

Study finds white Western women have lower body appreciation and greater media pressure to look thin

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White Western women have lower body appreciation and experience greater pressure from the media to be thin compared to Black Nigerian

and Chinese women across all ages, according to new research.

The study, carried out by psychologists at Durham University (UK), and published in *PLOS ONE*, explored the impacts of age and sociocultural pressures on body appreciation (feelings of positivity and pride about one's body) among white Western, Black Nigerian and Chinese women.

While all three groups had relatively stable body appreciation across ages, there were significant cultural differences.

White Western women were found to experience much higher pressure from the [media](#) to conform to thin or athletic body ideals across their lifespan.

This pressure did decrease with age, but even at its lowest, the pressure felt by Western women was still higher than for the other [ethnic groups](#).

Black Nigerian women recorded the highest body appreciation and far less media pressure regarding [body image](#). This pressure also decreased with age.

Meanwhile, Chinese women reported the highest ongoing family and [peer pressure](#) around body image, but media-related pressure was less and decreased with age.

The study, which involved over 1,100 women aged 18–80, was intended to gain new insight into the impacts of culture and age on body appreciation—two aspects that have had limited research focus to date.

Participants were asked to complete questionnaires to understand more about their own sense of body appreciation and the pressures they experience around body image from family, peers and the media.

The results showed that white Western women reported far more media pressure than other participants, but also endorsed a thin or athletic body type less as they got older.

Black Nigerian women did not display a strong pressure towards a thin or athletic build and reported higher levels of body appreciation. However, they also reported higher levels of appearance pressure from peers, which reduced with age.

Chinese women predominantly continued to endorse a thin body type across all ages but reported less media pressure around this than white western women.

Women in all three cultures experienced similar levels of family pressures, but the study showed this decreased significantly for white Western and Black Nigerian women as they got older but remained high for Chinese women.

Postgraduate researcher Louise Hanson from Durham University's Department of Psychology led the study. She said, "Most research around body appreciation to date has focused on younger white western women. We wanted to expand the scope and include [older women](#) and other cultures as these groups have historically been ignored.

"We found that body appreciation was relatively stable across all ages and sociocultural pressure was evident in all cultures. However, the extent to which this pressure was experienced and where it came from differed across cultures.

"Based on our results, we suggest that when developing interventions to increase body appreciation, experts should take all age groups into account, not just younger women.

"Additionally, there is also a need for interventions to be tailored to account for cultural differences, such as greater media literacy for white western women who reported the highest pressure in this area."

The researchers hope that their findings can help to encourage more studies into body appreciation and body image for women over 30. They also hope this can be a springboard to encourage more cross-cultural studies to better understand the cultural dynamics that impact on body appreciation.

In practical terms, the team argue that their findings indicate that body appreciation interventions should take all age groups into account and look at where they can be culturally-targeted to improve effectiveness.

More information: Examining body appreciation in six countries: The impact of age and sociocultural pressure, *PLoS ONE* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0306913](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0306913)

Provided by Durham University

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