

## **Studying the Body Image Status of Students at the University of Tabriz and Its Related Factors**

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**Abstract:***In modern consumer society, body and body image have become the major issues in social and cultural studies. Due to the importance of the body, there is a branch of sociology called "body sociology" that seriously investigates the issues related to the body and society. Accordingly, the main objective of this paper is to study the body image status of students at University of Tabriz and its related factors.*

*This is a survey study conducted with 372 people as study samples. Proportional stratified and random sampling methods were used for choosing the samples and the necessary information has been collected from undergraduate students of Tabriz University by questionnaire. The data analyzed by SPSS (22) and LISREL (8.5) software.*

*The findings show that the body image items have moderate to high importance among the students. The media advertisement and reference group variables had a positive and direct effect, while religiosity had negative and reverse effect on the body image of students. The only variable whose effect was not significant on students' body image was age. In total, 21% of body image changes can be explained by the variables in structural equation model. In addition, the final model of this study is considered as a fit model for body image.*

**Keywords:** *Body Image, Propaganda, Reference Groups, Religion*

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### **I. Introduction**

The body is not merely a biological and psychological being, but it is constructed socially [1,2]. In any society, the human body has a physical and a social reality. Shape, size, clothing and adorn of body are means to communicate and transfer information to other members of society. Therefore, the body is a culture and displays the fundamental issues within a culture.

The growth of consumer culture in modern and industrial societies and moving from modernity to the recent modernity is one of the major social changes that made the body as a key issue in contemporary Socio- Cultural studies [3,4,5,6]. These changes in today's culture and society made body image as one of the main concerns of people, particularly girls and women. Considering the changes in the body during the life made people to attention the concept of "body image" [7].

Body image is firstly defined by Shellder in 1950; His definition was from psychological perspective and it was considered as imagination of the body in our minds and the ways that our body becomes clear [8]. Society and its culture teach the individuals how to interpret many changes in their own body and others. The body image may affect the people's ability in making relationship with others and also getting reactions from others [9].

Tendency to beauty has always been present in human [10]. Having a desirable face makes the imagination of someone better and increases the self confidence. As a result, the social activities are performed in more acceptable level. The appearance is an important part of one's identity and in social situations appears immediately in dealing with others. Therefore, the importance of this personality structure is very obvious. Physical appearance is an important part of the body image because it is the first source of information used for social interaction with other people[11]. Rethinking and reforming the body and regular control of it are considered as the characteristics of modern society and is used to achieve the ideals introduced by the society and media. Using these measures, people can imagine their body and physical appearance. If this evaluation and image have been positive for the others, people will be satisfied by their body shape and vice versa. Dissatisfaction of body roots in the undesirability of assessments by others [12].

When it is expressed by other that somebody is not beautiful, it may suppress the person's confidence saved from the childhood and it may not be compensated by the other sources. It will subsequently affect the person's interactions in the future[13]. Social - cultural values, social comparisons, emphasis on physical attractiveness and negative experiences interacting with peers, being concerned about physical attractiveness and uncertainty about social communication lead to people's worry about others' evaluation of their physical structure. When the culture in society focuses on attractiveness, especially for women, it will gradually provide the concern about body image [14].

Many studies show that most women experience body image disorders and dissatisfaction which root in norm pressures and looking at woman's body as an object in capitalist society and consumer culture, especially by the media [12]. Positive body image can increase a person's self-esteem and negative body image not only leads to body dissatisfaction, but it also relates to excessive investment in physical appearance. Today, due to excessive emphasis on the physical beauty, the advertising images in fashion magazines and the media, attention to appearance, especially among women has gone beyond its normal level [15].

The body image is a less considered issue while today it has made much more mental obsession among the youth, especially women. A high percentage of students are dissatisfied with their physical appearance and keen to change their appearance. Fear and dissatisfaction with physical appearance can affect the social performance and interpersonal relationships [16].

A research study showed that 70% of students are dissatisfied with their physical appearance and 28% of them suffer from body image disorders [17]. Therefore, based on the above mentioned points, studying the body image to know the physical characteristics of Tabriz University students and sociological explanation are much more important. Now the main question is that what is the body image status among the students and what factors affect it?

## **II. Body text**

According to Mike Featherstone, body image is a mental image of the body that makes it appear to others. In a consumer culture, it is often assumed that people coordinate their body image to social acceptability. This view of body image is based on the assumption that the physical appearance, especially face that reflects the self, displays the inner personality and characteristics of the person. Featherstone believes that consumer culture is closely associated with the body. Buying the Consumable goods represents the social and personal identity of people. To prove that they belong to a particular class, people adjust their body with fashion, modify it, enhance it, shape it and make it [18].

