

Socio-cultural Influences and Media Portrayal of Concept of Beauty for Women

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Abstract

The present qualitative research aims to explore the socio-cultural influences and Media Portrayal of the Concept of Beauty for women. There is a need to discover how young women perceive the idea of beauty because of the pressure they face to meet beauty standards in socio-cultural context. For this purpose, eight University female students (aged 22-24) with varied physical characteristics were selected for semi-structured interviews using Thematic Analysis as an approach/method. The analysis revealed five major themes; Desirable Characteristics, Role of Social Institutions which further included four sub-themes (Family, Marriage, Educational Institutions and Professional Institutions), Perfection in Media, Attractive Qualities and Self-Image. It was concluded fair complexion, tall height, slim physique and long and straight hair are perceived as most important physical characteristics for meeting beauty standards. The role of social institutions, media and beauty products are important in reinforcing the concept of beauty. It was also found that participants' self-image was related to socio-cultural and media's concept of beauty and they emphasized more on inner qualities than physical appearance. The findings are discussed in light of existing researches and implications are given. There is a need to further investigate on this phenomenon such as ethnicity of participants and beauty practices to get better understanding about beauty standards.

Keywords: beauty, women, social, culture, thematic, media.

Introduction and Literature Review

Beauty as it is said is in the eye of beholder, this phrase explains the subjectivity of individuals in perceiving beauty. But the concept of beauty cannot be studied only as an individual's way of perception but the society and culture which shapes it are to be taken into account too. In addition to providing privileges to people who are attractive, the concept of

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beauty sets some challenges for those who do not meet its criteria. Women are more under pressure to meet beauty standards as compared to men, and thus face such challenges when they see how society, culture and media communicates the standards of beauty. This research is then carried out to explore perceptions of young women about socio-cultural influences and media portrayal of the concept of beauty in Pakistan where beauty standards are believed to have substantial effect on women's lives.

Kartika's (2016) showed that beauty is not only physical, although men's focus on women appears always to be physical because of men's behavior. Moreover, a woman may perceive herself to be "beautiful" only because of behavior that makes her physically attractive. How others evaluate someone as "attractive" is always subjective. There is no clear definition of beauty. Though, it is of no surprise that women are targeted more than men to pursue beauty ideals. There is a plenty of research done with focus on beauty for women as compared to men as the beauty culture has always centered on women in forms of advertisements, commercials and photographs (Taga, 2012).

Hussaini et al. (2015) in their qualitative study explored how educated young women of Asian University for Women perceive beauty and how their ideas differ from the social stereotypes in society. A phenomenological approach and purposive sampling were used. It was seen that educated women perceived beauty in different terms. All participants believed on women empowerment and wish to be educated and successful. Their criteria for internal and external beauty differed as they focused more on internal values of creativity, organization, kindness etc. as beauty for women. Therefore, the present research is intended to explore the perceptions of educated women regarding concept of beauty as influenced by socio-cultural forces and portrayed by media.

Social and cultural forces play major role in forming perceptions of individuals regarding the world, including beauty ideals. Beauty, as a concept, perceived, practiced and experienced, is not given. Several studies establish beauty as a socially constructed phenomenon (Steinberg, 2015). The "beauty myth" created by the patriarchal society keeps women constantly occupied with the predicament of how to look (Wolf, 2013).

Body image is a multidimensional construct that refers to one's perception of and attitudes about the size and shape of one's body. It has both a perceptual component that refers to how we see our body size, shape, weight, physical characteristics, performance, and movement, and an evaluative component, which refers to how we feel about these attributes and how those feelings influence our behaviors (Roosen & Mills, 2014). For example, several researches indicated that number of females with body image disturbances were increasing in India. Goswami et al. (2012) reported in their research that college going adult females faced high disturbances in their body image. The girls with high BMI were more dissatisfied with their bodies as compared to girls with low BMI.

Lewis et al. (2011) qualitatively explored the motives behind skin bleaching in Tanzania. Major themes evolved were removing of pimples, rashes, skin disease, to have soft skin, to look beautiful and European and to have white complexion. Removal of harmful effects of prolonged skin bleaching, to satisfy one's partner or to attract a male friend and to satisfy and impress peers were additional themes found in this study.

