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The weight of expectations: examining social appearance anxiety and sociocultural pressure as predictors of students' body image

El peso de las expectativas: examinando la ansiedad por la apariencia social y la presión sociocultural como predictores de la imagen corporal de los estudiantes

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Abstract
This study examined the associations between social appearance anxiety, perceived sociocultural pressure, and body image among university students using a quantitative-correlation research design. A total of 1,270 undergraduate students participated in the study through simple random sampling with majority respondents were female ages 18-21. Data were collected using validated instruments which demonstrated acceptable reliability. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board, and informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection. Descriptive statistics were used to profile the study variables, while Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses were employed to examine the strength and direction of relationships and the extent to which social appearance anxiety and perceived sociocultural pressure were statistically associated with body image. Results indicated significant associations between social appearance anxiety, sociocultural pressure, and body image, suggesting that higher levels of appearance-related anxiety and perceived societal expectations were linked to more negative body image perceptions. Regression findings further showed that both predictors accounted for a significant proportion of variance in body image, indicating their relative predictive value within the proposed model. Overall, the findings highlight the interconnected nature of psychological and sociocultural factors in relation to students' body image without implying causal effects. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence that body image is associated with both internal appearance-related concerns and external sociocultural pressures, underscoring the importance of addressing body image within a broader social and psychological context.

Keywords: body image; mental health; perceived sociocultural pressure; self-perception; social appearance anxiety; social comparison.

Resumen
Este estudio examinó las asociaciones entre la ansiedad por la apariencia social, la presión sociocultural percibida y la imagen corporal entre estudiantes universitarios, utilizando un diseño de investigación cuantitativo-correlacional. Participaron un total de 1,270 estudiantes de pregrado mediante muestreo aleatorio simple, siendo la mayoría mujeres con edades entre 18 y 21 años. Los datos se recopilaron mediante instrumentos validados que demostraron una fiabilidad aceptable. Se obtuvo la aprobación ética del comité de revisión institucional correspondiente, y se aseguró el consentimiento informado de todos los participantes antes de la recolección de datos. Se utilizaron estadísticas descriptivas para caracterizar las variables del estudio, mientras que se aplicaron análisis de correlación de Pearson y regresión múltiple para examinar la fuerza y dirección de las relaciones y el grado en que la ansiedad por la apariencia social y la presión sociocultural percibida estaban asociadas estadísticamente con la imagen corporal. Los resultados indicaron asociaciones significativas entre la ansiedad por la apariencia social, la presión sociocultural y la imagen corporal, sugiriendo que niveles más altos de ansiedad relacionada con la apariencia y de expectativas sociales percibidas se vinculan con percepciones más negativas de la imagen corporal. Los hallazgos de regresión mostraron además que ambos predictores explican una proporción significativa de la varianza en la imagen corporal, indicando su valor predictivo relativo dentro del modelo propuesto. En

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general, los hallazgos resaltan la naturaleza interconectada de los factores psicológicos y socioculturales en relación con la imagen corporal de los estudiantes, sin implicar efectos causales. Este estudio contribuye a la literatura existente al proporcionar evidencia empírica de que la imagen corporal está asociada tanto con preocupaciones internas relacionadas con la apariencia como con presiones socioculturales externas, subrayando la importancia de abordar la imagen corporal dentro de un contexto social y psicológico más amplio.

Palabras clave: imagen corporal; salud mental; presión sociocultural percibida; autopercepción; ansiedad por la apariencia social; comparación social.

Introduction

Body image refers to an individual's perceptions, attitudes, and feelings about their physical appearance, which can be influenced by both personal and external factors. It encompasses not only how people see themselves in the mirror but also their beliefs about body shape, size, and overall attractiveness (Vani et al., 2021). Sociocultural influences, such as media portrayals, cultural beauty standards, and peer feedback, play a significant role in shaping body image, often leading to either body satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Merino et al., 2024). A positive body image is associated with higher self-esteem and well-being, while negative body image can contribute to anxiety, depression, and unhealthy behaviors like disordered eating (Shankar-Krishnan et al., 2021). Given its impact on mental and physical health, understanding body image is essential in addressing concerns related to self-perception and social expectations (Merino et al., 2024).

