

## Understanding and addressing body dissatisfaction: communication challenges among technical college students

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the impact of body dissatisfaction on communication competencies among engineering college students and to put forth remedial strategies. As body dissatisfaction is still a grey area in research-related communication competencies, the researchers have focused on this arena. Sixty-one heterogeneous participants (male = 30 and female = 31) from one of the private engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu, India, participated during the summer semester. The judgment under the non-probability sampling technique was used. Moreover, rubrics were developed with four parameters: color complex, consciousness over their physique, shame and guilt, self-blaming, and lamentation. In addition, class observation techniques were used based on the aforementioned rubrics; the students accessed their classroom presentation using an evaluation sheet derived from the rubrics. The result revealed that around 70% of the participants suffered from body dissatisfaction, while the degree ranges from minimum to maximum levels. This hampers their effective communication and self-expression. With a holistic approach that combines mental health support, awareness-building workshops, peer mentorship, and communication skills training, the participants are mitigated by the impact of body dissatisfaction on communication within the student cohort.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Body dissatisfaction refers to a negative perception and evaluation of one's body, often driven by societal beauty standards and unrealistic body ideals perpetuated by media and cultural factors. It can have various implications for mental and physical health. Research has assessed the adverse effects of body dissatisfaction on both adolescent girls and boys, consistently linking it to immediate distress, low self-esteem, and depressive mood [1]–[3]. Additionally, attention has focused on muscularity-oriented body dissatisfaction as a clinical symptom of body dysmorphic disorder associated with depression and lower well-being [4]–[6]. Gendered dimensions highlight that women often report thinness-oriented dissatisfaction, while men report muscularity-oriented dissatisfaction, aligning with the correlation of femininity with thinness-oriented dissatisfaction and masculinity with muscularity-oriented dissatisfaction [7]. Body image, encompassing cognitive-affective, perceptual, and behavioral dimensions, is extensively studied, with the cognitive-affective aspect, known as body dissatisfaction, considered a key clinical symptom of eating disorders and an independent predictor of various maladaptive outcomes, including depression. Furthermore,

structural equation modeling studies with cross-sectional data consistently identify body dissatisfaction as a significant predictor of low self-esteem and depression in adolescent girls [3]. The world is exposed to images of "ideal" bodies through advertisements, movies, and social media. The media, including magazines, television, and social media, often promote unrealistic and idealized body standards. Exposure to these images can lead to social comparison and increased body dissatisfaction. These images often promote a specific body type that may not be realistic or achievable for most people. Indian society places a significant emphasis on physical appearance, particularly for women. There can be pressure on young people to conform to societal beauty standards, leading to dissatisfaction with their bodies. People with body dissatisfaction are more likely to engage in negative self-talk, which can then lead to anxiety and avoidance behaviors. They are also people who are more likely to use indirect communication, such as avoiding eye contact or making excuses to avoid social situations. Additionally, people with body dissatisfaction may have difficulty expressing their emotions, both positive and negative. In contrast, people with less body dissatisfaction are likely to initiate or engage in social interactions, and they are likely to withdraw from relationships as they are more sensitive to criticism about their appearance.

