

**MEDIA EXPOSURE AS A MEDIATOR OF THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURAL IDENTITY AND  
BODY IMAGE SATISFACTION AMONG ADOLESCENTS**

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**ABSTRACT:** This study investigated media exposure as a mediator of the relationship between cultural identity and body image satisfaction among adolescents. Four (4) hypotheses were postulated. Data were collected through convenience sampling using three hundred (300) participants. Results from the data analysis indicate that cultural identity is strongly and positively related to body image satisfaction,  $r=.59$ ,  $p<.01$ , emphasizing that individuals with a stronger cultural identity are more likely to be satisfied with their body image. This highlights the role cultural identity plays in shaping positive perceptions of one's body. Also, Cultural identity was found to be a significant predictor of media exposure ( $\beta=.14$ ,  $t(203)=4.02$ ,  $p<.001$ ), with a CI ranging from .21 to .61. This shows that individuals with higher cultural identity are more likely to have greater media exposure. However, media exposure was found to be negatively correlated with body image satisfaction,  $r=-.05$ ,  $p>.05$ , though this relationship was not statistically significant. The negative direction of this correlation implies that higher media exposure may be associated with lower body image satisfaction. Lastly, it was revealed from the result that Media exposure mediated the relationship between cultural identity and body image satisfaction. However, the mediation effect was negative; indicating that while cultural identity positively influences body image satisfaction, increased media exposure slightly diminishes this positive effect. Cultural identity's total and direct effects on body image satisfaction remained significant, reinforcing the strong positive relationship between these two variables despite the negative mediation by media exposure.

**Keywords:** Media Exposure, Cultural Identity, Body Image Satisfaction, Adolescents

## **INTRODUCTION**

With the pervasive reach of digital media, understanding its impact on body image satisfaction among adolescents is more crucial than ever. Jiotsa et al. (2021) highlighted the urgent need to address the escalating problem of body dissatisfaction and negative self-image among young people globally. This trend is significantly influenced by the proliferation of social media platforms, where adolescents are frequently exposed to idealized body images and beauty standards that are often unrealistic and unattainable (Fardouly et al. 2018). These platforms

perpetuate a cycle of comparison and self-scrutiny, contributing to negative body image and low self-esteem (Perloff, 2021).

The prevalence of body image dissatisfaction among adolescents is a significant public health concern, with research consistently demonstrating a strong correlation between media exposure and negative body image (Slater & Tiggemann, 2022). Adolescents today are constantly exposed to idealized images of beauty, often portrayed on social media platforms, which can lead to harmful effects on their self-esteem and body image (Cohen et al., 2020). The role of cultural identity further exacerbates this issue, as different cultures endorse diverse beauty standards that may conflict with the predominantly Western ideals disseminated through global media (Buchanan et al., 2021; Grabe et al., 2018).

The intersection of cultural identity and media exposure is complex, as media can either reinforce or challenge cultural norms and values related to body image (Bordo, 2018; Markus & Kitayama, 2018). For adolescents, navigating multiple cultural identities can create additional pressure to conform to disparate beauty norms, potentially leading to greater body image issues. Research suggests that media exposure may serve as a mediator in the relationship between cultural identity and body image satisfaction, as media representations can reinforce or challenge cultural norms, thereby influencing how adolescents perceive their bodies within their cultural context (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2019; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2018).

Existing studies (e.g., Levine & Piran, 2019; Rodgers et al., 2020) have primarily focused on the direct relationships between these variables, but the underlying processes that explain why media exposure is related to body image satisfaction remain under-explored. Despite the growing body of research on this topic, there is a need for a more comprehensive understanding of the specific mechanisms by which media exposure is related to body image satisfaction among adolescents. The present study aims to address this gap by examining media exposure as a route through which cultural identity relates to body image satisfaction. By exploring this mediation process, the present study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between these variables and contribute to the broader discourse on adolescent development and body image.

