Chapter 35

Body Image and Emotional Well Being Among Gay and Heterosexual Religious Young Men:
Modern Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Jews

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ABSTRACT

This chapter attempts to create a close-up picture of the society of Orthodox Jewish men in regard to their levels of religiosity and sexual identity. The author examines BI, emotional wellbeing, and the connection between them, among three groups of religious Israeli young men: Modern Orthodox (MO) heterosexual men, Modern Orthodox gay men (MOG), and ultra-Orthodox heterosexual men (UO). The findings pose an extremely important challenge to educators in Israel. The young men answered two questionnaires: SWLS and the Body Image Questionnaire. The BI and wellbeing scores for the MOGs were significantly lower than for the MOs and UO. The correlations between BI and wellbeing were different in each group: there was no significant correlation among the MO, among the MOGs there was a negative, medium, and significant correlation, and among the UO there was a positive, high, and significant correlation. These differences were explained by social and educational trends.

INTRODUCTION

In a previous book (Fisherman, 2015), the author discussed body image (the subjective picture of the size and shape of a person's body) and emotional wellbeing of male and female religious young adults in Israel. In a subsequent chapter of the book the author showed that there was a higher correlation be-

tween body image (BI) and emotional wellbeing among boys than girls. In this chapter the author has attempted to create a close-up picture of the society of Orthodox Jewish men. This, in regard to both their measure of religiosity (ultra-Orthodox and Modern Orthodox and sexual identity (heterosexual or gay sexual orientation) among the Modern Orthodox.

Over the past twenty years, there have been rapid social changes in Israeli society's attitude regarding lesbian and gay male sexual orientation. These changes have brought about a brisk process of people disclosing their sexual orientation and lowering of the age when people come to terms with their sexual orientation as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) (Ike, Slater, Hertz, & Katsaf, 2011). Concurrently, in Israel, lesbians and gay men face difficulties with the process of forming an identity. Israeli society is considered conservative due to the antagonism of religious and military institutions and political organizations, as well as Jewish culture which opposes a lesbian and gay male lifestyle (Shilo, 2008). These difficulties are intensified when dealing with religious adolescents torn between their religious obligations and sexual identity. More and more lesbians and gay men are disclosing their sexual orientation. However, the more lesbians and gay men who do so, the more conflicts are created between the LGBT community and religious, conservative society (Zevulun, 2015).

The correlation between BI and emotional wellbeing is discussed extensively in many studies, usually regarding women. In this study, the author seeks to examine the correlation between BI and wellbeing among three groups of young religious men: Modern Orthodox heterosexual men (MO), Modern Orthodox gay men (MOG), and ultra-Orthodox heterosexual men (UO).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Body Image (BI)

The complexity of BI is reflected in its large number of definitions, and the various psychological theories expressing different attitudes towards it. The current study, examining the connection between BI and wellbeing, defines BI according to Ravaldi et al. (2003), as a subjective picture of the size and shape of a person's body, feelings relative to the characteristics of the various parts of his or her body, and the body as a whole. This "subjective picture" is more important than objective dimensions to BI. In Israel too, Bachar (2011), and Maor (2012) demonstrated subjective self-esteem characterizes BI, rather than its objective dimensions.

There is relatively little research about BI among males as compared to females (Pila, Brunet, Kowalski, & Sabiston, 2016), because, historically, only such research about females interested researchers (Burlew & Shurts, 2013). In the previous book (Fisherman, 2015) the author reviewed studies discussing gender-based differences regarding BI and their correlation with eating disorders. The author brought studies that showed how adolescent girls and adult women suffer more than men from poor BI and eating disorders (Davison & McCabe, 2006; Eisenberg, Nicklett, Roeder, & Kirz, 2011; Mintz & O'Halloran, 2000; Stice & Shaw, 2003).

Many researchers have examined factors influencing BI. The main factors include social influence, and familial, personal, cultural, and spiritual factors (Brockhoff et al., 2016; Erlich & Fisherman, 2012; Snapp, Hensley-Choate, & Ryu, 2012). Social influence greatly affects the forming of self-image regarding appearance and looks. Any deviation from that considered normative leads to lack of satisfaction with the person's body, and eventually negatively affects ego in general (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2006).

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