

The Role of Media on Shaping of Body Image: A Gender Difference Study

Manisha Saha^{1*}

ABSTRACT

Media plays a significant role in shaping body image by presenting idealized and unrealistic standards of beauty. This can lead to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors, especially among young people. Past body image study has mostly focused on women, with little attention paid to men's body image. This research paper investigates the role of media in shaping body image and explores gender differences in this regard. The study used the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3 (SATAQ-3) (Thompson, 2004) to assess the relationship between media exposure and sociocultural attitudes towards appearance of 127 young Indian adults in the age group of 18-26 years were chosen using convenience snowball sampling Males (n=52), females (n=57) and non-binary(n=18). The results showed a significant correlation between the number of hours spent on media and sociocultural attitudes towards appearance, indicating that media exposure plays a significant role in shaping individuals' body image. However, the study found no significant gender differences in sociocultural attitudes towards appearance. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the impact of media on body image and emphasize the importance of media literacy and education to promote positive body image among individuals of all genders.

Keywords: *Body Image, Gender, Media, Young Adult*

Body image (BI) is an individual's subjective perception of their body, regardless of how they appear. It constructs that includes thoughts, feelings, assessments, and behaviours about one's own body. (Hosseini & Padhy, 2022). It is a self-insight regarding a person's physical appearance that has been greatly impacted by (and in) society through social media, television, interpersonal interactions, and magazine and print media covers. Cultural context and social pressures to exhibit oneself as comparable to renowned people might influence BI. (Rodrigues et al., 2021). Rajagopalan and Shejwal from Pune discovered that Asian women face media pressure to be slim. As a consequence, a strong relationship between body dissatisfaction and media pressure was observed.

In addition to this, gender and sex are distinct qualities that are integrally related to the human experience in shaping physiological, mental, and social activity. Gender relates to an individual's self-perception and portrayal as male, female, or nonbinary, as well as their

¹Student, Kristu Jayanti College, India, Bangalore, India

*Corresponding Author

The Role of Media on Shaping of Body Image: A Gender Difference Study

social position. (Dotto, 2019) Nonbinary gender identities encompass individuals who do not perceive gender within the confines of the traditional gender binary, consisting of the male/female categories. They typically have a broader understanding of gender, and may identify with multiple genders, a gender beyond the male/female binary, neither male nor female, or simply without a gender. (Webb et al., 2015; Liszewski et al., 2018). They are marginalized and at risk of stigmatization and negative health outcomes (Scandurra et al., 2019). Disordered eating in gender-variant kids may be linked to a worse quality of life and poorer mental health outcomes (McClain & Peebles, 2016). Adolescent body image influences them in a variety of ways: Boys are often subjected to social pressures that encourage them to develop larger, more muscular bodies, (Pope et al., 1997) while girls are pressured to have a slender or ultra-thin physique (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999). A recent study found that viewing media depictions of celebrities who have recently given birth negatively impacts the body image of non-pregnant women (Hopper & Aubrey, 2016). Eating disorders and body dissatisfaction are common among gender minority adolescents. Parents, friends, romantic partners, and even the media, which seem to have a significant impact on teenagers, may put pressure on them (Stice & Whitenton, 2002). The societal pressure brought on by the mass media reinforces the notion that achieving an "ideal of beauty" is required, stressing thinness for women and a strong physique for males (Furnham et al., 2002). The media propagates a standard of beauty that many individuals may find challenging to attain. (Stice et al., 1994) & (Keery et al., 2004); Internalizing this concept of beauty may act as a buffer between social pressure and the formation of one's body image.

A study conducted by the Department of Psychology at Kenyon College in Gambier found that mass media promotes a slim ideal that leads to body dissatisfaction (Groesz et al., 2002). Mintz and Betz (1986) suggest that females are more likely to idealize a lean physique due to images of slender women in the media (Malinauskas et al., 2006) found that 39% of female college students in the United States identified media as a source of pressure to reach a specific weight. In contrast, a study in Karachi, Pakistan, revealed that males experience higher levels of body image dissatisfaction than females (Khan, 2011). Several factors, including family, peers, and cultural views, may contribute to negative body image throughout youth (Sethi & Mehta, 2022).

