Unlocking Beauty: How Socio-Cultural Influences Shape Iranian Adolescents Body Image

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Abstract:

Despite the crucial role that body image dissatisfaction plays in shaping one's self-perception and overall wellbeing, there is a noticeable lack of literature discussing body image dissatisfaction and its implications for Iranian adolescents. This study delves into the mediating role of internalization of appearance ideals (IOAIs) in understanding the relationship between sociocultural influences (parents peers and media) and body image dissatisfaction among Iranian adolescents. With cultural norms and media representations exerting significant pressure on youth, examining how these factors interact and impact the IOAIs can provide crucial insights into the development of body image dissatisfaction. This research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between sociocultural factors and body image perceptions among Iranian adolescents by exploring these dynamics. In this prospective a quantitative correlational study was conducted to achieve the objectives of the study, which involved 405 participants aged (16-18) from 12 public high schools of both genders. The data analysis was performed using SPSS Version 26. Self-administered questionnaires were completed with four standardized measures: items from the Body Image scale by Ricciardelli and McCabe (2002); the Sociocultural Scale by McCabe and Ricciardelli (2001) and the Internalization-General scale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-4 (SATAQ-4) by Thompson et al. (2004). The findings indicate that 55.6% (225) of the respondents experienced dissatisfaction with their body image. In addition, there were no notable disparities between males and females in terms of adolescents' dissatisfaction with their body image. Also, the findings indicated that there was a positive correlation between sociocultural influence and body image dissatisfaction. Moreover, the research demonstrates a clear and immediate impact of parent influence and media influence on the dissatisfaction individuals feel toward their body image. Furthermore, the study discovered that the process of internalizing appearance ideals played a role in connecting peer influences, media influence, and body image dissatisfaction. This study underscores the importance of recognizing the nuanced interactions between body image dissatisfaction and the IOAIs across Iran as a diverse population and context.

Key Word: Body Image Dissatisfaction; Internalization of Appearance Ideals; Sociocultural Influence.

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I. Introduction

Body image dissatisfaction arises from the perception of a difference between one's actual physical appearance (actual body image) and the desired ideal body state (ideal body image) 1. Western cultural values have popularized the idea of thin women and masculine men as ideals of attractiveness 2. Historically, Eastern cultures viewed women with higher body fat as more attractive, viewing a plump physique as a symbol of good health, affluence, and reproductive capability. Men also embraced masculinity due to the prevailing gender norms that demanded strength and dominance 3. In recent years, while the societal expectation for women's bodies has shifted towards a preference for thinness, the traditional notion of masculinity for men has remained unchanged 4. These perceptions are shaped by various factors, including peers, family, social environment, and media 5 Society disseminates messages regarding the ideal appearance individuals should strive to achieve 6.

Previous research has indicated that perceived sociocultural messages, encompassing both the actual messages conveyed and individuals' interpretations of these messages, significantly influence body image 7,8,9. Adolescents, who are easily influenced by societal (parents, peers, and media) pressures, are particularly

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dissatisfied 10. These pressures push them to strive for a perceived perfect body in order to gain acceptance and validation from others 11. Therefore, it may lead to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders 12,13. Understanding the prevalence and factors contributing to body dissatisfaction among Iranian adolescents can aid in the development of culturally sensitive interventions to promote mental well-being.

This study aimed to identify the factors that influence body image dissatisfaction among the Iranian population. Individuals who attempted to attain the ideal body internalized these schemas 14,15. Body image dissatisfaction arises from the disparity between the idealized body portrayed in international standards and an individual's actual physical appearance. In addition to the media, peers and family also exert pressure on individuals to attain an ideal physique. Researchers recognize body dissatisfaction as a contributing factor to significant health-related issues. Body dissatisfaction can lead to various complications, including loneliness, excessive focus on appearance, depression, unhealthy behaviours like consumption of tobacco, alcohol, anabolic steroids, drugs, restrictive diets, intense exercise, and resorting to cosmetic surgeries 16,17,18. In addition to these issues, two significant complications include anxiety, depression, or eating disorders 44,19.

