

**UNDERSTANDING THE SPOTLIGHT EFFECT: A STUDY OF SOCIAL PERCEPTION AND BODY IMAGE CONCERN AMONG SELECTED ADOLESCENCE IN SHARJAH****\*Shams Jamal, Teeba Alaani, Noora Abughosh**

Sharjah American International School, UAE

**Received 07<sup>th</sup> April 2026; Accepted 10<sup>th</sup> May 2026; Published online 12<sup>th</sup> June 2026**

---

**Abstract**

A study from the Emirate of Sharjah looked at how adolescents think others pay them the same attention they do to others. The objective was to determine whether or not adolescents' self-consciousness, which refers to their belief that they are being watched or judged, is related to their dissatisfaction with their appearance and low social confidence. The study had a descriptive-correlational non-experimental design. The online questionnaire consisted of choice-based questions on a Likert scale and brief open-ended questions for primary data. This questionnaire was delivered to a total of 60 students studying in 10th, 11th and 12th grade. The results of the study showed that almost all participants had the impression that others noticed their looks and mistakes more than they did. This backed the so-called spotlight effect. Also, the result showed that the more social attention the adolescents felt they received from others the more body image concern they had with lower social confidence and comparison of appearance, especially on social media. Compared to boys, adolescent girls express more concern for their appearance, but boys are also quite conscious of their looks. The body image and self-confidence of adolescents in social situations were largely affected by the spotlight effect. This study finds ways to enhance the body image of young girls. Young people can gain real insight into the social rewards they get in-person and online. Parents and educators must be conscious of these effects.

**Keywords:** Spotlight effect, Body image, Adolescents, Social media, Self-esteem, Sharjah.**INTRODUCTION**

The focus of the current discourse attempts to establish a new definition of humanity in a social framework where people derive their sense of being from the perceptions of others. "The need to be understood, accepted, and appreciated in social settings influences people's speech, behavior, and their presentation of their physical appearance" (Abrami *et al.*, 2008). Social psychologists say that the self has been organized in evaluative and comparative terms where the 'others' are placed (Brown & Stopa, 2007; Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000). "When people begin to think that their mistakes, shortcomings, and bodies are constantly noticed and evaluated, ordinary social interactions may take the form of anxious and uncomfortable experiences." The factors mentioned are most visible in adolescents, who go through a period of quickening growth, both physiological and psychological. Pubertal changes, shifting familial assignments, and new experiences with autonomy each bring changes to the dynamics of peer relations and the relative importance of each of the new changes. Because of this, adolescents engage in more self-comparisons, which makes them more susceptible to the perceptions of their peer groups (Chiu *et al.*, 2021). Studies indicate that this focus on self-comparisons causes a greater concern regarding self-image and self-worth in those who suffer from social anxiety (Parsons *et al.*, 2021). Maintaining a well-rounded self-assessment is extremely difficult for social anxious individuals, as they pick out every small, seemingly insignificant thing and believe it is conspicuous to every onlooker. This is related to a cognitive distortion called the spotlight effect. The spotlight effect is the belief that people overestimate the degree to which their actions and appearance are witnessed and judged.

In a seminal study, Gilovich *et al.* (2000) instructed participants to wear a t-shirt displaying a provocative message and predict how many of their classmates would notice it. Participants estimated that nearly 50% of their classmates would notice the shirt, while the actual number of class members who noticed was closer to 25%. Most recently, people believe they are under constant scrutiny, and while the spotlight effect is pervasive, it is not as prevalent as people believe. Two other studies by Gilovich, Medvec, and Savitsky (1998) tested the illusion of transparency and a study by Brown and Stopa (2007) tested social anxiety. These experiments test that people believe their performance and appearance to be 'under the spotlight,' and that they feel obvious to other people, which they are not. It was also verified in the study by Brown and Stopa (2007) that the spotlight effect was most obvious in an audience-centered, high social-evaluative condition, suggesting that it is to a great extent influencing the social anxiety. The impact of these processes has increased dramatically now that there is social media. There is a huge flood of images, comments and responses to teenagers' profile pages 24/7 and through communication technology it is much simpler to access the outside world and also be exposed to encounters such as being 'liked', 'shared' and 'criticised' in front of the masses. Adolescents like to communicate by using technology and use electronic devices several hours per day (Lenhart *et al.*, 2015). In addition to this, it has been confirmed that audience-focused interactions via social media may cause issues regarding the level of anxiety and audience size (Underwood & Ehrenreich, 2017). A study showed how a group of college-going adolescents who were Instagram influencers over-estimated how many of their audience might actually pay attention to their highlighted feature (Ramsey, 2023). In addition to physical performance being under a spotlight, so is everything that one puts out online, even just an image. There are

questions of comments and silent criticism being passed, especially in cases where the person may suffer from social anxiety (Parsons *et al.*, 2021). It is in this period of time that a body image is constructed, and while a general consensus that negative body image leads to low self-esteem exists, a recent study found that the relationship between the two is somewhat more complex, that "there is no association between adolescent's body image level and their self-esteem" (Baiju *et al.*, 2025).

