



Music and Body Image

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Abstract

The association between music and body image is complicated and consists of an interplay of influences. Music has the capacity to affect the norms of the community, targeting those that are related to one's appearance and body ideals. 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 study dives into the depth of these issues and determines if the relationship between body image, music and the inter-connected impacts are identified by the students in higher education. Further, it investigates if these topics are addressed by the educational institutions and advocates to encourage dialogue on the concerned topic.

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, research articles and various studies 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.

The American Psychological Association identifies body image as an individual's perception about their body and the emotions one feels regarding it. Likewise, Jessica Cortez explains that body image is what an individual thinks and envisions about themselves. It influences how they view themselves and discuss about their physical attributes, both in private and in public. 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 explore the multidimensional relationship between body image, music and how media content shapes the attitude, personal beliefs, and behavioral patterns in an individual is an aspect that requires immediate attention. Such a study also sheds light on the role of media as to how it shapes the standards and norms of the people. 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.

The paper strives to highlight the need for a responsible and awareness in the creation of music videos and music and fosters among the students of higher education to develop an informed choice of consumption and frame a positive perception about themselves.

What makes this work crucial is that it equips the learners with the ability to observe and recognize the dangerous messages and helps bring about inclusivity and empathy. It also stresses on why institutions must adopt strategies to increase awareness, foster sensitivity and help students make responsible and 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. Studies conducted recently have addressed the alarming effects of music exposure that leads individuals to harbor aggressive thoughts and unfavorable self-perception. 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. The harmful content consumed may have detrimental effects on both men and women, and may reinforce a thought among men that the opposite gender appreciates 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. 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 study emphasizes on the negative messages that are infused in lyrics of the songs or the music videos that contribute to poor body image or lower self-esteem among women, leading to inadequate feelings or a belief system concerning their appearance. 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. The distinctive aspect of this work is its investigations on how models featured in the music videos lead young women to compare themselves with those in videos and how it influences their body image. This comparison was absent among women who listened to the audio-only content.

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.

Though there exists quite some research works concentrating on media influences, there is hardly much data to help grasp how popular music affects men. Issues relating to self-perception among men have been studied less as compared to women. Findings advocate that when exposed to popular music content men tend to frame an understanding of gender norms, attitude toward women, social attitudes, opinion relating to sexual harassment, permissive sexual values, permitted violence against women and border 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. Studies that were conducted in Australia have concluded that young boys' usually raise concern regarding their weight, muscularity, and overall body size. 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 women 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. According to a meta-analytical review, gay men face cultural expectations that pressurize them and make them feel miserable with their body weight and which in turn leads them to evaluate and compare themselves based on heterosexual male standards. 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.

There exists many studies that have concluded that music videos adversely affect young girls although they are a significant medium that upholds the culture of the community. 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.

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

Body image that is negative may cause detrimental impacts on one's health and mind and it is humanely impossible to hold an image of positivity all the time. Therefore, a simpler and healthy approach is body neutrality where the body of an individual is respected and the focus is shifted from what the body looks like to what the body is capable of doing suggests DeCero. Too much emphasis on the body way cause difficulties and so a neutrality must be maintained that benefit the wellbeing of people points 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 is yet to be explored. 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. Each listener forms a personal connection with music and it must be mentioned that its impact lies beyond society and culture. Though its effects may be difficult to trace at the onset, it does possess the capacity to shape significantly our emotions and mood. It gives us energy, soothes us, encourages and inspires us. It is crucial to understand that the effects of music are not always positive. There might be instances when music contributes to discomfort, anxiety and depression or dissatisfaction with one's physical attributes. 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 feels about their body is even more complicated as it directly affects their mental and physical wellbeing. Research has established that lyrics and music videos affect women in both positive and negative ways, yet, several women find themselves being too concerned about what others think of them. Adolescents too tend to observe and imitate 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. Further, some content pushes one to think that a woman is only validated when she pleases a man and does what is expected of her. This in turn, diminishes the independence and individuality of women and leads to objectification.

In contrast, one finds that men also undergo serious pressure to maintain a "perfect body" which hampers their body image, but not much investigations 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. Lyrical content and music videos shape the attitude and perception among men further affecting how they navigate their relations with women. Additionally, exposure to them 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 features, skin tone or body type. In some occasions, one might believe that some music videos or lyrics of songs may shame those with good body 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.



