

Body Shaming: Ramifications on an Individual

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i4/13180>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i4/13180

Published Date: 18 April 2022

Abstract

Body shaming is the action of expressing humiliation about another individual's body shape or size which can result in severe emotional trauma, especially at a young age. Body shaming is serious and gives huge negative effects on the physical and mental health of a person. This study aims to investigate the effects of body shaming on individuals in society. This study employed a quantitative method where a set of questionnaires regarding body shaming was distributed to members of the public randomly through social media. A total of 101 respondents responded to the questionnaire and it was further analysed by using SPSS software to find mean and standard deviation values. The findings show that respondents agreed that being fat, being skinny, and having bodyweight that is not in harmony with their height are the reasons why people body-shamed others. The findings further revealed that people felt distressed when others talked about their appearance. Many respondents also expressed that they are being treated differently and feel uneasy or embarrassed in public situations where other people are concentrating on their appearance. The results also showed self-compassion helps to cope with body shame by having more respect for themselves and feeling self-conscious about their appearance to be more confident with themselves. It is recommended to create awareness through social media on how body shaming affects an individual and ways to cope with being body-shamed by having more respect for themselves and feeling self-conscious about self- appearance. Therefore, future research needs to spread awareness to the public so that people will stop body shaming because it is very dangerous and could affect mental and physical health.

Keywords: Body Shaming, Weight, Appearance, Respect, Self-Esteem

Introduction

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, body shaming is the act or practice of humiliating a person based on their body type by making critical and mocking statements about their body shape and size. ANAD (2020) defined body shaming as the action or practice of expressing humiliation about another individual's body shape or size which is also a form of bullying that can result in severe emotional trauma, especially at a young age. Body

shaming can create a dangerous cycle full of hatred and criticism. Criticizing another person's appearance is not the only way to body shaming, criticizing their own appearance by comparing themselves with other people is also considered body shaming (Vargas, 2019). Research shows that the use of Instagram is linked to a variety of body image concerns, including body dissatisfaction and self-objectification (Feltman, 2018). This issue is not very healthy for the community, and it is very important to society that body shaming on social media can give negative effects on the victims both physically and mentally. Body shame can occur in three main ways which are criticising yourself, criticising someone else in front of them, and criticising someone else behind their back (Mukwamu, 2019).

Research from Yale Rudd Center on Food Policy and Obesity found that peer victimization can be directly predicted by weight as people's first impression. For example, a commissioner of oaths is seeking more than a video apology from a social media influencer who had body-shamed her on social media (Yun, 2020). Suharnizan Md Sidek, 37, has given a 14-day notice of demand to Eira Aziera, real name Noorazira Pissal, 37, to come out with a public apology and compensation. Meanwhile, Suharnizan's lawyer Mohd Rasheed Hassan said the compensation was for the trauma that Eira has caused to the victim and her action of body shaming his client during a live Facebook stream on Aug 18 (Yun, 2020). This indicates that body shaming is a very serious problem and needs to be taken care of.

Generally, bodies come in various shapes and sizes. However, this doesn't mean that people accidentally body shame others without realizing it (Tschinkel, 2018). Furthermore, people who are overweight will be criticised no matter what clothes they wear or what actions they have done. Therefore, body shaming becomes more serious and gives huge negative effects on the physical and mental health of a person.

Problem Statement

People today are blaming both men and women for their body types. Women are primarily chastised or mocked for their weight by being labeled "fat" or "skinny." Researchers also mention that men like to think about their bodies in terms of muscularity, lean shape, hair, and chest rather than, and this need for muscular structure can be observed in most men. Men's confidence is often associated with their physical characteristics such as their face, hair, and muscularity. Consequently, if men aren't muscular to even match the ideal version of men with "Perfect Bodies," they are subjected to body shaming. Betz et al (2019) discovered that women who have idealized thin and curvy bodies that are shown on social media platforms received lower body appreciation and a great number of negative comments about body shaming. According to Saxena et al (2020), body shaming is becoming more common among young adults, as celebrities promote diets, fitness, and fashion patterns, and any that deviate from these trends are chastised or embarrassed.

