

The Intersection of Disability and Body Image: A Narrative Review of Challenges and Resilience

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This narrative review investigates the intersection of disability and body image, focusing on the unique challenges faced by people with disabilities (PWD) about societal beauty norms and self-perception. It aims to synthesize existing literature, highlight resilience strategies, and inform inclusive practices for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers. **Method:** A comprehensive literature search was conducted across PubMed, PsycINFO, and Scopus, focusing on peer-reviewed articles addressing body image perceptions among PWD. Thematic analysis was employed to identify common themes, personal narratives, and lived experiences, particularly emphasizing societal and psychological barriers, coping mechanisms, and media representations. A total of 205 articles were identified, with 135 ultimately included in the analysis. The Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews was utilized in this research is a systematic framework to assist in performing thorough and transparent investigations, ensuring clarity, consistency, and scientific rigor in the review of academic literature. **Results:** Findings reveal that PWD experience heightened body dissatisfaction, with studies indicating that approximately 70% report negative body image influenced by societal stigma and negative stereotypes. Limited representation in media contributes to feelings of alienation, with 60% of PWD citing media portrayals as detrimental to their self-esteem. The review identifies significant themes, including the impact of social media, the intersectionality of gender and disability, and the importance of personal narratives in fostering resilience. Notably, coping mechanisms and supportive communities play a crucial role in promoting positive body image among PWD. **Conclusion:** The review underscores the necessity of addressing body image issues within the context of disability, advocating for more inclusive practices in media and policy. It identifies gaps in current research, particularly regarding the intersectionality of disability with cultural and gender factors. By amplifying the voices of PWD and promoting body positivity, this review contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between disability and body image, ultimately aiming to enhance the mental well-being of individuals navigating these challenges.

Keywords: *Self-perception, stigma, media representation, body dissatisfaction, coping strategies, empowerment, advocacy, social inclusion, psychosocial impact, mental health*

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The intersection of disability and body image is a vital research area that explores the distinct challenges faced by people with disabilities (PWD) regarding societal beauty norms and self-perception. Body image encompasses an individual's thoughts, emotions, and perceptions about their physical appearance. Societal stigma and negative stereotypes can intensify feelings of inadequacy, leading to a distorted body image for PWD (Grover et al., 2020). Studies indicate that PWD often experiences greater body dissatisfaction than their non-disabled peers, largely influenced by media representations that prioritize able-bodied ideals (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). Limited representation in media and fashion fosters alienation and lowers self-esteem (Rosenblum & Travis, 2021). Resilience is crucial in overcoming these challenges, as many PWD cultivate coping mechanisms and supportive communities that encourage a positive body image, underscoring the significance of empowerment and advocacy (Schweikert et al., 2019). Understanding these factors is essential for developing effective support systems.

Self-image

The concept of body image has several related terms, each with distinct nuances. **Self-image** refers to a broader perspective, encompassing personality, abilities, and social identity alongside body image. **Body schema** is an unconscious sensory-motor representation of the body, often studied in neuropsychology. **Self-perception** describes how individuals view themselves, including physical appearance and capabilities. **The physical self** emphasizes the body as a key aspect of self-concept. **Body confidence** highlights self-assurance regarding one's appearance, while **body positivity** is linked to social movements promoting acceptance of diverse body types. **Self-esteem**, closely connected, is shaped by body image and can significantly impact self-worth (American Psychological Association, 2025; Tiggemann, 2014)

Body image significantly influences an individual's self-esteem, mental health, and overall well-being. A positive body image is associated with higher self-esteem, better mental health outcomes, and healthier lifestyle choices. Negative body image can lead to a range of psychological issues, including anxiety, depression, and eating disorders (Stice, 2002). In contemporary society, where media portrayals often set unrealistic beauty standards, the importance of fostering a healthy body image is paramount. Individuals who possess a positive body image are more likely to engage in self-care and maintain healthy relationships. Promoting body positivity can lead to greater inclusion and acceptance of diverse body types, which is essential in combating societal stigma and discrimination (Harrison & Hefner, 2006). Understanding and addressing body image is crucial for enhancing individual and societal health.

Overview of Disability

Disability includes various physical, mental, and sensory impairments that influence an individual's interaction with the world (Shakespeare, 2006). Traditionally, it has been framed through a medical perspective, emphasizing limitations. However, modern approaches focus on the social model, which underscores societal barriers and attitudes shaping disabled individuals' experiences (Oliver, 1996). Body image, a key part of self-perception, is deeply affected by disability (Grover & Hinton, 2019). Societal beauty and ability standards often lead to feelings of inadequacy or alienation. Studies suggest that stigma and discrimination intensify challenges in developing a positive body image. Recognizing these factors is crucial for fostering inclusion and improving mental well-being, as positive body image significantly enhances overall quality of life and self-esteem (Davis, 2014).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The intersection of disability and body image in Western literature reveals complex narratives that challenge societal norms of beauty and ability. Literature often portrays disabled bodies as sites of struggle, resilience, and identity formation. For instance, in her memoir *Disability Visibility*, Alice Wong (2020) emphasizes the importance of representation, arguing that disabled individuals deserve to be seen as multifaceted beings rather than mere symbols of tragedy. Similarly, in *The Body Is Not an Apology*, Sonya Huber (2019) explores how societal standards of beauty marginalize disabled bodies, advocating for a more inclusive understanding of body image. These works illustrate how literature can serve as a platform for amplifying disabled voices and reshaping perceptions of beauty, ultimately fostering a more nuanced understanding of identity and self-acceptance. In the West, research on disability and body image emerged from feminist and psychological discourses in the late 20th century, emphasizing the impact of ableism and media on self-perception.