Rekha and Maran's (2012) study in Chennai showed that advertising also affects body image, with women idealizing thinner bodies due to the prevalence of thin culture in advertising. Bardone-Cone and Cass (2007) found that exposure to thin media images negatively impacted body image in both men and women, but the effect was stronger for women. Exposure to muscular male media images also hurt body image in men.

Barros et al. (2019) found that satisfaction with one's body directly affects their quality of life, with non-binary and pansexual individuals tending to have higher levels of body satisfaction. The study highlights the importance of providing adequate psychosocial support to individuals during the process of bodily transformation. Another study revealed that non-binary individuals had the highest levels of body dissatisfaction among the three subgroups examined, with gender congruence predicting body dissatisfaction (Liszewski et al., 2018). The internalization of societal beauty standards was also associated with body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors in the sample of transgender adults. Study by (Verveen et al., 2023) Body satisfaction was shown to be substantially associated to overall psychological difficulties as well as internalising and externalising problems in the studies.

The Role of Media on Shaping of Body Image: A Gender Difference Study

In adolescents with Gender Incongruence, greater body dissatisfaction is connected with worse psychological functioning.

According to Alfonso-Fuertes et al. (2022) study suggests that individuals who use Instagram more frequently are likely to have lower levels of body image satisfaction and self-esteem. This relationship is thought to be explained by the tendency to compare one's physical appearance to others on Instagram, which becomes more frequent with longer daily usage of the app.

Overall, the literature suggests that women may be more susceptible to the negative effects of media exposure on body image than men, although not all studies have found this gender difference. More research is needed to fully comprehend the mechanisms behind this phenomenon and develop effective interventions for promoting positive body image in both men and women.

The need for studying the role of media in shaping body image and its potential gender differences arises from the growing concern about the negative impact of unrealistic beauty standards promoted by the media. Research has shown that exposure to such images can lead to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and even eating disorders. Furthermore, it is important to investigate potential gender differences in the effects of media on body image, as men and women may have different experiences and responses to media messages. This research can inform media literacy programs and interventions aimed at promoting positive body image and reducing the negative effects of media on body dissatisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A sample of 127 young Indian adults in the age group of 18-26 years were chosen using convenience snowball sampling. Males (n=52), females (n=57) and non-binary(n=18) with an average age of 22.11 years participated in the study.

Instrument

This study utilized Thompson's 2004 Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3 (SATAQ-3) instrument. The scale is of 30 items. The participants indicated their opinions to the statements using a 5-point Likert-type scale. The minimum score for each question is 1, and the maximum is 5. The scale had good test-retest reliability, internal consistency Information (.96), Perceived Pressures (.92), Internalization-Athlete (.95), Internalization-General (.96), and Total subscale (.96) and good convergent validity (Calogero et al., 2004). The scale has also been adapted to Indian population (Lewis-Smith, 2021).

Objectives

1. To find the influence of media use on Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance among young adults.
2. To find the significant gender differences in Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance of young adults.

Hypothesis

- Ho1- There is no influence of media use on Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance among young adults

The Role of Media on Shaping of Body Image: A Gender Difference Study

- Ho2-There is no significant gender difference in Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance among young adults.

Research Design

The study utilized a research design based on quantitative methods, and the data was collected through the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3 (SATAQ-3), developed by Thompson (2004).

Procedure

A Google form was created for online administration to gather information. An official consent form, goal of the study, and instructions were given as part of the form. Socio-demographic information consisting of age, gender, educational qualification, place of living, social class and total hours spent on media were taken. Participants were selected through convenience snowball sampling. They were contacted via various online mediums and encouraged to share the form further. Participation was completely voluntary, and no incentives/compensation were provided. All responses were only used for the purpose of research and confidentiality was maintained. The results were computed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS

The aim of the present study was to explore the effects of mass media on the body image of Young adults in India. Further, the objective was to find out the differences, in the patterns of media influence among males, females and non-binary individuals. Males (n=52), Females (n=57) and non-binary (n=18) from the age group of 17-25 years of Bangalore participated.

The Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3 by Thompson (2004) was used to assess internalization, pressures, and information regarding media influence on body image. It was a convenience sampling study.

Table 1- Shows the correlation between the hours spent on media and socio-cultural attitudes towards appearance.

	n	Mean	SD	p
Hours Spent	127	2.29	.827	-
Sociocultural Attitudes towards appearance	127	81.24	19.954	.036*

Note: * $p < 0.05$

The table shows the relation between the hours spent on media and socio-cultural attitudes towards appearance. The results shows that the Mean is 2.29 and SD is .827 in hours spent using media and the Mean is 81.24 and SD is 19.954 in sociocultural Attitudes towards appearance variable and $p < 0.05$ and $r = .186$ which is significant this suggests that there is a significant relation between the two variables.

Table 2- Shows the analysis of Kruskal Wallis-H test of Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Scale and Gender.

	N	Mean Ranks	sd	X^2	p
Male	52	66.61			
Female	57	58.12	19.954	3.349	.187*
Non-binary	18	75.08			

Note: * $p > 0.05$

The Role of Media on Shaping of Body Image: A Gender Difference Study

The table 2 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the *Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance* female, and non-binary ($p > 0.05$) in this case the hypothesis is accepted and it can be said that there is no significant gender difference in socio-cultural attitudes towards appearance.

DISCUSSION

Previous findings have suggested that youth of both genders are actively influenced by body and beauty standards established by the media, leading to body dissatisfaction (Uchôa et al., 2019) Media use, particularly magazine reading, has also predicted a drive for thinness for both men and women (Harrison & Cantor, 2006). Another study by Bardone-Cone and Cass (2007) found that exposure to thin media images hurt body image in both men and women, but the effect was stronger for women. They also found that exposure to muscular male media images hurt body image in men. According to Festinger (1954) social comparison theory explains how people learn about themselves by comparing themselves to others. People often compare themselves to celebrities and famous figures in the media. When we see a picture of actors in the news or in a magazine, Men and women alike may be tempted to try the actor's story of going on a new diet. A study in Sikkim suggested that Body image dissatisfaction among men is exacerbated by the internalization of muscular body image ideals through media. (Sampath et al., 2020)

According to one study, a functional perspective of the body and acceptance of bodily defects define teenagers' happiness with their personal looks. The vast majority were physically active and felt exercise to be both enjoyable and beneficial to their health. Negative comments from family and friends were not given any importance. (Frisén & Holmqvist, 2010). The findings indicate that there is little variation in the amount to which media impacts males, females, and non-binary.

Another findings suggests that non-binary people's body satisfaction has a direct influence on their quality of life, and they need proper psychological assistance during the bodily change process. Non-binary people exhibit significant levels of body dissatisfaction, which has been linked to internalization of cultural beauty standards and gender congruence (Barros et al.2019 & Liszewski et al., 2018).

Research studies have shown that media can have an impact on the body image of all genders. While women are often the focus of discussions about body image, studies have found that men are also affected by media portrayals of idealized body types.

CONCLUSION

The findings in this research paper indicate that there is no significant difference between genders when it comes to sociocultural attitudes towards appearance and media. However, there is a notable correlation between the amount of time spent on media and socio-cultural attitudes towards appearance. These findings suggest that media exposure can have a significant impact on individuals' attitudes towards appearance, regardless of gender. Therefore, it is important for individuals to critically evaluate the media they consume and be mindful of how it may influence their perceptions of beauty and body image. Additionally, further research is needed to better understand the underlying factors that contribute to the relationship between media exposure and socio-cultural attitudes towards appearance.

