



EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BODY SHAMING AND SELF-CONCEPT AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

Body shaming is a pervasive issue with significant psychological consequences, particularly among adolescents. As adolescents undergo various physical and emotional changes, the pressures of social comparison and body image often lead to negative impacts on their self-concept. This study explores the relationship between body shaming and self-concept among adolescents in Cirebon, Indonesia. **Methods:** A cross-sectional design was used in this study. This study used total sampling, involving 180 students aged 12–16 years. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that assessed participants' experiences with body shaming and their self-concept, including self-esteem, self-identity, and physical appearance satisfaction. The questionnaire had previously undergone validity and reliability testing in a different school setting to ensure its accuracy and consistency. The analysis was conducted using Pearson's correlation and regression analysis to examine the relationship between body shaming and self-concept. **Results:** The findings indicate a significant negative correlation between body shaming experiences and self-concept. As body shaming experiences increased, adolescents reported lower levels of self-esteem, self-identity, and satisfaction with their physical appearance. These results highlight the psychological toll of body shaming and its negative influence on adolescent self-concept. **Conclusion:** This study provides strong evidence that body shaming negatively impacts adolescents' self-concept. These findings underscore the importance of addressing body shaming through interventions aimed at fostering self-acceptance, body positivity, and resilience among adolescents, particularly within school settings.

Keywords: body shaming; physical appearance; self-concept; self-esteem; self-identity

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical period of development that marks the transition from childhood to adulthood, typically ranging from ages 10 to 19 as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). This stage is characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth (González-Cabrera et al., 2017). Puberty brings about numerous biological changes such as the development of secondary sexual characteristics, hormonal fluctuations, and significant bodily transformation. For girls, these include breast development, the appearance of pubic and underarm hair, menarche, fat distribution, and continued brain maturation. For boys, common changes include voice deepening, genital development, nocturnal emissions, increased muscle mass, and body hair growth. Alongside these physical changes, adolescents begin to develop more complex thinking abilities, abstract reasoning, and emotional regulation, which significantly influence their social interactions and perceptions of self (Rose & Tynes, 2015).

During adolescence, individuals become increasingly self-aware and concerned about how they are perceived by others. These concerns are further magnified by societal standards and media portrayals of ideal body types, often leading to behaviors and attitudes that may harm adolescents' self-image. One such behavior is body shaming. Body shaming refers to the act

of criticizing someone based on the shape, size, or appearance of their body. It can take the form of teasing, mocking, or making negative comments, and can be directed either by others or even internally, leading to self-deprecating thoughts (Schlüter et al., 2023). Body shaming has become a pervasive social issue with significant psychological consequences, particularly among adolescents who are already vulnerable due to the ongoing changes in their physical and emotional states. A study presented at the Global Conference on Business and Social Science (Namaso et al., 2022) reported that 79.5% of respondents had experienced body shaming, with 50% acting as perpetrators and 29.5% as victims. Body parts most frequently targeted include the face (47%), body shape (26.8%), nose (15.6%), skin color (14.8%), legs (12.8%), hair (12%), weight (11.8%), stomach (10%), and arms (9.4%). These statistics underscore the widespread nature of this issue and its potential to affect adolescents' self-worth.

The issue of body shaming in Indonesia is equally concerning. In 2018, national police handled 966 cases related to body shaming, of which 347 were resolved either through legal prosecution or mediation (Pinto & Seidman, 2023). In West Java, body shaming incidents are often settled informally or within the community, without formal legal processes. Such data suggest that many instances go unreported, and the true prevalence may be even higher. Body shaming is intrinsically linked to the concept of self-concept, which refers to the cognitive and affective understanding that an individual has about themselves. Self-concept encompasses perceptions of personal identity, physical appearance, competence, and self-worth (Anwari & Hafizah, 2020). Adolescents who are subjected to body shaming may internalize these negative evaluations, which can distort their self-image and undermine their confidence. According (Feijóo et al., 2021), body shaming can lead individuals to experience shame, reduced self-esteem, and dissatisfaction with their appearance. These effects can contribute to the development of negative self-concept, potentially resulting in long-term emotional and psychological issues.

