



---

# Body Dysmorphic Disorder, Rejection Sensitivity And Appearance Anxiety In College Students

**Sanya Mittal** M.A Psychology Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Graphic Era Deemed to be University, Dehradun, 566/6, Bell Road, Society Area, Clement Town, Dehradun, Uttarakhand 248002

**Dr. Kanchan Yadav** Assistant Professor Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Graphic Era Deemed to be University, Dehradun, 566/6, Bell Road, Society Area, Clement Town, Dehradun, Uttarakhand 248002

**Mr. Pankaj Negi** Assistant Professor Department of Mechanical Engineering, Graphic Era Hill University, Dehradun

---

## Abstract

The goal of present research was to examine the associations in Appearance Anxiety, Rejection Sensitivity and Body Dysmorphic Disorder. To test the hypothesis that Appearance Anxiety, Rejection Sensitivity and Body Dysmorphic Disorder would be consistent with each other, self-reported questionnaires were administered on 110 college students (M age = 19.847). Consistent with the prediction Appearance anxiety and Body Dysmorphic Disorder were compatible with each other whereas an inconsistency was seen between Appearance Anxiety and Rejection Sensitivity, Body Dysmorphic Disorder and Rejection Sensitivity.

**Key Words:** Body dysmorphic disorder, appearance anxiety, rejection sensitivity.

## Introduction:

Individuals nowadays are conscious about their looks and appearance because pulchritude is lionized and individuals are scarcely victimized, hence envisioned to be charismatic, bodacious as companions and significant other. The main difference between the normal population and sufferers of Body Dysmorphic disorder have anguish and notable deterioration in essentially serviceable entities, which has also led to rejection sensitivity and appearance anxiety. Studies suggest that patients suffering from Body dysmorphic disorder were correspondently high on appearance anxiety, rejection sensitivity and reported poor self-competence.

DrEdaGobris (2018) described Body Dysmorphic Disorder as "self-perceived ugliness" and 5 million people in the US are affected by this. Due to the increasing concerns of body image, it has become important to study the compulsions and obsessions related to the morphology of an individual. Studies, often reported cases in which individuals are having suicidal thoughts or have already attempted once, because they hold delusions regarding the deformity of their face and body. Sufferers of Body Dysmorphic Disorder have reported being isolated, avoid social situations and around more than half of the women are being affected by this disorder as compared to men (nearly half) that is why it has become important to study about the factors leading to and are consequent to body dysmorphic disorder.

Enrico Morselli (1891) first introduced Body Dysmorphic disorder as "dysmorphophobia" in European literature. In ancient writings, it was described as "obsession de la Jonte du corps" (obsession with the shame of the body). DSM -5 lists it under "obsessive-compulsive disorder" in and is explained as a psychological phenomenon where in individuals scrutinize themselves which are attributable one's appearance. It was listed initially as a form of somatoform disorder (atypical) in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders. It was only in 1987 it was listed independently as Body dysmorphic disorder in revised edition DSM-3. Sufferers of Body Dysmorphic Disorder are unable to control their irrational thinking and as a result face emotional distress, consciousness towards appearances and indulge in activities such as "mirror checking".

Over, the year's researchers have found that individuals are anxious about facial features like eyes, nose, skin colour, hair. Catherine Silver (2018) stated to NBC News that "Body Dysmorphic Disorder affect about 5 to 7 million Americans". Studies also show youth affected by Body Dysmorphic Disorder are isolated, show a reduction in academic performance, social withdrawal and escape social situations. 2.5% males and 2.2 % females have Body Dysmorphic Disorder and the starting of Body Dysmorphic Disorder occurs at ages between 12-15 years (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Social Comparison theory advocates individual's congenital urge to determine their advancement and be notable in contrast to others. In this analysis of beingsurpass, individuals results in having negative psychological results (Festinger, 1954)

Researches show that viewing and idolizing images of models and actors on social media platforms like Instagram can make women unhappy and ultimately leads to negative self-evaluation (Grab, Ward, & Hyde, 2008). Moreover, women are using filters and photo editing platforms to increase their attractiveness as a result women tend to upload he most appealing pictures on social platforms (Pounders et al., 2016; Zhao et al, 2008).