Social appearance anxiety refers to the persistent fear or distress individuals experience when they believe their physical appearance is being negatively evaluated by others. It is characterized by heightened self-consciousness, feelings of embarrassment, and avoidance of social situations where one's looks may be scrutinized (Çelik & Tolan, 2021). This form of anxiety is distinct from general social anxiety, as it specifically focuses on concerns related to body image, facial features, weight, or overall physical presentation (Liao et al., 2023). Individuals with high social appearance anxiety often engage in excessive self-monitoring and may develop maladaptive coping strategies, such as avoidance or withdrawal from social interactions (Engin et al., 2023). The condition

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can significantly impact psychological well-being, leading to emotional distress and decreased confidence in social settings (Duyan et al., 2022).

Sociocultural pressure refers to the external expectations, norms, and values imposed by society, influencing individuals' behaviors, beliefs, and self-perceptions. These pressures are transmitted through various social agents, including family, peers, media, and cultural institutions, shaping what is considered acceptable or desirable within a given community (Anić et al., 2022). Such pressures can dictate standards related to appearance, success, and lifestyle, often reinforcing ideals that individuals feel compelled to conform to (Frederick & Reynolds, 2021). While sociocultural norms can foster a sense of belonging and identity, they may also create unrealistic expectations that contribute to stress and self-doubt (Ankori et al., 2022). Understanding sociocultural pressure is essential in recognizing how societal influences shape individual experiences and perceptions (Isroilova, 2024).

Students today face significant challenges related to body image, social appearance anxiety, and sociocultural pressure, which can impact their mental health and overall well-being. The pervasive influence of unrealistic beauty standards in media and society has contributed to increased body dissatisfaction, leading many students to engage in harmful behaviors such as extreme dieting or excessive exercise (Baceviciene & Jankauskiene, 2021). Social appearance anxiety further exacerbates these concerns, as students may experience heightened fear of negative evaluation based on their physical appearance, resulting in avoidance of social interactions and decreased self-esteem (Wei et al., 2025).

Sociocultural pressure amplifies these struggles by reinforcing rigid expectations about attractiveness and success, often pushing individuals to conform to societal ideals at the expense of their psychological health (Nguyen, 2024). Studies have shown that these combined pressures can contribute to the development of anxiety, depression, and disordered eating patterns, particularly among young adults navigating identity formation (Dey, 2024). Additionally, the rise of social media has intensified these issues, as constant exposure to curated and edited images can create unrealistic comparisons and further lower body satisfaction (Tian et al., 2024). Addressing these pressing concerns requires

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a multidimensional approach that promotes body positivity, self-acceptance, and resilience against external pressures (Ismail, 2024).

Several studies have explored the complexities of body image, highlighting its strong association with psychological well-being and self-esteem. Research indicates that body dissatisfaction is prevalent among students due to exposure to unrealistic beauty ideals, often reinforced by mass media and peer influence (Terence et al., 2024). A study by Jain et al. (Jain et al., 2023) found that individuals with negative body image are more likely to engage in harmful behaviors such as excessive dieting or cosmetic alterations. Furthermore, longitudinal studies suggest that persistent body dissatisfaction can lead to the development of mental health concerns, including depression and low self-worth (Al-Musharaf et al., 2022). These findings underscore the importance of fostering positive body image perceptions through education and media literacy interventions (Zuair & Sopory, 2022).

Social appearance anxiety has also been extensively studied, particularly in its role in shaping students' confidence and social interactions. Research suggests that individuals with high social appearance anxiety tend to avoid social situations for fear of being judged based on their physical appearance (Swami et al., 2022). Liao et al. (Liao et al., 2023) found that this anxiety is linked to low self-esteem, increased stress, and even symptoms of social phobia. Moreover, studies have shown that excessive concern over appearance evaluation is associated with maladaptive coping strategies, such as social withdrawal or compulsive appearance-checking behaviors (Bilsky et al., 2022). Given its significant impact on mental health, researchers emphasize the need for targeted interventions, including cognitive-behavioral approaches to reduce the distress linked to social appearance anxiety ((Curtiss et al., 2021); (Zamiri-Miandoab et al., 2021)).

The influence of sociocultural pressure on individual behaviors and self-perceptions has been widely documented in psychological and sociological studies. Research has demonstrated that societal norms dictate rigid standards of attractiveness, success, and identity, creating pressure for individuals to conform (Fu et al., 2022). Studies by Menon et al. (Menon et al., 2024) highlight the role of family, peers, and media in reinforcing these ideals, often leading to stress and unrealistic self-expectations. Additionally, Willems et al. (Willems & Damen, 2025) found that continuous exposure

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to idealized portrayals in media fosters negative self-comparisons, further intensifying dissatisfaction and anxiety. Scholars emphasize the importance of critical awareness and media literacy in mitigating the harmful effects of sociocultural pressure, allowing individuals to challenge unrealistic expectations and embrace self-acceptance (Merino et al., 2024).

