

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Media and Other Socializing Agents Influence on Male Body-Shaping Behavior: Body Esteem as a Mediator

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**Abstract:** Media and other socializing agents can play an influential role in creating an ideal male body because people live their lives in bodies. The influence of socializing agents on male body-shaping behavior is not widely discussed compared to the female case. This study is investigating whether the moderating role of body esteem between media and sociocultural factors has an impact on male body-shaping behavior. It examines the influence of media images and socializing agents in changing or maintaining that appearance among males. The sociocultural attitudes towards appearance, SATAQ-3 Scale, Rosenberg self-esteem scale, and the body image avoidance questionnaire were used to measure male body shaping behavior among 260 young Pakistani adults ( $M=22.76$ ;  $SD=4.99$ ). The findings indicated that media advertisements and family influence are significantly positive, whereas body esteem is negatively related to male body-shaping behavior. However, peers and female partner influence do not make any significant contribution to male body shaping behaviors. Furthermore, body esteem acts as a cause for men to indulge in body-shaping behavior to have a perfect ideal masculine body image.

**Keywords:** socialization agents, males body shaping, self-esteem, media ideals

People live their lives in bodies, and feeling comfortable with one's body can have a pivotal impact on one's experience of happiness (Swami et al., 2015), well-being (McCabe and Ricciardelli, 2004), and level of self-esteem (Gillen, 2015). However, the bulk of body-image research focuses on the pursuit of thinness among women due to exposure to media images of the "body-perfect" ideal (Bedford & Johnson, 2006;

Grabe et al., 2008; Webster & Tiggemann, 2003). Recently, researchers have shifted their focus from women's to men's body-image disturbances (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001; Ricciardelli et al., 2000) and the resultant strategies or behavior that they adopt to tune their bodies into so-called perfect and ideal masculine bodies (Field et al., 2001) because cultural pressures upon men's bodies have increased dramatically.

Over the past few decades, attaining a V-shaped body and reducing body fat have been the major changes in male body ideal (Dakanalis et al., 2015). Male body image concerns usually result from external pressures to conform to a specific “bodybuilder” physique: broad shoulders, a V-shaped back, and a muscular body. Men experience these pressures from the media’s definition of masculinity or from teasing and expectations from family, peers, and partners (Olivardia et al., 2004). Therefore, men too idealize models or celebrities in magazines, television, movies, among others, and want to be like them; this process of constant comparison of their own bodies with the media ideal causes many men to become dissatisfied with their bodies (Muris et al., 2005). The media constitutes a major sociocultural influence (Te’eni-Harari & Eyal, 2015) because men are bombarded with media images of superheroes, action figures, and bodybuilders, all of which suggest that they should work towards having dense and muscular bodies. Similar pressures come from family members, friends, and female partners as well.

Although men engage less in appearance-related comparison than women (Franzoi et al., 2012), teasing and unrealistic expectations often cause men to modify their bodies. As these standards of masculinity are unrealistic, they find themselves unable to achieve them, and this causes lowered body esteem (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003; Ricciardelli et al., 2000) and also increases body dissatisfaction among men (Galioto & Crowther, 2013; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2009). Here the question arises: if the media portrayal of masculinity is directly linked with indulgence in body-shaping behaviors in all men, why do not all men do something to tune their bodies according to the perfect muscular body? In this regard, previous researchers have argued that as men develop their body image and self-esteem while viewing media content, the impact varies from man to man. Cafri et al. (2005) also discussed in their research that attaining an ideal body image is the only self-motivation among young males who are striving to carve out their own space in their social groups. Men strive to have a lean, muscular body to look manlier than their peers. Harvey and Robinson (2003) backed up this research by further telling us that men appear to drive themselves to attain such body images at any cost; this has also persistently induced many other men to desire unrealistic body

images through impressions gained from the media and other sociocultural factors.