Kirtley (2016) qualitatively explored the experiences of 14 women who upon administration of Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) were identified as showing high dissatisfaction with their body shapes and approved disordered eating attitudes or habits as determined by the Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26). In depth interviews and data analysis was conducted using Interpretative Phenomenological Approach. Seven themes emerged from the data: Control, Social, Spiritual, Priorities, Exposure to Information, Avoidance, and Food Relationship. The first four themes were identified as having a positive, protective impact and negative, counterproductive impact. Participants' self-concept was found to be backed up by these four themes. The latter three themes, although likely having the same dual potential conceptualization were less compatible with an overall model despite being themes that were emphasized in the transcripts.

People may project their own desire to relate to attractive others by ascribing additional positive attributes (compatible to these bonding motives) to these attractive people (Lemay et al.,2010).

In Pakistan, beauty standards play major role in women's life specifically in terms of marriage. In Pakistani culture, complexion is a symbol of beauty, attractiveness and status. The individuals who have fair complexion are considered to be lucky, beautiful, attractive and rich. In Pakistani culture women who have fair complexion enjoy many benefits like they may face less problems in proposals and marriage (Maqsood, 2015). Males are attracted to fair complexion females. They also entertain benefits in work sitting, get favoritism from bosses. They face no ridicules, rumors and criticism. Similarly, Ashfaq and Shafiq (2018) performed content analysis of six dramas of three popular Pakistani TV channels. The study revealed that the stereotypes for perfect women" in Pakistan television drama serials reinforce patriarchal system of Pakistan. This depiction conforms to the norms of the society where fair skin color and slim physique is considered as a sign of beauty. It was found that females with lead characters were portrayed with white complexion, thin physique, black hair and being humble, submissive, less educated, home bound and mostly belong to middle class.

It cannot be denied that media has played a major role in describing and portraying beauty. It has cast a compelling effect on setting un-realistic beauty ideals as well as establishing stereotypes regarding beauty and character.

Beginning with depiction of beauty in media for young girls, Disney World has affluently performed its part in portraying and setting beauty ideals. Azmi et al. (2018) stated that from dating back to Snow white and Seven Dwarfs (1937) to Moana (2016), all Disney princesses are shown to possess similar qualities such as attractiveness, gracefulness and positive qualities. Majority of them are depicted as beautiful white girls, the depiction quite close to American culture. Lee (2009) stated that this portrayal might create a sense of misconception of beauty among girls of other cultures and ethnicities.

A qualitative study explored how Malaysian young girls (10 participants _aged 4 to 6 years) define beauty in Disney princess movies and how they define themselves as beautiful beings in relation to that portrayal. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and it was seen that young girls defined beauty in terms of physical attractiveness and positive qualities. However, they were aware that the beauty of Disney characters could not be turned in real life

and beauty was not only important quality to possess. They were conscious of this fact that they should not imitate them to become beautiful (Azmi et al., 2018). People's self-images are influenced by role media plays in reflection what should be considered beautiful. One of the examples is featuring attractive and very thin models, communicating the concept "thin ideal", to make people believe they should look like them to become attractive (Mills et al., 2017).

While advertisements endorse beauty products, they too influence concept of beauty. They constantly emphasize that beauty is something one can achieve, female consumers who are in need to become beautiful, try to obtain beauty (Chiodo, 2015). Madan et al. (2018) carried out three studies on female consumers from five countries (three Easterners and two Westerners). Three studies provide the evidence that interdependence self-construal increase the likelihood of using appearance enhancing products. Study 1 showed that Easterners (more interdependent) are more driven to use appearance enhancing products than Westerners. The results of study 2 revealed that Easterners conform to societal norms more and experience self-discrepancy which can be lessened by using appearance enhancing products. On the other hand, study 3 showed that strength of societal norms moderated the impact of interdependent usage of appearance enhancing products.

In a Pakistani advertisement of fairness cream, it was implied that to get married, a girl has to be fair-skinned to look beautiful. These advertisements portray models in makeup and photo-shopped images which is considered a standard image of beauty (Huda & Ali, 2015).

Bazzini et al. (2010) assessed what is beautiful is good stereotype in Disney movies on children in two studies. In Study 1, human characters in 21 films were rated on attractiveness, goodness, and character outcome. It was shown that character's attractiveness was a significant predictor of its portrayal. In second two, 42 children (aged 6-12 years) were shown film of either high or low beauty biasness and then they rated targeted peers (to assess whether attractiveness of character influence children's judgments of peers). The results showed that children rated the attractive target more favorably than less attractive target but film exposure did not increase children's use of stereotype.