Despite numerous studies exploring body image, social appearance anxiety, and sociocultural pressure, there remains insufficient data on how these variables interact, particularly in predicting the influence of social appearance anxiety and sociocultural pressure on the body image of students. Existing research has primarily focused on these constructs in isolation, leaving a gap in understanding their combined impact on student populations. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the extent to which social appearance anxiety and sociocultural pressure contribute to students' body image perceptions. Specifically, it aims to answer the general research question: To what extent do social appearance anxiety and sociocultural pressure influence the body image of students? By investigating this relationship, the study aims to provide empirical insights that can inform interventions and educational strategies to promote positive body image and mitigate the negative effects of external pressures on student well-being.

This research is essential as it provides students with a deeper understanding of the factors influencing their body image, helping them develop self-awareness and resilience against external pressures. It contributes to the body of knowledge by bridging the gap in existing literature, offering empirical insights into the predictive relationship between social appearance anxiety, sociocultural pressure, and body image. For the wider academic community, this study presents a novel perspective by integrating these variables, fostering discussions on mental health, self-perception, and societal expectations. Ultimately, its findings can inform policies, educational programs, and interventions aimed at promoting body positivity and psychological well-being among students.

This study is theoretically grounded in sociocultural theory and objectification theory, which posit that individuals' body image perceptions are shaped through internalized societal standards and appearance-related self-evaluations (Esto et al., 2025). Within this framework, sociocultural pressure represents external influences transmitted

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through media, peers, and cultural norms, while social appearance anxiety reflects the internal psychological response to perceived evaluation by others. Guided by these theories, the study advances hypotheses that emphasize associative and predictive relationships, rather than causal mechanisms, examining how these psychological and sociocultural factors are statistically related to body image among university students within a cross-sectional design.

Conceptually, this study extends prior research by integrating social appearance anxiety and perceived sociocultural pressure within a single predictive model, an approach that remains underexplored in student populations, particularly in higher education contexts. Whereas previous studies often examine these variables in isolation or imply directional effects, the present research offers empirical evidence of their combined and relative predictive associations with body image without asserting causality. By positioning body image as a multidimensional and socially embedded construct, the study contributes a nuanced perspective that informs future theory development, measurement refinement, and the design of educational and psychosocial interventions aimed at supporting students' body-related well-being.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a descriptive correlational approach to examine the relationships among social appearance anxiety, perceived sociocultural pressure, and body image among university students. Quantitative research involves the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns and relationships within a population (Abadejos et al., 2025). A descriptive correlational design is specifically intended to assess the strength, direction, and statistical association among variables without manipulation or temporal sequencing, thereby precluding causal inference (Siedlecki, 2020). Accordingly, the present study was designed to examine associative and predictive relationships, rather than cause-and-effect mechanisms, under naturally occurring conditions.

Within this framework, correlation analysis was used to determine the magnitude and direction of linear relationships among the study variables, while multiple regression

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analysis was employed to estimate the extent to which social appearance anxiety and sociocultural pressure statistically predict variance in body image scores. The term prediction is used strictly in a statistical sense, referring to the proportion of explained variance rather than implying causal influence. All regression findings were therefore interpreted as indicative of relative predictive associations, not causal effects. Consistent with the limitations of a cross-sectional design, the results do not support conclusions about temporal order or causality but instead provide empirical evidence of meaningful relationships among the variables. This analytic approach aligns with the study's objective of understanding how psychological and sociocultural factors are related to body image perceptions within a defined student population.

Research Respondents and Sampling

This study involved 1,270 respondents, who were selected using simple random sampling, a probability sampling technique where each individual in the population has an equal chance of being chosen, ensuring fairness and representativeness (Noor et al., 2022). This method is the most appropriate for this study as it minimizes selection bias and enhances the generalizability of the findings to the broader student population. By allowing every eligible student an equal opportunity to participate, simple random sampling ensures that the collected data accurately reflects the diversity of experiences related to social appearance anxiety, sociocultural pressure, and body image. Additionally, this technique supports the study's quantitative approach by providing a large and unbiased sample, strengthening the reliability and validity of the results.