Nowadays, the West’s most idealized male body shape is a man with lean masculinity and a V-shaped body with low body fat, whereas a normal body is considered less attractive (Cordes et al., 2016). Meanwhile, Pope et al.’s (1999) research concluded that, as the action figures that boys play with have more muscle mass, this causes a negative body image as this shape is almost unattainable for many because the people who possess it either have a natural tendency to adapt themselves to this body-shape or have the genes for it, which few others possess (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001). Several researchers (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Humphreys & Paxton, 2004; Murnen et al., 2003) have established that the mass media is to be blamed for the increasing self-esteem issues among young males. In addition, parents, peers, and partners directly affect their body-image dissatisfaction, which then affects behavioral outcomes and triggering negative behaviors, as proven by a tripartite influence model (Shroff & Thompson, 2006; Smolak et al., 2005). These negative behaviors include the use of steroids, drugs, an excessive amount of bodybuilding, and increased food supplement intake (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003). Men are constantly being categorized as thin or fat, and this not only lowers self-esteem and body satisfaction in oneself but also generates a sense of being abnormal in society (Law & Labre, 2002).

Many men look at their bodies in a less positive way due to the ideal male depicted by the media, which then induces a negative self-image of themselves in their minds. This leaves a gap of self-satisfaction in oneself as individuals strive to meet this ideal. At this stage, the main concern for an individual is how his own body looks to others. Comparison and low respect for oneself create a psychological scenario for men in which they feel deprived of respect and importance from others and creates negative self-images, which are defined as “a way of thinking and feeling about one’s self that negatively influences the person’s self-esteem, body esteem, and body satisfaction” (Barlett et al., 2005, p. 880). The first stage of negative self-image is negative self-esteem, where an individual is subjected to his own evaluation. Lastly, body esteem is how a person feels morally about themselves. These three factors are very different from each other. The study found that body esteem and body satisfaction are

correlated with self-esteem; if one feels dissatisfied with oneself, then this behavior will directly lower self-esteem. A study by Flament et al. (2012) highlighted that, among males, weight-esteem partially mediated the relationship between muscular ideal and restrained eating; appearance-esteem partially mediated effects in emotional and external eating regressions.

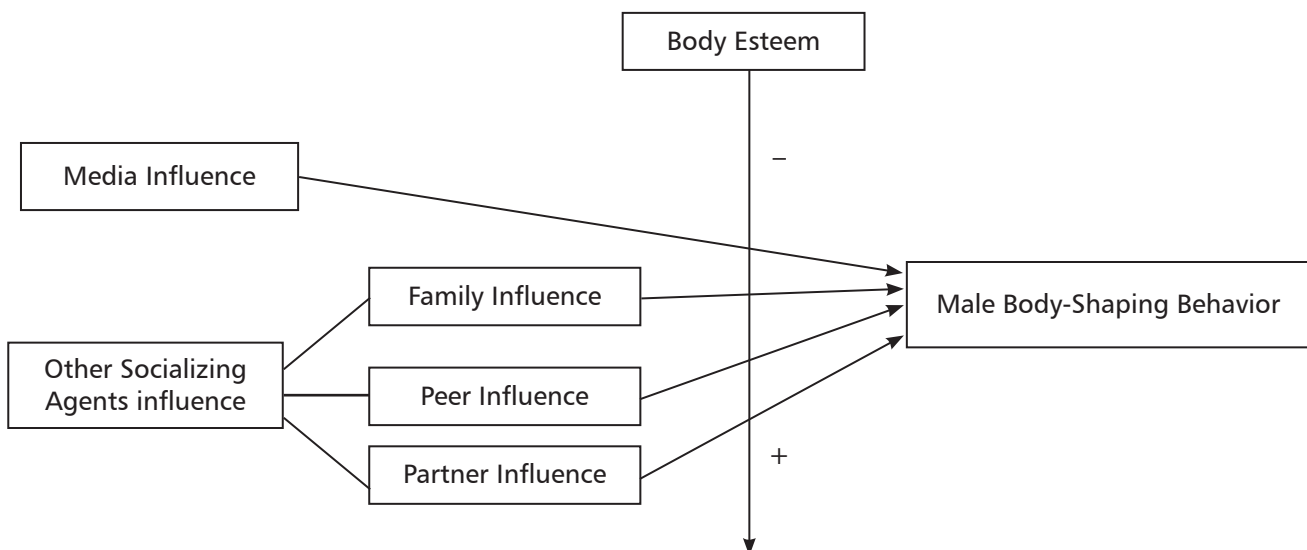
The current social standards of our society have made it necessary for a man to achieve not only a masculine body but also a more competitive body than his peers. Over the decades, this has made the standards of attractiveness for males a bit higher, and they are expected to achieve greater leanness and muscularity. This has not only made men more self-conscious about their bodies, but the ideal body image has also evolved to be less achievable by individuals who face greater competition from their peers. These individuals make it their life goal to achieve these standards to gain higher social standing and acceptability (Schooler & Ward, 2006). There have been several studies on body-shaping behavior, and all of them tell us about the consequences of these things in our real lives, including long-term health issues, eating disorders, stress, depression, low self-worth, and body satisfaction (Olivardia et al., 2004; Morrison et al., 2003).

