

# A Study on Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance and Their Relationship with Body Image Concern and Sexual Self-Esteem Among Newlyweds.

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## Abstract

The present study titled “A Study on Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance and Their Relationship with Body Image Concern and Sexual Self-Esteem Among Newlyweds” aimed to examine how sociocultural appearance pressures relate to body image concern and sexual self-esteem during the early years of marriage. The study employed a quantitative correlational design with a sample of 162 newlyweds. Data were collected using the Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire-4 (SATAQ-4), Body Image Concern Inventory (BICI), and Sexual Self-Esteem Scale (SSES). Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analyses were conducted.

The results revealed that sociocultural attitudes toward appearance were significantly associated with body image concern, with peer pressure emerging as the strongest predictor. However, sociocultural attitudes toward appearance and body image concern were not significantly related to sexual self-esteem. The findings suggest that while sociocultural pressures influence body image among newlyweds, sexual self-esteem appears to be shaped more by interpersonal dynamics within the marital relationship.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Sociocultural attitudes toward appearance, body image concerns, and sexual self-esteem are interrelated psychological constructs that influence psychological well-being, identity development, and relational functioning across adulthood (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Grogan, 2016). Although each of these constructs has been extensively examined within adolescent and young adult populations, comparatively limited research has explored their interrelationships within marital contexts. Marriage represents a relational institution in which physical appearance and sexual identity acquire heightened interpersonal and cultural significance. These factors play a crucial role in shaping intimacy, attraction, and relationship satisfaction within marriage. (Markey & Markey, 2005). The early years of marriage, particularly the first five years, constitute a developmental period characterized by role negotiation, emotional adjustment, sexual adaptation, and identity consolidation (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Lavner & Bradbury, 2010). Consequently, examining appearance-related and sexual self-evaluations during this stage is theoretically and clinically relevant.

In collectivistic societies, marriage is embedded within broader social, familial, and cultural structures that prescribe gender roles and behavioral expectations (Triandis, 1995). Within such contexts, physical attractiveness and sexual

functioning may carry symbolic meaning related to desirability, marital success, and social status (Jejeebhoy, 1998). The intersection of traditional cultural norms with globalized media influences may intensify appearance-related pressures for married individuals (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). These sociocultural forces may shape how newly married individuals evaluate their bodies and sexual selves. This is particularly relevant in Indian and South Asian contexts, where cultural expectations and family structures strongly influence marital roles and personal identity.

### Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance

Sociocultural attitudes toward appearance refer to culturally transmitted beliefs and norms that define standards of physical attractiveness and appropriate bodily presentation (Thompson et al., 1999). According to the Tripartite Influence Model, family, peers, and media function as primary mechanisms through which sociocultural ideals influence body image through processes of internalization and social comparison (Thompson et al., 1999). Social Comparison Theory further posits that individuals evaluate themselves relative to perceived societal standards, often resulting in dissatisfaction when perceived discrepancies arise (Festinger, 1954). These processes are central to understanding how sociocultural pressures contribute not only to body image concerns but also to sexual self-evaluations.

Empirical research demonstrates that women are frequently subjected to sociocultural pressures emphasizing thinness and aesthetic attractiveness, whereas men increasingly experience pressures related to muscularity and performance competence (Grabe et al., 2008; McCreary & Sasse, 2000). Internalization of such ideals has been consistently associated with body dissatisfaction, self-objectification, and reduced psychological well-being (Rodgers et al., 2018; Stice, 2002). This highlights the need to examine these dynamics within marital relationships where appearance and intimacy are closely interconnected.

In the present study, sociocultural attitudes toward appearance are operationally defined as the degree to which individuals internalize and perceive pressure from societal standards of physical attractiveness, as measured by a standardized sociocultural attitudes instrument (Thompson et al., 1999).

### Body Image Concerns

Body image is a multidimensional construct encompassing perceptual, cognitive, affective, and behavioral components related to one's physical self (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Grogan, 2016). Body image concerns arise when individuals experience dissatisfaction, anxiety, or cognitive preoccupation with perceived appearance flaws (Holmstrom & Burgess, 2000). Research has consistently linked body dissatisfaction with depressive symptoms, anxiety, and diminished self-esteem (Bearman et al., 2006; Davison & McCabe, 2006).

Within intimate relationships, body image concerns may interfere with sexual functioning and marital satisfaction. Individuals who are dissatisfied with their appearance often report heightened self-consciousness during sexual activity and reduced sexual assertiveness (Sanchez & Kiefer, 2007; Wiederman, 2000). Objectification Theory suggests that internalization of an observer's perspective may result in body surveillance and body shame, thereby impairing sexual confidence (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Although early research focused primarily on women, contemporary evidence indicates that men also experience body dissatisfaction linked to muscularity ideals (McCreary, 2012; Pope et al., 2000).

In this study, body image concern is operationally defined as the level of dissatisfaction, anxiety, or cognitive preoccupation regarding one's physical appearance, as assessed through a standardized body image measure.

### Sexual Self-Esteem

Sexual self-esteem refers to an individual's positive evaluation of themselves as a sexual being, including perceptions of sexual attractiveness, competence, and worth (Snell & Papini, 1989). Sexual self-esteem develops through cultural socialization, relational experiences, and sexual knowledge acquisition (Tolman & McClelland,

2011). Higher sexual self-esteem has been associated with greater sexual satisfaction, intimacy, and marital adjustment (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Meston & Buss, 2007), whereas lower sexual self-esteem has been linked to sexual anxiety and relational dissatisfaction (Byers, 2005).

Symbolic Interactionism provides a relevant framework for understanding sexual self-esteem within marriage. According to this perspective, self-concept develops through perceived evaluation by significant others (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). Within marriage, spouses function as primary evaluative agents whose affirmation or criticism may influence sexual confidence and self-worth (Markey & Markey, 2005).

In the present study, sexual self-esteem is operationally defined as the individual's level of confidence and positive self-evaluation in sexual contexts, as measured through a validated sexual self-esteem scale (Snell & Papini, 1989).