Body image [8] has four aspects: perceptual, affective, cognitive, and behavioral. The perceptual aspect of body image involves how individuals perceive the size, shape, and appearance of their own bodies. This includes the accuracy of mental representations, visual and sensory feedback, and cognitive distortions that may influence self-perception. Emotional states and adaptation to stimuli also play roles in shaping the perceptual aspect of body image. Understanding these factors is crucial for addressing body dissatisfaction and related mental health concerns. Similarly, the affective aspect of body image pertains [9] to the emotional responses individuals have toward their own bodies, encompassing feelings of satisfaction, dissatisfaction, shame, or pride. It involves the subjective evaluation of one's physical appearance and the emotional impact of societal or personal standards. Affective body image significantly influences overall well-being and mental health, contributing to the development of attitudes and emotional states related to one's physical self [10]–[12]. Understanding and addressing these emotional dimensions is essential for promoting positive body image [13]. In addition, the cognitive aspect of body image involves individuals' thoughts and beliefs about their bodies, encompassing cognitive distortions, selective attention, and comparisons to societal ideals. It includes the mental representation of one's body, shaping self-perception, and influencing overall body satisfaction. Cognitive processes play a crucial role in developing and maintaining body image concerns, making cognitive interventions essential for fostering a healthy relationship with one's physical self [14]. Moreover, students were affected by body shaming [15]. Eventually, the behavioral aspect of body image encompasses actions related to one's appearance, including appearance management through grooming, clothing choices, and exercise. It involves avoidance behaviors or engagement in activities that enhance or alter physical appearance. Behavioral patterns play a role in reinforcing or challenging body image perceptions, affecting overall well-being. Understanding these behaviors is vital for designing interventions that promote positive body image and address body dissatisfaction.

The objective/motivation of the study is to understand how someone's body dissatisfaction impacts self-esteem and self-confidence. When it comes to students, this study examines how their negative body image impacts their communication and investigates the role of peer support in mitigating communication barriers. Thus, it will help us understand and explore the impacts of body image on the academic performance of technical students of the study.

- To examine the impact of body dissatisfaction on self-esteem and self-confidence among technical students.
- To study the impact of negative body image on communication among students with body dissatisfaction.
- To investigate the role of peer support in mitigating communication barriers and explore body image's role in academic performance.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Body dissatisfaction can have detrimental effects on mental health, leading to conditions such as low self-esteem, depression, and eating disorders. These issues can be particularly challenging for youths who are developing their self-identity. Body dissatisfaction is not limited to one gender but can manifest differently. In the social comparison theory proposed by Michalos [16], individuals self-evaluate by comparing their appearance and social value to that of others. When people compare themselves to others they perceive as more attractive, they may experience body dissatisfaction.

Similarly, objectification theory [17] defines women as often objectified or viewed as objects of sexual desire rather than as people. This objectification can lead to body dissatisfaction, as women may feel pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards. Furthermore, sociocultural theory [18] discloses that body dissatisfaction is caused by cultural and societal factors, such as the media's portrayal of ideal body

types. The media often portrays thin, white, and able-bodied people as being more desirable and successful, which can lead to body dissatisfaction among people who do not fit these standards. Tripartite influence model [3] exerts influence through three key factors: individual characteristics, interpersonal connections, and cultural communications. Personal traits, such as low self-esteem and perfectionism, can make people more vulnerable to body dissatisfaction. Social relationships, such as family and friends, can also play a role, as they can influence our beliefs about our bodies and our self-worth. Cultural messages, such as the media's portrayal of ideal body types, can also contribute to body dissatisfaction. In addition to the sociocultural and objectification theories, several other theoretical frameworks can be used to understand body dissatisfaction. Cognitive-behavioral theory [19] states that body dissatisfaction is maintained by negative thoughts and behaviors. For example, people with body dissatisfaction may have negative thoughts about their bodies, such as "I'm ugly" or "I'm fat." They may also engage in negative behaviors, such as avoiding social situations or dieting excessively. Additionally, acceptance and commitment therapy [20] entrusts people to overcome body dissatisfaction by accepting their bodies and focusing on their values. For example, people with body dissatisfaction may learn to accept their bodies as they are, even if they do not fit society's ideal body types. They may also focus on their values, such as spending time with loved ones or pursuing their goals.

Furthermore, a theoretical model explains how body image can affect communication. According to the model, body dissatisfaction may give rise to adverse thoughts and emotions, consequently impeding effective communication. The model delineates three primary pathways by which body dissatisfaction influences communication. The cognitive pathway, as outlined by Grimberg and Hand [21], involves the generation of negative self-perceptions, including self-doubt, shame, and anxiety. These detrimental thoughts not only hinder concentration during communication but also foster avoidance behaviors. Similarly, the emotional pathway [22] leads to negative emotions, such as sadness, anger, and fear. These negative emotions can then make it difficult to regulate one's emotions, and they can also make it difficult to connect with others. Lastly, behavioral pathway [23] leads to avoidant behaviors, such as avoiding social situations or withdrawing from relationships. These avoidant behaviors can then further isolate the person and make it difficult to communicate effectively.