In a nutshell, the bulk of literature is available on how women and girls use different body-shaping

behaviors. However, not much research has been done on male body-shaping behaviors to avoid body dissatisfaction, so there is a need to explore how the different socialization agents like family, peers, mass media, and especially female partners, influence male body-shaping behavior to provide useful insight for researchers into the factors that impact male body-shaping behavior. Also, measures can be taken to avoid the dissatisfaction that is accompanied by lowered body esteem and well-being, especially among men, as the current study findings will highlight the fact that body esteem is an important consideration for the prevention of over-indulgence in excessive male body-shaping behaviors to attain so-called ideal masculinity.

In light of the above theory and literature, the following hypotheses were developed:

1. Media images of masculinity, family, peer, and partner influences are likely to predict male body-shaping behavior among young adults.
2. Body esteem is likely to be related to male body-shaping behavior among young adults.
3. The relationship between media images of masculinity, family, peer, and partner influences and male body-shaping behavior is likely to be moderated by body esteem among young adults.



**Figure 1.** Hypothesized Model of the Study

## Methods

### Sample

The sample for this study consists of (N=260) male participants. Fifty questionnaires were completed by professionals working in various advertising agencies, 30 questionnaires were completed by members of different gyms in Lahore city who had a well-built muscular body, whereas the remainder were completed by students at both private and public universities in Punjab, Pakistan, so as to have a heterogeneous representative male sample. The students were aged 20–26 years ( $M=22.76$ ;  $SD=4.99$ ) with a minimum bachelor's level of education, whereas the professionals were within the age range of 24–35 years ( $M=26.61$ ;  $SD=3.02$ ). Participants came from urban areas of Lahore, Punjab, with a well-educated background.

### Assessment Measures

#### SATAQ-3 Scale

For the sociocultural attitudes towards appearance, SATAQ-3 Scale developed by Heinberg and Thompson (1995) was used to measure the sociocultural factors within society, such as family, peers, and the media. It has further subscales that, in general, assess the muscularity vs. the thinness of the body shape. All in all, it is the most important instrument for researchers to assess the body image and body dissatisfaction of a person. Each item on the 38-item scale is scored from 1 to 5: definitely disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor agree, somewhat agree, and definitely agree. In the current research, the reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.76 for the current sample.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables (N = 260)*

Variables	<i>f (%)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Age (in Years)		22.76 (4.99)
Weight (Kg)		71.05 (15.26)
Height (ft)		5.80 (3.21)
Waist (inch)		32.44 (3.44)
Education		
B.A	32 (12)	
BBA	56 (22)	
BS	15 (5)	
CS	98 (38)	
MBA	25 (10)	
MS	22 (9)	
Pharmacy	12 (4)	
Family system		
Nuclear	185 (71)	
Joint	75 (29)	
Monthly Family income		24920.00 (28183.84)
Employment Status		
Student	205 (79)	
Business	10 (4)	
Manager	45 (17)	

### *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*

This is a 10-item Likert scale with four points from strongly agree to disagree strongly. This scale was designed by Rosenberg (1965) for the assessment of self-esteem with factors that are sociocultural and concern the body image of the individual. An individual can also assess their own self-esteem by using this scale. Scores are calculated as for items 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7: scoring is from SA=3, A=2, D=1, to SD=0 and for items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10 (which are reversed in valence): the scoring of these items were: SA=0, A=1, D=2, SD=3. The scale ranges from 0–30. Scores between 15 and 25 are within the normal range; scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem. The high or low score will determine how an individual will be able to assess his self-esteem, and the reliability of the current sample was 0.82.

