

Gender Differences in the Link between Self-Esteem and Social Self-Efficacy in
Emerging Adulthood

By
Rebecca Leanne Alaffe

A Thesis Submitted to
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in Psychology.

April 2017, Halifax, Nova Scotia
Copyright [Rebecca Alaffe, 2017]

Approved: Dr. Leanna Closson
Honours Thesis Supervisor

Approved: Dr. Maryanne Fisher
Second Reader

Gender Differences in the Link between Self-Esteem and Social Self-Efficacy in
Emerging Adulthood

By
Rebecca Leanne Alaffe

Abstract

The current study examined gender differences in self-perceptions in emerging adulthood. Specifically, associations between social self-efficacy and two indices of self-esteem (self-perceived appearance and global self-worth) were explored. Participants ($N = 803$; 205 men, 598 women) consisted of university students between the ages of 18 and 29 ($M_{age} = 20.48$). Results revealed that self-perceived appearance and global self-worth were significantly higher among men than women. In addition, self-perceived appearance was positively correlated with social self-efficacy for men, but not for women. A positive correlation was also found between global self-worth and social self-efficacy for both men and women. The results suggest that self-perceived appearance plays a greater role for men as compared to women in regard to how well they think they can socialize with others. The findings highlight the importance of understanding gender differences in the link between self-esteem and social self-efficacy for emerging adults.

Gender Differences in the Link between Self-Esteem and Social Self-Efficacy in Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood (18–29 years old) is a stage in the lifespan where changes occur, such as leaving one's parents' care, entering higher education, and starting a new career. University students often face these new challenges simultaneously, making life difficult, which could potentially affect their self-esteem (Morgan et al., 2012). When going through the earlier stages in life, adolescents and emerging adults try to solidify their identity. This uncertainty can alter their self-esteem because they are not sure of whom they really are (Steinberg, 2011).

Self-esteem is a stable, yet malleable, personality trait that can affect many aspects of one's life (Chung, Robins, Trzesniewski, Nofle, & Roberts, 2014). Self-esteem is considered stable because one develops it early on in life, and it rarely changes as we age. However, it is malleable because it can change in different situations, and from one domain to the other (Chung et al., 2014). Self-esteem is defined in psychological literature as the view of one's own worth (Chung et al., 2014). Self-perceived appearance and global self-worth are two constructs, among many others (including academic and athletic self-esteem), that are used to measure self-esteem (von Soest, Wichstrom, & Kvalem, 2016). Self-perceived appearance is how one sees one's own appearance in regard to physique and general attractiveness (Morgan et al., 2012). On the other hand, global self-worth is the general sense of how one feels about oneself as a person (Chung et al., 2014). These forms of self-esteem can relate to adolescent identity formation because adolescents are constantly self-aware and mindful of others' behaviours. This extreme self-awareness can lower adolescents' self-esteem if their physical appearance or behaviours do not match those of their peers and the people they look up to (Steinberg,

2011). However, it is thought that emerging adults may be subject to this identity crisis more so than adolescents (Arnett, 2007). This alteration in emerging adults' self-esteem due to an identity crisis may affect the way they cope in social situations.

Socializing may be one of the most important activities for growth and identity formation in young adults. Social self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to socialize well and to converse well with others; and a lower social self-efficacy is related to depression (Field, Tobin, and Reese-Weber, 2014; Maddy, Cannon, & Lichtenberger, 2015). Reis, Wheeler, Spiegel, Kernis, Nezlek, and Perri (1982) found that attractive people are more approachable and usually find it easier to socialize. This may have an effect on how individuals see their own abilities in social situations. People may think that they are not approachable because their self-perceived appearance is low, therefore, finding it hard to interact in social situations.

The following research examines the connection between self-esteem, based on self-perceived appearance and global self-worth, and social self-efficacy in emerging adulthood. This research aims to close the gap in previous literature by showing that one's self-perceived appearance and global self-worth might be connected to one's social experiences. Reis et al. (1982) focused on the connection between appearance and social abilities based on judgements from others on their attractiveness. The current study looks at this link based on self-perceptions of appearance and global self-worth, instead of opinions of others. This study also considers the role of gender in the links between self-perceptions of appearance, global self-worth, and social self-efficacy. It is expected that findings from the present study will provide evidence for the potential social cognitive benefits of high self-esteem on emerging adults. Previous research demonstrates that high self-esteem can help one adapt to the pressures of social situations (Hutteman, Nestler,

Wagner, Egloff, & Back, 2015). The current study further explores this idea by examining the connection between emerging adults' general view of themselves and their social self-efficacy.

Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adults are of interest for the present study because emerging adulthood involves a lot of change, which can decrease self-esteem (Morgan et al., 2012). Since emerging adulthood is a transition period, this is a time where emerging adults' global self-worth is most likely to alter (Chung et al., 2014). Emerging adults often go from parental sustainability to self-sustainability within a few years. This is often an overwhelming experience, and with the new life expectations putting pressure on them, many emerging adults might attempt to go back to the comforts of their childhood. The convenience of having parents around to take care of the basics of living independently provides a great relief. Once emerging adults move out of their parents' house, life can become uncertain and intimidating. Emerging adulthood is a time where adolescents try to become autonomous and grow into a distinct adult. Emerging adults feel like they are not in one age group or another, but feel as though they are in between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2007).

