The Influence of Culture on Body Image: a thematic analysis investigating perceptions of the effects of cultural appearance ideals on the body image of young women.

Roha Riaz

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that cultural beauty standards have a significant impact on the body image of women, however limited research observes this phenomenon in non-western populations. Previous literature has focused mainly on white middle-class women in clinical settings (Mulholland & Mintz, 2001), therefore this qualitative study aimed to explore how the subjective experiences Asian-British women have affected their body image. A critical realist perspective was adopted; to explore the different experiences, perspectives and feelings, 6 women (aged 18-24) were recruited using a volunteer sample. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using thematic analysis. Through this four themes emerged; (1) "Widely unachievable" western standards, (2) "I follow, like, my culture more", (3) "Asian clothing is a bit more forgiving" and (4) "As you grow older you learn to accept your body more". The findings suggest that culture is an important aspect of body image and societal appearance ideals play a major role the lives of young women. Limitations of this study are discussed in full.

Introduction:

Several psychologists have demonstrated the significance of body image concerns within young people (for reviews, see Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001; Smolak & Levine, 2002). Body image is referring to an individual's emotional attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of their own body. Past research conducted by Stice and Whiteton (2002) found that body image concerns or dissatisfaction with an element of appearance was found in 30% in boys and a shocking 60% in girls. Socio-cultural theories have been most prominent in attempting to explain the prevailing concerns with body image amongst younger people; these theories propose that cultural standards in every day society promote appearance ideals that put the physical attractiveness of individuals at the forefront on one's image (Keery et al, 2004). While it is evident that these socio-cultural norms apply to both males and females, it has been argued that females generally tend to be more impacted by these norms that males (Knauss et al, 2007).

The effect of social influences on body image

Cultural ideals of "beauty" and "body" are often modelled and reinforced through aspects within society, which are mostly communicated through the media; repeated exposure to images promoting thinness as the 'perfect body' in females may significantly affect the development and further maintenance of body image as individuals will internalize these ideals (Dittmar, 2009). However, some argue that increased exposure to media influences doesn't indefinitely predict body image concerns, media represents only one factor of the cultural norms; body image dissatisfaction can develop by the reinforcement of cultural appearance ideals from close social interactions, such as parents and friends (McCabe and Ricciardelli, 2005). Further, Keery's (2004) Tripartite Influence Model looking at body image concerns identifies "media, peers and parents" as the most important influences on body image. The effects of peers has been researched less within the mass literature available in body image even though experiences with peers provide an essential social aspect, in which specific cultural ideals and appearance norms are "communicated, modelled and reinforced" and thus, are a major contributor to negative development of body image (Jones and Crawford, 2006).

Internalization of societal ideals

The term 'internalization' refers to the degree to which individuals cognitively adhere to culturally defined ideals of attractiveness, and incorporate them into their personal beliefs and make conscious effort to achieve those ideals (Thompson & Stice, 2001). Some research has found an association between internalization of societal ideals and body image concerns amongst young women (Chen et al, 2007), internalization has been identified as a critical mechanism in the relationship between media exposure and body concerns (Thompson & Stice, 2001), even though internalization of appearance standards through media has still been found to impact girls more than boys. Knauss et al (2008) found that the process of internalizing media's appearance ideals predicts direct levels of body concerns amongst young girls but not boys. In relation to internalization by media standards, very limited research has considered how peer relationships have impacted appearance ideal internalization and body concerns in young women. More importance given to appearance ideals by social peers is said to reinforce commitment to these idealised images and result in the development of negative body image (Clark & Tiggemann, 2006).

Body Ideals in western culture

Within the western society, majority of these concerns stem from one's desire to be thin, 28-55% of young people wish to alter their size or shape, even though majority of those children would fall in the normal weight range for their age (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001). These concerns during childhood and adolescence have important implications on the self-esteem and psychological wellbeing in adulthood (Smolak & Levine, 2002), further they can also contribute to the development of eating disorders in the future (Shisslak et al, 1999). It is argued that eating disorders resulting from a low body image are prevalent in western society however, there is very limited research on the occurrence of eating disorders in non-western and non-white populations. Majority of research examining the importance of thinness has focused mainly on white, middle-class populations residing in western societies (Le Grange, Telch & Tibbs, 1998). Vartanian & Herman (2006) found that in most societies it is believed that individuals have control over their own body, so should be able to reach their ideal weight goals with some effort and maintenance. Although, women continue to accept the cultural standards to be thin, these ideals are often criticised for allowing individuals to believe that their body size is flexible and "easily

achievable" whereas, this may not often be the case in real life (Pompper & Koeing, 2004).

