



## Music and Body Image

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### Abstract

The connection between music and body image is complex and multifaceted. Music reflects societal ideals and norms, including those related to body image. Music has the power to make one feel empowered and confident and help them accept themselves the way they are. On the other hand, music can make an individual dissatisfied with their body and appearance. The perception and understanding of how one may look at his or her body depends on several factors like exposure to music videos, its lyrics and how the artists are portrayed in the videos.

This work will attempt to explore the intricate relationship between music and body image and highlight how music is used as a tool for objectification and how the idea of the “perfect” body type may lead an individual to suffer both mentally and physically.

This work will further explore and identify if music, body image and its effects are at all brought to the notice of the students pursuing higher education; if it is addressed by institutions and discussed in classrooms.

**Keywords:** *music, body image, dissatisfaction, sexual, videos*

### Objectives

1. To understand how music and music videos frame one’s opinion about body image and also those of others.
2. To study the positive and negative effects of music on women, men, adolescents, and transgender.
3. To analyze how music is used as a tool for sexualization and objectification.
4. To understand how music videos affect the understanding of the “perfect” body.
5. To study the effects of music on physical and mental health.
6. To see if body neutrality could be the solution.

### Methodology

The methodology is qualitative in nature. Secondary data like journals, articles and data from the internet have been studied extensively. Further, a survey has been conducted to highlight the profound influence of music on students pursuing higher education and graphical representations of the same has been shown.

### Introduction

Music is the art that is produced by using vocal and instrumental sounds for the beauty of form or emotional expression. It usually follows the cultural standard of melody, rhythm and harmony. Music is humanely engineered; it is conceptual and auditory. Music is the art that permeates every society and it is a protean art



as it lends easily to alliances with words (songs) and with physical movement (dance). Modern music is heard in a bewildering profusion of styles many of them contemporary and others engendered in the past. Through time immemorial, music has held profound influence in ritual and drama and as highlighted in several studies, it also holds the capacity to reflect and alter human emotions.

On the other hand, The American Psychological Association defines body image as “The mental picture one forms of one’s body as a whole, including its physical characteristics and one’s attitudes toward these characteristics”. Jessica Cortez believes that how one looks and imagines oneself physically can be termed as body image. It refers to how individuals feel when they look at the mirror or talk about themselves based on how they look both in social context and privately. Body positivity refers to the idea when one feels safe and has a positive opinion or outlook about their body irrespective of their shape and size. In contrast, body image that focuses on a dissatisfaction with their overall appearance, engaging in behavior such as frequent mirror checking, self weighing or avoidance of public situations is generally tagged as negative body image.

### **Need For the Study**

To understand the intricate connection between music and body image and how one forms a mindset and habits surrounding the media content they are exposed to and how society frames its norms based on this content is a need of the hour. Therefore, this study attempts to unveil the impact of music on mental health and daily life. This work will look closely at the detrimental messages and will also advocate regarding more inclusion of all body types in the industry and conscientious messages.

This work aims to establish the importance of producing music and music videos with much responsible, while also encouraging students pursuing higher education to build a more positive perspective toward themselves and the content they are exposed to.

It is essential to help students identify the harmful messages and foster empathy and inclusivity at the same time. What makes this work truly crucial is that it provides for methods implemented by institutions that will not only help spread awareness but will also sensitize the students and help them make informed choices.

### **Review of Literature**

Nina. (n.d.). How Music Can Change the Way You Feel and Act. edition.cnn.com. Retrieved November 13, 2023.

Contemporary studies have brought forward how music has the strength to influence one’s mind and body. It holds the power to impact illness like depression, anxiety and affect productivity and expenditure. Recent studies have also highlighted the negative impacts of music which might give rise to aggressive thinking or forming negative opinion about oneself. Through an experiment at the University of Groningen, researchers have established that listening to delighting or sorrowful tunes does not only help change one’s mood but also what they begin to observe. This happens the sensory stimuli affects the frame of mind. Levitin is of the opinion depression can be treated with music. Music that has softer and optimistic tunes helps energize an individual.