Diathesis-Stress Model of Body Dysmorphic Disorders suggests that it results from an interaction between genetically predisposing factors as well as external environment. Nevertheless, environmental factors that lead to development of Body Dysmorphic Disorder include, childhood abuse, bullying, peer pressure, peer victimization. Studies indicated that 79% of individuals suffering from Body Dysmorphic Disorder reported having childhood maltreatment and abuse. As stated by a longitudinal study on Body Dysmorphic Disorder, individuals who faced peer victimization in school developed Body Dysmorphic Disorder symptoms 12 months later. Researchers have postulated that individuals suffering from Body Dysmorphic Disorder face appearance anxiety and sensitivity towards rejection.

Appearance-based Rejection Sensitivity (Appearance-RS) is an inclination towards acting irrationally to repudiation based on one's body image. Rejection Sensitivity is an extreme emotional sensitivity and emotional pain triggered by the perception and does not hold any rational scrutiny. It is an irrational sense of rejection, failure. Karen Horney first postulated Rejection Sensitivity as a tendency to feel highly anxious, humiliated. Hyper vigilance to the feedbacks of others is known as Interpersonal rejection sensitivity. The reaction involves vexation and devastation as they misinterpret and distort the reactions of others. Expecting rejection in relationships makes it difficult to stay satisfied and contented (Downey-et-al, 1998).

Researchers have found that overeating, experiencing a mental breakdown, extreme anxiety; suicidal thoughts are some of the major symptoms of rejection sensitivity. A review found individuals who are sensitive to rejection sensitivity evaluated themselves negatively and were found to be spending more money on dates, contributing more to social groups. Therefore, individuals suffering from RS were found to be vulnerable to victimization. Scott and Downey (1994) enormously researched on rejection sensitivity and advocated adult rejection sensitivity and childhood experience with rejecting parents.

Other factors were also examined in another study, including physical attractiveness and weight (body mass index - BMI). Physical attractiveness came to be negatively correlated appearance-related anxiety symptoms and girls proclaiming high appearance anxiety were also found to have higher BMI. However, in boys BMI and appearance-related anxiety association was not found (Zimmer, 2018).

Philips-et-al (1993) interviewed 30 patients (17 men and 13 women) meeting the diagnostic criteria of DSM-3-R for Body Dysmorphic Disorder concluded that 15 years was median age, onset and prolongation of 18 years. The age pertaining to starting of Body Dysmorphic Disorder was early teen. The results concluded that Body Dysmorphic Disorder patients had comorbidity with appearance preoccupations (David and associates, 1996).

Overall, findings suggest that individuals who receive more negative appraisals are vulnerable to rejection based on their appearance. Specifically, individuals who felt

abandoned and rejected, at times when victimized versus positively appraised on their looks showed a great fascination towards esthetic surgery(Lora and associates2009).

The positive relationship between rejection sensitivity based on appearance and symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder among 106 students of British University was examined. Coherent to the hypothesis, rejection sensitivity based on appearance is highly anticipated manifestations of Body Dysmorphic Disorder. Moreover, findings also concluded a preference for esthetic surgery attributing to societal acceptance and self-acceptance on one's body image(Calogero and colleagues, 2010).

Self-esteem and the two social anxiety subscales were positively correlated with appearance related rejection sensitivity(Julie .C Bowker-et-al , 2012).Sociophobia has also been related to elevated symptoms of Body dysmorphic disorder as concluded by Amir Mufaddel-et-al , (2013) , it was also found that people high on both engaged in skin picking, reported to dermatologist after and a high comorbidity with delusional disorder

Social Anxiety disorder and symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder have also been found to result from being sensitive towards rejection based on appearance as advocated by Zimmer and Lavell-et-al (2014).Sensitivity towards rejection based on appearance arbitrated an association between victimization based on appearance and body dysmorphic symptoms and reasonably advocated associations between social anxiety and body dysmorphic symptoms. Findings suggest that those who were high on social anxiety or have past experiences related to victimization based on physical characteristics are inclined to interpret further appearance-based rejection, contributing to intense consideration for physical attractiveness.

