

APPEARANCE COMPARISON AND BODY DISSATISFACTION OF EXPATRIATE WOMEN IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

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Abstract: Body dissatisfaction has a powerful influence in mental and physical wellbeing in women. It has been linked to depression, anxiety and eating disorders. The current study examined how relocating to Thailand was related to body dissatisfaction in expatriate women through appearance comparison. In Thailand, the average female BMI is roughly 15% less than those of women from the USA and the UK. Previous research has shown that women have the tendency to compare themselves unfavorably with other women who were slimmer, even though it was negatively influencing their body image and mental well-being. The current study examined the role of appearance comparison in development of body dissatisfaction in female expatriates who relocated to Thailand (n=107) by sampling those who were working and living in Bangkok. The Physical Comparison Scale – Revised, the Body Scale Questionnaire and the Stunkard Body Figure Scale were applied to this sample. The result implied that the frequency of appearance comparison in this sample remained at similar rates regardless of the length of time spent in Bangkok. Frequent appearance comparison was linked to higher levels of body dissatisfaction, this is consistent with previous studies' findings. It was also found in this sample that the level of body dissatisfaction was significantly linked to the perceived body discrepancy between the actual body shape, the ideal body shape and the perceived body shape of the average Thai woman.

Keywords: Body Dissatisfaction, Appearance Comparison, Social Comparison, Expatriate Adjustment.

Introduction

Body dissatisfaction has powerful implication for the mental health. Many studies found that it related strongly to depression, anxiety and eating disorders (Ivarsson, Svalander, Litlere, & Nevonen, 2006; Smolak, 2004). Unfortunately for many people, it is difficult to avoid developing body dissatisfaction, due to the pressure to conform to the socially dictated standard of attractiveness, and because we have the tendency to compare ourselves to others. This is especially a challenge for women, who were found to be especially vulnerable to developing body dissatisfaction. Frederick,

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