The media has a firm grasp on the majority of individuals at this age because emerging adults are still easily influenced. This sometimes results in psychological issues including depression and eating disorders (Markey & Markey, 2012). This age group can still be vulnerable in regard to their self-esteem and this might affect how they view their ability to socialize (Chung et al., 2014). This makes emerging adulthood an excellent age group to consider.

Arnett (2007) argued that Erikson's idea of identity crisis might actually be more of an issue for emerging adults, rather than adolescents. This crisis occurs in emerging adulthood due to the fear of becoming autonomous and the anxiety that arises from making important life decisions such as finding a partner and a career (Arnett, 2007). These days, young adults still have the stresses of finding a companion and settling down, but are also expected to get a well-paying job, which takes quite a bit more education than it used to. Attaining a higher education takes a lot of time away from creating that family and settling down. Education is expensive, so many are forced to work during their time spent at school. These pressures put on today's emerging adults can be so stressful that some often drop out of school because they cannot keep up with the work load of school and their job all at once.

Some studies have shown that major life events, such as the transition from one school to another in adolescence can lead to decreased self-esteem (Chung et al., 2014). Emerging adults may experience decreases in their self-esteem when transitioning from high school to university. Many things come easier in high school than in university, so the change in academic institutions can become difficult. Those emerging adults who pursue a higher education are often concerned with their achievements in university. Some students have exceptionally high expectations of themselves starting out; and when they do not reach those academic goals their self-esteem drops because they did not attain their goals (Chung et al., 2014).

Morgan et al. (2012) mention that emerging adulthood is an important time for developing one's identity. Adolescence is the start of this development; however, this identity formation might continue for emerging adults when separated from high school friends and parents. Adolescents and emerging adults are often concerned with their

appearance and their future. These young folks often ask questions about what they must do next regarding education, jobs, and life. This conflicts with their identity production (Steinberg, 2011). Young people, including both adolescents and emerging adults, are also concerned with gaining recognition in the adult world, and gaining respect and status as an adult (Steinberg, 2011). These insecurities may elicit a negative view of one's self, thus reducing their self-esteem. Once emerging adults mature and stabilize their sense of identity, their self-esteem increases and becomes more constant throughout their adult life (Chung et al., 2014).

Self Esteem

Self-esteem is a stable personality trait, but it changes slightly within the different stages of life (Chung et al., 2014). It often decreases at the beginning of adolescence and increases into adulthood, and can help people adapt to their world (Chung et al., 2014; Hutteman et al., 2015). The higher one's self-esteem, the better their ability is to fit in well in many situations. For example, if someone with high self-esteem has never tried a certain sport before, and is placed in a situation where they need to try it for the first time, their positive view of themselves alone can help them excel in that situation. Hutteman et al. (2015) suggested that there are significant changes during young adulthood that involve adaptation, including leaving home or starting a new career. These challenges require emerging adults to alternate their lifestyle, which results in adapting to a new, independent way of life. Self-esteem, therefore, could help young adults adapt and transition through these changes.

Global self-worth is a form of self-esteem that focuses on the general experience one has of oneself, rather than focusing on one specific aspect. This facet of self-esteem, when elevated, can have a positive effect on behaviour modification, making personal

goals, and creating healthy coping strategies; and it can help prevent health problems including mental illness and antisocial behaviours (Chung et al., 2014). Some research has shown that academic performance in college can be directly related to students' global self-worth, depending on the pressure put on students to perform well and achieve higher grades (Chung et al., 2014). Therefore, having a higher global self-worth could have an impact on achieving higher grades due to creating attainable personal goals.

Previous research has not provided much evidence for significant gender differences for global self-worth in emerging adulthood. However, von Soest et al. (2016) found a small, but significant gender difference in adolescent levels of self-esteem in most domains including global self-worth, with males reporting higher levels of self-esteem over most domains. The researchers also noticed that these gender differences often decrease and level out between the genders as adolescents age. Therefore, emerging adults would expect less of a gender difference in levels of global self-worth compared to adolescents. Von Soest et al. (2016) state that global self-worth is typically correlated with other, more specific domains of self-esteem, such as self-perceived appearance; and that these types of self-esteem should render similar results. Therefore, if self-perceived appearance is positively correlated to social self-efficacy for one gender, then global self-worth should also have a similar correlation.

Self-perceived Appearance

Self-perceived appearance is an important contributor to self-esteem (Wichstrom & von Soest, 2016). Self-perceived appearance is determined by how well one thinks of one's overall appearance, including body size (i.e., height and weight), and general attractiveness (Morgan et al., 2012). North America's appearance-focused culture implies that people should be concerned with their looks and others' perceptions of them. Some

relate not having the ideal body type/weight to being not good enough, and this could potentially lower their self-esteem.

Appearance is an important aspect of self-esteem to study in emerging adults because self-perceived appearance is very vulnerable at this age due to societal and media pressures and expectations. Markey and Markey (2012) found that media consumption is negatively correlated with adolescents' and emerging adults' views of their appearance. Their results show that young adults are extremely sensitive to the pressures given by society and the media. In this age of technology, we are constantly bombarded with images and perspectives from around the world on how to look. We are exposed to about 5000 per day, according to Johnson (2006). Society has claimed a certain body type to be ideal today, and this societal pressure promotes poorer self-perceived appearance in emerging adults (Morgan et al., 2012).

