



A Correlational Study on Socio-Cultural Attitude Towards Appearances and Its Impact on Body Dissatisfaction and Relationship Satisfaction Among College Going Male

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationships between socio-cultural attitudes toward male appearance, body dissatisfaction, and relationship satisfaction among college-going males aged 18–22 years. Guided by theories such as Social Comparison Theory, Objectification Theory, and the Interpersonal Theory of Depression, this research explores how societal and media-driven ideals influence self-perception and relational dynamics. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through validated tools: the Socio-cultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-4R (SATAQ-4R), Body Dissatisfaction Scale, and Burns Relationship Satisfaction Scale.

From the findings obtained, there exists a notable positive correlation between socio-cultural attitude and body dissatisfaction, indicating how social influences impact the body image perception of males. It is important to note that there was no notable correlation between body dissatisfaction and relationship satisfaction. There was also no notable correlation between socio-cultural attitude and relationship satisfaction. It can be concluded from this that the influence of relationships depends on other aspects apart from physical appearance.

This highlights the need for encouraging body positivity and fostering awareness of the unrealistic expectations set by the media and social environment. Future studies need to investigate the impact of moderating factors, including self-esteem and emotional state, on the complex interaction between body image and relationship satisfaction.

Keywords: Socio-cultural Attitudes; Appearance-Related Pressure; Male Body Dissatisfaction; Body Image; Relationship Satisfaction; Young Men; Romantic Relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Body image issues and dissatisfaction with physical appearance have traditionally been viewed as concerns primarily affecting women. However, in recent years, socio-cultural pressures regarding male appearance have significantly increased. Media and societal expectations now promote male beauty standards that prioritize muscularity, leanness, and specific body proportions. Consequently, many young men struggle to navigate these ideals, which can affect their self-image and relationships. This study explores the interplay between socio-cultural attitudes toward male appearance, body dissatisfaction, and relationship satisfaction among college-aged males, offering valuable insights into how these factors influence romantic relationships.

The term socio cultural attitudes towards male appearance can be described as the set of standards imposed on an individual by external factors like media, family, and peer group that define what a perfect body looks like for males. The ideals usually promoted by society tend to focus on muscle mass, low body fat, and physical fitness as attributes of desirable male body image. Such stereotypes of ideal body are widely spread through advertising, social media, etc., and impact the self-image of men themselves. It is important to mention that such attitude towards male body image can lead to distorted perception and negative health consequences.

Body dissatisfaction is the term used to describe the negative perceptions or dissatisfaction people have about their physical appearance. In men, body dissatisfaction usually involves worry about muscle mass, fat, and body shape. High levels of body dissatisfaction have been linked to low self-respect, increased chances of developing mental disorders such as depression and anxiety, and difficulties in maintaining healthy social relationships. This dissatisfaction arises from the societal image of the "ideal" body of a man, making people adopt unrealistic body standards.

The concept of relationship satisfaction relates to the degree of happiness and fulfillment an individual experiences in his/her romantic relationship. The level of relationship satisfaction depends on certain essential components, among which are trust, communication, emotional intimacy, respect, and common goals. High levels of relationship satisfaction usually imply that there is harmony and support between the partners, who feel appreciated and understood. Thus, relationship satisfaction represents the overall quality of the relationship, including the way of dealing with conflicts and emotional connection. Relationship satisfaction is a highly important aspect of an individual's well-being and can affect other spheres of his/her life.

However, the increasing pressure on male body image can be attributed to the impact of media that projects a certain type of body image as the one that is ideal. Studies have shown that about 90% of the young men feel constant exposure to media that portrays muscular, fit, and athletic body as the one that is desirable. However, this pressure is especially felt by young college-going men, who feel the societal pressure to attain such type of body to the extent that about 70% men have expressed their feelings in this regard. The sources of such pressure include traditional media, social media, and interpersonal media, which have a high concern for physical appearance.

The issue of body dissatisfaction is common among young males with between 25% and 30% of them exhibiting moderate to high degrees of body dissatisfaction regarding their muscle size, body fatness, and general body appearance. Young men in college are especially prone to this problem because of exposure to the media and other social interactions where they are introduced to unrealistic body images (Frederick et al. 2006; Griffiths et al., 2016).