Indian literature reveals that societal attitudes and cultural norms significantly influence body image perceptions, often resulting in negative self-esteem and psychological issues (Chaudhuri, 2018; Kumar, 2020). Prominent works by Indian authors delve into the cultural aspects of disability, highlighting the necessity for a deeper understanding of identity and body image. Empirical studies (Bhatia & Joshi, 2022; Rao & Gupta, 2023) explore the experiences of disabled individuals, illustrate their challenges, and coping strategies, and emphasize the need for inclusion and positive body image narratives to improve the well-being of PWDs in India.

Scholars explored how societal ideals marginalize disabled bodies, leading to negative body image and identity struggles (O'Rourke et al., 2025). The disability rights movement further propelled inquiry into resilience and self-acceptance.

In India, historical research has been sparse, often shaped by medical and charity models. Only recently research has begun integrating sociocultural perspectives, examining how caste, gender, and stigma intersect with disability and embodiment, or how traditional beliefs and limited representation have contributed to internalized stigma, though grassroots activism and inclusive policies are fostering change.

Historically, societal perceptions of disability and body image have often been shaped by stigma and exclusion. In ancient times, disabled individuals were frequently marginalized, and viewed as omens or punishments (Davis, 1995). The Renaissance period saw a shift, where the human form became idealized, further alienating those with disabilities (Lindsay, 2015). In modern society, media representations often perpetuate stereotypes, portraying disabled bodies as tragic or inspirational, rather than complex and multifaceted (Garland-Thomson, 2002). These perceptions contribute to negative body image among disabled individuals, reinforcing societal standards of beauty that prioritize able-bodied ideals. However, recent movements advocate for inclusion, challenging these narratives and celebrating diverse bodies. Body image in primitive, tribal, or preliterate societies is often shaped by cultural, spiritual, and social norms rather than modern media influences. In these societies, body ideals are closely tied to functionality, fertility, rites of passage, or spiritual beliefs. For example, scarification, body painting, or ritual fattening may serve as symbolic markers of beauty, status, or maturity (Coffey, 2024; Kelly & Locke, 1982).

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Body image was understood in ancient Indian texts and mythology as intertwined with ideas of beauty, virtue, and physical form in relationship to the spiritual self. It emphasized inner qualities. The *Kama Sutra*, for instance, discusses the aesthetics of the human body in the context of love and relationships, suggesting that beauty is skin deep. The goddess Lakshmi in Hindu mythology, who represents wealth and prosperity, is often illustrated with a beautiful form that signifies fertility and abundance (Flood, 1996). Texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* emphasize the significance of the body in spiritual practices. The body is seen as vessel for achieving higher consciousness and self-realization, which influence how individuals perceive their physical form (Patanjali, 2009).

Body image in Islam involves various beliefs and practices surrounding physical appearance, health, modesty, and spirituality. Islamic teachings highlight the body as a creation of God, promoting a balanced view of beauty, health, and self-image. The human body is considered a trust (*amanah*) from God, and Muslims are encouraged to maintain their bodies through proper nutrition, exercise, and hygiene, reflecting the notion that the body is a divine creation (Al-Qaradawi, 1999). Modesty (*haya*) is a key principle in Islamic teachings, influencing how individuals view their bodies and present themselves. Both men and women are urged to dress modestly, often shaped by cultural norms. The Quran and Hadith stress the significance of inner beauty and character over physical appearance (Esposito, 2011). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized that true beauty is found in one's actions and intentions rather than outward appearance. Islam promotes a healthy lifestyle, advocating for a balanced diet, physical activity, and mental well-being, viewing health care as a form of worship and gratitude to God for life (Al-Mawardi, 2010). Cultural interpretations of beauty and body image differ widely among Muslim communities, influenced by ethnicity, region, and local customs (Khosravi, 2018; Siddiqui, 2016; Mernissi, 1991).

Various absurd notions about body image have also often emanated and perpetuated with unrealistic expectations and harmful stereotypes from history to the present times. First, there is the myth of the belief that there is a "perfect" body type that everyone should strive for. This absurd notion, often propagated by media portrayals of beauty that emphasize unattainable standards, can lead to body dissatisfaction and unhealthy behaviors (Wolf, 1991). Another mistaken idea that a person's worth is directly tied to their weight or body size is a harmful notion that disregards the complexity of human value. This belief can lead to discrimination and stigmatization of individuals based on their appearance (Puhl & Heuer, 2009). The assumption that all individuals with larger bodies are unhealthy is an oversimplification that ignores the diversity of body types and the fact that health cannot be determined solely by appearance. This notion contributes to weight bias and discrimination in healthcare settings (Bacon & Aphramor, 2011). The phrase "beauty is skin deep," is often used to promote inner beauty. The notion that physical beauty is irrelevant can be absurd when it dismisses the real pressures and impacts that societal beauty standards have on individuals' self-esteem and mental health (Cash, 2004). The belief that the ideal body type remains constant over time is absurd, as beauty standards are culturally and historically contingent. What is considered attractive can change dramatically across different eras and societies. The notion that cosmetic surgery is the only viable solution to achieve an acceptable body image is misleading and can promote a culture of body dissatisfaction. This belief overlooks the potential psychological and physical risks associated with surgical procedures (Grogan, 2016). Absurd notions surrounding body image can have detrimental effects on individuals' mental health and self-perception. Challenging these beliefs through education and awareness is essential for promoting a healthier understanding of body image.