Body shaming as a socially constructed phenomenon, reinforced by media and societal expectations of physical beauty. Individuals who do not meet these expectations are often stigmatized, which can lead to social exclusion and emotional distress (Adams-Santos, 2020). Body shaming damages the individual's self-respect and gratitude for their own body, weakening their mental resilience and hindering their capacity for self-love and acceptance. The relationship between body shaming and self-concept is particularly significant during adolescence, a time when individuals are actively forming their identities and personal values. According to (Insani & Widiarti, 2022), the environment plays a substantial role in shaping self-concept. Adolescents often rely on feedback from peers, family members, and social surroundings to develop their self-perception. Therefore, exposure to criticism, mockery, or negative comparison especially regarding physical appearance can severely disrupt this developmental process. Several factors influence self-concept, including parental upbringing, peer influence, personal experiences, physical appearance, and self-esteem (Chandna et al., 2022). Adolescents with negative self-concept may view themselves as weak, incompetent, unattractive, and unworthy of social acceptance. In contrast, those with positive self-concept are more likely to appreciate their own qualities, maintain healthy self-esteem, and strive for personal achievement and social success (Ke et al., 2020).

Nutrition and body image are also relevant in this context. The United Nations (WHO, 2020) recognizes nutrition as a key component in achieving the second goal of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aims to end hunger, achieve food security, and improve nutrition. Adolescents who receive adequate nutrition and develop healthy eating habits are more likely to have a positive body image and, consequently, a healthier self-concept. The adolescent population in Indonesia, comprising 46 million individuals between the ages of 10

and 19, represents a significant proportion of the national demographic (Kemenkes, 2023). In West Java alone, 4,082,130 adolescents were recorded in 2021 (Hermanussen, 2024). These figures highlight the importance of addressing adolescent mental health and psychosocial well-being as a public health priority. Preliminary observations in Cirebon revealed a concerning prevalence of body shaming experiences among students. Informal interviews with ten 9th-grade students indicated that many had encountered criticism or mockery from peers regarding their behavior, clothing, speaking style, and physical appearance. Specifically, four students reported being criticized for their behavior, five for their clothing, three for their manner of speaking, six for being the subject of gossip, three for physical appearance-related teasing, and five for comments related to skin color. These findings underscore the presence of body shaming within the school environment and its potential to impact students' self-concept. Given the widespread nature of body shaming and its potential to negatively affect adolescent development, it is imperative to investigate this phenomenon within the context of Indonesian junior high schools. This study aims to explore the relationship between body shaming and self-concept among adolescents in Cirebon. By examining the correlation between these two variables, the research seeks to provide insights that may inform interventions and policies to support adolescents in developing a healthy self-concept and resilience against negative social influences.

METHOD

Study Design

This study employed a quantitative, analytical observational approach with a cross-sectional design. cross-sectional design was chosen for its efficiency in assessing the relationship between body shaming experiences and self-concept at a single point in time, without manipulating the environment or variables. This approach is ideal for identifying patterns or associations between variables within a given population.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study consisted of all students enrolled in grades VII to IX at SMP Negeri 3 Gunung Jati during the academic year 2024–2025. The total population of the school was approximately 180 students. The inclusion criteria for participants required that they were adolescents aged between 12 and 15 years, actively enrolled at the school, and willing to participate in the study. Parental consent was also obtained for all minors, ensuring that participants were fully informed about the nature of the study. Exclusion criteria included students who were absent during the data collection period or those with known cognitive or mental health issues that could compromise their ability to respond accurately to the questionnaire. Based on the total student population of 180 students, to increase the precision and reliability of the results, 180 students were selected as the final sample size.

Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured self-administered questionnaire, which was divided into three main sections: demographic information, body shaming experiences, and self-concept. The demographic section included basic information such as age, gender, grade level, and social media usage. The body shaming section consisted of 15 items designed to measure the frequency and nature of body shaming incidents experienced by students. This section used a Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”, allowing respondents to express the intensity of their experiences. Finally, self-concept was measured using the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS), which assesses aspects of self-esteem, identity, and physical appearance satisfaction. Before the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted involving 20 students from a different school to test the reliability and validity of the instruments. The reliability analysis revealed Cronbach's alpha values of 0.87 for the

body shaming scale and 0.91 for the self-concept scale, indicating high internal consistency and reliability for the instruments used.