Featherstone [18] believes that in within the consumer culture, advertising, public and Television pressure provides numerous stylized images of the body. In addition, the mass media constantly emphasizes the benefits of body makeup. In the media, the stars and celebrities are hired to show the beautiful images of the body. Featherstone [19] claims that the main regulating factors of the body management in consumer culture, are media and technology.

Like Featherstone, Baudirillard believes that the text of the mass media in the twenty-first century backs of a repeating pattern of the body shape. Reinforcing the body messages is mutually done by publishing the stories of film and TV stars, news in the morning newspapers and the World Wide Web, radio and the printed material about celebrities [20].

Baudirillard believes that women and youth, compared to other age groups and men, want to go forward rapidly, then they aim to adopt themselves with it. Trying not to fall behind and not lose the advantage put women in the fashion cycle. In this field, women feel they should always be fashionable. He also states that our imagination of the body is not merely based on our understanding of the body, but there are socio - cultural factors which have an influential role in forming our body imagination. Therefore, we can say that one of the self-satisfaction elements is satisfaction from our body [21].

Goffman's interaction analysis is more important in understanding the body management and the fact that how people control and manage their body ([22]. In Goffman's view, the body is local of interaction in structuring the encounters ([4]. According to him, social life is a series of dramatic role play such as the one on the stage. In interaction, people try to show themselves as acceptable one to others [23]. He also states that in face to face interaction and also the social functions, appearance is very important. Make-up is a way to get this mask. It is only in extreme emotional situations and in the presence of friends that people put their make up mask away and appears as the private or real person [24].

Martin claims that changing and reforming the body lead to a new imagination of the body. Body image, as a process of socialization, is achieved during the growth in family, culture and society environment. Body image is a dynamic process. That is, it develops and shapes during one's life and is constantly renewed [25]. According to Stice, family, peers and the media play an important role in the transmission of social - cultural pressures for being thin. Of these three sources, mass media is the most important and influential source and has major influence in promoting the culture of thinness [26].

Grogan claims that body image is the perception, emotions and thoughts of women relative to their body which includes their evaluation from size, attractiveness and emotions associated with the shape and mass of the body. Body image is a social construct related to the person's satisfaction from the body. Grogan notes that the changing taste of the public, based on the priority of thinness to the obesity, actually, is a relatively new phenomenon that roots in the early twentieth century. Western beauty standards provide ideals for women that achieving them seems impossible. These ideals and goals put them in inferior position. It also forces them to be ready for any changes and control on their body [27].

In his studies, Crossley [28] noted that the gap of religious believes is filled up with body worship and investment on the body has been imagined as mean to touch the body. Foster and Hummel [29] in their study concluded that a desire to change the body between the people who regularly go to religious places is lower than those occasionally seen in such places or not at all. Morgan [30] also states that the more religious a person, the lower desire to body change. He adds that there is a great desire to change the body among people with a lower religiosity level.

Pike and Rodin [31] showed that young women and girls, criticized by the mothers and other family members in terms of weight and attractiveness, are more likely to suffer from food disorders. Rudd and Lennon [32] also claimed that high risk behaviors apparently refer to influence of family and friends. In similar studies, researchers also found that there is a significant correlation between putting pressure on a family member and dissatisfaction with the body and the negative image from [33].

On the whole, the theories and researches suggest that body image is a phenomenon influenced by many factors, such as family, friends, peers, religion and the media. Therefore, the research hypotheses will be as follows:

- There is a relationship between the age of the students and the body image.
- There is a relationship between religiosity and thought the body image.
- There is a relationship between the advertisements and the body image.
- There is a relationship between the reference group and the body image.