Iran has a rich cultural heritage with distinct social norms and expectations regarding body image, often influenced by historical, religious, and societal factors. These norms prescribe specific standards of beauty, emphasizing modesty, purity, and conformity to traditional ideals. Moreover, the media, including television, social media, and advertising, play a significant role in perpetuating these standards, promoting unrealistic beauty ideals that may contribute to body dissatisfaction among adolescents ²⁰. The understanding of sociocultural influences and IOAIs is essential in addressing body image dissatisfaction among Iranian adolescents. By recognizing the complex interplay between cultural norms, media representations, and individual perceptions, interventions can be tailored to promote body positivity, self-acceptance, and resilience against unrealistic beauty is critical for fostering healthier body image attitudes in Iranian society. In Iran, body image dissatisfaction appears to have worsened ^{21,22}. Given the scarcity of research on body image and related issues in Iran, the goal of this study was to conduct a review of the available literature. Our goal was to identify some of the contributing factors to body image disturbances in the Iranian population.

Understanding the mechanisms through which social influences impact adolescents' body image dissatisfaction is crucial for developing effective intervention strategies to promote positive body image and psychological well-being among this population. By examining the specific pathways through which parents, peers, and media influence adolescents' body image perceptions, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on body image and inform culturally sensitive interventions tailored to the Iranian context.

II. Material And Methods

This study aimed to investigate the correlation between parents, peers, media influences, IOAIs, and body image dissatisfaction among high school students in Tehran, Iran. This study utilizes a cross-sectional design and employs a quantitative epidemiological approach. Participants completed self-administered questionnaires that consisted of three standardized measures: items from the Body Image scale created by Ricciardelli and McCabe in 2002²³, the Sociocultural Scale developed by McCabe and Ricciardelli in 2001²⁴, and the Internalization-General scale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-4 (SATAQ-4) developed by Schaefer et al. in 2004²⁵. The Persian version of the test demonstrated acceptable validity and internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.871, 0.834, and 0.802.

The calculation of the body image dissatisfaction scale measure involves summing the scores of all the items. The scale quantifies levels of dissatisfaction with body image using a five-point scale, where a rating of 1 indicates a high level of satisfaction and a rating of 5 indicates a high level of dissatisfaction. The overall score spans from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating greater levels of body image dissatisfaction.23. The sociocultural scale measures parents, peers, and media influences, respectively. It is calculated by summing the scores of all 13,13,10 items. This study employs a five-point scale, which ranges from 'never' (1) to 'always' (5). The overall score on this scale can vary between 13 and 65, with higher scores indicating a higher degree of influence from parents, peers, and media24. The internalization-general scale measure is derived by summing the scores of all 10 items. The quantification of the internalization of appearance ideal is assessed using a five-point scale, which spans from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5). The scale's total score spans from 10 to 50, with higher degree of internalization of the appearance ideal25.

Procedure Methodology

Prior to data collection, requisite authorizations were acquired from relevant organizations and the study received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of University Putra Malaysia (code: UPM/TNCPI/RMC/1.4.18.2). According to Cochran's formula, a minimum sample size of 384 is required. In order to enhance precision, the sample size was increased by 20%, resulting in the selection of 460 students from Tehran, Iran ²⁶. Employing a multi-stage stratified cluster random sampling technique. The study sample

comprised of all high school adolescents in Tehran, Iran, during the year 2018. The study sample consisted 128,332 adolescent students studying in public high schools in Tehran. According to Cochran's formula, a minimum sample size of 384 is required. Tehran is a metropolis divided into five zones and further subdivided into 19 districts. For the initial stage of sampling, a lottery method was used to select three zones out of a total of five. Subsequently, within each selected zone, subsequently, within each selected zone, 3 districts were chosen specifically North 2, East 4, and West 5. Four schools, consisting of two male schools and two female schools, were chosen at random from each district. Within each school, one classroom was selected from each grade. A random sample of 15 students aged 16-18 years was selected from each class (n = 36), using a random number table. Following the explanation of the study methodology and objectives, all participants proceeded to sign an informed consent form. They were guaranteed the privacy of their information.