Marika. (2016). Sexual Content in Music’s Relationship with Consumers’ Body Image, Sexualization and Objectification. Stars. Library. Retrieved November 16, 2023.

One’s social reality can be driven from what they see or listen to. Many music artists can become role models and it is common for young girls to emulate their idols. However, when the artists do not portray a positive behavior themselves, strong influence on the young audience can be harmful. In certain genres



like pop, rap and hip-hop it is common to find sexually suggestive lyrics in songs along with power, sexism and violence. Moreover, media reports in the UK suggest that availability and popularity of more interactive media such as music videos among adolescents are increasing.

Demeaning messages of men in power over women, sex as top priority for men, objectification and sexual violence against women, women being defined by men and women under-valuing themselves are often observed in Rap and Pop songs. The sexual role of women is to please men and this relays the message that women exist as sexual objects and their value depends on their physical appearance. These messages that are harmful not only negatively affect women but also men who are exposed to these contents believe that women accept or enjoy violence in relationships. L.M Ward Suggest that 71% of the music videos have sexual content. Another research by E.M Volgman shows that once young women view media that leads to self-objectification, they internalize it which leads to a preoccupation with one's appearance and anxiety.

Exposure to body image ideals that do not physically match the average person and may be influential or detrimental to young girls. Mischner and colleagues established that when young girls are exposed to such media contents, they might begin to feel discontented with their bodies and feel more pressured to achieve the "perfect" body. This affects their body image and might affect how they see or feel for other women. It may make them view other women with better bodies with hatred.

Coyne, S. M., Davis, E. J., Warburton, W., Stockdale, L., Abba, I., & Busby, D. M. (2020). Mirror on the Wall: The Effect of Listening to Body Positive Music on Implicit and Explicit Body Esteem, Psychology of Popular Media, Advance online publication. scholarsarchive.byu.edu. Retrieved December 9, 2023.

This study suggests that appearance-based music lyrics had in adult women multiple realms of body satisfaction. The positive messages of music or music videos might bring about body positivity has not yet been established yet. However, recent studies and works have shown how both music videos and music may bring a change in a woman's attitudes and behavior. Literature suggests that music impacts both explicit and implicit self-esteem and woman in particular use music for empowerment and personal growth. Other research suggests that lyrics affects behavior more than musical tone, suggesting that message matters. This work suggests that when exposed to negative tunes or derogatory videos, women tend to form a lower self-esteem and poor body image and think they are not "good enough" or that their worth lies solely in their body. Besides, signs of body positivity are observed when woman were exposed to positive lyrics especially when paired with music video.

Beth, Rebecca, & Helga. (2007). The Impact of Thin Models in Music Videos in Adolescent Girl's Body Dissatisfaction. researchgate.net Publications. Retrieved December 9, 2023.

Music videos also depict socio-cultural ideals of the "perfect" body often highlighting scantily clad models whose dance movements further highlights the shape, size and proportions of their body. Growing evidence of unrealistic body ideals has detrimental effects on adolescent girl's body image. Mass media are a pervasive force in shaping body ideals and sensitizing adolescent girls to achieve a perfect body which is central to women identity when they are in phase of transition to womanhood. Though not all music videos feature ultra thin models yet videos that feature all-girls-bands are marketed to appeal to adolescent girls. What makes this study unique is that it focused on how young women when exposed to models in music videos show signs of poor body image in contrast to those who were only exposed to the songs without the videos.



Chrysalis, Francesca, Lesley, Cougar, Megan, & Wayne. (n.d.). "Where My Boys At?", The Need To Examine How Portrayals of Men in Popular Music Impact Male Body Image and Self Esteem. div46amplifier.com. Retrieved December 9, 2023.

