



Examining Sociocultural Influences on Body Image and Self-Acceptance



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ABSTRACT

When contemplating an individual's physique, perceptions are frequently molded by external evaluations and societal conventions, thereby influencing self-esteem and assessments of appearance. The ideals of thinspiration and fitspiration that are prevalent on social media platforms advocate for weight reduction and fitness objectives, thus impacting perceptions of body image. A positive body image encompasses appreciation and acceptance of one's physical form, shaped by elements such as physical activity and societal expectations. Music videos and lyrics can also affect body image, with objectifying content often detrimentally influencing self-esteem. The societal concept of beauty pageants that celebrate perfection presents difficulties in fostering body positivity. Women, in particular, may experience body dissatisfaction despite having a healthy Body Mass Index. The Bio-Psycho-Social model underscores the interrelationship of biological, psychological, and social factors in body image satisfaction. Although societal pressures and external evaluations can influence perceptions of beauty, embracing one's authentic self and intrinsic value is essential for self-acceptance. This paper highlights music videos promoting a positive body image, significantly impacting women by encouraging them to appreciate their bodies as beautiful. It finds that the pursuit of self-acceptance and an emphasis on inner beauty can yield a more affirmative body image and a stronger sense of self-worth amidst societal criticisms.

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Introduction

People have own ideas about their body. But they become more alert when they feel that their body is marked seriously by others. They immediately start thinking either positive or negative about their body. It means that the nature of these thoughts whether positive or negative typically hinges on individual's self-perception and the evaluations provided by

others. People frequently strive to view their self through the lens of external perspectives, relying on others' remarks to affirm their self-acceptance. Regardless of the number of times they scrutinize their reflection in the mirror, a single comment from another individual can alter their thought process and, at times, challenge their beliefs regarding their attractiveness on a given day. Social media,

societal feedback, validation, dietary habits, and physical health, whether consciously or unconsciously, influence individual's perception of body image.

Limited research and documentation have been conducted regarding body image in Nepal due to the predominantly Hindu society, which upholds and respects women rather than objectifying them. Furthermore, as beauty has been historically associated more with women than men, the perceptions of Nepali women regarding their bodies, body image, and beauty are not easily accepted, both by the women themselves and by the broader population. Consequently, researchers have decreased interest in exploring Nepalese women's perspectives on body and beauty, resulting in a lack of studies in this area. Additionally, male researchers often face challenges in studying women's beauty due to societal norms that discourage open discussions between men and women on this topic. Women also encounter limitations in conducting research; on one hand, research is not typically considered a high-paying profession that can be pursued easily, while on the other hand, academically qualified or professionally engaged women may be unable to undertake research due to their multiple domestic responsibilities. Therefore, the subject of women and beauty has failed to attract significant attention from male or female scholars in Nepal.

In light of the aforementioned circumstances, this paper aims to explore women's perceptions of their body image and beauty. Recognizing that female researchers may

find it easier to engage women in discussions about their bodies and beauty, I have chosen to focus on this topic. Women are more likely to share their thoughts and experiences regarding body types with other women. The principal research challenge lies in the fact that discussing women's body image remains a taboo in the academic arena, an issue I strive to address. The primary objectives of this paper are to examine women's perceptions of their bodies, the influences that lead them to accept or reject their current body image, the extent to which cultural beliefs shape their body image, and how media, specifically music videos, impact their perceptions of their own bodies.

Review of Literature on Body, Beauty and Women

Research indicates that women generally score significantly lower than men in areas pertaining to body appearance, body pride, image flexibility, and social well-being. Nevertheless, no discernible differences in body acceptance from others and emotional well-being between sexes were identified (Swami et al., 2018). Thinspiration and fitspiration represent two predominant aesthetic ideals disseminated across social media; thinspiration refers to visual and textual portrayals aimed at motivating weight loss, while fitspiration encompasses motivational imagery and text designed to encourage individuals to achieve fitness aspirations. Both ideals advocate for slender and toned physiques alongside promoting dietary practices, exercise, and yoga for enhanced appearance. It is believed that

fitspiration promotes healthier outcomes than thinspiration; however, it still perpetuates stigma as both present a framework for body image perception or dissatisfaction (Carrotte et al., 2017; Cohen et al., 2019).