Theoretical Framework

This section will review theories related to societal influence such as role models, socialization and positive inclination towards beauty.

Social Learning Theory Individuals learn attitudes and behaviors by observing others in their environment. They are inclined towards performing behaviors which they see rewarded or performed by those who they like and feel similarity to them (Bandura, 2000). In accordance with this theory, people's attitudes and opinions are deeply shaped by society in which they live. Beauty or physical attractiveness ideals are one type of attitudes which are influenced intensely by communication of society, culture and media.

Objectification Theory Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argued that women view themselves according to what other people think of them. They tend to conform to the societal standards of beauty for social approval and thus internalize what is considered appropriate in society. As a result, they begin to objectify themselves because they believe that beauty standards are not externally driven but internally derived (Mitchell & Mazzeo, 2009).

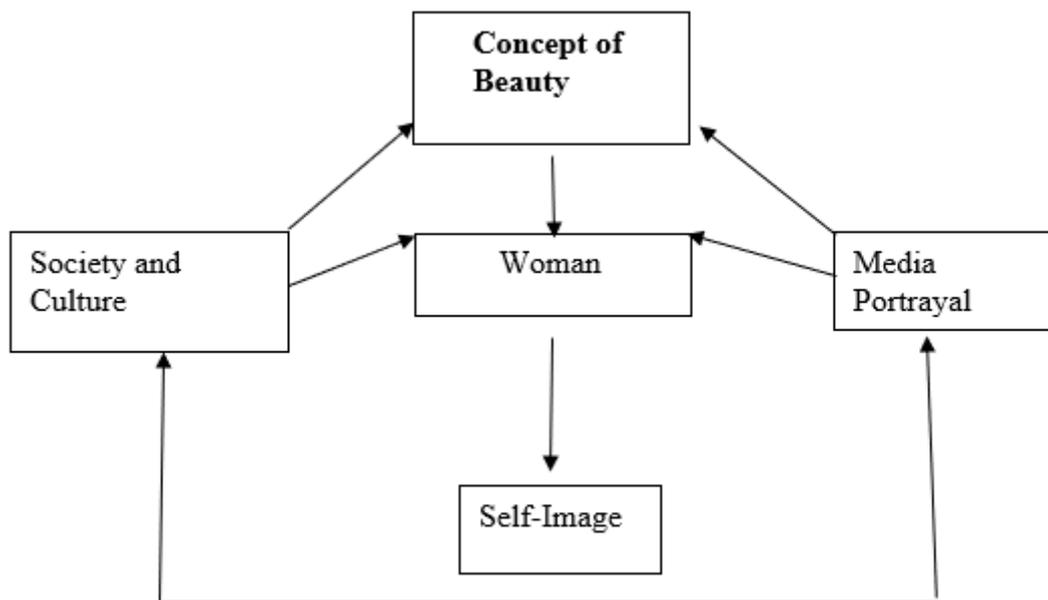


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of how woman perceives concept of beauty.

Rationale

Pakistani society is no different when it comes to beauty standards and the privileges it brings with it. White complexion, tallness, ideal physique and long hair are considered one of the defining features of women's beauty. Women with such looks are more favored over other women in many areas of life such as marriage, jobs etc. However, many educated women of young generation are questioning the beauty standards and are observed to emphasize more on positive traits. There is a scarcity of literature on women's perception regarding beauty standards. In their research, Hussaini et al. (2015) focused on the views of educated women based on the belief that educated women think differently from society's standards. Similarly, the present research is aimed to explore an educated women's perceptions of the concept of beauty in socio-cultural context media portrayal.

Objectives of Study

The study aimed to explore socio-cultural context and media portrayal of beauty as perceived by women.

Research Question

How young women perceive socio-cultural influences and media portrayal of the concept of beauty?

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This qualitative study was conducted to explore how young women explore the concept of beauty in terms of socio-cultural influences and media portrayal.

Sample

The sample was collected through convenience sampling strategy from different Universities of Lahore. The sample consisted of young adult women as according to law, people aged 18 are treated as adults (United Nations, 2013). The sample included women with varied physical characteristics as this research was not emphasized on a single facet of concept of beauty. However, participants with conditions such as albinism or vitiligo were not selected.