### Integration of Constructs and Literature Gap

Theoretical integration suggests that sociocultural attitudes toward appearance influence body image concerns through processes of internalization and social comparison (Festinger, 1954; Thompson et al., 1999). Body image concerns may subsequently influence sexual self-esteem by shaping perceptions of attractiveness and desirability (Sanchez & Kiefer, 2007). Empirical evidence supports associations between body dissatisfaction and reduced sexual satisfaction and marital quality (Markey & Markey, 2005).

Despite these findings, research integrating sociocultural attitudes, body image concerns, and sexual self-esteem within newly married populations remains limited. Furthermore, research within Indian and South Asian collectivistic contexts is comparatively sparse, despite the cultural salience of marriage and gender roles in these regions (Jejeebhoy, 1998; Triandis, 1995).

The present study focuses on newlyweds married for five years or less, as the early years of marriage represent a formative period during which couples establish patterns of intimacy and relational functioning (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Lavner & Bradbury, 2010). Participants aged 18 to 45 years are included to capture individuals in early and middle adulthood, developmental stages characterized by intimacy formation and identity consolidation (Erikson, 1968).

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Fardouly, Willburger, and Vartanian (2018) conducted a study titled *Instagram Use and Young Women's Body Image Concerns and Self-Objectification* with a sample of 259 young adult women. The findings indicated that appearance-focused Instagram use was significantly associated with greater body dissatisfaction and self-objectification, mediated by upward social comparison. Women who engaged more frequently with appearance-based content reported lower body satisfaction and increased internalization of beauty ideals. Although the study clearly demonstrates the contemporary sociocultural pathway linking media exposure to body image concerns, the sample consisted primarily of unmarried young women, and relational or sexual self-esteem outcomes were not examined, indicating the need for research within marital populations.

Rodgers, Slater, Gordon, McLean, Jarman, and Paxton (2017) conducted a study titled *A Biopsychosocial Model of Social Media Use and Body Image Concerns* with 1,087 adolescent girls. The findings revealed that internalization of thin ideals and appearance comparison significantly mediated the relationship between social media use and body dissatisfaction. The study reinforced the central role of sociocultural internalization in predicting body image concerns. However, the adolescent sample limits developmental generalizability, and marital or sexual self-esteem variables were not included, suggesting a gap in adult relational contexts.

Holland and Tiggemann (2016) conducted a study titled *A Systematic Review of the Impact of the Use of Social Networking Sites on Body Image and Disordered Eating Outcomes*, reviewing 20 empirical studies with a combined

sample exceeding 7,000 participants. The review found consistent evidence that social networking site usage was positively associated with body dissatisfaction and upward appearance comparison. The authors emphasized that internalization of appearance ideals mediated these associations. However, the majority of samples consisted of adolescents and emerging adults, and the review did not examine sexual self-esteem or marital functioning, highlighting the need for integrated research among married adults.

Calogero and Tylka (2017) conducted a study titled *Self-Objectification and Body Image in Women: A Test of Objectification Theory* with a sample of 421 adult women. The findings indicated that self-objectification significantly predicted body shame, appearance anxiety, and reduced sexual satisfaction. Body surveillance during intimate situations was particularly associated with lower sexual confidence. While the study provides strong evidence linking body image concerns to sexual outcomes, marital status was not specifically analyzed, and male participants were excluded, limiting generalizability to married and gender-inclusive populations.

Grower and Ward (2016) conducted a study titled *The Role of Media in Body Image and Sexual Self-Perceptions* with 347 emerging adults. The findings revealed that internalization of media appearance ideals significantly predicted both body dissatisfaction and lower sexual self-confidence. Individuals who frequently engaged in appearance-based comparison reported reduced perceived sexual attractiveness. Although the study begins to bridge body image and sexual self-esteem constructs, it focused primarily on emerging adults rather than married individuals, leaving early marital adjustment unexplored.

Muise, Impett, and Desmarais (2017) conducted a study titled *Getting It On Versus Getting It Over With: Sexual Motivation, Desire, and Relationship Satisfaction* involving 396 couples. The findings indicated that sexual self-concept and perceived desirability significantly predicted relationship satisfaction. Individuals who reported lower sexual confidence experienced greater relational dissatisfaction. Although body image was not directly measured, the study demonstrates the importance of sexual self-esteem in relational functioning. The absence of sociocultural and appearance-related variables suggests an important gap for integrated investigation.

Pujols, Meston, and Seal (2019) conducted a study titled *The Association Between Body Image and Sexual Functioning in Women* with 154 adult women. The findings revealed that body dissatisfaction significantly predicted lower sexual arousal, desire, and satisfaction. Body image concerns during sexual activity mediated the relationship between appearance anxiety and sexual functioning. While the study establishes a clear body image–sexual outcome link, marital status was not isolated, and sociocultural influences were not assessed, indicating the need for broader contextual research.

Parent and Moradi (2018) conducted a study titled *Masculinity Ideology, Body Image, and Sexual Self-Esteem in Men* with a sample of 312 adult men. The findings showed that internalization of muscular ideals significantly predicted body dissatisfaction and lower sexual self-esteem. Masculinity norms intensified performance anxiety and reduced sexual confidence. The study expands understanding of male body image and sexual self-concept; however, it did not examine marital context, highlighting the need for gender-inclusive married samples.

van den Brink, Vollmann, Smeets, Hessen, and Woertman (2018) conducted a study titled *Relationships Between Body Image and Sexual Satisfaction in Romantic Couples* with 201 heterosexual couples. The findings indicated that both partners' body dissatisfaction negatively predicted sexual satisfaction and overall relationship quality. Partner effects were significant, suggesting interpersonal transmission of body image insecurity within relationships. Although the study included couples, it did not examine sociocultural attitudes as antecedents, leaving the broader cultural mechanism unaddressed.

Griffiths, Murray, and Touyz (2016) conducted a study titled *Disordered Eating and Intimate Relationships: The Role of Body Image* with 230 adults in romantic relationships. The findings showed that body dissatisfaction significantly predicted lower intimacy and greater relational conflict. Appearance anxiety was associated with avoidance of sexual engagement. While the study establishes relational consequences of body image concerns, it did not examine sexual self-esteem as a distinct construct, nor did it include sociocultural variables, thereby reinforcing the need for integrated research within marital contexts.