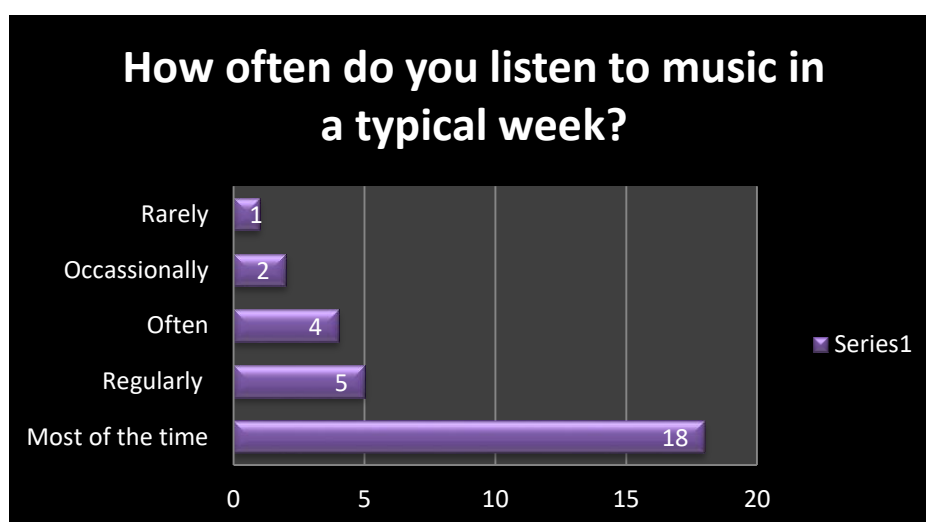
The survey that was conducted received a total of 30 respondents out of which 13 were male students and 17 were female students. All students are studying at the undergrad level in various reputed institution. Another observation is that learners are exposed to music very often in a week and many of them are aware that music influence their perception about body image and almost all of them experience changes in mood or self-esteem after listening to certain genres. Many participants have revealed that they understand that body neutrality can be achieved through music. Additionally, some respondents have acknowledged consistent pressure to fit into the body standards while others have 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 contributed to a change in perception relating to 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."

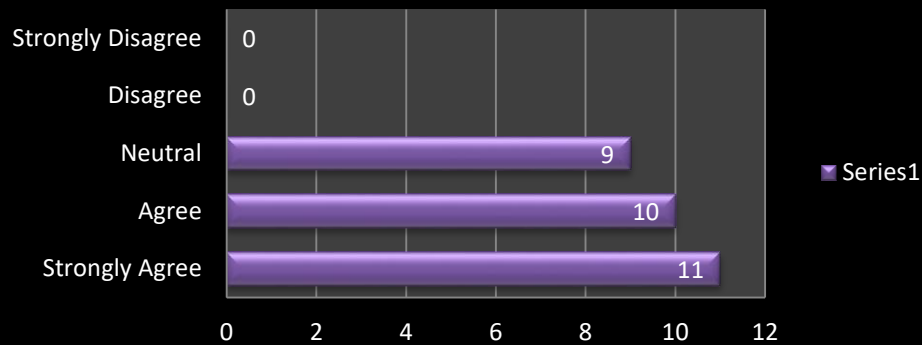
Respondent 2: "Immersed in the powerful beats and captivating melodies of ancient Indian tunes, the tales of Suryaputra Karna from Mahasharata and the divine exploits of Hanuman, resonated deeply through my headphones. Fueled by the powerful emotions evoked by the music, I felt an unwavering resolve 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 programsthat would foster their understanding about the world of music and body image.

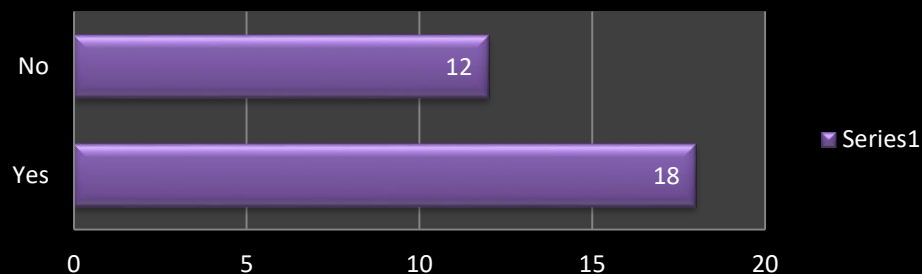




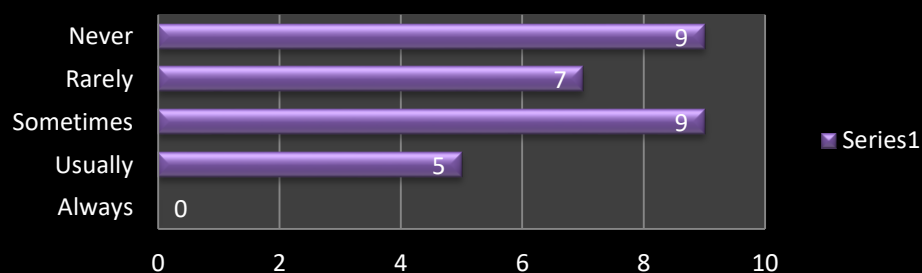
Do you believe that music you listen to influences your perception of body image?