Unlike traditional media, social media allows for continuous, real-time engagement, which can amplify the exposure to these idealized images and their impact (Perloff, 2021). Adolescents are not only passive recipients of media content but active participants who create, share, and interact with visual content that often reinforces societal beauty standards (Hogue & Mills, 2019). This interactive nature of social media intensifies the pressure to conform to these standards as users compare themselves to their peers and to influencers who portray seemingly perfect lives and appearances (Cohen et al., 2020). The algorithms used by social media platforms can further exacerbate the issue by promoting content that aligns with users' interests and interactions, creating a feedback loop that continually reinforces negative body perceptions.

Extensive research has consistently demonstrated that media exposure significantly predicts body dissatisfaction among adolescents. Studies have shown that adolescents who engage more with media are more likely to experience negative body image, highlighting the pervasive influence of media on young people's self-perception (Slater & Tiggemann, 2022). This correlation is

particularly strong with social media, where the prevalence of curated and filtered images sets unrealistic standards of beauty that adolescents often feel pressured to meet (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

The American Psychological Association (APA) has emphasized the significant impact of media exposure on adolescents' body image satisfaction, underscoring the relationship between social media use and increased body dissatisfaction among teenagers (APA, 2022). Social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, allow for the widespread sharing and viewing of images that often depict unattainable beauty ideals. This visual content, often enhanced through filters and photo-editing tools, creates a distorted reality that adolescents might perceive as the norm (Fardouly et al., 2018). Consequently, these platforms can amplify feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction as adolescents compare their own bodies to these idealized portrayals. Scholars have attempted to link body image satisfaction with various factors, including family dynamics, parental attitudes, and educational institutions (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001). However, cultural Identity has also been associated with body image satisfaction.

Cultural identity, encompassing the sense of belonging to a particular cultural or ethnic group, significantly influences adolescents' body image satisfaction (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Cultural identity shapes individuals' beauty standards and self-perceptions, with different cultures endorsing diverse ideals of attractiveness. For instance, Western cultures often prioritize thinness, while other cultures might value fuller body types or different physical traits (Grabe et al. 2018).

The intersection of cultural identity and media exposure is complex, as media can either reinforce or challenge cultural norms and values related to body image. In many cases, the globalized nature of media leads to the dissemination of predominantly Western beauty standards, which can conflict with local cultural ideals and exacerbate body dissatisfaction (Bordo, 2018). For adolescents navigating multiple cultural identities, this can create additional pressure to conform to disparate beauty norms, potentially leading to greater body image issues (Markus & Kitayama, 2018).

Media exposure, defined as the extent of interaction with various media forms such as social media, television, and magazines, has been consistently linked to body image concerns, particularly due to the frequent portrayal of idealized body types (Perloff, 2021). The nature of media consumption has also evolved, with increasing engagement in interactive media, such as social networking sites, which allow for more direct comparison and feedback. These platforms often feature user-generated content that reflects and reinforces cultural beauty standards, contributing to a pervasive cycle of body image dissatisfaction.

Adolescence is a formative period marked by heightened sensitivity to external influences, including media, which plays a critical role in shaping body image perceptions (Hogue & Mills, 2019). During this stage, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the effects of social comparison, a process where they evaluate their own appearance against the often unrealistic and idealized images they encounter online. Social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, amplify this comparison by continuously presenting adolescents with images that reflect societal beauty standards, often emphasizing thinness, flawless skin, and specific body proportions (Fardouly et al., 2018). This constant exposure can lead to internalized ideals of beauty that are

difficult, if not impossible, to achieve, fostering dissatisfaction with one's own body (Cohen et al., 2020).

The interactive nature of social media exacerbates this issue, as platforms allow adolescents to actively engage with content through likes, comments, and shares, which can reinforce negative self-perceptions and body dissatisfaction. Adolescents often seek social validation through these interactions, basing their self-worth on the approval they receive from peers and online communities. This validation-seeking behaviour can result in increased anxiety and stress as adolescents strive to conform to the perceived standards of beauty and popularity endorsed by social media influencers and peers (Perloff, 2021). Furthermore, the algorithms employed by social media platforms are designed to tailor content to individual preferences, creating echo chambers where adolescents are repeatedly exposed to similar types of idealized images, further entrenching negative body image perceptions.