Self-perceived appearance can affect self-esteem; and the more one wants to change how one looks can be correlated with lower self-esteem. Darlow and Lobel (2010) showed that when a woman is in a situation where she expects to be compared to others, her self-esteem decreases. This is especially true if she holds the North American cultural norm that 'skinny is beautiful' and that 'beauty is good'. When people attempt to improve their appearance and get compliments for doing so, this attention usually makes them feel better about themselves. These people are likely conditioned to associate the 'new look' with the positive feelings, and therefore, continue this potentially detrimental cycle. Some women are conditioned to rely on others for their self-perceived appearance, and this gives them their self-worth.

Males and females place emphasis on different things that are important for their self-esteem. Women's self-esteem in adulthood is based on self-perceived appearance,

and men emphasize their achievement in being the breadwinner for the family and being a good employee while they move on to higher positions in their career (Maddy et al., 2015). For males in emerging adulthood, this might include getting a proper education in a field that will yield them a well-paying job, in order to support his future family.

Women may worry too much about maintaining their ideal body weight and develop an eating disorder. These important self-esteem boosters can affect the outcome of people's lives. Hutteman et al. (2015) suggest that self-esteem might be the cause of life's outcomes, rather than the result of life's outcomes. This demonstrates the importance of self-esteem because life impacts one's self-esteem, and vice versa.

Body image is one way to test self-perceived appearance. Value is placed on body size and shape, resulting in body dissatisfaction if one's size and shape do not match the ideals of society. Morgan et al. (2012) found that body dissatisfaction occurs when one's ideal body does not match one's perception of their bodies. They found that the degree of body satisfaction in emerging adulthood is related to one's self-esteem. College students often experience small increases in body fat each year of their academic careers which may further contribute to body dissatisfaction (Morgan et al., 2012). These changes are usually due to the emerging adults' new responsibility for their own choices regarding food and alcohol intake, and making new friends who may be of bad influence for life choices (Morgan et al., 2012). Emerging adults transitioning to adulthood may have a lower body satisfaction because they find it harder, with the stresses of their new life away from home, to keep the stress weight off and stay within the ideal weight and size.

Morgan et al. (2012) found that there is a strong correlation between emerging adults' body satisfaction and their overall psychological well-being. Female emerging adults have a high focus on their appearance and have an unrealistic view of their body

weight, resulting in low body satisfaction (Morgan et al., 2012). Wichstrom and von Soest (2016) found that body dissatisfaction can have quite a variety of negative effects, including but not limited to, depression and eating disorders. Dissatisfaction with appearance is a major risk factor for disordered eating, according to Patrick and Stahl (2009). This is concerning. Patrick and Stahl (2009) also noticed that there were no differences in body dissatisfaction levels between late adolescence and emerging adulthood. This shows that women and men are dissatisfied with their bodies at all ages.

Dissatisfaction with one's body can predict one third of female eating habits (Morgan et al., 2012). These girls who are dissatisfied with their bodies are prone to engage in behaviours associated with eating disorders, such as taking diet pills, laxatives, excessive exercise, and purging. These actions and attitudes are unhealthy and can impose on youth's and young adults' physical and mental development (Holm-Denoma & Hankin, 2010). Many focus on their appearance as the main determiner for their self-worth. This is unhealthy for the mind and well-being of each individual. It is important for young women and men to have healthy perceptions of their appearance and their self-worth because this might have an effect on how well they think they can socialize.

Social Self-efficacy

Field et al. (2014) suggest that humans have the capacity to make deliberate decisions to change their behaviour. They state that social self-efficacy is one's belief in one's capacity to have interpersonal relationships, to regulate conflicts that may arise in social situations, and offer their own input and opinions during conversations in social situations.

Self-esteem increases when people are in social situations in which they feel included and involved. The opposite is also true. When someone feels excluded from a

group, they will experience a decrease in self-esteem (Hutteman et al., 2015). The outsider's self-esteem may be lower because the outsider feels lesser than the group and therefore feel as if they are not good enough as human beings since they are not good enough to be in the group. This research suggests that inclusion in a group affects self-esteem; however self-esteem can also affect the quality and quantity of group memberships (Hutteman et al., 2015). Feelings of inclusion in a social setting may predict changes in self-esteem, which might suggest that social self-efficacy could also be affected by inclusion in a group. One may feel as though they are not good at socializing and do not belong in social situations. Therefore, their social self-efficacy may drop considerably.

Rudy, May, Matthews, and Davis (2013) found that negative self-statements are negatively associated with social self-efficacy in adolescence. Negative self-statements are messages that one plays in one's head that are pessimistic, and typically reduce confidence and self-esteem. An individual's social self-efficacy affects how well that person actually performs in social situations (Rudy et al., 2013). A person's constant negative self-statements can have a drastic impact on their confidence levels in their ability to socialize well; therefore, reducing their actual ability to interact in social situations (Rudy et al., 2013).

