

Body Image Satisfaction and Social Appearance Anxiety among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between body image satisfaction and social appearance anxiety among young adults in India and whether gender moderates this relationship. Body image satisfaction and social appearance anxiety are two psychological concepts that affect the mental health and well-being of young adults. This connection is even more relevant due to the growing importance of digital media and ideals of appearance in our culture. Data was analyzed using Pearson correlation, Spearman correlation and independent sample t - test in Jamovi. Body image dissatisfaction is correlated with social appearance anxiety for both the genders. Moderate to strong for males and weak to moderate in females. Females reported higher social appearance anxiety than males, while for body image there were no significant gender differences reported. This research on body image and appearance anxiety, stresses on the need for culturally aware and gender sensitive interventions for young adults

Keywords: *Body Image Satisfaction, Social Appearance Anxiety and Gender Differences*

In the 21st century, body image has become a focus point of everyone's life, specifically of young adults dealing with the challenges of social integration and identity formation. Young adults are constantly exposed to idealized body standards and appearance related social pressures due to the widespread use of digital media and the increased cultural emphasis on physical appearance. This social pressure has affected the mental health, social functioning and general quality of life amongst young adults.

Due to the social pressures, body dissatisfaction and social appearance anxiety is increasing which is a factor for concern. As body dissatisfaction leads to mental health disorders like depression, anxiety and eating disorders. Then appearance anxiety causes social withdrawal, impaired relationship formation and hindered social skills

Also, there is a huge connection between body image satisfaction and social appearance anxiety as people's experience and opportunities are shaped by how they view their physical appearance and predict how others will judge it, which affects everything from social engagement to career prospects. In today's world, visual self-presentation on social media platforms has become essential for creation and to upkeep social identity.

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Hence, it is really important to promote positive self-compassion and resilience. Along with integrated and holistic approach in order to foster healthier body perception and social engagement.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Indian researches on body image and appearance anxiety

Singh et al (2020) examined body dissatisfaction, particularly in women. Traditional Indian beauty standards for fairness and slimness combined with western media deepens body image dissatisfaction. Disordered eating was linked to appearance anxiety and body image dissatisfaction. Media literacy acted as a protective factor.

Soohinda et al (2020) study focuses on young Indian men and found that body image dissatisfaction is not solely a female issue in the west but is increasingly prevalent among Indian men due to changing social norms and western influence. Men with both low and high body mass index were more likely to be dissatisfied. Sociocultural pressure, especially the lean and muscular ideal from the media, was the biggest contributor to body image dissatisfaction.

Vasudeva (2021) examined the link between body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem in Indian youth. And in the study females reported higher body image dissatisfaction and low self-esteem, while males had lower body image dissatisfaction and higher self-esteem. Appearance anxiety was evident in the participant's report that body image issues interfered with their social lives and daily routines. Hence, study recommended interventions for body image dissatisfaction in female youth.

Kapoor et al (2022) For his study surveyed 180 female college students and found that women who felt overweight were significantly most likely to be dissatisfied and have eating disorder. Body image dissatisfaction was negatively correlated with self-esteem. Concerns about appearance affected social behavior with participants avoiding social situations due to fear of being judged on their appearance are consistent with social appearance anxiety. Compounding pressures from family about weight and the media's thin ideal were also noted.

Shahi et al (2022) explored how resilience acts as a mediator between body image attitudes and social appearance anxiety in young adults. They found that negative body image significantly showed higher social appearance anxiety and resilience played a mediating role with high resilience individuals reporting lower social appearance anxiety even with poor body image.

International researches on body image and appearance anxiety

Oppong et al (2022) conducted a research on "selfitis" a compulsive act of taking and posting selfies as a mediator between self-esteem, problematic use of social media and smartphones, one's own physical appearance and mental distress in young Ghanaian adults. They found that selfitis mediated the link between problematic digital use and psychological distress. Low self-esteem and poor perception of one's own appearance were linked to higher selfitis, suggesting selfie taking might be a way to seek validation.

Papapanou et al (2023) explored the connection between social appearance anxiety, using social media and loneliness in Greek young adults. They found a strong link between all

Body Image Satisfaction and Social Appearance Anxiety among Young Adults

three factors. Both social media use and loneliness turned out to be independent predictors of higher social appearance anxiety. The researcher observed that more social media use means more comparisons and isolations, which heightens social appearance anxiety. This might lead to withdrawing further face to face interaction and more time spent online.

Muntean et al (2024) examined how different mental health indicators like anxiety, stress, body image, physical activity and quality of social connections interact to influence overall mental health and life quality in first year law students. They found that all these factors were significant and related to each other. Body image is important as students with negative perceptions about their appearance have worse mental health and life quality.

