

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Hiya and the Gymnasium: Body Image, Shame, and Self-Perception among Filipino Female College Students in Physical Education

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Abstract

Despite extensive research on body image in Western contexts, a significant gap remains in understanding how Filipino cultural values influence female college students' participation in Physical Education. This study aimed to understand the lived experience of female college students regarding body image in PE classes at a state university in the Philippines. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study engaged ten female college students who experienced body image concerns in physical education. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews to gain insights into their bodily perceptions, challenges, and the social dynamics of PE activities. The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns. Results revealed three primary dimensions of influence: self-perception (mixed emotions and self-consciousness), environmental factors (uniform discomfort, teasing, and spatial insecurity), and social influences (peer judgment, comparison, and instructor behaviour). Findings show that the combined effects of self-concept, environmental conditions, and social dynamics shape body image concerns among female college students. These dynamics significantly diminish student confidence and performance, highlighting the urgent need for inclusive PE environments that value body diversity. By situating these experiences in a localised context, this study contributes to Filipino PE literature by providing an empirical basis for culturally sensitive pedagogical shifts that prioritise student well-being. The findings underscore the need for a more inclusive and supportive PE environment that values body diversity and reduces judgment, ultimately promoting student well-being and engagement.

Introduction

Physical Education (PE) serves as a vital pedagogical platform in higher education, promoting physical fitness, holistic well-being, and sustainable health behaviours. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of PE curricula is frequently compromised by complex psychosocial barriers that disproportionately impact female college students,

influencing both their participation and motivation. Key among these barriers are sociocultural norms and internalised ideals of body standards, often leading to heightened self-consciousness in performance-oriented environments (Cagas et al., 2022; Haug et al., 2023). Body image, conceptualised as the multidimensional perception and emotional evaluation of one's physical

Keywords:

female body image, inclusive physical education, gender equity, cultural values, good health and well-being

Recommended Citation:

Roque, A. B., Martin, J., Baltazar, J., & Baltazar, S. (2026). Hiya and the gymnasium: Body image, shame, and self-perception among Filipino female college students in physical education. *International Sports Studies*, 48(SI), 37–50. <https://doi.org/10.69665/iss.v48i1S.135>

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self, is a primary determinant of engagement (Vani et al., 2021). Evidence demonstrates that women are especially susceptible to body dissatisfaction due to peer-driven norms and pervasive media representations (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Nuriana et al., 2024). In PE settings, where bodies are subject to explicit peer evaluation and increased visibility, these concerns are frequently amplified, rendering the gymnasium a site of psychological vulnerability rather than empowerment (Barker et al., 2022; Kerner et al., 2022).

In Southeast Asia, body dissatisfaction is exacerbated by the convergence of regional peer norms and pervasive media imagery, both of which significantly affect self-esteem and exercise behaviours (Al Riyami et al., 2024; Kwon, 2020). Studies in Malaysia and Thailand demonstrate that media-driven beauty ideals are closely linked to behavioural restraint and increased body-related anxieties among young women (Aparicio-Martinez et al., 2019; Chua et al., 2023). In the Philippines, this issue is further complicated by the indigenous psychological construct of *hiya*, which refers to shame or social propriety. Empirical evidence suggests that *hiya* mediates the relationship between Body Mass Index (BMI) and body image, fostering embarrassment that contributes to physical restraint in PE contexts (Brebante & Cagas, 2015). These culturally specific dynamics reveal a significant research gap and underscore the need for contextually grounded investigations into how female students in Philippine higher education navigate the interplay among traditional values, self-confidence, and participation (Tuazon et al., 2019).

The implications of body image extend beyond immediate academic participation to encompass broader mental health and behavioural outcomes. Negative body image is strongly correlated with social anxiety, persistent physical inactivity, and the avoidance of group-based activities (Sabiston et al., 2019; Regencia et al., 2023). In contrast, fostering a positive body image

is linked to greater resilience against appearance-based pressures and increased self-efficacy (Ouyang et al., 2020; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). These relationships underscore the extensive influence of body-related perceptions on key developmental domains, including self-concept and long-term health outcomes (Bucchianeri et al., 2013; Macêdo et al., 2020). Addressing these psychosocial determinants is therefore critical to developing inclusive PE frameworks that accommodate the diverse health and developmental needs of female students.