How men are represented in popular music and its impact on men has been studied by very few. When it comes to self-perception, men receive much less attention compared to women. Studies have shown that male consumption of popular music has impacted perceptions of gender roles, social judgments and attitude towards woman, views regarding sexual harassment, permissive sexual attitudes, violence against women and sexual behavior. Blond (2008) observed the increased representation of well-groomed, trimmed, muscular and sexually objectified male bodies cause high level of dissatisfaction causing males vulnerable to eating disorders, dieting, muscle dysmorphia, steroid use and cosmetic surgery.

Mulgrew, Volcevski & Rendell. (2013). The Effect of Music Video Clips on Adolescent Boys Body Image, Mood and Schema Activation. researchgate.net Publications. Retrieved December 8, 2023.

Adolescence is a period that is thought to be a crucial developmental stage when an individual deals and develops their body image. This is also a period when issues related to body image have been reported. In comparison to young women or girls the rate of dissatisfaction with their body remains low among young boys or young men. A few studies in Australia have shown that young boys have reported their dissatisfaction with certain aspects of their body like weight, muscle tone, size of their body. They therefore, engaged in excessive exercise, dietary supplements or steroid use. It is through music video clips which contain violent and aggressive acts and muscular singers having ideal male body have shown adverse effects on adolescents.

Body Image-Music. (n.d.). mediasmarts.ca. Retrieved December 8, 2023.

It is due to heavily ripped physique that standards among male hip-hop, heavy metal and even country singers that inspire young teenagers to aim for a "perfect" body thereby putting them at a risk of turning to bodybuilding which might be harmful under certain circumstances.

Negative Body Image: Causes, Consequence and Intervention Ideas, Report Prepared By 2CV for the Government Equality Office. (2019). assets.publishing.service.gov.uk. Retrieved December 10, 2023.

Research states that historically, black woman have more flexible and multifaceted definition of attractiveness that has led to greater social acceptance. However, portrayal of "fit and skinny" black women in media especially music leads to body dissatisfaction. Studies have shed light to wide representation of lesbian and bisexual women in mass media, which has put similar mainstream pressures on women to have a thin body. A meta-analytical review has advocated those gay men are put under pressure which leads them to feel discontented with their weight and compare themselves to heterosexual males. This primarily happens as they belong to a stigmatized group and cause them anxiety, stress and mental problems.

Zahabia. (2019, March). Objectification of Women in Bollywood Item Numbers. digitalcommons.usf.edu. Retrieved April 18, 2023.

Through studies several researchers have established that though music videos hold their cultural importance, they may prove to be a dangerous medium especially for young girls. Bollywood item numbers have usually sexualized and objectified the artists in order to appeal to the audiences. This study showed that 89.6% of songs had lead artists dressed provocatively to attract male viewers. It



resulted in high crime rates like rape and molestation and men find it acceptable to post misogynistic comments and body shame women.

Within health, Rhythmic influences: The Relationship between Music and Body Image. (n.d.). withinhealth.com. Retrieved December 4, 2023.

Many celebrities have advocated their support for the body positive movement that celebrates bodies of all shapes, gender, abilities and expression. The Grammy winning artist Lizzo is known for encouraging fans to reject body shaming stereotypes through her music. The list is followed by Taylor Swift, Lady Gaga, Adel and Beyonce. It is reported that songs by Rock bands like Queen, Guns N' Roses make listeners feel comfortable about their body along with Metallica, Tool, Nirvana who produced Pop and 90's music.

The song that generated most confidence among listeners is 'Confident' by Demi Levato followed by 'Flowers' by Miley Cyrus. Besides, the list includes Ariana Grande, Drake and Imagine Dragons. These and many other songs in this category feature songs that feature lyrics regarding strong individuals who reject outdated beauty standards in favor of creating their own. On the other hand, artists who have produced songs based on negative body image are Body in the water, LANY, Billie Eilish, Lana Del Rey etc.

Moira, & Allison. (n.d.). Yes, what you think about how you look affects your health and well being. everydayhealth.com. Retrieved December 8, 2023.