Body ideals in non-western cultures

it is considered that the need to be thin in western societies may be a "culturally bound syndrome" (Nasser, 1998), as a lot of non-western cultures devalue thinness, and larger women are seen as more attractive (Cheney, 2010). In Arabic culture, for example, thinness is not desired and bigger women are a symbol of fertility and womanhood. In the Punjabi culture, it is a compliment to tell a woman that she looks "fat and fresh". Further, larger women in non-western cultures stand as a symbol of longevity in countries such as India. 'Ethnic identity' is often studied in association to body image concerns amongst non-western populations; some research suggests that an individual's ethnic identity can directly aid in the development of a negative or positive body image and can discourage the internalization of western beauty standards (Rakhovskaya & Warren, 2014).

Whereas, other studies have argued that ethnic identity increases the need for being thin and the development of eating disorders (Sabik, Cole & Ward, 2010). It is likely that young girls with a strong ethnic identity compare their body to other Asian women that they see is media and in general, who are often portrayed as slim but with ample hips, fairer skin tone and modest. This will often leave them feeling overweight or inadequate in comparison. In addition to the cultural demands of femininity and submissiveness, it may contribute to unhealthy attempts to lose weight or alter skin tone, e.g. creams such as 'fair and lovely' designed to lighten skin tone but with adverse side effects.

Warren et al (2005) argue that ethnicity goes as far as to "protect against the development of a negative body image" as it provides individuals with more realistic and achievable ideals. The occurrence of eating disorders is reported much less in countries such as India, this could be due to the traditional Indian values where thinness is not seen as an aspect of beauty (Malhotra & Rogers, 2000). Bush et al (2001) found that in a lot of non-western cultures physical appearance is not seen as the epitome of a woman's worth in society rather it is seen as a predictor of success and wealth. In comparison to western culture where a women's appearance is seen as vital to their achievement and success professionally (Cheney, 2010). Wood-

Barclow et al (2010) suggest that ethnic minorities might have a greater "awareness" of the thin ideal but choose not to internalise it because of their ethnic identity, which gives them different values and cultural ideals.

Negative body image in Asian cultures compared to western

Research has found that women belonging to an Asian culture generally report less body image concerns than Caucasian women (Cachelin et al, 2002) whereas, Swami et al (2009) argued that Asian females are not immune to the phenomena of negative body image in the way that other cultures are (i.e. Black women). In a study investigating how women were impacted by mainstream western ideals found that Asian women were far more likely to internalise the western ideals, in the same way white women do, and in turn experience more body dissatisfaction (Evans & McConnell, 2003). Asian women have also been found to have more body concerns compared to white women (Cummins & Lehman, 2007). It has been suggested that Asian women show more eating disorders than Caucasian women (Dolan et al, 1990). This shows Asian women being equally as prone to the development of negative body image and eating disorders, in some studies the occurrence of eating disorders is higher in young Asian women than Caucasian women (Furnham & Adam-Saib, 2001).

Research by Dunkel et al (2010) examined body image concerns and internalization of western ideals in Muslim women of varying ages, as well as the relationship between wearing western and cultural (non-western) clothing. The results found that younger Muslim women reported inconsistencies between their present body and their ideal body weight; the inconsistency was less significant in non-Muslim women of the same age-group. It was found that girls who generally wore traditional clothing were less likely to internalise western ideals than girls who wore western clothing, emphasising the importance of clothes in the internalization of western ideals. Although, culture is a protective factor in certain groups, findings suggest an equal risk of the development of negative body image in Asian women of all ages.

