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The Impact of Body Shaming on Teenage Girls

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Abstract

The mass media has an important role in creating a view of ideal body standards. The existence of ideal body standards that emerge in society causes many individuals to experience body shaming. So that society has an indicator of a woman's beauty that is seen from her physical appearance. Body shaming is a person's action or treatment in giving bad comments or criticism about someone's physical appearance, whether related to body condition or appearance, which is done consciously or unconsciously. This form of body shaming is dominated by the color, shape, and size of the body in the form of verbal communication and some even take the form of physical violence. The research method uses a qualitative approach, with descriptive methods. Data was taken from in-depth interviews and journal sources. The results of this research show that body shaming still occurs among teenagers. Often body shaming behavior occurs in middle school or high school. The impacts felt are also very bad, namely stress, depression, and loss of self-confidence. As a result, victims of body shaming try to change themselves according to the appearance standards that have been constructed by society. Body shaming behavior can cause discrimination and verbal violence against individuals.

Keywords: *Body Shaming, Discrimination, Violence*

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly sophisticated technology is making many changes in human life. Among them is that it is increasingly easier for people to express their opinions through social media accounts. Not only that, they can also see the lives, styles, and behavior of other people through social media activities. This is what causes a lot of comments or criticism given by someone to groups or individuals who do not meet social criteria.

Unfortunately, the mass media has a significant influence on defining the ideal body standards. According to research, people, both men and women, use images in the media as a benchmark for evaluating their body shape and size (Grogan, 1999). The existence of such standards in society often leads to body shaming, which is a harmful and hurtful experience for individuals. It is disheartening to see that society still judges a woman's beauty based on her physical appearance.

Body shaming is a person's action or treatment in giving bad comments or criticism about someone's physical appearance, whether related to body condition or appearance, which is done consciously or unconsciously. According to research conducted by Yahoo Health with 2000 participants aged 13–64 years, 94% of teenage girls and 64% of teenage boys experienced online shame regarding their bodies (Miller, 2016). According to Gam et al., (2020, pp. 1324–1328), the prevalence of body shaming in 1 year among school teenagers (n=359) was 44.9%. As several studies have shown, body shaming can have a significant negative impact on people's health and behavior. For example, body shaming has been found to reduce self-confidence (Fauzia & Rahmiaji, 2019, pp. 238–248), potentially influence eating behavior (Flak, 2021), lead to school absenteeism (Gam et al., 2020), and increase levels of distress and insecurity (Sugiati, 2019, pp. 16–24).

In this era of increasingly sophisticated technology, the habit of commenting on someone's physical appearance is increasing. Based on the phenomenon, it can be understood that body image needs special attention just like other psychological aspects, especially for teenagers and students who are in the stage of forming a positive self-image. Unfortunately, not many people realize that body image is important in healthy psychological development. Various parties need to be actively involved in creating positive environmental conditions to help women form a positive body image. One of the environments that is very dominant in women's daily lives is the surrounding environment.

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Body shaming can occur in men and women. However, it often occurs in groups of women. Women in general are very concerned about their appearance in public. Based on the opinion of Ritzer & Goodman, women often experience oppression in various-and various levels of intensity. Intersectionality theory explains that women experience oppression in everyday life not only because of gender-based oppression but also because of the intersectional forms of existing social inequality (Ritzer & Goodman, 2011).

Carastathis explains that women's lives are constructed by many systems that overlap and operate on women (Carastathis, 2014). Intersectionality illustrates that women are indeed vulnerable to experiencing oppression and violence based on gender. One example of violence that is often experienced by women is related to social status, race, location of residence, and age.

One of the factors that contributes to body shaming among women is mass media. While theoretically, mass media serves as an information, education, and entertainment channel, it can also have other effects outside of its intended function. The impact of mass media can not only influence a person's attitudes but can also have an impact on behavior. At a broader level, the effects of mass media can also influence social and cultural systems within society (Bungin, 2006, p. 321).