Research conducted previously has provided evidence that lowered social self-efficacy is related to internalizing behaviours, and a reluctance to change (Maddy et al., 2015). The constant negative self-statements a young person has could have a potentially detrimental effect not only on their social self-efficacy, but on their overall thought processes of themselves, and this could lead to depression (Rudy et al., 2013). Social support helps reduce stress. This reduction in stress eases anxiety related to social

situations. Having good interpersonal relationships can reduce insecurities people may have that prevent them from excelling in social contexts; therefore, higher social self-efficacy is maintained (Maddy et al., 2015). This may demonstrate that higher self-esteem, resulting from interpersonal relationships, may be correlated with higher social self-efficacy.

Previous studies show the impact of physical attractiveness on how well one is perceived by others and how these attractive people handle social interactions. When one is attractive, others are usually drawn to them. People often say that they can tell someone is a 'good' person just by the way they look. Reis, et al. (1982) say that first impressions make up the majority of these stereotypes that beauty is 'good'. That first experience of an attractive person can influence how said person is perceived.

There are gender differences in how attractiveness can influence social interactions. At the university age, attractive men are often more assertive and typically interact more often than unattractive men when in social situations (Reis et al., 1982). These attractive men fear women less, making it easier for them to approach women. They are often rewarded with positive feedback from the women since women prefer to be approached by someone they deem socially desirable (Reis et al., 1982). Attractive women, on the other hand, are typically less assertive in social interactions than their unattractive counterparts, making them less likely to approach others for social exchange, but more likely to be approached (Reis et al., 1982).

According to the research of Reis et al. (1982), there was a strong, positive correlation with assertiveness due to attractiveness, and participation in social situations for both genders. Their study demonstrated that people often misjudge their social ability. The people who misjudge their social abilities frequently believe, due to the idea that

beauty is ‘good’, that they will not be perceived how they want in social interactions because they are not beautiful enough, thus reducing their social self-efficacy. This research demonstrates that one’s attractiveness, based on others’ perceptions of them, could potentially hinder or facilitate their ability to do well in social situations.

The Present Study

Previous literature illustrates that adults whom others judge as physically attractive tend to misjudge their own social abilities (Reis et al., 1982). The present study extends the research by Reis et al. (1982) by exploring the association between *self*-perceptions of appearance and social self-efficacy. It is important to look at self-perceptions, compared to other’s judgements, in relation to social self-efficacy because negative self-thoughts, or negative views of the self, are correlated with lower confidence in social exchanges (Rudy et al., 2013). When one’s self-views change, their confidence in their ability to socialize might also change, and vice versa. Past literature demonstrates high self-esteem as being helpful for one to adapt to new situations, such as social interactions (Hutteman et al., 2015). The current study investigates this further by specifically looking at one’s global self-worth in connection to one’s ability to socialize. The current study examined gender differences and associations between social self-efficacy and both self-perceived appearance and global self-worth in emerging adulthood. Males and females differ in many aspects, but are similar in other ways. It is important to look at these gender differences because findings for one variable may be significant for one gender, but not for the other. Research should pin point any complications based on specific genders as to avoid generalizing to the entire population.

Research question one: Do male and female emerging adults differ in their mean levels of self-perceived appearance, global self-esteem, and social self-efficacy?

Hypothesis one: I hypothesize that females will have lower self-perceived appearance compared to males. This hypothesis is based on the research stating that women were more likely to overestimate their own weight, resulting in a higher desire to lose weight in women than men (Morgan et al., 2012). Since previous research stated that weight and body satisfaction correspond with self-perceived appearance, this would show that women will have more issues with their appearance. Maddy et al. (2015) stated that female self-esteem (in their sample of adults ranging from age 18-87) is contingent with their looks. Therefore, women may be harder on themselves when rating their appearance, showing a lower self-perceived appearance score. Neemann and Harter (2012) also found gender differences in college students aged 20-23, where women had a lower self-perceived appearance than men.

Hypothesis two: I hypothesize that there will be no gender differences in the mean levels of global self-worth. This hypothesis is based on previous research by Neemann and Harter (2012) who found no significant gender differences in the mean levels of global self-worth among college students.

Hypothesis three: I hypothesize that there will be no gender differences in the mean levels of social self-efficacy. This hypothesis is based on previous research by Di Giunta et al. (2010) who found no gender differences in the mean levels of social self-efficacy for young adults in their early 20s.

Research question two: Are self-perceived appearance and global self-worth correlated with social self-efficacy for emerging adults?

Hypothesis four: I hypothesize that there will be a positive correlation between global self-worth and social self-efficacy. When someone has a negative view of themselves, they might relate that to how their peers view them intellectually and as a

friend, therefore, will also feel negatively about their capacity to socialize. This hypothesis is based on previous research showing that higher self-esteem can be beneficial in adaptive situations (Hutteman et al., 2015). For example, if someone thinks highly of themselves in a general sense they may have an easier time adapting to their social surroundings. When someone has an overall confidence, that confidence may transfer to specific aspects in their lives and might make it easier for them to be successful in new relationships.

Hypothesis five: I hypothesize that there will be no gender difference in the strength of the correlation between global self-worth and social self-efficacy. This hypothesis is based on previous research showing that having a higher general view of one's self may have an impact on how well one can adapt to social situations and behave in an appropriate manner (Hutteman et al. (2012).

Hypothesis six: I hypothesize that there will be a positive correlation between self-perceived appearance and social self-efficacy. If one views oneself as less of a person because of their perception of their appearance, their belief in their ability to socialize will hinder as well. Previous research from Reis et al. (1982) explained that attractive people have better first impressions than others and they are approached more. People may think that if they are not attractive, they are not approachable, and in turn, they will have a harder time in social situations.