This issue goes beyond being a personal issue to also affect individuals' romantic relationships, where emotional attachment and communication is concerned. It has been reported that roughly 20% of young men find issues regarding their bodies affect their relationships because of insecurities and self-esteem (Markey & Markey, 2006; Davila & Beck, 2002).

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) people evaluate themselves by making comparisons of their physical appearance, social status, and other characteristics to standards set by society and other people. In the context of body image of males, social comparison takes place by comparing themselves to the ideal images of the male body. This theory is highly relevant to the role of socio-cultural attitude in body dissatisfaction among men since those who are always making such comparisons are likely to develop body dissatisfaction.

Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) implies that societal messages encourage people to treat their bodies like something to be evaluated and compared. While it was originally developed for females, now Objectification Theory can be used in relation to males as well. It assumes that messages about male objectification in mass media create the ideal body shape for males, which is muscle and lean. The consequence of this may be the situation where a man sees himself only from the perspective of his appearance and suffers from body dissatisfaction.

In modern society, young men are under the pressure of cultural standards of male body beauty which stress muscles and leanness. Because of this, they tend to evaluate their body and experience dissatisfaction due to the fact that they see themselves as being different from what they should look like according to cultural standards. This not only influences self-image, but affects one's psychological state and relationships as well.

The problem of body image can affect a person's self-confidence, self-esteem, and his or her relationships. The individual can experience insecurity in relationships, lack of emotional closeness, and fear of judgment. Consequently, relationship satisfaction can be damaged.

The purpose of this research is to find out the effect of socio-cultural attitudes on body dissatisfaction which affects the satisfaction in relationships. The purpose of this research is to understand how societal norms affect not only individuals but their relationships too. This would help in understanding the psychosocial problems of men today and help in formulating interventions for the same.

The aim of this research is to investigate the socio-cultural attitudes about male body and find its relation with body dissatisfaction and relationship satisfaction among college students aged 18-22 years.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Socio-cultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-4R) was developed by Schaefer and Thompson (2018) to evaluate the influence of external factors on ideal appearance standards. According to their study results, sociocultural pressures have a substantial impact on body image among males and females, with mounting evidence suggesting that males are especially sensitive to muscular appearance ideals promoted in the media.

Hobza et al. (2007) examined the effects of exposure to the idealized male image portrayed in media on men and discovered that it often results in body dissatisfaction and poor self-image.

Their research highlights the influence of socio-cultural factors in shaping men's perception of their bodies.

Swami et al. (2010), in their cross-cultural study, identified a significant difference in how attitudes in society towards men's appearances are displayed in Western and Eastern societies. Men in Western societies admitted that they feel more pressured to look muscular and lean due to the prevalence of media in such societies.

According to Frederick et al. (2007), roughly 30% of men in Western societies are dissatisfied with their bodies, mainly regarding their muscle size and percentage of body fat. The authors' research findings also identified a clear association between body dissatisfaction and issues related to mental wellbeing, for example, depression and anxiety.

Griffiths et al. (2016) explored the behaviors associated with body dissatisfaction in men, such as excessive exercising, restrictive diets, and even steroid use. These behaviors are often driven by the internalization of societal standards that idealize muscular physiques.

The concept "Adonis Complex" was coined by Pope et al. (2000) to describe an increasing male preoccupation with getting a muscular physique due to the pressure from society. It may result in problems such as disordered eating, body dysmorphia, and low self-confidence, thus, adding up to one's dissatisfaction.

Markey & Markey (2006) investigated the effect of dissatisfaction with one's body on dating life. It was revealed that people dissatisfied with their appearance are unable to establish intimate relations, lack trust and have communication problems, resulting in relationship dissatisfaction.

Davila and Beck (2002) explored the way body image influences the process of relationship management. High dissatisfaction with one's body can be associated with maladaptive behaviors including jealousy and excessive seeking of reassurance.

Karney & Bradbury (1995) emphasized the indirect effects of body image issues on relationship satisfaction. According to them, low self-esteem and psychological well-being arising from body dissatisfaction serve as hurdles for forming a bond and communicating effectively between partners.

The studies conducted by McCabe & Ricciardelli (2001) indicate that sociocultural factors and body dissatisfaction serve as mediating variables in the link between self-perception and relationship processes. This implies that sociocultural factors do not only affect body image but also have effects on interpersonal relationships.