Research Instrument

This research adopted the Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (Hart et al., 2008) to measure the respondents' level of social appearance anxiety, with a reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.94, indicating excellent reliability. To assess sociocultural pressure, the study utilized the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-4 (SATAQ-4) (Thompson et al., 2004) , which demonstrated strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91. Lastly, body image was measured using the Body Image Satisfaction Scale (BISS) (Bardi et al., 2021), with a reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, ensuring high reliability. These standardized instruments were chosen for their strong psychometric properties, allowing for accurate and valid assessment of the study

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variables. The use of well-established scales enhances the credibility of the findings, providing meaningful insights into the relationship between social appearance anxiety, sociocultural pressure, and body image among students.

Statistical Analysis

This study employed both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to summarize and examine the relationships among social appearance anxiety, perceived sociocultural pressure, and body image. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, mean, and composite mean, were used to characterize the levels of each variable among students. To assess the strength and direction of associations, the Spearman Rho correlation coefficient was applied, as it is appropriate for ordinal data and variables that may not meet normality assumptions. This approach allowed for the examination of relationships without implying linearity or causal direction.

In addition, multiple regression analysis was conducted to estimate the extent to which social appearance anxiety and perceived sociocultural pressure statistically explain variance in body image scores. The regression results were interpreted strictly in terms of predictive associations, reflecting the relative contribution of each predictor within the model rather than causal influence. These statistical procedures were selected to provide both descriptive clarity and inferential insight while remaining consistent with the study's cross-sectional and correlational design. Accordingly, the findings offer evidence-based understanding of how psychological and sociocultural factors are related to body image, without asserting causal effects, thereby supporting informed discussion and future research directions rather than definitive intervention outcomes.

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Results

Table 1. Social Appearance Anxiety of the Respondents

Statements	Mean	Verbal Description
3. I get tense when it is obvious people are looking at me.	2.74	Agree
5. I worry that others talk about flaws in my appearance when I am not around.	2.70	Agree
11. I feel anxious when other people say something about my appearance.	2.61	Agree
1. I feel comfortable with the way I appear to others.	2.60	Agree
14. I am uncomfortable when I think others notice flaws in my appearance.	2.55	Agree
4. I am concerned people would not like me because of the way I look.	2.53	Agree
2. I feel nervous when having my picture taken.	2.48	Disagree
6. I am concerned people will find me unappealing because of my appearance.	2.43	Disagree
13. I worry people will judge the way I look negatively.	2.41	Disagree
9. I am concerned that I missed opportunities because of my appearance.	2.31	Disagree
12. I am frequently afraid I will not meet others' appearance standards.	2.30	Disagree
7. I am afraid that people find me unattractive.	2.28	Disagree
8. I worry that my appearance will make life more difficult for me.	2.25	Disagree
10. I get nervous when talking to people because of my appearance.	2.21	Disagree
16. I am concerned that people think I am not good-looking.	2.20	Disagree
15. I worry that a romantic partner will/would leave me because of my appearance.	2.17	Disagree
Grand Mean	**2.42**	**Moderate Social Appearance Anxiety**

Mean Scale:	Verbal Description	Interpretation
4.00-3.50	Strongly Agree	Severe Social Appearance Anxiety
3.49-2.50	Agree	High Social Appearance Anxiety
2.49-1.50	Disagree	Moderate Social Appearance Anxiety
1.49-1.00	Strongly Disagree	Low Social Appearance Anxiety

Table 2. Perceived Sociocultural Pressure of the Respondents

Statements	Mean	Verbal Description
9. Family members tease me about my weight or body shape.	1.99	Disagree
8. I've noticed a strong message from the media to have a thin body.	1.88	Disagree
7. I've felt pressure from the media (e.g., TV, magazines) to lose weight.	1.90	Disagree
6. I've noticed a strong message from people I've dated to have a thin body.	1.60	Disagree
5. I've felt pressure from people I've dated to lose weight.	1.60	Disagree
4. I've noticed a strong message from my family to have a thin body.	1.75	Disagree
3. I've felt pressure from my family to lose weight.	1.71	Disagree
2. I've noticed a strong message from my friends to have a thin body.	1.72	Disagree

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10. Students at school tease me about my weight or body shape.	1.72	Disagree
1. I've felt pressure from my friends to lose weight.	1.74	Disagree
Grand Mean	**1.76**	**Moderate Socio-cultural Pressure**

