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THE IDEAL BODY IMAGE AND WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Ideal body image is a hype created by the media and accepted by people. Therefore, people often compare themselves to that and try to attain it by changing their eating practices and engage in body change strategies. Girls in their adolescence and college-going ones often fall prey to body image issues. From time to time, society has set unrealistic standards for a beautiful body image for women. Earlier traditional media largely contributed to setting such unrealistic notions of beauty but now, with the advent of social media featuring a certain body type as the ideal has increased. The idea body image mostly disfavors the 'skinny', 'overweight', 'fat' inducing body shaming. Body shaming is not only limited to not possessing a certain body type, it includes disfigurements like acne, burns, blemishes. The myth of women's beautiful body is a social construct. From time to time society has always imposed certain notions on how a women's body should look like. The health and fashion magazine covers portraying unrealistic body image and body type has led to many issues like – low self-esteem, body image negativity, depression, anxiety, eating disorders like – bulimia, and anorexia. With the influence of social media, the ways of featuring certain body types over the other have increased through web articles, random advertisements popping up on the screen, celebrity profiles, memes, and many more. People dealing with body image issues find it hard to accept themselves as the society doesn't allow them to. This paper examines how acceptance of a certain body type as beautiful normalizes body-shaming leading to social exclusion.

KEYWORDS: Weight, Fat, Body Image, Body Shaming, Social exclusion, Stigma

INTRODUCTION

The concept of a beautiful body has often changed over the years with fashion magazine covers, celebrities, social media being the prominent influence. Fat or overweight bodies have always been unacceptable for society. Although weight management is a personal activity, the personal failure to achieve it and comply with the terms of a healthy person in societal context face social stigma. Those who don't qualify the societal norms of desirable weight and a beautiful body often face body shaming, mockery, social rejection. Such instances often lead to social exclusion and social isolation.

Those women who don't conform to the societal standards of a beautiful 'womanly' body often are the victims of social stigma. This leads to the normalizing tendency of the society to body shame those who don't conform to it. There are various ways of body shaming which is not always direct. Sometimes it is displayed through sarcastic undertones, praising a perfect body in front of someone with a not-so-perfect body (as per societal standards), and idealizing a certain body type creates a feeling of abnormality for those lacking it. Girls in their adolescence and college-going women are often the victims of such social norms. Apart from media being the agent for a beautiful body, the weight loss industry is also a part of its agency reminding everyone of the desirable body. According to the business wire, the U.S. weight-loss industry is now worth \$72 billion. Programs such as Photoshop, lightroom used to edit and recreate images often portray women's bodies with a small waistline, large breasts, long legs, and flawless skin making it seem perfect. Photoshop is used to hide the flaws and create unrealistic beauty. Photoshop can make unrealistic changes on a photograph of an average size woman. There are so many different tools one can choose from to change the whole physical appearance of a person altogether within a few hours or a few seconds on platforms like Instagram or Snapchat. (Gaffney, 2017) Nowadays, the inbuilt camera in phones have instant brightening features which make skin look flawless unrealistically, one could also enhance their eyes and enlarge the lips as well. However, with an increase in body awareness like the dove campaign, the role of NAFA (National Association for fat acceptance), and redefining Barbie dolls; efforts have been made to accept different body types, ditch the idealistic body images and embrace the realistic ones. The fashion designers have started to appoint plus-sized models to portray realistic body images. However, in the case of plus size fashion, it may seem an inclusive approach but there is hypocrisy underlying beneath it as the body frame of the plus-size has begun to shrink. All these instances breed insecurity, low self-esteem, body acceptance issues leading to social isolation and exclusion.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

- Understanding the concept of ideal body image of women
- Analyzing the impact of ideal body image issues on women and its resultant social exclusion.
- Suggesting measures for inculcating body positivity and inclusivity of diverse body images.

METHODOLOGY

This research paper is based on qualitative methodology. Dissertation, research papers, journals, videos, certain reliable websites, and newspaper editorials were used for the study. Therefore, it is completely based on secondary data. The sources are both national and international.