Negative body image brings a lot of harm and not everyone can have a positive body image therefore, working towards body neutrality which involves respecting our body for what it can do instead of focusing what it looks like would be good says DeCero. Any over-focus on the body can be problematic so if a neutral stance keeps one from over-thinking about could benefit wellbeing says Engler.

Kristen. (2022, June 30). Body Positivity vs. Body Neutrality. verywellmind.com. Retrieved April 18, 2024.

Body neutrality is an approach different from that of body positivity as it focuses more accepting the non-physical characteristics of the body. This is a good approach when feeling positive does not feel genuine and does not pressure an individual to love the body but to only accept it and find ways to appreciate it.

One can observe the intricate connection between music and body image and its influence on how one perceives oneself and others. However, how students view their bodies or their perception and understanding of body image has not been taken into consideration yet. Therefore, as already mentioned, this work tries to explore the profound influence of music on students pursuing higher education. The findings are based on a questionnaire and analysis of secondary sources that probes the intricate connection and highlights the dynamic interplay between music and body image on students pursuing higher education.

## Findings

Over generations one may notice how music has changed and shaped cultures and societies. The power of music can alter one's mood, change perception and inspire. Everyone has a personal relationship with music yet its effects on culture, people and their minds may not be apparent immediately. Music has the ability to deeply impact our mental state and raise our mood. It gives us energy, sooth us, encourage and inspire us. It



must be understood that music does not always leave a positive imprint; there are times when music may make one feel depressed, anxious and even uncomfortable or discontented with their overall appearance. Exposure to music videos and objectification as well as exposure to sexual content in the music videos leads to negative body image and decreased self-esteem.

This paper seeks to understand the current socio-cultural structure revolves around body image. From a very young age an individual is exposed to various forms of media out of which music holds an important position. Music and music videos not only frame our attitude towards ourselves but also how we look at people or what we tend to think about them. Through music videos the idea to stay fit and healthy has spread but when an individual compares their body with those they see or hear about and try to imitate them, it raises concern.

Body image is rather a complex phenomenon and what one feel about their body is even more complicated as it directly affects their mental and physical well being. Research has established that lyrics and music videos affect women in both positive and negative ways, yet, several women become sensitive and concerned as to how they are perceived by others. Adolescents on the other hand, tend to observe and imbibe what they see which leads adolescent females to try transforming themselves into more "slim and fit" type for greater acceptability among peer groups and the society at large. Additionally, content that women are exposed to make them believe that they are "mare objects" and their sole purpose is to please men or achieve their validation.

In contrast, one finds that men also undergo serious pressure to maintain a "perfect body" which hampers their body image, but not much studies have shed light on this. Sexualized lyrics and related imagery have led men to think that idealized bodies are needed. This simultaneously affects their mental health starting from depression, anxiety, body dysmorphia and dissatisfaction to suicide. Adolescent boys also go through such difficulties. However, facing psycho-sexual issues in the formative years of their life is a concern to be catered to. There are ample literatures that represent and confirm how women feel; however, as far as men or adolescent boys are concerned not much research is undertaken which makes it difficult to come up with effective solutions. The contribution of music videos and lyrics of a song is such that it frames how men go about their personal relationships with women. Additionally, exposure to item numbers affects the young viewers and adult viewers. It leads to misogynistic ideas further pressurizing women and raises crime rates.

The study establishes how the body positive movement is bringing in a wave of music that promotes self-love and acceptance of all people irrespective of their facial feature, skin tone or body type. In some occasions, one might observe that some music videos or lyrics of songs may shame those with and good body shame or fair skin tones while promoting body positivity. This too has harmful effects. Besides, it also leads one to be preoccupied with appearance undermining other aspects that make us complex. Therefore, an effective solution to these problems is to advocate body neutrality. This means that instead of listening to songs related to appearance one can listen to neutral songs.