### *Body-Image Avoidance Questionnaire*

This is a questionnaire scale that is designed to measure the individual's behavior regarding his body shape and how he looks. This is a 19-item questionnaire that deals with factors such as avoiding situations where people can see you or places an individual would avoid so that others cannot see his appearance and the fat he carries. An individual feels uncomfortable regarding his body, inducing deep body dissatisfaction in himself, making him hesitant to make contact or even allow anyone to see him, and for the current sample, the reliability value was 0.71 (Cash & Szymanski, 1995).

### *Demographic Information Questionnaire*

The information includes the age, gender, education, family system, employment, and marital status of the participants.

### *Procedure*

Initially, we got approval from the Institutional Ethical Board. After that, permission was obtained from the authors of the assessment measures. The survey pack was prepared, and then different participants were recruited based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria of the study. The participants were briefed about the nature and purpose of the research. Also, they were assured that the confidentiality of any information they provided would be maintained and were free to quit at any time during the study if they were feeling uncomfortable.

We visited different gyms located in the same area to avoid the effect of locality or socioeconomic status on the study variables for collecting information from professional bodybuilders. Initially, formal permission was obtained from the gym authorities to contact their gym members, and then, after their daily exercise schedule, the questionnaire was administered. Meanwhile, the students were recruited from different universities during their free time. Overall, participants took approximately 10–15 minutes to complete the survey.

### **Results**

This section presents the findings of the study. Firstly, it was stated in hypothesis 1 that there is likely to be a relationship between family, peers, partner, media, masculinity, body esteem, and male body-shaping behavior among Pakistani youth. For this purpose, a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was carried out, and the results are shown in Table 2.

The results revealed that among the demographics, weight and waist measurement are positively associated with body-shaping behaviors. Moreover, family influence and media advertisements are positively related to body-shaping behavior, which indicated that with an increase in media advertisements portraying masculinity and family pressure to become muscular and thin, male body-shaping behaviors increase. However, the relationship between body esteem and male body-shaping behavior is significant but shows a negative correlation, which highlights that with a decrease in one's body esteem, indulgence in male body-shaping behavior increases. Furthermore, peer and female partner influence is not significant, indicating that male body-shaping behavior was not influenced by peers or partner influence.

Moreover, it was hypothesized that body esteem would moderate the relationship between media advertisements, family, peer, and partner influence and body-shaping behaviors in Pakistani youth, for which a moderation analysis was run through Hayes' (2013) PROCESS. The only significant interactions were reported in Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 2***Correlations Among Study Variables (N=260)*

	Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Age	.19**	-.02	.20**	-.10	.10	-.01	-.01	.05	-.00
2	Weight	-	-.00	.76***	-.04	-.12	.04	-.02	-.00	.29***
3	Height		-	-.01	-.02	.04*	-.00	.06	-.02	.00
4	Waist			-	-.05	-.10	.03	-.01	.01	.26***
5	Partner Influence				-	.08	.14*	.17**	.07	-.04
6	Family Influence					-	.20**	.00	.07	.15*
7	Peer Influence						-	.11	.10	-.04
8	Media Advertisement							-	.12*	.19**
9	Body Esteem								-	-.15*
10	Body shaping Behaviors									-