Empirical studies indicate that targeted interventions, such as body positivity workshops, media literacy programs, and inclusive pedagogical approaches, are effective in reducing appearance-based stigma and promoting positive self-perceptions among students (Craddock et al., 2024; Garbett et al., 2023). In Indonesia, Craddock et al. (2024) demonstrated that culturally adapted school interventions significantly decreased appearance-related social anxiety and improved body satisfaction. In the Philippines, local initiatives highlight the necessity of structural and policy-level reforms. Key strategies include teacher training, the creation of accommodating PE environments, and the adoption of flexible uniform policies, all of which are critical for enhancing inclusivity and student comfort (Laborte & Mejarito, 2025; Regencia et al., 2023; Tagare et al., 2025).

The study is grounded on Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), and the lens of intersectionality (Piran, 2017; Richburg, & Stewart, 2024). Social Comparison Theory explains how individuals evaluate themselves relative to others, influencing body satisfaction and motivation for physical activity. Objectification Theory builds on this by describing how women internalise external evaluations, leading to body monitoring and appearance-related shame, especially in settings where the body is

publicly visible, such as physical education. Through intersectionality, body image is understood as shaped by the overlapping social and cultural factors of gender, class, and media influence. Ultimately, these theoretical perspectives reveal that body image in the Philippine PE context is not just an individual psychological concern, but a complex construct shaped by the internalisation of external gaze and the tension between traditional Filipino cultural values and modern social comparisons. This phenomenon moves from peer-level physical comparisons to systemic self-objectification, in which the body is seen as an object to be scrutinised rather than a vehicle for physical literacy. The intersection of Filipino class standards, rigid gender roles, and enduring colonial beauty ideals shapes this experience.

Despite extensive research, a significant gap persists regarding the influence of distinct Filipino cultural values on the PE participation of female college students. The existing literature is largely framed within Western paradigms that emphasise individualism and self-expression, which may not fully capture the sociocultural realities of Filipino women. In the Philippines, collectivist values and modesty norms intersect with the cultural construct of *hiya* (shame) and globalised beauty ideals, uniquely shaping how women perceive and present their bodies. Many current theoretical models do not adequately address these culturally embedded dynamics, resulting in a limited understanding of how body image relates to motivation and participation in the local context (Campoamor-Olegario et al., 2025). By situating these variables within Filipino conceptions of femininity, competence, and social belonging, this study aims to provide a more contextually grounded understanding of female engagement in physical education.

Therefore, this study explores body image concerns among female students in Physical Education (PE) to understand how

these perceptions influence their experiences and participation. By examining these dynamics, the research aims to contribute to the broader literature on physical activity, gender, and self-perception and serve as a reference for developing inclusive, gender-sensitive PE environments. The aim is to establish an empirical foundation for culturally grounded pedagogical shifts in Philippine higher education. By situating these findings in a local context, the study advocates for educational practices that prioritise student well-being and account for the unique sociocultural factors shaping female engagement in physical activity.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study, illustrating the dynamic relationship between student psychology and the classroom environment. It shows that PE Participation and Body Image Concerns exist in a reciprocal, bidirectional cycle: a student's self-perception influences their willingness to engage in activity, and their engagement or lack of it reinforces those self-views. These factors define the student's lived experience in PE class, encompassing emotional and social dimensions during physical activity. The model suggests that this lived experience should inform how Physical Education is taught, encouraging educators to adapt curricula, instructional strategies, and learning environments to support female students better.

Methods and Materials

To explore the lived experiences of female college students regarding body image concerns in Physical Education (PE), a qualitative phenomenological design was employed. A purposive sample of 10 participants was selected from a state university in the Philippines. All participants were female, aged between 22 ($M = 23.1$), and were third-year college students enrolled in various academic programs across different colleges within the university. This range of academic backgrounds

ensured broad representation of perspectives while maintaining comparability across year levels and educational experiences. Inclusion criteria specified female third-year students who had completed all required tertiary Physical Education (PE)

courses and maintained a full-time academic load. Exclusion criteria eliminated students with incomplete PE requirements, medical conditions that limited participation in physical activities, or those currently on academic probation.