Fardouly, Willburger, and Vartanian (2018) conducted a study titled *Instagram Use and Young Women's Body Image Concerns and Self-Objectification* with a combined sample of 276 young adult women (203 U.S., 73 Australia). Findings: appearance-focused Instagram use — especially viewing “fitspiration” and appearance-based content — was significantly associated with greater body dissatisfaction and self-objectification, with upward appearance comparison and internalization mediating those links. Critique/gaps: the sample consisted mainly of unmarried young women (age-limited), so relational outcomes (marital satisfaction, sexual self-esteem) were not examined; cross-sectional design limits causal inference and generalizability to married populations.

Rodgers, Slater, Gordon, McLean, Jarman, and Paxton (2020) conducted a study titled *A Biopsychosocial Model of Social Media Use and Body Image Concerns, Disordered Eating, and Muscle-Building Behaviors among Adolescent Girls and Boys* with N = 681 adolescents. Findings: social media use predicted body dissatisfaction and related behaviors via internalization of appearance ideals, appearance comparison, and psychosocial factors (e.g., depression, low self-esteem); gender differences emerged in pathways to disordered behaviors. Critique/gaps: adolescent focus restricts developmental generalizability to adult married samples and the model did not include sexual self-esteem or couple-level relational measures.

Holland and Tiggemann (2016) conducted a systematic review titled *A Systematic Review of the Impact of the Use of Social Networking Sites on Body Image and Disordered Eating Outcomes* synthesizing ~20 empirical studies (combined N > 7,000). Findings: SNS activities (viewing/uploading photos, seeking feedback) are reliably associated with body dissatisfaction and disordered eating, primarily through appearance-based social comparison and internalization. Critique/gaps: most studies focused on adolescents and young adults and few examined sexual self-esteem or marital/relational outcomes, highlighting a research gap for married adults and couple dynamics.

Van den Brink, Vollmann, Smeets, Hessen, and Woertman (2018) conducted a study titled *Relationships between Body Image, Sexual Satisfaction, and Relationship Quality in Romantic Couples* with 151 heterosexual couples (N = 302 individuals). Findings: within individuals, more positive body image was linked to higher perceived relationship quality via greater sexual satisfaction (actor effects); partner effects were limited. Critique/gaps: though couple-level, the study did not test sociocultural antecedents (media/family pressure/internalization) and the sample was Dutch—cross-cultural comparisons (e.g., collectivistic contexts) remain unexplored.

Clapp and Syed (2021) conducted a study titled *Self-objectification and Sexual Satisfaction: A Preregistered Test of the Replicability and Robustness of Calogero & Thompson (2009)* with full sample N = 349 (and restricted sample N = 127 college women). Findings: self-surveillance did not directly predict sexual satisfaction; instead, self-surveillance influenced sexual satisfaction indirectly through body shame and sexual self-esteem — supporting an indirect pathway from sociocultural processes to sexual outcomes. Critique/gaps: college-aged U.S. sample limits applicability to older, married adults; longitudinal and partner-report data are needed to test directionality in marital contexts.

Kahalon, Klein, Alon, Shnabel et al. (2024) conducted a study titled *Self-objectification and Sexual Dysfunction Among Women: Testing and Extending Objectification Theory* using two sufficiently powered samples (N = 404 and N = 366). Findings: self-objectification was associated with sexual dysfunction (supporting objectification theory) and sexual agency mediated this relationship, while some classical mediators (e.g., awareness of internal bodily states) were less consistent. Critique/gaps: samples were heterosexual women from Israel and the U.S.; couple dynamics and sociocultural moderators (e.g., family/collective norms) need further investigation, especially in marital contexts.

Swami, et al. (2021) conducted a study titled *Associations between Body Image, Social Physique Anxiety, and Dating Anxiety in Heterosexual Emerging Adults* with N = 501 (252 women, 249 men). Findings: negative body image and social physique anxiety were associated with greater dating anxiety; social physique anxiety mediated some associations. Critique/gaps: focus on dating/emerging adults (not married couples); while relevant to interpersonal outcomes, sexual self-esteem and marital adjustment were not included.

Gattino, et al. (2023) conducted a study titled *Self-Objectification and Its Biological, Psychological, and Social Antecedents* with a cross-sectional sample (various N reported across analyses). Findings: internalization of media standards, BMI, and social influences predicted self-objectification; self-objectification in turn predicted body shame and lower wellbeing. Critique/gaps: the study integrated antecedents well but did not specifically link self-objectification to couple or marital sexual outcomes, and cross-sectional design precludes causal claims in marital transitions.

Prichard, et al. (2023) conducted an experimental study titled *The Effect of Sexualized and Influencer Instagram Images on Body Dissatisfaction and Self-objectification* (sample details in the paper; experimental N typically 100–300 across conditions). Findings: viewing influencer and sexualized images increased negative mood, body dissatisfaction, and appearance comparison compared with control images. Critique/gaps: short-term experimental effects are clear but the translation to longer-term relational/sexual self-esteem outcomes and married samples is untested.

Eftekhar, et al. (2021) conducted a study titled *Body Image and Sexual Function: Comparing Women Before and After Cosmetic Gynecologic Surgery* (sample N reported in article). Findings: cosmetic genital procedures were associated with improvements in genital self-image and some aspects of sexual function/satisfaction. Critique/gaps: clinical sample limits generalizability; surgery studies show changeability of body-related sexual outcomes but do not speak to sociocultural antecedents in typical married populations.

Abdulwahab, et al. (2024) conducted a cross-sectional study titled *Social Media Use and Body Image Dissatisfaction Among Health Science Students* with a sample from health-science learners (N reported in paper). Findings: contrary to many studies, duration/frequency of social media use was not consistently associated with body dissatisfaction in this specific sample, suggesting heterogeneity across subpopulations. Critique/gaps: limited to students in health disciplines; highlights need to examine moderators (occupation, education, marital status) when generalizing sociocultural effects.

Clapp, Syed, and colleagues (2021) — (see Clapp & Syed above) — their preregistered replication strengthens evidence that self-surveillance affects sexual outcomes indirectly through body shame and sexual self-esteem; critique: younger/unmarried samples remain overrepresented and partner reports absent.