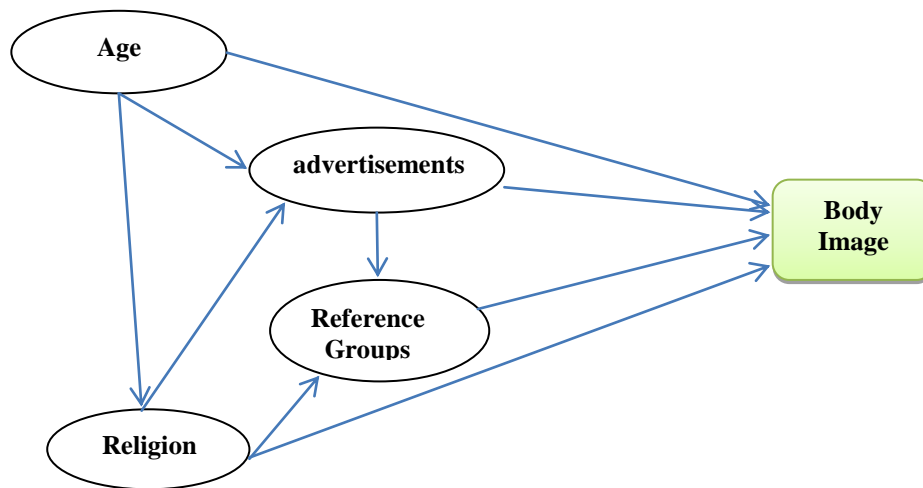


Fig. (1): Theoretical model of research

### III. Methodology

The methodology of this study, based on the aim of the research, is applied. That is, the research goal is to develop practical knowledge in a particular field (body image among students). Based on data collection, the research method is a survey in which the distribution of population characteristics, the explanation of the current situation and identifying the relationship between the events are considered. Measurement tool is a close-ended questionnaire. The statistical population includes the undergraduate students of Tabriz University who were 11,401 people in 2013-2014. Of these, 357 students are chosen through Cochran formula. To increase the generalizability of the results, the sample size has increased from 357 to 372 students.

$$n = \frac{NT^2S^2}{Nd^2 + T^2S^2} = \frac{11401 \times 3.84 \times 0.24}{11401 \times (.0/05)^2 + 3.84 \times 0.24} = 357.14$$

T=1.96 : 99% confidence level

S<sup>2</sup>=0.24 : the variance of the dependent variable items in the pilot study

D=0.05 N= 11401: the maximum acceptable error in the survey

**Table 1. The population and sample characteristics in terms of faculty and gender**

Faculties	Students of Faculty		Female students		Male students	
	population	Sample	population	Sample	population	Sample
Persian literature and foreign languages	746	25	531	17	215	8
Mathematics	637	21	402	13	235	8
Chemistry	667	21	376	12	291	9
Humanities and Social Sciences	1843	61	1152	38	691	23
Psychology and Educational Sciences	1045	34	694	23	351	11
Natural sciences	817	26	565	18	252	8
Physics	441	14	215	7	226	7
Agriculture	1686	55	987	32	699	23
Electrical and Computer Engineering	1128	37	416	14	712	23
Civil Engineering	951	31	258	8	693	23
Mechanical engineering	1440	47	480	16	960	31
Total	11401	372	6076	198	5325	174

To collect the data, a proportional stratified sampling and random sampling methods were used. It should be noted that the number of cases assigned to each of the colleges were based on the number of them. The collected data have been analyzed using SPSS software.

To measure the validity of the research scale, content validity is used. According to this validity, the consensus of experts indicates that the items in the questionnaire are suitable for measuring the variables. The final views and opinions of five experts in this field express the content validity of items in the questionnaire.

Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire. Most of the questionnaire items were designed like a five and six-degree spectrum and as a close-end questionnaire. The reliability of the variables, including the religiosity, advertisements, the reference group and the body image are estimated by Cronbach's alpha. Reliability test results indicate that items allocated to measure these variables had high reliability. The results of the variable reliability test are reflected in the table below.

**Table 2: Results of reliability analysis for the variables**

Variables	Items	Scales	Reliability
Religiosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If we leave the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice, immortality will be present everywhere.</li> <li>- On the Day of Judgment, our actions will carefully be handled.</li> <li>- The Quran is the word of God and what it says is the truth.</li> <li>- Anyone who believes in God is not afraid of death.</li> <li>- Sometimes I feel that I am closer to God.</li> <li>- Without faith, I feel my life is empty and meaningless.</li> <li>- Sometimes I fear from God.</li> <li>- It is wrong to cheat on taxes.</li> <li>- There should be determination in facing people with non suitable Hijab.</li> <li>- The sale of alcoholic beverages should be limited.</li> <li>- I always say my prayers and do not postpone it to the other times.</li> <li>- Most of the time I cannot fast and put it to the other times</li> <li>- I participate in religious ceremonies.</li> <li>- I try to participate in prayers in mosques.</li> <li>- I am very interested in reading Quran.</li> </ul>	Likert scale	0.90
Media advertisements	Influenced by the advertisements of the Internet, satellite, television, newspapers, magazines, radio and book	Likert scale	0.86
Reference group	Under the influence of the friends, family, relatives, actors/ actresses, athletes and singers' behaviors	Likert scale	0.67
Body image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I often feel that I'm physically attractive.</li> <li>- Most people know me handsome.</li> <li>- I hate my body form.</li> <li>- I am physically unattractive.</li> <li>- I like to be seen without clothes.</li> <li>- Before going out in public, I consider my looks.</li> <li>- I try to buy clothes which show me better.</li> <li>- I would pay special attention to make my hair.</li> <li>- I always try to make my physical appearance better.</li> <li>- In order to achieve my desired body, I follow the favorite diet.</li> <li>- I use plastic surgery to get my favorite appearance.</li> <li>- I brush my hair more than others.</li> <li>- I cut my hair more than others.</li> <li>- I clean my skin more than others.</li> <li>- I use massage and steam bath to keep my skin better.</li> <li>- To change my weight, I do exercise.</li> <li>- I weigh myself more than it needs.</li> <li>- I do body building</li> <li>- I limit my food rate to improve my fitness and lose weight</li> </ul>	Likert scale	0.83