The study has clearly demonstrated the presence of gender-related variations in terms of the total concern demonstrated in the study, thereby implying the constant presence of the factor of gender in affecting the relation between the total perception of body image and the total concern demonstrated in the study regarding the appearance and grooming of boys and girls in the study, where the total concern demonstrated by girls appears to be related to the need for social and societal approval and discontent regarding their appearance in comparison to boys, where the boys demonstrated their concern to be associated with appearance and grooming (Baiju *et al.*, 2025). Despite the growing interest in the spotlight effect, the use of social media, and its relationship to body image, little has been investigated in the Gulf area, in particular in the settings and values associated with the adolescents in the emirate of Sharjah, concerning the psychological processes involved in the spotlight effect and its link to adolescents and their current concern with their body image and appearance in a global and local context (Baiju *et al.*, 2025; Brown & Stopa, 2007; Gilovich *et al.*, 2000; Ramsey, 2023). Adolescents in the Emirate of Sharjah are fully integrated into an environment of "respect, modesty, and community" values and a highly deep global and social media- connected environment, which may create a "spotlight effect experience" of their concern for body image and appearance in a unique way. However, there is little to no information available in the current literature pertaining to the intersection of the spotlight effect and adolescent body image concerns in the Emirate of Sharjah. The present study "Understanding the Spotlight Effect: A Study of Social Perception and Body Image Concern Among Selected Adolescents in Sharjah" aims to address this gap. This study, which focuses on adolescents in the Emirate of Sharjah, aims to assess the spotlight effect, body image concerns, and the varying degree to which the social and cultural contexts in which adolescents are embedded impact the effect. The study endeavors to describe the emotional and social experiences of adolescents living in Sharjah and aims to help parents and teachers formulate more effective interventions to assist adolescents who experience concern and sensitivity regarding their appearance and body.

### Statement of the Problem

While documenting the psychological processes occurring in everyday life might seem impossible, researchers have published numerous documents on the spotlight effect, social evaluation, and pressure, especially concerning the body image of adolescents. Existing research suggests that the spotlight effect is when people overestimate how much other people notice their appearance and behavior (Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000). People with social anxiety experience the spotlight effect, which draws attention to their emotions and the perceived flaws to others in the situation (Gilovich *et al.*, 1998; Brown & Stopa, 2007). In addition, how social media provides users with access to images and evaluations is

becoming a reality for almost all adolescents. This causes a multitude of effects that increase the feeling of being seen by others and the pressure from the evaluations of others (Underwood & Ehrenreich, 2017; Lenhart *et al.*, 2015).

### Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to analyze the perception adolescents have of themselves in the Emirate of Sharjah using the spotlight effect, given their concerns about body image. The research studies the effect of being self-conscious about the attention of others on adolescents' confidence concerning the image of their body, and the way in which they perceive their social being. The research further explains the relationship of being self-conscious about one's appearance and social perception in the process of the transformation of the adolescents' self. The study explains the role of the spotlight effect and the perception of the social evaluation of the adolescents in Sharjah in the formation of their self-image.

### Research Questions

What is the relationship between the spotlight effect and body image in adolescents in the Emirate of Sharjah?

How does self-consciousness of one's body, perceived social attention, and confidence influence the perception of self and social presence of adolescents in everyday social encounters?

### Significance of the Study

Adolescents construct their egos in the awareness of the social audience in their presence. Using the spotlight effect and concerns about body image, this study demonstrates the effect of social perception on the emotional state of adolescents in the Emirate of Sharjah. Evaluating appearance helps gain insight into the social pressures that adolescents encounter (Gilovich *et al.*, 2000; Brown & Stopa, 2007). From a teaching perspective, social engagement (or lack thereof) of adolescents during learning activities is a concern for both teaching and counseling staff. In situations where adolescents feel that they are being evaluated both behaviorally and appearance wise, they tend to withdraw and develop anxiety, which impacts the learning process (Westrich, 2022). Understanding the emotional pressures that adolescents face can help parents come up with some strategies to cope and can improve the self-perception of adolescents.

The study focuses on adolescents and the social structure of Sharjah and seeks to define social and community perceptions of body image. Feeling that they are being evaluated behaviorally and appearance wise can cause adolescents to become socially withdrawn and anxious, which tends to have a negative impact on the learning process (Westrich, 2022). The study contributes to the body of existing literature by providing an example of the spotlight effect and how it can take on multiple forms in different cultures, namely in cultures that value reputation and modesty (Baiju *et al.*, 2025). This study makes it possible to develop coping support programs for self-consciousness. This study examines the implications of the spotlight effect with regard to body image and the building of the social and psychological framework in the Emirate of Sharjah on how to improve the social well-being of adolescents.