The survey that was conducted received a total of 30 respondents out of which 13 were male students and 17 were female students. All students are studying at the undergrad level in various reputed institution. It has been observed that students are exposed to music very often in a week and many of them are aware that music frame their perception about body image and almost all of them experience changes in mood or self-esteem after listening to certain genres. Almost all the respondents are of the opinion that music plays a crucial role in developing a sense of body neutrality; and the findings show that some students were aware of the pressure to fit into a certain body standard, while others never felt



it. Most of the students are either influenced by celebrity body images portrayed in music industry or they are not at all influenced.

One questions in the survey invited respondents to share their personal experiences where music influenced how they felt about themselves or perceived their body image. Out of several responses, 2 responses have been mentioned below.

**Respondent 1:** "Well I grew up in a family where I was constantly body shamed even if it was due to my DNA...I fell into depression and tried changing myself a lot and did a self harm in the process. But then after I started listening to stray kids and their songs it made me feel so much comfortable in my own skin...Yes, it took years but I'm confident in myself now and I don't try to fit into any standard...In a way they saved me so I really believe music does have that strength."

**Respondent 2:** "Immersed in the powerful beats and captivating melodies of ancient Indian tunes, the tales of Suryaputra Karna from Mahabharata and the divine exploits of Hanuman, resonated deeply through my headphones. Fueled by the powerful emotions evoked by the music, I felt an unwavering resolve to embark on a journey of self-transformation. The echoes of Suryaputra Karna and divine Hanuman in the music fueled not just a physical transformation but a holistic journey towards embodying the indomitable spirit of these revered figures."

Although to help a child develop holistically NEP 2020 has emphasized the need for music in higher studies as it can help foster diversity and creativity yet what is striking is that anything related to music or body image is not discussed at schools or colleges but several respondents are interested in educational programs that would foster their understanding about the world of music and body image.