IDEAL BODY

The ideal body image is inspired by models in fashion and health magazine covers, celebrities, etc. Earlier the idea of trendy body image was spread through traditional media. But, now with the advent of social media passing of information became much easier. The ideal body image creates a lot of pressure on young women to achieve. As human beings, we always seek validation, appreciation, and thus it appears to us that attaining such body type would make us worthy. These lead to many psychological pressures on the minds of women leading to eating disorders – bulimia and anorexia, anxiety, depression. The ideal body image has changed from time and time. The different body types that were considered trendy were-

The Gibson girl look in the 1900s represented the ideal body type with a voluptuous bust and wide hips, slender and tall.

The flapper look in the 1920s celebrated the straight figure of women with short hair and flat chest representing an independent woman with certain traits of boyishness.

Later in the postwar period i.e. 1950's women the fuller figure was accepted which was realistic and relatable to average women. Voluptuous women were considered beautiful with stretch marks and curves. Marilyn Monroe was one of the most celebrated beauties in this era.

The twiggy look also grabbed too much attention. Women with twiggy look were expected to look so skinny that their rib cage could be seen. Although, all these looks don't apply to all the countries in the world. But, in the fashion world these are still considered iconic body images for women.

With the rise of the film industry, the obsession with flawless skin also grew leading to the surge of beauty products. Michel Foucault in his book 'The Perverse Implantation' discusses how the industries try to manifest ideas in the minds of the people which in turn results in controlling the belief system of the people. This includes the fitness industry, cosmetic surgeries, fad diets, etc. For instance, if someone is overweight or doesn't have an ideal body type, the idea of achieving a perfect body is manifested. The ideal body image is manifested as well which ultimately breeds insecurity. Hence the whole industry runs on insecurity. These standards lead to an unhealthy circumstance for people who fail to achieve. Therefore, fat feminists and body-positive activists resist such standards.

HEALTH ISSUES:

As mentioned above the evils of body image obsession among woman has led to many health issues both physical and mental. The portrayal of ideal body image breeds many insecurities in the minds of women leading to many mental health issues. The physical health issues include eating disorders, diet pill consumption side-effects, and many more.

PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUES

There are many different eating disorders out in the world today but the most commonly known ones are bulimia and anorexia, which tend to go hand in hand. (Gaffney, 2017) Bulimic and Anorexic are very similar and are known, as is an eating disorder that is characterized by a low weight and the fear of gaining weight (National Eating Disorders). (Gaffney, 2017) Most of the time if you are anorexic you are commonly known to develop bulimic to prevent the intake of food. There are different types of bulimia such as bingeing, purging, and Nervosa which each have their own different symptoms (Gaffney, 2017). There are so many different known symptoms to bulimia. The most commonly known ones are the rooting of one's teeth and gums. These eating disorders are often identified by a dentist before any doctor. Developing an eating disorder can greatly affect the body of the person who has an eating disorder. There are so many side effects that someone can find today on the Internet, and how to help someone who has developed a disorder. (Gaffney, 2017)

The obsession with diet pills/slimming pills started growing among women for instant slimming. Rather than exercising and maintaining a healthy lifestyle the diet pills came as a easy way for fulfilling the slimming obsession. Diet pills has led to the harm of physical health. It develops an eating disorder and can also have long term side effects. Fast heart rate, increased blood pressure, restlessness are the after-effects of diet pill consumption. People who tend to lose weight as a result of diet pill tends to regain double the weight later.

The obsession for the ideal body doesn't limit the intake of diet pills, starvation or eating disorders. The trendy 'fad diets' that promises fast weight loss and nonsensical health benefits has many negative side effects like – dehydration, nausea, fatigue, constipation, malnutrition as they require the elimination of certain food habits that aren't harmful resulting in nutritional deficiencies. Some of the well-known fad diets are-The Atkins diet, Dukan diet, Ketogenic diet, Zone diet, Paleo diet, Baby food diet, the Cabbage soup diet, the Water diet, Banana diet.

