



RESEARCH PAPER

Pressured By Perfection: A Tripartite Influence Model Approach to analyze Body Dissatisfaction, Self-Esteem, and Disordered Eating among Emerging Adult Females

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ABSTRACT

This study set out to explore how young women are affected by the pressure to achieve a “perfect” body—particularly the thin, ideal image often seen in media and popular culture. It specifically looked at how this pressure relates to issues like low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating behaviors among emerging adult females. In today’s image-driven world, young women are constantly surrounded by unrealistic beauty standards, often promoted by social media, celebrities, and societal norms. These external influences can deeply impact how they see themselves, leading to harmful comparisons and emotional distress. Using the Tripartite Influence Model, this study examines how these cultural and social forces contribute to the internalization of thin ideals and the resulting effects on mental and physical well-being. A quantitative approach was used, drawing data from 300 female university students aged 18 to 25, living in urban areas. Participants were selected through purposive sampling. Standardized questionnaires measured how much they internalized the thin ideal, their levels of self-esteem, and signs of disordered eating. The data were analyzed using statistical tools such as descriptive analysis, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression to identify meaningful patterns and relationships. The findings showed a clear connection between internalizing the thin ideal and experiencing lower self-esteem and unhealthy eating behaviors. Media and peer influence stood out as major factors contributing to body dissatisfaction. Many participants reported feeling pressured to meet unrealistic beauty expectations, which in turn led to harmful dieting habits and emotional distress. These results confirm the key ideas of the Tripartite Influence Model in the context of young women’s daily experiences. There is a strong need for programs that promote body positivity and help young women critically evaluate media messages. Schools, universities, and mental health professionals should work together to create supportive spaces where young women can talk about body image, build self-worth, and learn healthy habits without the burden of perfection.

KEYWORDS Self-Esteem, Media Pressure, Tripartite Influence Model, Eating Disturbance, Emerging Adult Females

Introduction

The ideal fitness, glamorous lifestyles, curvaceous body, flawless skin and perfect figures of popular media celebrities from plays, movies and commercials inspire audiences and affect their mindsets and perceptions about themselves. Beauty intrigues everyone but is often closely associated with females in both social and cultural contexts. Ideal fitness of celebrities make profound effects on emerging adult female audiences and the way they see themselves in the mirror of inspiration of their role models. Because society has always set bars high in terms of beauty for women. This is the reason that the so called perfect reel life of media celebrities affect the real life body image, life style, eating

patterns, self-esteem or the way they conduct themselves and deal with their imperfections (Karnika, 2021).

Menon (2021) highlighted the insane obsession of young audiences with their celebrities by pointing out the fact that these youngsters not only get inspiration but actually start idealizing and worshipping their favorite celebrities increasing their urge to imitate them. This obsession to look perfectly fit and glamorous affect their mental health and lead towards a number of physical as well as psychological disorders. These issues lead towards unhealthy dieting, low self-esteem and dissatisfaction towards ones' own body among females. Lin et al (2023) indicated strong correlation between body dissatisfaction and disordered eating patterns among young adult females.

Celebrity like perfection obsessed females start comparing themselves to celebrities and try to attain the unattainable ideal physiques of their role models and fall prey to quick-fix diets and impatiently await the glow-up which was nothing but a deceit. They begin dieting without the assistance of a professional or expert nutritionist just to attain the thin, svelte, and intelligent body image of popular models and celebrities. The urge to accomplish unrealistic standards lead towards obsessive behaviours causing eating disturbances and they end up having low self-esteem and disappointment (Alanee, 2024).

It is an irony that the ideal beauty standards of society continue to plague young adult women in Pakistan and their perception of themselves even in today's era of modernization. There is a huge stereotypical gender biased difference in how perfect a woman should look to be acceptable. Compared with male counterparts it is a female are who is more affected by media, peer or sometimes family pressure to fit into the predetermined beauty standards. Internalization of this pressure directly affects a young girl's viewpoint life style and degree of self-esteem. The ideal yet naive standard of having a thin, skinny figure, plum lips, body curves, fair skin tone, button nose, doe-eyes shatters her self-worth and disturbs her eating patterns (Vutthikrai, 2024).

Jacob and Panwar (2023) highlighted the prevalence of disordered eating and "Diet culture" in order to attain unrealistic thin-ideal beauty standards set by media celebrities. The study concluded that since female audiences today have active exposure to fitness tutorial and weight-loss advertisements, Instagram posts of their favorite celebrities this highly disrupt their perceptions of fitness body images. They start imitating them by adopting low-calorie diets, heavy workouts resulting into disordered eating patterns and low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction.

