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PSYCHOLOGICAL FEATURES OF THE SELF-BODY IMAGE IN THE MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN AS FACTORS OF INTERPERSONAL INTERACTION

Abstract

Throughout a woman's life, her Self-body image can significantly impact her psychological well-being. The self-perception of a woman's body undergoes various changes as she experiences different life stages. Middle age, in particular, can bring about unique psychological features concerning body image for women. This article delves into the psychological aspects of self-body image experienced by middle-aged women and explores their impact on interpersonal interaction.

As a result, we identified such psychological features of Bodily self of women at the middle age as worries about the physical changes in their body, burden of being a mother and a wife, emotional and professional burnout, influence of societal and cultural norms. Moreover, the middle-aged females experience a critical period in personal development that is reflected in the changes of their system of values, relationships and preferences, as well as in wishing to change life and work conditions. These midlife challenges affect the psychological well-being and health of ladies, along with the perception of Self-identity, including the Bodily Self.

Besides, by the authors, was conducted a survey to identify the tendencies of the Self-body image of modern middle-aged women from the perspective of dressing and investigate the interconnection between Self-body perception and building interpersonal relationships. According to the findings, the majority of modern ladies does not pay heed towards fashion trends, and in general, have a lack of time and energy for shopping. Most females at middle age have a sedentary lifestyle, and, hence, do not have much motivation for going out and experimenting with new, fashionable looks.

Key words: Self-body image, Bodily self, Self-concept, middle-aged women, psychological features, midlife crisis, life conditions, changes, interpersonal interaction.

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ОРТА ЖАСТАҒЫ ӘЙЕЛ АДАМДАРДЫҢ ТҮЛҒАЛЫҚ ӨЗАРА ӘРЕКЕТТЕСУ ФАКТОРЫ РЕТІНДЕ ДЕНЕЛІК-МЕН ИМИДЖІНІҢ ПСИХОЛОГИЯЛЫҚ ЕРЕКШЕЛІКТЕРІ

Аңдатпа

Әйелдің бүкіл өмірінде оның денесінің бейнесі психологиялық әл-ауқатына айтарлықтай әсер етуі мүмкін. Әйел денесінің өзін-өзі қабылдауы әртүрлі өмірлік кезеңдерден өткен сайын әртүрлі өзгерістерге ұшырайды. Орта жас, атап айтқанда, әйелдердің дене имиджіне қатысты ерекше психологиялық ерекшеліктерге әкелуі мүмкін. Бұл мақалада орта жастағы әйелдер кездесетін физикалық өзін-өзі бейнелеудің психологиялық аспектілері қарастырылады, және олардың тұлғааралық қарым-қатынасқа әсері зерттеледі.

Нәтижесінде біз орта жастағы әйелдердің денесіндегі физикалық өзгерістерге алаңдаушылық, ана мен әйел болу ауыртпалығы, эмоционалдық және кәсіби күйіп қалу, әлеуметтік және мәдени нормалардың әсері сияқты психологиялық ерекшеліктерін анықтадық. Сонымен қатар, орта жастағы әйелдер жеке дамудың маңызды кезеңін бастан кешіреді, бұл олардың құндылықтар, қатынастар мен артықшылықтар жүйесіндегі өзгерістерден, сондай-ақ өмір сүру және еңбек жағдайларын өзгерту ниетінен көрінеді. Бұл орта жастағы проблемалар әйелдердің психологиялық әл-ауқаты мен денсаулығына, сондай-ақ өздерінің жеке басын, соның ішінде дене болмысын қабылдауға әсер етеді.

Сонымен қатар, авторлар киім тұрғысынан қазіргі орта жастағы әйелдердің өз денесі туралы идеясының тенденцияларын анықтау және өз денесін қабылдау мен тұлғааралық қатынастарды құру арасындағы байланысты зерттеу мақсатында сауалнама жүргізді. Алынған нәтижелерге сәйкес, қазіргі заманғы ханымдардың көпшілігі сән трендтеріне назар аудармайды және жалпы сатып алуға уақыт пен күш жетіспейді. Көптеген орта жастағы әйелдер отырықшы өмір салтын ұстанады, сондықтан олар көшеге шығуға және жаңа, сәнді бейнелермен тәжірибе жасауға ынталы емес.

