

Social Media and Body Dysmorphia Awareness Among High School Students: A
Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study investigates the relationship between social media use, body image concerns, and awareness of **Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD)** among high school students. Data were collected from 109 students using a Google Form survey with both quantitative and open-ended questions. The results from the survey showed that 66% of respondents had heard of BDD, though most reported only moderate knowledge. 36.9% of participants indicated that TikTok most strongly influenced their body image and 31.5% chose Instagram as the app with the most influence; a total of **96.3% agreed that social media increases body image pressure**. Qualitative feedback revealed recurring themes of insecurity, social comparison, and a strong desire for school-based awareness programs. Findings suggest that integrating mental health education into schools could promote healthier self-perception and improve awareness of BDD among teens.

Introduction

BDD is a psychological condition characterized by an excessive preoccupation with perceived flaws in physical appearance (Phillips, 2009). In recent years, the widespread use of social media has amplified exposure to idealized images, increasing body dissatisfaction among adolescents (Perloff, 2014). Adolescents frequently engage with platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, which contribute to unrealistic beauty standards and constant comparison behaviors. These influences can exacerbate insecurities, leading to decreased self-esteem and, in some cases, symptoms consistent with BDD.

Although awareness of mental health issues has grown, research suggests that **BDD remains underrecognized in school settings**. This study seeks to explore the relationship between social media exposure, self-perception, and awareness of BDD among high school students. The goal is to better **understand how online environments shape body image** and **identify strategies schools can use to promote positive body image**.

Method

Participants

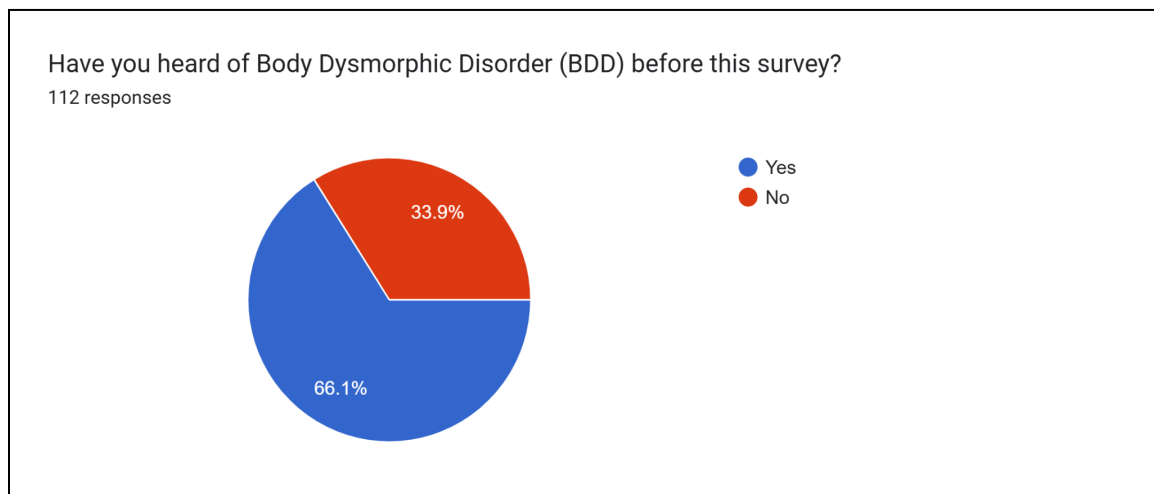
A total of 109 high school students from grades 9 through 12 completed the survey. Participation was **voluntary and anonymous**, and no identifying information was collected.

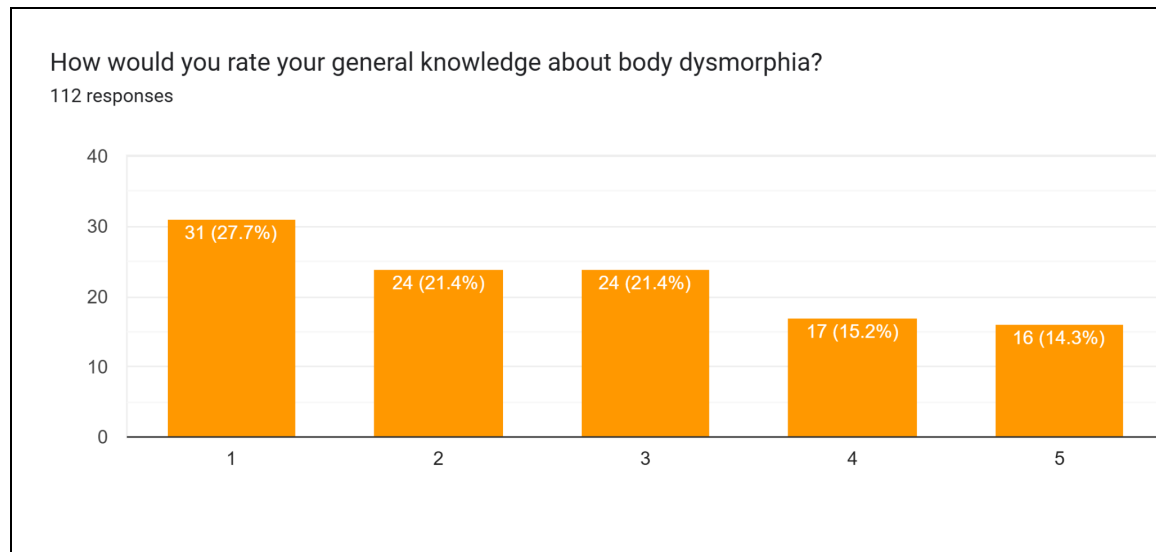
Materials and Procedure

Data were gathered through a Google Form containing both **multiple-choice and open-ended questions**. Quantitative items measured knowledge of BDD, social media habits, and body image behaviors using five-point Likert scales. Qualitative prompts invited participants to share personal reflections on appearance pressure and suggestions for improving school awareness efforts.