Women are often critical of their appearance and attribute significant importance to their looks. Approximately 85% of adolescents exhibit body image dissatisfaction, while more than half possess a healthy Body Mass Index (BMI) but remain discontent with their body shape (Malla et al., 2021). In the United States, a prevalent cultural phenomenon known as the Eurocentric aesthetic establishes values and criteria for beauty, such as fair skin, light-colored eyes, long straight hair, and smaller facial features alongside slender physiques. These standards parallel the African-centered aesthetic, which is often deemed less attractive and less feminine (Awad et al., 2015). The endorsement of restrictive beauty ideals correlates with diminished sexual well-being, both emotionally and physically. Acceptance of hegemonic beauty standards, internalization of the thin ideal, and a heightened investment in appearance collectively contribute to varying levels of this decline in sexual and emotional agency. "Pretty hurts" highlights the adverse ramifications faced by Black women who base their self-worth on the fulfillment of idealized beauty standards, often leading to emotional and psychological distress (Avery et al., 2021). In "Antony and Cleopatra," Shakespeare characterizes Cleopatra as an eternal and unchanging figure, asserting that age cannot diminish her allure,

nor can routine strip her of her distinctive charm. Conversely, Shakespeare's "As You Like It" presents a negative perspective on aging with the line "Sans teeth, Sans eyes, Sans taste, Sans everything," a viewpoint recently explored in the Weekend Australian Magazine (Ricciardelli et al., 2018).

The body is the most invaluable entity we human beings possess, an extraordinary amalgamation of cells, tissues, organs, and hormones. It constitutes our being from head to toe. While our body is a complete system comprising all its components, we often concentrate on the perceptions of others to evaluate ourselves. A positive body image can be characterized as the appreciation, respect, and acceptance of one's physical self (Augustus-Horvath and Tylka, 2011). Individuals engaged in physical activities such as exercise, yoga, and dance are more likely to embrace their bodies, as these practices contribute to enhancing physical shape. Elevated self-esteem and self-acceptance also facilitate the acknowledgment of our own bodies. Positive body image encompasses body appreciation, constructive processing of body-related thoughts, and an emphasis on functionality rather than mere appearance. This construct is intricate, comprising three principal components: recognition of the body, a constructive approach to processing body-related thoughts, and prioritization of functionality over aesthetics. Valuing the body's functionality entails recognizing its capabilities, being attentive to its requirements, and prioritizing overall health and wellness. Consistent physical activity

correlates with an improved body image; however, this association is less pronounced among women whose exercise motivations are primarily appearance-oriented rather than functional (Halliwell, 2015).

Receiving remarks such as "beautiful" and "handsome" from others can illuminate one's day and enhance self-confidence. Even recollecting such compliments from the past can evoke pleasant memories. Positive reinforcement is linked to heightened levels of optimism. The terms "beautiful" and "handsome" are consistently prioritized by individuals, fostering self-confidence, engendering pride, and connecting to affirmative past and future experiences. A favorable comment transcends mere words; it provides insights into how others perceive us. Observing models and celebrities and aspiring to achieve a similar body shape is a common aspiration for many. Body image is influenced by our perception of ourselves, which is often shaped by external viewpoints; we are also affected by feedback, as well as media including films, narratives, articles, music, and lyrics.

The body image literature is intrinsically linked to the literature on disability. In research conducted in the early twentieth century, Taleporos and McCabe (2002) found that bodily impairment negatively impacted individuals' psychological experiences, feelings, and attitudes toward their own bodies. The process through which individuals with physical impairments experience discomfort related to their bodies begins with the internalization of negative

social attitudes. This is followed by a gradual acceptance of their bodies over time. However, positive feedback from partners and others facilitates the development of a positive body image, even when their appearance does not conform to societal standards of beauty. This also suggests that individuals of any kind, given their unique differences, may begin to perceive themselves positively when deemed beautiful or handsome by others.

