



Binge drinking and cigarette smoking among teens: Does body image play a role? ☆



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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a critical juncture for the development of one's physical, mental, and social self, which includes body image. Previous research has linked poor body image and substance use in adolescents, but existing research on sex differences in these relationships is conflicting. The current study will examine the relationship between body image and substance use in adolescent males and females using data from the Oregon Youth Substance Use Project (OYSUP), focusing on alcohol and tobacco use. The logistic regression results indicated that females who reported lower satisfaction with body image engaged in more binge drinking and smoking, while the relationship was not significant for males. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Adolescence is a critical time for identity formation. One component of identity is body image, or the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that an individual has about their body (Cash, 2004). Body image formation begins at a young age and continues to develop throughout the lifetime (Smolak, 2004). Individuals can form a healthy and positive body image or a negative body image based on many factors, including the influence of their culture, family members, and peers (Smolak, 2004). Additionally, external influences like the media and societal stigma may influence body image formation (Smolak, 2004). Even young children can demonstrate signs of a negative body image and the internalization of unhealthy societal beauty standards (Smolak, 2004). The overarching concept of body image involves various components, including body appreciation, body satisfaction, body dissatisfaction, self-esteem, and more (Cash, 2004; Larson, Clark, Robinson, & Utter, 2011).

A poor body image has been linked with negative outcomes in adolescence, including risky sexual behaviors, eating disorders, and other mental health concerns such as depression (Cash & Deagle, 1997; Noles, Cash, & Winstead, 1985). Additionally, body image has been linked to substance use in adolescence (Ramseyer Winter, Kennedy, & O'Neill, 2017). The current study expands on existing literature by examining the relationship between body image and substance use in adolescents using data from the Oregon Youth Substance Use Project (OYSUP), focusing on alcohol and tobacco use.

1. Substance use in adolescence

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted a survey in 2015 of youth risk behaviors including alcohol and tobacco usage. Among high school students, 33% had consumed any alcohol in the last 30 days and 18% had engaged in binge drinking (CDC, 2016a). Additionally, 8% drove a vehicle after consuming alcohol and 20% were passengers in vehicles driven by someone who had been drinking (CDC, 2016a). Alcohol use in adolescents can have deleterious outcomes and can result in problems at school, in social interactions, and with the law (CDC, 2016a). There are also many health risks related to underage drinking, including injuries, disruptions in development, and death from alcohol poisoning (CDC, 2016a).

The same study from 2015 also examined tobacco usage and found that 32% of high school students had tried cigarette smoking in their lifetime, 11% smoked at least once in the previous 30 days, 3% smoked on 20 or more days, and 2% smoked at least one cigarette every day for the last 30 days (CDC, 2016b). Although tobacco use in middle and high school age youth is decreasing overall, there is still cause for concern. Age of first tobacco use, specifically younger age, is associated with a higher risk of developing a dependence on nicotine (CDC, 2017b). Cigarette smoking is the most common preventable cause of death in the United States and increases a variety of health risks, including heart disease, stroke, and lung cancer (CDC, 2017a).

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It is important to understand the factors that are associated with substance use during adolescence, such as body image, to better understand how to focus prevention programs and reduce negative outcomes associated with alcohol and tobacco use among adolescents.

2. Body image and substance use

The co-occurrence between body image issues and substance use in adolescents has been well established (Andrew, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2016; Ramseyer Winter et al., 2017). Additionally, research about body image and substance use in adolescents suggests that there may be differences in the relationship between these variables for males and females, although the results vary.

Some research suggests that poor body image related to weight concerns may be associated with the use of cigarettes to control weight in female adolescents; however, the same results are not always found in males (Cawley, Markowitz, & Tauras, 2004; Howe et al., 2017). Stice and Shaw (2003) concluded that body dissatisfaction and eating pathology were both related to cigarette smoking in a sample of 496 adolescent girls. Okeke, Spitz, Forman, and Wilkinson (2013) found similar links between poor body image and cigarette usage among Mexican-origin youth.

Conversely, Lange, Thamocharan, Racine, Hirko, and Fields (2015) concluded that perceived weight, weight change behaviors, and body mass index were found to be significantly related to cigarette smoking in adolescents of both sexes in a national sample of 15,425 adolescents, although the effects were stronger for females. Nieri, Kulis, Keith, and Hurdle (2005) also examined body image and substance use in adolescents in the Southwestern region of the United States who were primarily of Latino heritage. For both males and females, adolescents who rated their bodies as too fat were more likely to have recently used cigarettes. However, the predictive factor related to their weight status was found to differ: disliking one's looks was found to be associated with substance use in males while weight concerns were more likely to predict substance use in females (Nieri et al., 2005).