Cultural identity significantly influences how adolescents interpret and respond to media representations of beauty, as it shapes their standards of attractiveness and self-perception (Grabe et al., 2018). Adolescents from diverse cultural backgrounds may experience additional challenges when exposed to globalized media that predominantly disseminate Western beauty ideals, often prioritizing thinness and specific physical traits. These ideals can conflict with local cultural norms and values, creating a dissonance that exacerbates body dissatisfaction among adolescents who navigate multiple cultural identities (Bordo, 2018). For instance, while Western cultures might emphasize a slim figure, other cultures may celebrate fuller body types or different attributes, leading to a complex interplay of influences on body image.

Media exposure can serve as a mediator in the relationship between cultural identity and body image satisfaction, influencing how adolescents perceive their bodies within their cultural context (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2018). When media content reinforces diverse and inclusive beauty standards, it can positively impact body image satisfaction among adolescents from various cultural backgrounds (Rodgers et al., 2020). Conversely, pervasive exposure to homogenised beauty ideals that prioritise a narrow standard of attractiveness can undermine cultural differences and contribute to body dissatisfaction.

This highlights the need for media literacy programs that educate adolescents about the realities of media content and promote critical engagement with the images they consume. Research also shows that gender plays a significant role in how media exposure affects body image. Females are often more negatively impacted by media portrayals of beauty standards than males (Grabe et al., 2008). However, the rise of social media has begun to affect males more prominently, with increasing emphasis on muscularity and leanness (Daniel & Bridges, 2010). This indicates a growing concern across genders, necessitating a broader approach to understanding and addressing body dissatisfaction among adolescents.

To achieve the goals of the current study, we draw on the Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which posits that individuals derive their self-concept from their membership in social groups. This theory suggests that belonging to social groups provides individuals with a sense of identity, belonging, and self-esteem. One of the branches of Social Identity Theory

focuses on in-group favouritism, where individuals exhibit a preference for members of their own group over those outside of it. Recent research by Smith and Johnson (2019) explored the implications of in-group favouritism for body image perceptions, suggesting that individuals may internalise and adhere to the body image norms prevalent within their social group, thus influencing their own body image attitudes and behaviours.

Another aspect of SIT relates to intergroup comparisons, where individuals evaluate their own group positively in comparison to other groups. The theory also underscores the importance of social categorisation, where individuals classify themselves and others into social groups based on shared characteristics. García and López (2020) examined the impact of social categorisation on body image attitudes, suggesting that individuals may internalise and conform to the body image norms prevalent within their social category, thus influencing their own body image perceptions and behaviours.

A crucial argument of SIT is its relevance to cultural identity, as cultural groups form an integral aspect of social identity. Patel and Lee (2022) explored the intersection between cultural identity and body image concerns, highlighting how identification with one's cultural group can provide a sense of belonging and self-worth that buffers against the negative effects of media on body image by fostering resilience against societal pressures.

### **Cultural identity and body image satisfaction**

Research has shown that the influence of culture on body image is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Yam (2013) found that culture can shape body image through both internal and external factors. Internal factors include identification with a particular culture, which can influence body ideals and body satisfaction. External factors include cultural cues in the environment, such as media and peer influence, which can also impact body image. Among Asian American women, identification with Asian culture is related to a thinner body ideal, but exposure to Asian cultural cues is related to a thicker body ideal. Similarly, among Black American women, identification with Black culture is related to a thicker body ideal, but exposure to Black cultural cues is related to a thinner body ideal. These findings highlight the importance of considering culture in understanding body image and suggest that interventions aimed at improving body image among ethnic minority women should take into account the complex interplay between cultural identity and cultural cues. Yu (2015) showed that thin-ideal media exposure significantly increased body image dissatisfaction, while exposure to healthy media decreased dissatisfaction. Ozcan Dogan et al. (2018) revealed a strong correlation between adolescent body image and socio-cultural factors, as well as between adolescent body image and the importance adolescents place on the media. The regression analysis showed that body satisfaction, habits, and strategies related to body-building can be predicted by studying the attitudes and behaviors of parents, peers, and socio-cultural variables, including the perceived effect of the media (Ozcan Dogan et al., 2018). Based on these prior studies, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: Cultural identity will positively predict body image satisfaction.