## Structure of the study

The first chapter describes the background of the study, the problem statement, aims, research questions, and the significance of the study. The second chapter analyzes social perception, spotlight effect, and body image issues among adolescents, and reviews literature related to what this study will examine and related theories and previous work. The remaining chapters describe the study's methodology, findings and discussion, and the conclusion. Methodology outlines the research design, sample, data collection, and ethics. The findings are explained and examined in relation to other body of literature in the discussion. The last chapter describes the conclusion and significance of the study and lists recommendations for future studies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Early research in social psychology indicates we are poor at estimating how much others notice us. We believe ourselves to be highly visible. For example, in 2000, Gilovich and colleagues found college students believed others noticed their appearance to a significantly greater extent, calling this phenomenon the "spotlight effect". Additionally, Brown and Stopa (2007) found that socially anxious people and people who worry about negative social evaluation feel the spotlight effect more. This research is a good starting point, but most of the research subjects are college students. It is unknown if the same behaviors are evident in high school students, particularly in the case of students in Sharjah.

### Early Roots of Social Perception and Self-Awareness

Early research in social psychology indicates we are poor at estimating how much others notice us. We believe ourselves to be highly visible. For example, in 2000, Gilovich and colleagues found college students believed others noticed their appearance to a significantly greater extent, calling this phenomenon the "spotlight effect". Additionally, Brown and Stopa (2007) found that socially anxious people and people who worry about negative social evaluation feel the spotlight effect more. This research is a good starting point, but most of the research subjects are college students. It is unknown if the same behaviors are evident in high school students, particularly in the case of students in Sharjah.

**The Rise of Appearance Awareness in Social Settings:** The spotlight effect has grown beyond in-person communication with the development of social media. Teens now have to compare themselves to their peers more through likes, comments, and followers on social media (Lenhart *et al.*, 2015; Underwood & Ehrenreich, 2017). Additionally, research claims that people think more of their peers view their posts and pictures than actually do, meaning the spotlight effect is enlarged when people use social media (Ramsey, 2023). Many of these studies have focused on Western countries, and the presence of the spotlight effect in teens in Sharjah is still unknown.

**Digital Environments and the Intensification of Self-Consciousness:** The growing influence of social media has had the tendency to amplify the spotlight effect beyond one's face-to-face interactions. With the use of likes, comments and followers adolescent are constantly being asked to reflect on how their own physical selves compare to the social selves

others have created of themselves on social media sites (Lenhart *et al.*, 2015; Underwood & Ehrenreich, 2017). Similarly, it has been found that this perception of close scrutiny has been intensified online, with people overestimating how closely their posts and images are examined (Ramsey, 2023). These findings suggest that our digital experiences actually intensify the spotlight effect; however, the studies listed used a western perspective so there is yet to be conducted research that analyzes appearance based social perception in adolescents using a study context from Sharjah.

## Psychological Theories Related to Body Image and Social Perception

**Social Comparison Theory:** Social Comparison Theory states that individuals compare themselves and their lives to other people around them, and social comparisons made on a daily basis contribute to individual body satisfaction (Merino *et al.*, 2024). As the level of upward social comparison increases with exposure to images on social media, so does the level of body dissatisfaction, and self-esteem is inversely correlated with both upward social comparison and body dissatisfaction (Merino *et al.*, 2024). Given the nature of curated images and a vast amount of retouched pictures teens are confronted with daily it can be concluded they may compare themselves to their peers and others more often and with more rigor than adults which influences body satisfaction.

**Self-Discrepancy Theory:** Self-discrepancy theory posits that feelings of distress and negative emotions arise from discrepancies between a person's real self and an ideal self. Children may feel shame, anxiety, and distress due to self-perceived body image not reflecting ideal body image and negative thoughts will be elicited by continuous visual reminders (on and offline) of ideal slim and toned bodies (Merino *et al.*, 2024).

**Objectification Theory:** Objectification theory states that people, mainly women, are socialized to view their bodies from an observer's point of view and therefore are more prone to the spotlight effect. Empirical studies have shown that self-objectification has emotional and cognitive resource-diminishing effects on adolescents, making them more likely to be evaluated on their appearance and subject to social assessments (Merino *et al.*, 2024).

## Social Media and Body Image

The potential of social media to negatively affect body image is extensive because it exposes adolescents to appearance-focused content. Studies show that exposure to idealized and edited depiction of people on social media can cause low self-esteem and greater dissatisfaction with how they look (Merino *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, social media drives users to compare themselves more to others and increases awareness on their self-presentation. It can intensify the spotlight effect by giving the impression that a person's appearance is always open to public examination and judgment (Underwood & Ehrenreich, 2017).