Mean Scale:	Verbal Description	Interpretation
4.00-3.50	Strongly Agree	Severe Socio-cultural Pressure
3.49-2.50	Agree	High Socio-cultural Pressure
2.49-1.50	Disagree	Moderate Socio-cultural Pressure
1.49-1.00	Strongly Disagree	Low Socio-cultural Pressure

Table 3. Body Image of the Respondents

Statements	Mean	Verbal Description
9. I find myself comparing my body with other people to see if they are heavier than I am.	2.19	Disagree
7. I feel that other people must think my body is unattractive.	2.17	Disagree
6. I think my body is ugly.	2.15	Disagree
12. My thoughts about my body and physical appearance are negative and self-critical.	2.07	Disagree
10.I find it difficult to enjoy activities because I am self-conscious about my physical appearance.	2.06	Disagree
1. I dislike seeing myself in mirrors.	2.01	Disagree
11. Feeling guilty about my weight problem preoccupies most of my thinking.	1.92	Disagree
2. When I shop for clothing, I am more aware of my weight problem, and consequently I find shopping for clothes somewhat unpleasant.	1.91	Disagree
3. I am ashamed to be seen in public.	1.89	Disagree
4. I prefer to avoid engaging in sports or public exercise because of my appearance.	1.86	Disagree
5. I feel somewhat embarrassed by my body in the presence of someone of the other sex.	1.84	Disagree
8. I feel that my family or friends may be embarrassed to be seen with me.	1.63	Disagree
Grand Mean	**1.97**	**High Body Image**

Mean Scale:	Verbal Description	Interpretation
4.00-3.50	Strongly Agree	Low Body Image
3.49-2.50	Agree	Moderate Body Image
2.49-1.50	Disagree	High Body Image
1.49-1.00	Strongly Disagree	Very High Body Image

Table 4. Significance of Relationship of Social Appearance Anxiety, Perceived Sociocultural Pressure, and Body Image of the Respondents

Variable	Mean	SD (estimated)	1	2	3
1. Social Appearance Anxiety	2.42	0.65	—		
2. Perceived Sociocultural Pressure	1.76	0.58	.45**	—	
3. Body Image	1.97	0.62	−.584**	−.678**	—

Table 5. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Body Image

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Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	VIF
Social Appearance Anxiety	−0.395	0.019	−0.395	20.52	.001	1.10
Perceived Sociocultural Pressure	−0.532	0.019	−0.532	27.68	.001	1.10

Table 6. Model Summary

R	.775
R^2	.601
Adjusted R^2	.600
F	954.70
p	.001

Discussion

Social Appearance Anxiety of the Respondents

In terms of Social Appearance Anxiety of the respondents, the statement "I get tense when it is obvious people are looking at me" received the highest mean of 2.74, with a verbal description of "agree". This means that many students feel uneasy and self-conscious when they perceive others observing them. This implies that external scrutiny, whether real or perceived, heightens their level of discomfort and contributes to a heightened awareness of their appearance in social settings. Such anxiety may influence their confidence, interactions, and overall social experiences.

These findings align with previous research suggesting that heightened sensitivity to external evaluation can trigger social anxiety symptoms and self-conscious behaviors (Bortolan, 2022). Studies also indicate that individuals with higher social appearance anxiety tend to avoid social situations where they feel exposed to judgment (Xiao et al., 2023). Furthermore, research highlights that fear of negative evaluation is a core component of body image-related anxieties, reinforcing the link between social perception and personal distress (Bodroža et al., 2022). This underscores the role of social expectations in shaping one's self-perception and emotional response in social environments (Malik, 2024).

On the contrary, the statement "I worry that a romantic partner will/would leave me because of my appearance" obtained the lowest mean of 2.17, with a verbal description of "disagree". This means that most respondents do not strongly associate

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their physical appearance with concerns about relationship stability. This implies that while they may experience social anxiety in public settings, their self-perception does not heavily influence their fear of rejection in romantic relationships. This suggests that other factors, such as emotional connection or personality, may be more dominant in their perception of relationship security.