### **Cultural identity and media exposure**

Generally, research provides in-depth insights into the complexity of the relationship between mass media and people's cultural identities and highlights the importance of a holistic understanding in responding to the challenges and opportunities associated with this phenomenon. Media exposure has been found to influence adolescent's cultural identity. Avita et al. (2022) investigated the dynamics of the interaction between mass media and cultural identity, as well as the contemporary challenges that arise in this context. The researchers found that the mass media has a significant role in shaping people's cultural identity—media and cultural identity, as well as the contemporary challenges that arise in this context. Through literature analysis, this study outlines the development of mass media over time, from the era of newspapers and radio to the current digital age, which accelerates cultural exchange globally. Globalisation has expanded access to popular culture around the world, but it has also raised questions about cultural representation in mass media and potential cultural stereotypes. Mass media not only influence the cultural identity of society as a whole but also help in the process of individual identity construction through identification with specific cultural representations in the media. Guntur (2023) opined that technological developments have made social media a part of people's daily lives. The ability of social media to cross geographical boundaries causes a culture change, especially in cultural integration. We therefore state that:

Hypothesis 2: Cultural identity will positively predict media exposure.

### **Media exposure and body image satisfaction**

Body image has become a significant concern, with media influencing adolescents to focus on their body shape and shape their sensation-seeking behaviour. Studies have highlighted the importance of considering the impact of media on adolescents, particularly in terms of body image and sensation seeking. It is pertinent to note that the psychological effects of body dissatisfaction extend beyond self-esteem issues. Body dissatisfaction has been linked to serious mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders (Levine & Piran, 2001). Adolescents with negative body image are at higher risk of developing unhealthy behaviours, including extreme dieting, binge eating, and the use of performance-enhancing drugs (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006). These behaviours can have long-term health consequences, making it imperative to address the root causes of body dissatisfaction early on.

Xie (2020) revealed a negative correlation between body image satisfaction and the degree of media exposure in adolescents. In a related study, Javellana (2014) found a strong negative relationship between magazines and the weight of the respondents, suggesting that measures such as media awareness seminars and screening and balancing of commercials and advertisements on television and magazines are needed to balance the effects of media on adolescents. Mamatha and Ayappa (2021) reported that media exposure has both positive and negative effects on adolescents. Based on the above argument, it is hypothesised that: Media exposure will relate positively to body image satisfaction. Following from the above argument, we state that:

Hypothesis 3: Media exposure relates, and body image satisfaction negatively predicts body image satisfaction

### **Media exposure as a Mediator**

Scott's (2011) research examined the development of body image, particularly among girls and young women, identifying numerous factors associated with body image dissatisfaction. A significant factor is exposure to mass media, especially in relation to three theoretical constructs: awareness of a thin ideal, internalisation of that ideal, and perceived pressures to be thin. The hypothesis proposed that awareness, internalisation, and perceived pressures would mediate the relationship between American media exposure and body image satisfaction. The results indicated statistically significant relationships. Specifically, the more hours Trinidadian female adolescents spent watching American sitcoms, the less satisfied they were with their body image. Increased American media exposure also led to heightened awareness and internalisation of thin ideals, as well as greater pressures to adopt those ideals. Finally, it is hypothesised that media exposure will mediate the positive relationship between cultural identity and body image satisfaction.