Are you aware of any specific music genres or artists that promote positive body messages?

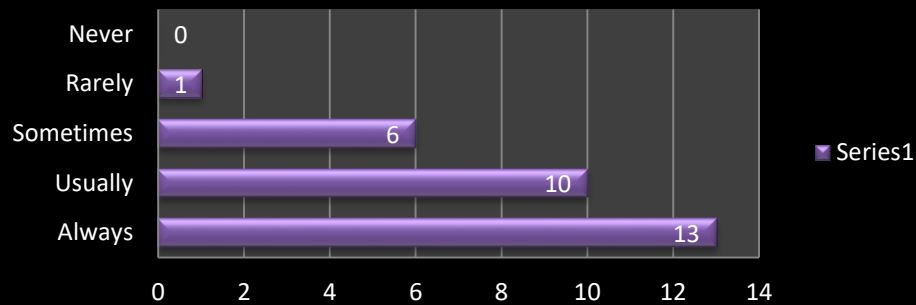


Have you ever felt pressure to fit into a certain body standard based on the music you listen to?

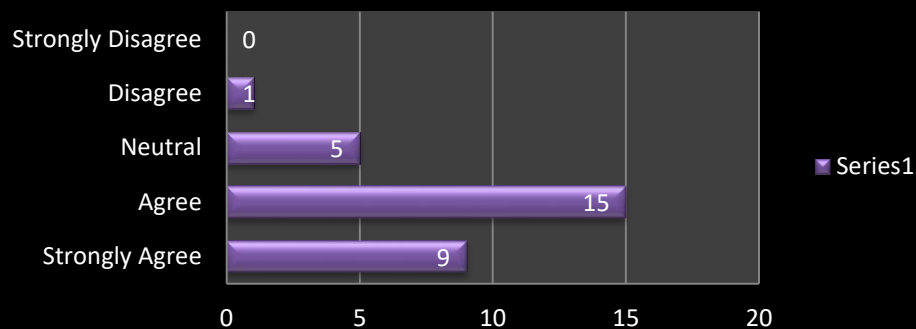




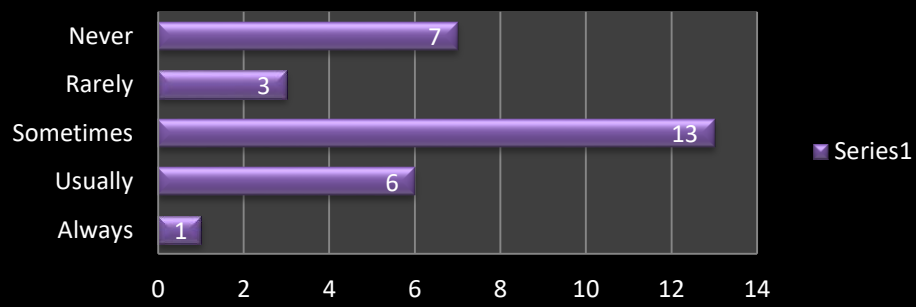
Have you ever experienced changes in your mood or self esteem after listening to certain type of music?