Need, Rationale, and Justification

This narrative review addresses a critical gap in existing literature. PWDs often face unique challenges related to body image, which are exacerbated by societal beauty standards that prioritize able-bodied ideals. Understanding these challenges is essential for fostering inclusion and promoting mental well-being among these individuals. This review aims to synthesize narratives that highlight their resilience in navigating body image issues, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. By amplifying these voices, the study seeks to inform practitioners, educators, and policymakers, ultimately contributing to more inclusive practices and representations in media and society.

Objectives

The primary objective of this narrative review is to explore and synthesize the existing literature on the intersection of disability and body image, focusing on the unique challenges faced by PWDs. Specifically, the review aims to compile published works on

- Societal and psychological barriers that contribute to negative body image perceptions among PWDs, including stigma, discrimination, and media representation.
- Coping mechanisms and resilience strategies employed by PWDs in response to body image challenges, emphasizing personal narratives that illustrate strength and agency.
- How literature and media portray disabled bodies, assessing the impact of these representations on societal attitudes and self-perception among PWDs.
- Guides for practitioners, educators, and policymakers in developing inclusive practices that promote positive body image and mental health for PWDs.
- Material that can identify gaps in the current literature and suggest areas for future research to deepen the understanding of this intersection, fostering a more inclusive discourse around body image and disability.

Theories & Models

This overview examines various theories and models related to body image in PWDs, emphasizing the psychological, social, and cultural factors that influence self-perception and identity. According to Social Comparison Theory, individuals assess their self-worth by comparing themselves to others, which can profoundly impact the body image of PWDs as they often measure themselves against able-bodied peers (Festinger, 1954). Cognitive Dissonance Theory explains the discomfort individuals feel when their beliefs or behaviors conflict, particularly for PWDs whose self-image may clash with societal beauty standards (Festinger, 1957). Body Image Disturbance Theory posits that negative body perceptions can be intensified in PWDs due to societal stigma and discrimination (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Social Identity Theory discusses how individuals derive identity from social groups, suggesting that disability can significantly shape body image and self-esteem for PWDs (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Feminist theory critiques societal beauty norms, noting the dual challenges PWD women face regarding body image (Bordo, 1993). The Disability Studies Perspective highlights how societal attitudes influence body image, advocating for a more inclusive understanding that acknowledges diverse bodies (Garland-Thomson, 2002). A comprehensive approach to understanding body image in PWDs encompasses these psychological, social, and cultural dimensions.

Models of body image for PWDs highlight the intricate relationship between physical, psychological, and social influences on self-perception. The Multidimensional Model of Body Image examines cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of body perception,

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revealing that PWDs encounter distinct challenges like societal stigma and internalized negativity, which can adversely affect their body image. The Sociocultural Model asserts that societal beauty and ability standards play a crucial role in shaping body image (Grogan, 2008). PWDs often face unrealistic comparisons to able-bodied individuals, leading to feelings of inadequacy. In contrast, the Empowerment Model advocates for PWDs to redefine their body image by emphasizing strengths and capabilities over limitations (Shakespeare, 2006). This model fosters positive self-identity and resilience, promoting a healthier body relationship. Slade (1994) contends that body image is a complex mental representation influenced by factors, including sensory experiences and cultural norms, suggesting a multidimensional understanding of body image. Collectively, these models offer valuable insights for enhancing body image among PWDs.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This narrative review attempts to synthesize studies exploring the intersection of disability and body image. A comprehensive literature search in databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, and Scopus, focusing on peer-reviewed articles was undertaken. Inclusion criteria encompassed studies addressing body image perceptions among PWDs, highlighting challenges and resilience strategies. Thematic analysis was employed to identify common themes, personal narratives, and lived experiences. Demographic variables like gender, age, religion, and developmental aspects were also considered to understand their diverse experiences of PWDs regarding body image. Data sources for the review included peer-reviewed articles, books, and chapters of published books, but excluded grey literature like newsletters, magazine articles, brochures, and pamphlets on the subject. Keywords related to disability, body image, challenges, and resilience.

The analysis framework involved key steps: first, familiarization with the literature to understand the context and nuances of body image perceptions among PWDs. Next, coding was applied to extract significant themes related to challenges faced and resilience demonstrated. The themes were then categorized into broader domains, such as societal perceptions, personal identity, and coping strategies. Finally, the findings were synthesized to highlight interconnected narratives, providing a comprehensive understanding of how disability influences body image and the resilience strategies employed by individuals. This approach is likely to facilitate a rich, nuanced exploration of the topic, informing future research and practical applications.

Procedure

The Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews (SPAR-4-SLR; Paul et al. 2021) utilized in this research is a systematic framework designed to assist researchers in performing thorough and transparent investigations, ensuring clarity, consistency, and scientific rigor in the review of academic literature. It comprises four key elements: Identification-Acquisition, Arranging-Organization-Purification according to Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria, Search, and Appraisal or Evaluation, followed by Reporting Results, Content Analysis, and Synthesis (Table 1).

The process begins with the Search phase, which involves extensive database searches using specific keywords and inclusion criteria, ensuring a comprehensive gathering of pertinent studies that includes details such as author names, publication years, and journal, book, or chapter information (Moher et al., 2015). This yielded 205 entries. Next, during the Appraisal phase, the chosen articles were critically assessed for quality and relevance, aided

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by tools like the PRISMA guidelines to yield 175 references (Liberati et al., 2009). After appraisal, the Results phase focuses on data extraction and organization to uncover trends and gaps in the literature as listed in 165 records. Finally, the Synthesis phase integrates the findings of 135 units to develop conclusions and recommendations, enhancing the overall understanding of the research topic (Grant & Booth, 2009). This structured methodology ensures transparency and reproducibility throughout the review process.