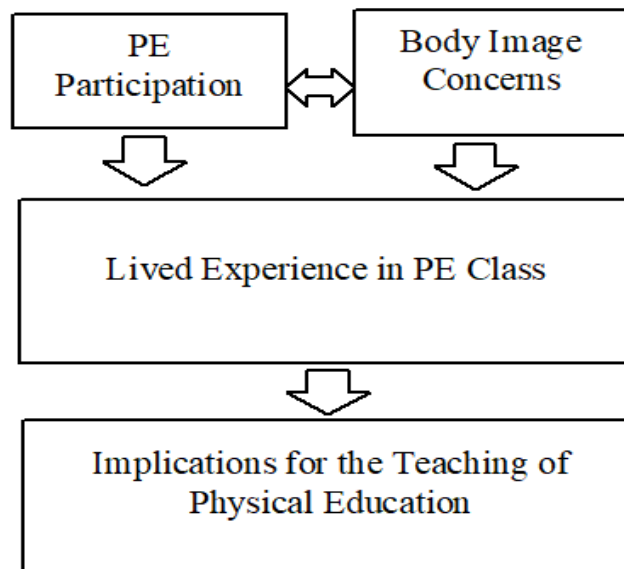


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework of the Study

Data collection was guided by a semi-structured interview protocol that experts in research and physical education reviewed. The interview guide focused on three primary areas: self-image, experiences in physical education (PE) contexts, and the influence of social factors. This approach provided structure while allowing participants to articulate their experiences and perspectives in detail. Each session began with rapport-building and demographic questions, followed by open-ended prompts aligned with the study's objectives. Probing questions were employed to encourage elaboration and clarify responses. Interviews were conducted individually, each lasting approximately 30 to 40 minutes. With participants' consent, all sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy and completeness. The interviews, conducted in Filipino by the primary researcher, explored participants' lived experiences of body image

within the PE context. Each interview was held in a private, neutral setting to maintain confidentiality and encourage open discussion. Recordings were subsequently translated into English for comprehensive analysis.

Participation in the study was strictly voluntary, with written informed consent obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Ethical rigour was maintained in accordance with the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHS], 1979), upholding the principles of respect for persons through voluntary engagement, beneficence by prioritising participant well-being, and justice through equitable selection criteria. To ensure confidentiality, all personal identifiers were removed, transcripts were anonymised, and data were stored in a secure, encrypted environment. At the time

of the study, institutional protocols permitted self-initiated, minimal-risk research to proceed with administrative approval instead of a full Institutional Review Board (IRB) review. While this procedural context is acknowledged as a limitation, providing this clarification underscores the study’s commitment to ethical transparency and academic accountability.

The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis, which involves familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. To ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the study, the researchers used bracketing, documenting and setting aside preconceived notions to maintain a neutral phenomenological stance. Reflexivity procedures included an ongoing audit trail of the researchers' influence on the data. To confirm accuracy, transcribed interview

data were returned to participants for verification and approval (member checking). Thematic analysis and interpretation of findings were also reviewed by a qualitative research expert to ensure coherence of the identified themes and to mitigate potential researcher bias.

Results

The analysis highlighted eight themes in three broad dimensions—self-concept, environment, and social influences—which contributed to female students’ body-image-related concerns and experiences in their involvement in Physical Education (PE). Together, the themes illustrate how self-concept, environmental influences, and social relationships can intertwine to shape confidence, involvement, and attitudes towards PE. Table 1 summarises the dimensions and themes.

Table 1. Summary of Dimensions and Themes

Dimensions	Themes
Self-Concept	Mixed Emotions Toward Their Bodies, Self-Consciousness During Physical Activities
Environment	Uniform-Related Discomfort, Teasing in PE Settings, Insecurity in PE Spaces
Social influences	Peer Judgment, Social Comparison, Instructor Behavior

Self-Perception

Within the area of self-concept, two interconnected themes emerged: ambivalence towards their bodies and self-awareness while moving. These themes demonstrated how students' subjective evaluations of their bodies affected their Physical Education experience, where students often felt tension between feeling their bodies were moving well and feeling insecure about their bodies.

Theme 1: Mixed Emotions Toward Their Bodies

Students frequently expressed a combination of pride and dissatisfaction regarding their bodies. They felt capable and sometimes even accomplished when they demonstrated skills, kept up with others, or showed athletic progress. These brief times of success felt good, and sometimes they felt good about themselves.

On the other hand, when students have these positive feelings, they are often followed by lingering insecurities regarding their appearance, body shape, and imperfections. The attitudinal clash between feeling proud of their performance and

dissatisfied with their appearance contributed to students' ambivalence toward participating in PE. In many instances, students felt that, while they could experience their bodies as strong and functional in practice, the mental focus on their appearance prevented them from sustaining that confidence.