Phillips and colleagues (2014) evaluated 46 sufferers of Body Dysmorphic Disorder in an elongated examination on rejection sensitivity based on appearance related concerns and personal rejection sensitivity. Considerate results show that Rejection based on appearance as well as personal rejection were severely associated with Body Dysmorphic Disorder and depressive symptoms, reduction of physical and psychological health which resulted in impaired social functioning.

Appearance related anxiety has been proved to be a facilitator for symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder even in teens and adolescences which resulted in individuals reporting high levels of appearance related anxiety and deficits in performing daily life activities also reported a sensitivity towards rejection as evaluated by Shawna Mastero-et-al(2016) on 387 individuals out of 35 reported high levels of all. Also, self-reported depression, social anxiety and behavior manifestations related to weight were considered. The cosmetic as esthetic surgery has gained a lot of popularity in recent years , as all the celebrities , movie stars are doing so , individuals idolize these celebrities and fall more for the corrective measures of their body morphology.

Studies showcase a high association of people having sensitivity towards rejection who also reported elevated body dysmorphic symptoms have attitude towards acceptance of cosmetic surgery. The findings of one such research concluded this by Saima Gul and Kehkashan Urooj(2017). Depression has also been found to comorbid with self reporting symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder, reactions on rejection. Research

findings identified a reasonable relationship between rejection sensitivity and depression, anxiety, loneliness, borderline personality disorder, and body dysmorphic disorder. Also, stated a strong correlation between anxiety, depression and Body Dysmorphic Disorder as investigated by Shuling Gao and associates (2017).

Schmidt & colleagues (2019), done cross-sectional survey study and retrospectively assessed early childhood appearance related experiences, including appearance-based rejection sensitivity, body morphology concerns, depression, anxiety and self-esteem in 501 adults. They also, analyzed gender differences and their interrelations. Findings suggested considerable proportions self-reported traumatic childhood events but no considerable differences in terms of gender. Also, association between sensitivity towards rejection based on appearance and bodily concerns were due to appearance related criticism in past received from significant others in both genders. Furthermore, the research concluded that impact of appearance related mocking were significantly greater in women.

### **Methodology:**

#### **Hypotheses**

H1: There will be a positive correlation between self reporting symptoms of Body dysmorphic disorder and Appearance anxiety.

H2: There will be a positive correlation between self reporting symptoms of Body dysmorphic disorder and Rejection Sensitivity.

H3: There will be a positive correlation between Rejection sensitivity and Appearance Anxiety.

**Aim :** The aim of this study was to examine the associations between Appearance Anxiety, Rejection Sensitivity and Body Dysmorphic Disorder.

#### **Sample:**

Participants were 110 college students (females age range =, mean age = 19.84) from various colleges of Dehradun, Uttarakhand and were selected using purposive sampling method for this research and were ethnically diversified.

Each Participant filled the consent form before the questionnaires for each variable (i.e. Rejection sensitivity, Appearance anxiety, and body dysmorphic disorder) were provided and was collected both manually and in Google Docs Format.

#### **Tools:**

**Appearance Anxiety Inventory:** Participants completed a revised adult version. (Veale and Costa-et-al, 2014). It has a total of 10 situations which were to be answered on 4 options ranging from 0 to 4. Appearance anxiety was calculated by simply adding the item scores.