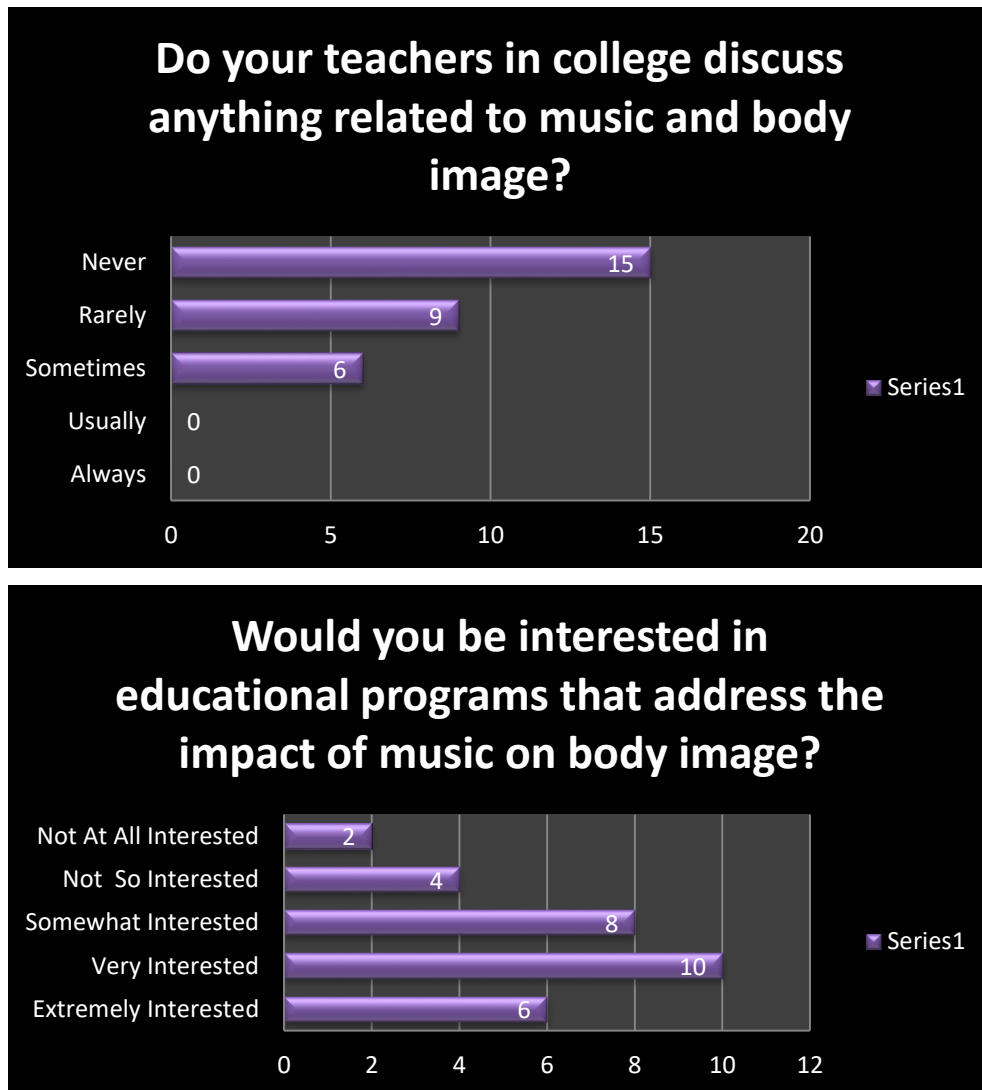


Do you think music can play a role in promoting body neutrality and diversity?



Are you influenced by celebrity body images portrayed in the music industry?





Pedagogy

Higher education offers several courses and all courses deal with several topics that intersect with the theme of the paper. The domination of music on beauty standards and body image can be incorporated within classroom discussions when teaching or approaching the topics mentioned below. 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. 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 Self and identity Self enhancement
CC7	Social psychology Social perception, attitudes, attitude and behavior link Social influence
CC8	Understanding Psychological disorders Normality and abnormality Anxiety disorders Mood disorders, eating disorders Anti social personality disorders
CC10	Social influences on behavior
CC11	Phobias and depression
CC12	Stages of lifespan development Family, peers, Media and schooling
DSE	Happiness and well being, positive affect and positive emotions Health psychology Culture, self and others – Who am I, Who are they? Progressive education Role of teacher 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 Popular movements



DSE	History of Bengal Black movements in the USA Afro-American women
SEC	Understanding popular culture Folk art, music- folk songs 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 encourage critical and analytical thinking among learners and help create positive perceptions and promote inclusivity based on body image while discussing how unrealistic standards seen in media can be misleading. It must be brought to notice that self-worth is crucial and all individuals deserve respect despite their weaknesses. Finally, the educator must mindful of their attitude toward body image and lead by example.

Suggestion

It is crucial 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 noticed 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

The findings have attempted to explore the relationship between music and body image which is not an area that has been much investigated. Nevertheless, the present work tried to navigate the impact of music on women, men, adolescents and others from various groups through a multidisciplinary approach which broke conventional boundary and tried providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic under scrutiny.

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 this study is relevant for educators, policy makers and industry professionals.

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