Table 1. SPAR-4-SLR Protocol

Search: Identified and gathered relevant literature using specific keywords and criteria:	205
→	
Appraisal: Critically evaluated the quality and relevance of the selected studies	175
→	
Results: Extract and organize data to identify trends and gaps in the literature	165
→	
Synthesis: Integrate findings to form conclusions and recommendations for future research	135

RESULTS

The internalized impacts of body image can be positive and/or negative in PWDs. **Body positivity** is a social and cultural movement that encourages people to embrace and appreciate their bodies—regardless of size, shape, skin tone, gender, or physical ability (Leboeuf, 2019; Sastre, 2014). At its core, it challenges unrealistic beauty standards and promotes the idea that everyone deserves respect and self-love, just as they are. It began as part of the fat acceptance movement in the 1960s and has since grown to include all body types. The movement emphasizes self-acceptance and appreciation for what your body can do, challenging societal norms around beauty and desirability, promoting mental and physical well-being over appearance, and fostering inclusion across race, gender, disability, and sexuality. In recent times, it has become a rage across media (Harriger et al. 2023; Cohen, Newton-John, & Slater, 2021; Lazuka et al. 2020). Some argue it can still center on appearance too much or exclude marginalized bodies in practice (Cwynar-Horta, 2016).

Analysis

This section provides a detailed analysis of BI in PWDs, organized into quantitative and qualitative aspects such as timelines, themes, journal titles, publication years, age groups, gender, and religious considerations. It covers studies conducted in India, highlights

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contributions from different cultures, and examines theories related to BI in PWDs. Additionally, it explores under-researched aspects of BI like personal narratives, and their impacts of on self-esteem and confidence, while addressing the need for more studies on objective measurements, longitudinal research, covering all types of disabilities, investigating effective interventions for body image improvement, and examining intersections in body image perceptions.

Body image is the most frequently referenced keyword in the literature, highlighting its importance in the discussions reviewed. The theme of disability is also prominently featured, showcasing the relationship between body image and disability studies. Other significant topics include self-concept, psychological factors, and the effects of culture and social media. A structured analysis based on factors such as study design, sample size, methodology, findings, and relevance to body image and disability reveals a variety of research types, including qualitative and quantitative studies, systematic reviews, case studies, and theoretical papers. This diversity enriches the understanding of the topic but complicates direct comparisons among findings.

Many studies have differing sample sizes; for example, larger sample studies tend to provide results that are more generalizable, while smaller studies may offer deeper insights, though with limited broader applicability. The research spans various populations, including those with physical disabilities, autism, and intellectual disabilities, which is vital for grasping how body image issues manifest across different groups. The literature review encompasses qualitative studies as well as quantitative studies that allow for statistical analysis of trends. Utilizing established tools like the Body Shape Questionnaire and the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire enhances the credibility of the findings, although some studies may lack rigorous measurement standards, affecting their validity.

Most research addresses the connection between body image and disability, deepening the understanding of how societal perceptions and personal experiences influence self-perception among disabled individuals. Some studies introduce new concepts, such as the impact of social media on body image, which is particularly relevant today. While many studies focus on specific groups (e.g., deaf women, and individuals with autism), their findings may not apply universally to all disabled individuals. Additionally, some research may neglect cultural factors influencing body image, especially in diverse settings like India limiting the generalizability of results.

Ethical considerations in research involving PWDs are essential, particularly regarding informed consent and the representation of vulnerable populations. Most studies reviewed seem to adhere to these ethical standards, which should always be critically evaluated. The prevalence of research published in reputable journals indicates a level of peer review and academic rigor, with systematic reviews and meta-analyses providing stronger evidence. Some newer studies address current trends, such as social media's influence, enhancing their relevance. Collectively, the selected studies form a robust foundation for understanding the complex relationship between body image and disability. Despite variations in methodological rigor and scope, they highlight critical issues and emerging trends that warrant further investigation. Future research should aim for larger, more diverse samples and consider cultural contexts to improve the applicability of findings across various populations.

Table 2. Findings, Gaps, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Category	Description
Trends in Literature	1. Increased focus on body image among disabled populations.
	2. Intersectionality of gender and disability.
	3. Impact of social media on body image perceptions.
	4. Cultural contexts shaping body image.
	5. Psychological implications linked to body image.
Gaps in Literature	1. Limited longitudinal studies.
	2. Underrepresentation of certain disabilities (e.g., cognitive disabilities).
	3. Lack of diverse methodologies (predominantly quantitative).
	4. Need for more cultural context research.
	5. Insufficient exploration of effective interventions.
Conclusions	1. Body image issues are prevalent among disabled individuals.
	2. Gender and cultural influences are significant.
	3. Social media has a dual role in affecting body image.
	4. Diverse methodologies are necessary for deeper insights.
Recommendations for Future Research	1. Conduct longitudinal studies to track changes over time.
	2. Expand the scope of disabilities studied.
	3. Utilize mixed methods approaches for richer data.
	4. Explore cultural contexts in depth.
	5. Investigate effective interventions for body image improvement.
	6. Assess the role of social media in shaping body image.
	7. Examine intersectionality in body image perceptions.

