

The Influence of Sociocultural Attitude towards Body Image Perception in Females

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Abstract

Body image concerns among young females are strongly shaped by sociocultural attitude. For many longer decades, Women's body image is significantly influenced by sociocultural factors, particularly the internalization of appearance ideals and pressures from peers and family. Due to these, it could lead to body dissatisfaction, lower self-esteem, and unhealthy attempts to change appearance. Understanding these influences is important, as negative body image is linked to low self-esteem and psychological distress. Most existing studies do not differentiate participants based on BMI categories, limiting the understanding of how body image concerns vary across weight groups. The present study aimed to explore the influence of Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance on body image perception among females aged 13–23. The study specifically examined how appearance-related pressure and internalization of societal beauty standards contribute to body image concerns. Data were collected using the Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire-4 Revised (SATAQ-4R). A total of 107 participants were selected, Participants were categorized based on Body Mass Index (BMI) to investigate whether variations in BMI correspond to differences in body image attitudes. The findings indicate that sociocultural pressures from family, peers, and media significantly shape body image perception. Participants with higher BMI levels reported greater appearance-related concerns and stronger internalization of thin-ideal standards. The study highlights the need for awareness programs addressing sociocultural pressure among young females and suggests that educators, parents, and media practitioners should promote healthier, more diverse representations of body image.

Keywords. Sociocultural Attitude, Body Image, Adolescents, Internalisation, Pressure

1.Introduction

Body image is defined as a person's perception of their physical self and their thoughts & feelings, positive, negative or both, which result from that perception. It can be influenced by a number of social factors, such as culture, the media, and interactions with family and friends. It often adapts to reflect new information, people, and experiences. (Florida State University Center for Health Advocacy & Wellness, n.d.) A person's beliefs about their looks, feelings about their body weight, height and shape, are called body image. The four aspects to body image are: perceptual, attitudinal, cognitive and behavioral (Cash, 2011).

Sociocultural Attitudes play a pivotal role in setting the standards for ideal physical appearance. They are an amalgamation of societal values, cultural norms and individual beliefs. Kostanski (2009) states that environment largely contributes to the mind set about body image. The reaction of the family, and other acquaintances towards them and their bodies plays a vital role in developing positive or negative body image. Some even develop body dissatisfaction due to teasing and taunting from own family members (Hardit & Hannum, 2012). Socio-cultural pressures are the actual and figurative messages in the form of beliefs, standards or choices that pressure a person to fit to the norms of the group (Cialdini et al., 2004). It stems from family, media and peers. our feelings are shaped by what we consume in society: the people we see on television, in films, in magazines, and, more recently, on social media. Women's health involves their emotional, social, cultural, spiritual, and physical well-being. It is determined not only by biology, but also by the social, political, and economic context of their lives (Affenito & Kerstetter, 1999, p. 85)

Studies shows that sociocultural pressure is a significant predictor of body image dissatisfaction in a wide range of genders, ages & cultural background. Although media has been the most extensive source of this pressure, friends and family are also crucial in influencing the self-perception, mostly through the process of internalization and comparison. How different people perceive and react to these pressures differs significantly according to gender and culture. Sociocultural determinants must be addressed to develop a healthier body image and prevent mental health complications, which should be achieved by educating, reforming policies, providing a favourable family environment, and responsible media practices(singh&shahi,2025)

Attitudes towards women vary widely between cultures. In patriarchal societies, men dominate every aspect of women's lives. Currently, attitudes towards the role of women in today's global society have changed extremely slowly ("Culture Attitudes Towards Women," n.d.) **Social attitudes towards women** vary as greatly as the members of society themselves. From culture to culture, perceptions about women and related gender expectations differ greatly. In recent years, there has been a great shift in attitudes towards women globally as society critically examines the role that women should play, and the value that women have (Wikipedia contributors, n.d.)

According to Sadik and Yilmaz (2025), the findings indicate that women's body image is shaped by a dynamic interplay between physical features and health, societal pressures and criticism, and self-perception and emotions. While each theme is distinct, their interconnections are evident. For example, *weight* is simultaneously a physical health concern and a social standard, while external criticisms often become internalized as negative emotions. These overlaps do not weaken the thematic distinctions but rather show the multidimensionality of body image. Ultimately, body image emerges as a construct where personal experiences, social evaluations, and emotional reflections converge.