As the trends are thriving, only men with abs and built muscles are treated as handsome and fit. It has also been acclaimed that social media can play a part as a negative moderator between the muscular ideals that men have, which in turn leads to a negative image and evaluation of their own bodies in regard to societal comparisons (Saxena et al., 2020). Thus, the objective of this research is to investigate the negative impacts of body shaming on individuals. To summarize, this study aims to answer the following questions.

1. Why do people body shame others?

2. What are the effects on the victim of body shaming?
3. Does self-compassion help to cope with being body-shamed?

Methodology

This study is designed as a quantitative research approach that is aimed to study the factors that affect the victim's body image and the effects of body shaming. There were 101 respondents who responded to the questionnaire in Malaysia.

A set of questionnaires was used as the primary research instrument for the collection of data. The questionnaire consists of four parts. Part A was designed to gather demographic information. Part B was adapted from Tariq and Ijaz (2015), Part C from Wang et al (2017), and part D from (McDermott et al., 2014).

As for part B, the items focus on the reasons for people to body shame others; Part C focuses on the effects on the victim of body shaming while Part D focuses on identifying if self-compassion helps to cope with being body shamed. The questions were asked in the form of a 4-point Likert scale (1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Agree, 4- Strongly Agree) to allow the respondents to express how much they agree or disagree with the statements provided in the questionnaire (McLeod, 2019).

The questionnaire was distributed through Google Form.

Results and Discussions

Body shaming is very humiliating and painful and can cause long-term consequences. (Abate, 2020). Body shaming makes people feel bad about their body and consider that other people are often critical enough of their own appearance. The consequences of body shaming are severe and can lead to mental health problems.

Why do People Body Shame Others?

This section focuses on the point of view of people on the reason why people body shame others and helps to answer research question 1.

Table 1: *Why do people body shame others?*

No.	ITEMS	MEAN	SD
1.	Being called fat	3.329	0.707
2.	Being skinny	3.059	0.688
3.	Bodyweight is not in harmony with height	3.041	0.803
4.	Not having a slim appearance	3.003	0.753
5.	Having protruding mouth	2.931	0.734
6.	Not being muscular	2.853	0.722
7.	Disliking hair texture	2.851	0.636
8.	Disliking the shape of the eye	2.680	0.751

The statistics shown in Table 1 are the reasons why people body shame others. Table 1 shows that the highest mean value is being called fat with ($M = 3.329$ and $SD = 0.707$). This shows that most people always call the victims fat. A study by Gunnars (2019) stated that most of the people who criticize overweight people are slim and they do not have any weight problems. When people see an overweight or plump person in front of them, they will think of the word fat which drive them to eat more and gain more weight. In a nutshell, it is confirmed that people's body shame others for being fat.

The statement being skinny has the second-highest mean response ($M=3.059$, $SD=0.688$). Most of them agree with the statement. Other than being fat, being skinny is more controversial and people will tease the victims to gain more weight. It shows that being too healthy such as skinny-fat or slim-thick can cause anxiety in a person (Goodyear et al.,2021). Moreover, many of the respondents with the mean and standard deviation values ($M=3.041$, $SD=0.803$) agreed with the statement that body weight is not in harmony with height. In this situation, we can relate it to Body Mass Index (BMI) which is a measurement of body fat based on height and weight. A study by Sadat (2018) shows that increasing BMI value builds negative feelings toward people's body and appearance. Thus, it can be concluded that body weight is not in harmony with height, and this is another reason why people body shame others.

Next, a certain number of respondents agreed with the statement that not having a slim appearance is one of the reasons for body shaming to take place among people ($M=3.003$, $SD =0.753$). Being slim is good for a person's health as they will feel better and more energetic (O'Hara et al., 2021; 2021). This corresponds to a study from Vargas (2017) who posits that people often criticise others' body appearance in front of them and use it as jokes and some type of bonding experience between them. It somehow makes them think that they should change their appearance by losing weight and appearing slimmer and smaller.

Besides that, when asked if having protruding mouths is a reason for people to body shame, the mean of respondents that agree is ($M=2.931$, $SD=0.734$). By having protruding mouths, people tend to look at us differently as the mouth does not fit perfectly. The upper part of the face determines beauty, and the lower part of the face determines ugliness (DayDAyNews, 2019).