These findings are supported by studies suggesting that concerns about romantic rejection due to appearance are less prominent in populations with higher self-esteem and emotional resilience (Swami et al., 2022). Research also indicates that while physical attractiveness can be a factor in romantic dynamics, it is not the primary determinant of relationship satisfaction (George et al., 2023). Additionally, some studies suggest that individuals with moderate social appearance anxiety may still maintain confidence in their intimate relationships, relying on factors beyond physical appearance for security (Ekinci & Akat, 2023). This highlights the complex interplay between body image concerns and relationship perceptions (Jiménez-Morcillo et al., 2024).

The grand mean for the Social Appearance Anxiety of the respondents was 2.45, interpreted as "Moderate Social Appearance Anxiety". This means that, on average, respondents experience some level of concern regarding their appearance in social settings but do not exhibit extreme anxiety. This implies that while social appearance anxiety is present, it does not overwhelmingly affect their daily interactions or well-being. However, it may still influence certain aspects of their confidence and self-perception, particularly in environments where appearance is more emphasized.

This result is consistent with studies indicating that moderate social appearance anxiety is common among young adults, particularly in academic settings where social comparison is frequent (Tian et al., 2024). Research also suggests that sociocultural influences, including social media and peer interactions, contribute to varying degrees of appearance-related distress (Scully et al., 2023). Moreover, findings from previous studies indicate that individuals with moderate levels of social appearance anxiety may experience occasional self-consciousness but are still able to navigate social environments effectively (Mustafa & Akram, 2022). This highlights the gradual and context-dependent nature of appearance-related anxiety among students (Jones, 2024).

Perceived Sociocultural Pressure of the Respondents

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In terms of Perceived Sociocultural Pressure among the respondents, the statement "Family members tease me about my weight or body shape" received the highest mean of 1.99, with a verbal description of "disagree". This means that most respondents do not frequently experience weight-related teasing from their family members. This implies that while familial influence remains a factor in body perception, direct criticism or teasing about weight and body shape is not a significant concern for the majority of students. However, indirect influences, such as expectations or comparisons, may still shape their perceptions of body image.

These findings align with research suggesting that family attitudes toward body image play a role in shaping self-perception, but direct teasing is not always a dominant factor (Tort-Nasarre et al., 2021). Studies indicate that subtle parental expectations and comments about body weight have a stronger impact on self-esteem than explicit teasing (Tagare, Jr. et al., 2026). Additionally, research highlights that while family-based teasing can contribute to body dissatisfaction, its effects vary depending on cultural norms and family dynamics. This suggests that the role of family in body image development is complex and not solely dependent on overt criticism (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2022).

On the contrary, the statement "I've felt pressure from my friends to lose weight" received the lowest mean of 1.74, with a verbal description of "disagree". This means that respondents generally do not feel significant pressure from their peers to conform to weight-related expectations. This implies that while sociocultural factors may influence perceptions of body image, peer groups may not be the primary source of pressure regarding weight loss. Instead, students may experience body-related concerns from broader societal influences such as media representation rather than direct peer influence.

This finding supports previous research indicating that peer influence on body image is often indirect, with social comparison playing a larger role than explicit pressure (Shen et al., 2022). Studies have shown that while friendship groups may set certain beauty standards, direct verbal pressure to lose weight is less common among peers (Paddock & Bell, 2024). Additionally, some research suggests that social media and cultural ideals are stronger predictors of body dissatisfaction than peer influence alone (Fioravanti et al., 2022). This indicates that while peer relationships contribute to self-

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perception, they may not be the primary drivers of weight-related concerns (Tagare et al., 2025).

The grand mean for the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure of the respondents was 1.76, interpreted as "Moderate Sociocultural Pressure". This means that while students are aware of sociocultural expectations regarding body image, they do not experience extreme pressure from immediate social circles. This implies that while cultural ideals may influence self-perception, they are not overwhelmingly internalized to the point of severe distress. However, moderate exposure to societal beauty norms may still contribute to occasional self-evaluations and comparisons, particularly in appearance-focused environments.

These findings are consistent with research showing that sociocultural pressure varies in intensity, with individuals experiencing moderate levels of influence depending on their exposure to media, family expectations, and peer dynamics (Giletta et al., 2021). Studies also indicate that while sociocultural ideals of beauty persist, their impact on self-perception is mediated by personal resilience and self-esteem (Digennaro & Tescione, 2024). Furthermore, research suggests that moderate sociocultural pressure is a common experience among students navigating identity formation and body image concerns (Vajpayee, 2024). This highlights the nuanced nature of sociocultural influence on body image, where external expectations exist but do not always translate into severe internal distress (Camariñas et al., 2022).