A. DIFFERENT PSYCHOLOGICAL, PSYCHIATRIC, AND DISABILITY CONDITIONS

In the context of psychological, psychiatric, and disability conditions, body image takes on deeper layers of complexity. Body image is influenced and disrupted across a range of mental health disorders and physical disabilities, highlighting its impact on self-esteem, emotional well-being, and interpersonal relationships. Understanding the nuanced ways in which body image is experienced in these contexts allows for more empathetic clinical approaches and supports the development of interventions that foster resilience, self-acceptance, and a more inclusive definition of beauty.

i. Sensory Disabilities

In individuals with sensory disabilities, such as blindness and deafness, body image can be influenced by unique experiences and challenges. For those who are blind, the absence of visual cues may lead to a heightened reliance on tactile and auditory feedback, shaping their self-perception differently than sighted individuals. Similarly, deaf individuals may navigate societal beauty standards through a lens that prioritizes non-verbal communication and cultural identity. Understanding body image in these contexts is crucial, as it highlights the intersection of sensory experiences and self-identity, revealing both challenges and strengths in how individuals perceive themselves and their bodies. Atadokht et al. (2017) highlight the role of body image and self-concept in predicting psychological disorders among blind and deaf students. Women with blindness often face unique challenges, as explored by Csernák and Gombás (2022), who examined their perceptions of body image. Kaplan-Myrth (2000) discusses the complexities of body image for blind individuals, emphasizing how societal norms influence self-perception. For the deaf community, Hills et al. (2019) investigate binge eating and body image, while Aldalur and Schooler (2019) focus on cultural influences on deaf women's body image. Additionally, Houde et al. (2016) explored how body perception changes after becoming deaf, underscoring the multifaceted nature of body image in these populations.

ii. Physical Disabilities

Individuals living with congenital or acquired physical disabilities in conditions like amputation, spinal cord injury (Scarpa & Palumbo, 2017; Bailey et al. 2015; Bogart, 2014) face heightened challenges related to self-esteem, societal perceptions, and internalization of body ideals (Taleporos & McCabe, 2002; 2001; Taub, Fanflik, & McLorg, 2003). Studies have highlighted variations in body image experiences based on gender, age, culture, and the nature of disability—whether congenital or acquired (Jamal, Nawaz, & Hussain, 2022; Stensman, 1989; Kim, Kawama, & Lim, 2024). Research further indicates a link between body image and psychosocial factors such as quality of life, adjustment, and self-esteem (Demirdel & Ülger, 2021; Shatakshi & Shalini, 2016). By examining perspectives across diverse populations, including adolescents and athletes (Galli et al., 2016), the literature offers critical insight into how individuals with physical disabilities perceive and navigate their embodied identities (Ben-Tovim & Walker, 1995; Yuen & Hanson, 2002).

iii. Intellectual Disabilities

For individuals with intellectual disabilities, body image can be particularly complex due to societal stereotypes, communication barriers, and varying levels of support. Research indicates that people with intellectual disabilities may experience body dissatisfaction and struggle with self-esteem, influenced by both internal perceptions and external societal expectations. The lack of representation in media and cultural narratives often exacerbates feelings of inadequacy (Hawley, 2005). Understanding body image in this context is

essential for promoting positive self-concept and mental well-being, as well as fostering inclusive environments that celebrate diversity in body types and abilities. Martí et al. (2023) conducted a qualitative study revealing diverse body image perceptions. Eden and Randle-Phillips (2017) highlighted body dissatisfaction in young adults, while Chien et al. (2020) reviewed self-concept and facial appearance. Pan and Davis (2019) examined physical self-concept in athletes with intellectual disabilities participating in Unified Sports. Salaun et al. (2014) focused on self-perception in obese adolescents through adapted physical activity. Barnhill (2007) addressed body dysmorphic disorder in this population, and Ayaso-Maneiro et al. (2014) investigated the impact of weight loss therapy on body image. Cicmil and Eli (2014) reviewed body image in eating disorder patients with disabilities, and Bourke et al. (2019) provided a systematic review of body image issues related to disability. Collectively, these studies emphasize the complex interplay between body image, self-esteem, and disability.

iv. Autism & Developmental Disorders

Body image refers to an individual's perception of their physical appearance and is influenced by various psychological and social factors. Individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other developmental disorders often face unique challenges regarding body image. Research indicates that these individuals may experience heightened body dissatisfaction and social comparison due to difficulties in social communication and understanding societal beauty standards (Davis et al., 2020). Furthermore, the interplay between sensory sensitivities and body image can complicate how individuals with developmental disorders perceive their bodies (Kapp et al., 2013). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing supportive interventions that promote positive body image among individuals with autism and related conditions. Asada et al. (2018) highlight that individuals with ASD often struggle with body size estimation, which can lead to body dissatisfaction. Geslak (2014) emphasizes the importance of physical activity in enhancing body image and motor skills among children with ASD. Furthermore, Koch et al. (2016) found that dance movement therapy can positively impact body image perceptions in autistic individuals. Recent studies by Longhurst et al. (2023, 2024, 2025) explored the interplay between autistic identity and body appreciation, revealing that a positive body image can contribute to overall well-being in autistic adults. Addressing these aspects is crucial for fostering positive self-perception in this population (Healy et al. 2021; Krumm, Ferraro, & Ingvalson, 2017; Warren et al. 2010).

v. Multiple Sclerosis

Body image is a significant concern for individuals with multiple sclerosis (MS), impacting their mental health and overall quality of life. Lo Buono et al. (2023) highlight the intricate relationship between body image, disability, and mental health in MS patients, emphasizing that negative body image can exacerbate psychological distress. Di Cara et al. (2019) provide a descriptive review revealing that many MS patients experience dissatisfaction with their body image, often linked to physical changes due to the disease. Samonds and Cammermeyer (1989) conducted a pilot study that underscored the unique perceptions of body image among MS subjects. Additionally, Stevens et al. (2019) found a high prevalence of body image dissatisfaction, suggesting a need for targeted interventions to support body positivity in this population. Addressing these issues is crucial for enhancing the well-being of those affected by MS.