The role of acculturation

Grabe and Hyde (2006) suggested that Asian women are also less likely to conform to western ideals due to a process known as acculturation: the process of adapting or borrowing traits from another culture leading to the modification of one's own

culture in some way. Cummins & Lehman (2007) argue that the conflict between whether to follow western standards of beauty or traditional values of the culture can increase the risk of body image concerns, some psychologists argue that acculturation intensifies body monitoring and draws attention to features that may be considered unattractive or unideal in the other culture. Whereas, Smart and Tsong (2014) argue that adherence to cultural standards of beauty within more patriarchal societies can intensify the pressure to be "thin, modest and attractive". It has been suggested that women who identify more with their culture are protected against unrealistic western ideals (Iyer & Hasiam, 2003). However, increased integration into the western culture may increase likelihood of adopting the cultures values and beliefs which may clash with their cultural values (Cheney, 2010). On the other hand, research has found that the more women adhere to their cultural norms the greater their overall body dissatisfaction was (Lau et al, 2006).

Research found that women living in India showed less body image concerns, whereas women living in the UK who identified as Indian showed greater body image concerns compared to Caucasian women (Jaeger et al, 2002). Suggesting that integration into the western culture can lead to the development of negative body image. However, some researchers suggest that body image concerns might be related to bicultural stress (Tsong & Smart, 2015), the process of combining the norms and values of two cultures, suggesting that western standards or traditional norms alone may not pose that much of a risk, it is the combination of the two that results in body dissatisfaction.

Present Study

It is evident that Asian women living in the UK have a "unique" racial experience that may aid the development of negative body image concerns. Asian women are sometimes eroticized and portrayed as submissive sexual beings, and are often at the receiving end of race-related bullying that mocks their unique racial qualities, such as, darker skin tone. Studies have found that those exposed to race-related or ethnic teasing/bullying are more concerned of their body and tend to have maladaptive eating attitudes (Reddy & Crowther, 2007). Further, Cheng (2014) suggested that anticipated discrimination has been linked to greater internalization of media beauty standards and in turn body satisfaction. Given the plethora of evidence highlighting the negative effects of cultural and western beauty standards on women

who are exposed to both it is crucial to gain a better understanding how different experiences may relate to body image concerns within this minority.

The broad aim of the current study is to gain further understanding of the development of body image in young Asian women by examining their perception of the effects of cultural ideals, as reinforced through the media and social influence, on their body image. A qualitative method was employed to allow for a greater understanding of the experiences of the young women and the impact of these experiences on their body image. In summary, the current study used qualitative methods to conduct semi-structured interviews to investigate how Asian cultural ideals impact the development of body image among young Asian females (aged 18-24) and how that interacts with the western ideals, whether that has a negative or positive influence will be explored.

Method:

Design-

A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate and a critical realist perspective was adopted to explore the perceptions of the effects of culture on body image. Qualitative research focuses on the participant's feelings, thoughts and emotions, it aims to understand the subjective perspectives of individuals, which is core to this study. According to Maxwell (2012) qualitative research allows for flexibility and openness which would be a key tool in understanding the experiences of participants, it further allows the research to explore the more complex issues related to body image.

Participants-

Six women that identified as Asian-British were recruited from Manchester Metropolitan University, they were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Individuals who met the following inclusion criteria were invited to participate; (a) self-identified as Asian-British, (b) identified as a woman, (c) were a full-time student at Manchester Metropolitan University, and (d) were aged 18-24. As the study aims to understand the experiences of culture on body image, a small sample size would allow for more in-depth data further, past research into body image has shown that the sample size was efficient (Greenlead, 2002). The position of the researcher, who will collect, transcribe and analyse all data, is important to

acknowledge, consistent with the critical realist qualitative research paradigm (Morrow, 2005), as it will impact the interpretation and assumptions made from the data. As the researcher of the current study belongs to the culture being examined, it could be argued that it allows for a better understanding and unique sensitivity to the terminology used.