**Self-Presentation and Perceived Visibility:** When adolescents showcase themselves on the internet, they filter out imperfections to create an image that prominently displays their positive qualities. It has been discovered that "higher

levels of image control are linked to the perception of audience members concentrating their assessment on the presentation” (Parsons *et al.*, 2021). The focus audience primarily evaluates the components of self-presentation rather than the self.

**Social Media Exposure and Mental Health:** The process causes the digital spotlight effect, which augments the impact of perceived visibility in an unprecedented manner. Merino *et al.* (2024) state that the presentation of an appearance-focused social media platform, combined with the resulting social comparison, manifests in anxiety, depressive symptoms, and social media dissatisfaction. The internalization of social media appearance standards leads to heightened concern over the perception others have of adolescents, along with an increased level of self-dissatisfaction. The real (or perceived) feedback adolescents receive through social media creates a framework in which their appearance, rather than their character, defines their worth and identity (Merino *et al.*, 2024).

### Cultural and Gender Effects within Body Image

**Beauty Standards and Cultural Norms:** The appreciation and recognition of beauty, beyond even the most localized community, is highly individual. Even within communities, there are those that consider an appearance with a fuller body as more beautiful than that with a slender body. It is indisputable that young people evaluate their bodies based on their understanding of current cultural norms, standards, and expectations (Merino *et al.*, 2024). Developing global media draws the attention of adolescents to the expectations and standards related to beauty in other countries. This may be the reason for the rapidly growing and spreading global body dissatisfaction.

**Gender Differences in Concerns Related to the Body:** It is theorized that women are more dissatisfied with their body image than men. This is linked to the theory of women’s beauty being associated with being slender (Baiju *et al.*, 2025). Men like women are likely to experience a shift in self-perception and therefore an unprecedented level of anxiety as a result of the societal and cultural cues that convey that men are to be tall, fit and muscular (Merino *et al.*, 2024).

**Intersection of Culture, Gender, and Social Perception:** Members of a culture’s social perception of how the feedback received from the members of that culture is understood and evaluated is likely to be dominated by the expectations and roles accorded to them by that culture. In cultures where reputation and dignity are of utmost importance, the youth are likely to be preoccupied with how they are viewed by their peers and the adults in their lives (Merino *et al.*, 2024; Baiju *et al.*, 2025).

### Conclusion

The spotlight effect occurs when adolescents feel like they are the main concern of those around them. For adolescents, the combination of social networks, the self, and the body are the key factors that affect their self-esteem. The spotlight effect is related to body image, and self-perception of adolescents and what they imply is well established. Social Comparison and Self-Discrepancy Theories explain how and why adolescents are the most affected regarding their evaluations of how they look. It is evident that social media is a source of social

comparison and self-monitoring that enhances appearance and concern and social-related evaluations. How adolescents perceive social evaluations and how they evaluate their bodies is affected by their culture and gender.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The current study utilized a quantitative research design to explore the relationship between the spotlight effect and body image concerns among adolescents in the Emirate of Sharjah. A quantitative research design was appropriate in this case because the researcher was interested in collecting data that could be quantified and allow the researcher to describe the relationship between the two variables. Since the current study does not involve the manipulation of variables, and can be considered as studying one of the many natural psychological phenomena, a non-experimental descriptive correlational research design was used in order to study the relationship between the spotlight effect, and body image concerns, among the adolescents of the Emirate of Sharjah.

### Target Population and Sampling

The target population was adolescents attending secondary schools in the Emirate of Sharjah, particularly those between 15 and 18 years of age. The method of sampling used in this study was convenience sampling, which in this case involved selecting the members of the target population who were readily accessible and willing to participate in the study. The final study sample consisted of an estimated 60 students, who represented both genders and who differed in their academic background.

The study sample was designed to include:

- Variation in grade within school (Grades 10, 11, and 12)
- Variation in respondents’ gender (Male and female)
- Variation in respondents’ cultural background within school

This was aimed at broadening the understanding of the spotlight effect among adolescents.

### Data Collection Procedure

For primary data, a structured survey was created to look at the following:

- The spotlight effect
- Body image
- Self-esteem
- Social anxiety

A survey is a primary quantitative data collection tool. To facilitate data collection, the survey was uploaded to a survey tool, Google Forms, where it was made accessible electronically. The participants rated the survey items using a Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” A Likert scale is the most appropriate for evaluating attitude and perception, as it is described in the literature.

The survey contained the following sections:

- The perception of being observed by others

- Concerns regarding physical appearance
- Social Behaviors
- The concern about the judgment of others

### Research Instruments

Self-report surveys were the primary research tools of this study, developed with various psychology-related subfields, such as the spotlight effect, social anxiety, and body image (Brown & Stopa, 2007; Gilovich *et al.*, 2000; Merino *et al.*, 2024).