"Sometimes I feel proud when I do the activity, but I still feel insecure about how I look." (P3)

"I like that I can keep up in class, but I keep thinking people are looking at my body." (P7)

"Even if I do well, I feel conscious about my shape and uniform." (P10)

Theme 2: Self-Consciousness During Physical Activities

The evaluated visibility and performative aspects of PE classes increased student self-awareness. Activities such as running, dancing, or participating in group sports positioned students' movements and bodies under others' scrutiny, increasing their awareness of their own bodies and movements. Visibility heightened discomfort, anxiety, and avoidance of active participation. Students recounted holding back effort, refraining from taking risks, or hesitating to attempt new skills due to fear of being perceived as awkward or of being evaluated by others. Even during play, students shifted their focus from enjoying the game to monitoring their performance image, undermining both inquiry-learning opportunities and excitement about PE. Additionally, increased attention to images further illustrates how insecurities about body image can inhibit and limit the developmental and experiential benefits of physical education.

"I can't help but feel everyone is watching me whenever I move." (P1)

"I become too shy to try new skills because I think I'll look awkward." (P9)

"During games, I focus less on playing and more on whether I look okay." (P5)

Environmental Factors

From the environmental factors, discomfort due to uniforms (within the categorisation of bodily experience), teasing (within the category of social experiences), and insecurities about Physical Education (PE) spaces were three overall themes that emerged. These findings suggest that the environment not only influences students' concerns about body image but also impacts their willingness to participate.

Theme 1: Uniform-Related Discomfort

Instead of supporting functionality and freedom of movement, PE uniforms were described as a significant source of discomfort and body image distress. Many students described their uniforms as tight, short, or revealing, which exacerbated their insecurities and made them reluctant to participate. For some, simply wearing the uniform made them feel as though every flaw would be on display for all their classmates to see, intensifying their reluctance to participate in activities fully. Others admitted to skipping the class, or at least considering it, because they did not want to wear the uniform. This issue, repeated throughout these first- and second-person narratives, highlights the role of clothing design and choice in influencing not only physical comfort but also psychological ease in participating in activities. A lack of alternative or choice in uniform was recognised as a barrier to engagement and inclusion, demonstrating how institutional practices may perpetuate any anxieties related to body image and injury.

"The PE uniform is too tight, and I feel everyone can see my flaws." (P8)

"I feel uncomfortable wearing shorts; it makes me want to skip class." (P2)

“I wish we had options for uniforms because I don’t feel confident in mine.” (P6)

Theme 2: Teasing in PE Settings

A frequent negative experience described by students in PE was teasing and comments about their bodies from peers. Students reported that jokes or comments, whether explicitly critical or disguised as "just kidding," made them feel embarrassed, discouraged, and, in some cases, disengaged from the material. Some participants reported that even the most innocent teasing made some students feel insecure about their participation. Students suggested that they chose to stay quiet, avoid drawing attention to themselves, or completely disengage or withdraw after experiences with teasing. This finding illustrates that peer interactions are just as important in a PE setting as the formal curriculum in shaping school-based experiences. When teasing becomes routine, it indicates an environment where vulnerability and shame are the norm rather than confidence and enthusiasm.

“Some classmates tease about weight, and it makes me not want to join.” (P4)

“Even if it’s a joke, comments about my body hurt.” (P10)

“I just stay quiet when they make fun of me during activities.” (P7)

Theme 3: Insecurity in PE Spaces

Students characterised physical education (PE) contexts (e.g., gymnasiums and outdoor courts) as intimidating spaces that intensified their bodily insecurities and anxieties. Due to the spaciousness of these environments and the visibility of peers, students felt as though they were constantly being watched and could not hide or leave the room to escape attention. This sensation of being seen usually manifests as students not wanting to move, learn new skills, or participate. The physical design of PE settings, which was intended to be

welcoming or helpful to students with body image issues, becomes a barrier to participation for students with body image issues. The space will emphasise self-consciousness and vulnerability rather than freedom of movement. Having awareness of bodily movement and of when they felt inadequate or anxious was heightened as a design feature in PE contexts.