Semi-structured interview procedure-

The current study was ethically approved by Manchester Metropolitan University before any data was collected (appendix 1). Participants were recruited through volunteer sampling, the study was advertised on the student participation pool provided by MMU, where participants could see the inclusion criteria before expressing interest. They then took part in a semi-structured interview lasting 45-60 minutes. Interview questions (appendix 6) were created by the researcher, using a feminist lens to allow participants to engage in discussion about their experiences with their body image. The topics focused on in the interview came from wider research into body imagine concerns; a variety of research was looked at and a semi-structured interview was deemed most appropriate as it allows freedom around the questions, so conversation can cover topics not previously considered by the researcher (Sullivan et al, 2012). Depending on the interview, additional prompts and questions were added by the researchers to explore the experiences of participants fully. Before the interview took place, participants received an invitation letter (appendix 2) followed by an information sheet (appendix 3) and then a consent form (appendix 4) which they signed. All interviews were conducted in a safe and quiet environment and securely audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher onto a password-protected computer, to protect participant's anonymity, a pseudonym was chosen by them and any identifying information was deleted from transcripts. After the interview participants were given a debrief sheet (appendix 5) which contained relevant counselling service details in case they felt affected by the interview.

Thematic Analysis-

To assess how culture impacts body image, thematic analysis was conducted on the transcripts of participant interviews. Guidelines suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used, this was in line with the epistemology of this study, firstly, the researchers read each transcript in detail and added thoughtful notes on their

interpretation of the data. As recommended by Boyatzis (1998) memo-taking was used to allow any relevant material or themes could be recorded. Open coding was used initially, data was transcribed line-by-line, which allowed the researcher to examine patterns, implicit meanings and any differences within the interviews. The researcher then used axial coding, during which line-by-line codes were expanded into broad categories so themes could be found, at this point common themes across the interviews were beginning to emerge. Lastly, though selective coding higher-level themes were found, themes were modified and developed if necessary, based on new information. This process occurred until homogeneity was reached. Sample of analysed transcripts is attached (appendix 7).

Ethics-

Ethical consent was obtained from Manchester Metropolitan University Ethics Committee in line with the BPS guidelines. Potential participants were recruited on a voluntary basis and reminded there were no negative outcomes if they chose not to participate, they were given an information sheet prior to participation with details of the study, they then signed a consent form to acknowledge they wanted to take part and had significant knowledge of what the study was assessing. Interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and transcripts were stored on a password protected computer only accessible to the researcher, participants choose their own pseudonym to ensure anonymity, however, confidentiality was not promised as direct quotes were used from their interviews. They were reminded of their right to withdraw at any point during the interview, and told they did not have to answer any questions that they felt embarrassed or uncomfortable about. The information sheet outlined that if they wish to withdraw after the interview they could do so up till 28th February 2018. They were provided with a debrief sheet after the interview thanking them for their participation, explaining in more detail the nature of the study and what will be done with the data. These details were not provided on the information sheet as their inclusion could potentially alter the participants' responses. All data, including digital and printed copies, was destroyed after the submission of the project on the 17th April 2018.

Analysis:

Through the thematic analysis of transcripts four main themes emerged;

Theme 1- "Widely unachievable" western beauty standards

In response to questions of peer, influence and media on body image participants consistently mentioned that the images they see on social media often had a negative impact on their body image, in most cases they were aware that these ideals are not realistic but it still affected their body image. Research by Dittmar (2009) has previously suggested that ideals represented in media promote the idea of the 'perfect body' and significantly impact the development of body image which is evident in these responses.

"literally everyone on Instagram has like portrayed themselves to like have the perfect most desirable life, the perfect body, the perfect relationship everything even like perfect skin which everyone obviously knows is like photoshop or facetuning but when you see it everyday you don't realise like that that's not how life is supposed to look you know?" (RR, 11-15)

"you see like skinny girls and they have big boobs and slim waits with big hips its just like a desire to be that...it is something that makes me a little down sometimes like I feel like I need to have that to fit in but I know it's just like a desire for now…" (JR, 8-14).

"most of the standards set are widely unachievable like not everyone can look like….like not everyones body type is gonna allow them to look like Bella Hadid" (JD, 23-24)

They also highlighted the importance of the opinions of their peers in how they felt about their body, there seemed to be a direct relationship; when told that their body looked good in a certain outfit for example, participants felt more confident wearing said outfit and if they were told that they didn't look good it tended to make them feel worse. Unanimously all participants expressed that opinions coming from their parents or peers were mostly positive and were a big part in the development of their body image. This falls in line with previous research that suggested that media alone is not the only factor that impacts body image, peer influence is equally as important (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2005).