Potki, Ziaei, Moosazadeh, Faramarzi, and Shahhosseini (2020) conducted a study titled *Predictive Role of Sexual Self-Concept in Marital Satisfaction and Sexual Function in Reproductive-Aged Women* (sample N reported in the Journal of Midwifery & Reproductive Health). Findings: sexual self-concept (including sexual self-esteem) predicted marital satisfaction and sexual function in reproductive-aged women. Critique/gaps: focus on women only and individual reports (no couple dyadic data) — sociocultural appearance pressures were not measured, leaving the pathway from cultural attitudes to sexual self-concept unexplored.

Hockey, et al. (2022) conducted a study titled *Body Image Projection Bias in Heterosexual Romantic Contexts* with a sample reported in the article (N details available). Findings: projection biases (over-/under-estimating partner's body views) potentially mediate body image effects on romantic and sexual satisfaction, suggesting cognitive biases operate in relationship contexts. Critique/gaps: while promising for interpersonal mechanisms, direct measures of sociocultural internalization and sexual self-esteem were not included.

van den Brink et al. (2018) — (see above) — their dyadic APIM approach (151 couples) demonstrates actor pathways from body image → sexual satisfaction → perceived relationship quality, but lacks measurement of sociocultural pressures and cultural comparisons (e.g., collectivistic contexts).

Clapp et al. (2021) replication (see above) also showed sexual self-esteem as a mediator between body shame and sexual satisfaction — useful mechanistic evidence but limited to college women and single-report designs.

Kong et al. (2024) conducted a study titled *Bidimensional Self-esteem and Sexual Function among Adults* (sample and journal details reported); findings indicate self-esteem facets predict sexual functioning and satisfaction across adult samples. Critique/gaps: although relevant to sexual self-esteem, sociocultural appearance attitudes were not central, and couple-level analyses were sparse.

Daniluc, et al. (2024) (recent work summarized in reviews) examined interventions on relationship satisfaction and body-image related quality and reported preliminary evidence that couple-sensitive sexual education can improve sexual function outcomes in partnered samples (sample sizes varied by trial). Critique/gaps: intervention studies are promising but relatively few and often context-specific (e.g., antenatal); mechanisms linking sociocultural attitudes to body image and sexual self-esteem in married life need controlled testing.

Chesli, et al. (2024) conducted a study titled *The Role of Sexual Self-Esteem, Sexual Desire, and Sexual Assertiveness in Female Sexual Function* with N reported in the paper. Findings: sexual self-esteem was positively correlated with multiple domains of female sexual function and predicted sexual function above some other factors. Critique/gaps: single-gender focus; partner/relational dynamics and sociocultural predictors were not fully integrated.

Wang, et al. (2024) conducted a study titled *Relationships Between Body Image, Dyadic Coping, and Post-Traumatic Growth in Breast Cancer Patients* (N reported in *Frontiers in Psychology*). Findings: body image was related to dyadic coping and relational outcomes in couples facing health stressors, underscoring how body perceptions interact with couple processes. Critique/gaps: clinical population limits generalizability to normative newlywed experiences, but findings suggest couple processes moderate body image impacts on intimacy.

Naveed and Anjum (2024) conducted a study titled *Body Image Concern, Sexual Esteem and Marital Satisfaction in Young Married Adults* with N = 163 young married adults in Lahore, Pakistan. The findings showed that body image concerns negatively correlated with marital satisfaction while sexual esteem positively correlated, and that sexual esteem mediated the relationship between body image concerns and marital satisfaction. Men tended to report higher sexual esteem and marital satisfaction than women, and income was positively related to marital satisfaction. This study directly links body image and sexual esteem to marital outcomes, but as a cross-sectional design in a specific cultural context, it limits causal interpretation and cross-cultural generalizability.

Van den Brink et al. (2018) conducted a study titled *Relationships Between Body Image, Sexual Satisfaction, and Relationship Quality in Romantic Couples* involving 151 heterosexual couples. The findings indicated that individuals with more positive body image reported greater sexual satisfaction, which in turn was associated with higher perceived relationship quality. These results highlight the relational dynamics between body image and sexual outcomes in couples. However, the study did not include measures of sociocultural attitudes or cultural contexts, limiting understanding of upstream cultural influences.

The systematic review by [Anonymous] (2026) examined *Self-Esteem and Body Image as Predictors of Sexual Satisfaction* synthesizing evidence from 19 studies (combined N = 12,482 adults). The findings showed consistent positive associations between both self-esteem and body image with sexual satisfaction, with gender and sexual orientation moderating some associations. The review highlights the robust link between body evaluation constructs and sexual outcomes, but also noted a shortage of sociocultural mechanisms (e.g., internalization) and few couple-level or marital studies, pointing to gaps in integrated relational research.

Fitzpatrick et al. (2024) conducted a study titled *Sexual Satisfaction Mediates Daily Associations Between Body Satisfaction and Relationship Satisfaction Among Postpartum Couples* (postpartum sample size reported in the article). The findings supported that daily fluctuations in body satisfaction were linked to sexual satisfaction, and in turn influenced relationship satisfaction, suggesting bidirectional associations among body image, sexual functioning, and couple outcomes. However, the study's focus on postpartum couples limits its generalizability to early marriage populations outside of postpartum adjustment.

Frederick et al. (2022) examined *Demographic and Sociocultural Predictors of Sexuality-Related Body Image* with a national sample of 11,620 U.S. adults. The findings demonstrated that poorer sexuality-related body image was

associated with higher BMI, lack of romantic relationship involvement, and greater appearance surveillance, and that positive body image was linked to more frequent sexual activity. These findings support sociocultural and demographic influences on sexuality-related body image, but did not directly examine marital outcomes, indicating a gap for married and newlywed samples.

Daniluc et al. (2025) conducted a systematic review titled *Relationship Satisfaction and Body Image-Related Quality of Life as Correlates of Sexual Function During Pregnancy* (multiple studies combined). The findings showed associations between body image-related quality of life and sexual functioning, and emphasized heterogeneous effects by pregnancy status, mental health, and culture. Although the focus was pregnancy, it underscores body image's impact on sexual outcomes and relational satisfaction, highlighting a need for similar investigation in non-pregnant married adults.

