pervasive nature of weight-related anxieties and the impact of societal expectations on body image (Grabe et al., 2008). However, their subsequent recognition of personal accountability for these changes suggests a shift towards a more empowered and self-aware mindset, characterized by agency and self-responsibility (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Importantly, the participants' efforts to manage weight were driven not solely by external beauty standards but by a broader emphasis on holistic well-being. This healthier approach to body image reflects a more balanced perspective, prioritizing physical health, and self-care over superficial appearance ideals (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Such attitudes align with the principles of body positivity and intuitive eating, which advocate for acceptance of diverse body shapes and fostering a positive relationship with food and exercise (Tribble & Resch, 2012). Furthermore, the participants' narratives challenge traditional notions

of beauty and highlight the importance of self-acceptance and self-compassion in navigating weight-related concerns (Neff, 2003). By reframing their perceptions of weight gain as a natural and inevitable aspect of the human experience, Yerin, Joy, and Rose demonstrate resilience and self-awareness, essential qualities for cultivating a positive body image (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Moreover, their emphasis on internal well-being over external appearance underscores the need for a paradigm shift in societal attitudes towards body image and weight. Research suggests that promoting body diversity and challenging weight stigma can foster greater acceptance and appreciation of diverse body shapes and sizes (Puhl & Heuer, 2009). By fostering a culture of body acceptance and inclusivity, individuals can cultivate a more positive and compassionate relationship with their bodies, promoting overall psychological health and well-being (Haines et al., 2006).

Self-classified Weight

Self-classified weight, an integral aspect of body image perception, encapsulates individuals' subjective assessments of their weight category (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). The narratives shared by Yerin, Joy, and Rose shed light on their perceptions of weight and its implications for their overall body image. Yerin and Joy's classification of their weight within the normal range signifies a sense of alignment between their subjective perceptions and objective indicators of weight status. This congruence between perceived and actual weight may contribute to a greater sense of body satisfaction and self-acceptance (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Additionally, Joy's acknowledgment of her weight as "light" suggests a nuanced understanding of weight relative to her own body and individual experiences. Such self-awareness and contextualization of weight may foster a more realistic and balanced perspective on body image (Alleva et al., 2017). Importantly, the participants' comfort with their self-classified weight reflects positive body image perceptions, underlining the significance of self-acceptance in shaping overall body satisfaction (Homan & Tylka, 2014). Research suggests that individuals who perceive their weight positively are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviors and experience greater psychological well-being (Quick et al., 2013). By embracing their bodies' diverse shapes and sizes, Yerin, Joy, and Rose exemplify resilience and self-compassion, essential components of cultivating a positive body image (Webb et al., 2015). Furthermore, their narratives challenge the notion of an "ideal" weight category and highlight the subjective nature of weight perception. In a society saturated with narrow beauty standards and unrealistic body ideals, promoting body diversity and acceptance is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and compassionate approach to body image (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). By reframing weight as a dynamic and multifaceted aspect of individual identity, individuals can cultivate a more holistic and empowering relationship with their bodies, promoting overall well-being (Swami et al., 2010).

Factors Influencing Positive Body Image Development

Cultural socialization significantly impacts body image as it shapes the standards and expectations within a culture (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Yerin, Joy, and Rose have moved away from adhering strictly to Korean beauty standards, developing their personalized standards that prioritize comfort and self-acceptance. Interpersonal experiences, including feedback from family and peers, play a crucial role in body image development (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Negative comments have affected Yerin and Rose, but their maturity has enabled them to overcome these influences, fostering a healthier body image. Physical characteristics and self-esteem are key components in body image development. The participants' journey toward accepting their physical selves underscores the importance of self-esteem in cultivating a

positive body image (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Their evolving perspectives and self-acceptance practices, such as positive affirmations, highlight the dynamic nature of body image. Social support has emerged as a significant factor in positive body image development. Yerin, Joy, and Rose received various forms of support, enhancing their comfort and satisfaction with their bodies (Maas et al., 2014; Puspita et al., 2017). This support has been instrumental in their body image integration, demonstrating the value of a nurturing social environment in body image perceptions.