"when someone makes a remark in not even a particularly negative way…like in Asians if someone wants to say you've put some weight on they will be like oh you're looking "healthy" and when you hear those words you just know its literally the worse thing they could say to you…it completely knocks down your confidence just really puts you down" (RA, 100-103)

Theme 2- "I follow, like, my culture more"

In general participants who adhered more to the standards set by their culture felt they had better body satisfaction, they felt less of a need to conform to western standards. A lot of the times, they chose to focus on their cultural standards more as they were more forgiving and less rigid in what they desired as an 'ideal' body and they felt they could relate to them a lot more than the western ideals. They also mentioned that there was less impact of trends in Asian culture, especially trends prominent in the west. This was previously suggested by Nasser (1998) that the ideal for thinness is culturally bound and most non-western cultures don't value the same ideals. Warren et al (2005) went as far as to say that following Asian cultural standards protected against the development of a negative body image as it provides more realistic and achievable ideals.

"I think for eastern culture there aren't as many like trend, its more basic than that, like its just about being healthy…, like the western culture desires right now this ideal slim-thick figure but for eastern culture it's just about being a healthy medium" (JR, 52-59).

"…I follow like my culture more because that is something that is a strong part of my identity I relate to that a lot more to that than the western standards…obviously I was raised in the western society but I was also raised in an Indian mind-set too and that is something that's very close to me" (RA, 62-65)

"like in the western culture its more to do with like big bums and like big lips, thin waist, thick thighs like stuff like that…and in my culture that doesn't really matter" (RR, 36-38)

On the other hand, some participants expressed that even though they chose to stick to their cultural standards more it did not have a positive impact on their body image instead it made it worse. The fact that the standards they wanted to follow were not equally represented in media made it difficult to accept their own body. And when

their friends have role models they could compare themselves to in the media and they did not it would affect their body confidence, Knauss et al (2008) found that internalization of media's appearance directly predicts body dissatisfaction. This shows the subjectivity of cultural experiences in women, what may seem positive to one person does not affect everyone in the same way.

"my culture does affect my body image because this is not something commonly represented in the media because like in the media the models are so different its very rare to find someone that looks like me in a magazine, it's all very different to Asian culture" (NC, 28-30).

Theme 3- "Asian clothing is a bit more forgiving"

Interestingly majority of participants discussed how they felt more comfortable when wearing Asian attire as opposed to western clothing, it was made clear that the comfort of Asian clothes was a bit more forgiving. As Asians value modesty wearing tight dress or short skirts or particularly revealing clothes is rare, due to the previous research suggesting that Asian women who wore western clothing showed less body dissatisfaction this is not surprising. The participants who said they preferred wearing Asian clothes and conforming to Asian standards happened to also be more accepting of their body. This notion is supported by previous research conducted by Dunkel et al (2010) who found that women who wore tradition or cultural clothes were less likely to western ideals than those who wore western clothing.

"it's a bit more like covered up…like most of my body would you covered up but like in jeans and stuff its more tight fitting…I just think Asian clothing is a bit more forgiving you know rather than like jeans and dresses and crop tops and stuff there isn't much you can do to hide in that so like you can cover up parts you don't like" (RR, 68-72)

"especially with the trend of body cons and figure hugging dresses and stuff at the moment it just leaves no place to hide its just like everything is on display…your lack of boobs…or your love handles its all there for people to see…" (MK, 86-89).

"if I was to wear like a tight dress in the community, god, I would get slated… like I wouldn't go to a community event with my boobs or too much skin on show like ever…even on like a Diwali night out I would be careful because like in the eastern

culture as soon as you show a bit of boob or leg like that's it you'll be labelled a 'whore' or a 'slut'" (JR, 124-130)

"you are expected to remain modest and that does affect how I dress like if I am out shopping and I see a skirt I like I know I cant wear it unless I wear tights underneath or leggings or something 'cause im not allowed like I would have to wear a top underneath it……it does affect how I choose to show my body definitely…so in that sense my culture does affect my body image but not negatively" (NC, 36-41)

It was interesting to see how much clothes impacted the body image of these women, when asked what made them feel negatively about their body image a lot of the participants said clothes was a major reason. Keery et al (2004) proposed that cultural standards in the western society put physical attractiveness at the forefront of one's image. Again, this is not surprising as in today's society there is a growing importance for women to be fashionable and dress well, which is further reinforced by media, so it would make sense women would feel the weakest when they feel like they aren't delivering.