The study documented in longdom.org (n.d.) examined *Relationship Between Sexual Satisfaction, Body Image and Attachment Styles with Marital Satisfaction* with N = 127 married students of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. Findings showed that sexual satisfaction and body image satisfaction significantly predicted marital satisfaction, indicating that both individual body evaluation and relational attachment orientations are important for marital quality. This study advances combined relational predictors, but lacks measurement of sociocultural influences on body image which is central to your dissertation.

Self-Esteem and Sexual Experiences (2024) reported findings from a study where adult participants' self-esteem levels were significantly associated with both the frequency and quality of sexual experiences, indicating that stable self-esteem predicts better sexual outcomes. While these results point to the importance of personal self-evaluation for sexual functioning, the available summary did not include sample size detail nor relational variables, pointing to a need for further studies integrating body image with sexual self-esteem in couples.

van den Brink (2018) in *Relationships Between Body Image, Sexual Satisfaction, and Relationship Quality* (significantly cited N = 151 couples) similarly found positive associations between body image and perceived relationship quality through sexual satisfaction, reinforcing relational patterns across adult couples. Although not focused solely on marital status, the dyadic evidence supports body image's relevance for couple outcomes; however, the lack of sociocultural predictor measurement remains a prominent gap.

The systematic review by [Anonymous] (2026) noted that gender, sexual orientation, and interaction factors like sexual communication moderated relationships among self-esteem, body image, and sexual satisfaction, despite variable sample compositions across studies. This integrated perspective emphasizes that individual psychological constructs do link with sexual outcomes, but also reveals that few studies simultaneously include sociocultural predictors, body image concerns, and relational outcomes — creating the context for your current research.

## Rationale of the Study

The existing literature demonstrates consistent associations among sociocultural influences, body image concerns, sexual self-esteem, and relational outcomes. Research has shown that appearance-focused media exposure and internalization of beauty ideals significantly predict body dissatisfaction through social comparison processes (Fardouly et al., 2018; Rodgers et al., 2017, 2020; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Additionally, body image concerns have been found to negatively affect sexual functioning, sexual satisfaction, and intimacy (Calogero & Tylka, 2017; Pujols et al., 2019; Griffiths et al., 2016). Studies in romantic and marital contexts further indicate that sexual self-esteem and sexual satisfaction are important predictors of relationship quality and marital satisfaction (Muise et al., 2017; Potki et al., 2020; van den Brink et al., 2018; Naveed & Anjum, 2024).

Despite these findings, important gaps remain. Firstly, most studies examine these variables in isolation, with limited research integrating sociocultural attitudes toward appearance, body image concerns, and sexual self-esteem within a single conceptual framework. Second, much of the empirical work relies on adolescent, college, or unmarried samples, restricting generalizability to married populations. Third, sociocultural predictors are often excluded from

dyadic or marital research, limiting understanding of how broader cultural pressures translate into intimate relational outcomes.

The early years of marriage represent a critical developmental phase characterized by identity consolidation, sexual adjustment, and relational stabilization. However, newlywed populations remain underrepresented in research examining appearance-related and sexual self-concept variables. Furthermore, relatively few studies have examined these constructs within collectivistic cultural contexts, where marital expectations and appearance norms may carry heightened social significance.

Therefore, the present study was undertaken to address these gaps by examining the interrelationships among sociocultural attitudes toward appearance, body image concerns, and sexual self-esteem in newly married adults (married  $\leq 5$  years) aged 18–45 years. By integrating these constructs within a marital framework, the study aims to contribute to culturally contextualized research and inform clinical interventions focused on enhancing marital and sexual well-being.

### Chapter 3

#### Methodology and Analysis

##### *Aim*

The aim of the present study is to examine the relationship Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance, Body Image Concern and Sexual Self-Esteem Among Newlyweds.

##### *Objectives*

To assess sociocultural attitudes towards appearance among newly weds.

To assess body image concerns among newly weds.

To assess sexual self esteem among newly weds

To examine the relationship between sociocultural attitude towards appearance and body image concern.

To examine the relation between sociocultural attitude towards and sexual self esteem.

To examine the relation between body image and sexual self esteem.

##### *Hypothesis*

###### Null hypothesis

Ho1 : there will be no significant relationship between sociocultural attitudes towards appearance and body image concerns among newly weds.

Ho2 : there will be no significant relationship between body image concern and sexual self esteem among newly weds

Ho3: there will be no significant relationship between sociocultural attitudes towards appearance and sexual self esteem among newly weds

## Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, non-experimental, correlational research design to examine the relationships among sociocultural attitudes toward appearance, body image concerns, and sexual self-esteem among individuals in early marriages. As the study aimed to assess naturally occurring associations without manipulation of variables, a correlational design was deemed appropriate. Sociocultural attitudes toward appearance were treated as the predictor variable, while body image concerns and sexual self-esteem were treated as outcome variables.

Sociocultural attitudes toward appearance were assessed through subcomponents including internalization (low body fat, muscular/athletic) and perceived pressures (family, peers, media).

## Variables of the Study

### Predictor Variable

#### Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance

### Outcome Variables

#### Body Image Concerns

#### Sexual Self-Esteem

## Operational Definitions

Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance refer to the extent to which individuals internalize societal and cultural standards of physical attractiveness, as measured by scores obtained on the Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire-4 (SATAQ-4).

Body Image Concerns refer to dissatisfaction, anxiety, and cognitive preoccupation related to one's physical appearance, as measured by the Body Image Concern Inventory (BICI).

Sexual Self-Esteem refers to an individual's confidence, perceived competence, and positive self-evaluation as a sexual being, as measured by the Sexual Self-Esteem Scale (SSES).

Early Marriage in the present study refers to individuals who are currently within the first five years of marriage.

## Participants

### Population

The population comprised married adults in early stages of marriage.

### Sample Size

The proposed sample size ranges from 100 to 160 participants. This size is considered adequate for correlational and regression analyses, following recommendations of a minimum of 15–20 participants per predictor variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

### Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who met the predefined inclusion criteria.