The survey contained the following:

- Close-ended questions
- A Likert scale was used for the response options.
- Perception-related survey items

Example survey items include:

- "I think people notice the way I look too much."
- "I am very self-conscious about the way I look in front of other people."

The survey was assessed to establish content validity for the constructs of interest and the standard presentation of response options, which adds to reliability and the consistency of the results.

### Research Instruments

The main research tool for this study was a self-report questionnaire. To develop a primary research tool for data collection, psychological constructs such as the spotlight (2007), Gilovich *et al.* (2000), Merino *et al.* (2024), social anxiety, and social and body image (Brown & Stopa, 2024) effects were all incorporated.

The questionnaire contained:

- Closed-ended questions
- Likert scale questions
- Perception measuring questions

Examples of the questions include:

- "Other people notice my appearance more than they really do."
- "Do you pay attention to your appearance in social settings?"

The questionnaire was designed to ensure that questions were sufficient and relevant to the constructs of the study to enhance content validity. Standardized answer formats enhanced the reliability of the questionnaire, as it ensured the same results could be repeated by the tool.

### Variables of the Study

The variables of the study were:

- Independent Variables:

Spotlight Effect (Being viewed and evaluated by others) (Gilovich *et al.*, 2000)

- Dependant Variables:

Body Image Concerns (Dissatisfaction with one's personal appearance) (Baiju *et al.*, 2025; Merino *et al.*, 2024)

Additionally:

- Self-esteem
- Social confidence
- Appearance consciousness

The variables were also measured by the participants' responses to the questionnaire. (Baiju *et al.*, 2025; Brown & Stopa, 2007).

### Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected was analyzed using both descriptive and correlational statistical methods.

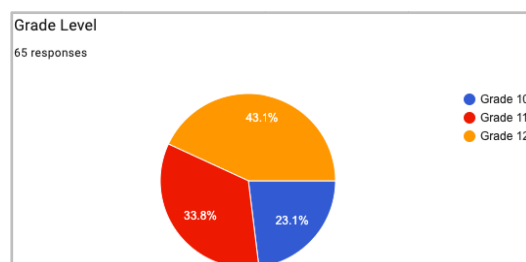
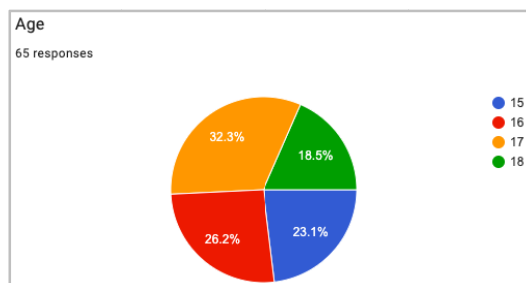
The analyses consisted of:

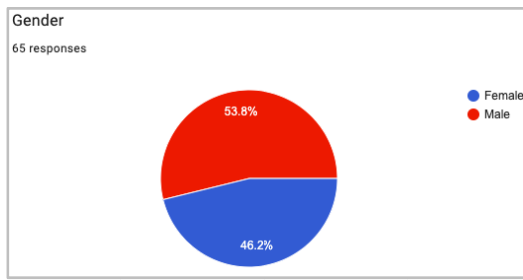
- Setting up the distribution and calculating the percentages of the data.
- Finding the patterns in the responses.
- Finding the differences among the data disaggregated by gender and grade.
- Finding the relationships between the spotlight effect and body image.
- The analysis attempted to deepen the understanding of the relationship between the perception of social spotlight and the perception of body image of adolescents.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and discusses the data collected from 65 adolescents from the Emirate of Sharjah. Data were processed, presented, and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, tables, and figures). Findings are presented in the order of the research questions to demonstrate how the spotlight effect relates to body image worries, self-esteem, social concerns, and social media.





The distribution of the respondents' age is shown in Table 4.1. The largest age group in the sample was 17 year olds. The majority of respondents were in Grade 12, with Grade 11 and Grade 10 represented in that order. There were similar numbers of males and females in the sample. The findings indicate that the participants in the study were representative of the adolescents in the target age and grade bands.

**Research Question 1: How does the spotlight effect relate to body image concerns among adolescents in the Emirate of Sharjah?**

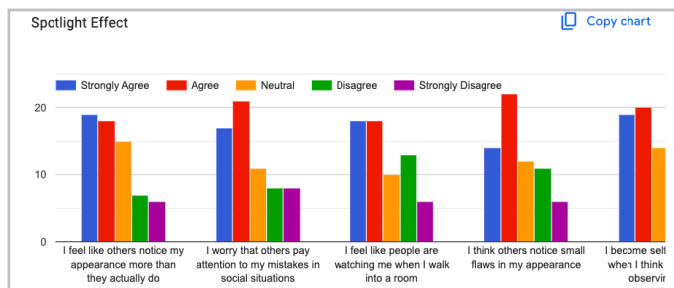


Figure 4.1. Spotlight Effect Responses Among Adolescents

Figure 4.1 shows that most respondents selected “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” in response to feeling noticed, watched, and judged. Many participants believed others focused more on their appearance, mistakes, and small flaws. This suggests that the spotlight effect was prevalent among the adolescent respondents in this study.