Participants completed self-administered questionnaires that consisted of three standardized measures. The questionnaire included socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, grade, weight, height, and family income. The exclusion criteria for the study included a lack of willingness to continue participating and the failure to return completed questionnaires. The valid response rate was 89%, with a total of 405 participants. The collected data were analysed using SPSS version 26 for descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The data will be analysed using the following statistical methods, taking into account the questions and research hypotheses.

Statistical Analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. Following the normality test, correlation techniques allow researchers to precisely describe the relationship between two sets of measures. The research hypothesis was analysed using Pearson's correlation coefficient ²⁸, to describe the relationship between parents, peers, media influences, IOAIs, and body image dissatisfaction and aggression. Smart PLS-SEM ²⁹ Figure.1, was employed to direct and indirect effect variables on body image dissatisfaction. To describe the mediating role (indirect effect) of IOAIs between parents, peers, media influences and body image dissatisfaction ²⁹ were employed with a 95% confidence level. The level P < 0.05 was considered as the cutoff value or significance ²⁸.

III. Result

As depicted in Table.1, The study contained 405 participants, with 44.2% being male and 55.8% being female. The majority of the individuals were 16 years old. Among them, 38.8% were in grade 10, 33.1% were in grade 11, and 30.1% were in grade 12. The findings indicate that 33.8% of households had incomes below the average. Adolescents were mainly from households with incomes below the average, while 46.2% had average income, and 20% reported family income levels that exceeded the average. The BMI analysis revealed that 16.0% of adolescents were classified as underweight, 69.9% as normal weight, 10.1% as overweight, and 4% as obese. The study revealed a low occurrence of overweight and obesity, but a significant occurrence of dissatisfaction with body image.

The data presented in Table 2 indicates that 55.6% of the participants reported a significant level of dissatisfaction with their body image, while 44.4% reported a lower level of dissatisfaction. The mean score for body image dissatisfaction was 67.59, with a standard deviation of 13.86. The study revealed that 84.6% of participants encountered significant levels of parental influence on their body image, whereas 15.4% reported minimal levels (mean = 45.39, standard deviation = 10.85). Furthermore, the study revealed that 56.7% of participants experience minimal peer influence on their body image, whereas 43.3% are highly influenced by their peers. This suggests a predominant lack of influence, with an average score of 45.35 and a standard deviation of 9.66. The study revealed that 55% of participants exhibited a substantial degree of media influence, whereas 45% displayed a minimal level, indicating a significant level of Internalized Ideals (IOAIs), while 48.6% displayed a low level. This suggests a significant degree of internalization. The mean score for internalization was 29.48, with a standard deviation of 8.50.

	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	179	44.2
	Female	226	55.8
Age	16 years old	149	38.8
	17 years old	134	33.1
	18 years old	122	30.1
Grade	Grade 10	149	38.8
	Grade 11	134	33.1
	Grade 12	122	30.1
BMI	Underweight = <18.5	65	16

Table.1: Demographic of Respondents (n=405)

	Normal = 18.5–24.9	283	69.9
	Overweight = $25-29.9$	41	10.1
	Obese = 30 or greater	16	4
Average	Below average $= < 3.5$ million RS	137	33.8
Family	Average = $3.5-5.0$ million RS	187	46.2
Income	Above average $= > 3.5$ million RS	81	20

Table .2. Desch	puve of variables		3 Level (11 - 403)				
Variable	Frequency	Percent	М	SD	Min	Max	
Body Image Dissatisfaction							
Low (25-50)	180	44.4	32.31	9.28	10	50	
High (1-24.9)	225	55.6					
Parents influence							
Low (1-32.4)	62	15.4	45.39	10.85	13	65	
High (32.5-65)	341	84.6					
Peers Influence							
Low (1-32.4)	228	56.7	45.35	9.66	13	65	
High (32.5-65)	174	43.3					
Mass Media							
Low (1-24.9)	181	45	28.16	9.13	10	50	
High (25-50)	221	55					
IOALs							
Low (1-24.9)	197	48.6	29.48	8.50	10	50	
High (25-50)	204	51.4					

Table .2:	Descriptive	of Variables'	Level (N = 405)

The Pearson correlation in Table 3 illustrates the relationship between parents, peers, mass media influence, IOAIs, and body image dissatisfaction. The findings indicate a noteworthy correlation between parental influence and body image dissatisfaction (r = .152, p < .002). The analysis demonstrated a noteworthy correlation between the influence of peers and body image dissatisfaction among adolescents (r = .280, p < .000). Furthermore, the study revealed a substantial correlation between media influences and body image dissatisfaction (r = 0.161, p < 0.001). The study revealed a significant association between IOAIs and body image dissatisfaction (r = 0.159, p < .001).

