

Thesis abstract

Beauty ideals and body image among adolescent girls: a cross-cultural study

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While having an attractive appearance is valued globally, and body image concerns have been reported in most regions of the world where they have been studied, most research has been limited to individuals living in high-income, English-speaking nations. Such concerns are more pervasive among females than males, and are known to intensify during adolescence, which in turn, can have damaging consequences for one's physical and emotional well-being. To advance the cross-cultural scholarship within appearance research, this program of work examined beauty ideals, body image, and potential factors contributing to these constructs among adolescent girls living in diverse cultural contexts. The data for this research was obtained from a large-scale ($n = 900$) cross-sectional multinational survey of adolescent girls living in Australia ($n = 184$), China ($n = 293$), India ($n = 223$), and Iran ($n = 200$).

Part One of this thesis (Chapters Three and Four) examined beauty ideals and body image concerns with respect to a wide variety of facial and bodily attributes. Chapter 3 showed that despite being from socially, linguistically, religiously, and economically diverse backgrounds, girls' notions of beauty were largely similar and mirrored attributes of the Eurocentric-Western beauty ideal (e.g., curvaceously toned physique

with straight/wavy hair). Slight contrasts in preferences were evident for non-weight related attributes which overlapped with girls' local beauty norms (e.g., fairness among Chinese and Iranians, and tanned ideal among Australians). Chapter 4 suggested that higher facial and bodily discrepancies were linked to lower appearance satisfaction, but this relationship appeared to be inconsistent across the four countries and was not moderated by the importance associated with those features. Further, girls in some countries (e.g., China and India) considered their facial attributes as more important than their bodily features to their overall appearance.

Part Two of this thesis (Chapters Five and Six) explored the potential role of different sociocultural factors in cultivating adolescents' beauty ideals and appearance concerns. Chapter Five investigated girls' perceptions of the extent to which different sources (e.g., peers, family, media), influenced their beauty ideals. While peers were perceived to be influential across countries, parents appeared to be more salient within India and Iran than in Australia, where social media influence rated the highest, and China who considered local celebrities as most powerful in shaping their beauty ideals. Chapter Six tested the applicability of the tripartite influence model of body image

and disordered eating for girls within each country and found support for a modified version incorporating direct effects from sociocultural influences on appearance satisfaction. Moreover, thin-ideal internalization and appearance comparisons mediated the link between sociocultural pressures and appearance concerns in all countries. Lastly, the salience of appearance-based pressures varied cross-culturally (e.g., family pressures in Iran and India and media pressures in Australia).

Together, while these findings highlight many similarities in appearance-based attitudes and related concerns between adolescent girls from quite disparate countries,

they also identify specificities within each country that can guide preventative efforts to reduce the negative impact associated with poor body image for adolescent girls in these countries.

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