Data Analysis

The collected data were entered into and analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics were first employed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample, the frequency of body shaming experiences, and the levels of self-concept. Normality testing was conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which determined the appropriate statistical tests to be used (Pandey & Pandey, 2015). If the data were normally distributed, the relationship between body shaming and self-concept was tested using Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation (Snyder, 2019). For non-parametric data, Spearman’s Rank Correlation was used to assess the strength and direction of the relationship. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical guidelines established by the Health Research Ethics Committee of Mahardika, and was granted approval with reference number KEP.067/KEP.ITEKESMA/IV/2024. Ethical considerations were taken seriously to ensure the safety and well-being of participants. Written informed consent was obtained from both the students and their parents or legal guardians prior to participation. The consent form explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of the data. To protect participant privacy, all identifying information was kept confidential, and data were stored securely.

RESULT

Table 1.
Presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants:

Demographic Characteristic	f	%
Age		
12-13 years	60	33.3
14-15 years	120	66.7
Gender		
Male	60	33.3
Female	120	66.7
Grade Level		
Grade VII	60	33.3
Grade VIII	60	33.3
Grade IX	60	33.3

Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the study participants, as well as the frequency of body shaming experiences and self-concept scores. A total of 180 students participated in the study, with a mean age of 14.2 years (SD = 0.97). The gender distribution was 33.3% male (60 students) and 66.7% female (120 students).

Table 2.
Frequency of Body Shaming Experiences

Type of Body Shaming	f	%
Weight-related Criticism	82	45.6
Physical Appearance Criticism	78	43.3
Skin Color Criticism	42	23.3
Teasing About Clothing	35	19.4
Facial Features Criticism	25	13.9
Mockery of Hair Length	15	8.3
Other	18	10.0

The body shaming experiences of the participants were measured using a 15-item questionnaire. The results revealed that a significant portion of students experienced some form of body shaming, as shown in Table 2. The most common forms of body shaming included comments on weight (45.6%) and physical appearance (43.3%). The data shows that a significant proportion of the students (45.6%) experienced weight-related body shaming, followed by criticisms related to their physical appearance (43.3%). These findings reflect the widespread nature of body shaming in the school environment and suggest that issues related to appearance are prominent sources of ridicule for adolescents.

Table 3.
Self-Concept Scores of Participants

Component	Mean Score (n=180)	Standard Deviation	Percentage (%) of High Self-Concept
Self-Identity	16.5	2.1	58.3
Self-Esteem	17.2	2.5	61.1
Physical Appearance Satisfaction	15.7	3.2	47.8

The self-concept of the adolescents was assessed using the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS). The overall mean score for self-concept was 49.4 (SD = 6.7), indicating a moderate level of self-esteem and self-worth. The results showed variability across the three components of self-concept: self-identity, self-esteem, and physical appearance satisfaction, as seen in Table 3.

Table 4.
Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Body Shaming and Self-Concept

Variable	Self-Concept (Total)	Self-Esteem	Self-Identity	Physical Appearance Satisfaction	P-value
Body Shaming (Frequency)	-0.39	-0.42	-0.36	-0.43	< 0.01

The primary statistical analysis used to assess the relationship between body shaming and self-concept was Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation. A significant negative correlation was found between the frequency of body shaming experiences and self-concept ($r = -0.39$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that as the frequency of body shaming experiences increases, self-concept tends to decrease, especially in the areas of self-esteem and physical appearance satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

In this study, 180 adolescents from Cirebon (mean age = 14.2 years, SD = 0.97) were surveyed about their experiences of body shaming and their self-concept scores. The sample was composed of 33.3% males and 66.7% females, and was evenly distributed across Grades VII, VIII, and IX (each 33.3%). Our analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between body shaming experiences and self-concept. In other words, adolescents who reported more frequent or intense body shaming also tended to score lower on measures of self-concept. These findings underscore the harmful psychological impact of body shaming during early adolescence—a developmental period when identity formation and self-esteem are highly vulnerable.

Impact of Body Shaming on Self-Concept

The primary objective of this research was to explore the relationship between body shaming and self-concept among adolescents in a junior high school setting in Cirebon, Indonesia. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by rapid physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. During this period, individuals begin to form more stable self-concepts, and external feedback plays a pivotal role in shaping how they view themselves. In this context, negative social experiences such as body shaming may significantly influence adolescents’ self-perception and emotional well-being. The findings of this study revealed a significant inverse relationship between experiences of body shaming and the overall self-concept of adolescents. Specifically, adolescents who reported more frequent encounters with

body shaming showed lower levels of self-esteem, diminished self-identity, and reduced satisfaction with their physical appearance. These results indicate that body shaming does not merely affect adolescents on a surface level but can fundamentally undermine the way they perceive and value themselves across multiple dimensions of self-concept (Hu et al., 2021). This aligns with the hypothesis that body shaming contributes to psychological distress and poor self-evaluation during the adolescent years.