Hypothesis seven: I hypothesize that there will be a gender difference in the strength of the correlation between self-perceived appearance and social self-efficacy. Specifically, I hypothesize that the correlation will be positive for males, but negative for females. This is based on the previous research by Reis et al. (1982) who stated that

attractive men are often more likely to approach others compared to unattractive men and this might make them think they are better at socializing than their unattractive counterparts. In Reis et al. (1982)'s research, attractive females are less likely to approach others. This might make them think they are not good at socializing.

Method

Participants

Participants in the current study were university students between the ages of 18-29 ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.48$). The participants were primarily Saint Mary's University students ($n = 698$); however, the study was open to students enrolled in any university (105 participants attended a university other than Saint Mary's University).

The participants included males ($n = 205$) and females ($n = 598$). There were eight students whose self-reported gender was "other" than male or female. However, given my interest in gender differences, this number was not large enough to include in the sample, so these data were removed. Therefore, only the data from males and females were used. The sample ($N = 803$) consisted primarily of emerging adults reporting an ethnic background as Caucasian (67.1%), Mixed (9.7%), Black (7.3%), and Chinese (4.4%). The majority of the students were in their first four years of university (93.2%), with a representative sample in each of those four years; 30% being in their first year ($n = 241$).

Procedure

Data were collected between September and April, throughout both Fall and Winter semesters of the 2016/2017 academic year at Saint Mary's University. The current research is part of a larger study conducted in a psychology lab supervised by Dr. Leanna Closson. Participants attending Saint Mary's University were recruited via the SONA system, as well as from posters that were placed around the campus. The SONA

system provides students access to a database listing opportunities to participate in research currently being conducted at Saint Mary's University. Through SONA, Saint Mary's student participants enrolled in a psychology course received a maximum of one half of a bonus point toward their psychology class of choice as compensation for completing the questionnaire.

University students attending an institution other than Saint Mary's were recruited through posting the study online on participant recruitment websites. Non-Saint Mary's students accessed the survey directly by clicking on a link to the online survey. Participants who attempted to complete the study, but were not currently university students, were not eligible. Participants completed the survey online through the Qualtrics website. Participants first read a consent form that described the study and informed them of the confidentiality of their responses and right to withdraw at any time, or omit questions they felt uncomfortable answering. Contact information for counselling services were also provided, both on the consent form and feedback letter, which was viewed after completing the survey.

Measures

Demographic Information The questionnaire began with questions that asked the participant to provide their demographic information. For this study, only age, gender, and ethnicity were of interest.

Self-Esteem Self-perceived appearance and global self-worth were measured using the Self-Perception Profile for College Students (SPPCS; Neemann & Harter, 2012). From the SPPCS measure, only the four items pertaining to the appearance scale and the six items pertaining to the global self-worth scale were used, totalling 10-items. For each of the items, students read a two-part statement where they had to choose which

half of the statement best applies to them at that moment in their life (the more positive half, or the less positive half). An example of a statement regarding appearance from this scale is, “Some students are not happy with the way they look BUT other students are happy with the way they look”. An example of a global self-worth statement is “Some students like the kind of person they are BUT other students wish they were different”. They then had to answer each item with “*really true of me*” or “*sort of true of me*” to that particular chosen statement. The measures for both self-perceived appearance and global self-worth demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .80$ and $.82$, respectively).

Social Self-Efficacy Social self-efficacy was measured using the Perceived Social Self-Efficacy scale (PSSE; Di Giunta et al., 2010). The PSSE has five items (e.g., “How well can you work/study with other students?”, “How well can you actively participate in group activities?”). Participants rated each item on a five-point Likert scale from (1) “*not well*” to (5) “*very well*”. A higher score on these questions means the emerging adult has a higher social self-efficacy. Tests for internal consistency for social self-efficacy indicated good reliability ($\alpha = .79$).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Measures for self-perceived appearance and global self-worth were rated on a scale of one to four, with one meaning the participant had a low self-perceived appearance or global self-worth (the participant chose the part of the statement that was less positive and chose “*really true of me*”), and four meant the participant had higher self-perceptions (the participant chose the part of the statement that was more positive and chose “*sort of true of me*”). Responses for social self-efficacy ranged from one to

five. Means and standard deviations for these variables are displayed in Table 1 for the full sample, and Table 2 for males and females separately.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Full Sample

Variable	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Self-Perceived Appearance	1	4	2.44	.84
Global Self-Worth	1	4	2.85	.70
Social Self-Efficacy	1	5	3.88	.72

Note. Min.= Minimum range, Max.= Maximum range.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Males and Females Separately

Variable	M (Males)	M (Females)	SD (Males)	SD (Females)
Self-Perceived Appearance	2.69	2.35	.76	.85
Global Self-Worth	2.94	2.81	.66	.71
Social Self-Efficacy	3.85	3.89	.74	.72

Primary Analyses

To test hypothesis one, two, and three, independent samples t-tests were conducted. Results revealed that self-perceived appearance and global self-worth were significantly higher among men than women. However, men and women did not differ in their mean level of social self-efficacy.

