

# **Women Teacher Trainees and the Predilection for Fashion and Glamour -A Study**

## **Abstract**

The attitude of women trainees towards fashion and glamour seldom receives any attention in academic forums. Though the topic may appear trivial, the fact remains that the environment in which trainees attend colleges of Education, particularly in metropolitan cities in India is one in which many uphold high ideals of attractiveness. The growth and popularity of Fashion and Women's magazine and the image of the woman with the perfect body which the Television channels telecast everyday have added fuel to a raging passion among teacher trainees. How pervasive is this trend? Does it affect the attitude of women trainees?

The investigator, a teacher educator by profession attempted a study of demeanor and attire of women trainees in teacher training colleges in select colleges. These were then corroborated with findings of studies of perceptions of youth in college campuses and comes up with a few interesting findings. The paper goes on to affirm that the perceived urge in women teacher trainees for perfection of the body instead of perfection of the mind can soon become a matter of concern. This is especially so because in ancient India, simple living and high thinking was the life style prescribed, particularly for teachers. But what we now perceive is something in sharp contrast. The investigator affirms that this is a matter of concern because the male sex is fast becoming a rare species taking up the teaching profession in colleges in general and Teacher Training colleges in particular.

**Key words:** Beauty, Body consciousness, Fashion, teacher training, Women trainees

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*The beauty of a woman is not in the clothes she wears, the figure that she carries,  
or the way she combs her hair... True beauty in a woman is reflected in her soul.*

*It's the caring that she lovingly gives, the passion that she shows &  
the beauty of a woman only grows with passing years.*

-Audrey Hepburn

### **1. Introduction**

Young people today live in an environment in which looks are of utmost importance. The cultural ideals of attractiveness is found to be high, particularly among teenagers.(1) Most media messages beamed in India have a sound Western influence and in some Western societies being thin is perceived as a sign of

beauty. Further, in India, particularly at the time of marriage families in search of a bride, tend to reward women with lean bodies and attractive faces.

To Tripathy & Rao (2019), not only has fashion consciousness, changed the environment but the changed scenario has both positive as well as negative impact. Yadav (2016) attempted a study of student's attitude towards clothing behaviour and found that those in professional courses have different attitude towards clothing in comparison to those students which study in general courses.

The investigator's informal interview with youngsters revealed that there is a growing interest among Malayalee college girls to maintain a weight below 40kg. What is the effect of such health consciousness? Does this affect their perception of expected roles of a teacher? This paper explores the issue.

### **The background**

There is a pronounced tendency among women trainees to compare themselves to the models in fashion magazines and on Television.(2) Discreet inquiries have revealed that some girls do starve themselves and use mild laxatives to maintain their body shape. Informal inquiries made by the researcher to Hostel Wardens in Women's Hostel have revealed that they have often come across the existence of high levels of body dissatisfaction and disordered-eating attitudes among hostel inmates.

### **Brief review of studies**

Many feminists have argued that in a patriarchal culture, women are subjected to various means of subordination including the objectification and degradation of their bodies. (Kilbourne, 1999)

According to the objectification theory, cultural objectification encourages self-objectification where women learn to monitor their own bodies; this in turn can lead to body shame and is thought to put women at risk for the development of eating disorders, depression, and or sexual problems (McKinley & Hyde, 1996)

Psychologists have noted that "Opportunities for . . . social comparison are ubiquitous, as everyday social interactions and the media inundate us with information about other people's accomplishments, actions, and lifestyles" (Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1997, p. 1141). Media can affect women's self-esteem and body esteem by becoming a reference point against which unfavourable comparisons are made. Studies suggest that social comparisons with media images increase body dissatisfaction, and body dissatisfaction leads to more comparisons. Research also indicates that the media, peers, and family all may have an influence on body dissatisfaction and body esteem.(Harrison & Cantor,1997)

Within society, mass media is one of the most influential sources of social learning through their use of verbal and visual symbolic models that show people how to perform desirable behaviours. Media influence how we perceive our bodies by being a cultural gatekeeper and framing standards of beauty for all of us (Garner, 1997) Many scholars have suggested that exposure to ultra thin models and celebrities on television and other media leads to increasing levels of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders in

young women.(Harrison & Cantor,1997; Levine & Smolak, 1996). Researchers have found a direct relationship between media exposure and symptoms of eating disorders.(Goodman, 2005)

Gerbner et al. (1986) showed, the exposure to television over time subtly “cultivates” viewers’ perception of reality. TV socializes people into standardized roles and behaviours and also creates the norms for society (e.g., being thin is being beautiful). The influence of TV on its viewers is thus not unidirectional but is intermingled with other influences.

### **Objectives of the study**

The main aim of the study was to find out the changing attitude to fashion, dressing and body consciousness among women teacher trainees in Kerala State, India. The specific objectives included:

- \*To find out the impact of Fashion Magazines and Media on women teacher trainees.
- \*To find out the nature of change in attitude to fashion and body consciousness among women teacher trainees.