Interview Guide

The semi-structured and open-ended interview protocol in Urdu language was developed on the basis of research aim as well as existing literature. The interview protocol was piloted with two individuals to check the validity of developed interview questions. The protocol was then finalized with amendments. The interviews were then conducted on phone calls. They were recorded and then later transcribed. Each interview lasted for maximum 30-35 minutes. The transcripts were assigned numbers for anonymity of participants.

Table 1

Demographics and Physical Characteristics of Participants

Participant No.	Age	Education	Complexion	Height	Weight (kg) and Physique	Hair Length and color	Hair Type	Size of Eye
1.	22	MBBS	Wheatish	5'0'' (short)	42 (Thin)	Long (Brown)	Straight	Small
2.	22	MS Botany	Wheatish	5'5'' (tall)	52 (Thin)	Long (Brown)	Straight	Big
3.	22	BS Computer Science	Fair	5'0'' (Short)	74 (Fat)	Long (Dark brown)	Wavy	Big
4.	23	Bachelors Fine Arts	Fair	5'5'' (tall)	64 (Fat)	Long (Dark brown)	Wavy	Small
5.	22	MS Health Psychology	Dark	5'4'' (Tall)	49 (Thin)	Short (Black)	Wavy	Small
6.	23	Post Graduate Diploma	Wheatish	5'7'' (Tall)	80 (Fat)	Long (Black)	Curly	Big
7.	23	M Phil Applied Linguistics	Wheatish	5'3'' (tall)	49 (Thin)	Short (black)	Wavy	Small
8.	24	BS Chemistry	Fair	5'1'' (Short)	41 (Thin)	Short (Brown)	Wavy	Small

Note. sign ' = Feet; sign'' = Inches; kg=kilogram

Procedure and Ethical Considerations

At first, nine participants were approached but eight participants agreed to participate after discussing the nature of research. The participants were informed about the requirement of recording interviews beforehand and ensured about the confidentiality of their information. They were provided with informed consent and demographic and physical characteristic sheet along with verbal consent.

The interviews were then conducted on phone calls due to ongoing COVID-19 crisis. They were recorded and then later transcribed.

Analytical Procedure

Transcripts were analyzed using Inductive Thematic Analysis. Transcripts were read many times to gain familiarization with the data which is the 1st step in thematic analysis and making comments on margins. The second step involved coding on left margins which were then collated into categories. The transcripts were again reviewed to see if categories represent the data. In final step, themes and sub-themes were named according to what they meant and reflected.

Findings

In this qualitative research, five key themes with further subthemes were identified after conducting thematic analysis. These themes were found to be prevalent in perceptions of participants about socio-cultural influences and media portrayal of the concept of beauty. The themes emerged are as follow:

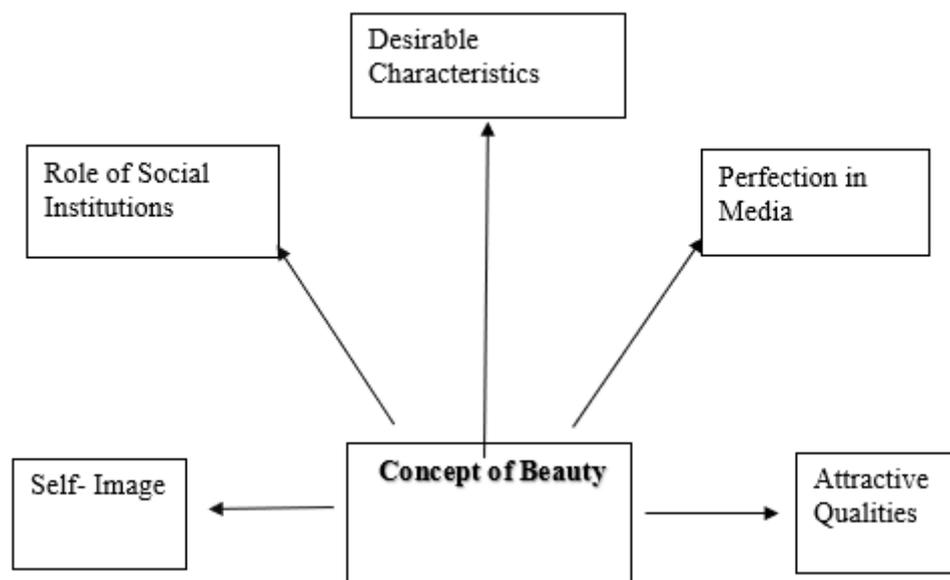


Figure 2. Five key themes emerged

Disable Characteristics

The participants perceived many physical characteristics that were considered necessary to meet standards of beauty as desired by society. The characteristics ranged from complexion, height, physique, facial features, hair, to several other features that are considered vital for a woman to be desirable in socio-cultural context. However, participants emphasized more on physical characteristics that mainly included height, complexion and physique, from which fair complexion was highlighted more as a fixed standard of beauty. The participants also focused on unrealistic image of beauty in society as one participant (no.7) said:

“The image of beauty is too unrealistic in our society.”

