

## Female Body Image: Older and Younger Women Reflected Through Machover's Draw-A-Person Test

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Studies show that women tend to have a negative body image throughout their entire life. This study hypothesized that older women put more attention on their physical appearance than younger women because of the emotional need to stay attractive despite going through physical changes. This study used the DAP test to analyze younger women's drawings (ages 25-35) and older women's drawings (ages 55-65), and examined them through two indicators: number of accessories and the emphasis on sensuality and sexuality. Results show significant positive correlation between age and number of accessories.

**Keywords:** Body Image, Machover's Draw-A-Person Test, self-esteem

In contemporary society, women of all ages have been known to develop a poor body image for a variety of reasons: societal pressures that define beauty, the ongoing battle with weight and thinness, and the quest to find and keep a romantic partner. Body image is layered throughout a women's life and has been a major contributor to depression and low self esteem (Tiggerman & Lynch, 2001).

Ironically, it has been noted that as the quintessential illustration of the "ideal woman" portrayed in the media gets gradually thinner, women get heavier (Tiggerman, et al., 2001). A distressing fact and possible response to this circumstance is that female body dissatisfaction has become normative in our society (Hurd, 2000). Consequently, more and more studies are exploring this phenomenon.

Younger women deal with issues of sexual attractiveness, pregnancies, and the desire to conform to the media's portrayal of "beauty". Older women must handle the aging process, which can contain body changes; menopause, illnesses, and increased weight gain (Pruis & Janowsky, 2010).

According to Muth et al. (1997), body evaluation is only one aspect of body image as a whole and should be distinguished from the importance placed on physical appearance. A woman may assess her body in a certain way yet an additional facet of body image is the extent of attention she gives to her looks. This research will attempt to examine the amount of attention placed on appearance via human figure drawings.

It is assumed that as a woman ages, her body dissatisfaction increases as she moves away from the classic ideal of beauty. She is no longer as thin or as youthful and the increased weight gain that inevitably occurs usually results in incessant dieting to maintain a thin figure. Hurd (2000) asserts that although older women are not as pressured by society to fit the mold of "being beautiful", they still care about their physical appearance.

There have been several studies investigating women's body image, young and old, using questionnaires and responses to figure line drawings using the Figure Rating Scale. This specific study, however, intends to explore how younger women and older women see themselves and their body image by examining women's self portrait drawings, using the Draw-A-Person test (Machover, 1949). And in a

more specific manner, this study intends to answer the question: Do older women care more about their appearance than younger women, as reflected in self figure drawings.

### Literature Review

According to Muth et al. (1997), body image is defined as the multi-faceted belief a person has about one's own body. This can include the way one thinks, feels, and acts regarding to one's physical appearance. According to their study, body image can be analyzed by three different characteristics: "evaluation, affect, and investment" (Muth et al., 1997). Evaluation refers to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one's body, affect refers to the emotional reaction one has to the self evaluation, and investment refers to the amount of attention or importance one places one's own physical appearance (Muth, et al., 1997).

The majority of women live with high levels of dissatisfaction regarding their body image throughout their entire life span. Hurd (2000) asserts that historically, a woman's value was solely based on her appearance; her body was, in essence, her currency. A woman's social and domestic roles were fulfilled through her body; bearing children and caring for her husband's and children's needs. Today, life has vastly changed for women in western countries, however; our society's obsession with women's bodies has not.

According to Tiggerman et al. (2001), women today are primarily frustrated with their shape and weight. It has been found that the desire to lose weight is constant throughout a woman's lifetime, and that fundamental events, such as puberty, pregnancies, and menopause, serve to increase body fat. According to Hurd (2000), previous researches concerning body image have generally focused on younger women's experiences, while by and large ignoring older women. Little is known about older women's experiences navigating the ageing process and how it affects their identities as women.

As previously stated, this research examines self figure drawings, known as Machover's Draw-A-Person test (DAP), in order to assess the amount of attention women assign to their physical appearance. Pihl & Nimrod (1976) state that the DAP test is one of the most widely used projective

assessment tools. In this test, the sketch represents the individual and the paper represents the individual's environment (Lev-Wiesel, 1999).

According to Lev-Wiesel (1999), researchers assert that human figure drawings are an effective mechanism to assess individual's anxieties, inner conflicts, and overall psychological problems. Empirically, the DAP test has been shown to correlate significantly with measures of depression and emotional problems. When a person is given the task to draw a person or themselves, the resulted drawing has been found to intimately connect to the individual's personality and inner self.

Based on the above Literature Review, the current study aims to compare the amount of attention and importance women place on physical appearance by evaluating human figure drawings from a group of younger women, ages 25-35, and older women, ages 55-65. It was hypothesized that older women will give more attention to their physical appearance in the human figure drawings than younger women.