Mass media, which often displays beauty advertisements featuring women with ideal body shapes, contributes to the creation of a stigma and ideal body standards for women. Rachman, A.H explains that Sociocultural norms have played a significant role in shaping our perception of femininity, with the ideal woman expected to embody elegance (Rachman, 2023, pp. 86–106). When women do not meet these standards, it can lead to body shaming behavior. In today's society, social media plays a significant role in people's lives. However, the visual richness found in social media is often used unwisely by many individuals. People tend to find information more enjoyable when it is presented with images or visuals, even if the content may not necessarily be accurate. This can lead to misinformation being spread, which highlights the need to re-check the source of information and provide a more in-depth explanation.

Fajariani & Ratri, found that the intensity of body shaming tends to increase following age and the awareness of the body and performance (Fauzia & Rahmiaji, 2019). In this study, body shaming was found to be primarily related to the color, shape, and size of an individual's body, often taking the form of verbal communication, and in some instances, physical violence. Participants in the study made efforts to avoid body shaming by taking care of their bodies, participating in diet programs, exercising, and studying cosmetology. These efforts led to the emergence of body positivity.

THEORY

A. Phenomenological Theory

Alfred Schutz said that the term phenomenology means the study of how phenomena, the things we are aware of, appear before us, and the most basic way they appear is as a flow of experience that appears continuously and we receive through our five senses (Craib, 1992). Overall, Schurtz focuses on the dialectical relationship between the way individuals construct social reality and the cultural reality they inherit from their ancestors in the social world (Ritzer & Goodman, 2011, p. 92). Overall, Schurtz focuses on the dialectical relationship between the way individuals construct social reality and the cultural reality they inherit from their ancestors in the social world (Ritzer & Goodman, 2011, p. 95).

It's unfortunate, but body shaming has become commonplace in society. Even though it is a form of bullying, it is often accepted and goes unnoticed. It seems that there is an ideal standard of physical beauty, including having pure white skin, straight teeth, straight hair, and a slim body. These standards apply to both men and women, but women are more likely to receive negative comments about their body size. If a woman is overweight, she is likely to be the target of cruel and hurtful comments about her body (Matlin, 2012).

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B. Intersectionality Theory

This theory believes that women face oppression in various forms and at different levels of intensity, according to (Ritzer & Goodman, 2011, p. 515). It is important to recognize that women face oppression not only due to their gender but also due to the intersectional forms of existing social inequality. Intersectionality explains how these different forms of oppression intersect and compound to create unique experiences of discrimination and marginalization for women.

According to Carastathis, women's lives are shaped by multiple systems of oppression that intersect and compound to create unique experiences of discrimination and marginalization (Carastathis, 2014). Intersectionality theory provides a framework for understanding this complex phenomenon. This theory acknowledges that gender is not the only factor that shapes women's experiences, but rather multiple factors such as class, race, location of residence, sexual preferences, and age can also contribute to the violence and discrimination that women face. In this theory, everyday inequalities are explained through the concept of vectors (Ritzer & Goodman, 2011, p. 516) which represent the multiple intersecting axes of oppression that shape women's lives.

Intersectionality theory emphasizes the multiple identities and factors that intersect to create unique forms of oppression and discrimination that cannot be understood through a single-axis framework. This theory has several advantages for analyzing issues of oppression, violence, or discrimination experienced by women. Unlike other theories, intersectionality theory does not solely focus on the gender framework but also takes into account other factors that intersect with gender to create a complex web of oppression. By recognizing the intersectionality of different forms of oppression, this theory can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of marginalized groups, including women.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach, with descriptive methods. Qualitative research is research that can explain and analyze the impacts, phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of a person or group toward something. Several descriptions are used to discover principles and explanations that lead to conclusions. Meanwhile, qualitative research itself is inductive: the researcher allows problems to emerge from the data or is left open to interpretation. Data was collected through careful observation, including descriptions in detailed context accompanied by notes from in-depth interviews, as well as the results of document and note analysis (Hamdi & Bahruddin, 2015, p. 9).

DISCUSSION

Forms of Body Shaming Behavior in Women

Women are connected with ideal bodies and beauty. Beauty has been constructed by society and has become a social control or measure for women. "Being a woman" means being beautiful, on the other hand, not being beautiful is not a woman and the concept of beauty itself refers to physical characteristics, so beauty is just an ornament, not true elegance" (Melliana S, 2006, p. 11).