Body	Pearson Correlation	1				
Image	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	Ν	405				
Parent	Pearson Correlation	.152**	1			
Influen	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002				
ce	Ν	405	405			
Peers	Pearson Correlation	.280**	.170**	1		
Influen	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001			
ce	Ν	405	405	405		
Media	Pearson Correlation	.161**	.123*	.505**	1	
Influen	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.013	.000		
ce	Ν	405	405	405	405	
IOALs	Pearson Correlation	.159**	.139**	.427**	.520**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.005	.000	.000	
	Ν	405	405	405	405	405

Table.3 Correlation Matrix of Independent Variables and Body Image

The study revealed that the independent variables explained 13.1% (R2 = 0.131) of the variation in body image dissatisfaction. As per the findings of Hair et al. (2019), R2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.20 are considered to indicate strong, moderate, and weak levels of significance, respectively. The data presented in the table demonstrates a statistically significant correlation between parental influence and dissatisfaction with body image ($\beta = 0.127$, t = 2.395, p = 0.017). The data in Table 4 shows a statistically significant correlation between parental influence and dissatisfaction with body image ($\beta = 0.127$, t = 2.395, p = 0.017). Furthermore, there is no substantial correlation between peer influence and dissatisfaction with body image among adolescents ($\beta =$ 0.05, t = 0.721, p = 0.471). Ultimately, the study demonstrates that media influence is a strong predictor of dissatisfaction with body image among adolescents ($\beta = 0.226$, t = 3.559, p = 0.000).

Table.4 Results of Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing							
Original Sample Standard Deviation T Statistics P Values							
	Sample (O)	Mean (M)	(STDEV)	(O/STDEV)			
Parent Influence-> BID	0.127	0.135	0.053	2.395	0.017		
Peer Influence-> BID	0.05	0.05	0.07	0.721	0.471		

Table.4 Results of Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing

	Media Influence-> BID	0.226	0.229	0.063	3.559	0.00
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Body Image Dissatisfaction

The results, as shown in Table 5, suggest that IOAIs did not act as a mediator in the connection between parental influence and body image dissatisfaction (β =0.004, T=0.318, P=0.750). Furthermore, the findings revealed that the connection between peer influence and dissatisfaction with body image is fully mediated by the Internalized Objectification Acceptance Indicators (IOAIs) with a beta coefficient of -0.036, a T-value of 2.377, and a significance level of 0.018. Finally, the findings indicate that the relationship between mass media and dissatisfaction with body image is partially influenced by the IOAIs (β = -0.040, T = 2.296, P = 0.022).

Table.5 Results of Indirect Effects Hypothesis Testing					
	Total Effects	Indirect	Direct Effect	Mediation	
		Effects			
Parents' Influence->IOAIs-> BID	β=0.131,	β=0.004,	β=0.127,	No Mediation	
	T=2.264,	T=0.318,	T=2.395,		
	P= 0.024	P=0.750	P=0.017		
Peers' Influence->IOAIs-> BID	β=0.014,	β=-0.036,	β=0.050,	Full Mediation	
	T=0.208,	T=2.377,	T=0.721,		
	P=0.836	P=0.018	P=0.471		
Mass Media Influence->IOAIs-> BID	β=0.186,	β=-0.040,	β=0.226,	Partial Mediation	
	T=2.732,	T=2.296,	T=3.559,		
	P=0.007	P=0.022	P=0.000		