“The gym feels like a place where everyone is watching.” (P9)

“I feel more insecure in open areas because I can’t hide.” (P6)

“I don’t enjoy PE spaces; they make me anxious.” (P2)

Social Influences

As part of the social influence domain, three themes emerged from data analysis: peer judgment, social comparison, and instructor behaviour. The themes demonstrated that students’ confidence, body image, and level of participation in Physical Education were significantly shaped by peer interactions and teacher interactions.

Theme 1: Peer Judgment

Students often reported feeling evaluated by their peers based on their performance and the appearance of their bodies. Such an evaluation process exerted pressure to comply with someone's standards of fitness or athleticism, thereby generating anxiety and reducing enjoyment. Students reported varying degrees of concern that they might make a mistake or lack skilfulness, which could result in them being perceived as worse than their peers or otherwise "bad," regardless of whether their performance accurately reflected their skill. Others felt that, whether they were performing poorly or not, students were directing their attention to their bodies. Being evaluated by one's peers for outcomes rejected the idea of participation and promoted exclusion. Whether students were aware of how they compared to their peers, it served to demonstrate how the peer-to-peer character

of social environments works in relation to a student's experience in physical education or sport settings and into education.

“I feel like classmates are judging me if I do not do well.” (P1)

“I get nervous because I think people are looking at my body.” (P8)

“Peer judgment makes me feel left out in activities.” (P5)

Theme 2: Social Comparison

Another recurring theme that eroded students' self-esteem and body satisfaction was the tendency to compare themselves to peers. Many students reported that they constantly compared their appearance, fitness, or sports performance to that of classmates whom they believed were fitter, thinner, or more skilled than they were. Usually, the comparative process left them feeling deficient, upset, or less willing to try. The comparison process reasserted internalised body ideals, making students feel they were not meeting expectations. Social comparison, a natural human tendency, was shown in this context to be especially problematic in a PE setting where appearance and physical performance are central to being involved.

“I always compare myself to classmates who look fitter.” (P3)

“Seeing others perform better makes me feel bad about myself.” (P4)

“I lose confidence when I compare my body with others.” (P7)

Theme 3: Instructor Behaviour

The role of educators was identified as either alleviating or exacerbating body image issues. Educators who were supportive, inclusive, and nurturing helped students feel valued and confident, regardless of ability or body type. Conversely, educators who focused on

physical appearance or only gave positive comments to students with slim or athletic body types may have facilitated insecurities among participants. Comments about students' sizes or physical fitness, regardless of intent or casual meaning, were particularly harmful; in fact, students reported that such comments made them feel judged and discouraged. Alternatively, educators who encouraged every student and emphasised effort over appearance motivated students and helped them feel more comfortable in PE, regardless of ability. Findings demonstrate the importance of educators' sensitivity and equitable practices in fostering a positive, inclusive atmosphere.

“When the teacher praises only slim or athletic students, I feel discouraged.” (P10)

“Sometimes the teacher's comments about weight make me self-conscious.” (P9)

“It helps when the teacher encourages everyone, not just the best athletes.” (P2)

Thematic Diagram on the Dimensions and Themes of Female Students' Body Image Related Concerns in Physical Education

Figure 2 illustrates the triadic relationship between the study's three primary dimensions: Self-Concept, Social Influences, and Environment. This visual synthesis maps the eight constituent themes identified in the findings. Self-Concept, which comprises mixed body emotions and self-consciousness, functions as the psychological core. Social Influences, such as peer judgment, social comparison, and instructor behaviour, dynamically shape this internal state. Simultaneously, these perceptions are filtered through Environmental Factors, specifically uniform discomfort, teasing, and spatial insecurity. The bidirectional arrows denote a reinforcing feedback loop in which external stressors and social evaluations mutually exacerbate internal body-image concerns.