When asked about the concept of beauty in socio-cultural context, participant no. 2 stated:

“The concept of beauty for women mainly includes an attractive face and for this, fair complexion is most important because if we are talking about society then fair complexion is primarily considered a symbol of beauty.”

She further added some more characteristics that were considered beauty in society:

“The features that can be described as beauty are that one has to be fair complexioned, tall, slim and possess symmetrical features.”

The participants described facial features differently, some described sharp features beautiful while some identified small features as a sign of beauty. Participant no. 3 described facial features along with fair complexion:

“Sharp features, small nose and round eyes are included in image of beauty.”

Participant no. 1 also identified sharp features to be considered as beauty saying:

“If we look with the perspective of old generation, then we come to know that nowadays a person who is tall, fair complexioned, slim and have sharp features is considered beautiful.”

The participants also discussed type and length of hair as one of the main determinants of beauty. They identified long and straight hair as a sign of beauty as participant no. 4 stated:

“In our Pakistani society, girls who are fair complexioned, long haired, tall and slim are believed to be attractive.”

Similarly, participant no. 4 added that:

“The girls who are very fair, straight haired, tall and slim.”

Along with physical characteristics, some participants also identified several other features which they perceived to be considered desirable for a girl in socio-cultural context as one of them (participant no.1) attributed girls as complete package:

“In our society, only those girls are considered beautiful who have chef abilities, can do anything, and are educated and a complete package in addition to being fair complexioned and slim.”

These features were also identified as necessary by participant no. 6 when she said:

“A girl should be perfect in every way and can do everything. She has to be a super girl but she should not have any demand.”

Role of Social Institutions

Role of social institutions emerged as a major theme with further four sub-themes of family, marriage, educational settings and professional settings. This theme revealed how society reinforces the standard of beauty by its attitude towards people who either meet standard or for those who do not.

Family. The sub-theme of family emerged when participants highlighted the role family and relatives play in inculcating image of beauty in girls and problems associated with it. Participant no. 7 reported that:

“I have observed that outsiders do taunt girls but family members which are also part of this society and mindset find faults in their daughters. They believe that they are doing good but they do not know how much it affects the self-confidence of their daughters.”

The role of old generation such as grandparents was also discussed when participant no. 3 said:

“One of my friends who is dark complexioned told me how her maternal grandmother used to make fun of her complexion in front of whole family.”

She further stated about the role of family as:

“The families who tell their daughters that they are very ugly begin to compete with others.”

Marriage. This emerged as an important theme because it emphasized upon the physical beauty of a girl. Moreover, it was also highlighted as a vital part for a girl's life in socio-cultural context. This was confirmed when participant no.3 said:

“In Pakistan, a girl's sole purpose is to get married and they have to be very pretty so they would not be rejected.”

Participant no. 5 said:

“In our society, an unmarried woman is not given respect as compared to a married woman, no matter how successful she becomes.”

Physical beauty was found to play major role in case of marriage. Participants highlighted the importance of beauty for a desirable marriage proposal. Participant no. 2 stated:

“Girls are selected for marriage on the basis of their physical appearance. Those who are not beautiful are more subjected to rejection.”

Preference for specific physical characteristics were also identified by participants as participant no.3 said:

“When people go for selecting daughter in law, they mostly prefer fair complexioned girl but the looks of boy does not matter for them.”

Participant no. 7 also highlighted the importance of sexual beauty as she stated:

“One of my friend’s sister got rejected for marriage because the boy’s mother objected on her underdeveloped breasts which in her opinion was a sign of infertility.”

It was found that physical beauty had a major and significant role for girls to get married.

Educational Settings. Educational settings emerged when participants reported about the discrimination students have to face in classrooms. Participant no. 3 said about the difference in behavior of a male teacher:

“I have observed in my school life that a male teacher shows supporting behavior towards the most beautiful girl of classroom.”