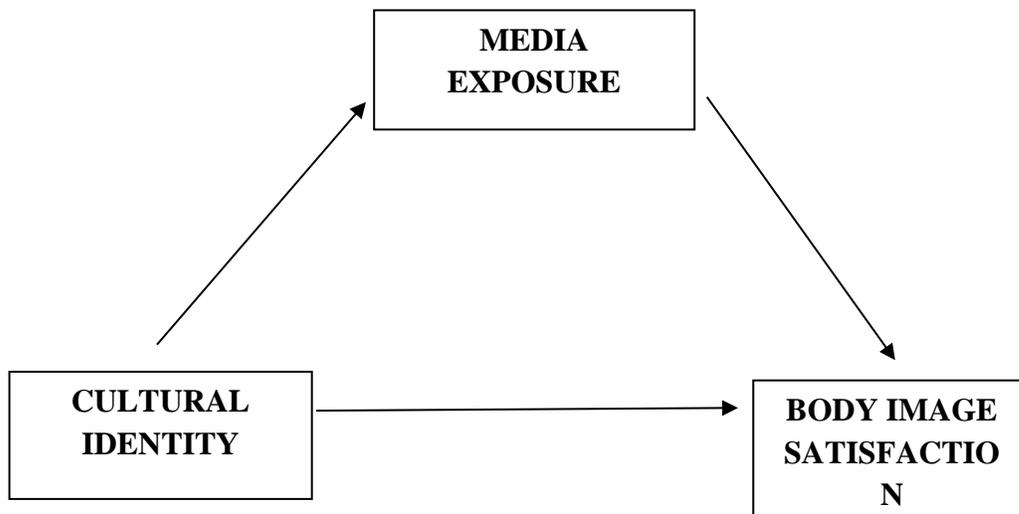


Figure 1: Conceptual model of media exposure as a mediator of the relationship between cultural identity and body image satisfaction among adolescents

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

A total of 300 participants were selected for the study. To gather a diverse range of participants, the researcher approached teenagers in various public spaces, personally meeting with them to explain the purpose of the study and requesting their participation in filling out the questionnaire. Recognizing the importance of including participants from different educational backgrounds, the

researcher also distributed questionnaires at a private institution after obtaining permission from the school principal. This approach not only broadened the scope of the sample but also ensured the inclusion of adolescents from varied socio-economic backgrounds. The participants' age ranged from 13 to 18, with a mean age of 15.90 ( $SD = 1.29$ ).

### **Instruments**

The revised version of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure Revised (MEIM-R) (Phinney & Ong, 2007) was employed to assess ethnic identity among adolescents. The MEIM-R was chosen over the original MEIM due to its refined structure and improved ability to capture the complexities of ethnic identity. It is a 6-item item scale, and each participant responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The revised measure provides a more accurate assessment of the two key components of ethnic identity: exploration and commitment. Exploration refers to the process of actively seeking information and experiences related to one's ethnic group, while commitment reflects a sense of attachment and belonging to one's ethnic group. Previous studies in primarily college student samples have indicated good reliability, with internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) ranging from .76 to .91 for the two subscales and .81 to .89 for the overall scale (Yoon, 2011).

The *Body Image Satisfaction Rating Scale (BISRS)* was adopted from the Body Image Questionnaire (BIQ) developed by Szymanski and Cash (1995) to measure body image satisfaction. The BISRS includes sample questions such as "I look energetic" and "My appearance is something that people will love to look at." Participants respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha of .85 was obtained for the present study.

The *Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)* developed by Alison and Rene (2023) was used to assess social media exposure. Participants responded on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 9 (hourly or more). Sample items include "scrolled aimlessly through my feed" and "looked at others story". Among the dimensions of this study is the Social Media Usage Scale (SMUS): consumption-based, interaction-based, and production-based; the consumption-based subscale, which consists of 5 items, were used for the current study. The consumption-based subscale was chosen due to its focus on the frequency and intensity of social media consumption. By focusing on the consumption-based sub-scale, this study aims to capture the extent to which adolescents are exposed to social media content, which is a critical factor in analysing its effects on their body image and cultural identity. The internal consistency of the SMUS (consumption-based subscale) has been reported with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 for this study.

### **Procedure**

Each participant was required to sign a consent form before proceeding to fill out the study questionnaires. The purposive sampling technique was used to choose participants; this sampling technique was chosen because it allows for the intentional selection of individuals who are most likely to provide relevant and insightful data in relation to the research topic, which examines media exposure as a mediator in the relationship between cultural identity and body image

satisfaction among adolescents. The consent form is contained in the first page of the study questionnaires. Containing a slot for filling their age and gender as well as briefly outlining the nature of the study and that the study will help in improving society. The consent form also stated that the responses of the participants would be treated with confidence. Additionally, the researcher obtained consent from the parents of these participants to ensure ethical compliance and parental approval. Three hundred and twelve copies of the questionnaires were distributed to the participants to give room for error and shortfall; three were not returned, while a total of three hundred and nine were retrieved, and nine were found to be invalid. Data collections were done for three weeks and three days.