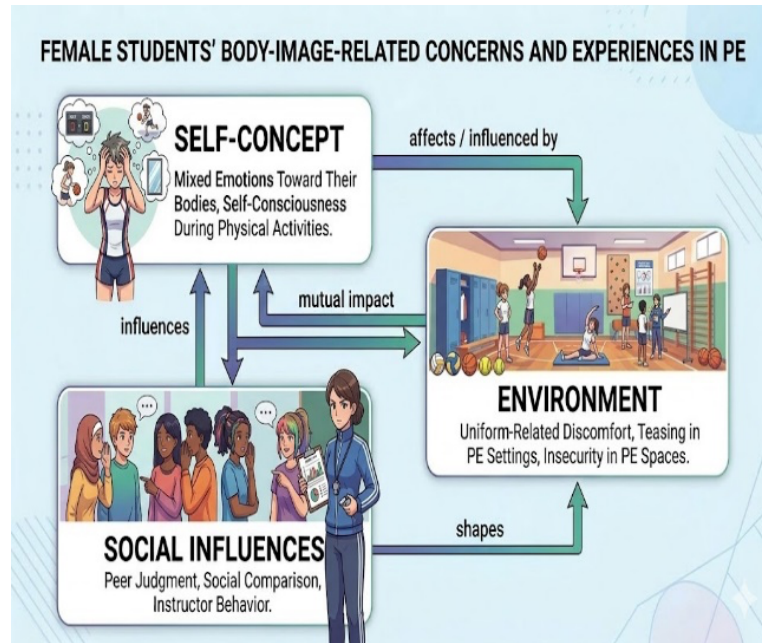


Figure 2. Dimensions and themes of female students’ body image-related concerns in Physical Education

Discussion

The results of this study show that body image concerns among female college students arise from the interplay of internal body perceptions, environmental contexts, and social influences. Students’ self-concept centres on a conflict between valuing physical competence and conforming to sociocultural expectations of appearance (Andersen & Smith, 2022). This tension aligns with Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), which holds that performative environments where the body is viewed and evaluated, such as visible PE spaces, trigger heightened self-consciousness, increased self-surveillance, and risk aversion (Slater & Tiggemann, 2010). The findings show that these appearance-based anxieties are primary barriers to participation, as students often prioritize aesthetic standards over a functional appreciation of movement (Prownpuntu et al., 2025; Regencia et al., 2023). The practical implication is that physical competence does not guarantee a positive body image. PE curricula must shift toward pedagogical models that

promote body positivity and self-compassion, focusing on the body’s functional capabilities rather than aesthetic surveillance.

Beyond individual psychological factors, environmental and institutional structures, such as required PE uniforms and exposure in open activity spaces, play a critical role in shaping student insecurity. Research identifies both restrictive and revealing uniforms as significant sources of body dissatisfaction and avoidance behaviour (Porter et al., 2024; Escoton et al., 2023). These structural triggers are often worsened by an institutional climate where teasing, weight-related stigma, and body-shaming contribute to student withdrawal and disengagement from physical activity (Nathan et al., 2021; Escoton et al., 2023). The results suggest that a student’s willingness to participate depends on a sense of safety and inclusivity within the learning environment, a finding reinforced by local evidence of the harmful impact of cultural and institutional practices (Cagas et al., 2022; Tagare et al., 2025). The policy implication is that educational institutions must re-evaluate uniform requirements by offering flexible clothing options and

designing activity spaces that are less socially risky to minimise performative pressures on female students.

Finally, the social dimension of the PE experience underscores how peers and instructors function as gatekeepers of student confidence through mechanisms of social comparison. The social dimension of the PE experience underscores how peers and instructors function as gatekeepers of student confidence through mechanisms of Social Comparison Theory. Consistent with Festinger's (1954) framework, students evaluate their self-worth against classmates perceived as thinner or fitter, which undermines self-esteem and motivation (Rojo-Ramos et al., 2022). Instructor behaviour emerged as a decisive factor in this dynamic. At the same time, a focus on physical performance or appearance-based praise intensifies self-imposed pressure; supportive and inclusive instruction that prioritises effort over aesthetics significantly mitigates student insecurity (Slater & Tiggemann, 2010; Barker et al., 2022). These findings reveal that inclusive teaching strategies reduce self-consciousness and promote sustained engagement (Pestano et al., 2024; Su et al., 2025). Consequently, teacher education requires professional development focused on body

image sensitivity to dismantle harmful comparison standards and foster a body-positive learning climate aligned with Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989), accounting for the overlapping cultural and institutional pressures students face.