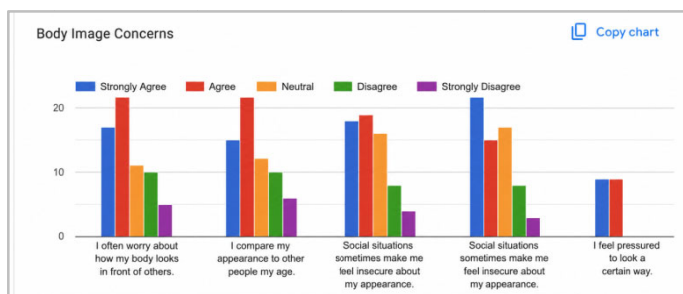
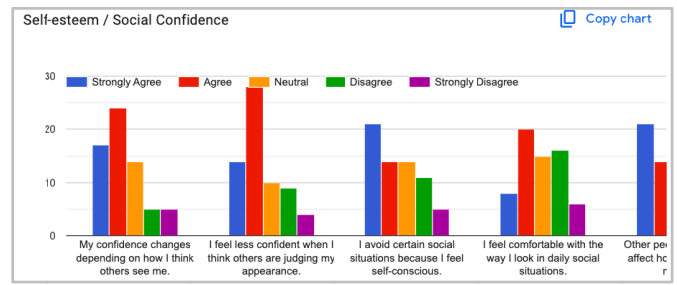


Figure 4.2. Body Image Concerns Among Adolescents

Figure 4.2 shows that many respondents felt worried about appearance, comparing oneself to others, and feeling pressure about appearance. This suggests that the participants had a dominant concern about body image. The results and Figure 4.1 reveal participants who felt observed had greater concerns about body image. Hence, it is concluded that the spotlight effect is connected to body image concerns.

**4.4 Research Question 2: In what ways does perceived social attention influence adolescents' confidence, self-esteem, and awareness of their physical appearance in daily social situations?**



Most of the respondents that Figure 4.3 addresses felt that their self-assuredness was tied to their perception of others. Many believed they were (self-)inadequate when it came to judging the appearance of others. Some said they preferred not to go to certain social events due to their concern of others judging them. The main conclusion of the findings is that perceived social attention has a considerable effect on the self-esteem and social confidence of adolescents.

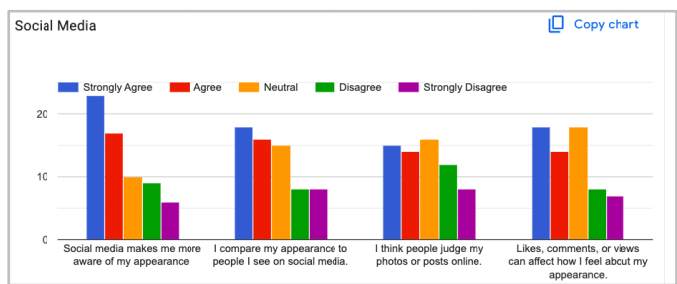


Figure 4.4. Social Media Influence on Appearance Awareness

As Figure 4.4 shows, the influence of social media has been significant towards the way in which adolescents evaluate their own appearance. Respondents indicated that social media has enabled them to be image focused and has made some adolescents more aware of the way that they physically present themselves. Many respondents indicated that the digital feedback in the form of ‘likes’, comments, and views has had a significant effect on the way that they feel about the way that they physically present themselves. Respondents indicated that the effect of social media has amplified the effect of social attention on adolescents.

Table 4.2. Common Themes From Open-Ended Responses

Theme	Example Response
Social Comparison	“Social media makes me compare myself more, which sometimes lowers my confidence.”
Feeling judged	“I feel like people notice small things about me.”
Lower confidence	“I feel more insecure after seeing people who look better or more confident than me.”
Online pressure	“Seeing perfect pictures online makes me feel like I need to look better.”

Table 4.2 summarizes the subjects presented in open-ended responses. Based on participants' descriptions and social media responses, comparison, insecurity, and pressure were all evident as a function of the pressure augmented by social media and peer response. Experts believe that these responses corresponded to the quantitative data. This detail helped to shed light on the impact social media has on the perception of social reality, self-confidence, and body image of adolescents.

**Summary of Findings**

Research data showed that a large number of teenagers in Sharjah believed that everyone was always watching them.