### Design and data analysis

The researcher used a cross-sectional survey design because the data was collected at a particular time and used to make inferences about the general population. The Mediation analysis was computed using simple regression. SPSS version 29 was the statistical package used for the analysis.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Frequency**

	Frequency	Percent
Male	124	48.6
Female	131	51.4
Total	255	100.0

**Table 2: Correlation matrix**

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Gender	1.51	.500	--				
Age	15.51	1.75	.03	--			
Cultural identity	21.13	4.02	.04	.12**	--		
Media exposure	21.26	11.83	-.28**	.07*	.14**	--	
Body image satisfaction	59.21	8.68	.09*	.03	.59**	-.05	--

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$

The relationships between body image satisfaction and other variables were examined through a correlation analysis (see Table 2). The results indicated that cultural identity is strongly and positively related to body image satisfaction,  $r = .59$ ,  $p < .01$ , suggesting that individuals with a stronger cultural identity are more likely to be satisfied with their body image. This strong correlation highlights the significant role that cultural identity plays in shaping positive perceptions of one's body.

Gender also showed a small but statistically significant positive correlation with body image satisfaction,  $r=.09, p<.05$ . This finding indicates that males tend to report slightly higher levels of body image satisfaction compared to females, although the effect size is relatively modest. In contrast, age did not show a significant relationship with body image satisfaction,  $r=.03, p>.05$ . This non-significant correlation suggests that body image satisfaction remains relatively stable across different age groups in the sample, indicating that age does not have a substantial impact on how individuals perceive their body image.

Finally, media exposure was negatively correlated with body image satisfaction,  $r=-.05, p>.05$ , though this relationship was not statistically significant. The negative direction of this correlation implies that higher media exposure may be associated with lower body image satisfaction; however, the weak and non-significant nature of this relationship indicates that media exposure alone is not a strong predictor of body image satisfaction and may interact with other variables to influence body image perceptions.

**Table 3:** Mediation and regression analysis

	<b>Coeff</b>	<b>Se</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>LLCI</b>	<b>ULCI</b>	<b>R-sq</b>
<b>Media exposure scale (outcome)</b>							<b>.11</b>
Age	.06	.24	1.87	.06	-.02	.90	
Gender	-.29	.92	-8.34	.00	-8.44	-5.22	
Cultural identity	.14	.10	4.02	.00	.21	.61	
<b>Body image satisfaction (outcome)</b>							<b>.37</b>
Age	-.03	.15	-1.00	.32	-.43	.14	
Gender	.03	.53	.93	.35	-.54	1.53	
Cultural identity	.61	.06	20.67	.00	1.19	1.44	
Media exposure	-.12	.02	-4.02	.00	-.13	-.05	
<b>Total, Direct, and Indirect effects of Cultural identity and Body image satisfaction</b>							
Total effect	1.28	.06	20.09	.00	1.16	1.41	
Direct effect	1.32	.06	20.67	.00	1.19	1.44	
Indirect effect	-.04	.01			-.07	-.01	

A series of mediation and regression analyses were conducted to examine these hypotheses (see Table 3).

The first regression analysis explored the relationship between cultural identity, age, gender, and media exposure, testing Hypothesis 2. The model explained 11% of the variance in media exposure, suggesting that these predictors accounted for a modest proportion of the variability in media exposure. Age was found to be a non-significant predictor of media exposure ( $\beta=.06, t(203)=1.87, p=.06$ ), with the confidence interval (CI) ranging from  $-.02$  to  $.90$ . However, gender significantly predicted media exposure, with males (coded as 1) reporting lower media exposure than females (coded as 0) ( $\beta=-.29, t(203)=-8.34, p<.001, CI [-8.44, -5.22]$ ). Cultural identity was a significant positive predictor of media exposure ( $\beta=.14, t(203)=4.02, p<.001$ ), with a CI ranging

from .21 to .61. These results support Hypothesis 2, indicating that individuals with higher cultural identity are more likely to have greater media exposure.