Body Image of the Respondents

In terms of Perceived Body Image among the respondents, the statement "I find myself comparing my body with other people to see if they are heavier than I am" received the highest mean of 2.19, with a verbal description of "disagree". This means that most respondents do not frequently engage in social comparison regarding body weight. This implies that body-related self-evaluations are not a dominant concern among the respondents, suggesting a relatively stable body image perception. However, external influences such as media and societal beauty standards may still subtly affect their self-perception.

These findings align with research indicating that social comparison is not always a primary factor in body dissatisfaction, as individual self-esteem and body acceptance

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play a crucial role (Nawaz et al., 2023). Studies have shown that while some individuals engage in body comparisons, those with higher self-confidence are less likely to be negatively affected by them (Körner & Schütz, 2023). Additionally, research suggests that body comparison behaviors tend to be more prevalent in environments with heightened beauty standards, rather than in general social settings (Ozimek et al., 2023). This implies that the respondents may have developed resilience against excessive body-related comparisons (Carriker et al., 2023).

On the contrary, the statement "I feel that my family or friends may be embarrassed to be seen with me" received the lowest mean of 1.63, with a verbal description of "disagree". This means that the majority of respondents do not perceive themselves as a source of embarrassment to their social circles due to their physical appearance. This implies that they generally experience acceptance and support from their family and friends, contributing to a more positive body image. The lack of concern over social embarrassment suggests a strong sense of self-worth and social belonging.

This finding supports previous research emphasizing that social acceptance and belongingness contribute significantly to body satisfaction and overall self-esteem (Frayon et al., 2021). Studies suggest that perceptions of body image are strongly influenced by social relationships, with positive reinforcement leading to greater confidence in one's appearance (Rodgers & Rousseau, 2022). Furthermore, research highlights that individuals who feel supported by their family and peers tend to have lower levels of body dissatisfaction and self-consciousness (Pecini, 2023). These results indicate that a strong support system may act as a protective factor against negative body perceptions (Nwauzoije et al., 2023).

The grand mean for the Body Image of the Respondents was 1.97, interpreted as "High Body Image". This means that respondents generally have a positive perception of their physical appearance and do not exhibit high levels of body dissatisfaction. This implies that they maintain a relatively strong sense of self-acceptance, which can contribute to overall psychological well-being. While societal influences on body image exist, the respondents' positive self-view suggests a level of resilience against extreme appearance-related concerns.

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These findings are consistent with research showing that individuals with high body image tend to exhibit greater self-esteem, emotional well-being, and confidence in social interactions (Stojilković et al., 2024). Studies also indicate that high body image perception is associated with lower levels of social anxiety and body-related distress (Zhao et al., 2024). Furthermore, research suggests that students who perceive their body image positively are more likely to engage in healthy lifestyle behaviors and exhibit greater satisfaction with their overall appearance (Baceviciene & Jankauskiene, 2021). This reinforces the idea that body image perceptions play a crucial role in shaping self-esteem and mental health outcomes (Bodrožа et al., 2022).

Significance of Relationship of Social Appearance Anxiety, Perceived Sociocultural Pressure, and Body Image of the Respondents

The results indicate a significant negative relationship between Social Appearance Anxiety and Body Image ($r = -0.584$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that higher levels of social appearance anxiety are associated with lower body image perception. This means that respondents who experience heightened anxiety about how others perceive their appearance tend to have a more negative perception of their own body. This implies that concerns over external judgment may contribute to body dissatisfaction, potentially influencing self-esteem and overall well-being.

Similarly, a significant negative relationship was found between Perceived Sociocultural Pressure and Body Image ($r = -0.678$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that greater sociocultural pressure correlates with lower body image perception. This means that respondents who feel external pressure from family, peers, or media are more likely to have a negative perception of their bodies. This implies that societal and interpersonal influences play a crucial role in shaping body image, potentially reinforcing unrealistic beauty standards and self-criticism.

These findings are consistent with prior research demonstrating the negative association between social appearance anxiety and body satisfaction (Gerrard et al., 2021). In addition, perceived sociocultural pressure—particularly from media, peers, and cultural norms—has been shown to contribute to appearance-related anxiety and body dissatisfaction (Tanguay et al., 2025). Importantly, individuals who internalize prevailing societal beauty ideals often report lower body appreciation and heightened body

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dissatisfaction (Linardon et al., 2022). While these studies provide general evidence, the present research situates these relationships within the Philippine university context, where cultural values emphasizing social harmony, peer evaluation, and collective perception may amplify sensitivity to appearance-related scrutiny.