This is called the spotlight effect. Negative body image is a feeling that young people experience when they believe they are being judged. Professors say that adolescents feel a lack of self-confidence and more insecurity at these times. Adolescents care a lot about how other people perceive them. At the same time, it allows us to answer the questions that the study is trying to address. Those are the times when adolescents are concerned about their image and self-esteem, which can be observed in the case of the adolescents of Sharjah. The spotlight effect, which is experienced by the adolescents of Sharjah, is likely to be even stronger. The adolescents of Sharjah are primarily worried about how they are perceived, both on social networks and off, in the real world.

## CONCLUSION

### Summary of the Findings

Study investigated the correlation between the so-called spotlight effect and body image concerns in adolescents in the Emirate This of Sharjah. The study attempted to determine how adolescents perceive being observed and evaluated by others, and how this perception can affect their confidence, self-esteem, and their awareness of their bodies. Lots believed that other people had noticed their flaws, that they looked at them more than they actually did, of the participants in this study felt that other people were paying lots of attention to them. Often they that they had made mistakes and that other people had noticed them too. This is a classic example of. People believe that they are under the spotlight and that everyone is watching them. In reality however, the spotlight effect, in which people believe that other people are giving them more attention than they actually are other people are just as busy and self-obsessed as we are and are not giving us as example people feeling self-conscious, embarrassed and worried about what others think of them. Consistent result throughout the study was that a large proportion of adolescents expressed concerns over body image in social situations Another and during development. Many of the adolescents expressed worries of how they look, comparing themselves to others and People are being watched by others can have a negative perception of themselves and become more self-conscious. For some's confidence can be greatly affected by how others perceive them. This means that people who believe that they people, this can be a real problem a and cause them to avoid many social situations, fearing that often tied to how they think others think of them and that can be a heavy burden to carry. they will be viewed in a negative light. This is because the confidence that people have of themselves is It is therefore interesting to see the impact that perceived how much social attention that people receive could have on Social media also appears to have a powerful effect to increase awareness of how one looks as well as to encourage comparison of self with others, such as peers, famous influencers and celebrities. Most of the adolescents reported using Instagram, Snapchat and/or TikTok. They reported that using these apps for social media increased their body image concerns negatively affecting their self-esteem. The study therefore addressed both of the research questions. The spotlight effect was found to be related to a number of body image concerns and therefore to affect the self-esteem, social confidence and emotional well-being of adolescents.

## Implications of the Study

The findings from this study have implications for the students, parents, the educators and the school counselors. A general understanding of the spotlight effect for adolescents and young adults with exaggerated feelings of being constantly observed could help students and their families and educators to understand that others are less concerned with the way that they look than students believe. This could reduce unnecessary anxiety and increase students' feelings of confidence. Also, parents of adolescents can take lessons from the research about the spotlight effect. Support your adolescent during times when he or she is concerned with appearance and discuss in a positive manner the adolescent's body image and self-worth. Help your adolescent to focus on the things that make him or her unique such as their strengths, character, activities, achievements, talents and accomplishments rather than their appearance. For teachers and school counselors, the findings about body image and social anxiety could be addressed through school-based programs as well as school counseling services. School-based programs as well as workshops in school counseling, addressing issues of self-esteem, media literacy, and mental health, could be very beneficial for students suffering from appearance-related concerns and therefore trying to manage how they look. From a school perspective, results can be used to promote a climate of acceptance, diversity and emotional well-being and to carry out and/or develop programs and activities to raise students' awareness on how social media can affect the way students see themselves and how unrealistic beauty models can have a negative impact on students' mental health. From an academic point of view, this study contributes to existing research on the spotlight effect and its relation to body image concerns in adolescents from Sharjah, a research population that is under-represented in current literature.

## Delimitations of the Study

The study is confined to a group of adolescents in secondary schools in the Emirate of Sharjah. The participants were between 15 and 18 years of age and were in Grades 10, 11 and 12. This study investigates one aspect of a young person's psychological world. The spotlight effect and body image concerns are the two aspects that are explored in this study. Other relevant psychological variables such as depression, eating disorders and family and parents' psychological variables were not investigated in this study. The data was collected by means of a self-reporting questionnaire distributed online via Google Forms. The data analyzed in this study is based on the participants' own perception and answers. The study had a sample size of approximately 65 students who took part in the study. The participants were selected by the researcher using convenience sampling. Hence, the results of the study would only represent the results and experiences of the adolescents in the study (i.e., secondary school students in the Emirate of Sharjah) and not the results and experiences of all the adolescents in Sharjah and the UAE. A short study it is only possible to draw on the findings of this study for a limited period of as in depth analysis.

## Recommendations for Further Research

Research is needed to further elaborate the study in several ways.

First, Using a larger number of participants from different schools, cities or even age groups.