In India, males and females may experience body dissatisfaction, but the specific pressures and expectations of appearance can vary. Gender differences in body dissatisfaction are well-documented. While both males and females can experience body dissatisfaction, females often face greater societal pressure to conform to idealized beauty standards, leading to higher rates of dissatisfaction [24]. Additionally, males may experience body dissatisfaction related to achieving muscularity and leanness [25]. Moreover, the impact of culture and body image was carried out by Pula [26]; the result showed the relationship between body image and culture, focusing on how body dissatisfaction can affect verbal and nonverbal communication, as well as the ability to build and maintain relationships. Moreover, Stewart and Stapleton [27] conducted a study on body dissatisfaction, such as appearance anxiety and appearance behaviors video conference amongst 191 Australians. The result showed that body dissatisfaction was controlled using the video conferencing method. Furthermore, Hosokawa *et al.* [28] investigated the relationship between social media and body dissatisfaction among 161 junior high school girls in Japan. The result showed that social media use affects girls' body dissatisfaction. Moreover, it leads to mental disorders. In addition, Dou *et al.* [29] examined a quantitative study comparing body dissatisfaction and social anxiety among 972 adolescents. The result showed that body dissatisfaction was positively associated with social anxiety. Gong [30] conducted a case study on the impact of communication on female body image anxiety. This study revealed that Chinese women compromised their fitness, weight loss, and slimming than men. Similarly, Kerner *et al.* [31] conducted a study on psychological and physical well-being among 446 students from 37 physical education classes. The result showed that body dissatisfaction was highly induced by their psychological and physical fitness—a comparative study between women and men on body dissatisfaction and education level. Quantitative data were collected amongst 1955 participants of different ages. The result revealed that body dissatisfaction increased with age between women and men; moreover, education level affected their body dissatisfaction [32]. Peer and family comments and attitudes regarding one's appearance can significantly impact body dissatisfaction, especially during adolescence when social acceptance is critical [33]. Eventually, body image provides an overview of the research on the impact of body image on communication, including studies on how body dissatisfaction can affect self-disclosure, social skills, and the ability to cope with stress [34]. In light of the literature review, it was witnessed that no studies were carried out on body dissatisfaction amongst technical students inside the classroom and its effect on their career perspective and their interpersonal abilities in society.

The above literature review paves the way to explore the negative body impact of a student in terms of their interpersonal communication, self-esteem and self-confidence. The following research questions navigate the study in the desired direction:

- How does body dissatisfaction affect self-esteem and self-confidence among technical students?

- How does negative body image affect interpersonal communication?
- What is the role of peer support in order to overcome communication barriers?

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1. Design and participants

In a convenient sampling design, a judgmental under non-probability sampling technique was used for this study. The study was conducted in one of the private engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu. The participants were selected based on the specific criteria (educational level), enrolled in higher education, and -studied a pre-final year in technical courses.

#### 3.2. Sampling procedure

For this study, 61 third-year technical students consented and were willing to participate. Moreover, this study was conducted during the summer semester, and they were enrolled in a course titled ‘Career planning and professional development’. Factors pertaining to body dissatisfaction were chosen for this study.