Body image influenced by music videos in the media age

Furthermore, body image is impacted by the influence of music videos and lyrical content. Contemporary music often emphasizes societal ideals of body image through its lyrics and visual representations in music videos. Concentrating on bodily functionality entails appreciating its capabilities, being cognizant of its requirements, and prioritizing well-being (Halliwell, 2015). Women who engaged in physical exercise reported heightened confidence, greater happiness, reduced anxiety, and diminished self-objectification compared to those who did not partake in exercise. Lyrics constitute the verbal component of music, articulating explicit or implicit messages to the audience. Music facilitates self-regulation by enhancing mood, emotion, and positive affect. It further amplifies enjoyment, imagination, self-dialogue, and arousal management, with additional advantages during physical exertion, such as emotional regulation, diminished perceived effort, and improved performance.

Very few research has investigated the

influence of music on body image, with the majority concentrating on appearance-centered music videos. Such videos adversely affect women's body image, escalating dissatisfaction, anxiety, and negative emotions while diminishing body appreciation and self-esteem (Karageorghis & Priest, 2012). The thematic focus of lyrics in popular music has transitioned from love-centric narratives to more sexually explicit content. Research indicated that between 2009 and 2013, 47% of pop songs objectified the body, 35% concentrated on the male or female gaze, and 30% addressed beauty or allure. Songs containing objectifying lyrics showed that 91.8% objectified women, and 86.5% of songs concerning attractiveness centered on women. Music genres denote distinct categories or styles characterized by shared traits such as rhythm, instrumentation, and thematic elements. Examples encompass pop, rock, hip-hop, classical, jazz, and country (Flynn et al., 2016). Though few studies have scrutinized music's impact on body image, research concerning music videos elucidates their detrimental effects on body image, amplifying dissatisfaction, anxiety, and negative emotions while decreasing body satisfaction, self-esteem, and self-worth (Mischner et al., 2013).

Numerous methods exist to juxtapose female bodies with varying social dimensions. Both males and females are increasingly vigilant about their physiques due to societal commentary, modeling, and the emphasis on aesthetically pleasing appearances in mainstream media. Significantly, one year

ago, a plus-sized woman triumphed in the Nepalese Miss Nepal beauty pageant for the first time in history, further earning the opportunity to compete in the Miss Universe pageant.

The archetype of the ideal body image has become so entrenched in societal perceptions that embracing body positivity poses a considerable challenge. Even representations of deities showcase flawless bodies and visages, mirroring societal expectations. Jane Dipika Garrett distinguished herself as Nepal's inaugural plus-sized contestant in Miss Universe 2023, contesting the belief that beauty contests should exclusively celebrate the "perfect body." While Miss Universe is dismantling barriers by incorporating trans women, mothers, and divorcees, Miss World has yet to adopt this progression. These standards of beauty are crafted to instill feelings of insecurity in women, directing attention solely toward physical appearance (Nepal, 2024).

A true champion who confronts societal biases, Nirmala Bhandari, claimed the title of Miss Disability Queen 2024. With a remarkable character and indomitable spirit, she excels not only in wheelchair basketball and para-powerlifting but also in social work and the performing arts (Davis, 2024). She has faced numerous comments and challenges but demonstrates that her inner strength surpasses any external judgments. It also verifies the notion that body image dissatisfaction is influenced from Medias and Media's industry.

Theoretical Framework

This paper specifically references three key theories, namely, Schema Theory, Ideal-Self Theory, and Bio-Psycho-Social Theory. Schema theory posits that individuals process and arrange information based on pre-existing cognitive frameworks. Regarding body satisfaction, internalized perceptions of one's appearance (body-related schemas) shape beliefs, behaviors, and the assimilation of new information concerning one's physique. For example, a woman may encounter numerous messages about her looks from media and various other sources. Over time, her ingrained beliefs about her body influence how she interprets and organizes new information related to her appearance, often subconsciously (Scholarsarchive & Davis, 2017).