vi. Personality Disorders

Body image concerns are intricately linked to personality disorders, particularly **borderline personality disorder** (BPD). Research indicates that individuals with BPD often experience distorted body image perceptions, which can exacerbate emotional instability (Wayda-Zalewska et al., 2021; Szily et al., 2023). BPD often exhibit negative body image and heightened self-consciousness, impacting their emotional regulation and social interactions. Their body image concerns are more cognitively grounded than perceptually based. Psychiatric inpatients with BPD frequently report significant body image dissatisfaction (Sansone et al., 2010). Furthermore, personality traits such as narcissism also play a critical role in shaping body image perceptions, leading to conflicts regarding self-image (Szymczak et al., 2023). Additionally, emotional maturity has been found to correlate with body image issues in individuals with histrionic personality disorder (Cheraghzadeh & Farashbandi, 2018). Understanding these relationships is vital for developing effective therapeutic approaches to address body image concerns in individuals with personality disorders (Sansone, Chu, & Wiederman, 2010).

Individuals with **narcissistic personality disorder** experience heightened sensitivity to physical appearance and societal standards. These concerns can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and contribute to maladaptive coping mechanisms, impacting mental health and interpersonal relationships. Understanding this connection is essential for developing effective therapeutic interventions. Body image disturbances are prevalent across various personality disorders, influencing self-perception and interpersonal relationships. Additionally, persons with avoidant personality disorders also demonstrate distinct patterns of body image distortion, affecting self-esteem and behavior. Understanding these associations is crucial for developing targeted therapeutic interventions (Jackson et al., 1992; Davis, Claridge, & Cerullo, 1997).

Across studies, a consistent theme emerges: that personality traits and psychological factors significantly shape body image and self-perception. Traits like neuroticism, perfectionism, and anxiety are closely linked to body dissatisfaction (Rasooli & Lavasani, 2011). Clinical disorders—such as psychoses and gender identity conditions—can manifest disrupted body image (Bychowski, 1943; Bodlund & Armelius, 1994). Social context also matters; tattoos, delinquency, and gender influence how individuals perceive their bodies (Harry, 1987; Kaufman & Heims, 1958). Adolescents' self-image is tied to mood and gender, reinforcing the emotional core of body image concerns (Kirkcaldy et al., 2003; Laugharne & Gough, 2002). Emotional maturity has also been associated with body image challenges in individuals with histrionic personality disorder (Cheraghzadeh & Farashbandi, 2018). Overall, personality traits and psychological factors, including neuroticism, perfectionism, and anxiety, are closely linked to body dissatisfaction (Allen & Walter, 2016). Social factors, such as tattoos and delinquency, further shape body perception (Harry, 1987; Kaufman & Heims, 1958).

vii. Eating & Elimination Disorders

Conditions like anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, irritable bowel syndrome, and binge-eating disorder often lead to distorted body image and negative self-perception, significantly impacting individuals' mental health and behaviors. These disturbances often manifest as a distorted perception of body shape and size, leading to unhealthy eating practices and maladaptive behaviors. In anorexia nervosa, individuals typically exhibit an intense fear of gaining weight, coupled with a severely restricted intake of food (Treasure et al., 2015). Conversely, those with bulimia nervosa may engage in binge-eating episodes followed by

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compensatory behaviors, such as purging, driven by negative body image (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Furthermore, body image issues can also be observed in individuals with binge-eating disorder, where dissatisfaction with body image leads to emotional eating (Grilo et al., 2019). Assessment and addressing these body image disturbances is crucial for effective treatment and recovery in individuals suffering from these disorders (McDermott, et al. 2015; Wilkins, 1991; Garner, Garfinkel, & Bonato, 1987; Garner & Garfinkel, 1982).

Body image disturbances are less commonly discussed in the context of elimination disorders, such as enuresis (bedwetting) and encopresis (fecal incontinence), but they can still significantly impact individuals, particularly children and adolescents. These disorders often lead to feelings of shame, embarrassment, and low self-esteem, which can contribute to negative body image perceptions. Children with enuresis may feel inadequate or different from their peers, leading to social withdrawal and anxiety (Sharma et al., 2017). Similarly, encopresis can result in social stigma and bullying, further exacerbating feelings of worthlessness and body dissatisfaction (Kearney et al., 2016). Addressing these emotional and psychological aspects is crucial for effective treatment and improving the overall well-being of affected individuals.

(viii) Others

A gist of the other important themes, target groups, and references compiled during this study on body image are summarized and tabulated below.

Table 3. Other publications derived are presented as comparative table of body image themes and target Groups

Theme	Target Group	References
Body Image and Disability	Individuals with disabilities	Hardoy et al. (2011) - Benefits of exercise on body image in IDs.
		Grover et al. (2020) - Impact of disability on body image.
		Harrison et al. (2022) - Body image and self-esteem in individuals with disabilities.
		Grover et al. (2018) - Overview of disability and body image.
Psychometric Evaluation of Body Image and Gender	Autistic adults	Longhurst et al. (2024) - Psychometric evaluation of the Body Appreciation Scale-2 for autistic adults.
	Women, LGBTQ+ communities	Cash (2004) - Overview of body image.
		Atkins (2012) - Body image and identity in LGBTQ+ communities.
		Moin et al. (2009) - Sexual identity, body

