

Internalizing Beauty Standards: Effects on Body Esteem in Young Adults

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Abstract

In an era dominated by visual culture and digital connectivity, societal beauty standards have become powerful forces shaping our body image, self-perception, and psychological well-being.

During adolescence and young adulthood, these beauty ideals, typically emphasizing thinness for women and muscularity for men, tend to become deeply internalized, influencing self-perception and contributing to the construction of body image. This internalization often creates a disparity between one's perceived actual self and the culturally defined 'ideal' self, thereby heightening vulnerability to body dissatisfaction, lowered self-esteem, psychological distress, and maladaptive behavioral outcomes. The study focuses on the relationship between internalization of beauty standards and body esteem in Indian young adults (ages 18–30 years). The data has been collected through validated psychometric tools using a cross-sectional correlational design through approx 310 participants consisting of the Body Esteem Scale (BES) and the Appearance Schema Inventory (ASI). The tools that have been used are a measurement of a participant's attitude toward his or her appearance and the degree to which those societal ideals factor into his or her self concept. The research looks closer at the cultural context in India which has made globalization normalize narrow beauty standards that often do not include diverse body types. The study addresses the importance of studying the mental health aspects of internalization of these standards to enhance the actionable intervention to foster body neutrality, resilience, and inclusive media representation. The findings are intended to help develop strategies to promote healthier body image and self-acceptance among young adults.

Keywords

Body Esteem, Beauty, Body Image, Internalization, Young Adults, Appearance.