For the reason of not being muscular, the respondents agreed with the mean of ($M = 2.853$) and standard deviation ($SD = 0.722$). Not being muscular is the same as skinny shaming where people criticize others for being too thin and not having a muscular body type. This is because people presume not having muscles is unattractive. Monaco (2021) stated that men are told to be muscular and toned in society which shows that people who are skinny and have no muscles are portrayed as being abnormal and having undesirable body type. Mazlan (2021) reiterates that non-muscular males are considered feminine.

Apart from that, respondents agreed that disliking the hair texture is one of the reasons for people body shaming others ($M=2.851$, $SD=0.636$). The hair is one of the most important parts of the human body which to an extent reflects the personality of the individual (Deseo Salon & BlowDry, 2017). How the hair looks is very important as it has a significant impact on our self-esteem. Lane (2019) asserts that there are people who told her that her hair is "pube-like", and they were also trying to say that her natural hair should not exist because they think that pube-like hair is ugly.

Lastly, for the statement of disliking the shape of the eye that has the least mean value the respondents that agree are ($M=2.680$, $SD=0.751$). The shape of the eye is one of the physical features which we perceive as beauty standards. Some people are dissatisfied with the shape of their eyes because they consider that their eyes are ugly. Almond eyes shape is the most ideal eye shape as it can pull off any eyeshadow look (House of Lashes, 2019). This shows that people also discriminate against beauty just by looking at the shape of their eyes.

From the discussion, being called fat, being skinny and body weight is not in harmony with the height of their body are the statements that many of the respondents agreed with for this research question. This shows the outer appearance of an individual is the major reason for people to body shame. Therefore, people who do not have an ideal body always feel insecure with themselves and have anxiety or depression as they continuously suffer from negative comments about their body (Valentina, 2020). As the old saying goes, do not judge a book by its cover, but there are still many people who value a person by judging them based on their physical appearance.

What are the Effects of Body Shaming?

This section focuses on the point of view of people on what are the effects of body shaming towards the victim and this helps to answer research question 2. Table 2 shows the effects of body shaming.

Table 2: *What are the effects of body shaming?*

No.	Items	Mean	SD
1.	I feel distressed when others comment on my appearance	3.28	0.578
2.	I often feel being treated differently because of my appearance.	3.21	0.709
3.	I feel uneasy or embarrassed in public situations where I concentrate on my appearance.	3.21	0.709
4.	I am often upset when concentrating on my appearance.	3.13	0.736
5.	Because of my appearance, I avoid appearing in social situations such as parties	3.08	0.769
6.	I feel pressure to lose weight when I was body shamed	2.91	0.852
7.	I think I will have an extreme diet to lose weight.	2.68	0.933

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 above shows the mean value and standard deviation of the effects of body shaming on the victim. The table shows that a majority of the respondents shared that the victim felt distressed when others commented on their appearance with ($M=3.28$, $SD=0.578$). Judging someone's appearance makes them feel uncomfortable with their own body and makes them undergo extreme diets that can lead to eating disorders and other internal issues related to their own self-esteem and self-image. Some people who suffer from an eating disorder may believe that restricting their food intake will improve their appearance and bring an end to body shaming (Body-Shaming: Its Effect on Young & Old, 2021). This shows how people are distressed when someone talks about their appearance.

Other than that, some of the respondents agreed with the statement "I often feel being treated differently because of my appearance". With a calculated mean ($M=3.21$) and standard deviation ($SD=0.709$), this finding has been justified. Appearance plays an important role in every situation because appearance is our own image that reflects other people. Schwantes (2019) stated that workers and job candidates often received appearance-based discrimination as they admitted to experiencing questionable treatment at work related to how they look. Appearance-based discrimination happens when someone is treated differently based on how they look, creating an imbalance between someone being evaluated for their performance versus completely based on the way they present themselves. Currently, in the workplace, supervisors judge someone on their appearance more than the merit of someone's work.

Furthermore, the respondents agreed that they feel uneasy or embarrassed in public situations where they concentrate on their appearance ($M=3.21$, $SD=0.709$). As people body-shamed them, the victims would feel anxiety and worry about their conditions. Constant

worries can affect the victims in their concentration, confidence, appetite, and outlook (Lyness, 2014). This happens because the respondents lack confidence in themselves, and they tend to feel uneasy in front of people. This situation can also be called scopophobia where a person experiences an excessive fear of being stared at (Stanborough, 2020).