Second, The findings from the Spotlight Effect and concerns regarding body image in adolescence could be compared between adolescents from differences in the way the Spotlight Effect affects and how concerns regarding body image are dealt with by adolescents in different cultural backgrounds and from various parts of the world. It would then become clear if there are any various social settings.

Third, future studies could include other psychological variables such as anxiety, depression, perfectionism and peer pressure that may influence the adolescents' body image.

Fourth, qualitative studies such as in-depth interviews or focus groups could help to gain more insight in the personal experiences and feelings of young people.

Fifth, longitudinal studies should be conducted to investigate how the spotlight effect and negative concerns with body image change and develop over time and in what way.

Finally, Future research should evaluate interventions delivered in schools that attempt to increase adolescents' self-esteem and deal with their appearance concerns, as well as other social problems. In addition, it would be useful to evaluate programs that attempt to change adolescents' social media use and other activities that bring about healthier representations of beauty.

## Conclusion

The current study was designed to examine the relationship between the spotlight effect and body image concerns in a sample of adolescents from the Emirate of Sharjah. Results of the study found support for the first aim of the study. That is, many adolescents in this study believed that they were the focal point of others' attention and that others noticed and evaluated their appearance. Furthermore, results found support for the second aim of the study. That is, adolescents' belief that they were the focal point of others' attention was related to a number of negative body image concerns and to lower levels of self-esteem, confidence, and positive affect. It also was related to higher levels of self-consciousness in social situations. The study found how social media contributes to adolescents' appearance concerns by increasing appearance comparisons and exposure to unrealistic beauty ideals. Moreover, the findings indicate how adolescents' body image concerns are further affected by general cultural and gender-specific pressure when adolescents perceive that others are evaluating their appearance. The study may have limitations; nonetheless, it is of value in gaining an insight into adolescents' feelings and thoughts about themselves as well as gaining some understanding about how they could be enabled to perceive their appearance in a more balanced manner and thereby understand the spotlight effect. The spotlight effect plays a significant role in the body image concerns and low self-esteem of adolescents. Raising awareness and the support of schools and families are essential to improve the emotional intelligence and overall well-being of adolescents enabling them to have a positive body image and higher self-esteem.

**Acknowledgments:** We greatly appreciate the guidance and feedback from our research supervisor, Miss Shaza Miles,

during this project. Because of her feedback and suggestions, we were able to enhance the quality of our research and maintain our focus and motivation throughout the project. We would like to thank the Sharjah American International School for the opportunity to research a subject that is significant to countless adolescents. We owe a great deal of thanks to the students in the Emirate of Sharjah who submitted a survey. We appreciate their sincere survey responses as they helped us understand the relationship of the spotlight effect and the body image of adolescents. We finally would like to thank our families for supporting and encouraging us through this project. Because of their motivation, we were able to complete the project.

## REFERENCES

- Baiju, R., Kumar, S., & Nair, P. (2025). Body image concerns and self-esteem among adolescents in social environments. *International Journal of Adolescent Psychology*, 14(1), 22–35.
- Brown, M. A., & Stopa, L. (2007). The spotlight effect and social anxiety: The mediating role of appearance concerns. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 45(10), 2400–2408. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2007.06.002>
- Chiu, K., Lee, J., & Wong, T. (2021). Adolescent social comparison and psychological adjustment in modern social settings. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 24(7), 901–917. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1757632>
- Gilovich, T., Medvec, V. H., & Savitsky, K. (1998). The illusion of transparency: Biased assessments of others' ability to read one's emotional states. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(2), 332–346. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.75.2.332>
- Gilovich, T., Medvec, V. H., & Savitsky, K. (2000). The spotlight effect in social judgment: An egocentric bias in estimates of the salience of one's own actions and appearance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(2), 211–222. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.78.2.211>
- Lenhart, A., Smith, A., Anderson, M., Duggan, M., & Perrin, A. (2015). *Teens, technology and friendships*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org>
- Merino, L., Santos, R., & Velasco, P. (2024). Social media exposure, self-comparison, and body dissatisfaction among adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 39(3), 410–428.
- Parsons, J. T., Whitfield, T. H., & Gomez, A. (2021). Social anxiety, self-presentation, and appearance concerns in online communication. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 24(8), 512–519. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2020.0674>
- Ramsey, L. R. (2023). Perceived audience attention and appearance awareness among social media users. *Psychology of Popular Media*, 12(4), 455–463.
- Underwood, M. K., & Ehrenreich, S. E. (2017). The power and pressure of social media in adolescence. *Adolescent Research Review*, 2(2), 127–143. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-016-0044-8>
- Westrich, L. (2022). Social anxiety and classroom participation among adolescents. *Educational Psychology Review*, 34(1), 145–160. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-021-09611-4>