### **Method/ Sources of data**

The data for this study was collected by personal observation of the teacher educator-cum-investigator over a period of six years in Teacher Training Colleges in more than five districts of Kerala State. The data collected was crosschecked with informal interviews wherever possible both with trainees and Teacher Educators.

### **Findings**

A few perceived behavioural changes are listed below:

- \*There is an increasing tendency among women trainees to define themselves through their clothing and hairstyle and many are not in favour of donning the college uniform.
- \*Some women trainees have their own celebrity whom they admire and occasionally some of them become followers of the celebrity’s social handle.
- \*In many women trainees there is a pronounced urge to post own well dressed images or photos with friends on social media platforms to gain publicity.
- \*Many show a tendency to display their newly purchased attire during programmes organized in the college. These according to them are ‘cool and trendy’ and seldom matches traditional attire worn by women teacher trainees.
- \* From hairstyle to toe nail polish, from anklets to the sindhur on the forehead were found to match the recent styles and trends flashed in Fashion magazines and Television channels.
- \* A pronounced tendency to adopt a personal perfume-something unheard of until a decades ago is fast catching on.
- \*A rather shocking observation is the tendency to take to forced dieting to acquire the body image of skinny beautiful girls in covers of teen magazines. Even during birthday parties they give lame excuses and avoid consuming fatty or specially prepared non-vegetarian dishes.
- \*Several women trainees confessed that if they fail to dress up properly matching the changing fashion trends they may not be accepted into their peer group and is likely to be branded as a ‘country maiden’. Further, when dressed in cool and classy style they are less likely to be bullied by other students in the college.

\*Though the study basically focussed on teacher trainees, the investigator did observe that women teacher educators who are modern in outlook appreciate and even sometimes openly discuss changing fashion trends with women trainees.

### **Implications of the study**

\*There is an urgent need to teach women trainees the reality that most of the pictures of models that appear in fashion magazines are photo shopped and with unreal body measurements.

\*One possible way of addressing this issue is to get active feminists to interact with women trainees. Committed feminists should be encouraged to act together and eradicate forces that threaten to disrupt body satisfaction and healthy eating.

\*Proper media literacy appear to be the need of the hour in colleges of teacher education. Well charted out media literacy classes can to a great extent prevent trainees from becoming entrapped or enraptured by media-boosted images of women and beauty.

### **Limitations of the study**

\*Impressionistic studies of this type have the obvious disadvantage of being subjective. However the findings of the study are to an extent co-related with similar studies conducted on women.

\*There has been no attempt at a longitudinal study and it is unknown whether the teacher trainees once they join the profession make mature and appropriate changes in their fashion and attire once they complete the course.

\*The actual effect of influence of parents and friends on individual trainees preference for enforced dieting to improve body shape has not been explored.

\*It is not really known how the women trainees find the money to regularly purchase cosmetics and trendy dresses which are quite expensive.

### **Further research**

\*The harmful effect on the body such as allergic reactions on skin through the over use of cosmetics to achieve a fair skin and the rise in expenditure for families for education of their children who perceive fashion as important as sports and study needs to be studied.

\*The real effect of spending more time for watching TV programmes, reading articles on fashion and surfing the web for trendy clothes which eats into the time devoted for studies and how it affects own academic performance may be studied.

\*The extent to which fashion statements of celebrities which the media highlights affects the perception of students in general and women trainees in particular may be studied.

### Summing up

For almost four decades, there has been a significant rise in the number of women joining teacher training colleges in India. And men unlike women are not in favour of the teaching profession and are fast becoming a rare species in schools. The impact this trend is likely to create is not fully known. It is in this context that the investigator has attempted to study a significant change in attitude of women teacher trainees.

Women trainees becoming fashion conscious is natural but getting addicted to it and yearning for a life of glamour does not match the expected life style of teachers followed for centuries in Indian culture and hence need to be brought to the forefront of academic discussions.(3) Whatever said and done, the impact of magazines, Television and the social media is here to stay and so sensitizing women teacher trainees to the hidden traps becomes essential. Studies on predilection for fashion and glamour among teacher trainees in India are rare and this study has tried to address the research gap.

### Notes and References

- 1.A review paper on the effect of fashion on teens by Dedhia & Heffa (2013) commenced their write-up by affirming that the young generation has a tendency to imitate and follow anything that appears ‘hip’ or ‘in’ and quickly relate and follow what is fashionable. In fact, fashion is something that makes teens wish to fit in and they struggle everyday for it.
- 2.According to Dedhia & Heffa, not only do the Media and magazines inspire teenagers but also have an impact on their dressing sense and the way teens try to look. They also watch “crazy reality shows” to live up to the celebrities shown on Television.
- 3.Mahadevan illustrated the eight synonyms of a teacher popular in ancient India. The ones which deserve special mention includes: A teacher is one who is able to demonstrate larger principles of life through their own living. The teacher is one who helps students see through the limitations of mundane life and help them attain a sense of fullness and attain complete inner development.
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