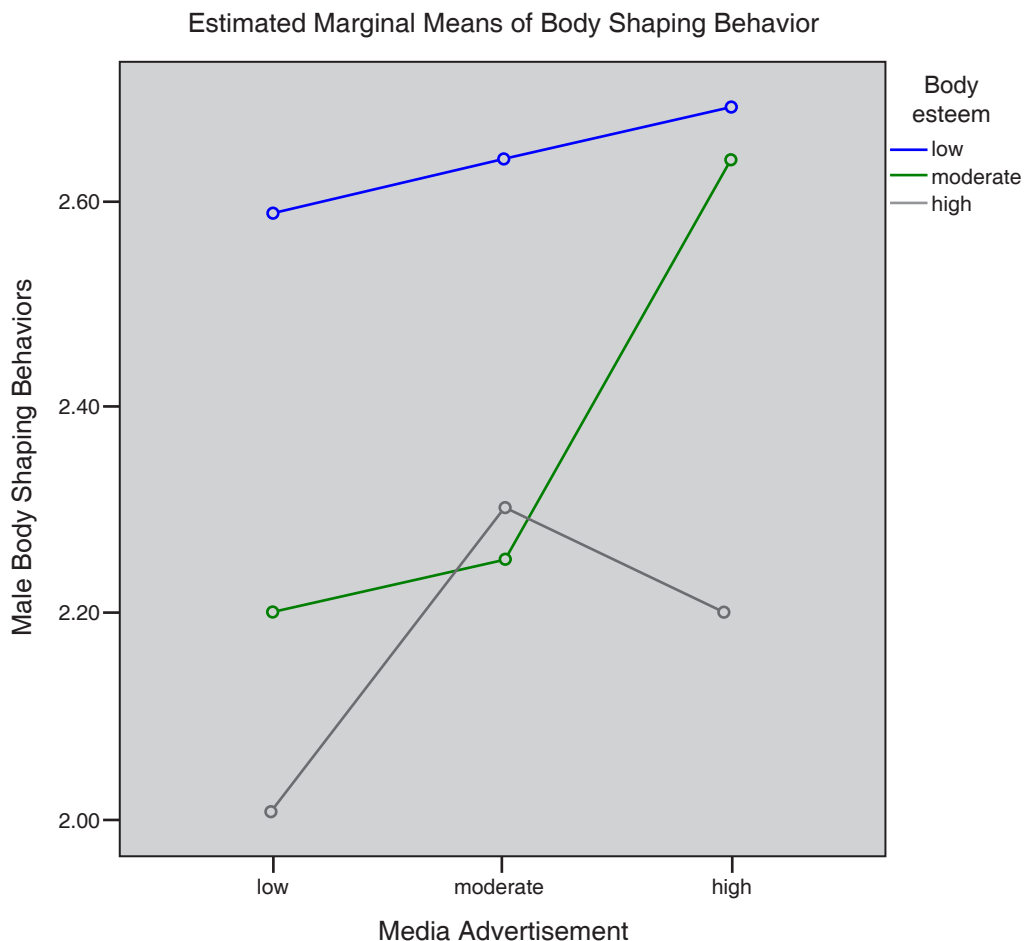
*Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p>.01, \*\*\*p<.001***Table 3***Hierarchical Regression Analysis Examining the Conditional Effects of Body Esteem on Relationship Between Media Advertisements and Body Shaping Behaviors (N=260)*

Variables	Body Shaping Behavior		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>95 % CI</i>
Constant	2.61**	0.04	[2.52, 2.70]
Body Esteem	-.07*	0.08	[.17, -.031]
Media Advertisement	.09*	0.12	[0.36, 0.19]
Media Advertisement x Body esteem	-.14**	0.05	[-1.12, 0.83]
Low esteem	-0.03	0.24	[ -.51, .45]
Moderate esteem	-0.09*	0.14	[-.36, .19]
High esteem	0.14*	0.23	[-.60, .32]
R <sup>2</sup>	.04*		
F	.26		

*Note. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01*

The results revealed significant main effects of body esteem and media advertisements in predicting male body-shaping behavior. Their interaction was also found to be significant. Moreover, body esteem's conditional effects on male body-shaping behavior at different levels of body esteem were also analyzed. At moderate and high levels of body esteem, the nature of prediction between media advertisements and body esteem on male body-shaping behavior was found to be negative and significant, whereas, at low levels of body esteem, the nature of prediction was found to be non-significant. The interaction plot highlighting significant interaction effects is given in Figure 2.