These findings are consistent with a growing body of literature emphasizing the psychological damage caused by body-related criticism. According to previous studies (Fatmawati et al., 2021), body shaming can significantly lower self-esteem, increase vulnerability to social anxiety, and contribute to feelings of personal inadequacy. Additional research by other scholars (Utaminingsih et al., 2023) has shown that repeated exposure to body shaming can damage an individual's self-worth, leading to the development of a persistently negative self-image. The current study supports and extends these findings by demonstrating that the impact of body shaming is not confined to physical appearance dissatisfaction alone, but also affects broader aspects of self-concept such as one's identity and self-worth. The concept of self-concept itself is multidimensional, encompassing how individuals view themselves not only in terms of their physical bodies but also regarding their personal competencies, social relationships, and psychological integrity. In this study, the self-concept was examined across three dimensions: self-esteem, self-identity, and physical appearance satisfaction. Adolescents who experienced frequent instances of body shaming scored lower in all three areas, suggesting that the experience of body shaming may be a comprehensive threat to adolescents' mental health. These results align with the findings of (Reyhan, 2019), who emphasized that a positive self-concept is foundational to healthy adolescent development and adjustment.

Furthermore, the link between low self-concept and various mental health challenges has been documented extensively. Previous research (Amhar et al., 2021) has established that adolescents with poor self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction are more prone to developing depression, anxiety, and disordered eating behaviors. The findings from this study echo these concerns and indicate the need for preventative interventions in school and community settings that address body shaming and its impact. One of the most notable results of the study was the significant effect of body shaming on the self-identity component of self-concept. Adolescents who had been subjected to body shaming reported greater confusion and dissatisfaction with their sense of identity. This result reflects the importance of peer validation during adolescence and supports the theory proposed by (Utaminingsih et al., 2023), which asserts that individuals' self-concepts are heavily influenced by how they believe others perceive them. When adolescents internalize negative evaluations about their physical appearance, this external criticism becomes integrated into their self-identity, leading to instability, insecurity, and a fragmented sense of self. This study highlights the deep and far-reaching consequences of body shaming among adolescents. It demonstrates that body shaming significantly undermines adolescents' self-esteem, self-identity, and satisfaction with their physical appearance—all crucial elements of a healthy self-concept. These findings underscore the urgent need for educators, parents, and policymakers to develop educational programs and psychosocial interventions aimed at promoting body positivity, resilience, and self-acceptance in adolescents. Creating supportive environments that discourage appearance-based judgments is essential to ensuring healthy psychological development during this vulnerable stage of life.

Gender Differences in Body Shaming Experiences

An interesting aspect of this study is the gender differences observed in the experiences of body shaming. While both male and female adolescents reported being subjected to body

shaming, the nature of the criticisms differed across genders (Deutsch et al., 2014). Female adolescents were more likely to report body shaming related to weight, physical appearance, and skin color, while male adolescents reported body shaming related to their physical appearance, facial features, and hair length (Professor Zohreh Shahhosseini et al., 2017). These findings reflect the societal pressures and expectations placed on both genders, albeit in different ways. In many cultures, including Indonesia, female adolescents are often subject to intense scrutiny regarding their physical appearance. Studies have shown that societal standards of beauty often emphasize thinness, clear skin, and specific facial features for women (Klineberg et al., 2006). This cultural pressure can lead to higher levels of body shaming among adolescent girls, as seen in this study, where a significant percentage of females reported criticism related to weight and appearance. In contrast, male adolescents, although less frequently targeted by body shaming, are still vulnerable to criticism, especially regarding facial features and hair length, which are more culturally associated with masculinity.

The gendered nature of body shaming in adolescence has been well-documented in the literature. According to (Tirmidziani et al., 2018), girls are more likely to internalize societal beauty ideals, which can result in body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem. For boys, body image concerns often focus on muscularity and physical strength, reflecting the societal ideal of masculinity. The findings of this study add to the body of literature by illustrating how both male and female adolescents are affected by body shaming, albeit in different ways. These gender differences should be taken into account when designing interventions to address body shaming, as the issues faced by each gender may require distinct approaches (Setiawan & Alizamar, 2019)s.