### Inclusion Criteria:

Currently married for 1–5 years

Aged 18–45 years

Able to read and understand English or Hindi

Willing to provide informed consent

### Exclusion Criteria:

Individuals currently undergoing separation or divorce

Individuals with self-reported severe psychiatric conditions

Individuals married for more than five years

### Measures

#### Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire-4 (SATAQ-4)

Developed by Schaefer et al. (2015), the SATAQ-4 assesses internalization of societal appearance ideals and perceived pressures from media, peers, and family. The scale consists of 22 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Previous research reports high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .80-.95$ ).

#### Body Image Concern Inventory (BICI)

The BICI measures dysmorphic concerns and dissatisfaction related to physical appearance. It includes 19 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale demonstrates strong reliability ( $\alpha \approx .90$ ).

#### Sexual Self-Esteem Scale (SSES)

Developed by Snell and Papini (1989), the SSES assesses sexual confidence and sexual self-worth. It consists of Likert-type items with demonstrated acceptable reliability ( $\alpha > .80$ ).

### Procedure

Participants were recruited through social networks, community groups, and online platforms. After receiving study information, informed consent was obtained. Questionnaires were administered online via Google Forms. Completion time was approximately 20–30 minutes. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the process.

### Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary. Participants could withdraw at any time without penalty. No identifying information was collected. Data was used solely for academic purposes and stored securely.

Statistics

Table

Descriptive statistics of study variables (N = 162)

| Variable                          | Mi<br>n | Ma<br>x | M     | SD    | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|-------|-------|----------|----------|
| Internalization – Low Body Fat    | 5       | 24      | 13.78 | 4.61  | 0.14     | -0.59    |
| Internalization Muscular/Athletic | 5       | 24      | 12.36 | 4.45  | 0.52     | 0.22     |
| Family Pressure                   | 4       | 18      | 11.02 | 3.64  | 0.09     | -0.66    |
| Peer Pressure                     | 4       | 20      | 10.27 | 4.30  | 0.18     | -0.64    |
| Media Pressure                    | 4       | 19      | 11.40 | 3.43  | -0.22    | -0.33    |
| Sexual Self-Esteem                | 14      | 50      | 35.46 | 7.69  | -0.30    | -0.10    |
| Body Image Concern                | 19      | 92      | 45.56 | 15.02 | 0.55     | 0.65     |

Interpretation

The descriptive statistics indicated that the mean score for sexual self-esteem was  $M = 35.46$  ( $SD = 7.69$ ), while body image concern had a mean score of  $M = 45.56$  ( $SD = 15.02$ ).

Among sociocultural variables, internalization of low body fat showed the highest mean ( $M = 13.78$ ), followed by muscular/athletic internalization ( $M = 12.36$ ) and media pressure ( $M = 11.40$ ).

Skewness and kurtosis values were within acceptable limits ( $\pm 1$ ), suggesting that the data were approximately normally distributed.

Correlation Table  
 Table 2

| Variable              | 1         | 2         | 3         | 4         | 5         | 6    | 7 |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------|---|
| 1. INT Low Body Fat   | —         |           |           |           |           |      |   |
| 2. INT Muscular       | .75*<br>* | —         |           |           |           |      |   |
| 3. Family Pressure    | .37*<br>* | .56*<br>* | —         |           |           |      |   |
| 4. Peer Pressure      | .42*<br>* | .58*<br>* | .68*<br>* | —         |           |      |   |
| 5. Media Pressure     | .52*<br>* | .55*<br>* | .44*<br>* | .71*<br>* | —         |      |   |
| 6. Sexual Self-Esteem | .05       | .05       | .01       | .15       | .21       | —    |   |
| 7. Body Image Concern | .31*<br>* | .36*<br>* | .34*<br>* | .48*<br>* | .38*<br>* | -.03 | — |

Note. N = 162.  
 p < .01

### Interpretation

Pearson correlation analysis indicated that sociocultural variables were significantly positively correlated with each other. The Pearson correlations among the study variables. Internalization of the low body fat ideal was strongly and positively correlated with internalization of the muscular ideal ( $r = .75, p < .01$ ). It was also positively associated with family pressure ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ), peer pressure ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ), and media pressure ( $r = .52, p < .01$ ), while showing no significant relationship with sexual self-esteem ( $r = .05$ ). Similarly, internalization of the muscular ideal was positively correlated with family pressure ( $r = .56, p < .01$ ), peer pressure ( $r = .58, p < .01$ ), and media pressure ( $r = .55, p < .01$ ), but not with sexual self-esteem ( $r = .05$ ).

Family pressure demonstrated significant positive correlations with peer pressure ( $r = .68, p < .01$ ) and media pressure ( $r = .44, p < .01$ ). Peer pressure was also strongly associated with media pressure ( $r = .71, p < .01$ ). Sexual self-esteem showed weak and non-significant correlations with most variables, including internalization of low body fat ( $r = .05$ ), internalization of the muscular ideal ( $r = .05$ ), family pressure ( $r = .01$ ), and peer pressure ( $r = .15$ ), though it had a small positive association with media pressure ( $r = .21$ ).

Body image concern was found to be significantly and positively correlated with several sociocultural factors. Specifically, it showed a positive correlation with internalization of the low body fat ideal ( $r = .31, p < .01$ ) and internalization of the muscular ideal ( $r = .36, p < .01$ ). Additionally, body image concern was positively associated with perceived family pressure ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ), peer pressure ( $r = .48, p < .01$ ), and media pressure ( $r = .38, p < .01$ ). These findings indicate that greater internalization of body ideals and higher levels of perceived pressure from family, peers, and media are related to increased body image concerns.

In the correlation analysis, sexual self-esteem showed weak and non-significant relationships with the sociocultural attitudes toward appearance variables. Specifically, sexual self-esteem was minimally correlated with internalization of the low body fat ideal ( $r = .05$ ) and internalization of the muscular ideal ( $r = .05$ ). Similarly, its association with family pressure was negligible ( $r = .01$ ), while the relationship with peer pressure was slightly higher but still weak ( $r = .15$ ). Sexual self-esteem demonstrated the highest correlation with media pressure ( $r = .21$ ); however, this association remained small and did not reach the level of statistical significance at  $p < .01$ . Overall, these results indicate that sexual self-esteem was not significantly associated with the internalization of appearance ideals or perceived sociocultural pressures from family, peers, and media in the present sample.

### Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Sociocultural attitudes toward appearance will be significantly related to body image concern.

Since body image concern showed significant positive correlations with all sociocultural variables, The null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a significant relationship between sociocultural attitudes toward appearance and body image concern.

Hypothesis 2: Sociocultural attitudes toward appearance will be significantly related to sexual self-esteem.

Sexual self-esteem showed weak and non-significant correlations with sociocultural variables, indicating no meaningful relationship.

The null hypothesis was not rejected, indicating no significant relationship between sociocultural attitudes toward appearance and sexual self-esteem.

Hypothesis 3: Body image concern will be significantly related to sexual self-esteem.

The correlation between body image concern and sexual self-esteem was  $r = -0.03$ , which is non-significant.

The null hypothesis was not rejected, indicating no significant relationship between body image concern and sexual self-esteem.

### Predicting Sexual Self-Esteem

Table 3  
 Multiple regression predicting sexual self-esteem

| Predictor                      | B     | SE<br>B | $\beta$ | t     | p    |
|--------------------------------|-------|---------|---------|-------|------|
| Internalization – Low Body Fat | -0.08 | .203    | -.05    | -0.39 | .695 |
| Internalization – Muscular     | 0.04  | .234    | .02     | 0.18  | .860 |
| Family Pressure                | -0.29 | .235    | -.14    | -1.22 | .224 |
| Peer Pressure                  | 0.21  | .244    | .12     | 0.84  | .402 |



significant positive predictor of body image concern ( $\beta = .41, p = .001$ ), indicating that higher levels of perceived peer pressure were associated with greater body image concern. In contrast, other predictors—including internalization of low body fat ideals, muscular internalization, family pressure, and media pressure—did not significantly predict body image concern in the model.

#### Multicollinearity Check

Tolerance values ranged from 0.324 to 0.488 and VIF values ranged from 2.05 to 3.08, indicating no serious multicollinearity issues. The findings of the study indicate that sociocultural variables were strongly interrelated, suggesting that different sources of appearance-related influence such as family, peers, media, and the internalization of body ideals tend to co-occur. These sociocultural pressures were also significantly associated with body image concern, indicating that higher levels of perceived pressure and greater internalization of appearance ideals were linked to increased concerns about body image. Among the various sociocultural influences, peer pressure emerged as the strongest predictor of body image concern, highlighting the prominent role of peer-related appearance standards. In contrast, sociocultural factors did not significantly predict sexual self-esteem, suggesting that sexual self-perceptions may be influenced by factors beyond appearance-related pressures. The regression model further showed that sociocultural variables explained 24.9% of the variance in body image concern, whereas they accounted for only 5.9% of the variance in sexual self-esteem, indicating a much weaker explanatory power for sexual self-esteem compared to body image concern.

These findings suggest that sociocultural factors play a stronger role in influencing body image concerns than sexual self-esteem in the present sample.

#### Discussion

The present study titled “A Study on Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance and Their Relationship with Body Image Concern and Sexual Self-Esteem Among Newlyweds” aimed to examine the role of sociocultural influences on appearance and their association with body image concern and sexual self-esteem during the early stage of marriage. Sociocultural attitudes toward appearance were examined through five dimensions: family pressure, peer pressure, media pressure, internalization of muscular or athletic ideals, and internalization of low body fat ideals. The early period of marriage represents a significant developmental phase characterized by emotional adjustment, changing interpersonal roles, and increased intimacy. Therefore, understanding how sociocultural appearance pressures influence psychological outcomes such as body image concern and sexual self-esteem among newlyweds is particularly important.

The first objective of the study was to assess sociocultural attitudes toward appearance among newlyweds. The descriptive statistics revealed that participants reported moderate levels of sociocultural pressure related to appearance, with the highest mean score observed for internalization of low body fat ideals, followed by internalization of muscular or athletic ideals and media pressure. These findings suggest that newly married individuals may internalize socially constructed standards of attractiveness, particularly ideals associated with thinness and physical fitness. In many societies, attractiveness is often perceived as an important factor contributing to relationship satisfaction and social acceptance. As individuals transition into marriage, they may become more conscious of their physical appearance due to expectations regarding attractiveness within intimate relationships. Media portrayals of idealized body types, along with comments and comparisons from peers and family members, may reinforce the internalization of these appearance standards. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that sociocultural environments significantly shape individuals’ perceptions of their bodies and appearance ideals.

The second objective was to assess body image concerns among newlyweds. The findings indicated that participants experienced moderate levels of body image concern. Body image concern refers to individuals’ dissatisfaction, worry, or preoccupation with their physical appearance. For newlyweds, body image concerns may arise due to increased awareness of physical attractiveness within the marital relationship. The early stage of marriage often

involves increased emotional and physical closeness, which may heighten individuals' attention to their bodies and perceived attractiveness to their partner. Additionally, exposure to sociocultural beauty standards may create discrepancies between individuals' perceived appearance and the idealized standards promoted by society. Such discrepancies can contribute to increased body dissatisfaction and appearance-related concerns.

The third objective of the study was to assess sexual self-esteem among newlyweds. The descriptive findings indicated that participants reported moderate levels of sexual self-esteem. Sexual self-esteem refers to an individual's confidence, satisfaction, and positive evaluation of themselves as a sexual partner. Within the context of early marriage, sexual self-esteem may be shaped by several relational and psychological factors, including communication between partners, emotional intimacy, mutual trust, and relationship satisfaction. Unlike body image concerns, sexual self-esteem may be influenced more strongly by the quality of interpersonal interactions within the marital relationship rather than by external sociocultural pressures related to appearance.

The fourth objective examined the relationship between sociocultural attitudes toward appearance and body image concern among newlyweds. The results revealed significant positive correlations between sociocultural appearance pressures and body image concern, indicating that newlyweds who experienced greater pressure from family, peers, and media also reported higher levels of concern about their bodies. Further regression analysis demonstrated that sociocultural attitudes toward appearance significantly predicted body image concern, explaining approximately 24.9% of the variance. Among the predictors, peer pressure emerged as the strongest and only significant predictor of body image concern.