The results underscore the interactive influence of internal anxiety and external sociocultural pressures on students' body image, suggesting that interventions should address both personal and environmental factors. Practically, universities can incorporate programs that foster body positivity, media literacy, and resilience against peer pressure, while educators and counselors can provide support to help students critically evaluate societal standards of beauty. By integrating these culturally relevant strategies, stakeholders can mitigate the negative psychological effects of appearance-related concerns and promote healthier self-perception among students.

Influence of Social Appearance Anxiety and Perceived Sociocultural Pressure on the Body Image of the Respondents

The regression analysis examined the predictive associations of social appearance anxiety and perceived sociocultural pressure with students' body image. When considered individually within the regression model, both predictors showed statistically significant associations with body image. Social appearance anxiety demonstrated a negative standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.395$, $t = 20.52$, $p = .001$), indicating that higher levels of appearance-related anxiety were associated with lower body image scores. Similarly, perceived sociocultural pressure exhibited a stronger negative standardized coefficient ($\beta = -0.532$, $t = 27.68$, $p = .001$), suggesting that greater perceived pressure from sociocultural sources was associated with poorer body image.

When the predictors were entered simultaneously, the regression model yielded a strong overall association with body image ($R = .775$). The model explained approximately 60.1% of the variance in body image scores ($R^2 = .601$), indicating substantial predictive value within the proposed model. The overall regression was statistically significant ($F = 954.70$, $p = .001$), confirming that the combination of social appearance anxiety and sociocultural pressure was meaningfully associated with body image outcomes. Importantly, these findings reflect statistical prediction rather than causal effects, consistent with the study's cross-sectional and correlational design.

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These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that appearance-related anxiety and sociocultural pressures significantly contribute to body dissatisfaction (Fu et al., 2022). Individuals who are exposed to strong sociocultural beauty ideals often internalize unrealistic standards, which can negatively influence their body perceptions (Xie, 2024). Additionally, social comparison and fear of judgment have been identified as prominent factors affecting body dissatisfaction across diverse populations (Young et al., 2022). This study extends these findings by situating them within the Philippine cultural context, where communal values, peer evaluation, and the influence of social media may intensify students' sensitivity to appearance-related scrutiny.

The results underscore the need to consider both internal psychological factors and external societal pressures when addressing body image concerns. Practically, interventions could include programs that promote critical media literacy, body appreciation, and resilience to social comparison, tailored to the cultural realities of students. Universities and mental health practitioners can leverage these findings to design culturally informed strategies that help students navigate societal expectations while maintaining positive self-perception, thereby fostering healthier body image and psychological well-being.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that social appearance anxiety and perceived sociocultural pressure are significantly associated with students' body image, highlighting the interconnected nature of psychological and social factors in shaping self-perception. Respondents who reported higher levels of appearance-related anxiety or greater perceived societal pressures tended to report lower body image, suggesting that internal anxieties and external expectations jointly relate to how students evaluate their bodies. These results reinforce the multidimensional nature of body image, which reflects both individual self-concept and the influence of social norms.

Practically, these findings underscore the need for interventions that address both personal and environmental factors affecting body image. Educational institutions can implement programs promoting body positivity, critical media literacy, and resilience to social comparison, while mental health practitioners can provide support that helps

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students manage appearance-related anxiety. Additionally, awareness campaigns and culturally relevant workshops can help reduce the pressure of sociocultural standards and encourage healthier self-perceptions. By recognizing body image as a socially embedded and psychologically influenced construct, stakeholders can develop strategies that foster positive self-perception, resilience, and overall well-being among students.

Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design precludes conclusions about temporal or causal relationships, allowing only for the identification of associations and predictive patterns among variables. Second, while regression diagnostics indicated acceptable levels of multicollinearity, potential overlap between social appearance anxiety and sociocultural pressure may still influence the precision of estimates. Third, the use of self-report instruments may introduce response bias, as participants' perceptions could be influenced by social desirability or recall errors. Finally, the sample consisted of university students from a specific geographic and cultural context, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other populations, age groups, or educational settings. Future research should consider longitudinal designs, diverse samples, and multi-method assessments to enhance the robustness and applicability of findings.

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