The second regression analysis assessed the relationships between cultural identity, media exposure, age, gender, and body image satisfaction, addressing Hypotheses 1 and 3. This model explained 37% of the variance in body image satisfaction, indicating a strong model fit. Age was not a significant predictor of body image satisfaction ( $\beta = -.03$ ,  $t(203) = -1.00$ ,  $p = .32$ , CI [-.43, .14]), and gender also did not significantly predict body image satisfaction ( $\beta = .03$ ,  $t(203) = .93$ ,  $p = .35$ , CI [-.54, 1.53]). However, cultural identity was a significant and strong positive predictor of body image satisfaction ( $\beta = .61$ ,  $t(203) = 20.67$ ,  $p < .001$ , CI [1.19, 1.44]), supporting Hypothesis 1. Contrary to Hypothesis 3, media exposure negatively predicted body image satisfaction ( $\beta = -.12$ ,  $t(203) = -4.02$ ,  $p < .001$ , CI [-.13, -.05]), indicating that increased media exposure was associated with lower body image satisfaction.

To test Hypothesis 4, a mediation analysis was conducted to determine whether media exposure mediated the relationship between cultural identity and body image satisfaction. The total effect of cultural identity on body image satisfaction was significant (Total Effect = 1.28,  $t(203) = 20.09$ ,  $p < .001$ , CI [1.16, 1.41]), suggesting that cultural identity positively influences body image satisfaction. The direct effect of cultural identity on body image satisfaction remained significant even after accounting for media exposure (Direct Effect = 1.32,  $t(203) = 20.67$ ,  $p < .001$ , CI [1.19, 1.44]). The indirect effect of cultural identity on body image satisfaction through media exposure was small but significant (Indirect Effect = -.04, CI [-.07, -.01]).

These findings partially support Hypothesis 4, indicating that media exposure does mediate the relationship between cultural identity and body image satisfaction. However, the direction of the mediation is negative, meaning that while cultural identity positively affects body image satisfaction, increased media exposure slightly diminishes this positive effect. This suggests a complex interaction where media exposure may undermine the beneficial impact of a strong cultural identity on body image satisfaction.

## DISCUSSION

This study investigated media exposure as a mediator in the relationship between cultural identity and body image satisfaction among adolescents. The result of this study revealed that cultural identity was positively related to body image satisfaction. Also, cultural identity was found to be a significant and positive predictor of body image satisfaction. This emphasises that individuals with a stronger cultural identity will likely have higher body image satisfaction and this can be attributed to the positive self-perception of our participants towards their body image, as cultural identity shapes individuals' beauty standards and self-perceptions. The findings of the study are consistent with the social Identity Theory, which posits that individuals derive their self-concept from their membership in social groups, suggesting that belonging to cultural groups can provide a sense of identity and belonging that buffer against the negative effects of media on body image (Smith et al., 2019; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This finding is also supported by the studies of Yam (2013), who opined that culture can shape body image through both internal and external factors. Internal factors include identification with a particular culture, which can influence body ideals

and body satisfaction. External factors include cultural cues in the environment, such as media and peer influence, which can also impact body image. This research shows that bi-cultural individuals who identify with multiple cultures exhibit different body image patterns depending on their cultural identity and exposure to cultural cues. Their study also stated that the influence of culture on body image is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon.

The findings of this study also revealed that cultural identity is a significant positive predictor of media exposure, suggesting that individuals with a stronger cultural identity tend to have greater media exposure. Cultural identity was also found to be positively and significantly related to media exposure. This brings to mind the importance of Cultivation Theory in the life of people. Gerbner and Gross (1972) contended that an individual's prolonged exposure to media content influences the individual's perceptions of reality, leading to the internalisation of unrealistic body ideals (Kim & Lee, 2019). Furthermore, the result is in line with the findings of Avita et al. (2022), who opined that mass media has a significant role in shaping people's cultural identity. They further asserted that mass media not only influence the cultural identity of society as a whole but also help in the process of individual identity construction through identification with specific cultural representations in the media.