Table.5 Results of Indirect Effects Hypothesis Testing

110 12 15 0.582 0.592 0.793 0.794 0.794 0.795 0.795 0.795 0.795 0.795 0.795 0.795 0.795 0.7		м	13	
Parent Influence	0.210	0.813 0.533 0.716 0.716 0.712 0.712 0.665 M 0.126	15	A10 A2
K1 0.534 K4 0.763 K5 0.757 K6 0.892 K7 0.757 K8 0.757 K8 0.757 K8 0.757 K8 0.757		0.04602190219		0.618 A3 0.799 A4 0.790 A4 0.700 A5 0.664 A8 0.706 A9 0.664 A8 0.706 A9 0.664 A8 0.706 A1 0.664 A3 0.709 A1 0.676 A1 0.676 A1 0.678 A3 0.799 A4 0.799

Note: BID=Body Image Dissatisfaction; IOAIs=Internalization of Appearance Ideals

Figure.1: Structural Model of the Study

IV. Discussion

Adolescents in modern societies are primarily focused on attaining a slender and physically fit body as their aesthetic goal. However, the physiological changes that occur during puberty increase the pressure on individuals to achieve these goals. They allocate a substantial amount of time (as well as financial resources) to pondering and ranking their physical appearance. Body image dissatisfaction refers to an individual's distorted perception, emotions, and thoughts regarding their physical appearance and body, resulting in notable distress and/or impairment³⁰, depression³¹ and anxiety³², reduced quality of life³³, concerns about weight, and the development of eating disorders³⁴. In this study male and female adolescents do not differ significantly regarding their body image dissatisfaction, which is align with previous studies ^{35,36}. It maty shows that both can adjust their body image perceptions ³⁷. Girls exhibit higher levels of dissatisfaction with excessive body mass, whereas boys display greater dissatisfaction with being underweight. Additionally, social influences exert a stronger influence on body image dissatisfaction in girls³⁸.

In exploring the intricate dynamics shaping Iranian adolescents' body image dissatisfaction, it is evident that multiple influences, including those from parents, peers, and media, significantly contribute to this phenomenon. Research has consistently demonstrated the profound impact of familial relationships, with parental attitudes and behaviours often serving as influential models for body image dissatisfaction ^{39,40}. For instance maternal criticism has a detrimental effect on body satisfaction in teenage girls, whereas paternal criticism increases the likelihood of body dissatisfaction in women in their early adulthood ⁴⁰. Another hand, particularly in males, parental criticism during adolescence is associated with body dysmorphic concerns,

increased body image dissatisfaction, and a desire for muscularity ⁴¹. Moreover, the peer context, characterized by social comparisons and acceptance-seeking behaviours, plays a pivotal role in shaping 2adolescents' body image perceptions ³⁹. Additionally, in today's digital age, media platforms wield immense power in portraying unrealistic beauty standards, which can exacerbate body dissatisfaction among adolescents ⁴². Thus, the correlation between parents, peers, and media influences and Iranian adolescents' body image dissatisfaction underscores the need for comprehensive interventions that address these multifaceted sources of influence. Recognizing the interconnectedness of these influences highlights the need for comprehensive strategies that address not only individual factors but also the broader socio-cultural contexts shaping adolescents' perceptions of their bodies.

This study investigated the role of internalized appearance ideals in mediating the influence of sociocultural factors on body image dissatisfaction among Iranian adolescents. It supports the notion that internalizing unrealistic beauty standards from media and social circles amplifies the negative impact of sociocultural pressures on adolescents' body image. These results align with the sociocultural theory of body image, which posits that exposure to idealized portrayals can lead to dissatisfaction if internalized ⁴³. In current study, firstly, the results indicate that both parental influence and media influence significantly predict body image dissatisfaction among Iranian adolescents. This underscores the importance of familial and media environments in shaping adolescents' body image perceptions and attitudes ⁴⁵, parents serve as primary socialization agents, transmitting cultural and social norms related to body image to their children ⁴⁶. Similarly, media, including television, magazines, and social media platforms, often fosters the assimilation of beauty ideals and results in heightened levels of anxiety and unease regarding body image among adolescent males and females alike ⁴⁷.