The concept of beauty constructed by society is relative, as it is based on an individual's external physical appearance. This includes traits such as a clean face without blemishes, healthy skin, a well-groomed appearance, a bright and white complexion, straight hair, tall and slim body, among other features. From a young age, women are taught to place importance on physical appearance. Parents may even compete to give make-up to their daughters to gain praise from society.

To meet the beauty standards constructed by society, women often purchase beauty products and engage in routine care, accessorize their bodies, wear nice clothes, and dress up. This is typically done to gain recognition from society as a feminine and beautiful woman. In some cases, women may even undergo plastic surgery to achieve these standards (Arsitowati, 2018).

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The emergence of the term body shaming in social life can be attributed to the social construction of beauty. Body shaming is commenting on someone's physique or other people's bodies with unfavorable comments by calling other people unfavorable names such as small, fat, ugly, and so on. There are several forms of body shaming, including Fat Shaming (Commenting on fat/big bodies) This is the most popular type of body shaming. Fat shaming is negative comments towards people who have fat or plus-sized bodies, Skinny / Thin Shaming (Commenting/criticizing thin bodies) This is the opposite of fat shaming but has the same negative impact. This form of body shaming is more directed at women, such as by shaming someone who has a body that is thin or too thin. Moreover, women will be considered unattractive if they have a hairy body. Skin color, a form of body shaming by commenting on skin color, also happens a lot.

Cash in (Seawell & Danoff, 2005) revealed that there are five aspects of body image, namely appearance evaluation, appearance orientation, body area satisfaction, preoccupation with being overweight, and self-weight classification. Zakiyah (24), for example, feels that her body's shortcomings lie in her fat body shape and bloated stomach. According to him, body shaming is joking excessively so that you use words related to body image so that you are offended. Body shaming will occur when someone experiences the impact of another individual's words that make them hurt. Now, when I hear bad words, I just brush them off, maybe because I'm used to it. In the past, during middle school and final high school, when I experienced body shaming, I felt hurt and offended, but couldn't express my feelings.

Zakiyah has also tried several times to prove to other people that she can be happy even though other people say bad things about her body image. He tried to improve his appearance even though everything needed a process. The same thing was experienced by Fani (23 years old), Fani had problems with her weight so many of her friends called Fani fat. Because of the body shaming that her friends did to Fani, she became insecure and embarrassed to represent herself in public.

In contrast to excessive shaming (i.e. ridicule or criticism of someone who is judged to be fat or overweight, 2019b), body shaming does not only target overweight individuals. Zakiyah and Fani each feel that they are fat, Nay (22 years old), feels that her body image is too small so many of her friends often call her Naycil (Little Nay). Even though this was often heard in her ears, for Nay it was just a joke so Nay didn't feel hurt. Nay feels no problem with her small body. However, sometimes there is a little feeling of blaming yourself because of your appearance. The same thing was experienced by Novikasari (22 years old) who had a thin body, so he became a joke among his friends. Alfia (21 years old) also experienced the same thing, she was once said to be skinny as if she never ate. When Alfia started to improve herself, and her body was a bit fat, they said "If she were a little thinner she would be prettier."

Body image is not only related to body proportions (body shape and size) itself but skin color and face can also be used as aspects in assessing a person's ideal body image. Putri Ariani (22 years old), for example, feels that she is not beautiful enough, and everyone doesn't like princesses. She feels she should be more beautiful, attractive, and slim. Putri's experience of body shaming makes her an inferior creature. Her friend once told Putri to go on a diet because she was tall and fat. Moreover, this incident happened on campus in public and made Putri immediately down or not confident and feel that I was an inferior creature.

A form of body shaming that occurs against women

The ideal body shape for women is height, proportional weight, clean and white skin, and a beautiful face. The existence of an ideal body shape that is developing in today's society makes individuals use it as a benchmark for judging and even body shaming other people's body shapes if they do not match the "ideal criteria". The forms of body shaming that are often experienced by women are verbal and non-verbal.