Throughout time, various facets of Self have been delineated, including two "actual" selves: the individual's self-perception and the perceived evaluations by others. "Others" may refer to significant individuals or society at large. Furthermore, several "potential" selves have also been acknowledged. The "spiritual" self pertains to one's moral sensibility, while the "social" Self corresponds to how others view us. In 1961, Rogers distinguished between societal expectations and personal ideals. Building upon Freud's notions, he characterized the superego as the moral conscience and the ideal self as aspirations and ambitions. The social "ideal self" encapsulates how we envision an improved version of ourselves in the eyes of those we admire. Colby

differentiated between "wish-beliefs" (e.g. personal desires) and "value-beliefs" (e.g. moral obligations). While various dimensions of the Self have been articulated in diverse theories, self-discrepancy theory offers a framework for comprehending their interrelationships, proposing two cognitive dimensions: self-domains and perspectives (Barnett et al., 2017; Higgins, 1987).

Furthermore, this study examines the influence of the bio-psycho-social model on the ideal self and the real self. The Bio-Psycho-Social model serves as a comprehensive framework connecting body image from multiple perspectives. Biology encompasses our genetics, physical health, and the functionality of organ systems. Physical health impacts mental well-being in various ways: the brain, as an organ, is susceptible to illness, and physical conditions can also influence body image. Psychological well-being significantly affects both mental and physical health. Unhealthy moods, thoughts, and behaviors can indicate mental health challenges and exacerbate overall well-being. Mental health and behavior may create a feedback loop; for instance, self-isolation. Socially, Marschall elucidates that the environment affects genetics. Environmental transformations can influence mental health in both beneficial and detrimental ways. The social environment is changeable so, modernization and trends are causes of social affect on body image (Marschall, 2023).

In this way, this paper conceptualizes the interconnectedness of Schema Theory, Ideal-Self Theory, and Bio-Psycho-Social

Theory, emphasizing how internalized body image perceptions and social influences shape individual self-concept, ultimately revealing complex interactions between biological, psychological, and social factors in understanding body satisfaction.

Research Methodology

This paper is the result of qualitative research in which content analysis was utilized as the primary methodology. In conjunction with content analysis, Video-based Content Analysis (VCA) is utilized. VCA is a qualitative research method designed to explore the manifest and latent meanings of both the words and actions depicted in a music video documented through any audiovisual material. The method grants researchers access to the subjective realities of life and offers a comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes of human thought, behavior, and emotion. In this paper, the researcher initially analyzed several songs addressing body image, including "Scars to Your Beautiful" by Alessia Cara, "Try" by Colbie Caillat, "Body" by Jordan Suaste, "Khoobsurat" by Vishal Mishra and Sachin-Jigar, including few others, and "Dami Chhu" by Samriddhi Rai. Upon review, I selected only one Nepali song, namely, "Dami Chhu," which was sung by Rai. It was selected for content analysis for several valid reasons. Firstly, comprehending a Nepali music video and interpreting or analyzing it by a Nepali writer is more accessible than with Hindi or English music videos. Secondly, this research seeks to elucidate the relationship between the body image of Nepalese women and the

influence of media, positing that Nepalese women have a preference for viewing Nepali music videos over non-Nepali music. This perspective will facilitate a more comprehensive conclusion in the context of this paper. Thirdly, recent trends in Nepal's music videos have transitioned from the traditional portrayal of heterosexual love to a focus on body image, which idealizes the self. This paper aims to reconceptualize the typical local context by illustrating the positive body image from a Nepalese perspective. The lyrics of all the songs were initially reviewed, and the selected song for content analysis was listened to seven times prior to the commencement of data transcription.

Data Analysis and Presentation

In this section, I proceed to show and examine several tracks that convey a distinct message regarding positive body image. Let me start with few lines from Samriddhi Rai's song, Ma Dami Chhu, which means *I am precious*.

"Ma magazine, khabar ko model haina

36 24 khai k k pani chaina

Ankha baba ko, naak aama ko paayen rey

Gaala ghataye ma super fly rey

Hidda harin jhai chaal chaina mero

Vanchan keta jhai paara, yo k ho

Thulo haaso mero roker rokina

Sarwagun sampanna pani ma dekhinna

Tyahi ni, ma j chhu thikai ta chhu, Ma Dami Chhu" (Rai, 2019)

The approximate English translation of the lyrics provided above is as follows:

I am not a model featured in a magazine

Nor do I possess that 36-24 ideal measurement
of a beauty

My eyes resemble my father's, and my nose
resembles my mother's

If my cheeks become slender, I resemble a
super model

I cannot traverse with the grace of a deer

My style is reminiscent of a masculine
aesthetic

I cannot stop my rowdy laughter

I am not that high-end woman

However, I exist authentically as I am; I
possess inherent value.