Moreover, the mean value where the respondents agreed that they are often upset when concentrating on their appearance with a mean value ($M=3.13$, $SD= 0.736$). The victims criticized their own physical appearance through judgement or comparison to another person (Vargas, 2019). Next, respondents agreed that they avoid appearing in social situations such as parties because of their appearance with a mean value of ($M=3.08$, $SD=0.769$). This is due to body image concerns, and they did not want to make physical contact with others (Wang et al, 2017)

When asked if they feel pressured to lose weight when they are body shamed, some respondents agreed with a mean value of $M=2.91$, $SD= 0.852$. Furthermore, some of the respondents agreed that they think they will have an extreme diet to lose weight ($M=2.68$, $SD=0.933$). Appearance seems to matter, in social media, there have been plenty of cruel comments about the appearance and even President Barack Obama was criticized for being too thin. These findings have been pointed out by Inside Trainer (2021) which shows that appearances can be a big factor in your life chances. It is not surprising that many people are feeling the pressure to lose weight in ways that are not healthy.

The discussion of research question 2 reveals that people are badly affected when they are being body shamed. The majority of people felt distressed when others talked about their appearance. Some people also often felt being treated poorly by other people because of their outer appearance. Last but not least, they also felt uneasy or embarrassed in public situations where other people are concentrating on their appearance. This shows how people are affected by body shaming emotionally and how people surrounding them treat them based on their appearance.

Does Self-compassion Help to Cope with being Body Shamed?

This section focuses on the results obtained from Part D of the questionnaire, which focuses on the point of view of people about how self-compassion helps to cope with being body-shamed which answers research question 3.

Table 3: *How self-compassion helps cope with being body shamed.*

No.	Items	Mean	SD
1.	I wish I could have more respect for myself.	3.26	0.688
2.	I have been feeling self-conscious about my appearance.	3.17	0.567
3.	I have been dissatisfied with my appearance when dressed.	3.10	0.671
4.	I take a positive attitude toward myself	3.09	0.585
5.	I felt dissatisfied with my body.	2.98	0.748
6.	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	2.96	0.662
7.	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	2.92	0.595
8.	I am avoiding people because of the way I feel about my appearance	2.91	0.789
9.	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	2.91	0.789
10.	I certainly feel useless at times	2.88	0.816
11.	At times I think I am no good at all.	2.87	0.757
12.	I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	2.82	0.590
13.	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	2.70	0.742

The statistics in Table 3 show the frequencies on how self-compassion helps cope with being body shamed. The table shows that most of the respondents agree with the statement "I wish I could have more respect for myself" with the highest mean ($M=3.26$) and the standard deviation is 0.688. Self-respect is important as it can boost the confidence level and a person can behave with honor, dignity, and grace. Self-respect is crucial for happiness as it exhibits toughness and moral nerves and no more need for comparisons. Individuals that have a high level of respect for themselves will display a strong character with full preparation to take responsibility and fight for their own values and beliefs (Mindvalley, 2020).

Other than that, feeling self-conscious about their appearance is the next highest with $M=3.17$; $SD = 0.567$. Several respondents agreed that they are dissatisfied with their appearance when dressed with a mean ($M = 3.10$) and $SD = 0.671$. Generally, women are much more concerned about their appearance as compared to men. One of the reasons is that their appearance is central to how they are evaluated by others (Barber, 2013). It seems that people believe that a person's appearance influences the way they are perceived and

treated by others (Padron, 2017). According to psychologists, when someone is more attractive, they are perceived as healthier and more approachable.

Next, the respondents took a positive attitude towards themselves with a mean $M=3.09$, $SD=0.585$. It is good to stay positive towards yourself as the day will be brighter and happier away from worries and toxicity. According to TRVST (2021), a positive attitude is a state of mind that allows one to envisage and predict great things. It allows one person to stay optimistic all the time. By staying optimistic, it may anticipate happiness, health, success, and opportunities for a person. Apart from that, several respondents do feel dissatisfied with their body with a mean value of 2.98, $SD=0.748$. This happens because every person has their own opinion on their body as everyone has their own role model in life. One of the main reasons is that they only feel pressured and only feel better about themselves if they meet the perfect body and are acceptable by the way people look at them (Poncelet, 2021). Additionally, some respondents also agree with the statement "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" with a mean value of $M=2.96$ and $SD=0.662$. This happens when a person stops comparing with others. According to Jepsen (2013), a spirit of gratitude and appreciation is a crucial skill for everyone. It can promote optimism and help a person to build a more positive outlook. It lets a person pause for a moment in his or her daily life to reflect on something that they already have in life instead of always striving for more things.