Theme 4- "As you grow older you learn to accept your body more"

All most all of the participants emphasised the importance of growing up and maturing on their body image, they felt that when they were younger the media and the opinions of others had a much greater impact on their confidence than it does now. Ricciardelli and McCabe (2001) found that 28-55% of young women felt unhappy about their body even though most fell in the normal range for their age hence it is not surprising that they felt they were more vulnerable to the images and body ideals portrayed in the media, and were more concerned with meeting them at younger ages. A study conducted by Dunkel et al (2010) found that younger women had more inconsistencies between their current and ideal body shape, this is similar to what was suggested by the participants.

"as you grow older you learn to accept your body type more like when I was younger I would see like on tumblr and stuff like thigh gaps and I was so set on getting a thigh gap I used to try so many different types of exercises and diets to achieve the perfect thigh gap… like you do realise later that everyone's body is different and you learn to be more forgiving of yours" (AG, 153-159)

"when I was younger it was definitely more pressure and I would end up buying things that I didn't actually want or even like just to feel better about myself so people would look at me and be like "yeah she's cool" and when I got to college I just kind of went off and did my own thing I dressed differently to everyone else" (NC, 127-131)

"I just think as I got older my feet got planted more firmly into reality and I just came to my sense…like are you sure you even want to look like every single girl out there…and eventually I decided I didn't and just chose to be me and accept my body as it is" (JD, 115-118).

Discussion:

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the perceptions of the effects of cultural ideals in young Asian women, it is clear from the analysis that this experience is subjective and effects individuals differently however, there are common themes found within each individual experience. Previous studies have consistently shown that women, coming from a non-western background but living in a western society, are increasingly adopting western standards of beauty rather than adhering completely to what is considered attractive in their culture (Dunkel et al, 2010). Few quantitative studies have examined how race-related features impact body image amongst women, this study contributes a qualitative perspective of the experiences of Asian women in western society. The consistencies found within different ethnic groups' level of body dissatisfaction indicates that more and more cultures who are exposed to the western standards are beginning to reinforce the thinner ideals (Mahmud & Crittenden, 2007). As a result of this trend, vulnerability of developing negative body image amongst young women increases (Cummins & Lehman, 2007). However, it is essential to mention that the measurement of body image is different in every culture hence it is difficult to use that as a reliable method to draw conclusions from.

Homogenous with previous conceptions of body image participants describes the "multifaceted nature" of one's own body image, through the influence of cultural ideals and evaluations from them self, important others (e.g. parents, friends etc) and societal standards (Cash, Morrow, Hrabosky & Perry, 2004). Previous research argues that the need for "thinness" and weight maintenance represents much of the concerns women face with their body image (Bearman, Martinez & Stice, 2006).

However, Asian women is this study indicate that this desire is much less intensified when they choose to follow their cultural roots more. This notion has been previously suggested by Rakhovskaya & Warren (2014) who argued that an individual's ethnic identity can directly contribute to the development of their body image, feeling less pressure to be a certain weight is bound to protect against negative body image. The women described the part played by cultural beauty standards in the development of unattainable beauty ideals, however, they felt that across ethnicities there is a normalized pressure to be a certain level of thin. They often felt a unique conflict in being considered "healthy" in comparison to other Asian women while also wanting the idealized western ideal, which favours curvaceous features. It is likely that women, who have to find this balance, experience increased biculturative stress, or struggle balancing the multiple cultures they identify with, which in most cases increase the risk of negative body image (Tsong & Smart, 2015). Myers et al (2012) also found that negative body image in women who compared themselves to their ethnic peers or celebrities/models have often been linked to negative body image, the comparison within ethnic minorities is an unexplored area that may influence body image significantly.