**IV. Result**

The results of the descriptive analysis of the religiosity, advertisements, reference group and body image variables shows that the average of students' religiosity, advertisements, reference groups and the body image were 73.63, 63.39, 53.63 and 87.72, respectively. It can be seen that the mean of these variables were higher than average.

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the research variables**

Statistics	age	Religiosity	advertisements	Reference group	Body Image
Sample	372	372	372	372	372
Mean	21.27	66.29	15.57	16.53	66.94
Mean Percent		73.63	65.39	54.63	58.72
Standard Deviation	1.6	1.46	6.20	3.88	12.45
Variance	2.58	212.97	38.48	15.058	155
Min	19	15	7	6	23
Max	26	90	35	30	107
R	7	75	28	24	84

The results of correlation analysis between body image and variables such as age, religion, reference group, and advertisement are reflected in Table 5. The results indicate that there was a positive and significant correlation between the media advertising, the influence of the reference group and the body image among students. In other words, students, who have more interaction with the reference group and the media advertising, the body image is more important to them.

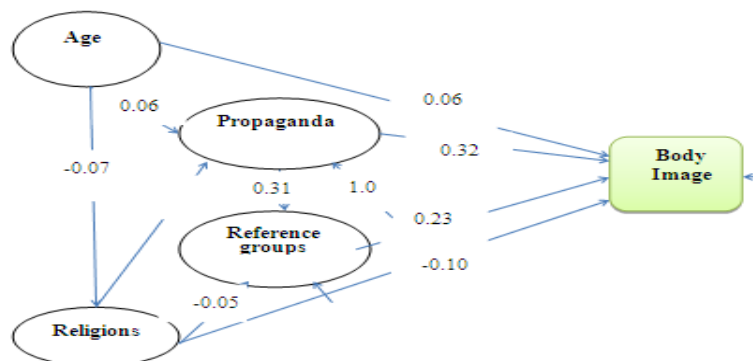
However, the situation is different for the student's religiosity. That is, there is a negative and reverse correlation between religiosity and body image of students. The data table shows that body image is not very important for students with stronger religiosity. This means that when the religiosity rate of the students is high, they are rarely interested in cases such as body image. In addition, the findings show that there is not a significant correlation between age and body image on the 95% confidence level. Among the research variables, advertisements and reference group had an increased effect while religiosity had decreasing effect on the importance of body image among the students.

**Table 4: the correlation analysis results of the research variables**

Variables		Religiosity	Advertisements	Age	Reference group
Body image	Correlation coefficient	-0.114	0.255	0.066	0.298
	Sig.	0.029	0.000	0.206	0.00
	n	372	372	372	372

**Fitness of path and the structural equation model of the Body Image**

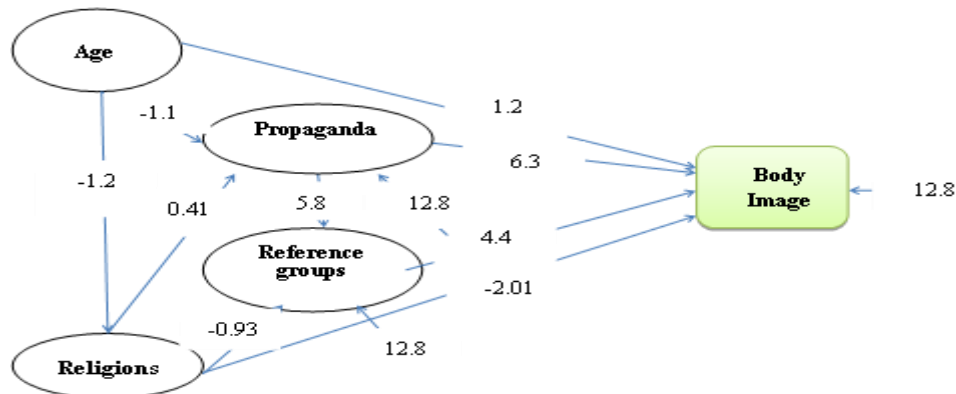
To determine whether the model of body image is a fitted model, various parameters in LISREL software are used. After preparing the final model of body image, the Chi-square, significant level and error values represent that this model is suitable to explain the changes of body image among the students because the Chi-square was not significant and the model error is estimated to be close to zero. In addition, the relative and absolute fit indices<sup>1</sup> indicate that the body image model is considered appropriate. Totally, 21% of the body image changes are explained by significant variables in the model. This explanation is statistically significant.