Magazines consistently provide platforms for individuals with aesthetic appeal, showcasing idealized bodily forms or figures that exude empowerment. The 36-24-36 metric is often heralded as the archetype of feminine beauty and physical desirability. Our physiques are perpetually intertwined with genetic predispositions, where differing bodily attributes reflect connections to our ancestry. Prominent cheekbones contribute to an impression of sophistication. Emulating the grace of a deer, embodying a tomboy persona, and expressing unrestrained laughter are frequently dismissed as qualities of beauty in women. This encapsulates the societal and cultural representations of femininity. The essence of womanhood transcends mere physical appearance; it encompasses the capacity to manage domestic responsibilities and foster familial structures. Regardless of a woman's physical, mental, or social attributes, the acceptance of oneself and recognition of personal beauty is paramount; thus, embrace

oneself as beautiful.

Each individuals have a unique taste. They have different interests. Therefore, being a model in a magazine may not be a straightforward endeavor of many girls. But some may harbor aspirations of gracing the cover page, and to achieve this, they engage in numerous activities to sustain their aesthetic appeal, such as adhering to strict diets, utilizing cosmetic products for radiant and luminous skin, and maintaining sleek hair. Females desire an enviable body-shape and facial symmetry, often influenced by observing others.

For decades, particularly in Eastern cultures, the belief persists that a 36-24-36 figure embodies the ideal female form; numerous songs and advertisements objectify the female physique with phrases like "Timro figure Coca-Cola", which means 'you figure is perfect like Coca-Cola' Receiving comments on various attributes may not always be advantageous; individuals offer numerous favorable remarks based on isolated features, such as, "If only your eyes were slightly larger, you would look so much more beautiful. However, many of our features are inherently linked to our ancestry and genetics. As social beings inhabiting a society where diverse individuals establish varying standards for perfection or desirability based on gender roles, judgments concerning male and female characteristics often arise. This societal scrutiny significantly influences one's perception of their ideal or authentic self, as individuals universally aspire to present themselves attractively, both internally and

externally.

It is frequently observed that only possessing an attractive appearance is insufficient without appropriate behavior as individuals also seek acceptance within societal norms concerning gender conduct. The demand for validation in the eyes of others often prevails. Being female comes with its own challenges; males experience comparable societal pressures, as both genders face expectations that shape a healthful environment rooted in cultural norms. Females are often bound by rules such as not speaking loudly, refraining from boisterous laughter, and adhering to a slow and graceful demeanor. A desirable female walk is characterized by gentle movements, a lowered head, and an avoidance of an open-chest posture, while rising in a manner akin to males is often perceived as socially unacceptable.

Some songs including a Hindi song, "Dil ke hi bas dum pe milega koi humse pyar nahi toh number milsakta he," sang by Dominique Cereio and Vishal Dadlani in a Hindi movie "Pyar Impossible," implicitly exemplifies the notion that possessing a good heart alone is insufficient for finding a partner; one must also maintain an appealing appearance to secure an opportunity for romance. However, Rai's song contrasts with typical heterosexual love-themed songs and music videos. The identical composition by Rai further proceeds as follows:

*Goro Mulayam Twocha malai chahidaina
Challa ley sundarta mapan garna paaidaina
Baruli kamar thiyo ahile, na hola samay*

sanga

*Na badliney ko hola, kahile chitikka parchhu
kahile aafnai taal maa*

Udnu chaina yo duniya ko maya jaal maa

Naari ramro saari ma pakkai ho

Choto mero skirt ki timro sochai tyo

These lines convey a sentiment of disavowing the societal constructs of beauty, which are often perpetuated by certain beauty brands advocating for attributes such as fair or luminous skin as the standard of attractiveness. Reports of acid attacks perpetrated by men against women upon rejection serve to illustrate the egotistical and destructive lengths to which some may go to undermine the perceived beauty of others, attempting to render them unattractive by targeting their appearance. The notion of possessing an appealing lower back, a flat abdomen, a toned midsection, and a well-defined waist contributes to the conventional criteria for a desirable physique, often epitomized as the "bikini body".