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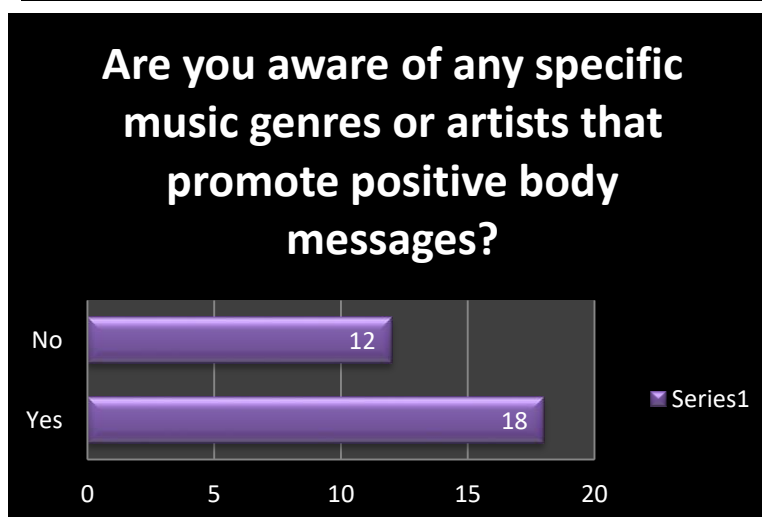
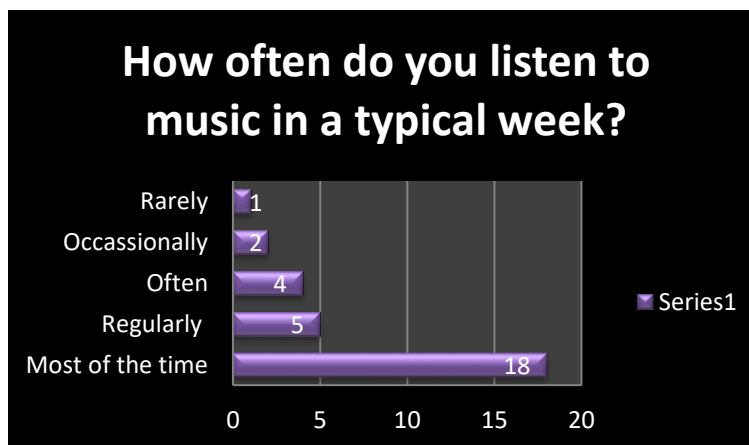
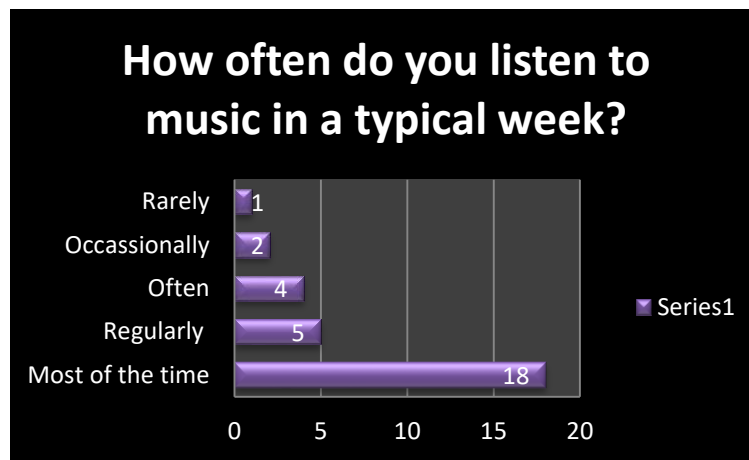
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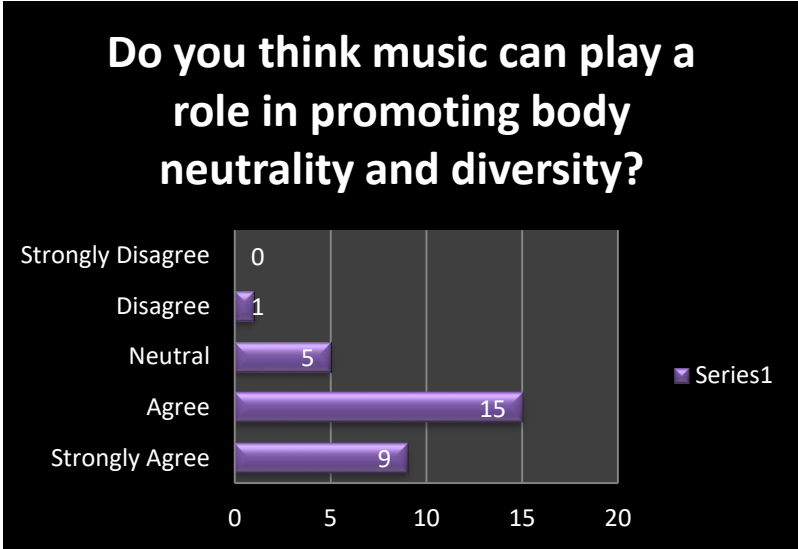
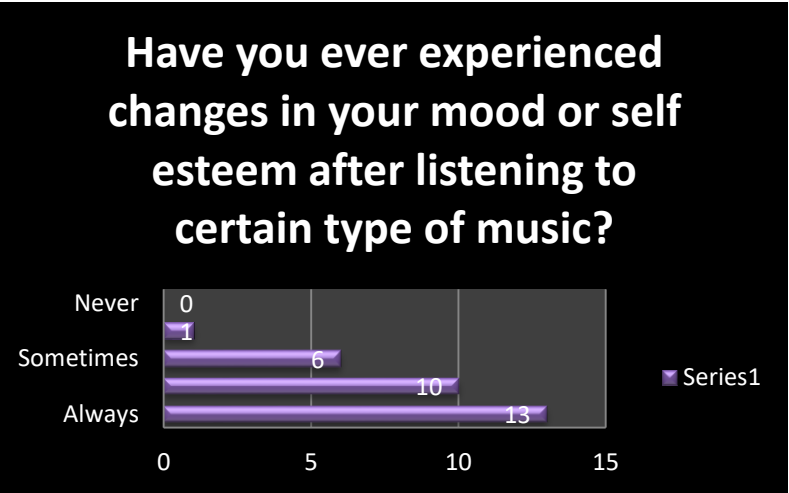
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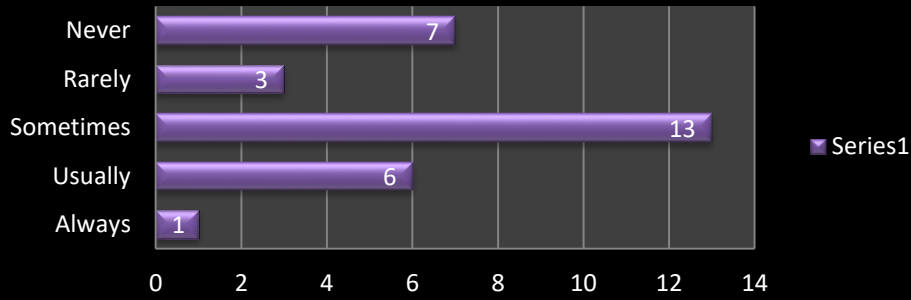
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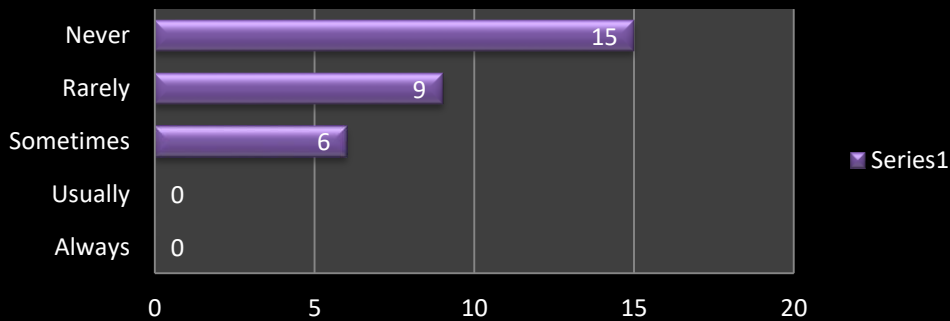