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Healthy body image and self-esteem predict well-being and various other psychological outcomes. In addition, body dissatisfaction is a mediator between BMI and psychological health outcomes, including self-esteem and depressive mood. Thus the link between a person's weight psychological health is accounted by his or her level of body dissatisfaction. (S. POORNA, 2016) The strongest predictors of negative body image where found to be caused by the lack of parental support, negative moods and feelings, the choice to diet as well, and lack of support from peers. (Gaffney, 2017)

BODY SHAMING

The 21st-century demand for women's thinness and fairness as the ideal body image has led to the normalizing of body shaming for those who aren't able to attain it. Body shaming is referred to as shaming someone for the kind of body one possesses which doesn't match the societal standards of beauty. Shaming is not only limited to not possessing a certain kind of body type, it includes disfigurements as well as-acne, burns, blemishes, etc. Body shaming is displayed in many ways- criticizing one's appearance through a comparison with another person, criticizing another person on their face, judging another person's appearance without their knowledge. Body shaming transcends beyond all cultures, sizes, race and gender

(although women are more prone to it). In a society that values weight loss and thinness as something everyone aim should aim for, fat-shaming occurs more than skinny-shaming which often comes with harsh jokes, comments, sarcastic undertones, uncomfortable stares, and

mockery. Now with the advent of meme culture, we often get to see body shaming images which propagates laughter and making a certain section of the people uncomfortable. Smartphone apps like- Fatify, Fat You, and Fat booth which allows one to turn a person's face into a fatter version by adding a double chin, puffer cheeks. Body shaming often results in social isolation which is basically to refrain from any kind of rejection or embarrassment as it usually comes from one's immediate circle like – friends, family or loved ones. Such rejection or mockery from the closed ones makes oneself to question their worth. Women being the targets of society, it dictates them the ideal body image, behavior and with the advent of technology many news ways have been devised to look perfect. It basically includes – cosmetic surgery, slimming pill intake, face lifting, cheek reduction etc. These processes help in retaining the flawless, youthful look in woman. With the surge of social media continuously displaying ideal body images of women, it reminds the average women every day that they aren't okay. Fat feminism originated in the third wave feminism which is an advocate of body positivity- it is a movement that incorporates the feminist notion of equality, justice. It stands in support of all those who are supposedly overweight. It dismantles all oppressive notions of the society which expects an ideal body image from women including a smaller waistline, sharp chin, slender and tall legs. It is against all institutional and non- institutional hegemonic bodies that affect the self-esteem of overweight people. These include the fat-phobia, media representation, diet-culture, employment and many more. To give a fair understanding, we can take the example of getting employed as a cabin crew member in the airlines. Most of the cabin crew members especially women when we see, dress or look a certain way and portray a societal standard of beauty. Sometimes, fair and clear skin is the eligibility criteria to get selected. Another form of body shaming can also be seen which is associated with marriage. Those women who reach their prospective age for marriage are often made to realize having overweight, too skinny, or don't look a certain job might not fetch them with good partners or would have a difficult time finding perfect matches. Although things have gradually started changing to a certain extent but is very sluggish in its approach.

CLOTHING AND BODY NEGATIVITY

The clothing size of a woman has led to body negativity in a certain way. Women who require large size clothing often face embarrassment in the stores sometimes due to its lack of size availability. As different brand of clothes has different measurements, the large sizes available often have smaller measurements than average women's body which results in disappointment, embarrassment and low self-esteem. The availability of plus size clothes lacks variety unlike the smaller sized clothes as the society expects women to have thin-framed bodies. A large number of people have started buying clothes online for the fear of shame, embarrassment and rejection.

PLUS SIZE MODEL HYPOCRISY

The average plus size women is unable to relate to the plus size model's body type as it is unrealistic in nature too. The size of the plus size models has gradually started to shrink. This kind of hypocrisy has greatly contributed to body negativity among average plus sized women. There has also been demands from plus sized models to stop being treated as second class citizens. # Droptheplus was a media campaign started by few Australian models to stop referring to them as plus size and rather call them models. We do not call slender models by a different name they are just models. So why can't a plus sized model be called just a model as well? (Gaffney, 2017)

THE BARBIE EFFECT

The Barbie dolls displayed a very unrealistic body type with a smaller waist, slender legs, sharp chin and a perfect hairdo. This look no way resembled closer to average women body type. But these dolls represented the epitome of beauty. Often someone who has smaller waist and slender legs are called as 'barbie' even today. These dolls influence young girls to a great extent. It affects how the young girls carry a view about their bodies.

However, with rising awareness, nowadays Barbie dolls are found in different shapes and sizes celebrating body diversity which clearly sends a message to every young girl to embrace different body types. According to USA today.com the dolls with diverse bodies are resonating with the girls. Its sale has risen up to 9% in the fourth quarter of 2017 after an initial drop (mallenbaum, 2018). The new Barbie is more inclusive which includes tall, petite, curvy Barbie. No body image is ideal. Each body is beautiful in its own way.