Results

Survey findings indicated that approximately 66% of students had heard of Body Dysmorphic Disorder, though only a **minority reported high knowledge levels**.





While 44.1% of students compared their appearance to others frequently (ratings of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale), over half (51.4%) spent more than two hours per day on social media. TikTok was identified as the most influential platform on body image, and 96.3% of respondents agreed that social media increases body image pressure among teens.

Qualitative responses added depth to these trends, revealing how comparison, insecurity, and online beauty standards shape students' self-perception. Many students described **intense pressure to meet idealized body norms**, with one respondent expressing that “the ideal body type seems so unreachable, so I feel bad that I can’t do it.” Another student explained that these pressures are persistent, writing, “It affects my daily life a lot,” highlighting how **appearance concerns extend beyond social media** use and influence overall well-being.

Several students described attempts to navigate or reduce comparison, though often with limited success. As one student shared, “Yes, I try so hard not to compare myself to

others & it's just... but I've tried experimenting with new clothing styles & sizes." Other responses reflected frustration, such as "Being fat is not a sin," suggesting resistance to harmful norms, while another wrote, "It's also kind of embarrassing to share... people will assure you but it will never truly be fixed," indicating ongoing internalized distress.

A second major theme involved the normalization and constant visibility of **unrealistic standards online**. Students frequently cited the role of algorithms in creating pressure to "improve" their appearance. Some students also noted that social media was not the only cause, but **amplified pre-existing insecurities**. One wrote that long-term self-perception struggles extended beyond appearance alone: "Many years ago I used to think my brown skin color personally looked ugly, but many years later I actually learned to like my skin complexion." This reflects how some students experience gradual self-acceptance despite pervasive digital pressures.

The third recurring theme focused on a strong desire for **school-based programs addressing body image and BDD**. Students consistently suggested PACK Time lessons, assemblies, and mental-health-oriented discussions. Examples included: "Pack time assemblies about awareness of BDD," "During PACK Time it could be a topic where teachers talk about it," and "Letting people know the signs and how to get help and using PACK Time to practice ways to fight it." Others emphasized broader mental-health discussions: "talks and discussions about mental health and being secure... not seeking external validation or criticizing things you can't change about yourself." Students expressed that these interventions should be normalized, nonjudgmental, and accessible.

A smaller number of responses suggested more general or systemic strategies, such as **increasing representation, hosting awareness clubs, or creating safe peer environments**. Comments included “Maybe a club dedicated to help people with BDD,” and “Bring awareness to the situation. Don’t be afraid to talk about it.” Some students referenced existing supportive communities like “LGBTQ+ Clubs / GSA & Lambert House Community,” reflecting the perceived value of identity-affirming spaces.

Overall, the qualitative data illustrated significant **emotional impacts of social media** and **strong student interest in structured support**. The themes of comparison-driven insecurity, unrealistic online standards, and requests for school-based education reinforce the quantitative findings and highlight key areas for intervention.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight a clear need for schools to take a more **active role in addressing body image concerns** and increasing awareness of BDD. Students’ reflections demonstrated not only the emotional impact of appearance-based comparison but also a strong desire for structured, supportive conversations within the school environment. Many respondents expressed that **they often navigate these pressures alone** and would benefit from guidance, resources, and open discussion.

Schools can play a critical role by **integrating body image education into existing programs** such as PACK Time, health classes, or advisory periods. Students frequently

suggested these settings as ideal opportunities for discussing topics like healthy self-perception, the influence of social media, and recognizing the signs of body dysmorphia. Incorporating lessons that normalize conversations about insecurity and self-comparison could help reduce stigma and encourage students to seek support earlier.

Additionally, **expanding mental health programming**—such as assemblies, peer-led workshops, or collaboration with school psychologists and counselors—may strengthen students’ understanding of body-related concerns. Creating spaces where students feel safe to share their experiences, whether through classroom discussions or voluntary small groups, can foster a more supportive school climate. Clubs and identity-affirming communities, which some students already see as helpful, could also be leveraged to promote positive body image and self-acceptance.

Finally, **schools may benefit from incorporating digital literacy** into these efforts. Teaching students how algorithms amplify idealized content, how to critically evaluate the images they encounter online, and how to manage comparison behaviors could empower them to navigate social media more intentionally.

Overall, the results suggest that students are open, willing, and even eager for the school to lead these conversations. By integrating mental health awareness, body image education, and digital literacy into regular programming, schools can create a **healthier and more supportive environment for all students**.

Conclusion

This mixed-methods study highlights that, while many students recognize Body Dysmorphic Disorder, few fully understand its implications. Social media serves as both a contributor to body image distress and an opportunity for awareness-building. By embedding BDD education and self-image discussions into school programs, educators can empower students to critically assess online content and foster positive self-perception.

References

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