As regards Hypothesis 3 of the study, the result of the analysis indicated that media exposure was negatively correlated with body image satisfaction, though this relationship was not statistically significant. The negative direction of this correlation implies that higher media exposure may be associated with lower body image satisfaction; however, the weak and non-significant nature of this relationship indicates that media exposure alone is not a strong predictor of body image satisfaction and may interact with other variables to influence body image perceptions. This finding was contrary to hypothesis 3 but in line with the study of Xie (2020), who asserted that exposure to the ideal body image in the social media environment has a detrimental effect on adolescents' body image satisfaction, leading them to pursue a more perfect body. The researchers found that dissatisfaction increases with heavier involvement in specific content views and browsing time. The result of their analysis revealed that media exposure was negatively correlated with body image satisfaction.

Lastly, in hypothesis 4 of the study, Media exposure mediated the relationship between cultural identity and body image satisfaction. However, the mediation effect was negative, indicating that while cultural identity positively influences body image satisfaction, increased media exposure slightly diminishes this positive effect. Cultural identity's total and direct effects on body image satisfaction remained significant, reinforcing the strong positive relationship between these two variables despite the negative mediation by media exposure. This finding is in line with the study of Guntur et al. (2023), who opined that Technological developments have made social media a part of people's daily lives. The ability of social media to cross geographical boundaries causes a cultural change, especially in cultural integration, thereby causing a change in perception.

### **Implication of the findings**

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between adolescent body image, socio-cultural factors, and media exposure. The influence of culture on body image

is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that social media can moderate, as social media has become part of the everyday life of almost every individual in society especially among adolescents, indicating that the findings of this study will be beneficial for social approval and societal values, which can in turn facilitate appreciation of one's body image and aid healthy body workout by avoiding specific content views and reducing browsing time.

The results and findings of this study have important implications for policy, practice, and subsequent research, the most important of which are working on developing thinking skills and self-learning among students in schools, as well as the need to activate the role of the media in providing meaningful content that preserves societal values, in addition to employing social media to support community participation of young people by organising awareness, volunteer and charitable activities, and finally the need to increase cooperation and coordination between all parties, whether they are media, schools, religious or civil institutions, youth centres, or other institutions to maximise the positive use of social media and to reduce its negative effects.

### **Limitations of the study**

The study's findings may not be universally applicable, as they might be specific to the demographic characteristics, cultural context, or institutional settings of the sampled area, as the research work was limited to adolescents, considering the time frame the study was carried out. Reliance on self-reported data might have introduced biased responses, as participants might have provided socially desirable responses. The limited financial power of the researcher might have also affected the sample size of the study. This study was cross-sectional, thus precluding any causal inferences. To provide a cause-effect relationship, an experimental study or longitudinal method of assessment is needed.

### **Suggestions for further studies.**

The findings of this study, this study therefore, suggest that future research should explore whether interventions aimed at enhancing media literacy could effectively mitigate negative body image satisfaction among adolescents. This recommendation underscores the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between social media usage and body image concerns in diverse cultural backgrounds. Future studies may also examine other demographic variables, such as the economic status of the parents as well as their age and educational level.

### **Conclusion**

The current study explored the link between cultural identity and body image satisfaction among adolescents. It also examined the mediating roles of media exposure in this link between cultural identity and body image satisfaction. The study aimed to add to the existing literature. Participation was voluntary, and three measures were used in gathering data. The result of the study showed that cultural identity was positively related to body image satisfaction; it was also found to be a significant and positive predictor of body image satisfaction. This emphasises that individuals with a stronger cultural identity will likely have higher body image satisfaction and this can be attributed

to the positive self-perception of our participants towards their body image, as cultural identity shapes individuals' beauty standards and self-perceptions. The findings of this study also revealed that cultural identity is a significant positive predictor of media exposure, suggesting that individuals with a stronger cultural identity tend to have greater media exposure. Finally, the result revealed that media exposure mediated the relationship between cultural identity and body image satisfaction.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of considering culture in understanding body image and suggest that interventions aimed at improving body image among adolescents should take into account the complex interplay between cultural identity and cultural cues.

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