However, it's not only the dolls display that is problematic, the mannequins at display, women in the video games also affect the girls at a early age as they start to idealize how a female body is supposed to look like.

IDEAL BODY IMAGE LEADING TO SOCIAL EXCLUSION

There is a close interlink between social isolation, exclusion and body image issues. Before getting into the details of it, one needs to understand the meaning of social exclusion. The term social exclusion is relatively of recent origin. Rene Lenoir, writing about a quarter of century ago is given credit of the authorship of the expression (sen, 2000). Rene Lenior talks about 'social misfits' who are generally socially excluded. (sen, 2000) Social exclusion is often associated with the denial of human dignity, rights, freedom, opportunities. It is a form of discrimination in which people are excluded from social, political, economic spaces fully or partially actively or passively. It generally occurs based on caste, religion, gender, class, ethnicity, disability, body image, and many more. Amartya Sen describes social exclusion as capability deprivation.

The ideal body image which is an epitome of beauty and perfectness for women often leads to the social exclusion of women who fail to achieve such notions. The exclusion results in low self-esteem. Such exclusion is not always society directly pushing away such women from social space instead it could be the disappointment or self-awareness of the failure to have a good body image can result in self-exclusion. This breeds isolation resulting in depression, appearance anxiety at the psychological level. The aforementioned eating disorder like anorexia and bulimia are also a part of the picture.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

(Gaffney, 2017) – This thesis discusses in detail the negative effects of social media on women. It criticizes the negative body imaging caused by social media. It also portrays a historical picture of women body imaging, varied arrangements of social media played its part in influencing the society of what type of body image makes a woman attractive. A very detailed criticism of the fashion industry and technology is written which influences the ideal body image.

(S. POORNA, 2016) - This research paper is aimed at studying the relationship between body image and media among young adults. It was found that females are concerned about body image than men. It discusses in detail the psychological impacts as a result of negative body imaging. This study implies the necessity of building self-esteem which is possible through proper counseling which is to be taken forward by the psychologist, social workers, and sociologists. It also emphasizes the issue of eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia which need to be given optimum attention as soon as possible.

CONCLUSION

The body beauty of women is of utmost importance which is influenced by a lot of factors in society. Media is highly responsible for creating the hype of ideal body image which has changed from time to time. However, the current trend demands a slimmer waistline, slender legs, and large breasts which is unrealistic. These thin-framed bodies qualify as the epitome of beauty in society. Young women consider them as their role models and adopt an unusual diet. It includes fasting, intake of slimming pills, fad diets which provide hardly any good in the total outcome. This ultimately results in various eating disorders and many psychological disorders brewing from low self-esteem. The unusual expectations for attaining this ideal body lead to the normalizing of body shaming on its failure to achieve it. Women are more prone to body shaming than men. Women being the subordinated ones since the past, the emphasis was always put on women to appear attractive to men. The patriarchal notions always treated women as property to man which needs to be attractive, loyal, a good mother, and a good manager in household chores. Body shaming is generally practiced against women from her immediate circle which includes mothers, relatives, neighbors, and peers to a certain extent. Most women of marriageable age get pressurized to maintain a beautiful body by their family as they are often made to feel that lacking a beautiful body wouldn't fetch them good rishtas (matches). As mentioned in this paper, the slender models in the women's magazine leave negative imprints among young minds which results in low self-esteem and a feeling of insecurity. This sense of insecurity benefits the diet industry, the fashion industry, etc. This sense of insecurity has led women to believe in fad diets, surgery, botox, slimming pills, etc. Although we see the rise of the plus-size model in the fashion industry, they are hardly treated at par with the slender models. They are a market mechanism to make a profit and not really a social concern of the industry to make it more inclusive. Rather the mantra is to appear inclusive rather than being inclusive in reality. Thus, the ideal body induces body shaming against those women who vary to a large extent from the ideal body image which ultimately results in social exclusion. This study suggests it very necessary for social media to display body diversity and embrace them in reality. Psychological counseling, awareness campaigns etc. must be organized to spread body positivity and negate body shaming in totality. Women are also influenced by the women in their lives, especially mothers should play the utmost role of teaching their daughters to love their bodies.

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