Interestingly, while peer influence was not found to be a significant predictor of body image dissatisfaction in this study, the mediating role of internalization of appearance ideals suggests that peers may indirectly influence adolescents' body image perceptions through the internalization of societal beauty norms. This highlights the powerful impact of cultural ideals on individual body image, mediated by internalized beliefs rather than direct peer pressure ⁴⁸ and it emphasizes the importance of considering multiple factors. Peers have a significant impact on shaping gender roles and aiding adolescents in developing a cultural identity. This influence extends to their physical, cognitive, and emotional growth through social comparison ⁴⁹, which may contribute to the internalization of appearance ideals and subsequent body image dissatisfaction.

Firstly, the discovery that internalization of appearance ideals serves as a mediator between both peer and media influences and body image dissatisfaction underscores the significance of psychological processes in shaping adolescents' perceptions of their bodies. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of internalization in the development of body image issues ^{50,51}. Adolescents often internalize societal standards of beauty promoted by peers and media, leading to unrealistic expectations and dissatisfaction with their own bodies. Moreover, the lack of mediation effect for parental influence suggests a nuanced understanding of parental impact on adolescents' body image. While parents undoubtedly play a crucial role in shaping their adolescent's attitudes and behaviours, this result implies that parental influence may operate through different mechanisms compared to peers and media. Alternatively, parental influence might directly impact adolescents' body image perceptions without necessitating internalization processes. This finding resonates with studies highlighting the multifaceted nature of parental influence on body image, including parental modelling of body image attitudes and behaviours ⁵² and family communication patterns ⁵³.

Overall, these findings underscore the complex interplay between social influences and internalization processes in shaping adolescents' body image dissatisfaction in the Iranian context. Interventions aimed at promoting positive body image among Iranian adolescents should consider targeting not only external influences such as parental socialization and media exposure but also internalization processes related to appearance ideals propagated by peers and media. Additionally, future research could explore other potential mediators and moderators of these relationships to provide a more comprehensive understanding of sociocultural influences on body image perceptions and dissatisfaction among Iranian youth.

V. Limitation

This study had limitations in terms of examining body image dissatisfaction and its associated concerns specifically in Iran. This study has several notable strengths, such as a substantial sample size, inclusion of both genders and a sample selection that represents the general population. Additionally, objective measurement tools were utilized to assess body dissatisfaction, rather than relying on self-reports. However, this study has certain limitations. Qualitative studies may provide more valuable insights compared to studies employing a cross-sectional design. This study does not evaluate the duration and frequency of media exposure, as well as the specific types of media that the participants have been exposed to. Religion plays a significant role in west Asian cultures, which is another contributing factor. In Iran, over 98% of the population adheres to the Islamic faith. However, recent research has failed to examine the impact of religious beliefs, attire, and social

interactions on body image. Future research should take into account religious attitudes, specifically those pertaining to Islam.

VI. Conclusion

The study's findings reveal a concerning uptick in body image dissatisfaction in Iran, affecting both genders equally. This emphasizes the necessity of addressing this issue holistically, with particular attention to men. Despite parallels with Western cultures in the pattern of body image dissatisfaction, notable differences exist. For instance, Iran's unique cultural factors may heavily influence perceptions, diverging from Western norms. Additionally, religious beliefs and practices prevalent in Iran may impart distinct attitudes toward body image compared to Western counterparts. Discrepancies in healthcare access and resources between Iran and Western nations could also impact the prevalence and management of body image issues. Moreover, socioeconomic conditions and wealth disparities may significantly shape perceptions of body image. These nuances underscore the importance of tailored approaches to address body dissatisfaction in Iran effectively.

The comparison between similarities and differences in studies is contingent upon the utilization of analogous instruments and evaluation methods. In this study, we employed a comprehensive measure of body dissatisfaction. However, it is worth noting that in certain studies, body dissatisfaction was examined within a specific spectrum. Consequently, we are unable to provide a definitive opinion on how this study compares to others. Based on these findings, we recommend that further investigations be undertaken in the future. First and foremost, it is important to take into account other influential factors such as the type of media exposure, the quality of relationships with family and peers (including both positive encouragement and criticism), the presence of psychiatric issues like depression, and one's religious beliefs. Furthermore, it is imperative to conduct a subsequent investigation on the development of a prognostic model for body dissatisfaction and its associated concerns, particularly eating disorders.

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