The t-test for self-perceived appearance, $t(796) = 5.14$, $p = .00$ revealed a significant effect of gender on self-perceived appearance. The t-test for global self-worth, $t(797) = 2.28$, $p = .02$ also demonstrated a difference in gender means for global self-efficacy. This suggests that these forms of self-esteem might have a similar effect on people. The test for social self-efficacy, $t(800) = -.68$, $p = .50$, on the other hand, was not

significant. This suggests that there were no gender differences in the mean levels of social self-efficacy.

To test hypotheses four through seven, bivariate correlations were conducted between social self-efficacy and both self-perceived appearance and global self-worth for the full sample (Table 3), also separately for males and females (Table 4). The results for the full sample showed a small positive correlation between social self-efficacy and self-perceived appearance ($r = .09$, $p < .05$, $df = 801$), as well for social self-efficacy and global self-worth ($r = .28$, $p < .001$, $df = 801$). Self-perceived appearance and global self-worth were moderately and positively correlated ($r = .46$, $p < .001$, $df = 801$). Correlations conducted separately for males and females revealed a significant positive correlation between self-perceived appearance and social self-efficacy for men ($r = .16$, $p < .05$, $df = 203$), but not for women ($r = .08$, $p < .05$, $df = 596$). On the other hand, positive correlations were found between global self-worth and social self-efficacy for both men ($r = .25$, $p < .001$, $df = 203$) and women ($r = .29$, $p < .001$, $df = 596$). Fisher's r to z transformation indicated no gender differences in correlations between global self-worth and social self-efficacy ($z = -.5$, $p = .62$).

Table 3

Correlations for Full Sample

Variable	SSE	SPA	GSW
Social Self-Efficacy	-		
Self-Perceived Appearance	.09*	-	
Global Self-Worth	.28***	.46***	-

Note. SSE=social self-efficacy, SPA=self-perceived appearance, GSW=global self-worth.
* $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Correlations for Males and Females

Variable	SSE	SPA	GSW
Social Self-Efficacy	-	.08	.29***
Self-Perceived Appearance	.16*	-	.47***
Global Self-Worth	.25***	.42***	-

Note. SSE=social self-efficacy, SPA=self-perceived appearance, GSW=global self-worth. Correlations for males are below the diagonal and correlations for females are above the diagonal.

* $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

High self-esteem and social self-efficacy can have benefits in all aspects of one's life, including self-perceptions of social competencies. Previous research describes the importance of high self-esteem on how one can adapt to new situations, including social interactions (Hutteman et al., 2015). Research also illustrates that adults tend to misjudge their social abilities based on others' perceptions of their appearance (Reis et al., 1982). The current study extends this literature, showing that how one perceives their appearance and global self-worth relates to their confidence in social situations and that these self-perceptions vary between males and females. The present study adds important information to the literature by demonstrating that self-perceptions can play an important role in the lives of emerging adults. The findings in this study can inform the development of programs to help emerging adults develop social skills by improving their self-esteem and vice versa

As expected, self-esteem and social self-efficacy were significantly correlated. The current research found that there is a positive association between one's overall sense of self and one's perceived ability to socialize. When someone has a negative view of themselves, they might relate that to how their peers view them intellectually and as a

friend, therefore, may also feel negatively about their capacity to socialize. This hypothesis is based on previous research that explains that having higher self-esteem can be beneficial in adaptive situations (Hutteman et al., 2015). For example, if someone thinks highly of themselves in a general sense they may have an easier time adapting to their social surroundings. In the current study, males and females differed in their mean levels of self-perceived appearance and global self-worth. These findings supported hypothesis one, which stated that there would be gender differences in self-perceived appearance, but failed to support hypothesis two, which stated that there would be no gender differences in emerging adults' global self-worth. Mean levels of social self-efficacy rendered no significant gender differences, supporting hypothesis three, which stated that there would be no gender differences in emerging adults' social self-efficacy.

In accordance with hypothesis four, global self-worth was significantly positively correlated with self-perceptions of social competence. This conclusion was expected considering the findings of Hutteman et al. (2015), which discovered that higher self-esteem was beneficial in adaptive situations. This would lead one to believe that the adaptive expectancies of a new social interaction may be a bit easier to achieve when one has a higher self-esteem. Further, in support of hypothesis six, levels of self-perceived appearance and social self-efficacy for the full sample were significantly positively correlated. According to Reis et al. (1982), attractive people are more easily approachable than unattractive people. Therefore, if one finds oneself unattractive and unapproachable in social situations, they may have a more difficult time interacting with others.

Results also concluded that males and females differed significantly in their correlations between global self-worth and social self-efficacy. This supported hypothesis five, which stated that there would be gender differences in the correlation between global

self-worth and social self-efficacy. Gender differences were also found in the correlation for self-perceived appearance and social self-efficacy. Males' level of self-perceived appearance was significantly positively correlated to their perceived ability to socialize. In contrast, self-perceived appearance and social-self efficacy were not significantly correlated for females. These results suggest that males and females differ in their levels of perceived appearance, but that self-perceived appearance may play a greater role for men compared to women in regard to their perceived social competence. This interesting finding partially supported hypothesis seven, which stated that there would be gender differences in self-perceived appearance, specifically that there would be a positive correlation for men, but not for women.