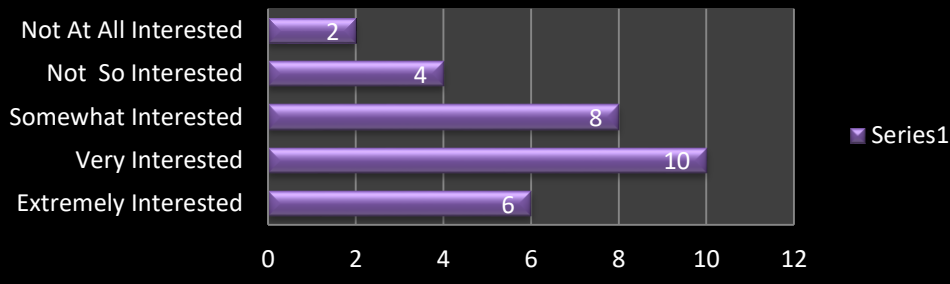
### Are yo uninfluenced by celebrity body images portrayed in the music industry?



### Do your teachers in college discuss anything related to music and body image?



### Would you be interested in educational programs that address the impact of music on body image?





### Pedagogy

Higher education offers several courses and all courses deal with several topics that intersect with the theme of the paper. While teaching or discussing the topics listed below the impact of music and body image and beauty standards can be incorporated into classroom teachings. Our education system offers several courses to students pursuing higher education. However, only three disciplines have been discussed in this paper.