REFERENCES

- Alfonso-Fuertes, I., Alvarez-Mon, M. A., Sanchez-del-Hoyo, R., Ortega, M. A., Alvarez-Mon, M., & Molina-Ruiz, R. M. (2022). The time spent in Instagram is associated with greater dissatisfaction with body image, lower self-esteem and greater tendency to physical comparison among young adults in Spain: an Observational Study (Preprint). *JMIR Formative Research*. <https://doi.org/10.2196/42207>
- Barros, L. de O., Lemos, C. R. B., & Ambiel, R. A. M. (2019). Quality of life and satisfaction with the body image of transsexuals. *Arquivos Brasileiros de Psicologia*, *71*(1), 184–195. <https://doi.org/10.36482/1809-5267.ARBP2019v71i1p.184-195>
- Calogero, R. M., Davis, W. N., & Thompson, J. Kevin. (2004). The Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-3): reliability and normative comparisons of eating disordered patients. *Body Image*, *1*(2), 193–198. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2004.01.004>
- Dotto, G. (2019). Gender and sex—time to bridge the gap. *EMBO Molecular Medicine*, *11*(5). <https://doi.org/10.15252/emmm.201910668>
- Festinger, L. (1954). A Theory of Social Comparison Processes. *Human Relations*, *7*(2), 117–140.
- Frisén, A., & Holmqvist, K. (2010). What characterizes early adolescents with a positive body image? A qualitative investigation of Swedish girls and boys. *Body Image*, *7*(3), 205–212. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2010.04.001>
- Furnham, A., Badmin, N., & Sneade, I. (2002). Body Image Dissatisfaction: Gender Differences in Eating Attitudes, Self-Esteem, and Reasons for Exercise. *The Journal of Psychology*, *136*(6), 581–596. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980209604820>
- Groesz, L. M., Levine, M. P., & Murnen, S. K. (2002). The Effect of Experimental Presentation of Thin Media Images on Body Satisfaction: A Meta-Analytic Review. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, *31*(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.10005>
- Harrison, K., & Cantor, J. (2006). *The Relationship Between Media Consumption and Eating Disorders*. ResearchGate; Wiley. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232584813_The_Relationship_Between_Media_Consumption_and_Eating_Disorders
- Hopper, K., & Aubrey, J. S. (2016). Bodies After Babies: The Impact of Depictions of Recently Post-Partum Celebrities on Non-Pregnant Women’s Body Image. *Sex Roles*. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Bodies-After-Babies%3A-The-Impact-of-Depictions-of-on-HopperAubrey/23a601fc9b6dd966bd57d8a41b8ad66cd60cc1e3>
- Hosseini, S. A., & Padhy, R. K. (2022). *Body Image Distortion*. PubMed; StatPearls Publishing. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31536191/#:~:text=Body%20image%20is%20the%20subjective>
- Keery, H., van den Berg, P., & Thompson, J. Kevin. (2004). An evaluation of the Tripartite Influence Model of body dissatisfaction and eating disturbance with adolescent girls. *Body Image*, *1*(3), 237–251. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2004.03.001>
- Khan, A. N., Khalid, S., Khan, H. I., & Jabeen, M. (2011). Impact of today’s media on university student’s body image in Pakistan: a conservative, developing country’s perspective. *BMC Public Health*, *11*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-11-379>
- Lewis-Smith, H., Garbett, K., Chaudhry, A., Ugluk-Marucha, N., Vitoratou, S., Dhillon, M., Shroff, H., & Diedrichs, P. C. (2021). Adaptation and validation of the Internalisation-General subscale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-3) in English among urban Indian adolescents. *Body Image*, *36*, 254–262. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.12.004>