Sadik, R., & Yilmaz, G. N. (2025) stated that the present study, it can be concluded that 37% had a neutral perception and 24% are unsatisfied with their body image. Psychological parameters like feeling anxious, lack of confidence, and attempts to change their body weight are associated with body image perception which may further result in affecting their mental health.

Manoj, T. I. 2016, stated that study underlines the importance of being aware of the relations between body image and self-esteem and the potential for socio-cultural influences to adversely affect general women population in Kerala. Strong observation which serves as an implication for the outcome of this investigation focus on the fact that an individual's level of self-esteem serves as a correlate to one's perception of body image, in that, as body image varies one's self-esteem may appreciate or depreciate (Abamara Nnaemeka C., and Agu Solomon A., 2014). One applied implication of the current study concerns the inclusion of self-esteem training in women. Indeed, it appears that some programs incorporate aspects of self-esteem in the promotion of positive body image. Our results appear to support the benefits of self-esteem for promoting positive body image. Although additional empirical evidence is

needed to support the effectiveness of intervention programs, it seems likely that self-esteem can contribute to reducing both appearance concerns and the ensuing consequences. Indeed, if it can be shown that self-esteem women are not bothered by comparisons with those judged to be better-off, self-esteem and self-compassion training will meaningfully contribute to prevention and treatment of body image concerns.

2. Review of Literature

Saadia Ghori, Manoj R, Ms. Sudar Oli D (2025) conducted a study which was aimed to investigate the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance among Indians and Non-Residents of India. The study indicated that there is no significant difference among NRIs and Indians in respect to sociocultural attitudes. Amrit Virk and Parmal Singh (2020) conducted a study on the relationship between body image and self esteem among medical undergraduate students. Study findings support the fact that body image dissatisfaction has its impact on self-esteem among college-going youth. Chhaya Akshay Divecha and Miriam Archana Simon (2022) conducted a study on body image concerns and weight control behaviors among medical students in a private medical college in Oman. The results showed no significant differences in body image perception, body image satisfaction, BMI, or weight control attempts across premedical, preclinical, and clinical students.

3. Method

3.1 Objectives

- To evaluate body image perception and levels of body dissatisfaction among females.
- To determine the relationship between Body image and sociocultural Attitude.
- To understand the influence of Sociocultural attitude towards body image perception in women belonging to various BMI groups (normal group and at risk group).

3.2 Hypothesis

H1: There will be no significant difference in sociocultural attitudes toward appearance across BMI categories (normal group and at risk group) among females.

3.3 Sample

The study was conducted on 13-23-year-old females whose weight and height are collected to calculate the BMI. The Sample consisted of 107 females. BMI is calculated to differentiate the data into normal and at risk categories.

3.4 Data and Sources of data

A structured google form was implemented to collect the primary data. The participants completed the google form after providing them the informed consent and ensured confidentiality and the data would be solely utilised for academic purposes. The google form containing the items of the tool was administered to women of ages 13-23. The study was conducted to understand the impact of sociocultural attitude on body image perception in female adolescents and early adults. During the time of data collection, ethical research practices and confidentiality were taken highly into the consideration.

3.5 Instruments Used

SATAQ-4R was the tool which was utilized to conduct our study. The Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-4-Revised (SATAQ-4R) captures the internalization of societal appearance ideals and perceived pressures from others. It is developed by Shaefer, L. M., Harriger, J. A., Heinberg, L. J., Soderberg, T., & Thompson, J. K in 2017. Each item of the SATAQ-4R is rated on a five point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (“definetely disagree”) to 5 (“definitely agree”). It has demonstrated internal consistency reliability with Cronbach’s alpha 0.73-0.96. The SATAQ-4R consists of male and female version. For the study, a female version of SATAQ-4R was administered which contains 31 items measuring the dimensions which are internalization of aspects like thinness, muscularity and general attractiveness and pressure which is experienced from family, peers and significant others.

4. Data Analysis

SPSS (Version 2.0) was employed to analyze and interpret data. It involved the combination of group statistics, used for measuring central tendency such as mean and standard deviation, inferential statistics techniques utilized for examining group differences like independent t-tests.

5. Result and Discussion

Table 1: Mean, SD and t value of variables among participants based on BMI.