Кілттік сөздер: дене имиджі, денелік «Мен», Мен-тұжырымдама, орта жастағы әйелдер, психологиялық ерекшеліктер, орта жастағы дағдарыс, өмір сүру жағдайлары, өзгерістер, тұлғааралық қарым-қатынас.

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ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ ИМИДЖА ТЕЛЕСНОГО-Я У ЖЕНЩИН СРЕДНЕГО ВОЗРАСТА КАК ФАКТОРЫ МЕЖЛИЧНОСТНОГО ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ

Аннотация

На протяжении всей жизни женщины образ ее Телесного Я может существенно влиять на ее психологическое благополучие. Самовосприятие женского тела претерпевает различные изменения по мере того, как она проходит различные жизненные этапы. Средний возраст, в частности, может привести к появлению уникальных психологических особенностей, касающихся телесного имиджа у женщин. В этой статье рассматриваются психологические аспекты образа Физического Я, с которыми сталкиваются женщины среднего возраста, и исследуется их влияние на межличностное взаимодействие.

В результате мы выявили такие психологические особенности телесного "Я" женщин среднего возраста, как беспокойство по поводу физических изменений в их теле, бремя быть матерью и женой, эмоциональное и профессиональное выгорание, влияние социальных и культурных норм. Более того, женщины среднего возраста переживают критический период в личностном развитии, который отражается в изменениях их системы ценностей, отношений и предпочтений, а также в желании изменить условия жизни и труда. Эти проблемы среднего возраста влияют на психологическое благополучие и здоровье женщин, а также на восприятие собственной идентичности, включая телесное "Я".

Кроме того, авторами был проведен опрос с целью выявления тенденций в представлении о собственном теле современных женщин среднего возраста с точки зрения одежды и исследования взаимосвязи между восприятием собственного тела и построением межличностных отношений. Согласно полученным результатам, большинство современных дам не обращают внимания на модные тенденции, и в целом у них не хватает времени и энергии на шопинг. Многие женщины среднего возраста ведут малоподвижный образ жизни, и, следовательно, у них нет особой мотивации выходить на улицу и экспериментировать с новыми, модными образами.

Ключевые слова: имидж Телесного Я, телесное «Я», Я-концепция, женщины среднего возраста, психологические особенности, кризис среднего возраста, условия жизни, изменения, межличностное взаимодействие.

INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the study. In modern society, the problem of body image in terms of Self-concept has become a reason for concern of multitudes of people, especially among the representatives of the female gender. The high standards of beauty and requirements to the dress-code lead to an increase in requirements to the ideal body image, including the appearance and the attire, as well as the demeanor of a person. The attitude of the personality towards own body, the feelings and thoughts related to one's own physique and looks, as well as the way a person manages his body, - all these are psychological factors that influence the bodily Self.

Nowadays, people pay attention to how others represent and conduct themselves. It is especially frequent in collectives and informal groups. Whether the individual is self-confident and has a healthy

self-esteem can be seen in the way he or she walks, talks and acts. Regarding the women of middle age, they may be concerned about their image in the professional environment and in the family circle. The features of their bodily self may have a big impact on the process and results of interpersonal interaction.

It is natural for women to wish to receive aesthetical pleasure when looking in the mirror and to note positive attitude from the surrounding people. If there are no problems with it, the dame will have a positive Self-body image. Contrastingly, in case she is not satisfied with own body and does not take care of it, the woman will form a negative perception of bodily self. Moreover, it can lead to failures in interpersonal communication and building favourable interrelationships. It is often unclear how to eliminate psychological barriers in interaction with the current state of one's body and perception of it.

The problem of Self-body concept and formation of positive image from the psychological perspective has been investigated for decades, but its connection to the personal experiences of making contacts and developing interpersonal relationships is not studied well. Furthermore, the world has considerably changed, compared to the previous century, and life conditions of women are quite different. Therefore, we deem it significant to consider this issue in the context of interaction between personalities.

Thus, the purpose of the study is to analyse the psychological features of women's self-body image as factors of interpersonal interaction and to conduct a survey to obtain relevant information about the interconnection between the Self-body image in terms of clothing and the experience of interpersonal interaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW.

The notion and structure of the Self-concept were proposed by an American scholar W. James, who viewed The self as an object of cognition, rather than a subject. He divided The Self-construct into four parts: the spiritual self, the material self, the social self, and the bodily self. Each person has their own individual image or ideas about themselves based on these aspects. According to the Self-concept a person creates connections and relationships with others and with themselves. It is different from self-awareness since it involves the evaluative component along with the cognitive and behavioral ones [1].