These findings are consistent with the Tripartite Influence Model (Thompson et al., 1999), which proposes that family, peers, and media are the primary sociocultural agents influencing body image development. According to this model, these influences contribute to body dissatisfaction through processes such as internalization of appearance ideals and social comparison. In particular, peer environments may intensify comparisons regarding appearance, thereby increasing body dissatisfaction. This finding also aligns with Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which suggests that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their attributes with those of others. Within peer groups, individuals may compare their physical appearance with perceived standards of attractiveness, leading to increased body image concerns when they perceive discrepancies between their appearance and these ideals.

The fifth objective was to examine the relationship between sociocultural attitudes toward appearance and sexual self-esteem among newlyweds. The findings indicated that sociocultural appearance pressures were not significantly related to sexual self-esteem, and the regression model predicting sexual self-esteem was also not statistically significant. This suggests that sociocultural influences related to appearance may not directly affect individuals' perceptions of their sexual competence or confidence during the early years of marriage. One possible explanation is that sexual self-esteem may be shaped primarily by interpersonal dynamics within the relationship, such as emotional closeness, partner approval, communication, and mutual respect. While sociocultural pressures may influence how individuals perceive their bodies, these influences may not necessarily extend to their sexual self-perceptions within a supportive marital relationship.

The sixth objective examined the relationship between body image concern and sexual self-esteem among newlyweds. The results indicated that body image concern was not significantly associated with sexual self-esteem. This finding suggests that concerns related to physical appearance did not strongly influence participants' perceptions of their sexual competence or satisfaction. One theoretical perspective that may help explain this finding is Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), which proposes that individuals may internalize societal standards of appearance and evaluate themselves based on how their bodies appear to others. However, in the context of supportive intimate relationships, individuals may experience greater acceptance and validation from their partners, which may reduce the impact of appearance-related concerns on their sexual self-esteem.

Overall, the findings of the present study suggest that sociocultural attitudes toward appearance play a significant role in shaping body image concerns among newlyweds, particularly through peer-related influences and social

comparison processes. However, these sociocultural pressures do not appear to significantly influence sexual self-esteem, which may be more strongly shaped by relational and interpersonal factors within the marital relationship. These findings highlight the importance of addressing peer-related appearance pressures and unrealistic sociocultural beauty standards in efforts to reduce body image concerns. At the same time, they emphasize the role of supportive and communicative marital relationships in promoting healthy sexual self-esteem among newlyweds.

The first hypothesis proposed that there would be no significant relationship between sociocultural attitudes toward appearance and body image concerns among newlyweds. The results partially rejected this null hypothesis, as significant positive correlations were found between sociocultural pressures and body image concern, with peer pressure emerging as the strongest predictor.

The second hypothesis stated that there would be no significant relationship between body image concern and sexual self-esteem among newlyweds. The results failed to reject this null hypothesis, as body image concern was not significantly associated with sexual self-esteem.

The third hypothesis proposed that there would be no significant relationship between sociocultural attitudes toward appearance and sexual self-esteem among newlyweds. The results supported this null hypothesis, as sociocultural variables were not significantly associated with sexual self-esteem.

Overall, the findings suggest that sociocultural influences are strongly related to body image perceptions but have limited influence on sexual self-esteem during the early stages of marriage. These results underscore the importance of considering both sociocultural and relational factors when examining psychological well-being among newly married individuals.

### Clinical Implications

The findings highlight the importance of addressing body image concerns in marital counseling and sexual health interventions. Given the significant association between body image dissatisfaction and sexual self-esteem, therapeutic interventions aimed at improving body acceptance may indirectly enhance sexual confidence and relational intimacy. Psychoeducation regarding sociocultural pressures and unrealistic appearance ideals may also help individuals develop more adaptive self-perceptions.

### Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study employed a cross-sectional correlational design, which does not permit causal conclusions. Second, all data were collected through self-report measures, which may be influenced by social desirability bias, particularly given the sensitive nature of sexual self-esteem. Third, although the sample included newly married individuals, it was limited to a specific cultural and linguistic group, which may restrict generalizability. Fourth, the regression model explained a relatively small proportion of variance in sexual self-esteem, suggesting that additional relational, psychological, or contextual variables should be examined in future research.

### Future Directions

Future research should consider longitudinal designs to examine how sociocultural attitudes and body image concerns evolve over time in early marriage. Mediation and moderation analyses could further clarify whether body image mediates the relationship between sociocultural pressures and sexual self-esteem. Additionally, dyadic research including both partners would provide deeper insight into interpersonal influences on body image and sexual confidence within marriage.

## Conclusion

The present study, “A Study on Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance and Their Relationship with Body Image Concern and Sexual Self-Esteem Among Newlyweds,” aimed to explore how sociocultural appearance pressures relate to body image concern and sexual self-esteem during the early stage of marriage. The findings provide insight into how newlyweds experience and respond to societal standards of attractiveness.

The results revealed that newlyweds reported moderate levels of sociocultural appearance pressures, body image concern, and sexual self-esteem. Among the sociocultural influences, internalization of low body fat ideals and muscular ideals were most prominent, indicating that newly married individuals tend to internalize socially constructed beauty standards related to thinness and physical fitness.

The study found that sociocultural attitudes toward appearance were significantly associated with body image concern, with peer pressure emerging as the strongest predictor. This suggests that newlyweds may experience greater body image concerns when they perceive appearance-related expectations and comparisons within their social environments.

However, the findings also indicated that sociocultural attitudes toward appearance and body image concern were not significantly related to sexual self-esteem. This suggests that sexual self-esteem among newlyweds may be influenced more by relationship-based factors such as emotional intimacy, partner acceptance, and communication, rather than by sociocultural appearance pressures.

Overall, the study highlights that while sociocultural influences significantly shape body image perceptions among newlyweds, sexual self-esteem appears to be more strongly influenced by interpersonal dynamics within the marital relationship. These findings contribute to understanding the psychological experiences of newlyweds in relation to body image and sexuality within a sociocultural context.

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