The same theme clearly revealed when participant No. 4 said:

“Teachers give more attention towards beautiful students as compared to ordinary looking girls.”

Professional Settings. Professional settings found to be an important theme when participants highlighted the issue of biasness in hiring. This subtheme encompasses favoritism, importance of professional skills and media’s criteria for hiring.

Discrimination in hiring on the basis of physical appearance was evident when participant no. 2 said:

“Many people are offered job on the basis of their complexion, features and body shape. Physical appearance is prioritized first in jobs”.

The relationship between beauty and success in real life was also discussed. Most participants reported that success and beauty are independent of each other but also narrated about the discrimination in hiring participant No. 4 said:

“I do not think that beauty and success are linked but in case of girls, jobs are offered more to those who are presentable. Here beauty plays a major role.”

This was also strengthened by another participant as:

“If someone wants to be successful or wish to have job in a company then one cannot deny existing beauty standards.”

Importance of professional skills was also highlighted as one of the main determinants of getting job. It was reflected when participant no. 2 said:

“Field related skills do matter; it means that job will not be offered only because one is beautiful. Beauty and success are somehow linked but, in most fields, even in media, beauty and skills play major role.”

Perfection in Media. It was evolved as one of the major themes when all participants attributed to media as major force in shaping beauty standards. The main theme reflected in all participants’ responses was the portrayal of perfection in electronic media and social media as

well. The perfect portrayal was not only limited to physical beauty but also with association of positive qualities. However, in accordance with portrayal of physical beauty, participant no. 1 said:

“On TV, a beautiful girl will be one who is fair complexioned and tall.”

She further highlighted the role media plays in associating positive qualities with a beautiful person.

“If someone has a negative role in drama then he/she would not be beautiful.”

Linking positive qualities with physical beauty was also strengthened when participant no.2 said:

“There is a new trend that beautiful girl plays the role of villain but her all sins are forgiven because of her beauty. The girl who is not beautiful is portrayed as neglected in a way that she is not getting married. She is seen playing a side role.”

Portrayal of perfectionism also combined beauty with success and career, and it was reflected when participant no. 5 said:

“Media portrays that an office going or a business woman is beautiful and stylish.”

Glamorization was also found to be a major contributing factor in portrayal of perfection. Participants reported that media glamorizes women to an extent that impacts peoples' perception of girls negatively. Participant no.2 stated:

“In media, if someone is not very beautiful then he/she is made to look perfect that is wrong because people think that in real life girls always look perfect.”

The role of social media was also discussed and it was found to be equally contributing as well as electronic media when participant no. 4 said:

“Those girls who have their own fashion channels on Facebook or Instagram are never dark complexioned and they are given more promotion.”

This theme also encompassed the impact of beauty products and their advertisements on people. It was found that physical appearance of endorser plays a major role as participant no. 1 said:

“If we see the advertisements of different beauty products, then we come to know that if are not fair complexioned or we have blackheads and blemishes on our skins then we are not beautiful.”

It was also found that beauty products make one find faults in one's physical appearance as participant no. 3 said:

“The beauty products work in a way that they make people realize their imperfections and offer their product as a solution. For example, fair and lovely realized that being dark

complexioned is a problem and on seeing its advertisement one will be tempted to use it for solving its problem of dark complexion”.

Attractive Qualities. Participants were asked about their own perception of beauty; what was their standard of beauty. It was found that most participants identified inner qualities as beautiful. Some described physical beauty in their own way while others mostly emphasized on values. Participant no. 1 replied when asked about her standard of beauty:

“There is no importance of physical beauty for me. I believe a person should be very nice. If a person possess good character, is religious, God fearing and humane then that person is beautiful”.

Some other values were also found to be perceived attractive by participants such as being non-judgmental, behavior etc. Participant no. 6 laughingly stated that:

“I like people’s character. I do not meet the social standard of beauty so I do not judge people on the basis of their physical appearance. So, what is attractive to me is how people behave with others, what kind of character they possess and they do not judge others. I befriend those who do not judge. People who talk nicely to others are very attractive to me.”

Way of talking and being well-behaved was identified to be key factors in perceiving beauty when participant no. 2 said:

“For me, beauty is an attractive face or physique which does not specifically include being tall or fair complexioned. Way of talking and behavior as well as being well-mannered also incorporates in beauty.”