Focusing on the bodily self, it is significant to understand what it implies. Bodily Self is a concept that has been defined in a variety of ways by different scholars. Some psychologists consider the bodily self as the physical body, while others have defined it as the mind-body connection. From the perspective of other psychological schools, the Self-body concept is the way in which we experience our bodies in relation to the world around us. To put simple, the Bodily Self refers to the set of knowledge and beliefs about one's own physical body, mental and emotional accepting or rejecting its characteristics, as well as the person's conscious and unconscious patterns of behavior.

If we apply Rogers' definition of the Self-concept to its constituent part – the Corporeal Self, we may interpret it as a person's perception and understanding of one's own body, based on the experience of the past, the ongoing processes and upcoming expectations. C. Rogers argued that, for the most part, a person's behavior is consistent with his Self-concept [2]. It proves that the Self-body image, in combination with other parts of Self-identity, plays a crucial role in making contacts and building interpersonal relationships since it is a motivator and, to some extent, a condition of successful interaction.

C. Jung, a psychologist and psychoanalyst from Switzerland, believed that the body-Self is like a blueprint in our minds that combines our physical body, our senses, and our instincts to make up who we are as a person. This means understanding our own body, how we interact with the world around us, and taking care of the body's basic needs [3]. From the viewpoint of E. Fromm, a German-American scientist, the bodily self is a part of the personality that has to do with its physical senses. It helps us understand the space around, feel positive or negative sensations, and experience physical needs and pleasure [4].

One of the most influential definitions of the bodily self is given by the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It is applicable in different fields, including psychology, sociology, and anthropology. In psychology, Merleau-Ponty's work has been used to understand the relationship between the body and the mind. He argued that the bodily self is not simply a physical object that we can observe from the outside, but rather an integral part of our living experience in the world. According to him, the "lived body" is a mediator of our consciousness, not just an embodiment of flesh and bones. He

believes that perception is when our body connects and interacts with the world. Thus, the body we live in is what enables us to perceive and transform things, and is the most important aspect of our consciousness.

M.Nussbaum, a famous philosopher highlights the significance of the corporeal Self. The corporeal Self is a way of understanding ourselves that includes both our physical body and our emotions and thoughts. It shows that we are limited as physical beings because we can only feel, have emotions, and think through our bodies [5]. Hence, the bodily Self encompasses all three aspects of the Self-concept, with the addition of the emotional feelings about one's own body.

I.Cohn asks if a person can really understand and judge themselves well. This connects to the issue of how the main functions of self-consciousness, namely regulating and organizing, and protecting one's ego work together. To make good choices, people need to know about their surroundings and understand themselves. On the other hand, the Ego-protective function mainly focuses on keeping a positive self-image and self-esteem, even if it means distorting information. Based on this, the same person can have both accurate and inaccurate opinions about themselves.

Proceeding to an outward expression of the Bodily Self – the Body image, its essence and features should be considered. If the Self-body concept encompasses how an individual sees their body's size, shape, aesthetics, and functionality, body image refers to how surrounding people perceive an individual, their impression and attitude based on the observable characteristics of a person. They include the physical appearance, manners of speech and behavior, non-verbal cues, habits, style, and accuracy or, vice versa, untidiness.

Actually, our body naturally shows others what is going on with us, without our realisation. Either we feel alright and confident - standing up straight, walking smoothly, and holding our head high, or we are closed in ourselves and afraid of something - hunching our back, taking small, delicate steps, and lowering our head. As such, body language gives a lot of information about a person, more than he or she intends to reveal.

A major influence on the body image of a person has the type of physique. V.P. Petlenko identifies 5 constitutional types (variants of the norm): hyposthenic (asthenic), normosthenic, hypersthenic, graceful (small and delicate), and athletic type [6].

In anatomy, three main types of body proportions are distinguished:

- 1) brachymorphic, which is characterized by a wide trunk and short limbs;
- 2) mesomorphic, average indicators of limb lengths and shoulder widths;
- 3) dolichomorphic, characterized by inverse ratios (narrow trunk and long limbs) [7].

Taking into account the features of one's own constitution, an individual may choose suitable attire and style, highlighting their advantages and hiding figure flaws. People usually firstly notice the appearance and dressing of a person, then his or her manners, mimics and gestures, and lastly, after interacting awhile, personality qualities and human values.