NATIONAL RESEARCH RELATED TO VARIABLES

Soohinda, Geeta; Sampath, Harshavardhan; Mishra, Divyanti; Dutta, Sanjiba (2020) This research examines the impact of media on the body image of young men in India. It reveals that the exposure to westernized body images via media results in body dissatisfaction in the Indian youth. The emphasis is made on the socio-cultural pressure as one of the important aspects affecting self-perception.

Nagar, K. and Virk, S. S. (2017) This research is concerned with the socio-cultural impact of Western media on the body image of the Indian youth. Significant correlations between the media exposure and adoption of the Western body standards have been found resulting in the increase in body image problems.

Singh, M., Parsekar, S., & Bhumika, T. (2016) This research analyzes body image concerns of the Indian adolescents and its relation to eating attitudes, media and famous people. The study was carried out among 550 pre-university students and revealed that 31.09% of respondents were prone to eating disorders and significantly influenced by media presentations.

PRE AND PRESENT BACK-UP OF OBJECTIVE

Traditionally, the issues related to body image have been attributed almost exclusively to females since the society has been concerned more about the female beauty criteria. Traditionally, physical appearance among men was not valued as much as such attributes as strength, ability, and economic well-being that used to define social and sexual appeal throughout much of the 20th century (Pope et al., 2000). At that time, male beauty was a much broader concept, glorifying male ruggedness and masculinity instead of focusing on extreme fitness. As a result, the bulk of scientific researches was dedicated to females (Thompson & Cafri, 2007).

However, the situation has changed dramatically lately. With the current media influence, the image of an attractive male is now presented in terms of lean and muscular physique (Griffiths et al., 2016). In addition, these ideals have gone beyond the cultural barriers to be applied internationally. For example, in India, body image is shaped by Bollywood movies and social media by creating ideals where fairer skinned and more muscular men are considered attractive, thus combining the global trends with the local ideals (Saxena et al., 2020). Research suggests that about 30% of men have moderate to high body dissatisfaction,

focusing on muscle mass and body fat. Body dissatisfaction has a negative impact on mental health and may cause anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Frederick et al., 2007).

Apart from the problems on an individual level, body dissatisfaction may create issues in relationships. It is known that men with body image concerns face troubles with emotional intimacy, communication, and even trust, thus reducing relationship satisfaction (Markey & Markey, 2006).

This paper attempts to explore the role of societal attitudes towards male physical appearances in contributing to body dissatisfaction, as well as the impact that these have on the individuals' romantic relationships. Through the analysis of the young Indian males' attitudes, the paper will be able to shed light on the way in which old cultural traditions blend with modern factors, thus making this particular group vulnerable to such pressures.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative, correlational research design to investigate the relationships between socio-cultural attitudes toward male appearance, body dissatisfaction, and relationship satisfaction among college-aged males (18–22 years). This approach was well-suited for identifying the strength and direction of the associations between these variables.

HYPOTHESIS

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between socio-cultural attitudes toward male appearance and body dissatisfaction among college-going males.

H2: Increased body dissatisfaction will be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction.

VARIABLES

Independent Variable: Socio-cultural Attitude Towards Male Bodies.

Dependent Variables: Male Body Dissatisfaction and Relationship Satisfaction.

RESEARCH DESIGN

SAMPLE

The participants in this experiment consisted of young males in their college years, aged from 18 to 22 years old. They were either in a current romantic relationship or in a romantic relationship of at least one year's duration. This age range is especially important as it is a period when individuals are greatly affected by the socio-cultural environment around them.

DATA

Data were collected from 100 male respondents from undergraduate students who were in romantic relationships. The Purposive Sampling method was adopted.

RESEARCH TOOLS AND THEIR DESCRIPTION

The Socio-cultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-4R (SATAQ-4R) is designed to measure the level of internalization by individuals of the social norms regarding appearance, with an emphasis on the male body. This instrument seeks to determine the level of endorsement by the subjects of the ideals of muscularity, leanness, and athleticism in the media and culture. The scale has been adapted to fit male subjects, considering the importance of muscularity and body size in the modern images of ideal manhood. The scale has 28 items, and the subjects give their levels of agreement with each item using a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree).