Schaefer, Burke, & Thompson, (2018) concluded that among Chinese couples, it was typical for one partner to complain about the other's physical unfitness or body obesity. Chinese women always strive to maintain their slimness and engage in such activities. After all, they believe that their husbands prefer slender and skinny wives or girls because they find them more appealing. So it is not just media but family, peers, partners, socio-cultural norms which put intense pressure on women to look their best.

Jemisenia et al (2019) conducted an experimental research to investigate the effects of exposure to celebrity Instagram pages and effects on body dissatisfaction and self-esteem issues among different groups of Nigerian females. The findings reported that body satisfaction and self-esteem decreased after heavy exposure to plump ideal images of Instagram pages and posts of celebrities

Literature Review

Body image refers to perceptions and feelings of an individual about their physical fitness and appearance it serves as a mirror in which a person sees its own self. This profoundly affects teir self-esteem, confidence and mental health. Emerging adult females

have been found to have significant psychological concerns regarding their body image particularly at the age of 18-24 when they are in a crucial phase of developing long-term fitness and health patterns (Malloy et al 2024).

Brown and Tiggerman (2022) conducted a systematic literature review to analyze celebrity influence of body images and eating patterns by analyzing 36 research studies fulfilling inclusion criteria. The findings of systematic review reported that ideal celebrity images, comparative appearances and celebrity idealism are highly linked with maladaptive eating disorders and body dissatisfaction among females.

Wang et al (2023) explained the critical role of media in shaping perceptions of audiences regarding ideal body images and thin-ideal beauty standards and effects on audiences. Certainly contemporarily when people have an active, frequent, regular and dynamic exposure to media every second this demonstrates that they cannot avoid the hyper effects of media on their perceptions regarding ideal body and self-images.

Media obsessed self-images in terms of curvaceous body shapes, ideal size, zero figures result into agitated obsessions with perfection, ideal thin bodies, unhealthy eating patterns, fixation with low calorie diets ultimately leading towards risk of frustration and dissatisfaction regarding self-image (Irene & Ramirez, 2023). In this way heavy exposure to these media celebrities through their social media pages affect negatively on body image and self-esteem of their female audiences (Nene & Oluwapamilerin 2023).

Shaffi (2022) conducted a study using t-test to analyze if there was any significant difference in terms of life satisfaction among males and females. The findings revealed that males score high in life satisfaction than females. One of the most central reasons of this difference was the standards both set for life. Since females usually set high standards of life in terms of their expectations such as beauty, life style, fitness accomplishments so they get more attracted towards fantasies and unrealistic prospects. This creates an undue pressure on their minds, this is multiplied with cultural preconceptions and eventually decrease their satisfaction making them distressed and disturbs their normal life patterns. Burnham (2020) also highlighted the fact that females compare and idealize more as compared to males so this leads towards dissatisfaction among them affecting their psychological mindsets and behaviours.

Luo, Jackson, Niu, and Chen's (2019) study delves into the mediating implications of downward and upward comparisons on relationships between media-based appearance pressure and changes in behavior, particularly eating disorders among women versus men. The study, encompassing 2421 undergraduate students from Chinese public universities, employed a survey-based questionnaire. Results highlighted gender differences in appearance connections, indicating that associated interferences might be gender-specific.

Tylka & Calogero's (2019) research addressed relationship-specific factors correlated with females' eating disorder symptoms. The study involved 409 community members and revealed that male partner thinness-related demands and access to pornography were linked to increased eating disorder symptoms. The findings underscored that such symptoms were more prevalent when partners felt pressured to maintain their thinness, with this correlation varying with age and the influence of media, peers, and families.

Examining the gap in appearance-related predictors of state body dissatisfaction, Fuller-Tyszkiewicz et al. (2019) explored whether these state-based effects were stronger for individuals with trait-level body image disturbances like internalization and body dissatisfaction. The study included 108 women between the ages of 18 and 40 and employed a survey-based questionnaire, with data gathering conducted through a

smartphone app. Results demonstrated the impact of body dissatisfaction on appearance-related characteristics. However, it also suggested that previous studies' exclusive focus on appearance assessments might have neglected other body image theories contributing to body dissatisfaction.

Shagar et al (2019) looked at how sociocultural factors might internalize the thin ideal, which then causes body dissatisfaction in women and results in restricted eating and bulimic behaviours. 820 females made up the sample size for the survey-based research, including 421 Australian and 399 Malaysian respondents among emerging adult females. The study's findings demonstrated that there were just two key differences between the Tripartite Influence Models supported by each culture. The effect of family members was dramatically linked with internalizing the thin ideal for Malaysian girls but not Australian females. For Australian young girls, there was a suggestive relationship between body dissatisfaction and limited eating, but not a significant one for Malaysian young girls.