**Rejection sensitivity Questionnaire:**Participants completed an 18 item scale that was developed for the use of college students (Downey G. and Feldman-et-al, 1996), each item has 2 sub hypothetical situations:Which were to be answered on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 6 (very much) and their expectation of rejection in the situation, from 1 (very unlikely) to 6 (very likely). Rejection sensitivity for each situation is calculated by multiplying the level of rejection concern (response of question a.) by the reverse of the level of acceptance expectancy (the response to question b.). The formula is  $R.S = (\text{Rejection concern}) * (7 - \text{acceptance expectancy})$ . The final score is obtained by taking the mean of the resulting 18 scores.

**Body Dysmorphic Disorder Questionnaire:**Participants completed a modified version of Yale-Brown Obsessive compulsive scale i.e.Body Dysmorphic Disorder-YBOCS.The Body Dysmorphic Disorder-YBOCS is a 12-item semi-structured clinician-rated instrument designed to measure the severity of Body Dysmorphic Disorder symptoms in individuals showing excessive preoccupation and subjective distress with physical appearance.The 12 items are rated on a 0-4 scale, where 0 indicates no symptoms and 4 indicates extreme Body Dysmorphic Disorder symptoms. The first 10 items assess excessive preoccupation, obsessions, and compulsive behaviours associated with dissatisfaction with physical appearance. The first 3 items are based on the Body Dysmorphic Disorder diagnostic criteria and assess preoccupation, impairment of global functioning, and subjective distress, which are related to both excessive preoccupation and compulsive behaviours. Items 11 and 12 assess insight and avoidance respectively. The total score is calculated as the sum of ratings for the 12 items, for a maximum score of 48.

**Results:**

Table 1 represents the correlations among the study variables. It was found that Rejection Sensitivity (R.S) and Body Dysmorphic Disorder (Body Dysmorphic Disorder) were moderately correlated. Also, there was no significant association found between Rejection Sensitivity and Appearance Anxiety (AA) but Body Dysmorphic Disorder is affected by rejection sensitivity as it was found to be negatively correlated.

Table 1.The coefficient of Correlations among college students.

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Body Dysmorphic Disorder	110	12.9	7.82			
2. Rejection Sensitivity	110	11	4.71	-0.049		

				0.53	
3. Appearance Anxiety	110	14.15	7.66	6	0.005

### **Discussion:**

Drawing the literature on Body Dysmorphic Disorder, Rejection Sensitivity, Appearance Anxiety, and the main focus was on the female population of the society, thus the males were not a part of this and could have mediated the gender differences in the study was these 3 variables. Second limitation is consideration of individual factors that might predispose from peer acceptance and other environmental factors. These factors might be considered in future research to determine whether they have any implication in the development of Body Dysmorphic Disorder, R.S, and AA. For, example social anxiety, loneliness, may be relevant to consider. Another limitation of this study is that it didn't include and differentiated between the other (i.e other than males) genders of the society. Also data collection was done through both face to face interaction as well as sharing online form, due to COVID 19.

Despite these limitations of the current study, the findings clearly showed a correlation between Appearance Anxiety and Self-reported symptoms of Body Dysmorphic Disorder. These findings Support the importance of appearance and physical attractiveness in females. The, study further found that rejection sensitivity and appearance anxiety is negatively correlated, this can be because it is not always true that people who are prone to rejection develop symptoms of Body Dysmorphic Disorder and also that people nowadays feel comfortable in there body types and facial features and that sensitivity towards rejection can due to many other factors other than body

Morphology such as:

- 1) Childhood experiences: being emotionally and physically abuse by parents or immediate relatives, emotional rejection from parents or double bind can bolster rejection sensitivity in children. It was also found that children who are sensitive to rejection deal aggressively with it and also show intense affliction towards interaction with peers. (Downey-et-al, 1998). Researchers also found that children who have been subjected to bullying may also grow up with angst of rejection.
- 2) Biological Vulnerability: many studies also found that there is a genetic predisposition in individuals who are high on rejection sensitivity.
- 3) Subjective Experiences: it is also discovered that people who experience high levels of rejection from family and friends are at higher risk for developing social-isolation and rejection sensitivity.
- 4) Seeking Affiliation: according to a study, men high on rejection sensitivity feel a high need to be liked by others. Further, the research also claimed that these men were ready to pay to a group which initially rejected them.(Rainer Romero-Canyas, 2010)

- 5) Complications in building relations: people high on rejection sensitivity have a constant fear of being rejected struggle to build new relations and also sabotage their present relationships.