The results revealed family influence's significant main effect on male body-shaping behavior, but body esteem's main effect was found to be non-significant. Furthermore, the interaction between family influence and body esteem was significant. The conditional effect of body esteem on male body-shaping behavior at different levels of body esteem were also analyzed, and at low and moderate levels of body esteem, the nature of prediction between family influence and male body-shaping behavior was found to be significant, whereas, at high levels of body esteem, the nature of prediction was found to be non-significant. The interaction plot highlighting significant interaction effects is shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 2.** Interaction Plot of Media Advertisement and Body Esteem on Male Body Shaping Behavior

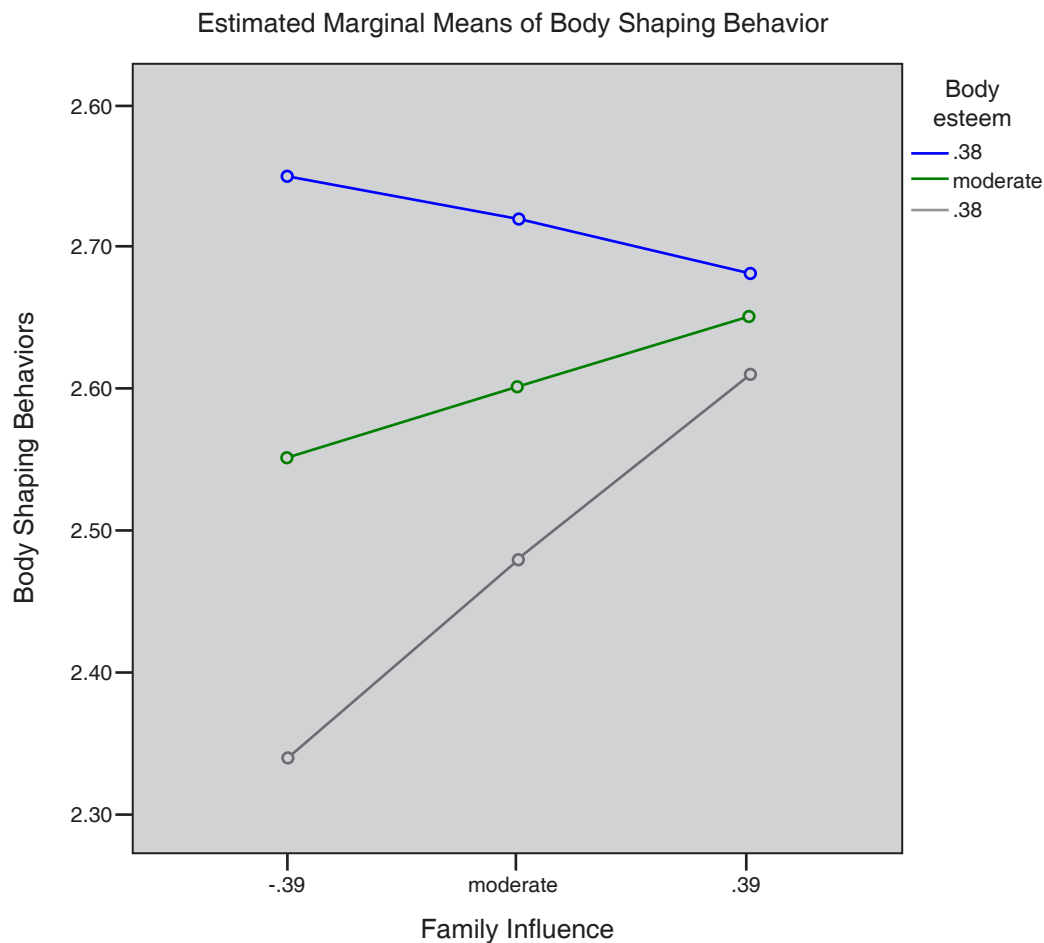


**Table 4**

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis Examining the Conditional Effects of Body Esteem on Relationship Between Family Influence and Body Shaping Behavior (N=260)*