Cultural Context of Body Shaming in Indonesia

The phenomenon of body shaming in this study is situated within the cultural context of Indonesia, where beauty standards and societal expectations are strongly influenced by both local traditions and global media. In Indonesian society, there is significant emphasis on physical appearance, particularly in relation to skin color and body shape. Lighter skin tones are often associated with beauty, success, and social status, while darker skin tones are sometimes stigmatized (Helen Permatasari et al., 2024). Similarly, a slim body is highly valued, especially among women, while individuals with larger body types may face discrimination or ridicule. The findings of this study suggest that these cultural beauty ideals play a significant role in body shaming experiences among adolescents in Indonesia. For instance, a significant number of adolescents reported being ridiculed for their skin color and body weight, reflecting the societal pressures to conform to certain beauty standards. These cultural influences can exacerbate body dissatisfaction and contribute to negative self-concept, particularly for those who do not meet the societal ideal (Bryson et al., 2020).

In addition to local cultural norms, global media plays a crucial role in shaping body image ideals. The pervasive influence of Western beauty standards, which often emphasize slimness and flawless skin, has been linked to increased body dissatisfaction among adolescents (Jaccard & Levitz, 2013). The spread of social media platforms in Indonesia has further reinforced these ideals, leading to a rise in body shaming behaviors. This study suggests that body shaming among adolescents in Cirebon is not only a reflection of local cultural norms but also a consequence of the globalized beauty standards that are promoted through media and technology.

Psychological Consequences of Body Shaming

The psychological consequences of body shaming, as revealed in this study, are substantial. Adolescents who experience frequent body shaming are more likely to suffer from low self-

esteem, poor self-identity, and dissatisfaction with their physical appearance. These outcomes are consistent with the findings of previous studies, which have highlighted the connection between body shaming and mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders (Zulkifli & Bakar, 2024). The negative effects of body shaming on self-concept can also affect adolescents' academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being. According to a study by (Hill et al., 2013), adolescents who experience body shaming are more likely to withdraw from social activities, engage in risky behaviors, and experience academic decline. The emotional toll of body shaming can be debilitating, leading to long-term consequences if not addressed. Furthermore, body shaming can create a cycle of self-perpetuating negative self-concept, where adolescents internalize the criticisms they receive and begin to view themselves in a negative light. This can lead to further social isolation, as they may avoid situations where they fear being judged based on their appearance (Setiawan & Alizamar, 2019). Over time, this negative self-concept can lead to a lack of motivation, reduced self-confidence, and an overall diminished sense of self-worth.

Implications for Interventions and Future Research

The findings of this study underscore the importance of addressing body shaming behaviors and promoting a positive self-concept among adolescents. Schools and communities play a pivotal role in shaping adolescents' self-perception and providing support to those who are affected by body shaming (Professor Zohreh Shahhosseini et al., 2017). Educational programs that promote body positivity, self-acceptance, and healthy self-esteem could be instrumental in reducing the prevalence of body shaming and its harmful effects. (Steinhausen & Metzke, 2001) Moreover, interventions should focus on challenging societal beauty standards and promoting diversity in body types, skin tones, and facial features. By encouraging adolescents to embrace their unique characteristics and appreciate their bodies, these programs can foster a sense of empowerment and self-worth (ZAKIYAH et al., 2017). Additionally, schools should provide counseling services to help students cope with the emotional consequences of body shaming and build resilience against societal pressures. Future research should explore the long-term effects of body shaming on adolescents' mental health and self-concept. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into how body shaming experiences affect adolescents over time and whether interventions can mitigate its impact. Furthermore, studies that examine the effectiveness of body image interventions in reducing body shaming and improving self-concept would be valuable in informing future educational and therapeutic practices.

CONCLUSION

This study provides significant evidence of the negative impact of body shaming on adolescents' self-concept. It highlights the need for targeted interventions to address body shaming, improve self-esteem, and promote body positivity among adolescents. The findings also emphasize the importance of considering cultural and gender differences when developing interventions. By understanding the complexities of body shaming and its effects on self-concept, we can better support adolescents in developing healthy self-perceptions and coping mechanisms to navigate societal pressures.

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