The Body Dissatisfaction Scale is used in determining how dissatisfied individuals are in different dimensions of their physical appearance. The scale is made up of 26 items where respondents use a 5-point Likert scale to rate their answers, and high scores signify higher body dissatisfaction.

The Burns Relationship Satisfaction Scale contains 7 items that determine the degree of satisfaction in the romantic relationships of people. Respondents rate their answers using a 7-point Likert scale.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

A 61-item questionnaire was devised that sought to evaluate the respondents on three variables, namely Socio-cultural Attitude Towards Appearance in Male (28 items), Body Dissatisfaction (26 items) and Relationship Satisfaction (7 items). Data, in the form of online questionnaire using Google Forms application, was collected from 100 male respondents from undergraduate students who are in romantic relationship.

The observations were sampled independently. The *Purposive Sampling method* was adopted. The responses were populated in Excel sheet format and after that transcribed into the SPSS software for analysis. The results obtained are documented in the succeeding paragraphs.

PROCEDURE

The mode for data collection was online. The questionnaire forms were circulated amongst the defined sample population using Google Forms. The document consisted of a Consent Form to ensure ethical standards and protect the rights of the participants. The participants were instructed well enough on the purpose of administration of the individual tests to elicit genuine responses.

However, no information on the correlational aspects of the study was revealed to ensure that the 'social desirability factor' amongst participants would not get triggered. The respondents' demographic details like age, gender, work status and work experience were collected to ensure the desired sample population. To ensure confidentiality and ensure uninhibited and genuine responses of employees, the name was not asked to be revealed for the study.

The responses were populated in Excel sheet format and after that transcribed into the SPSS software for analysis. The data obtained for each of the three variables was subjected to Shapiro Wilk Normality test. As the data was not normally distributed, nonparametric correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships among the variables.

STATISTICAL TOOL

Statistical analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics. Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to examine the relationships among socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance, body dissatisfaction, and relationship satisfaction.

RESULTS

NORMALITY DATA

The normality of the data was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test. It was found that the variables were not normally distributed; hence, Spearman's rank order correlation was used for further analysis.

Socio-cultural Attitude Towards Appearance

The Shapiro–Wilk test indicated that socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance were not normally distributed, $W = .667$, $p < .001$.

Table 1 Socio-cultural Attitude Towards Appearance of Respondents

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
socioculturalattitude	.328	100	<.001	.667	100	<.001
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

The result was statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicating a significant deviation from normality.

Body Dissatisfaction

The Shapiro–Wilk test indicated that body dissatisfaction was not normally distributed, $W = .641$, $p < .001$.

Table 2 Body Dissatisfaction of Respondents

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Bodydissatisfaction	.358	100	<.001	.641	100	<.001
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

The result was statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicating a significant deviation from normality.

Relationship Satisfaction

The result of Shapiro Wilk Test for Relationship Satisfaction, run on the SPSS software was as follows:

Table 3 Relationship Satisfaction of Respondents

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
relationshipsatisfaction	.221	100	<.001	.870	100	<.001
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

The Shapiro–Wilk test indicated that relationship satisfaction was not normally distributed, $W = .870$, $p < .001$.

CORRELATIONAL DATA

Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted to examine the relationships among socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance, body dissatisfaction, and relationship satisfaction among college-going males.

Table 4 Correlational Analysis

CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS					
Spearman's rho	socioculturalattitude		sociocultural attitude	bodydissatisfaction	relationshipsatisfaction
		Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.231*	-.088
		Sig. (2-tailed)	-	.021	.382
		N	100	100	100
	bodydissatisfaction				
		Correlation Coefficient	.231*	1.000	-.089
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	-	.380
		N	100	100	100
	relationshipsatisfaction				
		Correlation Coefficient	-.088	-.089	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.382	.380	-
		N	100	100	100

*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The results indicated a significant positive correlation between socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance and body dissatisfaction, $\rho = .231$, $p = .021$. However, no significant correlation was found between socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance and relationship satisfaction, $\rho = -.088$, $p = .382$. Similarly, body dissatisfaction was not significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction, $\rho = -.089$, $p = .380$.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationships among socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance, body dissatisfaction, and relationship satisfaction among college-going males aged 18–22 years. The findings indicated a significant positive correlation between socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance and body dissatisfaction, whereas no significant association was observed between either socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance and relationship satisfaction or body dissatisfaction and relationship satisfaction.