Verbal

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Verbal body shaming involves the use of negative words or sentences about a person's physical appearance based on perceived physical deficiencies. For example, Nadi, who is 23 years old and has a thin body, is often called a "twig" and is joked about flying away with the wind. Similarly, Della, who is 22 years old, has a chubby face which her friends often make jokes about.

Non-verbal

Body shaming is not only done through words but also in the form of actions as conveyed by Zakiyah, just like her friends on campus. Some come from NTT and have black skin. In general, friends form their groups according to ethnicity/race. Putri also pointed out that discrimination exists in university environments, where examples include wealthy students only socializing with other wealthy students and intelligent students only hanging out with other intelligent students. Additionally, ethnic and racial differences can also affect an individual's ability to get along with others.

The Impact of Body Shaming

Loss of Self-Confidence and Insecurity

Insulting or making bad comments towards other people is often considered just joking. However, this research shows that individuals who have experienced body shaming, even if they feel it is just a joke, feel hurt by this behavior. However, some women think this is normal, some say that they are starting to get used to jokes like that, and some feel down and even not confident. Loss of self-confidence. Individuals who are victims of body shaming can cause individuals to feel that something is missing in their body, which can cause a person to lose self-confidence. This is what was experienced by the informants of this research, namely Novikasari, Alfia, Nay, and Della.

The bad words received by victims of body shaming can affect the victim's personality. They tend to lose self-confidence because they feel that there is something wrong with them or even that their body does not match the intended concept of beauty. At first, Della ignored the bad words said by her friend. However, her friend's jokes made Della feel uncomfortable and insecure. For Alfia (21 years old), body shaming can reduce self-confidence, cause mental disorders, cause eating disorders and increase the risk of suicide. Fani (22 years old) also said the same thing, body shaming makes her experience stress, causing problems in everyday life. Nadi (23 years old) also experiences the same thing, namely being closer with friends, and feeling worried if what she does is not by what the public says or the ideal standards of a woman. Apart from that, it also causes mental health problems. Body shaming can cause anxiety, depression, and social isolation. Zakiyah (24) experienced the same body shaming; feeling insecure, not confident, so we felt there is something wrong with us, for example regarding our appearance.

Striving to become the Ideal Standard for Women

In several cases that happened to informants in this research, on average they tried to improve themselves. According to Della (22 years old), the characteristic of body shaming is comparing other people's bodies. With her fat body, Della tries to improve herself by paying attention to her daily diet, trying to use skincare, and body care, and paying attention to how she dresses. Body shaming by women can cause women to feel dissatisfied with their bodies, causing them to want to change their body shape to become ideal.

Similar to Della, Putri also tries to improve herself by maintaining her health, keeping her body clean, and using skincare and makeup. She also tried to lose weight to fit the ideal standards of women. Zakiyah (24 years old) also tries to show a better appearance so as not to experience body shaming again. Someone who experiences body shaming but tends to cover up their shortcomings with positive self-acceptance, this makes someone also gives a positive image of their body. Thus, the body shaming he experienced had no impact on him. As happened to Nay (23 years) and Alfia (21 years). Even though both of them had experienced body shaming in their surroundings, this

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did not make them depressed because they had instilled positive acceptance in themselves from the start by accepting their body's shortcomings and allowing the process to change them.

This is similar to what was experienced by Yesika (22 years old) who experienced body shaming because her face had acne. He also continues to accept himself as he is, because according to him, not everything can be measured by physicality or beauty.

Discrimination Occurs

Various impacts or problems arise from body shaming. One of them is discrimination. The existence of ideal body constructions for women created by society or even advertisements on television creates standard benchmarks or ideal standards for women's appearance. We know that Indonesia has many tribes and races that have their physical characteristics. Beauty standards constructed by society give rise to racial discrimination in certain environments. As stated by Zakiyah (24 years), she saw that in the world of universities, there could also be discrimination, for example, if a friend of hers was an introvert, then she had a disadvantage because she was too quiet. As a result, many friends around him often say bad things to their friends. There are even differences by comparison of skin color. For example, students from NTT have black skin, while students from Java have brown or white skin.

The same thing was also conveyed by Alfia (21 years) and Putri (22 years) that the discrimination that had occurred in the surrounding environment was due to differences between one tribe and another. Then there are smart groups, beautiful groups, rich groups, and so on. This makes some individuals who are not included in the indicators feel discriminated against because they are excluded.