Dimension	N	Mean	SD	df	t-values	significance
Internalization (thin)	57	11.70	3.34	105	0.85	0.39
	50	11.18	2.97			

Internalization (muscular)	57	13.45	3.17	105	1.20	0.230
	50	12.70	3.29			
Internalization (general attractiveness)	57	20.21	2.20	105	0.21	0.83
	50	20.12	2.24			
Family pressure	57	8.77	3.27	105	-2.76	0.007*
	50	10.58	3.49			
Peer pressure	57	8.03	2.97	105	-2.00	0.047*
	50	9.24	3.23			
Social media pressure	57	9.46	4.03	105	-1.93	0.056*
	50	10.90	3.64			
Significant others pressure	57	8.12	3.00	105	-3.21	0.002**
	50	10.28	3.91			
SATAQ-4R	57	79.75	13.27	105	-2.07	0.04*
	50	85.00	12.78			

**p<.005, *p<.05

The study is aimed to examine the Influence of Sociocultural Attitude towards body image among females belonging to categories of normal and at risk BMI. An Independent samples t-test was administered.

The sample consisted of 57 females with normal BMI and 50 females with at risk BMI. In internalization of thinness, mean scores obtained for females belonging to normal BMI category was 11.70 (SD= 3.34) and those of at risk BMI (SD=2.97) is 11.18. According to the t -test value of 0.84, p value (0.39) >0.05 the difference between the two means was not statistically different at 0.05level with 105 degrees of freedom. This implies that there are no significant differences at internalization of thin physique by females of both categories. (Engeln-Maddox, 2006) found out that research has also shown that women who have internalized the thin ideal are more likely to associate thinness with psychological (e.g., happiness, confidence), social (e.g., improved romantic and interpersonal relationships), and professional/financial benefits.(Christian et al., 2012; Culbert et al., 2015; Donovan et al., 2020;Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2014; Hoffmann & Warschburger, 2019; Paterna et al., 2021;

Schaefer et al., 2017) found women's internalization of the thin ideal has been linked with a range of problematic outcomes, including body dissatisfaction, appearance anxiety, low self-esteem, weight and shape concerns, social appearance comparison, self-objectification, and dieting and bulimic behaviours .

In the internalization of muscularity, The mean values obtained for females belonging to normal BMI category is 13.45(SD=3.17) and those females belonging to at risk BMI category 12.70 (SD=3.29). The t-test value obtained in this is 1.20 therefore and p value(0.230) >0.05 level indicates that there is no statistical significant difference between the two means at 0.05 level. Both BMI categories are not significantly different at internalizing the standard of muscularity

(Benton and Karazsia, 2015; Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2015, 2018; Boepple and Thompson, 2016; Carrotte et al., 2017; Bozsik et al., 2018) discovered that recently, this fixation on body fat has been compounded by the rise of the “athletic” ideal, epitomized by the fitspiration trend on social media, which portrays a body shape that is not only very slender, but also toned and muscular.(Uhlmann et al., 2018) stated that this body type is potentially even harder to achieve than a thin body and can lead to greater dissatisfaction than the previous thin female ideal ,with links to negative psychological outcomes (Cunningham et al., 2019).

For internalization of ideals of general attractiveness, the mean scores of 20.21 (SD=2.20) for females and 20.12(SD=2.24) for males. Since the test value is 0.21, p value(0.83)>0.05 level and no statistical significant difference at 0.05 level. There is no significant difference between females irrespective of the BMI categories they belong to at internalizing the norms or ideals of general attractiveness and societal beauty standards.

(Cafri.et al 2015) stated According to the tripartite influence model, this constant social reinforcement of prominent appearance ideals encourages each individual to internalize the relevant appearance ideal. (Thompson et al., 1999; Thompson & Stice, 2001) states Internalization refers to the degree to which an individual “buys into” socially-prescribed appearance ideals, expresses a desire to attain the appearance ideal, and engages in behaviors aimed at meeting those ideals

In experiencing pressure from family members to fit into the sociocultural standards for physical attractiveness, The mean scores are 8.77 (SD=3.27) and 10.58(SD=3.49) for females belonging to normal BMI and at Risk BMI respectively . The t -value is -2.762 and p value (0.007) <0.05 level, that means there is a statistically significant difference between the means of females belonging to both BMI categories. From the data obtained, females belonging to the at risk BMI category are subjected to higher pressure from the family than those of the normal BMI category.(Ata, Rojas, Ludden, & Thompson, 2011) asserted that within the context of the family environment, parents are strong communicators of appearance ideals and exert appearance-related pressures through direct appearance-related comments and modeling of appearance concerns.(Bearman, Presnell, Martinez, & Stice, 2006; Rodgers & Chabrol, 2009).found that the research suggests that such parental pressures exhibit considerable influence on sons' and daughters' body image and eating behaviors. (Vincent & McCabe, 2000) found that an additional source of familial pressure may stem from siblings, who have been shown to play a significant role in girls' dietary restraint.