The significant positive relationship between socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance and body dissatisfaction suggests that greater endorsement or internalization of appearance-related societal ideals is associated with greater dissatisfaction with one's body among young men. This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the influence of media, social comparison, and socio-cultural appearance ideals on male body image concerns (Hobza et al., 2007; Frederick et al., 2007). Exposure to idealized male physiques may encourage individuals to compare their own appearance with socially valued standards, potentially increasing dissatisfaction when they perceive a discrepancy between their actual and ideal body.

This result is also consistent with the existing studies on the influence of sociocultural factors on male body image. Modern appearance standards include such aspects as muscularity, slimness, and athletic shape, which may cause increased appearance-related problems in young men. Thus, the present result confirms the significance of the analysis of sociocultural factors when studying body dissatisfaction in male college students.

Nevertheless, no statistically significant relation between body dissatisfaction and relationship satisfaction was revealed in this study. This means that body image problems may not be converted directly into low relationship

satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction is a complex psychological construct that can be affected by multiple factors, such as communication, trust, emotional connection, support, and compatibility.

Similarly, there were no substantial connections found between socio-cultural attitude towards appearance and relationship satisfaction. That means that although socio-cultural pressures regarding appearance might be linked to the way young men view their bodies, they do not seem to have a direct connection with the way these men feel about their relationships in the current sample. This finding emphasizes the difference between body-image experience of a person and his or her relationship function.

In general, the results show that socio-cultural pressures might play an important role for the body images of young men, whereas relationship satisfaction might depend on other aspects. Further research can explore other variables, like self-esteem, social comparison, emotional well-being, communication, and partner support, in order to get a better insight into the connection between male body image and relationship satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationships among socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance, body dissatisfaction, and relationship satisfaction among college-going males aged 18–22 years. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance and body dissatisfaction, indicating that greater socio-cultural appearance-related attitudes were associated with greater body dissatisfaction among the participants.

However, no significant relationship was found between body dissatisfaction and relationship satisfaction, or between socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance and relationship satisfaction. These findings suggest that although socio-cultural appearance-related factors are associated with young men's perceptions of their bodies, relationship satisfaction may be influenced by a wider range of interpersonal and relational factors.

The findings highlight the importance of understanding male body image concerns within their broader socio-cultural context while recognizing that romantic relationship satisfaction involves multiple psychological and interpersonal dimensions. Further research with larger and more diverse samples may provide greater insight into the factors connecting male body image and relationship experiences.

LIMITATIONS

The study has certain limitations. First, the sample consisted of 100 college-going males aged 18–22 years who were in romantic relationships, which limits the generalizability of the findings to males from other age groups and backgrounds. Second, purposive sampling was used, which may limit the representativeness of the sample. Third, the study relied on self-report measures, and responses may therefore have been influenced by participants' personal

perceptions or social desirability. Finally, the correlational design does not allow causal conclusions to be drawn regarding the relationships among the variables.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this research have implications for gaining insight into male body image issues. First, the statistically significant correlation between the socio-cultural attitudes to appearance and body dissatisfaction underlines the necessity to encourage young men to become more media literate and develop critical skills concerning the unrealistic appearance standards promoted by the mass media.

Second, the lack of a statistically significant association between body dissatisfaction, socio-cultural attitudes, and relationship satisfaction indicates that the dynamics of relationships could be explained not only by appearance issues. Thus, programs for the improvement of communication, intimacy, trust, and mutual support would be helpful in this case.

SUGGESTIONS

Future research can incorporate bigger and more heterogeneous samples in order to increase the generality of the results. Future studies can also explore other variables like self-esteem, social comparison, affective states, partner support, and communication quality in order to gain a deeper understanding of the relation between body image and satisfaction in romantic relationships. The longitudinal design of future research can investigate the development of socio-cultural pressure about appearances and body dissatisfaction over time. Future studies can also explore the media exposure and cultural backgrounds.

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PLAGIARISM REPORT

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