Crow, Eisenberg, Story, and Neumark-Sztainer (2006) studied dieting behaviors among 4746 adolescents and found that girls who reported engaging in dieting behaviors had higher rates of cigarette use and alcohol use, no matter their weight. Andrew et al. (2016) completed a study with 298 girls between the ages of 12 and 16 and also concluded that girls with low body appreciation were more likely to use both alcohol and cigarettes. Wild, Flisher, Bhana, and Lombard (2004) concluded that adolescent girls with low body image self-esteem scores in South Africa were more likely to use both alcohol and cigarettes and engage in other risky behaviors. Adolescent males with low body image self-esteem were not found to be any more likely to engage in substance use than males with higher scores (Wild et al., 2004).

Ramseyer Winter et al. (2017) more recently found that adolescents who perceived themselves as above or below the average body size and level of attractiveness are more likely to use substances. These results applied to adolescent males and females who perceived themselves as attractive, female adolescents who perceived themselves as too fat, and male adolescents who perceived themselves as too thin. The results of these studies prove to be decidedly mixed – warranting further research. The current literature base leaves readers unable to make conclusions about the relationship between body image and substance use. While previous research has explored the associations between substances and body image, these studies often explore the use of substances to control weight, few studies assess substance use as a potential indicator for lower body image. Because of this, the authors seek to conduct further analysis regarding this potential relationship for both females and males.

3. The current study

To help fill this gap, the current study explores differences by sex in

the relationship between body image and substance use in an adolescent sample of eighth to twelfth graders in Oregon. The current study focuses specifically on the use of tobacco and alcohol. Based on the previously reviewed literature, we hypothesized that girls who exhibited lower body image were more likely to engage in binge drinking and smoke cigarettes, and we hypothesized that there would not be a significant relationship between body image and binge drinking and smoking cigarettes among boys.

4. Method

4.1. Procedure

We utilized Year 7 of the Oregon Youth Substance Use Project (OYSUP; Andrews, Tildesley, Hops, Duncan, & Severson, 2003) youth assessment, collected in 2005. The OYSUP was an ongoing longitudinal study that examines factors related to substance use among youth. It included eight annual assessments over a nine year period (one year funding gap between Time 4 and Time 5) and began in 1998 with a sample of 1st-5th graders ($N = 1070$). The Year 1 sample represented a 50.7% response rate. Andrews et al. (2003) found that the Year 1 sample was statistically comparable regarding demographics and SES when compared to the larger sample of elementary school students in their district. There was a 12% attrition rate between Year 1 and Year 7, with 133 students dropping from the study.

Participants from Year 7 ($N = 937$) were in eighth to twelfth grades (age range = 13.31–19.41, $\mu = 16.19$, $SD = 1.46$) during T7 and were recruited utilizing stratified random sampling among elementary schools in a western Oregon County. The sample was split evenly by sex (51% girls, $n = 482$) and had a “normal” BMI ($\mu = 23.20$, $SD = 4.70$) according to the CDC (n.d.). See Table 1 for a complete list of demographics.

4.2. Measures

4.2.1. Body image

This was measured with three items, one negative body image item and two positive body image items. The first measured feelings of unattractiveness with the following statement: “I frequently feel ugly and unattractive.” The second item measured how proud participants felt about their bodies. The item read: “I am proud of my body.” Finally, the third measured feeling strong and healthy: “I feel strong and healthy.” Response options for all three items were *describes very well*, *describes well*, *describes fairly well*, *doesn't quite describe*, and *doesn't describe at all*. Due to few responses in some categories, we collapsed the body image variables. For the feeling ugly and unattractive variable, the response options *describes me very well* and *describes me well* were collapsed. For the other two body image variables, *does not quite describe me* and *does not describe me at all* were collapsed.

4.2.2. Binge drinking

Binge drinking in the previous month was measured with the following item: “How many times in the last month have you had 5 or more drinks of beer, wine, or hard liquor, one after the other?” Response options included zero, once, twice, 3–5 times, and 6–9 times. This was dichotomized to capture ever binge drinking in the past month; no binge drinking in the past month was coded as a 0 and once or more was coded as a 1.

4.2.3. Ever tried smoking

This dependent variable was measured with the following item: “Have you ever tried a cigarette/cigar?” Response options included Yes and No.

4.2.4. Covariates

We controlled for age and body mass index (BMI) in all analyses.

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