RESEARCH MATERIALS AND METHODS.

In order to achieve the aim of the study the following methods were applied:

- the theoretical analysis of literature on the issue;
- the survey among middle-aged women for evaluating their self-body image in the regards of clothing and its impact on interpersonal interaction. 50 survey participants were given 30 questions of single-choice and 5-scale types.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

Theoretical Study. Before analysing the self-body image, let us consider more closely the nuances of the period of middle maturity for females. According to the psychosocial stages of personal development by E.Erikson, an individual at the age of 26-64 chooses between productivity and stagnation [8]. Productivity is possible when a person cares about the younger members of a family and does best to provide conditions for their well-being and overall development. Stagnation, in turn, happens when a person does not have motivation or strong will to accomplish work and other duties at a proper level.

Becoming a mother implies the growth of responsibility and obligations. Some women choose to be a housewife, while others continue their career and have to combine work and family. At this period, young mothers may feel a lot of stress and pressure because they do not have limitless energy and time for taking care of their children, keeping close relationships with their husband and relatives,

doing house chores and completing professional tasks. Such hardships in life may cause a decrease in the level of psychological well-being of the woman, leaving noticeable traces on her body and mental state.

In such cases, ladies of middle age may lose motivation to self-development and self-care. The lack of free time and regular tiredness negatively affect the psychological and physical health. For sure, it depends on the individual: whether she is able to cope with difficulties or not, and whether she is optimistic and stress-resistant enough. If the condition of a mother after giving birth is weakened, or initially is not good, it will be reflected in other aspects of her health. In addition, a woman's body, especially belly, changes after being pregnant, either gaining or losing weight and fat. It causes discomforts to ladies and worsens their self-body image.

The majority of middle-aged women work somewhere and have professional responsibilities. They also may continue education at postgraduate level, simultaneously fulfilling a role of an employee and a learner. Each role implies certain behavior and form of speech, as well as stylistic patterns to be followed. Different social groups which a female has to interact with presumes self-presentation, communication and cooperation. Sometimes she may hear unpleasant remarks from colleagues and administration. Provided that a woman has positive perception of Self-identity, including bodily self, she will solve problems effectively during interaction, with no harm to own psychological state and self-esteem.

With the passage of time, people get older, sager and more experienced, they tend to change their systems of values, principles and preferences, in general, their characters alter too. These phenomena occur in the middle age (30-50 years old), considered a transitional period of mental development. The midlife crisis in women is manifested by the reassessment of social roles, priorities, achievements, and rethinking of family relationships. It may last from 6 months to 2-3 years. The main indications include disappointment with the current circumstances (job, way of life, spouse, or kids), the crave for alter and the rise of new leisure activities, emotional precariousness, feeling easily upset and irritated [9].

Statistically, women are more exposed to professional and emotional burnout, which usually happens when they become discouraged because of the inability to balance family and work, and feel exhausted from constant pressure and overload. In the professional environment women often have to outperform men to get acknowledgement. Even when working in an office, women are often given caregiving tasks, such as preparing a room for the conference, booking tickets, or calling colleagues to make sure they are ready for an event [10].

To sum up, we can distinguish the following psychological challenges that middle-aged women encounter:

- 1) a hard choice between one's family and career;
- 2) the heavy burden of motherhood and being a wife;
- 3) two ways of personal development: productivity and stagnation;
- 4) psychophysiological and physical health problems;
- 5) worsening of the skin state and changes in the exterior (aging);
- 6) high societal standards that lead to the development of insecurities and comparison;
- 7) dissatisfaction with life and work conditions;
- 8) changing one's worldview, values, and priorities;
- 9) lassitude because of conflicts and arguments with family members;
- 10) emotional and professional burnout because of intellectual and physical overload;
- 11) worries about others and lack of energy for self-care;
- 12) a high level of irritability and stress;
- 13) problems with time and resource management;
- 14) comparison to other people (the youth, peers, attractive and successful women)
- 15) difficulty of accepting and loving oneself, especially after being criticized;

Now, let us consider these psychological factors in terms of the Self-body image of middle-aged ladies. It is worth to note that not all of determinants are negative: women at middle age develop increased psychological resilience, which can positively influence their self-body image []. As they age, women often gain a deeper understanding of their bodies, accepting that perfection is unattainable and embracing self-acceptance. This acceptance can lead to greater body satisfaction and improved overall well-being.