However, physicality is subject to change. Following childbirth, many women's bodies do not retain their former appearance, influenced by various factors such as health concerns and dietary practices. This underscores the notion that one cannot epitomize beauty on a daily basis for the satisfaction of others; rather, individuals can express themselves authentically, independent of external judgments. The wearing of a sari can consistently enhance a woman's elegance, yet one should not be appraised solely by their attire, whether clad

in a short skirt or saree, a long waist to toes covering cloth for women.

Looking at how people define beauty and how women or girls define their beauty drastically differs. Therefore, it is said that one should not focus solely on external attributes, as inner beauty holds greater significance than superficial allure. One may identify numerous imperfections in both themselves and others, yet still recognize their inherent worth, uniqueness, and beauty. Emphasizing the importance of both inner and outer beauty, it is acknowledged that perfection is unattainable; instead, imperfection can signify a unique path toward self-discovery and growth. Embracing oneself represents a crucial and accessible journey in life, as individuals are often viewed through the lens of others' perspectives and fleeting emotions. Individuals must remain centered on their own experiences. While numerous opinions may arise from external sources, one must continually affirm their beauty.

Discussion and Interpretation

Body image has become an increasingly concerning topic in contemporary society. As this issue evolves, it acquires various avenues for connection and engages different aspects. Body image is intertwined with psychological, biological, and social contexts; hence, it varies from one individual to another. Each human being is uniquely individual, and their bodies exhibit distinct characteristics that cannot be assessed by a singular standard. When society establishes a uniform framework to evaluate male and female beauty, there exists a significant potential for bias and judgment,

leading to suffering. The song "Dami Chhu" by Rai articulates the natural reasons for diverse body shapes, such as the absence of an idealized figure, not resembling magazine models, possessing genetic traits, and lacking societal representation of the female form. Nevertheless, I embrace myself as I am, which signifies that self-acceptance is essential for all.

In this analysis, body image is symbolically portrayed in a positive light. The song exemplifies a commendable body figure from beginning to end, inspiring listeners to accept their bodies regardless of external commentary. The primary focus lies on social factors, from which numerous comments arise from various individuals, influencing survival within public groups. Hence, receiving comments can impact a person's ability to confront the public with confidence. When one acknowledges both their inner and outer beauty and embraces oneself with resilience, no one can inflict suffering or impose negative effects.

Numerous slogans and quotes convey profound meanings about possessing a beautiful body image; all that is required is for individuals to perceive themselves with clarity. While people may provide various comments, human nature often leads us to first recognize the negative rather than the positive. Therefore, simply be yourself and embrace all the positive sentiments that resonate with you.

The song "Dami Chhu" really means a lot to show how we can perceive the self from a positive perspective. Time, socio-culture,

values, phenomena, etc. all are never constant so accepting the self is more important and needed than anything. Making positive songs from the socio-cultural perspective and in local form will be boundless contributions from media to manage body image dissatisfaction-related issues from our society. Celebrities and media are presenting concepts for body image to local people. Therefore, doing more research related to songs, media, and celebrities would give more positive patterns in individuals to accept themselves as he or she.

It looks therefore that the body image encompasses a multifaceted interplay of psychological, biological, and social factors, where diverse shapes reflect individuality. Embracing self-acceptance fosters resilience against external judgments, promoting positive body perception amidst societal pressures. Ultimately, perceiving oneself clearly enables personal empowerment and acceptance.

Conclusion

Women utilize a variety of techniques to improve their physical appearance and cultivate a healthy body image. Despite this, there is a tendency for women to place excessive emphasis on their appearance, which can ultimately lead to a negative body image. Within the context of today's media-dominated society, music and music videos hold a significant influence over how body image is perceived by individuals. This study has highlighted how certain music videos are making efforts to promote a positive body image message. Music videos that advocate for a positive body image have the potential to make a profound and lasting impact on society, especially among women. However, media has served as a significant platform for both learning to cultivate a positive body image and for promoting such an image to others, thereby encouraging women to embrace and appreciate their existing bodies as beautiful.

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