Variables	Body Shaping Behavior		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95 % <i>CI</i>
Constant	2.60***	0.04	[2.51, 2.68]
Body Esteem	.13	0.13	[.13, -.039]
Family Influence	-.13**	0.05	[-.02, -.03]
Family Influence x Body esteem	-.24*	0.08	[-.02, 0.50]
Low esteem	-0.23***	0.24	[ -.37, -.08]
Moderate esteem	-0.13**	0.14	[-.23, -.03]
High esteem	0.04	0.23	[-.18, .10]
R <sup>2</sup>	.05*		
F	3.45		

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$



**Figure 3.** Interaction Plot of Family Influence and Body Esteem on Male Body Shaping Behavior



## Discussion

The purpose of this research paper is to assess the impact of family, peer, and partner influences and media advertisements depicting masculinity on male body-shaping behavior. It is hypothesized that the relationship between media images of masculinity, family, peer, and partner influences and male body-shaping behavior is different at different levels of body esteem among young adults. Moreover, some studies suggested that media exposure affects the sociocultural context of self-evaluation (Van den Berg et al., 2007).

Teenagers and adults are more conscious about their physical appearance as the result of family, media, and peers influence (Arbour & Ginis, 2006). In the Pakistani context, lead male characters of TV dramas, advertisements, and films are showing masculinity that encourages youth to indulge in body shaping behavior (Yasmin et al., 2019). Few studies also claimed that body shaping is more common among youth instead of people in their fifties (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Moreover, it is a general trend in Pakistan wherein marriages are arranged by families, even in the urban population. This tradition is an important factor that increases family influence on youth to improve and maintain body shape and look more masculine before marriage. In addition, Pakistan is a male-dominated society, which is why in TV dramas' advertisements and movies, male characters are more in focus and powerful compared to females (Khan et al., 2011). This trend lays down the foundation for masculine male characters in movies and advertisements that leads viewers to shape their bodies and have a muscular look. Nowadays, in western movies, the action hero must have a muscular body; a similar trend is prevailing in Pakistani movies. In this modern era, mass media are believed to be a pervasive force in shaping physical appearance ideals both in males and females (Aglia & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004) as the result of media access and reach due to the availability of advanced media technologies.

This study argues that waist and weight management among males are due to media and family influence, which validated McCabe and Ricciardelli's (2001) findings that peer, parents, and media's influence on males to adopt strategies to manage weight and muscle tone. Barlett et al. (2008) conducted two meta-analyses to measure the influence of the mass media depiction of the muscular "ideal" male body on men's self-images (i.e., body satisfaction, body esteem,

and self-esteem) and revealed that from both Study 1 (correlational design) and Study 2 (experimental design) men felt worse about their bodies due to the pressure from the mass media. The present study also validated the media influence on men's self-images (body esteem). Some studies suggested that western media sport stars' coverage is still bound up with the production of masculinities (Whannel, 2002; Wensing & Bruce, 2003). Similarly, trends are also prevailing in Pakistan. Cricket is a famous sport in Pakistan, and many business organizations hired cricketers with highly muscular bodies as brand ambassadors for their products to attract the youth. In Pakistani dramas and advertisements, themes of masculinity are very common and have a profound influence on males, especially those living in urban areas. Therefore, the data for the present study were collected from the urban population, which were highly exposed to western media and western masculinity and body shaping ideas (Ullah et al., 2016).

Our mass media keeps on producing unrealistic body images, as earlier discussed, and these are not attainable. These images give us a false positioning in society, whether it is an actor with a ripped body drinking martini with a beautiful girl on a beach or a man with a body that makes him look care-free (Barlett et al., 2005). These false media depictions are constantly creating a gap between our real bodies and an ideal body. This gives us the perception of non-acceptance among our potential romantic partners and our peers. We are constantly being categorized as thin or fat, and this not only reduces self-esteem and body satisfaction in oneself but also leads to the sense of being not a part of society. Media exposure to male body-shaping behavior leads men to make comparisons with their peers, whom they think have an unrealistic body. We set these images as the standards for our society, and they become a goal that all men must achieve for fear of being neglected and seen as being of less importance.