Hofmann et al (2025) researched on body image and mental health in women with polycystic ovary syndrome. In the research they discovered a strong, bidirectional relationship between obesity, negative body image and poor psychological well-being. Women with a higher BMI reported significantly more negative body image perceptions, which is associated with lower quality of life, higher depression and more anxiety. The psychological issues were worsened by concern for appearance.

Liu et al (2025) explored how physical activity influences mental health and life satisfaction through body image and self-esteem. They found that physical activity directly benefited mental health and life satisfaction. In this research body image, self-esteem and gender are the important mediators. Body image and self as mediators as they help in explaining a significant portion of the relationship. Gender plays a role of mediator as it highlights the need for gender sensitive physical activity interventions.

Recent studies indicate that body image dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety are prevalent in different genders and cultures which intensified due to influence of social media, western beauty ideals and sociocultural pressures. Unlike 1900's research, which only used to focus on western white women and eating disorders in clinical settings. Contemporary studies have broadened the scope and incorporated Indian population, men and conditions like PCOS. They also examine newer concepts like selfies, digital media influence and resilience as mediators. Also, it reflects how globalization and technology have transformed body image concerns into a complex, cross cultural, gender inclusive public health issue.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between body image and social anxiety among young adults. The paper will also examine whether body image dissatisfaction serves as a significant predictor of increasing levels of social anxiety amongst young adults.

Objectives

1. To assess the levels of body image satisfaction and social appearance anxiety among young adults.
2. To examine the relationship between body image satisfaction and social anxiety among young adults.
3. To explore gender differences in body image satisfaction and social anxiety among young adults.

Body Image Satisfaction and Social Appearance Anxiety among Young Adults

Hypotheses

- **H1:** There will be a significant positive relationship between body image satisfaction and social anxiety among young adults.
- **H2:** Body image satisfaction will significantly predict social anxiety among young adults.
- **H3:** There will be significant gender differences in body image satisfaction and social anxiety among young adults.

Sample

The sample size for this research is 125. The age ranged from 18 - 26. A total of individuals participated in the study situated across India. Random sampling method was used for the conduction of data.

Research design

The research designs used are quantitative and correlation. As this design is appropriate for the examination of the relationship between body image satisfaction and social anxiety.

Statistical analysis

The data obtained was tabulated and analyzed using Jamovi in order to assess the finding of the study.

Variables

- **Independent Variables:** Body image satisfaction
- **Dependent Variables:** Social anxiety

Description of the tools employed

- **Social appearance anxiety scale:** This assessment is a self report scale which consists of 16 items. It measures anxiety specifically tied to one's overall appearance including body shape and features being negatively evaluated by others. The scale has a 5 point likert scale.
- **Body image satisfaction rating scale:** In this scale individuals are required to rate their satisfaction with their overall appearance or specific body parts using 1-10 rating scale, ranging from extremely dissatisfied to extremely satisfied. It is commonly used in clinical and research settings to measure body esteem.

Procedure

At first a topic was chosen for this research according to the researcher's interest area, going through the previous work and researchers of the same to understand the topic more. Finding the scales for the variables that had been chosen. Then selecting and filtering the population and sample for the research. Followed by making questionnaires including the two scales and carrying out offline and online data collection using google forms after taking the consent from the participants. Then after the data collection, it was analyzed using statistical tests like correlation and independent t - test in Jamovi. And then concluded the test by proving that hypothesis was true or not.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Body Image and Appearance Anxiety by Gender

Group	Variable	N	Mean	SD
Male	Appearance Anxiety	62	33.24	14.81
Male	Body Image	62	43.24	9.46
Female	Appearance Anxiety	62	40.84	16.33
Female	Body Image	62	46.44	8.19

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for both males and females participants on the measures of appearance anxiety and body image. Among males, the mean score for appearance anxiety was 33.24 and standard deviation was 14.81, while the mean body score was 43.24 and standard deviation was 9.46. Among females, the appearance anxiety mean score was higher at 40.84 and standard deviation was 16.33, While the body image mean score was 46.44 and standard deviation was 8.19. These figures indicate that females reported higher average scores on both scales compared to males, with greater variability in appearance anxiety scores on both groups. The relatively larger standard deviation in appearance anxiety compared to body image suggests more heterogeneity in anxiety related experiences irrespective of gender.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation: Body Image and Appearance Anxiety by Gender

Group	N	Pearson r	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	t	df	p-value
Male	62	0.553	0.352	0.705	5.141	60	< .001***
Female	62	0.337	0.095	0.541	2.773	60	.007 **