### Method

#### Participants

Participants consisted of two groups of participants ranging in age from 25 to 65. Group 1 consisted of eleven women ages 25-35 and Group 2 consisted of eleven women ages 55-65. Both groups were selected randomly in a convenience sample. 63.6% were single in Group 1 in contrast to 0% in Group 2. 27.3% were married in Group 1 while 90.9% were married in Group 2. In both Group 1 and 2, 9.1% were divorced. 9.1% of Group 1 had between 0-12 years of education on contrast to 18.2% in Group 2. In both groups, 54.5% had an undergraduate degree, while 36.4% had a master's degree or higher in Group 1 and 27.3% had a master's degree or higher in Group 2. In Group 1, 72.7% were Jewish whereas 27.3% were Arab. In Group 2, 90.9% were Jewish and 9.1% were Arab.

#### Instrument and Procedure

The instrument used in this study was the Machover Draw-A-Person test (1949). The subjects were given a blank sheet of white paper, a no. 2 pencil and eraser and were asked to draw themselves with no other additional instructions.

The indicators selected reflected the techniques women use to emphasize their looks. These included accessories, such as: jewelry, purses, shoes and belts, etc., which were counted in each individual drawing. The second indicator was the emphasis of sensuality and sexuality (EOSS), such as; hair, mouth, eyes, and the body. The indicator was rated on a scale from 1-5, 1 representing "does not stand out at all", 2 "does not stand out", 3 "stands out slightly", 4 "stands out", and 5 "highly stands out". Each drawing was analyzed by the group of researchers and the EOSS rank was decided together. The previous ordinal scale was upgraded to an interval scale for the statistical analysis.

The statistical analysis will be discussed in the Results section below.

**Results**

This research hypothesis stated that there is a difference between younger women (ages 25-35) and older women (ages 55-65) and their body image via the number of accessories added in each human figure drawing. In order to examine this assumption, an Independent Sample t-test was conducted and a marginal significance was found [ $t(20) = -1.69, p < 0.053$ ]. The average number of accessories in the older women's drawings (Group 2) ( $M = 2.55, SD = 1.57$ ) was larger than the average of accessories in the younger women's drawings (Group 1) ( $M = 1.09, SD = 2.39$ ).

In order to further specify the previous outcome, the Pearson Correlation test was conducted between the women's age and the number of accessories. A medium positive correlation and marginal significance was found [ $r = .035, p > 0.053$ ]. Therefore, as the age of women increases so does the tendency to draw themselves with additional accessories (See Figure 1 and 2)

Figure 1

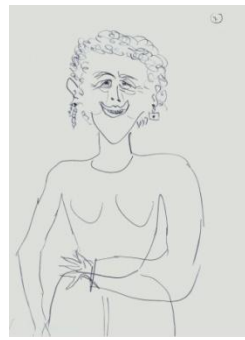


Female, Age 59 Accessories included in drawing: 2 earrings, purse, belt, and belt buckle



Female, Age 26 Accessories included in drawing: none

Figure 2



Female, Age 58 Emphasis of Sensuality and Sexuality: lips, breasts and figure. Accessories included in drawing: 3 earrings



Female, Age 33 Emphasis of Sensuality and Sexuality: mouth and eyes Accessories included in drawing: none

Furthermore, an additional Independent Sample t-test was conducted between age and the EOSS rank (emphasis of sensuality and sexuality, see Method) in both groups. There was no significant difference found [ $t(20) = 0.65, N.S.$ ]. (See Figure 2).

**Discussion**

The current study attempted to examine how younger women and older women perceive their body image, through human figure drawings using the Machover Draw-A-Person test (1949). The research focused on two indicators - the amount of added accessories and the ranking of the emphasis of sensuality and sexuality (EOSS). The results showed a marginal significant difference between older women and younger women regarding the number of accessories added to each drawing. In addition, a medium positive correlation was found between age and number of accessories.

The EOSS indicator was not found to be significant yet differences between the means were found. This could be due to the small sample size or because of the chosen ranking system.

The larger number of accessories that older women added to their drawings might signify the need to enhance their appearance. Hurd (2000) noted that a woman's sense of attractiveness is directly related to her feelings of self-worth. Hurd also cited Healey (1993), "the basic assumption underlying ageism that youth is good, desirable, and beautiful; old age is bad, repulsive and ugly" (Hurd, 2000 p.84).

Pruis et al. (2010) have claimed that, "...while older women (according to Pruis *et al.* (2010), the phrase "older women" refers to the ages 65-80 years old) still care about their body appearance, they put less attention on it..." (p.226). Although our findings prove to be opposite of what was found in the above stated research, it raises an interesting question: What is the definition of "older women" in research? Perhaps because of the advances in medicine, technology, media, etc. this definition might be changing. Women today live longer and the differences between the older ages (such as 60-80) are growing.

Additional factors that could have influenced the findings were - type of sample chosen: Group 1 consisted of mostly students which lacked in diversity, in addition to the short amount of time each person had to complete the drawing. Furthermore, the small sample size (N=22) limited research capabilities.

Future studies on this subject should focus on a larger more diverse sample, larger number of indicators in the drawings and more specific demographic data, such as: income, religion, cultural background, sexual orientation, etc. This data can then be analyzed together with the indicators to produce a wider understanding of the subjects in the study.

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