Though extensive research has been conducted to investigate and explore body dissatisfaction and eating disorders among young females in western settings but there has been a huge research gap in how these issues manifest in South Asian contexts particularly in Pakistan. Also the selected theoretical model, Triplate Influence model has rarely been employed in studying behavioral patterns of populations outside western countries resulting into a significant gap in interpreting relevancy and validity of theoretical framework in diverse cultural contexts.

Theoretical Framework

The Tripartite-Influence Model

The model elaborates the relationship between physical appearance and dietary imbalance and difficulties. According to the model, influences from families, friends, and the media may have a detrimental impact on a person's perception of their physical appearance and their tendency to overeat. Undoubtedly, there is a strong argument that family and peer groups may make remarks on body types, weight, fashion sense, and eating habits that may become progressively unfavorable with time. A further exposure occurs when idealized thin and slender body types are disparaged in media sources including television dramas, movies, and commercials. When thin-ideal internalization and appearance correlations are taken into account, the links between the pressure of social institutions, body ideals, self-esteem, and eating disorders are also impacted. The model has been found highly significant and relevant with the undertaken study.

The main goal of this study was to determine how the media, affects college women's perceptions about their body types and eating habits and other psychological behaviors. The basis of this study rests on the Tripartite Influence model, which has been employed to assess internal processes related to the idealization of media engagement and its effects (social, mass media, etc.). As Pakistani emerging adult females increasingly show an interest in the slim body archetype, the primary objective is to apply the model specifically to emerging adult females in Punjab. Embracing a slender physique is gradually becoming a measure of their core personal values. Various media platforms such as dramas, movies, and television commercials have collectively influenced the widespread belief that a leaner figure is synonymous with beauty.

Hypotheses

H₀1: Internalized thin-ideal does not have a significant effect on self-esteem between emerging adult females.

H₀2: Internalized thin-ideal does not have a significant effect on eating disturbance between emerging adult females.



Material and Methods

Research Design

The study has adopted a quantitative research design for collection and analysis of data. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the study's data.

Population

As the study was focused to investigate ideal body images among emerging adult females so all the women could have been considered population of study. But due to constraints it was substantial to select a certain sample which could accurately represent the population so a sample has been drawn for collection of data.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling technique was chosen to derive out the sample from diverse population in order to attain the most accurate, precise, reliable and valid findings of study. So a predetermined criterion was used to select a bracket and included young emerging adult females of two universities of Lahore as sample of study using purposive sampling technique.

Sample of the Study

The young emerging adult females from The Minhaj University Lahore and the University of Education (N=500) have been selected as sample group in this study. The age group ranged from 18 to 25 years of age. The distribution of the sample's level of education, occupations, TV viewing, feelings about body type, and satisfaction with one's appearance have been investigated.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Relationships among Self-Esteem and Thin-Ideal Internalization

		Self-esteem	Thin-Ideal Internalizationnn
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	1	-.356**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	500	500
Thin-Ideal Internalizationnn	Pearson Correlation	-.356**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	500	500

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

H₀₁ indicates that among female emerging adults, internalization of the skinny ideal is negatively correlated with self-esteem. The results show a strong negative link between the two variables with a high effect on the self-esteem association ($r = -.356$, $n = 500$, $p .05$).

Table 2
Relationship among Eating Disturbance and Thin-Ideal Internalization

	Eating Disturbance	Thin-Ideal Internalizationn
Eating Disturbance	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.730**
	N	500
Thin-Ideal Internalizationn	Pearson Correlation	.730**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	500

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

H₀₂ associations suggest that eating disturbance has the greatest influence on thin-ideal internalization in emerging adult females. The two variables had a strong correlation [$r = .730$, $n = 500$, $p .05$] with significant impacts on the link between eating disturbances.

Discussion

The first correlation test analyzed relationship between self-esteem and thin-ideal internalization among emerging adult females. As per results, the association between two factors is significant, indicating that exposure. Female viewers internalize the unrealistic beauty standards and thin-ideal images of their favorite celebrities and make them their role models for life. This validated the reality highlighted by Menon (2021) that internalization of thin-ideal celebrity inspired figures promote fitness obsession, dissatisfaction, low self-esteem among emerging adult females. This inspiration set unrealistic beauty standards for females. Emerging adult females start doubting their self-worth and this highly affect their perception of themselves leading towards frustration and dissatisfaction affecting their mental health and physical wellbeing as well. Eventually in order to have a slimmer figure and boost their confidence they develop obsession to low calorie dieting, exercising, and visiting fitness experts and doctors for a slimmer, ideal celebrity inspired appearance.