Chi-Square=1.85 DF=1 P-value=0.17332 RMSEA= 0.051

**Model (2)** the final and adjusted structural equation model of body image with standard beta coefficients

1 - Levels of absolute and relative fit indices are considered as a good model if it is close to one. Values of this index should be less than 0.90. Among the absolute and relative indices, when the values of PNFI and PGFI indices are close to zero, the fitted model will be a good model.



Model (3) the final and adjusted structural equation model of body image with T values

Table 5: goodness of fit Indicators in the final and modified structural equation model for the investors' tendency towards migration

Total Indexes		Relative Fitting Index		Absolute Fitting Index	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.21	NFI	0.98	GFI	1.0
T Value	12.77	N NFI	0.92	AGFI	0.97
X <sup>2</sup>	1.85	P NFI	0.098	PGFI	0.067
DF	1	RFI	0.84		
RMSEA	0.051				
p- value	0.17332				

In the final model and improved model of body image, the variables of advertisements, the religiosity and reference groups had a significant direct effect. Studying the direct effect of model variables shows that:

Of the three variables in the model, the media advertisements and reference groups had a positive effect and enhance the attention of students to the body image. Students, who are mainly under the influence of advertising and the reference group, usually concern their body image at a higher level and vice versa. The effect of Religiosity on the students' body image, unlike the previous two variables, was negative and reverse. That is, the higher level of religiosity among the students, the less attention to body image. Of these variables, the advertising had the highest and religiosity had the lowest direct significant effect. Except the media advertisements, other variables' direct effect on the body image was not significant because  $t < 1.96$ .

Considering the effects of the whole variables in the model, it could be said that the most important variables affecting students' body image are media advertisements and reference group. It should be noted that the religiosity play an important role in the body image of students and its role should not be ignored.

Table 6: Effects of structural equation model variables on the main internal variable

Variable	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects
Age	0.06	-0.02	0.04
Media Advertisements	0.32	0.07	0.39
Reference Groups	0.23	0	0.23
Religiosity	-0.10	-0.004	-0.104

### V. Conclusion

In recent years, interest in body image has significantly increased among the youth and adolescents so that most of the young people have focused on their body image. Accordingly, the main objective of this paper is to study the body image among students and the factors affecting it. After collecting the data, reference groups and media advertisements were identified as variables affecting body image.

Featherstone believes that in the consumer culture, advertising, public pressure and television provide numerous stylized images of the body. In addition, the public media continues to emphasize the benefits of body makeup. To display beautiful body images, the stars and celebrities are used in the media. According to Stice, family, peers and the public media play an important role in transferring the socio - culture pressures for losing the weight. Featherstone also calls the media responsible for regulating the body's management considers in the consumer culture media. Therefore, the media in today's world are one of the main causes of body image. The effect of public media on the body image is confirmed in this study and it is also found that the adverting enhances the students' tendency towards the body image. In other words, advertising is considered as one of the main sources of the students' attention to body image.

Religiosity is among the factors that play a decisive role in reducing the tendency of students to pay more attention to body image considerations. The findings of this research were consistent with Crossley, Foster

and Hummel and Morgan studies which showed an inverse relationship between religion and body modifications. Since that the religious people accept what God has blessed them, they do not try to change and reform the body and to get a positive image from their body, they never take any risk. In general, we can say that the imagination of the students from their body is above average and factors such as religion reduce its level, while the reference group and the advertisements increase the tendency of students towards the body imagination. In this regard, it can be argued that increased attention to body image and handling of dangerous works, such as using the drugs and cosmetic surgery, is seen as warning for families. They can prevent these problems by informing their children of the dangers of such actions.

If families can enhance their children's level of religiosity, they can easily be safe from the consequences of this harmful practice. In addition, while the press, newspapers and TV offer many advertisements about the body imagination, they can also prepare programs for displaying the dangers of drugs, improper diet and cosmetic surgery which are taken to achieve perfect physical form. Without the collaboration of doctors and specialists with the media, informing the people, especially students, seems impossible.

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