Implications for Counseling and Guidance

The study's results, which examine the link between parent attachment and emotional maturity among adolescents with physical disabilities, have important implications for counseling and guidance services. Counselors should stress the importance of parent attachment in adolescent emotional development. Workshops can help parents understand how their attachment styles impact their children's emotional growth. Encouraging parents to provide consistent support, open communication, and a nurturing environment can boost adolescents' emotional resilience and well-being. Counseling interventions should be customized for adolescents with physical disabilities. Programs should focus on enhancing emotional maturity through coping strategies, self-awareness, and emotional regulation techniques. Individual and group counseling can offer a safe space for these adolescents to express their feelings, develop social skills, and build self-esteem. Family therapy should be included to improve family dynamics and address overprotective parenting. Family sessions can help parents and adolescents understand each other's perspectives, improve communication, and create a supportive home environment. This can help balance necessary support with encouraging independence. Schools are crucial for emotional development. Counselors should work with teachers and staff to create inclusive and supportive environments for students with physical disabilities. Peer support programs and a culture of acceptance can help these students feel valued. Training school staff on supporting students with disabilities can further improve the school environment. Counselors should encourage adolescents with physical disabilities to develop self-advocacy skills and independence. Teaching them to advocate for their needs and make informed decisions can empower them and boost their confidence. Workshops on goal-setting, problem-solving, and decision-making can help these adolescents take control of their lives. Ongoing support is essential as adolescents transition through different stages of development. Follow-up sessions can help them navigate new challenges and reinforce learned skills. Longitudinal support ensures consistent help and resources, promoting sustained emotional growth and well-being. Counselors should collaborate with community organizations that support individuals with disabilities. These organizations can offer additional resources like recreational programs, mentorship, and social events to enhance social and emotional development. Connecting families with these resources creates a comprehensive support network. Individual counseling should focus on the emotional and mental health needs of adolescents with physical disabilities. Techniques like cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) can help them manage negative thoughts and emotions, build self-esteem, and develop coping strategies. Providing a safe environment for discussing feelings and experiences is crucial for emotional well-being. Parental involvement is vital. Counselors should guide parents on supporting their children's independence while maintaining a supportive presence. Involvement in counseling sessions and family activities can strengthen parent-child bonds and create a nurturing home environment. Implementing these strategies can significantly enhance the emotional maturity and overall well-being of adolescents with physical disabilities, helping

them develop resilience, independence, and emotional skills needed to navigate their social environments successfully and lead fulfilling lives.

CONCLUSION

The findings from the above analysis reveal that the three study participants maintain a positive body image, underpinned by self-established standards. They exhibit a significant level of contentment with their appearance, an outcome shaped by a confluence of factors: cultural socialization, interpersonal experiences, individual traits, personality (notably self-esteem), and social support networks. Among these, self-esteem plays a pivotal role. The practice of positive affirmations, as adopted by the participants, is highlighted as an effective strategy to bolster self-esteem, fostering feelings of gratitude and contentment with one's body.

This study offers valuable insights for readers, especially early adult female K-Pop fans who might be grappling with body image acceptance. It stands as a testament to the possibility of cultivating a positive body image, serving as a resource, inspiration, or guide for those on a similar journey. It is imperative for K-Pop fans to recognize the arbitrariness of prevailing beauty standards and to embrace the notion that there is no universal ideal that must be conformed to, particularly within the K-Pop fan community. Researchers aspiring to delve deeper into the subject of positive body image are encouraged to broaden the scope of inquiry to include adolescents, assessing whether this demographic can also achieve a positive body image. Future research should aim to build upon the present findings, taking into account additional variables that may impact body image development, such as age, gender, and beyond the factors explored in this study. Such comprehensive research endeavors can enrich our understanding and support the development of interventions and strategies to promote a healthier body image across diverse populations.

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