Examining this topic from the perspectives of female connections and perceptions it has been validated as claimed by Burnham (2020) and Luo et al (2019) that females compare and idealize more which lead towards development of certain psychological and physical problems in them. These emerging adult females after having regular and frequent exposure to the content presenting media celebrities as divas start comparing themselves to their role models and on-screen celebrities. They compare their body shapes to the slim, ideal, curvaceous and perfect body of their idols enhancing their realization of imperfections in their bodies. Such comparisons shatter their confidence, making them lose their confidence and lowers their self-esteem.

Eating disorders and internalization of the thin ideal in developing adult females were tested in second correlation. The results indicated that a high level of significance among two variables. It indicated that internalizing the slim ideal body image causes females to feel less confident overwhelmingly they develop excessive obsession to low calorie diets and eating disorders to keep their bodies look attractive and slim. These findings are reliable with the fact pointed out by Jacob and Panwar (2023) about the prevalence of disordered eating and “Diet culture” among females in order to attain unrealistic thin-ideal beauty standards set by media celebrities.

The findings of this study have analyzed that majority of young girls fantasize about having a tiny, slender physique because they do not look as thin, perfect and flawless like their role model celebrities. They try various types of diets, workout plans and sometimes even go for cosmetic procedures which are usually carried out through professionals who are not experts. However, it is a well-known fact that most people find it extremely difficult to stick to such difficult diet plans, workout routines and lose weight. As a substitute, people try to regulate their eating habits at inappropriate times, such as lunch and consuming some food in the morning, which is the primary cause of intense hunger. Many females eat vegetables because they believe that doing so will keep their weight from rising and will make their food easier to digest. They also think that all media celebrities, including models and celebrities from dramas, movies, and advertisements, adhere to similar diet plans and strategies. These false beliefs are to blame for disrupting females' flawed perceptions about beauty standards and affect their normal life routine particularly their eating patterns.

Media, doctors, people keep highlighting the negative implications of having a bulky and chubby body. Most people with heavy bodies and fat are aware of their physical condition, thus broadcasts about physique and the negative effects of bulky posture encourage them to internalize slender bodies. The information on common beauty presumptions that affect viewers of these kinds of programs are aired at Pakistani media. These broadcasts are grabbing people's attention by depicting ideal and typical body proportions and contrasting them with our own. Females in Pakistan also consume fast food, which contributes to their tendency to be larger and makes them more conscious of their thin and slender body types. Henceforth, in Pakistan, women are found in social situations where their families and peer groups keep exerting pressure to look perfectly fit on their minds which lead towards intense frustration and dissatisfaction resulting into distressed, low esteemed females with obsession to calorie deficient diets and disordered eating patterns.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to test the aforementioned model in terms of correlation with the effects of the media, internalization of the thin ideal, self-esteem, and eating disturbance; as a result, it also looked into the root causes of the eating disturbances among emerging adult females of Pakistan. The study tested the proposed hypothesis that if the internalization of slim ideal body images are shaped by Media, peer and socio-cultural pressure on female audiences. The findings reveal that media takes on a variety of roles in internalization. The quantitative cross-sectional survey approach was employed for data collection from a sample size of 500 emerging adult females. Findings of this study highlighted strong influence and media pressure on women to attain idealistic and perfect appearances inspired from celebrities. The obsession to have celebrity like thin-ideal body image is to blame for nutritional imbalance and other psychological as well as physical health problems among Pakistani young adult females. Media, celebrities, peer pressure, ideal body images, unrealistic expectations and unfair beauty standards set by social and cultural settings put gratuitous pressure resulting into high level of dissatisfaction, low self-esteem and disordered eating patterns and obsession with unhealthy diet among emerging adult females.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of study, it is strongly recommended to design and develop comprehensive interventions to address the detrimental impact of thin-ideal internalization among young women. Educational institutions need to incorporate body image awareness and media literacy programs into their curricula to help students interpret and analyze unrealistic beauty standards portrayed sensationally in media. Mental health support centres must be strengthened within universities to provide

professional help and counseling for psychocological issues related to self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating. Social media platforms and influencers do have a resposinbility on them and they must come forward to promote diverse and realistic body representations. Conclusively collaborative efforts between all key stakeholders including educators, parents, healthcare professionals, celebrities and other media professionals ought to create a supportive, positive and healthy environment to promote healthy self-perception which would eventually reduce the pressure of attaining unrealistic beauty and perfection goals among young females.

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