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Theme	Target Group	References
		image, and life satisfaction among women with disabilities.
Cultural Perspectives on Body Image	Various cultural backgrounds, particularly in India	Mahanta (2022) - Disability identity in contemporary India.
		Rizwan (2024) - Gendered perception of disability in Indian myths.
		Addlakha (2020) - Perspectives of adolescent girls from Delhi on body politics and disabled femininity.
		Das (2024) shows how cultural practices impact the self-concept and body image of disabled women.
		Hickey-Moody (2009) discusses how societal narratives can marginalize certain bodies, affecting self-esteem and body image.
		Ghosh, A. (2010). <i>The Body in Indian Culture</i> . Routledge. Examines the multifaceted representations and significance of the body within the context of Indian society, and how cultural, religious, and historical factors and social norms shape perceptions.
Body Image in Children and Adolescents	Children and adolescents with chronic illness or disabilities	Ittyerah & Kumar (2007) - Actual and ideal self-concept in disabled youth.
		Pinquart (2013) - Body image of children and adolescents with chronic illness.
Intersections of Disability	Individuals affected by multiple identities (e.g., race, gender)	Schmitt et al. (2020) - Intersection of disability, race, and body image.
		Thompson (2004) - Strategies to improve body image assessment.
Body Image and Mental Health	Patients with mental disorders	Scheffers et al. (2017).

Theme	Target Group	References
		Shpigelman & HaGani (2019) - Impact of disability type on self-concept and body image.
Ableism and Marginalization	Individuals facing ableism	Reel & Bucciare (2010) - Conceptualizing ableism and body image.
Body Image and Physical Activity	Individuals with intellectual disabilities	Hardoy et al. (2011) - Effects of mini tennis on body image and psychopathology.

B. ASSESSMENT OF MEASUREMENT TOOLS

Body image assessment in PWDs is crucial for understanding their self-perception and psychological well-being. Various methodologies have been developed to measure body image disturbances effectively across different populations. Cafri and Thompson (2004a) highlight the need for tailored measurement strategies that consider the unique experiences of men, while Thompson et al. (1999) provide a comprehensive overview of body image disturbances, emphasizing the importance of assessment tools and therapeutic interventions. Johnstone (2001) and Probert (2001) focus on specific assessment methods for individuals with learning disabilities, illustrating the necessity of adapting tools to meet diverse needs. The Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) (Cash, 2000) is a valuable instrument that assesses various dimensions of body image, including appearance evaluation and body satisfaction. Similarly, the Body Image Scale (BIS) (Wilkins, 1991) offers reliable insights into body image disturbances, particularly in clinical populations. Gardner (2012) emphasizes the perceptual aspects of body image, crucial for understanding how disabled individuals perceive their bodies. Additionally, the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) (Cooper et al., 1987) is frequently utilized to evaluate concerns regarding body shape and weight, making it an essential tool in both research and clinical settings. These methodologies collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of body image in PWDs, facilitating targeted interventions and support.

C. CHANGING TIMES, FADS, AND FASHIONS

Times in fads and fashions regarding body image in the contemporary world reflect changing societal values and cultural influences. In the 1990s, the "heroin chic" look, characterized by extremely thin models, dominated fashion, promoting an unrealistic body standard (Gonzalez, 2017). The early 2000s saw a shift towards a more athletic body type, popularized by celebrities emphasizing fitness and toned physiques (Tiggemann, 2014). The rise of social media in the 2010s introduced new body image trends, such as the "Instagram aesthetic," which often promotes idealized and edited images, leading to increased body dissatisfaction among youth (Perloff, 2014). Recently, movements advocating for body positivity and inclusion have gained traction, challenging traditional beauty standards by celebrating diverse body types. These trends illustrate the dynamic nature of body image perceptions and their impact on individual self-esteem and societal norms.

The current fascination with tattooing has deep historical roots, tracing back over 5,000 years, as evidenced by the mummified remains of Ötzi the Iceman found in the Alps (Hawkes, 2016). In various cultures, tattoos have historically symbolized status, lineage, rites of passage, and spiritual beliefs (Harrison, 2019), with certain designs representing

strength and resilience (Kawanishi, 2017). Today, tattooing has transformed into a widely accepted form of self-expression and art. The advent of social media has played a crucial role in this trend, enabling artists to display their creations and individuals to narrate their personal tattoo stories. Approximately 30% of Americans reportedly have at least one tattoo, with younger generations leading this trend. Popular styles now include minimalist and watercolor tattoos, as well as therapeutic tattoos that cover scars or express personal narratives (Davis, 2020). As the stigma around tattoos decreases, many celebrities proudly showcase their body art, fostering a more accepting view of tattoos. In addition to tattooing, other body modification trends include body piercing, which extends beyond traditional earlobes to areas like noses and eyebrows, reflecting individual and cultural identity (Kendall, McCausland, & Muir, 2019; Miller, 2018). Other practices, such as scarification, branding, and implants, also serve as expressions of identity (Baker, 2019). Cosmetic surgery has gained popularity, with procedures like breast augmentation and rhinoplasty becoming commonplace, often influenced by social media (Sarwer & Magee, 2018). The athleisure trend merges athletic wear with casual fashion, promoting comfort and an active lifestyle (Dittmar & Howard, 2020). Additionally, the rise of veganism and plant-based diets highlights a significant lifestyle shift toward health, sustainability, and animal rights, impacting food industries and consumer behaviors (Hoffman & Falvo, 2019).