Societal expectations on appearance create heightened body dissatisfaction in individual's nowadays as a result they become anxious about their looks. People high on appearance anxiety were found to be having close association with symptoms of Body Dysmorphic Disorder. The reason for their overlapping existence is that some are pre-disposed to some symptoms like Low- self-esteem because of being critically evaluated by parents and friends and also being exposed to traumatic life events such as bullying because of excessive weight, facial features, color and caste which result in person having emotional distortions.

### **Conclusion**

To support the Hypothesis, that Rejection Sensitivity, Appearance Anxiety and Body Dysmorphic Disorder would be found coherent with each other vast literature available from the past 25 years was viewed. Consistent with the Hypothesis 1 only Body Dysmorphic Disorder and AA were found to be significant with 0.536. These Findings are also consistent with the previous 3 similar studies of Body Dysmorphic Disorder and Appearance Anxiety (Schmidt-et-al, 2019; Shuling Gao-et-al, 2017; Shawna Mastero-et-al,2016) as well as with the numerous studies of Appearance-based rejection sensitivity(Philips-et-al,2014;Lavell-et-al,2014;),social anxiety(Mufaddel-et-al,2013;Lavell-el-al,2014). R.S and Body Dysmorphic Disorder showed a negative correlation of -0.049 whereas Body Dysmorphic Disorder and AA were found to have no association with each other and have an insignificant value of .005. However, it was also found that social anxiety can be a mediator of all the three variables (i.e. as per the literature review).

### **References:**

Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) Professional Webinar, Los Angeles, CA (Jun.7, 2018) "BDD: The Disease of Self-Perceived Ugliness and its Relationship to OCD"

Cuzzolaro, Massimo, and Umberto Nizzoli."Enrico Morselli and the Invention of Dysmorphophobia." *Body Image, Eating, and Weight*, 2018, pp. 85–95.Doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-90817-5\_6.

"Beyond Feeling Fat: Body Dysmorphic Disorder Is More Common than You Think." NBCNews.com, NBC Universal News Group, [www.nbcnews.com/better/health/what-body-dysmorphic-disorder-ncna882901](http://www.nbcnews.com/better/health/what-body-dysmorphic-disorder-ncna882901).

American Psychiatric Association (2013).*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 5th ed. Arlington, VA: Author.



Festinger L (1954). "A theory of social comparison processes". *Human Relations*. 7 (2): 117–140.

Grabe, S., Ward, L. M., & Hyde, J. S. (2008). The role of the media in body image concerns among women: a meta-analysis of experimental and correlational studies. *Psychological bulletin*, 134(3), 460.

Pounders, K., Kowalczyk, C.M. and Stowers, K. (2016), "Insight into the motivation of selfie postings: impression management and self-esteem", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 50 No. 9/10, pp. 1879-1892.

Zhao, S., Grasmuck, S., & Martin, J. (2008). Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24, 1816-1836.

Downey, G., Freitas, A. L., Michaelis, B., &Khouri, H. (1998). The self-fulfilling prophecy in close relationships: Rejection sensitivity and rejection by romantic partners. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(2), 545–560. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.75.2.545

Feldman, Scott, and Geraldine Downey. "Rejection Sensitivity as a Mediator of the Impact of Childhood Exposure to Family Violence on Adult Attachment Behavior." *Development and Psychopathology*, vol. 6, no. 01, 1994, pp. 231–247., doi: 10.1017/s0954579400005976.