This finding is very interesting because gender norms in today's Western society imply that women place more emphasis on the importance of their appearance than men (Markey & Markey, 2012). Therefore, one would assume that women would have had a significant correlation between appearance and social self-efficacy. With the rise in social media usage, men may have increased exposure to the pressure to look a certain way (de Jesus et al., 2015). Men are expected to be fit (whether muscular, thin, or athletic-looking). De Jesus et al. (2015) claim that the need for power over others, specifically women, is a motivator for muscle gain. With this pressure, men might start to think their performance in social environments relies on how they look. Also, it may seem that women, in general, are a bit more independent these days, with jobs outside of the home, resulting in a steady income. This may make them less reliant on their mates for financial support. In return, women may be more likely to look for physically attractive qualities in their mates rather than financial stability. This expectation may place an even greater pressure on these men to look a certain way.

The findings from the current study regarding how males perceive their appearance and how well they can socialize run parallel to what Reis et al. (1982) found. Their results showed that males' appearance, based on others' perceptions, is associated with how much they socialize, and this is more so than women. Their discovery is similar to the current study's findings where the difference in male and females' correlations between self-perceived appearance and social self-efficacy were contradictory to what was expected. Markey and Markey (2012) also found interesting results in regard to gender views of appearance. Contrasting their hypotheses, they discovered that men did not differ in their reactions to viewing plastic surgery in the media (via reality TV). This would suggest that men and women are okay with the idea of plastic surgery to enhance their appearance. The men in the aforementioned study were also likely to transfer the idealized beauty into their expectation of "real" women, making women feel like their natural beauty is not good enough for men.

In accordance with Morgan et al. (2012)'s study, stating that females entering university had a higher body fat percentage and lower body satisfaction than males, the present study found that females had a lower self-perceived appearance than males. This would show that since this society has certain standards as to how one should look, and that women naturally have higher body fat percentages, that these women would tend to have a lower self-perceived appearance. This was true in the present study. Even though the sample was relatively even across the first four years of university, 30% of participants were in their first year. Morgan et al. (2012)'s research demonstrated that first year students primarily experience this elevated body fat percentage compared to students in subsequent years. A significant amount of the participants involved in the

current study were in their first year, so maybe they experienced this increase in body fat, and that had an effect on how the participants rated their own appearance.

Implications

The current findings suggest that self-esteem is significantly correlated with social self-efficacy. Gender differences were found for self-perceived appearance and global self-worth. A significant correlation between appearance and social self-efficacy was found for males, but not for females. This finding was particularly interesting considering pre-conceptions of women being more concerned with self-perceived appearance in social settings than men (Darlow and Lobel, 2010; Maddy et al., 2015). The current study implies that self-perceptions of appearance can play an important role for both males and females. Researchers may take the information outlined in this paper and explore new possibilities in the development of programs that further the understanding of emerging adulthood and the connection between self-esteem and social self-efficacy in this life stage. The findings from this study can help emerging adults better understand the challenges that they face at this stage in life and potentially use that new understanding to improve their self-esteem as well as develop their social skills.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study had several strengths. First, this study had a large sample size (N=803) of university students, from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including international and local students. This ensured a representative sample in regard to ethnicity. The sample was also representative of students across all four years of university. The internal consistency for all three variables was very good. It is important in any study to ensure the measures used are reliable, that way the measure will gain the

same results every time it is used. Therefore, it can be trusted as a good measurement for the construct.

There were several limitations to this study that future research could address. First, the ratio of males to females was around 1:4. This is typical of similar studies done in the university setting. If resources and ample participants are available, future studies could use a stratified sampling technique. This would ensure that both genders are largely represented. In regard to gender differences, future research could look at the correlations between self-esteem and social self-efficacy for genders other than male and female. It would be interesting to see if other genders place more or less emphasis on self-perceived appearance and global self-worth on how well they think they can socialize, compared to males and females.

A second limitation of the current study is that claims of causality cannot be made due to the fact that this was a correlational design. Future research could change the design to a simple experiment and control for any possible confounding variables in order to gain a better understanding of what might be one of the main causes for these findings. This simple experiment might render results similar to the current study and might be able to solidify the correlations found in the present study and claim that levels of self-esteem may be able to predict levels of social self-efficacy.

Future research ideas could include the study of whether low social self-efficacy is connected to social withdrawal or loneliness in emerging adulthood. Students who believe they are not good at socializing may try to avoid social situations so they can escape the feeling of being rejected or uncomfortable.

University students go through a lot of change when entering the university environment, but also at each succeeding year of university. These changes may

potentially reflect in their self-esteem. According to Holm-Denoma and Hankin (2010) and Patrick and Stahl (2009), negative thought processes about one's body can start in adolescence and reappear later in life; so it may be important to study whether negative cognitions carry through from adolescence into emerging adulthood. This would be a great avenue for future research on the topic of emerging adults' self-esteem.

Future research should look further into the gender difference in the correlations for self-perceived appearance and social self-efficacy to investigate whether there may be a third variable responsible for this association. For example, the media may have a strong influence on self-perceived appearance, which in turn, may affect social-self efficacy. Markey and Markey (2012) concluded that reality TV shows can have an influence on how one views one's appearance. Social media is more readily available to emerging adults, therefore may have an even greater influence on self-perceptions.