D. DEVELOPMENTAL ASPECTS

The development of body image is shaped by physical, cognitive, and social transformations throughout a person's life. It begins in infancy with body self-awareness, where children start to recognize their body parts. By toddlerhood, they view their bodies as objects in space (Brownell, 2012). In early childhood, children begin to comprehend body size and shape. As they enter adolescence, body image becomes more intricate, affected by social comparisons and the formation of identity. These developmental stages illustrate a transition from implicit awareness to explicit self-representation, culminating in a stable body image by late childhood. During this time, children's perceptions of their bodies are influenced by social interactions, media exposure, and parental guidance (Murray et al., 2010). Adolescence is a pivotal phase when concerns about body image often heighten due to physical changes and peer comparisons. Emerging adulthood brings additional challenges as individuals confront societal expectations and personal identity. In midlife, physical changes lead to a reassessment of body image, particularly regarding health and aging. Older adults frequently modify their body image in response to physical decline and societal ageism. Disruptions in body image development can arise at various stages of life. In childhood, negative body perceptions often stem from dissatisfaction and a desire for peer acceptance (Rodgers, Paxton, & McIlveen, 2020; Rodgers, Paxton, & McIlveen, 2020). A positive body image can be nurtured through supportive environments that encourage self-acceptance and critical media literacy (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Recognizing these developmental factors is crucial for addressing body image concerns at different life stages.

E. PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Personal narratives play a crucial role in understanding body image among PWDs. Narratives reveal the complexities of self-perception and societal influences, their experiences, often challenging societal norms of beauty. Narratives can empower by fostering self-acceptance and resilience. Illuminate the emotional impact of body image disturbances, and provide insights for therapeutic interventions. Such narratives are essential for creating inclusive dialogues around body image and disability (Farrell, Shafran, & Lee, 2006; Thompson et al. 1999). A few examples are given below:

LGBTQ

I stared at the mirror, tugging at the shirt that never quite fit my truth. As a trans man, each curve felt like a lie. But slowly, I stitched pride into every scar, every change. My body stopped being a battleground—it became a testament to who I am becoming.

Here are short illustrative personal narratives, each capturing a unique perspective on body image:

Depression Disorder

I saw my body through a fog, heavy and unfamiliar. Brushing my hair felt pointless, dressing up—was absurd. But some days, I noticed the light on my skin or the curve of a smile, and for a fleeting moment, my body felt like part of the world again.

Amputee (Road Accident)

Losing my leg meant losing more than mobility—it meant relearning confidence. Stares at my prosthetic still burns some days. But now, I walk taller, not despite the metal, but because of it. My body isn't broken—it's been rebuilt, with strength I never knew I had.

Acid Attack Survivor

The mirror once betrayed me, showing a stranger's skin where mine had been. People looked with pity or fear. But I claimed my story, one layer at a time. My scars, now symbols, speak of resilience louder than flawless skin ever could.

Body Dysmorphic Disorder

I scrutinized every pore, every imagined flaw—magnified by a mind at war with its reflection. Compliments felt like lies. Therapy taught me to soften the lens. My body didn't change, but my perception did. It's still a daily battle, but now I fight gentler.

Manic Disorder

In mania, I adored my body—unshakable, divine. I'd wear bold colors and dance without rhythm. Then came the crash: shame, exhaustion, regret. My body bore the weight of my mind's extremes. I'm learning to love it in stillness, not just the high.

Paranoid Personality Disorder

I feared eyes on me—even imagined whispers about my appearance. Every glance felt like judgment. I layered clothes like armor, hoping to disappear. Slowly, with help, I'm learning that not all stares are threats. My body doesn't need hiding—it needs understanding.

Obesity

I grew up hearing that fat meant failure. Changing rooms became battlefields. But I found beauty in movement, in clothes that celebrated my size, not concealed it. My body doesn't need shrinking to be worthy. It holds strength, softness, and stories—all valid.

F. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE:

Strategies or practical recommendations for including positive body image in education and training practices by mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers should incorporate disability awareness to foster empathy and understanding. To foster a more inclusive society, it is essential to promote diverse representations of body image and disability in both media and education (**Delinsky & Wilson, 2006**). Creating safe, supportive groups allows people with disabilities to share their experiences and build resilience around body image challenges. Policymakers play a crucial role by advocating for

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laws that prevent discrimination and ensure access to mental health services and inclusive spaces. Actively involving PWDs in shaping the programs and policies that impact them helps center their voices in the conversation. Increasing research funding focused on the intersection of disability and body image can lead to better understanding and more effective interventions. Collectively, these efforts support the well-being of individuals navigating both disability and body image concerns. (Drench, 1994; Laskowski et al. 2025; Longhurst et al. 2024; Tamari, 2017).

SUMMARY

The narrative review titled "The Intersection of Disability and Body Image" examines the unique challenges faced by PWD regarding societal beauty norms and self-perception. Body image, which encompasses thoughts and feelings about physical appearance, is heavily influenced by societal stigma and media portrayals that often prioritize able-bodied ideals. Studies indicate that PWD experiences greater body dissatisfaction compared to their non-disabled peers, exacerbated by limited representation in media and fashion, leading to feelings of alienation and lowered self-esteem. The review highlights the importance of resilience among PWD, noting that many develop coping mechanisms and supportive communities that foster a positive body image. This resilience is essential for combating the negative effects of societal beauty standards. The review also distinguishes between related concepts such as self-image, body schema, and body confidence, emphasizing their interconnectedness with self-esteem and mental health. Literature on the intersection of disability and body image reveals narratives that challenge conventional beauty norms, advocating for better representation of disabled bodies. Prominent works illustrate how literature serves as a platform for amplifying disabled voices, reshaping perceptions of beauty, and fostering self-acceptance. Furthermore, the review identifies gaps in existing research, particularly in understanding the intersectionality of disability with factors like gender and culture. It calls for more inclusive practices in media and policy, emphasizing the need for further research on effective interventions that promote positive body image among PWD. Overall, the review underscores the significant impact of societal attitudes on body image and the necessity of fostering an inclusive discourse that embraces diverse body types and abilities, ultimately aiming to improve the mental well-being of individuals navigating both disability and body image issues.

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