### Sociology

|      |  |
|------|--|
| CC1  | Types of culture- popular, elitist, folk and consumer cultures, pluralism and multiculturalism, culture and personality.<br>Sociology and Psychology |
| CC7  | Sociology of gender and sexuality (entire paper)   |
| CC11 | Social fact: Suicide   |
| CC12 | Research method (encourage students to study music and its effects on body image of individuals and that of society)                                 |
| SEC  | Masculinity and femininity   |

### Psychology

|      |  |
|------|--|
| CC4  | Psychology of individual differences<br>Self and identity<br>Self enhancement  |
| CC7  | Social psychology<br>Social perception, attitudes, attitude and behavior link<br>Social influence  |
| CC8  | Understanding Psychological disorders<br>Normality and abnormality<br>Anxiety disorders<br>Mood disorders, eating disorders<br>Anti social personality disorders |
| CC10 | Social influences of behavior  |
| CC11 | Phobias and depression   |
| CC12 | Stages of lifespan development<br>Family, peers, Media and schooling   |



|     |  |
|-----|--|
| DSE | Happiness and wellbeing, positive affect and positive emotions<br>Health psychology<br>Culture, self and others – Who am I, Who are they?<br>Progressive education<br>Role of teacher<br>Inclusive education |
| SEC | Stress Management  |
|     |  |

**History**

|      |   |
|------|---|
| CC4  | Position of women in Medieval Europe  |
| CC5  | Bhakti (discuss devotional songs and draw parallels to the songs produced today)                                  |
| CC6  | Italian Renaissance and its impact on art   |
| CC7  | Bhakti movements and women bhaktas  |
| CC13 | Debates around gender<br>Popular movements  |
| DSE  | History of Bengal<br>Black movements in the USA<br>Afro-American women  |
| SEC  | Understanding popular culture<br>Folk art, music- folk songs<br>The impact of the internet and audio-visual media |

**A general pedagogical approach**

Integrate principles from psychology, sociology and media to foster a holistic understanding of relationship between music and body image and providing a multi-disciplinary integration.

By inviting guest speakers from music industry, psychology and media studies to help students understand and gain insights as to how music content is created and its influence of societal perceptions of body image would enhance the understanding of students.

Organizing workshops where students collaboratively analyze and interpret the collected data, applying statistical techniques to draw meaningful conclusions about the impact of music on diverse groups and individuals would engage students in active learning.

By conducting sessions encouraging students to critically analyze various research papers and questionnaire responses, will foster discussions on the societal implication and potential shifts in attitudes toward body image influenced by music.



The above-mentioned methods and pedagogical programs will benefit students theoretically but will enhance practical knowledge and will strengthen critical thinking and analysis.

Students must be encouraged to be thankful for what wonders the body can do and not what it looks like should be the approach. The educator must highlight that all people come in different shapes, sizes and appearance and all are beautiful and worthy of respect. One must encourage focusing on character, talents rather than physical beauty. An open and safe environment must be created to that allows students to speak without fear about how they feel or what they think. Teachers must focus and help students strengthen their critical thinking and help create positive perceptions and promote inclusivity based on body image and discuss how unrealistic standards seen in media can be misleading. It must be brought to notice that self-worth is crucial and all individuals deserve equal respect despite their weaknesses. Finally, the educator must mindful of his or her attitude toward body image and lead by example.

### **Suggestion**

It is important to note that media affects the mental state and affects everyone including women and men and adolescents, those of the LGBTQAI+ and other stigmatized and BIPOC communities. Despite men, adolescents, LGBTQAI+ communities and BIPOC communities playing a significant part of our society, it has been observed that no research is conducted to see how much music affects their body image and whether it makes them feel positive or stimulates negative thoughts and therefore, research is required in this field. The society also consists of the disabled and the ethnic groups who are under-represented in the music and music videos and when they are exposed to such sexualized lyrics and imagery it certainly impacts their mental health. But whether the impact is beneficial or contradictory is yet to be established.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it has been brought to light that the relationship between and body image is one that has not been much explored or studied; yet, the current work tried to understand the influence of music on women, men and adolescents. Through a multidisciplinary approach an attempt was made to go beyond the traditional boundary. Through the review of literature, we saw the profound impact of music on societal attitudes of body image. As the findings suggest, that music industry plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions, the research provides foundation for further discussion and the pedagogical approach engages students in active learning. In this ever-evolving music industry the study holds practical relevance foe educators, policy makers and industry professionals.