#### 3.3. Instruments and measures

A rubric was designed and developed to measure students’ -body dissatisfaction. In this rubric, four factors were used such as color complex, consciousness over their physique, shame and guilt, self-blaming, and lamentation over their appearance cum self-image. A comprehensive description of each factor is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Body dissatisfaction rubrics

SN	Factors	Negative	Neutral	Positive
1	Color complex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Inferiority over their skin color</li> <li>– Lack of confident</li> <li>– Admiration over white color</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Partially accepting their skin tone</li> <li>– Remedial disguises relying upon cosmetics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Comfortable and convenient with their skin tone</li> <li>– Self-glorification</li> <li>– Highly motivated and self-acceptance</li> </ul>
2	Consciousness over their physique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Self-aversion</li> <li>– Admiration over the ideal figure</li> <li>– Feel of inconvenience with their physique</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Knowing the facts about their physique and self-acceptance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– High confidence in their physique</li> <li>– Healthy lifestyle</li> </ul>
3	Shame and guilt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– High intolerance of themselves</li> <li>– Feel of shyness and guilt to show them up before people</li> <li>– Constantly trying to hide themselves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Adjusting with the facts of design and self-acceptance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Being fearless</li> <li>– Strong self-belief</li> <li>– Accepting the reality</li> <li>– Great attitude</li> </ul>
4	Self-blaming and lamentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Self-complaining</li> <li>– Intolerance</li> <li>– Self-lamentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Being generous and having high acceptance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Understanding the facts and carrying out the things</li> <li>– Self-glorification and satisfaction</li> </ul>

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

This study was carried out among 61 engineering students during their career planning and professional development course in their pre-final year of the Engineering Program during the summer semester. Classroom observation technique was used to assess individual’s body dissatisfaction and an evaluation sheet was used for every individual, which comprised of demographic profile (age, area of study, family status, and geographical location) and rubrics (color complex, consciousness over their physique, shame and guilt, and self-blaming and lamentation). The data collected during their course time were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Based on the assessment, the following points were discussed. Effective communication is crucial for engineering students because it enables them to work effectively in teams, solve complex problems, manage projects, and interact with clients and colleagues. It also helps with technical documentation, presentation skills, and compliance with industry standards. Furthermore, strong communication skills enhance safety, facilitate global collaboration, support career growth, foster innovation, and address ethical considerations within the field of engineering. Thus, effective communication skills are very much needed for engineering students. In contrast, communication barriers, such as language and

cultural differences, physical and emotional factors, biases, distractions, technology issues, and more, hinder effective information exchange. Overcoming these barriers requires awareness, active listening, clear language, and creating a supportive communication environment. Among these barriers, body dissatisfaction, while not exclusive to engineering students, can act as a communication barrier and affect the interpersonal interactions and dynamics within engineering programs. Body dissatisfaction can indeed serve as a communication barrier among engineering students by affecting their self-esteem, confidence, and willingness to engage in social and academic interactions. The selected participants for the study were all enrolled in the same class and shared common academic experiences. However, a significant proportion of these students reported body dissatisfaction, which they believed hindered effective communication and collaboration within the class.

## 5. FINDINGS

The study revealed that a considerable number of technical students-experienced some level of body dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction ranged from mild concerns to severe body image issues. Moreover, participants consistently reported that their body dissatisfaction negatively affected their communication with peers. Common emerging themes included lack of self-confidence, reluctance to participate in group discussions, and social withdrawal.

RQ1: How does body dissatisfaction affect self-esteem and self-confidence among technical students?

Based on the rubrics assessment, students have communication barriers in various forms, and it has been observed that individual body dissatisfaction has a vital effect. Moreover, participants' communication barriers had tangible academic consequences, such as reduced engagement in group projects and decreased participation in classroom activities. This leads to a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence. Furthermore, the factors such as color complex and shame affected the learners' self-reliance.

RQ2: How does negative body image affect interpersonal communication?

It is observed that students who have body dissatisfaction could not climb up well in their classroom presentation and other classroom activities such as group discussion in their class. Their negative body image has a high resistance to their interpersonal communication with a strong sense of self insecurities. Common attributions of body dissatisfaction like social comparison, performance anxiety, social withdrawal, impaired focus and concentration, perceived stereotypes, and health-related concerns have been noticed. Moreover, they self-blame themselves for their inability.