The Role of Media on Shaping of Body Image: A Gender Difference Study

- Liszewski, W., Peebles, J. K., Yeung, H., & Arron, S. (2018). Persons of Nonbinary Gender — Awareness, Visibility, and Health Disparities. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 379(25), 2391–2393. <https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmp1812005>
- Malinauskas, B. M., Raedeke, T. D., Aeby, V. G., Smith, J. L., & Dallas, M. B. (2006). Dieting practices, weight perceptions, and body composition: A comparison of normal weight, overweight, and obese college females. *Nutrition Journal*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1475-2891-5-11>
- McClain, Z., & Peebles, R. (2016). Body Image and Eating Disorders Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth. *Pediatric Clinics of North America*, 63(6), 1079–1090. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcl.2016.07.008>
- Mintz, L. B., & Betz, N. E. (1986). Sex differences in the nature, realism, and correlates of body image. *Sex Roles*, 15(3-4), 185–195. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00287483>
- Pope, H. G., Gruber, A. J., Choi, P., Olivardia, R., & Phillips, K. A. (1997). Muscle Dysmorphia: An Underrecognized Form of Body Dysmorphic Disorder. *Psychosomatics*, 38(6), 548–557. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0033-3182\(97\)71400-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0033-3182(97)71400-2)
- Rajagopalan, J., & Shejwal, B. (2014). Influence of Sociocultural Pressures on Body Image Dissatisfaction. *Psychological Studies*, 59(4), 357–364. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12646-014-0245-y>
- Rekha, V. S., & Maran, K. (2012). Advertisement pressure and its impact on body dissatisfaction and body image perception of women in India. *Global Media Journal: Indian Edition*, 3(1).
- Rodrigues, F., Monteiro, D., Flores, P., & Forte, P. (2021). On Redefining the Body Image Satisfaction Questionnaire: A Preliminary Test of Multidimensionality. *Healthcare*, 9(7), 876. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare9070876>
- Sampath, H., Soohinda, G., Mishra, D., & Dutta, S. (2020). Body image dissatisfaction in young Indian Men: Prevalence, psychosocial correlates, and the impact of sociocultural pressure. *Indian Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 36(2), 130. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijsp.ijsp_28_19
- Scandurra, C., Mezza, F., Maldonato, N. M., Bottone, M., Bochicchio, V., Valerio, P., & Vitelli, R. (2019). Health of Non-binary and Genderqueer People: A Systematic Review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01453>
- Sethi P. & Mehta V. (2022). Mincing Media: A Comparative Analysis of Media Influence on the Body Image of Young Males and Females. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 10(1), 143-155. DIP:18.01.014.20221001, DOI:10.25215/1001.014
- Stice, E., Schupak-Neuberg, E., Shaw, H. E., & Stein, R. I. (1994). Relation of media exposure to eating disorder symptomatology: an examination of mediating mechanisms. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 103(4), 836–840. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0021-843x.103.4.836>
- Stice, E., & Whitenton, K. (2002). Risk factors for body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls: A longitudinal investigation. *Developmental Psychology*, 38(5), 669–678. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0012-1649.38.5.669>
- Thompson, J. K., & Heinberg, L. J. (1999). The Media's Influence on Body Image Disturbance and Eating Disorders: We've Reviled Them, Now Can We Rehabilitate Them? *Journal of Social Issues*, 55(2), 339–353. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00119>
- Uchôa, F. N. M., Uchôa, N. M., Daniele, T. M. da C., Lustosa, R. P., Garrido, N. D., Deana, N. F., Aranha, Á. C. M., & Alves, N. (2019). Influence of the Mass Media and Body Dissatisfaction on the Risk in Adolescents of Developing Eating Disorders. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(9). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16091508>

The Role of Media on Shaping of Body Image: A Gender Difference Study

- Verveen, A., van der Miesen, A. I. R., de Graaf, N. M., Kreukels, B. P. C., de Vries, A. L. C., & Steensma, T. D. (2023). Body Image in Adolescents with Gender Incongruence and Its Association with Psychological Functioning. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(4), 3349. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20043349>
- Webb, J. B., Wood-Barcalow, N. L., & Tylka, T. L. (2015). Assessing positive body image: Contemporary approaches and future directions. *Body Image*, 14, 130–145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2015.03.010>

Acknowledgement

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Saha, M. (2023). The Role of Media on Shaping of Body Image: A Gender Difference Study. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 11(3), 2188-2195. DIP:18.01.205.20231103, DOI:10.25215/1103.205