The current study looked at the correlation between self-esteem and social self-efficacy for emerging adults currently attending university. Future research could study the correlations between self-esteem and social self-efficacy through the same age group, but obtain participants in emerging adulthood who chose to start a career instead of attend higher education. This research could then be compared to the findings of the current study to see if being in university could also play a role in emerging adults' self-perceptions.

Conclusions

The present study aimed to find potential gender differences in the association between self-esteem and social self-efficacy. Results from the current study found a significant correlation between self-esteem, specifically self-perceived appearance and global self-worth, and social self-efficacy for emerging adults. Further, results showed a

significant gender difference in self-perceived appearance in relation to social self-efficacy. In conclusion, males and females may be similar in some respects, but not in other ways, compared to what previous research may imply. For example, males may place a higher emphasis on their perceived appearance for their social competencies, compared to women.

References

- Arnett, J., J. (2007). Suffering, selfish, slackers? Myths and reality about emerging adults. *Journal Of Youth and Adolescence*, 36, 23–29. doi: 10.1007/s10964-006-9157-z
- Chung, J. M., Robins, R. W., Trzesniewski, K. H., Nofhle, E. E., Roberts, B. W., & Widaman, K. F. (2014). Continuity and change in self-esteem during emerging adulthood. *Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology*, 106(3), 469-483. doi:10.1037/a0035135
- Darlow, S., & Lobel, M. (2010). Who is beholding my beauty? Thinness ideals, weight, and women's responses to appearance evaluation. *Sex Roles*, 63(11-12), 833-843. doi:10.1007/s11199-010-9845-8
- de Jesus, A. Y., Ricciardelli, L.A., Frisen, A., Smolak, L., Yager, Z., Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, M., Diedrichs, P. C., Franko, D., & Gattario, K. H. (2015). Media internalization and conformity to traditional masculine norms in relation to body image concerns among men. *Journal Of Eating Behaviours*, 18, 137-142. doi: 10.1016/j.eatbeh.2015.04.004
- Di Giunta, L., Eisenberg, N., Kupfer, A., Steca, P., Tramontano, C., & Caprara, G. V. (2010). Assessing perceived empathic and social self-efficacy across countries. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 26(2), 77–86. doi: 10.1027/1015-5759/a000012
- Field, R. D., Tobin, R. M., & Reese-Weber, M. (2014). Agreeableness, Social Self-Efficacy, and Conflict Resolution Strategies. *Journal of Individual Differences*, 35 (2), 95-102. doi: 10.1027/1614-0001/a000131

- Holm-Denoma, J. M., & Hankin, B. L. (2010). Perceived physical appearance mediates the rumination and bulimic symptom link in adolescent girls. *Journal Of Clinical Child And Adolescent Psychology, 39* (4), 537-544. doi: 10.1080/15374416.2010.486324
- Hutteman, R., Nestler, S., Wagner, J., Egloff, B., & Back, M. D. (2015). Wherever I may roam: Processes of self-esteem development from adolescence to emerging adulthood in the context of international student exchange. *Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology, 108* (5), 767-783.
- Johnson, C. (2006). *Cutting through advertising clutter*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/cutting-through-advertising-clutter/>
- Maddy, L. I., Cannon, J. G., & Lichtenberger, E. J. (2015). The effects of social support on self-esteem, self-efficacy, and job search efficacy in the unemployed. *Journal Of Employment Counseling, 52*(2), 87-95. doi:10.1002/joec.12007
- Markey, C. N., & Markey, P. M. (2012). Emerging adults' responses to a media presentation of idealized female beauty: An examination of cosmetic surgery in reality television. *Psychology Of Popular Media Culture, 1*(4), 209-219. doi:10.1037/a0027869
- Morgan, A. Z., Keiley, M. K., Ryan, A. E., Radomski, J. G., Gropper, S. S., Connell, L. J., Simmons, K. P., & Ulrich, P. V. (2012). Eating regulation styles, appearance schemas, and body fat for emerging adults. *Journal Of Youth Adolescence, 41*, 1127-1141. doi: 10.1007/s10964-012-9757-8
- Neemann, J., & Harter, S. (2012). Self-perception profile for college students: Manual and questionnaires. Unpublished manuscript, University of Denver.

- Patrick, J. H., & Stahl, S. T. (2009). Understanding disordered eating at midlife and late life. *Journal Of General Psychology, 136* (1), 5-20.
- Reis, H. T., Wheeler, L., Spiegel N., Kernis, M. H., Nezelek, J., Perri, M. (1982). Physical attractiveness in social interaction: Why does appearance affect social experience? *Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology, 43*(5), 979-996.
- Rudy, B. M., May, A.C., Matthews, R. A., & Davis, T. E. (2013). Youth's negative self-statements as related to social self-efficacy among differing relationships. *Journal Of Psychopathological Behavioral Assessment, 35*, 106-112. doi: 10.1007/s10862-012-9319-0.
- Steinberg L. (2011). *Adolescence* (Ninth ed.). New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- von Soest, T., Wichstrom, L., & Kvaem, I. L. (2016). The development of global and domain-specific self-esteem from age 13 to 31. *Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology, 110*(4), 592-608. doi:10.1037/pspp0000060
- Wichstrom, L., & von Soest, T. (2016). Reciprocal relations between body satisfaction and self-esteem: A large 13-year prospective study of adolescents. *Journal Of Adolescence, 47*, 16-27. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.12.003