Importance of physical beauty was also discussed when participant no. 4 emphasized on physical beauty of girl in addition to being good natured:

“The physical beauty of a girl matters to some extent but for me, good looks matter but nature comes first. If a girl is not physically beautiful yet very good natured then she is beautiful inside out.”

Dressing sense was also identified to be important for physical beauty as participant no. 1 said:

“For me, inner beauty matters more than physical beauty. If a person has good intentions and is satisfied then he will be confident. Being well-behaved is important but staying up-to-date is necessary too. Being well-dressed, trendy and having fashion sense are essential qualities.”

Self-acceptance and self- care were also acknowledged for being beautiful when participant no. 3 said:

“If a girl accepts herself the way she is, then that is beautiful for me. If she is fat then she should not lose weight for society but for her own health. The same goes for skinny girl who wants to gain weight.”

She further emphasized on self-care stating that:

“Outlook do matter, it shows how much you love yourself.”

Self-Image. Participants’ physical characteristics were also taken into account for the purpose of how they see themselves in socio-cultural context. Their responses not only included their perception of physical appearance but their additional characteristics which they perceived were necessary for being desirable. This was confirmed when participant no. 1 regarded her medical education as a desirable feature along with her physical characteristics:

“If I talk about my society then I think I am 50% beautiful because I mostly get remarks about my eyes and I am a medical student as well so I think it also counts. The one thing I feel that I am not 50% beautiful according to society is because I am not very tall, not fair complexioned and sometimes, I get acne.”

Focus on career was also found as participant no. 5 who was student of MS Health Psychology with dark complexion and wavy hair stated:

“If I talk about my physical beauty then I am satisfied with myself. I used to feel inferiority complex because of my curly hair 3-4 years back but this is not the case now. Because our thought patterns and priorities change as we move on. For now, I am struggling to prepare myself for professional life and to build confidence for my career.”

Concern for one’s physique was found to be prominent in most participants’ responses. It was found that participants with either fat or thin physique were concerned because they perceived themselves unable to meet social standard of beauty. Participant no. 4 with fat physique said:

“Personally, I am thankful to Allah for He created me beautiful. But my physique is bit fat so I have to remain very conscious because of society. I would be rejected for marriage proposals. I have to live according to society because people will degrade me.”

She further added about her feelings saying:

“I feel bad that I cannot wear loose fitting clothes as I would appear over-weight and people will taunt me.”

Feeling bad about people’s comments was also confirmed when participant no. 6 said:

“I am a bit overweight so I know that I do not meet the social standard of beauty and I am not perfect either. I hear a lot of comments from people and I ignore them. But it is very

bad to point out someone for their fat physique in front of everyone. It can be said in other way too.”

Being skinny was also found to be disturbing for some participants. Participant no.8 with thin physique and wheatish complexion said:

“I see myself as average because our society creates problems for people who are either fat or thin. Sometimes people point out on my physique saying that I am very weak so I think that I do not meet social standard of beauty completely.”

Physical appearance was found to contribute significantly in creating self-image as one participant no. 8 who was student of MPhil Applied Linguistics with thin physique said:

“I see myself successful in my academic life but my biggest insecurity is my body image. I do not consider myself beautiful because I am too thin. I have issue of pimples and acne and body hair growth as well. I do not even like my feet.”

The participants’ responses revealed that physical appearance play a major role in self-perception.

Summary of Findings

Most important physical characteristics for beauty in socio-cultural context are fair complexion, tall height, slim physique and long and straight hair.

Social Institutions reinforce the idea of beauty standards and media portrays perfection. The socio-cultural and media’s concept of beauty is related to self-image.

Discussion

The present study explored perceptions of young women about socio-cultural influences and media portrayal of concept of beauty. The study found many physical characteristics as perceived by participants that are considered beauty in Pakistani society and many other factors that are considered important in contributing towards phenomenon of beauty. This chapter will discuss findings of study in light of existing literature.

Discussing about physical characteristics considered for beauty that are found in current research, there is a scarcity of indigenous literature that primarily consists of those characteristics. The study found fair complexion as one of the defining features of beauty as it was recurrently mentioned by participants for both socio-cultural context and portrayal of media. Maqsood (2015) discussed that complexion represents beauty, attraction and status in Pakistan as people with fair complexion are believed to be beautiful, attractive, rich and fortunate. One participant with wheatish complexion and short height did not perceive herself as beautiful because she believed that her these features do not make her desirable. But on the other hand, she perceived her medical education as a desirable feature.