Zimmer-Gembeck MJ, Webb HJ, Farrell LJ, Waters AM. Girls' and boys' trajectories of appearance anxiety from age 10 to 15 years are associated with earlier maturation and appearance-related teasing. *DevPsychopathol*. 2018 Feb;30(1):337-350. doi: 10.1017/S0954579417000657. Epub 2017 May 18. PMID: 28516825.

Phillips KA, McElroy SL, Keck PE, Jr, et al. Body dysmorphic disorder: 30 cases of imagined ugliness. *Am J Psychiatry*. 1993;150:302–308

Veale, D., Boocock, A., Gournay, K., Dryden, W., Shah, F., Willson, R., &Walburn, J. (1996).Body Dysmorphic Disorder. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 169(02), 196-201. doi:10.1192/bjp.169.2.196

Park, L., Calogero, R. M., Harwin, M. J., &DiRaddo, A.-M. (2009). Predicting interest in cosmetic surgery: Interactive effects of appearance-based rejection sensitivity and negative appearance comments. *Body Image*, 6, 186–193

Calogero, R. M., Park, L. E., Rahemtulla, Z. K., & Williams, K. C. (2010). Predicting excessive body image concerns among British university students: The unique role of Appearance-based Rejection Sensitivity. *Body Image*, 7(1), 78-81. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2009.09.005

Bowker, J. C., Thomas, K. K., Spencer, S. V., & Park, L. E. (2012). Examining Appearance-Based Rejection Sensitivity During Early Adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 23(2), 375-388. doi:10.1111/jora.12003

Mufaddel, A., Osman, O. T., Almugaddam, F., & Jafferany, M. (2013). A Review of Body Dysmorphic Disorder and Its Presentation in Different Clinical Settings. *The Primary Care Companion for CNS Disorders*. doi:10.4088/pcc.12r01464.

Lavell, C. H., Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., Farrell, L. J., & Webb, H. (2014). Victimization, social anxiety, and body dysmorphic concerns: Appearance-based rejection sensitivity as a mediator. *Body Image*, 11(4), 391-395. doi: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.06.008

Mastro, S., Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., Webb, H. J., Farrell, L., & Waters, A. (2016). Young adolescents appearance anxiety and body dysmorphic symptoms: Social problems, self-perceptions and comorbidities. *Journal of Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders*, 8, 50-55. doi:10.1016/j.jocrd.2015.12.001

Gul, S., & Urooj, K. (2017). Body Dysmorphic Disorder Features and Rejection Sensitivity: Attitude of University Students towards Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance. *Bahria Journal of Professional Psychology*, 16(2), 87-97.

Gao, S., Assink, M., Cipriani, A., & Lin, K. (2017). Associations between rejection sensitivity and mental health outcomes: A meta-analytic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 57, 59-74. doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2017.08.007

Schmidt J and Martin A (2019) Appearance Teasing and Mental Health: Gender Differences and Mediation Effects of Appearance-Based Rejection Sensitivity and Dysmorphic Concerns. *Front. Psychol.* 10:579. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00579

Veale, D., Eshkevari, E., Kanakam, N., Ellison, N., Costa, A., & Werner, T. (2014). The Appearance Anxiety Inventory: Validation of a Process Measure in the Treatment of Body Dysmorphic Disorder. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 42(5), 605-616.

Feldman, Scott, and Geraldine Downey. "Rejection Sensitivity as a Mediator of the Impact of Childhood Exposure to Family Violence on Adult Attachment Behavior." *Development and Psychopathology*, vol. 6, no. 01, 1994, pp. 231-247., doi: 10.1017/s0954579400005976.

Kelly, M. M., Didie, E. R., & Phillips, K. A. (2014). Personal and appearance-based rejection sensitivity in body dysmorphic disorder. *Body Image*, 11(3), 260-265. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.03.004

Romero-Canyas, R., Downey, G., Reddy, K. S., Rodriguez, S., Cavanaugh, T. J., & Pelayo, R. (2010). Paying to belong: when does rejection trigger ingratiation?. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 99(5), 802-823. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020013>