Strengths and Limitations

The results of this study provide some insight into the protective factors with body image, looking at multiple dimensions of identity in different social contexts (e.g. opinions of family members, exposure to media etc) and their impact on body image. By exploring in-depth experiences of women's realities within society, this study adds to current research aiming to enhance the understanding of the factors within culture that impact body image. The study explored Asian-British women's body image concerns with social inequality in society, specifically exposure to western beauty ideals. It is essential to continue to explore how culture influences body image in different age groups, as well as different ethnicities (Cheng et al, 2017). Future research could also explore how other factors, such as, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and social status integrate alongside culture in the development of body

image. It would also be interesting to investigate how women who are racially mixed deal with various standards of beauty within their ethnic beliefs.

Any conclusions drawn from this study should be interpreted considering limitations that could affect the generalizability of the findings, even though the participants offered in-depth accounts of their experiences with body image, the true complexity of how all Asian-British women perceive their bodies cannot be assumed. Also, the participants were all university students; hence, they aren't representative of the entire population of Asian-British women. Due to the small sample of Asian women used specific ethnic differences in body-image stressors, norms or ideals in comparison to the view of actual Caucasian women could not be identified. Since a lot of studies combine several ethnicities to come to a consensus such as Cummins et al (2005), future studies should explore potential ethnic subgroup differences in ideals, values and experiences that may influence body image. The researcher also identifies as an Asian-British female, has body dissatisfaction concerns of their own and has experienced the effect of socio-cultural appearance ideals on their own body image. Although all attempts were made to minimise the bias in interpretations it is possible that the views and experiences of the researcher influenced the interview and interpretation of it.

Practice Implications

The results of this study indicate the importance for psychologists who work with young Asian women to explore the specific cultural standards of beauty and challenge the assumptions of adherence to the dominant culture or stronger ethnic identity as a protective strategy against western ideals. Instead it would be useful to explore biculturative stress, strife with integration, and coping strategies to better understand negative body image development (Tsong & Smart, 2015). Gilbert (2003) suggested that psychologists could help young women to examine internalized messages and cultural pressures about their bodies (Gilbert, 2003). These strategies could help young Asian women to understand the oppressive systems of society that contribute to negative body image and encourage the growth of positive body image beliefs that are beneficial to their ultimate sense of identity.

Conclusions

The present study provides a comprehensive and inclusive perspective for understanding Asian-British women's body image experiences. The study aimed to understand the development of body image in young Asian women by examining their perception of the effects of cultural ideals, as reinforced through media and social influences, on their body image. The study adds to current literature by exploring how women balance the conflict between their own cultural ideals and the ideals of the society (e.g. media, family & peers) they are living in and the ultimate impact of that on their body image. By understanding Asian-British women's body image as something that is composed by social factors, uncongealed and subjective, researchers and potentially clinicians can further understand how cultural experiences can heighten the risk for the development of negative body image. The findings suggest that understanding the conflict faced by women in finding a balance between their culture and the west is integral to understanding Asian-British women's body image.

Reflexivity:

Within the context of the present study, the researcher had face-to-face interactions with study participants, the ways in which the participant's responses would be influenced by their own background, professionally and ethnic background, experiences and prior assumptions needed to be considered. The interviewer also identifies as an Asian-British female with body image concerns so an important question needed to be addressed before drawing conclusions from the data is whether the prior assumptions and experiences of the interviewer would influence the participants. It has been suggested that a possible way to reduce bias in qualitative research is to ensure that the research design of the study explicitly allows for the incorporation of a wide range of different perspectives and views, this is often called "fair dealing" (Dingwall, 1992).

The present study was designed to elicit contributions from a range of South Asian women from different religious and professional backgrounds. During the analytic process, no participants' views were valued over others, data analysis included a process of constant comparison between the various accounts to uncover similarities that could lead to the identification of common themes across the individual interviews. The interviewer was concerned that the focus of the research could potentially provoke anxiety in some participants, at the end of each interview the researcher took time to ensure that participants were not feeling distressed by their participation, overall none of the participants expressed such concerns.

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