Intersectionality in Body Shaming Behavior

Intersectionality theory was developed by black feminists who thought that previous feminist theories were very oriented towards white women (Cossins, 2003, pp. 144–156);(Ritzer & Goodman, 2011, pp. 443–448); and (Tong, 2007). Intersectionality was coined in 1989 by professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics "intersect" with one another and overlap. "Intersectionality" has, in a sense, gone viral over the past half-decade, resulting in a backlash from the right.

It's interesting how intersectionality highlights the fact that every individual has a unique identity and experiences different forms of discrimination based on various factors such as race, ethnicity, and intelligence. The concept of intersectionality views non-white people as the highest class, and it sheds light on the various forms of oppression that women face due to the existing social inequality order. It's crucial to understand how social relations and social construction impact our lives and shape our identities. More clearly can be seen in the example below;

Table 1. Intersectionality Table

Differentiating Factors	Intersectionality	Impact
Ethnic Skin color Caste Social class Language	Discrimination Occurs	Ostracized, groups are formed according to social status, minority and dominant groups emerge

Source: Author's analysis 2023

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Two factors explain how discrimination against women can occur, namely structural and representational factors. Structural factors are those that have been passed down from generation to generation and have shaped people's perceptions and beliefs about certain things, such as the societal construction of women's appearance standards. Women are often expected to conform to certain ideal physical standards and are often objectified in public spaces. This societal pressure to conform to these standards can lead to a lot of discrimination and criticism of women who don't meet such expectations. It's important to understand and address these factors to create a more equal and just society for women

Meanwhile, the representational factor is the subject who is in control of giving meaning to something. For instance, the mass media often presents a particular standard of beauty for women, which is then accepted as the norm by society. Advertisements, fashion shows, and other media outlets are often used to spread views about what constitutes attractive appearance indicators for women. This often leads to the creation of a rigid beauty standard that can be difficult for women to conform to. This is what ultimately emerges as a standard of beauty in society in general and is a social construction.

The media creates a view for society that women look beautiful if they meet the standards constructed by the public. Like women who have tall, slim bodies, white skin, straight hair, and good looks. This standard of beauty is illustrated by the media as a role model for the word beautiful. As a result, many capitalist groups are taking this opportunity by selling various weight loss products, even skincare.

These factors ultimately give rise to body shaming behavior in society. Women are the population that experiences the most body shaming behavior from other individuals. This is because women always prioritize matters of feeling, so many women try to look beautiful so that they can be recognized by the public. Discrimination that is carried out continuously will have an impact on verbal violence against women. The impact can make individuals feel stressed and can even endanger the lives of victims of body shaming. Body shaming will lead to bullying behavior. Thus, dominant and non-dominant or minority groups of women will emerge with all their shortcomings related to physical appearance. Intersectionality explains that body shaming behavior causes discrimination because based on interview results, some individuals differentiate friends based on ethnicity, skin color, brain intelligence, and even wealth.

CONCLUSION

In this era of increasingly sophisticated technology, the habit of commenting on someone's physical appearance is increasing. Based on the phenomenon, it can be understood that body image is something that needs special attention just like other psychological aspects, especially for teenagers and students who are in the stage of forming a positive self-image. This research shows that the role of mass media can influence people's assumptions about appearance standards.

Discrimination among female teenagers is often caused by body shaming behavior. This kind of behavior can take many forms, including differentiation between white and black skin. It can result in the creation of minority groups who are then ostracized because of their appearance. Those who experience body shaming may feel stressed, lose self-confidence, and develop a sense that there is something wrong with them. All of these factors can contribute to interpersonal issues.

It is important to understand that individuals attempt to achieve ideal body standards through various means, such as dieting, skincare, and even undergoing plastic surgery, due to the intersection of various forms of oppression and discrimination. Intersectionality explains that women experience oppression not only due to gender-based discrimination but also due to other social inequalities. Body shaming, in particular, is a manifestation of this intersectionality, where insulting remarks are made about an individual's race, ethnicity, or body type. This can lead to further oppression and discrimination.\

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