In the pressure arising from peers, the mean scores for females of normal BMI category are 8.03 (SD=2.97) and those of at risk BMI are 9.24(SD=3.23.) The t-test value shown is -2.006, p value 0.047>0.05 level which implies that there is statistically significant difference between the means of both BMI categories. (Haines, Neumark- Sztainer, Hannan, van den Berg, & Eisenberg, 2008; Menzel et al., 2010) found that from an early age, peer groups emphasize and reinforce cultural standards of attractiveness through appearance-focused conversations, appearance-related teasing, “fat talk,” and direct comments or criticism.

In the pressure arising from social media, 9.46 (SD=4.03) and 10.90(SD=3.64) are the mean scores for females belonging to normal and at risk BMI categories. The t-test value obtained is -1.93,the p value (0.056) which is slightly greater than 0.05 level. This implies that there is no statistically significant difference between the females of both BMI categories.(Penalba-Sánchez et al., 2022, Vall et al., 2023) found that the recent research suggests that body dissatisfaction and physical appearance comparisons have increased in young women since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.(Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) emphasized that repeated exposure to these media ideals also contributes to self-objectification, where one feels the need to constantly monitor/surveil one's appearance as compared to those ideals.

In the pressure experienced from significant others', the mean scores are 8.12(SD=3.00) and 10.28 SD=3.91))for females belonging to normal BMI and at risk BMI categories respectively. The t value is -3.21, p value(0.002) is less than 0.05 which implies that there is statistically significant difference. Females belonging to risk BMI are subjected to higher pressure from Significant others' than those of normal BMI category. (George et al., 2023) found that recent findings show that men's ratings of their female partner's attractiveness are associated not only with their own relationship satisfaction but also with their partner's satisfaction. (Carels et al., 2020, Carriere and Kluck, 2014, Killoren et al., 2022, Sheets and Ajmere, 2005) discovered that Women whose weight has been criticized by their partner report significantly lower relationship quality.

In experiencing the impact of sociocultural attitudes on body image perception, For females belonging to the normal BMI category, M=79.75, SD=13.27 and for females belonging to the at risk BMI category, M=85.00, and SD= 12.78. The t -test value is -2.074 and p value (0.040)< 0.05 level, this implies that there is statistically significant difference between the means of both categories. Females belonging to the at risk BMI category are highly pressurized compared to those females in the normal BMI category. (Grabe et al., 2008) underscored that the media often glorifies thin and socially approved bodies, leading women to view their bodies negatively. This has supported the findings. (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) accentuated that women's body image is influenced by societal norms of idealized bodies, which heightens self-criticism and makes it difficult to develop a positive body image.

6. Limitations

- The study is limited to female participants the findings cannot be generalized across the males and other gender identities
- Data collected through self report measures could be influenced by factors like social desirability, biases or inaccurate perception of one's self.
- Cultural and individual differences occurring in the media exposure and sociocultural experiences would not be fully captured.
- Extraneous variables like mood, motivation, mental health status and self esteem were not controlled.

7. Conclusion

The study was conducted to investigate how sociocultural aspects influence females' way of perceiving their body image. The data were collected and analysed, the findings showcase that

- Internalization of societal standards regarding beauty and appearance do not vary across the females who belong to both the BMI categories.
- Individuals of the risk BMI category experience higher external pressure from family members, peers and those of significant others' to fit into the standards of ideal physical appearance than those who belong to normal BMI.
- Females who are at the risk BMI category are subjected to high societal pressure in overall aspects.

The study implies that Sociocultural pressure affects the body image perception in females to a greater extent. Psychological and interpersonal factors play a prominent role in the perception than BMI alone. Mental health practitioners should take steps forward to address the concerns regarding body image issues. mental health conditions associated with low self-esteem must be eradicated by bringing interventions, programmes and campaigns. Media literacy on these concerns has to be enhanced. Through these, individuals will learn to embrace their bodies confidently and self acceptance will be highly inculcated.

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