The synthesis of the findings resulted in the development of a Thematic Model of Body Image in Physical Education, shown in Figure 3. The thematic visual model represents the interconnected dynamics that influence participation in physical education and its subsequent effects on body image. Body image serves as a central construct, shaped by the continuous interaction among self-concept, social influences, and environmental factors. The model demonstrates a reciprocal relationship in which internal identity and self-perception inform the interpretation of social cues, which in turn guide engagement with both physical and institutional contexts. This cyclical process supports the outputs at the base of the framework, translating these dimensions into actionable policy and pedagogical implications. These outputs provide a foundation for structural reform and the development of inclusive teaching practices within physical activity settings

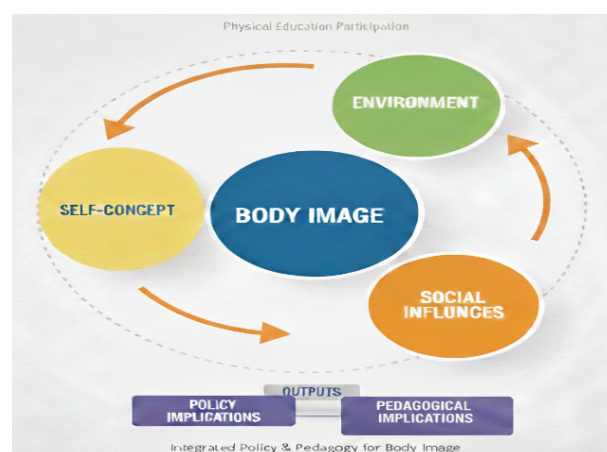


Figure 3. Thematic Visual Model in Physical Education

This study reveals that body image in physical education (PE) is a multifaceted synthesis of internal perceptions, institu-

tional structures, and social dynamics. Female college students navigate a tension between physical competence and aesthetic

standards (Slater & Tiggermann, 2010), where Objectification Theory explains how performative PE spaces trigger self-surveillance and anxiety (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). These pressures are reinforced by environmental barriers, such as restrictive uniforms and exposed activity spaces (Porter et al., 2024), as well as weight-related teasing and social comparison (Nathan et al., 2021; Rojo-Ramos et al., 2022). Ultimately, body image is situated within structural contexts that dictate a student's sense of safety (Cagas et al., 2022; Tagare et al., 2025), necessitating policy reforms and pedagogical shifts that prioritize functional effort over aesthetic surveillance (Pestano et al., 2024).

To address these challenges, educational institutions must implement comprehensive policy reforms and pedagogical shifts to foster a body-positive learning environment. This requires re-evaluating PE dress codes to offer flexible clothing options that prioritise student comfort, and designing activity spaces that minimise the performative visibility that can lead to self-consciousness (Escoton et al., 2023). Teacher education should also shift toward inclusive instruction that emphasises effort and functional appreciation rather than physical performance or appearance-based metrics (González-Calvo et al., 2022; Nguyen-Michel et al., 2021). By embedding principles of body positivity and self-compassion into the curriculum and enforcing strict anti-teasing policies, schools can reduce the harmful effects of social comparison and weight stigma (Pestano et al., 2024; Su et al., 2025). These changes shift the focus of physical education from aesthetic surveillance to the functional capabilities of the body, ensuring the PE environment supports equitable participation and long-term health-oriented development for all female students.

While this research offers valuable insights into the body image concerns of female college students in Physical Education, its findings are bounded by several key limitations. Specifically, the

study's focus on a single institution limits its generalizability to broader cultural or academic contexts. At the same time, its reliance on subjective self-perceptions introduces the potential for recall bias or social desirability. Furthermore, the exclusive focus on female participants excludes the perspectives of male and gender-diverse individuals, and the qualitative design prioritises depth over the broader statistical prevalence that quantitative measures could provide. Despite these constraints, the study remains a significant contribution to understanding how environmental structures and social factors intersect to influence body image and PE participation.

Future research should build on these findings by using mixed-methods designs to quantify the prevalence of body image concerns while preserving the depth of lived experience from qualitative studies. Given the influence of institutional factors, comparative analyses across diverse educational settings, such as private, public, and vocational institutions, are needed to assess whether differences in uniform policies and facility designs produce distinct psychological outcomes. It is also essential to broaden participant demographics by recruiting more inclusive samples, including male students and gender-diverse individuals, and to examine these dynamics through an intersectional framework that considers socioeconomic status and physical abilities. Intervention-based studies are needed to assess the effectiveness of body-positive pedagogical training for physical education instructors, focusing on whether shifting curricular emphasis from performance-based metrics to functional appreciation reduces self-surveillance and social comparison among students.

Funding

No external funding supported this study.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. Any personal circumstances or interests that could influence the interpretation of the research have been disclosed.

Notes on Contributors

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