RQ3: What is the role of peer support in order to overcome communication barriers?

Peer support plays a crucial role in overcoming communication barriers in several ways. Effective communication is vital for success and collaboration in an academic, professional, or personal context. Self-acceptance provides self-awareness that boosts individual's performance. Shared experience and empathy among peers help to normalize and comfort oneself to overcome hesitations.

## 6. DISCUSSION

Body dissatisfaction is a common problem among people of all ages and genders, but it can be especially challenging for people who are trying to overcome communication barriers. People who are unhappy with their appearance may be less likely to speak up or engage in social situations. This can make it difficult to build relationships and achieve their goals. Identify and challenge negative thoughts about our body, and when we have negative thoughts about our body, we have to ask ourselves if they are realistic or helpful. Are we comparing ourselves to others? Are we holding ourselves to unrealistic standards? If our thoughts are negative and unhelpful, challenge them and replace them with more positive and realistic thoughts. Similarly, social comparison established negative thoughts among the students [35]; negative thoughts increased among the control group [36]. Students struggling to overcome body dissatisfaction on their own must consider seeking professional help from a therapist or counselor. Language instructors could help learners identify and change negative thoughts about their bodies, develop coping mechanisms, and build self-esteem [37]. In contrast, self-esteem and self-confidence would differ based on gender [38]. Be assertive, and do not be afraid to speak up for ourselves and to express our needs. If someone comments negatively about our appearance, let them know that their comment is hurtful. Moreover, everyone must focus on these positive qualities rather than dwelling on negative thoughts about our bodies. Similarly, lower education is associated with negative thoughts [9], [32]. In a positive mindset, people spend time with people who make them feel good about themselves and appreciate them for who they are. Avoid people who comment negatively about your appearance or make you feel bad about yourself. Likewise, no differences were observed among genders on optimism and pessimism [39]. When communicating with others, focus on what we want to say rather than on our appearance; words are more important than appearance. Eventually, humor could be a great way to defuse uncomfortable situations and to make ourselves feel more confident. Education 4.0 helped the students overcome their hindrances and achieve

more with their self-learning tools [40], [41]. Similarly, muted sports videos developed the learners' intra and inter-personal communication [42], [43].

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study has delved into the multifaceted realms of body dissatisfaction and its profound influence as a communicative barrier among technical students. Through a comprehensive examination of this issue, researchers have uncovered the intricate web of factors contributing to this phenomenon and its far-reaching implications within the academic and social lives of students pursuing technical education. Findings underscore that body dissatisfaction is not merely a personal matter but a significant hurdle that hampers effective communication and self-expression among technical students. The prevalence of body dissatisfaction with far-reaching consequences affects the collective learning environment. Moreover, it witnessed how body dissatisfaction erodes self-esteem and self-confidence, leading to social withdrawal and fear of judgment.

Furthermore, the defensive communication strategies employed by students in response to body shaming perpetuate a culture of silence and hinder productive dialogue. These findings emphasized the urgent need for supportive interventions that foster body positivity and encourage open and empathetic communication. This study also recognized the role of peer support and the potential for campus culture and media exposure to exacerbate or alleviate body dissatisfaction. It is recommended to provide counseling services internally or externally to organize workshops and educational programs on body image and healthy lifestyles. It is highly recommended to promote mental well-being and self-acceptance, leading to effective communication strategies in educational institutions. Thereby allowing inferior mind students to thrive academically and personally, unburdened by the constraints of negative body image. This research catalyzes change and contributes to a more empathetic and communicative educational landscape for technical students. This study has its limitations within the classroom environment of a particular engineering college with a convenient sampling. Though there are various aspects of body dissatisfaction, this study only explores how it affects interpersonal communication and academic performance. Further studies could be conducted by conducting detailed surveys among school and college students. In a quantitative manner, the factors which are the main reasons for body dissatisfaction for under-13 (Kids) could be studied categorizing their age, gender, lifestyle, and aspirations.




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