The study found other physical characteristics such as being slim, tall, long and straight haired as a representation of beauty for women in Pakistan. The possession of all these characteristics was also termed as “unrealistic image of beauty” or “flawless beauty” by some

participants. They equally attributed media along with socio-cultural context to promote these beauty ideals. Ashfaq et al. (2014) mentioned in their research that being tall, extremely thin, fair complexioned and possessing flowing thick and long is considered definition of beauty on media. The participants with curly or wavy hair specifically mentioned straight hair and both regarded themselves imperfect.

As it was mentioned earlier, body image/concern for physique was found prevalent in most of the participants either with fat or thin physique. According to them, this was something that made them undesirable. One participant with thin physique and wheatish complexion regarded herself as average looking because she believed that her thin physique is something that made her perceive this way. She mentioned about negative evaluation on her physique. One of the participants with thin physique stated about her insecurity because she experienced negative/ mocking remarks about her physique. She said that she perceived herself successful in her academic life as she was student of M Phil Applied Linguistics but her body image clouded her judgments about herself. Szabo (2015) concluded that lower level of self-esteem was predicted by differences in ideal and perceived body image.

However, participants focused more on inner qualities such as good nature, manners, and way of talking, self-acceptance etc. as way to judge someone's beauty. On the other hand, desirability for certain traits in girls was also associated with physical beauty such as educated, possessing qualities of a super girl and cooking skills or are perfect. There is a considerable role of media in portrayal of perfect women in shaping stereotypes as Tarar and Pulla (2014) mentioned that a good woman on TV is portrayed with all positive qualities such as generousness, tolerance and understanding as well as one who does all house chores and depends on her family to make decisions for her marriage.

Society and culture play an important role in shaping attitudes and reinforcement of specific beliefs. In this research, family was emerged as subtheme that indicated that family plays a crucial role in determining self-image of a person who may experience discrimination at the hands of his/her family. It was found that individuals who struggle with their body weight are often discriminated by their families and friends (Puhl et al., 2008).

Marriage was also found as an important subtheme because it highlighted the importance of physical beauty for mate selection and its importance in girl's life seen in a collectivistic culture such as in Pakistan. both considered necessary for a woman in Pakistan.

Bias in various settings such as educational and professional settings was also found to be important in reinforcement of beauty ideals. Participants specifically mentioned professional settings where physical attractiveness was a major determinant of selection for job along with the highlighted role of media in portraying such biases. One of the participants said, "*Media portrays that a beautiful woman is likely to get a job; our society which is massively impacted by media moves in this manner too*". This was also found when many participants stated that physical attractiveness is a basic criterion to get a position in media as one of the participants said, "*We have never seen a dark-complexioned or fat news anchor on TV*". Some participants mentioned other fields such as airhostess, receptionist or sale girls that too require public exposure have same criteria.

Conclusion of the study

The role of beauty products in terms of physical attractiveness of endorsers was also found and impact of their advertisements as well. Kahle and Homer (1985) said that good-looking celebrity can be utilized to endorse a product that would promote the attractiveness component. Most of the participants mentioned beauty products that consisted of fair creams as solution of dark-skin problem. It can be concluded that most important physical characteristics for beauty in socio-cultural context are fair complexion, tall height, slim physique, and long and straight hair. Social Institutions reinforce the idea of beauty standards. Media portrays perfection in terms of physical appearance and association of positive qualities. Beauty products are commercialized as problem solving products and their celebrity endorser's physical appearance play important role. The socio-cultural and media's concept of beauty is related to self-image. Inner qualities are more focused than outer appearance.

Limitations and Suggestions

The interviews were not conducted in person because of ongoing situation of COVID 19. In-person interviews could be conducted in future for better understanding about participants' body language and facial expressions. Only one participant mentioned about sexual beauty which needs to be explored further. Issues such as acne/pimples or body hair growth were not investigated in detail so there is need to investigate them. The participants' ethnicity and marital statuses were not asked to see if there any differences existed. Participants' beauty practices need to be explored which were not targeted by present research.

Implications of the study

This research may help in identifying negative patterns in society about beauty standards especially in Pakistan where women are mostly judged based on their physical appearances and their ultimate goal in life is considered to be getting married. It may aid in understanding negative portrayal of beauty image on media and help in differentiating the media portrayal of women with that present in real life.

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