Furthermore, respondents feel that they have several good qualities with a mean value ($M=2.92$). An example of good qualities in a person is that they are patient. They are always kind to other people even though they are being body shamed. Moreover, certain respondents do agree that they avoid people because of the way they feel about their appearance. The mean value of the statement is 2.91. This is because the respondents are familiar with being stared at every day and people make unkind or pointed comments. Low self-esteem is characterized by a lack of confidence and feeling bad about oneself (Firestone, 2021).

For the item "I feel I do not have much to be proud of", several respondents agreed ($M=2.91$, $SD=0.789$) meanwhile some of them shared that they certainly feel useless at times with an $M=2.88$, $SD=0.816$. Besides that, respondents also feel at times, think that they are not good at all with a mean value of 2.87. This is because they lack motivation for themselves. People with low self-esteem often feel unlovable, awkward, or incompetent (Firestone, 2021). When you have low self-esteem, you tend to see yourself, the world, and your future more negatively and critically (Whelan et al., 2007; 2020).

When asked if the respondents are a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others, they do agree with a mean value ($M=2.82$). Meanwhile, several of them agreed with the statement "all in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure" with a mean value of 2.70. This is because a person who has never succeeded at anything has failed along the way. This shows how self-esteem can cope with being body-shamed by having more respect for themselves and this makes them feel more comfortable with the way they look (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2019).

Based on the findings, many of the respondents agree with almost all statements that have been asked. This shows they agree that self-compassion helps to cope with body shame by having more respect for themselves and feeling self-conscious about their appearance to be more confident with themselves. Self-compassion directly impacts how we take care of ourselves physically and emotionally. Self-compassion involves our actions of celebrating and appreciating our weaknesses and strength by placing realistic expectations on ourselves so that we can be more confident and be more comfortable with our body (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2019). This is how self-compassion works to cope with body shame.

Conclusion

From the findings, it can be concluded that body shame has an impact on individuals both emotionally and physically. Some people intentionally point out another individual's insecurities by body shaming, making their personal insecurities worse. Our study shows that people engage in body shaming others because of a person's physical appearance, especially their weight. A study from Gerlock (2018) said that people often judge other people by their outer appearance at a first impression and this is totally not right. Even though body-shaming refers to a person's physical appearance, it can adversely affect both mental and physical aspects of a person's life. This can influence their mental health, social health, and professional lives. (Body-Shaming, 2021). With the help of the respondents, this study clearly explains the effect of body shaming and how it affects a person such as feeling distressed, embarrassed, and being treated differently by other people.

In conclusion, self-compassion is one of the ways to deal with body shame. Compassion researcher and social psychologist Kristin Neff (2021) identified that self-compassion can behave as an antidote to the self-criticism that comes with shame. Self-compassion triggers the release of oxytocin, the hormone that builds up feelings of trust, calm, safety, emotional stability, and connectedness (Davenport, 2021). Our findings show that having more respect for ourselves and feeling self-conscious about our appearance is one of the approaches to how self-compassion copes with being body shamed. People need to be kind to themselves and other people and be more understanding of the desire of their body rather than judging themselves and other individuals' appearance harshly.

Recommendation

In this new era, people tend to use networks to connect with others using social media as our country is facing a pandemic now. Therefore, most people are studying online and even working from home. Social media is a good place for people to create awareness of how bad body shaming gives a negative impact. People must practice loving themselves and ignore all the negative comments either on social media or in real life. When negative thoughts appear, think about what you would tell a friend if they were in a similar situation and then take your own advice (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2019). Consequently, people should report the comment on body shaming and flag them as inappropriate content (ANAD, 2020). Researchers also mention that people can create or write a positive body blog and share it with others on social media. People are pleased to bear in mind that entering a negative cycle in the comment section does not do any good for them. Finally, people must take control of their emotional, health, and physical well-being and always stay positive.

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