The media keeps on producing images like this, thus inducing a negative self-esteem and body image in the men who see them. They keep on producing these unrealistic images, which not only directly affect the individual but also the people around that person, who become the stimulus for giving him an unrealistic perception of body shape.

A male feels fearful about finding his place in society, a society that is built on the competition

around who gains more acceptance than others. The relationships between body-shaping and body esteem are directly proportional. Today, we find a large majority of men who go to the gym to build up their muscles so that, in the future, they can show off those hulk-like muscles to their potential romantic partners and they can compare their bodies to the bodies of their peers. This, in turn, induces body-shaping behavior among their peers. This body-shaping behavior is designed to make a man stand out in society. A muscular man likes the idea of revealing his well-formed figure or clothes that can reveal his shape, and he is encouraged in this behavior by a constant bombardment from the media, which includes television, magazines, and other sources of advertisements.

Today, the global Western culture strongly emphasizes how one's appearance matters and what an ideal body shape looks like. Almost all the commercials and advertisements we see today have commoditized this idea to boost their sales, whether it is an advertisement selling gym equipment or any other product, such as alcohol. Men are not just lured by these media; movies also do their fair share of contributing to the body-shaping industry. Films like *Rocky*, *Thor*, and *Troy* are examples that have contributed to manipulating the minds of young and teenage males to achieve a shape that can make them look tough by attaining a muscular body. When a man is viewing media content and sees the bodies of other men that he thinks are more attractive and finer than his own, he is actually comparing his own body with the body of a person whom he thinks has an ideal body shape.

As far as the social standing and male body-shaping of the individual goes, we have successfully correlated body shape with sociocultural and media effects on the individual. At this point, we need to further investigate previous research on this topic. Wykes and Gunter (2005) talked about the way in which ideal body image is distorting the imagination of body image among young adults. The media is always projecting its thoughts onto the wider audiences, telling them how they should look and shape up in their society. Social media messages also tell us that one should have a better and bold-looking body in order to gain social standing. This culture of becoming modernized and being evaluated by everyone leaves some people searching for the perfect shape so they can better blend in with others. This research gives us a wider perspective about how the media is slowly shaping

the reality around people and convincing them that this is the only way to fit in with others in society, to fit themselves to the standards of the groups they want to be the part of, whether they be peers, family, or a romantic partner.

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, we collected data from Pakistan's second-largest city, Lahore, but the sample should be collected from throughout Pakistan to make it more generalized. Another shortcoming is that as it is a correlational study; we were unable to exclude the effects of other confounding factors that are likely to have an effect on male body-shaping behaviors. Thus, future researchers should focus on establishing a cause and effect relationship by doing experimental studies. Moreover, other variables that are likely to affect male body-shaping behavior, such as self-schema, self-evaluation, and the influence of modeling, should also be taken into account in future studies. Apart from these limitations, the research in this study is unique because it focuses on male body-shaping behavior rather than on the female ideal body image, which has been highlighted for many decades in previous literature. The findings of this study also provide men with the knowledge that they should maintain body esteem to avoid the body shaping behaviors generated by the false media portrayal of masculinity.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study have supported the claim that media images of muscularity and social factors such as family, peers, and partner influence are the precursors of male body-shaping behavior, whereas lowered body esteem acts as an incentive for men to indulge in more body-shaping behaviors to have an ideal muscular body. Many other researchers also support this hypothesis as being valid, that the media and society are responsible for shaping the body perception of men having lowered body esteem. In Pakistan, people are especially concerned about their body shape because they are frequently evaluated by other people, whether they are their peers, family, or partners, and now the sole lens for one's evaluation, the "mass media."

## Declaration of ownership:

This report is our original work.

**Conflict of interest:**

None.

**Ethical clearance:**

This study was approved by the institution.

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