Table 2 displays the Pearson correlation coefficients between body image and appearance anxiety for each gender group. For male participants, a statistically significant moderate positive correlation was observed ($r = .533$, $t = 5.141$, $p < .001$), 95% lower confidence interval is 0.352 and 95% upper confidence level is 0.095, indicating that males with more negative body image consistently tended to report higher levels of appearance anxiety. For female participants, the Pearson correlation was positive but weaker in magnitude ($r = .337$, $t = 2.773$, $p = .007$), with a 95% lower confidence interval which is 0.095 and 95% upper confidence interval which is 0.541. Although, the female correlation is smaller than that observed for males, suggesting the linear relationship between and appearance anxiety is less among women according to the results.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Body Image and Appearance Anxiety by Gender

Group	N	Spearman ρ	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	S statistic	df	p-value
Male	62	0.544	0.340	0.699	—	60	< .001 ***
Female	62	0.376	0.139	0.572	—	60	.003 **

For males there is a moderate positive relationship between body image and appearance anxiety. As body image scores increase, appearance anxiety also increases. This result is highly significant, the 95% lower confidence interval is 0.376 and upper confidence interval is 0.699. It does not cross zero which confirms the reliability of this relationship.

For females there is a weak to moderate positive monotonic relationship between body image and appearance anxiety. The relationship is still significant, then 95% confidence

Body Image Satisfaction and Social Appearance Anxiety among Young Adults

interval in lower 3.139 and upper 0.572 also excludes zero, indicating a genuine association. Though it is weaker than males.

Overall, the spearman for males is higher than females, suggesting that body image is a stronger rank order predictor of appearance anxiety in males.

Table - 4 Independent t - test for Body Image and Appearance Anxiety by Gender

Variable	Group	N	M	SD	Levene's F	Levene's p	t	df	p (2-tailed)	Cohen's d
Appearance Anxiety	Male	62	33.24	14.81	0.774	.381	-2.713	122	.008**	-0.49
	Female	62	40.84	16.33	—	—	—	—	—	—
Body Image	Male	62	46.77	9.38	0.617	.434	-1.894	122	.061	-0.34
	Female	62	49.79	8.32	—	—	—	—	—	—

An independent sample t - test was conducted to examine gender differences in appearance anxiety and body image. Results revealed a significant difference in appearance anxiety between males and females, indicating that females reported significantly higher appearance anxiety than males. The effect size was small to medium, suggesting a meaningful difference between the two groups. For body image, the t - test indicated no significant gender difference in body image scores.

Levene's test of equality of variances were also non-significant for appearance anxiety and body image. The data suggests that gender is a significant predictor of appearance anxiety but not for body image.

DISCUSSION

The research conducted on body image satisfaction and social appearance anxiety aims to examine the relationship between body image and appearance anxiety. It also examines whether it varies significantly in males and females. The results confirm that there is a positive relationship between body image dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety in both male and female participants. Males demonstrate a moderate to strong positive correlation, while females exhibited a weaker but significant positive correlation. Both the findings are consistent and indicate body image and appearance anxiety are positively correlated for both genders. This effect appears stronger for males than females in this study. Further, the results show that there are gender differences in body image and appearance anxiety. In males when body image increases, their appearance anxiety score also goes up. This happens consistently and predictably. On the other hand, for females it is the same as males. The only difference is that it is less consistent.

Additionally, the findings showed females scored higher on body image (M = 46.44) than compared to males (M = 43.24), on the other hand standard deviation is lower for females (SD = 8.19) than males (SD = 9.46) according to the scale. According to the scores females on average reported slightly higher body image perception on this particular scale, their experience of appearance anxiety also increased. The t - test revealed a significant gender difference in appearance anxiety. Female participants reported higher levels of appearance anxiety (M = 40.84, SD = 16.33) than compared to males (M = 33.24, SD = 14.81). Meanwhile, the t - test results for body image for female participants reported marginally higher (M = 49.79, SD = 8.32) than males (M = 46.77, SD = 9.38).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study confirms that body image dissatisfaction and social appearance anxiety are associated with each other, supporting the view that how young adults perceive and evaluate their physical appearance has direct relation to how anxious individuals are in situations where they could be evaluated and judged by others. Further, the study indicates that increase in body image dissatisfaction leads to increase in appearance anxiety simultaneously in both the genders. Additionally, the observations made on gender differences were that the relationship between body image and anxiety was stronger amongst males than females. This challenges the stereotypical thought that anxiety related to body image is only related to females. This sets an example that anxiety related to body image affects every individual irrespective of gender. And this issue requires immediate attention as it is increasing day by day making everyone a victim of depression and anxiety.

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Body Image Satisfaction and Social Appearance Anxiety among Young Adults

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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