Thus, it can be inferred that their Self-body image is shaped by various factors, such as:

- ❖ societal influences (beauty standards, fashion, trends, gender and age stereotypes, requirements to this or that social role, social norms);
- ❖ cultural ideals (beliefs and perceptions, attitudes to women, values, cultural stereotypes, traditions, etiquette);
- ❖ personal experiences (previous age stages, creating a family, motherhood, career, education, hobbies, - life experience, in general),
- ❖ experience of interaction (with relatives, friends, colleagues, acquaintances and unfamiliar people);
- ❖ individual characteristics (the appearance and the physique, physical and psycho-physiological health, personal traits, abilities and skills);
- ❖ type of activity or occupation (position, dress-code, labour conditions, intellectual or physical work, interests, leisure activities);
- ❖ midlife crisis (changes in personality, reassessment of values, priorities, relationships)
- ❖ the amount of time and motivation for self-care and self-development;
- ❖ opinions and attitudes of close people and people from social environment;
- ❖ psychological resilience and stress-resistance (adequate attitude to critique and Ego-protectiveness);
- ❖ lifestyle (healthy or pernicious habits, physical exercises, sleep patterns, diet);
- ❖ level of self-esteem (confidence, insecurities) and self-awareness (understanding own body).

The listed factors, that encourage or discourage, and, in general, affect the process of interpersonal interaction, are presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Factors of Self-body image of middle-aged women

EMPIRICAL STUDY.

Analysing the data obtained from the survey “The Self-body image of middle-aged women, in terms of style and clothing, as factors of interpersonal interaction, we noted the following tendencies:

- a) less attention to trends in fashion and attire;
- b) a lack of time to buy beautiful and stylish clothes;
- c) a lack of energy to take care of the clothes and closet;
- d) a relative indifference to other people’s opinions, except close ones;
- e) tough acceptance of criticism from the social environment;
- f) a lack of internal motivation to go out and, respectively, wear an expensive attire;
- g) a lack of explicit motivation to wear new, fashionable clothes;
- h) focus on accomplishing professional tasks, not paying attention to the appearance;

- i) feeling no need to wear beautiful clothes at home, in the family circle;
- j) insufficient knowledge about strategies of choosing appropriate clothing;
- k) presence of complexes regarding one's figure and low level of self-esteem;
- l) preferences of casual (at home) and official (at work) styles;
- m) avoiding participation in events which imply a long preparation of presentable appearance;
- n) unconscious comparison of own appearance and style with those of others;
- o) contradictory or negative thoughts about one's sense of style.

The comparative analysis of some survey questions is provided below, in Figure 2.

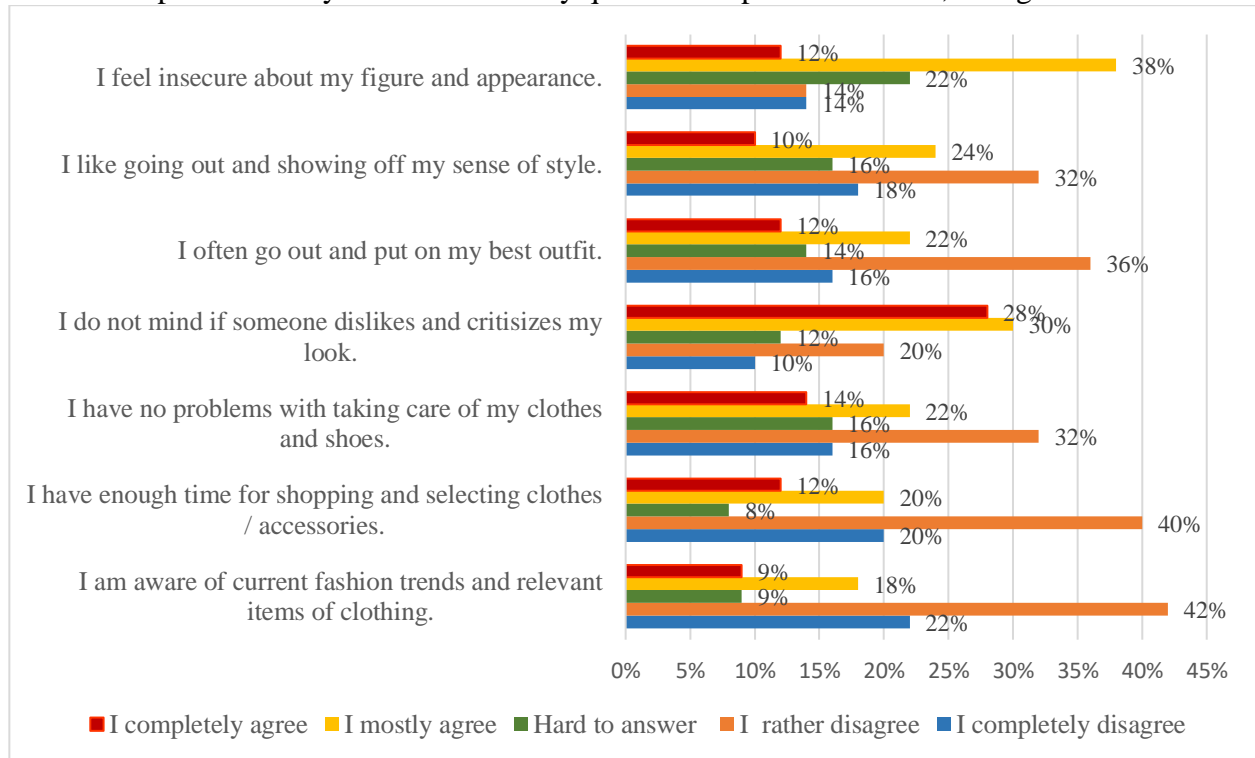


Figure 2. Analysis of the responses on seven Likert-scale questions

According to the data analysis in Figure 2, a half of the females at middle age feel insecure about their figure and appearance. 11 persons hesitated to answer the question. 28% of the surveyed ladies admitted having insecurities concerning their looks and physique.

Regarding the awareness of fashion trends and stylish articles of clothing, most middle-aged women gave negative responses. 27% of the survey participants keep up with fashion, 9% of them are well-informed about fashionable and stylish garment.

Proceeding to the statement about the sufficiency of time for shopping, more than a half of the respondents disagreed with it, which means that they do not have enough time for purchasing new clothes and accessories. 32% of middle-aged females find time for shopping.

As for the problem of washing and ironing clothes and taking care of shoes, 48% of the survey participants find it difficult and tiresome. 8 individuals neither agree, nor disagree with the statement. 36% of the ladies are fine with clothing care.

Considering the females' attitude towards judging looks and words of other people about their attire, women of middle maturity mostly ignore them. But still, 15 persons care about the opinions and remarks of social environment regarding their style and look.

The results of the survey show that 34% of middle-aged women frequently go out, putting on their beautiful clothes. However, 18 out of 50 people usually stay at home and do not hang out. 16% of the ladies do not leave their houses unnecessarily.

Moreover, only 5 surveyed individuals like socialising and are confident in their taste in clothes. 24% of the females mostly agree with the claim "I like going out and showing off my sense of style." Half of the middle-aged women prefer to relax at home, with no need to search for fashionable articles of clothing.

CONCLUSION.

Thus, the psychological aspects of self-body image are complex and evolve throughout a woman's life. Middle-aged women face unique challenges concerning body perception as they navigate physical changes, societal expectations, household and professional hardships, and life transitions. Considering the midlife crisis which women encounter with, its successful walkthrough may facilitate their personal development and better acceptance of themselves with all strengths and weaknesses.

Acknowledging and understanding these psychological features, along with challenging societal beauty standards can help women develop self-compassion and find acceptance in their bodies, ultimately fostering favourable self-body image and psychological well-being. Encouraging realistic expectations, promoting positive social support, and engaging in self-care practices can contribute to a healthier and more positive self-body image for middle-aged women.

Negative self-perception, in turn, can contribute to the challenges middle-aged women face in their interpersonal interactions. As they compare themselves with younger counterparts or perceived social norms, they may develop a negative view of their abilities, attractiveness, or overall worth. This negative self-perception can hinder their ability to engage confidently in conversations, establish new relationships, or maintain existing ones. It can lead to avoidance behavior, isolating them from potential social support networks.

However, it is important to note that not all middle-aged women experience negative psychological features of bodily self. Positive psychological features, such as body acceptance and high self-esteem, can also shape their interpersonal interactions positively. Women who have developed a positive body image and self-perception are generally more confident and comfortable in their own skin. This confidence can enhance their ability to assertively communicate, establish boundaries, and develop deeper connections with others.

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